



## Patriarchal Marriage Impact on Curriculum Implementation: Perceptions from Female Teachers and Girls in Hilltop Community, Zimbabwe

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**ABSTRACT:** This research examines how patriarchy, domestic violence, and early marriage affect female teachers and young girls in rural Zimbabwe. Both groups face similar challenges, including violence and restrictive gender roles, which hinder female teachers' instructional performance. Early marriage, common in rural communities, disrupts girls' school attendance and academic achievement. The study used purposive sampling in two rural secondary schools in the Nemakonde District (Hilltop Community), Zimbabwe. Qualitative data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, analysed thematically, and supported by verbatim quotations. Findings show that oppressive marriages negatively impact female teachers' instructional duties. Respondents recommend premarital counselling and in-service mental health support for teachers. The high rate of early marriage calls for immediate, coordinated intervention from key stakeholders, including educators, parents, school inspectors, and law enforcement.

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**KEYWORDS:**

Curriculum implementation, early marriages, equity, girl-child, inclusivity, mental health, patriarchy

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship notes that teaching has increasingly become a female-dominated profession (Clifford, 2014; Dillabough, 1999). Considering the negative impact of marriage on gender equity, this study examines how marriage affects curriculum implementation from the perspectives of female teachers and girl learners. The research explores challenges faced by female teachers and married girls, focusing on the effects of gender-based violence and early marriage on educational outcomes. Many young girls, influenced by societal norms, leave school early to marry (Chatterjee, 2022), resulting in lost opportunities for personal and economic advancement. Early marriage significantly undermines these girls' potential.

Married female teachers in patriarchal marriages experience a dual burden of domestic and professional responsibilities (Xhaho, Caro, and Baily, 2021). Some prioritize household duties over work obligations to maintain their marriages.

According to Sohal (2024), marriage has been a source of misery and pain for many female professionals because of its patriarchal nature. Walby (1983) argues that the concept of patriarchy is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality. McDonough (2013) defines patriarchy as a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. It can be noted that female teachers, even though they are professionals, are also suffering from the bondage of patriarchal society, which ends up affecting the way they perform their instructional duties; hence, negatively affecting curriculum implementation.

### 2. REVIEWED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The feminist perspective explains the phenomenon of this study, namely the challenges of patriarchy in the marriages of female teachers and young girls, as seen through domestic violence, early marriages, specified gender roles, and their effects on curriculum

implementation. The concept of patriarchy denotes a system of male supremacy over women that transcends different economic systems, eras, regions, and classes (Thapa, 2019). According to Boyquziyeva (2022), the ideology of male dominance has advanced due to the prominence of father-led leadership, with the father in a position of paramount importance in society as the sole head and protector of the family.

The feminist theoretical framework is classified into liberal, socialist, and radical approaches. The foundation of liberal feminism is the belief that women should have equal rights and opportunities in society (Nussbaum, 2021). Socialist feminism, being closely related to neo-Marxist social theory, raises questions about society and power, issues that are not addressed by liberal feminism. The focus of radical feminism is on curricula, women teachers' and girls' access to power, and policy formulation in schools (Srivastava, 2017). Radical feminism accepts that education is a tool for releasing women from subordination but argues that existing formal schooling cannot be trusted to serve that purpose.

Many studies show that women have less time for their careers than men because of domestic and caregiving responsibilities (Lee & Tang, 2015). This is influenced by societal constraints that assign specific duties to men and women due to the patriarchal nature of most African societies. Recent research confirms that this conflict extends to academics, with female workers, especially teachers, spending more time on domestic chores than their male counterparts (Jolly, Griffith, DeCastro, Stewart, Ubel, and Jagsi, 2014). When women are at work, their household chores are on hold. This explains why female teachers may prioritize home duties over work. Female teachers' absences from work exceed those of male teachers. Connell (2020) notes that female teachers leave work earlier than male teachers to attend to home duties, despite the presence of maids in some cases. If a child gets sick, female teachers take leave to care for the child, while male teachers do not, as these duties are socially assigned to women. Thus, according to feminist theory, workplace equality remains more an aspiration than a reality (Rottenberg, 2014). Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel (2020) argue that women are perceived as less dedicated to labour-intensive jobs because of their dual responsibilities at home and at work.

