Re-enrolled teenage mothers' lived experiences of sexuality education in the context of child marriage in Turkana South Sub-County Secondary Schools, Kenya

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https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.4.93

ABSTRACT

Child marriage continues to rob girls of their right to education across Kenya's arid and semi-arid counties, and nowhere is this more pronounced than in Turkana South Sub-County, where bride wealth, chronic poverty, and pastoralist tradition collide with a school system meant to protect them. This study asked a different question than most before it: not how many girls this happens to, but what it feels like to live it. This study was anchored on three objectives; 1. To explore teenage mothers' lived experiences of the content, timing, pedagogy, and classroom climate of school-based sexuality education; in Turkana South Sub-County. 2. To interpret the meanings teenage mothers attach to sexuality education and its perceived relevance to child marriage, pregnancy, consent, rights, and continued schooling. 3. To examine how gender relations, family expectations, economic conditions, community norms, and school structures mediate those experiences and meanings. Adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological design informed by Heidegger's philosophy of being-in-the-world, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived body, and van Manen's lifeworld existentials, the study set out to describe, interpret, and contextualise teenage mothers' own accounts of sexuality education and child marriage. Re-enrolled teenage mothers, aged 15-19 years, drawn purposively from five public secondary schools, shared their experiences through in-depth individual interviews; data saturation was reached at the fifteenth participant. Data were interpreted through van Manen's wholistic, selective, and detailed reading approaches, organised around the four lifeworld existentials: lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relation.The findings disclose a curriculum experienced as fragmented, reductively biological, and delivered too late; arriving only after marriage negotiations and pregnancy had already reshaped participants' futures. Sexuality education was taught through pedagogy of discomfort and avoidance, in classrooms where ridicule silenced girls' questions and stigma made re-enrolled mothers feel newly invisible. Participants attached layered, often contradictory meanings to what they had received: a missed protective opportunity, an occasional spark of rights-consciousness and voice, and most consistently a silence around consent, coercion, bride wealth that left them without the language, or the embodied confidence, to refuse. These experiences were mediated by patriarchal authority, a bride-wealth economy that treated daughters as household income, chronic poverty, and community resistance to open discourse, and thinly resourced schools lacking trained teachers and materials. The study concludes that sexuality education, as currently delivered in Turkana South, speaks to an anatomical body rather than a lived one, and enters a world in which the most consequential decisions about girls' futures have often already been made by others. Yet where education did engage participants as rights-bearing, embodied subjects, it opened a markedly different, more authentic sense of self evidence that the phenomenon remains open to change. The study recommends a comprehensive, rights-based, culturally contextualised curriculum introduced earlier in the school cycle; structured teacher training in facilitating sensitive discussion; locally relevant teaching materials; sustained community engagement with parents and elders; targeted support for re-enrolled mothers; and integration with social protection measures that address the economic roots of child marriage.

Keywords: Child Marriage, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Lived Body, Lived Experience, Lived Time, Kenya, Sexuality Education, Teenage Mothers, Turkana, Van Manen

I. INTRODUCTION

Child marriage remains one of the most persistent violations of girls' rights worldwide, with an estimated 650 million women alive today having married before the age of 18; United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF, 2020). The burden falls heaviest in Sub-Saharan Africa, where poverty, patriarchal norms, and the economic logic of bride wealth sustain the practice despite legal prohibition (Nour, 2009). Kenya's Marriage Act (2014) sets the minimum age of marriage at 18, yet close to one in four Kenyan girls still marries before that age, and pastoralist counties record rates well above the national figure (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey [KDHS], 2022). In Turkana County, livestock-

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based bride wealth, recurrent drought, and chronic poverty position daughters as household assets, and teenage pregnancy prevalence of 19%, against 15% nationally, reflects the same pressures (Mahuro et al., 2021; KDHS, 2022).

Education is widely regarded as the strongest protective factor against child marriage, and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is promoted as a means of equipping adolescents with the knowledge, language, and confidence to delay marriage and make informed decisions about their bodies (Kirby, 2007; United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2018). Kenya has integrated sexuality education into Life Skills and Biology, but delivery is uneven. Teachers are often untrained and uncomfortable with the subject, content is examination-driven and biologically narrow, and parents, elders, and religious leaders frequently resist open discussion (Too, 2019). Whether this provision protects girls in the settings where child marriage is most entrenched remains doubtful.

