

## Assessment of public awareness and perception of media campaigns on the implications of child marriage in Northwest Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Child marriage is a global human development problem, as it remains common in many parts of the developing world, particularly in Nigeria. Its causes are multiple and overlap, and its implications are lifelong for the victim's life and health. This study was an assessment of public awareness and perception of media campaigns on the implications of child marriage in Northwest Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design with a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The population of the study comprises male and female residents from Kano, Kaduna, and Jigawa states, totaling 30,052,107. A sample size of 600 was arrived at using the Cochran formula (1977). The study was anchored on planned behaviour and social cognitive theories as the theoretical framework. Findings from the study revealed that a good number of the respondents have fair knowledge of the media campaign messages on the negative implications of child marriages. Findings also identified the following as the risks associated with child marriage: infant and maternal mortality, complications during pregnancy and delivery, and vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases (STDS), among others. It was concluded that there are likely religion-traditional and economic reasons behind child marriages in the Northwest region of Nigeria. Consequently, it was recommended, among others, the need to package media messages on the implications of child marriages in local languages that the people understand. Also, there should be a concerted effort to make media campaign messages on the implications of child marriage more regular to enhance awareness and knowledge among the respondents to the messages. Furthermore, it was recommended that traditional rulers and heads of religious bodies lend their voices against the practise of child marriage in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Media, Media Campaign, Marriage, Child marriage, Awareness, Perception

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### Introduction

Child marriage is a grievous infringement of human dignity that prevents young people from achieving important life goals like getting an education. Child marriage is a very unfortunate development that tragically impacts the lives of child spouses, particularly young brides whose parents give out without their consent. Marriage is the only major life event that most individuals get to decide on, along with birth and death. Numerous young individuals, especially girls, are deprived of their fundamental right to choose their own marriage partners (UNICEF, 2021). This decision is frequently made for them, which breaches their

human rights. Regardless of the growing global agreement that girl child marriage should be avoided because of the detriments it induces to girls' rights and well-being (Raj & Boehmer, 2013; De Groot, Kuunyem, & Palermo, 2018; John, Edmeades, & Murithi, 2019), child, early, and forced marriage are still widespread in many parts of the world and show no signs of being eradicated any time soon (UNICEF, 2020).

Meanwhile, authors like Efevbera and Bhabha (2020) assert that the marriage of underage girls, whether formal or informal, is increasingly being recognized as a major obstacle to global progress and gender equality. There are common values and ideals shared by all cultures in every society. Child marriage, for instance, is acceptable in Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria (where the Hausa and the Fulani live) (UNFPA, 2012). The value of virginity, anxiety about having sexual relations before marriage, the desire to limit the sexual activity of young girls, and other cultural and religious standards are all cited by Erulkar and Bello (2007) as reasons for the prevalence of early marriages in the North. This could be a cultural practise in which parents or guardians marry off a girl child to someone who has initially provided financial or any other form of assistance to the family without her permission, usually during her childhood or adolescence (Mobolaji & Fatusi & Adedini, 2020).

Nevertheless, there are numerous negative effects of marrying young on both the girl child and community development. Several authors have observed that child marriage is linked to unjust gender norms that are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of local communities (Bicchieri, Jiang & Lindemans, 2014; Wahhaj, 2015) and is associated with poverty, low level of education and remote area (Braithwaite, 2014; Hossain, Mahumud & Saw 2016; Avogo & Somefun, 2019) and increased risk of domestic violence (Nour, 2009; Gage, 2013; Mourtada et al., 2017). Hence, low socioeconomic status, pressure from parents, peer influences, and unwanted pregnancies and other factors are frequently cited as reasons for young girl marriage (Unicef, 2001). Consequently, Mark (2022) found that this practise led to depression, anxiety, hostility toward men, school dropouts, VVF (VasoVaginal Fistula), early widowhood, frustration, and resentment.

In the same vein, child marriage increases the possibility of sexually transmitted infectious diseases, such as HIV, particularly once the girl and her partner are of different ages (Clark, 2004; Nour, 2006). As a result, it is occasionally referred to as forced marriage. Many of these girls are married off against their will or before they are mature enough to make an informed decision about who they should marry. As such, it is recognized as a violation of human rights by several regional and international legal agreements. About 14 million preteen and young females get married every year, with parental pressure often being a major factor (Adebambo, 2010).

Nearly 400 million women worldwide, or 41 percent of all women aged 20-49, were married or entered union when they were young (UNICEF, 2012) estimate. Researchers have tried to define child marriage in many ways, but most agree that it occurs when at least one spouse is under the age of 18 (ICRW, 2005; McIntyre, 2006; USAID, 2009; Adebambo, 2010). It is any marriage or relationship that involves at least one individual below the age of 18 (Braithwaite, 2014; Kyari & Ayodele, 2014; Mourtada, Schlecht & DeJong, 2017).

As such, child marriage is widely considered a serious violation of fundamental human rights, as explicitly stated in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Toyo, 2006; Braithwaite, 2014). Conventions among nations have resulted in a minimum age of consent to marriage of 18. In addition, she has the right to give her approval of the wedding date and place. In Nigeria, the Child Rights Act sections 21 and 23 prohibit marriages involving individuals below the age of 18 (Toyo, 2006).

