



A Study on  
**Child Marriage**  
in selected World Vision Ghana  
Operational Areas  
**2017**

**A Study on Child Marriage in  
selected World Vision Ghana Operational Areas**

**By**

**University of Ghana  
Centre for Social Policy Studies  
and  
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Book Title: A Study on Child Marriage in selected World Vision Operational Areas in Ghana

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	Antenatal Care
APs	Area Programmes
CHPS	Community Health -Based Planning Services
CHRAJ	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
DOVVSU	Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
FGDs	Focus Group Discussion
GES	Ghana Education Service
GDHS	Ghana Demographic Health Survey
GHS	Ghana Health Service
GLSS	Ghana Living Standard Survey
GSEPS	Ghana Socio -Economic Panel Survey
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
IDIs	In-Depth Interviews
KIIs	Key Information Interviews
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PNC	Post-natal Care
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
WVG	World Vision Ghana

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is:  
To follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the kingdom of God.

### **VISION STATEMENT**

Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness;  
Our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so.

### **OUR CORE VALUES**

We are Christian  
We are committed to the Poor  
We value People  
We are Stewards  
We are Partners  
We are Responsive

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

World Vision Ghana would like to express her heart-felt gratitude to University of Ghana – Centre for Social Policy Studies, especially to Professor Abena Oduro and her team for partnering to take up the research. We also want to thank all community members who availed themselves to be interviewed as part of the research.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The marriage of girls and sometimes boys before the legal age of marriage is a global phenomenon but fairly widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite having established a legal framework, the practice of child marriage persists in Ghana and is present in all the ten administrative regions of the country. Child marriage is known to adversely impact the well-being of the girl child and can have inter-generational dimensions. It is therefore necessary to understand why the practice continues and determine what measures can be introduced to make the laws more effective and to change behaviour. The four main objectives that this research by World Vision Ghana sought to address were:

- To examine the impact of child marriage on the girls and women with special focus on issues of domestic violence and maternal health and morbidity.
- To examine the sexual and reproductive rights of child brides and their access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- To identify and assess community-led actions and efforts to reduce child marriage.
- To evaluate the legal framework on child marriage (international, regional and national), services and capacity of formal and informal institutions including faith based organizations to prevent and respond to child marriage

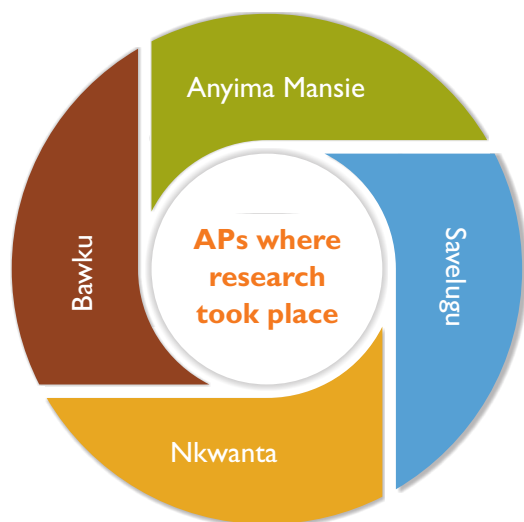
Data collection took place in eight communities within World Vision Ghana operational areas. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analysed. The quantitative study involved the analysis of existing data sets from the sixth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS), the 2008 and 2014 Ghana Demographic and Health Surveys (GDHS) and the Ghana Socio-economic Panel Survey which provided a macro-perspective on the prevalence and trends in the incidence of child marriage over time. Qualitative data provided the opportunity to better explore causal relationships. The qualitative data collection took place in the Greater Accra Region (institutional surveys) the Brong Ahafo, Volta, Northern and Upper East Regions. These regions were chosen based on the incidence of child marriage, inheritance practices, ethnic diversity and socioeconomic status as measured by the poverty incidence.

Child marriage was more prevalent in the rural areas than urban areas. Northern Region has the highest incidence at 38.0% with Greater Accra Region recording the lowest incidence at 17.8%. The three northern regions recorded the highest incidence and the highest child marriage gap indices which are above the national average.

There is the need for a multifaceted approach, which simultaneously addresses the causal factors with programmes deliberately designed to target the young brides. Policy should not only focus on the eradication of child marriage. Interventions should also be designed to assist girls who are married.



## Graphical Representation on Executive Summary



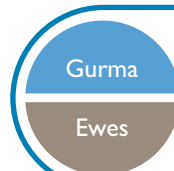
National incidence rate for women aged 18-49 years is **27.2%** (GDHS, 2014)



Incidence of child marriage among women 18-49 in rural area **34.3%** compared to **19.4%** urban (GDHS, 2014)



Regional incidence  
Northern **38.0%**  
Greater Accra **17.8%** (GDHS, 2014)



Incidence of child marriage  
Gurma **35.4%**  
Ewes **19.7%** (GDHS, 2014)

### CAUSES

1. Teenage pregnancy and pre-marital sex.
2. Poverty and acquisition of wealth.
3. Betrothal and forced marriage.
4. Parental neglect and supervision- "... There are some parents who will also not provide their children the basic things they need to stay in school. When that happens, they get some men who deceive them into marriage. ..."  
(Current child bride, Brong Ahafo Region).
5. Autonomous decision to marry- "... Yes, they were always asking me to get married. If you don't get married, they might give you to an old man to marry you. So when I met the young man..."  
(Mature child bride still married, Upper East Region).

### EFFECTS

#### Positive Effects

1. Marriage a source of prestige and honour- "... Having a married daughter, that itself makes people respect me..." (Mother of Child Bride, Northern Region).
2. Access to basic needs - "... She (child bride) is able to amass some wealth from her husband. She is then able to take care of her own family. She can even build a house for her father. She can take care of her younger children to further their education..." (Community Profile, Volta Region).

### EFFECTS

#### Negative Effects

1. Effects on girls' education.
2. Problems of employment.
3. Lack of financial support and access to basic needs.
4. Sexual and reproductive health and rights.
5. Child marriage and domestic violence.
6. Psychosocial effects.

## CHAPTER I - BACKGROUND OF STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

The marriage of girls and sometimes boys before the legal age of marriage is a global phenomenon though the incidence has declined globally with some countries making much more progress than others (Nguyen and Wodon, 2015). The practice is fairly widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although Ghana and several countries have signed international conventions and agreement that prohibit child marriage which have been translated this into national laws, the latest comparable figure for the sub-region suggests an incidence of 39% in 2008-2014 (UNICEF,2016).

Despite having established a legal framework, the practice of child marriage persists in Ghana and is present in all the ten administrative regions of the country. Child marriage is known to adversely impact the well-being of the girl child and can have inter-generational dimensions on the child and country.

### 1.2 The Ghanaian Context

Ghana is a low middle-income country that is rapidly urbanising. Its urban population comprised 50.9% of the total population in 2010, having risen from 43.8 % in 2000. Despite this, Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions remain quite rural. In addition to being ethnically diverse, Ghana also has some religious diversity. Two of the world's religions are practiced here in Ghana. These religions are Christianity and Islam and their adherents made up 71% and 17.6% respectively of the total population in 2010.

Different marriage practices are present in Ghana. Culture and religion allow for polygyny. In 2010 about 43% of the population above 12 years old was married (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Data from the 2010 Population and Housing Census reveals that very young children in Ghana get married. It is a practice that affects girls and boys, however the incidence is higher among girls. In 2010, about 5.6% of boys and 5.2% of girls aged 12-14 years were married (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). The incidence almost doubled to 9.2% among girls aged 15-19 years and was slightly lower at 4.8% for boys in the same age category. Among this older age group about 1% of girls were divorced, widowed or separated. The ten-year period between 2000 and 2010 saw a decline in the proportion of 15-19 year old girls who had ever been married from 19.5% to 13.2%. Child marriage occurs in both urban and rural areas, however child brides are more likely to be found in rural areas where they account for 17.5% of girls aged 15-19 years compared to 9.6% of urban girls.

### 1.3 Objectives of Research

The main objectives of the research commissioned by World Vision Ghana (WVG) in collaboration with University of Ghana's Centre for Social Policy Studies were:

- o To examine the impact of child marriage on girls and women with special focus on issues of domestic violence and maternal health and morbidity.
- o To examine the girl child's access to the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service.
- o To examine the sexual and reproductive rights of child brides and their access to sexual and reproductive health services.

- o To identify and assess community-led actions and efforts to reduce child marriage.
- o To evaluate the legal framework on child marriage (international, regional and national), services and capacity of formal and informal institutions including Faith Based Organizations to prevent and respond to child marriage.

#### **1.4 Methodology of Study**

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analysed. The quantitative study involved the analysis of existing data sets that contained information relevant for this study. These are the sixth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS), the 2008 and 2014 Ghana Demographic and Health Surveys (GDHS) and the Ghana Socio-economic Panel Survey.

The qualitative data collection took place in the Greater Accra Region (institutional surveys) and the Brong Ahafo, Volta, Northern and Upper East Regions. These regions were chosen based on the incidence of child marriage, inheritance practices, ethnic diversity and socio-economic status as measured by the poverty incidence. Data collection in the four regions outside the Greater Accra Region took place in a total of eight communities, that is two communities (one urban and one rural) where WVG operates in each region. The objective was to achieve as much diversity in context as possible in order to capture the different factors associated with child marriage in Ghana and its effects.

The instruments employed in the four regions were Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). As part of the field exercise in the regions, a community profile exercise was conducted in each community to obtain information on the history, socio-economic activities, customs and traditions.

Eight FGDs, comprising four each, all men and all women FGDs, were held in the four selected regions. The number of participants in the FGDs ranged from seven to twelve. A member of the research team facilitated the discussions with the assistance of an interpreter where necessary.

In each region, three to five key informants were selected and interviewed. These were individuals who held influential positions in the community and were informed about the subject of the research. These included chiefs, queen mothers, officials from relevant public sectors especially health, education, and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and religious leaders.

In-depth interviews were held with child brides and parents of child brides. Four categories of child brides were interviewed. The first category comprised girls who are currently married and are less than 18 years old. They were classified as current child brides. The remaining categories comprised women older than 18 years who got married when they were less than 18 years and were classified as mature child brides. They were sub-divided into three groups based on their marital status, that is, women who are currently married, women who are no longer married and women who have remarried.

Table I indicates the sample size for the in-depth interviews by categories and by region.

Table I: IDI Participants, by Region

Region	Brong Ahafo	Volta	Northern	Upper East
<b>IDI Participants</b>				
Current child brides	6	6	6	5
Parents of child brides	6	6	6	5
<b>*Mature Brides</b>				
Women married before 18 and still married	4	4	4	4
Women married before 18 but no longer married	2	2	2	2
Women married before 18 and remarried	2	2	2	2

*\*\*Mature brides refer to the three categories of women above 18 years who got married before the age of 18.*

Institutional interviews were conducted in Accra with ten(10) relevant state and non-state actors. Interviews were held with representatives from the public sector, local and international non- governmental organisations and some civil society organisations. The in-depth interview method guided by a semi-structured interview guide was used to explore questions relating to the role, motivation and level of commitment of the institutions in the fight against child marriage, the design and framework for implementing their interventions, how the interventions have worked or not worked and the lessons to be learnt from their involvement in child marriage interventions.

### 1.5 Data Handling and Analysis

Data collected from the four regions were all audio-recorded. All the audio files were transcribed verbatim and cleaned up for analysis. A thematic analysis was conducted for this exercise. Themes extracted were categorised into *global themes, organising themes, and basic themes* (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In deriving the codes for building the various themes, a coding frequency table was constructed to identify the various responses on each basic theme. A network of themes was constructed to demonstrate the relationships among basic, organising and global themes for each objective of the study. The thematic analysis did not only derive themes for the study but also generated direct quotes to support the various themes that were discussed.

### 1.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought from the Ethics Committee of the College of Humanities of the University of Ghana. Consent from participants was obtained prior to the start of the interviews. For the interviews with the current child brides below 18, consent was sought from the guardian, usually the father in law with whom they lived.

The guardians were given a form, which they signed to give consent for their dependents to participate in the research.

### **1.7 Limitations and Constraints**

In one of the two communities studied in the Northern Region, all the participants in the FGDs and community profile exercise and the key informants, were insistent on the fact the practice of child marriage did not exist in the community. With some additional effort, the researchers found that the practice was rife in the community. It is believed that this stance taken by the community was because of the presence of WVG staff in their midst. This is known as social desirability effect in research where the respondents give responses that they think the researcher would like to hear.

Another constraint experienced across all sites was the difficulty in determining the ages of the current child brides. Owing to the high illiteracy levels in the communities that were studied, almost all the current child brides that were sampled could not tell their actual age. The determination of the age thus required a lot of probing, which included asking for an identification card such as the NHIS card or using historical landmarks.

