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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

The Role of traditional leadership in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy: a case study of Mashonaland Central Province

By

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Abstract

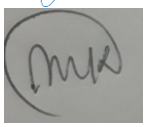
This research examined the role of traditional leadership in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. The study was guided by objectives that sought to explore the role of traditional leaders and strategies they employ, the challenges they face and measures for improving their effectiveness. A pragmatist philosophy and mixed methods approach was employed focusing on Mashonaland Central Province. Data were collected from 50 participants through questionnaires, FGDs and analysed through descriptive statistics and thematic statistics. The findings revealed that traditional leaders play a vital role in preventing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy through awareness campaigns and enforcement of cultural norms. However, their efforts are constrained by poverty, weak law enforcement and limited resources. The study further found that collaboration between traditional leaders, government institutions and other stakeholders is essential in addressing these challenges. The research concludes that traditional leadership remains a key institution in community governance and can contribute significantly to reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy when supported. The study recommendations include strengthening partnerships, enhancing community awareness programs and empowering traditional leaders through training and resources.

DECLARATION FORM

I, Tatenda Mubayiwa (B221101B) hereby declare that this dissertation is based on my own original work and has not been submitted for any degree at this university or elsewhere

Student:  Date: 27 August 2026

Supervisor:  Date: 27 August 2026

Chairperson:  Date: 28/08/2026

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and the young girls of Shamva district facing the challenge of early marriage and pregnancy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to God Almighty for granting me the strength, wisdom and opportunity to successfully pursue and complete this academic research. I am grateful to my supervisor for his valuable guidance, support and expert knowledge throughout the course of this study. I also wish to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my family for their unwavering support, encouragement, care and constant inspiration throughout my academic journey. Finally, I would like to acknowledge everyone who contributed directly or indirectly towards the completion of this study.

ACRONYMS

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
FBOs	Faith Based Organizations
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
MoPSLSW	Ministry of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
ZHDS	Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
ZNFPC	Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Background to the Study

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are rising global issues. UNICEF (2023) reports that the Sub-Saharan carries a disproportionate burden of child marriage, with nearly 40% of girls getting married before reaching 18 years. Zimbabwe is among the countries in Sub-Saharan region with a higher percentage of girls getting married before the age of 18. The statistics indicate that Zimbabwe carries a high burden of girls affected by child marriage and adolescent pregnancy as a result of the economic situation that has led girls into marriage for economic security. According to UNFPA (2024) Zimbabwe has 34% of early marriages and adolescent pregnancy at 23%. The Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey highlight that Mashonaland Central is one of the regions with high prevalence of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage of 37 % which is an alarming number of girls being affected by adolescent pregnancy and marriages. This has raised concerns on the role played by traditional leaders and community governance in addressing issues of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. As noted by (Matsiliza, 2024) traditional leaders (chiefs, headmen and village heads) have a strong influence over family, marriage and dispute resolution practices in rural communities. This study is essential in understanding how traditional leaders can influence issues like adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. In areas like Mashonaland Central, traditional leadership remains the first port of call towards such matters including marriage issues, inheritance and community discipline (Matsiliza, 2024) The influence positions them as key actors in addressing harmful practices. In Mashonaland Central traditional leaders have increasingly collaborated with civil society organizations, government agencies, international parties to implement community-

based interventions that aim to curb challenge of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. These include awareness campaigns, youth empowerment programs and the establishment of village committees tasked with monitoring and reporting cases of child marriages (UNICEF, 2022). These initiatives have demonstrated that when traditional leaders are actively engaged, they can become formidable allies in promoting children's rights. Community programs like Not in My Village and Girls Not Brides have been very helpful in stopping child marriage and encouraging girls to go to school. According to the Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC, 2025) these grassroots efforts provide culturally appropriate spaces for conversation and accountability, connecting statutory law and customary practice.

The coexistence of statutory law (national law) and customary law (traditional governance) leads to overlapping authorities that frequently clash (Chigwata, 2024). This has been further supported by (Matilisa, 2024) who argues that statutory law prohibits early child marriage, whilst customary law and traditional leadership practices determine the outcomes in practice. In Mashonaland Central community governance has enforced bylaws that discourage early child marriage and supporting girls' education highlights the role that is played by traditional leadership in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. However, despite these efforts the challenge of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage remains persistently high. The study aims to explore how traditional governance can be strengthened to address customary law that perpetuate adolescent violation of girl's rights

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the role that traditional leadership and community governance structures can play in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriages in Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. By examining the attitudes, strategies

and interventions employed by traditional leaders the study aims to uncover how indigenous systems of authority can be leveraged to promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the presence of national policies and programs that have been employed in preventing adolescent pregnancy and child marriages, its prevalence remains high in many rural areas in Zimbabwe, including in Mashonaland Central Province. While, traditional leaders have also been included in addressing child marriages through the Girls not Brides and the Not in my village campaigns adolescent pregnancy and child marriage still remain prevalent inn Mashonaland Central Province (ZHDS, 2023). Existing studies have largely focused on legal frameworks and national statistics; there is limited empirical evidence assessing the effectiveness of these traditional leadership interventions in addressing child marriage at the community level. This gap highlights the need to critically examine how traditional leadership can be strengthened to enhance child protection outcomes.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1 To examine the role that traditional leadership and community governance play in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

2. To assess the strategies and interventions implemented by traditional leaders to prevent adolescent pregnancy and child marriage
3. To explore challenges faced by traditional leaders in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage within their communities
4. To recommend culturally appropriate and sustainable approaches for strengthening child protection through indigenous governance systems.

a. Research Questions

1. What role can traditional leadership and community governance play in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriages?
2. What strategies and interventions have traditional leadership employed to address the issue of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Mashonaland Central?
3. What challenges do traditional leaders often face in enforcing laws against adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in their communities?
4. What culturally appropriate and sustainable approaches can be drawn from the Mashonaland Central experience to inform broader policy and programming?

b. Assumptions of the study

The research assumes that the community members and adolescent girls provide accurate and reliable information during interviews and questionnaires. The research also assumes that traditional leaders influence community attitudes and practices regarding adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

c. Significance of the Study

This study is essential as it contributes to academic knowledge, policy development, NGO engagement and community practice.

Academic contribution

This study contributes to the understanding on the intersection of traditional leadership and adolescent reproductive health in girls in Zimbabwe (Makumbe, 2022). By integrating the perspective from traditional governance structures, the study offers a nuanced understanding of

how cultural norms and leadership practices influence adolescent health outcomes. This academic contribution therefore develops culturally relevant frameworks that address Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) challenges in rural Zimbabwe.

Community

This study contributes to the development of locally driven solutions that resonates with the communities' cultural values. The engagement of traditional leaders in addressing adolescent pregnancy and marriage empowers communities to take ownership hence fostering a sense of collective responsibility and encourages the communities to fully participate in initiatives aimed at protecting SRHR for adolescent girls.

Policy implications

The findings from the research can help influence policy making in terms of understanding the role of traditional leadership in reducing adolescent pregnancy and marriage, leading to the incorporation of traditional governance in the implementation of reproductive health programs. This contributes to the development of culturally sensitive policies that can be easily adopted by the communities hence leading to the effectiveness of the policies in protecting adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights

NGO Engagement

This study provides insights into how NGOs can engage traditional leaders as partners in reproductive health initiatives. Understanding the role played by the traditional leaders in influencing community norms allows these organizations to have a better understanding on developing policies that align with the society norms and can be embraced by the targeted

communities. The collaboration between NGOs and traditional leaders help NGOs have better access into the communities.

