

The 'Demand Side' of Child Marriage: Expanding Gender Norms to Marriage Drivers Facing Boys and Men in South Sudan

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Abstract

In South Sudan, child marriage is often positioned as a cultural practice tied to conflict and displacement as well as gender norms affirming that girls should marry. Based on findings of a multi-sectoral gender assessment conducted by Save the Children in Rumbek, Torit, Malualkon, Bor and Kapoeta, our paper draws attention to multiple, connected drivers of child marriage. Drawing specifically on findings related to child marriage, we suggest the need to understand child marriage in the context of cycles of poverty and inter-clan fighting. In many communities, cattle form the basis for the 'bride price', driving cattle raiding, due to pressure on males to marry. The ability to pay the bride price may be an indicator of manhood in some pastoralist communities of South Sudan. We suggest that while humanitarian interventions tend to fixate on empowering girls or addressing gender norms girls face, less attention is placed on the 'demand side' of child marriage – on the gender norms pushing boys and men to marry girls. Our paper emphasises the importance of tackling norms from both the perspective of girls as well as boys and men within a broader context of improving livelihoods in South Sudan.

Keywords: child marriage; South Sudan; conflict; displacement; gender; gender norms

Introduction

Child marriage occurs frequently in the post-conflict setting of South Sudan, where ongoing inter-clan violence is accompanied by food insecurity and significant humanitarian need. Child marriage – defined as a

union where one or more partners is aged under 18 – is a significant problem across the world. Globally, one in every five girls is married before the age of 18, while one in every three of these child marriages occurs in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2018). UNICEF (2018) estimates that 650 million women who are alive today

were married as children, and Plan International's 2018 report *Adolescent Girls in Crisis* notes that 'child, early and forced marriage' (CEFM) is the most commonly reported type of GBV faced by girls in South Sudan (Plan International, 2018: 1). In 2019, Oxfam found an alarmingly high 71 per cent of girls in Nyal, Unity State, were married before age 18 (Oxfam, 2019: 5).

Studies document the consequences of child marriage including adolescent pregnancy (Yakubu and Salisu, 2018), poor maternal health outcomes (Godha *et al.*, 2013; Santhya, 2011), child mortality and morbidity (Raj *et al.*, 2010; Nour, 2006), and unequal power dynamics which may lead to intimate partner violence (Kidman, 2017; Erulkar, 2013). Child marriage is linked to adolescent pregnancy which has ripple effects, including reduced participation in economic development (Chaaban and Cunningham, 2011). Married girls may drop out of school or have poor education outcomes (Delprato *et al.*, 2015). Married girls also have less access to health services (Godha *et al.*, 2013; Nasrullah *et al.*, 2013). In sub-Saharan Africa, recent studies observe that the age of child marriage is rising (Koski *et al.*, 2017). Different to South Asia, where most of the research on child marriage has occurred, girls in some African countries have greater autonomy in choosing a spouse (Petroni *et al.*, 2017). Humanitarian agencies have frequently framed CEFM as a form of gender-based violence (GBV) (Plan International, 2018: 1; CARE, 2014), and this framework has also been presented by others (Belhorma, 2016).

The practice of child marriage is influenced by multiple drivers which vary depending on the context. A multi-country study in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Senegal identified how child marriage is influenced by intersections between poverty, lack of educational opportunities and norms that discriminate against girls (Petroni *et al.*, 2017). In many contexts, marriage is linked to the onset of puberty (Lal, 2015). Lower educational attainment may be a risk factor as well as a consequence of child marriage (Stark, 2018). Child marriage may occur more among communities facing poverty (Efevbera *et al.*, 2019; Stark, 2018; UNICEF, 2014), communities living in rural locations (Rumble *et al.*, 2018; UNICEF, 2014) and communities affected by conflict and displacement (Mazurana *et al.*, 2019; Baines, 2014; Schlecht *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, the relationship between conflict and child marriage is one that has resulted in considerable investment in tackling child marriages among displaced populations and in post-conflict settings by humanitarian agencies (Oxfam, 2019; USAID, 2010). This is linked to the focus on addressing sexual violence during conflict; child marriage is often framed as resulting in sexual violence, specifically marital rape (Mazurana *et al.*, 2019). The rationale linking

conflict and child marriage is that families face increased economic pressure and protection risks that result in them marrying off their daughters. However, existing reviews of evidence highlight that research on child marriage in humanitarian settings is limited, requiring further, context-specific research (Mazurana *et al.*, 2019). In some settings, families may be motivated to marry off their daughters due to the practice of bride price, which may be viewed as a means of decreasing their financial burden (Corno and Voena, 2016).