According to Adebambo (2010), child marriage is a union where one or both participants were subjected to coercion (physical or emotional) in order to consummate the marriage. Marriages between minors, even if the younger partner seems to desire to be with her, are deemed to be arranged unions under the law. A girl's essential rights to health, education, growth, and equality are often violated when she is forced into an untimely marriage (Unicef, 2021). Furthermore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) established in 1948 acknowledges that the right to grant "free and full" consent to a marriage is

compromised when one of the parties involved is not adequately mature to make informed decisions regarding a life partner (UNICEF, 2001). Accordingly, the right to provide free and informed consent to marriage is a fundamental human right recognized globally under the UDHR adopted in 1948. Therefore, child marriage violates the UNICEF guidelines on children's rights as well as the universally recognized human right to free and informed consent. Majority of countries, led by Nigeria, have signed these international treaties and adopted corresponding laws to better protect the rights of children. The Acts have been approved in most Northern states, but enforcing them has been challenging since numerous Northern states are also controlled by Islamic laws which take a liberal posture on early marriage by not placing a significant priority on age as a determining element in marriage (Offenhauer & Buchalter, 2005; Braimah, 2014; Mobolaji et.al, 2020).

At the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, guaranteeing that every child may benefit from a high-quality education was deemed "the most important problem" (EFA). Over 100 countries recommitted themselves at the Dakar World Education Forum in April 2000 to "guarantee by 2015 that all adolescents, particularly girls, have accessibility to and finish elementary school of exceptional quality "Secretary-General Kofi Annan used this Dakar gathering to unveil the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)". Thirteen different United Nations groups, spearheaded by UNICEF, have converged on collaborating on this landmark 10-year effort. Their mission is to help governments deliver on their pledges to ensure that all girls throughout the globe have equal access to a high-quality education. It was generally agreed that:

...discrimination against the girl-child and the violation of the rights of the girl-child, which often result in less access for girls to education, nutrition and physical and mental health care and in girls enjoying fewer of the rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood and adolescence than boys and often being subjected to various forms of cultural, social, sexual and economic exploitation and to violence and harmful practices, such as female infanticide, rape, incest, early marriage, forced marriage, prenatal sex selection and female genital mutilation." (Kyari & Ayodele, 2014, p.2)

In Northern Nigeria, girls are disproportionately affected by the widespread practise of underage marriage. The practise of marrying off young girls has detrimental effects not just on the girls themselves but also on their offspring, extended relatives, and communities (Adedokun, Tochukwu, & Adedeji, 2012). The authors suggested that early marriage has societal costs as well as individual ones for girls. The expenses to society in terms of both health care and human development (due to a lack of education) continue to rise as a direct result of teen pregnancies. The global fight against poverty in emerging countries is hampered by the prevalence of early marriage. This highlights the reality that child marriage undermines the work of all three levels of government to address educational issues, combat poverty and HIV/AIDS, and other development challenges in developing nations like Nigeria (Adedokun et al., 2012).

In Nigeria, the Northeast and Northwest regions have the highest rates of female illiteracy and child marriage in the country, at over 45 percent. In many such areas, girls are compelled to marry and engage in sexual activities at a young age, with some getting married as early as 10 years old (Adebusoye, 2006). These marriages usually involve young women and older men, with the men often selected by the brides' families (UNICEF, 2001). The adverse health risks, social costs, and economic losses associated with early and forced marriage, non-consensual sex, and teenage pregnancies disproportionately affect rural girls and women in all of these endemic areas (Kyari & Ayodele, 2014).

Despite the fact that both sexes may be victims of child marriage, the statistics show that females much outnumber their male counterparts. There are two types of child spouses: girls who marry before they turn 18 (known as child brides or child wives: married girls) as well as boys who marry before they turn 18 (known as child grooms; married boys) (UNICEF, 2001); however, this study specifically focuses on child brides as this social issue disproportionately affects over 80% of girls as compared to boys in all its forms. There have been several media campaigns, civil society groups' campaigns and NGOs campaigns on

child marriage such as: UNICEF media campaigns on child marriage, *Girls Not Bride*, Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative on dangers of girl-child marriage, UNESCO, Action Aid Nigeria, Development Research and Projects Centre (DRPC), Action Health Incorporated and Ford Foundation, among others.

Media campaigns are concerted attempts to accomplish goals through various forms of media. Campaigns aim to raise awareness, provide information, or alter the behaviour of their intended audience (Gever & Nwabuzor (2014, p. 80) citing (Day & Monroe, 2000). The media, both broadcast and print, have an obligation to educate the public about pressing problems facing the nation, such as the epidemic of child marriage. Several awareness campaigns against child marriage have been developed and aired by the broadcast media in an effort to encourage the desired behaviour among the public. Media campaigns, like those addressing HIV/AIDS, drug usage, breast cancer, among others are developed to improve public awareness, impact behaviour, and shift attitudes, as stated by Ataka (2017), citing Okorie (2014, p.2). Campaigns to combat diseases including TB, Lassa fever, Ebola virus disease (EVD), and HIV/AIDS have met with success thanks in large part to the media's coverage of these issues. Mass media campaigns may accomplish all of these goals by using both classic media forms like television, radio, movies, print publications, and billboards and emerging digital media like QR codes, websites, viral marketing, pop-up and banner advertising, and social media (Stead et al., 2019).

Using pre-existing media platforms like television, radio, newspapers, and others, media campaigns are a common method of reaching big audiences with messages. In fact, media campaigns have been used to influence the health habits of the general public for a number of years, such as: antenatal care services, family planning exposure, water, sanitation and hygiene campaigns among others. The success of media communications depends on their widespread and consistent dissemination to the target audience (Wakefield, Loken & Hornik, 2010).