1.8 Delimitation of the study

The study is intentionally delimited to the geographical scope of Shamva district in Mashonaland Central Province, where traditional leadership structures are actively engaged in local governance. Additionally, the study concentrated on the role of traditional leaders like village heads, chiefs and headman and community governance mechanism like village developments or customary legal systems except where they intersect traditional structures. This delimitation allows for a focused exploration of indigenous response to adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. The research was also limited to issues relating to adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Other social problems and districts within Mashonaland Central Province were excluded from the study.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The study faced limitations that include, resource constraints on transport and limited time to reach out to very remote areas of the province that might have narrowed the representation of such communities. To minimize these challenges, the researcher assured the participants of confidentiality and used multiple research tools to improve the reliability of the findings.

1.10 Definition of Key Words

Adolescent pregnancy

Adolescent pregnancy refers to pregnancy occurring in young women aged 10-19 years. It is often associated with limited access to sexual and reproductive health services, early sexual debut and socio-economic vulnerability (WHO, 2022)

Child marriage

UNICEF, (2025) defines child marriage as a formal or informal union where one or both parties are under the age of 18. It is considered a human rights violation and is linked to adverse health, educational and economic outcomes for girls (UNICEF, 2025).

Community governance

Community governance refers to a localized system of governance that combines customary institutions, grassroots organizations and state structures to ensure inclusive participation, social accountability and sustainable resource management at the community level (UNDP, 2024)

Traditional leadership

Traditional leadership refers to indigenous systems of authority led by chiefs, headman and village elders who govern community based on customary law and cultural norms. In Zimbabwe, these leaders are legally recognized under the Traditional Leaders Act and they play a role in dispute resolution, cultural preservation and community development (Zimbabwe Government, 2021).

Customary law

Customary law refers to traditional norms and practices that are accepted as legal standards within a community. In Zimbabwe customary law operates alongside statutory law and is administered by traditional leaders in matters such as marriage, inheritance and land use (Zimbabwe Legal Information Institute, 2022).

1.11 Dissertation outline

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of the study

This chapter gave the introduction, purpose of the study, research problem, research questions and the significance of the study. The chapter also outlined the delimitations and limitations of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter provided the cornerstone of the study because it focused on the literature review to understand the role played by traditional leadership in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The chapter also provided different scholars views and identified gaps that justify the need for the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

This chapter gives an overview of the research philosophy, research designs, and the research methodology used in the study. The chapter also explained the justification for using pragmatistic philosophy and mixed methods.

Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings

This chapter outlines the presentation findings of the research and discussion of the findings gathered from interviews, Focus Group Discussion and questionnaires in relation to research questions and objectives.

Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions, recommendations and areas for further research

The chapter summarizes the research findings, give conclusions and provide recommendations for policy makers, community and further research based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the role of traditional leadership and community governance in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in Zimbabwe with a focus on Mashonaland Central Province. The review critically examines what scholars and legal frameworks have established about the issue while identifying knowledge gaps that justify the research study. The study critically engages with existing literature to establish the research gap. As argued by (Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches, 2021) no research exists in isolation; it must be connected to prior studies to demonstrate its relevance and originality. Therefore, the review explores the prevalence and consequences of adolescent pregnancy and child marriages, role of traditional leadership and the legal and policy framework in Zimbabwe. The review also explores the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of the problem.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Ecological Systems Theory

This research is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1979). The theory underscores that individual behaviours are influenced by multiple levels including interpersonal, organizational, community and societal factors. According to (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) children develop within interconnected systems hence highlighting that child marriage and adolescent pregnancy are not caused by a single factor.

These five systems include the microsystem (direct interactions) where traditional leaders can play a role in shaping what families believe is acceptable through customary law and by laws hence reducing child marriage (UNFPA, 2022). The mesosystem (connection between microsystems) where traditional leaders and community governance coordinate community structures that are essential in tackling child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. Exosystem (indirect influences) where traditional leaders collaborate with NGOs in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and enforce community by laws that prohibit these practices. Macrosystem (broader cultural context) where conflicting customary and statutory law exist and weak law enforcement have influence on adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Traditional leaders play a role in promoting alignment with the national laws and mediating between customary law and statutory law. Chronosystem (influence of life and time transition) which explains how social transitions such as globalization, urbanization and increased access to digital media can influence adolescent behaviour. Traditional leaders play a role in guiding long term cultural change leading to reduced child marriage and adolescent pregnancy (UNICEF, 2023)

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) is crucial in this study because it explains adolescent pregnancy and child marriage as outcomes of interacting social systems rather than individual behaviour alone. In the Zimbabwean context, traditional leaders function within the mesosystem and macro system where they influence both community norms and the interpretation of customary. This theory is particularly relevant to this study as it also explains how factors at multiple levels including family, community and societal structures interact to influence adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. It also highlights the role of traditional leadership as a key actor within the community system.

Adapted from (Guy-Evans, 2024), *Simply Psychology.*



Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

2.2.2 Social norms theory

The research is also underpinned by the social norms theory which posits that individual behaviour is shaped by collective perceptions of what is normal or acceptable within a community (Cialdini & Trost, 2022). This theory is essential in explaining how the community influence the behaviour of adolescent girls through their beliefs. Social norms are perceived informal mostly unwritten rules that define acceptable and appropriate action within a given group or community thus guiding human behaviour (Cialdini, 1990)

In the context of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, social norms play a critical role in sustaining the practice. Descriptive norms, which refer to perceptions of what others commonly do may lead individuals to accept adolescent pregnancy and child marriage if it is widely practiced in their community. This perception therefore contributes to a large number of

girls getting pregnant married before the legal age of marriage. Injunctive norms which relate to perceptions of what others approve or disapprove of further reinforce the practice when communities view early marriage as acceptable or desirable. Moral norms which are based on beliefs of what is right or wrong, also contribute to the persistence of child marriage when it is culturally framed as a legitimate practice. Bicchieri (2016) argues that injunctive norms and descriptive norms strongly influence community behaviour.

These social norms are typically supported by traditional leaders who are considered as the main keepers of culture. This underscores the need to examine how traditional leaders influence social norms and shape the behaviour of young girls in their communities. It is through recognizing the process that social norms go through when they change or remain the same, that one can design interventions to transform community attitudes and behaviours that will be based on protective polices while not strengthening the behaviors that lead to child marriage. This theory provides a useful lens for understanding how community expectations and cultural beliefs contribute to the persistence of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage (Bichierri, 2016)

2.3 Global Context of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage remains a significant global challenge that mainly affect marginalized communities particularly those in low-and middle-income countries. (UNICEF, 2023) states that every year around 12 million girls all over the world get married before turning 18 years, and more than 16 million girls aged 15-19 give birth. The statistics highlight the widespread nature of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage all over the world which is a cause for concern. According to a report by Population Council (2023),

globally about 76% of first births to girls below age 18 today take place within marriage with a lot of variation across and within regions. The report further reviewed that virtually all births among girls below age 18 are within marriage in Northern Africa, Western Asia and South and Southeastern Asia. According to Population Council (2023), in other parts of the world, mainly Europe and Northen America childbearing under 18 years is rare, very little of these births happen in marriages (less than 30%). This indicates that adolescent pregnancy and child marriage remain prevalent in developing countries due to socio economic inequalities, limited access to reproductive health services and gender norms that restrict adolescent girls' independence and decision making. Darroch et.al., (2016) notes that several regions in Europe and North America have witnessed a dramatic decrease as a result of better access to contraception, sexual education and youth friendly health services.

