



# Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia

Study Results from Bangladesh and Nepal



# end child marriage

**A voice. A chance. A future.**

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Rohingya refugee Saleha, 10, looks out of her family's shelter in Kutupalong makeshift settlement, Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh.

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All collaborators in this research project are immensely grateful to the participating communities, and to the data collectors trained in each setting. We hope that this report will highlight the need for programmes and for programmatic collaboration related to child marriage not only in Bangladesh and Nepal but in humanitarian settings in South Asia and beyond.



# Foreword

Every child has a right to a childhood where they can play, where caregivers ensure their wellbeing, and where they are protected. Child marriage prevents this from happening and can result in serious human rights violations. In South Asia there are an estimated 285 million child brides. Fifty-nine per cent of women aged 20–24 in Bangladesh were married under the age of 18, 40 per cent in Nepal and 27 per cent in India. While the rates of child marriage are decreasing in the region, the vulnerability and insecurity that arises during humanitarian crises threatens to undermine this progress.

In South Asia, a region prone to natural disasters and one that has urgent and protracted conflicts, families may resort to child marriage during crises, as it is perceived to be the best means to provide economic and physical security. It can also be perceived as a way to preserve family honour and duty during crises and disasters that threaten the identity and security of those affected. While the drivers of child marriage may be similar, they are often heightened in emergency settings, and child marriage may be seen as a way to protect the family when the usual means of protection have disappeared. Humanitarian crises can also change prevailing social and gender norms in ways that reduce – or reinforce – the persistent gender inequalities that underpin and perpetuate child marriage.

This study challenges us to do better for children and young people in humanitarian situations – to urgently bolster economic and social security in those communities that practise child marriage so that this harmful practice does not increase as a result of the stressors families experience in crisis situations. Our programming must be more adaptive and responsive so that children and young people are empowered to shape their own futures and make their own choices, and parents and communities have the skills and empathy to support them. While much of our programming focuses on adolescent girls, we cannot forget the boys who are often excluded from programmes, and who also have the right to learn and grow up as responsible persons, able to make their own choices and empowered to have equal, respectful relationships.

UNICEF and UNFPA have joined forces to end child marriage in South Asia, and are committed to continue to do better to end the practice and support all children and young people to reach their full potential – as envisioned in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ICPD Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. As we publish this study, the world is grappling with the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time in which these imperatives are more vital than ever if we are to truly build back better and ensure that children and young people enjoy greater protections and opportunities than ever before.

All young people ultimately have the right to a say in the decisions that impact their lives, including whether, when and who to marry. Let us continue to work together to achieve the vision of the landmark frameworks that guide our work, and end child marriage in South Asia by 2030.



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Her shawl flapping in the wind, a girl stands outdoors in flooded Kulari Village in Nepal's Saptari District.

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Child marriage, defined as formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18, violates every child's right to reach their full potential. Various United Nations Conventions deem child marriage a fundamental violation of human rights (UNGA, 1949, 1989, 2014), as well as a harmful practice because it denies girls and boys the right to the highest attainable standard of health, places restrictions on life opportunities including the right to an education, and restricts opportunities – especially for girls – to participate fully in family, cultural and civic activities (Marphatia et al., 2017). Despite laws and international commitments to reduce the practice, child marriage remains widespread, with one in five girls married before their eighteenth birthday, globally (UNFPA, 2020).

In both development and humanitarian contexts, child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and sustained by cultural and social norms, poverty and lack of opportunities. However, crises may amplify or alter pre-existing drivers, or introduce new drivers, or even potentially, new moderators. Crises are often associated with increased sexual violence, the breakdown in the rule of law, disruption of social structures, as well as internal and international displacement, all of which have been shown to have impacts on child marriage in various contexts.

Studies suggest that rates of child marriage tend to be particularly high in insecure environments (Tembon and Fort, 2008). Of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage, the majority are also among the most vulnerable to natural disasters and most frequently found on lists of failed states (Lemmon, 2014). According to the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) report "A Girl No More", 9 of the top 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage were considered fragile or conflict-affected states (Schlecht, 2016). Most of the 25 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are also at high risk of natural disasters (Atkinson and Bruce, 2015).

The extent to which humanitarian settings impact child marriage practices and the processes through which they may modify its drivers are not fully understood. In an effort to establish an evidence base for child marriage in humanitarian settings, generally, and for South Asia, in particular, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and

the Pacific Regional Office (APRO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) partnered with the WRC and the Center for Humanitarian Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to conduct two country studies on child marriage in humanitarian settings in Bangladesh and Nepal.

This report combines the findings from research with conflict-affected Rohingya refugees from Myanmar residing in Bangladesh, and earthquake-affected communities in Nepal. The findings analyse similarities and differences across the contexts, in order to learn about these two settings and also to understand what might be generalized to child marriage in humanitarian settings more broadly. The hope is that the findings from these studies will inform programme interventions in these settings and provide insight into child marriage in humanitarian contexts.

## Background

### A. Review of existing research

Humanitarian crises do not cause child marriage to arise from nowhere, but evidence from a number of studies shows that they increase economic and physical insecurities, amplifying pre-existing drivers of child marriage (McAlpine et al., 2016; Schlecht et al., 2013; UN Women, 2013; Zabel, 2016). High rates of poverty and low access to education are frequently associated with child marriage and both are often worsened as a result of conflict and disaster (Schlecht et al., 2013). Humanitarian crises may also create new drivers, such as displacement, which can lead to the break-up of family networks and weakening of social institutions, as well as exposure to restrictive host government laws and policies, and the threat of sexual and other forms of violence (Zabel, 2016).

Humanitarian crises impact women, girls, men and boys differently due to their differing status and roles in society, and can exacerbate pre-existing gender and power inequalities (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018; van Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005). Consequently, understanding the impacts of humanitarian crises on child marriage must be informed by incorporating a gender perspective. Humanitarian settings can also change gender dynamics and roles, which affects marriage decision-making.



In many conflict zones, women and teenage girls are the sole providers and protectors for their families, men either having been killed or having moved away on combat duty (MacDonald, 2005; McAskie, 2000). Disproportionate sex ratios can contribute to competition for grooms, leading to pressure to marry earlier in order to secure a desirable husband, or to secure one before he leaves (MacDonald, 2005). However, these same factors can also contribute to marriage declines. For example, Eritrea saw a drop in the percentage of 15- to 19-year-old girls ever married from 38 per cent to 31 per cent between 1995 and 2002 due to the mass mobilization of male fighters (Neal et al., 2016). Alternatively, a shortage of women can also drive child marriage, as single men often do not have the skills to cook or care for young children, responsibilities which are traditionally and sometimes exclusively assigned to women and girls (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018).

Crises can force people to take on new responsibilities, which may be at odds with their traditional gendered social roles (El-Masri et al., 2013). The separation and loss of male household members leads to women acting as breadwinners and heads of household in higher proportions than in most non-crisis affected populations (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018; IASC Working Group, 2001). As a head of household or breadwinner, a woman may have increased decision-making authority in the home, including decisions about marriage. These abrupt changes in women's roles increase women's workloads but can also increase access to livelihoods and potentially change access to and control over resources in the household (McAskie, 2000; Oxfam GB, 2013).

Gender-based violence during crises can drive marriage as families seek protection for daughters in particular. Gender-based violence is sometimes an explicit part of combatant strategy in conflict. Women can be forced into marriage with combatants or may marry them to gain access to food or money (van Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005). In addition, men in crisis situations often have great difficulty in dealing with their changed identities, such as the loss of their breadwinner role. Men might feel humiliated and frustrated by the rapid changes in crisis settings, which may manifest as an increase in gender-based violence (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018). Crises can also provide opportunities to challenge discriminatory gender norms and unequal power

relations, as when women assume prominent roles in peacebuilding, or men take on greater care responsibilities (Oxfam GB, 2013). Humanitarian interventions themselves can either address people's needs in ways that can confirm traditional gender roles or can promote gender equality (The Basics on Gender in Emergencies, 2006).

## B. Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

The Rohingya people are one of the few Muslim ethnic minorities in Myanmar, living predominantly in northern Rakhine State, near the Bangladeshi border.<sup>1</sup> The Rohingya people have long been subject to violence from the Buddhist Burman majority, including government-sponsored violence. Over the last several decades, waves of violence have sent Rohingya people into Bangladesh to seek protection, including in 1978, the early 1990s, 2012 and 2016. Most returned, only to be forced to flee again.

In August 2017, following years of persecution and violence, the Myanmar military and border guard police engaged in a widespread and systematic attack against Rohingya communities. The extreme violence resulted in the death of approximately 7,800 Rohingya people and the mass exodus of survivors (Parmar et al., 2019; *Rohingya Emergency*, 2018). Around 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh, joining 300,000 refugees already living there, many without official refugee status. The established refugee camps at Kutupalong and Nayapara, just inside Bangladesh in Cox's Bazar District, swelled and more than 20 new camps were spontaneously formed. Most grew in a cluster around the original Kutupalong camp in Ukhiya District, forming the Kutupalong mega-camp, the largest refugee consolidation in the world (IOM *Bangladesh Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM)*, 2019).

Data from the Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) for 2015–2016 indicated that nationally, 16 per cent of girls in Myanmar are married before the age of 18 and 1.9 per cent are married before the age of 15 (Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports and ICF, 2017). The prevalence of child marriage was not given for Rakhine State specifically, but the median age of marriage was reported as 20.3 for women and 23.7 for men. The last Myanmar Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), conducted from 2009–2010, found that nationally 7.4 per cent of young women aged 15–19 are currently married, 6.5 per cent in Rakhine State (*Myanmar Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2009–*

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<sup>1</sup> Of note, throughout this report the name Myanmar is used to denote the Rohingya's country of origin, and Rakhine to denote the State. These are the Burmese names which are in standard use internationally. Some of the respondents have used the name Burma for their country and Arakan for state. These are the old names, still used by many ethnic minorities and groups that oppose the government.

2010 Final Report, 2011). Girls Not Brides reports that 16 per cent of girls in Myanmar are married by the age of 18, with a lower median age in Rakhine State (Girls Not Brides, 2017).

An October 2017 report from Social Science in Humanitarian Action, funded by UNICEF, reported evidence that child, early and forced marriage was commonplace among the Rohingya population, and that both child marriage and polygamy had been increasing among Rohingya populations in Bangladesh due to the scarcity of men and to economic difficulties, which meant girls were forced into adult roles sooner (Ripoll, 2017). Oxfam, Action Against Hunger and Save the Children published a gender analysis of the Rohingya response in August 2018, which found that child marriage was highly prevalent in both the Rohingya camps and local communities, with an increase in polygamy seen in the Rohingya community (*Rohingya Refugee Response Gender Analysis: Recognizing and Responding to Gender Inequalities*, 2018).

