
Child marriages in Uganda after enacting the death penalty for defilement

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Abstract: In 1990 at the climax of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Uganda, the government repealed sections of the law in order to protect population from infection of HIV/AIDS especially the children. This paper is thus based on the 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census which was conducted 12 years after the enactment of the law. The results showed that 4.5 percent of children in Uganda were in child marriages with girls being affected more than boys. Child marriages were found across all socio-economic and cultural class within Uganda. Many children in child marriages dropped out of school, lived in child headed households, lived in poor households especially those in urban areas, with Muslims, orphans, Northern and Eastern Region having higher proportion than other categories of children. This study shows the need to educate the public on the existence of the law so that children are protected from becoming wives and husbands.

Keyword: Child Marriages, Uganda, Death Penalty, Defilement

1. Introduction

In 1990 at the climax of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Uganda, the government revised and repealed sections of the law relating to sex. Section 122 was amended to read:

“Section 122 of the code is amended in subsection (2) by replacing the words ‘fourteen years’ with the words ‘eighteen years’ and deleting the proviso to that subsection”.

Section 123 was also amended to read

“123 (1) Any person who unlawfully has sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of eighteen years is guilty of offence and liable to suffer death” [1]

To what extent has this been put in practice? The subsequent analysis and discussions of the 2002 Uganda population and housing census conducted twelve years after the amendment of the law will try to answer this question and show the extent to which the amendments to the law have been put in practice.

In Uganda, child marriages continue to occur among all ethnic, religious and cultural groups, despite the fact that the country is a signatory to international provisions for the protection of children like the UN convention on the rights of the child (CRC) of 1989 [2]. Child marriage is a human rights violation that prevents both girls and boys (but most especially girls) from obtaining an education, enjoying optimal health, bonding with others of their own age,

maturing, and ultimately choosing their own life partners. This cultural practice has implications for freedom, rights and development of children. It thus warrants careful study.

Article 1 of the Convention on the Right of the Child refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old as child/early marriage. This is re-emphasized in African charter on rights and welfare of the child (ACRWC-1990) in article 21 to which Uganda is a signatory to that too. Child marriage involves either one or both spouses being children and may take place with or without formal registration, and under civil, religious or customary laws. In case of the girl child, child marriage can be defined as “Any marriage of a girl that is below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing [3]. Child marriage is an ancient, worldwide custom [4]. Other terms applied to child marriage include “early marriage” and “child brides.” Early marriage is vague and does not necessarily refer to children. Moreover, what is early for one person may be late for another. Child bride on the other hand seems to glorify the process, implying a celebration and a bride who is happy to start a loving union with her spouse. But for the most part, girl brides do not know and may have never met their groom neither do they have a choice to decide [5].

Although the definition of child marriage includes boys,

girls are at a higher risk of falling victim of the practice. While child marriage affects both sexes, girls are disproportionately more affected both in terms of numbers and consequences on their wellbeing. Their overall development is compromised, leaving them socially isolated with little education, skills and opportunities for employment and self-realization. This leaves child brides more vulnerable to poverty, a consequence of child marriage as well as a cause. For example, in Mali the girl : boy ratio of marriage before age 18 is 72:1; in Kenya, 21:1; and even in the United States, 8:1[6].

Nour, (2006)[5], has argued that child marriage is driven by poverty and has many effects on girls' health that include: increased risk for sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, death during childbirth, and obstetric fistulas. Girls' offspring are at increased risk for premature birth and death as neonates, infants, or children. Births resulting from child marriages are said to be "too soon, too close, too many, or too late". For example, a high percentage of girls in Ethiopia (25%), Uganda (42%), and Mali (45%) have given birth by the age of 18 compared to only 1% in Germany, 2% in France, and 10% in the United States [7, 5, 8].

Child marriage is now widely recognized as a violation of children's rights, a direct form of discrimination against the girl child who as a result of the practice is often deprived of her basic rights to health, education, development and equality. Tradition, religion and poverty continue to fuel the practice of child marriage, despite its strong association with adverse reproductive health outcomes and the lack of education of girls. This forms a strong justification for the study of the phenomenon in Uganda, a signatory to international child rights conventions, with a strong girls' education movement.

