
Nature of Conflict between School Administrators and Parents over Early Marriages

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Abstract. Using a qualitative case study design, the study sought to establish the nature of conflict between school administrators and parents arising from early marriages and to establish the conflict management strategies used by school administrators to resolve those conflicts. The findings of this study suggest that the nature of conflict related mainly to contradictory interests and biological ownership of the girl children. Among the conflict management strategies used to address such conflicts was dialogue between the school administrators and parents. The study recommends, among other things, that it is prudent for government and other stakeholders interested in education to find innovative ways of fighting early marriages in order to safeguard the future of the girl child.

Keywords: conflict, school administrators, parents, management strategies, early marriages

Introduction

In most African countries, marrying off of the girl-child at a tender age has become rampant, to the extent that the world at large has now become more concerned than ever before. Kauseni (2018) generalises this assertion by noting that all African countries are faced with the challenge of child marriage, a harmful traditional practice that robs girls of their education, their health and their future. In Africa, Amato *et al.* (2007) write, high rates of child marriage combined with a rapidly growing population could have devastating human and development consequences. Nour (2009) refers to early marriages as a silent health issue and, by extension, a violation of human rights as well as a crime against humanity. In this regard, early marriages have emerged as a serious cause for concern the world over. This is due, as Gamble and Gamble (2011) argue, to the fact that child marriages undermine the health, dignity, security and independence of their victims as they drop out of school, thereby giving rise to a major concern among many educational practitioners.

Michael (2019) provides glaring statistics to the effect that every two seconds, a girl is married before she is physically or emotionally mature enough to become a wife or a mother. Globally, 720 million women alive today were married before their eighteenth birthday. Every year, they are joined by another fifteen million child brides – the equivalent of the entire population of Mali or Zimbabwe. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2019) reveals that South Asia has the highest rates of child marriage in the world, given that almost half (45%) of all women aged twenty to twenty-four years reported being married before the age of eighteen. Almost one in five girls (17%) are married before the age of fifteen. It is for this reason that UNICEF is committed to fighting the scourge of early marriages as it believes that child marriage is a form of violence against children. In this regard, UNICEF (2019) has the goal to avert 500,000 child marriages by the year 2021.

The Zambian realities are even more glaring. Kauseni (2019) reports that 31 per cent of Zambian girls are married before their eighteenth birthday, and six per cent are married before the age of fifteen. In Zambia, which has ten provinces, the rates of child marriage vary from one region to another, and are highest in the Eastern and Northern provinces, where the

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median age for first marriages among twenty to forty-nine year old women was found to be seventeen and half years. Further to this, a situation report on early marriages in Zambia advances that Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 42 per cent of women aged twenty to twenty-four years married by the age of eighteen (UNICEF, 2015). The report further adds, however, that under statutory law, child marriages are illegal and are considered a form of child abuse. The legal age for marriage under statutory law is eighteen years for females and twenty-one years for males. While early marriages were not restricted to girls alone, as even boys were affected in particular instances, the international community's response to early marriages was in reaction to what UNIFPA (2006) and Michael (2019) noted when they argued that in many developing countries women and girls were still the poorest, least educated, most unhealthy, and most marginalised segments of the population.

Early marriage affects the lives of young girls in many ways, especially in rural Zambia and Africa as a whole. Most, if not all of the girls which these statistics represent, are school going children and are thus made to choose between marriage and school. In essence, most of the girls do not have a choice because the decision to be married at a tender age does not rest with them since it is often the preserve of their parents. Often, schools are at the centre of fighting for girls' education and their removal from early marriages, because they see education for a girl-child not only as a human right but also as indispensable for development. It is this clash of intentions between parents and schools that has given rise to the conflict between them caused by early marriages. Consequently, the present undertaking spoke to the management strategies employed by schools in resolving this conflict. Put simply, early marriages bring into the spotlight a conflict which needs to be resolved: parents may decide to marry off a girl-child at a tender age, while school managers and teachers have a duty to ensure that all children, girls included, have their right to education protected.

