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# Mitigating Underage Marriage of Girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone

Anne-Marie Kumba Kamanda  
*Walden University*

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2017

Abstract

Mitigating the Underage Marriage of Girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone

By

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M.S., Walsh College, 2010

B.A., Walsh College, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

The underage marriage of girls (UMG) practice by some parents continues to occur in Bo Town, Sierra Leone, and it is a problem. Regardless of the negative consequences, parents continue to marry off their young girls who become wives of rebels and participate in the civil war. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of adult women between 18 and 24 who experienced child marriage, parents who married off their young girls, and community leaders to understand why the UMG persisted in Bo Town. The theoretical frameworks used in this study were the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy behavioral theory. Data were collected through semi structured interviews. Participants in this study consisted of 5 community leaders, 5 adult women between 18 and 24 who experienced UMG before 18 years old, and 5 parents who married off their underage girls in the Bo Town district. Interview transcripts were analyzed, coded, and 16 themes emerged. Some of the themes included poverty, lack of awareness, education, enforcement, monitoring, leadership, child marriage, domestic violence, accountability, responsibility, dowry payment, and female genital mutilation. The findings may influence social change by using practices such as educating, monitoring, enforcing the banning of the UMG policy relentlessly. Furthermore, implementation of mentorship programs, counseling, leadership, and awareness training to young girls and parents could reduce the UMG practice in Bo Town. Consequently, if young girls are educated and allowed access to resources, they could become empowered and productive members of society as a whole, and the UMG problem may diminish in the Bo community.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my deceased father, Joseph A. T. Kamanda and my deceased mother Anne-Marie Ndemo Kamanda who gave me the drive to pursue higher education. Also, I thank Mr. Sylvester Mathew Junisa, my husband, for his support and courage during my program of study. I am grateful to my sister-in-law Mrs. Sylvia Hudroge who gave me the driving force to conduct this study. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my sons, Munda Kamanda, Moses H. Junisa, Hosea N. Junisa, and Christian Junisa for all of their morale support during the dissertation writing process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The underage marriage of girls (UMG) is an acceptable practice in most rural areas and cities in Sierra Leone (McClelland, 2008). When pushing for underage marriage, parents usually force their young girls to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) and marry off their daughters before they reach age 18; the reason for this is to have the young girls remain virgin and fertile for childbearing purposes (McClelland, 2008). Policymakers in Sierra Leone enacted a children's-rights bill and banned the UMG tradition, but FGM was not included in the bill after a private deliberation (McClelland, 2008). Therefore, child marriage continued in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. Since the UMG and FGM were connected, the FGM (Bondo) ritual pushed parents to send off their girls to be initiated into the Bondo as early as between 10 and 17 years old (McClelland, 2008). The Bondo institution continued operation by local elder women leaders who taught young girls how to become excellent wives, mothers, and elders (McClelland, 2008). As a result, young girls were married off immediately after the FGM ceremony.

Parents use the dowry payment triggered by child marriage to ease financial burden. Because of these economic implications, young girls become sex slaves or face the risk of isolation from society (Begum, 2014; Docksai, 2013). As underage marriage of girls became more important than education, parents engaged in forced marriage in Africa and all other developing countries. Most studies featured the cultural passion, poverty, and social status quo as factors related to the underage marriage of girls (Zaman, 2013). The UMG has been a problem for decades, and continues to spread in the Bo Town district of Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, young girls from Bo Town have become

victims of the system of social injustice against young girls, being married off by their parents against their wishes and consent (Zaman, 2013).

The study of the UMG can help all the stakeholders, such as parents, policymakers, law enforcement officials, social workers, educators, local leaders, and therapists, to mitigate child marriage. This study of underage marriage was important to explore factors related to the underage marriage of girls in the Bo Town area. It was vital to collaborate with policymakers, parents, and local leaders to understand the problem. Therefore, it was critical to analyze the different aspects, such as beliefs, education, and social implications, relevant to the issue of underage marriage in Bo Town in Sierra Leone. Since there was not much literature on the topic of underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone, this research meets a need. Parents and their girls can use the results of this study to understand child marriage and seek help to alleviate underage marriage (McClelland, 2008). Young girls will benefit from the alleviation of underage marriage in the city of Bo Town and nationally in the long-term.

### Background of the Problem

The UMG in Sierra Leone is an acceptable cultural practice, continuing to grow since the 17th century (McClelland, 2008). As some girls approach puberty, their parents force them to undergo FGM (McClelland, 2008). These girls experience FGM before reaching 7 years old in some countryside towns of Sierra Leone (McClelland, 2008). Young girls from Bo Town district have experienced the FGM as early as 7 years old to be ready to be married off by their parents. After the FGM ceremony, the parents remove these underage girls out of school to marry to older men (McClelland, 2008). FGM is a

cultural practice that female elders pass on from generation to generation. Therefore, I could not exclude the practice of FMG from the contributing factors to underage marriage in Bo Town in this study. Even though there is not enough literature specifically from the Bo Town area, Cloward (2014) found that FMG has contributed to underage marriage. Walker (2012) pointed out that because of social challenges, young girls were isolated from their peers. Similarly, these young girls from the Bo Town district face similar challenges, as they were isolated from their peers because their parents continue to marry off them. For example, elder women prepare young girls to be ready for marriage through the completion of the FGM ceremony. Most of the young girls, who are between 4 and 9 years old, face circumcision in Sierra Leone (McClelland, 2008). Despite the ban on underage marriage in Sierra Leone, parents force their young girls into child marriages without thinking of the long-term negative consequences (McClelland, 2008; Mutyaba, 2011).

Raj and Boehmer (2013) indicated that underage girls are likely to experience social problems such as less education or skills, tending to suffer gender-based abuse and discriminations. These findings were significant and warranted further study about child marriage of girls from Bo Town (Mutyaba, 2011). The themes of poverty, insecurity, domestic violence, and education deprivation are predominant in the child marriages of girls in Bo Town district (Mutyaba, 2011). These themes were some of the pieces of evidence I could locate that warranted further study (Santhya et al., 2010).

### Statement of the Problem

The general problem is that underage marriage has several adverse outcomes (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014; Oosterveld, 2010; Raj & Boehmer, 2013). However, local women leaders still perform underage marriage despite its known adverse outcomes. Specifically, there is a gap in the literature on the perspective of young brides, their parents, and community leaders from Sierra Leone, who still perform underage marriage despite its known adverse outcomes. Researchers have claimed that parents and young girls in an underage marriage have not understood the negative consequences that such practice triggering the long-term (Al-Ridhwany, & Al-Jawadi, 2014).

Moreover, the literature has demonstrated that, in the Bo Town district in Sierra Leone, after parents have forced their daughters into child marriage, their young girls end up experiencing sexual abuse and domestic violence when they withdraw from the wedding (Oosterveld, 2010). Furthermore, marrying off girls has continued to spark domestic violence, such as dowry-related disputes (Baldwin, 2012). Young girls who enter into underage marriages face social problems such as early mortality, health risks, and educational deficit (Docksai, 2012; Okonofua, 2013). For instance, some of the young girls from Bo Town district end up living through sexual abuse and become child soldiers after their marriage to rebels (Oosterveld, 2010). Some of the parents that engaged in this action promoted social implications that included the isolation of young girls from the Bo Town district community (Raj & Boehmer, 2013).

Besides these issues, some of these young girls from Bo Town district in Sierra Leone have also faced rejection from their parents. Furthermore, young girls from the Bo



Town area who fail to comply with the marriage tend to face denial of inheritance from their parents (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014). To mitigate the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, government officials must implement a ban on the FMG and underage marriage practices (Bjälkander, Leigh, Harman, Bergström, & Almroth, 2012). However, to understand fully the phenomenon of compliance to the tradition of UMG, there was a need to address the gap in the literature regarding the rationale that young brides, their parents, and community leaders had for performing underage marriages despite knowing their adverse outcomes.

#### Research Questions

I developed the following research questions to guide this study:

RQ1: What factors do child brides perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

RQ2: What factors do the parents of child brides perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

RQ3: What factors do community leaders perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

Through these research questions, I gathered information about the perceptions of child brides, parents of child brides, and community leaders in the southern province of Sierra Leone regarding the continuance of marriage of underage girls. In this manner, I addressed the problem and the purpose of the study.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of adult women who experienced child marriage, parents who married off their young girls, and community leaders to understand why the UMG persisted in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. In this study, I determined the reasons parents engage in such rites for young girls in the Bo Town district. Additionally, I built upon existing literature to reveal Bo Town parents' and young girls' perceptions, as well as the community members, as to why they continue the tradition of (UMG) despite its known negative implications (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

The results of this study provided an understanding of how young girls face the dilemma of denial of the family inheritance for noncompliance of (UMG; Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014; McClelland, 2008). Consequently, I used a case study research design to execute this study of the underage marriage of girls' experience in Bo Town through a (see Yin, 2011). A case study research design was appropriate for exploring this phenomenon and addressing the research questions of the study, as I used this approach to explore the perspectives of different groups of people. Moreover, case studies permit the exploration of perspectives of individuals regarding *how* and *why* questions, which were the focus of the research questions of the study (see Yin, 2011).

This study of the UMG in Bo Town was critical because the research uncovered what measures are necessary to mitigate the UMG. Additionally, the results of this study can help stakeholders involved (e.g., young brides, parents, community leaders, law enforcement, and policy makers) to have a wider perspective regarding the phenomenon.

Moreover, using the results of this study, local leaders of men and women can work together to combat underage marriage of girls' problem in Bo Town (see Bryson, 2011; Creswell, 2013).

I collected the data through face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions where participants explained their stories about underage marriage (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). I analyzed and interpreted data through computer programs and NVivo software and separated the dependent and independent variables (QSR International, 2014). For example, some of the themes I extracted from the data were poverty, child abuse, child marriage, domestic violence, education, and awareness training (Lee-Rife, Malhotra, Warner, & Glinski, 2012; Walker, 2012). Underage marriage is a persistent challenge that girls continue to face in Bo Town and most developing countries. As long as parents keep marrying off their daughters, girls from Bo Town will continue to suffer sexual and domestic violence. Additionally, even after marriage, these girls have no equal rights to inheritance (Lee-Rife et al., 2012; Mansaray & Johnson, 2012).

#### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks I used for this study were the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy behavioral theory. The primary argument that I uncovered to understand the parents' role in the underage marriage of girls was a self-efficacy behavioral concept. Under the social cognitive theory, there is a long-established view that individuals are willing participants in their development and that they can make things happen by their actions (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) developed the social cognitive theory and used it

to explain the factors that influenced human functioning, including the interplay of behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors.

For this study, I used the social cognitive theory to understand the rationale or justification for young girls, parents, and community leaders for practicing and tolerating underage marriage despite its negative implications. The social cognitive theory addresses the areas of self-regulatory, self-reflective, cognitive, and vicarious processes in human behavioral adaptation (Moos & Azevedo, 2009).

Moreover, Bandura (1977) extended the theory to include how people's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings can affect their behavior. Thus, self-efficacy beliefs are at the core of social cognition theory. Bandura (2011) defined these ideas as people's way of judging their capabilities to carry out individual actions and execute precise performance. Self-efficacy beliefs are the basis for a person's motivation, well-being, and accomplishments (Hyuksoo, Phelps & Doohwang, 2013). This self-efficacy behavioral theory showed how parents supported the underage marriage of girls without thinking about the long-term negative consequences (Hyuksoo et al., 2013). The supposition of this theory was that parents pursued an economic advantage in exchange for goods and service. Applying the self-efficacy behavioral approach (Hyuksoo et al., 2013) to parents from Bo Town indicates their primary goal was to make a profit off their young girls.

In this case study, I extended the theoretical implications of social cognitive theory to the phenomenon of underage marriage in Sierra Leone (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Some of the young girls who were victims of UMG experienced sexual abuse, health issues, and became child soldiers (Oosterveld, 2010). Most researchers have failed

to address FGM, and this is the gap of interest in this study (Bjälkander et al., 2012; McClelland, 2008).

### Definition of Terms

*Adult women:* For the purpose of this study, these were women between 18 and 24 years old who had experienced underage marriage before 18 years old. These women were married off by their parents. Some of the young girls who were orphans, they were married off by their uncles and aunts.

*Bondo society:* A ritual performed on young girls in Sierra Leone where FGM takes place before marrying off young girls. The Bondo society

*Community leaders:* These leaders build relationships with members of the communities and work together for the good of others. Community leaders should have the ability to communicate with stakeholders and listen actively. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, community leaders were leaders who steadily worked with law enforcement officers in Bo Town, young girls who were potential victims of underage marriage, and parents who had the potential to marry off their daughters before the young girls were 18 years old.

*Dowry payments:* A dowry payment symbolizes cash, goods, or property a bridegroom pays directly or indirectly to marry a potential wife. A dowry represents any property or valuable security that the two families agree upon to give to a marriage party any time either before or after the marriage ceremony (Begum, 2014).

*Exchange marriage:* According to Zaman (2013), an exchange marriage is a system that enables two family members to discuss and agree to give up a young girl

either before or after birth for the wedding. The system of exchange marriage was perceived as welfare, socio-cultural, and preservation of wealth and security in society (Zaman, 2013).

*Leadership integrity:* According to Van Genderen (2014), leaders are more ethical and honest when they live up to their responsibilities and uphold the agreements of contracts. A servant leader believes in what is good or right despite its ideology, even if it is against the financial interest of an organization (Van Genderen, 2014). Therefore, leading with integrity will require nonjudgmental, openness, and trust to maintain complete honesty. Most importantly, actions demonstrate values and exhibited respect, intentions, and actions that align with trustworthiness to followers (Van Genderen, 2014).

*Parents:* In this study, these were the men and women who married off their daughters before the young girls became 18 years old.

*Self-efficacy behavioral theory:* An extension of the social cognitive theory to include how people's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings can affect their behavior (Bandura, 1977).

*Social cognitive theory:* The social cognitive theory claims that individuals are willing participants in their development and that they can make things happen by their actions (Bandura, 1977).

*Soweis:* These are women who are executive leaders in the Bondo society (FMG) organization who receive their source of income from parents by initiating their daughters into the Bondo society (Kargbo, 2015).

*Triangulation:* According to Creswell (2013), triangulation occurs when researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data and confirm the validity of their findings. In addition, to achieve triangulation researchers employ multiple and different sources, investigators, methods, and theories to provide supporting evidence from various sources to highlight on perspectives and themes (see Creswell, 2013).

*Underage marriage:* Underage marriage behavior allows parents to marry off their girls before their daughters attain the age of 18. Parents continue to pass on the practice of underage marriage from generation to generation (Lee-Rife et al., 2012).

*Victims:* For the purpose of this study, victims are women between 18 and 24 years old from Bo Town, who experienced sexual abuse through underage marriage before 18 years old. I chose this age group because these women, who have been married off during their early teens, would have already experienced several years as married women, which meant they had sufficient knowledge to provide the relevant perceptions needed for the study. Young girls are forced into arranged marriage as early as 10 years old without consent. Young girls have no right to refuse marriage, and they are not allowed to participate in sexual negotiation (Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012).

