

Review Paper

Child Marriage in Sub-Saharan Contexts: A Travesty of Justice

Simon Murote Kang'ethe

Department of Social Work, University of Walter Sisulu,
Mthatha, Eastern Cape, South Africa, Postal code 5099

*Corresponding Author: skangethe@wsu.ac.za

Received: 25 March 2025 / Accepted: 12 October 2025

Abstract: Indeed, the article aimed to explore the phenomenon of child marriage and how it constitutes a human rights denial and travesty to justice to the girl child and, eventually, young women. This is because the phenomenon denies them the opportunity to self-determine their future through accessing education. Methodologically, the article used the traditional literature review narrative that tapped various data sources from mainly Sub-Saharan African countries, as well as some Asian and Indian contexts. The article drew data from various data engines such as EBSCOhost, the Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and University theses, books, and book chapters, as well as theses, to examine the human rights violations and grave injustices faced by girl children who are married off at a tender age, before reaching adulthood. The article revealed the following thematic dynamics of child marriage: Religiously sanctioned child marriage; patriarchy as a platform for child marriage; Social Norms and Poverty as an Aggravating Factor of Child Marriages; and Child Marriage aggravates gender disparities. The article recommends enforcing national minimum age-of-marriage policies and practices in selected Sub-Saharan countries; the need for governments to criminalize child marriage and enact a free education policy. The article concludes by exhorting African governments to enact and implement policies and programmes ensuring compulsory education for all in the country, with a mandatory level at which all must reach while adults. The study contributes to the scholarship of widening the horizon of research to leverage the rights of children, whether socially, politically, or culturally.

Keywords: Human rights denial; A travesty of justice; Adolescent sexual reproductive health; Intimate partner violence; Gender-based violence; Children's rights

Introduction

The importance of child marriage is academically relevant because it entrenches deep-rooted gender inequities, inequalities, and breeds poverty, making the girl child suffer deeper socio-economic disparities and entrenched gender inequalities (Chikono, 2024). Child marriage constitutes a human rights denial and travesty of justice. when children/adolescents must get married while they are still minors and lose their opportunities to exploit their potential through schooling (Opesemowo & Odumosu, 2023). This means that the countries, where child marriages are commonplace, are a bottleneck towards the realisation of several Sustainable Development Goals such as number 1 (eradication of poverty), number 2 (zero hunger), three (good health and well-being), four (quality education), five (gender equality), and 10 (reduced inequalities) (Kidman et al., 2024a, b). It is therefore important to examine the factors that contribute to the prevalence of child marriage in some Sub-Saharan African countries, despite the long-term harm it causes to children and, ultimately, to women. For comparative purposes, the researcher has highlighted the issue of child marriage in other non-Sub-Saharan African contexts, particularly in Asia and India.

The phenomenon of child marriage and human right issues

Child marriage is a culturally seated phenomenon and refers to any legal or customary union involving a boy or girl below the age of 18 (Ahinkorah et al., 2023). According to Kidman et al. (2024a, b), child marriage remains prevalent in many countries of the globe: 1 in 5 women aged 20–24 report marriage before 18, and health risks include early pregnancy and exposure to intimate partner violence (Kidman, 2017). This is considered both a human rights violation and a travesty of justice that continues to weigh down the developmental gains of girl children and young women (Kurniawan et al., 2020). As a solution to this undesirable phenomenon, both child marriage laws and access to education have been proposed as solutions. Some scholars contend that child marriage constitutes a harmful cultural process that poses serious human rights violations (Kang'ethe, 2023; Sewpaul et al., 2021). These scenarios are associated with underdevelopment and poverty, as well as are a bottleneck to the achievement of a number of sustainable development goals such as number 1 (eradication of poverty), number 2 (zero hunger), number three (good health and wellbeing), number four (quality education) number five (gender equality), and number ten (reduced inequalities (Kidman et al., 2024a,b).

