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CHILD MARRIAGE IN GHANA: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS OF VICTIMS' AND SERVICE
PROVIDERS' PERCEPTIONS AND
EXPERIENCE ON SUPPORT

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To begin demonstrates desire, but to finish demonstrates perseverance. This is not only a Masters' thesis, but also a masterpiece birthed out of passion, commitment, and love for change in the Northern Ghana.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Child Marriage in Ghana: A Critical Analysis of Victims' and Service Providers' Perceptions and Experience on Support.

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Keywords: Child marriage, stakeholders, Intersectionality, Survivors, Northern Ghana, Emancipation

This is a participatory practice research of stakeholders' views on support to victims of child marriages in Ghana. The purpose of the study is to explore how victims' and service providers' perceived and experience child marriage support. It seeks to unravel the support available to victims and the challenges social workers, and law enforcement agents face in helping victims and others at risk of child marriages to escape.

The study purposively sampled 14 stakeholders from the northern part of Ghana where the practice is prevalent. The study drawn on in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight victims, four social workers and two police officers. The social constructivist grounded theory and reflexive thematic analysis inspired by intersectionality lens were used to analyze the data. The analysis was done iteratively by comparing the emerging themes or discoveries to the reviewed literature, existing theories, and concepts.

The study asserts that, pervasive contextual and cultural hierarchies interwoven with other factors to keep victims in a state of vulnerability. It also emerged that survivors get less support from social workers and police officers, who are supposed to be front line agents facilitating support. Again, interferences from religious, traditional, and political actors makes social workers and police officers fight against child marriage practices ineffective in Ghana. As a result, the girls have been left on their own to battle their way out of the practice while the perpetrators remain unpunished. Hence, policymakers, human rights activists, and practitioners must fight Ghana's systematic injustices and campaign for laws and institutions such as social welfare and DOVVSU to operate without fear or favour.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this Masters' thesis to my beloved mother, who has nurtured me to be more focused and enthusiastic to my goals through your unseen tears.



Mrs. Kagao Kwuyiwuu Gariba

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Background of the study

Child marriage is a serious global contentious phenomenon, especially in developing countries and countries with promising economies like Ghana. According to recent findings, victims of child marriages are mostly forced against their will to give up their "childhood dreams" and become brides (Sarfo et al., 2019, 2020b; Schlecht, 2016). As a result, their childhood, and developmental years, during which they have the "prospects" to pursue and unearth their dreams, are cut short, and their human rights are jeopardized. Globally, it is estimated that, about 650 million girls and women alive today were married off before they turn 18 years (UNICEF Data, 2020). This social phenomenon occurs throughout the world and is about five (5) times more common among girls than boys (UNICEF, 2019).

It is documented that, girls in west and Central Africa face the highest risk of marrying in childhood. That is, about 4 in 10 young women in Africa were married before age 18 and among a 4 child brides in the region, 1 in 3 was married before age 15 (UNICEF Data, 2020). Again, west, and central Africa comprises 6 of the 10 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world (Kahono et al, 2018; McCleary-Sills et al, 2015). UNICEF (2020) report indicated that, west and central Africa faces a 'unique set of challenges' in her attempts to lessen the effect of child marriage in the region. Thus, halting the practices of child marriage in west and central Africa will required a renewed commitment. Again, scholarly findings have established that, government institutions, civil organizations, religious bodies have mapped serious campaign to end child marriages, but the practice keeps rising especially in west and central Africa (Mourtada et al., 2017; Sarfo et al., 2020b). Statistics have also show that, about 15million adolescent girls are married off every year (Alhassan, 2013; WiLDAF, 2014). In Africa, the legal age for marriage is 18years in most countries except Chad and Burkina Faso where 17years is the legal age (UNICEF & UNFPA, 2018). The pervasiveness of child marriages in Africa, Asia and other part of the world should be a great concern for social workers, international community and human rights organizations since, it has enormous negative effects on child health, gender inequalities, education, and on the overall development of a given country (UNFPA, 2010). We must, therefore, explore this social

phenomenon from the standpoint of child rights violations versus Ghana's social construction of cultural and developmental perspectives.

1.1 Definition and Legislations Against Child Marriage

United Nations Commission on Human Rights define child marriage, or early marriage, as any marriage where at least one of the parties involved is under 18 years of age (UNHR, 2020). In this context, a child marriage is considered to be a form of forced marriage, on the grounds that, one and/or both partners have not expressed full, free, and informed consent. Child marriage is a breach and abuse of children's rights under the African Charter on The Rights and Welfare of The Child 1990 (ACRWC, article-21), Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1981 (CEDAW, article 16-1B). All the above international and regional legislations on human rights instruments speak against the practices of child marriage. Findings has noted that, Ghana was the first country to ratify the Convention on the rights of the child on February 5, 1990, after its introduction by the United Nations in 1989 (Sarfo et al, 2020).

1.2 The Prevalence of Child marriage in Ghana

In the Ghanaian Context, children are generally considered as a vulnerable population and in need of some form of protection and guidance even in decision making. The social construction of children as 'persons in need of social protection and guidance' makes it problematic and even to the extent of forcing them against their will in the name of culture and religion. Does cultural rights trumps over child rights?

The Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS 2018) reported that, 5 percent of girls in Ghana were married before age 15% and 19.3% percent of girls are married off before turn 18 years. Sarfo et al (2019) has noted that, girls in the coastal and savanna regions of Ghana are mostly at risk of being victims of the practices of child marriage than girls in the urban centers where the prevalence is 1 out of every 3 girls (34%) who are below 18 years.

Reflecting on the gender inequalities in line with this practice, the prevalence of child marriage among boys exists, though it is 'hardly notice'. Compared to their females' cohorts, only 2.3% of males are married before their 18th birthday (Alhassan, 2013; de Groot et al., 2018). Although, comparing regional and global statistics, Ghana has seen a modest decline in prevalence (MICS, 2018) child marriages

continue to persist despite being unlawful. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 2015) enshrined the right of an individual to grant free and full consent to a marriage. In view of this, consent in this context cannot be recognized as “free and full” when the girl child has no voice to decide for herself. Moreover, Ghanaian legislations such as Children’s Act 1998, Act 560, the Marriages Act, the Child and Family Welfare Policy of 2014 as well as the recent National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage 2017-2026 prohibits marriages before the legal age of 18 years for both males and females (de Groot et al., 2018). Despite these sufficient legal framework both local and International (Ghana, being the first Africa country to ratify the UNCRC in 1990), Child marriage as a violations of child rights are still very common in Ghana.

1.3 The need for this research

Victims of child marriage are vulnerable population of children that are exposed to so many health, gender inequalities and developmental dangers (Sarfo et al., 2020b). However, little is known about ‘victims’ perceptions and experiences in line with support received, how they want it to be carried out and the kind of challenges service providers such as social workers and law enforcement agencies (police) faced in providing support to victims. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Articles 12 and 13 indicate that children have the rights to contribute to decisions affecting their wellbeing. Ghana was the first African country to endorse the Convention on February 5, 1990, after its introduction by the United Nations in 1989. By endorsing this legislation, Ghana made a pledge to the international community to incorporate provisions of the UNCRC into national policies and legislation. In view of this, Ghana introduced the Children’s Act 1998, Act 560, the Marriages Act, the Child, and Family Welfare Policy of 2014 as well as the recent National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage 2017-2026. However, child marriage practices continue to persist despite the above measures and legislation to end the practice (Malhotra et al., 2011; Schlecht, 2016; UNFPA, 2010).

Under the Ghana Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), the National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage 2017-2026 was launched. The main goals of the Framework are:

1. To influence positive change in communities’ beliefs, attitudes, and social norms

2. To accelerate access to quality education, sexual and reproductive health information, and services,
3. To ensure the legal and policy frameworks related to ending child marriage are in place, effectively enforced and implemented
4. To increase the quality and amount of data and evidence available to inform policy and programming.

Per the above, the ministry prioritized to ensure that, the policy framework are effectively implemented to end child marriage practices in Ghana but little is known about the said ‘support’ and challenges from the lens of the social workers, police officers and the children who receive such support.

1.4 Social Work in Ghana and support for Victims of Child Marriage

In Ghana, social workers use a combination of traditional, and western theories, local and international legal frameworks in handling psych-social and child abuse cases (Avendal, 2011). It was argued that, new crop of social problems emerged due to the erosion of traditional support system aftermath the colonial era. Apt and Blavo (1997, p. 320) cited in Avendal (2011) argues that, as the traditional support network weaken, social support in most communities are no longer handle solely by traditional actors. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is the main government agency committed to work productively with other social cooperate institutions in fighting all forms of negative cultural practices (MOGCSP, 2020).

The Ministry has three departments, that is, the department of Children, department of social welfare and the department of gender. The ministry collaborates with UNICEF, UNFPA, in fighting harmful Cultural Practices and Child Marriage (MOGCSP, 2020). It is also the main agency that regulate social work activities and non-governmental organizations through the department of social welfare and community development. In 1940, Ghana’s social work profession received an official status as it was incorporated under the Colonial Development Act of 1940 (Apt & Blavo 1997). Research indicated that, there was no unifying judicial contextual policies that guides and regulate the practice of the Ghanaian social worker (Avendal, 2011; Manful et al 2008). However, existing clauses of judicial and legislative standing orders of chapter five of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana outlined “Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms” (Republic of Ghana 2021). For instance, child abuses, child marriage issues are regulated

under it. Also, international policies, and frameworks are also cooperated in the works of social workers. These policies are, the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, African Charter on The Rights and Welfare of The Child 1979 (ACRWC, article-21), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1981 (CEDAW, article 16-1B).

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and DOVVSU (Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit) are the two government agencies that works in collaboration with social workers and non-governmental bodies that engages and provide support for victims of child marriage and other psycho-social issues in Ghana. CHRAJ, was established in 1993. According to CHRAJ (2021), the agency exists “to enhance the scale of good governance, democracy, integrity, peace and social development by promoting, protecting and enforcing fundamental human rights and freedoms and administrative justice for all persons in Ghana”. This agency also provides legal aid to victims who cannot afford the services of lawyers in matters concerning them. That is, child marriage victims could rely on this unit for protection when it comes to legal issues involving the court in annulling child marriage practices, should it be reported.

On the other hand, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) was established in 1998. It is a unit under Ghana’s Police Service with the objective “to prevent, protect, apprehend and prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence, child marriage and other child abuse cases” (Ghana Police Service 2021). The police under this unit provide counselling services in collaboration with social workers to persons who are traumatized as a result of child marriage or other abuses. They assist social workers to rescue, rehabilitate and placed victims in a safe environment. DOVVSU, CHRAJ and social workers works together to enforce the law relating to child marriage. This goes in line with the International Federation of Social Worker Code of Ethics (IFSW) (2012, p. 1), “Professional social workers are dedicated to service for the welfare and self-fulfillment of human beings; to the development and disciplined use of scientific knowledge regarding human behavior and society; to the development of resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; to the enhancement and improvement of the quality of life of people; and to the achievement of social justice”.

However, current studies reported that, about 70% of child marriage cases are not reported to these agencies and thus, makes it difficult for halting the practices of child marriage in Ghana (UNICEF 2019;

Torres & Villacampa, 2021; Akter et al 2021; Sarfo et al 2020). How could social workers and other cooperate bodies intervene if cases of such sensitive nature go unreported? In relation to the study goal, the researcher would like to explore the perceptions and experiences of these stakeholders (Social workers and DOVVSU-Police officers) on support provision to victims of child marriage. Again, the study would also explore victims' perception and experiences as well, to compare and reflect on these views on support.

1.5 Knowledge gaps

The existing social construction and cultural practices in Ghana where children are not supposed to speak among adults makes it very problematic for children to express their perceptions when family mount pressure on them and decide to marry them off at early age (Twum-Danso, 2009). Children are not expected to confront or correct adults even if their decision are perceived as risk, but the children must follow their orders. In view of this, children who voice out their opinions are generally considered by society as disrespectful or not trained well by their parents (Nukunya, 2016). A study by Twum-Danso (2009) has indicated that, the Ghanaian child uphold respect and obedience to adults as important rights for children. Unfortunately, this social construct restricts children's rights to have a say in matters against their will, although their rights to have a voice is supported by the UNCRC, Children's Act and the Child and Family Welfare Policy. The ritual in Ghana where children are expected to be passive receivers of adult socialization has been transferred to the practice of child marriage as children are not given the opportunity to express their views. How can the phenomenon be combated if culture and social constructs trumps over policies and legislations? Does the law respect culture?

Considering efforts made by law enforcement agencies and social workers to provide support to persons at risk or victims of child marriage backed by national/international policies and legislation, it is important to know the challenging's social work faced in helping victims and girls at risk escape the practice of child marriage in Ghana. Hence, perceptions and experiences of 'victims' and service providers (social workers and police officers) on child marriage support is necessary to discover possible ways to halt the practice. Exploring these perceptions and experiences can help us understand how child marriage is talk about and measures used to combat the "pervasive culture" that drives child marriage

and offers the international community, human rights activists and social workers opportunities for self-discovery and shared learning (Gordon, 2018).

Social work research is problem oriented rather than method based. Heinrich (2002) and Andersen et al., (2017) argue that social work has evolved into a phase where the traditional modes of knowledge production to inform practice is losing its grip — repeatedly challenged with increased demand for verticality, collaborative knowledge production and impact. Thus, exploring the perceptions and experiences of ‘victims’, the service providers such as the DOVVSU Police unit and social workers at the Department of Social Welfare and community development in Ghana on support victims received is very important in order to inform policy and practice.

1.6 Research questions

The main research question guiding the study is ‘what challenges does social work faced in helping victims and girl at risk of child marriage to escape the practice in Ghana’. Accordingly, the Specific research questions directing this thesis included the following:

1. What perceptions and experiences does victims and service providers have on child marriage support?
2. What support does service providers (social workers and police officers) offers to victims of child marriage?
3. What are the challenges these service providers confronted with in providing such support to victims?

