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# **UNESWA JOURNAL OF EDUCATION (UJOE)**

**An Online Journal of the Faculty of Education  
University of Eswatini  
Kwaluseni Campus**



**VOLUME 2  
NUMBER 2  
JANUARY 2020**

**ISSN: 2616-3012**

## **Investigating the phenomenon of ‘semester marriages’ among students at state universities in Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed at exploring the phenomenon of semester marriages among students at two universities in Zimbabwe. Semester marriages are different forms of short term sexual relations that are engaged in by university students. The study unravels the mysteries that exist within this practice which is barely explored in academic texts and literature. To achieve this, the study adopted a qualitative approach, guided by a phenomenological design. Data was collected using focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and postal essays. The data was grouped into themes, analysed and presented in response to the aim and objectives of the study. Because the issue under study is a sensitive one, all respondents were told about the sensitivity beforehand and they provided consent before participating. The findings of the study show that semester marriages are common among students at universities and there are people who thrive from their existence as pimps. In addition, the relationships are fuelled by peer pressure and desire to fit into the university community but they are very risky. The paper concludes that semester marriages increase students’ vulnerabilities to multiple problems such as Sexually Transmitted illnesses and unwanted pregnancies that may force some to drop out of school. The recommendations are that interventions should be crafted by universities together with other institutions to educate students on semester marriages.

**Key Words:** Sexuality, tertiary students, extra dyadic relationships.

### **Introduction and background**

The sexual lifestyles of university students have been given little attention in African research, particularly on issues relating to emerging romantic relationships associated with this youthful group. Few studies into the sexual life of university

students have been important in revealing the motives and dynamics of relationships entered by female students, especially with older sugar daddies while at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe (Masvawure 2010; Bhatasara 2006; Gukurume 2011). The study by Masvawure (2010) looked into why female university students choose to have romantic relationships with older men who are not university students. Another article by Bhatasara (2006) worried about how poverty forces young females in universities to accept sexual overtures from older men as a strategy to make ends meet. Similarly, Gukurume (2011) describes the reasons for female students getting into transactional relationships as mainly motivated by the desire to earn money and get other material benefits. All these articles worried about the female student's sexual relationships that are motivated by money and poverty, neglecting the male student and also neglecting the physiological motivators of these relationships.

Many of the previous studies decipher how student's relationships come in many forms; multiple or concurrent sexual relationships in which one may have several sexual partners at the same time, either in the sense of sex work or being involved in more than one sexual relationship at the same time (Gukurume, 2011). In some instances, they come as serial sexual relationships whereby a person gets into sexual relationships that do not last long, and immediately after each relationship, the person gets into another one (Preston-Whyte, 2003).

These relationships are characterised by many features. One of them being that they are usually shrouded in secrecy as telling other people about the relationship would mean losing the trust of a partner (Morris and Mirjam, 1997; Maharaj & Cleland, 2006; Gukurume, 2011). A second key feature of the sexual relations engaged in by university students are inter-generational relationships, with students engaging in sexual relations with men or women who are old enough to be their parents as a way of showing their virility (Maswaure 2010). The third key feature of university students' sexual relations is cohabiting, whereby students tend to move in and live with a person whom one is not married to as husband and wife (Nshindano & Maharaj, 2008). This is not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe's context as it started in colonial times when married men used to go in search for jobs in towns and in South Africa,

leaving their wives in rural areas, then finding girlfriends to live with in the towns (Hunter, 2002). While this may not be strange in the western world, and may be now common as a result of westernization, this phenomenon is still considered taboo and embarrassing especially for the unmarried woman, since pre-marital sexual relations are still considered in negative light in Zimbabwe. These unions have come to be known as Mapoto unions as Muzvidziwa (2002) quotes Chavhunduka who first used the term in academia in 1979.

