

Family Dynamics That Influence Female Child Marriage in Nigeria, Insights from the Lived Experiences of Affected Women: A Qualitative Systematic Review

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Abstract. Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally due to weak policy frameworks, economic instability, and sociocultural influences. Although child marriage has been widely studied, limited research has examined how family dynamics shape decision-making, gender roles, and resilience among affected women. This systematic review explored the family dynamics influencing child marriage from the lived experiences of Nigerian women married before the age of 18. 3 databases were searched using strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Study selection followed PRISMA guidelines, while the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tool was used to assess study quality. Data were analysed through thematic synthesis, and eight qualitative studies were included. Findings identified three major themes: parental decision-making processes, the influence of culture and religion on gender roles, and coping mechanisms and support systems used by affected women. Results showed that decisions surrounding child marriage are often driven by economic pressures and social expectations, with girls' wellbeing frequently subordinated to family reputation and financial interests. The review highlighted the adverse physical and psychological effects experienced by young brides. The study concludes that addressing child marriage requires culturally sensitive advocacy, policy reform, and community-based strategies aimed at reducing gender inequality and protecting the rights of girls.

Keywords: Child Marriage, Gender Inequality, Family Dynamics, Cultural Beliefs, Religious beliefs

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Global Scope and Significance of Child marriage

Child marriage (CM) is the legal or customary matrimony of any individual under the age of 18 (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] 2024). With evidence

showing 83% prevalence in girls and 12% in boys globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2023) concludes that CM is “Entrenched in gender inequality”. This statement is backed by a substantial body of research demonstrating that the variation in marriage rates among children is due to social, cultural, and economic factors that undermine the rights and potentials of girls compared to boys (MacKinnon, 2024, Plesons et al., 2021). Gastón et al (2019) in their gender expansive inquiry of eighty-two countries representing 51% of the global population of men reports that boys are also pressured to marry early and take on adult responsibilities. However, girls are more affected as sociocultural norms often prioritize a female’s role as a mother and wife over personal development and education, families marry off girls due to economic pressures and legal protection against CM in many regions are not well implemented (Schmidt et al., 2022). Furthermore, girls of age 10-14 years are 5 times more likely to die of childbirth in comparison to women of 20 years and above (Obaje et al, 2020). Consequently, young girls and their infants suffer from childbirth complications like obstetric fistula, obstructed labour, postpartum haemorrhage, low birth weight, still birth, depression, lack of education and poverty (Adedokun et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, the world has seen a 5% decline in CMs in recent years, over 12 million FCMs have been averted due to policy reforms, free universal education and employment opportunities for women especially in India, Bangladesh and Cambodia (Rodriguez, 2022). Even so, such statistics may undermine the actual prevalence of CMs because some cases go unrecorded due to fear of stigmatization, cultural expectations, and insufficient reporting systems in many countries, Nigeria inclusive (Asma et al., 2023).

Causes and Impact of Female Child Marriage in Nigeria

Nigeria occupies the third hottest spot globally with over 26 million child brides (UNICEF, 2024). Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2022) claim that children of 10 years old are commonly married in the country but such cases are underreported due to fear of public criticism. 12.3% of girls are married by age 15 and about 50% of women aged 20-24 in the North are married before their 18th birthday (Child not Brides, 2024). With a prevalence of 64%, Nigeria is estimated to have 20 million CMs which contribute substantially to maternal/child mortality and morbidity (Yaya et al., 2019). Specifically, a 10% reduction in CMs is projected to decrease maternal and child mortality by 70% in Nigeria (United Nations, 2023).

Various Research has found that economic incentive may be a major motivator for parents to marry off females as means of gaining economic favour through dowry and bride price (Salihu, 2024; Hodgkinson et al, 2016). Mobolaji et al (2020) reports that many communities in Nigeria are driven by religious and cultural beliefs that warrant adherence to female purity and domination. Yoosefi et al (2023) revealed that education and CM have a bidirectional correlation in Nigeria, as girls either get married because they are not in school or withdraw from school because of marriage. Because CM reduces female economic productivity, increase health care cost associated with early pregnancies, lower work force participation and increase intergenerational poverty, the country incurs a loss of approximately \$10 billion in annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (UNICEF, 2023; World bank 2022). Figure 1 provides a stock of factors that could influence FCM in Nigeria.

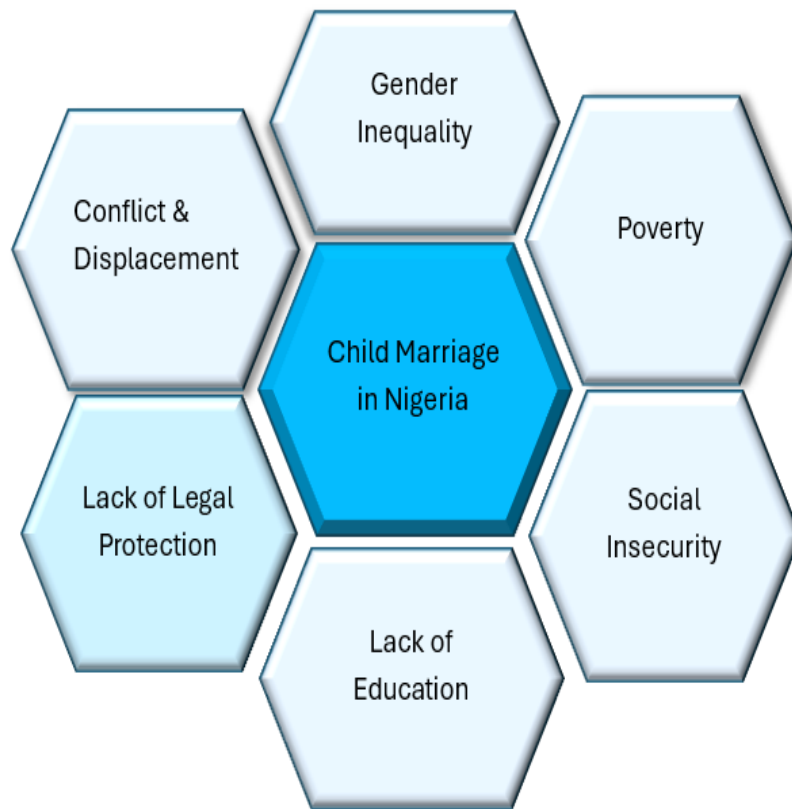


Fig. 1. The stock of factors that could influence FCM in Nigeria, adapted from National Bureau of statistics, Nigeria.

Family Dynamics and Child Marriage

Cultivating population awareness of the social determinants of health that include aspects such as health care access, economic standing, education, and other sociocultural aspects of daily life is evident, moving towards more comprehensive health promotion (Frank et al., 2020). Nigeria has come to value these factors as interventions that fail to weigh these intricacies may not yield desirable outcomes (Napier et al., 2017).

Family dynamics encompass prescribed roles, hierarchy of authority, emotional climate, ways of interacting, relationships and decision making of the family unit (Adedokun et al., 2017). Many European scholars have described how familial relationships influence the health status of adolescents and children in relation to health risks, resource acquisition, physical, mental as well as psychological health (Wäsche et al., 2021; Mussida & Patimo, 2020).

Critique of the Child Rights Act (CRA)

Nigeria is a party to the United Nations Convention on CRA which ensure that children are safeguarded from abuse rooted in the values of their family members, legal guardians and the society (United Nations, 2014). The Act further established that any individual under 18 is a child and should not be married. However, since it's implementation 43% and 16% of Nigerian girls are married before age 18 and 15 respectively (UNICEF, 2024). This is because only 25 out of 36 states have domesticated the Act due to cultural and religious resistance, lack of education and awareness, as well as socioeconomic barriers (Assim, 2020). This is evident in the highest prevalence observed in Northern Nigeria which is made up of predominantly Muslims that justify CM with certain Islamic scriptures that approve marriage at the occurrence of a girl's first menstruation which can be as early as 13 (Okoye and Okoye, 2022). To compound the issue, the section 29(4) (b) of the Nigerian constitution specifies that female children of any age attain maturity upon marriage (Onuora-Oguno, 2013), which depicts a case of social norm being amplified by policy.

