

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**EXPERIENCES OF “CHILD BRIDES” IN SELECTED BULSA
COMMUNITIES OF UPPER EAST REGION, GHANA**

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**A thesis in the Department of Counselling Psychology,
Faculty of Educational Studies, submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Counselling Philosophy)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

SEPTEMBER, 2022

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I, Pauline Atenglie Azenab, declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis/dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

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Signature:.....

Date:

Dr. Addai-Mununkum (Co-supervisor)

Signature

Date.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late father Peter Anayang Azenab who died in 2016 before I started this programme in 2017. All that I am is partly because of you.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work meant more to me than the results of two years of research and study. As a traditional leader and teacher, it has increased my exposure, information, expertise, experience, and interest in child marriage. Mrs. Christina Ammah, my supervisor, I am grateful for all you have done to bring out the best in me. I have gotten this far thanks to your advice and support. I gratefully appreciate my co-supervisors, Dr. Winston Kwame Abroampa, with whom I began this work, and Dr. Addai-Mununkum, with whom I concluded this study, for your contributions and suggestions. Thank you, Dr. Nora Nonterah, for taking the time out of your busy schedule to look at my work. Thank you, my fellow classmates. Also to Mr. Atuick Evans, Mr. Boniface Akanwarikum, and Mr. Aboalik Godfrey and Mr. Roland Adaatu, I am grateful to you for your support and encouragement.

In addition, I want to thank my family for their encouragement and support, as well as Aunty Teni and the late Major Anadem in Kasoa. The Chiefs and Queen Mothers of Siniesi, Dogninga, and Wiaga for giving me permission to conduct the study in your communities. I am grateful to all the child brides who spoke with me about their experiences. Thank you to the key informants who not only assisted me in identifying the child brides but also participated in the interview. Ni jiam jiam to everyone who helped me come this far in one way or another.

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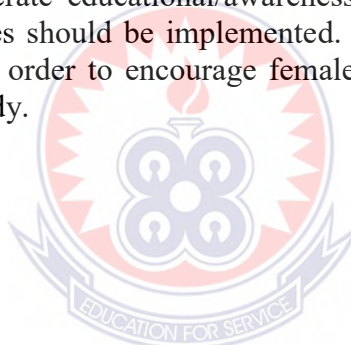
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of females who married before the age of 18. The study was carried out at Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga in the Balsa North and South Districts of Ghana's Upper East Region. The study investigated child brides' lived experiences and coping techniques, variables that impact child marriage, and approaches to alleviate the practise of child marriage among the Bulsas. The study was founded on the interpretative paradigm and phenomenological design in qualitative research to investigate the dynamics of child brides' experiences. The snowball sampling approach was used to pick 14 participants for the study. Data was gathered through interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with child brides, the headmaster, the circuit supervisor, and Queen's mother and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated repeating themes related to cultural, economic, and social aspects of the Balsa practise. The study also revealed that despite the genuine experience of child brides being one of beating and victimisation, the victims have been conditioned to remain silent in order to save their husbands from being detained by law enforcement. Child brides face challenges including psychological, emotional, physiological, physical, and sexual abuse. The study reveals that child marriage is a big issue in the areas of investigation. To address the issue, deliberate educational/awareness initiatives by headteachers and opinion leaders' activities should be implemented. This will be complemented with coaching and therapy in order to encourage females to speak up when required, as recommended by the study.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Marriage is perceived as one of the supreme aims of life in traditional Ghanaian society and is a union between a man and a woman to perpetuate the lineage through procreation (Dzobo, 1975). Marriage is practiced within a cultural context, as such different perspectives of marriages exist, and this is influenced by the practices pertaining in some societies (Pellow, 2002). Olson and DeFrain (2000) defined marriage as the emotional and legal commitment of two people to have emotional and physical intimacy, various tasks, and economic resources. Abu and Jones (2005), in their book *Polygamy in Islam*, have stated that marriage is the correct legal way by which Allah has ordained to produce children and replenish the earth. Marriage in Ghanaian societies, as elsewhere in Africa, is perceived as an institution of honour (Evans-Pritchard, 1951). According to Yussif (2013) in the Ghanaian traditional set-up, marriage involves the man and the woman concerned as well as their families.

In the process leading to marriage, some fundamental and relevant questions that demand answers are investigated. These determine the likely success or otherwise of the marriage. For instance, it is ascertained whether the woman is lazy or industrious, or whether the man is financially capable to cater for the woman. The above explanation of marriage does not in any way suggest children's involvement, however, this is gradually becoming a practice and has permeated all cultures.

Early marriage, also known as child marriage, is defined by the United Nations International Fund for Population (UNIFPA, 2006) as any marriage before a girl turns 18 years when the girl is not physically, physiologically, and

psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2005) defined child marriage, also known as early marriage as both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before the age of 18 years. Child marriage involves both boys and girls, however, UNIFPA and UNICEF definitions cater to and place emphasis on the girl. This is probably because the physiological and psychological weight of child-bearing is borne more by girls than boys. If the definitions given by UNIFPA and UNICEF could be relied upon, then no child should marry below the age of 18 years. However, this is not the case. Child marriage could be said to be a worldwide practice that cuts across all cultures, religions, and ethnicities. According to UNICEF (2014) each year 15 million girls marry before they turn 18 years old, 41,000 girls get married each day, 28 girls get married and every two seconds a girl gets married. UNICEF (2014) further established that more than 700 million women alive today were married before they were 18 years old. A recent report by UNICEF (2019) stated that the number of girls and women who married as children is more than 650 million with 12 million girls marrying each year. In developing countries, UNICEF (2014) stated that one out of seven girls would marry at the age of 15 years or even less than 15 years and further estimated that around 3,500 girls marry before 15 years. These figures are alarming not just at the global level but at the continental level as well.

Africa has the highest prevalence rate of early marriage with 70% of girls under 18 years marrying in three nations. They are Republic of Central Africa, Chad and Niger (UNICEF, 2012). In Sub-Saharan Africa, over 40% of girls enter marriage by the time they reach the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2012). The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) (2012) on the regional demarcation of Africa,

indicates that 41 % of girls under 18 were married in West Africa as well as Central Africa. UNICEF (2021) projected West and Central Africa, to have the highest level of child marriage where nearly 4 in 10 young women were married before age 18 years. The UNICEF (2018) report revealed the prevalence of child marriage to be 9% in South America and the Caribbean, 5% in the Middle East and North Africa, 44% in South Asia, and 18% in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ghana is one of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with one of the highest child marriage prevalent rates. The 2010 Population and Housing Census indicates that, out of a total of 3,254,007 children between 12-17 years old, 176 103, representing 5.4% were married (GSS, 2012a). The 2010 Population and Housing Census further revealed disturbing data at the regional level. In the then three regions of the North of Ghana that is Northern, Upper East, and Upper West, out of a total of 567,554 children between the ages of 12 to 17 years, 43,311 representing 7.6 percent were married. Among these married children of the then three regions of Northern Ghana, 23,050 representing 53.2 percent were girls (GSS, 2012a). Data released by the Ghana Statistical Service in 2014, the prevalence of child marriage stood at 27 %. More recent data revealed that 38 % of girls in Ghana marry before they are 18 years old (Ahonsi et al.'s 2019). This was supported by UNICEF (2021) where 5% of adolescents aged 15 years married in Ghana and the prevalence increased to 19% by the age of 18 years. UNICEF (2021) report on the situation of adolescents in Ghana highlighted child marriage and noted that the Upper East Region has the second highest child marriage rate in the country with 27.5 percent of women aged 20–24 married before age 18 while 5.9 percent were married before they were 15 years of age. Thus, conferring to the United Nations Population Fund, if the trend continues

without appropriate intervention, by the year 2030 more than 407,000 girls born between 2005 and 2010 will be married before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2014).

It is common knowledge that global development agencies and organisations such as UNICEF, and UNFPA have channelled a lot of resources and efforts into battling child marriage but this war seems not to be ending anytime soon. World leaders are also on guard to find solutions to this canker. Thus, various conventions, declarations, and laws have been put in place, both internationally and in individual countries to deal with the phenomenon. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) all directly or indirectly address the issue of child marriage.

In Ghana, considerable efforts have been made to address the issue of child marriage in the country. Ghana has been a signatory to many conventions and declarations on child rights and marriages such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (Women in Law and Development in Africa [WiLDAF], 2014) and the recent launching of the national strategic framework on ending child marriage in Ghana by the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection in 2016.

Despite these numerous efforts, the eradication of child marriage still remains a mirage in Ghana. WiLDAF Ghana (2014) noted that Ghana is one of the countries with the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in the world. The practice of child marriage seems to be rooted in a lot of practices that cannot be overlooked. For instance, in some parts of the world, parents encourage the marriage of their under-age school-going daughters for financial and social benefits and relief (UNICEF,

2005). This act by parents most often compels the girls to truncate their education, and render them unqualified for opportunities available to educated individuals for a decent job. They become financial dependents, and a move out of poverty is all stolen from them (Mardi et al., 2018). Among the Balsa in the northern part of Ghana some social practices such as “doglientiri”, translated literally from Buli language to mean: “maid-servant” facilitate the practice of child marriage. This is explained by Meier (1999) as a practice where a woman may claim one or several of her brothers' children preferably a girl, incorporating her into her household and later marrying her off to her husband or a responsible man within the clan. This practice has sent many under-aged girls into child marriage. It is common knowledge that certain cultural practices such as betrothal, bride exchange, and abduction also promote child marriage.

Religious rules or practices appear to encourage the practice of child marriage. Participants in a study by Nasrullah et al. (2014) provided religious justification in favor of their view-point on child marriage. They opined that per the teaching of Islam, it was the parents’ duty to marry their daughters as soon as they reached puberty. This kind of teaching psyched parents to marry off their daughters at puberty which is usually before 18 years. Nasrullah et al. (2014) also attributed early marriage to the concept of “adjustment”. That is, a bride who gets married before the age of 18 easily adjusts to the norms, practices, and expectations of the groom’s extended family. Mardi et al. (2018) corroborated the above and stated that some parents believed that a young bride adapts to their new homes much easier than older brides hence their desire to give them out for marriage. Contrary to the above, it has been discovered that child marriage increases the stress and pressure on victims as they are more prone to marriage problems (Ahmed et al., 2013).

Hodgkinson (2016) points to the fact that some parents choose to give out their children for marriage at a young age as they feel this is the primary way of securing their daughter's future. They also see her as a financial burden that they can relieve themselves of, and profit by marrying her out at a young age. A similar view is shared by Mardi et al. (2018) that some parents in poor rural families perceive their daughter's marriage as a way of reducing the family costs of living and also protecting and securing the child's future. This practice, however, thwarts the realisation of sustainable development goals such as gender equality, quality education, elimination of poverty and hunger, good life and well-being, decent work, and economic growth (UN, 2017). This is because the girl's dreams are shattered. According to Osafo et al.'s (2014) some parents in their bid to reduce sexual promiscuity in girls and possible teenage pregnancies after a girl has reached menarche. Some parents may feel pressured to marry their girls off early since sexual initiation is socially expected. In some instances, some parents are more afraid of the social stigma and ridicule than the reproductive health risk when they are exposed to sex at an early age. Some of these girls who are usually exposed to early sex have no knowledge about sex and their sex organs are still developing putting their reproductive health at a greater risk (Osafo et al., 2014).

Other studies on child marriage have revealed that various socio-economic and cultural factors such as lack of education, teenage pregnancy, abduction, and protection of family honour all influence child marriage (Adjei, 2015; Bakhtibekova, 2014; Mafhala, 2015; World Vision, 2017). Hence, (Ahonsi et al., 2019) indicated that efforts to curb child marriage in Ghana should be geared towards the retention of girls in school, empowering girls economically through vocational training, enforcing laws on child marriage, as well as designing tailored advocacy programs to educate

key stakeholders and adolescent girls on the consequences of child marriage. Early marriage is under investigation with the greater proportion of the scholarly literature coming from global development agencies and international charities (Camfield & Tafere, 2011). The few available studies on child marriage are based on trends, drivers, prevalence, poverty, policy and practice, and consequences of the practice on education and health (Adjei, 2015; Alhassan, 2010; Domfe & Oduro, 2018).

However, some studies on the experiences of child brides revealed that timidity, financial and economic dependence, less education, and less autonomy generally affect child brides' decision-making ability and hence their inability to have control over their own bodies (Erulkar, 2013). Erulkar (2013) finds child marriage as a form of violence against adolescent girls and young women because it increases their vulnerability to sexual, physical, and psychological violence throughout their lives while studies have indicated that friends and family are good support networks for the well-being of women in rural areas especially in countering isolation (Taylor et al., 1997). Karei and Erulkar (2010) indicated child marriage imposes social isolation on girls resulting from separation from friends and family.

This study focuses on child brides' experiences and also explores the coping strategies of the child brides in their marriages in the three communities in the upper east region of Ghana. The study is equally concerned about the factors that contribute to child marriage and measures in addressing child marriage in the study area.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As stated earlier, the Upper East Region has the highest prevalence rate of child marriages in Ghana, with about 39.2% of girls getting married before turning 18 years of age (GSS, 2012b). However, a recent report by UNICEF (2021) on the situation of adolescents in Ghana placed the Upper East Region as the region with the second

highest rate of child marriage in the country. According to UNICEF (2021), 27.5 percent of women aged 20–24 married before the age of 18 years, and 5.9 percent were married before they were 15 years of age. This is only second to Northern Region which recorded 27.8 percent of women aged 20-24 who married before 18 years and 9.4 who married before 15 years. The percentages above indicate that the practice of child marriage is declining but at a slow rate. This implies that the practice is still perpetuated in certain parts of the region, including the Bulsa North and South Districts, which have some of the highest rates of child marriages in the region – a reason for which they were selected as antichild marriage advocacy zones by Non-Governmental Organisation, Meter Ghana, in 2017 (Awuni, 2017).

The high prevalence of child marriages in the region has equally received scholarly attention. Studies have been centred on providing evidence, pointing out the causes and effects of the practice in the region. For instance, Adjei (2015) conducted a study on “the cycle of poverty and early marriage among women in Ghana” in the Kassena-Nankana Municipal as a case study. The focus of her study was on how poverty influences child marriage and further affects the development of the child bride. Again, World Vision (2017) also carried out a study in its operational areas (Upper East, Northern, Brong Ahafo, and Volta Regions) on child marriage using mixed methods. The study sought to reveal why child marriage is perpetuated and what measures could be introduced to make the laws more effective and to change behaviour.

The existing studies on child marriage are very important, however, their focus was not on the experiences of child brides and their coping strategies. Moreover, their studies were done in other parts of the region. There is virtually less focus on what the child brides’ experiences are and how they cope. They are not

given an opportunity to have a voice and tell their own story. In my viewpoint, a focus on getting first-hand information about what child brides go through and how they cope with their situation is pivotal for guidance and counselling services in two ways. Firstly, it would aid in the proper provision of guidance and counselling to child brides and opens up society to the hidden traumas they face. Secondly, it would guide the counsellor's approach and style of educating and sensitising other younger girls, parents, and opinion leaders to prevent a continuous occurrence of the practice. This study used a qualitative approach and explored child brides' experiences focusing on the negative impact confronting girls who married before the age of 18 years.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study explored the factors that contribute to child marriage, the lived experiences, and coping strategies of child brides, and measures to address child marriage in Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga in the Balsa North and South Districts in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

1. investigate factors contributing to child marriage in Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga in the Balsa North and South Districts in the Upper East Region of Ghana;
2. examine the lived experiences of child brides in selected communities in the Balsa North and South Districts;
3. find out the coping strategies of surviving child brides in their marriages;
4. suggest measures to address child marriage in the selected communities.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What factors contribute to child marriage in Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga in the Balsa North and South Districts in the Upper East Region of Ghana?
2. What are the lived experiences of child brides in selected communities in the Balsa North and South Districts?
3. How do child brides cope in marriage in these communities?
4. What measures can be employed to address child marriage in selected communities in the Balsa North and South Districts?

1.6 Delimitation

The study was restricted to factors contributing to child marriage, lived experiences, and coping strategies of child brides. It was limited to females who were married before the age of 18 years and lived in the marriage for at least a year. Also, the study was confined to Wiaga and Siniesi in the Balsa North District and Dogninga in the Balsa South District in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study was concerned with the perception and lived experiences of child brides and their coping strategies in the communities of Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga. Studies involving information about people's lives present a reaction of sensitivity and people will show resistance. This was the case regarding questions about their sexual and physical experiences. Child brides were hesitant to share that aspect of their lives and those who did, shared just a little.

Also, it was difficult to establish the age of the child brides as some of them did not know their ages and had no documents to help establish their ages. This made

it difficult during the data collection because the interview with some of them was truncated along the way.

Finally, the non-availability of data on child marriage in the two districts was a limitation in this study. I needed data from the districts on child marriage but the departments (Social Welfare, CHRAJ & DOVVSU) complained that the practice was not being reported. Thus, the study did not have data from the two districts but made use of regional data and the activities of NGOs in the districts.

1.8 Significance of the Study

A plethora of studies have been done on the trend of child marriage around the globe with little focus on the lived experiences of child brides. This study is significant because it brings to light factors contributing to child marriage in selected communities in the Upper East Region of Ghana. This would be of enormous help, to guidance and counselling personnel, social service workers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), religious, and traditional leaders for the formulation of programmes and policies at the local level towards tackling the practice. This is precisely so because the study describes the lived experiences of child brides in their marriages. The study provides knowledge and guidelines for people working at ending child marriage such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and traditional leaders to be more sensitive to the struggles of the girls in their interventions.

Also, it explains how the child brides cope in their marriages and measures in addressing child marriage. This could serve as a resource to traditional leaders, schools, and religious leaders on ways of complementing child marriage interventions. From this backdrop, the guidance and counselling needs, as well as the

socio-economic and intellectual empowerment of brides and would-be brides will be given the needed attention by all stakeholders.

The two District Assemblies as well as its decentralised departments including the Ghana Education Service, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service, the Social Welfare Department, and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) will have the opportunity to improve and expand their scope of work in the area by implementing the recommendations made in this study.

Future studies in the field will have a foundation to commence their work. This study will serve as the tunnel from which future academics will have the light to traverse the journey of their studies.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

Child Bride: This is a young girl who is forced or coerced into marriage before the age of 18 years.

Child Bride and child marriage: These terms will be used interchangeably.

1.10 Abbreviations

ACRWC:	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ADR:	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CB:	Child Bride
CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHRAJ:	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
CRC:	Convention on the Rights of the Child

DHS:	Demography Health Survey
DOVVSU:	Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit
FCUBE:	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education,
FGDs:	Focus Group Discussions
GES:	Ghana Education Service
GSEP:	Ghana Socio-Economic Panel
GSS:	Ghana Statistical Service
HIV:	Human Immune Virus
ICRW:	International Center for Research on Women
ILO:	International Labour Organization
IPPF:	International Planned Parenthood Federation
KII:	Key Informant Interviews
LIs:	Legislative Instruments
MICS:	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoGCSP:	Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection,
NGOs:	Non-governmental Organizations
OCHCR:	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
STI:	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN:	United Nations
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA:	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
UNIFPA:	United Nations International Fund for Population
WHO:	World Health Organization

WiLDAF: Women in Law and Development in Africa

1.11 Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into Six Chapters. Chapter Two consists of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and relevant literature related to the study. Chapter Three describes the research paradigm, approach, design, study area, sample and sampling procedure, data collection instruments, trustworthiness, and data analysis. Chapter Four presents the results while Chapter Five discusses the findings. Chapter Six presents the summary of findings, conclusion, and recommendations.

The next chapter reviews the related literature for the study.



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Overview

This chapter reviews previous works conducted on child marriage with a focus on perception, lived experiences, and coping strategies published by scholars and researchers in books, magazines, journals, and dissertations.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Feminist and Narrative Theories

Using feminist and narrative theories in the study of child brides' experiences allows for a comprehensive analysis of the complex factors contributing to their lives and challenges. By adopting a feminist lens, the study examines the power dynamics, social norms, and patriarchal systems that perpetuate child marriage. The approach emphasises the importance of addressing gender inequality and advocating for the rights of girls and women (Butler, 1999). Additionally, incorporating narrative theory allows the study to explore the lived experiences of child brides through their own stories and narratives. The approach acknowledges the agency and voice of the individuals and provides a platform for them to share their perspectives and challenges (Morgan, 2000). By analysing the narratives, the study gains insights into the emotional, psychological, and social impact of child marriage on the lives of girls. Overall, combining feminist and narrative theories in the study of child brides' experiences provides a holistic understanding of the issue, facilitates the development of strategies, and supports the empowerment and women.

2.2.2 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is a socio-political framework that seeks to understand and address the unequal power dynamics between genders, particularly focusing on the subordination of women and girls (Chafetz, 1997). It recognises that gender is not biologically determined but socially constructed, meaning that the roles and expectations assigned to individuals are shaped by cultural, economic, and political factors. Feminist theory aims to challenge and dismantle the systems of oppression by advocating for gender equality and the advancement of women's rights.

Butler (1999) explains feminist theory and suggests directions for change in social and environmental factors that create or contribute to problems experienced by women. Butler further explains and proposes interventions for women's intrapersonal and interpersonal concerns as well as provides a perspective for evaluating social and environmental experiences of groups and individuals, regardless of sex or gender. The emphasis placed on each of these three areas, along with the centrality of additional factors that influence marginalisation, oppression, and unwarranted constraints, depends on which feminist theory is employed (Bressler, 2007).

The feminist theory recognises that child marriage is rooted in gender inequality. It acknowledges that child brides often face multiple forms of discrimination and violence due to their gender (Beauvoir, n.d). By analysing the power dynamics within societies that enable child marriage, a feminist theory could help in understanding the underlying structural causes and how these inequalities perpetuate the practice of child marriage.

