

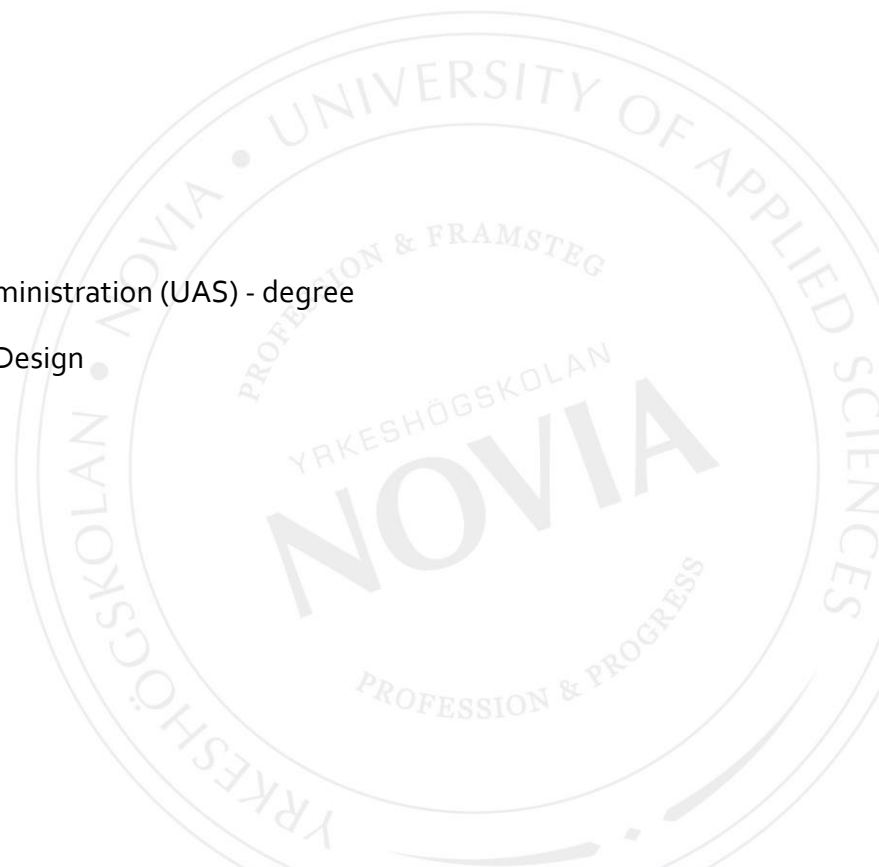
Designing Interventions for Minimizing Early Marriage of the Girl Child in Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the negative effect of early marriage of the girl child, develop an intervention program that would serve as an advocacy tool and at the same time, help minimize the rate of early marriage of the girl child in communities in the Abuja Municipal Council in Nigeria.

This study used three methods of data collection. They include a survey, face-to-face interviews, and a focus group discussion. These methods were considered suitable for a topic like this because they will help to generate a wide range of information. Secondly, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were a better option in an environment where internet connections are not so effective for an online meeting. The survey was administered to the entire sample size of sixty respondents while both the face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were administered to subsets of the study population. The selection criteria were based on the respondents' position or role they play in the subject matter.

The best part of this study was the development of an action plan by stakeholders to help in combating early marriage in Wumba village. The success or failure of the implementation of the action plan would determine whether the commissioner should scale up to other villages or review the current action plan. It is important to note that the development of an action plan was because of the insights gathered from data collection methods. The date for the development of the action plan was intentionally chosen to coincide with the United Nation (UN) International Day of the Girl Child usually held on the 11th of October every year. This event is a day dedicated to celebrating the power and voice of girls.

Language: English

Key words: early marriage, Nigeria, Wumba village, action plan, Centre for Family Health Initiative (CFHI)

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1 Introduction

This chapter presents the goals of this study, the research questions used and the scope of the study. Additionally, a process chart and timeline capturing the various stages of the study. Stakeholders mapping and their relationship to the subject matter were also visually explained.

Child marriage is any formal or informal marriage between a child under 18 years and an adult or another child. Though it affects both male and female, it is the girls/females who are mostly affected (UNICEF, 2020).

Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, the prevalence of child marriage was estimated to have decreased globally from one in four girls married a decade ago to one in five. The situation became worse after COVID-19 where an estimated number of 110 million girls compared to the previously estimated one hundred million before the pandemic will be at risk of getting married before their eighteenth birthday in the next decade (UNICEF,2020).

The situation has led to a global call to action to end child marriage by 2030 through the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). To achieve this, individuals, organizations, government, and relevant stakeholders must act and the time to act is now.

In 2016, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 became a global commitment under Goal 5 on gender equality in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). This led to a rapid increase in policy and programmatic efforts to end the menace. Two years later, a trend analysis by the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF indicated that though globally the rate of child marriage had declined from 25% to 21% globally in the last decade; however, many high prevalence countries had unfortunately seen stagnation and even an increase in child marriages. The implication is that progress would have to increase twelvefold if this target is to be achieved by 2030. (Anju & Shatha, 2021)

Several existing works of literature reveal the ills usually associated with early marriage and contributing factors. According to a 2020 country child marriage profile by UNICEF, Nigeria is home to twenty-six million child brides. It was reported that two in every five women were married in childhood. (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF],2022: Child Marriage Country Profile). In the Nigeria Situation Analysis report, it was revealed that approximately six million girls were married by the age of 15, and 36 million had entered marriage by the age of 18 in the year 2015. The prevalence is higher in Northwest and

Northeast regions of where an estimated 48% were married by 15 years and 78% married by 18 years. Child marriage is characterized as a complex, socially and culturally embedded harmful practice that negatively affects the personal growth, development, and prospects of the Nigerian child. (National Strategy to end Child Marriage in Nigeria: 2016)

With an estimated population of two hundred million, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and seventh largest in the world. The country is divided into Northern and Southern Nigeria. Early marriage of the girl child is most prevalent in the northern part. Many girls are married off before their 18th birthday against their wishes. This act not only violates the rights of the girl child, but it also poses a great threat to her health and academic progress. According to the Child Rights Acts (CRA), Part 1 Section 1 states that the "*best interest of the child to be of paramount considerations in all actions.*" Section 2 states that "*a child to be given protection and care necessary for his wellbeing.*" Although Nigeria, among other countries, adopted the CRA in 2003, unfortunately, the implementation of this law and other similar laws that protect the right of the child are not being implemented. One major reason could be a result of what Usan Maria Assim stated in a 2020 publication on why the Child Rights still does not apply throughout Nigeria. This was attributed to the fact that Nigeria operates the federal system of government, which means the law does not automatically apply in all the states of the federation. For example, while all the states in the south have domesticated the Child Rights Acts, eleven states in the north are yet to domesticate. (Usan, 2020). The prevalence of child marriage in the northern part of Nigeria can be linked to the system of government in place, particularly in regions where the commissioner oversees project implementation. In addition to the previous reason cited, other reasons for early marriage were in connection to Islamic religion which is also the dominating religion in the northern part of Nigeria. (Amzat,2020) It is also a known fact that some other dangers are health implication of the girl child whose body anatomy is not yet developed to manage some of the changes especially during pregnancy.

It is hoped that this study, when given due diligence, will help the commissioner develop a platform where it can address the issues of early marriage through sensitization of stakeholders on the negative effect of marriage especially on the girl child. It is also hoped that the study will be of considerable benefit to non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders who may be interested in similar studies.

1.1 Background Information of Commissioner

The commissioner for this project is the Centre for Family Health Initiative (CFHI). It is a non-governmental, non-for-profit and non-religious organization committed to the promotion of health and protection of wellbeing of families in Africa. The commissioner implements most of its project in the northern part of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory. Its mission is to develop a safe and accommodating society for all irrespective of gender or cultural background. This it does through community driven interventions, socio-economic empowerment, research, and policy development. The organization has a special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is registered with relevant agencies and departments of the government of Nigeria (GoN)

CFHI receives funding from both international and national organizations to provide community driven intervention services such as community health advocacy, community activation/demand creation and interventions, adolescent and youth program (AYP), social and economic empowerment of vulnerable population, capacity development, gender advocacy and intervention, micro enterprise training and support, project evaluation and implementation science, maternal new born and child health, skills acquisition programs for young women and girls. CFHIs has a safe space program where it provides psychosocial support services to its beneficiaries and education intervention within the limit of its funding. The organization works in remote communities, especially the hard-to-reach communities in the northern part of Nigeria. The commissioner is concerned about some of the practices in these communities. Most of the communities still engage in some of the globally unacceptable practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), domestic violence against women and early marriage of the girl child.

As a child advocate and community development service provider, the commissioner desires to develop a strategic service design intervention program to stop or minimize early marriage in communities where it implements its projects because early marriage, especially that of the girl child has had its untold hardship on many young women who are depressed as a result.

1.2 Goal

The goal of this project is to

- help the commissioner develop an intervention program that would help minimize early marriage, especially of the girl child in communities where it implements its activities.
- help the commissioner develop a service that would serve as an advocacy tool to reduce early marriage to the barest minimum in its project communities.

1.3 Research Questions

To help facilitate the project, three research questions were developed.

- i. Do early marriages affect the general wellbeing of the girl child?
- ii. What are the causes of early marriage in Nigeria and how can it be mitigated?
- iii. What are the consequences of early marriage on the girl child?

1.4 Timeline and Process Chart

The process chart is in accordance with the four phases used in the methodology. They include discover, define, develop, and deliver stages.

Discover Stage: The discovery stage was scheduled between January and March 2023. At this stage, there was a planning meeting between the researcher and the commissioner. Desk and literature reviews were conducted. The development and validation of data instruments were also conducted during this stage.

Define Stage: At this stage, results from data collection tools were analyzed. From the analysis, key issues to be addressed were identified and noted. Based on the insights gathered at this stage, a stakeholders' meeting to brainstorm on idea generation was scheduled.

Develop Stage: This was the ideation stage to develop the needed service for the project. As a result of the key findings, there was a brainstorming session on the best workable solution option to address the issue. The preferred solution was to have an annual event to serve as a platform to sensitize stakeholders and community residents. The deliverables of the event were the identification of the root cause of early marriage and development of an action plan to be implemented by stakeholders. The event was held on the 11th of October 2023, the same day the UN commemorates the International Day of the Girl Child.

Deliver Stage: The planned event which is the development of an action plan was prototyped in Wumba village on the 11th of October 2023. Relevant stakeholders developed an action plan with a commitment to implementing it within a specified scope and timeline. This event is to be replicated in other communities if this succeeds. Prior to the event, a work plan was developed between the researcher and the commissioner. A set of questionnaires was also developed to guide the event. The questionnaire can be found on appendix 3.

Figure 1 shows the various phases and tasks in the process chart.

	DISCOVERY STAGE January - March 2023	DEFINE STAGE 23rd March - 6th May 2023	DEVELOP STAGE May - June 2023	DELIVER STAGE October 2023
Objective	To understand the nature of problem	To have more insight of the problem	To generate a wide range of potential solutions to the problem	To select the best potential solutions for the problem
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning meeting 2. Development of data tools 3. Validation of data tools 4. Administration of data tools 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analysis of data collection tools 2. planning meeting based on insight gained from discovery stage 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brainstorming meeting with stakeholders to generate a wide range of potential solutions to the problem 	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selection of best solution option by stakeholders </div>
Deliverables	More insight uncovered.	Clear problem statement and process to help arrive at a solution	Availability of several possible solution of the problem	Prototype delivered

Figure 1. Process Chart and Timeline

1.5 Frame of Reference

The frame of reference was graphically represented as shown below.

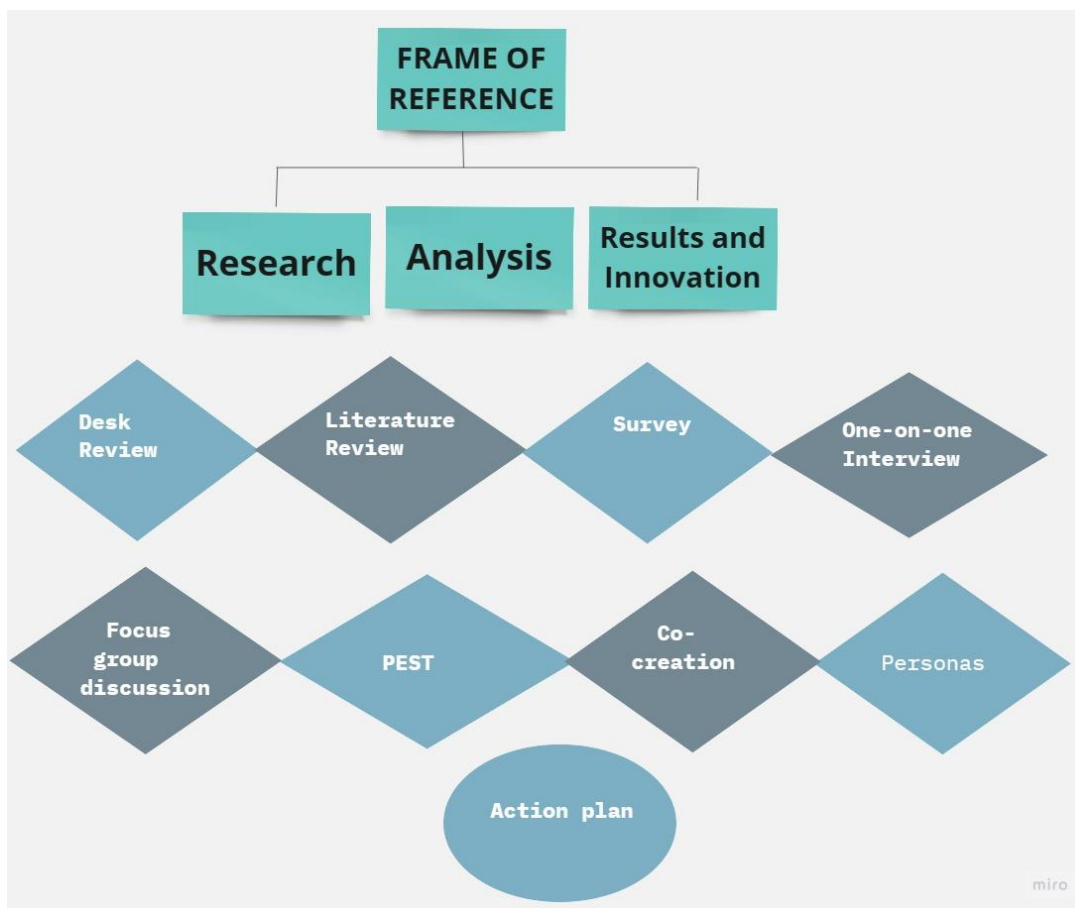


Figure 1.Frame of Reference

1.6 Stakeholders Mapping

This study mapped stakeholders based on the relationship of stakeholders to the project. It considered stakeholders that are directly involved, those connected and those who are considered connected in a way but not directly. The categories depicted in figure 3 are internal stakeholders which include the commissioner and its funders, the girl child, parents, religious leaders, village heads, teachers, field research assistants and service design lead. The connected stakeholders are funders, school heads, NGOs, and human rights activist. The external stakeholders are government and policy makers.

