



INFLUENCE OF NGO'S ON THE CONTROL OF EARLY MARRIAGE IN BORNO STATE (2018-2022)

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ABSTRACT: *Being a social problem, this research thus scoped its analysis on how Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been fighting early marriage in Borno State, Nigeria within the period 2018 to 2022. Child marriage is common in the region and is fueled by poverty, tradition and Boko Haram. These factors as well as the low implementation of protective laws are a violation of human rights and puts young girls at the mercy of gender-based violence, health risks and educational exclusion. This research uses an evaluation design in a case study of four NGOs to assess the interventions made. Results were obtained from structured questionnaires and interviews: gender equality promotion programs; school-based programs; community mobilisation programs; and media advocacy. Research findings establish that these multi-sectoral strategies have had direct positive impacts on awareness creation and early marriage, to a small degree. Despite these promising tools, cultural resistance, funding constraints and insecurity limit their efficiency. Specifically, the study finds that there is a dire need to increase the implementation of policies, involve traditional/religious leaders in programs, and revive antipoverty campaigns for education. Future research has to centre program evaluations for the long term and discuss displacement, for instance, as an intersectional concept. A closer look at these gaps will help stakeholders to develop better and more effective measures for ending early marriage in conflict-prone areas.*

KEYWORDS: NGOs, Early Marriage, Gender Equality, Borno State, Intervention Programs.



INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a social problem that is famous in almost all countries of the world and also in Nigeria involving persons below the age of 18 years. This situation in Borno State is exacerbated by Socio-political destabilization occasioned by insurgency, economic constraints and Social-cultural practices that support early marriage. This negative practice infringes on the human rights of girls; denying them education, exposing them to physical abuse, especially at home; and exposing them to severe health risks at this stage of pregnancy; such as VVF (WHO, 2020). The present study also reveals that early marriage remains a problem in Nigeria even though it is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Factors that have been noted in the formation of the problem comprise gender-based violence, poverty, and displacement due to crises (HN 119989). The authors of Save the Children (2018) argue that families in Borno State consider early marriage as an adaptation to economic stress, as a means of shielding daughters from social danger, and as a way of preserving family honour. These elements have been aggravated by the insurgency in the area through early marriage cases; Due to rising economic challenges, female-headed families in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps have been forced into early marriage because no acceptable alternatives exist (National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons [NAPTIP], 2010).

Borno State has embarked on multisectoral intervention programs to cut organizations such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) involvement in preventing early marriage, promoting girls' rights and stopping gender-based violence. Some of these are; community mobilization and education, school-based interventions, microfinance for women and media advocacy to change cultural practices (Gender Based Violence Sub Sector, 2017). However, challenges like cultural resistance, inadequate funding and the security concern challenge that have prevailed for a long time have hindered their efficiency. This study examines the influence of NGOs in combating early marriage in Borno State from 2018 to 2022. It evaluates the programs implemented, their impact, and the challenges faced, contributing to the understanding of effective strategies for addressing this pressing issue.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the types of programs implemented by NGOs to combat early marriage in Borno State.
2. To assess the prevalence and societal perceptions of early marriage and gender-based violence in the region.
3. To evaluate the influence of NGO programs on reducing early marriage in Borno State.
4. To identify the challenges faced by NGOs in implementing early marriage intervention programs.



Research Questions

1. What types of programs are NGOs implementing to combat early marriage in Borno State?
2. What is the prevalence of early marriage in Borno State, and how is it perceived by the local population?
3. How effective are the NGO programs in reducing early marriage in the region?
4. What are the major challenges NGOs face in implementing intervention programs against early marriage?

Significance of the Study

This study highlights the role of NGOs in addressing early marriage in conflict-affected Borno State. The findings will provide critical insights for policymakers and stakeholders, informing the design and implementation of more effective and sustainable interventions. By addressing a significant gap in the literature, the study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and child rights in Nigeria, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls (UNICEF, 2018).

