Children’s Dignity Forum (CDF)

Report on Child Marriage Survey Conducted in Dar es Salaam, Coastal, Mwanza and Mara Regions

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and
One World Action

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Significantly, we recognize and appreciate financial support from: Sigrid Rausing Trust for funding the Dar es Salaam and Coastal Regions Child Marriage Survey, One World Action for funding the Mwanza and Mara Regions Child Marriage Survey, and the Foundation for Women’s Health Research and Development (FORWARD) for providing technical support to CDF as well as the preparation and printing of this report.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACHPR</td>
<td>African Charter on Human and People’s Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACRWC</td>
<td>African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child</td>
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<td>CDF</td>
<td>Children’s Dignity Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
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<tr>
<td>FORWARD</td>
<td>Foundation for Women’s Health Research and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICCPR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICESCR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMA</td>
<td>Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organization of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACHPRRWA</td>
<td>Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Fund for Population</td>
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Executive summary

The main objective of this baseline survey on child marriage was to gather information on the extent, magnitude and consequences of child marriages in Tanzania, as a basis for raising awareness on how children, particularly girls, are affected by the practice. The survey was conducted in Dar es Salaam and Coastal Regions in November and December 2007 and in Mwanza and Mara Regions in April and May 2008. These four regions are among the areas in Tanzania most affected by child marriage. As shown in this report, girls are more affected by child marriage than boys, since girls are marginalized, their voices are never heard and they are, in most cases, considered as ‘investments’ by their parents and guardians who receive bride price when the girls are married.

The survey sought to find out firstly whether people in these regions knew anything about child marriage in their areas. Respondents were asked to define ‘who is a child’, whether they knew what child marriage was, and if they had any views on child marriage in their localities. Secondly, respondents were asked about the extent of child marriage in their areas – the number of cases in their communities – and whether they thought child marriage was a good practice or bad practice. Causes of child marriage formed a further category of questioning. The respondents were then asked if they knew the impact of child marriage on the individual children, their families and the community at large. Finally, respondents were asked if they knew any laws, policies or regulations which govern marriage in Tanzania.

The central findings of this survey reflect how child marriages have affected not only girl children but also boys, their families and the community generally. The effects are compounded by many factors including: lack of knowledge about what constitutes ‘a child’, ideas about the age at which girls or boys are considered ready for marriage, and the association of puberty with readiness for marriage for both girls and boys. It is clear from the findings that there are cases of child marriage in Dar es Salaam, Coastal, Mara and Mwanza regions, even though many respondents seemed to know that marriage below 18 years would be considered child marriage. There was a lack of linkage between the answers given to two questions: ‘when would a girl or boy be

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1 Numerous media reports indicate the prevalence of child marriage in Coastal areas (Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions), and in Mara and Mwanza regions.
ready for marriage’ and ‘at what age would a girl or boy be ready for marriage’. Most respondents indicated that a boy or girl would be ready for marriage at the age of 18 years and above. Yet the same respondents indicated that readiness for marriage is connected to puberty, which is not linked to a specific age (and almost always happens before the age of 18), and is largely associated with traditional rites such as ‘graduating’ from circumcision, for boys, or female genital mutilation (FGM) for girls.

On the basis of the findings of this survey and its limitations (e.g. time), it is recommended that there should be a further anthropological study. This would reveal more of the reality on the ground and possibly develop more concrete findings on the extent of the child marriage problem and the societal and legal solutions to it.
1. The child marriage problem: Background

1.1. Introduction

The protection of human rights, particularly children’s rights, has received little attention in Tanzania. A legal framework on children’s rights is lacking. One of the most well-known violations of children’s rights is the practice of child marriage. Yet this problem has, to date, attracted scant attention in Tanzania, prompting the need for research to find out its causes and effects, and to inform reforms that restore and maintain children’s dignity. Today, many girls as young as 14 or 15 years are forced into marriages by their parents, guardians or relatives. This is sanctioned by the 1971 Law of Marriages Act (LMA) which gives parents and judges the power to permit the marriage of children as young as 14 years. Girls are often forced to drop out of school to get married, and forego the chance to grow to maturity before marriage or make their own decisions about their lives. Child marriage disproportionately affects girls because social and biological factors make them more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and child bearing complications.

The main thrust behind this baseline survey, therefore, is the desire to stop child marriage in Tanzania, and end the severe physical, psychological and emotional effects it has on child spouses, particularly child wives.

The incidence of child marriage in Tanzania is high, despite the fact that Tanzania has signed and ratified a number of international and regional legal instruments relating to the protection of children’s rights. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (PACHPRWA), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Article 16(2) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) compels State Parties to enter marriages in an official registry. According to the CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendation 21,\(^2\) a

child marriage is defined as “marriage of a child below 18 years of age”\textsuperscript{3}. The ACRWC\textsuperscript{4} also contains a fairly clear definition of a child as being “every human being below the age of 18 years”.\textsuperscript{5} Specifically, it prohibits child marriage and the betrothal of girls,\textsuperscript{6} invalidating any marriage entered into by girls or boys below the age of 18 years.

Irrespective of these provisions and legal instruments, Tanzania has no single legal framework for protecting children against child marriages. Worse still, the available law (the LMA) permits the marriage of under-18s.\textsuperscript{7} A legal framework which promotes and protects the human rights of girls is needed. The government must ensure that its laws governing children’s affairs comply with the international and regional human rights instruments and other legal documents that it has signed and ratified.\textsuperscript{8}

Scholars\textsuperscript{9} have demonstrated a problem in ascertaining the prevalence of child marriage, largely due to the fact that not all marriages are officially recorded.\textsuperscript{10} For instance, for those aged between 15 and 19, marriage data is normally gathered by scrutinizing statistics and reports on reproduction or schooling, yet this may not yield realistic data, since not all drop-outs end up in child marriages.

\textsuperscript{3} The CEDAW Committee states that, the minimum age of marriage should be 18 years for both women and men. See also Article 6(b) of the PACHPRWA, CAB/LEG/66.6, Adopted on 11 July 2003 entered into force 25\textsuperscript{th} November 2005 (hereinafter, the Protocol on the Rights of Women), which states that minimum age of marriage for women shall be 18 years.
\textsuperscript{4} ACRWC OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49 (1990) entered into force 29\textsuperscript{th} November 1999.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., Article 2.
\textsuperscript{6} Article 21 (2) states that child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action including legislation shall be taken to specify minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory. Regardless of this provision, the Tanzanian Penal Code contains a provision, which allows the betrothal of child girls below the marriageable age (Section 38).
\textsuperscript{7} See Section 13 (1) and (2) of the Tanzania Law of Marriage Act, 1971.
\textsuperscript{8} So far Tanzania does not have a single piece of legislation to govern children's issues. Multiple laws govern children and each one specifies different ages for childhood. Others directly imply that a child is not capable of making sound decisions, e.g. election laws do not allow a person below 18 years to vote.
\textsuperscript{10} This position is very common in Tanzania, especially in rural areas where many customary marriages go unregistered.
There is also little credible data about marriages of children under the age of 14, and even less on those below the age of 10. However, it is estimated that, in 2002, about 52 million girls below 18 years of age were married worldwide; 25,000 are being married each day; and 100 million will be married by 2012. The practice, common in Tanzania, is most visible in rural areas, but also in urban areas and in some parts of the coastal areas where formal education has not been a priority.

The baseline survey was co-ordinated by CDF and conducted in the coastal regions (Dar es Salaam and Coastal), and in Mwanza and Mara regions in Northern Tanzania. These four regions were chosen because the practice of child marriage is alleged to be common here and so its effects should be familiar to most of the residents.

It is envisaged that this report will be disseminated to various stakeholders – including the government, civil society and the public at large – in order to show the extent and effects of the problem, raise awareness of it, and advocate for both social and legal reform.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Despite being prevalent, with profound impacts, child marriage in Tanzania attracts limited attention – yet it has become a serious problem in most parts of the country, particularly in rural and coastal areas and among poor populations in urban areas. Many children, particularly girls, as young as 14 and 15 years are forced into marriage by their parents, guardians or relatives. They may drop out of school to get married, and are generally denied the opportunity to mature and make decisions over their own lives before getting married. Child marriage has severe physical, psychological and emotional effects on the victims. Girls are disproportionately affected because their biological constitution makes them more vulnerable to reproductive health illnesses.

The need to combat child marriage and other harmful practices against children is more vital today than ever. Success depends on raising awareness among the general public, policy-makers and other stakeholders, and such awareness-raising activities need to be built on research.

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13 Ibid.
1.3. Objectives of the survey

1.3.1. Main objective

The main aim of this project is to raise awareness of and commitment towards the struggle to eliminate discriminatory customary practices which force children into marriage, particularly among local and national decision-makers and the general public.

The broad objective was to conduct an intensive baseline survey to gather specific data and general information on the extent, magnitude and consequences of child marriage in Tanzania, so as to contribute to efforts to prevent such violations of children’s rights.

1.3.2. Specific objectives

- to assess the prevalence/extent and incidence of child marriage, particularly relating to the girl child, in the selected regions and districts
- to analyze the various socio-economic and cultural factors and reasons leading to child marriage in Dar es Salaam, Coastal, Mwanza and Mara regions
- to assess the level of awareness on child marriage practices and the related consequences within the communities in Dar es Salaam, Coast, Mwanza and Mara regions
- to ensure that the research develops informed propositions, resulting from respondents’ recommendations on solutions for ending child marriage in Tanzania
- to raise awareness of the impact of child marriage, especially on girl children, and build possible alliances with local communities aiming to eliminate child marriage in Tanzania.

1.4. Significance of the study

Children of very young ages are being coerced into marriage, sometimes by ‘greedy’ parents or guardians, sometimes as a result of cultural practices and traditions which require them to get married soon after completion of rites like circumcision/FGM.

Poverty and economic hardship have been identified as reasons why parents marry off their girl children – bride price (paid in cows and/or money) is said to move parents out of abject poverty, a fact not substantiated by concrete evidence. Indeed there is credible evidence to show the reverse of this ‘poverty alleviation’ argument – child
marriages are responsible for causing abject poverty in many households of child couples and their children.

Young couples are usually not ready to take on parental responsibilities and are unable to sustain their families financially. Yet the cultural and traditional practices of some communities in Tanzania require children, both girls and boys, to marry when they are still very young. Some studies have revealed that girls are forced into marriage because their parents and relatives do not want them to get pregnant at home, as the parents would be ridiculed. For boys, early marriages happen mostly when they are the only sons in their respective families, and they may be forced to assume fatherly roles at too young an age. Many child marriages end in divorce and separation, when one or both spouses realize that they are not ready for the demanding marital responsibilities, particularly with partners who were forced upon them.

With this in mind, it is imperative that the community – which is instrumental in perpetuating child marriage and which can be greatly affected by it – should be involved in efforts to end the practice and its effects. This study was therefore undertaken to create and raise awareness of the issue, and encourage the community and local and national leaders to join the campaign against child marriage.