Methodology

Since this study took a qualitative approach, a descriptive research design was adopted. The study was conducted at a selected secondary school in the Kafue district in Lusaka Province. The school is situated in a rural area known as Chiawa. This area was selected because it has a high school dropout rate as a result of early marriages (Central Statistical office, 2010). The target population for this study was administrators and parents at the selected secondary school.

School administrators were targeted because they play a major role in protecting and respecting the right of the girl-child to education at school level. They are closely involved in the fight against early marriages to ensure that the girl child becomes educated and an independent member of society. Parents were included in this study because they are key stakeholders in the process of educating girl children. Thus, they were the right people from whom to obtain the information that this study sought to generate.

The sample size for this study comprised twenty-four research participants. In this study, the school administrators comprised one head teacher, one deputy head teacher, five heads of department, as well as two guidance and counselling teachers. The study also included twelve parents and two key informants from the office of the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS). The Village Headman was also interviewed. These participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling was used because it enabled the selection of participants with the potential to provide rich data and a thick description of their experiences of the phenomenon (Nswana & Simuyaba, 2021).

In collecting secondary sources of data, a literature review was conducted in different libraries on the subject matter. Various sources, including books, journals, reports, papers and

internet materials, were studied in order to gain a critical overview of the effects of early marriage on education for girls.

Primary data were collected by means of interviews and focus group discussions with the sampled population. The rationale for selecting an interview method was based on the potential the method has to help the researcher obtain more information and in greater depth by probing beyond the predetermined questions. Accordingly, a semi-structured interview was used because unlike a structured interview, the researcher is free to ask additional detailed questions that could explore the participants' deep inner feelings. This means that the researcher does not have to stick to the interview guide. In this study, interviews were held with the key informants, namely, head teacher, deputy head teacher, heads of department, village headman, and the guidance and counselling teachers, while focus group discussions were conducted with the parents. The strength of focus group discussions lie in allowing participants to agree or disagree with each other so that they provide an insight into how a group thinks about an issue.

Since data were obtained through qualitative approaches, qualitative thematic analysis was used for data analysis. Thematic data analysis is used when interpreting responses to open-ended questions, as well as data obtained from histories or conversations. As data were interpreted, particular themes related to the primary concerns or objectives of this entire study were identified.

Ethical Considerations

As a way of considering ethical matters, before going into the field the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of Zambia School of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Clearance Committee. Anonymity was assured throughout the process as a high level of confidentiality was observed in conducting the research.

Results

The Nature of Conflict between Parents and School Administrators Arising from Early Marriages

The first objective intended to ascertain the nature of the conflict between parents and school administrators with regard to early marriages. Participants were asked about the basic or inherent features, character and qualities presented by this kind of conflict. The participants noted the defining and characteristic features of the conflict, and the following themes emerged.

Contradictory interests

When participants were asked about the nature of this kind of conflict, one of the major themes which emerged was that of contradictory interests. In this regard, parents had very different interests compared to those of the members of the selected school. The findings established that the contradictory interests arose because parents want monetary gain, while the schools wanted to see the child educated. In this regard, one of the participants noted that:

Often times, parents are interested in getting money as bride price. When it comes to this, I mean issues of money, parents do not listen to us as administrators who advocate for children's right to education because they know that money is coming to them. In short, it's like money blinds them.

Threats and vulgar language

Apart from contradictory interests, this type of conflict, that is, over early marriages, between parents and school administrators was characterised by threats from parents in instances where the school administrators tried to intervene. One participant noted:

It seems their parents are also connected to the marriage. If we try to come in as a school, there are a lot of threats which come from parents.

