

Negotiated realities:
adolescent girls, formal schooling, and early
marriage in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria

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Author's Declaration

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Signed: Louise Wetheridge

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Let them choose paths
who think there are paths to choose.
We, we must grow new eyes
to see the asphalt in the chaste forest.
(Odia Ofeimun, from *Let Them Choose Paths*, 1980)

'Western feminism is also caught up in its ambivalence: fighting for inclusion, it installs exclusions; advocating change, it resists change; laying claims to movement, it resists moving.'

(Obioma Nnaemeka, *Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way*, 2004, p.363)

For Ruben and Florence

Abstract

Concerns of global education policy with gender disparities in access to, and achievement in, basic education in Sub-Saharan Africa since the millennium have repeatedly turned to the prevalence of early marriage to explain educational inequalities, positioning marriage as a barrier to education and girls as its victims. This thesis investigates the philosophical basis and empirical evidence for this global policy discourse by examining the connections between education and marriage for adolescent girls in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria.

The study maps and unpacks data and discourses on girls' education and early marriage across academic scholarship, policy literature, and empirical data, asking whether and how education is protective of adolescent girls in relation to marriage, and why girls marry. It adopts a mixed methods approach, connecting quantitative and qualitative methods and data to evidence different aspects of the interactions between marriage and schooling, deepening - contextually and conceptually - explanations for when, how and why school-age girls marry. Qualitative data, in the form of interviews and focus groups with girls, teachers, and policy makers, augment findings from analyses of quantitative data from the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey, to illuminate the significance of girls' agency and relationships to expectations and experiences of schooling and marriage. Inter-personal relations and negotiation are central tenets of Nigerian feminist theorisations of women and girls' everyday lives, which this study promotes in seeking to reframe and reformulate assumptions about adolescent girls, marriage, and education.

The study shows that girls marry for myriad reasons associated with their social conditions and experiences of formal schooling. The interplay of schooling with marriage suggests that the rhetoric on education as protective against marriage is simplistic and over-stated. Basic education, marriage and adolescence are deeply interconnected and living these interconnections is a dynamic and negotiated process among girls, families, schools and communities. Consideration to these interactions and, in particular, to the gendered and relational microcosms of schools and their effects on norms and agency is critical for progress towards equality in education and in girls' social lives.

Impact Statement

This thesis' concerns with adolescent girls, formal schooling and early marriage are each, and together, highly relevant to the contemporary international development policy and practice landscape. In 2015, during the research for this thesis, UN Member States adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of which targets aim to 'ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education' (target 4.1) and to 'eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage' (target 5.3). Since then, international research, policy and practice have accelerated efforts for girls' education and marriage as cause and consequence of inadequate schooling. This thesis contributes to the field of girls' education in Sub-Saharan Africa by evidencing how and why, in the context of North West Nigeria, marriage and formal schooling are connected in the lived experiences of girls, their families and teachers.

Within academia at the international level, the contributions of this thesis are three-fold. To the field of girls' education in Sub-Saharan Africa, the findings emphasise the salience for research to probe the form and content of 'quality' schooling that acknowledges and enhances girls' agency in relationships and marriage, including for marriage delay. This thesis emphasises the significance of social relations to girls' lives, but further research is needed to develop these ideas, including in different contexts. The thesis' theoretical contribution promotes reflection on, and the use of, indigenous feminist theories to frame and understand girls' experiences in context. Re-rooting theoretical framings of girls' education and marriage in indigenous concepts, rather than western ideas, can illuminate alternative ways of understanding and responding to girls' needs and rights. Lastly, this study's mixed methods approach, and especially secondary analysis of qualitative data, offers a methodological contribution by exemplifying that existing data can be effectively re-used for social research. Secondary data analysis has ethical and practical benefits, especially during pandemics, minimising travel and participant exposure. I aim to produce academic papers for publication on these three contributions to develop and share these thoughts widely.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the time and engagement of those working for girls' education in Nigeria. It is to those people that a major part of the dissemination of the thesis will concentrate. In consultation with ActionAid Nigeria, I aim to organise a remote thesis dissemination workshop for non-governmental organisations working on girls' education in Nigeria, such as the British Council and UNICEF Nigeria, and produce policy briefs with recommendations via the UCL Centre for Education and International Development. I continue to work professionally on girls' rights and education projects in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa. The work, ideas and findings of this thesis

inform my everyday professional practice and the thoughts and ideas that I share with others, formally and informally. In these ways, it is my intention to continue the dialogue, collaborations, and negotiations on adolescent girls, education, and marriage in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa well beyond the journey of this thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

CAPP	Community Action for Popular Participation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEFM	Child, Early and Forced Marriage
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
(N)DHS	(Nigeria) Demographic and Health Survey
ESSPIN	Education Sector Support Programme In Nigeria
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
FLHE	Family Life and HIV Education
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
JSS	Junior Secondary School
LG(E)A	Local Government (Education) Authority
QSA	Qualitative Secondary Analysis
SBMC	School-Based Management Committee
SMoE	State Ministry of Education
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board
TEGIN(T)	Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria (and Tanzania)
UBE	Universal Basic Education
UBEC	Universal Basic Education Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

UNGEI	United Nations Girls Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WAEC	West Africa Examinations Center

Chapter 1. Introduction

An estimated 132 million school-age girls were out of school worldwide in 2019 (UNESCO, 2019a). Enabling girls to enrol and remain in school in developing countries is a major goal, discussion and intervention of international development organisations. Among the myriad challenges associated with educating girls in Sub-Saharan Africa, one of those to have gained significant attention since the millennium is early marriage. Early marriage (commonly understood as marriage before the age of eighteen) has been strongly linked in international research and policy with girls never enrolling in school, dropping out prematurely, or failing to learn and thrive (UNESCO, 2004, p.123; UNESCO, 2010, p.75; Klugman et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2019a; UNESCO 2020). This thesis explores the data and discursive connections made between girls' education and early marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically Nigeria, by international education researchers, policy makers and influencers, girls, their families and teachers, and the evidence for these links. In doing so, the thesis presents diverse modes of recognition and representation of, and responses to, girls' education and early marriage, and offers some reflections on future approaches to this complex nexus for policy, research, and action.

On the first International Day of the Girl Child, in October 2012, the then-UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, stated:

“Education for girls is one of the best strategies for protecting girls against child marriage. When they are able to stay in school and avoid being married early, girls can build a foundation for a better life for themselves and their families” (Moon, 2012).

The protective essence of girls' education against early marriage at the core of Moon's assertion has often been repeated during the last decade by the United Nations, international agencies and governments: 'education itself is good protection against early marriage for teenage girls' (UNESCO, 2012, p.236); 'ensuring girls stay in school is one of the most effective ways to prevent child marriage' (UNESCO, 2013/14, p.18); 'keeping girls in school is essential to end child marriage' (Wodon et al., 2018, p.10); 'investing in education [...] protects girls from early marriage (UK Government, 2021). At the same time as education is promoted as protective, evidence shows that education systems and schools globally are under-financed, under-resourced and under pressure, especially in developing countries (UNESCO, 2015, Foreword). In Sub-Saharan Africa, a lack of basic infrastructure, teacher shortages, inadequate teacher training and irrelevant curricula are among the many factors that hinder all children's attendance and attainment at primary and secondary school

(UNESCO, 2015a; UKaid, 2018b). For girls, inadequacies in the provision of sanitation facilities (Sommer, 2010; Jewitt and Ryley, 2014), qualified female teachers, relevant curricula and discriminatory school policies, including those that bar girls who marry or become pregnant from remaining at school (Chilisa, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2018), have been associated with pushing girls away from school (Unterhalter, 2005; Stromquist, 2007; Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011; Walker, 2013). These pressures, resource struggles and gender inequalities have been exacerbated in 2020-2021 with the COVID-19 pandemic, during which millions of children have been unable to attend school, many of whom - especially girls - may never return (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Rafaeli and Hutchinson, 2020). Amidst this broad set of challenges to school systems in developing countries and what they can offer to girls to enhance opportunities, the central concern of this thesis is, *how is formal schooling protective of girls in relation to early marriage?*

Premature school leaving accounts for one third of the out-of-school primary-age girls worldwide (UNESCO, 2019b). These girls have enrolled in school but have been unable to remain. Early marriage has been presented by a number of UN organisations (and other international agencies) as a key barrier to girls' access and retention in primary and secondary school (Loaiza, E., Wong, 2012, p.2; UNESCO, 2015a, p.169), while marriage has been named as a reason for school leaving by girls themselves (Lloyd and Mensch, 2008; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008; Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011). This prompts the second interconnected query of this thesis: *why do school-age and adolescent girls marry?*

Understanding why something happens is essential to developing appropriate and effective responses. An exploration of why school-age girls marry necessarily means considering the role and experiences of girls navigating formal schooling and marriage. Since the millennium, effort by international development organisations towards better understanding and responding to the challenges of educating girls in developing countries has harnessed the voices and narratives of girls themselves, including the 2014 Girl Summit in London; International Day of the Girl Child every October (the 2020 theme was 'My Voice, Our Equal future'); and research publications on adolescent girls (Plan International, 2014; UNGEI, 2020). This concern with voice resonates with well-established feminist research methodologies, including research on girls and women's education (Francis, 2001, pp.74–75; McLeod, 2011), and theories of women's empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Klugman, J. et al., 2014; Gammage et al., 2016). Of three inter-related dimensions of women's empowerment - resources, agency and achievements – the dimension of *agency* comprises the key facets of consciousness, voice and action (Kabeer, 1999b; Gammage et al., 2016, p.5). Efforts to give a voice and listen to girls intends to better understand the challenges they face and to 'empower' them in the process. But an orientation towards girls' voice and

agency also incurs conceptual and practical complexities and contestations: the intentions, processes, experiences, and outcomes of 'giving voice' to women and girls raises critical questions of whose voice counts, where and by whom it is heard, and with what outcomes (Pereira, 2009; Jackson and Mazzei, 2009; Heugh, 2011; McLeod, 2011; Gammage et al., 2016, p.6). These are the fundamental concerns of cultural recognition and political representation for social justice (Fraser, 1998; Fraser, 2005). The implication for a research exploration of why school-age girls marry is to reflect the complexities of such a query while taking on a project of recognising and representing girls in the schooling-marriage nexus.

This thesis works to understand and respond to its two aims by mapping and unpacking data and discourses on girls' education and early marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa across academic scholarship, policy literature, and empirical data from adults and girls in North West Nigeria. Nigeria, an anglophone country in West Africa, provides the context of the thesis. Six of the ten countries with the highest prevalence rates of girls' early marriage are in West and Central Africa (Walker, 2013a; UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018) and the region has among the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally (UNICEF, 2015). In Nigeria, heterosexual marriage¹ is a social norm: an estimated 75% of women aged 15-49 are or have been married and 43% (aged 20-49) married before age eighteen (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.81). This thesis' focus on Nigeria is inspired in part because of the spotlight that has been shone on girls' education and early marriage in Nigeria in the last decade, in part by my own experiences there, and in part due to accessible data.

I first visited Nigeria in the autumn of 2010, returning regularly over the following two years, and intermittently since. Between 2010-2012, I was employed by ActionAid International, an international non-governmental organisation, to oversee a girls' education project called 'Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania' (TEGINT, 2008-2012). Under the auspices of this project, I visited primary and junior secondary schools across northern Nigeria, talking to students, teachers, government education officials, civil society organisations, UN, and donor agencies about girls' education. Each interaction, each experience drew my attention to the challenges faced by schools to deliver education in diverse but overwhelmingly resource-poor settings, and the different responses of school communities to overcome those challenges. Many of those challenges were associated with provision, but many, as became clear through discussions with teachers, schoolgirls and their families, were also about the *idea* of girls' education and how that idea was connected to social norms and expectations, particularly for adolescent girls. For example, during one

¹ Homosexual partnerships are criminalised in Nigeria under the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (2014).

visit to a junior secondary school in Bauchi state, North East Nigeria, in 2010, I met the Head Girl. She was fifteen years old and had just started Junior Secondary Class 3. At the end of Class 3, students normally take their Junior WAEC exams (equivalent to a UK GCSE, and the lowest level of educational qualification required for much formal employment). But she had just married and this was to be, she explained, her last week in school. At another school in Bauchi, I listened to members of the School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) discussing their outreach visits to families of non-attending schoolgirls. Marriage, they explained, could stop girls from attending school. Their role was to encourage families to continue to send girls to school *even if* they married. Marriage stories, narrated by girls, teachers and community members, persisted across the schools that I visited during this time. Girls' education and marriage were clearly connected issues in the lives of many Nigerian families, their communities and schools but the ways in which they were connected, and how those involved understood and responded to them, seemed opaque and variable, raising many questions for me: why were girls getting married; what was the role of their schools in their marriages; were the interventions delivered by TEGINT to enhance girls' education addressing marriage concerns and, if so, in what ways? These experiences catalysed my interest in the connections between these two facets of girls' lives and ways of understanding and responding to them.

Concurrently there was an explosion of empirical research and discussion in international development policy and programming on the implications of early marriage to girls' education (e.g. Erulkar and Muthengi, 2009; Nour, 2009; Lee-Rife et al., 2012). In April 2014, a global spotlight shone on northern Nigeria and the question of girls' education and marriage when the Islamic militant group Boko Haram (whose name roughly translates to mean 'western education is sinful') abducted 276 girls from their secondary boarding school in Chibok, Borno state, North East Nigeria. Overnight, international discussions about the connection between girls' education and marriage intensified (UN News, 2014; Segun and Muscati, 2014; King and Winthrop, 2015), including on social media (#BringBackOurGirls). While these discussions were centrally concerned with the abducted schoolgirls, the (lack of) prominence of girls' own views and voices in these discussions and their representation or appropriation by others were points of concern (Kelleher, 2014; Berents, 2016).

Nigeria presents a complex and interesting case to explore the links between education and marriage for girls. The national net enrolment rate² at primary level is 64% (UIS, 2019) but significant gender and regional disparities in education data mean that poorer, more rural girls in northern states are among the most likely to be out of school (Humphreys et al.,

² Net Enrolment Rate (NER) is a measure of the total population of boys and girls of the official age group of a given level of education who are enrolled as a percentage of the corresponding population.

2015, p.136; National Population Commission and RTI International, 2016, pp.10–11).

Nigeria has a high prevalence of early marriage with an estimated 43% women nationwide (aged 20-49) marrying before age eighteen (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.89). It is therefore a country in which challenges to the provision of girls' education intersect with trends towards early marriage and, at this intersection, are questions about identity, poverty, locality, resources, and gender equality.

Data and discourses on girls' education and marriage, as individual and interacting phenomena, are not new in Nigeria. Rich and nuanced Nigerian female and feminist scholarship on Nigerian women, gender, society, and education predates the Chibok abduction (Nnaemeka, 1998; Salo, 2001; Odejide, 2005; Ezeilo, 2006), as well as arising from it (Adichie, 2014; Mama, 2014; Pereira, 2016; Pereira, 2018). Personal experiences in northern Nigeria, and the increasing international prominence of Nigerian women's writing on gender and education, drew my attention to the depth and breadth of indigenous scholarship associated with education and marriage. This raised a further interest in whether and how this Nigerian scholarship was informing, or could inform, contemporary understanding of girls' schooling and marriage in/about Nigeria.

A considerable problem of reading, reflecting on, and re-presenting data and discourses on/about/from (early marriage in) Nigeria, especially by Nigerians, in the journey of this thesis, however, has been to reflect, and reflect upon, my positionality in relation to diverse scholarship and the aims of this thesis. In a 2001 interview, Amina Mama, a Nigerian-British feminist born in Kaduna state, northern Nigeria, critiques Gwendolyn Mikell's (a US-based afro-feminist) description of African feminism because Mikell,

‘describes African feminism as she sees it from the outside, from a physical and analytical distance, rather than from the perspective of someone engaged in feminist activism on the African continent’
(Salo, 2001, p.60).

Mama's critique emphasises the political activism at the heart of much African feminist research and scholarship. Suffice to say that this critique resonates with my own reflections on positionality in relation to this thesis' aims and intentions. I am white, British, middle-class, well-educated. I am female, a feminist, a mother, and married. I have lived in Sub-Saharan Africa, but temporarily, and I have stayed in Nigeria, but as a visitor. I, like Mikell, am an outsider, describing what I see with 'physical and analytical distance'. While acknowledging this, and negating neither difference nor distance from the subject(s) of this thesis, I am also encouraged by both the overarching mission of feminist research for the revaluation of subjugated knowledge for social change and social justice (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p.138), and

by reflections on insider/outsider research in comparative and international education that such dualisms 'can close down rather than open up debate and investigation' (Robinson-Pant, 2016, p.40). During the writing of this thesis and embedded across its chapters are reflections on the different contributions to knowledge of 'outsider' and 'insider' data and discourses on the connections between early marriage and girls' education. This is particularly important to a research project that seeks to map, explore, and illuminate different ways of 'knowing' (and responding to) social phenomena. The problems and potential of my own status in relation to the thesis aims, as well as the data utilised to consider these questions, is raised specifically in Chapter 5.

The analysis in the following chapters highlights cause for concern for quality education and lives free from harm for girls in Nigeria. But it also elicits powerful examples of girls' agency in relation to schooling and marriage, and the capacity of educational institutions and individuals to advance and respond to girls' needs, rights, and aspirations. By mapping how the relationship between girls' education and early marriage is articulated and why, by unpacking data and discourses at the intersection of these two areas of concern, this thesis hopes to contribute to increasingly refined understandings of, and responses to, these two facets of girls' lives (education and early marriage) in Nigerian, and international development, research, policy and practice.

Finally, this thesis has been a long time coming. From my first professional visit to Nigeria in 2010 to the inception of this research study in 2013, data and discourses on early marriage as a concern for gender equality and women's rights were emerging in international research and policy but were infrequently linked with concurrent debates about girls' education. In 2021, data and discourses on girls' marriage and education are prolific; 'child marriage and girls' schooling' is a popular subject of international development policy and policy discourses, aid funding, and global academic research. The launch by the Elders in 2012 of their campaign to 'end child marriage' was significant in propelling the subject to the front of many policy agendas (Chapter 2). The changing dynamics of the field of gender, education and international development over the intervening decade (including during this period by the processes and product of the Sustainable Development Goals) has brought with it significant changes to framing(s) and understanding(s) of, and assumptions about, early marriage and the relationship between early marriage and girls' education.

Discourses pertaining to girls' marriage and schooling have adapted and adjusted during this period to conceptual and empirical developments, including more (and more diverse) data. Themes and theories have emerged from global and multi-national academic and policy spaces, undergoing critique and refinement, which have been highly pertinent to this thesis' enquiry. Contested ideas about adolescent girls and adolescence, for example, have had

recent and critical implications on language and conceptualisations of child or early marriage (Chapters 2 and 3), while varied critiques of the framing and naming of ‘child’ or ‘early marriage’ have engendered nuanced and located ideas about the phenomenon, which have also advanced and adjusted my own position over time in relation to the topic. Additionally, the increasing range and depth of data in the field has facilitated the inclusion in this study of three different datasets within a mixed methods approach. These three datasets – from 2011, 2013 and 2015-2017 – gathered and analysed over the course of this research have exemplified the kinds of data and discursive shifts that have taken place in the field, as well as enabling my own engagement with, and developing arguments for, mixed methods and data (re)use (Chapter 5).

This thesis is located in a milieu of change. It tries to follow the flows of relevant discourses and data over the past decade, analyse and reflect on them here. I discuss aspects of the continuing dynamics of contemporary research and theories as they intersect with the concerns and context of this thesis, but the flow of ideas, data and discourses on early marriage and girls’ education, and my own (and others’) reflections necessarily and inevitably go far beyond the words on these pages. Academics, policy makers and influencers, aid agencies, (international) NGOs, and national governments continue to emphasise, adapt and refract different elements of policy discourse or research data on early marriage and girls’ education differently, including in relation to changing socioeconomic and political conditions and contexts. The Covid-19 pandemic is currently having significant implications on framings and responses to girls’ education and early marriage (Rafaeli and Hutchinson, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). In the concluding chapter, I try to open out a continuing, critical discussion by offering some ideas for further reflection, and directions for research and action, in a dynamic field.

Structure of the thesis

This introductory chapter has established the background to, and two key research aims of, this thesis. These two key research aims are: (1) to explore the relationship between early marriage and girls’ schooling to consider whether and how formal schooling is protective of girls in relation to early marriage; and (2) to establish why adolescent schoolgirls marry, according to those around them but, crucially, according to their own accounts of navigating schooling and marriage.

Chapter 2 proceeds by mapping global policy on girls’ education and early marriage. The chapter examines how early marriage has been conceptualised, by whom, and what issues or points of contestation have arisen about such conceptualisations in international and

national policy discussion. In this context, I then trace the evolution of global policy linking early marriage with girls' education, including a critical analysis of policy formulations by UN agencies, such as the text of the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the World Bank and prominent international NGOs. The chapter reflects on some of the implications of contemporary policy discourses on early marriage and girls' education for policy enactment, research, and programming.

Chapter 3 reviews the academic literature on girls' education and early marriage in developing countries, focussing on Sub-Saharan Africa and, where possible, Nigeria. The chapter begins by seeking to unpack the data and discourse pertaining to education as protective of girls in relation to early marriage. I map the connections between girls' education and marriage mooted by scholars from a range of disciplines showing how different data and methodologies have emphasised different forms of the association, and different explanations thereof, and asking what is shown and not shown by this literature. I consider what and how data indicates 'protection', and what are the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in this evidence. As the review moves towards qualitative studies from international education, ideas and empirical findings associated with this thesis' concern to explore why school-age girls marry arise. Explorations of schoolgirl marriage have harnessed theories of agency in trying to explain the persistence of this phenomenon. Some concepts and findings from these studies make illuminating contributions to the broad scholarship on marriage and schooling, but in this field, as elsewhere, gaps and obfuscations persist pertaining to theory and context.

Chapter 4 seeks to re-route and re-root the exploration of the girls' marriage and schooling nexus to Nigeria and Nigerian women's scholarship. In this chapter I explore whether there are indigenous perspectives through which data and discourses about girls' marriage and schooling can be considered and critiqued. The chapter proposes that Nigerian female/feminist concepts and approaches to understanding, recognising and representing African women's lives, and the critical events of their lives, might offer an alternative, rich and contextualised, entry to (re)think and explore empirical data on girls' marriage and schooling in northern Nigeria.

The study methodology proposed to meet the thesis aims and empirical data gathered and analysed are presented in Chapter 5. I advance a mixed method approach that, by illuminating different data and discourses on social phenomena, may contribute to social change (Mertens, 2011). My approach is an attempt to promote and advance existing mixed method research by showing how different data illuminate different facets of a relationship between social phenomena. This thesis draws on three datasets: primary quantitative data of the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (DHS); secondary qualitative data in

the form of interviews and focus group discussions with school-age girls, their families, teachers and head teachers in primary and secondary schools from the Transforming Education for Girls (TEGINT) project in Nigeria (2011); and primary qualitative data in the form of interviews with education policy-makers and influencers in Nigeria (2015). The chapter reflects on the approach, gathering, analysis and contributions of these data separately and in combination for (re)presenting and developing understanding about the connections between girls' schooling and early marriage and the views of girls on these processes.

Chapter 6 presents the policy context in Nigeria and Kaduna state, where the main body of the data were collected, to offer a situated background to the context of this thesis' analysis. It offers information on the political economy of Nigeria, summarising marriage and education policies prior to and in the decades following independence in 1960 and examining in detail the arc of education and marriage policy interactions since the start of democratic rule in 1999. I consider the trickle-down effect of global education policies and discourses (discussed in Chapter 2) on Nigerian socio-political discourses and legislation, focussing on the coincidence of, and contests over, the 2003 Child Rights Act and 2004 Universal Basic Education Act, to indicate areas of dispute between global, national and local discourses on education and children's rights and their effects on policy enactment for girls' education and early marriage.

Chapters 7 to 10 comprise the main discussion of the data analysed for this thesis. Chapter 7 presents pen portraits of eight adolescent girls and young women from Kaduna state - Aissata, Mercy, Dorothy, Zahrah, Sarah, Hadiza, Nafisah and Nana – whose narratives ground this thesis and give its focal energy. In this chapter I represent the girls' stories in summary and raise some questions for investigating the education-marriage nexus in the context of Kaduna state. I reflect on how the girls' narratives resonate with or refract from policy, academic literature, or the theoretical insights of Nigerian feminists. Whether the girls are married or not, their narratives demand deep thinking about why girls marry and how schooling might be implicated in marriage and vice versa.

Chapters 8-10 navigate an arc through stages of early marriage, exploring data and discourses on *when* schoolgirls marry (Chapter 8), *how and to whom* they marry (Chapter 9), and what happens *after marriage* (Chapter 10). Chapter 8 examines when Kaduna girls marry and what meanings are attached to marriage timing. Drawing on quantitative data from the NDHS and qualitative data from girls, teachers, head teachers and education policy makers, I consider meanings of maturity and how different interpretations of marital readiness – beyond age - are negotiated and rationalised by different groups of people. These data show that age-based advocacy and policy – pertaining to marriage and

education – obscure everyday, individual manoeuvrings around multiple and complex justifications for early marriage timing. Chapter 9 examines the social processes of marriage decision-making and spousal choice. In this chapter, the conceptual framings from Nigerian feminisms become illuminating: schoolgirls are shown in active engagement with marital processes, assessing and enlarging spaces for agency manifest in sometimes subtle and other times significant ways. These data challenge the idea of passive victimisation to suggest ways in which some adolescent girls, conscious of their social worlds, can make marginal in-roads to further their goals. Chapter 10 segues into thinking closely about education for already-married girls. Millions of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa marry before eighteen years of age every year. An investigation of the policy discourse of education as protective in relation to early marriage is incomplete without a consideration of education's protective potential for *already-married* girls. The chapter examines policy knowledge, attitudes and provisions according to education policy makers, influencers, head teachers and teachers in Kaduna state. It sets these alongside married adolescent girls' aspirations, attitudes and experiences of continuing education and shows how idiosyncratic approaches to inclusion can have both positive and adverse effects.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis, connecting the findings across the chapters, and returning to a consideration of the research aims. It highlights three main areas pertaining to methodology, theory, and the idea of education, where this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge on the marriage-schooling nexus for adolescent (northern Nigerian) girls. It ends with some thoughts on the contemporary era of social research, how knowledge on adolescent girls has changed over the decade of this thesis, and what questions remain insufficiently answered.

Chapter 2. Early marriage and girls' education in the global policy arena

This chapter examines global policy on early marriage and girls' education in developing countries. It traces the evolution of major global policy documents and discussions, including human rights treaties, United Nations (UN) and international organisations' policy reports, to show what connections have been made, when and by whom, between early marriage and girls' education. The chapter considers some of the implications of these global texts and their discourses for ways of knowing early marriage in association with girls' education in developing countries.

The chapter begins by examining the arc of human rights treaties and international policy documents and discourses on early marriage from the 1949 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the present day. It highlights some main points of contestation and coherence around understanding early marriage, what it is, where and why it happens. In doing so, it presents some of the problems that the global policy community has faced to define 'early marriage', and whether and how these problems have been overcome, and what a contemporary definition of early marriage is, and means, in global policy. This sets the scene for exploring how early marriage has come to be associated with girls' education in global education policy texts and discourses.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the global policy links between early marriage and girls' education. I consider how policy formulations on early marriage have been adopted and adapted into global agreements and discourses girls' education in developing countries and show how, and by whom, early marriage is associated with girls' education. This section focuses particularly on the evolution of the association in the reports of the UN's education body – UNESCO – as well as in other UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations that influence global education policy. It considers how girls' education is positioned in relation to early marriage to reflect on the thesis' query concerning the protective potential of education against early marriage.

The conclusion considers some of the gaps and challenges associated with global policy formulations on early marriage and girls' education in developing countries, including the dominant epistemologies upon which they have rested. It reflects on some consequences of global policy for policy enactment, and discussion, at regional and national levels, particularly discussion concerning the role and potential of girls' formal schooling to curb early marriages.

Evolving definitions of early marriage in global policy

The concept of early marriage in global policy has evolved notably since marriage rights were first established by the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which noted the right of persons to give free and full consent in marriage, and the 1964 UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, which reiterated consent rights and further required states parties to ‘take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage’ (Article 2). This section traces the evolution of a global definition of, and associated discourses on, early marriage by the UN and international policy making and influencing organisations.

The 1964 Marriage Convention established the idea of a minimum age for marriage in global and national policy but did not recommend a specific, universal minimum age for marriage. Subsequently, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) stated that:

‘The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.’

(UN, 1979, Article 16 (2))

CEDAW thus established ‘the marriage of a child’ as a human rights violation, against which minimum age legislation should be enacted, but it did not specify the meaning of ‘child’, including pertaining to age. This was addressed in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which defined a child as any person ‘below the age of eighteen years’ (Article 1) and required countries to ‘take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children’ (Article 24(3)). While the *implication* of the CRC to the CEDAW was that the marriage of persons under eighteen has no legal effect, the CRC did not explicitly associate its definition of a ‘child’ with a statement on minimum marriageable age, continuing instead to allow countries to set their own legal age of majority (the legal threshold age to adulthood) (Article 1). Nor did the Convention define or describe the ‘traditional practices’ that it sought to abolish. Loopholes and a lack of explicit definition of child or early marriage, including a universal minimum age for marriage, was apparent in prevailing global policy as the 1990s began.

From the mid-1990s, global policy makers attempt to solidify the human rights framework for the marriages of children and young people. CEDAW General Recommendation 21 (1994) clarified Article 16(2) that the ‘minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both man and woman’ (UN, 1994, Article 16(2), 36), and called on countries to enact relevant legislation. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), arising from the fourth UN

World Conference on Women, also recommended the enactment and enforcement of minimum age laws (UN, 1995, 274(e)). Comments and Observations by the UNCRC Committee, whose remit is interpretation and implementation of the Convention, in the early 2000s moved to align with CEDAW via General Comment No.4 (CRC/GC/2003/4), which specified the obligations of countries to establish a minimum age for marriage at eighteen years for boys and girls, with and without parental consent (UNICEF, 2006, D.9, 20). These iterative moves by the UN policy community during the 1990s and early 2000s established its endorsement of eighteen as the universal minimum age for marriage for boys and girls – with no exceptions - by the early twenty-first century.

Global guidance for the minimum marriageable age were regionalised to Sub-Saharan Africa during the same period (mid-1990s to mid-2000s) through the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organisation of African Unity, 1990), which entered into force in 1999, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Union, 2003, Article 6(b)). Both charters urge African countries to specify the minimum age for marriage at eighteen years. Article 21 of the African Children's Charter, under the heading 'Protection against Harmful Social and Cultural Practices', echoes the provisions of CEDAW that:

'Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.'

(Organisation of African Unity, 1990, Article 21(2))

This Article is notable for explicitly naming marriage below the minimum age of eighteen as 'child marriage'. Child marriage as the name for the betrothal and marriage of persons under eighteen gained traction by the mid-2000s across the UN, its bodies, members and among international organisations. UNICEF harnessed the term 'child marriage' from as early as 2001, using it across policy reports and position papers globally and regionally (UNICEF, 2001; UNICEF, 2006; UNICEF, 2017), maintaining its policy influencing from the basis of the UNCRC and with child marriage framed as a child protection issue (UNICEF, 2014). In 2011, the Elders (a group of elder statesmen and women who came together in 2007 to address global issues) initiated the Global Partnership to End Child Marriage (also known as 'Girls not Brides'), launching their first global campaign in 2012 'to end child marriage', with a central focus on girls under eighteen (Crosette, 2012). In the same year, the first UN International Day of the Girl Child focussed on child marriage (UN Women, 2012), thanks to

influencing by the international NGO Plan International and its Because I am A Girl campaign (Plan International, n.d.). Girls not Brides and Plan International established themselves during the 2010s as the major UN policy influencing organisations on child marriage (Davis et al., 2013; Girls not Brides, 2015). Both organisations defined child marriage by virtue of age (under eighteen) and focussed on girls owing to statistical data showing the higher proportion of girls experiencing 'child marriage' compared to boys throughout the world (ibid.). Child marriage thus became and remains a commonly understood term in the global policy community of UN and international organisations to refer to all unions of any persons before the age of eighteen (IPPF, 2006; Jain and Kurz, 2007; Parsons and McCleary-Sills, 2014).

However, translating global and regional policy on 'child marriage' into national policy and legislation has proved challenging. In the early 2000s over a dozen countries in Sub-Saharan Africa either had no legislation for minimum marriageable ages or laws comprised exceptions through which younger persons could marry, including with parental consent (an exception the UNCRC Committee had tried to foreclose) or lower minimum age laws for girls than boys (Melchiorre and Atkins, 2011, p.27; UNFPA, 2012, p.12; African Child Policy Forum, 2013). In 2014, a declaration of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child urged African member states to set the minimum age for marriage at eighteen for *both* girls and boys *without exception* in a further attempt to encourage the closure of legal inconsistencies and discrimination across Sub-Saharan Africa. While some countries have amended or adopted relevant legislation over the last decade – including Malawi, which adopted a constitutional amendment to raise the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 for girls and boys in 2017 (UN Women, 2017) - at least half a dozen countries in Sub-Saharan Africa still have none, inconsistent and/or strongly contested legislation pertaining to minimum age legislation, especially for marriage. In Senegal, for example, the minimum age for sexual consent is 16 for boys and girls and the minimum age for marriage is 16 for girls but 18 for boys (Family Code, 1989, Article 111). In countries with plural legal systems, including Nigeria, the age of majority is contested across different legal codes with major implications for consistency and discrimination in child marriage legislation (Chapter 6). These challenges of global policy enactment suggest problems of vertical (global to local) and horizontal (intra-national) harmonisation of marriage legislation, but they also indicate more fundamental challenges associated with the universal formulation of 'child marriage'.

‘Child’, ‘early’ and/or ‘forced’ marriage: debating maturity and consent

The basis of the term ‘child marriage’ in human rights treaties and UN policy documents has rested on a minimum marriageable age, and on the right of persons to give free and full consent for marriage, enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 16(2)) (and subsequently reiterated across several international and African regional human rights charters³). The UN CRC and CEDAW note that a child *inherently* cannot give free and full consent to marriage (CEDAW, Article 16(1)) because they are minors, too young to make an informed decision (UNICEF, 2001, p.2; UNICEF, 2005, p.1; Loaiza and Wong, 2012, p.11). Children, persons under eighteen, cannot fulfil this tenet of universal human rights. If a child is conceived as never able to give free and full consent to marriage by virtue of their age and status, then ‘child marriage’ may be deemed synonymous with ‘forced marriage’. The term ‘forced marriage’ in global policy texts specifically refers to an absence of free and full consent by either spouse (Council of Europe, 2005, 4; Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013a; Bunting et al., 2016, p.5) and ‘child marriage’ defines unions in which one or both spouse is below eighteen, with the terms sometimes used consecutively to describe violations of marital rights (CRC/GC/2003/4; OHCHR, n.d). ‘Forced marriage’, however, also describes marriages without consent where either or both spouse is *over* the age of eighteen and is thus broader than the term ‘child marriage’. Forced marriages are a feature of some contemporary conflicts (including in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Uganda), which have generated complex legal debates on defining and describing crimes against humanity in wartime (Bunting et al., 2016, pp.7–12). One of these debates concerns how to ascertain consent to marriage in a way that captures both the context and the capabilities of the persons involved, as well as their age (ibid., p.15).

Global policy discussions on age and consent to marriage have contributed to the emergence of an alternative or complementary term to child marriage: ‘early marriage’. Early marriage may be understood to also simply describe marriage before age eighteen (UNICEF, 2006; WHO, 2011; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2013). But early marriage also tends to be formulated as *including and extending* beyond the idea of child marriage:

‘violence and harmful practices such as female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, incest, female genital mutilation and early marriage, including child marriage’
(UN, 1995, 39, p.14).

³ Policy texts following this principle include: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966, Article 10(1); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966, Article 23(3); and the Maputo Protocol, 2003, Article 6(a).

This formulation by the Beijing Declaration positions early marriage as a term to capture marriages before age eighteen and marriages that are otherwise 'harmful'. The term 'early marriage' acknowledges 'an individual's level of physical, emotional, sexual and psychosocial development that that would make a person unready to consent to marriage' whatever their age (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013b, p.2). The idea behind the term seems to reflect the UN CRC's positioning of children as rights-holders with 'evolving capacities' (Article 5) who are 'capable of forming his or her own views' and have 'the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (Article 12(1)). The UN CRC Committee's General Comment No.4 (CRC/GC/2003/4) emphasises that minimum age legislation should 'closely reflect the recognition of the status of human beings under 18 years of age as rights holders, in accordance with their evolving capacity, age and maturity (arts. 5 and 12 to 17)' (D.9, p.24). The idea of the term 'early marriage' is thus to include and extend beyond 'child marriage' by giving due consideration to a person's capacity and maturity as well as their age. It has been favoured in some international policy texts, and among some UN and international organisations, instead of, or as well as, 'child marriage', because it is seen to capture the changing capabilities of children and young people, including to give consent, that may or may not align with their age (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013a). The term nuances the boundaries around marital rights violations, highlighting rights violations among non-consenting adults and potentially destabilising the rights violation of a 'child marriage' among apparently consenting older adolescents.

UN global policy discussions on adolescents have identified the challenge and complexity of universal interpretation and response to adolescent betrothals and marriages, particularly among 15-18 year olds (UNICEF, 2001, p.9; UNFPA, 2004). The mid-late adolescent period of childhood poses a problem, recognised in some UN policy documents, to a universal description of child marriage as a violation of human rights in cases where an adolescent has attained the national minimum age for sexual consent, for example, and presents the 'capacity' and 'maturity' to consent to marriage (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013b). Others in the global policy community, however, argue that the minimum age basis of marriage rights is absolutely essential to ensure consent is given freely, fully and well-informed, including with alternatives (Davis et al., 2013; UNICEF, 2014; Girls Not Brides, 2016; Plan International, 2016). Whose voice counts in claiming maturity and consent to marriage (the individual, community, national law, global policy) and by whom the validation of that union is made, are knotty problems of global policy and social justice debates on defining boundaries around child, early and/or forced marriage (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013b.; Fraser, 2005; Bunting et al., 2016).

The disproportionate effect of early marriage on women and girls

One common agreement of human rights treaties, the UN and international organisations concerned with child, early and/or forced marriage policy is on the disproportionate effect of the phenomenon on girls and women (UNICEF, 2001, p.4; UNICEF, 2005, p.1; UNICEF, 2014). UNICEF's 2005 exploration of early marriage begins: 'Marriage before the age of 18 is a reality for many young women'; 'boys are also affected by child marriage but the issue impacts girls in far larger numbers and with more intensity' (UNICEF, 2005, p.1). General comment No.3 to the CRC specifies that '*the female child* is often subject to harmful traditional practices, such as early and/or forced marriage' (UNICEF, 2006, C.11, p.15, my italics); the inaugural UN International Day of the Girl Child 2012 on child marriage focussed on girls (UN Women, 2012); and Sustainable Development Goal 5 for gender equality and female empowerment has an indicator to measure the 'percentage of women aged 20-24 married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18' (5.3.1). These exemplify the unequivocal association of early marriage with girls and women by global policy texts, which has been well-established by quantitative and qualitative empirical data (Chapter 3). The 'deep-rooted gender inequalities' associated with early marriage are emphasised in the UN General Assembly Resolutions on child, early and forced marriage (UNGA, 2015, 2/4; UNGA, 2017, 2/6, UNGA, 2019, 3/9). Gender inequality as a root cause of, and perpetuated by, early marriage has been well-recognised by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2001; UNICEF, 2005; UNICEF, 2006), and by other UN bodies including UNFPA, WHO and UNESCO (WHO, 2011; Loaiza and Wong, 2012; UNESCO, 2015b).

The disproportionate effect of early marriage on girls and women has generated alternative names for the phenomenon that capture sex bias, including 'child wives' (UNICEF, 2001, p.1) and 'child brides' (Mathur et al., 2003; Brown, 2012; Loaiza and Wong, 2012, p.13; Davis et al., 2013; UNICEF, 2015; Girls Not Brides, 2020). The naming of the Elders global campaign partnership as 'Girls not Brides' establishes girls as the focus but the use of 'bride' has been critiqued for being emotionally loaded, seeming to 'glorify the process, implying a celebration' (Nour, 2006, p.1644). Other academics have criticised the use of 'marriage' in these terms for a similar implication of celebration and suggested alternative labels for child, early and forced marriage including, simply, sexual abuse and modern slavery (Turner, 2013; Mihara and Abrahams, 2017).

There are a legal set of definitions established in global treaties pertaining to marriage and children and an overarching consensus among global UN, donor agency, and international organisations that the marriage of persons under the age of eighteen is a violation of children's rights. Yet global consensus on, and consistent use of, terms to describe marriage under different conditions has neither been achieved nor is necessarily desired due to the

variability of practices and processes. The tendency among UN and international organisations in the present day is to use all three terms, 'child', 'early, and 'forced' together in a single policy document, either as a comprehensive label or interchangeably (Ouattara et al., 1998; Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013b). In this way, target SDG 5.3 aims to 'eliminate all harmful traditional practices, such as child, early and forced marriage'. In 2014, 2016 and 2018 Member States of the UN General Assembly supported three successive Resolutions on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (UNGA, 2015; UNGA 2017; UNGA, 2019). Although not legally binding, these resolutions consolidated the UN global policy community's commitments to addressing 'child, early and forced marriage' (CEFM) and committed over 100 Member States to action. Following the UNGA resolutions, 'CEFM' has become well-recognised shorthand for the phenomena, utilised in the reports and recommendations of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN organisations and by international NGOs (Boender, 2018; Plan International, 2016; Plan International Asia Regional Office, 2018; Mazurana and Marshak, 2019).

While the shorthand CEFM persists among some members of the global policy community, some academic commentators have argued for the opposite: for linguistic clarity and improved disaggregation in the naming and measurement of the phenomenon (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013b; Bunting et al., 2016). They argue that the popularisation in policy arenas of the label CEFM confers 'uncritical analogous thinking' (Bunting et al., 2016, p.1) that curbs nuanced analysis and representation of the issue. Academic researchers have underscored that early marriage is not just about the act or outcome (married by 18) but about the processes, structures and systems around marriage (Meekers, 1992; Bunting, 2005; Arnot et al., 2012;). Different terms then constitute 'interrelated but distinct' (Bunting et al., 2016, p.5) conceptualisations of marriage that require differentiated analysis and response, and thus selecting an appropriate name for the specific form of marriage under discussion is critical (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2013a).

This thesis adopts the term 'early marriage' as its general signifier of marriages between persons either below 18 and/or deemed, by themselves or others, 'unready' for marriage. At the same time, I actively seek to specify the period of child/adulthood to which the union pertains *in context*, including in relation to national and subnational legal and sociocultural interpretations of child and adulthood and acknowledging the 'evolving capabilities' of children and young people. Subsequent chapters develop this thesis' argument for specificity and localisation in naming social practices such as early marriage and raise options for the application of the term 'adolescent unions' at global level (Chapter 3) and within Nigeria (Chapter 6), as well as for indigenous labels and ideas that re-root the 'power to name' social practices from the global north to Africa and its communities (Nnaemeka, 2001,

p.178). Driven by African feminists' arguments for indigeneity (Chapter 4), the data analysis chapters present and describe the Hausa and pidgin words and terms used to discuss marriage by research participants themselves, embracing these terms as part of an analytical discussion on meanings of marriage in northern Nigeria (Chapters 7 – 10).

This thesis' concern to situate its terms and naming in their legal and sociocultural context, and according to those who live through those experiences, is also an attempt towards listening to girls and how they describe marital experiences. In many global policy documents girls are presented as the object of early marriage. This is visible in, for example, the framing by the Beijing Declaration (1995) of girls as 'subjected to' 'harmful practices' including 'early marriage' (UN, 1995, 39, p.14) and in General Comment No. 3 to the UNCRC (CRC/GC/2003/3):

'the female child is often subject to harmful traditional practices, such as early and/or forced marriage, which violate her rights and make her more vulnerable'

(UNICEF, 2006, General Comment No.3, C.11, p.15)

The formulation of early marriage as a 'harmful practice' (CRC/GC/2003/3 and CRC/GC/2003/4) (UNICEF, 2006, C.11, p.15; E.10, p. 25; 39(g), p.29) to which girls are *subjected* arguably has the effect of removing the possibility for girls' voice and agency in marriage, *universally*. The image of girls as *passive* victims *subjected* to marriage is embedded in some UN, donor, and international organisations' publications (UNICEF, 2001; Brown, 2012; Asrari, 2015). Such a negation of girls' voice and agency has been recently addressed, including by the UNGA Resolutions on CEFM. These acknowledge women and girls' agency but that it is weakened by early marriage:

'child, early and forced marriage undermines women's and girls' autonomy and decision-making in all aspects of their lives'

(UNGA, 2015, 2/4; 2017, 2/6; 2019, 3/9)

The UNGA resolutions note that 'the empowerment of and investment in women and girls' and girls' 'meaningful participation' 'in all decisions that affect them' are crucial for economic growth (UNGA, 2015, 2/4) and sustainable development (2017, 2/6). The 2018 resolution adds to this a recommendation for 'the strengthening of their voice, agency, leadership and meaningful participation in all decisions that affect them'. This latest UN Resolution on CEFM begins to explicitly acknowledge girls' agency (as autonomy and decision-making) before, during and after marriage and the importance of strengthening agency. These additions to the 2018 Resolution indicate a process among the UN General Assembly members to consolidate and expand global policy, and its discourses, on early marriage in

relation to female agency. Ideas about agency in relation to early marriage are emerging in some contemporary academic research (Chapter 3) and filtering into global policy making and influencing.

The arc of global policy on early marriage has been steep and significant over the last two decades with the naming and definition of child, early and forced marriage evolving across global and regional human rights treaties and among global policy makers and influencers in UN and international organisations. Some ongoing contestations over, and elisions of, terms in legal texts, global (and regional) policy documents form a backdrop to this study. The evolution of definitions and discourses have fed into associations made in global policy between early marriage and girls' education, particularly since the millennium and by the UN's education organisation, UNESCO. The following section examines the link between early marriage and girls' education in global policy, how it has been formulated, what kind of policy positions have been promulgated and with what effects.

Early marriage and girls' education: international policy formulations

Neither the Education for All Declaration (Dakar, 2000) nor the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) mentioned child, early or forced marriage in relation to girls' education at the turn of the twenty-first century. Links between girls' education and early marriage have, however, gathered prominence in UN policy documents and discussions since 2000 and, in 2020, have a particularly high status as priority interrelated concerns of international development. The connection between early marriage and girls' education has been forged most deeply in the notion of early marriage as a *barrier* to girls' access to, and retention in, formal education. Among the first notations to this extent are contained in the 2003 General Comments to the CRC: General Comment No. 3 notes that early and/or forced marriage, 'often interrupt access to education and information' (CRC/GC/2003/3, UNICEF, 2006, C.11, p.15) while General Comment No.4 (CRC/GC/2003/4) states:

'children who marry, especially girls, are often obliged to leave the education system and are marginalized from social activities'

(UNICEF, 2006, p.26, point 20)

Early marriage is raised in relation to girls' education to explain girls' never enrolling, leaving school prematurely and/or being excluded from educational and social activities. This positioning of early marriage as a barrier to access to education has been repeated in the UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports (GMR), published annually to assess progress towards meeting MDG 2 (to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere— boys and girls alike—will be

able to complete a full course of primary schooling) and the Education for All Goals. The first GMR to mention early marriage was in 2004, when the report described early marriage as a 'social norm' (p.119) that 'holds girls back' (UNESCO, 2004, pp.18; 119): 'Early marriage massively impedes the educational progress of girls' (ibid., p.123). This report formulated early marriage as an impediment to gender parity in primary schooling (MDG 2) and to girls completing a full cycle of basic education (nine years primary and lower secondary schooling). This formulation is reiterated in subsequent GMRs (my italics):

'Cultural attitudes and practices that promote early marriage [...] can form a powerful set of *barriers to gender parity*'

(UNESCO, 2009, p.105)

'Girls face a distinctive set of *barriers*: longer distances may reinforce security concerns and, in some contexts, *early marriage prevents them from progressing beyond primary school.*' (UNESCO, 2010, p.75)

'Early marriage for girls is another *barrier to education* in some pastoralist communities.'

(UNESCO, 2010, p.178)

'Early marriage can act as another *barrier to secondary school progression*'

(UNESCO, 2011, p.76)

'Deeply engrained social, cultural and economic *barriers*, such as early marriage, often *prevent* young women from continuing education'

(UNESCO, 2012, pp.22; 235)

'Early entry into marriage and pregnancy *limits* adolescent girls' *access to and continuation in education*'

(UNESCO, 2015a, p.169)

UNESCO's 2004 GMR has been significant to discourses on early marriage and girls' education among UN organisations and in global education policy firstly because the report was the first of its kind to position early marriage as a 'problem' to the attainment of global education goals (including MDG 2), specifically to gender parity at the primary level, and secondly because it laid the ground for establishing further links between early marriage and 'the gendered patterns of school participation and retention' at secondary and higher levels of education (UNESCO, 2004, p.66). Early marriage as an obstacle to girls' formal schooling is a trope of several UN reports on girls' education, evidenced by analysis of Demographic and Health Survey data that show statistically significant positive correlations, at country and regional levels, between years in school and age at marriage (UNESCO, 2012, p.236; Loaiza and Wong, 2012, p.39). The first, 2014, UNGA Resolution on CEFM notes the 'negative impact' of CEFM on the achievement of the education MDG. CEFM, it notes, 'disproportionally affects girls who have received little or no formal education and is itself a significant obstacle to educational opportunities for girls and young women, in particular girls who are forced to drop out of school owing to marriage' (UNGA, 2015, 2-3/4). The UN organisations UNICEF and UNFPA have similarly advanced this discourse of early marriage as a barrier to girls' access to and retention in formal schooling:

'Early marriage inevitably denies children of school age their right to the education'
(UNICEF, 2001, p. 11).

'Often child marriage brings an end to a girl's chance of continued education'
(UNFPA, 2012, p.7)

'Negative consequences of child marriage abound, particularly for girls. They may be cut off from their families, their formal education left behind'
(UNICEF, 2012, p.10).

UNFPA has particularly emphasised tripartite links between marriage, pregnancy, and girls' schooling attainment. Iterative UNFPA reports since the mid-2000s have highlighted that 'the highest adolescent birth rates are found where child marriage rates are high'; 'adolescent girls become brides, get pregnant, and have children' (UNFPA, 2007, p.1); child marriage is an 'underlying cause' of adolescent pregnancy (UNFPA, 2013, p.iv). The interaction of marriage, pregnancy and education, in which marriage leads to pregnancy, which lead to

school drop-out has been re-stated with contributory evidence from mostly quantitative academic research, by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2012b, p.3; UNICEF, 2016, p.16), UNESCO (UNESCO, 2006, p.94; UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 2015a) and global policy influencers (Brown, 2012; Davis et al., 2013).

Coincident with global policy formulations of early marriage as a barrier to girls' education has been a complementary mirroring formulation of education as protective, or as 'panacea', against early marriage. UNESCO GMRs published between 2005-2009 barely mention early marriage, but those that do note that 'more educated women [...] marry later' and that higher educational attainment and later marriage may both reduce fertility (UNESCO, 2006, p.142; UNESCO, 2007, p.118). From 2012, UNESCO's GMRs pivoted their presentation of the link between early marriage and girls' education, not to emphasise marriage as a barrier but to emphasise education as protective:

'Education itself is good protection against early marriage for teenage girls. The median age for marriage among women with a secondary education, compared with those who have no education or only a primary school education, is over two years higher in Bangladesh and Nigeria'

(UNESCO, 2012, p.236)

'ensuring that girls stay in school is one of the most effective ways to prevent child marriage. If all girls completed primary school in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, the number of girls getting married by age 15 would fall by 14%; with secondary education, 64% fewer girls would get married'

(UNESCO, 2014, p.181)

'girls' participation in formal education is itself an important factor in delaying marriage and child-bearing'

(UNESCO, 2015a, p.169).

The global education policy discourse on the connection of early marriage with girls' education thus pivoted towards the end of the UN MDG-era from presenting the challenges and problems to achieving gender parity in formal schooling and girls' attainment, of which early marriage was significant, to positive advocacy for girls' access to, retention and completion of formal basic education to overcome early marital timing and early

pregnancies. This pivot can be summarised as ‘the longer a girl is enrolled in school, the better’ (UNFPA, 2007, p.8); ‘keeping girls in school is essential to end child marriage’ (Wodon et al., 2018, p.10), and it echoes a predominantly modern, or ‘assimilative’ approach to education for individual and national development (Datzberger, 2018, p.8). In this discursive framing both education and early marriage are generally understood quantitatively: education as ‘years in school’ and marriage as ‘age in years’. This can be explained in part by the form of available data (surveys, including the DHS), but the effect has been to obscure more substantive meanings of education and early marriage that might advance understanding of their interrelationship. Even while more ‘years in school’ might be correlated with older age at first marriage, *how* and *why* this link works has been poorly determined. Global education policy has hesitated on the question of *how* education is protective as a delaying mechanism for girls’ marriage.

Moreover, the direction and strength of the association between age at marriage and years in school has been queried. A 2001 UNICEF report asked whether girls are withdrawn from school to marry, or whether lack of schooling for girls’ is part of a pattern of traditional expectations and roles (UNICEF, 2001, p.11). The 2004 UNESCO GMR frames its explanation of early marriage in terms of families’ ‘economic burdens’ and/or concerns with female autonomy (UNESCO, 2004, p.123). Global education policy attention to ‘reaching the most marginalised’ (UNESCO, 2010) from and in education has pointed to the intersections of poverty, rurality, religion and sociocultural attitudes and practices (including early marriage) in exacerbating girls’ educational exclusion (UNESCO, 2010, p.167). A 2012 UNFPA research report nuanced earlier formulations of the negative affect of marriage on schooling by concluding that ‘that dropping out of school is less likely to be a direct consequence of child marriage than of poverty, the low status afforded to women, and social norms that lead parents to discount the value of investing in girls and their education (Loaiza and Wong, 2012).

More recent consideration of *how education protects* girls from early age at marriage has re-emphasised the quality dimension of education, moving beyond access and retention (years in) to ideas about what happens inside schools and education systems that may catalyse protective effects in relation to marriage. A book commissioned by The Brookings Institution in 2016 entitled ‘What Works in Girls’ Education. Evidence for the World’s Best Investment’, intended as a ‘one-stop access to hundreds of studies on girls’ education for any academic, expert, nongovernmental organization (NGO) staff member, policymaker, or journalist’ (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016, p.3) contains a section entitled ‘Girls’ education reduces rates of child marriage’ in which the authors argue that a ‘*high-quality education* for girls is a critical strategy for *preventing* child marriage and *mitigating* the harmful consequences for

girls who are already married (ibid., pp.48, my italics). The report notes that the ‘dominant thinking has been that if girls are in school, they are at much less risk of child marriage’ (ibid., p.49) because ‘being in school’ ‘supports the perception that girls are still children and hence not marriageable’ (Loaiza and Wong, 2012, p.51; UNESCO, 2014, pp.181-2). But perceptions and experiences of ‘being in school’ also affect the timing of marriage. Sperling and Winthrop reflect that ‘girls who are doing poorly in school, not learning well, and falling behind are sometimes being pulled out of school by their parents to marry’ (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016, p.49). What this adds to the discursive framing of girls’ education and early marriage is the point that low-quality schooling - manifest as poor teaching and learning – that does not meet the needs of girls is implicated in decisions to marry and leave school. In short, that poor quality education may itself compel and perpetuate early age at marriage.

Sperling and Winthrop do not substantiate their meaning of high-quality education to delay marriage, but Loaiza and Wong underscored some substantive effects of quality schooling in relation to marriage: schooling may ‘offer girls positive *alternatives* to child marriage’ and ‘help a girl develop *social networks* and acquire *skills and information*, all of which contribute to her ability to communicate, negotiate for her best interests and participate in decisions that affect her life’ (2012, p.51, my italics)⁴. Interestingly, this framing of schooling and marriage not only identifies outcomes of schooling (although broad) that protect in relation to marriage (social networks, skills and information) but also frames the protective potential of formal schooling in relation to early marriage beyond delaying marital timing to an idea of contributing to *marital decision-making*. This inculcates the idea that the protective potential of formal schooling is not only to delay age at marriage (‘prevent child marriage’) but also to enhance girls’ participation in decision-making. This implicates quality schooling not only in marriage timing but also spousal choice, where to marry, and girls’ experiences of marriage. This helps to extend the idea of education as protective beyond protection against early marriage timing towards other facets of protection, not least whether and how education protects already-married girls.

While the UNGA Resolutions recommend actions that ‘include support to already married girls’ (UNGA, 2015, 3/4; UNGA, 2017, 5/6, UNGA, 2019, 3/9-9/9) and the CRC General Recommendation No. 4 Point 31 urges the development of ‘policies that will allow adolescent mothers to continue their education’, there is an absence of discussion in global policy texts to date on the protective potential of education for already-married adolescent girls. An articulation by some policy influencers (Loaiza and Wong, 2012; Sperling and Winthrop, 2016) of education as having an endogenous role in the marriage-schooling nexus

⁴ Citing Malhotra, A., et al. (2011). *Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the evidence shows*, International Center for Research on Women, Washington, D.C.

advances the discursive framing of the link between these two facets of girls' lives, but the substantive ideas of *quality schooling* (including as they pertain to different contexts) continue to receive little substantive attention.

Conclusion

The chapter has discussed some of the major policy formulations on early marriage, and early marriage and girls' education, within human rights treaties at global and regional levels, and by UN and international organisations. As the global policy community moves well into the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) era (2015-2030), the arc of global policy texts and discussion on early marriage and girls' education has shifted from concerns with early marriage as a barrier to education - specifically to gender parity in primary schooling - to recognition that early marriage is a *cause and consequence* of girls' limited education; from a focus on factors exogenous to education that perpetuate early marriage, to concern with factors *exogenous and endogenous* to education that interconnect to perpetuate early marriage; from concerns with fertility, to concerns with puberty, adolescence and sexuality in the schooling-marriage nexus.

Global education policy discourse, which has been well-attuned to issues of educational access and marriage timing and the conditions of poverty, rurality, religion, and social custom that interconnect the two, is also paying closer attention to quality schooling in relation to broader marriage decision-making processes and experiences. Yet there remain major exploratory and explanatory gaps in these discourses, some of which are linked to data gaps in empirical research. Other gaps are connected to the Euro/western-centric, and therefore limited, range of ideas, concepts and theories from which assumptions and discourses on girls' education and marriage have grown. As this chapter has discussed, these assumptions and discourses emerge from 'thick cosmopolitanism' (Unterhalter, 2008, p.254) with its overarching universalism that informs global human rights. Chapter 3, the literature review, provides further detail on the existing evidence about, and gaps in understanding, the connections between girls' education and marriage.

Chapter 3. Girls, marriage, and schooling: connections and conclusions in academic research

Setting the scene: early marriage, early pregnancy, and reproductive health

During the MDG-era (2000-2015), with its aims to reduce child mortality (Goal 4) and improve maternal health (Goal 5), women's age at marriage became a focus of critical attention among health and demography researchers for its contribution to fertility, maternal mortality and morbidity, and infant mortality rates (Westoff, 2003; Lloyd and Mensch, 2006; Godha et al., 2012; Godha et al., 2013; Raj and Boehmer, 2013; MacQuarrie, 2016). Studies of Sub-Saharan Africa associated early age at marriage (<18 years) with early pregnancy and the heightened risks of harmful health outcomes including sexually transmitted diseases, obstetric fistula and maternal morbidity (Mahy and Gupta, 2002; Westoff, 2003; Nour, 2006; Godha et al., 2012; Walker, 2012; Adebawale et al., 2012; Westoff et al., 2013; Raj and Boehmer, 2013). The health problem of adolescent pregnancy encouraged research to describe and explain the phenomenon in the region. This research identified and advanced understanding about the role and effect of early marriage on early pregnancy and girls and women's health.

High fertility rates have been reported for decades throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987; Caldwell and Caldwell, 1990; Kirk and Pillett, 1998; Godha et al., 2012; Westoff et al., 2013) including Nigeria (Isiugo-Abanihe et al., 1993; Orubuloye, 1995; Feyisetan and Bankole, 2004). Household survey data, principally from the US Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), have provided the basis for much evidence on fertility and health outcomes. Established in 1984, DHS are nationally representative surveys of women and men (aged 15-49) comparable across countries that provide population estimates for fertility; family planning; infant, child and maternal health; marriage; sexual activity and HIV/AIDS - with recent optional modules on female genital cutting and domestic violence (Croft et al., 2018) - to enhance policies and services (Corsi et al., 2012, p.1602; NPC and ICF International, 2014, p.6)⁵. Marriage, defined as a legal or formal union (civil, religious, or traditional) or cohabitation, data are collected as 'a primary indication of women's exposure to the risk of pregnancy' in order to understand trends in fertility and reproductive health (NPC and ICF International, 2014, p.53).

⁵ Seven rounds of DHS have been conducted globally to 2020, with participating countries facilitating a survey around every five years.

Cross-sectional quantitative analyses of women's data from DHS across Sub-Saharan Africa have implicated women's marital timing in fertility and health trends. These analyses have presented statistically significant positive associations between the timing of first birth and first marriage among women: first birth tends to fall within two to three years of marriage; and women married before age 20 are more likely to experience early, repeat and rapid pregnancies and births, which increase their risk of morbidity and mortality (Singh and Samara, 1996; Westoff, 2003; Godha et al., 2012; Westoff et al., 2013; Raj and Boehmer, 2013). The conclusions from a close temporal association between first birth and first marriage have been a conflation of the events of pregnancy and marriage and an argument that early marriage, by association with pregnancy and birth, is harmful to maternal and infant health (Singh and Samara, 1996; Nour, 2006; Godha et al., 2012).

The close timing of marriage, pregnancy and birth may make it difficult to ascertain the sequencing of these events and separate their outcomes in women's lives (Singh and Samara, 1996; Singh, 1998; Westoff, 2003; Bearinger et al., 2007; Nove et al., 2014). Marriage may hasten pregnancy or vice versa - the two events are often intimately connected for women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa (Akpan, 2003; Walker, 2012) – but their relationship is also complex and variable by country and community of women. DHS data for married women aged 20-24 analysed from Ethiopia (2005), Guinea (2005), Mali (2006) and Niger (2006) indicated that women who married before age 15 were more likely to have a longer interval to first birth than women who married after age 18, suggesting a disassociation between marriage and birth among girls who married very young (Godha et al., 2012). This study also argued that the harmful health effects of rapid, repeat pregnancies equally affected women who married before fifteen and after 18, emphasising pregnancy and birth risks for all women regardless of marital age (ibid.). A DHS-based analysis of the excess maternal mortality risk to adolescent mothers aged 15-19 across 144 countries indicated a slightly higher risk for this group compared to women aged 20-24 but the highest risk for women aged over 30 (Nove et al., 2014). Studies such as these indicate that health risks associated with pregnancy and birth for women in developing countries are only partially explained by marriage timing (Schwab Zabin and Kiragu, 1998; Gage, 1998; Lloyd, 2005). Another explanation is the physiological and sociocultural timing and implications of female puberty.

Puberty - particularly menarche and breast development - interacts with and has a significant effect on the timing of marriage, pregnancy and birth among women (Glynn et al., 2010; Sommer, 2013; Ajah et al., 2015; Bello et al., 2017). Research insights into the significance of puberty on marriage and pregnancy is limited by the available data: DHS do not routinely collect menarche data and there has been 'almost no systematic effort to monitor the socio-

epidemiology of menarche' (Sommer, 2013, p.399). Cross-sectional survey research in Malawi and Nigeria that collected menarche data evidenced a positive association between earlier menarche and earlier sexual debut, earlier marriage and lower schooling levels (Glynn et al., 2010; Ajah et al., 2015). Researchers have noted that menarche exposes girls to health and social risks of sexual initiation and pregnancy, with this exposure increasing the likelihood of marriage for social and economic protection (Zaba et al., 2004; Kirk and Sommer, 2006; Lloyd and Mensch, 2006; Glynn et al., 2010). The average age at menarche appears to be declining in many Sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, to around 12 years of age (Abioye-Kuteyi et al., 1997; Bellis et al., 2006; Umeora and Egwuatu, 2008; Prentice et al., 2010; Aryeetey et al., 2011). Although the timing of menarche, and other physiological facets of puberty, vary by environmental and individual-level factors (nutrition, physical and reproductive health, socioeconomic status), trends towards earlier menarche are likely to have an effect on marriage timing (Gage, 1998, p.155; Glynn et al., 2010; Sommer, 2013).

The timing of, or age at, menarche, puberty, marriage, pregnancy and birth, and measuring these, matters for monitoring trends in health and society, government accountability, public services, safeguarding, and global human rights, which codify age as a universal benchmark (Melchiorre and Atkins, 2011; MacQuarrie, 2016). Age is central to the identification of 'adolescence' as a distinctive period of childhood between 10-19 years that comprises pubescent physiological and psychological transitions (UNFPA, 2004, p.58). While definitionally bounded by age, researchers of childhood have emphasised that adolescent transitions are non-chronological (unlike age), complex and variable (Woodhead and Montgomery, 2002; Bunting, 2005) and that transitions may be better understood as occupying different *stages* towards adulthood (Woodhead and Montgomery, 2002). Individuals and groups may occupy different stages of adolescence at different ages depending on individual and environmental conditions of their lives (Woodhead and Montgomery, 2002; Dixon-Mueller, 2008). One result of considering the criteria of ages and stages has been the disaggregation to smaller age groupings (in research and policy) to capture the discrete stages of adolescence while still able to measure and monitor them according to a universal benchmark: 'early' (age 10-14) 'middle' (age 15-17) and 'late' (age 18-19 or 18-24) (Dixon-Mueller, 2008; Nove et al., 2014; Curtis, 2015), or, commonly among policy-makers, 'early' (age 10-14) and 'late' (age 15-19) (UNICEF, 2011).

Age and stages groupings are useful to analyse and explain empirical data and refine policy concerning women. However, even these smaller groupings, established as universal standards, obscure arguments made by some qualitative sociologists that childhood and adolescence are socially constructed, highly contextualised and unpredictable (Woodhead

and Montgomery, 2002; Bunting, 2005; Arnot et al., 2012). Summarising literature on adolescence, a qualitative study on girls' transitions to adulthood in Ghana and India notes that there 'is increasingly no simple and clear 'arrival' at adulthood, yet policy on youth often presumes a single transition that follows one line' (Arnot et al., 2012, p. 183; also Bunting et al., 2016). This means that, even at national level, age categories assemble and homogenise diverse young people with diverse conditions, experiences and outcomes of adolescence living in communities with diverse sociocultural interpretations of childhood. The significance of puberty to pregnancy and marriage is not only physiological and psychological, but also social, cultural and gendered (Gage, 1998; Mensch et al., 1999; Bearinger, Linda HSharma et al., 2007; Blum et al., 2017). Meta-analyses of research on female puberty have stressed the importance of measuring and exploring the timing and the individual experience and sociocultural significance of menarche for understanding pregnancy, marriage and schooling (Sommer, 2013; Ibitoye et al., 2017).

Some qualitative socio-medical and sociological studies have identified how puberty matters for girls in diverse African contexts as a sociocultural signifier of maturity into adulthood and readiness for marriage (Mensch et al., 1998; Sommer, 2013; Bello et al., 2017). Cultural rites of passage may be instigated by biological markers of puberty but have gendered social meanings and implications (Bunting, 2005; Dixon-Mueller, 2008). Girls' transitions through puberty (menarche, breast development, psychology, sexuality) are monitored and controlled in many societies by parents and policies, much more than boys' transitions (Bearinger, Linda HSharma et al., 2007; Bello et al., 2017) with different standards and values attached to girls' and boys' sexualities and adolescent sexual behaviours (Gage, 1998; Mensch et al., 1999; Bearinger, Linda HSharma et al., 2007; Blum et al., 2017). Sociological studies covering early marriage emphasise that gender socialisation processes increase during puberty, with many Sub-Saharan African girls being prepared for the roles of wife and mother through pubertal rites and restrictions (Bunting, 2005; Arnot et al., 2012). Among the Hausa in northern Nigeria, seclusion (purdah) may be practiced to conceal and distance pubescent girls from the community (Egunyomi, 2006; Izugbara and Ezeh, 2010). At the same time as adolescents are being monitored and 'socialised' by adults, they may also start to be seen, and behave, more autonomously and as adults (Bunting, 2005, p.19; Zimmerman et al., 2019, p.100454). Caught between the mandates of childhood and the emerging roles and responsibilities of adulthood, adolescent girls are engaged in complex navigations of society. These studies imply that age can only be a partial explanation for adolescent girls' marriage. A combination of concepts of ages, stages, sociocultural context, norms and values offers a deeper understanding of when and how adolescent girls marry,

give birth and go to school. It is to school enrolment and attainment, and evidence for a link between schooling and marriage, that this chapter now turns.