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis will continue with four other chapters. The first chapter has provided a background to the study by identifying reasons why this study is needed and the research questions to guide the study. The second chapter focused on the literature review which will influence the discussion and analysis of the interview data. Chapter two begun with a conceptualization and recent trends of child Marriage to provide an understanding of the concept to give its meaning as used throughout the study. Chapter two also involved discussions of relevant international and local literature related to the topic under investigation. The literature review was guided by the research questions. Chapter three addressed the methodology

where the study design was presented as well as the data collection procedure and coding process. The data from semi-structured in-depth interviews were presented in chapter four following the coding. Presentation of the data was done according to the research questions. Chapter four also involved a discussion of the findings coming from the data. The literature, theories and the analytical framework were used in discussing findings emerging from the data. Chapter five was the concluding chapter where findings from the study were compared with literature within the Nordic context of the Saami indigenous people to provide an international perspective and shared learning for the study due to the nature of the NOSWEL programme. Also, implications of the findings to policy and practice were discussed. The chapter also provided directions for future research and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents review of pragmatic literature to reflect what has been researched on ‘marriage among minors by other scholars. The chapter aims at spinning the light on previous relevant scholarly work on the concept of child marriage from victims, and service providers perspective. Bryman (2012, p.102) argued that, literature review primarily takes a narrative review method because it sought to produce a thorough and critical overview of previous studies on the research topic. Even though this study is informed by my epistemological stance as a social worker and practice researcher. In searching the literature delineating this study, reviewed is done relating to what is already known within the focus of the study as well as why this study is essential. It is more about producing understanding of earlier works and how they correlate to the study area rather than accumulating knowledge from previous studies (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the review largely gives an impression of the topic areas that I explored through the study (Bryman, 2012).

Inserting the terms ‘Child (Early, forced) Marriage’ and ‘Support for victims or Survivors’ on the following search engines: Taylor & Francis Online, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ELEVIER, APA PsycInfo, DOAJ, Genesis-Women’s History, Gender and Women Studies Journal, have been searched for papers in English. The search showed a notable gap of empirical research in studies meeting the focus of this study. For instance, the result of the Google scholar search engine resulted in 3,780,000 globally for both gray and empirical literature. Most of the literature above are in the context of Asia and Africa. However, sorting for relevancy using keywords ‘Ghana’ and the subject matter of this study indicated 37,000 with only one (1) paper marked with ‘intervention’ from the perspective of Non-governmental professionals who works with married girls in Northern Ghana (Sarfo et al, 2020). Similar results appeared among other search engines like Taylor & Francis, JSTOR, ELEVIER among others but most notably, papers were mostly used quantitative approach to study ‘causes, prevalence, effect among others’. Although, extensive studies have been done on the issues of child marriage but only one paper met the focus, context and interest of this study. Altogether, the literature review showed an internationally gap of empirical research comparing Asia to Africa database on child marriage. It is, therefore, worth it to spin the light

in the context of Ghana on victims and service providers for them to share their perceptions and experiences on child marriage support.

2.1 Conceptualizing Child Marriage; Recent Trends

Child marriage over the decades has gained enormous research interest. Africa studies over the years has noted that, girls and women has been excessively affected by severely entrenched social norms, religious, and structural practices, which have contributed to significant gender inequalities in Africa (Moody 2020). Scholars argue that, Africa and Asia continents are patriarchal oriented right from individual household level to the governmental level (Shefer et al, 2010). Thus, discriminating against women and girls, especially the less privileged in rural communities from living to their fullest potential. Furthermore, these patriarchal systems in some communities in Africa, drive child marriage practices, (Moody 2020) argued. Also, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2020 report highlights these inequalities that continue to exist and violate women and girls' rights, affecting their health, education, economic, and even political participation.

Moody further claimed that, some African communities, the belief, and misconception that women and girls do not bring value to a family or society compared to men and boys has contributed to issues such as early childhood marriage (Moody 2020, p. 2). This also goes in line with findings of other scholars on child marriage practice, (Sarfo et al, 2019,2020; Alhassan, 2013, Akter et al 2021 and UNICEF, 2019), that, some cultural practices viewed girls as a source of wealth to the family in a form of dowry when married off young.

Child marriage practices in Ghana is highly rooted in religious, cultural beliefs and practices, teenage pregnancy, poverty, education, and gender disparities (de Groot et al. 2018; Ministry of Gender and Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP, 2016).

Karam (2015, p.30) argued and classified the causes of child marriage into three comprehensive categories.

- *The first is economic, where parents may marry off their young daughters in order to transfer the economic burden of looking after them to another family. In countries where the girls'*

families pay dowries as part of the marriage contract, there is an incentive to marry girls off early since the cost of the dowry increases with the age of the girl.

- *The second causal factor identified is structural, i.e. the lack of educational opportunities. Steinhaus et al. (2016) in a study on the causes of child marriage in Kenya and Zambia identified lack of education as one of the direct causes of child marriage. When there are limited opportunities for girls to proceed to higher education either because parents cannot afford to pay for their daughters' education or because girls do not get good enough grades to transition to the next level there is pressure on the girls to get married.*
- *The third factor identified is social, where cultural norms and practices and religious perspectives on when girls should marry are important causal factors. For example, in cultures where virginity prior to marriage is prized and pre-marital pregnancy is frowned upon, parents may marry off their daughters at a young age to avoid this.*

Child marriages occur because of poverty, causing girls to be used as objects to pay family debts or to make money. Furthermore, in some cultures in Ghana, (Sarfo et al 2019,2020; Moody, 2020) argued that, the practice is 'masked' as a way of 'protecting' a girl's virginity and family honor. Hence, the social concepts of 'virginity and family honor' are robbing girls dreams and potentials in rural communities in Ghana. Child marriage is a product and example of cultures undervaluing and discriminating against women and girls (Moody, 2020). Akter et al (2021) also argued that, the practice is a direct threat to the future of young girls. This is because, the practice 'robs' the girl child her future and ability to make good decisions that could affect their lives positively or negatively. Scholars noted that, the practice destabilizing the girl child education, and exposed them to violence and abuse which has a serious consequences for a country development; from the developmental point of view (Sarfo et al 2020, Akter et al 2021, UNICEF 2019). Akter et al (2021) further stated that, the practice of child marriage is not unique to any particular region or culture, rates are highest in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, usually in the most impoverished and most rural areas which Ghana is part of it.

2.2 The Ghanaian Construct of child marriage and the childhood

The perception of childhood in the Ghanaian context, has been constructed in several ways over the past three decades and these perceptions have noteworthy implications for this study and future discourses relating to child marriage and the girl-child. I will focus on the cultural construction of children as passive recipients of adult socialization (Bessell, 2011).

Childhood studies are generally examined in relations to socialization theory. These approaches view the child as ‘incomplete’ or biologically immature regulated by powerlessness and dependence (Lull, 1991). The perceptions of childhood as a “cessation and preparatory phase” makes it very challenging for children to express their opinion in matters that affect them (Qvortrup, 2017, p. 2). Comparing the present-day western view on children where the ‘child’ is thought to be dependent on adult socialization, in need of ‘protection’, the Ghanaian context, the parents/adult rather takes the responsibility to describe what is right or wrong for children, while children are expected to follow these guidelines and instructions provided by adults (Twum-Danso, 2009). This is because, the cultural practice does not allow children to have a say in any decisions define by the parent/adult (Twum-Danso, 2009a). Thus, Children are not expected to challenge or correct adults even if they make mistakes but to follow their directions. However, children who express their opinions or are assertive (self-confident) are normally considered rude or not trained well by their parents (Nukunya, 2006).

Putting this within the context of child marriage and the girl-child debate, parents usually turns to uphold ‘family honor’ in expend of their children rights, making it difficult to talk about child marriage and the violation of the girl-child rights in some cultures and religious context. The concept of ‘virginity and family honor’ refers to where the family intended to protect their name, fame against ‘shame’. The Ghanaian parent is with the view that, if their daughter gets pregnant before marriage, it brings the family shame and the society would call them ‘names’.

Research indicates that, Ghanaian children ‘trust’ their parents would always have their best interest at heart, therefore they have no need to have their views heard nor challenge them in matters affecting them (Twum-Danso, 2009). Unfortunately, this posed a serious challenge in the Ghanaian fight against child marriage. Since this cultural practices limits children rights to share their opinions and be involved in

decision making or even report child marriage cases to agencies for support, which is key in the UNCRC, the Ghanaian Children's Act and the Child and Family Welfare Policy.

2.3 My Position on the Use of the Term 'Survivor or Expertise'

Within the literature, different terms including 'service user' or 'client', victim are always used to describe or refer to a person who receives a service from a service provider. This study therefore draws from the limitations of Social Work profession in her use of the tag "service user" or 'client', victim and how this labels or identities is increasingly becoming problematic and weakening in its ability to reflect the true nature of the existing social connection, that is, the relationship between those who provide services and those who are the recipient of those services (McLaughlin 2009; Hartop, N. Barnard, A. & Wilkinson, M. 2017).

Child marriage 'survivor' or 'expertise' is a widely accepted terms in academic and in the social work literature (McGrath P., and Holewa. H, 2012). However, there is limited research exploring the meaning of the terms 'expertise', 'survivor' in scientific study for the very persons to which the term is applied. A survivor, therefore, refers to a person regarded as resilient or courageous enough to be able to overcome hardship, or misfortune (McGrath P., and Holewa. H, 2012). Dear (2004, p. 206–207) gives a description of who an "expertise" is, 'An expert . . . is a person who is reckoned to be likely to be experienced in a subject matters '

McLaughlin (2009), Hartop and Wilkinson, (2017) explains the essence of 'labels' in transcending categories, especially within social work as these could create more and intensify existing power imbalances in research and practice. Thus, 'experts or survivor by experience' is a natural reclassification of the service user–social worker relationship, because, unlike '*service user*', '*client*', before it, claims a specialist knowledge base rooted in an individual's experience in being. McLaughlin (2009, p. 1111) argue that, the practitioners working with an expert or survivor by experience is suggestive of a relationship of equals whereby one tacit knowledge has been accrued through their "*training and practice and the other through their lived experience*".

This study would employ these terms throughout the study to reflect on the epistemological and ontological position of the study design-practice research. This would help the researcher to minimize the effects of the tag "service user" or 'client', victims and how this categories could weaken the

researcher and stakeholders relationship and abilities to reflect on the ‘true’ nature of the phenomenon under study-child marriage (McLaughlin 2009). Reflecting on the above, it appears that using the term service user, client or victims could weak the study goal, as it might create and intensify power-powerless dichotomy of the stakeholders , co-players of the study and the researcher. However, I use the term ‘survivors, stakeholders or expertise’ interchangeably in this study to minimize the impact these categories or naming could have on the research process as it has been well described in the literature and the term is supported by clinical and gender studies. I will, therefore, use these terms as part of the discussion and analysis of the study findings.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approaches used to explore the study topic. The first half of the chapter highlighted the philosophical paradigms, research context and the research design suitable to ‘answer’ the study questions. Thereafter, I discussed the method of data collection, and sampling technique. In the second half of this chapter, I examined the data analytical framework, and ethical considerations of the study.

3.1 Qualitative Research and Philosophy of Science

A qualitative practice research design guided the investigation into the phenomenon of child marriage. According to Silverman (2001, p.25), using qualitative methodology is much more appropriate for exploring people's experiences, perceptions, or everyday actions - Considering that my research question is concerned with exploring victims', social workers and police officers 'perceptions and experiences' on child marriage support. A quantitative approach will not be appropriate for achieving this goal. As a result, it would be less appropriate than a data-driven or practitioner- and service-user-driven qualitative study (Bryman, 2016; Uggerhøj, 2014).

3.2 Philosophical Paradigm of the Study

The social constructivist grounded theoretical stance and reflexive thematic analysis inspired by intersectionality lenses were used in the study. The theory is most commonly used in research when little is known about the phenomenon under investigation and the goal is to develop a theory or model that demonstrates how existing factors intersect to create the stakeholders' experiences. To the best of my knowledge, based on a review of the literature, there is no study in the country that involves victims, social workers, and police officers who are frontline workers offering support to victims. Because constructivist grounded theory is used to investigate issues about which little is known, researchers do not begin their studies with theoretical assumptions, but rather their theories and ideas are based on data, and they are data driven (Charmaz, 2014). Inductive paradigm is based on developing patterns, meanings, and multiple interpretations from data (Charmaz, 20014). A key component of constructivist grounded

theory is the development of a theory or model; accordingly, a model was developed based on the experiences of victims of this study.

I iteratively compared the study findings to the reviewed literature (see chapter 2) and existing theories that fit well with the data. Scholars argued that the grounded theoretical approach also includes constant comparative analysis, known as the Constant Comparative Method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This involves the researcher moving in and out of the data analysis and discussion process. As a result, it enables me to comprehend and appreciate the concept of intersectionality, which describes how various elements interact to produce stakeholders' perceptions and experiences on child marriage. Creswell (2014) also contends that this constructivist research style is based on the fact that stakeholders' experiences have subjective meanings. There are multiple meanings, and I placed premium on these meanings. Open-ended questions were used to explore stakeholders' subjective meanings, perceptions, and interpretations. The hypothesis that good research is either faithful to theory or loyal to the data. I positioned that, data (stakeholders perceptions and experiences on the phenomenon) are established, and existing theories, concepts that fit well with the findings were compared and adapted *-inductive iteration grounded theory research*.

3.3 Epistemological and Ontological Paradigm of the Study

According to Heinrich (2002), the profession of social work have evolved into a stage where the traditional method of knowledge production to informed practice is losing its grip, thus, challenged with increased demand to measure impact. Uggerhøj (2011) points out that, the epistemological position of practice research is to create knowledge and understanding from practitioners, services users' lens and not only from the researcher lens. Unlike the traditional approach to research, which directly linked to the top-down, where research is carried out exclusively by researchers and social workers, service users are consumers of the findings. In practice research, Uggerhøj indicated that, the approach adopts the bottom-up epistemological stances, where the research process cannot be exclusively designed, conducted and findings presented by researcher to practitioners, and service users as consumers (Uggerhøj, 2011). Accordingly, Flyvbjerg put emphasis on it that, no one is knowledgeable enough or wise enough to give complete answers to social phenomenon 'child marriage' confronting social work practice (Flyvbjerg 2001, p.61).

According to Creswell (2014), ontology as a philosophy of science refers to the “nature of reality”. My ontological position for exploring this study, was between a social constructionist and interactionist. Here, I and the co-players (stakeholders) constructed the understanding of the phenomenon of child marriage from the data collected through an in-depth semi-structure interviews. Constructionism and interactionism posit that, social realities of a phenomena are constructed from the interactions between stakeholders rather than child marriage ‘out there’, that is outside of those involved in its construction (Bryman, 2012). For instance, instead of only focusing on what support is available to victims of child marriage, the study focused on how victims, social workers and police officers perceived and experience support, making it more subjective. Support could be categorized as a phenomenon ‘out there’ however the ‘experiences and perceptions of child marriage support’ depicts the lived reality of stakeholders. Therefore, understanding victims experiences and perceptions on support was best produced through the meanings they attached to those experiences, expressed in their interactions with the researcher.

