

Psychoeducational Challenges of Abduction Marriage and Strategies for Promoting Educational Continuity among Young Basotho Schoolgirls in Lesotho

Ms. Mabakoena Ramolula and Prof. M.M. Nkoane

Central University of Technology, Free State

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800059>

Received: 10 August 2026; Accepted: 16 August 2026; Published: 25 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Abduction marriage (*chobeliso*) remains a harmful cultural practice that continues to affect the educational experiences of some young Basotho schoolgirls in Lesotho despite legislative reforms and child protection initiatives. Although increasing attention has been given to the legal, cultural, and human rights dimensions of the practice, limited research has examined its psychoeducational implications from the perspectives of the girls themselves or explored contextually relevant strategies for promoting their educational continuity. The purpose of this study was to explore the psychoeducational challenges experienced by young Basotho schoolgirls following abduction marriage and identify strategies for promoting their educational continuity and well-being. The study was guided by the transformative paradigm and employed a qualitative participatory research design. Feminist Theory and the Rights-Based Theory provided the theoretical foundation by explaining how gender inequality, patriarchal social structures, and violations of children's rights shape girls' educational experiences. Purposive sampling was used to select young Basotho schoolgirls affected by abduction marriage, together with teachers, parents, and school counsellors who had direct experience of the phenomenon. Data were generated through storytelling, focus group discussions, drawings with narrative explanations, and Photovoice, and were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed that abduction marriage has significant psychoeducational implications for affected schoolgirls and highlighted the need for comprehensive interventions to support their successful educational participation and recovery. Participants further identified several strategies for promoting educational continuity, including school-based psychosocial support, trauma-informed educational practices, learner reintegration programmes, teacher professional development, family and community awareness initiatives, strengthened collaboration between schools and child protection stakeholders, peer support programmes, and effective implementation of policies protecting girls' right to education. The study concludes that addressing the psychoeducational consequences of abduction marriage requires coordinated, multi-sectoral interventions involving schools, families, communities, traditional leaders, and policymakers. Strengthening trauma-informed educational practices and psychosocial support systems is essential for promoting educational continuity, protecting girls' educational rights, and enhancing the well-being of learners affected by *chobeliso*.

Keywords: Abduction marriage; psychoeducational challenges; educational continuity, Basotho schoolgirls.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Globally, child marriage remains one of the most persistent violations of children's rights and a significant barrier to girls' education, health, and overall development (Pourtaheri et al, 2023). Despite international commitments to eliminate child marriage through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality, millions of girls continue to experience early and forced marriages that interrupt their education and limit their future opportunities (UNICEF, 2023; UNESCO, 2024). Education is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and an important driver of individual well-being, social inclusion, gender equality, and socioeconomic development (Akinwale, 2023). For girls, quality education promotes knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, improved health outcomes, economic empowerment, and meaningful participation in society (Dhiman, 2023). However, these educational opportunities are often

undermined by harmful cultural practices, gender inequality, and discriminatory social norms that restrict girls' access to, participation in, and completion of education (Ojong, 2025).

Among the harmful practices affecting girls worldwide, child marriage, including marriage through abduction, continues to pose serious educational and psychoeducational challenges. Research consistently demonstrates that girls affected by child or forced marriage are more likely to experience interrupted schooling, prolonged absenteeism, declining academic performance, emotional distress, fear, anxiety, trauma, and reduced educational attainment than girls who remain in school (Girls Not Brides, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). Beyond educational disruption, survivors frequently experience diminished self-esteem, social isolation, and psychological difficulties that negatively influence classroom engagement, concentration, learning, and future educational aspirations (WHO, 2023). These findings suggest that the consequences of child marriage extend beyond the immediate loss of schooling to affect learners' long-term educational and psychosocial development.

Within sub-Saharan Africa, harmful traditional practices continue to reinforce gender inequality and educational exclusion among girls despite legislative reforms introduced by many governments. Studies conducted across Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and other African countries demonstrate that forced marriage frequently results in school dropout, reduced academic achievement, social exclusion, emotional distress, and limited opportunities for lifelong learning (Walker, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2023; Plan International, 2023). Although legislation prohibiting child marriage exists in many African countries, the continued influence of poverty, patriarchal cultural norms, and weak implementation of child protection policies often limits the effectiveness of these legal interventions.

In Lesotho, abduction marriage (*chobeliso*) remains one of the harmful cultural practices affecting some young Basotho schoolgirls despite legislative reforms and child protection initiatives designed to safeguard children's rights. Girls affected by *chobeliso* often experience interrupted schooling, prolonged absence from school, fear, trauma, social stigma, declining academic performance, and difficulties reintegrating into the school environment. These experiences suggest that the consequences of abduction marriage extend beyond the period of forced marriage and continue to influence learners' educational participation, emotional well-being, and future educational opportunities. Although previous studies have examined *chobeliso* from legal, cultural, and human rights perspectives (Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2021; Sibanyoni et al., 2022), comparatively little research has explored its psychoeducational consequences from the perspectives of young Basotho schoolgirls themselves. Similarly, limited attention has been given to identifying educational and psychosocial strategies that can facilitate successful school reintegration and educational continuity following abduction marriage.

Addressing this knowledge gap is important because understanding learners' lived experiences can inform the development of trauma-informed educational practices, school-based psychosocial support services, learner reintegration programmes, and community interventions that promote educational continuity and protect girls' right to education. This study therefore explores the psychoeducational challenges experienced by young Basotho schoolgirls following abduction marriage and identifies strategies for promoting their educational continuity and psychoeducational well-being. By foregrounding the voices of affected learners, the study contributes to the development of gender-responsive, rights-based, and trauma-informed educational interventions that support vulnerable girls in Lesotho.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What psychoeducational challenges do young Basotho schoolgirls experience following abduction marriage?
- What strategies can promote psychoeducational well-being and educational continuity among young Basotho schoolgirls affected by abduction marriage?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main Objective

To explore the psychoeducational challenges associated with abduction marriage and identify strategies for promoting educational continuity among young Basotho schoolgirls in Lesotho.

Specific Objectives

- To explore the psychoeducational challenges experienced by young Basotho schoolgirls following abduction marriage.
- To identify strategies that can promote psychoeducational well-being and educational continuity among young Basotho schoolgirls affected by abduction marriage.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by Feminist Theory and the Rights-Based Theory, which together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the psychoeducational challenges associated with abduction marriage and the strategies required to promote educational continuity among young Basotho schoolgirls. While Feminist Theory explains how patriarchal social structures and gender inequalities perpetuate harmful cultural practices such as abduction marriage, the Rights-Based Theory emphasises the protection and promotion of children's fundamental rights, including the right to education, protection, participation, and development. The integration of these theories enables the study to examine both the structural causes of girls' educational vulnerability and the obligations of society to safeguard their educational opportunities and psychosocial well-being.

Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory examines how gender inequality, patriarchal power relations, and socially constructed gender roles shape women's and girls' lived experiences within society (Tong & Botts, 2022). The theory argues that patriarchal social systems often privilege male authority while limiting women's and girls' autonomy, educational opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes. Within many traditional societies, gender norms frequently position girls as future wives and caregivers rather than learners, thereby reinforcing unequal access to education and other social opportunities (Akinwale, 2023).

In relation to this study, Feminist Theory provides an important framework for understanding how abduction marriage (*chobeliso*) reflects unequal gender relations that restrict girls' educational participation. Girls subjected to abduction marriage are often denied the opportunity to make independent decisions about their education and future because these decisions are influenced by patriarchal cultural expectations. Consequently, the practice contributes to interrupted schooling, emotional distress, reduced educational aspirations, and limited opportunities for personal development. The theory therefore helps explain why girls experience educational disadvantage as a result of gendered cultural practices rather than individual choice.

Feminist scholars further argue that education serves as an important mechanism for promoting gender equality because it empowers girls with knowledge, confidence, critical thinking skills, and greater control over their lives (Tong & Botts, 2022). From this perspective, promoting educational continuity among girls affected by abduction marriage requires challenging discriminatory cultural norms while creating educational environments that empower girls to participate fully in learning. Within this study, Feminist Theory therefore provides a lens for interpreting participants' experiences of educational disruption, stigma, emotional trauma, and unequal educational opportunities resulting from patriarchal social structures.

Rights-Based Theory

The Rights-Based Theory is grounded in international human rights principles that recognise every child as a rights-holder entitled to education, protection, participation, survival, and development without discrimination (Abebe et al, 2025). The theory is informed by international instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, both of which affirm children's right to quality education and protection from harmful cultural practices.

The Rights-Based Theory views education not as a privilege but as a fundamental human right that governments, families, schools, and communities have a collective responsibility to protect. Harmful practices such as child marriage and abduction marriage violate several interrelated rights, including the right to education, protection from violence, participation in decisions affecting children's lives, and opportunities for healthy development

(UNICEF, 2024). Consequently, educational interruption following abduction marriage represents both an educational concern and a human rights issue.

Within the context of this study, the Rights-Based Theory provides a framework for understanding how *chobeliso* undermines girls' educational rights by disrupting schooling, limiting classroom participation, exposing learners to psychological harm, and reducing opportunities for educational progression. The theory also highlights the responsibility of educational institutions, policymakers, communities, and child protection agencies to establish supportive interventions that facilitate girls' reintegration into school and protect their educational continuity.

Furthermore, the Rights-Based Theory supports the development of learner-centred interventions such as school-based counselling services, trauma-informed teaching, psychosocial support, flexible learning opportunities, and community awareness programmes. These interventions contribute to creating educational environments where learners' dignity, safety, participation, and educational rights are respected and protected.

Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Study

The combination of Feminist Theory and the Rights-Based Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the psychoeducational challenges associated with abduction marriage among young Basotho schoolgirls. Feminist Theory explains the structural and cultural factors that perpetuate gender inequality and expose girls to harmful practices that disrupt their education. In contrast, the Rights-Based Theory focuses on the protection of children's rights and the responsibility of institutions and society to ensure that all learners have equitable access to safe, inclusive, and quality education.

Together, these theoretical perspectives enable the study to examine not only the educational and psychological consequences of abduction marriage but also the broader social, cultural, and policy contexts within which these experiences occur. They also provide a foundation for interpreting the findings and informing recommendations aimed at strengthening educational continuity, promoting psychoeducational well-being, challenging harmful gender norms, and protecting the educational rights of young Basotho schoolgirls affected by *chobeliso*. Through this integrated theoretical lens, the study contributes to the development of gender-responsive, rights-based, and trauma-informed educational interventions that support vulnerable learners in Lesotho.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Marriage, Abduction Marriage and Girls' Education

Child marriage remains a significant barrier to girls' educational participation and psychosocial well-being globally. Defined as any formal or informal union involving a person below the age of 18, child marriage is recognised as a violation of children's rights because it limits access to education, health, protection, and opportunities for development (UNICEF, 2023). A related practice is abduction marriage, in which girls are forcibly taken and compelled to marry without their free and informed consent. Although the practice varies across cultural contexts, forced marriage continues to affect girls in several African countries despite legal frameworks intended to protect them (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Girls Not Brides, 2024).

Education is a fundamental human right and an important mechanism for promoting gender equality, social mobility, and national development (UNESCO, 2024). For girls, education contributes to improved health outcomes, economic opportunities, decision-making capacity, and reduced vulnerability to poverty and violence (Akinwale, 2023; Dhiman, 2023). However, harmful practices such as child marriage can interrupt girls' educational pathways and limit their future opportunities. Girls who marry before completing their education are more likely to leave school, experience poor academic outcomes, and face economic disadvantage later in life (UN Women, 2022; UNESCO, 2024).

Across sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage is associated with poverty, gender inequality, limited educational opportunities, and patriarchal norms that prioritise marriage and domestic responsibilities over girls' education (Wopara, 2025). These factors can restrict girls' agency and contribute to educational exclusion. The consequences extend beyond school dropout to include prolonged absenteeism, learning gaps, declining academic performance, and difficulties returning to education (Bengesai et al., 2021; Elnakib et al., 2024). Returning girls

may also encounter stigma, social isolation, and fear of judgement, making educational reintegration more difficult.

The psychoeducational consequences are particularly important because child and forced marriage may involve coercion, violence, fear, and loss of personal autonomy. Studies indicate that girls affected by early and forced marriage may experience anxiety, depression, psychological distress, low self-esteem, and reduced educational aspirations (Nhampoca & Maritz, 2024; Muzingili, 2026). These experiences can affect concentration, motivation, relationships, and classroom participation. Thus, the effects of abduction marriage should be understood as an interaction between psychological well-being and educational functioning.

Feminist scholarship further highlights the role of gendered power relations in restricting girls' autonomy and reproducing inequalities within families and communities (Mohlabane & Tshoaedi, 2022; Weiler, 2023). From this perspective, abduction marriage represents not only an individual experience but also a manifestation of broader gender inequalities that affect girls' safety, rights, and access to education.

In Lesotho, these concerns are particularly relevant because customary practices and gendered social norms continue to influence the experiences of some girls. Existing research has examined child and forced marriage primarily from legal, cultural, and human rights perspectives (Likoti & Sibanyoni, 2020; Sibanyoni et al., 2022). However, limited attention has been given to how affected girls experience the educational and psychological consequences of chobeliso and how schools can support their recovery.

The literature therefore suggests that girls affected by abduction marriage may require counselling, trauma-informed teaching, academic catch-up support, supportive teacher–learner relationships, family involvement, and community interventions. In general, child and abduction marriage can disrupt educational trajectories, compromise psychological well-being, restrict girls' agency, and reinforce gender inequality. The limited context-specific research on the psychoeducational experiences of young Basotho schoolgirls provides a strong rationale for the present study.

