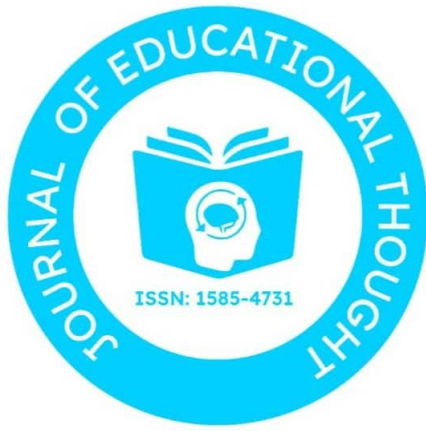




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**PERCEIVED IMPACT OF EARLY MARRIAGE ON THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL LIFE OF
THE GIRL-CHILD: A STUDY OF WOMEN IN GRONG VILLAGE, PANKSHIN,
PLATEAU STATE**

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Abstract

Early marriage is a pervasive issue in many parts of Nigeria, including Grong Village in Plateau State, where cultural traditions and economic difficulties contribute to its persistence, significantly impacting girls' education, health, and psychosocial well-being. This study examines the perceived impact of early marriage on the psycho-social life of the girl-child: a study of women in Grong village, Pankshin, Plateau state. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with a sample of 200 women randomly selected from three village clusters. Data were analysed using independent sample t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The study revealed that women in Grong Village perceived early marriage as having a negative significant impact on girls' education, career opportunities, and overall psychosocial well-being. Disruption of education, low educational attainment, and limited career opportunities were identified as major concerns. No significant differences were found in perceptions based on age or village cluster. Based on the findings, it was recommended to promote girls' education, economic empowerment programmes for girls and their families, community-based interventions to raise awareness about the negative impacts of early marriage need to be carried out.

Keywords: Early marriage, Girls' education, Cultural practices, Psychosocial life

Introduction

Early marriage in Grong Village, Pankshin Local Government, is not merely a cultural practice but a symptom of deeper social and economic struggles. Poverty forces many families to see early marriage as a financial relief, as it reduces household expenses for the parent and viewed as a means to secure a daughter's future. Economic desperation often leads parents to prioritize marriage over education, with studies showing that child marriage is significantly more common in rural areas and among the poorest demographics. Limited access to education further sustains this practice, as girls in rural areas face numerous barriers such as long distances to schools, inadequate facilities, and financial constraints, leading families to prioritize their sons' education instead. As a result, marriage is often seen as the best alternative for girls who lack access to schooling. Cultural and religious influences also play a major role, as many communities tie a girl's value to her purity and ability to marry early. Families fear that delaying marriage could bring shame or reduce their daughter's chances of securing a husband, and some religious interpretations encourage early unions. One of the most devastating effects of early marriage is its impact on education. Once married, continuing school becomes nearly impossible due to the responsibilities of managing a home, caring for children, and meeting societal expectations. Even if a girl wishes to return to school after marriage, societal pressure and financial constraints often prevent her from doing so, reinforcing a cycle of limited opportunities and dependence.

Marriage is traditionally viewed as a union based on mutual consent and shared responsibilities. However, for many young girls, particularly in rural communities, this choice is often taken away from them. Globally, including Nigeria, millions of girls are married off at an early age, long before they are emotionally, physically, or mentally prepared for the demands of marriage and motherhood (UNICEF, 2017). This practice, deeply rooted in cultural traditions, economic hardships, and misinterpreted religious beliefs, continues to limit girls' potential, depriving them of their right to education and a better future (Jain & Kurz, 2011).

Child marriage remains a critical issue in Nigeria, with statistics painting a troubling picture of about 44% of Nigerian girls are married before the age of 18, totaling over 24 million child brides, placing Nigeria third globally in terms of absolute numbers (United Nation International Children Emergency Fund, 2022). The situation is even worse in Northern Nigeria, where cultural norms and financial hardships compel families to arrange early marriages for their

daughters, often under the belief that marriage provides economic security and social status (UNFPA, 2020). However, rather than offering protection, early marriage often perpetuates cycles of poverty, illiteracy, and poor health outcomes (Walker, 2012).