Keep girls in school! Access to education to protect against early marriage

The research of predominantly health and demography specialists into the associations between marriage, pregnancy and birth intersects with international and comparative education studies over the implication of education in the marriage-pregnancy nexus. Researchers broadly concur that girls who enrol and remain in school for longer are, on average, more likely to marry and birth children later. In 1996, demographers analysed global 1990s DHS data to compare the proportion of women aged 20-24 who report marriage by age 20 who have seven or more years of schooling (equivalent to at least all primary schooling) to those with less than seven years schooling to assess the impact of educational attainment on marital timing and childbearing (Singh and Samara, 1996). In every country (including Nigeria), women with less than seven years' schooling were more likely than those with seven or more years' schooling to have married by age 20 (*ibid.*, p.153). In Nigeria (DHS 1990) women with less than seven years schooling were 60% more likely to have married by age 20 (*ibid.*, p.153-4). The researchers surmised that 'increases in educational attainment tend to be associated with decreases in the prevalence of early marriage' (*ibid.*, p.155). A statistically significant positive association between years in school ('educational attainment') and marital age has been presented in multiple DHS-based studies of Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, showing that as women's years in school increases, age at marriage rises with implications for later, healthier childbearing (Jejeebhoy, 1995; Ikamari, 2005; Adebawale et al., 2012; Westoff et al., 2013, p.11; Garenne, 2014). Regression analysis of Nigeria DHS has indicated that women (aged 15-49) with some secondary education may be 68% less likely to marry before age 18 than those with no education (Adebawale et al., 2012, p.100), and that each additional year of schooling for women delays their marital age by approximately six months (*ibid.*, p.103).

Among international education researchers, the identification of a link between girls' school enrolment and retention and marriage timing (Colclough et al., 2000; Jensen and Thornton, 2003; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008; Walker, 2012; Delprato et al., 2015) has advanced understanding of the causes of girls' lower levels of education than boys in developing countries and of persistent gender disparities in access to primary and lower secondary schooling despite decades of wide-ranging efforts to get more girls into school (Lewin, 2009; UNESCO, 2015b). DHS data from a survey in each of 27 Sub-Saharan African countries (surveys collected between 1998 and 2009) were analysed by researchers from the World

Bank in 2014 to quantify the effects of early marriage on girls' educational attainment (defined as literacy and some/complete secondary school), among married girls and women (aged 15-34) (Nguyen and Wodon, 2014). The OLS regression modelling estimated that among women (aged 25-34) who did *not marry before 18*, 36% had some secondary schooling and 13% completed secondary school, compared to less than 11% and 2% respectively of women who *did marry before 18*, and these differences are highly statistically significant (ibid., p.7). Their hypothesis that marrying earlier tends to reduce the 'educational attainment' of a girl held after controlling for variables including location, orphanhood, religion, premarital childbearing, and other household characteristics (ibid., p.8). This study emphasises the significance of having *some secondary* schooling to *delay* marital timing – an emphasis also made by Walker (2013, p.28) whose analysis of DHS data for West Africa indicates that the prevalence of early marriage only reduces significantly among women educated to secondary level. Another study of DHS data from 36 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South West Asia of the effects of marital timing among women (aged 20-29) who married before age 18 on schooling outcomes (years in school, literacy and lower secondary drop-out) similarly indicated (OLS regression) that early married women had fewer years of schooling than those who married later, and this is statistically significant (Delprato et al., 2015). Results for Sub-Saharan African countries identified that one-year delay in marriage (between ages 11-17) increased average years of schooling by 0.11 (0.15 years in Nigeria using DHS 2008), increasing to 0.54 in a model that accounted for country and community-level endogenous and exogenous variables including conflict, community trends in age at marriage, household socioeconomic and health variables (ibid., p. 46). These cross-sectional quantitative analyses evidence a statistically significant correlation between women's marriage age and years in school, literacy acquisition, and/or having some secondary schooling, at global and regional levels. However, what is also notable is that all these studies signal the low proportion of girls who have some secondary, and even fewer who complete secondary, regardless of whether they marry. In all three studies, the positive correlations between marriage timing and years in school *show slight and marginal* adjustments of each variable that keep girls in school and delay marriage rather than transform marriage timing, school duration or the substantive experience of both. They are subtle not transformational effects. Moreover, in the World Bank study, *two thirds* (64%) of women who married *after* age eighteen did *not* have some secondary schooling, meaning that, at most, they completed primary school and went through adolescence *out-of-school and unmarried*. Attention to the statistical significance of marital age and educational attainment should not obscure attention to factors endogenous to education that would seem to push girls out before or during adolescence and that are not connected to marriage.

Qualitative survey evidence has bolstered conclusions linking years in school with marital age. In 1999 the Nigeria DHS asked women aged 15-24 who had attended school but were not currently attending why they had stopped (National Population Commission, 2000, p.25)⁶. Thirteen percent of women who did not complete primary school, and 19% who completed primary but did not transition to secondary, cited marriage as their reason for leaving (ibid., p.25; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008, p.368). In 2008, schoolgirls' participating in a survey in northern Nigeria identified early marriage as the third most significant obstacle to them achieving their desired level of schooling (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011, p.31). These survey data align with quantitative analyses indicating a link between early marriage timing and lower educational attainment among girls, facilitating a refrain among researchers that early marriage is a 'barrier' or 'constraint' to girls' education (Colclough et al., 2000; Jensen and Thornton, 2003, p.13; Walker, 2012). Such findings have been harnessed as part of the explanation for persistent gender disparities in access to formal schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2014) and the argument extending from research into policy to get more girls in school and keep them there (Mathur et al., 2003; Lloyd, 2005; Ikamari, 2005, p.22; Nour, 2009; Adebowale et al., 2012; Walker, 2012; Westoff et al., 2013). Again, however, a larger proportion of girls in both studies cite reasons for, or experience, school leaving not primarily associated with marriage – the top two obstacles to schooling cited by girls in northern Nigeria were poverty and ill health (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011, p.31). While data on schooling and marriage are salient to advance understanding of these interconnected phenomena, resultant discourses should take care not to overstate claims about marriage and education.

Reverse causality has been acknowledged and discussed as a problem of conclusions about early marriage as a barrier to girls' access to education. A mixed method study in Ethiopia found that in one region, 'half of the girls who had never enrolled in school, and one third of those who had dropped out, were married or divorced' (Colclough et al., 2000, p.22). However, the study does not ascertain whether marriage pre- or pro-ceeded school leaving (Colclough et al., 2000). Analysing DHS data to investigate marriage and childbirth as determinants of school leaving in five francophone African countries, Lloyd and Mensch estimate that marriage was more likely than childbirth to be associated with school-leaving but that 'the risks of leaving school during adolescence for reasons other than childbirth or marriage far exceed the risks associated with these demographic events' (Lloyd and Mensch, 2006, p.13; Lloyd and Mensch, 2008, p.10). This develops the ideas of qualitative survey evidence. Delprato and colleagues' (2015) analysis indicates that most lower secondary dropouts among girls happen *before* marriage and, according to their IV

⁶ This question was never repeated by the DHS in Nigeria.

estimates for women aged 20-29 who married by age 18 in Sub-Saharan Africa, postponing marriage by one year actually increased the probability of dropout by 19.1% (Delprato et al., 2015, p.48). Longitudinal and qualitative research in Ethiopia and Zambia also found that 'most of the adolescent girls and boys had already dropped out of school for a range of reasons before they got married' (Mweemba and Mann, 2019, p.17; UNICEF Ethiopia and Center, 2020, p.2). Pregnancy was one, but by no means the only, reason for school leaving, which then hastened marriage (ibid.). These findings advance an argument for close contextual attention to reasons for school leaving, including those endogenous to education.

Compounding reverse causality are variations in positive trends in marriage and schooling data over time. Analysis of West Africa DHS data presents negative trends in the link between marital age and schooling years over time: in Nigeria, a decrease in primary school completion rates from 75% in 2000-2005 to 70% in 2006-2011 occurred alongside an increase in the median age at marriage from 16.6 in 2003 to 18.3 years in 2008; in Mauritania, a 33% increase in primary school completion rates occurred alongside a decline in marital age by 0.1 years over the same period (Walker, 2013, p.28). A reconstruction of trends in the relationship between mean years of schooling and age at first marriage for women aged 15-49 across *five survey rounds* in Nigeria (1990 to 2008) showed that women's age at marriage historically stagnated around 18 years despite increasing average years of schooling and currently has risen to over 18 despite no increases in mean years of schooling (Garenne, 2014, p.112). Longitudinal studies (such as Walker and Garenne's) have emphasised the need for caution in drawing conclusions about the correlations between age at marriage, pregnancy, and educational attainment. A meta-analysis of DHS-based studies published during the 1980s and 1990s on women's education and fertility in developing countries emphasises that positive associations between years of schooling and marital age are often subject to threshold effects, becoming weaker and smaller above secondary levels of schooling (Jejeebhoy, 1995). Adolescents complete lower secondary schooling *from* age 15 in many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (Lewin, 2009) so this suggests that from this age more schooling may not necessarily continue to postpone marriage. This evidence raises relevant questions about the operation of ceiling or threshold effects of educational attainment on marriage timing.

Inherent weaknesses with DHS-based studies concerned to understand marriage and schooling have been linked to the self-reported nature of the data (Singh and Samara, 1996; Neal and Hosegood, 2015) and the effects of standardisation for cross-national comparisons (Carr-Hill, 2013; Kriel et al., 2014). With regards to analysing the relationship between marriage and education, there are two central concerns: one, that providing an accurate report of age at marriage can be difficult in contexts where birth registration rates are low

and the issuance of certificates not standard and where marriage is not an event fixed by a reportable date but a process of collective community consent and iterative celebration, sometimes lasting several years (Pittin, 1990; Meekers, 1992; Arnot et al., 2012), both of which social features are pertinent to the Nigerian context (Adi et al., 2015)⁷. Depending on the sociocultural, moral and legal context, as well as the time lag between the marriage and survey, reports may also incur recall and social desirability biases whereby women misestimate their age at marriage (Singh and Samara, 1996; Neal and Hosegood, 2015). The second is that standard definitions of a 'household', the unit from which surveys are conducted, may not capture the complexity of the social units in which people live (Guyer, 1981; Kriel et al., 2014). Those resident in non-institutional dwellings (including boarding schools), peripatetic populations and very poor groups (migrant workers, sex workers, the homeless) tend to be excluded from standard surveys (Carr-Hill, 2013; Randall and Coast, 2015). These exclusions are problematic for marriage research because poverty tends to predispose girls to early marriage and therefore the poorest married or at-risk girls may not be included in standard surveys (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003; Walker, 2012; Young Lives, 2018).

Inconsistencies and interdependence in marriage and schooling data strongly suggest a range of confounding factors at play in the relationship. One strand of research that tries to unravel this complexity investigates why early marriage happens by looking to the conditions and contexts of girls' lives at country, community and household levels. Poverty, rurality, conflict and Muslim identities have been strongly associated, by quantitative and qualitative studies in different African contexts, to high rates of early marriage and low levels of schooling among girls, with each factor reducing the effect of years of schooling on marital timing (Colclough et al., 2000; Ikamari, 2005; Lloyd and Mensch, 2006; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008; Nguyen and Wodon, 2014; Delprato et al., 2015; Mweemba and Mann, 2019).

Gendered sociocultural norms have also been implicated: past incidence of early marriage in a community has been significantly associated with a higher likelihood of early marriage in the present (Nguyen and Wodon, 2014; Delprato et al., 2015). Survey evidence from Guinea in 1995 found that traditional expectations for girls to become first and foremost wives and mothers mean that girls are more likely than boys to stay at home before marriage, rather than going to school, to learn how to cook, clean and care for children (Colclough et al., 2000, p.24), with similar arguments repeated in literature reviews (Tuwor and Sossou, 2008). The imbrication of multiple factors in the marriage-schooling nexus means that the origins or

⁷ The National Population Commission in Nigeria, established in 1992 (and currently coordinator of the Nigeria DHS), is responsible for issuing birth certificates but the requirements, fees and forms for certification vary enormously by state and local government area.

determinants of schooling level and marital timing are often the same; in other words 'because low levels of schooling among young married girls can also be linked to common factors related to ability, poverty and backward traditional settings⁸, the early marriage-education relationship is likely to be endogenously determined' (Delprato et al., 2015, p.42; also, Westoff, 2003, p.13; Nguyen and Wodon, 2014, p.6). So, poverty, rurality, conflict, Islamic beliefs and gendered social norms are the root causes of both premature school leaving and early marriage. This moves an understanding of early marriage and schooling beyond a notion of early marriage as a barrier to girls' schooling towards an idea of a more mutually constrained relationship.

The endogeneity explanation, which posits that factors associated with marriage and schooling affect the outcomes of both, is enhanced in Keith Lewin's work to understand educational access (Lewin, 2007; Lewin, 2009; Lewin, 2011), which explores the interactions and confluence of explanations for school leaving and life events. Lewin conceptualised reasons for school leaving as pertaining to five interacting clusters: (i) social processes in schools; (ii) education administration; (iii) community-level social, economic and political characteristics; (iv) household characteristics; and (v) individual learner characteristics (Lewin, 2007, p.33-34). That households characterised by poverty where school fees cannot be paid or books purchased (education administration) experience school exclusion and drop out is widely reported (National Population Commission, 2000, p.25; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008; Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011, p.31; Delprato, 2015; Petroni et al., 2017, p.786; Mweemba and Mann, 2020, p.19). The poverty that catalysed exclusion from school may then precipitate marriage as households attempt to alleviate their financial circumstances, so that being already out-of-school increases the risk of marrying early (Lewin, 2007; Delprato et al., 2015, p.43; Mweemba and Mann, 2019, p.17). Alternatively, school fees lead some poorer girls to engage in sexual relationships with boyfriends or male sponsors for financial support but this itself risks unplanned pregnancy, marriage, school exclusion (Mensch et al., 1999; Petroni et al., 2017; Mweemba and Mann, 2019). Young Lives qualitative findings from Ethiopia highlight the range of interactive reasons for school leaving included failing a grade, health problems, having to look after or support parents, engaging in paid work, changing residence, and disputes in school with teachers or other students' (Young Lives and UNICEF, 2020, p.7). This notion of interacting clusters adds texture to findings from quantitative surveys from West Africa and Malawi on an association between early marriage and being overage-for-grade (Lloyd and Mensch, 2006, p.14; Glynn et al., 2018). Evidence from longitudinal demographic surveillance in Karonga, northern Malawi, indicated that being one year overage-for-grade increased schoolgirls' risk of

⁸ Critique of this notion of 'backward traditions' is taken on in Chapter 4, Nigerian feminisms.

pregnancy or marriage, and by age 14, girls who were three or more years overage-for-grade were more likely to get pregnant or marry than their on-grade peers (ibid., p. 11). Reasons associated with being overage-for-grade tend to pertain to late entry, absenteeism and/or grade repetition (Lloyd and Mensch, 2006, p.14; Glynn et al., 2018), and these may be associated with several of Lewin's clusters, particularly household poverty. Lewin's interacting clusters explanation places emphasis on the fundamental co-dependence of girls' school attainment and marriage timing.

Education - 'being in school' - appears to confer immediate protection to some girls in terms of delaying marital timing: girls currently enrolled and attending formal basic schooling are less likely than their non-enrolled peers to marry (Young Lives, 2018, p.2). But much research gets stuck at access and improving availability and accessibility of schools by looking to only a handful of components of some of the kinds of 'interacting clusters', or factors linked to marriage and schooling particularly education administration (fees), community-level and/or household characteristics (poverty, rurality, religion). This means that research gaps persist in understanding what happens in school (social processes) that matters to girls' attainment, experiences, and outcomes, including in relation to marriage. The studies reviewed thus far in this chapter have offered a limited understanding of *how* education protects girls from early marital timing or more substantive facets of 'early marriage'. An assumption that schools are benign spaces in which girls will thrive as long as they gain access might serve the education development industry but obscure gendered and exclusionary educational practices, processes, policies and politics (Pereira, 2008, p.46; Mama, 2011). This gap pertains to understanding 'quality' schooling for marriage prevention (Lee-Rife et al., 2012; Walker, 2012; Delprato et al., 2015). Walker notes the conundrum of parents faced with a 'failing education system' (Walker, 2013, p.8); World Bank researchers promote 'improvements in the *quality* of schooling so that the benefits for girls from enrolling are higher' (Nguyen and Wodon, 2014, p.10, my italics); Young Lives studies have emphasised the importance of improving access to quality and affordable schooling (Mweemba and Mann, 2019, p.46). The following section considers the meanings and significance of 'quality' schooling in relation to adolescent girls' marriage.

Being in or becoming in school: (how) does school quality matter to marriage?

Early marriage has been associated with 'poor schooling outcomes' (Walker, 2013a, p.28; Lee-Rife et al., 2012; Delprato et al., 2015). One learning outcome that has served as a proxy for quality schooling is literacy (Nguyen and Wodon, 2014; Smith-Greenaway, 2015), the acquisition of which has been linked to older age at marriage (Tuwor and Sossou, 2008;

Walker, 2012; Nguyen and Wodon, 2014; Delprato et al., 2015). Literacy has been harnessed as proxy for school quality partly because it is measurable and data are available – DHS, for example, asks respondents to read aloud a sentence in their mother tongue. One Sub-Saharan Africa DHS-based analysis measures school quality by the ‘community proportion of women who had not become literate after completing 5 or 6 years of school’ (Delprato et al., 2015, p.44). The study finds that ‘each year of marriage delay is associated with 22.2% point increase in literacy’ (ibid., p.48) and concludes that literacy is ‘a significant mediator of the association between marriage and schooling for girls’ (ibid., p.53).

Researchers have argued that literacy acquisition delays marriage by enhancing girls’ earning potential and socioeconomic status, which mitigates the effects of poverty and natal family dependence as drivers of marriage (Singh and Samara, 1996; Okonofua, 2013; Nguyen and Wodon, 2014; Lee-Rife et al., 2014). Studies of literacy and marital timing tend to conclude that to boost literacy, schools must improve girls’ access and retention through increasing the *quantity* of provision - more infrastructure, facilities, materials, teachers, and scholarships (Tuwor and Sossou, 2008; Baird et al., 2010; Lee-Rife et al., 2012; Delprato et al., 2015). This proposition steps into well-trodden paths of international education studies that have emphasised the importance of sufficient quantities of schools, facilities, materials, and teachers - redistributive justice - for girls’ access, retention and attainment (Fraser, 1998; Tomasevski, 2001; Snel, 2003; Pearson and Mcphedran, 2008; Sommer, 2010; Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011; Humphreys and Crawford, 2015).

Measurable facets of school quality have comprised not only what is *learned* (for example, literacy) but what is *taught* and how: curricula and pedagogy. Two key curricula have been promoted in relation to quality schooling against early marital timing: vocational and technical skills (Walker, 2013a; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Mweemba and Mann, 2019), and sexual and reproductive health (Singh and Samara, 1996; Bearinger et al., 2007; Igras et al., 2014; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Mweemba and Mann, 2019). Walker’s meta-analysis of early marriage data and programmes in West Africa recommends improving school quality for early marriage prevention through ‘implement[ing] the new WAEC⁹ Senior Secondary School Curriculum, which offers girls in secondary school a range of 34 vocational and technical subjects to choose from in developing a career’ (Walker, 2012, p.11). By ‘developing a career’ through skills-based training in school, girls’ earning potential and socioeconomic status is seen to improve (much as through literacy acquisition), which would encourage older age at marriage. A promotion of technical and vocational skills training in secondary schools to increase girls’ economic viability as an alternative to marriage is repeated by a qualitative study of adolescent girls, marriage, and schooling in rural

⁹ West Africa Examinations Council

Honduras that recommends a 'tighter link between secondary schooling and what [girls] are able to do afterward (e.g., have access to scholarships for tertiary education, job training, and entrepreneurship programs)' to help girls and their families to consider economically viable alternatives to marriage (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.45). Longitudinal qualitative research from Zambia and Ethiopia endorses 'improv[ing] the options available to young women' through vocational skills for improved economic opportunities but complements this with advocacy for sexual and reproductive health education to expand social and economic opportunities for adolescent girls (Mweemba and Mann, 2019; UNICEF Ethiopia and Center, 2020, p.18; Tafere et al., 2020, p.2). Sexual and reproductive health curriculum can provide girls with the knowledge and skills to safely consider and practice relationships with a reduced risk of unplanned pregnancy (and early marriage) (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Mweemba and Mann, 2019, p.27). However, research on adolescent sexual behaviours and schooling show that pedagogical approaches to sex education are as important as curriculum. Teachers' knowledge, pedagogical aptitude and personal attitudes to sexual and reproductive health have been associated with girls' knowledge and attitudes towards relationships and desire, health, and sexual behaviours (Slap et al., 2003; Stromquist, 2007; Sommer, 2010; Jewitt and Ryley, 2014; Willemsen and DeJaeghere, 2015). When curriculum and pedagogy are focussed on abstinence and fear, studies suggest that girls' knowledge is poor and they hold negative attitudes towards relationships (Mensch et al., 1999; Stromquist, 2007; Jewitt and Ryley, 2014; Willemsen and DeJaeghere, 2015). In Nigeria, interviews with teachers revealed that teaching on sexual and reproductive health was minimised and adjusted for pubescent Muslim girls, ostensibly for compatibility with Islam's teaching, with the effect that these girls lacked health information and reported 'not having known about menstruation prior to experiencing their first period' (Barker and Rich, 1992, p.202). These studies, considered alongside those that explicitly address marital timing, indicate the symbiotic significance of gender-sensitive *formal* curricula and pedagogy and *informal* gendered exchanges to the range and viability of options available to girls through quality schooling.

The salience of informal relationships between teachers and girls to girls' retention in school has also been signalled by research. In qualitative socio-medical research in Tanzania, surveyed girls commended teachers who allowed them 'to be excused if she complained of feeling "sick" or for assisting a girl with a menstrual accident by lending her a kanga [cloth] to cover the back of her uniform' (Sommer, 2010, p.526). The importance of empathetic, nurturing, 'girl-friendly' teachers to girls' attainment is reiterated across studies of gender and education in Africa (Mensch et al., 1999; Bunting, 2005; Dixon-Mueller, 2008; Sommer, 2013). Teachers who encourage, offer pastoral care and do not excessively punish can raise

girls' performance and persistence in school, especially through puberty (Mensch et al., 1999; Humphreys et al., 2008; Humphreys et al., 2015). So, if *formal* curricula and pedagogy could delay marital timing through diversifying girls' economic and social alternatives to marriage, *informal* interactions with teachers seem to matter to girls' performance and persistence in school. These findings suggest the dual significance of both types of exchanges – formal and informal - in the school environment. When schools offer practical opportunities to explore and experience a range of pathways after schooling *and* teachers hold attitudes that nurture girls' aspirations, girls may be better able to reflect upon, express and realise alternatives to early marriage and childbearing (Unterhalter, 2012; Delprato, 2015; DeJaeghere, 2016).

The gender-sensitivity of curricula, pedagogy and teacher-student interactions, as key features of quality schooling to delay marriage, is significant to their effectiveness (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). Gender and international education studies have underscored that technical fixes (infrastructure, materials, teachers, scholarships) to get and keep girls in school are necessary but insufficient because they fail to recognise and address underlying systemic gender inequalities and the (re)production of gender norms in schools (Stromquist, 2007; Unterhalter, 2007; Dunne 2007). Inadequate and/or discriminatory curricula and pedagogy, rules on absenteeism, dropout and discipline, and gendered attitudes and approaches beyond the classroom, can sustain and reinforce rather than transform gender inequality, perpetuating early marriage and premature school leaving (Sperling and Herz, 2004; Unterhalter, 2005; Stromquist, 2007; Sommer, 2010). This idea reflects and practices 'perspectival dualism' for social justice, acknowledging economic redistribution (technical, countable fixes) and sociocultural recognition of institutional obstacles that prevent participatory parity (Fraser, 1998). Specifically, in relation to the enquiry of this thesis, literature indicates a difference between the *provision* of schooling with curricula and pedagogy that provides options or alternatives to marriage and the *interpersonal experience* of schooling that dis/en-ables girls to *enact* those options or alternatives. Embedding gender equality in and through curricula, formal and informal pedagogy may improve girls' knowledge and skills, but the question remains as to whether and how girls transfer this into capacity to act. Gender inequality also intersects with other dimensions of discrimination in the school environment, such as religion (Barker and Rich, 1992; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008), meaning that girls will experience the provisions of schooling and their capacity to enact those provisions differently. One approach to trying to understand whether and how (some) girls make the leap between provision and enactment is raised by researchers who consider girls' agency in the marriage-schooling nexus (Thapan, 2003; Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Shah, 2016; Tafere et al., 2020). They have explored how

access to, and qualities of, formal schooling affect girls' aspirations, behaviours, and outcomes in relation to marriage. None of these qualitative studies that examine female agency in relation to marriage and schooling consider Nigeria. However, in recognising the active interaction of girls with their marriage and schooling, they help to develop the ideas and arguments of this thesis.

Understanding girls' agency in the marriage-schooling nexus

International education research has identified that being enrolled in and currently attending school reduces the risk of early marriage timing. But these studies do not tell us much about how girls themselves understand, experience and/or enact this relationship. As Datzberger has noted in her study of education in Uganda, a 'predominant focus on economic empowerment or employment generation through education [including in advocacy for literacy and skills curriculum] sidelines the role of education in enhancing the political and social agency of the poor to make necessary changes and decisions to transform their lives in very difficult circumstances' (Datzberger, 2018, p.39). This theme of agency development through education is explored in a handful of studies of married and unmarried adolescent girls and young women with some schooling that utilise and develop concepts of agency linked to schooling and marriage.

A mixed methods study in Pakistan in 2008, comprising household surveys and interviews with 71 married women aged 20-29¹⁰, considered forms of agency associated with being in school that seemed to affect when and *to whom* young women married (Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012, pp.151–2). The researchers mooted that the social status of 'being in school' could be a valid justification for delaying marriage, affording adolescent girls some leverage to postpone marriage (ibid., p.156). Aafia, a 12th grade student interviewed¹¹, 'used further studies as a delaying tactic', postponing her marriage by seven months (ibid.). Parents seemed to 'attach more respect to educated adolescents' - the social capital gains from enrolment at least partially explained a link between being enrolled in school and older marital age (ibid., p.154). This study (unlike any of those explored so far in this chapter) also explored whether years of schooling was associated with *who* women marry. Household survey data analysis showed that, while 45% of all married women (regardless of education status) had no say in spouse selection, a 'clear positive relationship emerged between

¹⁰ Interviewees were purposively sampled from a survey of 1094 households across Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to select women with different levels of schooling (Bhatti and Jeffrey, 2012, p.150).

¹¹ 12th grade is the end of upper or higher secondary school in Pakistan, normally completed between 16-18 years of age.

schooling and a woman's say in spouse choice, which was much stronger if young women were educated at secondary level and above: such young women were 2.7 times more likely to have a say in spouse selection compared to women without any schooling' (ibid., p.154)¹². The researchers concluded that the more years' schooling a woman has, and particularly current enrolment at secondary level, the greater the likelihood that she has a say in who she marries (ibid., p.155-7). Qualitative research in Ethiopia likewise advances access to formal schooling to increase the likelihood that adolescent girls have a 'greater say' in when *and* to whom they marry (Tafere et al., 2020, p.8; p.18). The studies maintain the inherent effects of enrolment on early marriage, going beyond the effects of access on timing to make links to spousal choice, but they do not develop ideas about the qualities of schooling that mechanise these effects.

Research on women's literacy suggests that literacy can enable girls to *reflect, make decisions and act independently* – in other words, literacy can confer agency understood thus (Robinson Pant ed., 2004; Arnot et al., 2012, p.186). Data from a longitudinal ethnographic study of eleven adolescent girls, their schooling and marriage in Gujurati, India, showed that some girls believed that acquiring literacy through secondary schooling would enable them to pursue aspirations for a better life prior to and during marriage, including having a job and doing less housework (Shah, 2016, p.93). In Ghana and Honduras, case studies of secondary school girls showed that literacy acquisition enabled them to communicate secretly with their peers, via letter writing or texting, providing a space for relationships and courtships that filled the void of physical spaces restricted by sociocultural norms (Arnot et al., 2012, p.186; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.37). Literacy enabled adolescents to explore and practice relationships and facilitated girls' desires for intimacy and connection that are otherwise not available outside marriage (ibid.). However, literacy acquisition may contribute to unintended negative consequences for schooling and marriage. The economic gains of literacy acquisition can adversely affect school retention if literacy gains catalyse employment instead of school with money earned becoming dowry for marriage (Shah, 2016, p.94). Developing romantic or sexual relationships covertly via letter writing or texting can also contribute to school leaving and marriage (Tafere et al., 2020, p.18; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). This suggests that the outcomes of literacy acquisition are multi-stranded, depend on social, economic, and familial contexts and conditions, and more complex than simply delaying marriage. Too much education – years and skills – is also perceived by some girls as risky in relation to spousal choice because they become older, have fewer domestic capabilities, and their 'educated' status narrows the

¹² As argued earlier in the chapter, comparing women with no education to those with secondary schooling is somewhat disingenuous because of the vast difference in never and ever enrolling.

range of similarly-educated partners (Singh and Samara, 1996, p. 149; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.320). Interviews with married women in India revealed 'a sense of immense pride among women who were uneducated or illiterate about their ability to function more effectively in practical terms than educated women' (Thapan, 2003, p.82). This evidence subverts the presumption that schooling status and literacy learning converts into delayed or 'better' marriages, or agency against marriage, showing how girls and young women's behaviours may be unexpected and socially and economically conditioned.

The social status of being schooled and the skills acquired through schooling do not alter the fact that some girls appear to 'choose' marriage over education (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.25). One facet of school quality that seems to affect the balance of preference, or choice, between staying in school and getting married is whether girls perceive school as relevant, interesting, and enjoyable. In Honduras, fifteen-year-old Griselda explained that she 'did not want to continue studying' because it was 'boring' and 'not relevant' (ibid., pp.30-32). This experience directly contributed to her leaving school and eloping. If school is 'unfamiliar to what [girls] experience' in their daily lives, they leave: 'marrying early and improving life in the short-term may seem better than staying in school and hoping for better future' (ibid.). A refrain of Ethiopian adolescent girls interviewed in Young Lives research is that disliking school encouraged leaving and marriage (Tafere et al., 2020, p.18; UNICEF Ethiopia and Center, 2020, p.7). When girls do not understand their lessons and dislike school early marriage is the next logical step (ibid.). In Pakistan, married young women 'rarely identify their schooling as something that increases their chances of intervening in key life transitions' (Bhatti and Jeffrey, 2012, p. 162). In India, interviews with thirty adolescent and adult women, all of whom married during adolescence, reflected women's 'disillusionment with the opportunities that education may be able to provide them: young adolescent women expressed an understanding that they were fated to do the housework or wash dishes, and would therefore be unable to make occupational or career choices' (Thapan, 2003, p.82). These examples indicate that when girls perceive school curricula as irrelevant and teaching as uninteresting or unclear, this may hasten girls' journey towards marriage for, at least, short-term relative gain. On the one hand this evidence presents a serious critique of relevant quality schooling for adolescent girls; on the other hand, a reminder of the lived compulsion among many girls for heterosexual relationships and marriage.

The studies considered have explored how particular aspects of 'being in' and 'becoming through' formal schooling are associated with the development of agency conceptualised as self-reflection, decision making and independent action that can delay marriage and enable some spousal choice (Jensen and Thornton, 2003; Thapan, 2003; Murphy-Graham and

Leal, 2015; Delprato et al., 2015). The predominant concept of agency harnessed in these studies reflects wider theory that defines agency as the capacity for choice and self-determination (Fraser, 1997), defining and acting on one's own goals (Kabeer, 1999; Kabeer, 2016). Self-reflection towards the valuation of important goals, and articulating how to achieve those goals, have been regarded as the bedrock of agency (Unterhalter, 2012, p.318; Kabeer et al., 2016) indicative of 'power within' (Kabeer, 1993, p.3). Noticing that young Indian women's aspirations for (and enjoyment of) work are linked to their 'tremendous sense of self-worth' (Thapan, 2003, p.81), Thapan promotes aspiration as a crucial pillar of agency. This is echoed by studies in Honduras and Gujarati, where girls' optimism to continue studying after marriage is conceptualised as agentic (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.34; Shah, 2016, p.93). A key finding across Young Lives research in Ethiopia and India is that children's (and parents) low aspirations 'make child marriage more likely' (Young Lives, 2018, p.2). Aspirations indicate that women and girls are reflecting upon and identifying their own desires and goals and setting conscious intentions around them, conferring agency even if desires are unrealised because of the implication of self-worth (Thapan, 2003; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). Girls' agency as self-reflection and aspiration can be developed through interactive facets of quality schooling: in Honduras, teachers 'counsel and help students think about their decisions', encouraging girls' aspirations and self-reflection (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.43). Female teachers can convey positive signals about women's ability to achieve and increase girls' aspirations, confidence and self-esteem (Aikman et al., 2005, p.50; Pearson and Mcphedran, 2008, p.52; Willemsen and DeJaeghere, 2015, p.51).

Voicing aspiration, speaking up, and independent decision-making are core to the idea of agency as autonomy (Thapan, 2003; Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Tafere et al., 2020, p.40). In Honduras, Griselda's aspirations for intimacy, independence and status recognition are articulated as a desire to 'become someone' (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.24). She, and her friend Melisa, *choose* love and relationships over schooling and undertake 'the grand act' of running away (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.38). In 'all of the cases of child marriage we were told of, the girl went off without parental consent' (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.38). These behaviours are characterised as 'oppositional' agency (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.37) - aspirations and acts *against* constraining structures and/or relations. This understanding of agency does not only emerge from but is in the design of several studies on agency in the marriage-schooling nexus (Thapan, 2003; Bhatti and Jeffrey, 2012; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). Thapan's research purposively examines agency understood as 'intended resistances', 'speaking out against' and independent action that defies others (Thapan, 2003, pp.80-83).

Murphy-Graham and Leal's research aims to examine the circumstances surrounding adolescent girls 'decisions', assuming decision-making agency by design (2015, p.25). The methodology and empirical findings align with theories of adolescent development associated with the growth of cognitive capacities for *independent* thought, decisions and behaviour (Bunting, 2005; Dixon-Mueller, 2008; Kabeer, 2016). They reverberate into popular international development discourse on female agency in which 'the quintessential agentic girl' *speaks out* and *makes decisions against* restrictive gender norms (DeJaeghere, 2016, p.252) characterised by slogans such as 'Brave Girls Say No!' (Unicef India, n.d.).

Defining and characterising female agency as autonomous and oppositional presents a challenge to a victim narrative associated with child marriage by showing evidence that adolescent girls can and do independently reflect, speak out and make choices, and arguing for this as a pathway to change. Yet promoting agency as autonomy, especially autonomy *against*, is also problematic. Firstly, this idea encodes agency as individualism, obscuring sociocultural context and social relations. Individual disruptions may be powerful and significant but are often socio-culturally mediated, contained and constrained. In Ethiopia, Young Lives researchers contend that while formal schooling may increase some adolescent girls' agency as voice in marriage timing and spousal choice, this is regulated by customary and patriarchal norms (Tafere et al., 2020, p.1). Bhatti and Jeffrey show that educated Indian women are more likely to *be asked* their opinion on marriage by their parents, but their views were not necessarily heeded because of gendered cultural structures and values. Most women submitted without question to their parents' choice of spouse, sometimes expressing regret but choosing not to speak out (Bhatti and Jeffrey, 2012, p.154-7). This exemplifies how some women opt 'not to exercise agency, as they do not want to be seen doing things which may challenge family honour or compromise their identities as married women' (Thapan, 2003, p.82). Structural gendered norms, traditions, institutions, and resources mediate or constrain autonomous agency in the process of becoming married.

Poverty and restrictive gender norms imbue girls narratives of being married even when girls have made apparently autonomous pre-marital decisions: in Honduras, girls' oppositional agency before marriage - nurturing heterosexual relationships and eloping – become 'accommodating' of gendered norms when they move to their husbands' homes and assume gendered tasks including cooking and cleaning (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.40). The researchers surmise that these girls 'internally negotiate what they believed would be the best outcome for them' (ibid., p.35), behaving in ways that implicitly acknowledge their poverty and material hardship (ibid. p.40). The gendered boundaries that frame girls and young women's expressions of autonomy indicate that these manifestations of agency are 'thin' - 'personal, subjective, short-term, and marginal' (Thapan, 2003; Murphy-Graham and

Leal, 2015, p.28; p.34) - recognising the restrictive contexts in which girls and young women may exercise agency.

The elevation of autonomous and oppositional agency reduces the significance of collective or relational agency in marriage practices and processes. Whether and how young women can influence, or decide, when and to whom they marry, and whether and how they exert influence or choice within marriage, may depend on their 'relational agency' (Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). Relational agency is dynamic – social relations may be constraining and/or enabling. Empirical findings from India showed that married young women 'engage in a twin-track process of compliance and resistance, submission and rebellion, silence and speech, to question their oppression in the family, community, and society' (Thapan, 2003, p.77). Women 'see their own well-being emerging or resulting from this familial well-being' so they concurrently facilitate change that *challenges* male power in relation to marriage (by ensuring they have some financial independence) while also taking decisions that *reinforce* traditional power relations within marriage (sexual dependence) (ibid., p.81). In Honduras, Melisa, who left school to marry for love, feels happy in her marriage because while 'she now takes care of Aldo - making his food, cleaning his clothes, ironing, and so forth - he did not prevent her from swimming or dressing the way she wanted to' (unlike her natal family) (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.34). These young women are negotiating their social position to gain relative independence in certain domains by conceding preferences or interests in other domains.

Important social relations for girls that are associated with schooling and marriage tend to pivot around fathers before marriage and husbands in marriage (Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Shah, 2016). In Pakistan, one girl's position as the youngest girl in the family meant that she 'was very near and dear to her father, he never used to refuse her demands' (Bhatti and Jeffrey, 2012, p.156). This close relationship enabled her to influence the timing of, and spouse for, her marriage: 'I saw him [my husband] and I liked him so only then I approved the proposal' (ibid.). In Gujarat, one adolescent girl 'actively negotiated her father's expectations of her marriage', influencing him to allow her to continue schooling, delay marriage and contribute to the choice of spouse (Shah, 2016, p.95). Aafia gained social status and respect by virtue of being in school and was able to persuade her parents to delay her marriage (Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012, p.156). The significance of parent-child communication and parental support to adolescent daughters to how girls navigate adolescence, schooling and marriage is noted in research in Kenya, Uganda, Senegal and Zambia (Petroni et al., 2017, p.789). In Honduras, Griselda and Melisa collude with their boyfriends through mobile phone courtship to meet and agree how to pursue their relationships (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). In India, women

reported discussing and collaborating on family planning with their husbands (Bhatti and Jeffrey, 2012, p.160). Husband-wife collusion may help young women to achieve productive and positive relationships through 'everyday talk', collaboration and negotiation (ibid.; Murphy-Graham, 2010, p.325-7). Love and attachment are the common feature of these examples of negotiation and collaboration - with fathers and/or husbands. They suggest the importance of social relational qualities of care and attachment as part of recognising female marital agency.

The studies show that girls and young women can be agentic in relation to marriage and schooling and that girls' agency is manifest in different ways including according to access to and qualities of formal schooling. Agency ebbs and flows and takes different forms according to different events in girls' lives, differing social networks, personal traits, opportunities, and constraints. The conceptualisation of, and empirical insights into, relational agency challenges the dominance of autonomous agency to propose social relations not as only restrictive but instead/also as constructive. Having a voice means articulating aspirations and preferences *and* having that voice listened to – the relational, dialogic element requiring engagement with others (Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012). These remarks from international education scholarship on relational agency echo notations from childhood studies of the inflection of the (gendered) social world in adolescent development (Bunting, 2005; Dixon-Mueller, 2008; Arnot et al., 2012) but go further to implicate girls themselves in engagement or cooperation with the adults who people that world. Schooling has the potential to enhance girls' marital agency, enabling girls to envisage alternatives, but for some schoolgirls who marry this is a considered and affirmative path. Thus, for a thesis concerned with whether and how education protects girls in relation to marriage, the educational experiences of married girls are critical. In its final section, this chapter examines literature on the role of formal schooling in already-married girls' lives, including whether and how it confers agency and protection in marriage.

Married girls and schooling: navigating positionality and negotiating participation

Data show that many millions of adolescent girls have married, and will marry, during their school years, and that the explanations for, and stories of, their marriages are diverse and complex (UNICEF, 2016; Petroni et al., 2017; Tafere et al., 2020). Much research has tried to understand the risk factors for early marital timing (<18), underscoring the significance of poverty, location, gendered social norms, conflict and religion, and recognise the dual significance of formal schooling to protect and promote marriage among adolescents. This chapter has presented the varied accounts of associations between educational attainment

and marriage timing, and pursuant discourses on formal schooling to prevent or protect *against* early marriage timing. However, millions of school-age girls are already married, and millions more adolescents will continue to marry¹³, so what about the rights of already married school-age girls to schooling and the idea of education to protect girls *in* marriage?

Quantitative and qualitative data indicate that married school-age girls in Sub-Saharan Africa seldom go to school (Singh and Samara, 1996; Delprato et al., 2015; Young Lives, 2018; Tafere et al., 2020; UNICEF Ethiopia and Center, 2020). Practical responsibilities, including new motherhood, and the gendered social and spatial boundaries of marital life tend to curtail re-enrolment (Tafere et al., 2020, p.2). Studies investigating the implication of women's empowerment (resources, agency and achievements) on marital timing and years in school indicate that in-marriage factors, specifically large spousal age gaps and domestic violence, exacerbate the problem of continuing education (Jensen and Thornton, 2003, p.14-16; Delprato et al., 2015, p.51). Nevertheless, one of the problems with survey-based analyses of the correlation between educational attainment (years in school / highest level reached / literacy) and age at marriage is that educational attainment is reported as *at the time of the survey* rather than *at the time of marriage* (Ikamari, 2005, p.9). This assumes that married girls and women are not returning to school. Conflating present attainment with past marriage may inaccurately represent the relationship between marriage and schooling by ignoring married girls' and women's school re-entry and thereby over-estimating attainment at the time of marriage or obscuring the acquisition of learning (particularly literacy) via alternative forms of education. A dominant assumption of married girls' permanent exclusion also entrenches an idea of school entry and exit as in/out phenomenon over an idea of access as gained and lost iteratively over time (Lewin, 2007, p.20; Lewin, 2015). Lewin's model of Zones of Exclusion from primary and secondary schooling conceptualises the non-linearity of access and the different moments and reasons that children may (temporarily or permanently) lose access (Lewin, 2007, p.28; Lewin, 2011, p.12; Dunne and Ananga, 2013). This conceptual approach recognises the ebb and flow of some girls' schooling (Lewin, 2007; Hunt, 2008; Sabates et al., 2010; Ananga, 2011; Humphreys et al., 2015). This conceptual standpoint, from which a presumption of married girls' permanent exclusion can be examined, presents a different position from the assumption of stasis and finality presented in much research (Jensen and Thornton, 2003; Delprato et al., 2015) which inherently negate, and therefore does not pursue, the possibility of married adolescents' continuing education.

¹³ The likelihood of escalating rates of girls' marriage before age eighteen has intensified since the Covid-19 pandemic (Plan International and Girls not Brides, 2020; UNICEF, 2021).

Examinations of married girls' education and/or formal schooling have shown that schooling continues to be important for girls after marriage. Longitudinal qualitative research in Zambia with adolescent spouses revealed that married girls' 'most commonly articulated aspiration was the desire to reenrol in school and complete their secondary education' (Mweemba and Mann, 2019, p.41). This finding is echoed by qualitative studies in Ethiopia (UNICEF Ethiopia and Center, 2020, p.6), Kenya, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia (Petroni et al., 2017, p.787), Honduras (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2010; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015) and India (Shah, 2016). Aspiration converts into the achievement of re-enrolment for some girls, who resume to complete secondary school exams or undertake other forms of vocational training (UNICEF Ethiopia and Center, 2020, p.7). Challenges and changes are associated with formal school readmission, however. Sometimes re-entry means having to repeat the class from which girls left, resuming school a year behind their peers, and re-negotiating the school timetable, regulations and disciplinary regimes to fit their new identities, routines and practical challenges of childcare, transport, security and finances (Ijeoma et al., 2013, p.76; Salvi, 2014). Other girls may be required by local education authorities to transfer to another school or to evening classes, rather than re-enter their former school (Chilisa, 2002; Walker, 2013a; Salvi, 2014). Policy research suggests that re-entry policies, and practices, at national and local levels are inconsistent and idiosyncratic. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (NPGBE) encourages schools to allow girls to resume schooling after childbirth or marriage (Chapter 6) but research in southern Nigeria found that schools 'often have a policy of refusing to allow married or pregnant girls to return' (Ijeoma et al., 2013, p.76). Across Sub-Saharan Africa, many countries that have re-entry clauses in their national education policies require married (and pregnant) girls to leave school for at least twelve months after which they may re-enter schooling or access alternative forms of education (Chilisa, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2018) but the specifications for re-entry are often vague. Even where national policy may intend towards inclusive and egalitarian responses, a lack of policy clarity or monitoring may have a detrimental effect on policy enactment at local levels (Swainson, 2000; Unterhalter, 2014; Unterhalter and North, 2018). The effect is that schools and local education authorities tend, by design or default, to have a wide berth to determine the local form and requirements for when, how and what type of education married girls resume. These challenges suggest that national and local education policies and practices might prohibit, or certainly make difficult, the achievement of girls' aspirations to re-enrol, contributing to the barriers married girls confront with formal school re-enrolment.

Non-formal, alternative education interventions have been developed (mainly by international NGOs) since the millennium for married girls and/or young mothers (Murphy-

Graham and Leal, 2010; Santhya and Erulkar, 2011; Walker, 2012; Walker 2013; Salvi, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2018). Some initiatives, including evening classes, aim to facilitate married girls' re-entry to formal schooling through an accelerated or 'catch-up' programme or provide an opportunity to attain a formal school certificate via an informal programme (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2010; Walker, 2013a). Educational interventions related to marriage predominantly focus on early marriage prevention or delay (Walker, 2013a; Kalamar et al., 2016). Additionally, in Walker's review, the two (of 111) programmes targeting already-married girls (Walker, 2013a, p.41), in Burkina Faso and Nigeria, both delivered community-based 'youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services' rather than facilitating school re-entry or following formal basic curricula (Walker, 2013a, p.43). Research on educational interventions for married girls across Sub-Saharan Africa show that these predominantly focus on reproductive health information and services (Santhya and Erulkar, 2011; Walker, 2012, p.238).

Formal education policies and practices, which separate married girls from their unmarried peers in school, and alternative education initiatives, which segregate married and unmarried school-age girls' education, arguably entrench the notion that marriage and formal schooling are intrinsically incompatible, position married girls no longer as children but as adults ready to enter work, and obscure the rights of the child to compulsory education (Melchiorre and Atkins, 2011; Salvi, 2014, p.118). Research suggests that education policy mandates tend to mark married girls as different, requiring segregation into new spaces in or beyond the formal school system. Walker's study notes that the language of 'special needs' has filtered into some research recommendations, and interventions, for married girls (Walker, 2012, p.12). Practices of specialisation and segregation in formal and non-formal education for married girls on the one hand recognises status difference and responds with 'alternative' tailored, flexible solutions; alternatively it may be seen as social stratification, emphasising difference and formalising exclusion (Slee, 2001, p.168; Fraser, 2005). A tendency to treat individual girls who are married, rather than addressing education systems, institutionalised norms and arrangements, is a further indication of the reactive and piecemeal approaches to married girls' education evidenced by research. Finally, differentiated treatments by schools and education policy of married girls and boys (and, especially, of pregnant girls from in-school partners) exposes de facto limits to gender equality in education. Researchers have identified the challenge for education policies and systems to recognise the right of married school-age girls to education and meet the practical and learning needs of married girls including for sexual and reproductive health information and flexible learning (Walker, 2013a, p.38; Walker, 2013b, p.31; Salvi, 2014) but

a question remains about whether 'quality' formal schooling can or should meet the needs of unmarried and married school-age girls as it strives to provide universal access for all.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how existing knowledge on adolescent girls' marriages and schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa has developed across different academic disciplines since the millennium. There has been a dearth of research studies on the marriage-schooling nexus in Nigeria, including mixed methods scholarship that explores how facets of education, beyond years in school, relate to adolescent marriage practices in Nigeria. This lack of (re)contextualisation of ideas and accounts of marriage and/or education to Nigeria is a major gap pertaining to the aims of this thesis.

One argument of this chapter is that scholarship has inadequately explored the form and content of 'education' associated with whether, when or to whom girls and young women marry. Education as 'years in school' has predominated in the majority of studies reviewed and, despite comments on the importance of quality education, there has been very little concentrated attention to the processes, practices and policies of formal schooling specifically implicated in girls' marriages. International education literature has recognised that poor quality schooling can fail families and children, pushing them out of school and towards marriage. This recognition by some studies emphasises the interconnectedness of the two research aims of this thesis: *inadequacies of quality schooling, in which education fails to protect, partially explain why schoolgirls marry*. But isolating the facets of 'quality' that retain girls in school and unmarried is an unmet research imperative. Furthermore, a research tendency to focus on the protective potential of formal schooling *prior to* marriage – especially to *prevent* early marriage / *delay* marriage timing, or, somewhat, to affect premarital decisions – has resulted in very few academic studies that consider the (actual or potential) protection offered by formal schooling to already-married girls. The combined effect of these gaps is to highlight that *the rhetoric on education as protective in relation to early marriage is overstated*.

Qualitative research has attempted to expose the lived conditions of adolescent girls (Mohanty, 1991, p. 61), situating their experiences in local contexts, histories, situated and evolving relations of gender and power, and lived experiences of girls in assessing marriage and schooling. The literature that explores female agency in the marriage-schooling nexus makes an epistemic shift from examining the instruments and means of associations between early marriage and girls' schooling to more open, girl-centric queries about marriage and education; it is, in part, a move from description and explanation (how are

marriage and schooling associated) to feminist exploration and representation (why girls marry). This move has recognised female agency in manifestations of girls' autonomy and relationships, attitudes and actions, highlighting the role of girls themselves in the marriage-schooling nexus. This literature has maintained the strong pulse emerging in cross-disciplinary studies on the salience of *society and the social* in explanations for girls' schooling and marriage. The significance of social relations, peopled interactions, dialogue, negotiation - in schools and among families - to early marriage and girls schooling, has been put on the table by some contemporary studies in international education. Again however, the forms and value of female agency in quality schooling to protect girls from or within marriage is under-explored and no studies to my knowledge root and explore these ideas in the context of Nigeria.

The following chapter seeks to *re-route* and *re-root* this thesis' exploration of girls, marriage, and schooling in Nigeria. I explore how Nigerian women's scholarship has considered and critiqued international literature on African women's lives, what those comments mean to an existing global scholarly knowledge base on early marriage and education, and whether and how space for an indigenous conceptual framework through which to examine marriage and schooling data and discourses, which reflects national and international scholarship, may be developed.

Chapter 4. Nigerian feminist frameworks for re-thinking girls, marriage, and schooling in northern Nigeria

The previous chapter explored international literature on girls' marriage and education, identifying the depth of mutual implication of these two facets of girls' lives. It argued that contemporary qualitative research on adolescent girls that has harnessed ideas about female agency to describe, understand and conceptualise the schooling-marriage nexus for girls has advanced an academic discourse on early marriage away from descriptive accounts, in which girls are largely passive recipients of education and marriage, towards explanatory girl-centred accounts, in which girls have aspirations, agency and lives grounded in social conditions and relations. However, neither empirical data nor feminist approaches to theorising the marriage-schooling nexus in this literature were specifically Nigerian. International studies across disciplines regularly argued for research contextualisation, stressing the significance of sociocultural conditions to girls' schooling and marriage (Arnfred, 2004; Blum et al., 2017; Ibitoye et al., 2017), but there were few studies of the Nigerian (or indeed African) context (Izugbara, 2005; Adebowale et al., 2012; Humphreys and Crawford, 2015), none of which utilised a Nigerian (or African) conceptual framework.

This chapter aims to develop the contextualisation of this thesis in its geopolitical and sociocultural setting and theoretical positioning. It takes forward the empirical findings and theoretical concepts proposed among international scholars by re-routing and re-rooting those ideas in Nigerian contexts and concepts. It considers what indigenous Nigerian female/feminist approaches to understanding and analysing women and girls' lives and gender relations can contribute to a refined and rooted framework for considering and critiquing data and discourses on Nigerian girls' schooling and marriage. While all the scholarship with which I am concerned here is by women of Nigerian descent¹⁴ they do not all claim to be 'feminist' - this itself is a source of debate and discontent (Kolawole, 2002; Oyèwùmí, 2002; Mama, 2011; Etomi, 2018). Yet by considering female/feminist writing, the chapter argues for thinking (again) about why schoolgirls marry in a way that is rooted in and by the social, economic, political, educational, and gendered context of Nigeria.

¹⁴ Charmaine Pereira was 'born in Kenya, of Indian descent, and resident in Nigeria' and self-identifies as an African feminist (Pereira, 2016, p.1). Pereira has lived and worked as a feminist activist scholar in Nigeria for several decades and written extensively on Nigerian feminisms, hence her inclusion in this chapter.

Restarting with Africa: the counter-discourses of Nigerian feminisms

Nigerian feminist Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí has argued that ‘interpretations of Africa must start with Africa’ (Oyèwùmí, 2002, p.1). In her critical essay on the challenges of African epistemologies, Oyèwùmí decries the ‘Euro/American cultural hegemony’ of international knowledge production about women and gender in Africa, promoting instead the imperative for African women to redefine and re-name concepts to describe African social organisation and practices. Many Nigerian women scholars have levelled criticism at academic writing on women and gender in Africa as universalising, homogenising, and patriarchal (Nnaemeka, 1998b; Oyèwùmí, 2002; Pereira, 2002). Obioma Nnaemeka described the appropriation of knowledge about Africa and African women by western scholars as ‘academic colonialism’ (Nnaemeka, 1998, p.21; Nnaemeka, 2005, p.38), while Charmaine Pereira has argued that ‘imperialism’ is woven into scholarly international development research in which ‘the epistemic power accruing to donor agencies as a consequence of their economic power’ perpetuates particular ways of ‘knowing’ African women (Pereira, 2009b, p.100). Pereira and the northern Nigerian feminist Amina Mama (like many pan-African women scholars) have questioned the hegemony and appropriation of knowledge about African women by the West and emphasised the importance for researchers to examine the production of knowledge, what it means to know, and other ways of knowing (Pereira, 2002; Mama, 2011). One specific point that these writers have made is to emphasise the inherent discrimination that academic writing on Africa ‘generally considered mainstream, ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’ is usually only ‘*malestream*’ (Arnfred and Adomako Ampofo, 2009, p.8, my italics). Advocating *locally grounded and feminist* empirical research and understanding of women’s lives and gender relations (Mama, 2011; Akinbobola, 2020) is thus a counter to the universalising and patriarchal tendencies that women writers identify as belonging to much knowledge produced about women historically. There is considerable global scholarship on epistemic injustice and decolonisation (Fricker, 2007; Dubgen, 2016; Mungwini, 2017; Crawford et al., 2021). This chapter focuses on Nigerian female/feminist responses to literature on women and gender in Africa and how their critiques of colonising (imperialist and patriarchal) epistemologies of women in Africa engender rich, indigenous responses, approaches, and concepts that, by challenging the ‘malestream’, seek the distinct recognition and representation of African women by themselves (Pereira, 2002; Nnaemeka, 2005; Mama, 2011).

Heterogeneity and indigeneity define Nigerian women’s writing and feminist scholarship on gender. Nigerian women have engaged with gender and feminism(s) in diverse forms over time, contesting and refracting discourses on women across disciplinary, geopolitical, and ethno-religious spaces (Pereira, 2004; Mama, 2011; Nkealah, 2016; Akinbobola, 2020). The

historic isolation of gender and women's studies units in Nigerian universities, combined with institutional and political-historical constraints (Mama, 2011, p.6), means that Nigerian feminisms and feminist research are relatively new as a coherent body (compared to international academia on/by women) (Nnaemeka, 1998a, p.5; Mama, 2011, p.8). However, the political imperative of countering both an imperialist patriarchy and internal civil patriarchy has given strength and volume to their work in the twenty-first century (Nnaemeka, 2005). One result has been the development of multiple Nigerian feminisms, each of which intends to redefine and delineate a feminism in/for Africa, with geopolitical, cultural, and ideological specificity (Nkealah, 2016, p.62)¹⁵. Another result, emerging from and distinct to these theories, has been multi-disciplinary empirical research by women exploring and critiquing gender, women, feminism(s) and feminist ideas, including ideas about agency, in Nigeria (Odejide, 2005; Akinbobola, 2020). Much of this conceptual and empirical work considers the intersections and tensions of social relationships with women's education, aspirations, and ambitions (Kolawole, 2002; Nnaemeka, 2004; Akinbobola, 2020). It thus both leans towards and makes specific and deliberate sidesteps from some of the ideas emerging in international research on girls' schooling and marriage, both of which moves are considered in this chapter.

While heterogeneity marks the spectrum of writing emerging from Nigeria, many published Nigerian female academics (Akinbobola; Amadiume; Bakare-Yusuf; Nnaemeka; Ogundipe; Oyewùmí) and novelists (Emecheta; Nwapa; Ngozi Adichie; Okparanta; Shoneyin) who address concerns of women, gender, and society are from southern, predominantly Christian, states of Nigeria. Publishing in English, theirs are specific sociocultural lenses that at times resonate with, and at times differ from, the smaller body of northern Nigerian women's writing (Mama; Alkali; Ramat Yakubu). This is important to recognise for a thesis concerned with the context of northern Nigeria. In addition, some contemporary women writers publish from the Nigerian diaspora (Mama; Nnaemeka, Ngozi Adichie; Okparanta), while others are based in Nigeria (Alkali; Bakare-Yusuf; Shoneyin). Thus, an ideological intent for locally grounded recognition and representation of 'African women by themselves' (Nnaemeka, 1998; 2004) is complex, with diverse Nigerian women writing about Nigerian (and pan-African) women, gender, feminisms, and society. The plurality, dynamism and

¹⁵ Nigerian feminist thought, like that across the African continent, is diverse. I have made a partial and provisional selection that is based on writers with familiarity with the social context of this study. This selection does not encompass the wide range of feminist thought and scholarship in Nigeria over the past fifty years. Additionally, while I identify and 'name' 'Nigerian feminisms' in this chapter, I recognise that doing so falls into a danger of methodological nationalism and of using the colonial invention of 'Nigeria' (see also Chapter 6) to name the feminist thought being drawn upon.

fluidity of Nigerian feminisms, emanating from diverse sociocultural, economic, religious and political groups, urges conscientious conceptual and discursive localisation (Nnaemeka, 1998; Kolawole, 2002; Nkealah, 2016). This localisation, or being 'locally grounded', does negate being 'globally informed' (Mama, 2011, p.18) but the critical point, as a South African feminist Naomi Nkealah (who has written extensively on West African feminisms) emphasises, is to pay attention to who is speaking, from where, and for whom (Nkealah, 2016).

It is salient for this thesis to note the specific locale of writing within a country as large, geographically and socio-culturally diverse as Nigeria while seeking out writing across diverse forms and localities within and beyond Nigeria to understand women's lives. This advances the possibility and potential for mutually illuminating dialogue between international literature, national and local theories on girls and women's lives pertaining to marriage and schooling. These points reverberate into my position as academic and author of this thesis. I noted in the Introduction that I am an 'outsider' to Nigeria, in terms of having what Mama critically calls 'physical and analytical distance' (Salo, 2001, p.60) from the context and content of this thesis. Part of the aim of this chapter is to consider and develop a dialogue between different (outsider/insider) discourses on adolescent girls, formal schooling, and marriage for a study of northern Nigeria. By exploring Nigerian female/feminist epistemologies associated with gender research, the chapter contemplates another/complementary way of 'knowing' girls, marriage, and education in northern Nigeria.

Nigerian female/feminist theorising: frameworks for considering gender and society

Oyèwùmí has asked what the implications for knowledge about African realities are when studies of Africa are dependent on western theories (Oyèwùmí, 2005, p.17). One of the ways in which a critique of theoretical dependency emerges is in debate on the nature and naming of an overarching feminist theory of and for Africa. For some Nigerian women scholars, 'feminism' and 'feminist' research are fundamentally un-African because those labels are rooted in western ideologies and epistemologies (Akinbobola, 2020, p.69). Alternative names and concepts have been proposed to describe and theorise African women's lives, including *stiwanism* (social transformation including women in Africa) (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994); *motherism* (Acholunu, 1995); *African womanism* (Kolawole, 2002); *nego-feminism* (Nnaemeka, 2004); *femalism* (Opara, 2005); and *snail-sense feminism* (Ezeigbo, 2012). *Motherism* and *femalism* elevate the female body and ideas of nurture and nourishment (Achonulu, 1995; Nkealah, 2016), while *African womanism*, *snail-sense feminism* and *nego-feminism* emphasise women's partnerships with men and ideas of

mutuality and conciliation (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ezeigbo, 2012; Nkealah, 2016, p.68). The variety of these theories indicates contestation over what defines and characterises women's lives but also shows the richness of ongoing intellectual interest and concern with understanding and representing African women's lives. Mary Modupe Kolawole argued that the plurality of Nigerian feminisms is positive, requiring 'dynamic purposeful recognition' and 'celebration' (Kolawole, 2002, p.96) because through recognising each theory women's lives may be better understood.

Indeed, there are many synergies across the female/feminist theories espoused. An emphasis on cultural contextualisation and the realities and experiences of African women living in Africa is one such synergy (Nnaemeka, 1998; Kolawole, 2002; Oyèwùmí, 2002). Another is a shared interest in fertility and motherhood in biological, cultural, and political terms. What motherhood is and means to Nigerian (African) women, and its importance in defining African women's lives, is conceptualised very distinctly in motherism compared to nego-feminism, but for both is a salient discourse for Nigerian feminists. Thirdly, at their core are shared values of cooperation, accommodation, patience, and negotiation (Kolawole 2002, Nneameka, 2004; Ezeigbo, 2012; Nkealah, 2016). These synergies are explicitly specified and advanced in Nnaemeka's theorisation of nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004). The breadth and depth of Nnaemeka's writing about African feminisms (1997; 1998; 2011), the depth of her presentation of nego-feminism (2004) and international academic responses to it (Fennell and Arnot, 2008; Nkealah, 2016), and the interactions of theory and social critique in her writing, specifically on female circumcision (genital mutilation) (2001; 2003; 2005), offer an opportunity to closely consider an approach to Nigerian women's lives philosophically and practically.

Nnaemeka is a south-eastern Igbo feminist theorist and activist who has written extensively since the 1990s on African literatures, language and culture, politics and power, and the African diaspora of which she has been a part for several decades¹⁶. Her work embraces and theorises the African continent, identifying and imagining African feminisms' themes and concerns with gender(ed) knowledge, womanhood, motherhood, agency, and social relations. Nnaemeka's epistemic foundation for her theory of nego-feminism is to move from 'learning about' to 'learning from' African women (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.354), 'building on the indigenous' so that 'African worldviews and thought are capable of providing the theoretical rack on which to hang African literature' (ibid., p.369). In this way her foundation builds on

¹⁶ My analysis of Nnaemeka's scholarship focuses on articles and papers published in English and not the body of unpublished conference speeches and oral and textual contributions in French.

contemporary Nigerian feminist/ female arguments for contextualisation. Nnaemeka presents nego-feminism as comprising two core interconnected facets:

'First, *nego-feminism* is the feminism of negotiation; second, *nego-feminism* stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of "give and take/exchange" and "cope with successfully/ go around." African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts'

(Nnaemeka, 2004, p.378).

Negotiation and 'no ego' are two mutually constitutive 'shared values that can be used as organising principles' to consider women's lives (ibid.). For Nnaemeka, these values are fundamental to women's everyday acts, behaviours and being. Nego-feminism as theory builds on Nnaemeka's editorial of 'Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power' (1998) in which she describes the features of everyday African feminisms as 'negotiation, collaboration, men as participants in problem solving and social change' (Nnaemeka, 1998, p.7). She argues that feminism is not confined to the academy in Africa as philosophy but is practised daily and intuitively by women in a variety of situations to handle patriarchy. African women, she argues, 'do feminism' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.387), their feminism is lived and enacted, not primarily in relation to the self or independently (it has 'no-ego') but in relation to others. The premise and manifestations of nego-feminism are fundamentally relational. 'No ego' feminism necessarily entails 'negotiation' with others, compromise and collaboration, give and take, mutuality, balance and intersubjectivity. Women's social, economic, and political relations with each other and with men are fundamental to their identity and everyday lives and thus fundamental to theory. Nego-feminism promotes and advances the criticality of relations and relational agency to African women's lives, which had been pointed towards but largely peripheral to ideas of women's agency as autonomy examined in the previous chapter.

Nkealah notes that 'nego-feminism' resonates with the South African concept of 'ubuntu' (Nkealah, 2016) because both are underpinned by 'an ideology of gender inclusion, collaboration and accommodation to ensure that both women and men contribute (even if not equally) to improving the material conditions of women' (ibid., p.63) and by attempts to 'take account of the varieties of the 'patriarchal bargain' women strike – albeit not as equals

– in order to survive and flourish in some measure’ (Unterhalter, 2007, p.61). Nnaemeka argues that women know whether to ‘detonate’ or ‘go around patriarchal land mines’ (2004, p.378); whether to challenge or compromise according to circumstance, and their actions are not ignorant of but reflect innate understanding of gender relations. This approach recognises women’s depth of experience and internal reasoning to assess and respond to daily challenges, doing so with a view to their own needs and the preferences, biases, needs and behaviours of others.

The centrality nego-feminism gives to *the other* in relation to the self in thought, acts and behaviour - the relational world - distinguishes it from the framework of human rights and western feminisms, which tend to focus on the individual and less on an ‘ethic of care or concern’ (Unterhalter, 2007, p.58). Individual autonomy and free choice are central tenets of human rights and human agency (Kabeer, 1999a; McNay, 2000; Gammage et al., 2016; also, chapter 2). Kabeer summarised agency as ‘the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them’ (Kabeer, 1999, p.3) with decision-making the most dominant form or indicator of agency (ibid., p. 17). Decision-making defines ‘positive agency’ in the form of ‘power to’: ‘people’s capacity to define their own life choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition, dissent and resistance from others’ (ibid., p.4). Positive agency (power to) establishes a ‘negative paradigm’ in which agency is a dialectic between freedom and constraint (McNay, 2000) and the individual, with his or her own rights, needs and preferences, is set apart from and in opposition to others. The preceding chapter showed that theories of female agency on which some important contributions to the literature on girls schooling and marriage depend have been largely based on western human rights-based concepts of female agency as autonomy manifest as independent choice and action, including *against* other people or conditions (Thapan, 2003; Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012; Delprato et al., 2015; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). These ideas of agency as individualism, self-definition and opposition appear distinct from the markers of mutuality, collaboration and compromise that mark Nigerian feminisms and define a nego-feminist concept of agency. Nego-feminism provides a Nigerian feminist counter-framework to the dominant (western) approach to female agency that can arguably help to elucidate the machinations of girls’ agency in the schooling-marriage nexus.

There is, nevertheless, some commonality in these framings of female agency when their ideas are *broadened* from their central tenets: Nnaemeka’s emphasis on women’s implicit or intimate knowledge of patriarchy and how to negotiate with or around it speaks to Kabeer’s discussion of “‘the power within’” or ‘the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their activity’ (Kabeer, 1999, p.3). This ‘sense of agency’ (ibid.) is an internalised capacity to reflect, adapt and navigate through and around situations to achieve certain

goals. Women's 'power within' appears to be a shared value of both conceptual framings of women's lives that manifests as overt bargaining and negotiation as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. This theoretical shared value was expressed in researchers' deductions that girls 'internally negotiated' their best course of action according to their intimate knowledge of their sociocultural environment (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.35). Indeed, forms of compromise and give and take comprised international analyses of girls' marital agency (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Shah, 2016). However, while this and Kabeer's theorising sees ideas of women's 'power within' as consisting of 'backstage influence in decision-making processes' (1999, p.447), nego-feminism is pivoted around this internal knowledge and negotiation capacity as at the *forefront* of rather than backstage to women's agency. This distinction points towards the importance of locating and localising women's everyday acts and behaviours in theory and analysis by focusing on the salience of intimate knowledge of specific social conditions and relations to the forms and outcomes of agency.

Nego-feminism reorients feminisms and concepts of female agency from autonomy towards collaboration, eschewing individualism for intersubjectivity. While some western feminisms 'reinforce individualism' and emphasise 'power grabbing' (Unterhalter, 2007, p.58), the 'language of feminist engagement in Africa (collaborate, negotiate, compromise) runs counter to the language of Western feminist scholarship and engagement (challenge, disrupt, deconstruct, blow apart, etc.)' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.380). Women's power is not in stasis but is, for Nnaemeka, 'negotiable and negotiated', to be assessed 'not in absolute but in *relative* terms – in terms of power sharing and power ebb and flow' (Nnaemeka, 1998, p.11). Ideas that cohere across the multiple feminisms proposed by Nigerian women theorists – collaboration, dialogue, mutuality, relationships – are central to nego-feminism, which challenges agency as autonomy and opposition by foregrounding the mutual tenets of negotiation and no ego to describe African women's daily thoughts, attitudes and acts. Nnaemeka advances agency as relational, with women navigating and pushing at normative gendered boundaries and, in doing so, performing a complex array of intersubjective moves. This analytical approach has a significant bearing on this thesis: it demands reflection on and recognition of girls' relational worlds, their interactions and social connections, how they and others express these relationships, and how these relationships might affect ideas and enactments of marriage and schooling.