Child marriage continues to be a major global human development issue (Population Council, 2004), prevalent in many developing countries, including Nigeria, where it is a violation against fundamental human rights. Its causes are multiple and overlapping and its implications are lifelong to the victim's life and health. Girls who marry at a young age have less opportunity for education and job, are socially isolated since they are separated from family and friends, and have a lower life expectancy than their unmarried contemporaries (UNICEF, 2014). A girl is at danger of marriage due to a variety of interrelated causes, such as poverty, the belief that marriage would give "protection," family honour, and societal conventions, customs, or religious regulations that support the practise. Numerous International organizations, media and NGOs have concentrated efforts in ending than in transforming the practice of child marriage. Several international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have initiated efforts to abolish child marriage, which they consider as a severe violation of human rights. UNICEF (2009, p. 5) also claims that "ending child marriage will help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by allowing girls and women to participate more fully in society, empowered and educated girls are better able to nourish and care for their children, leading to healthier, smaller families." The most effective approach to reducing the incidence of marriage at a young age is to increase support for girls' education and raise awareness about the negative effects of this social norm.

Girls and young women will develop assertiveness, self-assurance, speaking out, ability to make choices, and bargaining abilities if the media is used to raise public awareness of the consequences of early marriage on girls, their families, and the society as a whole. Daramola (2003) in Omera (2017) contends that the media has been singled out as an important way in which people learn about their communities (p. 22). This means that the media is still being used in attempts to solve the problem. But the extent to which the people of northwest Nigeria are aware of and adhere with media messages on the negative consequences of child marriage remains uncertain. Hence this study investigated public awareness and perception of media messages against child marriage in Northwest Nigeria.

Hence, there are changes in attitude and behaviour of the people; it shows the campaign has great influence on how individuals feel about hearing or reading the message. Based on the background above, this

study sought to investigate the Northwest awareness and perception regarding media campaigns and messages against child marriage. While it is true that numerous studies have been conducted on child marriage, there has been a paucity of studies that attempt to examine adherence to media messages about child marriage, hence the need for the study to examine the respondent's level of exposure to media messages, ascertain the level of awareness identify factors that influence respondents' perceptions and ascertain the level of influence of media messages on child marriage on respondents' practices in Northwest Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

In line with the research objectives, the following form the research questions that guided the study:

- What is the respondents' level of exposure to media messages on child marriage in Northwest Nigeria?
- What is the respondents' level of awareness of media messages on child marriage in Northwest Nigeria?
- What are the factors that influence respondents' perception to media messages on child marriage in North-west Nigeria?
- What is the level of influence of media messages on child marriage on respondents' practices in Northwest Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

This study is guided by the following hypotheses

- H<sub>01</sub>. The awareness level of respondents on media campaigns on the implications of child marriage is not related to their level of exposure to media messages on child marriage.
- H<sub>02</sub>. There is no significant relationship between awareness and respondents' perception on child marriage.

### **Literature Review**

The three primary drivers of child marriage are economic hardship, the desire to forge closer ties with extended family, and the belief that this would provide some kind of safety (Gynecol, 2009). Parents often held the view that tying the knot while their daughters were young would shield them from dangers like rape, teen pregnancy, and STDs such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS (Nour, 2009). A systematic review on child marriage in South Asia was undertaken by Subramanee, Agho, Lakshmi, Huda, Joshi, and Akombi-Inyang (2022). The study aimed to uncover the recurrent underlying factors and long-term effects of South Asian child marriage. The authors found that consistent risk factors for child marriage in South Asia included living in rural areas, having inadequate schooling, coming from a low-income family, and having little exposure to the media and religious institutions (Hindu and Muslim in particular countries). Child marriage has negative effects on maternal health care because of characteristics like low antenatal care service use, low institutional delivery rates, and low use of skilled birth attendants. The societal and economic pressures that lead to marriages between minors interact. Hence, given the multifaceted causes and consequences of child marriage, it is imperative that we make concerted efforts to advance gender equality and promote higher levels of education and employment.

In a similar vein, Phiri, Musonda, Shasha, Kanyamuna, and Lemba conducted a research on the causes of child marriages in Zambia, looking at both personal and societal factors (2023). The authors looked at how

different traits at both the individual and community levels were related to marital behaviour at a younger age. The authors found that even though the number of child marriages in Zambia has gone down over time, the number is still very high and very scary due to the fact that keeping girls in school is crucial to delaying their vulnerability to sexual awakening and marriage at a young age. Community issues, such as economic insecurity and access to reproductive health information, should be integrated into the design of reproductive health interventions in the country (Phiri et.al, 2023).

### **Child Marriage and Media Campaign in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, a developing nation, the media can play a crucial and forward-thinking role in promoting positive changes in the behaviour of rural communities. Hence, it is imperative to re-evaluate communication strategies and reconstruct media channels to sustain newly acquired behaviors. This is vital because the media has the power to enhance knowledge, set agendas for public discourse, and influence public opinion and policy formulation, as emphasized by Cabanero-Verzosa (2003). Media campaigns are coordinated efforts to achieve set objectives. Gever and Nwabuzor (2014 p.80) Citing Day and Monroe (2000), argued that the primary purpose of campaigns is to enhance awareness, educate, or induce behavioral modifications in the intended audience. Accordingly, the responsibility of creating awareness on matters of public importance, such as the harmful consequences of child marriage, falls on the shoulders of broadcast and print media. One of the most widely used methods for raising awareness about important social and health issues is through carefully planned communication campaigns (Salmon & Atkin, 2003). These campaigns employ a variety of strategies to reach a large audience with a consistent message over a set period of time (Rogers & Storey, 1987 cited in Fatimah, 2018).

Media campaigns might be launched to promote awareness and change the incidence of the inappropriate behaviour, which is on the rise in the North despite the negative implications of the practise that have been shown in recent studies. Following Senator Ahmed Yerima's 2010 marriage to an Egyptian girl when she was 13, media protests against child marriage reached a fever pitch. The Child Is Not a Bride campaign became a cultural phenomenon, trending on Twitter and Facebook and dominating the radio. In the following years post- Yerima, organisations like Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative, Ford Foundation, Girls Not Bride, Action Aid Nigeria, "Development Research and Projects Centre" (DRPC), Action Health Incorporated, and UNESCO have increased their focus on the plight of child brides and their work to end child marriage. This research, therefore, seeks to evaluate how well-known and receptive Northern audiences are to media campaigns warning against the risks of young pregnancy and early marriage (Unicef, 2021).

