

INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGES IN NORTH KORDOFAN STATE OF SUDAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION, HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage is considered a violation of human rights. The United Nations has called for elimination of the practice by 2030 (Sustainable Development Goal No.5). The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions (i) How many girls are getting married before the end of basic education; (ii) How many know of friends in other schools who are married at the end of primary education; (iii) Does the student support the idea of child marriages; (iv) Based on his/her experience, why do girls want to marry early; (v) Does the student think it is a tradition that should be ended either by law from the government or parents encouraged to stop the practice; and (vi) Are they aware of any of their friends who was married early going through difficulties- during child birth, violence against her, her inability to go back to school- etc.- as a result of child marriage? Data was collected mainly by interviews conducted with basic school students. Both boys and girls were interviewed. An analysis of data from five communities for the students who are in grade five to grade eight showed more than one fifth of the students were engaged or married; and that almost half of them (41.1%) thought it was absolutely suitable to marry during high school, after basic school or even before. In response to the question of why girls wanted to marry early, it was found that the perceived drivers for child marriage included tradition, love, peers pressure, to escape parental control, forced by parents, to improve her economic status, arranged marriage, strict parents and for prestige. However, more than half of subjects perceived that marriage changed girls live for the better. The study also found that 80% perceived that girls are unable to go back to school once they marry before the age of 18; and 68.9% of the students agreed that suffering could happen during child birth, 65.5 per cent of the students thought child marriage could lead to domestic violence and 60 per cent thought it is also a violation of human rights and women rights. To end child marriage, subjects advocated increased community awareness, promotion of girls' education and enforcement of government laws. Recommendations in the study included supporting vulnerable girls and increasing community involvement and engagement.

Keywords: Child marriage, community awareness, education, health, North Kordofan, Sudan, violence against women.

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is considered a violation of human rights. According to UNICEF (2018), child marriage is “an egregious violation of every child’s rights” (p.2). UNICEF estimates that global number of child brides is now at 650 million, including girls under age 18 who have already married, and adult women who married in childhood. UNICEF (2018) also pointed out that “In the Middle East and North Africa, substantial progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage has occurred over the past 25 years. Within the past 10 years, however, this progress appears to have slowed.” (p.5).

The Community for the Study

North Kordofan State is an undulating plain covering an area of 185,302 km² at an altitude of 1,500 feet (FEWS NET, 2013). The state population is approximately 3.2 million (2008 census), of which approximately 85% is rural. This study was conducted in ten communities¹ in five administrative units of Bara and West Bara Localities (Um Garfa, Jirajikh, El Mazroub, Bara and West Bara administrative units). Although, the ten communities differ in terms of the number of households, they share many similarities. All these communities are considered rural communities and lie in semi-arid areas. Services such as electricity and water supply are limited (some lack permanent water yards). People practice traditional agriculture, animal raising and some trading as the main economic activities. All communities have basic schools for boys and girls but students need to move to larger towns for secondary school. Almost all communities have health units, which provide basic health services. The communities have strong social ties as all descend from the same ancestors and are tied by blood and marriage ties.

Sudan context for the child marriage

Sudan has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with the Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2008 Sudan signed, but has not yet ratified, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, including article 6 which sets the minimum age for marriage as 18. Moreover, Sudan has not yet ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The current legal marriage of girls in Sudan is at age 10. The personal Status Law of Muslims, 1991, allows marriage of a girl once she has hit puberty and that 10 years old can be married by their guardian with the permission of a judge (El Nager, et al., 2017) and (Tønnessen & El Nager, 2018).

According to Girls Not Brides website (2018), Sudan ranks 29 with the percent of married girls by age of 15 being 12% and 34% for those married by age 18. In Sudan, child marriages and large spousal age differences are common. According to the data from Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of 2014 (MICS5), about 21.2% of young women age 15-19 years were already married. This proportion was significantly different between young women in urban areas (11.2%) and those in rural areas (26.0%). Wide variations between states were also noticed; for example, in Khartoum State (contains Khartoum the capital city) it is 6.9%, while it is 15.6% in North Kordofan State in western Sudan. Results, also, strongly showed some relationship between early marriages and the level of education. For example, 27.5% for women with primary education compared to only 2.4% for those with higher education (MICS5, 2014).