A fourth key feature that was introduced by Masvawure (2011 p. 166) is the idea of pimping which she defines as “pimp mediated transactional sex”. She goes on to quote Holsopple (1999, p. 47) who states that a pimp is “any man or woman who induces, promotes and profits from the prostitution of women or children” (Masvawure, 2011, p. 167). The above definition shows that some sexual encounters in universities are facilitated by a third party who brings sexual partners together and sometimes even maintains the relationship for them. In identifying potential female students that can be hired for sugar daddies, the pimps pointed out that they use sophisticated hunting skills. After identifying the girls, the boy pimp acts as a mediator whenever the sugar daddies or the girls want to meet so that the sugar daddies’ wives do not find out. This is therefore another feature of university students’ sexualities.

Important as these studies have become in revealing student’s sexual lives, they fall short of explaining an emerging phenomenon of ‘semester marriages’ in which both male and female students effectively participate in Zimbabwe’s tertiary institutions. Semester marriages are sexual relationships that female and male students enter into in order to satisfy their immediate needs during a learning season or term. These relationships are limited to time and space, being only relevant during the university’s learning session and quickly disappear when they close for the holiday or when students leave university.

Most of these pre-marital relationships entered into by students at university are usually rushed, shrouded in secrecy and they occur during times when they may be in other relationships elsewhere. This increases the risk of contracting STIs including HIV and it also increases dangers of violence within unions including marital unions

that can be disrupted as a result of such relationships (Morris and Mirjam, 1997; Maharaj & Cleland, 2006). In a majority of cases, older men believe that there is no need to use condoms because they assume that the girls are too young to have HIV (Gukurume, 2011). While on the other hand, the girls may feel that it is culturally immoral for them to demand condom use or to carry condoms with them (Maharaj & Cleland, 2006).

Indeed, HIV prevalence rate among adult Zimbabweans over 15 years was reported to be just under 15% in 2016 (GOZ, 2016). What is also worrying is the impact that pre-marital sexual relations have had on the HIV prevalence rates among the never married. The Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS) (2015) report brought out that 13.9% of women and 6.0% of men aged 20-24 are HIV positive. This group makes up the majority of the men and women who are in universities in Zimbabwe, and the high HIV prevalence is a worrying sign that makes it necessary to carry out a research on the nature, causes and consequences of the semester marriage phenomenon amongst university students. A study of this nature feeds into existing literature on sexual relationships in institutions of higher learning with a view to device sustainable responses and prevention mechanisms to the health and psychological vulnerabilities it causes to students and the wider society.

This study was aimed at answering the following research questions: how does the phenomenon of semester marriages operate in Zimbabwean universities?, what factors motivate students in Zimbabwean universities to enter into semester marriages?, what are the effects of semester marriages on students' health and social lives?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943), with a particular focus on physiological needs in which sex is captured. The theory believes that people have needs that, if satisfied, can serve to motivate people to do better. This therefore, means that sex is one such need which humans require during their social experiences. Some scholars have questioned that sexual intercourse is a physiological need, yet most agree that it forms an important part of human

existence. It is with this backdrop that this study seeks to utilise Maslow's theory to unravel the existence and practice of sexual relations that are referred to as 'semester marriages' in a university in Zimbabwe. This is particularly important considering that studying at university can become stressful for students at times, hence the need to explore semester marriages among students.

Maslow's theory claims that human motives develop in sequence according to five levels of need arranged in a hierarchy of importance. Maslow's basic proportion is that people want beings, they always want they have already. The hierarchy begins with the lowest level being physiological needs which including basic needs like food, water, sleep and shelter. This is followed by security or safety needs which include safety of the environment, health, protection from harm, freedom of danger, the need for predictability and orderliness (Cherry, 2014). The next level is on social needs which include the need for love, affection, belonging and friendship. The fourth level then includes esteem needs, divided into self-esteem needs (such as self-respect, competence, confidence and freedom) external esteem needs (such as status, attention, influence and fame). The final stage is when individuals seek to achieve self-actualization which entails the ability to reach one's full potential. However, self-actualization needs are hard to realize because individuals continue to set more targets after they achieve other targets. Maslow's needs are ranked from high order needs in stage one to lower order needs in stage five, so higher order needs are essential to survival, but the lower order needs are essential for those who have achieved lower order needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is used to analyse how students use semester marriages to satisfy multiple needs within the hierarchy, including even the basic needs such as food.

