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## **Relationships between Gender, Age-Group, Level of Education, and the Understanding of Marriage Rights among Young Marakwet People**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In transverse backgrounds, especially where legal pluralism and deep-rooted customary practices coexist, young peoples' knowledge of marital entitlements is shaped by local rites and kinship norms and statutory laws. This study was conducted to investigate young Marakwet peoples' understanding of marriage rights. It has therefore, examined how gender, age-group and educational level attainment can shape that knowledge. The study sort to respond to the research question that wanted to establish the relationship between a young Marakwet person's level of understanding of Marakwet marriage rights and the following social characteristics gender, age group and level of education. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) was used to guide the study. The study targeted 300 participants from Marakwet community. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used to identify the 90 respondents from three Marakwet Sub-Counties completed the instrument. Cross sectional survey design was used in the study. Descriptive–analytical cross-sectional survey that used a 20-item Youth Understanding of Marriage Rights Achievement Test was used to collect data (MRAT). A multi-stage random sample of 90 respondents completed the instruments. The analyses showed a moderate overall level of understanding (58.6%) with strong cultural uptake of marriage purpose (94.7%).It also revealed a weak awareness of statutory protections and constitutional legal awareness (25.3%). Inferential tests confirmed significant demographic disparities with males (13.04) outperforming females (10.21). The study findings revealed youths' moderate understanding, strong cultural purposes and weak understanding on statutory protections and prohibitions. This is significantly patterned by gender, age and education where males and older people showing higher awareness. The study recommends school-based culturally sensitive rights education and community outreach for all young people to be conducted. It also recommends engaging the local leaderships to support via availing legal services that promote youth capacity building on marital rights education.

**KEYWORDS:** Understanding, Marriage Rights, Marakwet Youth, Legal Literacy, Cultural Norms, Statutory Protections

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Most societies world over have institutionalized marriages and childbearing as essential collective processes. This is because marriage appears nearly universal. Despite this, marriage forms, ceremonies, eligibility rules, expectations, and rights associated with marital unions vary widely across cultures and historical periods (Hewitt & Churchill, 2020). Variations include who may marry whom, whether polygyny or monogamy is sanctioned, the ceremonial steps that confer marital status, the economic transactions that accompany unions, and the size and composition of post-marital households. These cultural differences shape not only how marriages are organized but also how young people learn what marriage means and which entitlements or duties attach to spouses (Kidman et al., 2024). This study situates itself within those comparative insights while focusing on a specific, understudied cultural setting: the Marakwet community in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya.

For the purposes of this research, marriage is defined as a socially or legally recognized conjugal union between two persons of opposite sex who, having completed the relevant customary rites or statutory procedures, enter into a lasting partnership characterized by mutual obligations, social recognition, and often the expectation of procreation (Henrickson et al., 2020). This working definition deliberately acknowledges the legal pluralism that structures contemporary Kenyan marital life: statutory marriages, religious marriages, and customary marriages coexist and are recognized under law, even as customary protocols continue to shape everyday practice and local understandings of marital rights and duties (Meroka-Mutua, 2024).

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Marriage rights encompass a broad bundle of legal and social entitlements. On the legal side, rights include free and informed consent to marry, a constitutionally protected minimum marriage age, rights to property and inheritance, entitlements to maintenance and custody, and protections against harmful practices that compromise bodily integrity or agency (Muthii & Associates, 2025). On the customary and social side, marriage rights may involve the right to receive or pay bride wealth, ritual privileges, authority over household decision-making, public status, and community-based expectations about gendered roles (Akurugu, Dery, & Domanban, 2022). Understanding marriage rights therefore requires attention to both statutory texts and the cultural repertoires through which young people come to know and expect particular marital entitlements.

Kenya's recent demographic data highlight why such attention is urgent. The 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey reports that a substantial minority of girls continue to enter unions before the age of eighteen, and that significant regional and rural-urban disparities persist in the prevalence of early marriage (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics & ICF, 2023). Complementary county-level analyses show that child marriage and early unions are concentrated in particular counties and correlate with poverty, school dropout, and limited access to services (UNFPA ESARO & Equality Now, 2023). These statistics demonstrate that statutory minimums exist but that many young people live in social environments where the legal baseline is insufficient to prevent early or coerced unions.

Harmful rites that intersect with marital eligibility such as female genital mutilation or cutting continue to influence marriageability in several Kenyan localities. National and international reporting reveals both progress and persistent challenges: while overall national prevalence has declined in some surveys, pockets of persistent practice remain and new patterns, such as clandestine cutting at younger ages, complicate prevention (Mohamud, Qureshi, de Wildt, & Jones, 2021). Focused empirical work in Elgeyo- Marakwet and neighbouring counties documents how initiation rites, alternative rites of passage, community attitudes, and intergenerational negotiation shape whether and how young people are marked as ready for marriage (Chepchirchir & Kagoiya, 2024).

