WAR AND
CHILD MARRIAGE

The Vulnerability of Girls to Child Marriage Due to the War in Northern Ethiopia

Kulsma Nur
2022 CARD Werdwet Research Fellow
May 2023

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CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT
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About CARD

The Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) is a board-led, for-not-profit organization registered in Ethiopia under the Civil Societies Law 1113/2019 with registry number 4307. CARD acquired its legal personality on 24 July 2019.

CARD aspires to see Ethiopia where democratic culture flourished on human rights values and has been working with a mission to empower citizens and groups of citizens to ensure their ability to promote and defend human rights and build democratic governance in Ethiopia.

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YOUTH AND WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT

Kulsma Nur
2022 CARD Werdwet Research Fellow
May 2023

Meron Zeleke (Ph.D.)
Research Advisor
Associate Professor and Senior Postdoctoral Fellow

DEDICATION

To all those affected by the war in Northern Ethiopia, especially women and children who bear its scars.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

FOREWORD

The Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) aspires to see Ethiopia where democratic culture flourished on human rights values and has been working with a mission to empower citizens and groups of citizens to ensure their ability to promote and defend human rights and build democratic governance in Ethiopia. To this end, CARD implements various projects under its five program streams including Youth and Women Empowerment.

CARD Werdwet Research Fellowship is project under the Youth and Women Empowerment program with the objective of raising the capacities of youth and women to make knowledge-driven societal changes through the facilitation of research opportunities and promotion of gender rights and protection of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

The CARD Werdwet Research Fellowship was first introduced in 2020. It is named after the Guraghe legend, Yeqaqe Werdwet, who fought for women's equal marital rights in the second half of the 19th century. CARD decided to name this research fellowship after Yeqaqe Werdwet because Werdwet's story is historical, inspiring, and educating to address traditional challenges through traditional means by promoting and exhaustively exploring local remedies. Werdwet Fellowship will continuously take young researchers and assist their search for evidence to promote gender-sensitive values in Ethiopia's traditions and give their research reports a platform for the use of civil societies. The Fellowship additionally gives women and the youth an opportunity to pursue their passion in researching and promoting indigenous knowledge and local medium to fight inequality and the rights of marginalized and vulnerable sections of the society. In 2022, CARD awarded the fellowship opportunity to five Ethiopian youth who aspire to scale up their research skills whilst helping knowledge-based advocacy for equality and promotion of a rights-oriented sociopolitical system. The research fellows have received financial support

to cover all related costs of the research work. Furthermore, a research advisor have been hired to assist the fellows develop a quality research product. By doing so, CARD believes that it can empower the fellows as well as support its advocacy through evidence-based researches.

Kulsma Nur, 25, is a law graduate from Addis Ababa University. She was an active member of the law school community in participating its leadership. She is also a graduate of Business Administration and Management in Admas University. Kulsma participated in moot court competitions in Ethiopia and abroad making it to the semi-finalist steps at the "All Africa IHL moot court competition". Her team also won the National Moot Court Competition on Women & Political Participation, which was organized by UN Women in December 2020. Kulsma was selected for the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellow 2023.

Kulsma's research as a Werdwet Fellow focused on the nexus between war and child marriage; travelling to war wrecked Afar region and meeting girls and women in camps where internally displaced camps are sheltered. Her finding stresses on the fact that "conflict and displacement creates an environment that exacerbates pre-existing harmful cultural beliefs and practices, leading to an increase in child marriage."

As the old adage has it, democratization the best system for progress towards justice and equality that so far has been tried; unfortunately, the struggle for democratization in Ethiopia has often been halted by violent engagements whose burden is always worst amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of our society including girls and women. The harmful tradition of child marriage as evidently indicated by Kulsma's research has been exacerbated as a consequence of the war in the Northern Ethiopia forcing regress in the small steps toward progress. CARD would like to take this opportunity to reiterate its call up on all actors to advocate for peace building, justice, and equality at all times.

Befekadu Hailu,
Executive Director
Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD)

ACRONYMS

WHO	World Health Organization
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
EDHS	Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey
APDA	Afar Pastoralist Development Association
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
CEFM	Child, Early and Forced Marriage
CM	Child Marriage
EM	Early Marriage

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as

▶ "… any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (1993, Article 1).

Estimates published by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) indicate that globally about 1 in 3 (30%) women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

Child marriage is one manifestation of gender-based violence. Six hundred and fifty million girls alive today were married as children and, every year, at least 12 million girls are married before they reach the age of 18 (OHCHR, 2022). Child marriage is a global issue; however, the overall prevalence of child marriage in Africa is higher than the global average (University of Pretoria, 2018). In East and Southern Africa, 31 percent of girls are married as children. Ethiopia is home to 15 million child brides with one of the world's highest rates of early marriage, according to UNICEF (2019).

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is prevalent in all contexts and countries of the world. Among various factors

that affect the prevalence of VAWG, armed conflict is a relevant condition in which such kind of violence escalates (Mootz, Stabb, & Mollen, 2017). Violence against women and girls continues to be the most pervasive and pressing human rights issue in the world today (UN Secretary-General António Guterres, 2021). It is a human rights violation, and the immediate and long-term physical, sexual, and mental consequences for women and girls can be devastating, possibly causing death as well (UN Women, n.d.).

A woman's right to have a life free from violence is upheld by international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Elimination of VAWG has been the prevailing global agenda recognized under Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (UN General Assembly, 2015).

Child marriage is receiving increased attention from humanitarian actors. Ending the practice of child marriage has been a global priority under direct target 5.3 and a key element in achieving nearly half of SDGs. It is included as a component of the revised 2015 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines on gender-based violence (GBV). Child marriage is also a concern for the Global Protection Cluster's Child Protection Working Group, agencies including the Council on Foreign Relations, UNICEF, and World Vision (Mourtada, Schlecht, & DeJong, 2017). Considering the magnitude of the problem, in 2016, UNICEF and UNFPA launched a joint global program to address child marriage in 12 countries with a high prevalence of child marriage around the globe: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen, and Zambia.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ethiopia is one of the countries with a high prevalence of child brides (UN Women, 2018). According to the 2016 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), 40.3% of young women aged 20 –24 years were married before attaining eighteen years of age, and 14.1% were married even before the age of 15. There are regional differences across Ethiopia. According to the 2016 EDHS (CSA and ICF, 2017), the median age of first marriage for women aged 20 – 49 was 16.2 years in the Amhara Region, 6.4 in Afar, 17.2 in Tigray, 17.4 in Oromia, 18.1 in Somali, 18.2 in SNNPR, 18.5 in Harari, and 18.7 in Dire Dawa.

Recent studies in the country show that girl-child marriage has a declining trend. This reflects the country's lauded efforts and the implementation of several initiatives in Ethiopia to tackle child marriage (Jones, Presler, Kassahun, & Kebede Hateu, 2020).

However, conflict erupted in Northern Ethiopia's Tigray region in November 2020, spreading into Afar and Amhara regional states. The conflict has had a particularly devastating impact on children. According to the EHRC and OCHA joint investigation report (2021), the war has adversely affected the enjoyment of children's rights, including their rights to life, to the highest attainable standard of health, to education, to adequate standard of living, and to protection of the family. As a result of both the ongoing war and Covid-19, an estimated 1.4 million children in affected regions have missed out on education since March 2020.

Recent research indicates that conflict and instability are significant drivers of child marriage. Seven of the ten countries, i.e. Niger (76%), the CAR (68%), Chad (67%), Bangladesh (59%), Mali (52%), South Sudan (52%), and Mozambique (48%), which had the highest rates of female child marriage in 2017, are classified as fragile states (Mazurana, Marshak, & Spears, 2018).

There are studies and reports conducted on the prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia and its effect on the child brides' rights, education, empowerment, and status (Guday Emirie, 2005; Abera et al., 2020). Significant factors that increase the vulnerability of girls to child marriage may differ in relation to the political, legal, and socioeconomic context of different regions (Tekle, Abay, & Woya, 2020; Vergroesen, 2027). There is some literature on child marriage but there is no study that looked into the driving factors of child marriages in armed conflict areas. This form of sexual and gender-based violence against children is little studied during times of armed conflict. This study will present information and analysis on contemporary development on the status of child marriage in Northern Ethiopia's conflict zone, adding knowledge to the subject of child marriage in conflict and humanitarian settings.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The general objective of this study is to examine the trend of early marriage in conflict settings with specific reference to the context of the war in northern Ethiopia.

1.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

▶ Examine the prevalence of child marriage in the Afar Region in general

▶ Identify the different factors and actors accounting for the practice in the region

▶ Understand the changing trends of early marriage (if any) within the context of the war in northern Ethiopia

▶ Identify the various factors that account for the increase in the risk of girls to child marriage within conflict-affected areas of the Afar Region

▶ Identify the challenges that exist in preventing and responding to child marriage practices within conflict settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

? How prevalent is child marriage in the Afar Region?

? What are the patterns and trends of
early marriage in the region?

? What are the different factors and actors accounting
for the existence of child marriage in the region?

? How did the war in northern Ethiopia impact the
trend of child marriage in the region?

? What are the various factors that account for
child marriage in the context of a conflict?

? What are the main challenges in preventing and responding
to child marriage practices within conflict settings?

? How can the challenges be addressed to
bring about meaningful change?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Child marriage is an ongoing problem in Ethiopia, with varying prevalence rates across regions. Despite major attempts to address this issue and recent declining trends, violence and instability have the potential to undo this progress. In the past, intense conflicts have been linked to an increased risk of child marriage for girls. For each year of continued conflict at this intensity, 15% increase in the prevalence of child marriage could be predicted (UNICEF, 2023).

The significance of this study derives from its focus on child marriage in a conflict situation, a little-studied form of sexual and gender-based violence against children during times of armed conflict. The study will provide information on the state of child marriage in northern Ethiopia's conflict-affected region, as well as expanding our understanding on the subject of child marriage in conflict and humanitarian settings.

The study is especially relevant given that the region's conflict ended only recently, leaving millions of children without access to education since March 2020. The research will also help to better understand the factors that drive child marriage in conflict-affected areas, highlighting the specific challenges and vulnerabilities that girls experience in these settings.

Despite of the high prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia's Afar region, there has been little research on the subject. As a result, by identifying the drivers of child marriage in the Afar region, this study will fill a critical gap in the literature.

The findings of this study will not only add to Ethiopia's present understanding of child marriage, but they will also provide insights that can drive policies and initiatives aimed at ending child marriage in the Afar Region and other conflict-affected areas.

In conclusion, the significance of this study is in its focus on child marriage in conflict settings, as the conflict has the capacity to reverse recent progress in addressing the problem in Ethiopia. The study will contribute to an understanding of the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by girls in these contexts by examining the driving factors of child marriages in conflict settings, as well as informing policies and interventions to prevent child marriage and protect children's rights.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter One gives an overview of the research, including the background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, significance of the study, and the overall organization of the research.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on child marriage, discussing its influencing factors and consequences at individual, family, and community levels. The chapter also delves into the prevalence and drivers of child marriage in Ethiopia, with a specific focus on the Afar Region. Additionally, legal instruments and policies related to child marriage, including those at international, regional, national, and Afar region levels, are outlined. The chapter concludes by examining child marriage in the context of humanitarian settings, including sexual violence against children and the factors influencing child marriage in armed conflict areas.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study, including the research design, study sites, sampling procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis.

Chapter Four analyzes data collected on the prevalence and persistence of child marriage in the Afar Region, along with the factors and actors contributing to the practice, including socio-cultural justifications, parent and community roles, and the impact of conflicts. The chapter also highlights challenges for preventing and responding to child marriage in conflict settings. The final chapter provides a summary of the main findings from the research. The chapter also discusses the implications of the findings for policy and practice, including recommendations for preventing and responding to child marriage. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research in this area.

CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW
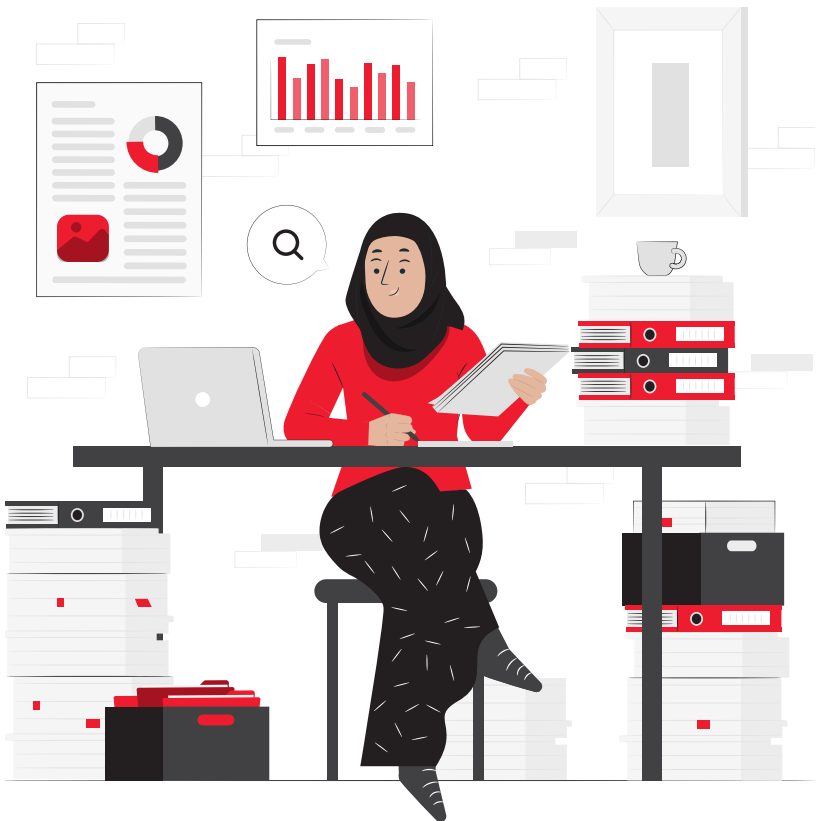
INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the conceptual framework of child marriage, including an examination of the terminology used to describe this practice and the factors that contribute to it. The review looks into the individual, familial, and community consequences of child marriage, with a special emphasis on its prevalence and drivers in Ethiopia, where it remains a widespread problem.

Furthermore, the review addresses the challenges related to the eradication of child marriage in Ethiopia, with special emphasis on the Afar Region, which has received less attention despite having a widespread prevalence of the practice. The research provides an extensive review of the legal instruments and policies governing child marriage, including international, regional, and national frameworks and laws. Finally, the chapter looks at child marriage in humanitarian settings, factors driving child marriage, and potential solutions to this problem.

2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the different ways in which various scholars define and conceptualize child marriage. There is not a universally agreed-upon definition of child marriage. Hence, an attempt is made to adopt the most commonly used definition of child marriage.

2.1.1 CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE:TERMINOLOGIES

Child, early and forced marriage is a human rights violation and an impediment to sustainable global development (Parsons et al., 2015). Often, the terms 'child', 'early', and 'forced' are interchangeable, with no noticeable distinction. However, these terms connote different messages as will be discussed below.

2.1.1.1 FORCED MARRIAGE

The Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) under Article 16(1)(b) reiterates men's and women's right to freely choose a spouse and to enter marriage only with their free and full consent. Forced marriage is defined as marriage at any age that occurs without the free and full consent of both spouses (Idris, 2019). It can include situations involving physical, psychological, or financial coercion, which render consent meaningless (Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), 2013). Child and early marriage are considered as forms of forced marriage because children under 18 cannot provide full, free, and informed consent (ECPAT International, 2020).

2.1.1.2 EARLY MARRIAGE

The term 'early marriage' has been interpreted, on separate occasions, as synonymous with 'child marriage' or as more inclusive than child marriage (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013). According to a UN Human Rights Council report (2014, p.3), early marriage refers to a marriage involving a person aged below 18 in countries where the age of majority is

attained earlier or upon marriage (Report No. A/HRC/26/22). It can also refer to marriages where both spouses are 18 or older but other factors make them unready to consent to marriage, such as their level of physical, emotional, sexual and psychological development, or a lack of information regarding the person's life options" (p. 3).

2.1.1.3 CHILD MARRIAGE

According to the UNICEF (2022), child marriage is any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. However, there is no universally accepted definition of the word 'child', which results in varying definitions of child marriage (Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), 2013).

Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI) (2013) explains that when 'child, early and forced marriage' is read as an inclusive term, it covers child marriages, early marriages, and forced marriages, as well as marriages that fall into more than one category. Including both 'child' and 'early' gives the term the specificity of 'child' (under 18 unless having achieved majority under a national law) and the potentially broader range of 'early' (under 18 regardless of a national law or otherwise unready for marriage) and it could thus serve to close the CRC Article 1 loophole of 'child marriage' while adding a definitive backstop to the more ambiguous 'early marriage'. Therefore, making a condemnation of 'child, early and forced marriage' encompasses the broadest possible reach of harmful marriages, regardless of age, culture, and traditions.

Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI) (2013) recommended that until the international community provides an explicit and consistent definition of these terms using an intersectional

definition, 'early and forced marriage' is the safest route forward as it is broader and does not exclude the marriages of people who have attained majority before the age of 18.

However, for the purpose of this research, we shall use the term 'child marriage' as it is defined by the international treaties (CRC, CEDAW, and ACRWC) adopted by Ethiopia and criminalized by the Federal Criminal Code of Ethiopia. This definition of 'child marriage' refers to any formal marriage or informal union where one or both parties are under the age of 18. This definition has also been adopted by Ethiopia and criminalized in the Federal Criminal Code of Ethiopia.

2.1.2 WHO IS A 'CHILD'?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as a

▶ **"Human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, someone attained earlier majority"** (UNCRC, 1989, Art. 1).

Rosen (2007) states that adopting a single universal definition of childhood in both international humanitarian and human rights law ignores the fact that there is no universal experience or understanding of childhood (p. 297). What defines a child is not just a number, but it also depends on many factors to know the moment a child becomes an adult (UNICEF). The differences in the biological, neurological, cultural, social, political, and legal state of childhood and adolescence should also be considered.

Biologically, a child is a young human being below the age of maturity (Larcher, 2017, 373). The brain undergoes a 'rewiring' process (especially in the prefrontal cortex) that is not complete until approximately 25 years of age (p. 373). According to Arain et al. (2013), the adolescent brain undergoes significant developmental changes during the transition from childhood to adulthood, with the prefrontal cortex being particularly important for complex behavioral performance. The prefrontal cortex helps individuals perform executive brain functions such as pausing to assess a situation, planning a course of action, and executing it (Arain et al., 2013, p. 459; Johnson et al., 2009, 217).

However, attempts by institutions and science to generalize about children have frequently faced criticism from anthropologists. According to Nielsen et al. (2017), the majority of psychological studies involving children have been carried out in 'WEIRD' (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) societies (p. 2). Allerton (2016) stated that the idea of 'childhood' (what is a child?) has been shown to vary widely, and so do understandings of the boundary (who is a child?) between children and adults, as well as between different children (p. 3). Childhood, as understood by the field of anthropology, encompasses a diverse range of experiences that are culturally defined and shaped by factors such as age, race, gender, and historical context.

Al-Dawoody & Murphy (2019) state in Islamic law, a child is someone who has not attained puberty. Al-Dawoody contends that reaching the age of puberty differs from one person to another and from one culture to another, and Islamic scholars and legal systems have set different standards. Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 767), the eponymous founder of

the Hanafı school of law, raises the threshold of the age of puberty to 18 for boys and 17 for girls.[01] Beyond the Hanafı School of Law, the jurists of the Mālikı School of Law posit various thresholds for the age of puberty: while most of them put it at the age of 18, some say 16, 17, or 19. Islamic legal discourse is thus unsettled as to the age of puberty, following which a person is no longer a 'child' (p. 558).

Even though an exact textual legal definition of 'child' can slightly vary depending on the instrument, a nearly universal concept of the legal notion exists, according to terminology standards for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse adopted by the Inter-Agency Working Group (Inter-Agency Working Group, p. 5).

Article 1 of the CRC sets forth:

"...a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."

Article 2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) states:

"...a child means every human being below the age of 18 years."

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01   Abū Hanıf ah drops the age of puberty for girls by one year because, he puts forward, they grow physically and mentally earlier than boys.

However, Clark-Kazak (2009) argues that international law overlooks the social meaning of age and its relation to human development. According to Clark-Kazak, the concept of social age should be used to capture the socially constructed meaning of physical development, roles attributed to different age groups, and their relationships. Social age analysis is necessary to understand the social context and experiences of children, rather than solely relying on a universal chronological age definition (p. 1309-1310).

2.1.3 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF 'CHILD MARRIAGE'

In this discussion, we will explore child marriage as both a human rights violation and a harmful traditional practice.

2.1.3.1 CHILD MARRIAGE AS A HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICE

Child marriage is identified by the UN as a 'Harmful Traditional Practice' (OHCHR, 2022). The UN regards child marriage as a traditional practice that is detrimental to the health and status of women or children. This conceptualization was adopted by the Ethiopian government and incorporated in national legislations and policies.

The Women's Policy (1993), Health Policy (1993), Population Policy (1993), Education Policy (1994), and Cultural Policy (1997) of the Ethiopian government all support gender equality and the abolition of harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage, that have a negative impact on the health of women and girls in Ethiopia. The National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs)

against Women and Children in Ethiopia was designed by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA) to bring all actors under a common vision to eradicate HTPs.

The National HTPs Strategy (MoWCYA) defines HTPs as:

▶ "… deeply entrenched traditional practices which affect/violate the physical, sexual or psychological well-being, human rights, & socio-economic participation of a human being in a society."

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), forced marriage, and child marriage were listed as Ethiopia's most prevalent forms of violence against women and children in the National HTPs Strategy.

However, some critics argue that the conceptualization of child/early marriage as HTPs is too western-centric. Savell (1996) argues that this conceptualization tries to impose the western perspective and suppresses and devalues local culture. For instance, Winter, Thompson, & Jeffreys (2002) contend that this approach ignores similar practices in western nations while linking HTP and violence against women to non-western nations and customs. That is, customs like circumcision and marriage before the age of 18 are not typically considered HTPs in western nations; rather, they may be viewed as either religious or cultural practices or, in the case of early marriage, as a violation of laws prohibiting underage marriage (p. 76-84)

2.1.3.2 CHILD MARRIAGE AS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

"Child and forced marriage represent a violation of virtually all human rights. It deprives women and girls of autonomy and choice over their bodies and their lives," says Veronica Birga, Chief of OHCHR Women's Rights and Gender Section (OHCHR, 2016).