2. Methodology

Source of data: The source of data for this paper is the 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census¹. All central statistical offices in Africa give out 10 percent of the census data to the public. For the case of Uganda, this translates to about 2.47 million persons. Of these 57 percent of the Uganda population was below the age of 18 years [9] making the sample size for this study over 1.4 million children. The inclusion criteria were that the individuals should be aged 10 to 17 more years. The reason for this was because the question on current marital status was asked about all people 10 years and above. Similarly, in Uganda, a child was anyone below the age of 18 years.

The analysis took all children aged 10-17 years. Child marriages were compared across selected factors namely age, motherhood, orphanhood status, relationship to the head, age category of head, type of housing, residence

divided into rural-urban district of enumeration and region, religion, ethnicity, school attendance, literacy levels and main source of livelihood. This was at bivariate level. The multivariate analysis used logistic regression model since the dependent variable (child mother) is dichotomous taking on value "1" if the child is currently in union/ever been in union and "0" if he/she was never married.

3. Results

3.1. Marital status of Children

Analysis of the 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census conducted twelve years after the amendment of the law shows to what extent the penal code amendments have been put in practice or have not been observed or have not reduced the practice of marrying off children in the country. In studying the homogeneity of children, [10] showed that one of the child vulnerability factors in Uganda is early marriages. Many scholars have indicated that orphans particularly girls are usually married off too early. The 2002 Census had a question on marital status of those aged 10 years and above and analysis of responses to this question gives results in Table 1. Among children aged 10-17 years, 4.5 percent were currently in a marital union or had ever been married at the time of the Census. An issue of major concern was that out of these, about 0.33 percent were in polygamous unions. In the whole population, 0.33 percent translates into over 17,000 children in the country being in polygamous union, while over 10,000 children were widowed. Overall, more than 230,000 children aged 10-17 years countrywide were either in marital union or had ever been in a marital union, which is a very serious social and health problem as this data represents 10 percent. Apparently, there were more girls in this category (6.5%) compared to the boys (2.5%). This statistic confirms the higher susceptibility of females. However, this was less than what was reported in 1990 in which the proportion of child marriage was 5.4 percent with girls being more than 5 times compared to boys in that year.

Table 1: Proportion of children by marital status

	Total children 10-17(0)		Sex of child	
	No	Percent	Male	Female
Marital Status	517,563		50.2	49.8
Never married	494,264	95.5	97.5	93.5
Currently married/cohabiting (monogamous)	19,704	3.8	2.2	5.5
Currently married/cohabiting (polygamous)	1,716	0.3	0.1	0.6
Widowed	1,062	0.2	0.2	0.2
Divorced/separated	817	0.2	0.1	0.3
Total	517,563	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ever married				
2002	23,299	4.5	2.5	6.5
1990	16,267	5.4	1.7	9.1

¹ This is the most recent census as the government has been postponing carrying out another census which had been slated for 2012.

3.2. Children's Marital Status and Selected Background Characteristics

A comparison of children that had ever been or were married along selected factors yielded the following results as presented and discussed below.

3.3. Child Marriage by Religion

Information on child marriages by religion has contrasting findings. For example, one of the regions with very high child marriages is the sub-continent (Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh). The countries forming up the Subcontinent as an example are predominantly Muslim (Pakistan and Bangladesh), India is predominantly Hindu while Nepal is a mixture [11]. This shows that information on child marriages by religion is controversial though it has been documented that some religious practices promote child marriages. The reasons given for child marriages range from protecting the family pride to economic benefits of the family. This is especially true when the daughter is married off. For instance, in a study carried out in Kamuda ADP (Area Development Project), Soroti district [12], one child stated:

"Some parents force their girls to marry because they want to taste something out of their girls before they die" (pupil -Amotot Primary school).