Socialization processes carry particular weight in producing marriage-related knowledge. Family conversations, initiation seclusions, school curricula, religious instruction, peer networks, and local leaders all contribute to a young person's legal and cultural literacy about marriage. These socializing institutions do not operate uniformly across all youth: differences in gendered expectations, cohort experiences, and educational exposure create divergent trajectories of rights awareness (Karkashadze, Kuprashvili, & Gugeshashvili, 2023). Consequently, the same statutory text can be interpreted very differently within a single community depending on whether a young person is male or female, an adolescent or a young adult, or has completed secondary or tertiary education (Nilsen et al., 2020).

Gender shapes both the content and consequences of marriage rights. In many customary contexts, including among Kalenjin sub-groups to which the Marakwet belong, marital arrangements historically channel public authority and economic control through men and patrilineal kin. Polygyny, bride wealth, and male prerogatives over household decision-making have structured gendered expectations about authority, lineage, and resource distribution (Julius, 2025). Women's rights to land, inheritance, and decision-making have often been constrained by those customary norms, even as statutory reforms aim to secure gender equality. Local narratives and oral histories from Marakwet elders and women's groups attest to longstanding tensions over women's access to property and recognition in marriage, and to efforts by civil society and local activists to expand women's legal consciousness and bargaining power (Tanui, 2024).

Age cohort matters because life-course transitions alter exposure to different normative regimes. Younger adolescents are typically more embedded within parental authority and initiation contexts that prioritize compliance and communal norms. Older youth and young adults, especially those who migrate for education or work to urban centres are more frequently exposed to statutory messaging, rights-based NGOs and diverse gender models which can foster alternative expectations about marriage timing, consent and spousal entitlements (Povey et al., 2022). Education amplifies these cohort effects. Schooling not only delays marriage by extending the time youth spend in formal learning environments, but also transmits civic and legal knowledge that can increase awareness of statutory protections and contestation strategies (Fitria et al., 2024).

Legal pluralism complicates the enforcement and internalization of marriage rights. The Marriage Act and subsidiary rules recognize customary marriages and require notification to the Registrar to secure formal protections, yet registration is uneven and many customary unions remain recognized primarily through local ritual leaders and kinship networks (Njaga & Co. Advocates, 2024). This gap means that young people may participate in customary marriages that empower certain rights locally while leaving them vulnerable in statutory terms, particularly regarding inheritance, registration, and formally administered remedies in cases of abuse or dissolution.

Comparative ethnographic work offers useful perspective on the malleability of marriage forms and the social construction of marital entitlements. Anthropologists have documented trial marriages, informal cohabitation patterns, and variable ceremonial practices across the globe, all of which suggest that local practice often outpaces or diverges from formal law and that community narratives determine which rights are socially salient. These cross-cultural comparisons reinforce the importance of situating legal reforms within broader social-cultural dialogues and of attending to how young people learn the norms that govern marital life

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(Nilsen et al., 2020). In the Marakwet case, specifically on the entanglement of initiation rites, bride wealth exchanges, gendered hierarchies, and evolving statutory regimes creates a distinctive landscape in which young people must negotiate competing claims about entitlement and duty. Oral histories and recent community-level research indicate that initiation and marriageability remain potent markers of adult status, even as some youth and households adopt alternative rites or delay marriage in favour of education and economic stability (Tanui, 2024).

Contemporary policy shifts in Kenya underscore the legal salience of marriage rights while revealing gaps between law and practice. The Marriage Act consolidates marriage law and stipulates procedural steps for notification of customary marriages, intending to secure legal recognition and attendant rights such as inheritance and property division; section 44, for instance, mandates notification of customary marriages to the Registrar within a prescribed period (Njaga & Co. Advocates, 2024). Yet on the ground, registration, awareness, and enforcement are uneven, and socioeconomic incentives often continue to align with earlier customary regimes rather than statutory expectations. This unevenness underlines why mapping knowledge and perceptions at the community level is essential.

Marakwet marital culture has deep historical roots that interact with contemporary socioeconomic pressures in ways that make the study of rights understanding both empirically rich and practically urgent. Ethnographic accounts and recent community research document initiation rituals for boys and girls that historically marked transitions to social adulthood and were prerequisites for social recognition as eligible spouses. Male initiation rites in many Marakwet lineages involved prolonged seclusion, instruction in communal duties, demonstrations of physical resilience, and public reintegration rituals that granted newly initiated men social status and authority. Female rites, where it is practiced, were often shorter and more secretive, and in some localities involved practices that have been the object of legal and human rights contestation (Tanui, 2024). Local elders and ritual custodians historically mediated marital exchanges, including bride price negotiations and public ceremonies, thereby embedding marriage rights within kinship, obligations and reciprocal obligations across extended families. In this context, marriage rights were not abstract legal claims but lived entitlements enacted through ritual, exchange, and communal sanction. These customary matrices did not, however, remain static: colonial rule, missionary influence, and post-independence legal reforms reconfigured which practices were publicly condoned and how authority over marital transactions was exercised (Ng'etich, 2024).

