
**PEER PRESSURE AND EARLY MARRIAGES AMONG SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN IN UGANDA: A
CASE STUDY OF KAKUMIRO DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT.**

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the relationship between peer pressure and early marriages in Uganda but with focus on Kakumiro District Local Government. The study was guided by both main and specific objectives as well as research questions which were the basis for the research findings. The researcher used both primary and secondary sources as well as methods of data collection to generate as much information as possible. The researcher was constrained with a number of factors such as the covid-19 pandemic which limited her physical contacts with the reliable respondents as well as the financial constraints that limited her movements to collect data from different sources scattered across the geographical area. However, the study found out that there is a close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages as many teenagers are driven into unwanted marriages by the influence exerted on them by their peers in their communities. The sample size was 40 respondents. These included 10 staffs of Kakumiro district, 10 officials of the civil society and 10 community members including a sample of school dropouts and 10 school officials. It was observed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed (60%) that there was a close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages among the school going children, 30% of the respondents agreed that peer pressure led to early marriage among the school going children, 6% of the respondents disagreed that peer pressure led to early marriages by citing other reasons, while 4% disagreed strongly that peer pressure cannot led to early marriage among the school going children. The government should facilitate fully all agencies involved in the education and hasten the fight against peer pressure as well as fighting early marriages for efficient monitoring and supervision including civil society so as to harmonize their efforts and initiatives towards the fight against the vice.

Key words: peer pressure, early marriages, school and children

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Back ground to the study: All over the world, marriage is considered a moment of celebration and a milestone in the lives of adults. Unfortunately, as this Digest makes clear, the practice of early marriage gives no such cause for celebration. Imposing a spouse on a child too often means that a girl or boy's childhood is shortened and their basic rights are threatened (Joventa et al., 2023). During the last thirty years of working with UNICEF in Asia, I have encountered the phenomenon of child and early marriage on many occasions. While most of the impacts remain hidden, it is abundantly clear that millions of children and young people, especially girls, suffer negative consequences (Aisha et al., 2023). According to the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which provide most of the current country-level data on child marriage, child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries (Richard, 2022). The highest rates are in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia, as well as parts of Latin America and the Caribbean (ICRW 2006; NRC/IOM 2005). Uganda is one of the countries with the highest number of early and forced marriages. 10% of girls are married before the age of 15 and 40% of girls are married before the 18th day of birth (Zowena et al., 2023). According to UNICEF data from 2011, approximately 46 percent of all women marry by the age of 18, despite the law setting 18 as the legal age for marriage. Yet many societies, particularly in Africa and South Asia, continue to

support the idea that girls should marry at or soon after puberty. Their spouses are likely to be several years older than them, but may be more than twice their age (Joventa et al., 2023). Parents and heads of families make marriage decisions for daughters and sons with little regard for personal consequences. Rather, they view marriage as a family-building strategy, an economic arrangement, or a way to protect girls from unwelcome sexual advances (Vincent & Peter, 2023). Many of these young brides are second or third wives in polygamous households. In some African countries, notably Botswana and Namibia, few girls marry at puberty. However, cohabitation is quite common. While the trend towards later marriage is clear for the continent as a whole, there are some countries such as Lesotho and Mozambique where the trend has been reversed. There are also cases where the stress of conflict or HIV/AIDS appears to contribute to early marriage (UNICEF, 2001 & 2020). Early marriage refers to a social situation where young girls and boys under the legal age and even adolescents join the decision to start a family (Aisha et al., 2023). Although the concept of early marriage is seen from the perspective of girls, it should be recognized that it affects boys, although incidents are common among young schoolgirls who drop out of their studies at an early stage and marry both boys and men who double or triple their age. (Ntirandekura et al., 2022).