Covid 19, Terrorism and Female Child Marriage

According to UNICEF (2021), the emergence of Covid 19 pandemic has a direct effect on FCMs practice in Nigeria through the closure of schools, economic blow and compounding pressure on health systems. The resulting financial hardship has prompted families to marry females off as means of survival (Batha, 2020). Moreover, since education is a protective factor for CM practice, closing of schools perpetuated the marriage of female children, likewise the disruption of essential reproductive health services which result in teenage pregnancy and marriage (Musa et al., 2021). Nigeria is also currently resisting the Boko Haram terrorist group that oppose western education and values, they abduct and force girls to marry militants, attack schools and communities, leading to a significant drop in school enrolment and attendance, particularly for girls (Amnesty, 2024).

Intersectionality and Feminist Theory

The intersectionality theory will be used as the primary framework for this research. The theory examines how multiple systems such as gender, religion, culture, and economic status may intersect to shape the lived experiences of individuals (Wyatt et al., 2022). This approach is particularly useful in the analysis of the interactions between parental choices, cultural and religious aspects and economic motivations in the context of FCM in Nigeria (Girls not Brides, 2022). Although the intersectionality theory provides a comprehensive framework, the feminist theory posits how gender roles and patriarchal power structure reinforce these intersecting factors (Evans, 2024).

Literature Review

At first research investigated the prevalence of CM in Nigeria, mostly utilizing Secondary analysis of the National Demographic and Health Survey Data (NDHS) resulting in a consensus that Northern Nigeria has the highest numbers of CMs possibly associated with religious, cultural and socioeconomic factors (Girls not Brides, 2023; Mobolaji et al., 2020; Adebawale, 2018). A recent example of such inquiry is how Bolarinwa et al (2022) used a multilevel logistic regression model to investigate the correlation between the prevalence of FCM and individual, household and community factors. The results unveiled that for the individual level variables,

having secondary education and above reduces the likelihood of CM ([a OR = 0.36; 95% (CI 0.29–0.46)]). This is corroborated by the findings of Allen & Adekola (2017), which showed that the high prevalence is likely linked to illiteracy because South Nigeria presents a different picture due to higher level of education. The study may be statistically generalizable to the Nigerian population but is unlikely to capture causal inference and may not provide a contextual comprehension like a qualitative synthesis

Stewart et al (2021) divulges that the family head often the father or an older male relative is the final authority in the matter of marriage choices. However, Wetheridge (2022) argued that mothers and other female relatives can shape choices as well, usually upholding the cultural beliefs that tie girls to malignant gender roles. A cross-sectional study by Nyangas & Aswile (2022) reveal that families frequently make decisions based on perceived economic benefits particularly in the creation of financial stability through dowries and family alliances. However, the study bears some design limitations in that it samples the population at one point in time which does not establish temporal relationship or even trends. Hodgkinson et al (2016) in their critical inquiry consolidated economic incentives as culprit of CM, stating that early marriage of girls is a poverty survival strategy, through business alliances. However, the study provides understanding of poverty in relation to CM but does not offer ample discuss about other socio-cultural factors.

Pourtaheri (2024) attempted to capture the factors that lead to CM, including 31 out of 3826 articles. The socioecological framework guided the creation of 22 subthemes from Individual factors, interpersonal relationships, community influence, and societal rules as overarching themes (Pourtaheri, 2024). Family circumstances were found to be the most notable interpersonal factors leading to CM, chastity and total submission of women, first menstrual cycle, morality, upholding family honour, preventing promiscuity, socio-economic issues, cultural adherence, religious scriptures (most commonly Islamic) are used as justification for the imposed gender roles within Nigerian families (Pourtaheri et al., 2024).

Lasdel (2019) offers a fresh perspective and reports that 56% of Nigerian women married before age 18 attest that they did so by personal choice, mostly due to peer pressure and the medias' portrayal of marriage as the utmost attainment of a woman's existence, especially in the Nigerian movie industry (Nollywood) and social media.

A noteworthy innovative qualitative synthesis by Eboka, (2018) involved the perception of men particularly cultural, religious leaders and fathers in northern Nigeria, it was found that participants are conscious that CM is illegal because they constantly made references to child rights advocacy in western regions, but they are content with the patriarchal power structures. Perhaps, further research can conduct ethnographies or in-depth interviews with Nigerian men across different age groups, to understand how their beliefs have been shaped overtime, asking question around family teachings, upbringing, religion and pressure to conform to cultural expectations can provide insights into channels and mechanisms used by families to foster intergenerational practices. This can inform behavioural strategies that involve men and boys and can be leveraged for health promotion. Lastly, Suyanto et al (2023) highlight that early marriage does not deter most women from adapting to the situation and even exhibiting elevated levels of strength. For instance, these coping mechanisms could include creating networks of

social support within their immediate families, informal schooling opportunities and trade (Walker, 2019).

Rationale and Gaps in Research

Global efforts to end poverty, hunger, maintain optimal health and well-being, provide quality education and improve economic growth are directly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 5.3 that encompass eliminating harmful practices like CM (United Nations, 2023). This is evident in the Nigerian context as FCM creates a self-reinforcing loop, where poor families marry off girls to alleviate hardship, resulting in severe health consequences (HRW, 2022). This redirects funding of key sectors such as education and infrastructure investments to financial provision of reactive healthcare that seeks to address complications such as obstetrics and emergent challenges like child malnutrition (Girls not Brides, 2021). The lack of education for girls then translates to low-income generation and labour market problems that circles back to re-institutionalising of more FCMs as poverty survival strategies (UNICEF, 2023). Despite the vicious cycle, there is a significant gap in research on the family dynamics that influence CM in Nigeria. Understanding the familial context can aid in breaking the intergenerational practice by creating awareness and developing culturally sensitive family centred interventions such as enhancing acceptance of girl child education which is a major protective factor for CM. Additionally, utilizing a qualitative methodology will allow the synthesis of relevant themes from the documented lived experiences of affected women, which is an approach that is more synergistic with the Nigerian story telling culture (Edosomwan et al., 2019) as opposed to relying on statistical interpretations.

Review Question, Aim and Objectives

Review Question

How does family dynamics influence the practice of child marriage in Nigeria, based on insights from the lived experiences of women married before age 18?

Aim

To examine the family dynamics that influence child marriage from the lived experiences of Nigerian women who were married before age 18.

Research Objectives

- I. To examine parental decision-making processes regarding female child marriage through the lived experiences of affected Nigerian women.
- II. To examine how cultural and religious beliefs shape gender roles in the context of child marriage
- III. To identify the coping mechanisms and support systems utilized by affected women

2. Methodology

Study Design

This study employs a systematic review, according to Boland et al (2017) Systematic reviews locate, analyse, and synthesise all pertinent results to a research question using rigorous procedures, integrating the best available evidence to present a high-quality answer.

The use of qualitative method is appropriate for this study because the research aligns with the interpretivist paradigm that makes a subject matter of understanding realistic human experiences and the contexts in which they occur, which is important for understanding how culture, societal norms and family factors interact in practice to lead to CM (Nickerson, 2024). This method is useful for engaging narratives from several studies drawing on meanings that individuals attach to their situations (Moran et al., 2020).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria outline attributes that a study must possess to be included in this review while the exclusion criteria provide characteristics that rule out any study (Randolph, 2019). Following the PRISMA guideline, the inclusion and exclusion features ensures relevance and reliability of review (Cooper et al., 2018). **Table 1** provides more detailed aspects of inclusion and exclusion criteria using the PEO framework.