Despite global and national efforts to curb child marriage, Nigeria's legal framework presents challenges. The Child Rights Act of 2003 explicitly sets 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2003). However, inconsistencies within the Nigerian Constitution complicate enforcement. Section 29(4b) of the Constitution states that any married woman, regardless of age, is considered an adult. This contradiction has allowed harmful practices to persist, making it difficult to fully protect young girls from forced or early marriages (Ezeh et al., 2021).

In Grong Village, young girls who are married off rarely make it past secondary school. Some never even complete primary education. This does not only limit their individual potential but also has a long-term impact on the community, as uneducated mothers are less likely to prioritize education for their own children, perpetuating the cycle of illiteracy and poverty (UNICEF, 2022).

Beyond education, early marriage exposes young girls to serious health risks. Many are forced into motherhood before their bodies are fully developed, leading to complications such as obstructed labor, high maternal mortality rates, and conditions like Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF) (UNFPA, 2020). Studies have shown that girls under the age of 16 are four times more likely to die during childbirth than women in their 20s (WHO, 2021).

Domestic violence is also a harsh reality for many young brides. With little to no autonomy in their marriages, they are often vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (Jain & Kurz, 2011). Additionally, early marriage isolates girls from their peers and social networks, leaving them with few support systems outside of their immediate family (UNICEF, 2020).

In Grong Village, early marriage is not just a common practice; it is a deeply ingrained way of life. Historically, girls in the community had very little access to education. Schools were either too far, poorly equipped, or too expensive for many families. As a result, marriage and farming became the only perceived options for young girls (UNESCO, 2019).

Although basic schools were introduced in the community in 1994, the mindset toward education has been slow to change, as many parents still see little value in educating their daughters beyond a certain level, believing that a girl's ultimate role is to become a wife and mother, while others simply lack the financial means to support their daughters' education, pushing them into early marriage instead. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including community awareness and education to help parents and leaders understand the benefits of keeping girls in school and the long-term consequences of early marriage through sensitization programs. Strengthening laws and policies is also essential, as the Nigerian government must strictly enforce laws prohibiting child marriage, close legal loopholes, and impose penalties on those who facilitate child marriages. Improving access to education by establishing more schools, providing scholarships, and creating support systems in rural areas can encourage parents to invest in their daughters' education rather than resorting to early marriage. Additionally, economic empowerment programs, such as financial support and vocational training for families, can help reduce poverty-driven early marriages by offering sustainable alternatives.

Statement of the Problem

In Plateau State Nigeria, Grong Village in Pankshin Local Government Area, early marriage continues to be a major obstacle to girls' education. Pankshin is known for its rich cultural heritage and agricultural economy, is home to various ethnic groups, including the Mhiship, Ngas, Mupun, among others. Despite its contributions to education and commerce in Plateau State, the area still grapples with deep-rooted socio-cultural practices, including early marriage, which disproportionately affects young girls.

Early marriage continues to be a critical challenge in Pankshin LGA, particularly in Grong Village, where cultural traditions and economic difficulties contribute to its persistence. Girls who marry early are often forced to leave school, significantly limiting their opportunities for personal and professional growth. The consequences of early marriage extend beyond individual lives, impacting families and communities by perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality which leads to significant problems for the society.

Despite efforts by government agencies to combat early marriageThe prevalence of illiteracy and unemployment in the community is closely linked to the persistence of early marriage, which

hinders individuals' ability to acquire basic education and skills. To effectively address this issue, a thorough investigation into the sociocultural factors driving early marriage in Grong Village is necessary, exploring its impact on education and overall well-being. There is a need for an in-depth examination of the sociocultural factors that drive early marriage in Grong Village, as well as the implications for education and overall well-being. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing targeted interventions that can help break the cycle of early marriage and empower girls through education.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to:

1. Examine the perceived impact of early marriage on psychosocial life of girl-child as perceived by women in Grong Village, Pankshin.
2. the influence of respondents' age on their perceptions of the impact of early marriage on girls' education in Grong Village, Pankshin LGA
3. Assess locational (village cluster) differences in perceptions of early marriage's impact on girls' education in Grong Village, Pankshin LGA