Psychoeducational Challenges Associated with Abduction Marriage

Psychoeducational challenges refer to the interconnected psychological, emotional, social, and educational difficulties that influence learners' participation, well-being, and academic achievement (Liu, Gui, & Ma, 2025). Educational success depends not only on intellectual ability but also on emotional health, psychological resilience, and social experiences (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2021). Learners exposed to trauma may experience difficulties with concentration, emotional regulation, classroom participation, and academic motivation (WHO, 2023).

Abduction marriage may therefore have consequences that extend beyond the marriage itself. Forced removal from family and school can create feelings of fear, powerlessness, uncertainty, and loss of control. Where violence or coercion is involved, emotional distress may continue after girls return to their families and schools. UNICEF (2023) notes that child marriage can have long-term consequences for psychological well-being, education, health, and social development, while Human Rights Watch (2023) highlights its effects on girls' autonomy, safety, and educational opportunities.

International studies indicate that girls affected by child or forced marriage may experience anxiety, depression, fear, trauma, shame, low self-esteem, and emotional isolation (UNICEF, 2023). These difficulties can continue after returning to school, affecting confidence, relationships, classroom participation, and academic engagement. Prolonged exposure to fear and violence may also interfere with attention, memory, emotional regulation, and learning (Brunzell et al., 2021).

Abduction marriage can further disrupt girls' developing identities and future aspirations. Adolescence is an important period for establishing identity, relationships, and educational goals, yet forced marriage may impose adult responsibilities prematurely and separate girls from their peers and educational routines. Muzingili (2026) highlights the importance of agency and future aspirations among girls returning from forced marriage, while Nhampoca and Maritz (2024) demonstrate the interconnected educational and mental-health consequences of early marriage.

The social dimension is equally important. Girls returning to school may encounter stigma, shame, isolation, and judgement from peers and community members. These experiences can discourage them from speaking about their experiences and participating in classroom or school activities. Gender inequality and discriminatory social norms may further restrict girls' participation in education (Akinwale, 2023; Ojong, 2025). Psychoeducational challenges should therefore be understood not only as individual psychological difficulties but also as outcomes shaped by wider social and cultural conditions.

African research reports similar experiences of emotional distress, uncertainty, and hopelessness among girls affected by forced marriage, with consequences for educational engagement (Plan International, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). Evidence from Mozambique, for example, links early marriage with educational disruption and adverse mental-health outcomes among adolescent girls (Nhampoca & Maritz, 2024). These experiences demonstrate that educational exclusion can result from the interaction of psychological distress, stigma, poverty, and restrictive gender norms.

Educational consequences may include absenteeism, school dropout, difficulty concentrating, declining academic performance, loss of motivation, and reduced educational aspirations. Prolonged absence creates learning gaps and makes it difficult for returning learners to keep pace with classmates. Ansari et al. (2020) demonstrate the broader relationship between absenteeism and later educational and socioeconomic outcomes, while Elnakib et al. (2024) identify educational disruption as an important consequence of child marriage requiring targeted intervention.

The challenges are also reinforced by poverty, limited educational resources, gender inequality, and restrictive cultural expectations. Research shows that child marriage and educational exclusion result from interconnected social, economic, and cultural factors rather than a single cause (Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021; Pourtaheri et al., 2024). Effective responses must therefore address not only the individual learner but also the family, school, community, and institutional environments surrounding her.

In Lesotho, these concerns are particularly relevant because customary practices and gendered social norms continue to influence the experiences of some girls. Existing research has examined child and forced marriage primarily from legal, cultural, and human rights perspectives (Likoti & Sibanyoni, 2020; Sibanyoni et al., 2022). The literature therefore suggests that girls affected by abduction marriage may require counselling, trauma-informed teaching, academic catch-up support, supportive teacher–learner relationships, family involvement, and community interventions. In general, child and abduction marriage can disrupt educational trajectories, compromise psychological well-being, restrict girls' agency, and reinforce gender inequality. The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that child and abduction marriage have consequences that extend beyond early entry into marriage and can substantially affect girls' educational participation and psychosocial well-being. Educational interruption, learning gaps, reduced academic confidence, emotional distress, stigma, and restricted autonomy may interact to create continuing barriers to educational progression. These consequences are shaped not only by individual experiences but also by gendered expectations, family and community structures, and broader social inequalities. Understanding these interconnected effects provides a foundation for examining the specific psychoeducational challenges that girls may experience following abduction marriage.

Educational Disruption, Attendance and Academic Performance

Educational continuity is essential for learners' academic progression and successful completion of schooling. Regular attendance enables learners to engage with curriculum content, participate in classroom discussions, complete assessments, and develop meaningful relationships with teachers and peers (UNESCO, 2024). Conversely, prolonged educational disruption contributes to learning gaps, reduced academic confidence, grade repetition, and school dropout.

International evidence consistently identifies child marriage as one of the leading causes of educational disruption among adolescent girls (UNICEF, 2023). Girls entering marriage frequently discontinue schooling because of domestic responsibilities, pregnancy, family expectations, and social pressures associated with marital roles (Girls Not Brides, 2024). Even when girls return to school, they often struggle to catch up with missed curriculum content and maintain satisfactory academic performance.

Within sub-Saharan Africa, educational interruption associated with child marriage contributes to declining attendance, absenteeism, poor examination results, and reduced educational attainment (Walker, 2019). Emerging evidence from Lesotho similarly suggests that girls affected by chobeliso frequently experience interrupted schooling, prolonged absence, learning gaps, and academic difficulties after returning to school (Maseka, 2022). These findings suggest that educational disruption extends beyond physical absence and continues to influence learners' academic participation long after reintegration.

Stigma, Trauma and School Participation

School participation involves more than physical attendance; it includes learners' active engagement, sense of belonging, confidence, and meaningful participation in classroom and school activities (Theron, 2022). Learners who experience acceptance and emotional safety are generally more motivated to participate actively in learning than those who experience discrimination or exclusion.

Research demonstrates that girls affected by child marriage frequently encounter stigma and social exclusion upon returning to school (Girls Not Brides, 2024). Gossip, ridicule, discrimination, and negative labelling contribute to feelings of shame and embarrassment that discourage classroom participation and reduce learners' confidence. Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2023) reports that many survivors of forced marriage withdraw socially because they anticipate rejection from peers and teachers.

Trauma further compounds these educational challenges. According to WHO (2023), trauma resulting from violence or coercion negatively affects emotional regulation, concentration, memory, and classroom engagement. Consequently, girls affected by abduction marriage often experience fear, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal that interfere with effective learning. Schools therefore have an important responsibility to create inclusive, trauma-informed environments that support learners' emotional recovery and educational participation.

Strategies for Promoting Educational Continuity

The literature highlights the importance of comprehensive interventions that address both educational and psychosocial needs following child marriage. UNESCO (2024) recommends learner reintegration programmes that combine remedial academic support, flexible learning opportunities, counselling services, and teacher support to facilitate successful school re-entry. Similarly, WHO (2023) advocates trauma-informed educational approaches that recognise the impact of traumatic experiences on learning and promote emotionally supportive classroom environments.