As well as these drivers, existing academic and non-governmental organisation (NGO) literature outlines how child marriage may be driven by social norms – unwritten rules for expected behaviour – which are often gendered. Within social norms theory, social norms are defined as beliefs about (1) what others do (descriptive norms) and (2) the extent to which others approve of a given action (injunctive norms); failing to comply with norms may result in sanctions (Cislaghi and Heise, 2018; Chung and Rimal, 2016). Existing research suggests there are specific social norms related to child marriage, specifically norms related to girls' education, adolescent girls' sexuality/purity, the expectation that girls bear children and the changing roles of parents in their daughters' lives (Schaffnit *et al.*, 2019; de Groot *et al.*, 2018; Jones *et al.*, 2018; Murphy-Graham and Leal, 2015). However, social norms do not operate in isolation and may overlap with other drivers. Most existing research on child marriage focuses on context-dependent drivers affecting the marriage of girls. There is some recognition of marriage as a requirement for fulfilling expectations of masculinity, which may pressure boys and young men to marry early (Clark *et al.*, 2006). Masculinities are not singular but take multiple forms, for example 'hegemonic masculinities' represent idealised forms of manhood which may include practices such as risk-taking, earning income and using violence or force (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Research suggests that South Sudanese returnee men seek to reassert their masculinity as a means of belonging, which may involve marriage, though returnees face social and financial obstacles to marriage (Grabska and Fanjoy, 2015). Little literature links child marriage and masculinities due to the focus on the marriage of girls.

To address the complex, multi-layered and contextual drivers of child marriage, a growing number of interventions have been designed, including promoting girls' education (Stark, 2018; Kanesathasan *et al.*, 2008), providing cash transfers to incentivise families to keep girls enrolled in school (Baird *et al.*, 2011), engaging men and boys in challenging child marriage (Greene *et al.*, 2015; Karam, 2015), mobilising influential community and religious leaders to denounce the practice (Karam,

2015; USAID, 2010), increasing girls' knowledge about sexual and reproductive health (Rahman and Daniel, 2010), implementing life skills activities for girls (Bandiera *et al.*, 2012), advocating for legislative changes to increase the minimum marriage age (Gage, 2009) and seeking to challenge the social norms that present child marriage as the expectation for girls (Cislaghi *et al.*, 2020; Muhanguzi *et al.*, 2017). Notably, the existing evidence on norms interventions on child marriage tend to focus on gender norms affecting girls, rather than the 'demand' side of norms that might push men and boys to marry girls (Greene *et al.*, 2015). Most often, evidence shows that interventions work on multiple drivers in combination, using a range of strategies to address root causes (Lee-Rife *et al.*, 2012). Reviews of evidence highlight that promoting girls' education through cash transfers or in-kind benefits have the greatest impact in preventing child marriage (Malhotra and Elnakib, 2021). Interventions focused on empowering girls have also been identified as successful (Chae and Ngo, 2017; Kalamar *et al.*, 2016) – also reflecting the focus on girls.

In South Sudan, a range of humanitarian actors, including NGOs, implement child marriage interventions. In one study, families most commonly cited conflict-related poverty and food insecurity for choosing to marry their daughters early (Oxfam, 2019: 6). Research often links child marriage to the conflict in South Sudan (Oxfam, 2019), including the most recent conflict which displaced 4.5 million people from 2013 to 2018 (Checchi *et al.*, 2018: 2). Prior civil wars have also been said to affect marriage practices (Stern, 2011). Other literature explores how ongoing fighting, food insecurity, lack of livelihood opportunities, coupled with deeply entrenched practices of violence, dowry and cattle raiding, contribute to child marriage (Huser, 2018; Hove *et al.*, 2017; JICA, 2017; Bérenger and Verdier-Chouchane, 2016; Oxfam, 2017). Similar to data in other settings, research in South Sudan links child marriage to increased economic instability. In South Sudan, child marriage has historically been seen as a customary practice. Research conducted in Sudan in the 1970s (including in areas close to the current border with South Sudan) found that girls were expected to marry from age 15. This expectation was tied to norms about virginity, family honour and modesty (Hayes, 1975). Among the Jikany Nuer, who lived in what is now the east of South Sudan, research in the 1980s highlighted the importance of child-bearing for women (Hutchinson, 1996). Research in what is now north-east South Sudan among the Dinka in the 1990s similarly revealed the expectation that girls marry shortly after menarche, usually around age 15, and the norm of having large families (Jok, 1999). Norms requiring girls