The biggest challenge with the age issue was the fact that the community focal person that helped with selecting the current child brides usually did not get the ages of the children right despite the strict instruction to do so. Thus, the researchers sometimes had to travel a significant distance to establish the needed rapport with the participants before they found out that the participant did not qualify because of her age.



*Interview of a child bride*

## 1.8 Conclusion

Several countries, including Ghana have signed international conventions and agreements that prohibit child marriage and have translated these into national laws but the child marriage phenomenon continues to exist. It is therefore necessary to understand why the practice continues and what measures can be introduced to make the laws more effective and to change behaviour.



*Focus group discussion with husbands of mature child and child brides*

## CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Child marriage is the outcome of the interplay of several factors. Karam (2015) has classified the causes of child marriage into three broad categories.

- *The first is economic, where parents may marry off their young daughters in order to transfer the economic burden of looking after them to another family. In countries where the girls' families pay dowries as part of the marriage contract, there is an incentive to marry girls off early since the cost of the dowry increases with the age of the girl.*
- *The second causal factor identified is structural, i.e. the lack of educational opportunities. Steinhaus et al. (2016) in a study on the causes of child marriage in Kenya and Zambia identified lack of education as one of the direct causes of child marriage. When there are limited opportunities for girls to proceed to higher education either because parents cannot afford to pay for their daughters' education or because girls do not get good enough grades to transition to the next level there is pressure on the girls to get married.*
- *The third factor identified is social, where cultural norms and practices and religious perspectives on when girls should marry are important causal factors. For example, in societies where a premium is placed on virginity prior to marriage and pre-marital pregnancy casts shame on girls' families, parents will marry off their daughters at an early age to prevent this.*

These causes are not mutually exclusive.

Not all child marriages are the direct result of parents making the decision to marry off their daughters. Pre-marital pregnancy can place girls in the difficult position of having no choice but to get married (Steinhaus et al., 2016). Inadequate sex education, ignorance about the use of contraceptives and difficulty in accessing contraceptives can result in early pregnancy and marriage before girls attain the legal age.

Child marriage has several negative consequences on girls. Ruptured uterus fistula, maternal mortality and morbidity, stillbirth, abortions, sexually transmitted diseases and gender-based violence are a few of the health challenges that arise out of child marriages (UNFPA, 2012). Mathur et al. (2003) indicate that child marriages lead to increased early childbirth and unwanted pregnancies in developing countries.

It is sometimes difficult to disentangle the causes from the effects of child marriage. Nguyen and Wodon (2014) and Delprato et al. (2015) are examples of studies that have controlled for the complex relationship between education and child marriage and established a negative relationship running from child marriage to girls' schooling. The low bargaining power of young brides, especially those married to much older men and insufficient education exposes them to emotional, physical, verbal and sexual violence (Santhya et al, 2010, Erulkar, 2013). A study on suicidal tendencies in Ethiopia finds a positive association between child marriage and suicidal thoughts (Gage, 2013). The employment opportunities of child brides are limited because of their low education levels and lack of skills.

Different marriage practices are present in Ghana. Culture and religion allow for polygyny. In 2010 about 43% of the population above 12 years old was married (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Data from the 2010 population and housing census reveals that very young children in Ghana get married. It is a practice that affects girls and boys, however the incidence is higher among girls. In 2010, about 5.6% of boys and 5.2% of girls aged 12-14 years were married (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). The incidence almost doubled to 9.2% among girls aged 15-19 years and was slightly lower at 4.8% for boys in the same age category. Among this older age group about 1% of girls were divorced, widowed or separated. The ten-year period between 2000 and 2010 saw a decline in the proportion of 15-19 year old girls who had ever been married from 19.5% to 13.2%. Child marriage occurs in both urban and rural areas, however child brides are more likely to be found in rural areas where they account for 17.5% of girls aged 15-19 years compared to 9.6% of urban girls.

Another important focus of the literature on child marriage is the low level of success achieved by many sub-Saharan African countries in their attempt to reduce the prevalence of the practice in spite of the global and national level attention and series of interventions it has attracted. This is sometimes explained by the lack of understanding of the multifaceted and multi-dimensional national and community level factors that perpetuate the practice. Thus, an approach that includes a critical examination of national and community causes and consequences of child marriage can help in building support for policies against child marriage (Nguyen and Wodon, 2014). Much of the published research on child marriage is carried out in Asian countries. It is hoped that this research will add to the literature on child marriage in Africa.

This is important because contexts differ and context matters for the design of effective interventions.

## **2.2 Measures of Child Marriage**

Different measures of child marriage are estimated using the sample of women aged 18-49 years in the GDHS data set and women aged 18-64 years in the GLSS data set. Girls aged between 15 and 17 years are not included in the estimates because some of them may get married before they turn 18 years. Table 2 presents the measures of child marriage at the national level, as well as for rural and urban areas. The incidence of child marriage among women aged 18-49 years is 27.2% and the incidence is higher among rural women at 34.3% compared to 19.4% for urban women.

An examination of the incidence of child marriage by region reveals a substantial amount of variation. Northern Region has the highest incidence at 38.0% with Greater Accra Region recording the lowest incidence at 17.8%. The three northern regions recorded the highest incidence and the highest child marriage gap indices which are above the national average. Not only are girls in these regions likely to marry before the legal age, they are also more likely to marry at a much younger age compared to girls in other parts of the country. Both the median and the mean age at first marriage in these three regions are also lower than the national average.



Table 2: Measures of Child Marriage by Location in Ghana, 2014

	Measures of child marriage			Age of first marriage	
	Headcount (%)	Gap (%)	Squared Gap (%)	Median	Mean
<b>Area of residence</b>					
Urban	19.4 (0.0074)	2.8 (0.0013)	0.6 (0.0003)	20	20.7
Rural	34.3 (0.0092)	5.1 (0.0017)	1.0 (0.0005)	18	18.7
<b>Region</b>					
Western	31.2 (0.0172)	4.8 (0.0033)	1.0 (0.0010)	18	19
Central	28.6 (0.0219)	4.1 (0.0037)	0.7 (0.0008)	19	19.8
Greater Accra	17.8 (0.0139)	2.6 (0.0023)	0.5 (0.0006)	21	21.6
Volta	25.3 (0.0174)	3.9 (0.0032)	0.8 (0.0009)	19	19.8
Eastern	26.0 (0.0161)	3.8 (0.0029)	0.7 (0.0007)	19	19.9
Ashanti	25.1 (0.0157)	3.7 (0.0027)	0.7 (0.0008)	19	20.2
Brong-Ahafo	23.3 (0.0150)	3.6 (0.0038)	0.8 (0.0008)	20	20.4
Northern	38.0 (0.0193)	5.7 (0.00438)	1.1 (0.0012)	18	18.5
Upper East	34.1 (0.0203)	5.0 (0.0037)	1.0 (0.0010)	18	18.4
Upper West	35.0 (0.0249)	5.5 (0.0048)	1.2 (0.0015)	18	18.4
<b>National</b>	27.2 (0.0060)	3.9 (0.0010)	0.8 (0.0003)	19	19.7

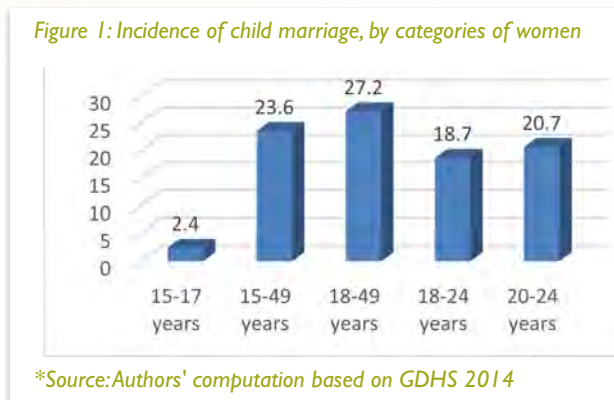
Standard errors are in parentheses.

\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

Figure 1 presents information on the incidence of child marriage among women in different age categories from different studies. This was done in order to compare the findings of this report with the findings from other studies. There is no specific reference age category in the literature for measuring the incidence of child marriage. Some studies provide incidence measures based on the age category 18-49 years as the denominator (for example, Nguyen and Wodon, 2015) while others

employ a reference age category of 20-24 years (UNICEF, 2015). Among the sample of women aged 15-49 years the incidence of child marriage in Ghana is 23%. This means that about one out of every five girls and women aged between 15 and 49 years got married before 18. The incidence is higher (27.2%) among the women aged 18 to 49 years. Among women aged 18-24 years, the incidence of child marriage is 18.7% whilst for women 20-24 years, the incidence is 20.7%

Table 3 presents information on the proportion of child brides who married at various ages. It is observed that some child brides were married off as early as 10 years. None of the current child brides were married so young. However, about 49% of the current child brides were married before they were 15 years. This contrasts with 26% of mature child brides. The caveat is that the information on mature child brides<sup>1</sup> may be contaminated because some might have died.



*Table 3: Child brides who entered into marital unions at the various ages (%) in 2014*

Age at first marriage	Current child	Mature child	Child brides
	brides	brides	
10	0.0	1.1	1.1
11	3.8	1.6	1.6
12	8.2	3.7	2.7
13	12.9	6.6	6.6
14	24.4	12.6	12.7
15	18.7	21.1	21.1
16	25.9	25.7	25.7
17	6.1	27.7	27.5

*\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014*

<sup>1</sup>Data on child brides in this document is in reference to what was collected by GDHS in 2014 and not WVG study

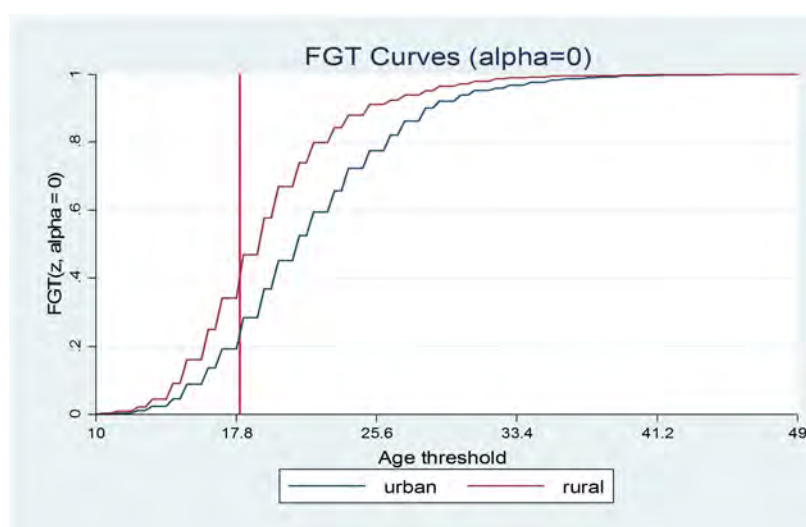
Ghana has several ethnic groups and for the purpose of this analysis, they have been categorised into nine major groups<sup>2</sup>. These are Akan, Ga, Ewe, Guan, Mole-Dagbani, Grusi, Gruma, Mande and other ethnic groups. The category “other ethnic group” refers to ethnic groups originating from outside Ghana, including the Fulani. The different measures of child marriage confirm the ethnic differences in the practice of child marriage in Ghana. The incidence of child marriage is highest among the Gurma at 35.4%. Next, with an incidence of 35.1% is the group of other ethnic group including ethnic groups not indigenous to Ghana such as the Fulani. The ethnic group with the third highest incidence is the Mole-Dagbani (32.9%). The ethnic group with the lowest incidence of child marriage is the Ewe (19.7%). The child marriage gap and squared child marriage gap are higher for the Grusi, Mole-Dagbani and other ethnic group. Very young girls are at a much higher risk of getting married before the legal age among these groups.

The incidence of child marriage is high among people of the African traditional faith (42.6 %). Persons who do not have any religious affiliation and those who are not affiliated to the major religions in Ghana also have a very high incidence of child marriage (42.1%). The incidence is lowest (24%) among people who profess the Christian faith and higher among Muslims (33.7%). The mean age of first marriage among followers of the African traditional religions is the lowest among the religious groupings. The child marriage gap of 7.3% is highest among the traditional adherents.

### 2.2.1 Stochastic Dominance Analysis

The robustness of the association between child marriage and location and child marriage and religious affiliation will be investigated by applying tests for stochastic dominance. First order stochastic dominance will be tested for by relying on simple cumulative distribution functions. The cumulative distribution of child marriage for rural women lies above that of the distribution for urban women. These graphs (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) do not intersect, indicating that irrespective of the threshold for the marriage age, women in rural areas are more likely to marry at an earlier age than women in urban areas.