Biological ownership of children

Stemming from the preceding theme, it was also discovered that the nature of this type of conflict involved features of a fight or a quest for ownership. This was characterised by the desire to show who had more control with regard to the girls' early marriage. The participants noted that parents became involved in matters of biological ownership which led them to argue that the child was theirs. To this effect, one participant stated:

Sometimes they say those children are not your children, they are our children why are you coming in? Your school is your school, our children are our children. We don't have powers actually to look at that or to help because the conflict is higher.

Another participant revealed similar sentiments on the nature of such conflict by adding the following:

Mostly parents will not accept administration to come in because of saying they are the owners of children, we are just part of children when they come to school, when they are not in school we don't have any hand to these children. That is why we are even failing to help those girls who have been married to come back to school.

Causes of Conflict between Parents and School Administrators Arising from Early Marriages

The second objective of the study sought to determine the causes of conflict between parents and the school arising from early marriages. Specifically, the investigation sought to bring to light factors or elements that could be used to account for the presence of this type of conflict over early marriages between parents and school administrators. This objective of the study produced the following themes:

Financial standing in society

It was revealed that the underlying cause of this type of conflict over early marriages was the difference in financial standing between parents and school administrators. One participant, the head teacher, noted the following that he had experienced in a case in which the school tried to intervene:

From our discussion with the parents, it seemed the parents had interest in getting the payment for marriage. It's poverty actually which prompted them to do that because at some point they insisted that we are only trying to intervene because we are better off, that we have a salary but that if we were like them, we would have done the same.

Some participants noted that in all the areas surrounding the selected secondary school, most parents were peasant farmers and most of them lived in extreme poverty. As a result, parents' financial standing in society was the main cause of conflict with regard to early marriages. While parents depended on farming, they knew that the school administrators had a salary and, as such, parents were in conflict with school administrators. In relating a case in which conflict arose, one of the participants had this to say:

Poverty is so high in that family such that they had many excuses; we cannot manage, we are so poor, even if the girl goes to school we will be required to buy uniforms, books, pens and other school requirements which we cannot manage. It therefore seemed all issues point to poverty. Parents want to marry off their children because of needing some help from the in-laws.

Academic performance

Apart from financial standing, the study also discovered that parents and school administrators had different perspectives with regard to the academic performance of the girl child which caused conflict. One of the research participants mentioned in this regard:

Parents believe that when their child is not performing well academically, it is a sheer waste of time to keep that child in school, hence they marry their children off as they think it is more beneficial than sending them to school. This perspective contradicts the intentions of the government and school administrators who value the right to education of the girl child.

Lack of appreciation for education

In addition to the views expressed by the participants in the preceding sections, it was also noted that while some girl children were withdrawn from school and forced into early marriages, others were forced into marriage if they failed their grade nine examinations simply because they did not value education. This was why one of the participants indicated that:

Parents do not value education for their girl children as the school administrators do. Therefore, parents choose to keep their children away from school and eventually marry them off. This makes administrators disagree with parents, thereby engaging in conflict on issues of early marriages.

The preceding narrative shows the differences in the way education is valued by the parties involved. Commenting on this, another participant stated:

There is need to sensitise the community on the importance of educating a girl child and her career. Parents have not realised the value of education for their children. Because they say you educate the girl child, then you have taken care of all the family.

Cultural beliefs

The study also found contradictory observations on cultural beliefs in this area as a cause of early marriages. One participant noted:

Culture doesn't encourage early marriage. It's individual interest. The Goba had a certain culture but now it's gone. It's just the attitude of individual people, they just want to get their children off school cheating that they are very poor, meanwhile they just want to have their children married so that they can get a bit of support from their in-laws.

The findings indicate that others suggested that cultural beliefs contributed to the conflict that arose over early marriages between parents and school administrators at the selected secondary school. One of the participants indicated that:

There is a cultural practice among the people in village that a girl is supposed to be engaged while she is still at school. However, the school administrators promote a practice which puts emphasis on the girl child being married after she attained some level of education.