to produce many children persist today according to recent research in Juba and Bor (Lacey, 2013). The practice of paying bride price to a girl's family prior to marriage also emerges as an important historical custom among many South Sudanese communities (Wild *et al.*, 2018; Lacey, 2013; Beswick, 2001; Jok, 1999). The systemic use of dowry has become part of families' plan for economic stability, though 'at the centre of the quagmire is the conceptualization of the daughter as an economic commodity' (Huser, 2018: 26). Cattle may be part of the bride price in some communities, which men often – though not exclusively – obtain through raiding (Glowacki and Wrangham, 2015). Rising bride price has been linked to increases in cattle raiding (Hudson and Mattfess, 2017).

Our literature review yielded limited publicly available reports and evaluations on the impact of current or past efforts to address child marriage in South Sudan. Some of the efforts that were mentioned include the South Sudan's Women's Empowerment Network (SSWEN) and Partnership against Violence and Exploitation (PAVE), which commit to stopping child marriage in the areas of Juba, Yambio and Maridi, through promoting girls' school attendance (Hove and Ndawana, 2017: 9). Another example was a USAID-funded 'Gender Equity Through Education' project (Munene and Wambiya, 2019). Through its 'Women and Girls for Change (WG4C)' programme, Plan International spent €300,000 between 2017–19 (Plan International, 2019: 8) through child rights clubs, child-friendly spaces and educating communities on child rights and the impacts of child marriage (Plan International, 2019: 18). The *Girls' Education South Sudan Project (2019–24)* represents an example incorporating a range of interventions including cash transfers, behaviour change communication (including radio programmes and life skills activities), research and funding for schools – focused on transforming life chances for girls through education.

Some of the challenges affecting child marriage programming in South Sudan include lack of funding and technical knowledge as well as ethnic conflict and lack of intergenerational dialogue (Hove and Ndawana, 2017: 9). The majority of programmes mentioned in publicly available research reports focus generally on improving gender outcomes such as through decision-making, while others focus on engaging women in livelihood activities, though not directly driven by the goal of reducing child marriage by addressing the demand for it. Literature that has emerged from organisations working in the humanitarian arena have included recommendations such as changing attitudes and beliefs and 'breaking the culture of silence on GBV'; investing in GBV service delivery and improving care for

GBV survivors; poverty reduction strategies; engaging men and boys; and fostering coordination between community leaders and other key figures such as teachers, and more (Huser, 2018; Oxfam, 2017; Bérenger and Verdier-Chouchane, 2016). Results or evidence of impact are, however, limited. The complexity of child marriage makes programming and evaluation of such programming extremely challenging, especially in a context like South Sudan.

In this paper we present findings on child marriage from a gender assessment conducted in South Sudan by Save the Children International (SCI) in November and December 2019. The gender assessment sought to obtain a better understanding of gender dynamics across multiple sectors of SCI's work in South Sudan. This paper specifically presents the findings of the gender assessment related to child marriage. It situates the practice of child marriage within the continuum of inter-clan fighting which is linked to cattle raiding and norms requiring males to pay bride price, alongside norms related to girls' virginity and child-bearing. We suggest child marriage needs to be analysed more holistically in terms of norms affecting not just girls, but males as well. In the following section we explain the methods used to conduct our study. We then present findings on key drivers of child marriage.

Methods

This study sought to understand gender dynamics and the implications for SCI's programming in South Sudan using mixed methods and multi-stakeholder consultations. It focused on identifying needs, interests and barriers across different sectors: education, protection, health, nutrition, food security and livelihoods, including economic empowerment. The gender assessment also sought to identify risks, vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms among communities as well as opportunities to increase voice and participation of women and girls. Child marriage was identified as a particular area of interest for the South Sudan office. To conduct the gender assessment, surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were used. The study was conducted in five geographical locations: Rumbek, Torit, Malualkon, Bor and Kapoeta (Lakes State, Eastern Equatoria State, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, Jonglei State and Eastern Equatoria State, respectively). These locations represent priorities for SCI's work in South Sudan. In addition, some key informants were from South Sudan's capital, Juba.