To corroborate the information by the child, a community leader held the same view:

"Early marriages resulting from parents forcing girl children to get married such that they can get dowry" (Community leader- Aminit parish)

Table 2 presents data on child marriages by religious affiliation. It is interesting that the Moslems who are alleged to have much higher proportions of child marriages are not much different from other religions. There is no significant difference in the proportion of children married by different religious affiliations. The proportions range from 4.2 percent for Anglicans and Pentecostals to 4.9 percent for Moslems.

Table 2: Marital Status by Religion and residence

Religion	Proportion ever married	Proportion Never Married	Total
Roman Catholic	4.7	95.3	100.0
Anglican (COU)	4.2	95.8	100.0
Pentecostal	4.2	95.8	100.0
Moslem	4.9	95.1	100.0
All others	4.5	95.5	100.0
Residence			
Rural	4.6	95.4	100.0
Urban	4.1	95.9	100.0
Region			
Central	3.8	96.2	100.0
Eastern	5.4	94.6	100.0
Northern	5.2	94.8	100.0
Western	3.8	96.2	100.0

3.4. Child Marriage by Rural-Urban Residence

Table 2 further presents child marriages by residence. The proportion of children currently married or ever married was slightly higher in rural areas than in urban areas. The proportions of children who had ever been married/currently in union were 4.1 percent in urban and 4.6 percent in rural areas. At a bivariate level, it can be concluded that rural-urban residence does not determine whether a child will be married/ever married or not.

3.5. Child Marriage by Region of Residence

During the 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census, the country was divided into four statistical regions as showed in Table 2. It is indicated in the graph that the highest proportion of children in marital union was registered in the Eastern region (5.4%) followed by the Northern region (5.2%) while Central and Western regions had same proportion of 3.8 percent of children ever married. It should be noted from other studies, such as the poverty mapping [13], that Eastern region has the highest poverty density in the country which may have something to do with highest levels of child marriages.

3.6. Levels of Married Children by District of Enumeration

Analysis was made to evaluate the hypothesis that vulnerability to child marriage did not depend on the district of enumeration. At the time of enumeration in 2002, the country had 56 districts and these formed the basis of this analysis. Table 3 shows the proportion of ever married children by district. It is evident from the table that the proportion of married children were lowest in Kabale (1.9%), followed by Rukungiri (2.1%), Bushenyi (2.3%), Adjumani (2.6%) and Kisoro (2.6%). With exception of Adjumani, these districts are found in South Western Uganda. Secondly, they all belong to the original district of Kigezi. The district within this sub region with the highest proportion of married children aged 10-17 is Kanungu which is 9th from lowest to highest out of the 56 districts.

Masindi district had the highest proportion of child marriages at 7.7 percent followed by Mayuge (7.6%), Kalangala (7.6%), Tororo (7.4%), Apac (6.9%), Busia (6.6%) and Bugiri (6.5%). It should be observed that four of these districts (Mayuge, Tororo, Busia and Bugiri) with the highest proportion of children married are from the Eastern region. One district, Kalangala was from the Central region but it is not a typical Central region district since it is made up of islands and a multiplicity of ethnic groups. It should also be noted that the main economic activity in Kalangala is fishing and many studies have showed that fishing populations live a very sexually vulnerable life. The spread of child marriages can also be seen in Map1. These findings can be concluded after looking at Table 4 which shows child marriages by ethnicity. This is because most of the districts have predominant ethnic groups. Within the same locality, the

difference between districts could be explained by the economic activities.