Maslow's theory will be supported by the Social exchange theory by Susan Sprecher (1998), which points out that sex is a resource that is given in exchange for something. While social exchange theory was used in various fields before, Sprecher (1998) analysed its uses in the study of sexuality arguing that sexual exchange theory is suitable for analysing five areas of sexuality namely a. how partners are selected; b. when sexual activity begins; c. dynamics of sexual satisfaction; d. issues of getting introduced to sexual activity; and e. nature and causes of extradyadic

relationships. Therefore, the sexual exchange theory is used to explain not only the process of partner selection in 'semester marriages', but also the reasons why people enter into illicit sexual affairs when they are in a university setting.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach as informed by interpretive phenomenological design to gain a deeper understanding of the nature, causes and consequences of semester marriages in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. The study found this method and design to be suitable for exploring a fairly emerging phenomenon of semester marriages (Bless, et al., 2013). In the lenses of constructivist and phenomenology design, researchers sought to bring out new developments in sexuality which is known as 'semester marriages' that have been formed by university students in their individual capacities but have also come to be accepted as a norm.

The study was made up of twenty five sampled students at two state universities in Zimbabwe. Of these twenty, eight students from the two universities who lived the phenomenon of semester marriages were snow-balled for in-depth interviews. Twelve students were conveniently sampled to participate in two focus group discussions, six students each per university, while the remaining five preferred to write brief essays to respond to the study's interview questions. While researchers wanted to have a gender balanced participants, they ended up having sixteen female and nine male students. This was because more females accepted the invitation to participate in the study than men and the researchers did not pursue male respondents beyond the nine who accepted to participate. The respondents' ages ranged between 21 and 36. Among all twenty five respondents, five were married (two men and three women), ten highlighted that they were in serious relationships (four men and six women), four highlighted that their relationship status was complicated at the time of the data collection and the remaining six stated that they were not in any serious relationship.

In the collection of data, three tools were employed, namely in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and essay guide. The first to be used was the focus group



discussion schedule which was conducted at the two universities. The focus group discussions were conducted by the lead author as the moderator with the assistance of a rapporteur and they both lasted just over one hour and forty minutes.

Face to face, unstructured phenomenological interviews were done with participants at the identified institutions. At first, thirty-six potential respondents were identified, and requested to participate in the study using WhatsApp messages, and sixteen responded saying they were willing, after which only eight were conveniently met at campuses and in locations. Guided by prepared questions, researchers were supported with follow-up questions that were asked to the respondents until they could not introduce any new knowledge as is recommended by Groenewald (2004). These follow-up questions used themes and ideas brought out in the focus group discussions which had opened provided the researcher with information on the issues that are of highest concern to students.

The essay guide was a self-administered tool which contained the same guiding questions that were used in conducting in-depth interviews. However, the essay questions were developed after the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, hence they were structured in a way that allows students to be able to comprehend what they are being asked. In the essays, respondents were guided by a statement at the beginning of the tool to encourage them to give all the details they want and ensure that they do not write their names on the essay guide. The focus group discussion was guided by the lead questions used in the in-depth interviews and the essays. The use of the three data collection techniques was done to achieve triangulation of methods so that findings may be verified by comparing the results from different respondents and methods.

Data were analysed in accordance with themes as derived from the objectives of the study. With the thematic content analysis approach, the study managed to rigorously explore and construct meaning from participants' subjective experiences and social cognitions of semester marriages. After the themes were identified, only quotations that covered the essential issues were brought into the write up. In addition, literature was sought to compare results with other studies carried out elsewhere.

The study mainstreamed various ethical issues including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and respect of participants. The researchers assured all respondents that their participation in the study was voluntary. The participants were also assured of maximum protection of their identity and protection from any form of harm for participating in the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following findings arose with regards to the nature, causes and consequences of semester marriages to students at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. This section starts by outlining the causes and typologies of semester marriages before explaining the consequences on students' social relations.

### Typologies of semester marriages

All respondents in the study agreed that semester marriages are a common phenomenon which comes in various forms in institutions of higher learning. The motivating factors ranging from an individual simply continuing with a sexual behaviour which they have always possessed, to genuine mistakes being made. The typologies and causes are defined in table 1.