Therefore, the study took a ‘participatory’ practice research epistemology and ontology position in which the real state of ‘support’ for victims of child marriage and its knowledge production is understood and created from the lens of the stakeholders through collaborations/negotiations (Uggerhøj, 2014).

3.4 Research Context

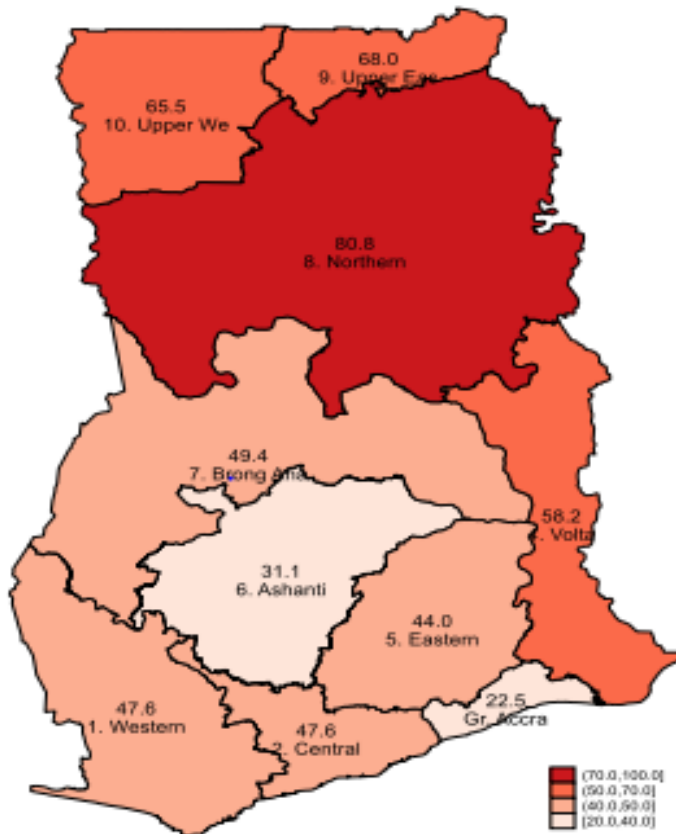
This research was conducted at the Northern Ghana which politically characterized as state neglected territories throughout history with unreliable interventions (Songsore and Denkabe 1995). Northern Ghana (was three regions) but now divided into six northernmost administrative regions: the Northern, North East, Oti, Savannah, Upper East and Upper West region. Ghana statistical service (GSS-2010) indicated that, the then three regions have the following gender population statistics.

Region	Female	Male
Upper East	540,140	506,405
Upper West	360,928	341,182
Northern	1,249,574	1,229,887

Source: Ghana Statistical Service (PHC-2010)

People at these regions are predominantly farmers. They grow sorghum, rice, maize, millet, yam, potatoes, groundnuts, and other subsistence crops to feed their family, normally not on large scale

farming. They have only one raining season which last for 4 months and the remaining months are dry season. Traditional religious beliefs, and culture, is highly treasured among the peoples there and they are patriarchal oriented. However, in some of the communities, especially the upper west and northern region where child marriage is prevalence, Islamic religion has deeply rooted there. There is high premium on virginity and bridewealth on young girls.



Source: MPI Report 2020

According to the Ghana Multidimensional poverty regional index (MPI-2020), these territories are the poorest in Ghana, with many blaming the situation on governments policies, and harsh environmental conditions. As seen on the figure, Northern region is 80.8%, meaning if you meet every 10 people, 8 are poor. Upper east region represents 68% and Upper west region 65.5%, meaning 6 people are poor respectively. I recruited stakeholders from these areas to be part of the study, using practice research design.

3.5 Practice Research Design

As stated above, the study drawn on practice research design as the methodological strategy to respond to the research questions. Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008) argued that, if researchers want to create scientific knowledge, precisely empirical data, to influence practitioners and policy makers action, then we have to focus on the contexts where the processes of generating knowledge for action really take shape, that is, on the settings where practice occur. Similarly, Gubrium and Holstein (1997, p.19) suggested that, the practice researcher goal is to richly look for thick description of realities surrounding the phenomenon without unduly distorting the places where it occurs. Hence, the need for practice research where various actors; the researcher, and stakeholders have a voice in the research process without anyone claiming final authority (Uggerhøj, 2014).

3.5.1 Theories of the Design

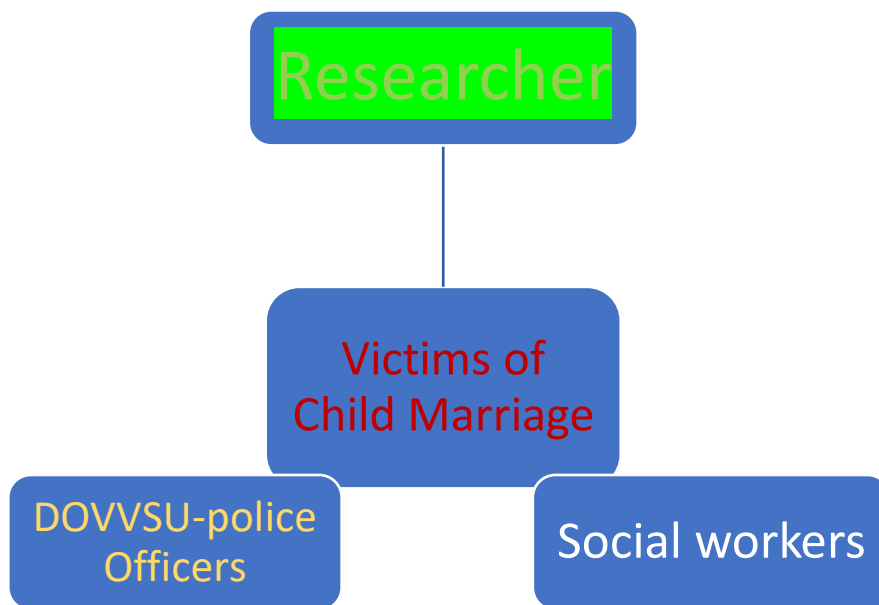
The study design explored and reflected on the theoretical viewpoint of mode 2 knowledge production and Science of the concrete.

Firstly, science of the concrete emphasized on bottom-up knowledge production where the researcher and stakeholders in the research process have a level of influence in the research. Uggerhøj (2012, p. 51) identifies this theoretical concept in what Flyvbjerg describes as a “natural connection” to practice research. The study drawn on this theory, where knowledge created from the study was purely based on the experiences of selected stakeholders and not guided by my preconceived notions and reflections on the research questions. To reach this bottom-up knowledge creation method, the study was conducted closely to the phenomenon-*child marriage* and the selected stakeholders and the collaborations continued through data collection, coding, analysis, and presentation of findings with specified duties (Uggerhøj, 2014). Here, democratic dialogue was a fundamental element of this theoretical viewpoint as the researcher collaborate in exchanging of ideas and reflections on the research with the practitioners, service users without anyone one of us claiming final authority (Julkunen, 2011). This dialogue is very necessary, because it helps the researcher to identify and appreciate the variations in interest between the selected stakeholders (Uggerhøj, 2014).

Secondly, mode 2 knowledge production is the second theoretical viewpoint connected to this design. This is because practice research seeks to produce knowledge that can be used to improve practice.

Kristiansson (2006; p.18) refers to this theory as an interaction between research stakeholders, each one of them have different interests and contributes a variety of competences and attitudes. It is a collaborative oriented where a phenomenon-*child marriage* is study with specified duties (Kristiansson, 2006). From the stakeholders experiences, knowledge from this study can help policy makers, NGO's to understand the interlocking elements producing the phenomenon. Drawing on this perspective, service users, practitioners who are mostly consumers of research, as in traditional research, have a voice of influence in the research process and findings (Nowotny et al., 2001). Hence, the selected stakeholders had an active roles in the research process, from beginning to the end. Having said this, in the next sub-section, I will specify the stakeholders, their responsibilities, level of involvement and collaborations or negotiations that took placed

3.6 Sample of Stakeholders, Roles, Collaborations, and Negotiations



From the above diagram, the stakeholders for the study are the researcher (me), victims of child marriage (survivors), social workers and the DOVVSU police officers.

The study sample size was fourteen (14) recruited through a purposive sampling technique. The stakeholders were purposely selected following some eligibility criteria: specifically, 4 social workers, 2 police officers and 8 victims who are either in it or escape child marriage in northern Ghana. However,

persons who does not falls within the above category were exempted from the study. To safeguard their identities, I assigned them pseudonyms and code names (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). The choice of this sampling technique was determined by the stakeholders' relevance to the research questions (Anderson et al., 2017), and their interest in participating (Uggerhøj, 2017). Furthermore, using this technique was to find a fairly homogeneous sample of child marriage stakeholders (victims, social workers ,and police).

3.6.1 Roles, Negotiations, and collaborations

Per the design, my core role as the researcher was to ensure that, the right methodological tools, and theories are used to carried out the study. Beresford argued that, briefing with stakeholders are fundamental for a successful research process (Beresford, 2002). This briefing was done individually with each stakeholder to ensure quality of their contributions to the research questions. Additionally, the researcher introduced the “*co-players*” to basis data coding, analysis, as part of the involvement in the preliminary stages of analyzing the transcribed data. The detailed theoretical and conceptual analysis was done by the researcher with guidance from the thesis supervisor. The Stakeholders on the other hand, were categorized into two: (10) *informants* and (04) *co-players or researchers*. Despite having already tabled on a research question, the *co-players* were involved in reflecting on what question could be included in the interview guide, how those questions could be posed to gather relevant (Beresford, 2002). The *co-players (especially the victims)* had similar knowledge as persons who are in it or at risk of child marriage practices, consequently, involving them in the analysis of those experiences was interesting and laid the groundwork for interesting research data.

Uggerhøj argued that, extensive dialogue and communication is crucial in carrying out a participatory practice research (Uggerhøj, 2011). Scientific knowledge on one hand and experience-based knowledge on the other, adapted into an integrated process, were two sides of the same coin. The semi-structured form of interview allowed the research to be “interrupted” by bits of reality which could trigger further reflection and (re)problematization. Findings were presented to the “*stakeholders*” for their appreciation. This was to make sure that the stakeholders further take ownership of their views and contributions to the study process. The Stakeholders were therefore, on Andersen’s 5th level of involvement as “*self-determined, partly actors and co-payers*” to this research. This is because their experiences and perceptions are critical, but I did not involve them further to 6th level because of interest, lack of

theoretical knowledge as well as limited time to explore the study. I, therefore, drawn on the practice experiences of the stakeholders of the study to explore the social phenomena of child marriage.

3.7 Semi-Structured WhatsApp Call interviews

All the interviews were conducted using semi-structured WhatsApp call interviews. Bryman (2012) refers to semi-structured interviews as the interviewer not limiting the frame of questions but asking a series of open questions about specific issues as they emerged. The semi-structured interviews used made this study flexible and resonates with the constructivist grounded theory. The study initially intended to conduct face to face interviews with stakeholders in Ghana. However, that was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant social distancing globally. The WhatsApp call interviews, therefore, served as a credible alternative to avoid any gaps occasioned by the COVID-19 for this research. Using the WhatsApp call interview was beneficial because it removed nervousness and shyness from stakeholders (especially the victims) that might have been the case in a face to face interview, considering that the research topic is a sensitive one and the researcher being an opposite gender. The interview instrument was structured by the researcher and presented to the co-players for their inputs (Veseth et al., 2017). This is to make ensure that, the stakeholders again, have a good level of control over the research methodology. The data was collected with the help of the social workers in practice, and thus, enable them to be brought to bear their experiences which was reflected in the interview questions. (See appendix 1) .Consequently, the interviews took approximately 2hour with breaks and was recorded using a voice recording device for each stakeholder.

3.8 Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) argued that thematic analysis as a data analytical tool involves “identifying, analyzing and reporting themes”, in line with the research topic. My choice of thematic analysis was inspired due its flexibility by not essentially depending on theory, rather, it can be deployed in different theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). Moreover, since my objective was to explore the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders on support for victims of child marriage in Ghana, it well-matched from the lenses of intersectionality stance – which focuses on how factors interwoven to creates stakeholders’ experiences, and realities.

After transcribing the data, I immersed myself into the data. Immersion here, I meant that , I read the data severally and thoroughly and became familiar with-it content. As I read the data, I made some notes of shared patterns seen in the data set. After getting holds on the data, I uploaded it into the Nvivo software for coding to begin. Using Nvivo, I was able to highlight and classify common interlocking patterns into nodes. The data analysis was more inductive than theoretical because the coding of data was not done to be fitted into preconceived themes, rather, the themes emerged from the data, in a bottom-up approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is not to infer that the data analysis was done in a theoretical or epistemological vacuum (ibid.). The literature review, constructivist grounded theory and analytic framework largely informed what angles and patterns to focus on in the analysis.

The study found seven (7) main themes and twenty (20) interlocking sub-themes that was generated. The analysis reflected the perceptions and experiences of the victims on support available, social workers, and DOVVSU official perceptions and experiences of support for victims and the challenges involved in providing such support to victims. From the analysis, five (5) of the themes – Deception, pervasively cultural and traditional hierarchies, support available, systemic challenges, interferences were more semantic interlocking themes and two (2) theme – escape patterns and victims as survivors, was a latent theme. Most of the themes are semantic themes because the study sought to report the explicit meanings of victims and service providers experiences and perceptions of support for victims of child marriage, consequently, the data to a large extent is represented in the wording of the themes. The latent theme on the other hand characterizes the conceptualizations and ideologies underpinning the meanings of victims’ perceptions and experiences of child marriage support, thus, I construed the stakeholders’ meanings within a bigger concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.8.1 Analytical Framework

The thesis’ analytical framework was inspired by ‘intersectionality’ a praxis grounded in critical race theory by Kimberle Crenshaw. She termed this analytical social construct as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Scholars argued that, intersectionality is a qualitative analytic framework developed in the late 20th century that identifies how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalized -*victims of child marriage* in society (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Wash, 2009). Thus, when child marriage is viewed through the lenses of gender, class, ability , it enables the researcher to ask hard

questions about social inequalities and oppression for the girl-child. This help the researcher to make sense of multiply intersecting oppressions.