Table 3: Percent of ever married children by district

District	Number (0)	Proportion Married	Proportion never married
Kabale	10,854	1.9	98.1
Rukungiri	6,832	2.1	97.9
Bushenyi	16,878	2.3	97.7
Adjumani	4,647	2.6	97.4
Kisoro	5,162	2.6	97.4
Masaka	18,465	2.7	97.3
Moyo	4,124	2.9	97.1
Ntungamo	8,524	2.9	97.1
Kanungu	4,480	3.0	97.0
Luwero	10,649	3.2	96.8
Nakasongola	2,603	3.2	96.8
Mpigi	10,107	3.4	96.6
Kasese	11,861	3.5	96.5
Kibaale	8,500	3.5	96.5
Rakai	10,319	3.6	96.4
Kapchorwa	3,889	3.6	96.4
Mbarara	23,071	3.7	96.3
Mukono	17,627	3.8	96.2
Mubende	15,451	3.9	96.1
Wakiso	20,217	4.1	95.9
Kumi	7,383	4.1	96.0
Arua	17,366	4.2	95.8
Sembabule	3,814	4.3	95.7
Jinja	8,274	4.3	95.7
Kampala	23,431	4.4	95.6
Kamuli	14,240	4.4	95.6
Kotido	14,961	4.4	95.6
Kamwenge	5,834	4.4	95.6
Nakapiripirit	3,442	4.6	97.4
Katakwi	5,307	4.7	97.3
Pader	6,527	4.7	97.3
Kiboga	4,812	4.8	97.2
Iganga	14,427	4.8	97.2
Yumbe	5,540	4.8	97.2
Soroti	7,002	5.0	95.0
Kabarole	7,983	5.0	95.0
Kyenjojo	7,996	7.1	95.0
Sironko	5,645	7.3	94.7

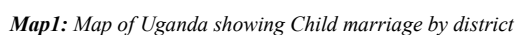
District	Number (0)	Proportion Married	Proportion never married
Kitgum	5,677	5.5	94.5
Kayunga	6,221	5.6	94.5
Mbale	14,669	5.6	94.4
Pallisa	9,955	5.7	94.3
Gulu	8,870	5.9	94.1
Bundibugyo	4,254	6.0	94.0
Lira	14,730	6.1	93.9
Hoima	7,096	6.1	93.9
Nebbi	8,776	6.2	93.8
Kaberamaido	2,487	6.4	93.7
Moroto	3,868	6.4	93.6
Bugiri	7,800	6.5	93.5
Busia	4,482	6.6	93.4
Apac	14,021	6.9	93.1
Tororo	10,324	7.4	92.6
Kalangala	395	7.6	92.4
Mayuge	6,282	7.6	92.4
Masindi	9,412	7.7	92.3
Total	517,563	4.5	95.5

3.7. Poverty and Child Marriages

Some studies particularly those by the World Bank have showed that poverty is a major cause of vulnerability (either for adults or children) [14]. The analysis further looked at the associations between poverty and child marriage. Although the 2002 Census did not have a direct question on poverty, this paper uses proxy indicator questions on poverty correlates; these included the possession of two sets of clothes, main source of livelihood and type of housing, to gauge the relationship between poverty and child marriages. Table 4 gives a proportion of ever married children with the proxy indicators of poverty.

3.8. Possession of Shoes and Two Sets of Clothes

The results shown in Table 4 indicated a very small variation between possession of a pair of shoes (4.7%) and not having a pair of shoes (4.5%) with those ever married. The data further shows that the proportions of children who had ever been married did not differ by possession of at least two sets of clothing to those ever married.



Source of livelihood is a pivotal determinant of poverty. Considering source of livelihood, eight categories were discerned. Accordingly, the highest proportions of married children were those whose source of livelihood was World Food Programme (WFP) (5.9%). In 2002, families which were receiving food from the World Food Programme were those mostly in Internal Displaced Peoples' (IDP) camps. Therefore, it is not surprising that these households were the most vulnerable. The least proportion of married children was among those whose source of livelihood was property income (3.7%). Usually, those whose source of livelihood is property income are the well-off to do families.

3.10. Child Marriages and Type of Housing

To further appreciate the association between poverty to child marriages, an additional factor that is the type of housing was analysed. It can be seen that more married children (6.5%) stayed in huts compared to 4.1 percent who did not stay in huts. Similarly, 5 percent stayed in temporary housing units compared to 3.4 percent who stay in semi-permanent and permanent houses.