Table 1: Defining Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria using PEO		
PEO	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population (P)	Nigerian women who married before the age of 18 regardless of their current residence within Nigeria. Inclusive of all ethnic groups, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds and reflections across different age groups at different points in their lives (e.g., during the marriage, in their 20s, 30s or 50s).	Nigerian women who got married at or after 18 years. Any woman outside of Nigeria or who is not Nigerian by nationality. Women who are unmarried or involved in civil unions.
Exposure (E)	Family dynamics (aspects that pertain to the family context, relationship and influence).	Studies that focus solely on individual, societal, legal factors and health impacts without consideration of familial factors

	Studies that focus on how cultural and religious practices influence family's decision and gender roles with reference to CM	Studies that cover only peer pressure and community factors without looking at family influence
	Papers that examined forms of marriage payments such as bride price and dowry which may have an influence on CM.	Studies exploring Legal court marriages and civil unions without mandatory financial aspects.
	Studies examining how family members make decisions about girl CM with consideration of power dynamics and gender roles within households as well as experiences after marriage	Other family related issues which are not tied to CM such as siblings rivalry or inheritance.
	Research exploring how families give or fail to give emotional, social, economic and support to girls after early marriage	Studies which are discussing CM in the global context with a limited emphasis on Nigeria
Outcome (O)	Knowledge and feelings about situations that predispose families to CM from the experiences of child brides before and after marriage.	Insights and Experiences not related to CM and secondhand experiences of community members, healthcare workers or advocates.
Study design (D)	Qualitative studies such as but not limited to phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and qualitative case studies	Quantitative research, mixed methods, systematic reviews and meta-analyses.
	Semi structured or in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, ethnographies and case studies shall be included	
	Published in English language including peer-reviewed journals and grey literature	published in other languages
	Published After 2010	Published before 2010

Search Strategy

The search process plays an important role for any systematic review as it balances the sensitivity and specificity of search to the review aim and objectives to identify the most suitable papers (Page et al., 2021). Hence, for this review, CINAHL, PsycINFO and MEDLINE databases have been chosen by virtue of health, social sciences and psychological fields (Goossen et al., 2020).

Reference lists of articles have been hand searched to retrieve more articles that may not have been identified through initial keyword searches (Boland et al, 2017). **Table 2** below shows the search strategy using the PEO framework (Population, Exposure, Outcome) with appropriate key concepts, related terms, Boolean operators, truncations and wildcards.

Table 2: Search Strategy using the PEO Framework			
Framework	Key words	Synonyms	Justification
Population	“Nigerian women”	“Nigerian girls” “Women of Nigeria”	The selected keywords are relevant to the research topic, using synonyms helps to account for variations in terms, improves search engine optimization and accuracy (Rakt, 2022)
Exposure	“family dynamics”	“family structure”, “family roles”, “family relationships”	
	“child marriage”	“early marriage”, “forced marriage”, “underage marriage”	
Outcome	“lived experiences”	“personal experiences”, “Subjective experiences”, “first person accounts”	
Boolean Operators	“OR”, “AND”, “NOT”	Application	Justification
Combined	(“Nigerian women” OR “Nigerian girls” OR “Women of Nigeria”) AND (“family dynamics” OR “family structure” OR	“OR” includes specified terms its attached to “AND” requires all specified terms	Boolean operators enhance precision in search strategy (Ryan, 2022)

	“family roles”) AND (“child marriage” OR “early marriage” OR “forced marriage”) AND (“lived experiences” OR “personal narratives” OR “Subjective experiences”)	to appear in a document and “NOT” excludes documents with specified terms	
Truncations	“*”		
	“Child marriage*”, “famil*”, “Wom*”	“*” will include variations like “Child marriages”, “families” and “Woman” or “Women”	Truncations allow the simultaneous search of multiple terms, usually applied at the end of words (Wilson, 2024)
Wildcards	“?”		
	Wom?n ,Marr?age,	“?” replaces one character within a word to capture forms like “woman” or “women”.	Wildcards allow flexibility by deriving multiple forms of a word in a single query (Wilson, 2024)

Study Selection Procedure

The selected studies from the database search results were pasted into Endnote X9 to handle and arrange the expected large number of references, then duplicates were removed. As suggested by Newman and Gough (2020) after undertaking the search strategy, obtained studies should be screened rigorously to ascertain their relevance to the study’s aim. For making the selection of articles, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow chart is used. First, the title and abstract of found articles are scanned against the inclusion criteria in the Primary Screening, irrelevant studies are rejected (Boland et al., 2017). In the second step, full text versions of relevant studies according to the title and theme are assessed for eligibility to see if they meet the predefined inclusion (Grewal et al., 2016). Such considerations include the geographical location of the research study, the nature and type of research study to be conducted, the population of interest and relation of the study to the set objectives. Eventually articles that do not satisfy the criteria for inclusion are rejected. A data extraction table gives a description of extracted data, it saves time and helps to easily sort studies with similar themes (Boland et al., 2020). Each study has definite information recorded on the table; study name, the author, study year of publication, sample size, study design, data collection method, study findings and limitation (Verma et al, 2024).

To achieve essential quality, the PRISMA standards are adhered to during this analysis. Studies that are irrelevant to the inclusion criteria are eliminated. Additionally, the variables in a standard data extraction template may be piloted to fit the study under analysis, correspond to the synthesis approach, theoretical assumption, and purpose of the review. (Büchter et al., 2020).

Data Synthesis

At this stage adequately appraised studies that satisfy the inclusion are synthesized. Thematic synthesis is more appropriate for this study because of the qualitative nature of the gathered evidence (Boland et al., 2020). This is useful when combining the findings of qualitative studies where the aim is to review, analyse and integrate the trends or patterns established in various research (Popay et al, 2006). This review follows an integrative approach which combines findings from multiple qualitative studies (Boland et al., 2017). The process starts by immersing and acquainting with the selected studies, followed by identifying codes, and reorganising them into descriptive themes (Boland et al., 2017). Descriptive themes further evolved into analytical themes; this will put findings of the previous body of research into perspective to answer the research question (Flemming and Noyes, 2021).

3. Results

Study Selection and Database Search Outcomes

From the database search in PsycINFO, CINAHL, and Medline, relevant to the keywords, 141 records were retrieved, 47 emerged from PsycINFO, 51 From CINAHL and 43 from Medline. Additionally, 25 articles were subsequently hand retrieved using a snowballing method from the reference list of the data base identified articles. Following the elimination of 68 articles that were duplicates, conducted outside Nigeria, inaccessible, with unrelated titles and written in languages other than English, 98 proceeded to further screening. Out of 98 articles, 48 were excluded for irrelevant themes, quantitative methodology, mixed-methods, meta-analysis, systematic reviews and questionnaires. This led to the retrieval of 50 full text articles for eligibility. Through eligibility assessment, 12 articles were excluded for not exploring family dynamics in relation to child marriage as well as the socioeconomic factors that are relevant to the research question, 21 articles were excluded because they were done before 2010 and 9 articles excluded because they included narratives of other stakeholders outside of affected women. This led to the identification of 8 studies which were appropriate and selected for the final analysis. Figure 2 shows the PRISMA flowchart detailing the inclusion and exclusion study selection process.