Due to the patriarchal nature of society, most female teachers experience domestic violence. This spillover affects their workplace performance, leading to poor service delivery and strained relationships with teachers and learners. Poor service delivery results in failure to perform in class, affecting curriculum implementation, as teachers are expected to be present for instructional duties. Oni-Ojo, Adenji, Osibango, and Heirsmac (2014) note that domestic violence affects curriculum implementation through absenteeism. Laith and Vaillancourt (2022) found that chronic absenteeism is a significant effect of domestic violence on female teachers. Hoff (2016) reported that female teachers absent themselves after domestic violence due to injuries, emotional distress, being locked up by husbands, or resolving disputes with counsellors or relatives. De Koker, Mathews, Zuch, Bastien, and Mason-Jones (2014) found that missing lessons also significantly affect the roles of female secondary school teachers. Koech (2013) noted that female teachers may be present but still miss lessons. Lloyd (2018) identified poor preparation as a significant effect of domestic violence on teaching. Low self-esteem was also noted (Chen & Qin, 2020). Teachers need confidence to perform well, but abuse leads to low self-esteem and reduced productivity (Plummer, 2014). Poor interpersonal relationships also affect female teachers' professional and administrative roles (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Davies (2019) found that female teachers often develop bad attitudes toward their husbands and deflect these onto students and staff due to domestic violence at home.

Child marriage is also linked to girls' increased risk of other forms of gender-based violence, including physical and emotional abuse by husbands and other family members, as well as marital rape and sexual coercion (Girls Not Brides, 2018). Early marriage significantly reduces the probability that girls will complete secondary school (Nguyen & Wodon, 2015). Although disentangling causation is difficult, the associations are clear and consistent. Other research has underscored that education is an effective protective mechanism against early marriage (McCleary-Sills, 2015). Across eighteen of the twenty countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage, girls with no education were up to six times more likely to marry than girls with a secondary education (Bank, 2017). The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before age 18 and to have children during her teenage years (Erulkar, 2013). Child marriage clearly has an impact on the resources available to girls, since girls marrying early often drop out of school (Birchall, 2018). Lloyd and Mensch (2008) assert that child marriage and pregnancies account for 5 to 33 percent of dropouts, depending on the country. In Nigeria, Nguyen and Wodon (2015) found that child marriage and pregnancies account for 15 to 20 percent of dropouts. According to Crenshaw (2015), girls are more likely to drop out of school early, as compared to boys, due to early marriage. It has also been suggested that in many cases, the control that girls have over the timing of their marriage, as well as their ability to continue their education, is limited (Bank, 2017). Early marriage was cited as a reason for up to 28% of secondary school dropouts in some African contexts. It was reported as a key reason young girls did not complete secondary school (Birchall, 2018).

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Research shows that females are significantly disadvantaged in social, economic, and administrative spheres locally and internationally (Lamphere, 2024). In education, for instance, the number of women exiting at higher and tertiary education, compared to those entering

the school system at the primary level, remains quite low (Morley, 2013). In contrast, the number of females marrying before attaining the Ordinary Level (O-Level) remains quite high and appears to be increasing gradually, especially in rural areas. The perennial trend is attributed to several political, economic, and social factors. Most marriage counsellors and feminists argue that patriarchal dominance in marriage remains a great cause for concern in both high school dropouts and negatively impacts female teachers as they perform their day-to-day instructional roles. (Mhembwe & Mapurisa, 2022, pp. 360-373)

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), women have the same rights as any other human being. However, these rights and freedoms are infringed by violence against women, which also promotes gender inequity in the community. The patriarchal nature of the marriages that female teachers and young girls enter enhances violence against them. This phenomenon motivated researchers to gain in-depth insight into both perpetrator and victim characteristics, based on perceptions from the immediate community.