However, African and Nigerian feminisms have also been critiqued in ways salient to this thesis. One critique - that African feminisms (re)produce 'cultural alienation' (Mekgwe, 2010; Nkealah, 2016) - argues that despite an ideology of inclusion and an agenda for social transformation espoused by, for example, nego-feminism, the cultural specificity of their

origins and their intellectual language are alienating to a majority of women. In short, who are these theorisations for, as audience and as subject? The intellectualised language of theorising in English, while resisting 'academic colonialism', uses the colonisers language (Nkealah, 2016, p.67). South African feminist Pinkie Mekgwe argues that while the historical experiences of African societies have rendered those societies hybridised, plural and fluid, theorisations of 'African feminisms' risk obscuring this plurality and (re)essentialising African cultures and gendered experiences, particularly in the form of binaries: West versus Africa; coloniser versus victim (Mekgwe, 2010, p.193). This critique is salient to this thesis' geopolitical and sociocultural location in North West Nigeria. Nego-feminism and other Nigerian feminisms have been proposed by women from Igbo dominant South East Nigeria: 'they therefore cannot speak for all Nigerian women under the banner of "Nigerian feminism"' (Nkealah, 2016, p.63). The southern roots and intellectual English formulations of theory establish epistemological and ideological distance from northern, Hausa culture. While Nnaemeka may speak for and about Nigerian (or, following her own proposal 'African') women generally, her analyses and propositions restate her southern Igbo roots: editorials largely comprise references to Igbo society and history (1997; 1998), and a 2011 volume of essays edited by Nnaemeka ('Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture and Social Change') does not include any chapters by or about northern, Hausa or Fulani women. Pereira points out that there are gaps in understanding and theorising the feminist perspectives of diverse categories of women and raises questions about the implications of these gaps for understanding 'differences' 'among various categories of women' (Pereira 2016, p.4). Certainly, there are many fewer published academic theorisations of women's lives by northern Nigerian women than southern Nigerian women, which points towards both a gap and a difference.

The obfuscation of northern Nigerian Hausa feminisms is partly a result of politico-historic educational inequalities in Nigeria to the detriment of northern states (Chapter 6) and in part a result of different modes of disseminating and discussing 'feminist' issues. Philosophies and practices concerning gender have tended to be found in Hausa popular fiction rather than academic publication (Whitsitt, 2002). Turning towards this domain are plenty of examples of writing in which gender, women, and social practices are examined, challenged, and theorised. *Littattafin soyayya* (romance fiction or 'Kano market literature') is a major platform for Hausa women writers and their readers to explore gender and sociocultural concerns, especially with marriage, motherhood and girls' education (Whitsitt, 2002; Whitsitt, 2003; Furniss, 2003). Zaynab Alkali, Bilkisu Funtuwa and Ramat Yakubu and are among the many women writers of northern Nigeria who address these concerns in their fiction writing (Alkali, 1987; Ramat Yakubu, 1990; Funtuwa, 1996). Their stories

narrate young women's collaborations with others, especially husbands, natal and marital families, to improve their social and economic status, negotiating ambitions within marriage and motherhood, and gaining respect in marriage (Alkali, 1988; Funtuwa, 1996; Shoneyin, 2010; Ramat Yakubu, 1990). In Yakubu's critically acclaimed novel *Alhaki Kwikwiyo Ne*¹⁷, Yakubu focuses on the resistances, negotiations and reconciliations that the female protagonist Rabi makes with her husband, his 'sins' (adultery, domestic violence), and men and women in her family and community (Ramat Yakubu, 1990; Ramat Yakubu, 2012). Rabi has aspirations and her array of enactments of agency – fleeing her husband; negotiating with his brother; collaborating with her children - are at the heart of Yakubu's story. Formal schooling is positioned an enabler of agency for Rabi, offering an alternative to marriage but more significantly mobilising girls' capacity to inch towards their goals, nudge at gender justice, within the social conditions and expectations of their lives. Recognising Hausa women's fiction writing is important firstly because, by doing so, the cultural specificity of Nigerian feminist theory becomes more readily apparent by juxtaposition and, secondly, because representing the content and themes of this writing (as much as is possible¹⁸) enables it to be considered alongside that of southern (and international) feminists concerned with gender, women, and society. Such 'reading alongside' (Nnaemeka, 2004) may help to accentuate the indigeneity of the feminisms applied to consider empirical data (re-rooting) and enhance the dialogic, complementary, and holistic intention of socially transformative feminist theories of Nigerian women's lives by offering additional/alternative insights from the north (*re-routing*).

This suite of conceptual ideas and approaches to considering women's lives in Nigeria (Africa) provides alternatives to analysing and understanding empirical data on girls' marriage and schooling. These concepts have also been much practised by Nigerian theorists in debates and actions on social practices, motherhood, and marriage. Indeed, for many of the Nigerian women with whom this chapter has engaged, theory and activism have vital synergies: Kolawole, Mama, Nnaemeka, Oyewùmí, Pereira are theorists *and* social and political activists engaging with activism to challenge and transform institutions that reinforce gendered power structures (Pereira, 2004; Mama, 2011). Mama advocates 'activist scholarship' that always connects intellectual work to movements to transform power relations (Mama, 2011, p.7), while Pereira argues for a 'mutually constitutive relationship, in which theory is grounded in the concerns of feminist activism and

¹⁷ 'Sin is a Puppy that Follows you Home' (Yakubu, 1990). Published in English in 2012.

¹⁸ The vast majority of *littattafan soyayya* is not accessible outside of Hausa northern Nigerian because women write in Hausa and lack an international publishing market. Some original texts have recently been published in English and there is some academic commentary on the literature overall.

activism is informed by feminist theory' (Pereira 2016, p.3). Kolawole argues that this work, among academic women, merely represents and bolsters the efforts of everyday women who 'present a catalogue of activism and dynamic collective mobilization against colonial oppression, traditional repression, voicelessness and injustice' (Kolawole, 2004, p.254-64) and, indeed, empirical analysis of tweets about #BeingFemaleInNigeria in 2015 supported this idea that feminism and activism are deeply connected for ordinary Nigerian women (Akinbobola, 2020, p.65). In this way, a third idea about theorising, and therefore understanding and responding to social practices emerges, whereby concepts and lived experiences symbiotically and constantly inform one another and are shaped and adjusted by one another over time and place; 'a third space where the immediacy of lived experience gives form to theory, allows the simultaneous gesture of theorizing practice and practicing theory, and anticipates the mediation of policy, thereby disrupting the notion of the academy and activism as stable sites' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.377). The final section of this chapter pursues this 'third way' by exploring how theory has been practiced and practice theorised among Nigerian women writers around the thematic and discursive terrains of gendered social practices.

Practising theory and theorising practice: female circumcision, motherhood, and marriage

Nnaemeka's critique of female circumcision in Africa offers a salient counter-discourse to western epistemologies of African women's lives (2001; 2003; 2005). This critique, spanning several works, addresses the ways, means and content of knowledge produced about female circumcision in Africa. It also spans the period in which Nnaemeka published *Nego-feminism* and exemplifies a dialogue between theory and practice. In addressing female circumcision, this critique also offers some insight for this thesis into indigenous discourse around practices named by international human rights treaties as 'harmful traditional practices', of which female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage are the most common (UNCRC, 1999, Article 24(3); UNICEF, 2006, C.11, p.15). I consider Nigerian feminist responses to, and counter-discourse on, female circumcision, as a way to consider the construction of alternative ways of knowing early marriage.

Nnaemeka's discursive exploration of female circumcision does not challenge the goal of eradicating the practice of female circumcision itself but takes aim at its discourse and politicisation, and the effects of these on the image and narrative of African women. Firstly, Nnaemeka argues that the adoption by international human rights and policy discourses of the term female genital mutilation (FGM) a 'harmful traditional practice' exemplifies the West's 'power to name' 'oblivious of and/or insensitive to the implications and consequences

of the naming' (Nnaemeka, 2001, p.178). This specific charge resonates with Amadiume's earlier overarching critique of 'the tendency to use European terms and expressions uncritically when addressing non-European cultures and experiences' with writing on Africa 'loaded with generalised terms which do not necessarily have general meaning, but serve a particularistic interest' (Amadiume, 1997, p.1). This echoes the indictments of Oyewùmí and Pereira on imperialist gendered knowledge production, and consequent efforts to re-conceptualise African women's lives under an indigenous name (stiwanism, femalism etc). These counter-responses emerge from a process of resignification. The resignification of female circumcision as female genital mutilation, and the establishment of linked legal frameworks beyond national boundaries, can be seen (including by Nnaemeka) to decontextualise and re-locate the practice, discursively and judicially, beyond the borders in which it mainly occurs. One effect of this *unmooring* of practice from context may be to lose sight of the complex explanatory threads that guide practice, interpretation, and response. Nnaemeka argues that the moral outrage expressed through the language of mutilation and harm additionally ignores the international community's 'complicity in creating the conditions against which its moral outrage speaks' (Nnaemeka, 2005, p.12)¹⁹. Nnaemeka's insistence on locally-rooted signification through naming is an engagement with social justice, particularly with what Fraser has termed misrepresentation, a political injustice with transborder forms and sources that arises when some groups are not accorded equal voice in decision-making (Fraser 2005, p.305) and with 'thick cosmopolitanism' (Unterhalter, 2008, p.543), 'the attempt to take ideas of justice beyond national boundaries' (ibid.), as in universal human rights or international campaigns against 'harmful traditional practices' that are delivered on a global stage (such as the London Girl Summit 2014). Nnaemeka's writing on female circumcision challenges thick cosmopolitan forms of justice as political insurgencies (Nnaemeka 2003, p.371), re-emphasising the issue of *whose voice counts*, and reorienting claims for social justice and about social practices back to local domains (Nnaemeka, 1998b; Robeyns, 2010). This argument advocates something of a clearing of the discursive load associated with 'child marriage' or 'early marriage' to instead analyse, interpret, and re-present girls' marriages based on local terms, ideas and practices.

All 'research into gender outside of the west should therefore be mindful that it runs the risk of projecting into the society that which is not there at either a discursive or praxial level' (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p.140). Her implication is that there may be a disconnect between hegemonic knowledge, and lived experience, of African gendered social practices that fundamentally misunderstand what is happening. To understand better then requires careful reflection of discursive (and judicial) framings, specifically the implications of how research

¹⁹ Female circumcision was also practiced in Europe in the 19th and early 20th century.

recognises and represents, speaks for and about, social practices. Following Amadiume, Nnaemeka, Bakare-Yusuf and Kolawole, means probing the assumptions embedded in the framing of early marriage (and FGM) as harmful traditional practices and critically examining girls' marriages through local lenses, not to disavow that child marriage is harmful and its elimination not vital, but to recognise and represent the practice appropriately and indigenously for social justice.

Nnaemeka's second argument is that re-naming female circumcision as 'female genital mutilation' (FGM) by the international community has 'narrowed the field of struggle' from gender ideologies, rites and structures to knives, cuts, and bodies (Nnaemeka, 2001). Making bodies preeminent turns the subject of concern, women, paradoxically into object. This effect contradicts a long-standing effort among Nigerian feminists to undo the 'celebrated image of African women as passive victims, marginalized without a voice' (Kolawole, 2004, p.253) and re-construct African women not as either/or (victim/agent) but both/and (Nnaemeka, 1997; Salo, 2001; Pereira, 2002; Kolawole, 2004). This means recognising girls and women simultaneously as *victims and agents*, implicating their dynamic engagements with social practices and institutions. It is not enough to label girls and women as victims or agents because dualisms such as 'agency and victimhood' 'are not mutually exclusive' (Nnaemeka, 1997, p.3). This idea is reflected in the importance of 'balance' to nego-feminism. It is also reflected in Bakare-Yusuf's point that a woman's identity as simultaneously girl, daughter, sister, mother, wife, woman, professional, friend results in a 'specific constellation of effects' on her power and agency (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p.134) and how gender, age, ethnicity, religion, class, region, or sexuality, interact to effect different forms and degrees of relative power (Pereira, 2004).

Women's writing on motherhood and marriage emphasises the experience of being 'both/and'. Across African literature – in fiction and academia - the family is a contested space in terms of how it is described and experienced, what it signifies, and how it is conceptualised. A dominant ideology of a nuclear monogamous heterosexual family, for example, is viewed by some as exemplary of 'inappropriate' universalism that ignores and demeans local forms and meanings of families and relationships (Oyewùmí, 2002) many of which comprise extended networks of kinship (Salamone, 2009; Ramat Yakubu, 2012). Presumptions that marriage and motherhood are restrictive, harmful and/or non-aspirational, especially for young women, are challenged by writing that describes the heterogeneity of women's beliefs, acts and experiences including confrontation, conformity, and collective action (Nnaemeka, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2003). Nnaemeka (1997) signals the importance of distinguishing between motherhood as institution and motherhood as experience, while acknowledging interrelationship between the two. While the institution is patriarchal,

maintains a gendered social order and reinstates women's reproductive roles (Pereira, 2004, p.13), motherhood may also confer social status, capital, respect, and power with diverse forms of agency. The difference between formal organising frameworks and informal practices in African societies - *de jure* and *de facto* modes of reality (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 130) - and how these are negotiated by women (Pereira, 2004, p.15) becomes important and have significance for ideas about (early) marriage. For Nneameka, the descriptors 'mother' or 'wife' are insufficient 'ontological considerations (being there)' requiring a 'modulated shift' to 'functional imperatives (doing what there)' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.360). Women are not passively 'being' mothers and wives, but are instead actively engaged in negotiations, collaborations, resistances, 'doing' agency in complex and creative ways. This re-imagining of African women's lives implies that 'what has been designated as 'irreconcilable, "unfeminist" contradictions are actually the tensions of mutuality, not antagonism, (*complementary* not *oppositional*) that give life, vibrancy and meaning to the African environment' (Nnaemeka, 1997, p.3). African women's practices, theorised thus, involve multiple stances and different decisions in relation to different people and moments of their lives. This idea echoes through Mama's emphasis on the inherency of women's aspirations:

'African women do have aspirations that go far beyond securing their survival: political, economic, social, intellectual, professional and indeed personal desires for change. It may be true that most African women are trapped in the daily business of securing the survival of themselves, their families and their communities but this is merely symptomatic of a global grid of patriarchal power, and all the social, political and economic injustices that delivers to women, and to Africans'

(Mama in Salo, 2001, p. 60).

Mama argues that injustices subdue women's aspirations so that it is not perhaps women's aspirations that need fertilising through interventions (like schooling or development aid) but instead injustice that requires dismantling. Women's aspirations confront these injustices, which women therefore have to work with and around. This idea is exemplified in Yemisi Akinbobola's contemporary empirical research on #BeingFemaleinNigeria (Akinbobola, 2020) in which she identifies the *dynamic* engagements and *balancing* acts of Nigerian women navigating their sex and gender in their everyday lives. Akinbobola's analysis of tweets under the eponymous hashtag found that, while many tweets focussed on confronting and resisting patriarchy, many were about balancing and navigating personal desire (further education; careers; romance) and normative (heterosexual) social expectations

(motherhood; young marriage; domesticity). Twitter seemed to provide an opportunity for women to express or test their voice (as a form of agency) within the confines of social media at a distance from their daily lives.

Nnaemeka's analysis of the discourse of female circumcision, and complementary insights into motherhood and marriage, offer an alternative discourse of gendered social practices in Nigeria. These insights draw attention to the range of effects that *naming* African social practices has on discourses and assumptions about women and gender, understanding women's lives, and responding in ways that advance social justice. Theorising practice adds richness to theory itself by showing how and why values of balance, negotiation, collaboration, multiplicity and dynamism come to have prominence in Nigerian theorisations of women's lives. These ideas are not alien to those espoused in international theory and literature but seem to have more prominence in indigenous Nigerian discourse. The final part of the chapter considers whether and how a suite of ideas about women's lives and agency, from the international literature review and this chapter's exploration of Nigerian women's writing, can be brought together and taken forwards as tools for analysing this thesis' empirical data on Nigerian girls, schooling and marriage.

'Ready to see the familiar anew' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.382)? A transnational feminist suite for (re)thinking girls, marriage, and education

This chapter has attended to the scholarship of Nigerian feminists concerned with the means, ways and ends of knowing women and girls' lives in Africa as a counterpoint to the knowledge (re)produced in Chapter 3. Nigerian women's writing argues that to better understand women and girls' lives, research must be indigenous, feminist, dynamic, and locally rooted - embedded in *in situ* social practice. It should 'build on the indigenous' 'learning from' African worldviews and utilising those as the 'theoretical rack' (Nnaemeka, 2004) from which to consider and conceptualise women's lives. Nego-feminism, in complementarity with African womanism, snail-sense feminism and others, positions women as active participants in dynamic social worlds constantly and intuitively negotiating and navigating aspirations and attainments with others.

This chapter has emphasised the importance of 'other ways of knowing' (Pereira, 2002; Mama, 2011). This implies the significance for new research on adolescent girls, marriage and schooling (such as this thesis) of critical engagement with the form, content and findings of international research *and* its epistemological and theoretical assumptions. This entails recognising and naming those assumptions and, crucially, evaluating those assumptions in relation to the specific geopolitical, sociocultural context of a new study while actively

seeking indigenous conceptual framings that might differently illuminate empirical data. Indeed, when we turn towards indigenous theory to understand women's social lives, what appears is a distinct, and sometimes complementary, set of ideas and concepts with which to reconsider girls and women's lives. Commenting on Nnaemeka's work, Akinbobola says that one learning for feminist researchers is that 'we should not be averse to learning from other ideas as we explore and expand what African feminism is' (Akinbobola, 2020, p.68). This implicates a process of sense-making by inclusion not ignorance – weaving theoretical threads from others, such as western feminists, into the theories of African contexts by African women.

When we do this for the topic of this thesis, what emerges is a suite of ideas about how girls might respond, reflect, and behave in relation to their schooling and marriage from autonomous to intimately relational agentic moves. While the former has arguably been idealised in international discourses, what the international literature and the ideas of Nigerian women writers together indicate is that girls and women's agencies are dynamic; sometimes apparently autonomous, at other times collaborative; sometimes apparently regressive, at other times progressive. In this way, one of the key complementarities of research and theory is that women's lives are resistant to 'fixing' and instead are the epitome of 'twin-track' (Thapan, 2003, p.77) or 'both/and' (Nnaemeka, 1997; Salo, 2001; Pereira, 2002; Kolawole, 2004; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). Analysing empirical data from Nigerian female/feminist framings of women's lives requires heeding above all the located, relational, interpersonal, collaborative forms of women's agency, recognising and valuing those forms as agentic and important. But it also means considering when girls and women make moves in other directions along the spectrum of interpretations of agency, and how these moves might be recognised and explained.

To 'see the familiar anew' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.382) means adjusting a long-standing focus on dominant approaches to, and assumptions about, African girls, marriage, and schooling, to accommodate and engage with alternative, indigenous feminist approaches to understanding women's lives. Critically, it means attending to what and how data is collected and how data is interpreted. It is to this question that the following chapter on research methods turns.

Chapter 5. Research methods and methodology: meaning making from multiplicity

In the previous chapter, Nigerian female/feminist approaches to studies on African women asked that researchers query dominant means of knowledge production, what it means to know, and other ways of knowing (Pereira, 2002; Oyèwùmí, 2002; Nnaemeka, 1997; 2004; Mama, 2011). Their arguments emphasised the importance for research to attend to the assumptions, processes, products, and social justice implications of learning about/*from* African gendered social realities. Their attention to epistemology, within which are raised concerns about power, homo/heterogeneity and agency, raises important questions for this study about what, how and why information is gathered and knowledge created on Nigerian adolescent girls' marriages and formal schooling, including the basis of this knowledge in the lived experience of girls and young women in local contexts.

The literature review highlighted that many studies over the last three decades pertaining to girls schooling and marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa have utilised quantitative research methods, specifically cross-sectional or longitudinal analysis of household surveys (Singh and Samara, 1996; Westoff, 2003; Godha et al., 2012; Westoff et al., 2013; Garenne, 2014; Glynn et al., 2018). These have been at least partly grounded by a positivist philosophy, the idea that (most of) what can be known exists as an independent, objective social reality that can be observed, counted, statistically analysed, and replicated across contexts (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007; Morgan, 2007). This research has had important effects on global policy and the international development agenda because it has shown the global scale of early marriage (Chapter 2). Primarily quantitative studies that have drawn on qualitative data and methods (Singh and Samara, 1996; Lloyd and Mensch, 2006; Walker 2013; Delprato et al., 2015) have often done so for *instrument development* where qualitative methods are used to develop and scale quantitative ones; for *contextualisation* of quantitative findings to specific socio-political conditions; and/or for *completeness* in bringing together a more comprehensive account of the enquiry area (Bryman, 2006, p.106) but the process and intentions of aggregating and generalising for explanatory power has tended, inevitably, to side-line the diversity, heterogeneity and agency of girls and women's lives.

Nigerian female/feminist ideas about the heterogeneous, socially active *and* socially dependent, gendered realities of African women have leaned towards constructivist/interpretivist epistemological standpoints that consider social realities as subjective, dependent, negotiated, fluid and highly localised (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007; Morgan, 2007). International qualitative research, which has

focussed on specific contexts and deliberately explored variety and agency in the girls' marriage-schooling nexus, showing the social relations and expectations that girls negotiate in navigating this nexus, have done so from interpretivist epistemologies (e.g. Thapan, 2003; Sommer, 2010; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). From qualitative methods and data, these studies have interpreted girls' narratives to draw (localised) meaning of the interrelationship between marriage and schooling. That meaning is *made*, constructed between researcher and participant, is a crucial point for Nnaemeka who emphasises that the researcher should recognise her position as one where 'meaning is made and not an essentialized location where meaning is discovered' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.361). Nnaemeka's point seems to present 'positivist' and 'interpretivist' standpoints in opposition, but I propose that their manifestation into research approach and practice can be complementary, co-existent and enriching when the value of each epistemology to *part of* knowledge is appreciated. There is precedence for mixed methods research, which I will discuss shortly. While research epistemologies and their roots are important to research assumptions and design (and I acknowledge my own feminist, interpretivist roots below), I am concerned with the epistemological, methodological, and ethical question of 'how researchers construct and use the knowledge that resides within groups of persons in a society or culture' (Thorne, 1998, p. 553). This concern with *how* knowledge from others is *constructed and used* means paying attention to what we do with what kind of data and for what purpose – the subject of this chapter.

The chapter continues in two parts. In the first part I outline and explain this thesis' mixed methods design. I propose that a mixed methods approach aligns with my research aims by enabling the development of a comprehensive and nuanced account of girls' marriage and schooling in context. This thesis' mixed methods design entails connecting two different methods (quantitative and qualitative) and three strands of data for *observation* to develop general descriptions (whether and how school and marriage are linked) with *interpretation* of local individual accounts to consider complexity (how precisely events are linked and why things happen). I propose that because mixed methods can embrace multiplicity, dialogue, reciprocity, and nuance, they can be complementary to feminist social research and resonant with the ideas of Nigerian women writers. Nonetheless, this research design entails practical challenges, including data selection and collection, which I discuss.

In the second part, I provide a detailed presentation and rationale for the three sets of data gathered and analysed in this thesis. An existing quantitative dataset – cross-sectional survey data of the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2013 – was analysed to establish general descriptions of, and factors linked to, girls, marriage and schooling, inspiring queries for further deeper, localised analysis. An existing qualitative dataset –

interview data collected as part of ActionAid's Transforming Education for Girls programme 2008-2012 – was used to *locate* some of the factors linking marriage and schooling in girls' narratives and 'determine local meanings attached to experiences' (Mertens 2007, p.223). Lastly, a primary qualitative dataset – interview data collected from policy makers and influencers in Nigeria in 2015 – was gathered to complement girls' stories with the views of those in positions of educational power. I describe the background for each dataset, ethical approvals, and the methods used to analyse these data. I conclude the chapter with comments on the complexity and salience of mixed method research for complex social phenomena and explain the balance of data utilised across the proceeding analytical chapters.

A mixed methods design for a complex social phenomenon

'a mixed methods approach to social inquiry distinctively offers deep and potentially inspirational and catalytic opportunities to *meaningfully engage with the differences* that matter in today's troubled world, seeking not so much convergence and consensus as opportunities for respectful *listening and understanding*'

(Greene, 2008, p.20, my italics).

Nnaemeka's concerns with different ways of seeing and knowing as critical to feminist theorising and activism (Nnaemeka, 1998; Nnaemeka, 2004) engages with the kind of potential of mixed methods research designs that Jennifer Greene, a social science methodology researcher, identifies. Nnaemeka and Greene, with their different concerns, both seek out ways for research to meaningfully engage with difference through respectful listening, or reciprocity, patience, and accommodation (Nnaemeka, 1998a; Nnaemeka, 2004; Greene, Jennifer, 2007; Greene, 2008). I consider how their notations on research with the core idea of *meaningful engagement with difference* have catalysed this thesis' mixed methods design and practice that aims for a nuanced and holistic way of 'seeing and knowing' Nigerian adolescent girls, their marriage and schooling.

Social scientists have often used 'various methods because the practical demands of the contexts in which they worked called for both generality and particularity' (Greene, 2008, p.7). A practical, pragmatic orientation towards mixed methods exists and has been discussed in international development research (Bamberger, 2000; Kanbur & Schaffer eds., 2007). The incorporation of quantitative and qualitative data and methods into a single study, relating local social attitudes and behaviours to wider societal systems, marked some of the more insightful research into early marriage discussed in Chapter 3 (Colclough et al.,

2000; Mensch et al., 2001; Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012). Bhatti and Jeffrey's study, as part of the Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty project (2005-2010), particularly encouraged this thesis' mixed methods design because they exemplified what and how different kinds of data (in this case, a quantitative household survey and qualitative individual interviews) could be incorporated in a single study of women's marriage and formal schooling, and analysed and interpreted side by side, in complementarity. The mixed methods approach enabled these researchers to develop strong, differently evidenced and nuanced arguments for how schooling affects Pakistani women's marital decision-making and comment on the gaps in single method studies on the topic (Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012, p.162).

Following Bhatti and Jeffrey's study, quantitative data and methods meet the demands of an examination of girls' marriage and education in a single country by enabling descriptive analyses of correlations between variables and mediating factors. Quantitative data can reveal, for example, patterns and trends in a particular population in marital timing according to religious affiliation, rural-urban residence or level of educational attainment (Ikamari, 2005; Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; Delprato et al., 2015). This information provides scene-setting, establishes important connections and patterns, and encourages further questions. But a study of a single country also lends itself to a qualitative research design to dig beneath statistical associations to examine social processes and practices through personal accounts. Qualitative data can reveal, for example, what individual girls and women think or feel about their lives, marriage and/or experience of schooling (Thapan, 2003; Arnot et al., 2012; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Shah, 2016). Thus, different types of data illuminate different facets of, and point towards different ways of knowing, the girls' schooling-marriage nexus. In this thesis, I try to connect quantitative and qualitative methods to paint different pictures of the Nigerian girls' marriage-schooling nexus and see how they complement each other.

The strength of a mixed methods research design to explore a complex social phenomenon such as the relationship between adolescent girls' marriage and schooling is, however, problematised at the point of considering a mixed methods *paradigm* – an epistemological, ontological and methodological underpinning of mixed methods practice. It is well understood that different research methods tend to be underpinned by different philosophies (broadly, quantitative research – positivism; qualitative research – interpretivism) so how can a single study contain more than one philosophy? Methodologists offer different resolutions to the paradigmatic problem. One perspective is that it is entirely possible to hold multiple paradigms in the same study so long as this is explicit and honoured and each paradigm (with its distinctive methods and data) relates to different stages of research (Greene, 2007;

Plano Clark and Creswell, 2008). This perspective can be described as ‘separately but together’ – bringing different research philosophies, methods and data together in one study but maintaining paradigmatic and analytical distinction. Researchers taking this approach to mixed methods may do so under a banner of research pragmatism (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2007; Greene, 2008; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), driven by a recognition of a ‘need to link social behaviour to wider social systems to meaningfully make interpretive sense of localized phenomena’ (Greene, 2008, p.7). A pragmatic approach tends to underpin mixed methods research in international development (Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012; Plan International, 2012; Plan International, 2015).

Pragmatism may be a reasonable and defensible paradigm for mixed method research (Johnson et al., 2007, p.125), but it seems to miss some of the ideas raised by Nigerian women and feminist methodologists associated with *what it means to know* or the *purpose* of research, especially in terms of social responsibility and social justice. The propositions of two western feminist education researchers explicitly address this point. Donna Mertens advocates mixed methods research designs in order to expose *different* versions of reality and cultural *complexity* (Mertens, 2007; Mertens, 2011) while Jennifer Greene similarly promotes mixed methods research on the basis that this orientation towards social inquiry enables engagement with *difference* (Greene, 2008, p.20) and ‘actively invite us to participate in dialogue about multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished (ibid., p.16). Both argue that mixed methods designs, underpinned by the ideas of exposing and engaging with difference, multiplicity and complexity, can facilitate the establishment of new knowledge *and* contribute to social change by emphasising perspective and voice by design (Mertens, 2007, p.212; Mertens, 2011). Mertens conceptualises this as the ‘transformative paradigm’ for mixed methods research (Mertens, 2007). Nigerian female academics have emphasised the importance of research contributing to social change including through direct links with social activism (Chapter 4) but what Greene and Mertens are proposing is that mixed methods designs can contribute to social change in and of themselves (as well as through their findings and outputs) by intentionally attending to multiple, different experiences of the social world. In this thesis, I, as a feminist social researcher, try to pay attention to and effectively represent on the page the populations and participants of each dataset and, especially, the adolescent girls included in the data.

The mixed methods practice of this thesis has involved working with three sequential strands of data: secondary quantitative data; secondary qualitative data; and primary qualitative data (designed after preliminary analysis of the two secondary datasets). I discuss the myriad

opportunities and challenges associated with gathering and analysing these specific datasets in the following sections of this chapter. But my overarching rationale for my mixed methods approach is threefold: firstly, that the limitations of one type of data are *offset* by the strengths of another; secondly, that a more *comprehensive* account of girls' marriage and schooling can be reached by employing quantitative and qualitative research; and, thirdly, that the depth and breadth of enquiry can be *enhanced and expanded* by using different methods (Bryman, 2006, pp.105–7; Johnson et al., 2007, p.122; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). I aim to take quantitative *and* qualitative findings from data into account, *linking them in dialogue* in developing interpretations of adolescent Nigerian girls lives, marriage and schooling experiences (Bryman, 2007; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007).

Mixed methods research is not easy (Johnson et al., 2007; Greene, 2008). I experienced challenges of analysis and representation in my own attempts to hold different data in dialogue in this thesis and explore and deepen ideas across more than one dataset. One of the most significant of these challenges concerned the period over which data were collected. My earliest dataset is the qualitative data of ActionAid's Transforming Education for Girls programme collected in August 2011; household survey data were collected by the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey between February and June 2013 (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014, p.9); and qualitative education policy data were gathered between July 2015 and March 2017. The data of this thesis thus span a period of six years. These six years comprise periods of political and socioeconomic change in Nigeria, including turbulent economic performance (O'Neill, 2014; CIA, 2019) and seismic national elections (Angerbrandt, 2018; Chapter 6). During the writing up of the data, there have been additional critical shifts associated with economic decline, civil conflict, and the major effects of the Covid-19 pandemic²⁰. The time period of the data offers an insight into change *and* stasis in relation to girls and women's lives, but the data necessarily capture very different moments. The data are sequential but the timeline inhibits integration of the data (Bryman, 2007, p.14). I recognise, while not being able to fully resolve, this issue and heed Greene's advice in neither expecting nor seeking data convergence but respectfully attending to the data in- and inter-dependently for incremental learning about girls, marriage, and schooling.

In representing data on the page and the writing-up phase I confronted challenges associated with the different technical and rhetorical criteria and norms for presenting quantitative and qualitative information (Bryman, 2007, p.12; Greene, 2008, p.16).

²⁰ The Nigerian experience and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, including on this thesis' findings and ideas, are considered in Chapter 11.

Presenting data, and especially attempts to hold the data in dialogue, is difficult when the discursive norms vary. My attempts to resolve this include a mixed representational approach that uses graphs and tables as well as pen portraits and stories distinctly and in symbiosis (Bryman, 2007, p.12). My research questions seek to complement and underline the mixed methods approach, and the ideas of dialogue and negotiation, by embracing observation and narration in complementarity, as follows.

Research Questions

Three research questions that draw on different research methods have been articulated to meet the overarching aims of the thesis to explore whether and how schooling is protective of girls in relation to marriage and why school-age girls marry. These questions have emerged from the preceding global policy and academic literature reviews and guide the forthcoming analytical chapters.

1. What are the associations between girls' marriage and formal schooling in North West Nigeria according to household survey data? What meanings of marriage and education do these associations rest on?
2. How do adolescent schoolgirls in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria, narrate their expectations and experiences of becoming and being married and what are the implications of formal schooling in these expectations and experiences? How do their stories complement or contrast with household survey data?
3. How is the Nigerian education system, specifically the policies, practices and education personnel of Kaduna state, disposed to meet adolescent schoolgirls' needs and aspirations in relation to marriage? What does this mean for the problem and potential of education to protect girls in relation to marriage?

Mixed methods and data: a tripartite approach

Dataset 1: Quantitative data of the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2013

The analytical work of this thesis began with the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) to ascertain key trends in age at first marriage among women across Nigeria, with a focus on northern regions, and some of the factors associated with early marital timing (before age eighteen). The intention was that descriptive analysis would yield insights into the links between marriage and other socioeconomic characteristics of girls' lives, including formal schooling, that could be pursued with qualitative research. This

preliminary analysis would repeat the kind of quantitative analysis done by researchers in other country contexts (Chapter 3). This thesis focuses on analysis of the 2013 NDHS, despite data from a subsequent 2018 survey being made available in October 2019 (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019), because the 2013 dataset complements and captures information at the midpoint between the two qualitative datasets analysed for this thesis in 2011 and 2015²¹.

Background and ethics

Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) are cross-sectional nationally representative household surveys. The NDHS 2013 sample was selected using a stratified three-stage cluster design. In stage one, stratification was achieved by separating each state into rural and urban areas and selecting 893 localities. In stage two, one enumeration area (EA) was selected from each locality, except larger localities in which more than one EA were selected, giving 904 clusters. In both rounds, rural clusters were defined as areas with populations of less than 20,000. As most Nigerians live in rural areas, urban areas in some states were over-sampled so the sample was not self-weighting. Stratification was done to allow for basic indicators to be estimated at national, regional and state levels. A total of 40,680 households (372 urban and 532 rural) were targeted nationally by NDHS with 45 households selected in each rural and urban cluster by equal probability systematic sampling. In Kaduna state, 1,080 households were selected of which 54% were rural (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014, p.7). All women aged 15-49 resident in a selected household on the night before the survey, and a sub-sample of men aged 15-49 in every second household, were surveyed through questionnaires delivered in English, Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo languages. The overall response rate was over 98%.

NDHS 2013 data are representative at the national, regional, and state levels. Across successive published survey data the lowest median age at first marriage (AFM) for women aged 20-49 nationally is in the North West region (National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009, p.95; National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014, p.58; National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.90). These data, combined with the focus of the qualitative dataset from ActionAid's Transforming Education for Girls programme in Kaduna state (described next) and my own professional experience, catalysed the location of this thesis' study to the North West region and to Kaduna state. Kaduna state has a majority Hausa Muslim population and contains important higher education institutions including Ahmadu Bello University. In 2013, the median age at first marriage among women

²¹ Data from the 2018 survey are, however, cited in Chapter 6.

(aged 20-49) was 17.5 (NPC and ICF International, 2014, p.58) and an estimated 40% of girls and women had no education (females aged 6 and over, *ibid.*, p.23).

The DHS program has its own ethical procedures and guidance. It requires survey respondents to provide informed and voluntary consent prior to each interview, with parents or guardians consenting to children and adolescents' interviews. The informed consent statement emphasises confidentiality. Interviews are performed 'as privately as possible', especially for sensitive topics. Interviews are identified by a series of numbers, which are replaced by randomly assigned numbers after data processing. Thus, the DHS program aims for a thorough process of informed and voluntary consent and participant confidentiality²². Data are independently verified and go through rigorous standards of enumerator training, piloting, data checking and accreditation (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014, p.9). My access and utilisation of these data followed ethical procedures for secondary analysis of quantitative data overseen by the ethical approval granted for this study by the Institute of Education in May 2015 (Appendix A).

NDHS 2013 data analysis

I analysed the Nigeria DHS 2013 using Stata 13. The multi-level cluster sampling design was taken into account by applying sampling weights²³ to calculate correct point estimates and standard errors and allow for non-response. To ascertain trends in the timing of marriage and associations with other characteristics of women nationally, in the North West region and in Kaduna state, I began by expanding the outcome of interest into two variables: (i) marriage before age 18 ('early marriage') and, (ii) marriage before age 15 ('very early marriage'). Descriptive analysis drew out simple medians and frequency distributions for women's marital timing at national, regional and state level. These provide further justification for the thesis' focus in the North West region due to the high prevalence of marriage before age eighteen in that region. The Kaplan-Meier method of survival probability was subsequently used to estimate the length of time (years) women (aged 15-49) live before marriage²⁴. Estimates were generated for the cumulative probability of marriage by age, by region, state, rural-urban residence, and educational attainment (years in school). Residence and years in school were selected initially in this analysis due to evidence in international literature of their generally strong significance to marital timing (Ikamari, 2005;

²² <https://www.dhsprogram.com/What-We-Do/Protecting-the-Privacy-of-DHS-Survey-Respondents.cfm>

²³ Individual weight for women is provided by DHS as v005. See Appendix B for an example .do file in Stata in which I applied sampling weights for analysis.

²⁴ Unmarried women were censored on the date of the survey. Kaplan-Meier survival curves were used to show the probability of marriage.

Nguyen and Wodon, 2012; Delprato et al., 2015). These analyses are presented in Chapter 8 on marital timing.

I then wanted to look further at what characteristics of women tended to be associated with the two outcomes of interest (i) marriage <18 years; (ii) marriage <15 years. Again, the international literature review offered variables of interest that had been generally significant in analyses of different countries. Six exposure variables were chosen: (i) state of residence; (ii) age group; (iii) rural-urban residence; (iv) ethnicity; (v) religion; (vi) educational attainment. Logistic regression was used to estimate the effect of each of the six exposure variables, independently in a univariate model and interdependently in a multivariate model, on the odds ratio of the outcome of interest (Kirkwood and Sterne, 2003). The results offer some basic explanations of why certain girls marry before age 18 or 15 according to their background characteristics. Including an education exposure variable provides a preliminary view of the association between years of schooling and marital timing, suggesting whether trends emphasised in prior research (more years in school protecting against marriage by delaying marital timing) holds for this sample of women in North West Nigeria. The reference categories for the regressions are either those with the largest sample size or, for age, the youngest cohort (15-19 years). The variable religion is collapsed from five into three groups because 91% of North West women are Muslim; ethnicity is likewise collapsed from eight to three groups because 78% women are Hausa, 9% are Fulani and observations for other named ethnicities are fewer than 50; missing data for both these variables are excluded (<0.1%). The education variable is also collapsed (no formal schooling; primary school; secondary or higher) on the basis that by age 15 (the youngest age of women surveyed) all girls should have completed primary school but many, given late entry prevalence, will still be in Junior Secondary School.

The Nigeria DHS offers an important and insightful, but only partial, account of the girls' marriage-schooling relationship in Nigeria. Large sample sizes and high response rates enable some generalisability of trends and associations to be drawn at sub-national level, while data standardisation allows comparative comments to be made about data from different regions, states and between survey rounds. This enables general responses to why young women in the North West region, and in Kaduna state, marry young according to their sociodemographic characteristics. It also signals the extent to which 'being in school' confers delayed marital timing - and therefore a form of protection' in relation to early marriage - in these localities. However, DHS data are partial with inherent weaknesses (Chapter 3). In the North West region of Nigeria, and within Kaduna state (although to a lesser extent), variations in access to, and qualities of, formal schooling have a significant effect on school enrolment, attainment and learning outcomes. Educational attainment data are likely to be

affected in this locality by seasonal variations according to the Islamic calendar (periods of fasting and celebration) and/or livelihoods demands (seasonal farming / market selling), for example, that contribute to absenteeism or drop-out. Moreover, many adolescent girls in the North West attend non-formal Islamic schools, especially Islamiyya schools, part or full-time (Chapter 6). Neither DHS nor government education data counts participation in alternative educational institutions.

The implication of these gaps and weaknesses is to emphasise that analytical findings from the 2013 NDHS are useful but partial, including in consideration of the multiple complexities pertaining to access to formal schooling in the North West region, outlined above. Their usefulness is to generalise about the 'problem' of early marriage in Nigeria and specify that problem sub-nationally and to indicate areas of association for further enquiry. Qualitative research can deepen this information by providing opportunities to explore girls and young women's own accounts of marriage and formal schooling in situ. This includes expanding the concept of 'early marriage' beyond marital timing to consider spousal choice, premarital and marital experiences. It also offers the opportunity to consider quality facets of formal schooling that seem to be linked to marriage timing beyond inputs (years) and outputs (literacy). It is to the qualitative data of this thesis that the chapter now turns.

Dataset 2: Qualitative research of Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria

The 2011 qualitative research of ActionAid's Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria (TEGIN) project, comprising interviews, focus group discussions and case studies, form one qualitative dataset utilised by this thesis. These data are used to deepen analysis of the trends and factors associated with girls' marriage schooling that are identified in quantitative analyses through a close reading of girls' stories and the accounts of their families, teachers and other school staff in one specific state of Nigeria. This section describes when, where and how these data were collected and the ethical procedures; the composition of the data; preliminary findings of the original research team; my own data analysis process; and some challenges and opportunities of analysing qualitative material as secondary data.

Background and ethics

Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria (TEGIN) was implemented from June 2007 to June 2012 in a partnership between ActionAid International, ActionAid Nigeria and the Nigerian NGO Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP). This girls' education project worked in 72 primary and junior secondary schools (JSS) in eight states across northern Nigeria: Kaduna and Katsina (North West); Bauchi and Gombe (North East); and

the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Niger, Plateau and Nasarawa (North Central). The project aimed to enable girls to enrol and succeed in school by addressing key challenges and obstacles that hinder their participation and increase their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011).

Shortly after its inception, the project team collaborated with national and international research partners to design a mixed methods baseline study to collect data on girls' education in the eight states. The baseline study identified barriers to girls' access to and attainment in formal government schools and examined different accounts of these barriers by girls, families, teachers and education officials. Girls identified poverty, ill health and early marriage as the three main obstacles to achieving their desired level of education (ActionAid and IOE, 2011, p.10). Early marriage was highlighted by girls, head teachers and other adults as an obstacle to girls' schooling and the research findings emphasised that 'more needs to be known about how and why this is practised, and what it tells us about gender relations and schooling' (ibid., p.26).

Inspired by the baseline research findings, the project team designed a qualitative study to examine the links between school fees, early marriage and violence and girls' schooling. This research was piloted and conducted over three months from June to August 2011 led by academic researchers at the UCL Institute of Education and Usman Dan Fodiyo University in Sokoto, Nigeria. Kaduna state was selected as the location for this in-depth qualitative study because, the team reasoned, here TEGIN was working in areas where conditions were relatively supportive of girls' education but where schools and communities were demographically diverse, a combination which provided the best opportunity for 'understanding the processes at work in contexts where the provision of schooling is not the main issue' (IOE and ActionAid, 2011). In short, if formal schooling is accessible to all, do school fees, marriage and/or gender violence mediate whether and for how long girls access schooling.

Researchers purposively selected one primary school and one junior secondary school in each of two communities in two Local Government Areas in Kaduna state. One community was in the northern Senatorial zone of the state, headquartered in the major city of Zaria, with a majority Hausa Muslim population. The two schools sampled here are mixed sex government day schools in peri-urban locations, adjacent to the border with Katsina state and approximately 25 kilometres by road from Zaria. According to data assembled by CAPP in 2011, in the academic year 2010/11, the primary school (pseudonym 'Babban'²⁵) had a pupil population of 2,392 (Gender Parity Index 1.15) and the junior secondary school

²⁵ The pseudonyms allocated here are those that I have ascribed for this thesis.

(pseudonym 'Karkara') had 902 students (Gender Parity Index 0.65). The head teachers at both schools were male. The second community selected is in the southern Senatorial zone of Kaduna state, headquartered in Kafanchan city, approximately 300 kilometres by road from the northern community. The Local Government Area has a predominantly Christian, mixed ethnicity population. The two schools selected are in peri-urban/rural areas approximately 30km from Kafanchan and less than 100 kilometres from the Plateau state capital, Jos. According to data assembled by CAPP in 2011, in the academic year 2010/11, the primary school (pseudonym 'Tauraro') had a pupil population of 293 (Gender Parity Index 0.99) and the junior secondary school (pseudonym 'Hanya') had 600 students (Gender Parity Index 1.05). The primary school head teacher was male, and the junior secondary head teacher was female (Table 5.1).

The TEGIN study was carried out in compliance with the Economic and Social Research Council guidelines (2010) and ethical approval was granted by the Institute of Education in June 2011. Study participants gave verbal consent to contribute to the TEGIN research during a sampling visit to each community and at the beginning of each interview (Appendices C, D and E). Participants were assured of confidentiality by enumerators at sampling and interview stages, including a commitment by the research to use pseudonyms in analysis and reporting, obscure biographical details, and follow ActionAid International's child protection protocols.

Data composition

The data comprises structured interviews with head teachers, teachers, and chairpersons of the school-based management committee (SBMC), and selected girls and their family members. Three structured interview guides were developed by the research team for: (i) girls (Appendix C); (ii) girls' parents and husbands (Appendix D); (iii) head teachers, teachers, SBMC Chairpersons, and any other focus group discussions (Appendix E). The interview guides were piloted in June 2011 in a school in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). All interview questions start with basic biographies, moving to a set of questions organised thematically to probe challenges to school attendance including school fees (amounts, purpose, actions for non-compliance); marriage (attitudes, decision-making processes, interactions with schooling, support systems); and gender violence in and around schools. Additional focus group discussions with boys in school and girls in or out of school were conceived as 'extra' data to be gathered according to time and resource opportunities. No guidance was provided on the size or sampling of participants for these discussions²⁶.

²⁶ My transcriptions and analysis indicate that 3-6 children participated in each focus group discussion.

Interviews were conducted by trained Nigerian enumerators from 8th-12th August 2011. Enumerators worked in pairs under a designated lead interviewer who was usually female and a fluent Hausa speaker. All the interviews with girl case studies were done by a female interviewer. Interviews could be conducted in Hausa, English, and/or pidgin. They were audio recorded using hand-held devices and scheduled to take place in private for a maximum of one hour. [Table 5.1](#) gives the data collected by the research team that are used in this thesis²⁷.

Table 5.1 TEGIN qualitative data, Kaduna state, August 2011

Senatorial HQ	Northern (Zaria)		Southern (Kafanchan)	
School pseudonym ²⁸	Babban primary	Karkara junior secondary	Tauraro primary	Hanya junior secondary
Pupil population (2010-11)	2,392	902	293	600
Head teacher	Male	Male	Male	Female
Interviews	Head teacher Teacher	Head teacher Teacher School-based Management Committee Chair	Head teacher Teacher	Head teacher Teacher School-based Management Committee Chair
Focus Group Discussions	Girls in school Boys in school	Girls out of school Boys in school	Girls in school Boys in school	Girls out of school ²⁹ Boys in school
Case Studies	Girl A	Girl A Girl D	Girl E	Girl A Girl B Girl C Girl D

The research focussed on gathering in-depth interviews with adolescent girls. To guide sampling and tailor interviews, the researchers designed a typology of five different ‘types’ of girls to sample as case studies, covering a range of experiences of schooling, marriage and fees ([Table 5.1](#) and [5.2](#)):

(A) a girl who had never dropped out of school;

²⁷ I have not used all data collected from the original study in this thesis. The reasons for this are given later in the chapter. For clarity, Table 5.1 only lists the data used by this thesis.

²⁸ The pseudonyms have relevant meanings in Hausa: ‘babban’ means ‘big’; ‘karkara’ - ‘rural’; ‘tauraro’ - star; ‘hanya’ - ‘road’.

²⁹ Girls out-of-school in Hanya and Karkara communities had all been out of school for between one to four years at the time of interview.

- (B) a girl who had dropped out, married, and returned to school in less than 1 year;
- (C) a girl who had dropped out, married, and returned to school after more than 1 year;
- (D) a girl who had dropped out for marriage and never returned to school; and
- (E) a girl who had dropped out due to school fees or levies.

Interviews with girls identified across the typology were intended to be complemented, where possible, with an interview (also in private) with the girl’s family members. Collectively, these interviews would comprise family case studies. However, enumerators struggled to find girls matching each ‘type’ in every community and concluded the study with eight of an intended 20 case studies, only five of which have complementary interviews with family members. Six of the eight case studies were obtained from junior secondary school communities ([Table 5.2](#)). In addition, the TEGIN research study, by design, did not sample girls who had never enrolled in school. Never-enrolled girls are highly likely to constitute a significant proportion of girls who marry early in a poverty context like Kaduna state. This is a limitation to a full analysis of marriage and schooling but complements the original aim of this thesis to examine the schooling-marriage nexus for girls who have ever attended school.

Table 5.2 Girl case studies

Zone	School	Case study girls³⁰
Northern Kaduna state	Babban primary	A: Nafisah - Nafisah’s father
	Karkara junior secondary	A: Hadiza D: Nana
Southern Kaduna state	Tauraro primary	E: Sarah - Sarah’s mother
	Hanya junior secondary	A: Aissata B: Mercy - Mercy’s father - Mercy’s brother C: Dorothy - Dorothy’s mother - Dorothy’s husband D: Zahrah - Zahrah’s father

³⁰ All case study girls have been given a pseudonym that resonates with their real name and social identity.

Fieldwork challenges and preliminary findings

Data gathering challenges emerged in each school and were summarised in the team field report (Appendix F) submitted in August 2011 by CAPP. This field report notes that the timing of the study during the August school holidays had a detrimental impact on the accessibility and availability of girls and family members for interview. In northern Kaduna state where the majority population are Muslim, access to girls and their families was constrained because the research took place during Ramadan when Muslim families were fasting and participating in special activities. This explained the lack of interviews with family members³¹.

Head teachers, teachers and SBMC chairpersons were all interviewed in private in school settings. However, case study interviews with girls varied in terms of their location and privacy due to the school holiday period. The field report notes that girls' and young women were interviewed in private rooms in their homes but that 'there was lots of interference from children and other family members which affected concentration'. Academic researchers have noted the significance of where respondents are interviewed, especially for research on sensitive topics, and how the location of an interview affects the participant's sense of identity at that moment (Akinbobola, 2020, p.51), their safety, comfort and sense of control (Dempsey et al., 2016, p.484).

The field report also notes difficulties with the length and respondent comprehension of the questions. The interviews were intended to take one hour, but reportedly took at least 2 hours, in addition to which enumerators found the questions complex and difficult to translate or simplify for clarity, particularly for the case study girls³². Lastly, the report stated that very few primary school girls get married in either northern or southern Kaduna state, so case studies B, C and D were not pursued in the two primary schools. Enumerators did capture a full complement of ten individual interviews in schools with head teachers, teachers and SBMC Chairpersons³³ (Table 5.2).

When the TEGIN project ended in June 2012, data from the 2011 qualitative study had been only partially analysed by the research team. The reasons for this comprised a combination of resource constraints, research personnel changes, and the paucity and patchwork of data gathered compared to the intentions of the study. The field work report had been completed.

³¹ It was not possible to elicit from the original enumerators' further reasons for missing family interviews but anecdotally they include refusal to participate and persons deceased.

³² For example, a note in the transcript of the interview with Aissata records: '*Question and tape stops and starts as interviewer asks two wrong questions from the guide*'.

³³ Primary schools in northern Nigeria did not, in 2011, have school-based management committees (SBMCs).

Cassette tape audio recordings of each interview or focus group conducted had been collected and labelled (school/respondent) by CAPP staff. English language transcripts (or summaries) of interviews and focus group discussions were made by enumerators during fieldwork. However, as I discuss in the next section, there were discrepancies between data reportedly gathered (according to the field report) and those made available as well as in audio and textual data quality.

Secondary analysis of TEGIN data

The TEGIN study focussed on girls' accounts of their formal schooling and whether and how processes and practices associated with their schooling and daily lives affected their attendance or experience of education. This focus complements the aims of this thesis. There was also a personal symbiosis between this thesis and the TEGIN study by virtue of my former employment with ActionAid International as the International Project Manager of the TEGIN project between 2010 and 2012. I was involved in the qualitative study's design and logistics, supporting and overseeing data gathering remotely having already visited TEGIN project partners and some communities and schools previously. This meant that I have some additional insight into the communities, process and outcomes of the research study, and its potential to offer rich data for further study. The in-depth interviews with girls, enriched by data from focus groups with other girls and interviews with family members and school staff, offer rich and under-explored data with which to explore opinions and accounts of the schooling-marriage nexus for adolescent girls in northern Nigeria. For this thesis, I wanted to use these data deliberately to foreground the narratives of girls and women on marriage and schooling, establishing themes and issues against which to consider other qualitative data as well as data of the Nigeria DHS. I aimed to use TEGIN data to develop ideas about how particular characteristics of women might predispose them to early age at marriage, building on associations developed through analysis of the Nigeria DHS, and expand from the NDHS data on ideas about meanings of marriage and the role of formal schooling in girls' marital expectations and experiences, going beyond years in school to consider girls ideas about the facets of education that are important to them. School staff data would frame girls accounts, offering insights into adult perceptions of marriage and schools' responsibilities for and responses to adolescent girls' needs, aspirations, and experiences. The TEGIN data were thus significant to the inception and development of the thesis.

In February 2014 I was granted access to, and received, 60 hard copy TEGIN audio cassettes and 45 electronic transcripts or textual files, labelled by school, from ActionAid Nigeria (Appendix G). This set of audio recordings comprised the original interviews in English, Hausa and/or pidgin. In March 2014 I began engaging and familiarising myself with

the audio data by listening to all the original recordings in any language to confirm that the audio was of sufficient quality to retain for translation/transcription and analysis. After this first iteration of listening, 16 damaged tapes were discarded, and the remaining 44 tapes were re-labelled by Zone, LGA, School, Respondent type, language, and duration, with brief separate notes of sound quality (clarity of voice, interruptions or breaks, background noise), and interviewer and participant biographies. The next stage involved matching original transcripts and texts made by Nigerian enumerators to the audio files: 37 audio files were matched to a transcript or text. These 37 matched files became the basis for analysis ([Tables 5.1](#) and [5.2](#)) uploaded as digital .aup files using Audacity software and cleaned to minimise technical interferences and background disturbances.

From March 2014 to March 2015 the TEGIN data were re-transcribed and analysed. I completed all re-transcriptions of the audio files in English, which comprised all eight head teacher and teacher interviews, as well as English language parts of three girls' interviews (Nafisah, Aissata, Dorothy). I recruited two experienced and independent translators, both academics from northern Nigeria, to translate and re-transcribe interviews in Hausa and/or pidgin³⁴. As the thesis prioritises girls' accounts, these translators concentrated on high-quality transcriptions for the interviews with the eight case study girls, especially those who had already experienced marriage (Nana, Mercy, Dorothy and Zahrah) and their family members. The translators subsequently worked on the focus group and SBMC chairpersons' audio files. Participating in a beginners' Hausa language course at SOAS in 2015 made it possible to discuss key words, phrases and concepts with these experts during the transcription process, and they gave insights into Hausa popular phrases and idioms and linguistic nuances, including related to marriage. In the data analysis chapters, Hausa words or phrases are provided with a footnote of translation and interpretation. Nnaemeka has insisted the importance for indigenous knowledge production of locally rooted signification through naming (Nnaemeka, 2004), which I argue comes to the fore in discourses on 'early marriage' in North West Nigeria.

Once the transcripts had all been analysed, and specific transcripts and smaller extracts had been drawn out for likely inclusion in the writing-up of the thesis, those transcripts were checked and refined with a third independent translator in 2017. This process aimed to reconfirm, add detail and make meaning of all those extracts. All three collaborators (Appendix H) brought depth, understanding and commitment to this work, despite time and resource constraints, and facilitated refining an understanding of context, interpretation of words and tone, and meaning making. Translation and transcription were an iterative, multi-

³⁴ Translation services were guided by Service and Confidentiality Agreements (Appendices J and K)

layered, collaborative and dialogic process. The efficiency of the re-transcription process depended to a great extent on the form and quality of the original transcripts and accompanying texts. In cases where the original transcripts were verbatim and clearly written in English, the process more simply involved simultaneous listening and reading, editing the original transcript with alternative translations, slight adjustments, notations, or simply for spelling and grammar. In the remaining cases, the original texts were not transcripts but rather summaries of interviews, in bullet point form or heavily abbreviated. This required more significant work, but the original text remained useful. The rigour and commitment to secondary analysis of these qualitative data aims to enhance its credibility and reliability.

Once all data were transcribed into English, a combination of hand and NVivo coding was done to identify keywords, themes and start making meaning from the data. The starting point was the themes of the original research – adolescent girls; early marriage; education - which were grouped as level 1, *a priori*, codes. To these codes, themes arising from the literature review, conceptual framing and research questions were inductively added. For example, the *a priori* code 'early marriage' was refined into sub-codes 'early adolescent marriage' (<15) and 'later adolescent marriage' (<18). Sub-codes associated with forms of agency (aspiration; speaking out; eloping; negotiating) were also added (Appendix I). This was a start at understanding what the words used by interviewees 'are being used to mean and do' (Hammersley, 2010, 4.8). A sample of five transcripts of different interview types were uploaded to NVivo to check and enhance the systematisation of hand coding and verify and assess the quality of hand-coding work. Hand coding was deliberately prioritised in an attempt to get close to the data, to the intertextual, interpersonal and socio-political context of the dialogues that had taken place.

The analysis of interviews took on elements of thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis. Even in the early stages of listening to the TEGIN data, and then in transcribing, I was alert to, and making notes of, key themes. This thematic analysis complemented the coding process. Themes and patterns were drawn out from the transcripts and developed and refined in the analytical process which develop and refine data analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2006). As I am interested in this thesis in girls' stories, and how others also narrate experiences or expectations of the schooling-marriage nexus, narrative analysis harmonises with this intention through its emphasis on how stories are told in their local contexts, how they represent series of events and harness cultural discourses (Silverman, 2011; Schutt, 2012, p.338). However, the duration and richness of the narratives in the TEGIN data are affected by regular interjections of interviewers, who ask questions, make clarifications or corrections,

or hasten the respondent along, all moments that shift and pivot the participant's narrative. Discourse analysis was also useful then to recall and recognise that the interviewer-participant were also engaged in a social relationship that was affecting the narrative being told. Discourse analysis emphasises that social relationships influence attitudes and behaviours and that what we think, feel and how we behave changes and can be contradictory, during and beyond research (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007). This illuminated that, while some girls and other participants talked about their experiences, navigations and negotiations of schooling and marriage prior to the interview, those social processes of navigation and negotiation were also being enacted during the interviews, which were themselves processes of – explicitly and implicitly - negotiating and co-constructing meaning (ibid.). These ideas about *negotiating* meaning and behaviours were particularly important to experience and consider in view of ideas and approaches to research that emerged during the literature review (Chapter 3) and conceptual development of ideas of female agency (Chapter 4). Following the imperatives of feminist research and complementarity to the demands of African feminist scholars to pay attention to indigenous voices and experiences, I also wanted to genuinely listen to the Kaduna girls' voices and their how they are presenting themselves, even as a preliminary exploration of their experiences and what they might mean. Retaining key words in context was imperative to the study's intention to remain locally rooted in its interpretation of data. Indeed, awareness of the parameters of the girls' interviews informed the approach to rigour handling their data – because these interviews are few, they are subjective accounts within a specific socio-political context, and they are not representative, this rationalises handling these data with care and as well as caution. Presenting the girls accounts, however, offers the possibility of considering a set of experiences of marriage and schooling in context.

Ethical considerations of secondary qualitative analysis

Ethical approval for secondary analysis of TEGIN qualitative data was granted by the UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee in August 2014. Access to the TEGIN data was through informal data sharing by virtue of my former role on the TEGIN project (Heaton, 2008, p.35). The benefit of this informality is (potential) access to the primary researchers and knowledge about the study but it also means that the data have not been organised for archiving and secondary analysis. Participant consent was not re-ascertained for the secondary analysis of their interviews but has been assumed based on a 'defensible judgement' (Thorne, 1998, p.551). This judgement is based on (i) the parameters of original consent in which a notion of reasonably informed consent covers secondary analysis, (ii) the complementarity or 'fit' between the original themes, concepts, and research questions of the TEGIN study and those of this secondary analysis, (iii) a commitment to stay close and

faithful to the data in analysis and (iv) an ethical approach to do no harm (ibid., p.552; Hammersley, 2010).

Secondary analysis of quantitative data such as DHS is generally 'respected, common, and cost-effective' (Hinds et al., 1997, p.408) but qualitative secondary analysis (QSA), especially of NGO data, has been relatively uncommon (ibid.; Hammersley, 2010; Long-Sutehall et al., 2011; Masefield et al., 2020). It can range from original or new researchers re-appropriating original data to verify original findings; investigating new research questions; focusing on a different unit of analysis; supplementing primary research; or conducting comparative work (Hinds et al., 1997; Thorne, 1998; Heaton, 2008; Long-Sutehall et al., 2011). Essentially, QSA involves 'revisiting and reworking' 'actual data' (Heaton, 2008, p.34-5), and there are myriad limitations and opportunities in this process. One of the main opportunities was the accessibility and research 'fit' of these under-examined data. Yet despite the overlapping and complementary themes and question areas of TEGIN and this thesis, I became increasingly aware in the process of revisiting these data that the prior agenda, concepts and design of the TEGIN study did not precisely match my own evolving ideas. I could not influence who participated, what was asked or the way the interviews were conducted and so the data are laden with the concepts, assumptions, and priorities of TEGIN rather than my own.

A specific ethical consideration also informed my use of these data. An escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2013 and 2014 in which northern Nigerian schoolgirls were specifically targeted in kidnappings and markets and religious buildings were also attacked (Chapter 6), precipitated the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office to advise against all but essential travel to most northern states including Kaduna state³⁵. This meant that any fieldwork I had planned to undertake for this thesis was unlikely to be ethically approved or practically plausible. However, using the TEGIN data was also proactive ethical decision. Methodologists have argued that QSA is ethically defensible and beneficial for researchers of vulnerable and marginalised populations that are difficult to access (Fielding, 2004, p.100; Long-Sutehall et al., 2011, p.336). This thesis on adolescent marriages in North West Nigeria encompasses both a vulnerable study population and sensitive location where negotiating access, building mutual relationships and pursuing ethical obligations may be particularly challenging (Parkes, 2005). By utilising existing data, participant exposure is reduced, in this case meaning that girls have not been repeatedly burdened by questioning on a sensitive and controversial topic. Thus, the decision not to re-expose was in the best

³⁵ See <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/nigeria>. Last accessed 30 May 2017.

interests of the participants as well as recognising and enhancing the efforts and results of the original research.

A key concern of drawing on TEGIN data was to validate their trustworthiness, credibility, and reliability. Concerns with verifying data tend to come from a positivist epistemology but are grounded by the importance of enhancing the credibility of research (Fielding, 2004). These issues can be exacerbated in research on sensitive topics such as early marriage (van den Berg, 2008, p.182). Data inconsistencies may be rooted in assumed or actual prejudices, social or political biases, and are fundamentally about the 'barriers between front and backstage behaviour', or between what respondents say they do and what they actually do (Camfield and Palmer-Jones, 2013, p.326). In analysing the data, I was very concerned with these issues, and how to not exacerbate biases in data handling and the analytical process. Translation and transcription were long and challenging processes. These processes are practical exercises, but are also theoretical entailing a set of assumptions and an approach to data (van den Berg, 2008, p.183). Temporal distance from the data improved, I believe the objectivity of my approach to interpretation, including through moving away from the original study agenda and concepts. Yet handling TEGIN data brought to the fore my unique relationship with these data – one of proximity and distance, objectivity and emotional attachment. I recognised these data (due to my former relationship to the research, researchers, and communities) but, three years later, 'listening to taped interviews of interactions evoke[d] strong emotional responses' (Hinds et al., 1997, p.414). My expectations were insufficient against the narratives and accounts presented: I had not, for example, adequately anticipated the wide arc of experiences from violence to love and elopement that girls narrated. These data thus became renewed and could be handled as such for the analytical purposes of this thesis.

The TEGIN data offered a good, but partial, set of interviews with which to complement and consider trends and ideas emerging from the NDHS analysis. The fact that the TEGIN research design and delivery followed protocols of rigour in design and delivery of the data, including pilot testing and enumerator training, in addition to which this thesis resourced independent translation and transcription, facilitates my conclusion that the data provide credible and reliable insights into girls' lives – their schooling and marriage expectations and experiences, in Kaduna state in 2011. However, the TEGIN study only collected data in schools and communities with no data from education policy makers and influencers at local, state, or national levels who are intimately implicated in discourses around marriage and schooling and, especially, educational responses to adolescent girls, marriage, and education. This gap catalysed the design and collection of another qualitative dataset

specifically to explore policy makers and influencers accounts of girls' marriages and schooling in Kaduna state. The following section describes these data.

Dataset 3: Qualitative research with policy makers and influencers

Remote interviews with policy makers and influencers, Nigerian and non-Nigerians living in Nigeria, form the third dataset of primary qualitative data. These interviews were conducted by me during the period 2015 to 2017 and have been used to explore policy perspectives on why school-age girls marry and whether and how schooling is protective in relation to marriage. This section describes when, where and how the data was collected; the ethical procedures; the composition of the data and the analytical process.

Background and ethics

Between July 2015 and March 2017 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype with fourteen policy makers and influencers working at different tiers of the Nigerian government and non-government institutions. The intention behind this data collection was that interviewing those responsible for designing, developing, and delivering on legal and policy frameworks pertaining to girls' education and marriage would reveal some of the discourses, attitudes, issues, and opportunities associated with adolescent girls' marriage and schooling in North West Nigeria, specifically Kaduna state. This primary qualitative research was approved by the IOE Ethics Committee in May 2015 (Appendix L³⁶).

Participant sampling was purposive and snowballed based on personal networks. An initial sample of twelve respondents were identified in liaison with CAPP and ActionAid Nigeria and through personal contacts in the development assistance community engaged with girls' education and gender equality. Of these twelve, eight granted interviews and one nominated a colleague to participate. Participant consent was gained through a written Letter of Introduction and Confidentiality Agreement tailored to each respondent requiring interviewer and interviewee signing and dating (Appendices M and N). Each interview began by the interviewer (myself) restating the purpose of the interview and requesting verbal consent, including for the interview to be audio recorded. Consent and confidentiality were assured in writing and verbally.

A semi-structured interview guide of 15 open-ended questions was designed to probe participants' attitudes, knowledge and experiences of girls' schooling, early marriage and related policy in North West Nigeria and Kaduna state. Using the TEGIN interview guides as

³⁶ Appendix L gives the research summary and ethical issues extracted from the Ethics Application.

a foundation, these questions were developed to *link and expand* on emergent findings from preliminary analyses of the quantitative Nigeria DHS data and the qualitative TEGIN data. I was especially interested in policy makers and influencers' knowledge of education sector guidance pertaining to marriage; their perceptions of the connection between marriage and schooling (and how they echo or diverge from teachers, families, and girls); and anecdotes of girls navigating education and marriage. The questions begin with a series of factual and descriptive questions, moving towards probing respondents' attitudes towards and experiences of education and marriage policy and practices (Appendix O). They were conducted in English and designed to last no longer than one hour.

Interviews were designed for remote completion (via Skype or telephone) due to geopolitical and resource constraints³⁷. Remote interviewing of policy makers and influencers minimised the burden on their time during an era of political change, as well as addressing resource constraints associated with face-to-face international meetings. But remote interviews also presented challenges of sound interference, time lags, crackling or sudden call failures. Just as with qualitative secondary analysis, remote interviewing can also limit the researcher's capacity for tacit information and understanding manifest through gestures and body language, making data more difficult to interpret. To mitigate these challenges, the interview guide was sent to participants in advance of the call. This meant that participants had the opportunity to ask questions about the interview in advance, clarify any questions, or concerns with the research process.

Nine interviews had been completed by August 2015 (Table 5.3). Initial approaches had failed to secure interviews with representatives of the Federal Ministry of Education and the LGAs in which TEGIN had worked. Timing was largely responsible for these delays: invitations to interview were initially sent shortly after Nigeria's general election of March 2015, which resulted in the first ever defeat of an incumbent president and transfer of power from one party to another, from a southern Christian, Goodluck Jonathan, to a northern Muslim and previous leader of a 1980s *coup d'état*, Muhammadu Buhari, a seismic political shift. Political ramifications included the movement of civil servants across and out of posts at all tiers of government. These ramifications were felt throughout 2015 and 2016, affecting the accessibility and availability of government respondents. These interviews were pursued in 2016 and secured between November 2016 and March 2017 in addition to one further interview with a prominent education INGO. A total of fourteen interviews were completed. Interviews with all respondents, but particularly with federal and local government officials, are imbued by political transition and its effects on policy discourses and practices. The

³⁷ Including ongoing UK FCO advice against all but essential travel to North West states

years 2015 and 2016 were a transitional period with significant movements of people, ideas and values.

Table 5.3 Policy makers and influencers interviewed, 2015-2017

Pseudonym	Type of Affiliation	Sex	Interview date
Eunice	Kaduna State Government	Female	July 2015
Damola	Kaduna State Government	Male	July 2015
Maddie	UN agency	Female	July 2015
Herbert	UN agency	Male	June 2015
Monifa	Donor agency	Female	July 2015
Lisa	Donor agency	Female	July 2015
Gaddo	Donor agency	Male	June 2015
Aisha	Development programme (bilateral)	Female	June 2015
Fatmata	Development programme (bilateral)	Female	June 2015
Mamman	International organisation	Male	November 2016
Amina	Federal Government	Female	November 2016
Husaina	Federal Government	Female	December 2016
Yakubu	Kaduna Local Government	Male	March 2017
Hassan	Kaduna Local Government	Male	March 2017

Analysing policy data

All respondents authorised audio recordings, which were transcribed immediately following each interview. Interview notes were attached to the audio and transcript files. Learning from the process of analysing TEGIN interviews, my analysis of these data pursued a similar process of inductive, intuitive, and methodical hand coding to generate clusters of themes

and meaning, which were verified by a sample of three interviews uploaded for analysis to NVivo. For this dataset, *a priori* and emergent codes developed out of the literature review and conceptual approach as well as emerging findings from the TEGIN and NDHS data analysis. As this was a smaller dataset, themes and sub-themes were easier to develop and consider across policy interviews and the NDHS and TEGIN data. Interestingly, the geospatial and social distance of telephone interviewing established a unique balance of rapport and anonymity between researcher and respondent that encouraged some free and frank dialogues, including personal stories and confidences, contest, interjections and invitations.