Research further demonstrates that teachers, families, counsellors, peers, and communities all play important roles in promoting educational recovery among vulnerable learners. Masten (2021) argues that resilience develops through supportive relationships that provide emotional security, encouragement, and opportunities for positive adaptation following adversity. Theron (2022) similarly emphasises that schools characterised by care, inclusion, and belonging promote learners' resilience and educational engagement.

Community awareness programmes strengthened child protection systems, and collaboration between schools, social workers, health professionals, and traditional leaders have also been identified as effective strategies for preventing child marriage and supporting girls' educational continuity (UNICEF, 2024; Girls Not Brides, 2024). Such multi-sectoral approaches recognise that educational recovery requires coordinated interventions extending beyond the school environment.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND KNOWLEDGE GAP

This study is informed by Feminist Theory and the Rights-Based Theory. Feminist Theory explains how patriarchal social structures and unequal gender relations contribute to harmful practices such as abduction marriage, thereby restricting girls' educational opportunities and reinforcing gender inequality (Tong & Botts, 2022). The Rights-Based Theory complements this perspective by emphasising children's rights to education, protection, participation, and development as articulated in international human rights frameworks (UNICEF, 2024).

Although existing literature has established strong links between child marriage and educational disadvantage, relatively little research has specifically explored the psychoeducational experiences of young Basotho schoolgirls affected by *chobeliso*. Most studies have focused on legal reforms, cultural practices, and child protection, with limited attention to the lived educational experiences of survivors or the strategies needed to promote their educational continuity. This study addresses that gap by examining both the psychoeducational challenges experienced by young Basotho schoolgirls following abduction marriage and the strategies that may support their successful educational recovery and continued participation in schooling.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach within the transformative paradigm to explore strategies for addressing the psychoeducational challenges associated with abduction marriage among young Basotho schoolgirls in Lesotho. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings within their natural settings through rich, descriptive data rather than numerical measurements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand how girls affected by *chobeliso* perceive the strategies required to address the emotional, psychological, social, and educational challenges arising from their experiences.

The study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design. PAR actively involves participants in identifying problems, reflecting on their experiences, and proposing practical solutions that may improve their own circumstances and those of their communities (Kemmis et al., 2022). This design was particularly appropriate because it provided young Basotho schoolgirls and other key stakeholders with opportunities to share their lived experiences and collectively identify strategies for promoting educational continuity and psychosocial well-being following abduction marriage. Consistent with the transformative paradigm, the study sought to amplify the voices of participants while contributing to social justice, educational inclusion, and the protection of children's rights.

Data were generated using multiple participatory qualitative methods to enhance the richness and credibility of the findings. Storytelling enabled participants to narrate their personal experiences of *chobeliso* and explain how these experiences influenced their education and emotional well-being. Focus group discussions created opportunities for participants to reflect collectively on common psychoeducational challenges and possible intervention strategies. Participants also produced drawings accompanied by narrative explanations to illustrate their educational journeys, emotional experiences, and future aspirations. In addition, Photovoice enabled participants to capture photographs representing barriers, support systems, resilience, and educational experiences within their communities. The use of multiple data-generation methods facilitated methodological triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997).

The study involved young Basotho schoolgirls who had experienced abduction marriage, together with teachers, parents, school counsellors, and community leaders who provided complementary perspectives on strategies for supporting affected learners. Throughout the research process, ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent and assent, confidentiality, anonymity, and protection from harm were strictly observed. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, and counselling support was made available to minimise the risk of emotional distress during data generation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analysed qualitatively using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analysing, interpreting, and reporting recurring patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine participants' narratives systematically and identify common themes relating to strategies for addressing the psychoeducational challenges associated with abduction marriage.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase process. The researcher first familiarised herself with the data by repeatedly reading interview transcripts, storytelling narratives, Photovoice narratives, and

explanations accompanying participants' drawings. Initial codes were then generated by identifying meaningful units of information relevant to the research questions. Similar codes were subsequently organised into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and compared with the original data to ensure coherence and credibility. The themes were then clearly defined and named before being interpreted in relation to the study objectives, existing literature, and the theoretical framework. This systematic analytical process enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns and generate an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives regarding strategies for addressing the psychoeducational challenges associated with *chobeliso* among young Basotho schoolgirls in Lesotho (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

Educational Disruption, School Attendance and Academic Performance Following Abduction Marriage

Educational participation extends beyond school enrolment to include regular attendance, continuous learning, classroom engagement, progression through grades, and successful academic achievement (UNESCO, 2024). Research consistently identifies child marriage as one of the major barriers to girls' educational participation because it interrupts schooling, reduces attendance, and increases the likelihood of poor academic performance and permanent school dropout (UNICEF, 2023; Girls Not Brides, 2024). Within African contexts, educational disruption associated with child marriage is further reinforced by poverty, gender inequality, and harmful cultural practices that prioritise marriage over girls' education (Wogara, 2025).

The findings of this study indicate that abduction marriage significantly interrupted participants' educational trajectories. Nearly all participants described prolonged school absence following abduction, resulting in missed learning opportunities, learning gaps, declining academic performance, and difficulties catching up with classmates after returning to school. For some participants, the interruption also affected their motivation to continue with their education because they perceived themselves as academically disadvantaged compared with their peers.

One participant explained:

"When I came back to school, everyone had already finished topics I had never seen. I could not understand what the teacher was explaining anymore." (Lerato)

Similarly, another participant stated:

"Sometimes I wanted to attend school, but I felt I was too far behind everyone else. I thought maybe I should just stop." (Thato)

These narratives illustrate that educational disruption extended beyond temporary absence from school. Participants described struggling academically after returning because they had lost continuity in learning and confidence in their academic abilities. The statements also suggest that prolonged absence created a cycle in which missed schoolwork resulted in learning difficulties, which subsequently reduced motivation and increased the possibility of further absenteeism. Reintegration into school therefore required overcoming both educational and emotional barriers.

The findings further suggest that school attendance alone cannot be used as an indicator of successful educational reintegration. Although participants returned to school, some continued to experience difficulties understanding lessons, completing schoolwork, preparing for assessments, and interacting confidently in the classroom. This finding is important because it demonstrates that educational continuity involves maintaining meaningful participation and academic progression rather than merely returning to the school premises.

These findings corroborate international evidence indicating that child marriage frequently interrupts girls' educational pathways and limits opportunities for educational attainment (UNICEF, 2023; UNESCO, 2024). Similar findings have been reported across sub-Saharan Africa, where marriage-related school interruption contributes to absenteeism, grade repetition, poor academic performance, and permanent school dropout (Walker, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2023). The present findings extend this understanding by demonstrating how educational disruption associated with *chobeliso* can continue to affect girls even after they return to school.

Within Lesotho, the findings suggest that *chobeliso* continues to undermine educational continuity despite legislation and child protection measures designed to safeguard children's educational rights. The consequences identified by participants demonstrate the need for structured academic reintegration, including catch-up lessons, flexible learning arrangements, teacher monitoring, and individual academic support.

