



(ISSN: 2602-4047)

Karas, R.Ş. (2024). Dramatic Empowerment: Utilizing Creative Drama To Counter Early And Coerced Marriages, *International Journal of Eurasian Education and Culture*, 9(26), 245-260.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.35826/ijoecc.2833>

Article Type (Makale Türü): Research Article

DRAMATIC EMPOWERMENT: UTILIZING CREATIVE DRAMA TO COUNTER EARLY AND COERCED MARRIAGES

Rojda Şükran KARAŞ

Dr. İstanbul Bilgi University, İstanbul, Türkiye, karas.sukran@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0005-0371-3369

Received: 14.11.2023

Accepted: 15.05.2024

Published: 01.06.2024

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the efficacy of creative drama as an intervention to enhance the recognition and enforcement of child rights among women subjected to early and coerced marriages. Conducted with twenty women from the Bağcılar district of İstanbul, all under the age of 45 who experienced forced marriages at a young age, the intervention consisted of ten creative drama workshops each lasting three hours at the Med Culture Center. The research employed a qualitative methodology, beginning with in-depth interviews to gather initial data on participants' views of 'early marriage' and 'childhood.' Following the interviews, participants engaged in drama-based activities designed to educate them about their rights as children. The qualitative analysis of workshop outcomes suggests a significant increase in awareness about child rights violations and positive contributions to participants' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development. These workshops were instrumental in deepening understanding of essential child rights, including education, protection, health, justice, freedom of expression, leisure, and safe living conditions, thus promoting a comprehensive acknowledgment of their rights until the age of 18. The findings indicate that creative drama significantly raised awareness about the detrimental effects of early and forced marriages. Participants reported a newfound sense of empowerment and the ability to recognize and advocate for their rights and those of their children. The study also emphasizes the transformative potential of creative drama in providing a supportive environment for participants to express their experiences and reflect on their personal growth. The implications of this research suggest that creative drama can be a powerful tool in combating early marriages by fostering awareness, resilience, and self-efficacy among affected women, ultimately contributing to broader societal change.

Keywords: Creative drama, child rights, early marriage, empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Every society has interpreted the concepts of children and childhood in various ways. Today, many countries have enacted special agreements and laws to ensure that children grow up under better conditions. These agreements and laws have introduced the concept of "Children's Rights." Akyüz (1999) defines children's rights as "rights and interests recognized by legal rules to ensure a child grows in freedom and dignity, in a healthy and normal manner, and in mental, physical, emotional, social, moral, and economic aspects." The first document prepared to protect children's rights was the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the League of Nations in 1924. This declaration was replaced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into effect on November 20, 1989, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the same day, and came into force on September 2, 1990. In Turkey, this convention was signed on September 14, 1990, and ratified by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on December 9, 1994. The Convention envisages measures for families, communities, governments, and international communities to maintain, implement, and respect the rights of all children without discrimination (UNICEF, 2002).

Investing in children is the safest investment for the continuity of societies (Aral & Gürsoy, 2001). Addressing the interests of the child individually and integrating them with the interests of society forms the basis of the idea that the child is the future of society. Bandura (1969) notes that during their growth period, children model themselves after and identify with someone in their environment. The characteristics of the person they emulate significantly influence their emotional, intellectual, and social development. In this context, raising awareness about child rights among women who have raised their own children and have been victims of rights violations is extremely important. Women being aware of children's rights while raising their children will enable them to nurture more successful and confident individuals. After describing the child as "innocent, sensitive, dependent, curious, lively, and hopeful," Akyüz (2000) emphasizes that allowing children to spend their childhood in a healthy, peaceful environment, learning new things, and developing themselves will be beneficial both for themselves and for society.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes and guarantees a child's rights through laws. Early marriages deprive the child of fundamental rights and freedoms and cause mental, physical, and emotional harm. These marriages often result in the victimization of girl children. Taner and Gökler (2004) state that girls married at a young age are subjected to sexual abuse against children. It is known that the sexual abuse experienced by children at a young age adversely affects their subsequent development periods. Early marriages of girl children violate their rights.