Child marriage is also known to be a widespread violation of human rights (Rafferty, 2013). It impedes educational development, and it is rooted in gender inequality. The low value placed on girls and women perpetuates the practice and its acceptability of child marriage in societies where the practice is common. Social norms around girls' education and women's participation in the formal labour force may mean that girls are not prioritised in household education investment decisions (McCleary-Sills, Hanmer, Parsons, and Klugman, 2015). Married girls are technically school dropouts, and most have little to no say in decisions about whether to continue or return to school, thereby limiting their literacy, numeracy, and economic contribution (Vogelstein, 2013). When girls marry early, their educational trajectories are altered. The earlier a girl marries, the more likely she is to have attained a low level of schooling (Nguyen & Wodon, 2015). Overall, child marriage negatively affects one's level of educational attainment and the likelihood of furthering studies (Tsip, 2015).

The way married teachers' and married girls' patriarchal experiences affect the implementation of the curriculum is absent from published literature. (Nera & Nyikadzino, 2025, pp. 1-20) Henceforth, the researchers found it prudent to investigate this silent phenomenon, examining the effect of patriarchal bondage on both female teachers and married girls in curriculum implementation.

The questions outlined below guided the study.

#### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- a) How pervasive is gender inequity among female teachers in the Hilltop community?
- b) What is the effect of early child marriage on girls' education?
- c) What are the preferred solutions to the problems faced by female teachers in marriage and by girls who marry early and drop out of school?

#### **5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Working within an interpretive paradigm (Isik, 2025), the study employed a qualitative approach to answer the main research question: 'Effect of patriarchal marriages on curriculum implementation.'" Qualitative research was best suited because it provides in-depth insights into the phenomena that quantitative methods would struggle to capture. The study aimed to collect rich, comprehensive data from a sizeable number of respondents (Creswell, 2009). In-depth interviews, informant interviews, and questionnaires were conducted with female teachers, head teachers, and school inspectors to triangulate data and accurately report the results.

#### **6. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

Both convenience and purposive sampling were used in this study. Omona (2013) posits that qualitative researchers intentionally use non-random sampling because their sampling is often purposeful. In addition, he says that researchers select individuals who yield the most information about the topic under investigation. A description of each sampling method used is provided. Convenience sampling, according to Lopez and Whitehead (2015), refers to situations in which population elements are selected because they are readily available. Convenience sampling (also called available sampling) was adopted because respondents were accessible or readily available (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). The convenience sampling method was chosen for its proximity and affordability. The female researcher, also an active instructional designer, was the lead person in accessing female teachers. Purposive sampling was intended to identify relevant respondents with the necessary information (Creswell, 2013). The participants were female teachers from two secondary schools, their head teachers, deputy heads, and responsible school inspectors, as well as some girl-child learners. Purposive sampling was guided by the researchers' knowledge of the population, the research elements, and the nature of the research purpose or objectives (Babbie & Mouton, 2011).

## 7. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 7.1 Demographic Characteristics of Female Teachers in the Study

Variables	Freq (n-16)	Percent %
Age (years)	Age (years)	Age (years)
24-30	3	18.75%
31-40	10	62.5%
>40	3	18.75%
Number of children	Number of children	Number of children
None	1	6.25%
1-3	11	68.75%
>3	4	25%
<b>Qualifications of participants</b>	<b>Qualifications of participants</b>	<b>Qualifications of participants</b>
Degree	12	75%
Diploma	4	25%
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>
Single	0	0%
Married	10	56.25%
Divorced/Separated	1	6.25%
Widowed	1	6.25%
Cohabiting	4	25%

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Female Teachers in the Study**

### 7.2 Main themes from the solicited data

<b>Theme 1:</b> Poor service delivery	<b>Subthemes:</b> Absenteeism, Missing lessons, Poor lesson preparation, Low self-esteem, Mental health problems
<b>Theme 2:</b> Poor interpersonal relationships	<b>Subthemes:</b> Negative attitudes, Lack of cooperation

### 7.3 Female Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Domestic Violence on Their Teaching Roles

The experience of female teachers on how domestic violence affected their instructional responsibilities was explored. Through interviews and interactions with female teachers, themes and several subthemes were produced that explained how domestic violence affected teachers' professional and administrative roles. Consistent with recent studies (Klencakova et al., 2023; Lamphere, 2024), our findings confirm that the spillover of domestic violence - rooted in the patriarchal nature of marriages - extends into the workplace, disrupting teaching and learning processes. Interviewed female teachers reported that domestic violence led to poor service delivery and strained interpersonal relationships with colleagues and students, mirroring trends observed in the wider literature (Rankine et al., 2022; Jolly et al., 2014).