Child marriage is both anti-developmental and a violation of human rights because it denies children the opportunity to mature and exercise their right to self-determination such as pursuing education and potentially securing a profitable career path (Kang'ethe, 2023; Sewpaul et al., 2021). The contention above is reinforced by studies by Kidman et al. (2024a), who argued that girls who marry before 18 have little opportunity to safeguard their lives through education, with ramifications for their economic potential and independence. Another reason why child marriage constitutes a human rights denial is the fact that the married girl is controlled and has no power or confidence to argue the case against any form of mistreatment and suppression. She usually suffers immense oppression and subjugation. Her negotiation power for her constitutionally guaranteed rights, such as adolescent sexual reproductive health rights (ASRH), is confounded (Kang'ethe, 2023).

According to Kang'ethe (2023), even if child marriage is sanctioned by the payment of bride price or lobola in most Southern African countries, the process raises cultural tensions as those who pay for the bride price tend to undermine the girl's dignity and self-determination and thereby promote malignant sexism (Sewpaul et al., 2021). This may be one reason why some social work practitioners are challenging the custom of paying bridewealth or lobola, arguing that it undermines women's rights. The contention of the above social work practitioners is that it is one of the cultures that takes away the rights of women, as it persuades men to emasculate women and girls' rights. Moreover, some social work practitioners believe the practice should be dropped as it commodifies women, with men who have paid brideprice (*lobola* in South African countries) feeling entitled to treat women slavishly, oblivious of their constitutionally guaranteed rights (Sewpaul & Larsen, 2014). Some social pragmatists argue that addressing child marriage may require community-based interventions, such as Afrocentric approaches like Ubuntu dialogues, which aim to shift the mindsets of those who support the practice (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020).

Patriarchy is also on the spot as a significant factor in child marriage (Kang'ethe, 2023). This researcher thinks that a patriarchal mindset is hegemonic in regions ridden with poverty and underdevelopment, which offers an opportunity for child marriage. This explains why the practice is most prevalent among sub-Saharan Africa's poorer and undeveloped societies (Kang'ethe, 2023). Moreover, since in most contexts, the men who marry these girls are elderly, they exert a controlling behaviour on their partners, leaving the married girls prone to acts of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse against them (Nasrullah et al., 2014). Such controlling behaviours have serious adverse effects on the physical, psychological, and reproductive health of these adolescents. These also impact their mental health conditions (Delara, 2016).

Religious practices have been accused of sanctioning child marriages instead of paradoxically discouraging them. In Zimbabwe, for example, the Johane Marange apostolic church is believed to treat young girls slavishly, oblivious of their constitutionally guaranteed rights of existence (Chikono, 2024). The sect paradoxically takes away the rights of children by sanctioning their marriage to elderly men. These girls

become victims of birth complications, high infant and mortality rates, gender-based violence, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Chikono & Kang'ethe, 2025).

These actions represent not only a violation of human rights but also a grave miscarriage of justice, as they undermine the principles of social justice, equality, and liberty whether examined from global, regional, or national perspectives (Muchacha et al., 2016). While many countries have advocated for the weakening of these cultural practices, this researcher argues that such efforts are driven by pragmatists who hegemonically prioritize Eurocentric approaches, often neglecting Afrocentric perspectives that might garner greater community support (Kang'ethe, 2023). This researcher thinks that perhaps most socially oriented African interventions work poorly because they rely hegemonically on a Eurocentric approach and curriculum and neglect the Afrocentric approaches. The call, therefore, for a balanced curriculum that uses both Eurocentric and Afrocentric tools is timely and topical (Kang'ethe, 2023; Sewpaul et al., 2021). This article discusses the human rights violations and the travesty of justice borne by girls who marry before adulthood (age 18).

From a global perspective, child marriage is widely recognized as a violation of human rights and a grave injustice (Kidman et al., 2024a, b). This is because it takes away the girls' constitutionally guaranteed rights, such as those of health and self-determination. The practice also goes against the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR, 1989). Different literature perspectives point out that the vice is associated with archaic practices in traditional and unmodernized societies where men wield hegemonic powers of controlling women and children. It is driven by patriarchy, reflecting a blatant abuse of gender, and stands as an epitome of gender inequality and injustice an expression of male chauvinist brutality, subjugation, and systemic suppression of women. It is also sanctioned by certain religious groups that disregard children's rights and modern values, such as education. The article aims to shed light on the factors that enable child marriage, with the goal of discouraging this harmful tradition. It also calls on governments and child advocacy organizations to implement stronger legal measures to criminalize the practice.