Among these rights, the right to education comes first for girl children. Early and forced marriages of women limit their place in the public sphere and hinder their participation in the workforce. In Turkey, early and forced marriages are often seen as a family matter. However, early and forced marriages, which occur in different ways and frequencies in every segment, involve complex, comprehensive, and public issues based on gender inequality, including economic, political, legal, religious, social, and cultural processes. Described as a magical

method, drama allows people to better understand themselves and display their talents. Among the primary goals of drama is to enable participants to empathize with others, thus helping them better understand themselves and their surroundings. The aim of drama studies is to nurture individuals who can engage in democratic behaviors, make connections between topics, think independently, and be tolerant and creative (Akyol, 2003). Creative drama allows participants to freely express their thoughts on a subject and share them without prejudice. Women forced into early marriages are women deprived of their childhood rights. With the impact of creative drama, these women become more effective in gaining knowledge about child rights and instilling a sense of child rights in their own children.

This study investigates the efficacy of creative drama as an intervention to enhance the recognition and enforcement of child rights among women subjected to early and coerced marriages. Conducted with twenty women from the Bağcılar district of Istanbul, all under the age of 45 who experienced forced marriages at a young age, the intervention consisted of ten creative drama workshops, each lasting three hours, at the Med Culture Center. The research employed a qualitative methodology, beginning with in-depth interviews to gather initial data on participants' views of 'early marriage' and 'childhood.' Following the interviews, participants engaged in drama-based activities designed to educate them about their rights as children.

This study was conducted using creative drama methods to help women become aware of the rights violations they experience and to create awareness about child rights violations by raising awareness about the rights of their own children. The main objective of this research is to raise awareness about child marriages across society and to foster consciousness and understanding of child rights among women who were married at a young age or through coercion. Specifically, this study focuses on women in the Bağcılar district of Istanbul who have been married at an early age, aiming to enable them to recognize the rights violations they have experienced and to develop a profound comprehension of child rights. To achieve this, the research was implemented through creative drama methods during workshop sessions held at the Med Culture Center, spanning a total of ten sessions. The significance of this study lies in shedding light on the severe social and individual problems posed by child marriages and exploring potential solutions to combat these issues. Particularly, it highlights the detrimental effects of early marriages on the psychological, social, and educational development of girls, as well as the violation of their fundamental rights. This research aims to enhance societal awareness and provide support to affected women, contributing to the betterment of both individuals and society at large. The creative drama approach, by allowing participants to share their experiences and actively engage in the learning process, is designed to effectively tackle complex issues like child marriages. The qualitative analysis of workshop outcomes suggests a significant increase in awareness about child rights violations and positive contributions to participants' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development. These workshops were instrumental in deepening understanding of essential child rights, including education, protection, health, justice, freedom of expression, leisure, and safe living conditions, thus promoting a comprehensive acknowledgment of their rights until the age of 18. The study also emphasizes the transformative potential of creative drama in providing a supportive environment for participants to express their experiences and reflect on their personal growth. The

implications of this research suggest that creative drama can be a powerful tool in combating early marriages by fostering awareness, resilience, and self-efficacy among affected women, ultimately contributing to broader societal change.

METHOD

Model of the Study:

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to enhance awareness of child rights among women who have been married at an early age or through coercion, utilizing creative drama methods. The research started on December 1, 2014, and ended on August 24, 2015. Qualitative research provides an opportunity to deeply analyze a subject, event, or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) note that qualitative research helps to understand a phenomenon from the perspectives of individuals, revealing the existing social structure and processes in this context. This approach ensures that the voices and experiences of the participants are at the forefront, offering valuable insights into the complexities of child rights awareness among these women.

To ensure ethical compliance, all participants were provided with and signed informed consent forms detailing the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and their rights, including data protection and privacy (KVKK - Personal Data Protection Law). This step was critical in guaranteeing that participants were fully aware of their involvement and the use of their data throughout the research process.

At the conclusion of the study, the data obtained from in-depth interviews and the creative drama workshop process are examined using qualitative analysis methods. This analysis offers insights into participants' levels of awareness and experiences regarding child rights. The research model effectively employs creative drama techniques to enhance participants' knowledge and awareness levels. Both the in-depth interviews and the creative drama workshops facilitate the sharing of experiences and increase awareness of child rights among the participants.

