Stories from within

A narrative study focusing on females' experiences, actions, choices and understandings of child marriage in Zimbabwe

By

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Abstract

The female child marriage research landscape in Zimbabwe concludes reasons, consequences and solutions as a means to bring awareness. However, there is an absence in the current literature of an individual perspective focusing on rural females experiences of child marriage and a theoretical contribution that highlights their actions, choices and understandings before, during and after the marriage in Manicaland. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how females in Manicaland experience child marriage. Furthermore, how their actions, choices and understandings can be understood via Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence. The methodology is a narrative-and fieldwork approach and the data was collected through eight semi-structured interviews and analyzed through a thematic- narrative analysis using the mentioned theories above. The findings indicate that females have limited knowledge on marriage and are limited in their choices and actions by gender structures. To escape negative events, they act via emotion-focused and problem-focused coping and follow gender norm and enter marriage. For many participants, marriage resulted in negative experiences but chose to stay due to recognition, dependence and fear. Others had positive experiences as they gained love and safety, which eased their ability to adapt and accept their lives as child brides. When gaining a higher sense of coherence, some changed their actions and chose to leave their marriages and others chose to stay due to motherhood and socioeconomic dependence. The majority of the participants no not advise girls to enter marriage in an early age.

Keywords: Child marriage, Zimbabwe, Gender, Social practice, Coping strategies, Sense of coherence

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List of abbreviations

HIV   Human Immunodeficiency Virus

STDs   Sexually Transmitted Diseases

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

UNICEF   United Nations International Children´s Emergency Fund

UN   United Nations

UNFPA   United Nations Fund for Population Activities

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

1. Introduction

Despite international and national agreements that work against child marriage (see Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948; Marriages bill 2017), 12 million girls, below the age of 18, enter marriage every year. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have the highest rates of child marriage in all regions (40 percent and 37 percent) and show more significant differences (50 percent or more) between girls who are from different social groups. Research shows that girls who live in the poorest households in rural areas, with limited education, are most likely to enter marriage at an early age (UNFPA 2012; UNICEF n.d.).

UNFPA defines child marriage when "one or both of the spouses are below the age of 18" (2012, p. 10), and is viewed as a violation against human rights because they tend to occur without a child´s consent or when the child is too young to make a rational choice (*ibid.*). In the context of child, marriage 82 percent of the children who enter tend to be girls whereas 18 percent are boys (UNICEF, 2013), therefore in this study I will focus on females, i.e., girls and women. There is well-documented research that highlights the negative consequences of child marriage for females such as (see Callaghan, Gambo & Fellin 2015; Petroni et al. 2017; Muchacha & Matsika 2017), socially isolation from families, drop out from school and be powerless to refuse sex and therefore vulnerable to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and other various forms of sexual transmission diseases (STDs). In addition, these females are seen to be suffering of sexual and domestic violence; physical damages from early childbirth and or die due to maternal mortality.

Child marriage is a complex issue and is seen as a consequence of interconnected factors, such as poverty and unequal gender norms. Poverty is one reason because there are underlying beliefs that parents marry their girls to secure their future (UNFPA 2012; Petroni et al. 2017). In other cases, mostly in Asian and African countries, a girl is viewed as a financial burden, and a solution is customary requirements such as "bride price," meaning a girls family is given payments in

terms of cattle or money when marrying of their daughter (Sibanda 2011). Social norms that tolerate inequality in gender roles and responsibility are also driving factors contributing to child marriage. In patriarchal societies, girls and women are exposed to cultural norms that assign them a "less" valued status compared to boys and men because of their gender. One example is the view on a girl's sexuality and that in some cultures, a girl's value shifts when she reaches puberty because her sexuality develops and marriage is then used to protect her against premarital sex (Krumer-Nevo 2005; UNFPA *ibid*.).

1.1. Child marriage in Zimbabwe

With a national rate of 31 percent early marriages (Plan International 2014), studies on child marriage in Zimbabwe have been conducted to understand why it occurs, what the consequences are and how to prevent it. Such studies have been conducted by amongst others; Sayi and Sibanda (2018); Sibanda (2011); Muchacha and Matsika (2017) and Demographic and Health Survey [DHS], (2015). The research concludes that child marriage is a consequence of poverty, religious- and cultural beliefs, gender inequality, limited knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and teenage pregnancy. Sibanda (*ibid*.) highlights the religious perspective and argues that Apostolic sects have a significant influence in Zimbabwe where prophets take advantage of their positions, and the Holy Spirit, to instill fear and control people, and to validate child marriage. A couple of arguments that are used, by prophets to validate child marriage, is that a girl is ready to get married when reaching her puberty because she is then seen as a woman and that a girl's virginity can cure a man who is HIV positive.

Another cause of child marriage in Zimbabwe is consent and casual relationships that result in teenage pregnancy. Due to this, girls decide to enter marriage because of socioeconomic dependence and social stigma. The previous reason is common in rural areas in Manicaland, the second biggest province in eastern Zimbabwe (Gregson et al. n.d.; Sayi & Sibanda 2018). Manicaland is ranked as the fifth-highest province of child marriage in the nation, with 30 percent, where

the majority of the population, 83 percent, lives in rural areas, and many girls enter marriage (CENSUS 2012; Sayi & Sibanda *ibid.*).

1.2 Research problem

There is well-documented research that highlights the issue of child marriage in Zimbabwe, but there is an absence of an individual perspective focusing on females experience, and actions, choices and understandings before, during and after the marriage in Manicaland. Similar studies have been conducted in Israel and Nigeria by, Segal- Engelchin, Huss and Massry (2015); Callaghan, Gambo and Fellin (2015) and Krumer- Nevo (2005), who focus on how females motivate, understand and experience child marriage using coping, interpretative phenomenological analysis and third world feminist approach including gender, culture, race and class. Callaghan, et al. (*ibid.*) highlight that females have limited understandings on marriage and felt poorly prepared to be a bride but that marriage is socially and culturally represented as the only option for a girl to develop to a mature woman. Segal- Engelchin et al. (*ibid.*) and Krumer- Nevo (*ibid.*), found similar patterns, i.e., females has limited options due to gender norms and mostly faces negative experiences, but argue that those females who enter marriage are not seen as passive victims; rather individuals who chose marriage as a self-initiated solution to solve family, financial and social problems in the context of their lives. In addition, the researchers also argue that giving a voice to females with experience of child marriage and highlight inner experiences, understandings and actions is important knowledge that should be elaborated within the child marriage research landscape.

Therefore, due to the limited research that lacks knowledge on experiences, and actions, choices and understandings before, during and after the marriage in Manicaland, this study aim to fill the research gap by analyzing females experiences, actions, choices and understandings applying Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence. Via this analysis it is conceivable to identify what limits and enables females actions in Zimbabwe, and to understand

how they reason and cope based on (un)available resources before, during and after the marriage. Hence, the case of child marriage in Zimbabwe gives an interesting point of departure to analyze females experiences, actions, choices and understandings with Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence to increase additional awareness.

1.3. Research purpose and Research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine how rural females experience child marriage in Manicaland by focusing in their narratives. Furthermore, the aim is to create a theoretical understanding of their experiences using Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence to highlight action, choices and understandings before, during and after the marriage. By conducting this study, the purpose is to increase awareness on theoretical knowledge that may be utilized practically for social workers to better understand child marriage in Zimbabwe that applies in Manicaland province. To achieve this purpose, the following research question has been formulated:

- What are rural females experiences of child marriage in Manicaland?
- How can their actions, choices and understandings be understood applying Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence?

1.4. Relevance for Global studies and Social work

Steger (2003 p. 13) define globalization as "a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant." Breaking down the definition, Steger (*ibid.*) argues that globalization entails multiple *social* processes actions and operations, meaning that social processes create and expand networks that overcome traditional, political, economic, cultural and geographical boundaries. Campbell et al. (2010) use the term "deterritorialization" to describe globalization as something with less of a

constraint on social interactions, for example that services, professions, and support are available for humans across the globe through different ways. Globalization can thus be understood as a process connecting people across the world on social, cultural and political levels.

Tryggred defines social work as a field that "promotes social change, problem-solving in human relations to gain empowerment and liberation with the purpose to promote human welfare […] human rights principles and social justice are essential values for social work" (2007 p. 20, own translation). Social work has for a long time had a traditional stance within authorities and welfare to support individuals, families and groups within states. However, Ife (2007; 2008) argues that the awareness on social issues also has a global dimension that requires social work interventions outside the traditional borders, "social work is moving to embrace internationalism at a time when the nature of 'the global' and the emphasis of international discourses are changing, and it is important for social work to engage with the new international discourses, while at the same time maintaining its unswerving commitment to the old and now somewhat unfashionable idea of social justice" (Ife, 2007). Hence, one might argue that there is an additional (global) dimension within social work that needs to be adapted and still maintain the purpose of empowerment and well-being for the individual.

To combine these interdisciplinary fields, Healy (2012 p. 12) defines international social work as a multidimensional concept that aims to "promote global social justice and human well-being and to ensure the ongoing relevance of locally based practice by calling attention to global realities that affect local conditions." Furthermore, international social work is a "further and action-oriented movement for global change" to promote social justice and empowerment of marginalized groups such as women and girls (Elliot 2012 p. 105; Healy 2012).

International social work is a relevant approach to target child marriage and global change as its values, e.g., social justice and human rights, have much in common with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example Goal 1: no poverty, Goal 3: good health and well-being and Goal 8: economic growth. One goal in particular, with more significance in this study, is Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, which includes "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage" (Girlsnotbrides n.d.; Sustainabledevelopment 2018). This study aims to highlight females experiences, actions, choices, understandings to early marriage and by identifying potential gaps, it is possible to assist social workers to create interventions for social justice and gender awareness that support gender equality (Desai & Solas 2012). Social workers contribute to conceptual and practical skills where conceptual skills include analysis of the context that further contributes to an insight into how structural issues affect the personal (Wilson 2012). Via this it is possible to create a theory of change (see Anderson 2004), i.e., use practical skills to identify and create strategies to address the issue, clarify the outcomes, evaluate and build community capacity. Hence, social workers are equipped and relevant to engage in global issues addressing child marriage, human rights and social justice (Wilson *ibid.*).

Research is an essential part of social work as it emphasizes a variety of methods, evaluations, collections of data about social problems and seeks to understand people's experiences from within. From a human right perspective, social workers need to address research that among other things involves voices of those who are not heard and experience structural disadvantage (Ife 2008). From a research point of view, this study will provide theoretical knowledge, which can be practically utilized by social workers and adds new research on child marriage in Zimbabwe that applies in Manicaland province.

1.6. Thesis disposition

This study is written in the following structure; **Chapter 1** includes the introduction, research problem and purpose and the relevance for global studies and social work. **Chapter 2** is a summary of previous literature on child marriage and ends with a summary of articles that conclude the significance of the topics for this study. **Chapter 3** describes the theoretical framework that is used in the analysis. **Chapter 4** describes the methodological approach that was used for the study. Thereafter, **Chapter 5** presents an analysis of the data containing the narratives and theories. Lastly, **Chapter 6** highlights the summary of the study, discussion of the findings in relation to previous research, relevance for social work, limitations and recommendations for further research.

