

# Consequences of Early Marriage on Young Girl – A Systematic Review

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i10/18852> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i10/18852

*Published Date: 09-10-2023*

## Abstract

Early marriage has challenged child brides in various aspects. Over the past year, early marriage has been continually discussed among scholars and still gained the attention of non-governmental organisation (NGOs) to reduce the prevalence of early marriage to date. Guided by the PRISMA review method, a systematic review identified 22 related studies mainly from Scopus database, while Springer Link served as the backup database. Three main themes were identified mainly social issues, health and well-being, and life skills and relationships which then produces 18 subthemes. It should be noted that the need for the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) related to the consequences of early marriage allows the author to look for any patterns from previous studies and encourage a holistic view of understanding the reviewed subject by conducting a more in-depth qualitative study for future studies, which will result in fruitful comprehensions in combatting the consequences of early marriage on children. It is also suggested to include the child bride's interpersonal relationship domain to gain more perceptions on early marriage.

**Keywords:** Early marriage, Child brides, Systematic review, Consequences, Interpersonal relationships

## INTRODUCTION

Children is defined as any human being that is under the age of eighteen years old as per announced by the United Nation Convention on the Right of the Child (1989) which indicates that children below the age of eighteen years old are still under the care of their parents or guardian. As a child, they shall be given chances to enjoy all the rights that are available to them which include the right to obtain an education, to be protected from crime and torture, the right to have the access to basic needs and health care services, and the right to live their lives as children to grow and develop into adults. Apart from that, children shall too be provided opportunities to enjoy their childhood

and celebrate their moments while making the journey through adulthood. Along their way, they can learn, explore, and slowly develop themselves to have a better career in the future. But, nowadays, we witnessed the stories of children mainly the young girls marrying at such young age which is contrary to the ideal ideation of children are the future of our nations, where they are also the ones who will lead our tomorrow. The marriage at young ages among the children has portrayed such a loss of potential leaders for our nations. UNICEF (2019) defined early marriage as a union whether it is a formal or informal union in which both partners or only one of them is below the age of eighteen years old, UNICEF added that this form of marriage occurs before the girl is physically, psychologically, and physiologically prepared to fulfil the duties and responsibilities of marriage. This phenomenon has been argued globally and indicates whenever a child enters a marriage union, their right to their life is violated as they are being denied the opportunities to develop normally and naturally whereas they are instead forced to grow up to be an adult while their mental and physical capacities are still a child.

Globalization too has challenged the societal norms and values that most of the community holds, including the norm of marrying at an early age. UNICEF strongly opposed the concept of marrying at an early age as they believe that early marriage threatens children's lives and health. However, the tradition of marrying at an early age has already become part of the community sub-Saharan Africa was found to be the place with the highest rate of early marriage, among the population itself there is about 35 percent of the young women are married before they turn 18 years old, followed by South Asia where approximately 30 percent of young girls get married at the age below 18 years old (UNICEF, 2020). In sub-Saharan, early marriage is a way to reduce the cost of the child-rearing process as marrying off one of their children contributes to lessening one person to feed in the household. Therefore, the community perceived that early marriage is a way of helping the community to survive and benefits them. Notably, early marriage is common across the globe where there are approximately 21 percent of young women were married before they turn their 18th birthday which estimated around 12 million young girls are married each year (UNICEF, 2020). The UNICEF (2020) also revealed that the global rate of early marriage has declined from over 50% to around 30%, indicating that the situation may be preventable, however, the total number of young girls under the age of 18 years old married each year is remained likely to be around 12 million. Even though early marriage is prominent among young girls, it is undeniable that early marriage also occurs among the young boys where UNICEF (2020) reported that across the globe, 115 million boys were married and men experience marrying below the age of 18 years old.

Most organizations and particularly the Non-Government Organizations (NGO) put a huge effort into progressing to reduce the number of early marriages across the world by planning programs and promoting their policies in protecting children's lives. Children are frequently associated with obtaining an education, nevertheless, the NGOs believe that children not only have the right to learn but also beyond that, where they deserve to grow up in an inclusive and safe environment. Understandably, children who marry young, on the other hand, may not have the opportunity to thrive and live beyond the ideal environment as per announced by the UNICEF and they may also face psychological challenges as a result of their early marriage.

Early marriage has continually been discussed among scholars and still gained the attention from the NGOs worldwide in ending the early marriage. For instance, (Efevbera & Farmer, 2021) and (Paul et al., 2019) focus their study on the health and wellbeing of a child bride. This paper is proposed to comprehensively review the consequences of early marriage on children, and it should be noted that the need for the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) related to the consequences of early marriage allows the author to look for any patterns from previous studies and encourage a holistic view of understanding on the reviewed subject, which will result in fruitful comprehensions in combatting the consequences of early marriage on children. This paper is also based on integrative review analysis, with the combination of data from the mixed methods, quantitative, and qualitative research design to understand the consequences of early marriage. Even though there is considerable literature on early marriage existing at the present, the attempt to systematically analyse research on the issues of early marriage through a proper procedure such as identification, screening, and eligibility remained restricted and may have not been thoroughly addressed. According to Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shaffril, Samsul Farid Samsuddin, and Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah (2020), the authors utilizing literature review will go through the process of analyzing, interpreting, and finally critically evaluating the existing body of the knowledge. By doing so, the systematic process allows the authors to discover some patterns, and eventually explored the gaps to allow expanding the study in the future. Therefore, by utilizing the process of systematic review, the current study may show the possible outcomes of themes concerning the consequences on the subject reviewed. The traditional narrative literature review is still valid nowadays, however, there might be several issues regarding predilection, and the authenticity of the articles chosen might be solely based on the authors' preference for their research (Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shaffril, Samsul Farid Samsuddin & Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, 2020). Unlike the SLR which places a strong emphasis on controlling the quality in reviewing the articles to ensure the robustness of the evidence through its systematic processes. Interestingly, by referring to this study, the relevant stakeholders such as the policymakers, medical social workers, NGOs, and human right activist can plan an effective intervention to address the consequences of early marriage for the children.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The review protocol by using PRISMA**

A systematic review paper on the consequences of early marriage was performed to identify how thus early marriage will affect the lives of the children and their consequences throughout their early marriage. This systematic review was carried out by following the checklist of The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Liberati et al., 2009). The purpose of using the PRISMA is to reduce biases while in the process of reviewing the articles and to provide transparency in conducting this review paper. Through this systematic process, current study able to formulate a systematic research question and in determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the literature included.