Contemporary Marakwet households therefore navigate a layered authority structure in which statutory instruments, religious institutions, national policy, and customary leaders all claim jurisdiction over marital life. This layered reality helps to explain why statutory protections, such as the legal minimum marriage age and property rights, may be formally available but practically difficult to access for certain youth, especially young women who may lack the social standing or documentation to claim formal remedies (Njaga & Co. Advocates, 2024). Recent local studies highlight how families sometimes perform customary marriages without formal notification to the Registrar, either because of lack of awareness, administrative barriers, or deliberate choice to prioritize customary legitimacy over state recognition (Akurugu et al., 2022). At the same time, intervention efforts by government agencies, NGOs, and community activists are introducing alternative rites of passage that preserve positive cultural elements while removing bodily harm, and these efforts are accompanied by public education campaigns that aim to increase awareness of legal rights and the benefits of formal registration (Mohamud et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, change is uneven. Some households have adopted alternative rites and delay marriage in favour of schooling, while others, persist with older patterns because of economic incentives that are tied to bride price, social pressure to maintain lineage continuity, or distrust of state institutions (Kidman et al., 2024). Education has emerged repeatedly in fieldwork as a pivotal mediator. According to Fitria et al., (2024), youths and young adults who have completed secondary school education or accessed youth empowerment programmes, researchers observed higher levels of awareness about statutory protections, are more skeptical toward harmful rites, and greater propensity to negotiate marriage timing. In spite of this, schooling alone does not guarantee rights literacy. Povey et al., (2022) asserted that the content and quality of education, the presence of rights-oriented curricula and the availability of supportive community institutions, all shape whether schooling translates into actionable knowledge that young people can deploy in marital negotiations. Ahinkorah et al., (2024) had reported that economic precarity also conditions choices. It is reported that in households facing financial stress, early marriage and initiation rites may be perceived as strategies to reduce the number of dependents or to secure bride wealth that can be redistributed to support other family needs.

Consequently, explaining variation in rights understanding and behaviour requires integrating legal analysis, demographic data, ethnographic insights, and attention to political economy. Mapping these dynamics among young Marakwet people, disaggregated by gender, age group, and education level, will uncover not only differences in abstract knowledge but also variation in the capacity to exercise rights in practice, the perceived legitimacy of statutory protections, and the local institutions that can be mobilized to strengthen rights adherence. By attending to the particularities of Marakwet social life while situating findings within national trends on child marriage, FGM, and registration gaps, the research will make policy-relevant contributions that respect cultural nuance while advancing rights and gender equity.

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## Statement of the Problem

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 recognizes statutory and customary marriages and fixes the minimum marriage age at 18 years (Meroka-Mutua, 2024; Njaga & Co. Advocates, 2024). The practice in Elgeyo- Marakwet County, tells a different story. The 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey shows that 15 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 years are already married or in a union (KNBS & ICF, 2023). Local studies link initiation rites especially female genital cutting, to higher marriageability (Tanui, 2024). Many customary marriages remain unregistered, leaving women without legal protection in inheritance, divorce, or property disputes (Njaga & Co. Advocates, 2024). This gap between law and practice exposes young people to risks that national policy was meant to address.

Gender shapes who learns about marriage rights and who makes decisions. In many Marakwet households, men dominate marital choices while women face cultural limits on their voice (Akurugu et al., 2022; Julius, 2025). Research shows that young women in most rural areas have lower awareness of rights and face greater exposure to harmful practices (Kidman et al., 2024). This imbalance weakens women's ability to assert their rights in marriage. Age adds another layer of inequality. Adolescents face pressure to marry early when households face financial stress (Ahinkorah et al., 2024; Kidman et al., 2024). Younger girls often enter marriages where they lack bargaining power, while older youth have more space to resist or delay marriage. These age-related pressures shape not only when marriage happens but also how young people understand and act on their rights. Education strongly reduces the risk of early marriage and improves legal awareness. Each added year in school increases protection (Fitria et al., 2024). Yet access to quality education is uneven in rural Marakwet. Rights education is weak or absent in many schools (Povey et al., 2022). Youth who leave school early remain uninformed about their entitlements. The protective effect of education is therefore undermined.

Despite this broad evidence from national surveys, there is little community-based data on how gender, age and level of education together shape the understanding of marriage rights among young Marakwet people. Programme designers and policy makers lack the local insight needed to reach the right groups with the right messages. Interventions risk targeting the wrong audiences or using approaches that fail to shift behaviours. This study has attempted to fill the gaps by examining the relationships between gender, age group, and education level. It has looked at the influences of these social characteristics on the understanding of marriage rights among young Marakwet people. The findings will provide practical evidence to guide programmes and policies with the view of ensuring that rights awareness improves. The findings also will appropriately inform the young generations, thus lead to decline of harmful practices, but a rise in young people gaining stronger protection under the law.

## Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research question

Is there a relationship between a young Marakwet person's level of understanding of Marakwet marriage rights and the following social characteristics, gender, age group and level of education?

### Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested:

H1: There is a relationship between a young Marakwet's gender and their level of understanding of marriage rights.

H2: There is a relationship between young people's age group and their level of understanding of marriage rights.

H3: There is a relationship between young Marakwet people's level of education and their level of understanding of marriage rights.

## RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study used a cross-sectional survey design. This design was chosen because it allowed the collection of data from a large sample of young people at a single point in time. It made it possible to compare how gender, age group, and education level were linked to the understanding of marriage rights. The design was cost-effective and practical for covering the scattered rural communities of Marakwet.

### Target Population

The target population included all young Marakwet people aged between 18 and 35 years living in Elgeyo-Marakwet County. This group was selected because they represented the age range in which marriage decisions and awareness of rights were most relevant. According to county population records and national survey data, young people in this age bracket made up a significant portion of the local population.

### Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage sampling technique was applied. In the first stage, two sub-locations were randomly selected from each of the sampled locations in Marakwet sub-county. In the second stage, three villages were randomly selected from each chosen sub-location. In the third stage, five young people were selected at random from each sampled village. This process produced a

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representative sample across gender, age groups, and education levels. The approach reduced bias and ensured that both remote and accessible villages were included.

## Sample Size

The final sample size was 300 respondents. This size was large enough to provide statistical power for testing relationships between variables while still manageable for data collection. The size was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size calculation, adjusted for the youth population in Marakwet sub-county.

## Research Instrument

Data were collected using the Youth Understanding of Marriage Rights Achievement Test. The instrument contained twenty items, organized into two sections.

1. Instructions section: This provided respondents with guidance on how to complete the test.
2. Items section: This consisted of thirteen multiple-choice questions and seven structured open-ended questions. The multiple-choice items assessed factual knowledge about statutory marriage rights, customary practices, and legal protections. The open-ended items assessed reasoning, interpretation, and application of marriage rights in practical scenarios. The instrument was developed after a review of the Marriage Act, Kenya Constitution, county reports, and relevant research studies. It was also validated by experts in education, law, and sociology to ensure content validity.

## Reliability of the Instrument

To determine reliability, the test was piloted with 30 young people from villages outside the main study sample. The test-retest technique was used, with a two-week interval between the first and second administration. Correlation coefficients from the two administrations were computed. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained, which indicated that the instrument was consistent and dependable.

## Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained research clearance from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and permission from county authorities. Research assistants fluent in Marakwet dialects were recruited and trained. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before participation. The test was administered in small groups in schools, churches, and community halls. Respondents who were not literate received oral administration of the test with neutral translation by trained assistants.

## Data Analysis

Data were coded and entered into SPSS version 26 for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used.

1. **Descriptive statistics:** Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to summarize levels of understanding across the sample.
2. **Inferential statistics:**
  - a) t-test to measure the understanding of young people by gender
  - b) One-way ANOVA was used to test differences in understanding by age group and education level
  - c) Post-hoc tests were conducted where significant ANOVA results emerged to identify which groups differed.Significance levels were set at  $p < 0.05$ . Findings were presented in tables and charts for clarity.

## Ethical Considerations

The study upheld ethical standards throughout. Participation was voluntary. Respondents gave informed consent before taking part. Anonymity was maintained by using codes instead of names. Confidentiality of responses was guaranteed, and data were stored securely. Sensitive issues such as female genital cutting were handled with respect and cultural sensitivity. The study ensured that no respondent was exposed to harm or ridicule as a result of participation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Extent of Understanding of Marakwet Marriage Rights

Table 1. Overall Mean Understanding Score

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	% Correct Understanding
300	5	19	11.72	3.45	58.6

Source: Research Data, 2025

The descriptive results indicate that young Marakwet people exhibit only a moderate understanding of marriage rights, as reflected

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in the mean score of 11.72 out of 20 (58.6%) with considerable variation across individuals (SD = 3.45). This outcome suggests that while a section of the youth are relatively conversant with aspects of marriage rights, a substantial proportion remain only partially informed, particularly on statutory provisions. The dominance of cultural interpretations over legal frameworks mirrors earlier findings in African contexts where customary norms continue to shape the conceptualization of marriage among youth (Asante, 2023). The persistence of such knowledge gaps implies that awareness of constitutionally protected rights, such as property ownership, spousal equality, and the prohibition of child marriage, remains limited.