Putting an end to child marriage cannot be achieved in a vacuum, so thorough research – both qualitative and quantitative – was undertaken to determine the causes and effects of the practice. The survey obtained data on the prevalence and incidences of child marriage practices, various socio-economic and cultural factors leading to child marriage, the level of awareness about it consequences, and respondents’ recommendations for combating the problem. The findings of this study are expected to form the basis for individual and institutional interventions and, most importantly, set the benchmark for a legal and social framework for the protection of children’s rights. They will be used to guide the creation and evaluation of future strategies to be adopted by the government and other stakeholders, particularly in joining the campaign to end child marriage in Tanzania.

1.5. Research methodology

To collect both primary and secondary data, the baseline study involved field and library research. The library research involved a document and literature review
specifically looking at the existing international and national legal instruments, policy
documents and reports relating to child marriage. Various earlier statistical data and
empirical studies on child marriage in Tanzania were reviewed, including documents,
books, journals and reports. Relevant information was extracted from these sources to
substantiate the magnitude of the child marriage problem and its various effects,
especially on girls.

Primary data was collected through structured and unstructured interviews,
questionnaires and focus group discussions with the targeted respondents. Interviews
and focus group discussions were preferred because of their reliability, precision and
flexibility. They also permit the interviewer to ask supplementary and rejoinder
questions and to clarify any questions or issues that might not be clearly understood
by the respondents.

This baseline survey used both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.
The former was used to determine the causes and effects of child marriage among the
 targeted communities, while the latter was employed to establish its extent and
magnitude in Dar es Salaam, Coastal, Mwanza and Mara regions. Quantitative
methods were also used to find out the levels of understanding/awareness among
respondents regarding the problem of child marriage, and whether or not this
understanding was dependent on the respondent’s age.

Dar es Salaam, Coastal, Mwanza and Mara were chosen because of the prevalence of
child marriage in these regions. In Dar es Salaam, the survey was conducted in Ilala
and Tembeke Districts, while in Coastal region the survey covered only Kibaha
District. In Mara, the survey was conducted in two districts, Tarime and Musoma
Rural Districts, and in Mwanza it covered Sengerema and Ilemela Districts.

Data analysis was done by developing categories of different responses, and the
research findings were presented by comparing and contrasting the responses obtained
from the field. Data presentation was mainly based on narrative and descriptive
reporting and, where necessary, raw data and quantitative figures were used.

1.6. Limitations
Several limitations were encountered in the course of this survey. The main constraint
was that inadequate funds had been budgeted for the work. The survey in Dar es
Salaam and Coastal regions was planned to cover seven districts – three in Dar es
Salaam region and four in Coastal region – but the budget was only able to cover three districts, two in Dar es Salaam and one in Coastal region. Kinondoni District in Dar es Salaam, and Mafia, Kisarawe and Bagamoyo Districts in Coastal region were therefore omitted from the survey.

Similarly, financial constraints were experienced during the survey in Mara and Mwanza. The funds could only provide for eight researchers to do field work. However, had there been more researchers, they would have had more time to concentrate on particular survey locations, rather than running from one place to another trying to meet as many respondents as possible. Inadequate funds meant researchers could only stay in the field for ten days. This made it easier for some respondents to stick to their ‘well prepared’ answers, since the researchers did not always have time to probe more deeply to find out the reality of every situation. It is believed that, given more time for field research, the researchers may have been able to actually observe some of the practices which are harmful to children and which fuel child marriages. A longer-term study is therefore suggested to help establish the deeper reality of child marriage in these regions.

The weather conditions of Mara and Mwanza during the survey period were unfavourable to both the researchers and the respondents. Rainy and windy conditions, combined with the poor infrastructure, impaired the researchers’ mobility and made it difficult to meet the respondents, who preferred to stay at home rather than attend focus group discussions.

2. Literature on child marriage in Tanzania

The issue of child marriage in Tanzania has engaged several researchers, both national and international.\textsuperscript{14} However, two major works – by Magoke-Mhoja (2006) and Katapa (1994) – distinguish themselves in the treatment of the issue in Tanzania and form the basis of discussions in this chapter. These researchers view child marriage – also termed early marriage\textsuperscript{15} – as a human rights and sociological violation, which has adverse consequences for those violated (mainly girls and young women). Most of these marriages are arranged without the prior knowledge or consent of the bride. In most cases it is girls who are subjected to child marriage.

\textsuperscript{14} For example, Magoke-Mhoja, 2006; Nour, 2006; Katapa, 1994.

\textsuperscript{15} As noted by Nour (2006) child marriage, which is defined as marriage to a child who is below 18 years, is a more accepted term, since early marriage is vague and does not necessarily refer to children.
Among the Kurya of Tarime, however, child marriage is afflicted on both boys and girls soon after circumcision or FGM. Circumcision and FGM are viewed as rites of passage to marriage. Hence, boys and girls as young as 14 marry and end up in unstable relationships.\(^1^6\)

It has been observed that child marriage is usually accompanied by early child birth, which poses risks for both the mother and her baby. Demographic and health surveys conducted in more than 10 African countries show higher maternal and infant mortality rates among teenage mothers (i.e. 13–19-year-olds) than among women aged between 20 and 35.\(^1^7\) Moreover, it has been noted that malaria parasite density is significantly higher in pregnant girls who are under 19 years of age than in pregnant women who are over that age. Malaria also increases HIV viral load and raises the risk of mother-to-child HIV transmission. The biological interaction between these diseases complicates treatment and presents a serious health risk that can result in the death of both mother and child. Consequently, mortality rates are 73 per cent higher for infants born to mothers who are under 20 years of age than to mothers over that age. Children delivering children are also prone to obstructed labour that many times leads to fistulas. Girls who are between 10 and 15 years of age face the highest risk because their pelvic bones are not ready for childbearing and delivery.\(^1^8\)

Poverty has been identified as a key factor in child marriage. Famine and the high cost of raising children, particularly education costs, have prompted parents to marry off their daughters for bride wealth. Often the bride wealth, usually paid in cows or money, is used by the father to alleviate his economic problems, marry other wives or pay for a son’s marriage. Rarely does the girl benefit from the bride wealth or any wealth accrued during her marriage.\(^1^9\) For example, among Katapa’s sample of 10 married teenage girls – eight married to young husbands, two married to middle-aged men – six said their father’s desire for bride wealth was the major factor in them marrying so young.\(^2^0\) Katapa also noted that, because many times the girl is married to an older man, she becomes a widow at a very early age. For example, among Katapa’s

\(^{1^6}\) Katapa (1994), p.89
\(^{1^7}\) Ibid., p.77
\(^{1^8}\) Nour (2006)
\(^{1^9}\) Magoke-Mhoja (2006); Katapa (1994)
\(^{2^0}\) Katapa (1994), p.80
sample of 15 mothers of teenage girls – of whom 14 had married as teenagers – six had already lost their husbands. The only mother of teenage girls who married when she was over 20 had received secondary education, but Katapa does not indicate whether the mother now had a married teenage daughter or not.\(^{21}\)

More than half of the sample of teenage girls (21 out of 40), did not aspire to get married for various reasons. Most reasons were socio-economic in nature, like the fear of overwork faced by married Kurya women, violence and harsh treatment by husbands against wives and children, and bearing many children. The bride wealth is usually quite high, meaning the girl has to persevere in such conditions because her father is unlikely to be willing or able to pay back the bride wealth he received. Katapa’s study clearly emphasised socio-economic and reproductive health factors relating to child marriage.

Magoke-Mhoja’s (2006) study, conducted in Tarime, Mara region and Mvomero, Morogoro region, is very much human rights based. The study, which focused mainly on court cases and out-of-court settlements/customary law, starts by narrating the rights of children in the international arena, which are not fully observed in the national statutes and practices. These rights are observed in conventions and treaties that Tanzania, as earlier indicated, is party to – the CRC, CEDAW and ACRWC, among others.

The study looks critically at court and customary law practices in the chosen communities with regard to the non-observance of child rights – this happens particularly in the lower courts, while more progressive rulings are seen at higher levels of the justice system. According to Magoke-Mhoja, legal precedence is one way to bring about progressive justice in Tanzania while awaiting state compliance with international conventions and charters that uphold children’s rights and call for non-discriminatory treatment of the sexes. She noted that culture is not static and that mobilising the community for change has borne fruit in some areas. One such example is the Maasai experience in Kajiado, Kenya, where they were mobilised to ensure that girls are enrolled in school and stay until they finish. Girl children who

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p.83
had been forced into marriage were brought back to school and counselled so that
ey could engage effectively in education.22

Katapa (1994) also noted that cultural practices are not static. There were some
changes in Tarime, Mara region regarding child marriages, particularly among women
who have had at least secondary education. Many girls do not want to marry or to
marry early, and those who do find ways of coming out of the marriage, especially if
it was arranged when one or both of the spouses were very young.23 It is evident that
boys or girls who marry young are not ready for the lifelong nature of marriage. This
makes many marriages temporal and unstable, with adverse effects on both the couple
and any children they have.

In both studies, the researchers tried to record the voices of those involved in child
marriages, with varied reactions. While the majority did not like the situation, some
thought it was acceptable because it was part of their culture. Nearly half of Katapa’s
sample of 40 girls would have preferred to postpone their marriage, and some were
afraid to marry, citing various reasons, the most prominent being the desire to become
nuns.24 However, neither study offers a genuine feel for the communities’ perceptions
about child marriage, so their conclusions and recommendations are rather
prescriptive. Katapa called for the elimination of socio-cultural practices that are
detrimental to the development and reproductive health of girls. Magoke-Mhoja
called for the enactment of laws and reform of the justice system to cater for the rights
of all children without the discrimination that currently exists against child wives and
widows. The current CDF study attempts to fill a gap, and reflect the perceptions of
communities on child marriage and ways to combat it.

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22 Magoke-Mhoja (2006), p.228
24 Katapa (1994), p.81
3. Research findings
3.1. Demographics

The targeted respondents in all regions included men and women of different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. Gender, marital status, and age were the main demographic characteristics of the survey, but respondents’ occupations, educational levels and religions were also taken into account. The diverse group of respondents was chosen so as to capture a more representative range of information from the community, and also because the study hypothesized that the demographic characteristics of the respondents would have a bearing on their understanding, views and attitudes towards child marriage practices. The demographics of the respondents are summarized in the tables below.