Study Group:

This research was conducted with 20 women in Bağcılar, Istanbul, all under the age of 45 and who had been forced into early marriages (Table 1). The study was organized as a creative drama workshop consisting of ten sessions, each lasting three hours, at the Med Culture Center. These workshop activities aimed to increase the participants' awareness and understanding of child rights. Each session included activities themed on child rights, drama techniques, and games.

Table 1. Participants' Personal Information

Personal Information	Variable	Frequency
Age	20-28	2
	29-36	14
	37-45	4
Age at Marriage	13	2
	14	2
	15	4
	16	9
	17	3
Educational Status	No Schooling	3
	Dropped Out	2
	Primary School Grad.	10
	Middle School Grad.	5
Employment Status	Employed	6
	Unemployed	14
Living Arrangement	With Spouse's Family	4
	With Spouse	15
	Separated	1
Child Possession	None	-
	Have Children	20
Other Early Marriages in Family	No	2
	Yes	18

The data shown in Table 1 provides insights into the personal information of the participants. An analysis of the age variable indicates that there are 2 participants aged 20-28, 14 participants aged 29-36, and 4 participants aged 37-45. Looking at the age of marriage variable, the most common age at first marriage was 16, followed by ages 15, 17, and then 13 and 14. Regarding educational status, the majority of participants were primary school graduates, followed by middle school graduates, those who have not completed any formal education, and the fewest being primary school dropouts. In terms of employment status, 6 participants were unemployed, while 14 were employed. Examination of living arrangements shows that 4 participants live with their spouse's family, 14 live only with their spouse, and 1 lives separated from their spouse. All participants have children. When looking at the presence of other early marriages in the family besides their own, findings indicate that 2 participants had no other early marriages in their family, whereas 18 did.

Data Collection Tools:

The research adopts an integrated approach combining participant action research and creative drama methodology. The researcher used multi-dimensional qualitative data collection methods to deeply examine the participants' social and cultural interactions and understand their impact on individual identities. For this purpose, the researcher focused on understanding participants' experiences through participant observation and unstructured interviews. Participant observation was utilized to deeply understand the behaviors, reactions, and interactions displayed by participants during the creative drama workshops.

Moreover, the researcher used creative drama workshops as a primary data collection tool. These workshops were designed to enhance participants' awareness and understanding of child rights. Participants expressed their thoughts and feelings about child rights through various drama techniques and games. This multifaceted approach allowed the researcher to deeply understand the participants' experiences and conduct a comprehensive analysis through various data sources. Consequently, this research represents a significant step in increasing participants' awareness of child rights and strengthening societal consciousness on this issue.

Data Collection:

The research aimed to raise awareness of child rights among women forced into early marriages and involved a three-stage data collection process. The research progressed through activities conducted both at the Med Culture Center and in the participants' own homes. The first stage began with preliminary observations to determine the content of the creative drama workshops aligned with the project goals. Field notes collected by the researchers provided valuable information about the daily life practices, social interactions, and the impact of these interactions on the lives of the participants and their children. These observations were made both at the Med Culture Center and in the participants' homes, thus comprehensively understanding the participants' natural living environments.

The second stage involved clarifying the objectives and content of the creative drama workshops based on the data obtained from observations and interviews. The workshop plans prepared during this stage were carefully designed according to the participants' age, education level, and language skills. The activities used in the workshops enabled women to become knowledgeable about children's rights while addressing themes related to these rights and discussing how to convey this information to their children. The workshops, conducted at the Med Culture Center, encouraged participants to share their experiences through an interactive and participatory approach.

The third stage involved semi-structured interviews aimed at deeply examining the experiences of the women who participated in the creative drama workshops, the new information they acquired, and how they could apply this knowledge. These interviews were conducted in the participants' homes to facilitate a comfortable and open expression of their experiences. The interviews focused on assessing women's social relationships, communication skills, and the impact of the workshops on their relationships with their children.