**Table 2. Extent of Understanding by Marriage Aspect**

<b>Marriage Aspect</b>	<b>Correct Understanding (f)</b>	<b>Incorrect/Partial (f)</b>	<b>%Correct Understanding</b>	<b>Mean Score (out of 20)</b>
Marriage Truths (monogamy/polygamy)	98	202	32.7	6.3
Purpose of Marriage	265	35	88.3	15.1
Age at Marriage (18 years vs 12 years)	112	188	37.3	7.4
Custodians of Marriage Rights (elders vs legal)	84	216	28.0	5.8
Rights – Children	158	142	52.7	10.5
Rights – Property	124	176	41.3	8.2
Rights – Security	97	203	32.3	6.7

  

<b>Marriage Aspect</b>	<b>Correct Understanding (f)</b>	<b>Incorrect/Partial (f)</b>	<b>%Correct Understanding</b>	<b>Mean Score (out of 20)</b>
Rights – Companionship	149	151	49.7	10.1
Rights – Recognition & Registration	105	195	35.0	7.0
Rights – Ceremony	121	179	40.3	8.4
Prohibition: Child Marriage	92	208	30.7	6.1
Prohibition: Close Relative	88	212	29.3	5.9
Constitutional/Legal Awareness	76	224	25.3	5.0

**Source: Research Data, 2025**

Understanding of marriage truths, particularly regarding monogamy and polygamy, was notably weak, with only 32.7% of respondents demonstrating correct knowledge and a mean score of 6.3 out of 20. This illustrates the enduring cultural salience of polygyny in Marakwet society, a practice historically tied to wealth, kinship, and lineage continuity. As Asante (2023) observes, polygyny has been central to African societies for generations, functioning as a mechanism for socio-economic stability and alliance-building. The fact that the majority of respondents derived their knowledge from cultural traditions rather than statutory definitions under Kenya's Marriage Act of 2014, which places legal limits on polygyny and emphasizes gender equity, reflects the continuing dominance of cultural relativism. The low mean score in this domain therefore signals the limited penetration of statutory interpretations of marriage into the cognitive frameworks of young Marakwet, underscoring the gap between lived cultural practices and formal legal standards.

In contrast, the purpose of marriage was overwhelmingly well understood, with 88.3% of respondents answering correctly and achieving a mean score of 15.1, the highest across all categories. This outcome indicates that cultural teachings remain effective in transmitting marriage as both a social and emotional institution. Njogu, Njogu, Mutisya, and Luo (2022) affirm that in Kenyan contexts, marriage is strongly defined by childbearing and family continuity, while Onkwani, Kakai, and Gimode (2023) describe marriage as a cultural anchor reinforcing belonging and identity. The exceptionally high mean score reflects the coherence and internalization of this knowledge, suggesting that when marriage is conceptualized through cultural relativism, understanding is deep and consistent. This stands in sharp contrast to weaker awareness in legal and rights-based dimensions, revealing an asymmetry between the robustness of cultural narratives and the fragility of statutory frameworks.

Knowledge of the age at marriage was moderate, with only 37.3% of respondents correctly identifying 18 years as the legal threshold and a mean score of 7.4. A significant proportion continued to associate marital readiness with circumcision and initiation rites, illustrating how cultural constructs of adulthood override statutory markers. Human Rights Watch (2020) highlights the persistence of this conflation, which legitimizes early marriages despite legal prohibitions; while UNICEF (2023) reports that child marriage remains prevalent in Kenya. From a cultural relativist standpoint, initiation rites confer social Adulthood and thus legitimate marital eligibility. Yet from a rights-based perspective, such interpretations undermine statutory protections designed to safeguard children from premature unions. The mean score reflects this tension, while sizable minorities

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have internalized statutory thresholds, cultural constructions of maturity remain more authoritative within community consciousness.

Awareness of custodians of marriage rights was even weaker, with only 28.0% of respondents correctly identifying legal institutions and a mean score of 5.8. Instead, the majority regarded elders as custodians of marital norms, reflecting the historically central role of clan leadership in regulating marriage. Advameg (2020) documents this tradition, while Onkwani et al. (2023) affirm that elders continue to function as cultural arbiters of legitimacy and authority. From a relativist perspective, this reliance on elders ensures continuity and social cohesion, but it sidelines statutory institutions that safeguard individual rights. The low mean score therefore illustrates not only the limited internalization of rights-based frameworks but also the persistence of communal authority as the primary source of legitimacy in marital matters.