Methodology

While methodology addresses how a research article is undertaken, this paper used a traditional literature review narrative tapping data from different research documents (Gentles et al., 2016), mostly journal articles published in English, complemented with a few monographs, books, and book chapters, University dissertations/theses, United Nations charters, and the Republic of South Africa's policy. To stick to the dependent variable of child marriages, the researcher chose concepts such as child marriage and health dynamics, child marriage and travesty of justice, child marriage and maternal fertility, child marriage and poverty, child marriage and intimate partner violence, and child marriage and gender-based violence.

These concepts were searched from common databases that included EBCOHOST, the Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and University theses. Although the researcher targeted journal articles published from 2020 onwards, he was also forced to seek those published earlier with rich data on child marriages. Data collection process saturated after 29 articles alongside 2 dissertations, 4 UN charters, 2 books, 4 book chapters, 1 book review, and 1 government policy document. The mountains of data collected from these data sources were analysed thematically and discussed to enhance further understanding of the subject of the human rights travesty that child marriage imposes on young girls.

The Findings

From the thematic analysis of the literature reviewed, four key themes of the factor enabling child marriage emerged.

Religiously Sanctioned Child Marriage

While religion is celebrated for inculcating moral and ethical values in societies, some religious practices paradoxically sanction child marriages (Chikono & Kang'ethe, 2025; Chikono, 2024). For example, in the Zimbabwean sect of John Marange, girl children as young as 14 years old are involuntarily given to marriage to older men after a proclamation that the Holy Spirit has sanctioned the marriage. This has been considered a gospel truth among the congregants that nobody can dispute (Dudzai et al., 2023). In Johane Marange's sect,

literature attests to a preponderance of risky sexual practices meted out to the girl children, some of whom may be at the nascent ages of adolescence (Chikono, 2024). This is also feared to be a critical factor in the ever-increasing statistics of HIV infection rate among adolescent girls and young women aged 15 -25 years in Zimbabwe (Gambir et al., 2024).

This researcher contends that the rights of these children are grossly violated. Their opportunity to advance in their education is cut off. This means they have no opportunity to shape their destiny through education, as education is believed to open the doors of opportunity in young people's lives. Quoting the words of the late South African first black President, Nelson Mandela, in his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, he has advised that education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world (Stern, 2021). This is because of its transformative capacity to leverage dire situations. Mandela used the word *weapon* metaphorically to connote how education, if used adequately, can help bring about meaningful change, whether socially, economically, or politically. From another perspective, though Mandela believed education was a more potent weapon to paralyze apartheid as people would cogently understand their rights with ease, this researcher believes that the phenomenon of societies marrying off girl children early in their childhood years obscures their rights to education and self-determination (Abera et al., 2020). This also compromises the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to improve the quality of education for all people, especially those in developing countries (Kidman et al., 2024a, b).

Despite the apparent traditional value of marriage, as it is considered a noble phenomenon in most societies of the world, with Africa leading in the practice, apparently, the girls who are wedded in their childhood years face a pernicious world, with their destiny in the hands of the elderly men who marry them. It is a paradoxically unfair union as these elderly men may be in their sunset years, physically and emotionally not able to support the union (Kang'ethe, 2018). Moreover, such harmful cultures may persist or even thrive if governments fail to take decisive action to eliminate them. Apparently, in Zimbabwe, and driven by Johanne Marange's apostolic sect, there appears to be no action from legal authorities when these marriages mess up the lives of the girl children. Dudzai et al. (2023) conducted a study on religious sects, revealing that women's and girls' rights continue to be violated without culprits facing the wrath of the law. Ironically and paradoxically, these marriages are sanctioned by religious authorities whom church members, often blindly and unquestioningly, follow despite the illusory and contradictory nature of such guidance (Chikono & Kang'ethe, 2025).