Intersectionality which acknowledges that individuals experience multiple oppressions based on their race, class, sexuality, and other social identities by applying an intersectional lens to the study of child brides allows one to understand

how different forms of marginalisation intersect and compound the challenges faced by child brides. The feminist theory highlights the importance of recognising women's agency and amplifying their voices (Fraser, 2013). When studying child brides, the aim is to shift the focus from viewing them solely as victims to acknowledging their agency in navigating their lives and challenging oppressive systems. By centering their experiences and perspectives, feminist theory ensures that the research process empowers child brides and gives them a platform to share their stories.

Fraser's (2013) feminist theory challenges the notion of a universal and fixed childhood experience. It recognises that childhood is culturally and socially constructed. Meaning, different societies interpret and value childhood differently. Applying this lens to child marriage allows the study to understand how cultural beliefs, economic factors, and social norms shape the perception of girlhood in societies where child marriage is prevalent. It helps to analyse how the constructions of childhood contribute to the perpetuation of child marriage.

The feminist theory emphasises the importance of advocacy and policy change to address gender inequality (Beauvoir, n.d). In this study, evidence-based recommendations that might transform the systems of child marriage will be provided. The recommendations include interventions that promote education, economic empowerment, and community engagement to create a more equitable environment for girls and prevent child marriage.

In conclusion, feminist theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the issue of child marriage.

2.2.3 Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) focuses on the power of storytelling and personal narratives to shape individuals' identities, experiences, and interactions with the world. The narrative approach to therapy and counselling posits that problems stem from repressive stories that master peoples' lives. In the context of studying child brides' experiences, narrative therapy can provide valuable insights into the complex social, cultural, and psychological factors that contribute to the practice of child marriage.

Narrative therapy emphasises the notion that people are not passive recipients of their circumstances but active agents who construct meaning and make sense of their lives through the stories they tell about themselves (Morgan, 2000). The stories people tell about their experiences shape their identity and influence their actions (White & Epston, 1990). In the study of child brides, narrative therapy recognises that girls have their own stories to tell, which are often overlooked or marginalised in mainstream discourses on child marriage. By listening to girls' narratives, the study gains a deeper understanding of the complexities of experiences.

Narrative therapy recognises the power dynamics inherent in storytelling as It acknowledges that dominant cultural narratives can reinforce oppressive structures and perpetuate harm (Bird, 2000). In the case of child brides, societal norms and gender inequalities play a significant role in perpetuating the practice of child marriage. By examining the dominant narratives surrounding child brides, the study identifies the harmful discourses that contribute to the marginalisation and disempowerment of girls. This analysis informs interventions and policy recommendations by challenging dominant narratives that promote gender equality.

Also, narrative therapy places emphasis on externalising problems rather than pathologising individuals or blaming them for their circumstances, this approach seeks to separate the person from the problem (Epston, 2000). In the context of child brides, it would involve externalising the issue of child marriage as a societal problem rather than solely attributing it to the girls themselves. By doing so, research shifts the focus from individual blame to understanding the broader structural and systemic factors that contribute to child marriage. This approach challenges victim-blaming discourses and promotes a more compassionate and holistic understanding of child brides' experiences.

The use of therapeutic questioning helps researchers explore the meaning and significance of specific events or experiences for child brides, allowing for a deeper understanding of their individual narratives. Also, reflective listening techniques are used to create a safe and non-judgmental space for child brides to share their stories and feel heard and validated. Moreover, narrative therapy encourages the co-construction of alternative narratives (Epston, 2000). By collaboratively exploring new and empowering stories with child brides, child brides' challenges and dominant narratives imposed on girls can be redefined. This process of re-authoring their stories fosters a sense of agency, resilience, and empowerment among child brides.

In summary, narrative therapy offers a valuable framework for studying child brides' experiences by centering the narratives of child brides and acknowledging the power dynamics inherent in storytelling, and nuanced understanding of the complex factors contributing to child marriage. This understanding informs interventions and policy recommendations that address the root causes of child marriage and promote positive change. The principles and techniques of narrative therapy, such as

externalising problems and co-constructing alternative narratives, guide researchers in conducting research that empowers child brides and amplifies their voices.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

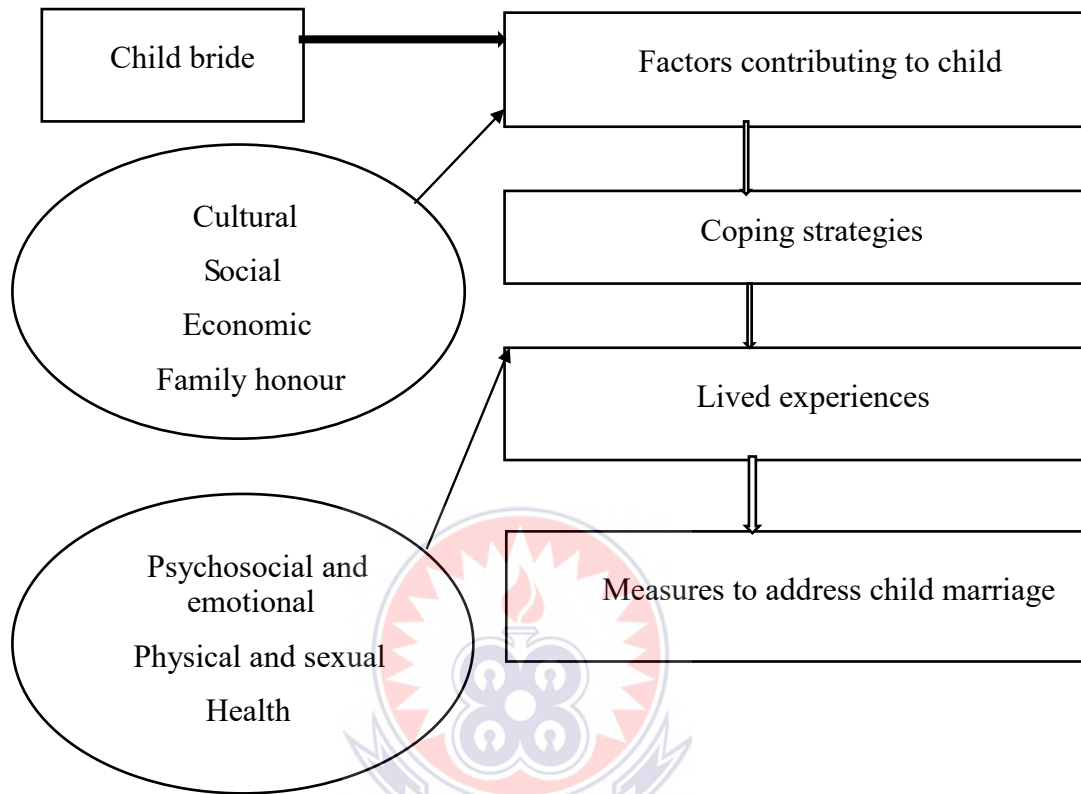


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework* (Source: Researcher's Concept)

The conceptual framework is construed within the feminist and narrative approaches underpinning this study. There are several factors contributing to child marriage and feminist theory allows one to understand how cultural beliefs, economic factors, and social norms shape the perception of girlhood in societies where child marriage is prevalent. It helps to analyse how the constructions of childhood contribute to the perpetuation of child marriage. Feminist theory aims to challenge and dismantle the systems of oppression by advocating for gender equality and the advancement of women's rights. It further explains and suggests directions for change

in social and environmental factors that create or contribute to problems experienced by women.

Whereas narrative therapy provides valuable insights into the complex social, cultural, and psychological factors that contribute to the practice of child marriage. Narrative therapy recognise that the girls have their own stories to tell, which are often overlooked or marginalised in mainstream discourses on child marriage. By listening to their narratives, one can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of their experiences.

2.4 Empirical Review

2.4.1 Factors Contributing to the Practice of Child Marriage

Child marriage is a practice across the globe. It is a socially established practice that has been carried on for many generations even to date and therefore is by no means a new phenomenon (Otoo-Oyorley & Pobi, 2003). Whereas there are international declarations and conventions to halt its practice, it has been perpetuated with minimum success over the years. The perceptions of child marriage by the different cultures have contributed to the difficulty in halting the practice.

2.4.2 Economic Perception

There are a lot of studies that corroborate the fact that girls were perceived either as an economic burden or an economic asset across the globe (Bakhtibekova 2014; Lloyd, 2005; Stark 2017). Therefore, some parents encourage marrying out their daughters while they are still children in the hope that the marriage will benefit them both economically and socially, while also relieving financial burdens on the family (Mathur & Malhotra, 2003). For instance, across rural Bangladesh and India, many parents consider girls as an economic burden to families, and therefore they are

married off as soon as they reach puberty (ICRW, 2013). In Tajikistan, girls are seen as a sort of relief during family hardships. The girls are given away to ease the family from much dependence. The dowry is seen as a family means of livelihood in such situations (Bakhtibekova, 2014). The bride price in most parts of the North of Ghana consists of a huge amount of money such as GH ₵1,500= £330 and gifts for 3-4 cows to the family of the bride (Dery & Diedong, 2014). Bakhtibekova further revealed that reducing the number of family members who share the same sources of food pushes many to condone the practice of child marriage (Bakhtibekova, 2014). Lloyd (2005) asserts that in many parts of Africa, especially Nigeria, the bride price, is used in exchange for the bride's labour and fertility which is an important resource for the wealth and survival of the family and, therefore, may induce early arrangements of marriage by parents. A study by Stark (2017) in Dar es Salaam revealed that a daughter can be married at a young age to an older, wealthier man because of what parents will receive as bride price which ranges from 50,000 Tzs equivalent to 20 Euros to 500,000 Tzs equivalent to 200 Euros. Parents were said to hope for a son-in-law who could not only provide for their daughter but who could also assist them financially.

In the northern part of Ghana Alhassan (2013) indicated that when a girl is married early, it reduces the economic burden on the family in caring for the girl, and increases family assets. In all this, what parents or society fail to realise is that girls are being sentenced to full-time poverty. Besides, Alhassan (2013) believes some of the brides are used to pay or settle the debts of their families and such brides are treated as commodities.

2.4.3 Social Perception

The social perception of child marriage is evident in the fact that society attaches some value to the bride of her age. UNICEF (2005) claims that the bride's wealth involves the exchange of money, animals, or other wealth from the bride's family to the grooms, or vice versa often determined by the age of the bride. Thus, lower dowry costs or higher bride wealth gains for girls' families serve as a common incentive for marrying girls early.

Child marriage is also perceived within the context of protecting territorial integrity and strengthening family ties. In the African and Asian cultures, the marriage or betrothal of children is valued as a means of consolidating powerful relations between families, sealing deals over land or other property, or even settling disputes (UNIFPA, 2006). For instance, in the Northern Region of Ghana, betrothal and forced marriages are strongly influenced by other issues including ethnicity, family ties, and negotiation (World Vision, 2017). A study in Nigeria showed that early marriage was considered valuable since marriage in local communities improves the social status and dignity of women (Mardi et al., 2018). In Tajikistan sending girls to their husbands' families opined by Bakhtibekova (2014) is seen as very ordinary because girls are seen as already belonging to their husbands' families. They are seen as some kind of guest family member and could therefore be married at any time.

Bakhtibekova further revealed how sometimes family protective attitude can play a role when it comes to early marriage. Some families most often anticipate a better life for their girls in their new family and intend to evaluate marriage as a way of protection against abuse. Thus, marrying them early is the best option and it further protects her honour as this is transferred to the husband and his family

(Bakhtibekova, 2014). This mentality is strong enough for parents to push their young girls away from home.

In other instances, girls expected to be rescued from violence, and workload in the household, and from stepfather or stepmother also became a propellant power for early marriage (Bakhtibekova, 2014). Similarly, Stark (2017) revealed that in Tanzania many girls from poor families wish to marry early with a dream of a better life with a husband who can give them more than their parents. Girls were said to believe that maybe life in their husbands' house would be different. Again, in order to reduce premarital sex and possible out-of-wedlock pregnancies after a girl has reached menarche, parents are compelled to marry them off early since sexual initiation is socially expected to coincide with marriage (Osafo et al., 2014).

2.4.4. The Cultural and Traditional Factors

Child marriage in some societies or cultures is rooted in traditions and it becomes nearly impossible to mitigate the menace (WiLDAF, 2014). Since the practices are rooted in the traditions and cultures of the people, they think it must continue. They fail to realise how detrimental it is to the child's well-being and the development of society. Culturally, premarital sex is seen as taboo and brings dishonour to the family of the girl, especially the girl, who is perceived to have engaged in any form of sexual promiscuity (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2004). Thomas (2009) found out that in some cultures, children are made brides through betrothal. This means children from infancy or even before birth is given to men before they come of age. The availability of literature revealed that the practice of betrothal and exchange marriage is recognised and accepted by many societies and cultures. For instance, in Pakistan, Yarrow (2015) and Anderson and Hamilton (2015) cited in Hodgkinson, (2016) recognise *Watta Satta* marriages, or exchange marriages as a

cultural practice relatively common in Pakistan. Watta Satta when translated means “give-take”, it is the marriage exchange of a brother-sister or uncle-niece coupling across two households. It is to establish reciprocity and accountability across the two families and to prevent violence and abuse. Despite the good intent of this practice, the relative age of the bride and groom is not usually considered and girls are often married to older men. The practice can put girls in precarious situations if the husband is abusive towards or divorces his wife, the husband in the other family is likely to do the same as a form of revenge. In Ghana, the Konkombas in the Northern Region practice bride exchange similar to what is practiced in Pakistan. When a family intends to marry a bride for their son and to pay a bride price, they will offer a bride in return. When a man of the bride's family wants a wife, the husband will provide a bride from his family for the man (World Vision, 2017). Meanwhile (Meir, 1999) revealed that among the Bulsas a little girl can be taken in by a female father (aunt) or close relative and later given to her husband or kindred of the husband as a wife. This is usually termed “doglientiri”. A “doglie” is usually regarded as a 'little wife' and as soon as she takes up residence in the household of her aunt, it is very difficult to determine when exactly her marriage to one particular man actually begins. Once again it is the 'owner' who will decide when the girl is mature enough to have sexual intercourse with her husband. The “doglie” is usually taken in at the age of three or four years which in many instances is more of a burden to the aunt than a maid.

Therefore, many are taken in at the age of 11 or 12 years. Meir (1999) provides two ritual practices that a female father can use to claim the brother's children. One is “logi nyatika” which reveals a pregnancy and “miisa boka” which is

done when the woman experiences stillbirths or miscarriages. This gives the right to the aunt to have the girl as “doglie”.

A cultural practice such as arranged marriage is performed in Pakistan to either settle a family, tribe, or clan feud or is offered in appeasement for a wrong committed by her family among other reasons (Yarrow, 2015). This practice is similar to what is practised in some parts of Ghana and Burkina Faso known as Trokosi. Females in some situations live in hostile environments where they are often treated as the enemy. This practice is against the principle of natural justice where girls have to pay the ultimate price of a crime; they know nothing about it through a lifelong commitment as in marriage. Whereas Mafhala (2015) writing on child marriage in South Africa acknowledged that culturally, abduction is acceptable and the girl is usually well received with kindness and respect but added that as culture evolves, this practise has also evolved. Mafhala was not explicit on the evolution of the practice of abduction in South Africa.

WiLDAF (2014) goes further to explain that some cultural practices are a bane to the development and growth of girls. Most parents believe that marrying their girl-child is a means of protecting their daughters.

2.4.5 Family Honour

Early marriage is seen as a preventative measure to protect girls’ chastity and sexuality upon which rests the family’s honour and respect. The importance given to virginity and childbearing leads to the early marriage of girls in families across the globe. This is because, society has stressed the fact that the value of the girl lies solely in her virginity which she must guard alongside others prior to marriage (Kifetew, 2006). In Ghana, strong emphasis is placed on girls maintaining their virginity and sexual purity before marriage, and strong disapproval of premarital sex

by society and religious bodies (Amoo, 2017). The ICRW (2013) found in a recent study that parents in India are often worried about the safety and security of young girls. Their worry stems from both fear of sexual assault and girls choosing to begin sexual activity. That is the main reason, parents feel it is the right time to discharge their duty and marry their daughters off when a girl attains puberty (Plan International, 2013).

2.4.6 The Lived Experiences of Child Brides

Child marriage makes it harder for families, communities and countries to escape poverty. Girls who marry as children experience inadequate socialisation, discontinuation of education, physiological and emotional damage due to repeated pregnancies among other things she is confronted with (Saxena, 1999). Child marriage definitely brings a girl's childhood and adolescence to a premature end. It imposes adult roles and responsibilities on young girls before they are physically, psychologically, and emotionally prepared to handle them (UNFPA, 2012), while others suffer social isolation resulting from separation from friends and family (Karei & Erulkar, 2010).

2.4.7 Psychosocial and Emotional Experience

The loss of adolescence, the forced sexual relations, and the denial of freedom and personal development as a result of forced and early marriage have profound and deleterious psychosocial consequences (World Vision, 2017). Results from a study in Asia and Africa showed that girls who married or are engaged as minors have an increased risk of suicide and depression (Raj, 2010). A study by Gage (2013), in Ethiopia confirmed Raj's study. Gage revealed that young girls once married or having received any form of marriage requests are significantly more likely to have

suicidal thoughts than girls who are not engaged in any marriage process. This could be attributed to brides being coerced into the marriage and in most cases marrying men who are often many years older than them (UNICEF, 2001). Further treatments meted out to the child bride according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OCHCR, 2013) included discrimination. This could take the form of loss of status, denial of property rights, and a range of others especially if she is widowed too young. In some cases, the brother-in-law forces himself on the young widow as a husband and she has no right to object to that second marriage as was the case with the first (OCHCR, 2013). In other cases, widows are rejected by their inlaws and their own families. These girls are left stranded with no resources, little or no education, and no means of earning (OCHCR, 2013). This means that while the child bride is mourning the dead husband, she is also mourning the gloomy future that awaits her. This suggests that the experiences that child brides go through do not only come from the husband's family but her family too.

Child brides tend to be affected by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and severe depression: symptoms of sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress (ICRW, 2012). Data generated from the first round of the Ghana Socio-Economic Panel (GSEP) Survey in 2009 on possible psychological effects of child marriage revealed that one out of every five current child brides experience a sense of hopelessness most of the time (World Vision, 2017). This is higher than the proportion of mature child brides and other married women (World Vision, 2017). According to Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi (2003), the emotional impact that child marriage has on women is too extensive to gauge. The girl is exposed to some sort of pressure to become a woman at a time when she is not physiologically and psychologically prepared for such roles. Some are oppressed in their marriages (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003) and

according to Hooks (1984), “being oppressed means the absence of choices.” And this is usually the situation of the child brides.

Children in some instances are living in polygamous marriages which come with its challenges. Women in Sub-Saharan Africa seem to have less satisfaction in polygamous marriages than those in monogamous marriages (Jankowiak et al., 2005).

2.4.8 Physical and Sexual Experience

Hodgkinson (2016) believes that girls who marry young are consistently likely to experience more violence, both verbal and physical, from their husbands than girls who marry later. The violence experienced is partly from in-laws especially when the girl does not live up to their expectations. A study by Dagdelen (2011) also revealed that child brides suffer some form of violence from their spouse, mother-in-law, step-children, sisters, and brothers of the spouse.

The UNFPA (2014) provided evidence of physical violence of child brides. The data postulates that only one in ten (10.5%) ever-married women aged 15-24 had ever been pushed or had something thrown at them. While 16% of ever-married women (15-24 years) had ever been slapped by their partners and others threatened with weapons such as knives and guns. In Ghana, data from the Ghana Demographic Health Survey showed that ever-married young women aged (15-24) experience various forms of violence from their partners (GSS, 2008).

Women in almost every age bracket experience and endure sexual violence from their husbands in their marriages. Some studies have revealed that women aged 15-24 have experienced sexual violence from their partners including being physically forced to have sexual intercourse or perform sexual acts they did not want to (ICRW, 2008). Women are expected to sexually please their husbands and violence is deemed as an acceptable way for a male to maintain the household (OCHCR,

2014). The work of Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra (2003) reveals that girls who marry early usually experience physical pain associated with sexual intercourse due to their underdeveloped reproductive organs. A study by Mardi et al (2018) on Iranian teenage mothers confirmed that some child brides expressed dissatisfaction with their sexual relationship. The study further revealed complaints by participants about the painful or coercive nature of their experience and added that they did it only to satisfy their husbands and family. In addition, Hodgkinson (2016) believes that child brides will likely continue to have non-consensual sex throughout their marriage. While this violence and other physical and sexual experiences remain a matter of concern to many, conversely, some girls see violence towards wives as not an abuse of their rights (OCHCR, 2014). Globally, 44% of girls aged 15-19 believed that a husband is justified in beating his wife in certain circumstances. Thus, violence towards wives is not always seen as an abuse of their rights (OCHCR, 2014).

2.4.9 Health Experience

Child marriage is often associated with multiple health risks. Young girls who get married will most likely be forced into having sexual intercourse with a counterpart who is usually much older (UNFPA, 2012). Studies have proven that girls who marry early usually experience physical pain associated with sexual intercourse due to their underdeveloped reproductive organs (Mathur et al., 2003). Also, ICRW (2012) believes that pregnancy-related deaths are the world's leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 with an estimated 70,000 adolescent girls dying of complications from pregnancy and childbirth annually. Girls 15 - 19 years of age experience significantly higher rates of maternal mortality globally than young women aged 20 – 24. The ICRW (2012) further estimates that 35-55 percent of adolescent girls are more likely to deliver a preterm or low birth-weight baby than are those who give

birth after 19 years. The health situation of early marriage does not only affect the pregnant mother and the foetus, but also continues after childbirth (OCHCR, 2013) which leaves girls in constant pain, vulnerable to other infections, incontinent, and often shunned by their husbands and significant others (Glinski et al., 2015, Hodgkinson, 2016).