"This practice is a crime for children. It makes them victims for all their lives," Sein told a panel of experts gathered recently at an OHCHR Expert Workshop in Geneva to discuss the impact of regional and national efforts to eradicate child and forced marriages.

The UN and other international organizations have ruled that child marriage violates both human and child rights. According to Human Rights Watch (2014), child marriage violates several fundamental rights, including the right to education, the right to be free from violence, the right to one's own body, the right to have access to sexual and reproductive health care, the right to employment, the right to freedom of movement, and the right to a consensual union.

One of the key rights violations relates to ending a girl's childhood prematurely. It effectively ends a girl's childhood and adolescence early and unnaturally by imposing adult roles and responsibilities before she is physically, psychologically, and emotionally ready (UNFPA, 2018). Often, child brides are expected to fulfill the roles of wife, domestic worker, and mother in their husband's household, which may be located far away and where polygamy is sometimes accepted. As a result, they can experience depression, hopelessness, and show signs of sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress (ICRW, 2012).

Studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between child marriage and domestic violence. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2015) reported that girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence than their peers who marry later. Furthermore, girls who are married off early are more likely to believe that a man is sometimes justified in beating his wife than women who marry later (UNICEF, 2016; Flake, 2005). In addition, research in Ethiopia revealed that married girls aged 15 to 19 years are more likely to report experiencing physical violence from their husbands than married women aged 20 to 24 years (Erulkar, 2013).

However, some studies dispute the direct link between child marriage and domestic violence. For instance, a study in India found that child marriage was not a significant predictor of domestic violence once socioeconomic factors were taken into account (Santhya et al., 2011). It is important to note that, despite these findings, a number of international organizations and experts have identified child marriage as a risk factor for domestic violence (ICRW, 2015; UNICEF, 2014; World Health Organization, 2013).

Child marriage has a significant impact on the education of girls and is considered a violation of their rights. Married girls face many practical barriers to education, including household responsibilities, stigma, forced exclusion from school and gender norms that keep them at home (UNFPA, 2018). Child marriage often results in adolescent pregnancy, and this too results in girls dropping out or being excluded from school because of national laws, a lack of support for re-enrolment, and stigma. The practice also contributes to the gender gap in education and reinforces social and

economic inequalities between men and women (Girls Not Brides, 2020).

Furthermore, child marriage often violates sexual and reproductive rights. Once married, girls are likely to find it difficult to insist on condom use by their husbands, who commonly are older and more sexually experienced, making the girls especially vulnerable to HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections. (Girls Not Brides, 2020). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child shared its concern that early marriage and pregnancy are significant factors in health problems related to sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003). The physical immaturity and virginal status of young girls increase the risk of HIV transmission by hymenal, vaginal, or cervical lacerations. Child marriage also increases the risk of human papillomavirus and cervical cancer transmission. It is frequent for girls in child marriage to experience deliveries that are too soon, too close, too many, or too late, resulting in high death rates related to eclampsia, postpartum hemorrhage, sepsis, HIV infection, malaria, and obstructed labor. As a result, child marriage endangers young girls' sexual and reproductive health, violating their fundamental human rights (WHO, 2013; Nour, 2006).

Horri (2020) argues that campaigns against child marriage are justified because child marriage raises the rate of maternal mortality in young pregnancies. These arguments are used to support the interventionist approach of outlawing all child marriages. He found that the reports were occasionally unsupported by sources, and that the alleged negative consequences were frequently not well supported by the evidence. He asserts that this indicates

the generalizing tendency of the international discourse (p. 1061).

2.1.4 MAINSTREAM APPROACHES TO CHILD MARRIAGE

Because of the existence of various customs and traditions within the institution of marriage alliances, as well as the existence of multiple forms and even cross-national and regional variations of marriage customs and traditions, child marriage is the subject of numerous and complex debates (Emirie,2005). This section attempts to review the 'mainstream' approaches to early marriage divided into four different frameworks: sociocultural approaches, economic approaches, the human rights-based approach, and the African feminism approach.

2.1.4.1 SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACHES

Sociocultural approaches tend to focus on connecting 'individual' actions to the cultural, historical, and religious context in which individuals live and employ norms of culture, tradition, and religion as explanations for practices like early marriage (Vergroesen, 2015).

The sociocultural framework can be explored in terms of 'customs' and 'traditions' as two common denominators for the causes of early marriage (Emirie, 2005). According to Heinonen (2002), 'customs' and 'traditions' can be understood as 'man-made doctrines, beliefs, practices, or stories that are passed from generation to generation, orally or by example'. Black (2001) asserts that customs surrounding marriage include the desirable age and the way in which a spouse is selected – depending on a society's

view of the family (its role, structure, pattern of life, the individual) – and collective responsibilities of its members.

From a sociocultural approach, there are various causes for child marriage. The most prevalent sociocultural justifications for child marriage, according to Vergroesen (2015), are to keep virginity until marriage, regulate fertility, and patriarchal elements embedded in cultural and religious beliefs and practices. According to Molla et al. (2008), in many societies, premarital sex is a taboo, especially among unmarried girls. This norm is widespread in rural Ethiopia, as in many traditional societies. There is a strong correlation between early marriage and the social aim of upholding the reputation of daughters in societies where the honor of the family depends upon the honor of its women. As a result, virginity becomes a necessary prerequisite as well as a categorical requirement for marriage (Emirie, 2005).

According to Anteneh & Kumie (2018), social norms play a significant role in perpetuating child marriage in Ethiopia, particularly the expectation that girls will marry at a young age and prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their education and personal development. Teferi (2014) asserts that patriarchal elements in religious practices and beliefs in Ethiopia foster a culture in which men are prioritized over women in a variety of contexts, including the home, workplace, community, and schools. As a result, girls' education is given less value than boys' education, which causes girls to drop out and child marriage rates to be higher. In several patriarchal cultures, child marriage is still common. Child brides frequently face life-threatening challenges, are coerced into sex before they are ready, and become pregnant too young (Stith, 2015).

Fertility is also highly valued in Ethiopian societies (Tilson & Larsen, 2002). The authors described the apparent relationship between childlessness and divorce in Ethiopian societies. Because of the value of fertility, families often reason that the younger a girl is at marriage, the higher the chances are she will produce a large family, which leads to early marriage. According to published research, child wives in Ethiopia are at high risk for poor health and maternal mortality because of the social pressure on them to show their fertility as soon as they move in with their husbands (Moges, 2018).

Sociocultural approaches regard efforts to influence social and religious norms and empowering girls as central to addressing early marriage. According to Greene & Stiefvater (2019), Berhane Hewan in Ethiopia can be cited as one of the specific strategies that have been used to alter norms at the community level by encouraging community dialogue and setting up mothers' and fathers' clubs, thereby reducing child marriage.

2.1.4.2 ECONOMIC APPROACHES

Under economic approaches, economic reasons and factors are used to explain the phenomenon of child marriage. Recent studies show that poverty and illiteracy are the primary causes of early marriage and its persistence. The emphasis on a child's economic value to the family, which may vary in 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' nations, is one particular idea within economic approaches.

"In developing countries, more than half of the girls from the poorest households are married before age 18. And girls from the poorest households are more than three times as likely to become child brides as those from the richest households." (Glinski et al., 2015, p. 52)

For instance, reasons to engage in child marriage in Ethiopia are often economically motivated in the sense that girls are considered either of economic value or as an economic burden for their families. The bride price (dowry) that the husband's family pays to the bride's family can be viewed as the economic benefit of child marriage in terms of money, cattle, or land while keeping the girls in the family house and paying for education poses a continuous economic burden on the parents and the rest of the family (Vergroesen, 2015). These and other arguments support the idea that the decision to marry off a girl early in life can be based on the economic value the marriage has for her and her family.

Considering this from an economic perspective, empowering a family financially can take away both the incentives and the necessity of engaging in the practice. Programs that provide families with economic support through income-generation opportunities or financial incentives tied to particular behaviors have been successful in delaying the age of marriage (Glinski et al., 2015).

Though many see a strong link between poverty and early marriage, the correlation is never monotonic. Family riches are not guaranteed to avoid early marriage (Abera et al., 2020).

2.1.4.3 THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

The human rights-based approach (HRBA), which places human rights as the normative and operational tool for

addressing issues, has become a central policy theme at global and regional levels through the initiatives of various agencies within the United Nations and regional organizations. Central to this approach is the need to place human rights at the center of all actions, programs, interventions, policies, and plans on issues touching on human welfare (Adeola, 2016).

Early marriage constitutes a violation of a girl's human rights. The practice violates a range of human rights, including those contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Amin & Chandra-Mouli, 2014). Pertinent to normative frameworks on child marriage in the African human rights regional system, the relevant provisions are the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Children's Charter) and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

In June 2015, African Union Head of State and Government (HOSG) under the AU Campaign stressed the need for a rights-based solution to the problem, taking into account international and regional norms on the rights of women and children. Applying the HRBA to ending child marriage, according to Adeola (2016), involves implementing four tools: participation, accountability, non-discrimination, and empowerment to guide policies and programs geared toward this objective.

Child marriage directly impacts girls' education, health, psychological well-being, and the health of their offspring. It increases the risk of depression, sexually-transmitted infection, cervical cancer, malaria, obstetric fistulas, and

maternal mortality (Nawal M Nour, 2009). In her article, Nour stressed that one of the best ways to prevent child marriage is to require girls to attend school until they have completed primary school (age 7 to 14 in Ethiopia), which has been established as a fundamental right.

With the presence of international conventions and declarations aiming at protecting girls from the harmful consequences of child marriage, in developing countries, including Ethiopia, girls are married early, mainly for sociocultural and economic reasons. Critics also argue that human rights-based approaches: (1) are often mentioned by organizations because of their discursive power while these organizations do not intend to bear the weight of the intention of the entirety of consequences that flow from it; (2) are too western-centric and do not appreciate local culture; and (3) lack effectiveness because they do not take local reality sufficiently into account (Vergroesen, 2015).

2.1.4.4   THE AFRICAN FEMINISM APPROACH

African feminism is a feminist epistemology and rhetoric that has provided arguments which validate the experience of women of Africa and African origin against a mainstream feminist discourse (Goredema, 2010). Scholars like Fennell & Arnot (2008) and Ntseane & Chilisa (2010) advocate African feminism as an alternative to the mainstream approaches such as the rights-based approach and traditional western-based feminism to child/early marriage.

According to Fennell & Arnot (2010), the main criticisms of these approaches are that they (1) do not sufficiently consider the local African context; (2) assume that there is universal womanhood; (3) use discourse that is based in

the west; and (4) do not recognize the power that African women have through their family ties and relations.

African feminists challenge and reject dominant narratives that generalize and oversimplify the situation of African individuals, including women, men, and children. Instead, they strive for recognition of the unique contexts, cultures, and people in Africa. Ntseane and Chilisa (2010) argue that indigenous African feminism is a useful tool for comprehending gender, regulation, resistance, and activism in educational research.

2.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILD MARRIAGE

2.2.1 REFLECTIONS ON THE MULTITUDE OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD MARRIAGE

Child, early and forced marriage is a complex issue with various drivers that are associated with different domains. Glinski et al. (2015) summarizes the key drivers associated with child, early and forced marriage in five main domains. The first domain is laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices. The second domain is cultural norms and beliefs. Gender roles, responsibilities, and time used comprise the third domain. The fourth domain is access to and control over assets and resources. Finally, patterns of power and decision-making constitute the fifth domain.

In the Ethiopian context, early marriage is practiced for various reasons. Various research studies assert that the prevalence of early marriage in Ethiopia is closely related to economic and sociocultural factors (Amin & Chandra-Mouli, 2014). According to the baseline survey conducted

by the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE), the major reasons for the practice of early marriage among the different ethnic and religious groups of Ethiopia are:

Economic reasons, i.e., improvement of the economic status of the family through marriage, through material gains during the marriage ceremony, or through dowry or bride price. The other reason associated with child marriage in Ethiopia is a parental desire to see the marriage of their daughter and/or a grandchild before they pass away as a way to strengthen ties between the marrying families. There is also a fear of qomo qär stigma, where a girl who is not married beyond a certain age is seen as undesirable for marriage and a shame to both her family and herself. Other reasons for child marriage include avoiding pre-marital sex and its consequences, the need to marry before menstruation appears, first-claim staking, gaining fame for giving a marriage feast, repayment for attending others' weddings, obtaining the services of a son-in-law, and fear of abduction.

These explanations for the persistence of early marriage in Ethiopia reveal "the economics of early marriage" and its sociocultural justifications (Amin & Chandra-Mouli, 2014).

The studies in Ethiopia suggest that negative attitudes towards women/girls are the key contributing factor to the practice of early marriage. Yet, it is also clear from the literature that no single contributing factor can fully explain the practice of early marriage in Ethiopia. Rather, the practice is more aptly attributed to the 'interplay of social

norms, economics, structures, and familial motivations' (Moges, 2018).

Child marriage is driven by a complex set of factors that take root in more stable contexts and are exacerbated in times of crisis. During conflict or natural disasters, such as drought and famine, and as natural support systems, family structures, and physical and institutional protections are decimated, rates of child marriage often increase (Glinski et al., 2015). For example, families in refugee camps in Burundi protect their honor by marrying their daughters off as early as possible (Black, 2001).

The causes of child marriage are deeply layered, complex, and interlinked. In various legal and societal contexts, there are a variety of interconnected sociocultural and economic structures and factors that encourage child marriage.

2.2.2 CONSEQUENCES TO THE CHILD BRIDE AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

In a child marriage, the girl's health, fertility, physical and psychological well-being, as well as her right to an education and other life choices, are all at risk when she gets married young. The consequences related to child marriage are discussed in the following section.

2.2.2.1 HEALTH-RELATED CONSEQUENCES

Child marriage is associated with several health risks.

A. | Risk for HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases

Married girls are more likely than unmarried girls to become infected with STDs, in particular HIV and human

papillomavirus (HPV)(Fan & Koski, 2017; Nour, 2019) . In sub-Saharan Africa, girls aged 15 –19 years are 2 to 8 times more likely than boys of the same age to become infected with HIV. Studies done in Zambia, Uganda, and Kenya demonstrated that married girls (15-19 years) have a higher likelihood than unmarried girls of becoming infected with HIV. Also note that the studies indicated girls were being infected by their husbands (Nour, 2009).

Fan & Koski (2017) noted child brides face increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV due to early and unprotected sexual activity, limited negotiation power in sexual decision-making, and older or more sexually experienced partners. Several studies have stated that the age difference between the men and their wives was a significant HIV risk factor for the wives.

B. | Early pregnancy-related risks

According to Marshall et al. (2016), in terms of maternal health outcomes, girls under 15 are five times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than adult women (p. 26). Girls who give birth before age 15 are at higher risk of maternal mortality and morbidity, including obstetric fistula, hemorrhage, sepsis, and pre-eclampsia (ICRW, 2015). Furthermore, pregnant girls are at increased risk of acquiring diseases like malaria, which kills more than one million people each year, 90% of them in Africa. Approximately 25 million pregnant women are exposed to malaria per year, and pregnant women are among the most severely affected by malaria. It becomes even more devastating when it interacts with HIV (Nour, 2009).

C. | Mental health risks

Compared to how child marriage affects child brides' reproductive health, fewer studies have looked at the psychological effects of child marriage. Gage (2013) examined the association between child marriage and the risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in adolescent girls aged 10 to17 years and showed Ethiopian girls who were married or knew they were likely to get married soon were more likely to have depressive symptoms and to have considered suicide than those for whom marriage was not yet planned. The result showed that the likelihood of experiencing thoughts of suicide was 1.81 times greater among girls who had previously been married, and it was twice as high among girls who had been promised in marriage or had received marriage proposals compared to those who did not report any involvement in marriage-related processes (Gage, 2013).

Psychosocial and emotional consequences also result from the effect of a girl's loss of mobility and her confinement to the home and households (Black, 2001). Black (2001) noted that most girls who are unhappy in an imposed marriage are very isolated and rarely get support from family or community for the traumas they suffered because of early marriages, premature sex, and child rearing (p. 9).

2.2.2.2 EFFECTS ON EDUCATION AND FUTURE ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

Child marriage diminishes the educational opportunities available to girls. Conversely, increased educational and employment options for females may lessen the possibility that they would be married young (Wodon et al., 2017).

There are two-way links between child marriage and girls' education. A 2017 study by the World Bank suggests that early marriage may account in some countries for 10 to 20 percent of dropouts in secondary school. It also suggests that for every year marriage is delayed, girls' schooling rises by 0.22 years and literacy by 5.6 percent, whereas it increases their chance of completing secondary school by 6.5 percent (Wodon et al., 2018)).

Early marriage is a major factor affecting girls' access to education, which in turn limits their opportunities and hinders their personal and social development (Emirie, 2005). Further, Emirie states that as the age of the bride at the time of marriage decreases, the probability of her acquiring critical skills and personal capacity development to manage adverse situations diminishes, affecting her overall welfare and economic well-being. According to Glinski et al. (2015)), girls who have less education are less likely to have access to social networks, important resources, and health-related information. Married adolescents' time is often limited because of their limited mobility, household duties, and caregiving obligations, making it difficult for them to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities.

2.2.3 CONSEQUENCES AT THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEVEL

The prevalence of child marriage contributes to the continuation of severe poverty and instability, violence against women and girls, high maternal mortality rates worldwide, and a growing educational gap between the wealthiest and poorest countries (CAMFED, 2017).

Decreased levels of labor force participation of women and girls have significant effects beyond the individual. Lower participation in paid employment may increase household poverty, increase vulnerability to economic shocks, lower income diversity, and incentivize short-term allocation decisions at the expense of longer-term investments in human and physical capital (Parsons et al. 2015). Parsons et al. (2015) also add that the lack of voice and agency in household decision-making and civic participation that typically accompanies child marriage also limits girls' input into community and national decision-making (p. 3).

2.3 CHILD MARRIAGE IN ETHIOPIA

2.3.1 PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is home to 15 million child brides, including currently married girls and women who were first married in childhood. Of these, 6 million were married before the age of 15. Ethiopia is among the highest ranking countries in Eastern and Southern Africa in terms of child marriage prevalence. The prevalence in Ethiopia (40%) is slightly higher than the regional average for Eastern and Southern Africa (35%) and about twice the global average (21%) (UNICEF et al., 2018).

Child marriage figures remain high in Ethiopia even though there have been changes. According to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Central Statistical Agency (2017), the median age at first marriage among women aged 25 to 49 has increased slightly since 2011, from 16.5

to 17.1 years in the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey 2016 (p. 67). During the same period, the percentage of women marrying before the age of 18 fell from 63% to 58%.

Levels of the prevalence of child marriage vary across Ethiopia. The highest prevalence of early marriage was observed in the Amhara (59%), Afar (38%), and Somalia (32%). On the other hand, Addis Ababa (7%), Harari (12%), and Tigray (12%) had the lowest prevalence of early marriage (CSA and ICF, 2016) Less than 10% of young women in Addis Ababa were married as children, compared to 50% or more in the Afar, Benishangul Gumuz, and Somali areas. According to UNICEF et al. (2018), child brides in Ethiopia are more likely to live in rural areas, in low-income homes, and with less education (p. 5).

2.3.2 MAJOR DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN ETHIOPIA

Child marriage is driven by numerous factors in Ethiopia. Socioeconomic factors and gender norms play a significant role in driving child marriage (Tekle et al., 2020; Molla et al., 2021). Furthermore, traditional beliefs that prioritize marriage and childbearing for girls over education and personal development perpetuate this harmful practice. Moreover, the value attached to virginity also drives early marriage in Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2019). Girls are expected to remain virgin until marriage, and early marriage is seen as a way to preserve their virginity. Finally, humanitarian settings such as conflict and displacement have been identified as drivers of child marriage in Ethiopia (Save the Children,

2019). In times of crisis, families may view early marriage as a way to protect their daughters and ensure their survival.

2.3.2.1 SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Child marriage affects girls in all regions in Ethiopia; however, it is most common in poor and least educated families. Girls from poor households are more likely to be married off at a younger age compared to those from wealthier families (Tekle et al., 2020), while lack of access to education, especially for girls, is associated with higher rates of child marriage (Tura & Belachew, 2020). Poverty, lack of education, and limited economic opportunities are among the socioeconomic factors that drive child marriage in Ethiopia.

Poverty is a widespread phenomenon in Ethiopia's rural areas, which is where the majority of Ethiopians live (World Bank, 2022). Child marriage is considered by some families as a means to reduce financial burden, as families believe that marrying off their daughters will mean one less mouth to feed and one less person to care for (Tekle et al., 2020). Other families regard child marriage as a way to secure financial support from the groom or his family (UNICEF, 2018). Limited economic opportunities in rural regions, where the majority of Ethiopians live, also contribute to the practice of child marriage in Ethiopia. Hence, families view marriage as a way to secure their daughter's future (UNFPA & ESPS, 2014).

According to Tekle et al. (2020), limited access to education is another socioeconomic factor that drives child marriage in Ethiopia. Education plays a significant role in empowering girls and increasing their agency, which can help protect

them from child marriage. Girls who are not in school are more likely to marry early because they lack the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue economic opportunities that could improving their lives (Gage et al., 2018; Dejene & Gebreslassie, 2019). This perpetuates the cycle of poverty and increases the vulnerability of girls to child marriage in Ethiopia.

2.3.2.2 GENDER NORMS

Gender norms contribute significantly to the practice of child marriage in Ethiopia. Connell (2012) defines gender norms as "shared ideas of what is appropriate for men and women in a particular society, setting, or social group". It refers to the widely accepted social rules about roles, traits, behaviors, status and power associated with masculinity and femininity in a given culture (Kågesten et al., 2016).

In Ethiopia gender norms reiterate that girls should be married off as soon as they reach puberty (Molla, 2020). Traditional roles and societal expectations of women in Ethiopia prioritize women's roles as wives and mothers above all else, with women expected to be subservient to men (Mensch et al., 2018). Early marriage is also seen as a way to protect girls' virginity and honor, which is highly valued in Ethiopian culture (Tiruneh et al., 2018).