Yuval-Davis (2006) stated that, intersectional analysis enables social workers and researchers to enter the experience of victims of child marriage with marginalized and stigmatized identities who experiences are rooted in oppression and discrimination. This is because, it aided the researcher to identify factors that interlock and kept the girl-child in a state of vulnerability. Intersectionality aligns very well with social work practice values and practice research because it is concerned with power, oppression, social justice, and emancipatory practice (Hancock 2016). According to Walby (2012), social work researchers can engage with intersectionality to interrogate the structural causes of child marriage and issues that arises for victims and girls who are at risk of the practice. I, therefore, deployed this analytical strategy to examine how societal norms, culture, religious beliefs intersect to perpetuate child marriage in the context of stakeholders experiences on child marriage support.

3.9 Ethical considerations

As indicated in Chapter one (1), child marriage is a sensitive global social problem. Thus, requiring high ethical standards to explore the phenomenon. To satisfy the ethical considerations, this study drew from the ethical research principles in Bryman (2016) and Creswell (2014) and the global social work ethical principles. These ethical issues are highly addressed (see appendix 3).

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

The study presents demographic characteristics of stakeholders, findings, interpretations, and discussions in this chapter, all through the lens of intersectionality. The study was motivated by three research questions: to explore victims' and service providers' perceptions and experiences on support, to determine what support is available to victims, and to learn about the difficulties involved in providing such support. Views from victims and service providers were conceptualized into themes and explored using the theoretical structure of intersectionality, in line with constructivist grounded theory and the ontological position of this practice study design. The study discovered seven (7) major themes and twenty (20) interlocking sub-themes that produce the phenomena of child marriage. In an inductive iterative process, the findings are compared to existing literature, models, and theories. The study also included the researcher's observations and thoughts during the data collection process.

4.1 Socio-demographic information of stakeholders

The study involved fourteen (14) research stakeholders comprises Eight victims and six (6) service providers (four social workers, and two police officers). All the eight (8) Victims voluntarily joined the study and share their experiences on the subject under study. With the exception of three victims who dropped out of school due to the practice, all the other five victims; two graduated from high school, and three are in school. There were few instances where four of the victims did not have good command of the English language- SW1 volunteered to translate and interpretate for the researcher. I perceived that, all the four victims wanted to reveal certain hidden issues, but language barrier and the SW1 made it challenging considering the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under study. The four other victims with their level of education, they were able to have good command of the English language to have participated in the interviews(Thus, interviewed them directly).

As Table 2 indicates, all the four social workers have background education in social work and other related programmes. Three are caseworkers providing support for victims at the department of social welfare and community development. Apart from SW2, a leader of an NGO providing services for

victims. There is a big difference with regards to the work experience of the social workers. While, SW1,2,4 had 3-6 years of experience, SW4 had much experience in the practice, 18 years and was the head of the department. As Table 3 indicates, all the two police officers have a background education and a much working experience at the DOVVSU unit of the Ghana police service. This could help in analyzing the study findings from the perspectives of both the victims, and service providers.

Table 1: Demographic features of victims

Participants	Sex	Age	Education	Current situation
V1	Female	24 years	High school graduate	Escape with a child
V2	Female	20 years	High school graduate	Still in the marriage
V3	Female	17 years	Senior High school	Escape with pregnancy
V4	Female	16 years	Junior High School	Escape with pregnancy
V5	Female	26	Drop out from school	Escape with three children
V6	Female	21	Drop out from school	Escape with a child
V7	Female	18	Drop out from school	Escape with a child
V8	Female	17	High school	Escape with a child

Table 2: Demographic features of social workers

Participants	Sex	Age	Education	Years of experience
SW1	Female	28	Social work	3years
SW2	Female	34	Business Administration	4years
SW3	Male	37	Planning	6 years
SW4	Male	47	MPhil	18years

Table 3: Demographic features of Police officers

Participants	Sex	Age	Years of Experience
P1	Male	55years	30 years
P2	Male	47years	18 years

4.2 Perceptions and experiences of victims and service providers on Child Marriage

The aim of the first research question was to map the experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders. Findings from the stakeholders reported four main themes in response to this research question: Deception, ‘pervasively’ cultural and traditional hierarchies, Escaping patterns, and victims as survivors. However, only the first three themes would be reported here and victims as survivors would be reported in the last section of the chapter as unreported but relevance. This section starts with presenting the findings themes and in cooperate existing literature to discussed them iteratively.

4.2.1 Deception

Responses from stakeholders showed that,- victims are usually deceived to perceive the practice as protective against economic conditions like poverty. Thus, victims sometimes naively adhered to parental and societal pressure. One of the victims had this to say:

‘they (parents) gave me out for marriage. They didn’t consider that, I am not matured,- like I said, the other time, I wasn’t mature enough to know the consequences [] I went in ‘naively’,. Happy, Even the fact that, my ‘class teacher’ wants me [] I was happy. So, I can say that, poverty is the cause of it in my situation’ (V1)

Similarly, when asked about what led them into child marriage, a victim indicated that:

‘I come from a poor home, my parents couldn’t provide for my needs and my parents have nine children because , my parents knew they couldn’t take care of our education and this ‘man’ came out to say that...he would take care of me... my parents saw it as an advantage, they saw it as an opportunity for them, as in, someone taking their financial burden’ (V6)

It was observed that, victims were deceived to entered into the marriage contract without having pre-knowledge about the consequences the practice could have on them. Rather, the girl-child view early marriage as an avenues of bettering their lives by helping reduce the family (parents) burden and themselves economically (Knox, 2017). Reflecting on the above, one might suggest that, victims initial knowledge regarding marriage, was perceived as an outlet where their dreams and aspirations could be nurtured.

The findings above is in line with the Tanzania study which indicated that, in some Africa cultural contexts, parents and girls view child marriage as a strategy of risk-reduction or burden lifting rather than a harmful behavior (Stark, 2018, 2017 and Knox, 2017). For instance, in harsh economic conditions, per the context of this current study, family interests may take precedence over the girl child interest. In such situations, literature suggested that, the girl-child may see marrying early as a means of supporting her family or maybe even herself (Archambault, 2011, Sarfo et al, 2019, 2020 and Knox, 2017). This might explain why some of the victims indicated that, they went into the marriage because, they are from a large and poor family background and that, their parents could not provide for their socio-economic needs. While previous studies on child marriage suggested that, poverty causes parents to push the girl-child to marry early (Abdallah, 2013; Sarfo et al, 2019, 2020; Moody, 2020; Akter, 2021), the situation was considered rare in this study. Findings showed that, even without any parental interferences, poverty limited the girl-child choices and prompt them to marry earlier than otherwise preferable. It was noted during the data collections that, most of the girls accepted to marry willingly without parental force. As said by one of the stakeholders that:

My parents were not helping me in my schooling, so I normally go to school with an empty stomach without money to buy food [] And there was this man who always give me material gifts including money. I had sex with him, and it led me into the practice early (V5)

According to the stakeholders they went into the marriage with an intention that, the ‘men’ would provide for them. Thus, safe from severe economic conditions. This might suggest that, harsh economic conditions could be the propelling factors robbing the girl-child future and as well a driving force of child marriage practices in rural communities in Ghana. In with this, the Service providers (social workers and police officers) views were sought to know how they perceived girls who are victims of child marriage. Responses from stakeholders held similar views that, victims of child marriage are children who has been denied certain rights and privileges. This is what one social worker had to say:

Yeah.... My perceptions about children who are victims of child marriage, I see them as people who are being denied of certain rights and privileges. Because a child is entitled to her rights, and one of her right is, her right to education. Then the child also has the right to marriage [....] she has the right to decide whom and when to married. Because, sometimes, the man, who married the child, excuse me to say maybe an illiterate who doesn't, who doesn't appreciate the importance of education, and when

they marry such children, they will never allow them to go to school' and that, eventually, closes down their future dreams of becoming what they want to. So, the department see victims of child marriage as people who has been denied certain rights and privileges' (SW3)

Edmeades and Hayes (2016), and Warner (2013) argued that, denial of the girl-child rights is situated in the context where, the practice of child marriage prematurely ends the girl-child childhood and imposes adult roles and responsibilities before the girl-child is physically, emotionally, and psychologically matured. A study by Engebretsen and Kabore (2011) found that, the practice of child marriage is deeply connected with an end to girls' formal education. Putting the literature in the context of this study, one may suggest that, the practice of child marriage reinforces gender inequality and the cycle of poverty. This is because, the girl-child would be unable to engage in skilled or professional employment, becomes economically dependent on her male counterpart (her husband), deprives of both social and economic mobility and is often unable to have a say or negotiate in household decisions.

Harper et al (2014) study found that, a denial of education means that, the girl-child would be unable to have access to important and meaningful information that has positive effects on her sexual and reproductive health, her rights more generally, as well as information that may allow her to have economic stability. In line with this, Edmeades and Hayes (2016) claimed that, a lack of employment means that, the victims are more likely to remain in poverty, the children are less likely to be educated. Hence, lack of economic independence might expose the victim of child marriage to be extremely vulnerable to economic shocks. A study by Brown (2012) also indicated that, poverty interlocking with other elements prominently like a lack of education on the girl-child's part, means that her children and herself are more likely to be malnourished, and suffer from preventable disease and infection. One of the victims of the study had this to say:

Hmmm, ok...the thing is that, hmmmm... 15 sec. how should I put it [...] When I was pregnant, you know... I was writing school exams, I moved in to stay with him, That is when the actual problem started, he was a professional teacher, he was my teacher in my primary school., and hmmmm, despite him being a teacher it wasn't easy... him feeding us or him feeding me... you can image... a pregnant woman taking GHS 1.00 a day for food.. when he is going to work, he would give me this money... and in the evening, when he comes, he gives me two cedis GHS 2.00 to buy food stuffs to cook for us to eat. It was just like that... I was pregnant and I wasn't eating well. one day... I went to the hospital and the

nurse said, I was malnourished.... I don't want to use the word... 'malnourished' but they said, I needed blood transfusion (V4).

According to the UNFPA (2012, p.6 and p. 12) child marriage restricts the girl-child “a critical period for growth, learning, identity formation and experimentation” and “denies girls the opportunity to fully develop their potential as healthy, productive and empowered citizens”. The next section discusses cultural and societal hierarchies that intersect with deception and other factors to keep the victims and girls at risk in a state of vulnerability.

4.2.2 Pervasively cultural and traditional hierarchies

Stakeholders perceived the Ghanaian society as ‘pervasively’ rooted with cultural and traditional norms that interlocked with other elements like poverty, interferences, religious practices to creates gender disparities. The pervasiveness of societal hierarchies in this context, therefore, refers to a system of control, based on traditions. That is norms, values and beliefs which interwoven with other factors to produces ‘social exclusion, or ‘otherness’ for the victims and girls at risk of child marriage. One of the police officers had this to say in respect to how society exclude the married girls:

Africa here, especially in Ghana, we have certain perceptions, the moment the elderly people comes in a situation[.....]they start pointing fingers on that child, referring to the child as deviance to ‘justify their actions’. The moment that happen, even a third party is afraid to ‘accept her into the society’. Sometimes, the society also frowns upon such girls thinking that, they are bad or delinquent girls, but it is not like that, they don't have the time to listen and understand the child’ (P1)

According to the stakeholders, pervasive cultural and traditional hierarchies are one of the main themes mesh with other sub-themes like family honor, societal exclusion, interferences, reintegration, and powerlessness among the married girls. Family honor in this study refers to an abstract belief of respectability that affects the social standing of a group of related people, this includes aspects of lifestyle such as family social status, religion, customs, marriage among others. A study by Nukunya (2006) indicated that, family honor is perceived as a significant attribute in a society. Thus, victims and members of the family must fulfill these ‘expectations’ of the family and society in order to be accepted. Responses from the victims, social workers and the police officers indicated that, families and society prioritize

‘family honor and relations’ over the rights and dreams of the girl-child. One of the stakeholders shared experiences that:

I did not have money to buy clothes or food for my child[...]. Sometimes I have no other option than, to run home but because my parents don't want me to come home, even if, I complain to them regarding the abuses they would rather give me food stuffs and push me to go back to the man's house [...] Because they didn't want people to insult them[...] they don't want me to come back home as a divorcee (V3)

A study by Nukunya,(2006) showed that, if a member of the family fails to adhere to the customs, norms, family image, that person would be excluded from the family. Social exclusion in this context is associated with the disapproval of or discrimination attributed to victims who goes contrarily against the family honor. Goffman differentiates among three types of societal exclusions (i) exclusion associated with mental illness; (ii) exclusion associated with physical deformation; and (iii) exclusion attached to labeling with a particular value, culture, religious belief, ideology among others (Goffman, 1963). He further argued that societal exclusions and names callings is “*an attribute that is deeply discrediting*” and which reduces the girl-child to a more vulnerable position (like- child marriage) “*from a whole and normal person to a tainted, discounted one*” (Goffman, 1963, p.3). Labelling, stereotyping, discriminating, and othering intersect to produce child marriage.

Findings corroborates with Goffman third typology of societal exclusion. Thus, the sum of this direct or indirect societal exclusion locks the victims into a ‘web’ of vulnerability. It was observed during the data collection that, victims who are assertive and wants to withdraw or runs away from the abusive child marriage are labeled by society as ‘deviants’ rather than being seen as persons faced with problems. A stakeholder has this to shared:

Oh, one other problem is, because of the relationship existing between the girl-child parents and the man, if the man maltreat the girl or if there is any other abuse cases And the girl complains to her parents, they normally don't listen or take her serious, rather push her back to the same situation, 'thinking the man is right (P1)

The study findings are also resonating with Simone de Beauvoir writings in the early 1950's on how society excluded or categorized girls and women as others. She argues that patriarchal society constructs

girls and Women as the Other of Men. Masculinity is therefore socially constructed as the universal norm by which social philosophies, laws about humanity are defined, discussed, and enacted against (ibid). Her ideas are relevant to the study findings, analysis, and discussion on stakeholders perceptions and experiences on child marriage. Similarly, Bauman (1991) also indicates that, the concept of societal exclusion and otherness is central to how societies establish identity categories (boxes) to produce child marriage. His arguments also align with Simone de Beauvoir notion of otherness in gender. He claims that identities are set up as dichotomies or contradictions: *'Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of the norm, deviance the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, the enemy the other of a friend'* (Bauman 1991, p. 8).