Data Analysis:

Every society has interpreted the concepts of children and childhood in various ways. Today, many countries have enacted special agreements and laws to ensure that children grow up under better conditions. These agreements and laws have introduced the concept of "Children's Rights." Akyüz (1999) defines children's rights as "rights and interests recognized by legal rules to ensure a child grows in freedom and dignity, in a healthy and normal manner, and in mental, physical, emotional, social, moral, and economic aspects." The first document prepared to protect children's rights was the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the

League of Nations in 1924. This declaration was replaced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into effect on November 20, 1989, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the same day, and came into force on September 2, 1990. In Turkey, this convention was signed on September 14, 1990, and ratified by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on December 9, 1994. The Convention envisages measures for families, communities, governments, and international communities to maintain, implement, and respect the rights of all children without discrimination (UNICEF, 2002).

Investing in children is the safest investment for the continuity of societies (Aral & Gürsoy, 2001). Addressing the interests of the child individually and integrating them with the interests of society forms the basis of the idea that the child is the future of society. Bandura (1969) notes that during their growth period, children model themselves after and identify with someone in their environment. The characteristics of the person they emulate significantly influence their emotional, intellectual, and social development. In this context, raising awareness about child rights among women who have raised their own children and have been victims of rights violations is extremely important. Women being aware of children's rights while raising their children will enable them to nurture more successful and confident individuals. After describing the child as "innocent, sensitive, dependent, curious, lively, and hopeful," Akyüz (2000) emphasizes that allowing children to spend their childhood in a healthy, peaceful environment, learning new things, and developing themselves will be beneficial both for themselves and for society.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes and guarantees a child's rights through laws. Early marriages deprive the child of fundamental rights and freedoms and cause mental, physical, and emotional harm. These marriages often result in the victimization of girl children. Taner and Gökler (2004) state that girls married at a young age are subjected to sexual abuse against children. It is known that the sexual abuse experienced by children at a young age adversely affects their subsequent development periods. Early marriages of girl children violate their rights.

Among these rights, the right to education comes first for girl children. Early and forced marriages of women limit their place in the public sphere and hinder their participation in the workforce. In Turkey, early and forced marriages are often seen as a family matter. However, early and forced marriages, which occur in different ways and frequencies in every segment, involve complex, comprehensive, and public issues based on gender inequality, including economic, political, legal, religious, social, and cultural processes. Described as a magical method, drama allows people to better understand themselves and display their talents. Among the primary goals of drama is to enable participants to empathize with others, thus helping them better understand themselves and their surroundings. The aim of drama studies is to nurture individuals who can engage in democratic behaviors, make connections between topics, think independently, and be tolerant and creative (Akyol, 2003). Creative drama allows participants to freely express their thoughts on a subject and share them without prejudice. Women forced into early marriages are women deprived of their childhood rights. With the

impact of creative drama, these women become more effective in gaining knowledge about child rights and instilling a sense of child rights in their own children.

This study investigates the efficacy of creative drama as an intervention to enhance the recognition and enforcement of child rights among women subjected to early and coerced marriages. Conducted with twenty women from the Bağcılar district of Istanbul, all under the age of 45 who experienced forced marriages at a young age, the intervention consisted of ten creative drama workshops, each lasting three hours, at the Med Culture Center. The research employed a qualitative methodology, beginning with in-depth interviews to gather initial data on participants' views of 'early marriage' and 'childhood.' Following the interviews, participants engaged in drama-based activities designed to educate them about their rights as children.