Table 4: Child marriages by poverty correlates

Poverty correlate	Proportion married	Proportion Never Married
Shoes		
Has shoes	4.7	97.3
Does not have	4.4	95.6
Two sets of Clothing		
Has at least two sets	4.4	95.6
Does not have	5.0	95.0
Source of Livelihood		
Subsistence farming	4.5	95.5
Employment income	4.4	95.6
Business enterprise	4.3	95.7
Cottage industry	5.0	95.0
Property income	3.7	96.3
Family support	4.6	97.4
World food programme	5.9	94.1
Other	5.8	94.2
Type of Housing		
Hut	6.5	93.5
Non-hut	4.1	95.9
Type of Housing		
Temporary	5.0	95.0
Semi-Permanent	3.4	96.6
Permanent	3.4	96.6

3.11. Child Marriage by Education

Education was divided into two namely literacy and school attendance. Table 5 gives literacy levels by child marriage and school attendance.

3.12. Child Marriages by Literacy

One of the most immediate outcomes of child marriages is children dropping out of school, which subsequently results into their low educational attainment. It is evident that many of the ever married children were illiterate (6.0%) while the literate ones were 4.1 percent. These differences are statistically significant. This finding is in agreement with what advocates of prevention of child marriages say that child marriages deprive children of the basics of life, like education [15, 16].

3.13. Child Marriage by School Attendance

The census data (Table 5) showed that most of the children had attended school (80.9%). A comparison between the ever married and the never married showed that only 37.3 percent of the currently married children were attending school at the time of the census; a figure far below that of the never married (83.0%). Almost one in two children ever married had left school before the year of the

census. The proportion of ever married children who had never been to school (15.7%) was more than twice (7.1%) among never married. It is clear that one of the problems faced by children that are married off early is dropping out of school.

Table 5: Child marriages by literacy level, school attendance and age category of household head

		Proportion Married	Proportion Never Married
Literacy level	Number	Percent	Percent
Literate	398,475	4.1	95.9
Illiterate	119,088	6.0	94.0
Total	517,563	4.5	95.5
$\chi^2=799$, $df=1$, $p=0.000$			
School attendance	517,563 (Total)	23,299	494,264
Attended in 2002	80.9	37.3	83.0
Left school in 2002	1.2	2.1	1.2
Left school before 2002	10.4	44.9	8.7
Never been to school	7.5	15.7	7.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
$\chi^2=3.6 \times 10^4$, $df=3$, $p=0.000$			
Age of household head			
Child (<18)	6,723	25.7	74.3
Adult (18-59)	413,499	4.5	95.5
Elder (60+)	90,693	3.1	96.9
$\chi^2=7.4 \times 10^3$, $df=2$, $p=0.000$			

3.14. Age of Household Head and Child Marriage

From Table 5, it can be observed that among the ever married children over 26 percent of the households were headed by children. This was over 6 times as many as those with adults aged 18-59 (4.5%). It is also worth noting that 3 percent of the ever married children lived in households headed by the elderly (aged 60+ years). Perhaps some of these ever married children who were pregnant might have been chased away by the parents and they ran to live with grandparents as it has been practiced in many cultures when a child became pregnant at home. Secondly further analysis not shown in the table of the ever married children by age of the household head revealed that 1,570 children were married to these elderly household heads. This result implies a high number of children involved in cross generational sex with elderly people fit to be their grandparents.

3.15. Ethnicity and Child Marriages

The study also looked at whether there was a difference for the ever married children by ethnicity. Since the census data had a question on ethnicity, analysis was made of marital status by ethnicity. Table 6 displays a total of 61 ethnic groups and nationalities that were considered. For

the non-Ugandan groups, each nationality was taken as an ethnic group. These mainly comprised of people from the neighbouring countries. These included: Sudanese (4.4%), Rwandese (7.4%), Burundians (4.3%), Tanzanians (5.8%), Congolese (10.9%) and Kenyans (11.4%). Citizens from countries other than the ones mentioned here like India were also considered as non-Ugandans. Within Uganda, there are some ethnic groups whose population is very small. Five of them (Bahehe, Batwa, Mvuba, Mening and Venoma), were grouped together to form a category known as other Ugandans Small. In addition, those whose category is other Ugandans comprised of those whose ethnicity was not stated. Altogether 61 categories were used to identify ethnic groups.