The existing evidence base is shaped largely by quantitative, determinant-focused inquiry concerned with prevalence, risk factors, and programme outcomes. Studies of teenage motherhood in Kenya have documented stigma, shame, and barriers to re-entry (Mwenje & Kessio, 2015), but the interpreted, first-person experience of girls who have lived through both a school-based curriculum and a forced or arranged marriage is rarely the object of inquiry. Research on sexuality education and research on child marriage have also developed largely in parallel, and almost no qualitative work has been located for Turkana South specifically. What is missing is an account of how these girls make sense of what school did, and did not, teach them.

This article addresses that gap. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological design informed by van Manen (1990), Heidegger (1962), and Merleau-Ponty (1962), it reports the accounts of thirty re-enrolled teenage mothers from five public secondary schools in Turkana South.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Teenage pregnancy remains a significant barrier to girls' education in Kenya's arid and semi-arid regions, and the situation in Turkana South is compounded by poverty, pastoralist practice, and the cultural weight of bride wealth (Nyangaresi & Kauka, 2021). Comprehensive sexuality education has been advanced by government policy as a means of delaying marriage, reducing pregnancy, and advancing gender equality (Ministry of Health, 2015), yet adolescent marriage rates in the region remain high despite its inclusion in the curriculum. Prior research on teenage pregnancy and child marriage in this setting has been dominated by quantitative, policy-oriented studies measuring prevalence and outcomes; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2018), leaving unexamined how sexuality education is actually lived, felt, and made sense of by the girls it is meant to protect. Because the problem is not merely how many girls this happens to but what it means to live it, a phenomenological hermeneutic approach is warranted: this study explored teenage mothers' lived experiences of sexuality education and child marriage in Turkana South Sub-County, Kenya. The needs of teenage mothers are exceptionally pressing in Turkana South, where both cultural and socio-economic conditions converge to sustain child marriage; yet little research has specifically documented and analysed their experiences of sexuality education as a potential lever for prevention.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. To explore teenage mothers' lived experiences of the content, timing, pedagogy, and classroom climate of sexuality education; in Turkana South Sub-County.
ii. To interpret the meanings teenage mothers attach to sexuality education and its perceived relevance to child marriage, pregnancy, consent, rights, and continued schooling.
iii. To examine how gender relations, family expectations, economic conditions, community norms, and school structures mediate lived experiences and meanings; in Turkana South Sub-County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in van Manen (2016) hermeneutic phenomenology, organized around four lifeworld existentials, namely lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation, that structure how any human being experiences the world. Rather than bracketing the researcher's pre-understanding, as descriptive phenomenology recommends, van Manen's hermeneutic approach treats interpretation as unavoidable and productive: understanding is always already shaped by the interpreter's horizon, and the task of inquiry is to bring that horizon into a disciplined, reflexive dialogue with participants' accounts.

Two further phenomenological traditions inform the analysis reported here. Heidegger (1962) ontology of being-in-the-world, including thrownness (Geworfenheit), falling (Verfallenheit), idle talk (Gerede), the anonymous "They" (das Man), and the distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand, supplies a descriptive vocabulary for the structures of everydayness that participants' accounts disclose. Merleau-Ponty (1962)

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phenomenology of the body-subject is drawn upon normatively, specifying what an education genuinely responsive to the lived, perceiving, desiring body would need to attend to, against which the sexuality education participants actually received can be evaluated. Van Manen's own concept of pedagogical tact, the teacher's improvised, relationally sensitive responsiveness to what a particular young person needs in a given moment, provides a further normative benchmark throughout.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Content, Timing, Pedagogy and Classroom Climate

