

## Relationship Between Government Ban on Early Marriages and Girls' Completion of Secondary Education in Narok West Sub-County, Narok County

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### Abstract

This paper examined the relationship between the ban on early marriage and completion of girls' secondary education in Narok West Sub-County, Narok County, Kenya. Despite the efforts towards the provision of universal basic education, the Kenyan government continues to experience a number of challenges related to the completion of girls in secondary education. The paper is anchored on Adam's Equity Theory. The descriptive correlational design was employed, and all students (3000 female students) and 653 teachers in the 7 girls' secondary schools in Narok West Sub-County formed the target population. Purposive sampling was used to select all the 7 girls' secondary schools in Narok West Sub-County. 1078 students and 182 teachers drawn from the seven secondary schools constituted the sample size. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. The instruments' reliability was determined using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the test-retest technique. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Correlation analysis. The results indicated that the relationship between the ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County was positive and significant ( $r(83)=0.254$ ;  $p=.019$ ). This implies that enforcing minimum age-of-marriage laws and banning early marriage can improve educational attainment for girls in Narok County.

**Key terms:** Ban on early marriage, girls' completion of secondary education, Maasai community, Narok West Sub-County, secondary school dropout rates.

## INTRODUCTION

Early marriage is a profound violation of human rights as it serves as a major barrier to girls' education, frequently leading to termination of schooling before secondary completion. It disrupts educational attainment, severely limiting future economic opportunities and health outcomes for young girls. As a fundamental right of every child, Abuya et al. (2017) have highlighted the role of education in enabling people to make reasoned choices and provide them with greater opportunities. Moreover, it alleviates poverty and disease and gives people a stronger voice in society. Education for girls, in particular, is of utmost importance for a nation, considering the social and economic benefits it brings. Despite the importance attached to education for girls, there are barriers to girls completing secondary school education. Early marriage is one of the most significant barriers to girls' education, acting as both a cause and consequence of low educational attainment (Abuya et al., 2017).

World Bank (2021) estimates that approximately 132 million girls are out of school, with 34.3 million falling in the category of primary school, 30 million in lower-secondary school and 67.4 million falling in the upper-secondary school age, mainly due to early marriage. UNICEF (2012) observes that gender disparity in education is often the norm in Africa and Asia. At the primary education level, where gender disparity persists in 37 per cent of countries, the disparity is at the expense of girls in more than 80 per cent of them. Such gaps are concentrated in Northern Africa and Western Asia, where the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school is 95 to 100 (95:100) and sub-Saharan Africa, where 93 girls for every 100 boys are enrolled.

In Africa, education for girls faces many challenges, including early marriage. Tuwor and Sossou (2008) concurred that the root causes of girls' low completion of secondary education include the patriarchal systems of social organisation and other sociocultural practices, notably early marriage. For instance, patriarchal systems enforce rigid gender roles that prioritise domestic duties over schooling, leading to early marriage where women are viewed primarily as wives and mothers, causing high dropout rates and reducing educational opportunities. This implies that early marriage is a significant cultural and economic barrier that forces girls in Africa to abandon

education, directly causing low school completion rates. Furthermore, Tuwor and Sossou (2008) emphasised that entrenched cultural practices prioritise domestic roles over formal education, hindering efforts to achieve gender parity in education.

Governments globally have attempted to put in place interventions to aid education for girls and to ensure that girls receive full and equal access to and achievement in basic education. Accordingly, governments have put in place strategies to fulfil these goals in education, including the provision of universal primary and secondary education. However, many children, including girls, are still out of school due to early marriage (Karumbi & Gathara, 2020). In Kenya, the government has enacted legislation aimed at banning retrogressive cultural practices that hinder girls' participation in education, including early marriage. For instance, Children's Act CAP 142(14) stipulates that no person shall subject a child to early marriage or other cultural rites, customs or traditional practices that are likely to negatively affect the child's life, health, social welfare, dignity or physical or psychological development (RoK, 2001).

This legislation has been implemented with some degree of success in increasing girls' participation in education. For instance, early marriage has hindered the participation of girls in secondary education (Karumbi & Gathara, 2020). UNICEF (2012) report that in 16 countries, including Narok County in Kenya, child marriage is one of the primary reasons why young girls are not enrolled in school. According to Abungu (2015), school completion for girls is below 40 per cent due to notorious cultural practices such as early marriage for girls.