The quantitative survey was designed using the Likert scale structure, inviting participants to respond to a series of statements by answering if they strongly agree,

agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree. Based on experience in similar lower literacy contexts, pictures of 'smiley faces' were used for participants to indicate which option they selected. The statements in the survey explored knowledge, attitudes and practices related to gender within multiple sectors. The survey questions were developed by the consultants in consultation with Save the Children technical staff in South Sudan. The questions were reviewed and revised with field staff and team leaders prior to data collection. The survey also captured sex, age and migration status. The FGD guide was structured in three parts: the first explored expectations, division of labour, access to resources and safety; the second explored social norms related to child marriage, gendered access to health and division of labour through a vignette which was developed based on existing vignettes on similar topics and revised with team leaders; and the third explored the relationship between NGOs and communities. Key informants varied by location based on their availability to participate in the assessment. In Rumbek, Torit, Malualkon, Bor and Kapoeta, semi-structured interviews were held with stakeholders including religious leaders, community leaders (including chiefs and women's group leaders), government ministries and local organisations. In Juba, we conducted KIIs with multiple government ministries, international NGOs (INGOs) and UN agencies. The semi-structured interviews used open-ended questions to gain insight on how gender is linked to multi-sectoral issues including health, food security, nutrition, protection and education.

Sampling

Across all locations, sample sizes were identified based on the time and resources available for the study as well as previous assessments conducted by SCI in South Sudan. The sample sizes were identified by SCI staff who understand the context well, with some input from the consultants. In making decisions about sample size, the assessment was designed to reach many stakeholders in each location to capture a diversity of perspectives and ensure saturation. Based on previous studies, we aimed to implement 100 surveys per location, alongside four FGDs and 6–12 KIIs per location. Participants for surveys, FGDs and KIIs represented three different samples. Overall, Rumbek accounted for 27.1 per cent of all study participants, Torit represented 18.1 per cent, Malualkon represented 17.6 per cent, Bor represented 18.6 per cent, Kapoeta represented 16.9 per cent and Juba represented 1.7 per cent.

For surveys, households were randomly sampled while walking through communities, with one participant from every second house selected. The questionnaire was administered to a household member over the age of

15, present in the household at the time of the survey. For the qualitative data collection, purposive and convenience sampling was used to identify participants. Participants of FGDs were invited by SCI based on age and sex so that in each location four FGDs were held with four groups (young women and girls aged 15–24, women aged 25+, young men and boys aged 15–24, men aged 25+). Each FGD had 8–12 participants. Interview sampling was purposive, based on specific categories of stakeholders, e.g. Ministry of Gender, religious leader, women's group leader. Particular effort was placed on ensuring women's participation as key informants. Tables 1 and 2 outline the total sample for this assessment.

Data Collection and Analysis

Local enumerators conducted the surveys using tablets. The survey tool was available in English, as well as three locally used languages – Dinka, Toposa and Arabic. FGDs were also facilitated by local enumerators in local languages using translated FGD guides. Given that these languages are often primarily spoken, rather than written, SCI staff used translated tools to explain particular terms to enumerators, so that enumerators used unified language.

The first author conducted interviews in Rumbek, as well as most of the interviews in Juba. The third author conducted all the interviews in Bor and a few in Juba. The fourth author also conducted a few interviews in Juba. The remaining interviews were conducted by SCI team leaders in each location. English was primarily used for KIIs; however, KIIs with community leaders, religious leaders and women's group leaders required knowledge of the local language, which was provided through SCI field staff. Interviewers took notes in English.

Table 1: Survey, FGD and KII participants by sex

Tool	Female	Male	Total
Survey	395	171	566
FGDs	117	136	253
KIIs	25	39	64

Table 2: Participants by location

Location	Survey	FGDs	KIIs
Rumbek	164	60	15
Torit	103	48	9
Maluakon	100	48	7
Bor	99	52	12
Kapoeta	98	45	6
Juba	0	0	15
Total	564*	253	64

*Two survey respondents did not provide their location.

Enumerators audio-recorded the FGDs, which were then transcribed into English by local translators in Juba. The team leaders took notes during KIIs, taking care to capture the exact words of participants instead of summarising or paraphrasing. The team leaders sent their interview notes to the consultant each day. The team leaders provided further clarification if content from notes was not clear.

