

# Issues, beliefs and experience of child marriage and gender-based violence in Uganda

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A Qualitative Study

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It is a scourge on our global society that even today, one in three women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a crisis that extends beyond national and socio-cultural boundaries, across the globe, and across our Commonwealth member countries alike. It affects people of all ages, genders, ethnicities and economic backgrounds. It is an urgent, world-wide human rights issue.

Recognising this, national governments, international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have developed strategies to end violence against women and girls (VAWG). Appropriate national and international laws are a crucial component in safeguarding women's and girls' rights. But alone, they are not enough. From the moment they are born, millions of girls are subjected to multiple forms of violence including rape, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation and child marriage. Survivors may experience trauma, drop out of school, suffer from mental health problems, all of which also have significant social and economic costs.

In spite of the progress made over recent decades, the statistics still tell a shocking and unacceptable story, as do the harrowing individual experiences of the survivors of GBV interviewed by the None in Three Research Centre for this report.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2018), more than half of women in Uganda experience gender-based violence in their lifetime<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that 40% of women aged 20-24 years were first married before the age of 18<sup>2</sup>. The None in Three Uganda team is seeking to prevent the persistent practice of child marriage through their research.

Media attention in countries across the globe raises consciousness of the issue in waves, from the Me Too movement, to the reported 'hidden' pandemic behind the 2020 lockdown due to Covid-19 – a surge in domestic abuse. This is not a new phenomenon, but the growing awareness is a catalyst for action to which we must respond. All countries, all societies need to work to eradicate this pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is working alongside partner organisations on measures that will help our 54 member countries to stem the rising tide of GBV especially school related gender-based violence (SRGBV). Educating to actively promote a gender equal, respectful, non-violent culture with gender aware pedagogy or approaches is key. As a member of the Global Working Group to End School-Related Violence, the Secretariat aims to help practitioners and policy makers in the education sector, apply a gender lens when developing violence prevention, response approaches and safeguarding. SRGBV affects millions of children and young people, especially girls.

The Centre's approach, which we in the Commonwealth subscribe to, is one of prevention through high-quality, gender sensitive education. By engaging young people as adolescents, when attitudes and opinions are forming, we stand the best chance of influencing them for good. The potential for adolescents and young people to act as agents of change and achieve the social transformation necessary to end GBV is tremendous. None in Three's approach includes developing and testing immersive, pro-social computer games, themed around issues of GBV, to help young players build empathy with victims, and to prevent future violence.

We welcome this research and the accompanying three reports (from None in Three in India, Jamaica and the UK) and the contribution that the innovative approach could make to our work. By listening to the lived experiences of both victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence in four study countries, the global research centre has built up a solid evidence base for each of its culturally appropriate, educational video games. It will therefore provide a new resource to help end GBV including school related gender-based violence.

Through renewed commitment and concerted action, we can end domestic and gender-based violence.

**Layne Robinson**  
*Head, Social Policy Development*  
*Commonwealth Secretariat*

# Message from the Commonwealth Secretariat

<sup>1</sup> Global Gender Gap Report 2018, World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

<sup>2</sup> Petroni, Seinhuis, Fenn, Stoebenau & Gregowski, (2017), *New Findings on Child Marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Education is universally acknowledged as a key factor for human development. Education for women and men, girls and boys widens opportunities, choices, incomes, and therefore plays an important role in lifting communities out of poverty. For women and girls, education contributes to the lowering of fertility rates, delay of the age of marriage, leads to smaller family sizes and significant reduction in infant and maternal mortality rates and ultimately increased mobility and productivity of women and girls.

Although the right to education is constitutionally guaranteed for every person in Uganda irrespective of sex, location or other economic and social standing and its benefits are widely recognised, it is unfortunate to note that many girls in Uganda continue to miss out on this opportunity because of teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

This research report reinforces the fact that 25 per cent of adolescent girls aged 10-18 years in Uganda drop out of school due to teenage pregnancy and child marriage. It further highlights the challenges pregnant girls and child mothers encounter. Pregnant girls and child mothers lack funds for health care for themselves and for their babies, they are most times malnourished, they are chased out of their parents' homes, they are forced to drop out of

school and they are not psychologically prepared for the roles and responsibilities of being mothers and in most cases being “wives”.

The study highlights the pains child mothers go through! There is pain carrying the pregnancy, there is pain in unsafe abortion, there is pain and suffering giving birth and parenting a child prematurely. We have learnt that disasters and emergencies such as Covid-19, escalate gender-based violence including teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

The best option for girls, their families and for the country at large, is to prevent teenage pregnancy and child marriage. The time to act is now. The post Covid-19 era provides an opportunity to act on the bold recommendations of this study; protect the rights of pregnant girls and child mothers and commit to take decisive steps to prevent cases of teenage pregnancy, child mothers and child marriages in future. We owe this to ourselves and future generations, to ensure that all women and girls attain their full potential and enjoy their rights.

**Angela Nakafeero**  
*Commissioner Gender and Women Affairs,  
Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social  
Development, Government of Uganda  
International Advisory Group, None in Three*

# Foreword

Gratitude is extended to everyone who has contributed to the development of this research report. Special thanks go to the nine research assistants who supported the collection of data included in this report. Your hard work and dedication is greatly appreciated. Special thanks are extended to our administrative assistant Sharon Adong, for her hard work and dedication during preparation for and the implementation of the qualitative research and continuous moral support rendered to us in the process of writing this report.

The study participants including the women, men, youth and key informants are highly appreciated. Thank you for allowing us to share and learn from your experiences.

Special thanks go to the staff of the Global None in Three Research Centre at the University of Huddersfield in the UK for all the support they accorded us in the process of collecting and analysing the data and writing the report.

# ***Acknowledgements***

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CEDOVIP	Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHRI	Foundation for Human Rights Initiative
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LC	Local council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MOH	Ministry of Health
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UDHS	Uganda Demographic and Health Survey
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UYDEL	Uganda Youth Development Link
VAW	Violence Against Women
WHO	World Health Organisation

# *Abbreviations*

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

**Child marriage** refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child **under the age of 18** and an adult or another child. While the prevalence of child marriage has decreased worldwide – from one in four girls married a decade ago to approximately **one in five** today – the practice remains widespread.<sup>3</sup>

*Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one sixth that among girls.*

# ***Executive Summary***

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>

## Background

This qualitative study forms part of a larger, international None in Three project that aims at investigating and preventing gender-based violence (GBV) in four countries and is funded by UK Research and Innovation through the Global Challenges Research Fund. The study investigated the drivers and consequences of child marriage on the survivors, their families and the community. It further investigated people's conceptualisations of child marriage and the predominant forms and causes of GBV in Uganda. The qualitative study was conducted in six districts in the Northern and Central regions of Uganda. These include: Wakiso, Nakasongola, Kampala, Masaka, Gulu and Amuru.

## Method

This study adopted a cross-sectional qualitative design. It involved obtaining personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs and meanings. The primary respondents of this study were women who got married before they turned 18 years of age. The study participants were recruited from Central and Northern Uganda.

*In total, 45 women who got married as children were interviewed for this study, of whom 12 were formerly abducted as girls by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).*

*Other study participants included men (25 years and above) who had been exposed to violence but were not violent themselves, male youth (16-24 years) who had completed or were at least half way through a violence reduction programme, male youth (16-24 years) who had been exposed to violence but were not violent themselves, and members of the communities (male and female) where survivors of child marriage lived.*

Data was mainly collected using face to face interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in local languages (Acholi and Luganda) to enable us to gain deep insights into the experiences of the women and FGD participants. Existing literature was reviewed to collect data on the trends and prevalence of child marriage and GBV to complement raw data.

# RESULTS

## UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The study explored how participants conceptualised GBV and it emerged that GBV was variously conceived to mean misunderstandings and quarrels between couples in a home, violence meted out to women by their husbands, violations of rights based on gender, general violation of human rights and violation of the rights of vulnerable populations such as children and people with disability (PWD). Most of the study participants viewed GBV as synonymous with human rights violations, domestic violence and violence against children and other vulnerable populations such as PWD.

There was a general consensus that GBV was very common, with some participants estimating the rate to be as high as 70% to 90%. The perceived rates of GBV were much

higher than those reported in demographic and health surveys in the country (see UBOS and ICF 2012; 2018); which could have been attributed to the study participants' tendency to perceive GBV to mean all other forms of violence. The findings also showed that GBV was manifest in all the major forms of physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. Other reported forms included GBV related to cultural practices and gender bias in the distribution of work and execution of formal and informal justice processes.

GBV affected both genders, however women and girls were reported to be its chief victims. While women experienced all the different forms of GBV, men particularly complained about being violated emotionally and treated unfairly when they reported cases of GBV to the authorities (gender bias). Poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, cultural norms, values and practices, women's lack of social and economic

empowerment, religious beliefs and practices, and weak institutional mechanisms emerged as the common causes of GBV. Much of the GBV reported by the study participants was perpetrated by intimate partners.

#### **DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE**

The study identified five main drivers of child marriage, notably: poverty; teenage pregnancy; school dropout; child abuse in the home; and armed conflict. These factors were intricately linked and operated at individual, household and community levels. Poverty mainly contributed to child marriage through increasing the girls' risk of dropping out from school, pushing parents to marry off girls for economic gain and rendering some girls vulnerable to advances of men offering gifts and a better life. School dropout created inactivity that made marriage attractive in the absence of pressure from school. Both the girls and their parents commonly viewed marriage as the best alternative to education. Teenage pregnancy primarily contributed to child marriage through evoking fear, stigma and shame rooted in social norms that illegitimated premarital sex and pregnancy, limited girls' opportunities to continue in school and created tensions that pushed girls to elope. Child abuse at home pushed several girls to opt for marriage to escape the torture and suffering they were subjected to; while armed conflict led to the abduction and forced marriage of others. In addition, the effects of war including insecurity, massive poverty, orphanhood and breakdown in formal and informal institutions incentivised girls, their parents and communities to resort to child marriage for social and economic security and protection.

#### **EFFECTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC**

The child marriage survivors were asked to share their experiences.

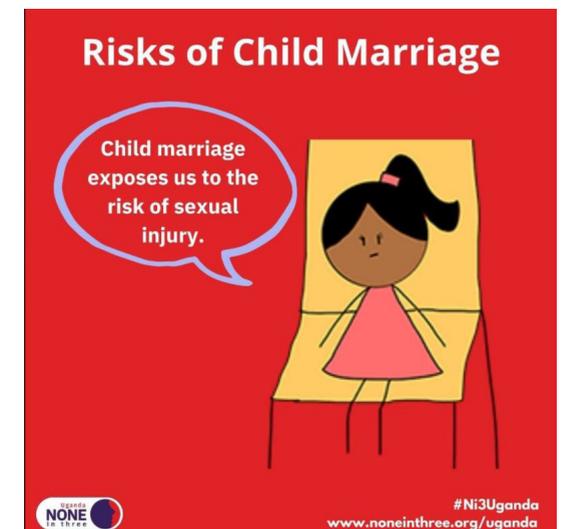
***It emerged that the experiences were generally negative, with most participants reporting a range of social, economic, physical and psychological repercussions of child marriage.***

The socio-economic effects included increased vulnerability to GBV and isolation, with girls who had eloped being particularly vulnerable. Power and age differentials, but also closeness in age between the girl and her husband, increased the risk for GBV. Other socio-economic effects included:

- limited economic participation as the girls were controlled and denied an opportunity to work by their husbands;
- limited decision making power over household matters like income expenditure and reproduction;
- limited educational outcomes and attendant access to both formal and informal economic opportunities;
- high incidence of family breakdown and single parenthood;
- increased risk of abuse and neglect of children born during the union; and
- stigma and rejection from the family and community.

#### **EFFECTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE: PHYSICAL AND HEALTH**

The physical and health consequences included exposure to health and reproductive health risks such as painful sexual intercourse and pregnancy related complications like bleeding, obstructed labour and still births. However, obstetric fistula did not emerge as a key reproductive health effect of child marriage in this study. Other physical and health effects of child marriage included high exposure to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and adverse effects on children's health and development such as malnutrition, stunting and death. The psychological consequences included feelings of regret and sadness and suicidal thoughts associated with lost dreams, childhood and opportunities as well as a heavy burden of childcare following the dissolution of the marriage.





## CONCLUSIONS

There is a limited understanding of what GBV entails in the general populace. GBV, and violence against women (VAW) in particular, remains a major problem in Uganda. GBV may be experienced differently by women and men. GBV is perpetuated by an interplay of behavioural and structural factors at individual, relationship, community and society levels. The various forms of GBV are rooted in stereotypes about masculinity and femininity and social norms that promote male dominance and female subordination as well as normative role expectations. These stereotypes and expectations remain very strong.

Child marriage is driven by mutually reinforcing social, economic and political factors at multiple levels. Parents/guardians contributed to child marriage through acts

of omission and commission such as abuse and neglect of children and marrying off girls for economic gain. However, several parents interviewed for this study did not wish to see their children married at a young age, which signifies positive change in attitudes towards child marriage among parents and communities in Uganda. While parents/guardians directly or indirectly pushed girls into marriage; several girls actively participated and exercised some autonomy in decisions to marry and in the choice of a partner. Enrolment and retention of girls in school is a key protective factor against child marriage. Child marriage has far reaching and in some cases lifelong adverse consequences on the development and wellbeing of not only the survivors and their immediate families but also the community and society at large.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Promote awareness and understanding of GBV*

There is need for more specific and targeted training to increase people's understanding of GBV. Government, through the district community department, should liaise with relevant civil society organisations (CSOs) to mobilise and engage communities in dialogue on the meaning of GBV, its forms, causes and consequences, its relationship with other human rights violations such as domestic violence, and the available support mechanisms, among others.

### *Address factors that perpetuate GBV*

Eliminating or reducing GBV to significantly low levels requires a multipronged approach to address the multilevel factors that perpetuate it. Alcoholism and drug abuse could be addressed through increasing awareness about their dangers to health, relationships and socio-economic development of individuals,

families and the society as a whole. The Uganda Ministry of Health (MOH) in liaison with voluntary and private actors should intensify campaigns to inform people about the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse to their physical, emotional, economic and social wellbeing. Mass media such as radio, television and newspapers could be helpful channels for disseminating such information to the populace. In addition, government should strengthen and improve institutional capacity to enforce existing laws and policies regulating access to and use of alcohol and substances. The Uganda Police Force should be equipped with adequate financial and human resources to enable them to enforce laws and policies on alcohol and substance use. CSOs can play a vital role in facilitating local governments to formulate and implement bylaws regulating the time for alcohol consumption and prohibiting the sale and use of dangerous substances.

### **Changing norms, practices and beliefs**

To change deeply ingrained cultural norms, practices and beliefs, the **Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD)**, and particularly its **Department of Family and Culture**, along with CSOs should concert **efforts to challenge norms that promote male dominance, gender stereotypes and harmful traditional practices**, while advocating for attitude change and adoption of more positive cultural practices. Community dialogues could be useful, to address the need to unlearn negative practices and learn more positive and progressive ones, that promote the rights of all people regardless of gender. Such practices are more likely to support socio-economic development at household, community and country levels.

### **Partnerships, training and resources**

**Engagement of and partnerships with cultural and religious institutions to spearhead the process of learning new social norms is critical to success. Innovative strategies such as prosocial games can be employed as a preventive educational tool to change attitudes of young people in and out of school.** Training to increase effective communication, mutual respect, support and understanding among intimate partners is critical for optimising the protective benefits of women's empowerment. Similar training should be extended to religious leaders, elders and clan leaders, all of whom are key players in providing support to married couples in Uganda to enable them to impart similar values to their clients. Similar competences are vital for those offering formal support such as CSOs, local councils (LCs), police, probation and social welfare officers. Government should further equip institutions addressing GBV such as police and the judiciary with adequate financial and human resources to improve their capacity to respond

to reported incidences of abuse. Training in case management principles, processes and procedures, professional ethics and communication, mediation and counselling skills, among others, may help to improve staff capacity to provide appropriate services and support to clients while minimising gender bias.

### **Multipronged, collaborative approach**

Addressing child marriage requires a multipronged approach that deals with drivers at individual, household and community levels. Multisectoral collaboration is needed, involving the efforts of different government ministries and departments, development partners as well as voluntary and private actors.

### **Improving access to sexual and reproductive health education**

Improving children's and young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is critical in preventing teenage pregnancy. Incorporating age-appropriate sexuality education in school curricula and integrating adolescent and youth friendly reproductive health services in the health care system are some of the ways this could be achieved.

### **Addressing poverty, child abuse and neglect**

To address the impact of poverty, household economic strengthening programmes should be scaled up to improve the capacity of parents/guardians to meet the basic needs of their children including enrolling and maintaining them in school. Since child abuse and neglect play a role in pushing children into marriage, economic strengthening programmes should be complemented with interventions to improve parenting skills and child protection practices at household and community levels. Mass training targeting parents/guardians can be helpful in this regard. This can be organised by the district

community department in partnership with CSOs. To foster sustainability of these efforts, grass roots child protection structures such as Para Social Workers and Child Protection Committees should be equipped with requisite knowledge and skills to continue providing the necessary information and support to parents/guardians and other community members.

### **Promoting school enrolment and completion**

**Strategies that promote school enrolment, retention and completion are critical in preventing child marriage. Community dialogues to change negative attitudes towards the education of the girl child remain necessary.**

We also propose that the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) in partnership with development partners and CSOs could institute a centralised system for tracking school enrolment, retention and completion and providing timely support to children on the verge of dropping out.

School-based social workers should be recruited and trained to facilitate the continuous process of identifying, linking and coordinating support to affected children to minimise the risk of dropping out. In addition, mechanisms to improve the school learning environment should be intensified. The MOES and partners should urgently address factors that push girls out of school such as child abuse, poor sanitation and lack of sanitary pads. Government should enforce the policy on allowing pregnant and girls who have delivered to remain in and return to school, vigorously. Action should be taken against school administrators who, on the grounds of pregnancy, deny the children the opportunity to continue in or re-join school. The MOES should partner with relevant government departments such as the MGLSD, with CSOs and with other partners to establish mechanisms for linking girls who wish to return to school after delivery to support services they may need, including psychosocial counselling and care, child day care services,

and scholastic materials. These services should enable them to cope with the likely stigma from peers, poverty and strained relationships with family, among other impediments to their enrolment and retention in school.

### **Empowering young people through education and training**

**Strategies to empower girls to say no to child marriage are critical. Interventions to educate children about the illegitimacy of marriages below the age of 18 years, the negative consequences of child marriage, its drivers and how to prevent them, and where to seek support when constrained or forced into marriage, are crucial.** Such information should be offered in the sections of the curriculum that address issues of child rights abuse. Debates and child rights clubs for in- and out-of-school children can also be used as a forum for discussing and equipping them with information on the dangers of child marriage, how to prevent it and where to seek support. Prosocial games can be employed as a useful tool for relaying information to children on the impacts of child marriage and where to seek support. Life skills training should be enacted to equip children and young people with the necessary competences to improve their problem-solving capacity and ability to make constructive decisions. Children should be further given information about and encouraged to embrace and utilise alternatives to mainstream education such as vocational training, other than resorting to marriage. Information on alternative government educational programmes such as Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) should be incorporated in the school curriculum and also shared with parents/guardians. Hindrances to accessing vocational education, including issues of availability, acceptance and affordability should also be addressed.

# 1

Defined internationally and in national legislations of several countries as the marriage or union of children below the age of 18 years (Malthus, Greene & Malhora, 2003; Save the Children, 2013), child marriage remains one of the dominant child rights violations in the world. While the practice involves both boys and girls, girls are disproportionately affected (UNICEF, 2018). It is estimated that 12 million girls are married every year compared to about 2.4 million boys (UNICEF, 2018).

## *Introduction*

## 1.1 Introduction

Defined internationally and in national legislations of several countries as the marriage or union of children below the age of 18 years (Malthus, Greene & Malhora, 2003; Save the Children, 2013), child marriage remains one of the dominant child rights violations in the world. While the practice involves both boys and girls, girls are disproportionately affected (UNICEF, 2018). It is estimated that 12 million girls are married every year compared to about 2.4 million boys (UNICEF, 2018).

Estimates suggest that sub-Saharan Africa has surpassed South Asia to emerge as the region with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. An analysis of demographic, health, multiple indicator cluster and country household survey data estimates that 40% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa get into marriage or union before reaching 18 years (UNICEF, 2018). The same report shows that the prevalence of child marriage in South Asia has dropped from almost 50% over a decade ago, to 30%. A much earlier 2005 report estimated that 42% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa get into union before age 18 (UNICEF, 2005) which suggests that the prevalence of the practice in the region has only declined marginally in the last decade. Similar analyses also indicate little decline in the prevalence of child marriages in sub-Saharan Africa over the last 30 years (Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Nguyen & Wodon, 2012; UNICEF, 2015a; Koski, Clark & Nandi, 2017).