Conflict Management Strategies Employed by School Administrators in Resolving Conflict between Parents and School Administrators in the Selected Secondary School in Kafue District

Regarding objective number three, the study sought to explore the conflict management strategies employed by school administrators. In this regard, the focus was on the conflict management strategies that were used and the suggestions that could be made for cases that brought about conflict between parents and administrators in the future. The following themes emerged:

Involving the police

Although the involvement of police was cited as one of the strategies, one participant mentioned that at times they had failed to resolve conflict even when the police were called in to assist. The participant said:

Mostly we have tried to involve the police but they seem so reluctant they have not helped us actually.

Dialogue

Another theme which emerged on the strategies for resolving conflict was dialogue. This was cited as one of the key conflict management strategies used to resolve conflict between parents and school administrators over early marriages. One of the participants indicated the following in this regard:

As a result of dialogue with parents, chiefs and the school administrators, some parents have even begun to report their girl children who are engaging in sexual relationships in order for school administrators to counsel the child on matters of sexuality and the significance of education.

Apart from dialogue, the findings of the study indicated that this kind of conflict could be resolved by employing a multi-sectoral approach by engaging various stakeholders. One of the participants had the following to say:

We try to resolve this kind of conflict by involving various interested stakeholders such as police service, the Ministry of Health and the village headman. We organise a round table meeting to discuss the contentious issues that brings about this conflict and reach consensus.

Another participant had similar thoughts to the above, as they indicated that:

What I could suggest is to call a strong meeting which is going to include the chief, the headmen, the police, the social welfare workers, the clinic and all stakeholders in the area to discuss on the issue and have one goal so that if that person goes astray from that agreement or runs from that agreement, a certain punishment by all the people who sat could be taken. This will be helpful because at the moment we don't have any way to punish that person who goes astray.

A number of participants supported a multisectoral approach as a conflict management strategy for current and future cases of conflict by insisting that, in fact:

We need a lot of sensitisation. We need a lot civic leaders. We need to involve headmen. We need to involve a lot of people who can discuss this issue. And we need a stiff punishment to be implemented to those who don't follow what's laid down.

Discussion**The Nature of Conflict between Parents and School Administrators Arising from Early Marriages**

The focus of research questions pertaining to objective number one was to unveil the basic or inherent features, character, or qualities presented by this kind of conflict. The emerging aspects are analysed and discussed below. The themes that emerged confirm Nswana's (2021) argument that conflict is unavoidable because it is bound to occur. This is why conflict between parents and school administrators manifested in various forms as discussed below.

Contradictory interests

It came to light that the nature of this type of conflict comprises contradictory interests. In other words, what is meant by contradictory interests is simply that parents have different interests relating to their children relative to the interests of the teachers. This finding runs

counter to Falcorner-Stout, Kalimaposo and Simuyaba's (2010) view that parents are vital partners in education, given that they influence their children's attitudes toward learning and support learning at home. While this argument was initially deemed to be true with regard to this study, the findings spoke otherwise because the results indicate that parental interest was vested in the benefits from early marriages. The findings established that contradictory interests arose from the fact that parents wanted monetary gain, while the school wanted to see the child get educated. While it is expected that parents should seek the good of their child, the findings revealed that for the sake of monetary gain, parents failed to live up to their duties and responsibilities of supporting their children at school as expected of them. It is at this point that parents came into conflict with the school administrators who were bent on ensuring that education was offered to every child who went to school. When a school-going child starts to miss lessons, school administrators become concerned. From what the findings revealed, it is at this point that conflict sets in, given that no matter how well school administrators explained certain things relating to early marriage to parents, they did not agree with the school's views because all they parents are interested in is the money they would receive and the continued benefits that were likely to accrue if the man who intended to marry their daughter was well to do. This was confirmed by the extract below from one of the participants:

Often times, parents are interested in getting money as bride price. When it comes to this, I mean issues of money, parents do not listen to us as administrators who advocate for children's right to education because they know that money is coming to them. In short, it's like money blinds them.