Survey data was extracted from Kobo to be analysed. The first and second author conducted descriptive and bivariate analysis, disaggregating survey data by sex, location and, where relevant, age. The FGDs were translated and transcribed into English by a local translation company in Juba. Queries about content from the first and second authors were discussed with team leaders and SCI staff to clarify content. For interviews, the first and second authors clarified content with team leaders and SCI staff. The first author thematically coded the FGD and KII data, first deductively identifying anticipated themes based on the topic guides and literature, and then inductively identifying further codes during the process of reviewing transcripts. The second author also reviewed the transcripts and contributed to analysis and write-up which was led by the first author. The qualitative data was analysed by sex, accounting for differences in male and female perspectives, to align with how the survey data was analysed. We also analysed the qualitative data by geographical location, identifying particular themes (e.g. revenge killings) by location. Perceptions of community members (gathered both through the survey as well as the FGDs) were contrasted with perspectives of key informants, who often had differing opinions about child marriage. We sought to place equal weighting on the quantitative and qualitative data, recognising the limitations of each and the benefits of analysing them together.

Ethics

To ensure data was collected ethically, enumerators and team leaders were trained on confidentiality, consent, conducting referrals for disclosure of violence and appropriate ways of engaging with communities during the data collection process, including ensuring privacy, managing engagement with children carefully in accordance with child safeguarding principles, and 'do no harm' principles. Ethics processes to ensure confidentiality, informed consent and safeguarding were implemented based on best practice guidance, including the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) guidance for research on violence against women, as well as SCI's internal research processes that were guided by advice from the Monitoring and Evaluation staff and the regional office.

The purpose of the assessment was explained to participants in plain language, using the three locally

used languages – Dinka, Toposa and Arabic. Participants were informed that their names were not being noted and that identifying information would not be included about them in outputs. Informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants, through explaining that their participation was voluntary. Participants were told they would not experience negative consequences if they decided not to participate and they were free to skip any questions they did not want to answer. For participants aged below 18, parents also provided written consent by signing or providing thumbprints on consent forms.

To ensure confidentiality, data was anonymised. No names of participants were noted by enumerators or team leaders. Information that could identify participants – such as detail about jobs, health conditions, accounts of children, etc. – was excluded from research outputs. Enumerators and team leaders took care to manage community expectations, to ensure participation in the study was not viewed as a means of obtaining benefits from SCI. Where possible, male enumerators conducted surveys with males and female enumerators conducted surveys with females, though this was challenging given the higher number of females at home during the survey.

Results

In our findings, we present key themes and drivers on child marriage. These demonstrate the importance of analysing child marriage in a comprehensive manner, with focus on how these drivers are often interconnected.

The Relationship between Child Marriage and Conflict

During our fieldwork, participants discussed varied perspectives on the extent to which the conflict in South Sudan had influenced the prevalence of child marriage. For some, child marriage was a long-established practice that has decreased over time: ‘Before, child marriage was worse’ (Rumbek, male, local NGO); ‘It [child marriage] is happening but not common. Long ago it was too much and could not be controlled’ (Torit, male, FGD); ‘[W]e don’t want to talk about early marriage and rape as caused by war. The war just added to it. It’s before ... and now’ (Juba, female, UN). For others, war was the cause of child marriage and other forms of harm against women (Maluakon, male, government official).

Gender Norms Enabling the Practice of Child Marriage

Our findings highlight that child marriage may be perpetuated by interlocking gender norms, specifically norms giving status to families whose daughters marry

early, norms valuing virginity and norms valuing child-bearing.

In the survey, 37.7 per cent of women and 34.5 per cent of men strongly agreed or agreed that if a girl is not married by the age of 18, it reflects badly upon her family. Agreement was highest among those aged 55+ and lowest among the 18–24 age group. In FGDs, participants also affirmed the importance of girls marrying early, indicating that the family is viewed as a ‘failure’ and will not be given respect by others in the community if a daughter fails to fetch bride price (Torit, female, women’s group leader).