It is feasible to indirectly oppose child marriage through media campaigns that emphasise the negative effects on health or growth of child marriage. This is particularly the case when media campaigns highlight developmental difficulties like dropping out of high school or health issues like Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF). For instance, the Nigerian media has been instrumental in establishing efforts that are not directly targeted at preventing early marriage (despite the fact that this is a significant cause of VVF) but are instead geared at healing sufferers of the illness (UNICEF, 2021). However, non-governmental organisations, International partners and the Federal Ministry of Health are using these efforts to tell the tales of victims' struggles and eventual recoveries. A good example of this type of programme is "Health Watch," a thirty minute broadcast on Radio Nigeria that features interviews with doctors and representatives from various health organisations that talk about health, fitness, and related topics. To counteract the harmful effects of child marriage, "Health Watch" provides a forum for talking about the experiences of girls and women who were forced into marriage at a young age. More so, citizenship may be relinquished by anybody over the age of 18 or by a married woman, which seems to indicate that women can be prior to the age of 18.

### **Public exposure to child marriage campaigns**

A study on Coverage and Effects of Child Marriage Prevention Activities in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia, by Gage (2009, page 34), found that coverage of messages against child marriage varied. This was

based on a survey of data from a study done in 2007, which found that both young women and young men mostly heard messages about delaying marriage from religious leaders and parents during community gatherings.

According to the results of the study, the earlier in life a marriage is regarded improper, the more informational outlets a respondent has been exposed to. Individuals who had no prior exposure to any media believed that any marriage of a girl before the age of 14.5 was considered early. However, those who had access to 10 or more sources of media believed that any marriage of a female before the age of 17.1 was premature. The impact of exposure to information about preventing early marriage was more significant for female adolescents in urban areas.

However, Konkora, Sanob, Antabea, Kansangaa, and Luginaaha (2019) investigated on how media messages about family planning reached women who had just given birth in Nigeria. The authors conducted the study by evaluating the structural influence model of health communication. In order to fill this gap, the researchers in Nigeria wanted to find out why some women were more likely than others to be exposed to family planning messages in the media after giving birth. The study found that traditionalist and rural women were also less likely to hear such messages in the multivariate analysis. Additionally, women who are more wealthy tend to hear more messages about family planning through the media than those who are less wealthy, less educated, or unemployed. The study also found that location (specifically the South West region) was associated with higher chances of receiving such messages. Overall, the findings suggest that there are disparities in mass media exposure that align with the structural influence model of health communication.

Similarly, Mehra, Sarkar, Sreenath, Behera, and Mehra (2018) conducted another study on the effectiveness of a community-based intervention to delay marriage and childbearing among teenagers in India and increase their likelihood of continuing their education. To measure the intervention's success, a post-test cross-sectional approach was used. An age range of 10–24 year olds was sampled using a multi-stage sampling strategy. Additionally, mass media exposure was found to be associated with a decrease in teen pregnancies and an increase in students remaining in school. When compared to their older siblings, the adolescents surveyed had an average age of marriage that was 1.2 years later, an average age of conception that was 0.85 years later, and an average of 1.54 more years spent in education. Consequently, this community-based, multi-component intervention can serve as a model for reducing early marriage and its associated repercussions in other regions of India with comparable socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

Another study on the public's exposure to messaging on the dangers of child marriage finds a pitiful level of awareness. Fowler's (2014) study, conducted in a Syrian refugee camp, found that an overwhelming majority of respondents (including refugees and staff members of the Al-Tkafu Clinic in Irbid) were unaware of any health education programs that educate people about the health consequences of marrying early. Respondents think that if such initiatives were in place, the vast majority of those exposed to them would abandon the cultural norms that promote child marriage. Another set of participants (UNFPA, and UNICEF staff) showed extensive exposure to messaging advocating for or against child marriage, in stark contrast to the previous group's answer.

Access to mass media messages on family planning and the use of family planning in Nigeria was examined by Ajaero, Odimegwu, Ajaero, and Nwachukwu (2016). It also looked at how different socio-spatial factors affected the connection between media exposure and contraception. The study relied on data collected in all 36 of Nigeria's states, as well as the capital city of Abuja, during the country's 2013 demographic and health survey. Results revealed that higher rates of family planning were associated with access to television messaging ( $r = 0.239$ ) and exposure to mass media messages ( $p < 0.0001$ ). Access to both television and radio broadcasts was found to significantly increase the likelihood of family planning use ( $OR = 1.2.225$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ) in adjusted regression analysis. The study also found that those with higher wealth quintiles ( $OR = 3.442$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ), secondary education ( $OR = 2.709$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ), and marital status ( $OR = 1.274$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) were more likely to use family planning. The research showed that the use of mass media

messages for family planning varied across different geographic and demographic groups. The study's findings indicate that exposure to pro-family planning messages in the media can increase the likelihood of its use.

### **Public Awareness about Child Marriage Practices**

Umana and Onwubuche (2021) evaluated the prevalence and effects of child marriage around the world from the perspective of local residents of Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. The study found that numerous factors, including high rates of poverty and traditional beliefs and practises, contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Child brides are more likely to stop attending school after getting married, and younger girls are more likely to sustain pregnancy-related complications like fistula, according to the study. Finally, there are a variety of approaches that might be taken to lessen the prevalence of child marriage. These include holding public vigils to protest the practise and using religious media like radio and television to spread the word that child marriage is immoral. Given that television is a potent platform to disseminate information on women's and girls' rights, particularly to those who are isolated, it has been recommended that NGOs persist in utilizing media and outreach methods to educate parents and youths in communities where early marriage is prevalent.