2. Previous literature on child marriage

The presented previous literature was selected based on the relevance of context, target group, and methodological and theoretical approach that applies in this study. The literature was found via LUBsearch using the following keywords: "girls experiences of child marriage," "child marriage and social work," "early marriage, Africa, qualitative research" and "married women narrative."

2.1. Child marriage in the Middle East

In her research, social worker Krumer- Nevo (2005) conducted 13 qualitative life-story interviews with poor women living in Israel. The purpose of the study was to understand poor women's inner experience of early marriage. This study investigates the different layers from the stories, which resulted in the complex ways of understanding how women, who experienced early marriages, cope. Focusing on narratives with a critical- feminist approach, Krumer- Nevo (*ibid*.) present the result in three titles: The importance of marriage, Marriage as an arena for self-definition and Circumstances that led to marriage in women´s life stories, i.e. (1) family dictates, (2) lack of a place to live and (3) love.

The participants described marriage as "the beginning of life" or "destiny" (Krumer- Nevo *ibid*. p.62), and that a marriage would give them financial and physical security and careers, which were not available within their families. Furthermore, some described marriage as a critical event for their identifications and that marriage was a beginning of a process that led to clarification in terms of who they are, what is expected of them and what they can reject and accept. The reasons for entering early marriage were *family dictates*, *lack of a place to live* and *love*. Living in conservative families led to some of the women to enter marriage, while others grew up in institutions, away from their families, and decided to get married to avoid being alone. Thirdly, the free choice of a life partner was also a motivational reason for some to get married, even though it went against the family's wishes. They were happy over their choices and that they had a voice to say "no" to their families (*ibid*.).

Segal-Engelchin, et al. (2015) conducted a case study focusing on engaged and married Muslim women in Israel with experience of early marriage. The purpose was to investigate women's motivations, advantages and disadvantages with early marriages. Furthermore, "to contribute to a nuanced understanding of women's agency outside of Western, individualistic notions of agency premised solely on personal fulfillment and choice (*ibid*, *p.*729), by using a third world feminist approach including gender, culture, race and class. They used a mixed method approach combining ten semi-structured interviews and artwork (due to subject sensitivity) that was analyzed in three levels: by women´s explanations, by researchers of symbolic elements to psychological and social context literature and a thematic analysis between married and engaged women and girls.

Segal-Engelchin, et al. (2015) concludes that females action towards marriage was a strategy to find a solution to a problem in their social context. Among engaged women, marriage was an action to gain freedom of cultural constraints, solve attachment issues in the future and escape from poverty and violence. Married women had similar expectations on marriage, i.e., love, respect, freedom and hope, but faced negative consequences and experienced: happy marriage with a heavy price, unhappy married and divorced with children. One participant pointed out the hefty price of missing her education and financial security. Another participant thought a marriage would give her stability and freedom, but it gave her misery and limited decision-making, which made her unhappy. In addition, a divorced participant said that early marriages "kill both the young girl´s identity and youth" (Segal-Engelchin, *ibid.* p. 742).

2.2. Child marriage in Africa

Callaghan, et al. (2015) conducted six qualitative interviews in Nigeria with six women who were married between the age of 8 and 15. Their purpose was to explore how Nigerian women understood and experienced early marriage as a cultural and socially located practice by letting them define their experience of early marriage, the transition to marriage and the role as a wife and mother. The theoretical framework bases on an interpretative phenomenological analysis and

critical feminist theory, focusing on "how women make sense of their experience of early marriage, how they able to secure sense of agency in their experiences, and consequently how resistance to complex cultural practices is enabled and constrained in their accounts" (*ibid*. p. 510).

Callaghan, et al. (*ibid*.) present the findings in five themes: *I wash, I cook, I clean* i.e. how they understood marriage itself, *running away and growing up,* i.e. their developmental process, *being married: duties, limitations* the description of marriage as a constrained space, *becoming a mother,* i.e. importance of motherhood, and *let them grow* is the participants hopes for other young girls in similar situations. They conclude that the participants described themselves as poorly prepared for marriage, that is was a traumatic experience, but that marriage is the only appropriate way, according to the culture, for girls to "grow up" and develop to mature women and responsible mothers. In addition, as wives were they expected to do domestic labor, respect and obey their husbands and family-in-law. The analysis revealed a complex correlation to dominant ideas about femininity and gender, as the participants did not express patriarchal power somewhat stereotypical explanations of their role in the home, i.e., obey, domestic work, etc. which was connected to their identities.

Petroni, et al. (2017) conducted research in four African countries: Kenya, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia to explore reasons for child marriage, to identify similarities and differences, as well as understanding what actions that needs to be taken into consideration when preventing child marriage. They used a mixed-method approach combining surveys, group interviews and in-depth interviews with girls and parents. Findings in Uganda, Kenya and Zambia show that unequal gender norms and economic insecurity contributed to a cycle of unintended pregnancies, school dropouts and early marriages for girls living in rural areas due to stigma and limited parental and financial support (Petroni, et al. *ibid*.). In Uganda, it was more common to let boys attend school because many households still maintain a traditional feminine and masculine perspective in which girls should stay home and do domestic work. Alternatively, their study in Senegal

shows a decreased number of child marriages when education is provided for girls as it empowers them and there are the other options than early marriage. To prevent early marriages, one must overcome barriers to education, provide second chance opportunities for dropout girls for own provision, tackle unequal gender norms and raise more awareness on adolescence and sexual reproductive health and family planning.

Muchacha and Matsika (2017) highlight the Zimbabwean social service role in addressing child marriage and argue that there is a limitation in their "traditional" work in the Zimbabwean context. Therefore, their purpose is to argue for the relevance of developmental social work practice in addressing child marriage over "traditional" social work. Poverty, cultural and religious practices and gender inequality are the main reasons for child marriage and the authors argue that the current social work department structure is from the colonial regime and that the colonial welfare system does not match with the social issues that Zimbabwe face, such as child marriage. Instead, they argue for developmental social work that aims empower people to meet social needs and to develop social resources based on peoples participation and community support. With this approach it is possible for social workers to participate with all stakeholders such as children, parents, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), traditional leaders, etc., and reflect regarding causes and effects on child marriage and make collective change. Moreover, Muchacha and Matsika (*ibid.*) argue that there is a need to raise awareness targeting all people in communities through dialogue, active participation, critical reflection, parenting skill education, that address sexual reproductive health, gender inequality and harmful practices such as child marriage, which can be done via development social work.

2.3. Summary of articles
Previous research provides information of experiences, reasons, consequences and solutions for child marriage. Similar to this study, Krumer- Nevo (2005); Segal-Engelchin et al. (2015) and Callaghan, et al. (2015) focuses on an individual level

and women's experiences, using similar approaches, i.e., qualitative approach, gender perspective and coping. The two previous articles were conducted in Israel and the latter in Nigeria, which identifies the gap of a Zimbabwean context. From a national and regional perspective Petroni et al. (2017), focused on Sub-Saharan Africa and used a mixed method that entailed group- and individual interviews and surveys. The comprehensive approach focuses on several countries to highlight similar and different patterns that contributed to child marriage and then identify potential solutions, which made this research differ compared to the ones above. A similar pattern with Petroni et al. (*ibid.*), Callaghan et al. (*ibid.*) is the focus on countries in the African region that have higher rates of child marriage, which has higher relevance for this study. On the contrary, Callaghan et al. (*ibid.*) research differs in the sense of context and lack of proper theoretical perspective. From an organizational perspective, Muchacha and Matsika (2017) have a different approach compared to the other articles in terms of not only focusing only on child marriage, but on Zimbabwe, social work and child marriage. They argue for the importance of changing the current social work structure in Zimbabwe to address a significant social issue, i.e., child marriage, which is relevant because their study confirm the need of social workers to address this topic.

The strength in the articles, combined, is that they give a comprehensive perspective on child marriage on an individual-, group- and organizational level. They are suitable for this purpose in terms of the target group, method and theoretical approach and confirm how relevant social work is to address this topic. However, there is an absence of female´s voices in rural Zimbabwe, which confirms the relevance of this study. Conducting this study would result in expanding knowledge of child marriage for social workers in Manicaland, Zimbabwe.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework contains Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence, which was inspired by literature of current research on child marriage and the narratives. The theories aim to highlight the participant´s experiences, actions, choices, and understanding of their environment with a focus on gender structure.

3.1. Social practice theory

From the roots in the structuration theory (Giddens 1984), Reckwitz (2002) formulated social practice theory that aims to understand how social beings, with their motives and intentions, change the world they live in by highlighting their actions. The assumption is that human activity and social structure are intertwined as human practices are determined by social orders, which consists of routinization, i.e., routines of moving the body, understanding and wanting or avoiding things. Furthermore, "social order […] appear as embedded collective cognitive and symbolic structure, in a 'shared knowledge,' which enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world" (Reckwitz, *ibid*. p. 246).

The agent, i.e. personal, act consciously but at the same time unconsciously, as agents act with intentions but are not aware of the non-intended consequences of their actions, i.e. the reproduction of social structures. According to Reckwitz (2002 p. 255) it is only possible to break these structures via an "everyday crisis of routines", meaning when the agent is confronted in a "situation" where the practice for some reason does not fit within the social environment, because the "normal" unreflected practice is not an adequate fit anymore. Instead, the agent have to cope (*ibid*.; Shove 2001).

A central aspect in this theory is "practice" which Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) defines as a "routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". Schatzki (2001 p. 56)

identifies practice as "organized nexuses of activity", i.e. "a set of doing and saying that is organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules" (58). Shove (2012) presents Reckwitz´s (*ibid.*) definition in a conceptual framework (*see figure 1)* that contains three elements that create and shape social practice. Below is an explanation of all three elements.

1. Material

The first element, material is included in a practice as material can enable or limits bodily and mental activities, for example for cycling one need a bicycle (Shove 2002; Reckwitz 2002). In this component, Shove (*ibid.*) includes things, objects, tools and the human body itself and means that in order for an agent to carry out a practice it is necessary to use specific material (Reckwitz *ibid.*).

2. Competence

A social practice also contains specific forms of knowledge or competence, which involves having the skills required to perform. For example, to cycling one needs to know how to cycle (Shove 2002).

3. Meaning

Shove (2002), includes Reckwitz´s (2002) mental activities (*see below)*, emotional and motivational knowledge as the third element, meaning. The author uses the concept to represent the aspirations, ideas and symbolical significance of participation, and that each practice contains routine mode of intentionality i.e., wanting or avoid things (Reckwitz *ibid.*).
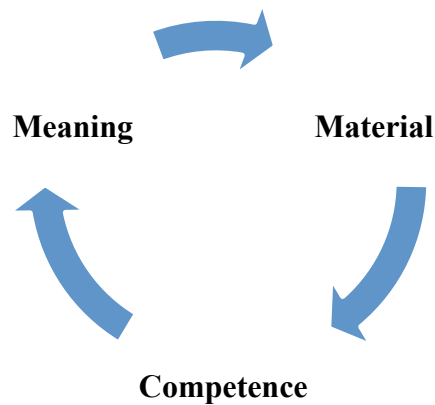
Figure 1: Conceptual framework for social practices by Shove (2012).