From a Feminist Theory perspective, these findings demonstrate how patriarchal cultural practices can restrict girls' educational opportunities by placing greater value on marriage and gendered social roles than on girls' education (Tong & Botts, 2022). The interruption of schooling is therefore not simply an individual educational problem but reflects broader gendered structures that constrain girls' choices and opportunities. Similarly, Rights-Based Theory interprets educational disruption as a violation of children's rights to education, participation, protection, dignity, and development (UNICEF, 2024). The findings therefore highlight the responsibility of educational institutions and other stakeholders to remove barriers that prevent affected girls from continuing their education.

Emotional Distress, Fear and Classroom Engagement

Learning is influenced not only by learners' intellectual abilities but also by their emotional and psychological well-being (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters, 2021). Emotional security enables learners to concentrate, participate confidently in classroom activities, and maintain positive academic engagement, whereas trauma, anxiety, and fear can interfere with attention, memory, motivation, and classroom participation (WHO, 2023). Child marriage has increasingly been recognised as a significant contributor to poor mental health among adolescent girls, with long-term implications for educational participation and development (UNICEF, 2023).

Participants consistently described fear, anxiety, shame, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress following abduction marriage. These emotional experiences affected their concentration, confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate in classroom activities after returning to school. Some participants explained that they remained preoccupied with their experiences even while sitting in class, making it difficult to focus on lessons or respond to teachers.

One participant explained:

"Even when the teacher asked questions, I wanted to answer, but I became afraid that everyone was looking at me." (Naleli)

Another participant reflected:

"I was always thinking about what happened to me instead of listening in class." (Palesa)

These narratives demonstrate the close relationship between psychological well-being and educational engagement. Naleli's account illustrates how fear of being observed or judged reduced her willingness to participate, while Palesa's experience shows how intrusive thoughts and emotional distress competed with the cognitive attention required for learning. Thus, participants' difficulties were not necessarily associated with a lack of interest in education but with the psychological consequences of their experiences.

The findings further indicate that emotional distress continued long after participants returned to school. This suggests that the end of the immediate abduction experience did not necessarily represent the end of its psychological consequences. Returning to familiar classrooms could also trigger memories, anxiety, embarrassment, or fear. Consequently, some participants required opportunities to process their experiences and rebuild their sense of safety before they could fully engage in learning.

The findings support previous studies demonstrating that traumatic experiences can impair learners' cognitive functioning, concentration, emotional regulation, and educational performance (Brunzell et al., 2021; WHO, 2023). They also support UNICEF's (2023) observation that survivors of child marriage may experience fear, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and diminished self-esteem. Similar findings have been reported throughout Africa, where girls affected by forced marriage continue to experience psychological distress that affects their educational participation after marriage (Plan International, 2023).

The findings therefore suggest that psychosocial support should be considered an integral component of educational reintegration. Counselling, supportive teacher–learner relationships, peer support, and emotionally safe classroom environments may assist learners in managing distress while rebuilding confidence and educational motivation.

From a Feminist Theory perspective, participants' emotional experiences illustrate the psychological consequences of gendered power inequalities that expose girls to coercion, violence, and restricted autonomy. Their fear and emotional distress should therefore be understood within the broader social conditions that enable harmful practices to persist. Rights-Based Theory similarly argues that children's right to education cannot be fully realised where learners experience persistent fear, insecurity, discrimination, or emotional distress. Ensuring access to education must therefore include creating conditions that allow girls to participate safely and meaningfully.

Stigma, Social Exclusion and Educational Participation

Meaningful educational participation requires learners to experience acceptance, belonging, dignity, and positive relationships within the school environment (Theron, 2022). However, stigma and discrimination frequently undermine these conditions by reducing learners' confidence and limiting opportunities for social and academic engagement (Link & Phelan, 2021). Previous studies have shown that girls returning to school after child marriage may experience ridicule, discrimination, and social exclusion from peers and communities (Girls Not Brides, 2024).

Participants in this study described returning to school only to face gossip, ridicule, judgement, and social rejection. Many indicated that these experiences reduced their confidence and discouraged active participation during lessons. The school environment, which could potentially have provided a space for recovery and restoration, was sometimes experienced as another source of emotional pressure.

One participant stated:

"Some learners whispered whenever I entered the classroom. I felt like everybody was talking about me." (Boitumelo)

Another explained:

"I stopped raising my hand because I felt people were laughing at me." (Relebohile)

These narratives suggest that stigma significantly undermined learners' educational participation by weakening their sense of belonging and discouraging classroom interaction. Relebohile's statement particularly demonstrates how anticipated judgement can influence behaviour even when direct discrimination is not openly expressed. Fear of ridicule can cause learners to withdraw, remain silent, or avoid opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge.

Participants' experiences further suggest that social exclusion may contribute to a loss of learner identity. Before abduction, participants may have understood themselves primarily as learners, friends, and members of their school communities. Following their experiences, however, some felt that they were viewed primarily through the lens of what had happened to them. This shift in how they perceived themselves and how they believed others perceived them could affect self-esteem, confidence, and educational aspirations.

The findings are consistent with previous research showing that social stigma can discourage girls from remaining engaged in education after child marriage (Plan International, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). Within African contexts, cultural expectations and gender norms may reinforce discrimination against girls while simultaneously normalising harmful practices. Consequently, educational reintegration requires rebuilding both academic confidence and social belonging.

The findings further support Theron's (2022) argument that learner belonging is fundamental to educational participation. A school that provides physical access but does not address stigma may therefore fail to achieve

meaningful inclusion. Schools should create opportunities for peer support, sensitisation, counselling, and inclusive classroom practices that enable returning learners to rebuild positive relationships with their peers and teachers.

Feminist Theory interprets stigma as a manifestation of unequal gender relations in which girls may be blamed, judged, or socially marginalised for experiences resulting from gendered violence and coercion. Rights-Based Theory, meanwhile, emphasises learners' rights to dignity, equality, participation, and inclusive education free from discrimination. Addressing stigma is therefore both an educational and a rights-based responsibility.

Strategies for Promoting Educational Continuity and Psychoeducational Well-Being

Educational continuity following trauma depends upon coordinated academic, psychosocial, family, and community support (UNESCO, 2024). Trauma-informed education recognises that effective learning cannot occur unless learners feel emotionally safe, supported, and accepted within their school environments (WHO, 2023). Previous studies recommend counselling services, learner reintegration programmes, teacher professional development, family engagement, and community awareness as important strategies for supporting vulnerable learners (Masten, 2021).

Participants identified several interventions that they believed would strengthen educational continuity after abduction marriage. These included school-based counselling, trauma-informed teaching, teacher training, peer support groups, family encouragement, community awareness campaigns, learner reintegration programmes, and stronger collaboration between schools and child protection stakeholders. The range of strategies identified demonstrates that participants did not perceive their challenges as having a single solution. Instead, they viewed recovery as a process requiring support at several interconnected levels.