The Population Council conducted a qualitative research study on marriage, and the sexual and reproductive health of Rohingya adolescents in 2018, in which respondents reported a strong preference for child marriages for girls but not for boys, which was attributed to religious teachings (Ainul et al., 2018). Girls were considered eligible for marriage as soon as they reach puberty and boys only after they started earning. The study found that child marriages are on the rise, facilitated by the informality of marriage practices and absence of rules in camps, in sharp contrast to the severe restrictions and fees imposed in Myanmar. One quantitative study (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2018) found that 62 per cent of female respondents in the camps and 59 per cent in the host community were married by age 18, and almost 19 per cent of female respondents in the camps and 24 per cent in the host community reported being married by the age of 15. Their qualitative findings indicated an increase in the rate of child marriage in the camps due, in part, to the easing of the strict prohibition of child marriage, which was strictly enforced in Myanmar, as well as economic distress, and a lack of perceived security for women in the camps.

### C. Earthquake-affected communities in Nepal

On 25 April 2015, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake shook Nepal. Aftershocks followed later that day and during the following days. Another major quake struck on 12 May. The earthquakes shook apart homes and triggered landslides that devastated rural villages, in addition to damaging some of the most densely populated parts of Kathmandu. The earthquakes killed nearly 9,000 people, injuring

22,000, and damaging or destroying 800,000 homes (Taylor, 2016). Over 8 million people were affected, including 2.8 million that were displaced for lengths of time varying from a few weeks to years (USAID, 2015)

Thirty-one out of the 75 districts of Nepal were affected. Districts north of Kathmandu and lying between the epicentres of the first and second earthquakes were the most severely affected, including an estimated 5.4 million people (Chaulagain et al., 2018). Two of these districts were chosen for the study: Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha. Both are within a day's drive of Kathmandu, north of the capital, abutting the Himalayas. Both were heavily affected by the earthquakes, but with some variability in their ethnic makeup, migration trends and religiosity, among other factors.

Sindhupalchowk suffered heavy casualties from the earthquakes, with the death of more than 3,550 people and injury of thousands more. Steep and narrow roads and a profusion of landslides slowed rescue efforts, and electricity and communication were cut off across the district, isolating residents. Of the 66,688 houses in the district, 64,565 (96.8 per cent) were fully or partially damaged (Land Management and Cooperative Agriculture and Food Security Project, 2018). As in Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha's geography contributed to the damage and hindered the aid response. A sociodemographic impact study conducted after the earthquakes found that an estimated 50,000 public buildings were damaged by the earthquakes and 100 per cent of its inhabitants were affected (Central Department of Population Studies, 2016).

Consistent with other countries in South Asia, Nepal has experienced declines in rates of child marriage during the last two decades, though it still has the second highest rate in South Asia, behind Bangladesh. Analysing data from the Nepal DHS 2011, Pandey (2017) assessed risk factors for child marriage in Nepal, using the Social Relations Framework, according to which "gendered relations place women in subordinate social positions and limit their capabilities to exercise their full potentials [...] Girls' early marriage, limited autonomy to choose their partners in marriage, and lack of education are some of the consequences of gendered social relations" in Nepal.

An analysis of the Nepal MICS 2014 by Sekine and Hodgkin (2017) found that married girls were 10 times more likely to drop out of school than their unmarried peers. Among women aged 20–24 years, 40 per cent said that marriage was the main reason to discontinue their education. Women who were married as children were not only more likely to have dropped out of school but to "have no formal

education, reside in a rural setting, live in poverty, or have an uneducated household head, and they tended to be older adults, Dalit or Muslim” (p. 6).

Rabi (2014) found that there is a high correlation between poverty and child and adolescent marriage. “Prolonged lack of income and poverty can have a significant impact on household decision-making, where a girl child is viewed more as a liability than an asset.” Poverty and lack of access to education are also linked with higher rates of child marriage. MICS showed that marriage before 20 years of age significantly decreased a girl’s access to education; more than 3 in 10 girls married before they were 20 have had no access to education. Dietrich et al. (2018) found that wealthier households in Nepal, as well as those with household members who were more educated, were less likely to have underage married household members.

A Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) multimedia report “Dads Too Soon: The Child Grooms of Nepal” (CARE, 2015) points out that Nepal is one of only eight countries in the world where more than 10 per cent of boys are married before the age of 18. In Western Nepal (where child and adolescent marriage rates are the highest in the country), Kapilbastu district is a hotspot for child marriage, with many child grooms. Among married girls, 26 per cent are wed by 14 years of age and 86 per cent wed by 19 years of age. Of married boys, 12 per cent are married by 14 years of age and 62 per cent by 19 years.

## Methods

The study incorporated three main methodological approaches: (1) a desk review; (2) quantitative household surveys of a stratified sample of Rohingya refugee households in Bangladesh and earthquake-affected households in two districts in Nepal; and (3) qualitative interviews incorporating key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) in both Bangladesh and Nepal. In order to ensure protection of human subjects, the study was reviewed by three Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). First, the study was reviewed by the IRB at the Johns Hopkins University (JHU). Second, it was reviewed by the IRB at BRAC University in Dhaka and in Nepal by the National Health Research Council in Kathmandu.

In both Nepal and Bangladesh, the study team conducted extensive consultations with community members and other stakeholders to review the study goals and objectives, target populations, and both quantitative and qualitative research methods and instruments. Tools for the study were adapted from prior WRC and The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg

School of Public Health research. Core elements of the tools are consistent across each of the contexts to ensure comparability. In that vein, some elements of the quantitative tools were based on indicators from the DHS and MICS. An important change in this study from prior work was the inclusion of boys. Prior studies had only included adolescent girls; however, because Nepal has a notable prevalence of child grooms and because of anecdotal information from the Rohingya camps that boys were also marrying young, adolescent boys were included in both settings and in both the quantitative and qualitative research.

In both contexts, the study team engaged with local research partners both to aid in implementation and ensure local perspectives were incorporated into the study. In Bangladesh, the local partner was Community Partners International, which already had years of experience working in the Rohingya camps, including with an extensive network of Rohingya community health volunteers. In Nepal, the local partner was the Center for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities. Based in Lalitpur, all of the center’s staff have years of experience conducting research throughout Nepal, including in the provinces targeted for this study.

## A. Desk review

The desk review drew from four main sources. First, peer-reviewed literature was identified by searching three academic databases: PubMed, PsycINFO and Scopus. Second, grey literature was identified from a range of organizations working on child marriage and related issues. These documents included research reports, programme reports, evaluations, web articles and data briefs, from organizations including Action Against Hunger, CARE International, Council on Foreign Relations, Girls Not Brides, The Global Fund for Women, Human Rights Watch, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children, UNFPA, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, UN Women and WRC. Third, the 2016–2017 Publications Catalogue from the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage was reviewed (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). Finally, an “Annotated Bibliography” produced by UNFPA, including select resources on child marriage in conflict and humanitarian settings, was reviewed (UNFPA, 2017). Grey literature was sourced by identifying non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on child marriage and searching their available literature, as well as other sources cited by them. Grey literature also included government documents and reports. In all, 484 articles were reviewed, of which 142 documents were included for full review.





Nasima Khatun, 17, is an adolescent peer educator in Rajpur Fardhuwa, Nepal. She provides skills training to other teens as part of a programme called “Rupantaran,” which means transformation. The programme engages girls at high risk of early and forced marriage and other obstacles that could dissolve their ability to reach their full potential.

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## B. Quantitative survey

The quantitative research comprised a cross-sectional household survey coupled with one to two adolescent interviews per sampled household. In each household, a survey was conducted with the female head of household or other adult female aged 18–49 that could speak about the household members. The household survey tool centred around a household roster, including the age and marital status of all occupants, as well as follow-up information on the marriages and living arrangements of adolescent members of the household, household sociodemographic information, marriage perceptions and exposure to interventions on child marriage or targeting adolescents.

From the household roster included in the household survey, up to two respondents between the ages of 10 and 19 years were selected and invited to participate in an individual survey. One boy, regardless of marital status, was randomly selected from the list of male household members between the ages of 10 and 19 years, if there were any. One girl, regardless of marital status, was also selected from the list of female household members between the ages of 10 and 19 years, if there were any. If there were no eligible participants of one gender, up to two could be selected from the other gender, if there was one who was married and one who was unmarried. The adolescent survey tool collected sociodemographic information and risk factors, household of origin characteristics, marriage perceptions, barriers to programme engagement, health and service knowledge, and intervention exposure.

In both countries, the sample was stratified and a two-stage cluster sampling with probability proportional to size was utilized to select households. In Bangladesh, the targeted sample of 1,200 households was stratified between 400 registered refugee households, those who arrived in Bangladesh prior to 1995, and 800 Forcibly Displaced Myanmar National (FDMN) households, who arrived after October 2016, and were not granted refugee status by the Bangladesh government. In Nepal, the sample was evenly stratified between Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha Districts, for a total of 600 households per district.

## C. Qualitative interviews

Among the respondents participating in the individual adolescent survey, a subset including both married and unmarried adolescents, and some of their parents, was invited to participate in a qualitative IDI. Those selected for IDIs were identified at the time of the quantitative survey. If they agreed to participate in the qualitative

component, a researcher contacted them to schedule the IDI at a later time. A total of 43 IDIs were conducted in Bangladesh with married boys ( $n = 10$ ), married girls ( $n = 10$ ), unmarried boys ( $n = 6$ ) and unmarried girls ( $n = 5$ ). A total of 49 IDIs were conducted in Nepal with married boys ( $n = 11$ ), married girls ( $n = 12$ ), unmarried boys ( $n = 8$ ) and unmarried girls ( $n = 8$ ). Only those adolescents aged 15–19 were invited to participate. A total of 22 parents of married children (12 in Bangladesh and 10 in Nepal) were also invited to participate.

KIIs were conducted with 20–25 individuals purposively selected to provide insights on child marriage practices among the target population, including community leaders, religious leaders, local police and service providers. FGDs were conducted with married and unmarried boys and girls, as well as parents, service providers (education, legal, health, adolescent-oriented services), and 20–24-year-olds. A total of 38 FGDs were conducted (16 in Bangladesh, 22 in Nepal) with 6–10 members each, for a total of nearly 300 participants.

## Findings

### A. Bangladesh

Child marriage is clearly present among the Rohingya displaced into Bangladesh, with strong indications that the prevalence increased among FDMN after their arrival, particularly for the first 2 years, until Bangladesh child marriage laws were more strictly enforced in the camps. Among adolescents aged 15–17, 3.1 per cent of FDMN boys and 9.4 per cent of FDMN girls are currently married, with no registered refugee boys and 8.9 per cent of registered refugee girls aged 15–17 currently married. There are very low rates of marriage before age 15 years for both populations, even for girls. That child marriage is more prevalent among current 15–17-year-old FDMN than among 20–24-year-olds suggests a recent increase in child marriage, after arriving in the camps. This is particularly notable for boys, as there were no 20–24-year-old men in the sample married before age 18, but 3.1 per cent of FDMN boys aged 15–17 were married. A similar, though smaller, increase was also seen among registered refugee girls, suggesting intermarriage of children between the FDMN and registered refugee communities.

