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The Beliefs of Youth in Ilala Municipal, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Regarding Marriages

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ABSTRACT **Original Research Article**

This study examined youth perspectives on marriage in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam, focusing on their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. The study was based on the fact that marriage remains an important social institution, while young people's perspectives on marriage are changing in response to economic conditions, urbanisation, education, changing gender relations, and evolving social values. A qualitative research approach and case study design were employed to obtain an in-depth understanding of youth perspectives on marriage within their social context. The study involved 15 participants, comprising eight youth interviewed individually, four youth participating in a focus group discussion, and three key informants. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions and were analysed thematically. The findings show that youth continue to perceive marriage as important for family formation, child-rearing, peace, and social and economic stability. However, their perspectives are also influenced by financial difficulties, education, family influence, urbanisation, social media, gender relations, and changing social values. Youth expressed concerns about gender-based violence, conflict, exploitation, and divorce, while also expecting marriage to provide respect, trust, love, equality, financial stability, and shared responsibility. The study concludes that youth do not necessarily reject marriage; rather, they continue to value it while expecting marital relationships to reflect both traditional family values and contemporary expectations of equality, emotional support, and mutual responsibility.

Keywords: Youth, Marriage, Attitudes, Beliefs, Expectations.

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Introduction

Marriage (also called matrimony or wedlock) establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as between them and their children (if any), and between them and their in-laws. It is nearly a cultural universal, but the definition of marriage varies between cultures and religions, and over time. Typically, it is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged or sanctioned (Ember, Gonzalez, McCloskey, 2021). Although marriage has historically been associated with procreation, family formation, and economic stability, its meaning has increasingly expanded to include companionship, love, emotional fulfilment, and individual aspirations. Nevertheless, marriage continues to play an important role in social continuity and stability (Ghand, 2016; Lutz, 2021).

At the global level, youth perspectives on marriage have changed significantly in response to socio-economic transformation and cultural change. In the United States, for example, young adults increasingly demonstrate what Cherlin (2004) describes as a capstone approach to marriage, whereby marriage is viewed as an achievement to be pursued after attaining financial stability, emotional maturity, and personal development. Although values such as trust, communication, and mutual respect remain important, contemporary

perspectives increasingly emphasise individual fulfilment, financial security, and personal growth (Pourtaheri et al., 2024; Wolfe, 2025). More broadly, the growth of individualism has contributed to the understanding of marriage as a matter of personal choice rather than solely a social obligation. Changing gender ideologies have also challenged some traditional expectations surrounding marriage, particularly among women (Harris, 2018; Darlong, 2024).

Across Africa, similar transformations have emerged, though shaped by diverse sociocultural and economic contexts. In South Africa, marriage patterns reflect a changing social landscape characterised by delayed unions, declining rates of formal marriage, and an increasing prevalence of informal partnerships. Statistical evidence indicates that registered civil marriages declined from 150,852 in 2014 to 99,289 in 2023, representing a 34.2% decrease (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2023). Such changes reflect broader transformations in family formation and suggest that young people increasingly view marriage as one of several possible pathways into adulthood rather than as an inevitable transition.

More broadly, young people across African societies continue to negotiate between traditional expectations and emerging modern values. While customary norms often emphasize marriage as an important social obligation associated with adulthood, family continuity, and community belonging, contemporary influences increasingly promote autonomy and individual decision-making. Economic pressures, increased access to education, urbanization, and public health concerns such as HIV have contributed to changes in marital expectations and practices (Pankhurst & Crivello, 2020; OECD, 2022). These changes are also gendered. Young men may experience pressure to attain financial and economic readiness before marriage, while young women may perceive marriage as potentially limiting their educational, occupational, and personal opportunities (Pike, Mojola, & Kabiru, 2019).

In East Africa, these dynamics are evident in countries such as Kenya, where marriage remains an important social marker of adulthood but is increasingly delayed amid economic constraints. Gender differences are particularly significant, with some young men expressing a desire to marry despite financial barriers to establishing households, whereas some young women demonstrate ambivalence towards marriage due to concerns about their future opportunities and autonomy (Parsons, Edmeades, Kes, & Petroni, 2015). Similarly, in Rwanda, youth perspectives on marriage have been influenced by changing educational aspirations, economic circumstances, and gender equality reforms. Evidence suggests that many young people increasingly prioritise education, employment, and personal development before entering marriage. Young women, in particular, have become more cautious about early marriage due to concerns about economic dependence and a desire to maintain greater autonomy and career opportunities (Abbott, 2015). These developments demonstrate how modernisation and socio-economic transformation continue to influence how young people understand and approach marriage in East Africa.