While it is a fact that young mothers have health problems linked to early marriage as stated above, pregnancy-related deaths are also known to be a leading cause of mortality for both married and unmarried girls between the ages of 15-19 (OCHCR, 2013). The GDHS (2014) report found miscarriages among girls aged 15–19 to be twice as high as that of other age groups in Ghana. Girls within this same age bracket are equally more at risk of malnutrition, high blood pressure linked to pregnancy, and eclampsia than women who are over 20 years old (WHO, 2004).

2.4.10 Educational Experience

Child marriage is a delimiting factor against promoting girl-child education in the Global South and sub-Saharan Africa. These parts of the globe have yawning gaps in literacy rates between males and females and the inequality gap is more disproportionate against females (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014). There are varied studies indicating strongly that education is a determinant of variation of age at marriage (Bates et al., 2007; Field & Ambrus, 2008). Thus, girls who graduate secondary school are up to six times less likely to marry as children when compared to girls who have little or no education (UNICEF, 2007). This is because marriage is often considered an alternative for illiterate girls who do not have any choices for the future (World Vision, 2008). However, girls experience some sort of discrimination from parents because they are perceived to be less intelligent compared to boys when it comes to education. Alhassan (2010) indicates that parents in Ghana are less likely to

educate their girl child because they are perceived to be less intelligent than boys and are likely to get pregnant while in school. Some parents themselves believe that their girl child belongs in the kitchen. Therefore, they are less likely to fund their education or help them to achieve their goals but are more likely to marry their girls off to the most eligible bachelor or man when they perceive her to be sexually mature (Sarfo et al., 2019). Not only are girls seen as good for the kitchen but also parents are reluctant to invest in their girl's education. Stark (2017) argues that some parents face difficult decisions about whether or not to invest in their girls' schooling and those who do, keep a close eye on their scholastic performance and whether they show any interest in boys. A primary concern is that they will become pregnant and be expelled from school, thereby "wasting" the money they have so far invested in their education since they are unlikely to return to school after giving birth. The perception that women belong to their husbands also discourages many parents from sending their girls to school or even investing in them (Alhassan, 2010). This has created gender disparity in education and has resulted in child marriage among girls in West Africa (Tuwora & Sossoub, 2008). The attitude put up by parents and guardians was noted by UNICEF (2001) with a greater concern. According to UNICEF, the girl child's education is abruptly halted and she is deprived of vital education needed for her preparation for adulthood. Their effective contribution to the future well-being of their family and society, and their capacity to earn and make a living are but shattered dreams (UNICEF, 2001).

This attitude or perception about girls by parents contributes greatly to the low rate recorded worldwide. For those who ever manage to enrol in school at least 20% of them are not expected to complete, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This means that one in six children in low- and middle-income countries will not complete

primary education (Hodgkinson, 2016)). Since the girl child is either denied education or dropped out of school, the probability of these girls ending up in marriage is great.

The societal perception of educated girls being difficult to control by their husbands or not submissive has contributed greatly to early marriage. Alhassan (2010) reports that educated women are perceived to be empowered and difficult to control. In view of this, men are reticent to marry educated women and would rather marry younger and less mature women or girls as they are perceived to be more submissive and easier to control than educated women. The fact remains that literate girls have stayed in education for long and thus have to marry later, but there is also strong evidence to suggest that quality education can empower girls to make decisions about whether, when, and whom they will marry. Thus, education is seen as a protective factor against child marriage.

A fact that cannot be ruled out regarding child marriage and education is the level of education of parents. Low educational levels among parents and poor access to schools, particularly in rural areas, impede girls' education and increase their likelihood of early marriage. Raj et al. (2012), point to the fact that it is the poor and least educated girls who are most vulnerable to early marriage. A 2010 study of 200 child marriages in Afghanistan found that 71 percent of parents who forced their underage daughters to marry were illiterate (ICRW, 2012).

Therefore, to conclude, when girls are denied the opportunity to education, they are denied the opportunity to develop and empower themselves for a better life tomorrow. The next alternative is marrying at a tender age.

2.4.11 Child Marriage and Legal Frameworks

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2014) report on child, early, and forced marriage highlighted those 147 countries still permitted children below the age of 18 to be married, of which 54 allowed girls to marry at a younger age than boys. Since the issuance of the OHCHR report, some States have reported efforts to strengthen the legal framework to prevent and address child, early, and forced marriage (UNGA, 2016). For example, in 2015 many countries criminalised child marriage and others raised the minimum age of marriage to 18. Togo adopted a new criminal code criminalising the practice of child and forced marriage while ensuring systematic birth registration. Nepal instituted a legal ban on child marriage and Chad raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for both girls and boys and made child marriage a punishable offence. Guatemala introduced the minimum age of marriage of 18 years for both girls and boys, and Spain raised the minimum age of marriage from 14 to 16 years for both girls and boys (UNGA, 2016). Malhotra et al. (2011) have argued that National and international bodies have recognised child marriage as a canker and violate the rights of girls as well as human rights and this thwarts development outcome.

Erulkar (2013) noted that violence against adolescent girls and young women is on the increase. This reinforces their vulnerability to sexual, physical, and psychological violence throughout their lives. A similar view is shared by Asiedu (2014) on the Ghanaian situation. Asiedu noted that in Ghana, gender-based violence is still a problem among child brides, especially in homes, which manifests in emotional, psychological, and economic terms as well as through certain cultural practices such as forced marriage and forced stay in abusive relationships.

The highlights of the experiences of child brides have increased regional organisations efforts to address child, early and forced marriages. The African Union, through its 2014 regional campaign to end child marriage, has supported national campaigns and national action plans to end the practice (UNGA, 2016). Besides, in July 2014, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in its resolution 292, tasked the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa with conducting a study on child marriages in 10 countries, including in the high prevalence countries of Malawi, Mali and Mozambique (UNGA, 2016).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right of the child. The declaration noted with keen interest that a child's consent to a marriage cannot be free and full when one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner, this cannot be a free and full consent for marriage (UNICEF, 2007). Again, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) is keen on the protection of the rights of the child against child marriage. Specifically, in article 16, CEDAW argues against child marriage.

While marriage is not necessarily looked at as a direct issue in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it has links to other rights. Some of the rights include the right to express one's views freely; the right to protection from all forms of abuse, and the right to be protected from harmful traditional practices (OCHCR, 2008). Child marriage is also identified and deliberated about by the Pan-African Forum Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children (AFASEC). The forum recognises child marriage as a type of "commercial sexual exploitation of children." (OCHCR, 2008).

Ghana has ratified and been a signatory to a number of conventions and other international and regional frameworks that seek to protect the rights of the child, particularly the girl-child. Some of them include the ILO Convention on the Worst

Forms of Child Labour (NO. 182), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. Locally, the 1992 Republican constitution protects the rights of the child in Article 28. There are other legislative instruments that locally seek the welfare of the child. They include the 1960 Criminal Code (Act 29), Children's Act 1998 Act 560/LI 1705, Criminal Code Amendment Act 1998 (Act 554), Juvenile Justice Act 2003 (Act 653), Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, 1993 (Act 458) and other amendments in 1994 (Act 484) and 1998 (Act 544), and the Education Act 1961/FCUBE, The Human Trafficking Act 2005 (Act 694). Also, a number of policy frameworks have been designed in the country to protect against the abuse of child rights such as the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2004, Draft Street Children in Ghana Policy Framework, 1995, National Gender and Children Policy, 2004, National HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Policy, 2004 and the Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy, 2000.

However, WiLDAF (2014) has observed that it is only the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560) that is the only legal document that explicitly talks about early and forced marriage. It also makes provision for penalty against those who contravene sections 14 and 15 and that of sections 8, 11, 12, and 13 of the Act. The Children's Act 1998 Act 560 makes provision for the right to education and well-being in section (8), the right of opinion in section (11), protection from exploitative labour in section (12), protection from torture and degrading treatment in section (13), right to refuse betrothal and marriage section (14), and penalty for contravention section (15).

According to WiLDAF (2014), the main institutions that are responsible for enforcing the Children's Act in Ghana are the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Department of Social Welfare, the Parliament of Ghana,

Committees of Parliament, the Ministry of Interior, Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ).

Despite the sections in the Children's Act that seek to protect welfare and empower children to stand up for their rights, there are challenges underlying the implementation of the Children's Act of 1998. WiLDAF (2014) identified two broad categories: legislation and enforcement issues.

Legislatively, WiLDAF (2014) asserts that some provisions of the Act require Legislative Instruments (L.I.s) to ensure that they are carried out. For instance, the creation of a fund to support victims and even regulate how the fund should be disbursed and providing shelters for victims and the management of the shelters demand legislative instruments. The District Assembly as mentioned in the Children Act 1998 (Act 560) in consultation with community leaders is not working hard to enact bye-laws to protect the girl child against forced and early marriage since it is in the interest of the community to protect the girl child. The courts do not take into consideration the interest of the child when adjudicating cases but rather they are guided by laws rather than emotions and the actual implications. The Act is not culturally sensitive; it does not have the cultural values of the country.

In terms of enforcement, WiLDAF (2014) noted that there are some cultural practices that make it difficult to prosecute reported cases. This is because at puberty a girl is ready for marriage culturally. The lack of training for those to facilitate the implementation of the Children's Act such as the police personnel poses a challenge. This is because they more often than not resort to mediation rather than prosecution in handling cases involving early and forced marriage. The Criminal Act 1960 which states the age of sexual consent is sixteen years conflicts with the age of marriage

(eighteen) in the Children Act 1998. All these coupled with inadequate resources to fund the necessary state agents involved in protecting the girl child are challenges in halting child marriage.

The above situation justifies that child marriage is still a serious human rights issue in Ghana. Legislation is yet to see the needed day light for progress in arresting the situation.

2.4.12 Coping Strategies

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) see coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts made to manage specific external and or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. Sacchi (2000) defines coping as behaviour and thoughts employed by the individual to manage stressful situations. In coping, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguished between two coping strategies: problem-solving strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies. Whereas in problem-solving strategies an individual puts in efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, in emotion-focused coping strategies efforts are made to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events. Some of the problem-solving coping strategies by Lazarus and Folkman include confrontative coping, seeking social support, planning full problem-solving, and seeking social support. The emotion-focused coping strategies include self-control, seeking social support, distancing, positive appraisal, accepting responsibility, and escape/avoidance. Similarly, Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (1989) suggest active coping, planning, restraint coping, seeking social support for instrumental reasons, and suppression of competing activities as problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping are positive reinterpretation and

growth, religion, humour, acceptance, and seeking social support for emotional reasons.

The 2001 (UNICEF) report explains that most girls who are unhappy in an imposed marriage are very isolated. They have nobody to talk to as they are surrounded by people who endorse their situation. This means girls have to remain in their situation as long as it takes. A study by Rashid (2006) revealed that many young married women tolerate their husband's behaviour and remain married because society accepts men who even marry ten times but despises women who marry even twice. In all these child brides desperate for freedom try to run away or take other avenues to leave their spouses or be abandoned by their spouses (ICRW, 2012). The girls usually think they could find refuge elsewhere by running back home to their families but they are often beaten and sent back to their husbands (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi 2003). Thus, distress is generally endured in silence. They are usually left with the responsibility of raising children without the husband or family's financial support, thus making them more likely to live in poverty (ICRW, 2012). Malhotra (2010) believes that this situation often persists throughout the girl's lifetime and translates into a lack of control over financial resources, and restricted access to information and social support systems or networks. However, in the United States of America, Le Strat et al. (2011) indicated that higher rates of depression and nicotine dependence were among women who married as children compared with women who married as adults. Thus, coping strategies among child brides are varied but all geared toward finding solutions to the challenging situations in their marriages.

2.4.13 Measures to Address Child Marriage

International efforts at ending child marriage are enshrined in conventions and declarations. These conventions and declarations are all geared towards addressing child marriage directly or indirectly. They include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (MoGCSP, 2016). However, efforts at addressing child marriage started as far back as the 1920s. Legal reforms began to gain grounds in the 1970s and 1980s, as countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Indonesia established or raised the legal minimum age of marriage to 18 for girls with programmatic interventions gaining grounds in the 1990s (Malhotra et al., 2011). Ghana's recent action at ending child marriage is reflected in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection's national strategic framework for ending child marriage which was launched in 2016.

In considering how the issue of child marriage is addressed, Malhotra, et al., (2011) pointed to the fact that girls rarely have the power to make decisions regarding when or whom to marry. Thus, they suggested parental education and community mobilisation in an attempt to change social norms and forge a more supportive, less punitive environment for girls and families who are willing and ready to change the custom of early marriage. Alhassan (2013) corroborates this view saying changing community attitudes toward early marriage and getting commitment and support from the family and the wider community is necessary for their protection is where the individual decisions are made. However, Mafhala (2015) underpins the fact that child marriage could be addressed by critically reviewing culture and seeing how we could employ human rights discourse as an alternative in resolving the disjuncture that exists between culture and religious values as well as those enshrined in human rights

discourse. The study further suggested that programs should be developed to equip community members to challenge insidious socio-cultural practices such as betrothal and the exchange of girls for marriage. This could be done through opinion leaders such as traditional leaders to influence public opinion.

The role of traditional leaders has been seen as crucial in addressing child marriage. Ahonsi et al. (2019) acknowledged the authority and role of the traditional leaders in their communities in ending the practice. The study indicates that chiefs should be more vocal against child marriage and that women should make it a point to report their husbands to chiefs when they are going to give their girls out for marriage. Ahonsi et al. (2019) further explain the need for community-based laws and policies that should be established specifically by the chief of the community and elders, which they believe, will help curb child marriage. Ahonsi et al. (2019) also suggest that police and other law enforcement institutions should step up efforts to curb child marriage. Ahonsi et al. (2019) explain that the law enforcement agencies should put a major focus on implementing and enforcing existing laws governing child marriage in Ghana. The UNGA (2016) reveals that in most countries, specific mechanisms have been put in place to monitor cases of violence against children and prevent child, early, and forced marriage. For instance, from 2014-2015, the children and family support centres acting in 11 regions in Azerbaijan discovered 20 cases of child marriages, of which 17 were prevented.

Malhotra et al. (2011) opined that simply being in school helps a girl to be seen as a child, and thus not marriageable. The school can be seen as a “safe space” for girls despite continued parental concerns about violence or sexual harassment in many settings, the school is still a socially acceptable alternative and helps to shift norms about early marriage. These findings are apparent in Ahonsi et al. (2019) study

which indicates that when a girl is enrolled and kept in school it can delay her age at first marriage. Ahonsi et al (2019) further suggested that interventions to stop child marriage should therefore include a component that aims at improving the retention of adolescent girls in school. Malhotra et al. (2011) added that the experience and content of schooling help girls to develop social networks and acquire skills and information, all of which contribute to their ability to better communicate and negotiate their interests. Stark (2017) is of the opinion that in preparing girls for employment and providing alternatives to early marriage, greater efforts need to be made to alleviate the hidden costs within the primary school system and the high costs of secondary education for the majority of poor students to make it that far.

Promoting girls' access to high-quality education and promoting women's economic empowerment and access to productive resources are key strategies suggested by (UNGA, 2016) to prevent child, early, and forced marriage. Ahonsi et al. (2019) suggested that conscious efforts should be made to empower girls through vocational skills for them to be able to earn a living. Employment opportunities need to be created for women living in the poorest informal areas. Employment-oriented education policies and greater efforts to ensure gender equality in labour markets are of vital importance to motivating girls and their families to continue studying (Stark, 2017). Meanwhile a lot of countries have also used the press, television, radio, books and social media to raise awareness of the impact of these harmful practices, transform societal norms and empower and equip girls with the information and skills to say "no" to early marriage (UNGA, 2016).

2.5 Summary

An overview of the literature reviewed clearly manifests that child marriage, though declining in some regions of the world is still a widespread social, economic and political challenge in most countries including Ghana. Child brides have numerous lived experiences. Several factors precipitate child marriage and there is a need for several efforts to be done in mitigating the phenomenon, especially in Ghana. The literature indicates that there is an urgent need for collaborated effort from all stakeholders to reverse the trend of child marriage in Ghana and by extension, the rest of the world. The next Chapter discusses the methodology for the study.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents the methodology used in the study. It describes the research paradigm and approaches used the design, and the population from which the sample was drawn. The chapter also provides details on sampling procedures used to generate the data in the study and data collection techniques. It also explains how data was analysed and the study's adherence to research ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The philosophical underpinning of this study is interpretivism. The basis of the interpretive paradigm is from constructivist epistemologists who are of the view that meaning is constructed not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Gray, 2004). Gray explained further that in the interpretive paradigm, social reality is created jointly through meaningful interaction between the researcher and the researched-on agreement. Thus, through the interview guide and further probing the study investigates the perspective and views of child brides on their lived experiences.

3.3 Research Approach

A qualitative approach to research was employed to enable the study to capture the lived experiences of child brides. A qualitative approach allows the study to capture meanings in individuals' lives (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000) and discover the meaning in a specific socio-cultural setting (Neuman, 2011). Studies that sit within the qualitative research tradition propose that the perspective of people is meaningful, knowable, and can be made explicit (Patton, 2002). In this case, the meaning of the

experiences of the child brides was made explicit by capturing their perceptions, perspectives, and understanding through interaction with them and the key informants. It provided the study an opportunity to have an in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences of the child brides.

3.4 Research Design

Phenomenological design was used in this study. A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). It allows the study to delve into people's perceptions or meanings, attitudes and beliefs, emotions and feelings (Denscombe, 2010). Adopting a phenomenological design is essential to understanding human experiences. The source of knowledge from the original experiences of study participants assists a study in grasping the essence of a phenomenon (Dowling, 2007). This description consists of "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). The study explored the perception of participants on child marriage among the people and the lived experiences of child brides with a focus on their psychosocial, emotional, physical, sexual, health, and educational experiences of child brides and how child brides cope with these experiences.

Also, the study explored what measures exist to address child marriage in the study communities. Phenomenological design was chosen to enable the study describe the lived experiences of the child brides and to gather first-hand information from those involved. The study design gave the study the opportunity to understand the experiences of child brides from their perspective as they told their stories and the essence of what it meant to be in that situation.

The transcendental or psychological phenomenological design was used in this study. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental or psychological

phenomenology focuses less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants. By employing transcendental phenomenology, I can explore how child brides perceive and make sense of their situation, their emotions, and their relationships. It allows for an in-depth analysis of their lived experiences, shedding light on the unique challenges they face, their aspirations, and the impact of societal norms and cultural factors on their lives.

3.5 Researcher's Role/Positionality

Sirnate (2014) believes the researcher's role is described as an "insider" when the research is carried out in the native culture and an "outsider" when the study is conducted in a foreign culture (Ryan et al.'s 2011). In line with the suggested perspective of Sirnate, the positionality of the study was seen as an insider since the study was conducted in the native culture. The study acted as a "human science researcher" (Moustakas, 1994), as data was collected from participants who had experienced the phenomenon and key informants who had insight into the experiences of child brides. There was no prior relationship between the study and participants except a few of the key informants. The position of the study was viewed as a traditional leader and professional teacher privileged, though the uncomfortable position of seeing some community girls turned into brides and students marrying before 18 years. Therefore, the study saw the credentials to be the "human instrument" for this study. Besides the key informants and some child brides from the community (Wiaga) knowing the researcher as a Queen Mother, I did not reveal my identity to the participants but built a good rapport with them easily which facilitated the study.



years and older 18.9% of people are non-literates. The proportion of the population who are literate in English only constitutes 67.2% while 28.7% are literate in both English and Ghanaian language only (GSS, 2014a).

On the other hand, the Balsa South District has a total population of 36,514 including Dogninga people. The males constitute 49.6% while females constitute 50.4% of the entire population of the district. The Balsa South District shares boundaries with the Balsa North District to the north, Mamprugu Moagduri District in the Northern Region to the South, West Mamprusi District to the west, and the Sisala East Municipality in the Upper West Region to the east (GSS, 2014b).

The Balsa South has 48.2% of females and 51.8% of males aged 12 years and older currently married. The proportion of the males who have never married (41.7%) is higher than that of the females (27.6%). There are about 15,974 non-literates in the Balsa South District, with the 65-year-old and over age group having the highest number (2,146) of non-literates. Of those who are literate, 75.0% are literate in English only, and 21.3% in English and Ghanaian language only. Male literates are more (4,427) than their female (261) counterparts. Also, it is clear that 24.5% of the males are literate in both English and Ghanaian languages as compared with 18.1% of the females (GSS, 2014b).