Demographic characteristics: Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total respondents</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Respondents no. per age group and gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic characteristics: Mara and Mwanza regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>24.90%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>17.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.20%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil servant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing values</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2. Knowledge and attitudes towards child marriage practices

3.2.1. Knowledge around the meaning of ‘a child’

The definition of ‘a child’ in Tanzania, as earlier indicated, varies from one legislation to another, and the majority of people are not aware of what the law says about who is a child. The level of understanding differs from one region to another. In Mara and Mwanza, 204 of the 342 respondents (59.6 per cent) indicated that they understood a child to be a boy or girl aged 0 to 18 years, compared to only 39 per cent of the 120 respondents in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions. A significant number of respondents in all regions defined a child as a person of 17 years or below, while some lowered the threshold to 14 years. Perhaps this range of responses reflects the lack of a single legal guide as to when exactly childhood ends, which in turn has a negative bearing on children’s rights and livelihoods. Other respondents linked childhood to schooling and economic dependence. For instance, some defined a child to mean “any person who is living with his/her parents and is dependent on them for everything”, while others said a child is “somebody who is being taken care of by the parents and who is studying in either primary school or secondary school or at tertiary level”. Some felt that childhood depends on the way the person in question behaves during interactions with others.25

25 Focus group discussion with secondary school students in Ilemela District, Mwanza held in April 2008.
26 This was experienced during the survey in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions.
3.2.2. Knowledge around the meaning of child marriage

Knowledge on child marriage was, by and large, lacking among respondents. This was more evident in Mwanza and Mara where respondents were specifically asked to define child marriage. Statistically, 44.4 per cent of respondents knew what child marriage means, while 26 per cent stated that they did not know anything about child marriage and its effects. The remainder belonged to the other categories – those who defined child marriage to be marriage under the age of 14 (5.3 per cent), under the age of 17 (9.9 per cent), and those in mixed categories (12.6 per cent) – all of which is worrisome. Even respondents who had indicated that childhood ends at 18 years subsequently claimed that, in marital terms, childhood ends after puberty and that always coincides with the completion of primary schooling. These responses were notable in focus group discussions where the researchers had a chance to probe for more clarification. One young respondent in Mwanza region stated:

“In theory a child is any person from 0-18 years, but in practice here in our community once you have completed Standard 7 and you are no longer studying anymore, you are considered to be an adult. You can get married anytime, and in most cases girls get married before they reach 18 years and such cases are quite many. Although comparatively boys who get married before 18 years are fewer than girls, those who have completed schooling and are not coming from wealthy families start working towards earning something to qualify for marriage.”

The relatively high number of respondents who did not know exactly what child marriage means indicates that children in many families may be at great risk of being married off, since the families make no distinction between marry off a girl child or a grown-up woman. In fact, for some it may be a case of the earlier the marriage the

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27 Focus group discussion with young people at Sengerema town centre, April 2008.
better, since the parents would be relieved of their duties to take care of their daughter.\textsuperscript{28}

In some areas, the word ‘child’ connotes someone very little, ‘a toddler’ maybe, or someone who is unable to do anything, who may still be in schooling and has not reached puberty. With this in mind, respondents in these areas could not imagine how someone could marry a child. For example, during the focus group discussion, local leaders from Tarime district said that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Traditionally there is no child marriage in our community as circumcision qualifies and prepares someone for marriage...once a girl is circumcised she is regarded as an adult.}
\end{quote}

This shows that, in the eyes of this community, a child who has reached puberty – even if he/she is still in school – has become an adult and can no longer be regarded as a child. Therefore if one marries such a person it is not considered child marriage.

To probe for more information on public awareness about child marriage, respondents in Mara and Mwanza were asked if they could tell when the marriage of a girl or a boy would amount to child marriage – looking specifically at factors such as age, maturity, and adulthood. On the question of age, most respondents (about 69.6 per cent) indicated that a marriage involving a girl less than 18 years of age would be child marriage. About 64.6 per cent indicated that a girl below 18 would be neither physically nor psychologically mature enough for marital responsibilities. Also, 22.2 per cent of those who argued that marriage of a girl below 18 would \textit{not} constitute child marriage stated that a girl below 18 years old would not have completed her education and therefore she cannot be considered ready for marriage. A considerable number of respondents (20.5 per cent) considered child marriage to entail the marriage of a girl aged less than 14 years.

Similarly, child marriage for a boy was considered by 70.8 per cent of respondents to involve a boy of less than 18 years, while 17.8 per cent indicated that marriage

\textsuperscript{28}During focus group discussions in Mwanza and Mara regions, participants hinted that sometimes parents allow their children into marriage to relieve them of the burden of raising them.
involving a boy below 20 years of age would be child marriage. Several reasons were given to support those views. For instance, 28.7 per cent considered that a boy below 18 years would not qualify for a normal marriage since he would still be dependent on his parents and/or guardians. A further 12.6 per cent indicated that a boy below 18 years would not have finished school, so if he married it would be a child marriage. Five per cent indicated that such a boy would not be mentally mature enough to warrant a valid marriage and or handle marital responsibilities. The rest did not know why they thought that marriage below 18 is child marriage, but they supported the view anyway.

Meaning of ‘a child’: Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions

Meaning of ‘a child’: Mara and Mwanza regions

Who is a child?
3.2.3. Indicators of readiness for marriage in boys and girls

Readiness for marriage was largely attributed to reaching puberty for both girls and boys even though puberty is not defined by or linked to one’s age. In Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions, 25 per cent of respondents stated that one is ready for marriage after reaching puberty. Similar responses were recorded in Mwanza and Mara regions, where 27.2 and 34.2 per cent of respondent said puberty indicated readiness for marriage in boys and girls respectively. Completion of school as an indicator of readiness for marriage accounted for 20.5 per cent and 28.4 per cent for boys and girls respectively. It was further argued (by 21.1 per cent of respondents) that boys’ readiness for marriage is determined by self-dependence and the ability to earn a living. This criteria was lacking for girls, underscoring the gender gap in role expectations.

Puberty is considered a transition period when children become adults. At puberty, secondary sexual characteristics are developing and young people start developing interests in the opposite sex. They also acquire the ability to reproduce. In many communities this transition is marked by special training and activities, such as circumcision for both girls and boys. After such training, one is considered to be an adult and therefore can engage in adult responsibilities.

The main reasons why puberty was highly regarded by respondents as a determinant for marriage differed with gender. For boys, puberty marks independence and ability to earn a living or an income. For girls, puberty marks readiness to physically bear children. One young woman from Nyamtalela village in Sengerema District, Mwanza put it clearly:

To most respondents in Mara, puberty was seen as the time when a girl or a boy is circumcised. Usually in Mara a girl would undergo FGM between the ages of 9 and 12 years, while a boy is circumcised at age 14.
“A girl who has reached puberty for sure can become pregnant and give birth to a child. Sometimes the birth is difficult but around here they give birth every day. Some are married others are not....”

In associating puberty with readiness to marry for boys, one respondent from Butiama stated:

“.... After puberty and when he has already been circumcised, he is a grown-up who can do everything including impregnating a woman and that is the major indicator that he is no longer a child....”

Thus puberty is highly regarded because it symbolizes the ability to reproduce offspring.

However, when respondents were asked the same question, but in a different way, they overwhelmingly rejected puberty as a sign of readiness for marriage. The question sought their views on whether a boy or a girl at puberty was ready for marriage. A respondent from Vuka Vijana Street in Mwanza indicated that:

“.....Reaching puberty is just a physical maturity; it has no relationship with psychological readiness and maturity for marriage responsibilities...”
There was also a concern raised that today’s children seem to mature early compared to children of the past, and therefore puberty cannot be used to judge their readiness for marriage. For instance, 55 per cent of the Dar es Salaam and Coastal region respondents said it is very important to look at other compelling factors, such as the fact that young girls mature very early and develop attractive shapes. One respondent from Ilemela ward, Mwanza observed:

”... nowadays children reach puberty when they are still very young, they are too young to take up marital responsibilities and even their physical organs are not fully developed....”

The conflicting responses are a cause for concern. It is difficult to discern from such statements whether puberty is indeed the main and most important determinant of readiness for marriage in the surveyed communities.

Self-sufficiency appeared to be the second most common response, after physical and psychological maturity, as an indicator of readiness to marry. Respondents from Mwanza and Mara regions argued that those who have reached puberty still cannot marry if they have not completed their primary schooling. Some respondents thought puberty should go together with self-dependency, meaning that a boy is ready to marry, not because he has reached puberty, but because he is no longer relying on his parents for almost everything.

3.2.4. Age of marriage for boys and girls

A boy was considered by the majority of the respondents to be ready for marriage at the age of 14 to 18, signalling a lack of knowledge and awareness about the concept of child marriage and the appropriate age for marriage. Other respondents indicated that a boy must be over 25 years or between 18 and 25 years of age before he marries. In, the former age group (14-18), eighteen was largely considered as an appropriate
age for boys to marry. That is why the majority of respondents fall into the 14-18 category. Those below the age 18 were fewer in comparison.

Similarly, a girl was considered by the majority of the respondents to be ready for marriage when she is aged between 18 and 20 years. They justified this argument by reasoning that this is the age at which she would be physically and mentally mature. Others argued that a girl would be ready for marriage between the ages of 20 and 25, after completing her education. Another significant group stated that a girl aged between 14 and 18 years would be ready for marriage. They reasoned that by this age she has sexual desires, and that traditions and customs would require her to get married following the completion of certain rites, like FGM.

There are considerable differences between the ages indicated for girls’ and boys’ readiness for marriage. One wonders whether the respondents deliberately provided their answers to show they were not favouring child marriage. It is noteworthy that while for girls the suitable age for marriage ranged from 14 to 25 years, for boys it ranged from between 14 and 18 years up to 25 years. It seems many respondents considered completion of primary school education to indicate girls’ readiness for marriage. However, it should be noted that the majority of students in the survey areas leave school after Standard 7, the highest level in primary education. Most Standard 7 graduates are 17 and under, so using completion of education as a yard stick to measure readiness for marriage simply means that many children will be married before they reach 18. Although in rural areas many students start schooling late, and

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30 This is according to Basic Educational Statistics provided by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, (BEST 2007)
may repeat years so that they finish primary school at the age of 20, there are also many who do not repeat years and who will thus be at risk of an early marriage.

3.2.5. Knowledge on child marriage
The inconsistencies observed so far provide insights into the gap between what communities practice and what they know regarding children and child marriage. On the one hand, respondents see puberty, completion of school and rites of passage as major indicators of marriage readiness. On the other hand, they think that girls and boys who have reached puberty are still too young to get married. For instance, in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions, survey respondents partially agreed that marriages between any persons who are unselfconscious, immature, under 18 years old, and unable to make an informed and proper decision and judgment when it comes to social contracts and interactions, can be considered as child marriages. Mwanza and Mara respondents support this view by largely recommending that 18 years and above is the suitable age for marriage for both boys and girls. Therefore, what seems that what is known is not practised. One could argue that perhaps knowledge on its own about child marriage is not enough, but changing attitudes and supporting other programmes (like access to further education) can help to change practice.