*Violators:* Habitually, most men in Bo Town engage in the unchangeable cultural practice of early marriage. Most men violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Child Rights Act, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012). In the end, men do not comply with the implementation of these conventions, declarations, and policy

instruments (Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012). Instead, the traditional practices drive the violation of human rights, primarily female genital cutting, forced marriage, and rapes against women. The young girls who come from Bo Town experience similar atrocities to the women in Nigeria (Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012).

#### Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

I assumed that it would be difficult to convince these women to participate because most women in Bo Town believe in social status quo through marriage (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014; Zaman, 2013). There was an assumption that participants of this study would withhold information about the UMG experiences. Conversely, participants of this study were eager to reveal their experiences about the UMG. Another assumption was that some participants could withdraw from the study, but no one withdrew from the study. Additionally, the male-dominated society in Sierra Leone might have created a bias for the study. I assumed that the IRB might not approve the study because of the vulnerable population in the study.

One of the limitations of this study was that the girls were so young and controlled by their parents, which limited access to the young girls (Okonofua 2013; Sabbe et al., 2013). Additionally, the behavior demonstrated a cultural implication that was in unification with the FGM practice. It was a challenge to have access to the local women leaders and parents, and convince them to terminate the FGM practice in Bo Town, Sierra Leone (McClelland, 2008). Additionally, it was hard to find participants that were victims of the underage marriage of girls and willing to participate in the study. Therefore, it was important to identify a pool of participants as an alternative plan to



collect data. Participants in the study included women who were between 18 and 24 and were victims of child marriage.

Since the study involved human participants, personal biases may have been introduced to the study. Moreover, introducing my own personal bias and threats may have been out of my control because of the direct contact with the participants during in-person interviews. To address this, I acknowledged any expectations of the outcome or turnout of the study to be aware and cautious of becoming inclined to coming up with these conclusions based on the expectations. Subsequently, it was imperative to respect and listen actively to participants while interviewing to cultivate credibility (Creswell, 2013). Developing an interview protocol allowed me to gather detail information from participants about the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone.

As part of the scope of the study, I only focused on the phenomenon of underage marriage in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. I did not explore any other phenomena within the region. Additionally, the participants mentioned were the only ones recruited for this study. In this study, I uncovered participants' perspectives and experiences and documented the resulting phenomenon. I demonstrated triangulation through descriptive coding and the coding of each transcript individually. I compared the codes to achieve quality data and ensured findings were connected with evidence by condensing data for coding (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

Researchers are required to demonstrate validity in research by building upon the existing theories, presumptions, or goals. In this study, I endeavored to prevent threats to validity in exploring child marriage in Bo Town (see Maxwell, 2013). For example, the

repeated patterns included policy, health problems, and child abuse. Since assumptions were inevitable, my role as researcher was to explain possible biases and the steps I took to reduce them in this study (Maxwell, 2013).

Therefore, I allowed independent individuals or organizations and professionals in the field to review the information. This strategy helped me control my bias (Miles et al., 2014) and ensure validity of the findings and the generalizability of the results (Maxwell, 2013). I addressed the potential limitations of the findings and presented the analysis of the data for peer review to demonstrate dependability (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, contacting an independent auditor to countercheck the analysis added to validity of the results. Finally, bringing other individuals, organizations, and professionals in to review the information was essential to confirming the findings for purpose of replication (Miles et al., 2014).

#### Significance of the Study

The population of focus in this study was the groups of child brides, the parents of child brides, and community leaders. From these groups of people, I gathered perceptions regarding the continuance of underage marriage in Bo Town in Sierra Leone. Through gathering data from this population, I also addressed the research questions of the study, which focused on these three groups. Sampling was completed through purposive sampling, and data collection used interviews.

Fulfilling the purpose of this study on underage marriage was significant to promoting change in the Bo Town area, Sierra Leone. For example, by examining underage marriage of girls, my findings could provide recommendations to mitigate child

marriage. Using the study results, local and international leaders can collaborate with social workers, young girls, and their parents to work with law enforcement officials to bring violators to justice. Policymakers can address and reform child marriage policy to protect the rights of the child (see Todre & Clayton, 2014).

Furthermore, I believe educators should implement underage marriage awareness training, and the media should help campaign through broadcasts to mitigate or prevent the issue of underage marriage for girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. These strategies would promote child marriage awareness in domestic and foreign communities. It was vital to involve human rights advocates since parents from Bo Town marry off their young girls without thinking of the negative consequences. These adverse outcomes were sexual abuse, education deprivation, and health issues (Ansari, 2013, p. 11).

#### Summary of Chapter 1

Child marriages are a problem that leads to social, economic, and educational issues (Okonofua, 2013). For example, some of the girls from Bo Town district who failed to comply with child marriage were isolated from society. These young girls were left with no education and skills to generate income (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014). The underage marriage of girls continued to promote sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among young girls. Consequently, similar evidence was found in Bo Town, but few studies have addressed the underage marriage of girls, indicating the gap in the literature (Docksai, 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of adult women who experienced child marriage, parents who married off their young girls, and

community leaders to understand why the UMG persisted in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. The results of the study elicited the recommendation of awareness training and education for the young girls and their parents from Bo Town district in Sierra Leone to mitigate UMG. Parents continued to participate in child marriage, and these young girls from Bo Town had no option but to become sex slaves, child soldiers, and face isolation from their communities.

Whenever the young girls from Bo Town refused to comply with UMG, they risked their inheritance and isolation from relatives and members of their communities (Wolfe, 2013). Most significantly, the health care sectors did not address the exploitation of young girls in Bo Town. In spite of the troubling consequences of child marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, there had been little effort by policymakers to enact laws to protect young girls in the district of Bo Town.

Public health practitioners lacked the resources and training to address the problem, and researchers were not addressing the issue enough in the public health field (Okonofua, 2013). Okonofua (2013) summarized the problem of child marriage by stating that prevention will require research and programming to protect adolescent reproductive social development in Africa. The ban on child marriage is challenging, because of the ineffective enforcement of the prohibition of UMG (Nasrullah, Zakar, Zakar, & Krämer).

### Conclusion

In summary, preventing or mitigating UMG in Bo Town is a constant problem because of the authoritative leadership of men. The long-standing traditions to ensure girls marry before losing their virginity and the FGM practice undermine the enforcement

of the ban on child marriage (Ghosh, 2011). Therefore, it was imperative to pursue the topic of the UMG in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. In this study, I explored the factors and perceptions of child brides, parents, and local community leaders about the continuance of the UMG in the southern province of Sierra Leone for decades.

In Chapter 2, I evaluate the literature on the UMG problem. Chapter 2 is organized into concepts and theories about the UMG from the existing literature about countries other than Sierra Leone. I chose this approach as there is not enough research on UMG practices in Sierra Leone, specifically Bo Town. Additionally, the literature review involves a discussion of the social, economic, and political (SEP) implications of the UMG. The literature review reveals how the FGM led to the continual UMG practice.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of adult women who experienced child marriage, parents who married off their young girls, and community leaders to understand why the UMG persisted in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. In line with this purpose, in this chapter I highlight the challenges associated with the UMG, including dowry payments, female secret ritual, the practices nested with the FGM, isolation of the young girls who failed to comply with child marriage, and payments to marry their young daughters (Begum, 2014; McClelland, 2008). The UMG in Bo Town district presents pervasive trends of SEP implications. The assessment and development of the theories and methodology of the study allowed me to unfold the cultural phenomenon and factors surrounding the problem of child marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone.

My review of the literature impertinent to the evaluation and the findings of this study. I have organized Chapter 2 into concepts and theories about the UMG from research in other countries. These countries are located in the Middle East, Asia, and the sub-Saharan Africa (Walker, 2012). I chose this approach because there were not enough studies from Sierra Leone to inform this study. Development of the conceptual framework may inform the collective understanding of UMG in Bo Town.

Kamal (2012) defined underage marriage or child marriage of girls as marrying off young girls by their parents before the young girls reach 18 years old. The child marriage practice is widespread in the sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Kamal, 2012).

The same trend continues amongst parents and their young girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. In this study, I explored the UMG in the Kakua Chiefdom of Bo Town, Sierra Leone. Oosterveld (2010) pointed out that young girls from Bo Town, Sierra Leone become wives of the rebels, experience early childbearing, and suffer from sexual abuse. As a result, the ban of the UMG policy enforcement is a concern for effectiveness in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. Consequently, communication with local men and women leaders, parents, and adult women who were victims of UMG was critical to understanding the problem. I found that it is important for policymakers to enact, enforce, and monitor the law to prevent and mitigate child marriage (Svanemyr, Chandra-Mouli, Sigurdson Christiansen, & Mbizvo, 2012).

### Research Strategy

The strategies I adopted for this research included visiting local university libraries and searching research databases for articles. These databases consisted of the Business Source Complete/Premier, ProQuest Central, and Google Scholar search engine. Furthermore, I searched the Political Science Complete database. Since there were not enough studies on the UMG in Bo Town, existing literature helped me to investigate the UMG and its negative implications in the Bo Town area. I used literature from Asia, Middle East, and the sub-Saharan African to explore the contributing factors that related to the UMG in the Bo Town.

The terms of search included UMG, social, economic, and political implications. In addition, human rights violations, leadership integrity, and child abuse, sexual abuse,

dowry payments, lack of awareness, and education are the terms to consider when exploring underage marriage of girls (Walker, 2012; Svanemyr et al., 2012).

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this research are the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy behavioral theory. Beliefs, behavior, and thought can lead to either harmful or harmless consequences. I will use the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy behavioral theory to understand the perceptions of participants in the UMG study (Bandura, 1977, 2011). These conceptual frameworks present the necessary behavioral paradigm to help understand cultural aspects of the UMG phenomena.

#### Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1977, 2011) extended the social cognitive theory to include how people's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings can affect their behavior and self-efficacy. In this manner, self-efficacy beliefs are the foundation of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 2011). Bandura defined self-efficacy beliefs as an individual's manner of judging personal capabilities to carry out individual actions and execute precise performance. Self-efficacy beliefs are the foundations for a person's motivation, well-being, and accomplishments (Bandura, 1977).

In this study, I used the self-efficacy behavioral theory to explore how young brides, parents, and community leaders in Bo Town, Sierra Leone, perceived their capacities about conformance and continuity of underage marriage without thinking about the long-term negative consequences (Hyuksoo et al., 2013). Researchers have exposed that individuals, especially parents, perceive a high return for having their young



daughter marry at a young age, which often motivates parents to continue the phenomenon of underage marriage (Bjälkander et al., 2012; Hyuksoo et al., 2013). Child brides, parents, and community leaders perceived that underage marriage could help them improve their personal situations through monetary gain. As such, such parents are likely to adhere to these practices regardless of possible negative implications (Hyuksoo et al., 2013).

### Literature Review

According to Ansari (2013), child marriage is a fundamental human rights violation, as the phenomenon demonstrates severe consequences such as health risks and sexual abuse. Furthermore, the contributing factors of the UMG in developing countries include the belief, passion, and continuation of the cultural practice of child marriage (Ansari, 2013). These views are evident among poor parents, those who live in rural areas, and those without education (Ansari, 2013, p. 11). Conversely, there was contradictory information in the literature that UMG practice was prevalent among both the poor and the wealthy parents, but earlier studies revealed that child marriage was rampant among poor parents only (Ansari, 2013, p. 11). Regardless, clearly child marriage is a human rights violation.

Crossette (2012) argued that human rights violations continue to spread among young girls because they are often forced to marry without participating in the decision, and their removal from school is evidence of deprivation of education. Most young girls became vulnerable to STDs and faced death in childbirth (Crossette, 2012). These lessons

are applicable to the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone, and warranted further study.

Docksai (2012) provided even more evidence on the negative outcomes of the underage marriage of girls. For instance, most of these parents force their underage girls to marry before age 18. This results in the parents removing young girls from school and subjecting them to early marriage against their will. Child marriage continues to be a problem for several issues, such as early childbearing, higher health problems, domestic violence, and sexual abuse (Docksai, 2012; Svanemyr et al., 2012). Furthermore, these girls also experience social isolation and/or STDs (Docksai, 2012; Svanemyr et al., 2012).

The ban on child marriage poses many challenges. For instance, Nguyen and Wodon (2012) pointed out that despite the Child Rights Act of 2003 enacted in Nigeria to enforce equal rights for children, which included the ban of violence, early marriage, and sexual abuse against children (Abdur-Rahman & Hassan, 2013), some parents from Bo Town continued to marry off their young girls (McClelland, 2008). Conversely, cultural and religious beliefs around the topic are also challenges to prevent child marriage. For example, consent law reforms by policymakers were necessary to curtail underage marriage of girls in Asia, Middle East, and Africa (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012). Changing the beliefs of parents is essentially an education issue, and this education problem starts with the lack of education opportunities provided to child brides.

**Global problem of underage marriage.** Ten million child marriages transpire annually and globally. Most importantly, the highest rate of UMG happens in West

Africa, Middle East, southern Asia, Latin America, and northern Africa (Svanemyr et al., 2012). The child marriage problem restricts young girls from opportunities and education, and results in increased sexual abuse and health issues (Svanemyr et al., 2012). Additionally, Walker (2012) indicated that most parents in neighboring African countries, such as Mali, Cameroon, and Nigeria, continue to participate in underage marriage. According to the report from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), multiple Sub-Saharan African and the South Asian countries participated in the UMG practice. The list of countries included a 75% rate of participation of child marriage by Niger and 68% for Chad, Central African Republic, and Mozambique (Ansari, 2013, p. 11). Additionally, the rate of participation was 56% in Mali, 55% for Burkina Faso, 52% in South Sudan, and 50% in Malawi (Ansari, 2013, p. 11). These percentages indicate that the widespread problem of UMG is predominant in developing countries.

In another study, Dickey (2013) noted that almost 5 million girls below 15 years old are married per year globally. According to Dickey, some of the young girls were between 8 and 9 years of age, indicating alarming human rights violations. In the Dickey study, young girls were compelled to marry, become sex slaves, and bare children in their childhood phase. The Dicky study provided further evidence of the need to research child marriage.

According to Kamal (2012), marrying off young girls before they attain the age of 16 was about social status acceptance that was common practice in the sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. For example, 36% of women between 20 and 24 years old were

married before they reached the age of 18 globally (Kamal, 2012). Additionally, Fofana (2004) argued that marrying off young girls as virgins was important to parents, and that pregnancy of teenagers in Sierra Leone is endless. Kamal pointed out that unstable social periods, protection of young girls, and the family nobility are contributing factors of child marriage. Young girls who were married off before reaching adulthood tend to experience severe social, health, and psychological penalties (Kamal, 2012). The UNICEF in Sierra Leone alleged that changing the behavior and attitudes of people posed a problem, and it was time-consuming (Fofana, 2004). Unfortunately, Sierra Leone is not the only country with these problems.

According to Kamal (2012), Bangladesh had the second highest child marriage at 65% in 2006 and ranked third at 69% of child marriage in the world. Niger was 77% of child marriage prevalence after Bangladesh. UNICEF has been supporting the local Non Governmental Officers (NGO) in performing surveys to understand teenage pregnancy. It is vital for agencies to develop bylaws to help mothers who are still minors. Specifically, working with traditional leaders of men and women is critical. Gaffney-Rhys (2012) pointed out that child marriage practice affects young girls predominantly. Child marriage was prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia. For example, 42% of young women between the ages of 15 and 24 in Africa were married before reaching 18, and this is evident in Bo Town as well (Gaffney-Rhys, 2012).