In Tanzania, marriage continues to hold considerable social significance, although its meaning and practice are increasingly shaped by socio-economic inequalities, urbanisation, and changing cultural practices. Child marriage remains a national concern, with approximately 37% of women aged 20–24 reported to have married before the age of 18. However, prevalence is lower in urban areas such as Dar es Salaam than in many rural areas (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Research indicates that early marriage may be associated not only with cultural expectations but also with economic insecurity, limited educational opportunities, and the pursuit of social legitimacy (Watts et al., 2017; Baraka et al., 2022). These circumstances demonstrate how established social norms and changing socio-economic conditions interact to shape attitudes and decisions concerning marriage.

At the national level, debates concerning marriage law reform have continued to focus on aligning legal frameworks with international standards, particularly on the minimum age of marriage and consent. At the same time, customary expectations, family influence, and economic circumstances continue to shape marriage practices across different Tanzanian communities. Existing reports further indicate that young people's experiences and expectations regarding marriage are connected to structural challenges, including unemployment, poverty, and rising living costs, which may influence decisions concerning when and whether to enter marriage (UNICEF, 2021; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Within this broader national context, Ilala Municipal provides an important urban setting for examining youth perspectives on marriage. The municipality is characterised by rapid urbanisation, informal employment, and exposure to diverse socio-cultural influences. Studies indicate that young people in Ilala experience considerable levels of unemployment and underemployment, circumstances that may influence their transition into adulthood and processes of family formation (REPOA, 2014). Evidence also shows that many young people engage in informal employment and small-scale economic activities because of limited access to stable formal employment (Mbagwa & Magali, 2021). Such economic circumstances may shape young people's expectations concerning financial preparedness, household formation, gender roles, and the timing of marriage.

Despite the social importance of marriage and the ongoing transformations in family formation, there remains limited qualitative evidence on how youth in Ilala Municipal understand and interpret marriage. In particular, limited attention has been given to their perspectives concerning the meaning of marriage, intimacy, gender roles, childbearing,

economic partnership, and the expectations they associate with marital life. Much of the existing literature focuses on marriage practices, early marriage, fertility, or broader demographic patterns, leaving insufficient understanding of how young people themselves construct and negotiate the meaning of marriage in an urban, rapidly changing social environment. This study therefore examined youth perspectives on marriage in Ilala Municipal, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to contribute to a deeper sociological understanding of how young people perceive marriage within changing socio-economic and cultural circumstances.

Theoretical Literature Review

To be able to understand young people's perception of marriage in Ilala Municipal, the integrated theoretical framework must be applied since marriage is not only a social institution but also a choice individuals make and one that is shaped by changing gender expectations. The factors influencing young people's perceptions, evaluations and decisions about marriage in modern Tanzania can be postulated and explained by more than one sociological theory. For this reason, this study is based on the Structural Functionalism, the Individualization Theory, and the Feminist Perspective, to create a comprehensive understanding of the link between social structures, personal autonomy, and the changing gender roles.

In understanding the nature of marriage as a social institution that is shaped by a culture's values, family structures and collective society's expectations, Structural Functionalism provides a valuable framework. Parsons (1951) and Durkheim (1893/2014) have pointed out the importance of social institutions for social cohesion, the social control of individuals, and the continuity of society. In the Tanzanian context, marriage is not only seen as a relationship between two people, but also as a social institution that is linked with family formation, social duties, respectability and community identity. From this theoretical perspective, the study explores the level of influence of the existing cultural values and the traditional social expectations on the perception and attitude of young people towards marriage in Ilala Municipality. However, it recognises that young people are able to conform to these set expectations, or that they can interpret and negotiate, and then challenge, the expectations, according to the social situation.