3.2.6. Adulthood for boys and girls
Respondents were asked when they thought adulthood begins for boys and girls. For boys, the majority of respondents argued that adulthood begins when boys are independent and can make independent decisions, and have completed formal primary schooling. Others were of the view that a boy becomes an adult when he reaches puberty, while a few argued that he becomes an adult when he is married and has managed to establish his own family separate from that of his father. When asked to specify the age of an adult boy, respondents argued that he will be considered adult between the ages of 18 and 20 years, because he would have reached puberty. Some respondents felt that a boy becomes an adult over the age of 25, when he would have completed his education. A few said that adulthood begins when the boy is between 20 and 25 years of age, as then he would be able to make independent decisions. Some did not know what age or did not know any reasons for considering a certain
age. This again reinforced the need to create awareness and for the law to specify the age at which one becomes a mature person.

The majority of the respondents argued that a girl would become an adult when she reaches puberty. This may indicate that respondents lied in relation to the above questions; or it could mean that being an adult still does not equate with readiness for marriage; or it might mean that there is a gap between people’s knowledge and what they actually practise. This helps to confirm previous discrepancies in respondents’ answers, indicating that child marriage is the prevailing practice since puberty is largely considered as a qualification for adulthood. Perhaps this also corroborates the prevailing notion that, when it comes to girls, society concentrates more on their physical development and neglects other equally important developmental aspects such as mental, educational and emotional development. Such a focus perpetuates gender inequality, as boys are allowed to grow and mature while girls are married at an early age because of their physical body morphology.

The use of physical development alone as the indicator of maturity shows a lack of knowledge about female sexuality and reproductive development among community members. It also highlights how the community views the girl child. She is considered a tool for reproduction, who should marry once physically mature.

A relative number of respondents, in all the surveyed areas, argued that adulthood for a girl will only come when she completes her studies (without which she would lack further and advanced education/training). Others argued that they did not know when a girl becomes an adult – this group could be perpetuating child marriage unknowingly.

The need to press for legal reform for the protection of children’s rights and for the creation of awareness in communities is thus further highlighted. The majority of people in the areas where child marriage is prevalent need to be informed on the effects of child marriage and the time/age at which a girl may be able to marry without jeopardizing her educational and other human rights.

The ability to be independent and to manage economic and social issues were mentioned as ways of determining the adulthood of a girl. Adulthood was also considered to be closely linked to a girl’s ability to manage domestic responsibilities and behave respectfully to her elders. Some focus group participants in Mwanza and
Mara regions indicated that they would test adulthood in a girl by observing closely how she carried out family responsibilities, like cooking and looking after the house when her mother is away, and the way she dresses in public. In other responses, girls’ adulthood was linked to her interest in boys – based on the notion that once a girl starts developing an interest in boys, and her physical body appearance changes, she has reached adulthood.

There are gender differences within respondents’ efforts to define what constitutes adulthood for boys and girls. The way a girl child is evaluated is different from the way a boy child is evaluated. Girls’ adulthood is linked to their ability to manage domestic responsibilities like cooking and caring for children, and their respect for elders, etc. This is contrary to boys’ adulthood which is marked by the ability to earn a living and make their own decisions. This has a bearing on how girls are viewed in society – they are not expected to make their own decisions, even regarding whom they should marry. Men are raised to be decision-makers and bread-winners. Such indicators are not accorded to girls – reminding us again of the importance of developing economic empowerment initiatives for girls, which could easily be achieved through continued schooling or training.

When asked the age at which a girl would be considered an adult, 40.4 per cent of respondents in Mwanza and Mara regions indicated 14 to 20 years. This is not significantly different from the age previously stated as determining readiness for marriage (14 to 18 years). Asked why, these respondents stated that 14–20 was the age when a girl would be physically mature for childbirth and able to take care of her husband. Another group of respondents argued that a girl would be considered an adult when she is over 25 years of age, since it is only then that she would have completed her studies. While 4.1 per cent indicated that they did not know the age for adulthood of a girl, 21.3 per cent indicated that a girl aged 12-14 years would be matured enough, although they failed to state up to which age a girl would be too young to be considered an adult.

Perhaps the most notable source of inconsistency as to when a child is ready for marriage, and at what age, is that society uses indicators such as puberty, economic independence and completion of school to
judge one’s readiness for marriage. It is evident that many people in society are not conversant with the ages or stages at which a boy or a girl is ready to handle marriage tasks and responsibilities.

3.2.7. Marriage of girls below 18 years of age
Male respondents, aged 18 and above, were asked whether they would be able to marry girls who were younger than 18 years. The majority of respondents in Mwanza and Mara regions (42.1 percent) said that they would not marry such a girl because she would not be psychologically and physically mature and it would be against their community values. This indicates that community values could act as a powerful tool to fight practices such as child marriage, highlighting again the need to campaign for attitude change among community members. Nineteen percent indicated that they did not know whether they would marry a girl under 18, as some girls are quick to mature physically, so even at the age of 16 they look like they are 20 years old. One young man noted:

“...You know, these girls are very different. Sometimes you meet a 16-year-old girl but she is so matured both physically and psychologically than an 18 years old girl. You may find that she knows everything. So it really depends – so long as she has already reached puberty marriage is possible....”

A further 5.8 per cent stated that they would marry a girl under 18 because she would be mature enough for marriage. Other respondents indicated that marrying a girl below 18 years is beneficial for her, since she would be freed from economic hardships. This view was shared by a school girl at Nyamtelela primary school:

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31 Focus group discussion with young men held in Sengerema town centre (Mwanza region) in April 2008.
32 Economic hardship was mentioned for girls who were living in abject poverty. Respondents argued that, for some girls, poverty at home accelerates their marriage because they think being married will relieve them from such poverty. This was also raised during the focus group discussions in which respondents indicated that some girls are forced into marriage to relieve their parents of the
“...some girls are married because, for example, if at home there is poverty and her parents don’t provide her with essential/basic things, when she meets boys from the lake who have money and start giving her small gifts she decides to run away with him...”

Marrying a girl under 18 was not seen to be a problem by many respondents, such as the young men known as *boda boda*, who reported various cases of successful marriages involving girls. They attributed the success or failure of these marriages to the degree of support provided by the parents in the family into which the girl or boy is married. Support from the whole family was considered key to a successful marriage. One young man said:

“...brother, marrying a girl who is below 18 years is very common here. However, if the married couple is living in town, the marriage is likely to face problems because there are a lot of distractions in town that lure either the boy or girl who is still young but has entered into marriage. But a number of them still succeed. In villages if your parents are supportive enough then such marriages always succeed...”

In Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions male respondents provided similar answers to these questions. For instance, 55 per cent said it is very important to look at other factors, not just age – e.g. girls mature very early and develop attractive shapes. Thirty per cent noted that secondary education is too expensive for many Tanzanians, so there is no other option for girls who have completed Standard 7 than to allow/force them to get married. Ten per cent refrained from answering and five per cent said they did not know what answer to give.

\[\text{responsibility of taking care of them and also to ‘save’ the girl from the poverty in her parents’ home.} \]
\[\text{These findings assume that the men who marry girls are relatively rich. However one defines wealth, it may be assumed that if a man can afford to pay bride price then he is considered rich or at least capable of taking care of his wife and children.} \]
\[\text{This is a local name given to young people who use bicycles to carry passengers to their destinations. A bicycle is hired like a taxi and they charge according to distances. They assemble at the main stand in Sengerema Town.} \]
\[\text{Focus group discussion in Sengerema town in April 2008.} \]
Girls – some of whom were students and unmarried – constituted a significant group of respondents in the survey. They were asked about the age at which they would want to get married: 48.2 per cent indicated a preferred age of over 20 years; 21.9 per cent said before they reach age 20; and 13.2 per cent said that they wanted to be married by the time the reach 18 years. Most female students clearly want to wait a little before getting married, suggesting a need for parents to consult children more on this issue, and then listen to and respect their views.

### 3.2.8. Attitudes of parents on the marriage of their daughters before 18 years of age

Respondents who had children were asked whether they would allow their daughters to get married before they reached 18. In Mwanza and Mara regions, the majority (31.9 per cent, or 131 respondents) said they would not allow their daughters to marry under the age of 18. This was stated on the basis that the girls would not be mature enough for marital responsibilities, and marriage would destroy their futures (they would not be able to continue with their studies). Within the same group of respondents, 25.4 per cent said that the appropriate age for a girl to get married is 18 and above, but 9.9 per cent indicated strong support for marriage before 18. They said they would marry off their daughters before the age of 18, so that they would get bride price to help them move out of poverty. They also believed these early marriages would be beneficial to the girls and their families since they would remove the risk of promiscuity and of pregnancy before marriage, which bring shame to the family. One man from Tarime noted:

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“…If she has finished Standard 7 and has nothing to do at home, I will definitely allow her to get married otherwise she might get pregnant and/or catch diseases (HIV)…”
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Marriage before 18 was warranted by respondents on the basis that children of this age are considered mature enough to know the difference between “good and evil”. Another man from Tarime confirmed this:
“...yes a girl who is 12 years is under age 18 but has matured sexually and she is wise, she would have known what sex is and therefore there is nothing she does not know, she has known evil and good I will allow her to get married ...”

This statement highlights how sexual awareness among children is considered not as a positive developmental stage, but as a sign of readiness for marriage.

Those who explicitly said they favoured marriage for their children before the age of 18 were few in number. However, a female teacher at Nyamtelela secondary school was very honest, stating:

“You know, in theory I might say that I will not allow my daughter to get married before age 18, but sometimes, you have a 16-year-old daughter at home who has finished and failed her school and as you can see here there is no vocational school where you can send her. Nevertheless some parents do not have money to do that, on top of that nowadays girls start having sex at a very early stage. If someone with good intentions of marrying comes I will bless the marriage...because [otherwise] she might just get pregnant while she is still at home. It happens around here often...”

This view perhaps represents what happens on the ground – that many more parents, than simply the few who explicitly stated so during the survey, would actually allow their daughters to marry young. This hypothesis is supported by the various inconsistencies in responses regarding age, adulthood and readiness for marriage. While some responses do indeed reflect what is socially desirable, it is doubtful whether they accurately reflect reality. For example one man in Tarime said:
“A girl who has reached 13 and above can be married because she has been circumcised/mutilated.” But he considered any marriage below 18 to be a child marriage.

This suggests that many people may now be aware that child marriage is an undesirable practice, but lack the courage or the means to stop it.

Whether parents would marry off their girl child below 18 years

3.2.9. Respondents’ attitudes on child marriage practices

The majority of respondents demonstrated negative attitudes towards child marriage. In Mwanza and Mara regions, for example, 89.8 per cent of respondents indicated that child marriage is a bad practice. They mentioned a number of social-economic impacts of child marriage to support this view, such as the increased risks during childbirth, increased poverty, and the denial of boys’ and girls’ rights to education. A mother from Katunguru ward explained:

“...child marriage is very bad especially to girls. If you see girls who were married before completing school their life is very bad, they have nothing at all, their youthfulness is gone. Sometimes they look older than me...”
because the husbands have neglected them. It robs children of the right to continue with schooling ...”