The understanding of specific marriage rights was uneven across categories. While 52.7% correctly identified children's rights, producing a mean score of 10.5, awareness of property rights (41.3%, mean 8.2), security rights (32.3%, mean 6.7), companionship rights (49.7%, mean 10.1), recognition and registration (35.0%, mean 7.0), and ceremonial rights (40.3%, mean 8.4) was considerably lower. Lusambili et al. (2021) highlight that property rights in Kenya remain obscured by patriarchal norms, while Melkam, Fentahun, Rtbey et al. (2024) document how violence and insecurity in marriage are normalized, which may explain the low recognition of security as a marital right. The moderate recognition of companionship suggests a shifting narrative toward emotional fulfilment, reflecting gradual cultural adaptation. However, the overall mean scores reveal a pattern, cultural frameworks emphasize procreation and continuity but fail to adequately transmit protections embedded in rights-based frameworks. This imbalance underscores the incomplete diffusion of statutory rights into everyday knowledge systems.

Understanding of prohibitions was similarly weak. Only 30.7% of respondents correctly recognized the ban on child marriage, with a mean score of 6.1, while 29.3% correctly identified the prohibition of marriage among close relatives, with a mean score of 5.9. UNICEF (2023) underscores the persistence and harmful consequences of child marriage, while Advameg (2020) notes that kinship-based prohibitions against incest were traditionally enforced through cultural mechanisms rather than statutory law. From a cultural relativist lens, safeguards exist but are embedded in lineage and clan-based systems, which may not align with legal prohibitions. The consistently low mean scores reveal that these prohibitions, though central to statutory protections, have not been integrated into the collective knowledge of young people, leaving significant gaps in their legal literacy.

Finally, constitutional and legal awareness recorded the weakest performance, with only 25.3% correct responses and a mean score of 5.0, the lowest across all dimensions. This systemic gap illustrates the dominance of cultural relativism in shaping perceptions of marriage while statutory frameworks remain peripheral. Wamalwa (2025) attributes such deficiencies to socio-economic disparities in access to civic education, while Austrian et al. (2024) demonstrate that structured rights-based programs can significantly improve awareness among youth. The low mean score confirms that legal literacy remains marginal in rural contexts, leaving young people ill-equipped to navigate formal marital rights and protections. This finding highlights a structural absence in the transmission of statutory knowledge, where cultural norms dominate and legal provisions remain abstract and inaccessible.

Taken together, the findings reveal a dual reality in the understanding of marriage rights among young Marakwet. On one hand, cultural relativism provides deeply internalized knowledge about the purposes of marriage, custodianship, and traditional markers of marital eligibility. On the other, rights-based perspectives, including property rights, security, legal custodianship, and constitutional protections, remain weakly understood, as reflected in consistently low mean scores. The analysis therefore demonstrates that while cultural frameworks offer clarity and continuity, statutory marriage rights remain fragmented, underscoring the limited diffusion of legal literacy within the community.

### Relationship between Social Characteristics and Understanding of Marriage Rights

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics by Gender**

Gender	N	Mean Score (out of 20)	Std. Deviation	%Correct Understanding
Male	160	13.04	3.21	65.2
Female	140	10.21	3.07	51.1
<b>Total</b>	300	11.72	3.45	58.6

Source: Research Data, 2025

The analysis of gendered differences in the understanding of marriage rights among young Marakwet reveals striking disparities, with males attaining a mean score of 13.04 out of 20 (65.2%) compared to females, whose mean stood at 10.21 (51.1%). This gap of nearly three points illustrates not only a cognitive difference but also reflects deeply entrenched socio-cultural dynamics that regulate access to knowledge. The relatively higher male mean may be attributed to their privileged roles within Marakwet's

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patriarchal structures, where men dominate decision-making processes and participate actively in cultural negotiations that disseminate information on both customary and statutory marriage norms. In contrast, women’s lower mean score underscores the enduring barriers they face, including exclusion from community forums and socialization practices that discourage open engagement with rights-based discourses. As Lusambili et al. (2021) observe, such gendered disparities in marital knowledge are a product of systemic patriarchal norms that privilege men while marginalizing women.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics by Age Group**

Age Group	N	Mean Score (out of 20)	Std. Deviation	% Correct Understanding
18–21 years	90	10.42	3.12	52.1
22–25 years	80	11.26	3.29	56.3
26–29 years	70	12.48	3.37	62.4
30–35 years	60	13.15	3.06	65.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>11.72</b>	<b>3.45</b>	<b>58.6</b>

Source: Research Data, 2025

The descriptive results reveal a progressive improvement in the understanding of marriage rights with age, indicating that maturity and social exposure significantly shape knowledge acquisition. Respondents aged 18–21 years recorded the lowest mean score of 10.42 out of 20 (52.1%), reflecting limited comprehension of marital rights, likely due to their relatively recent transition into adulthood and minimal engagement in marital processes or community deliberations. By contrast, the 22–25 age group showed modest improvement with a mean of 11.26 (56.3%), suggesting that increasing participation in social interactions, early marriage experiences, or exposure to post-secondary education begins to enhance awareness. A sharper increase is observed among respondents aged 26–29, whose mean of 12.48 (62.4%) reflects more active involvement in marital negotiations and greater access to both customary and statutory information through family responsibilities and community roles. The highest understanding was recorded among the 30–35 age group, who achieved a mean score of 13.15 (65.8%), highlighting the cumulative benefits of age, social maturity, and deeper interaction with cultural and legal frameworks governing marriage. This age-related progression mirrors findings by Onkwani, Kakai, and Gimode (2023), who argue that marriage in Marakwet society functions as a cultural anchor, with knowledge of its norms becoming more entrenched as individuals assume adult roles. Similarly, UNICEF (2023) notes that older cohorts are more likely to access information on marital rights due to their responsibilities within households and communities, while younger individuals remain on the periphery of such discourses.