In fact, as informed by contemporary conflict theory (Mills 1962), differing interests and resources lead to conflicts which may be hard to resolve. When monetary issues enter the picture, there is often conflict, which is hard to resolve, especially as the Zambian economy is not performing as expected. The above narrative goes to show that in most African contexts, as opposed to western contexts, any sight of marriage means more wealth, particularly those communities where the bride's parents stands to benefit. It is no wonder conflict on early marriage arises because parents do not wish to see anyone standing in their way just when they are about to receive much-needed money. It can, therefore, be concluded that the basic or inherent features, character, or qualities presented by this kind of conflict is that of contradictory interests. The findings revealed that contradictory interests fuelled this kind of conflict to the point that the relationship between the parents and the school administrators was compromised. Moreover, the nature of this of conflict led to another characteristic feature described under this theme and discussed below.

Threats and vulgar language

It also came to light that while the nature of conflict between parents and school administrators was characterised by contradictory interests, this kind of conflict was equally characterised by threats and vulgar language. In fact, the findings of the study indicate that the underlying cause of these threats and vulgar language is the contradictory interests. This was because these characteristics of conflict build on one another. This, therefore, meant that when contradictory interests started, parents and school administrators could not agree on the way forward regarding the education of the girl child in question, threats and vulgar language arose. This was often on the part of parents who vented their anger on teachers and school administrators who would for instance insist that the girl child should continue with her schooling. This finding is consistent with the view that Cornille, Pestle, and Vanwy (1999) convey. It becomes much more difficult for educators and parents to work together in an effective and meaningful way when there is vulgar language involved. The participants noted that often the use of insults and vulgar language arose when parents realised that teachers and school administrators were against their intentions and especially that teachers wished to

uphold the right to education for the girl child. It is for this reason that one participant noted the following:

It seems their parents are also connected to the marriage. If we try to come in as a school, there are a lot threats which come from parents.

The above extract from an interview was given as a reason why school administrators decided to give up in certain situations. It was noted that when insults and vulgar language persisted, teachers and school administrators decided to back off so that parents could do whatever they wished for their child. This inherent feature of conflict made it very difficult for the two parties to reach a consensus, given that once insults and vulgar language arose, disrespect on the part of parents set in and the school administrators became unhappy with the situation. The study found that this feature of conflict was always one way: the participants noted that it was always the parents who hurled insults at the school administrators and not the other way round.

Moreover, the above situation entailed that teachers and school administrators, even though human just like the parents, acted responsibly by not retaliating. This showed that teachers and school administrators acted responsibly in line with their expected mandate. Participants noted that once insults and vulgar language started, they gave up, concluding that parents would not be talked out of their decision to marry off their school-going child. Although some parents who were interviewed denied ever using insults, they insisted that they could use whatever language they wished if they saw that someone who was not the child's biological father or mother tried to intervene even though the final decision lay with them. This led to the next feature of the conflict between parents and school administrators which is discussed below.

Biological ownership of children

The findings of the study also revealed that with regard to this type of conflict, another feature which emerged prominently was the fight between parents and school administrators on who the parents were for the children who wished to engage in early marriages while in school. It was discovered that this feature comes in when parents feel challenged by the teachers who argued that they would take the case further to the authorities if parents infringed on girl children's right to education. The participants stated that parents argued that teachers had no mandate whatsoever to advise parents on matters that relate to their decision-making, especially as regards the marriage of the child, since parents are the legal parents and guardians of the children. Consider the evidence below:

Sometimes they say those children are not your children, they are our children why are you coming in? Your school is your school, our children are our children. We don't have powers actually to look at that or to help because the conflict is higher.