### **Formulation of Research Questions**

In the initial phase of this study, the author needs to develop an appropriate research question to guide the methodology of the current study. To begin with the process, the author develops the research questions of the current study based on the

ideas from the previous literature. The author's main objective is to systematically review the previous study that is related to early marriage and its consequences toward the children. Therefore, the following is the selected research question for this study – What are the consequences of early marriage toward on a young girl?

### **Systematic Searching Strategy**

There were four systematic processes to allow the authors to comprehensively retrieved the qualified articles which are identification, screening, eligibility, and quality appraisal as illustrated in Figure 1.

#### **Identification**

There were two identified keywords on the formulated research questions: early marriage and consequences. To expand the keywords, the author looked up the related phrases, synonyms, and variations for these keywords by referring to the keywords of the previous studies, using the online thesaurus, and by referring to the word frequency that the Nvivo Software suggested. Several possible related terms were identified based on this process, including child marriage, underage marriage, early union, child bride, results, effects, and influences. These keywords were processed using search functions such as Boolean operators as shown in table 1. The searching process was continued based on manual searching techniques, and the articles were handpicked in the databases like Springer Link. This process yielded a result of 1406 documents. A total of 996 documents were excluded after specifying the keywords based on the research question and remain with 410 documents to be appraised in the following stages.

<b>Databases</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("early marriage" OR "child marriage" OR "juvenile marriage" OR "adolescent marriage" OR "youth marriage" OR "underage marriage" OR "early union") AND ("adolescent*" OR "teenager*" OR "youth*") AND ("consequence*" OR "effect*" OR "impact*" OR "influence*") AND ("growth" OR "development*" OR "wellbeing" or "welfare"))
Springer Link	(("early marriage" OR "child marriage" OR "juvenile marriage" OR "adolescent marriage" OR "youth marriage") AND (adolescents OR teenagers OR youth) AND (consequences OR effects OR impacts))

Table 1: The Search String Used in this Systematic Review.

#### **Screening**

The following process is the screening process. The sheer number of published articles makes it nearly impossible for the author to review them all. As a result, the author had to use certain criteria to select which articles to include and which to exclude. Table 2 below shows the criteria selected for this process which are the period of the article published, the type of the literature, and the languages used in the literature. The inclusion criteria for the current study were the selected articles must be

within a period of 5 years; articles published between 2018 to 2022, five years period, are considered valid to be appraised in the systematic literature. However, the articles from 2022 might not be included at all, as the current study was carried out in February 2022. The second criteria are the type of document that will be selected to include in the current study. This study only included article journals, while chapters in books, books, article reviews, and proceedings papers were excluded. Lastly, as the authors are mainly understood in English, all the non-English documents were excluded from this study to avoid difficulties in translating the documents and potential confusion. After the screening process was done, 209 documents were to be considered and resulting in a total of 201 documents removed from the study.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Timeline</b>	Between 2018 and 2022	Published before 2018
<b>Document Type</b>	Journal article (research paper)	Review article, book and book chapters, conference paper.
<b>Language</b>	English	Non-English

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study.

### **Eligibility**

The third process was the eligibility, where authors manually excluded the remaining documents that did not match the inclusion criteria. Before the process begins, the authors ensure all the documents were not duplicated by tracing the documents one by one. Next, the authors then read all the title and the document's abstract to ensure the document focuses on the consequences of early marriage and not the causes of early marriage, focusing on the children as the main subjects rather than the stakeholders, and the methodology section was clearly defined and explained. Therefore, the final number of articles for the next stage to appraise the quality of the documents was 81 documents.

### **Quality Appraisal**

The remaining documents are then evaluated, reviewed, and analysed through the fourth process, which is the quality appraisal process. The documents were reviewed by two reviewers to determine the quality of the documents based on the clarity of the research proposed, the sampling method and its relevance in data collection, and how the data is analysed. The authors determined the quality of the selected documents based on the Mixed-Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) by Hong et al. (2018). Each document was reviewed thoroughly, and attention was given to the methodology section and how the analysis was performed. By doing so, the MMAT helped the authors to assess the quality of the documents based on the five criteria, for example, the rationale for using the research design to address the research questions, the adequacy of the research design to address the research question, and whether the sampling appropriate to represent the target population to address the research question. The authors need to choose three options to assess the documents; yes, no, or cannot tell, for each of the criteria. According to Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shafril, Samsul Farid Samsuddin, and Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah (2020), any documents that fulfilled at least four criteria were categorized as high-level quality, while documents that fulfilled at least three criteria were categorized as moderate-level quality and those documents

that merely fulfilled two criteria were belong to the low-level quality. Hence, the authors only included documents that belonged to the high-level and moderate-level quality, and the final selected documents were 22 documents.

### **Constant Comparative Technique**

The constant comparative technique is a systematic method to analyse data to develop the themes of the systematic review. Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed the technique to help the authors to sort and classify the data into codes and grouped the data based on their attributes, these attributes were then organized into a category and the categories were then combined in a structured way to develop the themes of the data collected. The final selection of the documents was then analysed further based on the technique and resulted in three themes and 18 subthemes.