In addition to providing information on the prevalence of child marriage among Rohingya in Cox's Bazaar, this study identifies several underlying causes – or drivers – of child marriage in this context, and how these are shaped by conflict and related displacement. Key drivers illuminated in this





In Bangladesh, a child bride travels on a boat in Dacobe Upazila, Khulna.

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study include gender discrimination, inadequate implementation of laws and camp policies, and economic insecurity. These drivers influence Rohingya life in the camp setting and contribute to an enabling environment for child marriage. Inherent and explicit gender discrimination gives rise to girls' diminished autonomy and lack of decision-making power as it relates to the selection of spouse, normative roles within the household, control of girls' reproduction and sexuality, and access to services and opportunities outside the household. Understanding the linkages within and between drivers, as well as identifying context-specific mediators and moderators of these will provide appropriately targeted programming and policy recommendations to support the healthy developmental trajectories for adolescents in all their diversity.

### Gender-based discrimination

Large differences in spousal age, and arranged marriages would suggest diminished autonomy and decision-making power of adolescent girls related to the selection of spouses. Evidence of a potential shift in these norms related to the recent displacement is noticed in a difference in spousal age between those refugees that were part of the first wave of displacement and those more

recently displaced (FDMNs). When more recently displaced adolescents marry, they are more likely to marry someone closer to their own age. Within this, however, girls, on average, are likely to marry someone just 1 or 2 years older.

Within the Rohingya community after displacement, Rohingya parents have the leading role in deciding both when their children will marry and to whom. Traditionally, Rohingya girls are considered most eligible for marriage in a specific window – starting a couple of years after menarche, and declining a few years later; a trend also observed in other parts of South Asia (Dietrich et al., 2018; Karim et al., 2016). Whereas menarche marks a girls' transition into womanhood signifying her physical ability to give birth and therefore fulfil her duty as a woman, boys are considered to be eligible for marriage when they are physically mature and, ideally, when they have the ability to earn money. This latter preference is limited in the camp setting.

Expectations about what it means to be a woman and fulfil gendered roles in Rohingya communities underpins the social norms that drive parents to marry off their daughters. Husbands are seen as primary earners and the family representative within the community. Wives are seen as responsible for

childbearing and all aspects of running a household, including domestic chores and hosting of in-laws. Even with some shifting of roles in the camp setting and new opportunities for women's participation in community organizations and in the workforce, their participation in life outside of the home is not universally accepted. Divorces and in-couple conflicts favour men over women, with more men having extramarital affairs or marrying multiple wives. Men also are able to divorce and remarry immediately if they choose to do so, whereas women are more likely to go back home and not get re-married.

Child marriage is often seen as a way of preserving the sexual purity (virginity) and honour of families by controlling the girl's reproduction and sexuality. Lack of security and parents' concerns about their daughters' physical safety and sexual purity were noted frequently by respondents as contributing to marriage decision-making. Concerns about security in the camps, mainly related to the density of shelters, composition of new communities of "strangers" and flimsy shelter construction caused parents to fear for their daughters' physical safety and sexual purity, and further restrict their movements within the camp to avoid interactions that could bring family shame. As a means of protection for young girls, parents see husbands as better able to provide physical security for daughters, and respondents reported that married women are less frequently targeted for harassment.

The community's intolerance of adolescent sexuality, particularly for girls, means that unmarried adolescents engaging in relationships, those who are the victim of a sexual crime, or even those who are perceived to have committed a breach of propriety can cause the family to lose standing and marriage prospects for the adolescent to decline. Often masked in concerns of physical safety and security, the underlying dampening and management of the girl's free expression of sexuality and ability to control one's own reproduction remains at the centre of this deeply rooted, socially driven gender inequity.

Gender-based discrimination contributes to women being valued less within society and reinforcing patriarchy where wives require permission to access essential life-saving services, such as health care and case management for intimate partner violence. Most respondents were largely favourable towards the services available in camp, although access was limited, especially for women and adolescent boys and girls. Though there are many services in the camps that target women, it can be difficult for married women to attend, as their husband's permission is required and women are discouraged from spending much time out of the home.

Community norms, such as expecting girls to stay inside the shelter after menarche and prior to marriage, made it more difficult for unmarried individuals to access sexual and reproductive health services, and thus their knowledge on those topics was more limited than those who were married. Adolescent boy respondents, in particular, noted a lack of adolescent-friendly services targeting them specifically, as well as a lack of convening space where they felt comfortable to meet.

### **Inadequate implementation of laws and camp policies**

Knowledge and enforcement of child marriage laws is particularly pertinent in refugee settings where individuals move between countries with different marriage laws, or different levels of enforcement of those rules. Overall, there was a lack of knowledge among respondents related to the Bangladeshi legal age of marriage as well as a lack of enforcement of the governing child marriage law that facilitated an enabling environment for Rohingya to marry their adolescent children, a custom agreeable to their religious faith and a tradition stymied in Rakhine State. Following displacement from Rakhine State, where child marriage rules were strictly enforced, to Bangladesh, where national marriage laws were not immediately announced or enforced, religious ceremonies proliferated and were largely reflected only in UNHCR records for family registration. These were well outside of the Bangladeshi legal system, and contributed to a surge in child marriage for the first year and a half following displacement. Directly preceding the study period, new enforcement policies were implemented in response to the surge. Since this potential moderator was issued a few months before data collection, its full effect could not be thoroughly assessed. Many respondents noted, however, that the prevalence of child marriage began to drop as a result of the change. Lack of clarity and enforcement of child marriage laws in the country of displacement does not arise as a driver out of prior research on child marriage in South Asia, but was one of the leading factors contributing to the increase in child marriage prevalence among the Rohingya community.

Camp policies surrounding the nature of aid distribution were a notable driver of child marriage. Aid was distributed according to an average household size of five people, which led to some families using child marriage as a tool for seeking additional food aid. Marrying a daughter, who would join her husband's household, reduces the number of people sharing rations in the household of origin. Similarly, if a newly married couple establishes a new household, instead of joining the groom's family, the new couple would qualify for their own aid distributions, decreasing ration sharing in both households of origin, and enabling them to share

with those households. Humanitarian aid itself serving as a vehicle for child marriage is a new and troublesome finding, with important ramifications for how future aid is distributed in communities where child marriage is practised. This underscores the importance of monitoring unintended consequences of aid policies and programmes, and increasing self-reliance among refugees.

### Economic insecurity

Economic insecurity among families was exacerbated due to displacement as refugees lost their livelihoods and ability to earn money in the camps. This driver arose most commonly in conjunction with male adolescents and their families looking to dowry as a source of income and parents marrying their children because they could not afford to keep them in the house. While some respondents also mentioned a lack of funds (for dowry, bride gold and wedding festivities) as a reason to delay marriage, by and large, economic insecurity was a stronger driver than moderating factor.

Economic insecurity directly arises from the lack of alternatives in the camp, with no formal education post primary school and scarce job opportunities. Both adolescents and their parents discussed seeing marriage as the only option for adolescents to pursue, given the lack of opportunities and uncertainty about the future. Education and job opportunities were also the only two alternatives listed by adolescents as viable options for delaying marriage, though much more so for boys than for girls.

## B. Nepal

Child marriage prevalence was moderate in both Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha Districts. In both, the proportion of adolescents married before age 18 was higher for girls than boys: 3 per cent of men aged 20–24 and 9 per cent of women in Sindhupalchowk and 5 per cent of men aged 20–24 and 7 per cent of women in Dolakha. The proportion of 15–17-year-olds currently married was slightly lower: 2 per cent of boys and 4.8 per cent of girls in Sindhupalchowk, and 0.6 per cent of boys and 4.6 per cent of girls in Dolakha. There were very low rates of marriage before age 15 years for both populations.

Qualitative respondents noted a slight increase in child marriage following the earthquakes, but reported child marriage to be on an overall declining trend in both districts. Of note, there are varying patterns within this trend. Arranged marriages prior to age 18 are decreasing, particularly for those younger than 15 years. At the

same time, love marriages and elopements among older adolescents are increasing. This may be one area that saw a change specifically related to the earthquake – with reports of increased elopements following.

In addition to providing information on prevalence of child marriage among earthquake-affected districts of Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha, this study identifies several underlying drivers in this context and how these are shaped by climate change and related disaster displacement. Key drivers illuminated in this study include gender discrimination, systemic poverty linked to racial discrimination, adolescent agency, education and economic insecurity. Moderators of child marriage included a supportive legislative environment.

### Gender-based discrimination

Traditional gendered norms of marriage still prevail. Boys' eligibility for marriage is determined by education, employment and financial condition, whereas for girls, while those factors may also be considered, health and the ability to care for the home and in-laws are considered more important. Interestingly, respondents reported an increasing trend towards delaying marriage and seeking educated women as opposed to traditional homemakers in the last few years. This may be a direct result of shifting normative effects from the earthquake as adolescents increasingly harness their own agency to reinforce the importance of education, now more readily available through government and NGO programmes post disaster.

The management of the girl's reproduction and sexuality is deeply entrenched, and respondents referred to the preservation of family honour and prestige as key reasons for child marriage. Engaging in premarital sex or becoming pregnant while unmarried are morally unacceptable and would lead to family shame and poor matches for the girls. There is some evidence to suggest that the widespread use of social media as a platform for self-initiated selection of spouses and the rejection of dowries marks potential shifts in this social norm that may have been further enhanced by the earthquake.

Lastly, some respondents expressed that marriage was a way of avoiding neglect or violence at home, securing basic needs or seeking comfort following the trauma of the earthquake. As rates of alcoholism rose, domestic violence was noted as a common occurrence and a correlate of the trauma and influx of funds via aid and loans for rebuilding. Among families that were displaced, concerns about security and honour in crowded relocation sites and concern about the risk of trafficking motivated some to marry children early, particularly daughters.



### **Systemic poverty linked to caste and ethnic discrimination**

Child marriage is more commonly practised in some communities than in others. Prevalence of child marriage was perceived by respondents to remain highest in Tamang and Dalit communities, which is consistent with prior reports (*Child Marriage in Nepal*, 2012; *Why child marriage persists in Nepal*, 2014; Kafle, 2016). Constituting over a fifth of the population of Nepal, the Dalit and Tamang communities are minorities that are disproportionately affected by poverty and systematic discrimination that restricts or denies access to resources, including education and livelihood opportunities (Pandey, 2017). Quantitative findings showed that child marriage prevalence was indeed highest for boys in the Tamang and Dalit communities and highest for girls among the Dalit and Magar.