Like mentioned, the theory visions individuals as bodily and mental *agents* who "carry" and "carry out" a social practice. Bodily activities refer to "actions that people directly perform bodily" (Schatzki 2001 p. 56), but a social practice also consists a set of routinized mental activities, i.e., know-how knowledge, interpretation, and emotional feelings such as desiring, hoping, feeling, believing, expecting, that shows in the agent´s bodily behavior. Without the mentally and bodily components it is impossible for the agent to imagine a practice and act in a specific way (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2001). See chapter 3.4. and 3.6. for further motivation on how the theory is applied for this study.

Within this thesis, the terms actions and choices will be used in the analysis. This theory may be seen as a more realistic attempt to cover the whole range of conscious and unconscious and action instead of rational choice approaches, which take a point of departure that everybody has full information on everything when one starts acting.

3.2. Coping strategies

Lazarus and Folkman (1984 p. 141) define coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person". What one might experience as an external/internal demand is evaluated in the

cognitive appraisal, "the process of categorizing an encounter and its various facts, with respect to its significance for well-being" (*ibid.* p. 31). The cognitive appraisal process is divided into two appraisals: *primary appraisal* and *secondary appraisal*. Primary appraisal is the process of how significant an event is for a person; for example, stress involves feelings of fear, harm or loss and threat. The second appraisal is the evaluation processes that aim to find a response to the internal/external demand. This process takes into account which coping strategy that will be used to manage the stressful situation.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) divide coping strategies into two categories: *emotion-focused coping* aims to diminish the emotional components of a stress by maintain a sense of hope and optimism and to deny the worst. Conventional strategies in this meaning are avoidance, minimization, distance, seeking social support, positive comparison and gaining positive value from negative events (*ibid.*). *Problem-focused coping* aims to handle the cause of stress by taking control, defining the problem, i.e. seek information, analyze the advantages and disadvantages and act. There are two groups of problem-oriented strategies: those directed to the environment (strategies for environmental pressures, barriers, resources) and those directed to the self (motivational strategies that develop new standards of behavior and learning new skills and procedures) (*ibid.*). Emotion-focused- and problem-focused coping strategies can both facilitate the coping process but how people cope depends on the context, gender, age, self-esteem, resources and how one resonates, find meaning and understand the situation, i.e., their sense of coherence.

3.3. Sense of coherence

Sense of coherence is a theory developed by Antonovsky (2005), which was originally used within medical fields, measuring people´s sense of coherence and to identify the source of well-being. The theory base on the hypothesis that stress and difficulties are essential elements of human existence, but how a situation affects the individual and its well-being depended on the individual´s sense of coherence. The theory has three components: *comprehensibility, manageability*

and *meaningfulness* and are consociate but do not depend on each other. According to Antonovskys (*ibid*.), people with high sense of coherence will most likely handle the strain situation better and feel better compared with people who have lower sense of coherence.

Comprehensibility

The first components comprehensibility (I can) refers to whether or not inner and outer stimuli make sense in terms of being structured, coherent and clear. In this perspective, an individual with a high feeling of comprehensibility, will be able to handle stimuli because the stress will be predictable. If inner resources such as intelligence and knowledge would be inadequate, it is possible to gain comprehensibility from external resources such as family, friends or other people. Thus, people with a high feeling of comprehensibility feel and understand that they can handle the situation (Antonovsky, 2005).

Manageability

The second component manageability (I know) refers to the extent to which one feels resources are at one´s disposal to help meet the demands posed by the stimuli. These resources are under one´s control or by others such as family, friends, God, etc. someone that entails trust and positive believes. With high manageability it is less likely that one will feel like a victim during the circumstances or feel that life is unfair. Meaning that when a situation appears, the person will know how to handle it (Antonovsky, 2005).

Meaningfulness

The third component, meaningfulness (I will) refers to whether one can view difficulties as a "welcomed" challenge and worth to invest energy, commitment, and dedication rather than a burden than one would avoid. One central component in meaningfulness is motivation in which Antonovsky (2005) argue is the most important component because people with high meaningfulness see, or seek, the meaning with difficulties, which makes it easier to adapt and handle the situation

and feel better. Thus, a person will handle a stressful situation better when there is meaning and motivation (*ibid*.).

To summarize, Sense of coherence is defined as "a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable (comprehensibility); (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli (manageability); and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement (meaningfulness)" (Antonovsky 1987 p.19).

In this study, I will have a liberal approach on Antonovskys (*ibid*) theory and use it as a phenomenological framework instead of its medical purpose. The components will be applied according to the inductive approach and highlight high alternative low levels of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness to identify how they resonate and understand their situation and if these components might have an impact on their choices, actions and well-being.

3.4. Gender as social practice

For this study, *gender* is used as social practice and is defined according to Campbell et al. (2010 p.215) "socially learned behavior and expectations that distinguish between masculinity and femininity." Instead of viewing gender as a cause for people's actions, it is arguable from this perspective that gender practices *are* actions because the social structure establishes by gender (Swidler 2001). Furthermore, social identities that are defined by age and gender are associated with rules for human behavior, which also argue for the relevance of gender practice (West & Zimmerman 1987; Giddens 1984). Hence, gender practices include known and accepted forms of behavior, actions, and interests that are socially available to normative associations to one´s gender (West & Zimmerman *ibid*.).

3.5. Strengths and Limitations

The theoretical framework was inspired by selected literature that highlights females motives, actions, and understandings of early marriage and was selected based on the relevance for the purpose of this study. The choice of using Social practice theory with a focus on gender was inspired by Segal-Engelchin, et al. (2015) who used a third world feminist theory, including gender, culture, race and class, that shape up the understanding of Muslim women's choices in Israel to child marriage. It is understandable and relevant to have an intersectional approach since several factors contribute to marriage, which their study takes into consideration. However, the purpose of their feminist approach is also to challenge the Western view on third world women in Israel, which this study does not primarily aim and is therefore not used in this this study. On the contrary, their focus on gender is a relevant point of departure due to this target group and topic and to understand how females chose to act according to gender norms or expectations in a specific context. Thus, this study will use Social practice theory with a focus on gender. On the contrary, Social practice theory is limited on the notion of describing what happens when an individual face an "everyday crisis of routines" and cope. Krumer-Nevo (2005) use coping as a tool to present how females handle discriminatory social constrains by entering marriage and their inner experiences as limited brides. The researcher has a similar approach as Segal-Engelchin, et al. (*ibid.*) in terms of understanding how females act in relation to social limitations, but the description on coping is not enough to identify what *type* of coping mechanism females might use. Therefore, the theory on Coping strategies, by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), is a useful component as it focuses on emotion- and problem-focused aspects on what the participants would do in a stressful situation, outside the gender structures. On the contrary, this perspective is limited in the notion to elaborate of how one´s choices of actions, and experiences during and after, are affected by their way of resonating, find meaning and understand child marriage. Therefore is Sense of coherence a relevant addition, which was inspired by Callaghan et al. (2015) interpretive

phenomenological analysis that was used to identify how married girls make sense of their experience as brides.

These theories are relevant for the purpose of this study but are not without limitations. Firstly, using gender as social practice and emotion- and problem-focused coping strategies excludes other possible practices and coping strategies that can be utilized. On the contrary, gender perspective is seen to be a relevant perspective to rise according to previous literature and because girls are more affected by early marriages than boys. A gender perspective will contribute to a clearer understanding of how female norms have an impact on choices and actions in Manicaland. In addition, emotion and problem-focused coping are relevant because they provide two different alternatives that are broad enough to capture essential point in their narratives. Furthermore, measuring whether a participant has a high or low sense of coherence is difficult due to the research approach, but the theory base on the assumption that individuals aim for stability, and it is a relevant point of departure to include in the study as previous research show that marriage was believed to be a solution for their problems and among other bring stability.

3.6. Theoretical application on themes

The theories will facilitate the analysis but have different emphasis on the themes. The themes were created based on the theories and content of the narratives and will represent the different titles in the analysis. Firstly, *Living in chaos* refers to the adverse backgrounds these females lived in with struggles and limited resources. Here is Social practice theory and Coping strategies highlighted to their actions and choices when following feminine norms, alternatively breaking them. In addition *Calm in the chaos* refers to their pre-understandings of marriage and what they expected to gain if entering marriage. This theme is to be seen as a component to the previous theme as the expectations are also motivational reasons for entering marriage. Here are Sense of coherence and Coping strategies used to focus on their understandings, choices and actions and show how they via their

expectations compare their negative lives, i.e. chaos, with the positive, i.e. calm, and act towards marriage.

Thirdly, *Being married: no walk in the park* refers to the reality of marriage and the negative experience that the majority faced. Here are all theories highlighted that focuses on why and how the participants are forced to follow and act to new feminine rules as wives. Alternatively, how and why they act when there is a crisis in their new roles. *Being married: a walk in the park* focuses on the participants who had positive experiences and all theories are highlighted with a focus on motivational factors that indicate how the participants, quickly, chose to adapt to new rules when resources were available and expectations fit with the reality. Moreover, *Break free and go with the flow* refers to when the participants have gained experience, knowledge and support and result in their choice of leave or stay in the marriage. Coping strategies and Sense of coherence are applied to highlight when some are choosing to break free from the destructive marriage as a result of gained knowledge and new motivational reasons. Social practice theory is applied when some chose to stay in the marriage. Lastly, *Change the rules* is seen to tie the narratives as the participants have reflected and gained experience and give advice girls who are in similar situations. Here are Social practice theory and Sense of coherence used to show how they, via their narrative and additional knowledge, change the perspective on gender practices.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research paradigm

Child marriage is a complex phenomenon that needs to be understood via the individuals and how they are affected in relation to social, cultural, economic and political factors. Hence, the ontological stance of this study is based on social constructivism. From a social-constructed point of departure, social reality is based on multiple social constructed realities via human interaction and in their social context (Creswell 2014). In this study, 'gender' is highlighted as a theoretical point of departure and can be seen as an ontological stance in which the participants live and construct their reality based on socially constructed gender (feminine) rules, roles and expectations, in the Zimbabwean context.

The epistemology stance of this study is based on interpretivism, which implies that knowledge is contextual and produced by exploring the meaning and interpretation of human action (Porta & Keating 2008). Interpretation works in two ways; series of interpretations that people in the context give based on their position and the researchers interpretation of the individuals interpretation (Snape & Spencer 2003).

From an interpretivism stance, I base this study on phenomenological approach that aim to capture the participants meaning and *experiences* about their reality of child marriage in Zimbabwe as an attempt to understand the phenomenon from their perspective and answer the research purpose. This is, why qualitative data was gathered. 'Experience' is then a central and important concept because it is directed towards something (child marriage) and is viewed from the female's point of view, meaning that there are no "right" or "wrong" experiences. Instead they are subjective and true for the individual and are seen as ways for these females to conceive and interpret their life worlds, which becomes primary knowledge. In the latter form of interpretation, I aim to understand and interpret their experiences, actions, choices and understandings from a more distanced

form where I will apply a theoretical perspective and interpret their narratives through that lens. In this stage of interpretation, the participants 'experiences' will be presented in the analysis (*see chapter 5.3 and 5.4.)* as 'positive' and 'negative' as an attempt to distinguish and clarify how they interpret their realities as child brides. This will be in line with the inductive approach in this study (Bryman 2018). Females voices are necessary to be heard to identify how they experience child marriage and to understand what might that 'cause' these experiences, actions, choices and understandings. Only based on this knowledge practical implications for social workers can be developed (*see chapter 6.2 on Practical implications for social work)*.