Poverty has been a major key driver to early child marriage and adolescent pregnancy as girls from poorest homes are likely to get pregnant early as a way of seeking economic security, lack of education and lack of access to reproductive health services. In many rural societies child marriage remains an accepted cultural practice especially in parts of Africa and South Asia which reinforce early pregnancy and child marriage. As noted by Yakubu & Salisu (2018) there is a link between early pregnancy and lack of parental guidance as adolescent girls are exposed to social media where they access sites that corrupt their minds leading to behaviors that contribute to pregnancy. Furthermore, lack of modern contraceptives, limited access to sexual and reproductive health education and Gender Based Violence has increased adolescent vulnerability (UNICEF, 2023)

In an attempt to reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, the WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF have launched global initiatives such as Global Accelerated action for the Health

of Adolescent which is aim at tackling the issue through education, empowerment and accesses to SRH services. However, these global efforts have been challenged by the COVID 19 which disrupted health services, social support systems and education. Several developing countries including Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique witnessed a surge of child marriages as a result of unintended pregnancy due to this pandemic (UNFPA, 2022). Adolescent pregnancy and marriage threaten the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals especially SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 5(gender equality). This highlights the need to integrate education, sexual and reproductive health and gender empowerment to tackle the main causes of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage

While global efforts have made progress, the persistence of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in developing regions suggests that structural and cultural factors continue to undermine these interventions

2.4 Regional context of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage remain a critical social and development challenge across many regions particularly in Sub Saharan Africa. The issue of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage is largely driven by structural factors such as poverty, gender inequality, lack of quality education and cultural practice that perpetuate early marriages for example *kuripa ngozi* (appeasement marriage) in many African societies. Across the region, Sub Saharan records the highest prevalence rates globally making it a key focus area for researchers and policy makers to research and understand the patterns and root causes of adolescent pregnancy and marriage (UNICEF, 2023)

African countries like Chad and Central African Republic record the highest rates of child marriage in the region, recording nearly 60% of girls getting married before 18 years ((UNICEF, 2023)In Southern Africa, countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique are also witnessing this challenge with Zimbabwe recording 33% and Mozambique at 48% of girls getting married before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2022)Early marriage is often perceived as means of financial security especially in rural areas where poverty is dominant. (Makumana, 2020) further noted that besides poverty, cultural practices also encourage adolescent pregnancy and child marriage as motherhood and marriage are viewed as symbols of maturity and family honor which leads to young girls married off before they even turn 18 years.

Studies in Sub Saharan Africa highlight that the interventions that actively involve community leaders and traditional authorities and local structures are more effective in reducing early marriages than purely legislative approaches (Chae & Ngo, 2017). This suggest that the integration of traditional leadership, community governance and legislative approaches is essential in addressing the challenge. While a few studies focus on the beneficial aspect of traditional leaders in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage (Ngulube, 2022), the rest contend that traditional leadership might actually be the cause of the continuation of the same practices that are damaging, as a result of the deeply rooted patriarchal norms (Mwabene, 2022)

2.5 Zimbabwean Context of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage

In Zimbabwe, the rate of teenage pregnancies is still very high especially in the rural areas where the norms of the culture and the limited number of law enforcers are still prevalent ((Muzingili, 2025) notes that this has a negative effect on the lives of adolescent girls as it

contributes to increased poverty and disease burdens, in some cases maternal deaths. The National Assessment on Adolescent Pregnancy in Zimbabwe (2023) report indicate that Zimbabwe is classified among 41 countries globally and 20 countries in Africa with high rates of child marriage. The child marriage prevalence rate is estimated to be at 33% slightly higher than global average of 29% which is an alarming number hence the need to examine the role of traditional leaders and community governance in addressing these issues. Child marriages remain an acceptable norm in some religious or cultural groups in Zimbabwe for example in most Apostolic religions like Marange early child marriage is an accepted practice. The rate of child marriages is higher in rural areas (22.7%) compared to urban areas (7.2%) hence indicating the need to address the influence of traditional leaders on issues relating to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in rural areas.

Furthermore, adolescent fertility rates are generally higher in provinces in the northern eastern and farming areas where child marriage is prevalent, for example Mashonaland Central records approximately 49.5 % of girls married before the age of 18. On the other hand, provinces such as Bulawayo and Harare records low rates with Bulawayo at 13 % and Harare at 21.7% for girls married before 18 years of age. According to (ZIMSTAT, 2023-24) and (UNICEF, 2023) 23% of girls aged 15–19 have given birth, with rural areas disproportionately affected hence highlighting that traditional leadership has the role to play in addressing child marriages and adolescent pregnancies given that rural areas are mostly affected compared to urban areas.

According to UNICEF, (2022) child marriages and adolescent pregnancy have been driven by several factors such as poverty as families marry off their daughters to reduce financial burden affecting the lives of adolescent girls. Limited access to education, gender inequality and cultural norms have also contributed to adolescent pregnancy and child marriages as issues like

community expectations around femininity and fertility has reinforced early unions (Matilisa, 2024). This therefore indicates that societal expectations have high influence on issues regarding to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy highlighting the need for further research.

Cultural practices, the influence of parents and social norms often take precedence over formal laws, especially in rural communities (Matilisa, 2024) Traditional leaders, as custodians of culture, have a strong grip on these practices, thereby becoming major players in interventions that seek to curb adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

2.6 Role of Traditional Leadership and Community Governance

Traditional leaders are pivotal in defining the social behaviours and norms of the community as well as having a say in the local institutions that can either sustain or eliminate issues like child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. According to Chiweshe & Chiweshe (2020) during their influence on African households, they are always present. Their influence extends to family decision making and enforcement of customary law. This, in turn, affects the practices that lead to adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, either by promoting them or through their reduction. This indicates that traditional leaders are major players in the issue of child marriage since not only do they have the power, but they can also influence the practices that lead to these behaviours. Traditional leaders such as chiefs, village heads and headmen have for a long time been the central figures in Zimbabwean communities. They were responsible for resolving disputes, implementing customary laws and setting social norms (Matilisa, 2024). Traditional leaders in Zimbabwean communities including chiefs, headmen and village heads have over time played main roles in community life, managing dispute resolution, enforcing customary law and setting social norms (Matilisa, 2024). Similarly, they have been at the forefront of community engagement, particularly in the implementation of awareness programs

and the mobilization of resources for districts like Shamva, Mt Darwin, Rushinga, and Mbire. These areas are characterized by the high prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. Through these initiatives, the traditional leadership highlight how they can be the change-makers in dismantling social norms with negative implications whilst at the same time facilitating sexual and reproductive health rights for girls and young women.