In southern Asia, the number of underage marriages rises to 48%, and child marriage happens in rural areas because the society emphasizes girls to remain virgin and fertile before the wedding (Gaffney-Rhys, 2012). Additionally, Ebrahimi (2014) argued

that Afghanistan is among the highest levels of maternal in the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that 460 deaths that relate to teenage pregnancy occurred for every 100,000 births. Furthermore, the study showed that forced child marriage creates an adolescent pregnancy and health concerns for young girls (Ebrahimi, 2014). For example, Sahar Gul, a 13 or 14-year-old girl was forced to marry, and when she failed to comply, her in-laws tortured and beat her, and then made her participate in prostitution. As a result, Sahar Gul's in-laws have been prosecuted for their actions against the girl (Ebrahimi, 2014). Several themes emerged from the Ebrahimi article, including social justice, political participation, and domestic violence. Further, Ebrahimi (2014) argued that forced marriage, health issue, and education pose concerns in forced child marriage. In addition to child marriage, teenage pregnancy, sexual slavery, and domestic violence present social injustice, human rights violations, and health risks emerge. Therefore, the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town relates to the child marriage phenomenon (Ebrahimi, 2014; Mansaray & Johnson, 2012).

**Education issues in underage marriage. A lack of education is one of the most pressing problems of child marriage.** Nguyen and Wodon (2012) argued that child marriage is one of the most important issues on the human rights' agenda that requires responsiveness. Child marriage has been associated with psychological and health risks that include vesicovaginal fistulae and HIV/AIDS (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012). Consequently, these girls often become sex slaves without education and no skilled trade. Education deprivation due to child marriage can lead to a significant negative effect on young girls (Nguyen & Wodon, 2012), such as being forced to participate in civil wars in

Sierra Leone (Mansaray, 2012; Oosterveld, 2010). Preventing underage marriage is crucial for ensuring that teenage girls complete primary and secondary education (Fofana, 2004; Kamal, 2012).

According to Gaffney-Rhys (2012), girls who fail to attend primary school are more likely married by 18 years of age than those girls who complete primary school. This idea correlates with child marriage occurrence in Bo Town because most of the young girls who fail to complete primary and secondary education in Bo Town end up marrying before age 18. Not allowing teenage girls to obtain trade skills often leads to a continuing cycle of poverty.

**Poverty issues in underage marriage.** Parents sometimes conceive of delaying marriage of their young girls as not an option. Most importantly, underage marriage is prevalent among the poorest people who comprise 20% of the population (Gaffney-Rhys, 2012). Svanemyr et al. (2012) addressed how poverty relates to child marriage. For example, poor parents might not have the means to pay tuition for their young girls to attend school or might not provide clothing, food, and shelter for their daughters. Consequently, these poor parents believe that marrying off their young girls will mitigate their economic liability or produce economic advantages such as high dowry payments for the potential bride (Svanemyr, et al., 2012).

Walker (2012) pointed out that, the trends, patterns, and themes include poverty, insecurity, and violence. These patterns are similar to the trends that are evident in Bo Town. For example, 83% of the people cannot earn more than \$2.00 per day in Mali, while the people in Nigeria earn less than \$2.00 per day. These data provide evidence that

parallels the survival situation for both parents and underage girls in Bo Town (Walker, 2012).

**Social issues in underage marriage.** Social implications have also pushed parents to marry off their daughters before they reach 18. Meeting the expectations of marrying and childbearing are relevant social norms in the Kakua Chiefdom (Svanemyr et al., 2012). The system of the underage marriage of girls is embedded in gender discrimination. Therefore, collaboration with the elder men and women leaders was essential for this study. Additionally, law enforcement officials, policymakers, and communities are essential to protecting parents and young girls in delaying the age of marriage and enacting a national law (Svanemyr et al., 2012).

While, Crossette (2012) indicated that some elders categorized the criticism of cultural values as a myth and that this has restrained the progress of developing countries. Other elders have initiated a campaign against child marriage, and this has coincided with lower poverty rates in developing countries (Crossette, 2012). According to Crossette (2012), forced marriage was not the only calamity that young girls in these countries have faced. Some young girls experienced rape and being trafficked teachers, and sometimes serving as sex slaves, cooks, and porters (Crossette, 2012). Similar consequences are evident in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. The United Nations (UN) focuses on women's rights, but not on the rights of adolescent girls, which indicates a gap in the findings of Crossette, as young girls face vulnerability between childhood and adulthood. Consequently, the fact that young girls have not been the focus of the women's rights campaign was a concern, requiring further study (Crossette, 2012). As such, one aspect of

the UMG problem not fully addressed by the women's rights campaign is the issue of dowry.

Begum (2014) argued that the richer the future husbands, the more dowry payment for the bride. Conversely, the implication was that whenever the marriage fails, the wife would have to refund the dowry payment (Begum, 2014). If not, the woman becomes a sex slave to repay the dowry and the experience is compared to young girls in the Bo Town district; who also experience sexual abuse to pay back dowry if they failed to comply with the UMG practice (Begum, 2014). As a result, Begum (2014) pointed out that dowry payment is a financial liability and social implications for young girls. For example, failure to pay a dowry prevented girls from obtaining an inheritance from the family property, and young girls isolated from their family. Additionally, child and forced marriage in South Asia was prevalent because of the pressure on girls to marry to gain SEP acceptance in society.

Whilst Leary (2014) revealed that some adults exploited children through forced labor, sex trafficking in private, and because of economic advantage. In these cases, parents marry off their young girls like goods and services. In comparison, young girl sex trafficking was under-reported, as was the UMG in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. The fact that young girls have to comply with child marriage for fear of oppression, retaliation, and fear of forfeiting their family inheritance is a tragedy (Leary, 2014).

McClelland (2008) argued that despite the parliament officials in Sierra Leone banning UMG in 2007, the section that would have discussed the FGM practice was omitted. Furthermore, a consent reform was not part of the child marriage ban in Sierra



Leone (McClelland, 2008; Nguyen & Wodon, 2012). The reason for this was that politicians were afraid to sacrifice their political career for the FGM in Sierra Leone (McClelland, 2008). Therefore, preventing or mitigating underage marriage means targeting the FGM cultural practice, concurrently. Understanding the role of these additional complicating factors sometimes involves exploring theoretical frameworks that one can use to explain them.

Hence, Radin (2010) provided some hope that theories might be useful in studying the complexity of phenomenon such as the UMG problem. Such theories may provide an explanation of reasons for participating in the engagement of child marriage. Therefore, a good theory can be useful in building upon the existing literature and driving further research (Radin, 2010). A cohesive theory might help explain the problem and reduce biases. Conclusions from theories are just interpretations of ideas alone. Strong theories have evidence to support them, which can aid in avoiding inconsistencies and misunderstandings in the outcomes (Radin, 2010). For example, Neff and Geers (2013) argued that fruitful marriages happen when individuals have expectations and validate these expectations, and they provided empirical evidence to support their claims. Most of the reviewed studies had robust theoretical frameworks and substantial empirical evidence to support them.

Santhya et al. (2010) indicated that data were collected from 8,314 married women who were between 20 and 24, and girls who married before reaching 18 years old. In essence, women who married at 18 and older planned their marriage more than those who had married before 18 years old (Santhya et al., 2010). Santhya et al. identified

the factors related to child marriage in the literature review, illustrating how young girls have certain barriers from achieving their full potential. These findings are similar to the barriers faced by the young girls from Bo Town, including education deficits and a lack of skills to generate income for themselves to improve their lives in the future.

Al-Ridhwany and Al-Jawadi (2014) highlighted a theory that young girls earn no respect in communities because they are unmarried. The child marriage theory predicts social implications and isolation of young girls from the community (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014). For example, parents who marry off their daughters before they complete primary and secondary education create a human capital problem in the long-term. The problem of child marriage has led to gender inequality in Bo Town and globally (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014). Ghosh (2011) argued that these young girls do not have freedom of choice, and that this is a human rights violation because their parents marry them off without their consent. As a result, the child marriage theory informs underage marriage of girls in Bo Town and motivates further study.

Therefore, the lessons from the study such as cultural practice, sexual, and physical abuse are social implications for young girls in Bo Town (Dickey, 2013). Predominantly, some cultures in Sierra Leone including the district of Bo Town continue to practice genital mutilation for many young girls when they reach puberty. Consequently, some of these girls face pressure to be married off immediately (Dickey, 2013). Gage (2013) pointed out similar widespread themes such as child marriage of girls between 14 and 17 years old, violence, no access to education, and limitation to exercise choices. Although data collection in Gage's study was through a survey, many of the

themes informed the UMG in Bo Town research problem. Moreover, defining girls' social status by marriage and childbearing is common in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Despite the Law of the Child Act in 2009 that defined a child as under the age of 18, preventing child marriage has been challenging. Traditional practices were the norms in some parts of Africa and the Middle East. For example, customary or the Sharia law in Nigeria or Saudi Arabia young girls can marry at an earlier age (Gaffney-Rhys, 2012). These lessons from the literature review aligned with the systematic issues concerning child marriage in Bo Town area, which demonstrates that the international community has not done enough to address child marriage problem (Gaffney-Rhys, 2012).

Nasrullah et al. (2014) disclosed that studies have shown that women who marry under 18 years old tend to be poorer and less educated than those young girls who marry as adults. Additionally, these young girls reside in rural areas with no access to health care services. Therefore, these factors contributed to high infant death and child sickness. The implications of the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone, resulted in further complications of child marriage. In essence, understanding early marriage children was important to address social vulnerabilities that young girls face. Consequently, on a global scale, it was essential to explore whether underage marriage evoked social and structural weaknesses (Nasrullah et al., 2014).

Hochschild (2013) pointed out that children ended up without quality lives, and society lacked human capital because young girls were forced into child marriage. According to Baldwin (2012), the UMG generated domestic violence such as dowry-

related disputes and killings of young girls. Therefore, attaining higher education, and the skills to compete in the global economy were not a priority. Most researchers have implied that poverty, illiteracy, and cultural practice are the contributing factors for child marriage (Okonofua, 2013; Walker, 2012).

**Mitigating underage marriage.** There have been many challenges to address and mitigate child marriage problem. Svanemyr et al. (2012) stated that addressing child marriage at the 65th Assembly of the WHO was challenging. For example, representatives said that discussions about child marriage in developing countries were problematic and illegal. Therefore, it was a human rights violation of young girls. As a result, the adverse outcomes include health and social implications for communities, young girls, and their parents (Svanemyretal., 2012). In respect of the above concerns, there were many concrete reasons that child marriage is an endless problem. There was a sense of urgency and immediate need to take action.

The Sharia law posed difficulty to preventing and mitigating UMG in Bo Town (Hassan & Abdur-Rahman, 2013). As a result, the child marriage theory by Hassan (2013) did mirror the underage problem in Bo Town. The behaviors and perceptions of parents justified further study about the UMG in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. Oosterveld (2010) emphasized that UMG was a persistent issue all over developing the world from cities to rural areas, and this was evident in the district of Bo Town. For example, underage girls between age 10 and 17 were forced to marry older men.

Dialogue with parents, young girls, and policymakers will change the community and family norms (Svanemyret al., 2012) for the better, which may impede underage

marriage of girls in Bo Town. In contrast, according to Rector (2012), policymakers identified that education minimizes poverty. Nonetheless, policymakers did not understand that marriage is anti-poverty. Ironically, married couples with children are 76% less likely to be poor than non-married families with the same level of education (Rector, 2012). Tragically, there was no communication with the youths at risk for future non-marital births about the importance of marriage in fighting poverty. Likewise, the social service system overlooked and despised the institution of marriage. Moreover, social service penalized low-income married couples. Subsequently, illiteracy, poverty, and the lack of awareness of human rights violations were factors related to the UMG. The “Human Rights” (2013) publication revealed the corruption from the top government officials to the judiciary levels, and bribery was acceptable for all private and business transactions.

In Sierra Leone, there was property crime, sexual assault, and endless robbery (“Human Rights,” 2013). Young girls in Sierra Leone experienced rape; teenage pregnancies, health issues, but young girls receive help from society rarely, and violators hardly face prosecution (Human Rights, 2013). This information from the existing literature informed the underage marriage study in Bo Town, justifying further research. Ansari (2013) stated that Bangladesh was not the only underdeveloped country that experiences child marriage before they attain 15 years old. Although the Ministry of Education pushed for partnership with the United States Nongovernmental Winrock International for girls to stay in school, this efforts was not successful (“Unity State Calls for Underage Marriage Action,” 2012). The young girls from Unity claimed that child

marriage was a regular cultural practice. Notably, it was regular practice among some ethnic groups like Nuer and Dink because of financial benefits.

Certainly, Wolfe (2013) pointed out that, whether young girls decided to escape child marriage or not, young girls kept prostituting for survival daily. Therefore, the behavior was a threat to human dignity, and it was an implication of UMG that warranted further study. While, Cloward (2014) pointed out how the FGM that contributed to child marriage, hindered and violated human rights, failed to protect young girls, promoted health problems, persecuted young girls; and killed young girls early because of early marriage without consent (Cloward, 2014).

Okonofua (2013) argued that a Nigerian Senate attested that policy makers, parents, and law enforcement officials failed to address problems modeled by child marriage. Sabbe et al. (2013) disclosed that, despite the demand for equal rights for girls and the increase of the age to 18 to marry, most parents continue to engage in child marriage.

## Summary of Chapter 2

The information about the child marriage problem did inform the UMG study. The lessons from the literature will assist policymakers, health officials, and law enforcement personnel. Local and international leaders, young girls, and parents can work together for policy reform to prevent the underage marriage. Hassan and Abdur-Rahman (2013) pointed out that in the United Kingdom girls are married off against their will. Girls' legal age to marry in the United Kingdom is 16 years old. The Sharia Muslim law allows a 14-year-old girl to marry as long as she has a sound mind. It is imperative

for the healthcare profession to identify, prevent, and respond to girls that experience sexual abuse and sex trafficking (Todres & Clayton, 2014). The initiative will prevent, detect, and respond to commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking to help victims of child marriage (Todres & Clayton, 2014). It is time for policymakers, community leaders, global leaders, and parents to take action to mitigating underage marriage problem (Santhya et al., 2010).

There is not enough known about underage, marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. This dearth of research indicates a gap in the literature that requires further study. Some parents including both men and women might challenge the initiative to end child marriage, as it will generate social change implications and the clash of cultural practice in the Bo Town community. Regardless, it is vital to prevent or mitigate underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, specifically enacting and enforcing laws to avert marriage of young girls before they reach 18 years old.