4.2. Research approach

This study has a qualitative research approach due to the relevance for the purpose and research paradigm. Unlike quantitative research that emphasizes objective measurements and statistics or numerical analysis of data through surveys, qualitative research involves collecting data in the field where the aim is to explore and understand individuals or groups view on social issues via face-to-face interactions (Bryman 2018; Creswell 2014). I did a mixed method approach in this study combining fieldwork and narratives. The research questions are based on an individual approach that includes females voices and understandings, which makes both approaches relevant. Starting with fieldwork, Blommaert and Jie (2010) present fieldwork as an approach when the researcher climbs down to people's everyday reality and describe their understanding of the world. Doing fieldwork requires many reflections and preparations due to its complexity (*see chapter 4.8. and 4.9. on ethical considerations and personal reflections*). I was in Zimbabwe from September- December 2018, when I did my internship with a local NGO and took the opportunity to collect my material during the same period. It was fieldwork in terms of being in Zimbabwe and interview females in rural areas to understand how child marriage is understood and experienced from their perspectives. However, my purpose was not to study a group in a natural setting over an extended period, and I did not do any observations (Creswell

2014; Blommaert & Jie *ibid*.). Thus I argue for a narrative approach, "[…] a story-based account of happenings/events, but contained within it are other forms of communication which convey the social and cultural location of the teller" (Roscoe, Carson & Madoc-Jones 2011 p.50). The story points out to a particular situation and is reflexive about what happened, to whom and where it happened with a beginning, middle and end. This approach accounts for how participants make sense of events and actions in their lives as agents. The ambition is to understand the agent(s) experience(s) and how the agent(s) interprets them. Thereafter, to provide an analysis in which the researcher interprets the circumstances were the narratives were constructed (McAlpine 2016).

The advantage of a narrative approach is the focus on individual self-motivation, which is highly relevant for this study (McAlpine, 2016). However, there are also limitations using this approach. Firstly, using a narrative approach can give the reader the impression that the researcher tells a coherent story instead of a limited section of people's lives. It is therefore essential to clarify what is excluded and included in the narrative. Narratives also tend to focus on "close to home" interpretations of experiences, which misses broader structural influences (*ibid*.). To clarify, the narratives in this study will include the experiences of child marriage and other sections of their lives are excluded. Secondly, due to the purpose it is more relevant to view structures "close to home" and their surroundings, as the intention is to provide contextual information. I am aware that excluding other parts of their lives and broader structures are limitations.

4.3. Data collection method

The data in this study consists of primary data, which were collected through eight semi-structured interviews. Bryman (2018) argue that narrative and qualitative interviews differ in the sense of focus, i.e., narratives focus on stories and interviews on experiences. However, Karen et al. (2011) disagree and argues that narrative research have different stances, which amongst other things explores what the individual has experienced and what these experiences mean to

the individual. With other words, stories can include experiences, which makes narratives and qualitative interviews similar. Therefore, I am using interviews. Semi-structured interviews are good to use because; the researcher learns about the participants from their perspective, the data contain historical information, interviews are helpful when there is no possibility to do observations and the researcher can be prepared with questions and themes (Creswell 2014; O´Rilley 2009). Similarly, people react differently at interviews and some prefer structured while others prefer unstructured (O´Rilley *ibid*.) which was also a reason why I chose to have semi-structured interviews, as an attempt to create balance. The limitations with interviews are that the atmosphere might not be natural and it is a higher risk of bias (Creswell, *ibid*.). To decrease the unnatural setting, I conducted the interviews conducted where the participants felt most comfortable, in this case, their homes. I used a male and a female translator that spoke Shona (one of the native languages), depending on their availability. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Shona while two were in English in which I conducted the majority of the interviews myself and the translator assisted me when needed. The ones who participated in the interview were the translator, the participant and myself. The participants had the opportunity to choose if they wanted social support from families or friends during the interview or if they wanted to be alone, all chose to be alone. To decrease the risk of bias there is a self-reflection part (*see chapter 4.9.)* where I acknowledge my positions in this study through reflexivity.

4.4. Conceptualization and Operationalization

To ease the interviews for my participants and increase validity in this study, I conceptualized and operationalized my themes into questions (Eco 2015) (*see appendix 1)*. The first theme is *Type of marriage and motivations* that cover questions of what type of marriage it was and why people were forced or choose to enter marriage. Followed with *Expectations on marriage*, i.e., what they thought a marriage would bring them, what their previous understandings of marriage was and if they received any information on marriage before. Thereafter,

Reality of being a bride child, i.e. how the marriage is/was, how they compared their lived today and before they got married, how they express their roles as wife and mothers and what other people expect from them. Furthermore, *Break free* when and why they left the marriage, what they gained or lost and how they feel about that choice. *Go with the flow,* i.e. why they are still in the marriage, how it feels and what motivates them. Lastly, *Change the rules* bases on what they would advise other girls in similar situations with their knowledge on child marriage.

4.5. Selection of participants

I used a non-probability sample (Cresswell 2014) in order to find relevant participants for this study: rural female with experience of child marriage. Previous research (see UNFPA 2012; UNICEF n.d.) highlighted that girls who live in rural areas are most likely to enter marriage. Thus, I focused on females in rural areas and excluded females in urban areas. As mentioned, I was in Zimbabwe with a local NGO and conducted the interviews while I was there because I was involved with cases of child marriage and focused on this topic as my own project.

The local NGO helped me gather my participants through their contacts: social service, ministry of education and health and other local NGOs. I received contact information and called some participants who understood English and another colleague called the ones who only spoke in Shona. Some of the participants knew other females who would fit in for the study and that were also how I gained participants. However, this took more time than expected, which is why there are eight interviews. I gained my participants through a snowball sample, i.e. got participants through contacts (O´Rilley 2009). According to O´Rilley (*ibid.*) this approach is limited due to two reasons; the sample will become homogeny and it can become an ethical issue in relation to confidentiality. On the other hand, a homogenous group not a limitation rather an advantage because this study aim to focus on a homogenous group. The second part is further motivated in ethical considerations. Using this sample was necessary for me due to my position as a

foreigner with limited knowledge in Shona or the culture and I had access to resources that would be difficult for me to gain alone. The NGO helped me with transport, contacts and translators and worked as a good bridge to create trust and calm among the participants, which I believed was an advantage due to my position as an outsider.

The result ended in eight females from rural areas in Manicaland. The table below presents the participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Age when married	Biographical information
Grace	32	17	Has two children and is not married
Regina	31	17	Has two children and is not married
Vaida	26	17	Has two children and is not married
Primrose	36	15	Has three children and is still married
Rutendo	15	15	No children and is still married
Mary	35	16	Has four children and is still married
Nswea	18	17	Pregnant and is still married
Peace	18	17	Has one child and is still married

Table 1. Biographical sketch of participants.

4.6. Data analysis

The data is analyzed according to narrative and thematic analysis. The aim in narrative analysis is to highlight the context people are in when telling their stories, how people create meaning in their narratives and what affects it leads to. Furthermore, the narrative is presented in a chronological structure where the individual behind the story is highlighted (Bryman 2018; Cresswell 2014). Narratives can also be analyzed using traditional thematic analysis, i.e. find themes in the data (McAlpine 2016). Thus, the data analysis in this study is a mix of narrative- and thematic analysis where the participant's narratives are presented in a chronological structure but divided in themes to facilitate the analysis. Like mentioned in chapter 3.6. the analysis consist following themes; *Living in chaos, Clam in the chaos, Being married: no walk in the park, Being married: a walk in the park, Break free and go with the flow and Change the rules.*

4.7. Validity and Reliability

Trustworthiness and *authenticity* were proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as alternative criteria to validity and reliability and elaborated by Bryman (2018), which is further discussed below.

Trustworthiness includes four sub-criteria: *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *conformability.* In my attempt to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, I have taken these sub-criteria into account. Credibility is measured with the fact that my participants acknowledged my interpretation of their narratives as accurate. However, this was done right after the interviews, which can raise other limitations *(see chapter 4.8. on ethical considerations).* Due to my result, i.e. eight participants is the outcome of the study not generalizable, but this is not the purpose for this study. On the contrary, with a "thick descriptions" (Bryman 2018), i.e. a detailed description of the social context, it is possible for others to evaluate how much of the result that is transferable to another context. Furthermore, to ensure the dependability of the study there is a clear description of how the study was conducted. In addition, I can confirm that the study does not

contain personal values that might affect the outcome of the study (*ibid*.). On the other hand, my position might affect the outcome of the narratives, which is further discussed in chapter 4.9. On Personal reflections.

Researching with interviews that focus on historical information can also affect the trustworthiness in the study due to the risk of lopsidedness. The participants are in different stages in their lives and thus some might have present experiences compared to others who have older experiences, which can affect the memory of the past (Bryman, 2018).

Authenticity, like validity, aims to identify how well the data is measured and how well it represents the reality of the researched context. Authenticity also includes sub-criteria: *fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity* and *tactical authenticity* (Bryman 2018). The first criterion, fairness, is achieved in this study by having a method that allows my participants to express *their* experiences of child marriage. I would not argue that ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity are achieved in this study as my participant´s narratives are based on experiences and the data is not shared with the participants (*see chapter 4.8. on ethical considerations)* which limits the participant´s possibility to educative authenticity (*ibid*.). However, I believe that telling a story for another person, in this case me as an outsider, one can realize about other aspects was not noticeable before, which can contribute to ontological authenticity, i.e., make participants better understand their social setting. Also, due to my snowball sample and the fact that some participants knew other females with similar experiences it is possible to argue for some educative authenticity, i.e., make participants gain a better perspective of other people in similar situations (*ibid*.).

4.8. Ethical consideration

Research within social science is supposed to be conducted in such ways that the integrity of the participants and research is maintained. Among other things, the

researcher should be aware of the effects of his or her work (Guchteneire n.d.). Firstly, I did risk analysis since I am aware of the sensitivity of this topic and possible effects it can cause the participants, as early marriage might be a challenging experience. I also had to consider the resources that were not available such as psychosocial support. Thus, I got in contact with experienced parties and received contact information to participants who they knew were willing to share their experiences. It was also essential to present the purpose; the contents of the questions and the voluntary, anonymous and confidential values that the research bases on. Therefore, a consent form was presented and translated to Shona when contacting them and before the interview started (*see appendix 2*). The participant's names in this study are pseudonyms identities and the city where the study was conducted is not mentioned to protect their identities (Guchteneire n.d.).