Consequently, Okiyi, Odionye, and Okeya (2020) examined the relationship between girl-child marriages and socio-cultural factors and media coverage. This research was a critical, systematic look at the topics at hand, and it used only secondary sources. The theories of the muted group and the spiral of silence serve as the basis for this research. The latter looked at how women and other minorities were represented in the media, while the latter suggested that the media actively worked to stifle any discussion of cultural issues that were unpopular with the population at large. According to published literature, the media rarely covers social issues such as child abuse and violence. The media gives more coverage to stories about people and events in other parts of society. The media, however, have a responsibility to raise awareness about issues linked to children's rights and safety.

### **Factors that Influence Perception and Practices towards Child Marriage**

Further studies by Raghunathan, Sushant, and Mankad (2021) focused on the extent public awareness initiatives help prevent child marriage at a young age. Researchers in the Indian states of Jharkhand and Bihar evaluated the outcomes of the recently launched early marriage campaign. To lessen the prevalence of child marriage, boost girls' access to school, and influence cultural perceptions of gender, researchers in two states of India conducted a cluster randomised trial. The study found that attitudes towards marriage and women's roles in the workplace and household showed no substantial change. There has been a minimal shift in traditional gender roles at home, and education has been seen more as a means to better manage the family than as a means to enable women to work and be autonomous.

A related study to these effects of early marriage for girls on their chances of completing the first year of high school in Zimbabwe: A propensity score analysis, by Bengesai, Amusa, and Makonye (2021). The study's findings imply that early marriage of girls is a major impediment to their continuing their education, which has consequences for the country's development strategy. Without action, the country is unlikely to achieve sustainable development goals. Adult-focused social change initiatives that challenge people's assumptions regarding adolescent sexuality and child marriage are needed. It is also important to prioritise measures that help young women complete their secondary education.

As a result, Mourtada et al. (2017) conducted qualitative research on child marriage among Lebanese people impacted by the Syrian conflict. This qualitative study's overarching goal was to learn more about the prevalence of child marriage among Syrian refugees in the Al Marj neighbourhood of Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. The second objective of the study was to analyze the collected data to suggest policies and programs aimed at reducing the causes and consequences of child marriage. The study included eight different focus groups with married and single young women and their parents. In addition, 11 key informant interviews with service



providers and stakeholders were undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of violence and displacement on Syrian refugees' marriage practices in the Al Marj community.

**Methodology**

The study employed the survey method, which was deemed necessary to analyze the viewpoints of a specific sample group in order to draw broader conclusions about the overall population in Northwest Nigeria. The study sample included both males and females from three states located in the Northwest region of Nigeria - Kano, Kaduna, and Jigawa. These states were chosen as they represent the entire Northwest region and are known to have a high incidence of child marriage. In fact, statistics show that in the North West and North East regions of Nigeria, almost half of the girls are married by the age of 15 and 78% are married by the age of 18. This makes Nigeria one of the countries with the highest rate of child marriage worldwide, according to the State of the Nigerian girl report in 2021. Based on data from the 2006 National Population Commission, the population of Kano, Kaduna, and Jigawa were 9,401,228, 6,113,503, and 4,361,002, respectively. To account for population growth since then, the UNDP's projection of 3.2% using a straight line formula was adopted for a 16-year period. This is shown below:

$$N_1 = N_0(1 + K_n)$$

where  $N_1$  = Current Population at a given growth rate as of 2022

Where  $N_0$  = Census figure as of 2006.

$K$  = Growth rate (0.032) constant

$N$  = Number of years after last census (2022-2006 = 16). Therefore, the researcher arrived at the new population:

**Kano:**

$$\begin{aligned} N_1 &= N_0 (1 + K_n) \\ &= 9,401,228 (1 + 0.032(16)) \\ &= 9,401,228 (1 + 0.512) \\ &= 9,401,228 (1.512) \\ &= 14,214,656.736 \end{aligned}$$

**Kaduna:**

$$\begin{aligned} N_1 &= N_0 (1 + K_n) \\ &= 6,113,503 (1 + 0.032(16)) \\ &= 6,113,503 (1 + 0.512) \\ &= 6,113,503 (1.512) \\ &= 9,243,616.536 \end{aligned}$$

**Jigawa:**

$$\begin{aligned} N_1 &= N_0 (1 + K_n) \\ &= 4,361,002 (1 + 0.032(16)) \\ &= 4,361,002 (1 + 0.512) \\ &= 4,361,002 (1.512) \\ &= 6,593,835.024 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore the total population for this study is 30,052,107.

The sample size for the study was determined by applying the Cochran formula (1977), which took into account a 95% confidence level (with a confidence interval of +10%), an estimated public awareness of 50% regarding media messages related to child marriage, and a margin of error of 0.04. The Cochran equation '1', which is suitable for large population sizes, was used to obtain a representative sample, as per Cochran (1963, p.75). The equation is as follows:

$$n = \frac{[Z_{/2}]^2 (pq)}{e^2} \quad n = \frac{[Z_{/2}]^2 (p)}{e^2} (1 - P)$$

"Where: n = sample size, Z<sup>2</sup> = confidence level, p = rate of occurrence or prevalence (the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in a population), q = complement of p and e = margin of error". Therefore.

$$n = \frac{[1.96]^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}{0.04^2}$$

$$0.04^2$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \cdot (0.25)}{0.0016}$$

$$0.0016$$

$$n = 600.25 = 600$$

From the application of the above-named formula the researcher derived a 600-sample size for quantitative data for the study.