Child marriage was also mentioned in relation to the importance of marrying a virgin; marrying a child ensures she is a virgin: ‘This is something rooted in the mind of the community, that when you marry a girl below 18, you’ve married a virgin. But if higher, you’ll find someone who is not a virgin’ (Rumbek, male, local NGO). This pressure to ensure virginity at the time of marriage can result in girls who are pregnant before marriage, being married off quickly. In these cases, child marriage is used as a solution to an unplanned pregnancy, resulting in children marrying (Rumbek, male, local NGO). In some cases, an older ‘sugar daddy’ may be brought in to marry a girl who has been impregnated by a boy who is the same age as a girl, because this older male may offer more cattle (Juba, female, government official).

The gender norm that girls need to produce children emerged from FGDs and interviews, with participants reflecting on how the value of girls/women is linked to reproduction: ‘We are just used as sexual materials – for production only’ (Rumbek, female, women’s group leader); ‘[Y]ou’re just there as someone to bear children’ (Rumbek, male, local NGO). This focus on reproduction is also reflected in the fact that, as well as menstruation, families often determine that girls are ready for marriage based on their physical size: ‘They think she is big enough to get married’ (Juba, female, government official).

Child Marriage as an Income-Generating Opportunity

Across all five study locations, child marriage was mentioned as a source of income for families. This was specifically because of the practice of bride price: ‘The father sees the daughter as an item valuable to bring income – to generate resources for the family’ (Rumbek, male, local NGO); ‘I will be rich in this community when my daughter gets married since a lot of cattle are given to me’ (Kapoeta, male, community leader); ‘Some people see their daughters as a means of survival’ (Juba, female, SCI). In interviews, bride price was described as requiring varying amounts depending on the community, but

often involving cattle, money and provision of other resources. According to multiple key informants, in some communities, the bride price may require up to 300 cows, while in others it requires a cash payment as high as 4,000–5,000 USD.

The reliance on child marriage as an income-generating strategy may be particularly pervasive among poorer families: 'Those below the poverty line especially look to girls as a source of wealth' (Rumbek, male, government official). If girls are educated, the bride price is even higher (Juba, female, government official).

Bride Price Linked to Manhood and Cattle Raiding

Our findings show that being able to pay bride price is seen as an indicator of manhood. In the survey, 75.9 per cent of women and 69.4 per cent of men strongly agreed or agreed that a boy who cannot afford to pay bride price will never become a man. In this context, '[n]o dowry means no marriage' (Torit, male, community leader).

Cattle are pivotal to marriage, including child marriage: 'Girls do not go to school and only wait to be exchanged with cattle' (Kapoeta, male, religious leader). The pressure to marry may lead to cattle raiding: 'Youth in this community are forced to go for cattle raiding so that they get cattle for marriage' (Kapoeta, male, government official); 'One of the most prevalent things in South Sudan is to marry you need to have a lot of cattle. These boys are pressured to steal' (Juba, male, SCI). Cattle raiding was described as being done by children (Malualkon, male, religious leader), as well as causing the death of youth (Kapoeta, male, religious leader). This drive to steal cows to fulfil bride price requirements has negative consequences because of the violence used to raid cattle stations: '[I]t can bring death to the family as a result of the scramble for the cows and resources' (Torit, female, women's group leader). Participants explained that 'those who cannot afford bride price' will steal to obtain cows to pay for a wife (Torit, male, community leader). Participants also described how if cattle are stolen, marriage prospects are impacted: '[W]hen your cattle are taken, you will remain with nothing and the family will be poor and thus make you not to marry' (Kapoeta, male, FGD). Access to weapons may be a reason that cattle raiding is viewed as the most viable option to secure livelihoods and reach the bride price requirements: 'They say, "The main reason we are raiding is we have guns"' (Rumbek, female, local NGO). This is linked to the fact that owning cattle means 'you have a choice to be killed or kill someone' (Rumbek, male, government official). References to men raiding cattle 'to feel strong' (Rumbek, female, local NGO) also reinforce the linkages between cattle, bride price and masculinity. In some locations, specifically Rumbek,

Torit and Bor, 'revenge killings' occur as a reaction to deaths from cattle raiding and inter-clan disputes. In Rumbek, 'revenge rape', where women and girls are raped as acts of aggression against other clans, was described as 'rampant' (Rumbek, male, government official): 'The clans there are clashing. If they find a woman from a clan they're having issues with, they rape her. They don't kill women, so they rape them' (Rumbek, female, local NGO).