Among the Maasai community in Narok West Sub-County, early marriage is deeply embedded in the cultural practices of the community. This cultural norm not only interferes with girls' education but also traps them in a cycle of poverty and gender inequality. Studies such as those by Nkoitoi (2020) and Bundi et al. (2023) indicate that early marriage negatively affects girls' educational outcomes, leading to increased dropout rates. As a result, girls' completion of secondary education is in jeopardy due to high dropout rates. The decrease in the enrolment of girls

as they progress up the academic ladder contravenes the government's commitment to ensuring 100 per cent transition and completion rates. This is a worrisome trend, yet the government has come up with laws, including a ban on early marriage, to improve the participation rate of girls in education. Having implemented a ban on early marriage, it is expected that this could have borne fruit in addressing the hurdles that hinder girls' completion of secondary education, not only nationally but also in Narok West Sub-County, where early marriage is practised.

Although the government has banned early marriage, the enforcement in Narok West Sub-County remains inconsistent due to a lack of local, sustained advocacy and limited support structures, leading to high dropout rates and low retention in schools. This has created a scenario where the legislative ban acts as a temporary deterrent, but not a total solution to the underlying cultural and economic drivers. Therefore, there is an unprecedented gap and lack of empirical evidence in relation to how the ban on early marriage is interpreted and implemented to promote the completion of girls in school.

Therefore, this paper examined the relationship between the ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to examine the relationship between the ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County. The study was guided by the hypothesis that a ban on early marriage has no statistically significant relationship with the completion of girls in secondary schools in Narok West Sub-County.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Girls' Completion of Secondary School Education

Girls' completion of secondary education is rising globally, with lower secondary completion reaching 79 per cent (Sage, 2022). UNICEF (2012) asserted that although there are many more girls attending school today than ever before. Since the Beijing Declaration on women's rights in 1995, substantial progress has been made in the number of girls completing school (Rasmussen et al., 2019). However, there is still low progress in achieving gender parity in school completion. In some regions, such as Western and

Central Africa, girls completing primary school are less than 50 per cent, and less than 12 per cent are finishing lower secondary school (UNESCO, 2025). APA News (2022) proposes that the barriers to girls' education include child marriage. Sage (2022) observed that less than one in five countries globally are reviewing policies on girls' access to secondary education. While acknowledging problems with girls' completion of secondary school education, Abungu (2015) noted that the failure to retain girls in school has led to educational wastage and lowers women's economic independence and socioeconomic empowerment. Taban (2010) found that a relatively low number of girls progress up the academic ladder mainly as a result of the regressive practices which demean women in social life.

In Kenya, only 18 per cent of women aged 25+ have completed secondary school, with rural, poor, and marginalised girls most at risk (Ngumo & Muasa, 2021). In Narok West Sub-County, girls' secondary school completion faces significant challenges due to early marriages and poverty (Adiema & Manasi, 2022). Early marriage acts as a near-absolute barrier to girls' education, frequently ending their formal schooling immediately or shortly after marriage. It creates a two-way trap where dropping out makes early marriage more likely, and marrying early makes returning to school nearly impossible (Abungu, 2015). While some girls excel, many face dropout risks, necessitating interventions like a ban on early marriage. Banning early marriage is likely to significantly increase the likelihood of girls completing their education by removing the primary driver of school dropouts (Ngumo & Muasa, 2021).

### Ban on Early Marriage and Girls' Completion of Secondary Education

Literature on early marriage and girls' education consistently highlights that child marriage acts as a major barrier to education, driven by poverty, restrictive gender norms, and insecurity. High poverty levels compel families to marry off daughters to reduce financial burdens or obtain dowries, treating education as a luxury or low-return investment (UNICEF, 2012). Traditional, patriarchal, and sometimes religious views emphasise domestic roles for girls over education, often socialising girls for early marriage. Married girls also frequently drop out due to increased

household obligations, pregnancy, or school regulations restricting married students (Morton et al., 2017).

Based on a cross-sectional survey design, Nhampoca and Maritz (2024) examined the reasons for girls dropping out of schooling in South Africa and discerned that early marriages were responsible for vast school dropouts. The study, however, did not investigate the impact of government legislation on early marriage on girls' completion rates. A study by Morton et al. (2017) contended that early marriage was closely associated with high rates of teenage pregnancies, maternal and child mortality and intimate partner violence. Although the study did not interrogate the outcome of the ban on early marriage, it asserted that the more educated a girl is, the less likely she is to marry early. UNICEF (2012) complements this view by recommending stern measures to curb the menace. However, Ganira et al. (2015) pessimistically argued that despite the existence of prohibitive laws, impoverished communities still tend to marry off their daughters for economic reasons in complete disregard of the girls' educational attainment.