In addition to the emphasis on the rise of individual autonomy and personal preferences and self-development, Individualization Theory offers a complementary explanation to Structural Functionalism, particularly in relation to the growing importance of these factors in the modernizing, urbanized, expanding education system and within the realm of economic change. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), people are taking greater responsibility for creating their own life paths, rather than following socially determined ones. Giddens (1992) puts forward a similar argument and states that emotional satisfaction, personal satisfaction and mutual consent are key to modern intimate relationships. This view is relevant to Ilala Municipal as some youth could be delaying marriage in favour of further education or training, career prospects, personal goals of finances and other goals. It also gives a structure for looking at the relationship between pressure to marry and perceptions of readiness for marriage among youth.

The Feminist Perspective adds to the analysis by highlighting the role of shifting gender perception in the expectations, roles and dynamics of marriage. The view that the roles of women and men in family systems are not fixed by nature but are socially defined is held by feminist scholars such as Oakley (1972, 1974). Improved access to education, employment opportunities and empowerment of women could therefore help to shift views on the roles and responsibilities of men and women. This perspective allows the study to investigate young people's expectations regarding shared decision making, financial responsibilities, household chores, emotional support and gender equality in marriages in Ilala Municipality. Moreover, it includes an account of how some young people might look at traditional marriage patterns critically or reconsider them as oppressive and unequal.

The integration of the three perspectives provides a balanced analytical framework for the study. Structural Functionalism explains the continuing social significance of marriage and the influence of collective norms; Individualization Theory explains the growing importance of personal choice, self-development, and changing life-course decisions; while the Feminist Perspective explains how transformations in gender relations influence expectations and evaluations of marriage. Together, these perspectives recognise that youth perspectives on marriage emerge from the interaction between social structures, individual agency, and changing cultural meanings.

The combined framework, therefore, helped in understanding the youth's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of marriage in Ilala Municipal. It assisted the study to understand how the youth are influenced by inherited cultural and societal expectations, even as they negotiate modern ideals of autonomy, equality, economic readiness, emotional satisfaction, and self-actualization. Therefore, such a theoretical perspective gives a sociological context to explain why some young people tend to uphold the value of marriage while others may either delay it or renegotiate, negotiate, or contest the age value of marriage.

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical evidence also demonstrates changes in young people's beliefs concerning the meaning, purpose, and nature of marriage. At the global level, Horowitz et al. (2019) found that many young adults in the United States increasingly regard marriage as essential to happiness nor to adulthood.

Similarly, evidence from the Pew Research Centre indicates that young people increasingly recognise alternative pathways to personal and social achievement through education, employment, and personal development. These findings suggest that marriage is increasingly understood as one possible life choice rather than an unavoidable social requirement.

At the continental level, Maharaj and Shangase (2020) found that South African youth associate successful marriage with financial stability, emotional maturity, communication, and shared responsibility. Their findings suggest that economic difficulties have encouraged young people to become more cautious about entering marriage. The African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC, 2021) similarly reported that changing social conditions have contributed to an increased emphasis among African youth on gender equality, personal choice, and participation in decisions about marriage.

At the regional level, Sommers (2021) found that young people in Rwanda increasingly believe that marriage should be based on love, mutual respect, and consent rather than solely on family expectations. Ruark et al. (2018) further reported that education, urbanisation, and changing social conditions are influencing young people's beliefs concerning gender roles and responsibilities within marriage. These findings demonstrate the coexistence of traditional beliefs about marriage with emerging ideas concerning autonomy, equality, and individual choice.

At the national level, Green et al. (2023) found that young people in Tanzania increasingly reject forced marriage and support greater individual participation in marital decision-making. Schaffnit, Urassa, and Lawson (2019) similarly reported that young people in urban Tanzania attach importance to financial independence and emotional readiness before entering marriage. Such findings suggest that marriage continues to be valued but is increasingly interpreted in terms of individual readiness and personal circumstances.

At the local level, Stark (2017) found that youth in Dar es Salaam hold diverse and sometimes contradictory beliefs about marriage. While some young people regard marriage as an important marker of adulthood and social respectability, others express concerns about economic insecurity, relationship instability, and the responsibilities associated with marriage. This demonstrates the coexistence of traditional and emerging beliefs about marriage within an urban Tanzanian context.