Our study also highlights the role of bride price in incentivising marriage: '[M]ost girls are given out for dowry. Parents want wealth of cows' (Malualkon, female, government official). Participants also discussed the impacts of bride price throughout a child marriage, including women feeling they need to repay men for the bride price paid to their families: 'Because men pay their resources to marry us, therefore we should work for them' (Rumbek, female, survey). It may lead to women having to give up money they have earned as well as their right to share their views: 'Men say, "I've bought you, the salary is all mine"' (Juba, female UN staff member); 'A working woman, after getting your salary, you must hand it over to your husband. You cannot say much because he has paid on you – because of the high bride price' (Juba, female, INGO). It can also be a justification for violence against women: 'He will say, "I paid dowry"' (Juba, female, UN).

Stakeholder Responses to Child Marriage

In interviews with international and local NGOs, government and UN agencies, the need to address child marriage was discussed. The majority of interviewees emphasised the importance of 'raising awareness' about child marriage, giving examples of past mass education campaigns in South Sudan. A few also referenced the importance of engaging with critical actors like chiefs, who hold a lot of power: 'When chiefs say, people listen' (Juba, female, government official). There were minimal references to using multiple strategies at once to address child marriage: 'You cannot tell me you are addressing child marriage when mothers and fathers can't provide for their families' (Juba, female, INGO).

Discussion

Our findings draw attention to the complex, interlocking drivers of child marriage in South Sudan. While there were mixed findings on the extent to which 'conflict' – in the sense of war – has been a cause of the practice of child marriage in South Sudan, we find that inter-clan violence continues to sustain child marriage. Our study also highlights the role of gender norms in driving child marriage in South Sudan. These include norms giving status to parents when a daughter marries, norms

relating to a girl's virginity at time of marriage, and norms that emphasise the value of child-bearing. Our findings demonstrate how bride price perpetuates child marriage, and show how bride price is linked to the gendered expectations of boys and men. Bride price is tied to economic insecurity both because families resort to marriage when bride price is needed as a solution in dire times, and because bride price reinforces the cycle of inter-clan conflict and insecurity by creating expectations on boys and men to acquire enough cattle to pay it. Our study thus demonstrates that child marriage drivers are context-specific and intersecting.

Our study deviates from other studies which focus on child marriage being linked to the economic and security pressures caused by war and displacement (Mazurana *et al.*, 2019; Mourtada *et al.*, 2017; Baines, 2014; Schlecht *et al.*, 2013) by presenting research demonstrating child marriage has been a long-standing practice pre-dating war. Although the conflict in South Sudan has officially ended, inter-clan fighting perpetuates child marriage in different ways than a large-scale conflict, blurring the lines between peace and war (Cockburn, 1998). An example of this is the long-term impact of the conflict on livelihood opportunities in South Sudan, and the subsequent poverty which reinforces practices such as cattle raiding for bride price. This enhances the understanding of how conflict-related cattle raiding is a localised driver of child marriage and emphasises the importance of analysing child marriage drivers broadly instead of narrowly.

We suggest that analysis of child marriage drivers often focuses on the gender norms resulting in girls being married off early, but less on the gender norms resulting in boys and men participating in child marriage – less on the 'demand' side. In our study, child marriage was also perpetuated by gender norms that pressure boys and men to earn enough money to pay the bride price. This pressure feeds into the practice of cattle raiding, which is itself shaped by norms on how males should use violence. Ethnographic research among some communities in South Sudan highlights that cattle-raiding is linked to needing to pay the bride price, linking violence and the aspiration among men to marry (Glowacki and Wrangham, 2015; Stern, 2011). Cattle raiding is a long-established gendered practice among many communities in South Sudan (Wild *et al.*, 2018; Holtzman, 2000; Jok and Hutchinson, 1999), tied to marriage as well as the abduction of women (Lacey, 2013). Bride price also acts as the impetus for young men to earn money (Stern, 2011). Cattle raiding became more politicised during the conflict, blurring lines between civilians and fighters (Wild *et al.*, 2018; Pendle, 2015). Our findings show that child marriage practices are linked to cattle raiding through the concept of bride price, underpinned by the

norm of girls marrying before adulthood. Existing literature documents that girls marry around the age of 15, that cattle form part of the bride price, and that boys and young men may raid cattle in order to pay that bride price (Glowacki and Wrangham, 2015; Lacey, 2013; Jok, 1999). Participants in our study discussed children and youth raiding cattle to pay bride price, and girls dropping out of school in order to be exchanged with cattle, suggesting synergies between child marriage, bride price and cattle raiding. More research is needed to better understand the interaction between these practices.