Also, other participants explained how they perceived and experience child marriage in rural Ghana. She noted that:

like I said, people are going through a lot... the society that we are living in now.... Especially Muslims they believe that, ulmmmmmm...when you are growing up----there is a particular age that you reach you should get married---they say that... when you grow pass that age... and you are still living with your parents ... is not considered right...that... angels or other... would not come to your house for a visit... they wouldn't visit your home again... and they would be cursing your parents...so sometimes, people get married at a younger age and they don't consider it to be a problem... they don't see it as a problem (V5)

Another victim shared her experience when she runs to her mother for comfort. she indicated that:

As for my mom, she will feel pain inside, but she wouldn't show it... She always makes it feel like, it is normal and if you get married ... you would suffer in the marriage and give birth, your child would prosper. The children would become successful but when you go into marriage... and you don't the children would not be successful. So, anytime, I report abuses cases to her... she would tell me that, marriage is like that,,, she said, that, they themselves are suffering in it but still they are there, so I should also endured the abuses (V3)

This findings resonate with existing literature on child marriage studies (e.g. Moody 2020; African Union, 2015; UNICEF, 2019; Akter et al 2021). This suggest that, victims of child marriage are affected

with deeply rooted cultural and traditional norms, religious beliefs, and structural practices, interlocking with each other and drives the phenomenon of child marriage. According to the social workers and the police officers, the factors interfere with support provision and makes their efforts to fight child marriage ineffective in most cases. Evident on the above analysis would be discussed under the challenges section of service providers.

The study by Moody (2020) found that Africa and Asia continents are patriarchal oriented. Thus, discriminating against women and girls, especially the less privileged in rural communities from living to their fullest potential. Moody also argued that, these patriarchal systems in some communities in Africa, drive child marriage practices (ibid). Similar to this findings, Sarfo et al (2019,2020) claimed that, such practices viewed girls as a source of wealth or honor to the family. Perhaps, this explain why, the service providers (the social workers and the police officers) indicated that, the men take advantage of the girls and abuse them in the marriage. One of the police officers share his thought and indicated that:

'You know everybody who is a child doesn't have a mature mind. OK, so, when they go into marriage sometimes, because of their 'naive' behavior, the men take 'advantage' of them, maltreat them and they don't have enough freedom' (P1)

According to the victims, domestic violence and emotional abuses are rampant every day. Findings showed that, the men do not respect the girls and even if they are doing something wrong, the girls cannot correct or advise them. One of the victims also indicated that:

He humiliates me in front of people, I tried to advise him to stop but he wasn't listening to me. Most people around him are afraid of him as well as myself (V2)

This resonate with a study by Tristam (2019) which reported, child marriage is a product of cultures and religious practices undervaluing and discriminating against women and girls. Similar studies by Akter et al (2021) and Mahato (2016) found that, the practice is a direct threat to the future of young girls. The current study found that, the practice 'robs' the girl-child of her future and her ability to make good decisions that might affect her live positively.

Findings from the Social workers indicated that, the pervasive nature of culture and traditions make it 'very dicey,'-difficult for them to offer support for victims of child marriage in most cases. The social workers felt that, victims are not offered the needed support. One of the social workers had this to say:

'These child marriage issue is very dicey to handle in Ghana, very difficult.. Yes, you just have it documented in the books that, you have rescued the girl and stop the child marriage. That, you have talk with the family and reintegrate the girl-child back to the family. And honestly, how effective is this? And how comfortable would that girl be at the family? You have stopped the child marriage alright, but you have not work on the victim effectively enough.'(SW4)

Similarly, another social worker also revealed that, it takes bravery to handle child marriage cases in Ghana. The social worker had this to say:

'Yes, they (informants-reporting cases) get attacked every day, even we the social workers, we get attacked too. Even though the mandate is there to operate but if you are a coward you can't handle or manage child marriage cases in Ghana' (SW2).

This pervasively cultural and traditional hierarchies could explain why, the victims are excluded from the mainstream of society and left them in the state of hopelessness without getting support from the social workers and the police unit. According to the victims, the practice destabilizes their education, potentials and exposed them to violence and abuse. Putting the current findings within the context of the literature, the study showed that, parents indorse family interest in expense of the girl-child rights or interest, making it difficult to talk about child marriage and the violation of rights. Unfortunately, this posed a serious threat in the Ghanaian fight against child marriage. Social workers at the department of social welfare and the police officers at the domestic violence and victims support unit (DOVVSU) associate this to low reporting of child marriage cases. This what the social workers has to say:

'Yes, we are looking at the security side of it, informants are afraid to report child marriage cases because, they fear to be attacked and I am saying, even we the social workers, who are managing such cases, it needs bravery to handle such cases'(SW2).

Reflecting on the data in light of existing theories, it is clear that pervasive cultural and traditional hierarchies limit girl-child rights to share their opinions, participate in decision-making, and even report cases to agencies for support, as outlined in the UNCRC, the Ghanaian Children's Act, the National

Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage. The low reporting of child marriage cases raises the question of girls' possibilities of escaping abusive child marriages that deprive them of their future.

4.2.3 Mapping Escaping patterns

Findings from the stakeholders indicated 'escaping strategies' as one of the main themes in response to the research question. Escaping pattern in this context refers to a planned means of escape or a way out of a difficult situation-child marriage. Responses from the victims indicated that, escaping from the practice is very difficult considering the pervasive cultural and traditional hierarchies intersecting with other factors like poverty. One of the victims that escape from the marriage had this to say concerning it.

'I struggle a lot in the marriage, abuses every day, my parents didn't want me to come home, because they do not want society to insult them, they don't want me to come back home as a divorcee (V2)

Mapping victims escaping patterns corroborate Nathanson's (1992) and (Tomkins, 1963) compass of shame model. The current study showed that, victims tried to use several means to escape from the abusive relationship-child marriage, but societal and cultural factors impeded such efforts. A positive interpretation of shaming event-child marriage, according to Elison and Pulos (2006, p.222), is to turn to its source and determine whether or not one cares to address it. In the context of this study, most of the stakeholders made an attempt to escape the practice, with the exception of the one who is still in the marriage. Findings from the victims experiences showed that, they always look for a means of escape. Thus, they run to their parental homes many times, but they were not accepted by their parents, rather the parents push them back to the abusive 'man'. One of the victims had this to say:

I run to my parents' home and they (parents) sent me back to the abusive man...Victim cry's.....They said, I should go back and when, I went back, it was still the same, things were not going well, even worse than before, he beats and shouts at me (V4).

Referring back to the compass of shame model, Nathanson (1992) indicated that at the Withdrawal pole the phenomenological experience of stakeholders are always negative emotions include shame, sadness, fear, and anxiety. Here, the victim admits the experience of child marriage as shame's message (abusive) and tries to withdraw or hide from the practice. Secondly, at the Attack Self pole, Nathanson argued that the phenomenological experience on the victims are negative emotions include self-directed feelings,

sacrifice themselves a lot in the abusive relationship, tends to blame the man's behavior on herself, believing she deserve it or blame it on outside forces.

Reflecting on the above, withdrawal and attack Self share two significant facets, that is the victim internalizing and acknowledgement of the negative experience of child marriage practice as self is found lacking-*vulnerable*. A central difference between the two poles can be seen in their motivations; victims using Attack Self technique often endure the practice in order to maintain the abusive relationships. Perhaps, the one who still in the marriage might utilized the attack self-technique as a defense mechanism. On the other hand, the seven victims are also using the withdrawal strategy to pull away from the practice in order to reduce the effect and experiences (Nathanson 1992). This is evident in the study findings as victims indicated that, they normal runs to their immediate family members for support. A stakeholder narrated her story in this manner:

Sometimes I have no other option than, to run to my parents place but because my parents don't wants me to comes home, even if, I complain to them regarding the abuses, they would rather advise me and give me food stuffs and push me to go back to the man's house (V7)

Responses from the victims also indicated how severe their condition was. One had this to say:

'My child was 7 months old and I got pregnant again for this 'man'. And when I got pregnant, I didn't know what to do, I knew that, what I was going through, I am not ready to give birth to another child again, so, I was struggling with it and I told him that, I can't keep the pregnant but he was insisting that I should keep it. That time, I didn't have money to go to any proper hospital for proper and safe 'abortion'. So, I was scare' (V1)

It is obvious from the above discussions that, stakeholders chances of escaping are very narrow. This bag the question,-

4.2.4 How did the seven stakeholders succeed to escaped?

Reflecting on the eight stakeholders (victims) with their cultural background, escaping the practice took place in two ways. Firstly, findings from stakeholders V5, V6, V7, and V8 showed that, they became pregnant and were forced to stay with the man by their parents. Whether or not bride pride is compensated, they believe that if a girl is pregnant for a man, she becomes his wife culturally. Girls are

not allowed to give birth in their parents' homes; instead, they must give birth in a man's house, but after the childbirth, they can choose to return to their parents. The above stakeholders are from the same cultural context. In light of the cultural background, the girls in question were deceived into the practice in the first place due to difficult economic circumstances and parental negligence. How will they look after the children since they are of themselves children without a source of livelihood?. The victims' revealed that they were aware of social workers at the social welfare department and that they had reported their husbands to the institutions, but that they had received no support from these statutory social workers. Stakeholders were led to believe that reporting their "husbands" to the police was cultural deviance.

Secondly, stakeholder V1, V3, and V4 were able to escape thanks to the assistance of an NGO that helps young girls. Parents of V3, and V4, in particular, signed an agreement with the NGO not to marry them off. However, V1 receive assistance from a separate NGO, which assisted her in obtaining a safe abortion and contraceptives. She claimed that she would not have been able to escape the marriage if the NGO had not intervened through the coordinator. She indicated that,

I was one of the brilliant girls, the coordinators kind of like me.... So, one day I inform one of the coordinators about my condition and they help me mobilize funds for the abortion. The doctor gave me contraceptives (the implant). When I got home, after some few days, the man got to know of it and was mad at me. I got abused several time, but I remain firm.... That was the support I got... They gave me money for the abortion and some food stuffs (V1)

Similarly, this is what she said when the researcher inquired about the effectiveness of the assistance provided.

'yes it was very effective, because if it 'wasn't that support... I am sure, I would still have been with the man as we speak. Things would have been worse than the way it was. Because, if not that, support, I would have had two children... even one, I was struggling... how much more two? So, I think it was effective for me. And it has helped me now,, now that I am here,, I am much better than before'(V1)

Reflecting on the above, the support received activated her resilient to escape the practice herself but not rescued like V3, and V4. All the escaped stakeholders are currently living with their parents, except V1 who have recently remarried. Putting the above into perspective, though, some of the stakeholders

indicated that, they aware of social workers and police officers, but they did not any assistance. Again, it was observed that, victims referred to NGO's officials but not statutory social workers. Therefore, one is bound to asked 'what support is available to victims and girls at risk of the practice?

4.3 What kind of support does the service providers give to victims in order to help them escape?

The second research question of the study was to explore social workers' and police officers' views and experiences on support available to victims of child marriage. Essentially, the focus was to identity the kind of services social workers and police officers offered to victims in prone communities where the practice is prevalence in Ghana. Findings reported two categories to this research question: support available and professionalism. Both social workers and the police officers shared similar views on the services offered.

4.3.1 Support available

Responses from the social workers and police officers showed that, support is available to victims trapped in child marriage practices. They indicated that, child marriage is a 'child rights violation' and it against the 'child and family welfare act' enshrined in the laws of Ghana. Findings revealed that, the social workers, the police unit at DOVVSU offers several services within the mandate of the law and some complementary services through collaborations with NGOs like, Plan Ghana, Care International, UNICEF and benevolence persons in the communities. It was observed that, both service providers are referring to statutory support. Essentially, one social worker disclosed this:

'One of the supports that, the Department of Social Welfare, offered to victims of child marriage are:

- 1. We provide a prosecution services, on the behalf of the victims, against the family members who perpetrate such practice. We take them to court, and make sure that, justice is served.*
- 2. Another support is, we sometimes educate the family, because they don't know the implication, of engaging their daughters or children to such a marriage. So apart from the prosecution service, what we do is, we have to educate them to understand what really the effects are, the implications of the marriage, they made their child to go into. When we educate them, and we know they are now getting the understanding of the implications of the practice,*

3. *We then, try to link or reintegrate the abuse girl-child back to the family members (SW3)*

Findings are in line with Dominelli (2009) three main styles of social work practice statutory intervention to social problems. These are conventional, therapeutic, and emancipatory. Following the conventional style of Dominelli, she indicated that social workers intervene in social problems and aimed at maintenance (care), which means improving users' social functioning or adaptation to situations and circumstances. Findings showed that, social workers at the department work with this style of social work interventions. According to the social workers and the police, they tried as much as possible to help the victims adapt and also deal with the civil and criminal nature of child marriage. This is what one of the social workers had to say:

we try to stop or disengage perpetrators from continuing with the marriage, should it be in the initial stage, we dissolve or discontinue the relationship with the help of the police. We make sure that, the girl-child in question is reintegrated back to the family and goes back to school, if she is already a student. And the legal aspect of it, especially, if there are grounds to established 'defilement'-the police take care of that' (SW3)

On the therapeutic approach, Dominelli, noted that, the social worker focus is on the interpersonal relationships that the victims have like the family, society, or community among others. Findings according to the police officers and social workers revealed that, they educate the perpetrators especially the parents on the dangers of the practice and its consequences on the girls. According to the social workers, psycho-social counselling is one of the main supports available to victims. In essence, one of the social workers indicated that:

'As for victims of child marriage, we offer psychosocial counselling to the victims. Besides the psychosocial support, we try to link the victims to other NGO's who provides complimentary services. Such as, the child wants to go back to school, the child wants to learn vocation/skill, or the child needs health care services. These are the complimentary services that, we link those children to.'(SW4)

Dominelli also noted the emancipatory approach (radical social work) as one of the interventional tools social workers work with. She indicated that, the social worker concerned is to ensure that social justice at the individual, group and community level is facilitated and also seeking structural changes with factors that intersect to produce child marriage. Findings from the current study, observes that, the social

workers and the police officers use this approach in their efforts to end child marriage practices. It was also observed that, both service providers were referring to established support but in reality, support is not available to victims. Th the next session shall discussed some of the challenges service providers' faced in their work with victims.