The reviewed evidence, therefore, indicates that young people's beliefs concerning marriage are transforming. Marriage continues to be associated with adulthood, family formation, social recognition, and companionship, but increasing emphasis is placed on consent, equality, emotional compatibility, economic preparedness, and personal choice. Nevertheless, limited qualitative evidence explains how these competing beliefs are constructed and negotiated by youth, specifically within Ilala Municipal.

Materials and Methods

This study was of a qualitative research nature with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the views of the young people on marriage in Ilala Municipal, Ilala District in Tanzania. By doing so, the researcher had the opportunity to explore participants' perceptions, interpretations, beliefs, attitudes and expectations relating to marriage in their social and cultural contexts. The study population included two groups of respondents; young people aged 18–25 years and a smaller group of key informants with knowledge and experience on youth, family and social issues in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Young people were given the primary focus as they are at a developmental stage where attitudes, values and expectations are shaping, and there are significant decisions regarding close relationships and family formation.

Fifteen people participated in the study. The participants were eight young people in individual in-depth interviews, four young people in a focus group discussion (FGD) and three key informants in individual interviews. The study thus involved 12 youth participants and three key informants. The youth participants shared their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and expectations about marriage directly, while the key informants were able to share some additional community-based and professional perspectives on the same topic. The data collection methods were semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Using several methods of data collection allowed the researcher to gather a variety of views and support the findings using methodological triangulation. In addition, the primary data and secondary sources were used to gain a general understanding of the views of the youth on marriage in Ilala Municipal in Dar es Salaam. Primary data gave direct information from the study participants and secondary data were used to provide background information and existing scholarly knowledge about marriage, youth and social transformation.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions. The use of this analytical method was deemed suitable as it allowed the researcher to identify, organize, analyze and interpret patterns, ideas, themes and topics that were recurring from the responses gathered from the participants. The themes identified were then interpreted in the light of the purpose and the theoretical frame for the study. Thirdly, the results were reported in descriptive and analytical talks with the help of some direct quotations from the participants. The quotations were used to illustrate and reinforce the interpretations from the participants' experience and perspective.

Findings

Youth Beliefs Regarding Marriage

This part is discussed under three sub-themes: perceived purpose and social significance of marriage, role of family, culture and religion on perversions around marriage and traditional and current views about marriage.

1) Perceived Purpose and Social Meaning of Marriage

Participants related marriage to building a family, giving birth to children, working together, and being recognised as a social unit. Youth Participant 2 commented:

> *"For many young people in Dar es Salaam, marriage is still seen as a way of building a stable family, having children, and sharing responsibilities. It is not only about living together but also about creating a family that has a recognised place in society."* (IDI- Gerezani Youth 2, 2026)

In this story marriage was more than just living together by the parties. It was seen as a socially recognised arrangement whereby people created families and took responsibility for each other and their children.

Other connotations of marriage were emotional and material assistance. Youth PP5 explained:

> *"I believe the purpose of marriage is to bring two people together so that they can support each other emotionally, socially, and economically. When there is mutual understanding, marriage can provide a sense of belonging and security." (IDI- Gerezani Youth 5, 2026)*

This phrase suggested that marriage was the partnership of many kinds of assistance from the partners. Thus, economic cooperation was understood together with emotional understanding and social connection, which implies that marriage was appreciated for the stability and sense of belonging that spouses might have from their partnership.

The study also found out that even as marriage retained an institutional identity in society. Key Informant, Ward Executive Officer:

> *"Marriage is still considered an important social institution because it provides a recognised environment for raising children and establishing family responsibilities. However, its meaning is changing as young people increasingly emphasise personal choice and emotional compatibility."* (KII-WEO-Kariakoo,2026)

This is a mixture of continuity and change. Although marriage remains the accepted form of organising families, younger generations started taking into account personal choice and affective motives in judging the marital ties.

Similarly, respondents mentioned the changing perception of marriage as a family duty. From FGD 3:

> *"Among young people in Dar es Salaam, marriage is sometimes viewed as a partnership rather than simply a responsibility imposed by families." (FGD-Gerezani 3, 2026)*

This indicates that the social significance of marriage is undergoing a process of reinterpretation, with increasing emphasis on the quality of the relationship between partners and their ability to cooperate and build a life together. Participants' accounts revealed that marriage holds various meanings in the lives of young people in Ilala Municipality. It was commonly associated with establishing a family, raising children, providing mutual support, gaining social acceptance, ensuring security, and developing companionship. Nevertheless, participants also highlighted the growing importance of individual preferences, emotional compatibility, and shared life goals. Thus, marriage continues to serve its traditional social purposes while its meaning and expectations are gradually evolving in response to the changing perspectives and aspirations of young people.

