

Children as Victims of Forced Marriages in Lesotho: A Question of Cultural Practice or Approval of Child Exploitation

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Abstract: This study focuses on the experiences of children as victims of abduction into forced child marriage in Lesotho. The study pays attention to children living in the rural area of Semonkong, where patterns of abduction into forced marriage are common. The objectives were, to explore factors that contribute to incidents of a child forced marriages, to determine the effects of a child forced into marriages. The study used a qualitative research method. A sample of 10 participants (all women aged 21-51) from the Semonkong area in Lesotho were sampled using Snowball sampling. In-depth interviews were used to collect data and were analyzed thematically. The findings: families use cultural practice as a means to exact power and authority to exploit children to escape poverty. Most girls were abducted without their consent, threatened, and were continuously violated in their marriages. They experienced damaging and degrading psychological effects from abduction but more so in their marriages. They endure all sorts of abuse and never reported the incident to the police. Recommendations: Preventing forced child marriage requires strengthened legal and policy frameworks, to ensure increased awareness and greater enforcement of existing laws.

Keywords: Abduction, crime, victim, children, forced marriage, victimization.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the victimization of young children through abduction in Lesotho. The epitome of this study is to explore the experiences of young girls who are forcefully abducted without their consent to be forced to marriages. The study also seeks to understand relationships between families' dependency on the child for better access to resources and the risks of living in poverty and destitution for young females. Fundamental questions are, are families deliberately selling their young girls for monetary gain to ameliorate poverty, and use culture for their justification? Are their families use cultural customs/practices as a vehicle to exploit their children by obtaining financial gain?, these are some of the questions the researchers had in mind when deciding to embark on this study because the exploration of the female child into forced marriage using cultural practice has grave consequences on the girl child and not many representatives' studies have examined this culture in Lesotho. various studies conducted in Lesotho rarely deepen the experiences of these young females into forced marriages and to what it means to their families as a form of poverty alleviation. Young girls are perceived as commodities and families rely heavily upon their abduction to receive monetary gain to fight against poverty.

This study is topical and relevant to be conducted as it depicts gruesome violations of human rights and impediments to the social and economic development

of the girl child (Kalam, 2014). The study further seeks to address the exploitation of young females through cultural practices and social norms to hinder young girls from gaining opportunities in the Lesotho country (Molapo, 2005). Many female children become victims of abduction to forced marriages without their consent and the amount of research available on this population is extremely limited in rural areas of Lesotho. Most research dwells on the legal framework and legislation of forced child marriage. For example, research conducted by (Winther; 2006) all points out to aspects concerning forced child marriage from a legal point of view not from the lived experiences of abducted young girls. The focus is on the legal instruments that protect the practice of forced child marriage. Another study conducted by Molapo (2005), on a Christian analytic approach of marriage through abduction among the Basotho people of Lesotho: a challenge for pastoral care ministry only focuses on the experiences of the herd boys when they witnessed the abduction of young girls into marriage. From the above assertions is evident that research such as this one undertaken which prioritizing the personal experience of children as victims of abduction has been largely neglected in Lesotho.

The majority of studies addressing forced child marriage-related research have relied on desktop research consisting of information already available than empirical. Methodologies used in various studies are secondary resources such as textbooks and desktop material such as (e.g Abdelgadir, 2001; Hanz, 2006; Mafhala 2015; Mawdza, 2015). While this type of information is important in establishing the incidence

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and prevalence of forced child marriage, it is unable to describe the unique lived experience of a girl child who has been victims of abduction into forced marriage. Therefore, they do not report empirically on the experiences and challenges faced by girls as victims of abduction into forced child marriage.

The study aims to fill gaps in the literature about the personal experiences of girl children living as victims of abduction into forced child marriage in rural areas of Lesotho. These experiences include consequences of living in poverty, all forms of violence/ abuse, and lack of emergence by some police officials in their rural communities. The recommendations of this study can be used to empower young women and culturally embedded communities. Furthermore, policymakers can pay more attention to developing programs and laws that deter this practice. By ending forced child marriage, girls' access to education and opportunities can be enhanced.