Research Questions

1. Of what impact is early marriage on psycho-social life of female-child as perceived by women in Grong Village, Pankshin?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in perceptions of the psychosocial impact of early marriage on girls in Grong Village, Pankshin based on age.
2. There is no significant difference in perceptions of the psychosocial impact of early marriage on girls in Grong Village, Pankshin based on village cluster.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Early Marriage

Early marriage, typically defined as marriage before the age of 18, is a complex issue with far-reaching consequences. According to UNICEF, an estimated 12 million girls worldwide are married before the age of 18 each year, with many experiencing negative outcomes such as

limited access to education, health risks, and emotional trauma (UNICEF, 2020). Research has shown that early marriage can lead to a range of negative health outcomes, including increased risk of maternal mortality, obstetric fistula, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (WHO, 2019).

The root causes of early marriage are multifaceted and context-specific, often driven by cultural, social, and economic factors. Poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality are key drivers of early marriage in many settings (UNFPA, 2020). Addressing early marriage requires a comprehensive approach that includes education, economic empowerment, and social support. By working together to address the root causes of early marriage, we can help protect the rights and well-being of girls and women worldwide.

Prevalence of Early Marriage in Nigeria

In Nigeria, child marriage remains a significant issue, with 43% of women aged 20-24 married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020). The prevalence of early marriage varies across regions, with northern states having higher rates due to cultural and religious practices (UNFPA, 2020). This practice has severe consequences, including limited access to education, health risks, and emotional trauma (WHO, 2019).

Efforts to address early marriage in Nigeria include legislation, such as the Child Rights Act, which prohibits marriage below age 18 (Nigeria's Child Rights Act, 2003). However, implementation varies across states, and advocacy groups continue to push for stronger laws and enforcement to protect girls' rights (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

The Impacts of Early Marriage on Education Level and Leadership Opportunities

Early marriage has been commonly known to be a major impediment to girls' education and their opportunities to assume leadership positions. Oyelude and Oseni (2021) demonstrate that early marriage greatly hinders the opportunities for education among young girls and thereby reduces their possibilities of developing leadership skills. The authors point out that at the time of marriage, a girl tends to be in circumstances that compel her to withdraw from school, hence blocking her from acquiring the knowledge and experiences essential to equip her for leadership roles. This deprivation of access to education is not only associated with the absence of formal

credentials but also with the lack of intellectual ability to think critically as well as leadership skills that accompany education.

Kyari and Ayodele (2014) study the socio-economic implications of child marriage in North Western Nigeria with a focus on the complex linkages between child marriage, cultural practices, and poverty. What they find is that many of these families understand early marriage to be a mode of economic insurance for their female children. Marrying off one's daughters within these cultures are often seen to ease the household's economic struggles. Regrettably, the practice negatively affects the education of the girl because she is required to assume domestic duties instead of pursuing her education.

The implication of child marriage on academic performance is significant, as attested by the record of Elujekwute, Uwalaka, and Elujekwute (2021) regarding the educational progress of female students in North-Central Nigeria. Their analysis indicates that marriage greatly hinders a girl's pursuit of further education due to various reasons, such as household responsibilities, lack of funds, and societal norms. Most of the girls who get married early are supposed to focus their energies on becoming wives and mothers, and there is little time remaining for school.

The Socio-Economic Impact of Child Marriage

Kyari and Ayodele (2014) studied the socio-economic implications of child marriage in North Western Nigeria with a focus on the complex linkages between child marriage, cultural practices, and poverty. The findings indicate that many of these families understand early marriage to be a mode of economic insurance for their female children. Marrying off one's daughters within these cultures is often seen as a way to ease the household's economic struggles. Regrettably, the practice negatively affects the education of the girl because she is required to assume domestic duties instead of pursuing her education.