2) Influence of Family, Culture and Religion on Marriage Beliefs

The findings revealed that family continues to play a significant role in shaping young people's perceptions and understanding of marriage. This influence was reflected in the views expressed by Youth Participant 6, who stated:

> *"Parents still have a strong influence on how young people think about marriage. In some families, parents expect their children to marry at a certain age, and sometimes they also have opinions about who their children should marry."* (IDI-Kariakoo Youth-6, 2026)

This perspective indicates that parental influence extends beyond simply encouraging young people to get married, as it also encompasses expectations regarding the appropriate age for marriage and the choice of a suitable partner. Consequently, family members continue to play an important role in shaping young people's perceptions of acceptable marital decisions.

Cultural norms and societal expectations also influenced participants' understanding of marriage and the transition into adulthood. In this regard, FGD Participant 1 remarked:

> *"Culture teaches us that marriage is an important stage of adulthood. Even today, young people may face pressure from relatives when they remain unmarried for a long time, especially when their friends of the same age are already married."* (FGD-Gerezani-1, 2026)

This observation highlights that marriage can function as an important social indicator of adulthood and maturity. Comparisons with married peers and expectations from family members may therefore place pressure on young people who remain unmarried, particularly in communities where marriage is viewed as a conventional stage in an individual's life course.

Religion also emerged as an important influence shaping participants' perceptions of marital relationships, obligations, and responsibilities. In this regard, the Key Informant from the Gerezani Social Welfare Office observed:

> *"Religion continues to influence marriage beliefs among young people because religious teachings emphasise commitment, responsibility, fidelity, and family stability. However, young people also interpret these teachings according to their current social and economic realities."* (KII-SWO-Gerezani, 2026)

This suggests that religious beliefs continue to influence young people's understanding of marriage, although individuals may interpret and apply these teachings differently. Their perceptions of marital responsibilities and relationships are often shaped by the interaction between religious values and personal experiences, including employment opportunities, financial circumstances, intimate relationships, and the realities of contemporary urban life.

The findings also demonstrated that young people sometimes encounter conflicts between traditional societal expectations and their aspirations for personal independence and decision-making. This tension was reflected in the views expressed by Youth Participant 8, who stated:

> *"Sometimes young people want to make their own decisions about marriage, but they also have to consider the expectations of their parents and religious communities. This can create tension when their personal choices are different from what their families expect."* (IDI- Kariakoo Youth -8, 2026)

This implies that young ideas on marriage are negotiated between individual preference and society dictates. Clearly, family, culture and religion continue to affect marriage values, but concurrently the young use individual discretion in reading and reacting to these forces.

3) Traditional and Contemporary Beliefs about Marriage

The findings indicated that participants recognized a shift between traditional and modern perceptions of marriage, particularly in relation to the understanding of commitment and the expectations surrounding the maintenance of marital relationships. This perspective was reflected in the statement made by Youth Participant 3, who explained:

> *"Traditionally, marriage was viewed as a lifelong commitment where couples were expected to remain together even when they faced difficulties. Today, many young people believe that marriage should also provide happiness, respect, and emotional support." (IDI-Kariakoo Youth -3, 2026)*

This perspective indicates that although marriage is still widely regarded as a lifelong commitment, contemporary perceptions increasingly emphasize relationship quality, emotional stability, and the overall well-being of both partners.

Participants further highlighted evolving patterns in partner selection and the factors they consider essential before making a decision to marry. In this regard, FGD Participant 2 remarked:

> *"In the past, people could marry because their families had agreed, but young people today want to choose their own partners. Love, understanding, education, employment, and financial stability have become important considerations before marriage*." (FGD-Kariakoo-2, 2026)

This observation suggests that the selection of a marriage partner is increasingly influenced by personal preferences rather than being determined exclusively by family arrangements. It further indicates that young people consider various individual circumstances, including personal aspirations, educational attainment, and financial stability, when evaluating their readiness for marriage.