The researchers postulate that the crime of abduction has serious implications for both the victim and society in general. It leaves the victim traumatized for life. This practice has a high propensity to destroy the fabric of society and children's lives of those abducted. If not addressed, it can perpetuate serious crimes that destabilize the country. A minor is raped to submission to marriage and this action on its own is illegal. People have been sentenced to long periods in prison but the situation appears to be persisting. Most minors are abducted on their way to or from schools in rural areas like Semonkong, thus destroying their education ambitions and to the other extent eroding the economic development of the country since future generations (young women) will have uneducated people.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), states that 2% of women are married off before their 15th birthday in Lesotho. A higher figure of 3% of women living in rural areas aged 20-24 were married before they turned 15. Lesotho is a source and transit country for women and children subjected to forced marriage especially in remote areas. In recent times, abduction in Lesotho has become a major concern to the Basotho nation as a whole. What motivated this study was the persistence of this practice which has since been outlawed by many countries (USAID, 2013). International conventions, regional and domestic policies have not managed to arrest the practice of forced marriages in Lesotho. It was for these reasons

and others that motivated the researchers to conduct this study. Accordingly, there is a need to explore why abductions continue to manifest in Lesotho and the legal framework is weak to address this human right issue.

Forced child marriage is an infringement of many human rights laws. In Lesotho, young girls experience such infringements without the opportunity of giving their consent. With this in mind, this study seeks to address these questions: What factors contribute to high incidents of forced child marriage (abduction) in Lesotho? and what are the effects of forced child marriage on victim girls in Lesotho?. This paper will discuss and focus on the following, theoretical frame, research methods, results, discussion and limitations of the study, and lastly conclusion and recommendations.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

To understand the meaning of *chobeliso* (abduction into forced marriage), Shelton, Hilts & MacKizer (2016) define abduction as "the coercive movement of a person and unauthorized confinement of a victim by force. Abduction is a crime in Lesotho like elsewhere in Southern Africa. According to Burchell and Hunt (South African Criminal Law Procedure Vol 1, 1997) "abduction consists of an unlawfully taking out of control of her of his custodian control with the intention/intent enabling someone to marry or to have sexual intercourse with that minor". The crime of abduction has serious implications for both the victim and society in general. It leaves the victim traumatized for life. This practice has a high propensity to destroy the fabric of society. If not addressed, it can perpetuate serious crimes that destabilize the country. A minor is raped to submission to marriage and this action on its own is illegal. People have been sentenced to long periods in prison but the situation appears to be persisting. Most minors are abducted on their way to or from schools in rural areas like Semonkong, thus destroying their education ambitions and to the other extent eroding the economic development of the country since future generations (young women) will have uneducated people.

The study was conducted in Rural Areas of Semonkong in Lesotho. Lesotho is an enclaved country within the border of South Africa. it is one of only three independent states surrounded by the territory of another country, and the only one outside the Italian peninsula and that is not a microstate. Lesotho is just

over 30,000 km² (11,583 sq mi) and has a population of around 2 million. Its capital and largest city are Maseru. The official language is Sesotho. The child abduction is normalised in Lesotho, the problem is pervasive without an end. Forced child marriages (abduction) in Lesotho have repressed young girls because in their marriages they are exposed to sexual abuse and early pregnancies. Thus, young girls cannot fend for themselves because of their status in society and cannot consider abortion as an option because it is illegal in Lesotho. Therefore, the probability of young girls being forced into early marriages and victimized within those marriages is very high (Teg, 2015). In Lesotho, 86% of women have reported incidents of abuse from their partners. Some of the common minority cultures practiced in Lesotho include *chobeliso* which refers to the abduction of young girls for marriage. The following is the aim of the study which the researcher wished to achieve by conducting this study.

RESEARCH AIM

The research aims to understand the practice of forced child marriages in Lesotho. Abduction into forced marriage is usually done without consent. In most cases, victims of *chobeliso* are usually under the age of 18.

Following is the theoretical framework underpinning this study which attempts to explain the phenomenon occurrences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For this paper, the researchers employed a theoretical framework to delineate the phenomenon under study.

Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory is based on an individual's motivation to exchange social and material resources as an important form of interaction (Cropanzano, Anthony & Daniel, 2017). It is further based on the activity of exchanging tangible and intangible which can be made more or less rewarding (Cook & Rice, 2006). It provides an overview of how social behavior is generated by social interactions between a two-party relation and how actors can produce reinforced behavior (Cook & Emerson, 1987).