#### *Typologies of semester marriages*

Table 1: Typologies of semester marriages		
Name given	Description	Duration
<b>One night stand</b>	This is a sexual encounter that only happens once, usually at night when people have gone for a party or night club and after taking alcohol.	One day/ night
<b>Friends with benefits</b>	This is a sexual relationship which is often disguised as a friendly union, though the people involved often engage in sexual relations when need arises.	Unlimited
<b>Off-campus affairs</b>	This is a relationship that is restricted away from campus, especially in the residences at night.	Only when people still see each other

<b>Call-up</b>	This is a sexual relationship which only happens when one calls the other over the phone to come and visit.	Usually one or two semesters
<b>Live-in relationship</b>	This is a sexual relationship in which students cohabit with each other when they are at school, away from home.	Only when at school

### *One night stand*

Many participants mentioned one night stands as a very common practice among outgoing students, and those with a busy night life. Two students defined a one night stand in the following quotes:

*Random sex just because you are drunk which you usually regret of the day after* (Shinhai, University A).

*This is a 'hit and run' in which you accidentally meet a girl and have sex once, without proposing love and then go* (Bizozo, University B).

While one night stands are believed to be common only among students that are out-going, three other respondents pointed out that such sexual encounters also happen even when one is not out-going and they are just studying in their rooms with a classmate. This type of sexual relationship is also mentioned in the study by Nshindano & Maharaj (2008) who highlight the presence of unplanned sexual encounters among young people in their study in Zambia. A one night stand is not possible to plan for and therefore it catches both parties unawares. This was explained in the quotes below:

*When I had a one night stand, I could not believe it... At first I thought I was dreaming and I only got back to my senses after we had finished. Even the girl told me that she was not happy about it afterwards because we had not talked about it* (Tatekhile, University A).

*It happened that I went to see a classmate to give her some notes. I found her putting on a drying towel and gave her a hug and we started caressing each*

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*other until we had unplanned sex. We both regretted after the incident, and she pleaded with me not to tell fellow classmates (Philoman, University A).*

As a result of them being caused by 'mistakes', one night stands are specifically what their name suggests, and they only last for that one night. After that the people may move away from the incident and continue with their relationships and lives as if nothing ever happened. One night stands are also a product of what Masvawure (2011) named pimping, whereby another individual facilitates the process for two people to meet. One of the male respondents highlighted that the culture of pimping is common especially when there are big functions at local night spots;

*Pimping is very common, both men and women can assist their friends or even strangers that they just know from around town to hook up with classmates and other people from campus... Some of these people can spend lots of fuel going to different places with a pimp to find a person to sleep with just for that night (Bhimpo, University B).*

During these functions, both boys and girls are recruited by pimps (who may be male or female) to meet one night stand partners for sexual relations.

### *Friends with benefits*

The typology of friends with benefits is one that seems to occur even in the greater society whereby sexual relationships are disguised as friendships. A number of participants highlighted that this type of semester marriage is difficult to handle because of the emotional costs that might occur if you start developing feelings of love for the friend with benefits. This is because the main reason that was given for getting into a friendship with benefits was that one of the two people would be having a serious relationship with another person. However, some friends with benefits may both be married people who simply engage in sexual activities when they are on campus to satisfy their physiological needs. One respondent highlighted that this is mostly common among mature students in their late twenties and early thirties who maintain friendships with potential sex partners in case the need for sex arises, especially when the pressure of school work becomes unbearable.

The use of sexual relations as a strategy to relieve stress is highlighted by Maslow in his 1930s study on the relationship between self-esteem and sexual behaviour between college students (Cullen & Gotell, 2002). Maslow analysed how women in college sought to balance their education by trying to stay in non-serious relationships that satisfy their physiological need for sex (Cullen and Gotell 2002). Similarly, another participant from university A explained that:

*I had a serious crush on the guy, and he told me that he had a crush on me too, but he is in a serious relationship. So I agreed to act as if we are friends when we are in public, but secretly having a sexual affair... I hoped that he would leave the other woman after seeing that I am a nice person (Alice, University A)*

This is similar to what was mentioned by Hunter (2002) who narrated how one of his female respondents in KwaZulu Natal's umjondolos (informal dwellings) got into relationships with men hoping that they would leave their partners in future.