Most of the female teachers who were interviewed acknowledged that they had missed work following incidents of domestic abuse due to physical harm, emotional instability, being locked up by their spouses, or resolving domestic disputes. They skipped school to deal with and process their domestic issues. These findings mirror a study conducted by Bujold (2023), who similarly concluded that most survivors of domestic violence expressed displeasure, felt ashamed, and were highly isolated from seeking work soon after the close shave. In instances when one would have violent injuries, such as bruises, swellings, and cuts, involuntary days off were prolonged.

FT1 narrated that *'After picking up a nasty fight or exchanging words with my husband of 10 years, I always find myself ashamed to attend class for days. I often quarantine myself for a while after finding a sweet lie to tell the school head.*

FT2 said,

*Going to school or work when I am in pain, in a poor mood, in low spirits, or injured is a big no. My high rate of absenteeism from class is a source of complaint to the school head. Although this concern was valid, it made more sense to skip duty than to go to class and cause misery and bickering among colleagues and learners after a difficult day at home. I occasionally skipped school due to alleged illness or financial difficulties.*

From the narratives, absenteeism from school is the norm after any form of domestic violence or abuse. The findings of this study echo those of Rankine, Fuhrman, Copperman, Miller, and Culyba (2022), who concluded that prior exposure to violence was associated with absenteeism and played a role in school attendance, emphasising the need for trauma-sensitive approaches to absenteeism. Participants reported that, despite knowing their teaching schedules and the appropriate time to attend class, they arrived late to school whenever they had marital disputes at home. Despite marital encounters usurping the energy of victims such that they may turn up for work ill-prepared, many missed classes due to physical exhaustion, mood swings, emotional exhaustion, and unruly behaviour from their spouses, partners, and relatives.

FT3 submitted that,

*After a quarrel one day, my husband's father went to the school and requested that I be excused for a few days to enable the family to resolve our family issues. I begged him to let me teach as the learners were about to have their end-of-term tests. I promised to take care of the household issues in the evening, but he could not have any of it. As a result, my headmaster gave in to the pressure and had to let me go. That day, I was supposed to teach three revision lessons, but I did not. Returning to school the following day became difficult as word had spread of my premature return home. Nevertheless, I received support from the school head and a few colleagues, which enabled me to resume work after a 3-day absence. Alas, I had already missed the scheduled lessons, and I felt that I had done a disservice to the learners.*

Participants conceded that inadequate planning for lessons can result from domestic violence at home. According to the participants, the unfavourable home environment and interruptions to lesson preparation are the reasons they do not adequately prepare for lessons. In cases where some preparation would have been done in advance, lesson execution may be hampered by, say, mood swings, which are exacerbated by a battered ego. Most respondents claimed that to avoid criticism from school administrators and related supervisors, they often give learners copious notes to keep them occupied. Similarly, a study by Kitchen (2017) uncovered that patriarchy-dominated female teachers are physically present in class, while absent-minded or day patriarchy walking. They enter the classroom merely to accept space. A few admitted that they even forged lesson plans to save their jobs. Such a status quo negatively affects how lessons are executed, class relations, and the efficacy of learner assessment initiatives.

FT4 said,

*I often ran out of time to either gather the necessary instructional materials or read around in preparation for some of my weekly lessons due to marital concerns that would haunt me for weeks. As a result, I have habitually failed to complete the required lesson plans. I enter the classroom and teach using my subject's main textbook, and I notice it works equally well.*

It follows that failing to prepare adequately for class can have detrimental effects on learners, particularly when they are in the care of novice female teachers. Even when female instructors created lesson plans, some claimed the plans were intended to deceive school heads to spare themselves further reprimand.