In Kenya, previous studies have consistently linked early marriage to low retention rates among pupils. For instance, Sakwa (2020) interrogated the role of traditional cultural practices on girls' education and averred that the pastoral communities remained active in perpetrating early marriage. However, the study did not look at the role of the ban on early marriage as has been interrogated in this paper. Chepkemoi (2020) focused on conceptualising the effect of retrogressive cultural practices on girls' education and affirmed that such practices as early marriage were punitive to girls' education as they reduced the girls' chances of competing fairly with their male counterparts. However, the study was purely descriptive and did not incorporate the implementation of the government ban on early marriage. Looking at the effects of early marriage on the academic performance of girls in primary schools among the Pokot in West Pokot County, Wamaru (2025) employed the survey and case study designs involving teachers, pupils, head teachers and parents. The study deduced that girls in primary schools performed poorly academically due to the prospect of

early marriage, emphasising that girls were perceived primarily in terms of marriageability, which forced them out of school.

Although Wamaru's (2025) study is informative, it did not interrogate the ascribed role of the government ban on early marriage in relation to girls' academic attainment in high school. Similarly, Louku (2025) examined the effect of forced Early Marriage on Maasai Girls' Education in Kenya. The study focused on the negative outcomes of forced early marriage on Maasai girls' education, analysing how education can prevent forced early marriage and what the government of Kenya should do to help. The study revealed that investing in education, particularly for girls, emerged as one of the best strategies to stop forced early marriage in the Maasai community. The report recommends the need for the government to collaborate through legislation to ensure the right of every child to education is guaranteed, and children must be free from early marriage. This formed an important basis for examining the ban on early marriage in relation to girls' education.

From the foregoing literature, it is apparent that early marriage is a major driver of school dropout for girls, creating a cycle of poverty, low self-esteem, and limited opportunities. Studies indicate that delaying marriage can increase educational attainment. Literature consistently identifies early marriage as a significant barrier to girls' education, often acting as both a cause and a consequence of dropping out. In many developing contexts, poverty is a primary driver, with parents forced to marry off daughters to reduce financial burdens. In addition, cultural traditions and the pursuit of family honour often prioritise marriage over education. The consequences of early marriage on education are severe, as married girls face immense challenges, including the loss of self-esteem, psychological stress, and isolation, which hinder their ability to learn. Literature points to several effective interventions to keep girls in school. Consequently, enforcing laws against child marriage is inevitably linked to school completion.

## Theoretical Framework

The paper was based on the Equity Theory (ET). Pioneered by Adams (1965), the theory posits that individuals are motivated to maintain fair, proportional

ratios between their inputs (contributions) and outcomes (rewards) in relationships, offering a valuable framework for understanding resistance to bans on early marriage and the challenges of enforcing such policies. Equity theory focuses on two sides: the input and the outcome. Based on the theory, a young girl compares her inputs with the outcome ratio with regard to education. If the girl perceives inequality, she will act to correct the inequity by lowering her concentration on her studies, and this may lead to absenteeism and even school dropout.

Government interventions, such as a ban on early marriage, can be applied as inputs and appreciated if they lead to school completion. Hence, the equity theory explains whether girls will feel motivated to complete school or not, considering the outputs that schooling has against the inputs. In addition, the theory offers a valuable framework for understanding resistance to bans on early marriage. For instance, when state-imposed legal bans disrupt existing social, economic, or cultural exchanges, stakeholders may perceive inequity, leading to resistance, policy evasion, or low enforcement.

In many contexts, early marriage is viewed as an investment (input) intended to produce outcomes

such as economic security, reduced dowry costs, protection of family honour, or upward social mobility. A legal ban is often perceived by families as an unjust reduction in their ability to manage resources and futures, creating an inequitable scenario. If a law is seen as unfair because it ignores the economic realities (poverty) that make early marriage appear necessary, stakeholders may not feel morally obligated to follow it. Hence, effective enforcement relies on the perceived fairness of the process.

If police enforcement is seen as punitive (only punishing families) rather than supportive (providing alternatives like education), it creates anger and resentment, making compliance less likely. To align with Equity Theory and succeed, the ban on early marriage should transform from purely punitive measures into equitable exchanges. Hence, the paper was anchored on equity theory as it suggests that a ban on early marriage may face resistance unless it is perceived as a fair exchange that provides better outcomes for girls and their families than the early marriage itself.

