



Research Report

Getting the Evidence: Asia Child Marriage Initiative

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Elizabeth Yarrow, Kara Apland, Ali Syed and Professor Carolyn Hamilton at Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC).

Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC), is the UK's leading children's legal charity, committed to promoting children's rights in the UK and worldwide. The Centre works around the world in partnership with governments, UN bodies and (I)NGOs in over 40 countries, to promote the rights of children through the reform of law, policy and practice. For the past 17 years CCLC has conducted in-depth qualitative and quantitative research and published widely on topics related to children's rights and gender issues.

Data collection and entry was supervised by the authors. It was carried out in Bangladesh by: Nazrul Islam Babu, Debashis Kumar Ghose, Rashedul Haque and Zakia Sultana (enumerators), and Md. Kamal Pasa and Afsana Sultana (qualitative researchers); data entry was carried out by Farhad Kabir; interpretation was provided by Sumaiya Tabassum Ahmed; and field work was coordinated by Md. Kamal Pasa. In Indonesia, data collection was carried out by: Chitra Anadhita, King Buana, Dessi Kuswana, Fitria Umami and Solikin (enumerators), and Didi Ahmadi and Lanny Octavian (qualitative researchers); data entry was carried out by Muhammad Akib; and field work was planned and coordinated by Herman. In Pakistan, Reflect Global coordinated data collection and entry, led by Muhammad Noman Ali: qualitative data collection was conducted by Younis Mari and Shehneela Mazhar; and survey data was collected by Muhammad Abu-Bakar, Abdul Ghafoor, Asif Habib, Fozia Jabeen, Sana Kanwal, Shakeela Khan, Musarrat, Noor-ul-Ain, Yasir Noshin, Zahida Parveen and Qurat-ul-ain Yousaf (enumerators).

The authors would like to thank all of the staff from Plan Asia's regional office for their assistance and guidance throughout the study and for their feedback on earlier drafts of this report. In particular, we would like to thank: Alexander Munvine, Matthew Riley, Alessandra Tranquilli and Noshaba Zafar.

They would also like to thank staff at Plan's Country Offices: Md. Abdullah Al Mamun, Farukh Ahmed, Soumya Brata Guha, Awlad Hossain and Jannatul Ferdous Ruma (Plan Bangladesh); Moudy Cynthia, Rasita Ekawati, Hery Nahampun and Desry Yuniafitri (Plan Indonesia); and Sofia Naveed, Sultan Tanoli and Naeem Tufail (Plan Pakistan) for their invaluable assistance in organising the field research and providing resources, information and helpful insights. They are also grateful to Plan staff who attended a validation workshop in Bangkok in March 2015 for their useful feedback on an earlier draft of this report and initial recommendations. They would also like to thank Jorun Arndt and Catrin Gosby at Coram Children's Legal Centre for their assistance in carrying out desk-based research to inform the literature review, and Jennifer Roest, for her assistance in developing researcher training materials and qualitative data collection tools.



Finally, the authors would like to thank all persons who generously gave up their time to participate in the study through interviews, focus groups, participatory group activities and through responding to surveys.

Coram Children's Legal Centre

Gregory House

48 Mecklenburgh Square

London WC1N 2QA

United Kingdom

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>2</i>
<hr/>	
Section 1: Introduction	5
1.2 Key Concepts and definitions	
5 Child	5
Marriage	
5 Child marriage	6
Forced Marriage	
6	
Gender	
6	
1.3 Analytic framework	6
Theoretical basis for the research questions	6
Developing the research questions	
7	
Diagram of the Conceptual Framework	9
1.3 Methodology	9
1.3.1 Desk review	
9	
1.3.2 Selection of Research Sites	
10	
1.3.3 Quantitative Methods	
14	
1.3.3 Qualitative Methods	15
1.3.4 An 'index' for programming	
16	
1.3.5 Ethics	16
1.3.6 Limitations	
16	
<hr/>	
Section 2: Legal Frameworks	17
2.1 International standards on child marriage	17
2.2 Legal frameworks governing (child) marriage in the case study countries	18
2.2.1 Bangladesh	
18	
2.2.2 Indonesia	
19	
2.2.3 Pakistan	19
<hr/>	
Section 3: Marriage Practices and Norms	20
3.1 Why do people marry?	20

3.2 Types of marriages in the research locations	22
3.2.1 Bangladesh	22
3.2.2 Pakistan	22
3.2.3 Indonesia	24
3.3 At what age do people get married?	25
Chart 2: Mean ages of marriage by gender/ specific research site	26
3.4 Age differences between women and their partners	27
Chart 3: difference in mean age of marriage between respondents and their partners	27
Chart 4: difference in ages of marriage between male respondents and their partners by country	29
Chart 5: difference in ages of marriage between female respondents and their partners by country	30
3.5 Norms about gender, marriage, and age (difference)	31
3.6 Ideal ages of marriage	
33 Chart 6: ideal age of marriage for girls by country	
33 Chart 7-9: ideal age of marriage for girls by country	
34	
3.6 Rates of Child Marriage	
35	
3.6.1 Perceptions of rates of child marriage	
37	
3.7 Norms and attitudes concerning child marriage	39
3.7.1 Findings from the quantitative data	39
3.7.2 Findings from the qualitative data	42
3.8 Marriage, agency and choice in practice	
44	
3.8.1 Child marriage: agency and choice	
46	
3.9 Norms in relation to marriage agency and choice	52
3.9.1 Findings from the quantitative data	52
3.9.2 Findings from the qualitative data	54
3.10 Attitudes that deviate from norms supporting child marriage	59
Section 4: Structural factors that shape child marriage (acceptability)	
61	
4.1 Child marriage and income poverty	
61	
4.2 Child marriage and economic dependency	63
4.3 Dowry	66
4.4 Male sexual dominance, violence and control of female sexuality	
68	
4.4.1 Access to sexual and reproductive health services	71
4.5 Education	75
Impact of education on child marriage practices	
75	
Impact of education on child marriage norms and attitudes	
78	
4.6 Lack of opportunity	79
4.7 Legal frameworks	82

4.7.1 Knowledge of the Statutory Minimum Age of Marriage	82
4.7.2 Enforcement of legal frameworks	84
4.7.3 Law enforcement and legitimacy	86
4.8 Media	
88	
4.8.1 Charts 75-77 use of media by country	88
<hr/> Section 5. Conclusion	
89	
5.1. Recommendations	93

Section 1: Introduction

This research study was commissioned by Plan Asia, and designed and implemented by Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC).¹

The research was undertaken as part of the Asia Child Marriage Initiative (ACMI), a multi-country venture which falls under the aegis of Plan International's *Because I Am a Girl* campaign. The Asia Child Marriage Initiative, which began in 2010, aims to prevent child marriage and mitigate its negative consequences on children, families and communities through interventions at multiple levels.²

The purpose of the study was to gather in-depth and detailed evidence on the root causes of child marriage practices. The research focused on exploring social attitudes, values and norms concerning child marriage, and identifying the structural and environmental factors which influence them. The results of the research will assist in the design of effective advocacy, policy and programming interventions aimed at eradicating child marriage. This research report presents the findings of the first year of research, which took place in three countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan.

The research also informed the development of an index for programming in areas which relate to the acceptability of child marriage. The index will be used on a yearly basis to measure changes in social norms, and structural and environmental factors that are associated with child marriage acceptability. The purpose of the index is to, measure the impact of Plan's programs in these areas to track progress, and to help Plan design programmes that are effective and well targeted.

1.2 Key Concepts and definitions

The research uses several key concepts and terms, which are defined below.

Child

For the purposes of this study, a child is defined as any person under 18 years of age. This definition is in accordance with international legal norms² and the standard policy and practice of Plan International and other international child rights organisations. It is recognised that social, cultural and religious norms may define the end of childhood earlier or later than 18 years of age, as do some national laws.

Marriage

Marriage is defined as a culturally sanctioned union made between two or more people that establishes certain rights and obligations between them, their children, and their broader families (in-laws).³ This may include formal, legally recognised unions, and those that are carried out under

¹ The Coram Children's Legal Centre is a unique, independent NGO dedicated to promoting and protecting the rights of children worldwide. The international team comprises a team of legal and policy experts who conduct international consultancy work, including research, training, technical assistance for legislative and policy drafting, and technical support the establishment and design of children's services, including legal services. ² ACMI seeks to address the practice of child marriage at multiple program levels; including work with girls to support their empowerment and agency; with families and communities to change socio-cultural norms, values and attitudes toward child marriage; and with institutions to implement laws, policies and public services that protect girls' rights to protection, freedom from violence, education, reproductive and sexual health, economic participation, citizenship and self-determination.

² See, in particular, article 1, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ W Haviland, H Prins, B McBride, D Walrath (2011) *Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge*, 13 edn., Belmont: Cengage Learning.

customary practice or under religious laws. This is important given that many child marriages occur outside formal, secular legal systems.⁴

Child marriage

Child marriage is defined as marriage where at least one party is below 18 years of age. Although international instruments do not set a specific minimum age for marriage, both the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have recommended that the minimum age for marriage for both men and women should be set at no lower than 18 years of age.⁵

Forced Marriage

According to international standards, marriage is only valid when it is entered into with the ‘free and full consent’ of both parties to the marriage.⁶ When free and full consent is not given by one or both parties to a marriage, this is considered to amount to a ‘forced marriage’. In much of human rights literature, the terms ‘child marriage’ and ‘forced marriage’ are used interchangeably, on the basis that meaningful or valid consent to marriage cannot be given by anyone below 18 years of age. However, this approach fails to account for the potential differences between forced and early marriage, most particularly from the perspective and experience of the child involved. Therefore, while a presumption that a child cannot consent to marriage may be a desirable legal position, it is important for the study not to presume that every child marriage is necessarily ‘forced’ (entered into without the free and full consent of the parties to the marriage). Failure to do so may compromise a full and nuanced understanding of child marriage practices in the case study countries, and may undermine the ability to recognise young people’s agency and decisionmaking within child marriage practices.

Gender

Marriage, including early and forced marriage, is a gendered phenomenon, which affects men/boys and women/girls differently. It is therefore important to define the concept of gender, and how it will be understood in the context of the study. ‘Gender’ refers to ideas, norms and identities associated with being a man or woman, boy or girl. According to Plan, gender refers to the ‘*socially constructed roles, responsibilities, behaviours, activities and attributes which society considers appropriate and expected for men and women and boys and girls. It includes the social organisation of women’s and men’s lives and relations.*’⁷

1.3 Analytic framework

Theoretical basis for the research questions

The research has been designed on the premise that the practice and prevalence of child marriage is (partially) influenced by cultural norms that create and reinforce ideas, and shape expectations, about the acceptability of child marriage, both in general and within particular circumstances. These norms and attitudes are themselves influenced by structural factors, such as legal and policy systems, inequalities in access to resources, benefits and services, and the distribution of social, economic and political power more broadly.

⁴ UNFPA (2012) *Marrying too young: end child marriage*, Available at: <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf> (Accessed: 21/08/2014).

⁵ CEDAW, General Recommendation 21.

⁶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 23(2)

⁷ Plan International (2011) *Because I Am A Girl: So what about the boys?*, Available at: <http://plan-international.org/girls/pdfs/biaaq-report-2011english.pdf> (Accessed: 21/08/2014).

Norms and attitudes concerning age and marriage are not homogenous; in any given community multiple ideas and perspectives will coexist. Nevertheless, there are some norms that are pre-eminent; more influential and dominant than others. An example might be the idea that younger women make more

attractive and desirable brides. Dominant norms and attitudes are closely associated with structures of social power; they are typically policed and enforced by persons in positions of authority, such as male heads of households, who are often rewarded for their efforts through the acquisition of very real social, material and economic benefits; for example, the father who saves dowry money through marrying his daughter early and/or to a significantly older man.

Alternative or ‘deviant’ norms and attitudes, that challenge the pre-eminent view, may emerge in situations where dominant norms frustrate or contract people’s realities, experiences and interests; such as, for example, girls who are subject to early marriage before they are ready, and against their will. This provides a basis for social change; through mobilising the voices and empowering those who do not conform to dominant perspectives; such as actions that empower women and girls, recognise their agency and transform gender relationships.



Furthermore, as dominant norms and attitudes concerning child marriage are determined by social and material conditions, through altering these conditions (for example, improving education, eliminating poverty etc.) dominant ideas can be reshaped to support norms that are prohibitive rather than supportive of the practice of child marriage.

Developing the research questions

The research questions have been designed around this theory, to gather information about:

→ The content and nature of (dominant) norms and attitudes concerning (child) marriage:

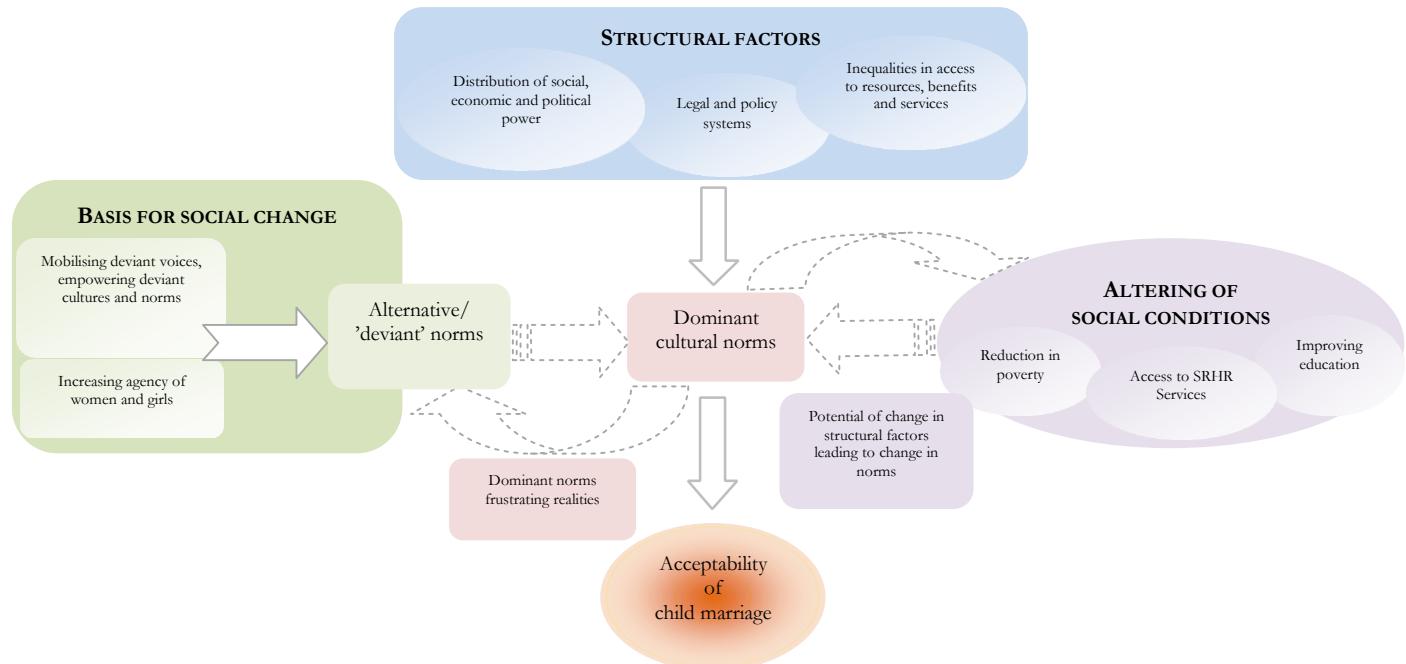
1. *What are the prevailing customs, moral rules and social norms about why and when a girl’s marriage should take place? Under what circumstances is marriage of a girl deemed to be necessary, desirable, acceptable, or unacceptable?*
2. *What is considered to be the ‘ideal age’ of marriage? What is considered to be ‘too early’ and ‘too late’?*

→ The influence of structural factors on these (dominant) norms and attitudes; and the substantive relationship between social and material conditions and the prevalence of child marriage (the relationship between dominant norms and social and material conditions):

3. *What factors are most important to the timing of marriage? (Household economic stress, how well a girl is doing in school or if she has dropped out, whether she is contributing income to the household, pre-marital pregnancy, experience or threat of sexual violence, the social status of the potential husband, etc.)*
 4. *Do changes in the realms of education, disaster risk management, sexual and reproductive health, livelihoods, violence against women and girls and implementation of policy relevant to age of marriage intersect with changes in the prevailing norms and attitudes on the acceptability of child marriage?*
- The presence, content and nature of alternative narratives, attitudes and experiences in relation to child marriage, and how these relate to dominant norms and practices:
5. *Do girls' ideas about marriage, and wishes concerning choice and timing of marriage, differ from the community's, and, if so, how?*
 6. *Is there a difference and if so, how many years / months difference is there, between the age girls say they would like / would have liked to be married and actual practices?*
- How dominant and less-dominant norms concerning child marriage relate to structures of social power:
7. *Who are the stakeholders in sustaining/ eradicating child marriage?*
 8. *Who are the main decision-makers in child marriage?*
- Finally, evidence gathered in relation to addressing all queries above will be used to answer the final research question:
9. *What are the preconditions for change in relation to child marriage? How can Plan most effectively intervene to change attitudes and individual and collective patterns of behaviour about child marriage?*



Diagram of the Conceptual Framework



1.3 Methodology

The study utilised a mixed methods approach to draw on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and to improve on the validity of results through data triangulation.

Methods and tools for data collection were also informed by Plan programming tools, particularly the Results Framework for Child Marriage and the Girl's Empowerment Star⁸. This was to ensure the relevance of research findings to Plan's program frameworks and approach.

1.3.1 Desk review

Initially, a desk review was carried out to examine existing literature on child marriage in the three case study countries, along with a legal analysis of international and domestic standards. It was found that the majority of literature on child marriage in the three case study countries tended to focus on estimating the prevalence of child marriage practices; mapping longitudinal trends in marriage ages and rates of child marriage; examining the causes of child marriage or factors that make children vulnerable to child marriage; and / or examining the impacts of child marriage. There appears to be very limited published research that explicitly addresses the research questions set out above; however, the literature review was useful in assisting in understanding the nature and extent of child marriage in each of the case study countries, which informed the research questions and development of data collection tools.

1.3.2 Selection of Research Sites

Research sites were selected both from Plan's child marriage programme areas, and areas where programming is about to start,⁹ in order to ensure the relevance of research findings for Plan's programming. In Bangladesh and Indonesia one semi-urban site and one rural site were selected; in Pakistan two rural sites and one urban site were selected.

Table 1: Research sites

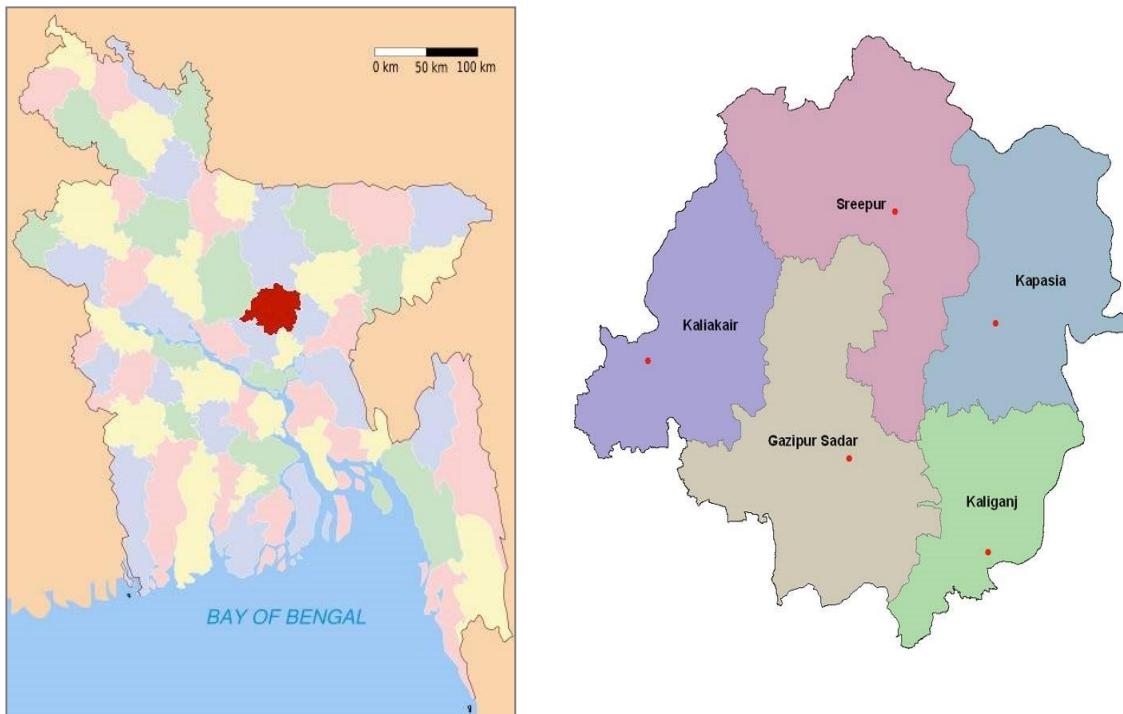
	Sub district/Sub region	Characterisation
Bangladesh	Sreepur, Gazipur	Semi-urban
	Khanshama, Dinajpur	Rural
Indonesia	Cigudeg	Semi-urban
	Babakan Madang	Rural
Pakistan	Mailsi	Urban
	Muzafargarh	Rural
	Rajanpur	Rural

⁸ The Girl's Empowerment Star is a tool used by Plan to monitor girls' perceptions of the opportunities and empowerment in their lives; <http://planinternational.org/files/global/publications/campaigns/girls-empowerment-star-english.pdf>.

⁹ The selection was purposive rather than random.

Bangladesh

Sreepur, Gazipur



Gazipur is a semi-urban district within the division of Dhaka, with a mixed urban and rural population (260,555 households are located in urban areas, while 565,903 are located in rural areas¹⁰). Sreepur is one of the largest districts within Gazipur, with a population of almost half a million (492,792 in 2011): 251,298 males and 241,494 females.¹¹ The average household size in Sreepur is 3.9, and most households are located in rural areas (91,402), compared to urban areas (31,470).¹² Sreepur has a low literacy rate of 30.3% (considerably lower than the national average at 58.8%¹⁴).

¹⁰ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Population and Housing Census 2011: Community Report Gazipur Zila*, available at <http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Census2011/Dhaka/Gazipur/Gazipur%20at%20a%20glance.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.dhakadiv.gov.bd> (information supplied by Plan Country Office, Bangladesh).

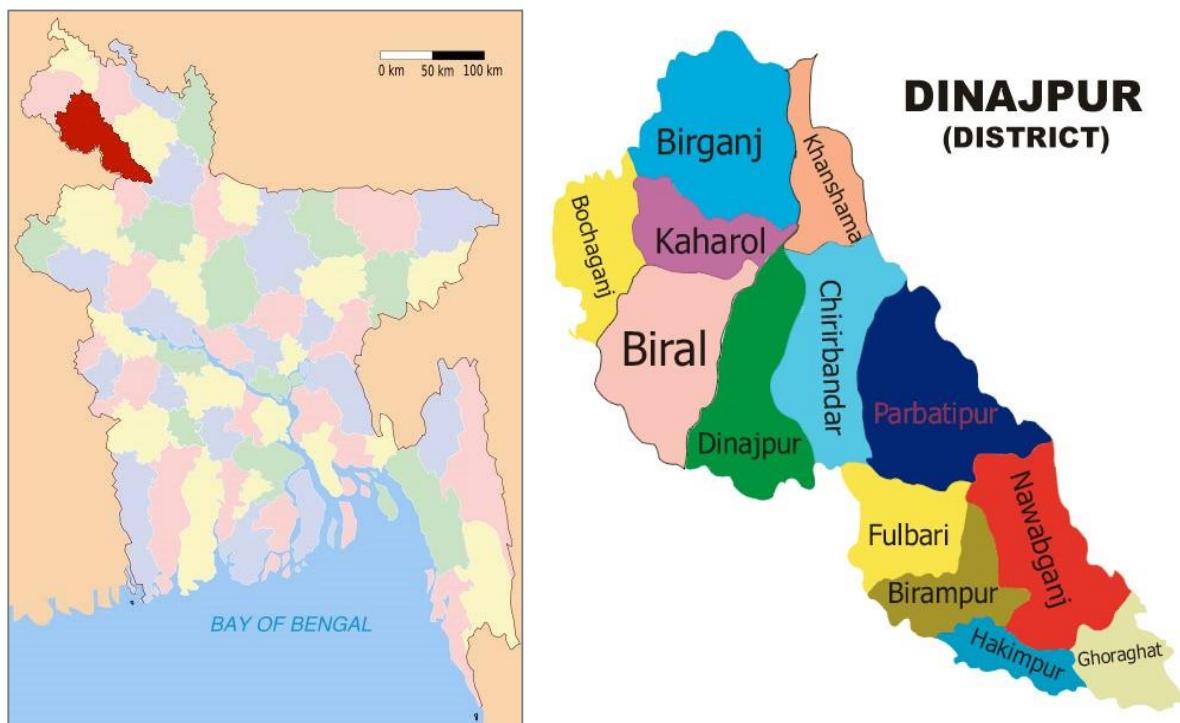
¹² Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Population and Housing Census 2011: Community Report Gazipur Zila*, available at <http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Census2011/Dhaka/Gazipur/Gazipur%20at%20a%20glance.pdf> ¹⁴

CIA, World Fact Book, *Bangladesh*, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html> ¹⁵

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Population and Housing Census 2011: Community Report Dinajpur Zila*, available at <http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Census2011/Rangpur/Dinajpur/Dinajpur%20at%20a%20glance.pdf>

¹⁶ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Bangladesh Population Census 2011*.

Khanashama, Dinajpur



Khanashama is a rural Upazila (sub-district) within the Dinajpur; a district in the North-West of Bangladesh. Dinajpur is a heavily rural district, with 500,729 of its 579,923 households located in rural areas.¹⁵ The economy of Dinajpur is based quite heavily on agriculture (particularly rice production), and is the main source of income for 72% of households (2011).¹⁶

Khanashama is a largely rural sub-district, with 37,320 households in rural locations and only 2,120 in urban locations. It contains 57 villages and has a population of 178,314 (90,038 male and 88,276 female).¹³ The average household size is 4.35.¹⁴ It has a literacy rate of 47.5% (lower than the national average of 58.8%).¹⁹

¹³ <http://www.dhakadiv.gov.bd> (information supplied by Plan Country Office, Bangladesh).

¹⁴ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Population and Housing Census 2011: Community Report Dinajpur Zila*, available at <http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Census2011/Rangpur/Dinajpur/Dinajpur%20at%20a%20glance.pdf>

¹⁹ CIA, World Fact Book, *Bangladesh*, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html>

Indonesia



Both research sites in Indonesia are located in **Bogor** Regency; a District in West Java province to the south of Jakarta. Bogor Regency has a population of over 5 million,¹⁵ and is a ‘commuter region’ for persons who work in Jakarta. Bogor Regency has a majority Muslim population (92.64%), with a Christian minority (3.4% protestant and 2.43% Catholic), and small Buddhist population (1.02%).¹⁶ The literacy rate in Bogor (98.7%)¹⁷ is quite high compared to the national average for Indonesia (90.4%).¹⁸

Babakan Madang and Cigueg are two sub-districts within Bogor. Babakan Madang has a total population of 112, 334 and Cigueg has a population of 127, 835.²⁴

¹⁵ Census, 2010, Biro Pusat Statistik, Jakarta, 2011.

¹⁶ "Profil Daerah Kota Bogor" (in Indonesian). 15 January 2010. Archived from [the original](#) on 21 September 2010. Retrieved 21 September 2010.

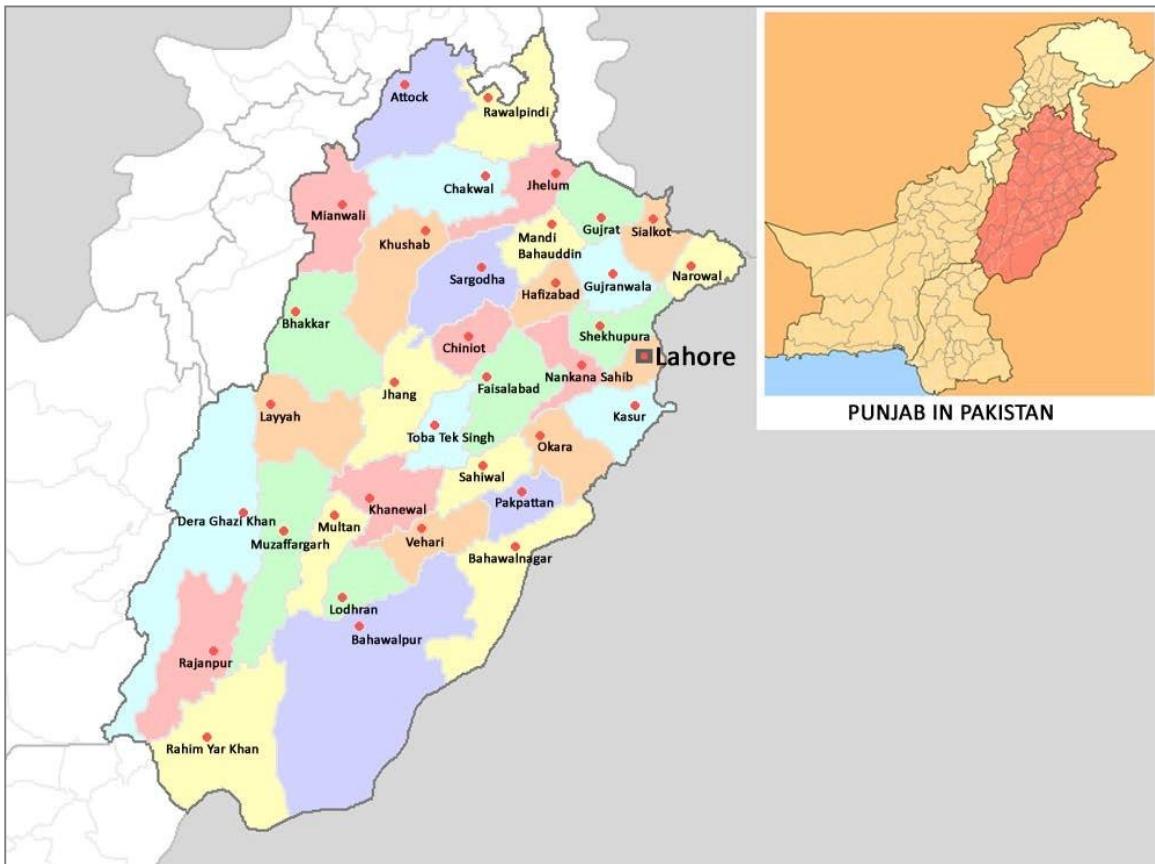
¹⁷ "Profil Daerah Kota Bogor" (in Indonesian). 15 January 2010. Archived from [the original](#) on 21 September 2010. Retrieved 21 September 2010.

¹⁸ CIA World Fact Book: Indonesia, available at <http://www.ciaworldfactbook.us/asia/indonesia.html>

²⁴ Information supplied by Plan Country Office, Indonesia.



Pakistan



All three research sites in Pakistan are located in Punjab; the most populous province of Pakistan, with a population of 91,379,615 (approximately 56% of the country's total population). Punjab has a mixed urban / rural population, with approximately 50% of persons (45,401,164) located in rural and 50% (45,978,451) located in urban areas.²⁵ Punjabis comprise the largest ethnic group, and the province is largely Muslim, with 97.21% of the population identifying Islam as their religion, and a small Christian minority (Christians make up 2.31% of the population).¹⁹

¹⁹ Information supplied by Plan Country Office, Indonesia.

Malisi is a city located in the Vehari District of Punjab, with a population of 704,878. Vehari has a population of 2,090,416, comprised of 51.85% males and 48.15% females.²⁰ The average household size in Vehari is quite large at 6.9.²¹ Vehari has a low literacy rate of 36.8%, with a large discrepancy between males (49.40%) and females (23.18%),²² which is considerably lower than the national average (54.7%).²³

Muzafargarth has a population of 2,635,903 and is a largely rural district, with 87.05% of the population located in rural areas.²⁴ It has a large average household size of 7.4, and a low literacy rate of 28.5%, with a very low literacy rate for females in particular (14.77%, compared to 40.87% for males).²⁵

Ranjanpur is a largely rural district, with a population of 1,103,618 persons (52.3% male and 47.37% female)²⁶, 85.49% of its population live in rural areas.²⁷ It has a high average household size of 7.3 and very low literacy rates of 20.7% in total (11.3% for females and 29% for males).²⁸

1.3.3 Quantitative Methods

The quantitative element of the research was designed to achieve comprehensive and representative data on prevalence, practices and attitudes regarding child marriage in each of the selected research sites. Data was collected through the administration of a household survey, which consisted of closed and multiple choice questions. The survey was designed to collect data on a range of indicators associated with the research questions, and Plan's 'Girls' Empowerment Star'. In each research site households were selected through systematic random sampling. In each household one individual was randomly selected to be the respondent of the survey.²⁹ Quantitative data was analysed with the use of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Findings were then triangulated in light of the qualitative data.

In total, 2742 surveys were completed, including 790 individuals (484 females, 306 males) in Bangladesh; 771 (472 females, 299 males) in Indonesia; and 1181 (767 females, 414 males) in Pakistan. Several inferential quantitative analysis techniques were used in the analysis and will be referred to throughout the report. Inferential statistical analysis involves the identification and analysis of patterns in a data set to draw conclusions about the population, which it represents. The primary techniques used in the report are defined briefly below:

²⁰ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Vehari District at a Glance*, available at <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/district-glance-vehari>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²¹ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Vehari District at a Glance*, available at <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/district-glance-vehari>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²² Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Vehari District at a Glance*, available at <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/district-glance-vehari>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²³ CIA World Factbook: *Pakistan*, available at : <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html>

²⁴ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Muzafargarth District at a Glance*, available at: <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/district-glance-muzaffargarh>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²⁵ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Muzafargarth District at a Glance*, available at: <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/district-glance-muzaffargarh>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²⁶ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Ranjanpur District at a Glance*, available at:

<http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/District%20at%20a%20glance%20Rajanpur.pdf>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²⁷ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Ranjanpur District at a Glance*, available at:

<http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/District%20at%20a%20glance%20Rajanpur.pdf>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²⁸ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Ranjanpur District at a Glance*, available at:

<http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/District%20at%20a%20glance%20Rajanpur.pdf>. Note, however that the latest population data is from 1998.

²⁹ Quantitative data was analysed with the use of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Findings were triangulated in the light of the qualitative data.

'Comparison of means' (t-test): A t-test is a statistical hypothesis test that can be used to determine whether two populations are significantly different from each other.

'Chi-squared test': A chi-squared test is a statistical hypothesis test that tests the strength of the association between two categorical variables, (for example the association between a respondent's religion and whether their marriage was officially registered). A chi-squared test can be used to identify significant associations between categorical variables, which suggest that they may be impacting on each other.

ANOVA: ANOVA, or 'Analysis of variance', is a technique which examines whether variation within a population is explained through its division into groups. One-way ANOVA involves a continuous dependent variable and one categorical independent variable (or factor). The technique is used in this report to determine whether variation in the dependent variable can be explained according to the grouping of the categorical variable.

Correlation: Correlation refers to the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. A significant correlation indicates the *existence* of such a relationship (though it does not imply that the relationship is causal). The correlation coefficient, which falls between zero and one, refers to the *strength* of the relationship where a higher correlation coefficient indicates a stronger relationship.

Regression: This report draws upon simple linear regression, a statistical technique that builds an optimal linear model of the relationship between an independent or explanatory variable (x) and a dependent or response variable (y); it is useful because it provides the proportion of the variance of one variable that can be predicted from the other. For the purposes of this study, the technique is used primarily to determine the relevance of the explanatory variable for predicting the response variable (for example, the variation in 'child marriage acceptability' that can be explained by a respondents income and such like).

1.3.3 Qualitative Methods

The qualitative research was designed to collect in-depth, contextual information on the nature and causes of child marriage and how child marriage is perceived and understood within the communities included in the research. Qualitative data was collected through a series of key informant, semi-structured interviews, focus groups discussions, and participatory methods, including role play and drawing exercises. The collection of qualitative data was assisted through the development of a series of tailored tools (these are available as an annex to the report). Sampling for the qualitative research was purposive (rather than random) and aimed to achieve diversity across a range of different variables including age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, location, and experience in relation to child marriage. Qualitative data was analysed manually through a thorough review of interview transcripts, recordings, and other materials to identify key themes, patterns, discourses, relationships and explanations relevant to the research questions.

In total, 158 semi-structured interviews were carried out with community members (boys and girls from the age of 12 years; young people; and parents) and other key stakeholders, including community leaders; government officials; marriage officiates and registrars; teachers; health workers; and persons who had been married as a child. In addition, 47 focus group discussions or participatory activities were carried out with age and gender specific groups of; children and young people aged 12 – 25 years, and parents.

Table 2: List of qualitative interactions by country

	Semi-structured interviews: community members	Focus group discussions and participatory activities	Semi-structured interviews: professionals and key stakeholders	Total
Bangladesh	27	14	20	61
Indonesia	26	14	19	59
Pakistan	37	19	29	85

A detailed list of stakeholders accessed during the qualitative research is available as an annex (Annex A).

1.3.4 An ‘index’ for programming

As part of the first year of the research, an index was developed, in order to ‘score’ communities according to the presence/absence of indicators associated with norms and attitudes about when a girl’s marriage is necessary, desirable, acceptable or unacceptable. The index may be used in each subsequent year of research to measure the *impact* of Plan’s programmes, in terms of progress towards addressing the structural/ underlying factors that influence child marriage attitudes and practices.

The index comprises a set of indicators that signal (reveal) the presence of structural/ environmental factors associated with child marriage (acceptability). Each community was assigned a value for each indicator based on the relative presence of that indicator on a scale from 1-10. Each indicator was then weighted according to its relative influence in relation to norms that are supportive or prohibitive of child marriage (child marriage acceptability). Weighting was determined through analysis of the quantitative data. Where there was found to be a strong association between a particular indicator and ideas accepting of child marriage, the indicator was given a high weighting. Where there was found to be a weak association between a particular indicator and ideas accepting of child marriage, the indicator was given a low weighting. The final score for each community was then determined by multiplying the values for each indicator by their weight and aggregating these results to create a final score.

1.3.5 Ethics

The research was guided by Coram Children’s Legal Centre’s Ethical Guidelines for Research, and a tailored Ethical Protocol and Research Toolkit (including checklists, consent forms and information sheets) were developed specifically for the research study. All of these documents are available into this report. Prior to commencing data collection, the Director of International Programmes and Research at the CCLC, and the Head of Research at Plan International, formally reviewed and approved the research methodology, tools and ethical protocol.