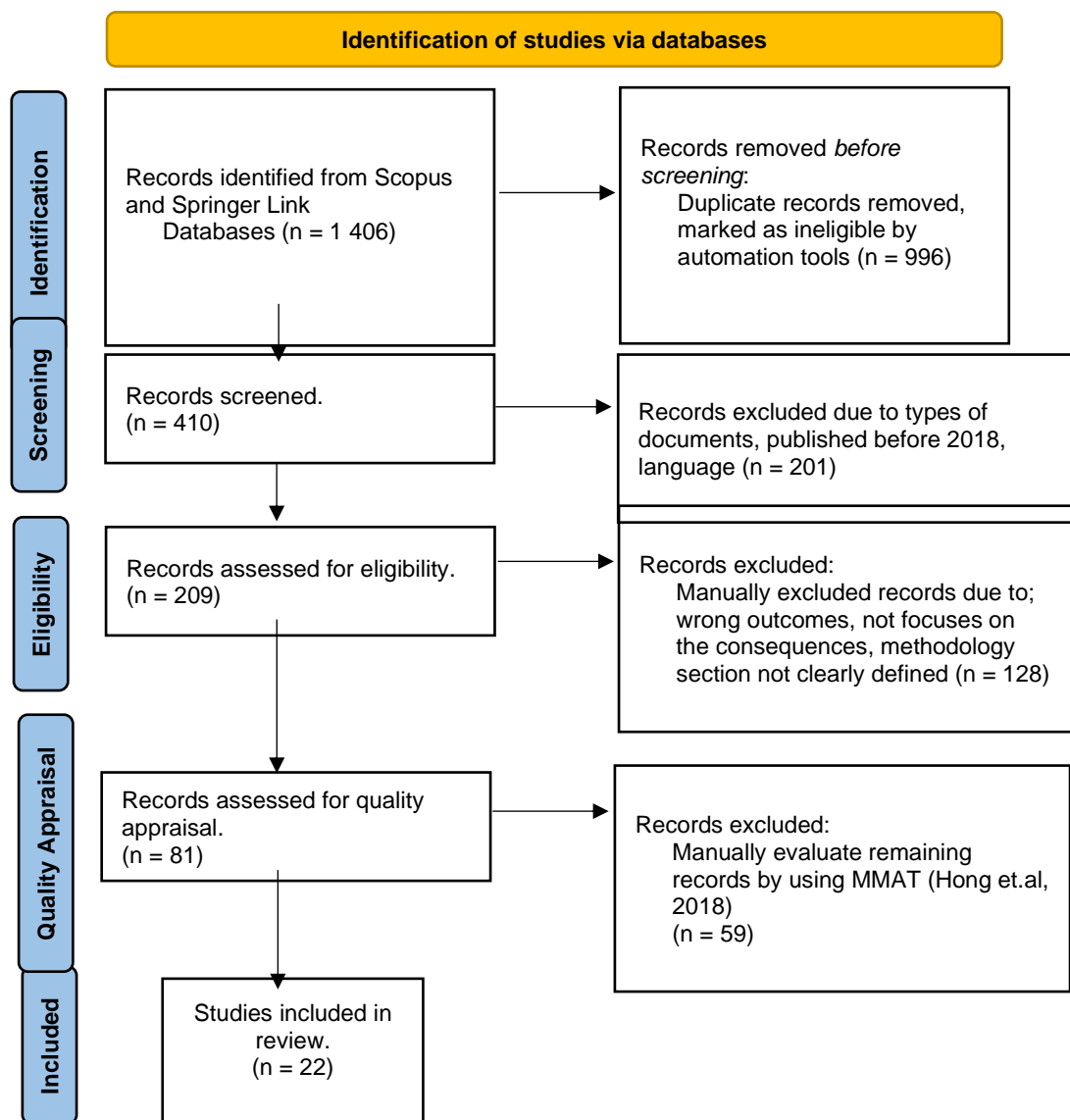


Figure 1: Flow diagram of the study.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Background of the selected articles**

Based on the review, the author managed to obtain 22 documents. Out of selected documents, most of the studies were in Sub-Saharan Africa with a total of nine studies, four studies were conducted in Egypt, two studies conducted in India, Indonesia, and Iran, one study in Turkey, Rohingya, and Palestine respectively. Seven studies utilized a mixed-method approach, nine studies utilized quantitative approaches, and six studies utilized a qualitative approach. Two studies were published in 2022, 10 studies were published in 2021, five studies were published in 2020, three studies were published in 2019, and the remaining were published in the year 2018. Based on the constant comparative technique, there were three themes developed: social issues, health and wellbeing, and life skills and relationships. The main themes have been further analyzed and resulting in 18 subthemes.

### **Themes and Subthemes**

Based on a systematic review, a total of three themes were abstracted from the selected documents namely social issues, health and wellbeing, and life skills and relationships as shown in the Table 3 and Table 4.



Authors and count	Study Design	Social Issues						Health and Well-being		
		EA	PA	SA	VA	BRI	FP	HI	MC	HA
Efevbera et al. (2021) – Africa	QL	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Duadji et al. (2022) – Indonesia	QN						✓	✓		
Groot et al. (2018) – Africa	QN						✓	✓		
Budu et al. (2021) – Africa	QN			✓						
Hunersen et al. (2021) – Egypt	MM		✓					✓	✓	
Elnakib et al. (2021) – Egypt	QL					✓		✓		
Abera et al. (2020) – Africa	MM	✓	✓		✓					✓
Raj et al. (2021) – India	QN		✓							
Tenkorang (2019) – Africa	MM	✓	✓	✓						
Baba et al. (2020) – Africa	QL						✓	✓		
Guglielmi et al. (2021) – Rohingya	MM		✓	✓			✓			✓
Paul et al. (2019) – India	QN							✓		
Susilo et al. (2021) – Indonesia	QL						✓	✓		
Naghizadeh (2021) – Iran	QN									
Kohan et al. (2021) – Iran	QL			✓					✓	✓
Elnakib et al. (2022) – Egypt	MM		✓			✓		✓		
Landis et al. (2018) – Africa	QN	✓		✓						
Hamad et al. (2021) – Palestine	MM		✓	✓	✓			✓		
John et al. (2019) – Africa	MM						✓			
Sezgin et al. (2020) – Turkey	QN							✓		
El Gazzar et al. (2020) – Egypt	QN			✓						
Sarfo et al. (2020) – Africa	QL						✓	✓	✓	

Table 3: Themes and subthemes.