The social exchange theory was chosen for this

study because it has been one of the major theoretical approaches that better explain the fundamental process of social human behavior. It explains how people are highly motivated by rewards expected during a social exchange. The benefits obtained from social interaction and opportunities that govern exchanges can depend on a person's preference such as the amount of money or status (Emerson, 1976). For example, a perpetrator abducts a girl to attain a status of manhood within his community. He is acknowledged as more manly because he now has a wife. In fact, from this point on he is treated as an adult and he will start to mingle with other adults unlike while he was unmarried. Thus, the social exchange theory can also be motivated by a person's self-interest in their interactions with others (Emerson, 1976). In this case, the abductor's main interest is to attain the marital status by all means necessary hence, the reason why he chooses to follow the abduction route.

The social exchange theory is concerned with actors. Actors can be individual's persons or groups acting as a single unit that is interested in positively valued outcomes than those they negatively value (Molm, 2006). The most notable methodology used by abductors; boys go in groups of three, four, or sometimes two to abduct or ambush a girl. They waylaid her while she is unaware, and then abduct her for their friend. The researchers discovered that actors weigh potential benefits and costs and make conscious choices that seek to maximize outcomes during an exchange. It is against this background that, during abduction "*chobeliso*" *chobeliso means families selling their young children for marriage, they participate in their children's abduction*). individuals would make a conscious decision to maximize outcomes. In terms of the girl being abducted, she is most likely to agree to the marriage because of fear of being assaulted by the group of boys. Intrinsic to abductors is the successful conclusion of the whole process of *chobeliso* for the benefit of their friend. As an accomplice to this crime, they benefit immensely by solidifying their friendship with the perpetrator (Chadwick-Jones, 1976).

While boys reap intrinsic rewards, a girl can also be forcefully exchanged for cattle by her family for a perceived better life. In that regard, the boy's family might not have negative outcomes if they are wealthy. During an exchange between parties according to this theory, resources may include tangible exchange and behavior that produces value for another. When actions

incur some form of cost for the actor who performs it and produces some kind of valued outcome, exchanges can be of positive value and a negative value (Molm, 2006).

The social theory offers social exchanges between people motivated at obtaining some valued reward for which they must pay something of value. Most individuals seek profits in exchanges in such that rewards are greater than costs. Therefore, the drivers of forced child marriage are attributed to decisions that are at heart and financially driven thus; families that force their daughters into early marriage tend to avoid high costs of dowry and continuance of education (Alston *et al.* 2014). It is important to understand that people weigh the value of the social rewards they receive against the costs. The social exchange theory states that costs are referred to as something of value that is given up such as money. For example, parents receive a high bride price for a daughter who is married near puberty. There are many different types of payments made such as the bridewealth which can be transferred in the form of livestock, money, and goods from the groom's family. This theory speaks to forced child marriage, as the cultural practice such as dowry and bride price in exchange for a bride can offer great financial incentives for families to consider giving up their daughter for marriage.

Thus, in this context, the reward of marrying off daughters is greater than the cost (Dlamine-Zuma, 2013). The future husband acquired rewards in the sense that the bridewealth is paid in exchange for the bride's fertility and labor. The daughter is used as a commodity by the family (Kyari & Ayodele, 2014). The following discussion pertains to the methods used for this study.

RESEARCH METHODS

The following discussion pertains to the research methodology underpinning this study.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative method was used to explore experiences and individual's opinions, feelings, and subjective data of abducted girls from Lesotho. This approach is relevant for this study because it seeks to understand human and social behavior in their natural setting such as the social behavior of children as victims of abductions into forced marriage in Lesotho. This approach enabled the researchers to collect in-

depth and detailed information from participants and is characterized by its aims which relate to understanding some aspects of social life (Mack *et al.*, 2005). It provided sound descriptive information essential to elucidate forced child marriages in Lesotho (Nkosi 2011).

Sampling

Given the sensitivity of this study and the elusiveness of the participants, the study sample was made out of 10 participants. These 10 participants were women who have been abducted when they were young into forced marriages. Given the sensitivity of this phenomenon, the researchers opted to use older women because children might be re-traumatized and there is a lot of red-tape ethical consideration when dealing with the young vulnerable group.

