THEIR
TIME
IS NOW

Eliminating Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Asia

Integral Technical Report
Plan International Asia Regional Office, 2018
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Plan International Asia Regional Office, 2018
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARSHI</td>
<td>Adolescents’ and Women’s Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BALIKA</td>
<td>Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income and Knowledge for Adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Building Resources Across Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEFM</td>
<td>Child, early and forced marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoH</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSSP</td>
<td>Female Secondary School Stipend Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICS</td>
<td>Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMR</td>
<td>Maternal Mortality Ratio</td>
</tr>
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<td>NFHS</td>
<td>National Family Health Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Purchasing Power Parity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACHAR</td>
<td>Promoting Change in Reproductive Behavior of Adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SER</td>
<td>School Enrolment ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRVS</td>
<td>Sample Vital Registration System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSENAS</td>
<td>National Socioeconomic Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND ON THE PRACTICE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The harmful impact of child marriage on the lives of girls and their children, families, communities and countries has been increasingly well documented. Many governments and civil society organizations around the world have taken steps to address the practice and to target its root causes. In Latin America and the Caribbean there is a comparatively high incidence of adolescent pregnancy and consensual unions, which has complicated the issue of early marriage in this region. The fact that girls seem to apparently choose to enter relationships and to have children has resulted in less recognition of these practices as harmful issues for girls, and data remain comparatively scarce in this region. (Adolescent pregnancy is closely related to child marriage and the report provides some basic data on this).

Plan International has made child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) a key commitment of its work to improve the lives of girls. Plan International has developed a Position Statement on CEFM and progress is being made under the global umbrella of 18+ Global that encompasses programming on CEFM in all four regions, including the Asia region. The Asia Regional Office has contributed to the development of innovative tools such as the Index of Child Marriage Acceptability. Plan International’s work harmonizes well with broader global commitments, including the Joint General Recommendation/General Comment No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on Harmful Practices, with its holistic framework for addressing harmful practices. With the objective of driving Plan International’s focus on girls’ rights at scale, the reach of 18+ Global has been expanded globally to encompass and influence all CEFM programming.

In the Asia region, Plan International has examined the causes and consequences of CEFM in Bangladesh, India and Nepal (with the International Center for Research on Women 2014); in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan (with Plan International and Coram Children’s Legal Centre, 2015); and in separate reports in Laos and other countries. Plan International has conducted a mapping of its research activities in the region. The 10+ Asia described the prevalence of CEFM and explained the causes and consequences of the practice in the countries where research was conducted. Plan International has focused on eliminating child marriage as a fundamental component of its commitment to children and adolescent girls, in particular, and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as the practice impacts on many health and development outcomes.

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report examines the prevalence of CEFM in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. It provides data on countries where child marriage is common (Nepal, Bangladesh, and others), and where it is less common (China), with an emphasis on the former. The data presented on prevalence and trends is drawn from UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other data, the Girls Not Brides website, government websites of the countries in question, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Population Reference Bureau reports, and other published sources that analyse trends overtime. (A complete list of data-related publications and websites are listed in the bibliography, see page 65).

This report synthesizes evidence that governments, universities and civil society organizations, including Plan International, have generated over the past 10 to 15 years. The objective of this review of the 14 countries that make up Plan International’s Asia region is to consolidate and systematically analyse the latest evidence on the prevalence, causes, trends, levers and impact of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM); and the work undertaken by governments, public and private sector actors and civil society organizations to end the practice. The report supports Plan International in preparing for the later stages of the research it intends to conduct on programmatic interventions and in its development of a regional plan of action to end CEFM.

The dramatic increase in research on CEFM has highlighted the similarities and differences in this practice across diverse settings. It has also generated numerous studies that approach CEFM from different angles, use different data, and evaluate different interventions. There is a need to consolidate this research and assess it to help focus and guide further research, programming and advocacy in the Asia region.

The report is organized around four research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of CEFM in the 14 countries where Plan International works in Asia? What are the historical trends?
2. What are the root causes/drivers of CEFM in the 14 countries where Plan International works in Asia?
3. What are the impacts of CEFM in the 14 countries where Plan International works in Asia (this includes a focus on health, protection, education and economic outcomes for girls, and their social/political participation and engagement)?
4. What actions have been taken to prevent CEFM in the 14 countries where Plan International works in Asia?
1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

This report is based on an extensive review of available literature that was submitted to Plan International by consulting firm, GreeneWorks, in October 2017. All statistics and figures included herein are current as of that date. While there is significant value in conducting this type of comprehensive desk review, some important limitations of the process and of the data have been identified.

- The mixed quality of published analyses: The desk review is naturally limited by the extent of existing data and research. The massive volume of research generated over the past ten years is not all of the same value, meaning that non-research-oriented organizations must sift through a great deal of information and may end up focusing or building on reports that are accessible but do not necessarily drive the field forward as much as might be hoped. Some of the research reflects measurements and perspectives that have not been informed by more recent understandings of the factors that drive child marriage and what can be done to end the practice.

- The limitations of data:
  - **Not always available:** The countries included in this report vary quite significantly in whether data are available and how child marriage is measured and defined, making for considerable inconsistencies across these country settings.
  - **May not reflect key groups:** Data on child marriage tend to emphasize the experiences of 15-19-year-old girls. Little is known about the 10-14 age group or the transition to marriage of boys, who are an important early-marrying group in some of the countries in this study, most notably Nepal.

Despite the limitations of existing data and published research, this review, nonetheless, provides a broad overview of CEFM in Asia, with a focus on the 14 countries in which Plan International works. Its primary contribution is to consolidate the vast array of studies that have been published on CEFM in the region and in the world over the past ten or more years. Its second major contribution is to demonstrate the specificity of factors that drive CEFM in the countries included in the analysis and the factors that are common to all and prevail in other countries in different regions.
The research team focused on available data and provided an analysis of CEFM among both boys and girls in the targeted countries, and how CEFM in these two groups manifested itself. One challenge was the comparative lack of data on boys, which has not been collected systematically.

Where possible, the report includes data on prevalence and trends using the following indicators:

- Mean age at marriage among 20-24-year-olds
- Percentage of 15-19-year-olds who are married
- Percentage married before the age of 15
- Percentage married before the age of 18
- Trends over time
- Age at first birth
- Age at first sexual intercourse.

Knowing the age at first sexual intercourse and the age at first birth can help identify girls at risk and the specific age group of girls in the years leading up to the “tipping points” that are strongly related to CEFM. Age at first intercourse or sexual initiation is particularly difficult to document where there is strong normative pressure around early marriage. These data are not collected in countries such as Pakistan where sexual activity, particularly among girls, must occur within the context of marriage.

The report first lays out the comparative tables and graphs where data exist across the 14 countries. It then details individual country profiles that vary in length and focus depending on the availability of data.

2.1 Comparative rates and numbers

Prevalence data on child marriage are typically presented in several forms and often reflect different age ranges. The median age at marriage generally uses the age range of 15, 20 or 25 to 49. The data in Figure 2.1 are for women currently aged 25 to 49. The median age at marriage was above 20 in 10 of the 14 countries, with the exception of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Median age at marriage was highest in Sri Lanka at 25, and nearly a decade lower, at 15.8, in Bangladesh: this illustrates that half of all women currently aged 25-49 in Bangladesh were married before the age of 16.
A second common statistic is the percentage of currently married women aged 20-24 who were married by exact age 15 and exact age 18. Child marriage by age 15 was highest in Bangladesh at 18 percent, while it was negligible in China and Indonesia. More than one in three women in Laos and one in five in Thailand were married by the age of 18.

The percentage of men who married by exact age 18 is often available only for ever-married individuals currently aged 25 to 49. This percentage tends to exceed the number of men aged 15 to 19 who are currently married, as age at marriage has risen. While the percentage of men married as adolescents was not insignificant, table 2.1 shows that women married in adolescence at far higher rates than men. In this table, Bangladesh stands out for the especially large gender disparity in the percentages married as children. The Philippines and Vietnam showed the smallest gap between women and men in the timing of marriage.
Table 2.1 Percentage of women currently aged 20-24 who married before the age of 15 and before the age of 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>married &lt; 15</th>
<th>married &lt; 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Girls Not Brides website, DHS, MICS.

Table 2.1 shows that in addition to the variability in child marriage rates among these countries, there are considerable differences in the rates of marriage before the age of 15. Only in Bangladesh, India, Laos and Nepal did more than 4 percent of girls marry before the age of 15, and the rates were quite high in the first two countries at 18 percent.

The percentage of adolescent girls currently aged 15 to 19 who are married is suggestive of trends in the youngest cohort towards a somewhat older age at marriage (see figure 2.3). Marriage among women in this age group exceeded 10 percent in all countries except in China, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste.
Figure 2.3 Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15-19 who are currently married

In which countries are the greatest numbers of girls affected by child marriage?

It is important to consider not only the percentage of the population of women who married as children but the actual numbers of women affected. The percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who married between the ages of 15 and 19 is shown at table 2.2, along with the total population of 20-24 year-olds and the number of 20 to 24 year-olds who married between the ages of 15 and 19 in each country.

While the percentage of girls marrying between the ages of 15 and 19 varied greatly in the 14 countries in which Plan International works, from 2 percent in China to 34 percent in Bangladesh, India had by far the largest number of married girls. With its large population of 1.2 billion, nearly 16 million women currently aged 20-24 were first married between the ages of 15 and 19. Bangladesh ranked second, with 2.5 million women married as adolescents. Pakistan and Indonesia had more than 1.2 million women currently aged 20-24 who married between the ages of 15 and 19. In China, with its population of nearly 1.4 billion, 2 percent translated to 900,000 women. While the size of five-year age cohorts varies slightly from year to year, a similar number of girls currently aged 15 to 19 can be expected to marry in these countries in the next five years.

Table 2.2 Number of women aged 20-24 who married between the ages of 15 and 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of women married between ages 15-19</th>
<th>Population of 20-24 year old women</th>
<th>Number of 20-24 year old women married aged 15-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7,460,000</td>
<td>2,536,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>781,900</td>
<td>125,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45,300,000</td>
<td>906,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>52,950,000</td>
<td>15,885,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10,600,000</td>
<td>1,348,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>360,400</td>
<td>90,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2,511,000</td>
<td>301,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,584,000</td>
<td>396,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10,258,000</td>
<td>1,236,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4,642,000</td>
<td>462,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>806,400</td>
<td>72,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4,642,000</td>
<td>742,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>58,100</td>
<td>4,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3,965,000</td>
<td>396,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ICF International; recent DHS and MICS by country 2009-16; U.S. Census Bureau www.census.gov.
What is the relationship between marriage and first sexual intercourse?

In contrast to recent trends in Africa, median age at first sexual intercourse in South and Southeast Asia was generally higher than median age at first marriage, confirming that the first sexual experience for most women occurred within marriage (see figure 2.4). Among the countries with data on sexual initiation, only in the Philippines did the first sexual experience occur, on average, before marriage. But patterns are changing, and the fear of a daughter’s exposure to sex before marriage is a key driver of early marriage. Early sexual experience outside of marriage as well as early pregnancy are both drivers of CEFM.

Figure 2.4 Median age at marriage and median age at first sexual intercourse

![Bar chart showing median age at marriage and first sexual intercourse for selected countries.

Source: ICF International; recent DHS and MICS by country, 2009-16.

Data for China, Laos, Sri Lanka and Thailand are not available in this data source.
2.2 INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY PROFILES

The profiles below provide a snapshot of the data available by country. More comprehensive country and regional reports are included in the bibliography, for example Plan International’s Child Marriage in Nepal report. In addition to weak management information systems in many of these countries, reliable survey data with comparable dates are not consistently available across these 14 countries. In countries where Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) or Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) have repeatedly been implemented, trends can be plotted over time in age at first marriage. In some countries, the data are insufficient to show change over time. Other sources such as the Laos Population and Housing Census, 2015, contain limited data on marriage. The profiles below draw on these and other sources.

BANGLADESH
COUNTRY DATA PROFILE

Total Population: 165 million
Population Under Age 15: 29%
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 34%
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 2,536,400
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
  • Married before age 15: 18 percent
  • Married before age 18: 52 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 60;
Females 67
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 163 births per 1,000 women by age 19 for women aged 15-24
Median age at first intercourse: 15.9 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first marriage: 17.2 among women aged 20-24
Age at first birth: 19.2 among women aged 20-24

For girls under the age of 18, Bangladesh had the highest percentage of girls who married as children in Asia, and the fifth highest in the world. Twenty-nine percent of girls in Bangladesh married before the age of 15, and 2 percent married before the age of 11, according to a UNICEF study.

Although a law specifying 18 as the legal age of marriage has been in effect since 1929, religiously-based “personal” law, which does not adhere to statutory requirements, prevails. The average age at marriage among women aged 25 to 49 in the 2014 Bangladesh DHS was 15.8. Over nearly 25 years, the mean age at marriage has only risen by 1.7 years since the 1993-1994 DHS survey, despite concerted efforts, including by Plan International, to end child marriage. However, Bangladesh is one of only two Asian countries for which the median age of marriage among 20 to 24-year-old women has been calculated from the most recent DHS (2014), and this age, 17.2, suggests, promisingly, that the younger cohort is marrying significantly later than older cohorts. (MacQuarrie, et al, 2017). While the Bangladesh Sample Vital Registration System (SVRS) shows the median age at marriage being over the age of 18 since at least 2010, this system is designed to provide data at the subnational level and is not typically cited for international comparisons.
Nationally, nearly one in four women, (23.8 percent of those aged 15 to 49) married before the age of 15. Child marriage was highest in Rajshahi Division, (33.3 percent), Rangpur, (31.5 percent), and Khulna, (31.1 percent.) It was lowest in Sylhet (9.2 percent). Nearly two out of three women aged 20-49 (62.8 percent) married before the age of 18. The rates of child marriage were highest in the same three divisions where they ranged from 71 to 75 percent of all women married by the age of 18. Among women aged 15 to 19, 34 percent were currently married. Again, the rates were highest in Rajshahi (47.8 percent), Khulna, (43.5 percent) and Rangpur, (41.9 percent) (Progotir Pathey, 2015). The adolescent birth rate (83 births per 1,000 women nationally) was highest in Rajshahi (99) and Rangpur (94) and lowest in Sylhet (45) (Progotir Pathey, 2015).

A recent qualitative study found that most child marriages were arranged (MacQuarrie et al, 2016). Women reported having no input into whether, when and to whom they would marry. Most had no desire to get married but were resigned to defer to their parent’s wishes. Among child marriages, 4.2 percent were polygamous. Nationally, 20.4 percent of 15 to 19-year-old married girls had a spouse who was ten years their senior. This percentage was highest in Khulna, (23.8 percent) and lowest in Rangpur (15.4 percent). Spousal age differences among married women aged 20-24 were similar. It would be useful to have more data on the age gap between spouses, as age differences can be a significant predictor of a lack of autonomy for women with a much older spouse. Physical or sexual violence committed by a husband or a partner was very high in Bangladesh. More than half of women aged 15 to 49 (53.3 percent) had experienced such violence (DHS, 2007).

The secondary school enrolment ratio (SER) has risen dramatically – 20 points since 2008 – without a parallel increase in the age at marriage (World Bank, 2017). The higher ratio for girls than boys may indicate that more girls than boys are older than their actual grade level. The SER, however, remains less than 68 percent for either sex. However, the percentage of women aged 15 to 49 who are literate has increased by 12 percentage points between the 2007 and 2014 DHS. While HIV rates are low (less than 0.1 percent) among males and females aged 15 to 24, nationally only 9 percent of women aged 15 to 24 can identify three ways of preventing HIV as well as reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission.

According to Human Rights Watch, 2015, government inaction and complicity by local officials (not requiring birth certificates, not looking closely enough at false ones, not intervening in weddings when the bride or groom are obviously children) allows child marriage to continue unchecked, while Bangladesh’s high vulnerability to natural disasters pushes families into poverty and drives decisions to marry daughters early. Recently, the government has been reported to be more proactive and collaborative in combating child marriage (personal communication with Soumya Guha, Deputy Country Director, Programmes, Plan International Bangladesh).

In 2017, Parliament passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, now awaiting Presidential approval. While the earlier Act established 18 as the minimum age at marriage, the new Act allows marriages for girls under 18 in “special cases” or for “the greater good of the adolescent,” but does not define what makes child marriage acceptable in these “special cases.” Girls Not Brides Bangladesh, a coalition of civil society organizations (including Plan International) working to end child marriage, issued a statement anticipating that the law could be widely abused and effectively mean that Bangladesh has no minimum age of marriage. It urged the government to define “special cases” in order to prevent the new law from being abused and girls being forced to marry as children (Girls Not Brides, 2017).
Population: 15.9 million
Population Under Age 15: 32 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 15 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 125,000
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: 2 percent
• Married before age 18: 19 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Data not available
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 57 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: 20.7 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first birth: 22.4 among women aged 25-49
Sources: World Population Data Sheet 2017, Population Reference Bureau; 2014 DHS; Girls Not Brides website; UNICEF MICS data.

More than 15 percent of women aged 15 to 19 were currently married. The median age of marriage was just under 21 years, a rise of nearly one year since 2000. Median age at marriage was above 20 in all but four provinces: Kampong Speu, Kratie, Kompot/Kep and Mondul Kiri/Ratanak Kiri, all of which had median ages above 19 (National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International, 2015, Table 9.4.1). Marriage below the age of 15 has declined from 7 percent among women aged 45 to 49 to 1 percent among women aged 15 to 19.

The legal age of marriage is 18 but girls can be married at 16 with parental consent.
Among women with no education, the median age at marriage was 19.7, two years younger than women with a secondary education. Among the lowest income quintile, the median age at marriage was 20 compared to 23 for women in the highest wealth quintile. Among women aged 15 to 19, 61.8 percent had completed some secondary schooling, while 2.8 percent had no education. Among those with no schooling, 10 percent could not read. Twenty-six percent of 15-19-year-olds had no exposure to mass media on a weekly basis. Fifty-five percent of women aged 15 to 19 were employed, and in four provinces, over 80 percent were employed. Second to agriculture (36.4 percent), the most common occupation among 15 to 19-year-olds was skilled manual labour (33 percent).

Data on first sexual experience suggests that women rarely engage in sex before marriage. Median age at first birth was above 22 except in the above four provinces in addition to Siem Reap. There has been an increase in adolescent fertility in recent years. Age specific fertility among 15 to 19-year-olds is now 57, up from 46 in the 2010 Demographic Health Survey. Among 15 to 19-year-olds, 18.4 percent had begun childbearing by the age of 16, and by 19, 31.3 percent of 15 to 19-year-olds were pregnant or had given birth. Neonatal mortality was highest among women who were less than 20 years of age at birth. Among high-risk births, 2.7 percent were attributed to the mother’s young age, (less than 18 years). More than 95 percent of women who gave birth before the age of 20 received antenatal care from a skilled provider, primarily midwife. Fourteen percent of infants born to mothers under the age of 20 were small or very small. Among married women aged 15 to 49, 18.2 percent had experienced physical or sexual violence committed by a husband or partner (2014 DHS.) Among women aged 15 to 19, 46 percent believed a husband was justified in beating his wife for at least one of six reasons. This is lower than the 57 percent of women aged 45–49 who shared this view, suggesting that women are becoming less tolerant of wife beating (National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International, 2015).