According to Siziba (2020), these marriage arrangements subject girls below the age of 18 years to a state of physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse despite the country having adopted and instituted legislation and policies to curb gender-based violence in all its forms (physical, emotional, and sexual violence). This blatant abuse of their sacred human rights denies these children the right to express their self-determination in life, such as choosing to continue their education, as well as the rights and opportunity to soberly choose their life partners without any duress (Kang'ethe, 2023; Sewpaul et al., 2021).

Patriarchy as a Platform for Child Marriage

While one of the positive aspects of patriarchy is to maintain law and order in society, it is paradoxically believed to offer a platform for abusing women and girl children in Sub-Saharan African countries (Kang'ethe, 2009, 2014). This is because patriarchal norms and values make men believe they should hegemonically control women and children by demanding subservience from them. Literature reveals that in South Africa, patriarchy plays out in suppressing women and the girl child through domestic violence (Mokwena et al., 2024). This constitutes a travesty of justice and paradoxically happens despite the rights of women being enshrined in South Africa's Constitution and the Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Unequivocally, in many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, patriarchal norms subjugate and suppress women through men's expression of masculinity and hegemonic powers to control women and children (Malesa, 2023). In societies where patriarchy is a huge norm, women do not have a say in the welfare of their children, as well as in the decision-making of their reproductive and sexual health (Gupta et al., 2023). Since many Southern African patriarchal-leaning societies believe in bride price, or *lobola*, during marriages, cases of men forcibly marrying off their daughters are not uncommon. Such actions are often driven by the pursuit

of pecuniary advantages (Sewpaul et al., 2023). This perfidious cultural exploitation allows for the commercialization of marriage to take away the rights of younger adolescents, who should be allowed to practice self-determination through advancing in education (Sewpaul et al., 2021; Kang'ethe, 2023). It is such cultures that Sewpaul et al. (2021) advocate for their discard and abandonment. The same contention is reinforced by Kang'ethe (2023), who, in his review of the book, "The Tensions Between Culture and Human Rights: Emancipatory Social Work and Afrocentricity in a Global World," calls for such cultures to be discarded among African countries to allow the girl children their freedom to self-determination. The girl children, therefore, need to be protected against the archaic practices of involuntary weddings to parties they do not choose or have an interest in. This is a gross travesty of social justice (Santhya & Jejeebhoy, 2015).

Social Norms and Poverty as an Aggravating Factor of Child Marriages

According to studies done by UNICEF (2021) among 20–24-year-old women in least-developed countries, 12% were married before the age of 15, and 38% before the age of 18, with the prevalence of child marriage assuming higher proportions in West and Central Africa, Niger, and Malawi (UNICEF, 2021). However, South Asia has the highest number of unmarried girls. Literature attests that in many countries, stronger social norms and poverty remain the salient drivers of child marriage (Kidman et al., 2024a, b). Studies in India, Bangladesh, and Ghana have demonstrated that child marriage is associated with poverty (Kidman et al., 2024a, b), with the poorest girls manifesting a higher propensity to child marriage. It also needs to be borne that the practicing communities view child marriage as an economic strategy to reduce the financial burden on families of caring for or educating the girl children. Moreover, it also needs to be processed that girl children may not be forced to marry, but some opt for it when their parents are poor and unable to pay school fees for them (Bajracharya & Amin, 2012).

In some cultures, child marriage is considered a natural part of growing up and a milestone that transitions a girl into womanhood, regardless of her actual age. For example, among the Yao people of Malawi, immediately a girl reaches puberty, she is expected to be married off (Melnikas et al., 2021). This then means that her pursuit of education must be terminated forthwith. The girl loses her opportunity to mend her future through education. Further, in some African cultures, girls are seen as economic burdens or second-class citizens compared to boys. Marrying them off early is often seen as a ploy to "protect" their chastity and uphold family honour. This resorts to a painful commercialisation of marriage at the expense of the girl children (Nhamapoca & Maritz, 2024). This is indeed an archaic culture that needs to be obliterated if the girl child is to enjoy the constitutionally guaranteed rights that many countries have put in place (Kang'ethe, 2014). Such societies need to undergo a paradigm shift in both their thinking and mindset if the girl child is going to enjoy the gender equality that the Sustainable Development Goals aspire to reach (Casey, Kim & Reid, 2024).