1.3.6 Limitations

The research was carried out in sites where Plan was currently programming or was about to start programming relating to child marriage, to enable the research findings to serve as a baseline against which to measure the impact of child marriage interventions over time. This, together with constraints in terms of timing and resources, limited the research team’s ability to select for ‘diversity’ in sites across different variables. In particular, in Indonesia and Bangladesh, there were found to be limited differences between research sites in terms of level of ‘rurality’, as the research team

were not able to visit a highly urban site – only ‘semi’ urban sites were available for selection. In some of the sites selected, participants were familiar with the work of Plan, including in relation to child marriage. In these cases participants may have wanted to provide researchers with an ‘appropriate’, ‘correct’, or ‘acceptable’ response based on their perception of data collectors as being associates of Plan. In the sites selected in Pakistan and Indonesia, Plan programming has only recently begun so this was less of a concern, however, Plan has already been programming for two years in sites in Bangladesh. This is likely to have impacted on results. This limitation was minimised through the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data - as the qualitative data collection allowed researchers to explore attitudes to child marriage in an in-depth and probing manner, the impact of programming in sensitising participants to be ‘on message’ was somewhat overcome.

Financial and practical challenges somewhat limited the ability for researchers to rigorously randomise the sampling for the household survey research. Comprehensive address lists were not available to use as sampling frames in the research locations.

Due to budget and time constraints, researchers were unable to re-visit selected houses more than once where no one was at home at the first visit. This may have introduced some bias into the sample. However, to adjust for this, researchers visited research locations at different times of the day.

In Pakistan, boys and men were disproportionately represented in the qualitative data, as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were predominantly carried out with boys and men. The reason for this is that researchers in the locations in Pakistan experienced difficulties gaining consent for participation in the research from women and girls to participate without the presence of a male family member. This had the result of limiting the amount of in-depth qualitative data collected in Pakistan on the attitudes and experiences of girls and women.

Section 2: Legal Frameworks

2.1 International standards on child marriage

International law clearly defines child marriage as a human rights violation through provisions in several instruments. Most notably, Article 16 (2) of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provides that: *‘the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect’*,³⁰ and Article 24(3) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) requires States to *‘take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.’*³¹ In its General Comment No 13, the CRC Committee includes child marriage in a list of acts that are considered as falling within the category of ‘traditional practices’ referred to in Article 23.

The Committees of both treaty bodies have also clarified that these treaty provisions should be understood as specifically prohibiting marriage under the age of 18 years. The CEDAW Committee issued its interpretation of Article 16(2) in General Recommendation No. 21, specifying that a ‘child’ is understood under international law to be a person under the age of 18 years and, therefore, that this article should be read as prohibiting marriage for both girls and boys under the ages of 18

³⁰ CEDAW, Article 16 (2).

³¹ CRC, Article 24 (3).

years.³² Furthermore, in its General Comment no. 4 on Adolescent Health and Development, the CRC Committee made a ‘strong recommendation’ that: ‘State parties review and, where necessary, reform their legislation and practice to increase the minimum age for marriage with and without parental consent to 18 years, for both girls and boys.’³³ This recommendation is also referred to in the Committee’s General Comment 13 on violence against children.³⁴

In addition to prohibiting marriage under the age of 18 years, international law requires that the minimum age of marriage should be the same for both men and women. In General Recommendation no. 21, the CEDAW Committee called on States to abolish provisions that establish different ages for marriage on the basis of sex, which are founded on discriminatory ideas about gender.³⁵ Further, in its General Comment no. 4, the CRC Committee elaborates that Article 2 of the CRC (which prohibits discrimination) should be interpreted as requiring specifically that the minimum age for marriage should be the same for both boys and girls.⁴³

Finally, in their combined General Comment on harmful practices, the CRC Committee and CEDAW Committee recognised that child marriages that include dowry payments could constitute a type of ‘sale of children’, which is prohibited under article 2(a) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.³⁶ The CEDAW Committee has also repeatedly emphasised that the institution of dowry may violate the right to freely choose a spouse.³⁷

2.2 Legal frameworks governing (child) marriage in the case study countries

2.2.1 Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a pluralist legal system³⁸, in which common law, statutory law and customary and religious law operate to regulate most aspects of life, including marriage. The minimum statutory age for marriage is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys, according to the *Child Marriage Restraint Act* 1929.⁴⁷ Any adult arranging, performing or ‘contracting’ a child marriage can be convicted of an offence, with a penalty of one month imprisonment or a fine.³⁹ Parents can be convicted if they permit or ‘negligently’ fail to prevent their child from being married.⁴⁰ If an impending child marriage is brought to a court’s notice, it can be prevented through an injunctive Court Order.⁴¹ In 2004, the Birth and Death Registration Act was amended to make it mandatory for the bride and groom to have a birth certificate before a marriage can be registered.

In addition to specifying a minimum age for marriage, statutory law criminalises the giving and taking of dowry, which is subject to prosecution under the *Dowry Prohibition Act* 1980. The Act defines

³² CEDAW, *General Recommendation 21*.

³³ CRC, *General Comment 4*.

³⁴ CRC, *General Comment 13*.

³⁵ CEDAW, *General Recommendation 21*.

⁴³ CRC, *General Comment 4*.

³⁶ CRC Committee and CEDAW Committee, Joint General Recommendation No. 31 and No. 18 on harmful practices, CEDAW/C/GC/31CRC/C/GC/18, 14 November 2014, para. 24.

³⁷ CRC Committee and CEDAW Committee, Joint General Recommendation No. 31 and No. 18 on harmful practices, CEDAW/C/GC/31CRC/C/GC/18, 14 November 2014, para. 24.

³⁸ A situation where there are multiple different legal systems operating alongside one another in a given society/ community.

⁴⁷ Section 2, *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

³⁹ Article 5, *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

⁴⁰ Section 6(1), *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

⁴¹ Article 12, *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

'dowry' as 'any property or valuable security' given or agreed to be given as consideration for the marriage, by one party to another party to a marriage, or their parents (or any other person).⁴²

Customary law in Bangladesh is shaped by the religious law and custom of each community (Christian, Hindu, Muslim) and constitutes a mixture of codified and uncodified rules, some dating back to the 1860s.⁴³ The concept of marriage within the context of customary law varies amongst communities, resulting in different yet overlapping legal systems, which establish a range of different rules and conditions for marriage.⁴⁴

According to a recent study on customary laws relating to gender-based violence in Bangladesh, Muslim (*Sharia*) law permits 'any person of sound mind who has attained 'puberty' to enter into marriage. However, 'there is no express provision of the age of 'puberty''. According to Hindu *Shastric* law, marriage is also permitted from 'puberty'.⁴⁵

2.2.2 Indonesia

The legal system in Indonesia is also pluralist, with systems of civil law, religious (Islamic) law and *adat* ('traditional law'). The *Law on Marriage* 1974 sets the minimum age of marriage at 16 for girls and 19 for boys, though parental consent is required for marriages taking place where one or both parties is under the age of 21 years. Marriages may lawfully take place below these ages where parents successfully petition a judge or '*other competent authority*'.⁴⁶ The *Law on Child Protection* 2002 makes parents '*responsible and accountable for.../.../preventing underage marriages*'.⁴⁷ While, for the purposes of the Law, a child is defined as a person less than 18 years,⁴⁸ 'underage marriages' are not further defined in the Law. Therefore, it is unlikely that this provision applies to marriages in which one person is aged less than 18 years. It has been reported that the Indonesian government is drafting a bill to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18 years of age.⁴⁹

In Indonesia, marriages (called *nikah siri* marriages) can take place according to Islamic law. These marriages are not registered in the civil system and are not officially recognised by the State. They are nonetheless considered to be 'valid' according to Islamic law.⁵⁰

While *adat* is difficult to translate, it is generally believed to be a system of prescriptions of customs, traditions, rules or practices that guide social life and decision-making in communities.⁵¹ Ideas of minimum marriage ages vary according to different *adat* systems across the country. A study published in 2009 using data from *adat* experts across 273 villages showed that the minimum age for marriage varied widely across the *adat* systems and regions, from a mean of 14.8 years for girls and 16.7 years for boys in one region (Bugis) up to 19.9 years (girls) and 20.3 years (boys) in another (Bali).⁵²

⁴² Section 2, Dowry Prohibition Act 1980.

⁴³ Leigh Blomgren, Global Centre for Women and Justice, Cornell Law School, *Child Marriage in Bangladesh: Impact of discriminatory personal laws* (2013) <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/WomenAndJusticeFellow5.pdf>

⁴⁴ Leigh Blomgren, Global Centre for Women and Justice, Cornell Law School, *Child Marriage in Bangladesh: Impact of discriminatory personal laws* (2013) <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/WomenAndJusticeFellow5.pdf>

⁴⁵ Tajul Islam and Rokon Uddin, *Customary Laws, Norms and Practices in Bangladesh: Gender-based violence perspective* (2013), p. 77.

⁴⁶ Article 7, *Law on Marriage* (1974).

⁴⁷ Article 26(c), *Law on Child Protection* (2002).

⁴⁸ Article 1, *Law on Child Protection* (2002).

⁴⁹ Hamilton et al. *Legal Analysis on Laws Concerning Violence Against Children in ASIAN States*, UNICEF, 2015.

⁵⁰ Hamilton et al. *Legal Analysis on Laws Concerning Violence Against Children in ASIAN States*, UNICEF, 2015.

⁵¹ A Buttenheim, J Nobles (2009) 'Ethnic Diversity, traditional norms and marriage behaviour in Indonesia', *Population Studies*, 63(3), pp. 279.

⁵² Ibid.

2.2.3 Pakistan

Pakistan has a complex pluralist legal system. Some legislative areas are under the jurisdiction of the provinces, and other matters are national. The (national) *Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929* sets the minimum age of marriage at 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys.⁵³ It imposes penalties on persons who arrange a child marriage and on parents who negligently fail to prevent their child being married.⁵⁴

Following the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment in 2010, however, the issue of child marriage was devolved to the jurisdiction of the provinces, although national law is still applicable in some provinces (namely, Balochistan, KP, FATA and the Islamabad Capital Territory). Sindh was the first province to pass a law amending the national Child Marriage Restraint Act: *The Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013* which set the age of marriage at 18 years for both boys and girls, and provides for a sentence of up to three years imprisonment or a fine for parents and also for brides and grooms.⁵⁵

Many marriages in Pakistan, however, take place under Islamic Law. Under the Zina and Hadood Ordinances (1979), a girl can lawfully marry when she reaches the age of 16 years or at puberty. Furthermore, the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), an influential constitutional body responsible for providing advice on Islamic law issues, has recently announced that girls are ready for marriage as soon as they reach puberty (however the law does not elaborate on a definition of 'puberty').⁵⁶ In April 2014, the Council also ruled that banning such unions was anti-Islamic.⁵⁷ It is thought that these rulings will have a major influence on the practices of local religious leaders.⁵⁸

In Pakistan, 'exchange marriages' (*Vani* and *Swara*) in which a young girl is 'given' as compensation to another family group for example to settle a blood feud, are unlawful under section 310 of the Pakistani Penal Code, and carry a sentence of three to ten years imprisonment. These practices are also against Islamic law, according to the Council of Islamic Ideology.⁵⁹

Section 3: Marriage Practices and Norms

3.1 Why do people marry?

*"Marriage is a custom. Everybody should be married. Marriage is a social norm. We all have to obey this rule. It's a tradition."*⁶⁰

In all three case-study countries, marriage was found to play a central and fundamental role in social life. There is a widespread presumption that people ought to marry for a range of reasons relating to sexuality, reproduction, kinship, companionship, religion, culture, and economic wellbeing. Rather than speaking of marriage as a choice, participants tended to speak of it as an obligation;

⁵³ Section 2, *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

⁵⁴ Sections 5 and 6, *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

⁵⁵ A series of Bills have been proposed which aim to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 years at national and provincial levels, and impose harsher penalties and sentences against perpetrators.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ M Zia-ur-Rahman (2014) *Pakistan's slow but steady progress on ending child marriage*, Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/2014/jun/02/pakistan-progress-ending-child-marriage> (Accessed: 21/08/2014).

⁵⁷ M Zia-ur-Rahman (2014) *Pakistan's slow but steady progress on ending child marriage*, Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/2014/jun/02/pakistan-progress-ending-child-marriage> (Accessed: 21/08/2014).

⁵⁸ M Zia-ur-Rahman (2014) *Pakistan's slow but steady progress on ending child marriage*, Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/2014/jun/02/pakistan-progress-ending-child-marriage> (Accessed: 21/08/2014).

⁵⁹ Government of Pakistan, *State Party Report to the UNCRC* (2009), para. 117.

⁶⁰ Interview, woman aged 19, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

as one participant in Bangladesh put it: “*marriage is mandatory according to Islam*”⁶¹ and a respondent in Indonesia similarly asserted: “*to be married is a must*”.⁶²

It is generally considered unacceptable for both men and women to remain unmarried too far into adulthood, although the consequences of not being married by an appropriate age appear to be significantly worse for women. As one 14 year old boy in Bangladesh explained: “*marriage is a social norm practiced over the years. Without marriage, a person is treated as incomplete, or sexually disabled, or characterless all together.*”⁶³ The majority of survey respondents across all three countries were married. As many as 90% of all adults⁶⁴ were married, with a strikingly low number (less than 2%) of respondents, remaining single beyond the age of 25 years.

The qualitative research revealed that reasons for marriage are heavily gendered (related to gender-based biases). When speaking of reasons why men should marry, participants tended to explain that marriage is necessary for the fulfilment of men’s sexual, emotional and reproductive needs, and that acquiring a wife is necessary for the fulfilment of household work and parental care; as one young man in Bangladesh explained:

*“There are several reasons for getting married. A wife is responsible for cooking for the family members and maintaining household works. Also she will take care of the father and mother [in laws]. A wife might give psychological support. Most importantly, sexual needs can be fulfilled from the wife.”*⁶⁵

Similarly, a man in Pakistan explained:

*“[people marry] for pleasure, for children, for family. When you come home you should be served food. People marry so that they can be facilitated by their wives. I am married, when I go home in the evening my everything will be ready: I will be served with water, food, clean clothes, and clean bed. I can sleep – relax. Today everyone is being provided these services either by [their] wife, mother or sister.”*⁶⁶

When asked why women should marry, on the other hand, participants across gender and age groups tended to focus on the risks associated with remaining single, and the burden that unmarried women present to their parents; as one young woman explained: “*girls can’t stay in their parents’ house their whole life long. Her responsibility should be taken by a man*”⁶⁷ another noted “*the main reason girls get married is sexual harassment. Safety is a big issue. Girls’ parents think girls are a burden.*”⁶⁸ It follows that the stakes of remaining unmarried are especially high for women. One participant explained: “*if a girl doesn’t get married people will start to gossip about her. She will lose her reputation, and people will think she is having affairs. For a man is less of an issue. He can remain single.*”⁶⁹ In a participatory group activity in Bangladesh, children wrote down the reasons that people in their community get married: “*Boys marry for young girl, sex, dowry and partner. Girls marry for shelter.*”⁷⁰

⁶¹ Interview, man, 19 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

⁶² Interview, woman, 18 years, Cigudeg, Bogor.

⁶³ Interview, boy, 17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

⁶⁴ Defined as persons 18 years and above.

⁶⁵ Interview, man, aged 19, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

⁶⁶ Interview, man, 22 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

⁶⁷ Interview, girl, 17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh

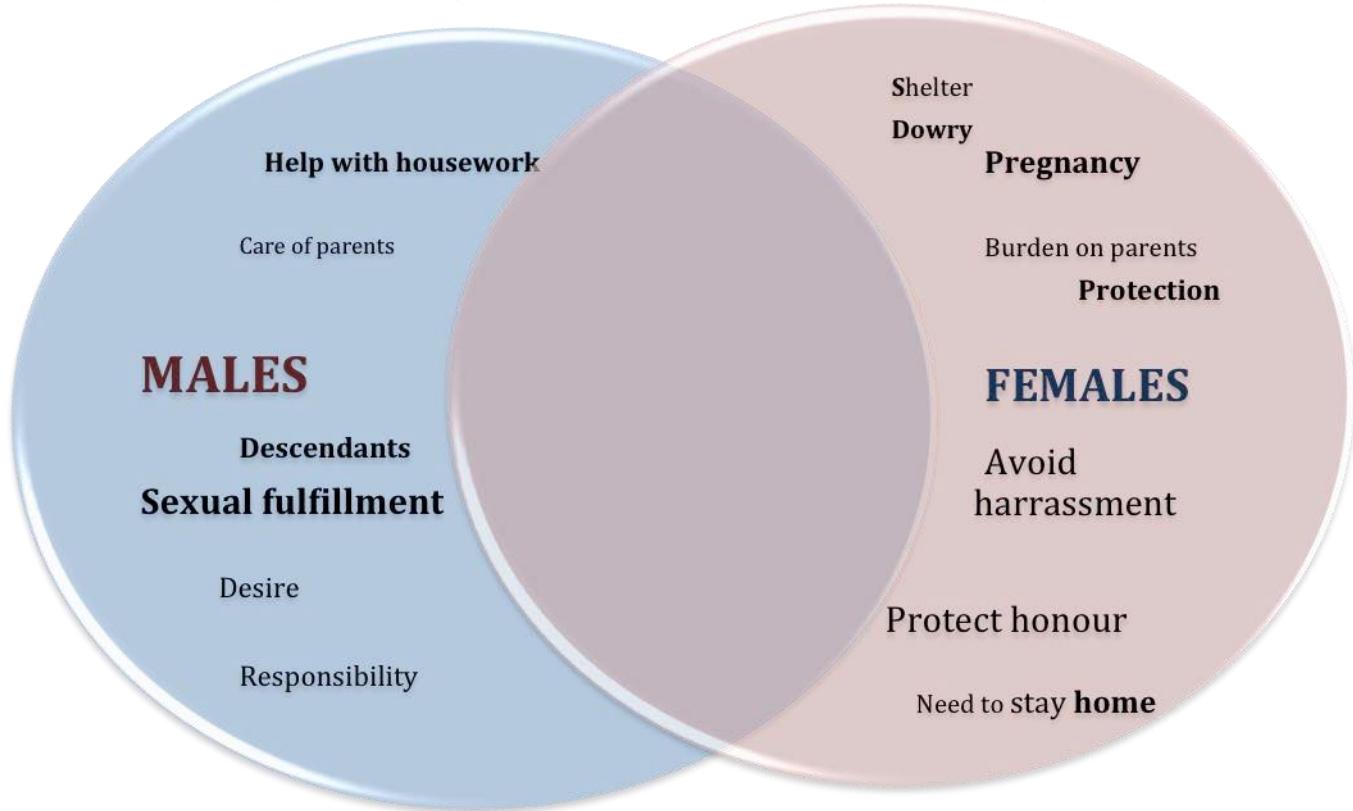
⁶⁸ Interview, girl, 15 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

⁶⁹ Interview, girl, 17 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

⁷⁰ Participative Group Activity, body map), children 12 – 14 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

Diagram 1: Ideas associated with reasons for marriage

The diagram below constitutes a visual representation some of the core ideas associated with reasons for marriage that emerged from qualitative interviews and focus group discussions.



3.2 Types of marriages in the research locations

The qualitative data demonstrated various marriage practices that are prevalent in the case study countries.

3.2.1 Bangladesh

Arranged Marriages

In research locations in Bangladesh, participants explained that the most prevalent and accepted marriages are those that are 'arranged': initiated by a couple's parent(s) or older relative(s). Often the parents of the bride will agree a monetary or in kind payment (dowry) to the groom's family in exchange for the marriage of their daughter.

"Most of the marriages happen by arrangement. The parents on the bride's side and on the groom's side visit each other's houses. The bride and groom also see each other at this time. After they have finished all the marriage agreements - such as dowry and 'denmohar' [bride security money] then the bride's Imam (Religious leader) completes the marriage the religious way. People from the bride's side and the groom's side attend the marriage. After that, when the wedding ceremony happens, they register their marriage 'officially' at the Kazi office [religious marriage registration body, which is distinct from the civil registration process]."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Interview, Community Leader, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

Love Marriages

'Love marriages' were another type of marriage identified by research respondents in Bangladesh. According to participants in the qualitative research 'love marriages' are far less common than 'arranged marriages', although some participants expressed the view that they are growing in popularity, especially in more urban parts of the country. Love marriages occur when a couple initiate and agree to a marriage, without the arrangement of their parents or another third party. 'Love marriages' are generally less acceptable than arranged marriages, and may require a couple to elope and sever ties with their families, at least temporarily. This can be very damaging to a couple's reputation, particularly the reputation of the bride, as well as that of her family. The stigma attached to 'love marriages' derives from the assumption that they are the consequence of a prior illicit sexual relationship.

3.2.2 Pakistan

Arranged Marriages

According to participants in the study, most marriages in the research locations in Pakistan are arranged by a couple's parents or other relatives, and typically take place between extended family members, for the purpose of strengthening kinship ties. Marriages may be agreed already when the couple are small children, and well before the wedding is due to take place. During qualitative interviews, boys often referred to having a particular girl 'on their name', who they would be married to once they had reached an appropriate age or stage in life.

Researcher: **Are you married?**

Participant: Yes a girl is on my name - she is 13 years old. Yes her age is marriageable age, but I will not marry until I complete my education.⁷⁰

Arranged marriages in research locations in Pakistan, like in those in Bangladesh, normally involve the payment of a dowry from the bride's family to the family of the groom.

Children in Ranjanpur developed the following role-play to describe a typical marriage in their community⁷¹:

Scene 1 "Before the wedding" (the girl is 12 years old, having just gone through puberty. The boy is 14 years old)

A relative has come to visit another relative along with his son and wife to propose the marriage of his son with his relative's daughter. The other relative immediately agrees to the proposal. The girl was around; she was listening to the discussion regarding the proposal but was not asked for her consent to the marriage. After the finalization of the wedding date, the boy's family left the scene.

Scene 2 "During the wedding" (girl is 14 years old; boy is 15 years old)

The *Kazi/Nikahkhwan* (religious leader) is called for the *nikah* (wedding ceremony). The groom's brother goes to request the *Kazi* to perform the ceremony. The *Kazi* sits on the stage. He starts writing conditions for the marriage: the boy will not take a second bride without the consent of his wife; the boy's sister will be given to girl's brother when she reaches *baligh* (begins her menstruation). The *Kazi* completes the *nikah* formalities. The *Kazi* asks the girl if she accepts the boy. The *Kazi* also asks the boy if he accepts the girl. Both bride and groom consent verbally.

⁷⁰ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 16 – 18 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

⁷¹ Participative Group Activity, drama, 15 boys, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

Watta Satta Marriages

According to research participants, *Watta Satta*, or ‘exchange’ marriages are relatively common in the two rural research locations in Pakistan, and particularly in Ranjanpur. *Watta satta* (which translates as ‘give-take’) constitutes the marriage exchange of a brother-sister, or uncle-niece pairing across two households. The couples of both families may be promised from a young age, or even prior to birth, but will usually not marry until they have at least obtained the age of *baligh* (puberty), usually defined by the start of a girl’s menstruation. One participant explained: “*my cousin was 24 years old and he was married with a 13/14 year-old-girl. Because it was an exchange (watta satta) marriage, the boy had to wait until she got baligh.*”⁷²

Watta satta marriages are intended to establish a system of reciprocity and accountability across two families, most particularly to provide an insurance mechanism to prevent family violence and abuse; as one young boy married at 13/14 years explained:

*“I married my cousin; and my cousin married my sister. My father said to me – ‘your sister is in trouble in your cousin’s house. They beat her.’ My father decided that I should marry and bring their daughter (my cousin) to our house. It was a *watta satta* marriage. I liked my wife before marriage but I did not want to marry at this age. I was very young, I felt scared. This marriage would have not taken place so early if my sister was not beaten.”*⁷³

Watta satta marriages appear to be practiced most frequently amongst poor families, perhaps because they do not require the payment of a dowry. Within *watta satta* marriages the (relative) age of the bride and groom is not considered very important; the overriding concern is to guarantee a reciprocal exchange between the two families. Participants explained: “*in *watta satta* marriages, ages are not seen;*”⁸⁵

⁷² Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

⁷³ Interview, boy who was married at 13/14 years, 14/15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

⁸⁵ Participatory Group Activity, body map, boys, 12 – 14 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

*"in this system, age is not given any consideration. It is fate whether a girl's husband is 50 years old or 15 years old. In watta satta a girl has to be received. She can be received for a 15 year old son, or a 35 year old brother."*⁸⁶

Love Marriages

'Love marriages' are considered very unacceptable and deeply stigmatised in all the research locations according to respondents in Pakistan. In the words of one participant: "*love marriage is not common in our area. It is said that you have to love the girl who is your wife, not a girl to make her your wife.*"⁸⁷ This relates to the absolute prohibition on sex and relationships outside of marriage, and the strict separation of boys and girls in social life, including at school.

Vani (or Swara) Marriages

'Vani' or 'swara' marriages are marriages where a young girl is offered to an individual, family, tribe or clan to settle a blood feud, or as compensation or appeasement for a wrong committed by her family. This type of marriage was not mentioned by respondents and do not appear to be prevalent in the research sites. According to secondary sources, however, it is practiced in regions of Pakistan.⁸⁸

Marriage through vulver

'Vulver', the practice of selling a daughter for a price⁸⁹, was not mentioned frequently by respondents, though some anecdotal emphasis of the practice emerged in the qualitative research.

Marriage to the Koran

Marriage to the Koran is a practice whereby a girl is made ineligible for marriage by being symbolically married to the Koran (or another object).⁹⁰ The practice is not a religious one, but is often used by a male head of household to protect family assets and property. While no specific cases of 'marriage to the Koran' were reported in the study, several respondents described the practice.

3.2.3 Indonesia

Unlike participants in the other two case study countries, respondents in the research locations in Indonesia did not generally consider 'arranged' marriages to be a desirable practice, and many felt that arranged marriages were not commonly practiced. Participants usually spoke of marriage as something that occurs after a couple have established a relationship and fallen in love: "*(people) get married because they are in love with each other and they believe that their partner is the right person to be married to. In some cases, they get married because their parents arrange it. Loving each other and having enough age are good reasons for getting married, whereas having an arranged marriage is bad.*"⁹¹

This finding is supported by evidence from the quantitative data, in which 76%/75.6% of respondents in research sites in Indonesia agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'marriage of girls / boys under 18 mostly happens because of love,' compared to a much smaller 41.0%/38 % of participants in Bangladesh, and 30.6%/30.2% of participants in Pakistan.

There were some examples of marriages described as 'arranged' that emerged from the qualitative data from Indonesia, although these accounts were comparatively rare. One young woman described her own experience:

⁸⁶ Interview, Marriage Registrar, Ranjanpur, Pakistan. ⁸⁷ Interview, father, 25 years, Muzaffargarh, Pakistan.

⁸⁸ Munir, Arshad and Nasim Akhtar, "A Social Custom, "Vani": Introduction and Critical Analysis", VFAST Transactions on Education and Social Sciences, Volume 3, Number 2, March-April 2014.

⁸⁹ Anderson, Siwan, "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice", *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 21, Number 4, Fall 2007, pp 151-174.

⁹⁰ Basu, Amitra, Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia, in "Governing Women: Women's Political Effectiveness in Contexts of Democratization and Governance Reform" Anne Marie Goetz (Ed), Routledge: New York City, 2009. ⁹¹ Interview, young woman, 18 years, Babakan Madang, Indonesia.

*"I got married in 2010. I was 14 and my husband was 20. We only knew each other for about a week, and then he proposed to marry me. His mother arranged our marriage...My parents in law decided about the marriage. I could not say anything because my parents also approved of our marriage...I felt pressured into getting married. The pressure came from my parents in law."*⁷⁴

3.3 At what age do people get married?

Given that marriage is perceived as both necessary and desirable, for both men and women, it is perhaps unsurprising that participants tend to marry at a relatively early age. The average (mean)⁷⁵ age for marriage amongst the survey sample was found to be relatively low across research sites in all three countries at 18.40 years in Bangladesh, 19.58 years in Pakistan and 20.20 years in Indonesia.

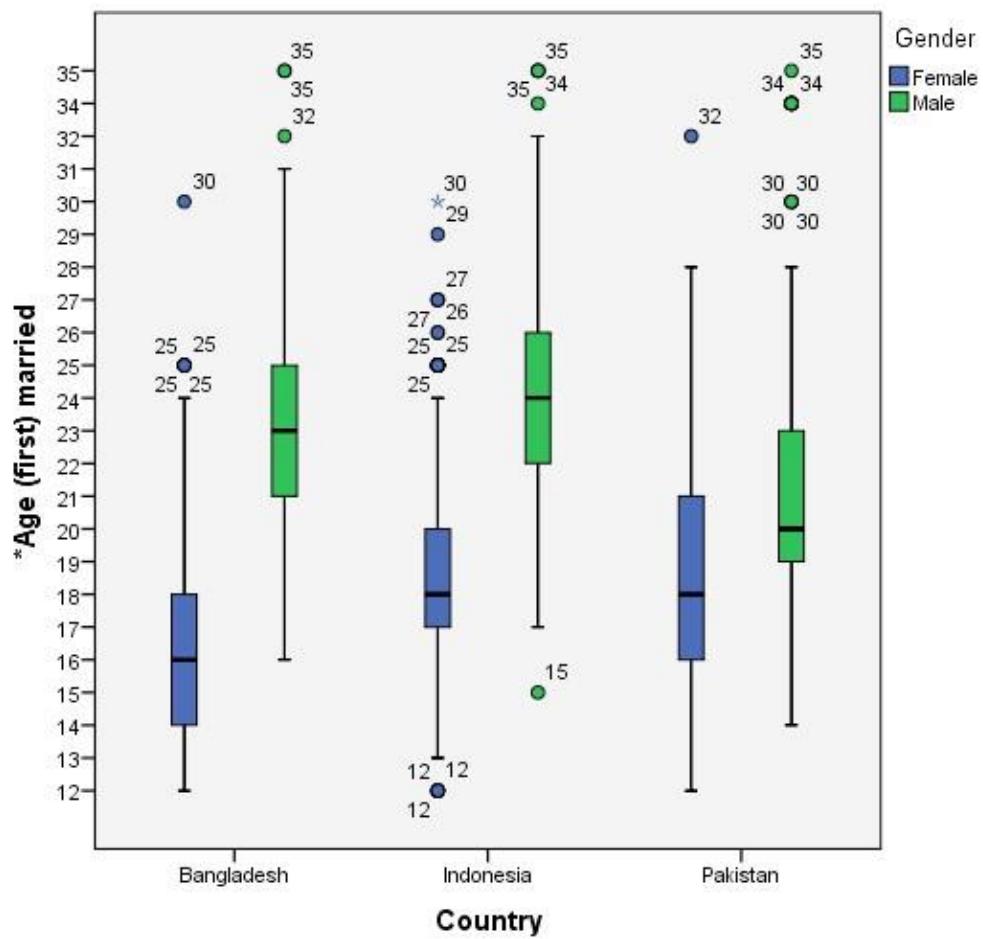
Chart 1: Mean ages of first marriage by gender/ country

The below graph describes the mean and distribution of the age of first marriage by gender by country. The coloured boxes on the graph span the age of first marriage for the middle 50% of respondents at each in each country, centred around a mean⁷⁶ value (the black line cutting across the boxes). Female respondents are represented in blue and male respondents are represented in green. The vertical lines stretching out from the boxes represent the outer 50% of respondents, and the dots and stars above and below the lines represent extreme values, with stars representing the most extreme cases.

⁷⁴ Interview, young woman, 19 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

⁷⁵ Mean refers to the central tendency of a probability distribution, it is calculated as the sum of every value in the distribution, divided by the sample.

⁷⁶ 'Mean' refers to the central tendency of a probability distribution, it is calculated as the sum of every value in the distribution, divided by the sample.



As this graph demonstrates the mean ages of first marriage in the sites selected in Bangladesh were 23.24 years for males, and 16.28 years for females; 23.98 years for males and 18.63 years for females in the sites selected in Indonesia, and 21.41 years for males and 18.77 years for females in Pakistan. Strikingly, as the graph demonstrates, females in research sites in Bangladesh and Indonesia which first married at the age of 25 years or above were married so late by comparison with the rest of the sample as to constitute extreme 'outliers'.

These findings indicate that the mean ages of marriage in the research sites are slightly lower than national estimates,⁷⁷ except in the case for females in Bangladesh, where nationwide figures estimate the mean age of first marriage at a slightly lower 15.8 years (compared to 16.28 in the sample). Small differences are not surprising, given that research sites included in the study were chosen to be representative of Plan's programming areas, rather than being nationally representative.



The mean age for females was significantly lower in the sites in Bangladesh compared to the sites selected in Indonesia and Pakistan (ANOVA, $p<0.001$).⁹⁶ The difference between the mean age of first marriage for females and mean age of first marriage for males was also found to be highest in Bangladesh, at 6.68 years.

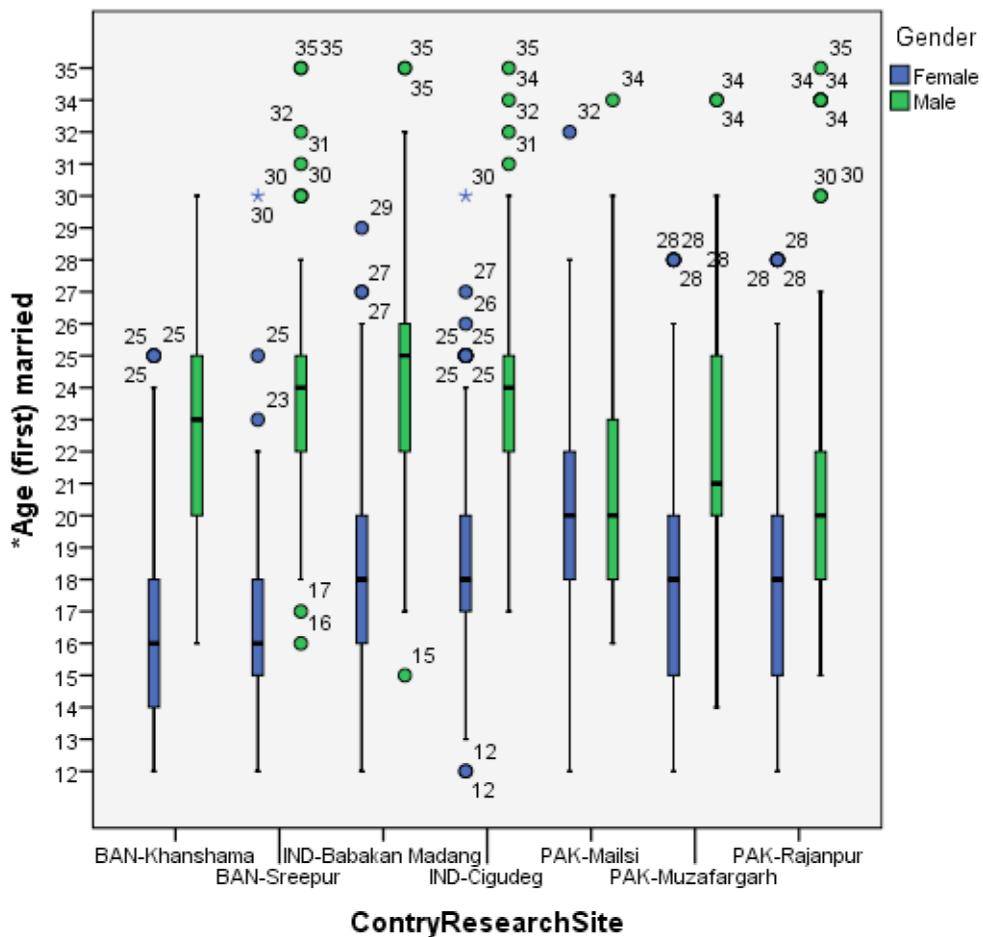
Chart 2: Mean ages of marriage by gender/ specific research site

The graph describes the mean and distribution of the age of first marriage by gender by specific research site. In all country case studies there was found to be a significant difference between the mean ages of first marriage for females and for males (T-test, $p<0.001$ for all countries). This is also the case when the data is disaggregated by specific research site, except for the urban site in Pakistan (Mailsi) where, interestingly, the mean ages of first marriage for males and females were found to be remarkably similar, although the spread around the mean remains unequal with girls married as young as 12 years, compared to boys who are married from 16.

⁷⁷ Demographic Health Survey (DHS) data, the median age of first marriage in Bangladesh is 24.2 for males and 15.8 for females (2011); In Indonesia it is 24.3 years for males and 19.9 years for females (2011); and in Pakistan it is 24.7 for males and 19.5 years for females. Demographic and Health Survey: Bangladesh, Table 4.5 (women aged 20 – 49 years and men aged 25 – 54 years): available at:

<http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR265/FR265.pdf>; HS Program (2012) Indonesia: Demographic and Health Survey 2012 (ever married women, 20 – 49 years and married men 24 – 55 years), available at: <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR275/FR275.pdf>; Demographic and Health Survey: Pakistan, Table 4.4 (women aged 25 – 49 years and men aged 30 – 54 years): available at: <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR290/FR290.pdf>.

⁹⁶ Significant at 0.01. Sig value 0.000.



One of the interesting things about the above graph is that it implies that where the mean age of first marriage of females is relatively low, there tends to be a relatively larger gap between the mean ages of first marriage for males and for females (i.e. Sreepur in Bangladesh). Conversely where the mean age of first marriage of females is relatively higher, there tends to be a smaller gap between the mean ages of first marriage for males and for female (e.g. Mailsi in Pakistan). In other words relatively younger brides tend to marry relatively older grooms.