Scope and Limitations

The study focuses on four NGOs operating in Borno State between 2018 and 2022. It evaluates the types of intervention programs they implemented, their impact, and the challenges they encountered. Limitations include restricted access to some areas due to insecurity and potential bias in self-reported data from respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Underpinning

International human rights reservation critically prohibits and condemns early marriage for children. Heralded by its ratification by many countries among which is Nigeria the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that marriage must not be forced but entered into willingly and willingly, and this cannot be possible where children are involved. Article 12 of the CRC also enshrines children's right to freedom of wishing to Partner/marry, and this aspect is most often denied to children in early marriages. In the same respect, the CEDAW also enshrines that culture and tradition that prejudice women and girls should be abolished. Article 16 of the convention addresses the question of protecting rights to marriage, especially of the girl child, this article specifically outlaws child marriage. These conventions exclude early marriage from the rights of human beings as enshrined in international law and promote children's rights by calling for education, gender equality, and the enactment of new laws. It has been further pointed out that education and gender equality are central instruments in the fight against early marriage. While education activates an empowering factor by providing girls with education and skills, education also brings about methods of changing early marriage by informing girls of education, enabling them to make changes to early marriages. The CRC in its Articles 28 and 29 recognizes education as a fundamental means for the development of children and as a



preparation for responsible citizenship in society. Early marriage for example is prevented by gender equality as espoused by the sustainable development goal number 5.

Empirical Review

It is in light of the aforementioned studies that this study confirms that cultural, economic as well as crisis-related factors characterize early marriage in Borno State. The research shows that poverty is a major factor that leads to this practice, parents force young girls into marriage to cut costs or get bridge wealth (UNICEF, 2017; Save the Children, 2018). In conflict-affected areas like Borno, the Boko Haram crisis has also contributed to early marriage by making families believe that early marriage will help protect female children from rape and/ or help them survive due to the Boko Haram-induced displacement and poverty. This is because the culture in Northern Nigeria also supports early marriage; virginity and a girl's worth are determined by people's perception of a mere marriage prospect. Further on philosophical support, religious and traditional beliefs also help cement this practice some denominations allowing marriage at puberty. For instance, Nnadi (2014) and Ladan (2015) case studies local beliefs that are associated with religious tenets, and efforts to eradicate early marriage.

Through the involvement of different strategies, NGOs have played a major role in combating early marriage. Programs include awareness, enabling, and mobilization. Some of the interventions by such institutions include the use of media to increase community awareness, workshops and participation to support girl child education and against traffic in persons (NAPTIP), Save the Children, and Alliances for Africa among others (UNICEF 2018, AfA 2020). Positive school-related practices like offering scholarships or designing safe seats for girls are meant to solve the problem of early dropping out of school which leads to early marriage.

Piloted and empirical assessments indicate that these interventions give modest outcomes. Promising methods of attitude change include dialogue-based community programs related to gender equality where youth appear to be the most receptive. However, they still have restricted access and cannot be sustained due to cultural practices that lack support from governments and are vulnerable to conflicts (Dhital, 2012; Onyido & Brambaifa, 2018).

Critical Analysis of the Literature

While the existing body of research provides a solid foundation for understanding early marriage in Borno State, several gaps and challenges remain. Most studies emphasize descriptive analyses of early marriage prevalence and its drivers, with fewer focusing on the efficacy and sustainability of specific NGO interventions. For instance, while NAPTIP's programs have been lauded for their multi-sectoral approach, there is limited empirical data on long-term impacts, particularly in conflict zones. Despite the existence of national laws like the **Child Rights Act (2003)**, enforcement remains inconsistent, especially in states with strong traditional or religious institutions. Few studies examine how government policies can complement or hinder NGO efforts. For example, Ladan (2015) highlights gaps in policy enforcement but does not explore synergies between policy and grassroots programs. While cultural and religious practices are often cited as barriers, less attention is given to the structural and systemic issues, such as weak governance, inadequate education infrastructure, and economic inequality, that sustain early marriage. Addressing these structural factors is critical for the long-term success of any intervention. Existing research often fails to address how factors like ethnicity, class, and displacement interact to influence early marriage. Girls from



poorer or internally displaced families, for example, face compounded vulnerabilities, a dynamic that requires more nuanced exploration. Long-term studies assessing the impact of interventions on early marriage rates and gender equality are scarce. Such data is essential to understand not just immediate outcomes but also the sustainability of programs and policy changes.