These interviews with policy makers and influencers 'complete the picture' of accounts of girls' schooling and marriage in northern Nigeria. These data enable me to consider the associations described by NDHS data with the accounts and experiences of girls, families, and school staff in TEGIN data with policy perspectives to consider the gamut of expectations, experiences, attitudes and discourses on girls, schooling and marriage in Kaduna state.

Some methodological implications, and in conclusion

In each chapter thus far, I have emphasised the salience of contextual appreciation for interpreting and making claims about adolescent girls' marriages and formal schooling and the interrelationship between the two. Such appreciation is particularly, though not exclusively, important to qualitative researchers many of whom underline the importance of 'being there' to understanding, interpreting and making meaning of research data (Mauthner et al., 1998; Hammersley, 2010) and having as much information about the geopolitical, sociocultural and local context as possible (Fielding, 2004). While I agree wholeheartedly with these ideals, it is also the case that none of the data for this thesis was collected by me, in person, in Nigeria. Throughout this chapter I have discussed, for each dataset, the specific strengths and weaknesses of the data and analytical procedures undertaken, describing ways in which I offset challenges and harnessed strengths or opportunities, through personal and professional affiliations; access to fieldnotes; being alert and responsive to cultural and linguistic contexts – gathering contextual information and taking 'actions that help the researchers feel close to a condition of "having been there"' (Hinds et al., 1997, p.414).

There is both precedence and commentary of the types of methodological moves I have made in this thesis. I have suggested that the dichotomy, or 'polarised language of dualism' (Bishop, 2007, 11.5), between primary and secondary research can easily become blurred (Camfield and Palmer-Jones, 2013; Thin, 2013) as a result of different forms of temporal,

spatial, social and emotional distance: the TEGIN data is secondary but I have seen and met many of the persons and communities involved, while the policy data is 'primary' but I have neither met nor seen any of those respondents. During analysis and interpretation of each dataset and the whole gamut of data used in this thesis concurrent moves to get close to and attain critical distance from these data resulted in a fluidity of my positioning around the primary/secondary dichotomy.

My positionality in relation to the tripartite set of data of this thesis is not uncommon in international development research in which 'data production and analysis are often separated' (Camfield and Palmer-Jones, 2013, p.324) with national staff and enumerators collecting data and international researchers being tasked with their analyses and interpretation (even if in collaboration with country teams, as with TEGIN research). The effect of this procedure is that 'most development research is essentially secondary analysis' (ibid., p.327). I believe that recognition of these incremental ways data and researchers gather distance is important, but it need not be to the detriment of effective, insightful and contextually appreciative research provided, following Nnaemeka, that one's positionality is constantly interrogated, 'from the social and personal to the intellectual and political—as an active subject location of shifting reciprocity where meaning is made and not an essentialized location where meaning is discovered' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.361). In the Conclusion (Chapter 11) I argue for and advance these interlinked ideas about positionality and methodology, and the distinctive value and potential of secondary analysis of qualitative (and quantitative) data in a Covid-19 world.

In this chapter I have presented my mixed methods research design and the three datasets utilised by this thesis, including how, when and by whom data were gathered and my analytical and interpretative methods. I have argued that this thesis' mixed methods design that connects qualitative and quantitative methods through three different sets of data allows us to see both *distinct* forms of the relationship between adolescent girls' marriage and schooling in Nigeria *within* either quantitative or qualitative data separately and to see *complementary* or *resonant* forms of the relationship *across* methods and data. This enhanced ability to elicit evidence about Nigerian girls' marriage and schooling *within and across*, which is enabled by a mixed methods design, means that the interpretations drawn from data in this thesis can reflect upon generalisable and locally specific information in combination to draw more comprehensive and nuanced (than single method studies) conclusions about the 'negotiated realities' of adolescent girls' lives, marriages and schooling.

While this chapter has built on prior chapters' engagement with the Nigerian country context by describing some of the characteristics of Nigeria and Kaduna state pertinent to the thesis' methods, I have yet to offer a detailed portrait of Nigeria. The following chapter offers this portrait of Nigeria: The Giant of Africa before I turn to analysing the data of this thesis in chapters 7-10.

Chapter 6. The ‘Giant of Africa’: education, marriage, and the politics of inequality in Nigeria

The previous chapters have established the study location of this thesis as Nigeria. Known as the ‘Giant of Africa’ for its large population and economy, studies of the Federal Republic of Nigeria reiterate the adjectives large, diverse, corrupt and conflict-affected (Falola and Heaton, 2008; British Council, 2012; Pereira, 2009; Moland, 2015). This chapter provides an overview of Nigeria’s political, economic and social conditions since independence from British colonial rule in 1960 examining features of the Nigerian state, from colonialism to the present day, that perpetuate and entrench inequalities, particularly educational and gender inequalities. The Introduction of the thesis outlined briefly that challenges faced in the provision of education by the Nigerian state, and unequal gendered access, experiences and outcomes of formal schooling, intersect with broader issues of gender inequality and sociocultural norms. Following the overview section, the chapter develops this analysis by examining the processes and practices associated, firstly with early marriage and, secondly, with basic education and subsequently on their convergences in policies and practices.

An overview of the ‘Giant of Africa’

Nigeria is the most populated country in Sub-Saharan Africa, home to an estimated 202 million people (World Bank, 2020). It is a young population: the median age is 18.6 years and over 60% of the population is under 24 years of age (Index Mundi, 2020). There are 389 different ethnic groups, the three largest of which – the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba – are estimated to comprise less than 25% each of the total population (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.4; Adeleye et al., 2014, p.3, Moland, 2015, p.365)³⁸. Ethnic diversity is complemented by linguistic and religious diversity: English is the official language but over 500 indigenous languages are spoken; and while there is a near equal divide between Christians and Muslims, followers practice diverse forms of Christianity and Islam, as well as pursuing spiritual and traditional beliefs (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.3; CIA, 2019). Religion and ethnicity broadly intersect: the majority of Hausa-Fulani in the North are Muslim, as a result of fourteenth century Islamic trading influences while Southern Yoruba and Igbo populations are largely Christian, as a result of colonial missionary activities (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.29; Sampson, 2014, p.105). However, there are Christian populations in the North and Muslim populations in the South (CIA, 2019; Dunne et al., 2020, p.1125). Nigeria is a

³⁸ Establishing the population size of different ethnic groups in Nigeria is very politically sensitive and no reliable data on this exist.

federation of 36 states and one Federal Capital Territory (FCT), grouped into six geopolitical zones³⁹. From independence in October 1960 to the inception of democratic governance in 1999, military rule dominated (Falola and Heaton, 2008; Pereira, 2009). Since 1999, successive governments have attempted democratic reform and the construction of a unified Nigeria but the debate about what Nigeria is and who Nigerians are continues (Falola and Heaton, 2008; Egiegba Agigboba, 2013; Dunne et al., 2020).

Since independence, Nigeria has grown to become one of the largest economies in Africa, boasting a high GDP per capita, and abundant material and human resources (UNESCO, 2013; O'Neill, 2014; CIA, 2019). Taking account of its large and young population, strong growth rates, entrepreneurialism and emerging middle class, in 2009 the Nigerian government launched a bold strategic plan 'Vision 20:2020' that aimed to develop the country into one of the top 20 economies in the world (National Planning Commission, 2009; World Bank, 2011). In 2015 Nigeria was reclassified as a lower middle-income country (Northcote, 2017), signalling its progress in human development and poverty reduction but with potentially negative effects on donor support (ibid.). A major percentage of national revenues (around 80 per cent in 2015) are derived from the rent paid by foreign oil companies mining petroleum in the southern Niger delta (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.182; Moland, 2015). Government revenues for public services are highly dependent on oil and vulnerable to global price fluctuations (CIA, 2019). In 1981, petroleum prices dropped worldwide plunging Nigeria into a recession lasting a decade. The oil wealth of the 1970s had made government officials extremely corrupt and lacking accountability to their citizenry (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.183; Pereira, 2009), so the then-government responded to the 1981 recession by taking foreign aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Saudi Arabia. External debt rose to \$18 billion by 1983 (Falola and Heaton, 2008, pp.203–4). In 1986, Nigeria instituted Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) measures but without the accompanying IMF loan, ostensibly to retain its own terms and control over the SAP process (ibid., p.217). The SAP led to increased unemployment and inflation, making it difficult for Nigerians to purchase basic household items (ibid., p.219). Government expenditure on social services declined contributing to a significant lowering of the quantity and quality of public health and education provision during the 1980s and 1990s (ibid.). In 2006, Nigeria agreed a debt repayment of \$12.4 billion in exchange for the cancellation of \$30 billion foreign debt. However, Nigeria's external debt stock is continually rising in the twentieth century, exacerbated by another sharp drop in global oil prices in 2015, which sent the country into recession, and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. In 2020 Nigeria's external debt

³⁹ These zones, or regions, are the South East, South South (also known as the Niger Delta), South West, North Central, North East, and North West.

stands at around \$40 billion (IMF and IDA, 2015; IMF, 2020; World Bank, 2020). This debt has major negative implications on national development and the provision of public services, particularly education (Odukoya et al., 2018; Robinson and Hussein, 2021 forthcoming).

High levels of government corruption (Transparency International, 2017), uneven distribution of oil wealth (Moland, 2015), public debt and highly complex processes of drawing down revenues means that 'the vast majority of the citizenry are excluded from the possibilities of development' (Pereira, 2009b, p.85). In 2018, an estimated 40% of the population (83 million people) were living below the international poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019; World Bank, 2019). With Covid-19 many more million people could fall into poverty (World Bank, 2020). The latest Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.539 puts Nigeria in the 'low human development' category alongside Rwanda (UNDP, 2020, p.243). When the HDI is adjusted to take account of inequality in the distribution of human development across the population, the Inequality HDI (IDHI) falls to 0.348, several rankings lower than Rwanda (ibid.). The inequity in human development is highlighted by heterogeneous experiences of poverty, which is markedly higher in rural areas and in the North West region (British Council, 2012, p.10; Enfield, 2019; UNDP, 2020). This disparity is a reminder of a historic North-South divide and the heterogeneous experiences of 'Nigerians'. During colonialism, the British policy of 'indirect rule' in Northern Nigeria (1900-1912) maintained the rule and power of existing leaders, systems and practices, including patrilineal early marriage, seclusion, and bride-price (Salamone, 2010, p.3). In 'the interests of both parsimony and cultural preservation' colonial expenditure on social services, including education, was forbidden in the North (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.116) and Christian missionary access severely restricted (Harris, 2013, p.287). By independence the North and South were dramatically different in terms of culture, local politics, education, social and economic development (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.116; Salamone, 2010, p.19; Harris, 2013, p.287).

The legacy of colonial policies has exacerbated ethnic and religious rivalries and civil unrest (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.209). For example, when Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 under President General Obasanjo, twelve northern states adopted Shari'a Law creating fear amongst Christians that (Sunni) Muslims were attempting to turn Nigeria into an Islamic state (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.238; Moland, 2015). The (informal) alternate transfer of presidential power between southern Christians and northern Muslims, such as in 2015 when Nigeria completed its first peaceful and democratic handover of power from Goodluck Jonathan (a Christian from the Niger Delta) to Muhammadu Buhari (a Muslim from Katsina state) is indicative of the deep and delicate processes of balancing ethno-religious tensions. Nigeria has been described as a 'profoundly religious nation' (Dunne et al., 2020,

p.1136), and strength of religious conviction has contributed to tensions between Christians and Muslims, from diverse ethnic groups, which periodically explode into violence across Nigeria, especially in northern states.

Kaduna state in the North West region is the third largest state by population (after Lagos and Kano) with a population of approximately 8 million (National Population Commission, n.d.)⁴⁰. The state has a pre-SAP history of robust employment in textiles and oil (Harris, 2013, p.287). Northern Kaduna's population is mostly Hausa-Fulani Muslim while southern Kaduna is multi-ethnic and predominantly Christian (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p.39). This ethnic and religious diversity has contributed to the state's rich culture and strong education opportunity, but is also implicated in severe civil violence in Kaduna state (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Alao and Mavalla, 2016): in 2000, disputes over the adoption of Shari'a Law led to over 5000 deaths in the state (Harris, 2013, p.291); in 2011, 2015 and 2019, pre- and post-election riots left hundreds dead (Angerbrandt, 2018); in 2012, 2014 and 2015 suicide bombs at religious gatherings and local government buildings left hundreds dead; and the kidnapping and murder of children and young people at schools and universities by armed groups has escalated during 2020-2021 (BBC World News, 2021). Uneven distribution of infrastructure and public services across Kaduna state, combined with high levels of youth unemployment (over 50%), contests over land rights, religious-based fears, and a culture of impunity of perpetrators of violence, have combined to perpetuate Kaduna state's conflict (Harris, 2013; Amnesty International, 2020a).

The disparity that marks diverse populations' access to wealth, public goods and services is exacerbated at the intersection with gender: women in Nigeria 'form an underclass' (British Council, 2012, p.6). Gender inequality is neither static nor does it affect all women in the same way but it is endemic across politics, economics and society as a cause and product of poverty and underdevelopment (British Council, 2012, p.2; Para-Mallam, 2017, p.23). In terms of political conditions and opportunity, the 2008 CEDAW Shadow report emphasises that the 'political climate is not gender friendly. Women are not able to compete favourably with men' (WomenAid Collective, 2008, p.29), while the 2017 report notes that 'the low level of women's participation and representation in governance and leadership processes in Nigeria accounts for the significant perpetuation of the social conditions of abuse and discrimination that Nigerian women suffer' (Women Advocates' Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), 2017, p.2). In 2018 only 5.6% Parliamentary seats were held by women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). In access to employment, women are far less likely than men to work in the formal labour market and there is a significant gendered

⁴⁰ This population estimate is from the latest national census conducted in 2006.

wage gap (British Council, 2012; WARDC, 2017; Enfield, 2019). In health, Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world at 814 per 100,000 live births (WHO, 2015, p.xi). Regional disparities in access to health services compound inequalities among women so that the proportion of pregnant women and new mothers accessing healthcare in the North West is a fraction of that in the South East and maternal mortality rates are much higher in northern Nigeria (British Council, 2012; Adeleye et al., 2014; National Population Commission and ICF, 2019). The Nigerian academic, Funmi Para-Mallam, argues that ‘social, cultural, political and economic processes and organisations are imbued with a patriarchal undercurrent’ in Nigeria, which erects ‘ideological and formal structures to curtail the range of choices’ for women (Para-Mallam, 2017, p.25). These gendered inequalities and the ‘range of choices’ available to women vary according to location, rurality, religion, ethnicity, and myriad other factors that in turn pervade women and girls’ disparate experiences of marriage and education.

Early marriage in northern Nigeria

Heterosexual marriage including marriage before the age of eighteen (‘early marriage’) is a social norm for women in Nigeria⁴¹. In 2018, 70% of women and 57% of men (aged 15-49) reported being currently in a union (married or cohabiting) (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.84). Of women currently in a union, 64% married before the age of 25 (ibid.). Table 6.1 shows the median age at first marriage for women in the six geopolitical regions of the country, and, in the North West region for each of the seven states. The median age at first marriage among women is the lowest in the North West region at 15.4 years in 2013 (15.8 years in 2018 (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.81)) compared to all other regions. However, these data vary by states comprising that zone: Zamfara has a median age at first marriage at 14.5 years compared to Kaduna at 17.5 years (in 2013). Some reasons for these variations pertain to those that interact and mark gender inequalities – poverty, rurality, ethno-religious identity, and access to public services, but these variations are also symptomatic of a complex and contradictory tripartite legal system in Nigeria in which laws and policies on marriage differ at state, regional and federal levels.

⁴¹ Homosexual partnerships are criminalised in Nigeria under the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (2014).

Table 6.1 Women’s median age at first marriage in Nigeria, 2013 and 2018⁴²

Region / state	Median age at first marriage (women aged 20-49)	
	2013	2018
South East	>20	>20
South South	>20	>20
South West	>20	>20
North Central	19.1	19.2
North East	16.4	16.7
North West	15.4	15.9
Jigawa state	15.2	15.8
Kano state	15.6	16.0
Kaduna state	17.5	16.6
Katsina state	15.0	15.5
Kebbi state	15.7	15.8
Sokoto state	14.8	15.9
Zamfara state	14.5	15.7

(NPC and ICF International, 2014, pp.57-58; NPC and ICF, 2019, p.90)

As a federation, the federal authority develops, monitors, and enforces national laws and policies. The Federal Government of Nigeria has ratified, without reservations, all major global human rights treaties pertaining to the marriage of minors⁴³. These treaties have been partially transformed into national law in the 1990 *Marriage Act*, 1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, and 2003 *Child Rights Act*. However, these federal laws differ on a minimum age of marriage and on the issue of consent. The *Marriage Act s.11 (b)* affirms a minimum age for civil marriage of 21 years, with those marrying younger requiring written parental consent; the *Constitution s.29, 4(a)* sets out eighteen as the acceptable minimum age for marriage but *s.29, 4(b)* justifies any married woman post-hoc as ‘of full age’; and the *Child Rights Act pt.III, 21* stipulates a minimum age of 18, voiding all marriages of persons under that age. Even though the *Child Rights Act* is the most recent (2003)

⁴² These data were not provided in the 2018 NDHS report. However, presenting 2013 data here complements the data period for which data are analysed in this thesis (2011-2016). At regional level, the median AFM has increased by 0.4 years in the intervening period (2013-2018) indicating little change over recent years.

⁴³ Including the CEDAW (June 1985) and its Optional Protocol of 2000 (ratified November 2004); the UNCRC (April 1991); and the ACRWC (July 2001), and Additional Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (December 2003).

legislation pertaining to marriage, it is the 1999 *Constitution* that prevails in a court of law. Moreover, federal government has authority only over civil marriages (via the *Marriage Act*), while customary and religious unions are the jurisdiction of states – each of which has its own government, laws, and judiciary - and/or Shari'a courts (Braithwaite, 2014).

One implication of this complex tripartite system has been the difficulty of developing, coordinating and enforcing legislation related to personal status issues, including marriage. The 2003 *Child Rights Act* (Table 6.2) is now the national framework for child rights, but the gradual development of a children's bill from the mid-1990s continually met serious and sustained opposition in Parliament from religious groups (Akinwumi, 2009, p.386). In October 2002, the Bill was rejected on the basis that its content, particularly setting the minimum age for marriage at eighteen years, was contrary to Islamic culture and values (Akinwumi, 2009, p.386; Braithwaite, 2014, p.479) and it took a special committee to finally facilitate its adoption in 2003. Dispute and controversy continue to mark debate on the minimum age for marriage for women in Nigeria: a 2013 review of the *Constitution* by the Senate was mired by its failure to remove clause 29 (4)(b), which deems any married girl or woman to have reached maturity ('full age') regardless of her age at marriage. The dispute, like contestations on the *Child Rights Act*, arose from an invocation of Islamic law by a Senator of Zamfara who claimed the tenet of marriage as commensurate with maturity for women of any age as central to Islamic rites (following a specific reading of the Qur'an regarding the Prophet Muhammad's marriage with Aisha) against which federal law cannot legislate (Erogbogbo, 2013). In July 2013, the Senate voted for the maturity clause to remain in the Constitution based on Islamic beliefs (ibid.). This equivalation of marriage and maturity is played out in defence and discourses on early marriage⁴⁴. Religious opposition led by Muslim Senators from the northern states also contributed to the failure of the Nigerian Senate to pass the *Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill* in March 2016, which had been under consideration for six years (2010-2016) before being voted out. This Bill had intended to domesticate the provisions of CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol, including provisions for women's equality in marriage and education. Opposition was again centred on the argument that the provisions of the Bill conflicted with Shari'a law and the tenet of freedom of religion (Makinde et al., 2017⁴⁵).

⁴⁴ Chapter 8 analyses data and discourses on marital timing in Kaduna state.

⁴⁵ The Bill was reintroduced in November 2019 but has not yet been deliberated (Iroanusi, 2021).

Table 6.2 Child Rights Act 2003: Provisions pertaining to marriage

Part	Section	Summary
III	21	Marriages contracted with persons under the age of 18 are null and void
	22(1)	No parent, guardian or any other person shall betroth a child to any person. Such a betrothal is null and void.
	23	Any person who marries or is betrothed to a child, promotes the marriage of a child, or betroths a child, is liable on conviction to a fine of 500,000 Naira; or imprisonment for a term of five years, or to both such fine and imprisonment.
	31 (1), (2)	Prohibition of sexual intercourse with a child; contravention is deemed rape and liable on conviction to imprisonment for life.

The federal *Child Rights Act* prohibits marriage and sexual relations with all persons under the age of eighteen in Nigeria ([Table 6.2](#)). However, the Act is on the ‘residual list’ of the 1999 *Constitution*, which means that state governments have exclusive responsibility and jurisdiction to enact the Act as appropriate to their situation. The *Child Rights Act* is unenforceable until it is passed into state law and each state has a right to amend the Act to comply with local traditions and religion (Akinwumi, 2009; Braimah, 2014; Ogunniyi, 2018). In 2020, of the 36 states nationwide, 11 had not domesticated the Act, six of which are in the North West region⁴⁶ where there are the lowest marital ages for women, the population is predominantly Sunni Muslim, and (in five⁴⁷) Shari’a (Islamic) law is implemented alongside customary and civil law (Ogunniyi, 2018; Adebowale, 2019). Localised control over marriage is not new: during the colonial administration, Islamic authorities in Northern Nigeria were given the power to legislate issues related to child betrothal (Walker, 2016, p.250). This power was, and is, predominantly patriarchal - held by older men to select, consent to, and coordinate marriages. In Shari’a Courts elder males predominantly hold sway, while at the family level, fathers generally play a significant role according to the Maliki doctrine of *ijbar* (fatherly authority) (ibid., p.255). The effects of both on women are significant: in Islamic jurisprudence the evidence a woman gives in court is valued at half that of a man (WomenAid Collective, 2008, p.22); women and men do not have equal rights in the dissolution of marriage (ibid., p.63); and the Shari’a Penal Code includes provisions for the

⁴⁶ Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Zamfara and Sokoto. The other five yet to domesticate the CRA are in the North East region.

⁴⁷ All except Jigawa

stoning of women upon conviction of adultery (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.238).

Negotiations among government and non-government actors of federal and Islamic law in some northern states have engendered state policies that offer some protection to girls and women and promote gender equality. For example, although they have not domesticated the *Child Rights Act*, Kebbi and Niger states enacted Prohibition of Early Marriage Laws in the early 2000s (WomenAid Collective, 2008, p.64). Whether and how these are implemented (and whether they still exist) is unclear but they indicate some willingness of some state authorities to engage with aspects of child and women's rights. Kaduna state is exceptional in the region for two reasons: (i) it introduced partial Shari'a law in 2001, meaning that local Muslim communities have more power to deal with civil matters through local Shari'a courts but Christians are normally exempt (Human Rights Watch, 2004); and (ii) in February 2018, it enacted the *Kaduna State Child Welfare and Protection Law*, domesticating the federal *Child Rights Act*. The *Kaduna State Child Welfare and Protection Law* (Table 6.3) specifies the age of majority as eighteen years of age and decrees null and void marriages before that age (Part IV, (1)). It also criminalises persons linked to child marriage practices specifying fines and prison sentences upon conviction (Part IV, (2)). However, the Law also makes an exception for Muslim communities specifically on the minimum age for marriage – from eighteen to *fourteen* years (Part IV, (3)). The implication of this clause is that Islamic Law supersedes state law on the issue of marital age for Muslim girls and young adolescents, which again points towards complex and politically challenging dialogues involved in negotiating policies for children and women's rights in northern states.

Table 6.3 Marriage in the Kaduna State Child Welfare and Protection Law, 2018

<p>(1) A person who has not attained the age of 18 is incapable of contracting a valid marriage, and accordingly a marriage so contracted is null and void and of no effect whatsoever.</p>
<p>(2) A person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. who marries a child; b. to whom a child is betrothed; or c. who promotes the marriage of a child; or d. who betroths a child; commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of not less than five hundred thousand Naira or imprisonment or a term of not less than five years or both.
<p>(3) Notwithstanding the provisions of sub-section (1) and (2) of this section a child who is a Muslim who has not attained the age of 18 years shall have the right to contract a marriage under Islamic Law, and the marriage so contracted shall be valid, provided that the child is 14 years or above.</p>

Kaduna State Child Welfare and Protection Law 2018, Part IV, 24 (1-3).

Northern state governors confront a substantial challenge to reconcile Nigeria's civil, customary and religious legal system, but a few states have manoeuvred around group demands and individual rights to tread a conciliatory middle ground, even if this policy-political ground tends to offer only marginal spaces for practical gender equality. Such manoeuvrings have not been limited to state legislature but have also included direct interventions to manage socio-economic or religious issues. In 2012, Kano state initiated a mass marriage programme, which matched thousands of divorced, widowed and latterly young unmarried, women to husbands as first or subsequent wives (Walker, 2016, pp.260–2). Envisioned as a pro-women poverty reduction strategy to ameliorate economic hardship among women, there were formal provisions for spousal consent, the provision of formal marriage certificates, and formalisation of divorce procedures, the latter of which are not common in marital processes. However, there was also no minimum age for participation and screening of women for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections was mandatory. Charges of forced marriage were denied by the authorities, as well as some spouses, who claimed that unions are coordinated by families and subsequently brought to the programme (ibid., pp.263-4). While the intervention troubles notions of 'free and full consent', and the ideal of romantic union, Walker argues that the 'constraints posed by culture and poverty on the decisional space of governments and families' and the 'power of state agency' (ibid.,

p.265) must be recognised, both of which are central to the web of complex socioeconomic and political negotiations, collaborations and compromise around marital processes in northern states.

National and international development and donor agencies have continued to push for the domestication of the *Child Rights Act* in northern states (Walker, 2016, p.254) and, in November 2016, a major new policy impetus to address child marriage emerged in the form of the National Strategy to End Child Marriage in Nigeria 2016-2021. This National Strategy, spearheaded by the Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, aims ambitiously towards the 'end of child marriage in Nigeria by 2030' (Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, 2016, p.10). It recognises the 'lack of implementation structures' (ibid.) for existing policies and intends to be a guide and coordinating mechanism for 'what can and should be done to end child marriage' (ibid.). The National Strategy builds on prior multi-sectoral development programmes and research initiatives across northern Nigeria that have advanced efforts to end child marriage through localised interventions in child protection, health and education programming, such as the DFID/UNICEF Girls Education Project 2004-2020; UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage Phase 1 and 2 (2016-2023); and ActionAid International Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria (TEGIN) project 2008-2012⁴⁸.

Despite laws and policies against early marriage, and multiple interventions by state and non-state actors, processes of change are slow on issues at the intersection of gender, religion, public services, and politics. Part of this challenge is rooted in funding constraints – the new National Strategy, for example, will pursue 'bottom-up budgeting' (Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, 2016, p. 54) but there is scant evidence that resources have been allocated. Additionally, Nigeria's complex tripartite legal system facilitates discriminatory policies and practices to remain relatively undisputed in parts of the North, where women's, and especially poorer rural women's, fundamental freedoms can be curtailed or ignored (Human Rights Watch, 2004; WomenAid Collective, 2008; Walker, 2016). Such economic and legal constraints and challenges indicate a lack of prioritisation to gender equality across all levels of the state. Nevertheless, some state governments are engaging in processes of negotiation and compromise, including with non-state groups, to meet the needs and rights of their diverse populations and respond to federal and international guidance on equality and non-discrimination. Many of the states in which Shari'a law is implemented (including Kano, Katsina and Kaduna) have allowed development interventions and dialogue to shape local practices, if not policies, for example

⁴⁸ Strategic Objective 5 pertaining to education is considered later in this chapter.

promoting girls' education and engaging faith leaders – especially Muslim Imams - on the timing of marriage and childbearing and access to reproductive health (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2013; Walker, 2015; Christian Aid, 2016; Amzat, 2020). These conciliatory moves imply that opportunities for dialogue and debate on marriage, and avenues for reciprocal learning for equitable policy transformation, are possible.

One of the sectors in which discourses of improvement and gender equality persist is basic education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2006; British Council, 2012). Improved access and quality of education has been a commitment of successive governments, which more recently has been linked to efforts to address girls' marriages. Objective 5 of the national child marriage strategy is to 'increase access to quality all round education including reproductive health information and all-round services' (Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, 2016, p.33). The chapter turns to consider the legal and policy status and conditions of basic education provision in northern Nigeria, focussing on gender equality, girls' education, and connections with marriage.

Basic education policy and practice

The complex legalities, decentralised responsibilities and regional disparities observed in marriage trends and practices are echoed in the delivery of basic education in Nigeria. Access to and the quality of basic education is fundamentally different across states and zones of Nigeria, traceable to colonialism and decades of post-independence political instability. During the colonial era, indirect rule in the North prohibited the work of Christian missionaries and their schools, ostensibly to maintain peace in the Islamic Sokoto Caliphate (Harris, 2013, p.287). For decades northern Nigerians could not access the European education that was being offered in the South. Consequently, by independence in 1960, the South had much higher levels of formal education and a burgeoning European-educated, literate, English-speaking class, which was not present in the North (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.111). Sociologists posit that contemporary inequalities in access to education - to the detriment of the North - are rooted in colonial practices (Egunyomi, 2006; Falola and Heaton, 2008; Adeleye et al., 2014; Moland, 2015).

After independence, the first Obasanjo government drew up a National Policy on Education (1977), offering six years' primary plus three years' junior secondary schooling (JSS) free of charge for every Nigerian child (Csapo, 1983; Odukoya et al., 2018). This policy intended to remedy regional educational and economic imbalances and promote post-civil war unity (Imam, 2012, p.190). However, military coups and political, economic and social instability through the 1980s-90s meant that this policy was barely realised. In 1999, under the

(second) new leadership of Obasanjo, the government (re)launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy promising free, compulsory and universal basic education. The 1999 *Constitution* placed education on the 'concurrent list', meaning that federal and state government should engage simultaneously⁴⁹. Nigeria signed the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 and in 2004 passed the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act 2004 ('UBE Act'), legislating for Government provision of pre-primary education and nine years of 'free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age' (UBE Act, 2(1)). The UBE Act's provisions for basic education, and the penalties to parents for non-compliance (2(4)), echo Section 15 of the Child Rights Act (2003).

To deliver universal basic education in Nigeria, the UBE Act established the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). UBEC's functions, as instituted by the Act (Section 9), include: (i) formulating policy guidelines and minimum standards for UBE nationwide; (ii) receiving and allocating Federal Government block grants for basic education; (iii) developing and disseminating curricula and instructional materials; (iv) auditing and professional development of school staff, and (v) coordinating UBE implementation with donors, NGOs and other agencies (UBE Act, 2004, 9(a-p); Larsen, 2009). UBEC's functions are wide-ranging and exist in combination with the various mandates of federal, state and local governments for the delivery of basic education, across which there are a number of overlaps, inconsistencies, and differences between what is meant to happen (policy) and what actually happens (practice) (Williams, 2009; Larsen, 2009; Bolaji et al., 2017).

Education policy responsibility lies with the National Council of Education (NCE), comprising the Federal Minister of Education and State Commissioners of Education. According to the latest National Policy on Education (2006), the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) is mainly responsible for formulating education policy and planning and delivering tertiary education, while State Ministries of Education (SMEs) have overall responsibility for education sector policy, planning and monitoring, and approving the budgets of each State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB). The SUBEBs are responsible for strategic planning and management of basic education services within their state, and most manage primary and JSS schools. The positions in all these government bodies are elected so after every major election there can be a complete change in leadership making for discontinuous policy enactment. In Kaduna state, unlike most states, the State UBE Law (2005) gives the management of junior secondary schooling not to the SUBEB but to the SME (Larsen, 2009, p.13; Kaduna State Government, 2013, p.20), fragmenting the delivery of basic education in

⁴⁹ Unlike the *Child Rights Act* that is on the 'residual list' giving state governments exclusive jurisdiction.

the state. Despite Kaduna State SUBEB and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) being focussed only on primary education, their mandates overlap, including on rehabilitating infrastructure, providing materials and equipment, and school inspection (Larsen, 2009, p.33)⁵⁰. More positively, although federal law does not require that a quota of members of SUBEBs or LGEAs be women, Kaduna SUBEB Law requires one of 13 SUBEB members and one of 12 LGEA members to be women (ibid., p.26-29).

Local Government Education Authorities, of which there are 23 in Kaduna State, have a range of governance and management responsibilities comprising planning, fund disbursement, inspections and supervisions, community mobilisation, and school monitoring including collecting data on enrolment and attendance. The National Policy on Education notes that LGEAs should feed the SME (through SUBEB) with statistics and information for planning purposes and make recommendations to SUBEB about staffing and infrastructure. LGEAs are the 'managers and guardians of schools' (Williams, 2009, p.3) but in practice often have little decision-making authority. SUBEBs, which administratively manage LGEAs, hold overall authority on school funding, staffing and quality issues with little downwards accountability (Williams, 2008; Kaduna State Government, 2013, p.20). Accountability is upwards and unidirectional from the LGEA Education Secretary to the SUBEB, the SME Commissioner, the State Governor, and the Federal Minister for Education.

Upwards accountability is a feature of basic education funding, which is complicated, generally inadequate and poorly coordinated (Williams, 2008; Larsen, 2009; Robinson & Hussein, 2021 forthcoming). There is a downward trend in federal budget allocation to the education sector at 6.7% in 2020 down from 7.4% in 2017 and 9.0% in 2000 (Rose and Adelabu, 2007; Moland, 2015, p.3; Adedigba, 2017). Universal Basic Education should be financed by federal government block grants of not less than 2% of Federal Consolidated Revenue Funds in addition to credits and donor grants (UBE Act, 11(1)(a)). However, block grants are contingent on states providing match funding of at least 50% (UBE Act, 11(2); Onyekwena et al., 2019, p.24)). Procedurally, UBEC receives the funds from the Federal Government and allocates funds to SUBEBs, which disburse the funds (Larsen, 2009, p.10). However, reports argue that education budgets at federal and state levels are 'invariably inadequate' (WomenAid Collective, 2008, p.46). Evidence collected by DFID's Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN)⁵¹ in Kwara, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano and

⁵⁰ The distinctive distribution of education mandates across SME, SUBEB and LGEAs in Kaduna state meant that in gathering data from policy makers in 2015-2016 I interviewed one SME representative, one SUBEB representative, and one representative in each of the two focal LGAs (Chapter 5).

⁵¹ ESSPIN was a partnership between the UK's DFID and the Nigerian Government that ran between 2008-2017 to improve school quality (www.esspin.org).

Lagos states indicated 'little evidence to link expenditures at the federal, state or local government levels with resources received by schools' (Williams, 2008, p.20) and there can be up to two years' delay in SUBEBs accessing funds, partly due to states not fulfilling the match funding requirement (Williams, 2009; Onyekwena et al., 2019). The adequacy and disbursement of state finances can be associated with levels of educational exclusion and discrimination (Imam, 2012; Unterhalter et al., 2018). In Kaduna state, education expenditure as a percentage of total state expenditure fluctuated from 11% in 2007 to 21% in 2009 to 14% in 2012, representing underfunding to achieve Education for All (Kaduna State Government, 2013, p.27). However, in its latest Education Strategic Plan for 2019-2029, the Kaduna state government has allocated 25% of its budget to education declaring the expansion of free education to the end of *senior* secondary school (Kaduna State Government, 2019), marking a notable upturn in investment and commitment to education in the state⁵².

Unstable, inadequate financing and complex management and oversight arrangements across different authorities have contributed to the poor condition of the formal basic education sector in Nigeria, particularly in northern states (Williams, 2008; Imam, 2012; Bolaji et al., 2017). Access to basic education (primary and junior secondary schooling) remains a fundamental challenge: UNICEF estimates that around 10.5 million of Nigeria's children aged 5-14 years are out of school – over 30% of the total primary school age population (UNICEF, 2020). UBEC data for 2018 estimate that 3.5 million primary age children (aged 5-11) are out of formal basic education in the North West region alone (UBEC, 2019, p.235). Under the 2004 UBE Act, all children should be enrolled in primary school at age six and complete junior secondary school preferably by age 14 and no later than age 16 (UBE Act, 15(1)). [Table 6.4](#) presents a compilation of basic education data for the period 2009-2016 for Nigeria as a whole. The national primary Net Enrollment Rate⁵³ increased only marginally from 58% in 1999 to 64% in 2010⁵⁴, with two-thirds of these pupils transitioning to junior secondary school. The gross enrolment rate is at least 20% higher than net enrolment indicating the significant proportion of over-age children in the system. Entering primary school, 26% of boys and 24% of girls are two or more years older than the official age for their class (National Population Commission and RTI International, 2016, p.16). The gender parity index (GPI)⁵⁵ for basic education is below 1 indicating disparity in

⁵² It is unclear from successive Kaduna state ESPs whether the state has succeeded in providing match funding to draw down federal government block grants.

⁵³ The Net Enrolment Rate (NER) measures the number of pupils of official primary school age who are enrolled in primary education as a percentage of the total population of children of the official primary school age.

⁵⁴ 2010 is the most recent year for which data are available.

⁵⁵ GPI measures relative access to education of males and females.

favour of boys in access to basic education at level. Girls are more likely to be out of school than boys at all stages and less likely than boys to complete basic education (WomenAid Collective, 2008, p.4; British Council, 2012, p.29; Universal Basic Education Commission, 2019). In 2018, 35% of Nigerian women aged 15-49 years had no formal education (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.44). Equality of educational opportunity can enhance social outcomes and the experiences of women in society yet many girls – particularly poor girls - remain underserved by basic education in Nigeria (Kazeem et al., 2010; British Council, 2012).

Table 6.4 Basic Education data, Nigeria, 2009-2016

Indicator	Date	Total	Male	Female	GPI
National ♦					
Primary Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)	2013 (♦ 2016)	94.1 (♦ 83.8)	95.3	92.8	0.99
Primary Net Enrolment Rate (NER)	2010	64.1	69.9	58.3	0.83
Transition to JS1	2009 (♦ 2016)	60.4 (♦ 68.6)	59.8	61.0	1.01
Junior Secondary School GER	2013 (♦ 2016)	52.5 (♦ 43.1)	58.8	53.5	0.95
Youth literacy rate	2008	66.4	75.6	57.9	0.77
Kaduna State ♦					
Primary GER	2016	109.2	114.0	104.4	0.92
Primary NER	2016	92.5	96.5	88.3	0.92
Primary Completion	2016	62.6	67.1	58.1	0.87
Transition to Junior Secondary Class 1	2016	89.7	91.6	87.4	0.95
JSS GER	2016	52.2	56.7	47.7	0.84
JSS Completion	2016	42.0	45.0	39.0	0.87

Source: ♦ UIS, 2018; ♦ FME, 2017⁵⁶

⁵⁶ All data provided in text and table are the latest available.

Regional disparities are significant (British Council, 2012, p.29). In Kaduna state, less than a quarter of women (aged 15-49) had any secondary schooling (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.45) and the government estimated that there were 106,000 out of school children (not enrolled in public or private basic schools) in 2015/16 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017a, p.34). According to the national education audit of 2018, 48% (GPI 0.94) pupils enrolled in public primary schools in Kaduna state were girls (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2019, p.66). Absenteeism and drop-out are a problem particularly among rural, poorer students and in northern states (Humphreys et al., 2015, p.136; National Population Commission and RTI International, 2016, pp.10–11). Among all children who drop out of school, the majority – of whom most are girls) do so at the end of primary, failing to transition to junior secondary school (National Population Commission and RTI International, 2016, p.16). Data compiled by UBEC in 2014 show the steady and significant decline in the number of children enrolled by primary class in Kaduna state as children progress: in Primary class 1 in 2013/14 around 248,000 children (GPI 0.85) were enrolled but in Class 6 the number enrolled was 40% less at around 134,000 (GPI 0.84). This is echoed by data for 2018 (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2019, p.52). Latest data also highlight two further challenges of the North West region and Kaduna state: being overage-for-grade and grade repetition. In the North West 9% of children (7% in Kaduna state) were enrolled in primary school overage (>11 years) (compared to an average of 3% across southern regions) (ibid., p.60). Kaduna state also has the highest absolute number of pupils repeating classes in primary school (65,000 pupils repeated at least one year) of all the states of Nigeria (ibid., p.97) and around 30% of JSS students repeated at least one class (ibid., p. 143).

Based on DHS data, UNESCO analysis shows that several basic education indicators in Nigeria have stayed the same or worsened since the inception of UBE: rural access to primary schools worsened, increasing rural–urban inequality and the youth literacy rate (15-24) declined from 71% (GPI 0.88) in 1991 to 66% (GPI 0.87) in 2008 (UNESCO, 2015, p.81-2). This indicates issues with access to, and quality of, basic education. In 2015 Nigeria failed to meet the target of universal primary education by 2015 and was ranked low at 103 out of 118 countries (with an index of 0.714) in UNESCO's EFA Development Index, which takes into account UPE, education quality, gender parity and adult literacy, meaning that it was measured as being 'far from EFA overall achievement' (UNESCO, 2015a, p.233). These data highlight that for very many Nigerian children, but especially those living in northern states, access to and progression through basic schooling is marred by challenges.

The increased enrolment rate at primary schools nationwide following the introduction of UBE has been short-lived, partly as a result of the lack of commensurate funding to increase

and improve infrastructure, materials, teachers or managers, which contributed to a further decline in the quality of schools, already unevenly distributed and with many needs (Moland, 2015, p.3). Many schools throughout Nigeria charge fees and levies to parents to make up the funding gap and provide for additional enrolments (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2012, p.14; Onyekwena et al., 2019) despite provisions in the UBE Act that fundamental basic education services (books, materials, classrooms, furniture and lunch) be free of charge (UBE Act 15(1)). Fees and levies, such as joining fees at the start of each academic year, examination fees, and excursion costs, are a major source of income for schools, some of which is even disbursed back to the SUBEB (ESSPIN, 2008; Onyekwena et al., 2019). Such levies, which recur throughout primary and JSS, in addition to the costs of providing children with uniforms and materials, deter poorer parents from enrolling some, or all, of their children (British Council, 2012; Nigeria Research Network, 2013; Moland, 2015). As elsewhere, girls in Nigeria tend to bear the brunt of families' decisions, with poverty intersecting with social norms to keep girls out of school (British Council, 2012, p.32; Humphreys et al., 2015; Sperling and Winthrop, 2016, p.7). Parents can be penalised (though to-date none have (Bello, 2017)) under the UBE Act for failing to ensure all children attend and complete basic education, yet the actual costs of formal schooling prohibit many families from meeting this mandate.

Violence across northern Nigeria has marred attempts to improve access to basic education in the last decade, especially for girls. Violent attacks on schools since 2009 by the Islamic group Boko Haram (whose Hausa name translates as 'Western education is sinful') have immediate effects on girls' attendance and school experience, as schools are destroyed or closed, teachers flee, and teaching is suspended. This violence has had its worse effects on schools in north-eastern states but has reverberated across the northern regions since 2011 with attacks on schools, religious buildings, media outlets and markets (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Comolli, 2015, pp.63; 113). Kaduna state has increasingly become an epicentre of violence in the region with attacks and abductions of pupils in communities, schools and universities across the state (Hoffman, 2017; Amnesty International, 2020; Campbell, 2021). In 2020 there were an estimated 200 violent events resulting in at least a thousand fatalities in Kaduna state (Campbell, 2021). This violence has long-term implications on girls and their schooling including displacement, harassment and fear, and low attainment and drop out (Amnesty International, 2013; Taft et al., 2018).

Access to and retention in formal public schooling is thus prohibitive for many girls for reasons exogenous and endogenous to schooling, including safety, costs, accessibility, perceptions (and realities) of poor quality. Despite allocating around 70% of all funding for UBE on infrastructure (ESSPIN, 2009b, p.3), buildings and facilities have been deemed

inadequate nationwide (UNICEF, 2012, p.xiii; Universal Basic Education Commission, 2019, p.197). The 2018 national education audit concluded that only 51% of existing primary school classrooms nationwide (54% in the North West and 43% in Kaduna state) were in a 'good condition' (UBEC, 2019, p.197-198). Successive Education Sector Plans (ESP) of the Kaduna state government have recognised that 'the scope for improving the quality of education in Kaduna State is enormous' (Kaduna State ESP, 2019, p.17). This includes the need to address 'the structural defects of some school buildings' (Kaduna State ESP, 2019, p.8) that have previously been noted as 'overstretched, in poor condition and unable to meet the demands of UBE' (Kaduna State ESP, 2013, p.14).

Following the state ESP and the UBE Act, education quality also comprises school management and teacher deployment, motivation and quality. Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School-based Management Committees (SBMCs) are vehicles for community participation in local provisions of basic education, mainly responsible for school development, resource mobilisation (especially PTAs), and monitoring teachers and students' attendance and retention (ESSPIN, 2009a; ESSPIN, 2009d; Williams, 2009). A scoping study conducted by ESSPIN in Kaduna state in 2009 identified 'issues around the establishment and management of these bodies' (Williams, 2009, p.3). Further research indicated that many SBMCs did not exist and where they did tended to be non-democratic with few women members and lacking clarity and purpose (ESSPIN, 2009). With regard to PTAs, the study by ESSPIN highlighted that levies mobilised by PTAs that were supposed to provide for supplementary experiences, such as excursions, for students, were diverted to pay for core costs such as materials, building repairs, and exams that should be paid for by state government (Williams, 2009, p.26). While the Kaduna state ESP 2006-2015 aims for the establishment and composition of SBMCs (Kaduna State Government, 2013, pp.36-40), the most recent ESP is concerned with their capacity building (Kaduna State Government, 2019, p.21) indicating a shift in priority away from formation towards effective functioning.

Shortages of qualified teachers affect schools throughout Nigeria including Kaduna State (UNESCO, 2012, p.xiii; Kaduna State Government, 2013, p.15; UBEC 2019). In 2016, the pupil to qualified teacher ratio (PQTR) in Kaduna state was high at 58:1 in primary and 48:1 in JS schools (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017, p.27), compared to a national average of 62:1 and 37:1 respectively (ibid., p.7). In 2019, the North West region had the lowest proportion of qualified teaching staff of all regions at 60% overall (40% at primary level but 80% at secondary level) (UBEC, 2019, p. 345-54). In Kaduna state, 75% of public primary school and 88% of secondary school teachers are qualified and the PQTR is estimated at 60:1 in primary schools (ibid.). The 2019 state ESP notes that while recruitment and training have increased the proportion of qualified teachers overall (Kaduna State Government,

2019, p. 18) teacher availability, motivation, training, and quality needs systemic improvement with particular attention to the needs of teachers in rural areas (ibid., p.15). These challenges cast a shadow over the merits and returns of investing in formal schooling (Nigeria Research Network, 2013).

Parental perceptions of formal public schooling as inaccessible and low-quality and have contributed to the enduring popularity of non-formal Islamic schools in northern Nigeria (ESSPIN, 2009c; Humphreys and Crawford, 2015). Forms of Islamic education - Qur'anic, Islamiyya and Tsangaya - exist in northern states alongside public education but with significant independence from state governments. Nigerian government data varies as to whether they count children who attend Islamic schools (and what kind) as 'out of school' (Humphreys and Crawford, 2015; Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), 2019), which means that data on children attending these nonformal provisions is uncertain. However, estimates indicate that at least 9 million children attend some form of Islamic education in northern Nigeria, either in addition to state schooling (in the hours before or after formal school or at weekends) or as their only school experience (ESSPIN, 2009c, p.2; British Council, 2012, p.26; Humphreys and Crawford, 2015). A process of integrating these schools into the UBE programme to monitor and improve quality has been ongoing for over a decade at national level (Humphreys and Crawford, 2015, p.98). Kaduna state started registering and gathering data on Qur'anic and Islamiyya schools from 2013 (as a pilot under the federal integration process) (Kaduna State ESP, 2013, p.17-18) but there is no update on this process in the latest ESP (2019). Islamiyya schools are particularly important alternative or additional modes for the delivery of girls' (especially adolescent girls) education across the North (ESSPIN, 2009c; Okekearu et al., 2017; Hamid and Tamam, 2018). Some 'communities have higher preference for Islamiyya schools for their girls over secular schools' (ESSPIN, 2009, p.5) because they teach in local languages or Arabic, and combine secular (English, science, and mathematics) and religious subjects into their curricula (ESSPIN, 2011; Kaduna State ESP, 2013, p.18). ESSPIN reported a high popularity of 'night Islamiyya schools' that provide an opportunity for married girls to return to education at evening classes (ESSPIN, 2009). The content and quality of these classes remains underexplored but give an insight into alternative (undocumented and partial) educational provision for girls, including married girls, in northern states, and the significance of these provisions for communities and families.

Convergences of basic education and early marriage: prevention, protection and response

This chapter has considered the socio-political and economic policy context of Nigeria in general, and the policies, problems and practices of early marriage and basic education as *separate* issues. This final section explores where, how and to what effect policies and practices on early marriage and basic education *converge*, mediated by concerns with gender equality and girls' education.

Basic education provision nominally covers children aged 6 to 16 years. Whether girls enrol and progress on time, or enrol overage for grade, those who stay in school will be there during puberty and much of their adolescence, experiencing physical and psychological transitions in primary and junior secondary school. Elements of the education system recognise the needs and transitions of adolescents, especially girls. The current National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2006) has a vision of 'gender sensitivity at all levels' of basic education with a goal 'to ensure equal access to basic education and promote retention, completion and high performance for all pupils', especially girls (ibid., p.6). Core strategies outlined in this document to increase girls' access to education and improve their retention, completion and performance are community sensitisation on the importance of girls' education, infrastructural improvements to schools, teacher training and curricula improvements on gender, and incentives for girls through scholarships. Among these strategies, a handful are articulated with adolescent girls in mind, including sanitary pads for adolescent girls, girls' clubs to increase girls' confidence and self-esteem, and boarding school provision to mitigate the journey to school for girls (ibid., p.12). Moreover, the first strategy for retention and completion is explicitly concerned with early marriage, supporting the enforcement of national and state policies against early marriage (ibid., p.13). While these strategies are predominantly oriented around quantifiable resource inputs to get and keep girls in schools, some address harder-to-measure features of quality concerned with girls in-school experiences and personal and social development. They are focussed on *resisting and delaying* marriage timing for girls, developing girls' confidence to resist, and thereby reducing 'early' marriages.

In Kaduna state, two successive Education Strategic Plans (ESPs) from 2006-2015 and 2019-2029 translate a federal vision of gender sensitivity in basic education into objectives focussed on attaining gender parity in access to primary and junior secondary schools and gender parity in teacher supply (Kaduna State Government, 2013, p.23-24; Kaduna State Government, 2019, p.16). Following the core strategies of the NPGBE, the first of these ESPs aimed to undertake community sensitisation on the importance of formal girls' education (2013, p. 41) and, in schools, offer positive incentives for girls to enrol and remain

including scholarships, infrastructure improvements, and 'girl-friendly counselling and guidance' including via girls' clubs (ibid., p.36). These aims indicate some sensitivity towards adolescent girls' specific needs for practical, psycho-social and peer support. In 2019 the ESP retained a focus on gender parity in enrolments and increasing female teacher numbers but shifted focus away from girls specifically towards children with 'special needs' and 'marginalised children and youth' (2019, p.7). A specification of 'marginalised' children is lacking, however, and only incentive schemes and infrastructure improvements remain targeted at girls. Neither ESP mentions marriage (or pregnancy).

One component of education delivery derived from federal level that has high resonance with the issues of adolescence, including marriage and sexuality, is the Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) curriculum for junior secondary schools. The 2003 FLHE is the mandatory comprehensive sexuality education programme that aims to prevent HIV/AIDS and 'provide individuals with information and skills necessary for rational decision-making about health' (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council, 2003, p.i; Igbokwe et al., 2019). Through FLHE the federal government has recognised the sexual and reproductive health needs and rights of adolescents (Huaynocha et al., 2014, p.192). Carrier-subject teachers received training and continuous support on the curriculum and the use of the FLHE manual (Huaynocha et al., 2014, p.198). The curriculum recognises adolescence as a period of change during which uncertainties about 'their bodies and how they function' as well as evolving relationships, feelings and messages can cause confusion but aims to inculcate 'positive self-worth' among young people (ibid., p.iii). It covers several topics, including puberty, sexual relationships, gender roles, self-esteem, and decision-making, offering practical information and addressing attitudes through participatory activities (ibid., pp.1-47). Under the topic 'negotiation' (ibid., pp.19-20), curriculum guidelines ask students to consider situations that may need negotiation and factors that influence negotiation, offering time to practise negotiating on a particular issue with their peers. One of the advantages of negotiation is listed as to 'delay marriage' (ibid., p.20). The link to FLHE to *delay marriage* recurs occasionally throughout the curriculum guidance. Moreover, guidance on interpersonal skills such as negotiation show that the curriculum design recognises that young peoples' attitudes, skills and behaviours in interpersonal relationships, their capabilities and agency in this area, as important.

Studies on the design, implementation and outcomes of FLHE have complimented the design and delivery of FLHE overall (Huaynocha et al., 2014; Wood and Rogow, 2015; Udegbe et al., 2015). There appear to be higher levels of FLHE activities in southern compared to northern states overall (ibid.), but research in four southern states found that the curriculum has increased 'critical consciousness about gender norms and roles' and

awareness of sexual violence, strengthened learner-centred interactive pedagogy, and 'increased student connectedness for girls', indicating the strengths and positive potential of the curriculum (Wood and Rogow, 2015, p.4). However, concerns have been raised about content – namely the abstinence-based approach to sexual health, which may be irrelevant to adolescents emerging social and sexual relationships – and adequate teacher training and support (Wood and Rogow, 2015, p.3-4). While the curriculum recognises the need for sociocultural adaptation over naming and delivery, and encourages this, one problem for northern states has been that FLHE 'conflicted with prevailing values and norms in some quarters and was difficult to implement' (Huaynoca et al., 2014, p.193). Data on implementation and outcomes are patchy in northern states, where the education system already struggles for adequate material and human resources. Kaduna state, like several in the North West region, was a 'late adopter' of FLHE in 2011 (Udegbe et al., 2015, p.70) and research has not ascertained the proportion of schools implementing FLHE in Kaduna state, how it is being implemented and any outcomes from implementation, although it suggests that schools have been provided with materials (ibid., p.86).

At federal and Kaduna state levels, recognition of and provisions for adolescent girls, particularly in relation to marriage, by the education sector, is limited. Policy and strategy specifications concerned with the *delivery* of education in schools do not deal with adolescence or marriage, despite the prevalence of early marriage in Nigeria including Kaduna state. Though there is some focus on pedagogy, evidence suggests inadequate support to teachers for teaching about gender and sexuality, and little concern with social relations in schools. Qualitative studies on Nigerian teachers' (including in northern states) understanding and practice of gender have indicated that teachers know and impart very little about gender equality and girls' rights (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2012; Unterhalter and North, 2016), which raises questions about the capabilities of teachers, without support, to provide gender sensitive curricula, pastoral care, or girl-friendly services in school.

The aims of the education sector policies and strategies resonate in the most recent document in which education and early marriage concerns converge: the National Strategy to End Child Marriage 2016. There are some broad echoes between the objectives and strategies of the NPGBE (2006), Kaduna state ESPs, and the FLHE, with Objective 5 of this Strategy ([Table 6.5](#)). These overlapping areas include improving school facilities; adolescents' groups/safe spaces; teacher capacity development; reproductive health information; and counselling (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2016, p.33). These echoes suggest efforts for alignment and harmonisation by this Strategy with existing federal resources. However, the details of this objective extend beyond the details offered by the national gender policy and Kaduna state ESPs by showing more

precisely how the education system and schools can and should pre-empt, prevent and respond to early marriage with recommendations pertaining to access and quality specifically for pubescent and adolescent girls.

Table 6.5 National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016), Objective 5

Objective 5: To increase access to quality all round education including reproductive health education and services to all children
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build the capacity of families to address and change the expectations, attitudes and practices in regard to child marriage 2. Promote access to, retention of girls in primary and secondary education through refurbishment of facilities (e.g. wash rooms for girls, separate toilets for boys and girls). 3. Capacity building of school administrators (PTA, SMCs), teachers and other staff to create protective and safe environments for girls 4. Integrate gender and rights education (with a focus on child marriage) in the primary and secondary school curriculum. 5. Facilitate access of adolescents at risk of child marriage and girls (especially the out of school young mothers) to vocational training institutions 6. Strengthen civil registration systems in Nigeria as a means to protect boys and girls from sexual and physical violence that lead to or arise from child marriage 7. Improve menstruation and hygiene management for girls in school through dissemination of the menstruation management readers in print, audio and video 8. Build girls' and boys' capacities in life skills and agency including self-esteem, self-defence and confidence to end CM 9. Facilitate and support the establishment of adolescents' groups which offer safe spaces for girls and boys to talk about sensitive issues. 10. Build capacities of senior women and male teachers in schools 11. Provide both in and out of school girls and boys with accurate reproductive health information to enable them manage their growth and development. 12. Equip health workers with adolescent counselling skills to promote adolescent health friendly services and rights in health facilities. 13. Facilitate access of girls and married adolescents to friendly adolescent health services.

(Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2016, p. 33, my bold)

The unique features of this list of recommended interventions in education are its naming of, and focus on, adolescence, and its tailoring of strategies to adolescent girls' psychological, social, physiological and practical needs. It is the only existing federal document pertaining to education and early marriage that recommends a holistic package of support and identifies education as a delivery vehicle. Nevertheless, this Strategy, like education sector

policies and strategies, focuses on *marriage delay*, reducing the proportion of girls who marry before age eighteen, rather than other facets of marriage decision-making such as how and to whom girls marry. While it recognises married adolescent girls, the support for this group is identified solely in terms of health services, with no statements pertaining to married school-age girls continuing educational provision.

There are a few statements and recommendations that point towards some responses to marriage among girls in school by the education sector. The NPGBE addresses pregnancy and 'other causes of dropout' among schoolgirls, stating that the federal government:

'encourages State Governments to [...] 'allow girls who drop out of school due to pregnancies or other causes to continue education'

(Federal Ministry of Education, 2006, p.13).

This statement has echoes of the federal Child Rights Act (2003):

'A female child who becomes pregnant before completing her education shall be *given the opportunity*, after delivery, to *continue* with her education, *on the basis of her individual ability*'

(2003, 15(5), my italics)

Given the temporal link between pregnancy and marriage in northern states in particular, the implication of these statements on pregnancy can feasibly be read into marriage. What they emphasise is the discrete and individualised nature of responses to pregnant, married or parenting girls to continuing education. State governments are encouraged, rather than mandated, to offer girls to option of continuing education and, for the Child Rights Act, this is based on individual ability. The NPGBE clarifies what 'continue education' means:

'The Federal Government of Nigeria encourages State Governments to establish Girls' Second Chance Education Centers, where girls who dropped out of school can continue learning academic subjects, as well as specific technical skills, and to provide adequate restructuring of such facilities including provisions of equipment and of facilitators salaries.

In collaboration with other development partners state governments are encouraged to work out modalities and develop guidelines for a school re-entry initiative. State governments are encouraged to develop relevant policies and laws governing re-entry and strategies for tracking school drop-outs.'

(Federal Ministry of Education, 2006, p.14).

Responsibility for 'Second Chance' and re-entry initiatives are devolved to state governments who are 'encouraged' to establish centres, develop guidelines, policies and strategies. There are two major issues in this devolution. Firstly, in Kaduna state responsibility for 'adult literacy and continuing education' has been attributed to the 'Agency for Mass Literacy but need to be coordinated with SUBEB' (Kaduna State ESP 2006-2015), which divides and complicates responsibility for premature school leavers' education (including married girls) across multiple different government education bureaus. Secondly, the looseness of the policy terms ('encourage', 'adequate', 'work out'), and the strain on basic education resources, contribute to idiosyncratic responses that are generally led and coordinated not by the state but by non-government organisations. Kaduna state ESPs contain no provisions for Second Chance or re-entry. However, the state hosts a number of bilateral donor-funded NGO-led initiatives that focus variously on literacy, numeracy and lifeskills and may or may not facilitate formal school re-entry (Adamu, 2017; Isiah, 2018; chapter 10). The idiosyncrasies of responses to married girls continued education highlight a challenge of defining and deciding appropriate forms of education for diverse adolescent girls. Diversification in response may suggest that girls have options from which to choose, but also indicates a piecemeal approach with no minimum standards to support married school-age girls.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a descriptive and critical analysis of the political, economic and social conditions in which basic education and early marriage operate in Nigeria and, specifically, in Kaduna state. Despite a legal framework for free and compulsory basic education for all children in Nigeria, and successive policies for implementation, there are gendered disparities in access and inadequacies in quality of formal basic schooling in northern Nigeria and Kaduna state. Inequality is, I suggest, institutionalised and decentralisation has presented major difficulties for the delivery of education for all. Policy and practice connections between early marriage and education are patchy and lacking full convergence or understanding of their mutual implication. Policy analysis and academic research suggests that girls in school are unlikely to receive sufficient practical, psychological or physiological support through their adolescence that might facilitate marriage delay, despite policy rhetoric on preventing early marriage.

Already married school-age girls have even fewer policy and practice support mechanisms. Opportunities to continue education, whether second chance or re-entry, may be available for some married girls via NGO interventions but these discrete and temporary practices are

set against a weak federal policy framework that leaves resourcing and implementation up to state governments. Resource constraints, and a focus on access, are implicated in the lack of attention to facets of quality schooling that address girls' agency and skills to navigate adolescence. This situation sets the scene for the following data analysis chapters and, next, an introduction to eight adolescent Kaduna girls whose lives are shaped by gendered and idiosyncratic experiences and outcomes of formal schooling and marriage.

Chapter 7. Pen portraits of eight Kaduna girls: Aissata, Mercy, Dorothy, Zahrah, Sarah, Hadiza, Nafisah and Nana

In this short chapter, I present eight pen portraits of eight girls who lived in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria in 2011. Five of these girls live in southern, and three in northern, Kaduna state. These portraits describe the girls' socioeconomic backgrounds, religious identity, family composition, schooling and marriage status and experiences. In creating these portraits, I have paid close attention to *what* each of the girls say in their interview about their lives, and *how* they have narrated their stories, using their accounts alone to create their portrait. The purpose of this chapter is to present these girls, whose experiences comprise part of each of this thesis' three main analytical chapters, and raise some questions for thinking about the interactions, and associated factors, between adolescent girls' schooling and marriages in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria.

Southern Kaduna state girls

Aissata

Aissata is thirteen years old. She lives with her mother, father, one sister and three brothers in southern Kaduna state. She is the fourth born and youngest girl. Her family are Christian.

In her home, she explains that her and her sister tend to do most of the chores, such as cooking, sweeping, mopping, fetching water and washing plates, even though they do not like it. Aissata thinks that chores should be shared equally between girls and boys.

Aissata and her siblings are all in school. Aissata enrolled in the local primary school aged six, transitioned to junior secondary school aged 11 and has just completed junior secondary class 3. During her schooling she never repeated a class, dropped out or was absent for more than a few days. Being ill only made it difficult for her to attend school sometimes. Her father paid her levies for junior secondary school. Aissata always paid on time, but some of her friends and peers could not and would be sent home or caned.

Aissata feels happy at school and most enjoys reading. Nevertheless, she has experience of fighting between boys and girls. Once, Aissata was sitting with her friends in the classroom and some boys disturbed them; she asked them to stop but they persisted and when she asked again one of the boys hit her. The teachers did nothing.

She thinks that school is very important particularly for girls to have something to do in their future. She wants to go to university and be a nurse. For Aissata, schooling also means gaining literacy, which is imperative, she believes, to get married.

Mercy

Mercy is seventeen years old. She lives with her mother, father and four siblings in southern Kaduna state. She married at age sixteen but lives with her natal family during the week while her husband works away from the village. Her natal family are Christian and are poor.

Before she married, Mercy's father paid her school levies, but she missed some school terms when he was ill and unable to work to pay the levies on time. When she could not pay her levies, her school drove her away⁵⁷ and caned her if she tried to return without paying. Mercy left school in junior secondary class 2. At this time, her father was unwell. She left school, subsequently married and gave birth (the precise timing of her marriage and pregnancy/birth is unclear). She explains that she married due to her condition and circumstances: nobody could afford to pay her school fees and take care of her needs.

Mercy is now back at school, in class 3, a year after she left. She has resumed in the same school with her peers. She was unhappy during the year she was out of school because she could see all her friends still going to school, but she was at home. She says that she feels nothing for her husband but has an interest in schooling. Her mother cares for her child during the school day and her father still pays her school fees. Mercy hopes to go to university and be a nurse to help people who are ill.

Dorothy

Dorothy is 27 years old. She is married and lives with her husband, aged 39, and his family in southern Kaduna state. Dorothy has two children aged 3 and ten. The family are Christian. Her husband has his junior secondary certificate and works as a driver. Her father-in-law is the head of her marital household.

Dorothy grew up in her aunt's house and later with her maternal grandmother. Her father died when she was 17 years old. She has two older brothers and is the sole surviving daughter. Her parents were both educated to secondary school level, but her family sometimes struggled to provide enough food and basic goods for their family and to pay Dorothy's school costs, including for books and uniform. In times of hardship, her parents

⁵⁷ 'kore', the Hausa word Mercy uses, means 'drive away'.

prioritised her brothers' education because they believed that men stay and guide their family home while women go to help their matrimonial homes.

The year of Dorothy's father's death coincided with Dorothy leaving junior secondary school in class 2 aged 17. She became pregnant to her boyfriend (then aged 19), left school, and married soon afterwards. She explains her marriage in terms of gaining support after her father's death. Dorothy does not regret her marriage, describing it as her destiny. She and her husband are managing, and he supports her with household tasks such as cooking. She sees her natal family regularly and participates in a '*zumunta*' or local cooperative.

After ten years out of formal schooling, Dorothy has re-enrolled in a new junior secondary school in class 2 thanks to her father-in-law, who pays for her secondary school fees and levies, and her husband, who pays for their children's nursery and primary schooling. Dorothy expresses regret that she left school and is happy to return. She was inspired to re-enrol to get government work, perhaps sweeping or cleaning, to sustain herself. Dorothy's aspiration is to go to college or university and become a primary school teacher. However, at the time of her interview her father-in-law was ill and Dorothy was concerned for her prospects of completing junior secondary school.

Zahrah

Zahrah is 20 years old. She lives with her extended, polygamous natal family comprising five co-wives and at least five siblings in southern Kaduna state. Her family are Christian and from a minority (non-Hausa) ethnic group.

Zahrah started primary school late⁵⁸ and experienced periods of extended absenteeism, corporal punishment and harassment, including beatings by teachers and being touched by boys, both of which she disliked. At 18 years of age, she left junior secondary class 3 due to pregnancy.

During her pregnancy, Zahrah married her child's father. Nobody advised her to marry but she felt bad getting pregnant. Her husband now works away from their village most of the time, so Zahrah lives with her family. Her parents require her to tell them before she leaves the compound and Zahrah tends not to go out with her friends anymore. Zahrah is taciturn about her marriage and her husband expressing that she feels nothing for her husband⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ Zahrah does not say how old she was exactly when she first enrolled in primary school.

⁵⁹ Zahrah (like Mercy) uses the Hausa "*ba koma*" ("nothing") to describe her feelings about her husband and being married. This phrase indicates an ambivalence or rejection of the husband/marriage but could also imply reluctance or reticence to engage with the interview question.

Zahrah wants to go back to school, but this depends on the possibility of leaving her child at home to be cared for by her parents. Returning to school would help her, she thinks, reach her ambition of becoming a tailor.

Sarah

Sarah is 18 years old. She lives with her mother and six siblings, among whom she is the youngest, in southern Kaduna state. Her parents, both Christians, separated a year ago and her father lives in a nearby village with a new wife. Her parents are both very poor: her father is unemployed, although he does some informal farm work, and her mother grows crops in their garden and earns money from weeding land. Her mother is devout, regularly visiting their local pastor for confirmation. Neither of her parents attended school.

Sarah completed primary school but with a long period of absenteeism during which she worked in a hotel to earn money for her family. When she resumed school, she repeated primary class 4. Her experience of schooling has been difficult: she did not have shoes and there was no money. Sarah dropped out at the end of primary school aged 14 because there was nobody to pay her junior secondary school costs. Since then, Sarah has stayed at home helping her mother and her siblings, but she does not enjoy this. She is acutely aware that she needs education but that her family have no means to support this.

Sarah thinks that girls should go to school to help their parents and to get a good marriage. She would like to complete senior secondary school and, with financial assistance, university, to get any job. Sarah is not married and says that her marriage has never been discussed.

Northern Kaduna state girls

Nana

Nana does not know her exact age, but she is not yet eighteen. She is from an extended, polygamous family comprising two co-wives and at least six siblings, among whom she is the eldest daughter.

Nana completed primary school, although she had periods of absenteeism when she was hawking (selling items on the street) to contribute to her family's income. During primary and junior secondary school, Nana says she experienced beating and caning for reasons including lateness, not paying her levies, or poor behaviour. She left junior secondary

school last year, at the beginning of class 2, because her family would not allow her to continue.