2.3.2.3 VALUES ATTACHED TO GIRLS' SEXUALITY

In Ethiopia, a girl's virginity and sexual purity are highly valued and families may consider marriage as a way to protect their daughters' sexual reputation (Tiruneh, Wilson, & Gebreslassie, 2018). According to Gage (2013), societal expectations pressure girls to conform to traditional gender

roles and avoid engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage.

Girls who engage in premarital sex or become pregnant outside of marriage are often stigmatized and ostracized from their communities, which leads to a sense of shame and exclusion for the girl and her family. This pressure is particularly strong in rural parts of the country where traditional values are strongly upheld and community members closely monitor the behavior of girls. In order to avoid these consequences and protect the 'purity' of their daughters, families marry their daughters as soon as they attain puberty or before that (Gage, 2013).

2.3.2.4 HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Humanitarian contexts such as conflict and displacement can also exacerbate factors including poverty, gender inequality, and cultural and traditional practices that contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Studies have shown that displacement and conflict are significant predictors of child marriage among internally displaced populations in Ethiopia (Mekonnen & Worku, 2021). Families in these contexts view child marriage as a way to protect their daughters from violence and exploitation.

In Ethiopia's Somali region, a study conducted found that child marriage was seen as a way for families to ensure their daughters' safety and to alleviate economic burdens, as girls were perceived as a financial burden on families (Banteyerga et al., 2019).

Recently, drought-affected areas of Ethiopia have shown a sharp rise in child marriage (UNICEF, 2022). UNICEF announced that cases of child marriage have nearly

quadrupled across the six drought-affected areas known in the vast region of Oromia. In the East Hararghe zone, child marriage cases increased by 51%, from 70 recorded during a six-month period in 2020-21 to 106 in the same period a year later. Families of child brides married off their daughters out of desperation, dread of violence and safety for their daughters, a lack of resources, and an inability to feed them (The Guardian, 2022).

2.3.3 CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE AFAR REGION

The Afar Region in Ethiopia, the homeland of the Afar people, is situated in the northeastern part of the country. The region is known for its diverse population, ranging from nomadic pastoralists to semi-agricultural communities. The region has an estimated population of almost 1.9 million people, approximately two percent of the total Ethiopian population. The Afar people are found not only in Ethiopia but also in Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia. The Afar people speak "Qfaraf", which is also the state's working language and belongs to the Cushitic branch of Afro-Asian languages. Religion plays an essential role in Afar society. The majority follow Islam, but there are also people who follow other religions within the region (Central Statistical Agency, 2007). The Afar Region, like other regions in Ethiopia, is divided into different administrative zones. These zones are Awsi Rasu, Kilbet Rasu, Gabi Rasu, Fanti Rasu, Hari Rasu, and Mahi Rasu.

As elsewhere in the country, the population of Afar is young: 12 percent is under five years of age and 39.5 percent is under 18 years of age. Because of a high rate of poverty and socioeconomic indicators that are far below national averages, the Ethiopian government designated the Afar

region as one of four developing regional states (UNICEF, 2022).

Child marriage is a deeply concerning issue in the Afar Region. According to UNICEF et al. (2018), the Afar Region now has the highest prevalence of child marriage in this age group in the country. In 25 years there has been almost no change in child marriage prevalence reported by women in the age group of 20 to 24 years, as this was 69 percent in 1991 and 67 percent in 2016, indicating the persistence of the harmful practice. To eliminate child marriage and fulfill the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3 by 2030, progress in Afar must be made 47 times faster (CSA and ICF, 2016). However, the prevalence of the practice in the region indicates the persistence of the harmful practice over time.

Driving factors of child marriage in the region are complex and interrelated. Poverty, traditional beliefs and cultural norms, limited access to education, and the ongoing drought crisis all play a role in perpetuating the practice (UNICEF, 2022). According to a study by UNICEF (2022), poverty is a key driver of child marriage in the region. Families in the region often see child marriage as a way to alleviate economic burden. Cultural and traditional beliefs also contribute to the practice of child marriage as girls' virginity and sexual purity are highly valued in the region, and families may view child marriage as a way to ensure that their daughters remain chaste until marriage (UNFPA, 2016). According to a study by CSA and ICF (2016), family concerns over the safety and protection of their daughters also contribute to child marriage in the region.

2.3.4 CHALLENGES TO PREVENTING AND ERADICATING CHILD MARRIAGE IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has built legal and policy frameworks to prevent the marriage of children. The Constitution, the Family Code, and the Criminal Code all set 18 as the legal minimum age for marriage. Moreover, the 2011 Growth and Transformation Plan targets a 50% reduction in child marriage in only five years and the National Alliance to End Child Marriage, a 2014 initiative led by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, aims to support the entire abandonment of the practice by 2025 (Marshall et al., 2016).

Despite efforts by the Ethiopian government and international organizations to prevent and eradicate child marriage, the practice remains prevalent. One of the main challenges identified by Chow and Vivat (2016) is the persistence of traditional gender roles and patriarchal attitudes that prioritize the value of girls as wives and mothers over their education and personal development. Hence, families prioritize early marriage as a way to secure their daughters' economic future and protect their honor.

Another barrier to eradicating and preventing child marriage in Ethiopia, according to Chow and Vivat (2014), is a lack of education and knowledge about the negative repercussions of the practice. Girls may not voice out against the practice because they are unaware of their rights or where to turn for help. Only 33.7 percent of Ethiopian girls who had experienced child marriage had gotten information about the negative effects of child marriage before marrying, according to Mekonnen et al. (2020). Furthermore, CSA and ICF (2017) discovered that only 32% of Ethiopian women were conscious of the negative consequences of child

marriage, indicating a need for increased education and awareness-raising efforts.

Families may also not be aware of the long-term negative consequences of child marriage, such as higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, lower levels of education and income, and increased risk of gender-based violence. Hence, they see child marriage as the better option for securing a good future for their daughters (Erulkar et al., 2015).

The lack of enforcement of laws and policies that prohibit child marriage is another challenge. Although Ethiopia has laws in place to prevent child marriage, including a minimum legal age for marriage –18 years. These laws are often not enforced. In some cases, customary laws and traditions take precedence over formal laws, making it difficult to eradicate the practice of child marriage (Chow and Vivat, 2014). According to a report by Girls Not Brides (2021), enforcement of laws and policies is weak and inconsistent, and most perpetrators evade justice.

In addition, child marriage is often intertwined with other societal issues such as gender inequality, domestic violence, and limited access to healthcare and education. As a result, eradicating child marriage in Ethiopia necessitates a multifaceted strategy that addresses the underlying causes and challenges (Chow and Vivat, 2014).

2.4 AN OVERVIEW OF LEGAL INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES RELATED TO CHILD MARRIAGE

2.4.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORKS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Currently, there are many legal frameworks that prohibit child marriages and impose duties on the States to follow suit in criminalizing child marriage. The frameworks are available at international, regional, and domestic levels. Under this section, the paper addresses legal frameworks that deal with child marriage at all levels.

2.4.1.1 INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Since the establishment of the United Nations, human rights issues have been on the agenda of the organization, and the first human rights declaration was adopted by the General Assembly (GA) of the UN on 10 December 1948. After a decade, the same organization adopted two binding human rights instruments (the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights) in 1966, and the covenants entered into force after 10 years upon the fulfillment of required ratifications by States.

The UDHR under Article 16(1) recognizes the equality of women and men of full age in marriage relationships, but fails to provide specific protections for the child against early marriage. Based on the declaration, the marriage shall be concluded based on the free consent of both women and men (UDHR). The protection given for the child against marriage under the provisions of the UDHR is not as effective, since it fails to prohibit child marriage and

define what a child means. Further, the declaration is still not binding even though there is an argument that advocates it attained the status of international customary human law (IHCL) (Zamfir, 2018).

The other UN human rights instrument that deals with the issue of child rights concerning early marriage is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The ICCPR provides a separate provision that deals with the rights of children, under Article 24. The provision recognizes the equal protection of children in society regardless of their backgrounds. The protection given to a child under the ICCPR seems too general and fails to determine who the child is because defining the child will clearly enable the protection of the child against marriage. In particular, in terms of child marriage, the Convention seems vague. However, the Convention recognizes the right to marriage of women and men as long as they have attained the marriageable age (ICCPR). The main defect of the Covenant is it failed to provide the minimum marriageable age or failed to define who the child is. Even though the Covenant is silent on this issue, the human rights committee provided the minimum age for majority –18 years (Refugees, para. 4). Based on the comment of the committee, children are protected against marriage unless they attain the age of 18 (General Recommendation No. 36).

2.4.1.2 CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

After decades of negotiation and advocacy by activists on the rights of women, the UN adopted a separate Convention that exclusively deals with the rights of women in 1979. The Convention is the first binding international instrument

that expressly prohibited child marriage (CEDAW). The Convention also obliges the State party to determine the minimum marriageable age by domestic law (CEDAW, Art. 16(2)). Even though the Convention prohibits child marriage, the duty to determine who the child is rests on the State parties. However, the committee on the convention recommends that the State Party should fix the minimum marriageable age to 18 for girls (General Recommendation No. 36, para 24(f)).

2.4.1.3 CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC)

The convention on the rights of the child is one of the main UN treaties that exclusively deals with the rights of the child both in respect of civil and political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights (UNICEF and others, 2012). The Convention defined the term 'child' as every human being below age 18 unless, under the applicable law, majority is attained earlier (CRC, Art. 1). Even though the Convention is designated to protect child rights, it failed to prohibit child marriage explicitly. Despite the lack of clear prohibition of child girl marriage, the Convention prohibited any sexual violence against children. Since child marriage is one type of sexual violence, each State Party is required to prohibit child marriage (CRC, Art. 34 (a, b, & c), 19 (1)(CRC; UNICEF, 2007).

2.4.2 REGIONAL (AFRICAN) LEGAL FRAMEWORKS ON CHILD MARRIAGE

The development of the human rights system is not limited to UN systems. Currently, almost all regions of the world have developed their human rights systems mainly by aiming to incorporate their own cultural and religious

perspectives (Alemayehu, 2022). Even though there were many and diversified reasons for the development of regional human rights systems, the majority of the treaties are almost the same as the UN human rights treaties in terms of substantive rights, duty holders (except for African human rights systems which impose duties on individuals), beneficiaries of the rights, and monitoring systems (with a slight difference, some regions have developed the strongest monitoring mechanisms, Human Rights Court/s).

Africa is one of the regions that developed its human rights systems. The region adopted several human rights instruments. For instance, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Children Charter), the Kampala Convention, and Protocol on Women's Rights, and several other protocols to ensure the respect and protection of specific groups of people. Under this section, the researcher tries to address African legal frameworks on the rights of children concerning child marriage.

2.4.2.1   AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (AFRICAN CHILDREN'S CHARTER)

The African Children's Charter is one of the most notable contributions of the African human rights system to realize the protection of child rights in general and particularly against traditional harmful practices (Johnson and Sloth-Nielsen, 2020). Concerning the protection of girls against child marriage, the charter is more comprehensive than CRC. As noted by Johnson and Sloth-Nielsen (2020), one of the compelling justifications for the adoption of a separate African Children's Charter on the rights of the child is to fill the gaps that were neglected during the drafting process

of the CRC. Under Article 21(2), the African Children's Charter explicitly prohibits child marriage of both girls and boys. Based on the Charter, State Parties have no choice but to determine the minimum marriageable age because the Charter fixed it to the age of 18. If the State Parties have other laws, customs, or religious practices that allow marriage for a person below 18 years, they are inconsistent with Articles 1(3), 21(2) of the Charter and should be discouraged. This is because the Charter obliges State Parties to fix the minimum marriageable age to 18 and State Parties are required to make their law at least consistent with the Charter (African Children's Charter, Art. 1(3)). Further, the Charter under Article 1(2) allows State Parties to apply the most protective domestic laws, international treaties, customs, etc.

2.4.3 NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Ethiopia is one of the countries known for the adoption of international human rights instruments since the establishment of the UN. Ethiopia has adopted the Geneva conventions, ICCPR, ICESCR, CRC, ACHPR, African Children's Charter, and so on (OHCHR, 2022). Since Ethiopia is a party to most international human rights instruments, all instruments are integral parts of the laws of the country. In addition to international standards, Ethiopia has formulated many domestic laws including the constitution, family laws (both at central and regional levels), criminal laws, and several policies and strategies to reduce and tackle child marriage.

2.4.3.1   THE 1995 CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

The constitution includes several safeguards to protect children from any human rights abuses, and it also has a separate section devoted to the rights of children. Under Article 36 of The FDRE Constitution, every child has a right to protection against any harmful practices. However, this provision has failed to prevent or outlaw child marriage. Despite the lack of a clear prohibition of child girl marriage under the provisions, the constitution under Article 34(2) recognizes the necessity of free and full consent of men and women for marriage. Since marriage is a judicial act, the prospective consent of spouses must also abide by another legal requirement – their capacity. Under the Ethiopian law, everyone below the age of 18 is incapable and cannot provide their consent to perform juridical acts (The Civil Code, Art. 199(3)). Therefore, child marriage cannot be justified even if the prospective child girls consent to the proposed marriage or have already concluded marriage.

2.4.3.2   THE REVISED FAMILY CODE OF ETHIOPIA (RFC)

The RFC provides detailed requirements for valid marriages. Once the marriage is concluded without complying with the requirement, the effects of the marriage may be voidable as a principle and void in some circumstances. Based on the code, the marriageable age is 18 as a principle, and no one shall be allowed to conclude a valid marriage before attaining 18 (RFC, Art 7(1)). The effect of underage marriage is voidable under the code.

The code also provides an exception for the age restrictions under Article 7(2). As per this provision, the Ministry of

Justice may allow the conclusion of marriage upon the request of the future spouses or the guardians or parents, for serious causes. The Ministry can allow the conclusion of marriage only if the future spouse attains the age of 16.

The exception provided under the Ethiopian RFC contradicts the African Children's Charter, which obliges State Parties to fix the minimum marriageable age to 18. Countries are expected to obey and bind themselves to international commitments, and failure to do that constitutes a violation of international commitments. Ethiopia is one of the parties to the African Children's Charter and is expected to modify national laws in a way that complies with the Charter.

2.4.3.3   CHILD MARRIAGE UNDER THE CRIMINAL LAW OF ETHIOPIA

Early marriage is one of the acts that constitute criminal liability under the 2005 FDRE criminal code. The code under Art. 648(a) provides that anyone who concludes marriage with a minor is punishable with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding three years in case the minor has attained thirteen years or above. The punishment will increase up to seven years in case the marriage is/was concluded with a minor below thirteen years of age. However, it may not exceed seven years of rigorous imprisonment (FDRE Criminal Code, Art. 648(b)). The fact that the family of the child or the child consented to the marriage may not relieve the offender from liability. Therefore, early marriage is a crime in Ethiopia without exception unless the marriage was concluded with the compliance of family laws of the country. For instance, based on the RFC, a minor who has attained the age of 16 may conclude a marriage with another person

upon the authorization of the Ministry of Justice (FDRE Criminal Code, Art. 648 Para. 1).

2.4.4 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE AFAR REGION

The Afar Regional State is one of the eleven (11) member states of the Ethiopian Federation. The Afar and the Ethiopian Somali regions are the only regions that have not yet enacted a family law that regulates issues of marriage. Currently, the applicable law for marriage is the 1960 civil code of Ethiopia. Even though the applicable law is the Ethiopian civil code, it has to comply with the federal and regional constitutions. The code shall only be applicable as far as it is consistent with the principles of the constitution and international treaties that Ethiopia is a party to as per FDRE Constitution, Art. 9(1) and 13(2).

2.4.4.1 THE REVISED CONSTITUTION OF THE AFAR NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE

The 1994 revised constitution of the Afar National Regional State recognizes the manner of the conclusion of marriage. Based on Art. 33(2) of the constitution, marriage shall be concluded only on the free and full consent of the future spouses. In this regard, the protections provided by the regional constitution are the same as the protection accorded by the FDRE constitution and other international instruments. The Afar constitution allows the conclusion of marriage only for the person who has attained the marriageable age. The marriageable age is currently 18 years in Ethiopia as per Article 21(2) of the African Children's Charter. Since Ethiopia is a party to the Charter, it is

applicable in the Afar Regional State and the latter has to obey the provision of the Charter. Therefore, marriage under the age of 18 shall be considered as a child marriage and a violation of the human rights of the child. Hence, it affects the fundamental rights of the child.

Further, the constitution prohibits any kind of harmful practice against women and girls under Art. 34(4). For this purpose, under the same provision, the constitution also provides that the government has to protect women and children against harm, and harm includes, but is not limited to, discrimination, and physical and psychological harm because of the existing law or custom.

2.4.4.2 THE 1960 ETHIOPIAN CIVIL CODE

The civil code is highly criticized for being against the fundamental rights of women and girls.[02] For instance, the code is discriminatory concerning the marriageable age. Art. 581 provides the attainment of 18 years for men and 15 years for women. This provision is clearly against the African Children's Charter, which prohibits child marriage or marriage under the age of 18 for both sexes as per Article 21(2). Further, the code under Art. 309 & 562 allows child marriage in a clear manner, which is against the basic principles of current international human rights instruments that Ethiopia has ratified. Moreover, the code allows arranged marriage, which contradicts the principles of free and informed consent recognized under the federal and regional constitutions as well as international instruments ratified by Ethiopia. Even though the code is the applicable

02 The Revised Family Code, Proclamation No. 213/2000, preamble Paragraphs, 2, 3, & 5 (RFC). The Proclamation limits the scope of the applicability of the RFC only to the administration accountable to the Federal Government, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa City Administration.

family law in Afar, any contradictory provisions of the code should be void as per Article 9(1) of the FDRE constitution.

2.4.4.3 THE CONTEXT OF LEGAL PLURALISM IN THE AFAR REGION

Afar is one of the unique regional states in Ethiopia. The residents of the region are predominantly pastoralist Muslims. Moreover, the people of the region have their own unique customary governance system, Mada'a (Pankhurst and Assefa, 2016). As a result, the rights of women and girls are either protected or violated by various norms. Despite the existence of various norms, both the FDRE and the regional constitutions prohibit any contradictory customs, laws, and religious practices if they contradict with the constitutions. Further, both constitutions provide a strong commitment to the protection of the rights of children and women. Beyond the recognition of the rights of the child and women, the FDRE constitution gives due attention to fundamental human rights and freedoms (Abdo, 2011. p.79). The constitution prohibits any harmful acts both on children and women as well as recognizing the equality of everyone regardless of any status of the individual. As a result, Ethiopia has attempted to fight any discriminatory acts against women and children by adopting several laws that prohibit aspects of customary laws that harms the rights of women and girls Cohen, Jasper, Liu, & Zhao, 2022, pp. 19-29).

Even though the country has been trying to abolish and replace pre-existing customary laws, the 1995 FDRE constitution and the Afar constitution allow and recognize the applicability of religious and customary laws concerning personal matters. Customary and religious laws have been

criticized for perpetuating discrimination against women (Abdo, 2011, p.83). Though the customs and religions may have negative effects on the protection of the rights of women and children, the constitution provides restrictions both in the scope and manner of their application. The applicability of these laws is limited to the adjudication of personal and family matters based on the consent of the parties. In other words, a customary or religious law shall be applicable only for dispute resolution in cases involving personal matters, such as succession, and family matters, such as marriage and marriage-related issues.

2.4.5 BASIC ELEMENTS IN THE LAW

Marriage is one of the most important juridical acts that needs due attention and protection of the law. The US Supreme Court describes the importance of marriage in its decision rendered in the case of Loving v. Virginia as follows: "Marriage is one of the 'basic civil rights of man', fundamental to our very existence and survival" (Legislative Guide to Marriage Law, 2005). At the same time, if the marriage was not concluded in a way that respects the fundamental rights of women and men, it may result in further damages and violations of human rights. For this purpose, in the modern legal system, there are several essential requirements to conclude a valid marriage. Failure to obey the essential requirements or elements may constitute a violation of the law, and it will further result in the violation of the fundamental rights of spouses.

2.4.5.1 THE MINIMUM AGE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The requirement of minimum age is vital to concluding a valid marriage for several reasons. The first reason is that it helps people to determine the capacity of the person to perform legal acts. Based on the Ethiopian law, majority can be attained at the age of 18 as per Art. 199(3) of the Civil Code and Art. 7(1) of the RFC. Then, a person can perform any juridical act attributed to her/him. The second reason is that fixing the minimum age for marriage will enable a person to decide on their action free of anything. Thirdly, it will help us to determine what child marriage is. Finally, it will reduce major risks that may result from early marriage and pregnancy (Black, 2001, p.2). Child marriage is a marriage concluded by girls or boys before attaining the minimum marriageable age fixed by the law −18 years old.

2.4.5.2 FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT

Consent is one of the most important elements to concluding a valid marriage. Issues of consent can be raised at any time, by anyone, at every place, etc. Vices of consent may happen at any time by anyone against someone or several persons. Both under the FDRE Constitution Art. 34(2) and the RFC Art. 6, marriage can be concluded only based on the free and full consent of the future spouses. According to Belete (2022), consent can be given only by future spouses, and no one can provide consent on behalf of either prospective spouse. He adds that countries have to ensure that prospective spouses have provided their free and well-informed consent to conclude marriage. Consent can be violated when the child girls are forced to marry. Girls cannot provide consent to the marriage because of the lack of capacity to do that as stated above. Even if a child

consents to a marriage, that consent may not constitute a valid expression of her free and informed consent. As a result, we cannot consider it a free and informed consent. The consent of a future spouse can be vitiated on several grounds, such as error, duress, lack of capacity, etc. The other most pertinent cause in the case of child marriage is duress (violence) and lack of capacity (Mazurana et al., 2019). Child girls may face duress from different directions or persons but the common one in Ethiopia is their family. "Child marriages in Ethiopia are often negotiated between families and seldom involve the child's consent" (Innocenti, 2022). In the majority of cases, child girls are forced to marry adult men due to family arrangements for a variety of reasons, including economic, religious, and social factors, or to save their lives during armed conflicts (Psaki et al., 2021; Mazurana et al., 2019).

2.4.5.3 EFFECTS OF DEFECTS CONCERNING BASIC ELEMENTS

The effects of failure to obey the minimum conditions (elements) will be either void or voidable. Under Art. 18(a) and 31(1), the effects of the lack of essential requirements RFC depend on the type of the violations. In case the violation is related to age, the marriage can be subject to dissolution by the court upon the request of the parents of the spouses, a public prosecutor, or other interested people. The application for the dissolution of the marriage concluded by the child shall be submitted to the court before the child spouse attains the age of 18. The period provided under Article 31(2) may not restrict the right of a child spouse to submit the application to the court for the dissolution of the marriage even if she has attained the age of 18.