4.4 Social workers, police officers challenges in supporting victims in child marriages

As indicated above, although, social workers, police officers are generally supportive to victims. However, findings from the study showed a general concern that, social workers and police officers encounter a lot of systemic challenges and interferences from religious, and traditional actors. This hinder support offered to girls who are at risk and victims of child marriage. The research question aimed at identifying the challenges that affect the effectiveness of such support in fighting child marriage. Findings identify one main category: systemic challenges and it is in consistence with the structural intersectionality analysis of Crenshaw (mapping the margins). She noted that, understanding the intersectional dynamics of crisis (child marriage) by practitioners and researchers may help in identifying the high levels of interferences and burnout experienced by social workers, police officers or counselors who attempt to meet the needs of such victims (Crenshaw, 1991).

4.4.1 Systemic Challenges

According to the stakeholders, managing or handling child marriage cases in Ghana is 'frustrating' and sometimes being terminated without any further investigations due to 'government cold attitude' in the areas of logistics and shelters for victims of child marriage. One of the social workers had this to say:

'sometimes, is kind of frustrating and the cases are sometimes terminated without any further follow-up. Because, if you are interested in prosecuting the perpetrators involved, where would you placed the girl-child. When the state agencies are not capable of managing the victims? Is not just about managing the victim or dealing with the criminal aspect of it, but what? Managing with the victim effectively, Basically, the girl-child must be somewhere, and you would be working on her,, to rehabilitate her. But that, the somewhere is not there for you to work on her' (SW4)

Responses from social workers, police officers showed that, they struggle a lot in their attempt to halt child marriage practices in Ghana. Findings showed that, pervasive societal hierarchies make their work with victims extremely difficult. The stakeholders revealed that, there is ‘no temporary or permanent shelters’ for girls and victims who are at risk and in need of institutional care. It was reported that:

‘If the victim needs temporary shelter we can’t provide... and these are the necessary things needed when providing psychosocial support to victims at the department’ (SW1)

Similarly, responses from the police officers at the DOVVSU unit also indicated that:

‘Because the girl case has been to the social welfare or taking to the police station, then it becomes a serious societal problem, they(parents) would be maltreating her. Since, the department of social welfare and DOVVSU couldn’t provide shelter for her and had to be reintegrated back to the family, whatever, she might be going through this time, she has to keep quiet, because there was no help. Yeah, the girl-child is not safe’ (P1).

According to the stakeholders the lack of adequate resources (shelters) and logistics (vehicles) at the various departments slows down their efforts to fight child marriage practices in Ghana. This corroborate with existing literature (Kaseke, 1991; Mupedziswa 2005; Chogugudza 2009) which argued that the social welfare department and victims support unit (DOVVSU) are not well equipped to address the socio-economic problems in Africa. This is evidence with the experience of the police officers and the social workers.

‘Yes, Mostly, we work hand in hand with the department of social welfare. Looking at the way, DOVSU is itself, there should be resources to operate on its own...But you know, In Ghana, sometimes it is just in the books, but it is not happening in reality’ (P2)

Perhaps, this explain why the social workers and the police officers complain bitterly about the inadequate funding or budgetary, shelters to place girls who are at risk of the practice, and logistics to rescue victims and punished perpetrators. It was dejected to observed findings from social workers and police officers with legal backings to report on child marriage cases as ‘just documented’. One of the social workers shared experience that:

'Yes, you just have it documented, that, you have rescued the girl and stop the child marriage. That, you have talk with the family and reintegrate the girl-child back to the family. and how effective is this? And how comfortable would that girl be at that family?' (SW4).

The above analysis showed that, social workers and the police officers reintegrate the victims back to the family. This left the researcher with a dilemma; How safe is the girl-child ? After being reintegrated back to the very family which perpetrated the practice. It is obvious from the analysis that, victims reintegrated back to the family might not be safe for them. However, one of the stakeholder who managed to escape the marriage indicated that, she 'do not see herself as a victim anymore but a survivor'. This is what she said:

No, I don't see myself as a victim anymore, because, I am no longer in 'that marriage'. My only problem now is that, the man doesn't take responsibility of the child, but I don't see it as a problem because, I am also capable of taking care of my son alone. So, I don't see myself as a victim anymore (VI).

The above statement from the stakeholder resonates with Henderson, and Milstein (1996) studies on resilience. They indicated that, the ability of a victim to recover from negative life experiences-child marriage and become stronger while overcoming the negative effects are resilience. The researcher explores further about the stakeholder insight on who a 'survivor' was, and this is what she indicated:

'Survive is like, the person has come through it, like the person has come through it successfully. Ulmmmmmm, like, I don't know how to explain it, but surviving something means, you have come through it, not like you regret coming out of the marriage, but you are happy to be out of it' (V)

Thus, in line with Ledesma (2012, 2014) who argued that resilience is said to be the ability for a victim to bounce back from hardship, hindrance, and misfortune (like in situations child marriage). Though reintegrating victims back into their families with the help of social workers and police officers can be a good way to stabilize the family. But, how is it done and what are the measures in place to ensure that the girl-child is safe?

4.4.2 Interferences

The study also revealed that, social workers, and police officers encounter too much interferences from people who are in positions of authority. According to the stakeholders, religious actors, traditional actors and politicians, exert some forms of influence that made support available to victims ineffective. Findings from the service providers showed that, there is a lot of external interferences from traditional and religious actors. One of the police officers had this to say:

And sometimes, the complainant... after that, reporting the case, there would be some kind of external or internal pressure, so intense that, the complainant would not like to appear before the police for the case to be processed to court. And once, there is no complainant, what would you be prosecuting in court? (P2)

Another officer indicated that, people in the society who kind of know better in most cases, tried to cover or shield perpetrators. This is what he said:

'people in the society who knows better, in most cases demand for the releases of certain perpetrators claiming it is a family case, so the police should allow it to be treated traditionally. That is what we have in this society...culturally it is difficult to work with, especially the family structure' (P1).

Findings from the social workers also revealed accounts of such interferences after the researcher asked whether the interferences are meant for the safety of the victims. This is what he said:

No, the interference would be trying to cover the perpetrator, that is where you talk of the religion and cultural aspect of It. if the case is reported to the police station, traditional actors like Chiefs would go in to plead, religious leaders would go in to plead, opinion leaders would go in, politicians would call in to interfere for the police not to process the case anymore (SW3)

Findings therefore showed that, due to the above interferences, most cases are left unattendance-leaving the girl-child in the state of powerlessness whiles society rob her future. Again, responses showed that, informants who are to assist the police and the social workers with information to fight the practice of child marriage are afraid of being attacked by perpetrators. This is what the social workers said:

Yes,,,, they (informants-reporting cases) get attacked everyday.. even we the social workers... we get attacked too.. even though the mandate is there to operate.. but if you are a coward you can't handle or manage child marriage cases in Ghana' (SW2).

This is in line with Crenshaw, Patricia H. Collins, Yul-Davis and other scholars on how intersectionality shapes the experiences of many women and girls of color in the U.S and other context. It was observed and argued that, economic considerations – ‘access to employment, housing, and wealth’ confirm that class or systemic structures play a significant part in defining the experience of women of color vis-à-vis battering’ (Crenshaw 1991, p.11). Also, Walt (1990) findings on immigrant women reported that, most immigrant women were unenthusiastic to exit the most abusive relationships for the fear of being deported. She predicted that, when these women faced with the choice between protection from their batterers and protection against deportation, many immigrant women chose the latter (Walt 1990, p. 8).

Thus, it would be intellectually premature to concluded from such lens of observations that it is simply the fact of poverty that is driving the social problem (child marriage). Rather, victims of child marriage experiences reveal how diverse societal structures intersect, since even the systemic dimension is not independent from culture, religion, and gender. A family counselor at a social service agency, also reported that, even though laws are enacted to protect victims and women who are at risk but access to such services is another problem. She noted that “this law sounds so easy to apply, but there are cultural complications in the Asian and African community that make even these requirements difficult to meet just to find the opportunity and courage to call us is an accomplishment for many.” (Hodgin 1991, p. E1). This is supporting the current study as the police and social workers indicated that, those who are to assist them with information are afraid to report cases to them. Also, due to societal interferences, informants after reporting cases could not testify in the law court. Thus, difficult to handle child marriage cases.

Hodgin (1991, p. E1) further argued that, the typical child abused spouse, she suggests, may live in an extended family where several generations live together, there may be no privacy on the telephone, some do not even have such telephone, no opportunity to leave the house, and no knowledge of whether a social service department like social welfare and DOVVSU is available. As a consequence, many women and young girls in such abusive relationships may be wholly dependent on their husbands as their link to the world outside their homes. Putting this to perspective, what means would the girl-child use to escape

or report cases? When the very structures which were supposed to protect her are against her. The researcher observed that, most of the victims of child marriage do not have knowledge of social workers and are afraid to even approach the police officers for help due to societal notions. The society as well as the perpetrators had polluted the victims minds to cover their actions against institutional care. This is what one of the victims said:

hmmmmm, people believe that, when send your husband to the police, the children wouldn't proper[...]it would affect your children when the grow (V3)

Chogugudza (2009) argued that, the major social problems in countries in Africa are poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, limited access to social work services and cultural interferences in child marriage issues. A study by Manful and Abdullah (2018), Mupedziswa (2005) and Van Breda (2015) showed that, one of the key method social workers deployed in intervening social problems in Africa is Case work. This is in consistence with the current findings, because all the social workers participated on the study referred to themselves as caseworkers. However, Mamphiswana and Noyoo (2000) argued that, given the systemic or structural nature of child marriage cases (intersecting with other factors), the social phenomenon cannot be tackled by using case work approach. Mary Ellen. Richmond (1922) and other writers claimed that, case work is mostly pitched towards enhancing the psychosocial functioning of the service users (victims) rather than emancipating the structural and macro challenges intersecting to drives the practice.

Reflecting on the literature, one might suggest that, social work practice at the department of social welfare and the DOVVSU department of the Ghana police service is not adequately resourced to end child marriage practices given that, the phenomena is deeply embedded in complex factors intersecting each other. Findings from the study identifies these factors as cultural and religious beliefs, economic, political, and social or peer influence. Scholars claimed that, addressing poverty and viable and sustainable income-generating options for girls and young women is one of the major solutions to child marriage(Sarfo et al 2020; Moody 2021; Chinyoka and Ganga 2011). However, the current study showed that, there is a lack of sustainable income-generating options, shelters for the girl-child who are at risks of child marriage. It would be interesting to noted that, most NGO's use the economic empowerment model as a way to response to the menace of child marriage, this model is good, but it would be

groundbreaking when structural intersectionality is in cooperated with emancipation techniques to the social phenomenon.

The researcher also observed that, interference from these structures could be the reason why ending child marriage practice in Ghana proves ineffective. Similar to this observations, a stakeholder shared his thought as follows:

In Ghana or Africa, people would say, we are doing sensitization on child marriage, [...] everybody is doing that, yes, you have gone to the communities, you have talk to them concerning the situation and left, did the people listen to you?, have you communicated enough for the people to understand ?, that is the situation... is about behavioral change communication, is about attitudinal change (SW4)

Gage's (2007) evaluative report on a community education project in Ethiopia showed that, traditional and religious actors perpetuating child marriage practices could also be an agent of change. The reported indicated that, these actors have been key agents of reforms, exercising considerable influence over public perceptions, building trust within communities, and fostering the cultural acceptability of deferred marriage age (ibid). As stated by SW4,

You don't approach child marriage cases, by going to the perpetrators house with a threat, or goes to the media houses with a threatening messages. No, if you start threatening people, that is where culture and religion would come in to play... people would feel like, you are insulting their culture (SW4)

Reflecting on this, one could suggest that, social workers and police officers (DOVVSU) should not use threat messages in carrying out community awareness and engagement activities on child marriage cases. Rather, they should deploy professionalism and emancipatory techniques by involving religious and traditional actors as change leaders against child marriage. Findings from the stakeholders indicated that, the phenomena of child marriage are an attitudinal and behavioral change issue. Thus, awareness creation and community education on child marriage should not be threat. The social workers explained that, once a threat is involved there is always going to be a resistance from traditional actors. This is very crucial especially in dealing with communities where child marriage is part of religious or cultural norms and practices, and these can only change if the leaders of such practices embrace change and recognize the importance of ending child marriage.

4.5 Theories

Theories and perspectives tend to be broad, and dynamic in ways of conceptualizing interventions with service users in social work practice. One of the greatest tools for social workers and researchers are theories and your ability to master and work with these theories in rendering services is very important to the profession of social work. As seen throughout the discussion and analysis of the study findings using Intersectional lens enables the researcher to spin the light and enter the experience of victims of child marriage with marginalized and stigmatized identities who experiences are rooted in cultural, religious oppression and discrimination (Yul-Davis, 2006; Wash, 2009). Findings from the study showed how systemic or structural inequalities intersect and shapes the practices of child marriage, (McCammon, Taylor, Reger, & Einwohner, 2017; Reger, 2012). It was argued by the researcher that, it would be scientifically premature to conclude from observation that it is simply the element of poverty that is propelling the social problem of child marriage practices in rural communities in Ghana. Rather, through the lens of the theory of intersectionality, victims of child marriage experiences reveal how diverse societal structures intersect, since even the systemic dimension is not independent from culture, religion, and gender.

Critics of intersectionality argued that, after mapping these margins on the phenomenon to know the various factors interlocking to produced child marriage-*what next?*. Davis (2008, p.25) asserts that intersectionality is ambiguous and open-ended, and that its "lack of clear-cut definition, only good in mapping categories on the phenomenon understudy. While the concept of intersectionality provided valuable insight and potential to the current research, its definition and application are still hotly debated. As a result, there is a need to improve it by deploying an emancipatory approach to seeking answers to the categories that have been well-defined above.

4.5.1 Emancipatory Theory

Using emancipatory theory to appreciate research findings in social work practice is very recent (Sewpaul et al 2015; Chinn & Kramer, 2011). Emancipatory theoretical perspective advances from; Critical Theory, Radical Social Work and Liberation Theology, but then moves beyond to focus on liberation from the constrains of societal prejudices, worldviews, and one's own's thinking (Fook, 2002).