QN = Quantitative QL = Qualitative MM = Mixed Method ✓ = themes/sub-themes can be found in the study

Social Issues		Health and Well-being	Life Skills and Relationships
<b>E A</b>	Emotional Abuse	<b>HI</b>	Health issues of young mother and newborn <b>CS</b> Communication Skill
<b>P A</b>	Physical Abuse	<b>M C</b>	Motherhood and Childcare <b>EO</b> Educational Opportunities
<b>S A</b>	Sexual Abuse	<b>H A</b>	Household Activities <b>C O</b> Career Opportunities
<b>V A</b>	Verbal Abuse	<b>P D</b>	Psychological Distress <b>Di</b> Divorce
<b>B RI</b>	Birth Registrati on Issues	<b>SI</b>	Social Isolation <b>RI</b> Relationship with In-Laws
<b>FP</b>	Financial Issues and Poverty		<b>S M</b> Support in Marriage <b>D M</b> Decision Making in Marriage

Table 4: Elaboration of themes and subthemes.

### ***Social Issues***

This category encompasses themes related to social problems, such as abuse and misuse, birth registration, and financial issues and poverty. Most of the articles reviewed discussed early marriage is associated with abuse and misuse from their partners and the family members of their partners, the majority of the children reported that they experienced domestic violence at least once in their early marriage journey. The most common type of abuse reported is physical violence from spouses and in-laws, other than that, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal abuse are also being reported from the children. In addition, documentation issues such as birth registration were recognized to be one of the challenges when it comes to early marriage. Finally, financial issues and poverty are major challenges that can prevent young mothers and families from achieving their full potential.

### ***Emotional Abuse***

A study by Efevbera and Farmer (2021) revealed the attitudes of the husbands toward their young wives. When the children's partners act as the main breadwinners of the family, the tendency of the partners to insult the child bride is higher due to their position as the sole financial provider of the family. When a child bride gets married without having proper financial stability, the child bride's position in the household is nothing more than a wife and a mother to take care of the household chores which results in the tendency of the husbands in bullying their wives by manipulating the child's emotions. Men also, in the other hands, tends to steer the children's self-esteem by using their authority over their wives in settling disagreement to show they are domineering in the marriage (Abera et al., 2020). Most of the study in Sub-Saharan Africa shows the same pattern of emotional abuse, where Landis et al. (2018) and Tenkorang (2019) revealed the comparison between adult brides and young brides, where women who married as child brides were more likely to experience emotional abuse and suffer from emotional distress compared to those adult brides.

### ***Physical Abuse***

Physical abuse was highly reported among children of a child bride. Amongst the reviewed literature, in a patriarchal society, child brides and physical abuse were highly reported where both women and men accept some form of spousal abuse including physical abuse as normality in their marriage (Abera et al., 2020). Studies carried out in Sub-Saharan, India, and Rohingya shows the same pattern where a majority of the child bride is experiencing various forms of intimate partner violence but accept it as part of marital challenges (Tenkorang, 2019; Abera et al., 2020; Efevbera & Farmer, 2021; Guglielmi et al., 2021; Hunersen et al., 2021; Raj et al., 2021; Elnakib et al., 2022). The most frequently reported physical abuse experienced by the children is in the form of spousal beating, where it is normal to beat their wives when their wives show disrespectful attitudes or as an act to solve disagreement in the marriage (Abera et al., 2020). Other literature showed that child bride feels unsafe in their marriage (Raj et al., 2021) because they are concerned if their actions may be seen as disrespectful to the traditional view of wives' responsibilities and duties in the household (Guglielmi et al., 2021). Physical abuse is perpetrated not only by the husband but also by the in-laws (Elnakib et al., 2022), child bride is generally often portrayed as a young individual that needs to fulfill their tasks and her roles as a devoted daughter-in-law by performing all

domestic responsibilities, it is a way to ensure the child bride can be a faithful wife to their sons. Hence, any actions that are seen as non-compliance with the ideation of devoted wives are seen as a bride that is lack of courtesy towards their husband (Hamad et al., 2021) and beating is a means of teaching the bride how to behave per the traditional expectations of wives' responsibilities. Therefore, early marriage is a form of a phenomenon that exposes children to violence and abuse.

### ***Sexual Abuse***

Early marriage leads to early sexual intercourse and pregnancy among child brides. Early marriage is often linked to sexual abuse due to their young age (El-Gazzar et al., 2020). This is because those who married before turning 18 were less likely to have sexual autonomy (Budu et al., 2021). Efevbera & Farmer (2021) revealed that young women as early as 13 years old have experienced first and repeated intercourse, and even though they feel they are not into it, they have no capacity to reject their spouse's desires. These married girls were twice as likely to experience sexual abuse by their spouses compared to the adults (Landis et al., 2018; Tenkorang, 2019; Guglielmi et al., 2021) because their autonomy to sexual intercourse is restricted due to fear of getting divorced by their spouse when they demand safer sex intercourse (Budu et al., 2021). Two studies included in this review shared the informants' sexual intercourse as 'scary' and 'weird' (Hamad et al., 2021; Kohan et al., 2021), and many of their first sexual experiences occurred when they were not mentally and physically ready for it. Although they did not have the autonomy to sexual intercourse, the married children revealed that they were aware of sexual diseases and how the sexual intercourse would result in early pregnancy.

### ***Verbal Abuse***

The age gap between a child bride and their spouse is usually huge, and their spouse is far older than them. Due to this age gap, spouses that are older than the child bride often misuse their wife as a place to express their anger. Studies carried out in Syrian and Sub-Saharan Africa shows the same outcomes, where the children reported that their husband often speaks harshly towards them (Abera et al., 2020; Hamad et al., 2021). They have to fully abide by their husband to avoid being beaten although they suffer from great frustration towards their husband's attitudes. The children have no choice but to remain silent to conform to society's perception of devoted wives. Albera et al. (2020) claimed that one way for the husbands to discipline their wives is by scolding their wives, and this act eventually results in verbal violence in marital life. By manipulating the position of a husband, they use harsh words to gain respect from their wives, which eventually verbal abuse can lead to diminished self-esteem and confidence in the wives.