The proportion of ever married children was lowest among the Bahororo at 2.3 percent and highest among the Lendu at 14.3 percent. The Lendu are among the smallest ethnic groups in terms of numbers with equal proportions found in Hoima, Masindi and Nebbi districts. Among the 9 big ethnic groups (Baganda 3.5%, Banyankore 3.2%, Basoga 4.8%, Bakiga 3.3, Iteso 4.8, Langi 6.5%, Bagisu 5.9% Lugbara 4.4% and Acholi 7.4%) the Langi had the highest proportion ever married of 6.5 percent while the Banyankore and Bakiga had the lowest of 3.2 percent and 3.3 percent respectively. It should be noted that the Banyankore, Bakiga and Bahororo are related and live within the same geographical area (South Western part of Uganda).

From the above analysis, it was necessary to find out if size of the ethnic group had a relationship with proportion married. In order to test this, a ranking of ethnic groups by size and proportion of children ever married was carried out. The correlation coefficient was found to be -0.182. Since correlation coefficient lies between -1 and +1 for highly correlated values, 0.18 is a very weak relationship between population size and the proportion of the population of ever married children. However, the negative value implies that there is an inverse relationship between the proportion of ever married children and size of the ethnic group. The smaller the ethnic group, the higher the proportion of ever married children but the relationship is not statistically significant ($P=0.1640$).

Table 6: Proportion of child marriages by the different ethnic groups in Uganda

Ethnicity	Number(0)	Current/ever Married	Never Married	SNO	SPM
Acholi	23,000	7.4	94.6	54	37
Alur	10,305	7.5	92.5	48	53
Baamba	0,686	8.5	91.6	16	56
Babukusu	0,325	9.2	90.8	7	57
Babwisi	1,263	6.5	93.5	24	46
Bafumbira	9,873	3.2	96.8	47	9
Baganda	96,945	3.5	96.5	60	11

Ethnicity	Number(0)	Current/ever Married	Never Married	SNO	SPM
Bagisu	22,138	5.9	94.1	53	43
Bagungu	0,967	3.9	96.1	19	14
Bagwe	1,523	6.5	93.5	26	47
Bagwere	7,771	5.9	94.1	45	41
Bahororo	4,364	2.3	97.7	38	1
Bakenyi	1,203	6.7	93.3	23	50
Bakhonzo	13,605	4.0	96.0	50	16
Bakiga	36,442	3.3	96.7	57	10
Banyabindi	300	4.0	96.0	4	15
Banyankore	49,863	3.2	96.9	59	8
Banyara	475	3.8	96.2	11	13
Banyarwanda	6,360	4.1	95.9	41	19
Banyole	6,522	6.4	93.6	43	44
Banyoro	14,489	4.0	96.0	51	17
Baruli	3,152	4.0	96.0	33	18
Basamia	5,510	6.5	93.5	40	49
Basoga	42,295	4.8	97.2	58	30
Basongora	246	7.3	92.7	2	51
Batagwenda	1,069	2.3	97.7	20	2
Batoro	13,405	4.8	97.2	49	32
Batuku	473	4.7	97.4	10	29
Burundi	1,648	4.3	95.8	28	20
Chope	429	8.2	91.8	8	54
Dodoth	9,106	4.4	95.6	46	24
DRC	1,393	10.9	89.1	25	58
Ethur	1,095	4.5	95.5	22	26
IK(Teuso)	308	6.5	93.5	5	45
Iteso	29,318	4.8	97.2	55	31
Jie	3,199	4.4	95.7	34	22
Jonam	1,787	5.0	95.0	29	34
Jopadhola	6,882	7.3	92.7	44	52
Kakwa	2,758	7.1	94.9	32	35
Karimojong	5,336	7.2	94.8	39	36
Kebu(Okebu)	617	8.4	91.6	15	55
Kenya	588	11.4	88.6	14	59
Kuku	709	5.9	94.1	17	42
Kumam	3,242	5.6	94.4	35	39
Langi	29,955	6.5	93.5	56	48
Lendu	175	14.3	85.7	1	61
Lugbara	21,173	4.4	95.7	52	23
Madi	6,435	2.6	97.4	42	4
Napore	771	4.3	95.7	18	21
Other Non-Ugandans	314	2.9	97.1	6	7