Educational Disruptions Brought About by Early Marriage

The implication of child marriage on academic performance is significant, as attested by the research of Elujekwute, Uwalaka, and Elujekwute (2021) regarding the educational progress of female students in North-Central Nigeria. Their analysis indicates that marriage greatly hinders a girl's pursuit of further education due to various reasons, such as household responsibilities, lack

of funds, and societal norms. Most of the girls who get married early are expected to focus their energies on becoming wives and mothers, leaving little to no time for school.

Health Risks and Social Consequences of Early Marriage

Aside from the educational and socio-economic consequences, early marriage also exposes girls to some of the most dangerous health complications. Envuladu et al. (2020) conducted research in Plateau State, Nigeria, that indicates the dangers of early marriage on girls' health. One of the most concerning impacts is exposure to maternal mortality as well as morbidity. Young brides tend to lack the biological maturity to give birth, and thus they may suffer from complications like obstructed labor and Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF), a serious condition that afflicts numerous young mothers in the developing world.

Early marriage can have severe social consequences, including limited education, social isolation, and loss of autonomy. Girls who marry early often drop out of school, limiting their future opportunities and potential (UNICEF, 2020). They may also experience social isolation, being cut off from friends, family, and community networks, which can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and disconnection.

Early marriage can also lead to increased risk of domestic violence, limited economic opportunities, and perpetuation of poverty. Girls who marry early are more likely to experience domestic violence and abuse, and have limited ability to acquire vocational skills, leading to economic dependence on their husbands (WHO, 2019; UNFPA, 2020). These consequences can have long-lasting and far-reaching impacts on individuals, families, and communities.

Early Marriage as a Development Issue in Africa

Bayisenge. (2012) adopts a broad perspective of early marriage, presenting it as a significant development challenge within the African context. According to the author, early marriage not only slows down the education and economic progress of girls but also hinders overall national development. Furthermore, the study contends that when girls are married at an early age, they are less capable of making positive contributions to the labour market, particularly in specialized fields that demand higher education levels. As a result, a significant portion of the population remains poorly educated and underemployed in the labour force, consequently constraining the country's potential for economic growth and development.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to gather quantitative data on the perceptions and experiences of women regarding early marriage and its psychosocial impacts on the female child. This design is appropriate for studies seeking to describe and interpret respondents' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions using structured questionnaires. The respondents for this study consist of all women in Grong Village, Pankshin. The sample comprises of two hundred women randomly selected from the two tribes in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State. The study employed multistage sampling technique. At the first stage, simple ramondom was adopted to select the targeted respondents, this is due to the fact that not all women can participate in the study. The selected respondents were then stratified based on age and tribe. Stratification is a process of classifying a sample or subjects under study into researcher's variables of interest.

A customized questionnaire, "Impact of Early Marriage on the Psychosocial Life of the Female Child Questionnaire" (IEMPLFCQ), was used to collect data. The questionnaire had two sections: Section A captured respondents' biodata, while Section B contained 20 items aligned with the study's objectives.

The instrument was validated by experts in counselling and measurement. To ensure reliability, a test-retest method was employed with 20 women who shared similar characteristics with the target respondents. The questionnaire was administered twice at a two-week interval, and the scores were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.83.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age and Tribe

S/N	Variables	Frequency	%
1	Age:		
	20 years below	19	19.0
	20 – 35years	49	49.0
	36 years above	32	32.0
	Total	100	100.0
2	Village Cluster:		
	Grong	33	33.5
	Kwarmut	34	33.0
	Getleh	33	33.5
	Total	100	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic breakdown of the 200 respondents. The age distribution reveals that 19% (n=19) were under 20 years old, 49% (n=49) were between 20-35 years old, and 32% (n=32) were 36 years or older. In terms of village representation, the sample was evenly distributed: 33.5% (n=33) from Grong hamlet, 33% (n=34) from Kwarmut hamlet, and 33.5% (n=33) from Gatleh hamlet.