### ***Documentation - Birth Registration Problem***

Most countries have enacted the minimum age to register for marriage applications with 18 years old as the legal age. However, child bride that enters the marriage before 18 years old and is pregnant with their baby has the difficulties registering their children's birth certificate once they deliver the baby due to the absence of proof of marriage or marriage certificate to enable them to continue the registration of the baby's birth certificate. However, according to Elnakib et al., (2021), the birth registration process will be difficult to carry on however it is not impossible to register

it by waiting for their marriage will be officiated once they reach the legal age of marriage according to their country. For example, in Egypt, couples are permitted to issue their children's birth certification once they received their marriage certification (Elnakib et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the procedure might take a long time, and could potentially raise an issue with the children's identification cards once they grow up.

### ***Financial Issues and Poverty***

Financial issues are one of the most critical issues that child brides have to face. Early marriage has made it difficult for child brides to take care of their families due to limited resources as the husband is the sole breadwinner of the family (John et al., 2019; Baba et al., 2020). Because most females are married off young, they are unable to acquire the essential skills to either find paid work or start a business that will help them provide for themselves and their children, and child brides remain unemployed due to their limited skills (Sarfo et al., 2020). A lack of reliable household income has led to sustainable and intergeneration poverty among the young couples and strengthened the poverty chain in the community that practices early marriage (Guglielmi et al., 2021; Susilo et al., 2021; Duadji & Tresiana, 2022), a married couple often have different core values about money. Often, wives are more likely to pay attention to their children's needs and savings, but the husbands most likely pay attention to the basic needs to survive. These core values often clash with each other and lead to disagreements between spouses. Due to young age and inexperience, money management is typically a challenge in the young couple's family. One article included in this review showed that very few women were reported to have their saving money or cash in their hands (de Groot et al., 2018). This condition indicates that early marriage has strengthened the poverty cycle among young couples.

Contrary to this situation, some girls in the Northern region of Ghana reported that they are benefiting from financial support from their marriage (Baba et al., 2020). Their working husband has already fulfilled their need that their parents failed to do so due to poverty. Some of the girls helped their husband harvest their crops and were able to feed their children with that money and even managed to give some to their parents.

### ***Health and Wellbeing***

This category includes themes related to physical and mental health, as well as motherhood and household activities. Health and well-being are essential for young mothers to lead fulfilling lives, and this category explores different factors that contribute to these areas. The subthemes under this category examine the challenges of young motherhood and new-born care, as well as the role of household activities in maintaining health and well-being.

### ***Health issues of Young Mother and Newborn***

Early pregnancies are common among young women due to early marriage. Among the health issues discussed in most of the included documents to be reviewed, almost all of the papers discussed health issues regarding the pregnancy and delivery process. Efevbera and Farmer (2021) and Hunersen et al. (2021) emphasized that early marriage leads to poor outcomes for girls who give birth at a young age. For example, a young girl may experience miscarriages (Hunersen et al., 2021), inability to control urination or defecation, heart problems, bleeding complications, anemia during pregnancy, and difficulties giving birth (Sarfo et al., 2020; Elnakib et al., 2021; Susilo et

al., 2021). These complications were most likely caused by the experience of rapid repeat pregnancy at a young age, with only one year and below of the gap between the first child and second child (Elnakib et al., 2022). It is possible to control the issues of rapid pregnancy with a small gap of the year by using birth control; however, the professional practitioner expressed their concern about letting the young girl insert IUDs as it may deteriorate the fertility of the young girls (Elnakib et al., 2022).

Next, due to financial issues faced by young couples in marriage, some of the young couple face difficulties in fulfilling the basic needs such as access to healthcare and food. A study by Hamad et al. (2021) proved that early marriage negatively influenced the girl bride's health due to being unable to consume nutritious foods and failing to consume a wholesome diet after they gave birth. Apart from that, due to early marriage among the young girls, these girls reported to have difficulties in carrying out their activities of daily living, such as bathing, getting in or out of bed, walking, and even using the toilet, as their body is not fully ready and prepared to pregnant and give birth (de Groot et al., 2018). In Turkey, most young brides suffer from somatic illness, characterized by pain and fatigue, that requires them to consume regular medications (Sezgin & Punamäki, 2020). Their pain and fatigue are when men are unemployed, and women take on income-generating activities by accepting any paid work, including lifting heavy goods in the supermarket (Hunersen et al., 2021).

Early marriage is not only vulnerable to the young mother but also leads to child mortality and malnourished baby (Duadji & Tresiana, 2022). A young mother herself is still in need of nutritious food for their growing, yet when the young mother is pregnant at such early age, they have to ensure that both the mother and the baby in the womb receive the appropriate amount of nutrients for the main organ to develops. Therefore, when the young mother fails to consume the correct amount of nutrients, the development of the baby in the womb might be affected and resulting in improper brain development and impact on the fetus's physical development, such as the baby born with low body weight and height (Paul et al., 2019; Duadji & Tresiana, 2022). The study by Baba et al. (2020) reported that child brides with children are related to the tendency of their children to get sick frequently due to insufficient nutrients in their bodies. As their children grow up, the inexperienced young mother is majority have lacked skill in identifying their children's sicknesses and face difficulties in managing the baby appropriately. When this happens, children continuously throwing tantrums due to their discomfort will cause the mother to become anxious and panicked. Therefore, it may directly lead the young mother to experience emotional distress and feel like a failure to be a mother.

### ***Motherhood and Childcare***

Childbearing and child-rearing can be exhausting and costly. Child brides did not have adequate knowledge to take care of children and resulting in an inability to properly care for their children at such young ages (Sarfo et al., 2020; Hunersen et al., 2021). Kohan et al. (2021) showed that most child brides described difficulty in maintaining attachment with their unborn babies and infants as they did not have proper support from family, no guides to nurture their children, and they were unprepared for the unwanted early pregnancy. Kohan et al. (2021) explained that the majority of the child bride let their family, mainly their mother, look after the baby, which resulted in the absence of bonding between the child bride and their baby.