Child Marriage Aggravates Gender Disparities

According to Fan and Koski (2022), child marriage, besides being a violation of human rights, is also a marker of gender inequality. This means it prevents countries from achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims for countries to address states of gender inequality and inequity (Long et al., 2023; United Nations, 2018) by 2030. Axiomatically, this state of gender inequality and inequity contributed by child marriage has dire economic consequences for women's future and feminization of poverty (Chikono & Kang'ethe, 2025). This is why the United Nations called for an end to the practice by 2030 (United Nations, 2018; Fan & Koski, 2022). Moreover, child marriages are less gender equitable. Studies by Wodon and Yedan (2017) reflected that women who married as children earn 9% less in adulthood. While this explains the likelihood of these girls living a financially difficult life, it mirrors other studies by Chikono and Kang'ethe (2025) that point to the increased feminization of poverty by these girls.

Studies by Kidman et al. (2017) reflect that African women who marry before 18 more often experience intimate partner violence throughout their married lives, with some violence likely to cause fatalities. Moreover, one of the spinoffs of child marriage is its impact on girls' health, whether physical, social, or mental (Fan & Koski, 2022; Efevbera & Bhabha, 2019). Many children who face early marriage suffer from maternal health care and intimate partner violence. This is gender-based violence that endangers

the girl's life and existence (Kang'ethe, 2014). Studies from low- and middle-income countries of Africa and Asia show that women who marry before 18 are more likely to have early pregnancies and less likely to have a skilled healthcare provider at the time of delivery. This pernicious quandary will likely jeopardize their health and the child's (Kidman et al., 2024 a, b; Fan & Koski, 2022). Moreover, children born to mothers under age 18 are 60 % more likely to die before they reach their first birthday (UNICEF, 2018).

Discussion

Child marriage in many sub-Saharan African countries, though declining gradually, remains a developmental gap that has to be settled if countries are to achieve the most desirable sustainable goals related to child empowerment, such as number 1 (eradication of poverty), number 2 (zero hunger), three (good health and well-being), four (quality education), five (gender equality), and 10 (reduced inequalities) (Kidman et al., 2024a, b). This means that governments must go back to the drawing board and work to annihilate factors that drive child marriages. Although societies see their development through cultural lenses, as cultures are the mirrors of the society (Kang'ethe, 2009), malignant cultures such as child marriages need to be addressed if girls and boys are to grow at the same pace. The reduction of child marriage holds promise for addressing the persistent gender inequities and inequalities that have long defined many Sub-Saharan African countries. While this is not an easy task because of the possible potential conflict between children's rights and cultural rights, governments need to strengthen their law reform agenda that will make societies realise the dangers of child marriages and their developmental implications. Indeed, child marriage presents a critical barrier to girls' schooling and gender equality in education (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015).

These countries where child marriages are rampant need to re-examine patriarchy and consider its pernicious impacts on the empowerment of girl children and women in general. This is because child marriage is believed to be driven by patriarchal norms and traditions that hegemonically bestow power to men at the expense of women and the girl child (source). It is these patriarchal nuances that condone child marriage without considering the rights of the girl child to choose a partner of her own. Her rights are emasculated (Sewpaul et al., 2023; Kang'ethe, 2023). In fact, patriarchy has been the driver of gender inequities and inequalities in many countries in Africa. In fact, patriarchy subjugates the rights of women and girl children. This is because it embraces customary law that upholds male dominance in inheritance, land ownership, and decision-making. It is a major epitome of child marriage. Under patriarchal norms, tasks, thinking, and attitudes of all the society are reinforced, with women being given the role of caregivers and homemakers (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). The role of religious practices also needs to be re-examined as they are profound drivers of child marriage. This is because religion plays a pivotal role in directing its membership on what needs to be done or believed, with members getting trapped in believing the whims and illusions of their leaders. In a country like Zimbabwe, the Johanne Marange sect is in the spotlight for condoning child marriage (Chikono, 2024). These children are usually wedded off to elderly men whose biological, social, and physiological strength may fail to resonate with the girl's potential and well-being. This is considered a human rights denial and a travesty of justice