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Problem statement

According to the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which provide most of the current country-level data on child marriage, child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries. The highest rates are in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, as well as parts of Latin America and the Caribbean (Aisha et al., 2023). Uganda is one of the countries with the highest number of early and forced marriages. 10% of girls are married before the age of 15 and 40% of girls are married before the 18th day of birth (Mercy et al., 2023). According to UNICEF data from 2011, approximately 46 percent of all women marry by the age of 18, despite the law setting 18 as the legal age for marriage. Forced child marriage is a life-changing reality for many girls around the world. Some at the age of 8 or 9 are forced to trade their childhood for a life that can be defined as isolation, violence and disease (Ninsiima et al., 2023). It is a practice rooted in tradition rather than religious custom and is practiced all over the world, from Asia to Africa to the Americas. The number of girls who are married as children is staggering. According to UNICEF, in 2007 more than 60 million girls aged 20-24 worldwide were married before their 18th birthday. If current trends continue, an additional 100 million girls – or 25,000-30,000 girls every day – will become child brides over the next decade. While boys are exposed to early marriage, most child marriages involve girls (Vincent & Peter, 2023). For example, in Mali, the ratio of girls aged 15-19 who were married as children compared to boys is 72 to one, and in El Salvador it is six to one. The ICRW review shows that child marriage rates are highest in parts of Africa and South Asia, where between half and three-quarters of girls are married before the age of 18. Niger, Mali and Chad have the highest rate. In Uganda, the current lockdown of the education sector has exacerbated the problem of early marriage as many girls drop out of school and parents lose hope of enrolling them in school (Oromo et al., 2023). Despite having legal tools against the vice like the Uganda Children Act 2016, the problem persists, prompting researchers to research and delve into the matter to find a better sustainable cure.

Research objectives

- To find out the relation between peer pressure and early marriages among the school going children.
- To examine other causes of early marriages among the school going children.
- To devise practical strategies and remedies to early marriages among the school going children.

Methodology

It is the blueprint for conducting the study that maximizes control over factors that could interfere with the validity of the findings. Designing a study helps the researcher to plan and implement the study in a way that will help the researcher to obtain intended results, thus increasing the chances of obtaining information that could be associated with the real situation (Burns & Grove 2001:223). The researcher employed the two research methods of descriptive and analytical research designs during the research. In this, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed accordingly, this helped to understand the relationship between peer pressure and early marriages. According to Polit and Hungler (1999:37) population is an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or

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members that conform to a set of specifications. In relation to this study, the population included officials of Kakumiro district both civil servant and political leaders, civil society officials and the a few community members as well as a few school administrators. The process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population is known as sampling (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber 1998:250; Polit & Hungler 1999:95). The sample size was 40 respondents. These included 10 staffs of Kakumiro district, 10 officials of the civil society and 10 community members including a sample of school dropouts and 10 school officials. Such respondents are representative enough and expected to have reliable and credible information about the topic.

Table 1: The sample size and sampling techniques for respondents selected for research

CATEGORY	SAMPLE SIZE	SAMPLE TECHNIQUE
Political leaders	5	Purposive sampling
Civil servants	5	Purposive sampling
Local people including school dropouts and school officials	20	Simple random sampling
Officials of the Civil Society	10	Cluster sampling
TOTAL	40	

Data was analysed qualitatively. The qualitative data obtained from the questionnaires was coded and tabulated on a scale and after was computed using statistical package for social scientists (SPSS) (Nelson et al., 2022). This is because the study is basically qualitative that is meant to investigate the relationship between decentralization and development. Data was analysed progressively using thematic qualitative analysis which is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data. These methods shall be used in order to be able to describe in detail the views and opinions of the respondents. Themes were defined and data was presented according to the identified themes which were based on the study objectives. Quotations were used to bring out the voices of the respondents for the case of interviews while photographs were used for the case of observation to bring out the message clearly. For the case of questionnaires, tabulations were used to reduce findings or collected data into a tabular form.

RESULTS

Types/forms of decentralization in Uganda

Table 2: Showing the different forms or sources of taxes collected under decentralization in Uganda in kiboga district local government

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S/no	Type or source of revenue	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Grants from central government	60	70
2	Property tax/rate, market dues, licenses and fees	30	25
3	Donations and loans	10	05

Source: Survey

From the table above, it shows that Kakumiro district local government mainly receives grants from the central government which includes both conditional and unconditional grants. This is represented by 70% of the total revenue for the district. Conditional grants are those monies given to the district to fund predetermined activities whereas unconditional grants are those monies given to fund any activity as may be deemed by the district authorities. Locally, the district only collects 30% of its revenue and this is attributed to low level of tax compliance, limited tax base and among other factors. Donations and loans. The district also receives some contributions from donors including private individuals and non-government organizations that have the financial leverage to donate any materials including money. This is however, the least source of district revenue standing at only 10% as represented in the table above.