¹ The communities are; Alnozha, Um Osher, Dale Yousif, Maganeen, Karse, Alkalsa, Nazeha, Alrowda, Umgarfa, Altaweel.

Table I below shows the percentage of marriages before age 15 among women aged 15-49 years, the percentage of marriages before age 18 among women aged 15-49 years and the percentage of young women age 15-19 years currently married as appeared in the OHCHR² report on progress made by Sudan on child, early and forced marriage.

Table 1: Percent of married young women in North Kordofan State, Khartoum State and Sudan

State	Marriage before age 15 (women age 15-49 years)	Marriage before age 18 (women age 20-49 years)	Young women age 15-19 years currently married
North Kodofan State	15.6	39.1	27.6
Khartoum State	6.9	26.5	12
Sudan	11.9	38	21.2

Source: OHCHR, 2018

Data from Table 1 showed that the percentage of marriages among young women in North Kordofan State is higher in all variables compared to the central state of Khartoum or Sudan at large.

What is Child Marriage?

Child marriage, also known as “early marriage”, is used to refer to both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2005). UNIFPA (2006) described child marriage as occurring before age of 18 when a girl is not yet physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. Child marriage involves either one or both spouses being children and may take place with or without formal registration, and under civil, religious or customary laws (UNFPA, 2006). Most child marriages are arranged and based on the consent Child marriage is common all over the globe and has inflicted dangerous and devastating effects on young children who are compelled to tie the knot in most cases. Child marriage is also indicative of the levels of development of a region or country as the phenomenon is predominant in developing countries (IPPF, 2006).

Drivers of Child Marriage

There are studies aimed at finding the reasons and occurrences of child marriages (NCCW & UNICEF 2013, Jain, et al. 2011), Malhotra (2010), Girls Not Brides (2018), (Hanmer & Elefante, 2016) and Sudan Child Marriage Strategy (2014). Based on these studies, there are four broad drivers of child marriages::

- Poverty; to improve the economic and social status; the cost of schooling. 54% of women living in poorest Sudanese households were married before the age 18 compare to 19% in the richest households (Girls Not Brides, 2018).
- Tradition, religious, culture and peer pressures (Promotion of child marriage of girls; the negative perception of girls’ education; to prevent pre-marital sexual relations; the belief that child pregnancy leads to larger families).
- Lack of education, job opportunities and economic options. 55% of women with no education were found married before they are 18 years old (Girls Not Brides, 2018).
- Insecurity in the face of conflict. Girls are more vulnerable and at risk of child marriage in conflict and crisis times. Families revert to child marriage during conflict to protect their daughters from gender-based violence, rape and social upheaval (Lemmon, 2014).

² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Outcomes of Child Marriage

Child marriage has numerous consequences on certain aspects of life. Some of these are its effect on education, health and gender-based violence.

Child Marriage and Education

Universal access to basic education and completion of primary education is one of the most important goals of the World Summit for Children of 1990. Education is a vital prerequisite for combating poverty, empowering women, protecting children from hazardous and exploitative labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and influencing population growth (MICS5, 2014). School dropout and child marriage are interrelated outcomes that have an enormous impact on adolescent girls, curtailing full realization of their rights, limiting their livelihood options, and harming their health and wellbeing as well as that of their children (K & ME, 2017).

Using the Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5) 2014 data, over three-fourths (76.4 percent) of children of primary school age are attending school. Out of this 76.4 percent, about 80.4 percent reach the last grade of primary school and only 28.4 per cent of the children of secondary school age are attending secondary school. Primary school completion rate³ is 79.3 percent. Some studies found that child marriages directly affected girls' education and increased girls' drop out from school (Mahato, 2016).

For girls who marry early, their access to formal or even informal education is severely limited due to domestic burdens, childbearing and social norms that believe marriage is incompatible with schooling (ICRW, 2006). Other studies found that delaying child marriage by one year is associated with an increase of half a year of education in Sub-Saharan Africa (Delprato, et al., 2015).

A study conducted by NCCW & UNICEF (2013) on child marriage in six states of Sudan found that for 50% of the respondents, marriage was more important to girls than education and 24% of those who married before age of 18 dropped out of school permanently.