The study's intention for sampling criteria included the following: participants that were victims of abduction into a forced marriage; black Basotho women from the ages of 21-51 years of age. The reason for choosing these criteria was because of their experience and exposure to *chobeliso* over a long period and they are still in these forced marriages and were appropriate in providing detailed information regarding their experiences. A Snowball sampling technique was employed to select them due to difficulties in reaching women who were forced to marry underage (Anieting & Mosugu, 2017). This method helped the researchers to be directed to the relevant respondents for the study. The researchers used this technique (snowball) to identify one respondent who was forced into a marriage who then directed the researchers to the next respondent until the desired sample size of 10 respondents was reached. All participants chose to remain anonymous and only pseudonyms were used. Respondents had to sign an informed consent sheet to show their willingness to participate in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were used in this study. The reason for choosing this method is that interviews allow the researcher to get in depth-data to clarify certain concepts (*abduction into forced marriages*) from participants. Furthermore, interviews played a fundamental role in gathering information on different perspectives, similarities, and distinctive thoughts of all participants (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). The interviews took place in Ha Lepae town and were recorded using

a tape recorder and a cell phone was used as back up in case the recorder did not work. A recorder allowed researchers to fully record the interviews without asking leading questions and distracting the participant. The interviews took approximately 30 minutes to an hour-long. All the ethical considerations were observed during data collection. The collected data was analyzed thematically. After the interviews, the researchers listened to the voice recordings while writing down word-for-word, and later translating and transcribing them. This allowed the researchers to recall relevant information eventuated during the interviews. This was followed by reading and re-reading the data, to ensure that the researchers were familiar with the data. Then it was coded leading to identified relevant themes.

RESULTS

The following discussion dwells on the result and discussion of the result. In this section, the researcher will use the term *chobeliso* and *abduction* interchangeably (*chobeliso* means families selling their young children for marriage, they participate in their children's abduction).

What Factors Contribute to High Incidents of Forced Child Marriage (Abduction) in Lesotho?

Participants were asked to describe a situation in which a child can be forced into marriage and the following pertains to the findings.

Extreme Poverty as an Instigator

The general findings from the data collected showed the practice of cultural *chobeliso/abduction* as a result of poverty. During the interviews, most participants expressed that poverty can highly contribute to the cultural practice of *chobeliso* (*chobeliso* means families selling their young children for marriage, they participate in their children's abduction). This is what some of the participants communicated when they were asked various questions on *chobeliso*:

'poverty can influence chobeliso for example if I need a pair of shoes and my parents cannot afford to buy me, it is possible that, if I am approached by a guy talking about providing a better life and even buying me the pair of shoes I need, I will agree to the marriage. Sometimes it happens that, you even tell your sister or

friend about your situation. Then unwillingly she can introduce you to someone and the process of chobeliso just takes place there and then without you knowing what you're getting yourself into.' [p2] (sic)

'...If you were to ask your daughter why she ended up agreeing to the marriage. They will tell you it's because they couldn't be taken to school; they couldn't work and get basic needs. They will give you reasons that, they saw marriage as a way out of poverty so that they get better clothing and other things. This happens a lot in cases where parents do not work and cannot afford to take their daughter to school.' [p10] (sic)

'Poverty can be one of the reasons but it's not one of the main reasons. If right now you need a job and get married because of that, your situation will not change because you will still live a difficult life being forced into marriage.' [p7] (sic)

'But it happens that parents nowadays look at cows and other family's wealth. That is how some young girls fall victim to chobeliso but I would never agree.' [p6] (sic)

The extracts above serve as a reference against how each individual coincides with their own desired standard of a good life. It appears that the economic climate has led to the cultural practice of *chobeliso* being used to solve poverty problems. Most of the respondents endured forced marriages because they seemed to lack financial resources, essentials for minimum standard living, and educational opportunities. Kyari and Ayodele (2014) noted that forced marriage may also be driven by adolescent girls themselves as a way to improve their quality of life (Kyari & Ayodele, 2014). The data reveals what was not anticipated by the researchers that, the lack of certain needs can steer a girl child towards *chobeliso* due to the desperate need to escape extreme poverty. Consequently, they agree to *chobeliso* because they are in dire need to satisfy their basic needs. This is a clear indication that poverty is not only an instigator but it attributes to the many incidents of *chobeliso* in rural areas of Semonkong. It is to note that as much as

families sell their girls to forced marriages, other girls find it forgivable as this helped them to escape poverty more so if they are being forced to marry a wealthy husband.