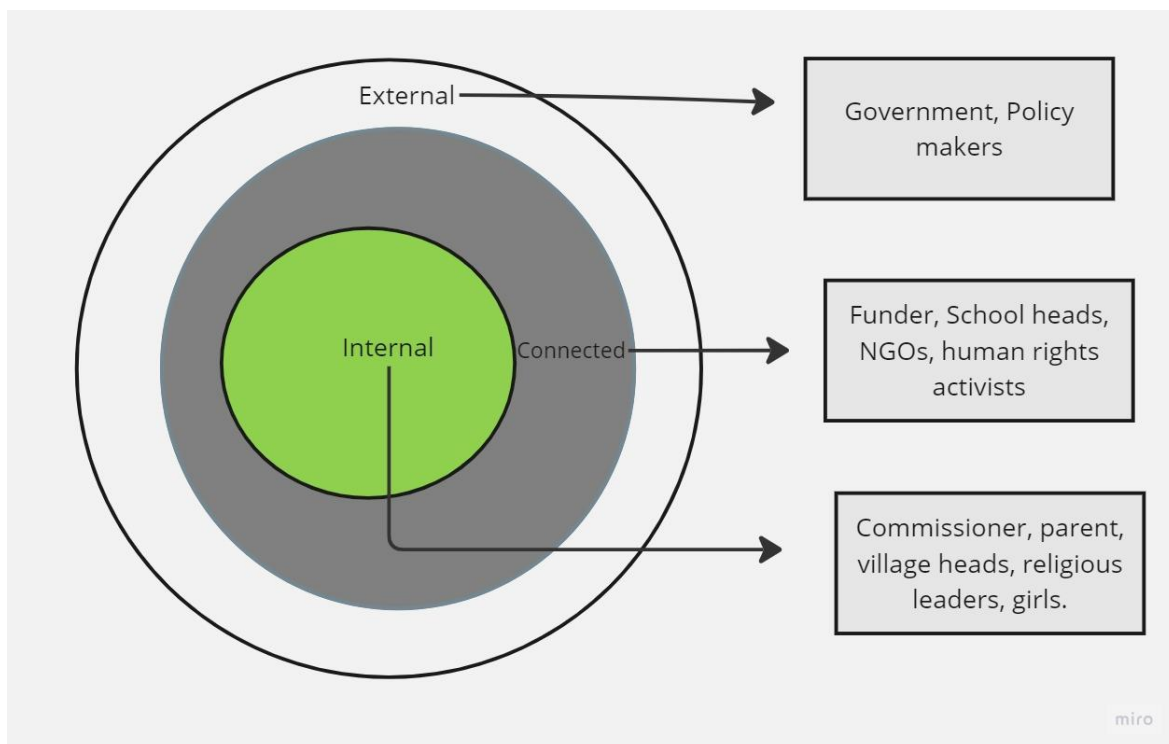


Figure 2. Stakeholders Mapping

1.7 Significance of the study

The findings of this study will be of immense benefit. to the girl child, parents, community leaders, religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, schools, and government. It will also be of immense benefit to researchers who might wish to conduct a related study.

1.8 Scope of Study

The scope of study was limited to Wumba and Apo-dutse communities in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) in Abuja the Nigeria Federal Capital Territory during the discovery stage. A total of sixty participants comprising thirty adolescents' girls, five schoolteachers, five government representatives, ten parents, five religious leaders and five village heads were used. But during the delivery stage, the scope was limited to Wumba village only. Since this is the prototype and maiden edition, its success will determine whether it shall be scaled up to other communities with high prevalence of early marriage.

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

- **Child Marriage:** It is the formal marriage or informal union between a child and an adult or another child (UNICEF 2016).
- **Child:** According to CRA a child is any person under the age of eighteen. (CRA)
- **Marriage:** An event where two people are joined together through vows and the promises to love one another until death parts them Parke: 2021)

2 Literature Review

This chapter deals with the review of literature considered to be of importance to this study. The literature review is discussed under two sub-headings - Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Framework

The review of previous literature by several other authors in our field of study is very essential as it gives us more insight on what we already know about the topic, what concept and theories have previously been applied, what research been used before, what previous controversies on the topic and how it was resolved, were there clashes of evidence, and who the key contributors to the research were. (Alan Bryman, 2016, P6).

2.1 Conceptual Framework

In conducting this research, several works of literature were reviewed to draw from the existing body of knowledge from several authors and sources who have done similar studies in the past. The framework illustrated several factors assumed to be the input that determined early marriage of the girl child. The independent variables include cultural, traditions, and religious practice, gender Bias, poverty, illiteracy, bride price, regional custom, and perceived inability of women to work for money. With the participation of girls, the study conceptualized these factors: firstly, ignorance, gender bias, parents' negative attitudes, secondly role models and insecurity and thirdly, it conceptualized completion rate of girls from school and finally, suggested remedies to early marriage.

2.1.1 Causes of Early Marriage

a. Cultural and Traditional Belief

Nigeria's varied cultural and landscape contributes to the prevalence of early marriage. Many people hold deep rooted practices, traditions or religious beliefs that prioritize early marriage as a means of preserving cultural identity, retaining family honour and consolidation of social ties. (UNICEF 2005). These cultural norms often bolster the belief that girls should be married off at an early age, continuing the practice across generations.

Evidenced based data is available to show that there is a wide gap between the southern and northern part when it comes to enrolment and retention of pupils in school, especially the girl child. The number of school enrolments is higher in the south than in the north. While enrolment is on the increase in the south, the same cannot be said in the north. A study conducted by Kainuwa, Yusuf and Sabon (2018) established a relationship between parents, cultural and religious beliefs, and student dropouts, especially the girl child.

The study revealed that there are doubts especially among the illiterate Muslim parents that a western education would teach "*corrupt*" Christian values to their children. Most parents believe that the western styled education is not compatible with Islamic religion principles, that the education system teaches Christian ethics, that some western education theories challenge Islamic teachings, and that female children lose interest in their future roles as mothers and housewives. This kind of statement, though based on ignorance, has a way of affecting people's minds negatively, especially illiterate parents and children. (Kainuwa & Sabon 2018).

b. Gender Bias

Gender discrimination and discriminatory social norms perpetuate the prevalence of early marriage in Nigeria. Deeply rooted traditional gender roles often limit girls' choices and opportunities, favouring early marriage over education and personal development. (Girls not Bride 2023). Social expectations place a greater emphasis on girls' domestic roles and early motherhood rather than their career aspirations, reinforcing the cycle of early marriage. (Girls not Bride: child marriage atlas)

Gender inequality in favour of boys over girls in terms of education is a common occurrence in the northern part of Nigeria, especially in the Northeast. Even though primary education is free in Nigeria, female net attendance is 47.7 % (UNICEF 2020).

Poverty

Poverty and financial constraint significantly contribute to early marriage in Nigeria. Families facing financial challenges may view early marriage as an option to alleviate economic burden and ensure their daughters' future (International Centre for Research on Women, 2013). The practice is seen to reduce household expenses and secure economic ties between families. Restricted access to education and employment opportunities also plays a role, as families may view marriage as a means of providing economic stability for their daughters. (UNICEF, 2012). A few cases where girls have been married off to older men for financial gains have been noted across many societies in the Middle East and South-Asian countries. Many other societies including those of Sub-Saharan see the payment of the bride price as a strategy for survival.

As revealed by Tobere Ovuorie. A journalist, in the worst-case scenario, the practice may lure innocent girls into prostitution by human traffickers who trick their parents by promising them marriage and excellent job abroad. (DW, 2021). According to the journalist, after the traffickers have succeeded in luring the girls to travel abroad with the promise of an excellent job or marriage, the girls find themselves being forced by the traffickers into prostitution in foreign countries. Studies by the United Nations (UN, 2003) also reveal that in Northern Pakistan, Afghanistan, and part of the Middle East, underaged girls are married off to settle disputes, pay debt or have the girl substituted for her brother's bride price. In such instances, young girls get married off by their parents to enable them to manage economic dearth that they may be faced with since there will be fewer persons to cater for.

Poverty as a factor in early marriage is a common occurrence in some Kenyan communities, especially in the Marsabit County. Studies by Jafred Muyaka (2018) revealed a high rate of poverty in these communities was a major reason for engaging in such practices. Young girls were forced by their parents to drop out of school to be married to rich old men in exchange for a bride price because poor families could not afford to provide the basic educational needs of their children. The challenges were worse for families which have more school-aged children. In addition, in a situation where children must struggle for the meagre available resources, the boys are prioritized. (Jafred, Muyaka 2018)

d. Illiteracy

Illiteracy among members of societies or families is another factor that contributes majorly to early marriage. In a study by Nub Bhandari on early marriage in Nepal, there is a belief that women who are educated are likely to become witches such that some families due to

illiteracy decides to prevent their girls from attending a good education. Therefore, girls who marry at an early age are most likely to have terminated school or to have received no formal education at all. (Nub, Bhandari. 2019).

Elsewhere in Kenyan, though the country has made tremendous efforts in expanding educational opportunities for its citizens, but still many school aged children are still unable to participate. Most of them come from the nomadic pastoralist communities from the northern region. According to a UNESCO 2010 report, fewer than 40% of children in the former Northeastern Province were in primary school four years after the government of Kenyan set the goal of 100% for national enrolment. The report further says that over 60% of Somali girls were not in primary school. (UNESCO 2010). Over a decade after the report, the situation has not changed much as revealed during the lunch of the UNESCO 2021 Kenyan National Study Report on Out of School Children. (UNESCO 2021)

e. Bride Price

The practice of bride price is a widespread practice in most African cultures. The belief of marriage as a gift exchange between social groups has been used to portray the system of marriage in Africa. It is argued that African traditional societies are sustained by a method of mutual gifts between individuals, families and tribes that is accelerated and reinforced by marriage. Several empirical work conducted across various African nations, provided evidence for this view. Families and societies have treated women as possessions in exchange for gifts and as sources of affluence, social status, and status especially when given in livestock such as cattle, goat, and sheep or even cash.

f. Religious and Social Pressure

Studies by Ranti, Sagita (2019) and Mat Lowel et al. (2020) established that part of the pressure which contributes to early marriage of the girl has to do with the mindset that it is a better way of controlling women and preventing pre-marital sex. Girls' virginity before marriage is highly esteemed in most cultures especially Asian and African societies. For that reason, practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriage of the girl are being practiced by communities who hold such belief. FGM is believed by many people

in Africa to reduce sexual urge. In some societies, as soon as girls begin menstruating, they may be withdrawn from school to keep them away from being exposed to fellow male pupils or teachers. Nevertheless, while all these practices are expected to shield the girl away from male sexual attention, marriage is a permanent and best solution, hence, the practice of early marriage. The study further noted that cultural and religious socialization made girls conformist. In most African countries, religion is taken seriously by worshippers, a factor that made its leaders enjoy a lot of influence in such matters as the timing for marriage of adolescent girls. The study suggests the empowerment of girls as the best way to saving them from early marriage.

Another study from Nigeria also establishes the fact that the illiteracy of parents is also a contributory factor to the increase in early marriage. Illiterate parents due to their mindset and influence on their children, constitute to the high prevalence of early marriage in Nigeria, especially in the Northern region. (Kainuwa, Yusuf)

2.2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the initial review of existing theories that serves as a guide for developing the argument for a research work. (Sarah, Vinz 2022). It was important for the researcher to take a stand on which theory or theories could guide the study.

2.2.1 Socialization Theory

Socialization theory is a Psychological and Sociological structure that seeks to understand how people acquire and internalize the beliefs, values, norms, and behaviours of their social environment via a process called socialization.

According to Lumen, an online learning platform, Socialization theory postulates that people learn and adopt social norms, beliefs, and behaviours through contact with others and their environment. It is a lifelong process that starts at birth and continues throughout an individual's life, shaping their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This was also corroborated by Belsky et al. (1991) who asserted that socialization has been conceived as a lifelong process of adapting to societal norms and values. Therefore, the process starts immediately after the birth of a child through contact with significant others. (Belsky et al 1991).

According to both authors, several agents play a fundamental role in the socialization process including the family, peers, school, media, and religious institutions. These agents serve as

channels through which individuals obtain and adopt societal norms and values. (Giddens, 2009). The theory of socialization reveals that parents, as first agent of socialization, play a bigger role in early marriage because they have a long-term impact on growth and personality of the child. This theory is context specific as there are many factors connected to it. Parents are primarily agents of socialization during childhood while peers and school become increasingly instrumental during adolescence.

This theory is described in terms of two divergent pathways of development considered to encourage reproductive success in the context in which they arise. In infancy, one is defined by a traumatic rearing environment and the development of dysfunctional attachment to parents and subsequent behavioral issues in adolescence by early pubertal growth and precocious sexuality and in adulthood, weak pair relationships and inadequate involvement in child rearing, while the other is defined by the reverse.

In this study, this theory explains that people around the child's care or the parents' care as well as the climate, contributes to child marriage. For example, the mother of the child was a child bride, the grandmother on and on to several generations. So, if the family has been poor or the child grew up being abused by the surrounding people, it may lead to early marriage as well.

2.2.2 Social Learning Theory

In a study by Kendra Cherry, she noted that Social Learning as initiated by Albert Bandura, posits that learning occurs by observation, imitation and modelling and inspired by factors such as attention, motivation, feelings, and emotions. The theory accounts for the interaction of environmental and cognitive elements that shape how people learn. (Kendal, Cherry 2022)

The theory suggests that behaviours are learnt through conditioning and cognitive theories such as attention and memory. Which further suggests that learning takes place because people observe the consequences of other people's behaviour.