In case the defect is related to the consent, the right to apply for the dissolution of the marriage is given to a person who is affected by the violence or duress as per Art. 35(1). Since most child marriages are concluded through forced arrangement or other means, it is difficult for the child spouse to claim for the invalidation or dissolution of the marriage unless represented by her parent/guardian or public prosecutor. In case no one applies, the child spouse may exercise the right to apply for the invalidation because the provision provides that the person whose consent is vitiated can demand the dissolution within six months of the cessation of the duress. Cessation of the violence may happen upon the child attaining majority. This is because one of the main causes of duress is related to sex or age (The Civil Code, Art. 1706(3)).

2.4.6 POLICIES TOWARD CHILD MARRIAGE

2.4.6.1 INTERNATIONAL

There are many attempts to end early marriage at the international, regional, and domestic levels. At the international level, one of the main actors concerning child rights is UNICEF (Johanna, 2022). UNICEF has introduced several policies to end child marriage and undertaken several studies and conferences. Even though UNICEF is the main actor in the area, other UN organs and NGOs are also active actors.

A. | Sustainable development goal (SDG), Target 5.3

Under the sustainable development goal, one of the main agendas is to achieve gender equality and empower women

and girls. Harmful practices such as early/child and forced marriage are among the factors that widen the inequality between women and men. Girls are the main victims of early/child and forced marriage because of cultural and other socioeconomic factors including armed conflict and other natural and man-made disasters. It is for this purpose that the SDGs call for the elimination of all harmful practices to advance the rights of women and girls globally. To eliminate early/child and forced marriage and other harmful practices, UNICEF is tasked with ensuring that all children are protected from violence and harmful practices both in humanitarian and development settings (Johanna, 2022). The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) created in-depth indicators of the target in order to guarantee its viability (ECOSOC, 2016). Indicator 5.3.1 refers to the "proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18." At the end of 2030, child marriage is expected to be eliminated. The goal was designed to end child marriage to reduce or end its socioeconomic impacts on the child, health problems due to early marriage, and other related negative effects (Girls Not Brides, 2017; UNICEF, Ending Child Marriage and Adolescent Empowerment, 2022).

Although it is a bold attempt to accomplish this target of the SDG, the African Union (AU) aims to end child marriage before 2063 under Agenda 2063. This shows the existence of disparity between the AU and the UN.

B. | UNFPA–UNICEF global program to end child marriage

The United Nations Fund for Population Analysis (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2005) both consider 'child marriage' to be one involving a person under the age of eighteen. UNFPA and UNICEF are envisioned

to end child marriage, teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence, and female genital mutilation (FGM) and call on partners in the East and Southern African region to increase their investment in empowering girls and women.

To achieve the target, they have prepared several initiatives and strategies. The first initiative is to adopt a multi-strategy approach which includes

"... Empowering girls and young women to be agents of change in their own lives, changing familial and societal attitudes towards them, providing them with good-quality health care and education, and creating a policy and legal environment that enables their empowerment" (Boyden et al., 2012).

The approach can be implemented through enacting the laws that can enable officials to take measures as well as enable girls an entailment. To empower and enable women and girls to decide on their issues, they should have a right that is recognized by the law.

The second initiative is to promote collaboration between stakeholders. There is almost a consensus that the involvement of several stakeholders (from girls to government, religious institutions, etc.) and a diversified strategy is necessary to end child marriage. In the same way, raising the awareness of boys and young men is the most important issue to end any kind of gender-based violence including child marriage. The other important instrument is ensuring the engagement of community leaders as ambassadors for the intended change. Yet another initiative is adapting interventions to the local contexts (UNICEF, Ending Child Marriage and Adolescent Empowerment, 2022).

2.4.6.2   CAMPAIGN TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA: CALL FOR ACTION

Child marriage and other traditional harmful practices are predominant socioeconomic and political challenges. Most international policies are focused on eliminating child marriage in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan countries. Almost all African countries now believe that child marriage violates the fundamental human rights of children, particularly girls. The former African Union Chairperson explained how child marriage is affecting girls' rights (AU Campaign, 2013). The campaign is designed to support the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda as well as the African Union's Agenda 2063. The African Union justified the campaign on several grounds. The first justification is the large number of girls and children, around 14 million, are forced to engage in arranged marriages. The second reason is that Africa has among the highest rates of child marriage, and some of the countries are among the leading ones. The third reason is that "girls from the poorest households are three times as likely to get married before age 18 as girls from the richest households". The other reasons are gender-based violence and discrimination, which are prevalent in the majority of developing countries and need to be tackled to end child marriage and to ensure the fulfillment of children's rights. Furthermore, a child born to a mother under the age of 18 has a 60% greater chance of dying in his or her first year.

The main objective of the campaign is to accelerate the end of child marriage in Africa. They also provided specific objectives, which included promoting the effective enforcement of the AU legal and policy instruments to ensure the fulfillment of girls' human rights and pushing

member states to draft laws which enable the elimination of child marriage, support launch policies, and so on (AU Campaign, 2013). The campaign purpose includes advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, and facilitation of technical assistance and capacity building. The outcomes of the campaign were reviewed in the majority of the countries. For example, in 2020, the experience of Zimbabwe and Zambia was reviewed in Addis Ababa (UN Women, 2020)).

2.4.6.3 DOMESTIC POLICIES

Ethiopia has introduced several policies and strategies to end child marriage with the collaboration of several international, regional, and local NGOs. Ethiopia has many other policies and action plans that call for the elimination of harmful traditional practices (HTPs), including child marriage, such as the 2013 "National Strategy and Action Plan on HTPs Against Women and Children in Ethiopia" (FDRE MoWCY, 2013).

Ethiopia is one of the 12 countries implementing the Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage in cooperation with UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund. The Ethiopian government also serves as the chair of the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM/C, the coordinating body for national efforts to eradicate child marriage (Erulkar, 2022). As a result of the government's and other stakeholders' efforts to combat child marriage, the practice has significantly decreased.

Under this sub-section, the paper addresses some of most recent policies and strategies that Ethiopia is implementing to end child marriage and other harmful traditional practices.

A. | **National strategy and action plan on harmful traditional practices (HTPs) against women and children in Ethiopia (2013-2014)**

This was a two-year action plan introduced by the government in 2013 which aimed to provide a strategic direction, an institutional framework, principles and actions for the prevention and elimination of all forms of HTPs. The action plan identified child marriage and female circumcision as the two harmful traditional practices (HTPs) that need to be eliminated first.

Later, the action plan was followed by initiatives such as Women's Development and Change Package 2017; and MoWCY's GTP II Sectoral Plan 2015/162019/20 in order to end child marriage and FGM.

B. | **National costed roadmap to end child marriage and FGM/C 2020–2024**

The roadmap aimed to end two main harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia – child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in 2025. Given that the primary objective of the paper is to discuss issues related to child marriage, FMG/C will not receive much attention in this section.

The roadmap identified the main causes or drivers of child marriage in the country, which include social, economic, religious, and cultural ones (National Roadmap, 2019). Almost in the same way, UNICEF also identified the main causes of early marriage as it is supported by the majority of customs in developing countries and some religions across the world. It is also used in low-income earning countries as a strategy for economic survival and to ensure the submissiveness of a wife to her husband to maintain male dominance (UNICEF, 2001). This implies that the

main causes of child marriage are almost the same but both documents failed to address the impact of violence or conflict with regard to child marriage. Despite this ommission, the national costed roadmap identified five main pillars to achieve the elimination of child marriage and FMG/C. These are: (National Roadmap, 2019)

A. Empowering adolescent girls and their families;

B. Engaging the community (including faith and traditional leaders);

C. Enhancing systems, accountability, and services across sectors;

D. Creating and strengthening an enabling environment; and

E. Increasing data and evidence generation and use.

The strategies are the main tools that the government envisioned to harvest the outcomes of the roadmaps for both HTPs. Despite the criminalization of child marriage, Ethiopia has not yet succeeded in eliminating child marriage because of the driving causes. As a result, it is important to tackle the main causes of child marriage by ensuring the participation of everyone, especially those potentially involved in child marriage negatively as well as positively (National Roadmap, 2019).

At the end of the programs, the roadmap identified five (5) main outputs. The first expected outcome is the empowerment of adolescent girls who have been exposed to child marriage. The second expected outcome is "Increased social action, acceptance, and visibility around investing

in and supporting girls, and generating shifts in social expectations relating to girls' education and elimination of child marriage and FGM/C" (National Roadmap, 2019).

 ." The third expected outcome is "ensuing accountability and improving the quality of services in responsible sectors". The fourth goal is to create a supportive environment for girls and women, and the final anticipated output is increased generation and use of a robust data and evidence base on girls for advocacy, programming, learning, and progress tracking (National Roadmap, 2019).

C. The 'End Child Marriage': A flagship program 2020-2025

The program was sponsored by UNFPA-UNICEF in Ethiopia by targeting 62 Woreda's (UNICEF Ethiopia, 2022). At least four types of results are expected at the end of the program. The first intended output of the program is girls (aged 10 –19) who are at risk of child marriage or pregnant, married, divorced, or widowed are engaged in gender transformative life skills and comprehensive sexuality education programs (UNICEF Ethiopia, 2022). The second anticipated outcome is that families, communities, traditional and religious leaders, and other influencers engage in dialogue and consensus-building on alternatives to child marriage (including education), adolescent girls' rights, and gender equality. The third goal is to improve the provision of integrated multi-sectoral services (WASH, health, social protection, education, and nutrition) to keep girls out of child marriage. The final expected outcome is capacity building and technical assistance provided to the government in order to implement a budgeted multi-sectoral gender-transformative plan to end child marriage across ministries and departments at the sub-national level (UNICEF Ethiopia,

2022). To ensure the success of the intended program, UNICEF identified several strategies which include ensuring educational opportunities for girls, child protection by financing national policies, social protection (by, for example, assisting social protection programs that promote girls' education and discourage child marriage), communication, and emergencies (UNICEF Ethiopia, 2022).

2.5 CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Barnes et al. (2018) defines humanitarian settings as areas affected by conflict, natural disasters, or other emergencies that cause significant displacement and humanitarian needs. These settings are characterized by limited access to basic services, such as health care, clean water, and food, and a high prevalence of infectious diseases. According to Girls Not Brides (2021), an estimated 14 million girls under the age of 18 marry each year, with a large percentage of them living in crisis-affected areas. Humanitarian settings generate an insecure environment in which girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, including forced marriage. In 2017, a Human Rights Council Resolution on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings recognized child, early and forced marriage as a human rights violation and a harmful practice that disproportionately affects women and girls globally. According to UNFPA, if current trends continue, the number of child marriages in humanitarian situations could rise by 40% over the next decade (2020).

2.5.1 SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN TIMES OF ARMED CONFLICT

Sexual violence is defined as "any act of a sexual nature which is committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive". This definition is not limited to physical invasions of the human body and can encompass non-penetrative acts or even those that do not involve physical contact (The Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu, Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda [ICTR], 1998).

During times of armed conflict, international human rights law (IHL), international humanitarian law (IHL), and international criminal law are all applicable. Sexual violence against children in conflict-affected areas are a violation of international human rights law and humanitarian law (United Nations, 2019). National laws regarding sexual violence and abuse of children vary by country based on the legal definition of what constitutes a child and child sexual abuse, and when a person reaches the legal age of consent for sexual activity. Under the laws of most countries, minors are expressly singled out for protection from sexual abuse and are considered incapable of granting legal consent for sexual activity (Mazurana et al., 2019).

Save the Children's research and programming experience indicates that especially girls but also boys under the age of 18 often make up the majority of survivors of sexual violence in conflict and conflict-affected countries; sometimes more than 80% of those affected by sexual violence are children (Aubert and Holder, 2013). The displacement and breakdown of social structures caused by armed conflict can leave children isolated and without protection from harm (Machel, 2009). Moreover, the

prevalence of sexual violence against children in conflict zones is likely underreported due to stigma, fear of retribution, and limited access to services and justice (Save the Children, 2013).

2.5.2 CHILD MARRIAGE IN ARMED CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Child marriage is a form of sexual and gender-based violence that involves other violations, including, for example, forced labor (Aoláin et al., 2018). Mazurana et al. (2019) state that conflict and instability are thought to be significant drivers of child marriage, particularly for girls. According to Bellizzi et al. (2019), humanitarian crises such as conflicts, natural disasters, and forced displacement exacerbate the issue of child marriage, adding that there is some evidence to suggest that girls in armed conflict and humanitarian crisis situations and fragile states are made more vulnerable to child marriage (p. 589).

The increased vulnerability of girls to child marriage in different contexts of forced migration, protracted crisis, and epidemics/pandemics are discussed below.

In the context of forced migration

Under this context, when displaced populations cross borders, their rights and protection systems are often weakened. They have to adapt to hostile environments that restrict their freedom of movement, access to basic services and livelihoods. In such contexts, girls become more vulnerable to child marriage (Girls Not Brides). It is often used as a coping mechanism in situations of displacement as families seek to protect their daughters from perceived

risks such as poverty, exploitation, and sexual violence (Bellizzi et al., 2019).

In the context of protracted crisis

Extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, and cyclones, have been brought on by climate change during the past few decades. These phenomena have caused a number of acute and chronic crises, which have then had an impact on economies and social systems (Girls Not Brides). In other protracted crises, such as those caused by displacement or conflict, child marriage rates tend to be higher due to the precariousness of life and the lack of protection systems. This has resulted in increased vulnerability to child marriage in nations that are more vulnerable to such climatic shocks (Nusrat, 2019).

In the context of epidemics and pandemics

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the harmful effects of epidemics and pandemics on women and girls, including a rise in child marriage rates. Lockdowns and curfews enforced during the pandemic in many countries have resulted in an increase in intimate partner violence, child neglect, and sexual abuse, which may have contributed to the rise in child marriage rates (UNICEF, COVID-19, 2020). Epidemics and pandemics have direct health impacts, including increased mortality and pressure on health services. In addition, it also disproportionately impacts women and girls and adversely impacts on child marriage (Girls Not Brides).

2.5.3 FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILD MARRIAGE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and driven by a complex set of factors that take root in more stable contexts and are exacerbated in times of crisis (Girls Not Brides; Mazurana et al., 2019). Some of the key drivers of child marriage in humanitarian crises are:

A. | Harmful social norms and gender-based violence

Many families who marry off their young girls are doing so in an effort to protect them from real or perceived threats of increased sexual violence because of the conflict. For example, families that remained in Syria in the early part of the conflict married their daughters to older men or men in the military as a way to try and protect the girls from kidnappings, sexual violence, and the Syrian military bombings (Mazurana et al., 2019) while in other situations, worries about an increase in sexual assault prompted families to wed their daughters earlier to ensure their virginity upon marriage and, in part, uphold the family's and their daughters' perception of honor (*"To Protect Her Honor"*). Social and cultural functions that enforce social gender roles for girls to marry and produce children may be strengthened where families feel pressure to uphold cultural values and notions of family honor and to continue their cultures.

Despite the research showing that the family is one of the most important resources that children and youth have to be able to survive with their physical, mental, and emotional health intact, in areas affected by armed violence, among the most toxic and pervasive physical, sexual, and emotional violence that many young people experience is that which

comes from their family members, and for child brides, from their husbands (Conley, 2020). The breakdown of traditional social and familial structures can lead to a lack of protection for girls and an increase in their vulnerability to early marriage (Bellizzi et al., 2021).

B. | Economic reasons

Families experiencing armed conflict may also marry off their girls in an effort to maximize their resources. They may marry her off to lessen the resources they need to give to the girl herself, or to try to access resources or protection from her husband and his family for their larger family, as in the cases of Jordan, Lebanon, and South Sudan ("To Protect Her Honor"; This Old Man Can Feed Us, You Will Marry Him). Child marriage rates often rise as a result of the disruption of social and economic systems created by these crises. For example, during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, child marriage rates increased as families struggled to provide for their children while also protecting them from the disease. In addition, the risk of child marriage in vulnerable communities increased due to greater poverty and food insecurity, climate change, and environmental degradation. (Bellizzi et al., 2019).

C. | Absence of key service provisions

According to Mazurana et al. (2019), when humanitarian crises occur, access to key services such as education, health care, legal services, and protection services may be limited or entirely absent. Where key service provisions are lacking, girls appear more likely to be married as they may not have access to redress mechanisms for instances of gender-based violence or discrimination. Where girls and their family members have access to school and legal services

and redress, it appears the practice of child marriage may decrease (Mazurana et al., 2019). The absence of these critical services may exacerbate girls' vulnerability to child marriage.

The disruption of health care services in humanitarian settings results in creating a situation where there is lack of access to critical health care services that could prevent or treat health conditions. For example, girls who lack access to sexual and reproductive health care may be forced into child marriage due to pregnancy or the fear of pregnancy outside of marriage (Singh et al., 2020). Furthermore, the absence of legal services in humanitarian settings may also contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Without access to legal services, girls and their families may lack the means to challenge or seek protection from child marriage; it leaves them vulnerable to this harmful practice (Mazurana et al., 2019). Overall, the absence of key service provisions, the disruption of social and familial structures, and economic insecurity are significant drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings.

CHAPTER THREE:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
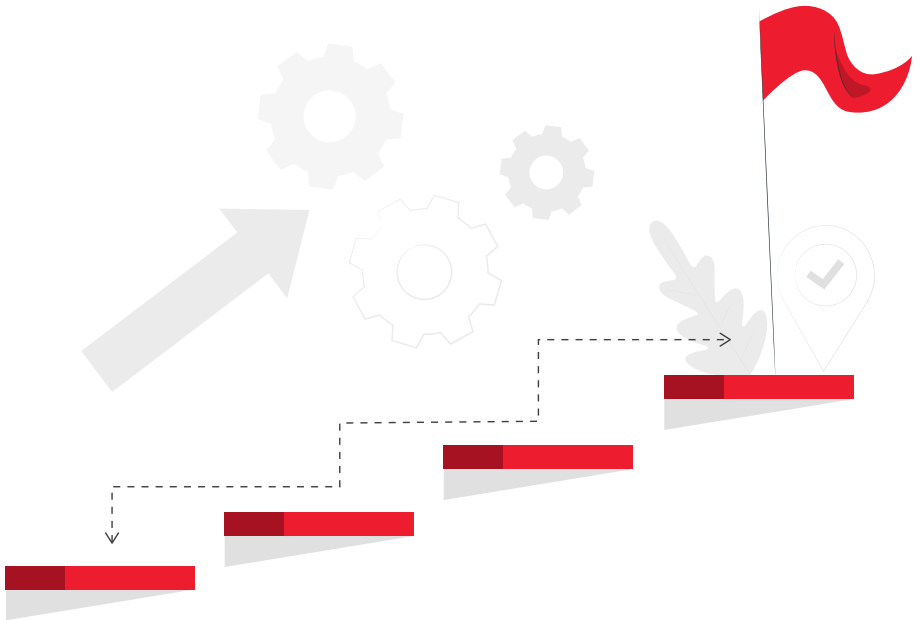
In this chapter, a comprehensive description of the methods and procedures used to gather and analyze data for the study is provided. This chapter describes the research design, data gathering methods, and data analysis methods that were used to answer the research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear and concise explanation of how the study was carried out. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the research and ethical issues considered.

3.1 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a qualitative research design to gather data in order to examine the trend in early marriage in conflict settings with a specific reference to the context of the war in northern Ethiopia. The research design made use of both primary and secondary sources of data.

3.1.1 PRIMARY SOURCES

The primary sources of data for this study were focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with various sub-groups of participants including married and unmarried girls; married women who got married before the age of 18; and mothers and fathers of married and unmarried children who are residing in IDP camps or conflict-affected zones. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with participants purposively selected to ensure that a wide range of service providers were included. Key informants included community and religious leaders, health workers, and service providers from local and international NGOs. The primary aim of these interviews was to gain valuable

insights into the issue of child marriage and its response in the context of conflict and displacement. Participants were chosen based on their relevance to the topic and their perceived expertise and experiences that could contribute to the study.

3.1.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources of data included published reports, academic articles, and other relevant documents related to child marriage, conflict, and displacement. These sources were obtained through online databases, libraries, and relevant organizations working on the issue of child marriage. The purpose of using secondary sources of data was to supplement and contextualize the findings from the primary data sources and to provide a broader understanding of the issue in the study context. The secondary data analysis helped to identify key themes and patterns related to child marriage in conflict settings, which were further explored through the primary data sources.

3.2 STUDY SITES

The research study gathered data from two locations in the Afar Region of Ethiopia. The two sites were the conflict-affected zone of Kasagita town, in Ada'r Woreda, and the Semera Stadium IDP camp site. The accessibility of data gathering locations was considered, as certain areas in the conflict-affected Afar region were deemed unsafe or difficult to access. Access to certain places in conflict-affected areas can be difficult due to security threats and physical barriers such as destroyed infrastructure or checkpoints (Rigterink & Hagmann, 2017). This strategy is consistent with earlier

research, which emphasizes the importance of assessing security and selecting study sites that are both safe and accessible in order to minimize risks to both researchers and participants (Leaning, 2004). The Afar Region Disaster and Risk Management Bureau was instrumental in identifying and selecting data collection locations to guarantee both access and safety.

3.3 SAMPLING

These target groups of the study are women and girls in Ethiopia's Afar region who are at risk of, or have experienced, child marriage. The research focuses specifically on those who have been impacted by the war in northern Ethiopia and are currently living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps or areas that were conflict zones. Key informants in the research included service providers and stakeholders, experts and practitioners, as well as parents and community leaders within the zonal and/or Woreda levels of the conflict zone.