The girl children who grew up in poverty-stricken environments tend to be affected the most. It is also evident that they are less likely to receive an education therefore, it becomes challenging when they are looking for employment thus, and in this context *chobeliso* is their only hope for a means to a better life. During the interviews, participants pointed out that, their parents do not have the means to take them to school. Most of the respondents who did not get the opportunity to go to school were subjected to *chobeliso* to alleviate poverty situation at home. Extreme poverty seems to be the contributing factor of *chobeliso* as girls are willing to endure marriage for an improved life. Even though there is no guarantee that the lives of these young girls will improve, they still stay in forced marriages to survive. Furthermore, Lesotho is one example, with 57, 1% of its population living below the national poverty line (UNDP, 2018). For that reason, it is no surprise why most participants would use *chobeliso* as an essential strategy to ease off expenses. This shows that economic survival is the top priority for these girls. Poor families are motivated to marrying off their daughters for economic gains. This is explained in the discussion below which is concerned with exchanging daughters to escape economic hardship.

Financial Benefit of Marriage

The consensus of the findings from the data collected showed that people agree to the practice of *chobeliso* because of the type of rewards or incentives accrued which may be crucial to them. This is motivated by acute levels of poverty which most rural households experience. People embrace the cultural practice of *chobeliso* because of the extreme poverty they are experiencing which consequently brings about financial benefits.

Financial benefits such as money, security, or anything of value are very crucial to address the dire poverty situation in most rural Lesotho especially Semonkong. During the interviews, the participants were asked if poverty can motivate families to marry off their children and the responses were truly staggering. This is what some of the participants had to say:

'I experienced this when I was still a young girl. Nowadays I realized if the boy's family has cattle and they are wealthy, Parents allow the union because they look at their circumstances and how they can be improved if their daughter is married into a wealthy family. So, come to think about it does happen a lot.' [p2] (sic)

'It happens that sometimes if you do not agree to the marriage then the boy's family will go to the girl's family and tell them what they will offer you if you agree to marry their son. So sometimes your family loves money or they are struggling, you might find yourself married into that family. Sometimes it happens that your parents won't even tell you instead, they will send you somewhere, then the boy will know where he can find you and that is how you end up being abducted into marriage, without having to protect yourself as well.' [p3] (sic)

The findings show that *chobeliso* has now become a practice whereby families are trying to financially benefit from. Girls from impoverished families are more susceptible to *chobeliso* especially if their parents are poor. This is a clear indication that some families seize the opportunity as a means of survival and for the possibility of an improved life. In this regard, it is important to note that, the opinion of the girl is not considered in this matter. The parents' decision takes precedence and their word is final.

The findings reveal that some families arrange these marriages. In this connection, many young girls do not know whom they are getting married to. Furthermore, one of the ladies stated that the family can even contribute to the abduction by sending the girl somewhere and most likely in a place where she is unprotected. In other words, creating an opportunity for *chobeliso* to take place unknowingly to the victim, hence creating a conducive environment for *chobeliso* to take place. In this manner, the parents can become complicit to this activity as a consequence of poverty the family is confronted with.

There seems to be a recurring trend with the cultural practice of *chobeliso* which grants full autonomy to the male child. Therefore, it is clear that the nature of *chobeliso* is problematic as it promotes

pressure to control young girls leaving them at risk and vulnerable. The daughter is used as a commodity by the family (Kyari & Ayodele, 2014). This means that the bride has a monetary value attached to her. Families tend to perpetuate forced child marriage more than traditional practices. In most cases, it appears to be families that are struggling to make ends meet that, marry off their daughters seems to be the ultimate solution to their destitute situation.

Most families are active agents in forced child marriage decisions and do not necessarily suffer the obvious penalties that affect the well-being of the girl child. As much as poverty plays a huge role in driving certain families to give up their daughters for marriage, families practice harmful cultural practices in name of *chobeliso* to improve and better their lives at the expense of their vulnerable, anguish, defenseless girl child. As much as families use their daughter to escape poverty by implementing principles of cultural practices, their children go through a lot of consequences in those marriages as a result. The following discussion dwells on the effects of forced marriages on the victims.