This study was conducted using creative drama methods to help women become aware of the rights violations they experience and to create awareness about child rights violations by raising awareness about the rights of their own children. The main objective of this research is to raise awareness about child marriages across society and to foster consciousness and understanding of child rights among women who were married at a young age or through coercion. Specifically, this study focuses on women in the Bağcılar district of Istanbul who have been married at an early age, aiming to enable them to recognize the rights violations they have experienced and to develop a profound comprehension of child rights. To achieve this, the research was implemented through creative drama methods during workshop sessions held at the Med Culture Center, spanning a total of ten sessions. The significance of this study lies in shedding light on the severe social and individual problems posed by child marriages and exploring potential solutions to combat these issues. Particularly, it highlights the detrimental effects of early marriages on the psychological, social, and educational development of girls, as well as the violation of their fundamental rights. This research aims to enhance societal awareness and provide support to affected women, contributing to the betterment of both individuals and society at large. The creative drama approach, by allowing participants to share their experiences and actively engage in the learning process, is designed to effectively tackle complex issues like child marriages. The qualitative analysis of workshop outcomes suggests a significant increase in awareness about child rights violations and positive contributions to participants' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development. These workshops were instrumental in deepening understanding of essential child rights, including education, protection, health, justice, freedom of expression, leisure, and safe living conditions, thus promoting a comprehensive acknowledgment of their rights until the age of 18. The study also emphasizes the transformative potential of creative drama in providing a supportive environment for participants to express their experiences and reflect on their personal growth. The implications of this research suggest that creative drama can be a powerful tool in combating early marriages by fostering awareness, resilience, and self-efficacy among affected women, ultimately contributing to broader societal change.

FINDINGS

This section delineates the comprehensive findings derived from the creative drama workshops conducted with women who were forced into early marriages. These findings are categorized under several thematic areas, reflecting the transformative impact of the intervention on the participants' perceptions of their rights, personal agency, and future prospects. The data is presented with a focus on how these women's understandings and attitudes have evolved both before and after their involvement in the creative drama activities.

Expectations for the Future

Before Creative Drama

Initially, participants exhibited a resigned and fatalistic attitude towards their future, heavily influenced by their restrictive life circumstances underpinned by deep-rooted societal norms. Statements from the participants prior to the workshops illustrate a bleak outlook:

- P3 lamented, *"I have no expectations from the future. I live with my mother-in-law; it's always been this way, and it will continue."*
- P8 expressed a sense of helplessness, *"I expect nothing from the future. It brings uncertainty. Why should I dream about tomorrow when my life is dependent on others?"*
- P19 shared a slightly different perspective, focusing solely on her children's prospects, *"It's too late for me. I expect nothing from life, only that my son receives a good education and secures a good position in society."*

These pre-workshop reflections highlight a common theme of dependency and lack of personal agency, where the women felt their lives were predetermined by external familial and social pressures.

After Creative Drama

The post-workshop reflections reveal a significant shift in participants' perspectives, characterized by a newfound sense of empowerment and the recognition of their own rights. The creative drama workshops facilitated a critical reflection process, enabling participants to envision a future defined by their own choices and aspirations:

- P6 noted a radical change in her outlook, *"Before this course, I expected nothing from my life. Now, knowing my rights, I will strive for my children and myself, ensuring my daughter does not endure what I did."*
- P20 pointed out the potential broader impact of the workshops, suggesting that they should be extended to include men, *"This is great, but it should be done for men, as they are the ones infringing our rights. It might be too late for me but could benefit my child."*

These reflections underscore the empowering effect of the creative drama activities, which helped the participants re-evaluate their life narratives from a position of strength and agency.

Perceptions of Childhood

Before Creative Drama

The narratives collected before the workshops painted a poignant picture of lost childhoods, with many participants articulating how early marriage deprived them of their youth and subjected them to adult responsibilities prematurely:

- P2 reflected on her lost childhood with sorrow, *"I don't even remember wanting to recall anything from my younger days. I grew up oppressed by my husband and mother-in-law."*
- P9 and P10 shared their experiences of how societal expectations robbed them of their childhood, *"Childhood is very important to me because I never experienced it. I wish I could go back to those years and avoid all that happened,"* and *"I didn't really have a childhood. I was engaged at 12 and couldn't play. I played with my children when no one was around instead."*

After Creative Drama

Post-intervention insights provided by the participants highlighted a reclamation of their childhood experiences through the medium of play and creative expression facilitated by the drama workshops. Participants reported experiencing therapeutic benefits from revisiting childhood activities, which also offered insights into how they could foster a nurturing environment for their own children:

- P2 joyously discovered the therapeutic nature of play, *"Now I realize, through playing here, that you can play at any age. We learned so much."*
- P4 appreciated the new parenting strategies learned, *"I learned how to be a better mother here. If I had these opportunities earlier, maybe I wouldn't have repeated the cycle of violence I experienced."*