One participant explained:

"If someone at school could talk to us every week, many girls would not feel alone." (Thato)

Another participant added:

"Teachers should understand what we have gone through before judging us." (Lerato)

These statements highlight two important dimensions of educational recovery: psychosocial support and teacher understanding. Thato's statement points to the need for accessible and continuous counselling, while Lerato's statement emphasises the importance of teachers understanding trauma-related behaviours. Together, the narratives demonstrate that participants wanted schools to become spaces of care rather than environments in which their difficulties were misunderstood or punished.

Participants also emphasised the importance of structured academic support. Catch-up lessons, flexible learning arrangements, peer mentoring, and continuous monitoring were identified as mechanisms that could assist girls in addressing learning gaps and rebuilding academic confidence. Such interventions are particularly important because emotional recovery and academic recovery are interconnected. A learner who continues to struggle academically may experience further frustration and loss of confidence, while improved academic support may strengthen motivation and encourage continued school attendance.

Family and community support also emerged as important components of educational continuity. Participants indicated that encouragement from parents and caregivers strengthened their determination to remain in school. Community awareness was similarly viewed as necessary for reducing stigma and challenging social norms that may contribute to abduction marriage. These findings demonstrate that responsibility for girls' educational recovery extends beyond the school itself.

The findings align with UNESCO (2024) and WHO (2023), which advocate integrated school-based psychosocial support and trauma-informed educational practices for vulnerable learners. Similarly, Masten (2021) argues that resilience develops through supportive relationships with teachers, families, peers, and communities. Participants'

recommendations also reinforce international calls for multi-sectoral approaches that combine education, child protection, health, and community interventions to address the consequences of child marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

Viewed through Feminist Theory, these strategies challenge patriarchal norms that restrict girls' educational opportunities and contribute to their vulnerability to harmful practices. Providing girls with counselling, educational support, safe learning environments, and opportunities for participation can strengthen their agency and enable them to reclaim their educational aspirations. From a Rights-Based perspective, the findings reinforce the collective responsibility of schools, families, communities, and governments to uphold girls' rights to education, protection, participation, dignity, and psychosocial well-being.

In general, the findings demonstrate that educational continuity following *chobeliso* cannot be achieved through school re-entry alone. Successful reintegration requires a holistic and coordinated response that addresses academic learning gaps, emotional distress, stigma, social relationships, family support, and child protection. The participants' voices therefore point towards an educational approach that is simultaneously trauma-informed, gender-responsive, participatory, and rights-based. This integrated approach provides an important foundation for developing contextually appropriate strategies to support the educational continuity and psychoeducational well-being of young Basotho schoolgirls affected by abduction marriage.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the psychoeducational consequences of *chobeliso* are interconnected rather than isolated. Educational disruption, emotional distress, stigma, and reduced academic participation reinforce one another, creating cumulative barriers to learning and educational progression. Prolonged absence from school can result in learning gaps and reduced academic confidence, while emotional distress and fear interfere with concentration and motivation. At the same time, stigma and social exclusion may weaken learners' sense of belonging. The consequences of abduction marriage should therefore be understood as a continuing process rather than a temporary interruption of schooling.

The study further demonstrates that participants were active contributors to identifying solutions to their educational challenges. Through FGDs and storytelling, they identified counselling, supportive teachers, academic catch-up programmes, positive peer relationships, family encouragement, community awareness, and stronger institutional collaboration as important conditions for recovery. This reinforces the value of participatory approaches in research involving vulnerable learners because their lived experiences can directly inform the development of relevant educational and psychosocial interventions.

The findings also show that educational recovery is closely connected to emotional and social recovery. A girl may return physically to school while remaining psychologically disconnected from learning because of fear, shame, trauma, or stigma. Similarly, counselling alone may not address academic difficulties caused by prolonged absence and learning gaps. This interdependence suggests that isolated interventions are unlikely to address the full range of psychoeducational challenges associated with *chobeliso*. Academic, psychosocial, social, and child-protection interventions therefore need to operate together.

These findings are consistent with international and African literature emphasising supportive educational environments for learners affected by adversity (Brunzell et al., 2021; Masten, 2021; UNESCO, 2024; WHO, 2023). However, the present study contributes a context-specific perspective by foregrounding the experiences of young Basotho schoolgirls affected by abduction marriage. Existing research has often focused on prevalence, legal protection, health consequences, or school dropout, with less attention to girls' experiences of returning to school and rebuilding their educational identities. This study therefore extends existing scholarship by highlighting the interconnected emotional, social, and academic dimensions of educational reintegration within the context of *chobeliso*.

Importantly, the findings also highlight the agency and aspirations of affected girls. Although participants described significant challenges, their narratives reflected a desire to continue their education and rebuild their

futures. Vulnerability should therefore not be equated with helplessness. With appropriate support, girls can regain confidence, strengthen resilience, and re-establish educational aspirations. Schools can consequently serve not only as places of academic instruction but also as spaces for belonging, identity reconstruction, healing, and future development.

From a Feminist Theory perspective, the findings illustrate how gendered power relations and patriarchal structures influence girls' educational opportunities. *Chobeliso* can constrain girls' autonomy over their bodies, relationships, mobility, and education, making the resulting educational and psychosocial difficulties part of broader gender inequalities. Addressing these challenges therefore requires interventions that challenge harmful gender norms, strengthen girls' agency, and ensure that schools do not reproduce discriminatory practices.

From a Rights-Based Theory perspective, educational continuity is inseparable from children's rights to protection, participation, dignity, equality, and education. Simply returning an affected girl to school does not necessarily ensure the meaningful realisation of these rights. A rights-based response requires safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory environments in which girls can participate meaningfully and access appropriate academic and psychosocial support.

The findings further highlight the importance of collaboration among schools, families, communities, traditional leaders, social workers, counsellors, health professionals, child-protection agencies, and government institutions. Since the causes and consequences of *chobeliso* extend beyond the school environment, schools alone cannot address all the challenges experienced by affected girls. Coordinated action is necessary to reduce stigma, strengthen protection mechanisms, prevent further harm, and challenge social norms that sustain harmful practices.

Consequently, educational continuity should be understood as a holistic process involving academic recovery, emotional healing, social reintegration, and protection. Reintegration should therefore extend beyond simply placing girls back in classrooms. Schools should develop structured reintegration pathways that combine academic assessment and catch-up support with counselling, trauma-informed teaching, peer support, family engagement, and appropriate referral mechanisms.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that addressing the psychoeducational consequences of *chobeliso* requires an integrated, trauma-informed, gender-responsive, participatory, and rights-based approach. Such an approach should respond to immediate educational and psychosocial needs while also addressing the structural and social conditions that contribute to girls' vulnerability. By foregrounding the lived experiences of young Basotho schoolgirls, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the educational consequences of abduction marriage and identifies practical pathways for promoting recovery, resilience, educational continuity, and successful school reintegration.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that *chobeliso* has significant and interconnected psychoeducational consequences for young Basotho schoolgirls. Abduction marriage disrupts schooling through prolonged absenteeism, learning gaps, reduced academic performance, and difficulties with school reintegration. Participants also experienced fear, anxiety, trauma, stigma, and social exclusion, which negatively affected classroom participation and educational engagement.