FT5 said,

*I must constantly create lesson plans on schedule. I usually prepared lesson plans after the session, or when I was more at ease, to avoid getting in trouble with the school administration.*

Probing further into how the teacher felt when she forged lesson plans to please the school head, and whether she would effectively deliver her lessons, she gave it a sarcastic laugh in the absence of adequate preparation. She retorted thus: *Teaching is unlike being a soldier, in which one can battle the enemy even when one is low or demoralized. Before one teaches, the facilitator needs to be emotionally stable, ready, and well-prepared for each lesson.*

When female educators, who are meant to be role models and stewards of societal norms and values, cheat or neglect their instructional responsibilities, one becomes more worried and envisions a serious nosedive in educational standards. These findings resonate with a similar study conducted by Acker (1995), which highlighted that most female teachers lamented that their homes were no longer safe places to work from. To keep the peace with their spouses, the teachers claimed that they had resorted to not doing any school-related work from home, which is next to impossible.

FT6, in her early thirties and married to a man of a lower education level, had this to say:

*One evening, after supper, I was preparing a lesson scheme of work to meet the school deadline. My husband called me, and I went and knelt near him. He just looked at me and kept quiet. I immediately went back to my study desk as I sensed danger. He started yelling at me on multiple allegations. I silently picked up my books and left for the bedroom. Unfortunately, he still followed me, grabbed my wrist, and started twisting my arm for no apparent reason.*

In such a condition, can any woman be fully prepared to teach? Further probing into this led to two female teachers in their thirties giving similar reasons, saying their husbands think that when they prepare lessons in the evening, they do so to annoy them, to deny them attention, or to somehow punish them. They concurred that their husbands similarly disrupted their lesson preparations. These findings corroborate research by Waismel-Manor, Wasserman, and Shamir-Balderman (2021), which uncovered that husbands often declare that their wives should finish schoolwork at school and reserve home time for the family. FT7 submitted that,

*Some acquaintances accused me of marrying an unenlightened man, and I agree with them now. However, back then, I thought they were unreasonable. This man is surely so barbaric, to say the least. Imagine that he occasionally switches off the lights when I am preparing my lessons or marking students' scripts from home? One day, he poured water on my notepad for no apparent reason.*

These two participants intrigued the researchers. We had further conversations to establish whether the allegations were true. One of the survivors (FT8) averred that:

*I will do anything to avoid getting intimate with him. I am so very sick and tired of his annoying behaviour. Only God knows. Staying up late at night preparing my lesson plans has become a good excuse.*

However, this breeds more conflict.

Some female teachers interviewed mentioned that marital conflicts led them to develop low self-esteem.

*FT9, who is in her forties, stated: "I have come to have a negative view of myself. I wonder if I were that ugly. One day, I questioned him furiously: Is there any value you see in me? To which he said, 'What do you think?' If you still had anything to be proud of, would I be fleeing from you?' I felt so miserable. I wished I were dead. I kept asking myself whether I was worthless beyond my professional role.*

FT10 had a harrowing experience. She had two marriages that both failed due to domestic violence. She had this to say:

*I had low self-esteem because of my experiences in marriage. I give thanks to God that I eventually received training as a counsellor. The training allowed me to help others in similar circumstances. By now, I should have committed suicide. I started being subjected to abusive behaviour before I even trained as a teacher. I never trusted either of my husbands in my previous marriage. We would fight at the slightest misunderstanding. Whenever my husband was away, in both unions, I would think of ways to hurt him further without any remorse. This affected my inner peace as a teacher, and it led to perpetual antagonism and violence in the home. I did not stop doing this until after I received support from a trained counsellor.*

Further narratives were from FT11:

*A serene, tranquil mindset is necessary for teaching. I worked hard when I first started teaching. I would be punctual in class, prepare all my lessons, and deliver them to my satisfaction. However, my work commitment withered due to what I had gone through at home. Occasionally, I harbour regrets and humiliation.*

FT12 said,

*Even if I had intended to stay home for the entire weekend during the height of our conflict, the toxic atmosphere at home would have forced me to return to work. Of course, I would continue to feel upset and uneasy even while I was in school. Such phenomena have a significant impact on my work. One day, I recall, I got home to find my husband just vicious for no apparent reason. He swore at me as I greeted him, and this tore my heart apart. I left my house right away for school. My kids begged me not to go as they sobbed. I could not take it anymore. I spent the whole night sobbing and stayed up when I got to school. For days and weeks that followed, occasionally, as I went about my daily duties, I had a vision of my children crying and pleading with me not to leave them. I love my career and my kids, but*