A gender approach to social learning uses cross-cultural, psychological, and anthropological analysis of gender roles and interactions. Gender conflict is a major subjects of psychologically focused anthropological research on interpretations of the discrepancies characterizing forms of male and female nature. Of special interest to Anthropologists is identifying the cultural influences that encourages the production of these traits and emphasize the conduct of sex roles. (Cindy Miller 2016).

One subject of a social learning orientation is how cultural learning form styles of male and female. According to Cindy, the effect of both male and female personality depended on the precise understanding of them by the society. Cindy's work has provided a substantial drive for feminist anthropology research into the social cultural factors affecting psychological development and gender identity. Gender identity is culturally and psychosocially determined.

2.2.3 Feminist Viewpoint on Gender in Education

Feminist viewpoint on gender in education focuses on understanding and addressing the ways in which conventional gender norms and stereotypes can restrain opportunities and perpetuate discrimination within educational settings. Feminists argue that education should be an equalizing force that empowers all individual regardless of their gender.

One feminist scholar who has contributed immensely to the subject on gender in education is Judith Butler. In her book, "Gender Trouble," Butler challenges the notion of fixed identity and argues that gender is performative, constructed through repeated social practices. From a feminist viewpoint, Butler suggested that educational institution should move beyond strict gender norms and provide an inclusive environment that allow student to explore diverse expression of gender. (Butler, 1990)

Another important feminist scholar in the field of education is Bell Hooks who emphasizes the need for a feminist pedagogy that challenges patriarchal structures and encourages critical thinking, she argues that education should engage students in discussions about power dynamics, gender roles and social justice issues, aiming to empower students to challenge and transform oppressive system. (Bell, Hooks. 1994). Feminist thinkers continue to advocate for educational practices that promotes gender equality, challenges stereotype, and create inclusive learning environment for all students.

2.3 Empirical Studies

Early marriage continues to be a significant social issues with far reaching consequences. This sections explored several literatures by other authors to shed more insight into the subject. It examined the prevalence of early marriage, its contributing factors, its effects for both individuals and the society at large. It also looked at legal and policy frameworks aimed at addressing the issue.

2.3.1 Prevalence of Early Marriage

Early marriage continues to take place in most part of the world, especially in developing countries. Its prevalence varies across regions and cultural belief. According to a report by UNICEF (2020) an approximate figure of twelve million girls is being married every year before they are 18 years. According to the findings of the Nigeria National Strategic Plan to End Child Marriage (2016-2020) report, approximately 6 million girls were married by the age of 15, and 36 million by the age of 18 in the year 2015. The report highlights a higher prevalence in the Northwest and Northeast regions, with an estimated 48% being married by the age of 15 and 78% married by the age of 18. It characterizes child marriage as a multifaceted, socially, and culturally embedded harmful practice that negatively affects the personal development and future opportunities of the Nigerian child. (National Strategy to end Child Marriage in Nigeria; 2016-2020).

Many girls are married off before their 18th birthday against their wish. This act not only violates the rights of the girl child, but also poses a great threat to the health and academic progress of the girls forced into it. The Child Rights Acts (CRA) see this as a violation of part one section one which states “*that the best interest of the child is to be given considerations in all actions*” Similarly, section two states that “*a child to be given protection and care necessary for his or her wellbeing.*”

Elsewhere in other developing countries, studies revealed that the prevalence is on the increase. This was affirmed in a study conducted by Prakash et al. (2022) in Nepal to find out the factors responsible for early marriage. Findings revealed that there is a 49.6% prevalence among households in Nepal with several responsible factors such as poverty, illiteracy, religious and cultural believes, among others.

2.3.2 Factors Contributing to Early Marriage

So many factors contribute to the perpetuation of early marriage, encompassing cultural traditions, poverty, lack of education, gender inequality and societal norms. Santhya and Jeejeebhoy in a publication, stated that traditional gender norms and practices, which prioritize early marriage for girls, are deeply rooted in some communities. Poverty also plays a significant role, as families may view marriage as a means of reducing economic burden and securing their daughters' future. Lack of access to quality education, particularly for girls, further reinforces the cycle for early marriage. (Santhya & Jeejeebhoy 2015). These

factors combined with societal expectations, often limit the choices and agency of young individuals.

A study by Gideon Tembo examined the causes and effects of early marriage in Zambia. The findings highlighted some of the factors responsible for early marriage to include cultural factors such as cultural belief and fear of remaining unmarried, economic factors such as poverty and social factors which include peer pressure. Other factors also identified were environmental factors which include too much freedom, and ignorance. (Tembo, 2021). The study went further to examine the challenges that early marriage poses to the education of girls. The study established that many of the girls drop out of school to get married while still in primary school. This was mostly caused by retrogressive socio-cultural practice that perceives the education of girls to be a waste of time and resources because of the widely held belief that girls will at some point get married and become somebody else's responsibility, which makes them prefer to invest more on the education of the boy who will retain the family name. Also marrying off the girls will bring a lot of financial benefits.

In another study by Kainuwa et al. on the Relationship Between Parental Economic Factors and Student Dropouts from Government Secondary School of Zamfara, Nigeria, the findings established that there are doubts among the illiterate Muslim parents that western education would corrupt their children by teaching them Christian values which are not in line with their Islamic beliefs. They claimed that education teaches Christian values which according to them challenges Islamic teachings and that female children lose interest in their future role as mothers and housewives. (Kainuwa, 2018). This belief by some parents might be based on ignorance but has grievous consequences on the academic future of the girl child.

For successful learning in school program, it is important for parents to be fully involved and support their children and wards for optimal results. The attitude of the parents towards the child's learning is important. But unfortunately, reviews from several literature revealed that this is still a problem as most parents are either illiterate or ignorant. Sadly, this has resulted in many girls not being highly regarded as boys in most communities, an attitude that has prevented them from achieving their full potential. Girls are prepared to be housewives, or valued to be adding economic value to the family through payment of bride price which might be used by their brothers for their marriage or to marry another girl from another family.

In a study by Muyaka (2018) on Community Environment and Education of Girls in Marsabit County, Kenya, the study explored the role of environmental influence in inhibiting girls' access to formal education. The study involved a total of 128 relevant stakeholders which include parents, boys, and girls in Marsabit County. The region is one of the marginalized in the country. Some of the findings were lack of role models for girls in the communities, high rate of teenage pregnancy, early marriage that hinders the girl from going to school (Muyaka 2018). Availability of role models can be a source of motivation and inspiration to girls. Lack of female teachers and other female professionals, to function as role models demoralizes girls' participation in formal education. Where staffing had more male teachers, there should be lots of female teachers too to motivate the girls for career aspiration. To minimize the situation, the study recommended active community involvement and participation. According to Abdullahi, community involvement and participation has become one of the important condition and is essential for project implementation. Addressing the maintenance issues of essential services is deemed achievable through community involvement, a concept that gained prominence in the early 1970s, according to Abdullahi. (Abdullahi 2019)

In an earlier report by UNESCO, it was noted that the Gabra of Northern Kenya tends to value their life stock more than their girl child. (UNESCO 2010). In one of the matters relating to supremacy, the people believe that, God first, followed by man, then cow and lastly the girl. This kind of perception or belief no doubt, explains the high prevalence of child marriage. Therefore, active community engagement and sensitization of community is paramount.

Insecurity is another major threat to early marriage and less female participation especially in Northern Nigeria. In April 2014, a total of 276 secondary school girls who went for an exam in Chibok community in Borno state of Nigeria, were kidnapped by a group of militant call "Boko Haram". Ever since, there has been series of other kidnapping of junior and high school girls in other Northern part of the country with the highest number recorded as 317 in 2021. (The Guardian: 2021). The girls were kidnapped in a government secondary school in one of the state of the federation. This constant kidnapping has left many residence from sending their daughter to school for fear of been kidnapped.

2.3.3 Consequences of Early Marriage

This section examined the consequences of early marriage on individual and community level.

Individual Level

a. Physical and Mental Health: child brides are at higher risk of pregnancy complications and childbirth, including pre-mature birth and health implications such as obstetric fistulas. Also, early marriage is associated with an increase rate of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression occasioned by stress and social isolation experienced by some girls. (Santhya & Jejeebhoy 2015).

b. Education and Economic Opportunities: it is an established fact that early marriage can obstruct the education of many girls, thereby limiting their economic prospects. The United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) 2020 reports that girls who marry much earlier are most likely to be withdrawn from school, resulting in limited skill acquisition opportunity, reduced chance for employment and not attaining economic independence.

c. Gender Inequality: Early marriage reinforces gender inequality by perpetuating traditional gender roles and expectations. In Kabeer's view, early marriage restricts girls' autonomy thereby limiting them from participating in decision process within their families and societies. This perpetuation of gender inequality according to Kabeer affects not just the individual but the society at large by hindering social progress and sustainable development. (Kabeer, 2011).

Gender inequality is a violation of human rights (UNICEF,2023). Gender inequality in favour of boys can be seen in many societies around the world. For example, the laws that govern marriage for boys and girls are not the same. According to a survey conducted by the World Bank to commemorate 2017 International Women's Day shows that the laws that govern marriage for both boys and girls are different in most developing countries, especially in the developing countries. For instance, while the boys are allowed to marry after 18 years, the same cannot be said of the girls who are allowed to marry between 12 – 14 years. (World Bank, 2017). This goes to show that girls in developing countries are at higher risk of gender bias than boys. Furthermore, in situations where girls are prevented from their rights to education may lead to

future unemployment of this target population. This might continue to be recycled for generations to come if the situation is not addressed. Resolving this will no doubt require active community involvement and participation. It is only then that sustainable intervention can take place.

Consequences for Communities

- a. High rate in Population Growth:** Early marriage contributes to high population growth. Posing challenges to sustainable development and resource allocation. Countries with higher rates of early marriage, tends to experience faster population growth which can have adverse effects on resources such as social services, infrastructure, as well as the environment. This may hinder efforts to achieve sustainable development goals. (UNFPA, 2013)
- b. Health and Social Welfare:** The increasing rate of early marriage might overstretch the healthcare and social welfare system as young mothers may require more attention in terms of specialized services and support. Santhya and Jejeebhoy argued that giving birth at a much younger age might come with lots of complications which can be a huge burden to the already over burden healthcare facilities. (Santhya and Jejeebhoy:2015)

2.4 Appraisal of Reviewed Literature

This chapter present a review of previous literature on the Effects of Early Marriage on the Girl Child in Nigeria. The scope was limited to Gosa and Apo-dutse communities in the North Central Region of Nigeria. The study reviewed books, journals, magazines, government, and international agencies documents amongst others. The theoretical part of this study focused on socialization theory, social learning approach, and feminist viewpoint on gender in education. The chapter also, highlighted some of the previous studies which revealed that most of the previous work were done in developing countries including Nigeria which prompted the researcher to narrow it down to local communities with particular emphasis to communities where the project commissioner operates. Thus, the next chapter is aimed at describing the research methods and procedures used for the empirical part of this thesis.

3 Methodology and Data Collection Tools

This chapter contains research design, sample and sampling techniques, ethical consideration, instrument for data collection, validity of the instrument, reliability of the instrument, procedure for data collection, method for data analysis, service design, co-design, and canvases.

3.1 Research Design

Research design is the analytical approach the researcher has chosen to integrate the different components of the study for coherence. It consists of the process for data collection, measurement, and interpretation of data. In this study, three methods for data collection were adopted. They include Survey, face-to-face interview, and focus group discussion. The choice of methods was informed by the fact that the study involves the collection of detailed information to be able to describe existing phenomenon accurately and objectively and to determine the nature of situation as it exist as at the time of study. Because this was a service design program, a service design component was also included. These are further discussed in their respective sessions.

3.2 Sampling and Sampling Technique

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset from a larger population to run an experiment instead of the entire population. (Prakhar Mishra: June 9, 2021) In this study a simple random technique was used. This is because it gives every element of the population equal probability to be selected. A total of sixty respondents served as the population size. They were randomly selected.

3.3 Ethical Consideration

Every scientific research is guided by ethical standards. This study considered four ethical principles which includes, informed and voluntary consent, confidentiality of the information shared, anonymity of research participants and benefit or at least no hurt to participants (Bhandari 2021). This was to ensure liberty and confidentiality of respondents.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected during data collection. The tools used include questionnaires, one-on-one interviews and focus group discussion. Secondary data were gathered through reviews of literature and other sources such as books, journals, government documents.

The questionnaire was administered to sixty participants in Wumba and Apo-dutse communities between the 14th and 16 of February 2023. A set of seven closed ended question were developed and administered to respondents. Of the sixty administered tools, only fifty-seven returned. The remaining three people could not be reached at the time of retrieval.

The face-to-face interview was conducted between 25th February to 2nd of March. A total of eleven participants from Wumba and Apo-dutse were involved. Participants were selected based on their essential role in the subject matter. A set of ten questions were developed by the researcher to help facilitate the interview questions. While seven of the questions were the same questions across respondents, three were specifically for adolescent married girls.

The focus group discussion was conducted by the research assistant at the Wumba chief palace on the 8th of March 2023 with a total of eleven participants. They were also selected based on their role and relevance in tackling the subject matter. A set of three questions were developed by the researcher to guide the process. A moderator anchored the session. There was also a transcriber who took notes and recorded the audio.

It is important to state that, due to the distance from Finland to Nigeria coupled with academics and work, the researcher could not be in Nigeria to conduct the field research in person. However, the researcher recruited and trained three research assistants. The researcher also developed the data tools and a detailed program description including timeline. In addition, a communication channel through email and WhatsApp was also created between the researcher and research assistants for regular communication. Details of the program description and data collection manuals can be found on in appendixes 1,2,3,and 5.

3.4.1 Survey

One of the benefits of the survey method is that it allows for a wide range of information. Survey method as a data collection tools, can be in open ended or close ended. While a closed

ended includes a set of predefined questions, an opened ended allows respondents to give their personal view on the given topic. (Mary Gormandy 2021). The close ended questionnaire has several options such as multiple-choice questions. In this study the close ended survey with multiple choice questions were used. The survey was administered to the entire sixty study participants but, only fifty-seven participants returned their forms. Therefore, the percentage was calculated based on fifty-seven as the denominator.

3.4.2 Face-to-Face Interview

Typically, a face -to-face interview is a data collection method that allows direct or physical contact between the interviewer and respondents. This method can help to acquire information, read body language, and create opportunities for further probe. (Hamed Taherdoost, 2022) This method was considered suitable for this study because of the poor internet network in Nigeria as well as poor knowledge in use of technology by the people involved.