Uganda remains one of the countries with unacceptably high rates of child marriage. With an estimated prevalence of 40%, the country ranks 16th in the world (Girls Not Brides, 2019). This is in spite of the development of several interventions to address the problem over the years. Key among these is the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancies (NSCM&TP) 2014/2015 – 2019/2020. It is

against this backdrop that a qualitative study exploring the issues, beliefs and experience of child marriage in Uganda was conducted to explore the underlying causes and consequences of child marriage. This report presents the background of the study, the purpose and objectives of the research, the research problem, research methodology and approach, study results, conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.2 Background of the Qualitative Study

This study forms part of a larger, international None in Three (Ni3) project aimed at investigating and preventing gender-based violence in 4 countries: Uganda, the UK, Jamaica and India. The project is funded by UK Research and Innovation (formerly the Research Councils UK) through the Global Challenges Research Fund and seeks to prevent violence against women and girls through education, using a public-health oriented approach. This approach will expose children and young people (14-17 years) to serious gaming interventions, which are underpinned by case narratives from detailed qualitative research from each participating country. The qualitative research supported the development of games that reflect the local context and which utilise role playing, gender and role switching strategies to build empathy and promote understanding. Game scenarios seek to promote gender equality and elevate the status of women and girls, both of which are at the heart of sustainable development. The use of prosocial gaming technology for changing attitudes and promoting behavioural change through experiential learning has been shown to be a promising approach in recent work (Boduszek et al. 2019). This study aimed at exploring the experiences of survivors of child marriage in Uganda, in order to inform the design of a prosocial video game to influence the attitudes of young people and raise awareness and help-seeking behaviour for affected children.

## 1.3 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The study investigated the drivers and consequences of child marriage on the survivors, their families and the community. It further investigated people's conceptualisations of the predominant forms and causes of GBV in Uganda.

### Specific Objectives

1. To explore social and cultural predictors/drivers of child marriage among girls at individual, household and community level
2. To explore the consequence of child marriage for both the victims and for Ugandan society
3. To investigate the conceptualisations, prevalence, predominant forms and causes of GBV in Uganda
4. To extract lessons that can be used to develop ecologically sound anti-GBV video games aimed at changing cultural, social, religious and other attitudes towards GBV and child marriage in Uganda

## 1.4 Situation of Gender-based Violence (GBV) and Child Marriage in Uganda

### 1.4.1 Trends and patterns of child marriage

The 1995 Uganda Constitution sets the age of consent and thus minimum legal age for marriage for both females and males in the country at 18 years. Child marriage in Uganda is therefore defined as the marriage or union of girls and boys below 18 years. It should be noted that in Uganda, marriage is used in reference to both formal and informal unions. Formal unions include those that are customarily/traditionally recognised or conducted by religious leaders and government officials. In informal unions the couple lives together as husband and wife, without legalising the relationship through any of the formal mechanisms (MGLSD, 2015a).

The prevalence of child marriage in Uganda has been declining in recent years (UBOS and ICF, 2012; Koski et al, 2017). The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) reports that the proportion of girls who married before age 15 and 18 declined from 19.6% and 56% in 1995 to 15% and 49% in 2011, respectively (UBOS, 1996; UBOS and ICF, 2012). Recent estimates from UNICEF show that the prevalence of child marriage in Uganda has further declined to 40% (UNICEF, 2018). However, Uganda remains one of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage in East and Southern Africa. The current prevalence rate of 40% is higher than the sub-regional average of 35% (UNICEF, 2018). In addition, the median age at first marriage for Ugandan women has remained consistently low over the years. The UBOS reports that the median age at first marriage among women aged 25 to 49 years was 17.9 years (UBOS and ICF, 2012), which suggests that a large proportion of girls living in Uganda married before their 18th birthday. In contrast men are reported to marry at a relatively later age, with the median age at first marriage for men aged 25 to 49 years being 22.3 years (UBOS and ICF, 2012). In addition, findings from the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) reveal that

**11.6% and 40.4% of ever married women aged 20-49 years were married by the age of 15 and 18 years, respectively; as opposed to 0.1% and 8.7% of men in the same age category.**

As in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, the risk for child marriage in Uganda is reported to vary by sex, residence, region, level of education, socio-economic status, ethnicity and religion. Girls are at a higher risk of getting married before age 18 compared to boys. UDHS data of 2011 show that only 9% of boys marry before turning 18 years compared to 49% of girls (UBOS and ICF, 2012). The same study shows that women aged 20-49 in urban areas were less likely to

marry before age 20 compared to those in rural areas whose median age at first marriage was 17.8 years. An analysis of UDHS data of 2006 also found that urban women married a couple of years later than those residing in rural areas (Ayiga & Rampagane, 2013). Reports further show that girls in the Northern region were more likely to marry below 18 years compared to those in other regions of the country. The median age at first marriage in the Northern region was reported to be 16.7 years, compared to the higher median age of 20.7 years recorded in Kampala City (UBOS and ICF, 2012). On average, girls in the Northern region marry at least a year earlier than those in the Central region (UBOS and ICF, 2012; Ayiga & Rampagane, 2013).

In regard to education and socio-economic status, the risk for child marriage increases with a lower education and wealth quintile. Ayiga and Rampagane (2013) report that women with secondary and tertiary education married six or nine years later, respectively, compared to those without primary education. Similarly, the UBOS reports a lower than average median age at first marriage of 16.9 years for women with no education compared to 20.8 years for those who had attained secondary education (UBOS and ICF, 2012). In addition, few women in the highest wealth quintile were reported to marry before age 20 (UBOS and ICF, 2012). In terms of ethnicity and religion, being Luo and affiliated to Islam is shown to increase the risk of marrying at an earlier age. Ayiga and Rampagane (2013) report that being Luo significantly reduced the age at first marriage by 11% while Muslim women married almost a year earlier than Christians. The two authors further identify age at sexual debut as a risk factor for marrying before age 18. They show that girls' initiation of sexual activity before 18 years significantly increases their likelihood of marrying before age 18.

#### **1.4.2 Manifestations and prevalence of GBV**

In Uganda, GBV manifests in the forms of physical, sexual, emotional and economic

violence as well as harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, child marriage and dowry related violence (MGLSD, 2015b). While GBV affects women, men, girls and boys irrespective of social, economic or political status (UBOS and ICF, 2007, 2012; MGLSD, 2016); women and girls are the most common victims. This is because GBV in Uganda, as in several other parts of the world, is mainly rooted in patriarchal social structures which assign roles to men and women in a way that perpetuates male dominance and female subordination, creating unequal power relations in families and the community (MGLSD, 2015b).

#### ***Evidence shows generally higher rates of physical, sexual and emotional violence among women and girls compared to men and boys.***

The UDHS of 2006 found that 60% of women aged 15-49 years had ever experienced physical violence since turning 15 years compared to 53% of men; while 39% of women reported ever experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime compared to only 11% of men. The study further found that men were less likely to have experienced physical violence in the past 12 months preceding the survey compared to women (20% of men vs. 34% of women). In addition, women were four times more likely than men to have experienced both physical and sexual violence (29% vs. 7%). Women aged 15-49 years also experienced higher rates than men of intimate partner violence (IPV) from spouses they were married to or living with as if they were married. 48% of women had ever experienced physical violence, 36% sexual violence and 49% emotional violence perpetrated by a spouse. This was in stark contrast with the experiences of men, where only 20%, 7% and 35% reported ever suffering physical, sexual and emotional violence, respectively, at the hands of their partner. Overall, 68% of women had ever experienced any form of spousal violence compared to 43.2% of men.

The Demographic and Health Surveys of both 2011 and 2016 recorded similar proportions of physical violence among women and men aged 15-49 years, that is, 56% for both women and men in 2011 and 51% for women and 52% for men in 2016. However, both surveys report that more women than men experienced physical violence in the preceding 12 months before the studies (27% for women vs 20% for men in 2011 and 22% for women and 20% for men in 2016). In regard to sexual violence, the UDHS of 2016 reports that more than twice as many women (22%) than men (8%) had ever experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. In addition, a higher proportion of women (13%) than men (4%) had experienced sexual violence in the past one year. The study further shows that women are still more likely to experience physical (44%), emotional (41%) and sexual violence (21%) at the hands of their spouse compared to men. The 2016 study records the rates of spousal physical, emotional and sexual violence among men as 21%, 36% and 9%, respectively. On the whole, women in Uganda tend to experience higher incidences of physical, sexual and emotional violence than men (UBOS and ICF, 2007, 2018).

GBV in Uganda is attributed to a myriad of socio-economic factors including cultural norms, values and practices, poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse and tension arising from increasing economic independence of women, among others (UBOS and MGLSD, 2019). The risk factors for experiencing various forms of GBV in Uganda include sex, age, pregnancy, marital status, parity, residence and education (UBOS and ICF, 2007, 2012, 2018).

### **1.5 The Research Problem and Rationale**

Child marriage remains unacceptably high in Uganda. The practice is associated with a range of undesirable outcomes for the girls, their families, communities and the country at large. These include intergenerational poverty, low levels of education attainment, high fertility,

pregnancy related complications, infant mortality and GBV (Clark, Bruce & Dude, 2006; Erulkar, 2013; Raj & Boehmer, 2013; Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; Yu, Mason, Crum, Cappa & Hotchkiss, 2016; Efevbera, Bhabha, Farmer & Fink, 2017). The Government of Uganda has committed to addressing this problem by ratifying various global and regional conventions and declarations and developing several policy documents including The National Strategy for Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy 2015-2020; 2010; 2014); the National Vision 2014 -2020; the National Gender Policy (2007); and other sector policies and strategic plans.

Whereas different interventions to address the problem have been executed, they usually focus on the aftermath of child marriage.

#### ***Sustainable prevention strategies that tackle its social and cultural drivers among the young are also urgently needed.***

Therefore, recognising that child marriage is a global problem which is significantly impacted by local social, cultural and economic factors, is critical in identifying sustainable solutions. However, this cannot be understood without high quality integrative research methods which address socio-cultural specificity. Digital/serious gaming technologies are an underutilised educational tool in raising awareness of the drivers of child marriage and changing attitudes/values that fuel the problem. The use of social media, within the context of a comprehensive communication and visibility strategy, provides the most optimal of opportunities for social transformation since it enables the large-scale engagement of men, women and children; a contribution that this study will make.

# 2

## ***Study Design, Methods And Implementation***



This study adopted a cross-sectional qualitative design. It involved obtaining personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs and meanings. Therefore, the adoption of qualitative methods was considered the most appropriate approach for exploring the experiences of survivors and perpetrators of GBV. The primary respondents of this study were women who got married before they turned 18 years of age. The study participants were recruited from Central and Northern Uganda. In total, 45 women who got married as children were interviewed for this study, of whom 12 were formerly abducted as girls by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In addition, there were 112 men and male youth participants including men (25 years and above) who had been exposed to violence but were not violent themselves, male youth (16-24 years) who had completed or were at least half way through a violence reduction programme and, male youth (16-24 years) who had been exposed to violence but were not violent themselves. Two other groups of participants were 40 female community members and 11 key informants from international agencies and CSOs like UNFPA, district Probation and Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers and officials from the Ministry of Children Affairs.

Study participants were identified by local leaders and referred to us for interviews. In other instances, participants were asked to recommend women who got married before 18 years, who were then contacted by our research team. Other participants were reached through community based organisations working with women.

Data was mainly collected using face to face interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in local languages (Acholi and Luganda) to enable us to gain deep insights into the experiences of the women and FGD participants. Existing literature was reviewed to collect data on the trends and prevalence of child marriage to complement raw data. All the interviews and discussions were audio recorded, transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts were imported into the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo v.12, for management of the analysis of emerging patterns.

The consent of the participants was sought before involving them in the study. To protect the privacy of the study participants only false names are used in this report. Details of the ethics of this study can be found in Appendix 1.

3

*Results*



### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we present the study results according to themes derived from the specific objectives of the study. These included: to explore social and cultural predictors/drivers of child marriage among girls at individual, household and community level; to explore the consequences of child marriages for both the victims and societies in which they occur; to investigate the conceptualisation, prevalence, predominant forms and causes of GBV in Uganda; and to extract lessons that can be used to develop ecologically sound anti-GBV video games aimed at changing cultural, social, religious and other attitudes towards GBV and child marriage in Uganda.

Table 1:  
Socio-demographic characteristics of female study participants who were child marriage survivors

Characteristic	Frequency (N=45)	Percentage (%)
<b>Region</b>		
Central	23	51.1
Northern	22	48.8
<b>Current Age (years)</b>		
15-19	6	13. Mar
20-25	11	24. Apr
26-30	10	22. Feb
31-35	8	17. Jul
36-40	4	08. Aug
Above 40 years	2	03. Aug
<b>Age at first marriage (years)</b>		
Nov 13	5	11. Jan
14-16	31	68.8
17-19	6	13. Mar
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	35	77.7
Separated/divorced	10	22. Feb

### 3.2 Characteristics of Study Participants

The study involved a total of 45 child marriage survivors from the central and northern regions of Uganda. Their age at first marriage ranged from 10 to 17 years. All the women were of reproductive age. Almost all the women had attained some level of formal education. However, only six of them completed lower secondary education (S1-S4). Most women were currently married, however, only six were still married to their first partners. While most (66.5%) of the women were involved in an income generating activity, about one third (33.3%) had no source of livelihood at the time of the study.

#### Status of first marriage

Still Married	6	13. Mar
Separated/divorced	39	86.7

#### Family Type

Polygamous	26	57.7
Monogamous	19	19

#### Number of children

01. Mar	27	60
04. Jun	14	31. Jan
07. Sep	2	04. Apr

#### Highest level of Education

No formal education	1	02. Feb
Primary	33	73.3
Secondary	11	24. Apr

#### Main income generating activity

Small/petty business	8	17. Jul
Farming	15	33.3
Causal labour	7	15. May
No source of income	15	No source of income 33.3

### 3.3 Conceptualisation, Prevalence, Manifestations and Causes of GBV

#### 3.3.1 Participants' conceptualisation of GBV

GBV was variously conceived as misunderstandings and quarrels between couples in a home, violence meted out to women by their husbands, violations of rights based on gender, general violation of human rights and violation of the rights of vulnerable populations such as children and people with disability (PWDs).

*According to me gender-based violence is the violation of someone's rights because of their gender identity. For example, people with disabilities which applies to males and females. You may find that when some buildings are constructed for example flats,*

*they don't put provisions for PWDs like where to pass, hence you find a woman when trying to climb stairs but she can't even walk, so she is suffering... - (FGD with Male Community Members Central Region)*

*In a home there is father, mother and children in that at times tension comes up mostly from the parents. Take for instance a woman left home and the man gets another wife and the children are left under the care of the stepmother who mistreats them; and at the end they are even denied school fees, so they end up suffering hence violence in a home. (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent Northern Region)*

*GBV means that both man and woman have misunderstandings in the family. (FGD with Male Community Members Central Region)*

**Gender-based violence from my side is the abuse which happens in a home between husband and wife with children among them and when all the time they are quarrelling. (FGD with Female Community Members Northern Region)**

**To me, gender-based violence is the way your husband treats you, and generally if he does not respect and fights you all the time... that is my understanding of [GBV] I can say. (FGD with Female Community Members Northern Region)**

**To me, I think when someone mentions GBV, I think it's when someone is mistreated or domestically abused because of their sex for example a man mistreating a woman because he is a man, he is the household head and therefore more superior to a woman or if you go to apply for a job, and you are disqualified because of being a woman, or when you are given that job, you are paid less salary compared to your male co-workers with whom you are serving in the position; just because you are female. (FGD with Female Community Members Central Region)**

**I understand gender-based violence to mean removing the rights of a person. A person has their rights. I understand gender-based violence to mean that you have taken away the rights of a person. For example; it might be that they are not eating, you are beating them up, you are making them do very strenuous jobs... (FGD with Male Youth in a Violence Reduction Programme Central Region)**

Some of the study participants' conceptualisations of GBV reflected international definitions of the concept as

**The limited understanding of GBV among most study participants highlights the need for training and awareness campaigns on the subject.**

violence that is based on gendered expectations, sex or gender identity of individuals (UNFPA, 2010), while others did not. The views of the majority of the study participants showed that they mixed up GBV with human rights abuse, domestic violence in general, and violence against children and other vulnerable populations. The participants

whose conceptualisations of GBV conformed to international definitions of the concept were mainly those who reported to have attended several training and awareness campaigns specifically focusing on GBV. Indeed, some of them were mobilisers and volunteers working for renowned anti-GBV agencies in the country such as the Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP). The limited understanding of GBV among the bulk of the study participants points to the need for more rigorous and targeted training and awareness campaigns on the subject.

### 3.3.2 Prevalence of GBV

There was a general consensus that GBV was very common, with some participants estimating the rate to be as high as 70% to 90%. These perceived rates of GBV are considerably higher than those reported in demographic and health surveys in the country (see UBOS and ICF 2012; 2018). This could be due to the study participants' tendency to confuse GBV with all other forms of violence. However, as indicated in several reports in the country (MGLSD, 2015b; UBOS and ICF, 2018) this study also found that the prevalence of GBV was perceived to be much higher than is reported. The participants indicated that reported levels were underestimates because of the widespread culture of silence, among both men and women. A FGD participant who volunteered as an anti GBV activist explained:

*It [GBV] is very common but the problem is silence. Many cases go unreported or unnoticed. As community activists when we are moving around in different zones or villages, people always stop us and report cases where women are being tortured, beaten, and denied food, but when you reach out to them to see how best to help, most of these victims will say they are okay, they would actually deny being victims, so such cases are very common, but the silence!*

Among women, silence was mainly attributed to fears of being stigmatised, losing the marriage and the attendant status that comes with it and losing support from husbands on whom they are often dependent.

*...the problem is most women have failed to stand up and end the silence, to stand up and fight for their rights despite the sensitisation programmes that have been put in place. They think they will lose their marriage, so because they want to have that status which they think is prestigious, they resort to silence. In addition to that most women are dependent on men; they don't work, so often times when they face GBV, they fear to report to the authorities because they can't sustain themselves in case their husbands are arrested. Then, when there is a case of say rape, people will always talk about it and point fingers at the victim, so there is a way it creates stigma. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)*

For men, the fear of being stigmatised and losing respect among peers and in the society was identified as the main factor fuelling their silence.

*...we men are suffering a lot though we don't say it in the community. For example, I cannot go to the elders and sit them down to tell them how my wife beat me last night, obviously I will become a laughing stock to them... (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent, Northern Region)*

*Men have this mind set of being strong, they also fear being undermined and besides men tend to keep their problems to themselves compared to the women. They also have the fear of being laughed at by their fellow men. (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent, Central Region)*

*To supplement, men fear embarrassment. In some cases, when you go to report domestic violence to police they ask you wondering that you are a man who puts on trousers and reporting that you have been beaten by a wife. So we feel ashamed to report such cases. (FGD with Youth Exposed to Violence but not Violent, Northern Region)*

Silence around GBV due to fears of stigma and women's dependent and subordinate position in society have also been reported in several studies (Brandt, 2003; Gill, 2004; Simister and Mehta, 2010). However, the role the construct of masculinity in a given community may play in perpetuating silence around GBV aimed at men remains under-explored.

Unsurprisingly, most of the study participants reported that GBV mainly affected women and girls in their communities.

*I think in our area, [it is] women [that] are mostly affected because they are perceived to be inferior; so men tend to have more power and control at home. Even in the cases of GBV [reported] at LCs (local councils) and police, it's the women that are always victims. (FGD with Female Community Members Central Region)*

*Me too I say it is women mostly affected and it's not only at the household level, but at all levels, be it in politics, at work institutions. So yes men are also affected but not so much as compared to women who are affected in all spheres of life. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)*

The exception were men in a fishing community, some of whom felt that they were more victimised than women while others opined that GBV among men and women was 50-50, that is, men and women were abused in equal measure. Further inquiry revealed that these men felt victimised because their women enjoyed a relative level of independence and protection from the authorities and openly asserted themselves against the authority of the men as reflected in excerpts from discussions with men in the fishing community below.

*Another form of violence [against men] is when your wife goes for karaoke and you take up the responsibility of bathing the kids. She will come back at night at 3:00 am and it is you the husband to open for her; imagine that. When she comes back and you ask her where she is coming from, she will respond angrily, 'if you can't manage me leave me alone, leave me to go because those who can manage me are there'.*

*You might go to work as a man and you don't leave money home, when she has children. So when you come back from work and ask for food, she also asks you whether you left behind money. That is disrespect and violence [against men] to me.*

*The violence we experience as men is as a result of the freedom that was given to women. When you get a misunderstanding at home, your wife will report to police and a man will be mistreated in such a way that they can even tell you to leave your home and the wife takes control. That is the most pressing issue for men [here].*

From the excerpts we can see that it is the weakening power and control over women and having to assume roles such as childcare, that are traditionally considered for women, that the men from the fishing community conceived as violence aimed at them. This points to rigid gender norms in the distribution of work and place of women in society. Fishing communities

in Uganda usually attract business people. Thus, most women in these areas are relatively independent; running economic projects or even relying on commercial sex work for survival. Therefore, they are less likely to be submissive and unaware of their rights.

Literature shows that women's empowerment often threatens men's dominant position; creating resentment and tensions that may exacerbate violence against women (VAW) (Simister and Mehta, 2010; UNFPA, 2010)). This underlines the need for continuous efforts to change men's conception of femininity and masculinity.