Recommendations to Address Child Marriage

Governments from countries with a higher prevalence of child marriages are encouraged to enact and enforce the policy of a minimum age of marriage. It is undeniable that the public health burden associated with child marriage is indisputable, especially in Africa and South Asia, where child marriages are widely prevalent (Kidman et al., 2024b). Although efforts to address child marriages are not uncommon in many countries, their effectiveness is in doubt. Governments must initiate, enact, and reinforce minimum-age-of-marriage policies and practices that guarantee access to education, which may also be needed to create a viable alternative to marriage (Kidman et al., 2017).

This researcher recommends that governments all over the world enact policies that criminalise the marriage of girls below the age of 18 years (Melnikas et al., 2021). This means that those elderly men who wed the younger girls and their accomplices who may have arranged the marriage should face the law. For this criminalisation to be effective, this implies that the practice needs to be supported by other policies, such

as the policy enforcing children to be at school up to a certain level, for example, form five or six (grade 13-14), where most children will be above 18. (Melnikas et al., 2021)

Unequivocally, this researcher thinks that the prevalence of child marriage is a recipe for a lack of education in countries ravaged by the quagmire of child marriage (Yaya et al., 2019). Policies that guarantee access to education may also be needed to create a viable alternative to marriage. It would also be important that this policy guarantees tuition-free education (Klein, 2024) This researcher believes that if countries could have a policy for all children to go to school and mandatorily reach a certain level where all will be adults (grade 13-14) upon reaching that mandatory level, opportunities for child marriage would diminish or get annihilated. However, since education places a heavy financial burden on many countries, especially in Africa and Asia, NGOs and other child-friendly philanthropic bodies are implored to collaborate in funding education.

Conclusion

Child marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa is a pernicious phenomenon that constitutes a violation of human rights and a travesty of justice to the girl child and, by extension, the younger women. It robs millions of girls of their childhood, education, health, and future. In Sub-Saharan Africa, factors such as patriarchy, religious sanctions, social norms, and poverty remain salient drivers. Indeed, child marriage perpetuates a culture of poverty, gender inequality, and poor health outcomes, weakening entire communities and countries. Perfidiously, child marriage manifests several health outcomes, such as maternal health, the death of infants, and the prevalence of gender-based violence. This researcher thinks that enacting and implementing policies and programmes, mainly to ensure compulsory education for all in the country, with a mandatory level at which all must reach, will optimistically help to eliminate child marriage. It is important that countries enact a policy for free education. This is because education in many countries in Africa is not free, and poor communities fail to go beyond grade 7. Moreover, criminalizing the practice and imposing heavy penalties on those who break the law can optimistically reduce child marriage. However, efforts to end the practice are crucial and require a coordinated pragmatism and advocacy by governments, NGOs, civil society, and individuals themselves. The political will of the country is salient if the war against child marriage is to be won.

Acknowledgment: The author acknowledges institutional support that facilitated access to key academic resources used in this review.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest

References

- Abera, M., Nega, A., Tefera, Y. *et al.* Early marriage and women's empowerment: the case of child-brides in Amhara National Regional State, Ethiopia. *BMC Int Health Hum Rights*, 20, 30 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-020-00249-5>
- Ahinkorah, B.O., Aboagye, R.G., Okyere, Siidu, A., Budu, E & Sanni Y. (2023). Child marriage and its association with partner controlling behaviour against adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa. *BMC Global Public Health* 1, 9 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s44263-023-00001-w>
- Bajracharya, A., & Amin, S. (2012). Poverty, marriage timing, and transitions to adulthood in Nepal. *Studies in family planning*, 43(2), 79–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4465.2012.00307.x>
- Casey, E., Kim, M., & Reid, A. (2024). Connecting gender equality with sustainability in early childhood: Educators understandings in Victoria, Australia. *Environmental Education Research*, 31(2), 304–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2024.2418310>.
- Chikono, G. (2024). *Feminization of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe: An evaluative study of women empowerment programmes in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Fort Hare, South Africa].