## Conceptual Framework

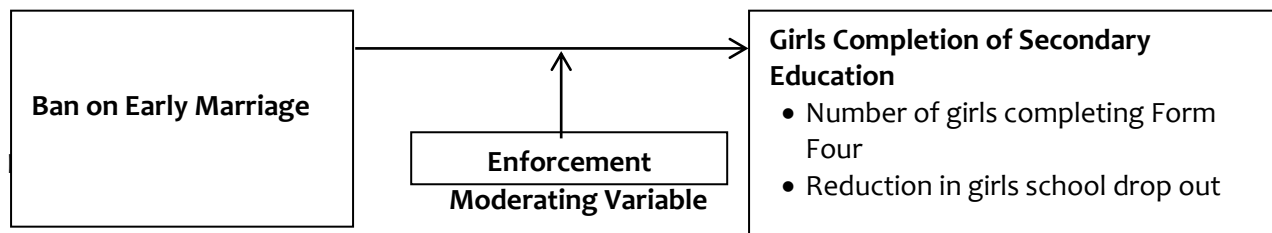


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the interaction of the dependent and independent variables. The independent variable was a ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education. The relationship between early marriage and education is bidirectional, implying that girls falling behind in school are more likely to be married early. Once married, girls often face high barriers to returning to school, which a strict ban aims to prevent. This relationship is, however, moderated by the enforcement of strict laws to eliminate the marriage of girls under 18.

## METHODOLOGY

The descriptive correlational research design was employed to investigate the relationship between the ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education. The correlational design was appropriate since it provided a quantitative description of relationships without inferring cause and effect.

The target population was 653 teachers and 3000 female students from 7 girls' secondary schools in

Narok West Sub-County. The sample size was calculated using Nassiuma's (2000) formula.

$$n = \frac{N(cv^2)}{cv^2 + (N-1)e^2} \quad (i)$$

Where,

n represents the sample size

N is the population (653 teachers; 3000 students)

$cv$  is the coefficient of variation (0.6).

e is the tolerance of desired confidence level of 0.05 at a 95 per cent significance level.

The calculation of the sample sizes for the students and teachers resulted in 1080 students and 184 teachers. Proportional stratified sampling was used to distribute the sample among categories of schools in the sub-county (national, extra-county, county and sub-county schools). The teachers and students were proportionately distributed among the three categories of schools in the county, and proportionate stratified sampling was applied to apportion the sample by school category.

The questionnaires for teachers and students were used to collect data. The questionnaires were used to obtain as much information as possible regarding the relationship between the ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education. The Likert Scale was used to gauge the respondents' agreement (e.g., Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) on questions regarding the ban on early marriage and school completion. The content validity of the questionnaires was achieved by designing questionnaires under the guidance of the supervisors to ensure items aligned with the objectives, covering early marriage and education completion. The reliability of the questionnaires was tested during the pilot study, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 was considered as being indicative of acceptable internal consistency and reliability of the Likert-scale questions.

Data was sorted, edited, coded, cleaned and processed. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, like frequencies and percentages, and inferential statistics, such as correlation, were used to analyse the data. Quantitative data were presented in tables as was appropriate. Descriptive statistics were instrumental in analysing quantitative data. Pearson correlation analysis was used to establish the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

Ethical approvals were obtained from the relevant institutions. During data collection, the respondents were fully informed about the study's purpose, methods, risks and how their data would be used. Consent and participation in the study were voluntary, and the respondents were allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty. The respondents filled in written informed consents, and the data obtained were treated with confidentiality. The respondents were not coerced into participating in the study, and no incentive was given to influence their voluntary participation. The researcher alleviated risks of physical, psychological, or social harm by allowing the respondents the right to withdraw from the study or stop participating at any time without penalty.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Girls' Completion of Secondary School Education

Data on completion rates were provided by the teachers. Completion rates were computed by dividing the number of a cohort that sat for KCSE by the number that enrolled in form 1, and expressing the ratio as a percentage. The completion rate was established by determining those of cohorts 2017 and 2018 and averaging them, as shown in Table 1

**Table 1: Completion Rates Based on the Data Provided by Teachers**

Year	Number enrolled in form 1	Number Completed Form 4	Completion rate
2017	9692	7211 (completed in 2020)	74.4
2018	9849	7416 (completed in 2021)	75.3
<b>Mean</b>			<b>74.9</b>

The results indicate that the completion rate of cohort 2018 (75.3%) was slightly higher than that of 2017 (74.4%). The mean completion rate was 74.9 per cent. These results imply that about a bout quarter of girls enrolled in form one did not complete their secondary education. This concurs with Macketiani et al. (2022), who concluded that the number of girls admitted in form one kept on reducing yearly within the four years of secondary school education.