### 3.3.3 Manifestations of GBV

The findings show that GBV manifests in all the major forms of physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. However, the participants reported that physical, sexual and emotional violence were the most prevalent of the four forms. These reports are consistent with findings from demographic and health surveys which show particularly high levels of physical, sexual and emotional violence in Uganda (see UBOS and ICF, 2007, 2012, 2018).

The main form of physical GBV identified by participants was battering. Women were reported to be the main victims of this form of abuse. In addition, isolated incidences of stabbing, murdering and burning with hot water were cited.

*It is common for husbands to beat, cane and slap women when they do something that they see as not right to them. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)*

*...most women think that if a man doesn't beat or hit you, it means he doesn't love you, so some men take advantage of such statements and beat up their wives severely, to me physical abuse is really too much in our community. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)*

Sexual violence was reported mainly to occur in the form of forceful sex, particularly in marital relationships, sexual harassment in the workplace and defilement, which includes child marriage.

*I think we should add on sexual abuse, on top of those two mentioned forms [physical and emotional violence], because even when you look at young girls they are always [sexually] abused while still young. (FGD with Female Community Members Northern Region)*

*...that aside we who reach out to the ladies to counsel and talk to them about marriage, we are always overwhelmed by the number of women who open up to us that they are always raped instead of having consensual sex; you know, without any fore play, at times they are sleeping and all of a sudden they feel something penetrating them. Can you imagine? (FGD with Female Community Members Central Region)*

*In addition, we have another form of gender-based violence in the jobs [market], some bosses force women to sleep with them in order to give them jobs. (FGD with Male Community Members Central Region)*

Sexual harassment and forceful sex were reported as mainly affecting women. Several male study participants asserted their belief in their "right" to have sex with their wives whenever they wish. Such attitudes are cited as key drivers of sexual violence against women (UNFPA, 2010).

*The number one violence against men is the issue of Odwel (sexual satisfaction). Most times women out of the blue just get very moody and they tend to deny their husbands sex which is a conjugal right. This happens many times; it could even be a month.... (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent, Northern Region)*

*It is true that we men face violence in bedrooms. On a given day, she might tell you that, taata (daddy) Amina, please buy for me some Vaseline. Then you tell her to wait until the following day. When you enter the bedroom, akukuba mugoongo (she ignores you), isn't that mistreatment? Because I have told her that I will buy the Vaseline the following day. She will tell you, 'if you don't buy for me the Vaseline, sigenda kukukombyako (I won't have sex with you)'. (FGD with Male Community Members Central Region)*

Emotional violence manifests in the form of insults, being ignored and disrespected and turning the children against the intimate partner. Being ignored, disrespected and influencing the children to turn against one of the parents were mainly reported by men.

*To me violence is what I interpret as lack of respect from people around you and most of all from for example my husband; like my husband was constantly insulting and slapping me several times. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)*

*The kind of gender-based violence I know is based on my own experience. The wife will say to you that we were not born together or from the same home. She then starts mistreating you and will also encourage the children to mistreat you. Just like the others have said, you will come home and nobody will be there to welcome you or to receive the items that you brought home. They will not respond to your greetings. They make you feel so bad that you can think about going back to where you came from... (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent, Central Region)*

With regard to economic violence, it was reported that women and girls were commonly denied opportunities to work and access education, respectively.

***This kind of violence comes in a manner of bullying. Like when a man does not want you to do anything, for example, like starting up a business and they take away your money so that you cannot leave their home. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

***Women are denied an opportunity to work, boys go to school but girls don't. Sometimes some parents like my father as an example, for him he doesn't like girls but he likes boys and supports them in school. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

***It was further reported that some men forcefully take women's money away, while others deliberately refuse to provide for the family leaving the burden on the women.***

***...as a woman you may be operating your income generating activities and a man may not be doing anything to generate income but every time you go back home, he takes your money by force... (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

***Some of these men don't give you money for food, go and sleep outside, marry other women, [and] abandon the responsibility of caring for the children to you alone. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

Besides physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence, participants identified GBV related to cultural practices such as bride price and female genital mutilation.

***Some husbands treat women with a lot of disrespect, they perceive them as property because they paid bride price. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)***

***We hear from what is happening in other communities, for instance mutilation of the girls' private parts, but we have not experienced that in this community. (FGD with Male Community Members, Northern Region)***

In addition, gender bias in the distribution of work and execution of formal and informal justice processes in response to GBV was also reported.

***Even tasks are classified, hard tasks are given to boys, yes that is gender-based violence as well...For example telling a boy to work as a porter even when he is not capable but because he is male. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

While men reported being treated unfairly in their engagements with the formal justice system, some women raised similar complaints about the informal mechanisms of addressing GBV at family level.

***When we quarrel, your wife will report as a must and you can't win that case. Yes, you might quarrel with your wife and she will batter you. You can't report because of fear and when you report the case to police, they will say you are guilty; the existing laws favour women. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

***Another form of violence I have observed is that when you go to judicial bodies both man and woman, they have a perception that it is always a man who is guilty [the perpetrator]. Even when your wife beats you and you report, they will blame the man. So that is another form of violence. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

***Most times I have reported when I have problems with my husband. Both my in-laws and my parents end up supporting my husband; claiming that me as a woman I am in the wrong and my husband is ever right. So, there is really no support for us women. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

It is evident that much of the GBV reported by the study participants is perpetrated by intimate partners. This affirms the findings of studies

that report high rates of IPV in various parts of Uganda (see UBOS and ICF, 2007, 2012, 2018; MGLSD, 2015b; Black et al, 2019). In addition, gender norms and stereotypes and perceptions of women and girls as subordinate to men greatly impinge on the forms of GBV reported above. This pattern lends itself to the view that GBV is rooted in unequal power relationships between women and men along with normative role expectations in a given society (Bloom, 2008; UBOS and ICF, 2012; SIDA, 2015). Therefore, interventions focusing on identifying and changing attitudes and social norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequality may contribute significantly to addressing GBV in Uganda.

### 3.3.4 Causes of GBV

The participants identified a range of social, economic, cultural, psychological and institutional factors that contribute to GBV in their communities. These include poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, cultural norms, values and practices, women's social and economic empowerment, religious beliefs and practices and weak institutional mechanisms for addressing GBV.

#### a) Poverty

Several participants reported that poverty and attendant financial distress fuelled physical and emotional IPV, while poor families often married off young girls to accumulate wealth.

***I had forgotten, poverty. Poverty is also a big cause of GBV in many families. GBV is very common due to poverty. When a man earns less, or fails to put food on the table he becomes stressed and furious. He starts beating and yelling at everyone in the home. Even women themselves, they become demanding and when a man fails to provide, there can't be peace at home. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)***

***In most cases, what causes violence between couples is unemployment that incapacitates men from taking care of their families; and usually if their wives ask them for money, they get offended and start quarrelling and fighting. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

***Sometimes you may go to work and fail to get money, then you inform your wife that things didn't work out on that day. Instead of understanding she starts quarrelling saying, 'so you are telling me that things didn't work out so what should I do, should we stay hungry today?' Yet you never intended to fail to get money. Then she stresses and disturbs your peace. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

***Parents send their daughter into marriage because they feel through marrying them off, they can be able to get some money from the dowry to address their [basic] needs such as buying food at home and paying rent. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

The tendency of financially distressed men to engage in violence and betrothal of young girls from poor families for economic gain have been reported elsewhere (UNICEF, 2005; Nour, 2006; The World Bank, 2009; MGLSD, 2011).

#### b) Alcohol and substance abuse

IPV is also commonly fuelled by alcohol and substance abuse. Our respondents reported that alcohol and substances impair the consumers' sense of reasoning and ability to protect themselves, thereby increasing their risk of perpetrating and falling victim to GBV.

***...our community is indeed a slum area, and on top of that we have very many types of drugs like kubar, marijuana, cocaine, very many types, sisha etc. Like for instance I have a neighbour who usually hosts a girl; this girl***

**usually puts some drugs under her tongue but in 20 minutes or less she blacks out. It is easy to rape such a person. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)**

**You also find in some homes men rape women, a man goes back home when he is drunk and forces the wife to have sex when she is not in the mood. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)**

**The scar you see here on my hand is the effect of my wife's action. We had a quarrel then I went out to drink. I came back drunk and just slept off. I didn't know that she was boiling water to burn me. I was awakened by extreme pain, only to realise that she had poured boiling water on me. She left the same night and has never come back home until now. (FGD with Male Community Members, Northern Region)**

**Me I think it is because of too much drug and alcohol abuse, you know we have very many bars in our community, so the drugs and alcohol influence men to commit GBV in the homes. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)**

In addition, alcohol abuse may undermine people's capacity to fulfil expected responsibilities in the home; creating tensions that commonly culminate in violence.

**When a man joins groups of other men who are alcoholic, he will drink and even forget to buy food for his family. As a woman, you must struggle to ensure that the children have eaten. When you try to talk to your husband to stop misbehaving, he becomes violent towards you. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)**

**The issue is about adultery and alcoholism. She might go to drink and after she goes out to commit adultery; remember the husband is at home. When she comes back [home],**

**then you try to talk to her about it; due to too much alcohol the quarrel begins from there. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)**

The data show that alcohol and substance abuse contributes to making men and women both victims and perpetrators of GBV. While alcohol and substance abuse is one of the most reported contributing factors to GBV the world over (The World Bank, 2009, WHO, 2014; UBOS and ICF, 2007, 2018), available literature mainly discusses how it influences men to perpetrate violence against women. There is little evidence on how alcohol consumption may influence perpetration of GBV by women.

#### c) Cultural norms, values and practices

Cultural norms that promote male domination and female subordination, normalisation of and silence about incidences of violence and a low social and economic status for women were cited as key perpetuators of GBV.

**When I talk about physical [violence], especially on the women's side; women over fear men. We often give them more respect and forget that we are also important; and this I would say is brought about by culture. Most women think that if a man doesn't beat or hit you, it means he doesn't love you, so some men take advantage of such statements and beat up their wives severely. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)**

**Usually, our tradition has made us women inferior, in a way that if a man talks, you as a woman you should listen without talking back and if you talk back, they label you disrespectful. So even if a man beats you up, traditionally, a woman may not be supported because, they feel a man should beat his wife. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)**

**What makes women vulnerable and what I feel is bringing a lot of violence is the fact that men are disrespectful towards women; because they marry as many women as they want and they expect their wives not to say anything since they are just married on their [men's] land. They usually tell their wives to either choose to stay in the marriage or to leave with their children. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)**

**Me I think its societal norms, or culture. For instance, many women think when they are beaten they are loved. In the same way, when a man is beaten by his wife, he won't come to report due to the fear of getting ashamed or lowering his masculinity. This means that GBV becomes inevitable, and thus such social factors will sustain it. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)**

**...For instance, there is a lady that I know who got married traditionally and the husband paid bride price. The man would abuse her in many ways, physically, emotionally, and many other forms of violence, but instead of the woman fighting for her rights or seeking support and assistance she would always suffer in silence claiming that the man had paid for her [paid bride price]. She thought she was supposed to endure all that because the man had paid for her... she endured all the beatings and torture because of the bride price that was paid to her parents. So my point is, very many people are experiencing violence in our community but they are suffering in silence; they don't know that it's a crime or that it's their right to not to be harassed. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)**

**"very many people are experiencing violence in our community but they are suffering in silence; they don't know that it's a crime or that it's their right to not to be harassed."**

The findings on the contribution of culture to GBV are consistent with several studies conducted in Uganda and other parts of the world (Gqola, 2007; Simister and Mehta, 2010; Ochen 2011; Ochen 2013a; 2013b; WHO, 2014; Black et al, 2019). They underline the need for continuous engagement of communities to change negative cultural norms, values and practices.

#### d) Women's social and economic empowerment

Women's social and economic empowerment in a context that promotes male dominance and control was shown to create tensions that increased the risk for GBV as men attempted to reassert their power over what they considered to be "disrespectful" and "errant" women.

**What normally causes this [GBV], are the kind of women we get. Some women we marry are more educated than their husbands and therefore have more financial strength than their partners. These kinds of women do not respect their husbands. Educated women are always so busy, have a lot of friends and they are up and down visiting friends and get no time for their home. When the husband complains about the lifestyles, they will disrespect your family and decide to rent their own homes and as a man you will want to show your power as the head of the family, and this brings a fight in the house. I am saying this from personal experience. (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent, Northern Region).**

**Gender-based violence takes many forms. Among adults there is domestic violence which is as a result of gender balance. Women no longer know that I am a woman in this home and the man is the head. So, it leads to domestic violence. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)**

In addition, some men reported that possession of money gave women confidence to abuse them.

***We face gender-based violence due to economic factors this way; you may give 50,000 [Uganda shillings] to your wife to start a business of selling fuel to get money. But when the business grows and she gets a lot of money, she will insult and disrespect you not knowing that it was you who gave her the start-up capital of 50,000. Then she continues to mistreat me because of the money she has. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

Similar to previous studies, these findings suggest that the social and economic empowerment of women may increase the risk for VAW (see Simister and Mehta, 2010; UNFPA, 2010). While the empowerment of women is generally protective against VAW (Jewkes, 2003 cited in The World Bank, 2009), these data suggest that it should be combined with interventions to inculcate a culture of mutual respect, support and understanding towards each other in marital or other relationships that involve women and men for sustainable outcomes (see also Ochen, 2017).

#### e) Weak institutional mechanisms for addressing GBV

Corruption and inefficiency in the criminal justice system was reported to sustain GBV in the community. Corruption promoted impunity among the perpetrators, several of whom committed GBV with the confidence that they could use money to buy off the authorities or sabotage the prosecution process.

***Empowerment of women should be combined with interventions to encourage mutual respect, support and understanding towards each other in relationships between women and men.***

***The main issue that has sustained GBV is corruption. When GBV cases are forwarded to police and LC (local council), the one with money always wins. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)***

***The main reason is money; because someone has money he will marry a young girl below 18 years... he will say, 'I have money, I will pay the State so that they misplace the file'. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region).***

It was further observed that the weak enforcement of laws against GBV encouraged several people to commit the crime.

***I think it's because of the loopholes in the authorities. Our judicial and law making organs are weak; they make laws but never follow up to implement them or to see whether people are abiding [by them]. If they could put strict laws and enforce them probably GBV would be no more. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)***

In addition, participants indicated that delays in responding to reported threats of violence provided room for the perpetrators to implement their plans.

***Whenever an issue emerges and you report to police, they take the matter for granted. Police wants evidence; that's why these days, if someone goes to police to report and they don't give him attention, they find dead bodies. Someone says, 'if that alternative has failed, let me revenge'. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

The identified effects of weaknesses in the institutional framework for responding to GBV call for measures to improve the efficacy of

the criminal justice system as part of a holistic approach to addressing the problem.

#### f) Religious beliefs and practice

Some religious beliefs and practices were reported to promote discrimination and violation of the rights of women. The study participants cited polygyny, acceptance of child marriage, segregation of women from men during prayers and denying women an opportunity to access mosques during their menses, as practised in Islam, as particularly oppressive.

***I also normally see this among the Muslims, women are left behind in terms of development; that is why you see even during prayers, women conduct their prayers from aside. There is a way they look at women as useless people. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

***I think gender-based violence is common in Islam. I am not a Muslim, but I don't talk ill against it [Islam]. In Islam, when a lady is in her periods, she is not allowed to enter the mosque. She might want to go for prayers but because she is in her periods, she can't be allowed to enter the mosque. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

***In addition to R4's argument on religion, what they have called sexual [violence] in Islam, they don't care about the girl's age, she is married off at 14 years in most cases; yet the laws of Uganda stipulate that a person can make an informed decision only when they reach the age of 18 years. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

***In the same line, in the Islamic faith, there is a statement that allows a man to marry more than one woman; but however much we say service [meeting sexual needs of the women] has to balance, it is not possible that a man can manage to satisfy all the women. Some are starved of love and attention.***

***I know that some women can't leave such marriages because of religion. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)***

Religious teachings and practices were also cited as promoting the submissiveness of women in marital relationships.

***...for me I am a Muslim but I always see that when people are making their vows, the man says, 'I will love you and do this and that...'; but then the woman responds 'I will also obey you'. It is a promise to be submissive, effectively saying I will do all that you please. So, religion is actually promoting submissiveness (Principal Probation and Welfare Officer, MGLSD)***

Religious beliefs and practices may therefore create and/or reinforce social norms that promote gender inequality and concomitant violation of women's and girls' rights. Thus, sustainable interventions for changing negative social norms need to recognise, identify and address potentially harmful religious beliefs and practices in addition to those rooted in culture.

All the identified causes feature in the ecological model of risk factors for GBV, which underlines issues at individual, relationship, community and societal levels (WHO, 2012). Poverty and attendant financial distress, substance abuse, cultural norms, beliefs and practices, ineffective criminal justice systems and alcoholism among both women and men are identified as leading causes of GBV not only in Uganda (UBOS and MGLSD, 2019) but in several parts of the world (The World Bank Group, 2009; WHO, 2012; SIDA, 2015). The prominence of these factors at local and global levels suggests that interventions directly addressing them may significantly contribute to reducing the prevalence of GBV in Uganda and the world at large.

### 3.4 Exploring the Drivers of Child Marriage

The study identified five main drivers of child marriage, notably poverty, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, child abuse in the home and armed conflict. These factors are intricately linked and operate at individual, household and community levels.

#### 3.4.1 Poverty

Most of the women interviewed identified poverty as a root cause of their getting married before turning 18 years. Participants indicated that they had withdrawn from school due to their parents' inability to afford education costs including school fees and scholastic materials such as uniforms and stationery among others. School dropout increased the girls' risk for marriage as will be explained in section 3.4.2.

***I stopped in primary six and my parents failed to pay for me school fees because they were very poor. (Birabwa, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I was 13 years, at 13 I started sleeping with men because I was no longer going to school. I was always being sent home for school fees, so I decided to give up on education... (Dembe, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***As a parent, you can be unable to fully support your daughter with sensitive materials like knickers. So if she happens to be checked during P.E (physical education) and she is missing a knicker, she will opt to drop out of the school and in the due process, be conned by a man, eventually leading to early marriage. (Miriam, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Some participants revealed that poverty and concomitant unmet needs pushed girls to accept marriage proposals from men within their communities who were offering them a better life. Girls who walked long distances to and from school were identified to be particularly vulnerable to the advances of men they met along the way, such as in trading centres. Bodaboda (motorcycle taxi) riders were cited among the men that commonly preyed on young girls.

***Poverty pushed girls to accept marriage proposals from men who were offering them a better life.***

***Life at home was hard, we used to go to school without food, we were always defaulting on [school] fees and sent away from school... This guy befriended me, he used to give me money, and even bought me a phone. Eventually he started pestering me to marry him. He said, 'you are here suffering, I will take you to my home in Kayunga***

***(a district in Uganda), and provide you with everything'. He convinced me to elope with him and advised me not to inform any of my family members before we left. He said they would refuse me to go with him and foil my chances of a better life. (Nagayi, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I tried to resist but he told me that he was well off and had money that he would provide for me. I had not known or visited their home before, so I had to accept to escape poverty from our home. I lacked several things and I was not even schooling, so I decided to go with him. (Ndibalekera, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***Yes, when the parents are not well off, often times the girl child is easily deceived by men with luxuries and expensive things which entices them to start staying with men in marriage hoping for more. (Kasalina, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

These findings therefore indicate that poverty increases girls' vulnerability to child marriage, as

men tend to take advantage of their vulnerable situations. The men offer them material things and promises of support, which entice the girls to accept their proposals of marriage. Scholars such as Zabel (2016) also underscore the role poverty may play in pushing girls into marriage to escape the situation at home.

Other participants stressed that their demands for school fees and other essential materials amidst financial constraints, often caused tension and conflict in homes, which eventually forced the girls to run away and get married. This was more common among participants who were not living with their biological parents.

***It was me who realised that life was too hard for me and she was so burdened with everything. ("Taking care of you? Is that what you mean?" asks the interviewer) Yes, I thought that my leaving would create space for her... (Ayoo, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Besides pushing the girls to get married, poverty was also observed to compel several parents to marry off their girls for economic gain, while others sent the girls to work at an early age to support the family, thereby increasing the risk of early marriage. Bride price is one of the major customs in Uganda. It is used to validate and legitimise customary marriages and involves exchange of the bride for material items like cows, goats, food items and monetary compensation, among other things, as commonly agreed by the families of the bride and groom. The study participants revealed that girls are commonly described as 'sukaali' (sugar) by their parents, which signifies the goods they hope to receive from bride wealth.

***This [child marriage] is caused by poverty of the parents. Such parents have given out their daughters to rich men with expectations of high financial returns. (Miriam, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***Some parents are very poor, so poverty makes them vulnerable, they give away their children to rich men, so that they get bride wealth, and improve on their welfare. (Eva, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***Still because of poverty, the girl child is sent to work as a house maid and earn some money for the family. As she is working as a house maid, the owner of the house will not take good care of her and later the child will be exposed to a lot of bad things, including bodaboda (motorcycle taxi) riders with their empty promises, leading her to get married at a very tender age. (District Education Officer, Gulu)***

Several studies conducted in Uganda attest to the correlation between the practice of exchanging bride wealth and child or forced marriage (Bukyabubi, 2004; Hague and Thiara, 2011; Bantebya, Muhanguzi & Watson, 2014). In a study of three districts in Eastern Uganda, Bukyabubi (2004) concluded that bride wealth payment exposes girls to child marriages as parents are impatient to acquire wealth. The findings of this study are consistent with the observations of Bhanji and Punjani (2014) who found that poor families may see marrying off young girls as a way of bringing social and financial benefits to the family. Addressing household poverty and changing social norms that promote commoditisation and exploitation of girls may thus significantly contribute to preventing child marriage in resource-poor settings.