- Chikono, G., & Kang'ethe, S. M. (2025). *Exploring the opinions of selected social service practitioners on abuses meted out to girl children by the Johanne Marange Apostolic Church organisation in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe: A 2015–2021 empirical study* (Manuscript in preparation).
- Delara M. Mental health consequences and risk factors of physical intimate partner violence. *Ment Health Fam Med*, 12,119–25.
- Dudzai, C., Zvokuomba, K. & Mboko, T. G. (2023). Religion, women, and girls' rights in Zimbabwe: The case of Zimbabwe's Johanne Marange Apostolic Church. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 8(4), 376-388. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-023-00271-2>
- Efevbera, Y., Bhabha, J. Defining and deconstructing girl child marriage and applications to global public health. *BMC Public Health*, 20, 1547 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09545-0>
- Fan, S., Koski, A. (2022). The health consequences of child marriage: a systematic review of the evidence. *BMC Public Health* 22, 309 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-12707-x>
- Gambir, K., Matsika, A. B., Panagiotou, A., Snowden, E., Lofthouse, C., & Metzler, J. (2024). Associations between child marriage and food insecurity in Zimbabwe: a participatory mixed methods study. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1), 13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-17408-7>.
- Gentles, S.J., Charles, C., Nicholas, D.B., Poeng, J. & Mckibbon (2016). Reviewing the research methods literature: principles and strategies illustrated by a systematic overview of sampling in qualitative research. *Syst Rev* 5, 172 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-016-0343-0>
- Gupta, M., Madabushi, J. S., & Gupta, N. (2023). Critical Overview of Patriarchy, Its Interferences with Psychological Development, and Risks for Mental Health. *Cureus*, 15(6), e40216. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.40216>
- Kang'ethe SM (2009). Inadequate male involvement in health issues: The cause of gender skewed HIV and AIDS situations in Botswana. In: T Maundeni, BZ Osei-Hwedie, E Mukaamambo, PG Ntseane (Eds.): *Male Involvement in Sexual and Reproductive Health: Prevention of Violence and HIV/AIDS in Botswana*. Made Plain Communications, pp. 7–28.
- Kang'ethe, S. M (2014). "The Woman and the Girl Child Phenomenon and Gender-based Violence in Botswana" in. *Human Rights and Social Equality: Challenges for Social Work* Vol 1. Ashgate Publishers (pp 125–132).
- Kang'ethe, S. M. (2023). The tensions between culture and human rights: Emancipatory social work and Afrocentricity in a global world. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 59(4), 419–424. <https://doi.org/10.15270/59-4-1180>.
- Kang'ethe, S.M. (2018). Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 54(3), 283. <https://doi.org/10.15270/54-3-649>
- Kidman, R. (2017). Child marriage and intimate partner violence: A comparative study of 34 countries. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 46(2) (2017), pp. 662–675.
- Kidman, R., Breton, E., Mwera, J., Zulu, A., Behrman, J., & Kohler, H. P. (2024a). Drivers of child marriages for girls: A prospective study in a low-income African setting. *Global Public Health*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2024.2335356>
- Kidman, R., Raub, A., Martin, A., Bhuwania, P., Bose, B., & Heymann, J. (2024b). Reducing child marriage in sub-Saharan Africa: Evaluating the joint potential of protective marriage and education policies. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 164, 107877. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107877>
- Klein, G. (2024). Free Education? Promises and Policy in South African Higher Education Funding since 1994. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 50(6), 877–900. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2024.2515796>.
- Kurniawan, E., Handesman, H., Rahmadi, R., & Najib, K. (2020). Early Marriage, Human Rights, and the Living Fiqh: A Maqasid al-Shari'a Review. *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan*, 20(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v20i1.565>