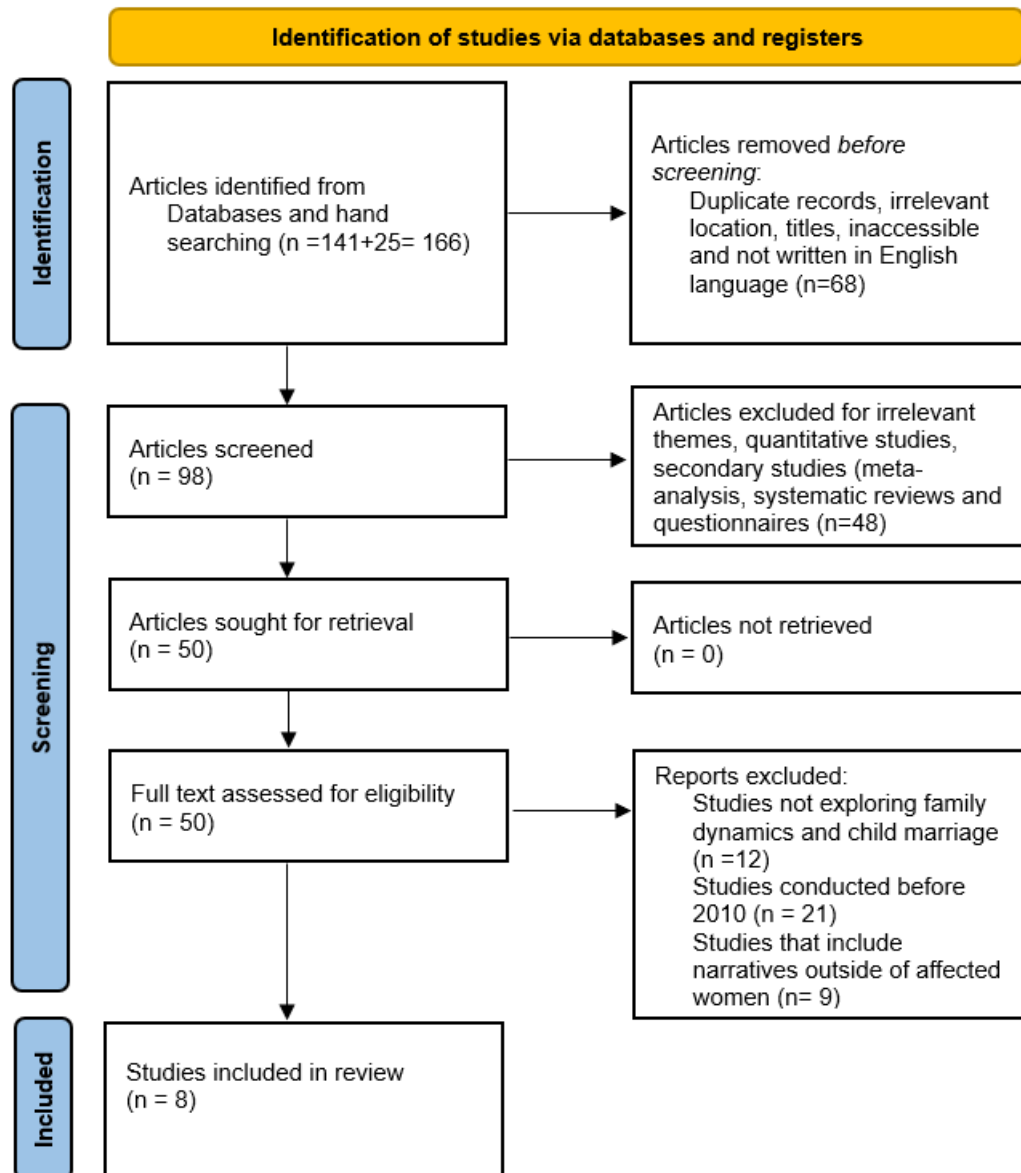


Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Quality Appraisal of Included Studies

The quality of eight included studies was appraised using the CASP checklist, which evaluates qualitative research on ten critical criteria: research objectives, rationale for using qualitative approach, quality research design, participant selection, data collection, researcher's role, issues of bias, quality of analysis, clarity of the conclusions, and research utility (CASP, 2018).

There is a fit between the study design used and objectives across all the studies as well as justification for choosing the designs which mostly revolved around exploration of sociocultural context of the topic and capturing first- person accounts. Data collection methods are clearly stated across all studies with in-depth interviews as the most common method (Uche &Uche, 2024; Adeyemi et al., 2023; Kehinde., 2022; Sonibare, 2021; Ashi, 2020; Zasha, 2018; Callaghan et al, 2015) while Adekola et al (2015) conducted focus groups discussions. Some studies combined purposive and snowballing sampling (Adeyemi et al., 2023; Kehinde., 2022; Zasha, 2018). Uche &Uche (2024) and Sonibare (2021) used the snowball method due to lack of access to participants through traditional sampling. This helped to build trust as referred participants did not feel alienated, however it also may have introduced selection bias presenting participant with similar characteristics and viewpoints. Three studies combined Random sampling and purposive sampling (Ashi, 2020; Adekola et al., 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015).

All the studies addressed the nature of the researcher-participant relationship in terms of establishing trust to encourage thoughtful responses from the participants. However, Adeyemi et al (2023) did not present any reflectivity on how the researcher may have introduced bias to the studies, participant recruitment details, confidentiality and ethical committee approval which is a standard practice in researching vulnerable individuals like child brides. Similarly, Callaghan et al (2015) admits dressing decently to conduct the interviews but there may be potential bias of her being a Christian woman interviewing Muslim women in northern Nigeria, this may have hindered access to certain participants and may have impacted the dynamics of the interviews.

Data Extracted, Study and Participant characteristics

Participant Characteristics

About 82.30% of ethnicity documented in the studies is a combination of Hausa, Fulani and Fulfulde (Adeyemi et al., 2023; Kehinde, 2022; Sonibare, 2021; Ashi, 2020; Zasha, 2018; Adekola et al 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015). The other 17.70% Igbo is documented in just one study (Uche & Uche, 2024). The total number of respondents is 113 all of which are women between age 14 and 50 that got married before they were 18 years old. Sonibare (2021) involved participants up to 50 years and results may be subjected to recall bias. Most participants had attended school for a few years, came from rural backgrounds and low-income families, the lowest age of participant across all studies is 14 and highest is 50. **Appendix 3** shows the studies and participants characteristics.

Major Findings

The findings of this study were organized under three overarching themes: Parental decision-making processes, Influence of cultural and religious beliefs on gender roles and Coping

mechanisms and support systems used by child brides. These themes collaborated to deliver 12 subthemes that fully captured the cardinal features as documented by affected Nigerian women.

Parental Decision-Making Processes Regarding Female Child Marriage

The decision-making for FCM is mostly influenced by parental authority, economic precarity, cultural desirability, and social pressure (Uche & Uche, 2024; Adeyemi et al., 2023; Sonibare, 2021; Ashi, 2020; Zasha, 2018; Callaghan et al., 2015). Fathers make the final decisions regarding who their daughters marry and mothers most often back them up (Ashi, 2020; Zasha, 2018). The practice is based on cultural norms and expectations, and it strongly indicates a need to preserve family honor while reducing household expenses (Adekola et al., 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015). Sonibare (2021) and Adekola et al (2015) noted that due to economic difficulties particularly in marginalized populations, dowry remains an instant monetary security system. This kind of incentive leads to regarding daughters solely from the economic standpoint, regarding them as a “burden”, for which it is possible to “solve the problem” by marrying them off early, especially in large families (Uche & Uche, 2024). Adeyemi et al (2023) observe that this lack of agency highlights a crucial Human Rights issue concerning their freedom, health, education and economic growth. However, the study received no ethical approval, and this may limit the credibility of their findings.

Some parents see early marriage as a means of safeguarding girls from immoral behaviors that can bring shame to the family. Specifically, Ashi (2020) pointed out that in most households, CM is considered as tradition that upholds the honor and status of the family. Zasha (2018) suggests that parents adhere to societal expectations and failure to marry off their daughters at early ages may subject them to stigmatization or shame. As a result, the girl’s capacities and well-being are overlooked for societal conformity. Although Callaghan et al. (2015) acknowledge the role of parents in choosing spouses, they emphasize that parents merely function as “arrangers,” whose authority is constrained by cultural norms. Sonibare (2018) observed that the interplay between protective parental intentions and societal demands reveals a nuanced dilemma: some parents can want the best for their daughters but are forced to disregard their wellbeing to satisfy the society. As a result, parents may continuously recreate cultural patterns that are detrimental to their daughters’ prospects, thus a call for community-level interventions that emphasizes social values and economic standing for women.