To highlight the seriousness of child marriage and why it is not a good practice, a nurse at Mwaka wa Watoto Health Clinic[^35] noted:

“Child marriage is not good. Every time we receive children who are expectant, we face challenges. Some are very young; they cannot even push the baby. Worse still sometimes they are abandoned by their husbands, who after impregnating them run to the islands and hide there. It’s pathetic. They are not well fed, and they do not have the slightest idea of how to take care of their children. Most of them are poor and have no jobs. In general their lives are totally destroyed and they have no hope.”

In Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions, when asked whether child marriage is a good or bad practice, 18 per cent of respondents said it is very bad practice, 27 per cent said it is bad, 40 per cent refrained from answering, and 13 per cent said it depends on the specific child being married.

Reasons provided to explain why it is bad included the fact that couples with one or both spouses of a young age would not be able to take good care of their children, exacerbating the problem of street children. Some respondents – in all survey regions – said that child marriage is against their traditions and customs. For instance, respondents from Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions explained that child marriage is immoral, and that many people know it is immoral but nevertheless practise it to subjugate women in order to control them. These respondents linked child marriage with the issue of power relations and control in the society. For instance a woman in Kibaha town observed:

“Men would always like to dominate and control women as they grow up and socialize under the patriarchy system.”

[^35]: This special clinic in Sengerema District Council dealing with pregnant women and their children.
When asked why young girls are targets for marriage, this respondent said it is because they can be more easily controlled than grown up women.\textsuperscript{36}

There were also respondents with positive perceptions on the practice. In Mwanza and Mara regions, for example, 3.2 per cent of respondents indicated that there was nothing wrong with child marriage as it was part of their culture. This view surfaced mostly in Mara.

\textit{Whether child marriage is a good practice: Mwanza and Mara regions}

\textit{Whether child marriage is a good practice: Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions}

In a focus group discussion with local leaders in Tarime, one man was particularly adamant in defending marriage after circumcision. He said:

\textsuperscript{36} This was evident during the Dar es Salaam and Coastal Regions survey interviews.
“I don’t see anything wrong. Problems during delivery may occur, but the wife is sent back home to her mother to make sure she has a safe delivery and any treatments that are necessary. But still we have so many girls who deliver successfully and continue doing so for several times.”

Such views – which conflict greatly with the nurse’s view (above) regarding the delivery problems faced by young mothers – confirm that it was prudent for this study to seek out diverse beliefs, attitudes and knowledge from a wide range of respondents.

3.3. The extent of child marriage

Ascertaining the exact number of child marriages is a key for measuring the magnitude of the problem and for designing mechanisms for ending it. However, gathering accurate statistics remains a challenge for researchers and child rights advocates at both national and international levels. In most cases child marriages are unofficial and unregistered. Survey questioning was therefore designed to enable respondents to tell about the prevalence of child marriage in their particular locality. Respondents were asked whether they knew about the existence of child marriages in their areas and whether they considered child marriage to be a good practice or not.

3.3.1. The prevalence of child marriage

The existence of child marriage was acknowledged in all regions. In Dar es Salaam and Coastal region, 25 per cent of respondents said that child marriage is very common in their areas and that they were aware of cases. A further 42 per cent said that child marriages are common in their areas, while 20 per cent said they happen rarely, and 10 per cent did not know.

In Mwanza and Mara regions the existence of child marriage was acknowledged by 25.7 and 26.6 per cent of respondents respectively. The existence of the practice was denied by 18.7 per cent of respondents in Mwanza, and by 17.5 per cent in Mara. In Mwanza, 1.8 per cent were not aware of the existence of child marriage; 3 per cent said
the same in Mara. In total for both regions, 18.1 per cent of respondents stated that the prevalence of child marriage in their areas was high, 13.5 per cent assessed the prevalence to be average, and 17.3 per cent indicated low levels of child marriage in their areas.

*The extent of the child marriage in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions*

The figures given above confirm that child marriages are prevalent in all survey regions – despite slight differences in percentages – substantiating efforts to end the practice.

Most respondents in all four regions were not willing to provide information on actual cases involving child marriage. Several reasons could explain this trend. Some respondents admitted that children are sometimes married away from their home areas so that neighbours do not know what has happened until afterwards. Sometimes, after a few months or years, the girl will return home with her child after the marriage has failed.

In cases where girls are taken from school in order to get married, evidence indicates that some parents collude with both head teachers and the local police to avoid legal action being taken against them. For instance, the teacher may write a false school transfer letter and the police could be bribed to stop them following the case. The level of secrecy is very high when a child is taken from school, because the parents are aware of the potential punishment.37 Commenting on the prevalence of child marriage in Dar es Salaam, and the secrecy behind it, one respondent made the following statement:

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37 These facts came out very clearly from the focus group discussions with students in both Mwanza and Mara.
3.4. The causes of child marriage

The prevalence of child marriage in the surveyed communities is driven by a number of socio-economic factors. Bride price, which is believed to reduce the daughter’s family’s poverty, was the main factor cited by most respondents in all four regions. Other factors mentioned included: lack of knowledge about the impacts of child marriages and about the rights of children; and religious beliefs, traditions and customs.

3.4.1. Reasons for marrying off girls
3.4.1.1. Poverty and economic hardship

Parents and guardians living in poverty are often tempted to marry off their young daughters to obtain bride price which they believe will relieve them from economic hardship. Young girls are thus viewed as a source of income and economic relief, and their marriages are deemed a necessary survival strategy for their families. In some cases, parents encourage their daughters’ marriages in the belief that this will benefit the children both financially and socially, as well as relieving the family’s financial burdens. Girls living in the poorest households and those lacking primary education are more likely to get married at a younger age than more educated girls or those living in wealthier families.

3.4.1.2. Traditional beliefs, culture and practices

Responses relating to the role of traditions and culture differed between regions. Respondents in some regions said that traditions and customs in their locality fuels child marriage, while in other regions respondents vigorously denied the influence of culture and tradition on child marriage. The majority of respondents, however, argued that child marriage is not integral to their traditions. In Mwanza and Mara regions 64.9 per cent argued that their traditions and customs do not allow child marriage, while only 25.7 per cent argued that it is a common practice and a part of their traditions and customs.

“You cannot get the exact number of children who are in marriages, child wives and child widows, but you can get some few incidences.”
Most respondents who claimed child marriage to be a part of their traditions were from Mara region. This is perhaps because Mara has well established initiation ceremonies that involve circumcision/FGM, after which ‘graduates’ are free to marry. Girls and boys go through particular rites which train and prepare them, both psychologically and physically, to handle adult responsibilities such as marriage and child rearing. After they graduate from these rites they are seen as adults, eligible for marriage and ready to take on marital responsibilities. Graduates consider themselves to be adults because they have been made to believe that they are.

However, these ‘adulthood’ rites take place barely after puberty and in some cases even before the girl has begun to menstruate (e.g. aged 9–12 years). The strong relationship between these rites and child marriage was confirmed during a group discussion with local leaders. They affirmed that those who have graduated from these ceremonies are no longer children and thus their marriage cannot be considered child marriage. Respondents from Mwanza did not show strong cultural activities that could sanction child marriages and denied the fact that child marriage forms part of their culture.

A close link between tradition and culture on one hand and child marriage on the other was also shown in Coastal region. Respondents said that child marriage is prevalent in rural areas, where there are strong cultural practices and beliefs denying girl children the right to decide on matters concerning their lives. For example in Magindu and Gumba villages in Magindu Ward; Dutumi and Kwala villages in Kwala Ward (both in Kibaha District), respondents explained that the Maasai and Barbaig communities living there are commonly practising child marriage. They
believe that when a girl has begun menstruating she has to get married and assume the responsibilities of taking care of the family. They believe that, in their communities, girls are not responsible for economic activities – they are viewed as potential wives and mothers and considered the perfect people to take care of family members, including sick and elderly people. They are also child bearers and housekeepers. This perception leads to various violations of women’s rights, as there are few chances for girls and women to air their feelings on how they are suffering in their families.

In some communities in Mwanza, like in Katunguru and Balatogwa, once a girl has completed primary school and reached puberty, she is given a separate room to sleep in, away from the main family house, just like boys are. This gives her the opportunity to meet boys at night and even go to local discos during holidays like Christmas Eve and Passover. Such discos and dramas will be attended mostly by young people. They dance together and may engage in sexual activities, which might result in pregnancy or marriage. A young girl at Balatogwa primary school said:

“...here in our village, both girls and boys are to blame, especially during the Christmas time. There are a lot of parties during that time and some girls and boys go to house parties where they meet with boys who are from the nearby islands who have come back for holidays and who have money because they sell fish. They are easily taken away and they get married ...”

This view was also supported by the head teacher who noted:

“... these local discos are now contributing very much on children getting into child marriage. In the past there were some traditions but nowadays such traditions are not there though still girls run away from home others are forced into marriages because of dowry, etc... but

38 One respondent provided this observation during an interview in Mwanza region.
largely modern lifestyles contribute a lot to children’s early involvement in sexual activities."

3.4.1.3. The role of religion
There were equally mixed responses regarding the role of religion in these marriages. In Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions, some respondents said that religious beliefs play a role in fuelling child marriage practices in some communities by placing greater emphasis on boys and girls getting married after puberty.\(^39\) For instance one respondent said:

“The rationale for this is based on the assumption that [for] a grown-up child [who has reached] puberty, the chances of committing adultery are greater. The only solution to keep the children away from having sex before marriage is to marry them and assist them to live according to the will of God.”

Another respondent confirmed this:

“Islamic religion requires that if a girl/boy reaches a puberty stage [she/he] must get married immediately before being corrupted by the rotten world.”

The responses were quite different in Mwanza and Mara. The majority of respondents in these regions (90.1 per cent) denied the existence of any connection between child marriage and religious beliefs. They specifically denied the fact that their religion allows or supports child marriage. A Catholic priest from Ilemela parish clarified why it is impossible for the church to sanction any child marriage. He said:

“... In our church, when our members inform us of the intention to get married, if he or she wants the church to bless the marriage and conduct the ritual, there are four conditions that must be met. First of all, a birth certificate or any other legal document that proves the age is 18 and above. Secondly we ask for a medical certificate that shows

\(^{39}\) This was expressed during interviews in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions.
the health status – and nowadays we do that from our own hospitals and health centre because people sometimes fake them. We also require them to be psychologically healthy and sound in mind. Then we offer teachings regarding the bible, guidance on married life. They have to attend all the teachings before the marriage is sanctioned. This being the case, it is impossible for anybody who does not meet the criteria to be allowed to marry...”