The authors do not know of any government initiatives to tackle CEFM in Cambodia but looked to the country team to verify and add instances of prevention and mitigation work. Global Slavery Index’s website reports that Article 5 of the Law on Marriage and Family (1989) allows for the marriage of children upon the consent of their parents or guardians if the girl becomes pregnant.

One additional observation on Cambodia is that a recent study on the lingering impact of the genocide during the Khmer Rouge era suggests that children who experienced the genocide intensely face disadvantages in both education and physical growth (Islam et al., 2017). Since difficulties in grade progression has been shown to be associated with early marriage in other country settings, this may be an important dynamic to consider when trying to understand early marriage in the Cambodian context. The authors hypothesize that marriage markets may act to concentrate the adverse impact of conflict across generations.

CHINA
COUNTRY DATA PROFILE

Population: 1.39 billion
Population Under Age 15: 17 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 2 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 906,000
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: Data not available
• Married before age 18: Data not available
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 93; Females 96
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 7 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19
Median age at first intercourse: 23.1
Mean age at first birth: 28.4 (Note: mean rather than median)

The Sixth National Population Census in 2010, showed that the early marriage rate for women between the ages of 15 and 19 was 2.1 percent, an increase of 0.87 percentage points since 2000. For males, the percentage of child marriages doubled from 0.3 percent in 2000 to 0.6 percent in 2010. In March 2016, the controversial “One Child Policy” was replaced by a two-child equivalent out of concern for the rapidly ageing population and its effect on economic growth. Following the revision of the population policy, the Total Fertility Rate has risen from 1.6 to 1.8.

The general legal framework for child marriage is included in Article 3 of General Provisions: Marriage upon arbitrary decision by any third party, mercenary marriage and any other acts of interference in the freedom of marriage shall be prohibited. The exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriage shall be prohibited. Bigamy shall be prohibited. Maltreatment and desertion of one family member by another shall be prohibited (personal communication with Hongman Zhang, Plan International China Country Office). All of these factors provide a generally supportive framework for working against child, early and forced marriage.

The legal age at marriage in China is 20 for women and 22 for men. In contrast to several other Asian countries, the median age at marriage nationally, 22.8 for women
and 24.6 for men, significantly exceeded the legal age (2010 National Census.) The Marriage Law was enacted in 1950 and revised in 1980. The law stipulates that marriage is based on the freedom to choose a partner, the practice of monogamy, equality of the sexes and bans the use of money or gifts in the arrangement of a marriage. Late marriage is to be encouraged. In deference to the customs of ethnic minorities, who practice early marriage, including the Muslim Hui of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, a supplementary policy to the Marriage Law was enacted in 1981; the policy allows ethnic minorities, but not Han Chinese living in the region, to marry at the age of 18 for females and 20 for males. Early marriages among the Hui people have gradually declined.

Education is nearly universal. Among all women aged 15 and above, 4.1 percent in urban areas and 10.7 percent in rural areas were illiterate. Among those married between the ages of 15 and 19, 34 percent had primary or less education (National Bureau of Statistics, The People’s Republic of China, 2012).

HIV prevalence in China was low at 0.037 percent in 2014. New HIV cases increased in China from 2015 to 2016, and 14 percent of new cases were among those aged 15 to 24-years-old (www.avert.org).

The one-child policy, in a culture with a strong preference for sons, contributed to a highly imbalanced sex ratio at birth. Nationally, the sex ratio at birth was 113.51, and it was above 110 in all but three provinces, including Beijing (106.8), ranging from a near normal low of 101.5 male to female births in Jiangsu to more than 125 male to female births in Anhui, Fujian and Hainan provinces (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). See figure 2.7 below.

This imbalance portends an ongoing shortage of women of marriageable age, and to a growing age gap between spouses. It is possible that girls choose early marriage to a peer rather than being later coerced into marriage with an older man as the shortage of women drives men to seek women from younger cohorts. Child marriage as a percentage of all marriages could be quite rare in China and still impact a significant number of girls, given the enormous population of China, nearly 1.4 billion. More than 900,000 women aged 20 to 24 married between the ages of 15 and 19 (see figure 2.7).
Population: 1.35 billion
Population Under Age 15: 29 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 30 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 15.9 million
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: 18 percent
• Married before age 18: 47 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males and Females: 74
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 25 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: 17.6 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first birth: 19.8 among women aged 25-49

According to a key indicators report from the National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS), 2015-2016, the percentage of women aged 20-24 who married before the age of 18 was 26.8 percent, a full 20 percentage points less than in the 2005-2006 NFHS-3 (47.4 percent). The percentage of women aged 15 to 19 who were pregnant or had given birth had also fallen by half, from 16 percent in 2005-2006 to 7.9 percent in 2015-2016. (Government of India, 2017). Because of India’s enormous population, with 54 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19, nearly 16 million or a third of all adolescent girls were married. Until the recent survey it was estimated that globally, every third child marriage occurred in India. Seventy-five percent of women aged 15 to 49 married before the legal age of 18. UNICEF ranked India number 10 in the world in terms of the prevalence of child marriage.

Figure 2.8 Trends in age at marriage in India, 1992-2006

Sources: Recent Demographic and Health Surveys. NOTE: median age of marriage from the 2015-2016 NFHS-4.
The median age at marriage nationally for women aged 15 to 49 rose from 16.9 between 1992 to 1993 to 17.4 between 2005 to 2006, an increase of about half a year. Due to India’s enormous cultural and economic variability, the percentage of married adolescents varied widely, from over 50 percent in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar to less than 7 percent in Goa and Mizoram. There were strong interstate and urban rural differentials in median age at marriage (16.8 rural versus 18.7 urban) as well as regional differences as shown in table 2.3. Between the 2000 MICS and the 2005-2006 DHS, the median age increased in all regions, but most significantly in Bihar, (14.6 to 16.3), Rajasthan (15.8 to 16.5), and Uttar Pradesh (16.4 to 17.0). In Andhra Pradesh the median age at marriage rose by more than half a year, (15.3 to 15.9), but remained below the age of 16. Comparable state level data from the recent NFHS-4 were not yet available as one report, but the median age at marriage can be expected to have risen significantly in most states.

The percentage of women aged 15 to 49 who were literate rose by 15 percentage points between 2005-6 and 2015-6, from 60.4 to 75.4 percent.

More than a third of married women aged 15 to 49 (37.2 percent) had experienced physical or sexual violence committed by a husband or partner. In India as a whole, the earlier a girl married, the more likely she was to experience intimate partner violence. For girls married below the age of 15, 30 percent had experienced physical violence in the last year (NFHS-3, 2006-7). Among girls who married after the age of 18, the figure was 16.7 percent. In Bihar, women who married before the age of 15 were more than three times as likely to experience physical violence as compared to those who married after the age of 18 (Singh and Anand, 2015).

In 2015-16, among women aged 15 to 49, 20.9 percent had a comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS, a small increase from 17.3 percent in 2005-6. Somewhat more than half (54.9 percent) knew that consistent condom use could reduce the chances of contracting HIV (Government of India, 2017).

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006 sets the minimum legal age at marriage at 18 for females and 21 for males. While it establishes punishment for those who do not prevent child marriage, and includes a right to annulment of child marriages, the Act relies on families to report violations. A national plan of action to end child marriage was drafted in 2013, but according to Girls not Brides, has not yet been finalized (www.girlsnotbrides.org).

The government and civil society initiatives addressing child marriage are so numerous in India that it is hard to know how to begin to describe them. One place to start is the now outdated Knot Ready report from the International Center for Research on Women.
Total Population: 264 million
Population under age 15: 28 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 17 percent
Number of married girls (below the age of 18): 1,348,886*
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: Data not available
• Married before age 18: 14 percent
Adolescent Fertility Rate 15-19: 48 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males and Females: 86
Median age at first intercourse: 20.6 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first birth: 22.0 among women aged 25-49
Sources: World Population Data Sheet 2017; Population Reference Bureau; UNICEF Indonesia, 2016; DHS 2012; Girls Not Brides website; UNICEF MICS data.

As one of the world’s most populous countries, with more than 10 million girls aged 15 to 19, Indonesia has one of the highest number of girls married as children. In 2012, 1,348,886 girls were married before the age of 18. Of these, 110,200 married before the age of 15 (UNICEF Indonesia, 2016). According to the 2012 DHS, about 17 percent of the female population aged 15 to 24 married before the age of 18.

The seven Demographic and Health surveys conducted between 1987 and 2012 showed a steady rise in the age at marriage. Although a recent report using the annual National Socioeconomic Survey (SUSENAS) suggests that progress has stalled, the gradual decline has continued. Between 2010 and 2015, the proportion of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 who married before the age of 18 declined from 24.5 to 22.8 percent. Marriage among girls below the age of 15 declined from 2.5 percent to 1.1 percent of ever-married women over the same period. Marriages among 16 and 17-year-olds accounted for 19.3 percent of all marriages in 2016 and has remained fairly stable since 2008 (Statistics Indonesia, Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), and UNICEF, 2016).

The percentages of girls marrying before the age of 16 and before the age of 15 are also declining and are low compared to South Asian countries, at 3.54 percent and 1.12 percent in 2015, respectively (BPS and UNICEF, 2016). However, the overall picture from the most recent analysis of child marriage in Indonesia is that progress in reducing child marriage in Indonesia has stagnated and that child marriage remains a significant problem, with rates among girls aged 16 and 17 of greatest concern (UNICEF, 2016).
The legal age at marriage in Indonesia was established by the Law on Marriage of 1974 as 21, but the true permitted minimum age is 16 for girls and 19 for boys, with parental consent required when either party is under the age of 21 years (18+ Coalition, 2016). Parents may petition to a judge or “other competent authority” for their child to marry below these ages, and these petitions are very likely to be approved (UNICEF Indonesia, 2016). Most of the dispensations for marrying before the age of 21 are given because parents are afraid that their child will have sex before marriage and want to avoid the risk of their child bringing shame to the family by being unmarried and sexually active.

A 2002 Law on Child Protection makes parents accountable for preventing underage marriages. Nonetheless, like Bangladesh, Indonesia is governed by personal (religious) and traditional laws as well as statutory laws and these traditional laws and customs have led, in some areas, to a mean age at marriage below the age of 15.

Nationally, the prevalence of child marriage was 22.82 percent but it ranged widely from 11.73 percent in the Riau Islands to 34.22 percent in West Sulawesi. Twenty provinces in both western and eastern Indonesia had a higher prevalence than the national average. The five provinces with the highest prevalence were West Sulawesi (34.22 percent), South Kalimantan (33.68 percent), Central Kalimantan (33.56 percent), West Kalimantan (32.21 percent) and Central Sulawesi (31.91 percent) (BPS, 2016).

One explanation for this diversity comes from a study of “adat”, a system of cultures and traditions that govern decision-making in everyday life in Indonesia. This suggests that the minimum age at marriage varies locally according to the adat traditions, with a mean age of marriage as low as 14.8 for girls and 16.7 for boys in the Bugis region (Buttenheim and Nobles, 2009).

The maternal mortality ratio has declined but was still high at 126 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016, especially in the poorest provinces and among the poorest women. Maternal mortality is associated with young age at first marriage (Raj and Boehmer, 2013). In 2014, a judicial challenge to the Marriage Law was filed by an NGO coalition, identifying the minimum age of marriage (16 with parental consent) as a significant contributing factor to the maternal mortality ratio. The Constitutional Court rejected the challenge (U.S. Department of State, 2016), largely to make the dispensation available so that pregnant girls can marry. The role of pregnancy in driving early marriage shows the importance of adolescent sexual and reproductive health education for children.

Aggravating the problem of preventing child marriage is that the registration of births is inconsistent across regions. Reportedly, nine out of ten child marriages involved girls and boys who did not have birth certificates (Plan Australia, 2014).

According to the Universal Periodic Review of Indonesia, 2017, a married child can be treated as an adult before the law and does not receive special protections afforded to children under the age of 18 as required by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Review recommends that the government take immediate action to prevent child marriage and push local governments to educate and advocate for its prevention. It also urged reducing dispensions for child marriages of girls and boys below the age of 16, which is usually granted in cases of pregnancy (Universal Periodic Review of Indonesia, 2017, as cited by the Sexual Rights Initiative, 2017). An evidence gathering survey, which may not have been nationally representative, found that seven out of ten child marriages are preceded by pregnancy (Plan International and Coram Children’s Legal Centre, 2015). This is in stark contrast to the majority of child marriages in South Asia, where age at first sex typically follows age at first marriage.
Population: 7 million
Population Under Age 15: 34 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 18 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 90,100
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
  • Married before age 15: 9 percent
  • Married before age 18: 35 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 64; Females 59
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 76 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19* 
Median age at first intercourse: 18.8
Median age at first birth: 16.6 among 15-19-year-olds who have given birth

While the population of Laos is small relative to most Asian countries, it is also very young, with a third (34 percent) of the population under the age of 15. Among 15 to 19-year-olds, 18 percent of women in Laos and 7 percent of men are married (Laos 2015 Population and Housing Census). Among women aged 20 to 24, 9 percent were married before the age of 15 and 35 percent were married before the age of 18 (MICS 2011-12). Among 15 to 19-year-olds, 22.2 percent of women were currently married. The median age at first marriage was lowest in the North (18.5) and two years younger in rural compared to urban areas (18.7 percent versus 20.7 percent). Almost twice as many women in rural areas were married before the age of 18 than in urban areas (43 versus 23 percent). Age at marriage was youngest in Huaphanh (18.2) and Xayabury provinces (18.9) but also below 19 in Oudomxay, Bokor, Luangprabang, Xiangkhouang, Borkhamxay, Savannakhet, Saravane and Sekong provinces (Ministry of Education and Laos PDR 2011-12, Table MS 3: Median Age at first marriage, 20-49). Marriage was more than four years lower among women with no education (18.2) compared to those with post-secondary education (22.7), and nearly three years younger among the poorest compared to the wealthiest quintiles (18.4 percent versus 21.2 percent).

Among ethnic groups, age at marriage was lowest among the Hmong-Mien (17.9) and the Mon-Khmer (18.2) (Ministry of Education and Sports, Laos, 2013).

Literacy among women aged 15 and above was 79 percent compared to 90 percent for men (Laos 2015 Population and Housing Census). Twenty percent of women aged 15 to 49 had no education. Among women with no education, 45 percent of 15 to 19-year-olds were married. The highest percentage of 15 to 19-year-olds who were currently married were among the Hmong-Mien ethnic group (35 percent). One in ten married women aged 15 to 19 had a spouse who was ten or more years their senior.

The median age at first sex was slightly lower than the median age at marriage (18.8 versus 19.2), suggesting some premarital sex. Childbearing was common among 15-19-year-old young women, but varied significantly by rural or urban residence, at 44 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 in urban areas, 89 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 in rural areas with roads, and 121 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 in rural areas without roads. Forty-seven percent of 15-19-year-olds had already had at least one child (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2016).

Overall, age specific fertility among 15 to 19-year-olds has declined from 94 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 in the 2011-12 MICS to 76 in the 2015 Population and Housing Census. In the 2011-12 survey, age specific fertility was highest in Phongsaly and Bokor provinces (145 and 149 respectively), and among the Hmong-Mien (161). Girls with no education had much higher birth rates (190) than those with lower secondary and above (85 and below). The poorest adolescents had nearly twice the birth rate of middle-income adolescents (183 versus 96). The average age of first birth among 15 to 19-year-olds who had given birth was very low at 16.6 years. Nineteen percent of women had given birth by the age of 18 (Ministry of Health, (2012), Lao PDR Social Indicators Survey, 2011-12.) The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) was 206 deaths per 100,000 live births, down from 405 in 2006. MMR was higher among women aged 15 to 19, (190 per 100,000 live births) compared to 178 per 100,000 live births for women aged 20-24 (2015 Population and Housing Census).

The population is 65 percent Buddhist. The legal age to marry is 18 for both males and females, but the Family Law of 1990 states that the age can be lowered to 15 “in special and necessary cases”. The Penal Code of 1989 specifies that engaging in sexual intercourse with a girl or boy under 15 years of age will be punished by imprisonment and a fine (United Nations Statistics Division, accessed 2017).

Fifty-six percent of women aged 15 to 19 believed a man has the right to beat his wife for at least one reason, most commonly that she neglects the children (44.2 percent) or goes out without telling him (28.9 percent). The percentage of women who justified wife beating was higher in all categories than among men.
MYANMAR
COUNTRY DATA PROFILE

Population: 53.4 million
Population Under Age 15: 28 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 7.4 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 301,320
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: Data not available
• Married before age 18: Data not available
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 51; Females 52
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 36 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: 22.5 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first birth: 24.7 among women aged 25-49
Population Reference Bureau; DHS 2015-2016; Girls Not Brides website; UNICEF MICS data.

Key influences on child marriage in Myanmar are the country’s cultural isolation, the non-sacramental transition to marriage, and a focus on love marriage. Among young women aged 15 to 19 in Myanmar, 7.4 percent were currently married and 1.1 percent were married by the age of 15. More girls and young women in rural areas (8.4 percent) were married than girls in urban areas (5.1 percent). The highest rate of early marriage was found in Shan (East), at 22.3 percent. Prevalence of early marriage was also high in Shan (North) and Shan (South), at 13.7 percent and 11.2 percent, respectively. The lowest rate was found in Sagaing at 4.7 percent (Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, 2011).

Median age at first marriage for women aged 25 to 49 was 22.1. Nineteen percent of women aged 20 to 49 were married before the age of 18, and 3.4 percent were married before the age of 15. On aggregate, the median age of marriage was above 20 years of age in all states/regions and among urban and rural residents. The World Policy Analysis Data Center does not provide a legal or minimum age of marriage for Myanmar.

The median age at first sexual intercourse was 22.5, slightly higher than the mean age of marriage, indicating that nearly all intercourse takes place within marriage. Marriage among girls in the poorest quintile was about twice as high compared to those in the richest quintile (9 percent versus 4.3 percent). Seven percent of women gave birth before the age of 18, but 18 percent had begun childbearing by the age of 19. Nineteen percent of those who had never been to school had begun childbearing as compared to 11 percent of those with primary and 3 percent of those with secondary schooling. Among the poorest quintile, 9 percent had begun childbearing compared to 3 percent among the wealthiest quintile. Adolescent childbearing was highest in Kachin, Chin and Shan States, suggesting that these states might be a focus for efforts to delay marriage.