Vulnerability of Children

The children are abducted because they are vulnerable, weak, and defenseless. During the interviews, the respondents expressed that children are at risk of *chobeliso* when walking alone in rural areas. This was highlighted during the interviews:

'yoh!!! ... I do not think it is easy for them to keep safe. Especially because you cannot predict what can happen. Sometimes you will be walking from town and even then chobeliso can happen. When I got married to my husband, I was walking from town in the evening; he had come with six of his friends. They threatened to beat me if I refused to go with them so I agreed. It is not safe here in Semonkong for girls to walk alone at night.' [p3] (sic)

'...Sometimes you are walking around everywhere and maybe you meet up with your male friend next thing he ends up pushing you and forcing you to marry him...' [p5] (sic)

'Young girls have duties such as collecting

wood or to getting water and their safety is not guaranteed, but it is better if she does not on her own.' [p1] (sic)

The study finds that it is not safe for girls in Semonkong, Lesotho to walk alone especially at night. Such exposure is exploited by abductors; this leaves children vulnerable to abused and coercion into marriage. A girl walking alone during late hours of the day can result in a disproportionately increased risk of *chobeliso*, which is associated with serious implications such as violence and injuries. It is not safe for girls to roam around freely without being susceptible to *chobeliso*. There is no way children can protect themselves when walking alone because there is a possibility they can be abducted. It is very important to note that young girls being abused and threatened are put in positions of vulnerability as they do not have protection at that moment. Perpetrators took advantage of the girls when they were alone in areas that were far from their homes. A young girl can also be abducted during her normal daily activities by an abductor and his peers (Erulkar, 2013).

What are the Effects of Forced Child Marriage on Victim Girls in Lesotho?

Lack of Preparedness for Married Life

Lack of preparedness for married life in this context refers to young girls who are forcefully abducted without a warning and state of readiness as they are married without their consent (Baba, Yendork & Atindanbila, 2020). During the interview, some respondents expressed that being married at a young age was challenging for them. They were missing out on certain aspects of their childhood due to *chobeliso*.

A few effects of *chobeliso* (abduction into forced marriage) were highlighted by the participants that such as missing out on playing and school. The participants emphasized that sometimes they found themselves in positions where they were rendered powerless and still couldn't leave the marriage because of responsibilities and dependency on the husband. A question was asked whether being forced into marriage at a young age affected them and how. Some of the responses were:

'For me, my life changed for the worst because I got an older man who I had to work so hard for. I was young, and I think I got married to someone who was not motivated to work. so, for me, it was

difficult because I was young, and I had to take care of an older person. It is not easy to work for an older person on the other hand you have children to also take care of. [p3] (sic)

'As a parent, because I went through chobeliso (abduction) even though I was not ready to be married then, I wouldn't like it if my daughter went through it too. But because children do what they want, you just see them arriving at your house with someone's daughter. It is up to you if you permit it or not...' [p5] (sic)

The study reveals that being forcefully married at a young age is very difficult. One of the respondents spoke about how hard it was caring for an older person who was not motivated to work. This means the husband was not employed which put a lot of baggage to the young girl to find means to support the entire family including the husband. Some participants also expressed endurance within the marriage and trying to avoid any conflict which might result in severe physical abuse with their husbands.

Participants expressed a lack of preparedness for marriage by highlighting that:

'There can be problems when she gives birth because her bones are still very fragile. Sometimes you find yourself playing with your age mates and forgetting you have to stick to motherly activities even though your small age allows you to play. You easily forget because you are not fully matured yet.' [p10] (sic)

'Life becomes very different. At the age of 13, I was married; some even get married at 12. Now you have to make a baby and that is not an easy thing to do especially when you are young sometimes you can lose your life.' [p6] (sic)

The study reveals that lack of preparedness for marriage can also have serious consequences on the health of young girls. They are minors at great risk of experiencing health issues. The risks associated with marrying before 18 involve unprotected sex with an older partner due to the strong desire to become pregnant. Therefore, forms of contraceptives are not

often used and the regularity of unprotected sex can easily drive infidelities resulting in the greater potential to HIV (Bruce & Clark, 2004). These findings reflect on the risks that are accompanied by forced marriage and how they can be detrimental to young girls in Semonkong.

Nour (2006), arrived at the same conclusion as this current study by stating that births resulting from child marriages mostly result in obstructed labor which is caused by the girls' pelvis being too small to deliver a fetus. Consequently, the fetus's shoulder cannot fit through the young mother's pelvic bones resulting in the immediate death of the mother and the neonate especially if a cesarean section is not done. This goes to show that the problems experienced during birth can leave young girls with server consequences such as losing control over (bladder) urine leak and feces (Nour, 2006).