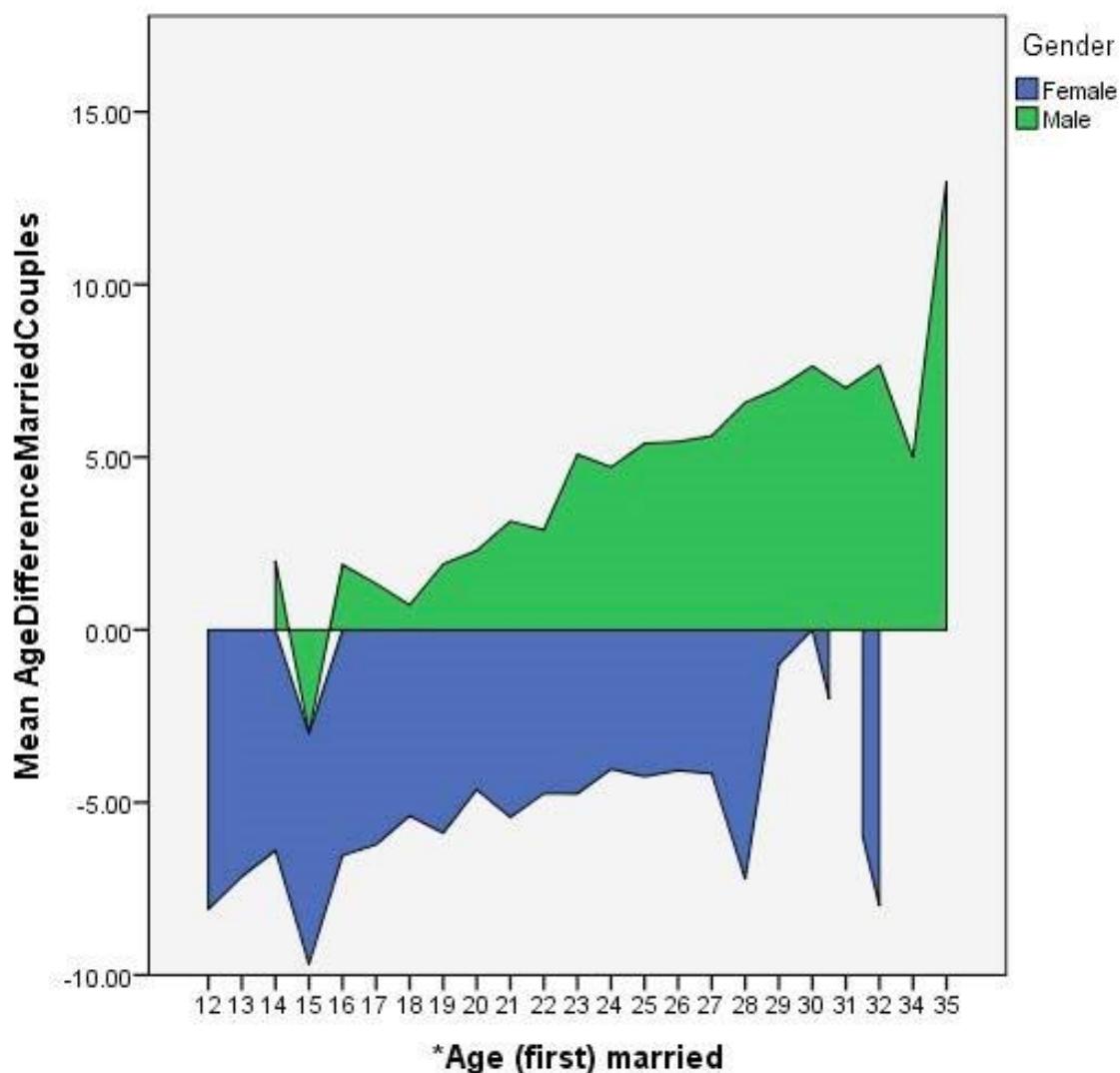
3.4 Age differences between women and their partners

These results are also observable in the survey data when comparing the average age gap between respondents and their partners. In Bangladesh, where the mean age of first marriage for girls was *lowest*, the mean difference in age between married females and their partners was *highest*: married females were, on average, around 7 years younger than their partners. Conversely, in Pakistan, where the mean age of first marriage of girls was highest, the mean difference in age between married females and their partners was lowest, at around 5 years.

Chart 3: difference in mean age of marriage between respondents and their partners

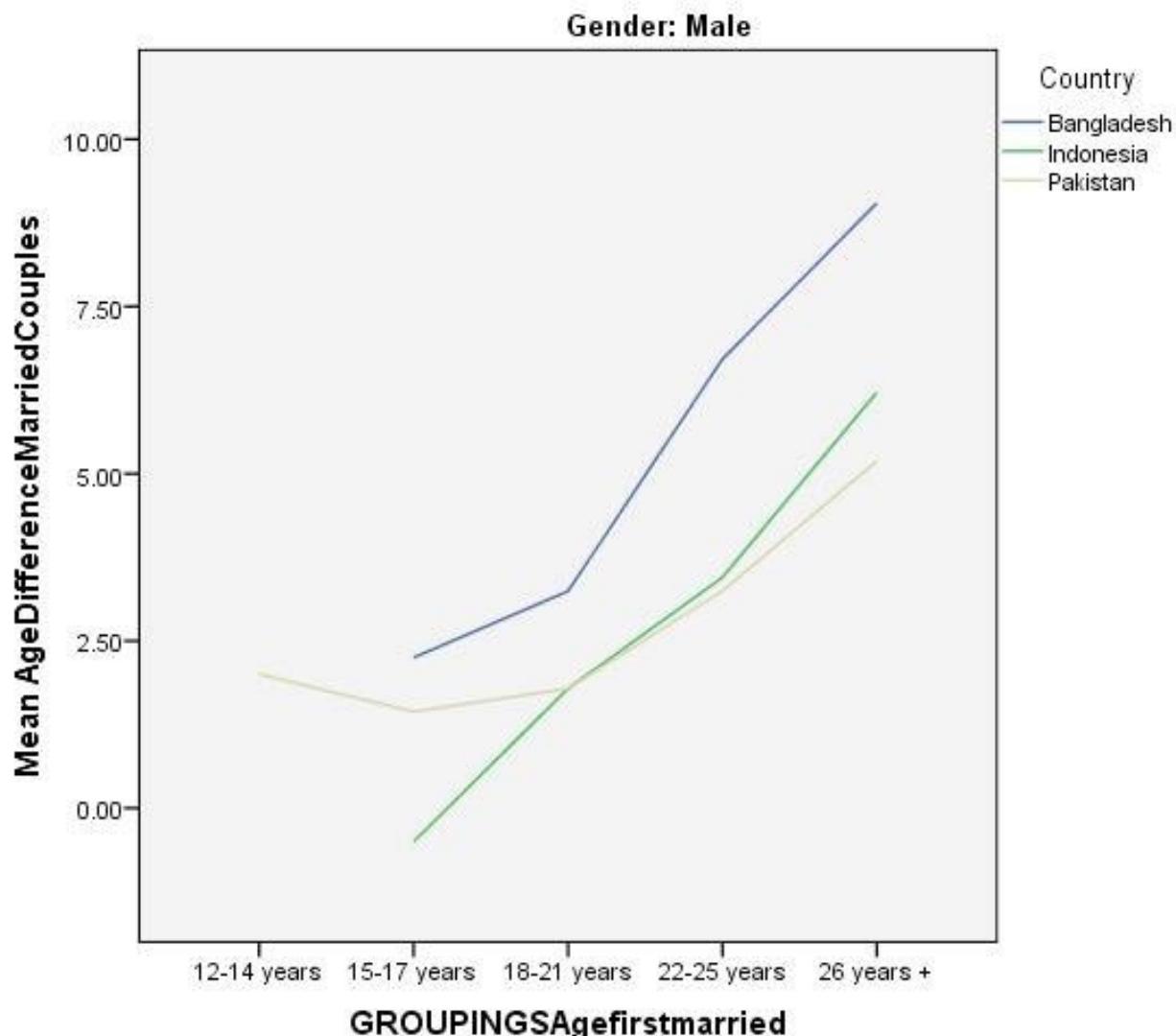
The graph below demonstrates the mean age difference between respondents and their partners, broken down according to the age at which they married. Female respondents are shown in blue and male respondents are shown in green. The y-axis represents the age difference between partners and the x-axis represents the age of the respondent at marriage. Negative values on the y-axis are assigned to people who were *younger* than their partners at marriage; positive values on the y-axis are assigned to those who were *older* than their partners at marriage.

As the graph indicates, most male respondents (green area) who married over the age of 16 years were married to *younger* partners, and conversely, almost all female respondents (blue area) were married to *older* partners. The green area dipping below the x-axis indicates that some boys who were married relatively early (at 14 to 16) years were younger than their wives. Importantly, the graph also demonstrates that respondents who were married as children were, in general, married to partners relatively older than themselves, compared to those who were married as adults. In other words, the younger a female respondent was when she got married, the larger the gap between her age and her partner's age.



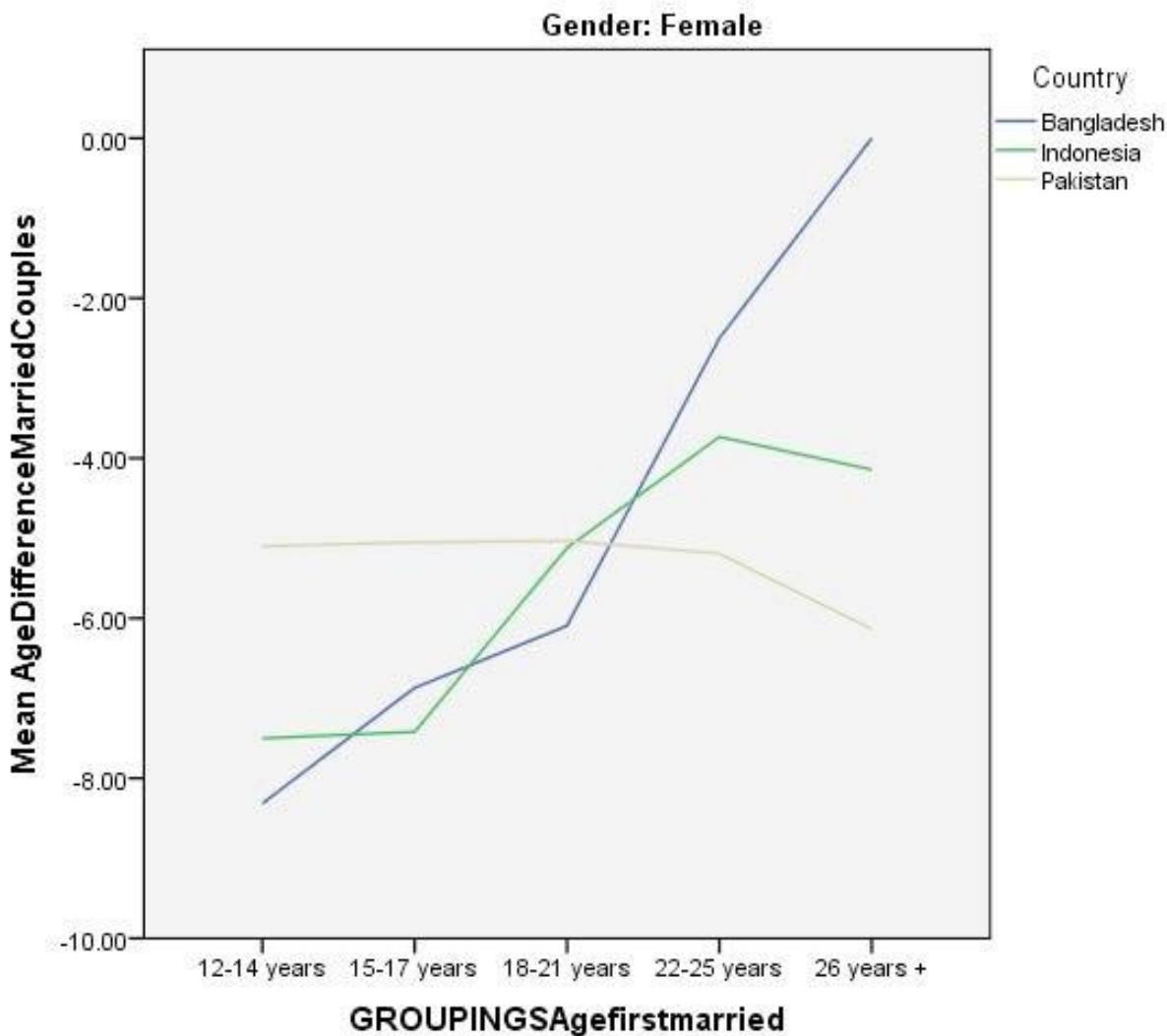
When the data is broken down by country the results reveal differences in Pakistan compared to the other two countries. In the research sites in Pakistan, males married under the age of 21 years tend to be married to women around 2 years their junior; larger age gaps between married males and their partners only start to emerge where men are married after the age of 21 years.

Chart 4: difference in ages of marriage between male respondents and their partners by country



Female respondents in research sites in Pakistan, on the other hand tended to be around 5 years younger than their partners, and this was found to be relatively constant regardless of the age that they were first married. This is in stark contrast to findings in research sites in Bangladesh, and to a lesser extent in research sites in Indonesia, where there were much larger age gaps between females married as children and their partners, compared to females married as adults.

Chart 5: difference in ages of marriage between female respondents and their partners by country



Age differences between married couples, where the bride was married as a child, were found to be particularly large in Sreepur, Bangladesh, where the mean age of marriage for females was also lowest. In Sreepur, females who were married as children were married to partners who were on average over 7.78 years their senior, and females married under the age of 15 years were married to partners who were on average 9.2 years their senior.

These results appear to indicate that there is a strong association between early marriage of girls, and a larger age gap between females and males within marriage. This is significant given that the data revealed an overwhelmingly dominant norm across all three countries that it is preferable for wives to be younger than their husbands. This both reflects and reinforces powerful gender hierarchies within marriage which are presented below

3.5 Norms about gender, marriage, and age (difference)

"There is difference [of] age of marriage for boys and girls...men must be the leader, and therefore men must be more mature than the women" – marriage officiate Indonesia.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Interview, marriage officiate, Madang, Bogor, Indonesia.

In all three countries, ideas about gender and sexuality promote the social and economic subordination of girls and women in relation to boys and men; as many as 89.1% of respondents agreed with the statement that “*a wife should be subservient to her husband*”, and 90.5% agreed that “*a husband should be the head of the household*”.

There is a widespread view that having an age gap between husbands and wives is necessary for securing male dominance in the household; the majority of respondents in all three countries (55.4%), and over three quarters (75.4%) of respondents in Pakistan agreed with the statement: “*younger brides are preferable because they are more obedient and respectful of their husbands*.” Interestingly, across all three countries older respondents were considerably more likely to agree with this statement than younger respondents, however there were no discernible differences between the views of male and female respondents.

Men and boys interviewed as part of the qualitative research conveyed a strong sense of entitlement to dominate their wives in all aspects of marriage, and expressed the view that this is best achieved through marrying a younger woman/girl; as one boy in Bangladesh explained:

*“I must choose bride younger than me so that I can control her. Moreover, she will be able to satisfy my demand. In addition, if I marry an older woman, she will try to have authority over me, and might not satisfy me sexually.”*⁷⁹

Relationships where the bride is either the same age or older than her husband, were perceived as lacking in ‘respect’, ‘understanding’ and harmony. A child in Indonesia explained: “*if I got married to an older woman, rather than me teaching my wife - as is obliged in Islamic teaching - she would teach me.*”⁸⁰ A girl in Bangladesh similarly declared:

*“I would like [to] marry someone who is senior in age than me, because he will be more mature than me. He will understand me and my family. If marriage happens between people of the same age, they will face problems. Family violence happens. Husband and wife do not respect each other.”*⁸¹

And a group of boys candidly elaborated:

*“People [are] taught that a same aged wife never show respect to her husband. This is a patriarchal society. Here men want to exploit women. But it is not easy to exploit a wife of the same age, or an older wife. If the wife is older than the husband, people raise the question of who is the head of family. And I think this type of couple will never be happy.”*⁸²

The qualitative research indicates that the norm discouraging marriage between (relatively) older women and younger men is especially strong in the research locations in Bangladesh. Participants explained that such couplings are heavily stigmatised and subject to ridicule. One boy interviewed in Dinapur told researchers: “*If I were to marry an older woman, the community members would insult my marriage. It is not the customary practice.*”⁸³ Similarly another young man declared: “*I*

⁷⁹ Interview, boy, 17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

⁸⁰ Interview, boy, 16 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

⁸¹ Interview, girl, 17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

⁸² Focus Group Discussion, 9 boys, 14 – 17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

⁸³ Interview, boy, 14 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

would like to get married to a girl younger than me...[Otherwise] community members might insult me, by citing that the wife is older than the husband.”⁸⁴

Ideas about what constitutes an acceptable age difference between partners appeared to differ across countries. It seemed from the qualitative data that participants in Bangladesh and Indonesia were more accepting of a large age gap than participants in Pakistan. During focus group discussions participants were presented with two ‘scenarios’: one that concerned a ‘love’ marriage between a 14 year old girl and a 25 year old man, and the other an arranged marriage of a 15 year old girl to a wealthy 35 year old man to ease the financial burden on her poor parents. These scenarios were found to be more acceptable to participants in Indonesia and Bangladesh. Participants in Pakistan generally found both of these scenarios unacceptable, regardless of the circumstances, on the grounds of the large age gap between the girl and the man; as one participant explained: “this is a big difference... Maximum there should be 4, 5 years difference, but 10 years difference is a big difference.”⁸⁵ These findings from the qualitative data are supported from evidence from the quantitative data as set out above, where age differences between married couples were found to be smaller in research sites in Pakistan compared to Bangladesh and Indonesia, especially in the urban site.



3.6 Ideal ages of marriage

As well as collecting data on actual age of marriage, the survey tool was designed to collect data on people’s ideas about the ideal age for marriage for both men and women. Interestingly, in all countries the mean ideal age for marriage was significantly higher than the mean age of actual

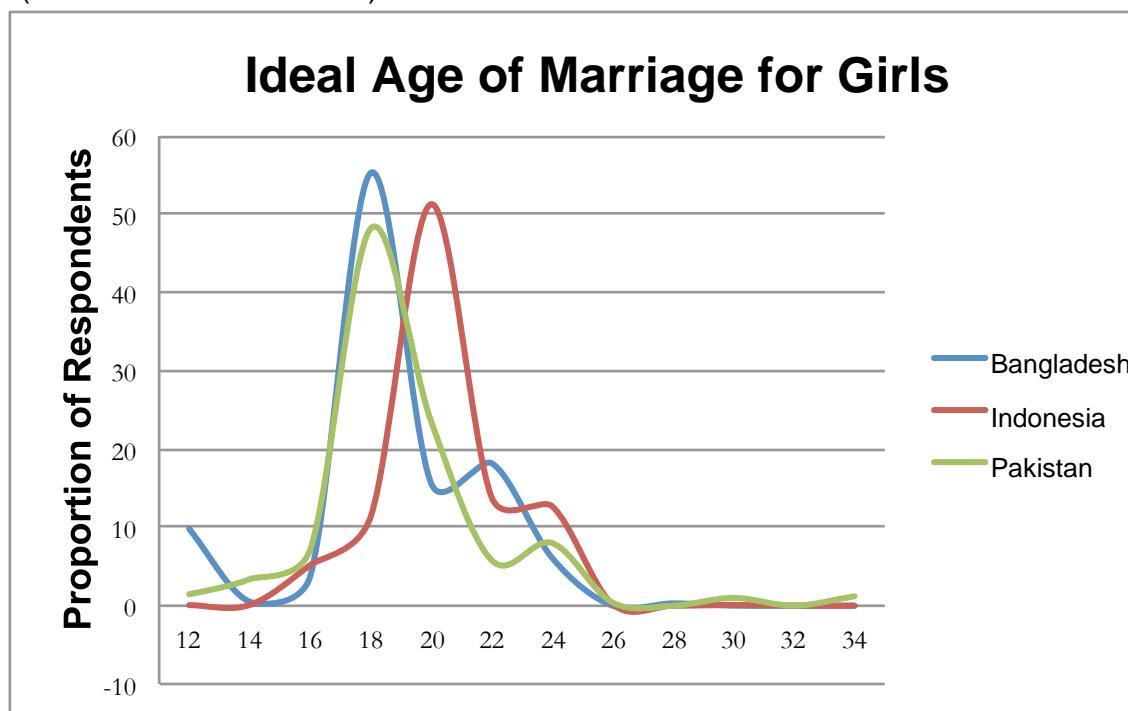
⁸⁴ Interview, man, 19 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

⁸⁵ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 16 – 18 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

marriage for females (Bangladesh=19.4, Pakistan=19.3, Indonesia=20.7) but not for males (T-test, $p<0.001$ for all countries).

Chart 6: ideal age of marriage for girls by country

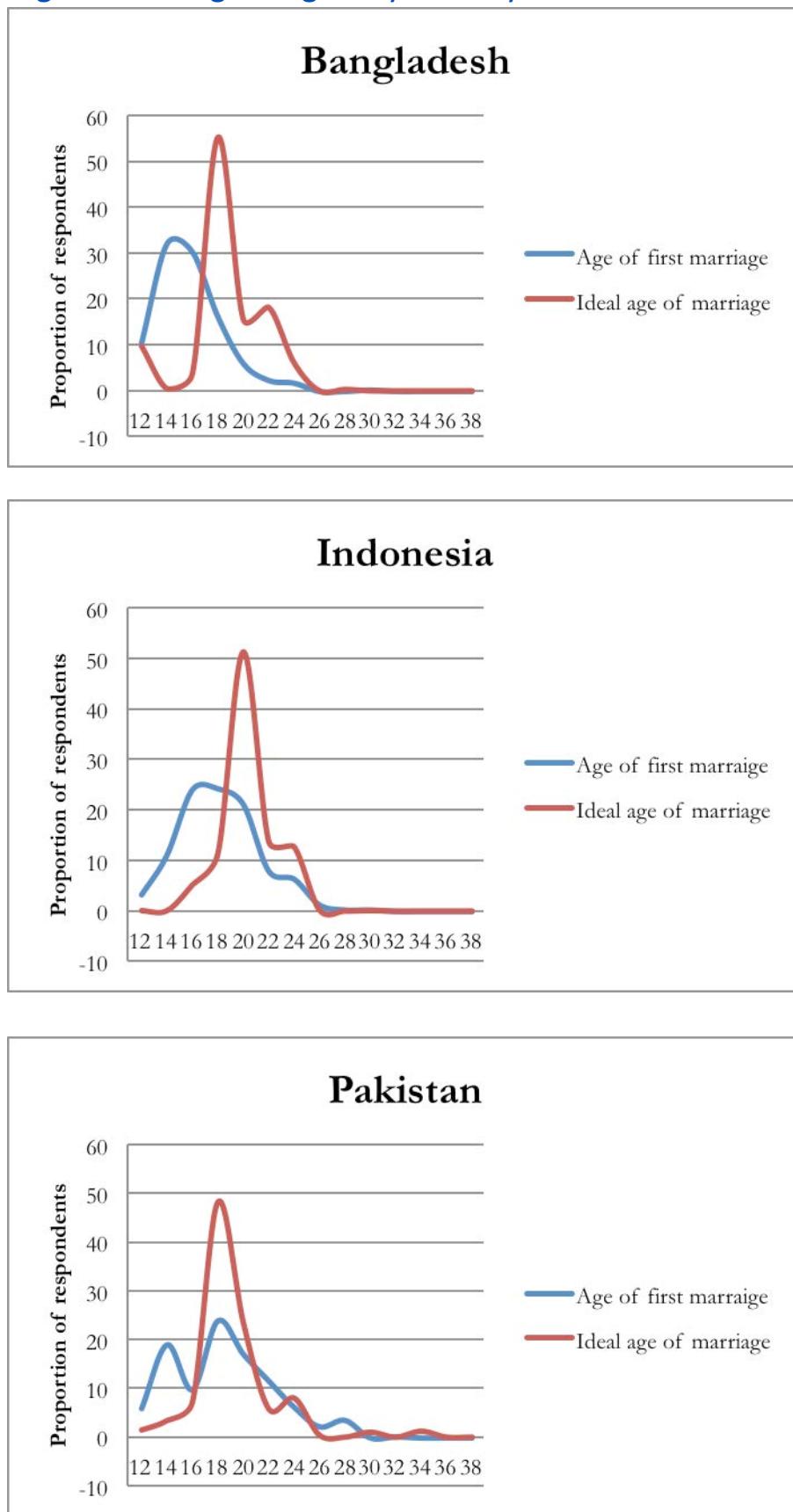
The below graph describes respondents' views concerning the ideal age of marriage for women/girls. As the graph demonstrates, respondents in Indonesia thought that women/girls should ideally marry at an older age (concentrated around 20) than respondents in Bangladesh and Pakistan (concentrated around 18).



Disaggregating responses on the ideal age of marriage by gender reveals small differences between females' and males' responses, with female respondents expressing the view that (both) men and women should be married slightly later (on average) than male respondents. Statistically significant differences in this regard were observed in Bangladesh for responses to the ideal age of marriage for females (T test, $p<0.001$), in Indonesia for responses to the ideal age of marriage for males (T test, $p<0.05$), and in Pakistan for responses to *both* questions: concerning the ideal ages for males and for females (T test, $p<0.001$).

The charts below compare respondents' stated ideal age of marriage for women/girls to actual age of marriage (of married, female respondents). In all three countries, the 'tipping point' in the graph (most frequent response) for the ideal age of marriage was several years older than the 'tipping point' in the graph (most frequent response) for actual age of marriage; indicating that in practice respondents married earlier than they consider to be ideal. The charts also demonstrate that respondents' views on the ideal age of marriage are much less diverse than their actual age of marriage. This suggests that actual age of marriage reflects a number of external factors, rather than ideas about 'age': this will be explored in Section 4 of the report.

Chart 7-9: ideal age of marriage for girls by country



3.6 Rates of Child Marriage

Consistent with existing evidence, rates of child marriage were found to be relatively high in all three countries, particularly in research sites in Bangladesh, and were found to be significantly higher amongst girls than amongst boys (Chi-square test, $p<0.001$ across all countries).

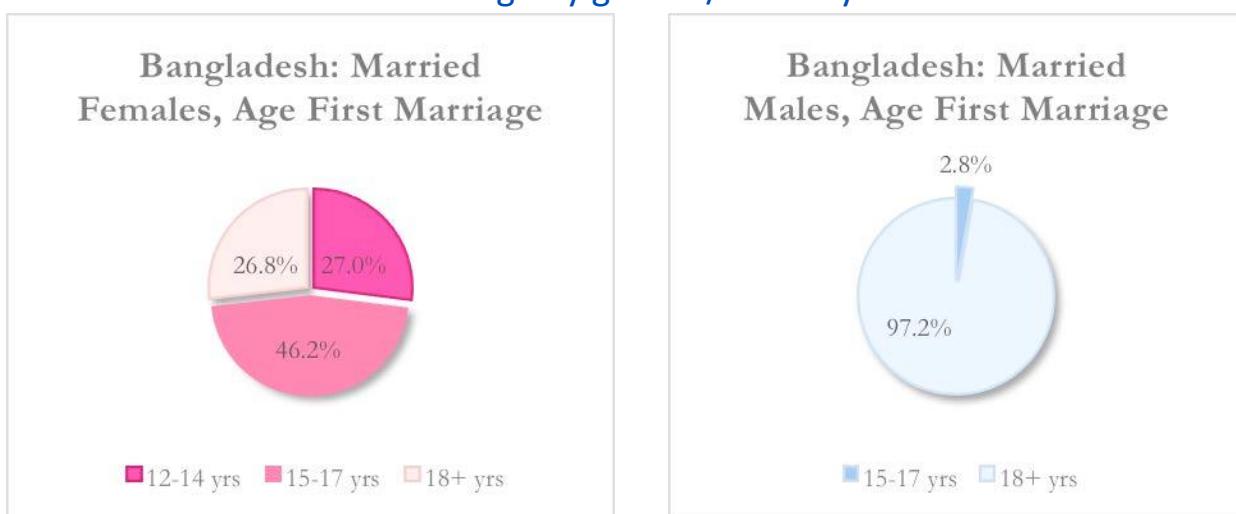
In research sites in Bangladesh an extraordinarily high proportion of married females, 73%, were married as children. This compares to only 2.8% of married males. Furthermore, whilst there were no males in research sites in Bangladesh married under the age of 15 years, over a quarter of the sample of married females, 27%, were married under the age of 15 years. Nevertheless, the data also indicates that rates of child marriage may be decreasing over time. Whilst almost 80% of females over the age of 50 years were married before the age of 18, this was the case for a considerably reduced proportion, 67.3%, of females aged 20-49 years.⁸⁶

Rates of child marriage of girls were found to be substantially lower in research sites in Indonesia where 38% of married females were married under the age of 18 years and 7.8% were married under the age of 15. The gender differentials in research sites in Indonesia was also striking with only 3.7% of the sample of married males having married as children, and no males married under the age of 15 years.

Rates of child marriage of girls were proportionally lowest in research sites in Pakistan with 34.8% of married females first married under the age of 18 years, however, rates of very early marriage (under 15) of girls remained comparatively high at 15.2%. Additionally, rates of child marriage of boys in Pakistan were also substantially higher than in the other two countries, with 12.9% of males reporting to have been married under the age of 18 years.

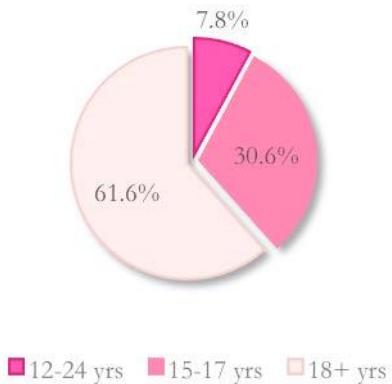
The relatively high rates of early marriage of boys in Pakistan may be explained by the prevalence of *watta satta* marriages; there may be compelling reasons to complete a marriage exchange across two families even in circumstances where the ages of the couple do not match, and/ or when either the bride or indeed the groom are comparatively young. During qualitative interactions, participants in the two rural research locations in Pakistan mentioned several cases in which young boys had been married to relatively older girls/ women, in the context of a *watta satta* marriage.

Charts 10-15: Rates of child marriage by gender/ country



⁸⁶ This figure is slightly lower than national DHS data collected in 2011 which found that 74% of women in Bangladesh aged 20-49 were married before 18 years.

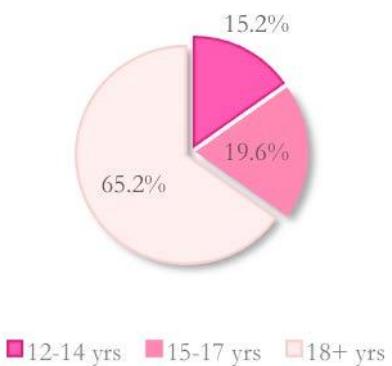
Indonesia: Married Females, Age First Marriage



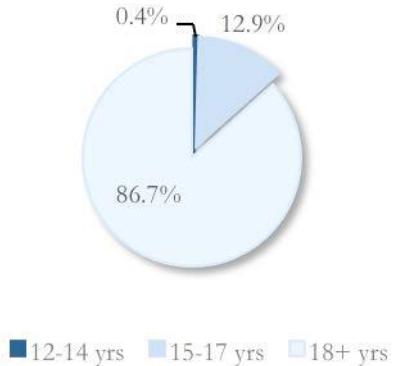
Indonesia: Married Males, Age First Marriage



Pakistan: Married Females, Age First Marriage



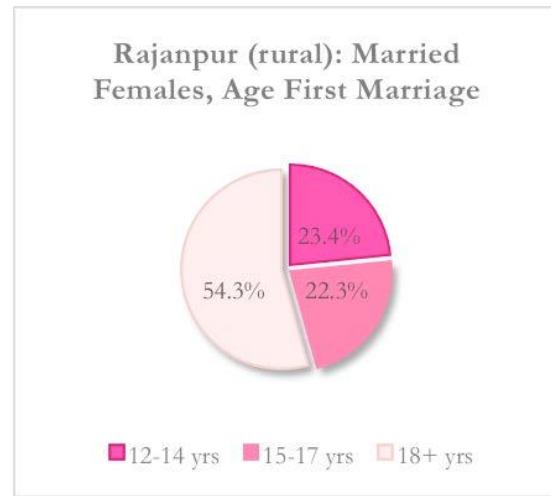
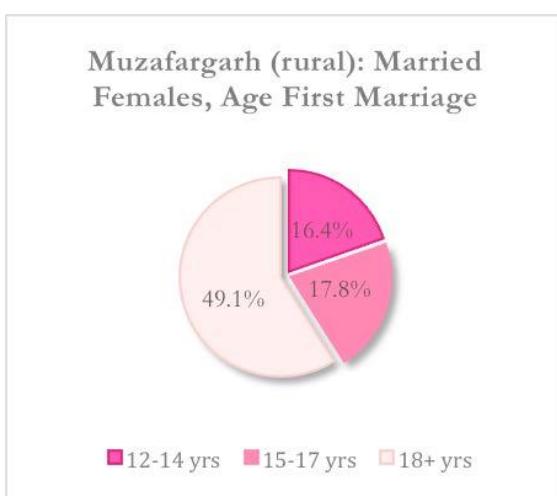
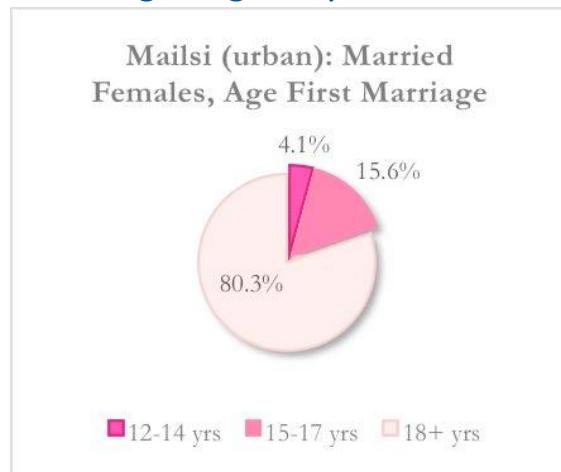
Pakistan: Married Males, Age First Marriage



Pakistan was the only country in which rates of child marriage were found to vary significantly according to research site (T-test, $p<0.001$). There was no significant difference between the rates of child marriage between the two rural sites in Pakistan, but there was a significant difference between the rates of child marriage of girls in the urban site (Mailsi) compared to the two rural sites (Rajanpur and Muzafargarh), as demonstrated by the pie charts below. (There were no significant differences between the rates of child marriage for boys across any of the sites).



Charts 16-18: Rates of child marriage of girls by research location in Pakistan



It is unclear why no significant differences were observed concerning rates of child marriage in different research sites in Bangladesh and Indonesia. It may be that there was not enough difference between the two sites selected in each of these countries in terms of risk factors associated with child marriage. In Bangladesh and Indonesia selected sites were characterised as ‘semi-urban’ and ‘rural’, whereas in Pakistan there were greater differences between the sites, with one ‘urban’ site and one ‘rural’ site selected. Furthermore, in Indonesia, the two sites selected were in close proximity to each other and shared similar socio-economic and ecological compositions.

3.6.1 Perceptions of rates of child marriage

The survey tool also collected data on respondents’ *perceptions* of rates of child marriage. The findings appear to indicate that respondents in research sites in Bangladesh are, in general, less willing to acknowledge (at least openly) that child marriage is a common occurrence in their communities, compared to respondents in research sites in Indonesia and Pakistan. Whilst the majority of respondents in Indonesia (67.6%) and Pakistan (58.1%) reported that child marriage frequently occurs in their community, this was the case for only 35.2% of respondents in Bangladesh; despite the fact that in practice child marriage appears to be a more common event in the research sites in Bangladesh compared to the other two countries. This may be a consequence of the stricter law in Bangladesh, which prohibits all marriage under the age of 18 years.

Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that there was a considerable minority of respondents in Pakistan, who were unwilling to acknowledge that child marriage occurs *at all* in their community:

15.9% of respondents in Pakistan reported that child marriage never occurs, compared to 6.8% of respondents in Indonesia, and only 1.3% of respondents in Bangladesh.

There were no significant differences between the responses of male and female participants in Bangladesh, however, in Indonesia and Pakistan female respondents were significantly more likely to identify child marriage as a frequently occurring problem than male respondents (Chisquare test, $p<0.001$).

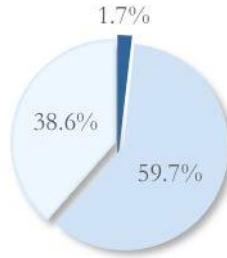
Charts 19-24: (Reported) perceptions of rates of child marriage

Bangladesh: Acknowledgement of child marriage



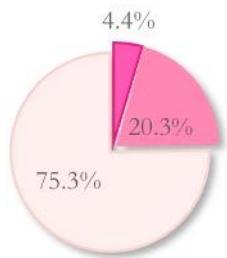
■ Never occurs ■ Rarely occurs
■ Frequently occurs

Bangladesh: Acknowledgement of child marriage



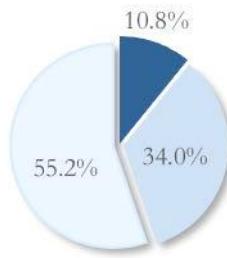
■ Never occurs ■ Rarely occurs
■ Frequently occurs

Indonesia: Acknowledgement of child marriage



■ Never occurs ■ Rarely occurs
■ Frequently occurs

Indonesia: Acknowledgement of child marriage



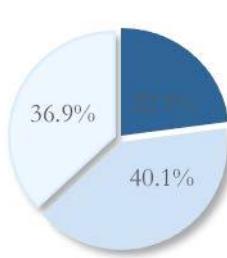
■ Never occurs ■ Rarely occurs
■ Frequently occurs

Pakistan: Acknowledgement of child marriage



■ Never occurs ■ Rarely occurs
■ Frequently occurs

Pakistan: Acknowledgement of child marriage



■ Never occurs ■ Rarely occurs
■ Frequently occurs

Furthermore, in Bangladesh, there were significant differences in perceptions of rates of child marriage according to age: older respondents were less likely to identify child marriage as a frequent occurrence, compared to younger respondents (ANOVA test, $p < 0.001$).

3.7 Norms and attitudes concerning child marriage

3.7.1 Findings from the quantitative data

The survey tool was designed to collect data on dominant norms and attitudes relating to (child) marriage. Participants were read a statement (such as “*there are advantages to marriage under 18 years*”) and then asked to express their level of agreement on a Likert scale with 7 variables: strongly agree; agree; slightly agree; neutral; slightly disagree; disagree; strongly disagree. Statements comprised those both accepting and unaccepting of child marriage practices.

Interestingly, the data from Bangladesh revealed significantly different (reported) attitudes towards child marriage compared to the other two countries. For example, whilst over half, 50.8% of respondents in Pakistan, and 45.5% of respondents in Indonesia agreed with the statement: “*there are advantages for girls to marrying under 18 years*”, as few as 2.2% of respondents in Bangladesh agreed with this statement. Similarly, whilst 57.6% of participants in Pakistan and 59% of participants in Indonesia agreed that marrying girls young can provide them with security, this was true of only 14.9% of respondents in Bangladesh; and whilst 90.3% of respondents in Bangladesh agreed or strongly agreed that pregnancy under 18 years can cause health problems, this was the case for only 56.6% of respondents in Indonesia, and 32% of respondents in Pakistan. Nevertheless, in response to the statement “*marrying girls under 18 years is the tradition in our community*”, as many as 88% of participants in Bangladesh agreed, compared to 48.5% in Pakistan and 30.2% in Indonesia.