Qualitative studies in Guinea, however, show that the participants who were having children showed great honor and joy in their marriage, as they had already fulfilled one of the communities' expectations to legitimately follow the rules of childbearing and child-rearing in her community (Efevbera & Farmer, 2021). The only reason they were happy about their marriage was because of her children. Being able to conceive has a great impact on the communities in Guinea due to the support and feelings of acceptance by the community when women experience childbearing. As a result, they were able to boost their self-esteem in the community.

### ***Household Activities***

Household chores and daily living activities are one of the challenging phases in early marriage as children have less experience in carrying out household chores. Children did not have the skills to take care of babies, such as feeding them and even cooking for the family at such young ages, which eventually made them face difficulties in being a mother and a wife at the same time (Kohan et al., 2021). A child bride is often associated with their husband's subordinate in the administration of the money in the household and the family's possession; although the husband has access to the resources fully, they do not pay attention to the wives' needs and their children's need (Abera et al., 2020; Guglielmi et al., 2021). Instead, the husband mistreated their wives as a helper that should only focus on the household chores and childrearing.

### ***Sign of Psychological Distress***

Early marriage has always been linked to psychological distress due to their lack of experience and young age to tackle adult responsibilities. Early marriage couple, especially the child bride, often worry too much, which eventually negatively impact their wellbeing (Efevbera & Farmer, 2021). Child brides were mostly worried about their children and their future, and these negative thoughts may lead to changes in their self-image and their subsequent relationships as they perceived their lives as hopeless due to lack of power in decision making and limited access to family resources as well as in risk of facing mental health due to their overwhelming conflicts in their marital (Hunersen et al., 2021). Abera et al. (2020) and Baba et al. (2020) revealed that children who married early often expressed their feelings which is something that they could not explain to everyone. Quantitative data from Guglielmi et al. (2021) showed that girls often exhibited signs of psychological distress when they think about divorces, their identity crises, and psychological problems due to improper course of childhood and adolescence (Naghizadeh et al., 2021), yet they could not express their distress includes the experiences of frustration and prolonged stress (Sarfo et al., 2020), due to the fear that they will show a disrespect attitude towards the in-laws. Consequently, this unfavorable condition results in higher levels of depressive symptoms among the young married couple than those who marry later (Sezgin & Punamäki, 2020).

Early marriage has a huge psychological impact on the young bride, especially if the marriage ends in divorce, because half of the data shows that the child bride becomes pregnant immediately after the marriage (Kohan et al., 2021; Susilo et al., 2021). Otherwise, the child bride would be more likely to be criticized by the communities when she is unable to conceive shortly after their marriage (Hamad et al., 2021). This situation creates a huge impact on the children's abilities to grow and pursue their careers once she is a divorcee because she has already had the responsibility to take care of her own child's wellbeing. In addition, forced marriage among the child

bride, frequently to a stranger, and the big pile of marital responsibilities, particularly the partner's sexual expectations, childbearing, and child-rearing, resulted in substantial emotional distress and despair among the child bride (John et al., 2019).

### ***Social Isolation***

Early marriage demands children fulfill their responsibilities as a mother and wife. Five studies included in this review indicated that early marriage causes the children to feel alone and isolated from their circle of friends at the same age (Abera et al., 2020; Guglielmi et al., 2021; Hamad et al., 2021; Hunersen et al., 2021; Raj et al., 2021). Children reported that early marriage limits them from meeting their classmates and friends, which leads them to feel very much depressed and impedes their capacity to socialize with their group age. Child bride in Yemen, Rohingya, and Syrian describe their early marriage as a jail that ended their lively childhood and caused them to stop behaving like a child (Abera et al., 2020; Guglielmi et al., 2021; Hamad et al., 2021). However, some married girls describe that their early marriage has improved their self-esteem as their statuses have elevated in the society from just child to being motherhood (Baba et al., 2020).

### ***Life Skills and Relationships***

This category includes themes related to personal and professional development, such as communication skills, educational and career opportunities, and marriage quality. Developing life skills and building strong relationships are critical for personal growth and success among young girls that enter marriage at early age. The subthemes under this category explore different aspects of these areas, including communication skills, opportunities for education and career development, and the challenges of marriage and family relationships.

### ***Communication Skill***

Most marriage works because it was built based on effective communication between men and women. One of the problem-solving skills in marital life is the communication between men and women to understand the needs and the effort to understand their spouse. However, marriage among adolescents has a lack of communication skills, where they have less interaction with their surroundings due to their young age. Kohan et al. (2021) described young brides and young grooms who had less knowledge on how to communicate with their spouses or how to treat each other if both the couple were underage. The study from Elnakib et al. (2022) revealed communication issues between spouses resulted in their needs not being adequately fulfilled, and this condition makes it difficult to communicate effectively with other members of the extended family too, resulting in a worsening of the in-laws' relationship.

### ***Educational Opportunities***

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund recommends children adequately obtain education during at least secondary school to acquire the proper skills to learn and adapt them for future careers. Five studies included in this review estimated the implications of early marriage on the likelihood of dropping out of school is as early as primary school (Tenkorang, 2019; Abera et al., 2020; Elnakib et al., 2021; Hunersen et al., 2021; Susilo et al., 2021). These studies were conducted in



Indonesia, Sub-Saharan, and Egypt, show the same pattern of children that enter marriage life early and most likely did not complete their secondary education; even so, some of the child brides continue their studies while married, into some point of time soon they slowly start to drop out from school due to their responsibilities as wives and mothers. Eventually, the children who did not continue their education and compared to those who married as adults, adolescents who married early were less likely to be educated and employed (Tenkorang, 2019; Susilo et al., 2021) due to their statuses as a child brides and inadequate experiences. Hence, early marriage prevents the opportunities for the children to learn (Naghizadeh et al., 2021), and based on mixed-method research from Abera et al. (2020), children think that marrying and giving birth as children have hindered their development.