A few respondents (1.8 per cent) said they did not know whether their religion allows child marriage, and 2.6 per cent argued that child marriage was permitted under their religion. The latter group said they would be allowed to get married after reaching puberty and when they agreed to live together. However, religious leaders who were interviewed stated categorically that their institutions have strict and well-established rules that ensure no child marriage is sanctioned.

3.1.1.4. Lack of knowledge on children’s rights and the impact of child marriage

Lack of knowledge on the impact of child marriage was cited as one of the reasons for its prevalence. In Mwanza and Mara, 26 per cent of respondents said child marriage was fuelled by public ‘ignorance’ about the impact of child marriage. However, 14.6 per cent argued that child marriages do not occur in their areas, because people are well aware of the impacts and of the national laws and regulations regarding age of marriage. About 52 per cent of the people interviewed in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions seemed to know very little about the consequences of child marriage; most had primary level education. A 54-year-old woman told the surveyor:

“If someone ended up at Standard 4, it is most likely that even his/her children will end up in that stage. It is very difficult for a Standard 4 person to take his daughter to secondary school; after all it is wastage of money and time.”

The survey revealed that some people do not value education as it does not repay the investment instantly – it is a long-term investment that is considered more risky in the case of girls, as they can get pregnant and be excluded from school at any time.
3.4.1.5. Other factors fuelling child marriage

3.4.1.5.1. Protecting girls from premarital sex, pregnancy and STIs

Some parents and guardians fear that keeping daughters unmarried after puberty increases the risk of pregnancy before marriage, which would bring great shame to the families. To some it is therefore considered necessary to marry off girls and boys immediately after completion of traditional rites, as they are ready to start their own families. For example, some parents interviewed in Bungoni area (Ilala District, Dar es Salaam) believed that child marriage offers their daughters protection from the threat of sexual assault and ‘sin’, prevents them from engaging in pre-marital sex, and hence protects them from HIV/AIDS. One respondent recounted:

“…we are not forcing our daughters to get married earlier; it is the circumstances that force us. Imagine my daughter has completed Standard 7. I have no money to take her to secondary school; she is just here at home. She has nothing to do, just waking up in the morning roaming here and there and then coming back home to sleep. This is very dangerous for a young girl like her. I have no other alternative. She has to get married so that she can stay with her husband peacefully rather than stay here at home where I am very much sure that she will be impregnated soon by hooligans.”

3.4.1.5.2. Poor parenting

Some respondents in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions said that poor parenting fuels child marriage. They felt that children start sexual affairs very early because of a lack of parental guidance, and that some parents lack parental skills such as being able to communicate properly with their children. They also blamed the parents for failing to teach their children good conduct and good behaviour so that they grow into responsible people.

3.4.1.5.3. Men’s preference for virgin girls

The preference for marrying virgin girls is still common in some communities. This preference is driven by a number of factors including the belief that these girls are free from the HIV/AIDS infection. In Mwanza, 14.9 per cent of respondents thought that many men would prefer to marry a girl child/virgin on the belief that young children do not have STIs. This was also the case in areas along the Coastal region. Virginity of girls before marriage is praised by the Zaramo tribe. One respondent from Mbagala Ward (Temeke District, Dar es Salaam) confirmed this:
“No men in this world would prefer marrying a girl who is not a virgin. Would you?” She questioned the surveyor. “And in this world where can you get a 21 years woman who is a virgin? The world has changed – young girls are engaging themselves into sex at the age of 12. It is shameful but if you want your daughter to get married while still a virgin, you can only succeed narrowly if you wait till she finishes Standard 7. Otherwise let them get married when they reach puberty.”

Some interviewed men said it is very enjoyable to live with a woman whom you have married while she is still a virgin. One respondent from Kibaha district in Coastal region said:

“Nothing can make a man [more] proud than knowing that he married his wife while she was still virgin…there is no way you can get over 20-year-old woman who is a virgin nowadays and the only solution to get a virgin woman is to marry those who completed Standard 7 and who have got no plans for further studies.”

Respondents in Mwanza and Mara regions also indicated that child marriage is caused by sexual desires. They said that girl children, especially when they reach puberty, are emotionally and sexually active and are therefore lured into child marriages. A man’s wealth may prompt him to marry more wives, preferably girls, as he can afford to pay bride price.

Other reasons offered for men’s reference for young brides include: ethical degradation on the part of the men who marry girls; peer pressure – when girls see their age mates getting married they want to do the same; cost – it is easier and cheaper for a man to approach a girl child for marriage; and there are no barriers to marrying a girl once she has left school.

3.4.2. Reasons for marrying off boys

Regarding child marriage for boys, 37.4 per cent of respondents in Mwanza and Mara regions cited sexual desire as the main reason. About 11.1 per cent argued that boys marry young when they are financially or materially able to do so, and that wealth at a boy’s home is more likely to accelerate his marriage. For example, where a boy’s parents have many cattle or other forms of wealth, or where the boy is able to earn money through fishing, business or mining, he is more likely to marry young, as he
can easily afford the bride price and other marital property like a bed, chairs, tables, etc.

While 14.6 per cent in the same regions argued that they did not know why boys married young, 21.1 per cent indicated that tradition and customs were the cause, because they make the boys believe that they are ready for marital responsibilities. This is more evident in Mara region. Other reasons mentioned included: peer pressure, especially when other boys in the community are getting married or following certain rituals like circumcision; pressure from parents; the need to increase labour power; to escape parental control; ‘ignorance’; and family poverty prompting boys to break away and find ways to look after themselves.

Meanwhile, the issue of sexual desire was considered important in both rural and urban communities. It was mentioned that globalization means even very remote communities are being flooded with media containing sexual images and information. Young people are being bombarded with such messages at a time when societal structures, which used to guide young people on sexuality issues, are declining.

Degraded moral values were mentioned as fuelling the problem. Children may be lured into sexual acts by people whom they consider to be their brothers, fathers, uncles, teachers, etc – people who should be guiding children through the challenging developmental stage of puberty. One student from Ilemela ward, Mwanza region said:

“Sometimes older people approach school children for sex. Being a child and inexperienced they agree and at last get married because their performance at school drops and they decide to get married...”

Such a scenario suggest a lack of moral values among adults, and a lack of life skills and reproductive health education programmes that could help young people to cope with the stress of puberty, which sometimes makes them think that marriage is the only way to deal with the desires they feel. This perhaps pertains more to girls than to boys, since in many communities girls are strictly criticized for expressing any interest in sexual acts – having boyfriends can tarnish their reputations and result in insults.
Considering the above issues, it is not surprising that boys choose to marry young. Other important causes of child marriage (for boys and girls), mentioned in all four regions surveyed, were being orphaned and the need for family stability. Children who are orphans may lack love, leaving them vulnerable to anyone who shows affection and intimacy. They may end up marrying in search of love, security and protection. Orphaned boys may marry so as to have a partner to help them with tasks and someone to talk to in the middle of their adolescent stage.

It was evident during field research, especially in Mwanza and Mara regions, that boys born to very old fathers were more likely to marry early. Their fathers were afraid of dying before their sons were married, as this could mean other members of the clan would take all of the father’s resources, particularly land and cattle. Child marriage for boys could thus be considered as a means of keeping family stability. One respondent from Balatogwa, Mwanza region, provided the following interesting scenario:

“Sometimes among the Sukuma, \(^{40}\) if a father has many cattle and may be for one reason or the other got his son late in his old age, he would like his son to take over the wealth he has accumulated. The only way to make sure that his son will settle down is to get married as soon as possible. But in other situations, there is this disease HIV that has wiped off many families. So when a young boy is left without a father or a mother and may be with his siblings, he has to marry at a very young age in order to get to a partner who can help with cooking.”

\(^{3.5.}\) Effects of child marriage

The literature and research reports reviewed for this survey indicated numerous effects of child marriage on both girls and boys, including: loss of educational opportunities, early death and complicated childbirth – the latter two being specific to young married girls. The Dar es Salaam and Coastal region survey revealed that 59 per cent of the people interviewed did not know the effects of child marriage.

\(^{40}\) Sukuma is the main tribe living in Mwanza region, including Sengerema district.
However, those who admitted knowing cases of child marriage, in all surveyed regions, highlighted several negative outcomes, including:

- complicated childbirth
- death of both newborn child and mother
- becoming an economic burden to their parents
- difficult marriages, with frequent marital disputes
- broken marriages
- poverty for the couple or for one of the spouses in the marriage
- poor family planning
- risky abortions.

3.5.1. Advantages of child marriage

Child marriage is considered beneficial for some people in the communities where the survey took place. Respondents identified positive impacts on individual children, their families and the community, as outlined below.

3.5.1.1. Advantages of marrying off girls

Although most respondents mentioned the negative impacts of child marriage, some thought it has positive advantages for the girl, her husband, her family and the society at large. In Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions, 20 per cent of respondents said the practice has some positive effects. Out of these, eight per cent said it is more advantageous to marry young girls because they are HIV/AIDS free. Twelve per cent said it is advantageous for their husbands, as it is easier to control young girls and to impose decisions over them. Other advantages mentioned are that young girls are cheap to live with and they have no big demands and dreams. These sentiments highlight social injustices against girls which are grounded in power imbalances.
In Mwanza and Mara regions, five per cent of respondents believed that the advantages of child marriage for a girl include early motherhood and the extension of her family. They indicated that it would not be good for a girl to have children late in life as raising them becomes difficult when you are old. This view featured prominently among Mara respondents who seemingly place great value on having children while the mother is still young and energetic. This further reflects the role of women in such communities. A young woman is considered stronger and someone who will work hard on the farm to feed her children and husband. In these communities farming, looking after the cattle and trading fish in the market are largely done by women, so the appeal of having children early – while still able to cope with all these demands – is very strong.

3.5.1.2. Advantages of marrying off boys
Respondents in Mwanza and Mara regions were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of child marriage for boys – 75.1 per cent did not see child marriage as advantageous for boys, while 8.5 per cent did not know whether it is or not. Seven per cent said that it is advantageous for a boy to get married, since he will then have a partner to help him. About 3.2 per cent indicated that it is good for a boy to get married because he will have his own children while he is still young.

3.5.1.3. Advantages of child marriages for the families
Mwanza and Mara respondents were asked if there were any advantages for the families. The majority cited bride price as the main advantage (for reasons discussed in detail above). They also mentioned that it is profitable for the husband’s family and
to the new couple’s family, as children born in the marriage will increase the family’s labour power.41

3.5.2. Disadvantages of child marriage
3.5.2.1. Disadvantages of child marriage for girls
Thirty-six percent of respondents in Mwanza and Mara regions pointed out that key disadvantage of child marriage are that girls experience difficult childbirth and economic hardships. Others stated that girls miss educational opportunities (14.3 per cent); get infected with STIs including HIV/AIDS (11.1 per cent); face perpetual psychological torture (10.8 per cent); and face unsustainable marriages or separation (12.9 per cent). It is noteworthy that 5.6 per cent stated that they did know any disadvantages of child marriage for girls. This again highlights the low level of understanding about the effects of this practice, and the necessity for creating greater awareness in communities where child marriages are prevalent.