Table 1: Geographical spread of participants

Place of displacement	Zone	No	FGD participants
Abala	Kilbet Rasu (Zone 2)	4	43
Ada'r	Awsi Rasu (Zone 1)	-	22
Barahle	Kilbet Rasu (Zone 2)	1	4
Gube	Kibelt Rasu (Zone 2)	1	5
Kasagita (conflict-affected area)	Awsi Rasu (Zone 1)	2	13
Koneba	Kibelt Rasu (Zone 2)	2	2
Wossema	Kibelt Rasu (Zone 2)	1	5
Total		**11**	**94**

3.3.1 STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The study used a purposeful sampling technique to select participants for focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The purposeful sampling technique has been widely used in qualitative research to ensure the selection of participants who have relevant knowledge and experiences related to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). This technique has been proven effective in recruiting a diverse group of participants, including those from marginalized populations (Patton, 2015). This technique was selected to ensure the inclusion of various sub-groups including married and unmarried girls; married women who got married before the age of 18; and mothers and fathers of married and unmarried children who are residing in IDP camps or conflict-affected zones. The researcher collaborated with the Women and Children Bureau Officer and long-time experienced health extension officers, who assisted in recruiting participants.

Table 2: Overview of the participants per actor group

No.	Actor Group	Interviews	FGDs
1.	Unmarried	6	24
2.	Girls	5	21
3.	Mothers	-	29
4.	Fathers	-	12
	Total	**11**	**86**

For the key informant interviews, a purposive sampling approach was used to ensure a wide range of service providers were included. Participants were identified based on their relevance to the issues of rights of women and girls, humanitarian response, and their work related to child marriage. The selected participants were chosen because they were perceived to have valuable insights and experiences to contribute to the study and could provide a range of perspectives on the topic. By including a variety of service providers, the study aimed to get a comprehensive understanding of the issue of child marriage and the response given to it within the humanitarian context.

Table 3: Overview of Key Informants

No.	Key Informants	Town	Interviews
1	Community and religious leaders	Ada'r and Abala	3
2	Service providers	Ada'r and Semera	2
3	A staff of an international NGO	Semera	1
4	Staff of local NGOs	Ada'r	2
	Total		**8**

3.3.2 DATA COLLECTION

In this study qualitative research collection tools, i.e in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, were used to gather primary data.

3.3.2.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method to capture research participants' "complete

stories and narratives", according to Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003). In this method, the interviewer interprets and develops the meanings of the interviewees' stories, replicating a natural process for constructing knowledge about the social world through day-to-day human interaction (Ibid.).

The interviews were conducted in Amharic, English, and Afar. The questions were asked in Amharic and then translated into Afar by data translators to the participants. Then, the responses of the participants were translated into Amharic in a back-and-forth manner on record. This procedure was followed in order to save information from being lost in translation. However, using an interpreter during interviews had its own challenges.

An interview guide for each actor group was created in advance (see Appendix II). During the semi-structured interview, all topics in the guide were covered with flexibility in content and sequencing. Additionally, relevant topics that emerged during the interview were explored.

Participants were initially asked to provide descriptive information including their place of displacement, age, age of marriage, number of children, etc. (See Appendix II for a summary of descriptions before each interview.) The interviews were conducted in private places to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for participants to speak freely.

3.3.2.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This research employs the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method, which is defined by Kitzinger (1995) as a group of individuals brought together by a moderator to gain

information about a specific issue through group interaction. FGDs provide additional insights to one-on-one interviews by allowing for group interaction and exploration of views. This method also allows the researcher to observe participants in their natural context, encourages contribution from shy individuals, and is useful for investigating cultural values and norms (Kitzinger, 1995; Wilkinson, 1998).

As was done with the interviews, the FGDs were conducted in Amharic and Afar. The questions were asked in Amharic and then translated into Afar by data translators to the participants. Then, the responses of the participants were translated into Amharic in a back-and-forth manner on record. This allowed the researcher to adapt the topics and questions to the responses during the interview itself.

During the focus group discussions, the behavior of participants varied according to gender and marital status. The unmarried and married girls seemed shy and reluctant to speak. They often covered their mouths while speaking and spoke in a low voice. On the other hand, the mothers were more outspoken than the girls, and the fathers were more confident and interactive than the mothers. These observations reveal the power dynamics within the community and shed light on who holds decision-making power and whose opinions are valued. Additionally, the focus group discussions proved to be an efficient way to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short time.

3.3.2.3 FIELD OBSERVATION

In this study, field notes and observations were also used as data collection tools. To get a thorough grasp of the research context, participant observation generally includes immersing oneself in the local culture (Bryman, 2008).

Casual interactions and conversations were more difficult due to the language barrier and the need for an interpreter. As a result, general observations of daily life and trips were the primary source of observation.

Traveling extensive distances into conflict-ridden territories has enabled the researcher to observe the devastating aftermath of conflict, including the ruins of homes, armored military vehicles abandoned by the roadside, and the dire living conditions of internally displaced persons within campsites. Maintaining objectivity was a challenge as the researcher had to be mindful of not allowing personal experiences to influence the interpretation of the participants' responses. For instance, there were instances where the researcher experienced a sense of insecurity, and this could have posed a risk of projecting such expectations onto the participants' responses.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the interviews and focus group discussions on attitudes toward child marriage can be analyzed using both content analysis and descriptive methods. Content analysis entails categorizing and analyzing data content systematically, which includes finding patterns, themes, and recurring ideas in participant answers. In the context of this study, content analysis was used to identify the various definitions of 'child' and 'girl' provided by participants, as well as the related cultural and social norms that contribute to child marriage practices in the region.

Thematic analysis is another qualitative data analysis technique used in this study. It involves identifying,

analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. In this research, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, and defining and naming themes. The data was analyzed using both deductive and inductive approaches to identify patterns and themes related to child marriage within the context of conflict and displacement. The results were presented in a clear and concise manner, using verbatim quotes from the participants to illustrate the themes and patterns identified through the analysis. Overall, the combination of content analysis and thematic analysis allowed for a thorough and nuanced understanding of the data collected in this study.

In conclusion, this study utilized both content analysis and thematic analysis to examine attitudes towards child marriage in the context of conflict and displacement. Both methods were instrumental in providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to child marriage in the study region. The use of verbatim quotes from participants helped to further support the identified themes and patterns. Overall, the combination of content and thematic analysis provided a thorough and in-depth analysis of the data

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations have been taken into account, especially conditions that should be met when dealing with displaced and vulnerable groups according to the guide for data collection in humanitarian settings.

Personal information of participants was kept confidential and cultural norms were respected during data collection. Local data collectors and facilitators were used to ensure understanding of community culture and norms. Safety and security of participants were given extra care.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants who were fully informed about the research objectives and the intended purpose of the data collected from them. Written consent was sought from all participants, and they were informed that their discussions and interviews would be recorded. Special attention was paid to obtaining consent from the parents of underage girls, which was obtained prior to data collection by a former health extension worker in the IDP camp.

3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the limitations of this study was the unpredictability of the conflict and its widespread nature, which made it difficult to access conflict-affected areas that could have been potentially more suitable study sites. The researchers had to rely on available information and recommendations from local authorities to determine which areas were safe enough to visit. This restricted the researchers' ability to explore a wider range of settings, which may have impacted the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, the location of data collection was only decided at the last minute based on the security situation of the region. This last-minute decision limited the choices of places where data could be collected and may have resulted in a less diverse sample of participants. This limitation may

have affected the ability to capture a complete picture of child marriage in the context of armed conflict in the region. Another limitation was the absence of research done specifically on child marriage both in the context of armed conflict and development settings, particularly in the Afar Region. The researchers had to rely on previous studies and reports to inform their research questions and methodology. This limited the researcher to very few available studies, limiting the ability to discuss and contextualize the findings within the specific region and conflict setting.

Finally, the absence of recent quantitative data collected during or following the end of the conflict in northern Ethiopia was a limitation. The researchers had to rely specifically on data collected from the experiences of participants.

CHAPTER FOUR:
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, which aimed to explore the trend of child marriage in conflict contexts, with a particular focus on the war-affected Afar region of northern Ethiopia. The main objective of our research was to investigate the prevalence of child marriage in the Afar Region and to identify the various factors and actors that contribute to this practice in the region. Furthermore, the study aimed to obtain insight into the changing trends of child marriage within the context of the conflict and identify the numerous factors that increase the likelihood of girls marrying as children in conflict-affected districts of Afar. Finally, the study aimed to identify challenges associated with preventing and responding to child marriage practices within conflict settings and to suggest practical ways to address these challenges for meaningful change.

4.2 CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE AFAR REGION: PREVALENCE AND PERSISTENCE

Child marriage is a significant issue in the Afar Region, with a prevalence rate of 67% among women aged 20-24 who report getting married before the age of 18. For generations, child marriage has been common in the region, and girls as young as 10 or 11 years old are commonly married. Marshall et al. (2016) found that girls are married off at young age in the region, which contributes to the perpetuation of child marriage and its dangers and consequences. According to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas (75%) than urban areas (39%), and women with no education are more likely

to get married before the age of 18 (77%) than those with secondary education (14%) (CSA and ICF, 2016).

The patterns and trends of early marriage in the Afar Region indicate that child marriage is deeply ingrained within cultural practices (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, N/A). According to a study conducted by the Central Statistical Agency and ICF International, there has been almost no change in the prevalence of child marriage reported by women aged 20-24 in the Afar Region over the last 25 years, with the prevalence among women aged 20-24 only decreasing from 69% in 1991 to 67% in 2016, indicating the persistence of the harmful practice. To eliminate child marriage and achieve SDG 5.3 by 2030, development in Afar must be accomplished 47 times faster.

In conclusion, the persistence of this harmful practice is deeply ingrained within cultural practices, and girls usually get married at a very young age. Despite efforts to address the issue, such as the SDG 5.3 target, there has been almost no change in the prevalence of child marriage over the last 25 years.

4.3 FACTORS AND ACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE AFAR REGION

Child marriage is a harmful practice that affects millions of girls around the world, including those in Ethiopia's Afar region. There are several reasons why child marriage continues to be prevalent in this region, despite its negative consequences. Under this section, the multifaceted factors and actors contributing to child marriage practices – various

cultural, social, religious, economic, and legal factors including the involvement from families, traditional leaders, or religious institutions that continue to perpetuate the practice in the Afar region – are discussed.

4.3.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILD MARRIAGE

To comprehend child marriage, it is necessary to comprehend the attitudes and beliefs that lead to the continuation of child marriage. A range of factors influence attitudes towards child marriage, including cultural norms and expectations, ideas about marriage and girlhood, and awareness about the health and well-being repercussions of early marriage.

Data was collected with the aim of obtaining insights into the attitudes and beliefs regarding child marriage prevalent in a specific community or region. The initial set of questions aimed to comprehend the community's perception and definition of childhood, girlhood, and marriage. This enabled the researcher to identify the cultural and social norms associated with marriage and age of marriage, which may contribute to child marriage practices.

IV. | Definition and understanding of child, girlhood, and girl

A. | Ambiguity surrounding the definition of 'child'

During the interviews and focus group discussions, participants were asked to define the terms 'child', 'girlhood', and 'marriage' in order to gain insights into the attitudes and beliefs regarding child marriage prevalent in a specific community or region. The participants had varying responses when defining the terms. These various definitions

of what a child is assisted the researcher in identifying the cultural and social norms associated with marriage and the age of marriage, both of which may influence child marriage practices. The participants' responses regarding the definition of child, girlhood, and girl reveal a lack of consensus and clarity on these terms in the specific community or region being studied. This finding is consistent with the literature on the social construction of childhood, which highlights that childhood is not a fixed, universal concept but is shaped by cultural and social norms (James & Prout, 2015).

The majority of participants described a child as someone under a certain age. Participant FGD g5 (2022) described a child as someone under the age of 13. FGD Mo5 (2022) defined a child as someone under the age of 20, whereas FGD Mo3 defined a kid as someone between the ages of 2 and 15.

A father asserted that one is only a child until the age of seven.

"Until he reaches the age 7 after that he is no longer a kid after that" (FDG F9, 2022).

This type of definition, in which childhood is defined as ending at a younger age, may add to the belief that children should be married off at a young age.

Greene & Stiefvater (2019) argue that traditional notions surrounding childhood are closely linked to attitudes towards early marriages; they suggest that cultural beliefs about age determine who can be considered ready or suitable for such unions – often leading young children to be forced into them without their consent or knowledge.

Interestingly, some participants responded to the question by pointing to a child around the age of three who was playing in the background. Furthermore, a boy around the age of eight declined to accept a candy as a gift, claiming he was not a child.

Some participants, however, viewed a child differently. An unmarried girl (FGD g2, 2022) described a child as

"someone who is not physically or mentally developed and requires help from others".

This definition gave a functional definition of the term, highlighting children's reliance on others.

A father (FGD F6, 2022) was initially confused with the question and sought the question to be clarified; he said,

"Talks can be differentiated from talk as one can differentiate a goat from the herd. So, for me, when we say a child, we can also mean a woman. A woman's reasoning, regardless of her age, is that of a child. So, please clarify your question."

This indicates two things. One, he hints to the fact that even when the question was clear, the participant perceived the term 'child' as ambiguous. And the participant's comparison of 'child' and 'woman' represents patriarchal attitudes toward women that are prevalent in many societies, where women are perceived as inferior and in need of male guidance and control. According to Kabeer (2000), patriarchal attitudes towards women are deeply ingrained in social, cultural, and economic structures and have a significant impact on women's lives. These attitudes are often reflected in gender-based discrimination, violence, and the subordination of women to men. Similarly, Chant and McIlwaine (2016) suggest that gender inequality is

reinforced by cultural attitudes towards women as as being inferior and subordinate to men, which are often deeply rooted in social norms and values.

In many societies, these patriarchal attitudes towards women are linked to practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, which are harmful to women's health and well-being (UNICEF, 2021).

B. | Girl/girlhood

There were varying opinions about what age range defines a girl. In many cultures, the transition from childhood to adulthood is not solely determined by age but is also influenced by factors such as marriage, motherhood, and social status (UNICEF, 2019).

Participant IDI 11, 2022 thought that any female under the age of 18 was a girl (child). Another participant (FGD g18, 2022) stated that a girl is under the age of fourteen. The majority of participants in the focus group discussion conducted in Kasagita concurred that a child is anyone under the age of 18. This definition draws a clear line between childhood and adulthood based purely on age. Even though the age varies, this is the definition used by international conventions and human rights frameworks to identify children under the age of 18. The lower ages used to define the word 'girl' imply that girls are expected to enter adulthood at a younger age within the community.

 On the other hand, an unmarried girl (FGDg 11, 2022) stated:

"She is a person who has not reached the age of marriage and who can't decide on her own." According to her, a female is **"someone who is married and has given birth".**

Her description of a girl as someone who is married and has given birth suggests that marriage and motherhood are markers of adulthood in her eyes.

Another participant from Kasagita defined a girl as one having the organs of a girl and will become a woman once she sees her menses (FGDg 24).

The definition of a girl given by the participant from Kasagita is based on physical markers, such as the onset of menstruation. This shows a biological essentialist view of gender, which suggests that biological sex and gender are inextricably linked, with females becoming women once they reach a certain physical milestone. This definition may support conventional gender roles and expectations, such as the expectation that women will bear children and perform domestic tasks (Lindsey, 2016). This belief can be traced back to various cultural and religious practices, including puberty rituals and menstrual taboos, which have been used to mark this transition in many societies (McMahon & Narain, 2018). This can also contribute to the practice of child marriage, as girls who have reached puberty are often seen as ready for marriage and childbearing, regardless of their age.

This definition may reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, such as the expectation that women will bear children and take on domestic responsibilities.

Overall, these different definitions of a girl suggest that the concept of girlhood is not fixed, but rather shaped by cultural, social, and legal factors. The discourse around the definition of a girl reflects different cultural norms and beliefs. The definitions provided by the participants suggest that the community's understanding of child, girlhood, and girl is shaped by cultural and social norms. The lack of

consensus on what constitutes a child and a girl reflects the ambiguity surrounding these terms in the community. This ambiguity may contribute to child marriage practices, as the lack of clear boundaries between childhood and adulthood may lead to early marriage for girls.

III. | Marriage tradition

The findings reveal various aspects of marriage traditions in the participants' communities, which are largely influenced by religion and culture. During the discussions on the definition of marriage, a participant presented her personal understanding of marriage, describing it as the act of

"Bringing together individuals who are in love and having children"

(FGDm 14). She mentioned that in their area, the marriage tradition involves the 'Nikah' (11:00), which is a Muslim marriage contract. A mother stated that in their community, the husband gives money, which is used to buy food and other things for the wedding, and to renovate and construct a home for the bride (FGD Mo 5). When asked about the basis for marriage in their community, the same participant responded that it is based on religion. It was stated that, while religion is the main influence, culture also plays a role. She explained that

"until the sheikhs leave the house, we won't do anything, but as soon as they leave, we will dance" (FGD M2, 2022).

Participant FGDg 8, 2022 stated that it involves a two-day wedding ceremony, after which the bride will return to her family's house for two years. When asked why the bride goes back to her own house instead of moving in with her husband, the group collectively responded:

"It's culture."

This practice is also found in many parts of the world, including some regions of Africa and Asia. The practice of returning to the bride's family home after the wedding is known as 'post-marital residence' and has been studied extensively in anthropology.

The majority of respondents have a similar definition of marriage, which is a religiously sanctioned union between a man and a woman, largely for the purpose of procreation. This is consistent with other societies' traditional conceptions of marriage, which see marriage as a means of creating and maintaining social and economic ties between families, rather than as a personal choice based on love. Anthony Giddens contends that, despite the development of individualism, the conventional conception of marriage as a social and economic institution has persisted in many societies (Giddens, 1992). Thus, the participants' definition of marriage reflects a broader societal understanding of the institution as a means of creating and maintaining social and economic ties between families.

In the context of child marriage, this view may perpetuate the notion that young girls are primarily valued for their reproductive capabilities and ability to maintain familial ties, rather than as individuals with their own desires and agency (Kaye et al., 2013). This view may also reinforce the acceptability of child marriage as a means of fulfilling societal goals, such as maintaining social and economic stability, rather than recognizing the harm it can cause to young girls who are forced into early marriage (UNICEF, 2014).

IV. | Common age and ideal age for marriage

Based on the responses from the focus group discussions conducted, there is a wide range of views on the appropriate age and common age for marriage in the communities represented that indicate the persistence of child marriage within the community.

The common age for marriage was stated to be 11 for girls and 25 for boys by the participants of the focus group discussions and interviews. In Group B, it was reported that the common age for marriage in the community was 15 for girls and 20 for boys, although men can marry until the age of 60.

In Kasagita, a group of fathers unanimously agreed that the common age for both boys and girls to marry was 15. Participants said that the appropriate age for girls to marry was when their breasts develop and their body changes, while boys become ready for marriage when they start producing sperm.

"When her breasts grow and her body changes, she will be fit for marriage,"

a father said (FGD F10, 2022). Her father will then call for her mother's tribe because her Absuma is her mother's lineage or clan. Then, he summons her mother's tribe, informing them that their daughter has reached the age of puberty.

"On the other hand, when a boy combs/ styles his hair and begins ejecting sperm, he is ready for marriage," the father added.

The responses from the communities represented reveal that there is no consensus on the ideal age for marriage. It

appears that cultural and social factors exert a significant influence on determining the appropriate age for marriage. A participant (FGD Mo6, 2022) stated,

"The common age for girls to get married is 16, but in times of conflict, it can drop to 9-14. Meanwhile, for men, the usual age for marriage is over 20, but in times of conflict, it can be as low as 15."

Based on the responses, it can be said that this community has differing views on the appropriate age for boys and girls to marry. The Father (FGD F4, 2022) believes that girls should marry between the ages of 13 and 15, and boys should wait until they are between the ages of 17 and 19. This is because girls mature faster and are more likely to be submissive to their husbands at a younger age, while boys should marry later in life because they need to find jobs and be able to support their spouses financially (FGD F3, 2022).

According to the focus group discussion with married girls (Group A, Stadium, 2022), the ideal marriage age for girls is between 13 and 15, while the ideal marriage age for boys is between 20 and 25. The group cited several reasons for this: the fact that women mature faster, religious and societal beliefs, and avoiding embarrassment from giving birth outside of marriage. There was also the belief that females should not marry boys their own age because the boy would find it difficult to control her and she would refuse to obey his commands.

Table 4: Age at marriage for the community

Community	Common Age for Marriage	Appropriate Age for Girls	Appropriate Age for Boys	Reasons for Different Ages
Focus Group A (unmarried girls)	11 for girls, 25 for boys	18-20 years	Not specified	Cultural and social factors
Focus Group (unmarried girls)	15 for girls, 20 for boys (men can marry until 60)	15-20 years	15-19 years	Cultural and social factors
Focus group discussion with fathers (Kasagita, 2022)	15 for girls and boys	When breasts develop and body changes	When producing sperm	Perceived maturity and readiness for marriage
FDG Mo1	9-16 for girls (in times of conflict)	16 years	Over 20 years (usually)	Cultural and social factors
FGD F 6	13-15 for girls, 17-19 for boys	13-15 years	20-25 years	Maturity, obedience, financial considerations
Group B, married girls, Stadium	13-15 for girls, 20-25 for boys	13-15 years	20-25 years	Maturity, religious and societal beliefs, avoiding embarrassment

In summary, the reasons why the marriage age differs for men and women in this community include cultural and religious beliefs, financial considerations, and gender roles. Girls are expected to marry at a younger age than boys, and this is attributed to their perceived maturity and obedience to their husbands. Boys, on the other hand, need to find employment to support their wives financially.

V. Perceptions of positive and negative impacts of child marriage

Key findings:

▶ The majority of responses indicate that there are no real benefits or advantages, and that child marriage is seen as a cultural practice without practical, economic, or social benefits.

▶ Some participants justified child marriage as a preventive measure against unwanted pregnancies in rural areas with limited access to pregnancy prevention methods.

▶ Early marriage is seen as imperative in some religious beliefs; failure to comply with this practice is seen as a serious transgression with severe consequences in the afterlife.

▶ The perceived health benefits of child marriage include control over sexuality, giving birth while young, and economic freedom from parents.

▶ Negative consequences of child marriage highlighted by informants include physical health problems, mental health issues, and conflicts in marital relationships.

▶ Fathers tended to highlight various advantages of child marriage for the girl, her family, and the community, while mothers and girls expressed concerns about the negative consequences of child marriage.

Gradual awareness of the disadvantages: According to the mother from the Stadium, the community is gradually becoming aware of the disadvantages of child marriage, and they are getting out of the system.

However, this mother (FGD Mo 10) believes that they still face many problems that force them to marry off their daughters. A key informant stated,

"We have seen an attitudinal change towards child marriage. What is now a challenge is that it has not yet led to behavioral change" (KII 3, 2022).