Figure 1: The graph showing the responses of the respondents on whether peer pressure leads to early marriages among the school going children.

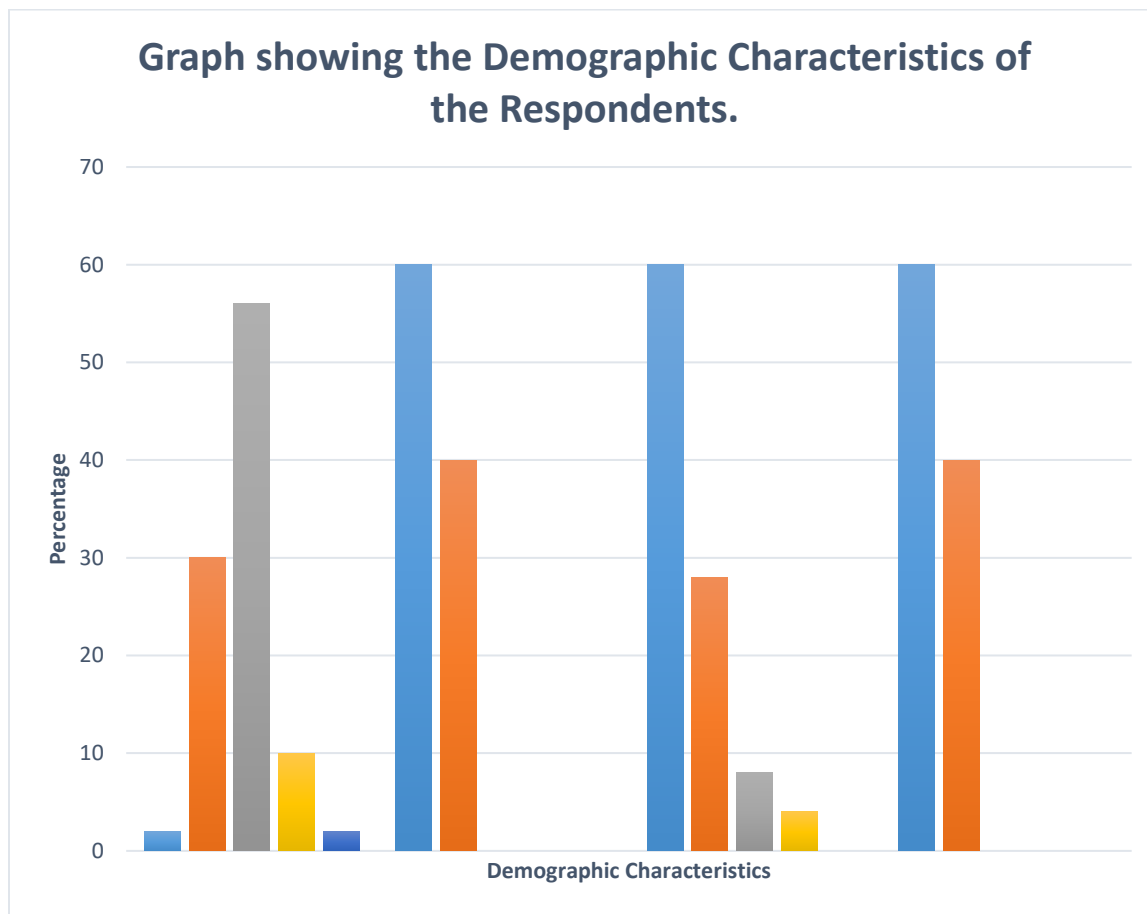
People's responses

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Source: survey

The graph shows that 100% of the respondent were aware of the existence of early marriages in the society 90% have strongly agreed that there is a close relationship between peer pressure and early marriages in Kakumiro district. 96% agreed that peer pressure poses a big threat to the society by influencing teenagers into early marriages. 70% of the respondents accepted to have forced into early marriages as a result of peer pressure. 30% of the respondents revealed that besides peer pressure, there are other factors that forced them into early marriages.