*I also realised that living with that monster of a husband would certainly kill me.*

FT13 told the researchers,

*I must admit that I usually act so aggressively towards learners for no apparent reason, and when I reflect on it now, I see that my response to them was severe. My only regret is that I am too embarrassed to apologise to the learners.*

FT14 reported that

*I frequently find that after fighting with my husband, I become stern and unkind toward the learners when I return to school. I can get naughty and readily agitated at times, especially when learners pose challenging questions in class.*

The interaction between female teachers and their students is reflected in these findings. It seemed strange that instructors, who ought to be close to learners to mentor and encourage them, did not feel the same way about the learners. These learners would start to avoid the teacher. Eventually, the learners would resent the teacher. Under such conditions, the learner-teacher relationship would not be conducive to instruction.

FT15 said:

*It is important that teachers in our department consistently collaborate as a team. However, lately, I prefer to work alone or sit alone most of the time. I am not sure why, as I used to love socialising and collaborating. Regretfully, the social appetite is no longer available. I suspect these are the effects of my abusive marriage.*

FT16 stated,

*As educators, it is our responsibility to mentor learners. Students in domestic violence relationships tend to seek support from teachers outside of school hours. As a result, teachers should be free with students.*

These findings mean that female teachers who survive domestic violence cannot sustain a good relationship with learners. Therefore, it can be noted that it is very difficult for female teachers to perform to their full potential when they are faced with marital problems and challenges at home. The patriarchal nature of society enhances domestic violence in many households in which the male partner is regarded as the sole head of the household. As a result, husbands feel they have the executive authority to abuse their wives, despite the wives' objections. Status in society. By virtue of being female, it seems female teachers, despite being professionals, in the eyes of the generality of society, are prone to abuse by their spouses. The societal stigmatisation of females as inferior to men is thus buttressed. No wonder why Sultana (2010) argued that patriarchy is a political institution that subordinates women.

## 7.4 Questionnaire Responses from School Administrative Executives (School Heads)

### 7.4.1 Background information on School Administrative Executives

Variables	Freq (n6)	Percent %
Age (years):	Age (years):	Age (years):
40-50	3	50%
>50	3	50%
<b>Gender of Participants:</b>	<b>Gender of Participants:</b>	<b>Gender of Participants:</b>
Female	1	16.67%
Male	5	83.33%
<b>Qualification for Participants:</b>	<b>Qualification for Participants:</b>	<b>Qualification for Participants:</b>
Bachelor's Degree	4	66.67%

Master's Degree	2	33.33%
Marital Status:	Marital Status:	Marital Status:
Single	0	0%
Married	5	83.33%
Divorced/Separated	0	0%
Widowed	1	16.67%
Cohabiting	0	0%
<b>Instructional Experience of the Participants</b>	<b>Instructional Experience of the Participants</b>	<b>Instructional Experience of the Participants</b>
<5	1	16.67%
5-10	2	33.33%
>10	3	50%

**Table 3: Background Information on School Administrative Executive**

#### 7.4.2 Gender of the Participants

#### 7.4.3 Results from Questionnaires (School Executives)

School heads and their deputies unanimously agreed that female teachers were the worst to ask for permission to be off duty or to leave school early for personal errands, compared to their male counterparts. Therefore, this can be justifiably attributed to the fact that most female teachers, especially those in rural schools, do not stay with their husbands at the school premises. Most female teachers thus frequently take time off to check on their families. Female teachers are also on record as often seeking transfers to stay as close as possible to their husbands, to safeguard their marriages and care for their children. However, male teachers have different concerns. The school heads agreed that, in most instances, female teachers confide in them about their marital challenges and the gender-based violence (GBV) they face at the hands of their husbands. Head 1P submitted that he had two female teachers who frequently excused themselves on GBV allegations. At first, he suspected that they were making up stories, but closer investigations revealed that the women had swollen or bruised faces. In view of the above, it can be underscored that some female teachers' marriages are a great hindrance to their expected instructional performance. Some marriages negatively affect curriculum implementation in schools. These findings are a mirror of research conducted by Klencakova, Pentaraki, and McManus (2023), who concluded that intimate partner violence reduces school attendance, grade achievement, and educational attainment.