#### 3.4.2 School dropout

School dropout was identified as increasing the girls' vulnerability to child marriage. Failure to meet school fees and buy scholastic materials due to poverty were cited among the key causes of school dropout by study participants.

**Well, my father passed on, and that was the end of my education. I remained with my mother, but as you know a lady cannot take full responsibility for children like what men can do. So, she couldn't afford to pay my school fees. We were very many and yet she had remained alone; so paying our school fees and meeting all our other needs was very challenging to her, she couldn't manage. (Atwendya, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

In addition, it was reported that some parents/guardians still attached low value to the education of the girl child, which in turn constrained girls' enrolment, attendance, retention and full realization of education capabilities. Such parents commonly prioritised the education of boys, yet others burdened the girls with domestic work, leading to their poor performance and eventual discouragement from continuing in school.

**Also, if there is no work to do, so as to raise money, people [may] decide in favour of boys' education leaving girls at home. Anyway, people make decisions differently. Many decide to pay for boys to continue with education and leave girls at home thinking that in future when she is grown up, she will move to her home. (Lamwaka, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

Similarly, a study by Wodon, Nguyen, and Tsimpo (2016) revealed that attaching low priority to girls' education is common in communities and cultures where social expectations lead parents to consider it unwise to invest in the education of girls. This is in spite of general improvement in attitudes towards the education of girls in Uganda. This points to the need for continued advocacy and awareness campaigns to change such negative attitudes of parents towards the education of girls.

However, not all girls drop out of school due to poverty or parents' negative attitudes

towards their education. It was reported that some girls dropped out to get married, even when their parents could afford and were interested in keeping them in school. Several of these participants revealed that such girls often took the decision to marry against the will of their parents.

**Those girls, no parent will tell her that you go and get married to Junior, no. They will make the decision for themselves; to get married when they are below 18 years. They think they are mature, and when you send her to fetch water she does not come back; and when you reprimand her, she will say that you are mistreating her, then she runs away and gets married. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)**

**No father will tell the daughter to get married to someone at a young age because they will get bride price; but it is the girls who make the decision. So you invest your money in her (pay school dues) but you end up losing. Others leave the money at school. If you decide to go and visit her say on Sunday assuming you put her in the boarding section, they will inform you that since 9th of the previous month they have been thinking she is at home. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)**

Such behaviour was mainly attributed to bad peer influence and disinterest in schooling. Several of the affected women reported that they later regretted their decision to get married.

**Some girls have had peer groups and even if they have money at home they can choose to leave school and get into early marriage. Some have peers who do drugs and take alcohol. They will cease to respect their parents but listen to their friends only; who will ill advise them. Whatever you tell them as parents it would be like the parent has no 'work' (does not know anything). It is their peer they consider to have 'work' and**

**knowledge. They only realise that the parents had good intentions after they get in trouble. So yes, it is mainly because of bad group influence or lack of interest in schooling. (Nemayite, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**Me there wasn't really anything wrong but only bad friends who advised me to go for marriage and I thought that was the right decision and later realised it was a bad decision. (Aya, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**I think it's mainly peer pressure that drives girls to get married, especially when they are in groups with fellow teenagers, they tend to go to music shows and concerts, dance clubs, where they get men who marry them. For example, I remember when I was still in school some friends would tell me about having boyfriends who usually bought them nice clothes and other luxuries. So they were trying to advise me to get one. (Atwendya, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

On the whole, school dropout influenced child marriage through creating idleness among the children and in the process making them consider marriage a priority. Being out of school also rendered the girls susceptible to the advances of men, who commonly lured them with promises of a better life.

**When they no longer go to school, they tend to be idle. So it's easier for them to be enticed to go in for marriage especially when men start dating them; they will eventually decide to marry them ... But if the girl is still at school, she will be thinking about books. (Kasalina, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**... when you are in school you concentrate more on books but when you are out of school you wish to get married off to avoid over digging at home and doing other chores. The man will tell you that you are not going to work a lot at his home. (Ndibalekera, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**When a girl drops out of school due to the inability of the parents to pay fees, the only thing that will come to their mind is going to get married to a man to support them. It doesn't matter the age. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)**

Participants further reported that out-of-school girls often consider marriage as the best alternative to education.

**One of the common things which is causing early marriage is school dropout. Once a girl is not studying, they will see that the best thing is to get married. (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent, Northern Region)**

**Providing girls meaningful alternatives beyond the mainstream education system is critical in preventing them from turning to marriage as the only alternative to school.**

**In addition, the individual and structural factors that hinder enrolment and retention of girls in school need to be addressed.**

Previous studies suggest that such beliefs about marriage are shaped by the environment and situations in which the girls live. According to Quentein (2016), parents of girls who drop out of school prefer seeing them married rather than idle. A similar observation is made by Steinhaus, Fenn, Gregowski & Petroni (2016) in

their study of child marriage in several African countries. This suggests that the girls develop and internalise these beliefs out of their day-to-day interactions at home and in the community. These findings support the views of Amin et al. (2013) who argue that personal beliefs

and practices that promote child marriage are shaped by the environment in which the girls live. They go further to show that children who grow up in high risk settings internalise and develop attitudes that support child marriage. This cycle needs to be broken through increasing awareness about the dangers of child marriage for the girl, the family and community at large and the benefits of delaying marriage.

Essentially, school dropout makes marriage more attractive in the absence of pressure from school. Providing girls meaningful alternatives beyond the mainstream education system is critical in preventing them from turning to marriage as the only alternative to school. In addition, the individual and structural factors that hinder enrolment and retention of girls in school need to be addressed. This includes measures to empower girls to opt for school instead of marriage when confronted with a choice.

### 3.4.3 Teenage pregnancy; limited options for the girl child

Teenage pregnancy emerged as a key driver of child marriage. Early sexual debut, adolescents' quest for fun, economic vulnerabilities, unrestricted movements due to parental neglect, peer influence and limited information about and use of contraceptives were some of the factors associated with increased risk of teenage pregnancy among girls. Similar factors have been identified in other studies of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in Uganda (UNICEF, 2015b; Maly et al, 2017).

*The upbringing of children is something that is very important in a child's life. You may find some parents who don't care about anything that happens to their children and for them all they want to know is have the children eaten? If they have had all the meals in a day fine and good; but how the child lives his/her life is none of their concern. So you*

*find a young girl joining bad groups watching dirty sex movies and with that she will have the urge to try it later she gets pregnant... (Abur, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*ah, the moment the girls start indulging themselves in sexual activities the motive is not being pregnant or getting married but problems happen...Yah their purpose is enjoyment but not such responsibility. The girls today will tell you that they would rather have HIV than being pregnant. (District Inspector of Schools, Masaka)*

*I got a boyfriend and conceived on my first sexual intercourse. I had no idea about family planning [methods]. I kept having sex [without protection] and did not think that I could get pregnant... (Atwendya, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*...too much desire for things. I may be a girl and then see someone putting on a nice dress yet there might be no where I could get money. The solution is to get a guy who can give it to me and when I get there I may end up getting pregnant... (Youth Exposed to Violence but Not Violent, Central Region)*

Girls who got pregnant out of wedlock and their parents often saw marriage as the only practical option. Discussions with community members revealed that most girls do not continue with education once they get pregnant. While the government of Uganda is committed to letting pregnant girls and teenage mothers continue with schooling, the study participants reported that girls found to be pregnant are usually expelled from school because they are regarded as promoting immorality. Even when they are accepted back in school after delivery, several of them get discouraged by the stigma their peers subject them to and eventually drop out. This exposes them to the risk of getting married as explained in section 3.4.2.

*You know producing children spoils people. When you go back to school after producing, you are always insulted. If you are to educate them [formerly pregnant girls], take them far away. But when you do not have the money [to take them to far schools], the child has to drop out. So when you go back to school and while joking with other students, they abuse you because of your previous pregnancy, you cannot continue with school and that means you have to stay at home. They see marriage as the only option. (LC1 Pabo Sub County, Amuru District)*

*And for the girls who give birth and return to school they will not get easy life, because their fellow pupils will abuse them and even the person responsible for paying her fees will not make it easy for them. That will make them fail to concentrate in class hence poor performance and they will give up studying. For the girls who get pregnant from S.2 downwards, most of them don't go back to school for fear of abuse from their fellow students. (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but Not Violent, Northern Region)*

The socio-cultural stigma that comes with teenage pregnancy also makes it difficult for girls to find men for marriage at a later time. This leaves them with limited options other than to get married to the men responsible for their pregnancy. In some cases, parents coerce the girls to get married to the men responsible for impregnating them to cover up the shame and disgrace associated with pre-marital pregnancy but also to avoid carrying the burden of taking care of the girl and the child.

*For some communities, it is shameful to live with a daughter who has a baby from [her parents'] home. So some parents try to make sure that the children get married to people who impregnated them so that they don't bring shame to the family. So in Uganda many child marriages are started*

*as a result of teenage pregnancies. (National Coordination Officer for Adolescent and Youth Programming, UNFPA)*

*Yes, because when you get pregnant often times the parents chase you away to go to the one responsible for the pregnancy, and that's when you start the marriage life. (Specioza, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*That [teenage pregnancy] also sends girls off into early marriages as your parents will treat you as an adult. They will tell you to go to the father of the baby. No one has the money to take care of you with your pregnancy apart from sending you off to your man...You have to end up in marriage because who will help you with your pregnancy at home when your parents are poor? They will send you off to your boyfriend to take care of you. (Nemayite, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

However, some of the girls take the decision to leave home and join the man to avoid burdening their parents on their own, which reflects their agency. Such girls were typically from families that were already struggling to survive. They viewed taking care of their pregnancy as an extra burden on their parents.

*The [pregnant] girls may feel they are burdening their parents and so decide to get married. Yah, you wonder what you are doing at home when pregnant; you add an extra responsibility to your poor mother so what you think of is to go live with your man. (Nasozi, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*Sometimes the girls are forced to elope because of being mistreated, stigmatised and insulted by family members for getting pregnant out of wedlock. Others elope out of fear of facing the wrath of their parents or because of the emotional attachment to their boyfriends. Yet others may be convinced by the men to elope out of fear that they will be arrested for defiling the girls.*

*When I got pregnant, my parents were ever quarrelling, and the situation wasn't good at all. I then decided to elope with the [responsible] man. ... Yes, I wanted to pursue a course in nursing. But since my mother used to spend the whole day insulting me and when my father returned in the evening, he also kept on beating me, I decided to leave our home [to get married]. (Nampijja, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*Some few girls take themselves into child marriage, but the vast majority are forced into it. Sometimes events happen to the child which force them into child marriage. For example, they may be carrying an unplanned pregnancy with no other viable solution to the problem. She might be forced to leave the current home where she has been staying because her parents insist that she must leave. Then she goes to live with the boy who impregnated her. Alternatively, the girl may have been found in a compromising position with the boy and then fears to return to her parents. Therefore, she decides to permanently elope with the boy. (FGD with Male Community Members, Central Region)*

*It all started when I realised that I was pregnant. I was really happy that yes am going to have a child and at the same time because of the age I was in, I think. I was carried away by the thought [of having a child] and the love I had for my boyfriend. So, I just left home one evening, without even telling my mother, to join my boyfriend and that was it. (Akanyo, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*I was pregnant, they asked me who was responsible and when I told them, they looked for him but unfortunately, he had run away and disappeared from that village. He feared being arrested, remember I was a minor. We continued talking on phone, then he convinced me to elope and join him. When*

*I decided to accept his request of eloping, he just sent me transport via mobile money and the address, then I ran away from home and went to him, that's how we started our marriage life. (Atwendya, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

We found that the problem of teenage pregnancy does not only affect girls, but also boys. The study participants reported that boys are sometimes forced to drop out of school to marry the girls they have impregnated. However, this practice seems to be on a limited scale, as several participants revealed that pregnancy hardly affects the education of responsible boys.

**Measures to address the root causes of teenage pregnancy such as poverty, limited access to sexuality education and contraceptives and poor parenting skills are necessary to reduce its contribution to child marriage.**

Several studies closely associate teenage pregnancy with child marriage (see UNICEF, 2015b; Steinhaus et al, 2016; Petroni, Steinhaus, Fenn, Stoebenau and Gregowski, 2017). However, there is little discussion on the different pathways

through which teenage pregnancy may perpetuate child marriage. This study shows that teenage pregnancy primarily contributes to child marriage by evoking fear, stigma and shame rooted in social norms that illegitimate premarital sex and pregnancy, limiting girls' opportunities to continue in school and straining girls' relationships with their families. Therefore, measures to address the root causes of teenage pregnancy such as poverty, limited access to sexuality education and contraceptives and poor parenting skills are necessary to reduce its contribution to child marriage.

#### 3.4.4 Child abuse in the home

We found that violence against children at home contributed to pushing girls into early marriage. It was reported that several girls from abusive families opted for marriage to escape the maltreatment and suffering they were subjected to at home. This trend was particularly common in families with stepparents and/or those raising orphans.

*It was my own decision [to get married], I was not forced. The conditions at home were not favourable, I was treated like a burden to my aunt, so I thought when I get married, I would find a better place to stay and have some peace. (Specioza, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*My mum passed on when I was still a baby, so my father married another woman. This woman tortured me, she would even refuse my dad to pay my school fees. At times when my dad would give her school fees for all of us, I and my siblings, she would use my school fees money and only pay for her children. So when I reached adolescent stage I resorted to having affairs with men. I fell pregnant in barely a year and that is how I ended up married. (Dembe, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*For me I got married when I was only 13 years old because both of my parents died. I was staying with my uncle, but my uncle's wife was very harsh towards me. Whenever she was at home, even eating was a problem. I would only get some relief when she was not at home. I never had anyone to cater for my basic needs, life was hard, so when I met my husband, I thought life would be better... (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)*

In some instances, stepmothers convinced the fathers to marry off the girls at an early age. However, even in such cases, girls commonly exercised some autonomy in the choice of the partner. An example was Suubi, whose

stepmother influenced her well-to-do father to withdraw her from school and marry her off. She reported that she had refused the first man presented to her for marriage by her relatives because he was very old.

*Not necessarily, my dad had enough money; his objective [of marrying me off] was not [to get] money or bride wealth. He just wanted me out of his home due to my step mother's influence. He told me that I am grown and should get married. He liaised with my paternal grandmother then they got me this man I am married to up to now. They first got me a very elderly man to marry, then I refused. Then they got me this one who was younger and I accepted to settle for marriage. (Suubi, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

**Domestic child abuse and orphanhood remain key risk factors for child marriage.**

Domestic child abuse and orphanhood have been closely associated with increased risk for early marriage in several parts of Uganda. Bantebya et al. (2014) found increasing

establishment of informal marriages or cohabitation arrangements, where young people often contracted themselves to escape unfavourable home environments. The UDHS of 2011 found that orphanhood increased children's vulnerability to child marriage (UBOS and ICF, 2012). Therefore, this study affirms that domestic child abuse and orphanhood remain key risk factors for child marriage in the country. Measures to improve child protection at family and community levels can contribute to prevention of child marriage.

#### 3.4.5. Armed conflict and child marriage

The study showed that armed conflict is

a key driver of child marriages in affected communities. This is mainly through abduction and forced marriages and creating a state of chaos and institutional breakdown that exacerbates key risk factors for child marriage such as poverty and orphanhood. Study participants related how they had been abducted from homes and institutions such as boarding schools and forced to marry commanders in the LRA.

**First of all, I wasn't interested in getting married by that time, but I was abducted**

**by LRA rebels when I was 12 years old and forcefully given to a man who impregnated me then I gave birth to a baby. (Acaa, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

Study evidence suggests that these abductions were calculated and organised to target young girls. An excerpt from our interview with Ayako, one of the women who had been formerly abducted, reveals that the rebels forced community members to identify for them homes with young girls for targeting as illustrated below.

**Ayako:** Yes, it is okay, uuh, how I got married was not good. In 1996, I was abducted and when I was abducted, I was 14yrs. I was forced to become his wife.

**Interviewer:** So tell me more of that story and how you were abducted, where you were taken and at what time?

**Ayako:** In 1996, in February on the 8th at 10pm in the night is when the rebels came and got me sleeping with my grandmother. When they came, they started asking where is the girl called A.J, is she in this place?

**Interviewer:** They came asking for A.J, which means they knew you?

**Ayako:** They had already asked from other places, because they needed girls so they were told and had the names written down on a list.

**Interviewer:** Who gave them the names?

**Ayako:** The neighbours.

**Interviewer:** Hmmm, did they give them [the names] in bad faith or they were forced?

**Ayako:** They were forced, they ask for where girls are, write the names down and walk with the list. So my grandmother said, 'I do not have anyone here called by that name'. They said, 'that lady sleeping let her wake up, pick all her belongings and come out with them'. So they said, 'get up and

pack your clothes'. So I got up and sat. They said, 'pick up your clothes'. So I stood up and picked my bed sheet...When I went out, they started asking me what my name was. I told them another name because previously we were told that if you told them your real names, once you escape they would look for you and you will be killed. I said I was called Lamwaka Christine. They asked me about a lady called Amony Jennifer, and whether she lived in this area, then I said, 'I don't know'. They asked me if I go to school then I said I don't. They asked why I don't go to school; I said I don't have someone to pay my fees and that I am staying with my grandmother, I have no father or mother.

**Interviewer:** They asked you these questions while you were still at home?

**Ayako:** Yes, when I was home.

**Interviewer:** Your grandmother was inside?

**Ayako:** Yes, they brought me out, they told me, 'you study, they already told us you study.' That I am in P7 or P6 and I don't study from here in the village, I study in town and they knew the name of my school.

**Interviewer:** They were saying all these they knew you as A.J?

**Ayako:** Even the person who brought them, the boy was there with them and said, 'she stays here'.

Literature indicates that girls in conflict settings are at a heightened risk of being subjected to GBV and sexual violence in particular (Ochen, 2011; Ochen 2013a; Lemmon, 2014; Zabel, 2016). Forced marriage of girls by insurgency groups is one of the documented weapons of war in conflict ridden areas (Ochen, 2011; Ochen, 2013b, 2013c; Human Rights Watch, 2012; UNFPA, 2012; UNICEF, n.d).

The effects of war including insecurity, massive poverty, orphanhood and breakdown in formal and informal institutions such as family networks incentivise girls, their parents and communities at large to resort to child marriage for social and economic security and protection. Both survivors and FGD participants in the northern region told of how several deprived and orphaned girls had turned to marriage in a desperate search for social and economic security during the war. They further revealed that amid widespread insecurity, parents saw the marriage of their daughters as the only way to protect them from danger.

**War also made many of the young girls get married off at ages below 18 years. And also I believe this war also affected so many other girls within the communities who had nothing to do in terms of survival in a home like food, clothing, shelters and the best they could do was to get married off to any man they thought could take care of them. (Abur, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**War has left many young girls without their parents and the only way they think of getting easy life is to go to their homes (marriage). (Acaa, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**When there is conflict you find that families live in unsafe regions like what happened here with the LRA activities. In these kinds of circumstances, you find that parents may genuinely believe that marrying their daughters is the best way to protect them from danger. (Atuku, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

The resort to marriage for social and economic security in situations of conflict has been reported elsewhere. A study of child marriage in conflict ridden Syria found that widespread acts of sexual violence meted out to girls necessitated their betrothal to protect their honour. Child marriage was therefore seen as an immediate source of security for the girls (Zabel, 2016). Similarly, in their study of child marriage in conflict and post conflict settings Schlecht, Rowley & Babirye (2013) found that conflict and insecurity motivated girls to marry early to cope with breakdown in family networks, loss and trauma. Other studies show that the economic hardships that ensue during conflicts may increase child marriage, as parents attempt to reduce the number of mouths to feed or improve their economic situation through bride price (UNFPA, 2012; Ochen, Bukuluki & Mugumya, 2010; Girls Not Brides, 2016). The heightened risk for the marriage of girls during war calls for particular measures to increase security and social protection for girls in conflict and post conflict settings.

In sum, child marriage in Uganda is perpetuated by a host of interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors at individual, household, community and society levels. While parents/guardians directly or indirectly participate in pushing girls into marriage, it is evident that in many cases girls exercise some autonomy in decisions to marry and in the choice of partners. A similar observation is made by Petroni et al. (2017) in their study of the drivers of child marriage in selected sub-Saharan African countries, including Uganda. They found that unlike in South Asia where parents were typically involved in arranging marriages and choosing partners for the girls, girls in sub-Saharan Africa exercised greater autonomy in choosing marriage partners. Empowering girls to say no to child marriage and providing them the necessary resources such as information, skills, services and opportunities to prevent and positively respond to the effects of early pregnancy, school dropout, poverty

and other drivers of child marriage is crucial for reducing the prevalence of the practice in sub-Saharan Africa.