### ***Career Opportunities***

Child brides mostly deal with domestic responsibilities, which include childbearing (Hunersen et al., 2021) and have caused an identity crisis among the children (Naghizadeh et al., 2021). The child bride dealing with household tasks needs to discover their role in society as a wife, mother, or student. The ideal ideation of children is to obtain adequate education, but on the other hand, the perception of Egyptian society towards young women, according to Elnakib et al. (2021), is women should become a mother and nurture their children, and the belief of woman's absolute responsibility is to attend to household chores. Due to these perceptions, young women did not have the opportunities to enjoy their youth which caused them to lack readiness to tackle adult responsibilities (John et al., 2019). They eventually failed to fit in as devoted wives to husbands and daughters-in-law of the family in the society.

Due to the identity crisis, child brides that initiate to find jobs will lead to new disagreements in their marriage. Most husbands will refuse to send their wives to work as the husband believes it will provoke their ability and domineering position as the head of the family and the primary provider (Elnakib et al., 2021). In addition, Guglielmi et al. (2021) revealed that only 5% of the study respondents had ever engaged in paid work, which indicated that the access to opportunities for advancements in the child bride's career is still scarce and remains limited, despite initiatives and interventions efforts from the government and NGOs. Naghizadeh et al. (2021) concluded in the study that early marriage has become an obstacle for the children to have a social status and appropriate job as their career.

### ***Divorce***

The first year of marriage will be the phase of childbearing; when a marriage starts to enter the second year of the anniversary, the quality of early marriage starts to deteriorate because the couple did not have a strong foundation in building their relationship and end up to divorcee (Abera et al., 2020). In the Tabriz region, early marriage is one of the contributors to the increment in the divorce rate (Naghizadeh et al., 2021). Some divorces are caused by child brides who have been subjected to various forms of abuse, and when they are no longer able to bear it, they seek assistance from their own family to seek divorce from their spouse to stop them from sufferings (Abera et al., 2020). While in Palestine and Syria, most divorce cases are due to the child bride are no longer able to cope with the family issues (Hamad et al., 2021). However, within a few years, the divorcees remarried their new partners, and the cycle of low-quality married life remained. Some of the divorcee's children described that although she is

currently a divorcee, she referred her life has been such a blessing to experience early marriage and that it should be appreciated as she has already matured from her experiences.

### ***Relationship with In-Laws***

Some of the child brides are misused and mistreated by their in-laws instead of their husbands. When their husband was off to work, their in-laws started to bully them by doing all the household chores even if the brides were in the pregnancy phase. When compared to their own parents' house, some children indicated that they have extremely limited autonomy when visiting their in-laws' house (Baba et al., 2020). They were restricted from moving freely and fear to get criticized by their mothers-in-law whenever they did not perform any household chores. Therefore, this situation limits the communication between the child bride, and the relationship between the in-laws is deteriorating.

### ***Support in Marriage***

The decision to enter early marriage is usually based on their parent's decision; parents often let their young girls marry without asking the bride's opinion. The earlier stage of early marriage has already shown that children of early marriage lack social support from their parents and family (Efevbera & Farmer, 2021). According to Abera et al. (2020), although the children have already mentioned they wanted to pursue their studies after the marriage, they did not get the necessary support from both spouse and parents in terms of their urge to learn and obtain appropriate education. Some girls mentioned that they received social support mostly from their friends and classmates, but due to their early marriage, they were unable to meet their friends and eventually lost their friendship due to their marital statuses (Guglielmi et al., 2021). Hence, the early married girl often lacks support due to her role as a mother and wife.

### ***Decision Making in Marriage***

Due to the child bride's young age, the decision of their own life, such as marriage, often being arranged for them, and they were unable to resist the decision as their opinion was perceived as immature (Budu et al., 2021). Since the child bride was perceived as immature, they often lacked the self-esteem to voice their opinion and to resist any actions from their spouses, including the decision of sex. Girls are disadvantaged when it comes to advocating for education and reproductive health rights because of power imbalances within the family (Hunersen et al., 2021; Abera et al., 2020). Women who married as children often did not have the opportunities for economic decision-making as they were not the breadwinner of the family (Raj et al., 2021). Also, they do not have power over their own body because their spouse is very domineering, and they do not have the autonomy of decision-making related to sexual and family planning (Tenkorang, 2019). Their decision-making was limited to the related roles of household chores such as buying groceries and children's clothing, and even the mother-in-law could take an active role in household decision-making, regulating the girls' routines and deciding whether they were allowed to leave the house for social visits or not (Elnakib et al., 2022). Naghizadeh et al. (2021) also agreed that children did not have power over their bodies and the probability of family interference in their marital life is higher in early marriage compared to those who married later. Therefore,

it is concluded that most child brides showed a very low autonomy in decision-making and restricted access to resources (John et al., 2019; Kohan et al., 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

The main purpose of current review is to systematically review the consequences of early marriage among the young girls. Numerous recurring themes and subthemes have been found in this systematic review. Themes pertaining to social issues (such as emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, birth registration issues, and financial issues and poverty), health and well-being (including psychological distress in young mothers and newborns, motherhood and childcare pertaining issues, household activities, and social isolation), and life skills and relationships (covering communication skills, educational opportunities, career opportunities, divorce, social isolation, relationship with in-laws, support in marriage, and decision-making in marriage). Also, this review indicates that there are connections between social issues, health and wellbeing, and relationships and life skills. For instance, emotional abuse and psychological distress can both have an impact on health and wellbeing, whereas communication skills and educational opportunities are crucial life skills that can affect relationships and general well-being of the young mother.