3.4.3 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus group discussion (FGD) as a qualitative method of data collection, brings community people together to discuss a particular topic. In this study, a total of eleven participants from the sample size were involved. The eleven participants were selected based on their roles, positions, or titles. They include religious leaders, traditional rulers, community representatives, parents, school representatives, and local authority representatives. The meeting was held in the village head's palace in Wumba community. The aim was to understand the individual's perspective, their belief, their concern and to proffer solutions to the subject matter. The exercise lasted for an hour. To guide the discussion, three open ended questions were structured. The FGD was facilitated by a research assistant with the help of the FGD manual developed by the researcher.

Validity of Data Collection

Validity refers to accuracy and meaningfulness of inferences. Content validity were checked through the systematically arranged objectives of the study where the questions answered the objectives. To improve face validity of the research, all the instruments for data collection methods were scrutinized by an experts in ensuring that the questions concentrated on issues essential to research objectives and that the survey, face-to-face interview and focus group discussion meets up ethical standard and practice.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

This study utilized a mixed method aimed at collecting both quantitative and qualitative data at single contact with the target participant but however, it is more rooted in quantitative analysis to enable all stakeholders have a better understanding of the data. Content analysis was conducted on the qualitative data gathered. This helped in promoting the use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis to further enhance the interest and academic effect of the study.

3.6 Service Design

Though there is no established definition of what service design is as several authors have defined it from their perspectives. But for the purpose of this study, two outstanding definitions were considered. According to Stickdorn and Schneider, service design is an interdisciplinary approach to improving existing service and designing services. (Stickdorn & Schneider. 2021, P33, 36). It involves understanding the needs and expectations of your customers or users, mapping out their whole service journey and designing innovative solutions that will give a good customer experience. Service design can also be seen as the planning and organization of people and processes for the purpose of improving employees' and users' experience. It helps designers to segment services and adapt fine turned solutions to suit all parties involved (Sarah Gibbons (2017) Service Design 101)

When it comes to addressing complex issues such as this study of early marriage not so familiar to so many people. Service design can be an important approach to understanding the needs and challenges faced by those affected. Using a service design approach can help in designing interventions to mitigate the problem. Thus, Service design was incorporated in this study in the following ways.

- a. **User Research:** an in-depth research was conducted to understand the factors contributing to early marriage. In addition to literature review, the study engaged with individuals, communities and organizations affected by early marriage in one way or the other, to gain insight into their experiences, needs and aspirations.
- b. **Stakeholder Mapping:** the study engaged with relevant stakeholders such as parents, community heads, government agencies, religious leaders, educators and affected girls themselves to understand their roles, perspectives and existing interventions related to early marriage.

- c. Co-creation Workshop:** The study conducted a focus group discussion with stakeholders to generate ideas and solutions. It encouraged diverse perspectives and ensured the participation of those directly impacted by early marriage. In ensuring that the voices of young people are heard, the married adolescent girls themselves were included in the design process as well.
- d. Design Mapping:** visual representation of the service journey related to early marriage was created.
- e. Intervention Design:** based on the insight gathered, an intervention targeted towards addressing the root causes, consequences and required action was developed together with the commissioner. It was agreed that there should be an annual event where relevant stakeholders in target communities will come together to deliberate on the root cause and effect of early marriage and thereafter develop an action plan to be implemented by all stakeholders involved.
- f. Prototyping and Testing:**
Following the agreement on the intervention design, a stakeholders meeting involving relevant stakeholders was held at Wumba community on the 11th of October 2023. The day was intentionally chosen to coincide with the United Nations (UN) International Day of the Girl Child commemoration. During the event, the root causes, and effects of early marriage were identified by stakeholders. Based on the identification of the root causes and consequences, an action plan to help mitigate early marriage was developed by stakeholders. Prior to the event, a timetable for the event was developed by the researcher and commissioner. A copy of this can be seen on the appendix.
- g. Implementation and Evaluation:** With the successful development of an action plan in Wumba village, the commissioner plans to continue in other communities where early marriage is prevalent. It also plans to incorporate early marriage related topics into its community engagement programs like better parenting and gender norms meeting. A monitoring and evaluation process plan was developed, capturing key indicators and milestones.

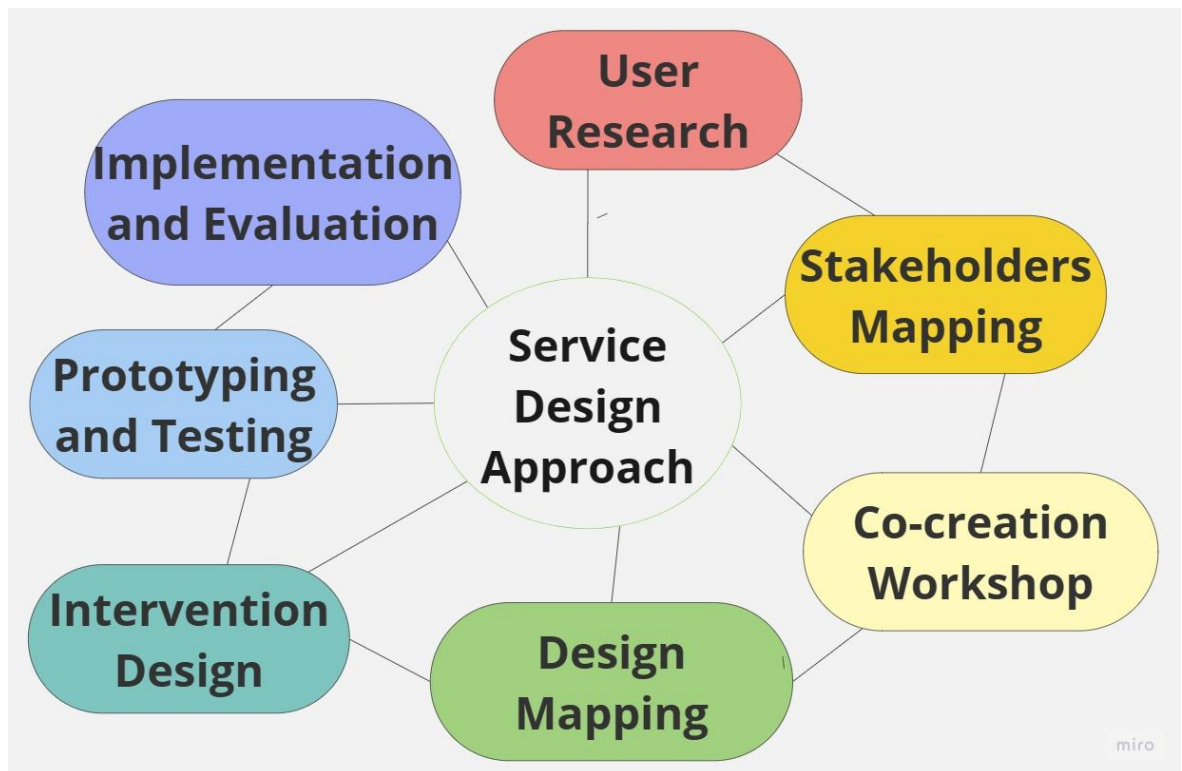


Figure 3. Service Design Approach

3.7 Co-design

Co-design is a problem-solving approach that requires active participation from relevant stakeholders in designing a project. (Evans & Terry, 2016)

Co-design as a problem-solving approach requires active collaboration of stakeholders to produce an innovative best solution to an identified problem. The collaborative nature of co-designs ensures that all stakeholders voice counts in the design process. It helps to improve user satisfaction. It can also help to build stronger and lasting relationships as well as trust between designers and users. (Tailor & Francis 2019)

The co-design aspect of this study was the active collaboration of the traditional rulers, religious rulers, school representatives, medical personnel, non-governmental organization, a cross section of the community residence, parents and the girl child who is the victim. The resulting effect was the development of an action plan.

3.8 The Double Diamond Model

The double diamond is a visual representation of the study processes and implementation phases. This was adopted from the UK Design Council Double Diamond Model. Having the

project in phases helped in enabling a smooth and easy implementation. For each of the phases, activities and tasks were executed.

In the discovery stage, I had a meeting with the commissioner. This was to avoid any form of assumption or misunderstanding of the subject matter. The meeting helped in having a proper understanding of the problem statement from the perspective of the commissioner. Other activities conducted at the discovery stage were the survey, interview and focus group discussion. In the defining stage, data were analyzed. From the analyses of data tools, more insight that could lead to workable solutions were gathered. The development stage was the collaboration with relevant stakeholders to brainstorm on the root causes and effects of early marriage. The conclusion of this stage was agreement by stakeholders to develop an action plan based on the identified root causes and effects of early marriage. At the delivery stage, a prototype on the development of an action plan was conducted in Wumba community by stakeholders. The action plan was developed on the 11th of October. The date was intentionally chosen to coincide with the UN International Day of the girl Child. The UN declares the day to promote the rights of girls and highlight gender inequalities. The action plan is to be implemented by stakeholders in Wumba community. In ensuring that the implementation of the action plan achieves its goals, a monitoring and evaluation plan was developed. The success of the action plan implementation in Wumba, would determine whether the commissioner would scale up in other communities where early marriage is prevalent.

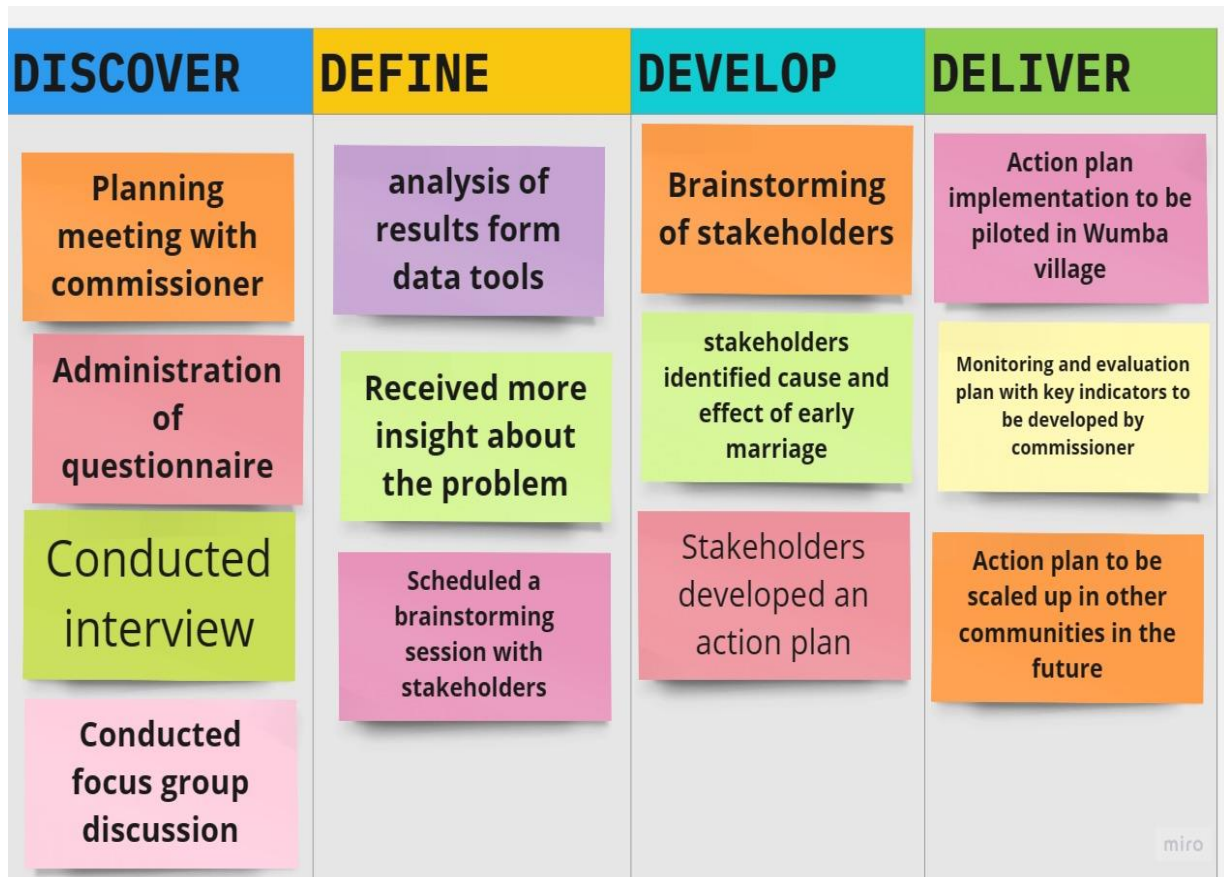


Figure 4. The double diamond process model

3.9 Canvases

Project canvases are a visual tool that simplifies a project and enables everyone to have a good understanding of the project. In this study, some of the canvases used include, stakeholders mapping, PESTLE analysis, business model canvas, root cause analysis.

3.9.1 PESTLE Analysis

The PESTEL framework is employed by organizations to examine and comprehend external macro-environmental factors that can influence an organization, industry, market, or project. It is an acronym representing political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal, and environmental factors. For a deeper insight into these factors and their impact on the project, a PESTLE analysis was conducted.

Political: The project may be imparted by the current government policy in Nigeria to remove oil subsidy coupled with heightened insecurity. This could discourage stakeholders from participating in the study especially in brainstorming meetings due to increased

transportation costs and concerns about safety from terrorists' activities. Some invited stakeholders might also hesitate to participate in the planned event.

Economic: Funding will be required for various aspects of this project, such as Information, Educational and Communication (IEC) material for mobilization and awareness campaign. Additionally, money will be needed to allocate resources for refreshment and transportation expenses for participants.

Socio-cultural Factors: given the project's complexity and its influence on a diverse range of stakeholders, careful identification was undertaken. These include the girl child, affected parents, village heads, religious leaders, and community case workers.

Technology: to ensure widespread and impact, the commissioner will need to conduct extensive social media campaigns across all its social media platforms both during and after the events. Creating a dedicated web page on their site for people to sign and support the commissioner's initiative to combat early marriage. Furthermore, involving mass media organization to cover the event will enhance its visibility to a broader audience.

Legal: while the commissioner is already registered with the Nigerian government, a formal letter requesting venue access, participation and support should be composed and sent to the village heads, religious leaders, and other stakeholders.

Environment: The scheduled time for the event which falls during Nigeria dry season in October, is advantageous. This is likely to encourage greater participation as opposed to the rainy season when both vehicular and human movement can be restricted to some extent.