Researching in rural areas is a limitation due to language barriers and limited resources that affect the participant's access to the material. I have not sent the data due to this issue; instead, I asked confirming questions, repeatedly, and summarize their narrative during and after the interviews to confirm that I understood their narrative right. I left my contact information to the NGO in case any of the participants want or need to reach me during and after the research activity, with the NGOs assistance, in which they are aware of (Guchteneire n.d.). Furthermore, sending the data and having a snowball sample can be problematic regarding anonymity because I cannot guarantee full anonymity since people might identify each other, which they also are aware of. According to my participants it is more important to be anonymous rather than getting the data because it was important that their narratives would be hidden from certain family members. Thus, I prioritize to protect their identities, as to code of conduct recommend (*ibid.*), instead of sending the material as I evaluated it to be a risk factor and the information would not be confidential.

Considering these ethical considerations, one might argue why I decided to focus on this topic and method. I argue that I pursued the code of conduct and that the research issue is based on scientific judgement that would benefit the participants because there is a need to listen to people that face social injustice (Guchteneire n.d.). Also, narratives are linked to power in the sense of controlling the language and discourse, which become meaningful and vital knowledge to social workers (Fook 2012). Conducting narrative research in social work provides an insight in the social structures, which lie behind individuals actions and understanding, which is necessary for the work to support people and decrease social injustice and benefit the participants, in this case females who experience child marriage (Roscoe et al. 2011; Guchteneire *ibid.*).

The researcher should also be familiar with host culture by researching on the country, culture and ethnic groups (Guchteneire n.d.). I decided to conduct the interviews between November and December because I needed contextual knowledge about child marriage in Zimbabwe due to its complexity and the Shona culture and language to greet my participants, and for practical planning such as transport and meetings and reflect about my own role in the setting. The latter is presented below.

4.9. Personal reflections

The researcher is a part of the interview and how the interview goes might depend on several factors (Blommaert & Jie 2010). In this section, I highlight the use of a (male) translator, recorder and my position, as a female researcher from West that may have had an impact on the interviews. Firstly, having a male, local, translator when researching on females experiences of child marriage can be a delicate situation since the participants share sensitive information in the presence of a Zimbabwean man. I chose to use a male translator, with my participant´s consent, because the only female translator was not always available and there was limited time to conduct the interviews. However, I identified that having a male translator was not the best option for this study because some participants did not want to answer all questions about their experiences as child brides. I also record my

interviews, which was necessary due to language barriers, to capture the narratives and be more present during the interviews, but this affected the "natural" setting and some became nervous when knowing that the narratives would be recorded. Hence, the interviews were not without any challenges and had therefore effects on the narratives.

Furthermore, Blommaert and Jie (2010) highlight the *observer´s effect* as a means for the researcher to reflect upon that he or she will not capture an event as if he or she would not be there. Instead, the researcher might affect the setting in terms of reactions, adjustments and adaption. I believe that there was an observer´s effect when I conducted the interviews, because I was an outsider, i.e. female researcher from West. It was challenging to create natural interviews because many of my participants had never been interviewed about their experiences in child marriage before by a Western researcher. Some interviews were easier and longer than expected while other was shorter and more structured. Furthermore, it is possible that they gave certain information because of my position as an outsider. Meaning that they gave information that they "thought" *I* wanted to hear instead of saying what *they* actually wanted to say.

My role in this study can also be discussed in relation to *reflexivity* (O´Rilley 2009). The purpose with reflexivity is to "think critically about the context and the acts of research and writing, and involves thinking about what we read [...] thinking about what we write and how; and acknowledging we are part of the world we study" (*ibid,* p. 189). Not only are there power dynamics on the field when an interview is conducted due to different positions, but also how the study is constructed. Being a researcher entails some privileges e.g. use of language, i.e. *how* and *what* I write and use of literature. Coming from an academic, social work, disciple might have effected the use of language and structure of arguments in this thesis.

According to code of conduct in research (Guchteneire n.d.), the research should be objective and without bias. However, the research is biased in terms of target group, which is motivated why, and literature. The use of literature has an impact on the study according to my interpretation, but I argue that they were the relevant and available literature on this topic. Hence, these ethical considerations, limitations and power dynamic are aspects that I have taken into consideration when writing the study.

5. Analysis

Like mentioned above, the analysis is structured according to following headlines and themes: *Living in chaos, Clam in the chaos, Being married: no walk in the park, Being married: a walk in the park, Break free and go with the flow* and *Change the rules.* The names are based on the content of the narratives and the theories that are applied.

5.1. Living in chaos

To understand the circumstances in which motivated the participants to act towards marriage, I asked how their lives were and what factors contributed to marriage. All participants described that they came from adverse backgrounds which affecting them and had an impact on their choice of marriage. For example, Grace said: *"[...] I lived my grandmother who abused me and didn't treat me good".* Vaida, Rutendo, Nswea and Peace described their marriages as an action of own choice while Grace, Regina, Primrose and Mary described it as forced by external factors:

"[...] I got pregnant... I felt forced to marry him because I didn't have any education, money or someone in my life that could help me. I was dependent on him... [...] His family and my grandparents didn't accept me because I got pregnant and was nothing" (Mary).

Initiating with gender as a social structure, it is possible to understand these females choice of marriage due to the fact of being a female. As an attempt to change their strain situations with limited options, they act according to what is socially acceptable for a girl without being aware of the consequences *(see next theme)*. Living in rural areas, with limited financial and social resources, they use their bodies and shared knowledge that a girl can get married because they, in this case, want to avoid something. One might argue that these females reproduce the structure of marriage because they are making choices based on accepted

feminine rules (Reckwitz 2002; Shove 2001). However, in Mary Grace and Nswea narratives it is possible to identify an "everyday crisis of routines" as they confronts in a situation where the normal behavior within the norms of being a girl does not fit to the environment:

"[...] I got pregnant. I forced myself on him and married him because I was afraid that my grandmother and uncles would know that I was pregnant before marriage... They would beat me and I didn't have any other options" (Grace).

"I lived with my grandmother... me and my boyfriend love each other and I got pregnant. I dropped out from school and was afraid to go back to my grandmother... So I chose marriage" (Nswea).

Becoming pregnant outside of marriage is seen as unaccepted, due to adultery, and creates fear of stigma and abuse, which results in them coping. One can identify external stress in their primary appraisal as Mary, Grace and Nsewa experience fear from their relatives due to breaking from the norms. However, it can also be seen as internal stress because they understand the consequence of breaking the routine, i.e., fornication, which creates stress and feelings of fear. As a response to this fear in the second appraisal, they act according to emotion-focused coping through avoidance (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), which is shown as they chose to avoid the cause of fear and enter marriage.

One can argue that Regina and Rutendo also experience an "everyday crisis of routines" (Reckwitz 2002) as they were abused and forced to child labor by relatives but eventually had enough and chose to change their situations. By not following what their relatives' want, they act via emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) as they also chose to escape from the cause of stress by entering marriage:

"My aunts were very abusive. They used to beat me every day. [...] I wanted to escape abuse so I got married... I felt that I was forced because of the abuse" (Regina).

"My grandmother forced me [...] to work on the field. She could wake me up in the middle of the night to work and then let me go to school on an empty stomach. She stopped paying school fees... I planned to run away but my boyfriend told me to marry him instead and we were in love so I did" (Rutendo).

Peace and Vaida were also orphans but entered marriage to gain financial security through roora (bride price). In Peace case, her pregnancy an additional reason compared to Vaida. Poverty can be connected to gender because these females do not have the same educational or work opportunities as males, which means that living in poverty, as a girl, is a limitation within the structure that restricts their choices and actions. In this case, poverty is an external factor that causes stress and affects them to act according to gender norms by entering marriage to gain roora. As female agents, they use their bodies and shared understand and act accordingly to gender norms in Zimbabwe, i.e. get married to gain roora, because roora is an appropriate solution to get out of poverty. In addition, by highlighting the routine mode of intentionality (Reckwitz 2002; Shove 2002), i.e. the meaning with their actions, it is arguable to identify relatives as important reason for their actions because they act with the desire to support them:

"[...] me and my grandmother lived poorly and I did not go to school because I was helping her...I had a boyfriend and got pregnant... I didn't want to financially pressure her so I decided to marry him to get roora that I thought could help her" (Peace).

"I did not go to school and I lived poorly with my sister and thought that she would be paid with roora if I would get married. At the time I thought that this was a good solution for our problems [...]" (Vaida).

Primrose was the only participant who lived with her parents and did not have any thoughts on marriage because she was a student; instead, she described her marriage as forced by her parents and religious beliefs. She described that it started with an illness (headache) and her parents were convinced that a prophet could cure her via spiritual connections. At first, Primrose challenged the power dynamics: *"I refused because I wanted to finish school,"* but living in an environment where being a girl equals limited voice and choice, Primrose was forced to enter marriage and did not refuse due to: *"fear of the older and unknown."* Similar to Peace and Vaida, Primrose options are limited due to power structures (Reckwitz, 2002) and were therefore pressured by people with influence, i.e. her parents and prophet, to enter marriage:

> *"My parents were members of the white garment apostolic sect. The prophet treated me and told my parents that I could stay so I would be cured…. […] my parents forced me to him and I was given to his brother and had to drop out from school"* (Primrose).

Living with limited resources and social support, Mary, Grace, Nswea, Regina, and Rutendo deviated from the social expectation of a girl and chose to act according to emotion-focused coping through avoidance, as an attempt to avoid the consequences and negative background. Lack of other options, they all entered marriage. Peace and Vaida acted according to feminine and cultural norms as it allowed them to enter marriage because it would help them and their relatives to gain financial security and avoid poverty. Furthermore, being limited by power dynamics, Primrose eventually stopped refusing due to fear and was forced by her parents and religious beliefs to enter marriage.

5.2. Calm in the chaos
In addition to the theme above, I asked the participants about their understanding on marriage- what they have been told about marriage and what they thought it would bring them. What was identified in the narratives was limited knowledge

but positive expectations of marriage. Primrose deviates in this theme because she never thought about marriage before it occurred and instead said: *"girls who go to school aren't to be given advice because they're not ready for marriage"*. For the others, living in difficult circumstances and believing that marriage would *"solve problems and give stability"*, as Mary and Vaida expressed it, also influenced them to act within this choice.

In this theme, the participants have higher comprehensibility, i.e., feelings of "I can", because their positive expectations are pre-understandings in which makes sense to aim for independence rather than staying in their current situations. Moreover, the feeling of " I can" effect their meaningfulness, i.e. "I will", as these understanding motivate them to act towards marriage (Antonovsky 2005). With a higher sense of coherence, they act according to problem-focused coping with the hope to leave the chaos and gain stability (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). One example is Regina who said: *"I expected stability, comfort and independence. I actually thought marriage would solve everything"*. All of the participants previously identified the stress, i.e. premarital pregnancy, abuse, child labor, poverty and being an orphan i.e. alone, and are here analyzing the advantages and disadvantages; stay where the stress is, or with these expectation, chose married and gain stability. Grace had a similar view as Regina and said: *"I believed that marriage would bring happiness, a life with no problems. I would be independent, free and make my own choices"*, which exemplifies the theoretical discussion.