Gender-Based Violence

This theme projects the violence faced by participants mostly during abductions into forced marriage. Participants argued that they were severely violated such as being raped, physically violated, and coerced into marriage more especially if they had an urge to resist during abductions. The violation was a form of prompting them to succumb and submit to the abduction. Respondents were asked if there were any incidents of abuse during abductions and this is what they expressed:

'yes, they are there such as rape. Most time the boy might love the girl at the same time he wants to force her into marriage but maybe she doesn't agree then, in turn, he abuses her by raping her.' [P2](sic)

'When a person abducts you without loving you they will abuse you (silence for a moment). They rape you as well to get you to accept the marriage.' [P9](sic)

'You can be raped and sometimes they beat you up because you don't want to chobela.' P6] (sic)

Abuse such as, being beaten and being raped.' [p7] (sic)

The study finds that during the abduction the main

violation perpetrated by males is rape as a form of submissive. Respondents pointed out that, the act of rape usually involves physical force which tends to involve the perpetrator assaulting his victim. The statement made by the respondents is concurrent with a view made by Tenkorang (2012) that, coercion and obligation for marriage in developing countries can perpetuate other crimes such as sex trafficking and abductions which may lead to forced marriages and entice rape. Women are continuously shattered by prolonged powerlessness due to the practice of *chobeliso*. During the interviews some participants shared that they sometimes resisted being abducted and forced into marriage and this is what one of the participants disclosed:

'they beat her if she resists. Chobeliso can never be one person going. The boy can never say I want this girl I'm going to take her, No! They go in pairs so that the other one helps his friend incase she refuses. And if she says No, that is when they beat her maybe until she agrees...' [P7](sic)

'She doesn't want and that is it. Sometimes he can get you pregnant and in that way, he has raped you and also beat you' [p4] (sic)

The participant conveys that, a girl who resists *chobeliso* is at risk of being beaten and threatened with dogs until she agrees to the marriage. It is important to note that, there can be more than one perpetrator of violence in this context. Not only one person abducts the girl but in most instances, the boys' friends can be involved. As a result, the girl will agree to the marriage because maybe they are frightened of what the group of boys can do to harm her. This is a clear indication that victims do not only suffer violence during the abduction but a lifetime of abuse during the unwanted marriage as their autonomy and dignity have been concealed in a culture of silence. Furthermore, the participants described situations in which a person can be forced into marriage. This is what the participants explained:

'Sometimes young girls get married when it is not their time and the guy might force them into sleeping with them especially if they reject the marriage. (pauses for a moment). The guy might rape the girl and then claim the unborn child. In that way,

many young girls find themselves as victims of chobeliso even though they were not ready at the time.'[P1](sic)

'Ache...(remark) I think it is when you are dragged. They take you by force without your knowledge. Sometimes they will tie your finger by the string until you love him. Or get used to being with him...'[p8] (sic)

'A person can enter marriage under circumstances of being abused. For instance, if he is your friend, maybe both of you are sitting somewhere together and he decides to physically beat you and force you to marry him without any agreement...' [p10] (sic)

The study finds power imbalances between men and young girls. Most young girls are not prepared to assume the adult roles and responsibilities that come with being married. It can be argued that, in forced marriages, inequitable relationships create challenging gender roles, more especially for young girls. Girls continue to find themselves in settings where there are coerced into marriage because they have no autonomy as they were taught to respect their elders and are mostly powerless. This can also result in restrictions on mobility and control of a girl's sexuality. Given this circumstance, girls are most likely to be victimized. The following theme pertains to fear.

Instilling Fear and Intimidation to the Victim Girl Child

The findings reveal that most young girls are most likely to be threatened and intimidated by their partners (Nasrullah *et al.* 2014). As a result; girls are left vulnerable in the hands of their partners. The extracts below give us a clear understanding of what participants experienced when they were forced into marriage. The participants were asked to describe a situation in which a person can be forced into marriage. The participants had the following to say:

'A person can enter marriage under circumstances of being abused. For instance, if he is your friend, maybe both of you are sitting somewhere together and he decides to physically beat you and force you to marry him without any agreement. It happens that you will be

afraid to go home because you're being beaten. That is how a person can be forced to marriage even though they did not intend to.' [p10] (sic)

'...But some girls never report because they are scared their husbands will punish them afterward.' [p7] (sic)

The verbatim above is a good example of how a girl child can be forced into marriage under circumstances of abuse resulting in fear. The abuse may involve physical abuse or emotional abuse resulting in fear of what may happen if she rejects the marriage (Warria, 2017). The extract above indicates that a person may not have any intentions of being married but because of the fear associated with rejecting the marriage, most girls just agree to the marriage to avoid any further abuse. With this being said, it is clear that abuse can invoke fear. The participant further stated that most girls are afraid to go home after they have been beaten during *chobeliso*. According to this response, fear is often one of the key reasons for not leaving and makes help-seeking more difficult for young girls.