Additionally, it was important for private and government organizations to provide resources for young girls to stay in school (Svanemyr et al., 2012). These resources would help young girls from Bo Town to have opportunities such as empowerment, higher education, and living healthy and purposeful lives in society. Since young girls from Bo town area suffered the most, the revamp of the ban on child marriage policy requires a call to action by policymakers. It is imperative to work with local and international leaders and policy makers to adopt a policy to prevent child marriage and enforce the policy on a consistent basis. Furthermore, it is important to raise awareness about underage marriage and sanction anyone who violates the child marriage

policy. It is important to explore whether national laws matter in the implementation of global norms to revamping the UMG (Kim et al., 2013). Moreover, Nasrullah et al. (2014) pointed out that in 2010 about 21,000 children under five years old faced death every day. Practically, 70% of deaths occurred in 15 countries such as Nigeria 22.3%, Democratic Republic of Congo 11.3%, and China 4.1% of preterm birth complications were discovered. Al-Ridhwany and Al-Jawadi (2014) argued in their study that early child marriage was as twice as the preferred, and the contributing factors consisted of socio-cultural issues and illiteracy.

The ongoing child marriage has demonstrated a gap in the existing theory that motivates researchers to replicate research to confirm findings (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, until leaders, parents, and law enforcement officials in Bo Town, Sierra Leone lead with integrity, it will be challenging to mitigate UMG (Van Genderen, 2014). As a result, it was important to understand the UMG problem in order to provide suitable recommendations to mitigate the problem.

Al-Ridhwany and Al-Jawadi (2014) used mixed methods, but failed to show research questions to support the qualitative research portion (Creswell, 2013). There was no central question, just overreaching questions that included sub-questions to investigate participants' perceptions of child marriage, which is a methodological limitation of the study (Creswell, 2013). As research questions delineate the methodology, the researcher should create relevant questions to investigate and understand the phenomenon of interest.



Sierra Leone authorized the Maputo Protocol, an African Charter of Women's Rights in 2003, to terminate the FMG practice for young girls under 18 years old (Kargbo, 2015). Regardless, as long as the FMG practice continues in Sierra Leone, some parents will continue to engage in a UMG of girls in Bo Town. The reason for this is that some parents believe that the UMG is a culture that should continue and that dowry payment was a good source of income. Based on the review conducted, the mentioned literature provides evidence to validate a UMG study. In addition, the social implications compel readers to seek more information. Therefore, researchers, policymakers, and local and international leaders should take action immediately.

### Conclusion

In summary, if law enforcement officials, educators, and human rights advocates had been inclusive in promoting education and child marriage awareness training, the problem would have been mitigated. In contrast, without a plan of actions such as anonymous calls, a website to report violators of the UMG, and enforcement to prosecute violators of the UMG in Bo Town, the UMG problem had continued to be a challenge to mitigate. As a result, it was necessary to implement leadership and awareness training, as well as to provide resources to young girls and parents in order to replace dowry payments to improve their quality of lives.

In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account of the research design of this study. The research method involved data management, ethical considerations, and data analysis. Further, I took into account the participants' protection of privacy during and after collection of data. The underage marriage of girls in Bo Town district will be a call to

action for stakeholders such as policy makers, community leaders, global leaders, and parents to mitigate the problem (Santhya et al., 2010). By pinpointing gaps and implications of the underage marriage of girls in this study, I uncover the endless reality of underage marriage of girls' problem in Bo Town, Sierra Leone (Neff & Geers, 2013).

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of adult women who experienced child marriage, parents who married off their young girls, and community leaders to understand why the UMG persisted in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. In line with this purpose, in Chapter 3, I explain the research method including the data collection, analysis, and ethical concerns. Moreover, I account for the data management processes, sample, and population. In Chapters 1 and 2, I presented a detailed account of real life experiences of victims of the UMG in Bo Town. Parents' engagement in the UMG drives the participation of the FMG practice (McClelland, 2008) that aggravates the ongoing problem of child marriage and is difficult to terminate. In addition, the authoritative male role in Bo Town, Sierra Leone demonstrates the gender disparity that continues to promote the UMG. Therefore, in chapter 3, I define the qualitative method and clarify the topic. The following research questions drive the research methodology of this study.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What factors do child brides perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

RQ2: What factors do the parents of child brides perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

RQ3: What factors do community leaders perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

Using these research questions as a guide, I gathered information about the perceptions of child brides, parents of child brides, and community leaders in the southern province of Sierra Leone regarding the continuance of marriage of underage girls. In this manner, I addressed the problem and the purpose of the study.

### Research Methodology

In this study, I used a qualitative methodology to examine the problem of the underage marriage in Bo Town in a case study format. The reason I chose this methodology was to explore and understand individuals and groups concerning the occurrence of events in real life situations (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, a qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to identify and understand the experiences and perceptions of individuals involved. Using the qualitative method, a researcher can explore perceptions of individuals and social groups within the context of their culture, history, and personal experiences, including socioeconomic status and community or organizational dynamics (Leedy & Ormond, 2010; Polit & Beck, 2010). Moreover, qualitative research is also appropriate when the researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon, as was the case in this study (Silverman, 2011). For the case of this current study, the phenomenon of interest was the UMG in Bo Town, Sierra Leone.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies permit the exploration or investigation of a particular phenomenon in depth within its uncontrolled environment

(Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). Moreover, the qualitative method offers its users the advantage of gathering and presenting rich data, especially when the researcher performs data gathering through interviews (Moretti et al., 2011). Hence, it was the appropriate methodology for this study.

The participants in this study included underage brides, their parents, and community leaders in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. I conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions. These strategies helped to explore the personal explanations of participants through their real life stories (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Additionally, my examination of documents, observation of participants, and a collection of the data generated direct excerpts from participants' responses.

Extensive research was necessary in order to understand the problem of exploring the perceptions and feelings underage brides, parents, and community leaders regarding their practice of continuing the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town despite its negative implications (Patton, 2002). In this study, I explored how young girls or underage brides in Bo town experience underage marriage and the practice of FMG (McClelland, 2008). Moreover, I also examined instances of young girls who experienced sexual abuse and denial of the family inheritance when they failed to comply with the cultural practice (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014; McClelland, 2008).

### Research Design

According to Creswell (2013), it is necessary to identify an approach to producing a qualitative study for a sophisticated study. The qualitative study needed to be specific for reviewers to be able to assess the research correctly. This strategy was important

because researchers who are beginners can have a structure to follow and through which to show organized ideas (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, I implemented a case study research design. A case study research design was inappropriate model because it focused on the in-depth exploration of the perceptions of participants using multiple sources (Yin, 2011). Other qualitative research designs were also considered for this study (including narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography). However, they were inappropriate for this study based on its problem, purpose, and the research questions. A phenomenology design could have been used for this study as this study focused on perceptions instead of lived experiences (see Moustakas, 1994). I did not choose a phenomenology design because subjectivity in my study was not possible to produce credible result. I used a case study design and engaged in in-depth interviews of participants individually (Creswell, 2013). I investigated three different groups of participants to understand their experiences of the UMG problem in Bo Town. A grounded theory design is aimed at developing a theory or model that is based on data that was systematically gathered, empirically grounded, and inductively analyzed (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010). This design was not aligned with the purpose and research questions of the study; thus, made it an inappropriate design to use. A narrative research design makes use of qualitative data presented in a story and chronological form to investigate a particular phenomenon (Wiles, Crow, & Pain, 2011). This research design was not appropriate for this study because this study did not involve the investigation of stories.

Conversely, Yin (2011) proposed four criteria in choosing a case study approach: (a) the study aimed to answer *why* and *how* questions; (b) the behavior of those involved in the study are not manipulated; (c) contextual conditions were covered, because these were necessary to the phenomenon under study; and (d) the phenomenon and contexts had unclear boundaries. Given these criteria, which applied to the purpose and research questions of this current study, I determined a case study was the most appropriate research design.

I used a qualitative design case study to examine the problem of the underage marriage of girls. A case study is also a method of conducting research that is appropriate when there is a need to develop valid inferences. For instance, when a researcher needs to develop a valid inference from events that do not involve the controlled environment of laboratories but that remain true to the goals of shared knowledge from laboratory science (Yin, 2011). Hence, in this study I employed a qualitative methodology with a case study research design.

The results of this study can narrow and provide a scope that captures young women's experiences of underage marriage as young brides before they reach the age of 18. Moreover, diverse qualitative methods feature facts, credible, and reliable findings and yield results (Creswell, 2009). With this in mind, I used explored many theories and implemented the qualitative method to understand the underage marriage of girls.

#### Sample and Population

Sampling is not just about people to observe and interview in a study, but sampling involves the settings, social processes, and events. Case studies require clear

choices and individual cases to involve in the research (Miles et al., 2014). According to Miles et al. (2014), qualitative researchers use small samples of people, while quantitative researchers employ larger numbers of the sample to obtain the statistical substance. In this regard, qualitative researchers set two peripheries to conduct qualitative research. Patton (2002) pointed out that qualitative researchers are familiar with ambiguities, and the methodology involves purposeful strategies as an alternative to methodological rules. According to Woodley and Lockard (2016), snowball-sampling technique helps a researcher to reach sensitive populations to recruit participants by asking potential participants to nominate a person. In contrast, I did not use the snowball sampling technique because of the vulnerability of the participants in the study.

In this study, I recruited 30 participants in case some participants withdrew or failed to appear for the interview. I reached saturation after 12 participants were interviewed. It was critical to interview five participants from each social group under the study. The reason was to understand different perspectives of each participant from these three different groups to achieve objectivity, and minimize bias in the study: (a) young girls who underwent underage marriage, (b) parents who married off their daughters before 18 years old, and (c) community leaders in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. I conducted interviews with these three groups to facilitate triangulation of the data (Denzin, 2012). I selected these participants from the Bo Town district of Sierra Leone. Furthermore, the sampling population represented all ethnic groups in Sierra Leone.

I explained to participants the purpose of my study before the interviewing sessions. I explained the consent form, made clear to participants of their rights to



privacy, and participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) wanted to know about the participants I was going to interview and specific questions I would ask before the fieldwork. In the end, since the topic was harmless and questioning was modest, the IRB approved the framework of the developing design and the sample questions to pursue the study (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I met the ethical standards of the research. Multiple cases involve a sample that explores different and similar cases in justifying it by stating the how, where, and why they study the theory (Miles et al., 2014).

#### Sampling Procedures

According to Creswell (2013), data collection involves concentrating on the real types of data and procedures for gathering them. Additionally, it is important to request permission to gain access to participants and sites. To conduct a good qualitative sampling strategy, it is necessary to record information both digitally and manually. It is crucial to consider potential ethical issues and data storage (Creswell, 2013).

The purposeful sampling in qualitative research is comprised of the selection of individuals and sites to inform the study and understand the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013). To begin, I needed to decide who or what to sample, the method of sampling, and how many participants or sites should be tested. Additionally, it was necessary to decide whether the sampling was consistent with one of the five approaches to inquiry (Creswell, 2013).

To facilitate purposive sampling, I obtained permission from the Kakua Chiefdom in Bo Town through a letter as seen in Appendix A. In the permission letter, I included a

brief background of the study, as well as its purpose and potential significance. I also expressed my intention to conduct the study in their community, especially with their young brides, parents, and community leaders. The permission was obtained before conducting the study.

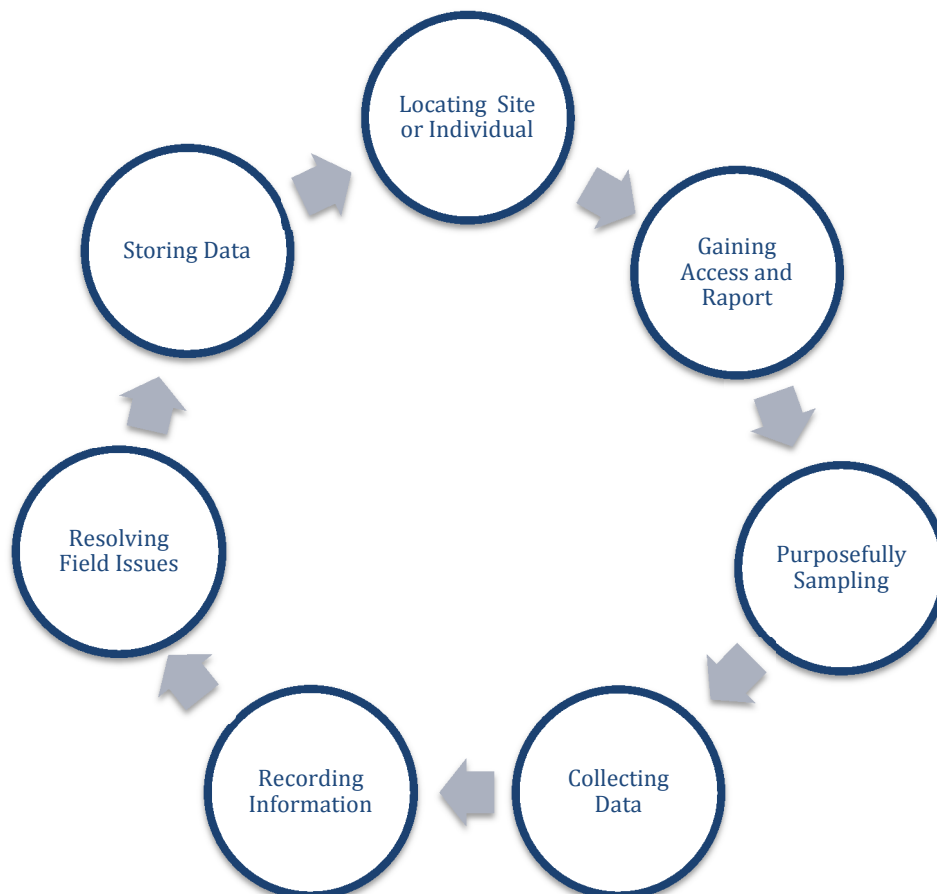
Upon obtaining the permission from the heads of the community, I traveled to Bo Town to deliver invitation letters to potential participants (e.g., five young brides, five parents of young brides, and five community leaders) for their quest to participate in the interviews for the study (see Appendix B). All interested participants were asked to sign an informed consent (see Appendix C), wherein they were informed about their rights and responsibilities as participants in the study. All participants were adults (18 years old and above) at the time of data collection. For child brides, they needed not to be recent child brides, as long as they experienced underage marriage when they were younger than 18 years old. Therefore, there was only one type of informed consent form. In the consent form, I also asked participants to indicate their preferred date and time for the interview.

### Sample Size

The lack of generalization tends to characterize one of the limitations of qualitative research because of the small sample sizes and lack of statistical values (Draper, 2004). Consequently, sample size is crucial to the reliability of a study. It was important to use the appropriate sample size to achieve correct analysis and results of the data. Therefore, the sampling targeted underage girls, parents, and community leaders from Bo Town in Sierra Leone. It was vital to ensure that participants were readily available (Creswell, 2013). The sampling for qualitative research denotes interview

settings, individuals, or groups of participants (Nastasi, 2014). For example, exploring and mitigating underage marriage of girls in the Bo Town, Sierra Leone was worthy because there were not enough research on the topic. Approximately, 15 participants, five participants from each group were recruited. The study participants used to answer the research questions included five child brides between the ages of 18 and 24 who were married before 18 years old, five community leaders, and five parents who married off their young girls from the area of Bo Town district; Sierra Leone.

I asked participants open-ended questions in the interview to understand the reasons for participating in underage marriage. While considering the resources available and the period of the study, I built theoretical constructs to demonstrate theoretical sampling that explained and examined the theory (Nastasi, 2014). Although the approach was similar to criterion sampling, the strategy focuses more on the abstract.