Respondents in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions said child marriage has negative impacts on the life and welfare of the girl child, the family and society. One respondent from Dar es Salaam region remarked:

“...child marriage has multiple serious consequences in the society. But one of the major consequences which hinder all other development is the denial of education to

41 This observation was evidenced also in the Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions survey. The bride price is highly valued in rural areas as well as in urban areas.
a married child girl. Once a girl child gets married, it is also her ticket out of school or any other career. We all know the bare fact that denial of the right to education is the denial to all other remaining rights. Therefore what follows is the total destruction of the life of the married child girl... Making secondary school education compulsory would save many young girls from being forced into child marriage. Parents are getting their children out of school for marriage. The proper solution is to transform the conditions like income poverty which most parents are facing to the extent of becoming tempted to force their young daughters into marriage.”

Some respondents said that child marriage is dangerous for girls from a medical perspective. One respondent from Coastal region cited premature pregnancies which cause a number of maternal complications and increase infant mortality rates. He added that violence and abuse as a result of forced marriages sometimes lead to post-traumatic stress and depression. He stated that:

“Married children are more likely to contract sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS than the unmarried ones.... unfortunately, girl children who are more physically susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases have less access to reproductive education and health services and they are often powerless to demand the use of contraception.”

This kind of response was raised by another respondent from Dar es Salaam region. She pointed out that:

“Child marriages are most likely accompanied by violence towards girls. After getting married to an old person, it becomes very difficult for a girl child to make any decision for themselves, having freedom of expression and even movement. Ultimately, all these problems subject girls to conditions where violation of their rights becomes part of their whole life.”

It was also pointed out that some girls are subjected to torture by their husbands’ families. An example was cited in Tarime district in Mara region, involving a young girl who had her ears and a finger chopped off by her father-in-law.
3.5.2.2. Disadvantages of child marriage for boys

Respondents in Mwanza and Mara regions stated that, when a boy gets married at a very early age, he is forced to shoulder a lot of responsibilities, like parenthood and providing for his family. They also indicated that, just like for girls, the boy child would miss education opportunities if he married at a very early age. They also pointed out that usually a married boy will eventually end up with a very large family, since he will not be able to plan his family effectively. Some respondents mentioned that early marriages involving boys often end up in separation, because the burden becomes too much for them to handle.

3.5.2.3. Disadvantages of child marriage for the families

Respondents from all surveyed regions indicated that child marriage increases the burden of responsibility placed on the couple’s family, as a young couple does not have enough skills to raise their children. Also, it was indicated that child marriage stagnates family progress in that it actually perpetuates the cycle of poverty, rather than relieving it. Some respondents indicated that the family is disadvantaged because children who marry lose out on educational opportunities and so will be less able to help their parents when they get old. One respondent from Mwanza region remarked:

“...Most of the time these marriages fail because as you get settled in the house, either the wife or the husband is not settled. The wife may still be childish and does not know how to handle her husband and give him the respect he deserves. Often there are quarrels between them. For the husband he might not have completed his teenage years and would want to associate with other women and neglect his wife and other responsibilities as a husband.”
3.5.3. Effects of child marriage on the community

The respondents were further asked whether they knew of any ways in which child marriage affects their communities. The majority, in all four regions, indicated that there are no effects different from the ones affecting the individual families and child couples. However, there were respondents who argued that all of the effects felt by the children and their families do have negative impacts on society at large, as society will generally be responsible for anything bad which may happen to those individuals or families. For instance, members of the community will be obliged to help a married child experiencing birth complications; or assist when married children are very poor; or deal with the impact of broken marriages that may result in increased numbers of street children; or assist when a young spouse contracts an STI, etc.

Other effects on the community were cited as: increased levels of illiteracy among community members who married at a very early age, and increased poverty in the community because of this illiteracy. Illiteracy was considered to affect even the government as there will be a loss of skills and a shortage of human resources for government posts, and thus a poorer society. Additionally, respondents said that the community is affected when child marriages end in separation/divorce and offspring from these marriages grow up without proper guidance or parental love.

3.5.4. Case studies on child marriage and its impact

A case study from Nyamtelela village (Mwanza region) told by a primary school teacher

“...In 2006 there was a case here with a girl aged 16 years. She was a very bright girl in class and was attending school every day. But when she reached Standard 7 we started noticing her behaviour change. She had developed to be a very attractive girl child and her physical body appearance was very appealing – she was at the prime of her youth. Her behaviour abruptly changed and she started missing classes. Later we discovered that she was already living with a man so in the mornings she would come from the man’s house to school. The head teacher reported the incident to the police. The accused man hid from the police for some time. Later he surfaced and the police did not take any action. The parents colluded with the police and by the time that girl was sitting for her final exams, she was one month pregnant. She is now married to the man but she failed her exams...”
A case study from Tarime District (Mara region) told by a Ward Executive Officer

A girl of 15 years was forced by her father to marry a man of 26 years. She was the first born in her family. At the time of her marriage she was 14. She had dropped out of school while in Standard 4 because her parents could not afford school uniforms and other school expenses. When the FGM time came, she was taken to be mutilated as preparation for marriage. Meanwhile, her father was negotiating for her bride price with his friend who had a 26-year-old son. The bride price was settled at TZS 300,000.

When the girl came from the traditional rites, and after healing properly, she was told to go to her husband. Marriage arrangements had been discussed and settled between the father of the bride child and the father of the groom in their daily meetings while drinking local liquor in the neighbourhood. Being a child, the girl could not comprehend the gravity of her marital responsibilities. She used to play childish games with her fellow children whenever they met. This childish behaviour meant that the girl would forget her marital responsibilities like fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking for her father-in-law.

The father-in-law was not pleased with his daughter-in-law’s childish behaviour, so he constantly reprimanded her against this behaviour, and on some occasions he would physically beat her. The father-in-law got so tired of the girl’s behaviour that he summoned her father, demanding the bride price back because the girl was unable to carry out her responsibilities as a wife.

The two parents quarrelled over the matter. Later that night, the girl’s father-in-law came home. He woke up his son and ordered him to tie the legs and hands of his wife with a rope. The son obeyed. Afterwards, the father-in-law took his knife and cut off the girl’s entire ear lobe. He continued and cut a portion of the other ear. In the process of defending herself from being cut, the girl’s finger was also chopped off. Other parts of her body were also cut, like her shoulder where she later received 12 stitches from the hospital to close the wound.

After he was done he took the cut body parts and gave them to a dog to eat. The girl was lying in a pool of blood. They untied her and told her to leave the house immediately – they chased her. She ran and managed to reach a neighbour’s house. Because of the blood loss she fainted shortly after arriving there. When she got her senses back she found herself in the hospital on a drip. She there for three weeks and is now recovering well and has been discharged from hospital.
She is currently back at her parents’ home. The local authority and hospital staff supported her treatments through donations. The father-in-law, who cut her ears, is under police custody with a case filed in court. The husband and the mother-in-law have run away, the police are still looking for them. However, the girl child has sustained life scars and injuries, with some organs gone. Nobody knows what kinds of defects she will have to live with for the rest of her life. This is how violent and cruel child marriage can be.

A case study from Mabibo area (Dar es Salaam region) told by a survey respondent

In 1996, at Mabibo area in Dar es Salaam region, a girl aged 16 had her future determined without her consent. Her parents forced her to drop out of school and arranged for her to be married to a man aged 39.

The girl was unhappy because her intention was to carry on with her studies. Her parents wanted her to get married, while she wasn’t ready to be married at that time. She became pregnant two months after the marriage. She had her first born (a baby girl) in 1997. Her second, third and fourth babies were all girls. Being a mother of four baby girls was an unfortunate situation for her. She then suffered a tragedy that illustrates some of the worst perils of child marriage.

On 27 July 2007, her husband left her and decided to search for another wife because she couldn’t bear baby boys for him. On 27 September 2007, she presented her claims to the Social Welfare Offices in Dar es Salaam to ask for a support (e.g. obtaining money) from her husband so that she could manage to take care of their four babies. While this was happening, the husband married another woman. When the husband got the information that his wife had reported him to the Social Welfare Department, on 28 December 2007, he came back to chase her out of the house so that he could live there with his new wife. She was rejected even by her mother-in-law and other relatives.

To date, no support has ever been provided by her husband. He has rejected Social Welfare Department orders to pay money for support. Currently, the girl is seeking other legal support at Magomeni Legal Aid Clinic (Legal and Human Rights sub offices) and aims to file a case on the issue against her husband.

A case study from Tandale area (Dar es Salaam region) told by a survey respondent

In 2003, in Tandale area in Dar es Salaam region, a girl who stays with her parents in a poor family was forced to drop out of school at the age of 14 to marry a rich man aged 40. She became pregnant 10 months later. Apart from experiencing complicated childbirth, she lost her baby in 2004 because the baby was infected by HIV. Consequently, the young mother’s life was filled with emotional and physical abuse from her husband.

The husband believed that she was the source of the HIV infection, though it was said by the young mother of the girl that the husband’s ex-wife, who died in 2002, was
alleged to have been infected with HIV. The husband started beating her daily; sometimes he didn’t give her anything to eat for two or three days. Ultimately, they divorced. Today, the girl lives a lonely life with her mother without any hope for the future.

The above case studies underscore how marriages involving children, boys and girls, are futile and why a strong call to end them is needed. The children involved in these cases ended up with no family, no husbands, and no education, and sometimes with psychological and physical damage. When it comes to child marriage, the unlucky ones die and the lucky ones live in miserable conditions where their rights are infringed, where inequalities thrive, and where the circle of illiteracy and poverty continues.

3.6. Knowledge and awareness on policies, laws and regulations that govern marriage

As indicated above, there is no single law which specifically provides for children’s human rights in Tanzania. This has caused the legal protection of children to be patchy, unclear and sometimes contradictory.

3.6.1. General knowledge on laws and policies governing marriage

Apart from investigating the magnitude of child marriage, its causes and effects, the study explored whether or not the community is aware of the legal and policy framework governing marriage. Respondents were therefore asked if they knew about any such laws. In Mwanza and Mara regions, 57 per cent said they did not know any law or policy, while 23.7 per cent stated that they were aware that laws govern marriage in Tanzania. They mentioned laws such as the 1971 Law of Marriage Act, and religious, traditional and customary laws. Various respondents said, based on their existing knowledge, that: a boy is allowed to marry at 20 years; no one is allowed to marry a girl under 18; staying with a girl for more than one month constitutes marriage; marriage to a girl below 18 years of age constitutes a crime.42

42 Evidence gathered during interviews and focus group discussions in Mwanza and Mara regions.
Responses in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions indicated that 90 per cent were unfamiliar with specific policies and laws on marriage and children’s rights in Tanzania. The remaining 10 per cent mentioned the 1998 Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act, the 1971 Law of Marriage Act, the Children and Young Persons Ordinance and the Affiliation Acts as being relevant laws.\(^4^3\) In all four regions, respondents appeared to be unclear as to whether ‘rules’ that they knew about were national laws or religious or cultural practices. Educating people more about the laws which govern marriages is evidently needed.