The percentage of secondary school-aged children who were enrolled in secondary school was 77 percent in urban areas and 52 percent in rural areas, but overall the secondary school enrolment ratio was barely above 50 percent for both males and females. Among 15 to 19-year-olds, 7 percent had no education, 12.3 percent had some primary education and less than 15 percent had completed secondary education and above. Girls with secondary or higher education were less likely to be married than those with only primary education: 5.2 percent versus 12.4 percent. Educational levels were by far the lowest in Shan (43.1 percent had no schooling). About 88 percent of all women could read. Among 15 to 19-year-old women, 24.3 percent had no exposure to mass media and 10 percent with no education could not read. Myanmar has the second highest prevalence of HIV in Southeast Asia, after Thailand (www.avert.org). While female youth are not currently among the key populations at risk, the overall low level of education and access to prevention information increases their vulnerability. Among 15 to 19-year-old women, 54 percent were employed, mainly in unskilled manual labour (37.3 percent), sales and services (21.4 percent), and agriculture (17.5 percent) (Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and Ministry of Health, 2011). Among married women aged 15 to 49, 16.3 percent had experienced physical or sexual violence perpetrated by a husband or partner (DHS 2015-16).
NEPAL
COUNTRY DATA PROFILE

Population: 29.4 million
Population Under Age 15: 31 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 37 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 396,000
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: 10 percent
• Married before age 18: 37 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 67; Females 72
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 71 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: 17.7 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first marriage: 18.9 among women aged 20-24
Median age at first birth: 20.2 among women aged 25-49
Sources: World Population Data Sheet 2017, Population Reference Bureau; 2011 DHS; Girls Not Brides website; UNICEF MICS data.

Adolescents aged 10 to 19 comprised 24 percent of the population in Nepal (DHS 2013). The legal age of marriage is 18 with a guardian’s consent, and 20 without such consent. According to the 2014 MICS, 10 percent of women aged 20 to 24 were married by the age of 15, a decline from 14 percent in 1996. Nearly half of all women married below the age of 18. Among 15 to 19-year-olds, 37 percent were married, and among 20 to 24-year-olds, 62.3 percent were married. Among rural residents, 92.9 percent of 15 to 24-year-old women were married. Child marriage was highest in the Terai and in the Central region, and geographic isolation and caste both play important roles in contributing to child marriage.

The median age at marriage has risen by 1.3 years over 15 years and is currently 17.7 among women aged 20 to 24 and 17.3 among women aged 25 to 49, suggesting that younger women are marrying slightly later than older cohorts. Eighty-four percent of women aged 15 to 24 are literate, but nearly a third of adolescents (32 percent) leave school in order to marry (Wodon, Nguyen, Yedan et al, 2017).

Figure 2.10 Trends in age at marriage in Nepal, 1996-2011

Sources: Successive DHSs and MICSs; UNICEF.
Nearly all sexual activity and childbearing takes place within marriage in Nepal. By the age of 19, a third of Nepalese women had begun childbearing (DHS 2013). Thirty percent had a live birth and 5 percent were pregnant. Adolescent births were twice as high in rural areas than in urban areas, but fairly equally distributed among mountain, hill and terai zones. Adolescent childbearing was highest by far in State 2 of 7 States, (27 percent), and lowest in State 3, (10 percent). The unmet need for family planning was highest among married women aged 15 to 19 at 35 percent.

Adolescent childbearing was highest among young women with no education, 32.6 percent, compared to 7.2 percent among those with secondary or higher education (DHS 2013). By income, adolescent childbearing was higher among the middle-income wealth quintile, 21.8 percent, than among the lowest and second lowest wealth quintiles (19.5 percent and 19.8 percent, respectively). Among the wealthiest quintile, 5.9 percent of adolescents had begun childbearing. Risk factors for maternal and infant mortality included high levels of anaemia among women aged 15 to 19 at 43.6 percent.

The Government of Nepal held a national “Girl Summit” in 2016, pledging to end child marriage by 2030 as part of its commitment to the global Sustainable Development Goals. With partners, including the United Nations and NGOs, it developed a National Strategy to End Child Marriage, which has yet to be implemented (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

A detailed study of the perceived advantages and harms of child marriage among lower caste rural girls in remote areas provides rich data on the push and pull factors influencing parents’ decisions to marry them (Karim et al, 2016). It also shows the role that Nepal’s remote geography plays in pushing parents to marry daughters when potential grooms present themselves, as they are uncertain of when a comparable spouse might be available (this is discussed in more detail later in this report).

### Population

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<td>207.774 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Under Age 15</td>
<td>35 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls aged 15-19 currently</td>
<td>14 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19</td>
<td>1,236,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of women aged 20-24 who</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Married before age 15</td>
<td>3 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Married before age 18</td>
<td>27 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males</td>
<td>49;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Fertility Rate</td>
<td>44 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age at first intercourse</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age at first birth</td>
<td>22.2 among women aged 25-49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As in other parts of South Asia, family connections and honour play important roles in driving child marriage in Pakistan. The median age of marriage in Pakistan has risen less than a year over more than twenty years, from 18.6 in the 1990/91 DHS to 19.5 in the 2012/13 DHS. Three percent of girls aged 20 to 24 had married by the age of 15 and 21 percent by the age of 18. The national legal minimum age of marriage is 16, with and without parental consent (except in Sindh province where the legal age of marriage is 18 for girls and boys). This is the lowest legal age among the countries included in this review (although Bangladesh has considered lowering the minimum age at marriage from 18 to 16).
Two Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys were conducted in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab in 2014. In Sindh, early marriage was higher than for the country as a whole: 16.3 percent of young women aged 15–19 were currently married. Among women aged 15 to 49, 9.3 percent had married by the age of 15 and 31.2 percent had married by the age of 18. Among women aged 45 to 49, 17.5 percent had married before the age of 15, compared with 4 percent of women in the 15–19 year age group, indicating that very early marriage is declining, most likely as a consequence of the expansion of education and changes in attitudes towards very early marriage. Among married women aged 15 to 19, 12.4 percent had a spouse who was ten or more years their senior.

The province of Sindh passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2014, becoming the first province to do so. The Act criminalizes marriages to children under the age of 16. The legal age of marriage is 18 for men and 16 for women and violators face imprisonment for up to a month, a fine of 1,000 rupees ($9.90), or both. Although many cases have been filed, prosecutions have been limited. In 2016, Sindh also became the first province to pass legislation for the registration of Hindu and other-non-Muslim marriages. This was a response to reported forced marriages in Sindh. The adolescent birth rate for married women aged 15–19 in Sindh was 56. Ten percent of women aged 20–24 gave birth before the age of 18. More than half (52.3 percent) of women aged 15 to 24 were literate (Pakistan 2014 MIC, Sindh).

In the Punjab, 9.2 percent of women aged 15 to 19 were currently married. Of these, 18.8 percent had a spouse ten or more years their senior. In the Punjab, the total fertility rate was 3.5; the contraceptive prevalence rate for women aged 15–49 was 39 percent; and 5.2 percent of women aged 15–49 were married before the age of 15, while 21 percent were married before the age of 18. The adolescent birth rate was 34. Twelve percent of women aged 20–24 had a live birth before the age of 18. Thirty percent of all births were of a low-birth weight. The infant mortality rate was 75. Stunting was highly prevalent among children: one-third of all children below the age of five were moderately or severely stunted and an equal percentage were underweight. Literacy among 15 to 24-year-olds was 67 percent, but only 24 percent of children of secondary school age were currently attending secondary school (Bureau of Statistics Punjab, 2016).

The Punjab provincial assembly passed a law in March 2015 increasing the penalties for parents and clerics who assisted in marriages between children, although the law left unchanged the legal minimum age for adolescents to marry at 16 (Library of Congress, Global Legal Monitor. Pakistan).

Pakistan has one of the highest rates of consanguineous marriages in the region. Such marriages are often preferred and take place when the bride is a child. There is limited consultation with the girl. Cousin marriages are associated with adverse maternal and child health outcomes including stillbirths and miscarriages as well as greater risks of termination (Omar, Farook and Jabeen, 2016).

Early and forced marriages, including treating girls as chattels to settle disputes and resolve debts, continue, despite the 2011 Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Amendment Act, which criminalizes giving a woman in marriage to settle a civil or criminal dispute, or coercing or compelling a woman by any means to enter into a marriage. In 2016, the National Assembly Standing Committee on Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony rejected an effort to amend the definition of “child” in the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 from 18 for males and 16 for females to 18 for both sexes. Pressure from Muslim clerics and particularly the Council of Islamic Ideology were believed to be the reason for the withdrawal of the bill.
THE PHILIPPINES
COUNTRY DATA PROFILE

Population: 105 million
Population Under Age 15: 32 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 10 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 496,000
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
- Married before age 15: 2 percent
- Married before age 18: 15 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 84; Females 93
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 57 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: 21.5 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first birth: 23.5 among women aged 25-49

Poverty and low levels of education are important factors contributing to the practice of CEFM in the Philippines and to rendering girls vulnerable to exploitative marriage schemes. In a 2013 visit to the Philippines, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons stated that child and forced marriage in the Philippines is closely linked to the trafficking and sale of children. Girls and young women are trafficked domestically and internationally for domestic work and sexual exploitation, and mail-order bride services and “sponsorship” play an important role in supporting and concealing this exploitation. When marriages take place between a Filipina girl and a foreign man, the wedding ceremonies are held in the Philippines so that the husband can be eligible for a spouse visa.

Median age at marriage has remained relatively high and stable from the 1993 DHS (21.6) to the most recent DHS 2013 at 22.3. Fifteen percent of women aged 25 to 49 were married by the age of 18.

The recent DHS data showed that 2 percent of girls aged 20 to 24 married before age 15 and 15 percent married before age 18. Urban women married on average two years later than rural women, (23.1 percent versus 21.5 percent). The age at first sexual intercourse for women aged 25-49 was 21.5 years, eight months lower than the median age of marriage. This difference is more significant than in most South and Southeast Asian countries studied (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014).

The legal minimum age for marriage for both sexes is 18: anyone below 21 must have parental consent. Under Muslim customary law, Muslim boys may marry at 15 and Muslim girls may marry when they reach puberty. There is some evidence of early forced/arranged marriage among indigenous peoples in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Save the Children, 2016, Child Rights Situation Analysis in ARMM; UNICEF, 2016, Participatory Research with IPs in ARMM a report that reviews previous studies of violence against children).

Girls who marry young face challenges in preventing early, unintended pregnancies. Ten percent of girls aged 15-19 had begun childbearing: 8 percent were already mothers and 2 percent were pregnant with their first child (DHS 2013). The adolescent birth rate was 57 and most births took place within marriage. Infant mortality among children whose mothers were under age 20 was about 30 percent higher than for mothers aged 20 to 39. About 75 percent of mothers under 20 had a skilled attendant present at birth.

Among women aged 15-19, 13.8 percent agreed with one or more circumstances in which a husband was justified in beating his wife. About 22 percent...
of married women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence since age 15. Women aged 15-19 had the highest proportion of women who had experienced violence in the last 12 months (8 percent). However, this was not broken down by marital status (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014).

According to the December 2015 Human Development Report, the maternal mortality rate was 120 per 100,000 live births. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) attributed the high rate of maternal deaths to inadequate access to reproductive health services. As amended by the Supreme Court in 2014, the 2012 Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act allows practitioners to deny reproductive health (RH) services based on personal or religious beliefs, requires spousal consent for women to obtain RH care and requires minors to have parental consent. Private health care facilities are not required to provide access to family planning. In September, 2016, the Supreme Court sustained its June 2015 temporary restraining order preventing the Department of Health (DoH) from procuring, selling, distributing, administering, or promoting specific hormonal contraceptives. Under President Duterte, who supports family planning for poverty reduction, the 2017 family planning budget will increase two-fold over the current budget (U.S. Department of State, 2016).

SRI LANKA
COUNTRY DATA PROFILE

Population: 21.4 million
Population Under Age 15: 25 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 9 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 72,576
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: 2 percent
• Married before age 18: 12 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 97; Females 102
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 15 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Age at first intercourse: Data not available
Median age at first marriage: 23.2 among women aged 25-49
Mean age at first birth: 26 (2007)

Sri Lanka’s DHS of 2006 is not in the public domain, while results from the 2016 DHS are pending. Since 1987, when an earlier DHS survey found that 3.4 percent of young women aged 20 to 24 married below age 15 and 24.4 before age 18, child marriages by 2000 had declined to 1.3 percent of marriages among girls below the age of 15 and 19.7 among adolescents aged 15 to 19. The median age of marriage for all women was 23.2 in 2007, and 9 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 were married. The Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs has conducted programmes in many districts to educate the public at the village level on the health and social complications that may result from early marriage. Women in Sri Lanka enjoy a comparatively high status and child marriage is lower in the country, certainly compared to its South Asian neighbours.

A case study suggests that early marriage and cohabitation in Sri Lanka more often results from sexual relations between teenaged girls and adult men, leading to pregnancy, rather than to arranged marriage (Goonesekere and Amarasinghe, 2013). This was based on a small sample, there is no prevalence data. Though young women in Sri Lanka are better educated and have greater professional engagement and mobility than many of their peers in the region; they are vulnerable to non-consensual relationships with men; the unintended consequence of pregnancy then generates family pressure for girls to marry. The authors concluded that early marriage is often entered not for reasons of tradition, but rather reflects an attempt to conform to normative standards dictating that girls who engage in sex should be married.

Sex with a girl under age 12 is considered statutory rape for Muslims, while for non-Muslims, the age of statutory rape is 16. The legal age of marriage for non-Muslims is 18. An article in The Economist reported:

Some conservative Muslims say the Koran permits child marriage. They insist that Muslims must continue to be exempt from secular family law. A qazi in Colombo told researchers that girls had to be married between 15 and 17 because their “value” decreases as they get older. Some present child marriage as a way to make teenage pregnancy less of a problem (The Economist June 15, 2017).

There is no minimum age of marriage for Muslims. The researchers found it difficult to obtain information about early marriage or statutory rape in the Muslim community, and thus this study was only conducted in non-Muslim areas. Most people were aware of the legal age at marriage, but there was some confusion about whether children under age 18 could marry with parental consent. Incidences of early marriage or cohabitation are inconsistently reported to the police and to Probation and Child Care Services. Some young couples who want to marry before age 18 lie about their ages or cohabitate until they are old enough to marry. Parents consent to these arrangements to save the girl’s honour. There is little evidence of forced marriage. Early marriage and statutory rape are mainly viewed from a moral perspective rather than as a violation of child rights (Goonesekere and Amarasinghe, 2013).
Population: 66.1 million
Population Under Age 15: 18 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 14.1 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 742,720
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
• Married before age 15: 4 percent
• Married before age 18: 22 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 133; Females 126
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 51 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: Data not available
Mean age at first birth: 23 (2009)

The 2015-16 Thailand MICS showed that 14.1 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 were currently married (National Statistical Office and UNICEF, 2016). Among 20 to 24-year-olds, 21.3 percent of women and 8 percent of men married before the age of 18. In the North and Northeast, a higher percentage of women aged 15 to 19 were currently married (17.7 percent) than in Bangkok and the South. Urban and rural differences were not great (13.4 percent versus 14.7 percent), but almost half (46.6 percent) of women aged 15-19 with a primary level education were currently married, while 15.7 percent of women with no education, 13.5 percent of women with secondary education and 1.4 percent of women with higher education were currently married. A girl in the poorest quintile was almost ten times more likely to be married than a girl in the richest quintile.

The proportion of women married or in union by the ages of 15 and 18 has not varied significantly over time: among women aged 45-49, 4 percent were first married by the age of 15 while among today’s 15-19 year-olds, 4.4 percent of women were married before the age of 15. The percentage of women married before the age of 18 among various age cohorts is also similar.

The minimum legal age for marriage for both sexes is 17 years; anyone younger than 20 years requires parental consent to marry. A court may grant permission for children to marry between 15 and 16 years. Islamic committees have joined government agencies in seeking to raise awareness and prevent child marriage under Islamic tradition. Some civil society organizations have observed that early and forced marriages between student teenagers who become pregnant, a practice to “save face” and protect the baby’s legal status, appear to be increasing as the country’s teenage pregnancy rate has increased (Equality Now, 2014). Thailand has comparatively high levels of premarital sex compared to some other countries in the region.

The literacy rate for women aged 20-24 is 95 percent. The secondary school enrolment ratio of greater than 100 percent for both males and females suggests not only universal secondary schooling, but that a significant proportion of students are older or younger than the official or typical ages of those grades (World Bank, 2017).

Thai women are less likely than women in most Asian countries to believe that spousal violence is justified. Nine percent of women aged 15 to 19 believed a husband was justified in beating his wife for at least one of five reasons (National Statistical Office and United Nations Children’s Fund, 2016).

Thailand has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in Southeast Asia. While its HIV epidemic is declining, new HIV infections are rising among young people under the age of 25, who are found to have less knowledge of HIV prevention than those over the age of 25 (www.avert.org).
Population: 1.3 million
Population Under Age 15: 44 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 8 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 4,648
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
- Married before age 15: 3 percent
- Married before age 18: 19 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Males 74; Females 80
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 47 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: 20.9 among women aged 25-49
Median age at first birth: 22.4 among women aged 25-49

The median age at marriage for 15 to 49-year-old women was 20.9, as was the median age at first sexual intercourse among women aged 25 to 49. There was little difference between urban and rural age at marriage. Median age of marriage among women currently aged 25 to 29 was lowest in Oecussi (18.8) and Covalima (18.9) and above 19 in all other districts. Eight percent of girls and 0.4 percent of boys aged 15 to 19 were currently married. Three percent of girls had married by the age of 15 and 19 percent by the age of 18. Even among the lowest education and wealth quintiles, the median age of marriage was above 19.

The unmet need for family planning among 15 to 19-year-olds was 27 percent (National Statistics Directorate of Timor-Leste, 2010). Maternal mortality was high in 2010 at 380 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Less than one in four mothers under 20 delivered in a health facility and only 33 percent of infants were delivered by a skilled birth attendant. Neonatal, infant and child mortality were all highest for children of mothers who were less than 20 years old at the time of birth compared to all other age groups. Fifty percent of all children were stunted and this percentage had increased since an earlier survey.

Although a small country, 45 percent of the population is under the age of 15, and a significant number of girls are at risk of child marriage. According to law, a marriage cannot be registered until the younger spouse is at least age 16, but the civil code recognizes cultural, religious and civil marriages. Cultural pressure to marry, especially if a girl becomes pregnant, is strong. Underage couples cannot officially marry but are married de facto once they have children together. Forced marriage is rare (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

The turbulent history of Timor-Leste appears to have contributed to a normalization of violence of all forms, and gender-based violence is very common. According to a recent study by the Asia Foundation, 51 percent of ever-partnered girls aged 15 to 19 had experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence in the last 12 months, and 14 percent of women aged 15 to 49 had been raped by someone other than their partner (Abbas and Ria, 2016). Among all women aged 15 to 19, 81 percent agreed that a husband was justified in beating his wife for at least one reason. Thirty-five percent believed a wife was not justified in refusing sex with her husband even if he had a sexually transmitted infection (National Statistics Directorate Timor-Leste, 2010).
Population: 71 million
Population Under Age 15: 24 percent
Girls aged 15-19 currently married: 10.3 percent
Number of 20-24-year-olds married by age 19: 396,500
Percent of women aged 20-24 who:
  • Married before age 15: 1 percent
  • Married before age 18: 11 percent
Secondary School Enrollment Ratio: Data not available - see below
Adolescent Fertility Rate: 34 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19
Median age at first intercourse: 21.2 among women aged 25-49
Mean age at first birth: 22.5 (2002)
Sources: World Population Data Sheet 2017; Population Reference Bureau; 2014 MICS*; AIS 2005; UNESCO; Girls Not Brides website; UNICEF MICS data.