The above evidence indicates that the conflict between parents and school administrators over early marriages was characterised by narratives of who had what right over the child. In this regard, teachers felt that parents used this feature to foil the school administrators' argument that their children should continue with school. The school administrators maintained that parents did not know the value of school; whenever they were advised to choose education over marriage, they quickly brought in issues of biological ownership. In fact, one participant even noted that at times parents asked school administrators if they, as parents, could allow anyone to make decisions on their children. This finding is consistent with Ingrid (2009) who emphasise that parents and school administrators struggle to develop and foster teacher-parent partnerships in a conflict-laden climate with limited knowledge about how best to handle such conflict.

Causes of Conflict between Parents and School Administrators Arising from Early Marriages

One of the fundamental objectives of this research was to ascertain the causes of conflict between parents and school administrators arising from early marriages. The main gist of the study, in regard to this objective, was to interrogate and unravel the factors or elements which are responsible for the prevalence of conflict of this sort between parents and school administrators. Various issues that emerged from the inquiry are presented below.

Financial standing in society

For as long as two or more people exist, conflict is inevitable in society. It is for this reason that conflict between parents and school administrators over early marriages cannot be avoided. This study showed that the conflict over early marriages that occurred between these two parties was caused by the differences in financial standing in society. As a matter of context, the selected secondary school is located in a rural environment where most parents are illiterate and not in formal employment; they are peasant farmers and live in abject poverty. Comparably, school administrators have more status and respect in the community than the parents since they are in formal employment and earn a monthly salary. This finding does not agree with that of Epstein (2011), who believes the cause of ineffective partnerships between school administrators and families to be the difference in their financial standing which therefore hinders the partnership.

The difference in financial status in society is one of the sources of conflict regarding early marriages in Chiawa area. One of the participants is quoted as follows:

From our discussion with the parents, it seemed the parents had interest in getting the payment for marriage. It's poverty actually which prompted them to do that because at some point they insisted that we are only trying to intervene because we are better off, that we have a salary but that if we were like them, we would have done the same.

Relating a case in which conflict arose, another participant echoed similar sentiments:

Poverty is so high in that family such that they had many excuses, we cannot manage, we are so poor, and even if the girl goes to school we will be required to buy uniforms, books and other school requirements. So it seemed all issue at the point of it is poverty. Parents want to marry their children because of needing some help from the in-laws.

This conflict has the potential to frustrate school administrators who stand with the government in regard to ensuring that the girl child is prevented from being married too early and that she acquires the necessary education required for her survival in society. Such conflict also has the ability to stifle the fight against early marriages in the country and to achieve the global agenda for universal education. Therefore, parents should be sensitised consistently to the importance of educating the girl child and should be encouraged to cooperate with school administrators as partners in the upbringing of their children.

It is also important to note that poverty has come into the limelight as a contributing factor to the prevalence of conflict over early marriages between parents and school administrators. Parents believe that school administrators are "better off" with regard to their financial status in society, as a justification to marry off their girl children. This is not only devastating for the education of their girl children, but also temporary in terms of the parents benefiting from the child as they claim when they marry their daughters off. Therefore, the government should strengthen the fight against early marriages by devising a deliberate policy to empower school administrators and other interested stakeholders to address the issue of parents giving permission for early marriages in communities.

Academic performance

The desire of both parents and school administrators is to see outstanding academic performance on the part of pupils/children. They are delighted by this and see it as significant to invest time and resources in the education of their children. However, it is always discouraging for parents when their children are not performing well at school and parents do not understand why they should continue to support and keep the child in school if their performance is poor. However, school administrators always believe that even the least performing child can improve and perform better. This difference in perspectives concerning the performance of the girl child in school, brings about conflict. On one hand, parents want to withdraw the under-performing girl child from school, while on the other hand, school administrators want the girl child to continue with their schooling, hence the conflict. This is evidenced in the statement made by one of the research participants:

Parents believe that when their child is not performing well academically, it is a sheer waste of time to keep that child in school, hence they marry their children off as they think it is more beneficial than sending them to school. This perspective contradicts the intentions of the government and school administrators who value the right to education of the girl child.