Table 3: Showing how the respondents opinionated on whether peer pressure leads to early marriages among the school going children

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	30	60
Agree	15	30
Not sure	0	0%
Disagree	3	6

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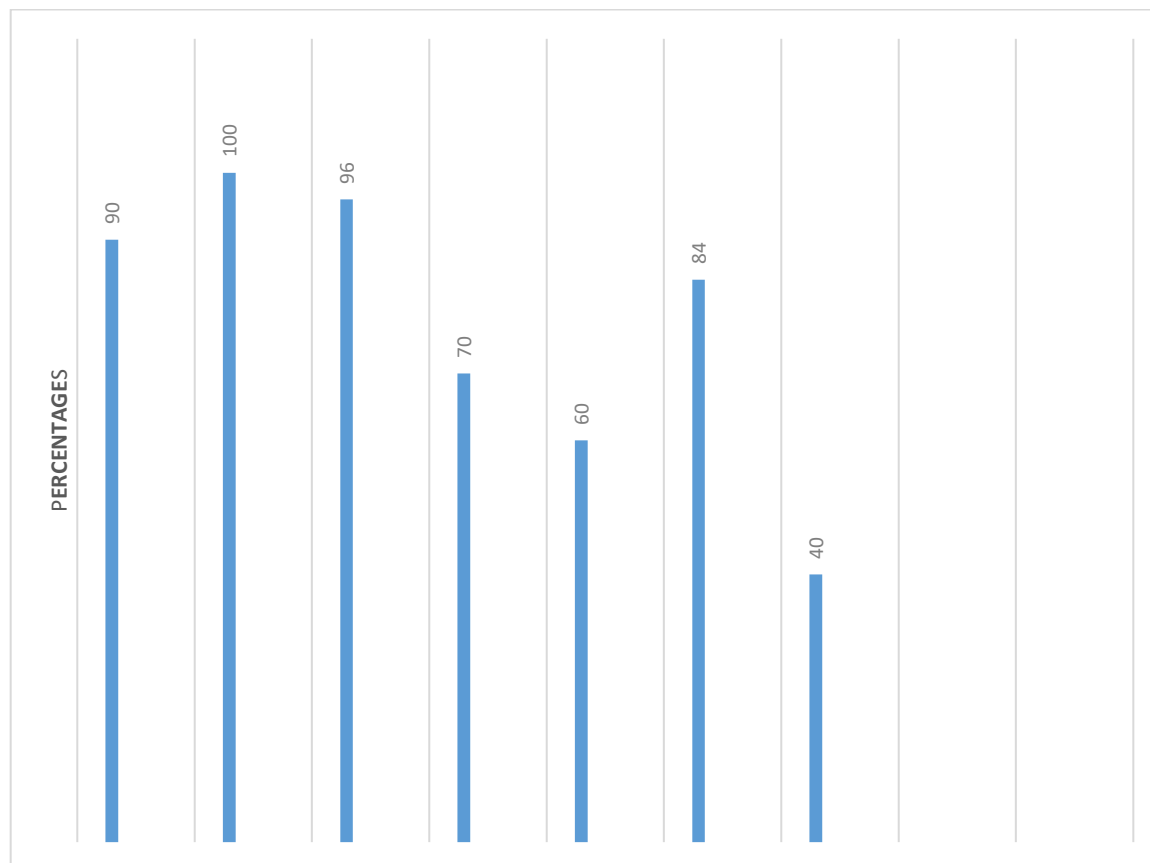
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Strongly disagree	2	4
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

From the above table, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed (60%) that there is a close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages among the school going children, 30% of the respondents agreed that peer pressure leads to early marriage among the school going children, 6% of the respondents disagreed that peer pressure leads to early marriages by citing other reasons, while 4% disagreed strongly that peer pressure cannot lead to early marriage among the school going children. This implies that on the average, there is a strong and close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages which strongly calls for efficient and effective government institutionalized policies. This is most likely to curb the vice so to meet the objectives of the education policy of Uganda.

Figure 2: The graph showing whether peer pressure leads to early marriages among the school going children

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From the above graph above, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed (60%) that there is a close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages among the school going children, 30% of the respondents agreed that peer pressure leads to early marriage among the school going children, 6% of the respondents disagreed that peer pressure leads to early marriages by citing other reasons, while 4% disagreed strongly that peer pressure cannot lead to early marriage among the school going children. This implies that on the average, there is a strong and close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages which strongly calls for efficient and effective government institutionalized policies. This is most likely to curb the vice so to meet the objectives of the education policy of Uganda.