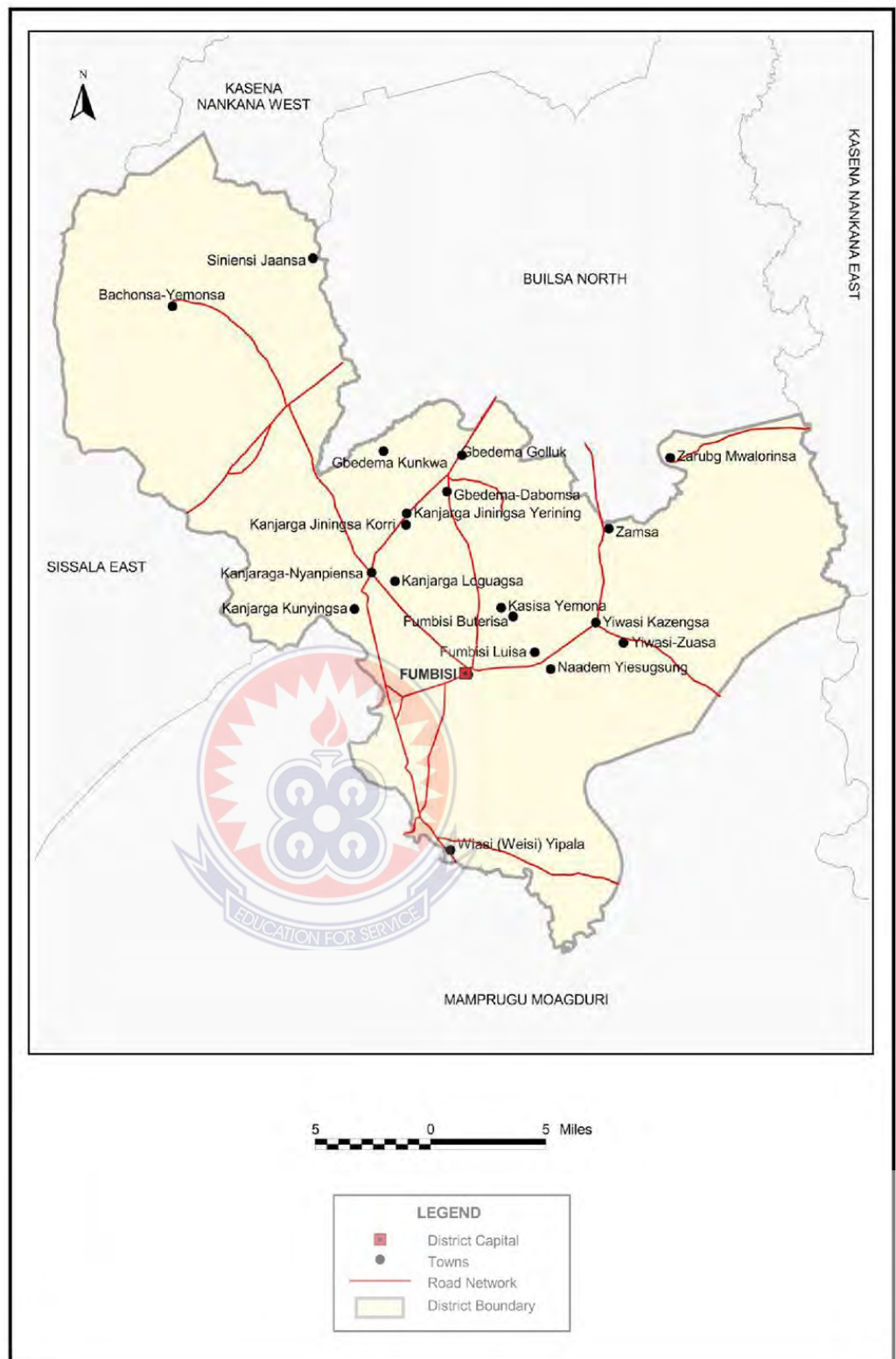


Figure 2. Map of Builsa South District (Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2014b)

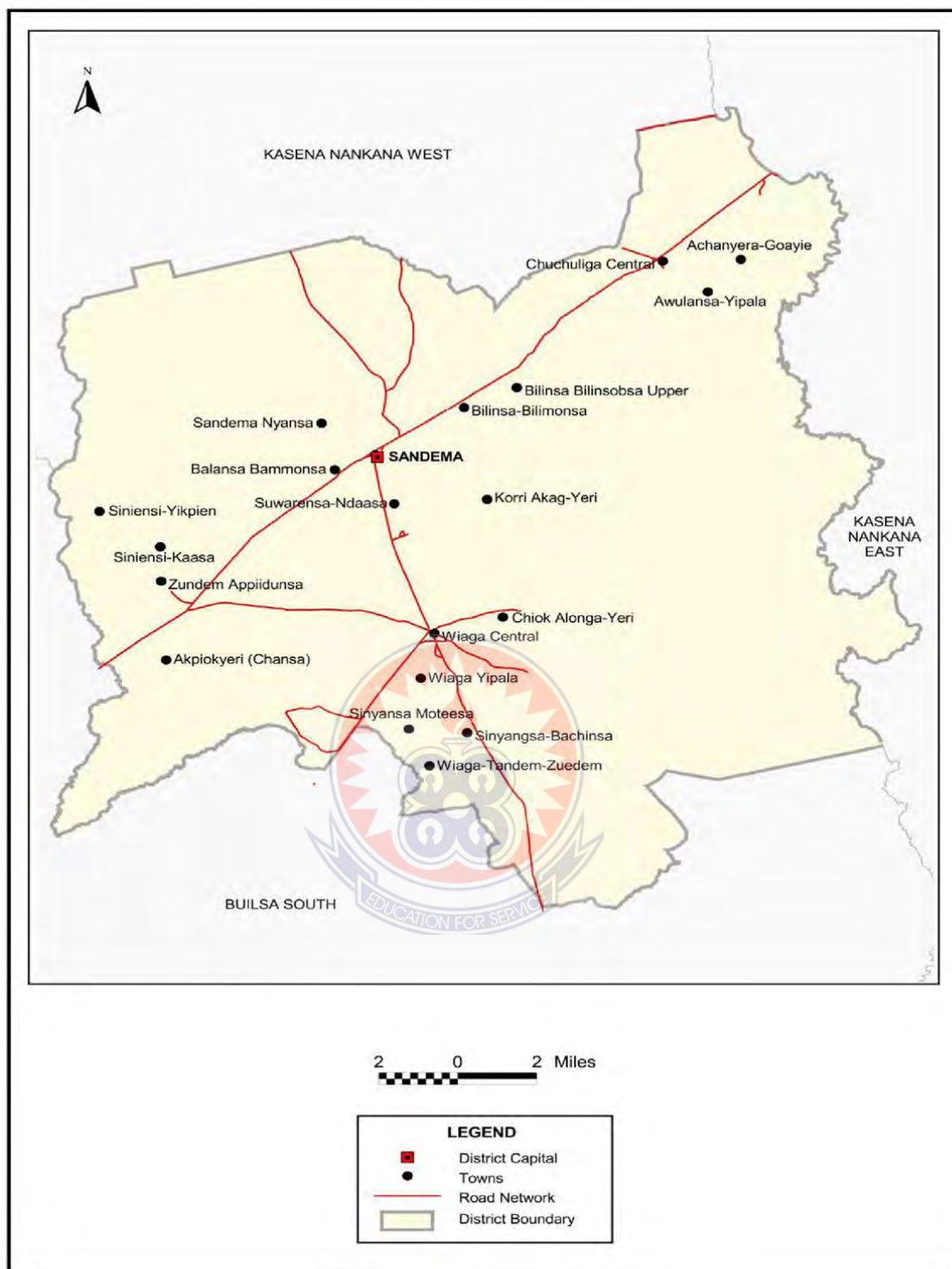


Figure 3. Map of Builsa North District (Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a)

3.7 Population

The study's population included all indigenes of Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga in the Balsa North and South Districts. The target population for this study comprised females who were married off or got married before their 18th birthday. The accessible population comprised child brides who were ready, available, and willing to participate in the study.

3.8 Sample Size

Polkinghorne (1989) (cited in Creswell, 2007), recommends that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Thus, considering the nature of the study and the approach used the sample size of 14 participants was preferred. Participants of the study were in two categories. They were the child brides and the stakeholders (key informants). The child brides included 3 participants each from Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga totaling 9. The second category consisted of 1 participant each including Circuit Supervisor (CS), Assembly Member, Headmaster, Chief's elder, and a Queen Mother totaling 5. These categories of participants were the key informants in the various communities involved by virtue of their position and having information on issues regarding child brides in their communities.

Qualitative studies demand that sample size follows the concept of saturation (Bowen, 2008). Besides, using phenomenology, Creswell (2007) suggests a sample size of three to ten participants. Thus, from the 9th child bride and 5th key informant, the study reached saturation since no new information was provided during the interview. The study used focus group discussion. Krueger (1998) suggests six to nine participants in a focus group discussion. In line with this proposition, a FGD consisting of seven out of the nine child brides was used. This is illustrated below in

Table 1*Grouping of Participants*

Participants Community	Child Brides'	Chief	CS	Queen Mother	Headteacher	Assembly Member
Wiaga	3	1	0	0	0	1
Siniesi	3	0	0	0	1	0
Dogninga	3	0	1	1	0	0
Total (14)	9	1	1	1	1	1

(Source: Fieldwork, 2021)

3.9 Sampling Procedure

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select sites and participants for this study. The study selected 14 participants for the study because they purposefully informed an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2003). Babbie (2009) argued that purposive sampling is based on some predetermined criteria, which usually include knowledge of the population, its elements, as well as goals of research. In addition, Bernard (2000) indicated that purposive sampling allows the researcher to decide why he or she wants to use a specific category of informants in the study as it provides greater in-depth findings than other probability sampling methods (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, participants were selected based on their knowledge of child marriage and/or victims of child marriage.

In order to select the sample for the first category of participants (child brides), the snowball sampling technique was a manageable and appropriate method as it is useful when “the members of a special population cannot be located” (Babbie &

Mouton, 2001). The CS, Assembly member, Queen Mother, Chief's Elder, and Headmaster helped in locating some of these child brides within the community. The child brides in turn provided information that led the study to identify and conduct interviews with other child brides.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are important aspects of research. Therefore, a careful consideration of the participants' feelings and sense of personal space was taken into consideration. The study was careful not to infringe on the rights of the participants and to take on the study in a way that did not do any harm to them and their lifestyles. Since a good number of the participants were actually basic school dropouts and could not read well, a consent form was well-explained to the participants for their voluntary participation at the beginning of the interview. Participants were told of the importance of telling the truth about their lived experiences. All participants were informed about confidentiality and all participants were given pseudonyms during transcription to ensure anonymity.

3.11 Data Collection Methods and Procedure

The means of generating data for this study were through semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and Key Informant Interviews (KII).

3.11.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Interviews were used as a way of generating data for this study as they allowed the study to have flexibility over the questions that were asked. Marvasti (2004) indicated that interviews are useful when one adopts an interpretive research approach, in which one assumes that reality is socially constructed and therefore, may rely on the reality of the participants in the setting of their interest.

The semi-structured interview guide for child brides was made up of 22 items with some probing questions. Demographic questions were used to start the interview with participants. However, when it got to their ages some were disqualified based on their uncertainty about their actual ages. While others were included based on the fact that some key informants were able to use their children's ages to help determine the ages of those participants. When child brides were to provide information on their husband's ages, some of them had challenges in providing such information. The other questions sought to elicit responses from participants on factors contributing to child marriage in their various communities. Participants also provided responses on their lived experiences in their marriages, how they are coping, and ways they think could help in addressing child marriage in their communities.

Since this study was interested in understanding the perception of child marriage and the lived experiences of child brides, semi-structured interviews proved to be useful. This is because child brides were given the chance to express what they wanted to express without feeling limited by a set of questions or options. Child brides from Wiaga were interviewed in Wiaga a house behind the Wiaga Chief's palace since most people are usually afraid of coming close to the palace. Those from Siniesi were also interviewed in one of the community's Town Council offices. Those from Dogninga were interviewed in a summer hut near the Dogninga chief's palace. None of them declined the use of the recorder which actually went a long way to facilitate the study. Seven participants were not fluent in English so they spoke in the local dialect (Buli). This was then directly transcribed.

3.11.2 Focus Group Discussions

Adebo (2000) stated that focus group interviews/discussions are useful for obtaining general information about a community and are useful tools for cross-

checking information. Group interviews require very careful preparation. Dawson (2002) added that the meeting should be held in a pleasant place with refreshments served to create a relaxed environment. The moderator needs objectivity and knowledge of the subject. The moderator starts with a broad question before moving to more specific issues, encouraging open and easy discussion to bring out true feelings and thoughts. This actually informed the choice of venues for the FGD which was one of the offices of the Siniesi Town Council. This study set up one FGD comprising seven child brides from Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga. All the participants were interviewed on the same questions. A recorder was used in the recording. The FGD had 46 questions that sought to uncloak information from the child brides.

A FGD allows for group interaction and sharing of realistic perspectives on issues discussed (Osei-Hwedie et al., 2006). The FGD was very useful as it provided a platform where participants openly talked about their experiences with others. Most of the physical and sexual experiences were actually shared during the FGD. This could probably result from the fact that they have found some sort of solidarity and have nothing more to hide from each other. It also provided a means of validating and cross-checking what was said during the in-depth interviews at the individual level and new information was added. It was during the FGD that participants admitted to physical abuse which was initially denied individually. This could be attributed to either my ability to navigate the questions well or participants feeling more comfortable with each other.

The FGD involved participants who took part in the interview from the three different communities. Three participants from Dogninga, three from Siniesi, and one from Wiaga gathered at Siniesi for the FGD. Siniesi was chosen as the venue for

FGD because it is situated in-between Wiaga and Dogninga and more convenient travelling from either Wiaga or Dogninga to Siniesi.

3.11.3 Key Informant Interviews

Adebo (2000) believes that key informant interviews enable a researcher to get specialised information from one or a group of persons about a community because the informants have specialised knowledge of the issue under study. Similarly, Chambers (1992) stipulates that key informant interviews involve enquiring who the experts are and seeking to obtain the desired information from them.

In this study, five key informant interviews were conducted. This involved a Chief's Elder, Assembly Member, Queen Mother, CS, and Headteacher who all had in-depth knowledge of child marriage in the study communities. Participants' interviews lasted between 25 minutes to one hour because some usually get excited and say a lot. The school head and CS were involved in the interview because most of the girls are of school-going age and their perspective will contribute greatly to the study. Besides, the CS played a key role in rescuing one child bride in his circuit. The Queen Mother and the Chief's Elder were involved because the study needed their viewpoint on what was being explored since they are leaders in their communities. The Assembly member was also involved because the study needed to know the districts' perspectives on the topic being explored. Each of them was called on the phone and the purpose of the study was explained in detail to them. The interview date was scheduled individually. A consent form was given to those who could read to indicate their interest by signing. The study was explained to the participants who could not read and they indicated their interest

3.12 Data Analysis Procedure

The main goal of data analyses is to reduce data to a manageable number of pages that address the evidence and the goal of the study (Robson, 1993). Data analysis helps in examining and categorising data, with the purpose of getting rid of extra and irrelevant information (Robson, 1993). Data was analysed manually using thematic data analysis. This strategy requires the study to organise data, immerse oneself in and transcribe the data, generate themes, code the data, and describe it (Kusi, 2012).

The data was collected through audio recordings and written notes. All the data generated from the child brides and two of the key informants were in the local language “Buli”. This data was transcribed from the local language “Buli” into English since the study understands and speaks Buli fluently. This was followed by familiarising oneself with the data by reading through the transcribed data line by line of each participant to make more sense and then carefully reducing the data for analysis. Significant statements, sentences, and quotes that provided an understanding of how the child brides experienced the phenomenon were highlighted. Themes were generated from the codes during the data analysis and coding. The coding process is to make sense of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse the codes into broad themes (Creswell, 2012). The coding of themes was built upon in relation to the research questions and also for answering the research questions. Inferences were drawn from the child brides and key informants by comparing and contrasting with reviewed literature, as well as information gathered from key informants.

3.13 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Guba (1992) argues that “trustworthiness criteria” is employed to judge the quality of the study located in an interpretive qualitative framework. The elements of “trustworthiness criteria” include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participant's original data and is a correct interpretation of the participant's original views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was ensured through triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of two or more methods of data collection in a study of some human behaviour (Cohen et al., 2000). Data generated through in-depth interviews was compared with data generated through focus group discussions. In doing so the accuracy of their stories was checked. To further enhance credibility, member checking was used. Member checking is the process of asking the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2007). Thus data, interpretations, and conclusions were shared with the participants (child brides) while the three key informants who could read were given the transcripts to read and make corrections. This gave participants another opportunity to clarify what their intentions were, correct errors, and provide additional information to the study.

Qualitative research does not aim at generalising findings. Instead, it questions whether findings can be transferrable. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents. It is the interpretive equivalent of generalisability (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Bitsch (2005) claims transferability judgement is facilitated through thick description. This was done by providing vivid and detailed descriptions of the

study areas, methods, and participants in the study to facilitate any reader who will want to replicate this study in a different context.

Dependability means if the study were repeated in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. Triangulation was one of the ways to ensure dependability. The interviews and the focus group discussion provided an opportunity to prove the consistency in the responses of participants. Dependability was also ensured through peer review or debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the role of the peer debriefer as a "devil's advocate," someone who keeps the researcher honest, and asks the appropriate questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations. The questions, observations, and comments made by peers enhanced the study. There was also frequent debriefing with my supervisors. The discussions helped correct flaws and suggested alternatives to help make the study dependable. It was also an avenue to test the interpretations and ideas as well as biases and preferences which went a long way to shape the study.

Confirmability establishes that the data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the researcher's imagination, but are derived from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The study's position as an insider facilitated in eschewing any form of bias and approached the study with neutrality to come by the findings of this study. Triangulation was also used as a means of confirmability. The raw data gathered through interviews with the child brides and the key informants and through focus group discussions are available for anyone to establish that the study is not a figment of the researcher's imagination.

3.14 Summary

This section justifies the choice of methodological preferences for the study. The study reveals that, most of the studies reviewed on child brides employed descriptive and narrative research designs. Therefore, the use of phonological research design is scarce, hence its adoption in this study.

The next Chapter presents the findings of the study.



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

The findings came from phenomenological research on child brides' experiences in three communities: Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga in the Balsa North and South Districts of the Upper East Region of Ghana. The findings are presented in themes developed from the objectives of the study as deduced from the participants. The findings came from nine child brides who were married off or got married as children. Views were solicited from an Assembly Member, Headteacher of a Junior High School, a Chief's elder, a Circuit Supervisor, and a Queen Mother. These categories are stakeholders (key informants) in the various communities involved in the study by virtue of their positions and knowledge of issues in their communities. The study examined the factors contributing to child marriage, lived experiences, coping strategies, and measures for addressing child marriage in various communities. Table 4.1 below shows the themes and sub-themes of the findings on child brides' experiences.

Table 2*Themes and Sub-themes*

Research Question	Theme	Sub-theme
1. What are the factors that contribute to child marriage in selected communities in the Upper East Region?	Cultural and religious	Mode of marriage Birth rituals
	Economic factors	Benefiting from in-laws Inability to meet basic needs Potential suitors do not want to be at a loss
	Social factors	Friendship and family ties Kindness Peers' influence and recognition
	Protection of family honour	Unable to bear shame and reject
2. What are the lived experiences of child brides in selected communities in Upper East Region?	Psychosocial and emotional experiences	Psychological experiences Social experiences Emotional experiences
	Physical and Sexual Experiences	Physical abuse Sexual abuse
	Health Experiences	Activeness of health insurance cards Contraceptive use Complications during and after pregnancy
	Education experiences	Refusal to continue education Shouldering educational expenses Assurance to learn a trade Prioritising children over education

3. How do child brides cope in marriage in these communities?	Coping strategies	Acceptance of reality Material and emotional support Trusting in God Working extra to earn income
4. What are the measures to address child marriage in selected communities in the Upper East Region?	Measures to address child marriage	Community sensitisation Enactment and enforcement of bye-laws Collaboration Social intervention Mentorship and support for married girls Keeping girls in school Guidance and counselling Marriage register and awards

(Source: Fieldwork, 2021)

4.2 The Existence of Child Marriage

The KIIs, FGD, and interviews with the participants in all three study communities proved that there is the existence of child marriage in (Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga) the Balsa North and South Districts in the Upper East Region. For instance, in a KII with one of the participants, it came out clearly that child marriage exists in the community. He stated that:

Yes. I can tell of one of the girls from my house. She was in school and before we knew it, she was pregnant. She would not tell us the one responsible for the pregnancy. So, an aunt of hers came and took her to where she was married and married her to a man. (KII -4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021).

Also, a KII with another person in one of the communities indicated that abduction or forced marriage is a predominant phenomenon in the community. He stated that:

Yes. It is quite a phenomenon within that enclave of communities. They still practice elopement and forced marriages. Particularly I can say forced marriage is a culture that is so prevalent in the area and is quite worrying.

(KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

Another participant showed that child marriage exists in the community. He stated that:

Yes, the form 3's that completed, there was a girl called ... It was a Friday and a student reported to us that some women went to the girl's house and took her along with them. The women happened to have come from her house and married in ... When she got there, they detained her and gave her to a man in the house. We sent a word to the people in ... but it proved futile. We complained to the office and they told us to get her parents involved. But her parents did not cooperate with us. It ended up like that. There is a similar one in here in ... yeri (house). With the help of the police, we were able to bring her back and she is in form three now (KII-2, Personal Communication, 2nd July 2021).

Data gathered from the child brides themselves indicates that the practice is still prevalent. One respondent stated, "I was caught. I went for drumming and dancing and they caught me" (CB-6, Personal Communication, 16th July 2021). Another also said, "I went to fetch water and they caught me" (CB-2, Personal Communication, 12th July 2021). A third recounted "I got pregnant before I completed JHS and went to the boy who got me pregnant and stayed with him" (CB-9, Personal Communication, 19th July 2021). A fourth person stated "Someone arranged for me to marry him" (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021). They took me there as "doglie". All these responses indicate that the practice of child marriage exists in the three communities.

4.3 Demographic Information of the Child Brides

The in-depth interview guide gave the child brides the opportunity to give their background and how they got married before they turned 18 years old. A respondent gave her background and how she was made a bride. She lived with only

her mother as she lost her father in the previous years. She has three elder and two younger siblings. This implies that she lived in a family of seven members constituting a mother, four girls, and two boys. She is the fourth born of her family. Although they all attempted schooling, at the time of the interview, only one girl and two boys were in school. Her parents are unlettered. Her two other sisters are married and only the younger one is still in school. Unfortunately, she ended her schooling in Junior High School when she realised, she was pregnant. According to her, she was progressing positively in her studies in school when she got married at the age of 16 years old. Her husband who was 20 years at the time of marrying her was not in school. She is currently 19 years old.