Viewing the narratives from a structural point of view, the females act with intended interests without knowing the consequences, since they do not have a "realistic" understanding of marriage (Reckwitz 2002) and are therefore not prepared of what might come. This is seen via Peace who said: *"I was told from others that being married is good and I will live well… but they didn't really say what it actually means"*. Mary described marriage as a proper solution so she would not live alone, but she also did not understand what marriage entailed*: "I did not get any information and did not understand what marriage was."* These

understandings exemplifies the limitations some had as they chose marriage despite not knowing the reality of it.

In other narratives, Rutendo and Nswea had a different understanding of marriage; love. Both married their boyfriends to escape abuse and fear but also because they were in love:

"I did not think much about it [marriage], but I would get love [...] I would be happy with him because we love each other" (Rutendo).

"I wanted love and believed that a husband and wife love each other when they are married. [---] I did not know anything about marriage" (Nswea).

Similar to above, Rutendo and Nswea also act according to problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) as they before entered marriage, identified the cause of stress and reflect on the advantages, i.e., love and safety and disadvantages, i.e., fear and abuse. Compared to the other participants, they have a positive component that eases their choice to enter marriage. Viewing their narratives from Sense of coherence (Antonovsky 2005), it is arguably to say that they, in this stage, managed the stress due to higher meaningfulness, i.e., love, and manageability, i.e., social support. More specifically, they have supportive partners that produce positive feelings and stimulate the motivation of love, and thus they chose marriage, even though the knowledge about it is limited.

Hence, having a positive higher sense of coherence and pre-understanding of what marriage would bring, it is possible to identify the participant's choice to act via problem-focused coping and motivations to enter marriage.

5.3. Being married: no walk in the park

After capturing the motivational reasons and understanding of what a marriage would bring them, I asked the participants to describe and interpret their realities as child brides, and to compare their lives before and after marriage, and how their expectations suited with reality. The narratives resulted in two types of experiences: one negative, i.e. no walk in the park that highlights how they acted in living with abuse, duties, external expectations, limitations and one positive, i.e. a walk in the park that focuses how they adapt to their new roles based on love and safety. For Grace, Regina, Vaida, Primrose, Mary and Peace were there more challenges, difficulties and they expressed that early marriage was a disadvantage compared to their previous lives.

Initiating with gender structure (Reckwitz 2002), there are new rules that ascribe on these females as they are now wives. They are now expected, by their husbands and family-in-laws, to do domestic work, become a mother and obey. Grace describes her duties: *"Wash clothes, cook, work on the farm, bring children and take care of the family […]"*. These expectations did not differ for the other females, and another example is Mary who said*: "[…] being a wife means responsibility and duties… bear children and become a mother [---] everyone expects something from you"*. She acts according to these norms because she does not want to be replaced: *"[…] I don't like this but that's the culture and if I don't follow it, he will find someone else who is better and I will be alone with four children"*. Mary´s statement is a clear example of her identifying and following the wife norms, and how she expresses herself in this meaning can be a further example of her being limited within the structure, as she describes her role as something negative. Despite these unpleasant feelings, she adjusts to her new role and chose to act accordingly to the expectations to avoid being replaced and left as a single mother.

Mary expressed that the difficulties in her marriage were due to her husband's unemployment and his habit of having multiple partners and she was afraid of

getting HIV. Mary was the only participant who in this stage tried to leave her marriage but faced limitations and went back:

> "*I tried to leave but then I realized that I was pregnant and I had to go back… this happened three times. [...] I am not as free as before".*

Mary gained new knowledge from her marriage and tried to break the structure by leaving, but her unexpected pregnancies and socioeconomic dependence stopped her. One might argue that Mary is restrained from acting outside the wife norm due to economic dependence and therefore chose to go back to her husband (Reckwitz 2002).

Following the wife norms was challenging for Regina because she had fertility issues and after two years, her family-in-law interfered and blamed her for being a bad wife: *"They blamed me and wanted to bring him a new wife because I wasn't 'good enough'* […] *I wanted to be a good wife".* One might argue that there is a desire in Regina´s statement to be a "good" wife and follow the motherhood norm. She cannot carry out a mother practice according to the norms as she does "function" to what is required to become pregnant (Shove 2002). Despite being an issue out of her control, Regina faced negative consequences as her husband started to abuse her: *"[...] I was young and immature, my husband abused me because it was my fault".* Compared to her life before and previous expectations on marriage, Regina says*: "...there is no advantage with early marriage [...] I wanted stability but didn't get it".* An "everyday crisis of routines" can be identified in Regina's case where her fertility is an issue to practice as a wife according to the stereotypes of femininity. In this stage, Regina chose to stay despite accusations and abuse because she wants to be a good wife and she has social support from her husband´s uncle: *"there was this uncle who was on my side and said that we were married and I should stay".* Having social support and a desire to be a good wife can be components to Regina´s level of meaningfulness and manageability (Antonovsky 2005), as she seems to handle the accusations and

abuse with the support from the uncle. Regina motivates to stay, i.e. her desire to be a good wife, could be seen as an attempt to ease her position in the family and improve her self-esteem. From a coping strategy perspective (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), the feeling of not being a "good" wife, fertility, abuse and accusations, can be seen as factors that cause stress for Regina. However, with social support from the uncle and motivation to be a good wife, she acts via emotional-focused coping by minimize the stress and chose to stay.

Following the routine of expectations in terms of domestic work and duties was not the issue for Grace and Vaida. Instead, they faced negative experiences such as abuse, mistresses and fear due to power relations between them and their husbands, and in Vaidas case family-in-law:

"[...] he took all of our money and used them on prostitutes and alcohol. He physically abused me and his family wasn't good to me because I was a farmer so they never respected me. [...] I lived in fear of HIV and abuse [...]" (Vaida).

"My husband physically abused me every day and he had a habit of having multiple partners and I was afraid of getting HIV [...]. Every time I tried to raise some issues he abused me. After a while I stopped saying something because I was afraid [...]" (Grace).

One might interpret that their husband's take a patriarchal stance and they feel legitimized to control and abuse their wives due to power dynamics and gender differences. However from Vaida´s and Grace's perspective, these experiences can also be seen as an "everyday crisis of routines" (Reckwitz 2002) because living in domestic violence and fear is not what they expected. Both expresses that they got a *"reality check"* and claim that they wasted their time and wanted to leave but chose stayed due to dependence. Grace expresses: *I didn't have a job or education so I was dependent on him and I had to take care of my two children.* Vaida said: *"I was young and afraid but at the same time I had nothing to go back to if I*

would leave […] and now I have two kids to take care of". Both examples indicate that being in the marriage resulted in negative experiences in terms of fear and abuse, but also due to being a mother and raise children in a destructive environment. One can argue that these females cope (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) as a result of fear, abuse, not having an education or employment and responsibility of children interconnected.

First, viewing this from Sense of coherence (Antonovsky 2005) it is possible to say that Vaida and Grace have lower comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness because their narratives do not indicate signs of well-being and stability. Firstly, the expectations and the reality of marriage was not a fit, as abuse was not predicted, therefore low comprehensibility. Secondly, both are aware that they lack resources such as social support; education, employment and money, etc. that could help them leave the marriage, which indicates lower manageability. Lastly, due to the reasons for Vaida and Grace to enter marriage, it is arguably to say that abuse is viewed as a burden rather a "welcomed challenge," which shows low meaningfulness.

Therefore, with a low sense of coherence, Vaida and Grace act via emotional-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), by gaining positive value from negative events, i.e. gain socioeconomic security if they stay in the marriage. By doing this, they reproduce the unequal roles within the marriage and obey their husbands due to fear (Reckwitz 2002).

Primsore and Peace highlights the mistreatments they face(d) in their marriage due to their gender and position as young brides and claim that marriage limited them in their every day lives. The role of being a schoolchild and a wife differ according to Primrose in terms of freedom. She talked about how her ambitions, i.e. education, were stopped due to marriage: *"I was determined to become something but now I am a wife and mother of four […] I did not choose this for*

me". Instead, the new rules of being a wife resulted in isolation and discrimination:

> *I was 15 and my husband isolated me… I was not allowed to work, my family-in-law talked badly about me and I had no voice because I was a child […].*

Due to her early age and fear, Primrose followed the wife expectations (Reckwitz 2002) and did what she was told: *"I did what they wanted because some threated me and I was afraid"*. Primrose narrative is an example of her actions being limited due to the gender structure and expectations, as she is a wife who should obey. On the contrary, it is also possible to interpret the feeling of fear as a reason for coping. Low manageability is shown in the sense of no education, employment and social support from her family, and low meaningfulness because she experiences her marriage as a burden compared to her previous life as a schoolchild. In addition, not being prepared for marriage and new expectations indicates low comprehensibility, as marriage does not seem coherent. With a lower sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 2005) it is arguable that Primrose uses her body and act via emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) and minimizes her own desires and well-being to avoid threats that lead of fear. The outcome is that the reproduction of power dynamics and gender expectations that she follows to avoid threats.

Similar to Primrose, Peace was isolated and controlled after she entered marriage and described it as frustrating:

> *"I was isolated and couldn't do what I wanted. I needed my husband's and family-in-laws permission to visit my family. […] it made me frustrated".*

Further in the marriage, Peace experienced mistreatment due to her being viewed as a child with no education or employment, she said: *"they don't listen to…I am just a wife with duties"*. Peace described her marriage as a limitation in her life: *"I don't like being limited and not having a voice. […] I was not controlled like this before"*. Despite this, she follows the rules of femininity in which she argues is for respect and desire to be a good wife:

> *"My family-in-law expect me to respect them and that is what I do when I ask for permission… because then I will be a good daughter-in-law. If a girl shows respect it means that she has good manors."*

It is possible to indicate a shift in her social role, as Peace is now a wife who is expected to ask for permission to visit her family and do her duties. Like the other participants, Peace is not satisfied with her position in her marriage but follows the rules as a young bride, i.e. fulfill her duties and show respect, because she wants recognition from her family-in-law that she is a good wife, which cam be argued to an act according to Shove´s (2002) mode of intentionality.

Facing the reality of marriage was a negative experience for Grace, Regina, Vaida, Primrose, Mary and Peace because it did not fit with their expectations and had a negative impact on their well-being. Early marriage resulted in limited actions and new rules, e.g. becoming a mother, which did not work for Regina due to fertility issues. Marriage also meant power relations, abuse, fear, obedience and dependence and these narratives exemplifies some of the limitations choices these females face(d) within their marriages.

5.4. Being married: a walk in the park

In Nswea and Rutendo narratives were there positive experiences as both gained love and safety, something they did not have before. Rutendo and her husband face some difficulties due to his family because he is a stepson and is therefore not treated as an equal family member: *"Because of this they make our lives hard.*

They burned down our house once and stole our food [...] We're trying to find jobs somewhere else so we can move".

Despite this issue, Rutendo expresses that her relationship with her husband is good. Both Nswea and Rutendo are happy in their marriages as they got what they expected. Getting what they expected eased their choice to follow the new roles and rules of being a wife. According to them, marriage is not experienced as a burden rather positive in which they accept. Both expressed that they are accepting the rules in making their new families happy because it makes them happy:

"I wanted love and I got love and it makes me happy. I live with a good husband and family-in-law who treat me well [...] I do not mind the duties I have. I didn't understand them at first [cultural purposes] but I learned. I accept my role" (Nswea).