Given this, and the findings in relation to actual marriage practices, which, as described above, reveal significantly higher rates of child marriage of girls in Bangladesh compared to Indonesia and Pakistan, it is surprising that only a relatively small proportion of participants in Bangladesh expressed ‘agreement’ with statements supportive of child marriage. This may be due to higher levels of intervention by development partners in the research sites in Bangladesh, and ‘sensitisation’ messages about the problems associated with child marriage. Results may also have been influenced by participants’ perceptions of researchers as representatives of an international organisation that campaigns against child marriage, and desire to provide researchers with an ‘acceptable’, ‘appropriate’ or ‘correct’ response. These results indicate that ‘ideas’ about child marriage, at least those that people are willing to openly articulate or express, do not necessarily correspond to what actually occurs in practice.

Scoring child marriage acceptability

Each individual was assigned a ‘child marriage acceptability score’ based on their responses to questions in the survey related to their individual⁸⁷ attitudes towards child marriage. Responses were ranked on a 1- 7 scale, where the lowest score (1) represents low levels of acceptability of child marriage, and the highest score (7) represents high levels of acceptability of child marriage. The responses were aggregated to assign each respondent an ‘acceptability score’ on a scale of 23 – 161, where low scores reflect non-acceptability of child marriage and high scores reflect acceptability of child marriage.

No.	Perception	Score
1.	Ideal age of marriage for girls.	(1) = >25; (2) = 23-25; (3) = 21-22; (4) = 19-20; (5) = 18; (6) = 16-17; (7) = <16
2.	Disparity in ideal age of marriage for girls compared to boys.	1) = 0 years; (2) = 1 year; (3) = 2 years; (4) = 3 years; (5) = 4 years; (6) = 5 years; (7) = <5 years
3.	Lowest acceptable age of marriage for girls.	(1) = 18 years or more; (2) = 17; (3) = 16; (4) = 15; (5) = 14; (6) = 13; (7) = 12 years or below
4.	Disparity in lowest acceptable age of marriage for girls compared to boys.	1) = 0 years; (2) = 1 year; (3) = 2 years; (4) = 3 years; (5) = 4 years; (6) = 5 years; (7) = <5 years
5.	Highest acceptable age of marriage for girls.	(1) = no upper limit; (2) = >40; (3) = 30-40; (4) = 25-29; (5) = 21-24; (6) = 19-20; (7) = 18 years or lower
6.	Disparity in highest acceptable age of marriage for girls compared to boys.	1) = 0 years; (2) = 1 year; (3) = 2 years; (4) = 3 years; (5) = 4 years; (6) = 5 years; (7) = <5 years
7.	A girl is ready for marriage once she starts menstruating	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
8.	There are advantages to marriage of girls under 18 years	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
9.	There are disadvantages for girls getting married under 18 years.	(1) = strongly agree; (2) = agree; (3) = slightly agree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly disagree; (6) = disagree; (7) = strongly disagree.
10.	Marrying girls young can help protect family honour/ reputation.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
11.	Girls who give birth between 1518 years are more likely to have a healthy pregnancy/ baby (compared to girls over 18).	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
12.	Marrying girls young can help resolve financial problems in the family.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
13.	Marrying girls young can help provide them security.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.

⁸⁷ As opposed to statements that require respondents to describe attitudes in their community.

14.	Early marriage of girls can help prevent sexual violence, assault and harassment.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
15.	Early marriage of boys can help prevent perpetration of sexual violence, assault and harassment.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
16.	Marrying under 18 years is likely to have a negative impact on a girls' education.	(1) = strongly agree; (2) = agree; (3) = slightly agree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly disagree; (6) = disagree; (7) = strongly disagree.
17.	Marrying a girl young is preferable because younger brides are more obedient and respectful of their husbands.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
18.	Even if a girl does not want to be married, she should honour the decisions/ wishes of her family	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
19.	Younger brides require a lower dowry than older brides.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
20.	A girl should never be forced or compelled into marriage.	(1) = strongly agree; (2) = agree; (3) = slightly agree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly disagree; (6) = disagree; (7) = strongly disagree.
21.	It is sometimes ok to beat or punish a girl when she dishonours her family.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
22.	A wife should be subservient to her husband.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.
23.	Men should be the heads of their household.	(1) = strongly disagree; (2) = disagree; (3) = slightly disagree; (4) = neutral; (5) = slightly agree; (6) = agree; (7) = strongly agree.

The mean 'acceptability score' in Indonesia was found to be 92.09⁸⁸ out of a possible maximum score of 161. The mean for female respondents was 93.13 and the mean for men was 90.46. The mean 'acceptability score' in Pakistan was found to be 99.13.¹⁰⁸ The mean for women was 99.90 and the mean for men was 97.69. The mean 'acceptability score' in Bangladesh was lower (perhaps for reasons discussed above) at 73.20. The mean for women was found to be 72.26 and the mean for men 74.68.

The absolute score for each country means very little in isolation. What is interesting, is the way in which the acceptability score was found to relate to other factors (including participants' level of income and education and access to sexual and reproductive health services), this will be explored in more detail in Section 6.

⁸⁸ 146 respondents in Indonesia were initially excluded due to missing responses for one or more of the 23 variables. In order to maintain the number of respondents, where a response was missing, this was filled in with the mean value for that particular variable. ¹⁰⁸ 167 respondents in Pakistan were initially excluded – responses were added based on means (as in Indonesia, above).

Relationship between acceptability score and ideal age of marriage for girls

Negative correlations (or negative linear relationships) were found between individuals' acceptability scores and their stated ideal age of marriage for girls in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan.⁸⁹ This indicates that there is indeed a relationship between the acceptability score and respondents' attitudes about the age at which girls should marry: individuals who have attitudes that are accepting of child marriage think that girls should be married at a relatively younger age. It should be noted, however, that whilst a correlation is present for all three countries, there is a considerable amount of variance amongst individual respondents; in other words, whilst in the aggregate, differences in ideas about the ideal age of marriage reflect attitudes expressed by the acceptability score, the relationship is not a simple linear one. This reflects the fact that individuals' (reported) ideas about age and marriage are varied and complex.

Relationship between acceptability score and age of marriage

It is important to recognise that the quantitative data can only provide a limited picture of the relationship between child marriage acceptability and child marriage practices; the relationship between individuals' attitudes and their own age of marriage is highly complex. For example, on the one hand a woman who married early might be more likely to recognise the disadvantages of early marriage – perhaps her marriage interrupted her schooling, or she was pressured to enter an exploitative match. On the other hand she may be inclined to adopt attitudes that normalise her own experience, especially if she comes from a background where community attitudes are generally more accepting of early marriage practices.

It is interesting to note, however, that in Pakistan and Indonesia, respondents' acceptability scores were found to be negatively correlated with their age of first marriage.⁹⁰ In other words, people who were married at a younger age were likely to be slightly more accepting of child marriage practices than those who were married at an older age.

In Bangladesh there was no significant correlation between age of first marriage and the acceptability score. This reflects the fact that, as previously noted, participants ideas about child marriage in Bangladesh appear to diverge significantly from actual behaviour, perhaps due to the prevalence of messaging and sensitisation about child marriage in the research sites in Bangladesh.

3.7.2 Findings from the qualitative data

*"Religion says that if a boy is able to take care of his wife then he can marry. Girls are eligible from their first menstruation."*⁹¹

The qualitative data indicates that in all research sites and across all case study countries, there is an age or stage of development below which marriage of a child is considered unacceptable on the grounds that the bride or groom is 'underage'; although the meaning of 'underage' is not always defined with reference to a discrete, numerical age. Ideas about when a girl is 'ready' for marriage are often defined through the appearance of biological and physical indicators, most significantly the onset of menstruation; as a teacher interviewed in Pakistan explained: "*traditionally we follow the physical appearance. If a girl is 10 and looks like 18 years old she is given into marriage,*"⁹²

⁸⁹ Pakistan: Correlation coefficient = -.057, significant at the .05 level (one-tailed); Bangladesh: Correlation coefficient = -.51, significant at the .01 level (one-tailed); Indonesia: Correlation coefficient = -.236, significant at the .01 level (one-tailed t-test).

⁹⁰ Pakistan: Correlation coefficient = -.121, significant at the .01 level (two-tailed); Indonesia: Correlation coefficient = -.270, significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

⁹¹ Interview, Community Leader, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

⁹² Interview, teacher, Muzaffargarraf, Pakistan.

another participant noted: “here puberty is an alarm for parents. They immediately start speaking with others or a boy’s family,”⁹³ and a group of fathers expounded: “18 years is the ideal age [for marriage] but [we] are living in a society which is mostly illiterate and people have no idea of ages in years or months. Most people look at the particular child’s physical appearance as an indicator.”⁹⁴

Evidence from the survey supports these findings from the qualitative research: as many as 81% of respondents in Pakistan agreed, slightly agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘a girl is ready to be married once she starts menstruating;’ as did 62.6% of respondents in Indonesia.⁹⁵ Although the onset of puberty may signal that marriage of a child is now appropriate and acceptable, this is not to say that people find it *ideal*. The age at which participants felt that a person ought to marry was found to be shaped by ideas about when individuals are ready and able to assume the social and economic responsibilities associated with marriage, in addition to biological, sexual and reproductive ones. As a participant in Indonesia explained:

*“in Islam, girls attain *aqil baligh* [puberty] at 9, while boys attain it at 15. They can get married at that age as long as their parents give their consent. However, a child should not be married between 9-15 years old. They will not be able to manage the household, and their marriage will be ruined. [Emphasis added]”*¹¹⁶

And a participant in Pakistan explained: “when a boy is able to work, make money, his marriage should be arranged.”⁹⁶

Despite some recognition that it may be important for a bride to have a degree of emotional and intellectual maturity to enable her to fulfil female social roles and responsibilities associated with marriage, it is apparent that biological or physical indicators persist in being preeminent for determining when *girls* are perceived mature enough for marriage, much more so than for boys. Even participants who rejected or challenged the idea that a girl is ready for marriage after first menstruation justified this primarily in terms of ideas about female physiology and reproductive development: “I worry that an underage girl will not be physically strong to bear the pregnancy;”⁹⁷ “the reproductive organs for women are still vulnerable so it can cause pregnancy problems,”⁹⁸ were typical arguments presented by respondents.

This is because female roles and responsibilities within marriage tend to be defined principally in terms of reproduction and reproductive work, activities that are primarily associated with biological functions of the body and are not thought to require a very high level of education or acquisition of skills. As one participant in Bangladesh explained, “in spite of their higher education girls have to perform family works. And secondary education is adequate enough to nurse the baby. It would be the right age for girls to be married.”⁹⁹ The male role within marriage, in contrast, is one of leadership and provider. A husband is expected to ‘govern’ his wife and family as well as supporting them financially. Therefore it is considered important for boys to at least finish secondary education and to obtain financial independence and security before getting married. As one participant explained:

⁹³ Interview, father, 32 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

⁹⁴ Focus Group Discussion, Fathers, 30 – 35 years, Muzaffargarh, Pakistan.

⁹⁵ Only 2.7% of respondents agreed with this statement in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, as previously noted, these findings may be due to higher levels of intervention by development partners in the research sites Bangladesh, and ‘sensitisation’ messages about the problems associated with child marriage. Related to this, these findings may have also been affected by participants’ perceptions of researchers as representatives of an international organisation that campaigns against child marriage, and their desire to provide an ‘acceptable’, ‘appropriate’ or ‘correct’ response. ¹¹⁶ Interview, religious leader, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia .

⁹⁶ Focus Group Discussion, fathers, 32 – 50 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

⁹⁷ Interview, NGO (Institute of Investigation for Special Data and Crimes), Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

⁹⁸ Focus Group Discussion, 6 Boys, 15 – 17 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

⁹⁹ Focus Group Discussion, 9 Girls, 15 – 17 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh. ¹²¹

Interview, mother, 37 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

*"parents will give consent for their son [to marry] when he already has his own income and has enough age; while for the daughter [consent will be given] when she gets a serious partner."*¹²¹

In other words it is not only the gendered division of roles and responsibilities within marriage that shape people's ideas about age and readiness for marriage, the relative value that is assigned to these roles is also important. Women's readiness for marriage is defined by their bodies, men's by their cultural and social, economic and educational achievements, because the values imposed on gendered roles within marriage, delineate women's work as rudimentary and inferior compared to that of men. This helps explain why the lowest acceptable age of marriage for men/boys tends to be substantially higher than the lowest acceptable age for women/ girls: according to the survey data, the mode¹⁰⁰ response to the question "*at what age is a person too young to marry,*" was 20 years for boys, and 15 years for girls.

In sum, therefore, participants did express disapproval of early marriage, however, this was defined in terms of being too young to take on the reproductive, sexual, social and economic work required within marriage. For girls, this is the period prior to being physically capable of having a sexual relationship and giving birth, and before they are mature enough to manage household chores and care of children and in-laws:

*"Marriage under 18 is bad. Because when a girl gets pregnant under 18, she faces antenatal problem, malnutrition, headache, mother and child death; the girl can't manage her family, maintain relationship with in laws. She meets problem in adjusting to conjugal life. She can't do household work properly within her in-laws house"*¹⁰¹

Boys are underage when they are not yet ready and able to assume responsibility for providing for a family, in all respects, but particularly in terms of finance:

*"if the boy is young, he will not be able to complete his responsibilities because he has not grown, he does not understand, he works in difficulties, after marriage boys usually leave their education, and work as labourers in fields, they carry heavy piles of cotton, their lives face many problems... Girls do not handle work at home; Girls cannot take care of their children because these girls themselves are children"*¹⁰²

It should also be noted that, whilst participants across all three countries were generally of the view that child marriage (understood not necessary as marriage below 18 years, but rather, marriage below an appropriate stage of development) is, as a generalised idea, unacceptable or undesirable; they were nonetheless accepting of child marriage in particular circumstances. The data (both qualitative and quantitative) indicates that participants' acceptability of child marriage is influenced by structural and environmental factors that create conditions within which child marriage becomes (perceived as) necessary or desirable. This is explored more fully in section 4.

3.8 Marriage, agency and choice in practice

As well as collecting data on child marriage, the survey tool collected quantitative data in relation to decision making and choice about when marriage occurs, as part of an inquiry into whether higher rates of child marriage (acceptability) are associated with a lack of agency¹⁰³ concerning the timing(s) of marriage. Married respondents were asked a series of question about the timing of their marriage: '*Was it your choice to get married at this time?*' '*Did you feel pressured into marriage by*

¹⁰⁰ Most frequent response.

¹⁰¹ Participatory Group Activity, body map, Dinjanpur, Bangladesh.

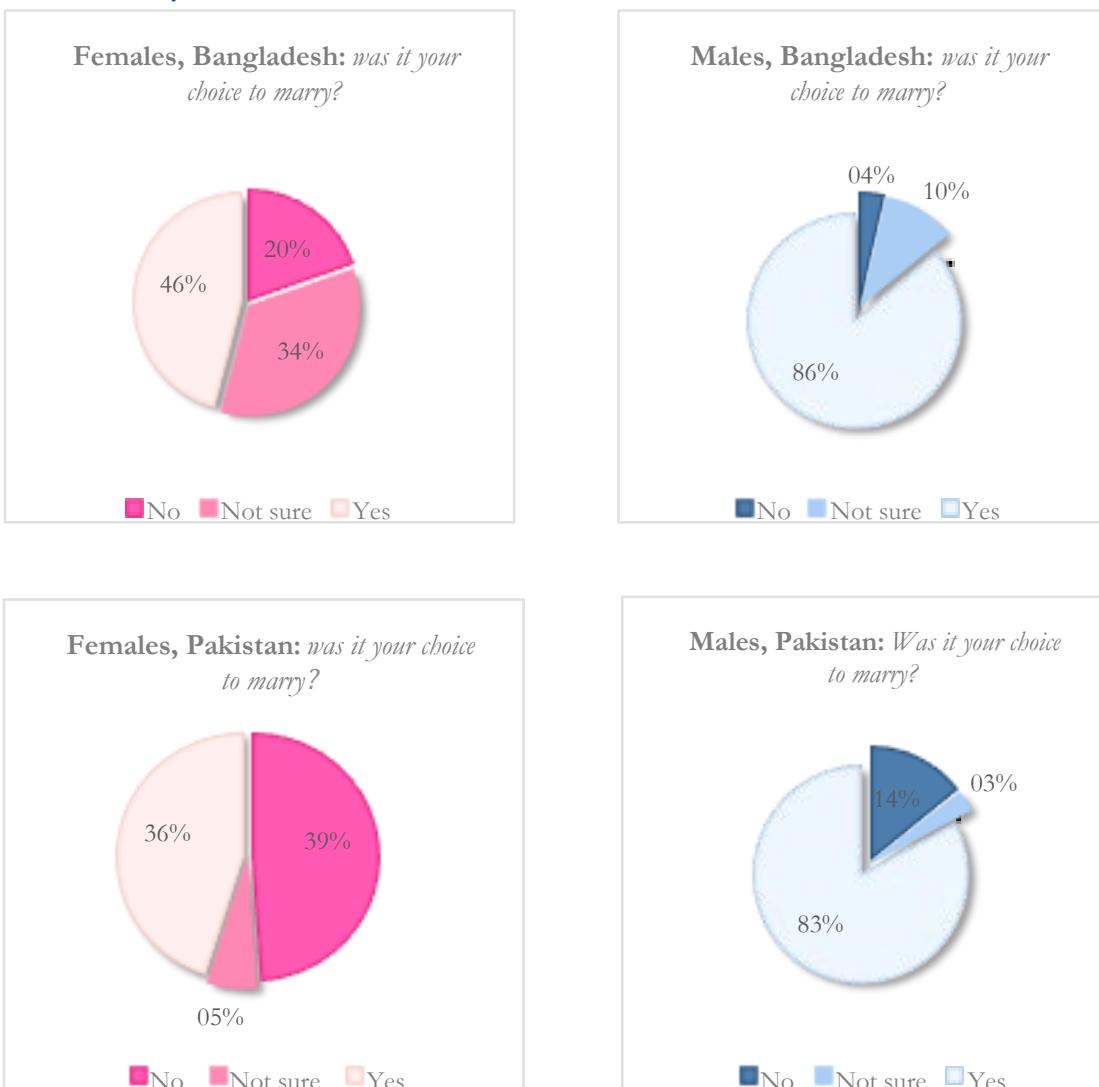
¹⁰² Focus Group Discussion, 3 Boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁰³ The capacity of an agency to 'act' in the world, and to take independent decisions about that action.

any person in your family?' 'Did you feel any social pressure/ pressure from society to get married at this time?'

There were significant and striking gender disparities in answers to these questions in Bangladesh in Pakistan. In research sites in Bangladesh, while 86.1% of males said that it was their choice to get married, this was true for less than half (45.9%) of female respondents. The results were similar in research sites in Pakistan with 82.7% of men asserting that they had chosen to marry, compared to only 44.7% of women who felt that marriage had been their choice. Furthermore, over a third (36.3%) of female respondents in research sites in Bangladesh reported that they had felt pressure from their families to marry, whilst this was found to be the case for only 10.4% of males; and 6.6% of females said that they had experienced pressure from society, as compared to only 0.7% of males.

(Reported) experiences of pressure (both family and societal) were (in general) lesser in research sites in Pakistan compared to research sites Bangladesh, but gender differentials were still pronounced. 4.7% of females in research sites in Pakistan reported having felt pressured by their families into marriage, and 3.8% felt pressured by society. This compared to 0.4% of males who felt family pressure, and 1.1% who felt social pressure. [Charts 25-28: Choice about marriage by gender/ country](#)



The gender differentials in Indonesia on the other hand, were not significant. There were small differences between the (reported) experiences of males and females that follow a similar pattern

to the other two countries, but these differences were too small to be statistically significant. A much greater proportion of both female and male respondents in Indonesia (compared to Bangladesh and Pakistan) felt that it was their choice to get married including 92.5% of females and 96.6% of males. 3.9% of females, and 3.1% of males experienced family pressure to get married, and 1.5% of women, and 2.5% of males felt pressured by society.

These results indicate that in Bangladesh and Pakistan men/ boys experience greater decision making power over when to get married, in comparison to that women/ girls. In Indonesia the differences between female and male participants were too small to be able to draw any conclusions to a rigorous standard of probability.

These findings are supported by evidence from the qualitative data; participants consistently explained that women and girls have less choice and influence over decisions about when and whom they marry, in comparison to boys and men. One participant in Bangladesh explained: “*a male can influence the decision about his marriage. He can clearly say ‘no’ or ‘not this bride’. But commonly a female cannot influence the decision except where she is educated and selfrelying*”.¹⁰⁴ Another participant noted: “*in reality, a girl has no value in society... It is very common in our locality that marriage takes place without consent of the bride. Many parents don’t feel the necessity to ask for consent of their daughter for marriage;*”

According to participants in Pakistan, the lack of importance of consent, particularly that of girls, is often reflected in the marriage ceremony itself, where a bride may not even be formally asked if she accepts the groom as her husband: as one participant explained: “*to accept the bride just moves her head which is basically done by others. Even her silence at the time of marriage is considered agreement/consent for the marriage,*”¹⁰⁵ and a marriage officiate told researchers: “*I ask the boy if he is married by force; I do not ask this question from the girl.*”¹⁰⁶

3.8.1 Child marriage: agency and choice

Interestingly, the data revealed significant differences in responses about choice and pressure concerning marriage between participants who were married as *adults* compared to those who were married as *children*. In Bangladesh, 66.3% of females and 86.4% of males married as adults reported that it was their choice to get married, this was the case for significantly reduced proportions, 38.6% of females and 75% of males married as children (Chi-square, p<0.001). Furthermore, much higher proportions – 41.1% of females, and 25% of males – of participants married as children felt that they had been pressured into marriage by their family, as compared to only 22.5% of females and 10% of males who felt family pressure as adults.

The findings in relation to social pressure were slightly different, with adult participants more likely to report feeling social pressure to marry compared to those married as children.¹⁰⁷ Considering these results in light of the qualitative data this suggests that as participants get older, social pressure to marry becomes greater, because there is a general expectation that people ought to marry before they become ‘unacceptably old’. 7.8% of adult females said they felt social pressure to get married, compared to 6.3% of females married as children, and no males married as children felt social pressure to marry, although 1.4% of males married as adults reported experiencing social pressure to marry.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, boy, 15 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹⁰⁵ Focus Group Discussion, fathers, 32 – 50 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Marriage Officiate, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁰⁷ Although the differences were too small to be significant at 0.05.

It appears from this data that family pressure to marry early is a significant driver of child marriage. The results with regard to experiences of ‘social pressure’ are harder to interpret. Social pressure may be an indirect driver of child marriage, through the presence and influence of social norms that promote early marriage of girls and boys (as explored throughout this report). Nonetheless, when it comes to individuals’ experiences of pressure to marry (e.g. a particular person at a particular age) this pressure tends to come directly from their family members (i.e. those closest to them) rather than from friends, neighbours or other members of society.

There were also differences in research sites in Indonesia in responses to questions about marriage and decision making, between participants who were married as children and those who were married as adults (although the results are not quite as striking as in Bangladesh). In

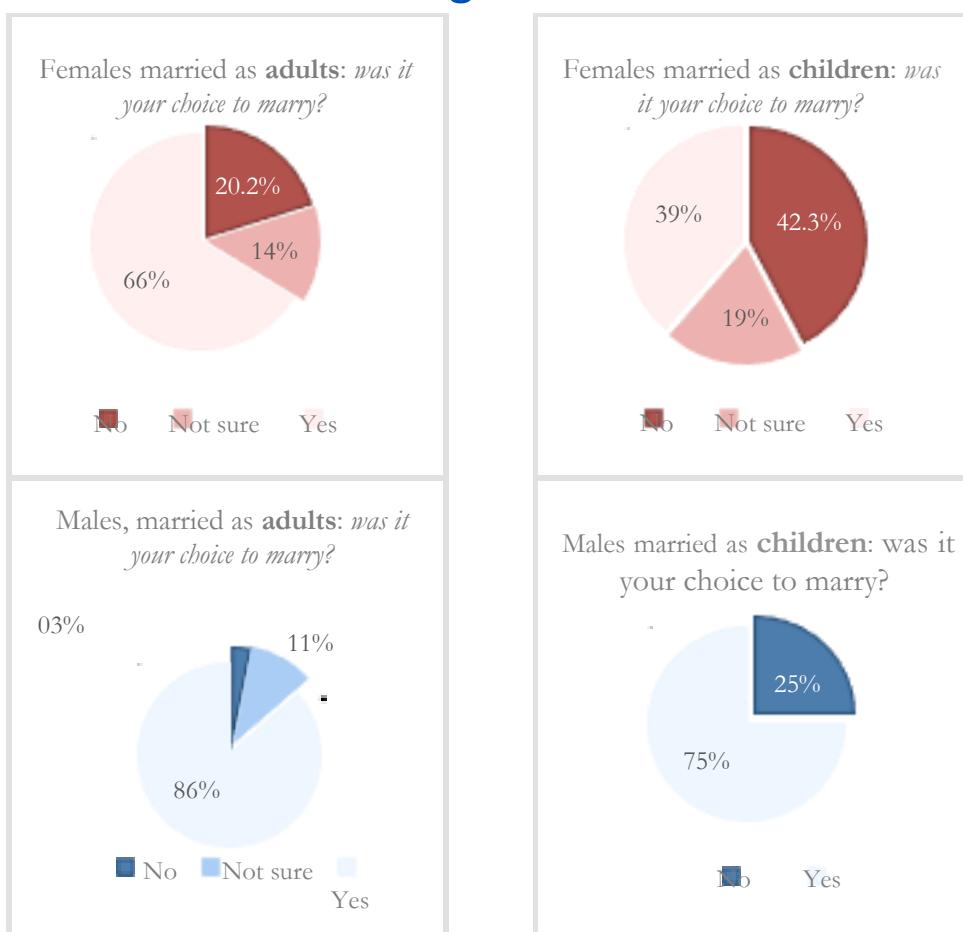
Indonesia, whilst 96.2% of females and 97.4% of males married as adults said that it had been their choice to get married, these proportions were reduced to 87.2% of female and 84.3% of male participants married as children.¹³⁰ Furthermore, whilst 7.4% of females, and 16.7% of males married as children reported feeling pressured into marriage by their families, this was only true of 1.7% of females and 2.6% of males married as adults.¹³¹ The data in relation to social pressure revealed no statistically significant differences between participants married as adults compared to those married as children.

The data from Pakistan revealed only very slight differences in relation to the question: “*was it your choice to be married at this time*”, for female respondents married as adults, compared to those married as children: participants married as children were less likely to answer ‘yes’ to these questions than those married as adults, but only by a marginal value which was not found to be statistically significant. There were significant results, however, for males: 85.2% of males married as adults stated that it had been their choice to get married, compared to only 68.6% of males married as children (Chi-square, $p<0.01$). Furthermore, whilst no men married as adults in Pakistan said that they had felt pressured into marriage by their families, 2.9% of males married as children reported feeling family pressure, and a further 17.1% said that they were ‘not sure’.

Charts 29-52 Decision making about marriage: child vs. adult marriage

On the graphs below, darker colours designate a lack of decision making power over when to marry. The pie charts that represent participants married as children have darker segments that are significantly larger than those that represent participants married as adults, demonstrating that children have less agency in relation to decision making about marriage compared to adults.

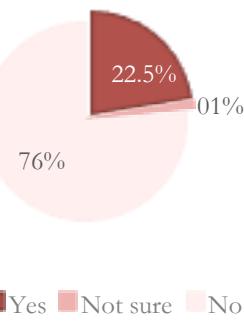
Bangladesh



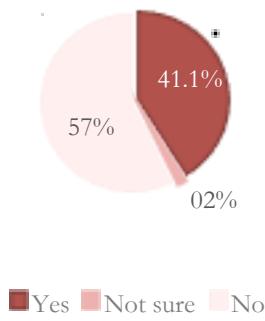
¹³⁰ Results for males are just outside the 95% confidence level: p= 0.051%. Furthermore the sample size for **males** married as children is small.

¹³¹ Ibid.

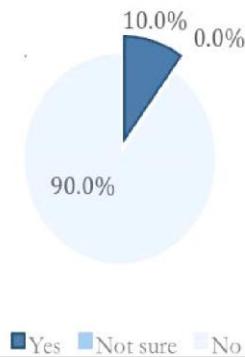
Females married as **adults**: did you feel family pressure to marry?



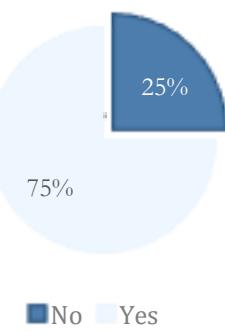
Females married as **children**: did you feel family pressure to marry?



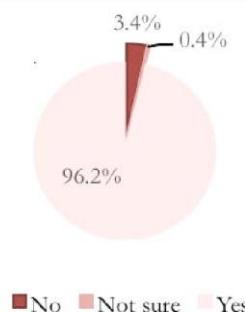
Males, married as **adults**: did you feel family pressure to marry?



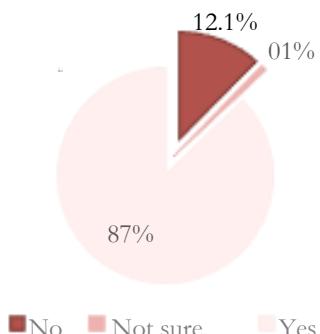
Males married as **children**: did you feel family pressure to marry?



Females married as **adults**: was it your choice to marry?



Females married as **children**: was it your choice to marry?



Males married as **adults**: did you feel family pressure to marry?

2.6%

97.4%

■ Yes ■ No

Males married as **children**: did you feel family pressure to marry?

16.7%

83%

■ No ■ Yes

Females married as **adults**: did you feel family pressure to

1.7%

98.3%

■ Yes ■ No

Females married as **children**: did you feel family pressure to

07%

93%

■ Yes ■ Not ■ No

Males married as **adults**: did you feel family pressure to marry?

2.6%

97.4%

■ Yes ■ No

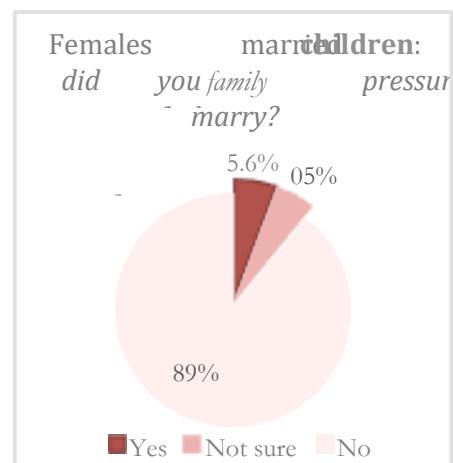
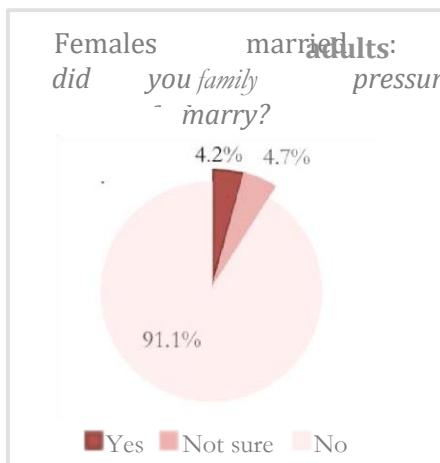
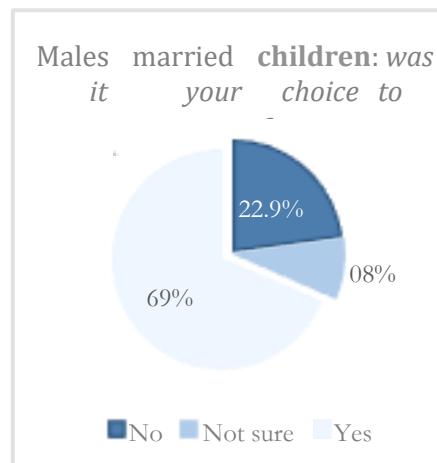
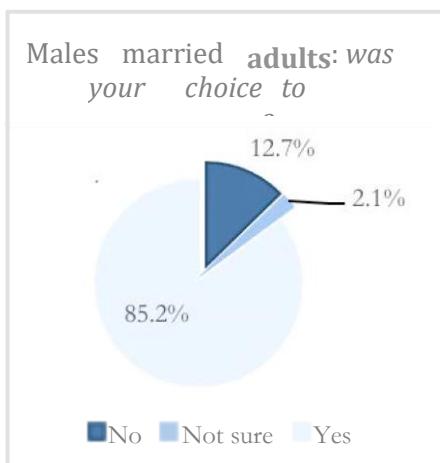
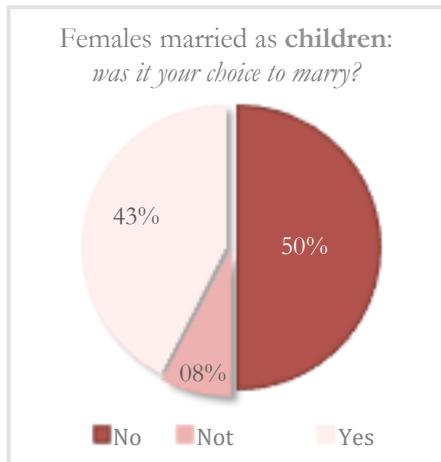
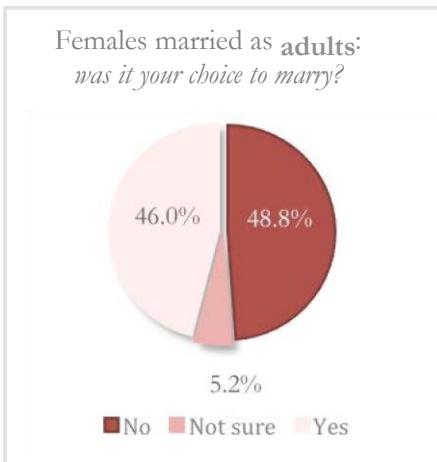
Males married as **children**: did you feel family pressure to marry?

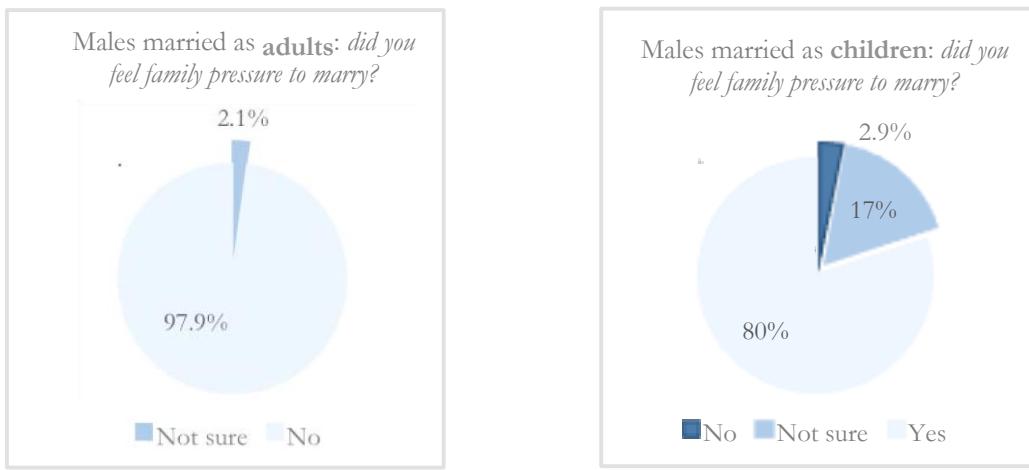
16.7%

83%

■ No ■ Yes

Pakistan





Again, these findings are supported by evidence from the qualitative data. Participants consistently explained that a person's age is tightly related to the degree of power that they are able to exercise over when and whom to marry, and this is especially the case for boys; as a participant in Bangladesh explained: "*the age of the bride and groom does matter. An older groom is able to influence parent's decision more.*"¹³² Another explained: "*parents become stricter on their decision when the age of the boy is relatively lower than the matured age*". What this suggests is, of course, that child marriages are more likely to take place without the consent of the spouses.

Importantly, decision making and agency within marriage are not only affected by a person's age or gender; education and wealth are also of significance. An older boy may be able to have more influence over his parents' decisions about when he marries and to whom, if he is supporting his family financially, and/or has a higher level of education. A participant in Pakistan noted: "If the boy is educated and from the city...[then] they get to choose but that is not that common."¹³³ Another participant similarly noted: "the age of the bride and groom does matter. An older groom is able to influence his parent's decision, more than that of the bride, because of his maturity and economic self-sufficiency."¹³⁴ This may also be the case for girls: "if women are educated then parents consider their opinion."¹³⁵ A respondent in Bangladesh, candidly summarised:



¹³² Interview, boy, 14 years, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

¹³³ Interview, woman, 23 years, Muzaffargarraf, Pakistan.

¹³⁴ Interview, boy, 14 years, Dinajpur, Bangladesh. ¹³⁵ Interview, girl, 15 years, Bangladesh.

*"The extent to which [a person's] consent might be given importance depends on the age, level of education, and income. Consent of a less educated girl from poor family is often ignored. The age of the boy often influences parents. [For a girl] her age might not be so much of an influencing factor."*¹³⁶

3.9 Norms in relation to marriage agency and choice

"Forced marriage of a boy is not possible, but forced marriage of a girl is possible...If a girl is forced [into marriage] then the boy can try to make her happy and finally she will settle with him. For some time she will be unhappy but then she will be [happy]."¹⁰⁸

3.9.1 Findings from the quantitative data

The survey tool also collected quantitative data in relation to social norms about decision making and choice with regard to marriage. Respondents were read a series of statements and asked to express their agreement with that statement. Statements included: *'even if a girl does not want to marry she should honour the decisions/ wishes of her family'*, *'even if a boy does not want to marry she should honour the decisions/ wishes of his family'*, *'a girl should chose for herself when to marry'*, *'a boy should choose for himself when to marry'*, *'a girl should never be forced into marriage'*, *'a boy should never be forced into marriage'*.