In our study, being unable to pay the bride price resulted in sanctions for boys/men: not being seen as a man – a continuation of historical positioning of marriage and bride wealth (Hutchinson, 1996). In this situation, stealing cattle may not just be a solution to the lack of bride price, but also, through the use of weapons and violence, a means of demonstrating masculinity and strength (Hudson and Matfess, 2017) including hegemonic masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Marriage itself may mean achievement of expectations associated with manhood (Clark *et al.*, 2006). The dynamic of militarised masculinities is particularly relevant for a context where men have been involved in fighting during the conflict, and helps to contextualise the practice of 'revenge killing' and 'revenge rape' in some locations. Rape, especially, may be viewed as a symbolic act against a particular group: an assertion of masculinity. The positioning of these gendered acts of violence within interconnected issues related to economic insecurity and political economy (Luedke and Logan, 2018) expands upon dominant conceptualisations of rape as a 'weapon of war' which tend to over-simplify the drivers of violence and emphasises the importance of holistic, context-specific analysis.

While existing analysis of child marriage interventions emphasise girl-focused interventions and the empowerment of women and girls (Chae and Ngo, 2017; Kalamar *et al.*, 2016; Lee-Rife *et al.*, 2012), some reports draw attention to the need to 'engage men and boys' in addressing child marriage (Greene *et al.*, 2015). However, this engagement typically takes the form of awareness-raising activities with men and boys so that they recognise the dangers of child marriage (Glinski *et al.*, 2018) and working with male community and religious leaders who are seen as gatekeepers of the community (Karam, 2015). In these reports, the need to make men and boys 'allies' in the fight against child marriage is emphasised. Less evident is the narrative that boys and men need to be engaged from the perspective of understanding the 'demand side' of child marriage (Greene *et al.*, 2015) to explore norms among men that make marriage important to them. Understanding the

dynamic between masculinities and marriage is needed in order to ground interventions in the 'demand' side of child marriage.

We suggest that this study challenges the sometimes-narrow depictions of child marriage drivers, which might only simplistically refer to 'culture', conflict or gender norms from the perspectives of expectations on girls. Our findings emphasise the importance of taking a holistic, multilayered and context-specific approach to understanding child marriage drivers. Our work is also unique in involving extensive fieldwork in the areas of Rumbek, Torit, Malualkon, Kapoeta and Bor. As such, our study contributes to debates on child marriage in humanitarian settings by contextualising the practice within the drivers affecting both girls and boys/men in South Sudan.

Conclusion

This study suggests that there is a need to expand how conflict, war and displacement are conceptualised as drivers of child marriage in South Sudan. It suggests child marriage drivers need to be analysed more broadly, taking into account intersecting and context-specific social conditions, history, norms and practices. Our study finds that in South Sudan, the lines between war and peace are blurred, such that localised inter-clan conflict may also perpetuate the practice of child marriage, alongside gender norms that were reinforced through conflict such as militarised masculinities, and finally through the lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities presented in the post-conflict era.

Our study also suggests the need to address the gender norms perpetuating child marriage not only from the perspective of expectations upon girls in South Sudan, but also in terms of the gender norms that boys and men face pressure to meet. In a context like South Sudan, marriage may not only be a symbol of womanhood, but may be an indicator of manhood because of its linkage to the payment of bride price. While the argument that boys and men face gender norms that pressure them to earn income as a means of providing for their families is not a new one, these norms have not been directly tackled in relation to the practice of child marriage, nor has dominant analysis gone beyond the narrative on engaging men and boys as gatekeepers and allies. Our study underscores the need for analysis of child marriage drivers to be conducted more holistically instead of solely being framed in terms of economics or conflict. Future humanitarian interventions in South Sudan would benefit from extending beyond merely engaging males to raise their awareness on the risks of child marriage, or to mobilise their leadership in the community so that girls are not married as children. Males should be

engaged to understand and address the 'demand side' of child marriage, in part by exploring the norm linking pressure to earn with being a man and with marriage, and the subsequent challenges to earning sustainable livelihoods in the current South Sudan context. This requires further research to understand linkages between masculinities and marriage, and masculinities and violence, which may also be relevant for other humanitarian settings. It may also mean addressing the root causes of economic insecurity, which is a larger challenge in conflict-affected South Sudan and contributes towards providing a nuanced picture of child marriage drivers.

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