Nana married after leaving school. While she was still in school, suitors would come to her home. She has been married for five months and lives with her husband. She is not pregnant and does not have any children. Since marrying, Nana has stayed within her marital family's compound leaving only three times to visit a sick relative, for her uncle's funeral and for a naming ceremony⁶⁰. She will be able to go out regularly after a year of marriage. She expresses deference towards her husband for decision-making on what she can and cannot do, including spending small amounts of money.

Nana did not want to stop school and told this to her mother who said that she could not do anything. Nana feels that it is unlikely that she will resume schooling because her husband would refuse and there are many married young women in her family and community who do not go to school. Nana would love to finish senior secondary school.

Hadiza

Hadiza is 14 years old. She lives with her Muslim parents, seven siblings and her father's second wife and six children in northern Kaduna state. Her parents are farm owners, working on their farm and employing farm hands. Her mother completed primary school before marrying. Her father is the head of the family and makes decisions about household finances and schooling.

Hadiza's brothers all completed junior secondary school and one attended University in Zaria. Her three elder sisters are married with children and left school in junior secondary class 2. Hadiza started primary school aged seven. She has just finished junior secondary class 2 and hopes to transition to class 3 after the school holidays. However, she is worried about having money and has been selling potatoes on the street during the school holidays to contribute to her school costs. She has so far been unable to pay the fee for her Junior Secondary School Certificate (N1,100 / £3) at the end of class 3, which is causing her concern.

Hadiza is not married. She is deferential towards her parents on the question of whether and when she may marry, saying that they will make the decision and she will accept it. With her sisters' precedence of leaving school at the end of class 2, the dual concerns of secondary school exam fees and marriage are much on Hadiza's mind.

⁶⁰ Nana was in partial seclusion following her marriage, but the interview was granted and took place within her marital family home.

Nafisah

Nafisah is 14 years old. She lives with her mother, her father, her father's two co-wives, and a total of 24 children, most of whom are girls, in northern Kaduna state. She is her mother's sixth and youngest child. The family are Muslim, and the family compound is large but well-resourced. Her father was the village head of their community but died a year ago and the eldest brother has taken his role as head of the family and village head. The family is richer than others in the village and always have enough food.

Nafisah's parents were both educated to secondary school level. Nafisah's father believed in education and insisted that the children have a western and Islamic education and attend school regularly. Two of her older brothers are teachers and two of her older sisters are married but completed junior secondary school. Nafisah started school aged seven and is currently enrolled in primary class 6. She did not attend school for periods of time when she was younger due to illnesses, including measles. Her eldest brother has just paid the three hundred and fifty naira for Nafisah's common entrance levy into junior secondary school⁶¹. Nafisah always feels happy going to school. She is the primary class 6 captain and a member of the girls' club. She believes that every girl deserves to be enrolled in school by her parents because schooling is so beneficial. She wants to study to become a medical doctor because her religion does not allow men to examine women. Nafisah is not married and has not had any pressure to marry.

Reflections on schooling and marriage: insights from girls' stories

Marriage timing: a complex nexus of factors

The eight girls of Kaduna state, whose stories I have crafted from the interviews they gave, are all engaged in complex navigations of family, gendered sociocultural norms, schooling, and adolescence. Whether, when, how and why these girls marry seems to be determined by a complex nexus of interrelated individual and relational sociodemographic, and idiosyncratic, factors. Natal family poverty is very often implicated in girls' accounts of their home lives, school exclusion or leaving, and decisions to marry. But all of these girls are 'poor'⁶² and their poverty appears only a partial explanation for whether and when they marry – religious belief, parental illness or death, gender norms and pregnancy are strongly

⁶¹ This applies to all primary six pupils intending to transition to junior secondary school and equates to less than 1 GBP.

⁶² Their wealth profile was not estimated by TEGIN researchers but it is likely that all live, or have experienced living, below the international poverty line (USD 1.90/day).

interwoven with poverty in these girls' accounts. Mercy is poor, married and in school, while Sarah is very poor, unmarried and out of school. None of the portraits – except perhaps Nana - indicate that they left school *because* of, or for, marriage. Instead, their marriages were consequent to school leaving for other reasons framed by gender norms, roles and relationships. This troubles a discursive causal link between marriage and premature school leaving (Chapter 1), and some research interpretations of quantitative data that argued that early marriage leads to early school drop-out (Chapter 3). The portraits raise questions as to the factors – and people - implicated in the timing of girls' marriages and the (gendered) discourses constructed to explain or justify why girls marry when they do. These questions are pursued in Chapter 8, which draws on quantitative and qualitative data to examine the factors associated with early marriage timing and how girls, and adults connected to girls (teachers, head teachers, education policy makers and policy influences), articulate the right time for marriage.

Marriage processes and experiences: parental authority and girls' agency

Girls' relationships with their natal and marital families are important to their expectations and experiences of schooling and marriage. Zahrah, Sarah, Nana and Hadiza are deferential towards their parents, especially their fathers, while Nana defers to her husband and father-in-law. These relationships, and the way in which girls describe them, signal patriarchal communities and the significance of regimes of authority and respect. Yet, Aissata, Mercy, Dorothy, Zahrah, Hadiza and Nafisah also express aspiration and agency related to schooling and marriage and schooling, from earning money to stay in school to expressing autonomy in decisions to marry for support. The girls' portraits hint that they may be active in negotiating their complex circumstances to improve their well-being, cognisant of their relationships and relational conditions. These portraits invite further investigation of girls' roles in marriage processes and experiences, how, why and to whom they marry. Chapter 9 delves into qualitative data gathered for this thesis to explore girls' roles and relationships in marriage. It reflects on findings of research examined in Chapter 3, and the theoretical framings offered by Nigerian feminists in Chapter 4, to ask whether and what forms of agency girls can and do have prior to and during marriage and whether and how formal schooling plays a role in the development and realisation of agency.

Aspirations and experiences of schooling in relation to marriage

All eight girls started and have completed (or nearly completed) primary school. Schooling is a prominent feature of their lives. Most of them express enjoyment of schooling but

experiences of corporal punishment and gendered harassment imbue their narratives. Whether currently in or out of school, all the girls want to be in school and have aspirations for higher education for employment and/or marriage. Educational aspirations are repeatedly linked to marriage – gaining literacy for marriage (Aissata; Sarah); gaining a job to sustain herself in marriage (Dorothy). Schooling may function to *delay and improve* marriage, but only if resources, families, and the conditions of schooling are amenable.

These portraits indicate that married girls in Kaduna state can and do resume formal schooling. Mercy and Dorothy have both returned to school after marriage, including, for Dorothy, after a long period of absenteeism. This raises a question not only about the role and reality of schooling to protect girls from early age at marriage (delaying marriage) but also about the role and potential of schooling to protect already-married girls, improving their lives and offering opportunities to gain the competences and capabilities to which they aspire. The final data analysis chapter (Chapter 10), which draws on interviews with girls, teachers and head teachers, education policy makers and influencers, investigates this dual function potential of formal schooling to protect *against* and protect *in* marriage.

This chapter has provided a descriptive overview of the lives of eight girls living in Kaduna state. Their pen portraits set the scene for deep-dive data analysis that pursues the three insights on marriage timing and decision-making, processes and experiences, and the role and potential of education sequentially through the next three chapters.

Chapter 8. Negotiations on marriage timing: age, identity, and meanings of maturity

In global and African human rights treaties, marriage before the age of eighteen is unlawful and a violation of human rights (OAU, 1990, Article 21(2); UN CRC/GC/2003/4). Sustainable Development Goal 5.3, international development policies, and agency programmes coalesce around the goal of ensuring that no child marries before she or he is at least eighteen years of age (Loaiza, E., Wong, 2012; Davis et al., 2013; UNICEF, 2014). Yet early marriage practices remain widespread across Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in rural, poverty contexts, including states of North West Nigeria, where access to basic services, education and employment is limited (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003; Walker, 2012; Young Lives, 2018; Chapter 6). Alongside a global policy focus on marital age has emerged debate on the multifaceted and diverse nature of adolescent development and the sociocultural and philosophical complexities associated with setting universal minimum ages. These concurrent discourses have contributed to increasing contemporary research that intends to better understand *why* girls marry *when* they do. Of the four girls interviewed as part of the TEGIN project in 2011 and described in the previous chapter who were currently married (Mercy, Dorothy, Zahrah and Nana), there was little uniformity in the timing of their marriages.

This chapter explores and seeks to understand marital timing among northern Nigerian girls using quantitative and qualitative data and methods. Analysing the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2013), I present data on the prevalence of early marriage (<18 years) across regions and states of Nigeria according to selected demographic criteria. This quantitative data analysis offers one mode of recognition of early marriage and its associated factors in this context.

The chapter then shifts to a consideration of what girls say about marriage timing. Mercy, Dorothy, Zahrah and Nana would be among those DHS statistics of women married before eighteen. Their views offer insights to marriage timing (both typical and ideal) that develop and counterpose links highlighted by quantitative data, beginning to suggest how marriage timing is conditioned by highly socialised and gendered discourses of marital readiness that are only partially concerned with age. Following the girls' evidence, I consider views on marriage timing according to girls' parents, their teachers and school staff, and education policy makers and influencers. In these analyses, I pay attention to what is said about some of the factors associated with early marriage by quantitative data - religious and ethnic identity, wealth – as well as to adults' emphasis on ideas about female physiology, gender

roles and norms. I conclude with comments on the implication of single and mixed data interpretations for how early marriage is understood, what policy implications are entailed and what further research is needed.

Marriage timing among Nigerian women: the DHS data view

Standard analyses of the prevalence and patterns of early marriage utilising Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) organise marriage data according to a cut-off age for 'early' marriage at <18 years and, increasingly, an additional cut-off for 'very early' marriage at <15 years (UNICEF, 2011; Nove et al., 2014; Curtis, 2015). This is the primary mode of organising data to describe early marriage using DHS in which age in years defines 'early marriage'. Descriptive analysis of the women's questionnaire of the Nigeria DHS 2013 reveals basic information about women's marriage in Nigeria (Tables 8.1 and 8.2)⁶³. In 2013, three-quarters of Nigerian women aged 15-49 were ever married; over half (53%) married before age eighteen and a quarter (26%) married before age fifteen. The median age at first marriage for women nationwide was 18.8 years (Table 8.1). Nigerian women marry younger than men: 28.8% of young women aged 15-19 reported being currently married or in a union compared to only 1.1% of young men; this increases to nearly two-thirds of women (64.6%) compared to 14.4% of men aged 20-24 (Table 8.2). The likelihood of divorce or separation, regardless of age at first marriage, is very low (2.7% of ever-married women were divorced or separated). The slight decrease in the proportion of women aged over 40 who are currently married (Table 8.2) is likely to be partly explained by spousal death rather than divorce because, as indicated in age at marriage data, women tend to marry men older than themselves – the mean spousal age difference nationally is 8.2 years (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014, p.53; Adebowale, 2018). Data published by consecutive surveys suggest little change in marriage patterns over time: 70% of Nigerian women report being currently married in 2008, 75% in 2013, and 70% in 2018; women's (aged 15-49) median age at first marriage was 18.4 in 2008, 18.8 in 2013, and 19.1 in 2018, a decade variation of just + 0.7 years (National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009; National Population Commission and ICF, 2019).

⁶³ This analysis was conducted using Stata 13, survey setting the data, and using the approaches described in Chapter 5. All data presented are my own analyses unless otherwise stated.

Table 8.1 Women's sample overview 2013 (women aged 15-49)

Descriptor	National	North West	Kaduna
Sample size	38,948	9,673	1,243
Outcome			
Ever married	29,128 (75%)	8,615 (89%)	987 (79%)
Currently married	27,274 (70%)	8,319 (86%)	944 (76%)
Early marriage (<18)	15,485 (53%)	6,675 (78%)	627 (64%)
Very early marriage (<15)	7,525 (26%)	3,989 (46%)	325 (33%)
Median age at first marriage (years)	18.8	15.3	17.3

(Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2013, my analysis)

Table 8.2 Percent distribution of women and men (aged 15-49) currently married or living together, by age, 2013

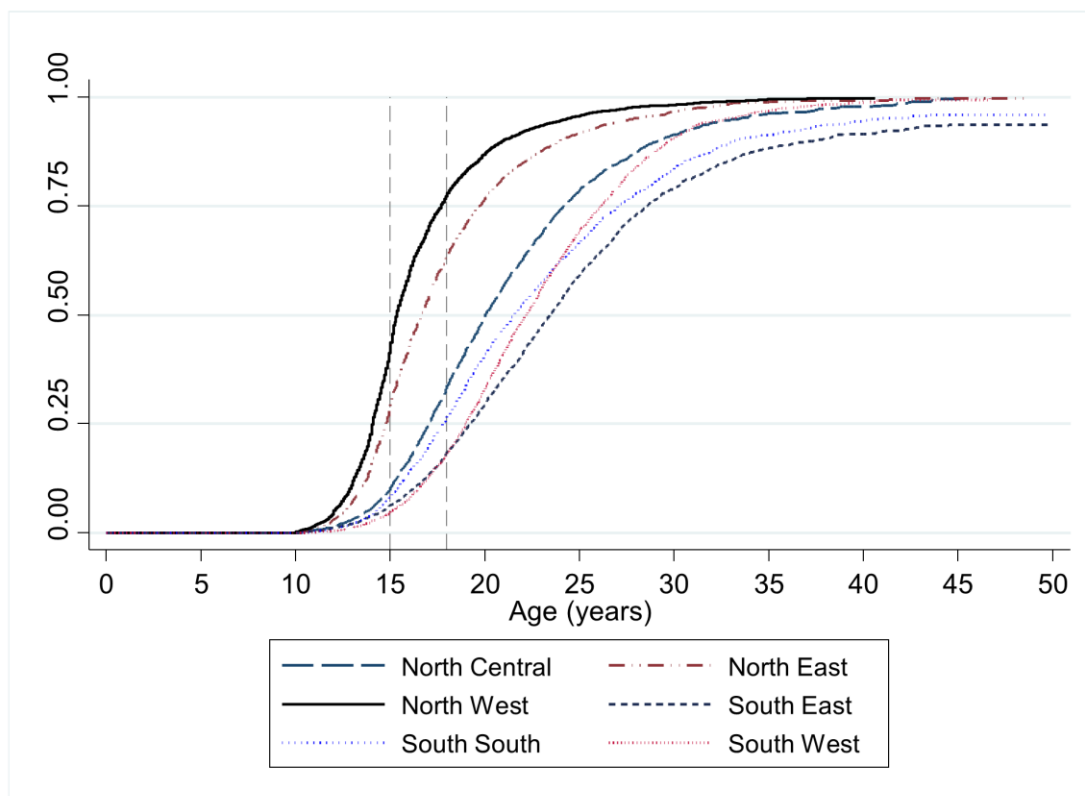
Age / %	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
Women	28.8	64.6	82.8	89.1	91.2	89.1	85.0
Men	1.1	14.4	45.0	72.5	89.0	95.0	95.7

(Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2013, my analysis)

Nigeria DHS data are representative of populations at the level of each of six regions and 36 states. [Figure 8.1](#) presents the results of a Kaplan-Meier survival analysis of women's reported age at marriage by region, used to ascertain in which regions women have the highest probability of early marital timing. The different curve distributions indicate variability in the likelihood of marriage by age by region. In 2013, women living in the North West and North East regions have the highest probabilities of marrying before eighteen. For North West women in 2013, the probability of marriage by age fifteen was 42% and by age eighteen was 78%, compared to 5% and 20% respectively for women living in the South West. This analysis resonates with [Table 8.1](#) and with data published by the DHS program, according to which the North West has the lowest median age at first marriage (women 20-

49) across consecutive survey rounds at 15.3 years in 2008, 15.4 in 2013 and 15.9 years in 2018 (National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009, p.95; National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014, p.58; National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.90). These data justify this thesis' focus on this region according to high prevalence of early marriage to examine context-specific trends, attitudes, practices and ideas associated with marriage.

Figure 8.1 Cumulative proportion of women (aged 15-49) married by age by region

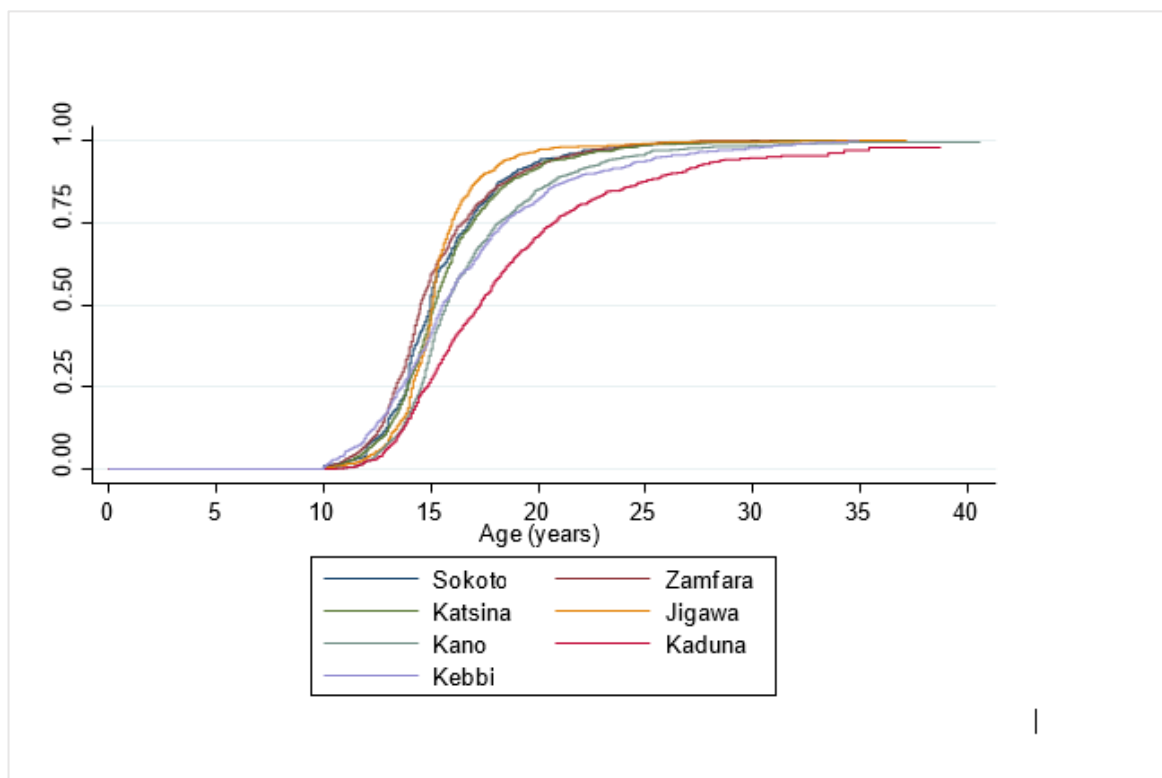


Marriage data can also be analysed at the level of states in Nigeria. The North West region is comprised of seven states⁶⁴. [Table 8.1](#) showed some preliminary data for this thesis' primary state of interest in the North West region: Kaduna state. In Kaduna state in 2013, the prevalence of early marriage was high among women aged 15-49 at 63% but the state has a lower proportion of women married early than the North West region as a whole ([Table 8.1](#)). This points towards the contribution of other states in the region to the regional data. So how does women's marriage timing vary by North West state? [Figure 8.2](#) presents a Kaplein-Meier survival analysis of women's reported age at marriage by state in the North West

⁶⁴ Sokoto, Zamfara, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano and Kebbi.

region. The probability of marriage by age eighteen is highest for women living in Jigawa state at 95%, while the probability of marriage by eighteen is lowest for women in Kaduna state at 60%. The graph thus bears out the indication in the basic descriptive analysis (Table 8.1) that Kaduna state women have an objectively high but *relatively lower* probability of early marriage than women in other states of the region. These data illuminate differences in marital timing according to state of residence, signalling the salience of paying attention to sub-national variations in marriage timing, especially for a country as large, populous and heterogenous as Nigeria. They also agitate further research to explain state-level differences in marriage timing.

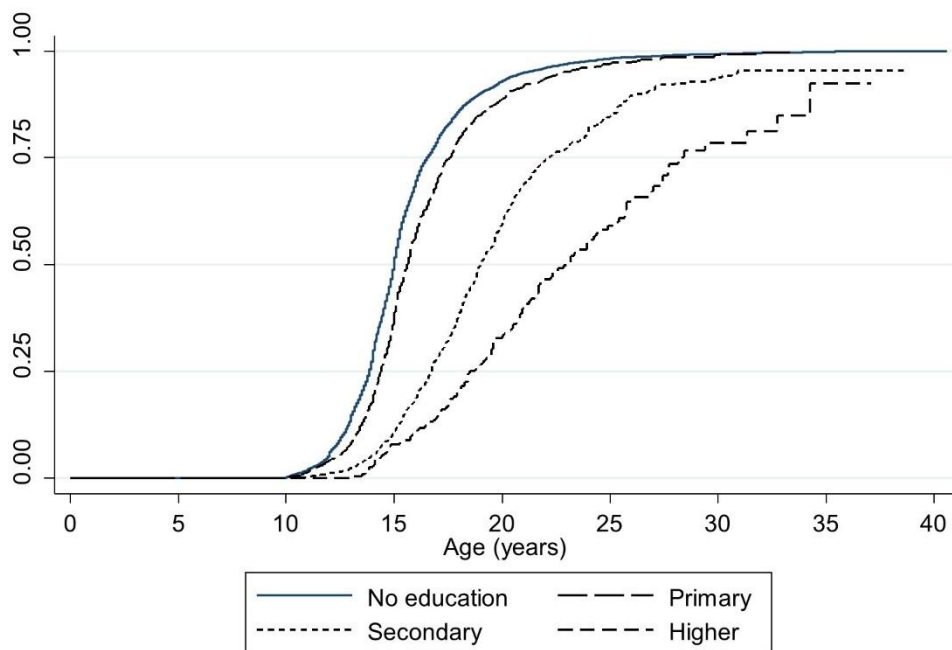
Figure 8.2 Cumulative proportion of women (aged 15-49) married by age by North West state



Academic research has suggested, on the whole, that girls who marry at a younger age have fewer years of schooling compared to girls marrying at older ages (or, girls with fewer years of schooling marry younger than girls with more years of schooling) (Chapter 3). This thesis aims to understand the data and discursive links between marriage and education for girls and women in northern Nigeria. Access to and completion of basic education for children in northern Nigeria, and especially girls in North West Nigeria, remains a major challenge (Chapter 6). Among women aged 15-49 in 2013, 37.8% nationwide report having

no formal schooling rising to 69.4% in the North West. Given the high proportion married by age eighteen, [Figure 8.3](#) examines the connection between marital age and education using the Kaplan-Meier technique. The graph shows the cumulative proportion of ever-married women (aged 15-49) married by age by their highest level of education attained.

Figure 8.3 Cumulative proportion of women (aged 15-49) married by age and educational attainment level in the North West region



[Figure 8.3](#) shows a decreasing probability of early marriage (<18) by level of education: among women with no formal schooling, the probability of marriage by eighteen is 85%; among women with some primary schooling, 79%; some secondary schooling, 38%; and some higher education, 22%. While the difference in the cumulative proportion of women married by age eighteen is similar whether they have none or some primary schooling (difference of 6%), the difference between those with some primary and some secondary is larger (difference of 41%). My analysis of North West women's median ages at first marriage by educational level consolidate this pattern: the median age at first marriage was fifteen for North West women with no education; 15.6 with some primary; 19 with some secondary, and 23 years of age with some higher education. These findings complement those presented in other quantitative studies, which have used these data to argue for the importance of girls' access to *secondary school in particular* to reduce early marriage (Adebowale et al., 2012; Walker, 2013a; Nguyen & Wodon, 2014). However, these data

cannot *explain* how and why marriage timing and educational attainment are linked, including the confounders associated with this connection and what substantively about 'being in school' affects marriage timing.

Crude bivariate descriptions such as region or state of residence, or educational level, by marital age will be confounded by other demographic characteristics of women. The literature review highlighted the salience for research of attending to multiple, intersecting and mutually reinforcing characteristics of women and girls and the conditions in which they live to understand marriage patterns and trends (NRC and IOM, 2005; Dixon-Mueller, 2008; Arnot et al., 2012). Among those characteristics commonly reported on by quantitative and qualitative researchers is rural/urban residence and religious identity (Ikamari, 2005; Delprato et al., 2015; Tafere et al., 2020). To ascertain the range and significance of residence, religion and other associations between marital timing and sociodemographic characteristics of women, data of the NDHS 2013 women's questionnaire was analysed using logistic regression. This analysis aims to identify more specifically *which women* in the North West region, and in Kaduna state specifically, are most likely to marry in adolescence. Table 8.3 and Table 8.4 present the output of the effect of six sociodemographic variables - state; age group; residence; ethnicity; religion; and education - on two outcomes: early marriage (<18, for all women aged 18 or over) (Table 8.3) and very early marriage (<15, for all women) (Table 8.4) in the North West region. Table 8.5 presents the same analysis for women living in Kaduna state only⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ In these tables, religion and ethnicity are collapsed into three groups each because 91% of women in the North West are Muslim and 78% are Hausa, and education is collapsed to a binary variable on the basis that by age 15 (the youngest age of women surveyed), all women should have *some* schooling.

Table 8.3 Risk factors for marriage before eighteen, women (aged 18-49), North West Nigeria, 2013

	n/N (mar/tot)	%	Univariate		Multivariate	
			OR (95% CI)	P (Wald)	OR	P (Wald)
State						
Kano	1455/1909	76	Ref		Ref	-
Sokoto	989/1142	87	2.35 (1.56 – 3.54)	<0.001	1.54 (1.07 – 2.21)	0.021
Zamfara	888/1038	86	2.13 (1.48 – 3.08)	<0.001	1.42 (1.01 – 1.98)	0.041
Katsina	966/1163	83	1.74 (1.24 – 2.51)	0.003	1.24 (0.90 – 1.72)	0.187
Jigawa	988/1083	91	3.16 (2.12 – 4.71)	<0.001	1.96 (1.33 – 2.89)	0.001
Kaduna	627/1085	58	0.41 (0.27 – 0.62)	<0.001	0.75 (0.54 – 1.04)	0.088
Kebbi	762/1057	72	0.80 (0.58 – 1.11)	0.180	0.53 (0.40 – 0.72)	<0.001
Age group						
18-19	497/732	68	Ref		Ref	-
20-24	1237/1652	75	1.32 (1.08 – 1.62)	0.007	1.23 (0.99 – 1.53)	0.057
25-29	1410/1769	80	1.81 (1.44 – 2.27)	<0.001	1.61 (1.28 – 2.04)	<0.001
30-34	1121/1333	84	2.42 (1.91 – 3.08)	<0.001	2.37 (1.82 – 3.09)	<0.001
35-39	928/1159	80	1.79 (1.37 – 2.34)	<0.001	1.57 (1.18 – 2.09)	0.002
40-44	710/878	81	1.83 (1.34 – 2.49)	<0.001	1.49 (1.07 – 2.08)	0.018
45-49	772/954	81	1.97 (1.44 – 2.69)	<0.001	1.48 (1.05 – 2.07)	0.024
Location						
Rural	5434/6445	84	Ref		Ref	-
Urban	1241/2032	61	0.27 (0.20 – 0.35)	<0.001	0.46 (0.38 – 0.57)	<0.001
Religion						
Islam	6367/7827	81	Ref		Ref	-
All Christian and Catholic	227/542	42	0.15 (0.12 – 0.20)	<0.001	0.55 (0.39 – 0.76)	<0.001
Traditionalist and Other	52/71	73	0.70 (0.32 – 1.51)	0.362	1.01 (0.56 – 1.80)	0.986
Ethnicity						
Hausa	5600/6919	81	Ref		Ref	-
Fulani	616/686	90	1.89 (1.20 – 2.99)	0.006	1.29 (0.90 – 1.86)	0.165
Others	449/858	52	0.23 (0.17 – 0.31)	<0.001	0.82 (0.60 – 1.12)	0.207
Education						
No education	5491/6401	86	Ref		Ref	-
Some education	1184/2076	57	0.19 (0.16 – 0.24)	<0.001	0.40 (0.33 – 0.49)	<0.001

The univariate results of [Table 8.3](#) indicate that the odds ratio (OR) for marriage before age eighteen were statistically significantly lower for living in an urban area (OR 0.27 (95% CI 0.20-0.35)) compared to rural residence; identifying as Christian or Catholic (OR 0.15 (95% CI 0.12-0.20)) compared to Islam and having some education (OR 0.19 (95% CI 0.16-0.24)) against no education. Complementing the output of the Kaplein-Meier survival analysis ([Figure 8.3](#)), these results show that, against the baseline comparator Kano state, living in Kaduna state statistically significantly *lowers* a woman's odds of marrying early (OR 0.41 (95% CI 0.27-0.62)), while living in Jigawa state *increases* the odds of early marriage (OR 3.16 (95% CI 2.12-4.71)). All age groups older than 18–19-year-olds have a statistically significant higher odds of early marriage, but this trend is not linear.

Multivariate results adjust for each other variable and show the significance of the effects of the individual coefficients of each variable. In the multivariate model for early marriage in the North West ([Table 8.3](#)), the statistical significance of state of residence is reduced, particularly for Kaduna state. This means that state of residence only partially explains early marriage; other factors are in play. Identifying as Christian or Catholic and having some education continue to produce statistically significant lower odds of early marriage, although their effects have reduced: the odds of early marriage among Christian women have reduced to 45% less than for Muslim women, compared to 85% less in the univariate model; the odds of early marriage are 60% higher for women with no education compared to those with some education, after adjusting for other variables. This indicates a different risk profile for early marriage for never-enrolled and ever-enrolled women, evidenced by other Nigeria DHS analysis (Adebowale et al., 2012). The multivariate model shows how women's odds of marrying before eighteen is affected by interacting sociodemographic factors.

Sociodemographic factors associated with the outcome of marriage before age fifteen (very early) are similar to those for marriage before age eighteen. The univariate model in [Table 8.4](#) indicates that, against their baseline comparators, women living in urban areas (OR 0.35 (95% CI 0.27-0.45)), identifying as Christian or Catholic (OR 0.20 (95% CI 0.13-0.32)), and having some education (OR 0.24 (95% CI 0.20-0.29)) are characteristics of women associated with highly statistically significant *lower* odds of marrying before fifteen years of age (i.e. the same as for women marrying before eighteen). The statistically significant effects of these characteristics hold in the multivariate model in which variables are adjusted for each other.

Table 8.4 Risk factors for marriage before fifteen, women (aged 15-49), North West Nigeria, 2013

	n/N (married/ total)	%	Univariate		Multivariate	
			OR	P (Wald)	OR	P (Wald)
State						
Kano	763/2228	34	Ref	-	Ref	-
Sokoto	631/1314	48	2.05 (1.57 – 2.69)	<0.001	1.54 (1.22 – 1.95)	<0.001
Zamfara	677/1189	57	2.83 (2.12 – 3.79)	<0.001	2.27 (1.79 – 2.88)	<0.001
Katsina	593/1304	45	1.79 (1.37 – 2.34)	<0.001	1.40 (1.11 – 1.78)	0.005
Jigawa	528/1211	44	1.59 (1.25 – 2.03)	<0.001	1.09 (0.86 – 1.39)	0.471
Kaduna	325/1243	26	0.65 (0.44 – 0.97)	0.035	1.02 (0.76 – 1.36)	0.917
Kebbi	472/1184	40	1.29 (0.98 – 1.71)	0.070	0.99 (0.75 – 1.30)	0.945
Age group						
15-19	499/1928	26	Ref	-	Ref	-
20-24	594/1652	36	1.57 (1.33 – 1.86)	<0.001	1.46 (1.23 – 1.74)	<0.001
25-29	784/1769	44	2.28 (1.91 – 2.73)	<0.001	2.09 (1.76 – 2.46)	<0.001
30-34	668/1333	50	2.90 (2.39 – 3.51)	<0.001	2.70 (2.25 – 3.25)	<0.001
35-39	516/1159	45	2.25 (1.83 – 2.76)	<0.001	2.06 (1.69 – 2.51)	<0.001
40-44	432/878	49	2.58 (2.06 – 3.72)	<0.001	2.27 (1.83 – 2.83)	<0.001
45-49	496/954	52	2.96 (2.37 – 3.71)	<0.001	2.51 (2.02 – 3.21)	<0.001
Location						
Rural	3392/7289	47	Ref	-	Ref	-
Urban	597/2384	25	0.35 (0.27-0.45)	<0.001	0.56 (0.46 – 0.68)	<0.001
Religion						
Islam	3844/8925	43	Ref	-	1.00	-
All Christian and Catholic	98/623	16	0.20 (0.13 – 0.32)	<0.001	0.44 (0.26 – 0.73)	0.002
Traditionalist and Other	31/83	37	0.84 (0.55 – 1.30)	0.435	0.66 (0.31 – 1.38)	0.266
Ethnicity						
Hausa	3316/7870	42	Ref	-	Ref	-
Fulani	430/801	54	1.53 (1.22 – 1.90)	<0.001	1.39 (1.12 – 1.72)	0.003
Others	235/985	24	0.36 (0.24 – 0.54)	<0.001	1.08 (0.76 – 1.54)	0.654
Education						
No education	3450/7062	49	Ref	-	Ref	-
Some education	539/2611	21	0.24 (0.20 – 0.29)	<0.001	0.46 (0.39 – 0.55)	<0.001

Complementary to [Figure 8.3](#), the data in [Table 8.4](#) suggest that, while early marriage is prevalent across the region, women in some states may be at higher risk of very early marriage (<15) while women in other states are at higher risk of older adolescent marriage (at 15-17 years of age) but the reasons for this are unclear. The effects of ethnicity on marital timing (<15 and <18) appear similarly complex. While univariate modelling suggests that Fulani and other ethnicities may have higher odds of early ([Table 8.3](#)) and very early ([Table 8.4](#)) marriage than Hausa, their significance is eliminated in multivariate models, *except* for Fulani women marrying before fifteen (p. 0.003). These data suggest that ethnicity may be implicated in marriage timing, particularly very early marriage, but further data are needed. Given the evidence in the literature of the more significant detrimental effect on health and education of young adolescent marriages compared to older adolescent marriages (Singh and Samara, 1996; Godha et al., 2012; Westoff et al., 2013), these data also flag the critical importance of analysing and paying attention to disaggregated outcomes and risk factors.

[Table 8.5](#) presents the same logistic regression analysis for Kaduna state. Population numbers in this analysis are much smaller than for the region but indicate some notable characteristics. In the univariate models for both outcomes of interest (marriage <18 and marriage <15), identifying as non-Muslim, belonging to a minority ethnic ('other') group, and having some education all have a highly statistically significant odds reduction effect. However, the significance of religious and ethnic identity are reduced in both multivariate models, indicating that these variables depend on others for their effect on marriage timing. Urban residence retains a statistically significant effect to reduce the odds of marriage before age eighteen. Living in an urban area may be associated with older age at marriage but, despite Kaduna state's rapid urbanisation, around 60% of the state's total population live in rural areas (Lloyd-Jones et al., 2016, p.29) highlighting the importance of trends in rural areas. Having some education significantly reduces the likelihood of marriage before eighteen in Kaduna state as in the whole North West region. The consistent effect of having some education to reduce the odds of early marriage at regional and state level demands further, deeper analysis.

Table 8.5 Risk factors for marriage before fifteen and eighteen, Kaduna state, 2013

	Univariate <15 years				Multivariate <15 years		Univariate <18				Multivariate <18 years	
	n/N (married / total)	%	OR (95% CI)	P (Wald)	OR	P (Wald)	n/N (married / total)	%	OR (95% CI)	P (Wald)	OR	P (Wald)
Age group												
Under 25	101/496	20	Ref	-	Ref	-	181/338	54	Ref	-	Ref	-
25 and over	224/747	30	1.58 (1.14 - 2.18)	0.008	1.73 (1.31 - 2.30)	0.001	446/747	60	1.24 (0.91 - 1.70)	0.167	1.36 (0.99 - 1.86)	0.054
Residence												
Rural	236/715	33	Ref	-	Ref	-	416/624	67	Ref	-	Ref	-
Urban	89/528	17	0.33 (0.15 - 0.73)	0.01	0.53 (0.38 - 0.85)	0.010	211/461	46	0.34 (0.17 - 0.68)	0.004	0.60 (0.45 - 0.80)	0.001
Religion												
Islam	250/693	36	Ref	-	Ref	-	437/601	73	Ref	-	Ref	-
All Christian, Traditional and Other	74/546	14	0.22 (0.12 - 0.40)	<0.001	0.44 (0.20 - 0.97)	0.042	189/480	39	0.21 (0.14 - 0.32)	<0.001	0.5 (0.32 - 0.96)	0.036
Ethnicity												
Hausa	198/552	36	Ref	-	Ref	-	354/485	73	Ref	-	Ref	-
Fulani	15/44	34	0.87 (0.41 - 1.86)	0.708	0.65 (0.34 - 1.24)	0.182	29/36	81	1.41 (0.49 - 4.05)	0.503	0.98 (0.39 - 2.43)	0.955
Others	112/647	17	0.28 (0.15 - 0.53)	<0.001	0.98 (0.45 - 2.15)	0.967	244/564	43	0.24 (0.16 - 0.38)	<0.001	0.83 (0.4 - 1.52)	0.534
Education												
No education	218/526	41	Ref	-	Ref	-	375/479	78	Ref	-	Ref	-
Some education	107/717	15	0.20 (0.12 - 0.33)	<0.001	0.45 (0.27 - 0.74)	0.003	252/606	42	0.17 (0.11 - 0.25)	<0.001	0.36 (0.24 - 0.54)	<0.001

Data analysed from the women's questionnaire of the 2013 Nigeria DHS show that women's marital timing varies across Nigeria according to different demographic and social variables. Data show that the North West region has the highest proportion of women reporting marriage before eighteen of all the regions in Nigeria, supporting the thesis' focus on this area. Women living in Kaduna state have a lower risk of marrying early than women living in other states in the region but the median age at first marriage is below eighteen (17.3 years) and the explanatory power of state of residence to marital timing is reduced with the addition of other variables to the regional logistic regression models, meaning that other factors are confounding this link (Table 8.3 and 8.4). To determine, then, *which* women within Kaduna state might be more likely to marry early, the state model (Table 8.5) indicates two characteristics that consistently and significantly *increase* women's odds of early marital timing – rural residence and a Muslim religious identity - and one characteristic – having some education – that consistently and significantly *reduces* the odds of early marriage. Rurality, Islamic faith and some formal schooling have been associated with early age at marriage in other quantitative and qualitative research in other Sub-Saharan African countries (Ikamari, 2005; Lloyd and Mensch, 2006; Delprato et al., 2015; Mweemba and Mann, 2019). However, these data show that Christian populations do practice early marriage: 39% of Christian women reported marriage before 18 in Kaduna state (Table 8.5), marking a simplification of the discourse of religion in marriage timing. This analysis has shown how these factors operate in the North West Nigerian geopolitical context. It has also highlighted the importance of attending to specific outcomes of interest and the variability of significance to different factors.

While these quantitative data usefully point towards the prevalence and patterns in marriage timing in North West Nigeria and Kaduna state, they reveal limited information about how and why certain factors are linked to marriage timing. Those factors that are significant and consistent (rurality, Muslim identity, some schooling), and those that appear weaker and more complex (ethnicity), demand further exploration and explanation. The following part of this chapter considers how these, and other factors, are discussed in descriptions of, attitudes towards, and ideas about, marriage timing according to girls, school staff and education policy actors interviewed as part of the TEGIN research and by myself during the period 2011 to 2017.

Discourses of marriage timing: attitudes, assumptions and meanings of maturity

Age in numeric years is the key analytic variable to describe early marriage through DHS data. Distilled as categorical variables, early (<18 years) and very early (<15 years) marriage, and educational attainment (none; primary; secondary; higher) can be usefully analysed to illuminate connections and associated factors, as the previous part of this chapter has shown. However, the literature review (Chapter 3) highlighted some emergent discussion over the precedence of age as the defining formulation of early marriage given the significance of menarche, puberty and gendered sociocultural context to the timing, experience and outcomes of adolescent marriages (Bunting, 2005; Arnot et al., 2012; Blum et al., 2017). Contestation over appropriate marriage timing, and the ascription of 'early marriage' according to a woman's age in years, is a contemporary feature of the Nigerian legislative system: a 2013 review of the *Constitution* was mired by its failure to remove clause 29 (4)(b), which deems any married girl or woman to have reached maturity regardless of her age at marriage (Chapter 6). These academic and policy discussions indicate that interpretations of, and meanings attributed to, 'early marriage' are negotiated by policy makers, communities and families rather than solely fixed by age.

Against the formulations of (and insights into) early marriage offered by DHS data, this part of the chapter examines the social meanings attached by different individuals in Kaduna state to the question of when girls marry and why they marry when they do. I explore data from interviews with girls, parents, teachers and education policy actors to consider how marriage timing is articulated and explained by girls, school staff and policy actors - including in relation to the factors elicited by quantitative data analysis – and what ideas these data advance about how women's marital timing is defined and understood in Kaduna state. I start by looking at what the eight Kaduna girls say about marriage timing before turning to the views of adults around them.

Girls' views on marriage timing

The eight Kaduna girls whose narratives have shaped this thesis (and whose backgrounds I portrayed in Chapter 7) were asked their views on ideal marriage timing (Table 8.6). Among this small group of girls are some notable features of data. The three northern Kaduna state girls expressed younger ideal marital ages, at 17 years of age, than the five southern Kaduna state girls, at 25 years of age. Already married southern girls (Mercy, Dorothy and Zahrah) expressed higher ideal ages for marriage compared to their actual ages at marriage by between two to 14 years. Additionally, current marital status seems to mediate preferences for marital timing with already married girls expressing older ideal ages for marriage than unmarried girls.

Table 8.6 Girls' status and views on marriage timing

Respondent	Location	Age at interview	Marital status	Ideal age for marriage	Parents ideal age
Nana	Northern	<18	Married <18	15	-
Nafisah	Northern	14	Unmarried	16-17	12-14
Hadiza	Northern	14	Unmarried	14-15 (or 20)	-
Sarah	Southern	18	Unmarried	15	25
Mercy	Southern	17	Married at	30	18
Dorothy	Southern	27	Married at	23	25-30
Zahrah	Southern	20	Married at	20-30	25
Aissata	Southern	13	Unmarried	25	-

The sociodemographic contexts of northern and southern Kaduna state have generalisable differences: the majority population in the north are Muslim, and the girls live in rural communities, while the southern population are multi-ethnic and predominantly Christian (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p.39) and the girls live in, or near to, semi-urban communities. The articulated ideal of marriage in adolescence among the northern girls (Nana, Nafisah and Hadiza) resonates with this chapter's DHS analysis that indicated the significance of rural residence and a Muslim religious identity to the odds of early marriage timing. However, further exploration of these qualitative data offer insight into why these ages come to be expressed as ideal for marriage.

The girls discuss and explain their views on entering marriage. Nana, Nafisah and Hadiza, Muslim girls living in the Karkara community of northern Kaduna state, concur that 15 to 17 years of age is generally ideal for marriage. Nana says that at 15 years of age a girl is

“grown-up”, while Nafisah rationalises 16-17 years old “because I heard my parents say that it is the ideal age for every girl to get married”. Hadiza is similarly clear that when she marries depends on her parents:

Interviewer: When do you want to get married?

Hadiza: It is not my decision. My parents will decide for me.

(Hadiza, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Hadiza confirms that her father is the head of the family who makes, and finances, household, marriage, and schooling decisions and she is deferential towards her parents, especially her father. The authority of the father in deciding when girls marry is repeated by out-of-school girls in Karkara community who engaged in a focus group discussion as part of the TEGIN data collection process:

Interviewer: Who takes the decision when to marry?

Girl 1: The father.

Interviewer: What about the mother?

Girl 1: She supports the father.

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

During this focus group discussion, the girls discuss how girls’ age, norms related to authority and power, and girls’ schooling aspiration are negotiated in views and practices of marital timing:

Interviewer: In this community, at what age do girls marry?

Girl 1: 12 years old Islamically.

Interviewer: Giving her into marriage at the age of 12, does that have any advantage to her?

Girl 1: It has some advantage from the Islamic point of view.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Girl 1: That is her religious belief, that at age 12 she should be given into marriage.

Girl 2: Things have now changed. Some girls stay up to 15 to 16 years old before they are married.

Girl 3: But there is a problem now, some stay up to 20 years in the name of schooling.

Girl 4: Some are 12, 15, 17 or even 20.

Interviewer: Which one is best for you?

Girl 4: 17 years is good. Your husband will not be abusing you that you are illiterate.

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

In their discussion, the girls invoke the Islamic religion as institutional authority to establish and explain a framework for very early marriage (at 12 years old). The discussion pivots on ideas of power and authority – religious, parental, male – over marriage timing, with the expression ‘given into’ marriage and comment on being abused by your husband. Power in the community and family in Kaduna state is predominantly held by men (Harris, 2012). In Shari’a Courts elder males hold sway, while at the family level, fathers generally play a significant role according to the Maliki doctrine of *ijbar* (fatherly authority) (Walker, 2016, p.255). This resonates in what Nafisah, Hadiza and the out-of-school girls say about religious and paternal authority in marriage timing.

A ‘change’ towards later adolescent marriage (at 15 or 16, aligned with the end of basic education in Nigeria) is associated by the out-of-school girls to *staying* in school and *gaining literacy for marriage*. The idea of schooling that delays marriage is blended with ideas of religion:

“The religious teachers would want a girl to be married after she had gained some religious training and some western education”

(Out-of-school girl, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Hadiza likewise implicates schooling aspiration in ideal marriage timing:

Interviewer: When do you think a girl is ready for marriage?

Hadiza: If she does not want to continue with her studies, at the age of 14-15.

Interviewer: What if she wants to continue her studies?

Hadiza: If she wants to continue and the parents are supportive there is no problem if she reaches 20 years.

(Hadiza, Karkara, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

For Hadiza, if a girl does not aspire to study, she can marry at fourteen, but if she wants to continue studying – *and her parents are supportive* - she can be twenty years old before marrying. For Hadiza and the out-of-school girls, their aspiration for and ability to continue

schooling beyond mid-adolescence is part of a narrative of marriage timing but contingent on parental and/or religious support. These northern Muslim girls' responses indicate a carefully negotiated account of marriage timing according to religious doctrine, parental authority, school retention, and age.

Among girls in southern Kaduna state, the median ideal age at first marriage is 23 years old but their attitudes towards marriage timing vary according to the conditions and characteristics of their lives. Dorothy married at 17 and has two children but her perception of ideal marital timing is older, when a girl has a 'capability' for marriage:

“for a girl to appreciate her marriage she should be at least 23 years [...] she is capable of handling marriage issues at that age”.

(Dorothy, married, Hanya, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Dorothy describes her family as “poor”; she has a lot to do and always needs her “husband’s approval for whatever I need to do”. She describes negotiations with her husband over household tasks and with her father-in-law over her education. In Dorothy’s story, the prominence of her relationships with her marital family and her ability to “manage” the household seem to align with her ideas about timing marriage when a girl has practical and emotional capabilities. The salience of male relationships to Dorothy’s daily life also has some echoes of northern girls’ discussions of their fathers and patriarchal social norms.

Zahrah and Mercy, like Dorothy already married, identify around thirty years of age as ideal for marriage. Zahrah does not explain this but Mercy, who married and became pregnant at sixteen, explains that:

“by then she must have finished secondary school and university, also she must have got a job that will sustain her when she gets married”

(Mercy, married, Hanya, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Schooling - wanting to go to school but being sent home for not paying her fees and then due to pregnancy – is a major feature of Mercy’s marriage story. Her experiences of schooling have been transient – intersected and interrupted by poverty, pregnancy, and marriage – but her aspirations are consistent to continue schooling (she has returned to junior secondary school) and become a nurse. The narrative prominence and emotional significance of schooling in Mercy’s story elides with her preference for older age at marriage to complete higher education for employment and self-sustainability in marriage. Her idea of

the purpose of staying in school goes beyond northern girls' expressions of gaining literacy for marriage to ideas about professional, economic autonomy in marriage⁶⁶

Unmarried out-of-school girls' views on marriage timing are also primarily linked to schooling aspiration. Five girls aged 13-19 years who participated in a focus group discussion pinpoint ages between 26 and 30 years old as ideal for marriage. They had been out of school for between one term and one year; three are double orphans and two are single orphans; living in poverty and unable to pay their school fees. Yet, they all have "plans" to return to school, they "want to learn" and express schooling aspirations despite narratives of hardship and poverty that present obstacles to these aspirations. Their older ideal ages for marriage are explained by schooling aspiration. This link between marital timing and schooling aspiration, conditioned by poverty, has a mirror in Sarah. Sarah is 18 years old and has been out of school for four years (since she was 14) due to severe poverty. Unlike the focus group girls, Sarah thinks that she will "never return" to school and expresses her ideal age for marriage as 15 years of age. Sarah, Mercy and the unmarried out-of-school girls' accounts indicate that the absence or presence of aspiration, and resources, is implicated in preferences towards marriage timing. These girls are negotiating lived experiences of poverty with aspirations and expected outcomes of schooling in their marriage preferences.

Adolescent girls raise different ways of thinking about marriage timing that include and go beyond age. In the northern zone, authority of religion and elders/parents mediates girls' attitudes and expectations towards marriage timing. In the southern zone, religion and parental authority are not mentioned; instead, girls recognise that poverty predisposes them to marriage especially when manifest as inability to pay school fees. The inability to pay fees removes the protective mantle of being in school to delay marriage timing. This kind of education poverty – fees as a barrier to schooling - seems to affect girls' attitudes towards ideal marriage timing, but not in completely predictable ways. Whether education poverty is linked to girls preferring older or younger marital age seems to depend on the extent of their aspirations for schooling and what they believe they will gain or learn from schooling. For Hadiza and focus group girls in northern and southern Kaduna, simply *wanting to be in* school justifies delayed marriage, but for Mercy, Dorothy and other girls, schooling has to be justified through *material gains* – literacy, practical competence, a job.

Cutting across northern and southern girls' accounts is the significant role of relationships to girls' attitudes towards marriage timing: relationships with parents, religious elders or

⁶⁶ Chapter 9 pursues further girls' ideas about skills and competencies for marital independence and relationships.

institutions, husbands and marital families, and schools. The following section considers whether and how the views of parents on marriage timing resonate with those of these girls.

Parents' views on marriage timing

Interviews were conducted as part of TEGIN research in August 2011 with parents of married girls in southern Kaduna state - Mercy, Dorothy and Zahrah – and two unmarried girls – Sarah in the southern zone and Nafisah in the northern zone. Each recounted experiences of and attitudes towards girls' marriage timing (Table 8.6). Zahrah's father's ideal age for women's marriage is 25 years of age although he confirms that eighteen is the most common age for marriage among the girls in his family. Mercy's father and Dorothy's mother similarly express older ideal ages at marriage than the ages (16-18) at which their daughters married:

“It's good for a lady to get married when she completes her secondary school”

(Mercy's father, Hanya, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“25-30 years so you can get work to help yourself and parents”

(Dorothy's mother, Hanya, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Sarah's mother, who has another daughter who married at 15 years old, echoes these parents' sentiments, saying that girls should marry at “25 years old [...] in order to have a good character and a good education”. Like the married young women, their parents express older preferred ages at marriage than those at which they have experienced [their daughters] marriage. They echo girls' ideas about staying school and gaining moral and/or practical competences from schooling – a ‘good character’, ‘helpful work’ – before marriage, gains that are, and are not, explicitly linked to being married.

In northern Kaduna state, the father of Nafisah, age 14 and unmarried, was interviewed. Northern girls' carefully negotiated accounts of Islamic religious belief and paternal authority are implicated in Nafisah's father's account, in which he invokes the dual and symbiotic salience of religious and paternal authority in appropriate marriage timing. His account mirrors the ages identified for marriage among girls in Karkara community as well as the explanatory framework of religion and parental authority:

Interviewer: In your opinion when do you think a girl should be due for marriage?

Father: Whenever she reaches the age of 12, 13 to 14 years old. And when religion says she is due.

Interviewer: Why do you say religion?

Father: Marriage is a religious institution and has to be done according to the rites of religion. I married two [daughters] at 16. I was the one that said they should get married.

(Nafisah's father, Babban community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

In ideas about schooling aspiration and outcomes mediated by poverty in the southern zone, and about religious and parental authority in the northern zone, the ages identified and discourses around ideal marriage timing recur across interviews with girls and their parents. This suggests familial norms and implicit, relational understandings about marriage timing. All the girls interviewed by TEGIN had been to school at some period of their lives, and schooling features in many of their accounts of and attitudes towards marriage. I turn now to consider how the individuals engaged in formal schooling – teachers, head teachers, government education officials, education policy makers – articulate and frame discourses around girls and women's marriage timing to understand whether they promulgate schooling aspirations (and minimum policy standards) and/or raise alternative factors and views. These adults are also often parents themselves, a dual identity that may illuminate the complex negotiations of different facets of girls, and their families, lives in marriage timing decisions.

School staff and policy makers' views on marriage timing

Nine teachers (3 women and 6 men), and 3 School-Based Management Committee (SBMC)⁶⁷ Chairmen, from the northern and southern Kaduna state, were asked their view on ideal marriage timing for women, in addition to two local government authority (LGA) officials, one state, and one federal government education official (1 woman and 3 men) (Table 8.7). Evidence from four Nigerian policy influencers working with donor agencies or development programmes are also considered⁶⁸.

Nineteen years of age was the median ideal age at first marriage for girls (among those who specified). This is just over the minimum legal age for marriage in Nigeria according to the Child Rights Act 2003. That Nigerian state and non-state actors would coalesce around an age at least equivalent to national and global legal framings is broadly unsurprising. As a

⁶⁷ SBMC members are selected from among the leaders and parents in the community surrounding a school and intend to be representative of that community.

⁶⁸ Six policy interviewees are excluded: 3 of whom are non-Nigerian and 3 did not discuss marital timing.

northern Head teacher stated to confirm his professional identity and responsibilities, “everything is by the Ministry. We are within the Ministry of Education”. However, variations in ages and reasons for marriage timing indicate ways of understanding marriage timing in Kaduna state, some linked to what girls say, and others strongly divergent.

Table 8.7 Adults associated with the education system views on marriage timing

Respondent	Location	Sex	Ideal AFM
Husaina, Federal governor	National	Female	Refused
Amina, Federal governor	National	Female	18
Damola, State governor	Kaduna state	Male	Not elicited
Hassan, Local governor	Northern zone	Male	18
Babban Primary Head teacher	Northern zone	Male	18
Babban Primary Teacher	Northern zone	Female	25
Babban Primary SBMC Chair	Northern zone	Male	20
Karkara JSS Head teacher	Northern zone	Male	18-19
Karkara JSS Teacher	Northern zone	Male	>18
Karkara JSS SBMC Chairman	Northern zone	Male	18
Yakubu, Local governor	Southern zone	Male	<30
Tauraro Primary Head teacher	Southern zone	Male	25
Tauraro Primary Teacher	Southern zone	Male	Not elicited
Hanya JSS Head teacher	Southern zone	Female	20
Hanya JSS Teacher	Southern zone	Female	25
Hanya JSS SBMC Chairman	Southern zone	Male	18-25
Monifa (Donor agency)	National	Female	Not elicited
Gaddo (Donor agency)	National	Male	18
Fatmata (Development programme)	National	Female	>18
Mamman (Development programme)	National	Male	18-21

Teachers, head teachers and SBMC chairmen in northern Kaduna state tended to specify younger ideal ages for female marriage (median age 19 years (7 observations)) than those in the south (median age 23 years (5 observations)). This broadly echoes trends in the girls and parents’ data (Table 8.6). The oldest preferred age mooted is “before 30” (local government education official, southern zone), which aligns with the ideal age specified by the southern girls Mercy and Zahrah. Female respondents gave older ideal ages – median

22 years (5 observations) - compared to male respondents – median 20 years (12 observations).

In substantiating their views on marriage timing, *all* school staff and several officials harnessed a language of ‘maturity’, associated with a minimum age of eighteen:

“For me 18 years old is ideal [...] At this age, she is fully matured”

(Male head teacher, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“18 or 19 years, by that time the girl is matured for marriage”

(Male head teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“A girl should be fully matured before she gets married and that’s from age 20”

(Female head teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

The elision of age eighteen with a discourse of maturity resonates with the tenets of federal, regional and universal children’s rights charters, which associate minimum age for marriage with ideas of capability and maturity. The 2016 Nigerian National Strategy to End Child Marriage articulates its goal as to ‘reduce the percentage of girls who are married before attaining full maturity (usually 18) in Nigeria by 2021’ (Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, 2016, p. 10). In this policy discourse and that of school staff marriage timing and maturity are elided, with age partially associated. Asked to substantiate the meaning of ‘maturity’ for marriage, school staff and policy actors invoked explanations associated with individuals – girls’ psychology and physiology – and institutions – schooling; religion and ethnic custom; legislation, which sometimes complement and at other times diverge from other qualitative and quantitative data presented in this chapter. Each explanation was associated with a distinct approach to gender and education with different implications for adolescent girls, education policy and practice. I have captured these adults’ meanings of maturity to define ideal marriage timing under three themes: (i) socio-emotional maturity; (ii) cognitive maturity; and (iii) physical maturity. For some, these meanings are established independently but for others they engage complex and sometimes fraught negotiations intersected by aspects of personal and professional identity.

Socio-emotional maturity for marriage

Socio-emotional maturity for marriage is invoked by teachers in the northern part of the state as the attainment of a capability to manage social relationships associated with marriage.

The teacher at Karkara junior secondary school says, “when you marry, it’s a good thing,

you'll be happy, you'll get a companion" but argues that this is more difficult when girls marry before eighteen because they "are not mature and cannot accommodate the husband's needs":

"any problem that arises between the two of them, she will not be able to control her emotions, she will start crying or shouting"

(Male teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

This teacher identifies socio-emotional differences in girls' capabilities according to their age. When girls marry before eighteen, he argues, they lack emotional self-control, they 'cry' and 'shout' when problems arise, whereas after eighteen, girls can 'control' their emotions and be 'accommodating' to their husband. Self-control and accommodation to a husband as social prerequisites for marriage resonate in a comment of the SBMC Chairman of Babban primary school who says that at 18 years of age a girl will be able to reach "mutual understanding" with her husband. In the same school, a female teacher explains maturity for marriage in terms of being able to 'face family problems':

"25 years old is the best age for a girl to marry [because] the girl is matured and can face family problems."

(Female teacher, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

The composition of socio-emotional maturity for marriage thus comprises self-control and ability to handle disputes, negotiating with and around others. These comments implicate a girl's ability to handle *herself* and handle herself *in relation to* others. They resonate with Dorothy's idea that the ideal time for marriage is when girls can 'handle marriage issues'. These socio-emotional skills are associated, for all these respondents, with girls having some formal schooling before marriage. The male teacher at Karkara emphasises that education "changes your behaviour" (from emotional to self-control) while the female teacher at Babban stresses the importance of "education knowledge" before marriage. In these discourses, education is not invoked as protection from marriage but as preparation for marriage; education and marriage are not counterposed, as in DHS data analyses and interpretations, but are connected. This connection is through the value formal schooling for socio-emotional maturity for marriage and in ideas about gaining cognitive maturity for marriage as rational thinking and professional skills.

Cognitive maturity for marriage

A discourse of cognitive maturity among adults includes ideas of rationality, knowledge, practical competence, and utility. Marriage timing is appropriate when a girl has attained 'enough' education to be useful to her husband and family after marriage. For the SBMC Chairman of Babban primary school ideal marriage timing is:

"20 or 21 years old to have her degree and a deep education that will help her to assist her parents, husband, and the community [...] if she is educated, she can assist him in maintaining the house because she has knowledge. For instance, she read economics so will be economizing his provision and not wasting them."

(SBMC Chairman, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Marriage at 20 or 21 years old is rationalised by girls' gaining education to enable them to *help other people* – their parents, husband, family, the community. This explanation re-asserts the importance of girls' capabilities in relation to and in support of others through the productive skills acquired from education. These skills are domestic and private – 'maintaining the house'. The importance of household management is echoed by another teacher who argues that girls married before eighteen "find it very difficult to even manage their home" (Male teacher, Karkara, northern zone). Amina, a federal government official, rationalises 18 as ideal for marriage because at that age:

"you should know how to sweep, take care of the home, take care of yourself, not to talk of taking care of the husband!"

(Amina, federal government official, 24/11/2016)

The productive skills emphasised by these adults are domestic but also civil. Hassan, a Muslim local government official in the northern zone, specifies 18 as the ideal age for girls to marry saying,

"Let the girl finish her senior secondary school before getting married. By then she is fully developed, she can be very useful to society and the community, she can be employed and work, and she can manage her home properly when married at that level."

(Hassan, Local Government official, northern zone, 07/03/2017)

Hassan marks marriage timing by girls' acquisition through secondary schooling of formal (human capital) capability – 'they can be employed and work' - and informal (social capital) capability – manage their home properly. One head teacher's comment concurs with

Hassan's proposition of eighteen as ideal for marriage linked to completing senior secondary schooling⁶⁹:

“18 years old is ideal because she must have completed her secondary education. She will be better informed formally and informally and would be respected by all”.

(Male head teacher, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

In these data there are overlaps between domestic and civil, informal and formal requirements for girls and young women in marriage that emphasises women and girls' productive utility in both spheres as a determinant of ideal marital timing. Education is posited as protective of girls in relation to early age at marriage by conferring (or being seen to confer) the productive skills needed for marriage.

Education is also seen to confer respect (Head teacher, Babban primary school). Social respect is linked into an idea of cognitive maturity that is concerned with girls' social and community-interfacing role, being able to share the knowledge they acquire through schooling with others in the community. This is emphasised by the female teacher in Babban who says that a girl should ideally marry at 25 years of age by which time she will be able to “impact her educational knowledge to her children and other children in the community”. The idea that later marriage in combination with more education enables young married women to be useful privately and publicly is shared by the head teacher at Tauraro primary school in southern Kaduna state:

“At that very age [25] she has finished her education up to university level, maybe she started work [...] to help society. First to help her parents, even the ones she will marry.”

(Male head teacher, Tauraro primary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

In these data, the purpose of education is to develop girls' skills and competences for marriage. These skills and competences comprise domestic and civil utility but revolve around utility *for others*. Having some education – especially to the end of secondary schooling – protects girls *from* early age at marriage and protects girls *within* marriage by enabling them to be well-informed and helpful and conferring a respected social status. This idea of education *for* marriage and *for* others dominates and resonates with the idea that, for these respondents, more education facilitates marriage.

⁶⁹ Children who progress smoothly through formal schooling would complete junior secondary school at age 15 and senior secondary school at age 18 (chapter 6).

Two respondents, however, identify the importance of older age at marriage and more education *for girls themselves*. A female teacher at Hanya junior secondary school in the southern zone associates finishing education before marriage in order that *she* can get 'something doing':

"When a girl is 25 she can get married, she will be matured enough. She will follow the proper channels and finish her education so that she will get something doing."

(Female teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

While the idea mooted by other respondents of productivity before and for marriage is reiterated, the emphasis here is on productivity - having something to do - *for her own sake*. This uniquely implicates work for professional and economic autonomy, not for others. Mamman, a development programme staff member, also states that girls should be able to attain higher education before marriage *for its own sake* – not linking education to a marital function but to girls developing capabilities for themselves:

"a girl should be allowed to finish at least the first degree or diploma for herself before she considers marriage"

(Mamman, development programme, 21/11/2016)

For the most part, facets of socio-emotional and cognitive maturity are considered necessary among these adults for girls to function *in their relationships with others* in marriage. Staying in school for longer is seen to confer these competences and therefore an ideal maturity for marriage that is linked to being at least eighteen years of age. The function of schooling is for marriage, preparing girls for their role as wife, even while staying in school delays marriage timing. These interviewees associate schooling with the development of socio-emotional and cognitive skills – self-control, interpersonal accommodation, household management - even though these are not taught through the formal curriculum. This suggests that they see schools as important sites for socialisation.

The acquisition of competences through schooling that comprise the notions of socio-emotional and cognitive maturity may have implications for forms of girls' agency before and during marriage. In Nnaemeka's theorisation of women's everyday lives in her concept of Nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), she emphasises the importance of social relationships, collaboration, mutuality, and negotiation for women to make gains in their lives. These social conditions and processes echo those described in these discourses of maturity for marriage: 'coping successfully' with domestic and civil demands; negotiating family issues; 'accommodating' others' needs; gaining respect; gathering material resources. These competences that come to define socio-emotional and cognitive maturity have resonance in

the kinds of processes and practices detailed in Nego-feminism that women need and use in their everyday lives to function and to thrive. This indicates how social relations may be significant to ideas about ideal marriage timing. Additionally, the importance attached by some respondents to women gaining employment or ‘something to do’ before marriage has implications for girls’ agency because of the potential of work outside of the home not only for financial independence but also to catalyse agency within the home, such as shared decision-making on expenditure (Kabeer, 2008). This suggests how these forms of maturity for marriage, even while they may seem functional and reductive, may be critical to girls’ wellbeing and potential for relational and autonomous agency in marriage.

Physical maturity for marriage

According to the sociologist Ruth Dixon-Mueller, ‘variations across individuals and groups in the onset and pace of pubertal transitions mark the growth and maturation of the brain’ (Dixon-Mueller, 2008, p.254). Adolescents’ ‘cognitive capacity’, she says, is ‘closely tied to the hormonally driven processes of bodily maturation’ (ibid.). Ten respondents identified bodily maturation, or physical maturity, as *the* sole signifier of maturity for marriage and several others noted the dual significance of female physical maturity with another meaning of maturity for marriage. Physical maturity was identified through observable markers of puberty including girls’ size and weight, breast development and menstruation, and connected to marriage timing:

“The girl, as soon as she grows taller, just from her look, she’s due for marriage”.

(Damola, Kaduna state government education official, 02/07/2015)

“People will be saying, ‘look at her, as big as she is and she is not married”

(SBMC Chairman, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Academic research in Sub-Saharan Africa has evidenced the gendered sociocultural significance of puberty – especially menarche and breast development – to marital timing (Bunting, 2005; Sommer, 2013; Ibitoye et al., 2017), including in Nigeria (Bello et al., 2017, p.S40). Menarche and signs of puberty are significant in teachers and education officials’ discourses on marriage timing. They attach different meanings to different manifestations of puberty and physical maturity in relation to marriage including as a signal of girls’ emergent sexual desire, which catalyses adults’ fear of unplanned pregnancy and, equally, as a positive signal of reproductive maturity and childbirth capability. Two SBMC Chairmen in the northern zone link their ideal marital age for girls (18 and 20 years of age respectively) to

reproductive maturity, emphasising the sociocultural significance of female physiological development in relation to family formation:

“The essence of marriage is procreation, so she will bear him children”

(SBMC Chairman, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“Giving birth gives peace of mind”

(SBMC Chairman, JSS Karkara, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Observable signs of puberty catalyse other adults’ responses to female sexuality including fear of pregnancy. This response is used to explain practices of early marriage and to justify positions on ideal marital timing, evidencing the extent to which parents and adults monitor girls’ pubertal transitions and attach gendered standards and values to physical transitions. In Babban primary school, the head teacher defines his ideal age of marriage for girls as 18 because “staying long before getting married might lead to pre-marital sex”. The female teacher and SBMC Chairman of this school, and Yakubu (local government education official, southern zone), identify ideal marriage timing at 25, 20 and “up to 30” years respectively for reasons linked to socio-emotional and cognitive maturity, but all raise the importance of physical maturity to marital timing in relation to fears of pre-marital sex:

“Once a girl starts to develop physically, the parents are forced to give out such girls for early marriage⁷⁰ because of the fear of unwanted pregnancy”

(Female teacher, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“When the girl is problematic, or she flirts, that was the main factor that force them [parents] to marry her at that age. Or she has grown bigger with that age.”

(SBMC Chairman, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

“Sometimes if you allow them to stay long at home some negative things [pregnancy] can happen to them”

(Yakubu, local government education official, southern zone, 27/03/2017).

The association of physical development, specifically puberty, with marriage timing is made through assumptions about, and expectations of, girls’ sexuality. These assumptions and expectations are focussed on girls whose puberty, manifest as anticipated sexual behaviours, becomes ‘problematic’ or blameworthy and linked to ‘negative things’, meaning pregnancy.

⁷⁰ The teacher and SBMC Chairman use the Hausa phrase ‘*sauri aure*’ to refer to ‘early marriage’.

This idea that marriage is hastened by menarche and pubertal transitions is embedded in the very language of 'early marriage' in Hausa. The phrase '*matan aure*' meaning 'married woman' is a common identifier for any married female; '*sauri aure*' has emerged relatively recently in linguistic terms to refer to 'early marriage' but it literally means 'married in haste' or 'married beforehand'. *Sauri aure* is often attached discursively in Hausa interviews (case study girls; girls in and out of school; and in Babban community) with marriages preceded by (actual or assumed) sexual initiation and/or pregnancy.

Justifying marriage timing according to female physical development leads some adult respondents down tortuous ideological pathways. A dialogue with the male head teacher at Karkara junior secondary school exemplifies a kind of complex positionality on marriage timing, which evolves during a discourse on female physicality to rationalise marriage timing. The head teacher states that an ideal age for marriage is "18 or 19 years, by that time the girl is matured for marriage" and links this to girls completing junior secondary school. However, when asked about practice, he says that some girls marry "at the age of 12 or 13 or 14 years, even in the urban areas like my place Zaria" because:

"some parents are afraid that if they don't give out their daughter for early marriage maybe she will be spoiled. They don't want her to be impregnated in their house. That will bring shame to them."