Ethnicity	Number(0)	Current/ever Married	Never Married	SNO	SPM
Nubi	576	2.8	97.2	13	5
Nyangia	443	2.5	97.5	9	3
Other Ugandans Small	1,806	4.9	97.1	30	33
Other Ugandans	251	2.8	97.2	3	6
Pokot	1,616	4.5	95.5	27	28
Rwanda	2,005	7.4	94.6	31	38
Sabiny	3,740	3.7	96.3	37	12
So (Tepeth)	508	11.8	88.2	12	60
Sudan	3,736	4.4	95.6	36	25
Tanzania	1,075	5.8	94.2	21	40
Total	517,563	4.5	95.5		27
Correlation coefficient			P=0.1640		-0.182

SNO-Rank in terms of Size of the ethnic group from the smallest to the biggest

SPM-Rank in terms of proportion children married from smallest to biggest

4. Factors Affecting Marital Status of Children

In order to assess the overall effect of marital status as a form of vulnerability, a logistic regression was run for all the variables except district and ethnicity.

4.1. Orphanhood Status of the Child as a Determinant of Child Marriage

Table 7 gives the results of the logistic regression model fitted on the determinants of child marriages. The major variable considered in the model was orphanhood status where the reference category was those whose both parents are alive. All the odds ratios for orphanhood status were greater than one which means that the odds of an orphan being married are greater than those of non-orphans. The paternal orphans were 61 percent more likely to be married followed by the double orphan with 60 percent odds more than non-orphans. The maternal orphans had 47% odds to get married than non-orphans.

4.2. Sex of Child as a Determinant of Child Marriage

The other variable considered in the model was sex and the reference category was boy children (Table 7). Controlling for other factors, girls had three times more odds of being married than boys. This is in conformity with most studies which indicate that girl children are more vulnerable to early marriages than their male peers [15].

4.3. Residence of the Child as a Determinant of Child Marriage

Rural-urban residence was another variable considered

while looking at child marriages as a form of vulnerability. The reference category was those children in urban areas. The results in Table 7 show that children living in rural areas had 17 percent less odds to be in marital union than those living in urban areas. This is perhaps attributable to the more challenges met by rural orphans than those in urban centers. In addition to rural-urban residence, the study also considered region of residence. Central region was taken as the reference category shown in Table 7. The results pertaining to region of residence show that children who lived in Eastern and Northern regions had 54 percent and 44 percent respectively more (higher) odds to be in a marital union compared to those who were residing in the Central region. No difference was observed between Central and Western region.

4.4. Source of Livelihood as a Determinant of Child Marriage

The main source of livelihood affects the decisions individuals and families make. In the multivariate analysis further grouping was done. Four categories of livelihoods were considered namely subsistence, employment income, business and cottage industry taken as one group. The group labeled others had property income, family support, World Food program etc which was used as the reference category. It can be seen in Table 7 that those children whose main source of livelihood was subsistence had 11 percent more odds to be married children than children classified in the other category. Similarly, those whose main source of livelihood were employment income and business had 7 percent and 2 percent respectively more odds to be married compared to those whose main source of income was taken as others. The difference between business and others was not statistically significant.

4.5. Household Headship as a Determinant of Child Marriage

Household headship was also a variable that was considered as a factor increasing vulnerability of children. This was more so in the earlier era of HIV/AIDS where many children were left on their own. Households headed by adults (age 18 -59 years) were taken as the reference category. Table 7 shows that children in households headed by children had nine times more odds of being vulnerable to being married than those in households headed by adults while households headed by the elderly persons had 33 percent less odds to have married children. The probable explanation for this finding is that children taken up by the elderly are better disciplined and cultured hence do not rush to marry even as they may lack some necessities.