Empirical studies consistently show that school-based sexuality education in Kenya falls short of the comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) standard. In Homa Bay, Mombasa and Nairobi counties, education-sector policies were found to have largely promoted an abstinence-only approach, and the topics integrated into compulsory, examinable subjects were limited in scope (Sidze et al., 2017). The same study reported that fewer than half of teachers (46%) had received any in-service training on sexuality education and that nearly half (45%) felt unprepared or uncomfortable answering students' questions. Other Guttmacher Institute analyses describe a biology-focused, examination-driven curriculum delivered through prescriptive, fear-based methods, with forced sex, gender-based violence, contraception and HIV prevention weakly covered or omitted. Students in Western Kenya likewise identify unmet needs for topics such as contraception, sexual rights and abortion (Sidze et al., 2017). Timing compounds the problem, since high adolescent fertility and early sexual debut mean instruction often arrives after the experiences it should prepare girls for (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics et al., 2015). In Turkana, beading and betrothal may begin before adolescence (Girls Not Brides, 2021). Pedagogy is described as didactic, moralistic and teacher-centred and is shaped by teachers' attitudes: among 122 teachers surveyed in Kisumu, half agreed that a girl cannot decide for herself whether to use contraception and 43% agreed that a girl who uses contraception is promiscuous (Maurice et al., 2021). Classroom gender dynamics also matter, as young women's use of an indirect "soft no" shapes how their refusals are read (Too, 2019). No Turkana-specific evidence on content delivery was located.

2.2.2 Meanings Attached to Sexuality Education

Evidence shows that CSE grounded in rights and empowerment can delay sexual debut and reduce unintended pregnancy (Fonner et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2018). Marriage and pregnancy, however, are read through family honour and economic logic. The Yes I Do! Baseline study found that teenage pregnancy was associated with child marriage in all six countries studied and that, in Kenya to a lesser extent than in Ethiopia and Indonesia, child marriage was perceived as an appropriate way to avoid premarital sex or pregnancy outside wedlock (Kok et al., 2023). In some communities a pregnant, unmarried daughter is married off quickly, bringing family honour and bride wealth (Girls Not Brides, 2021), and UNICEF Kenya (2016) frames child marriage in Turkana as a family asset strategy. A gap also exists between the rights and consent language taught in classrooms and the gendered scripts through which consent is negotiated and between the legal framework and its enforcement in Turkana (UNICEF Kenya, 2016). On continued schooling, a study in Korogocho, Nairobi, found that poverty, childcare responsibilities and stigma kept adolescent mothers out of school despite the re-entry policy, while parents, teachers and community leaders named childcare and financial support and less hostile school environments as facilitators of re-entry (Mukabana et al., 2024). Studies in Bondo and Zambia report similar stigma and ambivalence about school (Walker, 2012) whereas counselling and psychosocial support help mothers feel protected and persist (educational support systems study, 2024/2025). Meaning is therefore shaped by each school's relational and institutional climate.

2.2.3 Mediating Factors

The literature identifies gender relations, family and economic conditions, community norms and school structures as interacting mediators. Inequitable gender norms are linked to reduced girls' autonomy, while more equitable attitudes are associated with staying in school and delaying marriage (KDHS, 2022) Gender-transformative school programmes can shift these norms: in Nairobi informal settlements, a school-based empowerment programme strengthened girls' self-confidence and agency to resist sexual violence and promoted gender-equal attitudes among boys (Sidze et al., 2017). In Turkana South, beading is a household strategy for securing bride wealth (Fonner et al., 2014). In Marsabit County, climate stress, household poverty and dowry converge to commodify girls and precipitate child marriage and UNICEF Kenya (2016) frames child marriage in Turkana as asset management under chronic pastoralist vulnerability. Community categories such as children "of the home" versus "of the field" press families toward marriage after pregnancy, and schooling can distance educated women from community expectations. In schools, robust re-entry has been found to depend on childcare, financial support and non-hostile climates (Mukabana et al., 2024), and only about a third of teachers report training across all CSE topics (Maurice et al., 2021). No Turkana South school-level evidence was located.

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Together, the reviewed studies reveal a geographic and contextual gap (almost no peer-reviewed qualitative work on Turkana County, and none on Turkana South), a methodological gap (few hermeneutic phenomenological designs), a population-intersection gap (sexuality education and child marriage studied separately, not through teenage mothers who lived both), and a mediator-integration gap (no study integrating all four mediators in an arid and semi-arid pastoralist setting).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative interpretive design grounded in van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology. The design sought to illuminate a phenomenon about which little first-person, in-depth qualitative evidence exists, particularly in the specific geographic and cultural context of Turkana South Sub-County, where no prior literature specific to the sub-county was located.