Figure 2: Cumulative distribution of age at first marriage by location

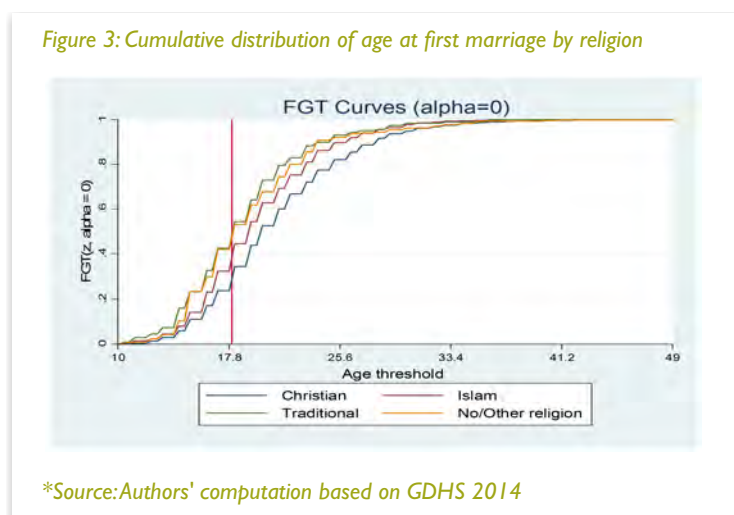


\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014

<sup>2</sup>This classification follows that used by the Ghana Statistical Service in the classification of ethnic groups in the 2010 Census report.

Figure 3 compares the cumulative distributions of age at marriage for women with different religious affiliations. The intersection of the curves at different age thresholds suggests that the ranking of religious groups based on the incidence of child marriage depends on what value the age threshold takes.

Despite this, the cumulative distribution curve for Christian women does not intersect any of the other curves. This implies that whichever measure of child marriages is used, child marriage will be found to be less prevalent among Christians compared to the other religious categories.



## 2.3 Characteristics of Child Brides

This section explores the characteristics of child brides on the basis of education and literacy, skills and apprenticeship training, employment status and current poverty status. It begins with a discussion on the age and education of their spouses and partners which is based on data from the 2014 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey.

### 2.3.1 Characteristics of spouses and partners

The mean age gap between current child brides and their spouses is 6.7 years. Among mature child brides the mean age gap is higher at 7.7 years. This suggests that young girls who are currently married are more likely than girls who married in earlier periods to be married or in consensual unions with men closer in age to them.

Majority of the men (65.4%) have secondary education and about 21% have no education and none had tertiary education. In contrast, women who married when they were adults are more likely to be married to men who have tertiary education (15.3%) and less likely to be married to men with no education (16.7%).

### 2.3.2 Education and Literacy of Child Brides

The study employed two indicators, highest academic qualification and literacy rate to examine educational attainment of the various categories of married women in Ghana. The incidence of no education is higher among child brides (33.5%) compared to women who did not get married as child brides. This is suggestive of a negative relationship between child marriage and educational attainment. However, a disaggregation of child brides by age indicates that current child brides are more likely to have acquired some education than mature child brides.

Table 4: Highest educational attainment and Literacy Rates (%)

	Current child brides	Mature child brides	Child brides	Other married women
<b>Educational Attainment</b>				
No Education	20.0	33.6	33.5	22.4
Incomplete primary	30.2	17.7	17.8	11.7
Complete primary	24.0	7.6	7.8	4.0
Incomplete secondary	25.8	37.7	37.6	45.6
Complete secondary	0.0	2.4	2.3	9.2
Higher	0.0	1.0	1.0	7.1
<b>Current School Attendance</b>				
Still in School	16.1	4.1		
<b>Literacy</b>				
Cannot read at all	57.5	71.7	71.6	51.6
Able to read parts of sentence	11.4	8.4	8.4	9.1
Able to read whole sentence	31.1	20.0	20.1	39.4

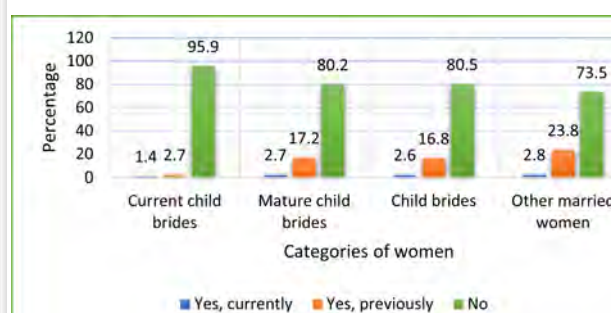
The literacy rate is higher among current child brides and much lower among mature child brides. This may be because of the recent intervention programmes in education that appear to have improved school enrolment in the country.

\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014

### 2.3.3 Skills and apprenticeship of Child Brides

The acquisition of skills through apprenticeship training improves the employability of women. However, child marriage can reduce the likelihood of young adult women acquiring skills through apprenticeships because of the responsibilities of marriage and child care.

Figure 4: Apprenticeship training, by categories of married women (%)

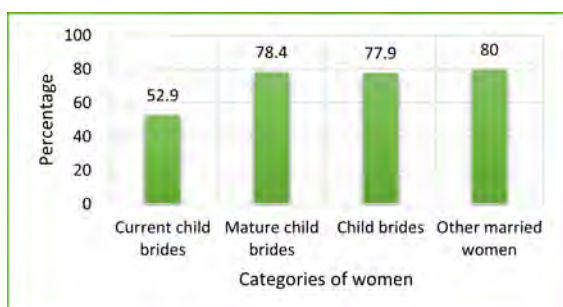


The incidence of having undertaken an apprenticeship among current child brides is negligible since they are still quite young. Of interest therefore is the incidence of apprenticeship among women who married as child brides compared to women who married at 18 or later. Mature child brides have lower rates of having undergone apprenticeship.

### 2.3.4 Employment Status of Child Brides

The economic activities of women have important implications for welfare, decision making and bargaining power within the household. Two indicators – current employment status and type of employment are examined.

Figure 5: Employment status, by categories of married women (%)



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS 6, 2012/13

While about four out of every five married women who married after 18 years is employed, just over half (52.9 %) of the current child brides are employed. This suggests that current child brides are more likely to be economically dependent and powerless.

The type of employment of workers, to a larger extent, determines their level of well-being. Majority (68.3 %) of the current child brides are engaged at the household level as contributing family workers.

Among mature child brides, about 33% of them are contributing to the family labour, with 34.8% engaged in non-farm self-employment. This means that the working child brides in Ghana may be powerless when it comes to production decisions and resource allocation.

Figure 6: Type of employment, by categories of married women (%)

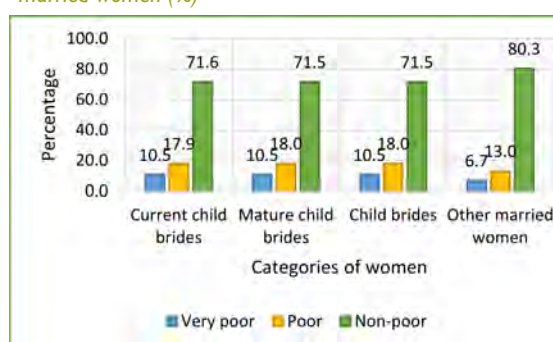


\*Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS 6, 2012/13

### 2.3.5 Poverty Status of Child Brides' Households

Ideally, the poverty status of the households of the parents or guardians of the girls and women should have been examined. However, because this information is not available, the current poverty status is estimated for the households the girls and the women are currently members of. The study employs three categories of poverty status – extremely poor, poor and non-poor – to examine the well-being of the various groups of married women.

Figure 7: Current poverty status, by categories of married women (%)



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS 6, 2012/13

The incidence of poverty is higher among the households of child brides compared to households of women who got married or entered into consensual unions at 18 years or older. This may be because those who married when they were 18 or older tend to be more economically active and are therefore more likely to contribute to their households' consumption expenditure. It is interesting to note that the incidence of poverty among households with current child brides and mature child brides is about the same. It suggests that poor households may be the recipients of child brides.

## 2.4 Outcome or effects of child marriage on Child Brides

The estimates provided in this section are generated from the sixth round of the GDHS. It presents evidence on the relationship between child marriage and the reproductive health decisions and outcomes of girls and women. Specifically, the focus is on the age at first pregnancy, contraceptive knowledge and use, number of births and intimate partner violence and the psychological disposition of the child brides.

### 2.4.1 Age at first pregnancy of Child Brides

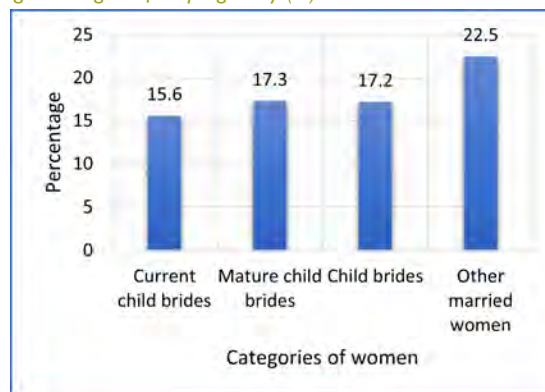
Early pregnancy can have implications for the health and future economic outcomes of girls. For instance, pregnancy at an early age has been found to lead to complications at child birth, low birth weight of children as well as maternal and infant morbidity. Moore et al. (2009) and Santhya et al. (2010) provide evidence on the association between child marriage and early childbirth. Mathur et al. (2003) indicate that child marriage leads to increased early childbirth and unwanted pregnancies in developing countries.

While on the average, women who married when they are 18 years or older would become pregnant for the first time at age 22.5 years, the mean age at first pregnancy for current child brides is 15.6 years. This is lower than the mean age of first pregnancy of women who were child brides (17.3).

### 2.4.2 Number of Children of Child Brides

Since child brides begin having children at an early age it is expected that they will have more children during their lifetime. Figure 9 presents information on the number of children ever born and the number of living children. The average number of children ever born is higher amongst mature child brides (4.1) compared to the women who married when they were 18 or older. The results suggest that the early age at first pregnancy among child brides contributes to the high number of births.

Figure 8: Age at first pregnancy (%)



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS 6, 2012/13

Figure 9: Average number of children



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GLSS 6, 2012/13

## 2.5 Access to Services

### 2.5.1 Antenatal and Postnatal Care

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends a minimum of four antenatal visits during pregnancy. About 72.5% of current child brides attended at least four antenatal visits during their last pregnancies whilst amongst mature child brides, about 87.7% attended the minimum required antenatal visits. However, amongst women who entered into their first marriage or consensual union when they were 18 years or older, 92.2 per cent attended the required minimum antenatal visits.

In addition, WHO recommends that a pregnant woman attends her first ante-natal care (ANC) during the first trimester of pregnancy since early antenatal visits enable early detection of pregnancy-related complications. From the chart it is realised that for all the categories, the figures drop significantly though most women had made at least 4 ANC visits. The WHO also recommends that both mother and baby attend postnatal clinics within 2 months after the birth of the child. The figures for the various categories increased slightly above those who had attended ANC during the first trimester. Girls who are child brides are less likely than mature child brides and women who did not marry as child brides to make use of reproductive health services because child brides are less likely to make decisions regarding their own health care compared to the other categories of child brides and married women.

### 2.5.2 Contraception for Child Brides

Figure 11 provides information on contraceptive use among the different categories of married women and girls. The incidence of contraceptive use is lower among current child brides. This may be because young brides may not know about contraceptives or else do not have the bargaining power to discuss or negotiate contraception with their spouses. Godha et al. (2013) found that in Southeast Asia, child marriage leads to lower contraceptive usage among women. Raj et al. (2009) report a negative relationship between child marriage and fertility control outcomes in India.

