Prevalence and Correlates of Child Marriage in Zambia

Though various international agreements and national laws are being put in place to prevent child marriages, the percentage of girls marrying below 18 years in most developing countries is still high. Globally approximately 33% of girls marry before their eighteenth birthday (UNICEF 2012). Child marriage remains a pervasive problem in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Zambia as one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa is not an exception.

Child marriage has several effects and consequence. These include high risk to complications during child birth, maternal mortality and infant mortality. Santhya (2010) observed that the risk of serious lasting complications such as fistula is higher during early and middle adolescent ages. Moreover, Conde-Agudelo , Belizán & Lammers (2005) established that adolescents below 16 years are 4 times more likely to die of pregnancy related complications compared to women in their early twenties. Despite this being the case, there is limited research on determinants of child marriage in Zambia. Therefore this study aims at estimating the levels and identifying the determinants of child marriage in Zambia in 2007 and 2013-14.

Data Source and Methods

Methods

Data for this cross-sectional study was drawn from the 2007 and 2013-14 ZDHS. These are nationally representative sample surveys of women and men of reproductive age. Its main objective was to provide information on levels and trends in fertility and use of family planning methods among other things. The samples for the surveys were selected using a stratified two-stage cluster design. The 2007 survey covered 8,000 households where 6,500 men aged 15-59 and 7,146 women aged 15–49 years were interviewed whereas the 2013 covered 18,052 households where 16,411 women aged 15-49 and 14,773 men aged 15-59 years were interviewed. A detailed report of the sampling design and sample size estimation is available in the both reports. The samples for this study were 1009 and 1,684 currently married young women aged 20-24 for the 2007 and 2013-14 ZDHS, respectively.

Ethical Considerations

The study was based on secondary analysis of data from the 2007 and 2013-14 ZDHS which had no participant identifiers. The study did not need any ethical approval. The authors just needed permission to use the data sets. This was obtained from MEASURE DHS, ICF International.

Variables Measurement

The outcome variable was child marriage. This was constructed by using the age of first marriage variable. Those who married before age eighteen experienced child marriage whereas those who married at eighteen and above did not.

The independent variables are ethnicity, religion, place of residence, region, education, occupation, exposure to mass media and wealth index. Stata 12.0 was used to analyze the data.

Statistical analysis

The data was analysed at three levels. The first level of analysis is the univariate one. This level included the computation of child marriage and describing the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the sample. The bivariate level examined relationships

between child marriage and the independent variables. At the multivariate level, binary logistic regression models were employed to explore factors related to child marriage.

Preliminary Results

The levels of child marriage were 55.4% and 48.6% in 2007 and 2013-14, respectively. More than half (60%) of the young women had primary, 29% had secondary or higher and 11% of them had no education in 2007 whereas close to half (49%) of the young women had primary, 45% had secondary or higher and only 6% had no education in 2013-14. Young women without employment were 46% in 2007 compared to more than half (53%) of them in 2013-14. The majority of the young women resided in rural areas in both years (65% and 61%, respectively) and more than three quarters (81% and 83% in 2007 and 2013-14, respectively) were Protestants.

Results also show that young women with primary education had the highest proportion (69% and 61%) of child marriage in both years. More than half (52% and 54% in 2007 and 2013-14, respectively) of young women who married before age 18 were from poor households. Most of the young women who married before their eighteenth birthday resided in rural areas (77% and 69% for 2007 and 2013-14, respectively).

Multivariate results for 2007 show that young women with secondary or higher were 75% less likely to marry before age eighteen. Moreover, young women belonging to rich households had lower odds (0.48) of marrying before their eighteenth birthday. Nyanja young women were 2 times more likely to marry before age eighteen. Results for 2013-14 reveal that from young women with secondary or higher education had lower odds (0.37) of marrying before age eighteen. Muslim young women and those from other religions were 5 times more likely to marry before their eighteenth birthday. Mambwe/Tumbuka young women had higher odds (1.5) of marrying before age eighteen. In addition, young women with exposure to mass media were 26% less likely to marry before eighteen years.

Conclusion

The prevalence of child marriage and its determinants among currently married young women aged 20-24 in Zambia was determined. Results revealed that though the level of child marriage reduced from 55% in 2007 to 49% in 2013-14, it is still high. Young women with secondary or higher education were less likely to marry before eighteen in both years. There is need for concerted efforts to prevent child marriages in Zambia.

Table 1: Distribution of currently married males and females by unmet need status, Zambia DHS 2007

Selected characteristics	2007			2013-14		
	Married <18 %	Married 18 & above %	P-value	Married <18 %	Married 18 & above %	P-value
Highest education			0.000			0.000
No education	14.8	6.5		8.5	4.5	
Primary	68.7	47.8		61.2	36.7	
Secondary/Higher	16.5	45.7		30.4	58.8	
Religion			0.2103			0.1729
Catholic	19.2	15.3		16.3	16.2	
Protestant	78.9	83.7		82.4	83.5	
Other	1.9	1.0		1.3	0.3	

Wealth Index			0.000			0.000
Poor	51.6	29.7		53.6	38.9	
Middle	22.4	21.8		19.5	17.4	
Rich	26.0	48.4		26.9	43.7	
Ethnicity			0.0137			0.0077
Bemba	33.8	38.2		30.3	34.9	
Tonga	11.3	16.1		19.7	18.8	
Luvale/Lunda	8.1	11.0		6.3	8.3	
Barotse	5.7	6.3		4.6	8.4	
Nyanja/Eastern	20.8	12.1		22.2	17.3	
Mambwe/Tumbuka	17.0	13.2		14.4	10.3	
Other	3.3	3.1		2.5	2.0	
Occupation			0.0001			0.0108
Not working	41.1	55.1		51.1	54.5	
Professional/ Clerical	13.9	16.0		15.1	19.7	
Agriculture	42.1	27.0		33.3	25.1	
Manual	3.0	1.9		0.5	0.7	
Residence			0.000			0.000
Rural	76.8	56.0		68.7	52.8	
Urban	23.2	44.0		31.3	47.2	
Region			0.0023			0.001
Central	11.7	11.5		9.1	9.8	
Copperbelt	12.0	18.9		10.1	16.3	
Eastern	19.4	10.3		16.6	10.1	
Luapula	9.2	6.4		7.4	7.2	
Lusaka	9.4	16.5		16.5	20.3	
Muchinga	18.1	15.1		7.9	5.7	
Northern	5.9	6.2		9.8	5.8	
North Western	9.1	10.1		4.1	4.5	
Southern	5.2	5.2		14.1	14.5	
Western				3.7	5.8	
Exposure to mass media			0.0961			0.000
No	29.1	2.7		37.1	23.5	
Yes	70.9	76.3		62.9	76.5	