The findings also highlighted changing perceptions of roles and responsibilities within marital relationships. In this regard, the Key Informant from the Kariakoo Community Development Office explained:

> *"Contemporary young people are questioning some traditional expectations about marriage. For example, they increasingly expect both partners to contribute economically and share household responsibilities rather than seeing these responsibilities as belonging exclusively to one gender."* (KII-CDO-Kariakoo, 2026)

This viewpoint reflects a growing recognition of shared responsibilities within marriage. Both financial contributions and domestic obligations are increasingly viewed as responsibilities that can be undertaken by either partner, demonstrating changing perceptions of traditional gender roles and expectations.

Nevertheless, the findings showed that young people have not entirely abandoned traditional marital values and cultural practices. This was evident in the views expressed by Youth Participant 7, who stated:

> *"I think marriage is still important, but the way young people understand it has changed. We want the values of respect, commitment, and family that existed traditionally, but we also want freedom of choice, equality, and the ability to leave a relationship that becomes abusive."* (IDI- Gerezani Youth-7, 2026)

This response highlights the coexistence of traditional values and evolving perspectives among young people. Established principles such as commitment, mutual respect, and family stability continue to be appreciated, while modern considerations, including personal autonomy, gender equality, and protection against abusive relationships, are gaining greater significance. The findings therefore indicate that

young people are not completely rejecting traditional marital beliefs; rather, they are selectively preserving certain cultural values while reassessing others in response to changing social conditions and contemporary expectations.

Discussion

The results show that the youth were aware that marriage is a social institution and a personal relationship. The participants linked marriage with family formation, childbearing, social recognition, mutual support, sense of belonging and security. Meanwhile, they highlighted the importance of freedom of choice, emotional matches, and mutual goals within relationships. The views presented in these accounts illustrate that young people hold a variety of values toward marriage that are a mixture of traditional institutional values and modern ideas about relationships.

Purpose and Social Meaning of Marriage

The idea of marriage creating a socially recognized family and creating an appropriate environment for childrearing is consistent with the principles of Structural Functionalism. Based on this theory perspective, the function of marriage is to organise family roles, to socialise members of the family and to link the family to wider family responsibilities (Parsons & Bales, 1955). The results are also consistent with Magesa's (2020) observation that in many African settings marriages goes beyond two persons to the family and broader social networks. Social recognition was thus important as participants saw marriage as a way to formalise family relations and their obligations in the community.

But also, participants highlighted the role of emotional, social and economic support in marriage. Their conception of marriage in terms of a partnership implies that marriage has lost its exclusive function in the reproduction or fulfillment of social norms. Rather, love, companionship, mutual understanding and emotional security have become key facets of a successful marital relationship. This is consistent with Sommers and Uvin (2011) findings that young people in Rwanda are getting more interested in the concept of love, respect, and consent for marriage. It also echoes Giddens's (1992) description of shifts in intimacy, which is increasingly dependent upon good communication and emotional satisfaction in relationships. From the findings, it can then be concluded that traditional institutional roles and modern personal expectations about marriage have not been superseded one by the other but rather they are still present.

Influence of Family, Culture, and Religion

Family, cultural values and beliefs remained important influences on young people's understanding of appropriate timing for marriage, choice of partner, commitment to marriage, fidelity and marriage responsibilities. There was a pressure from parents and relatives, especially when young people in the participants' age group had already tied, they said. This implies that marriage remains an accepted marker of adulthood and social maturity. Religious doctrines also instilled the norm of permanency, responsibility, and family stability. The results validate the assumptions of Structural Functionalism which focuses on socialization and the influence of the social institutions in the passing on of common values and control of individual behaviour (Durkheim, 1893/2014; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). So, the ideas and values of marriage that are formed among youth are not developed at a standstill but are influenced by the family, culture, and community systems.

These institutions continued to exert their influence on the participants, but they were not unquestioned. They spoke about conflicts between the wishes of parents or religious groups and the wishes of the person or persons they wish to marry and when they wish to marry. This observation is consistent with Individualization Theory, which posits that it is important to view young people as active interpreters of social expectations and traditional life-course patterns that they inherit (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). It is also in line with Green et al. (2023) who found that there has been an increase in the desire to be involved and give consent at individual level in marital decision-making in Tanzania. However, the results indicate that individualisation in Ilala does not need to imply total absence of social influence. Instead, youth actively engage with family, cultural and religious norms and expectations, and try to make their own choices. Thus, they lived lives of socially constrained choice in which personal autonomy is striven for in the presence of ongoing social relationships and institutions.