Figure 10: Combined chart of proportion of women who attended at least 4 ANC visits, ANC attendance in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester and PNC visit within 2 months of childbirth

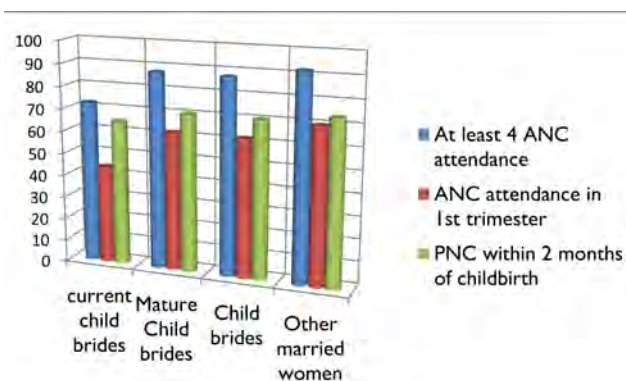


Figure 11: Contraceptive use (%)



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014



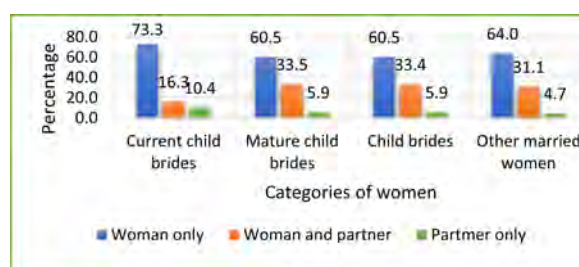
### 2.5.3 Decision-making of Child Brides

Three decision making indicators are considered in this section. These are control over the use of women's earnings, participation in decisions concerning women's health care and participating in decisions concerning large household purchases.

#### Control over their own earnings

Women who earn income tend to have substantial degree of autonomy in the use of their earnings. Compared to mature child brides, current child brides are more likely to make this decision alone. This may be indicative of the nature of the relationship between very young brides and their partners. They may not earn very much and spouses may decide to let them have control over their earnings.

Figure 12: Decision making on women's earning (%)

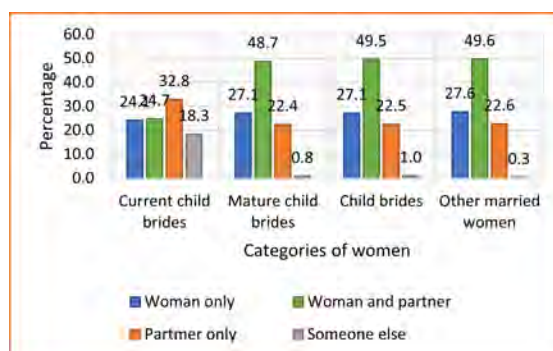


\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

#### Participate in decision on own health

In contrast to mature child brides and other married women, other people are more likely to make the decisions regarding the health of current child brides. Only about 49 per cent of child brides are involved in this decision compared to 75 per cent of mature child brides and 76 per cent of other married women.

Figure 13: Decision making on women's health care (%)

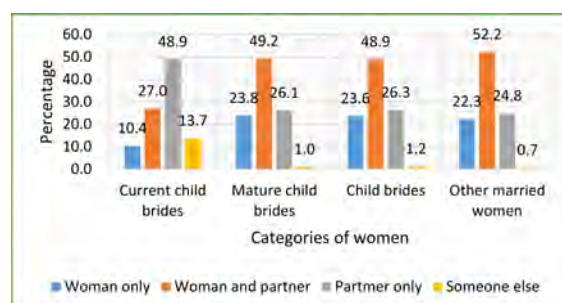


\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

#### Participate in decision over major household purchases

Similar to the health care decision, current child brides are less involved in household decisions on large purchases as 62.6% of current child brides indicate that decisions concerning such household purchases are made by either their partner only or someone else. This is not a surprising finding; since they are young they are left out of most major decisions. Second, since they do not have much earning power they are unlikely to be contributing to the purchase of the items for the house.

Figure 14: Decision making on large household purchases (%)



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2014.

### Participate in decision over visits to her family or relatives

Compared to mature child brides and other married women, a larger proportion of current child brides are not involved in the decision concerning when to visit family members or relatives. The decisions on visits to family and friends are made without the involvement of about 45% of current child brides.

### 2.6 Intimate partner violence- physical violence, emotional violence and sexual abuse

Three types of intimate partner violence meted out by male spouses or partners on their wives or partners are examined. These are verbal abuse, emotional abuse, physical violence and sexual violence. Raj et al. (2010) found out that in India, women who were married as children are more likely to suffer violence from their spouses or partners.

From figure 16, current child brides are much more likely to have experienced abuse in the past 12 months. Though verbal abuse was common among the other categories of women, the other forms of abuses were very minimal.

### Sexual violence

Data for this section is sourced from the fifth round of the GDHS. Although the incidence of reported sexual abuse in the past 12 months is low, the incidence is higher among women who married when they were children.

Figure 15: Decision on visit to family or relatives(%)

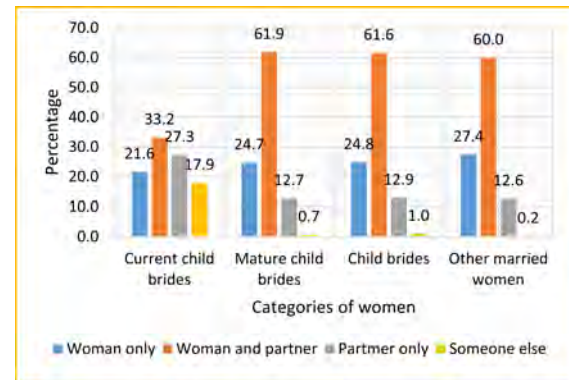
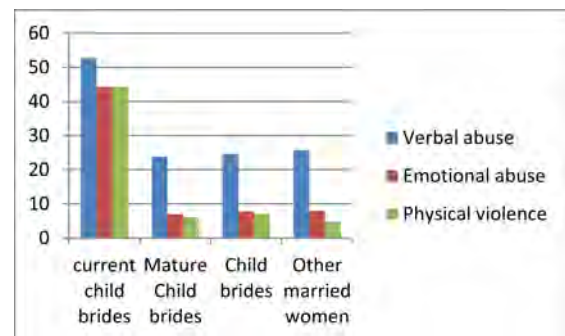
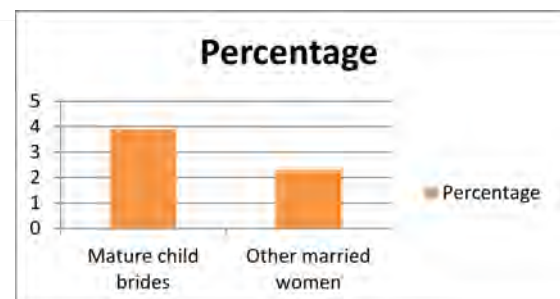


Figure 16: Experience of abuses, by categories of married women (%)



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GSEP 2009/2010

Figure 17: Experience of sexual violence, by categories of married women (%)



\*Source: Authors' computation based on GDHS 2008

## 2.6.1 Psychological Impact

Data from the first round of the Ghana Socio-Economic Panel (GSEP) Survey conducted in 2009 is used to assess the possible psychological effects of child marriage on child brides in Ghana. The GSEP, at present, is the only nationally representative survey that contains information on the psychological and subjective well-being of respondents which measures the frequency of a respondent feeling hopeless, depressed or worthless. These same questions were asked as part of Kessler Psychological Distress Scale.

The frequency of married girls and women in Ghana experiencing a sense of hopelessness is low. However, about one out of every five current child brides experience a sense of hopelessness most of the time. This is higher than the proportion of mature child brides and other married women.

Almost 86% of child brides reported not feeling depressed compared to the older women. This finding that only a fraction of current child brides suffer from depression is unexpected given that about 20% have a sense of hopelessness most of the time.

About 79% of current child brides mention that they don't have a sense of worthlessness. This contrasts with mature child brides of whom lower proportions (61.4%) do not have a sense of worthlessness. Also categories of married women when compared to current child brides do have a sense of worthlessness it is not most or all of the time.

Table 5: Combined on feeling of hopelessness, depression and worthlessness

Feeling of hopelessness						
Frequency		None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Current bride	child	66.2	4.3	9.5	19.9	0.0
Mature bride	child	54.7	20.1	14.4	7.8	3.1
Child brides		54.9	19.8	14.3	8.0	3.0
Other married women		62.1	15.6	13.9	6.5	2.0
Feeling of depression						
Current bride	child	86.2	6.3	7.5	0.0	0.0
Mature bride	child	37.2	27.7	23.7	9.1	2.4
Child brides		38.2	27.2	23.4	8.9	2.3
Other married women		40.9	25.3	24.0	8.2	1.7
Feeling of worthlessness						
Current bride	child	79.1	4.3	16.6	0.0	0.0
Mature bride	child	61.4	19.1	11.4	5.8	2.3
Child brides		61.5	18.8	11.5	5.7	2.3
Other married women		67.0	14.3	12.7	4.5	1.6

\*Source: Authors' computation based on GSEP, 2009/2010

## CHAPTER 3 - FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH

### 3.1 Demography of Respondents on Child Marriage

Forty seven (47) participants were interviewed during the study. This comprised 27 respondents who were still married, 5 who had remarried, 8 who were no longer married and 7 were currently brides. For all the different categories of respondents, most of them had at least basic education and were employed. The common occupation mentioned by the respondents was farming while a few mentioned that they were engaged in trading and artisanship (gari processing, shea nut processing and of selling cooked food). Majority of the respondents also had children less than 3.

Table 5: Background characteristics of respondents

Marital status	Still married	Remarried	No longer married	Current brides
	27	5	8	7
Education				
None	8	2	7	0
At least basic education	19	3	1	7
Occupation				
Unemployed	7	1	3	3
Employed	20	4	5	4
Number of children				
Less than 3	17	2	4	7
More than 3	10	3	4	0

### 3.2 Geographic Scope of Study

The study collected data from eight communities in four regions in Ghana. This section presents background information gathered from the community profile exercise. The exercise involved interviews with three to five elders in each community. Hence, the information in this section is a direct presentation of accounts given by community elders and not extracted from any documented sources.

#### 3.2.1 BrongAhafo Region

Anyima and Krabonso are located in the BrongAhafo region of Ghana. These communities are largely inhabited by the indigenes (Bono speaking people) but they have a number of migrants from the three northern regions. They are largely a Christian dominated community while the other religions are in the minority.

Though these communities have a number of basic schools there is a low interest in education among the youth. Majority of the children who attend school do not complete the basic education level. The biggest concern is about education of the girl-child.

Most girls in the community drop out of school due to teenage pregnancy and do not return to school after they deliver. The main marital practice among the Bono is monogamy; polygyny is largely practiced among the settlers from the three northern regions. In the past, parents would make marriage arrangements for their children but this is not the case anymore. The only circumstance under which child marriage is allowed is when the girl is not in school. It is perceived by the community that it is better for them to be married once they are not in school so that they do not engage in bad practices that will bring shame on the family.

### **3.2.2 Upper East Region**

Tanga and Kamega are both located in the Upper East region of Ghana. Tanga is a very large community in the Bawku West District. It has six ethnic groups in the community with the Kusasi who are the indigenous people, being the largest. Traditional religion is the most predominant in the community followed by Christianity and Islam. School enrolment is high at 100 per cent, but almost 80% of children especially girls within the community do not complete basic school due to teenage pregnancy. Child marriage used to be a common practice in the community but currently it is frowned upon in the community. They have their own community level laws to help reduce the occurrence of the practice. This includes naming and shaming parents who give their children into marriage. This has been working well and the majority of parents are refraining from the practice.

Kamega is one of the oldest communities in the Bawku West District. The main marital practice is polygyny where men can have as many wives as they can afford. The practice of child marriage was prevalent about twenty years ago and the main driver of the practice was hunger resulting from poverty. However, the practice has reduced significantly especially with emphasis on the importance of education. Very few parents are involved in the practice and for those who do, poverty still remains the reason. Currently, the practice of child marriage stems from girls getting pregnant at an early age.

### **3.2.3 Volta Region**

Kecheebi-Asuogya is a farming community in the Nkwanta District in the Volta region. The residents are mainly Kokomba speaking people. The people in the community practice traditional religion.

Girls do not usually complete JHS mainly because of financial constraints by their families. Teenage pregnancy and early marriage are also reasons girls drop out of school. No girl from the Kecheebi-Asuogya community has ever attended senior high school. The most common marital practice is polygyny usually resulting in large families. The community practices 'exchange marriage' and this is what is hindering any efforts at addressing child marriage. Exchange marriage is an arrangement where a man is expected to give his daughter or sister to his wife's family in exchange for his wife. Failure to do this means the man has to return his wife and their children to the woman's family. However, currently, girls are refusing to go into these marriages especially when they do not like the men they are being given to. This resistance on the part of the younger generation is still not enough to do away with the practice because it is a long cherished tradition of theirs.

Dadieaso is another community in the Volta Region. Traditional religion is practiced by most of the people. Girls in the community do not appear to appreciate the importance of education and for this reason drop out quite early. Teenage pregnancy is another challenge that their girls face with their education.