**3.6.2. Knowledge on the legal age of marriage**

In response to questions about the legal age of marriage in Tanzania, 55.8 per cent in Mara and Mwanza regions stated that they knew the age limit while 34.5 per cent said that they did not.

Those who claimed to have knowledge of the minimum legal age limit mentioned ages ranging from 14 to 35 years of age. Many (37.4 per cent) cited 18 years as the legal age of marriage. A relative number mentioned 20, 21, 22 and 25 years, while a few stated 15 years to be the legal minimum age.\(^4^4\)

As for Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions, 29 per cent of respondents cited 18 years as the legal age for marriage and suggested that this should be retained, because girls who are at least 18 can make decisions, are mature and more likely to be prepared to take care of the family, and are capable of distinguishing between good and bad. Two per cent did not answer and 67 per cent vigorously opposed 18 as the minimum age limit, suggesting that parents should instead look at the level of maturity of their children. For instance, one respondent said:

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\(^{43}\) Evidence gathered during interviews with some respondents in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions.  
\(^{44}\) Information from focus group discussions and interviews in Mwanza and Mara regions.
“…nowadays girls mature very early and they also finish schools while child and have nothing to do. Therefore to stop them from joining commercial sex groups and vagabonds (after completion of their studies), they need to get married.”

Clearly members of the community have different perceptions and knowledge of the legal situation, and different wishes for the minimum marriage age, which all directly affects children’s rights.

The minimum age of marriage in Tanzanian laws varies depending on gender and circumstances, so it is not surprising that few people knew the correct answer. This calls for a change in the law, so that there is one easy-to-understand law stating a single age for both males and females, and which is not attached to conditions and/or circumstances.

Respondents’ reasons for believing the legal marriage age they had cited to be correct varied. Those believing the legal age to be between 18 and 35 reasoned this to be the age set by law, and to be an age at which children will have: matured, completed their studies (enabling them to escape poverty), and become independent, able to make free decisions, and able to understand their marriage partners. Marrying when mature was also seen to reflect good behaviour for the families involved.

The group of respondents who stated the legal age of marriage to be between 14 and 17 reasoned that children would have completed Standard 7, would be mature enough to enter into marriage, and would be better off getting married than being idle. This information gives us an indication of what the communities where child marriages are prevalent know about marriage and the laws. This reality stresses the fact that creation of awareness about the effects of child marriage should be made an important agenda in both policy and legal reforms so as to speed up the child protection legal framework suggested by this survey.

The mixture of answers to questions about minimum legal age of marriage indicate that those who think the age should be less than 18 are likely marry off their children
soon after puberty, or at whatever age they think to be appropriate. While this is partly due to lack of awareness about the effects of child marriages and about the country’s legal provisions, substantial blame can also be placed on the Law of Marriage Act, because it explicitly allows the marriage of under-18s with parental or judges’ consent. Therefore, not only is there a need for improved community awareness on this issue, but urgency for changes to the law so that there are no permitted exceptions to the minimum marriage age.

### 3.6.3. Knowledge on children rights

The issue of children’s rights within Tanzanian law was a further area of questioning. Sixty-four per cent in Mwanza and Mara regions said they knew of some rights, such as the right to education, the right to freedom of expression and the right to have basic needs met. Although these formed the majority of respondents, a significant number (16.7 per cent) indicated that they did not know any of the rights for children, and 10.5 per cent did not even know whether there are any rights for the children.

The question of whether child marriage violates children rights was answered by respondents who had indicated an awareness of rights issues. About 75.7 per in Mwanza and Mara regions and 35 per cent in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions said the practice does violate children’s rights.45 These results, particularly in Dar es Salaam and Coastal region, indicate low levels of awareness or knowledge that child marriage is a serious violation of human rights.

When asked what rights they thought were being violated, respondents mentioned the rights to education, freedom of expression, and life. They explained the rights violations further by describing the retardation of girls’ development, teenage

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45 This was revealed during the interviews and focus group discussions in Dar es Salaam, Coastal, Mwanza and Mara regions.
pregnancies, social isolation, the negative health and education consequences, the loss of decision-making rights, and the reinforcement of the gendered nature of poverty. In Mwanza and Mara regions, 4.1 per cent believed child marriage is not a violation of human rights, while 11.4 per cent did not know whether it is.

Raising awareness among communities about how children’s rights are being violated through child marriage practices needs to supplement any work around raising awareness of the effects of child marriage.

### 3.6.4. Respondents’ views on what should be done

In Mwanza and Mara regions respondents were given an opportunity to offer suggestions for how to end child marriage. The answers were as follows:

- The government should take stern disciplinary measures against those who force children into marriage, including parents/guardians who force their daughters and sons to enter into child marriage, men who marry girls and women who marry young boys (43.9 per cent).

- There should be educational programmes for disadvantaged children and families which have been affected by child marriages (21.3 per cent). This view was also expressed in Dar es Salaam and Coastal regions.

- Communities which embrace child marriage as a tradition and custom should be advised to abandon the practice because of the effects it has on the child spouses, their families, the community and the government (5.3 per cent).

Other suggestions from respondents in all four regions included:

- Parents should listen to children’s voices and respect their views.

- Girl children should not be considered just as investments to bring wealth soon after marriage.

- Education should be free for girls from poor families.

- The legal marriage age should be increased.
4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

This survey sought to investigate and report on the prevalence of child marriage and its effects on children, particularly girls. It is evident from the findings that child marriage is a real problem in Dar es Salaam, Coastal, Mwanza and Mara regions, although the prevalence levels differ between them.

Demographically, the survey respondents were very diverse – males and females; young and old; well-educated and the illiterate; married, single and divorced/separated; students, farmers, business people, pastoralists, fishermen and civil servants; from Christian, Muslim and other religious backgrounds. Their answers were equally diverse, depicting the different levels of understanding around issues relating to child marriage.

In relation to understanding and attitudes toward child marriage, many respondents from Mara seemed not to comprehend the issue of child marriage – to them a child is a person who is too young to be able to do anything for him/her (i.e. a toddler). Levels of awareness on child marriage were evidently very low, with most respondents indicating that a boy or girl will be ready for marriage responsibilities once they reach puberty and the traditional rites have been performed.

Despite slight differences in the extent of child marriage in each region, all regions clearly still have child marriage as a common practice. There are many reasons for the prevalence. Parents and guardians of girl children marry them off to gain bride price so as to alleviate family poverty and relieve the burden of providing for their daughters. Others are married off young because of peer pressure or sometimes lack of educational opportunities. Boys are forced into marriage so that they can have children of their own when they are still young and also increase the family labour power.

Respondents were nevertheless reluctant to discuss specific child marriage cases in their areas. There are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, they perhaps did not want to associate themselves with such a despicable practice. While most said they did not know of cases because those involved in child marriages often relocate to other villages or areas to dodge the law, it is doubtful whether this is a true reality.
The need for a deeper anthropological study to this effect gains ground here. Secondly, some respondents have a little knowledge that marrying off a child is against the law. They may thus have refrained from mentioning specific cases to avoid associating themselves with the legal implications.

As for the causes of child marriage, survey respondents by and large cited family poverty as a factor that forces parents to marry off young daughters in return for bride price. However, there is no evidence that those who are relatively rich families in these regions do not allow their girl child to marry have girl children to marry off. The need to raise awareness was cemented by this study since there is no clear relationship between marrying off girl children and moving out of poverty. In fact, some respondents indicated that marrying off girl children perpetuates family poverty – the married girl also becomes poor because she is unable to practice family planning, unable to help her children, and more likely to marry off her own daughters at an early age. Other causes mentioned included wealthy, often elderly, men luring girls and their poor families to accept a marriage. For boys, the ‘only son’ phenomenon forces parents to impose marriage on their very young sons so that they can have an heir well established before they die.

Apart from the benefit of having and caring for children when still very young, strong and energetic, respondents were unable to state any other tangible advantages of child marriage for the girl, the boy, their families or the whole community.

Although part of the blame for child marriage practices lies with the communities who consider the practice to be part of their traditions, substantial blame should also be placed on the inadequacy or absence of policy and legal frameworks for the protection of children. There is no single law dealing with children’s rights in Tanzania, nor is there any piece of legislation talking about the definite minimum legal age of marriage or about the protection of children’s rights to education, to social security, play, etc.

The effects of child marriage are plainly evident within communities where the practice is common. If children are to be protected, then communities need to participate in the process of changing perceptions around the supposed advantages of child marriage, and perhaps also in the process of changing traditional rites of passage to adulthood, so that they happen at a more appropriate age.
4.2. Recommendations

In order to end child marriage in Tanzania, there is a dire need to press for legal reform to bring in a uniform definition of childhood (removing the contradictions in current legislation) and to prescribe the minimum age of marriage (removing current laws which contain loopholes that permit the marriage of under-18s).

Legal reform – without the dissemination of information to communities about the legal position of child marriage – would be futile. As such, there should be awareness-raising programmes to educate communities about how they can participate to make child marriage history. Meanwhile, a community participatory approach needs to be used to discourage and abolish cultural practices that support child marriage.

Since this survey was constrained by time, it is suggested that a more thorough study, taking an anthropological view, is needed in these regions. It was difficult to ascertain the reality on the ground about the extent of child marriage (caused by the deep-rooted traditions and customs) because there was insufficient time to develop the relationship between researchers and respondent that is necessary for deeper probing of sensitive issues. Reliable and more accurate findings can only be obtained when researchers have more time to spend in the field, studying child marriages, their effects and the difficulties experienced by the married children themselves.

The study shows that there are cases of child marriage in the respondents’ areas, despite respondents’ reluctance often to discuss specific cases. But the lack of follow-up mechanisms presents a huge challenge both in collecting details of the cases and keeping accurate records of them.

The effects of child marriage on children, especially girls, are tremendous. The report recommends that there should be a mechanism for assisting children who have been affected by child marriage. This might include legal and health services and basic needs social services. Such services would empower affected children, especially child wives and widows, to stand up for their rights.

Extensive study and grounded research must be conducted in other parts of the country to collect wide and in-depth data to assist CDF in developing intervention programmes nationwide. The process of enacting laws requires extensive justification, so CDF needs to have to hand valid research data collected from across Tanzania to give credibility to its lobbying and advocacy activities.
CDF must initiate and establish a strong network of human and children’s rights activists. This network must spread all over the country to support the huge campaign that is needed against child marriage in Tanzania. The network must be responsible for guaranteeing the campaign’s success and making sure that the mission and vision of the campaign are accomplished.
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