The findings demonstrate that educational recovery cannot be achieved through school re-entry alone. Affected girls require integrated academic, psychosocial, family, community, and child-protection support. Trauma-informed and gender-responsive educational practices are essential for creating safe and inclusive learning environments. The study further concludes that stronger collaboration among schools, families, communities, traditional leaders, and government institutions is necessary to protect girls' educational rights. Ultimately, supporting girls affected by *chobeliso* requires a holistic, participatory, rights-based approach that promotes healing, resilience, educational continuity, and future aspirations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that schools establish structured reintegration programmes that combine academic catch-up support, counselling, and flexible learning opportunities for girls returning to school after abduction marriage. Teachers should receive training in trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and inclusive teaching practices to create safe and supportive learning environments. Schools, families, counsellors, social workers, traditional leaders, and child protection agencies should strengthen collaboration to support girls' protection, recovery, and continued education. Community awareness programmes should also challenge harmful gender norms, reduce stigma, and promote girls' rights to education, dignity, safety, and participation. Finally, the Ministry of Education and relevant stakeholders should strengthen policies, monitoring mechanisms, and psychosocial support services to prevent educational exclusion and promote the long-term well-being of girls affected by *chobeliso*.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study contributes context-specific knowledge on the psychoeducational experiences of young Basotho schoolgirls affected by *chobeliso*. It extends existing literature by connecting educational disruption with emotional distress, stigma, social exclusion, and challenges of school reintegration. Methodologically, the participatory approach foregrounds girls' voices and lived experiences in understanding educational consequences and possible solutions. The study also contributes practical insights for developing trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and rights-based interventions to strengthen educational continuity and psychosocial well-being in Lesotho.

REFERENCES

1. Abebe, T., UdL, M.A.B., Budal, Š., AAU, T.J.J. and PUJ, R.L.O., 2025. FRAMEWORK ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS REPORT.
2. Akinwale, A. A. (2023). Gender equity and social progress: Empowering women and girls to drive sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Innovation Research and Advanced Studies*.
3. Angwaomadoko, E. A., Yunusa, E., Abalaka, F. F., Audu, M., & Vincent, J. A. (2026). School kidnappings and psychosocial well-being: Emerging public health concerns in Nigeria. *Unifya*, 2(2).
4. Ansari, A., Hofkens, T. L., & Pianta, R. C. (2020). Absenteeism in the first decade of education forecasts civic engagement and educational and socioeconomic prospects in young adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 49(9), 1835–1848. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01260-6>
5. Bengesai, A. V., Amusa, L. B., & Makonye, F. (2021). The impact of girl child marriage on the completion of the first cycle of secondary education in Zimbabwe: A propensity score analysis. *PLOS ONE*, 16(6), e0252413. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0252413>
6. Bhushan, T. (2025). Breaking the chains: Understanding and combating early marriage-induced violence against girls. In *Social, political, and health implications of early marriage* (pp. 61–92). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
7. Bonvillain, N. (2020). *Women and men: Cultural constructs of gender*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
8. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
9. Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2021). Trauma-informed positive education: Using positive psychology to strengthen the learning and wellbeing of students affected by trauma. *School Psychology International*, 42(2), 123–142.
10. Bryan, J., Williams, J. M., & Griffin, D. (2020). Fostering educational resilience and opportunities in urban schools through equity-focused school–family–community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling*, 23(1), Article 2156759X19899179.
11. Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2018). Narrative inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.
12. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
13. Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success*. Learning Policy Institute.

14. Dean, L., Obasi, A., El Sony, A., Fadul, S., El Hassan, H., Thomson, R., & Tolhurst, R. (2019). "He is suitable for her, of course he is our relative": A qualitative exploration of the drivers and implications of child marriage in Gezira State, Sudan. *BMJ Global Health*, 4(3), e001264.
15. Detrick, S. (Ed.). (2023). *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: A guide to the travaux préparatoires*. Brill.
16. Dhiman, D. B. (2023). *Education's role in empowering women and promoting gender equality: A critical review*.
17. Dombo, E. A., & Sabatino, C. A. (2019). *Creating trauma-informed schools: A guide for school social workers and educators*. Oxford University Press.
18. Elnakib, S., Ali, A. K., Mieth, K., & Chandra-Mouli, V. (2024). Mapping the evidence on interventions that mitigate the health, educational, social and economic impacts of child marriage and address the needs of child brides: A systematic scoping review. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, 32(1), 2449310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26410397.2024.2449310>
19. Ergün, N., & Bozdağ, F. (2026). Educational continuity under crisis: How school-based support professionals navigate systemic constraints. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 121, 103528.
20. Flick, U. (2022). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.). Sage.
21. Ginsburg, K. R., & Jablow, M. M. (2020). *Building resilience in children and teens: Giving kids roots and wings*. American Academy of Pediatrics.
22. Girls Not Brides. (2024). *Child marriage and girls' education: Evidence and global advocacy update*. Girls Not Brides. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org>
23. Global Partnership for Education. (2023). *Transforming education through stronger education systems: Annual results report 2023*. Global Partnership for Education.
24. Gwimbi, P. (2017). Mainstreaming national adaptation programmes of action into national development plans in Lesotho: Lessons and needs. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*, 9(3), 299–315.
25. Hailu, D., & Beyene, H. (2025). Child marriage and girls' educational experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 104, 103021.
26. Hamad, B. A., El-Bilbeisi, A. H., Albelbeisi, A. H., & El Afifi, A. M. (2021). The psychological and social consequences of child marriage among adolescent girls: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1–15.
27. Herrenkohl, T. I., Hong, S., & Verbrugge, B. (2019). Trauma-informed programs based in schools: Linking concepts to practices and assessing the evidence. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 64(3–4), 373–388.
28. hooks, b. (2021). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
29. Human Rights Watch. (2023). *"I just want to go to school": Barriers to education for girls affected by child marriage*. Human Rights Watch.
30. International Rescue Committee. (2023). *Safe healing and learning: Integrating mental health and psychosocial support into education programmes*. International Rescue Committee.
31. Isik, O. (2025). Qualitative research approaches and data collection methods: Understanding meaning and experience. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, 7(6), 19–32.
32. Jejeebhoy, S. J. (2024). *Gender norms and the wellbeing of women and girls in India: A review*. United Nations Population Fund.
33. Katsonga-Phiri, T., Grant, K. E., & Brown, M. (2019). Trauma intervention in sub-Saharan African children: A systematic literature review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(4), 453–469.
34. Kitching, E., & Poandl, M. M. (2025). Fostering students' posttraumatic growth: A multitiered approach for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 29(1), Article 2156759X251320931.
35. Korgbe, A. S. (2025). *Student mothers in Liberia: The role of international nongovernmental organizations in education completion* [Doctoral dissertation, Drexel University].
36. Koslouski, J. B., & Stark, K. D. (2021). Trauma-informed practices in schools: Supporting students exposed to adverse childhood experiences. *School Psychology International*, 42(5), 473–490.
37. Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2021). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (6th ed.). Sage.