### Sampling Technique

The study adopted a multi-stage sample technique. "multi-stage sampling necessitates the researcher to pick his samples in stages until he arrives at the appropriate sample," (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafu, & Okpanachi, 2012, p. 190).

**Stage one:** The study focused on men and women in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states in Northwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. These states were selected because of high incidence of early and child marriage as indicated earlier in the population of study.

**Stage two:** To reduce the sample to a manageable proportion, the respondents were clustered in line with the states selected using the cluster sampling technique. Hence, respondents in each state represent a cluster.

**Stage three:** From each cluster (state) a senatorial district where the state capital is situated was selected purposively giving a total of three senatorial districts selected for the purpose of the study.

**Stage four:** At this stage, a local government area from the selected senatorial districts was selected. The choice of the LGA's from the senatorial districts within the capital is to ensure media presence for the purpose of the study. In all, 3 LGA's were selected.

**Stage five:** Two towns were selected from each of the LGA's selected by means of balloting, giving a total of 6 towns selected.

**Stage six:** Quota sampling technique was used to select the 600 respondents. This was achieved by dividing 600 by 6 to arrive at 100 respondents that were selected from each town, giving to a total of 600 involved in the study.

The descriptive and inferential statistics was used to describe data on how media messages on child marriage create awareness and influence perception in North-west Nigeria. Tables with frequency distributions and percentages were used to present the data. They were employed to provide answers to questions pertaining to the study's objectives. Likewise, Pearson coefficient correlation was adopted to test the relationships between the level of media exposure to media messages and awareness of media messages on the implications of child marriage and also the relationship between respondent's level of awareness of media messages and audience perception of messages on child marriage.

In all, six hundred (600) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the various respondents, out of which 568 copies were retrieved. This amounts to 94.7% return rate and used for the analysis. The data from the questionnaire were presented in tables of frequencies and simple percentages.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What is the respondents' level of exposure to media campaigns on child marriage and their perception of such messages?

**Analysis of responses about respondents' level of exposure to media campaigns on child marriage and their perception of such messages.**

**Table 1: Media of communication that respondents have access to**

Which of these media of communication do you have access to?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Radio	240	42.3	42.3	42.3
	Television	92	16.2	16.2	16.2
	Newspaper/ Magazine	35	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Internet	63	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Any of two	112	19.7	19.7	19.7
	Any of three	20	3.5	3.5	3.5
	All the above	6	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	100.0

Data in table 1 above on media platforms accessed by the respondents show that majority of the respondents 240 representing 42.3% have access to radio. Those who are exposed to television constitute 92 (16.2%), Internet 63 (11.1%), newspapers/magazine 35 (6.2%), those who have access to any two of the media platforms are 112 (19.7%). What this implies is that radio remains the most accessible medium among traditional media.

**Table 2: Frequency of access to the media**

How often do you access these media					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daily	351	61.8	61.8	61.8
	Weekly	93	16.4	16.4	78.2
	Occasionally	124	21.8	21.8	100.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	

The data presented above were about how often the respondents have access to media. Majority 351 (61.8%) have access to the media on daily basis, 93 (16.4%) weekly, while 124 (21.8%) have access to the media occasionally. This shows that a good number of the respondent have regular access to the media.

**Table 3: Frequency of exposure to media messages on child marriage**

How often do you hear, read, or see these media campaigns					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	109	19.2	19.2	19.2
	Sometimes	216	38.0	38.0	38.0
	Rarely	135	23.8	23.8	23.8
	Never	108	19.0	19.0	19.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	100.0

As presented in table 3 above on how often the respondents are exposed to media campaigns against child marriage, 109 (19.2%) are always exposed to the campaign, 216 (38%), are sometimes exposed to the media campaigns, 135 (23.8%) are rarely exposed, while 108 (19%) are never exposed to the campaigns on child marriage. This means that majority of them are sometimes exposed to the media campaigns against

child marriage. It implies that respondents' level of exposure to media messages against child marriage is moderate.

**Research Question Two:** What is the respondents' level of awareness of media campaigns on child marriage and their perception of such messages?

**Analysis of responses about respondents' level of awareness of media campaigns on child marriage and their perception of such messages.**

**Table 4: Are you aware of media campaigns against child marriage**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	389	68.5	68.5	68.5
	No	87	15.3	15.3	83.8
	Can't say	92	16.2	16.2	100.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	

As presented in table 4 above on whether respondents are aware to media campaigns against child marriage, 389 (68.5%) said yes, they are aware of media campaigns against child marriage, 87 (15.3%), said no, while 92 (16.2%) can't say. That is, they are undecided about being aware of media campaigns on child marriage. This means that majority of them are aware of media campaigns against child marriage.

**Research Question Three:** What are the factors that influence respondents' perception to media messages on child marriage in North-west Nigeria?

**Table 5: Respondents' perception of ideal age of marriage given media campaign**

From the campaigns seen, heard, or read, what is regarded as the ideal age of marriage					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	12 - 17 years	30	5.3	5.3	5.3
	18 years and above	299	52.6	52.6	52.6
	Not Stated	170	29.9	29.9	29.9
	Don't know	68	12.0	12.0	12.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	100.0

The data in table 5 above is about respondents' perception of what is regarded as ideal age of marriage based on the campaign messages about child marriage the audience are exposed to. A total of 299 respondents (52.6%) believe the ideal age is 18 years and above; 170 (29.9%) not stated, which means undecided on the ideal age for marriage; 68 (12%) don't know, 30 (5.3%) think it is 1 – 17 years. This means that majority of the respondents believe the ideal age of marriage is from 18 years and above.