Community governance structures such as village committees, ward committees and community-based organizations complement traditional governance efforts as they play a role in providing mechanisms for decision making. Village heads and chiefs often make use of community dialogues, traditional courts (dare) to denounce child marriages. This has been supported by reports made by MoPSLSW (2020) indicating that sensitization programmes facilitated by the Ward Child Protection Committees have significantly contributed to changing attitudes especially in Mashonaland Central where there is high prevalence. Community governance structures in Mashonaland Central have also been engaging in awareness and education campaigns in schools educating parents, the community and adolescents on the dangers of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy (UNICEF, 2021). As noted by (Charumbira, 2020), traditional leaders have also been instrumental in reforming harmful practices through the National Chiefs Council by condemning practices like kuzvarira arguing that they violate constitutional rights. This clearly indicate the role that traditional leaders play in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy through initiating cultural reforms that address key drivers of early marriages.

2.7 Legal and Policy Framework in Zimbabwe

The legal and policy framework governing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Zimbabwe is anchored in the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment 20) Act of 2013 which

serves as supreme law of the country. The Constitution provides a human rights-based approach which is essential in addressing issues affecting adolescent girls particularly issues related to girls' education, early marriage and adolescent pregnancy hence outlining girls' rights. The inclusion of girl's rights in the 2013 Constitution highlights the significant efforts that has been put in place by the government with other legal commitments on child marriages. In line with the 2013 Constitution, Zimbabwe has passed several laws to curb the problem of child marriage which include the Marriage Act (Chapter5:17) enacted in 2022 which sets 18 years as the minimum legal age of marriage without exceptions and prohibits child marriage. Another key law is the Education Amendment Act (2020) which reinforces education for all children and prohibits schools from excluding pregnant girls. This law is aimed at guaranteeing that young mothers can continue with their education and not excluded from the school system. Meanwhile, the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act and Children's Act impose penalties for child abuse. The National Gender Policy (2017-2021) which promotes gender equality and the elimination of Gender Based Violence hence promoting inclusion of girls and women rights in policy making decisions related to women and girls.

Another key policy is the National Development Strategy (2021-2025) reflects rights-based approach to gender equality and child protection. Equality Now (2025), reports that Zimbabwe ratified the regional and international key instruments including the African Charter on the Rights and Warfare of the Child (ACRWC,1990), the SADC Protocol on Gender Development (2008) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) hence highlighting the legal commitment of the country in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage supporting girls' education and rights.

Despite this commitment made by the government enforcement remains weak especially in rural areas. Economic pressures like poverty also perpetuate early child marriage and adolescent pregnancy as parents marry off their daughter for economic security. In some rural areas, customary practices such as *kuzvarira* (pledging of girls in marriage) and *kuripa ngozi* (appeasement marriage) persist hence contradicting constitutional laws. As noted by (Mwabene, 2022) many families bypass statutory laws by relying on customary arrangements hence making the efforts of the governments less effective. This research therefore aims to address the tension between the customary law and statutory law and investigate how traditional leaders can be engaged to support statutory laws rather that bypassing it.

2.8 Gaps in the Literature

The literature review highlights the challenge of integration in terms of statutory law and customary law. The interaction between customary law and statutory law remains underexplored, particularly in terms of enforcement challenges. As noted by (Maposa & Sibanda, 2022) the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) and the Marriage Act (2022) prohibits child marriage and sets out the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 years, however customary practices permit informal unions with parental consent, this therefore shows how customary law and statutory law often conflict. Traditional leaders and families often bypass statutory law by facilitating informal unions which they view as part of local culture for example cultural practice chimutsamapfihwa in Zimbabwe reinforces early child marriage and adolescent. The lack of studies showing how traditional leadership and community governance creates a balance between statutory law and customary law highlights a research gap that this research seeks to fill.

Women and girls' voices and perspectives in community governance structures are underrepresented in the literature. The underrepresentation of women raises concerns on the issue of inclusivity, gender sensitivity and women empowerment. The existing literature mostly highlights how traditional chiefs, village heads and headman have contributed to addressing early child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and they are men (Makumbe, 2022) The inclusion of girl's voices who are the most affected by child marriage and adolescent pregnancy is crucial in making the interventions effective, however the voices are often marginalized hence the initiatives become less effective. This gap highlights the need for gender sensitive interventions and research in order to understand the experiences and the perceptions of the affected adolescent girls. The research aims to fill the gap by including girls' perspectives on the role of traditional and community governance in addressing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy and early child marriages.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a review of literature regarding adolescent pregnancy and child marriages, particularly focusing on the role played by traditional leadership and governance systems in solving these issues. This chapter provides a review of global, regional and local literature on adolescent pregnancy and child marriage emphasizing the roles played by poverty, culture, gender inequalities and poor law enforcement as the leading causes of these social issues. This chapter also considers the impact of traditional leaders in shaping community behaviour and customary practices including interventions carried out within communities. In addition, this chapter evaluates the current policies for child protection in Zimbabwe and the conflicts that arise between statutes and customary laws. The two guiding theories used in this chapter are Ecological Systems Theory and Social Norms Theory, which provide a theoretical

basis on how families, communities, and societies influence adolescent behaviours. Finally, this chapter identifies gaps in the current literature particularly the lack of empirical research on Mashonaland Central Province and on interventions by traditional leaders.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and design adopted for the study on traditional leadership and community governance in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage In Mashonaland Central Province. The purpose of this study is to examine how traditional leadership influence cultural norms, enforce by laws and contribute to reduce adolescent pregnancy and early child marriage. The chapter gives a detailed analysis of research approach, design, population, sampling, data collection methods and ethical considerations. The chapter further highlights how the research methodology aligns with the theoretical framework and the research objectives to ensure the validity of the research findings.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the underlying beliefs and assumptions about the nature of knowledge, reality and research processes that guide the researcher throughout their study (Prime, 2024). The study adopts an interpretivist research philosophy which emphasizes the understanding of the social phenomenon from the perspectives of participants. According to Bryman, (2022), interpretivism assumes that social reality is constructed through human interaction and is context dependent. In this context, adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are shaped by cultural norms and traditional practices. By applying the interpretivism philosophy, the research aims to understand how traditional leaders, community members and adolescent girls perceive these issues.

3.3 Research Approach

Research methodology can be described as the analysis of the principle of methods, rules and suggestions employed by a discipline or systematic study of the methods that are or have been applied within a discipline (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). The study is anchored within the pragmatist research philosophy which provides the foundation of the adoption of a mixed methods approach. Pragmatism rejects a rigid separation between constructivist and positivist approaches and instead emphasizes that the research methods should be selected based on their ability to answer the research problem.

The study employed a descriptive research design anchored on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative research method was appropriate for researching complicated social phenomena as it gave the researcher an opportunity to conduct detailed analysis of people's experience, attitudes and perception. This method provided rich detailed insights into how traditional leaders perform and what role community governance plays in their functioning. Moreover, this method corresponds with social norms theory and ecological systems theory because they emphasize that human actions occur due to a number of levels of influences. This method allowed the researcher to explore various levels of influence that may affect the decision-making process of people regarding traditional leaders' influence on people's social behaviors. Weinreich (1996) claims that qualitative research makes it possible for the researcher to reach a level when they start thinking like the target group members. It allowed the researcher to become immersed into the social and cultural environment of the target group members.

Additionally, the use of quantitative methodology allowed gathering and analyzing numerical data that were analyzed statistically for ensuring increased objectivity and reliability

of the results obtained. According to (Creswell, 2021) the application of the quantitative methodology provides an opportunity to quantify the relations between variables under analysis. Furthermore, it enables the evaluation of trends, patterns and relations between variables using statistics. The implementation of the quantitative approach was essential for investigating the impact of traditional leadership, community awareness and governance systems on the spread of child marriage.