Only my mother is alive. I have three siblings before me and two after me. Four girls and two boys. I am the fourth. We all attempted school but for now, only one girl and the two boys are currently in school. I was 16 when I married. My other two sisters are married too. The younger one is the one in school (CB-1, Personal Communication, 11th July 2021).

Another child bride reported that her marriage came about when she migrated from her community to a neighbouring community, where her grandmother's house is. That is where according to her they "caught" her (CB-2). She was about 15 years old and in class six. However, she and her husband already knew each other before their marriage. This resulted from her previous visits to her grandmother's house. It was during that period that her boy took her as a girlfriend.

Despite her abduction, her grandmother's relatives did nothing to rescue her from the man. This is because, as she stated, "I think they and the boy's parent knew what they were doing." Even her own mother did nothing to rescue her daughter. The grandmother seems to have been in the known prior to her abduction but she did not inform her. Marriage protocols such as going to the lady's house to seek her hand in

marriage from her parents were broken. In her case, the family of her husband only visited her mother and family members after they had abducted her. In spite of this, she reported that her family welcomed her husband's people and did nothing to rescue her. Although on several occasions she tried to escape, this proved futile. She was always accompanied anywhere she went, even to attend nature's call. She recalled her attempt to escape was ignited by her desire to return to school to continue her education.

A respondent in another community also gave a description of her background. She stated that she lived in a family of six children, two women and a father. According to her, she was in class six when she got married and at the age of 15 years. Her husband, who is now 24 years old, was 20 years old when he married her. Although her husband was attending school in the southern sector, upon his return to the village, he stopped schooling. At the teen age of 16, she gave birth to a child but unfortunately, in the seventh month, the baby died. Currently, at age 19, she has yet another baby.

We are 7 children but one is no more. My father had two wives and one left and he married again. Am the first daughter but the third born. I was in class six when I married. My husband is about 21 years old and was attending school in the south and when he came, he stopped (CB-3, Personal Communication, 13th July 2021)

A child bride narrated that her marriage came about when she was sent to the community as a *doglie* to her aunt. KII-4 in one of the communities explained the meaning of the word *doglieta* as “a practice where a woman who is already married takes a relative of hers precisely a girl to raise her up. She could give that girl to her husbands or any well-behaved man in the house as a wife” (KII-4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021).

Previously, she visited her aunt during holidays when she was in class six at the age of 16 years and that was when she met her husband. Upon deliberations between her husband and aunt, she was brought there to stay permanently. She recounted, “When I used to visit my aunt, he was buying things for me. He then saw my aunt and she brought me permanently” (CB-4, Personal Communication, 14th July 2021). She knew she was not up to the age of marriage but could not say no neither did her aunt to her marriage.

Another participant who came from a family of 15 said she is the fifth born out of nine children of her mother. Her step-mother has six children. She lives in a polygamous family as her father has two wives. All her parents never attended school. She married when she was in primary five at the age of 17 years old. Her husband is however about 26 years of age.

...My father has two wives. My mother has nine children and my step-mother has six children. The girls are three from my mother and I am 5th born. I was 17 years old when I married. I was attending school and went to my parents in the south and when school reopened, I spent about four weeks. When I returned, I went to school and they told me to go and bring my parents. By then I was staying with my step-mother in..... But she did not go to the school. So, I stopped school (CB-5, Personal Communication, 15th July 2021).

Recounting the incident of how she got married, she said that her husband and his friends visited her house and asked her to accompany them home. When they arrived at her husband’s house, they married her without her consent. She narrated that she wept bitterly but to no avail because she knew she was not up to the age of marriage. Another child bride gave her background and the circumstances that led to

her marriage. She indicated that currently she is 19 years of age but married when she was 15 years old. Her husband is 24 years old. After realising her husband would not agree for her to continue her education, she took her heels back to her mother to continue her education.

I am 19 years old and married when I was 15 years old. My husband is 24 years old. I lived with my parents and my siblings. None of my parents went to school but I have an aunt who went to school (CB-6, Personal Communication, 16th July 2021).

She narrates, “My mother asked me to come back and attend school. I told him and he refused so we quarrelled and I came. I wrote the entrance exams and am now continuing”. She stated that it was one New Year occasion where there was a drumming and dancing session, and a group of people abducted her. She did not even know the man she married before anywhere.

Another participant from one of the communities asserted that she lived in a family of six: a mother, a father, and three children. Her elder sister who was married in one of the communities arranged her marriage for her. She stated, “My sister got me for him.” She was not initially taken as a *doglie* before the marriage. It was her sister who specially arranged her marriage with the man because she knew how life was at home.

I am 18 years old. I was living with my parents before marrying. My sister is married. I was in form one when I got married. My parents haven't been to school. They are both farmers (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021).

Another child bride who had lost both her parents said she was with an aunt who arranged her marriage with another aunt in the house of the groom. She only got to

know of the marriage when the woman came with her husband-to-be to her aunt and that day, I just followed them to their house. I was just about 14 years old.

I am an orphan. I do not know my age. I was about 14 or 15 years old when I married. I was living with my aunt who arranged for me to marry. I stopped school when I was in class three. I had lived with three different people before marrying. I have a young brother (CB-8, Personal Communication, 18th July 2021).

A child bride gave her background as coming from a polygamous family of 10. Her mother's children are five and her step-mother has two children. Her parents are nonliterate. The father is a farmer and her mother a house-wife. According to her, she willingly married at the age of 17 years after completing JHS. This she attributed to the fact that her parents could not support her to pursue her educational dreams.

I come from a family of six. I am the first child of my parents. My father has a second wife who gave birth to two children. My mother is a house-wife and my father is a farmer (CB-9, Personal Communication, 19th July 2021).

The background of the child brides depicts children who are vulnerable as they come from poor homes, lack education, and decision-making power. Those who should have protected them gave them out in marriage or failed to rescue them when they fell prey to forced marriage.

4.3.1 Demographic Information of Child Brides

Table 3

Demographic Information of Child Brides

Identity of Bride	Marriage Age	Marriage Years	Education Level	Spouse Age
CB-1	16	3	JHS	20
CB-2	15	4	Primary	-
CB-3	15	4	Primary	20
CB-4	16	3	Primary	-
CB-5	17	5	Primary	26
CB-6	15	4	Primary	20
CB-7	15	5	Primary	-
CB-8	14	3	Primary	-
CB-9	17	3	JHS	-

(Source: Fieldwork, 2021)

4.4 Research Question 1: What factors Contributes to Child Marriage in Selected Communities in the Upper East Region?

This sought to solicit the views of child brides and key informants on the factors contributing to child marriage in their communities. Both child brides and key informants had almost the same responses regarding the factors contributing to child marriage. Their views were captured under the themes of cultural, social, economic, and family prestige.

4.4.1 Cultural and Religious Factors

The interviews from both child brides and key informants pointed to the fact that the cultural factors influenced child marriage in the three communities. Both child brides and key informants alluded to the fact that the marrying of children is a cultural practice. One key informant shared the view as follows:

The fact that child marriage is mentioned means that is a cultural practice. As I mentioned, abduction. These are cultural practices that people used to marry their wives even with adults and it has become prevalent among young women. The root cause is the cultural influence. They see nothing wrong with it (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.4.1.1 Modes of Marriage

Culturally, the modes by which women were married out are the same ways girls were made wives. Chiefly, abduction is a cultural practice used to marry women among the Bulsas. In this practise a man who is interested in a woman with or without her consent could mobilise his friends to abduct her. Just as stated above by (KII-3), if this is used to marry adult women, it would be more prevalent among the young brides. A respondent, from one of the communities narrated how she was abducted. She stated that “it was one New Year occasion where there was drumming and dancing session, a group of people caught me” (CB-6, Personal Communication, 16th July 2021). According to (CB, 6), she did not know the man prior to the marriage but accepted him. Another abducted child bride narrated that she had gone to fetch water from a borehole when she was abducted. Yet another was returning from the market when she was abducted. These other two were however in a relationship with their men and knew them but would not have consented to marriage at that time. These kinds of marriages are however formalised later.

The girls who were abducted indicated that none of them would have consented to marriage at that age if not abducted. This was how one of them kept it: “If not because they caught me, no” (CB-1, Personal Communication, 11th July 2021). The following were their reasons for not consenting to marriage at that young age. First of all because they were in school and secondly, they were “too young to marry”. They also mentioned that what was more frustrating was the fact that their parents did little or nothing to help them. Some parents who attempted to rescue their children rather condoned and connived with the families of the abductors to keep the girls in their marital homes for reasons best known to them. “I think my grandmother knew of my marriage and did not tell” (CB-2, Personal Communication, 12th July 2021).

4.4.1.2 Birth Rituals

Two basic practices were very prominent during the interviews regarding the cultural factors contributing to child marriage in the three communities. These were *miisa bob ka* (tie a rope) and *puik nya ti ka* (reveal or announce a pregnancy). The (KII-1) succinctly explained *miisa bob ka* and stated emphatically that the practice is on a decline.

Miisa bob ka was performed when a woman continuously had miscarriages or still birth. Then a soothsayer is consulted to find out from the gods. When the soothsayer says that the gods want them to perform bob miisa (tie rope) then a daughter from the house who is married will place a rope on a god and make her request and tie the rope around the woman’s waist. So, they cannot do anything with the child without her permission or blessing should the child survive (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

The *puuk nya ti ka* was explained by the KII-3 as follows:

...when an aunt witnesses the birth of a baby girl or plays a role, that girl is automatically for her. She is like a god-daughter and the parents cannot marry her without her permission. So, you see, her future is already determined for her. I think it is a form of arranged marriage (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

In both practises the women involved act as foster parents or God-parent by either taking the girl into their home or supporting the girl from afar. Whoever played a role in the birth of a child either through *miisa bob ka* or *puuk nya ti ka* had absolute right to the welfare and marriage of the child. When the girl lived with her biological parents, the parents updated the “godparent” about the progress of the girl. If she was with the “godparent”, she also updated her biological parents on the progress of their daughter. The godparent cannot marry the girl without notifying the biological parents of the girl. Only one out of the nine child brides interviewed was born through the *puuk nya ti ka* but stayed with the biological parents. A child bride responding to the question of the cultural perception of child marriage alluded to the fact that *missa bob ka* and *puuk nya ti ka* promoted the practice of child marriage. She explains that:

If you are a child, someone would say that she performed some rituals and your mother gave birth to you so she would come and request for you. She takes you into her home and can decide to just give you out to a man without your consent (CB-4, Personal Communication, 14th July 2021).

Another cultural practice that stood tall was *doglieta* (maidservant). This was explained by the KII-4 as

A girl child could be given out to support an aunt in another community, like a maidservant, and in the process, the child is made to marry one of the young men in the house as a husband sometimes against her will and once is a

cultural norm, it's allowed to stand (KII-4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021).

The *doglieta* (maidservant) is mostly a result of the *miisa bob ka* (tie a rope) and the *puuk nya ti ka* (reveal a pregnancy). This is because the one who does the *miisa bob ka* or the *puuk nya ti ka* could take the girl to her husband's house as a maidservant also known as *doglietiri* (the practise of maidservant). However, there are instances where a girl could be taken as a maidservant without anyone performing the "rope tying" or "revealing the pregnancy". Only one out of the nine child brides actually married as *doglie* (maidservant) through *miisa bob ka* (tie a rope). Accordingly, her paternal aunt who performed the rituals took her to her marital home as a maidservant and arranged for her marriage.

The question as to whether there was a religious perception of child marriage had just two responses as all other respondents could not find any. A Key Informant indicated that there are instances where a girl takes part in a sacrifice to the gods but that girl is not from that family. Culturally, it is seen as a call by the god to be a member of that family and she is given out for marriage.

...In case the child or girl was taken to a different family to stay with the family for a while, and perhaps they offer sacrifice and she happened to take part of the sacrifice...maybe is a condition for you to marry that particular house (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

A child bride also indicates that sometimes when a girl is abducted and there are attempts to rescue her, she starts behaving strangely and being comfortable with the family that abducted her. Sometimes any attempt to rescue her would be met with resistance and she would portray signs of familiarity with her abducted family. There is often the believe that she had been given something to eat or she had been charmed. When the study inquired to know if she had been a victim of the charms

since she was abducted, she said she does not know because the victim usually does not know.

... when they abduct you, they may do some things that will make you behave like you already know them for a long. In our culture, they will say they will bring some medicine(charms) and cast it on you (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021).

The responses indicate that in the three communities (Wiaga Siniesi and Dogninga), cultural factors to a large extent contribute significantly to the practice of child marriage. This includes the abduction of child brides, arranged marriages, maidservant practises, and birth rituals. These factors collectively contribute to the girl's vulnerability in the three communities.

4.4.2 Economic Factors

The views gathered in this study displayed the significant role economic factors played in child marriage. These factors indicated the vulnerability of girls and how the lack of economic means increased the likelihood of girls being forced into early marriage.

4.4.2.1 Benefiting from in-Laws

Participants disclosed that parents benefited economically when their daughters married despite the fact the bride price is nothing to write home about among the Balsa people. Balsa tradition postulates that in-laws could be invited during the farming season to help on the farms. Thus, parents who do not have cash to pay usually rely on their in-laws during the farming season. Also, occasionally, there could be other remittances from in-laws especially if the girl is married into a more resourceful home. A participant indicated that the:

...Other reason could be poverty... Some see it as a source of support when their girl child is married off. The in-laws from time to time or on some occasions will come to their aid when they are in need (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.4.2.2 Inability to Meet Basic Needs

It was disclosed that some parents see child marriage as a way of alleviating economic burdens. Where parents struggle to provide for their children's basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, they believe that marrying off their daughters at an early age will ensure their well-being. Participants were also of the view that financial hardship influenced the girls to go in for boys because parents cannot provide their basic needs. Usually what their colleagues possess entices them and they are tempted to believe that their parents are negligent.

...mostly it is poverty... when they go out and see that their colleagues are well catered for but they lack a lot of things, they are pushed to go in for men. (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

A child bride also disclosed that a boy supported her to complete her Junior High School (JHS) and she willingly married him. She was also emphatic in stating that she was sure her parents would not be able to bear the cost of her education coupled with the fact that she was already pregnant with the boy and marrying him was better than staying home.

My parents could not support me to go to school so I willingly married the boy who saw me through my JHS (CB-9, Personal Communication, 19th July 2021).

An interview with a child bride showed that girls who were from poor homes knew that their parents could not take good care of them and marriage was the best option for them. She stated:

If your parents are unable to care for you then a man should. This is the reason I married a man who can take proper care of me (CB-6, Personal Communication, 16th July 2021).

Another child bride stated that she was an orphan when she was a child and had stayed with three different relatives. The fact that she was going to manage her own home and make her own decisions made her excited despite the fact that she was not in school and still too young to marry. She said:

I was surprised when I was told to follow the woman and that the man with him was my husband. I felt okay since I would be in charge of my own home. This was the happiest day of my life (CB-4, Personal Communication, 14th July 2021)

4.4.2.3 Potential Suitors do not Want to be at a Loss

Some Key Informants stated that some suitors who provide for the child brides sometimes do not want to be taken for granted, so they quickly abduct the young girls so that they would not be at a loss. In other words, the supposed suitors of the child brides felt that they had invested in the relationship and cannot allow someone else to benefit.

...the other thing is that, due to poverty when they are approaching adolescence, they have needs that cannot be met by parents. The other support is that when they approach or propose, they accept the proposal as a means of getting their needs met. Before you realised, it becomes a fully-grown relationship and then some of them have a greedy intent. Because I cannot be dating you and sponsoring you and allow somebody to come and take you away.... I will be at a loss for sponsoring you. So, when they start dating them, they think the only way they can achieve their objective is to get

them marry to them so that they can live together as wife and husband. That is why you get a lot of them marrying when they are not in school or even in school (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.4.3 Social Factors

The findings in this study on the social factors contributing to child marriage is seen as a way to protect girls from perceived risk and cement relationship as well as the recognition and prestige society accords married people.

4.4.3.1 Friendship and Family Ties

Participants alluded to the fact that the support, companionship, and sense of belonging that friendship provides can serve as the basis for child marriage. One participant explained that neighbourliness and friendship over time induce parents to give out their girls to cement their relationship. Some parents also arrange marriages for their children to strengthen social bonds, secure economic stability or maintain traditions. A participant intimated:

...people build relationships with time and to cement those relationships, they intermarry and even give their underage girls out. The economic benefit and the fact that a child of theirs is married to a particular family has some sort of prestige. Some will be willing to marry their girls out without reservation (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

In a focus group discussion, none of the participants admitted to being given out to cement a relationship however, a few admitted to the fact that the neighbourliness made it difficult for them to be rescued. A child bride admitted that after her abduction, her parents wanted to rescue her but were told that it would ruin the relationship between the family and the whole section of that community. Implying that nobody from her section would marry from that section of her husband if she was rescued from her abductors. Since her father did not want to set a bad

precedent, she stayed in the marriage. Another child bride expressed that although her parents did not accept her marriage and brought her back home, they sent her back to her husband because of family ties. She said:

My father came down from the south and told them to bring me back home and they did. Later on, they sent me back to my husband's house because they said the extent to which they knew one another, if they should keep me at home, it would not be good (CB-5, Personal Communication, 15th July 2021)

4.4.3.2 Kindness

Some participants indicated that simple acts of kindness such as compassion, being generous in action and words, and showing care were reasons for some parents to give their daughters out in marriage. In other words, girls could be given out to reciprocate some kind of gesture one received. However, giving girls out because of kindness received had reduced drastically. She intimated:

Our grandfathers used to give their daughters out when they were treated well by others. For instance, some young men had wives because they supported an old man on his farm or fetched water for a family when water was very scarce (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

4.4.3.3 Peers Influence and Recognition

Some participants were of the view that peers could also influence child marriage. A participant narrated:

.... children could be mates, the girl realises that the friends are marrying and she is alone, she may be tempted to think that is normal and may also fall for it when she gets a suitor (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021).

Some child brides also indicated in a focus group discussion that when a girl marries and settles down people recognise and respect her more than those who are of the same age and they are promiscuous. Also, a Key Informant mentioned how some group of girls visited a colleague who gave birth and came back to school talking

about the cuteness of the baby. The participant stated that it was normal for the girls to visit a dropout student or a married student who had given birth and talked among themselves. The Key Informant argued this could influence some of them to follow the same trend. Some of the child brides also mentioned during the focus group discussion that those who were married were not older than them except the few senior high schools, nurses, and teachers who were married. In other words, the practice is seen as normal among the child brides.

From the views expressed above it is obvious that family ties, peer influence, and recognition as well as kindness highlighted how harmful social norms contribute to child marriage.

4.4.4 Protection of Family Honour

The key informants and child brides indicated that parents and guardians usually want to protect the family image and would push girls who got pregnant or demonstrated their interest in men to marry even if it was not of their own volition.

4.4.4.1 Unable to Bear Shame and Rejection

The participants believe that most parents are unable to bear the shame their daughters bring to them when they are pregnant while still with them. To cover up the shame and maintain the family reputation, most parents coerced and persuaded their daughters to marry the man responsible or any man who is ready to marry a pregnant girl. A Key Informant narrated how a girl he knows was helped by her aunt to marry in order to save the family from shame and disgrace. The participant disclosed:

... She was in school and before we knew it, she was heavily pregnant. She was not willing to tell us the one responsible for the pregnancy. So, an aunt of hers came and took her to where she was married and married her to a man (KII-4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021).

Another Key informant revealed that despite the fact that marriage rites were performed before a girl was married when parents suspected and confirmed the pregnancy of their wards, they were desperate and in a haze to give their daughters out before the full knowledge of society. The formalisation of the marriage rites per tradition becomes a secondary issue since they were in a haze to dispose of the girl. The Balsa culture does not even allow marriage rites to be conducted when a girl is pregnant. However, according to a Key Informant just a handful of parents who still want their girls in school will swallow their pride and keep their daughters at home and seethe silently. The Key informant stated:

.... Once the person takes up responsibility, they feel that the next option is for the girl to go and stay with the “husband” so that they take advantage of the pregnancy and formalise the relationship. They want to take the shame away and by so doing get her married. Just a few swallow their pride and keep their daughters but the majority send them away to the man responsible or any man who will want to marry her (KII- 3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

Participants intimated that some parents rejected and shut their doors to some of the girls when they were pregnant. This usually compelled the girls to look for shelter somewhere. Some of the girls find shelter in the men responsible for the pregnancy. Meanwhile, girls who came from polygamous homes will have to face the wrath of their mothers for the disgrace they brought upon them. She feels that she had failed as a mother in raising her daughter which resulted in the pregnancy.

One participant stated:

...What they will just tell you is to go to the one responsible for the pregnancy for they cannot take care of her to give birth. That rejection can compel the girl to marry. Especially if you are a woman and your rival’s daughter marry without getting pregnant and yours is pregnant, it will be a big shame. It will be an insult to you as a mother (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

One of the child brides mentioned that her pregnancy actually compelled her to marry the man responsible for the pregnancy but she did not receive rejection from her parents. She stated that it was a personal decision but she felt it would take off the shame and disgrace from the family and lessen the cost of an additional mouth.

Some key informants also mentioned that some parents marry their girls at an early age because it will save them from the shame of marrying them out after the harm has been done.

The responses indicated that child marriage was a complex issue in the three communities that was influenced by multiple factors. The factors were situated within the cultural, social, economic, and protection of family honour.

4.5 Research Question 2: What are the Lived Experiences of Child Brides in Selected Communities in the Upper East Region?