### **Agency and self-initiated early marriage**

Adolescent agency was the most notable driver of child marriage identified for both boys and girls. This phenomenon, resulting in an increased proportion of love marriages, is widely recognized, by respondents and previous reporting (Aryal, 2007; *Child Marriage in Nepal Research Report*, 2012; Choe et al., 2005). Some parents met their children's increased agency with pride that their children were educated and mature enough to make their own decisions, while others met this phenomenon with resignation that they have lost the ability to make decisions for their children. Love marriages have become more common and are now more prevalent than arranged marriages in some areas. Prevailing social norms governing the unacceptability of premarital sex and higher social status attributable to married adolescents may also help to facilitate the social desirability of early marriage among peers. Elopements, in particular, may have increased following the earthquakes, as adolescents sought comfort in new relationships, left difficult conditions at home and tried to make plans for a less certain future.

Though this increase in adolescent agency is widely acknowledged, their decisions are not always perceived as being in their best interest. This issue was brought up most in relation to social media use. Internet access has dramatically expanded in the last few years, with increasing levels of connectivity and decreasing cost of cellular phone usage. Although only 38 per cent of the adolescent survey respondents reported having access to the Internet (37 per cent of girls and 40 per cent of boys), it was reported by both adolescents and adults to be a key factor in the increase in elopements. Using social media, and Facebook in particular, adolescents can meet people outside of their village or school, opening new opportunities for relationships, and contributing to the increase in love marriages and

elopements. Some adolescents made commitments without ever having met in person. Some of the adolescents who married after whirlwind social-media-driven romances later expressed regret about their decisions, most commonly girls.

### **Education**

The disruption of protective systems for children, including the closure of schools due to earthquake damage, were one of the most noted earthquake-related drivers. Notably, low levels of educational attainment of the male head of household appeared to be associated with higher rates of child marriage. In households where there was no child marriage, the average level of educational attainment for female head of households was nearly 3 years more. This suggests the gradual intergenerational shift of normative values of the importance of education for girls and the benefits of delayed marriage. Directly after the earthquake, there was an increase in NGO and government programming opening up a diverse array of opportunities to learn about the negative consequences of child marriage. This furthered the ongoing shift in gender differences in school enrolment with an increase of educational prioritization for daughters.

### **Economic insecurity**

Increased economic pressure was one of the most noted earthquake-related drivers. Destruction of houses and property and interruption of livelihoods from the earthquake resulted in additional financial strain. For some parents, this directly related to decisions made to marry daughters early. For some adolescents, decisions to marry revolved around the fulfillment of basic needs, such as food and shelter. Once the immediate threats of the crisis subsided, traditional migratory work patterns surfaced as adolescents and young adults from this area have long migrated to Kathmandu, or internationally, for work opportunities. However, in the wake of the crisis, the rate of migration increased following the earthquakes' disruption of the local economy (Wilson et al., 2016). Some adolescent boys married before leaving, or used the relocation as an opportunity to elope.

### **Supportive legislative environment**

The recent change in the legal age of marriage in Nepal and accompanying education and awareness campaign were reported by qualitative respondents to have had a moderating effect on child marriage. All respondents were aware of the change, and most either knew of or had participated in activities associated with this campaign. This change reinforced the already declining trend in child marriage in the target districts and made it more difficult to ascertain the impact of the earthquakes and recovery (Raj et al., 2012).

## Discussion and Recommendations

### A. Discussion

By design, the study focused on sites with disparate characteristics to learn from comparisons between two diverse humanitarian contexts in South Asia: a protracted displacement whose impetus was conflict and oppression, and a not-too-recent natural disaster. It is apparent from the study that these two situations are indeed different when it comes to their effects on child marriage despite high rates of displacement in both. There were several factors that interacted to sustain or moderate the practice of child marriage in both settings, including social norms that perpetuate gender and racial inequality, economic insecurity, protective and supportive policy environment, and education.

#### Deep-seated drivers of child marriage do not fundamentally change

A major finding from this study is that the underlying, deep-seated drivers of child marriage that have been identified in existing research do not fundamentally change during crises. This study confirms the enduring importance of economic insecurity, physical safety and social norms as drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings. Although these fundamental drivers are still present, the nature of the crisis and the response can exaggerate or minimize them. Any new drivers that appear, such as the impact of food distribution on child marriage, are not as deep seated and are more circumstantial in nature, and may therefore be easier to address.

#### Gender-based discrimination and shifting social norms in crisis

The study shows that social and gender norms remain important as drivers of child marriage. It outlines a number of areas where norms around control of adolescent sexuality and reproduction, in particular for girls, together with other discriminatory gender norms, continue to play a significant role in determining the age of marriage. The study shows that social and gender norms may change both positively and negatively, and rapidly, in humanitarian settings. In Nepal, the widespread use of technology and social media directly following the earthquake created an environment where adolescents were comfortable to exercise their agency to delay marriage to seek out other opportunities or to choose their own spouse and reject dowry. The earthquake appears to have coincided with, and possibly contributed to, a shift in family dynamics leading to a relaxation of social norms regarding arranged marriage and family formation. In contrast, formal education for

adolescents was not available and social media was not as widely used in camp settings in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, concerns over flimsy or densely situated shelters, increased interactions between boys and girls, and newly formed communities of “strangers” drive parents to seek out ways to control adolescent reproduction and sexuality through marriage or other restrictive and harmful practices. In Nepal, domestic violence in the home was a driver of adolescent-led marriages, whether as a result of feelings of parental neglect or actual harm to the child.

#### Adolescent boys

The lack of physical security for all-female households was cited as a driver for marrying boys younger in Bangladesh, in which case an adult woman married an underage boy in order to keep the family safe. Safety continues to be salient for girls, but the effect on child grooms is a new finding.

Even with an increase in the number of child grooms or boys at risk of marriage in both Nepal and Bangladesh, there is evidence that boys are not being targeted by programming. This lack of engagement is a lost opportunity to engage boys in their own right about the risks of child marriage and to provide opportunities that would prevent them from marrying as children.

#### Honour and family duty

In both contexts, while represented as concerns about physical safety and security, control over adolescent girls’ sexuality and reproduction remained central to narratives about preserving family honour. A strong sense of duty to family and honour were key elements of child marriage dynamics in the two study sites, reflecting the institution of marriage in South Asia as one that joins families, not individuals, and confers inter- and intrafamily roles and responsibilities.

While traditionally associated with economic insecurity, decisions to migrate, marry and find work are also deeply rooted in the idea of duty to the family. Duty is also reflected in how parents view their relationship with their children and their responsibilities around marriage and protection especially of adolescent girls. In the face of perceived and real threats to physical security, families seek to protect a girl’s honour as a means of protecting the family’s honour. This driver assumes even greater importance as parents struggle with their inability to protect their family physically, including a girl’s honour. Adolescent girls’ sexuality and safety represent the honour and integrity of the family. This suggests that when a family’s own existence and safety is under threat, parents and families may become even more concerned with protecting that honour.

### Economic security

Respondents in both study sites noted the lack of economic opportunities in their communities. Following displacement, economic insecurity among Rohingya families was exacerbated as refugees lost their livelihoods and ability to earn money in the camps. This lack of economic opportunity may have led to earlier marriage as parents of boys seek dowry payments and parents of girls seek a way to decrease the amount of resources needed to feed their families. This sentiment was echoed in Nepal, where marrying early, either as decided by the parents or by adolescents themselves, revolved around the fulfillment of basic needs. Also in Nepal, a lack of economic opportunities led to migration, particularly of boys, and may have prompted early marriage, so that boys were accompanied, or served as a reason to elope. In Bangladesh, many of these drivers appear to have become more important. In the face of economic insecurity, families report marrying off girls in order to ensure they are fed by someone else, or marrying off boys to gain a dowry.

Distribution of aid has unintended consequences. In Bangladesh the design of food aid targeted at five-member households appears to have led to an increase in child marriages. The policy of meting out aid to family units can have severe adverse consequences when it comes to child marriage. While splitting household units for income support is a known risk for which there are many existing approaches, it was a surprising finding to discover this risk continues and that it is leading to marriage.

### Social media and self-initiation

Increasing anecdotal evidence suggests that social media has contributed to the rise of self-initiated marriages in South Asia. This study is the first to confirm a link and provides qualitative evidence that details the shift that allowed this change to occur in Nepal. However, while the quantitative data indicate that adolescents are using social media more frequently and the qualitative data point to self-initiated marriages arising due to these interactions, the actual number of marriages resulting from these interactions appears to be small.

### Impact of legislation

The study also illustrates the impact of legislation on harmful practices, such as child marriage and the influence of legal provisions on the age of marriage on individual and community decision-making. It shows that normative beliefs and legislative frameworks interact in various and sometimes unintended ways to affect patterns of child marriage.

In Rakhine State, the Rohingya had been subject to laws prohibiting early marriage and polygamy, as well as laws restricting the number of children they

could have. Once in Bangladesh, respondents noted feeling freed from these restrictions, and there was an increase in child marriages and polygamy, and a drive to have more children. When legal jurisdiction was established and camp authorities began to enforce laws regarding child marriage, the age of marriage reported increased and child marriages declined.

Immediately following the earthquake, Nepal enacted a law raising the official age of marriage for girls to 20. The high age of marriage laws in Nepal create a large gap between the onset of puberty and the ability to express adolescent sexuality in a socially and legally sanctioned manner. This mismatch of social norms in favour of early marriage, adolescent sexuality and legislative priorities may have created an incentive for adolescents to elope or self-initiate marriage.

### Humanitarian crises: nature, duration and patterns of displacement

The regions in Nepal included in this study were affected by an acute rapid onset natural disaster. Within a year, nearly all people displaced by the earthquake were back in their own communities, and rebuilding was well underway. In contrast to this acute event, the crisis affecting the Rohingya is chronic and the displacement protracted. While climate and disaster-related displacement may share some similar features to conflict-related displacement, there are some important differences.

### Conflict versus natural disaster

The conflict, associated displacement and ensuing impacts on child marriage patterns in Rohingya communities suggests that conflict may exert particular forces leading to changes in child marriage. Increased perception of threats associated with trauma and displacement, insecurity and lack of physical boundaries in the camp setting strengthen reliance on child marriage as a form of maintaining family honour, as well as safety and security. In Nepal, while there was a short period of encampment for those in the earthquake zones, and the risks of physical security and the need to protect girls from sexual assault were present, the short-term nature of displacement and relatively more rapid recovery may have prevented these perceptions from having a lasting impact as a driver of child marriage. However, the trauma and displacement associated with the earthquake does appear to have had an impact on self-initiated marriages.

### Short-term disaster cycle versus protracted crisis

Short-term versus protracted crises may also have differential impacts on child marriage. In Nepal, the earthquake-affected population was displaced

temporarily but then returned to live in, or near, their communities of origin. Those who were displaced did not travel far, and most were able to eventually return to their community of origin, with the return to some semblance of normality quite quickly after the earthquake. The Rohingya faced discrimination and violence in Myanmar, an escalation of which led many of them to flee to Bangladesh, and they continue to face violence and instability in their current situation. Protracted crisis and displacement magnify threats to marginalized populations, even the perception of which appears to affect child marriage patterns.