3.2 Setting and Participants

The study was conducted across five public secondary schools in Turkana South Sub-County, Kenya, a pastoralist region with among the highest documented rates of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in the country. Thirty teenage mothers participated, ranging in age from 15 to 19 years (M = 16.8). Participants were distributed across Form Four (43.3%), Form Three (30.0%), and Grade Ten (26.7%), all having re-enrolled after a period of dropout associated with pregnancy or child marriage.

3.3 Target Population

This study used a target population of thirty teenage mothers who had been re-admitted in schools to continue with their education. The study population targeted teenage mothers who are currently re-enrolled, or in the process of re-enrolling, in public secondary schools within Turkana South Sub-County, and who have experienced school-based sexuality education either before or after their pregnancy and or marriage. This population was chosen because it uniquely occupies the intersection of the study's central phenomena: these are girls who have lived through sexuality education as students, who have experienced pregnancy and, in many cases, child marriage, and who have subsequently returned to the schooling system placing them in a distinctive position to reflect on the relevance or irrelevance of what they were taught to what they subsequently lived through.

3.4 Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

The study uses purposive sampling, combined with criterion sampling, to identify thirty participants who meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) female, aged 15-19 years at the time of interview; (b) has given birth to at least one child after a forced marriage; (c) currently enrolled, or re-enrolled within the past 24 months, in a public secondary school in Turkana South Sub-County; and (d) able and willing to give informed consent or assent to participate. Girls who are enrolled but have not experienced pregnancy or marriage, and mothers who are enrolled in private or non-formal educational institutions, are excluded, in order to maintain the analytic clarity of the sample.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were generated primarily through in-depth, semi-structured phenomenological interviews conducted in participants' preferred language (Ng'aturkana or Kiswahili), with translation support from a female research assistant who was also a guidance and counselling teacher. Interviews were organized loosely around van Manen's existentials of lived body and lived time, inviting participants to describe concrete, lived episodes of their sexuality-education experience rather than abstractions or generalizations.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological method, involving iterative engagement with the whole of each transcript, thematic reading for statements or phrases that seemed particularly essential to the phenomenon, and reflective writing that moved recursively between the parts and the whole, following the hermeneutic circle. Themes reported here were interpreted through the Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian frameworks described above.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the researcher's university institutional review board, followed by authorization from Kenya's National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and relevant county education authorities. Because most participants were minors under Kenyan law, a layered consent process was

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used, involving parental or guardian consent alongside participant assent, and case-by-case ethical judgment for married participants. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, potentially identifying details were altered or generalized, and a distress protocol was in place throughout data collection.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 The Lived Curriculum, Timing, and Classroom Climate

Findings are organized around four interlocking patterns in participants' accounts of the content, timing, pedagogy, and classroom climate of the sexuality education they received. Illustrative quotations are identified by pseudonym, age, and school from where reported by participants originated. A Fragmented, Biologically Reductive Curriculum: Participants overwhelmingly described sexuality education as sporadic and confined almost entirely to reproductive biology. As Amina (17, Form 3) explained, lessons were frequently left incomplete:

> *"We learnt about the reproductive system in Biology, and sometimes the Life Skills teacher would talk about relationships, but it was never complete... We never finished it."* (Amina, 17, Form 3), date: July 23, 2026

Nasibo (16, Grade 10) recalled a teacher explicitly deprioritizing non-examinable content: a topic she asked about was waved away because it was "not in the exam." Napus (18, Form 3, married at 15) articulated most directly what this narrow biological focus foreclosed:

> *"If they had talked to us about why girls get married young, about how we can say no, not just the science of reproduction, maybe things would have been different for me. The science was not going to help me when my parents arranged for me to be married."*(Napus, 18, Form 3, married at 16) date: July 23, 2026

Read through Heidegger's ontology, this pattern discloses a curriculum that treats the adolescent body as merely present-at-hand, an inert object to be inspected and labelled, rather than as ready-to-hand equipment participants might take up in their actual negotiations with marriage pressure or desire. Read normatively through Merleau-Ponty, a curriculum teaching the reproductive system as a set of static, labelled parts, divorced from the lived, motile, desiring body participants actually inhabit, teaches what might be called an anatomical corpse rather than participants' own lived body. Knowledge That Arrives Too Late: A distinct temporal dimension pervaded participants' accounts. Ekiru (18) described school and home as disconnected worlds:

> *"By the time they started talking about reproduction in Form Two, I was already being prepared for marriage at home... School was one thing, home was another."* (Ekiru, 18, form 4) date: July 23, 2026).