Research Question 1: *Of what impact is early marriage on psycho-social life of female-child as perceived by women in in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State?*

Table 2 Mean Scores and Rankings Based on Women's Perspectives.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	RANK
3	Disruption of education	3.17	1 st
4	Lack of educational attainment	3.11	2 nd
10	Limited career opportunities	3.10	3 rd
8	Increased vulnerability to domestic violence	3.02	4 th
15	Low self-esteem	3.01	5 th
5	Exploitation	2.98	6 th
9	Negative impact on mental health	2.93	7 th
19	High infections risk	2.92	8 th
1	Health risks	2.85	9 th
14	Early divorce possibility	2.82	10 th
18	Limited autonomy	2.80	11 th
11	Low aspirations and expectations	2.77	12 th
7	Disgrace	2.71	13 th
13	Problems decision-making problems	2.69	14 th
12	Less opportunity in the workplace	2.69	15 th
2	Poverty	2.65	16 th
20	lack of economic independence	2.60	17 th
6	Reproductive health problems	2.59	18 th
16	Child neglect	2.53	19 th
17	Role identity and intimacy problem	2.50	20 th

Table 2 shows women's perceptions on the impact of early marriage on female children's psychosocial life in Grong Village. All 20 items scored above 2.50, with items 3, 4, and 10 having the highest means (3.17, 3.11, and 3.10). These items highlighted education disruption and lack of educational attainment as major consequences of early marriage.

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant difference in the perceived impact of early marriage on psycho-social life of female child by women in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State on the basis of age.*

Table 3: ANOVA on the impact of early marriage on psycho-social life of female child on the basis of age

Source	Sum Squares	of df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-val.	Crit. F-val.	Remark
Between Group	458.908	2	152.969			Not Rejected
Within Group	84699.087	97	108.728	1.41	3.04	
Total	85157.995	99				

Table 3 reveals that the calculated F-value (1.41) is less than the critical F-value (3.04) at a 0.05 alpha level, indicating no statistically significant difference. As a result, the null hypothesis is retained. This suggests that women's perceptions of the impact of early marriage on female children's psychosocial life in Grong Village do not significantly differ based on age.

Hypothesis II: *There is no significant difference in the perceived impact of early marriage on psycho-social life of girl-child by women in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State based on village cluster*

Table 4: ANOVA on the impact of early marriage on psychosocial life of female child based on village cluster.

Source	Sum Squares	of df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-val.	Crit. F-val.	Remark
Between Group	14794171	2	73.64			Not Rejected
Within Group	663.906	97	71.42	1.97	3.04	
Total	154158.078	99				

The ANOVA results show no significant difference in the perceived impact of early marriage on the psychosocial life of female children among women in different village clusters in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State. With a calculated F-value of 1.97 being less than the critical F-value of 3.04 at 0.05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is not rejected, indicating that village cluster does not significantly influence perceptions of early marriage's impact.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the impact of early marriage on psychosocial life of female child in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State. The findings on the respondents' demographic

characteristics provide valuable insights into the age distribution and village cluster representation. The age distribution reveals that 19% of the respondents were below 20 years of age, 49% were between 20-35 years of age, and 32% were 36 years and above. This suggests that the majority of the respondents were in their reproductive age group, which is a critical demographic for studying the impact of early marriage on the psychosocial life of female children.

The village cluster distribution shows that the respondents were relatively evenly distributed across the three village clusters, with 33.5% from Grong hamlet, 33% from Kwarmut hamlet, and 33.5% from Gatleh hamlet. This even distribution suggests that the study's findings may be generalised to the entire Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State, and reduces the likelihood of bias in the results.

The study revealed that women in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State, perceived the influences of early marriage on the psychosocial life of female children to be education disruption, lack of educational attainment, and limited career opportunities among others. This implies that women in Grong Village perceived that early marriage can affect the psychosocial life of female children by disrupting their education, limiting their educational attainment, and reducing their career opportunities in life. This finding is in line with previous studies that have shown that early marriage can lead to school dropout and reduced educational attainment. This finding is consistent with the study of Jensen and Thornton (2023) who found that early marriage can limit girls' educational opportunities. Similarly, Raj et al. (2019) revealed that child marriage is associated with lower educational attainment and reduced economic opportunities. The finding is also in support of Psaki et al. (2019) who found that child marriage can disrupt girls' education and limit their future prospects.