Reflecting on the above, emancipation from one's own thinking, identifying the interrelation between individual consciousness, societal consciousness, and the significance of modifying both individual and societal consciousness is crucial to the social work practice. It gives a critical context for service providers to advocate for social justice, economic prowess and to question structural obstacles that creates child marriages (Sewpaul, et al, 2015). Chinn and Kramer (2011) argues that, researchers, social workers, policy makers commenced in addressing a given social phenomena (child marriage) by asking critical and reflective questions of either that which exists unfairly in a society or of that which does not (but should) exist. Such questions challenge the status quo and drivers of the practice of child marriage. Through reflective thinking processes, that which is wrong-*child marriage* is critiqued, assessed and perceptions of how the practice could be halted are developed. The reflective processes stem from practice research- *collaborative input, analysis, and envisaging from many perspectives, especially those who suffer injustice or inequity(victims of child marriage)*. These understandings are resultant from creative and reflective thinking processes that lead to formal expressions of a problem, potential solutions with action plans, and a vision for an improved future (Chinn & Kramer, 2011).

Emancipatory theoretical analysis requires the researcher exploring child marriage, the policy maker, the service provider to take a step back and not allowing his\her societal constructions, worldviews to be a stumbling block in offering support to victims or girls at risk of child marriage. The concept of emancipatory social work spins the solution on us, as service providers. Freire (1970) reminds us that it is not enough for victims to recognize their own oppression but as Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.30) points out, participatory practice research using intersectionality and emancipatory lenses should leads the stakeholders involved to “take responsibility for their own emancipation from the dictates of societal, cultural injustice, alienation, and unfulfillment”. Through the collaborations with these stakeholders, their consciousness was raised to explore new frontiers and become role models for change. Thus, said by one stakeholder after the researcher asked, how would you help someone who might be at your shoe to escaped?

I would use my experience and what I have done to escaped to advise her. However, it is not easy depending on the type of parents or society, if her parents are different, then, it would be easy to help her escaped (VI)

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

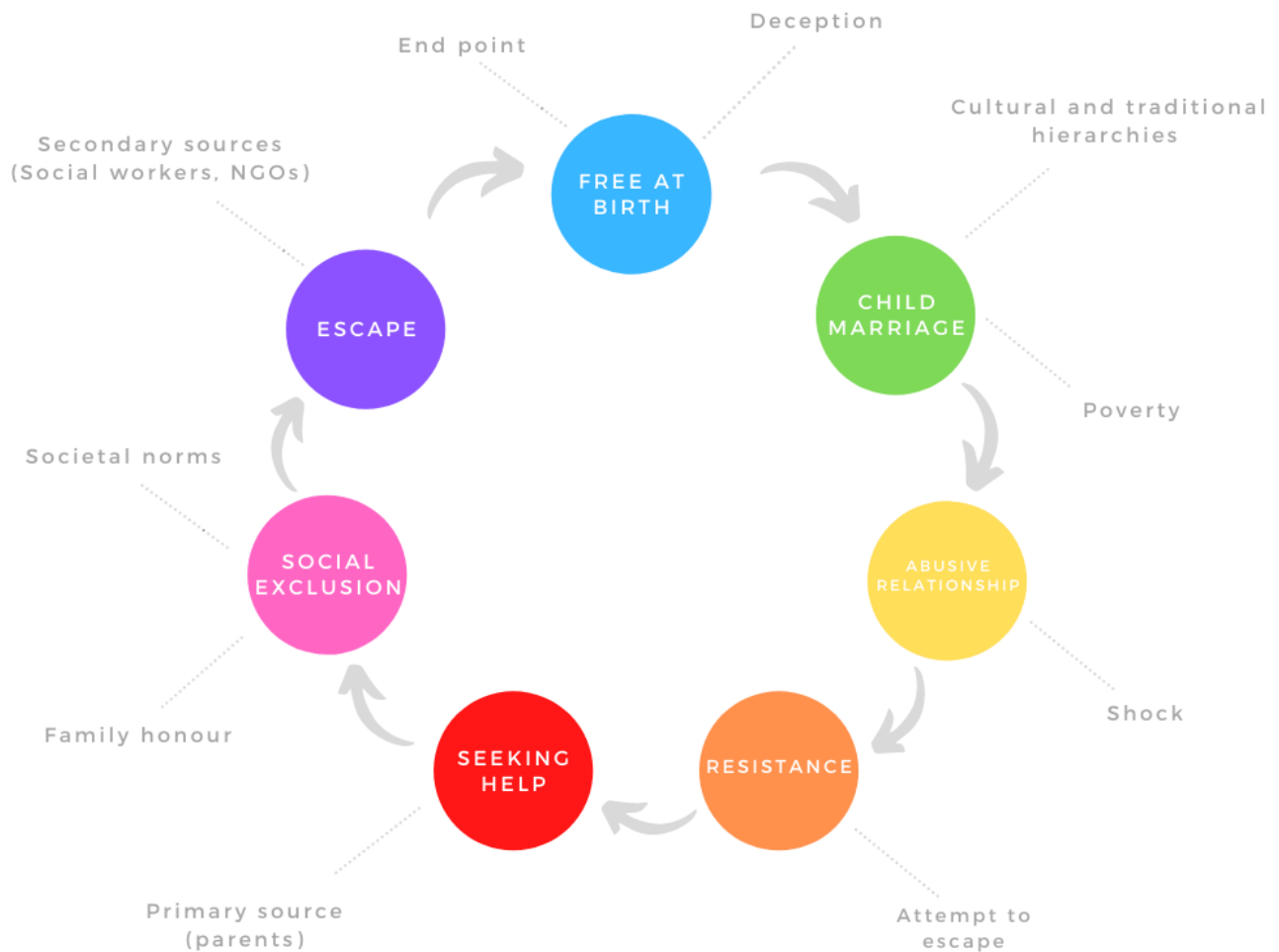
5.0 Introduction

This chapter present summary of findings and concludes by contextualizing the study findings in the context of literature, from the Nordic,-Saami context, my position on where to go from here based on the findings, and some implications that could be drawn to influence practice decisions.

5.1 Summary of findings

This qualitative study aimed at exploring the perceptions and experiences of victims and service providers on child marriage support in Ghana. The following research questions were investigated in the study; what perceptions and experiences does victims and service providers have on child marriage, what support does service providers (social workers and police officers) offers to victims of child marriage, and what are the challenges these service providers confronted with in providing such support?

According to the findings, stakeholders saw Ghanaian society as pervasively embedded in cultural and traditional hierarchies, which intersected with other factors to rob young girls of their future in relation to child marriage. This is demonstrated on the below model.



As indicated above, the girl-child is free at birth with so much potentials, dreams, and aspirations. However, cultural, and traditional hierarchies, poverty and other harsh economic pull and push factors interlock to deceive the girl-child into the marriage. As the findings indicated already, the intension of going into the marriage (whether through parental and societal influence) tends to be abusive (shock).

At this point, the girl-child impulse to be free emerges. As a result, proceed to the resistance phase (Attempt to escape). Findings showed that, when victims are on the verge of escaping, they turn to their primary source of support (parents) for assistance. This is also inconsistent with the Help Theory, which suggests that survivors take a series of predictable steps to seek help for their insufficiencies; it is a series of well-ordered and purposeful cognitive and behavioral steps, each leading to different types of solutions (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998; Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008).

However, according to the current study, as stakeholders seek assistance from their parents, they become more vulnerable. According to the findings, the family support network (parents) exclude them due to societal norms such as family honor. As findings showed, when the girl-child is being excluded and pushed back into the abusive relationship, it turns more worse than before, at this stage, the girl-child lost trust on the immediate primary support system (parents). From the survivors, they turn to seek help outside the primary support network either through their own efforts, *-run away*, government, non-governmental agencies, or other benevolence persons in the society. However, according to the study, survivors received less support from societal institutions such as social services (social workers and police). Findings revealed that exploring these options could support them get back to free at birth. However, the researcher had a lot of dilemmas and hard questions.

1. What happens after the survivor comes back to the stage of free at birth, are they really free?
2. What is the place of social work practice in exploring this stage and what about the potentials and dreams wasted?

Therefore, this study concludes that the survivors got less support from state institutions like social welfare and DOVVSU, who were supposed to be front liners facilitating support. Again, interferences from religious, traditional, and political actors makes social workers and police officers fight against child marriage practices ineffective in Ghana. As a result, the girls have been left on their own to battle their way out of the activities, while the perpetrators remain unpunished.

5.2 Contextualizing the study findings within the Nordic-Saami Context

The study findings are compared with existing literature within the Nordic context due to the nature of the programme (Nordic Masters' in social work and welfare-NOSWEL). Findings from the study share some resemblances and differences with research carried out in the Nordic context of Saami indigenous people.

In line with the political intersectionality concept on how women and girls of color (minority) “are positioned and frequently discriminated against...” (Crenshaw 1991, p.1252). Makes it necessary for the researcher to compare the study findings from the lenses of intersectionality. This is because, it enables the researcher to detailed investigation of the ways in which systemic factors such as

dispossession, poverty, culture of indigenous peoples intersects with identity and gendered. The goal is to explore the different effects these factors have on girls and women, and how these processes have contributed and reinforce intragroup hierarchies and patriarchal oppression in indigenous Sámi communities, all of which result in robbing the future and dreams of young girls and women (like situations of child marriage). A study by Kuokkanen (2015, 2008a) revealed that, there is a pressing necessity for scholars to examine the ways in which gendered violence among young girls and women is explained, addressed, and often sanctioned in indigenous communities.

A literature showed that, there is a considerable study on gender-based violence and human rights abuse (per the context of this study-child marriage) against aboriginal women and girls in most cultural settings of the world (Sarfo et al 2020; Moody 2020; Akter 2021; Canadian Council on Social Development and NWAC 2009; Amnesty International, 2009; Quebec Native Women 2008), but, there is a striking absence of literature, statistics, or reports on violence against Sámi young girls. Some scholars argue that, the lack of Nordic studies indicates that gender-based violence against Sámi women and young girls' is not an issue (Kuokkanen, 2015). The 2012 working paper of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII or PFII) also indicated one of the critical and diabolic matters thoroughly debated, was the difficulty of recognizing the internal systemic dimensions of violence against indigenous women and girls, the existence and prevalence of which is often a dark Omen (forbidden) subject within indigenous Saami communities. Kuokkanen (2015) critique the Norwegian Sámi Parliament, Finnish Sámi Parliament and Swedish Sámi parliament (Sámediggi, 2008, 2009; Sametinget, 2004, 2008) that, the Sámi political institutions, researchers and activist, did not considered violence against women as a priority to them. According to Kuokkanen, the Sámi Parliaments have paid non-gendered lip service to the practices.

The Swedish National Public Health Institute 2010 report showed that, Saami women were afraid that their own minority group would find out that they seek help from authorities (social workers and police) had revealed their exposure to violence (Statens folkhälsoinstitut 2010a). Many of them also feared that they would damage their family's honour if they left their husband. According to the report some Sami women described a culture in which it is forbidden to talk about the violence and its consequences (Burman, 2017). The above findings corroborate with the current study on child marriages in Ghana.

Reflecting on the above, one can therefore argue that, interlocking deeply rooted patriarchal norms, cultural practices render human rights abuses against aboriginal girls and women as a “family business” and downgrade aboriginal women’s and girls’ rights to an inferior position in their communities.

Nordic scholars also argued that, Sami woman’s place in society and at home has changed greatly as a result of changes to the Saami culture (Thallaug Øverli et.al., 2017; Kuokkanen, 2015). Nevertheless, it is arguable whether or not Saami women have more or less power than they once did due to lack of adequate scientific findings. While it is true that the Saami’s’ Norwegianization assimilation oppression has caused a loss of power (such as in reindeer herding or in the home) it is also true that women are still the primary caretakers in Saami society and pass on cultural knowledge to their children (Balto 2007). The only dissimilarities between the Ghanaian context and the Nordic context is because, Saami women are involved in both politics and the media, which allows them the opportunity to influence legislation that pertains to the Saami and get their message out via the written word, radio, and television. Thus, access to such resources that were once out of reach comes the opportunity to yield more power and use it in ways beneficial to young girls and women in Saami indigenous communities (unlike the case of child marriage in Ghana where such access to recourses are limited). Again, the above could be a shared learning for the survivors and girls at risk of child marriage in Ghana.

5.3 Where do we go from here?

The study findings have indicated that the Ghanaian fight against child marriage practices is nowhere near an end due to structural and cultural challenges. For example, social workers held the view that, interferences from opinion leaders like traditional and religious actors and successive government cold attitude makes their efforts in providing support ineffective. There appears to be the concern that,- victims of child marriages do not get the needed child welfare protection services from state institutions like Social workers and DOVVSU. Even though, these stakeholders had the feeling that they had the responsibility to end the practice should the government prioritize and provide them with the needed resources and logistics.

Findings from the study do not point towards measures and policies where the opportunity for space or voice was given to social workers and police officers to share their views on how to end the practice. However, the study goal was to explore the challenges social workers and police officers face in helping

girls and victims to escape child marriage practices in Ghana. Although the experiences and perceptions of social workers and police officers mostly did not reflect possibilities for victims escape, the co-researchers and especially the victims share experiences on escape patterns which was discussed in the chapter four.

It is Ghana's systemic, cultural practice and family structure that seems to make it difficult for social workers and police officers to end child marriage practices. Yet, the study findings have shown that with appropriate measures put in place, the social problem of child marriage can be halted. This is evident from the social workers and police officers that, the social phenomena of child marriage are an attitudinal and behavioural change problem. Thus, awareness creation and community education on child marriage should not be threat oriented. The social workers explained that, once a threat is involved there is always going to be resistance from traditional actors. This is very crucial especially in dealing with communities where child marriage is part of religious or cultural norms and practices, and these can only change if the leaders of such practices embrace change and recognize the importance of ending child marriages. Thus, governmental institutions must be strengthened to fight the practice of child marriage. The government and other partners should not just document in the books to attract international attention that they are fighting child marriages, but the laws must work without fear or favour as well as allocating budgeting and building of shelters for girls and victims at risk of abuse. Social workers and police officers held the view that child marriages are deeply rooted in a lack of strong governmental systems that makes social workers and police officers efforts ineffective in supporting victims as well as ending the practice. Hence, there are significant challenges in ending child marriage practices in Ghana, the present study offers many possibilities to try new ways, such as emancipatory approach to end the social phenomenon of child marriage.

5.4 The study implications for practice and policy

Firstly, emancipatory social work enables practice researchers, service providers to be mindful of how their worldviews, and interventions strategies could influence their engagements with victims. Accordingly, there is the need for service providers to be sensitive when offering support to victims who are already traumatized by societal and cultural hierarchies. Policy makers, social workers, police officers must challenge the systemic injustices, religious prejudices, structural limitations as identified

by the intersectionality notion. This can be achieved through holding the government accountable, making the systems, and laws to work without fear or favour. Again, they must ensure that, victims consciousness is enhanced, awareness of new possibilities for escape, and an understanding of structural barriers, policies, and practices. This can be done, by empowering them on how to use social media to their advantaged (voicing out their grievances without interferences) as seen by the Saami people in the Nordic countries.