In the same way that norms about age and marriage were found to be heavily gendered, the findings reveal that social norms concerning agency, choice and decision making regarding marriage are strongly gendered: shaped both by a person's gender and by gender related biases. In all three countries, participants were more likely to agree with statements supportive of men/boys' agency with regard to decision making about marriage compared to that of women/ girls. For example, whilst 75.8% of participants in Pakistan agreed with the statement *"boys should choose for themselves when to marry"*, this proportion reduced to 62.8% when the same question was asked about girls. Furthermore, whilst the overwhelming majority of participants in all three countries agreed that it was wrong to force anyone into marriage, there were proportionally fewer participants who agreed that a woman/girl should never be forced into marriage, than those who felt that a man/boy should never be forced.

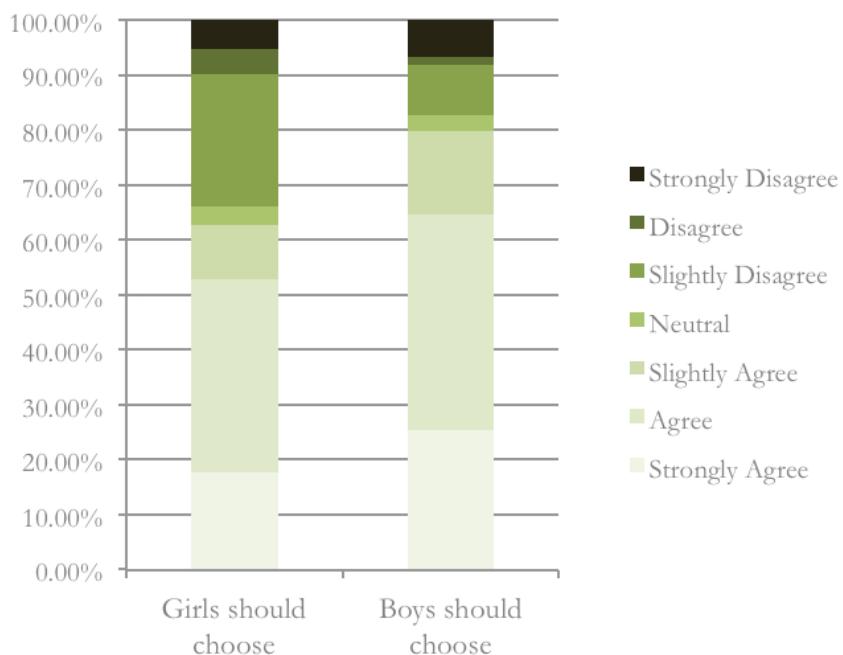
Charts 53-55: Norms about decision making in marriage based on gender

¹³⁶ Interview, community leader, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

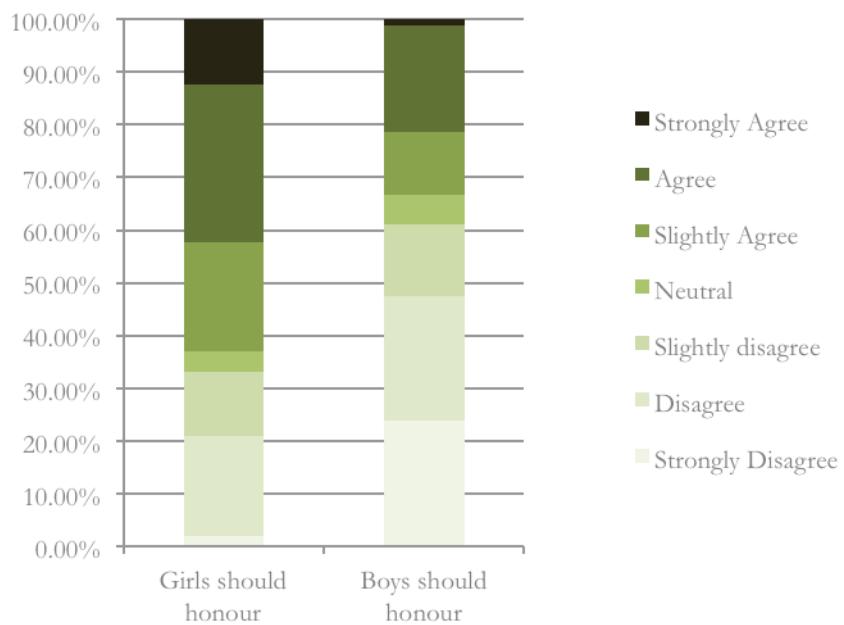
On the graphs below, darker colours are designated for responses that reflect more restrictive ideas about decision making and marriage. The 'bars' that represent responses in relation to women/girls have significantly larger darker segments than those that represent responses in relation to men/ boys, demonstrating that norms about decision making about marriage are more restrictive for women/ girls than they are for men/ boys.

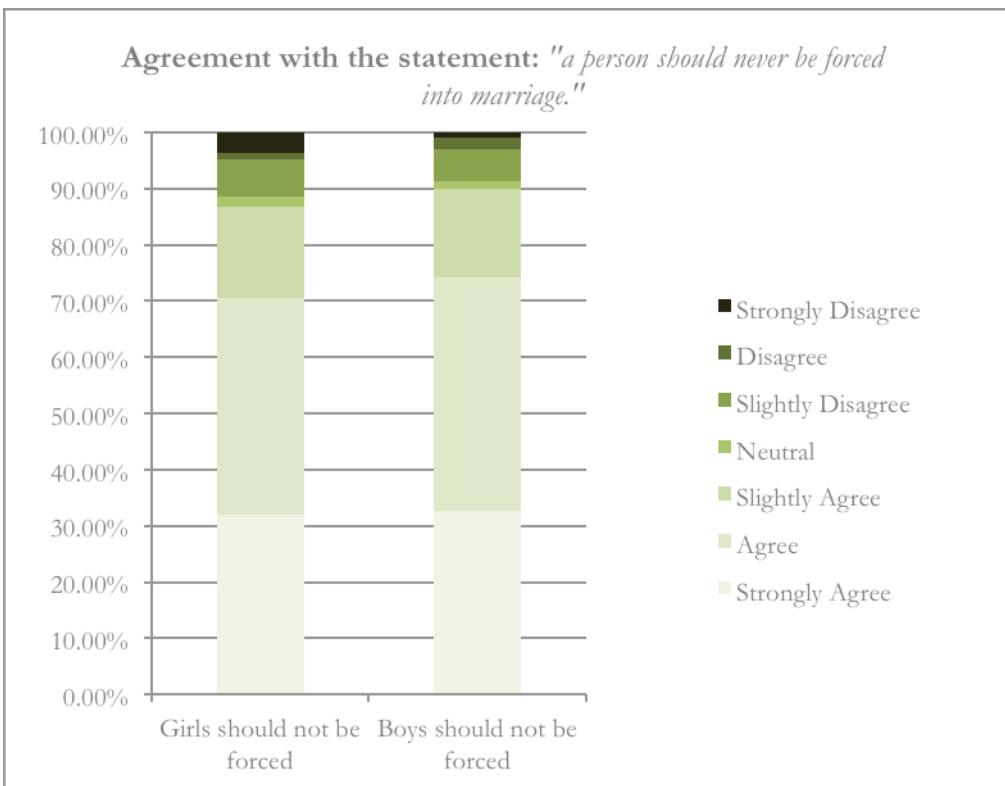
¹⁰⁸ Interview, man, 22, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

Agreement with the statement: "A person should be able to choose for him/ herself when to marry".



Agreement with the statement: "even if a person does not want to be married they should honour the decisions/ wishes of their family."





The survey data also revealed some differences between the views of male compared to female respondents in relation to these questions. In general, female respondents were more likely to be supportive of parental authority over decision making about marriage (for both men/boys and women/girls) compared to male respondents. For example, whilst 66.5% of female respondents agreed with the statement “*even if a girl does not want to get married she should honour the decisions/ wishes of her family*”, and 59.6% agreed with this statement for boys, proportionally fewer male respondents agreed with these statements: 54.9% agreed for girls, and 55.7% agreed for boys.

On the other hand female respondents were less likely than male respondents to be supportive of forced marriage of girls: 92.3% of females agreed that a girl should never be forced into marriage (and 37.9% agreed strongly), this compares to a slightly smaller proportion (89.4%) of males who agreed with this statement (and 32.3% who agreed strongly). Furthermore, 69.1% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that a girl should be able to choose when to marry, compared to a proportionally lower 61.1% of males.

Across all three countries the majority of respondents, therefore, agreed *both* with the statement a person “*should be able to choose for themselves when to marry*”, and with the statement that even if a person “*does not want to marry they should honour the decisions and wishes of their family*”. They also overwhelmingly agreed that it was wrong to force anyone into marriage. In order to understand these apparent contradictions, it is necessary to unpack how participants understand ‘choice’, and ‘force’ in relation to decision making about marriage.

3.9.2 Findings from the qualitative data

“There is a common saying, ‘the heart and body of a woman breaks down but their mouth keeps mum.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Interview, boy, 14 years, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

Arranged marriages: Bangladesh & Pakistan

Findings from the qualitative research indicate that in Bangladesh and Pakistan parents have considerable authority over when and whom their children will marry. Boys may have some influence over these decisions, particularly in cases where they have a degree of financial independence; in general, however, the views and opinions of children, especially that of girls, younger children and less educated children, are either marginalised or altogether excluded in marriage decision-making processes. As one father in Pakistan explained:

*"In our society parents decide about the marriage of their children, and amongst the parents, the father has final power. The girls and boys do not disagree. If the boys and girls are older, then they might tell parents about their likes or dislikes, but they cannot reject their parents' decision."*¹¹⁰

A group of boys in Bangladesh similarly noted: "boys and girls are supposed to give their consent in order for a marriage to take place. However, it is the desire of parents in reality. Parents only inform their boys/girls [of their decision]. Our parents bring us up for many years, we cannot disobey them."¹¹¹

Reactions to several scenarios presented during the Focus Group Discussions demonstrate the influence and power of parents within traditional marriage practices in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and the lack of agency of children. One scenario presented concerned two 16 year old children who wished to get married without their parents' consent. This scenario was generally considered unthinkable by participants, particularly those from more traditional backgrounds; as a group of boys in Pakistan explained: "*This marriage will not take place. If they are living in urban area, they can marry but not in rural area, for us parents are important.*"¹¹² Similarly a group of children in Bangladesh responded: "*it is not possible. Parents and grandparents [will] try to make them understand. These types of scenarios are not common in our community.*"¹¹³

Another scenario concerned a 15 year old girl: her parents were arranging her marriage with her 25-year-old cousin, despite her wish to marry someone else. Although reactions to this scenario were somewhat mixed, research participants tended to agree that the girl should marry her cousin and respect the wishes of her parents; as one participant reasoned: "*she should marry her cousin; she will live happy with her cousin because her family will convince her, and her life will be settled.*"¹¹⁴ Another participant agreed: "*she should honour the decision her parents have made. She must acknowledge the fact that her parents have raised her and they are her custodians and they are authorised by the Islamic laws.*"¹¹⁴

As mentioned, in rural sites in Pakistan, *watta satta* marriages (the simultaneous exchange of a brother-sister, uncle-niece, or cousin pairing across two families) are relatively common. These marriages are arranged to strengthen and reinforce relationships between two families; and they may be agreed whilst a child is still very young, or even before their birth. A participant in Pakistan described a particular case:

"There was this girl who was 10 years old when she got married - the age of the boy was around 12. The reason that they were married at that age was that their parents had decided their marriage much earlier - even before the girl was born. It happens in

¹¹⁰ Interview, father, 32 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹¹¹ Focus Group Discussion, 10 girls, 12 – 14 years, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

¹¹² Focus Group Discussion, Boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹¹³ Focus Group Discussion, 9 Boys, 14 – 17 years, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

¹⁴³ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 16 – 18 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹¹⁴ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 14 years, Muzaffargarraf, Pakistan.

the watta satta cases. When the male/boy don't have any girl in their family to give in return, they have to agree to give their first born girl to the family into which he is marrying” ¹¹⁵

The bride and groom rarely play an active role in decision making regarding a *watta satta* marriage, they will simply be informed of the marriage by their parents and expected to comply. The idea that the couple concerned should give their ‘consent’ to the marriage was often expressed as being irrelevant or of low priority. As one participant explained:

*“Parents do not ask boys and girls about their consent, they just share the decision taken by them, and then the marriage takes place. In rare cases only, a boy [might] express his interest in another family, but his interests are changed when elders persuade him. Parents make the final decision, and children have to accept it.”*¹¹⁶

Similarly another participant noted:

*“The mother and father decide about marriage. Boys and girls are told about the marriage date - they are told that they will be married in that family with that girl. Most of the marriages are done without the consent of the bride and groom...no one seeks consent of the girl or boy because boys and girls are not able to decide.”*¹¹⁷

Parental control over decisions about marriage within the contents of arranged and *watta satta* marriages is not only a right, it is regarded as a *responsibility*; parents have a duty to see that their children are married and settled. It is their role to initiate the marriage of their children: to decide when it will happen and to whom. Failing to find a suitable match by an appropriate time constitutes a deep failing in their parental obligations: as one participant explained: “*according to social customs and religious law, boys and girls should be married one day. It's a major duty of parents. If not, we have to face social pressure and critiques. So it is parents' responsibility to marry their daughter when she reaches puberty.*”¹¹⁸ A group of girls similarly explained: “*according to our society the desired age at marriage of girls is 12-13 years. The maximum age parents get their daughter married off is from class six. Otherwise people take it negatively and say that the daughter has crossed the age of marriage but her parents are careless.*”¹¹⁹

Therefore, even though marriages are often carried out without the consent of the couple concerned, and whilst there may be a considerable degree of pressure and coercion applied (by parents over their children) this is not typically regarded as problematic, even by children themselves. Rather, it is considered as part of the proper and natural order of things; as one boy explained: “*because my parents gave birth to me and raised me, it would not be fair to disobey them.*”¹²⁰ Children are taught to respect their parents; to challenge or contradict their decisions is regarded as disrespectful and wrong: “*I want my parents to find a girl for me; I will not go for love marriage because my parents have helped me to grow – brought me up. I do not want hurt my parents.*”¹²¹ Another participant, a young woman in Pakistan, told researchers:

“it is said in Islamic teaching that offspring must obey their parents and when they don't they can give them harsh treatment and even force them to do certain things - if they don't want to go to pray parents can force even beat them to do so. I think that

¹¹⁵ Interview, community leader, Muzaffargarraf, Pakistan.

¹¹⁶ Focus Group Discussion, 3 boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹¹⁷ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹¹⁸ Focus Group Discussion, mothers, 24 – 39 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹¹⁹ Focus Group Discussion, 9 girls, 12 – 14 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹²⁰ Interview, boy, 15 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹²¹ Interview, boy, 16/17 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

*the same will go for the marriage. I would force my daughter if she is not willing to obey our choice for her. I would even do the same for my son too".*¹²²

A group of boys similarly explained: "We respect our elders, we stay silent in front of them; Marriage related things are decided by parents; Society gives them this right; and we will have this right, when we are parents."¹²³

The passive and subordinate role of women and girls within social life renders them especially unlikely to contradict or challenge parental authority about marriage; in the words of a community leader in Bangladesh: "*a woman/girl is socialised to be passive in family decisions. Their voices are rarely appreciated.*"¹²⁴ In this context, the question of female consent to marriage becomes almost tautological; as participants explained: "*a boy has to give his consent [for marriage] but girls are not asked about their consent – because everyone knows that girls do not go against parents.*" Similarly a marriage officiate noted: "*I ask the boy [groom] if he is being married by force; I do not ask this question from the girl because the girl will not say this.*"

The decisions that parents make about marriage on their children's behalf are understood as being for the benefit of the child, as well as (or even because of) the interests of the family as a collective. Many child participants spoke of their future marriage as a 'gift' or 'favour' that they would receive from their parents: "*our parents [arrange our marriage] with love and care. We do not need to spend time on these things; it is their job.*"¹²⁴ A marriage is seen as desirable, especially for girls, when it is seen to be a 'good match'. If a woman/girl is married to a man who will 'take good care' of her; her own choice, preference or views have little bearing on whether her marriage is considered acceptable or legitimate. In the words of one participant: "*In families consent does not matter, because all are happy. In this world marriage is a big occasion for a girl.*"¹²⁵

Of course, in practice there are occasions in which the wishes and decisions of parents do not align with those of their children, but in an environment where girls and women lack power and agency, as well as opportunities to access support or redress when they are in a coercive situation, forced marriages will be very difficult to resist. Furthermore, the consequences of refusal, particularly for girls, can be extreme and severe. As one participant explained:

*"Marriages without the consent of the parents mostly happen when the girl and boy run away. But most of the time they either end up being captured by the police - and the girl handed over to the parents - or the girl is killed by the parents in the name of honour;"*¹²⁶

Another participant similarly reported: "*girls are killed if they refuse to marry boys of their parents' choice.*"¹²⁷ Strikingly over a third (34.1%) of all male respondents in Pakistan agreed that it is acceptable to physically beat or punish a girl who dishonours her family concerning marriage. The lack of power that girls have to resist an unwanted marriage, was reflected in some participants' view that the only way to escape is through suicide. One participant in Pakistan described a recent case in his community:

¹²² Interview, woman, 23 years, Muzaffargarraf, Pakistan.

¹²³ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹²⁴ Interview, Community Leader, Dinapur Bangladesh.

¹²⁴ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 16 – 18 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹²⁵ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 16 – 18 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹²⁶ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Muzaffargarraf, Pakistan.

¹²⁷ Interview, teacher, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

*"If a boy is forced into marriage, he separates from his parents. If a girl is forced, she commits suicide. One girl from the Khokhar family took pesticides two months ago. She died. She wanted to marry another boy, but her parents wanted to her to marry her cousin."*¹²⁸

Another participant, this time in Bangladesh, spoke of what she would do: *"if my parents try to get me married against my will I will resist. Firstly, I will try to convince them. If I fail, I'll appeal to them...of committing suicide."*

In practice, therefore, children may have very little power to resist their parents' decision to marry them off, but this is not necessarily conceptualised as 'force' or regarded as 'forced marriage'. As one participant explained to researchers:

*"no, no there are no forced marriages, when children resist [a marriage] they will be 'motivated' by their elders and friends to go for that marriage. It is easier to convince young boys and girls; generally boys and girls in our rural area do not object to what parents decide."*¹²⁹

If a person never expects to make a decision for themselves, or to have the opportunity to choose their own future based on personal judgement and desire, it makes sense that force is not defined through pressure, coercion or lack of choice. This helps explain why, despite the fact that there was general consensus amongst participants that forced marriage is objectionable, in practice children and young people often have no, or very limited choice, about when and who they will marry.

Hierarchy and decision-making power in non-arranged marriages: Indonesia

In Indonesia, as previously discussed, arranged marriages are comparatively rare, and evidence from both the qualitative and quantitative data appears to indicate that there is a higher level of acceptance that couples should decide for themselves when and whom to marry. A group of boys described how marriage occurs in their community:

*"The youngest age a person got married in our community was 17 years. She married straight after she graduated from school. Her boy at the time was 21 years old and they were in love with each other for a long period. They decided to get married. This sort of marriage for us can be accepted. Because they have already dated for a long time. They love each other, and maybe they do not want their partner to become another person's wife or husband;"*¹³⁰

Nevertheless, as in Bangladesh and Pakistan, parents in Indonesia do still appear to hold a considerable amount of power and influence over their children's decisions regarding marriage. Participants in the qualitative research expressed substantial deference to their parents, explaining that if their parents wished for them to marry, they should, even if it went again their own personal wishes, and this was especially the case for girls. 62.8% of participants in the survey agreed with the statement: *"even if a girl does not want to be married she should honour the decisions and wishes of her family"*, and 59.8% agreed with this statement for boys.

Respondents in both research sites in Indonesia also expressed the view that a marriage should not take place without the consent of a couple's parents, and that in the case that it did, it would need to take place in secret: *"in order to take place, the marriage should have an agreement from the parents and the couple. When someone doesn't agree, it will be better to postpone the marriage, so that no*

¹²⁸ Interview, boy, 16/17, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹²⁹ Interview, man, 22 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹³⁰ Focus Group Discussion, 6 boys, 15 – 18 years, Babakan Madang, Bogor, Indonesia.

one could be hurt.”¹³¹ Another participant similarly explained: “the most important consent comes from the parents. If one of them cannot give consent, the marriage can be cancelled. Otherwise they will do secret marriage.”¹³²

The importance of parental consent is also provided for in law. As noted above, while the minimum marriage age is 16 for girls and 19 for boys, the law states that all young people must have parental consent to marry before the age of 21. Also, according to marriage registrars, marriages can take place under the minimum statutory age where both sets of parents have given consent: “We cannot refuse if the parent and guardian of the child give their consent and request us to administer his/her marriage.”¹³³

Whilst it appears that women/ girls in research sites Indonesia have, in general, more decisionmaking agency over when and whom they will marry (compared with in Bangladesh and Pakistan), they nonetheless lack power in initiating marriages. There is a dominant and widespread expectation that marriage should be instigated by men/ boys and their families, and that girls should passively wait for a proposal, along with her parents’ acceptance; as participants explained: “*the men make decisions about the marriage;*”¹³⁴ “*the girl herself makes decision, though parent’s decision is more dominant. The man’s party usually proposes the marriage to the woman’s party, but in order to take place, the marriage must have consent from both parties.*”¹³⁵

In addition, women/ girls who are dating or in a (sexual) relationship may face significant pressure to marry, regardless of age, due to the social stigma associated with being sexual active outside of marriage. One young woman described her own experience:

“I got married [when] I was 17. My husband was 18. We got married because of my parent’s suggestion. It was better to get married to avoid that unwanted thing (pregnancy) since we have been dating for a long time. My parent decided about the marriage. I actually did not really know about my husband, because we only dated for a year.”¹³⁶

Another participant explained:

“a parent who finds out that their child is dating will directly ask them whether the relationship is serious or not. They must get married if they are serious and have the financial capacity...Parents are afraid that their daughters will ‘go beyond the limit’ in their relationship with the boys.”¹³⁷

74.2% of participants in the survey in Indonesia agreed with the statement: “*marriage of girls under 18 years may happen because of pregnancy*”. These issues are explored in more detail in the sections below.

¹³¹ Interview, girl, 13 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹³² Focus Group Discussion, 6 boys, 12 – 13 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹³³ Interview, Marriage Officiate, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹³⁴ Interview, boy, 12 years, Babakan Madang, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹³⁵ Interview, girl, 18 years, Babakan Madang, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹³⁶ Interview, girl, 16 years, Babakan Madang, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹³⁷ Interview, teacher, elementary school, Babakan Madang, Bogor, Indonesia.

3.10 Attitudes that deviate from norms supporting child marriage

Generally, the qualitative data demonstrated considerable uniformity across research participants in attitudes to marriage and marriage age within research sites in each case study country. It also demonstrated significant uniformity in attitudes that support acceptability of child marriage (for instance, attitudes that support gender hierarchies / inequality and restrictive norms concerning female sexuality). This was particularly the case in Bangladesh and Pakistan, where social norms relating to gender roles appear to be less flexible.

'Deviant' attitudes that were less accepting of child marriage did emerge from the data, though most often, these were tightly connected to and supporting of dominant norms relating to gender roles within marriage, rather than appearing to challenge them. For instance, across all countries, where respondents demonstrated attitudes that were in direct opposition to child marriage, this tended to be related to the gendered roles that girls / women and boys / men are expected to perform within marriage. Participants who expressed opposition to child marriage did so where they were of the view that this would mean a girl would be unable to perform her primarily reproductive role and 'manage' the household effectively. They were opposed to boys marrying young if it meant that they were then not in a position to support the family financially.

*"The boys have to be economically solvent to marry as they are to take family responsibility and fulfil their family needs...For females, the legal age of marriage is 18 and 21 for males. If a girl got married after this age, she will not face all kinds of pregnancy-related problems. If any girl got married before this age, she will face pregnancy and birth related complexities, and physical or mental damage...(at this age) they know very well about household from their mothers."*¹³⁸

Across all research sites, some participants expressed opposition to child marriage on the basis that it was more likely to lead to less harmonious marriages, conflict, domestic violence and divorce: *"The top problem of this type of marriage (a young marriage) is divorce. As the couple is immature, they lack mutual understanding and self-respect, they quarrel with one another almost always and the result of this is divorce. Sometimes it causes physical violence to the girl."*¹³⁹ Interestingly, while respondents across all research sites were generally supportive of an age gap between spouses as being necessary to maintain male control and harmony within marriage, respondents who expressed opposition to significant age gaps within marriage tended to do so on the basis that this may result in communication problems, violence and a lack of harmony:

*"Same age is most preferable for marriage. An age difference between a husband and wife should only be 2-3 years. If the age difference is higher, many physical problems emerge, and they quarrel with each other due to different opinions."*¹⁴⁰

In Indonesia, particularly in Cigudeg, some young participants expressed the view that an age gap between spouses is problematic, on the basis that this will result in inequality within marriage; a view that challenges the social acceptability of gender hierarchies within marriage:

¹³⁸ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 14 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹³⁹ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 14 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹⁴⁰ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 14 years, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

*"I want to get married after I finish my university and have a job...I want my partner to be the same age as me, because I'd feel just uncomfortable if I got married with an older man"*¹⁴¹;

*"I want to get married at the age of about 27. I want to get a good job and make my parents happy first. I want to get married with a girl who is at the same age with me, so we can have the same level of thinking"*¹⁴²;

*"We want to get married with those who are the same age with us, because they will have the same understanding of facing life."*¹⁴³

Resistance to norms that support child marriage appeared linked to attitudes that oppose forced marriage. As set out above, lack of agency in marriage decision-making (of girls in particular) is supportive of child marriage. While generally, marriages that take place without the express consent of girls are not considered by participants to be 'forced marriage', some expressed strong opposition to marriages that take place without the consent of both parties to the marriage, recognizing these marriages as forced or at least 'non-consensual':

*"Parents' consent is important, but the consent from the couple is far more important. If one of them (parents or couple) do not give consent for the marriage, then it is better for the marriage to be canceled rather than forcing to be performed and finally ends up with divorce"*¹⁴⁴;

*"To take consent of girls in marriage has become more important now days."*¹⁴⁵

In Pakistan, some focus group participants expressed opposition to a scenario in which the parents of a 17 year old girl arrange for her to be married to her 24 year old cousin, against her will, on the ground that this amounted to a forced marriage, which was considered unacceptable: *"It is totally wrong with girl because she does not want to marry her cousin; The cousin should feel bad; if cousin is forced, then girl and boy will not live happy."*¹⁴⁶

Section 4: Structural factors that shape child marriage (acceptability)

The previous sections of this report have examined practices and norms relating to child marriage, and its acceptability. This section seeks to explain these practices and norms through an exploration of their relationship with broader contextual factors. Previous research ¹⁴⁷ has established the degree to which child marriage practices (and the norms and attitudes that support them) are related to underlying influences such as lack of economic and educational opportunity and social norms that justify and condone male sexual dominance and violence against women and girls.

¹⁴¹ Interview, girl, 13 years, Cigudeg, Indonesia.

¹⁴² Interview, boy, 15 years, Cigudeg, Indonesia.

¹⁴³ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 14 years, Cigudeg, Indonesia.

¹⁴⁴ Interview, boy, 16 years, Cigudeg, Indonesia.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, government official, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

¹⁴⁶ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Vehari, Pakistan.

¹⁴⁷ Harper, Caroline, Nicola Jones, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and David Walker, "Unhappily ever after: Slow and uneven progress in the fight against early marriage", Overseas Development Index, July 2014, <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinionfiles/9088.pdf>

Understanding the nature of these relationships is critical to designing programming that can effectively change marriage practices in a sustainable way.

4.1 Child marriage and income poverty

*"A girls' parents always think about the groom's economic status. A middle aged, opulent man can marry as he wishes."*¹⁴⁸

Child marriage practices and attitudes accepting of child marriage are often associated with income and poverty: in particular, child marriage may occur as a response to economic insecurity. Analysis of the quantitative data collected during this research, aggregated across the three country case studies, does indeed reveal, as expected, a positive correlation between income level and age of first marriage;¹⁴⁹ that is to say, survey participants with relatively higher incomes tended to report a higher age of first marriage than those with lower levels of income. Similarly, a comparative analysis of respondents' income according to whether they were married as an adult or as a child demonstrates that on average, respondents who are married as children have lower incomes than those married as adults.

	Median Monthly Income	Mean Monthly Income	Mode Monthly Income
Adult marriage	141.30 USD	117	99
Child marriage	129 USD	104	78

It is important to note that data on income refers to the monthly income of respondents' current household, whereas data on age at marriage refers to a past event, nonetheless, it is still interesting to note that those respondents married as children are currently significantly poorer than those who were married as adults.

Data from both the qualitative and quantitative components of the research demonstrates that child marriage functions as a coping strategy for families living in poverty or financial insecurity. Child marriage was found to be more acceptable to participants when it takes place in the context of economic necessity: where it provides a means of survival for girls and their families. In all three countries, respondents marrying a daughter to an economically secure man is a priority for families from deprived backgrounds; if an opportunity to do so arises it is not to be missed, regardless of the age or wishes of the girl. A group of parents in Indonesia described the attractive features of such an arrangement:

*"A woman we know, her husband arranged the marriage of their second daughter who was 14 with his rich friend who was 40. The man has a lot of money, a stable economy. He helped the family to renovate their house, and brought food supplies for the entire family every month. He even sent them to pilgrimage (hajj)."*¹⁵⁰

During focus group discussions respondents were presented with a scenario where the parents of a 15-year-old girl want to marry her to a wealthy 35-year-old man so that he can help them financially. Participants overwhelming expressed support for the marriage in this context. In the

¹⁴⁸ Interview, NGO, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹⁴⁹ R= 100, .01% significance level (2-tailed).

¹⁵⁰ Focus Group Discussion, 8 parents (mixed gender 25 -60 years), Babakan Madang, Bogor (Lanny).Indonesia.

words of one participant: “*better for the girl to marry the old man, because there is no guarantee she can survive or get a better life by leaving home*”.¹⁵¹

When asked if it is ever right to force someone into marriage, many respondents explained that in cases of economic necessity a forced marriage is acceptable; “*I think [forced marriage] is a problem. However, if the parents are getting sick, or facing family economic crisis, the arranged married then could be ok as long as it can help the parents' burden.*”¹⁵² Similarly, a group of girls in Bangladesh illustrate how marriage of a girl as young as 11 may be viewed as acceptable, or even rational, in the context of poverty:

*“I know a girl who got married at the age of 11. Her family was very poor. Her parents found that it would be easier to satisfy the groom with a younger girl. Then they decided that it would be irrational to delay the marriage of their daughter; even an underage daughter. Besides this, if they married their child, then they would be free from a huge of burden of maintaining her cost.”*¹⁵³

The relationship between economic hardship and *acceptability* of child marriage is also demonstrated by analysis of survey data, which reveals statistically significant negative correlations between respondents’ income level and their ‘child marriage acceptability’ scores in Bangladesh¹⁸⁵, Indonesia¹⁸⁶ and Pakistan¹⁸⁷ (bivariate correlation, p<0.05 in Bangladesh and Indonesia, and p<0.1 in Pakistan), as well as their level of current savings¹⁵⁴ (bivariate correlation, p<0.01 in all three countries). This indicates that individuals with higher income tend to have attitudes which are less accepting of child marriage and vice versa. Analysis of survey data also revealed significant associations between respondents’ income level and their explanations for why child marriage of girls happens. Analysis of income variance between respondents who agreed with the statements that ‘*marrying girls at a young age can help resolve financial problems in the family*’, and that “*marrying girls at a young age can help provide them security*” and those who disagreed, found statistically significant differences between the average income of each group (t-test, p<0.01). Respondents who agreed with these statements had significantly lower incomes than those who disagreed with these statements; again, this supports the conclusion that economic insecurity has a considerable impact on acceptability of child marriage of girls.

4.2 Child marriage and economic dependency

*“The father is only member in of most of our families who earns. Girls are considered as extra burden to their family. Traditionally, girls have to leave their father's house, and go to their husband's house.”*¹⁵⁵

The economic drivers of child marriage have a particularly pronounced impact on attitudes and practices relating to the marriage of *girls* because of their subordinate social position as economic dependents. In all case study countries, the majority of women and girls depend upon men for their financial security; first upon their fathers, and later upon their husbands. This dependency is rooted in a gendered division of labour, according to which women are responsible for homemaking, child bearing, and childcare, whilst men are responsible for providing income. As one respondent in

¹⁵¹ Focus Group Discussion, 6 boys, 15-18, Babakan Madang, Bogor (Didi), Indonesia.

¹⁵² Interview, woman, 18 years, Cigudeg, Bogor (Didi) Indonesia.

¹⁵³ Focus Group Discussion, 9 girls, 15 -17, Dinapur. Bangladesh.

¹⁵⁴ R = -0.22, .01% significance level (2-tailed).

¹⁵⁵ Focus Group Discussion, 9 girls, 12 – 14 years, Bangladesh, Gazipur.

¹⁹⁰ Interview, mother, 22 years, Bangladesh, Gazipur.

Bangladesh aptly summarised, “A husband gives shelter and security to his wife. His wife takes care of his family and gives birth to his child.”¹⁹⁰



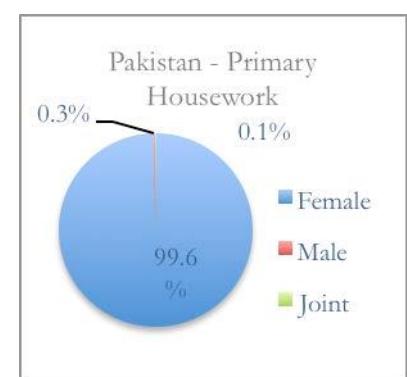
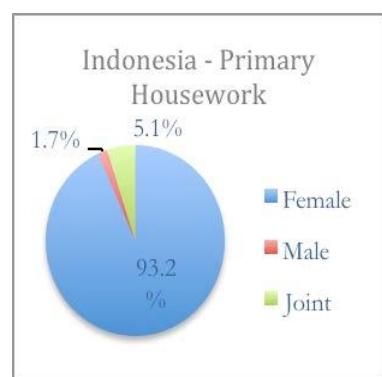
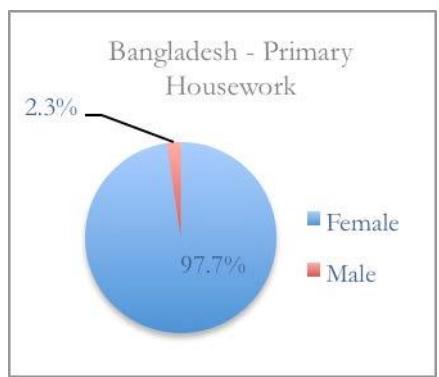
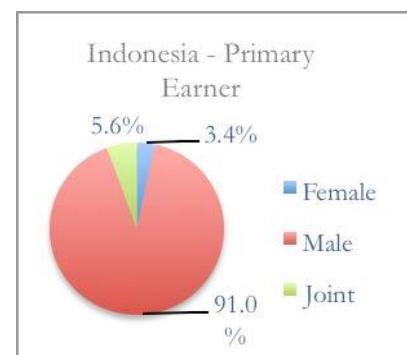
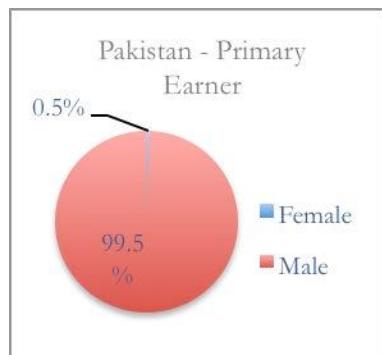
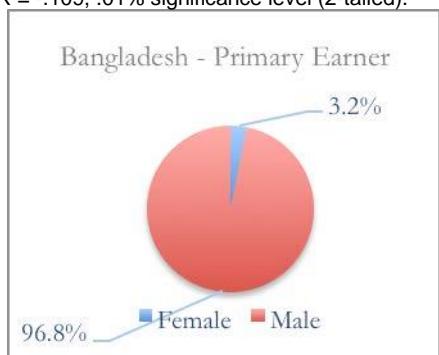
The quantitative data demonstrates that there is extreme division of labour according to gender in research sites in all three countries. When asked to name the ‘primary earner’ in their household, 99.5% of respondents in Pakistan, 96.8% of respondents in Bangladesh, 91.4% of respondents in Indonesia named a male family member. Conversely, when asked to name the person primarily responsible for housework, 99.6% of respondents in Pakistan, 97.7% of respondents in Bangladesh, and 93.2% of respondents in Indonesia named a female family member.

Charts 56-61: Gendered divisions of labour

¹⁸⁵ R= -.083, .05% significance level (2-tailed).

¹⁸⁶ R = -.092, .05% significance level (2-tailed).

¹⁸⁷ R = -.109, .01% significance level (2-tailed).



Qualitative data from all three countries demonstrates how this gendered division of labour functions to solidify gender hierarchies. As a 17 year old Pakistani boy explained:

*"Importance is given to those in the family who arrange expenses, and bring food and clothes. Girls and women do not do this role - that is why the role of men and boys is important. My brother is respected in the family because he also works at the merchant shop and does other kinds of work in the land."*¹⁵⁶

The response of a Bangladeshi boy - when asked why marriage is important - is particularly illustrative; *"a wife is not to be paid but she contributes more than servants who have to be paid a lot of money to do any work. Moreover, a servant would not look after parents, such as other family members."*¹⁹² Here the participant acquaints a wife's role in the family to that of an unpaid 'servant'.

Interestingly, participants in Bangladesh and Pakistan reported that marriages are arranged for both boys and girls *in order to maintain* this dominant division of labour:

*"When a mother becomes old and she can't do the household activities like rearing children, cooking, household management etc. then parents feel the need to marry off the eldest son of the family. The main purpose of this is that the new female member/wife will take household responsibility of that mother. A man needs someone to take care of him, which is another important reason for marriage."*¹⁵⁷

Yet while child marriage may occur to ensure that both female and male gender roles are fulfilled within a family, given the nature of these roles and girls' relative dependency within them, child marriage of girls occurs far more frequently.