The acceptable form of marriage in this community is monogamy even though one may find a few people practicing polygyny. Child marriages used to be carefully arranged in the past by children's parents to keep the girls from being promiscuous but currently the children make their own choices. Unfortunately the girls get pregnant thus precipitating these choices. They consider the arranged marriages to be helpful because girls stay chaste until the proper customary rites are performed for them to be married. They reckon that the high incidence of teenage pregnancies is as a result of the absence of these arranged marriages and the rules that govern it.

### **3.2.4 Northern Region**

Nanton and Gbumbum are both Muslim communities in the Savelugu-Nanton District in the Northern region. Polygyny is the predominant marital type. These communities consistently denied the existence of child marriage in the community. Their religion frowns on pre-marital pregnancy. To avoid the family being put to shame by a daughter who gets pregnant out of wedlock, such girls are given out into marriage. The community perceived marriage of young girls more like a control mechanism to prevent promiscuity among girls. It is also customary practice that in the unfortunate event of a girl falling pregnant, it is compulsory that the man responsible for the pregnancy marries the girl irrespective of her age. These are the circumstances under which child marriages occur in the community. Community members are of the view that there is a very low prevalence of girls dropping out of school as result of teenage pregnancy because they are married off immediately they begin to exhibit signs of promiscuity.

In Gbumbum, Islamic marriage is practiced and this involves the exchange of kola and a small amount of money as the main requirement for the customary marriage rites. This is usually crowned with a big feast before the woman is sent to the man's house. To the younger generation, the feast is an opportunity to be lavished with gifts from their loved ones and it is also a source of pride to their parents. Thus they insist on the feast before they move to the homes of their husbands. In the event of child marriages which community members insist does not exist, there is nothing like a party since the children are forced into the marriage and sent to the houses of their husbands against their will so they cannot even request to have the feast.

## **3.3 Causes of Child Marriage**

### **3.3.1 Teenage Pregnancy and Pre-marital Sex**

Information gathered from respondents indicates that teenage pregnancy is a common cause of child marriage in the study area. Teenage pregnancy is seen in the Volta, Brong Ahafo and Upper East regions. Girls who have had children at age 13 and 15 have to get married. Sometimes this becomes a form of forced marriage because the girls are not ready to be married but are compelled to do so because of the pregnancy as confirmed by key respondents and child brides. The link between pregnancy and marriage pertains more to the current child brides than the mature child brides. Most of the current child brides in this study admitted they had gotten married because they had settled with the father of the child as a sign that their child's father had accepted responsibility as well as not leaving the child fatherless. For some brides their parents gave them the ultimatum to marry whilst others made the decision to do so themselves.

**“... Now we are saying that increasingly, the most influencing factor is teenage pregnancy. So when they get pregnant, whether they were sexually abused, whether it was peer pressure, adventure, if pregnancy happens, marriage happens. ....”** (MoGCSP)

**“... There are such issues. As I mentioned earlier on, there are girls who may even give birth at the age of 13 or 15 years. The moment you give birth too, then you are ready to get married, so they are forced into it....”** (Key Informant, Volta region)

**“... I had to marry him because I was pregnant ...”**  
(Current child bride, Upper East region)

**“Yes she was pregnant and it was because of it that they came to ask for her hand in marriage. ...”** (Father of child bride, Volta region)

Another reason why parents put pressure on their daughters to get married is to protect the image of the family when the girls become pregnant. Several institutions that were interviewed confirmed this finding. For example an official from the Ghana Health Service had this to say:

**“... There is a stigma associated with teenage pregnancy. The family will like to save their face, so they marry the girl off and also, because of the financial implications of having an extra mouth to feed, they want to marry the girl off....”** (Ghana Health Service)

Mature child brides had more varying opinions on the reasons that led to their getting married whilst they were children. Their discussions centred more on personal experiences. Among mature brides between 19 and 40 years old who are still in their first marriage becoming pregnant was not a common cause of their marriage. Their parents decided for them to get married when they were children in order to avoid pre-marital sex and pregnancy and the shame the latter would bring to them and their families. This is a cause for child marriage found to be more pronounced in the Northern region where teenage pregnancy is not common.

**“... It is beneficial in the sense that if I hadn't married maybe I would have been impregnated by another man which would have been an insult for people to insult me with. It is better I am married...”**  
(Mature child bride, still married, Northern region)

The child brides further explained that poor academic performance, continuous class repetition, and early withdrawal from school had resulted in an unplanned pregnancy and then marriage. Most of the brides dropped out of school in class six when they had turned 16 but began primary school when they were nine or older. Another reason was low financial support from their parents to cover the costs of education. In such situations the tendency was they dropped out of school and found a job to help their parents who could not afford to buy school bags, shoes and uniforms amongst other items for school.

***“... I wasn't academically good and also my parents couldn't assist me financially so I dropped off to learn a trade, then I started dating and then finally got pregnant...”*** (Current child bride, Brong Ahafo region)

### **3.3.2 Poverty and Acquisition of Wealth**

The poverty related factors are multi-dimensional which comes from the parents' living situation as well as children's demand of material goods which the parents cannot afford. The discussions with current-mature child brides as well as FGD participants revealed that both parents and the girls could be motivated by financial gain and a sense of security to agree to child marriage. The underlying causes though are quite varied. There are cases where the parents seek directly to acquire wealth by marrying the child off at a tender age. The wealth is acquired through the bride price paid to them once the child enters the marriage. Some parents clearly articulated that poverty was the reason why they had given their daughters out to be married.

***“... When she completed school I didn't get enough money for her to continue her education. A man wanted to marry her, so I informed him that if he could help her continue her education after marrying her, then that's fine. This is because I didn't have money, but I just can't just allow him to take her. ...”*** (Mother of child bride, Upper East region)

***“... Girls in this community become pregnant and they don't grow before they marry. The fault is from the parents and poverty. When a girl is 12 years, her menses starts and she needs money to buy sanitary pads. Since her parents cannot afford it she will go out and find a man who will flatter her and give GH5 to her to buy the pad. At night she will go back to the man and this is what brings teenage pregnancy. ....”*** (FGD participant, Upper East region)

***“... Currently, I think the problem comes from the parents. Poverty seems to be a major contributing factor. I believe that if the parents are able to adequately provide the needs of their children, they won't be going after boys who will later get them pregnant. ...”*** (Father of child bride, Volta region)



Current child brides especially who had been forced into marriage were of the opinion that their parents were not concerned about their age or their desire to go to school, but rather about the bride price.

**“... yes I wanted to go to school but my father refused and gave me out for marriage in exchange for cattle. ...”**

*(Mature Bride no longer married, Upper East region)*

**“... Right now, our fathers do not care about your age. All they are interested in is to take the cows that will be presented for the marriage ...”**

*(Current child Bride, Upper East region)*

However the need for financial assistance also drove some of the child brides into marriage as confirmed by respondents at national and district level institutions. When they perceive that their parents cannot assist them financially, especially in school they regard it as a sign that they must start fending for themselves. Most often there develops an unspoken commitment on the part of the men who promise to take care of the girls seeking financial assistance. The age of the girl is not seen as a deterring factor in the relationship by the man, the girl and at times the parents. Eventually when pregnancy appears, the man accepts responsibility and the girl is married off to him.

**“... when I was schooling my parents couldn't provide me all of my needs and that is why I got myself a man to assist me financially...”**

*(Current child bride, Brong Ahafo region)*

**“... Sometimes the girls give themselves up because they have no one to help them.....”** *(FGD participant, Volta region)*

Different views and perceptions are held on the link between the desire to acquire wealth and child marriage. Some respondents during the FGD blamed parents who cannot take care of the need of the children. Others, however, blame the girls who are seen to have become materialistic and are not satisfied with what their parents give them. The girls also tend to copy their friends who suddenly become wealthy after they got married. They believe that getting into a relationship or marriage can help them become wealthy.

**“... The money becomes the incentive. When an uneducated girl gets married and gets so much money, her female friend who is in school, may also want the same thing. She may now choose to get married, because she stands to benefit a lot, which she might not get when she goes to school. ....”** *(Father of child bride, Volta region)*

Another dimension of poverty is introduced by a key informant of the study. They admit that parents give their children out for marriage because at times they regard the girl child as unimportant. Such disregard for the rights of the girl child makes some parents push them into marriage when they are still children. The little they have can then be used in caring for the other children.

***“...We also know that in some communities where the girl child is not as valued as the boy child they think she will become a wife or a mother anyway so she is better off being married early. ...” (MoGCSP)***

### **3.3.3 Betrothal and Forced Marriage**

Betrothal and forced marriage were found to be strongly influenced by other issues including ethnicity, family ties and negotiation. The study found that these marriages tend to be based on arrangements and negotiations made between the parents of the brides and the husbands or the families of the husbands. One form of this which involves an exchange of brides is more prevalent amongst the Konkombas in the Northern region and Volta region. The reason for the exchange is to keep wealth (measured in cows) in the family. Instead of a family intending to marry a bride for their son pay a bride price, they will offer a bride in return. Subsequently, when a man of the bride's family wants to get married the family of the bride's husband will provide a bride from their family for the man. In some instances girls are forced to marry in order for her family to acquire cows which are then used to pay the bride price of their brothers who want to get married.

***“...The practice is endemic in the Konkomba areas. What has entrenched this practice is the exchange marriage, so one family marries into another family. The other family must pay back with a bride, if you don't they will come and send all the children away with their mother. The sad aspect of it is that some of the girls in the relationship do not understand why their brothers would not receive a payback on their behalf. So at times the ladies themselves pack off if the families they are married into do not pay back to their family. ...” (CHRAJ)***

Amongst the current child brides, in the Upper East, Volta and Brong Ahafo regions, the study finds fewer instances of betrothal and forced marriage compared to the mature child brides. Some mature brides mentioned how their arrangement for marriage was made when they were born. This would usually happen when family ties are strong and binding. The girls therefore have no choice in this situation since the betrothal happens before they are of age. Once they attain maturity they are then moved to their husband's house.

***“When I was given birth to they said when I grow I will be given to him ...”***  
*(Current child bride, Northern region)*

**“...Yes like the northern culture where a child is betrothed at the early stages such as when the child is growing, the child is forced to marry. Within the northern communities it is prevalent. This is not because they're dropping out of school but they are given out for marriage. ....”** (Ghana Education Service)

Some mature child brides mentioned that they lived under the care of their in-laws until they were physically mature before a marriage ceremony was performed to seal the marriage.

**“...The marriage ceremony was not even performed. I was given to the man when I was very small; my breasts were not developed by then. I was there six years before I developed breasts...”**  
(Mature child bride, still married Upper East region)

Brides were sometimes hailed as having saved the family name because if they had not agreed to get married, their family would have suffered disgrace and could destroy ties with the family of the man chosen for her to marry.

**“... Yes. When my brother got married to his daughter, I was asked to go and help him take care of his children since his wife was dead. It was during this time that I got married to my husband as an exchange for his daughter. ...”**  
(Mature child bride, still married Brong Ahafo region)

This respondent was the second wife of her husband. She served him faithfully and looked after his other children. However her husband's daughter had been exchanged for her. So her (second wife) husband's older daughter was now married to her (second wives') brother.

Most mature child brides identified with such arranged marriages and recognized them as an expression of gratitude such as help provided during hard times to parents. Hence they had willingly accepted the proposal at the time and gotten married. Some parents also spoke about how strengthening of friendship ties resulted in child marriage. In one particular instance the parent herself was married as a child and she believes it was a good decision that was made for her. Her child was given out for marriage for a similar reason. Aside friendship and gratitude, respect is also another cause of arranged marriages. These three reasons were more pronounced in the Northern region and Upper East region than the Volta and Brong Ahafo region.

**“... My father and my husband's father were friends this was done to solidify their friendship...”** (Father of child bride, Northern region)

**“... You can give your daughter to your friend to marry because of the good relationship that you have with him. ....”** (FGD participant, Upper East region)

**“... When the man shows respect and gratitude to the father of the girl he (father) can give her out...”** (Mature child bride, still married Northern region)

Not all such marriages are accepted by the girls. In this case, if the girls are found to resist marrying the men chosen for them, they are at times carried physically to the home of the men and then kept there to prevent them from running away. In several cases the brides were moved to live in a place far from their home to prevent them from attempting to run away. Eventually they settled and stayed in the marriage.

**“... They snatched me away to the man's house. I was given food. I refused and they knew that if they should leave me I would run away so they brought me from Jirapa to Krabonso. ...”** (Mature child bride, still married, Brong Ahafo region)

A third type of the arranged marriages respondents talked about was subtle parental force by some mature brides. According to her, her father had continuously threatened that he would marry her off to her sister's husband. Finally, she had to find someone to marry before the father marry her off.