### Migration and displacement

Unlike other forms of migration, displacement (or forced migration) tends to increase poverty and economic insecurity, as the study findings from Bangladesh and Nepal illustrate. When a community is socially and culturally disposed to child marriage as a solution to problems arising from external threats and economic insecurity, in particular in new, unsafe surroundings, child marriage may offer a solution. This is shown by the reported rise in child marriage immediately following the earthquake in Nepal and upon arrival of displaced Rohingya populations in Bangladesh.

In addition to the feelings of insecurity that accompany displacement, migration as a solution to the economic and physical insecurity prompted by a crisis may prompt child marriage in and of itself. Few interviews were conducted with boys who had migrated following the earthquake, but evidence indicates that labour migration following the earthquake may have prompted earlier marriages to occur. Further research with individuals who migrated would be useful to understand how migration and family formation, including through child marriage, could be related, especially in the context of humanitarian situations.

### Ethics of research in humanitarian settings

Finally, this study has highlighted the ethical and logistical difficulties of conducting research on child marriage in humanitarian settings. The researchers in this study took great efforts to ensure community buy-in and ethical approval across both Nepal and Bangladesh, a vital step in ensuring that marginalized populations are protected in the research process and in disseminating findings to the studied populations. These processes and recommendations will be shared in a separate document.

## B. Recommendations

Recommendations for future research, policy and programming suggested by the study findings include the following:

### 1. Research

#### Ethical research on child marriage in humanitarian settings

The study process recognized that the dearth of research in the area of child marriage in humanitarian and emergency situations might in part be due to the complicated ethics around doing research with marginalized and vulnerable populations. For this study, great care was taken to ensure that respondent communities had a voice in consenting to and learning from the research to which they were party. It is noted here that any future studies in humanitarian settings must be equally cautious in subjecting vulnerable and marginalized populations to research.

#### Gaps in research

The study generated an understanding of the persistence of the deep drivers of child marriage across different contexts. Given the consistency of the deep drivers of child marriage across different settings, and the ethical challenges of surveying marginalized populations, it is recommended that future studies focus on implementation research, and what works to effectively programme to end child marriage, rather than research on drivers of child marriage in humanitarian contexts.

However, four areas identified for further research which are not yet well addressed in studies on child marriage in emergency settings and which merit further study are:

- Migration and displacement. A limitation of this study is the inability to know about the populations that have been affected by these crises who have migrated and are therefore not currently in the geographical study areas. Both the Nepal and Bangladesh study findings suggest that migration and displacement affect patterns of child marriage. However, the study was not able to fully explore these topics and they merit further research.
- Influence of social media. This study has shown evidence of a trend towards social media driving self-initiated marriages among young people, however further work is necessary to understand the extent to which this is changing marriage patterns or is, in practice, only affecting a small number of young people and their families.
- Natural-disaster-affected settings. The study findings, including the increase in young people's agency and rise in self-initiated marriage in Nepal, raise questions about the impacts of natural disasters on marriage and family formation. Whether or not these changes were already taking place as part of an existing trend, were exacerbated by or occurred as a result of the



emergency and its aftermath, and their longer-term impact on patterns of child marriage merits further research.

- **Gender and social norms.** The study identified a number of ways in which harmful gender and social norms were affected both positively and negatively by the crisis. However, more work needs to be done to understand changes in social and gender norms that occur in humanitarian settings, how they impact patterns of child marriage and whether this leads to lasting change in prevalence of child marriage in impacted communities.

## 2. Programming

As this study has identified, the response to child marriage in humanitarian settings needs to be flexible and adapted to each specific context. As the underlying drivers of child marriage shift in importance in a crisis, becoming exaggerated or moderated, existing child marriage programming may need to be scaled up or scaled back, or significantly altered to remain relevant and effective in the changing environment. The following recommendations for child marriage programming reflect the need to respond quickly and effectively, to put in place adaptive programming that reflects the varying needs of vulnerable populations, as well as to avoid or adjust programming interventions that create unanticipated adverse incentives or unintended consequences.

- **Economic and physical insecurity.** This study has shown that drivers such as economic and physical insecurity become much more important in humanitarian crises as determinants for decision-making around marriage. Programmatic interventions that seek to bolster economic and/or physical security in humanitarian situations should therefore be quickly scaled up to reduce the likelihood that these drivers will increase in importance and impact, leading to more and/or earlier child marriage.
- **Social norms.** The study shows that social and gender norms can change very quickly in an emergency, both positively and negatively, and in unexpected ways. When these norms shift, programming needs to be nimble and adaptive in order to support communities effectively. Providing adolescent girls with tools to navigate working outside the home, pressures to elope and the experience of family formation at a young age would be important components of needs-driven, adaptive programming.
- **Adolescent boys.** Finally, programming must address the needs of boys. Boys are getting

married, and boys are on social media and courting girls. Their engagement is critical to build healthy relationships and communities where girls and women are valued and respected. Boys must be engaged in their own right and for their own benefit as boys also suffer consequences of child marriage as well, both as child grooms and as husbands of underage brides.

## 3. Policy

With regard to policy, the following recommendations are identified:

- **Legislation.** The influence of laws on child marriage and the interaction of laws and policies with social norms and religious practices, in particular in humanitarian settings, was clearly raised in this study. The findings point to the need to continue to monitor the impact of legislation on child marriage. This includes how laws are being enforced, how they are being perceived and received by members of communities, in particular those impacted by humanitarian crises, where there are gaps in enforcement or knowledge of the law, and ultimately, whether they are effective at stemming child marriage.
- **Patterns of child marriage.** Child marriage is not a uniform practice across or within countries, and this study confirms this view. Laws and policies that aim to address and prevent child marriage must recognize these differences as well as the different contexts in which they are applied. In contexts where adolescent sexuality is taboo, but the age of marriage is high, laws have the potential to create adverse incentives, that may in practice increase child marriage and early union. Advocacy and legislative reform are needed to better account for different patterns of child marriage, including to recognize the potential for adolescent agency, how it impacts child marriage, and how existing and proposed legislation may impact adolescent self-determination.
- **Civil registration.** The study identified the continued need for efforts around implementing and improving civil registration. Qualitative evidence from both countries indicated the need for reinforcing civil registration in emergencies. Marriage registration not only protects the family, but is also usually required for birth registration, and when complete, is a more effective way to monitor and measure child marriage than household surveys. These services should continue to be offered even in humanitarian settings to ensure continuity, and ensure children and young people are able to realize their rights.



## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>APRO</b>	Asia and the Pacific Regional Office
<b>ARSA</b>	Arakhan Rohingya Salvation Army
<b>CIC</b>	Camp-In-Charge
<b>DHS</b>	Demographic and Health Survey
<b>FCN</b>	Family Counting Number
<b>FDMN</b>	Forcibly Displaced Myanmar National
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>ICDDR,B</b>	International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh
<b>IDI</b>	In-depth interview
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IPV</b>	Intimate partner violence
<b>IRB</b>	Institutional Review Board
<b>JHU</b>	Johns Hopkins University
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interviews
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>MSF</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>ROSA</b>	Regional Office of South Asia
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN Refugee Agency)
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WRC</b>	Women’s Refugee Commission



A child is dressed for her marriage ceremony in Kurigram, Bangladesh

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### A. Definitions and global scope

Child marriage, defined as formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18, violates every child's right to reach their full potential. Various United Nations Conventions deem child marriage a fundamental violation of human rights (UNGA, 1949, 1989, 2014), as well as a harmful practice because it denies girls and boys the right to the highest attainable standard of health, places restrictions on life opportunities including the right to an education, and restricts opportunities – especially for girls – to participate fully in family, cultural and civic activities (Marphatia et al., 2017).

Despite laws and international commitments to reduce the practice, child marriage remains widespread, with one in five girls married before their eighteenth birthday, globally (UNFPA, 2020). This practice disproportionately affects those in the least developed countries, where approximately 40 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18 and 12 per cent are married before the age of 15 (UNFPA, 2020).

While both girls and boys are affected, there is a higher rate of child marriage among girls (Arthur et al., 2018). An analysis by Gastón (2019) found that approximately 1 in 21 men aged 20–24 was first married before the age of 18, across the 82 countries for which data were available since 2007. Arthur et al. (2018) found that girls are married before the age of 18 nearly five times more than boys. Additionally, though new laws and international commitments have seen positive results in reducing child marriage, country-level legal exceptions to the minimum age requirements hinder the ability to enforce these laws (Arthur et al., 2018; Psaki, 2016).

### B. Consequences of child marriage

Rooted in gender inequality and sustained by cultural and social norms, there is a large body of literature denoting the negative consequences of child marriage for girls and their communities.

Girls are at increased risk of negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes, such as early or unintended pregnancies, morbidity and mortality for the child bride and their offspring (Beattie et al., 2015; Ertem et al., 2008; Kamal and Hassan, 2015; Kamal, 2012; Santhya et al., 2010; Shawky and Milaat, 2001; Yako, 2007), and increased risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections including HIV (Delprato and Akyeampong, 2017). Low contraceptive use, high fertility rates and shorter birth spacing have been noted and associated with limited decision-making within child marriages and a lack of control related to sexual lives after marriage (Delprato and Akyeampong, 2017; Arthur et al., 2018). Lower utilization of maternal health services, including pre- and antenatal care, (Godha et al., 2016; Marphatia et al., 2017) has been linked with prevailing gender differences, gaps in knowledge of available services and care-seeking behaviours of girls (Delprato and Akyeampong, 2017).

Young married girls are more likely to experience intimate partner violence (IPV) than those who married at a later age (Arthur et al., 2018; Kidman, 2017; Psaki, 2016). Several studies indicate child marriage is associated with negative mental health outcomes for girls. These include depression (Ahmed et al., 2013), decreased autonomy and decision-making power (Pandey, 2017), lower self-efficacy and stress.

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Marriage in childhood often means an end to the girl's education, further limiting her vocational opportunities and resulting in underdeveloped social networks (Arthur et al., 2018; Beattie et al., 2015; Godha et al., 2016; Marphatia et al., 2017). In Nepal, married girls were 10 times more likely to drop out of school than their unmarried peers (Sekine and Hodgkin, 2017). Boys who marry under the age of 18 often experience additional economic and social pressures as they take on social roles as economic providers for their new family (Gastón et al., 2019). Similar to young married girls, young married boys can have trouble accessing education or employment opportunities due to their marital status.

## C. Child marriage in humanitarian settings

In both development and humanitarian contexts, child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and sustained by cultural and social norms, poverty and lack of opportunities. However, crises may amplify or alter pre-existing drivers, or introduce new drivers or even, potentially, new moderators. Crises are often associated with increased sexual violence, the breakdown in the rule of law, disruption of social structures, and internal and international displacement, all of which have been shown to have impacts on child marriage in various contexts.