### 3.5 Experience of Child Marriage

The women interviewed were asked to describe their life experiences during their first marriage, including how they were treated by their husbands, in-laws and other family members. Similar questions were posed to the FGD participants. It emerged that the experiences were generally negative with most participants reporting a range of social, economic, physical and psychological repercussions of child

**Most participants reported a range of negative consequences of child marriage, including GBV, isolation, regret, lack of autonomy, poor health and marriage breakdown.**

marriage. These included increased vulnerability to GBV and isolation, limited economic participation; limited decision-making power; regret and sadness; exposure to reproductive health risks, adverse effects on child development, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and a high rate of marriage breakdown.

#### 3.5.1 Socio-economic consequences

##### a) Limited economic participation

Many survivors of child marriage were unable to engage in productive activities after entering the relationship. Several of them revealed that they were isolated, denied freedom of movement and inhibited from participating in economic activities.

**He stopped me from doing any income generating activity so I would only wait for the money he would give me and life was**

**really hard, so I decided to come back home... (Atuku, a Child Marriage Survivor).**

**No I did not do anything and he would not allow me to work. I would just stay home doing nothing but take care of the home and my child. (Birabwa, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

Even when participants engaged in some economic activities, they rarely had power over the appropriation of the proceeds, as described by 35-year-old Tina, who had first married at 16 years. "...he sold my pig and didn't say a thing; not even to give me a coin from the sales. When I asked him why he sold my pig, he yelled at me," she related.

**Child marriage is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and gender inequality.**

The inability of women to contribute to household income aggravates tension due to economic strain hence contributing to domestic violence. Existing literature shows

that child motherhood has negative effects on the socioeconomic status of the mother and limits her economic opportunities (FIDH and FHRI, 2012). In general, child marriage is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and gender inequality (Warner, Allison, Lyric & Redner, 2013).

##### b) Limited decision-making power

It was reported that child mothers did not have any powers regarding making decisions on household matters like income expenditure, reproduction and relationships. Decisions on household matters were generally taken by husbands. Where participants engaged in decision making, their views were seldom considered, as Viola, who was 13 years at first marriage, indicated:

**I used to participate in making decisions but he would just shun them as senseless.....he**

**would never let me make any decision. I had to ask for permission on almost everything whether am going to collect firewood or go somewhere, it was him to decide for me even when he wasn't around, I had to first wait for him to get back home so that he grants me permission on anything that I wanted to do. (Viola, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**There has never been any decision making from me, am not given that chance. What he decides is what is supposed to be done. I can't suggest anything concerning us as a family. He just does what he pleases or what he thinks is right. He can't allow me to decide or even listen to my views. (Eva, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

Evidence suggests that the girls' young age and inexperience affected their confidence to assert themselves and contribute to decisions in the household. Nasozi, who was only 16 years when she first married, explained how her husband, who was also violent, played on her naivety and timidity to control all her actions:

**No I was very young he would come and beat me, and dictate whatever he wanted me to do. I was naive and timid; I would see him and start to worry what next? So I was not able to make any decisions regarding those family issues. (Nasozi, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

Other studies have also associated child marriage with limited participation in decision making on matters related to various aspects of child brides' lives including reproduction, access to health care, household purchases and visits to the natal family, among others (Green et al, 2009; UBOS and ICF, 2012; Nsubuga, 2004). Child brides' limited participation in decisions at household level is to an extent attributed to their lower levels of education attainment (Erulkar, 2013) as described in point (c) below.

##### c) Limited educational outcomes and economic opportunities

Child marriage limited the educational opportunities of girls in the study, because they

**"on reaching school and looking at the blackboard, tears would just flow from my eyes. I would keep regretting why I dropped out to get married in the first place; so that stopped me from studying"**

all dropped out of school to get married. As earlier indicated, only six of the women we talked to had completed the lower level of secondary education. Some of those who attempted to resume their education after the marriage failed due to limited financial capacity amid parenting responsibilities, while others were overwhelmed by feelings of regret for dropping out earlier and lacked the necessary emotional support and encouragement to remain in school. This points to the need for robust psychosocial and other support services if formerly married girls are to be enabled to return to and successfully complete school.

**When I got abducted I was in P.7; so when I came back I continued with my education up to S.2 and dropped out due to lack of school fees. I had many responsibilities, taking care of children, so I could not manage. I tried several times to fill forms from World Vision for scholarships, but my name never came back among the beneficiaries, so I gave up. Even I have tried filling forms for my children over 10 times but I couldn't succeed so I have given up. (Acaa, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**Yes, he used to shout at me plus beating me. Instead of talking to me gently, he would just quarrel. So, I said to myself, I cannot handle the situation because he got me from school. When I left, I tried to go back to school, but I later dropped out. Because I would go to study but on reaching school and looking at the blackboard, tears would just flow from my eyes. I would keep regretting why I dropped out to get married in the first place; so that stopped me from studying. (Viola, a Child Marriage Survivor).**

The poor educational outcomes were associated with a low socio-economic status for most of the women. Several of them reported struggling to access formal and informal jobs due to lack of academic qualifications and/or inability to speak fluent English.

***I regret not being able to accomplish school or my studies, I really lost a lot as a result of not attaining education. For example, I can't get a formal job, because I don't have the qualifications. (Tina, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***Time comes when I want to get a better job, but they ask for qualifications that I don't have, they employ only the learned, you know the educated ones. There was a time when I didn't want to get married the second time, after my previous marriage. I wanted to get a job and live a better life but I couldn't get it. Not even as a domestic worker / house maid, they would often ask me whether I sat my O (ordinary) level exams, and yet I didn't even finish primary...[sobs]. Those that wanted house maids would prefer people who are fluent English speakers, so I ended up not qualifying even for such nontechnical jobs of just babysitting children. (Dembe, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

The poor educational outcomes spilled over to the offspring of some of the women. Several of them reported struggling to educate the children beyond primary school level. A poignant example was Acii, who was 14 years at first marriage. She expressed regret that she was financially unable to support her daughter to complete even primary level:

***I also have a lot of stress as a result of this early marriage in that I had no money to take care of my children which led to my first born joining bad peer groups. She ended up pregnant without even sitting for primary seven; so I feel bad that my daughter has also followed my footprint of giving birth so early. (Acii, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Acii's case also attests to the vicious cycle of teenage pregnancy and child marriage as has been suggested elsewhere (see Hofferth and National Research Council, 1987).

***Children of child mothers are at an elevated risk for poor education outcomes.***

Several studies demonstrate how child marriage limits educational opportunities for girls and their offspring. Statistical analyses of demographic and health survey data from several sub-Saharan African countries show that child marriage significantly lowers literacy rates and levels of education attainment among affected girls (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; Delprato, Akyeampong, Sabates & Hernandez-Fernandez, 2015). The low levels of literacy and educational attainment are associated with limited opportunities for the girls to access and participate in formal paid employment, thus remaining economically dependent and powerless (Gebresilase, 2014). In addition, this study shows that low levels of literacy may also limit the girls' access to employment within the informal sector, thereby compounding their socio-economic vulnerability. Evidence further suggests that children of child mothers are at an elevated risk for poor education outcomes including never enrolling in school, entering school late and dropping out at primary level. The risk for poor education outcomes is shown to be higher for girl children of child mothers compared to the boys (Delprato, Akyeampong & Dunne, 2017).

#### ***d) High incidence of family breakdown and single parenthood***

Our study found that child marriage increased the risk for family breakdown. As earlier indicated, all but six child marriage survivors had separated from their first partner. The separations emanated from experiences of GBV, philandering and abandonment by husbands, failure to cope with the responsibilities and pressures of sustaining a home due to a young

age and for the formerly abducted girls, escaping and rescue from the bush by government authorities. Some participants reported returning to their parents' homes while others entered into new marriages immediately.

***He beat me for many days consecutively because he had started seeing some other girl and I think he wanted me to not talk about it. The best I had to do was to go back home, I am [living] with my mother now. (Akanyo, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I decided to go back to my father's home since there was nothing left to hold on to; I had lost my baby, and my husband had deserted me. I went and apologised to my father, he forgave and took me back. (Dembe, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***We separated I got misunderstandings with him as he was unfaithful and cheating on me a lot. (Nasozi, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***You know when you are young it is very hard to manage a home and address every problem that comes because you are still young. Me for example, I failed to stay in my marriage because I could not manage the problems that were coming, so I decided to return home. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

Dissolution of the first marriages left most of the participants single parents. This often meant that they bore the burden of caring and providing for their children without any support from the former husbands. We found that most of them struggled to meet the children's needs due to limited economic opportunities.

***Usually most of the girls who marry early, they do not take long in their marriages. They end up returning home with their children and they fail to support them. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

In addition, those who re-married commonly left the children from the previous relationship in the care of relatives, particularly their mothers, because they were not accepted by the new husband. This further increased the risk for possible neglect and abuse of these children. Children that returned with their mothers from the bush were particularly susceptible to rejection due to widespread stigma as will be discussed in point (e) below.

Single parenthood was particularly common among formerly abducted women, primarily due to a wide range of negative stereotypes that were associated with being married to and living among the LRA rebels for a long time (see point (e) below). Almost all of them failed to sustain their new marriages. Some were abandoned when the husbands realised that they were returnees from the bush. Several of these men were pressurised by their families to leave the women when they learnt that they had previously been abducted. In some instances, the women succumbed to such pressures and insults and left on their own, while others separated from the men because they had rejected the children they had returned with.

***He used to treat me well, he had loved me too. He had decided to live with me because he knew who I was from the beginning. He did not take alcohol, he loved my child but you know when you constantly receive pressure from your parents and relatives, you don't live with a peace of mind. Every time they are taunting you about marrying a returnee from the bush, and how you have wasted money. So I decided to leave him. If he can give support to his children that is okay, but if he does not, it's upon him. I came back to rent and stay with my children. (Lamam, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I am now single. The last one [man] I got married to, he said that he doesn't want my children, but I said, 'If you don't want my***

**children, you stay there and I will be here with my children, and before, I told you that I was abducted'. (Acaa, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**I had a man that we stayed with for some time, but when his parents realised that I had returned from the bush, they told their son not to take me home; that I would finish their entire clan. That since I had returned from the bush I could have killed many people while in the bush. The man decided to abandon me with all the children because I had twins and one more child for him so those are 6 children I have now. (Lakica, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**I got the father of my two children when I was in Lacor but after he realised that I was abducted, he left me saying he cannot live with a former abductee as a wife. (Acii, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

It was further revealed that former child brides typically ended up in multiple relationships due to the elevated risk for dissolution of the first marriage. This led to producing children with different men, which may have increased the risk for neglect of children from the earlier relationship, especially where the current partner did not accept them.

**The biggest problem that girls are getting as a result of early marriage is having different children with different men, since they got married when they are young. They will leave their first husband and later try to get another one with whom she will have another child. (FGD with Men Exposed to Violence but Not Violent, Northern Region)**

While evidence suggests that child marriage increases the likelihood of being in a polygamous union (Clark et al, 2006; UNICEF, 2015b), its potential contribution to the formation of other family forms such as single parenthood and increased abuse and neglect of children born during the marriages are not sufficiently discussed.

#### **e) Stigma and rejection from the family and community**

The formerly abducted women we interviewed reported being isolated and rejected by their family members and former friends when they returned from the bush. Several of them avoided associating with them in any way including visiting or sharing housing. An example was Lakica who was abducted and coerced to marry at 13 years. She related how her mother and former friends had abandoned her when she returned from the bush in 2002:

**I did not get any help from my mother instead, she told me that, she had already forgotten about me and that, if I can live on my own, then I should, but she cannot help me with anything... My old friends have all rejected me, but the friends I came with from the bush are the ones that I relate with well. But the ones here at home, some of them have even forgotten about me but the ones I returned with from the bush are now like my family. (Lakica, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

A similar experience was shared by Lamam, a 39-year-old woman who had been abducted at age 14. She narrated how her father declined to visit her at the rehabilitation centre and practically erased her from the list of his children, when she returned from the bush:

**When I came back I expected a better life from the side of my parents. Instead life was the contrary to my expectations; my life was never easy. When I reached GUSCO [Rehabilitation Centre] my mother was trying her best to visit me but my biological father to whom I was even a first born never bothered to step foot where I was. I was speculating while in the bush that, the day I will return home I think my siblings and the both of my parents will be filled with happiness; just to realise that my dad had deleted my name from among his children. He lost all the love he had for me. (Lamam, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

Similar behaviour was exhibited by the new partners the women found, several of whom abandoned them when they realised that they were returnees from the bush (i.e. had been abducted as girls). Rejection was also experienced from neighbours. Some women reported frequently moving house to escape abuse and insults from neighbours and other community members (Ochen, 2015). These attitudes were rooted in the belief that the returnees were possessed by evil spirits, which the LRA Commander Kony was perceived to have. They were further stereotyped as violent, murderers, rebels, promiscuous and generally likely to generate curses for their associates.

**Life is so hard for me because people think that since I am a returnee, I may kill them. Even in town here I keep shifting from one place to another. I can't go back to my home village, Kitgum because people keep taunting me that I am a rebel and that hurts me so much. At least in Gulu here, people are mixed, some are good while others are bad, so at least I can stay here. (Lakica, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**In case of any misunderstanding between you as a couple, some men start referring to your history; how and what you did while in the bush, which is stigmatising to us. For example, your husband may say, 'You women from the bush, you like changing men and men have never been enough for you'. So these kind of words are so annoying... it was not our wish to sleep with these men but we were forced. (Lagum, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

**My father refused to pick me up because they used to say that we were possessed by the spirits of the dead. So I continued staying at GUSCO [Rehabilitation Centre] until I started renting a house for myself. (Alimochan, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

The negative stereotypes were extended to the offspring the women returned with from

the bush. They were rejected by some family members and new partners on the premise that they were 'rebels' which connoted that they were likely to be violent, destructive and, in essence, good for nothing. Lakica related how her new partner discriminated and refused to pay school fees for the children she returned with from the bush, because he expected no good from 'rebels':

**When I returned [from the bush] and got this man, he would never support me with my children's responsibilities...the children I returned with from the bush and that is why I had challenges in paying their school fees. He would clearly tell me that he will never pay my children's school fees. He would say, 'I cannot pay for rebels in school'. I would encourage him to pay for the children like they are his own and that nobody will come claiming them but he refused. That would really hurt me because I know my children are not rebels; they are just products of an inevitable event that I went through in my life. (Lakica, a Child Marriage Survivor)**

These findings are in consonance with other studies of the experiences of formerly abducted women in Northern Uganda; which allude to widespread stigmatisation and rejection of both the women and their children born in captivity (see (Ochen, 2011; Ochen, 2013b; Ochen, McAuley & Jones, 2013; Ochen, 2015; The Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2015; Mukasa, 2017).

#### **f) Increased vulnerability to GBV and isolation**

Several survivors reported that they were commonly subjected to GBV during the marriage. The violence was mainly perpetrated by spouses and in some cases in-laws. It typically started during the first pregnancy or after birth of the first child.

**...because before I got pregnant we had no problem at all. We had a peaceful marriage, we would agree on several things. He treated**

*me well, until I got pregnant. (Specioza, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*My problems started when I got pregnant. I always felt cold, I just wanted warmth, every time I would cover myself, put on heavy clothes for warmth. He told me that I had to bathe very cold water every morning to gain some energy, and whenever I refused he would pull me out of the house forcefully while am crying; so he tortured me so much when I was pregnant which made me hate myself and the pregnancy. He started cooking the food himself, he would prepare breakfast for me very early in the morning and order me to eat the food by force, after which he would take me to the garden and force me to dig yet I was feeling very weak with the pregnancy growing, so he really tortured me. (Tina, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*I was not respected, he would take alcohol and come back home insult and also beat me up, and when I gave birth the situation worsened. So I chose to leave him to go and work and sustain my siblings and my mum. (Nasozi, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

It was not very clear why pregnancy and childbirth increased the risk for violence. However, considering the fact that financially constrained men tend to resort to violence (The World Bank, 2009), it could be argued that the demands of pregnancy and childbirth increased financial distress among the men, sparking off violence. In addition, narratives from the women and community members show that alcohol abuse, power and age differences between the girls and their husbands and, among young couples, immaturity, also played a role.

*He would force me to have sex even when I was not in the mood. He would forcefully undress and rape me. (Betty, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*Whenever I used to go somewhere like may be in the garden to get banana leaves and fibres,*

*or to the shop; when I returned home he would first check my private parts. He would tell me to undress and spread my legs to see if I have not had intercourse with his brother. I used to tell him, there is no other man I sleep with but he wouldn't listen. (Tina, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*These girls are usually vulnerable to violence and abuse from the men that marry them. Because they are young, men tend to take advantage of that and mistreat them. For instance, they beat, insult and torture them in many ways; and the girls being young and innocent, they at times fear to go back to their parents especially if the parents had a hand in marrying them off. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)*

*We used to fight a lot. I think because we were both young, no one was respecting the other. He would threaten to beat me and I would tell him no way, but in the end he would always overpower me. (Atwendya, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

In some cases, the violence was associated with the girls' inability to execute domestic chores to the satisfaction of both their husband and in-laws.

*If we were going to dig, my mother-in-law wanted me to dig morning and evening. I couldn't manage it at all...My mother-in-law hated me, she used to speak ill of me. She wanted her son to bring another wife and for me to go back home, because according to her, I did not want to dig and yet I used to dig. I told them, you want a person who digs both in the morning and evening. Generally, the way my mother-in-law and my husband treated me was not nice at all. I told them you got me when I was still young, now that I have given birth, you want to send me away. (Viola, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

Vulnerability to violence was found to be particularly high among participants who eloped compared to those whose family members were

involved in arranging the marriages. This is indicative of the potentially protective nature of formal unions. Several of the girls who eloped were isolated from the public, hidden in houses and banned from talking to anyone in the community by their husbands and in some cases in-laws. Access to mobile phones which could enable them to communicate home was restricted. This was done to ensure that the men and their families did not get in trouble for defilement, but also that the girls did not escape to return home as reflected in the excerpts below.

*At first when I eloped to join their [husband's] family they were locking me inside the home. They never allowed me to move out of the house. They said that I was still young to be married, so they were afraid and scared that they would be arrested in case the authorities got to see me with the pregnancy. (Atwendya, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*When we reached Kayunga, he took the phone he had bought for me away. He refused me to talk to anyone, and would confront any person he saw talking to me. I think he was afraid that they would give me ideas to escape and return home. I was really lonely... (Nagayi, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

This finding lends itself to the observations of Bantebya et al. (2014) and Schlecht et al. (2013) all of whom indicate that such informal unions deny girls basic protection and social status which in turn leads to isolation with limited support structures.

Formerly abducted women reported that they had been coerced into having sex with the strangers they had been allocated as husbands, turned into servants for the husbands and their older wives, beaten for not meeting the expectations of both husbands and older co-wives and threatened to be killed when they did not comply with any orders from the husbands.

*He was sleeping and ordered me to enter and join him in bed, then I refused. Then he asked me if I knew that they kill people here very fast and if I don't want to go inside, he would just make an order for me to be killed. I feared death so I went inside the bed with all of my clothes on. I slept with my back towards him. He asked me to undress but I refused, he insisted by tearing my clothes and ordering me not to scream. So I undressed and remained with just a petticoat and knickers, then he asked me to undress completely. He said, 'Here you don't sleep with clothes, should they find you with lice you will be killed'. I knew he was lying, but I removed the petticoat, then the knickers remained. He asked me why the knickers were on and said, 'Remove it all, do you know I kill people? I can decide to twist your neck if you joke with me'. I undressed and then he asked me to face him. When I faced him he tried to penetrate me. I felt like he was cutting me with a razor blade and putting chili pepper. My body was shaking, I really bled. He wasn't minding, I was crying and he was not minding at all and in the morning after he saw how much I had bled, he just left me. That very morning, they said we have to go and I had not even washed my face, the pain in my groin was excruciating, I was walking with the legs spread apart. (Achan, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

*In my first marriage it was so hard. We worked under orders from the husband and his six older women. Garden work, cooking, laundry was all on us two young girls. When you delayed finishing the chores, even if they had eaten they would order the escorts to beat you for cooking late so it was not an easy life. You had to look for firewood and there was no fire wood in Sudan; you had to search for anything which could light fire. (Acaa, a Child Marriage Survivor)*

They were further subjected to regular insults about their past, whenever disagreements emerged between them and their new partners, as described in point (e) above.

However, not all the girls reported abuse and mistreatment during the marriages. A few of them reported being respected, cared for and supported by their husbands. Some of these women were formerly abducted girls, who had been forcefully married to much older LRA army commanders, while others had been married off officially by their families.

***He [the LRA army commander, my second husband] was trying his best to care for me. He was respectful; in fact, he would treat me like his child. (Achan, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I am happy he [my husband] respects me and I do the same. We discuss all that we have to do together. When we had just married, I asked him to allow me to go back home to sell off my food which was in my garden. He allowed me and I came back with 100,000/=. This money helped us in one way or another to start off and such support and trust is very great in a relationship. I have been so hard working like I told you right from home and I have been elected as the role model for the rest of the people in this sub county to pass on my knowledge. I deal in all food stuffs and also sell them to earn a living. (Biyinzika, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Other women reported support from in-laws, even when their husbands were abusive.