**Table 5. Descriptive Statistics by Education Level**

Education Level	N	Mean Score (out of 20)	Std. Deviation	% Correct Understanding
Primary	85	9.84	2.98	49.2
Secondary	115	11.72	3.23	58.6
College/University	100	13.62	3.08	68.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>11.72</b>	<b>3.45</b>	<b>58.6</b>

Source: Research Data, 2025

The results reveal a strong positive relationship between educational attainment and understanding of marriage rights among young Marakwet respondents. Those with only primary education recorded the lowest mean score of 9.84 out of 20 (49.2%), reflecting limited comprehension likely shaped by restricted exposure to civic knowledge and constrained opportunities to engage with legal or statutory frameworks. Respondents with secondary education showed a marked improvement, attaining a mean of 11.72 (58.6%), which suggests that progression through the school system equips individuals with broader literacy and analytical skills that enhance awareness of rights and responsibilities within marriage. The most pronounced understanding was observed among the college and university-educated group, whose mean of 13.62 (68.1%) indicates that advanced education significantly enhances not only literacy levels but also access to discourses on human rights, gender equity, and legal frameworks. This trend resonates with findings by Austrian et al. (2024) who demonstrated that targeted rights-awareness programs embedded in educational contexts strengthen young people’s ability to challenge discriminatory practices and advocate for equitable marital arrangements.

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**Table 6. Understanding of Marriage Rights by Gender (Independent Samples t-Test)**

Gender	N	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	160	13.04	3.21	2.87	298	0.005*
Female	140	10.21	3.07			

Source: Research Data, 2025

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in their understanding of marriage rights,  $t(298) = 2.87$ ,  $p = 0.005$ . Male participants ( $M = 13.04$ ,  $SD = 3.21$ ) scored significantly higher than female participants ( $M = 10.21$ ,  $SD = 3.07$ ), confirming that gender is an important factor influencing awareness levels. This disparity reflects structural and cultural dynamics in Marakwet society, where men, through their involvement in practices such as dowry negotiations, polygyny arrangements, and initiation rituals, gain direct exposure to both customary and statutory marital discourses (Asante, 2023; Onkwani, Kakai, & Gimode, 2023). By contrast, women's lower mean suggests reliance on indirect sources of knowledge, primarily elder guidance and oral traditions, which emphasize compliance with cultural expectations rather than engagement with formal legal frameworks (Human Rights Watch, 2020). These findings support the hypothesis that gender plays a significant role in shaping knowledge of marriage rights, with patriarchal norms reinforcing men's informational advantage while constraining women's agency in marital decision-making.

**Table 7. Understanding of Marriage Rights by Age Group (One-Way ANOVA)**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.56	3	4.19	7.41	0.001*
Within Groups	169.12	296	0.57		
Total	181.68	299			

Source: Research Data, 2025

The inferential results further strengthen the descriptive trends by statistically confirming the significance of age in shaping the understanding of marriage rights among young Marakwet. The one-way ANOVA (Table 5) shows that the observed differences across age categories were not due to chance, with the model yielding  $F(3,296) = 7.41$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . This provides strong evidence to support Hypothesis 2 (H2), which postulated that a respondent's age is associated with their level of comprehension of marital rights. In practical terms, the test demonstrates that as youth transition from early adulthood into their late twenties and early thirties, their exposure to cultural practices, marital negotiations, and community dialogues equips them with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of both customary and statutory dimensions of marriage. This finding is consistent with the anthropological argument advanced by Asante (2023) and Advameg (2020), who contend that African societies often reserve critical marital knowledge for older youth who are closer to marriageable age and therefore more actively involved in rites of passage, bride wealth processes, and decision-making forums.