Humanitarian crises across the world are becoming more frequent and increasingly protracted. Atkinson and Bruce (2015) found that both the number and scale of natural disasters have increased over recent years, with the likelihood of displacement due to a disaster 60 per cent higher than it was 40 years ago. Furthermore, the proportion of disasters related to climate change has increased, accounting for approximately 80 per cent of the increase in the number of disaster events between 2000 to 2009, as compared to those from 1980 to 1989 (Atkinson and Bruce, 2015).

Studies to date suggest that rates of child marriage tend to be particularly high in insecure environments (Tembon and Fort, 2008). Of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage, the majority are also among those considered most vulnerable to natural disasters and most frequently found on indexes of failed states (Lemmon, 2014). The data available on rates of child marriage in fragile states, however, do not fully reflect the rates during or resulting from conflict. Although Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) have been completed in conflict-affected countries, including Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Somalia, the data do not fully reflect the emergency setting. In the Myanmar MICS, for example, five townships were removed from the sampling frame due to security

concerns, and 40 selected enumeration areas were ultimately replaced due to security issues during data collection. Similar challenges are faced in the other locations, with data from conflict-affected areas commonly absent from public data sets. Despite recent attempts to measure the rates of child marriage among populations directly affected by conflict and/or natural disasters, little robust data is currently available to confirm how many children may be affected by the practice of child marriage in these settings.

The extent to which humanitarian settings impact child marriage practices and the processes through which it may modify its drivers are not fully understood. In 2014, the Council on Foreign Relations asserted that, "there is a wide gap in data that assesses the degree to which fragile contexts perpetuate child marriage, resulting in a gap in informed interventions" (Lemmon, 2014). Given the limited qualitative evidence and robust quantitative estimates of child marriage in humanitarian settings, it is important to accurately assess the current situation in order to appropriately address the needs. A greater knowledge of the drivers of child marriage in emergencies is required to better understand what can be done to prevent or mitigate the effects of child marriage.

## D. Impetus for the study

In an effort to establish an evidence base for child marriage in humanitarian settings, generally and for South Asia in particular, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia Pacific Regional Office (APRO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) partnered with the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) and the Center for Humanitarian Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to conduct two country studies on child marriage in humanitarian settings in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Site selection for this study was based on several factors. Because the study was funded by UNICEF and UNFPA regional offices, there was a commitment to undertake research in at least two countries, as opposed to comparing sites within one country. Prior research had demonstrated the importance of context in understanding child marriage. This study aimed to understand the specifics of the two contexts investigated, but also to see whether something could be said about child marriage in humanitarian settings more generally, such as overarching moderators or drivers that might apply across contexts. For this reason, in addition to the two country sites, the study also examined two different kinds of humanitarian crises – one resulting from a natural disaster and one caused by conflict.

Although seasonal disasters, such as annual flooding and monsoons, do occur in this region the project timeline did not allow waiting for a crisis to unfold at an unknown time. In addition, the immediate aftermath of a crisis was not deemed an appropriate time to engage in this research. The recent emergence of the refugee crisis in Bangladesh suggested itself naturally as a study site, and so a complementary site was sought: a natural disaster in a recent time frame. The 2015 earthquakes in Nepal fit well: they affected a relatively large number of people and, though the event itself was acute, its effects endured and full recovery would take several years.

This report combines the findings from research with conflict-affected Rohingya refugees from Myanmar residing in Bangladesh, and earthquake-affected communities in Nepal. The findings are presented with analysis of similarities and differences across the contexts, in an effort to learn not only about these two settings but also to understand what might be generalized to child marriage in humanitarian settings more broadly. It is hoped that UNICEF, UNFPA and others will use the findings from these studies to inform their interventions in these settings and to gain insight into child marriage in humanitarian contexts.

## E. About this report

This report includes the following sections:

- **Executive Summary** and **Introduction**.
- **Background chapter**, which briefly describes prior research by the WRC and Johns Hopkins University (JHU) on child marriage in other humanitarian settings in the Middle East and Africa; summarizes a review of the literature on child marriage in humanitarian contexts within, and outside of, South Asia; and also provides background on the two populations and humanitarian contexts: Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and earthquake-affected communities in Nepal including pre-crisis child marriage patterns and practices and precipitating events of the humanitarian crises.
- **Methods chapter**, which describes the strategy and scope of the desk review on child marriage in humanitarian settings within and outside of South Asia; provides an overview review of ethical and contextual considerations; outlines the quantitative and qualitative design, sampling plan and data-collection processes, and concludes with a discussion of study limitations.
- **Findings chapter**, divided into two sections, one on the Bangladesh study findings and the second on the Nepal study findings, each of which describes the respondent characteristics, prevalence of child marriage, spousal age difference, drivers and moderators of child marriage, and issues associated with child marriage in these two humanitarian contexts.
- **Discussion and recommendations chapter**, which summarizes the key findings from the Bangladesh and Nepal studies; presents a contextual comparison of drivers and moderators of child marriage, and presents recommendations for further research, programming and policy related to child marriage in humanitarian settings.
- A list of **References** cited in this report.
- Three **Appendices** which present the quantitative survey instruments, the qualitative interview guides, and a description of the key indicators and analytical approaches used in the report.

## F. Statistics and data analysis

Child marriage prevalence was estimated using two main indicators: the proportion of people aged 20–24 who were married before age 18 and those married before age 15; and the proportion of adolescents aged 10–19 who are currently married. The first indicator measures completed child marriage, while the second represents those currently experiencing child marriage. For the 20–24-year-olds married before 18 and before 15, all of the respondents involved were over 18 at the time of interview, thus there is no further risk of child marriage. The advantage of this measurement is that it is a global standard and child marriage in humanitarian settings can be compared readily to national or subnational data across the globe. The disadvantage is that many child marriages among 20–24-year-olds would have occurred years in the past (up to 9 years in the past for a 24-year-old woman married at 15) and thus is not as useful an indicator for assessing current risk or designing interventions.

Measuring the proportion of adolescents, 10–19 years old, who are currently married provides a picture of current marriage among this age group but must be interpreted with some caution. For the 10–17-year-olds, although they might not be married at the time of the interview, the risk of being married as children still remains. For the 18- and 19-year-olds, if they were not married as children then their risk of being married as a child has passed.

For many indicators – including those relating to decision-making and services, as well as differences between subgroups (such as between girls and boys, or between Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) and registered refugees) – comparisons were made using a chi-square test for significance, and presented as a p-value. Though both the quantitative and qualitative data were used to determine a sense of trends in child marriage, changes in prevalence rates were not tested for statistical significance, for several reasons: First, there is no real baseline for Rakhine State, Myanmar, and the Nepal earthquake occurred 5 years ago so it is difficult to measure what changes in child marriage were due to the crisis impacts and what are due to secular trends. Second, there are no comparison populations in the study (non-earthquake-affected populations in Nepal, for example, or migrants to Kathmandu; or in the case of the Rohingya populations, those still living in Myanmar or those who migrated to countries other than Bangladesh). Third, while current marriage among 10–19-year-olds is important for understanding recent trends and impacts, it is not directly comparable to 20–24-year-olds married before age 15 or before age 18, as 10–17-year-olds are still at risk of child marriage, while some 18- and 19-year-olds may have married after turning 18.

### Qualitative analysis

Audio recordings of qualitative interviews were transcribed by native speakers, and the transcripts translated into English for analysis. Transcripts were coded and analysed using Dedoose, an online qualitative analytic software (SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC., Manhattan Beach, CA). Each transcript was coded by two analysts from the research team to enhance reliability and reduce variability. An initial codebook was based on the domains outlined in the semi-structured interview guides based on the key research questions. Further codes and subcodes were developed inductively. The coded transcripts were analysed using content analysis strategies, and comparing differences between strata, genders and types of respondents. Analysis of each code was discussed with the full analysis team in the context of overarching themes and findings.





Rohingya refugee Asmot Ara, 14, holds her two-month old baby Rubina, outside their shelter in the Balukhali makeshift settlement, Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh. Asmot fled from Myanmar after her village was attacked in 2016. While fleeing, she lost sight of her siblings and parents and doesn't know if they survived the attack. She came to Bangladesh with the help of fellow villagers and soon after was married to the son of one of her neighbours. Asmot Ara agreed to the marriage as she was alone in the refugee camp and the family promised to take care of her.

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Two girls play in Nepal – a much-needed moment of joy after two earthquakes in just over two weeks heavily damaged Sindhupalchowk District. Many homes, schools, medical facilities and small businesses were destroyed.

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# Chapter 2

## Background

### A. Prior WRC/JHU research on child marriage in humanitarian settings

The WRC and JHU have partnered since 2011 to build the evidence base on child marriage in humanitarian settings. To date, they have collaborated on nine studies in countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East (see Table 1).

In 2011, the WRC and JHU initiated research to study child marriage during conflict and displacement, and to generate recommendations to reduce the vulnerabilities of adolescents to child marriage in humanitarian contexts. This research sought to understand how traditional practices around age of marriage may change during conflict, and what factors contribute to those decisions. At the time the research was begun, anecdotal information suggested an increase in this practice, but very little had been done to systematically explore the intersecting individual and societal factors contributing to changes in customs and norms around marriage, including child marriage.

Between 2011 and 2015, WRC, JHU and collaborating partners conducted research on three conflict-affected populations: Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Somali refugees in Ethiopia and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kachin State, Myanmar.

The studies concluded that in order to reduce child marriage practices, programmers must ensure that the basic needs of families are met during the acute phase of an emergency, and ensure that programming is designed to promote the agency and value of adolescent girls.

In 2017, WRC and JHU joined with UNFPA in a four-country study of risk factors and outcomes related to child marriage among refugee and IDP populations in humanitarian contexts in Northern Iraq, Djibouti, Yemen and Egypt. Fieldwork on those studies was completed in 2019 and reports and journal articles will be forthcoming in 2020.

In 2018, WRC and JHU partnered with UNFPA APRO and UNICEF ROSA in a research project under the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, with the following objectives:

- to measure the prevalence of child marriage in humanitarian settings in the South Asia region – specifically one population displaced by conflict (Bangladesh) and one population displaced by a natural disaster (Nepal);
- to explore the drivers of child marriage within these same conflict-affected and climate-affected communities; and
- to develop recommendations for interventions and programmes.

**Table 1**  
Prior WRC/JHU research on child marriage in humanitarian settings

Country	Study population	Qualitative	Quantitative
Lebanon	Syrian refugees	✓	✓
Egypt	Syrian refugees	✓	✗
Ethiopia	Somali refugees	✓	✓
Djibouti	Somali refugees Yemeni refugees	✗	✓
Myanmar	Kachin IDPs	✗	✓
Northern Iraq	Iraqi IDPs Syrian refugees	✓	✓
Yemen	Yemeni IDPs	✓	✓



A child at her marriage ceremony in Bangladesh.