4.5.1 Lived Experiences of Child Brides

The child brides provided nostalgic accounts of their lives with their families prior to their marriages. Almost all the nine child brides came from homes that were poverty stricken, yet they lived a happy life. The girls' lives were likened to any girl in her early teen years. They visited friends, washed their own clothing and those of their younger siblings. Some swam in rivers and dams and played "Ampe" with friends and age mates in the same vicinity. They ran errands for their parents and relatives and made their own money by selling firewood, charcoal, and shea nuts. *"We go to the forest for firewood and shea nuts"* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021). Their parents also did things for them. For instance, when asked who sells the firewood and shea nut, a participant replied; *"my mother or myself. Any of us"* (CB,7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021).

When I inquired about what had changed? There was a sharp contrast in the lives of the child brides. The lived experiences of child brides were categorised into psychosocial and emotional, physical and sexual, health and education. Examining the overall well-being of child brides, a participant indicated that child brides go through a lot of experiences that could be described as difficult and not easy. She acknowledged that for some of them and their children, their general appearance is nothing to write home about. They also confided in her about the behaviour of their husbands. Some of the men beat the girls up and they were unwilling to live up to their responsibilities. She intimated:

Their experiences are not good at all. We have some of them who cannot clothe themselves and their babies well. They just put on anything at all no matter where they are going. They just do not have good clothing to wear. Yes, some talk about how their husbands get drunk and sometimes lack understanding and beat them. Some also talk about how they will not give them money and be chasing other girls. Some are not happy that their children go to school wearing improper uniforms and other kids are wearing uniforms. Even proper food to eat is a problem (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

Another key informant further illustrated the devastating lived experiences of child brides.

It is terrible and traumatising, very challenging. You can see that she is not mentally and psychologically prepared to handle such marital issues but suddenly finds herself in that context. If it happens that you are forced to perform roles you have not learned and you, do it with a heavy heart. Because there are certain tasks you do know that is beyond your physical strength so you could see the exertion of the physical strength and pressure on the physical strength, the person looks exhausted, depressed, and unkempt. And I see those things every day (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.5.1 Psychosocial and Emotional Experiences

Child brides' psychosocial and emotional experiences were explained through the psychological, emotional, and social well-being of the child brides. While others feel good and adjust very well, a good number of them think that their experiences were not pleasant.

4.5.1.1 Psychological Experiences

All nine child brides admitted to experiences of bullying, insults, humiliation, and being ignored by their spouses and some in-laws as well as the absence of their husbands in their lives. Some of the child brides lamented about the attitude and behaviour of their in-laws, especially mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. One of the child brides complained that it led to cooking differently since her mother-in-law had never appreciated her cooking. She intimated:

My mother-in-law knows very well that I do not have my own cooking utensils but she did not provide some for me when she told me to be cooking differently. I did not even have my own foodstuffs to cook. I went back to my mother who gave me a cooking pot. When this happened, I started doing all kinds of work so that I could make money and that is how I took care of myself and my child until today (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

The mistreatment did not only come from the mother-in-law but the sisters-in-law as well. According to some of the child brides, some of their sisters-in-law did not appreciate anything they did. They just could not please them. They even insulted and gossiped about them to their brothers who also insulted them. A child bride stated:

Do you know that when I wash bowls and my sister-in-law wants to use one, she will wash the bowl again? She claims that I do not know how to wash bowls. The most annoying thing is the lies she tells his brother about me and he uses that to insult me. I just know that she does not like me but what can I do? I have children and I have no job. I cannot abandon my children. I am just managing here.

(CB-5, Personal Communication, 15th July 2021).

Some also talked about the unavailability of their husbands at home and spending most of their time with their friends during the day and part of the night.

You see, some of them will go out in the morning and come back at night with nothing. What happens during the day they do not know and they do not ask. They will come drunk and wake you up to do one or two things and even insult you. All these hurts (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

The behaviour of the husbands of the child brides was confirmed by some of the key informants

...we live with them and we see how they treat the young girls. They do not want to do anything and want to live like kings. They spent their time with friends drinking and smoking anything that would make them high. Just a few are responsible. The girls are suffering too much (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

KII-4 disclosed that some of them leave the marriage after a year or two because it becomes unbearable for them. Sometimes some of the child brides get support from their mothers-in-law if the mother-in-law is good. He stated that: *“some are helped by their mothers-in-law when they are beaten, threatened or even what to eat”* (KII-4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021).

The psychological experiences from above indicated the difficulties child brides faced in asserting their rights, the lack of autonomy, and the struggle to adapt to marital responsibilities. These experiences could have long-lasting effects on their mental health, well-being, and overall development.

4.5.1.2 Social Experiences

Child brides described how they were physically restricted in terms of freedom of movement. Almost all of them talked about how they had the freedom to move about when they were with their parents. However, their lives took a sharp twist when restrictions were imposed on their movement. Findings in this study revealed that child brides were restricted to movement during the early years of marriage because they were likely to shun their responsibilities and engage in gossip.

I was returning from a drumming and dancing session when I was abducted. I enjoy drumming and dancing and since I came here, I have never gone for drumming and dancing. I am not allowed to go to the dam and wash my dirty clothing but to carry the water home and wash. This is because I will be gossiping and will not return on time to perform other house chores. Now it is getting better because I can visit the market and buy or sell things (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

Also, Child brides mentioned that they were restricted or not even allowed to receive their friends into their matrimonial homes. They were being suspected of gossiping with them or they would have a bad influence in their lives. One asserted:

You know, they are people I know before I came to know them. Now I am being told to cut links with them. Someone told me it is temporal but how long will I be able to endure this? I am not just happy at all. I am not! (CB-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

Participants narrated their experiences of being restricted from visiting their families, especially at the early stage of the marriage. This was not only experienced by the abducted brides but all. The child brides were restricted because they were married and had to start their own families. One child bride asserted:

Do you know that it was after six months into my marriage that I was given the opportunity to visit my family? It was like I was in prison. I did not know anyone in that family and I had no friends. I remember my mother visited me

twice before I was able to visit home. It was not easy at all for me (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021)

A Key Informant affirmed the above and explained that in the initial stage of the marriage, the girls do not have the luxury to move freely as they suspect that they may run away:

In the initial stage of the marriage, child brides are usually not allowed to move freely especially those that are abducted. But after giving birth they live a normal life. This is because their husbands think they will not run away again even if they do, they would have benefited too (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

Apart from the two child brides who willingly accepted the marriage proposals of their husbands, the rest of the child brides admitted to being stalked by relatives of their husbands. They were afraid the child brides might run away since they were coerced into the marriage. However, as indicated earlier, this was usually in the early stage of the marriage when their husbands could not afford to lose them at that early stage.

When I married, I did not know that people were watching every move I made. I took a bucket to go and fetch water and left the bucket at the well and wanted to escape but I was brought back. I actually attempted running away twice and was brought back and each time cautioned (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

The issue of lack of autonomy was of great concern to most of the child brides especially those who lived with their mothers-in-law. The mother-in-law directed and steered the affairs of the home. Most of them explained that this made them very handicapped. A child bride stated: *“She made decisions about what we eat, when I should go to bed, where I should go, and even who I should be friends with” (CB-9,*

Personal Communication, 19th July 2021). She stated further that she feels pressured to work sometimes when she does not even feel well.

The experiences of the child brides above are an indication of the negative social outcomes and challenges child brides go through due to early marriage. The experiences of powerlessness, and less or no autonomy reduced their decision-making power and meaningful contribution to her family.

4.5.1.3 Emotional Experiences

The findings in this study indicated that child brides experienced fear, sadness, and anxiety due to the behaviour of their husbands. Child brides explained that in the early stages of the marriage, they had difficulty sleeping at night. Some also talked about waking up at night and finding it difficult to sleep again. This feeling of sleeplessness persisted from unfamiliarity of the environment to worrying about basic needs. They explained that because of their inability to meet their basic needs, they kept tossing in their mats at night. One explained:

When I first got married, I had difficulty sleeping at night because I did not know anyone. You know I still have difficulty sleeping at night because I have a lot of things to think about. For instance, what would the next day be like? Would it be better or worse than yesterday? I know I think too much (CB-1, Personal Communication, 11th July 2021).

Also, some child brides talked about being easily irritated and angered because of the actions of their husbands. They find themselves transferring their anger to their children whom they know they are innocent. One child bride stated:

There was a day I asked for money to buy medicine for my sick baby who was almost a year old. This man did not reply and just walked out. When I turned to my child, she was also crying nonstop. I just shouted at the baby as if we

were quarrelling and that ignited the crying the more. In the end, I felt sorry for the baby (CB-3, Personal Communication, 13th July 2021).

Child brides indicated that they feel they do not have a say regarding decision-making in the marriage. Most of them lamented over the fact that they were not involved in any decision-making. They only take instructions from their husbands and cannot express their opinions in the marriage. They cannot express their desires, concerns, or needs in the marriage. In other instances, when they make requests for something their husbands do not even answer them. A participant intimated:

I am the talking type and I am sure you would have noticed that. Do you know that my husband talks to me only when he is in need of something? What kind of relationship is this? He told me one night that we would be going to sow groundnut the next day. Where the farm was, I did not know. Tell me is this fair?(FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

4.5.1.4 Physical and Sexual Experiences

The physical and sexual experiences examined any form of physical and sexual abuse or violence that child brides suffered and endured in their marriage. The key informants also narrated some physical and sexual abuses they saw or heard of child brides.

4.5.1.4.1 Physical Abuse

All nine child brides initially denied any physical abuse from their husbands or relatives of their husbands. However, in the focus group discussion and key informant interview, it was revealed that physical abuse occurs. The physical abuse took different forms as narrated by child brides. They were beaten, slapped, dragged on the ground, punched, physically restrained, and had things thrown at them. In a focus group discussion, one child bride explained how she was beaten by her husband and had her dress torn. She explained:

I guessed my sister-in-law told him something about a place he told me never to visit. He confronted me and when I denied visiting the place, I was beaten mercilessly and had my dress torn (CB-9, Personal Communication, 19th July 2021).

The beating of child brides was affirmed by a key informant who added that a request could attract beatings. He stated:

I went to ... to meet the community members. Two girls walked to me and pleaded with me to help them renew their health insurance. When I inquired to know if they were married because they had babies. They said yes and started talking about how they were beaten by their husbands because they needed money to renew their health insurance (KII-5, Personal Communication, 5th July 2021).

Another key informant also confirmed that child brides were beaten. She was asked the question: Have you heard of some of them being beaten? She responded:

Oh yes. But some of them will say that they have fallen down or something of the sort. The girl I just told you about, the husband beat her up and even tore her school uniform because she told the husband she wanted to go back to school (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

A Key Informant also indicated that child brides were beaten and coached not to mention their ordeal to a third party. He stated that even mature women who had lived in the marriage for long were beaten.

I think some are beaten and I can give you one example. A girl was beaten by her husband and she had a deep cut close to the eye. Someone took her to the hospital and when they asked her, she claimed she fell. This is because, they told her if she says her husband beat her up, the police will come and pick her husband. You know because they are young their strength is not a match with the men. And you know even mature women are beaten what about the girls? (KII-4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021)

A respondent mentioned additionally that though her husband has not beaten her, he had constantly threatened to beat her. She was asked: Does he threaten to beat you? She replied *“For that one, he says it”* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021). A child bride also said her mother-in-law had threatened to beat the son the day he laid hands on her. She said: *“My mother-in-law told me the day he would lay hands on me, she will personally beat him”* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

Some of the child brides confessed to being slapped not just by their husbands but also by their in-laws. One child bride mentioned: *“I was slapped by mother-in-law for looking straight into her face while she was talking”* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021). Another child bride also talked about how she is often physically restrained by her husband who claimed he does not want to beat her. *“My hands are held to my back firmly and it hurts. That is what he does to compel me to do what he wants”* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

4.5.1.4.2 Sexual Abuse

In this study, child brides admitted to sexual abuse however, they were not willing to talk about how they were sexually abused. A key informant who played a key role in rescuing a child bride in 2018 narrated how some of them were usually sexually violated. He stated:

When the girl refused sex after some time especially those abducted, women aid the man to have sex with the girl. The women would restrain the girl by holding her legs apart and others hold her hands (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.5.1.5 Health Experiences

The health experience was basically put into activeness of their health insurance card, complications during or after pregnancy, and use of contraceptives.

4.5.1.5.1 Activeness of Health Insurance Cards

The National Health Identification Card (NHIS) of a few of the child brides and their children were active. Some had just their children's cards active and others had their cards and their child's cards inactive. The NHIS card is what is used to have access to health care in Ghana. Those child brides whose cards or their children were inactive could not have access to health care. They resulted in the use of herbs to treat themselves and their children when they were sick. This is not because they want to but they have to. Some of the child brides renewed the cards themselves and the others had their husbands renewing their cards for them. This was when the question was asked: who renewed the card for you?

A Key Informant buttressed and reinforced the above experiences. She mentioned that:

There are some girls who cannot buy common paracetamol syrup for their babies when they are sick. In fact, their health insurance expired and they cannot even renew. They are always out there borrowing to survive. The health and survival of their babies is in the hands of God. A good number of them resort to boiling herbs (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

4.5.1.5.2 Contraceptive Use

All the child brides indicated that they had knowledge of the use of contraceptives when they started antenatal. However, they have not used or tried to talk to their husbands about using any contraceptives. This was because their husband would think they were promiscuous or they were afraid to make such a request. This

was when participants were asked the question: have you used any contraceptives or asked your husband to use one before? One replied “No.” When she was further asked why? She responded, “*I am afraid and shy to tell him*” (CB-4, Personal Communication, 14th July 2021). When another child bride was asked the same question: She replied “No.” Why? “*He will think I am a bad girl*” (CB-8, Personal Communication, 18th July 2021).

One child bride admitted to discussing the use of contraceptives with her husband and he vehemently refused. This was when she was asked: Have you talked to your husband about using any contraceptives? She said “Yes, but he refused. He does not agree for me to use anything and said he would not use anything” (CB-9, Personal Communication, 19th July 2021). She concluded, “*I am thinking about going to do it without telling him*” (CB-9, Personal Communication, 19th July 2021).

4.5.1.5.3 Complications During and after Pregnancy

Some participants also indicated that during pregnancy, they had some complications. She mentioned that she was given some advice to buy some medicine which she was able to buy. Accordingly, when she got home, she received coaching as to what to do. In another scenario, a respondent stated that she had an underweight baby.

Some of the child brides had some complications during pregnancy. Some of them recounted situations of anaemia, low birth weight, and malnutrition. One participant mentioned that she had “*low blood*” (CB-4, Personal Communication, 14th July 2021). Another stated: “*My blood was not enough*” (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021). When I asked what they did to increase the blood level. They were told to buy medicine but they could not afford it. However, at home, the child brides were helped to drink some herbs to increase their blood levels. One

said: *“I was told to mix different things and be drinking”* (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021). The child bride who had the underweighted baby was told to eat well and allow the baby to breastfeed at close intervals. She stated: *“I was told by the nurse to let the baby suck within close intervals so he could be well”* (CB-1, Personal Communication, 11th July 2021).

Also, a child bride aborted a pregnancy with a concoction and almost died. She narrated:

My baby was eight months old when I knew I was three months pregnant. I could not afford to be talked about in the community coupled with the shame of breastfeeding and being pregnant. A friend took me to a woman who directed me to make my own concoctions. When I drank the concoction, my last memory and consciousness was when I took my bath and was sweating profusely. The next moment I opened my eyes, I was in the clinic (CB-8, Personal Communication, 18th July 2021).

Child brides' health experiences were riddled with a high risk of complications, poor nutrition, and overall poor health due to inadequate access to health care.

4.5.1.6 Education Experiences

The respondents indicated their lived educational experiences as refusal to continue their education, shouldering all educational expenses, prioritising children over education, and assurance to help them learn a trade.

4.5.1.6.1 Refusal to Continue Education

All those who had an interest in returning to school after marriage were afraid that their husbands and families would not allow them to go back to school. They had this conviction and preferred to live with it than to make a request they knew would not be granted. A child bride indicated that when she married, she attended school until she became pregnant and dropped out of school. She was asked if her husband

would give her a chance to go back to school since she ended in the primary. She responded, *“I do not think he will give me a chance”* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021). Another respondent narrated that she was in Junior High School when she got married. She indicated her interest in returning to school but was afraid she would be denied the opportunity. This was when she was asked if she would like to go back to school? she replied: *“I was afraid of him because I did not know what he would say”* (CB-1, Personal Communication, 11th July 2021).

In a related situation, a child bride indicated that after she married, she wanted to return to school but her husband and parents objected to it. She said: *“Yes, I wanted to go back to school but I was told to learn a trade”* (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021). A key informant interview showed that child brides are not able to return to school after they become pregnant. He added that since parents usually had many children when a girl willingly or is forced into marriage, the opportunity for education is lost. He stated:

...she would want to go back to school but she does not have that chance again. And because we give birth to many children, when you miss your chance, another person takes it and you will not get it again (KII-5, Personal Communication, 5th July 2021).

Buttressing the points above, a key informant also painted the same gloomy picture of child brides' education. She was asked whether child brides return to school after marriage and childbirth. She stated:

I do not know of any. However, there is this girl from my house who was abducted I cannot remember the year. She was very intelligent and her aunt encouraged her to go back to school. She fought with her husband because he did not want her to go back to school. She is now in her father's house

attending school. She is the only one I know (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

4.5.1.6.2 Shouldering Educational Expenses

Most child brides who were bold enough to inform their husbands of their interest in returning to school were given two options: bear the educational expenses by themselves or be housewives. Some of the child brides intimated that if they could bore the educational expenses, they would not have married. One child bride stated: *“Living conditions are not good at home so I cannot go back to school. He is finding ways to refuse that responsibility”* (CB-8, Personal Communication, 18th July 2021). Another child bride indicated that she wanted to go back to school but did not tell her husband. She said: *“Because he would tell me to take care of everything”* (CB-3, Personal Communication, 13th July 2021). This was when she was asked why she did not tell her husband.

4.5.1.6.3 Assurance to Learn a Trade

The child brides indicated that when they first married, their husbands assured them to enroll them in learning a trade. They mentioned hairdressing, tailoring, and weaving as what they wanted to learn. Some child brides explained in a FGD that their husbands asked what they would want to learn since they would not go back to school. *“I told him I wanted to learn how to sew”* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021). Another said, *“hairdressing”* (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021). Only one out of the nine child brides were learning tailoring all others as they told me were “still waiting.” Almost all the child brides were told by their husbands that they would make them very useful and productive if they stayed with them. A year after marriage their husbands were either postponing or being evasive

when the topic of learning a trade was raised. In an FGD with the child brides, it was confirmed that when pregnancy sets in, the story changes entirely. One asserted that:

When I first married, there were a lot of assurances about learning a trade. He would say I will do this and that for you. But when I became pregnant and had my child, he said he could not remember saying that (FGD, Personal Communication, 20th July 2021).

4.5.1.6.4 Prioritising Children over Education

Most of the child brides prioritised their children's welfare over their own education. One child bride who had two children revealed that she wanted to quit the marriage and return to school but for the sake of the children, she stopped. She would rather spend those hours to earn money to help feed her children. When asked what she does to earn income? She said depending on the season *"I could be picking shea nuts, firewood or carrying concrete"* (CB-3, Personal Communication, 13th July 2021). Another child bride mentioned that after she was abducted, her aunt advised her to continue her education. She told her husband but he refused and even tore her uniform into pieces. She took her second child who was less than two years and came to the paternal home to continue her education.

The lived experiences of child brides were filled with various challenges and hardships. These experiences included a lack of decision-making power, maltreatment by husbands and in-laws, health risks, and lack of education.

4.6 Research Question 3: How do Child Brides Cope in Marriage in the Communities?

4.6.1 Coping Strategies

The participants indicated their coping strategies as acceptance of reality, trusting in God, working extra to earn income, emotional and material support from parents, and alcohol consumption.

4.6.1.1 Acceptance of Reality

Child brides explained that their survival in their marriages was because they accepted and respected the decisions and instructions of their husbands and in-laws. They had no say in any decision making and the acknowledgment of that fact and living by it helped them to cope. Questioning or putting forth a suggestion was tantamount to defiance of the authority of their husbands or in-laws. One child bride wanted to go back to school and her husband refused. She stated:

Failure to listen to the man meant that I had gone against his authority. Anything concerning my education would be my responsibility. I cannot afford to go back because of education and abandon my children. I know education is good and I will make sure my child attends school (CB-1, Personal Communication, 11th July 2021).

Similarly, another child bride mentioned that anytime she needed money to buy something she borrowed. She stated: *“I always borrow and pay later” or “I just keep waiting until he gets or I earned money”* (CB-3, Personal Communication, 13th July 2021). Many of them will have to accept their situation to keep surviving in the marriage.

This confirmed what was intimated earlier by the KII-1:

There are some who cannot buy common paracetamol syrup for their babies when they are sick. In fact, their health insurance expired and they cannot even renew it. They are always out there borrowing to survive. The health and survival of their babies is in the hands of God. A good number of them resort to boiling herbs (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

4.6.1.2 Material and Emotional Support

Child brides were assisted materially, financially, and emotionally by their parents, relatives, and friends. One child bride mentioned that anytime she needed money and her husband did not have it, she would go to her parents or other relatives. What do you do when you are angry or sad? She replied: *“Anytime my husband makes me angry or sad I usually go to my parent’s house. I stay for about two days and return”* (CB-2, Personal Communication, 12th July 2021). When your husband threatens you? She said: *“I will just be quiet and walk away”* (CB-2, Personal Communication, 12th July 2021). Another child bride stated that she shared her challenges with her mother who has encouraged her to stay in the marriage. She stated:

I was just 16 years old when I married because it was hard for my family. I feel it is harder here. At home, I was only supporting my mother but here I am made to follow instructions. I do not have a say in any decision. My mother’s encouragement kept me going (CB-1, Personal Communication, 11th July 2021).