(Male head teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Following the teachers in Babban, the head teacher explains that early marriage may happen because parents fear that the onset of puberty will result in premarital pregnancy, which would incur shame. However, the distancing that he initially establishes by contrasting his view on marital timing with others' actions dissipates after his recognition that early marriage happens 'even' where he is from, after which he increasingly struggles to reconcile his ideal position with his experience of actual practice. This struggle leads him towards a defence of appropriate marriage timing according to bodily maturation:

Head teacher: She should be matured before you give her out [...]

Interviewer: I thought the most common reason that people use was that Islam says a girl after menstruation [cannot stay] in her father's house?

Head teacher: [*interjects*] By that time she is matured now!

Interviewer: Is that what you mean by matured?

Head teacher: Yes, now!

Interviewer: But it's just menstruation...

Head teacher: You know it is because of the type of food we are taking now! A girl can start menstruating at the age of nine or ten!

Interviewer: So... what..

Head teacher: [*interjects*] You see the breast coming out at the age of ten! Then she's matured to be given out!

(Male head teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Through this dialogue, puberty – menstruation and breast development - comes to override age (and completing junior secondary school) to define marriage timing. His evolving emotional conviction in this is signalled by frequent interruptions and exclamations in, what becomes, a passionate defence of early marriage timing.

A fraught personal negotiation of female physical maturity with age, idealism, and other meanings of maturity is not limited to this head teacher. Damola, the state government education official, stresses that families' views on marriage timing tend to be based primarily on girls' physical development. He eschews giving his own view on ideal marriage timing but observes the significance of physical maturity among Kaduna families:

“Sometimes the size of a lady becomes her maturity for marriage. So, you know, sometimes the age is not even considered. If she is somebody who, she grows up so huge and fat even with a smaller number of years of age, she can be sent for marriage not mindful of the age.”

(Damola, Kaduna state government education official, 02/07/2015)

As with the head teacher, Damola's observations are particularly fraught when young adolescent girls' bodies mature visibly in advance of their age in years – there is a particular concern and tension navigating the question of marriage timing for girls of a 'smaller number of years' who have begun puberty, the result of which is to suggest that *embodied age means marriage maturity over age in years*. The implication of these data is that marriage timing is determined by a subjective view on corporeality. This is exactly the response given by Husaina, a Muslim education official born in the North West region and now based in Abuja. According to Husaina, girls become mature at different times according to their unique developmental trajectories and this should be considered in marriage timing:

“if you ask me what my own view is on it, in our community, what is the age, you know people are different. We are created differently. You find out some girls grow up very quickly, so it's not even the age that matters. [...] I don't believe in any minimum age.”

(Husaina, Federal Government education official, 05/12/2016)

For Husaina, recognising different trajectories of 'growing up' – beyond age - is central to defining marriage timing. Her resolve in the significance of difference, and recognising difference, leads her to reject a minimum age for marriage. Husaina takes on the rejection of age in years to define marital timing, with which Damola struggled.

An orientation around puberty in defining and rationalising marriage timing draws attention to the importance of understanding micro-contextual patterns of puberty, including the timing of menarche and observable physical manifestations of puberty, to understand when girls' marry (Sommer, 2013; Ibitoye et al., 2017). These data suggest that girls showing the first visible signs of puberty - at any age - are more likely to be viewed as 'mature' and ready for marriage than their peers who physically develop later. This indicates the salience of paying attention to adolescence in its physiological form. Among these teachers and education government officials in Kaduna state, the interpretation of ideal age at marriage is very corporeal. This contrasts to an approach to age, and adolescence, linked to abstract numbers in the DHS, global and national legal instruments, and dominant concepts of adolescence (Bunting, 2005; Bunting et al., 2016).

Religious belief and ethnic custom

The girls of Karkara community in northern Kaduna state implicated religion, specifically Islam, in early marriage. Invocations of Islam are also present among the adults who define marriage timing primarily according to female physical maturity. None of these invocations were explicitly negative. Husaina, who embraces a notion of adolescent development stages (growing up) overriding age does so, importantly, from her "own view, in our community" of Hausa Muslim people, distancing herself in these expressions from federal law: "I'm not speaking from the legislative aspect", she begins. By speaking assertively as a Hausa Muslim, Husaina contextualises her viewpoint within that ethnoreligious identity instead of her professional identity, establishing distance between her personal and professional positions. Islamic religious belief is used to explain, as a matter of fact, early marital timing by school staff in the northern zone:

"In the Islamic religion, a girl has a slated age to get married and as soon as she attains that age of 14 years it is believed that she is matured physically."

(Male head teacher, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

“Islamic religion does not encourage leaving a grown-up girl without marriage”

(SBMC Chairman, Babban primary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

However, there were tensions and fractions in attempts to reconcile Islamic religious beliefs with an ideal age at marriage and physical maturity. Neither Muslim interviewee above identifies adolescence as the ideal age for marriage, but they defend early marriage through recourse to a shared religion. The religious identity of the male head teacher of Karkara JSS is drawn into his conversation on marriage timing to exacerbate his struggle to negotiate and reconcile conflicting positionality on marriage. He begins stating that girls should be at least 18 before marriage but soon argues that menstruation and breast budding signal maturity for marriage regardless of age in years. However, he then reverts saying:

“But according to Islam, it is not proper for you to give out your daughter for marriage at the age of 10 or 12 or 13”

(Male Head teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

On the one hand, his professional and religious framework urges him towards older age at marriage but girls' puberty - physical maturity - agitates this view. When pressed to explain early marriage, he concedes that “I think everything depend solely on the father. Considering our cultural background here”. This shift towards individuals and away from institutions signals a difficulty to fully reconcile religious belief, professional identity, and personal attitudes towards gender. Religion is significant in early marriage policy: the minimum age for marriage specified by the *Kaduna State Child Welfare and Protection Law* is eighteen, but the Law makes an exception for Muslim communities from eighteen to *fourteen* years (Part IV, (3)). The implication of this clause is that Islamic Law supersedes state law on the issue of marital age for Muslim girls and young adolescents, which points towards complex and politically challenging dialogues involved in negotiating policies for children and women's rights in northern states.

The implication of religion on views of marital timing suggests the challenges and complexity of holding together a comprehensive view on girls' marriage at the intersection of professional and personal positions. Religion was part of the explanatory framework harnessed to define marital timing, but interpretations of religion and tradition are contested and portrayed differently by respondents of different identities. Religion was presented as part of the discourse of marriage timing much more often among Muslim respondents (girls and adults) than Christian respondents, which may indicate a greater challenge for Muslims of holding together different narratives and norms about marriage (and education) in

contemporary Nigeria. Yet DHS data show that early marriage happens across diverse communities in Kaduna state ([Table 7.5](#)). These data are insufficient for a full consideration of religion to marriage timing but imply that religiosity and interpretations of customs are crucial, dynamic and complicating components of marital timing.

'The coordination is quite a challenge': negotiating maturity for marriage

“marriage requires you to be emotionally ready, to be physically ready, and sometimes, if you believe in religion, to be religiously ready. So, it takes these three aspects but if one aspect is lacking the coordination is quite a challenge.”

(Monifa, donor agency, 22/07/2015)

Monifa is Yoruba from southern Nigeria, working for a multilateral donor agency delivering a women's rights programme in North West Nigeria. Ideal marriage timing for girls, she says, requires a *combination* of emotional, physical, and religious readiness and the coordination of these different facets is a challenge. While this chapter has elicited three dominant discourses of maturity for marriage among teachers, head teachers, government officials and policy influencers, for many of whom one meaning of maturity was the justification of ideal marriage timing, navigating different discourses was also a challenge. As Fatmata, a development programme staff member, simplifies: “it's complicated”.

Complexity has been shown in the difficult discursive navigations of maturity by Husaina, Damola and others, and in the diverse discourses of marriage timing of girls, parents, and education actors. Girls and adults appear to be engaged - *at that moment* - in negotiating a meaning of maturity for marriage that aligns diverse social and individual conditions that are seen to comprise part of that readiness. The interplay of different meanings of maturity point towards a 'difference between formal organising frameworks and informal social practices' (Pereira, 2004, p.15) associated with girls' marriage. Substantive responses to ideal marital timing that go beyond age, only very partially harness legal and political frameworks and minimum standards. Gaddo, a highly educated Muslim northern Nigerian working for an international NGO, evokes the challenge and complexity of reaching a definition of ideal marriage timing in the Nigerian context:

“I think for me that the minimum [age of marriage] has to be after high school [...] about age 18 or so, an age where technically, well at least legally, legally by that time their body has matured to know what she wants to do, she has full mental and psychological development to know what is right in her view. Hopefully she'll know that if she gives birth, she has the physical capacity to do that, then make choices also informed by her own rational thinking, rather than someone who forces her into a situation where she probably doesn't know what she's doing. You know, according

to the Child Rights Act - I believe there is this Act for about 18 years old - this is, you know, from a number of assumptions about how human bodies function and at what age they become what. There are all kinds of factors that affect this, but at least this is the age of maturity.”

(Gaddo, donor agency, 24/06/2015)

Gaddo’s response repeats multiple meanings of maturity: legislative minimum standards; physical maturity (the body); cognitive, and socioemotional maturity (rational thinking, knowing what she wants to do) but in doing so is unwieldy. His answer seems to start from the *idea* of a legal minimum age on which he tries to retrofit other meanings of maturity and in this process the explanatory scaffolding becomes unstable. Both Gaddo and Monifa are pragmatic, however, in recognising that the absorption and coordination of different discourses of maturity is an ongoing process.

Conclusion

These data emphasise the challenge for age-based advocacy and policy on marriage and education of everyday, individual manoeuvrings around multiple, complex meanings of maturity for marriage. The significance of individual factors overlaying institutional standards or regulatory frameworks has emerged in the explanations for marital timing associated with socio-emotional, cognitive and physical maturity. All these discourses render age in years subjective rather than fixed and position the relationship between marriage and education differently. For adults, when girls marry is contingent not only on their age but on the presentation and social representation of different facets of ‘maturity’. It is these discourses of maturity that make meaning of marriage timing.

One implication of this is that being attuned to the onset of puberty among girls (as individuals or groups) and what puberty signifies to local communities is critical to explain and respond to marriage timing. Some research studies are attentive to this (Glynn et al., 2010; Sommer, 2013; Ajah et al., 2015), but these are few and tend to examine the timing of pubescent events rather than social meanings of puberty. Attention to pubescent development should not, additionally, ignore underlying structures and systems of gender inequality a result of which is the essentialisation of girls to bodies and bodies to marriage (Nnaemeka, 2001; Kolawole, 2004). These systems and structures at the root of meanings of maturity may arguably be associated with the absence of girls’ voices or views in adult rationalisations of marital timing. Girls’ interviews showed that girls were able to perceive and identify preferences for marriage timing showing their capacity to reflect on, and have

aspirations associated with, when they marry. However, only Mamman and the female teacher at Hanya JSS indicated that girls should be actively engaged in when they marry.

This chapter has shown that different perspectives on marriage timing, and the different assumptions upon which they rest, have a significant implication on when girls marry and their retention and expectations of schooling. The next chapter explores accounts by girls and adults of marriage processes and marriage itself. It considers girls' roles in marriage, examining the kinds of agency girls exert and how their agentic capabilities may be linked to schooling. This advances an idea about schooling linked to marriage not just about social (domestic and civil) capabilities but an enhancement of agency. It also aims to develop understanding of why girls marry, and how schooling may be protective, by taking the focus beyond when marriage happens (at what age) to social processes associated with becoming and being married.

Chapter 9. Becoming and being married: collaborations, collusions, and constraints

This chapter foregrounds adolescent girls' accounts of their expectations and experiences of marriage in Kaduna state. It seeks to understand the forms, constraints and opportunities for agency in becoming and being married, and how formal schooling is connected to marital aspirations and agency. International policy discourse has generally assumed that girls are passive recipients of early marriages that are conditioned by sociocultural norms and economic realities and authorised by families and communities. Yet the previous chapter showed that girls and adults negotiate different discourses on marital timing (*when* to marry) associated with meanings of 'maturity', ideologies of religion, aspirations for education, and realities of poverty. The complexity of these interlocking discourses makes it difficult for individuals, and government policy, to cohere on a Nigerian definition of early marriage. Girls are highly engaged in these discourses, particularly in relation to schooling - they point out that staying in school and *doing well* (gaining literacy and skills for civil and domestic work) can *postpone and improve* marriage, with broader social capital effects in the form of respect, social and professional status. This chapter pursues an argument that *adolescent girls are engaged in marriage processes*, reflecting on and enacting different pathways to marriage and realising different agentic capabilities in relation to marriage according to a range of conditions and relationships in and beyond school.

Eight girls' accounts of *how and to whom* they marry and the decisional spaces they have in becoming and being married provide the central arc of the chapter. Unlike the pen portraits, this chapter re-presents girls in their own words. By foregrounding girls' voices in this chapter, I intend towards a contextually grounded representation of Nigerian schoolgirls *by themselves* (Nnaemeka, 1998; 2004). Their accounts are complemented by data from focus group discussions with adolescent girls and young women, aged 13 to 27 in and out of school, compiled from the TEGIN dataset, as well as insights from their family members, teachers, and education policy makers and influencers to examine reflections or refractions from what girls say. A preliminary analysis of DHS data on women's sexual, social and marital relationships sets the scene for the chapter and raises questions for thinking about girls' relationships and experiences of becoming and being married in North West Nigeria and Kaduna state.

Understanding women and girls' relationships: the DHS data view

Chapter 8's analysis of marriage timing in Kaduna state identified a discourse of physical maturity associated with marriage timing that dominated many teachers' and education policy makers' interpretations of marital readiness. For Aissata, a 13-year-old unmarried schoolgirl interviewed as part of the TEGIN research in August 2011, the ideal time for marriage is when girls have the reproductive maturity to have children, and for many adults observable signs of puberty raised the risks and rewards of pregnancy and marriage. DHS collect marriage data to indicate women's exposure to pregnancy and reproductive health trends (NPC and ICF International, 2014, p.53). As I argued in Chapter 3, this has contributed to a dominant but narrow understanding of early marriage defined by age in numeric years rather definitions premised on broader understandings of adolescent development including different, locally specific, meanings of maturity. Furthermore, there are no data in DHS on *how* or *to whom* girls marry and marital decision-making processes.

Data extracted and compiled from Nigeria DHS publications in this section are used as proxies for the kinds of relationships and experiences associated with becoming and being married. To start considering how and to whom girls marry, and their initial experiences of being married, we can look towards DHS data for North West Nigeria and Kaduna state on marriage, sexual initiation and first birth over three successive survey rounds ([Table 9.1](#)).

Table 9.1 Women's median age at event⁷¹

Variable / Year	North West region			Kaduna state		
	2008	2013	2018	2008 ⁷²	2013	2018
Median age at first marriage (women aged 20-49)	15.3	15.4	15.9	17.7	17.5	16.6
Median age at first sex (women aged 20-49)	15.5	15.5	15.8	16.6	16.8	15.8
Median age at first birth (women aged 25-49)	18.3	17.9	18.6	19.0	19.4	18.9
Adolescents aged 15-19 who have begun childbearing (%)	44.6	35.7	28.5	31.6	33.2	31.3

(National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009; National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014; National Population Commission and ICF, 2019).

⁷¹ These data are compiled from published reports.

⁷² Data for Kaduna state 2008 only were extracted from the women's questionnaire using Stata 13.

These data indicate the close temporal association between sexual initiation and marriage for women in the North West region and in Kaduna state, such as has been described for other contexts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Akpan, 2003; Glynn et al., 2010; Walker, 2013a). In the North West region, the maximum temporal difference between first marriage and first sex was +0.2 years in 2008. This indicates that sexual initiation and marriage are concurrent events in women's lives. Median ages at first sex and first marriage have hovered around age 15 for the last decade, but the median age at first birth has increased overall and the proportion of adolescents who have begun childbearing has decreased by 16.1% since 2008. The median delay between first marriage and first birth is 2.2 years. The key takeaways of the regional data are that: (i) marriage and sexual initiation before age eighteen is common; (ii) over a quarter of adolescents have started childbearing; (iii) despite marrying and having first sex in mid-adolescence, some adolescents manage to delay childbearing. Due to the nature of the survey instrument, the aspirations, acts, negotiations or desires that led to these events, including ideas about education, cannot be known.

Data for Kaduna state in 2013 and 2018 indicate slightly different trends to the region. One differentiating feature is that sexual initiation tends to *precede* marriage by at least 0.7 years for Kaduna women. Their median age at event for all three variables is also generally higher than for women in the region. However, while median age at event is increasing across the region, in Kaduna state age at events has *decreased by 0.5 to 1 year* between 2013 and 2018. The median ages at events are *younger* in 2018 than they were in 2013. Moreover, the proportion of adolescents who have begun childbearing is higher in 2018 in Kaduna state than in the region at nearly one third (and this has changed little since 2013). This trend is the opposite to what might be expected given regional and national trends and interventions towards delaying marriage and childbearing (Walker, 2013a; Walker, 2015), including the National Strategy to End Child Marriage 2016-2021 ([Table 6.5](#)). Preceding political analysis of Nigeria (Chapter 6) points towards two plausible explanations.

Increasing conflict and civil violence in Kaduna state since 2010, including attacks on schools, has contributed to internal displacement, fear, and more children out of school (Harris, 2013; Amnesty International, 2020b). In this climate, parents seek to protect their children and, with formal schools no longer perceived as safe, girls may be more likely to marry. At the same time, there has been increasing antipathy towards 'western' values, including formal education and later marriage, especially among conservative and religious groups, which, combined with violence, can erode commitments to girls' education and delayed marriage (Comolli, 2015, p.42). The proceeding qualitative data analysis examines

how Kaduna girls link marriage, sexual initiation and childbearing and what explanations – aspirations, acts, needs or desires - they offer for these links⁷³.

DHS gathers and presents data on household decision-making as a proxy for married women’s empowerment. Empowerment comprises agency – how a person pursues their goals - in different forms (Kabeer, 1999a), and these data can prompt queries about the type and extent of agency women have in marriage. The Nigeria DHS have collected data on three decision-making capabilities of married women (aged 15-49): (i) own healthcare; (ii) major household purchases; (iii) visits to family or relatives (Table 9.2). The figures presented are for the proportion (%) of women who reported either making the decision by themselves or jointly with their husband.

Table 9.2 Decision-making capabilities of currently married women aged 15-49⁷⁴

Variable / Year	North West region			Kaduna state		
	2008 ⁷⁵	2013	2018	2008 ⁷⁶	2013	2018
Own healthcare	18.8	16.2	19.9	-	54.1	37.0
Major household purchases	17.3	15.0	15.8	-	52.4	41.6
Visits to family or relatives	29.8	23.5	44.2	-	54.1	61.5
None of these	65.0	73.8	53.7	-	34.7	37.4

(National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009; National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014; National Population Commission and ICF, 2019).

At the regional level, over half (53.7%) of married women make neither sole or joint decisions on any variable, and in Kaduna state the figure is just over one third (37.4%). Married Kaduna women’s engagement in these household decisions is relatively high compared to women in the region but, at both levels, these data signal a large proportion of married women with no autonomous or relational agency over domestic facets of their lives. However, there have been increases in the proportion of women who report being able to decide on visiting family or relatives over time by 14% between 2008-2018 in the region, and by 7.4% in Kaduna state. Visiting family or relatives is the most common decision in which

⁷³ This is limited since the qualitative data were collected in 2011 and 2015-17 before the latest NDHS data showing these reverse trends.

⁷⁴ These data are compiled from published reports

⁷⁵ NDHS 2008 had four decision-making variables, the additional being ‘making purchases for daily household needs’. It is excluded here for comparability across survey rounds.

⁷⁶ Data by state are not given in the 2008 Nigeria DHS report.

married girls and women are engaged. Among married adolescent girls aged 15-19 nationwide in 2018 less than 20% report decision-making on their own healthcare or major household purchases, 41% in visits to family or relatives, and 56% report having no decision-making (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019). These national data for adolescents complements the North West regional data to suggest that married adolescents do not have significantly more or less decision-making power in their household than married women of other age groups.

Data on spousal violence provided by NDHS reports can also signal the form of marital relationships and women's agency and empowerment. In 2018, over a quarter (26.8%) of ever-married women aged 15-49 in the North West had ever experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from their partner or spouse. Spousal violence reports are higher in Kaduna state than any other state in the region – in 2018, 16% of married Kaduna women reported having experienced physical violence sometimes or often in the past 12 months, compared to 7% in the region overall. These data on violence have had marked upturn between 2013 and 2018: in 2013, only 9.3% of married women in Kaduna state reported recent physical violence (7% less than in 2018); and in the region only 3.3% (4% less) (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014, p.316; National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.447). There may be explanatory threads linked to state and region-wide civil violence and unrest and associated increases in religiosity (Chapter 6). Increased reports of violence may also be connected to women gaining agency rather than increasing prevalence, with agency conferring increased likelihood of reporting, but the links between women's agency and spousal violence is complex (Jewkes, 2002). In 2018 many women interviewed believed that spousal violence is justified: over a third (37.3%) of married women (aged 15-49) in the North West, and 22.3% in Kaduna state, agree with at least one justification for a husband hitting or beating his wife, the most common being if she goes out without telling him or refuses sexual intercourse (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019, p.417). These data indicate the agentic challenges that women face during marriage in patriarchal societies.

A handful of research studies of Sub-Saharan Africa have indicated that spousal violence may reduce the likelihood of married girls and women continuing their education (Jensen and Thornton, 2003, p.14-16; Delprato et al., 2015, p.51). Quantitative and qualitative studies of the region have shown that married adolescent girls in Sub-Saharan Africa seldom go to school (Singh and Samara, 1996; Delprato et al., 2015; Young Lives, 2018; Tafere et al., 2020; UNICEF Ethiopia and Center, 2020). This is borne out by Nigeria DHS data. In 2013, over three-quarters (76%) of currently married adolescent girls aged 15-19 in the North West region have never enrolled in school. Just under a quarter (23.2%) of married

adolescent girls attended school at some point more than a year ago, and fewer than 1% report being currently enrolled (Table 9.3).

Table 9.3 Marriage and school attendance among adolescent girls aged 15-19 in the North West⁷⁷

Population Total (% rural)	Currently married Total (% pop)	Currently married and never enrolled No. (%)	Currently married and formerly attended (> 12 months ago) No. (%)	Currently married and attended school in last 12 months No. (%)
1,973 (67.4)	1,097 (55.6)	838 (76.4)	255 (23.2%)	4 (0.36)

These data indicate that married adolescents are most likely to have never enrolled in school. While a quarter ever attended, fewer than 1% resume within 12 months of marriage according to these data. We do not know from these data how or why these very few girls were able to attend school after marriage. Nor are these data comprehensive on married girls' ever returning to education: there are no data on girls and young women who resume formal schooling more than 12 months after marriage, or evidence pertaining to other forms of continued education outside the formal school system. Through the following analysis of qualitative data gathered for this thesis, I explore additional dimensions of the trends indicated by quantitative data on social and sexual relationships, marriage and formal schooling.

⁷⁷ Data extracted and compiled independently from NDHS 2013 using Stata 13.

Becoming married: negotiating social and sexual relationships

Adolescent sexuality and sociocultural norms: premarital pregnancy

At eighteen years of age, in junior secondary school class 3 of Hanya community, southern Kaduna state, Zahrah became pregnant. She left school and married the father of her child before giving birth. She explains that “nobody advised” her to marry but that she felt “bad” about her pregnancy and so married. In the same community, in different years, Dorothy and Mercy also became pregnant, left junior secondary school in class 3, and married their child’s father at 17 and 16 years of age respectively. Zahrah, Dorothy and Mercy’s trajectories exemplify a social and temporal interaction of adolescent sexuality, premarital pregnancy, school leaving, and marriage that was often narrated by adolescent girls, especially in southern Kaduna state, and is observable in Nigeria DHS data ([Table 9.1](#)) and research studies across Sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 3).

Zahrah’s account of pregnancy compelling marriage is complemented by her father who is asked about the circumstances of Zahrah’s marriage:

“We called the husband and informed him because she cannot stay with the pregnancy in her parent’s house. She can join him.”

(Zahrah’s father, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Mercy’s older brother likewise implicates sociocultural norms in Mercy’s post-pregnancy story:

“The way we are, according to our culture, when a girl gets pregnant, we will not allow her to stay in the family house. She will go and stay with the husband that impregnated her.”

(Mercy’s older brother, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Zahrah and Mercy are compelled by sociocultural tradition to leave their natal home during pregnancy, marry and relocate to live with their child’s father, their new husband. These are definitive moves narrated unequivocally by the girls’ male family members, which are corroborated by education staff in southern Kaduna state:

“There is a tradition that says a girl that gets pregnant in the house should not deliver in the house. She must go to her husband’s house”

(Female Head teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“Some of them get pregnant. Then it becomes necessary for them to go for marriage.”

(Yakubu, Local government education official, southern zone, 27/03/2017)

The norm of spatial relocation (to her husband's house) and social repositioning (as married) of adolescent girls in the event of pregnancy is underpinned by discourses of propriety and necessity ("she must"; it "becomes necessary"), and family shame: if your daughter becomes pregnant in your house this "will bring shame" (Male Head teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone):

"if she is not married and now she is pregnant without a husband she becomes an embarrassment to culture and religion"

(Male teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Yakubu, a local government education official, narrates his nineteen-year-old daughter's pregnancy in junior secondary class 3 with her "agemate in school":

"I too was a victim. I have one daughter. After I had spent my money paying school fees, buying all these school materials, I had paid her money for WAEC⁷⁸, when she's graduating, before I know pregnancy just appeared and I was sick, I was not happy. I fell ill myself"

(Yakubu, male, Local government education official, southern zone, 27/03/2017).

Yakubu's embarrassment and shame of his daughter's pregnancy have strong psychological and physiological responses – he becomes unhappy and ill. His story centres on the money he has spent on her education and his surprise at her pregnancy that "just appeared". His account shows that he was blindsided by his daughter's adolescence, identifying his daughter solely as a girl-in-school rather than as engaged in social and sexual relationships. The narrative focus on his emotional response to her pregnancy obscures *her story* – the form and circumstances of her relationship and the implication of her schooling remain untold. Yakubu says that "after serious investigation" her boyfriend accepted that he was the child's father and "he took her as his wife".

Marriage mitigates and facilitates the avoidance of the social stigma and shame of premarital pregnancy by relocating and socially repositioning the girl, and responsibility for her, to the house of the man with whom she became pregnant and to whom she will marry. The narrative interconnection of pregnancy with marriage partially reflects and partially refracts from DHS data: it supports the idea that sexual initiation and marriage are interlinked, but Zahrah, Mercy and Dorothy all give birth within nine months of marriage and all before age eighteen. They

⁷⁸ The Junior West African Examinations Council (WAEC) exam is taken by junior secondary school students at the end of class 3 (dependent on exam entry fee payment). It provides a certificate of basic education and the possibility of access to higher education.

are not among those for whom first birth is delayed by 2-3 years, rather exemplify the third of adolescent girls who have already begun childbearing in Kaduna state.

For all three girls, and according to their teachers and Yakubu, pregnancy means leaving school. Mercy confirms that “giving birth stopped me from going to school”. According to Zahrah and Dorothy:

Interviewer: Why did you stop attending school?

Zahrah: Because I was pregnant.

(Zahrah, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Interviewer: What made you leave the school?

Dorothy: I was pregnant at that time. [...] If you're pregnant you can't go to school.

(Dorothy, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Zahrah, Mercy, Dorothy, and Yakubu's daughter are late adolescent, post-menarchal, Christian girls, in junior secondary school in southern Kaduna state, when they develop heterosexual relationships that lead to their pregnancies, school leaving and marriage. Their schools expelled them when their pregnancies were realised. While they were pushed out of school for the outcome of a sexual relationship, it was as girls-in-school and within the boundary of the school that they became involved in the heterosexual relationships that led to their pregnancy. Dorothy's then-boyfriend, who she subsequently married, was nineteen and in senior secondary school when he met Dorothy, aged seventeen. Yakubu's daughter met and became pregnant with her “agemate” in class 3. Mercy was sixteen and in-school when she became pregnant. The role of the school appears as one of benign neglect in the development of the girls' relationships and sexualities, and then of outright rejection of girls to an outcome of those relationships.

The girls' stories resonate with evidence of qualitative research in Sub-Saharan Africa that indicate how nascent heterosexual adolescent relationships in school can directly contribute to premature school leaving and marriage, especially in the absence of sensitive and supportive educational curricula and policy (Tafere et al., 2020, p.18). These data suggest the salience of national education policy attention to the Family Life and Health Education

curriculum (Chapter 6) and of school sites to offer pastoral support and information to adolescent girls and boys in developing heterosexual relationships during their schooling⁷⁹.

Adolescent sexuality and sociocultural norms: gender roles and gender violence

Dorothy, Mercy and Zahrah became pregnant during their schooling years. We do not know from their interviews the precise circumstances of their relationships and pregnancies. However, the girls do speak about processes of gendered socialisation and gender violence experienced in school, which indicates the role of schools and teachers in promulgating gender norms associated with adolescent behaviour and outcomes.

All eight girls recount experiences of struggling to pay termly school fees and, especially, the exam fee for their junior school certificate exam (Junior WAEC) in class 3⁸⁰. When Mercy and Dorothy could not pay their fees, their school sent them away⁸¹ and caned them if they tried to return without paying. Zahrah experienced corporal punishment, including beating by teacher, during her time in school before marriage. Girls out-of-school in Hanya community simply say, “they just flog us”. Aissata and Nana, in northern Kaduna state, describe experiences of students who could not pay fees being sent home and flogged: “some [teachers] will slap you, some will cane you” (Aissata). Girls out-of-school eloquently summarise what many girls say:

“You have to pay the money or else the school will not allow you write the exams and sometimes we get beaten for not paying such money and be driven home”

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Girls’ experiences of being driven away, physically punished, and kept away from school for not paying fees - failing to meet school standards and expectations that exist despite a policy of free basic education – exemplify the challenges, endogenous to education, for adolescents to stay in school. These challenges significantly affect these girls’ attendance and experience of schooling but may also be experienced by boys in school particularly as corporal punishment is legally permitted in Nigeria (Gershoff, 2017).

However, girls interviewed in TEGIN research fluently recount experiences of physical and sexual harassment by their peers and teachers that show the normalisation of gendered

⁷⁹ As well as indicating the inadequate provision of sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, for adolescents (Bearinger, Linda HSharma et al., 2007; UNFPA, 2017, p.21).

⁸⁰ Passing the WAEC is a prerequisite for entry to senior secondary school and for much paid employment. The Junior WAEC registration fee varies by Local Government Area but is usually 4-10,000 Naira (£10-20 GBP.) For poor families this could be equivalent to several months’ earnings.

⁸¹ They both use the Hausa word “kore”, meaning to be sent or driven away.

socialisation, sexualisation and violence in schools, which can contribute to school leaving. Mercy describes how she was approached by a boy in school to become his girlfriend and when she refused, he beat her. Zahrah recounts several instances of “being touched” by boys when she was playing with her friends or sitting in the classroom reading a book, which she disliked. On one occasion:

“I am sitting inside the classroom and somebody comes and disturbs me. I tell him that I don’t want.”

(Zahrah, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

An out-of-school girl in Hanya narrates a similar experience of harassment:

“Sometimes a boy will touch you inappropriately on the buttocks, and you don’t like it. [...] This was when I was in school. I usually warned him, whatever jokes he is playing his hands should not go near my buttocks”.

(Girls out-of-school, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

The girls in Hanya community continue to recount incidents of sexual assault in the communities, for which there were no repercussions on the perpetrators⁸². Boys, teachers and discriminatory gender school norms are implicated in girls’ experiences of harassment in school. In a focus group discussion with girls out of school in northern Kaduna state, the girls say:

Interviewer: Do boys or teachers touch or harass you sexually in school?

Girls (all): Yes, they do.

Girl 1: Some teachers will say they love you, you either co-operate or they will fail you in your exams.

Interviewer: If it happens what normally happens, do they stop coming to school?

Girl 2: Some continue coming to school while others get irritated and refuse to come to school. There was a girl in this school who was caught with her boyfriend trying to make love in the classroom. She was caught by the class teacher. He gave her about 50 strokes of the cane. Her boyfriend is not a student of the school. He was not punished, but the girl was.

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

⁸² For example: “They [boys] catch you for road like this they go fit rape you. There is a place where they sit and smoke, if you follow that place, they will pick at you”.

A male teacher is presented as a threatening figure (these girls say that they “fear” their former teachers and head teacher) who makes girls’ educational success dependent on their acquiescence to a sexual relationship. The school is presented as discriminatory in its response to sexual intercourse in school – caning the girl and not punishing the boy.

These girls’ stories illustrate and substantiate the patriarchal nature of Kaduna communities, in which men (and boys) tend to hold power over women and girls in families and on school sites. They indicate the normalisation of gendered violence within these schools among students and school staff and the negative effect of these in-school experiences on girls’ emotional response to, and attendance and learning in, school. Moreover, the fluency with which girls exemplify incidents of violence suggests the normalisation of expectation of violence as part of structural gender norms and roles. The authority of fathers over households, which girls discussed in the previous chapter pertaining to marriage timing and decision-making, reverberates into these gendered social and sexual relations in schools. Where gender violence is structural and systemic, being in school does not protect girls from school leaving and marriage but pushes them away to their communities and their families.

Gender norms and narratives of gender violence in (and beyond) schools are significant and underpin Mercy, Zahrah and other girls’ experiences of schooling, but they are only part of their complex negotiations of myriad, multifaceted social and sexual relationships during adolescence. Some of these relationships engage girls as agents, navigating their sexuality, schooling, and relational preferences through and despite the conditions of their lives.

Adolescent sexuality and sociocultural norms: agency through/despite pregnancy?

At the same time as adolescents are being gendered and ‘sexually socialised’ through their social and sexual relationships and interactions in and beyond school, they also start to show more agentic behaviours (Bunting, 2005, p.19). A close examination of some girls’ accounts of premarital pregnancy indicate alternative narratives that highlight and raise questions about forms of girls’ agency in becoming married as opposed to narratives in which they are recipients of gendered norms. These accounts are interesting for their *content* but also for the *act of re-telling*, and what both elements signal about girls’ agency in becoming married. Aissata, unmarried and in-school in northern Kaduna state, tells the story of her cousin, Summayya⁸³:

⁸³ I have paraphrased Aissata’s account, which was partially in pidgin.

'Summayya became pregnant in JS class 2⁸⁴. She initially denied her pregnancy to her teachers and her family, pretending that she had a stomach ache. However, when her parents insisted on a hospital scan, Summayya ran away. When she returned, her uncle (Aissata's father) "called her and threatened her to tell the truth". Instead, Summayya packed her clothes. Aissata "ran home during school break and helped her pack. I was crying and begging her. But she said she was leaving". She left with her boyfriend (not the father of her child), who said that "if they ask, she should say it was him that got her pregnant". Summayya's boyfriend "liked her" and supported her. They eloped to another village, had the baby, took their junior WAEC, and married. Summayya has enrolled in senior secondary school in another village and her husband cares for her baby while she is at school'.

(Aissata, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

In Aissata's story, Summayya takes ownership of her pregnancy and makes a series of oppositional (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015, p.37) moves against her teachers and family members. She 'denies' her pregnancy, runs away, resists 'telling the truth', and then leaves. The circumstances of her pregnancy are not known, but Summayya's behaviour afterwards comprise a series of autonomous and oppositional moves that suggest some self-determination to forge her own pathway through her pregnancy against others demands. Her relationship with her boyfriend and his collaboration and collusion are fundamental to her agency in eloping and establishing a new home in another village. It seems that they are the same age, as they both subsequently take their junior WAEC (class 3 exam). Summayya's supportive and collaborative relationship with her boyfriend facilitates and enables the realisation of her preferences including, later, to resume schooling. Her story, as told by her cousin, exemplifies forms of autonomous and relational agency in becoming married through/despite pregnancy.

Dorothy, like Summayya, elopes to marry after becoming pregnant. Dorothy speaks instinctively and self-assuredly about her marriage, how and to whom she married. She had been living with her maternal grandmother at the time she married because her father had recently died. She married to have someone "to support me". She does "not regret" her marriage. Her story indicates her active engagement in marriage, corroborated by her mother's account:

⁸⁴ Summayya's age, and that of her boyfriend, are not given by Aissata. However, Aissata was in JS1 aged 13 at the time and her cousin was in JS 2. Girls in JS Class 2 are *normally* around 14 years of age but may be older.

Interviewer: Who took the decision for the marriage?

Mother: Who should take what decision when she's already pregnant? Only her and her husband took the decision.

Interviewer: So, there was nothing like parent's decision?

Mother: No, I only knew after they had married.

(Dorothy's mother, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Dorothy's mother presents her daughter's opposition to her parents in eloping to marry after becoming pregnant without her consent ("I only knew after"). Dorothy appears to pre-empt the social necessity of her marriage by doing it herself, taking responsibility and making the decision to marry with her then-boyfriend. Like Summayya and her boyfriend, Dorothy and her husband collude after her pregnancy to take their own decision to elope and marry without family intervention.

Two intertwined strands of decision-making comprise Summayya's and Dorothy's stories: eloping or running away as a form of proactive oppositional agency and being able to choose your spouse. The ideal, idea and act of determining your own spouse, and eloping to ensure that outcome, is present in the expectations of unmarried girls to marriage. Unmarried out-of-school girls in southern and northern Kaduna state are asked about their expectations of marriage and their role in becoming married. The ideas of spousal choice and resistance as running away are admired and aspired towards among girls in the northern zone:

"The girl can choose the man she wants to marry. If she is forced to marry a man outside of her choice, she could decide to run away."

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

A group of six adolescent girls (aged 13-19) out-of-school in the southern zone likewise admire and aspire towards ideals of spousal choice and resistance, here as a form of collaboration and relational agency with their boyfriend, using pregnancy as a means to guarantee their choice of spouse:

Interviewer: When they marry, who takes the decision: the papa, the girl, or the boy?

Girl 1: The girl and the boy.

Girl 2: The girl and the boy will make their decision. By themselves they decide.

Interviewer: So, if you want to marry will your father say yes or no?

Girl 2: He said I can make my choice.

Interviewer: You can make your choice. Papa will allow you. If you wake up and say, "Daddy I want to marry, this is the boy I want to marry", your Daddy will not say "no, I don't want this boy"?

Girl 2: He will agree.

Interviewer: What if he doesn't agree? What's going to happen? Do you have cases where the father doesn't agree?

Girls (chorus): Yes.

Girl 3: Some and they will get pregnant.

Interviewer: Ok, they will just get pregnant?

Girls (chorus): Yes.

Interviewer: Once they get pregnant the father will do anything? He will marry them?

Girls (chorus): Yes.

(Girls out-of-school, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

These unmarried out-of-school girls expect and aspire towards agency in how and to whom they marry. One girl asserts that she "can make my choice", others that girls and boys decide "by themselves". These are striking statements of self-confidence and agency in spousal choice, and contrast with other girls, including Hadiza and Nafisah in the north, who emphasise deference to their parents (Chapter 8). In part this anticipated agency is autonomous – girls can choose - and in part it is relational – *together* boys and girls decide. It is also conceived ideally as resistant to authority, namely their fathers. Their denouement flourish, to 'get pregnant', is a peer collusion against their elder father exploiting sociocultural tradition for their own ends. Pregnancy, in this premeditated idea, would be a defiant and proactive strategy to gain the marriage and spouse of their choosing; becoming pregnant would give the girls, in their view, some agency.

Possibilities and practices of relational agency in becoming married cuts across the stories of these adolescent girls, of Dorothy and of Summayya, as collusion and collaboration with boyfriends. The girls' male peers appear as 'participants in problem solving', helping the girls to forge proactive pathways through pregnancy to marriage (Nnaemeka, 1998, p.7). Some adolescent girls have positive expectations of marriage, and these are partially attributed to the role of boyfriends as collaborators, jointly navigating with girls a path through sexuality

and sociocultural norms. Girls have ideas and ideals about the possible avenues through which they can and could access negotiating power in how and to whom they marry. These ideas indicate that they have a degree of 'self-worth', which has been considered a bedrock of agency (Thapan, 2003).

The forms of actual and aspirational agency in becoming married is heavily mediated by the girls' economic conditions. Dorothy's father who paid her school fees had died within months of her becoming pregnant, and she explains her marriage in terms of needing "support". Mercy's marriage is similarly contextualised by circumstances of poverty and needing someone to "take care of my needs". Yet the positioning of oneself as agentic, despite constrained and mediating circumstances, is significant to some of the girls' self-presentation. This signals a form of agency in the girls' accounts of becoming married that is concerned with the process of talking and storytelling and what that means for agency. The *processes of (re)telling* their stories and talking (to an outsider) about marriage and pregnancy itself confers agency to the girls, I suggest. It is not possible to know whether the out-of-school girls' intended resistances would be realised in practice, but this is only partially the point. The act of verbalising, aspiring towards, and projecting admiration to such agentic behaviours confers "power within" (Kabeer, 1999) in aspiring towards, and articulating, these preferences and behaviours. They have agency over their own storytelling and words, and in the process of reflection, consideration, and planning. The possibility and power of gaining agency in the retelling of a story comes to the fore in Mercy's account of her marriage in which, despite her constrained economic circumstances and her pregnancy, she takes decisive ownership of her marriage, stating "I decided to get married". Mercy confers agency to herself retrospectively in the retelling of her story. Other girls furnish each other with agency: in Aissata's story of Summayya, and in the self-assured interjections of the out-of-school adolescent girls in Hanya, the girls add and attach power and agency to their peers and each other in the process of *describing* becoming married.

Adolescent schoolgirls' accounts signal that they are aware of and engaged in heterosexual relationships, and often sexually active, in and out of school. These data support a recommendation raised in literature on adolescent marriages and agency in Honduras of a need for a "deeper understanding and acknowledgement of how consensual courtship and adolescent sexuality play a role in child marriage" (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2014, p.39). The idea that *positive* social and sexual peer relationships and narrative, dialogic processes, can offer some subtle forms of agency to adolescent girls in becoming married is echoed in girls' aspirations for marriage that are framed by love and desire.

“I want to enjoy”: aspirations, longing, and love

Some of the girls’ confident self-presentations as autonomous continue in the way in which they describe reasons for marrying. These data indicate that love and desire are part of adolescent girls’ emergent sexualities and the stories of becoming married. The out-of-school adolescent girls in Hanya community continue to discuss - with much fun and laughter - what would prompt them to marry and the benefits of marriage. Their responses indicate aspirations of marriage as a collaborative and mutually dependent relationship, and for marriages that fulfil practical needs (for food, money), strategic interests (learning, advice) and desires (companionship, enjoyment, wealth):

Interviewer: What are the benefits of marriage?

Girl 1: To live together and enjoy each other’s companionship. You will also learn a lot of things from your husband. You will benefit in terms of advice.

Girl 2: Because I want to enjoy with my husband!

Girl 3: If I see my boyfriend’s house is better than mine, I will go and fill my stomach!

(laughter)

Interviewer: What about you?

Girl 4: If my boyfriend’s house is richer than mine, I will immediately marry him⁸⁵

(Girls out-of-school, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Girls’ aspirations, hopes and expectations for positive marriages are emphasised in their affirmations: “I want to enjoy”; “I will go”; “I will immediately marry”. These are optimistic aspirations for egalitarian, dialogic and fulfilling partnerships. Their words imagine marriage as conferring enough of what they now have too little, with the implication of attaining pleasure (companionship, food, wealth, sex) through marriage. Girls out-of-school in the northern zone similarly express preferences for marriage associated with richness, saying that:

“[married girls] are doing better and even becoming fatter upon enjoyment”

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

⁸⁵ Hausa and pidgin adapted to standard English

These may be short-term and opportunistic aspirations for marriage, but they show that girls hold aspirations, desires, and some intentions (“I will”) to act autonomously to fulfil these goals.

The girls talk of enjoyment and companionship, not love or romance. But for Mercy’s older brother, and Zahrah’s father, love and romance catalysed Mercy and Zahrah’s marriages:

“The first day she attended school she met a boy and they fell in love [...] When the boy and girl fall in love, it’s very hard for someone to separate it”.

(Mercy’s brother, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“She showed that she loves the boy and married life”.

(Zahrah’s father, Tauraro community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

According to her brother, Mercy ‘fell in love’, became pregnant and consequently married. Zahrah’s father implicates two forms of love – romantic love, and love of a social condition (marriage). These accounts implicate Mercy and Zahrah as partially active in the relationships that led to their marriages. However, importantly, neither girl expresses these engagements in their own accounts⁸⁶.

Zahrah’s father’s perception that Zahrah ‘loves’ married life, and the hopes and aspirations of the unmarried out-of-school girls that marriage will give them what they do not have, is captured in an interview with Fatmata, a Hausa Muslim northern Nigerian who works for an international NGO on an adolescent girls’ programme. Fatmata describes how girls’ desire to marry may be linked to aspiration or expectation for social and material gains from marriage:

Fatmata: Sometimes girls want to get married, it’s not always that girls are forced.

Interviewer: Why? What kind of scenarios are there where girls want to get married?

Fatmata: It’s the socialisation, maybe she accepts that marriage means being respected, it means owning your own home. If a girl is in poverty and has nothing, when you get married you have a marriage trousseau that you take to your home where you have your furniture, you have your room, silver, glass and decorations in your room and that’s your

⁸⁶ Both Mercy and Zahrah say that they feel nothing (Hausa - “ba komai”) about their marriages. This can be taken at face value but could also suggest a reluctance to respond to interview questions about how they married.

space and you are the decision-maker about what to eat and what not to eat. [...]

(Fatmata, development programme staff, 25/06/2015).

Fatmata's account signals the relative agency that adolescent girls perceive and may gain through marriage. Gaining a social identity as a wife may garner respect and pride, ownership of material possessions, and micro-level decision-making and spatial autonomy. These micro, domestic gains are slight, but may have significant meaning for out-of-school girls in poverty contexts.

Patriarchy and persuasion: marrying to stay in school

Gendered social and familial relations are significant to girls' journeys through marriage and schooling. While a patriarchal structure overlays many girls' expectations and experiences of marriage and schooling, interviews offer insights into how some families negotiate the circumstances and conditions of school-age girls' marriages in relation to their education. Ummi, a 14-year-old Muslim girl living in northern Kaduna state, describes how her father, mother and boyfriend discussed and negotiated her marriage. Ummi's father's decision-making authority is paramount, and echoes the accounts of Hadiza and Nafisah, but the role of Ummi's mother and her prospective husband are also critical:

“My name is Ummi. After I had completed my primary education, there was this boy that says he loves me. My father said he will give me in marriage to that boy and that I will continue with my education after I have married him. My mother said it cannot be possible since the boy is not educated. When the boy was confronted about allowing me to continue my education after marriage, he told my parents that he is not ready to marry me now, he wants to go to school. On hearing this, my parents decided that since I really want to continue with my education, I can return to school after the Salah⁸⁷ break.”

(Ummi, out-of-school girl, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Ummi's father takes the decision to 'give her in marriage' but on the condition and assurance that she will continue her education *after* marriage. Her mother's intervention queries the choice of spouse on the basis that he is not educated, which leads to the marriage being postponed so that both Ummi and her prospective husband can gain more schooling. While Ummi's father is presented as the patriarch, Ummi's mother's intervention signals the

⁸⁷ Muslim prayers. Ummi is here referring to the salah for Ramadan.

discrete but critical micro-influences that some women as wives and mothers may be able have. The dialogue between Ummi's father, mother, the boy, and Ummi is central to their negotiation of love, marriage, and education in which they reach a partnership agreement. Ummi herself can express her desire to continue schooling, which are considered and responded to by her parents. Together, the family navigate a mutually agreeable pathway through marriage and education that prioritises education in the short-term within the context of marriage in the longer-term.

The idea that families negotiate girls' schooling as a condition of marriage is repeated by Ummi's peers in Karkara community:

"If I get a husband that allows me to finish my school, I will".

"[resuming school] depends on the agreement reached with the man I will marry. If he wishes, I will continue and if not, that will be the end."

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

The negotiations and relational nuances involved in navigating marriage, school and family reverberates with what Hadiza, in Karkara community, has said about parental support to continued education before (or after) marriage (Chapter 8). Such relational negotiations are recognised by Aisha, a Hausa Muslim NGO worker from Kaduna state. Aisha's account of marriage and schooling emphasises the negotiations, compromises and conditionalities that can comprise family decision-making on these two facets of girls' lives:

"Sometimes it's even a trade-off in the sense that it's a form of negotiation. The parents will give the girl a condition: you can only go to school if you get married. So, she doesn't have an option but to look for someone who will marry her, or marry the person who the parents want, so that she can go to school."

(Aisha, development programme staff, 30/06/2015)

Aisha's example extends the idea from Ummi's story that continued education depends on marriage – you can only stay in school if you marry. For Ummi, it is the assurance of marriage that enables her continued education, but Aisha suggests that it can be more than this – girls are compelled to marry *for* their schooling. This is contrary to the assumption that marriage requires the end of schooling for girls, which instead moots that marriage can enable continued schooling – they are *not* mutually exclusive. It offers an alternative view on why adolescent girls marry, and how and why they continue their schooling after marriage. It has resonances in Summayya's story, in which Summayya resumes schooling after childbirth and marriage, but refracts from Nana's story and from the DHS data view that indicates how few girls resume schooling after marriage. This idea that girls marry for

schooling raises questions about Mercy, Zahrah and Dorothy's experiences of schooling after marriage, and about whether and how schools support married girls (Chapter 10).

These data on adolescent schoolgirls' expectations and experiences of becoming married show that secondary school is a place where adolescent peers interact and navigate new emotional, physical and sexual relationships at the same time as they are developing intellectually. School is a site of aspiration and opportunity but also of risk, where whether and how girls' can negotiate social and sexual relationships becomes critical to the outcomes of their adolescence. Patriarchy, gender violence, and school policies, combined with emergent heterosexual relationships developing during schooling, can combine to push girls into adolescent marriages. In a context in which marriage is inevitable, exclusion from schooling can heighten the viability, even desirability, of marriage by girls and their families in attempts to secure a better life, including continuing schooling. Girls are not only passive recipients of others' decisions to marry, they reflect upon, discuss, contribute and make a range of relational agentic moves to improve their lives. The following section considers whether and how the anticipated negotiated realities of marriage and schooling are realised in the state of being married.

Being married: acquiescence, aspirations, and subtle agency

"Sometimes it doesn't work": disappointment and marital dependency

"The problem with men is that they will accept all conditions and agreements before marriage and after the marriage they will not fulfil their promises"

(Zainab, out-of-school girl, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Zainab's statement encompasses the expectation and reality for some girls of marital disappointment and dependency. Zainab is fourteen years old, and unmarried, but shows a strong awareness of how premarital conditions and agreements may be thwarted by spouses after marriage. It is a distrust of men that seems to extend from girls' understanding and experiences of gendered social relations and conditions in which men and boys have significant power. Zainab's expression of distrust is echoed by girls in the southern zone who, though unmarried, express fear of disappointment, dependency, and violence in marriage. Asked about the problems⁸⁸ or disadvantages of marriage, Rose, an unmarried Christian girl, says:

⁸⁸ The question and answers repeat the Hausa word '*wahala*', meaning affliction or trouble. The main '*wahala*' girls cite concerns spousal violence

“You marry and have children and your husband will not take care of the children. You will have to slave to look after them and still that is not enough. He takes what is yours and beats you up. We see that a lot, that is why marriage scares us a little.”

(Rose, out-of-school girl, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Rose’s expectations of marriage comprise fear of spousal relationships and of becoming a ‘slave’ to your family as a wife and mother. She, and her friend, raise the problem of spousal violence – being ‘beaten up’ physically, emotionally and financially in marriage. These expectations echo their accounts of gendered violence in their schools by men and boys and reflects the high prevalence of spousal violence reported in DHS data in the region and in Kaduna state.

Girls’ dependency on their spouses is significant. This seems to mirror the contingency on fathers to girls’ accounts of entering marriage. The patriarchal hegemony of fathers seems to give way to husbands in marriage. The dependency of newly married wives on their spouses is emphasised by Aisha, a bilateral development programme manager and a Hausa Muslim from Kaduna state. Aisha suggested earlier that girls may marry to continue their education, entering agreements negotiated by their families and prospective husbands to return to school after marriage. Yet she acknowledges that “sometimes it doesn’t work”:

“Sometimes it [marriage and schooling] doesn’t work, because the man ends up not wanting her to go to school because she could get pregnant on and on, not having the regular, ideal interval between births, which would affect her school. Or he might not give her peace of mind to be able to attend to school, or his family starts saying stuff that will stop her from going to school”.

(Aisha, development programme staff, 30/06/2015)

Aisha’s explanations for girls’ being disappointed and dependent in marriage is attributed to men ‘not wanting’ his wife to go to school in practice (away from the negotiated ideal of betrothal), pregnancies, and marital family harassment. Aisha’s suggestion is that the relational reality of being married is quite different from the negotiations of becoming married. Girls out-of-school in the northern zone pin their aspirations for resuming schooling after marriage on their spouses, acknowledging their dependency, and conceding that marriage and schooling are unusual:

Interviewer: Returning to school after marriage or stopping completely, which one happens more frequently in this town?

Girl 1: Most girls stop going to school when they get married

Girl 2: They mostly stay at their houses.

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Although these girls have affirmed and admired forms of girls' agency in becoming married, they are conscious of the potential disappointments and realities of being married. This indicates the complexity for adolescent girls becoming or newly married of negotiating marital realities, navigating expectations, aspirations, and dependencies, and of the oscillation between aspiration and acquiescence, premeditated and practiced agency.

Nana expressed no expectation of schooling after marriage, and this is her reality of being married:

Interviewer: How does your marriage affect your schooling?

Nana: It's a problem because I stopped. He will not allow me.

Interviewer: Have you ever tried to go to school and he said no?

Nana: No.

Interviewer: Why?

Nana: There are many of us who are not going out to school.

(Nana, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Nana is in seclusion to continue her preparation for the roles of wife and mother (Egunyomi, 2006; Izugbara and Ezeh, 2010). Nana left school, married, and does not expect to resume schooling because her husband "will not allow" her and this is the practice in her marital family. Her married peers in her household have set the precedence for her marriage, confinement and spousal deference (Nguyen and Wodon, 2014; Delprato et al., 2015). Nana's marriage has conformed to Islamic tradition in her leaving school, courtship, betrothal and marriage. Since her wedding day, she has been in seclusion, leaving her marital home only three times to visit a sick relative, for her uncle's funeral, and for a naming ceremony. These outside visits reflect the kinds of capabilities of married women portrayed by the DHS data – according to which, the most prevalent decision-making capability of married women in the region is for visits to friends or relatives. She says that she will be able to go out more often a year after her marriage⁸⁹. Nana is very clear on her capabilities in terms of household finances too, explaining that she may spend small amounts of money autonomously but makes most decisions 'with her husband', again reflecting the DHS data on women's household purchasing power:

⁸⁹ Wife seclusion, or purdah, is not uncommon among Hausa Muslim communities in North West Nigeria, but data on its prevalence and associated factors is not available in DHS. Nana's interview was permitted by her husband and took place in her marital home.

Interviewer: Can you make your own decisions since your marriage?

Nana: With my husband.

Interviewer: When you want to spend 100 Naira⁹⁰, can you spend the money without your husband?

Nana: 100 Naira is too much.

Interviewer: If you spend 20 Naira do you tell him?

Nana: No

(Nana, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Nana is dependent on her husband and her new marital family, but there is also a sense that she has some marginal spaces for relational agency through her affirmation that decisions are taken “*with my husband*” - she participates in this interview, has been outside to visit family and friends, and has autonomy over very small expenditures⁹¹. Nana also continues to hold and be able to articulate aspiration for education, which suggests that she holds a sense of self-worth:

“If I will be allowed, I will go back [...] If I can finish senior secondary that is enough”

(Nana, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Nana’s marginal options for cooperation with her husband, and her hopes for education, are fragile, but they are also hopeful. Less than 20% of women (aged 15-49) complete senior secondary school in Kaduna state (NDHS, 2013, p.34), fewer in rural areas, signalling the aspirational quality of Nana’s ideal. Nana’s aspiration finds bigger spaces in the narratives of married girls Mercy and Dorothy, in the southern zone, both of whom are enabled to resume formal schooling after marriage thanks to family support. But the spaces that these girls find and exploit, vary and depend, as Nana’s do, on the quality of their sexual and social relationships.

Being married and being in school: aspirations, agency, and achievement

Adolescent girls aspire to stay in or resume schooling, whether or not they marry and despite their gendered school experience. They continue to attach value and significance to being

⁹⁰ 100 Naira is equivalent to approximately 20 pence sterling (0.20 GBP). It would afford, for example, some food (meat, fruit) or a short journey on public transport in Kaduna state.

⁹¹ The male teacher at Karkara suggested that seclusion practices may be more restrictive for some newly married young women in Kaduna state on the basis of ‘*kulle*’, Hausa for ‘full purdah, in which married women never leave their marital homes.

educated and believe in its transformative potential to improve their lives. This is true of unmarried girls in and out-of-school and already-married girls:

“[After marriage] I still had the interest to go to school”.

(Mercy, married, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“I like coming to school. I want to learn. [...] I want to be a doctor or a teacher”

(Hadiza, 14, unmarried, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Girls’ belief in formal schooling and their tendency towards ambitious educational aspirations indicate their ability to identify their desires, articulate how education can help them achieve their goals, and their self-worth and self-confidence. Mercy wants to go to university and become a nurse; Zahrah wants to finish secondary school and learn to be a tailor; Dorothy hopes to “finish secondary and start doing something or to go somewhere. Maybe to college [...] even to university” and has an ambition of becoming a primary school teacher. These married girls’ aspirations for schooling are articulated in terms of achieving economic and social autonomy through work. The goal of education *for employment* indicates that what Mercy, Zahrah and Dorothy need from education are skills for work with the formal and professional sectors.

The girls’ stories show that the realisation of their aspirations is contingent upon their social relationships with their families and their spouses. For Mercy and Zahrah, the relationship with their parents is critical to their return to school. Zahrah and Mercy’s spouses are regularly absent from the community due to employment demands. Their husbands’ absence seems to confer opportunity for them to re-enter school in negotiation with their mother and father. Mercy’s interest to go to school is enabled in collaboration with her mother who has agreed to care for her child in order that Mercy can return to junior secondary class 3 in the same school that she left a year ago upon her pregnancy. Zahrah has also negotiated with her parents for her return to school in class 3 after the school holidays:

Interviewer: How will you go back to school?

Zahrah: I will leave the children at home.

Interviewer: Who will take care of them?

Zahrah: My mother and father.

(Zahrah, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

The dialogue and interaction with her father that characterised Zahrah’s entry into marriage reappear in her negotiation of her parents’ childcare support when she returns to school. Her

father confirms that he and her mother “are advising her as parents”. Zahrah’s supportive and collaborative relationship with her parents facilitate Zahrah’s education and enable Zahrah to reflect on, articulate and strategize to achieve her goals. She has considered a strategy for childcare and economic independence, through which she could be wife, mother, learner and worker, which she can clearly and assertively articulate. Zahrah articulates an aspirational future in which she can balance social norms and her own desires. In becoming and being married, Zahrah’s agency is strongly relational.

The significance of family relations to married girls’ realisation of schooling aspirations is emphasised in a dialogue with girls in the northern zone of Kaduna state. One of the girls narrates how her father made an agreement with her sisters’ husbands-to-be to negotiate their re-entry to school after marriage and childbirth:

Interviewer: When did they [married girls] get back to school?

Girl 1: After they had weaned their babies.

Interviewer: Did their husbands enter into agreement with your father?

Girl 1: Yes, they did, and all husbands agreed.

(Girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

For other girls, the familial negotiations and collaborations that enable girls to re-enter schooling extend and depend on the natal and marital family combined. One father, also the Chairman of the SBMC, describes how he (her father), his father (her grandfather), and her spouse reached an agreement, which was enacted, to combine her marriage and schooling:

“They are many [girls] who got married and continued with their studies after marriage. [...] My father said I should marry my daughter. I wanted her to continue with her studies. Fortunately, she married and continued with her studies. Now she is pursuing her NCE [National Certificate of Education].”

(SBMC Chairman, Babban primary, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

His account simultaneously exemplifies patriarchal decision-making authority and intra-familial negotiation. The opportunity to re-enter school after marriage, and the possibility that girls navigate around patriarchy under these conditions to access their goals for school, is further suggested in the account of Damola concerning the re-entry decision-making process between a husband and wife. Damola’s account underscores a husband’s power over his wife (as ‘custodian’) even as he also describes how collusion, dialogue and negotiation between the husband and the wife, and the women’s influence and persuasion, enables her schooling:

“When she is married, she is under the custody of her husband. So, if the two of them accept and agree that yes, it is not yet late, my wife can still go back, he can meet the authorities and those concerned and say, ‘we want a second chance’. But the decision has to start from the couple. They have to agree. If she comes on her own, her husband has to be contacted because the time she uses coming to school is the time she has to attend some of her domestic affairs, which are religiously and culturally binding.”

(Damola, Kaduna state government education official, 02/07/2015)

Aisha concurs with Damola that married girls’ re-entry to schooling depends on her husband and her relationship with her husband:

If she’s lucky to have a man who appreciates education, he will give her support. I know someone who, in her house, the girls only attend primary six and then get married. She did not marry for a long time but in the end she married. Fortunately for her, he is someone who appreciates education, so he forced her to go to school and today she is benefitting from that. She is the only girl from her family to go to school. She is the envy of everyone”

(Aisha, development programme staff, 30/06/2015).

Aisha suggests that the fulfilment of girls’ aspirations for schooling depend on their husband’s (and their new marital family’s) valuation of formal schooling. Girls are ‘lucky’ or ‘fortunate’ if they marry a man who appreciates education. The critical factor here is the significance of girls’ relationships with their husbands and their husband’s family.

After ten years out of formal schooling, Dorothy re-enrolled in junior secondary school class 2, aged 27. She “wanted” and is “happy” to be back at school:

Interviewer: How do you feel now that you are in school again after marriage?

Dorothy: I wanted it, that is why I went back.

Interviewer: What motivates married women with children to go back to school?

Dorothy: I have more respect [being a married women at school]

(Dorothy, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Dorothy’s account of re-entering school is assertive, self-confident and self-oriented, littered with “I” and “me”. She positions herself as central to her account, with her self-motivation,

self-belief and practical ability to negotiate her identity as wife, mother and student. Dorothy's articulation of self-worth and self-belief are strong and are enhanced and supported by her marital family, especially her husband, who provide a supportive structure for her aspirations. Her father-in-law pays her secondary school fees and her husband pays their two children's school fees. Dorothy confirms that she needs her husband's "approval" to do some things, but is keen to emphasise the distinctive mutuality of her relationship with her spouse:

Interviewer: Do men normally engage in women's work like cooking, and other related things?

Dorothy: No! But my husband does sometimes.

(Dorothy, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

The implication of collaboration with her husband in Dorothy's entry to marriage that was narrated by her mother extends into their marital relationship. Dorothy can return to school thanks to her husband, who himself completed JS Class 3 and is a driver. Dorothy's husband expresses ambitions for his wife that support this idea of their mutuality and co-dependency:

Interviewer: Where will you want her to be?

Husband: I even want her to become a Governor, but alternatively I would like her to be a nurse or get a job in the works department.

(Dorothy's husband, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

The financial and emotional support of Dorothy's husband is pivotal to Dorothy's aspiration and ability to achieve her goals. Though she is evidently determined and strong-willed, her husband's collaboration strengthens her agentic potential. Despite having eloped, Dorothy's mother shows considerable support and ambition for her daughter. Her mother says that she too was "happy" when she "saw that she was back in school" and wants Dorothy to "finish her secondary school" and "become a big person". Dorothy's reality as wife, mother and student is realised through negotiation and collaboration with many family members – her husband, father-in-law, and mother. Her account signals the importance of relationships to girls' agentic capabilities.

Learning from adolescent girls in the representation of marriage and schooling

How and what are we 'learning from' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.354) these accounts of adolescent girls in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria? These data show evidence for Kaduna girls

having a strong “bedrock of agency” (Kabeer, 1999; Unterhalter, 2012) manifest as self-reflection towards the valuation of important goals or aspirations, conscious intention and articulating how to achieve those desires. Having and articulating aspirations indicates that these girls have “power within” (Kabeer, 1993, p.3) before and during marriage.

Adolescent girls’ stories indicate strongly that they behave consciously of the contexts, conditions and relations (social, economic, and educational) in which they live. Their dynamic social worlds inform and form their agency at different moments in their journeys through adolescence. Many of these adolescent girls ‘navigate the expression and achievement of their choices through their relationships with their parents’ (Zimmerman et al., 2019, p.100454) and other family members. Sometimes girls conform or acquiesce to patriarchal norms but acquiescence is consistently mitigated by persistent aspiration for a better life. Other times girls challenge, expressing resistance and behaving antagonistically. This alteration of conformism and challenge, acquiescence and antagonism, seems to signal an undoing of the imagery of passive girls who are the victims of marriage to reveal more complex stories and explanations of marriage among adolescents.

Adolescent girls’ experiences of formal schooling play a major role in their understanding of their social worlds, their aspirations, and the form and outcomes of their marital agency. On the one hand, being in or having been in secondary school seems to enable self- and societal reflection, and confer self-worth, aspirations for more education and employment, and some autonomous and relational decision-making influence and capacity. All the girls express positive views about secondary schooling. On the other hand, being in secondary school can perpetuate and entrench girls’ perceptions of their gendered social worlds, including the normalisation of discrimination and inequality. As adolescents are actively negotiating both fear of sexual violence and desires towards sexual relationships, the school becomes a fraught site to navigate. The endogenous challenges of schooling thus present a major counter-argument to the kind of proposal such that ‘if universal secondary education were achieved, child marriage could be virtually eliminated’ (Wodon et al., 2018, p.7) by showing how secondary schools are gendered sites of sexual socialisation that may problematise as well as pave girls ways through adolescence.

In this chapter I have enlarged and contextualised the preliminary insights of prior academic research into women and girls’ marital and educational agency and, especially, their relational agency manifest as collusions, collaborations and negotiations with families and spouses before and in marriage. Girls’ agentic capabilities are conditioned and constrained by social, cultural, economic and educational conditions and by adolescent girls’ dependencies on their families and their experiences of schooling. Girls’ relationships are contingent but also dynamic. Fathers and husbands are particularly significant to girls’

expectations and experiences of becoming and being married. The relational agency expressed by girls resonates with the heart of Nego-feminism's notion of negotiation and compromise. However, a divergence from Nego-feminism's ideals can be located in its appraisal of no-ego. The girls' accounts show significant self-orientation, with expressions of personal, individual desire and inherent autonomous intent. I suggest that this is associated with adolescence and youth and the energy and urgency of the ego in adolescence. This ego in fact seems critical to the girls' self-worth and therefore their ability to express agency in their own lives.

Mercy, Zahrah, Dorothy, and Summayya's stories, as well as insights of other girls contributing through focus groups, signal the possibility of married girls' school re-entry, countering assumptions in global policy discourses and data from DHS of the mutual exclusivity of marriage and schooling. The next chapter pursues the ideal, idea and reality of married girls' education by examining knowledge, attitudes and practices towards married adolescent girls' formal schooling and continued education to query the assumption of education as protective in relation to marriage to consider whether and how far schooling is protective for already-married adolescent girls.

Chapter 10. Negotiations on education after marriage: protective or protectionist schooling?

This chapter examines ideals, ideas and negotiations of married girls' continuing education among girls, school staff, and education policymakers. School-age girls marry for myriad reasons endogenous and exogenous to education. It is hard for girls to return to education after marriage, for reasons associated with gendered social norms and household responsibilities, as well as the availability and accessibility of education. But this chapter argues that attention to married girls' aspirations and attitudes towards education, and whether, how and what form of education is on offer, are of central importance to the issue of education as protective in relation to early marriage. It seeks to show that idiosyncratic approaches to married girls' education, especially those that err towards shielding education institutions, are insufficient and fail to protect school-age girls from harm and ensure their right to basic education. Nigeria DHS data suggest that very few married girls or young women return to formal schooling ([Table 9.3](#); Wodon, 2018, p.27), but data of the women's questionnaire does not elucidate married girls' access to or experiences of formal schooling or alternative forms of education.

This chapter draws on the qualitative data analysed for this thesis. The first part explores education policy knowledge and attitudes regarding education for married girls among policymakers and influencers, head teachers and teachers, and adolescent girls, examining how they reflect or refract from policy mandates and each other. The second part considers whether and how knowledge of, and attitudes towards, education policy steer enactments of education for married girls (Unterhalter and North, 2018; Tromp and Datzberger, 2019). I am interested in discourses and realisations of married girls' education, and how these relate to married girls lived experiences of re-entering school or education. The third and final part homes in on the discourse and provision of 'second chance' education in North West Nigeria. Second chance has become an increasingly dominant term in international girls' education policy, including in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2010, pp.194–5; UNESCO, 2012; Sperling and Winthrop, 2016, p.235), with provision donor-driven and (I)NGO-led. I consider how 'second chance' is framed and enacted in the Nigerian context and how it relates to broader knowledge, attitudes and provisions for married girls' education.

In conclusion, I argue that variability, indeed idiosyncrasies, in knowledge of, attitudes towards and provisions for married school-age girls' education, and therefore adolescent girls' subjective experiences, has led to a dilution of the policy and social ideal of free, universal basic education for school-age and adolescent girls. The response to this, I

suggest, is to recognise and systematise provision for married girls' schooling – minimising the adverse effects of this 'negotiated reality' - even while targeting marriage prevention among unmarried girls in and out of school.