Esther (19) learned about family planning from a health worker only after she was already pregnant, asking pointedly why nobody told girls "these things" before everything happened. In Heideggerian terms, this is not merely a scheduling problem but an experience of thrownness: participants were already thrown into marriage negotiations and reproductive risk before relevant curricular content arrived, if it arrived at all. Read through van Manen's existential of lived time, temporal appropriateness is a condition of pedagogical possibility, not a logistical afterthought; knowledge offered after the moment of lived urgency cannot be taken up as usable equipment for living. This finding has direct structural implications: child-marriage pressures in Turkana South frequently begin in upper primary or early secondary school, while sexuality education, where delivered at all, is concentrated in later secondary years.

A Pedagogy of Discomfort, Avoidance, and Silence: Participants described marked teacher discomfort and deflection. Akiru (18) recalled a teacher who "would rush through those topics like he was ashamed of them," directing students to "read on your own." Lokapur (15, Grade 10) recounted asking about forced marriage and being told this was "a family matter and not something for school," an exchange that left her "ashamed for asking."

Heidegger's concepts of idle talk (Gerede) and falling (Verfallenheit) name precisely this pattern: discourse that names a topic just enough to move past it without allowing its truth to become genuinely disclosed. Normatively, this is where van Manen's pedagogical tact does its sharpest work: Lokapur's shame is the direct phenomenological signature of tact's absence, while Merleau-Ponty's account of intercorporeality highlights that judgment is communicated between bodies before it is communicated in words, as when Namuya (19, Form 3) described a teacher who "would look at you as if you had done something wrong for asking."

Classroom Climate of Ridicule and Institutional Compliance**:** Peer dynamics compounded teacher discomfort. Chelimo (16, Grade 10) explained that when reproduction was discussed, the boys would laugh and tease, so "I keep quiet." Napeyian (18, Form 3) recalled a male teacher whose own comments about girls asking questions "made you feel dirty for asking," after which "nobody asked questions." Heidegger's concept of Mitsein (being-with) discloses participation as structured in advance by das Man, the anonymous, taken-for-granted norms of the peer group, rather than by explicit rule. Ngeya's (16, Grade 10) observation that a visibly uncomfortable teacher's discomfort "makes us uncomfortable too" illustrates what Merleau-Ponty concept of intercorporeality would predicts: affect circulating bodily through the room, felt before it is understood.

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The four themes reported under Objective One describe a single cycle and should not be read as four separate deficiencies. Examination logic narrows the curriculum toward what is assessable. Nasibo's report that a teacher dismissed a question as "not in the exam" and Amina's account of a topic that was started and never finished show this narrowing at work. What is skipped is precisely what bears most directly on marriage and coercion. The resulting silence is then taught, in a hidden-curriculum sense, as the proper way to treat sexuality: by hurrying past it, deflecting it to "read on your own," or describing a forced marriage as "a family matter." Peers learn from this and reproduce it, as in Chelimo's account of the boys' laughter that taught her to "keep quiet." Each step makes the next more likely, and the cumulative effect is a classroom in which the most protective knowledge is the least likely to be spoken.

4.2 Meanings Attached to Sexuality Education

Participants attached layered and often contradictory meanings to their sexuality education. Most consistently, it was recalled as a missed protective opportunity; several participants reflected, in retrospect, that a different, earlier education could have changed their trajectory, reinterpreting a foreclosed past in light of a possibility they now recognise as having been available in principle (Heidegger, 1962). Some described occasional moments that sparked rights-consciousness or a shift in bodily comportment and self-worth, moving them from feeling like an object to be given away toward a felt sense of agency capable of asserting a claim, even where that claim was ultimately not honoured by family or community (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). One participant reframed her education itself as a form of worth comparable to bride wealth, illustrating an active, resourceful capacity for meaning-making rather than passive reception of what was taught.