**“He said he was going to make me marry my sister's husband, so that we all can be married to him at the same time. That sister of mine is currently living in Kumasi with her husband. So I had to find a man to marry, to prevent that. ...”** (Child bride, remarried Brong Ahafo region)

Another mature bride no longer married and aged 75 mentioned it was her mother who gave her out for marriage after consultation with the gods.

**“A friend of my parents told them that his elder brother is a good man and he would like me to marry him. So my mother went to see a god called Kokroo's priest and told him 'my daughter does not want to marry'. At that time we were three girls, she never had a son The god told my mother that I don't like promiscuous life, but it is going to be difficult. At the time, we went out to play and came back in the night to sleep. The god helped my mother by giving her something to put in a food prepared for me to eat. ...”**  
(Mature child bride, no longer married, Brong Ahafo region)

This mature bride did not bear her mother a grudge for this. She is a traditionalist and accepted that this decision that had been made in her interest had benefitted her greatly. She has children with the husband and had been married to him for over fifty years until he passed away.

Arrangements and negotiations made by parents can also be to acquire wealth to cater for the siblings of the bride. Few parents, key informants and participants of the focus group discussions mention this factor as a cause of child marriage. When they mentioned this during the study, it was subtle and termed arranged marriage intended to strengthen friendship ties and in the best interest of the child and the family. It is more pronounced by the current and mature child brides. They spoke about the circumstances that led to their marriages. The institutional respondents also mention how prevalent this practice is. They explain that it is linked to culture, religion and ethnicity.

***“...A father can promise a male friend that when his wife becomes pregnant and delivers a baby girl, he will give her to him. That means that marriage has already been initiated right from the day the child is conceived. So as this child grows up, the man may be 30 years older but since the father has agreed to the marriage it will happen. It is a way of tightening up that relationship between the father and that friend of his. It is an old time tradition so changing it will be difficult...”***

*(Ghana Health Service, District Nurse Northern region)*

Parents at times believe that they are doing what is best for their children especially with the threat of pre-marital sex and teenage pregnancy on the increase. The parents and key informants see the practice of arranged marriages as an unfortunate decision made because of poverty. As the parent said but for lack of financial resources to continue caring for their children they would not have sent the child into marriage.

***“... But the poverty is what pushed us to do that. ....”***

*(Mother of child bride, Upper East region)*

The highest level of education attained by the parents of the child brides was Middle school/ JHS. Farming is the predominant occupation for most of the parents and they have no alternative income earning activities. Poverty is therefore an endemic feature of the study communities and it is a stimulus to the occurrence of child marriages.

### **3.3.4 Parental Neglect and Supervision**

Another important cause of child marriage that resonates in the interviews with the respondents is parental neglect and negligence. There remains a question of who to blame for children who are allowed to make their own decisions including getting married before they reach age 18. On one hand, the mature child brides blamed their parents for their being married as children. They said their early marriages were due to parental neglect and irresponsibility. The child brides blamed their parents for not being able to care for them, guide and control them during their childhood and adolescence; the parents blamed their daughters for not listening to them. Some of the child brides explained why they blame their parents for their marriage as children.



*Current mature and child brides*

**“...Because all I have become is the doing of my father, he never took care of me and my other siblings. And parents should take care of their children and avoid trying to have an alternative way of getting it...”**

*(Current child bride, Northern region)*

**“...The issue is that she wanted to get married, so whatever I say, she won't listen to me...”** *(Mother of child bride, Upper East region)*

**“... She decided to get married. She was the one who brought the man home....”**

*(Father of child bride, Volta region)*

**“... There are some parents who will also not provide their children the basic things they need to stay in school. When that happens, they get some men who deceive them into marriage. ...”** *(Current child bride, Brong Ahafo region)*

The mature child brides believe that when children are stubborn, parents marry them off to rid themselves of the burden of caring for them.

**“... It was because these children will not help their parents at home. When they are disobedient, they're given in marriage to avoid any problem. ...”**

*Mature child bride, still married Northern Region)*

### 3.3.5 Autonomous Decision to Marry

Some of the child brides declared that they made the decision and choice to get married themselves. The responses however indicate that at times there were some underlying reasons for this willingness to get married. One mature child bride explained that it was an easier choice since her parents had told her it was time to get married. For this child bride it was either she got married to the man of her choice or another suitor would be given to her by her parents.

***“...Yes, they were always asking me to get married. If you don't get married, they might give you to an old man to marry you. So when I met the young man...”***

*(Mature child bride still married, Upper East region)*

For others, they loved their spouses and hence they got married to them. What is gathered from these brides is they had a relationship with their spouses that blossomed into love and then they decided to get married. Another child bride loved her husband and though her family was against her decision to get married she went ahead and married him.

***“... No, we both loved each other. Some people did not like the idea of me marrying him but I loved him. ...”*** *(Mature child bride, still married Brong Ahafo region)*

Father of child brides were very emphatic about the self-made decisions their daughters had taken to get married when they were still children. It is the self-made decisions to engage in pre-marital sex that results in pregnancy and eventual marriage. The parents of the child brides do not agree that underlying factors such as poverty and parental neglect, mentioned by the current child brides is the cause of pregnancy and child marriage.

***“.....She ran from the house to join him. So we did not even know where she was going and who the person was. When she came back she was pregnant. I think she spent about a week with the man and came back. ....”***

*(Father of Child Bride, Upper East region)*

Several parents confirmed that they had tried dissuading their daughters from pre-marital sex even before they got pregnant. Once they became pregnant they regarded themselves as old enough to make their decisions.

***“... The issue is that she wanted to get married, so whatever I say, she won't listen to me. ....”*** *(Mother of child bride, Brong Ahafo region)*

Parents inadvertently equate the age of their daughters and becoming pregnant to a sign of maturity. There is no mention of their psychological maturity. The discussion is on being healthy which is more related to the development of physical attributes. A mother of child brides discussing when her daughters were married had this to say

***“... She married at age sixteen and the second one seventeen...”***

*(Mother of child bride, Northern region)*

***“...The age they got married, if you are nine years and healthy, the first one was thirteen years and the subsequent ones some were twelve and***

***some were not up to twelve years. ...”*** *(Father of child bride, Upper East Region)*

This parent went on to discuss the fact that she advised her daughter against the relationship but she would not listen. In her time she had married as a child bride but her husband paid the bride price and performed all other necessary rites as custom demanded before she moved into his house. She would have preferred her daughter to finish school but she got pregnant. She mentioned that the marriage was in difficulty, but she would not accept her back into her home. Her daughter had made her decision and she must make the best of the choice she had made.

***“... In my case, my both parents were poor when I need something at***

***school they couldn't provide that is why this man deceived me after giving me the***

***money to pay for what I needed at school. ...”*** *(Child bride still married, Volta region)*

### **3.4 The Effects of Child Marriage**

While much of the effect remains hidden, it is clear that child brides tend to suffer negative consequences as compared to the benefits attributed to early marriage. However, discussions with child brides and parents of child brides reveal that from their perspectives it has some positive effects. These positive effects, just like the negative effects, are deeply intertwined with the reasons why child marriage occurs.

#### **3.4.1 Positive Effects of Child Marriage**

Issues discussed under positive effects of child marriage include marriage as a source of prestige and honor as well as access to basic needs.

##### **Marriage as a Source of Prestige and Honour**

Marriage in the two communities in the Northern region was regarded as prestigious and honourable to a child bride and her family. Some current and mature child brides in the Northern region indicated that getting married has brought them respect and honour in their community. Among their peers, they are respected because they have “settled down” (married) and are seen to be responsible.



Adults in the community also show them respect because they have a husband and are thus expected to behave responsibly. Parents who have married daughters also enjoyed some prestige and respect from community members.

***“...Having a married daughter, that itself makes people respect me...”***

*(Mother of Child Bride, Northern region)*

***“...When you marry, you are accorded a great deal of respect ...”***

*(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Northern region)*

From the various responses, it shows that marriage forms an integral part of the society and affects a girl's status as well as that of her family in Nanton and Gbumbum in the Northern region of Ghana. To be recognized and respected in these communities as a woman goes hand in hand with marriage.

### **Access to Basic Needs**

Child marriage was viewed as providing financial stability to girls coming from economically disadvantaged homes as some child brides got married as a means to escape from poverty. They attested that their parents could not provide their basic needs and this led them to get pregnant leading to marriage. Since they are now the responsibility of their husbands they concur that they are well provided for. Some respondents had this to say:

***“... I have more money now than when I was with my parents”***

*(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)*

***“...He (husband) gives me money, unless he does not have...When I see something I want and I like it, when I tell him, we will go and he will buy it for me...”*** *(Current Child Bride, Still Married, Brong Ahafo region)*

***“... He supports me because when I request for something, he gives me...”***

*(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Northern region)*

In other instances, other family members of the child brides' husbands also provide financial support for their daughters-in-law. They readily and happily were interested in their well-being and went out of their way to ensure they lacked little or nothing.

***“... My husband's mother is the one who takes care of me...”***

*(Current Child Bride, Northern Region)*

*“... They even bought me some clothes, when I got married. My father-in-law is an ex-soldier, so when he takes pension allowance he buys things for me. He buys yam, oil, and other things. My mother-in-law is also a trader, so she also buys all the things I need at home...”*

*(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)*

Furthermore, some parents see marrying off their daughters as a way of breaking out of poverty and thus are eager to marry off their daughters into wealthy families.

*“... She (child bride) is able to amass some wealth from her husband. She is then able to take care of her own family. She can even build a house for her father. She can take care of her younger siblings to further their education...”* (Community Profile, Volta region)

### **3.4.2 Negative Effects of Child Marriage**

This section discusses the negative effects on child marriage and its implications on girls.

#### **Effect of Child Marriage on Girls' Education**

The educational background of the child brides interviewed in the four study areas indicated that whereas some had no formal education, others had attained some level of education ranging from lower primary to JHS three. Majority of the child brides who did not have any formal education were mainly the mature child brides who got married before the age of 18 years but are older now. The current child brides are more likely to have had some formal education. This is a reflection of the effect of government policies such as Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), the capitation grant and school feeding programmes that have created incentives to send all children to school. However, most girls do not proceed further than primary school or JHS because of teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

Some mature child brides from their experience also observed:



*Interview of a child bride*

**“...The girls are not able to continue their education when they get married...”**

*(Child Bride, No Longer Married, Upper East region)*

**“... Girls will not be able to continue with their education when they get married...”**

*(Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Upper East region)*

**“...When they (girls) give birth, they do not want to go back to school again because they feel shy...”** *(Community Profile, Brong Ahafo region)*

In addition, factors such as fear of stigmatization and relocation after marriage also makes it difficult for child brides to go back to school after marriage and childbirth.

The institutions also identified one of the negative effects of child marriage on the child brides as truncating the human development potential of the girls.

**“...The fact that children are being married out has several implications on the country's human capital development. What child marriage simply does especially for girls is that, it truncates their education. It means that it affects them in their education....”** *(Interview with ActionAid Ghana Official, 2016)*

The low level of education of child brides can therefore be attributed to the fact that girls sometimes dropped out of school because of marriage. Truncating education because of marriage has future implications for the girls' social, economic and health status.

### **Problems of Employment**

All the child brides who took part in the study were either unemployed or working in the informal sector. The unemployed child brides were mainly aged between 16 to 19 years. Child brides in this age range tend to be unemployed because they are in the reproductive stage of their marriages and therefore due to the burden of childbirth and childcare, they were not engaged in remunerable jobs. Also, because they withdraw from school and they come out with no skill that can help them engage in an economic activity that can generate substantial income to meet their basic needs. Those who are employed are working in the informal sector, mainly in low skilled occupations such as farming, trading and sheanut gathering. This is how some matured brides put it:

**“... It (marriage) has affected my education because if I had gone to school I would have completed and gotten a good job to take care of my children...”** *(Mature Child Bride, No Longer Married, Upper East region)*

**“... I wanted to go to school to a higher level such that I will be able to find employment. Right now, I am married and staying at home and suffering ...”** *(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Volta region)*

## **Lack of Financial Support and Access to Basic Needs**

Access to financial support plays an important role in child brides' lives because most child brides give birth as soon as they marry which increases their financial responsibilities. Since some child brides are unemployed and those who are employed work in the informal sector, which is noted for unstable income, most child brides tend to have financial burdens when their husbands are not able to provide or meet their financial needs. However, not all girls who marry early experience financial stability after marriage or have access to financial support from their husbands. This was also confirmed by FGD participants and an official of ActionAid Ghana.