***I got a lot of support from my mother-in-law. She could give me money, buy me things like clothes, utensils, foodstuff; even my husband's brothers used to buy me things. He would abuse me, but I stayed because of her [mother-in-law]. (Aloyo, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***Those [in-laws] were good to me. They treated me with respect and they love me so much to***

***date, even if we separated. They call me, then we talk on phone and we get to know how each of us is doing. My mother-in-law used to give me food, check on me, bought me baby clothes. She would buy for me some sugar because she knew her son very well and his weaknesses. (Birabwa, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Existing research literature generally associates child marriage with an increased risk for GBV. For instance, the UDHS of 2011 and 2016 both found that slightly higher proportions of women who married before their 18th birthday experienced physical violence compared to their counterparts who married at 18 years and above (UBOS and ICF, 2012, 2018). The increased susceptibility to GBV has been attributed to the girls' limited autonomy, which is linked to the significant age and power differentials within the relationship (Schlecht et al, 2013). However, this study shows that close proximity in age between the girl and husband may also increase the risk for GBV due to immaturity of the couple. This highlights the need to encourage both girls and boys to delay marriage to a later age.

### 3.5.2 Psychological consequences

**“I regret getting married at a young age”:** feelings of regret, sadness and suicidal thoughts

The study found that several survivors of child marriage regretted the decision to marry early because of the repercussions it had had on their education and attendant access to economic opportunities and ability to provide for their children. Several of them emotively described the lost childhood, dreams and opportunities and the regret and sadness they felt whenever they encountered peers who had continued with their education and were now better off.

***I already told you that I regret a million times. I missed schooling, yet I loved school. Whenever I see those I studied with and they are better off, I feel sad...My peers are now better educated than me, I feel like a failure, huu... (Nasozi, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I have now ruined my dreams of ever becoming a professional nurse, and minus that still I feel I also missed being a young wild girl like my colleagues were. (Akanyo, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***Yes, I regret getting married at a young age because my child reaches a point when I can't care for him, can't afford his education. His father also cannot pay for his education so I regret having married this man. (Jane, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

The survivors further reported that they were commonly taunted about and condemned for dropping out of school at a young age and eloping, all of which made them feel sad.

***He often blamed and accused me of dropping out of school and reminded me of how my family hated me. Yet he is the reason why all that happened, so he would insult me with such words which made me cry and always be sad. I had no peace; at times he would yell at me and say, 'you are suffering because you are illiterate, you thought getting married to me would be your source of security instead of staying with your parents and focusing on your studies'. You know such statements would demoralise me. They would make me cry all the time regretting why I fell in love with him... The other thing I regret is about my step sisters, because they attained education and got good professions. So even when we have family meetings I often feel small among them, and worse of all they always stigmatise me for not being educated. They belittle me so much which makes me regret and wish I had also studied like them... (Dembe, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

For the formerly abducted women, the insults were primarily associated with their experiences in captivity. Such insults were commonly perpetrated by husbands. The formerly abducted women further reported feeling sad about being rejected and labelled by their new

partners and other community members, the rejection and labelling of their children born in captivity and being sexually exploited by men who had no interest in committing to them.

***To make it worse, my parents asked him for bride price and he told my parents, 'go and ask Kony for her bride price because she was Kony's wife, then if Kony pays, then I will also pay'. I got so hurt and asked myself if I was born to be used by men for free [without commitment]. (Lakica, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

The regret and sadness progressed to suicidal thoughts in some cases. An example was Specioza, a 34-year-old woman who was 16 years at first marriage. She reported contemplating suicide when, following separation from her husband during pregnancy, the burden of taking care of herself and her child became too heavy. She narrated:

***After some time, I felt I couldn't manage to take care of my child, the earnings were not enough to sustain the both of us. I hated myself, I hated life to the extent that I wanted to commit suicide with my child. I once thought of going to a busy highway so that I could end both mine and my child's life. (Specioza, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Marriage before 18 years is generally associated with negative psychological and psychiatric outcomes. One quantitative study reports increased odds of suicidal thoughts in girls aged 10-17 years who were married or involved in the marriage process in some way (Gage, 2013). In addition, qualitative studies allude to depression among married girls due to perceived powerlessness, a heavy burden of domestic duties, isolation from their natal families, dropping out of school, oppressing traditions and lack of decision-making power (Gebrasilase, 2014).

### 3.5.3 Physical and health consequences

#### a) Exposure to sexual and reproductive health risks

The study found that child marriage exposed the survivors to several sexual and reproductive health risks. These ranged from painful sexual intercourse and pregnancy related complications such as bleeding, obstructed labour and still births, some of which were directly associated with the survivors' immature bodies.

***The pregnancy itself was a challenge to me, often times, it would bleed out of the blue. ...I tried to push [the baby] but with a lot of difficulty, and in the end, it was a still birth (baby died during birth); so since then doctors recommended that I should never give birth normally because my starting sexual intercourse at an early age damaged my cervix. They told me that the cervix got a complication because of starting sex early; so when I try to push the baby during child birth, the cervix also wants to come out. So for the two children that I have now, it has always been C (caesarean) section, you know I almost lost my life during delivery of my first child and still it was C – section. (Dembe, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***He always wanted several rounds of sex in the morning, then in the afternoon, like that and often times I felt pain in the joints that connect the thighs to the private parts (pelvic bone). There is a way he would twist my inner bones and I really felt like my groin area was torn apart because of the too much force he used in the several rounds of rough sex that he had with me. (Tina, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I faced it rough when I had sex with that guy the first time. I conceived and I kept bleeding for a while until later. I was 16 years old I don't know what happened. (Nasozi, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***The challenge I got was that my birth canal was very small so I ended up getting serious tears as the baby was passing. (Achan, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Pregnancy related complications among child mothers were also reported by the community members who participated in FGDs, as well as key informants. In one FGD the participants reported that girls commonly suffered from obstructed labour, leading to still births and sometimes their death. This was attributed to limited knowledge on how to care for pregnancy among the girls.

***The girls conceive and often fail to push the babies; she may die or the baby. They don't know how to care for the pregnancy, antenatal care issues... (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)***

It was further reported that several child marriage survivors produce premature babies, which increases the risk for both maternal and infant mortality.

***The child produces an immature baby because she is young. So the death of young children increases. The young mother can die as well, just like the new born baby. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)***

However, a good number of women reported experiencing no complications during their first pregnancy. Some attributed the positive outcomes to the support of significant others which had enabled them to take proper care of the pregnancy, others associated it with the use of traditional herbs, yet others felt it was sheer luck from God.

***I didn't have any complication. My mum was supportive during that time. Maybe I would have got complications if she wasn't there, but she took good care of and guided me throughout the pregnancy. I conceived at 16 years, but all went well. (Yudaya, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***I had a very normal delivery from the hospital but the only problem was the labour pains which almost drove me mad. But thank God it didn't take long because I started labour at about 3pm and by 7pm I had already given birth. I just pushed and the baby came out weighing 3.5kgs. I can say I was very lucky and God really protected me. (Akanyo, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***...because I was young, they told me my inner [pelvic] bones had not yet developed; they were young for me to be able to push the baby. Fortunately, my mother-in-law did whatever she could to soften those bones and I gave birth normally. She used to give me a lot of herbs for drinking, bathing and at times sitting in but you know that was another form of torture to me because the herbs would be very cold! She would bathe me early every morning, and tell me to sit in a basin of cold herbs for a couple of hours... (Atwendya, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

One of the consequences of child marriage is teenage pregnancy, because girls not only lack capacity to negotiate protected sex but are also usually pressurised to conceive by the husbands, relatives, in-laws and other community members. Most of the participants who were not pregnant at marriage reported to have conceived their first babies in the first year of the union. The one who conceived after a year reported that she had been under so much pressure to conceive because her husband had started questioning her fertility. This pattern is consistent with international studies, which show that girls who marry as children start their reproductive lives early (UNICEF, 2015c; The World Bank and ICRW, 2017). In addition, as in our study, the research literature shows that pregnancy and childbirth related complications such as obstructed labour, bleeding (haemorrhage) and still and premature births are more prevalent among 15–19-year-old girls and are their leading causes of death (Ganchimeg,

2014; Neal, 2016). However, while obstetric fistulae are one of the commonly reported pregnancy and child related birth complications among child mothers, it did not emerge as a key issue in our study. None of the women we talked to reported suffering from obstetric fistulae. This finding is consistent with other research, which generally suggests that the risk for obstetric fistulae among child mothers is less in Eastern and Southern Africa compared to West Africa. (see Wall et al, 2004; Melah et al, 2007; Meyer et al, 2007; Roka et al, 2013; Barageine, Tumwesigye, Byamugisha, Almroth & Faxelid, 2014).

#### b) High exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV

Most of the women were either knowingly or unknowingly in a polygamous union or their spouse was involved with multiple sexual partners; which exposed them to the risk of infection with STDs including HIV. We found that the husband's relationship with other women usually started during pregnancy or after childbirth. While we could not substantiate why men tended to cheat on child marriage survivors during pregnancy and after childbirth, some FGD participants suggested that it was because the girls looked unattractive to the men at this stage. One of them explained that childbirth strains the girls, making them look old and unattractive, while another related that men saw pregnant girls as trashy:

***...once you give birth, you start looking old and ugly. Your husband will leave [you] and start looking for other women. (FGD with Female Community Members, Northern Region)***

***The husband's relationship with other women usually started during pregnancy or after childbirth, increasing the risk to their partner of STDs.***

***When the girls get pregnant the men run and get other women. They see you who is pregnant as trash. (FGD with Female Community Members, Central Region)***

The reported deterioration in the physical appearance of the girls is probably due to the strain pregnancy and childbirth imposes on their immature bodies amidst limited means to take good care of themselves.

Some women reported getting infected with HIV by their philandering husbands. For instance, 63-year-old Suubi reported that her husband had got involved with another woman and in the process infected her with HIV.

***My husband confused himself and got another woman and he infected me with HIV in the process. I had decided to divorce him but I was counselled by several women friends then I stayed for the sake of my children. I went to hospital and he corrupted the doctor not to tell me the truth. Until I went to Masaka [Regional] Referral Hospital after I suspected that he was HIV positive; I got tested for HIV which proved I was positive. (Suubi, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

Literature shows increased risk for HIV infection among young married girls in sub-Saharan Africa (Glynn et al, 2001; Kelly et al, 2003). Big age differences between the girls and their partners, higher frequency of unprotected sex, high probability of being in polygamous unions and limited access to information about HIV and opportunities to abstain and use condoms (Clark et al, 2006; UNICEF, 2015a) are some of the factors that expose young married girls to STDs.

### ***c) Adverse effects on children's health and development***

The study participants reported poor health and development outcomes for the children of child mothers. These included malnutrition, stunting and death. Poverty, poor child spacing, limited knowledge and inexperience in handling children, and low education levels and immaturity of the mothers were among the

main causes of poor health outcomes for their offspring, as portrayed in the excerpts below.

***I would forget and just remember that I had produced a child, I would then begin touching as I searched for him. I even feared breast feeding him. And I would always say, 'You are disturbing me, if I was not around whom would you disturb?'... (Achan, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***"my first baby eventually died because it was malnourished..."***

***It was very challenging because he reached the age of eating and taking drinks, but I couldn't feed him. I didn't know about it and I didn't have any one to tell me. It was actually my***

***neighbour, the young one you found here who told me that the baby was past the age of relying on only breast milk. She told me to start giving him porridge and solid foods like potatoes and eggs, but I didn't know anything about it yet the baby was 7 months [old]. To make matters worse, I conceived when my baby was only 8 months [old] and ended up with two young babies. I could not take good care of them. (Maria, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

***When I became pregnant, life was very hard. I had no money and to make matters worse I conceived again. Life became even harder and my first baby eventually died because it was malnourished... (Korina, a Child Marriage Survivor)***

In consonance with these findings, other research shows that the children of women who marry before age 18 in sub-Saharan Africa are at a higher risk for poor health outcomes including death, malnutrition, poor development and stunting (Clark et al, 2006; Yu et al, 2016; Efevbera et al, 2017). Poverty and low education levels among child mothers are cited as the key factors impinging on the poor health and development outcomes for their children (Efevbera, et al, 2017).



*Conclusions and  
Recommendations*



## 4.1. Conclusions

GBV was variously conceived as misunderstandings and quarrels between couples in a home, violence meted out to women by their husbands, violations of rights based on gender, general violation of human rights and violation of the rights of vulnerable populations such as children and people with disability. This suggests a limited understanding of what GBV entails in the general populace.

GBV was reported by participants to be very common. Its prevalence was perceived to be much higher than reported due to a widespread culture of silence among both women and men. GBV affects both genders, however women and girls were reported to be its predominant victims. Therefore, GBV, and VAW in particular, are perceived as a major problem in Uganda.

GBV manifests in the multiple forms of physical, economic, sexual, emotional, negative cultural practices and gender bias in the distribution of labour and handling of reported GBV cases. While women experienced all the different forms of GBV, men particularly complained about being violated emotionally and treated unfairly when they reported cases of GBV to the authorities (gender bias). This suggests that GBV may be experienced differently by men and women.

GBV was reported to be mainly perpetrated by intimate partners. Thus, for several people (men and women) in Uganda, GBV is experienced in the form of IPV, which remains very common.

**Enrolment and retention of girls in school would be a key protective factor against child marriage.**

The various forms of GBV are rooted in stereotypes about masculinity and femininity and social norms that promote male dominance and female subordination as well as normative gender role expectations. Social norms that promote gender stereotypes and male

dominance remain very strong and are a key impediment to the elimination of GBV, and VAW in particular.

The causes of GBV reported by participants include alcoholism and drug abuse, poverty, cultural norms, values and practices, religious beliefs and practices, women social and economic empowerment and weaknesses in the criminal justice system. GBV is therefore perpetuated by an interplay of behavioural and structural factors at individual, relationship, community and societal levels.

A form of GBV, child marriage is promoted by a range of social, economic and political factors at individual, interpersonal, household, community and societal levels. These include poverty, school dropout, teenage pregnancy, domestic child abuse and armed conflict. These factors interact and reinforce each other to lead to child marriage.

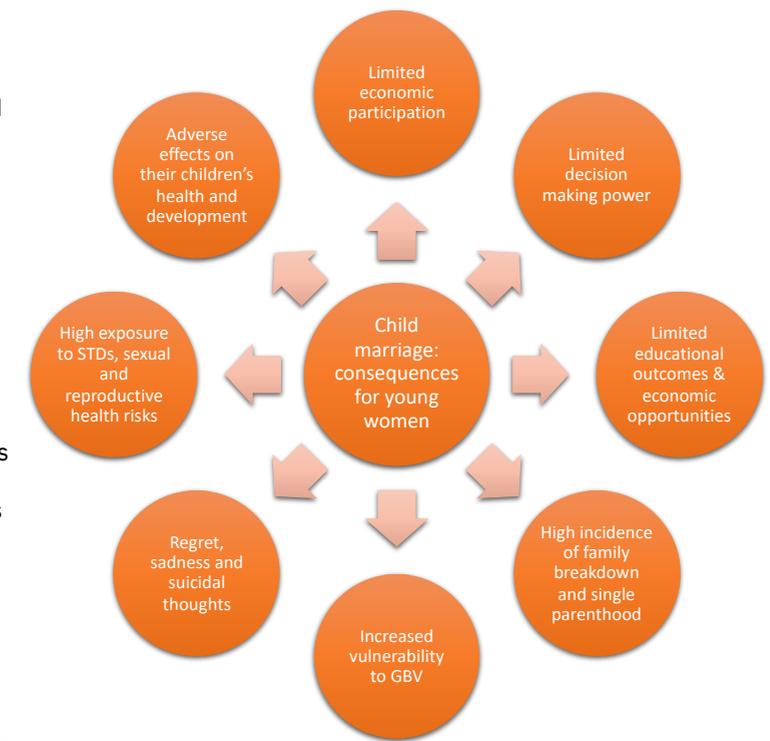
**Girls can be empowered to delay marriage.**

Parents/guardians contribute to child marriage through acts of omission and commission such as abuse and neglect of children and marrying off the girls for economic gain. However, there are some who do not wish to see their children married at a young age, which signifies positive changes in attitudes towards child marriage among parents and communities in Uganda.

In all the cases in our study, child marriage was preceded by school dropout. This suggests that enrolment and retention of girls in school would be a key protective factor against child marriage.

We found that several girls actively participated in decisions to marry. Although the majority were pushed by circumstances such as poverty, school dropout, unplanned pregnancy and child abuse, a few opted for marriage even when their parents were willing and able to continue educating and supporting them. Thus, girls may exercise some autonomy in decisions to marry, which suggests they can be empowered to delay marriage.

Child marriage poses a host of negative physical, social, economic and psychological consequences for the survivors and their offspring, families and communities. These include limited economic participation, limited decision making power, limited educational outcomes and economic opportunities, stigma and rejection from families and communities, high incidence of family breakdown and single parenthood, regret, sadness and suicidal thoughts, high exposure to STDs and sexual and reproductive health risks and adverse effects on their children's health and development. Therefore, child marriage has far reaching and in some cases lifelong adverse consequences on the development and wellbeing of not only the survivors and their immediate families but also the community and society at large.



## 4.2 Recommendations

### **Promote awareness and understanding of GBV**

People in Uganda are generally aware of the notions of human rights and violence, but do not clearly understand what GBV entails. There is need for more specific and targeted training to increase people's understanding of GBV. Government, through the district community department, should liaise with relevant civil society organisations (CSOs) to mobilise and engage communities in dialogues on the meaning of GBV, its forms, causes,

consequences, relationship with other human rights violations such as domestic violence and available support mechanisms, among others. Not only would this engender a more in-depth understanding of GBV among the populace, but also help to minimise incidences arising out of ignorance.

### **Address factors that perpetuate GBV**

Eliminating or reducing GBV to significantly low levels requires a multipronged approach to address the multilevel factors that perpetuate it. Alcoholism and drug abuse could be addressed through intensifying awareness about their dangers to health, relationships and socio-

economic development of individuals, families and the society as a whole. The Uganda Ministry of Health (MOH) in liaison with voluntary and private actors should intensify campaigns to inform people about the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse to their physical, emotional, economic and social wellbeing. Mass media such as radio, television and newspapers could be helpful channels for disseminating such information to the populace. In addition, government should strengthen and improve institutional capacity to enforce existing laws and policies regulating access to and use of alcohol and substances. Available evidence indicates that the current legal framework on alcohol and substance abuse is weak and obsolete and therefore not deterrent enough (Kasirye, 2016), which implies the need for the formulation of stronger and relevant laws.

In addition, enforcement of existing laws is impeded by inadequate resources (Kasirye, 2016; Wasajja, 2019). The Uganda Police Force should be equipped with the necessary financial and human resources to enable them enforce laws and policies on alcohol and substance use. CSOs can play a vital role in facilitating local governments to formulate and implement by-laws regulating the time for alcohol consumption and prohibiting the sale and use of dangerous substances.

#### **Changing norms, practices and beliefs**

Changing deeply ingrained cultural norms, practices and beliefs calls for continuous engagement and education. The MGLSD, and particularly its Department of Family and Culture and CSOs should make concerted efforts to challenge norms that promote male dominance, gender stereotypes and harmful traditional practices, while advocating for attitude change and adoption of more positive cultural practices (Ochen, 2014). This could be achieved through community dialogues bringing together people from different sections of the community to

**Concerted efforts are needed to challenge norms that promote male dominance, gender stereotypes and harmful traditional practices, while advocating for attitude change and adoption of more positive cultural practices.**

share perspectives and experiences on the dangers of existing practices and build consensus on the way forward. The dialogues should address the need to unlearn negative practices and learn more positive and progressive ones that promote the rights of all people regardless of gender and are more likely to support socio-economic development at household, community and country at large.

#### **Partnerships, training and resources**

Engagement of and partnerships with cultural institutions to spearhead the process of learning new social norms is critical to success. Since religion reinforces some of these negative gender stereotypes and practices, it is important that religious leaders and institutions are also engaged and challenged to modify them. In addition, innovative strategies such as prosocial games can be employed as a preventive educational tool to change attitudes of young people in and out of school. These could be designed to focus on critical issues such as gender fairness and equality, respect for both gender and demystification of normative constructions of femininity and masculinity while emphasising positive masculinity, among other issues. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) and the National Curriculum Development Centre should be enlisted as core partners in these efforts to facilitate integration of such innovative tools in the school curricula.

While women's empowerment is shown to be protective, it also triggers tensions that often culminate in IPV. Optimising the protective

benefits of women's empowerment requires that these efforts are combined with mechanisms to increase effective communication, mutual respect, support and understanding among partners. This could be achieved through training organised at community level. Religious leaders, elders and clan leaders, all of whom are key players in providing support to married couples in Uganda (UBOS and ICF, 2012), should be equipped with requisite knowledge and skills to impart similar values in their clients. Similar competences are vital for formal support structures such as CSOs, LCs, police and probation and social welfare officers.