The mean age of marriage was 21.2. The legal age of marriage is 18 for girls and 20 for boys. The law criminalizes organizing or entering into marriage with an underage person (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). Ten (10.3) percent of girls aged 15 to 19 were currently married, 5.8 percent to a spouse ten or more years their senior. Less than 1 percent (0.9 percent) of women aged 15-49 years were first married or in union before the age of 15, while 11.2 percent of women aged 20-49 were married before the age of 18.

The difference in urban and rural child marriage was not as large as in some countries (7.4 percent in urban areas versus 11.7 percent in rural areas).

However, 26.0 percent of women aged 15-19 from the poorest households versus 2.3 percent of those from the richest households were married by the age of 18. Child marriage was most prevalent in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas where 22.6 percent of 15 to 19-year-olds were currently married, and the Central Highlands, where 14.8 percent were married.

The adolescent birth rate has declined from 45 in the most recent DHS to 34 in the 2014 MICS. The percentage of women aged 15-24 who had a live birth before the age of 18 was less than 5 percent.

Among women aged 15-49, 28.2 percent agreed with at least one reason where a man was justified in beating his wife (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). The age of consent for sex is 18 and penalties for sex with minors range from five to ten years in prison. The most recent sex ratio is of concern: 113 male births per 100 female births. The government has a rather strict population policy aimed at no more than two births per woman without permission, but the policy does not have penalties for violators.

Education in Vietnam is free and compulsory up to the age of 14 (US Department of State, 2017). Literacy among 15 to 24-year-olds is 96.5 per cent and 83.9 percent of children of secondary school age are currently attending secondary school, a substantial increase over the last decade. Three in ten married girls are in the lowest educational category with only primary education.
2.3 A DISCUSSION OF TRENDS IN THE REGION

As the data illustrates above, levels of child marriage in the Asia region varied dramatically between countries, ranging from 75 percent among young women in Bangladesh to 14 percent among young women in Vietnam; and from 5 percent among young men in Timor-Leste, Vietnam and Indonesia to 19 percent among young men in Nepal (DHS 2009-2016, most recent for each country). It may be possible, however, to highlight some ways in which the Asia region as a whole differs from other parts of the world.

- Marriage in the region tends to precede sexual activity, especially for young women; this is in contrast with Africa and Latin America, and as many as 156 million men live in the region today who married as children as shown in table 2.4 (UNICEF global databases, 2016, based on DHS and MICS, 2007-2014). Nepal and Laos ranked among the top countries where at least 10 percent of boys married as children. There is very little information on their experiences (one exception is some of the research emerging from CARE’s Tipping Point project in Nepal).
- In other parts of the world child marriage has diminished significantly before the age of 15. Bangladesh, at least, continues to have considerable proportions of young women marrying before the age of 16. There seems to be an East Asian and a South Asian pattern, with age at marriage slow to go beyond 18 in South Asia, while it has increased to 19 and into the early 20s in East Asia.

A review of the health consequences of child marriage in Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan (Marphatia et al 2017) found that under-age marriage is occurring at a slightly older age range, but still below 18 years. Between 1991 and 2007, the overall prevalence of marriage under 18 years of age for women aged 20-24 decreased in these countries, largely as a consequence of the fewer marriages of girls below 15 years. Demographic Health Survey data show that there has been little change in the prevalence of marriage at ages 16 and 17. As Marphatia and her colleagues note, “These patterns are important to recognize because the predictors and consequences of marriage in these different age groups are likely to be different.”

The existence of data on child marriage and the validity of this data are an issue in the region. Few countries in the region have robust and reliable Management Information Systems, and Civil Registration and Vital Statistics are often incomplete or inconsistent. As a consequence, it is not always possible to analyse the practice of child marriage as it relates to early sexual activity and pregnancy. Tables 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 illustrate the limited data available on early intercourse and early birth, independent of marital status.

Data on sexual initiation are hard to come by, and data on non-marital childbearing with its higher rates of associated terminations are even harder to obtain, especially for countries where termination is illegal. One global analysis of early pregnancy and abortion does not include any of the 14 countries included in this review (Sedgh et al 2015). A recent study of the proportion of 15-year-old students who had ever had sexual intercourse (Woog and Kågesten 2017) found that the figure was highest in Latin America, followed by Africa, and the Western Pacific excluding Samoa. The researchers found that the proportion of 13 to 15 year old students reporting sexual intercourse in the four Southeast Asian countries with data were 0.5 per cent of males and 0.2 percent of females in Indonesia; 19 percent of males and 11 percent of females in Thailand, 14 percent of males and 4 percent of females in Bangladesh, and 4 percent for both sexes in Vietnam.

Table 2.4 Percentage of men married by age 18 among ever-married men currently aged 25-49

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of men married by 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICF International; DHS and MICS 2009-16; Laos age range 20-49; Thailand age range 20-24.

Data for China and Sri Lanka are not available in this data source.

Table 2.5 Percentage of students aged 13-15 who reported ever having sexual intercourse, by gender, according to developing region and country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In describing overall trends in marital timing in the Asia-Pacific region, Farahani et al (2012) identified three distinct patterns of age at marriage and never-marriage: In Japan and Australia, there has been a sharp rise in both age at marriage and in never-marriage over the past four decades. In Iran, Thailand, Malaysia, Azerbaijan and New Zealand, age at marriage has experienced a small increase and non-marriage some increase over the same period. In a third set of countries, including China, India and Tajikistan, a third pattern is observed where there has been a minimal change in the age at marriage and non-marriage. Given the legacy of China’s one-child policy, however, there are large numbers of men in China who will never marry; this is not the case in India (Farahani et al, 2012).

Sexual debut before the age of 15 was more common in South and Southeast Asia than in East or Central Asia, where it was less than 1 percent of girls in the countries surveyed. Bangladesh and India stand out as having 15 percent and 8 percent respectively of girls aged 15 to 19 who had sexual intercourse before the age of 15, (table 2.5); sexual debut is almost exclusively within marriage in these countries. Sexual debut varied much more by residence and wealth in India than in Bangladesh. In Southeast Asia, the highest percentage of girls who had initiated sexual intercourse before the age of 15 was in Laos (5.2 percent of girls aged 15 to 19) and, as in India, this varied greatly by residence and wealth. Among the wealthiest quintile, age of sexual debut in India was on a par with other East and Central Asian countries.

### Table 2.6 Proportion of 15-19-year-old females who have ever had sexual intercourse before age 15, by residence and wealth, according to developing region, subregion and country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region, subregion and country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Wealth quintile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia (2013-2014)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan (2010-2011)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan Republic (2014)</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan (2012)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan (2006)</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan (2006)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan (2010-2011)</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh (2014)*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan (2010)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India (2005-2006)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives (2009)*</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal (2014)</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan (2012-2013)*</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka (2006-2007)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia (2014)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia (2012)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos (2011-2012)</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines (2013)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand (2012-2013)</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste (2009-2010)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam (2013-2014)</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: (Woog and Kagesten, 2017) *Sample consists of ever-married women (those who are currently married, widowed or divorced/separated) only; never-married women were not surveyed. Data have been adjusted to represent all women in the age group by using household survey data to represent both ever-married and never-married women. This is not the case for Sri Lanka where data are only available from country reports where data have not been adjusted. Notes: Data are from the most recent survey available (years denoted parenthetically), u=unavailable. Sources: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Republic, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. Sri Lanka, Thailand - DHS country reports (survey data unavailable). All other countries, most recent DHS surveys.
Early childbearing is most risky for mothers and infants when the mother is very young. Births before the age of 15 were quite rare in all Asian countries profiled as illustrated in table 2.6 with the exception of Bangladesh, where 4.4 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 had given birth by the age of 15. Only among the wealthiest 20 percent in Bangladesh did this percentage fall below 2 percent. As shown earlier, a high percentage of girls in many of these countries had given birth by the age of 18.

Table 2.7 Proportion of 15-19-year-old females experiencing a birth before age 15, by residence and wealth, according to developing region, subregion and country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region, subregion and country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Wealth quintile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia (2013-2014)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Central Asia                 |       |           |       |        |        |        |        |         |
| Kazakhstan (2010-2011)       | 0     | 0         | 0     | 0      | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0        |
| Kyrgyzstan Republic (2014)  | 0.1   | 0.1       | 0     | 0      | 0       | 0.3     | 0       | 0        |
| Tajikistan (2012)           | 0.1   | 0.1       | 0     | 0      | 0.3     | 0       | 0       | 0        |
| Turkmenistan (2006)         | 0     | 0         | 0     | 0      | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0        |
| Uzbekistan (2006)           | 0.1   | 0         | 0.2   | 0      | 0.2     | 0       | 0       | 0        |

| Southern Asia                |       |           |       |        |        |        |        |         |
| Afghanistan (2010-2011)      | 1.6   | 1.9       | 0.2   | 3.7    | 1.7    | 1.6    | 1.1    | 0.4      |
| Bangladesh (2014)*           | 4.4   | 4.7       | 3.6   | 6      | 5.9    | 4.1    | 3.8    | 1.6      |
| Bhutan (2010)                | 0.5   | 0.7       | 0.2   | 1.6    | 0.1    | 1.5    | 0      | 0        |
| India (2005-2006)            | 1.2   | 1.4       | 0.5   | 2.6    | 1.5    | 1.2    | 0.6    | 0.1      |
| Maldives (2009)*             | 0     | 0         | 0     | 0      | 0.3    | 0      | 0      | 0        |
| Nepal (2014)                 | 0.5   | 0.6       | 0.4   | 0.6    | 0.2    | 1.2    | 0.4    | 0.3      |
| Pakistan (2012-2013)*        | 0.1   | 0.1       | 0.3   | 0.2    | 0.2    | 0      | 0.2    | 0        |
| Sri Lanka (2006-2007)        | 0.1   | u         | u     | u      | u      | u      | u      | u        |

| Southeast Asia               |       |           |       |        |        |        |        |         |
| Cambodia (2014)              | 0.2   | 0.2       | 0.1   | 0.3    | 0.6    | 0      | 0.1    | 0        |
| Indonesia (2012)             | 0.3   | 0.4       | 0.2   | 0.9    | 0.3    | 0      | 0      | 0.3      |
| Laos (2011-2012)             | 1.2   | 1.5       | 0.4   | 3.7    | 1.8    | 1.2    | 0      | 0        |
| Philippines (2013)           | 0.4   | 0.6       | 0.3   | 1.2    | 0.3    | 0.4    | 0.2    | 0.1      |
| Thailand (2012-2013)         | 0.3   | 0.4       | 0.2   | 0.1    | 0.9    | 0.3    | 0.2    | 0        |
| Timor-Leste (2009-2010)      | 0.4   | 0.5       | 0.1   | 0.5    | 0.5    | 1      | 0      | 0        |
| Viet Nam (2013-2014)         | 0.2   | 0.3       | 0     | 0.9    | 0      | 0      | 0      | 0        |

Source: [Woog and Kagesten, 2017] *Sample consists of ever-married women (those who are currently married, widowed or divorced/separated) only; never-married women were not surveyed. Data have been adjusted to represent all women in the age-group by using household survey data to represent both ever-married and never-married women. This is not the case for Sri Lanka where data are only available from country reports where data have not been adjusted. Notes: Data are from the most recent survey available (years denoted parenthetically). u=unavailable. Sources: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Republic, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. Sri Lanka and Thailand - DHS country reports (survey data unavailable). All other countries - Demographic and Health Surveys.
To gain an understanding of the causes of child, early and forced marriage in Asia, the report draws from an analytical review of literature from these countries over the past 10 to 15 years. It describes broad categories of causes/drivers and illustrates these in the various country settings. The report also identifies gaps in some of the countries, as this type of analysis is not possible systematically across the focus countries.

The causes of child, early and forced marriage are often related to one another, with, for example, gender inequality shaping an intense concern with the management of girls’ sexuality and limiting girls’ choices and putting pressure on their families, especially poor families, to marry them early. The causes of child marriage vary across settings, but it would be unusual to find a cause in one setting that is not reflected in some way in the causes of the practice elsewhere. Drawing from earlier research by Greene (2014) and Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindemans (2014), a typology of reasons was developed for marrying girls as children. This next section on the causes of child, early and forced marriage is organized around these seven drivers of the practice.

1. Gender inequality and the subordination of girls.
2. A view of girls that prioritizes their sexual and reproductive roles.
3. Family expectations and traditions that focus on family interests and alignments.
4. Economic scarcity and the pressures this places on families to marry their daughters.
5. The impact of conflict and instability on family decision-making regarding marriage.
6. A lack of alternatives for girls apart from marriage.
7. A weak legal framework, a lack of enforcement of laws, and plural legal systems.

These causes of child marriage are interrelated but have been separated for the purposes of this analysis.
3.1 GENDER INEQUALITY AND THE SUBORDINATION OF GIRLS

Gender inequality, with all of its limited vision of girls and their prospects, the constraints it places on girl’s access to information and services and the impediments it poses to the realization of their rights subordinates them to the wishes of others, deprives them of important human capital investments and drives them into relationships in which they lack control. Subrahmanian (2008) in a study of child marriage among rural women in India argues that early marriage is part of the wider practice of excluding females, through their subordination to men and deprivation of equal access to social and material resources. Through child marriage, girls and women are systematically deprived of educational, financial and social resources and prevented from realizing their rights and accessing their entitlements (Lane 2011).

An interest in the connection between social norms and gender inequality has provided important insights into the lives of girls in recent years. A close study of these connections has permitted researchers and practitioners to pick apart specific aspects of gendered social norms and explain how they are supported by other factors and conditions in girls’ lives, including economic opportunities, services and even geography (Vaitla et al, 2017).

One factor at the intersection of gender inequality and child marriage is a value for docility and a focus on domestic roles. These are qualities valued by men, as they for their part tend to be socialized to take the lead in household decision-making and to be concerned with roles and relationships beyond the walls of the home. The characteristics viewed as appropriate for girls and young women focus on their subordination and their domestic roles. Many people believe girls should be good wives and mothers, focusing on others and putting their own well-being and personal development in second place. In a male-dominated society like Pakistan girls and women are largely confined to the walls of their own home, with the intention of keeping them safe and dignified as good sisters, daughters, wives and mothers.

Besides, girls’ and young women’s subordination is also valued in young women as they are being considered by potential grooms and their families who tend to prefer young, malleable brides. Docility as an expression of the subordination of girls and women is cultivated from childhood, making it more difficult for girls to defend their own interests, including when family discussions of marriage arise.

Different expectations often exist regarding the timing of marriage for boys and girls (Plan International and Coram Children’s Legal Centre, 2015). Figure 3.1 below shows the disparity in minimum age at marriage laws for boys and girls (Arthur et al, 2014). Of note is the concentration of countries where girls are permitted to marry at least one year before boys in the Asia region, with India and Bangladesh having laws that allow girls to marry three to four years earlier than boys.

Figure 3.1 Gender disparity in minimum age at marriage laws

Sources: Arthur et al, 2014; Analysis of data from World Policy Analysis Center; Child Marriage Database, 2013.
These laws encapsulate the normative expectation that girls should marry earlier than boys. The majority of countries where there is a significant disparity in the minimum age at marriage for males and females are found in Asia. In Indonesia, for example, the true minimum age at marriage, despite the law stating that the age of 21 is the minimum, is 16 for girls and 19 for boys (18+ Coalition, 2016). This is associated with community perceptions about women who marry at older ages, and perceptions about what women should be (perceptions that women should do most of the domestic work and gendered low expectations for women’s roles outside the home) (communication from Plan International Indonesia colleagues).

The lack of a unified movement for girls’ rights has made it difficult to advance their rights, even after decades of the women’s movement. Plan International’s ultimate commitment to girls’ rights is focused at a high level of gender transformation. It goes beyond improving specific conditions in girls’ lives and seeks to improve their social position and their value and contribute to the full realization of their rights.

A huge gap in the gender inequality literature concerns the role of men in marriage and early marriage in particular. It is men who are marrying girls, yet there is little research on this. What are their motivations and attractions? This is an important gap in understanding this practice.

3.2 A VIEW OF GIRLS THAT PRIORITIZES THEIR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE ROLES

Societies that are patriarchal – where fathers are the heads of families, and men have authority over women and children – offer girls and women little choice regarding their sexual lives. The concern with the management of girls’ sexuality and reproduction translates into social control, and a girls’ lack of choice regarding her sexuality is a core aspect of patriarchy. Despite its importance, however, development interventions aimed at gender inequality and girls and women’s rights and empowerment have largely remained silent on the subject of sexuality. To address child marriage, it is critical to address sexuality, and with it, the patterns of male dominance and female subordination that define sexual relations within the context of child, early and forced marriage (Greene et al 2017). The fact that young girls are viewed as being ready for marital sexual relationships enters them into long-term social pacts that lock them into a place of subordination to their husbands.

As a socially constructed experience, sexuality reflects gender inequalities, and the requirements for its management reinforce gender inequalities (Greene, Perlson and Hart, 2017). Social norms shape how sexuality is viewed, expressed, experienced and
constrained. Parents want their daughters to be chaste, and there is a risk that girls who grow older may lose their virginity outside of marriage, because they might have love affairs or they might be harassed.

Discriminatory social norms that value girls primarily in terms of their reproductive capacities are critical to understanding early marriage (Harper et al, 2014). Expectations about girls’ childbearing are fundamental to the pressures to marry them early. Research in Nepal has found that despite decreases in the total fertility rates in Nepal, women who marry earlier have a significantly larger total number of children over their reproductive lives (Adhikari 2010). This pattern is likely replicated in other settings; it has been said that fertility postponed is fertility foregone (Morgan 1982), and the opposite is also true: fertility begun today can lead to the fertility of tomorrow, with early starts bearing greater numbers of children.

Global research has increasingly linked female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage as manifestations of a similar concern with the management of female sexuality. One review, for example, notes that although FGM is most commonly practiced in Africa, it is also practiced in several countries included in this review: in Indonesia, and in specific ethnic groups in India, Pakistan and Thailand, for which there are no reliable data on prevalence (DFID, 2013).