Upon systematically reviewed the literature, this review conclude that majority of the literature found a similar pattern where health issues of young mother and newborns and psychological distress are the significant consequences of early marriage among the young girls followed by their experiences of physical and sexual abuse. Furthermore, because they married at such a young age, these young girls encountered difficulties in developing essential life skills. Their limited communication skills, combined with limited access to school and professional prospects, hindered their ability to make informed life decisions. This finding clearly emphasizes that child bride has also frequently experiences physical and sexual abuse, which have the potential to negatively impact their mental health wellbeing, concurrently early motherhood is often associated with the health issues for both young mothers and the health statuses of their newborns. Therefore, it is crucial to effectively addressed the research trends and patterns regarding to the consequences of early marriage on the child brides so that stakeholders can works hand in hand towards a society where every girl has the opportunity to thrive, free from the harmful consequences of early marriage.

## **FUTURE DIRECTION**

It is undeniable that early marriage has led to several challenges among the young married couple, particularly for the child bride. Throughout the years, child brides have shown the same patterns of the consequences of early marriage, and some research areas can be given attention and have a great potential to further the study.

This systematic review includes a fair number of research approaches to cover a wide range of research methods, such as mixed method (7), a quantitative approach (9), and a qualitative approach (6). The qualitative data provides a great deal of detail in explaining the phenomena of early marriage and should be used more frequently in this field of study to gain a better knowledge of the phenomenon. For the younger participants, it is crucial to get a piece of better information by conducting in-depth interviews rather than distributing survey forms due to their younger age and inability to understand certain words in the questionnaires as they were dropped out earlier from school and some of the child brides may not attend secondary school, and their

knowledge might be limited (Tenkorang, 2019; Abera et al., 2020; Elnakib et al., 2021; Hunersen et al., 2021; Susilo et al., 2021). Therefore, an in-depth interview provides opportunities for the children to ask and get a better understanding of the questions and to avoid potential misinterpretation of the questions.

In this review, the majority of the study was conducted in the rural area of Sub-Saharan Africa (9). A large empirical gap can be found in the results of this review, where the lack of studies in the South-Eastern Asia regions, including Brunei, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia, remained limited. It might be either the countries' lack in numbers of early marriages or the topic is not interesting to be further analyzed. For future study, to contribute more to the body of knowledge, a comparison between cultures can also be conducted to investigate the differences in how they perceived early marriage in their community.

Other than that, based on the themes and subthemes, the researcher was able to identify some potential gaps in the study that could be conducted to contribute new knowledge to the stakeholders. By conducting more studies on early marriage, it is advantageous to integrate the child bride's interpersonal relationship with their family members to unveil a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

The findings of this systematic literature review also shed light on the significant consequences of early marriage on young girls and emphasize the need for appropriate prevention and intervention programs. The implications of this study extend beyond academia and have the potential to guide policy makers in designing effective legislation and clear framework policies on early marriage. By addressing the following future directions, stakeholders can make informed decisions and develop targeted strategies to combat early marriage and its adverse effects.

1. **Legislative Measures:** This systematic review underscores the urgency for policy makers to enact comprehensive legislation against early marriage. The findings provide evidence of the negative consequences experienced by child brides, and policymakers can utilize this information to advocate for stronger legal frameworks to protect young girls from early marriage. The study highlights the need for stringent laws that set a minimum age for marriage and enforce penalties for offenders. Policymakers should be encouraged to use the findings of this review to strengthen existing legislation or develop new laws that address the specific needs and challenges faced by child brides.
2. **Prevention Programs:** The identified consequences of early marriage in this review can inform the development of prevention programs aimed at raising awareness and promoting behaviour change. Policy makers can collaborate with relevant stakeholders, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, to design and implement interventions that target communities at high risk of child marriage. The findings suggest the importance of comprehensive approaches that address the underlying factors contributing to early marriage, such as poverty, gender inequality, and lack of access to education. Prevention programs can focus on providing education and empowerment opportunities for young girls, promoting gender equality, and engaging community leaders and parents to challenge traditional norms and practices.
3. **Intervention Strategies:** The review highlights the need for intervention programs to support child brides who are already married. Policy makers can use the findings to develop targeted interventions that provide support services, including access to healthcare, education, vocational training, and psychosocial support. These interventions should prioritize the well-being and empowerment of child brides, enabling them to rebuild their lives and break the cycle of early marriage. Collaboration

with local organizations and service providers is crucial for the successful implementation of such interventions.

4. **Inclusion of Qualitative Research:** This systematic review demonstrates the significance of qualitative research in gaining a better understanding of the complex phenomenon of early marriage. Policy makers should recognize the value of qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews, to capture the experiences, perspectives, and emotions of child brides. By incorporating qualitative methods into future research, policy makers can access rich and nuanced insights into the lives of child brides and tailor interventions to meet their specific needs.
5. **Bridging Regional Gaps:** While this review includes a substantial number of studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a notable dearth of research from South-Eastern Asian regions, including Brunei, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Policy makers should encourage and support research initiatives in these regions to fill this empirical gap. Understanding the regional variations in the prevalence and consequences of early marriage can help shape context-specific policies and interventions. Additionally, cross-cultural studies comparing different societies' perceptions and practices regarding early marriage would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.
6. **Interpersonal Relationships:** This review suggests the need for future studies to explore the child bride's interpersonal relationships with family members to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Policy makers should encourage researchers to investigate the dynamics and impacts of these relationships, as they play a crucial role in shaping the experiences and well-being of child brides. Such studies can inform the development of interventions that strengthen family support systems, promote positive parenting practices, and foster healthier relationships within the context of early marriage.

This systematic review has effectively addressed the research trends and patterns regarding the consequences of early marriage on child brides, by summarizing the consequences of early marriage for child brides and identifying key themes and subthemes, this review highlights potential areas for further research analysis in future studies. By incorporating these future directions into research and policy initiatives, stakeholders can leverage the knowledge gained from this systematic literature review to design appropriate prevention and intervention programs, establish legislation to combat early marriage, and provide support to child brides. Ultimately, this will contribute to safeguarding the rights and well-being of young girls, promoting gender equality, and breaking the cycle of early marriage.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We are grateful to the Geran Inisiatif Putra Siswazah (GP-IPS), Universiti Putra Malaysia for funding and supporting in conducting this study.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

All authors declare no conflicting interests.

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