Child brides have to endure suffering experienced in marriages and if they seek to divorce their husbands, they face harsh stigma by being disowned by their families, experience threats, and are more likely to be excluded by the community (Warria, 2017). From this perspective, it is evident that children are encouraged to stay in abusive marriages thus, resulting in great fear of reporting any abuses during the abductions. This in turn leads to deliberate victimization of children and can contribute to the negative well-being of children. The extract above rationalizes that, fear contributes to the complex and risky nature of the decision to leave.

DISCUSSION

The following is the discussion of the research findings

The findings revealed that the causes that contribute to high incidents of forced child marriage are extreme poverty and economic factors. Economic hardship in rural areas such as unemployment and lack of resources has contributed to girls enduring forced marriages. The researchers found that to escape the cycle of poverty, some families often exchange their daughters for marriage to gain financial resources. For families, marrying off their daughters allows them to

reduce their expenses. The findings indicated that, once girls are married off their families are less likely to encourage schooling. Thus, if a girl's schooling is affected their employment prospects are bleak. Unfortunately, with economic opportunities severely limited, child brides are more likely to perform unpaid work in homes such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for their children. It is more challenging for them to find employment, therefore; they are most likely to live in poverty as they do not receive any income. However, the short-term economic reasons that influence parents' decisions, do not serve the long-term interests of young girls.

The effects of forced child marriage revealed in the study findings include risk of violence, health consequences, and negative impact on educational attainment. When girls are forced into marriage, most of them try to resist abductions. The findings reveal that when girls resist abductions they are most likely to be physically assaulted, and raped by the perpetrator(s). Some of the young girls experience emotional abuse and intimate partner violence during the abductions and in their marriages.

Forced child marriage exposes children to sexual violence which may result in unwanted pregnancies. The findings show that girls with unwanted pregnancies encountered problems during birth. It was stipulated in the findings that, education of young girls tends to be compromised in situations where girls are abducted at a young age. Forced child marriage is one of the main reasons that adolescent girls drop out of school. The effects of limited educational attainment can lead to low earnings for child brides and their prospects of being employed are reduced.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In the Semonkong area, settlements are often dispersed and sparsely populated therefore; some participants took a while to arrive at the meeting point where the interviews were conducted. This is because of difficulties in finding a faster mode of transport. Semonkong terrain is extremely challenging due to the lack of roads and the mountainous nature of the place. The study did not include participants younger than 18, which could have enhanced the richness of the study. Interviewing children in forced marriages would have provided better insight into the harsh realities those adolescents endure. Including children in the study

would mean that current information would be plausible. Instead, the researcher opted to interview adult females who were abducted as children to forced marriages.

The researcher experienced a few challenges during the data collection process. Some of the participants did not engage as much and seemed to withhold information. When some of the participants were asked how they were affected by forced marriage at a young age, they seemed hesitant to express themselves. Participants became uneasy when this particular question was asked. It could be due to sensitive nature of the question that triggered previous traumatic experiences.

In a few cases, participants came to the interviews with other expectations. For instance, one participant thought they would receive incentives for partaking in the study even though the researchers had shed light on the purpose of the study. This was nevertheless expected due to the challenging economic situation the participants faced in the area.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Female children become victims and their vulnerability is very high mostly in rural areas such as Semonkong where *chobeliso* is prevalent. The dominant culture *chobeliso*, in rural Semonkong, has become a norm. In these rural areas, a girl child is left with no voice of her own. She is discriminated against and left to feel like a second class citizen. Most importantly, young girls are silenced and rendered powerless in these forced marriages. Additionally, the autonomy that men have over girls has resulted in controlling behaviors that are linked to violence.

Many young children are becoming victim to *chobeliso* due to poverty and lack of a strong criminal justice system. The Legal aspect has created challenges in that people need to be more enlightened about the practice. There must be a concerted effort to disseminate sufficient civic education about the serious repercussions of *chobeliso*, the value of education, marriage, and human rights. Without this civic education, the future of society is bleak and the girl child will suffer indefinitely. Therefore, without education, there can never be development because education is development. *Chobeliso* does not only disrupt the education of a girl child but it destroys the

future development of a country.

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