Influence of Cultural and Religious Beliefs on Gender Roles in Child Marriage

In Nigeria, cultural and religious beliefs often demand that a woman should be totally submissive and obedient, thus confining young brides to wife and caretaker roles (Kehinde, 2022; Adeyemi et al., 2023; Callaghan et al., 2015; Zasha, 2018; Ashi, 2020). For instance, Kehinde (2022) observed that the Hausas and Fulanis see early marriage as a rite of passage for a girl with most emphasis being laid on procreation and the ability to serve their husbands, not by earning ability or education. The narrative demonstrates a social construction and hierarchy that limits women's access to self-actualization and professional success. Adeyemi et al (2023) observed that some form of Sharia law still permits early marriage in their peculiar contexts, and this violates the National Child Protection Laws. In their study some of the participants framed CM as an act of destiny or the ‘will of Allah’ – which legitimizes early marriage of girls.

Callaghan et al (2015) opined that some parents and community members use these religious interpretations to introduce marriage as a necessity in which a girl has no say, and her only choice is to obey her parents and religion.

Zasha (2018) also captures the cultural and religious traditions as the major determinant of girls' restricted roles in society. The study found that for children in Northern Nigeria, marriage is normal as religion justifies cultural beliefs that supports teaching the girl child that puberty is a time indicator for marriage. Meanwhile, it not only hampers personal development of girl children, but also continues to perpetuate gender prejudices within Nigerian communities. Since these traditions revolve around honor, Chasity, family and cultural norms, they deny young girls' education and rights to be empowered (Adeyemi et al., 2023). Adekola et al (2015) and Ashi (2020) state that this entrenchment of traditional roles retains a pipeline of poverty that denies young girls' opportunities to institute change, lift themselves out of generational poverty and gain education. A critique of these cultural and religious reasons demonstrates the importance of responding to and changing the cultural practices that dominate female childhood and prevent their freedom and equality.

Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems used by Child Brides

The results show that the women who are affected by early marriage in Nigeria use several strategies to manage their circumstances primarily relying on psychological and community-based support (Uche & Uche, 2024; Adeyemi et al., 2023; Kehinde, 2022; Sonibare, 2021; Ashi, 2020; Zasha, 2018; Callaghan et al., 2015). This reliance on social networks and religion is documented as being a useful mechanism in dealing with marital challenges. However, those coping strategies are two faced as they offer short term solutions to stress but at the same time keep the subordination of the wife within the marital union a continuous reality. According to Sonibare (2021), this means child brides utilize behavioral strategies to maintain the suppression of self to avoid conflict. For example, most participants mentioned avoiding conflict with their husbands, co-wives and in laws by obeying cultural rules to maintain peace in the household and this encouraged constant bullying.

Adekola et al (2015) observed that while such strategies may provide a measure of stability it is done at the expense of the girls, these coping mechanisms make it possible for girls to live with those realities but do not seek to stop the traditional gender roles that reinforce those disparities. Adeyemi et al (2023) consolidated that when women are treated according to cultural conventions and do not receive the necessary support, it can increase the danger of exploitation. For example, Uche & Uche (2024) pointed out that these girls build mental resilience overtime, but their progress is tested by constant domestic abuse. Ashi (2020) opined that child brides are vulnerable due to lack of social support, insufficient education, and health care access as some of the rural populations still practice traditional medication, which fails to serve the reproductive health needs of women adequately. Another area of concern is mental disorders, this social isolation in combination with poor emotional support from the communities leaves their mental health unattended. According to Callaghan et al (2015) the types of support that can be offered by family or the community do not address the psychological and emotional needs of child brides, yet another emblem of inadequate support system and resources.

4. Discussion

Parental Decision-Making Processes regarding Female Child Marriage

Fathers usually arrange female CMs based on perceived financial incentives, culture and tradition while mothers appear to be more empathetic but play supportive roles in maintaining these traditions (Adeyemi et al 2023; Adekola et al 2015). This is in consistence with the findings of Stewart et al (2021) and Wetheridge (2022) that found that even in the absence of the father, the eldest male relatives make the final decision concerning marrying girls off and mothers often have no say or accept it has faith because they were once child brides too. They end up consoling the girls with their own stories of overcoming the challenges of getting married early. A study from rural Bangladesh India ((Talukder et al., 2020) agrees with such contentions and stated that mothers are more sympathetic than fathers, but they accept marriage as the undeniable faith of every young woman according to tradition, culture and religion.

Economic incentives as documented by Nyangas & Aswile (2022) and Hodgkinson et al (2016) resurfaces with great force, with dowries appearing as an immediate means of resolving the economic problems of families living in poverty, thus robbing daughters of their rights to education and financial freedom (Adekola et al., 2015). Yoosefi et al (2023) note that early marriage is a way of attaining income or shelter for the parents and is a bridge of human rights at the core of gender brutality. The conflict between protective parental intentions and social pressure offers a rather paradoxical picture as Ashi (2020) agrees with Pourtaheri et al (2024) that child marriage is socially acceptable in Northern Nigeria, and parents assume that it protects children against early pregnancy to maintain family honor. This study further mentioned that these practices, however when not followed by families, lead to stigmatism in society. On the other hand, Gündoğdu & Bulut (2022) have opined that there are some families who think that delaying marriage is good for the girls' education. The perspectives demonstrate a potential for growth regardless of pressing societal expectations. These findings show that there is need for social behavioral change interventions targeting men and regulating the current economic pressures that force parents to marry their daughters early.

Influence of Cultural and Religious Beliefs on Gender Roles in Child marriages

In Nigeria, child marriage (CM) is based on intergenerational cultural and religious norms in the society that perpetuate gender roles and marginalize the agency of girls (Adeyemi et al., 2023). The marriage expectations promote fertility and obedience over education, and CM is a practice to preserve family honor and applied to maintain purity until marriage (Union, 2015; Adeyemi et al., 2023). As Adekola et al. (2015) remarked, family elders especially fathers are the authoritative cultural individuals who uphold tradition above the autonomy of girls. Deviance is usually socially punished via the process of social exclusion (Feyissa et al., 2023). However, Mehra et al. (2018) state that intergenerational communication can subvert and alter the damaging attitudes toward early marriage.

Early marriage is frequently justified via studies of religion based on religion justifications, particularly those reflecting in the Islamic faith (Pourtaheri et al., 2024; Adeyemi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the study conducted by Adeyemi did not cover more than five wards in one state and cannot be easily applied to the whole country. Aldila & Wijaya (2024) present other Islamic views that support the education of girls and their empowerment. Oyeyipo (2024) goes further

to indicate that education is more and more believed to increase positive chances of marriage relationships hinting of a change in traditional norms. The conflict between education and cultural identity, as well, is confirmed by Yousefi et al. (2023).

Nigerian youth living in urban areas are abandoning traditional rules and embracing education and equal gender as part of economic development (Kuteesa et al., 2024). Such moves are however not well supported legally or even policy wise. However, the process of the worldwide shift and evolving local attitudes can lead to the impetus towards policy measures intended to stop CM (Eboka, 2018; Adekola et al., 2015).

Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems used by Child Brides

Patterns of coping by child brides similarly illustrate how social structures, especially community and social networks, may be supportive and at the same time a source of hindrance. Early marriage can be considered a stressful situation due to which many women rely on kinship ties, religious faith and adaptive behaviors. As noted by Sonibare (2021) such approaches only serve as temporary fixes to problems that arise from structural imbalance in opportunities and decision making that has marred women into remaining subordinate without chances of self-enhancement. However, while short-term solutions like dependence on family or prayer may provide a short-term solution, they regularly leave enduring problems of CM unsolved.

Pourtaheri et al (2024) assert that the external social environments within which the above coping styles have been embedded are cast from a patriarchal mold that leaves women disenfranchised and disempowered. The study further states that while social networks can provide kinship support, they can also retain the norms that sustain the practice. These contrasting viewpoints bring to light the issue of the interconnection between personal subjective adaptation processes and objective social processes. However, Yoosefi Lebni et al (2023) claimed that support networks which can reduce initial distress are not extensive enough to work for complete eradication of structural aspects that compel early marriage. For instance, many women largely follow femininity scripts for peace's sake in their marital contexts, only to find themselves sacrificing personal needs and success (Zasha, 2018). This trend holds true with other studies from other settings like Ethiopia and Pakistan, where child brides also use behavioral strategies to uphold unity in their homes in the process of enduring physical and psychological abuse (Charan et al., 2024; Dessie et al., 2023).