**Table 6: Is there any harm in being married at a very young age**

Is there any harm in being married at a very young age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	297	52.3	52.3	52.3
	No	187	32.9	32.9	32.9
	Don't Know	83	14.6	14.6	14.6
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	100.0

The data in table 6 above are on whether respondents think if there is any harm in being married at a very young age. 297 (52.3%) said yes, 187 (32.9%) said no, while 83 (14.6%) don't know. This means that majority of the respondents believe there is harm in getting married at a very young age.

**Table 7: Harms/ills contained in the campaign seen, read, or heard**

Variables	Frequency
Suspended or lack of education	135
Medical complications during pregnancy and delivery	291
Infant and Maternal mortality	270
Exposure to STDs, HIV/AIDS	201
Greater exposure to domestic and sexual violence	117
Don't know	10

The data in table 7 above were about responses on the options of ills or harms contained in the campaign messages carried in the mass media about early marriage to sensitize the people about the negative impacts of early marriage.

The responses shows that majority of the respondents (291) believe that early marriage can lead to medical complications during pregnancy and delivery. This is followed by 270 respondents who believe that it causes Infant and Maternal mortality. 201 respondents also believe that child marriage can expose the child victim to contacting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS, etc. 135 respondents see child marriage as something that prevents a child from having access to basic education, while 111 respondents believe that it exposes a child victim to domestic and sexual violence.

**Table 8: Have the campaigns done enough to educate you on the negative consequences of child marriage**

Have the campaigns done enough to educate you on the negative consequences of child marriage					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	309	54.4	54.4	54.4
	No	216	38.0	38.0	92.4
	undecided	43	7.6	7.6	100.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	

The data in table 8 above is on whether the campaigns have done enough to educate people on the negative consequences of child marriage. As can be seen in the table and chart above, 309 (54.4%) respondents said yes, 216 (38%) said no, while 43 (7.6%) are undecided. This means that majority of the respondents believe that the media campaigns have done enough in educating people about the negative consequences of child marriage.

**Research Question Four:** What is the level of influence of media messages on child marriage on respondents' practices in Northwest Nigeria?

**Table 9: Influence of media campaigns against child marriage on respondents**

Influence of media campaigns against child marriage on respondents' practice regarding marriage					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Great extent	297	52.3	52.3	52.3
	High extent	88	15.5	15.5	67.8
	Fair extent	117	20.6	20.6	88.4
	Low	66	11.6	11.6	100.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	

The data in the table 9 above is about the influence of media campaigns on child marriage on respondents' practice regarding marriage. 297 (52.3%) say it influences them to a great extent, 117 (20.6%) fair extent, 88 (15.5%) high extent, 66 (11.6%) low extent. This shows that most of the respondents were greatly influenced by the media messages on child marriage.

**Table 10: Support/opposition to marriage of girls under 18 years**

Based on information from the campaigns, would you still support/oppose the marriage of girls under 18 years					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fully support	25	4.4	4.4	4.4
	Support to some extent	92	16.2	16.2	20.6
	Fully oppose	366	64.4	64.4	85.0
	Oppose to some extent	81	14.3	14.3	99.3
	Undecided	4	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	

The data above are about whether the respondents still support or oppose the marriage of girls under the age of 18 after having been exposed to media campaigns against child marriage. 366 (64.4%) of respondents fully oppose child marriage, 92 (16.2%) support it to some extent, 81 (14.3%) oppose it to some extent, and 25 (4.4%) fully support it, while 4 (0.7%) of respondents are undecided. That data shows that the majority of the respondents strongly oppose the marriage of girls under 18 years of age based on the information gleaned from the media campaigns.

**Table 11: Adherence to the media messages on child marriage**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	398	70.1	70.1	70.1
	No	101	17.8	17.8	87.9
	No sure	69	12.1	12.1	100.0
	Total	568	100.0	100.0	

The data in table 11 above are about adherence with media messages against child marriage. 398 (70.1%) said yes, 101 (17.8%) no, while 69 (12.1%) are not sure. It shows that majority adhere with the media messages against child marriage.

**Socio-cultural/religious influence on child marriage**

The data presented above, are about socio-cultural/religious influence on child marriage. Respondents rated the statements of socio-cultural factors that influence child marriage in line with their degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements. There are various factors that contribute to child marriage. These include the practice of using child marriage to strengthen family ties, cultural and traditional norms that support child marriage, the powerlessness of child victims to go against their parents' wishes regarding marriage, and the question of whether religious beliefs condone child marriage.

H<sub>01</sub>. The awareness level of respondents on media campaigns on the implications of child marriage is not related to their degree of exposure to media messages regarding child marriage

**Table 12: Test of hypothesis one**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		How often do you hear, read or see these media campaigns	Level of knowledge on implications of child marriage occasioned by media campaigns
Level of exposure to media messages on child marriage	Pearson Correlation	1	.874**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	568	568
Level of awareness of media messages on child marriage	Pearson Correlation	.874**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	568	568
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The table 12 above was extracted from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software that was adopted to determine the relationship between respondents' awareness and exposure on media campaigns on the implications of child marriage and the degree of their exposure to media messages on child marriage.

The result of correlation obtained shows that the relationship is positive as it shows 0.874. This is considered positive because it is close to +1 in value. This invariably implies that there is strong positive relationship between audience's awareness of the messages about child marriage and the degree of exposure to media campaign messages about child marriage.

This therefore means that the null hypothesis which says there is no relationship between the variables was rejected.