Child Marriage and Health

Child marriages have health consequences. According to Hampton (2010), these children often experience “numerous hardships and ailments, from malnutrition and physical abuse to infection with HIV.” (p.509) Child marriage puts the girls at risk of child pregnancies with life-threatening conditions. According to UNICEF as in Ahmed (2015), “around 50,000 girls die during pregnancy, mostly in low and middle-income countries and that the prevalence of stillbirths and new born deaths are 50 per cent higher in mothers who are below 20 years of age”. This also leads to child mothers taking care of children even though they are not physically mature to undertake this task. (Jain, et al., 2011). Also, child marriages can cause severe psychological and emotional stress like forced sexual relations, denial of personal development and freedom as these children who are now married are expected to play the role of a mature person (Jain, et al., 2011) and (Raj, et al., 2019).

Child Marriage and Gender-Based Violence

As girl children are still vulnerable and submissive, they can be subject to the atrocities of domestic violence and abandonment (Jain, et al., 2011) and increased risk of intimate partner

³ Number of children attending the last grade of primary school (excluding repeaters) divided by number of children of primary school completion age (age appropriate to final grade of primary school)

violence (Raj, et al., 2019). The data collected from Sudan (MICS5, 2014) showed that domestic violence is acceptable to 34.0% as people age 15-49 years stated that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife in at least one of the following circumstances: (1) she goes out without telling him, (2) she neglects the children, (3) she argues with him, (4) she refuses sex with him, (5) she burns the food. Yet again, according to Sudan (MICS5 2014), one in five women and girls, including 19 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner within the last 12 months.

Purpose of Study

This study investigated the prevalence of child marriage among basic school students of both sexes and their perception of the connection between it and girl's education. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following questions-

- a. How many are getting married at and before the end of basic education?
- b. Does the student support the ideas of child marriages?
- c. How many know of friends in other schools who are married at the end of primary education?
- d. From his/her experience, why do girls want to marry early?
- e. Are they aware of any of their friends who was married early going through difficulties- during child birth, violence against her, her inability to go back to school- etc.- as a result of child marriage?
- f. Does the student think it is a tradition that should be ended either by law from the government or parents encouraged to stop the practice?

Specifically, the study will look into:

- The percentage of the students who are either married or engaged before completing the basic school.
- The perception of the student of the appropriate time of getting married.
- Motives of girls to marry early as perceived by the students.
- The students' perception of the relationship between child marriage and dropping out of school, child birth complications, gender based violence, etc.

Data Collection

A questionnaire was given to students' guardians for consent and followed by interviewing the students. A stratified random selection procedure was used for the selection of subjects. Consideration was given to equal representation of students in the targeted grades from fifth to eighth regardless of sex. Two-third of the respondents were girls (66.7%) and one third were boys (33.3%) who study at basic schools from grade five to grade eight. The interviews with the students were carried out between April 2017-June 2018.

Data Analysis

Data was collated and analysed using percentages and frequency counts.

Question 1: How many are getting married at and before the end of basic education in North kordofan State in western Sudan?

Table 2a below showed the marital status of 90 students from ten communities visited in Bara and West Bara Localities. Data showed that 13.3 percent were already married and 8.9 percent were engaged. Table 2b showed that some were engaged/ married by age 13 (4.4 percent).

Table 2a Incidence of child marriage among students.

Variable	Number	Percentage
Single	70	77.8
Engaged	8	8.9
Married	12	13.3
Total	90	100.0

Table 2b Age of students when they were engaged/married

Variable	Number	Percentage
13	4	4.4
14	2	2.2
15	3	3.3
12	3	3.3
10	4	4.4
11	1	1.1
8	1	1.1
16	2	2.2
Total	20	22.2

Question 2: Does the student support the ideas of child marriages?

Table 3 below showed the perception of the students of the best time to get married. Data showed that 30 percent responded that the best time for marriage was after high school while 21 percent indicated the best time for marriage was after basic education. 15.6 percent of the respondents felt the best time for marriage was after university education.

Table 3: Perception of the best time to get married

Variable	Number	Percentage
During basic school	9	10.0
After basic school	19	21.1
During high school	9	10.0
After high school	27	30.0
Never	5	5.6
I don't know	5	5.6
After University	14	15.6
18 Years old	2	2.2
Total	90	100.0

Table 4 showed data on Student support of the idea of child marriage. 51.1 percent of respondents Strongly Agree/Agree with child marriages while 41.1 percent of respondents Strongly Disagree/Disagree with child marriages. Table 5 below showed that about half of the students thought that students prefer and support the idea of marrying early before they are 18 years. Furthermore, they also perceived that the community support child marriage.