#### *Off campus affairs*

Off campus affairs are a classic form of semester marriages which are restricted in boundaries as a means of ensuring that the sexual lives of students remain a secret. Off campus affairs therefore occur often as a way to hide the relationship from the knowledge of people on campus, and even those at home. The quotes below explain this:

*Some girls are like that, they have men out there (taxi drivers, sugar daddies and others) who they have sex with, but once they come here, they act as if they are not in any relationship (Tamuka, University B).*

*Pimps are usually not students, DJs at night clubs, friends from home or combi drivers who be-friend students... I have seen girls getting picked up by drivers of pirate taxis and being taken to meet sugar daddies, they don't say it, but people see them (Chamu, University A).*

Off campus relationships also include those that are facilitated by pimps or other third parties. Individuals that may facilitate off campus affairs can be fellow students

or friends that do not study at the same university as Chamu wrote in his essay which is quoted above. These individuals facilitate sexual relationships between students and non-students in a different way. While Masvaure (2011) provided examples of male students as pimps, the above respondent showed that people who facilitate relationships between students and 'sugar daddy or sugar mummies'<sup>1</sup> are sometimes outsiders. These pimps thrive on students' desire to maintain secretive sexual lives off campus.

Preston-Whyte (2003) points out how secrecy is commonly practiced when individuals' sexual activities are with multiple individuals. This quotation from Tamuka below is in line with Masvaure (2010)'s findings in her study that some women have two different men that they are involved with sexually at a time, one who provides for their material needs and another who is being groomed to become a future husband. Such types of relationships that are aimed at looking flashy among school mates meet needs such as getting trendy clothes, cosmetics and electronic gadgets including mobile cell phones and watches (Masvaure, 2010). Gukurume (2011) highlights that the need to get someone to buy food is also a reason why some female students in tertiary institutions get involved in semester marriages. While on the other hand Clowes, et al. (2009) highlight that peer pressure and the desire to look trendy among other students forces female students to get into transactional marriages while they are on a South African university campus.

### *Call-up affairs*

A call-up is a relationship whose sole purpose is to provide one another with sexual services as and when one requests for it. These take two different forms, one may be tied around financial benefits for one of the two sexual partners, and another type may simply be a secret sexual affair. Participants involved in call-up relationships explained that:

*My call-up partner is a woman who is older than me... she has one child, and does not want people to know about our relationship. So she calls whenever she wants me, and if I am around, I go and see her (Terence, University B).*

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<sup>1</sup> The term sugar daddy is used to explain a grown-up man who has sexual relations with young women.

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*Usually it's our male friends at the university that go with girls to parties where we hook up with rich dudes in town. It's on Fridays and Saturdays and when the dudes wants to see us, the boys help the dudes to reach us (Shamiso, School B)*

The call up affairs can also be sophisticated and be facilitated by mediators in the form of pimps who are either students or people who are not students when there are gigs and other interactive functions. This confirms Masvaure (2011 p. 168)'s study which provides a case of a female student at a university in Zimbabwe who trusted her friends not knowing that they were pimping her and earning from her affair with a sugar daddy. The meetings are setup with people that do not know each other, and female students go there in groups ranging between two to five. In some instances, female students go for clubbing with female and male friends for some drinks and end up being tricked to get into semester marriages. This suggests that in some cases individuals can even be tricked into getting involved in semester marriages while the trickster benefits. Resultantly, many of the innocent girls end up entering into these relationships in a bid to please their friends not knowing that they are being sold out to sugar daddies or sugar mummies (Masvawure, 2011). Such call up affairs are unique transactional relationships that are based on the ability of the sugar daddies or sugar mummies' to finance the students' entertainment as is also noted by Daly (2017) and Clowes et al (2009) among students in Canadian universities and in South Africa, respectively. Indeed, this kind of relationship is also typical of the secrecy that is mentioned in the article by Preston-Whyte (2003) in which sexual activity occurs in a clandestine manner. This is also typical of transactional sexual relationships that are highlighted by social exchange theories as is also highlighted by Gukurume (2011) in his study of transactional sexual relations.