**Innovative strategies such as prosocial games can be employed as preventive educational tools to change attitudes of young people in and out of school.**

Effective response to GBV may help to improve reporting of cases but is also crucial for prevention as it serves as a deterrent to potential perpetrators. The study findings show that corruption, bias and delayed response often discourage reporting, thereby providing room for GBV to continue unabated. Government should provide adequate support to institutions fighting corruption to improve their ability to enforce relevant laws. Government should further equip institutions addressing GBV such as the police and judiciary with adequate financial and human resources to improve their capacity to respond to reported incidences of abuse. Training to improve staff capacity to provide appropriate services and support to clients may help to minimise gender bias. These can be organised by relevant government departments in partnership with CSOs and the academia. The topics of focus should include case management principles, processes and procedures, professional ethics and communication, mediation and counselling skills, among others.

#### **Multipronged, collaborative approach**

The drivers of child marriage are many and mutually reinforcing. Addressing the problem therefore requires a multipronged approach that deals with drivers at individual, household and the community as a whole through multisectoral collaboration combining the efforts of different government ministries and departments, development partners as well as voluntary and private actors. These include the MGLSD, MOES, MOH, the police, the judiciary, UN agencies such as UNICEF and CSOs.

#### **Improving access to sexual and reproductive health education**

For instance, improving children's and young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is critical in preventing teenage pregnancy. Incorporating age-appropriate sexuality education in school curricula and integrating adolescent and youth friendly reproductive health services in the health care system are some of the ways this could be achieved.

#### **Addressing poverty, child abuse and neglect**

To address the impact of poverty, household economic strengthening programmes should be scaled up. This will improve the capacity of parents/guardians to meet the basic needs of their children including enrolling and maintaining them in school. However, since child abuse and neglect play a role in pushing children into marriage, economic strengthening programmes should be complemented with interventions to improve parenting skills and child protection practices at household and community levels. Mass training targeting parents/guardians can be helpful in this regard. These can be organised by the district community department in partnership with CSOs. To foster sustainability of these efforts, grassroots child protection structures such as Para Social Workers and Child Protection Committees should be equipped

with requisite knowledge and skills to continue providing the necessary information and support to parents/guardians and other community members.

#### **Promoting school enrolment and completion**

The findings show that enrolment and retention of girls in school is protective against child marriage. Strategies that promote school enrolment, retention and completion are therefore critical in preventing child marriage. Community dialogues to change negative attitudes towards the education of the girl child

**Strategies that promote school enrolment, retention and completion are therefore critical in preventing child marriage.**

remain necessary. We also propose that the MOES, in partnership with development partners and CSOs, could institute a centralised system for tracking school enrolment, retention and completion and provide timely support to children on the verge of dropping out.

School-based social workers should be recruited and directed to facilitate the continuous process of identifying, linking and coordinating support to affected children to minimise the risk of dropping out. In addition, mechanisms to improve the school learning environment should be intensified. The MOES and partners should urgently address factors that push girls out of school such as child abuse, poor sanitation and lack of sanitary pads. School-based social workers can contribute to creating a safe learning environment by providing professional and targeted support to children in schools. Government should also enforce the policy on allowing pregnant and girls who have delivered to remain in and return to school. Punitive action should be taken against school administrators who deny the children opportunity to continue in or re-join school due to pregnancy. The MOES should partner with

relevant government departments such as the MGLSD, CSOs and other partners to establish mechanisms for linking girls who wish to return to school after delivery with necessary support services, including psychosocial counselling and care, child day care services, scholastic materials, among others, to enable them cope with likely stigma from peers, poverty and strained relationships with family along with other impediments to their enrolment and retention in school. The district community department and school based social workers can be engaged to coordinate such initiatives.

#### **Empowering young people through education and training**

**Strategies to empower them to say no to child marriage are critical**

Since girls may exercise some autonomy in decisions to marry, and often see marriage as the only viable alternative to school and as a means of escaping poverty; strategies to empower them to say

no to child marriage are critical. Interventions to educate children about the illegitimacy of marriages below the age of 18 years, the negative consequences of child marriage, its drivers and how to prevent them, and where to seek support if constrained or forced into marriage are crucial. Such information should be elaborated in the sections of the curriculum that address issues of child rights abuse. Debates and child rights clubs for in- and out-of-school children can also be used as a forum for discussing and equipping them with information on the dangers of child marriage, how to prevent it and where to seek support. Prosocial games can be employed as a useful tool for relaying information on the impacts of child marriage and where to seek support, to children. Life skills training should be enacted to equip children and young people with the necessary competences to improve their

problem-solving capacity and ability to make constructive decisions.

Further, children should be given information about and encouraged to embrace and utilise alternatives to mainstream education such as vocational training, other than resorting to marriage. Information on alternative government educational programmes such as Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) should be incorporated

in the school curriculum. Such information should also be provided to parents/guardians during parents' and teachers' meetings held in schools. Mechanisms to disseminate similar information to children out of school and to communities as a whole should be devised. This further implies that hindrances to accessing vocational education, including issues of availability, acceptance and affordability should be addressed.



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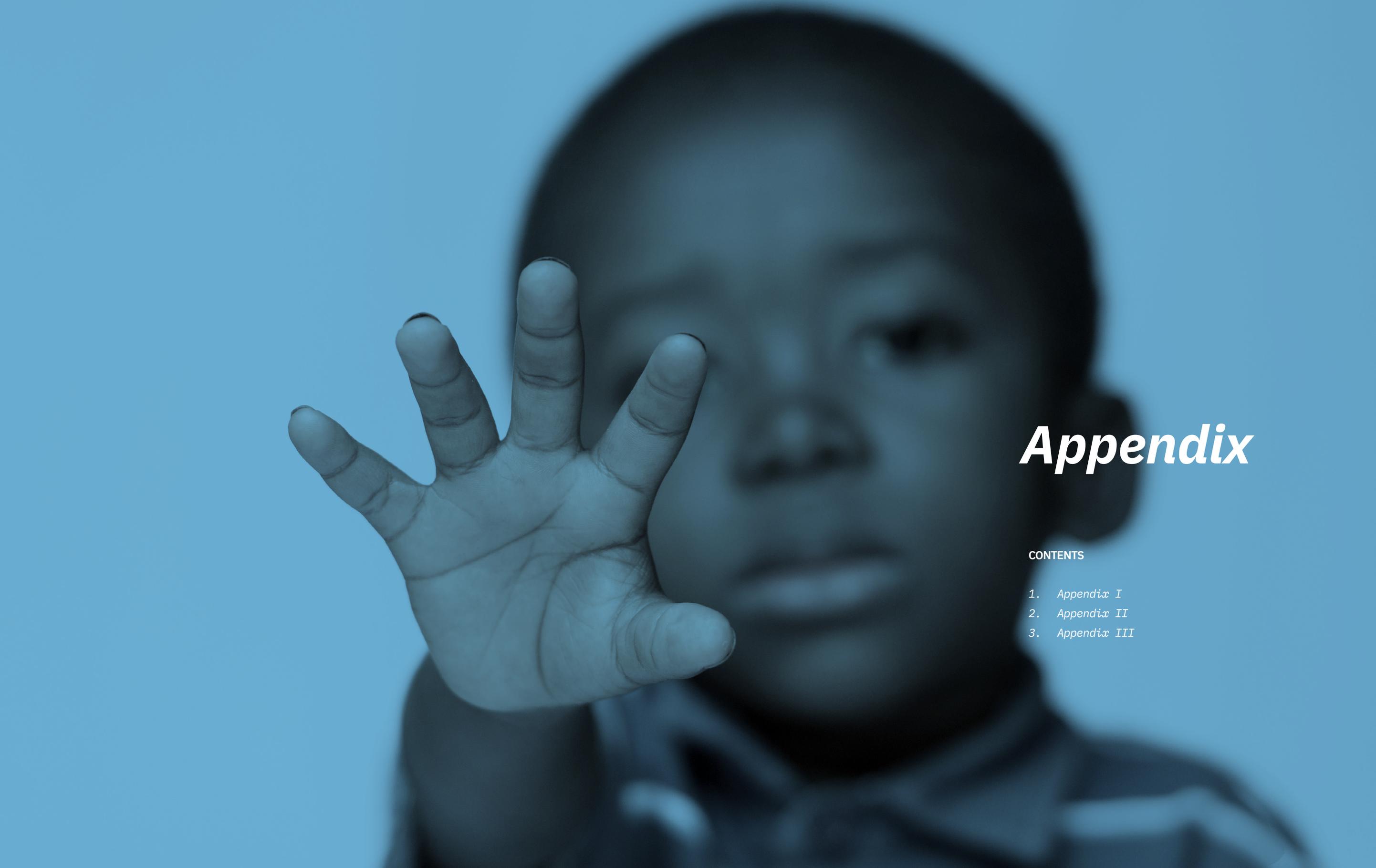
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# *Appendix*

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## Appendix I:

### Detailed Study Design, Methods and Implementation

#### The Study Areas and Population

The sample was drawn from two regions: North and Central Uganda. The districts from where the respondents were drawn include: Wakiso, Nakasongola, Kampala and Masaka for the central; and Gulu and Amuru for the northern region. These districts were targeted for their experiences in military conflict, their location (rural and urban) and the perceived risk and prevalence of child marriage, among others.

The primary respondents of this study were women who got married before they turned 18 years of age. Other study populations included men (25 years and above) who had been exposed to violence but not violent themselves, male youth (16-24 years) who had completed or were at least half way through a violence reduction programme, male youth (16-24 years) who had been exposed to violence but not violent themselves and male and female members of the communities where the women (survivors of child marriage) lived. Several key informants at community, district and national levels were also interviewed for the study.

#### Study Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional qualitative design. Data were collected at one point in time. Qualitative methodology is sensitive to unique personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs and meanings of individuals and was therefore considered to be the most appropriate approach for exploring the needs of survivors and perpetrators of GBV.

#### Sample Size and Distribution

This study involved 45 women who got married

before 18 years. Twenty-two (22) women were from the northern region while twenty-three (23) were from the central region. Half of the women from the northern region had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In addition, 112 men and male youth, 40 female community members and 11 key informants were interviewed for this study. The key informants included, staff of international development agencies like UNFPA, district and sub county officials and religious and cultural leaders.

#### Selection of Study Participants

This research relied on referral by community leaders, community based organisations to identify survivors of child marriage and other categories we included in the study. This was important in ensuring participants are relevant to the social phenomena being studied. This approach was particularly important given the sensitivity of the issue being explored. To capture the diverse lived experiences of survivors of child marriage, the women were selected on the basis of various criteria. The women eligible for selection were those who had spent at least one year in the marriage. We selected a mix of women who got married at different ages including those who got married as early as 13 years and below and those who had got married at 15, 16 and 17 years, those who were still married to the same men and those who had left, those who were currently married to other men and those who were now single and those living in urban and rural areas. The research team worked with different implementing partners to identify the survivors of child marriage in the two regions.

Male youth (16-24 years) who had completed or were at least halfway through a violence reduction programme were identified from Naguru and Kampiringisa National Rehabilitation Centre both located in the central region and Gulu Remand Home in the northern region. We mainly selected and engaged youth who

had been convicted of crimes related to GBV such as assault and defilement. Men and youth who had been exposed to violence but not violent themselves were identified through organisations providing services to them. Such organisations included Men's Forum against Domestic Violence. Selection of participants from two regions aimed at capturing a wider cultural diversity in the findings.

#### Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document review.

##### In-depth interviews with women

Face to face interviews were held in local language with each of the selected survivors of child marriage. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. These interviews primarily enabled us to gain deep insights into the lived experiences of the women, including their strengths and resilience in coping with adversities during child marriage. The issues explored included events that preceded the marriage of the women, their experiences during the marriages and particularly how they impacted their socio-economic progress, perceptions of drivers of child marriage in their communities, available interventions and suggestions for addressing the problem.

##### In-depth interviews with key actors

Face to face in-depth interviews were held with stakeholders in the implementation of interventions for preventing child marriage and teenage pregnancy. These included individuals from international agencies and CSOs like UNFPA, district Probation and Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers and officials from the ministry in charge of children affairs among others. The interviews explored

the prevalence of child marriage at national, district and community levels, drivers and consequences of child marriage on the survivors, communities and country at large, existing interventions and possible solutions to address the problem. Discussions with key actors provided us vital information to triangulate data from the primary respondents.

##### Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with male and female community members and the various categories of youth and men as elucidated in section 2.1. Each FGD convened eight members and was conducted by a moderator who was assisted by a note taker. The discussions lasted two hours on average. They explored various subjects including participants' understanding of GBV, the prevalence of specific forms in their communities, drivers of GBV and personal experiences of violence. The discussions also explored the participants' understanding of the drivers and consequences of child marriage. Discussions with men/youth were important in establishing how they define violence and their experiences in living with/without GBV. Further, the discussions with men were valuable in identifying what strengths and other strategies men draw on in managing, preventing or escaping the risk of violence. Discussions with male and female community members helped to triangulate the views of both women and the men/youth involved in the study.

##### Literature/Document Review

Several documents were reviewed to obtain relevant contextual information on GBV and child marriage. These included reports of international agencies such as UNICEF and UNFPA; government reports, policies, action plans and strategies; journal articles; and reports of local CSOs focusing on GBV and child marriage. Information from these sources supplemented data from primary sources. To enable a focused review, a document review guide was used.

### Data Management and Analysis

All the interviews and FGDs were audio recorded. They were then transcribed, translated to English, word processed and imported into NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software for further management. Analysis was conducted using deductive and inductive thematic analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The process involved reading and re-reading the transcripts several times and coding relevant sections, words, paragraphs and sentences according to themes/nodes generated from existing literature, the study objectives and those emerging from the data. Relevant themes included contributing factors to child marriage, effects of child marriage on self, effects of child marriage on families, meaning of GBV and strengths, resilience and coping strategies.

### Quality Control

It was important to ensure that qualitative research was credible and did not stray into the anecdotal. We therefore adopted the quality framework proposed by De Witt and Ploeg (2006) which calls for ‘balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance and actualization’. This was given effect in several ways:

Prior to data collection, the research assistants were taken through a two-day rigorous training to orientate them to the study purpose and design, including the study objectives, area, participants, methods and tools. The training included practical sessions where the research assistants agreed on the appropriate translations of questions in the study tools into the local languages.

The data collection process was closely supervised to ensure that the right participants were selected, and the tools properly administered. Each region had a team leader and supervisor charged with the responsibility of providing continuous guidance and oversight during the data collection process.

The persons contracted to transcribe the interviews/discussions, also translated them into English. However, each transcript was compared with the original audio interview by a member of the core research team proficient in the language to ensure consistency in the translation.

Coding was conducted by two members of the core research team. To enhance accuracy of the process, the two members regularly reviewed each other’s work to minimise contradictions in the interpretation and assignment of codes to specific data. In addition, where there was doubt on the appropriate code to assign to specific statements, the two members always discussed the coding to build consensus.

### Ethical Considerations

#### Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by Makerere University School of Social Sciences Institutional Research Ethics Committee (MAKSS REC 09.18.217) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (SS 4939). In addition, the necessary steps were taken to ensure that no harm - intended or unintended – was inflicted on the research participants. Besides taking due diligence in the recruitment of the researchers, the sensitive nature of issues around child marriages and GBV also required taking a gender sensitive approach.

#### Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all the selected participants before involving them in the study. Participants who could not write due to illiteracy and other factors signed using a thumb print. The informed consent forms were printed in Luganda, Luo and English. Literate participants were given opportunity to read and interpret the consent form before signing, except where they opted to be read for. The research

assistants read and interpreted the informed consent forms for illiterate and semi-illiterate participants.

The consent process involved informing the participants the study purpose, how they had been selected, the benefits of participation and their right to voluntary participation and to withdraw from the study at any point, as well as assuring them of confidentiality.

#### Confidentiality

Researchers and investigators were fully aware of the need to ensure the protection of participant confidentiality. All the research assistants were obliged to take an oath of confidentiality during the contracting process. We ensured confidentiality by making sure that participants were only contacted in safe ways and interviewed in private spaces where the conversation could not be heard by others. During both interviews and FGDs participants were not asked for their real names. FGD participants were identified by numbers. Unauthorised access to interview/FGD transcripts was restricted by locking computer files with passwords. In addition, digital audio recordings were deleted after transcription. Only pseudonyms are used in this report.

### Appendix II:

#### Researchers’ Briefing Notes

##### INFORMATION SHEET FOR WOMEN

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study on the needs of women who are affected by gender-based violence (violence directed to women because they are women). It is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and how you will be involved should you agree to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

Although there is research on gender-based violence, we need to understand the problem from the perspectives of women themselves; the effects of violence on them and their families. We want to improve services and access to justice for all women and this research will be used to train professionals and agencies to be able to respond more effectively to the needs of women.

Where is the research taking place?

The research is taking place in Uganda and similar research is being undertaken in China, India, Jamaica and the UK. We hope its findings will be valuable for women globally.

Who is conducting the research?

The research is being undertaken by the None in Three Centre which is based at the University of Huddersfield in the UK. The persons responsible for the research in Uganda are Dr Eric Awich Ochen and Ms Esther Nanfuka Kalule. It is likely that they will have other local experts working with them. The contact details of the lead researchers are at the end of this sheet.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been invited to take part in the study because as a survivor yourself, you may be in a position to offer an insight into the challenges of women who face gender-based violence.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is up to you to decide whether or not to join the study and there will be no adverse consequences if you decide not to participate.

What is required of me if I do take part?

If you agree, we will ask you to choose a false name (which you should remember) – this is to protect your confidentiality and this is the only name that will appear on our records. We will not ask you for any other contact details, although you may contact us at any time. We would then ask you to read and sign the consent form (using your ‘new’ name). We would then carry out an interview of between 45-90 minutes. The interview will be done in a place which is safe and which offers privacy. We would like your consent to audio record the interview, this would only be used by the research team and means we can capture everything that is important. Once we have written up the interview, the recording will be destroyed. We will make sure that transcripts have identifiable information removed and are carefully stored in a locked storage cupboard or on password protected computers. Audio recordings will also be stored securely using a password.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in the study?

We hope that your participation may help to improve support and services in the future for women experiencing violence. On a personal level, you may find it beneficial to be able to talk about your experiences but if you feel upset, the interview will be paused and you can take a break or you can withdraw from the study. If you think that participating in the study will put you or anyone you know at risk of harm, we would support you in seeking help and protection.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. If you reveal any information that suggests someone is at significant risk of

harm, we will ask your permission to inform the appropriate authorities or support you in doing so. Everyone in the study will be given contact details of counsellors – it is your choice whether to seek help. Your identity and confidentiality will be protected at all times. We may use quotations from your interview in publications but these will not be traceable back to you.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

A preliminary report of the research findings should be available within six months of completing the study. The report will be placed on the project website and if you wish you will be able to download this. We will use the research findings to produce policy and practice guidance and we will write publications and present the findings at conferences. In this way we will be able to share your views with as many people as possible.

#### **Compensation**

You will receive a compensation of 20,000 (twenty Thousand Uganda shillings) to cover compensation for your time and a refund of transport fare if the interview takes place outside your normal home environment and you have to travel to meet the interview team. We will also ensure that we provide you with a drink and some snacks during the interview process.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, you should ask to speak to the Country Director or Qualitative Lead for Uganda. If the matter concerns them or if you so wish, you can contact one of the Co-Directors of the None in Three Centre. All contact details are listed at the end.

What do I do next?

If you would like to take part in the study, please contact Ms Esther Nanfuka Kalule, Tel [provided to participants]. Details are listed below.

Further Questions?

If you are interested in taking part but have further questions, please contact one of the research team.

#### **None in Three Project Contact Details**

Noneinthree@hud.ac.uk

Project Co-director:

Professor Adele Jones  
Noneinthree@hud.ac.uk  
The University of Huddersfield,  
Queensgate, Huddersfield HD13DH, UK  
Telephone [provided to participants]

Project Co-director:

Professor Daniel Boduszek  
Noneinthree@hud.ac.uk  
The University of Huddersfield,  
Queensgate, Huddersfield HD13DH, UK  
Telephone [provided to participants]

Research Director for Uganda:

Dr Eric Awich Ochen, tel and email  
[provided to participants]

Qualitative Lead for Uganda:

Ms Esther Nanfuka Kalule, Tel and email  
[provided to participants]

If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) about; (1) concerns regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects’ issues, please contact:

Dr. Stella Neema

The Chair  
Makerere School of Social Sciences  
Research Ethics Committee  
Telephone and email [provided to participants]

Or

Dr. Peter Ndemere

The Executive Secretary  
The Uganda National Council of Science and  
Technology,  
Kimera Road. Ntinda P. O. Box 6884 Kampala,  
Uganda  
Telephone and email [provided to participants]

#### **RESEARCH CONSENT FORM**

We are pleased to introduce to you the None in Three (NI3) Global Research Centre, Makerere University. The None in Three project is a partnership between the University of Huddersfield (UK), The Indian School of Design and Innovation (India), Makerere University (Uganda), The University of Sheffield (UK) and the University of Technology (Jamaica) and funded by the UK Research and Innovations Fund (formally Research Council UK).