## **Ban on Early Marriage and Girls' Completion of Secondary School Education**

The relationship between the ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County, Kenya, was examined. Data on the ban on early marriage was gathered from the teachers, students, and principals. Pearson's correlation was used to test the hypothesis, which stated that the relationship between the ban on early marriage and completion rates was not statistically significant. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Relationship between Ban on Early Marriage and Completion Rates**

Scale	Completion rates in percentage	
Ban on early marriage score	Pearson Correlation	.254*
	p-value	.019
	N	85

The results show that the relationship ( $r=.254$ ) between the ban on early marriage and completion rates was positive. It means that effective enforcement of the ban enhanced the completion rate of girls in Narok West Sub-County. The results further show a statistically significant relationship between the ban on early marriage and completion rates,  $r(83)=.254$ ,  $p=.019$ . The implication is that the enforcement of a ban on early marriage affects completion rates. These findings affirmed that the relationship between the ban on early marriage and completion rates was statistically significant. This concurs with Wilson (2022), who established that changes in minimum age at marriage laws have proven effective in reducing early marriage.

Macketiani et al. (2022) concurred that early marriages hurt girl child education, and the awareness campaigns by the government were bearing fruit in enlightening the community on the unlawfulness of early marriage. Delprato et al. (2017) indicated that early marriage continued to be a notable contributor to inequality, although its effects have diminished over time. Omoeva and Hatch (2022) agree that the impact

of early marriage on school participation is significant and predicts subsequent school exit. It can be inferred, therefore, that the efforts by the government to sensitise the community against the vice had borne fruit since students were aware that early marriage was against the law.

These results imply that banning early marriage is directly linked to higher retention rates, allowing girls to complete basic education. Educated girls are more likely to break the cycle of poverty, having higher earning potential and the ability to negotiate their rights. The ban also forces a shift in community perspectives, where girls are increasingly viewed as individuals with rights rather than as sources of dowry. However, the traditional beliefs, such as the Maasai tradition, where initiation is immediately followed by marriage, remain strong, and girls are often seen as assets, with families seeking dowries to survive, particularly during droughts. The results are relevant to Narok West Sub-County, which is a pastoralist area where cultural practices strongly dictate the life paths of girls, making the ban essential for protecting them. In this area, early marriage is a primary cause of low

retention rates in primary schools within the Sub-County.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** This study explored the ban on early marriage in relation to girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County. The study scrutinised the perceived association between the ban on early marriage and girls' education in the region. It is apparent that early marriage is a primary cause of school dropout for girls, and this directly affects girls' school completion. This is because the deep-rooted beliefs that perpetuate child marriage often outweigh the general knowledge and effort to implement the ban on early marriage, causing some girls to discontinue their education in favour of early marriage. As a result of intense family and community expectations, some girls appeared to prioritise marriage over education.

Based on the findings, it can be inferred that the relationship ( $r=.254$ ) between the ban on early marriage and completion rates was positive. This indicates a weak-to-moderate positive relationship and suggests that while stricter enforcement of legal bans on early marriage tends to be associated with improved educational completion rates for girls, the policy alone is not the sole driver of improvement, likely interacting with other socio-economic factors in Narok West Sub-County.

**Recommendations:** The persistence of early marriage in Narok West Sub-County underscores the complex relationship between the law and cultural traditions. Implementing the ban on early marriage requires a multifaceted approach that not only educates girls on their rights but also challenges the societal norms that perpetuate early marriage as a social norm. The government should foster dialogue, promoting empowerment, so that the communities can work towards breaking the cycle of early marriages in order to enable girls to pursue their educational aspirations. Schools, NGOs, and the government should advocate for girls' education as a fundamental right and an essential factor in promoting gender equality.

They should also collaborate to provide educational materials, resources and programs that highlight the long-term benefits of education for girls, helping girls to recognise their rights and the value of continuing their education. It is also essential for the government to provide financial support to families in Narok West Sub-County through scholarships, school fee subsidies, or conditional cash transfers to help alleviate the financial burden on families. This would reduce the incentive for parents to marry off their daughters at an early age and encourage them to keep their children in school.

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