For example, Adekola et al (2015) argued that while family members may encourage a woman in the face of challenge or difficulty, they are more likely to also remind her of the traditional role of the woman as subordinate to her husband. This brings a shift of focus on the use of initiatives that maintain cultural relevance while changing the oppressive social functions of affirmative support. Informal schooling opportunities and trade as reported by Walker (2019) is not common in Nigeria due to lack of resources and government delivered initiatives, instead child brides rely on kinship ties and other related social bonds (Zasha, 2018).

5. Conclusion

The results of this review show that decision making by parents was found to play a central role, especially fathers who exert most of the influence on the marriage of their daughters, these decisions are often made due to the pressure from the greater society, religious convictions and the economic stratum. Though at times, even more caring than fathers, mothers contribute to upholding these traditions and gender roles that neglect the young girls' rights and their dreams in favor of family reputation. Social factors, for example, dowry increases early marriages since low-income earners aim at cutting expenses. This commodification of girls limits their freedom, education and decision-making rights. Another factor that has contributed significantly to perpetuating CM as an intergenerational practice is culture and tradition. Parents consider early marriage as a shield against immoralities, so they act according to societal expectations to avoid public disgrace. Due to the stigma attached to late marriage, families are forced to comply with these cultures even when doing so goes against the best interest of their children.

However, the younger generation in urban parts of Nigeria are catching on to the need for change and are activating against redundant cultural practices that contribute to poverty. However, due to the lack of supporting legal structures and appropriate policies, the change is slow.

The strategies utilized by the affected women provide a fascinating exploration of agency regarding the experience of oppression. According to most participants interviewed, they rely on kinship ties, religious faith and adopt certain behaviors needed to deal with early marriage. But these practices just strengthen the regenerative traditional roles of women and men in marriages, and do not challenge the real causes of CMs. Psychological problems, particularly loneliness, emotional upset, and difficulties in finding a competent therapist, are common among child brides, especially in the rural areas. This review underscores the importance of evidenced based interventions that are culturally appropriate including education and community activism as well as legal support to combat retrogressive practices and advance female rights.

Future Research Outlook

The evidence presented in this review raises several innovative directions for future research. This review focuses on parental decision-making, societal pressure, religion and culture. Further studies could examine the views and attitudes of the new generation, especially those who have experienced urbanization and education. Such studies could provide information needed in analyzing changes in perception and the impact of probable change in culture. Multivariate analysis is another sophisticated statistical method that can be used to gather informative data on the topic, by using different stratifiers like a combination of religion, ethnicity and income and the strength of their relationship to CM. Such analyses may also control for other factors such as household or community characteristics and can utilize both cardinal and ordinal measures. This disaggregation of data by specific stratifiers helps decision-makers to evaluate sub-groups and monitor how these gaps change longitudinally. This data can then be used to hold governments and their partners accountable for ensuring initiatives are delivered more equitably. Another critical direction of improvement is the quality assessment of the effectiveness of the existing programs, educational activities, economic stimuli, and legal changes. While global development goals underscore these approaches (UNICEF,2024), little

is known about their effectiveness in particular cultural settings such as Nigeria. It can be posited that detailed evaluations of these interventions may point to developmental needs and effective practice.

Implications and Recommendations

Strengthening Health Protection against Child Marriage in Nigeria

Health protection strategies aimed at CM in Nigeria requires a combination of social, legal and health care interventions. Firstly, there is a need for the harmonization of customary, Sharia and federal laws with the CRA to enforce regulations against CM and ensure penalties for violators (Edokwe, 2020). Law enforcement personnel should be well trained on child protection and reporting channels for interventions and monitoring should be established (Du et al., 2022). Developing a solid reporting system that prioritises accessibility and confidentiality may encourage victims of CM to report cases (Du et al., 2022). For example, the Government can establish reporting centres in the communities and make provision for toll-free hotlines that respond to cases in real time with uncompromising data protection. It may also help to establish social support work and mental health services to respond to and meet the reproductive and psychological needs of affected individuals (Salami et al., 2022). This may involve training health professionals and care givers on trauma informed practices as well as expanding sex education programs in schools (Adedokun et al., 2017). Most importantly, it is crucial to improve anti-corruption efforts and build public trust by prosecution of fraudulent officials while improving civil participation by addressing poverty and lack of education to empower citizens (Girls not Brides, 2016). For example, Rwanda has made progress by improving on government accountability through establishing strict anticorruption laws and transparency (Kigali, 2022).

Sociocultural Behavioral Change Advocacy

By being a role model, changing sociocultural aspects in Nigeria has been successful because Nigeria is strongly based on cultural and traditional principals (Abubakre, 2023). An interesting example is Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who in 1949 organized Abeokuta women and staged an uprising against oppressive taxation despite all the risks to the cultural norms (Olusesi, 2024). She also drove a car on the road in 1952, which was quite a taboo and it became a strong statement that inspired many women to discard the societal norms (Peace, 2024). Very recently, in the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian President and Vice President received the vaccine publicly to engender trust, which led to an increase in uptake (Desmond, 2021). The above illustrations highlight the influence of visible leadership in changing cultures.

Raising of successful female role models, particularly those who delayed marriage in order to get education but later established families, may serve as a means of changing the attitude towards early marriage. This is in line with the Social Cognitive Theory that emphasizes the role of observation-based learning and self-efficacy (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2020).

Religious and cultural leaders are also significant players when it comes to the re-shaping of gender norms. In Nepal, religious heads raised their voices against child marriage, and that prompted changes (UNICEF, 2019). This is in line with the Health Belief Model, which focuses

on the perceived severity, benefits, cues to action, and self-efficacy (Boskey, 2024). Moreover, inter-generational dialogue, as observed in Katsina, would enhance understanding between the elderly and the young, and such interventions can be applied in other communities in Nigeria (Wrapanigeria, 2024).

Education for Community Development

This study showed that education stood out and is recommended for countering the issue of CM. A girl child loses the chance to attend school due to cultural/economic difficulties hence punishing her to a lifetime of poverty and lack of agency (HRW, 2024). While Gender sensitive educational programmes and awareness may transform these hegemonic discourses, it is important to address the economic factors that hinder school participation (Ekundayo, 2022). For prospect, United Nations Foundation (2024) asserts that the Ethiopia's Berhane Hewan program has made significant progress, the program allocates cows as economic incentives to poor families, it has created a livelihood for parents and helped keep girls in school. Similar strategies might be effective in Nigerian marginalized populations through financial support, scholarships, vocational training, food assistance, cash transfers, unemployment benefits and housing support (Girls not Brides, 2023). Moreover, educational programs like Tostan's Community Empowerment Program (CEP) can be used at the community level, which currently functions in Mali, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, and Gambia (Missiaen, 2021). According to Simpson (2020) one of CEP's key areas of focus is Human Rights Education, hence, conducts awareness creation within families disapproving of the social practices that support CM. Subsequently, thousands of communities have vowed to stop practicing CM through mass education and culturally appropriate activism (Missiaen, 2021).

Limitations of the Review

The restriction to English articles may have caused the loss of essential viewpoints as some documents are published in the local languages. This language bias strongly justifies why there should be the inclusion of more comprehensive approaches to research. Another limitation is the fact that many of the studies reviewed for this paper have small sample sizes, meaning that the experiences may not have been wholly captured by the studies reviewed. To minimize such limitations, future studies should be devised using mixed research methodologies, larger and more heterogeneous samples should be included. Moreover, search limited to papers published after 2010, means omission of certain historical data which could expand the understanding of changes in the practice of CM. This review is one of the many articles that focus on the victimization of female children and omits that boys are commonly married early due to sociocultural beliefs that force them to become men before 18 for the purpose of furthering the family line and securing their role as providers. In some Nigerian cultures, it's the girl's family that pay dowries, religion also prompt boys to marry early as way of avoiding premarital sex and this also hinders their educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2024). Meanwhile, male abuse victims are less likely to report cases due to gender expectations of masculinity (Quinn-Walker, 2024).