### *Live in relationships*

Live in relationships are arrangements that people enter into after feeling that they love each other and decide to move in together during the time that they will be at school. These unions resemble what Muzvidziwa (2002) referred to as *mapoto*, resembling informal unions which may sometimes not last beyond an individual's university years. *Mapoto* unions are a means that may be used by urban women as



a survival strategy during harsh economic times. This situation was aptly described by female respondents who provided essay responses explaining about the nature of Live in relationships;

*They stay together as married people do... some claim that they do it so that they can afford to buy food and other necessities which will be difficult without their partners, but mmmm I think one of them would just be using the other for sex (Cherise, University A).*

*Girls who get into live in relationships usually do that with men who are much older as a way to get someone who takes care of them during their time at university. At home people don't even know that they are wives to men who are the age of their parents (Shamiso, University B).*

As shown above, live in relationships are also practiced together with much older lovers as a means of making university life more manageable. This is particularly interesting as it supports the narrative shared by Muzvidziwa (2002) that women who enter into *mapoto* unions are secretive and do not disclose their relationships to their family and friends. Shamiso also explained that the only way to know whether a person is involved with a live-in boyfriend is to secretly follow them where they stay, because such people do not even want people to visit them.

Regarding the motives, the students' involvement in semester marriages is sometimes evidence of the desire to satisfy their sexual needs highlighted in Maslow's studies. As Cliff explains below about why he is involved in a live in relationship, the objective is often to get stability and happiness during their stay at campus. This is in line with the views of Muzvidziwa (2002) who pointed out that people who get into Mapoto unions do it so that they can get stability and be able to work in the hustle and bustle of town life. As Maslow argues, sex being a basic need enables individuals to actualize and focus on other life challenges with a more stable mind-set (Cullen & Gotell, 2002).



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## Consequences of semester marriages

The consequences of semester marriages are difficult to ignore and possibly they extend to other factors that are beyond the scope of this present study. Some individuals claimed that they realise some positive benefits from semester marriages including being able to make it through studies they would otherwise not afford; having someone to share intimate moments with; and being able to get satisfaction that they cannot get from their other partners. However, a majority of participants in this study highlighted that individuals who enter into semester marriages face several challenges including exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancies, failure to complete studies, family disintegration and being disowned by financiers.

One of the main effects which respondents claim to get from semester marriages is the intended desire to find someone who helps them to make it through their university studies. Some respondents confidently outlined these benefits from their relationship in the quotes below;

*Without my girl I would not be able to be focused on my school work, she comforts me and encourages me. I no longer care about petty issues and now I know my goals... of course other people would not understand this (Cliff, University A).*

*Its sometimes beneficiary as the two share everything, put together the little food stuffs from home, and above all save themselves from paying rentals as they will be staying together sharing a room for \$60 per month (Shamiso, University B).*

*Dating an older person is sometimes helpful when he is responsible to finance you in terms of school fees, clothing and food stuffs. In my case, I accompany him for shopping in South Africa and he spoils me with all my 'goodies' and needs, something which makes me focus on my studies (Terence, University B).*

This perspective shows that some individuals get into semester marriages with the intention to get assistance to settle and focus on their studies, and not only to have fun out of it. This is in line with Maslow's views that sexual gratification assists people to be more motivated to perform in their other duties (Cullen & Gotell, 2002). Chivimbiso explained some girls enter into sexual relationships with sugar daddies for "a good living". This view was shared by one of the respondents in the study by Clowes, et al. (2009) who pointed out that female students get into some relationships so that they can compare with others at university because their parents cannot provide them with luxurious things. Therefore, semester marriages are used to provide benefits that help individuals to increase their self-esteem as is also suggested by one of the respondents in Masvaure (2010 p. 861)'s study who pointed out that "*I just need to be flashy on campus*".