The above statement indicates that parents were only willing to keep children in school and support them if they recorded outstanding academic results at school. However, poor academic performance should not be a justification for parents to marry off their daughters. This is because there are many factors that contribute to children's poor performance in class, such as a lack of learning materials, poor teaching style on the part of the teacher and other related issues. Thus, parents needed to give their children a chance to improve their academic performance, and avoid making decisions that would spoil their children's future.

Lack of appreciation for education

Education is very important in shaping a person into a responsible member of society. It has the capacity to make an individual become productive and independent in decision-making and in many other aspects of life. For these reasons, education is a valuable ingredient in the development and survival of the person. However, it was discovered in this study that some parents in Chiawa area did not value education for their children. There were indications that some of the girl children were withdrawn from school and forced into early marriages when they failed their grade nine examinations, simply because their parents did not value education. While parents did not attach due importance to education, school administrators valued education so much that they did everything possible for the girl children to acquire it. The differences in the way education was perceived by parents and administrators caused conflict between the two parties. Although Parres (2010) argues that parents value education, this finding does not seem to agree, given that the parents in this study did not appear to value education.

This kind of conflict has the potential to negatively affect children's education. Therefore, there is a need for mutual understanding between parents and school administrators because they are partners in educating children. Parents need to understand the good intentions of the school administrators regarding the education of their children. It is therefore important to sensitise the community to the importance of education in the lives of their daughters. The mind-set of parents towards education should be transformed so that they begin to consider education as a valuable asset in their children's lives. Unlike early marriages, parents should realise that education can permanently alleviate poverty in the family. Their daughters' early marriages simply perpetuate and exacerbate families' poverty levels.

Cultural beliefs

Culture plays a vital role in the way one perceives things and relates to others. The norms, beliefs and values that make up culture can affect education both negatively and positively. However, the study revealed contradictory observations on cultural beliefs in this area as a cause of early marriage, compared to contemporary conflict theory devised by Mills (1962). Cultural beliefs are part of the social structures that are created and which potentially lead to conflict between people with differing interests and resources. It was disclosed by the participants that the Goba people, who predominantly live in Chiawa, have a culture which does not stifle the attainment of education by girl children. However, individual interests play a major role when it comes to parents and guardians marrying off their daughters. This was supported by the view below of one of the participants:

Culture doesn't encourage early marriage, it is individual interest. The Goba had a certain culture but now it's gone. It's just the attitude of individual people they just want to get their children off school cheating that they are very poor meanwhile they just want to have their children married so that they can get a bit of support from their in-laws.

In addition to the aforementioned views, other participants suggested that cultural beliefs contributed to the conflict that arose between parents and school administrators over early marriages at the selected secondary school. It was indicated by one of the participants that:

There is a cultural practice among the people in Chiawa area that a girl is supposed to be engaged while she is still at school. However, the school administrators promote a practice which puts emphasis on the girl child being after she attained some level of education.

These contradictory views are a source of concern because they suggest that the two parties were at loggerheads in the process of educating the girl child. Administrators blamed the parents who opted to allow their daughters to enter into marriage agreements before they had completed their education. This cultural practice negatively affects children's education, as the child's attention shifts from education to marriage issues. It could be that the girl meets a boy after school, thereby spending less or no time on her studies. Therefore, early engagement to be married should be discouraged in order to secure the education of the girl child.

Conflict Management Strategies Employed by school administrators in Resolving Conflict between Parents and School Administrators

When the question was asked about the conflict management strategies employed by school administrators, a number of themes emerged. These themes partly confirm Epstein's (2011) view on how the barriers, and in this case conflict, between parents and school administrators can be resolved.

Involving the police

The findings of the study revealed that the apparent presence of this conflict, its nature and the devastating effects it had on society needed everyone's efforts so that the evil of early marriages, which rob girl children of their right to education, could be stopped. As a result, the theme of police involvement emerged as a management strategy often employed by school administrators. The evidence below speaks to the reality of this conflict management strategy.