**Test of Hypothesis Two**

H<sub>01</sub>. There is no significant relationship between level of awareness on media messages child marriage and residents' adherence to media messages on child marriage

H<sub>02</sub>. There is significant relationship between awareness of media messages on child marriage and residents' adherence to media messages regarding child marriage

**Table 13: Test of Hypothesis Two**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		Level of awareness of media messages on child marriage	Adherence to media messages on child marriage
Level of awareness of media messages on child marriage	Pearson Correlation	1	.906**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	568	568
Adherence to media messages on child marriage	Pearson Correlation	.906**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	568	568
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The table 13 above shows the test of hypothesis that determine the relationship between awareness of media messages against child marriage and residents' adherence to media messages regarding child marriage

The result shows 0.906 point. Based on benchmark, it is considered that the relationship is significantly positive as it is close to +1. This means that the null hypothesis was accepted.

**Discussion of Findings**

**What is the respondents' level of exposure to media messages on child marriage in Northwest Nigeria?**

The analysis of the respondents' level of exposure to media messages against child marriage shows that for frequency of exposure to media messages regarding child marriage, the majority (38%) of the respondents say they are sometimes exposed to the media campaigns, not always. The second-highest number of respondents says they are rarely exposed to messages against child marriage. While 19.2% said they are always exposed to the messages, 19% of the respondents reported never being exposed to the media messages. The implication of the result is that even though many members of the public are aware of the media campaign against child marriage, their level of exposure to the messages about child marriage is moderate, given the fact that the majority of them are not always exposed to the messages.

The findings above are similar to those of Ajaero et al. (2016), who found that exposure to pro-family planning messages in the media increased the chance of its use. Higher-income groups, as well as those in the South and other parts of the country, are more likely to use family planning. The findings also collaborate with the findings of Konkora et al. (2019), who found that wealthy women were more likely to hear messages about family planning in the media than less wealthy, less educated, or unemployed women. Similarly, there was a favourable correlation between location (the South West) and the likelihood of receiving such communications. Disparities in mass media exposure were identified, which is consistent with the structural



influence model of health communication. The study is also in line with the study of Mehra et al. (2018), who found that Youth in Crisis (YIC) and exposure to the media are two intervention strategies that have been shown to help stop early marriage and pregnancy and keep more students in school. However, the study locations are different, and there may be some intervening variables like socio-cultural factors.

### **What is the respondents' level of awareness of media messages against child marriage in Northwest Nigeria?**

Data on respondents' level of awareness about media messages against child marriage shows that the majority (68.5%) of the respondents are aware of media campaigns, while 15.3% indicated not being aware. The implication is that the majority of the respondents are aware of media campaigns against child marriage. Talking about awareness, the study also found that, when asked what the respondents regarded as the ideal age for marriage as seen, read, or heard in the campaign, the majority (52.6%) believe it should be 18 years and above. 12% said they don't know the ideal age for marriage.

However, the study findings are consistent with the findings of Umana and Onwubuche (2021), who found that numerous factors, including high rates of poverty and traditional beliefs and practises, contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Child brides are more likely to stop attending school after getting married and younger girls are more likely to sustain pregnancy-related complications like fistula, among others. The study is also in agreement with Okiyi et al.'s (2020) study, which found that the media rarely covers social issues such as child abuse and violence but rather gives more coverage to stories about people and events in other parts of society. The media, however, have a responsibility to raise awareness about issues linked to children's rights and safety.

### **What are the factors that influence respondents' perception to media messages on child marriage in North-west Nigeria?**

The results show that child marriage has a lot of negative consequences, with 309 (54.4%) respondents saying yes, 216 (38%) saying no, and 43 (7.6%) being undecided. This means that the majority of the respondents believe that the media campaigns have done enough to educate people about the negative consequences of child marriage. This is in line with the findings of Ehoru and Badey (2022), who found that many young people think marriage isn't as important as it used to be and that it may be making things worse for society as a whole. The study findings are also consistent with those of Nasrullah et al. (2014), who found that some factors that seem to contribute to the persistence of child marriage in Pakistan are the strong influence of culture and community perceptions, the different interpretations of religion, and the protection of family honour, as described by the participants.

### **What is the level of influence of media messages on child marriage on respondents' practices in Northwest Nigeria?**

Even though they have seen media campaigns against child marriage, the respondents who responded still support or oppose the marriage of girls under the age of 18. 366 (64.4%) of respondents fully oppose child marriage, 92 (16.2%) support it to some extent, 81 (14.3%) oppose it to some extent, and 25 (4.4%) fully support it, while 4 (0.7%) of respondents are undecided. That data shows that the majority of the respondents strongly oppose the marriage of girls less than 18 years of age based on the information gleaned from the media campaigns. Results show that media messages about child marriages to a great extent influenced the respondents who are fully opposed to child marriage. The result of the findings is in agreement with the findings of Raghunathan et al. (2021) who found that attitudes towards marriage and women's roles in the workplace and household showed no substantial change. The authors found that there has been a minimal shift in traditional gender roles at home, and education has been seen more as a means to better manage the family than as a means to enable women to work and be autonomous. The study also in tandem

with the findings of Bengesai et al. (2021) who found that early marriage of girls is a major impediment to their continuing their education, which has consequences for the country's development strategy.

### Conclusion

The respondents in Northwest Nigeria have been exposed to media campaigns regarding child marriage, but the level of exposure is moderate. The respondents exhibit a good level of awareness about media campaigns concerning child marriage and have fair knowledge of the associated implications. They acknowledge that the appropriate age for marriage is 18 years or older, as highlighted in the campaigns, and have a clear understanding of the harmful consequences of child marriage, which they strongly oppose. The media's messages against child marriage influence the respondents to some extent. There are other factors apart from media messages that encourage child marriage in Northwest Nigeria, such as religious beliefs (Islam), culture and tradition that support child marriage in Nigeria, financial gains informed by the bride price, and family ties.

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