Variants on the theme of chastity, as elaborated by Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindemans, 2014, include:

- Ignorance-about-chastity: Parents overestimate the risk of love affairs and harassment, in part because the consequences in socially conservative settings may be so severe for girls and their families.
- Chastity-norm: Daughters are expected to be chaste, and the slightest suggestion of premarital sex would ruin the reputation of both daughter and parents.
- Ignorance about chastity-norm: Parents overestimate the extent to which others expect them to have chaste daughters, but since this is not a topic that people can discuss freely and without judgment, it is difficult for this perception to be corrected.
- Desire and independence: Children themselves desire love and marriage (referred to as “Juliet” by Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindemans, 2014). In Sri Lanka, for example, sexual relationships, often non-consensual, take place between adolescent girls and adult men (the typical pairing in the context of patriarchal attitudes about dominance and submission), with pregnancy sometimes leading to marriage and cohabitation, rather than families arranging marriages as was historically the case (Goonesekere and Amarasuriya, 2013).
In indigenous communities in Cambodia, desire similarly drives adolescent girls’ relationships, but they are likely to pair off with adolescent boys only a year or two older than themselves (Plan Cambodia & Bregoohan Consulting, 2017).

- Fear of sexual assault: Singh and Vennam (2016) observe that, “early marriage protects girls’ marriageability, which can be destroyed by premarital sex, whether it occurs through sexual violence or through choice.” The impact of parental concern with sexual violence is corroborated by research conducted by Plan International’s Asia Regional Office (2013).

Adolescent pregnancy also plays an important role in driving child marriage in Asia. In Indonesia, for example, in the scoping survey conducted for the Yes I Do project, implemented by Plan Netherlands, along with CHOICE, Rutgers and Amref (the African Medical and Research Foundation) in December 2016, seven out of ten child marriages in Indonesia were as a result of pregnancy. This shows that adolescent pregnancy and the limited knowledge of sexual and reproductive health among girls are key factors in driving child marriage in the region. This is compounded by the lack of youth-friendly and gender-sensitive health services, which is discussed later in the report.

### 3.3 Family Expectations and Traditions

Marriage is deeply rooted in family expectations and cultural traditions, and these are often invoked as important reasons for marrying girls early. This section highlights expectations and traditions that focus on family interests and alignments, perceptions about the age at which other families are marrying their daughters, and the view that as a tradition, child marriage is more important than any limited harm it might cause to a girl. Child marriage is linked to the high value of religion and family identity as members of a given religious group, and in South Asia, the role of caste.

Typical expectations include:

- **Conciliation**: Marriages are primarily an instrument to bring families closer together rather than to make spouses happy.
- **Conformity**: All girls are getting married young therefore families must marry their daughter young. Regarding appropriate age at marriage, young women are viewed as “left over” by the age of 26 in China, for example, or much earlier in South Asia.
  - Ignorance about conformity: Parents overestimate the number of girls that are getting married young, and this translates into the impression that they must follow suit or they will “miss the bus” and lose out on opportunities to marry their girls.
- **Tradition**: Child marriage is a “custom”, a “tradition”, part of people’s “culture.” There is no doubt that marital arrangements and weddings are a moment when family traditions are expressed. But this refers to the perception that because something is a tradition, it cannot be questioned or avoided.
- **Religion**: Religion is important in the region and plays out in marriage patterns in widely divergent ways. It is referenced as a key driver in child marriage in India, Pakistan, and Nepal, for example, but is not so closely associated with marriage in Myanmar and China, in contrast. Where it plays an important role, it guides mate selection, ritual, and reflects group identity.
  - **Group identity is an expression of religious beliefs (people act in a certain way because they belong to a particular religion and might feel different from others of that faith).**
  - **Traditional practice reinforces the belief that this is how it has always been done.**
- **Ignorance about harm**: People underestimate the harm child marriage causes or disregard it because of the perceived benefits of early marriage.
- **Perception of benefits**: Most families who marry girls early can readily identify both the harms and benefits of marrying girls early and for delaying their marriages (e.g., Karim et al, 2016 in Nepal and Bangladesh). An important manifestation of this factor is the lack of control young people, including young men, often have over their own marriages, particularly in South Asia. Johnson has analysed the evolution of how children’s perspectives are valued in the changing context of Nepal (2010). In Nepal, in addition, fathers’ attitudes towards old-age care speeds up the process of bringing new wives into the household for their sons, while mothers are more reluctant to bring a young wife into the household for fear it will spoil their relationship with their son (Jennings et al, 2012).
- **Caste**: There is pressure to accept available partners, even when the girl is too young. Research in Nepal highlights the importance of caste in constraining and forcing families to accept available spouses, as the pool of eligible partners may be limited, particularly in remote rural areas (Karim et al, 2016). As a consequence of caste requirements, families jump at the chance to marry a girl, even when she is very young, in response to the availability of an appropriate prospect for marriage. Banerjee et al (2013) have written about the impact of caste on mate selection in India and observe that despite the preference to marry within caste in West Bengal, 30 percent of their sample study married outside it, indicating what is potentially an important trend.
- **Safeguard**: If (good) grooms are scarce, it is better to marry whenever a (good) possibility arises. This has been illustrated in the caste-related research referenced above but can be relevant for the population in general.

Some of the social norms literature has highlighted some very specific technical concepts regarding beliefs and expectations of relevance to child marriage. Mostly closely associated with the distinction between different kinds of beliefs and expectations and their measurement is Christina Bicchieri and colleagues. One study by Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindemans (2014) was very useful for this study and information from it can be seen at table 3.1.
This framework of norms is very interesting but seems to ignore the issue of power as the condition for inequality. Who sets the rules of the game? Usually the persons in power, with subordinate members of society playing their contributing roles. In this sense, the normative focus sidesteps the power hierarchies that shape so much of value and practice in any society.

Table 3.1 Types of beliefs regarding child marriage, with examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of belief</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factual beliefs</td>
<td>Beliefs about reality other than about people’s behaviour and thoughts</td>
<td>An older girl will not find a good husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal normative beliefs</td>
<td>Beliefs about how a person should behave</td>
<td>I should marry my daughter as soon as she reaches puberty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical expectations</td>
<td>Beliefs about what people do</td>
<td>All my neighbours marry their daughters as soon as they reach puberty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative expectations</td>
<td>Beliefs about what other people think people should do</td>
<td>My neighbours think that daughters should marry as soon as they reach puberty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindemans (2014 white paper).
3.4 ECONOMIC SCARCITY/POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES

Across the 14 countries in this study, girls in poorer families are more vulnerable to child marriage for many reasons; for example, they leave school earlier because of the costs associated with education, and limited resources are more likely to be spent on a boy’s education than a girl’s (Singh and Vennam 2016). If a girl is not attending school, parents are more likely to marry her and sometimes marry off a younger daughter along with an older sibling to avoid the costs of a separate marriage later. UNICEF, 2014b found that in India, the median age at first marriage was 19.7 years for females in the richest quintile of their sample compared to 15.4 for females in the poorest quintile. See table 3.2.

The cost benefit argument is often given as a factor in child marriage, but as Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindemans (2014) point out, most studies do not clearly define the costs and benefits, and instead point to ‘moral rules’ that shape expectations related to conforming to normative marriage age (104).

Table 3.2 Median age at first marriage by wealth quintile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Highest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2014 DHS</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2005-06 DHS</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2012 DHS</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>2014 DHS</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>2015-16 DHS</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2011 DHS</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2013 DHS</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>2012-13 DHS</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>2009-10 DHS</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Data for China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam are not available in this data source.

- Why educate?: Girls are costly to raise, and marriage means one less mouth to feed.
- Dowry: Parents have to pay higher dowries for older girls, lowering age at marriage. For very young brides in Bangladesh, dowry is low or sometimes waived entirely (Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2015). In Southeast Asian culture, the “bride price” is paid by the groom; dowry is relevant to the South Asian context only.

Environmental conditions and climate change have added additional economic pressure on families to marry their daughters early, especially poor families. CARE’s Tipping Point research in Nepal and Bangladesh documents the intense vulnerability of girls from families in flooded areas of Bangladesh and in remote mountains of Nepal (Karim et al, 2016). Research by Human Rights Watch (2015) reiterates the vulnerability of households in Bangladesh. Many marriages are driven by environmentally induced poverty. The dowry can be very low or waived altogether for very young girls, and these marriages can be sped up by environmental pressures. In several interviews, HRW was told that parents would sometimes insist on paying a dowry because they believed the transaction would increase the value accorded to their daughter and she would be treated better by her in-laws. Girls Not Brides synthesizes additional information on the impact of climate change in Bangladesh on child marriage here.
3.5 CIVIL CONFLICT/REFUGEE CIRCUMSTANCES AND UNCERTAINTY

Early marriage is often perceived by families as a protective measure and used as a community response to crisis (e.g., Myers, 2013 in Bangladesh). Fear of rape and sexual violence, of unwanted pre-marital pregnancies, of family shame and dishonour, of homelessness and hunger or starvation were all reported by parents and children as legitimate reasons for early marriage (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2016). Poverty, weak legislative frameworks and enforcement, harmful traditional practices, gender discrimination and a lack of alternative opportunities for girls (especially education) are all major drivers of early marriage that are sharpened by the fear and anxiety symptomatic of fragile contexts. As a result, parents and girls resort to early marriage as a protection against both real and perceived risks.

In Cambodia a recent study on the lingering impact of the genocide during the Khmer Rouge era suggests that children of people who were of a marriageable age at the time of the genocide and experienced the genocide intensely face disadvantages in both education and physical growth (Islam et al, 2017). However, since difficulties in grade progression have been shown to be associated with early marriage in other settings (see Mensch et al 2017), this may be an important dynamic to consider when trying to understand early marriage in the Cambodian context. The authors hypothesize that marriage markets may act to concentrate the adverse impact of conflict across generations.

3.6 A LACK OF ALTERNATIVES TO MARRIAGE

Can families envision a life for girls that does not involve marriage in childhood? The answer to this question depends, in part, on the availability of services and circumstances that make an alternative life possible. Education, employment opportunities, and public safety that make it possible for girls to access the services that are their right and entitlement are all often missing, especially in poor rural areas. In these settings, it verges on being pointless to inform people of the harms of early marriage, as they cannot foresee a successful life course for their daughters where child marriage is not the centrepiece.

When there are no good schools nearby and no jobs for women, young women may be pushed to marry earlier than they or their families might otherwise prefer (e.g., Field and Ambrus, 2008 in Bangladesh; Jensen, 2012 in India). This is partly a structural problem, partly a lack of demand for higher quality local services for girls, and partly a reflection of the constraints placed on girls in the context of gender inequality (for example a refusal to permit them the mobility to go to school in the next village). The underlying reasons leading to the lack of access to basic services should be examined here in more detail.

3.7 WEAK LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND FUNDING COMMITMENTS

Legal frameworks are fundamental for establishing a shared social expectation regarding the appropriate timing of transition to marriage. But there are many ways in which these legal frameworks may be weak.

- No laws forbid child marriage or, if they do, they are not enforced. In India, for example, child marriage has been prohibited since the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929.
- Existing laws are inconsistent. Any discussion of weak legal frameworks must include a discussion of contradictions related to statutory legislation. In Indonesia, for example, the marriage law and child protection laws do not support each other. In Indonesia the minimum age for marriage for girls is 16, and for boys it is 19, meaning that the legal framework contributes directly to supporting child marriage. In this case the law itself is part of the problem, and advocacy is needed to change the law.
- Existing laws are only weakly enforced. India provides an illustration of a situation where the laws against early marriage and dowry have been on the books for years but for a variety of reasons, they are not enforced.
- People are ignorant of the law: The laws forbidding child marriage are not known to the population.
- Co-existing and competing plural legal systems and the supremacy of customary law undermine minimum age at marriage laws. Customary law plays a key role in perpetuating child marriage (UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children Office). In addition, exceptions that give parents the right to approve marriages undermine the national minimum age at marriage; this is the case in Indonesia, for example.
- Weak birth registration impedes documentation of the age of girls and boys when they marry and undermines enforcement of the law. Only about 60 percent of births and 57 percent of marriages in Nepal are registered, for example. The government’s failure to register births and marriages undermines efforts to prevent child marriage, and one researcher refers to an “invisible generation” (Panta, 2015). In Indonesia, as another example, nine out of every ten child marriages involve girls and boys who do not have birth certificates (Plan International Australia, 2014).

The limitations of the law and policy have been analysed in this study. Beyond this, however, and even in settings where the most supportive legislation has been passed, the failure to allocate resources to ending child marriage remains a barrier.
4. CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE IN ASIA

Although many countries have not documented the negative impact of child marriage in their specific settings, this research draws from work in other settings to shed light on the consequences of child marriage in Plan International’s focus countries in Asia. (The information presented here focuses more on the lives of girls, little has been written about the impact of early marriage on the lives of boys).

4.1 MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Early marriage often leads to pregnancy and childbearing before the age of 18. In Bangladesh, nearly one in four women (24.4 percent) aged 20-24 had at least one live birth before the age of 18. Adolescent births are linked to many adverse health outcomes for both mother and infant. Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading cause of death among 15 to 19-year-old girls globally, with nearly 70,000 deaths annually (UNFPA, 2013). Across 144 countries, maternal deaths are about one third higher among adolescent mothers aged 15 to 19 (260 deaths per 100,000 live births) compared to 190 deaths per 100,000 live births among women who give birth between the ages of 20 and 24 years (Nove et al, 2014; Mendez and Victora, 2014). In terms of pregnancy-related morbidity, obstetric fistulas are more common among young, physically immature mothers. A study in Pakistan found that women with obstructed labor were more likely to be first time mothers under the age of 20. An unrepaird fistula can lead to lifetime incontinence, pain and social isolation. Ninety percent of a small sample of Pakistani women with obstetric fistula reported that it had a major impact on their lives, yet few had the knowledge or resources to seek a repair, and of those who did consult a doctor, three out of four had a failed repair (Jokhio et al, 2014).

Child marriage is also associated with poorer maternal nutrition, and higher rates of child mortality and stunting among offspring. In Nepal, the infant of a mother under the age of 18 years is 60 percent more likely to die in its first year of life than an infant born to a mother older than 19 years (Cousins, 2016). A World Bank analysis has estimated that if child marriage was eliminated globally, 2.1 million fewer child deaths and 3.6 million fewer cases of stunting would occur between 2016 and 2030, affecting an average of 140,000 children per year (Wodon, Onogoruwa and John, 2017). Table 4.1 shows that in countries such as China and Sri Lanka, where births to adolescents are rare, maternal and infant mortality are low in comparison to countries where a significant percentage of adolescents have begun childbearing (are pregnant or have given birth).
Table 4.1 Measures of sexual and reproductive health among adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of adolescents who have begun childbearing*</th>
<th>MMR/100,000</th>
<th>IMR/1,000</th>
<th>Percentage of 15-19 year-olds with unmet contraceptive need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>197</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adolescents who are pregnant or have given birth.

Source: ICF International, 2015; The DHS Program; Accessed 15/7/2017; Guttmacher Institute, 2017.

MMR: Maternal Mortality Ratio: Deaths per 100,000 live births.

IMR: Infant Mortality Rate: Deaths in the first year of life.

Unmet need for contraception: A woman wants to prevent or delay a birth by two years but is not using contraception.

4.2 VIOLENCE

While girls are often married off by parents who have the intention of protecting their daughters, physical and sexual abuse is often perpetrated against child brides by their husbands. Early and forced marriage has been described as a “reservoir” of sexual abuse and exploitation in which young married women have little or no power over how they are treated. It has been argued that marriage legitimizes acts such as non-consensual sex that would be crimes outside of marriage (ECPAT International and Plan International, 2015). Girls forced in to early marriage experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than women who marry between the ages of 20 and 24. Among Plan International countries with available data, Bangladesh has the highest percentage of married women aged 15 to 19 who have experienced physical or sexual violence committed by their husband/partner. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics’ Report on Violence against Women Survey 2015 found that 34 percent of all girls aged 10 to 14 and nearly 40 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 had been raped at least once (U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016). A study in Tamil Nadu, India found that more than half of women married before the age of 15 experienced physical violence (Singh and Anand, 2015).
There are 15-19 year-old women who have experienced physical or sexual violence by their husbands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of 15-19 year-old women who have experienced violence in marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DHS surveys.

The “violence” module used in a growing number of countries as part of the Demographic and Health Survey questions women and men about the circumstances under which a husband is “justified” in beating his wife: 1) she goes out without telling him; 2) she neglects the children; 3) she argues with him; 4) she refuses to have sex with him; and 5) she burns the food. In Bangladesh and the Philippines, women are more likely than men to believe that beating is justified in one or more of these circumstances. In the Punjab and Sindh regions of Pakistan, 49 and 40 percent of married women respectively aged 15 to 49 agreed with at least one of these reasons as a justification for wife beating. Men’s justification for wife beating is highest in Timor-Leste, where a very violent political history appears now to contribute to violence against women and children (Abbas and Ria, 2016). A recent analysis of DHS data on women aged 15-49 from Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan found that women who married at younger ages were more likely to experience violence than women who married later (Macquarrie, 2016). Violence in marriage has repercussions for mental and physical health, confidence, autonomy and other measures of social well-being.

4.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

Globally, depression is a major and growing cause of disability and a precursor to suicide and self-harm (Ferrai, 2013). A study on the causes of death among young people worldwide showed that in the WHO Southeast Asia region, the number of injury-related deaths among young women, particularly from fire-related deaths and suicide, is significant, and noted that the role of violence from family members in many cases was an important precursor. Self-inflicted injuries were the second leading cause of death (after maternal causes) among women aged 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 in this region (Patton, et al. 2009). In Afghanistan, child marriage is identified as a key factor in causing women to self-immolate (Khanha, Verma and Weiss, 2013).

Among women who had experienced physical or sexual violence, as shown at table 4.2, the majority of women in the four surveys agreed that they were afraid of their husbands “most of the time”. The four countries for which this data are available are Cambodia, 77.7 percent; Myanmar, 67.5 percent; Nepal, 70.6 percent; and the Philippines 76.8 percent (recent DHS surveys). A study in the U.S. found that girls married as children suffer from depression, severe isolation and emotional violence in their homes, and women who married as children were more likely than women who married as adults to receive treatment for any psychiatric illness during their lives (Le Strat, Dubertret and Le Foll, 2011). Psychiatric treatment for depression and other psychological ailments is not an option for many poor women married as children in less developed countries.

4.4 EDUCATION

The impact of child marriage on education plays out in several ways. It is well established that girls who are poorly educated are more likely to be married as children. Demographic and Health Survey data from 78 countries shows that between 2000 and 2010, 63 percent of women aged 20 to 24 with little or no education were married by the age of 18 compared to 20 percent of women with secondary education (Loaiza and Wong, 2012). As figure 4.1 for Bangladesh illustrates, age at marriage is higher for those with higher levels of education. Here, however, only women with higher education are typically spared from child marriage.