4.3.2 SOCIOCULTURAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE

A. Cultural beliefs and norms perpetuating child marriage

The findings reveal the strong influence of cultural and religious beliefs on the prevalence of child marriage in the studied community. The following themes are identified: cultural norms, religious beliefs, health concerns, and gender roles.

Cultural and religious beliefs:

Cultural norms are a major factor in perpetuating child marriage in the community. As stated by the interviewee IDI 11 (2022), the practice is deeply ingrained in their culture, and the origins of the practice are not clear.

"It's our culture. We don't know how and when this all started. It was here before we were born," interviewee IDI 11 (2022).

The community's belief that girls should be married off as soon as they reach puberty reflects a cultural norm that emphasizes the importance of early marriage and childbearing. The responses suggest that the cultural norm in the studied community emphasizes the importance of

early marriage and childbearing. This norm is reflected in the belief that having children at a young age will be advantageous for both the parents and the children. FGD Mo15, 2022 noted,

"The only advantage of getting married younger is that the girl will have children sooner." This implies that childbearing is seen as a desirable outcome.

Similarly, FGD Mo14 (2022) believes that giving birth at an early stage will allow the child to grow together with the parents, suggesting that this is an important consideration for the community.

The response from FGD F2, 2022 also reflects the cultural norm of valuing early marriage and childbearing. He cited an Afar saying,

"A journey you started during the night and child you have when you are young will take you to good places."

The metaphorical meaning behind this saying is that having a child at a young age will enable the parents to enjoy the benefits of having a child for a longer period of time, and the child will be able to support them in their old age. This reinforces the idea that early marriage and childbearing are important cultural values that are deeply ingrained in the community.

There is also a strong belief among caretakers that if a girl doesn't get married right after she starts menstruating, her health will decline. FGD F14 stated,

"According to our traditional doctor, the amount of blood a girl loses until the age of 18 will determine the number of children she can have. This can

cause problems for her kidneys and uterus, and her menstrual cycle can also affect her body. Therefore, it is preferable to have children at a young age." (2022)

However, the community's health worker explained where this way of thinking could come from.

"The prevailing belief among parents and the community is that once a girl begins menstruating, she should be married immediately; otherwise, her physical condition will continue to deteriorate." This belief stems from the fact that girls tend to experience low iron levels during menstruation, which can lead to decreased blood levels and fainting spells, especially in hot weather. However, this belief does not take into account the other factors that may contribute to a girl's overall health and well-being" (KII2, 2022).

Furthermore, a religious leader believes that early marriage is necessary to prevent girls from becoming ill-mannered. These beliefs are deeply ingrained in the culture and religion of the communities (KII1, 2022).

Religious beliefs also contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Many parents and religious leaders believe that it is necessary to marry off a girl as soon as she reaches puberty. According to FGD F 11,

"If a girl is not married by the time she starts menstruating, it is as if her father has kept a dead body in his house, and he will be punished in the afterlife for it."

The religious leader from the Stadium site specifically mentioned that the decision to marry is based on visible physical changes, such as weight gain and breast development, rather than age. He stated,

"We don't know what the law says. Our law is Sharia, and we don't know anything that is based on the law. Religion tells us that it's not the age but what we should consider is what's visible to the eye. For women, we see when she gains weight, her hips get bigger, and she grows breasts. We make decisions based on what we see. The religion doesn't put age limits; it is based on what can be observed from the changes of the body of the girl and the boy," (KII 1, 2022).

The statement by the religious leader highlights two main factors that contribute to the persistence of child marriage in his community. The first factor is the emphasis on visible physical changes such as weight gain and breast development as the criteria for determining a girl's readiness for marriage, rather than age. The second factor is the prioritization of religious and cultural norms over legal provisions such as the age of marriage set by the law. The religious leader's statement demonstrates how deeply ingrained and pervasive sociocultural norms can be, which can impede the enforcement of laws and policies aimed at curbing child marriage. According to Population Council (2016), religious leaders often play a role in promoting child marriage by encouraging families to marry their daughters off at a young age.

Overall, social, cultural, and religious roles play a significant role in shaping the social dynamic in this community. These findings are coherent with the sociocultural theory, which holds that social norms, attitudes, and values all have a role in influencing child marriage practices (Singh & Samara, 2020). The prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia is deeply rooted in traditional, cultural, and social norms, as well as religious laws. These norms and laws are often stronger than legal measures.

B. | **Family concerns and protection of daughters**

Protecting family honor

According to IDI 11, a married girl from Kasagita, fear of unwanted pregnancy and getting pregnant outside of marriage is one of the reasons for child marriage. This fear is shared by many parents who believe that if they give their daughter what she wants, she will get pregnant and bring an unwanted child into the family (2022).

A mother (FDG Mo25, 2022) believes that parents are forced to marry off their underage daughters because people are out to ruin them. She stated,

"Now, being in a relationship before getting married is becoming the trend. These days, the girl herself may come to her parents saying she is in love, and the parents may marry her off to prevent her from getting pregnant outside of wedlock and ruining their reputation and family name. She threatens her parents that she will harm herself if they don't marry her off and the parents see no other option."

The finding above highlights the sociocultural reasons that are often used to justify child marriage in certain communities. It reflects the idea that parents and families may engage in child marriage to protect the reputation of their family and to prevent their daughters from engaging in sexual activity outside of wedlock, which is considered the worst fate not only for the girl but for her family and the community as a whole.

According to FGD F10 (2022),

"Marrying a girl early shields her from three things: the first is for herself, the second is for her mother and father, and the third is for the community (her tribe)."

⊙ | **Protection from sexual abuse**

Family and parents consider child marriage as a means to protect girls from sexual abuse and rape. A health worker highlighted,

"Families generally do not reject a marriage proposal for their daughter, as they fear that if they refuse, the man may rape the girl, and then they will be forced to marry her to him, anyway. Therefore, if a proposal is made, they usually accept it" (KII4 2022).

"If a girl gets raped and she gets pregnant, then her child will be called a bastard," (IDI 5, 2022).

This aligns with the theory of social control, which proposes that families and communities use social institutions such as marriage to regulate the sexual behavior of individuals and maintain social order (Jewkes, 2002). This belief is further reinforced by the fact that families are hesitant to reject a marriage proposal for their daughter as they fear the possibility of sexual violence and the social stigma associated with it.

Similarly, research conducted in Yemen found that child marriage is seen as a way to protect girls from sexual harassment and assault (Al-Sakkaf & Tawfiq, 2016).

C. | **Perception of safety of married girls**

There is a belief among the participants that married girls are safer than unmarried girls, which is also common perception in many cultures, and it is often cited as a reason for child marriage. Some believe that being married makes a girl safer because her husband and his family will protect her.

Research shows that this perception is prevalent in many parts of the world, including Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. For example, a study conducted in Ethiopia found that some parents marry off their daughters at a young age because they believe that marriage will provide them with protection and security (Belachew et al., 2020).

Some participants, however, did not agree with this perception and believed that unmarried girls could also be protected.

A father (FGD F3, 2022) stated,

"If their daughter's husband cannot protect her, they would tell his parents that he is not protecting her, and they (the girl's family) would protect her with him.

Another father from Kasagita (FGD F8 (2022) stated,

"She will be protected regardless of whether she is married or not. If she is with us, then her safety is our responsibility. If she is married, then that responsibility becomes her husband's. Either way, she will be protected."

D. | Control over girls' sexuality

Some parents believe that if their daughters remain unmarried for too long, they will become disobedient and engage in activities that the parents do not approve of. A Kasgita father (FGD F11, 2022) believes that as a girl gets older, she becomes less obedient to her parents. This goes with the theory of socialization, which states that child marriage is a means of socializing girls into their expected gender roles and preparing them for marriage and motherhood (Lloyd & Mensch, 2006). Girls are expected to conform to traditional gender norms and prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their individual aspirations

and desires. Therefore, parents may view child marriage as a means of ensuring that their daughters are socialized appropriately and conform to gender expectations.

The responses from the informants indicate that marrying a girl while she is young stops her from wanting men other than her husband. It supports the notion that sexuality and gender are central concerns of early and child marriage. A father from Kasagita (FGD F7, 2022) stated,

"She will not have the desire for other men since her husband will have her from the moment she starts sexually maturing,"

thus preventing her from seeking relationships outside of her marriage. This relates to the theory that underpins the practice of child, early and forced marriage to the control of women and girls' lives by families and communities, particularly the control of their sexual and reproductive lives (Women Living Under Muslim Laws(WLUML), 2013)

Other studies have shown a similar view. In communities where child marriage is prevalent, parents often view it as a means of safeguarding their daughters' virginity and ensuring that they remain sexually pure until marriage (Mensch, Bruce, & Greene, 1998). According to Gage (2013), girls who engage in premarital sex or become pregnant outside of marriage are stigmatized and ostracized in rural communities, leading to a sense of shame and exclusion for both the girl and her family. To protect their daughters' purity and avoid these consequences, families marry their daughters off as soon as they attain puberty or before.

4.3.3 ECONOMIC FACTORS AS DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The findings suggest that economic factors play a significant role in child marriage practices. The findings from the data collected in the study suggest that economic factors are a significant driving force behind child marriage practices. Some participants believed that child marriage could provide young girls with a sense of security, a home, and children.

Religious leaders stated,

"We are solely focused on how she will be taken care of. This is because we want her to be able to take care of herself and her husband to take care of her as well. This way, she will have her own home and family to take care of" (KII 1, 2022).

Other participants state that it secures economic freedom from parents. A married girl (IDI 7, 2022) stated,

"Marrying early could provide girls with a home, children, and freedom from parental control."

A key informant (KII 3, (2022)) emphasized that poverty is a key factor to the practice of child marriage in the region. The informant highlighted,

"Child marriage allows the family to minimize 'teeth and hands', fewer mouths to feed."

The findings align with research that highlights economic factors as a driver of child marriage practices. For instance, studies conducted in Africa and Ethiopia have shown that poverty, among other factors like lack of access to education and economic opportunities, and dowry systems can contribute to child marriage (Tiruneh, Wilson, &

Gebreslassie, 2018; Nour 2009; and Yoo and Palermo, 2018). In some cases, families may see child marriage as a way to secure their economic well-being by transferring the financial burden of caring for a daughter to her husband's family.

4.3.4 LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW

During the study, it was found that some participants lacked understanding of the concept of law. When asked about the legal age for marriage, some participants were unsure of the answer, while others gave conflicting responses. Particularly, among the participants in the Stadium site, the term 'law' was not well understood.

When asked about the legal age for marriage, the girls were unable to provide an answer because they were unfamiliar with the concept of law. They explained that their community uses a *de facto* governing structure called Malba to settle disputes and conflicts, which is the primary means of resolving issues in the region, particularly around Abala. Therefore, the term 'law' is not well-understood in their community, and Malba is the preferred method of resolving conflicts.

It is worth noting that some participants mentioned learning about the legal age from school or community meetings, while others were unsure of the source of their knowledge.

The persistence of child marriage in many communities is not only a result of cultural norms but also a lack of knowledge and awareness of the law prohibiting it. The findings suggest that most of the participants in the focus group discussions did not know the legal age for marriage and instead relied on cultural and religious practices

to determine when a girl is ready for marriage. Some participants, including an unmarried girl from the Staduim site (IDI 5, 2022), stated that the legal age is 18 and that marrying before that age could lead to legal consequences. However, others, including mothers and a religious leader from the Stadium site, stated that they did not know the legal age.

Research conducted in Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ethiopia found that the lack of knowledge and education about the legal minimum age for marriage, as well as the consequences of child marriage, contributes to the prevalence of this harmful practice. A study by Osamor and Grady (2018) in Nigeria found that lack of knowledge about the legal consequences of child marriage, as well as a general lack of awareness about the law, contributed to the persistence of child marriage practices. Another study conducted by Erulkar and Muthengi (2015) in Ethiopia found that knowledge of the law prohibiting child marriage was limited among girls and their families in rural areas, which contributed to the continued practice of child marriage in these communities.

The lack of effective legal enforcement is another factor that contributes to child marriage practices in the region. Despite laws prohibiting child marriage, the practice is still widespread due to a lack of effective implementation and enforcement. FGD Mo 24 stated,

"There is no follow-up to ensure whether the law is being practiced. Even government officials themselves are also marrying off their underage daughters" (2022).

This indicates that government officials, who are expected to uphold the law, are themselves violating it by allowing their

daughters to be married before the legal age. This shows there is a need for greater accountability and control in the practice of the law preventing child marriage.

4.3.5 ACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHILD MARRIAGE PRACTICES

The practice of child marriage is influenced by several actors. The main actors contributing to this practice in the Afar Region are male family members, community and religious leaders, and traditional doctors. The involvement of these actors is complex, and their actions play a significant role in perpetuating this harmful practice.

I. The role of parents and families in decision-making for marriage partners

From the informants' views, it can be seen that there are different approaches to decision-making for marriage partners in the community. The findings below are presented in three categories based on their lineage: matrilineal, patrilineal, and self-decision-making. In an informant interview with UNFPA (2022), these groups were referred to as gatekeepers of the community.

A. Matrilineal decision-making

Matrilineal lineage decision-makers are those who come from the mother's side of the family and have a significant role in deciding who their daughter will marry. It involves members of the mother's family and her clan. The mother's brother (uncle) is one of the primary decision-makers for the niece's marriage partner.

A Kasagita father (FGD F11, 2022) stated,

"Our priority is to make her wedding beautiful. First, we contact her mother's brother (uncle) and inform him that our daughter is ready for marriage. If he has a son, he will marry her to his son; if not, he will search for a husband for her who is a close relative. She is his responsibility; her father only gets involved when the uncle says he isn't able to find a husband for her."

B. | Patrilineal decision-making

People from the father's side of the family of the groom and bride play a crucial role in determining marriage partners for their daughters and sons. In another focus group discussion, it was stated that the uncle may also be consulted, but ultimately the father makes the final decision. The father checks the family of the groom, his clan, and whether he is a good man or not before making the decision.

A participant in an FGD (FGD F6, 2022) stated,

"First and foremost, the father is responsible. The potential husband and his family pick a bride, and then they converse with the girl's father. After consulting with the girl's relatives, the girl's father makes a decision on the marriage."

A religious leader said,

"The father is responsible for making the decision and checks the family background and ancestry of the potential husband, as well as his character" (KII 1, 2022).

C. | Self

Based on the responses provided, there were only a few instances where it was explicitly mentioned that the girl

herself decides who she marries. One response came from IDI 10 (2022), where it was stated that

"if she loves someone, she will marry him, and if it's her Absuma, she will marry him. No one will force her".

The other response was from a mother (FGD Mo20, 2022), where it was mentioned that

"she chooses for herself".

It is important to note that these responses were not in abundance, and most of the other responses indicated that the girl's family or community played a significant role in choosing her husband.

There were sharply contradicting responses to these views reflected by participants. From the same focus group discussion, a participant (FGD Mo 20, 2022) rejected the option that the girl should choose for herself. She stated,

"In my day, our fathers were the ones who made such decisions for us. I will not just accept any man that my daughter chooses. We must conduct a thorough background check. Can he even support her? Does he even have a job? And if he doesn't, how will his family support the newlyweds if they can't even support themselves? How will they cope when they have children if we don't check these things first? They will just be a burden on their families, and it's like pouring water from one cup to another back and forth. It's completely meaningless!"

As another participant (IDI 3) highlighted, choosing a husband is the responsibility of the community and does not depend on the woman's interest, which can lead to conflicts and health complications (2022).

Overall, the findings suggest that decision-makers in the community play a significant role in determining child marriage practices in the region. Matrilineal lineage decision-makers, primarily the mother's brother, have a significant role in deciding who their daughter will marry. On the other hand, patrilineal decision-makers, including the father, have the final say in choosing the marriage partner for their sons and daughters. Moreover, the community's involvement in decision-making is also crucial in many cases, emphasizing the collective nature of decision-making in these communities.

These findings are consistent with previous research on the topic. A study conducted by Belachew et al. (2020) in Ethiopia found that parents and other family members are the primary decision-makers in child marriage practices. Another study by Dejene et al. (2021) also found that families and communities play a significant role in determining child marriage practices in Ethiopia.

As understood from the responses of girls on whether they could voice their refusal to marriage arrangements made by family members, almost all said they could not. It is very difficult for the participants to consider rejecting their parents' decisions.

"If we say no, then they will curse us. That will not be good for us. Our lives will become harder and we will face many challenges. We will go crazy" (FGDg5, 2022).

A study by Amin et al. (2017) found that interventions that focus on changing social norms and empowering girls to make decisions about their own lives can be effective in reducing child marriage rates. Another study by Godha et al. (2018) found that interventions that involve families and

communities in decision-making about child marriage can be effective in reducing child marriage rates.

II. | The role of the community and religious leaders

A multi-country study conducted in South Asia found that traditional healers, religious leaders, and community elders were key influencers in shaping attitudes and beliefs around child marriage. They were often the ones consulted by families and community members when deciding whether or not to marry off a girl child (Raj et al., 2014).

Community and religious leaders are among the decision-makers for the partners of spouses. They play a role in the process of marriage mostly from the start to the end of wedding ceremonies.

III. | The role of traditional doctors

Responses from informants indicate that traditional doctors play a significant role in shaping the community's perception of child marriage. The traditional doctors are respected and trusted by the community members, who heed their advice and guidance.

"Our traditional doctor says that the blood she loses through menstruation until she reaches 18 will determine the number of children she will have. It will create problems for her kidney and her uterus. It's good to have a child when you are young before your body declines because of menstruation. This is what our doctors tell us and we listen to them" (FGD F11, 2022).

This is an example of how traditional beliefs and practices shape the community's understanding of reproductive

health. Such beliefs reinforce harmful practices such as child marriage in the community.

"The family will not be impacted in a negative way. They want their daughters to get married early. The family is not negatively impacted directly unless she gets sick. Even if she gets sick, they go to a traditional doctor. The community is still not willing to go to health centers. They don't trust the vaccines and health workers. They think it will make them sterile" (KII 4, 2022).

The community's lack of trust in health centers and vaccines and their preference for traditional doctors further reinforces the importance of traditional doctors in shaping the community's perception of child marriage.

4.4 NEXUS BETWEEN CONFLICT AND CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE AFAR REGION

4.4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

In November 2020, conflict erupted in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region between Ethiopian government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), following a year of rising political tensions between the Ethiopian Federal Government and TPLF authorities. The war had expanded to Tigray's neighboring regions of Afar and Amhara by July 2021 (HRW, 2022).

Due to the fact that the war was fought primarily in towns and rural areas with large civilian populations, many civilians

died, suffered physical and mental harm, and were the victims of sexual and gender-based violence as a direct result of the violence committed by the warring parties. Public infrastructure, health care facilities, educational institutions, houses of worship, and private property have all been looted or destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and are facing a number of difficulties. The findings of the EHRC and other international human rights organizations show that the parties to the conflict were engaged in varying degrees of abuses and violations of human rights and humanitarian law (EHRC, 2022; Amnesty International, 2022).

In June 2021, the Ethiopian government declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew its military from most of Tigray, though fighting continued in parts of the region. Later, the Ethiopian government and TPLF signed a cessation of hostilities agreement on November 2, 2022, to end the two-year war in Ethiopia's Tigray region. The agreement included provisions for the disengagement of troops from both sides, the release of prisoners, and the establishment of a joint committee to investigate human rights abuses committed during the conflict. The situation remains complex and fluid, and it is unclear when a lasting peace will be achieved (The Global Observatory, 2023).

A. | The impact of the conflict and the displacement

Key findings:

▶ The conflict has had a profound and devastating impact on society in general.

▶ Many lives have been lost due to hunger
and bullets, with people facing uncertainties
about their survival on a daily basis.

▶ Displacement has been a major challenge, with families
split, and people missing, adding to the emotional turmoil.

▶ Obtaining food and basic essentials has been difficult for many.

▶ Livestock, a vital source of livelihood for
many, has been abandoned or lost.

▶ Government assistance has been minimal, and some
participants of this research were urged to fight with weapons.

▶ The fears and uncertainties about the future are constant.

B. | The impact of the war on the community as a whole

The responses reflect the immense impact of the conflict on the lives of the society in general, including loss of lives, displacement, challenges in accessing basic necessities, and emotional distress. Based on the responses from the participants, it is evident that the conflict situation has had a profound and devastating impact on the society in general. Many lives have been lost due to hunger and bullets, with people facing uncertainties about their survival on a daily basis. The use of long-range heavy artilleries, aerial attacks and firing bullets has resulted in casualties and injuries. The participants express constant fear and uncertainty about the future.

A participant in a focus group discussion (FGD F2 (2022)) stated,

"We were constantly on edge, never knowing if we would survive each day. Every morning we woke up with uncertainties, unsure if we would make it through the day. And as the day turned into night, we still didn't know if we would live to see another day. The fear and worry never left us."

Displacement has been a major challenge, with people fleeing their homes and livelihoods, often with no clear destination in mind. Families have been split, and there have been reports of missing people, adding to the emotional turmoil. Some participants described the difficulty in obtaining food and basic essentials.

Another participant (FGD F8 (2022)) stated,

"When the fighting began, I carried my children to safety and went out again to look for food. We carried wounded people out in between firing bullets. We tried to save those who were wounded, but we couldn't bury our dead. There is this thing called 'wedel' in Afar. We stacked up stones on our dead, and when things cooled down, we buried them. We left our homes without knowing where we were heading. All our movement was like being in the dark. We were only able to identify those who were left behind after some time. Some are still missing and we don't know whether they are alive or dead. You know, 'One can't be lost in death but in disappearance'."

Livestock, which is a vital source of livelihood for many, has been abandoned or lost, compounding the economic and social implications of the conflict. Participants mention asking assistance from the government but obtaining minimal support or being urged to fight with weapons, emphasizing the difficulties encountered by the afflicted population.

C. | Young girls' lives affected by conflict and displacement

The impact of the conflict on women and children is also underlined. The responses suggest that the conflict has had a devastating impact on the lives of young girls in the area, including physical harm, psychological trauma, and a loss of family members and support. The following are some of the common impacts reported by the participants.