Charts 62: Marriage of girls and boys for financial reasons

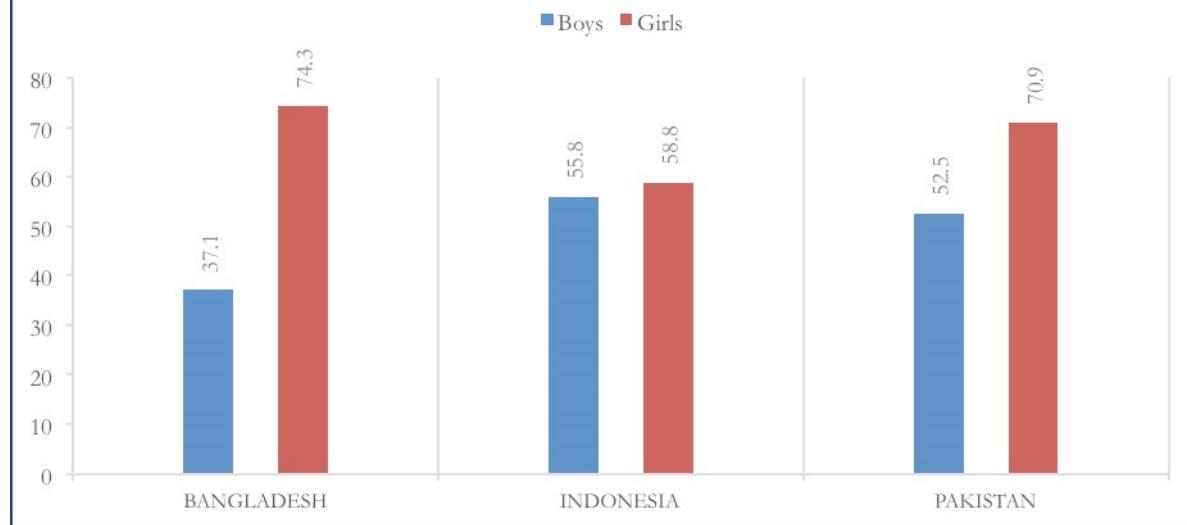
The graph below illustrates how a greater proportion of survey respondents, agreed with the statement; 'marriage of girls under 18 years sometimes happens for financial reasons', than agreed with the same statement applied to boys. This disparity was particularly stark in Bangladesh and, to a slightly lesser degree, in Pakistan. There was least disparity in responses for boys and girls in Indonesia, where, as demonstrated above, gendered divisions of labour were relatively lower (although still pronounced). Furthermore, Indonesia is also the only country where marriage of girls does not require a dowry; the impact of dowry on early marriage of girls is explored below.

¹⁵⁶ Interview, boy, 16/17 years, Pakistan, Ranjanpur.

¹⁹² Interview, boy, 17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh..

¹⁵⁷ Focus Group Discussion, 10 boys, 12-13 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh. .

Agreement with the Statement: 'marriage under 18 sometimes happens for financial reasons.'



This is because child marriage is not only seen as a means of ensuring girls' economic security; it also serves to relieve a family of the burden of supporting a daughter. Dependency positions girls as a financial burden; within poor families daughters may be perceived as a problem to which marriage is the primary solution, whereas a son, in contrast, may be perceived as a potential future earner. As a Bangladeshi teacher explained, "*At the age of 13/14, poor parents started thinking about marriage. Poor parents think girls are dependent. They will not get benefits from a daughter. Families expect more from boys, boys will feed them;*"¹⁵⁸ and a respondent from Pakistan noted: "*a girl is considered a burden on the family; families do not have resources to feed them for long time*".¹⁵⁹

Many participants expressed the view that child marriage is an *acceptable* practice when it can shift the financial burden of caring for a girl onto another family. Five girls, aged 15-18, in Indonesia expressed the social pressure that unmarried girls feel to marry, to avoid continuing to absorb their families' resources: "*It is better to get married than become your parent's burden.*"¹⁶⁰ And a group of 15-17 year old boys in Indonesia described how a girl should accept even an undesirable marriage in order to provide financial relief to their families; "*It is better to accept the marriage even if the girl feels pressured. This is preferable to refusing the marriage and letting the girl's family face a deeper economic problem.*"¹⁹⁷

Evidence of this was also observed in the survey data, where the size of a respondents' household was found to be negatively correlated with their attitudes concerning the ideal age of marriage for girls in all three countries (bivariate correlation, $p<0.01$), as well as their child marriage acceptability score (bivariate correlation, $p<0.01$ in all three countries); in other words respondents from larger households were more likely to think that girls should be married younger, compared to those from smaller households, and this was found to be especially true of adult, male respondents.

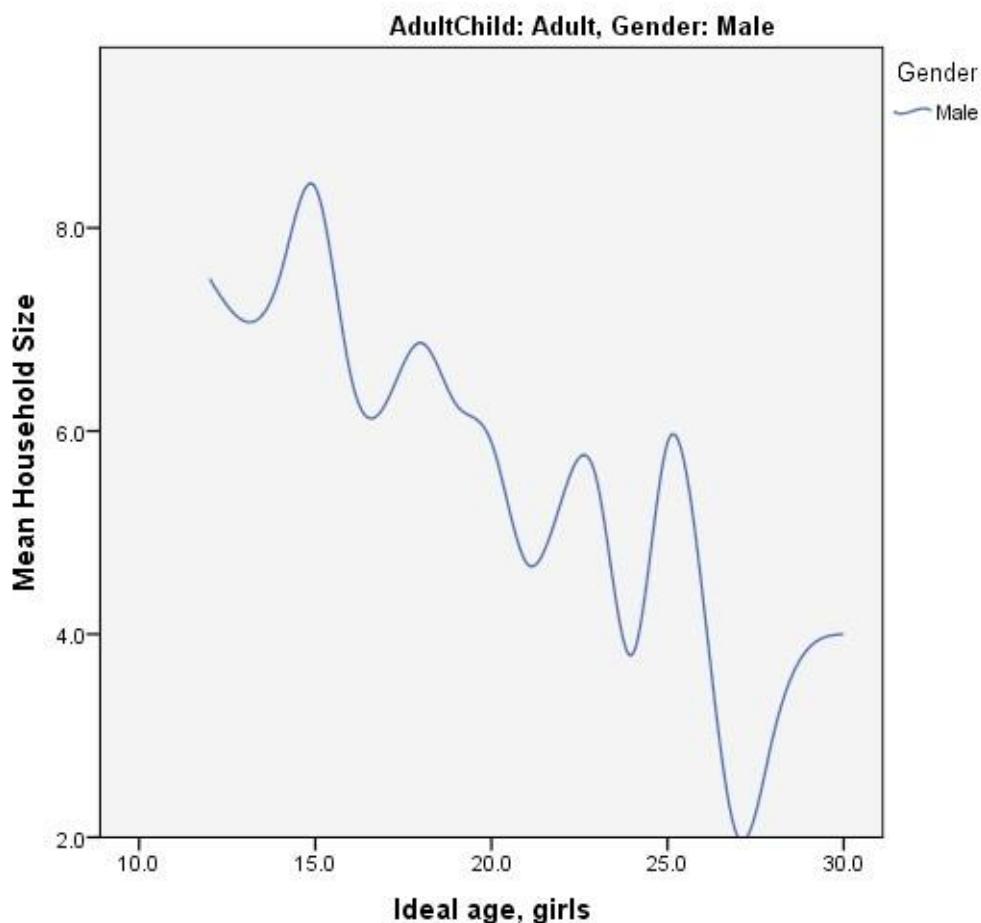
¹⁵⁸ Interview, teacher, woman, Dinapur, Bangladesh..

¹⁵⁹ Interview, health worker, Rajanpur, Pakistan, Rajanpur,.

¹⁶⁰ Focus Group Discussion, 5 girls, 15-18 years, Cigudeg, Bogor (Lanny) Indonesia.).

¹⁹⁷ Focus Group Discussion, 6 boys 15-17 years, Cigudeg, Bogor (Didi) Indonesia.).

Charts 63: Comparing adult male attitudes concerning the ideal age for marriage with size of household



4.3 Dowry

In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the position of women/ girls as a financial burden on their parents is entrenched through the system of dowry, whereby the parents of the bride are expected to bestow property or money on their daughter upon marriage, which will be transferred to her in-laws. Poorer families may face significant difficulties raising and preserving adequate resources for a dowry for their daughter, compelling families to marry their daughters as soon as they have sufficient funds, regardless of their age. A Pakistani doctor explained: “*dowry is an issue because of poverty. Parents are not that much well off to give heavy dowries to their girls. So parents wed off their girls soon.*”¹⁶¹

Younger girls may require a lower dowry as they are typically considered relatively desirable, especially by older men. Youth is associated with beauty, virginity and fertility, as well as obedience; as a young Pakistani man declared: “*if my wife dies, I will go for a second marriage. I will look for a young and virgin girl, because it is good to have a wife who is not used by others,*”¹⁶² About half of survey respondents in Pakistan and Bangladesh agreed with the statement that ‘younger brides often require a lower dowry than older brides’, and these findings were supported by evidence from the qualitative data. As a community leader in Bangladesh explained: “*as the age grows, the amount of dowry rises. So parents think it wise to get [their daughters] married early even when the girls disagree,*”¹⁶³ and a group of parents agreed: “*the younger the girl is, the less the dowry*”.¹⁶⁴ In some

¹⁶¹ Interview, Doctor, Pakistan.

¹⁶² Interview, man, 22 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁶³ Interview, Community Leader, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁶⁴ Focus Group Discussion, fathers, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

cases dowry may be waved altogether for younger girls. A father in Bangladesh described one such case:

*"there was a seasonal farmer who used to work on my land. He arranged the marriage of his daughter when she was just 13 years. I suggested to him not to do this, but the proposal was good and no dowry had to be given. So he married the girl."*¹⁶⁵

In this context, families face significant economic pressures to marry their daughters young. Doing so not only removes the financial cost of supporting her, it does so at a lower 'price' than will be obtainable as she ages. Meanwhile, marriage provides a means for ensuring their daughters' future economic security; an outcome which is critical given her financial dependency and the stigma she will face as an unmarried woman. In this way the institution of dowry actualises (makes real) the idea that early marriage provides protection for women/ girls: because of the dowry market and the way that it functions; this is not only a notion or norm, it is a matter of fact.

The economic incentives for early marriage have particular weight, of course, in the context of poverty. A group of parents in Bangladesh aptly summarised this cost benefit analysis for poorer: "*daughters are a burden; the sooner we get rid of the burden the better. Besides, an aged daughter's marriage costs a greater dowry.*"¹⁶⁶ A group of girls told researchers of a particular case known to them:

*"I know a girl who got married at the age of 11. Her family was very poor. Her parents found it easier to manage the groom's expectation for dowry for their daughter when she was younger. They decided it would be irrational to delay the marriage of their daughter, even though she was underage. Besides this, if they marry her, they would be free from a huge burden of maintaining her cost."*¹⁶⁷

The system of dowry may also create economic incentives for early marriage of boys if the family of the boy are presented with an opportunity to marry their son to a girl with a sizeable dowry. A community leader in Bangladesh explained: "*there are some families who pressure their boys to get married if the dowry offered by the bride's family is higher than their expectation.*"²⁰⁵ A young Bangladeshi boy explained that in some situations families may see marriage as an easier investment in their sons, than providing for their education – which can be a lengthy and expensive process before it results in any economic return:

*"some guardians go for arranging marriage [of their sons] with an expectation to get dowry. With the dowry money they aim to support their son to be involved in income generating activities. By contrast – a minimum of 25 years is required to complete graduation. Then a man requires some years to get a good job and settle down."*¹⁶⁸

The institution of dowry, therefore, is both a direct and indirect driver of child marriage (acceptability); a *direct* driver in the sense that it provides rational economic incentives for early marriage practices, and *indirect* driver in the sense that it functions to undermine and devalue the social position of women and girls, and degrade female personhood. Through the system of dowry, women and girls are reduced to commodities that have a particular market 'value' – one that depreciates over time. The words of one young boy in Bangladesh are illustrative of the demeaning manner in which participants often spoke of women and girls in the context of dowry: "*if a bride looks ugly, then the*

¹⁶⁵ Interview, father, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁶⁶ Focus Group Discussion, fathers 35-75 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh, .

¹⁶⁷ Focus group discussion, girls, 15-17 years, Bangladesh, Dinapur,.

²⁰⁵ Interview, Community Leader, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁶⁸ Interview, boy, 14 years, Dinapur, Bangledesh..

*groom's demand [for dowry] goes high.*¹⁶⁹ This is significant given that presentation of data findings and analysis throughout this report has demonstrated clear links between gender hierarchies, discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls, and the prevalence of child marriage and its level of acceptability.

4.4 Male sexual dominance, violence and control of female sexuality

*"The girl's name was Afsana – she was in class 7. She was very beautiful. Many boys disturbed her. That's why her parents arranged her marriage."*¹⁷⁰

Male sexual harassment and violence against women and girls was a consistent explanation, as well as *justification*, of child marriage of girls by participants in the research.

The acceptability of early marriage of girls is informed by highly conservative norms that on the one hand strictly prohibit sexual activity outside of marriage, and on the other, hold woman and girls, along with their wider families, responsible for any transgression of this norm, *irrespective* of consent. Under such conditions an unmarried girl poses a constant threat to the reputation of her family, either because she has a relationship, or is perceived to be having a relationship prior to marriage, or because she is (perceived to be) at risk of becoming victim to sexual harassment or violence, which will be equally devastating to her reputation. This creates considerable incentives for parents to marry their daughter at the earliest opportunity to secure her reputation and avoid the social stigma attached to remaining female and single; as participants explained:

*"One of the main reasons for early marriage is to protect the family from disrepute associated with immoral activities of the girl. Parents fear that before she has sex with someone they should marry her. She might make a bad name for her parents. Once she is married, the responsibility and burden is shifted."*¹⁷¹

In sum, parents are compelled to marry their daughters soon after puberty, because the mere existence of a sexually attractive yet unmarried women/ girl poses a threat to a patriarchal social order that insists and depends on absolute male dominance and control over female sexuality.

Participants in the research often equated sexual 'promiscuity' with experience of violence, as a group of boys in Bangladesh argued: "*marriage is necessary to control oneself from illegal sexual activities. Girls get married for security to avoid any unexpected incident.*"¹⁷² Another interviewee explained: "*parents often feel insecure keeping their girls unmarried. By insecurity I mean the risk of affair, relationship, sexual harassment,*" and a third similarly explained:

*"Keeping girls [unmarried] generates a risk of an illicit relationship. This type of behaviour creates a threat to the family honour. **The threat includes the possibility of illicit sexual relations or sexual harassment of girls** [emphasis added]."*¹⁷³

One participant explained why he had married his wife when she was only 14 years old:

¹⁶⁹ Focus Group Discussion, 9 boys, 12-15 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, teacher, female, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁷¹ Focus Group Discussion, fathers, 32-50 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁷² Focus Group Discussion, 9 boys, 12-14 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁷³ Interview, boy, 14 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

"It was a love match. People knew about our relationship – they criticised our relationship...I could have married her after two or three years, but social value is very important. People criticised us negatively. For girls it's a big problem – it is her dignity and her family's dignity. That's why I married early."

Respondents relayed numerous stories of child marriages allegedly arranged as a remedy for sexual violence, harassment and rape, to avoid family shame. A health worker in Indonesia told researchers of one such case:

"[the girl] was really depressed because she had been raped by three persons. Her age was about 15 years old. She got married with one of [the perpetrators]. There was no bad reaction from the community to the family, because they were married.¹⁷⁴

Children in Dinapur, Bangladesh, developed a role-play relaying the story of an early marriage as part of a participatory research activity:

A girl aged 13 years is compelled into marriage due to 'eve teasing' (sexual harassment). The parents are forced to get their girl married off because they were unable to protect their daughter from sexual harassment. The boy who was harassing her was the son of a powerful, elite person. They are always going about, so keeping the girl unmarried creates a risk of sexual violence. If the girl is sexually harassed, it would be a shame for the family. This might cause a difficulty for getting a potential good groom in the future.¹⁷⁵

In focus group discussions participants were presented with a story about a 14 year old girl who is raped on her way home from school. As a consequence her parents decide they should immediately marry her to an older man who already has a wife. Participants reactions to this scenario were mixed, but many agreed that the girl should be married as soon as possible: "*It is fine to get married instead of being unmarketable;*" "*it is better to get married than bearing the shame*"; "*it is not her fault, but nobody will believe it's not her fault*" were typical responses.¹⁷⁶ Disturbingly, some participants felt that the old man was doing the child a favour by agreeing to marry her even though she was a victim of rape, as one young girl in Indonesia explained: "*the man is very kind and noble, because he knows about the [rape] and still wants to take responsibility [for the girl].*"¹⁷⁷ Participants consistently explained that a girl who is no longer perceived to be a 'virgin' loses her value on the marriage 'market' and her dowry price rises significantly: "*parents are always worried about the unexpected incident of their daughter – such as eve teasing [sexual harassment]. This incident makes it a hard task to get a groom for this girl.*"¹⁷⁸ A Bangladeshi boy succinctly summarised the situation: "*nobody wants to marry a girl with no chastity.*"¹⁷⁹

The link between sexual violence and early marriage, therefore, is mediated through attitudes that hold female victims of violence responsible for their own abuse; attitudes which are associated with norms that normalise and justify male perpetration of violence against women and girls.¹⁸⁰ The qualitative data consistently revealed evidence of such attitudes amongst participants in all three case study countries: in particular there is a prevailing acceptance of rape and physical violence within the context of marriage. One woman in Indonesia told researchers: "*I feel pressured to make*

¹⁷⁴ Interview, health worker, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹⁷⁵ Participatory activity, role play , children, mixed group, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁷⁶ Focus Group Discussion, Girls, 12-13 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹⁷⁷ Focus Group Discussion, Girls, 13-14 years, Babakan Madang, Indonesia.

¹⁷⁸ Focus Group Discussion, Boys, 14-17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁷⁹ Interview, boy, 14 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

¹⁸⁰ E Buchwald, *Transforming Rape Culture*, 2005.

love with him maybe once or twice. I know that it is my duty to give him services, including making love”,¹⁸¹ and another similarly said:

*“I have had sex with him without my willingness, and I got a headache at that time. I accept that because a wife is not allowed to refuse her husband’s sexual call. People in the religious gatherings say that.”*¹⁸²

In relation to domestic violence, a group of boys in Bangladesh explained to researchers: “*a woman is afraid of her husband. If she did slap back she will be divorced. Her parents will not accept her. Her life is ruined*”.¹⁸³

Due to ethical concerns, the survey was not designed to collect data on experiences of sexual violence and rape; however, data was collected in relation to sexual harassment and physical violence. Reported experiences of sexual harassment were highest amongst females in Bangladesh at 16.1%. This compares to 11.1% of females in Pakistan and 9.0% of females in Indonesia reporting experiences of harassment. Reported rates of intimate partner violence were highest in Pakistan, with 23.8% of married females reporting experiences of physical violence at the hands of their husbands. 19% of married females in Bangladesh reported being subject to partner violence, and only 2.1% of married females in Indonesia reported this. It is worth bearing in mind that these figures are likely to be lower than actual rates due to widespread underreporting of this type of violence.¹⁸⁴

Interestingly, in Pakistan and Bangladesh, participants married as children were significantly more likely to report experiences of intimate partner violence than those married as adults (Chi-square, $p<0.01$).

The survey also collected data on attitudes towards sexual and gender based violence. As many as 61.2% of participants in Pakistan, and 58.8% of participants in Indonesia agreed that marrying girls young can help prevent sexual violence, and 58% (Indonesia) and 53% in Pakistan also agreed that early marriage of girls can help protect the family honour and reputation.

These results were considerably reduced for Bangladesh: 10.8% agreed that early marriage can protect family honour and 14.4% agreed that it can help prevent sexual violence. Nevertheless, the qualitative research did reveal attitudes strongly supportive of this position in Bangladesh, and it is likely that survey responses may have been influenced by reasons already discussed¹⁸⁵, resulting in these comparatively lower numbers.

¹⁸¹ Interview, woman married as a child, 34 years, Cigudeg, Indonesia.

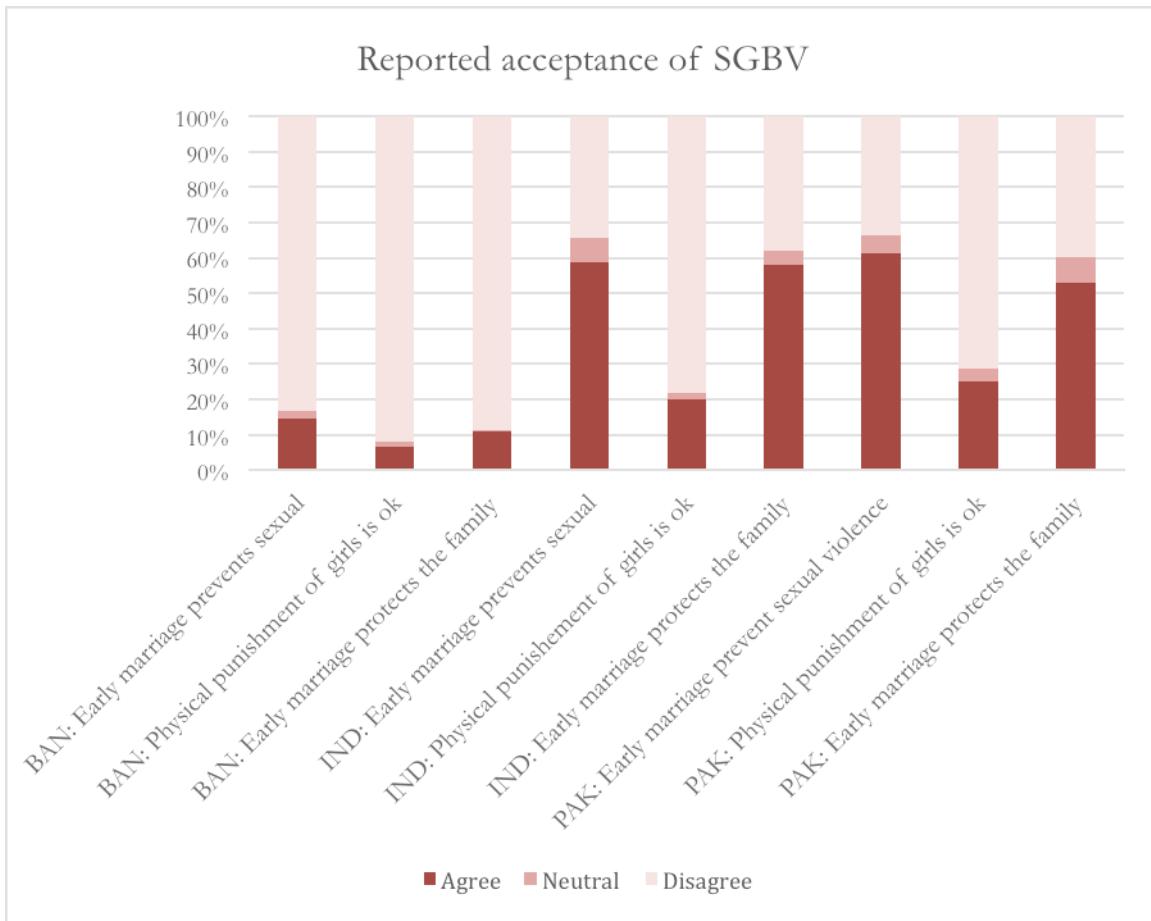
¹⁸² Interview, female, 24 years, Cigudeg, Indonesia.

¹⁸³ Participative activity, boys, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹⁸⁴ WHO (2001), *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women*, Available at <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/womenfirtseng.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ The communities selected in Bangladesh were familiar with Plan programming on child marriage.

Chart 64: Proportion of participants reporting acceptance of SGBV by country



Interestingly, in all country contexts, participants who agreed with the statement “*it is sometimes ok to physically beat or punish a girl if she dishonours her family*”, were found to have a significantly higher mean ‘child marriage acceptability’ scores, than those who disagreed with this statement (mean acceptability score of 92.9 for those who agreed, 89.6 for those who were ‘neutral’, and 83.8 for those who disagreed) (ANOVA, p<0.001); indicating that those respondents who (reported to be) accepting of violence against women and girls, were also (reportedly) more accepting of child marriage practices.

4.4.1 Access to sexual and reproductive health services

The stigma associated with female sexuality, and prohibition on sexual relationships outside of marriage, is exacerbated by a lack of availability and access to sexual and reproductive health services particularly for young, unmarried women. Pregnancy before marriage is deeply stigmatised; it causes great shame and social exclusion for girls and their families. According to many research respondents, in the case that an unmarried girl does become pregnant, arranging for her immediate marriage is a necessity. Qualitative research participants frequently expressed that a girl ‘must’ get married if she becomes pregnant outside of marriage, and that pregnancy outside of marriage was an exception to the dominant view that forced marriages are unacceptable: “*If the girl is pregnant, then the parent must force her into marriage. There is no other solution*”¹⁸⁶; “*It is not allowed to force someone to get married. However, parents can force the children to get married if the girl is pregnant.*”²²⁵ One religious leader in Bangladesh explained: “*when someone calls me to perform [a] marriage ritual, I usually check the age. If the age is below the minimum legal age I refuse to*

¹⁸⁶ Focus Group Discussion, parents, mixed gender, 25 – 60 years, Babakan Madang, Indonesia.

²²⁵ Interview, girl, 12 years, Babakan Madang, Indonesia.

*perform the ritual. However, if someone gets pregnant before marriage, I advise them to get married".*¹⁸⁷

In Indonesia participants viewed unplanned pregnancy to be one of the most significant and important drivers of child marriage, 74.5% of participants in Indonesia agreed with the statement: "*early marriage of girls may happen because of pregnancy.*" The proportions of participants who agreed with these statements were significantly reduced in research sites in Bangladesh (35.6%) and Pakistan (15.3%), perhaps because norms prohibiting sexual activity outside of marriage were found to be so powerful in research sites in Pakistan and (to a slightly lesser degree) in research sites in Bangladesh, that participants were often unwilling to even acknowledge that girls may become pregnant before marriage, with many participants stating that 'this doesn't happen in our community', or "*we cannot say anything about it; it is difficult to understand*"¹⁸⁸. Others relayed the severe consequences that may result in the case of an 'illegal' pregnancy: "*If it happens it is bad for [the girls'] family, she might be killed by [her] parents, because of the bad name for her family*"¹⁸⁹. A group of boys in Pakistan described one particular case: "*this has happened in our area; her parents killed her and gave an excuse that while ironing, she was electrocuted.*"¹⁹⁰

During focus group discussions, participants were presented a scenario in which two 15 year old classmates have a relationship and the girl becomes pregnant. The couple do not want to marry, but are pressured by their parents to do so. The vast majority of participants agreed that marriage in this case was the only option: "*it is better than embarrassing their families;*" "*nothing can be done, they should get married to each other;*" "*they should marry, otherwise people will criticise them. Their family reputation will be hampered.*"

Acceptability of child marriage following a pregnancy appears to be exacerbated by the norm that children born to an unmarried mother are 'illegitimate' or 'illegal'; a norm supported by laws (or community interpretations of laws) that deny legal identity and access to services to children born to unmarried mothers: "*If a girl accidentally gets pregnant by someone, she has to get married to that person. Because having [a] child before marriage is unrecognized/illegal;*"¹⁹¹

*"in our society, a baby of an unmarried girl is called Jaroj (Bastard Child) and her mother is considered a sinner. Both mother and baby are not only stigmatized but also their lives become very difficult. Without a father's identity, the baby could not get services even from government, such as admission to school."*²³¹

According to the quantitative data, there is a lack of access to / availability of sexual and reproductive health services in all research sites. Participants in the survey were asked to identify types of contraceptives that were available in their community. Strikingly, 78.5% of participants in Pakistan were unable to identify any form of contraception available in their area. This was also true of (a considerably reduced, but still high proportion) 45.4% of participants in Bangladesh and 39.6% of participants in Indonesia. In addition, 81% of married participants in Pakistan reported that they did not use any form of contraception, as did over half (53.6%) of married participants in Indonesia and 32.8% of married participants in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, 25.8% of married respondents in Pakistan said that contraceptives are *never* available in their community. A further 20.1% of participants said they were available but only to individuals

¹⁸⁷ Interview, religious leader, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

¹⁸⁸ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁸⁹ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁹⁰ Focus Group Discussion, 3 boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

¹⁹¹ Focus Group Discussion, girls, 15 – 17 years, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

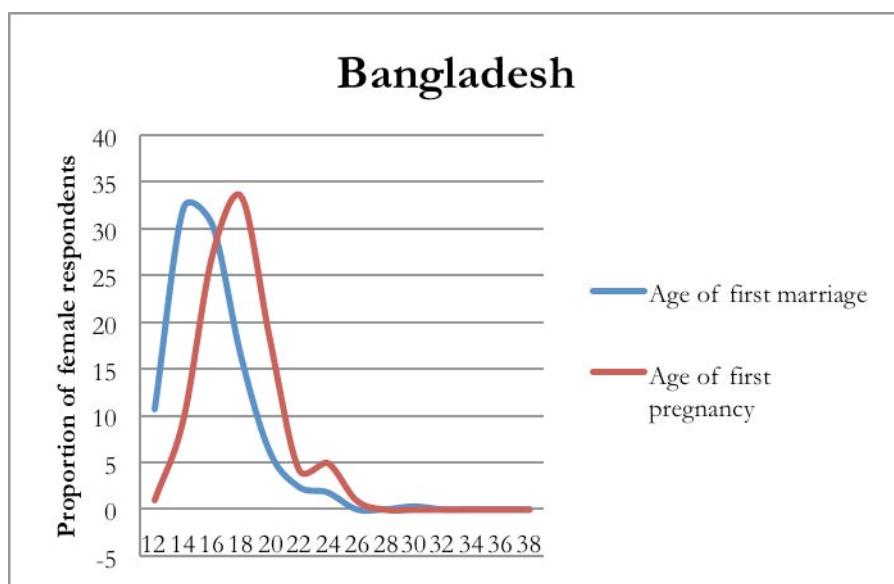
²³¹ Interview, marriage registrar, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

that are married, and the rest of the sample, 54.1%, reported that contraceptives are only available to individuals who are married and who already have children. In Indonesia, 15.9% of married respondents reported that contraceptives are never available in their area, and a further 82.8% reported that they were only available to individuals who were married or who already had children. Finally, 87.3% of respondents in Bangladesh reported that contraceptives are only available to people once they have married or have had children.

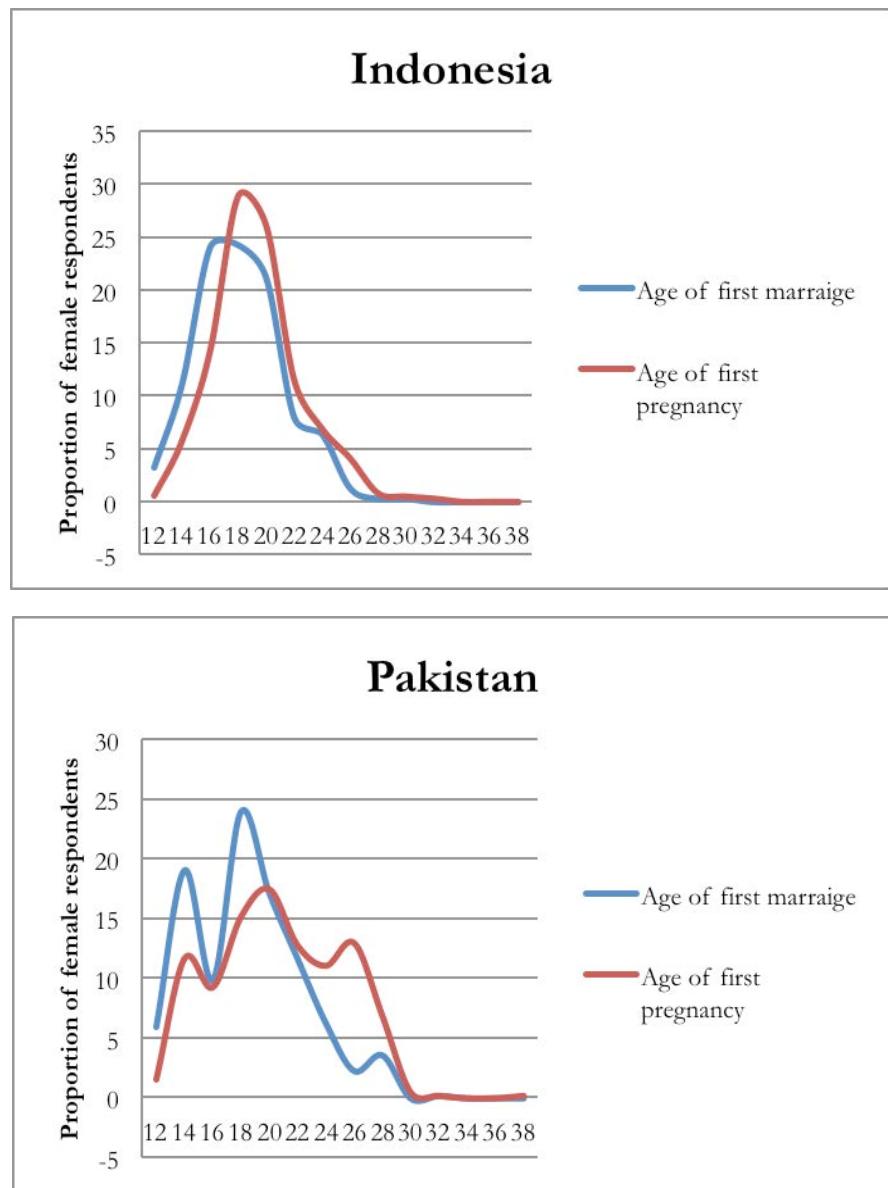
These findings were supported by the qualitative data. A trend that was observed across all research sites is that women do not generally use contraception until they are married and have had their first child. It appears that this is the result not only of a lack of availability or practical access to SRH services, but also of highly restrictive norms that deeply stigmatise sex outside of marriage and prevent service providers from delivering services to unmarried girls / women. There is a view that, if girls are not supposed to be having sex outside of marriage, it is highly undesirable to grant them access to SRH services. Lack of contraception use after marriage but before a girl / woman has her first child may be related to strong social expectations for women to start childbearing once they are married: *“People here do not use contraception after getting married, because they believe it will be difficult for the wives to get pregnant. They use contraception after having a child, either contraceptive injection or pills.”*¹⁹²

The charts below present the proportion of female respondents who were first married at each age (12 – 38) and who were first pregnant at each age (12-38), by country. It is worth noting that the ‘age of first pregnancy’ line closely follows the shape of the ‘age of first marriage’ line, with a gap of about two years between them. Indeed, 80% of survey respondents reported having their first child within three years of their first marriage. This indicates that there is a clear relationship between age of first pregnancy and age of first marriage, with respondents tending to have a child one or two years after they marry.

Chart 65-67: Proportion of female respondents by age of first marriage and age of first pregnancy



¹⁹² Focus Group Discussion, parents, mixed gender, 25 – 60 years, Babakan Madang, Indonesia.



There also appears to be a lack of knowledge among girls in research sites about SRH services and contraception more generally, along with a lack of ability to access services, and a lack of confidence or sense of entitlement to such services. Some respondents expressed the view that children and adolescents, at least those who are not married, should not receive sex education or information on SRH (in schools, at home or otherwise) as education on 'safe sex' and access to contraceptives could cause them to engage in 'free sex'. Negative social consequences appear to be viewed as a means of ensuring that unmarried persons do not engage in sexual activity:

*"There is no education about contraception. If we tell them about contraception, it means that we teach them how to do that (sex) in a safe way, without fear of pregnancy. It is better for us to tell them about the horrible effects of sexual intercourse."*¹⁹³

It was reported by many respondents that sex and relationships education in schools is either nonexistent, very minimal or of poor quality: "*Teachers do not teach us about family planning, and contraceptives; teachers say that we only teach what is in books*"¹⁹⁴; "*We receive basic education about reproduction in biology class. The teacher informed us about the reproductive organs and the*

¹⁹³ Interview, teacher, Cigudeg, Indonesia.

¹⁹⁴ Focus Group Discussion, boys, 12 – 15 years, Ranjanpur, Pakistan.

*functions.*¹⁹⁵ Though it was observed by some participants in Bangladesh that Plan and other NGOs have started to carry out awareness raising in communities on SRH, including providing some sex education in schools, it is unclear what impact this will have in improving access to SRH services.

Interestingly, married participants in the survey who reported using a modern form of contraception had significantly lower acceptability scores than those who were reportedly not using any form of contraception (ANOVA, p<0.001). Furthermore, participants who were able to identify one or more modern forms of contraception available in their community had significantly lower acceptability scores than those who did not. These findings demonstrate the associations between lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services and norms and attitudes concerning child marriage (ANOVA, p<0.001).

Strict limits on access to abortion in all research locations limit the options available for unmarried pregnant girls and women, contributing to (acceptance of) child marriage in the case of pregnancy. In Pakistan, respondents did not identify abortion as a possibility in the case of unwanted pregnancy. In research sites in Bangladesh and Indonesia, however, several participants mentioned that, hypothetically, abortion is ‘an option’ for unmarried pregnant girls, but one that is considered to contravene religious norms:

“When someone calls me to perform marriage ritual, I usually check the age. If the age is below the minimum legal age I refuse to perform the ritual. However, if someone gets pregnant before marriage, I advise them to get married rather than do abortion. According to Islam it is the most evil work. Abortion means murder of a new life”¹⁹⁶;

“Many children now get married earlier because they date too much. A few of them get pregnant and so have to get married while they are still underage. Of course there is an alternative – to do abortion – but this is a huge sin. So she [the pregnant girl] must marry with her boyfriend.”¹⁹⁷

4.5 Education

Impact of education on child marriage practices

The quantitative data demonstrates a clear relationship between age of marriage and years in education. An analysis of data aggregated across countries revealed a highly significant positive correlation between age of first marriage and years in school, indicating that individuals who stay in education longer get married later.¹⁹⁸ The positive correlation also exists at the country level: highly significant positive correlations were found between age of first marriage and years in school in Bangladesh ($r= 0.146$, p<0.01%); (Pakistan: $r=0.332$, p<0.01%); and (Indonesia: $r=.383$, p<0.01%).

A separate analysis of male and female respondents reveals a stronger correlation between age of marriage and years in school for female respondents than their male counterparts, as well as a slightly higher level of significance for female respondents.¹⁹⁹ The increased strength in correlation may be partly explained by the fact that the values relating to years in school and age of marriage (in particular) were more highly concentrated. It suggests that the relationship between age of marriage and years in school is clearer for girls than boys and that every additional year that a girls

¹⁹⁵ Focus Group Discussion, girls, 15 – 18 years, Babakan Madang, Indonesia.