Perceptions of Marriage

Before Creative Drama

Initially, the participants' views on marriage were deeply entrenched in traditional norms, where marriage was seen not as a partnership but as a duty predominantly towards their husband's family:

- P20 described marriage as an inevitable part of life, *"Everyone gets married eventually; what else would you do? I was 16-17, thought to be old enough."*
- P7 highlighted the gendered expectations, *"Marriage means life together, helping each other's families. That's why a man marries."*

After Creative Drama

Reflecting on their experiences in the workshops, participants expressed a shift towards viewing marriage as a mutual partnership, emphasizing the importance of consent and shared responsibilities:

- P2 articulated a redefined view of marriage, "*Marriage is about love, compassion, and starting a new life together, not just enduring because it's tradition.*"
- P5 and P8 stressed the need for mutual decision-making and shared responsibilities in marriage, "*I now believe a woman shouldn't marry just because she's of age; she should do so when she's ready, both personally and emotionally,*" and "*Marriage should be a partnership, not a burden carried under the guise of tradition.*"

These narratives illustrate a transformative shift in how marriage is perceived, moving away from traditional constraints towards a more equitable and fulfilling partnership.

Views on Child Marriages

Before Creative Drama

Initial discussions revealed a resigned acceptance of child marriages as a cultural inevitability. However, through the course of the workshops, participants began to critically analyze and question the implications of such practices on children's rights and well-being:

- P2 and P12 provided poignant reflections on the impact of child marriages, "*No one should marry at a young age. Men want girls to marry before they can make their own decisions,*" and "*I was given away at 15 like an animal. It hurts even when you sell an animal you've raised.*"

After Creative Drama

The workshops facilitated a deepened understanding of the detrimental effects of child marriages, leading to a consensus against such practices. Participants advocated for raising the legal age of marriage and emphasized the need for informed consent:

- P1 and P6 underscored the importance of maturity and consent in marriage, "*If I had married at 25, I wouldn't have suffered so much. Older women can make better decisions,*" and "*True marriage should happen when both parties are ready, not because parents decide it's time.*"

These findings illuminate the efficacy of creative drama workshops in enhancing participants' awareness of their rights and empowering them to challenge oppressive cultural norms. The transformation observed in the participants' attitudes towards child marriages, their perceptions of marriage, and their visions for the future highlight the potential of creative drama as a powerful tool for advocacy and psychological empowerment. The workshops provided not only a space for critical reflection and discussion but also a platform for participants to reshape their narratives and reclaim their autonomy, thereby contributing to broader societal change in attitudes towards women's rights and child welfare.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted with 20 young women who experienced early marriage before the age of 18 provides valuable insights into the cognitive and emotional unpreparedness imposed by such practices. These participants emphasized that their marriages were orchestrated without their consent, highlighting a significant lack of agency and adverse impacts on women's psychological health and autonomy. This aligns with the findings of Erulkar (2013), who notes that early marriage can lead to psychological health issues, including depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders due to the lack of preparedness and the burden of responsibilities.

Furthermore, Edmeades, Hayes, and Gaynair (2015) found that delaying marriage significantly affects empowerment at the household level, with women who married at or after 18 years of age being more involved in household decision-making processes compared to child brides. However, age alone does not unilaterally empower women; cultural definitions of one's position in society also play a crucial role (Edmeades et al., 2015).

The application of creative drama in this research underscores its effectiveness as a transformative tool for social change. Bridget Mary Aitchison's (2001) work on transformational drama highlights the profound impact participatory arts can have on empowering individuals and influencing societal norms. Aitchison explains that transformational drama acts as a catalyst for change in communities and society by addressing issues of social importance and altering people's perceptions, attitudes, and reactions to those issues. The findings of this study align with the broader discourse on the need for innovative approaches to address complex social issues such as child marriage (Svanemyr, Chandra-Mouli, & Raj, 2015). Creative drama allows participants to freely express their thoughts and share their experiences, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of child rights.

This study reinforces the necessity for state intervention to significantly mitigate the prevalence of child marriages. Moreover, the role of civil society is pivotal; grassroots movements and educational programs can effectively shift public perceptions and behaviors regarding early marriages, contributing to the empowerment and well-being of young women.