Table 4: Students support the idea of child marriage

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	20	22.2
Agree	26	28.9
No opinion	7	7.8
Disagree	25	27.8
Strongly Disagree.	12	13.3

Table 5 below showed that about 51.2 percent of respondents Strongly Disagree/Disagree with the idea that the whole community supports child marriage while 40.1 percent of respondents Strongly Agree/Agree with the idea that the whole community supports child marriage.

Table 5: The whole community support the idea of child marriage

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	23	25.6
Agree	13	14.4
No opinion	8	8.9
Disagree	32	35.6
Strongly Disagree.	14	15.6

Question 3: From your experience, why do girls want to marry early?

In Table 6 below, data on perceived reasons of girl's child marriage based on students' experience is presented.

Table 6: Perceived reasons of girls' child marriage.

Variable	Number	Percentage
Arranged marriage	5	5.6
To escape parental control	9	10.0
Love	18	20.0
Strict parents	5	5.6
Forced by parents	8	8.9
To improve her economic status	6	6.7
Peers pressure	12	13.3
Prestige	5	5.6
Traditions	22	24.4

Table 6 above showed respondents' perceived reasons for girls' child marriage. The perceived reasons included traditions, love, peers pressure, to escape parental control and forced by parents.

A further analysis of the reasons for girl's child marriage showed that three-quarters of the students thought that they undergo different types of pressure. However, more than half of them believed that marriage changes girls live to the better.

Table 7 and 8 below showed students level of agreement with the statements, "Girls feel different types of pressure to marry early" and "Marriage changes girls live to the better". In Table 7, 74.4 percent of the respondents Strongly Agree/Agree with the statement, "Girls feel different types of pressure to marry early". In Table 8, 55.6 percent of respondents, Strongly Agree/Agree that marriage changes girls' life for the better.

Table 7: Girls feel different types of pressure to marry early

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	47	52.2
Agree	20	22.2
No opinion	7	7.8
Disagree	13	14.4
Strongly Disagree.	3	3.3

Table 8: Marriage changes girls life for the better

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	34	37.8
Agree	16	17.8
No opinion	19	21.1
Disagree	17	18.9
Strongly Disagree.	4	4.4

Table 9 shows perception of the students about the preference of men marrying only young girls in their communities.

Table 9: In our community, men like only to marry young girls

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	57	63.3
Agree	11	12.2
No opinion	3	3.3
Disagree	13	14.4
Strongly Disagree.	6	6.7

Table 9 above showed that 75.5 percent of the students perceived that men in their communities like to marry young girls while only 21 percent thought the opposite.

Question 3: How many know of friends in other schools who are married at the end of primary education?

Table 10 below showed that 71.2 percent of respondents Strongly Agree/ Agree with the statement that “Girls in my community marry too young”.

Table 10: Girls in my community marry too young (marry early)

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	41	45.6
Agree	23	25.6
No opinion	4	4.4
Disagree	13	14.4
Strongly Disagree.	9	10.0

In Table 11 below, more than 75 percent of respondents Strongly Agree /Agree with the statement, “I know someone who married under the age of 16”.

Table 11: I know someone who married under the age of 18

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	47	52.2
Agree	22	24.4
No opinion	9	10.0
Disagree	8	8.9
Strongly Disagree.	4	4.4

Question 5: Are students aware of any of their friends who were married early going through difficulties- her inability to go back to school, during child birth, subjected to violence- etc.- as a result of child marriage?

Table 12 below shows perceptions on ability of girls who marry as a child to go back to school.

Table 12: Girls who marry early are unable to go back to school

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	45	50.0
Agree	27	30.0
No opinion	5	5.5
Disagree	10	11.1
Strongly Disagree.	3	3.3

Table 12 above showed that 80% of the respondents perceived that girls are unable to go back to school once they marry before the age of 18. In Table 13 below, 68.9 percent of respondents agree with the statement, “Girls who marry early may suffer during child birth”.