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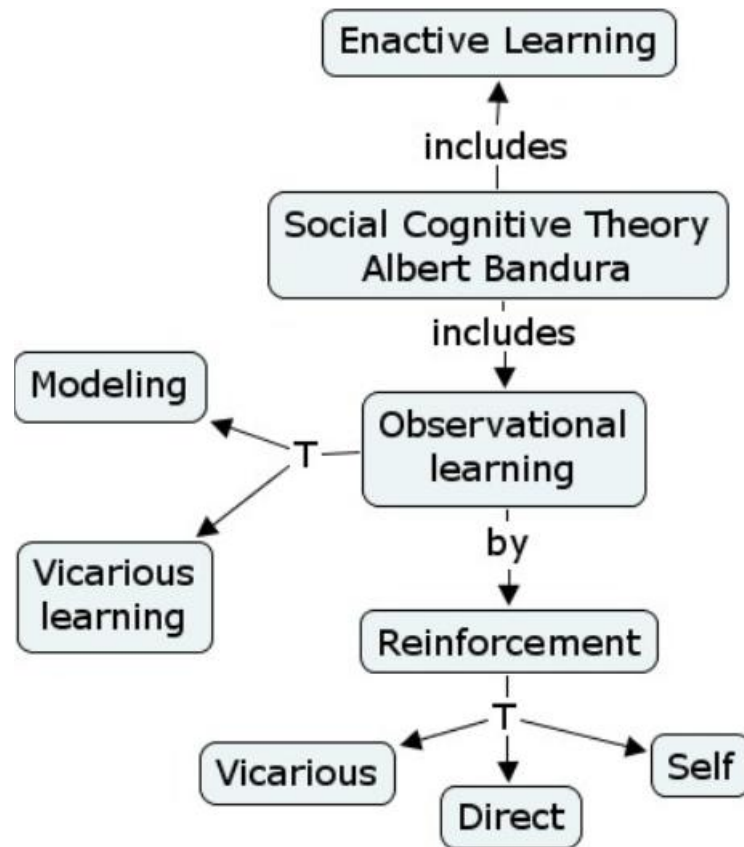
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Ethical Consideration

This is a systematic review of previously published articles; formal ethical approval was not sorted. There was no direct contact with participants and all data analysed were retrieved from secondary sources.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Enactive Learning and Social Cognition theory



Source: Adapted from Albert Bandura (2010)

Appendix 2: Data Extraction										
No	Study Title	Author & Year	Study Design	Sampling Size	Data Collection	Outcome	Conceptual Framework	Theoretical Framework	Limitations	Article links
1	The Health Consequences of Child Marriage among Rural Women: Evidence from Igbo-Eze North, South-East Nigeria	Uche &Uche (2024)	Qualitative design (phenomenological approach)	20 women who experienced early marriage	In-depth interviews were conducted by the author using an interview guide to ensure consistency. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted between 45-60 minutes	The study revealed that child marriage heightens maternal mortality. Participants shared stories of losing family members and close friends due to childbirth complications and lack of access to health care services. Vulnerability to infectious diseases (HIV, Human papilloma virus and subsequent cervical cancer),	Social Norms Framework	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Exosystem)	The study focused on two specific communities, this geographical limitation prevents generalizability of results to other communities with varying cultural and societal influences.	The health consequences of child marriage among rural women: Evidence from Igbo-Eze North, South-east Nigeria

						mental health challenges (depression, anxiety and trauma), adverse reproductive health outcomes (preterm births, obstetric fistula), still birth and low birth weight are also documented. The results of the study showed that inadequate parenting has a huge impact on child marriage, with parents frequently choosing cultural norms over the welfare of their children.				
2	Causes and Challenges of Girl-Child Marriage	Adeye mi et al (2023)	Qualitative method (cross sectional research design)	20 child brides	In-depth interviews (the researchers developed an interview guide	The results show that the practice of CM is sustained by cultural norms and	Social Determinants of Health	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Macrosystem)	The study has limited focus on the intersectionality of factors like ethnicity,	(PDF) Causes and Challenges of Girl-Child Marriage in Northwest Nigeria

					including questions around marriage arrangements, age at first marriage, educational background and reasons for marrying early. There was informed consent and interviews were audio recorded. The duration of the interview was not documented in the study).	religious interpretations and beliefs about protecting girls' chastity and family honour. It also points out the consequences include violation of human rights, limited potential for girls, obstruction of sustainable goals and gender inequality.			social status, economic advantage, disadvantage and cultural norms and only focused on challenges associated with age of marriage. The cross-sectional nature of the study limited its exploration to a particular point in time. Perhaps a longitudinal study can expose the long-term effects of child marriage practice. The sample size of 20 participants and limited geographical scope could have impacted on the	
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									generalizability of the study.	
3	Socio-cultural Interpretation of Marriage and Health Consequences of Girl Child Marriage in Northern Nigeria	Kehinde (2022)	Qualitative study (phenomenological approach)	10 child brides	In-depth Interviews (The researchers used structured in-depth interview guide that covers areas like meanings participants assign to their experiences, health problems, educational background and age at marriage. There was verbal consent, and the interview was audio recorded, the duration of the interviews was not mentioned in the study).	The study shows that girls are married off before they are mentally and socially capable of marital responsibilities and commitments. With a median age of 15 in Katsina, the study laid emphasis on severe physical, mental and psychological health consequences, as well as vast attribution of low educational attainment with CM.	Social Determinants of Health	Feminist Theory (Patriarchal Dynamics)	The study's focus on a single LGA and the sample size of 10 participants could have made it not generalizable. The snowballing sampling means that existing participants made referrals, and this could have resulted in gathering participants with similar characteristics and experiences potentially skewing the findings. The interview duration was not documented which is important concerning the	(PDF) SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF MARRIAGE AND HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF GIRL CHILD MARRIAGE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

									sensitivity of the topic, as longer durations could have led to emotional stress.	
4	Being a Child Bride in Nigeria: A Feminist Narrative Inquiry	Sonibare (2021)	Qualitative design (based on narrative enquiry)	15 Former child brides	In-depth interviews using a semi-structured guide consisting of 12 open-ended probing questions. Each interview lasted 20 minutes with questions about matrimonial experiences , motherhood , factors influencing antenatal use and future aspirations. The interviews were audio recorded, and researchers	The results of the study highlight the intricate interactions between economic circumstances, cultural norms, religious beliefs, and familial authority that limit health seeking behavior of child brides and contribute to the continuation of CM among Nigeria's Hausa-Fulani group. The study revealed that the women desire to advocate for	Social Coping Strategies	Resilience Theory	The small, homogeneous sample size of fifteen Hausa-Fulani participants limits the research and may have an impact on how broadly the results may be applied. Furthermore , depending too much on retrospective recollections could skew participants' stories.	"Being a Child Bride in Nigeria: A Feminist Narrative Inquiry" by Olubukola Foluke Sonibare

					also took field notes and documented non-verbal cues.	better educational opportunities for their daughters, signaling a better recognition of education as a protective factor.				
5	The Lived Experience of Child Marriage and its Health Effects among Young Mothers in Nigeria	Ashi (2020)	Qualitative study (phenomenological design)	10 former child brides	In-depth key face to face interviews (designed open ended interviews questions on the psychological, physiological and sociocultural and institutional experiences . Each interview lasted 45 mins to 1 hour, audio was recorded and transcribed using NVivo 12 software.	The results show that Child marriage is linked to detrimental physical, psychological and mental outcomes like obstetric fistula, depression and educational deprivation. Additionally , there is a lack of agency and autonomy for underage brides in their marriages. Because of the patriarchal	Social Norms Framework	Social Constructionism	Data collection was limited to non-Muslims, participants responses may have captured their emotional state rather than the actual experiences due to the sensitive nature of the questions asked. The study was also conducted without interpreters, and this may have limited the expressions	"The Lived Experience of Child Marriage and its Health Effects Among Yo" by Anastasia Iliwo Ashi