METHODOLOGY

An evaluative research design was adopted to assess the effectiveness of NGO interventions. The population included NGOs addressing early marriage in Borno State. Purposive sampling selected 80 respondents from four NGOs, with 20 participants from each. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics (using SPSS) and thematic analysis were employed for quantitative and qualitative data, respectively.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean score determination for the nature of programmes being implemented by the NGOs to address early marriage in Borno State

Items rating(X)	Frequency (f)	Sum of frequency	Mean
4	202	808	4.0
3	92	368	4.0
2	79	158	2.0
1	49	49	1.0
<u>Sum</u>	<u>442</u>	<u>1383</u>	
<u>Mean</u>		<u>3.13</u>	<u>3.13</u>

Source: researcher's computation

Mean score = FX/F

Thus $1383/442 = 3.13$

In addition, the mean score indicates that the multisectoral programme approach, comprehensive national action plans, gender equality promotion, school initiatives, community interventions, and media intervention programmes all work effectively to prevent early marriage. This is supported by the criterion mean value of 3.13, which is above the 2.5 criterion mean cut-off mark.



Table 2: Mean score distribution for the perception of residents on early marriage and gender-based violence in Borno State.

Items rating (x)	Frequency (f)	Sum of frequency	Mean
4	142	568	4.0
3	48	144	3.0
2	53	106	2.0
1	28	28	1.0
<u>Sum</u>	<u>271</u>	<u>846</u>	
<u>Mean</u>		<u>3.12</u>	<u>3.12</u>

Source: researcher's computation

Mean score = fx/f

Thus $846/271 = 3.12$

Regarding the mean score, the criterion mean value of 3.12, which is higher than the 2.5 criteria mean cut-off mark, indicates that the average Borno person views early marriage as simply a "custom," "tradition," or part of people's "culture." Early marriage is also viewed as a source of pride for many Borno indigenous people; most Borno parents view it as normal for their children, especially their daughters, to marry young, and many parents believe that this gives them the opportunity to see and care for their grandchildren while they are still quite young.

Table 3: Mean score distribution for the influence of the NGO programmes on the fight against early marriage.

Items rating	Frequency (f)	Sum of frequency	Mean
4	155	620	4.0
3	48	144	3.0
2	53	106	2.0
1	28	28	1.0
<u>Sum</u>	<u>284</u>	<u>898</u>	
<u>Mean</u>		<u>3.16</u>	<u>3.16</u>

Source: researcher's computation

Mean score = fx/x

Thus $846/271 = 3.16$

Additionally, the mean score indicates that the criterion mean value of 3.16, which is higher than the 2.5 criteria mean cut-off mark, indicates that more people accept that the work of NGOs has resulted in increased efforts to maintain sexual and reproductive health, ensuring that boys and girls learn about sex, reproduction, and the risks associated with it at an early age, ensuring that there is a decrease in the concerns that sex education will encourage early sexual relations and pregnancy, and increasing the number of campaigns that support the idea that education and learning are essential to girls' advancement, which has led to persuading parents to keep their daughters in school and guaranteeing that they receive basic education as a right; and



Table 4: Mean score distribution for the influence of the NGO programmes on the fight against early marriage.

Items rating (x)	Frequency (f)	Sum of frequency	Mean
4	85	340	4.0
3	84	252	3.0
2	57	114	2.0
1	50	50	1.0
Sum	276	756	
Mean		2.74	2.74