4.6. Religion of the Child as a Determinant of Child Marriage

With regard to religion, 4 groups were used and other category which comprised mostly the Pentecostal was taken as the reference category. Moslem children had 18

percent more odds to be married, while Catholics had 10 percent more odds to be married compared to those in other religions. It was discovered that in comparison to Protestants (Anglicans), there was no difference in the probability of being married among the other religion. This may be due to the fact that the majority of those comprising the group others being Pentecostals are close to the Anglicans in belief and practices of their religion. For instance, they share attitudes towards Family planning. In any case most Pentecostals were once in Anglican Church.

Table 7: Logistic regression of determinants of child marriage

Marital status	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval	
Orphanhood						
Non-Orphan	1.000					
Paternal	1.613	0.047	16.3	0.000	1.523	1.709
Maternal	1.471	0.028	20.5	0.000	1.418	1.527
Double	1.606	0.045	16.8	0.000	1.519	1.697
Sex						
Male	1.000					
Female	2.961	0.045	71.0	0.000	2.874	3.051
Residence						
Urban	1.000					
Rural	0.827	0.021	-7.5	0.000	0.787	0.869
Region						
Central	1.000					
Eastern	1.536	0.030	21.7	0.000	1.477	1.596
Northern	1.439	0.029	17.8	0.000	1.383	1.498
Western	1.034	0.022	1.6	0.111	0.993	1.077
Source of livelihood						
Subsistence	1.108	0.030	3.8	0.000	1.052	1.168
Employment income	1.068	0.034	2.1	0.040	1.003	1.138
Family support	1.024	0.039	0.6	0.537	0.950	1.104
Others	1.000					
Age category of household head						
Child headed	9.126	0.283	71.4	0.000	8.589	9.698
Adult headed	1.000					
Elderly headed	0.676	0.014	-18.6	0.000	0.649	0.705
Religion						
Catholic	1.104	0.027	4.1	0.000	1.053	1.158
Anglican	1.013	0.025	0.5	0.600	0.965	1.064
Moslems	1.181	0.034	5.7	0.000	1.116	1.250
Others	1.000					

5. Summary

Despite the punitive law enacted to deter defilement of young girls and boys, the presence of child marriages is a proof that many children in Uganda are defiled. Results from the census data which was conducted 12 years later after the enactment of the law showed that child marriages continued to occur. This was across all socio-economic and cultural status of children. Orphaned children, girl children, those residing in Eastern region, those in child headed households were more likely to be married. A ranking made in 2012 by ICRW (2012b) [17] shows that Uganda is number 14 in having the highest proportion of child marriages in the World. These findings are not different from those found elsewhere in the world. According to the PRB [18] policy report, the issue on child marriage can be summarized as

“Although most countries have passed laws declaring 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage, too often the laws are not enforced and social, economic, and cultural realities perpetuate the practice. Certain risk factors, such as poverty, low levels of education, and region, are directly correlated with higher rates of child marriage [19]. Poor families have few resources to support healthy alternatives for girls, such as education, or even to feed and clothe them, and economic gains to families in the form of a bride price may act as further motivation for child marriage [20]”.

6. Recommendation

In order to reduce child marriages, there is need for multifaceted approach to the practice. The enactment of a legislation prohibiting it is not enough mainly because the enforcement of these may not be thorough. Secondly some of the laws may be at odds with long held traditions of various groups in Uganda. This calls for an appreciation of the cultural attitudes and beliefs towards the practice, a protracted campaign about the ills of the practice for eventual attitudinal change. Additionally, the systematic redress of the economic cause of the practice that is poverty in the country will help in significantly reducing the practice as it may eliminate the need to marry children off because of inability to look after them because of the need for basic survival of the parents. A study should be carried out on the survival status of children born to child mothers in Uganda in order to inform policy. The current programs on cross generation sex should target both boys and girls. Programs on the youth delaying sex should target children as young as 11 years just before the first cases of marital status are registered. The Information, Education and Communication messages should include dangers of early sex and challenges of being young wives/husbands. Lastly, there is need to educate the public on the existence of the law so that children are protected from becoming wives and husbands at an early age otherwise it is not enough to enact deterrent laws which the general public cannot understand or are not aware of, and these when enacted should be strictly enforced.

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