© Naymuzzaman Prince/UNFPA Bangladesh

## B. Summary of existing research

To inform the design and implementation of the research and to guide interpretation of results, available literature on child marriage in humanitarian settings was reviewed, including peer-reviewed literature, as well as grey literature sources (government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN reports, as well as print media and selected web-based resources). Due to the paucity of data on child marriage in humanitarian settings in South Asia in particular, data from humanitarian settings more broadly was also reviewed (see Methods section below for a more detailed description of the desk review that was conducted).

Humanitarian settings can encompass a wide range of contexts, including conflicts, displacements, natural disasters, climate-related disasters and epidemics. Studies suggest that rates of child marriage and teen pregnancy tend to be particularly high in these kinds of insecure environments (Tembon and Fort, 2008). Evidence from multiple settings shows that child marriage practices increase during humanitarian crises, with a disproportionate impact on girls (*Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises*, 2016; Dewi and Dartanto, 2019; Girls Not Brides and International Center for Research on Women, 2016). In addition, forced marriage, where one or both parties do not give free or full consent to the marriage, increases in frequency during times of instability (Girls Not Brides and International Center for Research on Women, 2016).

Of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage, the majority are among those considered most vulnerable to natural disasters and most frequently found on indexes of failed states (Lemmon, 2014). According to the WRC's report 'A Girl No More', 9 of the top 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage were considered fragile or conflict-affected states (Schlecht, 2016). Most of the 25 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are also at high risk for natural disasters (Atkinson and Bruce, 2015). Girls Not Brides notes that several countries with high vulnerability to climate change also have high child marriage rates (Girls Not Brides, 2018). In South Asia in particular, the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are not currently conflict affected, but have experienced recent humanitarian crises in the form of both natural disasters and effects of climate change, as well as conflict-related displacement from neighbouring countries.

Humanitarian crises do not cause child marriage to arise from nowhere, but evidence from a number of studies shows that they increase economic and physical insecurities, amplifying pre-existing drivers of child marriage (McAlpine et al., 2016; Schlecht et al., 2013; UN Women, 2013; Zabel, 2016). High rates of poverty and low access to education are frequently associated with child marriage and both are often worsened as a result of conflict and disaster (Schlecht et al., 2013). Humanitarian crises may also create new drivers such as displacement, which can lead to break-up of family networks and weakening of social institutions, as well as exposure to restrictive host government laws and policies, and the threat of sexual violence (Zabel, 2016).

## 1. Gender dynamics in humanitarian contexts

Humanitarian crises impact women, girls, men and boys differently, due to their differing status and roles in society, and can exacerbate pre-existing gender and power inequalities (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018; van Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005). Consequently, an understanding of the impacts of humanitarian crises on child marriage must be informed by incorporating a gender perspective. Humanitarian settings can also change gender dynamics and roles, which affects marriage decision-making. Because gender interacts with all of the other drivers for child marriage in humanitarian settings, it is discussed first as an overarching consideration, rather than separately as a discrete contributory factor.

As noted in a 2005 literature review on gender and humanitarian aid, “a hazard only turns into a disaster when vulnerability is high” (van Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005). Gender constructs almost invariably function in a way that increases women’s vulnerability, including reduced education and employment opportunities, less political representation and fewer civic freedoms. Women generally have fewer resources to fall back on in the case of emergency, further increasing their vulnerability in crises (van Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005). In addition, women are exposed to greater health dangers, traditional expectations and home-based duties limit mobility, and increased workloads during emergencies decrease time for working outside of the house (van Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005). A 2002 International Labour Association (ILO) report states that “women’s subordination is a root cause of their disaster vulnerability” (ILO Recovery and Reconstruction Department, 2002). This pre-existing vulnerability means that the impact of humanitarian crises on child marriage is also likely to be disproportionately felt by women and girls.

The global refugee population was about half female in 2018; of the 31.5 per cent of the refugee population for whom disaggregated data were available, 52 per cent were under 18 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). In many conflict zones, women and teenage girls are the sole providers and protectors for their families, men having either been killed or being away on combat duty (MacDonald, 2005; McAskie, 2000). Disproportionate sex ratios can contribute to competition for grooms, leading to pressure to marry earlier in order to secure a desirable husband, or to secure one before he leaves (MacDonald, 2005). However, these same factors can also contribute to marriage declines. For example, Eritrea saw a drop in the percentage of 15 to 19-year-old girls ever

married from 38 per cent to 31 per cent between 1995 and 2002 due to the mass mobilization of male fighters (Neal et al., 2016). Alternatively, a shortage of women can also drive child marriage, as single men often do not have the skills to cook or care for young children, responsibilities which are traditionally, and sometimes exclusively, assigned to women and girls (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018).

Crises can force people to take on new responsibilities, which may be at odds with their traditional gendered social roles (El-Masri, Harvey, and Garwood, 2013). The separation and loss of male household members leads to women acting as breadwinners and heads of household in higher proportions than in most non-crisis affected populations (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018; IASC Working Group, 2001). For example, one in four of all Syrian refugee families in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon are headed by women and, in Mali, more than half of displaced families are headed by women (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018). As a head of household or breadwinner, a woman may have increased decision-making authority in the home, including decisions about marriage. These abrupt changes in women’s roles increase women’s workloads but can also increase access to livelihoods and potentially change access to and control over resources in the household (McAskie, 2000; Oxfam GB, 2013).

Despite shifts in gender roles, among refugees, men generally retain control over household income, are the primary recipients of income-generating activities or cash transfers, and decide how cash is spent, although women are often the recipients of aid distributions (El-Masri, Harvey, and Garwood, 2013). In settings where only men are recognized as household heads, women’s difficulties accessing relief assistance have served as a driver for child marriage, to enable them to access aid and subsidies (MacDonald, 2005; International Center for Research on Women, 2013). This was the case in countries such as Indonesia following the 2004 tsunami, leading to the marriage of girls to “tsunami widowers”, so that they could access aid and receive state subsidies and benefits for marrying and starting a family (International Center for Research on Women, 2013).

Female headed households, whether made that way by the crisis or existing prior to the crisis, are more likely to suffer from food insecurity in emergency settings, as acquiring resources like food or water can be physically taxing and dangerous tasks and may not be feasible due to a lack of assistance for childcare (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018; van Dijkhorst

and Vonhof, 2005). Women in female headed households are also more susceptible to abuse and exploitation and more likely to be forced to engage in sexual transactions for money and access to services (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018). This vulnerability can serve as a driver for marriage generally, including child marriage. Being in the home without a man present has been cited as a contributing factor for the early marriage of daughters in multiple settings (Ahmed et al., 2019; Innovations for Poverty Action, 2018; Lemmon, 2014; Schlecht, 2016).

Gender-based violence during crises can be a driver for child marriage as families seek protection for daughters in particular. Gender-based violence is sometimes an explicit part of combatant strategy in conflict. Women can be forced into marriage with combatants or might marry them to gain access to food or money (van Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005). In addition, men in crisis situations often have great difficulty in dealing with their changed identities, such as the loss of their breadwinner role. Men may become humiliated and frustrated by the rapid changes in crisis settings which may manifest as an increase in gender-based violence (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018).

Gender also factors into decision-making around marriages intended to secure refugee status or citizenship. Some Syrian refugees ensured their sons were married before they left Syria due to a belief that a man is more likely to be able to enter some neighbouring countries if he is married or part of a family (*Too Young to Wed*, 2014). In Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, marriage of Syrian refugee girls and women to Jordanian husbands was viewed as a way of securing sponsorship that would allow a bride and her family to move out of the camp and live in the host community (*Too Young to Wed*, 2014).

Crisis can also provide opportunities to challenge discriminatory gender norms and unequal power relations, as when women assume prominent roles in peacebuilding, or men take on greater care responsibilities (Oxfam GB, 2013). Crises can have differing impacts on women's public participation, with the absence of men potentially creating space for women to take on leadership roles, and the demands on women's time potentially limiting their opportunities to participate (Byrne and Baden, 1995). Humanitarian interventions themselves can either address people's needs in ways that can confirm traditional gender roles or can promote gender equality (*The Basics on Gender in Emergencies*, 2006).

## 2. Drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings outside of South Asia

The majority of research done on child marriage in humanitarian settings has been conducted outside of South Asia. Due to the limited amount of research from South Asia, the findings from other regions may provide useful insights, though caution must be taken in applying their findings across settings. The most commonly discussed drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings from regions other than South Asia are presented below, in order of emphasis in the literature. Data from South Asian settings are presented in the subsequent section.

### (a) Economic insecurity

Humanitarian crises whether acute or prolonged, are generally associated with economic instability and/or food insecurity. Existing poverty is exacerbated, as markets are interrupted, families are displaced and assets are destroyed (Falb et al., 2016; Schlecht, 2016). Previously comfortably off families might move into lower income percentiles and adopt new coping mechanisms (Lemmon, 2014). War and displacement can lead to high rental rates, low wages and lack of work opportunities (Mourtada et al. 2017). Displacement can jeopardize economic security via harmful laws and policies in the host country, such as a prohibition on refugees working (Zabel, 2016). Climate change contributes to decreased production and food insecurity, from floods, droughts, and resulting crop destruction (Girls Not Brides, 2016a). A report on fragile states from the African Development Bank demonstrated that, in addition to its direct effects on the economy, conflict also interrupts poverty reduction efforts (Lemmon, 2014).

Parents may marry off children to bring the family some income in times of economic hardship, either via bride price or dowry (McAlpine et al., 2016). They may have lost livelihoods, lands or homes because of a crisis, and marrying their daughter may seem like the best or only option to alleviate economic hardship (Falb et al., 2016; Girls Not Brides, 2018). Among IDP and refugees in Uganda, the impact of poverty on bride price was one of the most significant influences reported to affect marriage practices (Schlecht et al., 2013). The inability of families to pay traditional bride prices contributed to the rise of early and informal relationships and marriages, as parents felt unable to protest due to their inability to provide the resources required for



formal marriages. In cultures practising dowry rather than bride price, sudden or sustained scarcity may induce poor families to marry their daughters early in order to pay a smaller dowry (UN Women, 2013).

Marrying a child that will go to live in another household reduces the economic burden of feeding and clothing that child (Van der Gaag, 2008). The inability of parents to provide financially for their children results in new motivating factors for individuals and families to consider relationships earlier than they otherwise would have (Schlecht et al., 2013). Climate change-related food shortages have been linked to higher rates of early marriage to the point that the term “famine brides” has been coined to describe the phenomenon (“Brides of the Sun”, n.d.; Girls Not Brides, 2016a; Deen, 2010; Spencer, 2015). The lack of employment and livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugees in Jordan is consistently reported as a leading factor in early marriage, as families seek to reduce their economic burden by reducing the number of mouths to feed in a household (*Too Young to Wed*, 2014).