Mostly we have tried to involve the police but the police seem so reluctant they have not helped us actually.

As noted above, police involvement is one among many possible conflict management strategies. However, school administrators were quick to note that this strategy, though

readily available, did not always yield the intended results. This was because, to a very large extent, the police were disinterested which made it very difficult for administrators to use this strategy. The findings revealed that in some cases this strategy had worked and in some cases it failed dismally.

Dialogue

Conflict is inevitable in our society, but it should not be left unattended to and unresolved. Thus, it would not be wrong to argue that every conflict has a way through which it can be resolved and conflict over early marriages is no exception. In this study, dialogue was suggested as a conflict management strategy in resolving conflict between parents and administrators over early marriages. This finding is in line with Mills' (1962) contemporary conflict theory which acknowledges that conflict is ever present in society, but it can be resolved through various conflict management strategies. Thus, citing dialogue as a means of resolving the conflict over early marriages confirms the aforementioned proposition of the theory. Dialogue in the form of a round table meeting comprising the parents, chiefs, police, social welfare workers and school administrators was conducted to iron out the conflict existing between the parents and school administrators and come up with measures to combat early marriages in Chiawa village and particularly at the selected secondary school. This was evidenced by the view presented below from one of the participants:

We try to resolve this kind of conflict by involving various interested stakeholders such as police service, the Ministry of Health and the village headman. We organise a round table meeting to discuss the contentious issues that brings about this conflict and reach consensus.

Based on the above view, it was vital to take a multisectoral approach to resolve the conflict and also completely eradicate early marriages in Chiawa village. A number of interested stakeholders needed to be incorporated in the fight against early marriage. It was also paramount to note that this fight could not be fought by the school administrators alone. It requires the concerted efforts of all stakeholders to find lasting solutions to this scourge. Therefore, dialogue coupled with a sense of inclusiveness or taking a multisectoral approach could help to resolve conflict over early marriages.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the conflict between parents and school administrators was characterised by contradictory interests, in which the interests of the parents and school administrators did not match. The other characteristic feature of this kind of conflict was vulgar language as well as threats or a fight over who the biological parents of the child were. Basically, a conflict of interest existed between the administrators and parents. This interest bordered on how much importance each party attached to the education of the girl child. The study indicated that some parents in Chiawa did not value education for their daughter as much as the school administrators did, hence the misunderstandings.

The causes of conflict between parents and school administrators arising from early marriages are cultural beliefs, lack of value for education, academic performance and financial status in society. The issue of the financial status should be given attention. It entails that government should improve the economic status of people especially those in rural areas in order to put a stop to some problems including early marriages.

Regarding the conflict management strategies used by school administrators at the selected secondary school in Kafue district, in the management of conflict between parents and school administrators arising from early marriages, it was suggested that this conflict may be resolved through dialogue and the involvement of the police. Therefore, the researcher inferred that conflict over early marriages between school administrators and parents is prevalent at the selected secondary school, and puts the girl child at a disadvantage

as the acquisition of education is hindered. Accordingly, it is prudent for government and other interested stakeholders to find innovative ways of preventing early marriages in order to safeguard the future of the girl child.

Recommendations

Based on the findings established in this study the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. It is recommended that dialogue should be used, in a multisectoral context, to resolve conflict over early marriages and devise measures at the local level that could help in the fight against them.
2. It is also recommended that community sensitisation against early marriages and about the value of educating the girl child should be strengthened and propagated in order to change the mindset and attitudes of parents towards the education of the girl child. This activity should take an inclusive approach involving, among others, the parents themselves and girls from the same village who have completed school and can act as role models.
3. Government should devise a deliberate policy to empower school administrators to act against parents who allow their daughters to enter into early marriages. The policy should also provide protection for school administrators against being harassed by parents. This will encourage and motivate school administrators to fight against early marriages.

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