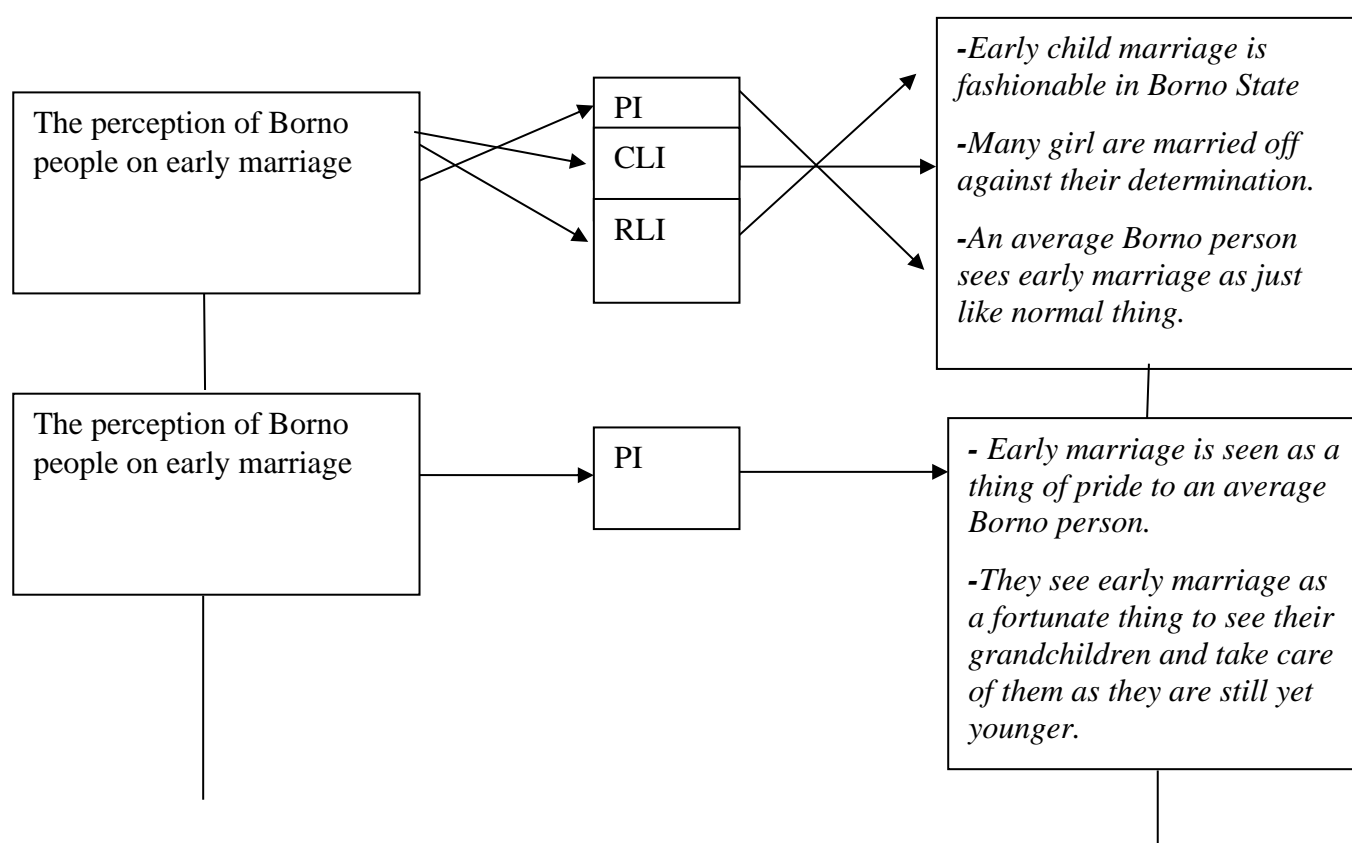
Source: researcher's computation

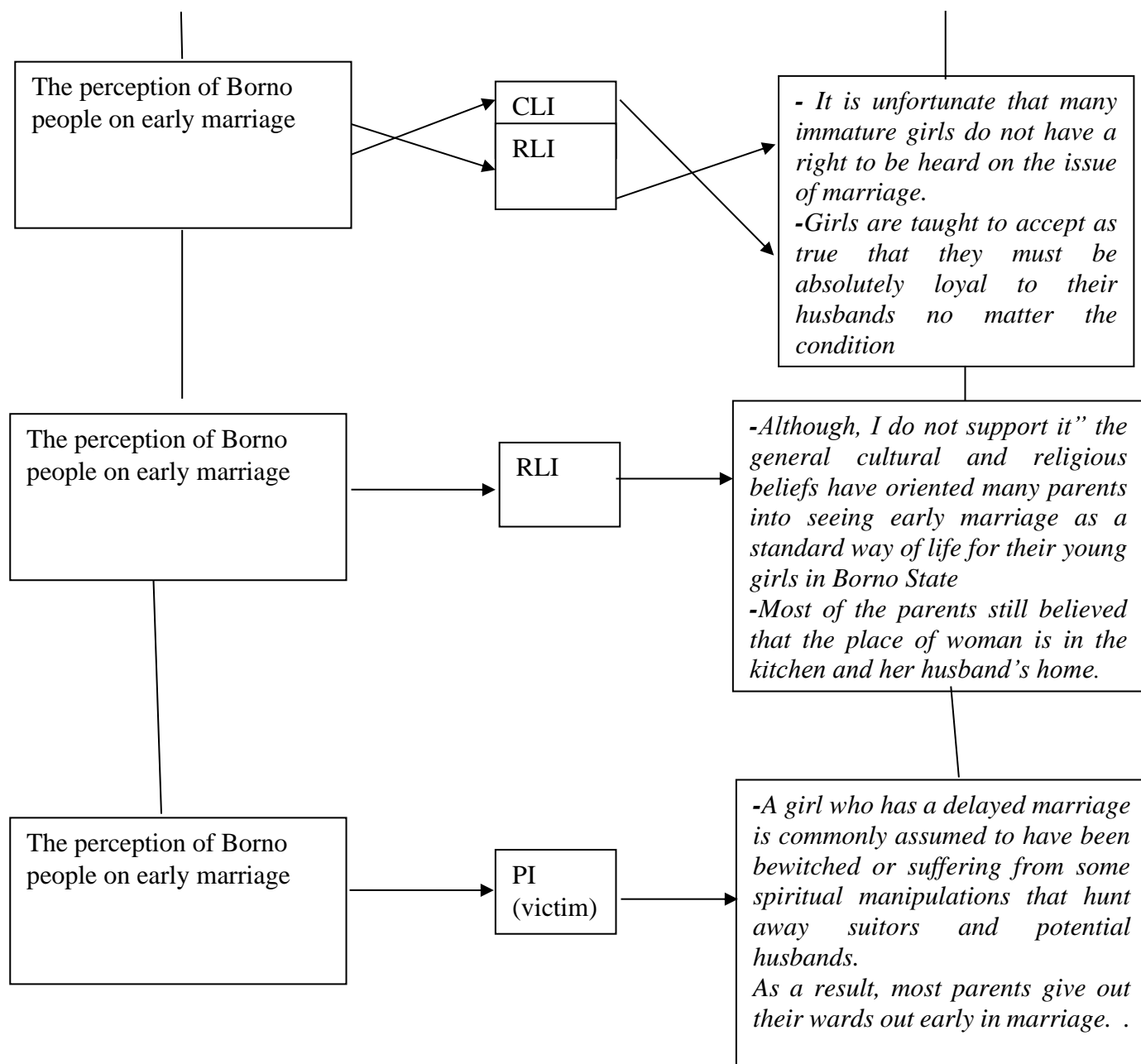
Mean score = $\frac{fx}{x}$

Thus $\frac{756}{274} = 2.74$

Additionally, the mean score indicates that the under-reporting of early marriage acts has encouraged certain cultural beliefs and practices that infringe on the rights of the girl child and, as a result, encourage abuse. The majority of people's lack of awareness is a major challenge faced by NGOs. Poor implementation of laws, such as the non-adoption of the Child Rights Act of 2003 (CRA) by all states in the federation, is hindering the fight against early marriage. The victim's dependence on their parents or guardians for the proper enforcement process makes it more difficult for them to pursue their case.

Flowchart for the interview of the perception of Borno people on early marriage





PI – Parent Interview

CLI- Community Leader Interview

RLI – Religious Leader Interview

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study on NGO interventions in combating early marriage in Borno State reveal significant insights into the prevalence of early marriage, the nature of interventions, and their impact. NGOs predominantly employ multi-sectoral approaches, integrating education, community engagement, and advocacy. Programs such as school-based initiatives and media interventions were identified as effective in reducing early marriage rates by promoting awareness and supporting girl-child education. Early marriage remains highly



prevalent in Borno State due to factors such as poverty, cultural norms, and the Boko Haram insurgency. The study identified that economic pressures and perceptions of security play crucial roles in perpetuating the practice. Despite structural and logistical challenges, NGO programs have had measurable success in raising awareness and reducing early marriage rates. The study reported positive shifts in community attitudes and increased participation of girls in education, particularly in communities actively engaged by NGOs. Major obstacles include cultural resistance, insufficient funding, insecurity, and weak policy enforcement. NGOs struggle to sustain long-term impact due to these barriers, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