"Me and my husband are happy, we are in love and take care of each other… [...] I don't see any issues with the things I do [...] I accept them because I love him [...] "(Rutendo).

Compared to her life before marriage, Rutendo claims that her life is better now in terms of safety: *"I am safer now. I have love and don't have to go around hungry anymore"*. In her case is her family-in-law a cause of stress, but with the theoretical argument from *Calm in the chaos,* in relation to Sense of coherence (Antonovsky 2005), it is understandable that Rutendo has a higher sense of coherence due to love, safety and social support. She expressed that their issue can be solved when they move, which can be related to problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), as she shows indications for understanding the cause of the stress, how to handle it and have support doing it.

In Nsweas case, there was no expressed cause of stress in her marriage. Instead, she learned and adapted quickly to the new rules due to feelings of happiness. For

example, she did not understand the cultural meanings of all practices but managed to learn because of her mode of intentionality, i.e. her desire to make her husband and family-in-law happy because it makes her happy (Shove 2002).

Neither Rutendo nor Nswea understood the meaning of marriage before entering it, but with positive components did they manage to accept, adapt and learn to act as wives and it makes them and their new families happy. Rutendo said: *"I feel good as long as we´re together"*. Nswea closes the interview with: *"I am happy here"*. None of them had any thoughts on leaving the marriages but chose to stay. Nswea and her husband are expecting their first child and Rutendo is searching for a job.

The remaining parts of the analysis will not consist more of Nswea and Rutendo to avoid repetition. Their analysis shows their experiences and consist their actions, choices and understandings before and during the marriage.

5.5. Break free and go with the flow
In relation to their negative experiences, I asked Grace, Regina, Vaida, Primrose, Mary and Peace to explain what happened in their marriages that made them leave or stay. In this part of their narratives it is noticeable to view changes in their lives that resulted in new and or same mindsets and actions.

Living in their marriages for years and being limited to function as a happy wife and mother according to the stereotypical norms, Grace, Regina and Vaida experience an "everyday crisis of routines" (Reckwitz 2002) as they broke the position as a subordinated wife by leaving their marriages. Vaida left after seven years as the abuse escalated: *"[…] he was beaten me, no matter what I did. After I got more perspective I realized that this was not good for my children or me"*. Compared to Regina and Grace, Vaida claimed that her children motivated her decision: *"My children motivated me, their well-being and safety is important for*

me [...]". Grace and Regina also gained experience and information that helped them leave their abusive marriages:

> *"I was married for eight years and later in my marriage I joined a local NGO that empowered women through economic generating projects. I got more information about my rights and realized that a life in abuse is not a life and I had enough" (Grace).*

> *"I left after five years when my husband was too abusive and the accusations didn't stop. I got more perspective comparing my life and leaving the marriage was better for me, [...] my life is more stable now [...]" (Regina).*

One might argue that Grace and Vaida, in particular, have higher sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 2005) as they now have a new understanding they take into consideration when choosing how to leave. Regina´s choice seems to be influenced by higher meaningfulness as Regina prioritizes her well-being rather than accepting an abusive marriage. Vaida also show higher meaningfulness via her children's well-being. At the same time, her new understanding of her abusive marriage can be seen as indicators of higher comprehensibility, as she understands that the abuse and mistreatment is predictable and will not end if she stays.

Living with abuse was *"hurtful and difficult"* for Grace and after she joined the NGO, she received information about her rights and resources that helped her understand how destructive her marriage was and therefore chose to act differently. Thus, Grace´s sense of manageability increased (Antonovsky 2005). Having new information and resources to her disposal is also arguably for increased comprehensibility as she left the stress, i.e. the abusive marriage, knowing that she could due to social and financial support. The expression *"I had enough"* can be an indicator of meaningfulness, as Grace chose to priority herself and find motivation to break the destructive marriage and power dynamics.

In addition, Regina, Grace and Vaida uses problem-focused coping towards themselves as their experiences of child marriage resulted in new knowledge and resources in which they used to create new motivational strategies, i.e. themselves and their children. Having this additional knowledge enables them to adopt new skills outside of the stereotypical norms as a female in rural Zimbabwe, with a better outcome (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). This is seen via their statements about their choices of leaving: *"I feel happy and free",* said Grace, Regina expresses: *"my life is more stable"* and Vaida close with: *"I am happy and have peace in mind".*

On the contrary, leaving their marriage came with a price in which all faced different consequences. Vaida never received bride price and felt that she lost the thing she wished to gain for her sister before entering her marriage. Regina expressed the consequence of losing her virginity and Grace for her children:

> *"I lost…my virginity. People in my village call me an "old woman" [divorced person who has lost its virginity]. Its social stigma but still better than my marriage" (Regina).*

> *"I make my own soap today […] I moved back to my aunt, it is better there… but I don't live with my children because I can´t afford having them here […]" (Grace).*

Breaking out from gender norms can still result in consequences due to their social position as females, such as Regina. However, despite difficult choices, Regina, Grace and Vaidas actions and choices resulted in better well-being and stability and all claimed that their lives are better today comparing when living in the marriage.

Primrose and Mary also gained support via local NGOs. After three years in her marriage, Primrose joined an NGO that empowers women and she claim that it

eased her life and marriage: "*my husband got counseling in gender equality and allowed me to work and it feels good [...]*. Mary received similar support after nine years, as an NGO paid for her school fees and she finished her education and got employed in a school library. Getting support eased her situation in terms of acceptance: "*After this [education and employment] the community and his family accepted me because now I am 'something'*". On the contrary a job gave her more responsibility, which pressures her: "*the pressure is on me now because my husbands doesn't have a job*". The new rule gave her acceptance and recognition but more pressure to take care of her family. Furthermore, despite gaining external support, both still experience more disadvantages than advantages about their marriages. Primrose says: "*[...] there is nothing good with my marriage... I am only staying because of my children, they are my first priority*". Mary adds: "*I am not happy but I accept my life. I am doing this for my children, they will suffer if I leave and it is important that our family is together*". Primrose and Mary are still in their marriages and motivate that the choice is based due to their children.

From a feminine constructed point of view, it is arguably to claim that Mary´s and Primrose´s choices to stay are influenced by norms of motherhood and family structure, as they function according to stereotypical expectations, i.e. be a conjugal family (Reckwitz 2002). Despite gaining additional support, i.e., liberty and empowerment, they still stay. These choices could be interpreted as enabled or limited gender actions because additional support ease Mary and Primrose lives enough to stay and accept their position as wives and mothers, but in an unhappy marriage.

Peace motivational factor differs in the sense of being financially dependent on her husband*: "I never finished my education, I don't have a job and I have a baby... I'm dependent on him"*. Her motivation can be seen as a result of imitated choices within the rural wife structure. It appears as she categorizes herself in a position where being a mother and wife involves a mindset of "no other options" than staying in the marriage. Another example to argue for limitation is that her

feeling of unhappiness: " […] *this marriage does not make me happy […]"*, is not a valid reason for her to leave as she says: *"I don't feel like I can leave my marriage because I do not have a good reason […] I will just make it work"*. One might argue that Peace accepts her life as she uses her body with know-how knowledge to follow the gender norms between a husband and wife due to dependence (Shove 2002).

After years with abuse, mistreatment and challenges Grace, Regina, Vaida, Primrose, Mary and Peace gained experience, perspective, social and financial support that enabled them to take other actions compared to previous years. Gaining external and internal empowerment, perspective and motivation was necessary for Grace, Regina and Vaida to make the choice to leave their destructive marriage. Mary and Primrose also gained support that eases their lives to a certain extent. However, family structure appears to be more significant than their own well-being as they chose to stay due to their children. Lastly, despite gaining new understanding, Peace also chose to stay due to socioeconomic dependence. Grace, Regina and Vaida are happy with their decisions while Mary, Primrose and Peace still experience unhappy feelings but accept their lives.

5.6. Change the rules

Like mentioned in the theoretical framework, social practice theory aims to understand how social beings with their intentions, change the world they live in, via bodily and mentally actions. To end the interviews I asked the participants what advice they would give to other girls in similar situations based on their experiences. All participants expect Nswea and Rutendo, expressed the importance to wait with marriage due to maturity and had similar advice: be independent before getting married, more specifically; have an education and employment. They expressed that a girl who is older and independent will have a better position in the marriage and get respect since she will have a higher status.

From a feminine point of view, it is arguable to claim that some of the participants change the view on being a wife and mother and, mentally, experience an "everyday crisis of routines" compared to the beginning of their narratives (Reckwitz 2002; Shove 2002). For example, Vaida says: *"A young girl should priority herself first and not rush into marriage"*. Instead of accepting mistreatment and abuse due to power relations etc. the participants seem to change their mindsets about themselves as they and understand their positions better via their experiences, for example Grace says: *"I was immature and too young for marriage but I didn't understand it then [...] its better to wait"*. Other expressed other aspirations a girl should gain before entering marriage, which indicates a change in terms of how they reflect on the social norms of being a girl:

"There is no need to rush into marriage [...] girls will be more respected if they have a job and educations"(Regina).

"You will only be accepted and respected if you are "something"... like have an education and job" (Mary).

Primrose was forced to marry a man she did not choose or love and expressed therefore the need for girls to stay in school and allow them the opportunity to choose marriage when they are older. Primrose is active today to raise gender awareness and change the stereotypical image for girls: " *I am trained to give counseling so now I can empower girls... [...] I have experience which I hope can help other"*. This is example of how Primroses experience motivates her to help other girls and change the rules for girl.

Their advice and changed practices can be seen as the result of a higher sense of coherence (Antonovsky 2005) as their experiences have contributed to new knowledge that would help other girls make other choices. Comprehensibility is seen in their advice, as they highlight that girls *can* change their position in a marriage if they chose to marry when they are older and are independent.

Manageability is seen in the sense that they are mentors who can provide information and be an external resource, like Primrose. Lastly, having resources, knowledge and being independent can give other, positive, meaning in their choice for entering marriage:

> *"With job and education is there no reason for a girl to be married and dependent on a man in an early age" (Peace).*

Ending the analysis with peace´s statement, it is possible to identify that expanded knowledge; mindsets and practices can change gender rules, resulting in other choices that would enable girls in Manicaland to act differently than see marriage as the only option.

6. Concluding discussion

6.1. Summary

The current literature that focuses on girls experiences, actions, and understandings of child marriage, in Israel and Nigeria, are highlighting coping, interpretative phenomenological analysis and third world feminist approach. The research describes that girls have limited understandings on marriage but chose to enter marriage as a self-initiated solution to solve family, financial and social problems in the context of their lives, or because marriage is seen as a proper way for girls to develop to mature women. In the marriage, the majority of the girls faced negative experiences and did not recommend marriage as an option for other girls. However, there is a gap in current literature that show an absence on females experiences of child marriage and a theoretical understanding on their actions, choices and understandings before, during and after the marriage in Manicaland. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how rural females in Manicaland province experience child marriage. Furthermore, how their actions, choices and understandings could be understood using Social (gender) practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence. To address this topic, I created an analysis that contributes to an additional understanding of how and why the participants resonated like they did, before and during the marriage that resulted in an end, i.e., were new knowledge and resources led to some leave and other stays in their marriage.