I. | Deaths and injuries:

The conflict has resulted in many deaths and injuries, including young girls:

"There is a huge impact on girls. First, we were hit by heavy artillery. Women and children were injured and some have died. And when we leave our homes to escape the fighting, girls got separated from their family and there are girls who have been raped. Those who tried to escape also died on the road of thirst and hunger." (IDI 8, 2022)

II. | Sexual abuse:

Throughout the conflict, there have been reports of sexual assault and rape, and girls have been particularly vulnerable to this kind of violence, which has had a significant impact on their lives. At least 49 women and girls were reportedly sexually assaulted by the TPLF the forces when they were occupying the region in Afar, and there were also reports of sexual violence (Insecurity Insight, 2022).

III. | Suffering of pregnant women:

Many pregnant women were forced to give birth while fleeing, in the middle of the desert, which has resulted in many deaths due to the lack of medical care, food, and

water. A participant (FGD m7 (2022)) said, "We have faced so many challenges; some have fallen off cliffs; elders have died; men have died due to the conflict; pregnant women have given birth and died during birth in displacement...." There have been reports of pregnant women forced to give birth fleeing from their homes to safety (APDA, 2022).

IV. | Separation from family:

Families, parents, and children have been separated from their families while trying to escape the conflict. This has resulted in them being exposed to various dangers such as rape, hunger, and thirst. A participant (IDI 10(2022)) said, "....Mothers have been separated from their children."

V. | Psychological impact:

The conflict has also had a severe psychological impact on girls, as they have witnessed and experienced various forms of violence and trauma. It is also worth noting that some girls were unresponsive when asked how the conflict had impacted them, which could be attributed to the common behavior among women and girls of not vocalizing their pain. Instead, it was the facilitators who provided information about the impact of the conflict on the girls in their groups.

Another participant (STADIUM ENTRY, 2022) said,

"From what I have observed, the community isn't open about talking about what has happened in the past. A mother from Kasagita said to me that the war was horrible, and we want to forget. Don't poke at our wounds. We are grateful that we now have peace. In this focus group, according to what the facilitator conveyed to me, three of the women don't know if their husbands are dead or alive. TPLF soldiers took them and they haven't seen them since."

Overall, the conflict has had a devastating impact on the lives of young girls in all three regions in northern Ethiopia that has been affected by the war.

4.4.2 EXPOSURE OF YOUNG GIRLS TO CHILD MARRIAGE DUE TO CONFLICT/DISPLACEMENT

The results imply that there was greater exposure of young girls to the practice due to the conflict in the communities affected by it. It appears that changes in patterns of child marriage and the exposure of young girls to child marriage are linked to conflict and displacement, both directly and indirectly.

⊙ | Changes in the patterns of child marriage due to the conflict

Respondents in the focus group discussions and in-depth interview reported that child marriage has increased since the conflict in the region, particularly due to the desire to preserve the bloodline and ensure the continuity of the community by replacing lost lives due to the war. However, there are also other underlying factors that indirectly play significant roles in exposing girls to the practice of child marriage, which are discussed in the following sections.

A. | Economic and social disruptions

According to a thematic assessment by the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) on the two-year conflict in northern Ethiopia, the violence has had a profound impact on the Afar Region's economic and social fabric. According to the research, food insecurity has become a major concern in the region as a result of the impact of the conflict on agricultural activity, pastoralism, and the local market

system. Displacement caused by the conflict, the attacks on livelihoods and assets, and landmines have disrupted customary patterns of mobility and access to markets and resources, making it difficult for people to meet their basic requirements. According to the ACAPS research, the violence has also affected education, with many schools being closed owing to insecurity, which in turn resulted in learning losses and jeopardized the prospects of the next generation (ACAPS, 2022).

A father in the Stadium site (FDG F1) shared his frustration on their financial situation saying,

"When we fled our home, we left with nothing. Whatever we had there has been destroyed. We don't have jobs here, either. We are relying on others to survive" (2022).

However, it is worth noting that some respondents also mentioned that they have not had the chance or resources to organize marriages due to the impact of the conflict on their communities, such as the lack of property, water, and food.

"No, because we don't have property or money for a wedding" (FGD Mo 20, 2022).

Economic and social breakdown can lead to an increase in child marriage in several ways. In many cultures, marriage is seen as a way to secure a family's financial stability, and economic insecurity can lead families to marry off their daughters at a young age to alleviate financial pressures. When families are struggling to meet their basic needs, they may view marriage as a way to reduce their financial burden by transferring the responsibility of caring for their daughter to her husband's family. A study by the World Bank (2015) found that conflict and displacement can also increase the

risk of child marriage. The study showed that during times of conflict, one of the reasons families may marry off their daughters is to secure their daughters' economic future.

B. | **Child marriage for bloodline preservation and rebuilding community**

Research on child marriage in conflict-affected areas suggests that the desire to preserve the bloodline and rebuild the community has been identified as a contributing factor to the increase in child marriage in those areas. Fathers and community members believe that early marriage ensures the continuity of the community and helps to replace lost lives due to the war. Some fathers mentioned that they have lost friends and family members, and early marriage is a way to continue their legacy.

"Our sons were going to battles; we need to make sure that he will at least have left a part of him behind. We don't know if he will survive or die so we need to make sure that his bloodline continues" (FGD Mo, 12, 2022).

"In places where there were more than 300 people living, there are now only 90 people left, and families of four houses have now been left with only one house. We need neighbors and friends. Previously, we used to collect bride prices and also celebrate the marriage, but now we are not taking money. All we need is to increase the number of our neighbors and friends," a participant (FGD F2, 2022) stated.

Another father added**, "I have lost friends that I grew up with; all I have is their memories. So to make sure their legacy continues, I have to marry their children early, either to my children or other suitors"** (FGD F5, 2022).

Asked if child marriage has increased because of the conflict, another participant (IDI 6, 2022) said:

"Yes, it has increased because people want to preserve their bloodline to ensure its continuity."

Some individuals believe that child marriage is a cultural and religious practice, so the conflict has not influenced the practice in any way.

For instance, a mother stated, "No one forces us to wed or marry our girls at an early age. We do it because it's how it's been done up to now. It's our Ada (culture)" (FGD Mo1, 2022).

This suggests that child marriage is a deeply ingrained cultural practice in some communities, and the conflict has not influenced the practice in any way. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that cultural and religious beliefs can be major drivers of child marriage (Kohno et al., 2020). The study highlighted how deeply rooted beliefs and values surrounding marriage, gender roles, and sexuality in certain communities can drive families to marry off their daughters at a young age.

However, a respondent also mentioned that she has not had the chance or resources to organize marriages due to the impact of the conflict on their communities, such as the lack of property, water, and food.

"No, because we don't have property and money for a wedding."

Overall, the responses emphasize that the desire to preserve the bloodline and rebuild the community is a major contributing factor to child marriage in conflict-affected areas. The loss of lives due to the war has led to the belief that early marriage ensures the continuity of the community

and helps to replace lost lives. This, fueled by the deeply ingrained cultural and religious beliefs surrounding marriage, gender roles, and sexuality can be a major driver of child marriage.

C. | Breakdown of protective systems

There are several protective systems that are commonly considered effective in preventing child marriage.

I. | Education

In addition, the war has resulted in the breakdown of the formal education system, which has been a protective factor against child marriage. According to Save the Children (2021), about 2.3 million children remain out of school in northern Ethiopia despite last November's peace agreement ending two years of conflict, with the reconstruction of damaged buildings yet to commence.

According to the responses gathered from the participants, not all girls have been able to return to school. Those who haven't been able to return to school have stated financial problems, and resettling in the new place has been a challenge to resume school.

A married girl in a focus group discussion (FGD m7, 2022) said,

"We have not resumed our education. We're still getting used to the new place."

A mother in an FGD (FGD Mo 10, 2022) commented:

"There are girls who have not resumed because their parents are unable to cover school expenses. Even the cost of exercise books and pens have tripled. It is hard to afford that."

However, the mother's response indicates that some girls had resumed their education, and the unmarried girls from FGD Groups A and B confirmed that some girls had been able to return to school. The responses show that the community has a positive attitude towards education (FGDg 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 20, 22).

Yet, there is also a link between the girls being forced to drop out of school and their chances of getting married earlier. In some cases, parents prioritize their daughters' marriage over education, and if the daughter's husband wants her to drop out, she is expected to obey. A father in an FGD (FGD F8, 2022) said,

"No one will force her if she wants to continue her education. But after marriage, if her husband wants her to stop her education, then she should. It's not our business. He is responsible for her and she should obey him."

A key informant (KII 8, 2022) questions the quality of education provided by the schools:

"The education system was already struggling even before the conflict. Most of the students that get enrolled in school don't graduate from high school. Parents send their daughters to school only when their children can get some education that can create economic opportunities. Afar children don't learn in their native tongue and that contributes greatly to their low performance at school. In addition to that, they only go to school three days per week. So it is not right to put all the blame on the destruction of schools when the education system was already failing children and their parents."

The results of the grade 12 national exit exam in Ethiopia also highlight the systemic issues within the education system. In the 2014 Grade 12 national exit exam reportedly,

980,000 students sat for the Grade 12 national examination in Ethiopia. Out of that number, only 28,000 students who took the exam scored above 50%. This means that only three percent of the students who took the exam passed. The results are far more resounding in the Afar Region: 5,280 students sat for the exam and only 33 were able to pass to join university. The conflict only added fuel to an already burning system.

This lack of quality education may also contribute to the prevalence of child marriage in regions like Afar where educational opportunities are limited, in turn limiting economic opportunities.

It is clear from the responses that education is valued, and parents prefer their daughters to pursue both education and marriage if possible. However, in some cases, financial constraints and traditional gender norms can hinder girls' education and lead to early marriage.

Girls Not Brides found that poverty and lack of education are two of the primary drivers of child marriage. The study showed that when families are struggling to meet their basic needs, they may view marriage as a way to reduce their financial burden by transferring the responsibility of caring for their daughters to their husbands' families. Additionally, when girls are denied education, they may be more likely to be married off at a young age (Girls Not Brides, 2014).

II. | Weak legal frameworks

One of the most significant protective systems that is often compromised in conflict-affected areas is the legal system. During times of war, the rule of law can be weakened, with legal institutions often destroyed or incapacitated. As a result, there may be little to no legal recourse for girls and

women who are forced into early marriage. Having strong laws and policies against child marriage, along with their enforcement, can act as a deterrent to child marriage. It also reinforces the community's reliance on customary institutions in safeguarding the community.

Regarding the legal system in the Afar Region, the recognition of the traditional legal system by the Ethiopian constitution has made it possible for long-standing customs, including those that are harmful to women, to endure. Hussen (2009) emphasized how discrimination against women has resulted from the gap left by this pluralistic legal system, as women are frequently denied access to the legal system and must rely on male family members to represent them. Despite the potential advantages of this system in resolving local conflicts and disputes, it is essential to address the problems of gender inequality and discrimination in order to guarantee the protection and upholding of women's rights. This issue is highlighted by a key informant (KII 3, (2022)), who claimed:

"Afar people have followed their own traditional ways of governing their community. The problem is that this cultural institution does not provide space for women; hence, women issues are not given priority and are not represented. It also creates a barrier, limiting their access to information in regards to issues like child marriage."

The government strategy to address underage marriage focused on education and mediation rather than punishment of offenders (U.S. Department of State, 2022). In addition to this, the participants except for a few, are not aware of the legal age for marriage, which is set at 18 years.

III. Lack of awareness of, and access to, child marriage prevention services

Access to health, legal, and social services is essential for preventing and responding to child marriage. The responses from the different informants suggest varying levels of awareness about organizations and institutions working to protect girls and women from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and specifically child marriage.

Most of the respondents from the Stadium site have very limited knowledge of organizations or institutions providing services. Very few of those who know have had firsthand experience of what such organizations do.

A participant in a focus group discussion (FGD F10) said,

"'Work' is something that can be observed with the eye. We ask people who they are and they tell us they are people that work on this and that, but when we turn again, they are gone. We only have a glimpse of them but we do not see their work" (2022).

Another participant (FGD Mo13) commented,

"We did not get the opportunity to engage with them but our neighbors have told us that they had taken a training on child marriage" (2022).

The informants were asked about the institutions that girls can turn to for help in case of child marriage. Women's Affairs was the most frequently mentioned institution and cited as a first option (FGDg (17, 1, 18, 22, 24, 25), 2022). A participant (IDI 6 (2022)) mentioned opening a case with the police, while another (FGDg 26) from Group B mentioned the Sharia court. Unmarried girls from Group A, Stadium site, stated that they would turn to the law for help.

Informants also mentioned the police, Sharia court, and the law as places they can turn to for help in cases of child marriage (FGDg (3, 6, 9), 2022).

It is important to note that the decision to seek help from these institutions is not always easy. As a participant (FGD Mo 9) said,

"It would be hard for girls to go to the police if they don't want the marriage. They would report it to their own parents and family, which would put too much pressure on them by itself, so they wouldn't go to the police" (2022).

Overall, the responses suggest that while some organizations are working to protect girls and women from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)and child marriage, their efforts are not always visible or comprehensive. Furthermore, there appears to be limited awareness among some informants about the existence of such organizations. This highlights the need for increased awareness and availability of services to prevent child marriage, as well as the importance of providing a safe and supportive environment for girls to seek help.

D. | Sexual and gender-based violence

Since the outbreak of the conflict, incidents of conflict-related sexual violence have been reported, implicating all parties (United Nations Security Council, 2022). The responses indicated that families have become more protective of their daughters since the conflict and displacement started. The reasons for this vary: fear of strangers, danger of rape, and concern for their daughters' safety. Some families send their daughters to school with a male family member; others protect them while they are at home. The protective measures include not allowing them

to talk to people they don't know and watching out for any strangers in their surroundings.

An unmarried girl (FGDg 3, 2022) said,

"Our parents tell us not to talk to people we don't know."

Another unmarried girl (FGDg 8, 2022) added,

"Yes, because if she gets raped and then gets pregnant, her child will be called a bastard."

Additionally, some families have taken steps to arrange marriages for their daughters as a means of protecting them. It is clear that the conflict and displacement have had a significant impact on the protective measures taken by families and communities, and that these measures are aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals in the affected areas.

Parents and community members believe that marrying their daughters off at an early age will protect them from harm, such as rape or other problems related to the conflict. A religious leader (KII 1, 2022) stated:

"It protects girls from being hurt or raped by the fighters. So she will have someone to care for her and protect her."

Another study conducted in Afghanistan by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) found that conflict and displacement have contributed to an increase in child marriage, as families see marriage as a way to protect their daughters from violence and instability.

4.5 CHALLENGES IN PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

This section outlines challenges in preventing and responding to child marriage in conflict-affected areas, including limited access to conflict-affected areas, few local organizations working on the issue, priority not being given to saving lives, funding gaps due to high numbers of internally displaced persons, and the impact of COVID-19. The intermingling of displaced and non-displaced populations also contributes to the persistence of child marriage. This emphasizes the need to address these challenges and develop effective strategies for preventing and responding to child marriage in conflict settings.

4.5.1 CYCLIC HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE REGION

According to a key informant (KII UNFPA), "The Afar Region has been in a cyclic humanitarian crisis since 2017. Four consecutive drought seasons (which also affected the southern and eastern parts of the country), the pandemic, and the protracted conflict that occurred in the region have impacted the economic setting of the region." (See also, Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2023.) This crisis has had a significant impact on the economic setting of the region and limited its resources and capacity to effectively address the issue of child marriage as other competing priorities arise.

4.5.2 PRIORITIES SHIFTING TO SAVING LIVES

During times of conflict, the focus of humanitarian efforts often shifts towards saving lives and addressing immediate needs such as food, shelter, and medical care. This can result in a shift in priorities away from addressing issues such as

child marriage, which may not be seen as a priority in the context of a crisis. As a result, efforts to prevent and respond to child marriage may be deprioritized, and resources may be directed towards other sectors. This highlights the challenge of addressing child marriage in conflict settings where competing priorities arise.

4.5.3 LIMITED ACCESS TO CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

Limited access to conflict-affected regions in the Afar Region is a challenge to addressing the issue of child marriage and reforming the structures that were once built to prevent the practice. Without proper access, it becomes difficult for organizations and agencies to provide the necessary support and resources to communities affected by child marriage. Additionally, limited access can also hinder data collection and research efforts, which are crucial for developing effective prevention and response strategies.

4.5.4 THE LIMITED NUMBER OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON THE GROUND IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

According to a key informant (KII 3, 2022), only one organization – the Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA) – is working on the ground in the region. This limits the capacity of the region to effectively prevent and respond to child marriage practices, as well as reforming the structures that were once built to prevent the practice.

This limits the reach of interventions and the ability to scale up efforts to address child marriage. Additionally, limited access to different regions due to poor telecommunications further exacerbates the situation.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
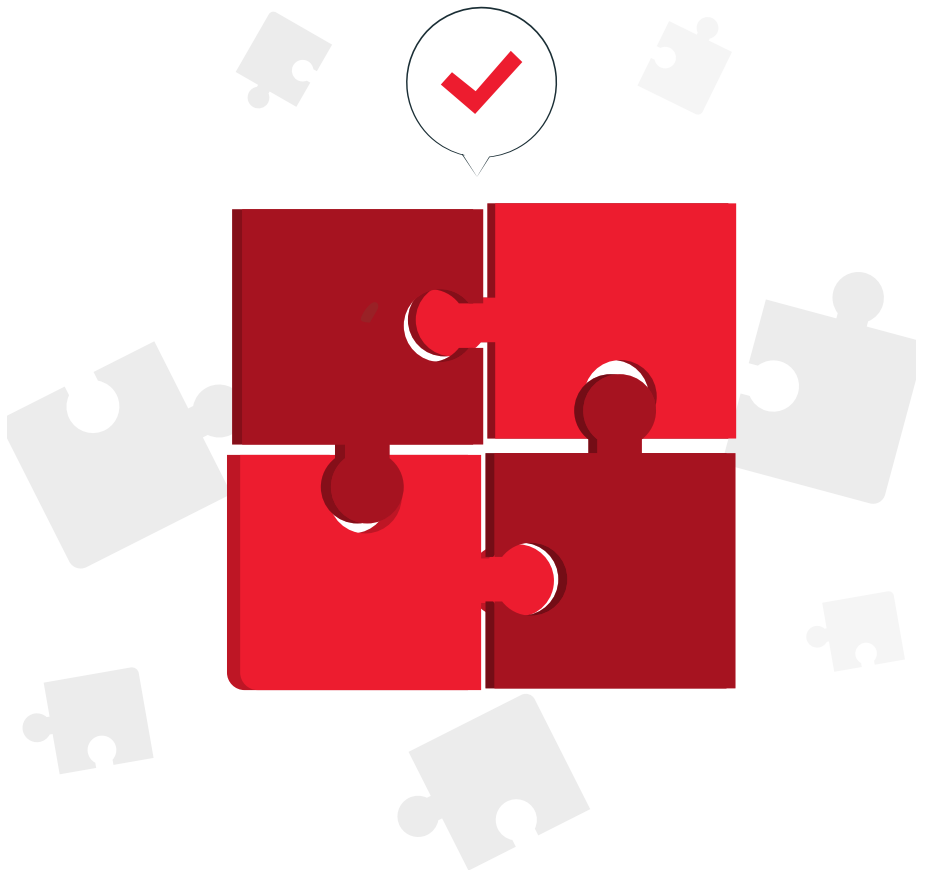
5.1 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

In conclusion, the findings above suggest that the increase in child marriage in conflict-affected areas is driven by a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and social factors. Conflict and displacement creates an environment that exacerbates pre-existing harmful cultural beliefs and practices, leading to an increase in child marriage. At the same time, economic pressures and the need to rebuild communities can also contribute to an increase in child marriage practice. Addressing the issue of child marriage in conflict-affected areas will require a multi-faceted approach that takes into account the cultural, economic, and social factors that drive the practice.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Firstly, policies aimed at ending child marriage need to address the root causes of the practice, including poverty, cultural norms, and beliefs about gender roles. Efforts should also be made to educate communities on the negative consequences of child marriage, including its links to sexual violence, early pregnancy, and limited educational opportunities. Secondly, health workers and other professionals working with families and communities should be trained to address the misconceptions and beliefs that support child marriage. They should be equipped with the skills, knowledge, and support to help families understand the harms of child marriage and the importance of protecting girls from sexual abuse and violence.

Thirdly, it is important to involve community and religious leaders in efforts to end child marriage. These leaders hold a significant influence over community norms and beliefs, and their support

is crucial in shifting attitudes towards child marriage. They can play an important role in promoting alternative practices that prioritize the well-being and safety of girls. When doing this, it is necessary to find ways to integrate women's issues into the local cultural institutions, as the exclusion of women's voices and perspectives may hinder their progress towards gender equality and empowerment. Overall, addressing the perceptions and beliefs that support child marriage requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach that involves communities, families, policymakers, and professionals. By working together, it is possible to end child marriage and create a safer and more equal world for all girls.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Research on identifying gaps in national and regional policies and interventions should be conducted to understand why the practice of child marriage persists.

Research to investigate the role of gatekeepers of tradition and the factors that influence their support for the practice of child marriage, including traditional healers and practitioners, should be conducted. Existing studies suggest that traditional doctors, and community and religious leaders play a significant role in perpetuating harmful cultural practices, including child marriage.

Research identifying the overall impact of child marriage in all conflict-affected areas of the Afar, Amhara, and Tigray regions should be conduct by obtaining context-specific and gender-and-age disaggregated information on child marriage. This information would enable us to get targeted responses to the challenges faced by children and their families affected by armed conflicts.