The desire to have someone to have intimate relations with is also a driver of engaging in semester marriages. This is particularly among individuals who claim that they are not managing to have such experiences in their 'main' relationships, and then they seek to make amends by getting involved with someone whose company they enjoy. One of the female respondents who wrote an essay and is in her early 30s highlighted that some men are not able to provide the intimacy that other men can provide. She stated that especially in marriages sometimes there is no more romance and finding a male university student to have a good time with whenever one is away from home removes a lot of stress and allows her to focus on school work.

While those positive effects of semester marriages may be noted by some students, excerpts from a majority of respondents present semester marriages as disastrous both in the short and long-term. The quotes below explain the challenges;

*My classmate who has now left school got involved with a big businessman from town. The man would just call her and provide her with money and goodies... but he made her pregnant and started forcing her to get rid of the pregnancy... she ended up getting very sick when the pregnancy was removed by an old woman in the townships (Bernedict, University B).*

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*Some act as if what they are doing is normal, but it destroys them and eats them inside... some graduate when they already have HIV, others drop out of school due to unwanted pregnancies and other male students have been beaten by husbands of the women they fool around with. (Tom, University A).*

*It's useless to get into a semester marriage, being used like a rug and then someone just leaves you... Especially for us women, men use you and go around telling everyone what they did with you (Cherise, University A).*

*It's a risky venture. Some have even been recorded as they were drunk, having sex, and the videos spread all over haaaa its bad (Shamiso, University B).*

The above quotations show that semester marriages often have negative effects for students, especially female students who abort and develop health complications that may lead to death in the process. This is particularly because the relationships are not intended to survive beyond the university and are often only aimed at satisfying immediate needs whilst ruining their future, and risking losing their lives and being barren. However, even male students also face illness from STIs and violence as a direct result of semester marriages.

The evidence provided by Shamiso also raises fears of abuse that some students may encounter during semester marriages. These are also shared by Clowes, et al. (2009) who highlight the risk for abuse and gender based violence within a university in South Africa. The article by Clowes and colleagues shows that one girl was murdered by her boyfriend in her room as a result of jealousy within a semester marriage. This raises worries about students who get involved in such sexual relationships as one night stands and call ups because there will be no love and concern for them from the people that they get involved with. As highlighted by Shamiso, some of these students end up having sexual videos of them being spread through social media which can damage their future. With the advent of revenge porn, the risk for having sexual photos and videos leaking is very high. When this happens, the least that the victim does is to drop out of school, endure insults and stress, with the worst being an attempt or committing suicide. Therefore, some forms

of semester marriages increase the risk of being abused among those who get involved in them.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that semester marriages are common phenomenon in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. The motivating factors are diverse, ranging from an individual simply continuing with a sexual behaviour which they have always possessed, to genuine mistakes being made. None of the other studies talk about genuine sexual desire among students, nor do they mention that male students may also be involved with older women while they are at school. Semester marriages have become an opportunity for some learners to earn the status that they could otherwise not earn as a result of their backgrounds as they get gifts from their partners. Others have been able to raise some money from facilitating relationships between their school mates and sugar daddies or sugar mommies. On the other hand, some students claim that being involved in a semester marriage allows them to focus on their education with a stable mind-set because they will be getting sexual satisfaction from their partners.

Regardless of the circumstances, the semester marriages phenomenon remains a practice that exposes students to STIs and sexual abuse. In particular, such sexual engagements as one night stands are dangerous as they include sexual relations with an individual that a student may have never met before. Of both sexes, women are affected more by these secretive relationships, as they may end up getting pregnant and with higher chances of dropping out of school, and even risk dying as they try to abort unplanned pregnancies. In light of the above, the following recommendations are made for policy makers, the university and health centres that make contact with tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe;

- All university students must compulsorily be taught about sexuality within the tertiary institutions using real case examples that have happened to sensitize them of the dangers of semester marriages.

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- Universities must create firm networks with organisations that deal with young people's sexual relationships to ensure that they provide extensive education and support to those who need it.
  - Tertiary institutions should continue to provide learners with contraceptives freely and using many methods to ensure that they may reduce the risk of unprotected sexual encounters.

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