*Figure 1.* Data collection activities.

**Locating a site or individual.** According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative researcher engages in the sequence of activities in collecting data by locating the site and individuals to study. It was important to find participants, settings, and away to access participants and establish communication. For example, finding a site or individual involves the determination of purposeful sampling sites, and individuals that sample a group of people (Creswell, 2013).

**Access and rapport.** It was imperative that I had access to the sites and individuals to ask participants for permission to study the site, so that it was easy to

collect data(Creswell, 2013). Additionally, it was vital to request permission from the human subjects review board to protect participants from harmful effects. In this regard, I submitted a proposal to the board that detailed procedures of the research project (Creswell, 2013).

#### Instrumentation

I initiated contact with the manager of the Bo Town Regional Library and leaders of the community centers in Bo Town through telephone, and requested permission verbally and gave a synopsis of the study based on their knowledge of the subject of UMG. After tentative verbal agreement from the Regional Bo Town Library and the local leaders of the community centers for me to use these sites to recruit participants, I submitted an application to the IRB to conduct the study on UMG in Bo Town, Sierra Leone.

Also, I submitted an application with documents to the IRB, and the IRB approved the study on August 8, 2016. The approval number for this study is 08-09-16-0297942. After the IRB approval, I emailed request for permission sites letters to the leaders of the community centers, and the manager of the Bo Town Regional Library to use the Bo Town Regional library and community centers' notice boards to post flyers and letters of participation in the study. For the purpose of this study, in-person interview was necessary to capture participants' expression in the moment of the interviewing process and to establish trust with participants.

## Interview

A face-to-face interview was reliable to uncover participants' beliefs, expressions, perceptions, and attitudes (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I interviewed individually parents who married off their young girls, community leaders, and adult women between (18-24 years old) who experienced underage girls' marriage. In-person interviews assisted in understanding perceptions of the behavior of the participants. I used both structured and unstructured interview technique. This approach obtained certain information from a certain group (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, I utilized open-ended questions to bring out the best answers from participants to allow them to explain questions to avoid misinterpretation. The interview protocol helped to guide the research questions within the parameter of the underage marriage of girls' study in Bo Town. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix D.

Table 1

*Interview Protocols Chart for the Qualitative Study*

Study Attributes	Description
Purpose of the Study	Explore the perceptions of young brides, their parents, and community leaders on why still perform underage marriage in a town in Sierra Leone despite its known adverse impact.
Duration of the interview	30 to 45 minutes
Structured and unstructured open-ended questions	Why do young brides, their parents, and community leaders continue the practice of underage marriage in Bo Town?
Inform participants about their rights to privacy	Participants' identity will not be revealed and participants have the rights to withdraw from the study anytime
Consent forms	Participants' signature

*Note.* Interview protocols chart for the qualitative study.

**Data management.** I recorded information through field notes, tape recorder, scanner, external hard drive, and computer (Creswell, 2013) to conduct the underage marriage of girls' study. Due to the enormous amount of data generated in this study, data collection and management were necessary. Therefore, I employed the Nvivo tool to

compile, analyze, and manage data (QSR International, 2014). Consequently, the use of the software helped me to achieve efficiency.

**Computer.** I used a computer to record and store the data or used a scanner to save the information on a computer hard drive. The computer was one of the best tools that helped me to maintain and manage the information and data from the study. I used two layers of security with strong passwords, and I locked up the computer in a safe place for unauthorized users to protect information in the computer (Creswell, 2013).

**Scanner/external hard drive.** I used a scanner and external hard drive to organize my research data, and these tools stored large data as a disk backup safely. In this regard, a scanner was used for information annotations from interviewing participants and observation from the field. Most importantly, I scanned the information into a computer after interviews, saved the information on a computer, and transferred the data to an external hard drive for security (QSR International, 2014).

**Audiorecorder.** I used a audio (cassette) recorder to interview participants to ensure quality, the productivity of the story, and efficiency. Additionally, I purchased enough batteries for the tape recorder for the interview sessions and recorded participants with their consent. This process helped to manage and protect the information as evidence of events unfolded (QSR International, 2014). Furthermore, since the technology was a challenge in Sierra Leone, and blackouts were frequent, a tape recorder was used to record interviews. Since law and order were challenging and the sensitivity of the participants in the research, creating a video segment was not an option.



### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection used in this study was determined by the nature of the research question or problem. The data collection techniques were suitable for the study and environment (Creswell 2013). Therefore, my research consists of a phenomenological importance relating to the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town. I used several strategies to collect data. These strategies included interviews, observation during the interview, and writing down important occurrences (participant and nonparticipant), and I made adjustments in the data collection when essential (Creswell, 2013).

I interviewed participants to explore the contributing factors of the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town to understand participants' beliefs, perceptions, and expressions (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, I asked open-ended questions to extract answers from interviewees. These strategies allowed participants to answer in details to the pre crafted interview open-ended questions concerning the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town (Payton, 2002). I used both structured and unstructured interview techniques to obtain precise information from selected individuals (Creswell, 2013).

### Data Analysis

The use of computer software tools helped to interpret and analyze the collected data. The software tools also helped with accounting for collected data from interviews and some notes that were documented from observation during the interview, as well as with maintaining credibility during analysis. I maintained a responsibility to safeguard the data collected for analysis throughout the process. I developed personal insights and worked through the theories, listened to interviewees actively, and presented a vivid

description of the qualitative coded and analyzed (Chenail, 2012; Creswell, 2013). Additionally, I used the Nvivo software tool to organize, retrieve, and identify data efficiently (QSR International, 2014).

#### NVivo as a Data Management Tool

NVivo is influential to the management and organization of data (QSR International, 2014). NVivo can manage data, images, and information on research. For example, researchers can use NVivo to create folders that manage and organize manuscripts and to display the time documents read, including before and after the reads occurred (QSR International, 2014). Furthermore, researchers can use NVivo software to collect and read text, which enhances interpretation and understanding of outcomes. Audio and video data can be imported into Nvivo for analysis (QSR International, 2014). Most importantly, the Nvivo software allows for the manipulation of documents by nodes, import documents into a PDF, and creation of memos and annotations.

I utilized the Nvivo software to combine data, crosschecked data, and link data analysis. As a result, I pinpointed trends and tested theories (QSR International, 2014). Therefore, the software has the capability to annotate nodes, augment the data collection, create themes, and store data folders for later examining, classifying, sorting, and organizing (QSR International, 2014).

#### Nvivo as an Analytical Tool

The computer Nvivo software allowed me to control documents and files when necessary that were challenging to code manually. The computer software saved me time during coding. The Nvivo software helped me to merge documents after much practice.

The computer software produced diagrams, charts, graphs, and exhibit codes from the analysis (Payton, 2002; QSR International, 2014). I queried information with the assistance of the Nvivo software.

The Nvivo software has the capability to compare, contrast the data, and code data to connect with the study (Nvivo Software, 2014). The use of the Nvivo software assisted in checking for patterns and validated the collection of the three interview responses. Furthermore, the Nvivo software helped to organize data, import data, and code data, rather than hand coding (Creswell, 2013; Payton, 2002).

#### Issues of Quality

Quality begins with the foundation of perceptions of credibility (Patton, 2002). It involves executing accurate techniques for quality data collection during fieldwork. According to Patton (2002), demonstrating reliability during and after the collection of data is crucial to achieving quality. Quality situates standards and measures up to standards that induce credibility from researchers and the readers' judgment (Patton, 2002). Peer review allows peers to challenge postulations, ask hard questions about methods and interpretations, and provide a way to listen to the researcher actively (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, peer review permitted me to refine the research design, strengthen the arguments of the problem under inquiry, and produce a quality study. Above all, quality involved credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

### Role of the Researcher

In this section, I explain the possibility of biases, and how I managed these biases (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). For example, I separated my duty as the researcher from my acquaintances in Sierra Leone. I refrained from bribery and corruption. I stressed the processes to reduce an examiner's bias and accentuated rigorous and systematic data collection methods (Patton, 2002).

Consequently, I listened to participants actively and respectfully with empathy during face-to-face interviews, asked to follow up questions to ensure I understood participants' answers, and validated sources during fieldwork to produce quality data (Patton, 2002). The goal of triangulation was to verify data and reduce inquirer bias. There was a possibility that evaluators could be biased in their findings (Patton, 2002). It was essential to understand bias and clarify experiences and prejudices that could have obscured the investigation and interpretation of the study (Creswell, 2013).

### Ethical Concerns

Since bribery and ongoing corruption are apparent in Sierra Leone, there were foreseeable challenges in maintaining ethical standards (Human Rights, 2013). Thus, participants were informed that bribery was not an option to prevent bias, and participants' identity was concealed. I did not link the participants' identities to the study (Creswell, 2009). Further, participants were notified of the purpose or the actual intent of the study, and that participants' participation in the UMG study was voluntary. Most significantly, participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview anytime (Patton 2002; Creswell, 2013). Women who were between 18 and 24 were among the primary

participants of the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, as they were victims when they were young girls.

Therefore, there was an explanation of privacy rights, and participants including parents were required to sign consent forms (Creswell, 2013). In this study, there were no minors in the study. The IRB was contacted for guidelines and submission of the consent form (Walden University, n.d.). All data collected for the study was kept in my private office. Physical or printed data (e.g., transcripts, interview protocols, informed consent) were kept inside a locked cabinet that is accessible to the researcher alone (Creswell, 2013). I retained all digital or electronic files (e.g., spreadsheets, thematic diagrams) password-protected in my personal computer. I will retain all this information for 5 years after finishing the study. After 5 years, I will destroy all data through shredding, burning, or permanent deletion.

Furthermore, to demonstrate credibility and quality, it was necessary for other scholars and peers to scrutinize, review, and analyze the research results (Patton 2002). Most importantly, planning, organizing, and documenting data were critical to presenting findings with validity. I established credibility by adhering to ethics and understanding the consent rule for participants including minors. Especially, when conducting interviews, observing participants or objects (Creswell, 2013; Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011).

### Conclusion

In summary, I incorporated the research methodology into the initial qualitative phase study and in-depth interviews with selected participants through purposeful and

meaningful sampling (Creswell, 2013). I explained to participants the purpose of the study, duration of the study, and invited participants to participate in the study. I did inform participants about their rights to privacy, and they had the option to withdraw from the study any time without explanation (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

I interviewed five parents who married off their daughters before 18 years old and five women who were between 18 and 24 years old who experienced the underage marriage of girls. Additionally, I interviewed five community leaders in Bo Town district of Sierra Leone. I used both structured and unstructured interviews methods so that participants could answer interview questions accordingly (Creswell, 2013).

The findings that 63% of women have married before age 18, and most of the women lack education (Santhya et al., 2010), triggered further research into UMG in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. I used the Nvivo Software to compile, analyze, and interpret data through coding. Finally, I used a computer, tape recorder, and a cabinet with a lock to store the data (Creswell, 2013; Nvivo software, 2014). Subsequently, in Chapter 4, I discuss data production, collection, and documentation. Further, in Chapter 4, I present meanings, themes, and patterns that were uncovered in the study. Finally, answers to the research questions are proposed.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of this study and provide a discussion of how I produced, collected, and documented the data. Also in Chapter 4, I present my process for identifying and tracking meanings, patterns, and themes during the study. Ultimately, I present answers to the research questions. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of adult women who experienced child marriage, parents who married off their young girls, and community leaders to understand why the UMG persisted in Bo Town, Sierra Leone..

Participants provided me with different insights about the reasons parents engage in such rituals targeting young girls in the Bo Town district. Additionally, in the study, I build upon existing literature to uncover parents', young girls', and community leaders' perceptions from Bo Town district, as to why they continue the tradition of underage marriage despite its known negative implications (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). With this study, I also provide an understanding of how young girls face the dilemma of denial of the family inheritance for noncompliance of underage marriage (Al-Ridhwany & Al-Jawadi, 2014; McClelland, 2008).

I conducted the study of the underage marriage of girls' experience in Bo Town using a case study research design (see Yin, 2011). A case study research design was appropriate in exploring this phenomenon and addressing the research questions of the study, as I used it to explore the perspectives of different groups of people. Moreover,

case studies allow for the exploration of perspectives of individuals regarding the *how* and *why* questions, which was the focus of the research questions of the study (see Yin, 2011).

This study of the underage marriage of girls (UMG) in Bo Town was critical because the research uncovered what measures are necessary to adopt in order to mitigate the underage marriage of girls. Additionally, the results of this study could help stakeholders (e.g., young brides, parents, law enforcement, policy makers, and community leaders) to have a wider perspective regarding the phenomenon. Moreover, the results could be used by the local leaders of men and women to work together to combat the UMG's problem in Bo town (Bryson, 2011; Creswell, 2013).

I used two conceptual frameworks to explore the problem of UMG in this study. The theoretical frameworks for this research were the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy behavioral theory (Bandura, 2011). Bandura's social cognitive theory is based on the seminal works on social learning theory. In social cognitive theory, Bandura claimed that learning existed through observations of surroundings and people in communities. Under the social cognitive theory, there is a long-established primary argument that individuals are willing participants in their development and that they can make things happen by their actions (Bandura, 2011). Bandura developed the social cognitive theory to explain the factors that influence human functioning, including the interplay of behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors.

I developed the following research questions to guide this study:



RQ1: What factors do child brides perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

RQ2: What factors do the parents of child brides perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

RQ3: What factors do community leaders perceive as influencing the continuance of marriage for underage girls in the southern province of Sierra Leone?

### Research Setting

A qualitative case study is an examination and analysis of a single or collective case with the goal to capture the complexity of the purpose of the study (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Qualitative case study research illustrates “naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods” (Hyett et al., 2014, p. 2). Case study methodology upholds deep connections to core values and intentions, and it is vivid descriptions of real life experiences (Hyett et al., 2014). As I demonstrated in this data collection section, the participant responses during the interviews exhibited how the participants perceived experiences of underage marriage.

The interview responses of the participants established their awareness of the UMG practice in Bo Town. The library where I interviewed participants in a private room was conducive to the interview sessions because there were no distractions. Participants felt safe, and after the interviews, I locked and secured the devices and items such as a computer, tape recorder, notepad, and consent forms. No significant situation occurred during an interview that influenced my interpretation of study results. There was

a power failure during the second day of the last interview session. Fortunately, extra copies of the consent forms, batteries, two charged laptops, and a flashlight were available. Interviews were rescheduled at the participant's request because of rain. Therefore, I finished the interviews 1 day later than planned. No participants suffered significant distress other than minimal fatigue. There were no extra funds needed because I planned for the study from application to the IRB and requested permission to access the interview site before recruiting participants and traveling to Bo Town to conduct the study.

### Demographics

I selected participants from different communities in Bo Town, such as Tikonko, Baoma, and Telu in the Bo Town district. The participants included five adult women between 18 and 24 years old who have experienced UMG in Bo Town, five parents who married off their young girls, and five community leaders who worked with social services and law enforcement and who were assigned to a chief to address and resolve social problems in Bo Town district. It was essential to conduct the study in Bo Town because Bo Town is the second largest city in Sierra Leone West Africa, with different ethnic groups, a diverse population, and a place where parents continue to marry off their young girls.