The primary objective of the project is to understand the dynamics, psychosocial and cultural causes of Gender-based Violence (GBV) with a specific focus on Child Marriage.

Currently the project is conducting a qualitative study on the dynamics of Gender-based Violence and Child marriage in particular. We hope its findings will be valuable for women globally. In Uganda, the approximate number of individuals participating in the research study will be about 50 women. This study has been approved by Makerere University School of Social Sciences Institutional Research Ethics Committee.

We hope that your participation may help to improve support and services in the future for women experiencing violence. On a personal level, you may find it beneficial to be able to talk about your experiences. You will also be provided feedback on the study findings shall be provided to the research participant in a timely manner. If you think that participating in the study will put you or anyone you know at risk of harm, we would support you in seeking help and protection.

All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. If you reveal any information that suggests someone is at significant risk of harm, we will ask your permission to inform the appropriate authorities or support you in doing so. Everyone in the study will be given contact details of counsellors – it is your choice whether to seek help. Your identity and confidentiality will be protected at all times. We may use quotations from your interview in publications but these will not be traceable back to you.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to join the study and there will be no adverse consequences or any cost if you decide not to participate. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The researcher may also terminate the research participant's participation if it is realised that the participant is not eligible or too ill to complete the study.

You will receive a compensation of 20,000 (twenty Thousand Uganda shillings) to cover compensation for your time and a refund of transport fare if the interview takes place outside your normal home environment and you have to travel to meet the interview team. We will also ensure that we provide you with a drink and some snacks during the interview process.

This is a research study rather than provision of clinical care that will last for a period of 1 year, but your participation will only be required for a short time approximately one month. The study will not involve any treatment or procedure which may involve risk to the research participant and will not involve the collection of human materials

1. I confirm that I have been given the information sheet for the None in Three research. I understand the purpose and nature of the study, have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction.
2. I agree to take part in the study. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without facing any adverse consequences.
3. I understand that the study is confidential and my real name will not be used at any stage.
4. I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions.
5. I give permission for interviews/ focus group discussions to be audio-recorded and transcribed
6. If I am uncomfortable with the session being recorded, I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time.
7. If I am distressed as a result of taking part in the study, I will be given help to access counselling or support from an appropriate agency.

8. I agree to inform the researcher if I am unsafe because of my participation in the research.
9. I give permission for anonymised quotes to be used in any publications.
10. I understand that all information gathered in this study will be kept confidential unless there is a possibility of harm occurring to a child or other vulnerable person. In the event of the possibility of harm, I give permission for appropriate authorities to be informed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant      Date      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of witness      Date      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of researcher      Date      Signature

None in Three Project Contact Details  
Noneinthree@hud.ac.uk

In case of questions about the research project, the research participants' rights and welfare please contact;  
The Research Director:  
Dr Eric Awich Ochen, tel and email [provided to participants]

Qualitative Lead:  
Ms Esther Nanfuka Kalule, tel and email [provided to participants]

Website: <http://www.noneinthree.org/>

### Appendix III:

#### Study Tools

#### a) In-depth Interview Guide for Child Marriage Survivors

1. Find out the age of the respondent at first marriage, current age, current marital status, and family type (monogamous, polygamous, single type)
2. Number of children the person has
3. Highest level of education
4. Residence: rural, urban, peri-urban
5. Whether involved in any income generating activity

#### Experience in Marriage

6. Tell me about the events that led to your getting married early?
  - a. Probe whether her own parents were involved
  - b. Was there a pregnancy? (were you pregnant?)
  - c. Or other relatives are the ones who married her off?
  - d. Whether she was in School at that time
  - e. Was any other sibling (boy or girl) married off early?
  - f. Whether the family was experiencing a crisis of any nature (e.g poverty)
  - g. Whether bride price was paid, to who, who took it
  - h. What were your feelings in the process of being married off so early if you can recall?

- i. Did you do anything to try and stop the marriage?
- j. Did you take part in making decisions on when and who to get married to?
7. What has been your experience/ life after getting married?
- a. How were you treated by your husband? (do you feel you were respected by him?)
- b. How were you treated by your in-laws? (do you feel you were respected by in-laws? Please explain)
- c. What kind of support did you receive from your parents, husband, in-laws and the community?
- d. Who was the most supportive of these?
- e. Did you have any income generating activity then? How about now?
- f. Were you able to have control over the finances you made? How about now?
- g. Were you involved in any decision making regarding any family issue?
- h. Did you still communicate with your friends you had before you got married?
- i. Have you made new friends in the marriage? how different are these from your previous friends?
- j. Did you marry within the same community or stayed within?
- k. Are there regrets you have about getting married that early?
- l. Do you feel there is a part of your childhood that you may have missed by marrying so early? What could this be?
- m. What was your experience during your first pregnancy? (At what age was it, ask for any complications, who supported her, experience of childbirth and child care, health status of children, what were the challenges?
- n. What is the education experience of your children? (How many are in school, what level, any dropouts and why they have dropped out)
- o. Did you experience any form of abuse and domestic violence? (probe for understanding and incidents of marital rape)
8. Experiences of other girls who got married early
- a) Do you know of any girls in your community who got married early?
- b) What do you perceive to be their experiences? (Probe for both positive and negative experience)
9. Drivers of child marriage
- a) Now let us talk about the factors that perpetuate child marriages in this area. Probe for the role of:
- Poverty
  - Cultural beliefs and practices e.g. moral factors, initiation ceremonies, male child preference, bride wealth/ price
  - Religious beliefs
  - School dropout
  - Teenage pregnancy
  - Indiscipline among children/ moral degeneration
  - Upbringing of children
  - Globalisation/modernisation
  - Economic independence, i.e. children working and getting money at a young age
  - Location

- b) There are some circumstances where parents marry off their girls at an early age? What do you think motivates them?
- c) There are some circumstances where young girls choose to get married even when they have the support by parents to remain in school? What do you think motivates them?
- d) What do you think needs to be done to reduce or prevent child marriage in your community?

10. Effectiveness of Interventions addressing child marriage

- a) In case you experienced any form of violence, what support did you receive? Explore from who?
- b) Perception of their effectiveness? Any gaps?
- c) What initiatives are there to prevent child marriage in your community? Explore if they are government, local, NGO
- d) What support is provided to girls who get married early? Explore if they are government, local, NGO

**b) Focus Group Guide for Men Exposed to Violence but not Violent**

1. Let us talk about your understanding and views about Gender-based Violence.
- In your opinion what does Gender-based Violence mean? Probe for the different forms physical, emotional, sexual etc
  - The researcher should introduce the ranking exercise
2. How common would you say violence against women is in the communities that

- you have grown up in? What could be the reasons for the identified trend?
3. How about violence against men? How serious of a problem is it? What could explain the identified trend?

4. What forms of violence have you experienced? (Probe for the types of violence the respondents have personally experienced)

Probe for:

- Forms of violence experienced
- Perpetrator(s)
- Duration of abuse
- Perceived cause of the violence

5. How has living with violence affected your life?

Probe for:

- Effects on individual's physical wellbeing, self -esteem, personal development
- Effects on family & other personal relationships such as peers

6. Was there anything that could have been done to help you escape the violence you were exposed to?

7. What kinds of support did you receive to address the violence you were exposed to? Probe for the sources of support

8. How has the support you received changed your life?

9. Was there more you would have liked them to do for you?

10. Male victims of domestic violence commonly do not report the abuse they face. What could be the reasons behind the Men's silence? What do you suggest should be done to encourage male victims of domestic violence to report?

11. Looking back at your situation, what advice would you give other men exposed to Violence?

Child marriage as a form of GBV

12. Now Let us talk about child marriage as a form of GBV. (Researcher could briefly explain what it means in Ugandan terms)

Probe for:

- Appropriate age for marriage?
- How prevalent is it in this area?

Drivers of child marriage

13. Now let us talk about the factors that perpetuate child marriages in this area.

Probe for the role of:

- Poverty
- Cultural beliefs and practices e.g. moral factors, initiation ceremonies, male child preference, bride wealth/ price
- Religious beliefs
- School dropout
- Teenage pregnancy
- Indiscipline among children/ moral degeneration
- Upbringing of children
- Globalization/modernization
- Economic independence, i.e. children working and getting money at a young age
- Location

14. There are some circumstances where parents marry off their girls at an early age? What do you think motivates them?

15. There are some circumstances where young girls choose to get married even when they have the support by parents to remain in school?

What do you think motivates them?

16. How does child marriage affect children who marry early?

a. Let us start with the problems you have seen among girls who marry early?

Probe for effects of child marriage on:

- Personal development such as education, work or employment
- Physical and psychological health
- Spread of HIV and other STIs
- Domestic burdens
- Childbirth, rearing and upbringing
- Violence and abuse

b. Now let us discuss the problems you have seen among boys who marry early?

Probe for effects of child marriage on:

- Personal development such as education, work or employment
- Physical and psychological health
- Spread of HIV and other STIs
- Domestic burdens
- Childbirth, rearing and upbringing
- Violence and abuse
- Perception of masculinity: how does marrying early affect the boys' sense of manhood and identity?

17. What do you think needs to be done to reduce or prevent child marriage in your community?

### c) Focus Group Guide for Youth Exposed to Violence but not Violent

1. Let us talk about your understanding and views about Gender-based Violence.
  - In your opinion what does Gender-based Violence mean? Probe for the different forms physical, emotional, sexual etc

- The researcher should introduce the ranking exercise

2. How common would you say violence against women is in the communities that you have grown up in? What could be the reasons for the identified trend?
3. How about violence against young men? How serious of a problem is it? What could explain the identified trend?
4. What forms of violence have you experienced? (Probe for the types of violence the respondents have personally experienced)

Probe for:

- Forms of violence experienced
- Perpetrator(s)
- Duration of abuse
- Perceived cause of the violence

5. How has living with violence affected your life?

Probe for:

- Effects on individual's physical wellbeing, self-esteem, personal development
- Effects on family & other personal relationships such as peers

6. Was there anything that could have been done to help you escape the violence you were exposed to?
7. What kinds of support did you receive to address the violence you were exposed to? Probe for the sources of support
8. How has the support you received changed your life?
9. Was there more you would have liked them to do for you?

10. Male victims of domestic violence commonly do not report the abuse they face. What could be the reasons behind the Men's silence? What do you suggest should be done to encourage male victims of domestic violence to report?

11. Looking back at your situation, what advice would you give other young men exposed to Violence?

Child marriage as a form of GBV

12. Now Let us talk about child marriage as a form of GBV. (Researcher could briefly explain what it means in Ugandan terms)

Probe for:

- Appropriate age for marriage?
- How prevalent is it in this area?

Drivers of child marriage

13. Now let us talk about the factors that perpetuate child marriages in this area.

Probe for the role of:

- Poverty
- Cultural beliefs and practices e.g. moral factors, initiation ceremonies, male child preference, bride wealth/ price
- Religious beliefs
- School dropout
- Teenage pregnancy
- Indiscipline among children/ moral degeneration
- Upbringing of children
- Globalization/modernization
- Economic independence, i.e. children working and getting money at a young age
- Location

14. There are some circumstances where parents marry off their girls at an early age? What do you think motivates them?

15. There are some circumstances where young girls choose to get married even when they have the support by parents to remain in school? What do you think motivates them?

16. How does child marriage affect children who marry early?

a. Let us start with the problems you have seen among girls who marry early?

Probe for effects of child marriage on:

- Personal development such as education, work or employment
- Physical and psychological health
- Spread of HIV and other STIs
- Domestic burdens
- Child birth, rearing and upbringing
- Violence and abuse

c. Now let us discuss the problems you have seen among boys who marry early?

Probe for effects of child marriage on:

- Personal development such as education, work or employment
- Physical and psychological health
- Spread of HIV and other STIs
- Domestic burdens
- Child birth, rearing and upbringing
- Violence and abuse
- Perception of masculinity: how does marrying early affect the boys' sense of manhood and identity?

17. What do you think needs to be done to reduce or prevent child marriage in your community?

#### **d) Focus Group Discussion Guide for Youth Undergoing Rehabilitation**

1. Tell me about the events that led to your rehabilitation in this institution (Researcher ask each participant to tell you their story).

Probe for:

- Crime committed
  - How their family and community responded to their situation?
  - Any incidences of perceived violence and abuse against the participant
2. Now let us talk about your understanding and views about Gender-based Violence.
- In your opinion what does Gender-based Violence mean? Probe for the different forms physical, emotional, sexual etc
  - The researcher should introduce the ranking exercise
3. How common would you say violence against women is in the communities that you have grown up in? What could be the reasons for the identified trend?
4. How about violence against men? How serious of a problem is it? What could explain the identified trend?
5. In what ways do you think that male youth in your community are encouraged to behave in violent ways especially towards women?

Probe for:

- Socio-cultural causes
- Economic issues
- Role of masculinity
- Morality and upbringing

6. From your experience, what strategies do male youth use to prevent violence to others?

7. If a man or youth was concerned about his own violent tendencies and wanted help, what kind of response and services would make a difference?

8. How about men or male youth who are victims of gender-based violence, what kind of help do they need? Where would they get such support?

9. How has your experience been after rehabilitation?

Probe for:

- How the rehabilitation experience has changed their attitudes, behavior?
  - Kinds of help which was/is being provided in the institution/ the ones that were most helpful
  - How might services be more responsive to the needs of men in similar situations?
  - Is there more you would like them to do - what sort of things can be helpful?
10. Looking back at your situation, what advice would you give other young men who have a tendency towards violence?

#### **e) Key Informant Interview Guide (MGLSD, District Community Department, District Education Office, NGO actors)**

1. Comment on the prevalence and magnitude of gender-based violence in Uganda

2. What are the commonest forms of violence and who is most affected?

3. Provide an overview of the prevalence of child marriage in Uganda/Region/District.

Probe for:

- Rural-urban, religion, ethnicity and regional dynamics
  - Difference in prevalence among boys and girls
4. How do the following factors perpetuate child marriages?

Probe for the role of: (Separately ask about the contribution of each factor to marriage of boys and girls)

- Poverty
  - Cultural beliefs and practices e.g. moral factors, initiation ceremonies, male child preference, bride wealth/ price
  - Religious beliefs
  - School dropout
  - Teenage pregnancy
  - Indiscipline among children/ moral degeneration
  - Upbringing of children
  - Globalization/modernization
  - Economic independence, i.e children working and getting money at a young age
  - Location
  - Any other factors
5. In what specific ways are boys and girls affected by child marriage?

Probe for:

- Physical including health consequences
- Social consequences
- Psychological consequences
- Economic

6. How does child marriage affect highly prevalent communities?

Probe for:

- Social
- Health
- Economic consequences

7. What strategies are in place to reduce/prevent child marriages?

Probe for strategies (start with strategies at that institution):

- Family level
- Community
- School level
- Rural and urban

8. How effective have they been?

9. What gaps have you identified if any?

10. What more needs to be done to reduce/prevent child marriage?

Probe for:

- Policy interventions
- Community interventions
- Cultural adjustments

#### **f) FGD Guide for Community Members (Male and female participants from the general community)**

General Questions on GBV

1. How is gender-based violence (GBV) understood and defined in this community?
2. How common is it? What forms are the commonest? Who is mostly affected men or women?
3. What factors do you think cause and

sustain GBV in this community?

Probe for the role of:

- Economic factors e.g. poverty, dependence
  - Socio-cultural factors e.g. power imbalances between men and women, cultural and religious beliefs, upbringing, moral degeneration
4. What factors produce additional risks for women affected by gender-based violence? (Ask women participants for their views on the reasons for increased risk for them)
  5. What support and interventions are available to the victims/ survivors?
  6. What gaps do you see in the available interventions? What do you suggest should be done to improve the effectiveness of available interventions?

Questions on Child Marriage

7. Now Let us talk about child marriage as a form of GBV. (Researcher could briefly explain what it means in Ugandan terms)

- How prevalent is it in this area?
- Who is mostly affected girls or boys?
- How does it manifest among the girls? Are they forced to get married by parents or elders at a young age or they actively participate in getting partners?
- What do you think motivates parents to marry off their girls at an early age?
- What in your view motivates the girls to marry early?
- How about among the boys? Are boys forced to marry off early? Do they choose to get married for some reason? What could be these reasons?

8. Now let us talk about the factors that perpetuate child marriages in this area.

Probe for the role of:

- Poverty
- Cultural beliefs and practices e.g. moral factors, initiation ceremonies, male child preference, bride wealth/ price
- Religious beliefs
- School dropout
- Teenage pregnancy
- Indiscipline among children/ moral degeneration
- Upbringing of children
- Globalization/modernization
- Economic independence, i.e children working and getting money at a young age
- Location
- Whether these factors affect boys and girls differently

Of all the factors mentioned above (you can remind them of the points) what do you consider to be the top three most important causes?

9. How does child marriage affect children who marry early?

Let us start with the problems you have seen among girls who marry early?

Probe for effects of child marriage on:

- Personal development such as education, work or employment
- Physical and psychological health
- Spread of HIV and other STIs
- Domestic burdens
- Childbirth, rearing and upbringing
- Violence and abuse

10. Now let us discuss the problems you have seen among boys who marry early.

Probe for effects of child marriage on:

- Personal development such as education, work or employment
- Physical and psychological health
- Spread of HIV and other STIs
- Domestic burdens
- Childbirth, rearing and upbringing
- Violence and abuse
- Perception of masculinity: how does marrying early affect the boys' sense of manhood and identity?

11. What support is available for the survivors? Let us start with informal support at household and community levels? How about from government and NGOs? Assess whether there is specific support for boys and girls

12. What do you think should be done to eliminate child marriage from this area?

13. What efforts to eliminate the practice are in place? What is your view on their effectiveness? What are the gaps? How should they be addressed?

**g) Document Review Guide**

Theme	Documents reviewed
Study Methodology	<p>Global and regional guidelines and standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNCST research guidelines</li> <li>• UNEG Ethical Guidelines and the UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis</li> <li>• UNEG Handbook, Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation - Towards UNEG Guidance</li> </ul>
Trends of child marriage in Uganda	<p>Journal articles, policy statements, strategic plans and research reports. They include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage results reports</li> <li>• Annual Police Crime Report for the last three years</li> <li>• National Population Housing and Census Report (2014)</li> <li>• National Strategy for Ending Child Marriages and Teenage Pregnancies (2015-2020)</li> <li>• National Strategy for Girls' Education (NSGE) in Uganda (2014 – 2019)</li> <li>• UDHS Report-2011,2016</li> <li>• Orphans and other Vulnerable Children Management Information System</li> </ul>
Situation Analysis of GBV	<p>Journal articles, policy statements, strategic plans and research reports. They include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender assessment report 2017</li> <li>• National GBV data base</li> <li>• Annual Police Crime Report for the last three years</li> <li>• UDHS Report-2011,2016</li> <li>• Annual Sector performance reports including; Health Sector Performance Reports</li> </ul>

Drivers of child marriage Journal articles, policy statements, strategic plans and research reports.

- Police reports and Child Helpline reports
- The Gender in Education Policy
- Primary Leaving Examination results report 2015, 2016, 2017
- Social Development Sector Plan (SDSP) 2015/16 -2019/20
- Social Development Sector Performance reports
- Social Sector Monitoring and Support Supervision Reports
- Social Sector Ministerial Policy Statements
- National Strategy for Ending Child Marriages and Teenage Pregnancies (2015-2020)
- Uganda-Poverty-Assessment-Report-2016

Consequences of Child marriage Journal articles, policy statements, strategic plans and research reports. National documents include;

- Health Sector Performance Reports
- Education Sector Performance Reports 2016, 2017 and 2018
- UDHS Report-2011,2016
- National Development Plan II
- Annual Police Crime Reports for the last three years



***Profiles***

**Professor Adele Jones, PhD**

Professor of Social Work at the University of Huddersfield, Adele specialises in international children's rights and prevention of violence against women and children. She has authored numerous publications on a range of topics around child abuse and gender inequality and led more than 26 international research projects, culminating in the creation and leadership of the global Ni3 Research Centre.

<http://www.noneinthree.org/meet-the-centre-team/adele-jones/>

**Dr Graham Gibbs, PhD**

An expert in qualitative research methods based at the University of Huddersfield, Graham has led and supported a range of social science research projects, with a focus on computer assisted learning. Graham has written two books on qualitative data analysis and supported researchers with NVivo data analysis in international projects including Ni3.

<http://www.noneinthree.org/meet-the-centre-team/graham-gibbs/>

**Dr Tim Gomersall, PhD**

Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Huddersfield, Tim's research interests include: the psychology of illness self-management; gender, sexuality and health; and health technology evaluation. He has authored and co-authored several publications around psychology and health, and has provided expertise to the Ni3 team in using a metasynthetic approach to reviewing existing literature.

<http://www.noneinthree.org/meet-the-centre-team/timothy-gomersall/>

**Esther Nanfuka**

Esther is a Lecturer in the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University. She is also the Research Fellow on the None in Three Research Project Uganda. Her research interests revolve around child protection, gender-based violence and resilience among people living with HIV and other vulnerable populations

<http://www.noneinthree.org/uganda/meet-the-team/esther-nanfuka-kalule/>

 [www.noneinthree.org/uganda](http://www.noneinthree.org/uganda)



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and Innovation

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