Girls drop out of school in order to get married. In Nepal, nearly one in three girls (32 percent) aged 12 to 17 indicated that child marriage was the reason they dropped out of school (Wodon, Nguyen, Yedan et al, 2017). Early marriage curtails the opportunity for completing school as well as any future prospects for schooling and earnings.

The earlier a girl drops out of school, the greater the effect child marriage has on her educational attainment. Each year of marriage before the age of 18 can decrease the probability that a girl will complete secondary school by 4 to 6 percent (Nyugen and Wodon, 2015). In South Asia, the effect of marrying at age 12 or earlier is a 24 percent reduction in the likelihood of completing school as compared to girls who marry at age 18 or older. For girls married at 17, the likelihood of completing school is reduced by 4.9 percent. And, conversely, the longer a girl stays in school, the lower the probability that she will marry below the age of 18. For every additional year a girl spends in school, her probability of marrying is reduced by 4 percent in Bangladesh and Nepal and 3 percent in Pakistan (Wodon, Nguyen, Yedan and Edmades, 2017). Increased education has often been proposed as the solution to ending child marriage, but, as the Bangladesh chart above illustrates, even with increased education, and fewer women with little or no education, most girls continue to marry below the age of 18.
Figure 4.1 Age at marriage in Bangladesh by level of education, 1993-2014

- No education
- Primary
- Secondary
- Higher

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If children are exposed to less education as a result of their mother having married very early, they may experience disadvantages themselves, related to both their health and education. Studies in Nepal and Bangladesh uphold this association of the intergenerational impact of child marriage (Choe, 2005; Bates et al, 2007). Although data and analyses on the intergenerational impacts of child marriage are only available for some country settings, it can be assumed that this intergenerational effect is present across the 14 country settings in this report.

While the evidence is very limited, child marriage can have a negative effect on boys' schooling as well. In general, boys are not required to leave school as consistently as girls when they marry. Evidence from the United States shows that in instances where boys support partners or babies they are likely to experience reduced school attainment with lasting economic effects (Greene and Merrick 2015).

### 4.5 Economic Impact

The economic benefits of ending child marriage are often seen through the lens of education and its effect on later earnings. For women who marry as children, a lack of engagement in the labour force has long-term implications for the girls themselves and their families, and also at the community and societal level (Chaabane and Cunningham, 2011). Recent studies by the World Bank and the ICRW have estimated the economic impacts of child marriage through several channels and provide a strong economic rationale for countries to end child marriage (Parsons et al 2015). In terms of the effect of child marriage on labour force participation and earnings, ending child marriage in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan would result in gains in earnings by girls, who otherwise married early, ranging from 11.85 percent in Bangladesh to 13.28 percent in Pakistan. The aggregated gross national income from these increased earnings are substantial: $US4.8 billion in Bangladesh, $US7.10 million in Nepal and $US6.3 billion in Pakistan (Wodon, Savadogo and Kes (2017). A report on the economic impact of child marriage in Indonesia (Rabi, 2015) indicates that if girls were to marry after the age of 20, the increase in schoolinng and in earning capacity would mean that cash flow would increase by up to 1.7 percent of the gross domestic product, which is significant.

The economic value of girls and boys is contingent on the opportunities that are available to them and that they are permitted to pursue. To what extent can this be changed? It would be useful to have more information on the views of boys and their families of child marriage, and the varying economic value of boys to their families and how this varies by marital status. Many of the interesting studies on the economic value of boys and girls to their families in Asia were written in the 1970s and 1980s, when there was a special interest in understanding the connections between this value and fertility. A major cross-cultural study on the value of children in Asia was conducted by the East-West Institute (Arnold and Fawcett, 1975; Ware, 1978). The most important themes for understanding their economic value are the costs of childrearing, the opportunity costs of having children at a given time, the economic activities of boys and girls, the economics of family formation and the costs of marrying a daughter or son, and the roles girls and boys play in supporting parents in their old age. In summarizing the literature, the Ware study (1978) showed that the economic circumstances of families determine to a large part their calculations of the value of their children and their willingness (and ability) to invest in them.

Women married as children also tend to have more children over their lifetime. Eliminating child marriage would reduce population growth by 21 percent per year in Bangladesh, 8 percent per year in Nepal and 2 percent per year in Pakistan. This would increase the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and the poor would especially benefit (Wodon, Onagoruwa, Yedan et al, 2017).

Child marriage also has an economic impact due to the increase in the likelihood of stunting among children of adolescent mothers. Stunted children have 20 to 25 percent lower earnings as adults. The estimated economic benefit of ending child marriage would mean an increase globally in purchasing power parity (PPP) of $US41.6 billion in 2016 as child mortality decreased, and $US91.1 billion as stunting decreased. Globally, ending both child marriage and early childbirth would increase these economic benefits to between $US56 and $US109 billion annually (Wodon, Onagoruwa and John, 2017).

### 4.6 Fertility and the Intergenerational Effects of Early Childbearing

South Asia differs from other parts of the world in that sexual intercourse still occurs mostly within marriage. As a consequence, marriage marks the beginning of the period over which a woman will be exposed to the risk of pregnancy. Early marriage means a longer period of potential childbearing and thus potentially a greater number of children. Even, however, as adolescents, girls may experience lower fertility than they do in their twenties. Various studies have shown that girls who marry as children have higher fertility over their lifetimes (in Nepal, see Adhikari, 2010; in Bangladesh, see Nahar et al, 2013; in India, young women who marry early and have several children are likely to be sterilized in their early twenties as Raj et al, 2009 found). Higher fertility likely occurs through a number of mechanisms, including a greater demand for children on the part of husbands and in-laws, less reproductive control, shorter birth intervals and more unwanted pregnancies (Godha et al, 2013). The short interval between generations that occurs from early marriage and childbearing means that child marriage has an impact on the aggregate level of fertility and the growth of a country’s population.

Research suggests that raising the age at marriage could have a significant impact on a number of health outcomes as well as cumulative fertility. Raj and Boehmer (2013), for example, conducted simulations
using data from 97 countries and found that a 10 percent increase in girl child marriage could be associated with a 3 percent increase in the infant mortality rate, a 0.3 percent increase in the total fertility rate, a 70 percent increase in the maternal mortality ratio, and a 10 percent decrease in skilled birth attendance.

4.7 GIRLS’ WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Girls’ opportunities and self-determination are sharply constrained by child marriage. The fact that married girls tend to have less education, whatever the causal relationships that bring this about, has implications for their well-being (UNICEF 2016), their status within their families (Malhotra, 2012), their social networks, their adherence to rigid gender norms (Bongaarts et al 2017), and their social and civic participation.

Adolescence is a period of personal development, but if the emphasis in a girl’s life is on her domestic tasks and parenthood, she may not be afforded much opportunity to develop her knowledge, skills and confidence. Restricted to her domestic role and limited in her mobility, she is prevented from access to her friends and peers, and often sufficiently isolated that it may harm her mental health (Greene, 2014). Child marriage, with its association of a lack of education, exposure to violence and other consequences, contributes to reducing young women’s empowerment, and this continues throughout their lifetimes (Lee-Rife 2010). The social consequences build on one another, reinforcing girls’ and women’s limited social and human capital, harming their health and that of their children, and keeping them in the domestic sphere away from civic life and opportunities to contribute to their communities.

A final note on consequences: Although data on divorce are not readily available for a number of countries in this study, data from Indonesia suggests that divorce rates are higher for women married before the age of 18 (Badan Pusat Statistik and UNICEF, 2016). This is a consequence of child marriage that deserves a more systematic analysis around the world.
5. Efforts to Prevent Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Asia

What are the most promising options to end and mitigate child marriage in Asia?

The analytic framework for this section, and throughout this report, is based on Plan International’s Theory of Change on child marriage. The framework provides the backdrop and rationale for the actions and outcomes, discussed below, needed to end the practice of CEFM.

Plan’s Theory of Change to end child marriage emphasizes the interconnectedness of three major areas. These areas determine the discussion on programme options and the recommendations that follow.

- a. Social Norms, Attitudes, Behaviours, and Relations - requiring interventions at various levels to change norms, attitudes behaviours and relations.
- b. Policy Frameworks and Budgets - requiring the engagement of government at various levels to promote policies and investments to end child marriage.
- c. Social and Economic Resources and Safety Nets – calling for the provision of services to support and empower girls, including economic opportunities that shift traditional incentives for early marriage.

This section focuses on examples of programme interventions that have been implemented in each of these areas.
**5.1 COMMUNITY LEVEL: SOCIAL NORMS, ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOURS AND RELATIONS**

An important focus, especially in recent years, has been on opportunities to work with families, communities and local leaders to change gendered social norms at the grassroots level. As experts on social norms have pointed out, however, child marriage is often a result of a complex range of circumstances and influences. Norms are important but changing the factors that perpetuate child marriage entails more systemic understanding and integrated interventions. A recent, authoritative review states:

Our study suggests that improving girls’ well-being requires providing information about the consequences of harmful norms while creating safe spaces for community members to come together to question existing norms, expand personal capacities and aspirations, and reimagine existing relationships. Successful projects do not only work with girls, but also include boys, women, and men in their families and in the community at large. Interventions that fail to include the entire social network might increase girls’ capacity to resist social expectations but would not achieve durable change in those social expectations — possibly increasing, rather than reducing, harm and violence. Successful interventions have an integrated approach; that is, they address the factors other than social norms that result in gender inequality, including the economic and legal circumstances that contribute to sustaining harmful practices and behaviours (Vaitia et al, 2017).

In summary, this perspective highlights the need for “practical solutions” grounded in multi-sector strategies to address the root causes of gender disparities discussed in Section 3. The causes of gender inequalities are complex and disparate and are usually best addressed with multi-sector interventions. Changing mindsets about appropriate roles, relationships and opportunities for girls requires an expanded set of approaches and tactics. These may range from legal measures such as birth registration to economic actions such as cash transfers or to educational initiatives and inter-generational or peer-to-peer discussion groups.

**Support the evolution of gender-related social norms**

An analysis of the literature on norms by Marcus et al (2014) highlights the importance of ‘large-scale drivers’ of gender norm change, by which they mean shifts in economic opportunity, education, communications, and legal frameworks. Additional drivers of change include social reforms, cultural change, political mobilization and resolving conflict. They found that significant shifts in gender norms and relations have typically been driven by several factors simultaneously.

The most critical of these coincident changes seem to be education, economic opportunities, exposure to new ideas and political and social mobilization.

Central to shifting gender-related social norms is to offer women greater economic opportunities (Kabeer et al, 2013). This is discussed at greater length later in this report. Changes within the garment industry in Bangladesh provide an example of the ways that ‘external’ forces can contribute to shifts in gender-related behaviours long viewed as immutable. Economic opportunities for adolescent and young women in garment factories have enabled both greater personal mobility and improved financial security. At the same time, these gains seem not to have dramatically shifted expectations about the appropriate timing of girls’ marriages. (Amin et al, 1998). Long-lasting changes in these values and expectations entail resetting social patterns that discriminate against girls from birth, shaping their identities and confining their aspirations.

A key implication for programme responses is that the disadvantages girls face are a social product — meaning they are the outcome of the ideas and actions of women and men, and girls and boys across societies and communities. Creating better outcomes for girls therefore necessarily entails engaging more inclusively across genders, age and social groups. “It is imperative to...[overcome the norms that] put a higher value on boys and encourage parents not to invest in educating a girl because she is viewed as paraya dhan or belonging to someone else” (Singh and Vennam 2016).

**Address sexuality**

Girls’ and women’s lack of choice regarding their sexuality is a core aspect of patriarchy and its gendered power disparities (Greene, Perlson and Hart 2017). With the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world has been given an opportunity to strengthen the ways in which the community of donors, policymakers, and practitioners engage in the struggle to end gender inequality. To improve girls lives sexuality must be addressed (see Report: Expert working meeting on sexuality and child, early and forced marriage (CEFMJ). The reality, however, is that waves of development interventions aimed at gender inequality and girls and women’s rights and empowerment have largely remained silent on sexuality.

By ‘addressing sexuality’ programmes must take into account what is known about family and community views of girls’ and boys’ sexual lives. Sexuality is central to marriage. Concern with the proper management of girls’ sexuality limits how girls are viewed, their life prospects and shapes the nature of marriage. Sexuality seems like a high-potential and also high-risk area of intervention. Traditional interventions may well have avoided sexuality for good reason. But efforts to end child marriage may stagnate if no attempt is made to think and talk about the social ideas about girls and boys and their sexual relationships and roles that drive the practice of child marriage.
Disseminate strategic public communications

Building broad public awareness and support to end child marriage is important to the sustainability of short-term interventions to eliminate child marriage. Bouman et al (2017) make the case for using theory-based entertainment-education as a complementary strategy to build such support. Such approaches can have high initial costs, especially given the formative research needed to develop appropriate and high-quality content. But these strategies can be cost-effective in terms of producing lasting normative change on a mass scale. For example, the Population Foundation of India, based in Delhi, developed a primetime television series challenging the discrimination that women face in India. Reaching 58 million viewers, pre- and post-evaluations showed a significant increased awareness of the adverse consequences of child marriage and a rise in the ideal age for a woman to have her first child.

Other profiled programmes include Breakthrough (Nation against Early Marriage) in Bihar and Jharkhand, India, which uses videos highlighting the role of fathers, among others, and Bedari in Pakistan, where radio and street theatre programmes raise awareness of child marriage and the need for new legislation. In a qualitative study of the effectiveness of different communications strategies targeting adolescent girls in the Kailali district of Nepal, Samuels and Ghirme (2015) found that street dramas, girls’ clubs and radio programmes were all effective in changing discriminatory social norms.

These communications were most effective when they focused on girls, boys and parents.

Livelihood-centred activities to empower girls provided a base to communicate messages about gender-based discrimination. In Nepal, CARE’s Chunauti project used behaviour change strategies including mass media, peer education and celebrity endorsements to challenge existing norms and advocate for the establishment and enforcement of laws and policies against child marriage. These efforts significantly improved knowledge on the harmful effects of child marriage among parents, adolescent boys and girls in three districts. Social mobilization included the development of child marriage eradication committees, forums addressing gender-based violence, and children’s clubs which raised awareness about child marriage at the community level and advocated for law reinforcement at the district and national level.

Promote family and community discussion

Save the Children’s Voices, Choices and Promises series (2011; 2013) used a variety of behaviour change communication strategies to help parents, communities, girls and boys understand the benefits of gender equality and the harmful consequences of child marriage. Choices was a curriculum for 10 to 14-year-olds aimed at improving opportunities and aspirations among children and advocating for girls to remain in school. An evaluation by Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health found a significant positive impact of the programme in creating more gender equitable attitudes. Significantly fewer boys and girls felt that domestic violence was acceptable and significantly more believed that girls should have the same chances as boys to go to school and to work outside the home. The companion programme, Promises, targeted parents and community
members with the aim of influencing more gender equitable behaviours towards their children, along with keeping girls in school, delaying marriage, and reducing gender-based violence. In the field-tested communication strategy, posters, based on the communities’ input and expressed aspirations, were prominently displayed to encourage dialogue. These approaches are useful to consider as a consciousness-raising strategy when working at the community level.

In the interest of challenging intractable social norms such as child marriage and gender-based violence, CARE (2017) developed and tested new social norm measures based on Bicchier’s synthesis of social norms theory (Bicchier, 2006). Bichhieri proposes that social norms are held in place both by empirical (what I think others do) and normative (what I think others expect me to do) expectations. A difference between empirical and normative expectations suggests a point of entry to challenge existing normative behaviour. CARE followed Bicchieri’s recommendation to develop vignettes or short stories about imaginary characters followed by guided questions to ascertain whether a norm existed, and how norms were influencing behaviours. This work was developed in Ethiopia and Sri Lanka. CARE’s research offers some insights on understanding and changing behaviour around social norms that is worth considering in locations where child marriage norms have been very slow to change.

Work with faith communities

The relationship between child marriage and faith can change depending on the community and the ways that norms relating to child marriage are addressed. While child marriage is more common among Muslims in many settings, there is considerable variation in marriage rates among adherents that is shaped by other local factors driving child marriage – often including poverty. Islamic faith leaders have been successfully engaged in efforts to retain girls in school and delay marriage (Gemignani and Wodon, 2015). Engaging with faith-based organizations, faith communities and faith leaders can help build support for policies that seek to eliminate child marriage and can help address the needs of married girls who are often overlooked in interventions focused on preventing child marriage (Karam, 2015).

Engaging religious leaders to speak out against child marriage can be an important strategy to support families in deciding not to marry their daughters early. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in collaboration with the Population Council and UNFPA, went a step further, developing key messages about issues including HIV/AIDS, and opposing early marriage and female genital mutilation, to incorporate into church teachings and promote new social norms (Mekbib et al, 2012). Although the evaluation of the “Developmental Bible” showed mixed results in terms of influencing attitudes towards early marriage, greater success in changing knowledge and attitudes about HIV suggests the potential for training and facilitating religious leaders as agents of social change.

However, in a study examining programmes that involved Muslim religious leaders in efforts to end child marriage, Walker (2015) found that while it is important to engage with religious leaders in discussions about family law reform and women’s empowerment, success is not a given. Religious leaders tend to support keeping girls in school and delaying marriage but feel constrained by their own conservative societies from publicly supporting the age of 18 as the minimum age of marriage. In a Plan International report in Niger (2013) described as “perhaps the best case for engaging Muslim scholars in the fight to end child marriage,” it was noted that religion and tradition are often used to insulate and sanction child marriage practices.

Work with men and boys

In almost all contexts addressing the attitudes of male family and community members regarding child marriage and the role of masculinity in shaping these attitudes is fundamentally important (Greene et al 2015). The review here of interventions that currently work with men and boys looks at what can be built upon more systematically in future work on child marriage. It is rather remarkable that regarding the institution of marriage, so little has been done to address the role of men and boys, whose power and control of decision-making and resources is so central to maintaining the status quo.

Men and boys must be included if efforts to challenge patriarchal social norms are to be sustained beyond the duration of any intervention. Traditional male understandings of ‘what it means to be a man’ and of the roles embedded within that understanding – brother, husband, father, partner – are often identified as constraints for more equitable gender relations. Programme models are emerging that support shifts along various paths towards more equitable and mutually beneficial roles and relationships between men and women. Often these programmes emphasize the incentives for men to be more caring, respectful, supportive, and non-violent, and to share decision-making prerogatives, household assets and domestic duties more fairly.

The values and expectations people carry throughout their adult lives are often inculcated at very young ages, making it essential to engage adolescents and young women to challenge gender norms that are against their interests or well-being. The same rationale applies to the values and expectations held by men and boys, who should be engaged across age groups to support ending child marriage.