38. Letsie, P. R. (2021). *School re-entry policies: A human rights and cultural conundrum for pregnant and parenting adolescents in Lesotho* [Master's thesis, University of Pretoria].
39. Liebenberg, L. (2018). Thinking critically about photovoice: Achieving empowerment and social change. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1–9.
40. Likoti, P. M., & Sibanyoni, E. K. (2020). *Children as victims of forced marriages in lesotho: a question of cultural practice or approval of child exploitation*. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 9, 723-734.
41. Liu, C., Gui, J., & Ma, Y. (2025). Interdisciplinary intervention to improve mental health and academic adaptation of adolescents with chronic diseases: Integration of educational psychology and public health. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1732927.
42. Mahanetsa, T. M. (2024). *Exploring a framework for the holistic well-being of orphaned learners in Lesotho secondary schools* [Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State].
43. Malhotra, A., & Elnakib, S. (2021). 20 years of the evidence base on what works to prevent child marriage: A systematic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 68(5), 847–862. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.11.017>
44. Masten, A. S. (2021). Resilience of children in disasters: A multisystem perspective. *International Journal of Psychology*, 56(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12740>
45. Mitchell, C. (2021). *Participatory visual methodologies: Social change, community and policy* (2nd ed.). Sage.
46. Mkhize, G., & Vilakazi, F. (2021). Rethinking gender and conduits of control: A feminist review. *Image & Text*, 35, 1–22.
47. Mohlabane, N., & Tshoaedi, M. (2022). What is a woman? A decolonial African feminist analysis of womanhoods in Lesotho. *South African Review of Sociology*, 52(1), 40–57.
48. Morelli, S. (2022). Abduction marriage and customary law in Lesotho: Contesting culture and children's rights. *Journal of African Law*, 66(3), 395–414.
49. Muthengi, R., & Menecha, J. (2025). Factors associated with major depressive disorder among parents of pregnant teenagers at African Inland Church in Wamunyu District Church Council, Machakos County, Kenya. *African Journal of Emerging Issues*, 7(24), 47–61.
50. Muzingili, T. (2026). Hope or continued captivity: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the future aspirations of girls who returned to their families after forced marriage. *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 20(2), 178–199.
51. Ndaule, M. (2023). *Intimate partner violence in Mokhotlong, Lesotho* [Master's thesis, National University of Lesotho].
52. Nhampoca, J. M., & Maritz, J. E. (2024). Early marriage, education and mental health: Experiences of adolescent girls in Mozambique. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*, 5, 1278934. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fgwh.2024.1278934>
53. Norrish, J., & Brunzell, T. (2023). How is trauma-informed education implemented within classrooms? A synthesis of trauma-informed education programs. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(3), 94–120.
54. Ojong, A. S. (2025). Transforming female education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Addressing socio-cultural, economic, institutional and instructional barriers to access and inclusion. *Journal of African Innovation and Advanced Studies*.
55. Plan International. (2023). *State of the world's girls 2023: Girls' rights in times of crisis*. Plan International.
56. Pourtaheri, A., Mahdizadeh, M., Tehrani, H., Jamali, J., & Peyman, N. (2024). Socio-ecological factors of girl child marriage: A meta-synthesis of qualitative research. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1), 428. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-17943-3>
57. Ramakhula, T. (2022). *The impact of customary law and its constitutional protection on the social status and political participation of women in Lesotho* [Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State].
58. Ribeiro, C., Mesquita, C., & Beltrán, J. H. (2025). Child rights-based pedagogy in early childhood education: Insights from Portuguese educators. *Education Sciences*, 15(10), 1301.
59. Rossen, E. (2020). *Supporting and educating traumatized students: A guide for school-based professionals* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

60. Sacker, A., & Schoon, I. (2007). Educational resilience in later life: Resources and assets in adolescence and return to education after leaving school at age 16. *Social Science Research*, 36(3), 873–896.
61. Salihu, H. M. (2024). Child marriage and adolescent girls' mental health in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *BMC Women's Health*, 24(1), 1–18.
62. Save the Children. (2023). *Protecting children through integrated child protection systems*. Save the Children. <https://www.savethechildren.net>
63. Sediqi, F. (2026). Examining the consequences of school bans on the self-esteem of Afghan adolescent girls in Kabul, Afghanistan. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 1–14.
64. Sesma, J. T. F. (2024). *Understanding the needs of primary school teachers operating in international crisis response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia: Supporting trauma-informed, emergency mental health services for children in conflict and war zones* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California].
65. Shean, M., & Mander, D. (2020). Student wellbeing and learning: The relationship between emotional health and educational engagement. *Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 37(2), 89–102.
66. Sibanyoni, E. K., & Likoti, M. P. (2022). Legislative responses to child victims of abduction into forced marriages in Lesotho. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 11(5), 495–502.
67. Theron, L., Ungar, M., & Höltege, J. (2022). Pathways of resilience: Predicting school engagement trajectories for South African adolescents living in a stressed environment. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 69, 102062.
68. Tong, R. and Botts, T.F., 2024. *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction*. Routledge.
69. UN Women. (2024). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2024*. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org>
70. UNESCO. (2024). *Global education monitoring report 2024: Gender report*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
71. Ungar, M. (2021). *Multisystemic resilience: Adaptation and transformation in contexts of change*. Oxford University Press.
72. UNICEF. (2024). *The State of the World's Children 2024: The future of childhood in a changing world*. UNICEF.
73. United Nations. (2023). *Convention on the Rights of the Child: General principles and implementation guidance*. United Nations.
74. United Nations. (2024). *The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024*. United Nations.
75. Walker, J. A. (2019). *Building resilience and resistance to child, early, and forced marriage through acquiring skills*.
76. Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369–387.
77. Wang, C., & Redwood-Jones, Y. (2001). Photovoice ethics: Perspectives from Flint Photovoice. *Health Education & Behavior*, 28(5), 560–572.
78. Warria, A. (2019). Child marriages, child protection and sustainable development in Kenya. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 23(2), 121–133.
79. Weiler, K. (2023). Feminist analyses of gender and schooling. In *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 269–290). Routledge.
80. Wiedermann, C. J., Barbieri, V., Plagg, B., Marino, P., Piccoliori, G., & Engl, A. (2023). Fortifying the foundations: A comprehensive approach to enhancing mental health support in educational policies amidst crises. *Healthcare*, 11(10), 1423.
81. Wopara, N.E., 2025. *Child Marriage in Africa: The Effectiveness of International Organizations in Ending Child Marriage*. University of California, Santa Barbara.
82. World Health Organization. (2023). *Mental health and psychosocial support in education and school settings: Guidance for implementation*. World Health Organization.