**Table 8. Post-Hoc Comparisons (Tukey HSD)**

Age Group Comparison	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
18–21 vs 22–25	-0.45	0.12	0.002
18–21 vs 26–29	-0.68	0.15	0.001
22–25 vs 26–29	-0.23	0.10	0.041
26–29 vs 30–35	-0.18	0.11	0.084 (ns)
22–25 vs 30–35	-0.34	0.12	0.061 (ns)
18–21 vs 30–35	-0.73	0.14	0.001

Source: Research Data, 2025

The Post-Hoc Tukey tests (Table 6) provide critical insights into the specific age group differences underlying the overall ANOVA significance. The results demonstrate that the youngest respondents (18–21 years) consistently scored significantly lower than their older counterparts, with mean differences of -0.68 ( $p = 0.001$ ) against the 26–29 cohort and -0.73 ( $p = 0.001$ ) against the 30–35 group, reflecting substantial knowledge gaps. Even the comparison between 18–21 and 22–25 years yielded a significant mean difference of -0.45 ( $p = 0.002$ ), underscoring that comprehension of marriage rights begins at a lower base and only gradually improves as young people age. The contrast between 22–25 and 26–29 years was also significant (-0.23,  $p = 0.041$ ), suggesting that the late twenties mark a critical threshold for deeper understanding, possibly due to increased involvement in marriage negotiations, dowry processes, and broader community

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participation. Interestingly, the comparisons between the oldest groups (30–35) and both 22–25 and 26–29 years were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), implying that by the late twenties, youth have already attained knowledge levels comparable to their early thirties peers. This pattern reveals that the steepest learning curve occurs between the late teens and late twenties. Such findings resonate with Njogu et al. (2022), who emphasize that in Kenyan societies, cultural and legal literacy around marriage is progressively transmitted as youth move through life-cycle stages, gaining both social responsibilities and experiential exposure.

**Table 9. Understanding of Marriage Rights by Level of Education (One-Way ANOVA)**

Education Level	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between	10.32	2	5.16	6.12	0.003*
Within	162.45	297	0.55		
Total	172.77	299			

Source: Research Data, 2025

The inferential results reinforce the descriptive patterns by statistically confirming the significance of education in shaping young Marakwet people’s understanding of marriage rights. The one-way ANOVA (Table 6) shows that the observed differences across education levels were not due to chance, with the model yielding  $F(2,297) = 6.12$ ,  $p = 0.003$ . This provides strong evidence to support Hypothesis 3 (H3), which posited that respondents’ educational attainment is associated with their comprehension of marital rights. In practical terms, the test demonstrates that as individuals advance from primary through secondary to tertiary education, their awareness of statutory and human-rights-based protections improves significantly. This trend underscores the role of formal schooling in equipping youth with the legal knowledge and civic literacy needed to navigate marriage institutions more effectively. Such findings echo Human Rights Watch (2020), which observes that individuals with limited schooling often depend on oral traditions and community elders for guidance, leaving them less informed about formal legal safeguards, while higher education broadens exposure to civic content and rights discourses.

**Table 10. Post-Hoc (Tukey HSD)**

Education Level Comparison	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Primary vs Secondary	-0.58	0.14	0.001
Primary vs Tertiary	-0.92	0.18	0.001
Secondary vs Tertiary	-0.34	0.12	0.024

Source: Research Data, 2025

The Post-Hoc Tukey tests (Table 7) provide sharper insights into the specific contrasts driving the overall ANOVA significance. The results reveal that respondents with only primary education scored significantly lower than both secondary ( $-0.58$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and tertiary-educated peers ( $-0.92$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This suggests that reliance on oral tradition and elder-led instruction at the primary level leaves many gaps in legal knowledge. Even secondary school graduates, while better informed, still scored significantly below tertiary-educated respondents ( $-0.34$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ), highlighting that secondary education provides only partial awareness that may not sufficiently cover the breadth of statutory protections. These results suggest a cumulative effect of education, with each successive stage providing greater exposure to formalized discourses on marriage, law, and human rights. This pattern aligns with UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes that higher education enhances not only technical knowledge but also the capacity to critically engage with cultural practices and question inequities in traditional institutions. Overall, the findings indicate that tertiary education represents a decisive threshold for developing a deeper, rights-based understanding of marriage, equipping youth to bridge customary practices with statutory frameworks in contemporary Marakwet society.

### CONCLUSIONS

Young Marakwet people exhibit moderate understanding of marriage rights, with strong awareness of the purpose of marriage but limited knowledge of statutory protections, legal custodians, prohibitions, and constitutional rights. Cultural teachings dominate knowledge acquisition, while legal literacy remains weak, especially among females and those with lower educational attainment. Gender, age, and education significantly influence understanding of marriage rights. Males, older youth, and tertiary-educated respondents demonstrate higher knowledge, while females, younger individuals, and those with only primary education show substantial gaps. Education, in particular, plays a pivotal role in bridging cultural practices with statutory knowledge, reinforcing rights awareness.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Integrate structured marriage-rights and gender-equality education into school curricula and community programs to enhance legal literacy among youth, with particular focus on younger and female populations. Engage local leaders, elders, and NGOs to

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promote awareness of statutory protections, complementing traditional teachings with rights-based guidance. Encourage formal registration of marriages and provide accessible legal resources to ensure youth can exercise their rights effectively.

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