¹⁹⁶ Interview, religious leader, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

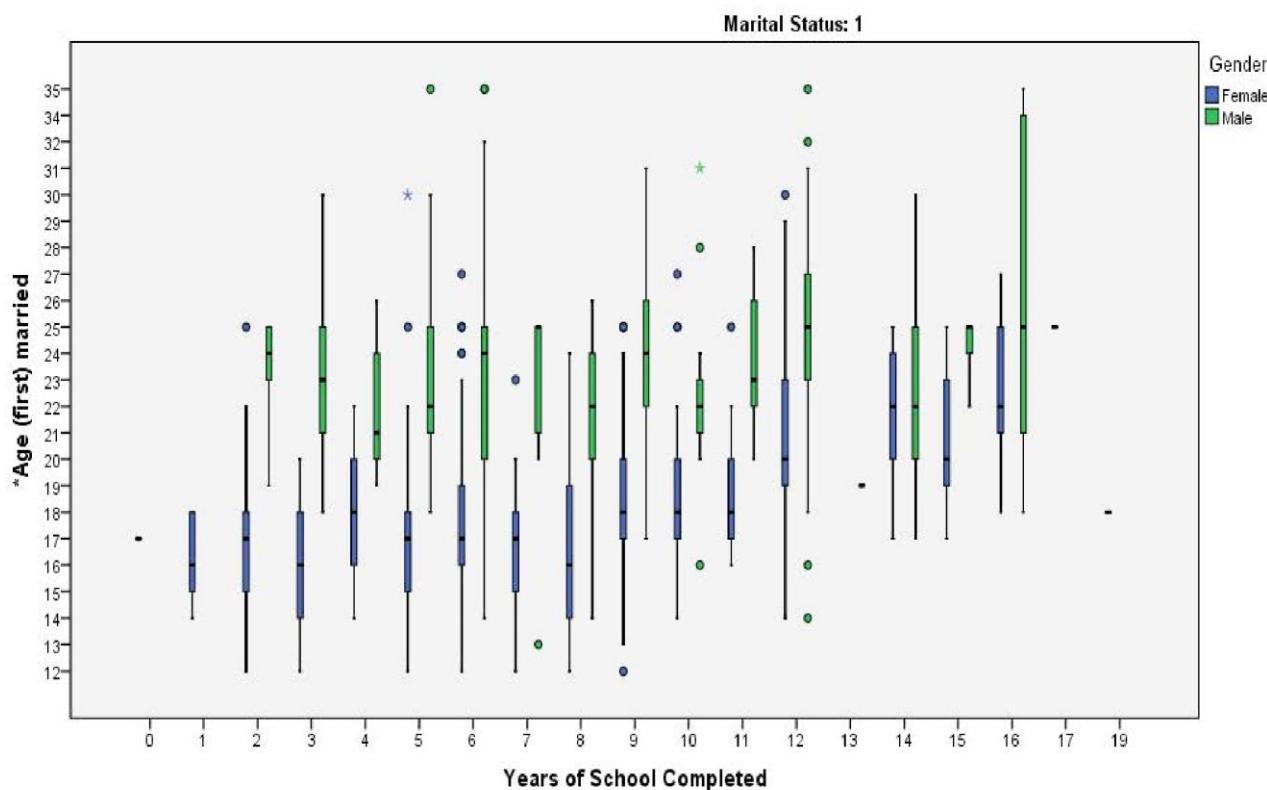
¹⁹⁷ Interview with woman who was married as a child, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

¹⁹⁸ Correlation coefficient = .285, correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

¹⁹⁹ Female: correlation coefficient = .428, significant at .01 level (2-tailed); Male: correlation coefficient = .124, significant at .05 level (2-tailed).

or woman stays in education is associated with a greater increase in age of marriage than the same year would be for a boy or man.

The distribution in respondents' age of marriage at each education level is demonstrated through the graphical representation below. It is important to note that despite the clear relationship that exists between age of marriage and years in education, this is a general trend; there are high levels of variation within this trend, as can be observed in the graph below. The coloured boxes span the age of first marriage for the middle 50% of respondents at each education level centred around a mean value (the black line cutting across the boxes) with female respondents represented in blue and male respondents represented in green. The vertical lines stretching out from the boxes represent the outer 50% of respondents (minus the extreme values), and the dots and stars hovering



above and below the lines represent extreme values.

Charts 68: Age of marriage by years in education

Despite the range in age of marriage at each 'education level', a number of interesting trends emerge from the graph above. Firstly the correlation is apparent: with each additional year of education, both female and male respondents' tend to report an older age of first marriage. Secondly, at each level of education, female respondents who had reached that level were still, nonetheless, consistently married early than their male counterparts at that same level of education. Thirdly, men are more strongly represented at higher 'education levels', and women more strongly represented at lower 'education levels'. Finally, it is interesting to note that as 'education level' increases, the age of marriage of male and female respondents converges.

In research sites in all three countries there were also significant differences in the age of first marriage of females according to their parents' level of education. Female respondents' whose parents had obtained some formal education were on average married significantly later than those whose parents' were uneducated (T-test, $p<0.01$ for Indonesia and Bangladesh, and $p<0.1$ for Pakistan).

The relationship between education and age of marriage was clearly articulated by respondents in focus group discussion and interviews. Many described this relationship as a ‘trade-off’ whereby a child can either be in education or be married; as one participant explained: “*I got married at the*

age of 18, because I did not continue my school.”²⁴⁰ In the case that a girl gets married it is highly unlikely that she will be able to continue her schooling, due to her responsibilities towards her husband and in-laws, and the convention that it is appropriate for her to remain at home. Boys, however, may continue in education. A teacher in Pakistan described one such case:

“There is a boy in 6th grade who got married while he was 12, now at the age of 13 he is the youngest married person in this school, there are several boys who are married at this age. This marriage was due to the sickness of his mother. I think it was the right decision by their family as they were not able to afford any help at home who can work in place of his mother, so getting this boy married was the only option they had.”²⁴¹

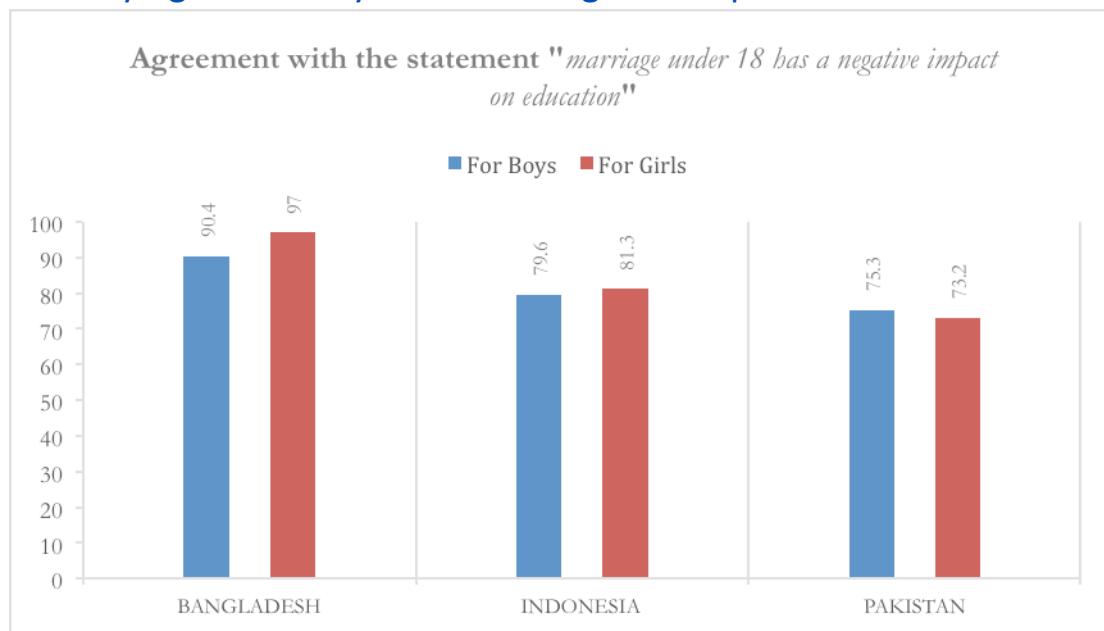
Interestingly, when asked about the typical age of marriage in their communities, both adults and children frequently reported two sets of ages: one for those who stay in education and one for those who do not:

The ideal age of marriage for boys is 20 and for girls is 18, if they are school /college going, then marriage might be delayed to 25 [for men] and 20 [for women].²⁴²

In reality for those who withdraw from education or are illiterate the most common age for marriage is 14-17 years for girls and below 20 years for boys. On contrary, for the educated the common age of marriage is 20 years or more and 25 years or more. There are several reasons affecting marriage at this stage. For girls, most of the relatively non-wealthy families conceive that girls should not be staying longer in the house if they are drop outs from the school.²⁴³

Respondents in all countries overwhelmingly agreed that marriage under 18 years has a negative impact on education for both boys and girls. A slightly greater number of respondents agreed that marriage under 18 has a negative impact on girls' education than boys' education in Bangladesh and Indonesia, whilst slightly fewer respondents agreed that marriage under 18 has a negative impact on girls' education than boys' education in Pakistan.

Charts 69: Marrying under 18 years has a negative impact on education



²⁴⁰Interview, boy, 17 years, Babakan, Bogor (Did), Indonesia.

²⁴¹Interview, teacher, man, Muzafargarh, Pakistan.

²⁴²Focus Group Discussion, fathers, 35-75 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

Whilst responses relating to girls' education may reflect the fact that girls' education is interrupted by marriage more frequently than boys' is, responses relating to boys' education may be due to a perception that interruptions to boys' education are more problematic. On the whole, however, it is clear that the vast majority of respondents recognised the negative impacts child marriage has on education for girls and boys, at least in the abstract. The relationship between education and acceptable age of marriage is illustrated by the following statements, made by a group of Bangladeshi girls: "*What is the ideal age for marriage? Educated girl-30; uneducated girl- 20; educated male- 35; uneducated male- 25.*"²⁰⁰

Both qualitative and quantitative data suggests that child marriage frequently interrupts girls' education, yet the relationship between child marriage and lack of education for girls goes much deeper. Norms relating to gender hierarchies within marriage, such as female dependency and subservience, influence the acceptability of child marriage practices and serve to devalue girls' education. Education is not seen as relevant or necessary for women and girls. As a Pakistani man explained;

*"Women literally have no role in my society except having kids and raising them. Besides, women also take care of their spouse while the husband has the role of performing outside jobs by default. If a woman is educated, the nature and roles of partners may change..."*²⁰¹

A group of Bangladeshi girls echoed his statement, "*Many mothers and mother's in law think that there is no necessity for higher education of girls; rather the girls should learn to perform household chores.*"²⁰²

Furthermore, several respondents explained that an educated women may be perceived as undesirable, as it may pose a challenge to maintaining appropriate social hierarchies;

*"They do not send them for education because parents consider that these girls have to be married one day; people also think if these girls are educated they will be out of control which means inviting trouble for the family. They will live on their own, they will not obey anyone."*²⁰³

An educated bride may also be undesirable to a groom's family, rendering it more difficult for parents to find her a suitable match; as one participant explained: "*a groom's mother will choose a very young bride so she can dominate her. A young bride will adjust with the family very soon. An educated girl faces problem to find a good groom.*"²⁰⁴ As a result an educated girl may require a larger dowry, making the economic trade-offs between education and marriage for girl children even greater; as a group of girls in Bangladesh reported: "*girls don't need further education because a highly qualified bride requires a highly qualified groom. And a highly qualified groom demands a much greater dowry;*" they conclude: "*because of this community people prefer to marry their children at a very early age.*"²⁰⁵ On the other hand an educated female child may be able to grow up to secure a job and contribute the income earning potential of her family, but this potential is perhaps not always recognised in contexts where marriage, dowry, and domesticity is the overwhelming norm for girls.

²⁰⁰ Focus Group Discussion, 9 girls, 15-17 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

²⁰¹ Interview, young man, 24 years, Muzafargarh, Pakistan.

²⁰² Focus Group Discussion, 9 girls, 15 – 17 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

²⁰³ Interview, father, 55 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

²⁰⁴ Body mapping, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

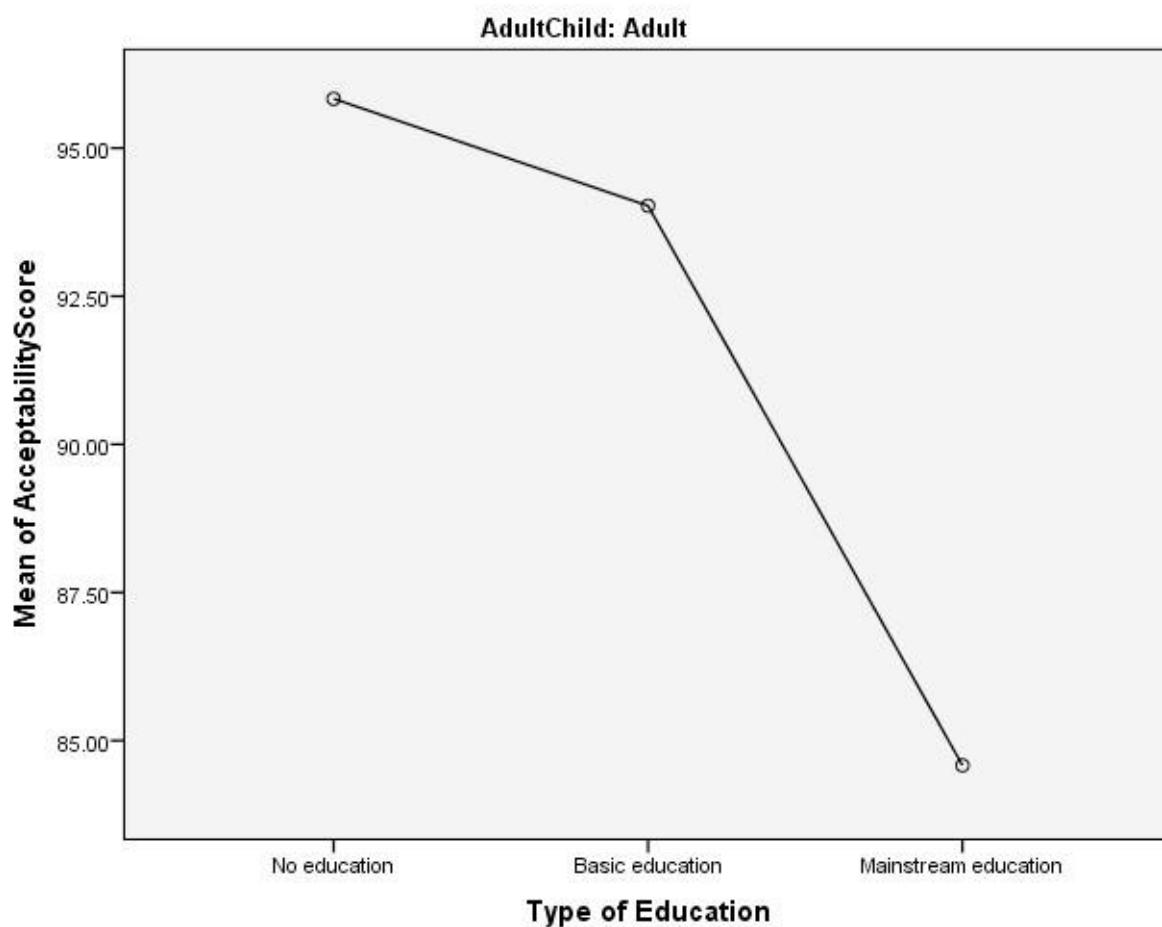
²⁰⁵ Interview, government official, women's welfare, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

Impact of education on child marriage norms and attitudes

The survey data also revealed relationships between respondents' level of education, as well as their parent's level of education, and their acceptability of child marriage.

In research sites in Bangladesh there was a significant negative correlation between adult respondents' 'child marriage acceptability scores' and their number of years spent in education: those respondents who had stayed in education longer had lower child marriage acceptability scores ($r=-0.33$, $p<0.01$). There was also an, albeit very weak, negative correlation present in the data from Pakistan (-0.02, $p<0.1$). Furthermore, in research sites in Bangladesh and Pakistan there were positive correlations between adult respondents' years in education and their ideas about the ideal age of marriage for girls: those respondents who had spent more years in education felt that girls should be married older, compared to those who had spent fewer years in education (Bangladesh, $r=0.17$, $p<0.01$, Pakistan, $r=0.15$, $p<0.05$). No significant relationships were observed in the data from Indonesia.

In research sites in all three countries, there were also significant differences between the acceptability scores of adult respondents who reported having 'no education' or 'basic education' compared to those who reported to have participated in formal or mainstream education (ANOVA test, $p<0.01$ for all countries).



The data also revealed significant variances between the acceptability scores of respondents depending on their parents level of education (ANOVA test, $p<0.01$ for all countries); respondents with parents who had 'no education' had significantly higher acceptability scores than those with educated parents.

4.6 Lack of opportunity

Marriage of children may be considered more acceptable in contexts where there are limited alternatives available, particular in the form of education and/or employment: “*here, if there are people who do not go to school and do not have any job, in order to anticipate them from making activities out of the law, then it is better for them to get married.*”²⁰⁶ It is clear that across the three research countries women and girls have access to fewer life opportunities than boys and men; as a government official in Bangladesh described:

*“we belong to a patriarchal society. In this society male dominates over female. Society doesn’t provide equal opportunities to men and women... They [community members] think girls do not have any future ahead they must lead their life under male supervision. Basically they do not have any ambition about their girl child.”*²⁰⁷

93.5% of respondents in Bangladesh, 72.5% in Indonesia, and 68.9% in Pakistan agreed with the statement: “*marriage of girls under 18 years mostly happens because there is a lack of education and job opportunities*”, these proportions were significantly reduced to 45.1% (Bangladesh), and 58.8% (Pakistan) when participants were asked the same question about boys. In Indonesia, however, a greater proportion of participants (77.6%) agreed with this statement in reference to boys than for girls.

Lack of alternatives to marriage may be particularly pronounced in rural areas, where education and employment opportunities are more limited; as a health worker in Pakistan explained: “*in urban areas girls are busy in education but in rural areas girls have nothing to do. That is why child marriages occur.*”²⁰⁸ Similarly a group of parents noted:

*“in urban areas, people might be thinking of children’s education and jobs, but here these things do not exist; girls and boys do not get education that is why they consider to marry their children as soon as possible.”*²⁰⁹

As noted above, Pakistan was the only country in which rates of child marriage were found to vary according to research site: 62.6% of respondents married under 18 years in Pakistan were living in rural areas (Chi-square, p<0.01).²¹⁰ The differences were even greater for marriages under age of 15 years, with over three quarters, 78.4% of respondents married under 15 years living in rural areas (Chi-square, p<0.01).

²⁰⁶ Interview, marriage registrar, religious affairs office, Babakan Madang, Indonesia.

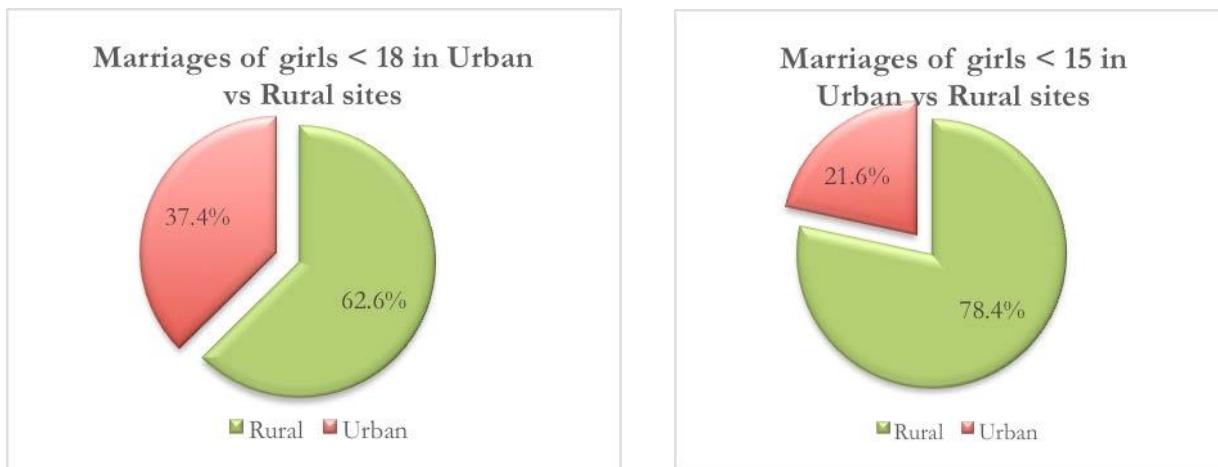
²⁰⁷ , Interview, government official (women’s welfare), Dinapur, Bangladesh.

²⁰⁸ Interview, health worker- supervisor, Rajanpur, Pakistan—.

²⁰⁹ Focus Group Discussion, fathers, 32 – 50 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

²¹⁰ Significant at 0.01.

Charts 70 & 71: Rates of child marriage in rural vs. urban areas in Pakistan²¹¹

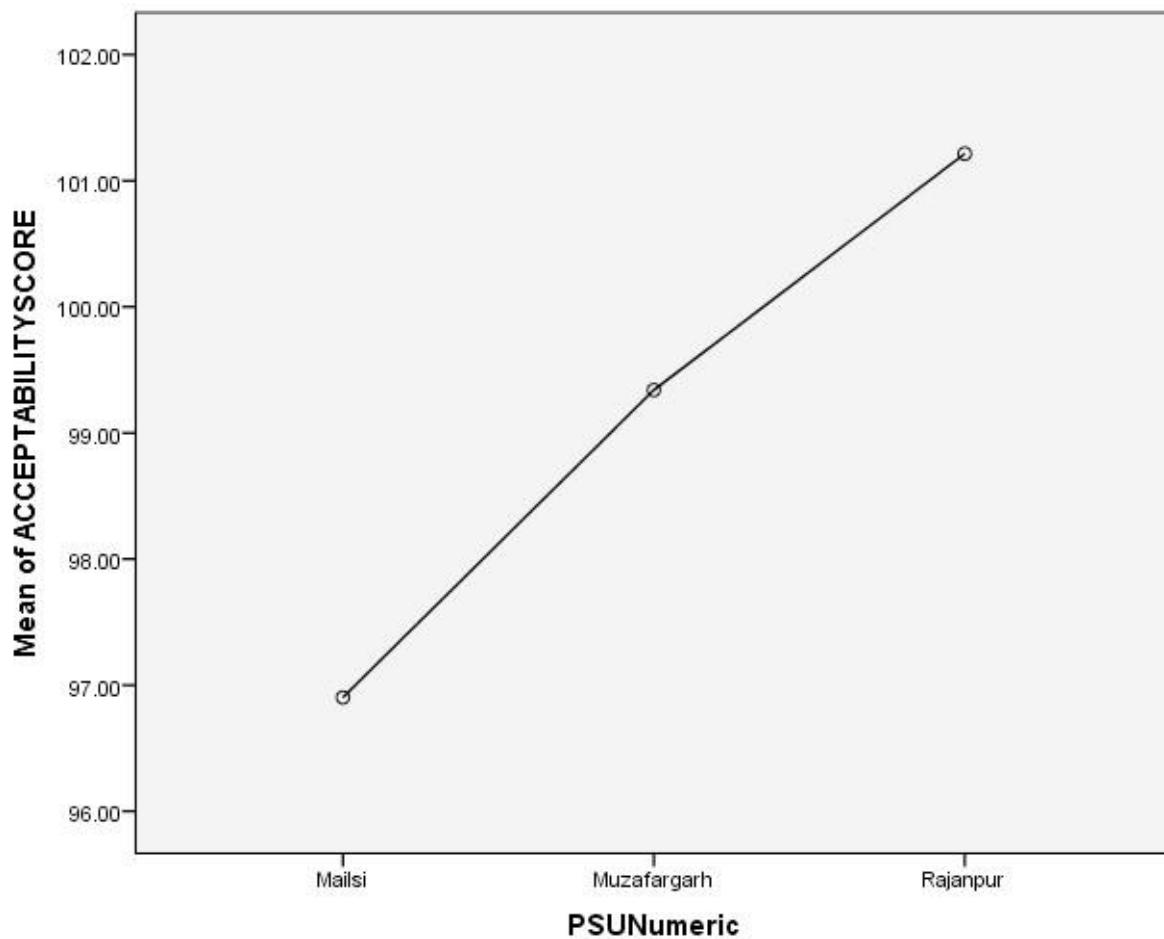


There were also significant differences between the levels of child marriage acceptability in the rural sites compared to the urban site in Pakistan, with respondents in rural areas reporting higher levels of child marriage acceptability.

Chart 72: Mean child marriage acceptability scores by location in Pakistan

This graph compares the mean acceptability scores by PSU in Pakistan. An ANOVA analysis – a technique that compares variance between groups to variance within groups in order to draw conclusions about whether variance is explained by categorical groupings - reveals highly significant (.01% significant level) variance in the acceptability score *between* PSUs. There is an overlap in the 95% confidence interval for the means of the two rural communities, indicating that the significant difference in acceptability scores is between rural and urban communities.

²¹¹ Proportions have been weighted to equalise the sample.



These results were not born out in the quantitative data in Bangladesh and Indonesia. As discussed, it may be that there was not enough difference between the two sites selected in each of these countries in terms of their 'rurality'. In Bangladesh and Indonesia selected sites were characterised as 'semi-urban' and 'rural', whereas in Pakistan there were greater differences between the sites, with one 'urban' site and one 'rural' site selected. It may also be the case that the relatively low levels of income and the high rates of income inequality in the semi-urban sites in Indonesia and Bangladesh also contributed to relatively higher levels of child marriage (acceptability).

4.7 Legal frameworks

Do you know of any cases where parents have forced their children into marriage? Can you tell us what happened?

Yes, last month one girl got married in our community without her consent. The groom's age was too high compared to the bride.

Why do you think this happened? The girl's family was poor.

What does the law say about this?

According to the law it's a punishable crime.

Is the law enforced?

No, people use bribes to control the law enforcement.²¹²

²¹² Focus Group Discussion, women, 24-29 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

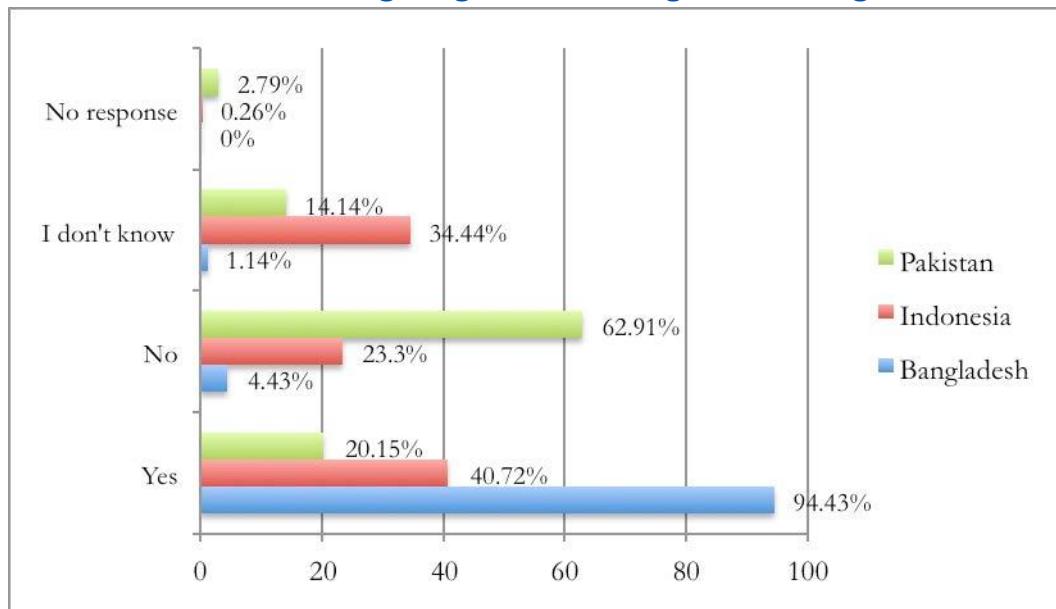
National legal frameworks establish a minimum statutory age of marriage in all three research sites: in Bangladesh, the *Child Marriage Restraint Act* 1929²¹³ establishes the minimum age at 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys; in Indonesia, the *Law on Marriage* 1974 sets the minimum age of marriage at 16 for girls and 19 for boys (parental consent is required for marriages taking place where one or both parties is under the age of 21 years);²¹⁴ and, in Pakistan, the *Child Marriage Restraint Act* 1929 sets the minimum statutory age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys. In Pakistan, legal regulation of marriage has been devolved to the Provincial level, and a number of bills which would raise the minimum age of marriage have been proposed.²¹⁵ In Punjab province, where this study took place, however, no new legal provisions have been passed at the provincial level, and national legislation still applies.

4.7.1 Knowledge of the Statutory Minimum Age of Marriage

When asked the question ‘Do you know - is there a legal minimum age for marriage according to statutory law?’ the vast majority of survey respondents in Bangladesh (94.4%) answered ‘yes’. Furthermore, the majority of those who answered yes, were able to correctly identify these ages: 94.4% correctly identified the legal age of marriage for girls (18 years), and 73.9% correctly identified the legal age of marriage for boys (21 years).

The proportion of the population who reported that there is a legal minimum age for marriage was comparatively much lower in Indonesia and, to an even greater degree, Pakistan; where 40.3% and 20.2% of respondents answered ‘yes’ when asked about the existence of a statutory age. By comparison 62.9% of respondents in Pakistan reported that there is *not* a minimum age of marriage in the law. As will be explored below, these differences are reflected in qualitative data, which demonstrates that recognition of national legislation on marriage in Pakistan is relatively weak. The graph below illustrates the differences in respondents’ knowledge of whether a legal minimum age of marriage exists between the three countries.

Chart 73: Is there a minimum legal age for marriage according to statutory law?



Furthermore, unlike in Bangladesh, in Indonesia and Pakistan, the vast majority of respondents who replied that there *is* a minimum legal age of marriage identified that age incorrectly. In Indonesia, none correctly identified the minimum legal age of marriage for girls to be 16, and only 1.6% correctly

²¹³ Section 2, *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

²¹⁴ Article 7, *Law on Marriage* (1974).

²¹⁵ For example, Sindh province has set the age of marriage at 18 years for both boys and girls, and raised penalties for violating the law.

identified the minimum legal age for boys to be 19. In Pakistan, only 17.9% of the 20.2% of respondents who answered ‘yes’ to the question about a statutory minimum age correctly identified the legal age of marriage for girls at 16. It is interesting that 50% of respondents incorrectly identified the legal age for girls to be 18, which may reflect the influence of NGO messaging on the CRC.

In sum, survey data clearly indicates that knowledge of the legal minimum age of marriage was much stronger in the Bangladesh research sites than in the research sites in Indonesia and Pakistan. This result is perhaps unsurprising, given that Bangladesh research sites had received more sensitisation messaging relating to child marriage, as discussed above. Yet it is also paradoxical, given that the research sites in Bangladesh were found to have a significantly higher proportion of child marriages than the other two countries, and suggests that knowledge of the law in Bangladesh is failing to have much impact on attitudes or practices regarding child marriage. Respondents emphasised the inconsistency between law and practice in qualitative interviews and focus groups; many correctly identified the legal age of marriage, reported that ‘people are well informed’ about the law, and went on to explain that ‘state law’ is failing to effectively prevent the occurrence of child marriage, which instead occurs as a reflection of other dominant normative frameworks. A group of 12-14 year old girls in Bangladesh told researchers:

“According to state law the legal age of marriage for boys is 21 and for girls is 18. But 15-year-old girls and 21-year-old boys are allowed to get married in our community. Most of people in our community are well informed about this state law. But no one pays heed to the state law.”²¹⁶

Similarly, as put by a 17-year old Bangladeshi girl:

“According to our country rule, girls should marry after 18 and boys should marry after 22. People know the law but don’t follow it. People are not respectful about the law. If a marriage happens under the minimum age, nothing is going to happen. If both sides’ parents agreed, nobody interferes in the marriage”²¹⁷

Finally, as expressed by a group of parents:

“Most people in our community know the law about minimum age of marriage; but only few obey... in Islamic view, girls should be married as soon as they reach puberty. In social tradition, girls tend to be married after 14/15.”²¹⁸

This finding suggests that programmatic approaches that focus on sensitisation about legal standards without addressing underlying causal factors, will only have limited impact on practices.

4.7.2 Enforcement of legal frameworks

Official marriage registration processes are intended to facilitate the enforcement of the statutory minimum age of marriage in all three countries. In Indonesia, marriages are officially registered by a District Marriage Registry (KUA). Similarly, in Pakistan and Bangladesh a ‘Nikah register’ or ‘marriage registrar’ appointed at the municipal level (often called a ‘Kazi’) is responsible for the issuance of a Nikah Nahma, or ‘marriage certificate’. Survey data suggests that rates of officially registered marriages are highest in the Indonesia research sites, where 94.2% of married respondents reported having an official ‘government registered’ marriage. By contrast, in Bangladesh research sites, less than a third (30.95%) of married respondents reported having a

²¹⁶ Focus Group Discussion, 10 girls, 12 – 14 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh

²¹⁷ Interview, 17 year old girl, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

²¹⁸ Focus group discussion, fathers, 35-75 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh

government registered marriage, and in Pakistan research sites, less than half (46.74%) of married respondents reported having a government registered marriage.

Qualitative data suggests that registration requirements are not preventing the occurrence of under-age marriage, which frequently takes place outside of formal systems. Many respondents described how, in a case where one of the parties is under-age, the marriage will proceed without a formal registration. According to a respondent in Indonesia, “*If someone wants to get married under the minimum legal age, usually he or she will not register the marriage to the KUA.*”²¹⁹ Similarly an NGO employee in Bangladesh explained how child marriage happens informally: “*Law is not effective in our country to reduce child or forced marriage. People marry off their daughters secretly.*”²²⁰ A Bangladeshi community leader confirmed his statement:

*“If girls are not the proper age for marriage, then their parents arrange the marriage secretly. A few days ago a girl got married to a groom from another region: the girl was in class four, and it was not a registered marriage.”*²²¹

Not only do child marriages frequently go unregistered, the qualitative data demonstrates how, in practice, the system of marriage registration is *permissive* of under-age marriages. In all three countries, respondents mentioned cases where marriage officiates registered under-age marriages. In other cases, respondents were not required to prove their age.²²² As a Pakistani a boy married at the age of 16 (below the legal age) recalled: “*The marriage registrar came, he performed nikah (issued the certificate), got my signature, and nothing else; I did not show any document and no one asked me about my age.*”²²³

The finding that under-age marriages are frequently officially registered is also supported by analysis of survey data. It is interesting to note that in both Bangladesh and Indonesia, the proportion of ‘child marriages’ that were government registered was *not* significantly different from the proportion of ‘adult marriages’ that were ‘government registered’: in Bangladesh, 30.6% of child marriages were reported to be ‘government registered’ (compared to 31.3% of adult marriages); and in Indonesia, 77.39% of child marriages were reported to be ‘government registered’ (compared to 79.5% of adult marriages). By comparison the proportion of child marriages that respondents reported to be government registered (37.2%), and adult marriages reported to be government registered (50.3%) is significantly different in Pakistan.²²⁴ This may be due to the fact that in Pakistan, child marriage rates were significantly higher in rural sites, where official registration rates appear to be lower.

Marriage officiates may accept or even issue false documents in order to register under-age marriages, according to respondents. For instance, when asked about the process for getting married, an Indonesian woman who was married at 13 years explained:

*“The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) staff asked me about my age and together with my parents he agreed to upgrade my age (to become 17 years old) so that it looked like a normal age for marriage. We registered our marriage providing my new ID made instantly by the village officer and then got [a] marriage certificate.”*²²⁵

²¹⁹ Interview, health worker, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia

²²⁰ Interview, marriage officiate, Dinapur district, Bangladesh

²²¹ Interview, female community leader, Gazipur district, Bangladesh

²²² Interview, marriage officiate Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia; Interview, woman married as a child, 39 years, Babakan Madang, Bogor (Didi), Indonesia.

²²³ Interview, man married as a child, 22 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan

²²⁴ P = .000, .01% significance level.

²²⁵ Interview, father, 37 years, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

In fact, according to several respondents, the use of false documents is a common practice: “*when people want to marry their children who are still underage they ask village leader and marriage officiates to upgrade their children’s age. Unfortunately there are no consequences for making such decision.*”²²⁶ This practice was confirmed by officials themselves; a public notary in Bangladesh reported that he and his colleagues often issue false documents when one or both parties are underage:

*“there are some malpractices among the notary public personnel. In most of the cases, when either parties could not meet minimum legal age requirement, the guardian come to us [to issue an affidavit] ..When both guardians agree to the marriage, notary public official find it easy to issue a marriage declaration.”*²²⁷

The prevalence of false documentation suggests that while the law is not preventing under-age marriages from occurring, marriage officiates wish to be seen to be enforcing the law. Thus the law does have some authority and influence on practices. For instance, in Pakistan, while marriage registrars are reportedly unconcerned with age verification, they record false ages in order to appear to be compliant with the law:

*“Nikahkhwan did not ask me about my age; he just recited verses from the Quran, had prayers and signature on the register; then he gave us a copy from the register; no one asked me about CNIC or birth certificate. But Nikahkhwan said that boy’s age should be written as 18 years and girls age should be written 16 years.”*²²⁸

A Pakistani government official explained: “*I think child marriages are decreasing, but at least in the documents ages are written 16 for girls and 18 for boys, it is mainly because of fear of arrest by the police, or legal matters...*”²²⁹

It is important to note, however, that while marriage officiates may be taking steps to comply with the law (at least on paper), penalties for registering under-age marriages do not appear to be enforced. For instance, despite the recent introduction of penalties for performing a child marriage in Bangladesh - officiates may be convicted of an offence and issued a fine or a one-month prison sentence for conducting a child marriage²³⁰ - respondents did not report a single instance where penalties had been enforced. This was the case across the research sites: as stated by respondents in Indonesia, “*There is a law on this matter [prescribing a minimum age for marriage], but there is no consequence for violating this law.*”²³¹

Survey respondents’ perceptions of law enforcement also demonstrate that laws prohibiting marriage under a minimum age often go unenforced: of the 94.4% of respondents who identified a statutory legal age in Bangladesh, 55.2% reported that when children are married under the legal age, someone will intervene in the case. By contrast, in Indonesia of the 40.3% of respondents who identified a statutory legal age, only 10.4% reported that an intervention will occur, and in Pakistan, of the 20.2% of respondents who identified a statutory legal age, 49.2% reported that someone will intervene. [Chart 74: Who intervenes?](#)

²²⁶ Interview, health worker, Cigudeg, Bogor, Indonesia.