					Participants gave written consent and requested that pseudonyms should be used to protect their identities).	culture that permeates the population, husbands' rule and wives have little to no say in how decisions are made, and this hinders access to maternity care and overall wellbeing. Lastly, the study suggests policy change to improve access to education and healthcare.			of the participants. The study also fully focused on cultural norms in connection to CM practice with limited focus on the individuals that exploit these norms.	
6	Agency and Wellbeing in the context of Early Marriage; A Qualitative Inquiry into the Northern Nigerian Context	Zasha (2018)	Qualitative approach (Informed by principles of grounded theory and ethnography)	24 child brides	Semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and participatory techniques. The interviews	The findings of the study show that young married girls have limited power to make decisions due to cultural, economic and family constraints	Cultural Beliefs and Practices	Feminist Theory (Gender Norms)	Some participants struggle to recall their ages at marriage, which could affect the accuracy of their accounts. It is also stated that there is tension	(48) Agency and wellbeing in the context of early marriage : a qualitative inquiry into the northern Nigerian context Doosuur Zasha - Academia.edu

					lasted 20 minutes to 1 hour depending on the time the participant could allocate.	in Northern Nigeria. It further states that access to economic stability and resources can help them make better decisions and improve overall wellbeing. Additionally, the study looks beyond seeing the girls as mere victims, recognizing their agencies and the complex realities they navigate.			between the participants and the organization which could have prevented potential participants from sharing their accounts thus limiting diversity in the experiences. The participants are also educated which makes the study not generalizable to most Northern Nigerian states where CM is most prevalent.	
7	A Qualitative Assessment of the Effects of child Marriage on Female Education and Entrepreneurship in Northeastern Nigeria	Adekola et al (2015)	Qualitative research design (phenomenological approach)	Eight child wives	Focus group discussion	The study revealed the detrimental effects of CM on women's education and entrepreneurship which is caused by poverty and	Family Systems framework	Feminist Theory (Patriarchal Dynamics)	The study utilized the NDHS (2008) data which may not capture recent trends. Limited geographic focus, self-reporting	(48) A Qualitative Assessment of the Effects of Child Marriage on Female Education and Entrepreneurship in Northeastern Nigeria Paul O

						cultural norms. The author observed that the practice is more common in Northern Nigeria, and it's used to control female sexual expression. The author documented child bride's lack of decision-making power and a need for multi-faceted interventions to address the issue in Nigeria.			might have introduced bias.	. Adekola - Academia.edu
8	Hearing the Silences: Adult Nigerian Women's Accounts of Early Marriage	Callaghan et al (2015)	Qualitative Study (phenomenological approach)	6 women who experienced early marriage	In depth interviews (an interview guide was used structured around different stages experienced in marriage, daily life	According to the study, women's identities are limited by early marriage, as participants report little marriage preparation and a heavy focus on	Social Norms Framework	Social Constructionism	Generalizability is limited by the study's small sample size of six participants. The study was conducted in a hospital where the	(PDF) Hearing the silences: Adult Nigerian women's accounts of 'early marriages'

					responsibilities, advice for other girls facing early marriage and there was verbal consent, duration of interviews was not documented).	household responsibilities. The study emphasizes that participants' response in topics relating to CM is often sparse and repetitive and driven by cultural expectations, this highlights lack of agency. The study delves into the coping mechanisms utilized by woman an recommends considering local context as opposed to imposing western ideals of gender equality.			child brides were receiving obstetric fistula treatment, their reliance on the hospital for treatment may have stopped them from expressing views that differ from the hospital's stance against CM. The interviewer as a Christian woman may have introduced bias as the participants were Muslims from northern Nigeria. Despite showing her respect by wearing an Islamic outfit, her position as	
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									an outsider and religion may have influenced the dynamics of the interview answers. Her personal sentiments may have also influenced the direction of the interview, leading the participants to reject or affirm certain theories. There was also no information on the duration of the interviews. Depending solely on verbal assent may have made it difficult to guarantee informed participation.	
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Appendix 3: Study and Participant Characteristics						
Author & Study Title	State/City	Language used for Data Collection	Data Analysis	Study Funding	Sampling Method	Demographic features of Respondents
The Health Consequences of Child Marriage among rural women: Evidence from Igbo-Eze North, South-East Nigeria Uche & Uche (2024)	Enugu state (communities of Etteh and Enugu Ezike)	Igbo	Thematic analysis	No funding	snowball sampling	20 women between the age of 18- 45 years, all married before 18 with 15 currently married at the time of the research and 5 widowed. 16 participants had primary education and 4 had secondary education. All participants are from the Igbo speaking communities of Enugu.
Causes and Challenges of Girl-Child Marriage	Kankara Local Government Area, Katsina	Hausa and Ffulde	Thematic analysis	No funding	Random sampling, snowball sampling,	The mean age of participants is 15.2 years ranging from

Adeyemi et al (2023)	State, Northwest Nigeria				and purposive sampling.	thirteen to seventeen years. Most participants received formal education with the highest qualification being a secondary school certificate of Education (SSCE). Majority of participants are Hausa and a few Fulani women, and they all practiced Islam.
Socio-cultural Interpretation of Marriage and Marriage in Northern Nigeria Kehinde (2022)	Katsina Local Government Area (LGA)	The study did not explicitly state the language for data collection.	Thematic analysis	No funding	Purposive sampling, snowball sampling.	The respondents were less than 18 years at the time of marriage with mean age at

		But it is most likely that the interviews were conducted in local languages given the study was conducted in Katsina.				14.7 years. Majority are Hausa and Fulani Muslim and had experienced one pregnancy.
Being a Child Bride in Nigeria: A Feminist Narrative Inquiry Sonibare (2021)	Southern Nigeria (Sabo west and Sabo east)	English and Hausa	Thematic analysis	Study did not provide specific information about funding	Snowball sampling techniques	Participant were between the age of 19 to 50 years with varying levels of education including Arabic attendance school and some having no education.
The Lived Experience of Child Marriage and its Health Effects among	Igu community of Abuja	Pidgin English	Thematic analysis	Study did not provide specific information	Purposive sampling	Participants are 18-24 years who experienced CM at ages

Young Mothers in Nigeria Ashi (2020)				about funding		14-16. Low level of education and high prevalence of Poverty.
Agency and Wellbeing in the context of Early Marriage; A Qualitative inquiry into the Northern Nigerian Context Zasha (2018)	Nasarawa State (Wamba Local Government Area).	Hausa	Thematic analysis	Funding is not explicitly stated but research was conducted in collaboration with a local NGO.	Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling	Participants were between the age of 15 to 25 years with varying levels of education, from both monogamous and polygamous marriages and income generating activities.
A Qualitative assessment of the effects of child marriage on Female Education and Entrepreneurship in Northeastern Nigeria	Taraba state (Bali Local government)	The study did not specify data collection language	Descriptive analysis	Funding is not stated	Purposive sampling	All participants are child wives under age 18 from Bali eastern Nigeria.

Adekola et al (2015)						
Hearing the Silences: Adult Nigerian Women's Accounts of Early Marriage Callaghan et al (2015)	Sokoto Nigeria	Hausa	Interpretive phenomenological analysis	Funding is not stated	Purposive sampling	Respondents are adult women between the age of 25 and 35 married before age 18, were treated for fistula at a regional hospital. They are from poor rural backgrounds with little formal education.

Appendix 4

Table 1: CASP Quality Appraisal of Included Studies											
Study	Clear Aim	Is Qualitative Method appropriate	Is the Research Design appropriate	Recruitment Strategy	Data Collection	Relationship between researcher and participants	Ethical Consideration	Was the Data Analysis rigorous.	Clear Findings	Value of Research	Overall Quality Rating
Uche & Uche (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Adeyemi et al (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can not tell	Yes	Yes	Can not tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate

[illegible]