Hindsight, and what the education is credited with; Participants' reflections that a different education "could have saved" them (Akiru) or "changed everything" are retrospective constructions and should be read as such. They were formed after marriage, pregnancy, and return to school, and they reinterpret earlier lessons in light of outcomes not yet visible when those lessons were taught. This does not make them unreliable. In a hermeneutic study, retrospective reinterpretation is itself the phenomenon of interest. It does, however, call for caution in how the claim is carried into recommendations.

The same participant who said that real education "could have changed everything" also said, in describing the community, that "no teacher, no book, no education can change" a father's decision. These statements appear to conflict, but they can be reconciled through Akai's account: after the health worker's session, her uncle "did not listen, but at least I knew I had the right to say it." What participants credit to sexuality education at its best is not a guaranteed change of outcome but the capacity to name one's situation, claim a standing in it, and be, in Heidegger's terms, a being whose existence is at issue for her. This is a modest and realistic claim, and it is also the more defensible one. It places the value of education in voice and self-understanding, while leaving room for the structural interventions that Objective Three shows to be necessary.

Silence as a finding; The consistent absence of consent, refusal, contraception, and the legal consequences of child marriage deserves treatment as a finding in its own right. Esther learned that sexual rights existed only "on the radio much later," and Losike was told only not to have sex before marriage while her bride wealth was being negotiated. In both accounts the education spoke to a choice, whether to have sex, while the decision actually being made, whether and to whom to marry, remained outside the lesson's frame. This mismatch suggests that abstinence-oriented messages address a decision participants were not always positioned to make. It is consistent with Chandra-Mouli et al.'s (2015) caution that approaches commonly accepted as good practice may not address the realities of the settings in which they are deployed.

Value found within inadequacy; The minority accounts of value deserve attention precisely because they are so modest in their means. Napir's teacher offered no new resource, only a reframing: education as "our bride wealth." The reframing worked because it used the economic idiom of the community and turned it toward schooling, and because it was delivered by a teacher who evidently cared about what became of the girls. This echoes the literature in which supportive teachers and trusted female staff emerge as significant for girls' resilience and resistance to marriage pressure (Mmari & Sabherwal, 2013). It also indicates that some of the protective potential of sexuality education may reside in relationships and framing that are available without large expenditure, a point of practical relevance for under-resourced schools.

Irrelevance and the limits of a standardized curriculum; Lokwawi's remark that the Life Skills book shows "people in cities" and not "people like us" converts a curricular abstraction into an everyday experience. A nationally standardized text addresses a generic adolescent, whereas the participants' lived problem was a specific one, namely cattle, bride price, and a father's authority. This supports Mmari and Sabherwal's (2013) observation that a formal curriculum alone is insufficient to alter deeply embedded behavioural norms without attention to community context, and it underlines the importance of cultural contextualization emphasized in Chapter Two.

Overwhelmingly, however, participants described a pervasive silence around consent, coercion, and bride wealth that left them without the language, or the embodied confidence, to refuse unwanted marriage or sexual advances

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(UNFPA, 2021). This silence was experienced as a foreclosure not only of vocabulary but of a lived, rehearsed sense of themselves as beings capable of refusing; a gap between abstract awareness of rights and the practical, embodied capacity to exercise them in the moment a decision was being made about their lives (Nour, 2009).

4.3 Mediating Factors

These experiences and meanings were shaped by a set of interlocking structural forces rather than any single cause. Patriarchal gender relations and a bride-wealth economy positioned daughters as a source of household income, making marriage a rational economic decision for struggling families (Aysel et al., 2016); In Esther's account, the cattle were received by her father and "that was the agreement." In Akiru's, "the man decides." These statements locate consent outside the girl, with the household head, so that the concept of individual consent taught, where it was taught at all, had no obvious place to land. This links with the wider African evidence that patriarchal norms socialize girls toward marriage and motherhood while boys are directed toward education and income (Nour, 2009; Walker, 2012).