The association between fathers’ attitudes and sons’ marriage-related behaviours are independent of the association between mothers’ attitudes and sons’ behaviours, suggesting that interventions that target parents separately could be worthwhile (Jennings et al 2012). Specifically, “fathers’ positive attitudes towards sons’ care of elderly parents speed marriage timing, while mothers’ positive attitudes slow sons’ marriage timing” (Jennings et al 2012: 940). The authors’ interpretation is that fathers want a daughter-in-law to help with caregiving, while mothers are fearful for the relationship they have with their sons and hesitate to bring a new wife into the household. Given that parents and siblings have such a key role in determining when girls get married, it is important to change current mindsets, which see the future role of girls as being...
limited to ‘wives, daughters and mothers’, and to use positive role models in the community to influence prevailing notions of entrenched patriarchy (Singh and Vennam 2016).

5.2 POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND BUDGETS

Numerous policies can influence child marriage, directly and indirectly, including minimum age at marriage laws, education policies, child protection guidelines, gender equality-related laws and policies and public safety. What is the situation in regard to national and regional laws and policies in Asia? National plans for addressing child marriage vary hugely in type and scope. There is almost certainly no cross-country consistency or universal metric to measure how effective they are. Instead, they are sorted here by the domain that they attempt to address.

Support laws that convey new expectations regarding child marriage

There is strong interest in understanding the impact of legal mechanisms to change overarching norms and acceptance. The review undertaken for this report indicates that legal mechanisms are singularly ineffective in changing norms and acceptance. Strictly legal responses to child marriage have been found to backfire in a number of settings including India and Ethiopia. In India, for example, the law is punitive – the law treats girls as the sole victims, punishing boys/youths by putting them in a juvenile home and arresting parents, thus separating girls from their families. Anyone can make a complaint, bringing the police onto the scene. Girls may not want to marry early but rarely go against their parent’s wishes. A punitive legal approach does not seem appropriate and has unintended negative consequences for girls and their families.

Laws alone are not the answer. Despite laws to prevent child marriage in many of the countries where child marriage is common, rates globally have declined little over the past ten years. While strengthening birth and marriage registration systems makes it easier to enforce child marriage legislation by being able to prove a girl’s age at marriage, registration systems also enable targeted programmes and services to the neglected girls who are already married (Machel, et al. 2013). The evidence on the impact of registration on child marriage is limited, however, and there is no concrete assessment of its impact on education or child marriage in this report. Although the percentage of countries that allow child marriage has decreased, exceptions based on religious or customary law allow girls in 33 countries to be legally married before the age of 18.

Most children marry with parental consent. Considering both parental consent and religious or customary law, 31 percent of countries allow girls to be married at the age of 15 (World Policy Analysis Center, 2015). Girls are also subject to marital age discrimination.

In 61 countries, girls are allowed to be married at younger ages than boys; in 52 countries, the age disparity is two to four years. Countries in which strong protective laws exist but are not adequately enforced include Bangladesh, which has a legal minimum age of marriage of 18 without any permitted exceptions, but the rate of marriage for girls between 15 and 19 has hardly changed in 20 years (51.3 percent in 1991 versus 45.7 percent in 2011). Compliance with marriage registration policies is important to ensure that marriages are legally recognized so that girls do not lose their marital rights (Arthur et al, 2015), which is particularly important in the case of the death of a spouse, divorce or abandonment.

Support laws that convey new standards and parameters regarding child marriage

In Nepal, 10 percent of girls are married by the age of 15. Based on interviews with 149 key informants, primarily married girls, Human Rights Watch (2016) recommended that Nepal’s existing child marriage law be reformed to make it more effective. “Reforms should: 1) include tougher punishments for those who arrange or conduct child marriages; 2) remove provisions that discriminate based on gender; 3) establish a requirement that anyone conducting or registering a marriage verify the age of the spouses; 4) provide support services and compensation to victims of child marriage; and 5) increase the statute of limitations for legal action regarding a child marriage until the married child reaches at least the age of 21.”

Singh and Vennam 2016 assert that the: “Enforcement of existing laws within an enabling environment is critical. It is important that existing laws to curb girls getting married during adolescence are enforced within an enabling framework, so that all avenues – legal, economic and political – support young girls and ensure that they are provided with the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Structural barriers need to be identified and culturally appropriate systems evolved that support the smooth transition of girls from secondary schools and higher education into the job market. Only if girls become financially independent will they be able to take the opportunity to achieve their full potential.”

One challenge to the enforcement of progressive laws is that there are often competing customary laws that undermine civil law. In Pakistan, discriminatory practices under Shari’a law, such as giving a child in marriage to settle a dispute, persist in tribal areas and in the Punjab, despite a 2004 Act prohibiting the practice. The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2011, resulting from a struggle by women’s rights organizations, is described as “a milestone in the history of women’s rights in Pakistan.” The law penalizes early and forced marriages, as well as the wrongful denial of inherited property for women. However, as responses to the previous law show, concerted efforts are needed to enforce the new law (Abbas and Ria, 2012).
Encourage and adopt multi-sectoral or integrated policies and programmes

Nepal has a new National Strategy to End Child Marriage as part of meeting the Sustainable Development Goal to end child marriage by 2030. In a country where girls are still considered an economic burden, Indu Ghimire, Gender Advisor at CARE Nepal, said a multi-sectoral approach, which includes addressing poverty, caste issues, gender-based violence, and cultural norms, is necessary (Cousins, 2016). The new strategy incorporates six pillars: the empowerment of girls and adolescents; quality education for girls and adolescents; engaging boys, adolescents, and men; mobilizing families and communities; improving access to services; and strengthening and implementing laws and policies in line with international human rights standards. The law must be harmonized with other provisions including those for property rights, gender-based violence, divorce, annulment, marital rape, dowry, birth registration, and citizenship (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2016).

Given that dowry rises with a girl’s age in a way that drives age at marriage downward, it may make sense to build a campaign against the practice of dowry in the countries of South Asia where it is prevalent, something akin to a public health campaign like those that have been linked to preventing HIV (Singh and Vennam 2016). Since dowry continues to have a negative impact on both girls and boys, the latter often have to take out large loans to pay for their sisters’ marriages, and is a major cause of girls being married to the first male who makes ‘reasonable demands’: it is critical to build a campaign against this practice. ‘Dowry-free blocks and districts’ should be declared and celebrated in countries. There is little research on the practice of bride price in the East Asian region and the extent to which altering this practice in these countries would reduce early marriage.

Global and regional policies can also play important roles

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly reference harmful practices – including child marriage and female genital mutilation – that stand in the way of the achievement of gender equality and the realization of girls’ rights. This has created an opportunity to shape national implementation plans that have and will continue to follow from the SDGs as countries report back on their progress in this area.

In 2015, the United Nations Human Rights Council unanimously adopted the first-ever substantial resolution to strengthen efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage. Such marriages were declared a violation of human rights. The resolution calls for national action plans on child marriage and encourages member states to work with civil society to develop and implement a “holistic, comprehensive and coordinated response to address child marriage and support married girls.” The resolution was adopted by 85 member states. In 2017, the Human Rights Council passed a similar resolution to end child marriage in humanitarian settings (www.girlsnott brides.org).

United Nations treaty monitoring bodies call for governments to address girls’ limited access to health services and reproductive health information; ensure access to adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services; raise awareness about the negative effects of child marriage; address gender-based violence arising from child marriage; establish a minimum age of marriage of 18 in all domestic law; enforce and strengthen existing legislation; and improve birth and marriage registration to curb the practice of child marriage (Khan et al. 2013). Child marriage violates many rights that are recognized in the individual constitutions of a number of states. These include rights to equality and non-discrimination, the right to dignity, the right to life and health, the right to education, the right to
freedom from slavery and exploitation, and the right to personal liberty and privacy. “Personal” religious and customary laws violate these rights as does parental consent as a substitute for a girl’s consent to marriage (Shah et al. 2013).

Advocate for and facilitate the implementation of laws and systems on the books

The Center for Reproductive Rights calls on South Asian governments to take a multifaceted approach to eliminating child marriage and addressing adolescent pregnancy as a consequence of child marriage and a leading cause of maternal mortality. The “wholly inadequate” response to child marriage by South Asian governments reflects their “overwhelming lack of accountability and political will” to eliminate the practice and address violations of reproductive rights and the right to be free from sexual violence that girls experience as a result of early marriage. Through its district wide approach, Plan International Bangladesh has linked together the empowerment of girls, the engagement of their community leaders and families, activities to empower girls economically, and the engagement of the entire government machinery. They have met with success in two sub-districts of Dinajpur, for example, raising the age at marriage measurably between 2010 and 2016.

5.3 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND SAFETY NETS

The third core area of Plan International’s Theory of Change addresses some of the drivers and root causes of CEFM, including financial drivers and the provision of other safety nets. It needs to be determined whether focusing on providing financial options for families can mitigate against CEFM. These interventions should be conducted as part of an integrated strategy, not as a standalone activity.

Based on its work in India, where education, income and caste are the key predictors of child marriage, ICRW concluded that improving girls’ access to information, opportunities and life options through life skills and livelihood training raises their aspirations beyond early marriage and motherhood and increases their ability to negotiate key decisions with their parents. Working directly with parents and particularly fathers is crucial. Programmes must deal with the underlying social norms around sexuality and chastity and address the pervasive parental fear that daughters will be sexually violated or become pregnant before marriage. Girls are often severely constrained in their ability to spend time outside the home, whether to socialize or to participate in civic life. Parents may favour delaying marriage but are unwilling to go against community social norms. Programmes must address these underlying fears, gain the trust of parents and offer safe spaces for girls (ICRW, 2008).

Support income generation for girls and their families

A clear recommendation emerging from the programmatic literature is to target the poorest and rural households. Vulnerable girls living in the poorest households, especially in rural areas, require a special empowerment focus, as they experience the highest rates of child marriage. The expansion of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and crop insurance will provide the poorest families with the means to retain children in schools and not pull them into paid work from an early age (Singh and Vennam 2016).

A replication of Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) in Uganda shows the impact of addressing information gaps and providing income-generating opportunities (Bandiera et al, 2012); “The programme offers some promise to policymakers, as a low cost and scalable intervention that enables adolescent girls to improve their life outcomes. The gains from a twin-pronged ELA-style programme are especially acute among adolescent girl populations, who face constrained labour markets as well as the norms of early marriage and childbirth.”

Save the Children USA’s Kishoree Kontho is one of the largest adolescent empowerment programmes ever implemented in a developing country. The programme experimented with life skills, financial education, and incentives (cooking oil) to delay marriage among 15,739 girls. An evaluation of the programme by the Poverty Action Lab found that girls eligible for the incentive for at least two years were 25 percent less likely to be married before the age of 18, 16 percent less likely to have given birth and 24 percent more likely to be in school at the age of 22. Girls living in communities which were randomized to receive a six-month empowerment programme did not have lower rates of child marriage or childbirth but were 10 percent more likely to be in school (Buchmann et al, 2017).

Promote rights education and social networking

A similar programme of Balikas or girls’ collectives in Andhra Pradesh, India, supported by UNICEF, has enabled girls to learn about their rights to avoid marriage and about the dangers of early pregnancy and childbirth, and has helped girls to avoid forced marriage (Chatterjee, 2011). In its multi-pronged approach, UNICEF works with the government on child marriage issues, builds community support among youth groups, women’s groups, and school children, and supports efforts to raise awareness of the harmful consequences of child marriage among key actors such as marriage hall owners and religious and community leaders. An estimated 400 early marriages were prevented through such efforts in 17 districts during a recent May-June wedding season. Plan International has endorsed engaging, educating and mobilizing parents, and providing safe spaces and forums for girls to help them become agents of change on their own behalf as part of a comprehensive action plan to address child marriage (Davis et al, 2013).

The Population Council’s “BALIKA: Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents” project aimed to address the key needs of adolescent girls and provide programmatic evidence of what works to delay marriage in Bangladesh (Amin et al, 2016). A baseline survey found that adolescent
girls were socially isolated, had very few opportunities to earn an income or learn a skill, or to develop social networks or participate in civic life. By offering a safe place to meet other girls, socialize, and acquire desired skills under the supervision of supportive adults and mentors, BALIKA centres aimed to fill an important void in the lives of girls.

**Empower girls to advocate on their own behalf**

The political engagement and activism of girls and women is essential for changing the policies that affect them. In India, a 1993 law reserves leadership positions for women in randomly selected traditional village councils. Using this natural experiment, Beaman et al (2012) found that when villages had chosen a female leader for two election cycles, the gender gap in aspirations between male and female adolescents aged 11 to 15 and among parents for their male and female children was dramatically reduced. In these settings, the gap in educational attainment between adolescent boys and girls was wiped out and girls spent less time on domestic chores.

As Plan International considers the type of advocacy it may wish to engage in, it should consider drawing inspiration from other wide scale successful campaigns in the region: the child labour campaign was particularly successful in Asia. The buy-in of governments into similar types of social work or public health campaigns is essential, once they have seen the proof that they work.

The challenge, of course, is that although advocacy efforts are intuitively compelling and have resulted in important policy and programme changes, success is difficult to replicate across contexts. The local drivers and cultural specificity of child, early and forced marriage make ‘best practices’ difficult to distil. As yet there don’t seem to be universal ‘good practices’, and to the extent that there are pretty well-established advocacy pathways across a number of country contexts, there are no simple measures of ‘what’s effective, and why’. And of course, attribution and success in advocacy is notoriously imprecise.

That said, information sharing, awareness raising, citizen voice and participation can positively affect the development context for local communities and civil society. The utility of advocacy ranges from communications and public opinion messaging to local community mobilization, making it a success factor from the grassroots to the government level. Policy changes or reforms are generally essential to success in most country settings, and as such are an important anchor of Plan’s Theory of Change. Advocacy strategies and content should be shaped by local culture, history, politics, values and understandings, as well as by principles such as participation, fairness, transparency, and accountability.

In Bangladesh, CARE’s Adolescents’ and Women’s Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative (ARSHI) project aimed to reduce maternal mortality, morbidity and disability among women and adolescents by addressing gender inequality and social constructions of manhood as they directly affect a woman’s health. The social movement to combat violence against women was successful in influencing lawmakers, thereby facilitating a greater fulfilment of rights for women across Bangladesh. In evaluating the project for scale up, Picard, (2011) shows that large-scale impact can be achieved less expensively by paying more attention to the power or influence which a tested...
model has on decision-makers, potential adopters and others. Key principles include gender-transformative rather than gender-sensitive or gender-neutral strategies, child sensitivity, safety and participation, and accountability – inviting feedback from programme participants, staff, partners, and all individuals or institutions who interact with the team, and community control. The team must give greater control to the community (or groups) and guard against dependency. As an example of a successful intervention, the “Dead Mother Rally” educated adolescent boys about maternal mortality and engaged them in protests against the attitudes and practices that lead to the death of young mothers. This intervention was picked up by many other communities in the area.

Plan International Bangladesh has also engaged local government and young people together in the fight to end child marriage. They have raised awareness among girls and boys to understand why their friends are not coming to school. If they believe that this may be because young people are getting married, they first try to persuade the parents not to proceed. If they don’t succeed, they may return with local government authorities or heads of schools to convince the parents not to proceed. Young people’s awareness and their confidence in engaging with authorities are essential.

**Leverage economic incentives to delay marriage while creating shifts in norms and expectations about the appropriate age of marriage**

The International Center for Research on Women evaluated a Government of Haryana incentive programme, *Apni Beti, Apna Dhan* (Our Daughter, Our Wealth), in which poor parents received a savings bond of 2,500 rupees on the birth of a daughter, which was to mature to 25,000 rupees when she turned 18, provided the girl had not married. Girls in the programme were found to stay in school longer (Nanda et al, 2014). Beneficiary girls were more likely than non-beneficiary girls to complete 8th grade, but there was no impact at higher levels of education. The programme did not shift gender norms, as parents often believed that the incentive was to defray the cost of the girl’s marriage rather than to enhance the value of girls to their parents. In the end, beneficiaries received considerably less money than was anticipated and the majority of girls spent the benefit on marriage expenses. Of girls who married before 18, there was no significant difference between girls whose families received the benefit and those who did not. The lack of community engagement on the purpose of the savings bond is likely to have contributed to misunderstanding among parents and a failure to shift gender norms (Nanda et al, 2015; Gaynair, 2011).

In Bangladesh, a school stipend programme introduced in 1994 made secondary schooling free for rural girls, covering 2 million girls each year. The Female Secondary School Stipend Programme (FSSP), provided monthly stipends to female students from Grade 6 to Grade 10 for students aged 11 to 15. Stipends were provided as long as the students met the following conditions: i) maintained at least 75 percent attendance, ii) secured at least 45 percent marks in the annual examinations, and iii) remained unmarried.

The stipend covered a portion of the direct costs of schooling and was given directly to female students who withdrew the cash from their personal bank account. Annual direct costs of secondary education per student were about $US54 in 1998, including tuition, uniforms, textbooks, and examination fees. The total annual stipend for a girl ranged from $US12 to $US30.25 for grade 10. Over a period of several years, the programme was associated with a marked increase in the enrolment of girls in school. An evaluation based on DHS data showed that eligible girls obtained a 14 to 25 percent increase in years of schooling. These girls also married later, had greater autonomy in making decisions, were more likely to work in the formal sector, had fewer children, and their children’s health outcomes improved (Hahn, et al, 2015). The FSSP contributed to raising women’s years of education by 1.6 to 2 years while the free tuition policy did not lead to any significant impact on their educational attainment. The stipend programme is associated with an increase in the age of marriage of women by 1.4 to 2.3 years with some evidence suggesting that the age of marriage of men also increased. One additional year of education is associated with a 2.4 to 5.3 percent increase in the labour force participation of married women, suggesting that education policies targeted towards women have not only substantially raised female education attainment but have also improved the economic prospects of low income families through increased female labour force participation (Hong and Sarr, 2012).

Conditional and non-conditional cash transfers have not been contrasted in the same setting to determine if one or the other has more of an effect on child marriage. However, it is possible to draw some conclusions through a careful analysis of existing studies: Non-conditional cash transfers have been shown to influence sexual behaviour among young women in sub-Saharan Africa who chose their own sexual partners. In Asia, in contrast, child marriage is most often entered into as a result of parent’s decisions, meaning young people do not control the arrangements; these circumstances would suggest that conditional cash transfers would be more effective. However, the experience of Haryana State’s *Apni Beti, Apna Dhan*, described above, suggests that while the conditional cash transfer kept girls in school for longer, girls married as soon as they could and used the funds for their dowry rather than for any investment in income generation or education (Nanda et al 2014).

**Provide reproductive health information and contraceptive access to help delay marriage among girls**

The WHO Guidelines on Preventing Early Pregnancy and Poor Reproductive Outcomes Among Adolescents in Developing Countries (Camacho and Chandra-Mouli, 2011), make the case for preventing early marriage and early pregnancy, which may lead to forced marriage, by providing legal support for adolescents to access contraceptives. Access to contraception must include reducing financial and social barriers to their use through free or low cost commodities, and confidential youth-friendly services. Educating the community
about the risks of adolescent pregnancy helps build community support for providing contraceptive services to adolescents, and educating girls about sexuality and coercive sex and that contraceptive use can help them to avoid early marriage.

