

# EARLY RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS: VULNERABILITY OF YOUTH IN UGANDA

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# Acknowledgements

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## Study team:

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# Background - early marriage

- Any marriage before age 18
- Considered a form of sexual violence
- Worldwide 67 million women aged 20-24 in 2010 were married before age 18 <sup>1</sup>
- Common in many parts of Africa and Asia
- Poor health outcomes, risk of spousal abuse
- Association between education and early marriage clearly exists but is complex

# Research objective

To explore and document the factors that promote and mitigate child marriage during conflict, and generate recommendations to reduce the vulnerabilities of young people to child marriage in such settings.



Source: Danish Refugee Council

# Key research themes

- Changing marital norms and practices in conflict-affected populations
- Conflict-affected adolescents' views on marriage
- Married adolescents' experiences
- Community members' and parents' perspectives on early marriage
- Service providers' experiences and recommendations

# Research setting

- Mucwini Transit Camp (Kitgum)
  - Small ~1000 people but congested
- Nakivale Refugee Settlement
  - Approx. 57,000 people
  - Multi-ethnic, with a large population from the eastern DRC



Source: UNHCR

# Methods

- Phenomenological research approach
- 18 focus group discussions (FGDs), nine each in Mucwini and Nakivale: youth; parents
- 17 key informant interviews (KIIs): community leaders, service providers, NGO and UN staff
- Thematic content analysis to generate initial codes, search for themes, review and define/name themes

# Changes in marriage practices

- Formalized marriage with bride price was common before conflict
- Families splintered by conflict: impact on the dominant social and economic processes of marriage
- Changes in conceptualizations of marriage, and expectations about the likelihood of formal marriages

# Changes in communication between adults and children

*“In the past, Acholi used to talk with youth in the courtyard in the evening time...With the ...conflict...there are guns and shots here and there, no one is feeling safe. Parents used to provide instruction and guidance each evening, so that the next day, youth would know how to behave.” (Kitgum, KII, sub-county official).*

# Early relationships

*“We have no foundation, and that is why our children do not marry. They may get pregnant or impregnate at a very early age and start staying together without the consent of both parents [because we have no wealth].*

(Nakivale, adult FGD participant)

*“Girls and boys do their own things without letting the parent know because they say they don’t have money to spend on bride price and gifts, and also the parents are [too] poor to support them.”*

(Nakivale, female FGD participant, in school, 10-14 year age group)

# Factors promoting early relationships

- Limited access to education
- Economic needs
- Social support needs

# Consequences of early relationships

- Unmarried girls in informal relationships may be seen as lacking virtue
- Isolation of young couples within their communities

# Recommendations

- Empower parents and young people in settlements to access viable livelihoods
- Increase safe access to secondary education for both boys and girls
- Involve community members in protection strategies
- Seek to reduce isolation of young people in relationships, especially those with young children
- Build resilience among youth to overcome physical and emotional strains during and after emergencies