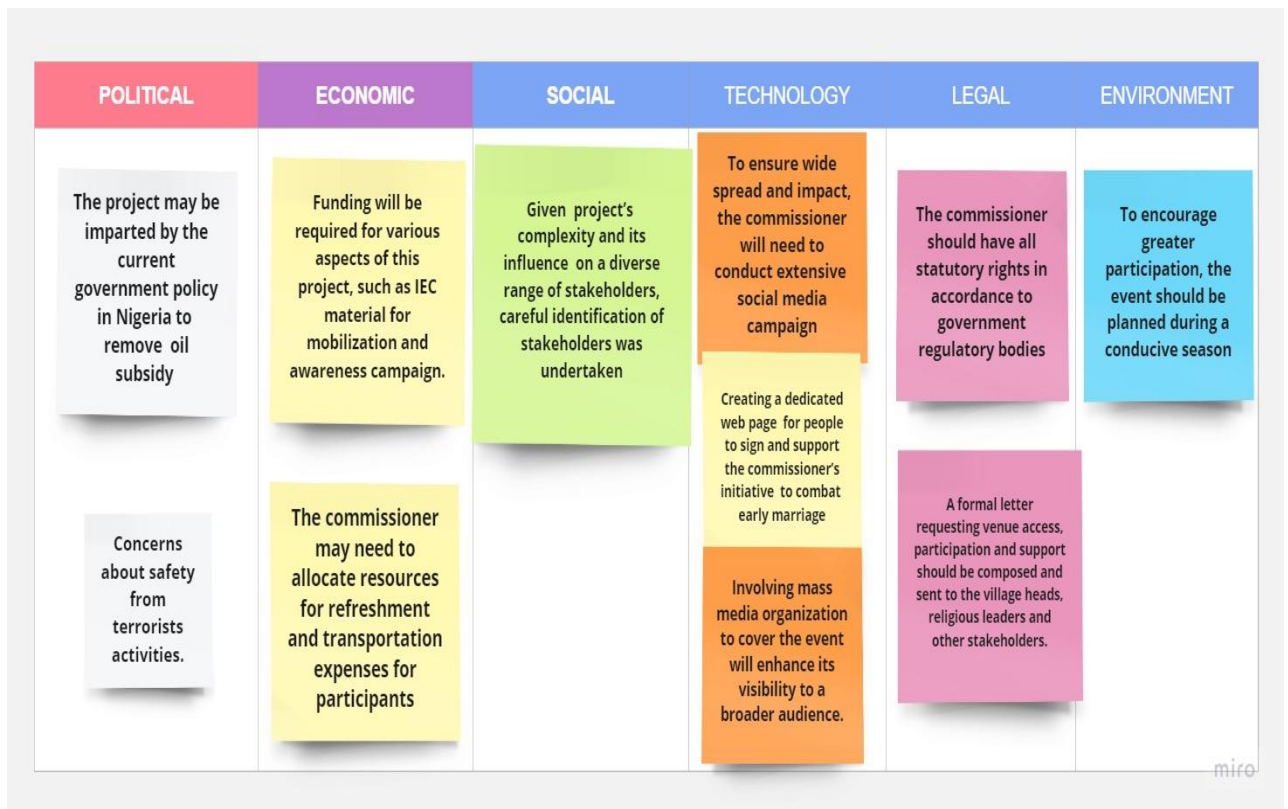


Figure 5. PESTLE Analysis

3.9.2 Business Model Canvas

The business model canvas is a one-page management strategic tool for visualizing business ideas. It has nine components representing different fundamental elements of a business. These include key partners, activities, key propositions, customer relationship, customer segments, key resources, channels, cost structure and revenue.

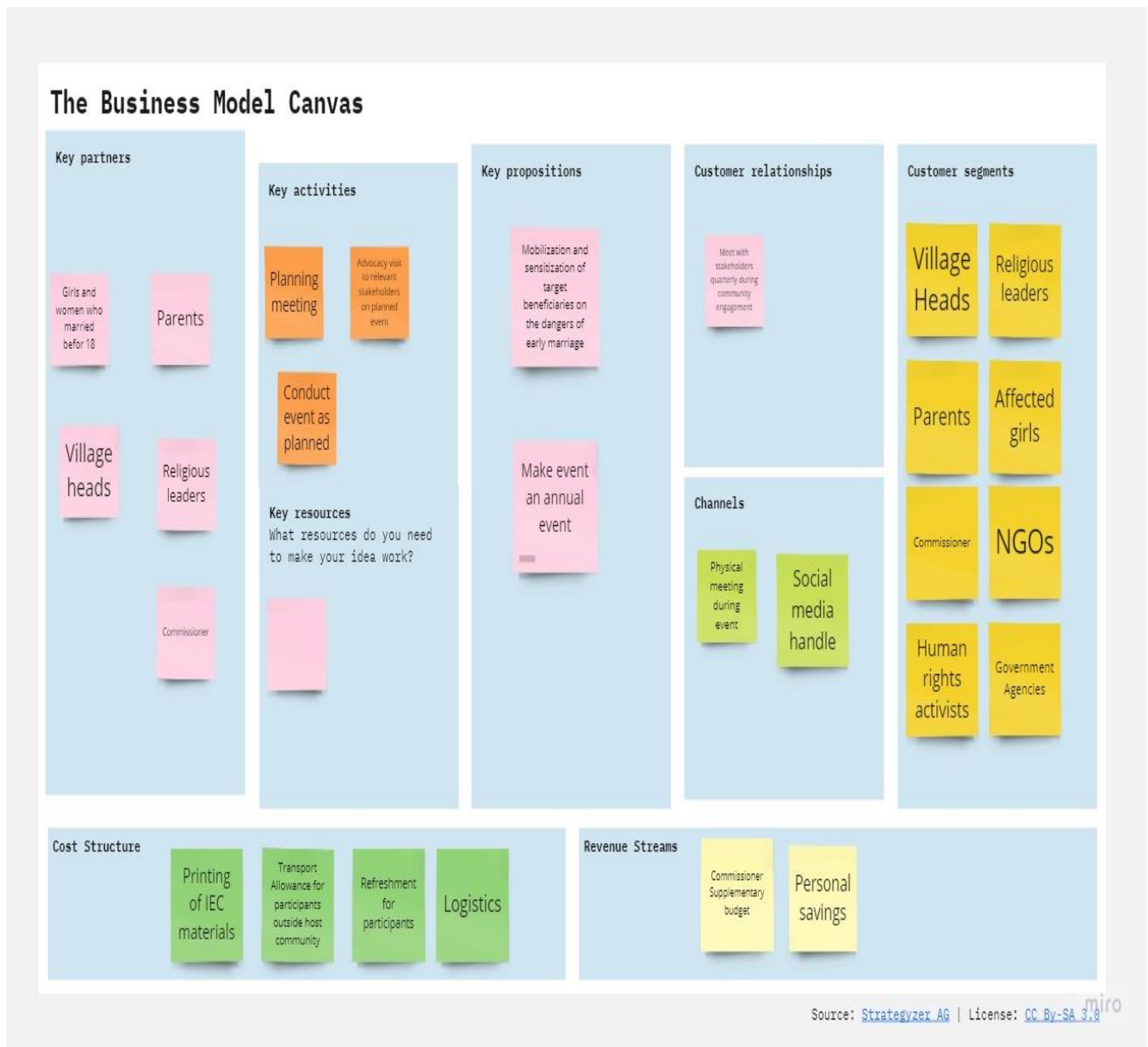


Figure 6. The business model canvas

4 Results and Findings

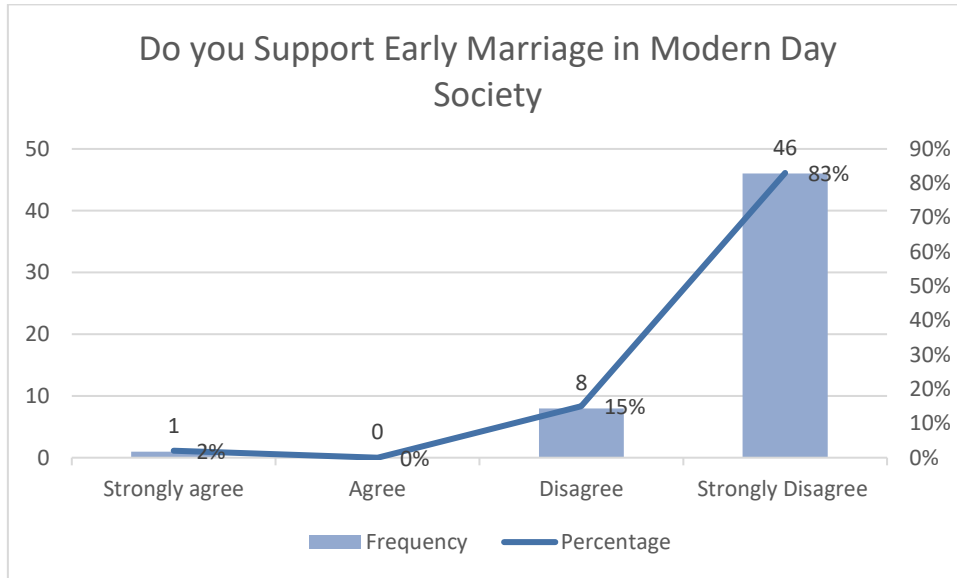
This chapter gives a summary of the result of analyzed data. Sources of analyzed data include, survey, face-to-face interview and a focus group discussions as shown below.

4.1 Results of Survey

The survey was conducted between 14th and 16th of February 2023. It was administered on a four-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. It was administered to all sixty study participants, but only fifty-seven returned their forms. The

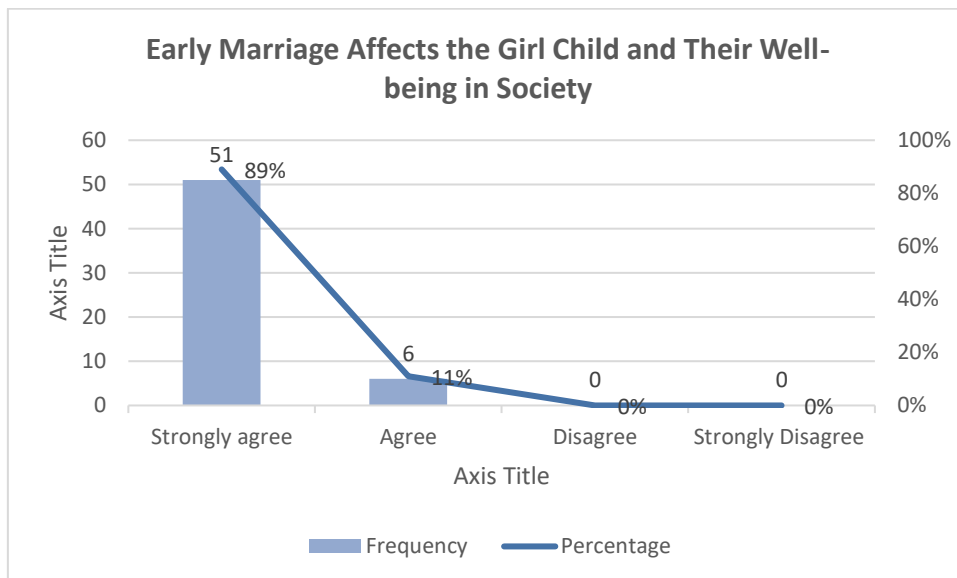
remaining three were not available as at the time of retrieving forms due to one reason or the other. Data was analyzed using excel pivot table.

Table 1. Analysis of question one



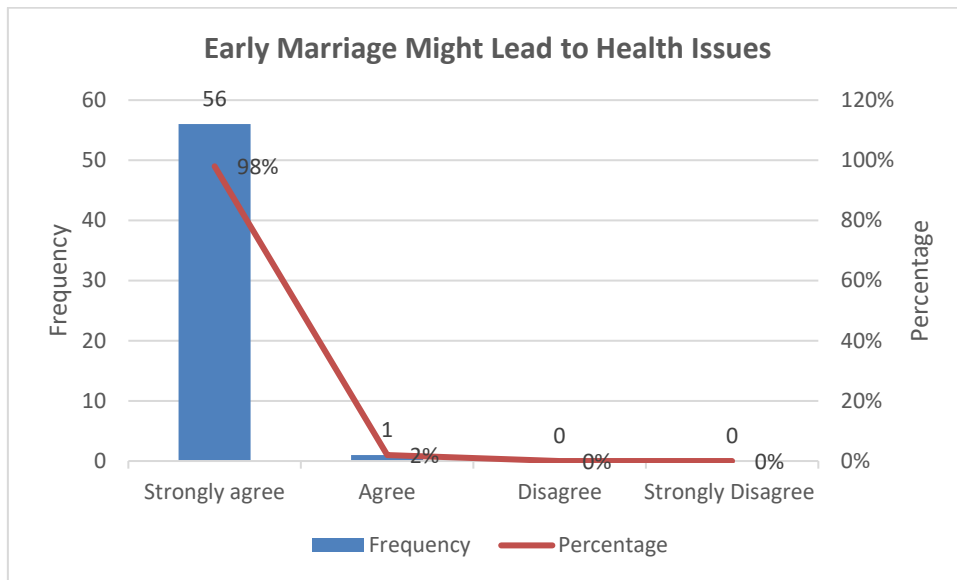
From the above table, in question one, participants were asked whether they support early marriage in modern day society. Responses were received from fifty-seven participants. one participant representing 2% of total respondents said he strongly agree, eight participants representing 15% disagreed, forty-six participants representing 83% said they strongly disagreed. There was nobody for the option of agreeing. From the above analysis, the majority do not support early marriage.