*“... Before I got married, it (access to financial support) was better. When I was with my sister whenever we went to the market to sell and the day's sales were not good she (sister) knew I had worked hard and therefore gave me money to buy something...” (Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Northern region)*

*“...when you marry early without having any work doing and your husband too does not take care of you, you will end up looking miserable and so dirty because you cannot even afford money to buy soap to wash your cloths and medicine too for your child when he/she falls sick and so sad ...” (FGD, Female, Upper East region)*

*“... Child marriage also brings about the vicious cycle of poverty because, once they are truncated in education, they do not have skills; they have not developed the attitude to even acquire the skill. Therefore, they grow up being poor. The children they bring forth too, they are not able to take care of them. So, there is malnourishment ...” (Interview with ActionAid Ghana official, 2016)*

Financial support for child brides from their husbands becomes a problem because in some communities and situations where men have more than one wife, it becomes a challenge for husbands to provide financial support for all their wives. Additionally, the age difference also affects the financial support child brides receive from their husbands. In cases where the child bride's husband is very old, he may be too weak to work to support his family financially. A child bride expressed:

*“After I gave birth things were hard because he (ex-husband) was having many wives, he couldn't take care of me alone and leave the rest and by then too, the man (husband) was also weak ...”*  
*(Mature Child Bride, No Longer Married, Upper East region)*

*“... Therefore, I asked her why she married early, and she said it was her parents who gave her to the old man, and he [husband] is not even taking care of her...”*  
*(Key Informant, Female, Nurse, Volta region)*

### 3.4.3 The Effect of Child Marriage on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

This section discusses issues on effect of child marriage on the reproductive health of child brides as well as their sexual and reproductive rights.

#### Effect of Child Marriage on Reproductive Health

The child brides interviewed had between one and nine children. Child marriage leads to early childbirth, which can have adverse effect on the reproductive health of the mother and child (Jensen and Thornton, 2003). Most of the reproductive health problems child brides identified had to do with delivery. Due to their physiology, child brides experience a prolonged labour and difficult delivery. They either go through episiotomy or undergo surgery in order to have a safe delivery. Those who experienced prolonged delivery explained:

***“...I went to the hospital on Friday evening and from that time to Saturday, I could not deliver. When they (nurses) checked, they said I did not have enough opening. My relatives had to hire an ambulance and my husband had to pay. It was at Papasi that I was able to deliver...”***

*(Current Child Bride, Volta region)*

***“... It was between 6 pm to early morning 4 am before I was able to give birth... I was cut ...”*** *(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Brong Ahafo region)*

***“... Because I was young, my sex organ was too small for childbirth, so they had to cut a part of it, to allow easy passage of the child...”***

*(Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Upper East region)*

Child marriage predisposed girls to various health complications involving reproductive health, which may increase maternal and infant mortality rates. Some give birth to under weight babies who had to be put in special care units to ensure the babies survived although in some instances the babies did not and the mothers are left traumatised from the difficult delivery experience.

***“... I started to feel pains about 3 days to giving birth and I was taken to hospital. The child was below weight and was put in an incubator...”***

*(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)*

***“... The fact that children are being married out has several implications ... Then, it goes further to also affect them in health because they are not mature for the consequences of a married woman. Most of these girls later develop fistula, which is a health condition ...”***

*(Interview with ActionAid Ghana official, 2016)*

***“... I had difficulty during my pregnancy and childbirth, it was tough... because of that I was scared of him (husband) by then, but currently, I do not fear him anymore...”*** (Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Upper East region)

### **Effects of Child Marriage on Sexual and Reproductive Rights of the Child Bride**

Norms and values about women's position in marriage to their husbands suggest that women should submit to their husbands. Wives in their bid to submit to their husbands end up not exercising their sexual and reproductive rights such as deciding on when to have sex or not. The child bride does not have equal power in decision making in areas such as when to have sex, have children and stop having children. This was most common with brides from the two Northern regions where inability to initiate sex was due to shyness and the fact that it was not right for a woman to initiate sex in her marriage.

***“... He is my husband, so I just have to allow him...it is not right for me to do that. That is even something God hates...”***  
(Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Upper East region)

***“... No, I do not want any more children...Yes, but he (husband) says after he has gone to pay my dowry and also performed the marriage rites that I cannot determine how many children he should have with me.”***  
(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Brong Ahafo region)

***“... [Laughs] the man does what he wants, for woman you have no decision...”***  
(Matured Child Bride, Remarried, Northern region)

***“... He has been doing that (initiating sex)...How can I ask ... I feel shy so I don't ask for it ...”*** (Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)

By extension, such acts of not allowing wives to have a say on issues bordering on the marriage limits child brides in taking part in the decision-making process in their marriage. In some instances, husbands threaten their wives who try to have a say in their marriage. This can be attributed to the age difference between the child bride and her husband, which results in unequal partnerships where the child bride has little or no power in decision-making.

***“... I refused to give birth because the first one is still young — The family met and discussed the issue but he said he would kill the two of us so I had to leave to my parents...”*** (Mature Child Bride, Upper East region)

## Contraceptive Use

Studies in Ghana indicate that knowledge on contraceptives is high however its use among married women is low compared to non-married girls (GDHS, 2008, Awusabo - Asare et al., 2004). Most of the child brides in the Northern region, specifically the current child brides did not have knowledge of family planning methods and thus did not use contraceptives. However, child brides in the other three regions had knowledge about contraceptives. Knowledge on contraceptives was acquired from the nurses during post-natal clinics.

**“... I take the injection. I got to know of it when I took my child to the hospital for weighing...”** (Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Upper East region)

**“... the nurses who do the weighing of our children do educate us about family planning— I went to hospital, I went for the family planning injection...”**  
(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)

Some child brides have husbands who support their use of contraceptives.

**“... I told him that I do not want to have more children now, and he agreed... He said I could do it (family planning) if I want to...”**  
(Mature Child Bride, Still Married Upper East region)

**“... He was the one that introduced me to it. I was on a family planning method... He was the one that introduced me to it. I was given an injection at the hospital...”** (Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)

Some child brides are not allowed by their husbands to have access to any of the family planning programmes. These child brides held the view that they had to seek permission from their husbands before accessing family planning programmes. In cases where the permission does not yield a positive response, the child brides resort to deception in order to access and use contraceptives to plan their reproductive lives.

**“... I would discuss it with him first. If he agrees then I do, but if he does not I would leave it...”** (Mature Bride, Still Married, Northern region)

**“... No, I cannot do it (access family planning) unless I tell him ...”**  
(Current Child Bride, Northern region)

***“...and I have done family planning (Norplant). I told him to give me money to go and do it after birth, but he did not so I went there to do it myself. I sought his consent to do it but he did not want me to do it. So I did it myself. Yes, I told him I have done it for 2 months and he did not complain about it. However, what I have actually done is for 3 years ...”***

*(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)*

#### **3.4.4 Child Marriage and Domestic Violence**

Child marriage is also a cause for concern because of the potential adverse consequences for women's physical well-being. Child brides are predisposed to three main forms of domestic violence namely physical, verbal and sexual abuse. Twelve child brides experience physical abuse in the form of wife battering mainly due to sexual and reproductive health matters.

***“...So one day he wanted us to have sex, then I told him that I was not going to allow him to do it because I was already having discomforts with the pregnancy. Then he got angry...So when he came home and I tried to talk about it, then he beat me.”*** *(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)*

***“... A man beat up his wife mercilessly over family planning. He later came here to warn me that I should never do it for her if she comes to request for it. And I told him that he cannot stop me from doing my work. So I asked him about the number of children he has, and he said he only has 11 children ...”***

*(Key Informant, Female, Nurse, Volta region)*

Aside being battered by their husbands in their marriage, it came out during some interviews that child brides are over worked in their marital homes.

***“... When you marry here you become a servant to the whole family and not the husband alone and due to the hard work you may fall sick ...”***

*(FGD, Female, Upper East region)*

***“I do a lot of work in this house. I have to fill the barrels with enough water to be used by the household... That is not all, I have to go and mill some grains for the household and then help in preparing the meals for the entire household. I do all this as well as taking care of my son. This is what I do every day, I go to bed so tired.”*** *(Current Child Bride, Northern region)*



Child brides also suffer verbal abuse from their husbands. In other instances, some child brides were sexually abused by their husbands when they do not give in to their sexual demands. Girls are sexually abused in the form of being forced to have sex against their will. This statement was expressed by most of the child brides:

**“...When I do not agree it (sexual intercourse) is painful and when I agree it is not painful...”** (Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)

**“...Therefore, one day he wanted us to have sex, and then I told him that I was not going to allow him to do it because I was already having discomforts with the pregnancy...but he did not understand”**  
(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)

### **3.4.5 Psychosocial Effects of Child Marriage**

The psychosocial effect is discussed in relation to the emotions of child brides as well as their social relationships after marriage. The study looked at how being married at an early age affected women emotionally. This was assessed by asking the child brides how they felt about the age at which they got married, their marital status and their marriage.

Social relationship was assessed by asking child brides about their relationships with their peers and other community members, their participation in social activities after marriage and their social status in the society. The child brides who were forced into marriage had emotional problems and were unhappy about their marital status as well as the marriage union itself. It was reported by 9 child brides that they were sometimes emotionally scared and found it difficult to come out of it. This emotional trauma pushes some child brides to harbour suicidal thoughts while some return to their homes against the will of their parents.

**“...My husband brought me here by force --- I cried for a long time thinking about my situation till I gave birth to my first child and I was advised to accept my situation...”** (Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Brong Ahafo region)

**“...I was not happy, but since they have forced me into it, I just have to make myself happy. But deep down in my heart, I was not happy ...”**  
(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)

**“... His (husband) conversation with me was not good. He'll tell me constantly that he doesn't love me ...”** (Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Volta region)

**“... There were constant quarrels between us because of that I did not have peace. It can even lead me to stab myself to death ...”**  
(Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Northern region)

**“... When I came back, my father was always insulting me. I could not even utter a word. I only shed tears when I try to utter a word...”**

*(Mature Child Bride, Remarried, Upper East region)*

Aside the emotional effects child brides go through because of marriage; child marriage also affects their social life in terms of their interactions with their peers, families and community members. Some child brides especially women below age 20 are sometimes cut off from their peers when they marry: Others are prevented from taking part in social activities because their husbands do not want them to run away from their marital homes. Furthermore, husbands keep their wives away from the public to 'protect' them from bad company.

**“...none of my friends visit me as they used to. Rather when they see me, they pass by as if I do not exist...”** *(Current Child Bride, Brong Ahafo region)*

**“...There has been a change since I got married. Previously, I used to have conversations and mingle with my friends...”**

*(Mature Child Bride, Still Married, Upper East region)*

**“...My rivals were going but I was not allowed because somebody might take me away from him...”**

*(Mature Child Bride, No Longer Married, Upper East region)*

### **3.4.6 Antenatal and Post Natal Services at the Community Level**

According to data obtained from the field, the communities visited which have health centres/ CHPS compounds provide ante-natal care (ANC) and postnatal care (PNC) services to the child brides. During the interviews, quite a number (17) of child brides mentioned that they had ANC and PNC services and they also delivered at health facilities. One child bride recounted her experience of childbirth at a health facility.

**“My health was stable. I started to feel pains about 3 days to giving birth and I was taken to hospital. The child was below weight and was put into an incubator. So every day my mother had to pay Ghc10.00 for an injection but, my mother did not have money.”** *(Current child bride, Upper East region)*

Knowledge of family planning among current child brides was high and quite a number of them intended to use it. In a few instances, some current child brides had started using it. They obtained the information and service from the health centres in their communities. For the communities that had no health facilities the current child brides accessed this service in nearby communities that have health centres. Access and use of these services among the current child brides was high.

*“When I went for weighing (postnatal care) at the clinic, one of the nurses told me that after delivery if I want to go back to school I should come for the family planning injection” (Current child bride, Upper East region)*

### **3.4.7 Other Services from Organisations**

Although the institutions interviewed in section 4 below outlined a number of interventions such as counselling, community sensitization and material support that they have rolled out in response to child marriage, the communities in which we carried out the study are yet to experience any of such interventions. Perhaps their scope of operation has not been broad enough.

When we sought to explore if there were organisations providing any form of services for girls who are married under the age of 18 in the communities that were studied, the general response across the different locations and the various categories of respondents indicated that there were no such organisations providing any form of services for current child brides or girls who got married under 18 in general.

Interviews with current child brides indicated that they wished these services were available. The girls indicated their desire for organisations to provide services such as counselling during pregnancy and financial assistance to go back to school or set them up to learn a vocation after child birth.



*Interview of a mature child bride*

These services were not being offered by any organisation in the 8 communities that were studied except Krabonso in the Kintampo South District. It emerged during the community profile exercise that a programme initiated by WVG Ghana called the Girl Child Initiative School Programme which happens to be a government policy had been introduced that allowed their girls to go back to school after childbirth. The initiative actively involved the parents of the pregnant girls. They also added that through the initiative, some girls had become confident enough to continue attending school during pregnancy till they gave birth and also continued after delivery.