1. **Policy Implications:** The findings underscore the urgent need for stronger governmental support and enforcement of child marriage laws, such as the Child Rights Act. Without consistent policy enforcement, NGO interventions risk being undermined by systemic gaps.
2. **Programmatic Implications:** The study highlights the importance of holistic and context-sensitive approaches. Future programs should integrate socio-economic support for families, targeting poverty as a root cause of early marriage. Additionally, sustained funding and resources for NGOs are critical for scaling successful interventions.
3. **Community-Level Implications:** The findings emphasize the need for greater community engagement to address cultural norms. Programs must focus on long-term behaviour change through education and dialogue, involving traditional and religious leaders to foster collective ownership of the issue.

COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The findings align with existing research on the drivers and impacts of early marriage in Northern Nigeria. The study corroborates findings from Nnadi (2014) and Ladan (2015), which highlight poverty, cultural norms, and insecurity as primary drivers of early marriage. Like these studies, it emphasizes the socio-economic and gender-based dimensions of the practice. While previous research often focused on the descriptive aspects of early marriage, this study adds depth by evaluating the impact of NGO interventions. It also identifies the need for integrating government policies with grassroots efforts, an area previously underexplored. Unlike some studies, such as Dhital (2012), which emphasized the success of media campaigns, this study found that media interventions, while useful, are less impactful in isolation. It suggests that multi-pronged approaches involving education and community engagement are more effective in the Borno context. The findings of this study reaffirm the complexity of combating early marriage in conflict-affected regions like Borno State. While NGO interventions are impactful, systemic barriers, particularly poverty and weak policy enforcement, remain significant challenges. Future efforts should focus on addressing these structural issues, fostering community ownership, and integrating government and NGO efforts.



to ensure sustained progress. This study contributes valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to combat early marriage and promote gender equality.

CONCLUSION

The literature on early marriage in Borno State underscores the complexity of the issue, driven by cultural, economic, and crisis-related factors. While NGOs play a vital role, their efforts are constrained by systemic barriers, cultural entrenchment, and limited support from government frameworks. Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impacts of NGO interventions, strengthening the integration of policies and grassroots efforts, and addressing structural inequalities alongside cultural norms. Only through a holistic and sustained approach can meaningful progress be achieved in combating early marriage in Borno State and similar contexts globally. NGOs have adopted a multisectoral approach to address early marriage, utilizing strategies like promoting gender equality, implementing school initiatives, community engagement, and media interventions. These programs aim to combat gender-based violence and early marriage while fostering awareness and education. Early marriage remains prevalent in Borno State, driven by socio-cultural norms, economic hardship, and the lingering effects of insurgency. Gender-based violence, including sexual, physical, and socio-economic abuse, is closely linked to early marriage in the region. While NGO programs have positively influenced awareness and reduced the occurrence of early marriages to some extent, systemic barriers such as poverty, deep-seated cultural practices, and limited government support hinder their full effectiveness. NGOs encounter significant obstacles, including inadequate funding, cultural resistance, and security issues due to the insurgency, which limit their operational capacity and impact.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY, OR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. **Practice:** NGOs need to strengthen community-based approaches by integrating traditional and religious leaders into their programs. Collaborative efforts with local stakeholders can enhance the acceptance and effectiveness of interventions. Additionally, increasing access to education and economic opportunities for girls is critical to breaking the cycle of early marriage.
2. **Policy:** The study underscores the importance of implementing and enforcing laws like the Child Rights Act (2003), which prohibits early marriage. Governments at both state and federal levels should harmonize conflicting legal frameworks and allocate resources to support grassroots interventions. Enhanced collaboration between NGOs and government bodies can ensure more comprehensive and sustained efforts to address early marriage.
3. **Future Research:** More longitudinal studies are needed to evaluate the long-term impact of NGO programs and to identify the most effective strategies. Research should also explore the intersectionality of factors such as displacement, poverty, and ethnicity in



perpetuating early marriage. Furthermore, studies focusing on the role of men and boys in combating early marriage could provide valuable insights for designing inclusive interventions.

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