Table 2. Analysis of question two



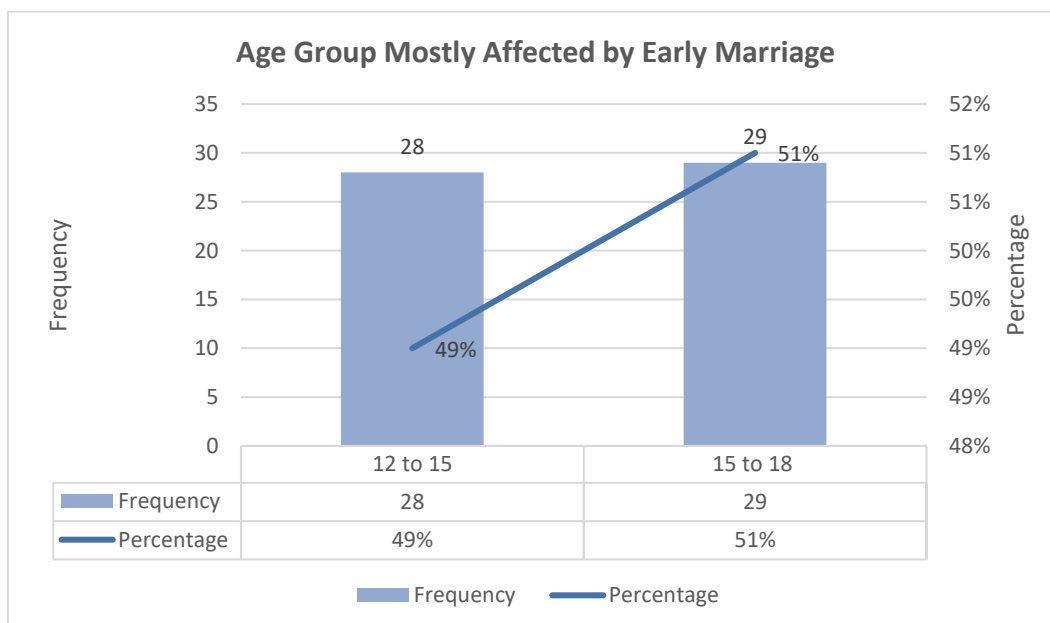
The data on table 2 reveals that fifty-one participants representing 89% of fifty-seven respondents strongly agreed that early marriage affects the well-being of the girl child. Six participants representing 11% said they agreed while the options for disagree and strongly disagreed were 0% as none went for them. The result shows that many are aware that early marriage can affect the well-being of a girl child.

Table 3. Analysis of question three



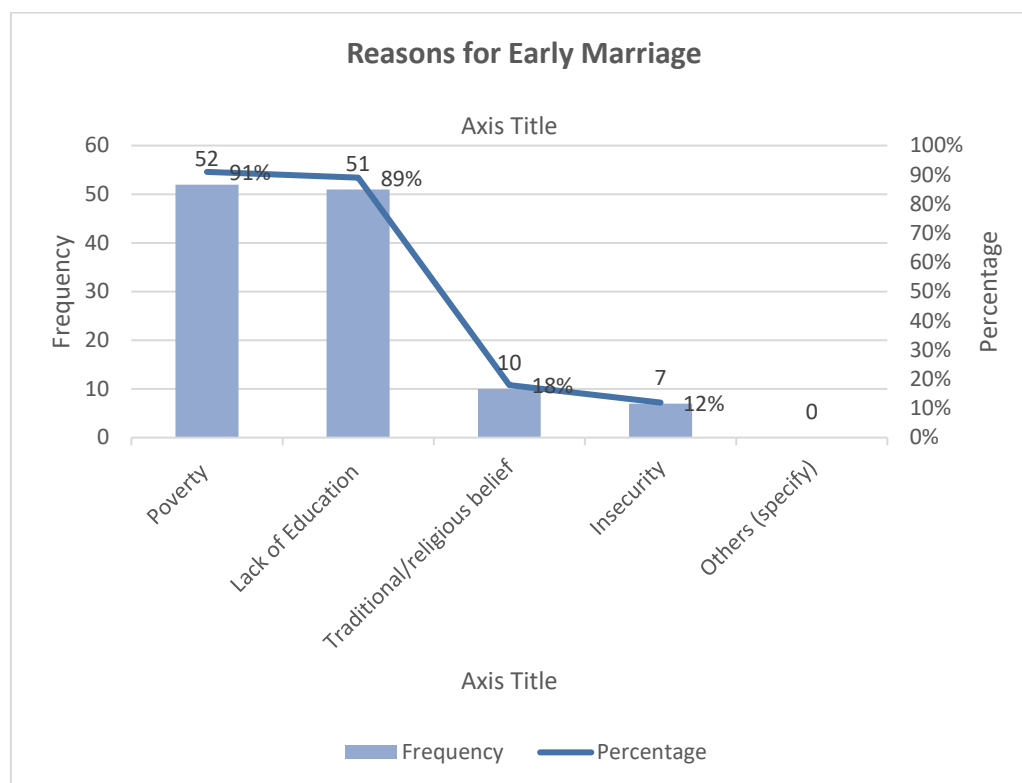
A total of fifty-six respondents out of fifty-seven participants strongly agreed that early marriage might lead to health issues. One participant representing 2% agreed. None went for the options of disagree and strongly disagree. The response from participants shows that majority are well informed of the health complications that may arise from early marriage.

Table 4. Analysis of question four



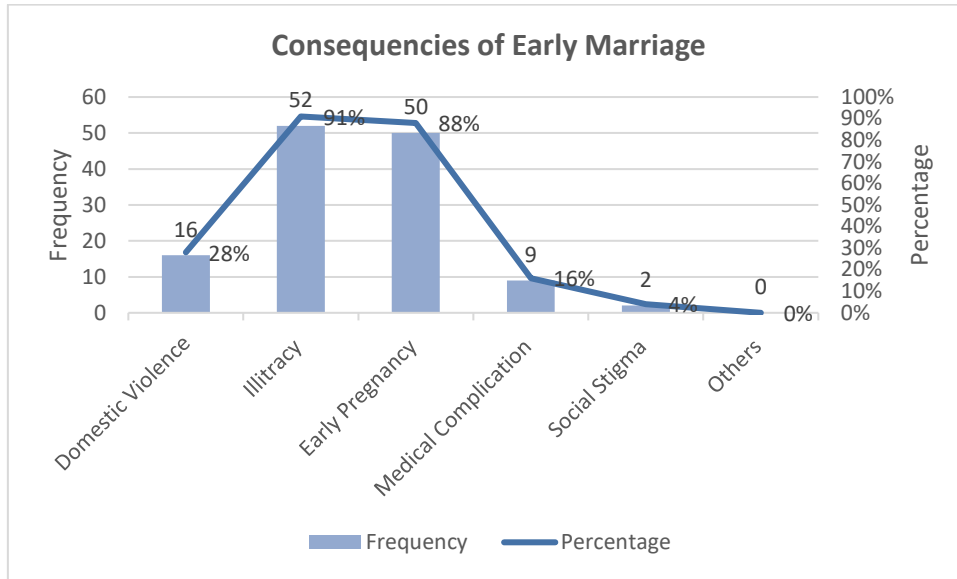
On the question of which age group are mostly affected by early marriage, a total of twenty-eight representing 49% said it was 12-15 years age range. The remaining twenty-nine representing 51% of the respondents, however, said it was in the age range between 15-18 years. From the above analysis, though the percentage of response are close, it shows that majority thinks that the age group mostly given out for marriage is between 15-18. Overall, whether 12-15, or 15-18, one thing clear is that either of the options is still early marriage.

Table 5. Analysis of question five

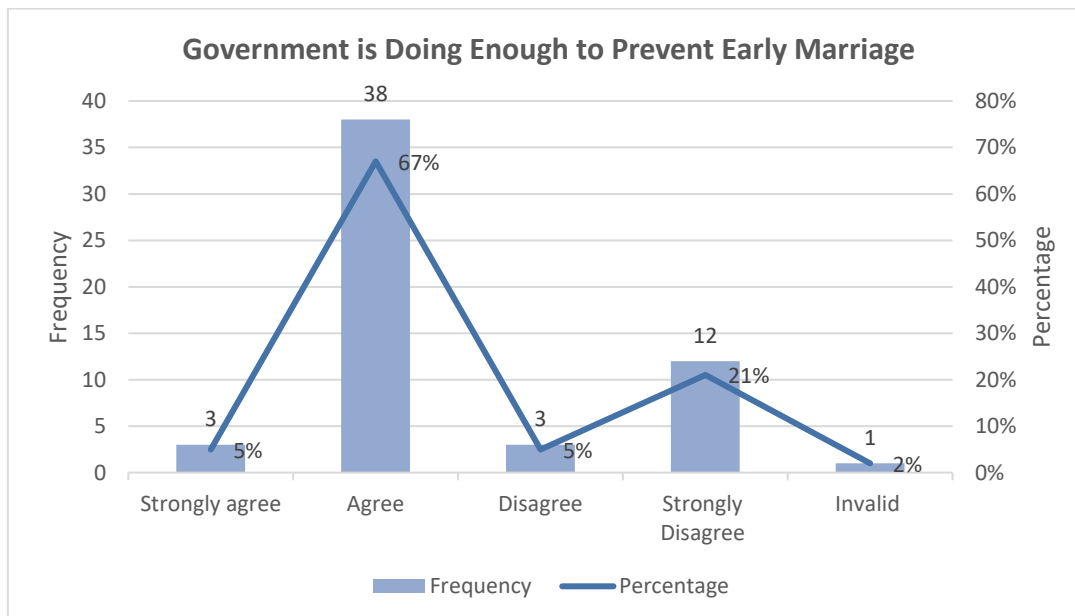


In question 5 participants were allowed to choose more than one option, therefore, the column on percentage will not sum up to 100%.

Fifty-two persons representing 91% thinks poverty is the reason for early marriage, fifty-one persons representing 89% thinks it is lack of education, ten persons representing 18% attributed it to traditional/religious belief, while seven persons representing 12% thinks it is insecurity. From the above data, one may conclude that poverty and lack of education are the major factors responsible for early marriage practice in Nigeria because it had the highest number of responses.

Table 6. Analysis of question six

Participants were allowed to choose more than one option in question 6. From the analyzed data, sixteen participants representing 28% said domestic violence, fifty-two representing 91% identified illiteracy as one of the consequences, fifty representing 88% said early pregnancy, nine representing 16% said medical complication while the remaining two representing 4% mentioned social stigma. From the above analysis, illiteracy and early pregnancy are the major consequences of early marriage.

Table 7. Analysis of question seven

From the analyzed data on question 7, three participants representing 5% said they strongly agreed that the government of Nigeria is doing enough to prevent early marriage, thirty-eight representing 67% said they agreed, three respondents representing 5% disagreed that

government is doing enough to prevent early marriage, while twelve respondents representing 21% strongly disagreed. There was, however, one void answer as the respondents gave multiple answers.

4.2 Interview

4.2.1 Conducting the Interview

The interview was a face-to-face interview. It was conducted between 25th of February to 2nd of March 2023 in Wumba and Apo-dutse communities. A total of eleven participants selected from the population size were involved. A set of ten open-ended questionnaires were developed to guide the process. While seven of the questions were general questions for all participants, three were specifically targeted at married adolescent girls.

As mentioned earlier, due to time and other constraint, I could not go to Nigeria, and therefore, was not part of the interview team. However, a Research Assistant conducted the interview and focus group discussion on my behalf. The questions were developed by me and sent to the Research Assistants who I trained and provided with the interview manual and detailed description of the step-by-step approach on how to administer the tool. Of the total sixty sample size, a total of eleven participants across all categories were included in the interview session. participants were notified of the interview date and time two weeks ahead. While some agreed with the date and time, others requested a convenient time which was granted.

4.2.2 Interpreting the Interview

Responses from interview were summarized and categorized on four thematic areas using word cloud as shown below. The four themes are, reasons for early marriage, how can early marriage be reduced, consequences of early marriage, the role of government and community.

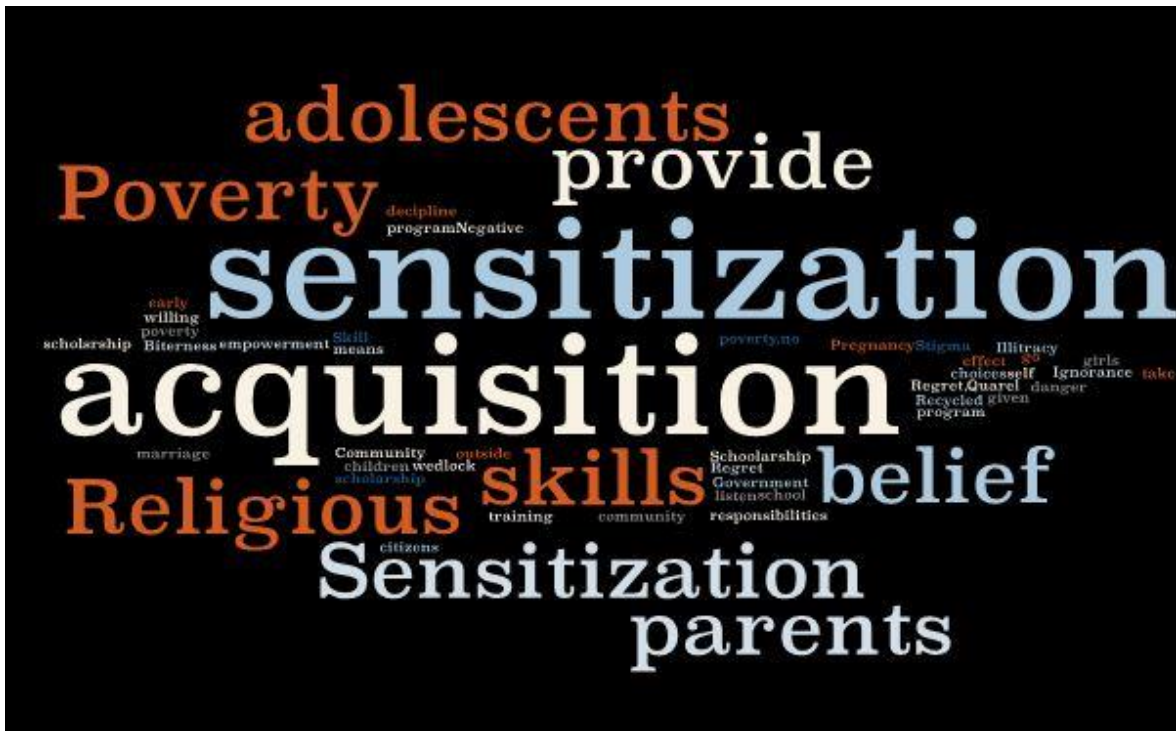


Figure 7. Word cloud

4.3 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

There is no single best method in analyzing focus group discussion data. The nature of the analysis is determined by the research questions and the purpose for which the data are collected. (Analyzing Focus Group Data: Sage Publishing) One of the purpose of FGD is to provide in-depth exploration on a topic such as this project which is not so well known by many people. For such exploratory research, a simple descriptive narrative will suffice.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted on the 8th of March. Eleven participants from the sample size were involved. In conducting the exercise, there was a moderator who coordinated the discussion session. The audio was recorded. There was also a transcriber who took notes of all the discussions that went on during the process.