Four of the head teachers, who were male, noted that, due to the negative impact of problematic marriages on the effective implementation of the school curriculum, they had resorted to assigning male teachers to examinable classes, that is, ZIMSEC Grade Seven classes. They conceded that male teachers were less likely to be victims of GBV. In contrast, some may be GBV perpetrators themselves. However, one school head (Head 3P) argued that most female teachers who were pestered by marital challenges that negatively affected their tour of duty were not married to professionals of any sort but to laypersons. He alleged that the problem husbands were often of lower educational levels than the female teachers themselves. Thus, Epstein (2022) suggested that female teachers should be urged to make wiser life choices regarding marriage, lest they regret the greater part of their working lives.

Meanwhile, we wish to point out that of the three schools identified for the research, all their school heads and deputies were male, except for one school that had a female deputy head. Therefore, Moyo (2022) inferred that gender inequality is still an area of great concern in rural primary schools, which may be a testament to the patriarchal dominance of the generality of Zimbabwean society and the education system.

**7.5 Key Informants Interviews and Questionnaires (School Heads, Deputies, and School Inspectors)**

**7.5.1 Details of the senior educators who responded to the study questionnaires and interviews**

Occupation	Male	Female
School Heads	3	0
Deputy School Heads	2	1
School Inspectors	3	0

**Table 4: Details of Respondents to Questionnaires and Interviews**

**7.5.2 Responses to closed questionnaire items on girl child dropouts (head teachers and school inspectors)**

*Responses to Questionnaires*

Responses analysed from the questionnaires showed that school dropouts were more prevalent among girls. Most of the girl-child school dropouts were attributed to early pregnancies and marriages, even though some factors caused girls to drop out of the school system, such as traditional beliefs. (Prevent Adolescent Pregnancies, Invest in Comprehensive Sexual Education, 2024) Most rural communities still perceive it as a sheer waste of resources to educate a girl child (Sikhwari, 2024), despite the nation having successful female professionals. These are the lucky few out of thousands. (Dangarembwa & Gwirayi, 2025, pp. 59-77) In the face of economic hardships and poverty, rural communities do not seem enthusiastic about investing in the education of the girl child, which is quite regrettable. All the research participants agreed that it is desirable to educate a girl child, as it gives them better socioeconomic value and respect from their would-be husbands and society at large. It was regrettable to note that once a girl child fell pregnant, she would automatically drop out of school, as the school was not prepared to deal with the sluggishness and nausea associated with pregnancy. Stigmatisation from fellow learners and teachers also remained problematic. Even though the Government of Zimbabwe is encouraging pregnant and married girls to continue attending class (Statutory Instrument 13 of 2025), this policy has not been embraced by the generality of Zimbabwean rural society. It remains a taboo, if not an abomination. Often, a girl child may return to school at a different stage, only after delivery. It was noted that if a girl child got married or fell pregnant and was allowed to attend school, it was so difficult for her to perform well in class. Even though Pillay (2018) argues that, with support, pregnant girls and young mothers can excel academically, policies allowing pregnant girls to continue their schooling have led to improved educational outcomes (Birchall, 2018). Research highlights that structural barriers, such as lack of childcare and stigma, hinder performance rather than pregnancy itself (Wolfson, Schmidt, Stinson, and Poole, 2021). Such learners were associated with regular illness, sleeping sickness, fatigue, and household chores related to mothers. Implementing the curriculum as if all were well was therefore very difficult for the teachers. It would take considerable tolerance and patience for teachers to best manage a class with an early-marriage survivor (Walker, 2019).

All the participants also agreed that measures should be put in place to curb child marriage, as this negatively affected the effective implementation of the school curriculum. Heads confirmed that workshops were being done from time to time to enable school authorities to allow pregnant and married girls to continue with their schooling. They also confirmed that the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) was following up with girls who had dropped out of school due to early marriage or pregnancy to return to school and continue their education.