I concealed the identity of the participants during the interviews by assigning each participant a number and a letter. Participants in the study were interviewed individually. Numbers were assigned to participants based on the order of participation in the interviews. The first participant (CL1) was one of the community leaders in Bo Town. He

worked with the local government and law enforcement regarding social problems with youths in Bo Town district. The second participant (CL2) was a community leader from Baoma, and he worked with the local government. He coordinated community development affairs in the region.

The third participant (CL3) was a woman, and she was a leader of the Bondo society known as the FGM to the western world. CL3 admitted that she still participates in the FGM ceremony, but she only deals with adult women from 18 years and over. CL3 reported that she changed her behavior from initiating underage girls into the Bondo society after the government enacted the law in 2003 to terminate the FGM practice for young girls under 18 years old (Kargbo, 2015). Her responses were conflicting though because CL3 works with women's rights organization presently.

CL4 was a chief and he explained that during the interview that he had to deal with the underage marriage of girls under 18 on a daily basis because his role required him to authorize the UMG marriage. CL5 was a community leader for central part of Bo Town district who worked in collaboration with social workers, law enforcement, the local court, and leaders of community leaders in Bo Town on social problems.

The second group of participants was adult women between the ages of 18 and 24. The first interviewee in this group, AW1, who was 19 years old, said she was married off at 11 years of age. The second participant, AW2, was 24 years old, and she indicated she was married off at 17 years old. The third participant, AW3, was 22 years old, and she said her parents married her off at 14 years old after going through Bondo society. AW4 was 20 years old, and she reported her parents married her off at 12 years old. The fifth

participant, AW5, said her mother married her off at 10 years old after undergoing the FGM practice.

The third group of participants included parents from Bo Town district who married off their young girls before their young girls were 18 years old. There were five participants in this group, and I concealed their identity through the codes P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 respectively. The first participant in this category (P1) was a school administrator, the second participant (P2) was one of the local women leaders of the FGM ritual, and the third participant was a housewife. The fourth participant (P4) was a secondary school teacher, and the fifth participant (P5) was a local farmer in the Bo Town area. Note that all participants in this study were not related biologically to each other.

#### Data Collection

I used the following steps for data collection: observed the participants, took notes, identified themes, and interpreted the data (see Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). The interviews were structured and unstructured, and I recorded them with a tape recorder. I also took field notes on the participants' responses (see Creswell, 2013). Additionally, I completed the data transcription manually and through the Nvivo software. My background in interviewing skills assisted with recruiting and interviewing participants effectively. This experience includes being a customer service representative for over 25 years with 16 years at my current workplace, a federal governmental agency. In this job, I have interviewed potential beneficiaries with vulnerability by asking open-ended questions to explore the nature of a customer's problem. As a result, I determined

the appropriate actions or referrals to employ. I screened customers for potential social benefit eligibility. These benefits include death or survivors, widows, widowers, retirement, and social security supplementary income benefits. I am required to uphold to all guidelines according to the organization's policies. During these interviews, it is imperative to build a trustworthy relationship. Accordingly, it is important to listen actively with empathy and extract information through open-ended questions.

These attributes enabled me to interview participants conscientiously. Therefore, I handled participants' narratives of the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town with respect and empathy. I reserved a private room in the Bo Town Regional Library to conduct interviews. After participants had given me provisional verbal consent, appointments were scheduled for in-person interviews. Participants were from Bo Town district and were comprised of five adult women between 18 and 24 years old who had experienced underage marriage in Bo Town, five parents who married off their young girls, and five community leaders.

Community leaders' responsibilities were working with social services, law enforcement, and a chief to resolve social problems in communities. I requested participants' contact information so that I could schedule appointments for interviews. In addition, my contact information could be found in the invitation letters and participation request flyers for participants to call and schedule an appointment to participate in the study. Before the interviews began, I gave a synopsis of the study. I informed the participants about their right to privacy as well as their right to withdraw at any time from

the study without penalty. I provided two consent forms in person per participant that totaled 30 copies, plus an additional 15 for a total of 45 copies.

I used the same interview questions for interviewees associated to one of the groups. Since I needed to recruit 15 participants, it was important to have 15 extra copies of the consent forms in case someone withdrew or rescheduled. I used a computer to type notes out from three participants who requested not to be recorded, and I backed up data through an external hard drive (Creswell, 2013). The interviews took place in a private room of the Bo Town Regional Library face-to-face and individually. The interview procedure lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and I conducted five interviews per day.

I used the same questions for each of the interviews, which were structured and unstructured, with open-ended questions. Data were recorded with a tape recorder, computer, and notebook (see Patton, 2002). The interview questions can be found in Appendix D. Although it rained a lot during the interview period and some participants rescheduled their interviews, the process of collecting the data did not suffer a significant impediment. Additionally, there was a power failure during the last interview session. In spite of everything, the interview continued because I had extra copies of the consent forms, batteries, two charged laptops, and LED flashlight along with me.

### Data Analysis

The case study procedures were employed because of the in-depth theoretical perspectives of the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. After data collection, the data were organized, transcribed, and analyzed. I used the Nvivo software to analyze the data (QSR International, 2014). The research method was skewed toward

an understanding of the content of data in the course of the systematic classification process of coding and identification of themes or patterns, which were used to describe the meaning of the qualitative responses (Cho & Lee, 2014). According to Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, and Casey (2015), there is no regular way of analyzing qualitative data.

Since data analysis is mainly complex and peculiar phase of the qualitative task, the goal is to organize data thoroughly and creatively. In addition, the purpose is to obtain patterns and extract themes from the data. It is important for the qualitative analysis to demonstrate a logical framework, which highlights four stages that include understanding and coding the raw data. While synthesizing the data, I merged the perceptions and description of themes. Finally, I merged the propositions at the decontextualizing stage, comparing findings with previous research to boost the precision of the research (Houghton et al., 2015). I identified themes from the data and organized the information into folders by letters and numbers that represented the participants. These strategies directed the identified themes and patterns during data analysis (Creswell, 1998). The Nvivo software allowed me to cross-examine certain data or groups of data, and to define themes (Creswell, 2013).

The searching and merging tools in the Nvivo software were some of the greatest benefits in the data analysis for retrieving and coding the data to crosscheck the manual coding. In the process of data analysis, detailed account parallel of ideas and statements were coded for direct interpretation of meanings. This approach permitted me to present meanings of some important occurrence as findings. I coded transcripts depending how often the themes emerged in the data analysis.

The data analysis is composed of in-person interviews partially structured in advance with an open-ended questions, tape-recorded audio data, and field notes. I tape recorded 12 participants, but three participants preferred not to be recorded. Therefore, I took notes from three interviewees and stored the data on the computer that was protected with a strong password and multiple layers of security. Additionally, the tape recorder was kept under lock and key in a safe deposit box. Participants in the UMG study were from Baoma, Telu, and Tinkonko from the Bo Town district. Ultimately, the findings of the study were connected with the research questions. The following themes emerged below:

**Theme: Bad.** While CL2 responded to the same question as “child marriage is bad, and it should have no place in any society,” CL 3 said; “I will not encourage underage married for young girls, parents must be sensitized child marriage laws.” When I asked CL3 about the negative effect of UMG, I did notice frustration in the participant's eyes when he was talking about the UMG practice.

**Theme: Poverty.** CL3 declared that poverty was one of the major contributing factors of the UMG practice. In addition, CL3 and CL 4 declared that the UMG was not good. The practice places young girls at disadvantageous positions because young girls from Bo Town become a single parent, drop out of school, and are used as sex slaves. CL5 participant's evaluation of the perception of the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town district was that no one had awareness of the risks, health issues, and pregnancy complications that emerged from underage marriage. According to CL5,



Well I think there are some risks involve. Previously, I don't think that people saw the risk involve with time now all of these we have been reading these papers, people are now aware of its health hazards. Especially for underage children let's say at the ages of 14 and 15 years it is very difficult for them to conceive when you are pregnant. Sometimes, the children they give birth to sometimes might be stillbirth. The womb of these teenagers is not mature for pregnancy so when they get pregnant, they are unable to conceive safely.

**Theme: Lack of awareness.** Therefore, CL5 thought it was because there was a lack of awareness of the negative outcomes of the underage marriage of girls, and that this was one of the reasons the UMG practice persisted. The five participants in this category highlighted the negative consequences of the UMG, such as young girls continue to face health issues, premature birth of children, as well as isolation and rejection from communities, peers, and parents. Their husbands sometimes abandon young girls after marriage. Eventually, young girls have to become sex slaves to pay back dowry. Unfortunately, young girls have limited education or no education.

**Theme: Enforcement and monitoring.** On the other hand, CL5 stated that no one has addressed monitoring of the ban of UMG law, and reporting to law enforcements not common. Even when the UMG incidents were reported violators did not face prosecution. As a result, the UMG problem continued to drive underage marriage because law enforcement had not enforced the ban of the UMG law. In this category, several themes emerged such as risk, health issues, poverty, dowry, education, awareness, sex slaves, child marriage, drop out from school, and that UMG was bad. These repetitive

words created themes in the data analysis and demonstrated the conceptual structure in the study.

**Theme: Negative impact.** Regarding positive implications, participants proclaimed there were no positive implications because young girls dropped out of schools, experienced early death, underage pregnancy, became sex slaves to repay dowry, and ended up with no education. In the community leaders' view, a young girl without skill sets has limited or no opportunities in society. When I posed the question, "What is the potential role of a community leader to stop underage marriage in your town?" CL 4 implied the following:

You as a community leader should tell young girls to know there are risks involve when you get pregnant before the age of 18. Some of them do not know about the risk involve, so you have to tell them the risk involve in complicated (early) Sex. As a community leader, you have to inform them by educating them because some of the young girls do not have the information. You the community leader have to tell them to abstain from sex more so unprotected ones when they are still teenagers. Even like in the Mosque and the churches also have a role to play by telling them to abstain from sex until they are 18 and married. As a community leader, I should tell them to pay attention to their education so they can become great people in the future. Try to give very good examples of successful women in the society that have done very well for themselves and the society they belong to, like Ellen Johnson Sherriff (who is the Head of

state for Liberia is a woman). These examples are encouraging them to stay away from sex and child marriage.

**Theme: Accountability and responsibility.** Furthermore, I asked the question “How can policy change help mitigate risks and negative effects related to the underage marriage of girls?” CL5 said bylaws against the UMG should be enforced. It was important for parents to be sensitized to these laws, and CL5 explained the negative effects of the UMG practice. The government should hold parents accountable, and there should be resources to help young girls and boys who are potential victims of childmarriage in Bo Town. Community leaders should have the responsibility to follow up with UMG issues in communities. Finally, all participants were for the ban on the UMG commitment.

**Theme: Confusion.** When I asked AW1, “How old were you when you got married (underage marriage)?” she said she was married off by her parents at 11 years old. While AW2 said she was married off by her parents when she became 17 years old, AW3 reported she was married off by her parents at 14 years old. Furthermore, AW4 said she was married off at 12 years old, and AW5 reported she was married off when she was 10 years old after the FMG ceremony. I asked the second question, “How did you feel when you were offered to marry at a young age?” The participants gave the same answers such as “I am not sure, or angry.” Then, I asked follow up questions, such as, “How did your parents or guardian tell you that you will be married at a young age?” The participants all stated during the FMG ceremony or immediately after. The next question

I posed was “What was your immediate reaction? Why?” Three out of the five participants (AW1, AW2, and AW3) said they were happy, and two participants (AW4 and AW5) said they were mad because they wanted to stay in school, but happy because they thought marriage would enhance their lives.

**Theme: Dowry payment.** When I asked all the participants individually this question, “Despite these negative implications, what pushed you to commit to an underage marriage?” the participants (AW1-AW5) stated they did not have money and support to continue their education. I asked a follow-up question, “When you got married at an early age did your husband give any money for you bride price?” Participant AW1 said she did not receive a dowry payment. In contrast, AW2, AW3, and AW4 said they received a dowry payment.

In providing an assessment from the AW participants, responses to the questions indicated that some of the young girls never understood why their parents married them off, while two said because there was no money to pay for education. These answers are consistent with the answers given by the community leaders. Consequently, AW participants indicated underage marriage was detrimental to the young girls because they experienced many problems such as health issues, teenage pregnancy, early death, domestic violence, premature delivery of children, and no education. These themes are also consistent with the community leaders' perceptions about underage marriage and themes found in existing literature in Chapter 2.

The third and final group of participants was parents who married off their daughters under 18 years old. Participants were interviewed individually, and they

consisted of P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. P1 said she married off two of her daughters who were 13 and 14 years old. According to her statement below:

Well according to our parents our fore parents, like our mothers grandmothers and great grandmothers the normal and actual age was the real age of 18 because before ever they initiate a girl they parents will have first to see a friend who wants the girl hand in marriage. If there is no man/friend (or sometimes the father on his agreement will act like the man-in-charge)for the girl's hand in marriage.Because from the initiation the girl goes straight to the marriage house. By then she is fully matured. Even me, I was fully matured before getting initiated and getting married, even though my people were leaders of the Bondo society. That was the formal age.

**Theme: Female genital mutilation.** Participant P1 statement above was in a conflict of her marrying off both of her daughters 13 and 14 years old. The participant was referring to “initiation,” as the FMG that is referred to as Bondo society ceremony in Sierra Leone. According to this assessment, participant P1 supported FMG and UMG practice if a young girl was 18 years old. When I asked the question, “What are the negative implications of the Bondo society versus the young girls under 18 going into marriages?” P1 pointed out the following:

Well under 18 years, girls going into underage marriage now, if the girl is not fully matured but gets into underage marriage, and if she is pregnant before the age of 18, she is going to get painful childbirth. Sometimes they deliver stillbirth. So many young girls who experience child marriage destroys their education, and

the parents support most of this early girl child marriage. Even last week we attended a workshop and discussions were done on these issues about this early girl child marriage. One major factor of this early girl child marriage was as a result of poverty. Mostly is also mainly the mothers involving with this polygamous homes. Since the father has many children with four or five wives, he could not provide food for all the children. Perhaps father has 15 or 12 children, and he alone cannot take care of all those children. If a man is asking a young girl to marry, the parent will think early marriage will improve parents and young girls' lives. Sometimes, this is what brings about the early girl child marriage. Poverty also brings about another factor called child trafficking. People go to the villages to their relatives asked for children to go to school, but when they come to the big towns with these children, they allocate all the household job on that child. So in the morning he/she will clean the house and do everything at home. If ever they send her to school, they will make sure that all the household job perfectly was done before the child goes to school. So by the time the girl gets to school she is almost late for classes. The school may decide to punish her or send her back home. If the young girl is sent back home, there is a tendency she will not go home, but visit a man until school is over then she will join her colleagues back home.

**Theme: Child trafficking and child labor.** Additionally, I asked P1 to explain what she meant by child trafficking of young girls to big towns. P1 clarified that child trafficking contributed to child labor in Sierra Leone because some people visit rural

areas to request young girls to help them to further education. In contrast, young girls are used as maids without going to school. P2 married off her daughter when the young girl was 12 years old. While P3 married off her young girl who was 15 years, participant P4 married off her young girls when she was 16, and P5 married off her daughter when she was 17 years old. Participants affirmed their daughters have to be married off after experiencing the FMG ceremony because young girls were respected in the community, as the dowry payment helped parents for the marriage and helped parents to pay their debt, and early marriage prevented young girls from sexual harassment.