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| ANNEX 1: DATA COLLECTION PARTICIPANTS

I. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Table A: Unmarred girl less or equal to 18

Code	Age	Education Level	Religion	
IDI 1	15	5	Muslim	
IDI 2	13	3	Muslim	
IDI 3	10		Muslim	
IDI 4	10	6	Muslim	
IDI 5	18	12	Muslim	
IDI 6	16	11	Muslim	

	Original Residence	Data Collector	Date	Location
	Abala	Seid Ahmed	04/11/2022	Stadium IDP site
	Berhale	Seid Ahmed	04/11/2022	Stadium IDP site
	Koneba	Mohammed Jilani	04/11/2022	Stadium IDP site
	Koneba	Mohammed Jilani	04/11/2022	Stadium IDP site
	Wossema	Mohammed Ahmed	04/11/2022	Stadium IDP
	Abala	Mohammed Ahmed	04/11/2022	Stadium IDP site

Table B: Girls Married under 18

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	Education Level	Religion	
IDI 7	15		-	5	Muslim	
IDI 8	18	14	-	11	Muslim	
IDI 9	18	17	-	12	Muslim	
IDI 10	20	15	-	6	Muslim	
IDI 11	20	15	-	-	Muslim	

	Original Residence	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)	Data Collector	Location	Date
	Abala	Married	0	Edris Mohammed	Stadium IDP Camp Site	05/11/2022
	Gube	Married	0	Edris Mohammed	Stadium Camp Site	05/11/2022
	Abala	Married	0	Mohammed Jilani	Stadium Camo Site	05/11/2022
	Kasagita	Married	0	Mohammed Jilani	Kasagita	10/11/2022
	Kasagita	Married	1	Seid Ahmed	Kasagita	10/11/2022

Table C: Key Informant Interviews

Name (Optional)	Mode of	
Religious Leader	In-person	
Community Leader	In-person	
UNFPA Coordinator	Zoom	
Health Worker	In-person	
Health Worker	Phone Interview	
Religious Leader	Phone Interview	
Community Leader	Phone Interview	
NGO Worker	Phone Interview	

	Location	Interviewer	Date of Interview
	Stadium Camp, Semera	Edris Mohammed	12/11/2022
	Stadium Camp, Semera	Edris Mohammed	12/11/2022
	Semera, Afar	Kulsma Nur	05/01/2023
	Adar, Afar	Kulsma Nur	22/12/2022
	Mille, Afar	Kulsma Nur	23/12/2022
	Adar, Afar	Kulsma Nur	25/12/2022
	Adar, Afar	Kulsma Nur	27/12/2022
	Semera	Kulsma Nur	28/12/2022

II. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Date: 03/11/2022; Location: Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Abdu Mohammed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table D: Group A: Married Girls under 18

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD m1	18	15	Housewife	
FGD m2	15	12	Housewife	
FGD m3	16	14	Housewife	
FGD m4	15	13	Housewife	
FGD m5	18	15	Housewife	
FGD m6	16	14	Housewife	
FGD m7	16	13	Housewife	
FGD m8	15	13	Housewife	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	8	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	8	Abala	Muslim	Married	1
	6	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	1
	9	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	9	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	8	Abala	Muslim	Married	-

Date: 03/11/2022; Location: Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Abdu Mohammed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table E: Group B: Married Girls under 18

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD m9	22	15	-	
FGD m10	16	15	-	
FGD m11	16	15	-	
FGD m12	18	16	-	
FGD m13	17	15	-	
FGD m14	17	17	-	
FGD m15	16	15	-	
FGD m16	18	14	-	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	10	Abala	Muslim	Married	3
	10	Abala	Muslim	Married	0
	4	Berhale	Muslim	Married	2
	10	Koneba	Muslim	Married	1
	8	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	9	Koneba	Muslim	Married	-
	6	Abala	Muslim	Married	–
	12	Abala	Muslim	Married	-

Date: 03/11/2022; Location: Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Abdu Mohammed

Translator: Mohammed Jilani

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table F: Group C: Married Girls under 18

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	Educational Level	
FGD m17	17	15	Student	10	
FGD m18	20	15	Student	12	
FGD m19	20	17	Housewife	5	
FGD m20	20	16	Student	9	
FGD m21	19	15	Student	10	

	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	Abala	Muslim	Married	1
	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	Abala	Muslim	Married	-
	Abala	Muslim	Married	-

Date: 04/11/2022; Location: Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Abdu Mohammed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table G: Group A: Unmarried Girls under 18

Name (Optional)	Age	Education Level	Original Residence	Religion
FGD g1	14	5	Abala	Muslim
FGD g2	10	5	Abala	Muslim
FGD g3	10	5	Abala	Muslim
FGD g4	11	5	Abala	Muslim
FGD g5	10	1	Abala	Muslim
FGD g6	11	3	Abala	Muslim
FGD g7	12	4	Abala	Muslim
FGD g8	12	4	Abala	Muslim

Date: 04/11/2022; Location: Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Abdu Mohammed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table H: Group B: Unmarried Girls under 18

Name (Optional)	Age	Education Level	Original Residence	Religion
FGD g9	10	2	Abala	Muslim
FGD g10	10	4	Abala	Muslim
FGD g11	14	5	Abala	Muslim
FGD g12	15	5	Abala	Muslim
FGD g13	12	-	Abala	Muslim
FGD g14	13	5	Abala	Muslim
FGD g15	15	5	Abala	Muslim
1FGD g16	15	5	Abala	Muslim

Date: 05/11/2022; Location: Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Mohammed Jilani

Translator: Abdu Mohammed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table I: Focus Group Discussion with Fathers

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD F1	25	19	-	
FGD F2	48	27	-	
FGD F3	53	25	-	
FGD F4	52	25	-	
FGD F5	53	19	-	
FGD F6	40	29	-	
FGD F7	48	25	Teacher	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	-	Wossema	Muslim	Married	4
	3	Wossema	Muslim	Married	9
	-	Gube	Muslim	Married	13
	-	Wossema	Muslim	Married	11
	-	Gube	Muslim	Married	17
	-	Gube	Muslim	Married	5
	Diploma	Gube	Muslim	Married	13

Date: 05/11/2022 Location Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Seid Ahmed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table J: Focus Group Discussion with Mothers: Group A

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD Mo1	27	17	Student	
FGD Mo2	25	13	Housewife	
FGD Mo3	28	14	Housewife	
FGD Mo4	27	17	Housewife	
FGD Mo5	48	16	Housewife	
FGD Mo6	40	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo7	28	13	Housewife	
FGD Mo8	50	13	Housewife	

	Educational Level	Original Residence of	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	9	Wossema	Muslim	Married	5
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	4
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	3
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	4
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	8
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	8
	-	Gube	Muslim	Married	7
	-	Wossema	Muslim	Married	7

Date: 05/11/2022; Location: Stadium IDP Site, Semera

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Mohammed

Table K: Focus Group Discussion with Mothers: Group B

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD Mo9	30	20	Housewife	
FGD Mo10	25	18	Housewife	
FGD Mo11	35	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo12	35	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo13	29	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo14	35	20	Housewife	
FGD Mo15	45	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo16	25	16	Housewife	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	3
	9	Berahle	Muslim	Married	2
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	9
	-	Berahle	Muslim	Married	3
	-	Berahle	Muslim	Married	9
	-	Berahle	Muslim	Married	5
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	5
	-	Abala	Muslim	Married	4

Date: 26/ 05/ 2015; Location: Kasagita, Afar

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Seid Ahmed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table L: Focus Group Discussion with Fathers

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
1. FGD F7	30	15	Cattle herder	
2. FGD F8	35	20	Cattle herder	
3. FGD F9	55	30	Cattle herder	
4. FGD F10	30	15	Cattle herder	
5. FGD F11	35	20	Cattle herder	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	5
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	4
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	2
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	4
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	1

Date: 26/ 05/ 2015; Location: Kasagita, Afar

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Seid Ahmed

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table M: Focus Group Discussion with Mothers: Group A

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD Mo17	20	16	Housewife	
FGD Mo 18	45	17	Housewife	
FGD Mo19	22	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo 20	50	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo 21	30	14	Housewife	
FGD Mo22	20	14	Housewife	
FGD Mo 23	30	15	Cattle herder	
FGD Mo24	25	16	Housewife	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
		Kasagita	Muslim	Married ,	6
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	1
	4	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	5
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	8
	5	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	3
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Widowed	2
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	4
	-	Kasagita	Muslim	Married	1

Date: 26/ 05/ 2015; Location: Adar, Afar

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Translator: Mohammed Jilani

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic and Afar

Table N: Focus Group Discussion with Mothers: Group B

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD Mo25	50	30	Housewife	
FGD Mo 26	45	30	Housewife	
FGD Mo27	30	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo 28	33	19	Housewife	
5. FGD Mo 29	45	25	Housewife	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	8	Adar	Muslim	Married	6
	-	Adar	Muslim	Married	5
	-	Adar	Muslim	Married	5
	8	Adar	Muslim	Married	4
	-	Adar	Muslim	Married	5

Date: 26/ 05/ 2015; Location: Adar, Afar

Data Collector: Kulsma Nur

Language in which the interview was conducted: Amharic

Table 0: Focus Group Discussion with Unmarried Girls: Group A

Name (Optional)	Age	Age at marriage	Occupation	
FGD Mo25	50	30	Housewife	
FGD Mo 26	45	30	Housewife	
FGD Mo27	30	15	Housewife	
FGD Mo 28	33	19	Housewife	
FGD Mo 29	45	25	Housewife	

	Educational Level	Original Residence	Religion	Marital Status*	No. of Children (if any)
	8	Adar	Muslim	Married	6
	-	Adar	Muslim	Married	5
	-	Adar	Muslim	Married	5
	8	Adar	Muslim	Married	4
	-	Adar	Muslim	Married	5

ANNEX 2: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

I. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW/ FGD GUIDE

Basic information (interview)

Date _____

Location _____

Data collector(s) _____

Language in which the interview was conducted _____

- ☐ Name (Optional) _____
- ☐ Age _____
- ☐ Occupation _____
- ☐ Educational Level _____
- ☐ Religion _____
- ☐ Ethnicity_____
- ☐ Original Residence _____

Background information for every group meeting

Date _____

Location _____

Facilitator(s) _____

Language in which the interview was conducted _____

Background Information about Respondents

☐ Name (Optional) _____

☐ Age _____

☐ Occupation _____

☐ Residence before displacement _____

☐ Educational Level _____

☐ Religion _____

☐ Marital Status* _____

☐ No of Children (if any) _____

Part 1: Introduction

Greetings,

My name is *(Interviewer's/Facilitator's name)*. I am currently conducting a study on child marriage in the Afar Region and the vulnerability of girls to child marriage due to the war in northern Ethiopia.

You are one of the selected individuals to participate in a brief focus group discussion that will take about 90 minutes. The discussion aims to elicit what you know about and how you perceive the norms, attitudes, and driving factors of child marriage in your community and what has since changed due to the conflict. The objective of the group discussion is, therefore, to clearly understand the factors associated to child early marriage and the vulnerability of young girls to child marriage in a context of violence and to identify the challenges that exist in preventing and responding to child marriage practices within conflict settings.

The focus group discussion is voluntary, and data from this study will probably be published.

Please be informed that your identity will be kept confidential during the write-up process of the research. Fellow discussants will also declare to keep secrecy of the discussion points and the identity of other discussants.

A. Unmarried girls/ Married girls

Part 2: General questions on the informant's attitudes towards child marriage

1. I would like to know how you understand and define the following terms:
    ☐ 1.1 Child

    ☐ 1.2 Marriage

    ☐ 1.3 Girlhood

2. How do you define the term 'marriage'?

Part 3: Prevalence and sociocultural justifications for the practice

1. Can you tell me a bit about the marriage tradition in your area? What are the types of marriage and at what age do girls and boys get married?

2. What is the usual age for marriage in this community (for girls/boys)? Why do you think that is?

3. What do you think is the appropriate age for girls to marry in this community? Why? Is it different for boys? Why?

4. Do you know what the legal age for marriage is (for girls/ boys)? If 'yes', please share with me what you know about what the law says and how you got to know about it?

5. How are most child marriages in this community planned?
   Please share with me the rituals and the usual process.

6. Who gets to choose the husband for the girl in your community? Why?

7. What are the attributes of "a good wife" in the community?

8. What do you think are the reasons for the practice
   of child marriage in your community?

Part 4: Impacts of child marriage

1. What are some of the advantages (practical/economic/ social) for
   the girls in marrying early? What do you think are positive impacts of
   child marriage to the girl, her family, and the community at large?

2. What are some of the disadvantages (practical/
   economic/ social) for the girls in marrying early?

Part 5: Conflict and child marriage

1. As we all know, this is an area that is affected by the ongoing
   war in northern Ethiopia. Would you please tell me how
   the lives of young girls are impacted by the conflict?

2. How did the conflict impact the marriage
   practices in your area? Please explain.

3. In your opinion, how do conflicts impact the exposure of
   young girls to early marriage? Do you think conflict situations
   impact the practice of early marriage? Please explain.

4. How are girls affected in the context of the conflict/displacement
   due to the northern Ethiopian conflict? Do you see any changes
   with regard to the exposure of young girls to child marriage?

5. What are the factors, in the context of a conflict, forcing
   families to arrange for the marriage of young girls?

6. Please share with me the cases of young girls' marriage that happened in the context of the conflict in your area.

7. Have girls been able to go back to school after the conflict (after being displaced)? What are your options if you don't go back to school?

8. How many of you prefer to get married, go to school, or both? Why?

9. Have members of your family been more protective since the conflict and your displacement?

10. Do you think married girls are safer than unmarried girls? Why?

Part 6: Mapping various actors working on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

1. Who is working on protecting girls and women from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and specifically child marriage in this area? Think about all the service providers and NGOs working in your area. Do you think it is enough?

2. In the case of child marriage, who can girls turn to for help?

3. What is your opinion about the different activities they are engaged in? Do you think child marriage should be eradicated? If 'yes', tell me more about it.

4. In your view, what should families, the community, and NGOs do to prevent child marriage?

Additional question for married girls

1. Can you share how and by whom your husband was chosen for you? What influenced their decision?

2. From your experience, do you think that the conflict/ displacement had an impact on you getting married early? Can you please share with me in what way?

3. Please share with me the cases of young girls' marriages that happened in the context of the conflict in your area.

4. Have you been able to continue your education after your marriage? Why/Why not?

B.   Fathers/Mothers

Part 2: General questions on the informant's attitudes towards child marriage

1. I would like to know how you understand and define the following terms:
    ☐ 1.1 Child

    ☐ 1.2 Marriage

    ☐ 1.3 Girlhood

2. How do you define the term 'marriage'?

Part 3: General background questions - prevalence and sociocultural justifications for the practice

1. Would you please share with me the common types of marriage practices in the area?

2. What are the different types of marriage common in your area?

3. What are the common ages for boys and girls to marry in the area? How are the ages different for boys and girls? Why?

4. What do you think is the appropriate age for girls to marry in this community? Why? Is it different for boys? Why?

5. Do you know what the legal age for marriage is (for girls/ boys)? If 'yes', please share with me what you know about what the law says and how you got to know about it.

6. Who gets to choose the husband for the girl in your community? Why?

7. What are the attributes of "a good husband" in the community?

8. What do you think are the different reasons for the practice of child marriage in your community?

Part 4: Impact of early marriage

1. What are some of the advantages (practical/economic/ social) for the girls in marrying early?

2. What are some of the disadvantages (practical/economic and social) of marrying at an early age for the girl?

3. What is the common tradition in the area regarding girls' education after marriage? If they drop out of school after marriage, what are the justifications forwarded by the community?

Part 5: Conflict and child marriage

1. Can you tell me a bit about how the conflict situation has impacted the lives of people in general?

2. Do you see any changes in your attitudes or the attitudes of your community towards child marriage? If 'yes', please tell me more about what those changes are and the factors associated with them.

3. Have there been changes in the age of marriage for girls since the conflict? How? What do you think are the reasons?

4. How did the conflict impact girls' education? Do you see any link between the girls dropping out of school and their chances of getting married earlier? If 'yes', please explain the nexus between the two.

5. Do you think your daughters will be safer (more protected) after they get married? How?

6. Will you get your daughters married before they reach 18 years? Why? Why not?

7. Did the conflict (displacement) influence this decision?

Part 6: Mapping various actors working on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

1. Who is working on protecting girls and women from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and specifically child marriage in your area? Think about all the service providers and NGOs working in your area.

2. What are the main activities they do pertaining to child marriage that you are aware of?

3. What is your opinion about the different activities they are engaged in? Do you think child marriage should be eradicated? If 'yes', tell me more about it.

4. in your view, what should families, the community, and NGO do to help stop child marriage?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add?

II. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Basic Information

Date _____

Location _____

Name of key informant _____

Gender _____

Place of residence _____

Zone _____

Kebele _____

Name of organization/ institution _____

Occupation _____

Interviewer _____

Part 1: Introduction

Greetings,

My name is *(Interviewer's name).* I am currently conducting a study on child marriage in the Afar Region and the vulnerability of girls to child marriage due to the war in northern Ethiopia.

You are one of the selected individuals to participate in an interview that will take about 60 minutes. The interview is aims to elicit what you know about and how you perceive the norms, attitudes, and driving factors of child marriage in your community and what has since changed due to the conflict. The objective of the interview is, therefore, to clearly understand the factors associated to child marriage and the vulnerability of young girls to child marriage in the context of violence and to identify the challenges that exist in preventing and responding to child marriage practices within conflict settings.

The interview is voluntary, and data from this study will probably be published.

Please be informed that your identity will be kept confidential during the write-up process of the research.

Service providers

Health care service providers

1. How long have you been a health care service provider? What are the kinds of services you provide to the community?

2. What do you think of marriage in general?

3. What do you think of child marriage in general where the parties are under 18 years?

4. What is the most common age for girls and boys to get married? Have there been any changes since the conflict? If 'yes', why do you think that is?

5. How common was child marriage in your community? How about since the conflict? Have you seen any changes?

6. What are the positive impacts of child marriage to the girl, her family, and the community at large?

7. What are the negative impacts of child marriage to the girl, her family, and the community? What are the health problems that young girls who have been married in your community have faced? Can you please share a story with me?

8. Do you believe there are adequate health care services related to adolescent reproductive health issues and pregnancies? How about since the conflict and displacement?

9. What do you usually do to assist children that are at risk of child marriage or who are already married?

10. Do you and other HEWs work to raise awareness about the risks of child marriage? With whom? What messages do you convey? How is your work perceived?

11. What more needs to be done? By whom?

Police officers/Prosecutors

1. How long have you been a police officer? What is your role under this position?

2. What are your thoughts on child marriage (marriage where the parties are under 18 years)?

3. Was child marriage prevalent in the community you serve before the conflict? How about now?

4. What difference have you observed in terms of prevalence or drivers or age of the brides?

5. How does your station handle cases that involve sexual and gender-based violence? What is the work that you do in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence?

6. Could you talk about what is the mandatory procedure in terms of reporting violence against children? Is there a different procedure for reporting child marriage?

7. What are the laws applicable to child marriage in the region?

8. Have you handled any cases related to child marriage before the conflict? How about after the conflict?

9. How many cases of child marriage is handled through your police station? Do you keep records of reports on child brides? May we have access to the records?

10. What do you think are some of the obstacles or challenges that married children or those at risk of marriage face in terms of accessing these services?

11. What do you think are the main difficulties in addressing child marriage in this community? In what ways has the conflict added to the challenges in addressing the issue?

12. Do you think the service that you are providing to children at risk of child marriage is enough?

13. What do you think should be done to help address the prevalence of child marriage in the conflict-affected communities and in IDP camps?

14. Is there anything more you would like to add?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NGOS

Part 2: General background, prevalence, and sociocultural justifications for the practice

1. What type of program does your organization work on in relation to preventing child marriage in the Afar Region? Can you please tell us about the work your organization does in relation to addressing, preventing, and protecting girls from child marriage?

2. How prevalent is child marriage in the Afar Region, specifically in the conflict-affected areas of northern Ethiopia, i.e. zone 2?

3. What are the major factors and drivers of child marriage that you have identified in the community?

4. What do you think are some of the obstacles or challenges that married children or those at risk of marriage face in terms of accessing these services? Could you please elaborate?

Part 3: General questions on the effectiveness of the global program to end child marriage

1. Have the objectives of the global program to end child marriage been met in the Afar Region? Have there been unexpected results/impacts? Overall, what have been the key achievements or what do you think they will be? How do you measure this?

2. What challenges and obstacles do you face in addressing child marriage in the community?

Part 4: Nexus between conflict and child marriage

1. Can you share with me how the conflict in the different parts of the Afar Region impacted the lives of children in general and girls in particular?

2. How do conflicts impact the exposure of young girls to child marriage? How has the conflict situations in the region impacted the practice of child marriage in the region? Please explain.

3. What are the challenges that exist in preventing and responding to child marriage practices within conflict settings? Has the northern Ethiopian conflict impacted your work in addressing child marriage? If 'yes', please specify.

4. Are there any programs or activities planned in response to protecting children and girls from the impacts of the war after the conflict?

5. Do you know of any other programs in other local or international organizations within the Afar Region that work on eradicating child marriage?

Additional question for local NGOs

1. What do you usually do to assist children that are at risk of child marriage or who are already married?

2. What are the challenges that child girls face related to reporting cases of child marriage in the community?

3. Which members of the community do you target in
   your activities related to child marriage?

4. Could you talk about what mandatory procedures there
   are to follow in terms of reporting violence against
   children? What about reporting child marriage?

5. Do you feel you have the necessary information and capacity
   to assist children at risk of early marriage? If not, what more
   can be done by stakeholders in order to fill the gap?

Religious leader/Community leader

Part 2: General background - prevalence and sociocultural justifications for the practice

1. Would you please share with me about the marriage practices
   in the area? What are the different types of marriage that
   are widely practiced in your area? Can you please share
   with us the rituals and the usual religious process?

2. What are the various roles religious/community
   leaders play in the community?

3. What is the common age for boys and girls to marry in the
   area? How are the ages different for boys and girls? Why?

4. At what age does the religious law allow girls and boys
   to get married? Is there any religious justification for
   that? If 'yes', please share with me those reasons.

5. What do you think are the reasons for the practice of child marriage
   (marriage before 18 years of age) in your community?

6. Do you know the legal age for marriage (for girls/boys)? If 'yes', please share with me what you know about, what the law says, and how you got to know about it.

7. What are some of the advantages (practical/economic/ social) for the girls in marrying early to the girl, her family, and the community at large?

8. Who gets to choose the husband for the girl in your community? Why?

9. What are the attributes of "a good wife" in the community?

10. What do you think is more important for the girl: Education? Marriage? Or both?

Part 3: Conflict and child marriage

1. Can you share with me how conflict affects the lives of children in general and girls in particular?

2. In your opinion, how do conflicts impact the exposure of young girls to early marriage? Do you think conflict situations impact the practice of early marriage? Please explain.

Part 4: Suggestion for intervention

1. If a case of marriage of a girl under 18 came to you, what do you believe you would do about it?

2. Do you think that something should be done to prevent child marriage in your community? If 'yes', what exactly do you think needs to be done?

3. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

WAR AND CHILD MARRIAGE

The Vulnerability of Girls to Child Marriage Due to the War in Northern Ethiopia

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2022 CARD Werdwet Research Fellow
May 2023

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