- **State Intervention:** Consistent with the recommendations by Lee-Rife, Malhotra, Warner, and Glinski (2018), this study advocates for robust governmental policies that enforce stricter regulations against child marriage and support educational and social programs that empower young women. Effective state intervention can significantly mitigate the prevalence of child marriages by implementing and enforcing laws that protect children's rights and promote gender equality (UNICEF Europe and Central Asia, n.d.).
- **Engagement of Civil Society and Educational Institutions:** This research emphasizes the critical role of NGOs and educational bodies in leveraging tools like creative drama to raise awareness and foster societal change. Interventions by civil society, such as those highlighted by ActionAid Nepal (2021) and Restless Development (2019), demonstrate how grassroots movements can facilitate deeper community engagement and empowerment, particularly in settings affected by early marriage.

Educational institutions also play a pivotal role in preventing child marriage by integrating these interventions into their curricula (UNESCO, n.d.).

- **Empowerment of Women:** This study underscores the importance of initiatives aimed at enhancing women's empowerment and self-efficacy. Programs designed to increase knowledge and awareness among women about their rights and available support mechanisms are crucial for promoting self-advocacy and independence. The Women's Refugee Commission (2022) highlights the need for comprehensive strategies that include economic empowerment and access to education to effectively combat the underlying causes of child marriage.
- **Promotion of Creative Drama Techniques:** The effectiveness of creative drama as noted by Aitchison (2001) supports the expansion of arts-based methods in research and social interventions. These techniques offer participatory and engaging ways to address and reflect on personal experiences and societal issues. The use of creative drama has been shown to raise awareness and foster empathy, making it a valuable tool in combating child marriage and empowering individuals.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on combating child marriage by illustrating the efficacy of creative drama in raising awareness and empowering affected individuals. The study highlights the need for integrated efforts involving policy, community engagement, and innovative intervention strategies to address the complexities of early marriage. By implementing the recommended strategies, stakeholders can work towards creating supportive environments that uphold the rights and well-being of young women globally. These efforts are vital for not only addressing the symptoms of early marriage but also its underlying social and cultural drivers, as documented in the broader body of gender and development literature (Akçay, Yiğit, & Bay, 2024).

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study on the impact of creative drama workshops on young women who have experienced early and forced marriages, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of interventions and policies aimed at addressing and preventing such practices:

Strengthening Legal Frameworks

- Governments should enhance and enforce legal measures to prevent child marriages. This includes setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 without exceptions and implementing stricter penalties for violations.
- Legal support services should be expanded to provide young women with the resources to challenge coercive marriage practices and seek justice.

Educational Programs and Awareness Campaigns

- Develop and fund educational programs that focus on the rights of women and children, the consequences of early marriage, and the benefits of education for girls.
- Launch awareness campaigns targeting communities where early marriages are prevalent, using mediums and messaging that resonate locally, possibly incorporating creative drama as a tool for engagement.

Community Engagement and Empowerment:

- Engage community leaders, including religious and traditional leaders, in discussions and workshops to reshape norms and perceptions around the age of marriage and the roles of women in society.
- Implement community-based programs that empower young women by providing them with life skills, financial literacy, and access to microfinance opportunities to enhance their independence.

Support Structures and Services:

- Establish and fund support centers that offer psychological counseling, legal advice, and educational services to women who are at risk of or have escaped early marriages.
- Create safe spaces where young women can share their experiences, receive support, and regain confidence, which can be facilitated through the continued use of creative drama methods.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Implement systems to monitor the effectiveness of interventions aimed at preventing early marriages, with a focus on long-term outcomes for women's health, education, and economic status.
- Regularly update stakeholders, including policymakers and community members, on the progress and impacts of these interventions to ensure transparency and continued support.

Policy Advocacy:

- Advocate for policies that support the education and health of girls at national and international levels. This includes lobbying for increased funding for girls' education and reproductive health services.
- Collaborate with international organizations to align national policies with global standards and practices to protect children and prevent early marriage.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders including policymakers, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations can create a multi-faceted approach that addresses the legal, educational, social, and psychological aspects of early and forced marriages. This holistic approach is essential for sustainable change and for protecting the rights and well-being of young women globally.