**7.5.3 Child Marriage Prevalence at Karuru Secondary School**

Year	Total number of girls	Married	Dropouts	Total number of married and dropout girls	Percentage
2021	150	23	8	31	21%
2022	130	15	7	22	15%
2023	155	20	5	25	16%

**Table 5: Child Marriage Prevalence at Karuru Secondary School**

#### 7.5.4 Child Marriage Prevalence at Nyamakate Secondary School

Year	Total number of girls	Married	Dropout	Total number of married and dropout girls	Percent
2021	150	19	10	29	19%
2022	175	20	5	25	14%
2023	180	15	7	22	12%

**Table 6: Child Marriage Prevalence at Nyamakate Secondary School**

#### 7.6 What should be done to reduce the prevalence of early marriages for girls?

From the responses given by school inspectors, it was underscored that there is a need to challenge gender norms that perpetuate the idea that girls are inferior to boys, especially in rural areas. They stressed that ending child marriage begins with understanding the traditions and patriarchal systems that perpetuate societies in which girls are denied human rights because of their sex. It was noted that many girls grew up believing that their virginity or reproductive status was their only asset, against which they should guard. The school inspectors emphasized the need to ensure that female learners receive the same high educational standards as their male peers. Parents should be encouraged and supported by a systemic welfare fund to keep the girl child in school if their sexuality is violated. Groups and programs meant to promote the sustainable development of the girl-child must be intentionally funded by the central government and targeted philanthropists; strategic funding can help bridge gaps in resources, infrastructure, and capacity (Calderon, Cantu, and Chuhan-Pole, 2018.) It was also crucial to strengthen services for girls who were at risk of, or had entered, child marriages. The work CAMFED was doing in support of the girl child was highly commended.

However, on the one hand, the school inspectors suggested that the Zimbabwean government should strengthen its dedication to curbing the perennial menace of child marriage by enacting related laws and policies in alignment with international best practices. The policies should enable the deliberate absorption of ‘patriarchal survivors’ into the school system and the prevailing socioeconomic development matrix. Most African states have adopted measures to enable girls to return to school after pregnancy, but implementation and compliance require greater attention (Jochim, 2021).

### 8. CONCLUSION

This discourse examined how patriarchal marriage affects curriculum implementation in identified secondary schools in the Hilltop Community. Patriarchal marriages were seen to hurt teaching and learning. Patriarchal marriages fostered an increase in gender-based domestic violence and early marriages in rural communities, with reference to married girls and female teachers. Given the importance of teachers in helping learners actively learn, it was underscored that a mental-health wellness programme should be instituted in schools to provide psychological support, especially to female teachers who survive GBV and to girls who often survive sexual abuse. The study established that multiple marital factors were impeding the curricular performance of female teachers. Female teachers in violent relationships provided compromised instructional services to the nation. This was shown by the teachers’ regular absences from work, incomplete lesson plans, and questionable tantrums in class. Furthermore, female teachers in problematic relationships exhibited low self-esteem. This exacerbated their poor delivery service. On the one hand, child marriage reared its ugly head in the schools studied. An alarming fraction of the girl-child was found preferring early marriage to their education. Most girls dropped out of school after marriage, thereby compromising their right to education (Bengesai et al., 2021). The victim girls experienced depression, stigmatisation, and loneliness. Participants conceded that girls who dropped out of school were ordinarily semi-literate. (Mhembwe & Mapurisa, 2022, pp. 360–376) This contrasts with the global perception that, from a socioeconomic perspective, educated mothers are more valuable to their husbands and society. Research participants also underscored that a girl's punctuality in attending classes and completing school-related activities was negatively affected if she became pregnant. (National Assessment on Adolescent Pregnancy in Zimbabwe, n.d.) It was evident that ‘young ladies’ in most rural schools stopped attending school soon after getting married or pregnant. This was attributed to the societal effect of stigmatisation and outright rejection by parents for the misdemeanour (Woollett et al., 2021, pp. 1-10). Besides the Government’s proclamation that victims of sexual offences and early marriages should continue with their schooling (Doodhnath, 2024), the situation on the ground remains contrary. The Zimbabwean society has not embraced the phenomenon. The best-case scenario was

where a girl-child returned to school after delivery, bouncing back at a different school where the host community would not be acquainted with the girl's blemished past.

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**Transparency:** The authors declare that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent. No key aspects of the investigation have been omitted. Additionally, the study followed all professional ethics and research conventions.

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