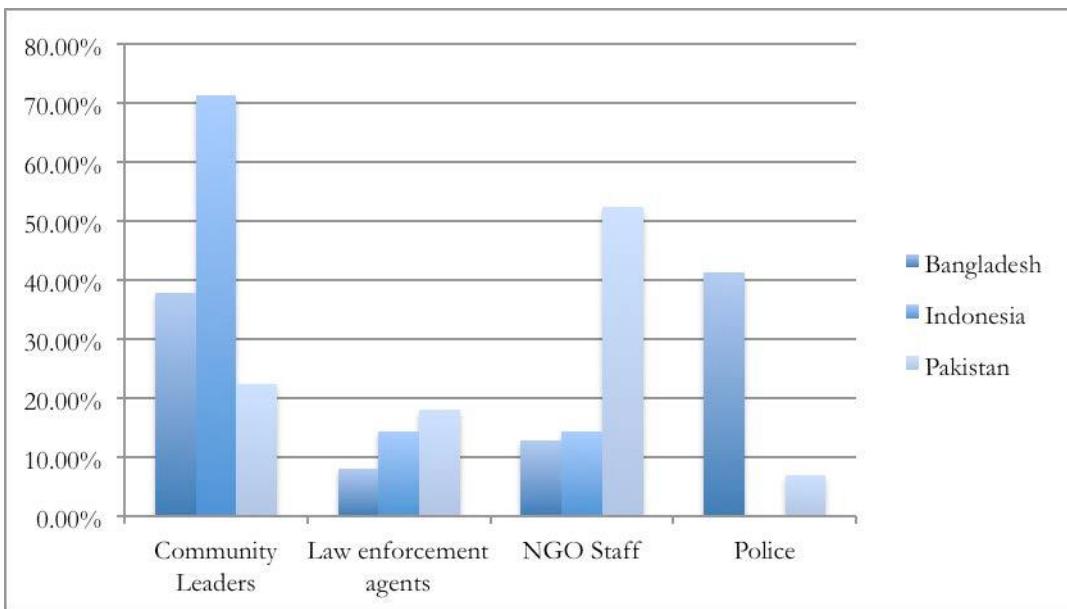
²²⁷ Interview, marriage registrar, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

²²⁸ Interview, boy married at 13/14, 16/17 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

²²⁹ Interview, government official, Department of Social Welfare, Rajanpur, Pakistan.

²³⁰ Article 5, *Child Marriage Restraint Act* (1929).

²³¹ Interview, health worker (doctor), Cigudeg, Bogor (Lanny), Indonesia.



The chart above presents responses to the question of which authority intervenes in a case of child marriage, broken down by country: in Bangladesh the majority of respondents who answered this question answered the police, in Indonesia participants answered community leaders and in Pakistan participants answered NGO staff. It is important to note that particularly in Pakistan and Indonesia, the proportion of respondents who identified authorities that intervene in a case of child marriage was extremely small in relation to the overall sample (14 in Indonesia, 116 in Pakistan, and 412 in Bangladesh).

4.7.3 Law enforcement and legitimacy

Given the fact that legal penalties are not frequently imposed, marriage officiates' efforts to improve compliance with the law, or to appear to be enforcing the law are likely to reflect more than a response to punitive incentives; rather, they may be seen as an attempt to reconcile legal norms with dominant social norms and practices. Indeed, officials described taking a flexible attitude toward law enforcement in order to navigate the incompatible priorities of enforcing the minimum statutory age of marriage, and maintaining popular legitimacy in a context where marriage below the legal age is seen to be acceptable or even desirable. As put by a Bangladeshi community leader,

*"Of course I pose a barrier to a marriage taking place when someone intends to marry below the minimum legal age...It is not legal [to marry below this age] - as a member I could not ignore when someone disobeys the law. However, sometimes I have to think about my vote bank. Breaking any marriage makes the guardian unhappy, and that affects voting."*²³²

The contradiction between law enforcement on the one hand, and societal and religious norms on the other, was aptly summarised by a group of parents in Bangladesh;

*"Union Council personnel, UNO²³³, and the police are responsible for enforcing this law. But local elected representatives remain inactive, as they are concerned with their popularity among voters... In Islamic [the] view, girls should be married as soon as they reach puberty. In social tradition, girls tend to be married after 14/15."*²³⁴

²³² Interview, local government leader, male, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

²³³ Upazila Nirbahi Officer, the executive official of an upazila (sub-district).

²³⁴ Focus Group Discussion, fathers, 35-75 years, Dinapur, Bangladesh.

Indeed, when asked about law enforcement, a Pakistani respondent emphasised the power of social pressure not to interfere in the case of an underage marriage:

*"If a girl is married by 10 years of age, the parents can take the case to court; but if parents are the ones doing it, then no one can stop them, it would cause personal enmity...People can also go to the police; but people will not do because they fear bad consequences."*²³⁵

Interpretations of religious doctrine, or what the Bangladeshi parents quoted above referred to as the 'Islamic view', play a powerful role in legitimising 'under-age' marriage. In all three countries, participants explained that according to Islam, a girl is ready for marriage when she reaches puberty/begins menstruation. This interpretation was expressed with particular frequency and conviction in Pakistan, where respondents frequently cited religious doctrine when discussing the law: "*People do not marry below 13/14 years of age; this is the minimum age in Sharia told to us by Molvis...the given limit is 14 years, marriage can take place after this age but not before it.*"²³⁶ This is perhaps consistent with the fact that this is the context where statutory standards were least recognised. In all countries, however, marriage officiates and other law enforcement officials, expressed an unwillingness to contradict this norm, even in order to enforce national legislation;

*"In Islam, aqil baligh (puberty) is the standard of maturity and marriage eligibility. We must be wise in handling the differences between age stipulation in both regulations (state and religion). Thus, if someone insists to get married because the religion allows him/her to do that, we must not force them to follow the state regulation concerning the marriage."*²³⁷

The data also demonstrates how religious doctrine and traditional practice can be used to justify an early marriage with a range of underlying causes. Consider the following excerpts from qualitative interviews:

*We are not allowed to register the marriage of a person aged less than 16. She or he has to file the case to the religious court. We can only register the marriage if the religious court approves it. Usually the court approves it because the girl already got pregnant.*²³⁸

²³⁵ Interview, boy, 13/14 years, Rajanpur district, Pakistan.

²³⁶ Focus group discussion, boys, 15-18 years, Rajanpur, Pakistan

²³⁷ Interview, health worker (doctor), Cigudeg, Bogor (Lanny), Indonesia.

²³⁸ Interview, marriage officiate in the Religious Affairs Office (KUA), Cigudeg, Indonesia.

Community members consider girls to be the perfect age for marriage as soon as the menstruation starts. So for girls it is about 13 years and for boys is 18/19 when they start earning. Interestingly, community members are not concerned about minimum legal age of marriage rather they are more inclined to find a good groom, i.e. wealthy person. Similarly, after start of work, parent want to see their son get married off.²⁸³

These examples demonstrate how individuals are likely to appeal to religious norms, or the idea of ‘tradition’, to legitimise an underage marriage, which is considered to be acceptable or even desirable for other reasons; an early pregnancy in the first case quoted above, and a financially beneficial match in the second. This suggests that in order to understand the failures to enforce the minimum legal age of marriage across the research sites, it is critical to understand not only competing normative frameworks such as religion and tradition, but the circumstances in which they are applied.

4.8 Media

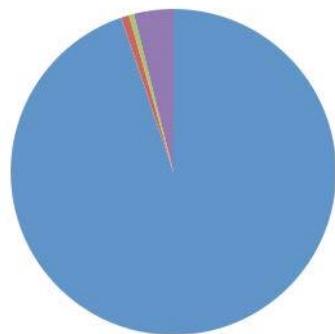
The survey gathered information from respondents on their consumption of media. Respondents were asked: “*In an average week, which sources of media do you use*”. The results were similar across the three countries with television being the most overwhelmingly consumed media source. Internet was the second (next to television) most frequently used source in Indonesia, whereas in Pakistan and Bangladesh, radio was the second most used source of media. 10% of the sample in research sites in Pakistan said that they accessed no media at all.

4.8.1 Charts 75-77 use of media by country

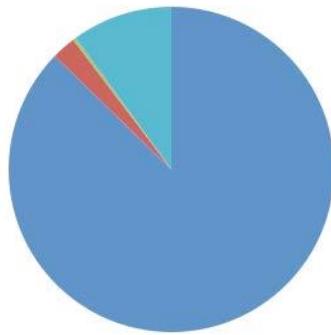
Bangladesh: use of media



Indonesia: use of media



Pakistan: use of media



²⁸³ Focus Group Discussion, girls, 15-17 years, Gazipur, Bangladesh.

Interestingly, Participants who reported not to use any media source had significantly higher child marriage acceptability scores than those who reported frequently using a source of media (t-test, $p<0.001$).

Section 5. Conclusion

The research presented in this report draws on in-depth and detailed evidence regarding child marriage practices, the social attitudes, values and norms that shape these practices, and the underlying structural and environmental factors that influence them. In particular, the report set out to determine:

- The **content and nature** of (dominant) practices, norms and attitudes concerning child marriage;
- The **influence of structural factors** on these (dominant) norms and attitudes and the substantive relationship between social and material conditions and the prevalence of child marriage (the relationship between dominant norms and social and material conditions);

- The presence, content and nature of ***alternative narratives, attitudes and experiences*** in relation to child marriage, and how these relate to dominant norms and practices; and,
- How dominant and less-dominant norms concerning child marriage ***relate to structures of social power.***

It is critical to examine dominant reasons for marriage, in order to understand the drivers of *child marriage*: when asked why people marry, respondents in the study often expressed views that were accepting of child marriage, particularly for girls. The study found that marriage plays a central and fundamental role in social, economic and political life. Respondents described a powerful expectation that people must marry, which is also born out in practice: across the research sites, less than 2% of respondents remained single beyond the age of 25 years. The qualitative research revealed that reasons for and roles within marriage are heavily gendered. Participants explained that men marry in order to fulfil their sexual, emotional and reproductive needs and that it is necessary for a man to have a wife in order to take care of household work and parental care. By contrast, responses regarding the reasons that women marry focussed on the risks associated with remaining single, the need for protection (from sexual harassment), the importance of fulfilling their social roles as mothers, and the burden unmarried women present to their parents.

Significant gender disparities were found regarding the age at which people marry, which also relate to the gendered roles that men and women play within marriage. Across all three countries, the mean age of marriage for females was significantly lower than the mean age of marriage for males (Bangladesh - 16.28 vs. 23.24; Indonesia - 18.77 vs. 23.98; Pakistan 18.77 vs. 21.4). Survey data also demonstrates that the younger a girl is when she marries, the larger the gap between her age and her partner's age; while, the older a man is when he marries, the larger the gap between his age and his partner's age. Participants in the qualitative research expressed the view that an age gap is necessary for securing male dominance in the household. Indeed, the social subordination of girls and women within marriage was widely expressed across the research sites: 89.1% of respondents agreed with the statement that "*a wife should be subservient to her husband*", and 90.5% agreed that "*a husband should be the head of the household.*"

Child marriage – marriage in which at least one party is below the age of eighteen years – was found to be prevalent in all research sites: in Bangladesh, 73% of married females were married as children, as compared to only 2.8% of married males; in Indonesia, rates of child marriage among married women and girls were considerably lower, at 38%, as compared to 3.8% of married boys and men; and in Pakistan 34.8% of married females were married under the age of 18 and 12.9% of married males were married under the age of 18. Findings demonstrate that individuals who marry early, especially girls and those from deprived backgrounds, are particularly likely to experience lack of agency, coercion or even force in decisions about who and when to marry. Across case study countries, respondents who were married as children reported experiencing greater pressure, and less agency in the decision to marry, than respondents who were married as adults.

Respondents across the research sites tended to differentiate between 'arranged marriages', and 'love marriages'. While arranged marriages are common practice in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and respondents tended to describe love marriages as unacceptable, arranged marriages are considered to be undesirable in Indonesia; instead, participants explained that people get married when they 'are in love' and 'find the right partner'.

Particularly in Bangladesh and Pakistan, parents have a great deal of authority over when and whom their children marry. This pressure is normalised so that children, above all girls, have very little power to resist; several participants explained that girls who refuse to cooperate with their parents may be subject to honour killings, and several girls mentioned suicide as the only means of avoiding

being forced into marriage. Finally, women and girls lack agency in determining when and whom to marry as compared to men and boys, and participants explained that it is never acceptable for a woman to initiate a marriage.

Qualitative data does suggest that across all case study countries there is an age or stage of development below which marriage of a child is considered unacceptable, but that age is often not defined with reference to a discrete numerical value. Instead, participants often identified the point at which a girl is ready for marriage in terms of biological or physical indicators, most notably the onset of menstruation. By contrast, boys were described as being ready for marriage once they have finished education and established financial independence. This reflects the fact that female roles and responsibilities within marriage tend to be defined primarily in terms of reproduction and reproductive work, activities that are primarily associated with biological function, while male roles and responsibilities include providing leadership and financial support, which require a higher level of education and the acquisition of skills. The fact that different value is placed on these respective 'roles' serves to perpetuate the social subordination of women and girls.

Analysis of respondents' views on the *ideal* age of marriage demonstrated that the age at which girls and women marry in practice is significantly lower than the age at which respondents felt they should marry in all countries. By contrast, the ideal age of marriage was consistent with actual age of marriage for boys and men. While analysis of survey data demonstrates that there is a relationship between attitudes on child marriage (child marriage acceptability) and child marriage practices, changing 'ideas' about age and marriage are unlikely to lead to significant change in marriage practices until the underlying drivers (poverty etc.) of these practices are addressed. For example, despite the finding that rates of child marriage are highest in Bangladesh, attitudes and norms of Bangladeshi respondents were found to be least accepting of child marriage, possibly due to education and sensitisation about the risks associated with child marriage.

The study found that practices and attitudes concerning marriage are heavily influenced and shaped by environmental and economic factors; economic deprivation, financial dependency of women and girls, the institution of dowry, and lack of education and opportunity all create rational and powerful incentives for child marriage. These are reinforced by social norms that justify and condone male sexual dominance and violence against women and girls.

Analysis of quantitative data aggregated across the three country case studies reveals a significant positive correlation between income level and first age of marriage, indicating that individuals from more deprived backgrounds are likely to marry earlier. This phenomenon was explained by qualitative data, wherein participants emphasised that child marriage is used as a coping mechanism for families living in poverty both through removing the financial burden of providing for their daughter and obtaining a match with a wealthy man. The economic drivers of child marriage have a particularly pronounced impact on attitudes and practices relating to the marriage of girls because of their subordinate social position as economic dependents. They are further entrenched by the institution of dowry (whereby the parents of the bride are expected to bestow property or money on their daughter upon marriage); as younger girls are considered relatively desirable they tend to require a lower dowry, thus marrying a daughter early serves to remove the financial burden of supporting her, at a lower cost.

Another important driver of child marriage which emerged from the study relates to male sexual dominance, control of female sexuality and violence against women and girls. Participants across the research sites emphasised that early marriage of girls is acceptable because it can protect girls from sexual harassment and violence, which they tended to define as any sexual activity that occurs outside of marriage: sex outside of marriage is viewed as strictly unacceptable, regardless of consent. Dominant attitudes hold women and girls, and their wider families, responsible for any

transgression of this norm, which creates pressure for families to marry their daughters soon after puberty, to avoid the shame associated with their daughter's (potential) engagement in a sexual encounter. Thus the acceptability of early marriage of girls is informed by norms that prohibit sexual activity outside of marriage and hold girls responsible for their own abuse, while permitting non-consensual sex perpetrated by men within marriage. Indeed, in Pakistan and Bangladesh, female participants married as children were statistically significantly more likely to report experiences of intimate partner violence than those married as adults.

Education was found to be an important underlying factor relating to child marriage and its acceptability. An analysis of data aggregated across countries revealed a highly significant positive correlation between age of first marriage and years in school, indicating that individuals who stay in education longer get married later; the correlation is even higher for female respondents. Quantitative data also demonstrates that girls whose parents had obtained a higher level of education were married at a later age. Across the research sites, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that marriage under 18 years has a negative impact on education of both girls and boys. Furthermore, respondents with a higher level of education were found to hold attitudes that were less *accepting* of child marriage. Finally, participants often voiced views that marriage of children was considered to be more acceptable in contexts with limited alternative opportunities (such as education). These findings suggest that education may play a particularly important role in shifting both child marriage practices and its acceptability.

In all three case countries, efforts to eradicate child marriage have included the establishment of legal regulations, which prohibit marriages where one or both parties are below a statutory minimum age. The research findings demonstrate, however, that the law is enforced rarely, if at all. Less than half of survey respondents in Pakistan and Indonesia were aware that there is a statutory minimum age of marriage, and while the majority of respondents in Bangladesh were able to identify the legal age of marriage, they overwhelmingly reported that 'state law' is failing to effectively prevent the occurrence of child marriage, which instead takes place as a reflection of other dominant normative frameworks. Law enforcement officials included in the study described various ways in which they attempt to reconcile legal standards with dominant social norms and practices, for instance, by issuing false documents, or discouraging child marriage. This indicates that the law does appear to have some bearing on norms. Yet participants described how when structural drivers discussed above create a compelling reason for an illegal child marriage, this overrides any consideration of the law.

The limited impact of law and legal systems on attitudes and practices reflects a broader finding about the challenge of shifting attitudes and practices relating to child marriage through normative messaging. The study clearly demonstrates that these practices and attitudes are a reflection of structural and environmental factors, particularly relating to economic insecurity, hierarchical gender norms, and the socially dominant ideas about gender, power and violence that they produce. The ultimate aim of this research is to strengthen understanding of the environmental and structural factors that influence child marriage and to enable effective programming with the aim of reducing, and in the longer term eradicating, child marriage practices.



5.1. Recommendations

The recommendations presented in the table below have been developed based on the findings of the report. In particular, the recommendations address the factors that have been shown to be the most important in informing child marriage attitudes and practices. Global research relating to effective reduction / prevention of child marriage programmes also informed the development of the recommendations. The recommendations were also informed by discussions of a workshop that took place in Bangkok in March 2015, involving Plan staff from the Asia regional office, relevant country offices and other key staff.

The recommendations are therefore structured according to six key areas of activity, which all relate to indicators that were found by the study to have a relationship to child marriage and child marriage attitudes and practices. These include:

1. Addressing poverty and lack of opportunity (particularly for girls);
2. Improving (access to) education;
3. Promoting community safety and addressing impunity for violence against women and girls;
4. Increasing access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services; 5. Strengthening law and institutional frameworks to respond to child marriage; and
6. Improving sensitisation / messaging on child marriage and gender equality.

The recommendations within each key area are structured according to Plan Asia's Programme Framework and Theory of Change on child marriage. This is to ensure that the recommendations are tightly tied to Plan's programming structures and processes and are therefore more easily 'actionable'. According to Plan's child marriage Programme Framework and Theory of Change, the strategic goal relating to child marriage is intrinsically related to gender equality: "Asia without child marriage where girls and women reach their full potential as equally valued members of society and have equal status with men and boys." Plan's programming is structured on three intervention levels:

- **The individual level**, which focuses on economic dependency, lack of opportunity and lack of access to education, and is aimed at ensuring that girls and their families have agency, economic assets and advocacy skills to support them to decide if, when and whom to marry;
- **The community and family level**, which focuses on income poverty, male sexual dominance, violence and control over female sexuality and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, and aims to build social movements to

transform gender norms and practices that drive child marriage, through supporting families, communities (including men and boys) and community / religious leaders to take action to end child marriage and realise the rights of girls; and

- **The institutional level**, which focuses on legal frameworks and institutional structures and practices (e.g. dowry), to ensure increased capacity and accountability of authorities to prevent child marriage and better implementation of key laws and policies by facilitating an enabling legal and policy environment that protects girls from child marriage, promotes girls education and access to sexual and reproductive health rights.

Cross-cutting actions are also identified and include:

- Education promotion at each level;
- Youth advocacy through peer-to-peer methodology; and
- Awareness-raising through behavioural change communication.

In addition, the recommendations are informed by Plan's Policy on Gender Equality.²⁸⁴ This Policy is aimed at realising Plan's commitment to gender equality, which it sees as '*central to achieving our vision for change: a world in which children, both boys and girls, realise their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity.*'²⁸⁵ The Policy sets out 12 commitments that should be mainstreamed into all of Plan's programming. These commitments sit within six principles of Child Centred Community Development. It is therefore important to ensure that programming on child marriage also aims at realising Plan's gender equality commitments. These commitments include:

Plan's community centered development principles	Plan's commitments to gender equality
Children are at the centre of Plan's programming	1. Plan will confront and challenge gender discrimination, stereotyping and unequal power relations between men and women, and boys and girls in the interest of promoting the rights of children
Plan's programmes are guided by human rights standards and principles	2. Plan will advocate and promote gender equality as an explicit human and child right 3. Plan will systematically work to end all forms of gender-based violence and all practices that undermine the dignity of children and their right to protection from physical and psychological harm

²⁸⁴ Plan International, *Plan's Policy on Gender Equality: Building an Equal World for all Children* (2011), available at: <https://plan-international.org/girls/pdfs/plan-gender-policy.pdf>

²⁸⁵ Plan International, *Plan's Policy on Gender Equality: Building an Equal World for all Children* (2011), available at: <https://plan-international.org/girls/pdfs/plan-gender-policy.pdf>, p. 2

Research Report	Asia Child Marriage Initiative	94
Plan's programmes promote an environment of social inclusion and non-discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">4. Plan will build programmes and partnerships that promote respect for diversity and sensitivity to cultural differences. Plan will not tolerate practices that result in gender-based discrimination, prejudice or inequality5. Plan will implement long-term strategies of social change to address the causes of gender-based exclusion and discrimination	
Gender equality is an integral objective of all Plan programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">6. Plan will ensure that a gender analysis and actions to promote gender equality are included in all programmes7. Plan will promote the empowerment of girls and women to close gender gaps and ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to realize their rights8. Plan will engage with men and boys in promoting gender justice by challenging gender stereotyping and other root causes of gender discrimination	
Plan's programmes maximize the free and meaningful participation of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">9. Plan will ensure the equitable and meaningful participation of girls and boys in decisionmaking processes that affect their lives	
Plan is accountable for its actions in support of children's rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">10. Plan will create an enabling environment for gender equality to thrive in our internal organizational culture11. Plan will analyse the risks that may arise in the pursuit of gender justice and will take steps to prevent any potential harm to girls and boys12. Plan will mobilize and dedicate the human, technical and financial resources to meet its commitments to gender equality	

While all gender equality commitments are relevant to all areas of the recommendations, commitments that are particularly relevant are listed in the table.

Finally, not all recommendations apply to all of the case-study countries. Where a recommendation is particularly relevant to a specific country, this is set out in the table below. The stakeholders that should be engaged in order to implement the recommendations are also set out, as is the time scale: whether the recommendation is a short-term (1 – 3 years), medium-term (3 – 5 years) or long-term

(more than 5 years) activity / goal. Actions have been prioritised using a three-tier system. Activities that are considered high priority are coloured in red; medium priority activities are coloured in yellow; and low priority areas are coloured in green. Where activities are a particular priority for a specific country, this is identified in the table.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS ON ADDRESSING POVERTY AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY (PARTICULARLY FOR GIRLS)				
<i>Poverty in the family and lack of opportunity (particularly for girls) were found to be key factors contributing to attitudes that are supportive of child marriage. It is essential that child marriage programming aims to ensure that families who experience poverty do not see it as necessary to marry their daughter(s) at a young age in order to relieve the family of the burden in raising her or to pay a smaller dowry. It is also essential to ensure that opportunities exist for girls to be educated and financially independent, so that marriage is not seen as the only way to ensure that girls achieve financial security.</i>				
Recommendation	Stakeholders	Country	Length of activity / goal	Priority: country
1.1 Institutional level actions				
Advocate for the adoption of a law banning the institution of dowry in Pakistan. This law could be modeled on the Bangladesh law.	Ministry of Justice, other advocacy organisations	Pakistan	Long-term	Medium
Carry out awareness-raising among law enforcement officials about the legal prohibition on dowry and assist in devising response mechanisms/systems for violations of this law including community policing and user-friendly reporting mechanisms.	Police	Bangladesh (Pakistan, if law referred to above is adopted)	Short-term / long-term	High (Bangladesh)
1.2 Community and family level actions				

Create links with existing vocational training centres and employment centres (government and non-government) and advocate for them to prioritise the delivery of programmes and support to girls/ women.	Vocational training centres / employment centres; NGOs and other service providers	All	Short-term	High (especially in Bangladesh and in rural communities in all countries)
Develop further accredited non-formal education and training opportunities in the communities and support to access income earning programmes.	Existing non-formal education providers	All	Medium-term	Medium

Research Report	Asia Child Marriage Initiative	96		
1.3 Individual level actions				
Support girls and their families or engage in existing village savings schemes (savings groups) and training programmes to improve the capacity for girls and women to build and save financial resources. This could include, for example, sessions delivered to women and girls by business leaders in each community. This could replicate the programme in Indonesia, in which women invest collective capital and share interest as a dividend among the group to support greater financial security.	NGOs and other service providers	All	Short-term	Medium
Support girls and women in setting up businesses (e.g. provide 'mentors' in the business community to assist women and girls in developing skills to establish business; encourage loans to women and girls to assist in establishing businesses).	NGOs and other service providers	All	Short-term	Medium

Research Report	Asia Child Marriage Initiative	97
-----------------	--------------------------------	----

2. RECOMMENDATIONS ON EDUCATION

The research shows that keeping girls in school has a significantly positive impact on reducing the likelihood of child marriage. This opens the question of how to do this, and how wide the programmes should go. Programming will inevitably have to focus on income generation of some kind, as poverty is a big reason for removing girls from education, and thus for child marriage. Programmes include conditional cash payments/transfers in kind to the families supporting girls to stay on at school and income-generation in schools (perhaps involving women as well). However, there could also be a focus on setting targets for communities and for girls, relating to the percentage of girls that stay on in school which might provide community and official pressure on families to allow their girls to remain in school until the end of compulsory school age at least. Plan could also work with schools and local employers to promote access to employment, particularly for girls, as they leave school.

The recommendations relate to gender equality commitments 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Recommendation	Stakeholders	Country	Length of activity / goal	Priority: country
1.4 Institutional level actions				
Advocate with district and local government officers to ensure that existing government 'safety net' programmes (scholarships and other financial educational support, free non-formal education opportunities, income support etc.) are targeted at girls (and the families of girls) particularly those who are identified as being vulnerable to child marriage – e.g. due to levels of familial deprivation	District / sub-district level government officials who administer government programmes aimed at poverty alleviation; NGOs and other service providers	All	Short-term	High (especially in Bangladesh and in rural communities in all countries)
Work with the Ministry of Education at district level to set targets for enrolment rate of girls in primary and secondary schools and for ensuring that schools meet quality indicators to ensure retention. Schools that can show they meet the enrolment target and key quality indicators should be rewarded by extra grants/ equipment etc to the school and community (in some form of community facility). The aim of the programme would be to encourage the school and the community to place pressure on parents to leave their girls at school so that the school generally and the community benefit.	Ministry of Education, schools, community leaders	All	Short term to medium term	Medium

igh (especially in
Bangladesh and in
rural communities
in all countries)

medium

medium

medium

medium

igh

igh

Work with schools and local employers to ascertain what skills and knowledge would make girls employable within the area when they finish school. Following consultation, work with schools to devise learning programmes / modules / resources, additional to the curriculum, which are suited to local employment conditions and provide girls with education and training to enable them to access the employment market. Parents should be informed of the curriculum which should be offered to girls from around the age of 12.

Education
Departments /
Ministries, schools/
chambers of
commerce etc

All

Medium to
longterm

Medium

2.3 Individual level actions

Create adolescent girls empowerment groups through safe spaces in schools and the community. These groups could support girls, using a peer-to-peer methodology, to develop skills such as financial literacy, life skills, sexual health knowledge and skills, and information on how girls can report risks of child marriage and other forms of violence.

Schools, NGOs

All

Short-term

High

N AND GIRLS

the sexuality of
age attitudes
ould seem
ly has a high
eeds to be
se through
f boys and the
dition,
duce the

h programmes
d girls.

v: country

<p>Advocate for and assist the Government at the national level to develop a rigorous and corrective education curriculum (that is, one that works to address damaging gender norms), from early childhood through all educational levels. This could include carrying out a review of school curriculum to identify and remove sexism and negative gender stereotypes. Plan should also consider developing learning modules for students that are designed to address harmful gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate violence against girls and women, and raise awareness of the harms caused by child marriages. Modules should also be developed that addresses violence, including sexual violence, and consent (including what is acceptable behavior and what is not), and the rights of girls not to be subjected to violence. These modules should also include materials on how to access support and services to prevent child marriages. Plan could consider advocating with several schools in the programming districts to pilot modules / key learning materials.</p>	<p>Education Departments / Ministries, schools</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>A pre-service curriculum for teachers to sensitise them and equip them with the skills to teach children about child rights, harmful gender stereotypes, violence, sexual harassment and child marriage could be developed and integrated into pre-service teacher training curriculum.</p>	<p>Ministries of Education, teacher training colleges / universities</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>Medium</p>

<p>Encourage and assist schools to develop a zero tolerance policy of the use of violence and sexual behaviour in schools to apply to both pupils and staff. Children should participate in setting the policy and the sanctions for inappropriate behaviour. The policy should serve as a basis for school's Code of Conduct, which will regulate and sanction behaviours, to be accompanied with a child sensitive reporting mechanism and establishment of school Child Protection Committee, to receive and refer the reported cases as well as engage in effective mediation whenever cases do not strictly require involvement of child protective services. Reporting mechanisms should involve and link to community based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs).</p>	<p>Schools, CBCPMs, police</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>High</p>
--	--------------------------------	------------	-------------------	-------------

Research Report

Asia Child Marriage Initiative

102

<p>Work with community based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) or PTAs to build their capacity to deliver parenting classes to parents in the communities, which parents should be highly encouraged / incentivised to attend. Parenting classes should focus on how to teach sons what is acceptable social and sexual behaviour, on promoting the value of girls and on managing behaviour of children.</p>	<p>PTAs, CBCPMs</p>		<p>Medium-term</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Capacity building should be carried out with law enforcement officials at the district and sub-district level in handling cases of sexual violence, in order to ensure accountability for perpetrators and encourage reporting. When possible, the existing community based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) should be encouraged and supported to contribute towards more consistent reporting and referrals of all alleged cases.</p>	<p>Police</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>High</p>

3.2 Community and family level actions

Carry out sensitisation and outreach work in schools to educate boys and girls about laws relating to violence and the consequences of committing acts of violence against women and girls, with relevant information being integrated into the school learning resources / activities.	Police, schools	All	Short-term	Medium
Community sensitization efforts should include messaging to sensitise the public on the unacceptability of any form of sexual harassment or violence against girls and that such behaviour is will be punished in line with the legal regulatory framework.	Schools, community organisations, parent groups, community leaders, media (press, radio, online)	All	Long-term	Medium
Engage boys and young men in awareness raising and advocacy campaigns against child marriage. This could be carried out using peer-to-peer methodologies	NGOs, media, community leaders	All	Short-term	Medium

4. RECOMMENDATIONS ON INCREASING ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Lack of access to information and sexual and reproductive health services was found to be related to the likelihood of child marriage (acceptability), particularly in Indonesia. Dominant norms across all countries are highly disapproving of sexual activity between unmarried persons, and girls in particular. Pregnancy outside of marriage appears to be a circumstance in which child marriage will nearly always be considered acceptable, and even necessary (this finding was particularly strong in Indonesia).

The recommendations relate to gender equality commitments 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 9.

Recommendation	Stakeholders	Country	Length of activity / goal	Priority: country
4.1 Institutional level actions				

Link to and support existing advocacy and programming efforts (e.g. UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA) aimed at the introduction and development of comprehensive sex and relationships education in the compulsory school curriculum.	Education Ministries or Departments, schools	Bangladesh, Indonesia	Medium-term	Low
Develop gender-sensitive youth friendly health clinics in project areas. These could be stand-alone or developed within youth centres. The clinics could be generalist with a focus on SRH (to avoid young people being stigmatised by going into a clinic). They could deliver information, advice and refer girls for services (including contraception, abortion and prevention of teenage pregnancy. The health clinics could link to other support structures, to refer children for social support where required. Health workers could carry out outreach work at schools and youth and community centres. The health clinics could also run confidential telephone advice lines to assist girls who face difficulties physically accessing a health clinic privately.	Health Department or Ministry; existing clinics or youth centres (if any), social welfare officers, local health workers	Bangladesh, Indonesia	Short-term	Medium
Develop a system for disseminating information on sexual health to young people on a confidential basis. This could be done through schools and / or youth or community centres.	Schools, youth / community centres	Bangladesh, Indonesia	Short-term	High
Advocate for the reform of laws that impose barriers on access to SRH services (e.g. in Indonesia, access to SRH services is legally restricted to married persons).	Ministry for Justice	Indonesia, Bangladesh	Long-term	Medium
Advocate with governments to ensure that children born outside of wedlock are legally able to be registered and have same access to documentation, and education and other services, as children born within marriage, in order to counter the widely-held view that children born outside of marriage are 'illegitimate'	Ministry for Justice	Indonesia	Long-term	Medium

5. RECOMMENDATIONS ON STRENGTHENING LAW AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS TO RESPOND TO CHILD MARRIAGE

The inadequacy of laws relating to marriage age, along with the lack of knowledge of these laws and weak enforcement of laws was found to be related to child marriage attitudes and practices. Also, the lack of 'buy in' to laws relating to marriage age by marriage officiates and registration bodies, along with the community in general, and the dominance of customary and religious laws, were also found to relate to child marriage attitudes and practices.

The recommendations relate to gender equality commitments 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Recommendation	Stakeholders	Country	Length of activity / goal	Priority: country
5.1 Institutional level actions				
Advocate for the reform of the <i>Child Marriage Restraint Act</i> in Pakistan to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for both boys and girls in all provinces.	Ministry of Justice, other advocacy organisations	Pakistan	Medium-term	Medium
Carry out capacity building of relevant stakeholders (police, marriage registration bodies, religious leaders and marriage officiates), which increases knowledge of the statutory minimum age of marriage and work	Police, marriage registration bodies, religious leaders,	All	Short-term	Medium

with these stakeholders to ensure implementation of the Law.	religious marriage officiates			
Work with stakeholders and district level government to improve monitoring systems of marriage registrars (civic and religious), to ensure that child marriages are not registered and validity of such marriages is denied.	District level government officials, marriage registration bodies (civic and religious)	All	Short-term	Medium

Work with religious leaders to sensitise local religious marriage registrars and officiates and religious clerics to the minimum age for marriage in each country, and in relation to the harms caused by child marriage	Religious leaders, marriage registrars and officiates	All	Short-term	High
Work with existing advocacy organisations (in particular, UNICEF, if possible) to carry out a review (gap analysis) of laws relating to sexual violence (against international standards and best practices). This should also include assessing legal obstacles to convictions for sex offences. Plan could support advocacy efforts aimed at the reform of laws to ensure that legal barriers to conviction are removed.	Ministry for Justice, other organisations who carry out law reform work	All	Long-term	Low
5.2 Community and family level actions				
Carry out community awareness-raising about the legal minimum age for marriage and the legal consequences for breaching the law.	Schools, community organisations, parent groups, community leaders, media (press, radio, online)	All	Short-term	Medium
<p>6. RECOMMENDATIONS ON SENSITISATION / MESSAGING ON CHILD MARRIAGE</p> <p>The research assists in providing a greater understanding of the ideas that shape child marriage acceptability and the circumstances in which child marriage is considered acceptable and unacceptable.</p> <p><i>The recommendations relate to gender equality commitments 3 and 4.</i></p>				
Recommendation	Stakeholders	Country	Length of activity / goal	Priority
6.1 Community and family level actions				

<p>It is critical that sensitisation messages about the negative impacts of child marriage do not reinforce social dominant gender identities and roles, which are associated with inequalities between men and women, including within marriage. For example messaging may include information about the negative health impacts of early childbirth; and the negative consequences of girls assuming an important role in the family for which they are not sufficiently mature / educated. However, caution would need to be exercised to ensure that this messaging does not reinforce the idea that women/ girls role within marriage can be reduced to their ability to fulfill sexual and reproductive roles. Priority must be given to messaging that reinforces the full personhood, and agency of women and girls, on a basis of equality with men.</p>	<p>Schools, community organisations, parent groups, community leaders, media (press, radio, online)</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Short-term (over the long term, the goal should be to challenge ideas about gender roles within families and society.</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Messaging in community sensitization actions should promote the positive contribution that an educated and/or economically independent woman can make to a marriage and to a family in assisting in income generating and other activities.</p>	<p>Schools, community organisations, parent groups, community leaders, media (press, radio, online)</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Community messaging should promote the message that marriage involves responsibility, and that it is important for boys and girls to be sufficiently mature, financially responsible and to have completed at least</p>	<p>Schools, community organisations, parent groups, community</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>Medium</p>

primary education before getting married.	leaders, media (press, radio, online)			
Community messaging should focus on the stress that marriage can have on a young couple who are not sufficiently mature to cope with the demands of adult life and how this can lead to marital breakdown and poor parenting.	Schools, community organisations, parent groups, community leaders, media (press, radio, online)	All	Long-term	Medium
Community messaging should dispel myths that child marriage will protect girls against poverty.	Schools, community organisations, parent groups, community leaders, media (press, radio, online)	All	Long-term	Medium
Plan could recruit respected community leaders who are parents in the community (or work through the CBCPMs) to carry out peer-messaging to parents about the negative impacts of child marriage and the importance of delaying marriage until both parties are sufficiently mature.	Community leaders	All	Short-term	High
Plan should aim community sensitisation at religious structures (religious leaders, religious courts, marriage registration bodies and officiates) who appear to be highly significant in influencing the views of parents and children.	Religious leaders, religious marriage registration bodies and officiates	All	Short-term	High

Coram International

Gregory House 48 Mecklenburgh Square
London WC1N 2QA
United Kingdom
www.childrenslegalcentre.com



Plan International Asia Regional Office
14th floor, 253 Sukhumvit 21 Road (Asok)
Klongtoey Nua, Wattana,
Bangkok 10110
Thailand
www.plan-international.org/asia

For further information about the

Asia Child Marriage Initiative
Please contact Alessandra Tranquilli
Regional Gender Research Manager Plan
International Asia Regional Office
[alessandrat.tranquilli @plan-international.org](mailto:alessandrat.tranquilli@plan-international.org)