One participant summarised this entanglement directly as "education is expensive, marriage is income." Chronic poverty intensified this pressure (Reidy, 2016), while community resistance, including parental protest at schools and, in some accounts, a mother's open anger at the subject being taught, constrained open discourse on sexuality and pushed teachers toward watering down content to avoid conflict (Njeru, 2016). Nayomi's account is worth emphasizing: after her mother reacted angrily to something she had learned in Life Skills, she stopped speaking about it at home. The silence encountered in the classroom thus extended into the household, so that girls were denied a conversation in both settings. The principal's report that parental protest creates pressure to "water down" content shows the mechanism from the institutional side. Together they depict a loop in which community disapproval reduces what teachers say, which reduces what girls have to talk about at home, which in turn leaves community assumptions unchallenged. This is in line with earlier documentation of community and religious resistance to sexuality education in pastoral settings (Shefer et al., 2013) and suggests that community engagement should be an early and continuing component of any redesigned programme and not an afterthought.

Thinly resourced schools, lacking trained teachers, facilitator materials, and in-service support, left even willing teachers without the practical capacity to deliver sensitive content effectively, regardless of personal motivation (Chandra-Mouli, 2015). Together, these factors did not act on participants as external variables but constituted a single, mutually reinforcing lifeworld within which their bodies, choices, and understandings were formed (Heidegger, 1962).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Regarding Objective One, the study concludes that sexuality education as delivered in the sampled schools was experienced by teenage mothers as fragmented, narrowly biological, poorly timed relative to the onset of marriage pressures, and delivered through a pedagogy of discomfort and avoidance within a classroom climate that discouraged genuine disclosure. Regarding Objective Two, the study concludes that teenage mothers attached complex and layered meanings to this education: predominantly as a missed protective opportunity and as conspicuously silent on consent, rights, and the lived realities of coercion, but also, in isolated instances, as a genuine source of agency and self-understanding, and as culturally distant from the specific realities of bride wealth, and arranged marriage that most directly threatened their futures. Regarding Objective Three, the study concludes that these experiences and meanings were substantially mediated by patriarchal gender relations, a bride-wealth economy that positioned daughters as a source of household income, chronic poverty, community resistance to open sexuality discourse, and school structures lacking trained personnel and support materials factors that did not operate independently but constituted a single, mutually reinforcing lifeworld.

Overall, the study concludes that sexuality education, as currently delivered in Turkana South, arrives too late, addresses too narrow a conception of the body, and is delivered into a world in which decisions about girls' futures have frequently already been made by others; yet where it engaged participants as rights-bearing, embodied subjects, it opened a demonstrably different, more authentic mode of self-understanding, indicating the phenomenon remains open to change.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the study recommends the following: Curriculum content and sequencing: The Ministry of Education, through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, should revise the Life Skills and Biology curricula to integrate consent, refusal, rights, and the specific local drivers of child marriage (including bride wealth) alongside reproductive biology, and should introduce this content earlier; in upper primary and early secondary school ahead of the typical onset of marriage pressures documented in this study.

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Pedagogy and teacher capacity: Teacher training institutions and the Teachers Service Commission should provide structured pre-service and in-service training that equips teachers with the skills and confidence to facilitate sensitive discussions, manage classroom ridicule, and create a safe, non-judgemental space for questions, rather than relying on teachers' individual comfort with the subject matter. Support materials and school structures: County and national education authorities should supply facilitator handbooks and locally contextualised teaching materials for pastoralist communities such as Turkana, so that sexuality education content visibly reflects participants' own lifeworld rather than an implicitly urban, generic one.

Community engagement: Schools, in partnership with local administration and community health structures, should engage parents, elders, and community leaders in structured dialogue on the purpose and content of sexuality education, so as to reduce the resistance and "watering down" of content documented in this study while remaining respectful of legitimate cultural concerns. Support for re-enrolled teenage mothers: Schools should develop explicit provisions including counselling, flexible academic support, and staff sensitisation to address the stigma and silencing experienced by re-enrolled teenage mothers, and should ensure that sexuality education content acknowledges their present reality as mothers rather than addressing only pregnancy prevention. Integration with economic and social protection measures: Given the study's finding that poverty and the bride-wealth economy substantially mediate vulnerability to child marriage, education-sector interventions should be complemented by social protection measures such as bursaries, cash transfers, or school feeding programmes targeted at economically vulnerable households in Turkana South.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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