3.4 Research Design

A case study research design was adopted focusing on Shamva district in Mashonaland Central Province as the study area. (Creswell & Creswell, 2021) defines a research design as the overall plan or strategy that guides a study, explaining how data will be collected, analyzed and interpreted in order to answer the research questions and achieve the study objectives. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of how traditional leadership and community governance mechanisms address to the challenge of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

As noted by Yin (2018), case study research allows for an in-depth examination of contemporary phenomena within their real-life context, making it highly suitable for this study. The selection of Shamva District is important because it provides a context where traditional authority structures, cultural norms, and formal government systems interact in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. This case study enables an examination of the interplay between traditional leadership, community governance and state institutions in addressing these social challenges. It further provides deeper insight into the strategies and challenges involved in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage through local governance systems, which cannot be fully captured through surveys or purely quantitative approaches

3.5 Target population

The study population consisted of stakeholders such as traditional leaders, chiefs, headmen, village heads, community members including parents and guardians, adolescent girls who possess firsthand knowledge on issues relating to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The study population also included Community based Organizations (CBOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) working on addressing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

3.6 Sample Size

A sample refers to a smaller group selected from the target population for participation in the study (Bryman, 2022). The sample size approximately consisted of 50 participants involved in issues of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage through purposive and stratified sampling techniques in order to capture different perspectives to generate an understanding of the factors contributing to the problem.

3.7 Sampling Methods

Sampling is the process of selecting the right population for research in order to gather data from them. According to Whitehead (2016), the goal of sampling is to find eligible volunteers in a given study region such that the study emphasis may be studied properly. The study focused on selected districts with the highest reported rates of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage including Mt Darwin, Rushinga and Shamva (ZDHS, 2024)**.**

Purposive sampling

A purposive sampling was used in selecting stakeholders who have influence or are affected by issues of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. According to Campbell et al., (2023) purposive sampling involves deliberate selection of participants based on their knowledge experiences and relevance to the study. The method allowed for deliberate selection of traditional leaders, community leaders and government officials who hold leadership positions and have direct influence in addressing child marriage

Stratified sampling

The research also used stratified sampling which is a probability method where the whole population is divided into different and sometimes overlapping groups based on the shared characteristics relevant to the study (Thomas, 2023). The technique ensured that all relevant groups were disproportionately represented hence strengthening the internal validity of the study as different perspectives were put into consideration.

3.8 Data Collection Methods

3.8.1 Semi structure interviews

The research employed semi structure interviews for communities, traditional leaders, health workers, NGOs and community members to explore their experiences, influence and perceptions towards adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. This method is crucial as it allowed for flexibility hence collective perception and in depth understanding of different experiences.

3.8.2 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

The study also used Focus Group Discussions with adolescent girls provided insights into shared experiences, social norms and community expectations. This method allowed for interactions which highlights collective perceptions and understanding on community expectations.

3.8.3 Questionnaires

In addition, the research also used questionnaires which were distributed to selected participants particularly those who were not able to attend structured interviews and focus group discussions. The questionnaires were designed based on previous studies on traditional leadership and adolescent health (Makumbe, 2022)This method allowed for inclusivity and participation of individuals who preferred to respond privately.

3.8.4 Secondary data

Documentary analysis

Relevant documents like local by-laws and court records, National Legislation (Constitution 2013) and (Marriage Act 2022) were reviewed to support the findings from the semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires

3.9 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the extent by which the research instrument is able to measure what it is intended to measure, whilst reliability refers to the consistency of research over time (Creswell & Creswell, 2021) To ensure validity, the study employed various data sources such as interviews questionnaires document reviews, and focus group discussions to secure validity. Content validity was confirmed by ensuring that the questionnaire items were consistent with the research objectives.

3.10 Data analysis

Data analysis can be defined as a methodical way of arranging, coding and explaining gathered data to research questions' answering and study objectives' attainment (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Here, the author of the paper used qualitative and quantitative research methods as a means of deeply exploring the research problem. Qualitative data that was collected through interviews and FGDs was analyzed using thematic analysis per (Braun & Clarke, 2023) method. Data analysis involved transcription of all verbal data, coding of textual data into meaningful units and the identification of patterns and themes reflecting perceptions, challenges and strategies allowing for an in depth understanding of the experiences of community members. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics and responses. Tables, graphs and charts will be used to present the research findings

3.11 Pilot Testing/ Pretesting

Bryman (2022)**,** defines a pilot testing as the preliminary testing of research tools before actual data collection. A pilot test was done with a group of 10 people from Bindura District in

shack who were not involved in the main study; pilot testing served a dual purpose of refining the interview guides as well as checking the suitability of the data collection instruments for the research objectives. The changes that were incorporated contributed to the enhancement of reliability and validity**.**

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The study complied with the ethical standards and the ethical principles that guide research. Given the sensitivity of topics and the cultural dynamics that requires strict adherence to ethical standards. As noted by Resnik (2020), ethics matters in research and it can help promote the key aims of the research. These ethics of research includes anonymity, cultural sensitivity, informed consent, confidentiality and minimization of harm (Creswell & Creswell, 2021)

Informed Consent

All participants were given clear, written information explaining the study's aim, what they would have to do, the possible risks and benefits. Consent forms were signed before starting data collection, where participation was entirely voluntary. For vulnerable groups such as adolescents, additional protections were observed including parental or guardian consent where applicable.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participant identities were protected through coding and pseudonyms. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity biological names were altered by using codes. Data from interview and questionnaires was stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

Minimization of Harm

To prevent psychological, emotional or social harm, the study was planned very cautiously. Sensitive questions were asked in a very polite manner. Participants had the right to not answer any question or leave the study at any time. When a participant showed or caused distress, then a proper referral to support services was arranged.

Voluntary Participation

Participants were informed that their participation was absolutely voluntary and that if they refuse the study or withdraw at any time, there will be no penalties or negative consequences.

Cultural Sensitivity

The research honored the local customs, languages and beliefs. Where necessary, data collection tools were translated and community leaders or gatekeepers were engaged to help building trust and gain access.

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology and research design utilized in the study. The research philosophy, mixed methodology and case study research design utilized in exploring the role played by traditional leadership and community governance in tackling adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Mashonaland Central province were highlighted. Furthermore, the chapter presented on the study population, sample size, sampling method, data collection instruments and procedures such as interviews, questionnaire size, research instruments that include focus group discussion and document analysis was also provided.

Moreover, the chapter included the details on validity, reliability and ethical considerations guiding the study. The methodology applied in the study was suitable for collecting qualitative and quantitative data associated with adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the data collected from the participants involved in the study including traditional leaders, adolescents, community members and representatives from relevant organizations. The study adopted a mixed methods approach and data were gathered using interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions. A total of 50 participants were included in the study selected to provide different perspectives on the findings gathered on the role of traditional leadership and community governance in addressing child marriages and adolescent pregnancy in Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe.

