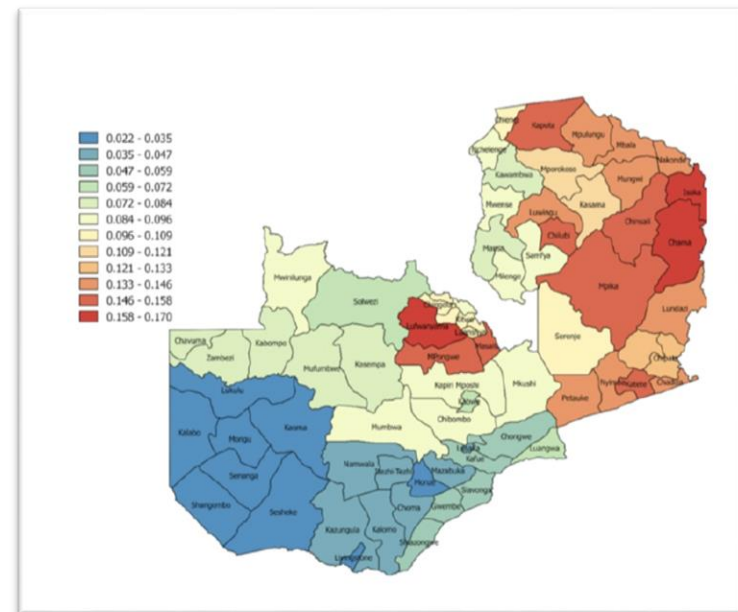




**Research Department
September, 2022**



**INFORMATION BRIEF: CHILD MARRIAGE IN
ZAMBIA**

INFORMATION BRIEF

CHILD MARRIAGE IN ZAMBIA

Child Marriage: What it is

Child marriage is defined as the legal marriage or informal union before the age of 18.¹ It has globally been identified as one of the major detriments to development and a major impediment to the realisation of human rights. Zambia has not been spared from this: 31 per cent of women marry before their 18th birthday.

Prevalence of Child Marriage in Zambia

A study conducted by the Population Council and UNFPA, concluded that child marriage is very high in Zambia. Although the study indicates that the vice declined in 2014, it is still ranked one of the highest in the World.² The rates of child marriage vary from rural to urban

areas and are as high as 60 per cent in the country's Eastern Region.³

Why it happens

1. **Poverty:** Some families marry off their young daughter(s) to receive a payment of dowry. This dowry gives them great financial relief.
2. **Vulnerability:** Orphans and stepchildren are especially vulnerable. In some families, they may be married off to reduce the financial burden. Vulnerable children may also feel getting married is an escape from mistreatment.
3. **Protecting a Girl's Sexuality:** Parents may believe that if they marry their girl child off young, will have sexual intercourse only with her husband, and her family's honor will remain preserved.

¹ Ministry of Gender: National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia: 2016-2021

² *ibid*

³ IPU

Effects of Child Marriage

- Propagates poverty: once married, it is rare for girl children to further themselves in education, thus propagating a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty.
- Creates health risks: Results in early child bearing thus, leading to increased number of child mortality.
- Fuels Gender-based violence (GBV): Greater risk of physical, sexual and emotional GBV.

Legal and Policy framework in relation to Child Marriage in Zambia

A few examples can be cited as follows:

- **The Constitution, Chapter 1 of the Laws of Zambia** - defines the age of a child as 18;
- **The Children's Code Act No. of 12 of 2022** provides for the reforms and consolidates the law relating to children;
- **The Marriage Act, Chapter 50 of the Laws of Zambia** – provides for among other things, the rightful age for marriage;

- **The Adoption (Amendment) Act, No. 24 of 1997** – Protects the rights of the adopted child to consent in relation to marriage; and
- **Education Act, No.23 of 2011-** Prohibits the marrying off of a child who is a learner.

What can Parliamentarians do?

- MPs should continue to urge the Government to report regularly to Parliament on the implementation of laws and programmes on ending child marriage;
 - Work closely with organisations that create “safe spaces” for girls to address the underlying causes of child marriage;
 - Monitor implementation of policies such as free education, re-entry programmes, provision of effective menstrual sanitation facilities and provision of comprehensive sexuality education.
-