Traditional and Contemporary Beliefs

Participants acknowledged distinctiveness in the traditional and current points of view concerning marriage. Older views were more likely to be linked to a long-term commitment to a partner, to keeping the situation going, to the importance of family authority, to women having a distinct role, and to the idea that the woman should stay for the child's sake, while newer views were more likely to be linked to the idea of achieving personal happiness, respecting the partner, offering emotional support, partner choice, and the right to leave an abusive relationship. But not all participants were opposed to traditional values. The values of respect, commitment, family stability were prime, coercion, abuse, and unflexible gender roles were less and less accepted. The selective acceptance implies that the process of cultural transformation does not necessarily mean that the whole tradition is rejected or continued without any changes. Instead, it is a continuous, re-thinking of inherited values, an adaptation to today's social situation.

The results align with those of Ruark et al. (2018) which shows that perception of gender roles is changing as a result of education and urbanization, and traditional values are coexisting with contemporary values. Likewise, African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC, 2021) reveals an increasing desire among African youth to be

treated equally, have personal autonomy and be involved in decisions of marriage. On the one hand, Individualization Theory helps to account for young people's growing preference for autonomy in their choice of marriage partners and compatibility in their domestic responsibilities, and on the other, the Feminist Perspective helps to explain young people's critique of unequal power relations and domestic responsibilities. Oakley (1974) argued that the division of labour in marriage is not a natural division but is socially created. Another measure of the consideration of traditional gender roles is the level of support the participants give to having women and men work together on economic contributions and household tasks.

These results then highlight the development of a new paradigm of marriage among youth. They also valued commitment, family formation, child-rearing and social recognition, but they also increasingly equated a desirable and socially meaningful marriage with consensual, equal, emotionally healthy and individual choices. That traditional and contemporary beliefs were not considered as mutually exclusive, then. Rather, young people merged with traditional values that they deemed to be important with the expectations they believed they had in the modern world, which seemed to offer the potential for more equitable, supportive, and fulfilling marital relations.

In addition, those who considered marriage to be a means of belonging, security and support rated marriage favourably when it was perceived as possessing these attributes, and less favourably when it lacked them, in particular belonging. In addition, youth who linked marriage to belonging, security and mutual support rated marriage positively when they perceived it to possess these attributes and negatively when it was perceived as lacking these attributes, especially belonging. Their faith, then, furnished valuable norms for them to evaluate current and future marriage bonds. This is a relationship indicating that attitudes toward marriage must be examined in relation to the beliefs that underlie them. The levels of consent, responsibility, respect and emotional security, participants experienced in marriage were highly related to their acceptance and approval of marriage.

Conclusion

The research finds that youth have a mixed view of marriage, combining traditional social norms and norms of the modern era surrounding close relationships. Marriage is still considered a socially recognized institution that creates families, helps raise children, provides responsibilities, and provides social acceptance. But it was being increasingly agreed that love, mutual consent, emotional compatibility, individual choice and partnership should be a part of marriage as well. The definition of marriage has not been abandoned but is now gradually expanded from a role of a family institution that is associated with the continuity of the family and the task of society to be a role that is also expected to make both men and women feel fulfilled and their autonomy.

Family, culture and religion remain strong influences on young people's views on commitment, fidelity, marital duties, acceptable age at marriage and acceptable partner choice. However, there isn't a one-to-one correspondence between young people accepting and reproducing these expectations without question. Rather, they discuss conventional values in terms of their educational status, socio-economic status, individual hopes and dreams, and their experiences of familial relationships in the city. While values like commitment, mutual respect, and family stability are still important, the pressure to conform, abusive relationships, and the need to stay in harmful marriage relationships are being questioned. Thus, youth beliefs are shaped by a process of selective continuity that takes into account only those parts of marriage that are deemed desirable. Young people's beliefs, therefore, are the result of selective continuity, which filters out from cultural memory those aspects of marriage that are not socially valued or perceived as unequal, restrictive or harmful.

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