4.2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 4.1 Distributions of participants by sex

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	35	70
Female	15	30
Total	**50**	**100**

The research constituted of 35 female participants accounting of 70% of the participants whilst male respondents constituted 15 participants which accounted for the 30 % of the

participants. These participants were selected from villages, wards and community institutions within Shamva district where issues of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are most prevalent. The higher representation of female participants in this study is appropriate given that adolescent pregnancy and child marriage disproportionately affect girls (UNICEF, 2021). This enhances the relevance and depth of the finding particularly in understanding lived experiences and gender specific vulnerabilities. Additionally, inclusion of male participants is equally important as it reflects the role that boys and men play in influencing outcomes including decision making, relationships and cultural expectations. This balanced sex representation captured perspectives of both sexes hence providing a more holistic understanding of this issue.

1.2.2 Distribution of participants by age

Age group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 18	20	10
18-30	15	30
31-50	10	40
50 +	5	20
Total	50	100

The majority of respondents were below 18 years constituting of 40 % of the respondents. This age group represents a critical development stage associated with high vulnerability to adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Permission was sought from their parents/ legal guardians prior to participation. Adolescent in the specified age group will be subjected to peer pressure, socio-economic challenges, and less parental guidance, hence increasing the probability that they participate in risky behaviour. With reference to Ecological

Systems Theory, such factors are part of the microsystem since the immediate social context surrounding the individuals affects how they behave. The introduction of teenage girls under the age of 15 shed light on awareness and prevention. Respondents in the 18+ age group accounted for 20 % of the respondents and their inclusion is equally important as it offers lived experiences and observations within the community. The inclusion of these different age groups captures both preventive and experiential dimensions of this issue.

4.2.3 Distribution of respondents by educational level

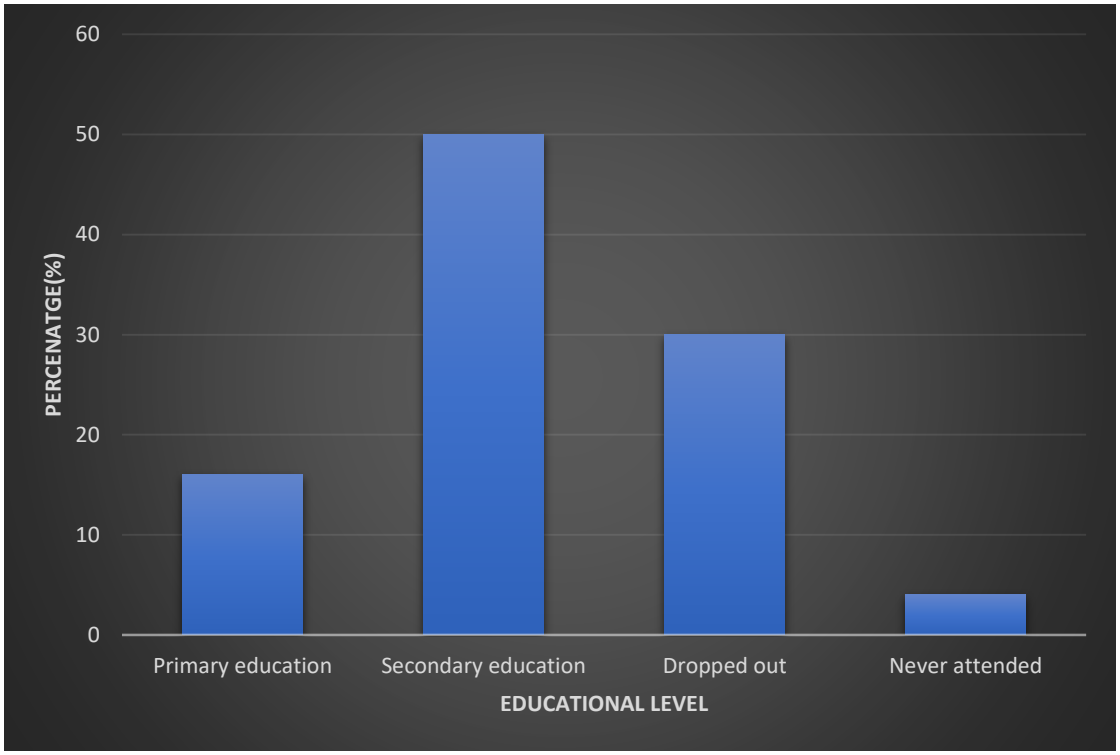


Figure 4.1 Distribution of respondents by educational level

The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents attained secondary school constituting 50% of the research population. This suggests that the majority had education exposure and were able to provide informed perspectives on issues related to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. 30% of respondents indicated that they dropped out of school

highlighting a significant cause and consequence of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Girls who drop out of school are more likely to get married at an early age reflecting the link between early marriages and school dropout. Respondents with only primary education accounted for 16% whilst 4% of the population never attended school highlighting that limited educational attainment increase adolescent vulnerability to adolescent pregnancy and child marriage due to lack of information on these issues. Using the Ecological Systems theory perspective, schools play a pivotal role within the microsystem by influencing the decision of girls. Therefore, increasing access to education for girls may be instrumental in reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in Mashonaland Central Province.

4.2.4 Distribution of respondents by ward

Table 4.2 Distribution of respondents by ward

Ward	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage (%)
11	18	36
12	16	32
13	16	32
Total	**50**	**100**

The findings indicate that ward 11 contributed the highest proportion of participants constituting of 36% of the total sample while wards 12 and 13 each contributed 32% of the total sample. These three wards fall under the leadership of Chief Bushu who is actively involved in interventions aimed at addressing child marriages and adolescent pregnancy in Mashonaland Central. The representation of three different wards ensures that the research reflect a comprehensive view of the traditional leadership reducing bias and enhancing the reliability of

data. From the Ecological Systems Theory perspective, community governance play a pivotal role in influencing adolescent behaviours and social norms hence the representation of different wards helped the researcher in understanding how different community governance affect the decision and behaviours of adolescent girls in relation to issues of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