In answering the first research question "How do rural females in Manicland experience child marriage?", I attempted to provide in-depth knowledge of child marriage by letting my participants tell their narratives containing motives and experiences in which resulted in two point of views- one negative and one positive. In answering the second research question "How can their actions, choices and understanding be understood applying Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence?", I found that females from rural areas tend to

come from challenging backgrounds with limited resources, have limited understandings on their choices before entering marriage and are mostly limited to act due to gender norms and power relations. I identified similar explanations of what existing research highlights concerning this issue, in particular, that marriage was a *choice* to escape adverse events such as poverty, stigma, and abuse or that these factors among other things *forced* girls to chose marriage. In addition, that marriage mostly results in negative consequences for girls such as school dropouts, social isolation, abuse, etc. From this point of view, the study confirms current knowledge within the research on child marriage.

However compared to previous literature, this study have different theoretical approach using emotions- and problem focused coping and gender as social practice and sense of coherence that gives an extra deeper focus on females ways of act, choice and resonate *before*, *during* and *after* the marriage.

Females from rural areas in Manicaland, with experience of child marriage, demonstrate two forms of actions and choices before entering marriage. In their attempt to try to solve their stressful situations some chose to act outside of the gender practice via emotions-focused coping in which they avoided the stress and entered marriage. Others took a perceived advantage of the female cultural practice, bride price, and chose to enter marriage to gain financial security, and another participant chose to accept marriage because of gender limitations and power structures. In addition, the majority of the participant's choices were also influenced by positive expectations on marriage, i.e. their pre-understanding, which was showed via their high sense of coherence. This pre-understanding enabled them to act differently using problem focused- coping as they compared their expectations to their negative backgrounds and evaluated that marriage is a perceived advantage that would result in stability, freedom, dependence and love.

Like previous literature indicates, many participants in this study had negative experiences in their marriage. However, this study highlight how and why these

females chose to stay and acted despite these negative experiences. They expressed that marriage was a negative experience because it resulted in social-isolation, abuse, limited-decision making etc., as a result of gender limitations, power relations and patriarchy. Some females stayed and adapted to the new roles in the marriage and followed the shared stereotypical identify of a wife due to dependence and desire to be recognized as a good wife. Other participants experienced issues with adapting to the expected roles in which they faced stress but chose to stay due to dependence, available social support and desire to be a good wife and acted via emotion-focused coping through minimization and gain positive value from negative events.

Interestingly, this study also identified a few participants who had positive experiences, which is missing in the current research in Zimbabwe. Their choices are understandable as their expectations suited with the reality and they gained love and safety. One participant faced some challenges but managed to handle the stress because her choice was influenced by a higher sense of coherence and problem-focused coping. These components made the stress clear in terms of 'it is manageable' with social support from her husband. The other participant chose to act according to the gender structure because her choice was motivated by giving and receiving love, in which eased ability adapt to her new role.

Towards the end, Sense of coherence was used to show how several participants gained experience that influenced their problem-focused coping as their children and their well-being motivated them to break the power dynamics and gender expectations as they left the marriage. Gender practice was highlighted to show how other females chose to stay in the destructive marriages because of family structures and dependence.

Lastly, Sense of coherence and gender practice was highlighted in the end, i.e. after marriage, that showed how their new understandings changed their attitude

towards girls potential choices to enter marriage and how they are breaking the shared knowledge on supporting female child marriage.

This study presents females experiences of child marriage and their actions, choices, and understandings as an attempt to provide in-depth knowledge. However, these findings highlight a usual sophisticated understanding concerning the relationship between experiences and choices and actions. This was not taken into consideration in the beginning of the study, but one might discuss whether the experiences they encounter resulted in actions and choices they made or if they made choices and acted according to their experiences. What shows, via this study, from the beginning to the end, is that some choices and actions are influenced by mainly negative experiences. Some used their experience in their problem-focused coping to decide to leave the marriage. However despite gaining experience i.e. knowledge, some participant choice to stay and one argue that their choice to stay result in the negative experiences. This will be further explained below.

6.2. Practical implications for social workers

The empirical findings have important implications for international social workers. Firstly, the outcome for the majority of the participants was negative experiences when having positive expectations, which could be due to a lack of proper information. It does not come out clear where or how all received these pre-understandings of marriage and my expectation, before the interviews, was that they would understand the meaning of marriage due to socially constructed gender norms, and thus have "realistic" expectations. However, this was not the case and one reason could be due to family disintegration, i.e. being an orphan, because having support and information could affect their actions and resonation differently. Furthermore, being an orphan in correlation to teenage pregnancy seems to be a new internal target group who enter marriage in Manicaland, which is not spotted in previous literature. Lacking a guardian and mentor that can provide vital information makes the social worker's profession more relevant and important as social workers are equipped to support vulnerable people and

provides counseling. Focusing on education and support may help orphans and pregnant girls to gain knowledge and stability to make other choices.

Secondly, referring back to the paragraph before practical implications, I need to clarify again that this thesis does not take a rational point of view when analyzing choices. Social practice theory takes a stance where agents conscious and unconscious actions are enabled and/or limited due to their gender, in which this thesis shows significant examples of limitations. For example, even though some became empowered via NGOs, they still chose to stay in an unhappy marriage due to their children compared to another participant who left her marriage due to the same reason. They have the same motivational factor but differ in their choices and actions, i.e. follow the norm and break it, and experiences (or outcome), i.e. good and bad well-being. Meaning that external resources that result in empowerment can ease lives, but not enough for some to leave an unhappy marriage because family structures are more important. I found their mother practice i.e. stay or leave for their children, engaging because my pre-understanding of empowerment and child marriage was that females would leave a bad marriage if they were empowered. Instead, the findings indicate the complexity of choices and actions and experiences as being a mother and living in an unhappy marriage result in limitations where females put their well-being aside for their children. This issue is not reflected in existing literature on child marriage, in which this study have identified a new gap where social workers need to support and possibly develop new projects for "empowered" wives who live in unhappy marriages.

Thirdly, This study also identified positive experiences of child marriage, which is new knowledge that raises ethical questions for how social workers and other relevant parties should taka a stance when addressing positive experiences of child marriage. For example, what should a social worker do or follow when the (illegal) marriage has a better impact on the child's life compared to her previous life?

Lastly, having a phenomenological approach and using the categorized term 'experience', facilitated the analysis and the understanding of why human rights are not defined for some females since it is clear to view structural disadvantage, i.e., lack of resources, information, voice and being abused, due to their gender and socioeconomic backgrounds (Ife, 2008). Hence, social workers as human rights workers are relevant and necessary to address these issues of social disadvantage to support girls and women in Manicaland.

6.3. Self-reflection, Limitations and Further research

I chose this topic due to my internship in Zimbabwe where I got involved with cases of child marriage and believed that this was a necessary experience and opportunity to bring additional knowledge on this topic. There was a perceived lack of perspective of the females themselves and limited theoretical contributions on actions, choices and understandings in Manicaland. My primary motivation was to listen to females and highlight their narratives but their actions and understandings had a bigger impact and the relevance for conducting academic research in which motivated me to conduct this study. Based on relevance for the purpose and previous literature, I thought that including the chosen theories would help bring this perspective in and focus on actions, choices and understandings in different parts of the marriage. In this stage, I argue that this is a relevant combination because the study fulfilled the purpose and contributed to new additional knowledge in the child marriage landscape, which fills the research gap that applies in Manicaland.

The findings resulted in these conclusions under specific circumstances, i.e. context, method and theoretical approach, and can differ when using other approaches. Several limitations and challenges have been mentioned throughout the thesis but there is a few that needs to be highlighted. Firstly in this stage, I argue that the study would have a different quality if there would be more time to understand the culture, language and get to know the participants. Instead, there

was not enough time to go as deep into their narratives as I expected in the beginning. With more time and another method approach like ethnography, i.e. observe the culture and meaning during a longer time, would it be possible to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, females actions and the *observer´s effect* might be less obvious.

Another limitation in this study was is the biased target group. Majority of the founded research highlights female child marriage but boys can also enter marriage, which makes further research with a male perspective necessary because there is a need to raise awareness on boys. From this study's point of departure, it would be interesting to investigate if these motivates are implacable for male and to increase awareness on boys who enter marriage. Therefore, with these limitations it is suggested that further research should consider more research on females and males experiences, actions, choices and understanding of child marriage in other regions and include other methodological and theoretical approaches.

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8. Appendix

8.1. Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduction

Name:

Age: current and when the marriage took place

Length of marriage:

Current relationship status:

Children:

Type of marriage and motivations

- How would you identify your marriage? (Forced or own choice)
- What was the reason(s) for you to get married? (Own choice)
- Why do you believe that you were forced?

Expectations on marriage

- How did you view marriage before you got married?
  - What did you think if would bring you? *(notice positive and negative factors)*
- If there was none, why?
- Did anyone provided you with information or guidance on marriage and expectations?
  - What?
  - Was it helpful or were there gaps?

Reality of being a bride child

- After you got married, did your views stay the same or change?
  - Why/ Why not?
- Has anything about your marriage had any impact on your life? *(notice positive and negative factors)*

- • What and why?
- How is life different for you now compared with before you got married?
- How would you describe your experience as a wife?
- What is expected of you, as a wife by your family, husband and family-in-law?
- How do you feel about these expectations?

Break free
- When did you decide to leave your marriage?
- What made you leave your marriage?
  - • What new resources or understandings did you gain?
- What did you gain or lose by this choice?
- What do you do today?
- Based on your experience and choice of leaving, how would you describe your well-being?

Go with the flow
- What motivate you to stay in this marriage?
- How do you feel about your marriage?
  - • What makes you feel like this?
- What do you gain by staying?
- What do you do today?
- Based on your experience and choice of staying, how would you describe your well-being?

Change the rules
- Based on your experience, how do you understand child marriage compared to before entering it?
- What advice would you give other girls who are in similar situations?

Appendix 2: Consent form

My name is Juliette Eissa and I am a Master student at Lund University. I am currently conducting research on females experience on child marriage in Manicaland. More specifically how females define the motivations, advantages and disadvantages with child marriage. I was informed by [names of authorities] that you might be a suitable participant for my study. In that case, would you be interested in participating in this study by allowing me have an interview with you that takes approximately 40 minutes. This interview is a voluntary, meaning that you are free to end the interview whenever.

The purpose of the study is to examine how child marriage is experiences and understood by women, who were married as children. Secondly, the aim is to create an alternative understanding of child marriage from a sociological perspective using Social practice theory, Coping strategies and Sense of coherence. This information and knowledge that may be utilized practically for social workers to better understand child marriage in Zimbabwe that applies in Manicaland province. Everything within the report, i.e. private purposes, names and findings, will be anonymous and the material is confidential, the narratives will only be used for the purpose of this study and I am open to share the result with you.

I consent according to the above

Signature:

_____

Clarification   of   name:

_____

Mail   address   and/or   phone   number:

_____

If the person is s minor, below 18, consent is needed from the responsible guardian.

I am the guardian for the minor named:

_____

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me [name] through [phone number] or [name of contact person from local NGO] [phone number].

Thank you!