A participant also mentioned that she shared her difficult moments with the sister who arranged her marriage. The sister had encouraged her and told her it was difficult everywhere. Another child bride also revealed that she received material support from the aunt who arranged for her marriage. She stated: *“I go to her to*

complain how my husband treats me and she advises me and sometimes gives me foodstuff to use for some days” (CB-8, Personal Communication, 18th July 2021).

4.6.1.3 Trusting in God

Trusting in God was one of the ways child brides coped in their marriages. This was because they had a deep conviction that the behaviours and attitudes of their husbands were not normal. Their ways of expressing their belief in God was not by going to church even though few actually went to church. Child brides prayed in their homes for God to intervene in their situation. When asked what she would do if she had no money to buy medicine for her baby. A child bride responded: *“I boil herbs for my child and pray for a miracle” (CB-5, Personal Communication, 15th July 2021).* She added:

I had often prayed to God to help me live with my husband despite all the nonsense he does. This man drinks and smokes but does not have money for his family. Do you think that behaviour is normal? (CB-4, Personal Communication, 14th July 2021).

One child bride also indicated that she goes to church to pray to God to intervene and change the behaviour of the husband. She intimated:

I even attend night prayers which I prefer to the day prayers. This is because during the day, people dress elegantly and I cannot dress like them (CB-6, Personal Communication, 16th July 2021).

4.6.1.4 Working Extra to Earn Income

Child brides revealed that they do all kinds of work to earn income to be able to meet their basic needs. They did all kinds of work depending on the season. In the dry season, child brides engaged in carrying concrete, burning charcoal, and cutting firewood. In the rainy season, they help people on their farms and pick shea nuts.

Many confessed they learned to do some of the work in their matrimonial homes. A child bride stated:

I have to discover ways of making money to sustain me and my children. My husband does not know how we clothed ourselves. I am at peace with myself now because I do not look up to him for anything. If he gives me, I will gladly receive but if he does not give no problem (CB-7, Personal Communication, 17th July 2021).

In the focus group discussion, almost all the participants admitted to the fact that they worked harder than when they were not married because of their extra responsibilities. When I inquired about those responsibilities, they mentioned payment of bills like medical bills and buying ingredients. Most of these things were done from the money they earned.

4.6.1.5 Alcohol Consumption

All the child brides denied using alcohol as a means to cope. However, some key informants mentioned that some of the child brides also take in excessive alcohol to cope with their situations at home. This was when I asked the question: do you know if the child brides also drink to cope with their problem? This was what one said:

Yes, some of them actually drink and get drunk. They learn this from other women as they mingle with them. When they start to go to funerals and other functions in the community that is when they learn to drink. You know what alcohol is like when you take it and you are able to do what you could not do then you go in for more. Those who drink end their marriages in no time (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

The responses indicated that although the child brides in the study communities were going through a lot of experiences that might be tinted unpleasant, they have built resilience in order to cope with their difficulties. Their ability to

develop a positive mindset, find an inner strength, and maintain hope for a better future.

4.7 Research Question 4: What are the Measures to Address Child Marriage in Selected Communities in the Upper East Region?

4.7.1 Measures to Address Child Marriage

The views were gathered from participants in the study on measures to address child marriage in their communities. This includes community sensitisation, mentorship, motivation, social intervention, collaborating to keep girls in school, awards, and creating bye-laws.

4.7.1.1 Community Sensitisation

Participants in the study proposed community sensitisation as a means to address the issue of child marriage. The participants mandated the traditional leaders to spearhead the sensitisation since they were the most revered people in the community. They could help create awareness of the harmful traditions that perpetuate the practice of child marriage and its negative consequences while promoting gender equality and women empowerment. A participant disclosed:

I suggest sensitisation of communities on the need to understand and accept that the practice of child marriage is not helpful. When our chiefs should mount a platform to talk about this, I know many would listen and support in the fight. I think they should challenge the norms that promote the practice (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021)

Another participant added:

I think the chiefs should also advocate for girl's education not just at the primary school level but at the JHS and SHS. When they complete SHS they will have matured enough to make their own decisions (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021)

4.7.1.2 Enactment and Enforcement of Bye-Laws

The enactment of bye-laws to address the practice of child marriage was also mentioned by both key informants and the child bride. Some of the key informants were not happy with happenings in their communities. A key informant stated that most of the girls were usually found in the community streets especially on the market days even after 7:00 pm. The Key Informant indicated:

... I went one day and asked the ... Chief is it possible to make a bye-law regarding students found at 7:00 pm on the street? The issue should be discussed at fora and certain bye-laws put in place to check some of these things (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

Another Key Informant was of the view that enforcement of the bye-laws should also be of concern to community members. Where the laws are enacted but not enforced, would be likened to the laws on child marriage now which are not being enforced.

You know currently Ghana has laws on child marriage. Assuming we are only enforcing the law on the right age at marriage which is 18 years right? Would we be talking about child marriage today? My point is that we should have people in the community who would help to enforce the bye-laws if not the bye-laws will be a fiasco. (KII-2, Personal Communication, 2nd July 2021).

4.7.1.3 Collaboration

Participants called for a collaborative effort by bringing together various stakeholders such as parents, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), government agencies, religious and community leaders. The collaboration should aim at education and awareness, empowerment of girls, policy advocacy, and provision of support services. A participant intimated:

There should be collaboration with all groups and individuals interested in child development in addressing the practice. If all institutions and

organisations interested in child development collaborated, like law enforcement agencies, child rights activists, NCCE, social welfare, NGOs, and other agencies that are into such advocacy to support with the necessary logistics, this canker, if not eradicated, will be reduced to the barest minimum (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.7.4 Social Intervention

Participants were of the view that social interventions should be given to families that find it difficult to provide for girls. Teachers could help in identifying girls who are very vulnerable and at risk of child marriage and the necessary resources to be provided for them. A Key Informant disclosed:

You know what CAMFED does in some schools? CAMFED identifies needy girls at the basic level and provides them with educational and sanitary items with the help of the teachers. Assuming each school gets such an intervention. Girls at risk of dropping out of school will remain in school and it could go a long way to curb early marriage (KII-5, Personal Communication, 5th July 2021).

A participant suggested that community-based education programmes, community dialogue, peer support groups, and social interventions help address the practice of child marriage. A key informant intimated:

Social intervention could be an effective tool to address child marriage. When you mention social intervention people usually think of resources like sharing items with people. However, as a community, we could tailor our own interventions focusing on challenging societal attitudes, beliefs, and norms that contribute to the practice of child marriage (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.7.1.5 Mentorship and Support for Married Girls

Some participants were of the view that girls who were at risk of marrying early could be mentored by responsible adults. This could help them to receive

guidance and other resources to help them make informed decisions. Also, the girls would build resilience and have a voice in making decisions about their lives. A participant stated:

Mentorship could provide encouragement, advice, skills, and knowledge that could help empower the girl child. Also, Mentorship could help the girls build self-confidence to withstand societal pressure. The girls would be able to watch out for each other and be a voice for other girls (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

A key informant acknowledged the presence of poverty in the community but indicated that others succeeded. She disclosed:

There are women who came from poor homes but made it in life. Those women could help the girls navigate their lives to become better individuals in the future (KII-1, Personal Communication, 1st July 2021).

Another key informant explained that there were girls who with the help of authorities or their own will-power escaped or ran away from early marriage. Mentorship could help build resilience and confidence in such individuals to become the best version of themselves. Some key informants were of the opinion that married girls still need to be empowered. There should be systems in place to facilitate and assist child brides who still want to return to school or develop skills to have access to resources. A participant intimated:

The girls need to be empowered in any way that they can be self-reliant. Some want to go back to school but they cannot because they do not have the resource or their husbands would not agree. Is there a way out? Do you remember the Shepherd school concept? A similar thing could be done for the girls. Skills training could be given to those who are not interested in going back to school. Things like this would help these girls (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.7.1.6 Keeping Girls in School

Most of the participants acknowledged that girls who were in school were safer than their counterparts at home, especially after the incident of the abducted school girl in one of the communities in 2018.

I think parents should ensure that their children are in school since of late children who are in school are not marrying like those not in school. Since the incident in 2018 regarding that school girl who was abducted, men are afraid to marry girls in school except the girl is interested in marrying (CB-4, Personal Communication, 14th July 2021).

A participant also stated that keeping girls in school helps the girls acquire skills and knowledge that would empower them to make informed decisions.

When you manage to keep girls in school, it will help postpone the age of marriage as she is seen as a school-girl. It will also help her acquire valuable skills which will last a life-time. Education empowers the girl and builds her self-confidence and she is able to express herself in all circumstances (KII-2, Personal Communication, 2nd July 2021).

4.7.1.7 Guidance and Counselling

Some participants believe guidance and counselling could help girls become assertive, furnish them with the right information especially information on their rights, and help them build self-esteem. A key informant was of the opinion that:

Guidance and counselling could help in curbing the practice of child marriage since most victims are usually in school or dropped out of school. School counsellors could provide girls with information about their rights and how to defend their rights if they were infringed upon. Unfortunately, there are no trained school counsellors in basic schools (KII-4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021).

Another participant was of the view that if there were trained counsellors in the schools the students would be assertive.

I tell you if we have trained counsellors in our schools the students would watch out for each other. They would report when one is married out because they are with each other in the community. Even now they report but that is if a teacher notices the absence of a girl and asks. So, I think the counsellors could help do the magic for us (KII-2, Personal Communication, 2nd July 2021).

The expression of a child bride who was abducted when she was in JHS truly confirmed the lack of school counsellors at the basic level. The question was, did you have a school counsellor? Yielded the response “*I don’t know*” (CB-6, Personal Communication, 16th July 2021). The question was then explained: Was there someone in your school who could help students who had problems? “*It was the headmaster*” (CB-6, Personal Communication, 16th July 2021).

4.7.1.8 Marriage Register and Awards

There was also a suggestion for customary marriages to be registered in the communities. This would help track the age of marriage in the various communities. However, for this to happen, the traditional leaders must be empowered to be more committed to the task. A participant disclosed:

I propose marriage registers in each section of the community by the sub-chief to record marriages as is done in the law court or churches to help monitor age at marriage. The chiefs and traditional authorities should be trained and sensitised to register marriages in their communities. This would help record or have statistics on marriage in the community and to know if child marriage persists (KII-4, Personal Communication, 4th July 2021).

Some key informants also suggested the institution of an award scheme for communities that record low or no incidents of child marriage, especially after an

intervention. The award should further help in the development of the community but not individuals. Therefore, participants further suggested the provision of social amenities as the award. A participant explained:

Communities that do not record or record low incidences of child marriage should be provided with some social amenities that are lacking in that section to motivate them. This could be done by organisations that are into fighting to prevent child marriage (KII-3, Personal Communication, 3rd July 2021).

4.8 Summary

The chapter unfolded the background of child brides in the study. From the findings, it was obvious that child marriage was still prevalent in the three communities since all nine child brides married before the age of 18 years. The factors contributing to child marriage illustrated the complexity of the practice as it was rooted in the cultural, social, and economic lifestyle of the people and a violation of it attracted no sanction. This therefore makes it difficult for parents and guardians to rescue their girls. The lived experiences as recounted by the child brides and confirmed by key informants indicated unpleasant experiences. This to some extent was seen as normal and others equally saw it as liberation from family hardships and having autonomy in domestic decision making. Some of the measures proposed to address the practice included community sensitisation, counselling, and registration of customary marriage. The next Chapter discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 Overview

This chapter identifies, interprets, and discusses significant and novel findings from the study. The major findings in this study will be highlighted.

5.1 Research question 1: What Factors Contribute to Child Marriage in Selected Communities in the Upper East Region?

5.1.1 Factors Contributing to Child Marriage

In this study, the aim was to gather views from participants on factors contributing to child marriage in their communities. The views gathered were categorised into cultural and religious, social and economic.

Findings from the study revealed that some cultural practices among the Bulsas promoted the practice of child marriage. Practices such as *miisa bob ka* (tie a rope) and *puk nya ti ka* (reveal or announce a pregnancy) to some extent gave autonomy to an aunt or relative who had undergone the rituals for a child to be born to act as a parent or a God-parent. The aunt then takes the child and integrates her into her household as *doglie* (maid-servant). In most instances, they appeared to have more rights over the child than the biological parent. Where the girl stayed with the aunt, she had every right to arrange for a good husband for the girl as and when she deemed appropriate to do so. She could then inform the girl's parents of her intention.

The findings above corroborated those of Meir (1999). According to Meir, two ritual practices established a female father a claim of the brother's children. One is *logi naytika* which reveals a pregnancy and *miisa boka* which is done when stillbirths or miscarriages are experienced. A *doglie* was usually regarded as a 'little wife' and as soon as she took up residence in the household of her aunt, it was very difficult to

determine when exactly her marriage to one particular man actually began. Once again it is her aunt who will decide when the girl is mature enough to have sexual intercourse with her husband.

It is enshrined in the Balsa culture that, a woman could be married through abduction and the marriage formalised later. It was evident in the findings that abduction was used in marrying adults and was prevalent among young vulnerable girls. The abduction of these girls could be described in a *Rambo style*. Where a group of men who had the intention to abduct a girl mobilised themselves and carried the young girl away. What was shocking in all these incidences was the fact that parents who should rescue their girls from these men failed to do so because the act would taint their relationship. In some instances, some brides do not know the groom but would have to accept and live in such marriages as was the case of one of the brides. This finding was in tandem with Mafhala (2015). Mafhala studies suggested that, culturally in South Africa abduction was an acceptable way of marrying girls and the girls were usually well received with kindness and respect.

The views expressed by both key informants and child brides indicated that marrying girls out was viewed as easing a burden in the family. Some of the child brides saw themselves as a burden in the family since they came from polygamous homes and witnessed the struggles to make ends meet. Thus, marrying very early eased the economic burden on the family. Confirming the findings, Mathur and Malhotra (2003) stated that parents encouraged marrying out their daughters while they were still children in the hope that the marriage would benefit them economically and socially, while also relieving financial burdens on the family. Bride prices in most parts of the North of the country consist of huge amounts of money to the sum of ₵1,500= £330 and gifts for 3-4 cows to the family of the bride (Dery, &

Diedong, 2014). However, the study departed with the payment of bride prices which brought economic gains as among the Bulsas brides' price was nothing to write home about. Rather parents and relatives receive support during farming season from in-laws when they are called upon. In instances where the family is better off than the girl's family, they will receive some food once in a while.

Some of the girls also willingly married because it was a way of liberating themselves from the economic hardship at home. The above buttressed the finding of Stark (2017) who revealed that in Tanzania many girls from poor families wish to marry early with a dream of a better life with a husband who could give them more than their parents. Girls were said to believe that maybe the life in their husband's house would be different.

In the African and Asian cultures, child marriage is also perceived within the context of protecting territorial integrity and strengthening family ties (UNIFPA, 2006). The above reflected the true picture in this study. Participants revealed that family ties held parents back from rescuing their daughters from child marriage. In the situation of some girls, their parents refused to rescue them since it would jeopardise the ties between the families. It was also evident that the respect and prestige received in society influenced some of these girls to marry. The practice was not frowned upon in society and as a matter of fact, girls under the age of 18 years who married and settled down were recognised and respected than girls above that age who were not married.

Feminist theory emphasise the power imbalances, patriarchal structures, and gender inequalities that perpetuate child marriage. The findings on the factors contributing to child marriage in this study as revealed by both the child brides and the key informants are linked to cultural practices, social and economic factors. The

findings highlighted how cultural norms and social expectations often prioritised men's needs and desires over women's well-being which further made them economically dependent. The personal stories and narratives that surrounded child marriage were made explicit through cultural beliefs, traditions, and social norms. These actually shaped individual understanding of child marriage.

5.2 Research Question 2: What are the Lived Experiences of Child Brides in Selected Communities in the Upper East Region?

5.2.1 Lived Experiences

The lived experiences of the child brides have been categories into psychosocial and emotional, physical and sexual, health and education.

Findings from the study indicated that the psychological, social, and emotional experiences were viewed as both bearable and normal and unbearable and difficult to cope with. Few of the child brides were influenced to think that all the experiences they were going through were not different from adult marriages. They accepted and viewed their initial and subsequent experiences as normal adding that it actually helped them keep and sustain their marriages. Narrative therapy recognises the power dynamics inherent in storytelling. It acknowledges that dominant cultural narratives could reinforce oppressive structures and perpetuate harm (White, 2010). However, a good number of the child brides said their lived experiences were unbearable for them. Some studies have indicated that friends and family are good support networks for the well-being of women in rural areas especially in countering isolation (Taylor et al., 1997). This was not the case for the child brides as many lamented over the restrictions imposed on them. They intimated that it was unfair to cut off relationships with people they had built over a long period of time.

A key informant indicated that most of the child brides were often stalked because they thought they might run away most especially those abducted. This was actually confirmed by two abducted brides who attempted to run away. Those who attempted to run away were reprimanded for that act and cautioned seriously to desist from it. Child brides expressed how different it was for them to associate with their peers who were still in school. They expressed how inferior they appeared before them. Some also thought that the workload was too much and complained of instances where ill health was not even an excuse not to work. Some also indicated that they were not welcomed as their in-laws (mother and sisters-in-law) were poisoned making things difficult for them. The above-lived experiences of the child brides corroborated with the studies of Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi (2003). They noted that the emotional impact that child marriage has on women is too extensive to gauge and some were oppressed in their marriages. Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, further revealed that the girls were exposed to immense pressure to become women at a time when they were not prepared for these roles.

In the three study communities, the participants were not blunt with their physical and sexual experiences. Once married, girls are likely to feel, and in many cases are, powerless to refuse sex. Women aged 15-24 also go through various forms of sexual violence from their partners such as being physically forced to have sexual intercourse or perform sexual acts they did not want to (UNFPA, 2012). Similarly, child brides in this study admitted to being forced to have sex. They were not ready to share beyond being forced to have sex. However, key informants disclosed that for girls who were usually abducted, women helped the husband to have sex with them if they had continuously resisted sex for some time. This would not only bring physical harm to the victim but psychological trauma. The silence with which the victims

endure forced sex allowed the chain of perpetrators to go free. It is worth noting that most child marriages that occurred in the study area were between females and males within the same age brackets. This could be attributed to the fact that young boys and girls were allowed to marry as and when they wished. However, there were rare cases of older men marrying young girls.

Physically, all respondents suggested they did not receive any beatings but were often threatened of being beaten. This is in line with (UNFPA,2012) when it stated that there are instances where the partners of women (15-24 years) threatened them. However, contrary to the above, in both the KIIs and FGD, it was revealed that child brides are beaten by their husbands for making requests to their husbands. If their husbands cannot provide, they beat their brides. This act of violence is not talked about and cannot be mentioned anywhere since they have been schooled to see it as normal and part of marriage life. This finding corroborated that of Hodgkinson (2016) where girls who married young were consistently likely to experience more violence, both verbal and physical, from their husbands than girls who married later. Participants also suffered physical abuse from their in-laws: sister-in-laws and mother-in-laws. This is consistent with the views expressed by (Dagdelen 2011; Hodgkinson 2016). They stated that violence experienced was partly from in-laws especially when the girl does not live up to their expectations

Bayisenge (2011) argued that child brides are likely to find it difficult to insist on condom use by their husbands, who commonly are older and more sexually experienced, making the girls especially vulnerable to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The findings are compatible with Bayisenge as child brides admitted to being afraid to insist or ask their partners to use condoms or other contraceptives. The few who had the courage were disappointed as their husbands did

not agree with them. The health insurance card which is used in the country to access health care was inactive among some child brides which they attributed to a lack of money to renew their cards. A few have both their cards and their children's active while others have their children's cards active and yet others have both theirs and that of their children's cards inactive. This has made access to health care difficult for both child brides and their children. Many have resorted to God's intervention when they or their children are sick. Also, child brides learned to use different herbs to treat different sicknesses and illnesses not because they wanted to but because they had to. The lack of money to seek medical care had pushed them to resort to herbal medicines. This to a greater extent helped them to treat themselves and their children.

Raj et al. (2012) point to the fact that it is the poor and least educated girls who are most vulnerable to early marriage. The above is true about this study. Findings revealed that all the child brides came from very poor family backgrounds and had non-literate parents. Many of them attested to the fact that their education was truncated because their parents could not provide for them to be in school or continue after JHS. This parent who was unlettered and probably lived with other parents whose wards went to school but gained nothing would find it hard to fathom that education would at least delay the child bride's marriage. Thus, poverty and parents who were non-literate were those whose children were susceptible to child marriage in the study area. Raj et al. (2012) pointed to the same fact that it was the poor and least educated girls who were most vulnerable to early marriage. Two brides who willingly married confessed that if they had the option to continue their education, they would have embraced it. It was also revealed in this study that following the incident of the abduction of the school girl by the chief's son in 2018 and the attention it received, school girls were shielded from early marriage in that

community. The school is now a safe haven for girls in that community as well as the neighbouring communities.

The study discovered that few of the child brides were allowed to continue their education after the marriage but stopped when they realised, they were pregnant. Yet, when others wanted to continue with their education, they received some sort of opposition from their husbands. A child bride fought with her husband and had her school uniform torn to raise the issue of going back to school. Key informants also disclosed that some girl's education was truncated when their parents realised, they were pregnant. They dispatched them to men responsible for the pregnancy knowing well that the girls would not be put in school after giving birth. Some parents who were interested in their children's education would not give them out in marriage when they were pregnant.

5.3 Research Question 3: How do Child Brides Cope in Marriage in the Communities?

5.3.1 Coping Strategies

Sacchi (2000) defines coping as behaviour and thoughts employed by the individual to manage stressful situations. Accepting reality, relying on parents and other relatives for both financial and emotional support, trusting God, working extra to earn income, or forgetting experiences were the copying strategies adopted by child brides. In this study, coping strategies are associated with how child brides are surviving in their marriages amidst the immaturity and challenges they are being confronted with. Accepting reality was perceived by child brides to mean that they either accepted what they were told by their husbands or denied the reality they were being confronted with. They learned all this in the marriage because refusing what their husbands told them was tantamount to challenging their authority. Their ability

to deny the truth of what they experienced helped them escape reality and remain in the marriage. A study by Rashid (2006) revealed that many young married women tolerate their husband's behaviour and remain married because society accepts men who even marry ten times but despises women who marry even twice.