The findings on Hypothesis 1 revealed no significant difference in the perceived impact of early marriage on the psycho-social life of female children by women in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State, on the basis of age. This finding suggests that women of different ages in Grong Village share similar perceptions about the impact of early marriage on the psychosocial life of female children. This could be due to the cultural and societal norms that are prevalent in the area, which may transcend age boundaries. This is in-line with the findings by Psaki et al. (2019) found that cultural norms and values can influence parents' decisions to marry off their daughters at a young age. The finding is also consistent with the study by Santhya et al. (2019), which

found that women across different age groups in India shared similar experiences and perceptions about the impact of early marriage on their lives.

The findings on Hypothesis II revealed no significant difference in the perceived impact of early marriage on the psycho-social life of girl children by women in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State, based on village cluster. This finding suggests that women from different village clusters in Grong Village share similar perceptions about the impact of early marriage on the psychosocial life of female children. This could be due to the shared cultural, social, and economic contexts that exist across the village clusters. Previous studies have shown that geographic proximity and shared cultural contexts can lead to similarities in perceptions and attitudes towards social issues (Kishor & Gupta, 2009; UNICEF, 2014). For instance, a study by Kishor and Gupta (2009) found that women from different regions in a country may share similar perceptions about the impact of early marriage due to shared cultural and social norms. The finding of no significant difference in perceptions based on village cluster is also consistent with the study by Raj et al. (2019), which found that the impact of child marriage on girls' education and health outcomes was similar across different regions in a country.

Implication of the Study

The study's findings have significant implications for policy and intervention strategies aimed at addressing early marriage in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria. The fact that women in the area perceived early marriage as having a significant impact on girls' education, career opportunities, and overall psychosocial well-being highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the root causes of early marriage. Policymakers and stakeholders can use these findings to develop effective strategies to promote girls' education and empowerment, and mitigate the negative impacts of early marriage. For instance, interventions could focus on improving access to education, providing economic opportunities for girls and their families, and promoting awareness about the negative effects of early marriage. Additionally, the finding of no significant difference in perceptions based on age and village cluster suggests that a single, unified approach may be effective in addressing early marriage across different age groups and geographic locations in Grong Village. Overall, the study's findings provide valuable insights that can inform policy and intervention strategies to address early marriage and promote the well-being of female children in Grong Village and beyond.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the impact of early marriage on the psychosocial life of female children in Grong Village, Pankshin, Plateau State. The findings reveal that women in the area perceive early marriage as having a significant impact on girls' education, career opportunities, and overall psychosocial well-being. Specifically, the study highlights education disruption, lack of educational attainment, and limited career opportunities as major concerns. Notably, the study found no significant differences in perceptions based on age or village cluster, suggesting that women across different age groups and geographic locations in Grong Village share similar views on the impact of early marriage. These findings are consistent with previous research that has shown the negative effects of early marriage on girls' education and psychosocial well-being. The study's results underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the root causes of early marriage and promote girls' education and empowerment in Grong Village and beyond. By understanding the perceptions of women in the area, policymakers and stakeholders can develop effective strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of early marriage and improve the lives of female children.

Recommendations

It was recommended base on the findings as follow:

1. **Promote Girls' Education:** Efforts should be made to promote girls' education and reduce the dropout rate, particularly in areas where early marriage is prevalent. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, provision of scholarships, and mentorship programs.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Economic empowerment programs for girls and their families can help reduce the incidence of early marriage. This can be achieved through vocational training, social support, microfinance programs, and economic support initiatives.
3. **Community-Based Interventions:** Community-based interventions should be implemented to raise awareness about the negative impacts of early marriage on girls' education, health, and psychosocial well-being. This can be achieved through community outreach programs, advocacy, and sensitization campaigns targeting community leaders, parents, and young people.

4. Parents should prioritize their female children's well-being by providing for their basic needs and educating them on reproductive health. This can help prevent risky sexual behaviour, teenage pregnancy, and ultimately, early marriage.

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