Table 4: Showing other factors that lead to early marriages among the school going children in Kakumiro district local government

Factors that lead to early marriages	Male	Female	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	20	20	48	40
Closure of schools due to the pandemic	2	5	02	30
Tradition	4	4		10
Religion	4	3		10
Ineffective child laws and policies	10	6	50	05
Child neglect by parents	5	4		05

Source: Primary data

The findings on the table above indicate that 20 male and 20 female respondents agreed that apart from peer pressure, there are other factors that lead to early marriages among the school going children in Kakumiro district local government. And these were as follows:

The findings on the table above indicate that poverty was the leading cause of early marriages as parents tend to marry off their daughters in exchange for bride price. This stood at 40% supported by 20 males and 20 female

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respondents. The study further found out that the closure of the schools was another big cause of early marriages as many teenagers got pregnant and automatically dropped out of school. This stood at 30% of the response rate.

Tradition was cited as another cause of school dropout due to some cultures promoting early marriages and denying the girl children education in favour of the boys. It received 10% response rate. Religion such as Islamic tend to force children into early marriages as early as 14 years of age. Ineffective laws and policies of government were cited to be another cause of early marriages among the school going children since the authorities are reluctant to reprimand the culprits.

Child neglect especially for the girl child was seen as another factor propelling teenagers into early marriages due to lack of parental guidance and care. This received 05% of the total responses. These respondents were picked out of the sample of 40 which indicates 96% of response and only 04% were not accessible. The study reveals that 60% of the respondents were males whereas only 40% of the respondents were females. This has given a fair distribution of responses according to gender indicating limited bias in the selection process.

Table 5: Showing the remedies to the factors that lead to early marriages in Kakumiro district local government.

Remedies	Male	Female	Frequency	Percentage
Increased government funding for poverty eradication projects	20	20	48	40
Opening of education institutions for children to study	2	5	02	30
Change of attitude of the parents and teenagers through civic education or sensitization	4	4		10
Effective laws and policies against early marriages	4	3		10
Strong political and administrative will	10	6	50	05

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Enacting laws against child neglect	5	4		05
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Source: Primary data

The findings on the table above indicate that 96% of the respondents agreed and proposed that government should increase the resources given to fight poverty so to stop parents from selling their daughters for bride price. This indicated 40% of the responses. A strong Political and administrative leadership is crucial towards the elimination of this vice. This is indicated by 05% of the response from various respondents. The findings on the table above indicate further that 30% of the respondents cited a negative attitude of parents and teenagers which force them into early marriages. This should be averted through civic education and sensitization about the dangers of early marriages and benefits of education. They therefore advocate for civic education to the clients so as to change their mentality. 05% of the respondents advocate for strong and effective laws and policies to counteract early marriages and child neglect as well as forced early marriages. The laws existing are already effective and not enforced accordingly.

Figure 3: A pie chart showing the relationship between peer pressure and early marriages among the school going children in kakumiro district local government.

From the table and pie chart above, the findings show that 96% of the respondents agreed that there is a close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages in Uganda and kakumiro district local government as respondents have revealed. Only 4% of the respondents were not sure and objected citing other varying reasons as shown in the tables above. This however, does not distort the fact that peer pressure is the leading cause of early marriages in the kakumiro district local government.

Conclusions

The study concluded that 100% of the respondents are aware of the existence of the peer pressure as a drive for early marriages among the school going children. This study further concluded that there are several challenges encountered by the local governments among which include political interference, poor funding curtailing the capacity of the corporation to dispense its mandate, negative attitude of clients leading evasion of paying tax which pose a heavy financial threat to the authority activities and the unfavorable legal environment which is deterrent enough and the problem of poor intergovernmental relations. The study found out that 96% of the respondents agreed that there is a close correlation between peer pressure and early marriages in kakumiro district local government and only 04% of the respondents rejected citing other reasons.

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Recommendations

The government should facilitate fully all agencies involved in the education and hasten the fight against peer pressure as well as fighting early marriages for efficient monitoring and supervision including civil society so as to harmonize their efforts and initiatives towards the fight against the vice.

Massive sensitization should be reinforced so as to enable clients change their mindset and desist from bad attitudes that promote early marriages.

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