- Long, G., Censoro, J. & Rietig, K. (2023). The sustainable development goals: governing by goals, targets, and indicators. *Int Environ Agreements* 23, 149–156 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-023-09604-y>
- McCleary-Sills, J., Hanmer, L., Parsons, J., & Klugman, J. (2015). Child Marriage: A Critical Barrier to Girls' Schooling and Gender Equality in Education. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13(3), 69–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2015.1075755>
- Melnikas, A.J., Mulauzi, N., Mkandawire, J. *et al.* Perceptions of minimum age at marriage laws and their enforcement: qualitative evidence from Malawi. *BMC Public Health*, 21, 1350(2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11434-z>
- Mokwena, K. E., Ramushu, E. M., Ngema, V. M., & Ramatsui, O. (2024). Experiences and Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Qualitative Study in the City of Tshwane, South Africa. *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development*, 36(3), 17 pages. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2708-9355/14049>
- Muchacha, M., Matsika, A. & Nhapi, T. (2016). Child Marriage Among the Apostolic Sects in Zimbabwe: Implications for Social Work Practice. *The Tensions Between Culture and Human Rights*, 165. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/57695/9781773851839.pdf?sequence=1#page=173>
- Mugumbate, J. & Chereni, A. (2020). Now the theory of ubuntu has its space in social work. *African Journal of Social Work*, 10, 5-17.
- Nasrullah M, Zakar R, Zakar MZ. (2014). Child marriage and its associations with controlling behaviors and spousal violence against adolescent and young women in Pakistan. *J Adolesc Health*, 55(6), 804–9.
- Nhampoca, J. M., & Maritz, J. E. (2024). Early marriage, education, and mental health: experiences of adolescent girls in Mozambique. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*, 5, 1278934. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fgwh.2024.1278934>
- Opesemowo, O. A., & Odumosu, E. (2023). The Sway of Early Marriage on the Girl Child Education among Some Ethnic Groups in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 6(3), 26-41. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2023.18>
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Government Gazette, Vol. 378, No. 17678. (8 May 1996) Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Santhya, K. G., & Jejeebhoy, S. J. (2015). Sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescent girls: Evidence from low- and middle-income countries. *Global Public Health*, 10(2), 189–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2014.986169>.
- Sewpaul, V., & Larsen, A. K. (2014). Community development: Towards an integrated emancipatory framework. In A. K. Larsen, V. Sewpaul, & G. Oline (Eds.), *Participation in community work: International perspectives* (pp. 230–246). Routledge.
- Sewpaul, V., Kreitzer, L., & Raniga, T. (2021). *The tensions between culture and human rights: Emancipatory social work and Afrocentricity in a global world*. University of Calgary Press. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/57695/1/9781773851839.pdf>
- Sikweyiya, Y., Addo-Lartey, A. A., Alangea, D. O., Dako-Gyeke, P., Chirwa, E. D., Coker-Appiah, D., Adanu, R. M. K., & Jewkes, R. (2020). Patriarchy and gender-inequitable attitudes as drivers of intimate partner violence against women in the Central Region of Ghana. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1), Article 682. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08825-z>
- Siziba, E. (2020). *Gender-based violence in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of institutional responses* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria, South Africa].
- Stern, J. (2022). A very long walk to freedom. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 44(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1992873>
- UNICEF. (2018). *Child marriage: Latest trends and prospects*. United Nations Children's Fund.
- UNICEF. (2021). *Child marriage*. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage>
- United Nations. (2018). *The sustainable development goals report 2018*. United Nations.

- United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations.
- Wodon, Q., & Yedan, A. (2017). *Impact of child marriage and early childbirths on population growth across multiple countries*. World Bank, Education Global Practice.
- Yaya, S., Odusina, E. K., & Bishwajit, G. (2019). Prevalence of child marriage and its impact on fertility outcomes in 34 sub-Saharan African countries. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 19, Article 33. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-019-0219-1>