Married girls' education: policy knowledge and attitudes among policymakers

All four already married girls profiled as case studies in this thesis – Mercy, Zahrah, Dorothy and Nana – agree that married girls should be able to return to formal schooling after marriage, including if they have had children.

Interviewer: Do you think it is good for girls who marry to stay in school?

Mercy: Yes.

(Mercy, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Interviewer: Is it good for a married woman to go back to school to study?

Dorothy: Yes! It is necessary, it is good for her own progress.

(Dorothy, Hanya community, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Dorothy's husband is supportive of married girls and women resuming formal school, claiming that there is "no problem with that". Zahrah asserts that all married mothers should all be able "to complete school" while out-of-school girls in Hanya community also express support married girls' education. In the northern zone, Nana hesitates before affirming that a married girl should resume "to continue her education" while Nafisah affirms that,

"it is ok for girls who are married or become pregnant and have babies to stay in school because education will help her to secure a job and support her family"

(Nafisah, 14, unmarried, Babban community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

These girls attitudes resonate with research findings from Honduras to Zambia on married girls' aspirations to re-enrol in school and complete their secondary education (Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Mweemba and Mann, 2019). These aspirations and attitudes suggest that girls in the northern zone are somewhat more equivocal about married girls' education than their peers in the south, however. Those out-of-school and unmarried suggest that "those that finish school before marriage are feeling better than the married ones in school", which indicates a group preference towards completing schooling before marriage. This preference is expressed unhesitatingly by Hadiza:

“The best thing is for them is to remain at home. [...] Let her finish her school first before getting married so that she will not be *roaming*⁹² about in the name of school after marriage”

(Hadiza, unmarried, Karkara community, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Hadiza’s reply locates married women in the home and is concerned that they would be ‘wandering around’ as married women by travelling to school. She clarifies that her view is according to Islamic religion: “in religion, it is not good” but that “if their husbands accept it’s not a problem”. Although Hadiza holds strong convictions about the importance of education for girls, her expressions also indicate her sense of propriety linked to social and moral institutions (religion, education, marriage) as well as conscientisation to gendered sociocultural norms and expectations associated with marriage: she has expressed deference to her parents on the question of marriage timing and spousal choice, and deference to the husband on decision-making. The previous chapter argued for the criticality of social relationships, and especially paternal and spousal relationships, to girls’ capabilities for agency in relation to marriage and education. In the absence of marital experience, Hadiza is expressing an expectation of deference, whereas Dorothy, already married, has experience of negotiating school re-entry with her husband in a way that would underpin her encouragement of others’ re-entry. Thus, while most of the girls, married and unmarried, have positive attitudes towards married girls’ education, there are also doubts associated with gendered sociocultural norms. Lastly, none of the girls explicitly mention alternative education for married girls, such as Islamiyya schools, but it is not completely clear that they mean formal schooling when they refer to girls ‘staying in school’ or returning to school’. This is a gap for this analysis given girls conscientisation to the importance of both western and Islamic education, and evidence in the literature of the significance of alternative provisions especially for Muslim adolescents (Humphreys and Crawford, 2015; ESSPIN, 2009).

As outlined previously (Chapter 6), it is the Nigeria Child Rights Act (2003) and the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (FME, 2006) that provide policy guidance on school re-entry and continuing education for children who have dropped out of school. The NPGBE states that children who drop out of school should be “allowed” “to continue education” (FME, 2006, p.13). It continues that state governments are “*encouraged* to develop relevant policies and laws governing re-entry” and “*work out* modalities and develop guidelines” (ibid., p.14, my italics). This policy document offers no further precision on the terms or modes of

⁹² Hadiza uses the Hausa word ‘*yawo*’, which means roaming or wandering aimlessly, here in a negative sense. Roaming around can be linked to immorality; married women should have a specific place to go to.

this 'allowance' nor does the term allow itself suggest accountability to deliver. Neither of the two most recent Kaduna State Education Sector Plans 2006-2015 or 2019-2029 contain any references to formal school re-entry for any child, including married and/or pregnant girls (Kaduna State ESP, 2013; Kaduna state ESP, 2019). However, they do mention continuing education. The 2006-2015 ESP notes that 'adult literacy and continuing education are managed by the Agency for Mass Literacy but need to be coordinated with SUBEB⁹³' and there should be an Adult Education Centre in each local government area (Kaduna ESP 2006-2015, p. 20). However, the document does not specify the target population of these centres, making it unclear whether these or formal schooling would be the ordinary recourse for married girls. Kaduna state policy thus obscures married girls' education while federal guidance lacks clarity and clout.

At federal level, the opacity and ambivalence of policy guidance can be partially explained by the fact that education is on the concurrent list (federal and state government should engage simultaneously) meaning that some responsibility can be deflected from federal to state level. However, the purpose of the concurrent list is concurrent engagement – different levels operating and guiding together. The implication of federal ambivalence on re-entry and continuing education for premature school leavers, ambivalence which is not true of UBE policy, is variability in attitudes and approaches at different levels of the education system. It is exemplified in the policy knowledge and attitudes of two federal government education officials, Husaina and Amina. Both women, who have had long careers in government education departments, state that married girls and young women can resume education but would re-enter via adult education centres not via formal schooling regardless of their age:

Interviewer: Is it possible for girls to return to school after marriage?

Husaina: I don't think there is any arrangement for schools to give support to children with early marriage. No, no, what we have is not girls going back to formal school, but they can go to a women's centre. We have some centres where she can learn from class and some little literacy, technical and vocational skills and so on.

Interviewer: Ok, so she would be with adult women doing some literacy classes...

Husaina: Yes, yes.

(Husaina, female, Federal government education official, 05/12/2016)

⁹³ State Universal Basic Education Board. For responsibilities see Chapter 6.

Interviewer: Are married girls in school?

Amina: Yes, yes. That is why they have this Adult Education.

(Amina, Federal government education official, 24/11/2016)

While these officials affirm re-entry for married girls, their understanding (of policy and provision) is that married girls are necessarily moved across the education system from basic into adult education, in the process repositioned as adult women with technical and vocational learning needs.

Damola is a senior manager in the Kaduna state education system with oversight responsibilities for primary and junior secondary schools. He is unsure and expresses ambivalence about state education policy pertaining to married girls:

Interviewer: Is there any policy at state level on girls who become pregnant or marry during school?

Damola: Well, truly speaking I wouldn't like to delve too much into it. If she's married, she has to be given special consideration but to say that there is a policy in the state, I wouldn't like to lie to you, I'm not sure whether there is something like that.

(Damola, Kaduna state government education official, 02/07/2015)

Against his policy uncertainty is a personal conviction in giving 'special consideration' to married girls but it only later becomes clearer what this might mean, when he says that:

"If she's fully matured, there's this category of adult education class, but if she's not fully matured and she's within age limit of being in school, she should be enrolled!"

(Damola, Kaduna state government education official, 02/07/2015).

Damola's first response to married girls' education is to propose adult education class – echoing the federal officials' responses and the reference in the Kaduna State ESP to which it is likely that he is referring. However, he offers the conditional alternative of re-enrolling in formal schooling dependent on a married girls' age and 'maturity'. Damola may well be referring back to his meaning of maturity for marriage as physical maturity and pubescence, and/or to the implication of religion in meanings of maturity. The 'age limit' for junior secondary school is preferably 14 and no older than 16 years of age according to the 2004 UBE Act (15(1)). The implication of Damola's statement, albeit opaque, seems to be that married girls below 16 could re-enter school but older, 'matured' girls would go to adult

classes. The NPGBE does not specify an upper age limit for re-entry or continuing formal schooling, however.

Eunice works in the Kaduna State Ministry of Education in the department responsible for state policies on basic education. She correctly affirmed the absence of state policy pertaining to children's re-entry including married girls' education. Instead, following federal language, she emphasises Kaduna State Ministry's 'encouragement' of girls to continue their education after marriage for which, she says, "there is no age limit":

Interviewer: You said earlier that there is no state policy. Is that right?

Eunice: Yes, we encourage. There is no document. That is the document that we want to develop in the Ministry.

(Eunice, Kaduna state government education official, 22/07/2015)

In the years between the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education's 'encouragement' of states to develop re-entry policies (2006) and Eunice's interview (2015), no document has been developed pertaining to continuing education or re-entry in Kaduna state. Eunice rationalises the lack of documents on re-entry by saying that re-entry is "something that we are doing just naturally like that" but she aspires towards developing that document. This aspiration that is based on external rather than internal (governmental) influence because, she explains, "many organisations are coming to find out what we are doing in the state and we don't have a document". This indicates that pressure to document policy on re-entry and continuing education comes from outside of government, from non-governmental organisations.

Simultaneous to there being no written policy, teachers and local government officials across the state concur with Eunice on the idea that re-entry is 'naturally' supported and encouraged, for example:

"they are allowed to continue with their school"

(Female teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

"They can go back to school. We don't have such girls that stay like that, early marriage and then they will never continue schooling.

(Teacher, Tauraro primary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

"Actually it's very common. It's not a special story to tell. Immediately after the ceremony, after maybe a week or so, they now return back to their normal class"

(Hassan, local government education official, northern zone, 07/03/2017)

“Even after marriage they can go back to school. Even my wife I married her when she had not completed secondary school. But I sent her back to school to finish her SSCE⁹⁴ and then I sent her for her NCE⁹⁵, she completed and now she’s a teacher, my wife.”

(Yakubu, local government education official, southern zone, 27/03/2017)

These accounts exemplify the broadly supportive and encouraging attitudes to re-entry that suggests that federal policy is approached instinctively and informally at local government and school level. They echo an idea from Nigerian feminists of a difference between formal organising frameworks and informal practices in African societies - *de jure* and *de facto* modes of reality (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 130). Yakubu’s highly personal and informal response exemplifies a kind of subjective *de facto* reality. His story is imbued by pride – ‘she’s now a teacher, my wife’ – and patriarchy – ‘sending’ his wife back to school. These attitudes and approaches to married girls’ education – a focus on support and encouragement, and the (subjective) significance of power holders (government officials, fathers) to offer this support – echoes what is written into federal policy. These attitudes are further resonant in one of the major discourses associated with the provision of education for married girls among policymakers and teachers: that married girls only need encouragement. But what are the forms and conditions of encouragement for re-entry?

Re-entry to formal schooling: married girls only need ‘encouragement’?

“We should encourage them” says Hassan, a local government education official in the northern zone, of married girls returning to school, echoing his peer in the southern zone:

“[schools] have just a kind of encouraging them, encouraging the newly married girls to continue with their classes”.

(Yakubu, local government education official, southern zone, 27/03/2017)

A discourse of ‘just encouragement’ is harnessed among teachers and head teachers on what married girls’ need to access formal schooling (again). In the absence of, and uncertainty over, formal policy direction, casual encouragement, motivation and sensitisation become the bedrock of informal access to schooling for married girls among teachers and schools:

⁹⁴ Senior School Certificate Examination: the exam at the end of senior secondary class 3 normally taken at around 18 years of age.

⁹⁵ Nigeria Certificate of Education enables entry to the teaching profession.

“[girls] need encouragement. For example, our workshop motivated some of them, who went back home telling their mates at home who have gone to early marriages.”

(Female teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Interviewer: Is anything that would make [married girls] feel they want to go back to school or remain in school?

Head teacher: They will only encourage them, encouragement.

(Female Head Teacher, Tauraro primary, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

The repeated emphasis on encouragement and motivation implies that the language of policy may be imbuing local enactments. Eunice underscores the importance of encouragement, in the absence of state policy, claiming that “a lot of [girls], after you sensitise them, you encourage them, they go back”. The idea that all married girls need to return to school is encouragement operates across three different sub-discourses associated with (i) patriarchal decision-making to ‘send’ girls back; (ii) pastoral care and dialogue, and (iii) conditions for re-entry that are contingent upon girls’ attitudes and capabilities.

Yakubu’s account of proudly sending his wife back to school exemplifies the first sub-discourse of the power of husbands and fathers to decide whether married girls’ resume formal schooling, which echoes the contingency of some girls on their fathers and husbands that were evidenced in previous chapters on when, how and to whom girls marry. For some married girls, resuming school is dependent upon the support and ‘allowance’ of these same male relatives. The account of a School-based Management Committee (SBMC) Chair exemplifies the practice and social influence of spousal authority over female education:

“A man from this community married a girl from a village in Zaria. He allowed her to attend this school and she is now a health worker. This went a long way in encouraging other men in the community to send their wives to school so that they can also become successful.”

(SBMC Chairman, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

While this and Yakubu’s examples clarify the significant role of some fathers and husbands to decide whether and how girls continue their education, it also points towards positive change for those girls in being enabled by their families and schools to resume. This enablement is an important idea that takes a different shape in teachers accounts of encouraging married girls back to school. In teachers’ accounts, pastoral care and dialogic relationships with girls and young women are paramount: these are more paternalistic than

patriarchal approaches in which the co-construction of positive student-teacher relationships come to the fore. One teacher explicitly likens the role of a teacher to that of 'a father' or 'counsellor', 'encouraging' girls to continue schooling:

"A teacher is more or less a father, a counsellor. [...] Teachers encourage them to continue their schooling."

(Male teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

This teacher's idea that teachers are like counsellors, and the notion that they offer psychosocial support, guiding and engaging with students to encourage their education, is echoed in a story of a female head teacher in the southern zone. Dialogue, psychosocial support and collaboration are central elements of this story, which also advances the social, moral and political imperatives of teachers to offer education for all:

"When I came and took over this school as Principal, she [the mother] came to me. I asked her to give me her daughter so she will stay with me, I will train her, she will go to school. I admitted her in JS1. After a year, she [the mother] opened up and told me that she dropped out in JS2 and married. She had had three kids by the time we were talking. I said, "would you like to continue?" She said, "yes". "Can you afford?" She said "yes", she will work and she wants to continue. She has children, the husband is not earning much, and she is young. She wants to continue in school. In the initial stage her daughter said, "no, how can I be in the same school?" I had to sit her [the daughter] down, counsel her, then she agreed. Now the mother has finished her secondary school."

(Female Head Teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

The authority of the head teacher is significant to enable the girl, and then her mother, to resume schooling – the head teacher is receiving and allowing these girls to return to school. Yet the relationships she describes with the mother and daughter are based on mutuality, care and dialogue: they sit down and talk, asking each other questions, and encouraging. These relationships enable and advance intergenerational female schooling. However, the account also indicates the complexity of individual and familial narratives involved in back-to-school agendas, the negotiation of intertwined social and economic conditions and preferences, and the challenge to school-age girls of a 'no age limit' approach to provision that sees mothers – who may be 'young' but beyond the nominal age for junior (14 years) or senior secondary (18 years) - in school with their daughters.

The role of teachers and head teachers to counsel, guide and encourage married girls and women back to school is extended by Aisha, a manager of a development programme in the state. Aisha says that positive dialogic relationships between teachers and students is one of the most important enabling condition for children to return to school and thus a focus of the development programme for which she works:

“we’re talking to teachers and trying to improve teacher-pupil communication, relationship, so that teachers can give the enabling environment required for girls to come back to school”.

(Aisha, development programme staff, 30/06/2015)

Aisha goes on to say that what married girls need to help them re-enter school is:

“a child-friendly counsellor to understand her situation. [...] they need everybody to rally round and give the necessary support she needs at that time. Everybody in that environment has to be made to realise that this is a person with a unique challenge who needs to be supported.”

(Aisha, development programme staff, 30/06/2015)

Aisha’s account blends the ideas of encouragement, support and inclusion mooted by other teachers and education officials’ expressions for school re-entry with a view of the uniqueness and special needs of married girls resuming education. This is an idea of *inclusion* to the school environment, with people ‘rallying around’ to support access for the married girl, with *specialisation within* the school environment through the allocation of a counsellor. Her account indicates a distinction between the conditions of (re)*accessing* school after marriage and the conditions of *provision in school* for married girls. This takes forward an understanding of how married girls access education to consider educational provision or quality that for her, like the male teacher in Karkara, necessarily involves forms of counselling and, more broadly, ideas of protecting girls through educational provision.

While dialogue and encouragement for re-entry characterises these teachers’ unconditional approaches, in several other accounts re-entry is conditional upon girls’ interest. The ‘special consideration’ that Damola earmarks for married girls’ re-entry is thus contingent on interest and only if the girls and women show interest should she be encouraged and supported:

“If the affected child has the interest, she says ‘look, in spite of the fact that I’m grown up, or I’m able to bear two three, four children, I want to go back to school’, that interest has to be encouraged and supported.”

(Damola, Kaduna state government education official, 02/07/2015)

A male teacher in the southern zone discusses the importance of sitting down and talking with girls to encourage them to return to school. However, he too emphasises that girls need to be 'interested' and have the desire to resume:

"If you want to make [married girls] continue with their studies, you sit her down. After sitting down, ask, 'you are married and you are back home, what are the reasons?' And then ask, 'are you still interested? If you're asked to go back to school, will you go?'"

(Teacher, Tauraro primary, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

There are two strands to these narratives of supporting girls' interest to resume schooling. The focus on girls' interest as a condition of resumption on the one hand places responsibility and focuses on girls to show interest in education over marriage. This is referred to by another teacher in Karkara:

"Interest, interest is also part of it. Some of them they don't even have the interest. They only have interest in marrying".

(Male teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

In the focus on individual interest as a condition, institutional responsibility and accountability, through outreach, local, state or national directives or policy are deflected. The onus on girls to earn special consideration suggests that official support may be limited to girls with the economic and social resources, and agency, to voice those requests. On the other hand, the teachers are also representing themselves as actively supporting re-entry, engaging in dialogue and expressing concern for girls' lives beyond the classroom. In this way, they *partially* also express and enact the idea of 'formal education as a moral and political undertaking' (Aikman and Dyer, 2012, p.177) by assuming their role beyond the classroom into their community and intending to offer holistic and interactive support to married girls. These two strands indicate that there are complications and messiness of attitudes and approaches to married girls' re-entry, particularly linked to which girls can resume and how. These variations of accessibility signal attitudinal and ideological differences among education policymakers, head teachers and teachers on continuing education after marriage. One manifestation of this is signalled in the conflation of re-entry for married girls of school age and any, or 'young', married women. In two accounts from Hanya community and in Damola's story is a narrative of support for *any married woman* to resume formal schooling. Dorothy's story signals such attitudes and approaches: Dorothy is 27 and have been out of school for ten years when she re-enters in junior secondary class 3. This suggests complexity in both the ideology of formal schooling and of the practice of

inclusion, in short, who (decides who) is included and excluded by re-entry and is there any role for alternative forms of continued education after marriage?

Re-entry recommendations: repetition, transfers, separation and specialisation

Girls accounts, corroborated by families and teachers, and DHS data, indicate the close temporal association of marriage and pregnancy, meaning that girls and young women re-entering education are doing so as wives *and* mothers. The mother whose story was recounted by the head teacher of Hanya school had had three children between leaving school and re-entering; Dorothy had two children; Mercy, Zahrah and Summayya all had one child each. Others, like Nana, experience a period of seclusion after marriage. Most, therefore, will be absent (or have dropped out) from school for at least a year before the possibility of re-entry. This absence and the older age and altered status of girls upon re-engagement with education has *learner implications*. Eunice explains:

“If a girl is in JS2 and she marries or becomes pregnant in JS2, you know that she will go home for a year, so it means she will miss one year. But her mate will move to JS3. When she returns, she’ll repeat the class, so she’ll be in class with the younger ones.”

(Eunice, Kaduna state government education official, 22/07/2015)

Eunice’s statement implies that re-entry requires class repetition, which puts girls with a younger cohort. Being overage-for-grade by up to a couple of years is not unusual in North West Nigeria (Chapter 6) but it is the act that girls are not with their former peers combined with their altered status of married/mothering girls that seems to matter here. Eunice continues to explain that resuming out-of-cohort can be “difficult” for married girls, who may feel “sad” not to be with their friends. This emotional and social adjustment is exacerbated when girls are absent for longer periods:

“I have a case of a girl who was out [of school] for three years. By the time she wants to go back to school her classmates are at University. She was sad but she’s back at school now.”

(Eunice, Kaduna state government education official, 22/07/2015)

When Mercy, Zahrah and Dorothy discuss returning to formal school, they express ‘happiness’ at this proposition and their experience of re-entry, which they link to being respected in school by virtue of their marital status. Girls out-of-school in Hanya community concur that schools treat married girls with respect. This respect means that they do not experience corporal punishment in the same way as unmarried students, and they have

purpose in the form of gaining skills for employment (Chapter 9). Gaining social capital through marriage mitigates what they used to dislike about school and gives them purpose, which seems to outweigh not resuming with their peers.

An alternative for married girls, whether or not they have children, to resuming in their former school is to transfer to another school (Chilisa, 2002; Walker, 2013a; Salvi, 2014). The idea of transfers, as proposed by education officials and school staff in Kaduna state, is to mitigate emotional and social repercussions of re-entry. The primary rationale for transfers is to offer social protection for married girls, mitigating the emotional loss of being with their old friends and enabling married girls to re-establish their identities in a new and neutral educational space. Dorothy re-enters class 2 in a different school, having moved to her husband's family home in a new community. Her transfer is therefore practical – she has re-located due to marriage – but has social benefits of gaining respect and joining new school clubs. In this way, transfers are proposed for the married girls' benefit:

“If they don't want to go back to the same school, we will work to ensure that they are enrolled in a different school”.

(Eunice, Kaduna state government education official, 22/07/2015)

“If they come back to the same school, they don't feel free with their old friends and to mingle with others becomes a problem. That's why we advise that they change school after marriage, over there they don't know her historical background”

(SBMC Chair, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

“when she's pregnant she'll stay at home and after delivering she'll go back, maybe change schools and go to another school”.

(Teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

However, changing schools may also arguably serve to shield and protect the school from which married girls originally dropped out from judgement or stigma – a *protectionist* act. Transferring married girls maintains the original school site as unaffected by the incursion of adolescent marriage or pregnancy and deflects responsibility for the provision of schooling for married and/or mothering girls, including pedagogical or resource implications, to another site. While rationalised for girls' benefit, transfers may also distance girls from their peers and social support networks during a period of immense transition in beginning marriage.

Unlike Dorothy and Summayya, Mercy and Zahrah resume school in the same school from which they left a year previously. They re-gain access to their school but there are pedagogical and resource implications of this that are discursively constructed in terms of segregation or separation and specialisation. In the northern, predominantly Muslim, zone of Kaduna state (where there are no accounts from girls of resuming school after marriage although there are accounts from adults) the separation or segregation of married girls from their peers and classmates is a dominant ideology and aspirational practice. Asked about married girls' school re-entry two members of the Karkara school community say:

“there would be separate classes for boys, girls and married girls”

(SBMC Chair, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

“we are thinking of creating a separate class for married students. I think that will go a long way in encouraging the married student to return to school because maybe someone with a husband will not like their wife to come to school and sit with...”

(Head teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

Providing a separate class for married girls would encourage their return to school, they envision. Separation is not, in this case, for the benefit of married girls but in response to the anticipated preferences of spouses and, by implication, to create social distance between unmarried and married students. In-school segregation marks married girls out as *different* from other students. An ideology of difference characterises a southern Christian head teacher's response to the provision of schooling for married girls in which she argues that they need *special* classes and teachers:

Interviewer: Do you think there are some things that should be done for those who are married and return to school?

Head teacher: They need special classes and they need special teachers. It is not all teachers that can handle them. If they can even provide them with uniforms, free. I think that one will encourage them. Free exercise books.

(Head teacher, Tauraro primary, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

This head teacher's idea of educational 'specialisation' marks married girls as 'unique' (following Aisha) and needing 'special' pedagogical and resource interventions: specific and extra personnel (teachers; counsellors), spaces, and materials. The head teachers of Tauraro, Hanya and Karkara schools, as well as both state education government officials,

refer in their interviews to the importance of free uniforms, books and scholarships, or a “schooling kit” (Mamman), as important to encourage re-entry among all children but especially married girls. While ideas about material inputs to support married girls access to schooling dominates, there are also marginal insights to how pedagogy and curriculum can support already-married girls in school and protect unmarried adolescent girls and boys in relation to marriage:

Interviewer: Should schools provide more support on marriage? What are schools’ responsibilities on marriage?

Hassan: Yes. The responsibilities are in biology, training to go about married life, so we must teach the young ones how to go about marriage to make your husband happy, and husband to make his wife happy too. The school can play a better role in that through teaching, through lessons, for girls and also boys on how to go about their married life.”

(Hassan, local government education official, southern zone, 07/03/2017)

While Hassan’s approach is heavily gendered it also indicates a broad-spectrum idea about reproductive education – ‘biology’ and about nurturing positive heterosexual relationships – that make each other ‘happy’. Hassan inculcates girls and boys in these pedagogical ideas, emphasising relationships and mutuality. His response exemplifies thinking about how schools can be ‘better’ at conferring protection in relation to marriage for girls *and* boys before *and* during marriage.

On the other hand, specialisation may be an alternative phrase for separation, maintaining the idea that married and unmarried students need segregating and perceiving married girls’ difference as destabilising and disruptive to ‘normal’ school provision. This advances an argument of this thesis (Chapter 8) that some schools and systems of education are engaged practically and discursively in maintaining (protecting) the school as a space of safe and *rational* learning, socially and spatially distant from what are sometimes conceived as the *disruptions* of adolescence, sexual relationships, pregnancy and marriage. Hadiza’s attitude to married girls in formal schooling and schools’ exclusion of pregnant girls once their pregnancy shows reflects this idea of maintaining social and protectionist boundaries around the school.

The mutual incursion of pregnancy and marriage among some adolescent girls who leave school prematurely, especially in southern Kaduna state, is considered in responses to provision that focus on how mothers would return to school. Mercy and Zahrah resume JS class 3 with the support of their mothers who care for their babies while they are at school, while other new mothers may receive help from their mother-in-law or other relatives

(Chapter 9). Additionally, some girls “come along with [their babies] to school”, including with helpers or sisters (girls out-of-school, Karkara community, northern zone). The head teacher of Karkara junior secondary school corroborates that some girls bring and nurse their babies in school, when asked about facilities to help married girls return to school:

Head teacher: I will give them room to come along with people that will be taking care of their babies.

Interviewer: They can bring babies. Ok, any other?

Head teacher: I have already talked to the teachers that they should be allowing them to go out and feed their babies.

(Male head teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011)

While his approach signals a high degree of pastoral care and consideration, his colleague also recognises that bringing their babies to school may facilitate married girls’ access and attendance but does not help her learning:

Interviewer: How do they manage this [returning to school]?

Teacher: Well, they have a lot of problems, some of them do come with their babies. While receiving teaching, the baby will be stopping her so she will not even give full attention to the teaching. [*pause*]. Just as you have seen what happened there, they are now writing exams and the child is a small boy and the child is even crying. She has to hold the child while writing the exam [...]

Interviewer: Do you have anything in the school to support these girls?

Teacher: The only encouragement the school gives is she should try and read hard so in the end she’ll be able to pass her exams and try to get somebody that will be assisting her with nursing the baby at home.

(Male teacher, Karkara junior secondary school, northern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

That girls bring their babies to school signals both the allowance, and consideration of the school, and girls’ determination to take their junior secondary exam. It also signals the challenge for schools of supporting school-age married mothers in conditions of resource constraints that mean that ‘encouragement’ is the only possible provision.

The challenge of childcare in school support and provision for married girls’ schooling and, particularly, the idea of crèches at or near school, is much discussed among female teachers and education officials. To a large extent, the provision of a crèche is a highly aspirational model response lauded by policymakers and influencers but only achieved through external

(aid) intervention. Maddie, a non-Nigerian UN agency staff member, says that best practice provision for married girls' education would be "the establishment of crèche or day care centres, so that while the girls are in school there's a place for [children] to be". The Kaduna state government education official, Eunice, chooses a success story of married girls re-entry that pivots around the provision of childcare for married girls and young women by an international NGO:

"This organisation we work with in the state were able to bring back some girls who had dropped out in JS2 and return them to school. We made a crèche for their babies. As I'm talking to you now, the Principal is struggling with the number of girls who are back in school with their children. [...] We have over 120 girls now back and the nanny cannot cope with the number of kids in the crèche!"

(Eunice, Kaduna state government education official, 22/07/2015)

Eunice's account suggests the transformative potential of institutional childcare as a targeted intervention to enable married girls' schooling, but also infers the resource constraints and "struggles" at school-level to manage and maintain such an intervention. Teachers' awareness of balancing aspiration with the reality of their own individual school's resource constraints marks their conversations about this provision for married girls:

"If the school is rich enough it is supposed to have a day care school where children will be taken care of by other people and the school will be paying them"

(Female teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone).

Establishing or supporting a creche for young mothers depends, as she says, on school finances. The source of her sense of obligation ('supposed to') is unclear as there is no written or policy guidance on childcare for married girls continuing education either in Kaduna state or at federal level. In the context of Kaduna state, and North West Nigeria, where basic education is under-funded and schools have very limited resources, the ideal and idea of a crèche is highly aspirational. This is reflected in a dialogue with the head teacher of Hanya school who, though she coordinates re-entry for girls and their mothers (earlier this chapter), she responds with incredulity to the idea of differentiated provision or additional resources for married girls in school:

Interviewer: For those who are returning to school, are there facilities to support them?

Head teacher: Facilities? To support them? Like money or what?

Interviewer: Maybe like money, resources, taking care of their children?

Head teacher: The school? The school should give that facility?

Interviewer: Ideally the school?

Head teacher: Mmm.

[Long pause]

Interviewer: Ok, so if there should be provision of facility, what category of facility do you think those girls would require?

Head teacher: Mmm. Facilities to take care of the babies? For them to school in this school?

Interviewer: Yes. Perhaps so that the girls can concentrate?

Head teacher: Maybe the NGO should build a nanny centre in the school for them!

[Laughs]

(Female Head teacher, Hanya junior secondary school, southern zone, 8-12/08/2011).

Having affirmed and supported married girls' access to school, her responses here indicate that she has not considered differentiation or specialisation as in-school strategies or responses. This may suggest that once in-school she positions and responds to children based on sameness, and/or that resource constraints curb the provision of additional services/resources, and/or that she does not conceive of married girls' social, emotional, or economic needs. Her hesitancy and caveats may be rooted in a tension between her moral and political compulsion to provide access against an awareness of the lack of resources for 'special' treatment and her lack of expertise to consider the appropriacy or content of 'special' treatments. She finally resolves this conundrum by relocating the strategic and financial responsibility for any such provision externally, to a non-government organisation.

These data show that education officials, head teachers and teachers are actively negotiating the value, nature and implementation of education for married girls, which is made more difficult and idiosyncratic in the absence of clear policy guidance. Married girls' continuing education is a newly viable option for some married girls, hence the contemporaneity and variability of its associated discourses – people are feeling their way through a new phenomenon. But what this means is that married girls' experiences are subjective and non-systematic. Informal approaches that comprise encouragement, dialogue and psychosocial motivation are the bedrock of approaches to re-entry. This verbal support may be conditional, however, on head teachers' attitudes and on girls' agentic capabilities to 'speak out' and engage in dialogue with education officials or teachers. In-school provisions

are also subjective, contingent upon school staff attitudes, beliefs and school resources. Both care and control are exercised through access and provision, with encouragement and counselling set against permission and segregation.

The discursive practices of difference and differentiation, which characterise several interviews with teachers and government officials, can be interpreted in terms of justice and ideas about inclusion. The naming and articulation of married girls as a specific group needing 'special' attention suggests on the one hand that these girls are being recognised by their marital and educational status and this results in aspirations or intentions towards dismantling obstacles that prevent them from participating on a par with their school peers (participatory parity) (Fraser 1998), for example, providing a crèche so that their babies have care while they school. Recognising girls by their marital status and therefore recognising their and their families (husbands) needs, could also effectively enable the redistribution and allocation of resources to an under-resourced population of school students – a form of redistributive justice (Fraser, 1997). This is manifest in aspirations for 'special classes and teachers', for example. Yet access and in-school practices and provisions based on girls' marital status is also arguably a form of social stratification that re-engages, even formalises, exclusionary practices and discourses (Slee, 2001, p.168). Viewed this way, separation, segregation and specialisation as forms of differentiation are less aspirational than adverse inclusion. Adverse inclusion means that even though married girls might be nominally 'included' - allowed or encouraged to re-enter school – the conditions of their re-entry might be insufficient, unsustainable, or inappropriate to their status, responsibilities or needs. Husaina, Amina and Damola had suggested that instead of formal school re-entry, married girls might attend adult education or women's centres. One of the manifestations of this in Kaduna state, and across the North West region, is in the form of 'second chance' education to which the chapter now turns to examine whether and how this alternative complements or offsets formal school re-entry.

Giving girls a 'second chance': alternative discourses and provisions of married girls' education

'The Federal Government of Nigeria encourages State Governments to establish Girls' Second Chance Education Centers, where girls who dropped out of school can continue learning academic subjects, as well as specific technical skills, and to provide adequate restructuring of such facilities including provisions of equipment and of facilitators salaries.'

(Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education, 2006, p.14)

The National Policy on Gender in Basic Education specifies the encouragement of Second Chance education centres for girls who have ‘dropped out’ of school. It defines these centres as providing both *academic* and *technical* tuition with adequate *equipment* and *facilitation*. This section examines the realisation of this policy dictum in Kaduna state for married girls.

‘Second chance’ has become a popular discourse and strategy in girls’ education policy and practice internationally (UNESCO, 2010, pp.194–5; UNESCO, 2012). In international education policy, the programmatic approach is often associated with structured provisions for alternative, bridging, non-formal and/or technical and vocational learning (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016, p.234). This usually includes literacy and numeracy, and sometimes comprises an aspiration for these girls to return to school or be ‘reabsorbed’ (Benjamin, 2017). Second chance education may be provided through a range of venues and at different times of the day or year, including in government schools after normal school hours (ibid.) or through specifically established centres. What Second Chance Education means in different contexts and by different groups who experience it is less interrogated by international research or policy, particularly when it is not conflated with formal school re-entry but, I argue, understanding the form, content and biases related to married girls’ education is critical to understanding whether and how education is, or could be, protective in relation to *being* married.

Table 10.1 Kaduna State Education Sector Plans: targets related to continuing education provision

Targets of the 2006-2015 ESP	Target of the 2019-2029 ESP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Adult Education Centres in each LGEA by 2008 • Establish Post Basic (primary) Centres for women from 4 to 25 covering all the 23 LGAs by 2010 • Adult Evening (JSS1-SS3) centres to be expanded from the present 4 in Kaduna to one in each LGA by 2008, to six centres each by 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of literacy and continuing education centres for adults and youths (Current Baseline – 230 Basic, 115 Post Literacy, 4 Continuing Education)

The two latest Kaduna Education Sector Plans do not refer to second chance education, although the phrase is part of policymakers and influencers discourse of continuing

education for married girls. Instead, the ESPs refer to and contain targets for Adult Education Centres, Post-Basic Centres and Adult Evening Centres (2006-2015) or Basic, Post Literacy, and Continuing Education (2019-2029) (Table 10.1). It is unclear who (beyond adults and youths) are the target of any of these centres. Moreover, the provisions of the ESP (in the period of interviews it would be the 2006-2015 ESP that would be known) were neither known nor echoed by any interviewed teacher or policymaker. Their ideas, ideals and enactments of continuing education for married girls revolved around an idea of 'second chance' linked to formal school re-entry or, on the contrary, a separate institutional provision of women's or second chance centres.

Second chance is first raised by the two state government education officials as a discursive practice and framework for formal school re-entry. This is an extension of the discourse of allowance and encouragement, in which that allowance and encouragement is framed as "giving girls a second chance" (Damola), or:

"We give our girls a second chance. What we mean is that girls who leave school and are married can come back and continue with their education"

(Eunice, Kaduna state government education official, 22/07/2015)

"We're advocating now for a second chance for girls to go to school. Before I've not really heard of anything, I don't really think they've been given an opportunity, although there's adult literacy classes. But talking about second chance, we're asking communities and schools and parents to give those girls a second chance to come back to school, even after marriage or divorce or after they were pregnant and they've had the baby"

(Aisha, development programme staff, 30/06/2015)

Aisha clarifies that 'second chance' is "just a phrase" meaning re-entry permission. She associates the novelty of this discourse with the contemporaneity of the approach. Eunice concurs that this informal approach has been a recent "achievement" of state government education. However, the usage of 'second chance' as a 'phrase' also appears problematic firstly in framing married girls' re-entry not as a right (to basic education) but as an 'opportunity' and, secondly, in seeming to attribute *failure* against their 'first chance' to girls who have married but are given another opportunity thanks to a benevolent adult. This is problematic because it is somewhat at odds with some girls' agentic accounts of marriage, in which they are actively engaged in negotiating terms (Chapter 9), and evidence of formal

schooling as a contributory factor in pushing adolescent girls away from education (Chapter 8).

National level education policymakers and influencers conversely framed 'second chance' in terms of actual alternative provision rather than discursive framing of formal school re-entry. Husaina affirms that there is no federal government policy for married girls' re-entry to school, so their options are women's centres or second chance centres:

Husaina: Women's centres focus on classes, technical and vocational skills. In second chance they do more literacy. They even get them to the level where they can write the final exam for WAEC and NECO⁹⁶ if they want to proceed. Second chance concentrate a little bit more towards formal education.

Interviewer: Ok, and are both of those supported by government?

Husaina: Yes, they're supported by government.

Interviewer: Ok, so do you agree with that system where married girls go to second chance or the women's centre instead of ..?

[interrupts]

Husaina: I do agree. It's another opportunity given to the girl.

(Husaina, Federal government education official, 05/12/2016)

The technical and vocational component of education for married girls is emphasised by Herbert, a UN agency worker, for whom 'alternative education' after marriage means skills acquisition:

"If she has dropped out of school and got married, let her have access to flexible or alternative education where they have another opportunity to learn and acquire skills, for example skills in tailoring, cooking, there are a number of them"

(Herbert, non-Nigerian, UN agency development programme, 26/06/2015)

Husaina's first response of women's centres and Herbert's approach to continuing education for married girls suggests their view on the salience for married girls of acquiring livelihood skills; that a technical curriculum serves girls' new marital status. That married girls would access 'women's centres' also confers 'adult' status to girls by virtue of marital status and regardless of age (in the same way that, historically, health service provision has been

⁹⁶ West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO). WAEC and NECO both provide junior and senior secondary school examinations (in JS class 3 and SS class 3) that facilitate entry to higher education.

categorised (Gage, 2000; Bearinger et al., 2007). It also assumes that married girls no longer require age-based peer support, the general learning acquired through formal schooling, or formal school exam certificates. On the other hand, Mercy, Zahrah and Dorothy all rationalise their desires to re-enrol in junior secondary school because they aspire towards professions for independent livelihoods (tailoring, nursing, teaching) so, if available, women's centres would facilitate skills development less available largely due to resource and teaching constraints through formal schooling.

Second Chance centres, according to Husaina, focus on formal educational skills particularly literacy and include the opportunity to take national school examinations. A focus on literacy is the dominant component of many documented Nigerian 'Second Chance' programmes including small-scale initiatives in Kaduna state (Adamu, 2017; Isiah, 2018). One current Second Chance education programme, funded by DFID and coordinated by a local NGO Mobilising for Development (M4D) offers girls aged 13-17 years of age living in Kaduna state (as well as Jigawa and Kano states) who have either never attended school or dropped out 'a second chance to have an education' (Adamu, 2017). This second chance offer comprises lessons of basic literacy and numeracy conducted in primary schools after school hours. The LGEA provides teachers and classrooms while M4D offers materials and coordination. Literacy acquisition has been linked to delaying marriage and improving spousal choice (Chapters 3 and 8). Already-married girls claim that 'being literate' will help them to 'get a job' and, in turn, improve their economic and social agency in their marital homes (Dorothy and Mercy).

Husaina's account of second chance education of 'getting them to a level' to do exams resonates with the kind of catch-up or accelerated learning to re-enter the school system, dependent on academic performance, that has comprised second chance programmes across West Africa (Walker, 2013a). Other programmes offer combined teaching: ENGINE II, a programme relaunched in 2018 in Kaduna and Kano states, funded by DFID and managed by MercyCorps and KHAN, aims to improve girls' (aged 16-19) 'social, literacy and entrepreneurial skills' (Isiah, 2018). The variety of offer signals the possibility of choice but in contexts in which girls' continuing education has social dependencies and conditions, this indicates another form of subjectivity, lack of systematisation and opacity of both ideology and delivery.

Some policy influencers signal that twin-track or multi-stranded approaches are strategic. While ENGINE II imparts literacy, the overall intention of 'second chance' is for girls to 'return to formal schooling to complete their studies' (Isiah, 2018). The Kaduna State Deputy Governor's wife's Second Chance Initiative, operational since 2000, provides vocational training and adult education, but also aims for drop-out girls to be 'reabsorbed' into school to

complete their education (Benjamin, 2017). Mamman, a senior INGO staff member interpreted 'second chance' as such a kind of twin-track approach of dedicated Second Chance schools *and* the adjustment of UBE policy for married girls' school re-entry:

"we encourage state governments to establish Second Chance schools and make sure that UBE policy allows for girls to not only go back to schooling but begin from where they left"

(Mamman, development programme staff, 21/11/2016)

Mamman's approach reflects the fluidity and emergence of ideas, ideals and provisions for continuing education, which sometimes blend aspirations for formal schooling with ideas about alternative opportunities. Mamman lauds an intervention targeting married and divorced young women in Niger state that provided dedicated and separate schools including a crèche:

"In Second Chance schools girls who married early and the marriage broke down are able to continue with their education. In one school over 2,300 young women and girls, some of them with their babies, were taking classes. They had a crèche there".

(Mamman, development programme staff, 21/11/2016).

Fatmata, a development programme manager in Kaduna state, concurs with the crèche provision (echoing previous accounts of the significance of childcare for married women resuming schooling) but advances the importance of shorter hours of education for married girls to enable them to manage the demands on their time:

"What we need to do is [...] schools that are specifically for married women, where it has facilities to look after their babies and they're able to go to school and come back, for shorter periods, instead of having six hours maybe four hours in school".

(Fatmata, development programme staff, 25/06/2015).

Fatmata's idea means that girls would avoid having to negotiate a standard school timetable upon readmission to formal schooling (Ijeoma et al., 2013, p.76; Salvi, 2014) with a shortened provision being negotiated for and around them instead. This idea of flexibility to married girls' specific conditions echoes Herbert's earlier advocacy of 'flexible' education. While Dorothy, Zahrah and Mercy negotiations for childcare with their families enable their school re-entry, the ideal of institutionalised flexibility could facilitate these socio-familial negotiations. The policy influencers – Herbert, Mamman and Fatmata's – ideals also instil

the significance of nurture and empathy (Bunting, 2005; Dixon-Mueller, 2008) in responses to married girls' education for appropriate adaptation to their new social lives and to maximise their educational attainment.

These data show that interpretations and implementation of 'continuing education' for married adolescent girls are inconsistent. Provision comprises formal, non-formal, alternative or technical education; some target all girls who have never enrolled or dropped out of school, while others target only already-married girls, or divorcees; they have a range of pedagogies and goals from skills acquisition to academic absorption. The idiosyncrasies of responses to married girls continued education highlight a challenge of defining and deciding the appropriate form of education for diverse adolescent girls. However, there is concurrently a strong sense of policy makers, influencers, and teachers attempting to accommodate and negotiate around both federal policy and girls' needs (or assumed needs). The forms of accommodation vary, but the intention to accommodate signals a shared value of the kind espoused by Nigerian feminisms and valuation of girls' education including for married girls. As ideas around second chance emerge in Kaduna state, attention to girls' expressed desires for learning after marriage by policymakers and influencers as well as school staff could consolidate the fragility of rhetoric and realisation of second chances for girls.

Aspirational or adverse inclusion? Ideals, ideas, and insights into education for married girls in Kaduna state

The accounts of girls, teachers and education officials presented in this chapter suggest that re-entry and continued education for married girls and young women may be a more common practice than indicated by DHS data or by international research and global policy discourses, all of which tend to assume all married girls' permanent drop out and exclusion. This evidence counters a presumption of married girls' permanent exclusion in a range of accounts of girls' education and marriage (Jensen and Thornton, 2003; UNESCO, 2012; Delprato et al., 2015) instead supporting the concept of educational ebb and flow, dynamism and multiple points and forms of drop in and drop out (Lewin, 2007; Hunt, 2008; Sabates et al., 2010; Ananga, 2011; Humphreys et al., 2015). Moreover, I propose that these data show that reasons for school leaving, and particularly as conceptualised in Lewin's five interacting clusters (Chapter 3), also pertain to reasons and conditions for school re-entry and/or continued education. Whether and how married girls resume education depends on formal education policy ('education administration'); the terms and forms of accommodation into school or education including the attitudes of teachers and officials towards married

girls' education (social processes in schools); the availability and accessibility of education for married girls ('community-level social, economic and political characteristics'); girls negotiations of and access to family support, including for childcare (household characteristics); and, lastly, girls 'interest' in education ('individual learner characteristics') (Lewin, 2007, p.33-34). This mirroring interpretation of an existing conceptual framework of educational access shows the symbiosis of reasons for school leaving and reasons for resumption which, in acknowledgement, can facilitate full spectrum protective educational responses: 'keeping girls in' and 'getting them back'.

However, there remains the issue of quality and *to what* girls are returning and why. Teachers, policy makers and influencers recourse to material provisions – new or additional classes, buildings, physical spaces, books – reproduces commonplace discourses of quality that are elided with quantifiable material resources and education justice as redistribution. In poverty contexts where material deficits are high, reducing the response to married girls' schooling provision to books, extra personnel and space as envisioned by the head teachers, state education officials and some policy influencers interviewed by TEGIN and myself may be enticing but is a sticking plaster over transformation to the conditions of access and provision of schooling for married girls and other premature school leavers. Such a focus on material provision also obscures insights and attention to female agency development through returning to education; whether and how continuing education can help to enhance forms of girls' agency in marriage and transform their experiences of being married. There are hints of this in the interviews analysed for this thesis with married (and unmarried) adolescent girls' aspirations for literacy and technical skills for employment but a paucity of evidence and attention to education for married girls for spousal and marital relationships and relational agency. This is a major, and largely unacknowledged, gap.

Ideas and ideals for transformative married girls' education are new and, these data show, idiosyncratic. Policy provisions for married girls education, where they exist, are not embraced in all places, or by all policy actors, equally (Tromp and Datzberger, 2019, p.3). These data do not demonstrate that re-entry is common or, indeed, sustained: the 'rhetoric of inclusion is strong, but conceptions and practices of inclusive education are inconsistent' (Slee, 2013, abstract). The absence of formal policy and principles are an opportunity to listen and learn to generate and enact change that is responsive and inclusive of the needs, rights and expressed desires of married adolescent girls. It would see girls represented in the discourses and practices of their educational provision. This would seek to fundamentally engage with the question of whether the meaning of education is, or should

be, the same after marriage and whether and how it can be achieved on equivalent terms as prior to marriage, or as other children with other complex identities, needs and preferences.

Chapter 11. Conclusion

This thesis has explored the interactions of marriage and formal schooling for adolescent schoolgirls in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria. The two central aims of the work were to investigate whether and how formal schooling is protective of girls in relation to marriage, and why schoolgirls marry. Based on a critical literature and policy review and data gathered and analysed for this thesis, I have argued, firstly, that *the idea of education as protective in relation to early marriage is overstated*. Household survey data show that girls' years in school tends to be strongly correlated with their age at marriage, but this association is subject to ceiling effects and to major subtleties linked on the one hand to education - school level and quality - and, co-dependently, to the social context and conditions of girls' lives. Girls' experiences of marriage and schooling are heavily gendered and strongly relational: experiences of violence and harassment, insensitive curricula and pedagogy can promote marriage as an obligation for girls. Qualitative data, and some of the international and comparative education literature, analysed for this thesis emphasise that girls' expectations and experiences of schooling have an impact on and are impacted by whether, when, how and to whom they marry; marriage and schooling are not isolated but intrinsic facets of girls' lives. Furthermore, the idea of education as protective has been limited in scope to delaying marriage. This contrasts with a more holistic notion concerning *how and to whom* girls marry and their *experiences of, in and through* marriage. This thesis has drawn attention to those poorly considered facets of educational 'protection', showing how, for example, literacy and in-school social relationships, may delay but also catalyse and/or improve marriage in ways that indicate the complexity of the marriage-schooling nexus and girls' agency in marriage.

The empirical data analysed for this thesis show that school-age girls in Kaduna state marry for myriad reasons linked to their socioeconomic conditions, social identities and social relationships. This thesis argues, secondly, that socialisation processes, formal and informal social relations, for girls in school - with peers, teachers, head teachers, and education officials - have a major effect on marriage timing, experience and outcomes. Even when 'quality' schooling provides formal curricula and pedagogy incorporating alternatives to or skills and capabilities against/for marriage, it is the informal, *interpersonal* experience of education, curricula, pedagogy that dis/enables girls to enact those improvements. Close attention to the accounts of eight Kaduna girls - Aissata, Mercy, Dorothy, Zahrah, Sarah, Hadiza, Nafisah and Nana - illustrate that girls are cognisant of, can reflect upon, aspire towards, and enact different agentic possibilities in relation to marriage and schooling according to diverse social relationships. In this way, this thesis offers an original

contribution through its mixed methods approach in which qualitative data has augmented what can be understood from the quantitative data of household surveys such as DHS, yielding more nuanced, comprehensive, context-specific and girl-centred accounts of the interrelationship between girls' schooling and marriage.

Throughout the exploration of its aims, this thesis has been concerned with trying to elicit knowledge and understanding from those within the research context, who are also subject to policy discourses, particularly girls but also their families, community members, school staff and education policy actors. It is a marked and crucial epistemic shift to centralise girls' knowledge and understanding and, in doing so, to recognise and represent their agency in the marriage-schooling nexus against the assumption of the passive girl of child marriage that has been so homogenised and universalised across global policy discourses. This re-orientation has shown that the local epistemologies and ontologies related to marriage and schooling are dynamic and negotiated among girls, families, schools and communities. The role of formal schooling, the attitudes and practices of school staff and education policy makers in whether, at what age, how, to whom, and why girls marry, and their experiences of being married, is far more complicated and nuanced than dominant representations of the relationship. Interviews with parents, teachers and policy makers evidence their deep implication in girls' agency and marital experience but also the extent to which they are simultaneously engaged in their own intricate navigations of policies, practices and preferences associated with gender, education and society. This thesis offers evidence that girls' accounts are situated in dynamic negotiation with adults' own navigations. While many children's agency is denied or subdued under the weight of patriarchal sociocultural norms (as well as being misrecognised by modern development agendas), I propose that through close and honest attention to, and representation of, girls' accounts of adolescence, marriage and schooling, what and how they relate their expectations and experiences, it is possible to begin to 'see the familiar anew' (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.382) with regard to girls' education and early marriage.

This thesis has contributed to *what* we know about the relationship between girls' marriage and schooling (specifically in North West Nigeria) and attempted to challenge *how* we come to understand this relationship. It has offered a substantial critique of prevalent, western/Euro-centric epistemologies, assumptions, conceptualisations, and modes of knowledge production about girls, marriage and schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since the millennium, dominant understanding of the connection between girls' early marriage and formal schooling among global policy makers has oriented around getting and keeping girls in school to prevent their marriage before age eighteen (Ki-Moon, 2012; UNESCO, 2014; Wodon et al., 2018). This understanding, or way of knowing, has been rooted in quantitative

data analyses and/or 'thick cosmopolitan' (Unterhalter, 2008, p.254), universalist concepts and standards of adolescence, girls' education and early marriage defined by age, years, and measurable indicators. Drawing on indigenous feminist conceptual framings for how African women live their everyday lives, particularly for the context of this thesis Obioma Nnaemeka's concept of Nego-feminism, points away from simplistic ideas about education, early marriage, and their connections, towards ideas oriented around the *interconnectivity of experiences* (adolescence-marriage-education) *and of people* (girls-parents-teachers-policy makers) in navigating social lives. I have adopted and accented the idea of '*negotiated realities*' in the title and analytical thread of this thesis because of the complementarity between Nnaemeka's concept and the narratives of girls, their families and teachers, and education policy actors, but also because its central tenets of no-ego and negotiation have had resonance and significance to some of the philosophical challenges of engaging with a research study of adolescent girls, education and marriage. These challenges have been linked to the thesis' use of terms and to ideas that are being debated and strengthened in the contemporary era of decolonisation (Crawford et al., 2021).

Throughout this thesis, I have employed a range of terms to describe and develop ideas about the relationship between adolescent girls' marriage and education. Specifically, the terms 'education', 'marriage', 'adolescents/ce' and 'agency' comprise the thesis title and inhabit the body of this work. Chapters have explored these terms (separately and in their interrelationship), unravelling when, how and by whom they have been used, defined and/or adapted. The meaning of education, for example, and its myriad roles and forms have been much discussed throughout this thesis; they are multiple, contested and evolving. I have also explicated my own positionality in relation to this research study as a white, British feminist working in the international development sector. My adoption and continual use of such terms is both essential for writing and reading a thesis and problematic for writing and reading a thesis that situates itself in a flow of academic critique of dominant and western/Euro-centric thought in the field of gender, education and international development. At one and the same moment, I am critiquing and reproducing terms at the heart of my research.

In the journey of this thesis, and in this final work, I recognise that marriage, adolescence, and agency are particularly unstable and subjective terms; they are contested and dynamic, replete with Eurocentric, modern liberal assumptions that demand critique. The terms are also mutually constituted and intertwined, produced and adjusted symbiotically by prevailing cultural and political discourses, including (much discussed in this thesis) of gender, the family, and motherhood. Despite prescribed formulations in (western-driven) global policy texts, the idea of 'marriage' is subjective and fluid, varying by geopolitical contexts and social

ideologies and often not easily fixed by a reportable event (Meekers, 1992; Bunting, 2005). Within Nigeria, betrothal and marital processes vary enormously according to social identities and economic means; unions can be formed through diverse processes and multiple institutions (religious, customary, civil) as well as constituting diverse forms and peoples (monogamous and polygamous; nuclear to highly extended) as indicated by the range of family units in which the girls interviewed for this study live. Even while these were overwhelmingly situated within a heteronormative social and institutional framework, across Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, there are continual efforts to challenge, reframe and revalue African sexualities (Arnfred, 2004; Pereira, 2009a). Similarly, cross-disciplinary researchers of 'childhood' have extensively emphasised the instability and disunity of this category of analysis, especially in relation to intersectionality and, again, despite global policy urges to 'fix' childhood textually and discursively (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2002; Bunting, 2005; Burman, 2020). How and by whom 'childhood' and 'adolescence' are constructed and represented has a significant bearing on its idealisation, perceptions and practice (Burman, 2020, p.130). This thesis has critiqued one dominant idea associated with childhood in international development of the passive girlchild 'victim' of marriage drawing on contextualised (Nigerian) counter-representations that deconstruct binaries and emphasise social relations, mutuality and agency. Here too I utilise (and have tried to unravel) a term, 'agency', that likewise occupies a fraught discursive terrain (Burman, 2020). The neoliberal idea of agency as autonomy and 'free choice', idealised by resistance, has been challenged by feminist scholars (as I have shown in Chapters 3 and 4), including in relation to Muslim identities, who have shown that female agency is manifest in diverse ways according to social conditions (Mahmood, 2019; Crossouard et al., 2020). In short, models of 'marriage', 'childhood' / 'adolescence', and 'agency' that have been constructed and idealised predominantly by the West can be seen to overlook alternative modes of configuring, understanding and inhabiting those terms. It is through attention to some of those alternative modes that this thesis has attempted to illuminate different epistemologies and ontologies associated with early marriage and girls' education.

Implications

Based on the findings of this thesis, and its exploratory conceptual work, I propose three main areas in which this thesis contributes to, and has implications for, thinking (again) about the marriage-schooling nexus for adolescent girls in northern Nigeria and, potentially, in other countries of West or Sub-Saharan Africa. These areas pertain to methodology; indigenous feminist theory; and the relational world of schools and are linked sequentially to the thesis' three analytical research questions.

Negotiating methods and data: mixed methods for complex social phenomena

This thesis applied a mixed methods approach underpinned by pragmatism and an aspiration of research for social change. The process of gathering and analysing quantitative and qualitative data has enabled the illumination of different facets of, and ways of understanding, the myriad and complex links between schooling and marriage. In the context of North West Nigeria, the thesis' quantitative data analysis showed that while there is a high prevalence of early age at marriage, with risk factors associated with known characteristics of women (religious identity, residence), qualitative data showed that schoolgirls' relational microcosms – their engagement and connectivity with their families, friends, and teachers - play a major part in determining when, how and to whom they marry. In short, the interplay of quantitative and qualitative information - by design - enhances *what* we know and *how* we come to understand adolescent schoolgirls' marriage. This enhancement supports an argument for mixed method approaches to complex social phenomena, such as marriage and education. This does not only mean gathering, using and analysing quantitative and qualitative data in the same research paper but entails thinking about and applying a conceptual framework for connecting methods and data that, by design, aims to engage with and negotiate across findings from different sources, philosophies and discourses.

The importance of mixed methods seems to me to be at the forefront of global feminist concerns – and, notably, the concerns of Nigerian feminists – with knowledge production, what it means to know and other ways of knowing, which I explored in Chapter 4 (Pereira, 2002; Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2011). Indeed, feminist sociologists have initiated and advanced transformative mixed method research that engage a *dialogic and accommodating* approach to achieve social justice (Mertens, 2007; Greene, 2008). These concerns and ideas speak to *thinking beyond dominance* – dominance of a single method, a single story, a single approach, a single interpretation – be it in conceptual frameworks, methods, data representation, or interpretations of findings, to alternative ways of knowing.

The liminality of the current era is a pertinent opportunity to truly (re)consider sociological research methods and methodologies – to examine what is needed, what works and how we can do things better and differently. The start of the Covid-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 stopped much sociological and international development research in its tracks. Its continuation, concurrent with a climate crisis, is forcing researchers to reconsider the purpose, questions, and outcomes of research. Since then, there has been an explosion of interest and commentary in virtual or digital research as a pragmatic methodology that could be differently configured for different disciplines or different research topics and questions (Kara and Khoo, 2020; Ghosh, 2020; Nind et al., 2021). These commentaries have often stressed the ‘imperative’ of digitally-based research in the contemporary world (Ghosh, 2020). Yet, the ability to exist, work and participate in this social world virtually is a privilege (Beaunoyer et al., 2020; Saxena and Johnson, 2020). Access to technology, particularly for participation in qualitative research, is often limited for the most marginalised communities where, equally, international development research is often focussed. The ethical issues of research with marginalised communities and individuals have come to the fore during the pandemic as researchers have had to balance research imperatives with additional (health) risks to themselves and participants, but the long-standing ethical issues of research with vulnerable populations – concerns with access, subject sensitivity, harm, reciprocity (Fielding, 2004; Long-Sutehall et al., 2011) - pertains as much to virtual empirical as to physical empirical research (Kara and Khoo, 2020). I propose an argument, based on my experience during this thesis, that the development of ideas and approaches for working digitally should be complemented by renewed interest and vigour in attending to data re-use, re-purposing and re-analysis. Of the many new resources and think-pieces on research during a pandemic, only a handful attend to the potential of secondary analysis of qualitative data (QSA) (Masefield et al., 2020; Tarrant and Hughes, 2020; Kara and Khoo, 2020). Secondary analysis of quantitative data, such as household surveys, has been accessible and acceptable for decades in complementarity to empirical research. While qualitative data archiving and re-use has increased in recent decades, I believe now is the time for a thoughtful but marked upsurge in accessing, accepting and adapting qualitative data for secondary research in international education and development.

A handful of studies in sociology and international development are advocating for secondary qualitative data analysis addressed to the current era (Masefield et al., 2020; Tarrant and Hughes, 2020; Kara and Khoo, 2020). These advance existing arguments for (and acknowledge the caveats of) qualitative secondary analysis (QSA), but emphasise the ‘unrealised opportunity’ of secondary analysis of qualitative data ‘to provide new research insights in critical areas’ (Masefield et al., 2020, p.2). In this thesis I re-purposed qualitative

data from an international NGO-coordinated study in which data had been under-utilised due to project funding, human resource and time constraints. Masefield's article, which focuses on secondary qualitative health research from NGO data, points out that 'secondary analysis of NGO data is used infrequently in academic research' despite the fact that NGOs are often the only organisations to gather rich, local and even longitudinal data from marginalised groups. NGOs also often play multiple roles across service delivery, monitoring, research, and advocacy and activism meaning that they (may) embody the ideal of activist-researcher (Mama, 2011). Although dependent on mutual accommodation and understanding, there are significant potential mutual benefits for researchers and NGOs of NGO data re-use across the multiple roles played by NGOs.

As well as offering researchers the potential to explore and add value to rich and existing data with new insights into social phenomena in the form of research findings, I argue that the potential of QSA is also about ethics and epistemologies. Qualitative secondary analysis offers an enabling and potentially transformative platform for knowledge co-creation, addressing long-standing concerns with power dynamics and inequality in data interpretation and research outcomes (Pereira, 2002; Pereira, 2009b). Research partnerships already exist in international development research in which national and international researchers team up to co-create research projects with, generally, national teams gathering data and international teams guiding analysis and interpretation. This was the process with the TEGIN data (re)used for this thesis. In this thesis, I have rationalised my own secondary analysis through a personal and professional association with Nigeria and the TEGIN project, as well as having drawn on the expertise and insights of several Nigerian academics for data translation and interpretation. These kinds of joint endeavours will surely take precedence going forwards, as they both mitigate the potential health risks of international research and facilitate more egalitarian power dynamics in research production. My proposal for secondary research complements these endeavours by mooted the possibility of joint approaches to *existing* evidence, where the locale of existing data becomes the centrifugal point for the *re-co*-production of learning. This would have the same benefits as partnership projects, mitigate the (increasing) ethical concerns of primary research and maximise existing data. Such a relocation of knowledge co-production to its source also, I think, reflects how the pandemic has foregrounded the 'local' and 'the material, embodied experiences of locality' (Saxena and Johnson, 2020). Locality and embodied experience have been critical tenets of the narratives of this thesis and of its conceptual framing. Thus, the idea of advancing secondary qualitative research within a mixed methods approach to social phenomena has both practical and feminist philosophical merits. Ultimately, then, I

want to argue that we (researchers and international development organisations) move beyond *whether* we re-use qualitative data to *how and why* we do so for social justice.

Indigenous feminisms and/or understanding adolescent girls' experiences

In this thesis, I attempted to centrally position and learn from the narratives of adolescent girls (and other women) on adolescence, marriage and schooling. It was a deliberate, feminist approach that was captured in my methodology and second overarching research question. There is little by way of original contribution in eliciting women's voices, however, including in international and comparative education research where girls' voices (and #girlsvoices (Plan International)) are an integral part of research and advocacy (Greene et al., 2009; Unterhalter, 2012; Plan International, 2014; UNESCO, 2020). Yet there remain two important issues in this relatively new paradigm of attention to girls' and women's voices, which are: whose voice is raised, and how are we listening?

The first issue of whose voice counts is fundamental to the social justice idea of recognition (Fraser, 1998; Beicker, 2004; Fraser, 2005). Analyses of development programmes have suggested that it tends to be more powerful individuals - better-educated, literate, relatively wealthier, urban - who participate in community development, development research and whose voices are elicited (or 'cherry-picked'⁹⁷) for the global stage (Cornwall, 2003; Jones, 2019). Such implicit biases in granting voice to marginalised women and girls then merely reproduces 'dominant codes' – Eurocentric ways and content of speech (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). There is a degree of conscientisation to this question. But, I suggest, far less attention has been paid to the issue of *how* we listen. With what assumptions and conceptual frameworks are we heeding and responding to what girls and women say?

This thesis' analysis of global policy and international literature on early marriage and education showed, at different moments, that how early marriage and education are understood, and the meanings made from these social experiences, have by and large been rooted in western-centric worldviews and ontologies. In these, agency has been primarily conceptualised as autonomy – independent decision-making, choice, action (Thapan, 2003; Bhatti and Jeffery, 2012; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015; Gammage et al., 2016). This is reflected in survey questions on women's 'decision-making' (e.g. the Demographic and Health Surveys) and in targets for women's leadership and decision-making in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (e.g. indicators 5.5.1 and 5.6.1⁹⁸). These conceptualisations of agency

⁹⁷ Greta Thunberg, 28 September 2021, speech at the Youth4Climate Summit.

⁹⁸ Indicator 5.5.1 - the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments'; indicator 5.6.1 – 'the proportion of women aged 15-49 who make their own informed

as autonomous decision-making, while important and valuable, tend to be accompanied by the idea that women's sociocultural conditions and relationships are necessarily constraining and have to be fought against. Yet when we turn from these dominant ontologies and look towards indigenous conceptual frameworks for thinking about women's lives, we arrive at *different and complementary* ways of theorising female agency. It is, as I have argued, an important re-routing and re-rooting procedure in the endeavour to recognise and represent adolescent girls' lives. In Nigeria, ideas about agency focus not on solely autonomous behaviours but behaviours rooted in and by social relationships. Nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), in complementarity with the theorisations of other Nigerian women non-fiction and fiction writers, emphasises the negotiations, collaborations, and compromises *with others* that imbue women's everyday experiences and approaches to life. These ideas invite a critical appreciation of the dynamism, intersubjectivity and interaction of peoples at the root of girls' marriage and schooling journeys and a critical appraisal of the utility of 'agency as autonomy' in a social context like Nigeria. I want here to take on a debate that Male and Wodon attempted to navigate in their recent paper entitled 'Girls' Education and Child Marriage in West and Central Africa Trends, Impacts, Costs, and Solutions' (Male and Wodon, 2018). In this paper they refer to feedback from a peer reviewer who cited an extract from a paper by Cornwall and Anyidoho (2010, p.145) on the tension between globalised concepts of women's empowerment and indigenous theories of social collectivism. The citation comprises the following:

For many feminists, 'women's empowerment' represents a sorry but not unfamiliar tale of how a once-radical concept was stolen by the high priests of neo-liberalism only to be foisted onto women in the global south as their putative salvation. [...] In contrast to indigenous notions of empowerment that promised transformation through mobilization and collective action, this alien 'empowerment' is individualist, instrumental, neo-liberal.

Male and Wodon reply that,

'individual incentives and collective action are not necessarily mutually exclusive. When economic incentives move the needle for enough families in a community to delay marriage for their daughters and keep them in school, this may lead to new collective dynamics. [...] In other words, economic incentives for individuals may lead, facilitate or even be the trigger for collective mobilization.'

decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use, and reproductive health care'. <https://sdg-tracker.org/gender-equality>

Based on the work, approach and evidence of this thesis, I want to suggest that Male and Wodon fundamentally misconstrue, and continue to replicate, the point made by Cornwall and Anyidoho in allowing and arguing that the ‘needle’ of development is individual(ised) and that the individual triggers the collective. What Cornwall and Anyidoho, Nnaemeka and Nigerian feminists’ work has argued is that, on the contrary, collectivist and collective behaviour is the needle by which women (and men’s) behaviours are enacted. Male and Wodon are right that autonomous and collective actions are not mutually exclusive, but in prioritising individualism they revert to western-centric models that preclude indigenous conceptual frameworks.

Critical appreciation and appraisal of national and international theorisations does not require throwing one or other out – they are not (necessarily) mutually exclusive – it is a process of *becoming* locally grounded and globally informed (Mama, 2011, p.18). By cross-fertilising the theorisations of women’s everyday lives of Nigerian feminists with international concepts, a suite of ideas about female agency develops that can enrich our appreciation of, and interpretation of, adolescent girls and women’s lives. This suite of ideas encompasses meanings of agency from autonomy to relational, comprising thoughts, aspirations, desires, gestures, slight and dramatic acts and, above all, foregrounds ‘the power and agency, not the paralysis, of African women’ (Nnaemeka, 2005, p.32).

The act of cross-fertilisation, or ‘reading alongside’, is as important as its outcomes in terms of better understanding early marriage and schooling. This action may be messy, but there is messiness in women’s lived experiences (Nnaemeka, 2003, p.358); women (and men) often behave in unexpected ways. Nevertheless, the process of ‘reading alongside’ opens valuable spaces to fertilise alternative or adjusted conceptual framings for social phenomena. Bakare-Yusuf promotes the construction of African realities from within with the critical, playful and pragmatic absorption of external schemas (2003, p.139) just as Nnaemeka advocates for a ‘multiplicity of different but related frameworks from different locations [that] touch, intersect and feed off of each other’ (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.363). It is this kind of mutual engagement of theorising towards a richer and more grounded interpretations of social phenomena that this thesis aims toward: a ‘decentring’ of master narratives (Fennel and Arnot, p.534) towards multiplicity and balance.

The implications of education in marriage: relationships and relationality

The third research question of this thesis asked how the Nigerian education system is disposed to meet adolescent schoolgirls’ needs and aspirations in relation to marriage. The thesis has argued that formal basic schooling in Nigeria has contradictory effects on girls’

marriage: it has the potential to delay marriage and enhance girls' marital agency through imparting knowledge and skills and egalitarian values, attitudes and behaviours, but it may also entrench patriarchy, unequal, gendered socialisation, and push girls away. As much as schools have the potential to transform, they can promulgate gender inequality through stereotypes, norms and expectations.

This thesis argues that socialisation and social processes in schools are significant to whether and how adolescent girls' experience the potential or pitfalls of education.