However, what was common across all sites was that there are several NGOs such as World Vision Ghana and ActionAid Ghana and governmental organisations who are working in the communities. Whereas the activities of the NGOs are more preventive, the governmental organisations are more reactionary in their approach dealing with crises as they emerge. What emerged from the study is that none of these organisations are providing services that are deliberately targeted towards child brides and the challenges that confront them.

## CHAPTER 4 - INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Institutional Response to Child Marriage

Fighting child marriage was not the core mandate of many institutions interviewed. However, their focus was turned to this issue by information placed in the public domain by the media (electronic and press – reports, news items, documentaries) and annual reports of DOVVSU. Membership in a human rights network which has the general mandate to fight against all forms of violations, particularly those against children who are considered vulnerable and voiceless was another important push factor. The institutions also consider children as assets of the state that are being destroyed through the widespread practice of child marriage.

The institutions had this to say about how information from the source motivated them to have interventions on child marriage:

*“...as I explained to you, we see the statistics of child marriage from annual reports and we know that we cannot be proud about it; the devastating consequences to our country is overwhelming so we needed to respond, we needed to show leadership as the biggest state institution with that mandate to protect children.” (MoGCSP)*

*“We did a lot of things. First, we looked at literature. When you look at the recent Demographic and Health Survey reports, it looks at teenage pregnancy, it looks at child marriage. We looked at UNFPA, which has also done some work on child marriage. We also looked at other statistics by Abantu for development. They have done some parliamentary advocacy work on that. Then we did some field work, and consultations. Most of the issues that came up were child marriage and teenage pregnancy.” (WVG)*

On the issue of prevalence, data from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS 2014) shows that child marriage is not the preserve of any particular tribe in Ghana. However, child marriage is skewed towards the three northern regions. The opinion of most of the institutions interviewed supports the position of GSS regarding prevalence. They are of the view that in as much as the phenomenon is much more prevalent in some regions of the country, particularly the northern part, the practice is a nationwide custom and different social and cultural circumstances and settings facilitate the practice among all the ethnic groups in Ghana. Below are some quotations representing the opinions of the institutions regarding the prevalence of the phenomenon.

*“Well, my personal impression about child marriage in Ghana is that it's quite prevalent. And it's all over the country. It is not particularly targeted in any one region. All ten regions, there is evidence that children are being married out. From my observation, child marriage does not pertain to a particular tribe. It's among all the ethnic groups that we have in Ghana. However, the prevalence is higher in some areas. Again, there are some social underpinnings. In some instances, what we noticed was that in families where either the father or the mother is not available, children lose parenthood; orphans. They are much susceptible to those practices because there is no one in the family to really care much. So they are easily pushed into child marriage” (Interview with ActionAid Ghana official, 2016)*

*“I think child marriage is prevalent in the northern part of the country but will not be specific like maybe in Wa or Tamale. We have been recording it from the northern part of the country. In the southern part is...we don't have enough cases there but mostly it is at the northern part, the Upper East, Upper West and the Northern Region.” (Interview with DOVVSU official, 2016)*

*“...well this issue is general. You can't specify the region where this is prevalent. What we can say is that in some areas, the religion of Islam and the Muslim community have been cited as noted for child marriage.” (Interview with Muslim Family Counselling Services official, 2016)*

*“Now first, we will say that it's quite more rural but now because of migration, there is an urban side as well, I think the majority occur in places that are rural.” (Interview with Ark Foundation official, 2016)*

## **4.2 Actors in the fight against child marriage**

Considering how widespread child marriage is and its devastating negative effects, multiple actors comprising national and international, state and non-state are actively involved in the fight against its perpetration in different parts of the country and from varied perspectives. The institutions were asked to provide information on the actors they know of who are involved in the elimination of child marriage. The respondents mentioned more than 30 institutions that play different roles in the fight against child marriage as classified.

### 4.3 Interventions to reduce child marriages (Institutional / community led)

The institutions have carried out varied interventions in different communities to reduce child marriage. The interventions cut across advocacy, social assistance, legal support, education and awareness creation, counselling among others. The intervention activities both directly and indirectly target child marriage. For example, some of them target general child rights and protection or girl child education in the hope that achieving such goals will necessarily relieve the girl child of early marriage. Some institution had this to say about their intervention activities:

*Yes...our programmes have intervened in child marriage issues. We did a project on early and forced marriages in Kintampo, Jeima and in all those places we went to train them on child rights, gave them all the negative aspects of it and fortunately in one of the schools we worked in, one child was rescued. They really married her off and through our intervention they went to bring her back to school (Gender Studies & Documentation Centre)*

*The whole essence of the adolescent sexual health programmes is to prevent child marriage and even if we don't, to prevent teenage pregnancy or unwanted pregnancy. You may be a teenager and you don't want the pregnancy. If we prevent teenage pregnancy, by extension, we are preventing teenage pregnancy which is the main cause of child marriage in the country. You may be 20 but you don't want the pregnancy. These are some of the programmes we are having and large programmes across the country. Also in our policies, we want to prevent harmful traditional practices and our advocacy around that area involving responsible parenthood which is one of our key components in adolescent sexual reproductive health.*

*(Ghana Health Services)*

## 4.4 Recommendations

Policy should not only focus on the eradication of child marriage. Interventions should also be designed to assist girls who are married. Three sets of interventions are recommended under the headings of preventive, transformative and promotive measures to achieve these objectives. The causes of child marriage vary across different locations and ethnic groups. Policy interventions must be designed taking into account the specific circumstances of each group.

### 4.4.1 Preventive Measures

These are measures to reduce or eliminate the causal factors that push girls into child marriage.

#### **4.4.1.1 Sexual and Reproductive Health Education**

It is therefore recommended that World Vision Ghana partners with the Ministry of Education to design programmes that introduce sexual and reproductive health education much earlier, preferably in the upper primary classes though it is currently taught at the junior high school level. Discussions with some young brides who got married because they became pregnant revealed that they did not know the link between sexual intercourse and pregnancy. Inadequate sexual and reproductive health education and poor timing of the receipt of this education increases the risk of pre-marital pregnancy among adolescent girls despite having heard of some contraceptives.

#### **4.4.1.2 Contraceptive Use**

Since girls can become sexually active quite early, it is thus important that adolescent girls can gain access to information on and access to contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Government health facilities are the main sources of contraceptives supply. It is recommended that alternative sources of contraceptive supply must be created to improve upon access by adolescent girls and boys. It is further recommended that WVG partners with the Ministry of Health and other NGOs in the health sector to develop programmes that will train private health care providers to provide family planning information as well as supply contraceptives.

#### **4.4.1.3 Reduce the school dropout rate**

Child brides in this study dropped out of school either before they became pregnant or after they had become pregnant. The policy recommendation in this section is targeted at girls who drop out of school before they get pregnant. It is recommended that a three-pronged approach should be adopted. World Vision Ghana can partner with the Ministry of Education to do the following:

- o Ensure physical access to all levels of pre-tertiary education.
- o Create a school environment that caters for the needs of all types of learners. In addition, girls clubs can be created and resourced to help develop literacy and numeracy skills of the girls. These girl clubs should also include activities that will make girls appreciate the advantages of education.
- o Engage girls in projects that provide them opportunities to earn some income. The projects should be designed in a way that they do not compromise the time girls have to spend on their studies and other domestic chores. Savings programmes could be created so that incomes earned from these activities are saved to be spent on the girls' school supplies and other necessities. The expected advantage of such a strategy is that it would keep girls in school longer and make them less susceptible to whatever enticements young men would bring their way. Earning their own income could contribute to increasing the self-confidence of the girls.

#### **4.4.1.4 Introduction of modern internal control mechanism**

Traditional internal control mechanisms such as puberty rites which delayed the first sexual encounter of girls and provided them with sex education appear to have broken down. This has been identified as one of the causes of teenage pregnancy.



It is recommended that WVG partners with the communities to create community based clubs for both school and out of school girls which develop some modern internal control mechanisms to encourage the girls to delay their first sexual encounter. These clubs can also be venues for providing the girls with sexual and reproductive health education.

#### **4.4.1.5 Improving the income levels of parents and guardians**

The incidence of child marriage is higher in regions and communities with a high poverty incidence. The inability of parents to provide necessities and little extras for their daughters pushes some girls into relationships resulting in unplanned pregnancies and then marriage. Some parents marry their daughters off early in order to reduce the burden of their upkeep. The introduction of income-generating opportunities for parents and guardians through projects and programmes would be one way to reduce the incidence of child marriage. Of critical importance is the implementation of programmes that will increase agricultural output and incomes in rural communities. Also important for rural communities is the introduction of alternative sources of income, for example non-farm activities. Training that improves the skills of the self-employed to increase output and reduce costs would be useful for urban households, many of whom operate micro and small businesses in the informal sector. Improvement in the supply and quality of infrastructure in poor neighbourhoods will reduce the constraints that many businesses face.

#### **4.4.2 Transformative Measures**

Transformative measures are interventions aimed at changing the attitudes of parents, adolescent boys and communities toward girls and to develop norms and behaviours that will discourage child marriage. Some of the causes of child marriage emanate from norms, practices and beliefs of communities. These norms and values treat girls as commodities.

It is recommended that WVG should form a partnership with the National House of Chiefs and with queen mothers to educate and sensitize the communities on the negative effects that child marriage has on the girls, their children and communities. The National House of Chiefs should be empowered to advocate reform of harmful practices in their communities. Girls clubs should be formed for out of school girls. These clubs should provide the girls with basic skills that will facilitate their return to school. There should also be an income generating component. Boys should not be left out of these interventions since their relationships with girls are also important in the dynamics of teenage pregnancy.

#### **4.4.3 Promotive Measures**

These are measures being recommended to reduce the negative effects of child marriage on child brides. It is recommended that WVG in partnership with the relevant government agencies and/or other NGOs develop programmes that will facilitate access of child brides to family planning services and other reproductive health services. The role of WVG must include empowering communities to advocate for improved services, impressing on government to formulate new relevant policy or implementation or revising of an existing policy where necessary. Skills training interventions designed to target child brides will also be required. Providing assistance to child brides could be interpreted in some quarters as condoning the practice.

However, especially in situations where child brides have children making it difficult or impossible to break the union, they must be provided with some assistance to improve their well-being. It is also recognised that providing support to child brides risks creating perverse incentive effects. This suggests that the design of these programmes, especially the selection criteria, will have to be carefully thought through.

Some child brides, particularly the young girls who do not have children would want to leave the marriage. However, in many instances when the girls leave their marital homes their parents are not willing to accept them back in their natal homes. World Vision Ghana should consider to help empowering the alternative living arrangement within the community/family structures and mechanisms to accommodate girls who run away from their marital homes. These could operate as holding stations as negotiations are carried on with parents to accept them back. They could also be long-term places of residence for girls whose families disown them. The shelters could be set up in collaboration with Department for Social Welfare and/or in partnership with other NGOs that are working in the area of marriage.

#### **4.4.4 Addressing Institutional Challenges**

Coordination of the activities of the different actors interested in eliminating child marriage is required in order to reduce replication of activities in the same communities and more efficient use of the totality of resources. The National platform on child marriage chaired by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection provides the opportunity to begin the process of collaboration and coordination. It is recommended that a strong collaboration must be formed with relevant community structures in the planning and execution of interventions on child marriage. It is also important to encourage and support community initiatives on child marriage. In this way the enforcement becomes natural for community leaders.

Greater effort should be made in strengthening monitoring and evaluation of interventions to eliminate child marriage. The establishment and implementation of these systems will make it easier to document successes, learn from them and share the successes with collaborators. Challenges will be identified earlier and addressed in a more systematic manner.

The Girl Child Unit of the Ghana Education Service is facing challenges in the process of developing a policy on girl child education. The Unit would benefit from assistance to develop the policy. A policy on girl child education will provide the legal/policy framework that will require schools to keep girls in school when they become pregnant. It will also provide legal backing for schools and organisations to prevent girls from being taken from school to get married.



The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560) are consistent in their definition of a child and both state that the legal minimum age of marriage is 18 years. The Criminal Code 1960 (Act 29 amended up to 2003) defines rape as carnal knowledge of a person 16 years of age and above without consent. Thus, girls and boys can engage in consensual sex when they are at least 16 years old but cannot marry unless they are 18 years. This difference in the age of consensual sex and the age of marriage creates a difficulty for the elimination of child marriage that results from teenage pregnancy. It is recommended that the inconsistency between the ages be resolved and the age for consensual sex should be increased to 18 years.

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