**Theme: Bondo society.** Parents who married off their daughters initiate their daughters before 18 years old and immediately married off young girls because parents expected a dowry payment. The Bondo society ceremony prepared young girls for marriage and adulthood. Local women leaders in the Bo Town district performed this ritual.

**Theme: Leadership.** Since Soweis are executive leaders in the Bondo society (FGM) organization, they drive an ongoing FGM practice and parents engagement of the UMG (Kargbo, 2015). In this analysis, it would be challenging to prevent UMG practice because Soweis perceive the eradication of the FGM practice as a sign of dishonoring culture, womanhood, and sisterhood in Sierra Leone. Most significantly, it takes away their source of income, and parents would not receive dowry payments (Kargbo, 2015).

**Theme: Arranged or fixed marriages.** Then, I asked this question, “Were these fixed marriages?” She responded yes, and the next question was “Who arranged for these underage marriages to happen?” She replied that they were fixed marriages, and “my

husband and I arranged for underage marriage.” Furthermore, P1 revealed that the father of the young dictates dowry payment. P2 married off her young girl when her daughter was 12 years old, and participants said they look forward to a dowry payment to use to buy food, clothes and pay the debt. Parents revealed that relationship with their daughter was unpleasant after marriage because young girls faced starvation, domestic violence, health issues, and disappointment.

**Theme: Culture and traditions.** P3 married off her daughter when her daughter was 15 years old, P4 when her daughter was 16, and P5 married off her daughter when the young girl was 16 years of age. The next question asked to all parents was “How did you decide to marry off your young girl (underage marriage)?” When a young girl goes to the Bondo society (FGM), she is ready to marry. Participants said UMG practice is an acceptable culture in Bo Town. Poverty is one of the contributing factors of UMG occurrence and desire for acceptance in the society. Dowry played a major role, which parents use to buy food and clothes.

**Theme: Respect in community.** Nonetheless, parents had no money, food, and employment to take care of their young girls. Participants in this category said positive implications consist of respect for young girls in communities because they were married. Conversely, parents believed early marriage prevented sexual harassment, and that it was a cultural honor to promote traditions of UMG practice by parents. As a result, young girls were denied family inheritance if they did not comply with the UMG practice.

**Theme: Health issues.** In contrast, when I asked in the interview “Will you recommend it?” participants responded no, because they encountered problems such as



health issues, high divorce rates, and becoming sex slaves. Participants emphasized negative implications with no money, education, and employment, and living in the communities with frustration.

There were several discrepancies or inconsistencies found in cases in this study. For instance, parents believed underage marriage was appropriate, while community leaders denounced it. Another variation was that two adult women who were participants in the study expressed no regret for their parents marrying them off. However, I asked, "Did your life become better when you got married?" She replied "no," and stated her life never improved, and this indicated the young girls might have been confused and unaware of the negative consequences of the UMG. Another discrepancy in the cases was the connection between the Bondo society and child marriage. Although the policy was enacted for young girls not to be initiated into the Bondo society (FMG) until 18 years old, people in Bo Town continue to honor the Bondo society ceremony. Given this information, mitigating or terminating underage marriage of girls in Bo Town might be difficult to accomplish.

#### Evidence of Trustworthiness

Based on the research design, which was a qualitative case study comprised of human participants, it was important to meet the ethical standards of the IRB approval. Therefore, appropriate written approval to access the site for interview purposes was required. The consistency of events from the three groups of participants demonstrated evidence of trustworthiness. Most importantly, I consulted and compared multiple

sources such as the field notes and participant interview responses to the existing literature (Janesick, 2011).

I did acknowledge my personal bias, expectations, and outcomes during the research process. However, I remained neutral and cautious throughout the study of becoming inclined to coming up with misconceptions and conclusions based on expectations. Therefore, I executed the data analysis extensively by transcribing raw data from interviews. In addition, I extracted thorough descriptions of themes, and I interpreted from participants' responses and field notes. I built validity upon the existing theory, presumptions, or goals, to prevent bias.

#### Credibility

To receive credible information, I was non-judgmental, and I exercised patience to instill trust and to maintain complete honesty before, during, and after interviewing participants. As a result, I demonstrated values by respecting participants' culture, showed respect, and acted in a way that aligned with being trustworthy with participants (Van Genderen, 2014). Identifying threats to the findings was critical to ensuring a credible child marriage study in Bo Town (Maxwell, 2013). The repetitive patterns to name a few, included themes such as policy enforcement, health issues, domestic violence, child labor, female genital mutilation, early death, dowry, leaders, poverty, education, awareness, and child abuse. Additionally, the child marriage of girls' theory is one of the existing theories that justify further study (Maxwell, 2013).

### Transferability

It was important to ensure quality by upholding to the internal generalizability regarding the findings (Maxwell, 2013). I addressed limitations of the findings by presenting the analysis of the data for peer review to demonstrate dependability (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, I contacted an independent auditor to countercheck the validity of the information. Finally, bringing others in to review the information was essential to confirming the findings for purpose of replication (Miles et al., 2014).

### Dependability

For the most part, there are more consistencies than discrepancies found in the study. For example, many themes emerged that were consistent with the literature, such as leadership, drop out of school, child labor, and domestic violence. Additionally, themes such as lack of awareness, leadership, poverty, female genital mutilation, bad, good, enforcement monitoring, accountability, dowry payment, Bondo society, culture, health problems, respect, confusion, and arranged marriages were extracted from the data analysis. As a result, participants' responses were consistent with the existing literature.

### Confirmability

I explored the UMG phenomenon with participants' perspectives and experiences, as well as field notes. Triangulation through descriptive coding and coding transcripts individually was justified. I compared themes to achieve quality data analysis, and to ensure findings connected with evidence by condensing data for coding (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014) Independent individuals including doctoral students who

had completed their dissertation writing process, or organizations, and professionals in the field reviewed the information for validity.

This strategy allowed me to check for bias regarding the findings and to ensure quality by adhering to internal generalizability regarding the findings (Maxwell, 2013). I addressed potential limitations of the findings and presented the analysis of the data for peer review to demonstrate dependability (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, it is vital to contact an independent auditor to countercheck the validity of the information. Finally, bringing others in to review the information was essential to confirming the findings for purpose of replication (Miles et al., 2014).

#### Summary

The investigation of the underage marriage of girls in Bo Town affirmed the two theoretical conceptual frameworks used to explore the UMG study. For example, the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy behavioral theory by Bandura (1977) are the theories based on the seminal works on social learning theory. In social cognitive theory, Bandura pointed out that learning exists through observations of surroundings and people in communities. As P1 implied in a calm attitude, nothing was wrong with participating in early marriage as long as young girl age is 18 years old. P1 said her ancestors engaged in Bondo society, early marriage, and she would too. Some parents declared with frustration that poverty, limited resources, and no international support to assist them urged them to engage in the UMG practice.

In regards to social cognitive theory, Bandura (1977) pointed out that individuals are willing to participate in their development and that they can make things happen by

their actions. Although parents continued to marry off their daughters, community leaders were frustrated. While young girls displayed disappointments about the UMG practice, some parents glorified the UMG. Themes such as monitoring, enforcement of the ban on the UMG policy, awareness, and education are positive signs that most of the participants were advocating for help.

Perceptions of community leaders who work with the community to resolve social problems included that young boys should be included in the resolution to combat underage marriage because young boys are now marrying young girls in Bo Town. Parents also highlighted young boys because parents stated some young boys generated income through running motorcycles as transportation and influenced young girls to marry early. As a result, Bandura's (1977) theory was consistent with the study that environmental factors could influence humans through the interplay of behavior.

The results also uncovered parents who married off their daughters before 18 years old and adult women between 18 and 24 revealed their perceptions of underage marriage. Participants' responses and field notes revealed themes consistent with the themes in existing literature. Participant CL2 commented that young girls and boys should be educated about the UMG problem.

Finally, CL5 stated as long as there is no accountability, and leaders are not leading with integrity, it would be difficult to mitigate underage marriage. The findings highlighted how the culture was one of the contributing factors to the underage marriage of girls. Unfortunately, people in Sierra Leone still believe in the culture and continue to practice the UMG. Therefore, there is a clash of culture between the Western world

dishonoring the UMG culture, and most parts of Bo Town continue to promote the underage marriage of young girls.

In Chapter 5, I provide further interpretation of the findings in the context of the theoretical framework. Furthermore, I also address the conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and implications for positive social change, and conclusions in the next chapter. I pinpoint themes that emerged from the responses from the interviews.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of adult women who experienced child marriage, parents who married off their young girls, and community leaders to understand why the UMG persisted in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. The participants' responses to my interview questions provided me with different insights about the reasons parents engage in such rituals targeting young girls in Bo Town district. In this chapter, I use the themes that emerged from the data analysis to determine the type of recommendations.

The population of focus in this study was child brides, the parents who married off their daughters before daughters were 18 years old, and community leaders in Bo Town district. I achieved sampling of this population through purposive sampling. Through face-to-face interviews, I gathered the perceptions of the participants regarding the continuance of underage marriage in Bo Town in Sierra Leone. Through gathering data from this population, I addressed the research questions of the study, which focused on these three groups.

Fulfilling the purpose of this study on UMG was significant to promoting change in the Bo Town area of Sierra Leone. For example, I investigated the UMG, and my findings helped solicit recommendations to mitigate child marriage. For example, one of my recommendations is that local and international leaders collaborate with social workers, young girls, and their parents to work with law enforcement officials to bring violators to justice. Another is that policymakers can address and reform child marriage

policy to protect the rights of the child (Todres & Clayton, 2014). Furthermore, educators could implement underage marriage awareness training, and the media could help by campaigning to mitigate or prevent the underage marriage for girls issue in Bo Town, Sierra Leone.

### Interpretation of Findings

In the interviews with me, participants were able to disclose their experiences without hesitation about the underage marriage issue. The methods and theories I used in this study provided supporting evidence from various sources and highlighted on perspectives and themes. During data collection, I observed the participants' demeanor when they were answering questions. Community leaders demonstrated signs of frustration for the community's persistent engagement of the UMG practice. While some parents who married off their young daughters under 18 years old agreed that the UMG practice was good, community leaders disagreed that the culture of underage marriage was acceptable. Conversely, some of the themes that emerged from in my findings included domestic violence, a lack of education and awareness, and being forced to be a sex slave, and these were consistent with the findings of Ansari (2013).

Ebrahimi (2014) pointed out that similar themes around child marriages, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and health problems, continue to spread in Afghan society. These themes are consistent with the themes I found in this study where by young girls experienced similar problems of underage marriage in Bo Town. The authoritative leadership of men, the long-standing traditions to ensure girls marries before



losing their virginity, and the practice of FGM all undermine the enforcement of the ban on child marriage (Ghosh, 2011).

One parent (P1) who participated in the study supported underage marriage because of her generational culture affiliation, and P1 stated that most of their ancestors were Soweis. Soweis were executive leaders in the Bondo society (FGM) organization, and they did not want to stop the FGM practice (Kargbo, 2015). Soweis perceived the eradication of the FGM practice as a sign of dishonoring culture, womanhood, and sisterhood in Sierra Leone (Kargbo, 2015). Most significantly, they felt that it took away their source of income and that parents would be without dowry payments after the Bondo society young girls were married off immediately (Kargbo, 2015). In this regard, there are connections between the UMG and the FGM practices.

My findings revealed that parents engaged in the arranged marriages, and parents never involved young girls in the decision process of whether or not to marry. In addition, I uncovered how young girls experienced premature delivery of children because their wombs were not matured to sustain a pregnancy. Victims of underage marriage in this study disclosed their misconceptions of the practice because the young girls never understood the negative consequences of underage marriage until after the marriage crumbled (AW2). Parents' perception about using the dowry payment to pay their debts motivated them to continue to marry off their daughters. Unfortunately, based on their responses, they received little or no benefits from dowry payments and underage marriage.

I identified gaps in the literature of the field after reviewing the existing theories used by authors on the topic (Creswell, 2013). For example, the theory that child marriage could help women to earn respect in society and promote economic stability in the community is contradictory (Al-Ridhwany and Al-Jawadi, 2014), because women in this study stated they had no money, employment, or husband. Parents married off young girls from Bo Town, and girls became single parents, eventually dropped out of school, and were used as sex slaves. Sometimes, young girls are caught in the middle of child labor, domestic violence, or early death. One participant (CL2) pointed out that young girls deserve to stay in school for better opportunities in the future. While in contrast, one parent stated she had no money to support her family and the dowry payment for young girls helped to pay off debts. Adult women in this study seemed confused about the negative consequences of underage marriage. These participants agreed that UMG was wrong and that the relationship between parents and daughters became unpleasant because their magnificent expectations crumbled as divorce rates, health problems, and sex slavery to pay back dowries increased. All community leader participants brought up themes such as enforcement and reforming of the ban on UMG, hiring more enforcement officers, and that parents should receive resources to survive.

### Recommendations

It is important to designate a task force and an army of volunteers to maintain ongoing oversight and prosecute those who sexually abuse minors. Most importantly, to stop the domestic violence that continues to spread as a solution for young girls in Bo Town area similar to Afghan society (Ebrahimi, 2014). Some of the adverse outcomes of

UMG are sexual abuse, education deprivation, and health issues (Ansari, 2013, p. 11).

Therefore, collaborating with law enforcement, social workers, and community leaders could help to combat child marriage and sexual abuse of young girls in Bo Town.

Additionally, providing rehabilitation for young girls could avert the long-term emotional and physical consequences of the practice (Todres & Clayton, 2014). The findings from this study also revealed that young boys should also receive awareness training about UMG to mitigate UMG, because when young boys understand the negative consequences of UMG, they can be involved in educating the public to achieve the desired results (P1).

I recommend that a database be created for all young girls in primary and secondary school linked with the board of education, the monitoring task force, and law enforcement to alert when young girls are absent from school for one day or more. Educators should check with parents, guardians, or caretakers to ensure young girls stay in school. If they receive no response, the task force should investigate, document the findings, report the incident to the board of education, and alert law enforcement for further communications with parents and guardians.

Human rights organization should work with the court system, monitoring task force system, and the police officers to stop accepting bribes, and violators of UMG should be prosecuted. Chiefs from all villages in the Bo Town district should be accountable for officiating marriages of UMG. If chiefs are found officiating underage marriage, they should face the consequences by paying a fine of 500,000 Leones for the first offense. After the second offense, chiefs should be banned from officiating marriage ceremonies.

Furthermore, the results from this study can drive education, awareness, leadership training, and policy reform on the ban on underage marriage of girls in Bo Town to mitigate UMG. These results can foster social change in reaching out to young boys and working with community leaders, women, parents, law enforcement, social workers, and educators. Practitioners could use the results to implementing UMG awareness training in primary and secondary schools' curriculum.

It is important to designate a task force and an army of volunteers to maintain an ongoing oversight. For example, part of the oversight could be to allocate a budget to provide a task force, such as enforcement officers to enforce the ban on UMG, and compliance officers to monitor the system of underage marriage. I also recommend that social workers and counselors be available to schools in Bo Town to work with educators, parents, and young girls who might be potential victims of underage marriage.

#### Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations noted in Sabbe et al. (2013) and Okonofua (2013) was that the parents were marrying off their young girls. This behavior has a cultural implication that was practiced in unification with the FGM practice. Stemming from this, it was challenging to access the local women leaders and parents to convince them to terminate the FGM practice in Bo Town, Sierra Leone (McClelland, 2008). Additionally, it was difficult to find participants who were victims of the UMG and who were willing to participate in the study.

Hence, it was important to identify a pool of participants as an alternative plan to collect data. Participants in the study included five women who were between 18 and 24

who were victims of child marriage. Since the study involved human participants, personal biases might have been introduced to the study. Moreover, the introduction of my own personal bias and threats as researcher may have been out of my control because of the direct contact with the participants during in-person interviews. To address this personal bias, before conducting the study I acknowledged any expectations of the outcome or turnout to be aware and cautious of becoming inclined to coming up with these conclusions based on my expectations. Subsequently, it was crucial for me to respect and listen actively to participants while interviewing to cultivate credibility (see Creswell, 2013). The interview protocol allowed me to systematically gather detailed information from participants about the UMG in Bo Town, Sierra Leone.

#### Implications

The social implications of not stopping UMG are the ongoing human rights violations and young girls experiencing a poor quality of life without education and employment. The negative consequences of UMG, such as child labor, child marriage, and limited opportunity for young girls to function in their communities, will continue to promote uncontrollable problems if not stopped. If no one tries to change the culture, human capital will decline and the economy of Sierra Leone will not grow. Consequently, the results of my study can be used to empower young girls and parents by implementing mentorship programs, leadership and awareness training, and counseling programs. Further, these findings could inspire social change because if young girls and parents have access to education. Additionally, if the ban of the UMG policy is monitored and enforced. Consistently, young girls and parents could become valuable members of the

Bo Town community. Finally, enhancing education could reduce poverty and mitigate the UMG practice in the society as a whole.

### Conclusions

The child marriage problem can lead to social, economic, and educational issues (Okonofua, 2013) if not addressed. For example, peers, society, and parents isolated and rejected young girls in this study if unmarried. The theory that young girls earned respect in the community because they were married contradicted the behavior of domestic violence toward young girls by their husbands. Therefore, law enforcement officials, educators, and human rights advocates should be inclusive in promoting child marriage awareness training. Government officials should implement leadership training to train community leaders, law enforcement officers, and counselors to handle UMG incidents.

Most significantly, resources should be available for parents and young girls to survive, including shelters and mobile telephones for victims to make anonymous calls. Finally, a website to report violators of the UMG and enforcement for prosecuting violators of the UMG in Bo Town would help mitigate the problem. If these solutions are implemented, social change efforts will mitigate the problem of underage marriage and the tragic dynamic will improve in Bo Town.

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Appendix A: Site Permissions and Participation Flyer

**Site Permission for Library**

Date: July 23, 2016

Dear Sir or Madam,

Attention: Library Manager

My name is xxxxxx and I am a doctoral student from the Walden University. I plan to conduct a research and my study is about an underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. The purpose of my study is to explore the perceptions of young brides, their parents, and community leaders on why still perform underage marriage in a town in Sierra Leone.

I am requesting permission to post on the notice board flyers to request to participate in a study (exploring and mitigating underage marriage of girls in Bo Town the study), hand out invitation letters to potential participants, and talk about the study to recruit potential participants. Additionally, I request permission to use a private room to conduct face-to-face interviews of potential participants individually in the Bo Town Regional library.

The participants will include 5 parents individually, 5 community leaders individually, and 5 adult women between 18-24 years old from different communities such as the Kakua Chiefdom in Bo Town and the rural areas of Tikonko, Blama, and Telu.

I believe that conducting this study will be beneficial to all of us because we will all gain relevant information regarding the phenomenon of underage marriage of girls in a new perspective. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through



my cell phone at XXXXXXXXXXXX or e-mail - I am hoping to receive a positive response from you.

Sincerely yours,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

### **Site Permission for Community Center**

Date: July 23, 2016

Dear Sir or Madam,

Attention: Community Center leader:

My name is xxxxxxxxxxxx and I am a doctoral student from the Walden University. I plan to conduct a research and my study is about an underage marriage of girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. The purpose of my study is to explore the perceptions of young brides, their parents, and community leaders on why still perform underage marriage in a town in Sierra Leone.

I am requesting permission from the community centers leader to post on the notice board flyers to request to participate in a study (exploring and mitigating underage marriage of girls in Bo Town the study) to recruit potential participants. Additionally, hand out invitation letters to potential participants and talk about the study.

I plan to interview potential participants in a private room in the Bo Town Regional library. The participants will include 5 parents individually, 5 community leaders individually, and 5 adult women between 18-24 years old from different communities such as the Kakua Chiefdom in Bo Town and the rural areas of Tikonko, Blama, and Telu.

I believe that conducting this study will be beneficial to all of us because we will all gain relevant information regarding the phenomenon of underage marriage of girls in a new perspective. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through my cell phone at XXXXXXXXXXXX or e-mail XXXXXXXXXXXX

I am hoping to receive a positive response from you.

Sincerely yours,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

### **Participation Flyer**

Participate in Research

#### **Volunteers needed for research study**

Exploring and Mitigating Underage Marriage of Girls in Bo Town, Sierra Leone

Researcher: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, Doctoral Student, Walden University

#### **Can you participate?**

##### **What is the study about?**

The study is to explore the perceptions of young brides, their parents, and community leaders on why still perform underage marriage in a town in Sierra Leone. I would like to conduct my data gathering (interviews) in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. I believe that conducting this study will be beneficial to all of us because we will all gain relevant information regarding the phenomenon of underage marriage in a new perspective.

##### **Who can participate?**

- Adult Women who were Young Brides Once (18-24 years old)
- Parents
- Community Leaders
- Participants who can comprehend in English verbally
- Be able to express their experiences about underage marriage of girls in Bo Town

##### **What is involved?**

- Participants will be involved in face-to-face interviews which are expected to last approximately between 30 and 45

- Participants will be asked open ended questions with follow up questions
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and will be used for transcription purposes only
- Interviews will be interviewed at the Library in a private room
- There will be no gifts, rewards, or incentives to be given to any participant

**What are the risks and benefits involved?**

- The benefits of this study are that recommendations from this study will benefit young girls, parents, and the society in general. The implementation of the recommendations will promote quality lives for future generations.
- There is only minimal risk to the participant. The risk will involve fatigue or upset Participants may feel uncomfortable about answering certain questions about feelings of belonging during the interviews.
- However, in case of any distress during and after the interview, the Rehabilitation will offer free counseling service. The contact number is Clinic Phone:  
Counseling: provide free counseling service

Researcher's contact information:

**Please contact xxxxxxxxxxxxxx to learn about more information**

**Email: xxxxxxxxxxxx**

**xxxxxxxxxxx Mobile**

## Appendix B: Participant Invitation

**Participant Invitation**

Date: July 23, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a doctoral student currently conducting my dissertation about underage marriage in Bo Town, Sierra Leone. The purpose of my study is to explore the perceptions of young brides, their parents, and community leaders on why still perform underage marriage in a town in Sierra Leone. In line with this, I would like to invite you to be part of my data gathering (interviews) because I believe you have the knowledge that is appropriate to provide the needed information in my study. I believe that conducting this study will be beneficial to all of us because we will both gain relevant information regarding the phenomenon of underage marriage in a new and wider perspective.

**Who can participate?**

- Adult women who were young brides once (18-24 years old)
- Parents
- Community Leaders
- Participants who can comprehend in English verbally
- Be able to express their experiences about underage marriage of girls in Bo Town

If you are interested to participate, please read the informed consent. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through my local telephone numbers and email address. Telephone Numbers are XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX. E-mail: XXXXXXXXXXXX

I am hoping to receive a positive response from you.

Sincerely yours,

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

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## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Dissertation: *Underage Marriage of girls, Bo Town*

Time of interview: 9am-4pm

Date: 10/19/2016

Place: Bo Town, Sierra Leone

Interviewer: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Interviewee: Five Adult Women who were Young Brides Once (18-24 years old)

Position of Interviewee: Doctoral Student

The research will investigate underage marriage of girls' problem in Bo Town and how to mitigate the problem. The qualitative method is a case study that will focus on an open-ended and follow up questions through interviewing parents, adult women between 18 and 24 years old who experienced underage marriage of girls. In addition, I will interview community leaders and each group will consist of at least five participants. Participants will explain provide explanation of their experiences for to understand in depth of the problem. These questions directly address the first research question.

Questions with follow up questions:

1. How old were you when you got married (underage marriage)?
2. How did you feel when you were offered to marry at a young age?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. How did your parents or guardian tell you that you will be married at a young age?
- b. What was your immediate reaction? Why?
3. What did you feel towards your parents/guardians and your groom when they asked you to marry at such a young age?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. Did you feel any anger or ill-feeling toward your parents? Why?
- b. Did you feel any anger or ill-feeling toward your groom? Why?
4. What are the positive implications of underage marriage?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. Can you say that these positive implications pushed you to commit to an underage marriage?
- b. Were there no alternatives that may provide you the same positive implications without having to go through underage marriages?
5. What are the negative implications of underage marriage?

**Follow up Questions:**

- a. Were you aware of these negative implications before you agreed to an underage marriage?
- b. Despite these negative implications, what pushed you to commit to an underage marriage?

- c. Would you still recommend going through underage marriage now (for young girls) despite of these negative implications?
6. How does poverty play a role in underage marriage of girls in Bo Town?  
**Follow-up Questions:**
  - a. Kindly explain how poverty pushes families to commit to underage marriages?
  - b. How did you benefit from your dowry?
7. How does culture or traditions play a role in underage marriage of girls?  
**Follow-up Questions:**
  - a. How significant is pre-arranged marriage of girls to parents in Bo Town?
8. What are other factors that influence the continuance of underage marriage of girls in Bo Town?  
**Follow-up Questions:**
  - a. Can you say that these factors give you benefits or advantages in life? How?
  - b. Are there other means of accessing these benefits without undergoing underage marriages?
9. How can awareness training and education help to mitigate underage marriage of girls?  
**Follow-up Questions:**
  - a. What are the perceived social implications of underage marriage of girls in Bo Town?
  - b. What can be done to combat/avoid these social implications?
10. I thank you for participating in this interview. Please, I will ensure that your identity and responses will remain confidential including potential interview in the future.

Interview Protocol Dissertation: *Underage Marriage of girls, Bo Town*

Time of interview: 9am-4pm

Date: 10/20/2016

Place: Bo Town, Sierra Leone

Interviewer: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Interviewee: Five Parents

Position of Interviewee: Doctoral Student

The research will investigate underage marriage of girls' problem in Bo Town and how to mitigate the problem. The qualitative method is a case study that will focus on an open-ended and follow up questions through interviewing parents, adult women between 18 and 24 years old who experienced underage marriage of girls. In addition, I will interview community leaders and each group will consist of five participants. Participants will provide explanation of their experiences for to understand in depth of the problem. These questions directly address the second research question.

Research Questions answers, and follow up questions

1. How many of your daughters married below the age of 18?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. Were these fixed marriages?
  - b. Who arranged for these underage marriages to happen?
  - c. What role did the father play in marrying off your underage daughter?
2. What type of relationship you and your underage daughter had before you married her off?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. How did you decide to marry off your young girl (underage marriage)?
3. How did you feel when you offered your child to marry at a young age?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. How did marrying off your young daughter shape your relationship with her afterwards? Did she get mad at you?
  - b. How did you react to your daughter's reaction when you told her about her underage marriage? Did you understand her reaction?
  - c. How did you improve the relationship between you and your daughter after marrying them off at a young age?
4. How does your family's economic status impact your decision to commit your daughter to underage marriage?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. Was this a common occurrence in your town?
  - b. How did you benefit from your daughter's dowry?
5. How does culture or tradition play a role in underage marriage of girls?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. How significant is pre-arranged marriage of girls to parents in Bo Town?
- b. How do you feel about the ban on underage marriage of girls?



6. What are the other positive implications of underage marriage of girls?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. Can you say that these positive implications pushed you to commit to an underage marriage?
  - b. Were there no alternatives that may provide you the same positive implications without having to go through underage marriages?
  - c. What could these alternatives be?
  - d. Did you consider pursuing these alternatives instead of underage marriage? Why?
7. What are the negative implications of underage marriage?
- Follow-up Questions:**
- e. Were you aware of these negative implications before you agreed to an underage marriage?
  - f. Despite these negative implications, what pushed you to commit to an underage marriage?
  - g. Would you still recommend going through underage marriage now (for young girls) despite of these negative implications?
11. How can awareness training and education help to mitigate underage marriage of girls?
- Follow-up Questions:**
- a. What are the perceived social implications of underage marriage of girls in Bo Town?
  - b. What can be done to combat/avoid these social implications?
8. I thank you for participating in this interview. Please, I will ensure that your identity and responses will remain confidential including potential interview in the future.

Interview Protocol Dissertation: *Underage Marriage of girls, Bo Town*

Time of interview: 9am-4pm

Date: 10/21/2016

Place: Bo Town, Sierra Leone

Interviewer: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Interviewee: Five Community Leaders

Position of Interviewee: Doctoral Student

The research will investigate underage marriage of girls' problem in Bo Town and how to mitigate the problem. The qualitative method is a case study that will focus on an open-ended and follow up questions through interviewing parents, adult women between 18 and 24 years old who experienced underage marriage of girls. In addition, I will interview community leaders and each group will consist of five participants. Participants will explain provide explanation of their experiences for to understand in depth of the problem.

Research Questions answers and follow up questions:

1. How do you feel as the community leader about underage marriage of girls in Bo Town?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. What is the potential role of a community leader in the continuance of underage marriage in your town?
2. How does the community benefit (positive implications) from underage marriage of girls?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- c. Can you say that these positive implications encouraged you to sustain and continue underage marriage in your community?
- d. Were there no alternatives that may provide you the same positive implications without having to go through underage marriages?
- e. What could these alternatives be?
- f. Did you consider pursuing these alternatives instead of underage marriage? Why?

3. What are the negative implications of underage marriage to your community?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- g. Were you aware of these negative implications?
- h. Despite these negative implications, what made you decide to continue underage marriages in your community?
- i. Would you still recommend underage marriage now (for young girls) despite of these negative implications?
4. How can policy change help mitigate risks and negative effects related to underage marriage of girls?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. How can community leaders help the government of Sierra Leone address negative issues linking to underage marriage of girls?
- b. Are you in favor of a ban on underage marriages? Why?
- c. How do policymakers perceive underage marriage of girls?
- d. How do human rights advocates can help in mitigating underage marriage of girls in Bo Town?
- e. How are international organizations helping to mitigating underage marriage of girls in Bo Town?

Answer:

5. How does poverty in your community play a role in the continuance of underage marriage?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. What strategies can you pursue to alleviate poverty among parents, young girls, and women in your community?

6. How does culture and tradition contribute to underage marriage of girls?

**Follow-up Questions:**

- a. How significant is pre-arranged marriage of girls to your community?
- b. What can you put in place of this generational culture for decades?

7. I thank you for participating in this interview. Please, I will ensure that your identity and responses will remain confidential including potential interview in the future.