Secondly, the study has shown that, girls and victims of child marriages have limited opportunities for institutional care and escape. Considering that children have the right to be protected and also have a say in decisions affecting their wellbeing anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Articles 12 and 13. In line with this, Ghana introduced the Children's Act 1998, the Child and Family Welfare Policy of 2014 as well as the recent National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage 2017-2026. Social workers should amid the challenges work on reorienting parents and other stakeholders mindset on the rights of the child. Social workers, police officers could strategize and organize parents, traditional and religious actors (especially those who mostly interferes in most cases) where attitudinal and behavioral change techniques would be inculcated concerning the consequence the practice have on the children's, their rights and the legislation backing this. Stakeholders who join this community of change should not necessarily be those who have been in contact with the Department of social welfare and the domestic violence and victims support units (DOVVSU) concerning matters of the practice.

This is to ensure that they are not labelled as people with problems (which might create bad mindset), but this community engagement and awareness creation should be considered a normal and awakening call. Even though, shelters are not available to place victims and girls who are at risks of abuse and violence from the family as indicated by the social workers and police officers, parents and stakeholders should be advised by social workers (especially the police) not to maltreat victims based on a reported case and caution parents that any form of maltreatments against children constitutes a criminal offence.

Moreover, the idea of social workers and police officers reintegrating victims back to the family might be a way to strengthen the family, however, surveillances must be mounted to ensure their safety. This can be achieved by discussing such decisions with the victim and asked for her opinion regarding best possible ways to handle it, perhaps they might an idea of where they could be safe.

Furthermore, social workers and police officers should be provided with psychoeducation and training to ensure that they have an understanding of how to effectively intervene and handle victims who are traumatized with the practice. The training can take the form of equipping social workers and police officers with the needed communication and attending techniques to be able to establish a therapeutic relationships with victims and girls who are at risk. Most of the social workers and the police officers had some background education in social work and other related programmes relevant but did not show they had the needed skills to effectively build a healthy relationships with victims and stakeholders perpetrating the practice of child marriage. Therefore, the content of social work education could provide some focus on the rights of children, policies, legislation, skill-helping techniques supporting this and effective measures to halt the practice. Seminars and in-service training can be offered to social workers to update the communication and skill-helping strategies in working with victims.

Again, it was noted that, social workers and the DOVVSU police officers are mandated and guided by child rights legislation and policies in their practice therefore the education should create awareness about the existence of these documents such as the Children's Act 1998, Act 568 and the Child and Family Welfare Policy, National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage 2017-2026. With knowledge of these policies and legislation, social workers may have the sense of being backed by legislation to implement strategies that might halted the practice without fear of being attack by perpetrators. Ensuring effective practices should not only limited to policies and legislation but building therapeutic relationship with victims is key to ensuring that the girl-child open up to social workers and police officers. Service providers should continuously build relationship with victims from when the case is reported until when it is closed.

5.5 Limitation of the study

Though this study has succeeded to find suitable alternatives to gather relevant data for the study. Some apparent challenges encountered in the study process. As part of being reflexive and to signal future researchers about what could be done better, I would highlight a couple of the challenges that appear to have limited this study in one way or the other.

Firstly, the use of grounded theory enables a flexible grounds where the researcher could probes further based on codes generated from the initial interview question. However, because some of the interviews

were conducted through social workers mobile phone using their WhatsApp platforms, it was not adequately done. The internet disturbances made it difficult most at times to get relevant information's victims, social workers and police officers were trying to communicate. Again, due to the sensitive nature of the study phenomenon, especially the 4 victims, might want to disclose certain secrets about their experiences but due to the present of a third part might block such vital information.

Moreover, the use of the semi-structured guide might have made the interviews too open leading to several themes which might not be directly related to the study. In view of the limited sample size of the study, findings may not be generalized to other contexts. However, theoretical generalizations could be possible by making general interpretations from the study based on the study findings.

Furthermore, the cultural and language barrier was a limitation to the study. Even though the social worker (SW3) offered to help translate the questions to the language of some of the victims and also, translate the answers in English to me through the phone. The study would have been a bit less complicated if I and the 4 victims spoke the same language for the interviews. I could have steered the interviews into diverse angles to reveal deeper insights to reflects, the other 4 victims I had done the interviews myself.

5.6 Recommendation for Further research

It appears that child marriage is reinforced by deeply rooted societal and cultural norms which drives victims family attitudes and behaviors in rural communities. Therefore, further studies could explore the views of parents on how support could be promoted. In addition, research could be done on how to shape and strengthen social policies and institutional systems at the national and subnational levels. Furthermore, practice researchers could also do a plot studies on the effectiveness of emancipatory approach to the phenomena. Finally, in light of the target to end child marriage in the SDGs and the impact that this will have on national development planning, researchers could also map strategies to build evidence base data in child marriage practice.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title of Project: The State of Child Marriage in Ghana: A Critical Analysis of Victims and Service Providers Perceptions/Position on Support.

Before progressing to main goal of discussions for the interview, stakeholders would be asked day-to-day questions to make the interview environment informal. A question like “how is your day?” may be asked. The aim of these introductory questions is to serve as an icebreaker to open-up stakeholders to the researcher and co-players.

VICTIMS

Background Information:

1. Sex: 2. Age: 3. Background Educational level: 4. Religious Background

Have you escaped or still in the condition of child marriage? How long have you been in it?

Research Question: What perception does victims of child marriage have on support in Ghana?

- a. What is your perception of child marriage?
- b. What informs your thinking?
- c. Do you see it as a problem?
- d. How do you perceive yourself as a victim of the practice?
- e. What led you into your current situation as a victim?

- f. Did you receive any support either from your family, friends, NGO's, and Government agencies?
- g. How did you connect with this support service?
- h. What kind of support did you receive?
- i. How did the support receive help you in your situation?
- j. Can you say, the support received, is effective or ineffective in helping you escape child marriage?
- k. Please explain your position.
- l. What do you prefer or expect could be done differently to improve support for victims of child marriage?
- m. How did you escape from it, or what will you do to escape from the practice of child marriage?

SERVICE PROVIDERS (social workers and Police officers)

Background Information:

1. Sex: 2. Age: 3. Religious background 4. Background Education level: 5. Name of organisation.

6. Role in the organization:

How long you have been working with victims of child marriage?

Research question 1: What support does service providers offers to victims of child marriage?

Social workers' and Police officers' perceptions on support for victim

- a. How do you perceive children who are victims of child marriage?
- b. What informs your perceptions?
- c. How do you connect with victims of child marriage?
- d. How do you intervene when you ascertain the need for support?
- e. Which perspectives or orientations ascertain the need for support?
- f. What kind of support do you offers to these victims?
- g. What methods or services do you work with in providing support for victims?
- h. What perceptions do you have regarding the support offered?
- i. Can you say, the support offered, is effective or ineffective in ending the practice in Ghana?
- j. Please explain your position.

Research Question 2: What challenges do service providers face in providing support to victims of child marriage?

Social workers and police officers

What challenges do you experience when providing support to victims of child marriage?

- a. In terms of defining the problem (who see it as a problem?)
- b. In terms of providing support or intervention
- c. In terms of working with victims, law, society, victims' immediate families and collaboration with other professionals (the police, social workers, and the court)
- d. What do you prefer or expect could be done differently to improve support for victims of child marriage?

APPENDIX 2



Aalborg, 26th of February

STAKEHOLDERS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

THE STATE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN GHANA: A STUDY OF VICTIMS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS PERCEPTIONS ON SUPPORT.

Dear Stakeholder,

My name is Samuel Logoniga Gariba, a NOSWEL student at the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Aalborg University, Denmark. The NOSWEL program is a joint degree (<https://www.uis.no/nb/nordic-master-programme-social-work-and-welfare-noswel>) grounded on the theory that, social workers globally are confronted with new challenges and demands due to growing social diversity and increasing international migration. This unique, joint degree programme seeks to explore new approaches and methods that generate innovation, new knowledge, and improved skills for the practice fields.

Your concern is therefore, sought to collaborate in a research on the subject of child marriage in Ghana. UNICEF recently reported that, west and central Africa faces a ‘unique set of challenges’ in its attempts to minimize the effect of child marriage trend. Thus, halting the practices of child marriage in west and central Africa will require a renewed commitment and increased investment from like-minded stakeholders and human rights activists. Unless progress is accelerated, it will take 100 years to end child marriage in Africa (UNICEF, 2019).

The aim of this study is to study the perceptions of victims and service providers on support. This to study the challenges victims, as well as service providers, experience in breaking out of child marriage. By your participation and collaboration in this study, you will share your experiences and reflections on every step of the research process. The result of this will contribute to the award of a Nordic master's degree in Social Work and Welfare.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your name will not be linked to any written or verbal report of this research project. It is purely an academic work and the final report will be submitted to the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Aalborg University. It is also likely that parts of the research will be submitted for publication in an academic peer reviewed journal.

Your collaboration in this study is purely voluntary, and you can choose to withdraw at any moment without consequences. You can also refuse to answer some questions and still remain in the study.

If you have any questions about this study, please ask me. You may keep a copy of this consent form.

You are deciding about participating in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue your participation at any time.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Supervisor

Date

Signature of Stakeholder

Date

APPENDIX 3

Ethical Consideration,- Trustworthiness and authenticity

As indicated in Chapter one (1), child marriage is a global contentious social problem robbing young girls their future and potentials and it has been a subject of public concern with policymakers, international communities and researchers tagging it as a social problem and gender-based violence. This concerns have made the issues of child marriage a sensitive one, requiring high ethical standards to investigate the phenomenon. To satisfy the ethical considerations, this study drew from the ethical research principles in Bryman (2016) and Creswell (2014) and the global social work ethical principles in Ghana and internationally. The following ethical issues was addressed and satisfied in the study: informed consent, invasion of privacy, confidentiality, and harm to participants

Again, this practice research posed the ethical and moral dilemma of whether to burden persons who are faced with problems with a research process which will not resolve their problems in a short or middle term. Davison (2004) claims that it would be morally unjustifiable for any social work researcher to leave informants damaged with the experience of a traumatic interview. Therefore, the researcher strives to avoid objectifying the stakeholders by offering them the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time.

3.0 Trustworthiness and authenticity

Scholars over the years, argued that, validity and reliability are principles for assessing the quality of quantitative research, however, these measures have become increasingly relevant in the field of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) findings shown that, trustworthiness and authenticity are adapted measures of the validity and reliability criteria in assessing the quality of research. Bryman (2012) for instance has argued for the incorporation of validity and reliability principles in qualitative research other than restraining its essence to the quality of the study. On trustworthiness, Lincoln, and Guba (1985) (also cited in Bryman, 2012) identified four main criteria that assess the quality of qualitative research – credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.1 Credibility

The findings of the present study are credible because the data collection was done within ethically acceptable standards. I used an open methods approach and disclosed to the stakeholders the purpose of the study, how research results were to be disseminated, and who was sponsoring the study. For this practice design study, co-players especially the social workers, police and the victims validate the study findings. Creswell (2014) argued that to regulate the accuracy of the qualitative findings, the researcher may take the final report, major findings, or themes back to stakeholders to determine whether they feel that they are accurate. Another way of ensuring the credibility of the findings is through triangulation which involves using several sources of data in the study and crosschecking findings (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). By way of triangulation, the present study compared findings with existing literature from another context.

3.2 Transferability

The findings of the study provide a rich account of the experiences of stakeholders on child marriage support. The richness can be seen in the themes generated and how this study reflects the intersectionality nature of the social phenomena-how factors intersect to keep victims on a perpetuate vulnerable position. Accordingly, transferability can be obtained from the escape route or patterns of victims experiences of child marriage discussed in Chapter four. Moreover, Creswell (2014) points to resorting to thick descriptions of themes that is the *insider's and outsider's* detailed analysis of the context and providing the many perspectives that define the themes. The present study offered a nuanced viewpoint of each theme by reporting contradictory existing literature (Creswell, 2014).

3.9.3 Dependability

This study has clearly delineated and explained each of the procedures involved from the need and significant of the study, constructivist grounded theoretical choices, sampling, methodological choices, epistemological and ontological choices, and ethical considerations. These explanations are vital in the sense that whoever reads this research findings will not be left with more questions as to why I made certain choices and why they were the best choices. Again, all the research files this study generated have been saved electronically with a password in my google drive account, in my computer, and the university of Stavanger OneDrive online platform . Another way this study is trustworthy is the fact that it has been

reviewed by the supervisor, peers, and external examiners (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). In the process of conducting the research, two seminars were conducted by my university where I presented the progress of the study to my colleagues, supervisor, and invited researchers. These people were able to make useful comments on aspects of the research for improvement. In addition to the seminars, I had regular engagement with my research supervisor on the various chapters of the study. Finally, the final research report was shared with the co-players, two cohorts and one external auditor to review the work as well as oral defense.

3.4 Confirmability

Confirmability includes the demonstration that the researcher's personal preconceptions have not distorted the findings of the study. This is accomplished through being reflexive and open minded about potential biases. Creswell (2014) and Bryman (2012) indicates that by commenting on how your background: gender, culture, motivation for the study, and socioeconomic origin, you improve the validity of the study.

3.5 Authenticity

Concerning authenticity, Lincoln, and Guba (1985) identified the following larger issues as criteria: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalyst authenticity, and tactical authenticity.

First on fairness, this study has been fairly done by regarding the rights of stakeholders and rigidly followed high ethical standards. Secondly on ontological authenticity, by exploring stakeholders experiences and perceptions on child marriage support, the ontological position of interactionism and constructionism was achieved. Thus, this study is authentic because it has given a voice to victims who are living their social reality and understand how it feels. Again, in terms of educational authenticity, victims were able to visualize and see themselves as survivors which reflected their strengths and resilience. Fourth on catalytic authenticity; the current study will be a catalyst for future policy intervention and lenses of where service providers would rapidly respond and rescue girls who are at risk of the practice. Fifth on tactical authenticity; victims of child marriage by knowing the escape routes, and the surviving strategies might empower them to be more resilient and to plan their way out of the practice. Not only them, policymakers now have empirical evidence of where to start from in their attempt to halt the practice of child marriage.