Table 13: Girls who marry early, may suffer during child birth

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	43	47.8
Agree	19	21.1
No opinion	18	20.0
Disagree	8	8.9
Strongly Disagree.	2	2.2

Table 14 below 65.5% of respondents Strongly Agree/Agree with the statement that “Girls who marry early are more subjected to domestic violence”.

Table 14: Girls who marry early, are more subjected to domestic violence

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	44.4
Agree	19	21.1
No opinion	19	21.1
Disagree	9	10.0
Strongly Disagree.	3	3.3

In Table 15 below, 60 percent of respondents Strongly Agree/ Agree that child marriage is against human rights and women rights.

Table 15: Child marriage is against human rights and women rights

Variable	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	35	38.9
Agree	19	21.1
No opinion	17	18.9
Disagree	7	7.8
Strongly Disagree.	12	13.3

Question 6: Does the student think it is a tradition that should be ended either by law from the government or parents encouraged to stop the practice?

Table 16 below showed perceptions of respondents about how child marriage could be ended. 45.6 percent of respondents indicated that community awareness and guidance was the way

to go and 21 percent of respondents perceived that providing girls' education was also the path to ending child marriage. Only 7.8% thought there should be government laws to end this practice.

Table 16: How do you think this tradition of child marriage can be ended?

Variable	Number	Percentage
Community awareness and guidance	41	45.6
Girls' education	19	21.1
I do not want to finish it	3	3.3
Change customs and Traditions	5	5.6
I don't know	9	10.0
Marry at 18 years old	2	2.2
Government laws	7	7.8
Awareness; men shouldn't marry young girls	1	1.1
Girls shouldn't agree	3	3.3
Total	90	100.0

DISCUSSION

The discussion will focus on three areas:

- Why does child marriage remain and is so prevalent? In the culture
- The need to put an end to child marriage
- What can be done to end child marriage and improve schooling for girls?

- **Why does child marriage remain and so prevalent in the culture?**

Table 6 showed the perceived reasons of girls' child marriage. The reasons included tradition (24.4%), love (20.0%), peer pressure (13.3 %) and to escape parental control (10 %). According to Nour (2006), poverty plays a central role in perpetuating child marriage. Also, child marriage is perceived as a mechanism against premarital sex and unwanted pregnancies for young girls.(p.1646). This study showed that tradition is the major force that motivated parents to marry their daughter when they are less than 18 years. This study will agree in part with Nour (2006) since one of the reasons given by the respondents for early child marriage was to improve the girl's economic status (Table 6) and more than 55 percent of respondents agree that early marriage changed the girls life for the better (table 8). On the other hand, girls themselves accept being married as children for different reasons; love, economic factors, peer pressure, prestige or just to escape strict parents. Table 9 showed that more than 75 percent of respondents indicated that men only like to marry young girls and more than 76 percent of respondents indicated that they knew someone who had married under the age of 18. A result that was not expected was that 55.6 percent of respondents Strongly Agree/agree that early marriage changes a girls' life for the better.

- **The need to put an end to child marriage**

Effect on education

The majority of the students agreed that girls who marry at young age (before 18 years) are unable to go back to school. Dropping out of school before completing secondary education (average age is 18 years) has negative effect on girl's life. Results indicated that 80% of the students agreed that child marriage reduces the likelihood that girls will complete their education. Education is vital for economic development and positively affects economic growth because it is directly related to entrepreneurship, productivity growth and employment opportunities and women development (Latif, et al., 2015). Students who do not

drop out early will help reduce the illiteracy rate of the country and improve the innovative environment. The effect of drop out on the economic situation is very clear as they are unlikely to find jobs and more likely to continue without finding jobs (Latif, et al., 2015). Moreover, high dropout rates due to early marriage has social consequences and affects society in many ways- it reduces the ability of the society to grow economically and hinders its democratic development (Colclough, et al., 2000). Consequences of student drop out, also, include lower wages, unemployment prospects and possibility of health problems (Wagenaar, 1987). Some major social costs of dropping out of school include reduced political contribution, excess demand for social services, increased rate of crime and poor health levels (Colclough, et al., 2000).