4.3 Awareness and knowledge

4.3.1 Distribution of participants by awareness of Legal age of marriage

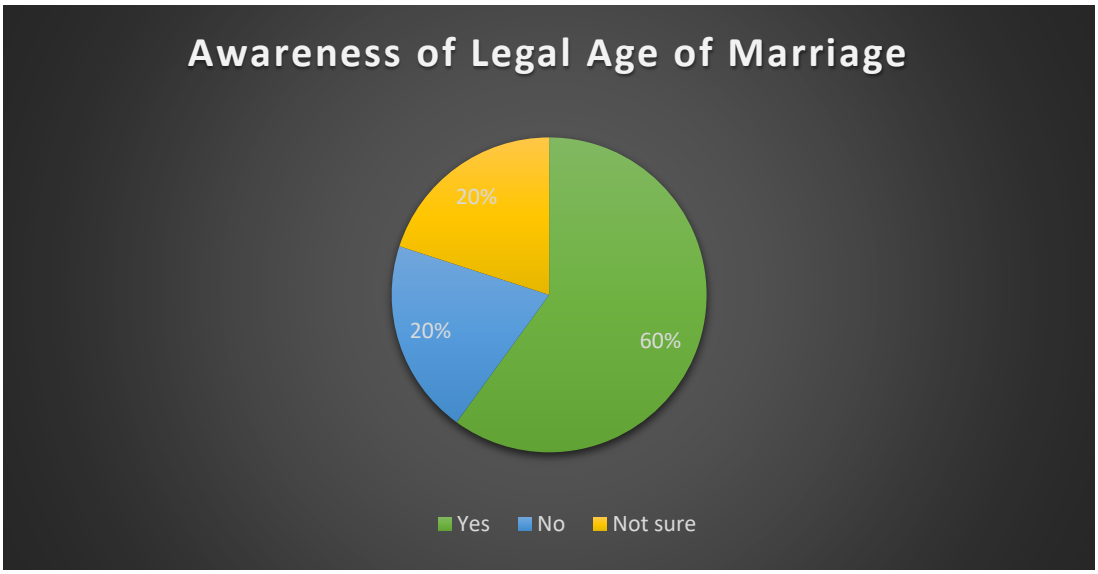


Figure 4. 1 Distribution of participants by awareness of Legal age of marriage

Those who correctly answered that the legal age of marriage in Zimbabwe is 18 years old constitute 60% of the sample population. However, the remaining 40% of the sample population is unaware or unsure of the legal age of marriage in Zimbabwe. It implies that although there is high knowledge among the majority of the population, a section of the people still possesses wrong knowledge regarding the age of marriage. This supports UNICEF (2023) which emphasizes that lack of awareness of legal frameworks undermines enforcement efforts. From a Social Norms Theory perspective, the continued acceptance of early marriage within

some communities reinforces behaviours that normalize adolescent pregnancy and child marriage despite legal prohibitions. This finding suggest that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without effective community level dissemination and education particularly through traditional leaders and local institutions.

4.3.2 Distribution of participants by knowledge of referral pathways

Table 4.3 Distribution of participants by knowledge of referral pathways

Knowledge of referral pathways	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage (%)
Yes (Aware)	30	60%
No (Not aware)	20	40%
Total	**50**	**100%**

The research findings show that 60 % of respondents were able to correctly identify 18 years as the legal age of marriage in Zimbabwe. This suggests that although a majority of the respondents have knowledge on where adolescents can seek help, a significant proportion still lack this critical information. This knowledge gap among 40 % of the respondents may hinder effective intervention in cases of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage as these community members may fail to refer individuals to appropriate support services This reflects those structural barriers at the community level, consistent with the exosystem level of the Ecological Systems Theory. There is thus a need for greater sensitization and education among the community members especially through traditional leadership channels.

4.4 Prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

4.4.1 Causes of child marriage

The respondents indicated poverty and cultural practices as key drivers of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in their community. A respondent stated that:

"Some parents marry off their daughters because they cannot take care of them. Most parents believe that girls are sources of income considering that they are meant to be married and exchanged through lobola" *(*P1, Community member)

Another respondent further stated that

"*Kana pamba pasina chekubata zvinobatsirei kuchengeta mwanasikana. Chimwechete chingatoitwa kuroodza mwanasikana"*

"When there is no money, families think marriage is a solution" (P7, Community member).

The findings prove that poverty is a major structure driver of early marriage and pregnancy. It is clear that in many families, the primary concern is immediate financial survival compared to the future development of girls. These findings are in line with previous research findings from (UNFPA, 2022) which argues that economic pressures expose adolescents to high risks of pregnancy and early marriage practices in rural areas. This reflects the exosystem level of the Ecological Systems Theory where broader economic conditions influence household decisions making processes. As a result, families perceive marriage as an economic coping strategy, particularly in communities experiencing persistent poverty and unemployment.

Respondents also indicated cultural practices as another major key driver of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in their communities. One community elder noted that:

*"*In our culture, early marriage was once accepted through traditional norms like kuzvarira (a culture where a girl is informally pledged, often a decision made by parents without a girl's consent or kuripa ngozi (appeasement marriage)" (P5, Community elder)

(Respondent 7). Another community elder added:

"Some parents think that a girl is ready for marriage after puberty, parents only consider physical maturity and fail to consider educational and psychological readiness" *(*P3, Community elder).

These findings highlight that cultural beliefs can lead to the perpetuation of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. The cultural beliefs that associate marriage with maturity is an example of how social norms can affect human behaviour. Social Norms Theory states that people tend to follow behaviours considered socially acceptable within the community for fear of being socially ostracized. In this case, the belief that girls will be ready to marry after reaching puberty supports early marriage traditions within the community. It is because of this that teenage pregnancies and child marriages still exist despite laws against them.

4.4.2 Role of traditional leaders in addressing child marriage

The respondents acknowledged that traditional leaders play a role in discouraging child marriage although enforcement of by-laws is sometimes inconsistent. One respondent stated that:

"Our chief speaks against child marriage in meetings, he is also part of the Not in my village campaign which speaks against child marriage but enforcement is still weak at village level" (P2, Community member)

Another respondent further stated that:

"Traditional leaders try to stop early marriages, but some cases are hidden from them especially when it involves close relatives or money hence making it a challenge to deal with issues that community members decide to deal with at home" (P2 Community elder).

These findings suggest that while traditional leadership play an active role in advocacy and awareness creation their effectiveness is limited by weak enforcement mechanisms and community resistance. Traditional leaders appear to exert greater influence in promoting awareness and discouraging harmful practices than enforcing legal compliance at community level. From the perspective of the Ecological Systems Theory, traditional leaders operate within the mesosystem and macrosystem where they influence the relationship between families, communities and governance structures. However deeply entrenched cultural norms and hidden practices continue to weaken enforcement efforts. This particularly addresses Objective one which sought to examine the role of traditional leadership. The findings indicate that their role is more influential at the level of awareness than enforcement.

4.4.3 Community governance and Child Protection Systems

The study also explored the effectiveness of community governance structures such as child protection committees and health services. A respondent stated that

"The child protection committee is active and welcoming but not everyone reports cases to them, many girls hide these issues or they report to their families but such issues are addressed at home which make this a recurring challenge. (P4, Community stakeholder).

Another participant added

"The clinic helps girls but many young people are afraid or shy to go there hence how will the child protection system know the issues" (P3, Community member).

The limited utilization of child protection systems indicate that members of the community may lack confidence in using the available services and reporting systems. From a Social Norms Theory perspective, the attitudes within the community may affect the likelihood of reporting such cases of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. These findings reflects that there is a need for enhanced community-based child protection systems and better awareness of services available to the public.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter present findings of the study in relation to the research objectives. The findings indicated that adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are still common in Mashonaland Central Province. Factors like poverty, cultural beliefs, limited awareness and weak enforcement contribute to this issue. While traditional leaders and community governance structures are crucial in raising awareness and child protection initiatives, challenges such as underreporting, stigma and limited support systems still hinder intervention efforts**.**

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the summary, conclusions and recommendations derived from the study findings. The discussion was guided by research objectives and focuses on evaluating the role of traditional leadership and community governance in countering adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Mashonaland Central Province.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This study examined the role of traditional leadership and community governance in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Mashonaland Central Province. The research was guided by objectives focusing on the role of traditional leaders, the strategies they employ, the challenges they face and the development of appropriate recommendations for strengthening child protection systems within indigenous governance structures.

The research was informed by literature which shows that adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are driven by a combination of socio economic and cultural factors including poverty, gender inequality, limited educational opportunities and deeply rooted traditional norms (UNFPA, 2022). The literature further highlights the important but often complex role of traditional leadership in shaping community behavior particularly in contexts where customary and statutory law co-exist.