They were always receiving both financial and emotional support from their relatives and their friends and in-laws. This helped cushion them for some time. Their parents encouraged them to remain in the marriage for every marriage has its challenges. Also, to the child brides this was an anchor for them. Child brides admitted that if not they learned how to share what they experienced in their marriages, they would have thought that their experiences were different. The 2001 UNICEF report explained that most girls who were unhappy in an imposed marriage are very isolated. They have nobody to talk to as they are surrounded by people who endorse their situation. This meant she had to remain in her situation as long as it took.

Participants also mentioned the fact that they actually trusted God and committed everything in his hands. While they worked in the physical, the spiritual realm needs to be attended to. Despite not all admitting to going to a place of worship, they believed in the God almighty who could make their situation better. Some of the child brides believed that some of their husbands had money and failed to support them. To them, it was not normal thus they had to seek God to intervene on their behalf. A good number of them admitted to working extra than before just to provide for their needs. It was revealed that relying on the man meant starvation. The experiences challenged them to find ways of making money to provide for their daily needs.

5.4 Research Question 4: What are the Measures to Address Child Marriage in Selected Communities in the Upper East Region?

5.4.1 Measures to Address Child Marriage

Malhotra, et al. (2011) pointed to the fact that girls rarely have the power to make decisions regarding if, when, or whom to marry. Thus, they suggested parental education and community mobilisation in an attempt to change social norms and forge a more supportive, less punitive environment for girls and families who were willing and ready to change the custom of early marriage. This study concurred with the study above as some child brides indicated that their consent was never sought in the process of the marriage apart from the two brides who willingly agreed to marry as children. In other words, they have no decision-making power in their own marriage.

Therefore, to help address the practice of child marriage, participants suggested there should be sensitisation of community members on the practice to create awareness of the harm it brings to society and that punitive measures could be muted out on perpetrators. All participants acknowledged the role of traditional leaders in the sensitisation of the people as they are the most revered individuals in the community. Ahonsi et al. (2019) study suggested the need for community-based laws and policies that should be established specifically by the chiefs in communities and elders, which they believe, will help curb child marriage. The above findings are apparent in this study as some participants explained the need for bye-laws in the community and people to enforce the bye-laws. Accordingly, most of the girls were always wandering about especially on market days which exposed them to their abductors. The bye-laws when enacted and enforced would regulate their going and coming in, especially at night.

Due to the incident of the abduction of the BECE candidate in 2018, school girls were safe from early marriage in that community as well as the neighbouring communities. This finding is similar to Malhotra et al. (2011) and Ahonsi et al. (2019), supported by the fact that simply being in school helps a girl to be seen as a child, and thus not marriageable. Stark (2017) is of the opinion that greater efforts need to be made to alleviate the hidden costs within the primary school system and the high costs of secondary education for the majority of poor students to make it that far. In this study, two brides abandoned their education and opted for marriage because of the cost of education.

Feminist theory explains and suggests directions for change in social and environmental factors that create or contribute to problems experienced by women. It further explains and proposes interventions for women's intrapersonal and interpersonal concerns as well as provides a perspective for evaluating the social and environmental experiences of groups and individuals (Beauvoir, n.d). Participants suggested some social interventions must be put in place to ensure girls' retention in school, especially among the poor. The school teachers could help identify these poor students for these interventions to be given to them. While acknowledging poverty as one of the causes of the practice of child marriage a participant was of the view that others have become successful even in the midst of poverty. Thus, suggesting mentorship and role modelling to help curb the practice in the community.

Guidance and counselling were also seen as a way of curbing the practice, especially in schools. All nine child brides attempted schooling before they got married. Thus, the school environment was seen as a safe haven for these girls to confide in someone and get the needed psychosocial help. Therefore, the school should make counsellors available and give the needed help to support these girls.

Just as marriages were registered in churches and the law courts, the traditional authorities could also be trained to register marriages in their traditional area. This will check the age of marriage and help curb the practice.

5.5 Summary

This Chapter discussed the study's findings with reference to the review of related literature. The next section presents the major findings, conclusions and recommendations for future studies.



CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview

This Chapter summarise the study's findings by offering a summary of significant findings, conclusions, recommendations, counselling implications, and future research directions. It gives straightforward answers to the research questions by extracting pertinent data from the outcomes given on each question. Because this last Chapter provides a summary of the outcomes of the main and secondary data sources, there are no additional references to items or information that have already been recognised in the text. The following subsections provide summaries of the various thematic concerns.

6.2 Summary of Findings

The study's findings of the in-depth interviews, KIIs, and focus groups reveal that child marriage occurs in the Bulsa North and South Districts ((Wiaga, Siniesi, and Dogninga) of Ghana's Upper East Region. The respondents for the in-depth interviews, which were the major focus of this study, all married before their 18th birthday, implying that they were child brides at the time of their marriage. The findings were summarised using the research questions below.

6.2.1 Research Question 1

1. Child marriage in three communities in the region's two districts revealed that the variables influencing child marriage were cultural, social, economic, and family honour preservation.
2. The participants believe the practise of *miisa bob ka* (tying a rope) and *puuk nya ti ka* (announcing a pregnancy) led to *doglieta* pressuring

innocent girls into early marriage. Abduction, which was traditionally accepted in adult marriages, was also employed in the marriage of young girls, where the marriage was legalised after the abduction. Arranged marriages were also accepted, and participants were victims of all of these practises.

3. Socially, it was found that children were handed out as a result of the compassion of others. Giving females out of compassion, on the other hand, has been dramatically curtailed. Also, some participants believe that peer pressure affected child marriage. Others, however, admitted that the strengthening of familial bonds supported the practise of child marriage.
4. The study showed that poverty drove the majority of parents to support the practise of child marriage. Girls from low-income families believed that marriage was the greatest option because their parents could not care for them. Furthermore, guys who have invested in a female in some way would not want to be cheated on by other men while simultaneously abducting the lady.
5. For the sake of family honour, parents who are disappointed in their daughters because they became pregnant send them to the guy responsible for the pregnancy. This was due to their view of the conduct as a dishonour to the family.

6.2. 2 Research Question 2

1. The child brides described their marital experiences in the three villages studied: Dogninga, Siniesi, and Wiaga. The child brides' lived

experiences were classified as psychological and emotional, physical, sexual, health and education.

2. Psychosocially and emotionally, the girl brides stated that some of them were not permitted to see their parents due to taboos in their husbands' homes. Outsiders were forbidden from socialising with people outside their husbands' families for fear of exposing the husband's family problems to outsiders. Some were barred from receiving companions in their married homes, while others were constantly stalked because their spouses feared they would be courted by other men. Both brides and key sources acknowledged that the constraints were in the early stages of the marriage and may endure for a few years. This was because the husbands were frequently apprehensive and worried that the brides would flee or, as previously said, be courted by other men. The friction between their in-laws caused them psychological distress. Other child brides expressed gratitude to their mothers-in-law for their love, protection, and encouragement.
3. Child brides were brutalised physically and sexually, but they were taught and trained not to reveal their suffering, even if they visited the hospital or school, lest their husbands face legal consequences.
4. In terms of their health, their spouses disagree with their utilising contraception. Some of the responders had health issues throughout their pregnancies, such as low blood levels and underweight newborns. Because their NHIS cards were inactive, some had trouble receiving health care.

5. Except for two girl brides who finished JHS, the rest of the child brides dropped out of school either before marrying or when they became pregnant after the marriage. Those who attempted to return to school after giving birth were met with severe opposition from their husbands. Some of their husbands preferred that their wives learn a trade, which just one had begun at the time of this study.

6.2.3 Research Question 3

1. Brides coped with their experiences by following their husbands' hobbies, working hard, and seeking assistance from friends or family.
2. When they are distressed, some travel to visit their parents before returning to their spouses.

6.2.4 Research Question 4

1. Traditional leaders and other groups interested in tackling the practise are sensitising communities. All interviewees recognised the significance of traditional leaders in raising awareness or enacting by-laws to combat the practise of child marriage.
2. They believed that groups with a low or no incidence of child marriage could be encouraged to do so by providing some social amenities that were lacking in the community and empowering traditional authorities to establish marriage registers to record weddings.

6.3 Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn as an upshot of the study's findings.

6.3.1 Research Question 1

1. Child marriage was fostered in the selected Balsa territories by cultural beliefs, community attitudes, increasing economic realities, and the safeguarding of family dignity.
2. Balsa cultural practises encouraged families to participate in child marriage in the selected Balsa enclaves.
3. Societies view child marriage as a barter deal and hence do not frown on it, which explains the growth in the selected Balsa communities.
4. Families' economic circumstances compelled them to engage in child marriage in order to improve their living situations.
5. In the Balsa culture, the protection of family honour is claimed to justify the practise of underage marriage.

6.3.2 Research Question 2

1. In their marriages, brides go through emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, health, and educational experiences.
2. Child brides are frequently traumatised as a result of mistreatment in their marriages.
3. In such marriages, they are denied their fundamental right to freedom, association, and education. Due to a lack of education, child brides are unable to acquire the information and skills required for personal development.

4. The experiences have a detrimental influence on the lives of child brides because they face greater health risks and restricted access to health treatment.
5. They also endured psychological and emotional trauma as a result of the relationships they were forced into, as well as physical and sexual abuse.

6.3.3 Research Question 3

1. Bride's cope with their experiences by seeking counsel and assistance from trusted persons like friends and family members.
2. The brides discovered their own way to economically empower themselves by working hard and undertaking a variety of jobs to support their families.

6.3.4 Research Question 4

1. Addressing child marriage necessitates a multifaceted strategy that includes community sensitisation, bye-law enactment, female child empowerment, the employment of role models, and registration of traditional weddings in the three selected communities.
2. Awarding and inspiring communities in the Balsa territory that do not practise child marriage in order to inspire other groups.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and with conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made:

6.4.1 Research Question 1

1. During Parent Interactions and School Management Committee meetings, headteachers should educate parents in the targeted communities about the consequences of child marriage on the girl child.
2. Headteachers in the selected communities should educate community members about some of the antiquated cultural ideas and practises including child brides in the communities during cultural activities.
3. Teachers and headteachers in the selected communities should educate parents that the female child is not a commodity to be traded for compassion or to build family relations.
4. The girl child is not a commodity to be traded for money or to improve the family's economic problems. As a result, headteachers should collaborate with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to educate parents in order to discourage them from engaging in such an unhealthy and unproductive uneconomical practise.
5. Through the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), headteachers and teachers in the designated localities should educate parents on their obligations and responsibilities. Also, parents should be urged to be prepared to fulfil their parenting responsibilities in order to avoid harming their girl child through early marriages.

6.4.2 Research Question 2

1. Parents should be made aware of the difficulties that child brides face in their marriages in order to dissuade them from indulging in such practises. This may be accomplished by involving important child protection and human rights groups, such as Action Aid Ghana, Plan Ghana International, and Right to Play, in the educational process.
2. Men who abuse child brides should be reported by girls and opinion leaders in specific communities and subjected to the full force of the law. This will assist in limiting the number of child brides in Bursa land.
3. Teachers and opinion leaders in the targeted areas should report human rights violators to CHRAJ so that they can be dealt with in accordance with the law.
4. Teachers, in partnership with health experts in the selected areas, should arrange regular health discussions and screenings for students, community members, and victims of child marriages to share their lived experiences and dissuade others from becoming child brides.
5. The painful lived experiences of child brides highlight the need for teachers to organise girls' clubs and NCCE groups in schools to safeguard and empower girls.

6.4.3 Research Question 3

1. Teachers in the selected communities should organise talks for students using the Child brides as facilitators and presenters to share their lived experiences. This will empower and discourage colleague girls from becoming preys.
2. Teachers in the selected communities should involve the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) to force husbands of child brides to

provide skill training jobs for their brides. This will help make child brides economically independent.

6.4.4 Research Question 4

1. Teachers should work with opinion leaders and all key stakeholders in the designated communities to develop by-laws that would eliminate this scourge in the Balsa land.
2. Teachers, in collaboration with appropriate non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and opinion leaders in the selected areas, inspire and reward meritorious communities for preventing child brides in their jurisdictions.

6.5 Guidance and Counselling Implications

1. The study's findings showed that all the child brides except the two who completed JHS were either dropouts or still in school when they were made wives. At the most basic school level, school counsellors should see every girl child as vulnerable and at risk of marrying. This will assist them in putting in place measures to assist the girls in reporting the practise, which is widely seen as normal.
2. Child brides who are in unpleasant marriages or who leave the marriage require psychological care, especially in the early phases when they have adjustment issues and wish to go. Guidance and counselling services may be critical for giving them.
3. Guidance and counselling services might be critical in providing a secure environment for people to express their thoughts, analyse their experiences, and develop coping mechanisms.
4. The findings highlighted the need for community-based intervention. Guidance and counselling specialists should work with the parent-teacher

association, school administration committee, and other educational stakeholders to increase awareness about the negative effects of child marriage.

5. The study emphasised the necessity of reproductive health education for school-age children, particularly females. The child brides lacked knowledge about their reproductive health, making them vulnerable to early pregnancy and difficulties. To empower females with information, guidance, and counselling might include age-appropriate and culturally relevant sex education.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Research

More studies should be conducted to solve the following issues:

1. The culture of silence among underage brides regarding their marriage mistreatment. This is because, during the study, the majority of the child brides refused to relate their experiences with abuse, particularly physical and sexual assault.
2. The long-term effects of child marriage on people, families, and communities, as well as the social, economic, and mental health ramifications for both boys and girls who married as youngsters. The findings of the study showed that child brides returned to their impoverished families for support.

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APPENDIX I

Informed Consent form for Key Informants

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

**TOPIC: EXPERIENCES OF “CHILD BRIDES” IN SELECTED BULSA
COMMUNITIES OF UPPER EAST REGION, GHANA**

I am Pauline Azenab, a second-year MPhil student at University of Education, Winneba. I am conducting a study on the aforementioned subject.

This study will require you to participate in an interview that will last around 45 minutes. You are encouraged to participate in this study because I believe that your experience as a community opinion leader may greatly contribute to understanding and acquiring information on how early marriage might affect a girl's life, particularly in your community. I will ask you to discuss what you observe and what you know about child brides in your town. If you do not want to answer any of the questions during the interview, just let me know, and I will move on.

The chat and interview will take place in private from July 1 to July 31, 2021. This study will not include your name. The information will be recorded and kept private. There will be no direct reward to you, but your involvement will most likely aid in learning more about the lives of young married ladies. The findings of this study will be disclosed to you at a meeting before they are generally available to the public. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you opt to participate in this study, please sign the permission form provided below. Please email me if you have any queries regarding this study.

I freely consent to participate in the study.

Participant's signature

Date

Study's Signature

Date

APPENDIX II

Informed Consent form for Child Brides

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

**TOPIC: EXPERIENCES OF “CHILD BRIDES” IN SELECTED BULSA
COMMUNITIES OF UPPER EAST REGION, GHANA**

This permission form provides you all the information you need to determine whether or not to participate in this study. I am Pauline Azenab, a second-year MPhil student at the University of Education in Winneba. I am conducting a study on the aforementioned subject.

This study will need you to participate in an interview that will last around one hour. You have been requested to participate in this study because I believe that your experience as a girl who married at a young age might greatly contribute to understanding and learning about how early marriage can affect a girl's life. I will be asking you to share a piece of your life narrative and answer some difficult questions. If you do not desire to answer any of the questions throughout the interview, please state so, and I will go on to the next.

The chat and interview will take place in private from 1st July to 31st July 2021. This study will not include your name. The data will be recorded in a notebook and on a tape recorder. The information will be kept private.

There will be no direct reward to you, but your involvement will most likely aid in learning more about the lives of young married girls. The findings of this study will be discussed with you in a meeting before they are generally available to the public. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you opt to participate in this study, please sign the permission form provided below. Please email me if you have any queries regarding this study.

I freely consent to participate in the study.

Participants signature

Date

Study's signature

Date

APPENDIX III

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Child Brides

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

TOPIC: EXPERIENCES OF “CHILD BRIDES” IN SELECTED BULSA
COMMUNITIES OF UPPER EAST REGION, GHANA

A. Introduction

1. Let us have an introduction
2. Did you all marry as child brides?

B. Factors Contributing to Child Marriage

3. How did your marriage happen?
4. Would you have preferred to marry differently?
5. If yes, what is wrong with the way you married?
6. Why have you accepted to be married?
7. Are others thinking that there is something wrong with the way you married?

C. Lived Experiences of Child Brides

8. How was life before marriage?
9. What your day was like?
10. What were the things you used to do?
11. Is life different now for you? How different is it now?
12. What experiences are you living with that you want to talk about?

Psychosocial and Emotional

13. Do you feel safe and comfortable here?
14. How do they treat you? (Husbands and in-law)
15. Do you have a rival and how do you feel about it?

16. Are your basic needs provided? How does that make you feel?
17. Do you relate with people outside your marital home?
18. Can your friends visit and can you visit your friends?
19. Can you visit your family?
20. Do you feel they stalk you?
21. Does he intimidate you?
22. Do you feel ignored?

Health

23. Do you go to the hospital when you or your child is sick?
24. Do you have health insurance? What of your child/children? If yes, how did you get it and how do you renew it?
25. How do you get drugs which are not covered by the NHIS?
26. Do you have knowledge of contraceptives, does your husband agree?
27. So, what do you do?
28. Have you aborted before?

Education

29. Are you in school now?
30. If no why did you stop?
31. Averagely were you a good student?
32. Which class did you stop and why?
33. Would you like to go back to school?
34. If no why and if yes why?
 - i. Do you see your classmates around?
 - ii. What comes to your mind when you see them?

Physical and Sexual

35. Does your husband beat you? If yes, why?
36. What else does he do to you other than beat you?
 - i. Does he throw things at you, threaten you, insult you?
37. If he wants to have sex with you how does he go about it?
38. Do you both agree?
 - i. If you want to have sex and he refuses, what do you do?
39. Do you deny him sex?
40. Does he compel/force you to have sex?

D. Coping Strategies

41. How are you coping as a child bride in the marriage?
42. Do you have thought of quitting and if yes, why are you still in the marriage?
43. What do you do when you are threatened, beaten, angry, intimidated, ignored, denied socialising?
44. Do you talk to people about your problems? Do you turn to God?

E. Measures in Addressing Child Marriage

45. How would this practice be addressed? What about the cultural, economic, and social practises?
46. Can guidance and counselling be a way of addressing child marriage

Thank you.

APPENDIX IV

Interview Guide for Child Brides

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

TOPIC: EXPERIENCES OF “CHILD BRIDES” SELECTED BULSA
COMMUNITIES OF UPPER EAST REGION, GHANA

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on child brides and how you have experienced it and coping with it.

A. Introduction

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How old were you when you got married and how old are you now?

B. Factors Contributing to Child Marriage

3. Please tell me how you got married.
4. Who initiates and who makes the final decision?
5. How do you perceive the practise?
6. Are others thinking that there is something wrong with the way you married?

C. Lived Experiences of Child Brides

7. How was your life before marriage? Tell me what your day was like. What were the things you used to do?
8. Is life different now for you? How different is it now?
9. Can you tell me your experiences as a child bride in the marriage?

Psychosocial and Emotional Experiences

10. Are you allowed to see friends and family?
11. Are you intimidated, scared or ignored?

Physical and Sexual Experiences

12. Were you blackmailed, threatened, or sexually assaulted?

Health Experiences

13. Who pays hospital bills and if they can afford it?

14. Do you have an NHIS card?

15. Do you have any knowledge of contraceptives

Educational Experiences

16. Were you in school when you got married?

17. Will your husband allow you to go back to school?

18. Are there other experiences you want to share?

D. Coping Strategies

19. Have you thought of quitting the marriage? If yes, what has stopped you?

20. How do you cope as a child bride in the marriage?

E. Measures to Address Child Marriage

21. Do you want to see child marriage put to a stop? If yes. What should be done to end this practice?

22. Can guidance and counselling help in addressing this practise?

Thank you.

APPENDIX V

Key Informant Interview Guide

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

TOPIC: EXPERIENCES OF “CHILD BRIDES” IN SELECTED BULSA

COMMUNITIES OF UPPER EAST REGION, GHANA

A. Introduction

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How long have you lived in this community?

B. Factors Contributing to Child Marriage

3. Do you have children marrying in this community? If yes. How do they marry?
4. What are your thoughts on children marrying in your community?
5. What perceptions do you have on the economic, social, cultural, and family prestige of child brides?

C. Lived Experiences of Child Brides

6. How do the girls live their lives before marriage?
7. Can you tell me what their normal day was like?
8. Do you think there are changes after their marriage?

Psychosocial and Emotional Experiences

9. Are they restricted or prevented from seeing friends and families? If yes, why?

Physical and Sexual Experiences

10. Are the brides blackmailed, threatened, or sexually assaulted?

Health Experiences

11. Who pays their hospital bills?

12 Do they have NHIS cards?

13. Do the brides have any knowledge on contraceptives and their uses?

Educational Experiences

14. Are brides usually in school prior to marriage?

15. Do husbands allow brides to go back to school?

16. Are there other experiences you want to share?

D. Coping Strategies

17. How do child brides cope in their marriages?

18. Do they turn to God?

E. Measures to Address Child Marriage

19. What do you think could be done in addressing child brides in your community?

20. How can the issues of cultural, social, economic, and family prestige be addressed?

21. Could guidance and counselling play a role in addressing the practise?

22. Kindly help me identify some of the child brides in this community?

Thank you