4.3.1 Summary of Focus Group Discussion

A total of eleven participants selected across the different sub-set of sample size participated in the exercise. The sub-set included the girl child, religious leaders, village heads, parents, and teachers. The focus group discussion had three questions. Responses from participants were summarized using Miro board.

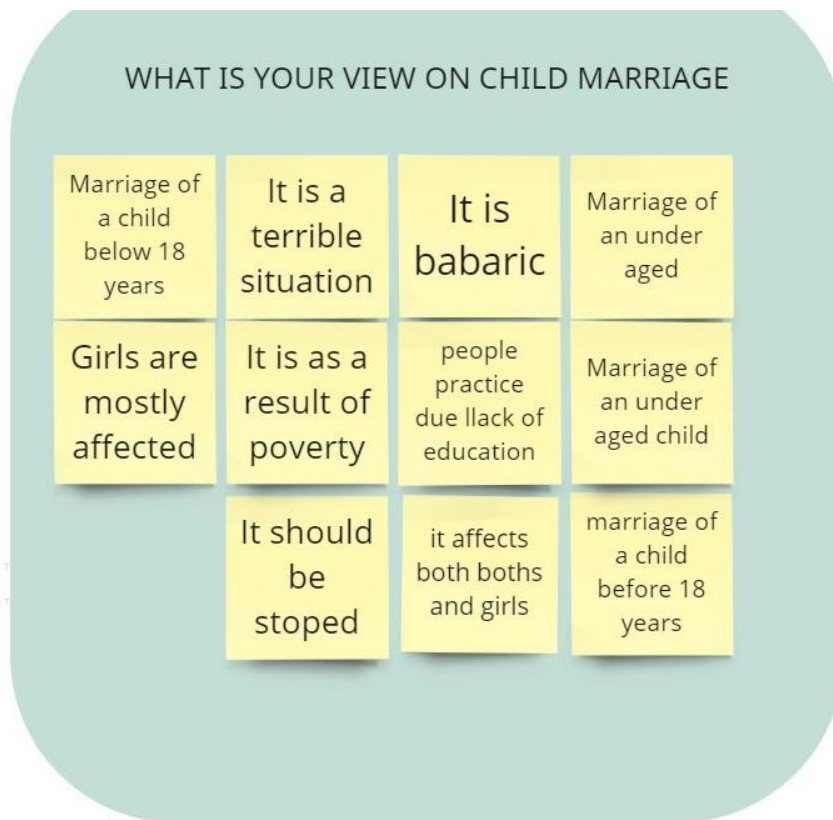


Figure 8. FDG question one summary



Figure 9. FDG question two summary



Figure 10. FDG question three summary

4.4 Personas

To further illustrate the findings from the research, personas were created. Personas are fictional characters created based on research findings. Each persona represents three distinct categories of participants used in this research. The first persona used is the young woman who was married as an adolescent. The justification is that she can relate to the feelings of the girl child and what she is passing through. The second and third personas were the village head and the religious leaders. Both play a key role when it comes to early marriage. In Nigeria. While the village head is the custodian of tradition, the religious leader is regarded as the spiritual head and interprets the scriptures to worshippers. The choice of making use of these three personas is because of their crucial roles in society.

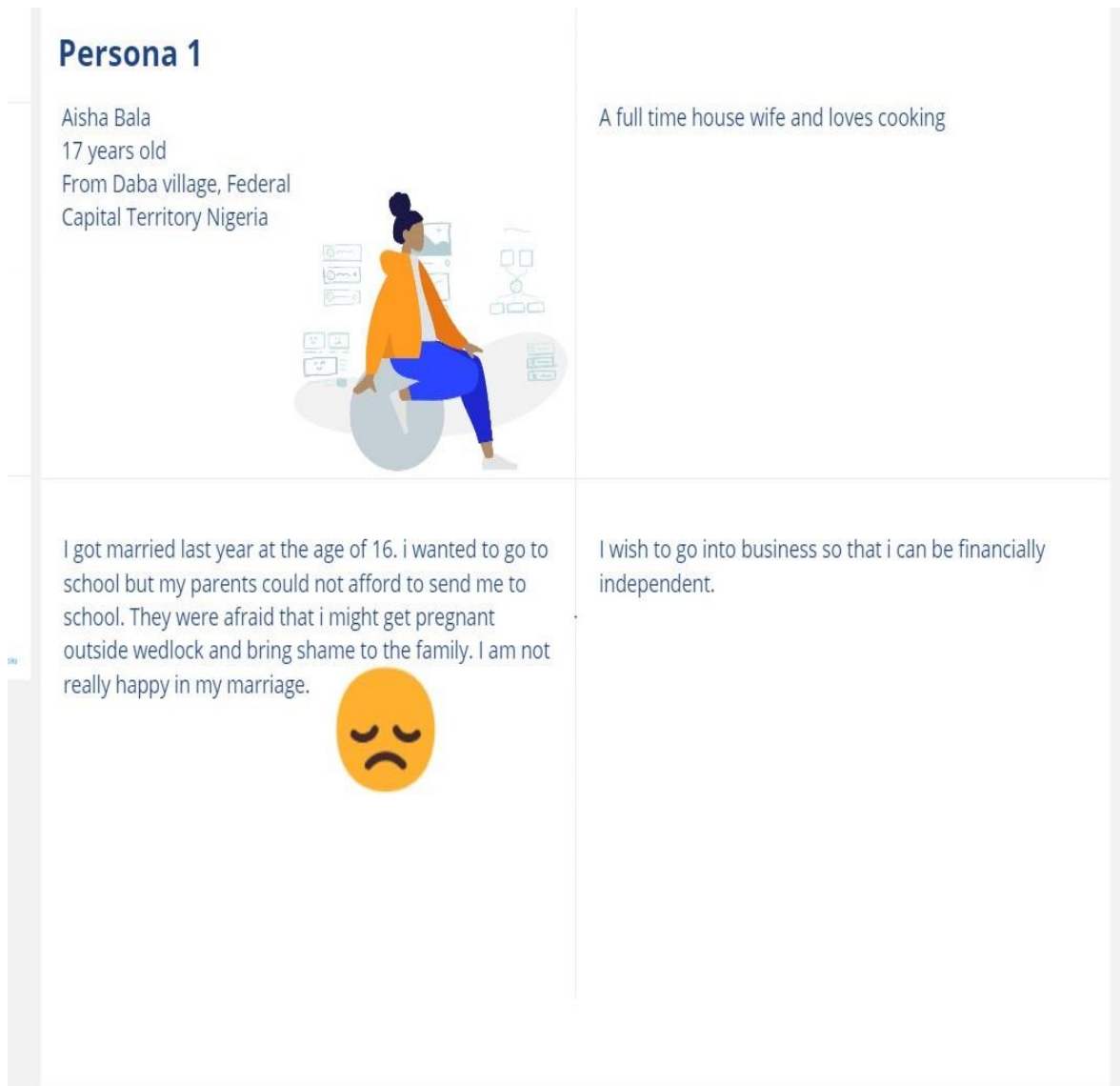


Figure 11. Persona 1

Persona 2

Joseph Maji
42 years old from Sabalo
Village, Federal Capital
Territory, Nigeria.



Village head of Sabalo village

Child marriage especially of the girl child is an aged long issue that cannot be eradicated immediately, we will need to sensitize our people on the dangers of early marriage. It will take some time, it is not an impossible task Education of the girl child brings so many benefits.

Illustration by Pexels/Getty

my goal is to help sensitize my community on the importance of educating the girl child.

Figure 12. Persona 2



Figure 13. Persona 3

5 Service Development

This chapter talks about the development of an action plan and the processes involved. It explains the pre-event and day of events' activities and the results.

5.1 Prototype

Following the brainstorming sessions, ideas were generated by stakeholders in the developing stage, stakeholders agreed that the best workable solution was the development of an action plan to be implemented within specified timelines. This was to be piloted in Wumba village. The success of its implementation would determine scaling up to other villages where early marriage was prevalent in communities where the commissioner implements its program. The event date was scheduled to coincide with the United Nations (UN) International Day of the Girl Child which usually is held on the 11th of October every year. This year's theme was captioned "*Invest in girls' Rights: Our Leadership, Our Well-being.*"

5.2 Pre-Event

Since the researcher could not go to Nigeria to coordinate the event, a work plan was developed prior to the event to help monitor the timeline and assign duties. A detailed program description and questionnaire to guide the coordination of the event was developed, and research assistants were trained on what to do. One month before the event, firstly, stakeholders were officially informed about the upcoming events. Secondly, a curtesy visit was conducted to the village head. Thirdly, the venue for the event was secured and every logistics issues were taken care of. Finally, a few days before the event, reminders were sent out to all stakeholders.

5.3 Day of Event

The event started at 10.00 am Nigeria time. It was a community engagement event in the form of a panel of discussion. Six of the stakeholders were selected as panellists to address the issue. Thirty community residents served as the audience while a research assistant was the anchor person coordinating the discussion session. Each panelist had specific questions posed to them by the anchor person. The audience were given an opportunity to either ask a question or make a contribution. From the discussion sessions, some root causes of early marriage of the girl child were identified. Based on the identified root causes, stakeholders

developed an action plan. The action plan had proposed activities to be implemented. Each activity had an assigned person responsible for its implementation within a given timeline. After the development of the plan, the research assistant read to the hearing all what has been agreed in case there is any omission or addition. After the reading, stakeholders agreed that everything was in order and thereafter signed a commitment to implement all that was contained in the workplan. Details of the signed document can be found in the appendix.

5.4 Summary of Event

For clarity and better understanding, the analysis of the discussion session was analyzed by visualizing with personas and problem tree. The developed action plan was also visualized using Miro board.

5.4.1 Personas

Personas are fictional characters created based on research findings. Based on the different perspectives on the negative effects of early marriage on the girl child received from stakeholders in early marriage, personas were created based on different perspectives. Personas consisted of a traditional leader, Islamic and Christian religious leaders, school representatives, health personnel and a married girl child. These personas were selected because of their relevance to the subject matter.



<p>Aisha Magaji. 18 years old Married at 15. Mother of two Lives in Wumba village. Currently divorced.</p> 	<p>Does mania jobs to fend for herself and two children.</p>
<p>" i married early not because i wanted to. it was due to circumstances beyond me. Now, i am divorced after having two children as a result of domestic violence by my husband. Now I am left alone to cater for me and my children. I regret marrying early"</p> 	<p>" I wish to have a regular source of income so i can train my children in school and give them a good life. My goal is to be economically empowered so i can take good care of my children"</p>

Figure 14. Adolescent girl



<p>Idris Abubakar 56 years old Village Head of Wumba. Lives in Wumba village.</p> 	<p>Custodian of Wumba culture and tradition. Presides over traditional affairs.</p>
<p>" if parents choose to train their daughters and decide not to give her out early for marriage, there is nothing wrong with. Most people give out their daughters early for marriage due to their personal reasons"</p> 	<p>" at the community level, i and my cabinet members shall engage on periodic sensitization and awareness creation on the dangers of early marriage of the girl child"</p>

Figure 15. Village District Head

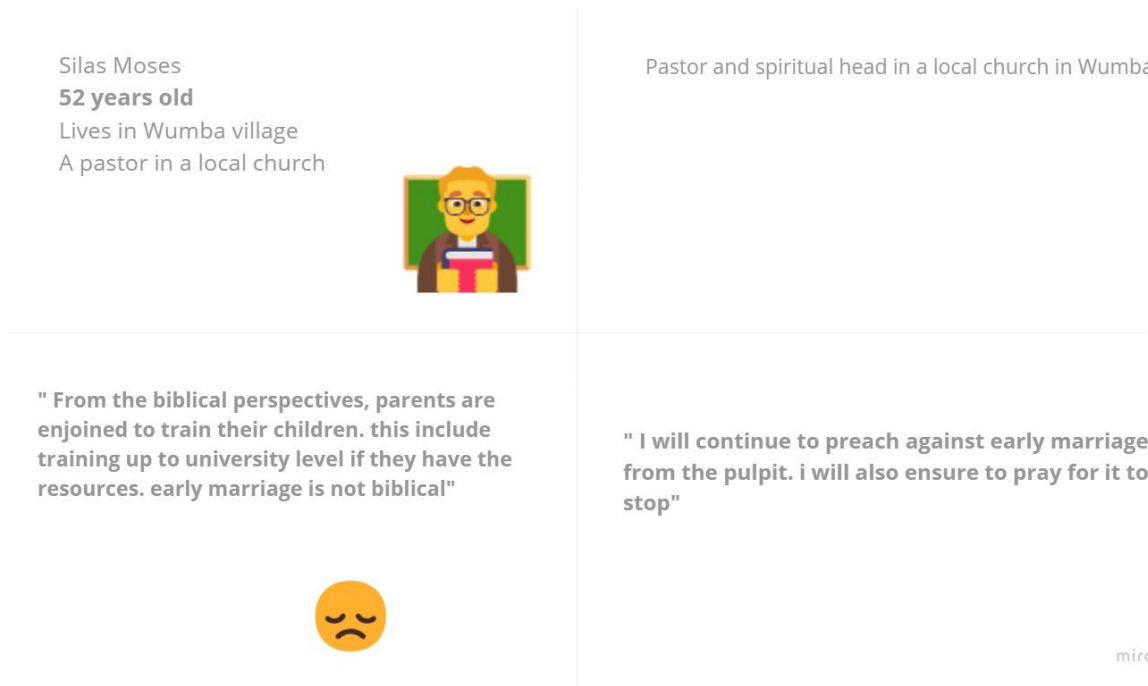


Figure 16. A Christian Cleric.