The study was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Social Norms Theory (Cialdini & Trost, 2022) which explain how individual behaviour is

influenced by interactions across family, community and broader societal systems. A mixed methods research design was employed using questionnaires, semi structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from traditional leaders, adolescents, community members and key stakeholders. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity were strictly observed throughout the study.

The findings revealed that adolescent pregnancy and child marriage remain prevalent in the study area despite the existence of legal frameworks. While there is some awareness of the legal age of marriage and available referral pathways, significant gaps remain in implementation, enforcement and community knowledge. Poverty, cultural norms and limited access to services were identified as major drivers of the problem. The study also found that traditional leaders play an active role in community engagement and behavioural influence; however, their effectiveness is constrained by weak enforcement capacity and underreporting of cases.

Overall, the study concludes that addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage requires a multi-dimensional approach that goes beyond legal enforcement. Strengthening the capacity of traditional leadership, improving coordination with formal child protection systems and addressing underlying socio-economic and cultural drivers are essential for sustainable change. Continuous community education and empowerment of vulnerable groups are also crucial in reducing the prevalence of these challenges in Mashonaland Central Province.

5.3 Conclusions

1.Role traditional leadership play in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy

The research demonstrates that while traditional leadership plays a significant role in shaping community behaviour, it is only partially effective in preventing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage due to a larger structural and societal factors. The study demonstrates that legal frameworks alone are insufficient to eliminate adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Even if the laws exist the community level implementation remains inconsistent. This implies that law enforcement is very weak and what determines community compliance is much more the cultural norms than formal legislations.

2. To assess the strategies and interventions implemented by traditional leaders to prevent adolescent pregnancies and child marriage

The study found that traditional leaders implement several interventions like community engagement and enforcement of local by-laws aimed at discouraging child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. These strategies help in raising awareness and behavioural change at community level. However, their impact remains limited and inconsistent due to weak enforcement mechanisms. This finding aligns with literature which suggests that community-based interventions are often effective in raising awareness but less effective when not supported by formal institutional backing. The study therefore concludes that while traditional leaders are active in prevention efforts, their strategies require stronger institutional support to achieve sustained impact.

3. To explore challenges faced by traditional leaders in addressing adolescent pregnancy and child marriages within their communities

The findings revealed that traditional leaders face multiple challenges including inadequate resources, limited enforcement capacity, lack of cooperation from some families and underreporting of cases due to stigma and secrecy. Additionally, weak coordination with formal child protection systems further reduces their effectiveness. This supports existing research which highlights that traditional authorities often operate within structural constraints that limit their ability to enforce child protection laws effectively. The study concludes that these challenges significantly weaken the capacity of traditional leaders to fully address adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, despite their influential position in communities.

4.To recommend culturally appropriate and sustainable approaches for strengthening child protection through indigenous governance systems

The study concludes that effective prevention of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage requires culturally sensitive and community-driven approaches that integrate traditional leadership structures with formal governance systems. Strengthening traditional leadership through training, resources, and institutional support is essential for sustainability. This finding is consistent with literature that emphasises the importance of integrating indigenous governance systems into formal child protection frameworks to improve effectiveness and community acceptance. The study further concludes that sustainable interventions must balance cultural values with legal frameworks in order to achieve long-term behavioural change.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

Government and traditional leadership structures

In addition to training traditional leaders, they should be equipped with sufficient resources and supported at the institutional level through policy and resource allocation to administer by laws and to deal with cases of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy effectively and efficiently

NGOs, schools, community

There has to be ongoing awareness on not only the legal age of marriage, reproductive health but also referral pathways be it through the means of schools, community meetings and local media to ensure that community members are aware of referral pathways to reduce underreporting of cases**.**

Government and development partners

Government and other development partners need to put in place programs that are meant to reduce the rates of drop out from schools. This may involve financial assistance to vulnerable families, building of secondary schools close to other communities as well as return to school policies for adolescent mothers

Child protection committees

Child protection committees as well as health facilities should be strengthened and improved in a way that is more accessible, ensures confidentiality and it is also quite youth friendly so as to motivate reporting as well as the use of services.

5.5 Areas for further research

According to the data presented, a few issues were identified that need more research to get a clearer picture of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in connection with traditional leadership and community governance in Mashonaland Central Province. The study focused on Shamva district only and a limited population sample of 50 participants which can limit the generalizability of the research findings, future research should extend to other districts like Mt Darwin, Bindura and Mbire. The research showed that among others, some child marriage cases remain hidden due to secrecy and community concealment practices. Furthermore, research should be carried out to understand the reason for underreporting such as fear of stigma, family pressure and community norms that discourage reporting. Knowledge of these factors would be a great help in building up the child protection reporting systems. More studies should also be done to find out how deeply ingrained cultural expectations influence culturally sensitive interventions without posing a threat to the traditional authority structures.

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Report

Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS, 2023)

Appendix 1: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRES

Good day to you all. My name is Tatenda Mubayiwa, a final year student at Bindura University of Science Education. I am conducting research on the role of traditional leadership and community governance in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and you have been identified as part of my research population whose views and experiences are valuable to the success of this study.

The study ensures voluntary participation where you can withdraw at any stage of the study without any penalties or negative consequences. You may choose not to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable or pressurized. Your responses will be kept confidential and only be used for academic purposes and all identities will remain anonymous.

Participant signature (Optional)…….

Section A: Demographic Information

Please tick or fill in the appropriate response.

1. **Age:** ☐ Below 10 ☐ 10-13 ☐ 14-18 ☐ 18+
2. **Gender:** ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ Prefer not to say
3. **Community/ ward…….**
4. **Level of education:** ☐Primary ☐Secondary ☐Dropped out ☐Never attended

Section B: Awareness and Knowledge

5. Are you aware of the legal age of marriage in Zimbabwe? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

6. If yes or not sure. What do you understand to be the legal age of marriage in Zimbabwe according to the Constitution? ☐ Under 18 years ☐ 18 years ☐ over 18 years ☐ I do not know

7. Are you aware of the pathways that are followed when adolescent girls face challenges related to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

8. Do you know where to access sexual and reproductive health services? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section C: Community Perceptions

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

(1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4= Agree, 5 Strongly Agree)

9. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Child marriage is common in this community

10. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Poverty contributes to child marriage

11. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Parents encourage early marriage to reduce household burden

SECTION D: Role of Traditional Leadership

12. Do traditional leaders in your community speak against child marriage? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

13. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Traditional leaders enforce bylaws that prohibit child marriage

14. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Traditional leaders report cases of child marriage to authorities

15. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Community members report cases of early child marriage

Appendix 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Good day thank you for agreeing to be part of this interview. My name Is Tatenda Mubayiwa I am conducting a study on the role of traditional leadership and community governance in addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in Mashonaland Central Province. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any stage of the research and choose not to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable. The information will be kept confidential and only be used for academic purposes.

Purpose: To explore perspectives of cultural authorities

1. How would you describe the situation of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in your area

Understanding causes

2. What cultural, social or economic factors contribute to child marriage?
3. How do initiation rites or traditional practices influence adolescent behaviour?

Role of traditional leaders

4. What actions are you taking to discourage child marriage?
5. Have you issued any by laws or community rules on child protection?
6. How do you handle families who attempt to marry off a child?
7. Do you collaborate with governments departments (Social welfare. MoHCC, Police)

Appendix 3: Research Approval Letter