Teachers' and education policy makers attitudes and perceptions of 'maturity' for marriage - particularly the prominence of the 'problem of puberty' for formal schooling - as well as girls' experiences of discriminatory school policies and daily violence and harassment mean that many girls do not (consistently) enjoy or feel safe at school. These experiences maintain and perpetuate gender stereotypes about acceptable social sexual behaviour to the detriment of girls. Often, policy and programme responses to these gendered challenges focus, as shown in Chapter 3, on the provision of more and better resources - schools and classrooms; school fences; female teachers; sanitation facilities - which addresses global concerns about under-resourced schools and education systems (SDG targets 4a, b and c). However, this focus on lack of resource, and meeting resource needs to improve girls' enrolment, retention and experience, obscures attention to less 'visible' facets of quality schooling that seem to affect girls, including whether, when, how and to whom they marry and experience marriage. Such less visible facets pertain, this thesis argues, to how social relations in schools - with peers, teachers, school staff and local education governance - affect adolescent girls' agency, including their marital agency. The values, attitudes, dispositions and behaviours of those to whom girls relate have a major bearing on girls' values, attitudes and behaviours. This is a part of girls' experience of formal schooling that redistribution of resources cannot 'fix' but instead requires explicit recognition of gender and responses to gender (in)equality in education - a far larger project.

The evidence of this thesis suggests that we (academia/policy makers and influencers) still do not understand what facets of quality schooling affect girls' experiences of marital timing, spousal choice, becoming and being married. Global education policy discourse advocates for girls' education to prevent early marriage and asks how to increase educational attainment (years in school) for girls to do so, but neither enquires nor specifies the facets of quality implicated in marriage timing, practice or outcomes. Charmaine Pereira has argued that, in Nigeria, 'public education today is unlikely to contribute to the formation of self-confident young women who are politically aware and active in society' (Pereira, 2016, p.3). To make further progress towards this goal, consideration to the relational microcosms of schools (and the perceptions and practices of those who work in schools) and the effects of

these relational microcosms on gender norms and girls' expectations and experiences of becoming women is essential.

Making room for married girls' education

Global policy discourses continue to rightly emphasise persistent high rates of girls' marriage before the age of eighteen and advocate for countries to push forwards their commitments to ending child and early marriage by 2030 (SDG target 5.3). Recent data and predictions indicate that progress towards reducing rates of early marriage is stalling (and, in some contexts cases have risen rapidly) due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Phillipose and Aika, 2020; Plan International and Girls not Brides, 2020) and, longer term, the effects of the climate crisis (Chamberlain, 2017; MacLeod et al., 2019; Pasten et al., 2020). Despite these persistent high rates of marriage among girls, the most recent global research and policy documents on early marriage (Male and Wodon, 2018; Wodon et al., 2018; Walker, 2019; Tafere et al., 2020) say little substantive about educational opportunities and the right to education for already-married school age girls. These studies recognise and emphasise the challenge of education for married school-age and adolescent girls - 'Once a girl marries or becomes pregnant, it is often extremely difficult for her to return to school even if this is in principle allowed by schools' (Male and Wodon, 2018, p.4); 'for many young women, returning to school after having children was considered unrealistic' (Tafere et al., 2020, p.34) - but fail to advance reflexive, insightful concepts or approaches to respond to the problem. While global policy and advocacy targets marriage prevention and delay among unmarried girls, this large population of already married and soon-to-be married school-age girls are being under-served with piecemeal, idiosyncratic and small-scale responses.

The idiosyncrasies of knowledge, attitudes and provision of education for married girls in Kaduna state of North West Nigeria was documented in this thesis, which showed how the option of returning to school or continuing alternative forms of education was heavily affected by local government and school-level education policy, provision, and attitudes. While national policy underpins attitudes and provision, it is at the local level where married girls' educational options are realised or thwarted. This indicates the significance of systemic, overarching policy formulations on married girls' education being developed hand-in-hand with state/local provision that targets the needs and rights of education for married girls. On the one hand, one of the best ways to do this for married school-age girls is likely to be through reintegration into formal schooling – this is what many of the Kaduna girls aspire towards and formal schools already exist. In this case, efforts towards improving formal school quality are paramount to meet the needs and rights of married girls in school, just as

much as attention to quality is urgently required for the goal of marriage delay and prevention through education. On the other hand, there may be arguments in particular contexts for alternative educational provision that has more inherent flexibility than formal school provision and adjusted and adapted curricula and pedagogies. Either way, the key point from this thesis' analysis is that education for married girls should be *systematised* and be enacted on the basis of *complementarity* with formal education rather than on the basis of individual attitudes and actions. We need to make room not only for *provision* of married girls' education – acknowledging that ending early marriage will not happen imminently – but for married girls *voices and agency* in these policies and provisions.

Looking forward: ideas for further research and/in the contemporary era

The socio-political context of North West Nigeria, global policy discourses on adolescent girls, early marriage, and education, and critical analyses of these terms, have evolved significantly since the inception of this thesis and during the last 12 months of 2020-2021. These geopolitical, discursive and conceptual shifts have partially destabilised the evidence and findings of this thesis but also mean that there is much more research to be done going forwards. It is to these two points that I wrap up this conclusion.

Civil unrest, violence and political-religious tensions continue to affect the whole of Nigeria. In the North West region, violence associated with schools and education has increased in recent years. There were at least ten mass school kidnappings across the North West region in the six months between December 2020 and July 2021 (Amnesty International, 2020; BBC World News, 2021; Muhammed, 2021), and in July 2021 Kaduna state suspended all schooling for at least six weeks due to insecurity following months of kidnappings and violence that targeted schools and students across the state (Muhammed, 2021). Escalating violence has a detrimental effect on all children's education and especially girls with evidence suggesting that a lack of safety in school has contributed to rises in adolescent marriages in the state (Amnesty International, 2021). The next general election will be held in Nigeria in 2023, and the serving President, Muhammadu Buhari has already confirmed that he will not be on the ballot. This will be another seismic moment for Nigeria to hold a peaceful and democratic election and reaffirm its commitments to education for all and to schools that are safe from harm.

Global discourses on adolescent girls, marriage and formal schooling have advanced tremendously, and largely constructively and reflexively, especially since the mid-2010s. There are now several studies, often nurtured from partnerships between academic researchers and aid programmes, on adolescent girls' marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa

(Wodon et al., 2016; Berhane et al., 2019). These begin to recognise that girls' pubertal transitions have an impact on why and how girls marry and experience marriage, and that marriages during mid-late adolescence are distinct from marriages that occur during childhood and early adolescence. Adolescence is becoming a period of childhood marked for its distinctiveness and adolescents are now a priority group of the international development community. Research is being funded and conducted internationally on the sociocultural meanings of adolescence and experiences and outcomes of adolescents (for example, Oxford University's longitudinal Young Lives study (2002) and the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) study by the UK's Overseas Development Institute, 2015-2024). These try to ascertain contextually relevant 'identifiers' for 'adolescence' and capture richer and more nuanced accounts of girls' lives in different country contexts to advance understanding of their opportunities, challenges and needs. These studies and their ideas are also contributing to critical assessments of the term 'child marriage' into one that acknowledges, recognises, and better represents the heterogeneity and diversity of girls, and their social conditions, affected by marriage and offers more targeted and tailored responses. Based on these recent issues and emerging evidence and discourses in the field of this thesis, I would like to home in on three areas for further research that I believe could be generative going forwards:

Measuring adolescent agency

Neither agency nor adolescence are stable, universal concepts, as this Conclusion and the thesis has elaborated. There is, I believe, an urgent need for research on girls and young women (who may be identified according to different ages in different settings) to problematise and critically examine dominant assumptions about what female 'agency' is and means, and how it is recognised and valued, in different contexts. This would be with the aim of opening up and developing more nuanced conceptual spaces in which to consider girls' agency, including in relation to education and marriage. This would entail a recognition that agency can have multiple, co-existent and apparently contradictory manifestations (Crossouard et al., 2020).

I have shown that standard survey questions, such as those in the DHS, adopt a hegemonic definition of agency as autonomy, asking about women's 'decision-making authority' in specified public and private domains. Nigerian feminist writing on women's agency has, alternatively, emphasised that the social relationality of women and girl's agentic moves. A first consideration would therefore be to consider whether and how these two approaches – agency as autonomy and in terms of relationality – could mutually constitute a richer

delineation of 'agency' as a universal indicator or metric. Another consideration may be to better, and more consistently, locate conceptual frameworks for adolescent female agency in specific contexts in the first instance. A recent study by GAGE concluded that 'developing contextualised gender measures is instrumental in being able to capture adolescents' voice and agency' (Vyas et al., 2021). This could entail using concrete, 'rooted' examples, to constitute or modify a concept of adolescent female agency. Such an approach would resonate with Nigerian feminist arguments for embedded interpretations of girls and women's lives.

I have, in this thesis, tried to distinguish forms of female agency – from autonomous to relational – and their expression before, during and within marriage. In this regard, I wonder whether there might be utility not only in more nuanced and located concepts of agency but also, in relation to marriage, to the critical examination of distinct forms of agency according to moments of marital processes. In short, is there a way of conceptualising marital agency(ies) in three waves or movements: agency *to* marriage; agency *in* marriage; and agency *through* marriage. Attention to multiple agentic waves might accent the significance of different facets of agency at different moments in marital processes. This could then indicate potential modes of enhancing adolescent girls' (and women's) agency, including through formal schooling, and in mutuality with boys and men. Consideration to each of these initial ideas linked to measuring adolescent female agency could enhance the recognition and representation of adolescent girls' lives.

Quality schooling before and for marriage

This thesis has repeatedly emphasised that gaps remain in understanding both what 'quality education' means and for what outcome: marriage delay/prevention (among unmarried girls) versus marital agency before marriage (how and to whom a girl or woman marries) versus marital agency in marriage (for married girls). It begs the question, when quality education for marriage prevention is advocated, how can we pay better attention both to what outcome is intended and what qualities we refer to? Different facets of formal schooling and/or alternative education are likely to contribute to different facets of marriage. Based on the findings of this thesis, I propose that questions for further research in this area might include:

- What facets of school quality help girls to stay in school and remain unmarried?
- What facets of school quality increase girls' agency in how and to whom they marry?
- What facets of school quality improve girls' experiences of marriage and enhance their marital lives beyond marriage (in work; parenthood; familial relations; social/political engagements etc).

What matters about child marriage now? / Child marriage matters now.

This decade of the twenty-first century is witness to considerable local, national, regional and global social, cultural, economic and political shifts. In this new decade, what matters about 'child marriage'? This broad question asks for attention to whether this universalising, rights-based term is fit-for-purpose, and how we understand its meaning, implications and ramifications in a world of coronavirus, conflicts and climate crisis, as well as in relation to processes of decolonisation and geopolitical power shifts. Literature is emerging on all of these themes (Chamberlain, 2017; MacLeod et al., 2019; Pasten et al., 2020; Phillipose and Aika, 2020; Plan International and Girls not Brides, 2020; Crawford et al., 2021). Perhaps now is the time to take a step back as we develop future research (and programming) on adolescent girls, marriage, and schooling to re-consider our framings, understanding, and social and political practices of the factors that underpin and connect these themes: power and (in)equality. To recognise the whole gamut of girls and women's, boys and men's lives, in marginalised societies – their access to, experiences and outcomes of education and marriage – perhaps we might refocus on the deeply maintained hierarchies of power and gender inequalities that persist to marginalise and maintain these practices. If child marriage and girls' education matter, then it matters that we proactively and critically re-engage with the social processes, practices and conceptualisations of gender inequality.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IOE Ethics Application 2015 - Research Summary and Ethical Issues

Research Summary

For my doctoral research on early marriage and girls' schooling in North West Nigeria, I propose conducting secondary data analysis of qualitative data, previously collected as part of the Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria project, and quantitative data available through the USAID Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) program.

My mixed methods doctoral research focuses on three overarching questions.

1. What is the prevalence of early marriage in North West Nigeria and what socio-demographic variables affect its occurrence? (Quant.)
2. How does formal schooling influence girls' experiences of, and pathways through, adolescence, especially sexual initiation and marriage before age 18? (Quant + Qual)
3. How are girls' roles inscribed by their communities and under what circumstances do girls' act against local norms and expectations in relation to marriage? (Qual)

I have been granted access, for the purposes of doctoral research, to the full DHS datasets for Nigeria (2008 & 2013). I will use STATA 13 software to analyse these datasets using survival analysis, regression and other statistical modelling techniques. The datasets are stored on a password protected computer in the LSHTM. The datasets are being used in accordance with the program guidelines (<http://dhsprogram.com/data/Access-Instructions.cfm>).

The qualitative data was gathered in June-August 2011 in Kaduna state, North West Nigeria, with ethics approval then granted by the IOE in June 2011. The 2011 ethics application was led by Prof. Elaine Unterhalter. Prof. Unterhalter was the lead researcher on the ActionAid-led project, Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria (TEGIN), for which this data was collected. The aim of the qualitative research study was to examine the relationship between school levies, early marriage and experiences of violence to girls being pushed or pulled out of school. The study intended to answer the question:

How do gender relations in school, communities and households contribute to girls being pulled and pushed out of school? Particularly how do practices of early marriage, experiences of violence, and the levying of school fees contribute to this, and what opportunities exist to challenge these forms of exclusion?

The research was conducted successfully, however, due to time and resource constraints the project was unable to fully analyse and describe the outputs of this rich dataset. I was formerly the International Project Manager of TEGIN; my current doctoral research picks up the critical issue of girls' schooling and early marriage in Northern Nigeria. I have approval from the project lead organisation – ActionAid Nigeria – to translate, transcribe, analyse and write about the dataset as part of my doctoral research.

The data comprises approx. 60 hours of recordings, on cassette tapes, of key informant interviews and focus group discussions held at four schools (2 primary + 2 junior secondary) in which the project was working in Kaduna State. Interviews / FGDs were held in English / Hausa with:

- Head Teachers and Teachers
- Girls' Club Facilitators / Matrons
- School-Based Management Committee Chairpersons
- Boys and girls in-school
- Parents of girls in-school and out-of-school
- Girls' out-of-school, including married girls.

The methods I will use to analyse the qualitative data will depend on the compiled quality of the datasets, which I will assess after all tapes have been translated and transcribed (by January 2015). I will do analysis supported by CAQDAS using coding and content analysis, but also thinking about interpretation, representation and narratives through the transcription and analysis stages. I will do qualitative data analysis training modules run by IOE in 2014-15.

Ethical Issues

The qualitative data were collected in 2011 according to rigorous codes of conduct agreed between the project partners. All the enumerators were trained in child and vulnerable adult protection, codes of conduct and research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants through an opt-in strategy. All interviews were conducted on the basis of confidentiality. All participants under the age of 18 were interviewed by an enumerator of the same sex – i.e. girls were interviewed by female enumerators - to maximise sensitivity and participants' wellbeing in the process. Ethical approval for the primary research was granted by IOE in 2011.

The focus of my research is within the remit of the 2011 research study: early marriage and girls' schooling. The data is not in the public domain.

The data was retrieved from ActionAid Nigeria in February 2014 face-to-face in Abuja in cooperation with Prof. Unterhalter. Please find attached a copy of my formal request for the data to ActionAid Nigeria. Upon collection, Prof. Unterhalter signed an acknowledgement slip. I also attach email correspondence between myself, the International Head of Education, ActionAid International and ActionAid Nigeria Country Director confirming the temporary hand over and rights to use the data.

The issue raised by the secondary data analysis is that some of the data contains sensitive personal information including: ethnic and religious background; marriage; sexual and reproductive health; intimate partner relations. The following actions have been / will be taken to address the ethical issues:

- Fully anonymised data. Participants are labelled by unique identifiers comprising first letter of school + unique number, e.g. H01. A code sheet retains only associated socio-demographic markers: participants' school/community location, sex, age, job title/position, religion (if known), ethnicity (if known), marital status (if known). Anonymised participants are linked if applicable – for example if married or members of the same natal family.
- The data are stored securely as hard copies (original cassette tapes) and electronically (as audio files on 'Audacity' software). The original cassette tapes are stored in a lockable cupboard. The electronic files are stored on a password-protected laptop.
- The electronic files will have all names removed from their sound file;
- The hard copy cassettes will be returned securely to ActionAid Nigeria, or destroyed according to ActionAid's guidance, by the end of 2015;
- ActionAid Nigeria will be the primary beneficiaries of the research findings. I will prepare a short paper for them outlining the key findings of my analysis of this dataset. Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP) are also critical beneficiaries, to whom I will submit the same report.

Appendix B: Example .do file of NDHS 2013 analysis using Stata 13

```
cd "H:\My Documents\NDHS Work\NDHS 2013"
use caseid v* s* using NGIR6AFL.DTA, clear
count
*38,948 - verified by report*
save DHS2013WomenSmall, replace
**REOPENING**
cd "H:\My Documents\NDHS Work\NDHS 2013"
use DHS2013WomenSmall.DTA, clear
count
**Rename variables**
rename v013 svyagegp
rename v024 region
rename v025 ruralurb
rename v130 religion
rename v131 ethnicity
rename sstate state
rename v502 marhist
rename v012 exactage
rename v511 afm
rename v190 wealth

**WEIGHTING**
* cluster number v001; sample strata number v022 - strata is state + rural/urban; sample
weight v005; v022 sample strata no. & v023 sample domain are the same in this dataset*
browse v001 v005 v022 v023
gen wgt=v005/1000000
```

```
sum wgt
```

```
gen cluster=v001
```

```
gen strata=v022
```

* Survey setting the data to take into account the sampling design*

```
svyset cluster [pweight=wgt], strata(strata)
```

```
svydescribe
```

Investigate stratum (60) with only 1 PSU (v021)

```
list strata v021 if strata==60
```

```
tab v023
```

```
tab v023, nol
```

From also looking in report, stratus with 1 PSU is Akwa Ibom Urban (South South). Merge Akwa Ibom Urban with Akwa Ibom Rural to get rid of single PSU problem

```
replace strata = 59 in 27953/27995
```

```
svydes
```

AFM: the Basics

```
summ afm
```

```
univar afm
```

```
univar afm, by(ruralurb)
```

```
univar afm, by(region) onehdr
```

```
svy: mean afm
```

```
svy: mean afm, over(region)
```

```
svy: mean afm, over(ruralurb)
```

```
svy: mean afm, over(state)
```

```
svy: mean afm, over(religion)
```

```
svy: mean afm, over(wealth)
```

****Create Early Marriage and Very Early Marriage variables****

```
tab v511 marstat, m
```

```
rename v511 afm
```

```
rename v010 yearob
```

```
rename v009 monthob
```

```
gen birthdat=mdy(monthob,15,yearob)
```

```
rename v507 monthof1mar
```

```
rename v508 yearof1mar
```

```
gen mardat=mdy(monthof1mar,15,yearof1mar)
```

```
*(9820 missing values - same as 'never married's)*
```

```
gen intyear=int((v008-1)/12)+1900
```

```
gen intmonth=v008 - ((intyear-1900)*12)
```

```
gen intdat=mdy(intmonth,15,intyear)
```

```
*Generate binary variable: never married = 0; ever married = 1*
```

```
gen evermar=-1
```

```
replace evermar=0 if marhist==0
```

```
replace evermar=1 if marhist==1 | marhist==2
```

```
label define evermar 0 "never married" 1 "currently or formerly married"
```

```
label val evermar evermar
```

```
tab evermar
```

```
*(75% ever married)*
```

```
tab afm evermar,m
```

```
tab evermar v505 if afm==., m
```

```
*Generate Early Marriage binary*
```

```
*Set earlyafm=1 if afm<18
```

```
*earlyafm=0 if married at or after 18, or if aged >= 18 and not married
```

```
*and earlyafm set to missing if the respondent is <18 years of age whether married or not*
```

gen earlyafm=.

replace earlyafm=1 if afm<18

replace earlyafm=0 if afm>=18 & afm!=.

replace earlyafm=0 if evermar==0 & exactage>=18 & exactage!=.

replace earlyafm=. if exactage<18

tab earlyafm, m

4,946 respondents currently aged <18; 15,485 or 40% aged over 18 and married <18

Generate Very Early Marriage binary <15 + >=15 among currently or formerly married women

gen veryearlyafm=.

replace veryearlyafm=1 if afm<15

replace veryearlyafm=0 if afm>=15 & afm!=.

replace veryearlyafm=0 if evermar==0 & exactage>=15 & exactage!=.

tab veryearlyafm, m

7,525 women married <15 - verified

label define veryearlyafm 1 "m < 15" 0 "m >=15 or never"

label val veryearlyafm veryearlyafm

tab veryearlyafm, m

Appendix C: TEGIN Structured Interview Guide for Case Study Girls

Introduction

My name is working for CAPP on TEGIN. The project aims at helping to find ways to increase girls' access to education and keep them safe both in schools and in the community. The study seeks to find out girls' experiences in and out of schools to help improve the situation.

All information will be confidential and so feel free to answer in your own words, ask what you don't understand, and feel free to leave the questions you are not comfortable answering or to stop at will. Can we proceed?

(This interview will take at least 90 minutes to 2 hours and may be split into 2 sessions)

Identifier: Please circle the appropriate identification *without asking the girl*:

- a. A girl who has remained at school with no experience of dropout; she is not married; she has had minimum 6 years continuous schooling;
- b. A girl who has been married and remained at school (if she dropped out, she only dropped out for less than one academic year i.e. temporary drop out);
- c. A girl who has been married and dropped out of school completely (not returned to school since marriage)
- d. A girl who has been married, dropped out for more than one academic year but now returned to school
- e. A girl who dropped out of school for an unknown reason or another reason and is not married; *(the purpose of this is to understand another reason for drop out and put that in the context of our research)*
- f. A girl who has dropped out of school as a result of inability to pay school levies / fees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – ALL GIRLS

1. How old are you? (years)
2. Are you currently at school? (Yes / No)
3. How many children are you? (how many are fostered and how many given birth by your parents; how many male and female)
4. How many of these children are in school and out of school
5. How many completed school?
6. What is your position- are you the first, second ... or last child of your parents?
7. How many wives does your father have?
8. Is your mother still in your fathers' house?
9. Are you staying with your mother?

SCHOOLING

(If girl is in school)

10. What class are you in?
11. How old were you when you started going to school?
12. Have you had any breaks in attending school? (*probe – when were these (class and age), what was the reason*)
13. Have you repeated any year(s) at school? (*probe – when were these- get class and age what was the reason*)
14. How do you feel about going to school? What things do you like? What don't you like?
15. How well are you doing at school? (*Probe for class participation, leadership position, attendance, participation in school activities, position in class, peer relations*)
16. Does anything make it difficult for you to attend school? What things are difficult? (*probe deeper as to reasons why*)
17. Do you think it is the same for boys? why/why not?
18. What level of education would you like to reach?
19. What would you like to do in the future, after school? (*probe for family and career aspirations*)
20. What do you think you will most likely do after school? (*probe for reasons for differences with above*)

(If girl returned to school)

21. What class were you when you stopped and returned?
22. How old were you when you stopped and returned to school?
23. Have you repeated any year(s) at school? (*probe – when were these- get class and age what was the reason*)
24. How do you feel about going to school? What things do you like? What don't you like?
25. How well are you doing at school? (*Probe for class participation, leadership position, attendance, participation in school activities, position in class, peer relations*)
26. Does anything make it difficult for you to attend school currently? What things are difficult? (*probe deeper as to reasons why*)
27. Do you think it is the same for boys? why/why not?
28. What level of education would you like to reach?
29. What would you like to do in the future, after school? (*probe for family and career aspirations*)
30. What do you think you will most likely do after school? (*probe for reasons for differences with above*)

31. Why did you stop going to school? (*probe deeper for reasons – related to school and home; story behind them*)

32. Do you think this problem is faced by lots of other girls? why/why not?

(If girl is not in school)

33. What class were you in when you stopped going to school? What old were you?

34. How old were you when you started going to school?

35. Did you have any breaks in attending school when you were in school? (when were these (class and age), what was the reason)

36. Did you repeat any years when you were in school? (when were these, what was the reason)

37. How did you feel about going to school? (what did you like? What didn't you like?)

38. Why did you stop going to school? (*probe deep for reasons – related to school and home; story behind them*)

39. Do you think this problem is faced by lots of other girls? (why/why not)

40. Do you think boys face similar problems? (why/why not)

41. Do you have any hope or plan to go back to school? (*probe: what will help you do this; what will make it difficult; how likely do you think it is*)

42. What would you like to do in the future? (*probe: family, relationships, education level; training, employment, aspirations*)

43. What do you think you will most likely do? (*probe for reasons for differences with above*)

Perspectives on education (*all girls*)

44. Do you think that every girl deserves to be enrolled in school by her parents? (why/why not)

45. What age do you consider ideal for a girl to get married? (ask why)

46. Do you think it is OK for girls who are married to stay at school? (why/why not)

47. Do you think it is OK for girls who become pregnant and have babies to remain or go back to school? (why/why not)

FAMILY (*all girls*)

48. Are you married? (*Pls note if married- no need to ask the question*)

(If no, ask questions as below. If yes, explain that we want to ask them some questions about their original family and growing up. Need to adapt questions into past tense if not living with them now)

49. Can you tell me about your family? (*probe for relationships, whether she is living with her original family, a guardian etc*).
50. Who do you live with? (*probe - who is the head of the household*). What work do people in the household do? (*If farming try to find out whether the head of the household owns land or rents, whether they own farming tools, whether they grow enough food to feed themselves most of the year? If not farming try to find out all occupations*)
51. Can you tell me the story of your growing up and family? (*probe for significant events e.g. births, deaths, sibling relationship, stepmother, position in the family, marriages including polygamous household, alternative guardians, moving home, caring responsibilities – this may take some time*)
52. Did your mother go to school? What level did she reach? Why did she stop?
53. Did your father go to school? What level did he reach? Why did he stop?
54. Do any children bring in income to the house? If yes, what do they do?
55. Who decides how money is spent in your home (*probe: on food, clothing, schooling, health, transport, bigger expenditures*)
56. How poor or wealthy you think your family is compared to others in your community? (*probe on why, e.g. income, owning land, quality of house, ability to pay levies, level of education, clothing, food etc*).

LEVIES

(For girls who have been to school)

Decision-making process

57. Can you remember the type of levies you have paid and approximate estimate on each.
58. How often are you able to pay your levies?
59. Who pays the levy at household level?
60. How is the decision made in the home for the payment of levies?
61. Who pays for the levies aside your parents?

Experience of school levies

62. Have you ever missed paying any levies? (*Probe for seasonality, frequency, duration, class*)
63. What happened when you did not pay? (*Probe for the story*): Sent home? Punishment? (*probe further: nature, how did it impact on schooling*) Did you manage to find the money for levies? If yes, How? How long did it take? Did you stay away from school in the mean time? If no, what happened? Did you manage to go back to school, and when?

EARLY MARRIAGE

For girls who are married

64. What age/ school class were you when you got married?
65. Narration of experience on Early Marriage (take time with girl)
- i. Who made the decision for you to get married?
 - ii. Were you consulted in the decision?
 - iii. How did you feel about decision?
 - iv. Did you take any action to resist or challenge the decision? (*Probe why/why not*)
 - v. If so, what was the response?
66. How do you feel being married?
67. What are the benefits for you now that you are married?
68. Are there things that would have been different if you were not married? (*probe for such things and why she thinks so*)
69. Would you have preferred to have been married at a later time? (*probe to establish if situation affects her schooling and in what ways*)
70. What has changed since you were married, and how?
- i. Friendships (who they are, how much time and freedom)
 - ii. Relationships with family
 - iii. Ability to make own decisions (e.g. where to go, how to spend time, use of resources)
 - iv. Workload and nature of work
 - v. Any community work, or community relations (e.g. belonging to any groups, activities, decision making fora such as committees, religious activities)
 - vi. Schooling
 - vii. Access to resources (i.e. better or worse off financially?)
71. Do you already have children? (*Probe when; what age; why; how many*)
72. If yes, how has this changed things in your life (or how do you think it will change things when you have children), in terms of schooling, work and relationships with others? (*probe for how; and whether it is marriage or children that have the biggest impact*).

For girls who are married, dropped out and did not return

73. Can you relate the story of how and why the marriage resulted in dropping out of school? (*Probe for frequency, timing of drop out in relation to marriage; expectations of old and new family; how much say she had in the matter; whether she tried to challenge the drop out*).
74. What was the response of friends, parents, teachers, religious leaders, boyfriends/husbands about you dropping out of school? (*probe - did they encourage you,*

were they against it?) What did your parents, teachers, religious leaders, boyfriends think? (responses to these groups separately)

For girls who are married and in school

75. Are there any school facilities to support girls' like you returning to school?

76. If yes,

- What are they?
- How good are they?
- Are they affordable?
- Are they relevant?
- Have you used the facilities / service?
- If yes, how; if no, why didn't you utilize it?
- What constraints do girls like you face in accessing these facilities/services?
- What types of facilities do you need?

77. Who supports you?

78. In what ways were you supported by: Family; friends; husband; husband's family; others?

For girls who are NOT married:

79. Have you experienced any pressure to get married?

If no, skip next 3 questions.

If yes:

80. What age/class were you?

81. Narration of Experience on attempt on Early Marriage (Probe to cover the issues below)

- Who made the decision for you to get married?
- Were you consulted in the decision?
- How did you feel about this?
- Did you take any action to resist or challenge the decision? (Probe why/why not)
- If so, what was the response?
- How did the situation end up with you not getting married?

82. How do you feel about this?

83. What is important to you at this age of being unmarried? (i.e. how does not being married affect your relationships, work, schooling etc.)

84. Do you already have children? (*Probe when; what age; why; how many*)

85. If so, how has this changed things in your life (or how do you think it will change things when you have children), in terms of schooling, work and relationships with others?
(*probe for how; and whether it is marriage or children that have the biggest impact*).
86. Are there any facilities to support girls who are married or with children returning to school?
87. If yes,
- What are they?
 - How good are they?
 - Are they affordable?
 - Are they relevant?
 - Have you used the facilities / service?
 - If yes, how; if no, why didn't you utilize it?
 - What constraints do girls like you face in accessing these facilities/services?
 - What types of facilities do you need?
88. Who supports you at home?
89. In what ways were you supported by: Family; Friends; School; Others?

VIOLENCE (*all girls*)

90. Do you think girls and boys are treated the same way at home? At school?
(*Probe: What kinds of chores/jobs do girls/boys do at home/at school? (e.g. cleaning, cooking, farm work, looking after children)*)
- Do you think girls and boys should be treated in the same way? Why/why not?

In School

91. Sometimes girls and boys have problems like being beaten or hurt, being touched where they don't want to be touched, or being insulted. Have any of these happened to you, or to anyone you know at school? Which ones? (*Probe: beating/fighting/whipping/caning; forced sex/touching thighs, buttocks or private parts/touched where you didn't want to be touched; someone is rude/insults/ threatens/ frightens you*)

If No, go to Home/community violence

92. Thinking about one of these problems, can you describe what happened? (Prompt: Where, Who, e.g. teachers, other pupils, male, female)
93. When did this happen? (*probe for class, age; probe for frequency of violence occurrence*)

94. Why do you think it happened? (*Probe for Perception/understanding of violence - ask whether she sees something wrong in what was done to her-violence, abuse, injustice etc.*)

95. Did anyone see what happened?

- If yes, who was it, and did the person offered any help?

96. Was it reported?

- If yes, by who, to who and what action was taken?
- If no, why?

97. ***If the girl has talked about her own experience.*** If the same thing happened again would you report it/tell someone about it again? Why/why not?

If the girl is talking about experiences of others. If the same thing happened to you would you report it/tell someone about it? Why/why not? Who would you tell and why?

98. Do you know where to report such happenings at school/or any existing policies/laws? (*let girl mention examples*)

99. How has this incident/these incidents affected you? (*probe for schooling: attendance, performance, health, social relationship-with peers etc*)

If the girl dropped out as a result of violence

100. When did you drop-out? (*Class/age*)

101. Why did you drop out? (*Probe for feelings about returning to school or stopping school*)

102. Why were you unable to return to school?

103. Who has shown you more concern in school or home or elsewhere?

104. How safe do you feel now in school or home? (safe or unsafe?)

105. Do you wish to continue school -the same or different school?

106. Do you wish to continue staying/living in the same home?

Home or community violence (i.e. repeat questions from violence in school)

Have you experienced any problems like being beaten or hurt, being touched where they don't want to be touched, or being insulted at home? Which ones? (*Probe: beating/fighting/whipping/caning; forced sex/touching thighs, buttocks or private parts/ touched where you didn't want to be touched; Someone is rude/insults/ threatens/frightens you*)

If No, ask about in the community.

107. Thinking about one of these problems, can you describe what happened? Where, Who, e.g. parent, uncle, husband, male, female?
108. When did this happen? (*probe for class, age; probe for Frequency of violence occurrence*)
109. Why do you think it happened? (*probe for Perception/understanding of violence - ask whether she sees something wrong in what was done to her-violence, abuse, injustice etc.*)
110. Did anyone see what happened? If yes, who was it, and did the person offered any help?
111. Was it reported? If yes, by who, to who and what action was taken? If no, why?
112. ***If the girl has talked about her own experience.*** If the same thing happened again would you report it/tell someone about it again? Why/why not?
- If the girl is talking about experiences of others.*** If the same thing happened to you would you report it/tell someone about it? Why/why not? Who would you tell and why?
113. Victim's awareness of where to report such happenings/or any existing policies/laws (let girl mention examples)
114. How has this incident/these incidents affected you? (*probe for schooling: attendance, performance, healthwise, social relationship-with peers etc*)

END

Appendix D: TEGIN Structured Interview Guide for girls' parents and husbands

Introduction

(This interview is to be administered to parents and husbands of the girls sampled for case studies).

My name is working for CAPP on TEGIN. The project aims at helping to find ways to increase girls' access to education and keep them safe both in schools and in the community. The study seeks to find out girls' experiences in and out of schools to help improve the situation.

All information will be confidential and so feel free to answer in your own words, ask what you don't understand, and feel free to leave the questions you are not comfortable answering or to stop at will. Can we proceed?

Identifier: Please circle the appropriate identification without asking

- a. Parents of a girl who has remained at school with no experience of dropout; she is not married; she has had minimum 6 years continuous schooling;
- b. Parents or husband of a girl who has been married and remained at school (if she dropped out, she only dropped out for less than one academic year i.e. temporary drop out);
- c. Parents or husband of a girl who has been married and dropped out of school completely (not returned to school since marriage)
- d. Parents or husband of a girl who has been married, dropped out for more than one academic year but now returned to school
- e. Parents of a girl who dropped out of school for an unknown reason or another reason and is not married; *(the purpose of this is to understand another reason for drop out and put that in the context of our research)*
- f. Parents of a girl who has dropped out of school as a result of inability to pay school levies / fees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before you start, write down the following in your notes:

1. *Name of school*
2. *Date of interview*
3. *Sex of the respondent*
4. *Age of the respondent (in years)*
5. *Occupation of the respondent*
6. *Educational level of the respondent*

7. What type of household do you live in (nuclear, extended/compound)?
8. How many wives do you have?
9. How many children reside in your house? Probe for how many she/he is responsible for (i.e how many are fostered and how many given birth to) and how many are male and female)
10. Do any children bring in income to the house? If yes, what do they do?
11. Who decides how money is spent in your home (probe: on food, clothing, schooling, health, transport, bigger expenditures)
12. How poor or wealthy you think your family is compared to others in your community? (probe on why, e.g. income, owning land, quality of house, ability to pay levies, level of education, clothing, food etc)

SCHOOLING

13. How many of these children are in school and out of school? How many are boys and how many are girls.
14. How many completed school and at what level? How many are girls and how many are boys?
15. If not all the children are in school- why and what criteria was used to decide who is to be in school or not?
16. Are the criteria different for girls and boys and what are the differences?
17. Are you the sole decision maker over your children/ wife schooling?
18. What role does your family members play (probe for spouse, parents and other extended family members)
19. What is the age and class of the children that are schooling?
20. Does anything make it difficult for your children/ wife to attend school? What things are difficult? (probe deeper as to reasons why). If husband mention wife
21. Do you think it is the same for boys? (probe why/why not)
22. Does your daughter or wife have any breaks in attending school? When, how often and what was the reason)
23. How did you feel about your daughters/ wife going to school? (what did you like? What didn't you like?)
24. What level of education would you like your children/ wife to reach?
25. What would you like them to do in the future, after school? (probe - family, training, career aspirations)
26. What do you think they will most likely do after school? (probe for reasons for differences with above)

27. Do you think that every girl deserves to be enrolled in school by her parents?
(why/why not)
28. What age do you consider ideal for a girl to get married? (ask why)
29. Is it OK for girls who are married to stay at school? (why/why not)
30. Is it OK for girls who become pregnant and have babies to remain or go back to school? (why/why not)

LEVIES

31. What type of levies you have paid and approximate estimate on each.
32. How often are you able to pay levies?
33. Who pays the levy at household level?
34. How is the decision made in the home for the payment of levies?
35. Have you ever missed paying any levies? (probe for seasonality, timing, duration, frequency, duration, class)
36. What happened when you did not pay? (probe):
 - Being sent home?
 - Punishment? (probe further: nature, how did it impact on schooling)
 - Did you manage to find the money for levies?
 - If yes, How? How long did it take? Did you stay away from school in the mean time?
 - If no, what happened? Did you manage to go back to school, and when?
 - How did the following actors feel about your dropping out of school – friends, parents, teachers, religious leaders, boyfriends?

EARLY MARRIAGE

37. What age/ school class was your daughter/ wife when she got married?
38. Who made the decision for the daughter to get married?
39. Was your daughter and your wife consulted and what role did they play in decisions to marry.
40. What was your daughter's or wife's reactions to the decision
41. How was her reaction handled
42. How is she coping combining marriage and schooling
43. What has changed since your daughter or wife married, and how?
 - a. Friendships (who they are, how much time and freedom)

- b. Relationships with family
 - c. Ability to make own decisions (e.g. where to go, how to spend time, use of resources)
 - d. Workload and nature of work
 - e. Any community work, or community relations (e.g. belonging to any groups, activities, decision making fora such as committees, religious activities)
 - f. Schooling
 - g. Access to resources (i.e. better or worse off financially?)
44. What are your greatest concerns for your wife schooling
45. Are there any school facilities to support girls' returning to school?
46. If yes,
- What are they?
 - How good are they?
 - Are they affordable?
 - Are they relevant?
 - Have you used the facilities / service?
 - If yes, how; if no, why didn't you utilize it?
 - What constraints do girls like you face in accessing these facilities/services?
 - What types of facilities do you need?
47. Who supports your wife or daughter?
48. In what ways is she supported by:
- Family?
 - Friends?
 - Husband?
 - Husband's family?
 - Others? (in school or community including groups or organizations?)

Appendix E: TEGIN structured interview guide for head teachers, teachers, School-Based Management Committee Chairpersons, and all other Focus Group Discussions

Introduction

My name is working for CAPP on TEGIN. The project aims at helping to find ways to increase girls' access to education and keep them safe both in schools and in the community. The study seeks to find out girls' experiences in and out of schools to help improve the situation.

All information will be confidential and so feel free to answer in your own words, ask what you don't understand, and feel free to leave the questions you are not comfortable answering or to stop at will. Can we proceed?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before you start, write down the following in your notes:

- *Name of school*
- *Position of the respondent*
- *Sex of the respondent*
- *Name of researcher*
- *Sex of researcher*
- *Date of the interview*

SCHOOLING

1. Does anything make it difficult for girls to go to school, or stay in school? What things make it difficult, and how? (Probe for in school factors such as levies, difficulties understanding school work, lack of facilities, violence and ill treatment (including punishment, sexual abuse or harassment, humiliation).
Probe for out of school factors including marriage, pregnancy, household chores, caring responsibilities or need to earn income/support family work).
2. Which of these tend to lead to temporary absence from school and which to permanent dropout? Can you explain how, and why?
3. What about for boys or girls? Are the difficulties the same or different? How, and why?

LEVIES

Knowledge of Levies

4. What are all the levies (or fees) charged by the school in the last year - in cash and kind? When do these have to be paid? (Probe for how much)

5. Describe how often payment are made? Probe for entrance fees at various levels, new session fees, time, season, regular and irregular payment and burden of payment.
6. Are there differences in the amount charged between boys and girls? Probe for reasons for the differences and forms of levies (eg sport).
7. Are there exemptions, scholarship schemes and community support? What are they and by who? Do you know anyone who received these? Who were they? (probe whether exemptions are going to the most needy or the best connected)
8. What happens when girls don't pay? What happens when boys don't pay?
9. Is it important to impose levies? Why/why not?

Decisions and Purposes of Levies

10. Who decides on the types, amount, quantity of the levies in this school? Probe for teachers, school management, parents, LGEA/SUBEB
11. Who are the people responsible for collection of the levies or materials?
12. How are the funds and materials utilized? (probe if they get an explanation from the school for how the money is used; how the funds are accounted for; issuance of receipts and reports on the disbursement of the levies.)
13. What happens if a student is unable to pay the levies? Probe for being sent home from school, withholding of result, lack of promotion and punishment (list the type of punishment).
14. What are the different disciplinary measures put in place to ensure compliance to payment?
15. Are there instances of students refusing to come to school as a result of non-payment? Or being sent away from school? (Probe for both temporary and permanent drop-out). If yes how many of such cases do you know? (You may check school). Probe for a bit more detail if possible on the background of the family.

EARLY MARRIAGE

Perception and Views of Early Marriage

16. What is the best age for a girl to get married (probe for why, and the reasons for a difference with the above)
17. What are the benefits to herself, her husband, her family, his family, their community...?
18. What can be the negative consequences?

Decision making process

19. What are roles for father and for mother in decision for a girl to be married out early?
20. What is the role of the girl in the decision making process?
21. Can the girl challenge the decision made?
22. What kinds of pressure exist around early marriage: probe for social, economic, moral, religion, cultural e.t.c.
23. What factors influence families' decisions on whether to marry a girl early or not.
Probe for socio-economic and religious factors.

Early marriage and drop-out

24. How does early marriage contribute to temporary or permanent drop-out? Probe for the seasonality of drop-out, timing, frequency, duration. Classes affected most, cases of drop-out as a result of early marriage.
25. What has changed over the last ten years regarding dropping out as a result of early marriage?
26. Do you know girls who are married and stayed in school or went back to school? How did they manage this? What motivates those that dropped out as a result of marriage to return to school? Please ask for descriptions of specific girls, rather than general statements
27. What factor is responsible for the change in early marriage whether increasing or reducing?

Support System (in the school)

28. Are there any facilities to support girls' returning to school after marriage?
29. If yes,
 - What are they?
 - How good are they in giving a good learning environment?
 - Are they adequate for girls to pass end of JSS exams?
 - Are they affordable? Are they conveniently located?
 - Is what they learn relevant to their lives ?
 - What constraints are there in accessing them if any? (probe on costs, training of teachers, learning materials etc)
30. If not:
 - What sort of facilities do you want for girls returning?

Support System (at home)

31. Who supports girls who are married?
32. In what ways does she gets the support

- Family? (mother, father, sisters, brothers)
- Friends?
- Husband?
- Husband's family?

33. In what ways do any of the following contribute to girls getting married early and/or dropping out of school– friends, parents, teachers, religious leaders, boyfriends? Family economic status How?

34. In what ways do any of the following actors help girls to resist getting married early – friends, parents, teachers, religious leaders, boyfriends? How?

VIOLENCE

Prevailing violence against girls

35. Are there instances when boys/girls or teachers or other adults do some things you don't like? (Probe: beating/fighting/whipping/caning; forced sex/touching thighs, buttocks or private parts/ touched where you didn't want to be touched; Someone is rude/insults/ threatens/frightens you)
36. Talking about these things which types affect girls more? Which happen most often?
- a. In schools?
 - b. In communities?

Locations of violence

37. Ask questions about location or where violence happens. Attempt a school mapping.
- c. In school violence, probe for types, timing and location, persons
 - d. On the way to school, probe for types, timing and locations
38. How do children get punished at home? (Prompt: Why? Is it the same for boys and girls?) Probe: beating/whipping/caning; severe punishment; hard labour; insults/ threats.
- e. What type of girls get more punishment, probe for vulnerability, orphan, step daughter, housemaid
 - f. What type of punishment?

Drop-out and Violence

39. How does corporal punishment (beating, whipping, caning, hard labour) affect girls' schooling? (Probe for temporary and permanent drop out, as well as how it affects girls' confidence, ability to concentrate and do well in school.)
40. In what ways do being teased, touched sexually or forced to have sex by other pupils or teachers affect girls' schooling? (Probe for temporary and permanent drop out, as well as how it affects girls' confidence, relationships with other pupils and teachers, ability to concentrate and do well in school. Do teachers exchange sex for grades?)
41. Are there instances when bullying of a student affect coming to school? Probe for timing, duration, location and class affected most. (Probe for temporary and permanent drop out, as well as how it affects girls' confidence, relationships with other pupils and teachers, ability to concentrate and do well in school.)
42. Do you or girls you know often miss classes/school to avoid punishment? Probe for instances.

Report and support at school (school children only to be asked these questions)

43. If girls are physically punished **at school** do they tell anyone? Is any action taken? (if yes probe for actions and by whom)
44. In cases of sexual violation **at school**, what forms of action are taken (against the perpetrators: boys, teachers or people in the community.
 - a) By parents? (mothers/fathers)
 - b) By schools? (teachers/head teachers)
 - c) Community leaders (traditional/religious)
 - d) vigilante
 - e) By police?
 - f) By health services
 - g) By any others (specify)?
45. Which of these are most helpful and supportive, and why?
46. Which are the least helpful and supportive, and why?
47. What is a girl to do if any of these things happen? (Prompt: When, e.g. which lessons? Girls clubs? What did they say? Who said it?)
48. Do you have any ideas about what could make school safe for girls? For boys?

Report and support outside of school

49. If girls are physically punished **at home** do they tell anyone? Is any action taken? (if yes probe for actions and by whom)

50. In cases of sexual violation **at home or in the community**, what forms of action are taken (against the perpetrators: boys, teachers or people in the community).

- a) By parents? (mothers/fathers)
- b) By schools? (teachers/head teacher)
- c) By community leaders (traditional and religious)
- d) Vigilante
- e) By police?
- f) By health services
- g) By any others (specify)?

51. Which of these are most helpful and supportive, and why?

52. Which are the least helpful and supportive, and why?

53. What is a girl to do if any of these things happen? (Prompt: When? What did they say? Who said it?)

54. Do you have any ideas about what could make communities and homes safe for girls?
For boys?

END

Appendix F: TEGIN Qualitative Research Field Report, August 2011

The fieldwork was carried out between 8th- 12th August 2011. Prior to the fieldwork a pre-fieldwork workshop was held with the research team in Kaduna on the 6th and 7th of August. One of the objectives of the workshop was to introduce the research team to the AAN child protection policy and ethical issues and their implication for the research. Other objectives of the workshop included review and role play on the data collection tools, introduction and discussion on the TEGIN research protocol, methodology, procedure and guidelines. Field workplan was also developed and agreed.

Data Audit

The data was collected from four schools in Kaduna state: two from northern and southern parts each. A total of 13 FGD, 14 case studies and 24 KII are available for analysis. This excludes the 6 cassettes outstanding. Out of a total of 71 recorded cassettes, 6 cassettes are not yet recovered and 4 are faulty. The transcription was done almost verbatim, skipping repetitions and introductions.

Table 1: Distribution of data

Schools	FGDs	Girl Case studies	In-depth interview
LGEA Primary 1 ('Babban')	Girls in school Boys in school Mothers	Never dropped out of school Dropped out for other reason and never return	Mothers and fathers SBMC Chair Head teacher Teacher
GJSS 2 ('Karkara')	Girls in school Girls out-of-school Boys in school	Never dropped out of school Married and returned Married and never returned Drop out for other reasons (fees or levies)	Mothers and fathers Head Teacher SBMC Chair Teacher
LGEA Primary 3 ('Tauraro')	Girls in school Boys in school Mothers	Never dropped out of school Dropped out for other reasons (fees or levies) Dropped out and returned	Mothers of in-school girls Head teacher SBMC Chair Teacher
GJSS 4 ('Hanya')	Girls in school Girls out-of-school Boys in school Mothers of in and out of school girls	Never dropped out of school Married and returned more than a year later Married and never returned. Dropped out for other reasons (fees or levies).	Mothers and fathers Head teacher SBMC Chair Teacher

Challenges

1. Because it is holiday period the married students do not have the freedom to come to the school freely without permission from husbands. Almost all the married students were not available in the school to be interviewed. Consequently, we visited the women in their homes to conduct the interview. Because the interview was conducted at home there was lots of interference from children and other family members which affected concentration. Even though the interview was conducted in the room of the women away from family members, other family members and children do come in to greet and probably to see what we are doing.
2. The questions were very loaded and lengthy. Administering a question takes longer than initially envisaged - around 2-3 hrs. Consequently, it was very hard to keep the respondents attentive through out the interview. In order to address that, we always have to rush with the questions halfway into the questionnaire which affected the quality of the responses we get.
3. The girls had difficulties understanding the question. In the process of addressing some ethical concern (privacy), the questions were not direct to the point and this had affected the ability of the respondents, especially the girls to comprehend the questions and the quality of their responses. Time was spent trying to explain most of the question which means taking more of the respondents time. After an hour, the women become less attentive.
4. Some of the respondents refused to be interviewed on some sensitive issues such as violence against girls and the inability of parents to pay for their daughters schooling. It is viewed as failure by parents. The refusal was respected.
5. Primary schools do not have cases of dropout, married and returned.

How were the challenges addressed?

- Some interviews were not conducted. For the restriction on women, the researchers followed them to their homes to conduct the interview.
- Probing on sensitive issues and give possible examples/illustrations to get them understand and to open up. This is especially so on issues like violence against girls and marital relations.
- On the reluctance /refusal to give audience to the research questions, the situation was reported to the village head supporting the TEGIN project and to the SBMC chair of the Secondary School.

- Some in-school girls available were used to identify married students and to escort the researchers to the homes of the married women.
- Questions were compressed and a little of probing was done due to the timing of Ramadan so as to meet up with the respondents schedules.

Appendix G: Letter to ActionAid Nigeria requesting TEGIN data

ActionAid Nigeria

ADDRESS REDACTED

17 February 2014

FAO: ActionAid Nigeria

I write to make a formal request to borrow the Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria (TEGIN) tapes. These tapes contain data gathered by researchers in 2011 in four schools in Kaduna state for the TEGIN project. The purpose of my request is to re-analyse this data as part of my own personal PhD research.

I confirm that all data will be kept in confidence and according to the TEGIN project's protocols on data protection.

My supervisor, Professor Elaine Unterhalter, has been requested to convey the tapes to the UK for copying, after which they will be safely returned to Abuja via courier at the earliest possible time. Should Prof Unterhalter be unable to carry the tapes, we will discuss an alternative suitable arrangement in liaison with ActionAid Nigeria.

Many thanks for your support. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any queries.

Yours faithfully,

Louise Wetheridge

MPhil/PhD candidate, Institute of Education, London

Appendix H: TEGIN data translators

Name	Affiliation	Role
Dr Garba Saleh	Lecturer, Ahmadu Bello University, Kaduna State	Translator
Ubaida Bello Muh'd	Executive Director, Hikima Community Mobilization and Development Initiative, Sokoto State	Translator
Ibrahim Mai-Bornu	Independent	Translation and Interpretation support

Appendix I: Data Codes TEGIN analysis

Early marriage

- Very early marriage (before age 15)
- Mid adolescent marriage (aged 15-17)
- Later adolescent marriage (age 18-19)

Defining early marriage

- Legal/policy
- Religion / tradition / custom
- Emotions / feelings
- Learning / intellect / mental capability
- Bodies / puberty / menarche

Formal schooling

- Access
 - Primary schooling
 - Junior Secondary schooling
 - Non-formal education
 - Islamic school
 - Islammiya
 - Women's centres
- Quality
 - Materials/infrastructure
 - Curriculum
 - Pedagogy
 - School policies / rules and regulations
 - Punishment
 - Physical and sexual violence
 - Ideas about teaching
 - Extra-curricula activities
 - Relationships: peers; teachers
 - Teacher attitudes
 - Teacher behaviour

Agency

- Aspirations

- for education
- for work
- for marriage
- for relationships
- other aspirations
- Confidence / self-worth
- Status / respect
- Resources / socioeconomic conditions
- Autonomy against / resistance
 - Speaking out
 - Running away
 - Eloping
 - Concealment / hidden acts
- Relational agency
 - Deference / acquiescence
 - Collaboration
 - boyfriend
 - female friend
 - mother or father
 - another family member
 - Negotiation
 - boyfriend
 - female friend
 - mother or father
 - another family member
 - Collusion
 - boyfriend
 - female friend
 - mother or father
 - another family member

Appendix J: Hausa-English Translation Services Agreement

This Contract dated: [INSERT]

Period covered by the contract: [INSERT]

Parties to the Contract

Client : Louise Wetheridge

Translation Provider : [NAME]

With regard to the translation and transcription of MP3 audio files from Hausa language into English language ('the **Services**') entrusted by the Client with the Translation Provider, the parties to this Contract, hereby agree to be bound by the following terms and conditions.

1. The Client is to provide the Translation Provider with all materials to be translated and transcribed by the Translation Provider.
2. Should the Client wish to raise any disagreement with the Services by the Translation Provider, the Client is entitled to request, within seven days from receipt of the Services, that the Translation Provider make revisions to the translation within a reasonable specified time frame and at no further cost to the Client, until the Client is satisfied with the translation.
3. The Translation Provider shall make every effort to render a quality translation that is true to the original, accurate, and coherent. This notwithstanding, the Client's attention is drawn to the following circumstances: that some words may not be translatable, that no absolute equivalence of two words or expressions exists between any two languages or even within the same language, and that there exists a great diversity in different languages or within the same language. Although it is the responsibility of the translator to minimize this type of discrepancies, the Client is however not entitled to rejecting the translation on account of a translator's particular choice of words.
4. The Translation Provider observes the ethics of translation and is responsible for the accuracy of the translation and for confidentiality of the assignment (detailed in the Confidentiality Agreement).
5. The Translation Provider shall complete the Services by the due date of [INSERT].
6. Full payment shall be made by the Client to the Translation Provider within seven days of satisfactory completion of the Services. The gross value of the Services is [INSERT] Nigerian Naira (approximately [INSERT] GBP).
7. Should the Translation Provider be unable to provide Services that are up to standard and according to the delivery timetable, the Client has the right to terminate, paying only what has been satisfactorily completed by the Translation Provider.

8. If additional translation and/or transcription is required, separate charges will be negotiated and levied.

9. Should this Contract require any corrections, amendments, substitution, or alteration, the same must be in writing and must clearly make reference to this Contract. Any supplements to this Contract must be signed by an authorized person or representative of each of the contracting parties.

10. Detailed Service guidelines are provided in Annex 1 to this Contract.

The Client: Louise Wetheridge

Signed:

Dated:

The Translation Provider:

Signed:

Dated:

Annex 1: Translation and Transcription Guideline

1. Text formatting

- a. Please use Arial 11 point font, left-aligned, single line spacing
- b. Please provide the following labelling information at the top of the transcript:
 - Name of Interviewer
 - Name of Respondent
 - Date of Interview (if known)
 - Place of interview (if known)
 - Length of interview (minutes)
- c. Questions by the Interviewer must be labelled by typing an 'I:' at the left margin and then indenting the question. Questions by the Respondent must be labelled by typing an 'R:' at the left margin and then indenting the response.
- d. Mark every 5 minutes of audio on the transcript with [5:00]; [10:00] etc on the right-hand side of the text;
- e. Audiotape changes: please indicate in the text the time when the audiotape side A ends, with [side A ends at 45:30].
- f. When the interview is completed please type 'End of Interview' and note the time when interview ends.
- g. Please save the transcript as a Word document (.doc or .docx).

2. Content

- a. Audio should be transcribed verbatim, i.e. word-for-word. Please do not summarise or abbreviate what is said.
- b. Mark verbal tokens, e.g. mmm, aha, ehea as they are expressed with indicative yes/no in square brackets, e.g. mmm [yes];
- c. Mark nonverbal and background sounds including *laughter, coughs, sneezes, cross-speech, page turning; background noise* and any distinctive non-verbal sounds in brackets in the text.
- d. If a word or phrase is inaudible and you cannot hear it or decipher it after 2 attempts, please write [inaudible] in the text
- e. If you are unsure about a phrase or the accuracy of the transcription please put the words or phrase in brackets surrounded by question marks, e.g. 'I am from ?(Zaria)? but I now live in Manchok'.
- f. Pidgin: retain words spoken in pidgin in their original form (e.g. *belle; pikin; bom-bom*) and write an English language equivalent after the pidgin word in square brackets, e.g. 'belle [*pregnant*]'.

Appendix K: Translator Confidentiality Agreement

Study: Early marriage and girls' schooling in Northern Nigeria
Researcher: Louise Wetheridge, PhD Candidate, UCL Institute of Education
I, _____ [Name], do hereby agree to maintain full confidentiality when serving as a translator for this research project.

I will be performing the following translation services: Transcribing audio recordings into English from Hausa. I verify that I have the qualifications to accurately perform the translations.

As a transcriber of this research data, I understand that I will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews and focus group discussions. The information on these recordings has been revealed by interviewees who agreed to participate on the condition that their interviews would remain strictly confidential and anonymous. I understand that I have a responsibility to honour this confidentiality agreement.

Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I confirm that I will adhere to the agreement in full.

Specifically, I _____ (PRINT NAME) agree to:

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., MP3, transcripts) with anyone other than the Researcher;
2. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual revealed during the transcription of recordings or in any other research information;
3. Not make copies of any raw data in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts);
4. Keep all research information secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
 - keeping all digitized raw data in computer password-protected files;
 - closing any computer programs and documents of the raw data when temporarily away from the computer;
 - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data after completing the translation tasks; and
 - using closed headphones when transcribing recordings.

5. Return all data in any form or format (e.g., MP3, transcripts) to the Researcher when I have completed the translation tasks.
6. Erase or destroy all research data that is not returnable to the Researcher (e.g., MP3 files; Word documents; information stored on my computer hard drive or any backup device) upon completion of the translation tasks.

Transcriber: _____ (PRINT NAME)
Signature: _____ Date: _____
Researcher: _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix L: IOE Ethics Application 2015 - Research Summary and Ethical Issues

Research Summary

This mixed methods PhD research examines the causes and consequences of early marriage in North West Nigeria and how they are associated with aspects of girls' schooling. The study analyses secondary quantitative and qualitative data (for which ethics approval has already been received) and intends to gather further primary qualitative data to which this application for ethics review pertains. This additional data is intended to provide contemporary information on interpretations of gender and social justice by education policy-makers and advisors who influence girls' schooling and lives.

The three overarching research questions guiding the PhD study are:

1. What accounts of early marriage are offered by Demographic and Health Survey data and how far do these accounts consider causality or disentangle complexity around early marriage and education?
2. What do particular diverse contexts in North West Nigeria highlight about the range of intersections between girls' schooling and early marriage how these are negotiated by different groups?
3. What meanings of gender and social justice are deployed in discourses and analyses of early marriage and education by policy communities in Nigeria and what are the implications of these lenses for policy and practice?

The research study was successfully upgraded at UCL IOE in December 2014.

This application, for which ethical clearance is sought, is to collect qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews with policy-makers and policy advisors in Nigeria. Due to the security situation, it is not possible to travel to Nigeria to conduct these interviews, so the data will be collected through telephone discussion and email correspondence.

Adult participants will be purposively sampled and comprise key, relevant education officials at the local government, State and Federal levels. The participants will include:

- 2 x Education Secretary at 2 Kaduna Local Government Education Authorities (LGEA);
- 1 x education / gender officer at the Kaduna State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB)
- 1 x education / gender officer at the Kaduna State Ministry of Education (SMoE)
- 2 x education officials (Permanent Secretary to the Minister & Gender Desk Officer) at the Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja (FMOE)

- 1 x Education Advisor at the UK Department for International Development (DFID) Nigeria
- 1 x Education Adviser at Unicef Nigeria
- 1 x Education Adviser at USAID Nigeria.

The objectives guiding this data collection phase are to:

1. Ascertain policy-makers' perceptions of changes in girls' education in North Western Nigeria, including enrolment, attendance, retention, drop-out, over time and their explanations for these changes;
2. Investigate policy-makers' definitions of the problem of girls' schooling and early marriage and the ways strategies to address this are formulated;
3. Explore how gender roles and relations, constructed and practiced by policy-makers at different institutional levels in relation to girls' schooling and marriage, support or inhibit substantive gender equality and what opportunities girls have to participate in, or challenge, these roles and relations.

The interviews will be coordinated and conducted via telephone or Skype using a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 1). Each interview will be audio recorded with participants' informed consent. Each interview will last no longer than 60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in June-July 2015.

Ethical issues

The research is with adults but covers a sensitive and controversial topic in the context. The key ethical issues concern:

- Informing participants about the purpose and findings of the study: this is particularly challenging as the interviews will be conducted remotely. Where possible I will use video as well as audio to interview the participants to develop a better rapport (e.g. Skype video). I will provide two opportunities to discuss the purpose of the research – in the formal letter of introduction and at the beginning of each interview. I will also share my email contact details for any further queries. Findings will be shared via follow-up through email and or letter. Participants will also be able to contact the NGO CAPP, who have offices at the State and Federal level and will provide local guidance and contact as needed.
- Handling a controversial issue at a time of change: early marriage is controversial and contested, particularly in Northern Nigeria. There are ongoing debates related to

marriage in the Constitution and at state level, including as a result of diversity in the domestication of the Child Rights Act and implementation of Shari'a law in northern states. The related issues of girls' education and early marriage are associated with some security tensions. The President-elect, M. Buhari, is due to take office on 29 May 2015 and some governmental appointments are outstanding to date. However, girls' education and early marriage have a high media and political profile in the country, among national and international governmental and non-governmental bodies. This means that people are accustomed to and conversant in key themes related to the topic of my research. NGOs and international agencies have been conducting high-profile research and campaigns on the issue in Nigeria over several years and this is escalating since the Chibok incident in 2014. I do not expect the research topic to create shock or tension. Participants have the right not to participate and/or to refuse to answer specific questions. This information will not be disclosed.

- Handling sensitive information: cases may be discussed in which names or personal information is disclosed. This data will be kept in confidence and be transformed into anonymised form immediately after interview, in order that individuals associated cannot be identified. Any participant requiring pastoral support, child protection or legal advice on specific cases will be directed to contact the Executive Director at CAPP, who is willing to provide this support as required.
- Confidentiality and anonymity: participants will be assured of confidentiality at all stages of the research. All documentation (transcriptions and reports) as well as audio files will be anonymised and stored securely in compliance with the Data Protection Act. Care will be taken in all reports and publications to ensure that participants cannot be identified in any direct quotes used.

Appendix M: Policy interviews - Letter of Introduction

Dear Mr / Mrs / Sir / Madam

My name is Louise Wetheridge and I am a PhD researcher at the UCL Institute of Education in London, United Kingdom. I am conducting doctoral research on girls' schooling and marriage in North West Nigeria, specifically examining these issues in the context of Kaduna State.

You have been highly recommended to me by [insert contact] as a well-informed expert and experienced professional whose work pertains to girls' education in Northern Nigeria. I would therefore like to invite you to participate in this research study through a brief interview with myself over the forthcoming weeks.

The Objectives of the interview will be to gather and learn from your personal and professional experience on:

1. Changes in girls' education in North West Nigeria over the last ten years, including changes in girls' enrolment, retention and performance in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools;
2. Processes and practices of marriage in North West Nigeria;
3. The interaction of marriage and girls' education, and policy strategies to address this.

The interview will be conducted by telephone or Skype and last a maximum of one hour (60 minutes). All information that you give during the interview will be treated as confidential and will be anonymised. I attach a Confidentiality Agreement to this letter, which outlines the steps I will take to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of all interviewees. Following the interview process, I will compile a Summary of Findings for each participant and disseminate this document to you via email or in paper copy. If you have any questions at any time, you may feel free to contact me.

I very much look forward to the opportunity to speak with you about girls' education in North West Nigeria and hope that you will find the process rewarding and informative.

Next steps:

1. Please contact me at your earliest convenience to confirm your participation;
2. Please propose a date and time when you would be available for interview.

Please feel free to contact me at any time, either by telephone, Skype or email. My contact details are provided below.

Yours [sincerely / faithfully]

Louise Wetheridge

PhD Candidate: UCL Institute of Education, University of London

Appendix N: Policy Interviews - Confidentiality Agreement

Study: Early marriage and girls' schooling in North West Nigeria
Researcher: Louise Wetheridge, PhD Candidate, UCL Institute of Education

I, Louise Wetheridge, do hereby agree to maintain full confidentiality when serving as an interviewer for this research project.

Specifically, I will:

1. Keep all information shared with me by participants confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format with anyone other than my research Supervisor (Prof. Elaine Unterhalter, UCL IOE);
2. Ensure that other Parties supporting the coordination of this research (e.g. ActionAid / CAPP) do not have access to the interview data and cannot link participants to information, by anonymising data and retaining data in secure personal locations and formats (see 6);
3. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual(s) named during the interviews;
4. Anonymize participants and any other named individual(s) of the interviews, in order that individuals cannot be identified after interview;
5. Ensure that any audio recordings of interviews (where participants give consent) are anonymized, kept in confidence and in secure locations and formats;
6. Keep all research information secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
 - a. keeping all digitized raw data in encoded and computer password-protected files;
 - b. closing any computer programs and documents of the raw data when temporarily away from the computer;
 - c. permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;
 - d. using closed headphones when transcribing any audio recordings; and
 - e. not retaining any data in paper/hard copy format.
7. Erase, destroy or transfer to a secure storage facility all anonymized research data upon completion of my PhD; and
8. Work in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act.

Researcher: Louise Wetheridge

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix O: Interview Schedule - Interviews with policy makers and influencers

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Louise Wetheridge. I'm a PhD researcher at the UCL Institute of Education in the UK. My research investigates the issue of early marriage, meaning marriage before the age of 18 years, and girls' schooling in North West Nigeria. I have contacted you for an interview today to find out more from you about your views and professional experience on early marriage and girls' education.

Everything that you say today and all information shared will be treated as confidential and anonymous. When I write up my study no one will directly be able to identify specific points you make, and I will take steps to protect your identity. Please feel free to answer in your own words, ask what you don't understand, and tell me if there are questions that you are not comfortable answering. If you do not want to answer a question it will not be a problem. I very much appreciate your help with my research project.

Do you have any questions? May we proceed?

A. Schooling

I want to start the interview by asking you some general questions, drawing on your professional viewpoint, about girls' basic education and the factors that affect girls' primary and junior secondary schooling.

1. How has girls' education changed over the last ten years, let's say since 2007 and Yar'Adua's Presidency, in [North West Nigeria / Kaduna State / Kaura LGA / Kudan LGA]?
2. Currently, what makes it difficult for girls to go to school or stay in school in [North West Nigeria / Kaduna State / Kaura LGA / Kudan LGA]?
(probe: internal and external factors e.g. school facilities, specifically early marriage)
3. a. What helps girls to enrol or stay in school in [North West Nigeria / Kaduna State / Kaura LGA / Kudan LGA]?
(probe: in-school and external support from national to family e.g. policies; employment opps; scholarships; in-school facilities; parental education/support; etc).
 - b. Are these factors that make it difficult or that help girls the same for *all* girls?
How? Why?
 - c. Are these factors the same for boys? How? Why?

B. Early marriage and schooling

Let's move on to the issue of early marriage and its relationship to girls' schooling. By early marriage I mean girls' marriage before the age of 18.

4. How does early marriage contribute to girls' never enrolling in school, or not attending or dropping out of school?
(Probe for precision on their view of the meaning of marriage (process or 'event') and the type of association – what age of girls are affected; how does it affect school progression; does it lead to temporary or permanent drop-out; is a specific 'type' of girl is more/less affected)
5. How has early marriage as a factor contributing to girls' dropping out of school changed since 2007, since Yar'Adua's presidency?
(Probe: has the incidence of marriages increased or decreased overall? What evidence do you have of this? What factors are responsible for this change? Does it affect schooling in the same way as it used to?)
6. Do schools provide any specific support to girls who return to school after marriage?
 - a. If yes, what type of support? Where? How? *(Case study / example?)*
 - b. If no, do you think that they should?
(Probe: non-formal learning centres / literacy classes etc)

C. Early marriage

7. What, in your opinion, is the ideal age for a girl to get married? Why do you think so?
8. What kind of pressures exist around early marriage? For which groups specifically?
(Probe: economic, social, cultural, religious or moral or other pressures)
9. a. What do you think are other people's views on the benefits of early marriage to girls, their families, their husbands, their communities, society in general?
(Probe: views for each person queried)
 - b. Do you agree with these views or do you think differently?
10. a. What do you think are other people's views on the disadvantages of early marriage to girls, their families, their husbands, their communities, society in general?
(Probe: views for each person queried)
 - b. Do you agree with these views or do you think differently?
11. Either personally or professionally, do you know, or have you heard about, any families where early marriage has occurred? I do not want any names, but thinking about that specific case, can you tell me what happened?

(Probe: when the case occurred; where the family lives (state/LGEA); demographic characteristics of family (ethnicity; religion; composition); girl characteristics (orphan; at school; siblings); marital process incl. decision-making; role of girl in process; outcome).

12. Either personally or professionally, do you know of any cases where a girl has taken an active role in an early marriage – either in deciding to get married or resisting marriage? Can you tell me about a case?

(Probe: when/where; girls' role; how she acted; enablers (support); outcome).

13. Either personally or professionally what or who provides support to girls once they are married? Firstly, in schools, who or what provides support for married girls who return to school? How is this support provided? What about at home or in the community?

(Probe: husbands, teachers, religious leaders, etc. Is the support pastoral, financial, domestic, educational?)

Finally,

14. In your opinion, is there anything that government at federal level should or could do to address the issue of early marriage as it relates to girls' education? What? How? What about State government? What about local government? What about the international community?

15. Are there any other points you want to add to give me more information?