Ethics Statement

"This article complies with the journal's writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics rules, and journal ethics rules. The author bears responsibility for any violations related to the article." The research started on December 1, 2014, and ended on August 24, 2015.

Author's Contribution Rate Statement: The contribution rate of the first author in this study is 100%.

REFERENCES

- ActionAid Nepal. (2021). *Youth-led campaign against child marriage*. <https://nepal.actionaid.org/stories/2021/youth-led-campaign-against-child-marriage>
- Aitchison, B. M. (2001). *Transformational drama: Theatre for community and social change* [Doctor of Creative Arts thesis, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong]. Retrieved from <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/943>
- Akçay, S., Yiğit, R. R., & Bay, F. (2024). Experiences of child marriage among women and men in Turkey. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-024-02791-5>
- Akyol, A. K. (2003). Drama ve dramanın önemi. *Gazi Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 1(2).
- Akyüz, E. (1999). Cumhuriyet döneminde çocuk hukukundaki gelişmeler. In *Cumhuriyet ve Çocuk 2. Ulusal Çocuk Kültürü Kongresi* (pp. 87-101). A.Ü. Çocuk Kültürü ve Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi.
- Akyüz, E. (2001). Çocuk Hakları Sözleşmesinin temel ilkeleri ışığında çocuğun eğitim hakkı.
- Aral, N., & Gürsoy, F. (2001). Çocuk hakları çerçevesinde çocuk ihmal ve istismarı. *Milli Eğitim Dergisi*, 151.
- Bandura, A. (1969). *Principles of behavior modification*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Edmeades, J., Hayes, R., & Gaynair, G. (2015). *Improving the lives of married adolescent girls in Amhara, Ethiopia: A summary of the evidence*. International Center for Research on Women. Retrieved from <https://care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TESFA20Final20Evaluation.pdf>. Accessed August 22, 2020.
- Erulkar, A. (2013). Early marriage, marital relations and intimate partner violence in Ethiopia. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 39(1), 6-13. <https://doi.org/10.1363/3900613>
- Erulkar, A. (2020). Early marriage and women's empowerment: The case of child-brides in Amhara National Regional State, Ethiopia. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 20(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-020-00249-5>

- Kümbetoğlu, B. (2005). *Sosyolojide ve antropolojide niteliksel yöntem ve araştırma*. Bağlam Yayıncılık.
- Lee-Rife, S., Malhotra, A., Warner, A., & Glinski, A. M. (2018). Effectiveness of a community based intervention to delay early marriage, pregnancy and school dropout among adolescents in rural Zambia. *BMC Public Health*, 18(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5586-3>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Navarro, M. R. (2011). Eğitimde drama ve sosyal değişim: Teorik bakış açıları. *Yaratıcı Drama Dergisi*, 6(11), 27-48.
- Restless Development. (2019). *Using street drama as resistance: Child marriage*. <https://wearerestless.org/2019/02/06/using-street-drama-as-resistance-child-marriage/>
- Svanemyr, J., Chandra-Mouli, V., & Raj, A. (2015). Research priorities on ending child marriage and supporting married girls. *Reproductive Health*, 12, 80-84. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-015-0070-6>
- Taner, Y., & Gökler, I. (2004). Çocuk istismarı ve ihmali: Psikiyatrik yönleri. *Hacettepe Tıp Dergisi*, 35, 82-86.
- UNESCO. (n.d.). *Governments recognize role of education in addressing child marriage and early pregnancy*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/governments-recognize-role-education-addressing-child-marriage-and-early-pregnancy>
- UNICEF. (2002). *The state of the world's children 2002*.
- UNICEF Europe and Central Asia. (n.d.). *Preventing child marriage*. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/child-marriage>
- Women's Refugee Commission. (2022). *A feminist vision on economic empowerment and livelihoods for preventing child marriage*. <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Economic-Empowerment-and-Livelihoods-for-Preventing-Child-Marriage.pdf>
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2013). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri* (4th ed.). Seçkin Yayıncılık.