A lesson drawn from West Africa (Fenn et al 2015) shows that making contraception available and enhancing girls’ ability to manage their reproductive lives before marriage, protects them from being pushed into marriage as a result of pregnancy. Improving access to contraception as an intervention to delay marriage would seemingly work better in some parts of Asia than in others. In Bihar state, India, Pathfinder’s Promoting Change in Reproductive Behavior of Adolescents (PRACHAR) project had an impact on age at marriage and on contraceptive use among young married women without actually providing services. The project aimed to increase girl's age at marriage, delay the first birth after marriage until the age of 21, and to promote birth spacing of at least three years between the first and second births. PRACHAR information and educational interventions were directed at unmarried adolescents, who received a three-day reproductive health training, including negotiation skills for communicating with their parents and partners. “Infotainment” parties were held for young married couples to promote delaying the first birth and spacing the second. Community mobilization used street theatre and posters to reach parents and influential community members, and information on the location of services was provided. Based on a subsample of trainees, the project was highly effective in increasing contraceptive use, both before and after a first birth among young couples and increasing the age at marriage and at first birth. Age at marriage for trained girls was 1.5 years higher than for those girls who did not receive training (20.9 years versus 19.4 years) (Rahman and Daniel, 2010). The authors note, however, that the claimed impact seems unrealistic as age at marriage for both groups is so much higher than the average for Bihar overall.

The Berhane Hewan Project, in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, used a multi-pronged approach including community mobilization and dialogue, group mobilization of girls, house to house visits by mentors, reproductive health information and services, school supplies and other incentives, to keep girls in school and delay marriage. After two years of implementation, marriage was delayed, and school attendance and family planning use increased. However, it was difficult to determine which components had the greater influence in bringing about these changes. In-depth interviews suggested that community conversations, social mobilization and school incentives were equally important (Mekbib and Molla, 2010).

Empowerment and voice

Girls have a voice and an agency when they can make decisions about their own lives and act on those decisions. The World Bank finds that constraining girls’ voice and agency leads to a loss of productivity and can affect the achievement of development goals (Klugman et al, 2014). Giving a voice to girls and young women and promoting their collective action has been identified as one of three key strategies, including involving local community leaders and working with men and boys to raise awareness about girls’ and women’s rights, as strategies to eradicate women’s gendered experiences of poverty (Jones and Presler‐Marshall, 2012). For example, as described above, in the Indian girls’ collectives called Balika Sanghas, girls are ‘sensitized about their rights and taught how to tap into various government and non-governmental schemes that can benefit them’ (Chatterjee, 2011). With this support, girls are increasingly able to use their collective voice to fend off arranged marriages and continue their schooling.

In Guatemala, the Population Council’s Abriendo Oportunidades programme works with rural Mayan girls aged 8 to 18 to build girls’ voice and agency through girls’ clubs and safe spaces, where girls gain practical skills; to build social networks and take on leadership positions, including paid internships with local agencies; and to mentor younger girls. Workshops conducted with girls and their mothers include sessions on self-esteem, life skills, developing aspirations and planning for the future, sexual and reproductive health, and the prevention of violence and HIV. An evaluation found that 100 percent of Abriendo girls had completed the sixth grade, compared to 81.5 percent of girls nationally, while 97 percent of Abriendo girls had not given birth during the programme cycle, compared with 78.2 percent nationally for comparably aged girls (Catino et al, 2011).

Empowerment is not static and the cumulative experiences, including of unplanned or mistimed pregnancies, shape a woman’s current empowerment status over the course of her lifetime (Lee-Rife 2010). Save the Children’s adolescent empowerment programme, Kishoree Kontha, or “Adolescent Girl’s Voices,” included an empowerment component in which girls could meet several days a week in safe spaces to socialize and receive training on life skills, nutrition and reproductive health. Half of the empowerment communities also included financial literacy training. Girls in the empowerment programme did reach higher educational levels but, unlike the impact of the incentive programme, age at marriage was not affected (Poverty Action Lab, 2012).

Provide training in life skills

Another aspect of the Kishoree Kontha (“Adolescent Girls’ Voices”) project implemented by Save the Children in Bangladesh was life skills training, including strengthening relationships between girls and their parents and other adults. Girls discussed with their families what they learned and developed family disaster risk-reduction plans. According to an analysis of their Developmental Assets Profiles, girls in the programme showed significant improvements in terms of overall well-being, including support, empowerment, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values and positive identity. These findings suggest that girls who receive training will be more involved in decisions that affect their future, such as staying in school or avoiding early marriage (Scales, et al. 2013). In Bangladesh, in addition, life skills training, including gender rights negotiation, critical thinking and decision-making, is one of three components of
the Population Council’s BALIKA project, a randomized controlled trial to evaluate strategies to delay marriage among girls aged 12 to 18 in areas where child marriage rates are at their highest. The other two components of the trial provide training in livelihoods and tutoring in maths, science and computers (Population Council, 2014).

**Savings groups and livelihoods**

The opportunity to receive training in financial literacy and negotiation skills and to become part of a peer-focused savings group has been a powerful experience for girls in CARE’s work around the world (CARE 2012). BRAC’s Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) programme, initially developed in Bangladesh, has offered hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged adolescent girls in Bangladesh, Uganda, Tanzania, Afghanistan, South Sudan and, most recently, Haiti and Sierra Leone the opportunity for a better life through mentorship, life skills training and microfinance. It has been rigorously tested and its positive impact on the lives of girls has been demonstrated. (The model first developed in Bangladesh was evaluated with a randomized controlled trial in Uganda (Bandiera et al 2012)).

**Expand girls’ opportunities for education**

The increasing education of girls in Nepal has shown the value of education to families and communities and challenged gender norms on the role of women in Nepalese society. Interviews with 33 female key informants highlight the importance of the support of parents and the extended family to a girl’s education and revealed how their success has encouraged other members of their family to become educated (Parker et al, 2014).

It has been hypothesized that a mother’s non-formal literacy education might delay her daughter’s age at marriage, through such avenues as improving the mother’s communication skills and her ability to influence family decisions and increasing her knowledge about women’s rights and children’s health (Smith, et al. 2012). Providing literacy education to mothers of adolescent girls is a potential strategy to gain support for delaying marriage.

Singh and Vennam 2016 state that: “Secondary schooling is key to delaying child marriage. In light of the fact that 89 percent of the girls in our sample who completed senior secondary education, remained single at 19 years of age, it is evident that institutions such as elementary and secondary schools have a critical role to play in giving girls more autonomy and agency. Universalisation of secondary education, with safe transport to and from schools and expansion of residential facilities at secondary and higher education level, is critical to ensure that girls are allowed the opportunity to continue education, particularly when the socio-economic conditions of households pull them into child labour. Also, build agency and educational aspirations. The curriculum in schools, as well as adolescent programmes such as Bet Bachao Beti Padhao and Rashtriya Kishori Shakti Karyakram, must be tailored to encourage problem-solving, decision-making and critical thinking skills and provide support for young girls to identify opportunities and pursue career pathways. Broader efforts are required to ensure that schools adequately serve and empower all girls at risk of child marriage and also provide opportunities to help married girls to continue at school or return to it.”

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6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

After the initial documentation of prevalence and trends, the report asked how child marriage in Asia is different from the practice in the rest of the world. Now the question to be addressed is whether child marriage in Asia is different from the practice in Africa or Latin America in ways that require alternative programmes and policies to prevent and address it? Even within Asia, there are differences among countries, more generally within this study between Southeast and South Asian countries. Is it possibly to generalize about what needs to be undertaken in the region to end child marriage?

This section draws on effective programmes that have been implemented and makes recommendations of what needs to be done. It is organized according to the three domains of Plan International’s Theory of Change and also presents recommendations for further research. Although some programme responses to address the root causes of unfairness may not fit perfectly within Plan International’s three dimensions framework, the model is meant simply to instil a sense of the need for varied interventions to address the challenge of child marriage. Indeed, many of the interventions in this report address more than one of these domains or formulate what they are trying to accomplish in slightly different language.

The recommendations that follow are not exhaustive, but they are meant to build on or highlight some of the most interesting opportunities presented by the programme review in the previous section.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS ORGANIZED BY THE THREE DOMAINS OF PLAN INTERNATIONAL’S THEORY OF CHANGE

Laws, policies and budgets

As has been noted in regard to laws that could contribute to ending child marriage, “Globally, many serious obstacles to addressing child marriage remain. These include: discriminatory marriage and divorce laws; the [failure to set]...national minimum ages for marriage below 18 years, or not at all; poor publicity and enforcement of laws; competing religious, customary or local laws that can undermine protective national law; lack of birth certificates (to verify a child’s age upon marriage) and marriage certificates (to establish officially that a marriage has taken place), further impeding possibilities for dissolution and redress; and the assigning in some jurisdictions of quasi-majority status to married children, thereby
removing them from the special protections usually afforded to children” (Turner, 2013). How can this area be addressed?

- Encourage laws that convey new standards and parameters regarding child marriage. A useful place for this effort to begin could be to advocate for an end to disparities between the legal minimum age at marriage for girls and boys. The majority of countries where there is a significant disparity in the minimum age at marriage for males and females are found in Asia. There is a distinct concentration in the Asia region of countries where girls are permitted to marry at least one year before boys, with India and Bangladesh having laws that allow girls to marry three to four years earlier than boys. These laws encapsulate normative expectations regarding boys’ and girls’ marriage, and to challenge them would promote national discussion without inflaming any sense that an outside standard was being imposed.

- Advocate for the enforcement of existing laws intended to create a framework to counter early marriage. Despite minimum age at marriage laws, it is far too easy to misrepresent girls’ ages, or for local authorities to look the other way when marriages are entered into.

- Disseminate strategic communications to increase public awareness and inform policymakers. Everyone, from community members to policymakers should have complete information on the realities of child marriage in their setting, and the laws that exist to discourage it.

- Encourage local civic participatory mechanisms for women and girls so that their voices contribute to improved gender policies. These mechanisms should support women and girls in advocating for their interests and rights as development actors and community members.

- Encourage and adopt multi-sectoral or integrated policies and programmes to address the disparate drivers of gender disparities. This requires a high-level perspective that governments are often best positioned to provide.

Changes in norms

Support the evolution of social norms that reflect gender inequality, of which there are many manifestations in the lives of adolescent girls.

- As discussed in greater detail in the programme review, taking family and community concerns about girls’ sexuality into account when designing programmes is essential.
No one can be a more powerful advocate on the topic of child marriage than girls themselves, and they must be empowered to speak out on their own behalf if this practice is to go away. As they are seen expressing their preferences and appearing in public spaces, girls may come to be seen as deserving of preference and of occupying more and greater roles beyond those of wife and mother.

- Work with families, communities and local leaders to promote community discussions and question practices and social norms at the grassroots level.
- Work with faith communities to build community support in areas of shared interest such as education and delaying the age of marriage.
- Work with men and boys as family and community members on resetting expectations and norms around age at marriage and the dynamics within marriage.
- Mobilize the media to work in a concerted fashion to fight child marriage, building a communications strategy across each country that focuses on context-specific customs and norms.

Social and economic resources and safety nets

- Prioritize economic stability for families at risk of child marriage, including income generation strategies for girls and their families. Leverage economic support for delaying marriage while also creating shifts in social norms for the appropriate age of marriage.
- Prioritize girls' economic empowerment, supporting savings groups for women and girls to boost their security, resilience and well-being. If ending child marriage is to be a reality, more thought must be given to the alternatives to marriage for girls and their families.
- Create better outcomes for girls by engaging with them more inclusively on child marriage at the local level across gender, age and social groups. In divergent settings, boys, mothers, tentmakers, priests and others all have important roles to play in challenging child marriage. The more different types of people that are mobilized to eliminate CEFM, the more saturated a population will become so that any person who leads in countering the practice will have backup.
- Provide training in life skills to enable girls and women to better engage and operate on their own. When a girls' marriage is being considered, she is the only predictably present individual. To the extent possible, girls must be prepared to question, discuss, request, negotiate, plead and bargain with the adults in their lives who wish to move them onto this new life stage.
- And the well-worn but ever powerful: Expand girls' opportunities for education.

Research recommendations

In keeping with this multi-sectoral emphasis, there is also a strong need for a unified research agenda, one that helps to align and focus the generation of evidence on the problem of child marriage, its causes, consequences and what can be done about it (Greene, 2014).

- The focus on child marriage among girls has neglected boys in those places where boys also get married at very young ages. One cause of this is that child marriage has often been studied from data collected by organizations interested in reproductive health that focuses (overly) on women. These sources of data have also tended to start collecting data among 15-19 year-olds, but there is still very little information about 10-14-year-olds, who are vulnerable to changes and conditions in the period just before marriage. These sources of data have also tended to focus on married women, providing less information on the about-to-be married or the not-yet-married, whose life experiences are extremely relevant for understanding the causes and consequences of CEFM.
- The complexity and cultural specificity of the problem: Understanding the root causes of child, early and forced marriage is complex and can often require conducting in-depth ethnographic interviews; information that is not often collected. Much more intervention work has been conducted in some settings than in others, generating rich experiences in some places but shedding little light on the sorts of programmes and policies that may need to be implemented in culturally divergent countries.
- The limited time period often given to measuring programmatic impact: CEFM takes time to shift and it also takes time to measure trends. In some settings, CEFM has not been an area of focus for very long. In addition, donor funding tends to last for shorter periods than can reasonably be expected to lead to social change. As a consequence, many interventions do not get the necessary follow up to measure their ultimate impact on child marriage, and instead capture data on intermediate factors in their evaluations. This limited funding horizon tends to drive a focus on shorter-term change rather than long-term change in the lives of girls. It leaves the question unanswered as to what real difference it makes to girls lives whether they marry or don’t marry before the age 18.
- More needs to be learnt about men and boys and they should be the target of more interventions. A huge gap in the gender inequality literature concerns the role of men in marriage and early marriage in particular. It is men who are marrying girls, yet there is almost no research on this. What are their motivations and attractions?
Four research reviews of programmes for girls around the world provide inspiration for programme design.

1. The Young Lives project’s excellent review points to a number of important domains that affirm Plan International’s Theory of Change, and the specific recommendations are integrated and referenced below (Singh and Vennam 2016).

2. A review by ICRW evaluated 23 child marriage prevention programmes, including seven in Bangladesh, five in India and one each in Indonesia and Nepal (Lee-Rife et al, 2012). Among these, the most successful in preventing child marriage were programmes providing incentive schemes to improve the enrolment and retention of girls in school, and programmes empowering girls with information, skills and support networks. To sustain such efforts, it is suggested that there is advocacy for an integrated, multi-pronged approach that clearly addresses deeply entrenched community and social norms as well as provides opportunities for girls to be educated, employed and for them to participate. The potential for large-scale and sustainable impact is enhanced if the intervention fosters structural change, e.g., working with government schools and other institutions to educate girls and increase their opportunities, and incorporates large-scale information, education and communication campaigns to reach parents, community members and religious leaders. Programmes that focused primarily on national advocacy and legislative reform were less successful in preventing child marriage.

3. Lemmon and ElHarake (2014) examine a number of programme strategies, including Plan’s work with the Government of Bangladesh to prevent marriage under the age of 18 by implementing online birth registration to circumvent parents from later falsifying a girl’s age. ICRW’s Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD), “Our Daughter, Our Wealth”, incentive scheme in Haryana, India had a positive effect on girls’ education although incentives were not required to be used for school fees. While the recommendations in this review are specifically aimed at United States government actions, some are relevant to Plan International, e.g., supporting efforts to address the root causes of child marriage, targeting funding to countries with the highest prevalence by proportion and absolute numbers of girls affected, and focusing on improved evaluation.

4. A review of all published articles on child marriage interventions up until 2015, for those with statistical evidence of impact, was undertaken by Kalamar et al, 2016. It found that most of the seven interventions, with statistically measurable positive impact in raising the age of marriage or reducing the proportion married as children, provided an economic incentive to keep girls in school, while one, implemented by the ICRW in India, involved a life skills curriculum to improve the reproductive health of both married and unmarried youth.

6.2 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A few points unite what has been learned from this review of interventions. First, while the field is starting to obtain a sense of the weight of individual strategies and their merits, there is considerable consensus around the need to attack child marriage from multiple angles. Even when a single-sector intervention has been successful, there is agreement on the importance of implementing integrated prevention strategies to end this deeply rooted practice. Organizations working to end child marriage must promote multi-sectoral or integrated development policies and programmes to address the complexity and scope of the child marriage issue. A broad set of combined and mutually reinforcing interventions that work at different levels are required to end child marriage.

Secondly, the field needs to strengthen its focus on the “depth” of child marriage, i.e., measuring at exactly what age it is taking place, not simply assessing whether it occurs before or after the age of 18 (Nguyen and Wodon, 2012). It is acutely important to eliminate child marriage occurring at the earliest ages; and interventions must be adapted to the needs of girls – at the specific ages at which they are vulnerable. The factors that drive child marriage in the 10 to 14 age range differ from those driving marriage at slightly older ages and this variability needs to be taken into account in programmes.

Thirdly, it is critical to remember married girls (e.g., Bruce, 2012; Greene et al, 2014). As has been seen, girls married as children experience many negative consequences to their health, both physical and mental, their human capital, their social networks and their future opportunities. It is incumbent upon those concerned with the well-being of girls, therefore, to separate out the impacts of child marriage from the marriage itself and to the extent possible, delay childbearing, continue girls’ schooling, reinforce their social networks, and build their skills. It is essential that married girls be supported and that any stigma they might face in institutions be overcome.

Finally, this report draws from numerous other studies and lays out an exhaustive set of root causes for child, early and forced marriage. Assuming these are relevant to a specific country context, it makes sense to organize programmes around addressing these root causes when possible rather than treating symptoms. Holding a programmatic agenda up to these root causes may be a good way to cross-check the extent to which programmes address child marriage as vigorously as they can.
The bibliography was not produced as an integral part of this Phase One report but is included here to provide references to the comprehensive literature review that was undertaken.

Research Question 1: Prevalence of CEFM


UNICEF. *Global database on child marriage* (2016). UNICEF.


**Research Question 2: Causes of child marriage**


Research Question 3: Consequences of child marriage


Recommended citations.


Research Question 4: Responses


Population Council (2014). BALKIA (Bangladeshi Association for life skills, income and knowledge for adolescents).


Save the Children International (2013). Promises: Engaging communities in gender equity for girls and boys: the Promises approach. Westport, CT: Save the Children US.

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Parikh, S. “They arrested me for loving a schoolgirl”: Ethnography, HIV, and a feminist assessment of the age of consent law as a gender-based structural intervention in Uganda. Social Science and Medicine, 2011.


**Data Sources**


Karachi, Pakistan: UNICEF and Sindh Bureau of Statistics.


National Statistics Directorate (NSD) [Timor-Leste], Ministry of Finance [Timor-Leste], and ICF


**Research Agendas**