Figure 17. A Muslim Cleric



Figure 18. Community Health Worker



Figure 19. School Teacher

5.4.2 Root Cause Analysis

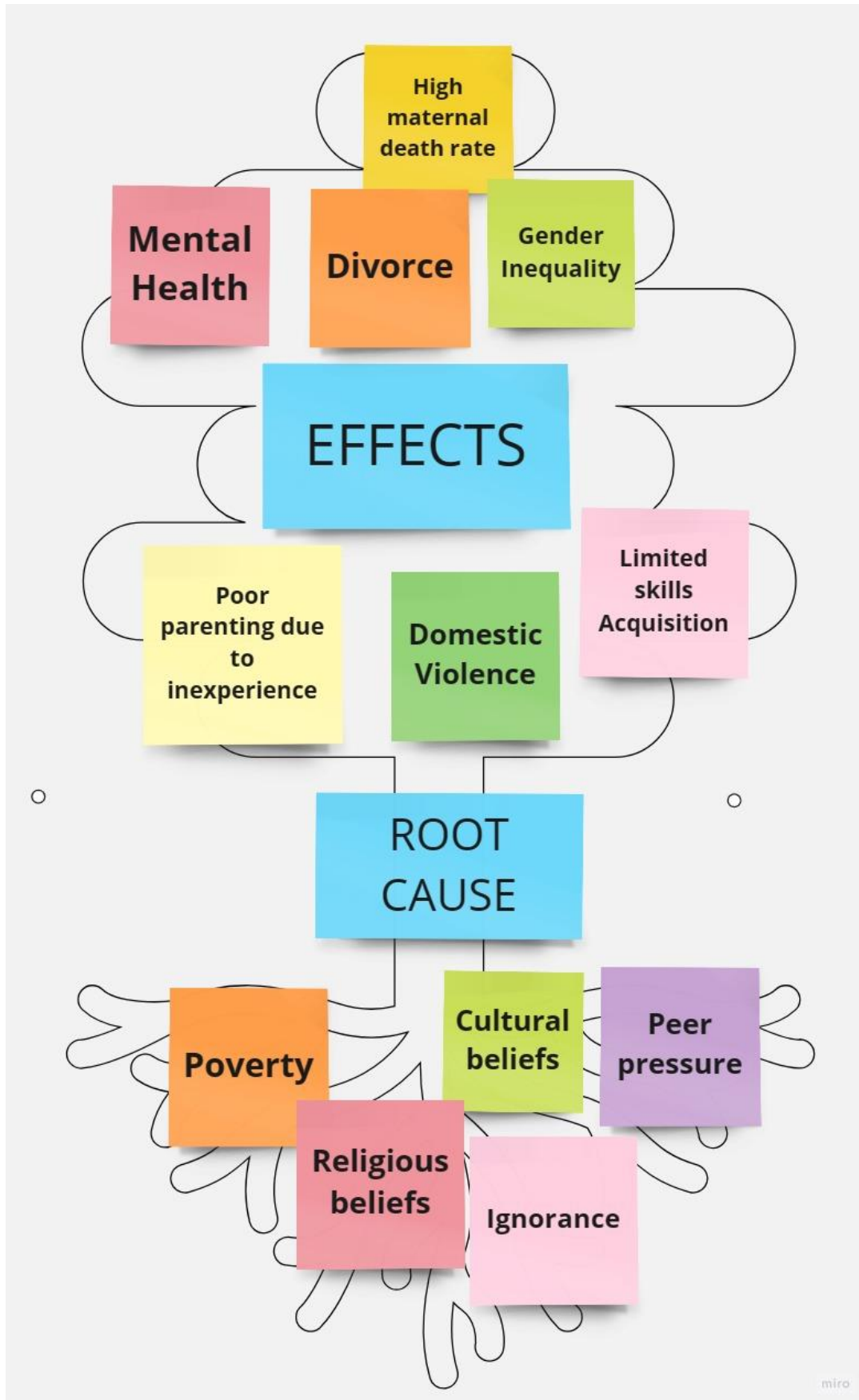


Figure 20. Root Cause Analysis of Early Marriage of the girl child in Wumba Village

5.4.3 Action Plan

Activity/Task	Responsible Person	Timeline	Expected Output
Community mobilization and sensitization on the negative effect of early marriage	Village head - Wumba village	To be determined	Community parents and caregivers are sensitized
Health education	Wumba assigned community health personnel	Fortnightly	Target beneficiaries educated on the health implication of early marriage of the girl child
Sensitization of parents during PTA meetings	Assigned teacher from Wumba community school	Quarterly	Parents and caregivers sensitized on the dangers of early marriage of the girl child
sensitization of church worshippers	pastor of Wumba local church	Quarterly	Church members are sensitized on the negative effects of early marriage of the girl child
Sensitization of Muslim worshippers	Imam of Wumba local mosque	Quarterly	Muslim worshippers are sensitized on the dangers of early marriage of the girl child

Figure 21. Action plan Developed by Wumba Community Stakeholders to address early child marriage.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents discussions of key findings, recommendations, and implications of the study.

6.1 Discussion of the Findings

This section summarizes the findings of the study on designing interventions for minimizing early marriage of the girl child in Nigeria

The goal of this study was to collaborate with the commissioner CFHI in developing an intervention program to help minimize early marriage of the girl child in Nigeria especially in communities where the commissioner implements the program. Several methods including survey, interview, focus group discussion and visualization were utilized. The results of the data collection tools were analyzed. Based on the insight gained from analysis, the study engaged relevant stakeholders in a brainstorming session to generate several probable solution options to tackle the situation. The best suggested options for the required solution was the development of an action plan by stakeholders. The method employed for the development of the action plan was a community engagement forum where stakeholders identified the root cause of early marriage and proper solution. This helped in the development of the action plan. This event is going to be an annual event to be implemented by the commissioner. The maiden edition which served as the prototype or pilot study, was implemented at Wumba village precisely on the 11th of October, 2023. The day was intentionally chosen to coincide with the UN's International Day of the Girl Child. The day is set aside by the UN to commemorate girls globally. It is a call to action for the empowerment of girls and acknowledging their rights. The event was quite a success as stakeholders not only developed an action plan, but also pledged themselves to the commitment. This can be seen in appendix 6.

6.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that poverty, ignorance, cultural religious belief, and peer pressure accounted for factors responsible for early marriage. The resulting effects are very devastating. Such effects include domestic violence, high maternal death rate, mental health problems, divorce, limited skills acquisition, and gender inequality. The development of an action plan by stakeholders shows actions do not necessarily need to be taken at the national

level. Individuals and the community can effectively initiate a program strategy in resolving social issues such as this. The discussion sessions also show that many people, due to ignorance, hide under the cover of religion and culture to perpetrate this act. It is important for people to realize that man-made culture and traditions to guide their affairs. Man can also modify it to suit the need of the current situation. It is important to state that it might not be easy to stop early marriages, especially of the girl child, but can be minimized through strategic service design and implementation at the local, state, and national level. The international community also needs to continue supporting the Federal Government and non-governmental organizations committed to empowering young women and girls in Nigeria.

If the action plan is effectively implemented, it will be of immense benefit to the girl child, government, community leaders, religious leaders, elementary and high school teachers, and school counsellors as well as researchers who may wish to conduct studies in same or related field.

6.3 Recommendations

This study was able to collaborate with stakeholders to identify some root causes of early marriage and to develop an action plan. For optimal results, the researcher recommends the following:

1. The commissioner should ensure an effective monitoring strategy for the implementation of the developed action plan.
2. The commissioner should key into its already existing community engagement program and incorporate sensitization on early marriage.

6.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study has a far-reaching contribution to the government of Nigeria in policy and decision making as it highlights some of the root causes of early marriage. The study will also be of immense benefit to international partners already working or interested in exploring the subject area or designing programs in community development. This study will also help local NGOs in the effective design and implementation of community engagement programs through collaborative efforts with stakeholders and dialogue.

6.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

This study identified the following as areas for future studies:

1. This study can be conducted on a larger scale to cover the entire Nigeria country.
2. The root causes, effects and consequences of early marriage can be further investigated.

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Appendix 1. Interview Manual

INTERVIEW MANUAL	INTERVIEW MANUAL
<p>Interview Manual</p> <p>Research Topic: Early Marriage and its Negative Effect on the Girl Child in Nigeria</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>This data collection tool is divided into section A, B, and C. section A is a guide on how the interview section should be conducted. Section B contains the respondents' biodata while section C contains the lead questions for the interview.</p> <p>SECTION A – RESPONDENTS BIO-DATA</p> <p>Instruction: Kindly mark (X) where applicable</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Community: _____</p> <p>Sex: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Status: adolescent/young mother <input type="checkbox"/> parents () religious leader () village head/community leader () government representative () others (please specify) _____</p> <p>Age: 10-15 <input type="checkbox"/> 16-25 () 26-35 () 36-44 () 45 and above ()</p> <p>Qualification: ACE <input type="checkbox"/> HND () BSC/MSC/MED () PhD () Others (specify) _____</p> <p>Section B: Instructions and Guide on how to Conduct Interview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The interview participants shall be selected across each sub-set of the sample size. The maximum number shall be twelve (12) and minimum number shall be eleven (11). Questions one to six of the questions shall be answered by all respondents while questions 7-10 shall be answered specifically only by the adolescent mothers. After the interview, the data tools should be scanned and sent back to the researcher. 	<p>Section C: Interview Questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is your view on the issue of child marriage in your community? Do you think early marriage, especially of the girl child is a violation of their rights? Are you aware of any policy or law that supports the right of the child. If yes, mention the ones you know! What are the possible ways to mitigate the challenges of child marriage in your community? Do you think the government has a role to play in this. If your answer is yes or no, tell us the reason for your answer. Is there any other comment regarding the subject discussed. At what age were you married (for the married adolescents) Do you regret marrying early (for the married adolescents) If you had your way at what age would you have married and why (for the married adolescents) Any other comments (for the married adolescents)

Appendix 2. FGD Manual

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION MANUAL

Focus Group Discussion Manual

Research Topic: Designing Interventions to Minimize Early Marriage of the Girl Child in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

This data collection tool is divided into section A, B, and C. Respondents' biodata, guide on how to conduct the FGD session and the FGD lead questions.

SECTION A – RESPONDENTS BIO-DATA

Instruction: kindly mark (X) where applicable

Name: _____

Community: _____

Sex: Male Female: ()

Status: adolescent/young mother parents () religious leader () village head/community leader () government representative () others (please specify) _____

Age: 10-15 16-25 () 26-35 () 36-44 () 45 and above ()

Qualification: NCE HND () BSC/MSC/M. ED () PHD () Others (specify) _____

Section B: Instructions and Guide on how to Conduct the FGD.

- The interview participants shall be selected across each sub-set of the sample size. The maximum number shall be twelve (12) and minimum number shall be eleven (11).
- During the focus group discussion, participants shall sit in a circular form round the table. There shall be a moderator, a transcriber, and a recorder. (Participants should be notified that the conversation is being recorded)
- After the session, the recorded audio and transcribed information should be sent to the researcher.

SECTION D: FGD LEAD QUESTIONS

1. What is your view on the issue of child marriage?
2. Is it possible to stop early marriage. If yes or no, what are your reasons.
3. What is the way forward?

Appendix 3. Survey

DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Research Topic: Designing Interventions for Minimizing Early Marriage of the Girl Child in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

This data collection tool is divided into section A and B. Respondents biocdata and the questionnaire section. This is to be administered by the research assistants. The survey questions are to be administered to all 60 respondents. Upon completion, the data tool is to be scanned and sent to the researcher.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. To what extent does early marriage affect the girl child.
2. What are the causes of early marriage in Nigeria.
3. How does parents' illiteracy enhance early marriage.

SECTION A – RESPONDENTS BIO-DATA

Instruction: kindly mark (X) where applicable

Name:

Community:

Sex: Male () Female: ()

Status: adolescent/young mother () parents () religious leader () village head/community leader () government representative () others (please specify)

Age: 10-15 () 16-25 () 26-35 () 36-44 () 45 and above ()

Qualification: NCE () HND () BSC/MSC/M.Ed () PHD () Others (specify)

SECTION B – SURVEY/ QUESTIONAIRE

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Y	N
1	Do you support child marriage in modern day society						
2	Early marriage affects the well-being of the girl child						
3	Early marriage might lead to some health complications on young girls						

4	Which age group do you think is mostly affected by early marriage: a. 12-15 () b. 15-18 ()						
5	Which of the following underlisted reasons do you think is responsible for early marriage in your community. You can choose more one option if you wish. a. Poverty () b. Lack of education () c. Traditional/religious belief () d. Insecurity () e. Other (specify) _____						
6	What are the consequences of child marriages in your community. Please feel free to choose more than one option if you wish to a. Domestic violence () b. illiteracy () c. Early pregnancy () d. Medical complication () e. Social stigma () f. Other (specify) _____						
7	Government is doing enough to prevent early marriage						

Appendix 4. Work plan

S/N	Activity	Expected Output	TIMELINE				
			Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
1	Planning Meeting	Team member have a better understanding on the way forward					
2	Advocacy and courtesy visit to village Heads	The village heads from each community gives consent for the program to be organized in their communities and pledges support					
3	Secure venue for event	The venue for event is available and secured					
4	Send invitation to stakeholders	Stakeholders prepare ahead of time to attend event					
5	Send reminder to invitees	Stakeholders are reminded	of the upcoming event				
6	Host Event	Relevant stakeholders and target communities increase knowledge on the effect of early marriage on the academic performance of the girl child.					
7	Action Plan	Stakeholders and communities residence develop an action plan on the way forward					
8	write and send report	Documentation of event					

Appendix 5. Program Description Manual

Designing Intervention to Minimize Early Marriage for the Girl Child in Nigeria

Description of Event Procedures

1. Event format: Town hall meeting (it could be held in the chief's palace)
2. Panel of discussants
 - Religious leader – Imam
 - Religious leader – pastor
 - Medical practitioner
 - School head or representative
 - Married adolescent girl (could be previously married adolescent girl now an adult still married or divorced etc)
3. Audience
 - Women - between 7-10 (including women leader)
 - Men - between 7 – 10 (including men leader)
 - Youths – between 7- 10 (preferably married adolescent girls should be more, then few boys)
4. Procedure
 - The Lead Research Assistant anchors the discussion using the questionnaires
 - Participants are informed that the conversation will be recorded, and their consent granted.
 - Each panel of discussant answers their respective questions.
 - At the end of discussion, the audience will ask questions. Each panelist will answer questions related to their area. After the question-and-answer session, the audience can also contribute if any.
5. The highlight of the event is the development of an action plan.
 - Audience (community residence) agree on what should be done to stop early marriage.
 - They make a commitment to how they can stop the practice as an individual and as a community.
 - The action plan should be documented and read back to them. After reading, if there was any omission or addition, it will be corrected. After correction, the village head and other relevant stakeholders will sign as a sign of commitment to stop the practice.