Effect on Health

Table 13 showed that 68.9% of the respondents agreed that there are health consequences during child birth related to early child marriage. Nour (2006) concluded that there are health consequences related to early child marriages- infection with STDs particularly, HIV and human papilloma virus (HPV) and cervical cancer. Married young girls, also, face pressure to prove their fertility and often embrace their fate and bear children quickly. Nour (2006), also, identified the problems of children delivering children. She stated that girls 10-14 years of age are 5-7 times more likely to die during giving birth, and girls 15-19 years as twice as likely. Another identified risk is obstructed labor which leads to fistula. Nour (2006) pointed to the huge effect of child marriage on their offspring as these infants suffer repeated illnesses and deaths. For these infants, the mortality rate is 73% higher than for infants whose mothers are more than 20 years.

Effect on girl's development

Every minute, 23 girls marry (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Marrying too young puts girls personal development and wellbeing at risk. Girls are not physically or psychologically ready to assume their new roles as wife and mother. Results from tables 14 and 15 showed that 65.5 per cent of the respondents Strongly Agree/Agree that child marriage could lead to domestic violence and 60 per cent Strongly Agree/ Agree that it is also a violation of human rights and women rights. This perception is in line with all the declarations of the United Nations.

- **What can be done to end child marriage and improve schooling for girls?**

Girls Not Brides (2017) pointed to the importance of girls' education in stemming child marriages. They indicated that "Being in school builds a girls knowledge and skills so she is better able to delay marriage and can help support the perception that girls are still children and are therefore not of marriageable age." (p.3). 21.1 percent of respondents strongly agree /agree that child marriage could be ended by promoting girls education. Girls education is not a priority for many families in the community. A study conducted on child marriage in six states of Sudan found that 50% of the family members thought that marriage is more important to girls than education (NCCW & UNICEF, 2013). Multi-level programmes are recommended to end child marriage:

Programs for students

- Introduce special programmes in the curricula that motivate and interest girls and provide units in several subject areas of the curricula dealing with consequences of child marriage on development and future.
- Invest in and support girls' education by providing support and/or exemption of schools fees for students in the poor communities to decrease drop-out rates.
- Build peer support on the idea of preventing forced and child marriage.

- Encourage the relevant institutions and non-governmental organization to mobilize programmes such as food for education to reduce drop-out rate and hence child marriage.

Programmes for married girls

- Build schools for girls in the communities with high rates of child marriage. For more effectiveness, curriculum should be combined with special programmes on maternal and psychological health and importance of girls' education to reduce child marriage and health risks.
- Introduction of life support programs for married girls to increase their skills and self-confidence.
- Provide job training to married girls (i.e. vocational training) to increase employability
- Provision of reproductive health awareness programmes and services to reduce teenage pregnancy and its health consequences.

Programmes for communities

- Increase community awareness and commitment among parents, teachers, religious leaders and other influential adults to eradicate forced and child marriage;
- Support and incentives or recognition of the parents who decide to let their daughters' to continue their studies and enjoy their childhood.
- Form and activate community watch unit to early intervention and report cases to authorities and child protection units at the relevant states.
- Form and activate national programmes and media to increase the public awareness and advocate for human rights, child rights.

Programmes at the national level

- Advocate for amendment in the personal law to change the legal age of marriage from 10 to 18 years for both girls and boys and enforce these laws to protect children.
- Strategies to close gender gap and increase women empowerment so women can control the decisions that affect their education, reproductive and future life.
- Change of the woman image in media and curriculum which feature her as a weak, poor mother not as a strong productive working mother which has an important role inside and outside home.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study investigated child marriage prevalence, drivers and the way-out in rural communities of Western Sudan. An analysis of data from five communities for some of the students who study in grade five to eight showed more than one fifth of the students were engaged or married; and that almost half of them (41.1%) thought it is absolutely suitable to marry during high school, after basic school or even before. As response to the question why girls want to marry early, it was found that the perceived drivers for child marriage included traditions, love, peers pressure, to scape parental control, forced by parents, to improve her economic status, arranged marriage, strict parents and for prestige. However, more than half of them perceived that marriage changes girls live to the better. 80% perceived that girls are unable to go back to school once they marry before the age of 18; and that 68.9% of the students agreed that suffering could happen during child birth, 65.5 per cent of the students thought child marriage could lead to domestic violence and 60 per cent thought it is also a

violation of human rights and women rights. To end child marriage, increase community awareness, promote girls' education and enforce government laws were perceived are the most forces. programmes focus on supporting vulnerable girls and on increasing community involvement and engagement were recommended to end child marriage and promotion of girls' education.

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