In times of economic insecurity, parents also look to marriage as a means of securing a child's, particularly a daughter's, future by marrying them into a more food-secure household (Girls Not Brides, 2016a; van der Gaag, 2008). This was a common finding for internally displaced Ugandans, Congolese refugees in Uganda, Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Somali refugees in Ethiopia in a 2016 report (Schlecht, 2016). Among Syrian refugees in Jordan, many of the marriages of young women in refugee camps were deemed transactional by parents. Daughters were frequently married to older men as a way of securing financial sponsorship for them (*Too Young to Wed*, 2014). This motivation also leads to larger spousal age gaps, as families believe that older men can provide more financial stability and protection (Lemmon, 2014; Spencer, 2015).

### (b) Physical insecurity

Humanitarian settings increase the risk of sexual violence and assault (Lemmon, 2014; Loaiza and Wong, 2012). In a systematic review on the association between natural disasters and violence, Rezaeian (2013) concluded that natural disasters increase the rate of violence both in the short and long term. A 2015 report from the IFRC on gender-based violence in disasters also found an increase in sexual violence when people were displaced by disasters. Chew and Ramdas (2005) report that the chaos of natural disasters contributes to social breakdown that increases vulnerability to sexual abuse. Increased sexual violence rates are also

associated with armed conflict (McAlpine et al., 2016; Zabel, 2016). As the majority of this violence is directed towards women, this is a gender-specific driver.

Child marriage is seen by many families as a form of protection, particularly for daughters (Falb et al., 2016; International Center for Research on Women, 2013; Spencer, 2015; UNICEF, 2014). Amid disaster and conflict, child marriage becomes a more palatable option for parents and families looking to protect their girls from the violence of conflict, or verbal and physical harassment in relocation sites (Lemmon, 2014; MacDonald, 2005). Fear for girls' physical security and feelings of insecurity are often cited as motivating families to choose early marriage (Lemmon, 2014; Mourtada et al., 2017; Zabel, 2016).

Marriage is seen as providing several forms of protection. Marrying a daughter means that she is living with a man in the house, who can provide physical protection (Schlecht, 2016). In some settings, married women are considered at less risk of sexual harassment or assault, motivating families to marry daughters at younger ages in insecure environments (International Center for Research on Women, 2013; Lemmon, 2014; *Too Young to Wed*, 2014). Marriage also protects girls from pregnancy outside of marriage, which may result from sexual violence (International Center for Research on Women, 2013; McAlpine et al., 2016; Schlecht, 2016).

Though physical insecurity is generally identified as a driver of child marriage, in a review of data on the impact of armed conflict on adolescent transitions, Neal et al. (2016) identified several studies in which child marriage declined. A study in Mali found an increase in child marriage for girls below 15 years but not for those above 15. During the Lebanon civil war, the proportion of married young women aged between 15 and 19 years declined by more than half (13 per cent to 5 per cent) and, during the second intifada from 1996 to 2005, the percentage of women between the ages of 15 and 19 who were married declined from 30 per cent to 15 per cent in Gaza, and from 21 per cent to 12 per cent over the same period in the West Bank (Neal et al. 2016). Adverse material and economic conditions were commonly cited as key reasons for the decline, as young people delayed marriage due to difficulties finding employment and affordable housing (Neal et al. 2016). In addition, women were frequently confined to the home during periods of intense violence, reducing opportunities to meet potential partners (Neal et al. 2016).

### (c) Gender norms and adolescent sexuality

Parents of adolescents frequently articulate the need to protect family honour when discussing the policing and preservation of daughters' sexual purity. Violence against girls and the expression of adolescent sexuality are both rendered as an offence against the family. Protection of family honour is considered adequate justification for marrying daughters in many settings. In humanitarian settings, both the actual and perceived risk of sexual violence is higher, motivating parents to marry daughters at younger ages.

Concerns about honour are frequently reported as a key reason for marrying daughters at young ages in humanitarian settings (Mourtada et al., 2017; Neal et al., 2016; Schlecht, 2016; Spencer, 2015; *Too Young to Wed*, 2014). Research among internally displaced Ugandans, Congolese refugees in Uganda, Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Somali refugees in Ethiopia found that honour and protection play a critical role in child marriage decisions during conflict and instability (Schlecht, 2016). In a study of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the concept of "al Sutra", or protection of a woman's honour and reputation, was the most pronounced factor why parents marry off their daughters during conflict and displacement (Mourtada et al., 2017). Similarly, a study of Syrian refugees in Jordan also reported protection of a young woman's honour was a key driving force for increasing early marriage (*Too Young to Wed*, 2014).

Pregnancy outside of marriage is highly taboo in many cultures, whether or not it is the result of rape. Although sexuality outside of marriage by individuals of any gender can be an issue of family honour, there is often a higher burden placed on women and girls, thus there is a strong gender element to this driver. Rape, extramarital sex or an extramarital pregnancy could disgrace the family and prevent future marriage (McAlpine et al., 2016). Both a rape victim and an adolescent who has been caught in a rendezvous without a chaperone may find themselves forced to marry (Asnong et al., 2018; Falb et al., 2016; International Center for Research on Women, 2013). Marriage is seen as a means to safeguard family honour, as well as preserve fertility of girls within marriage (International Center for Research on Women, 2013; Lemmon, 2014; Spencer, 2015).

### (d) Human trafficking

A 2015 IFRC report on gender-based violence in disasters found that human trafficking seemed to increase in humanitarian settings because people are left poorer and are more vulnerable to exploitation after disasters. World Vision also

reported that humanitarian crises can break down existing social networks, rendering ineffective child protection mechanisms that help to prevent trafficking in more stable times (Zabel, 2016). Disaster often results in dislocation and separation of family members, which can render youth more vulnerable to trafficking (UN Women, 2013).

Although individuals of all genders are trafficked in crisis settings, women and girls are more often targeted in sex trafficking. A systematic review of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in settings affected by armed conflicts in Africa, Asia and the Middle East found that there are various forms of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in conflict-affected settings, including forced combatant sexual exploitation and sexual slavery (McAlpine et al., 2016). In Iraq and Syria, terrorist groups have abducted girls and women as "spoils of war" to be raped, sold and forced into marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2018). In 2010 and 2011, girls were abducted from school in Somalia and forced to marry fighters of the Islamist armed group al-Shabaab. Parents refusing to give their daughters away were threatened or killed (Girls Not Brides, 2018). In Nigeria, Islamist group Boko Haram abducted 270 schoolgirls in 2014 and subjected them to various forms of violence, including child marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2018).

### (e) Barriers to education

Decisions about child marriage and continued schooling are closely related and often made jointly (Bajracharya et al., 2019). Women and girls often have less access to education because of barriers reinforced by traditional gender roles which designate women as caregivers, limiting their personal opportunities and ambitions (IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, 2018). Humanitarian crises bring with them increased barriers to school attendance. Schools may close due to damage, instability, violence or lack of resources. Even if schools are open, conflict can make the journey to and from school more dangerous, so parents and families keep children home from school to ensure their security (Schlecht et al., 2013). These adolescents may end up in marriages earlier than they would have if they could have safely attended school because parents see marriage as an additional safeguard against violence (Lemmon, 2014; McAlpine et al., 2016).

Interruption of education was reported by all mothers and service providers in a study of Syrian refugees in Lebanon as one of the major challenges faced by adolescent girls resulting from the conflict. It is also a driver for parents to marry off their daughters at an earlier age (Mourtada et al., 2017). In Tajikistan, girls of school age who live in conflict-

affected regions were less likely to complete their studies than girls in more stable areas (Lemmon, 2014). In Uganda, limitations in access to education, long distances to school, and language barriers in school contributed to school dropout and early, informal marriages among refugees (Schlecht et al., 2013).

The changing climate is affecting girls' ability to continue school, as they must devote more time to collecting increasingly scarce water and firewood (Deen, 2010). As climate change accelerates deforestation and alters water supplies, women and girls must walk even further each day, leaving little time for school and, in some cases, increasing their vulnerability to physical or sexual violence (Girls Not Brides, 2016a).

#### (f) Weakening of social institutions

The onset of both natural disasters and armed conflict weakens social institutions (Lemmon, 2014). Humanitarian crises can lead to the breakdown of social security systems, collapse of social cohesion and failure of law enforcement (Rezaeian, 2013). Even in countries where legal frameworks to protect women and children exist, crises can cause justice systems to falter and lose legitimacy, resulting in a widened gap between formal laws, including those that set a minimum age of marriage, and customary

laws or practices followed at the community level (Lemmon, 2014).

Humanitarian crises also frequently take a heavy toll on community networks and family relationships (Schlecht, 2016; Schlecht et al., 2013). In a crisis, parenting responsibilities can become secondary to basic survival needs (Schlecht, 2016). The splintering of family networks caused by conflict and displacement has been found to diminish cross-generational communication regarding dating and marriage, such as traditional coming-of-age practices (Schlecht et al., 2013). A systematic review of the impact of armed conflict on adolescents found that refugee camps reportedly enhanced both the desire and opportunity for improved social cohesion, resulting in increased first marriage rates among the very young (Neal et al. 2016).

Humanitarian crises can also lead to changes in traditional marriage customs. Among Syrians in Lebanon, both children and parents expressed a view that conflict and displacement changed the customs around marriage, including lowering expectations for marriage, marriage ceremonies becoming less expensive and easier to arrange, and marriage no longer being a cause for celebration (DeJong et al., 2017; Schlecht et al., 2017). Both adult and adolescent Syrian refugees spoke of a decrease in the age perceived appropriate for



Ishrafi Khatun, 10, stands in front of her school, Borobari Government Primary School, in Bangladesh. It was submerged under water due to severe rainfall and flooding.

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marriage since coming to Lebanon (DeJong et al., 2017). Service providers, young women and parents also reported changes in some marriage practices, including a shorter engagement period, lower bride price, changes in cousin marriage practices and a younger age at marriage (Mourtada et al., 2017).

### (g) Self-initiation

Though there is less data, there may be an association between humanitarian settings and an increase in self-initiated early marriage. Humanitarian crises bring with them trauma and stress, which can drive adolescents to seek comfort (Schlecht et al., 2013). In some settings, comfort is found in self-initiated relationships, resulting in either unchaperoned trysts that result in pressure to marry, or self-initiated elopement. DeJong et al. (2017) found that self-initiated relationships were coping mechanisms to deal with the hardships faced by Syrian refugees. In a study of IDPs and Congolese refugees in Uganda, participants reported that poverty, splintering of family and lack of education (exacerbated by the conflict) affected the views, perceptions and behaviours of youth around relationships and marriage (Schlecht et al., 2013). In both populations, early relationships and informal marriages increased, supplanting formalized, socially sanctioned marriage, including courtship, family approval and bride price (Schlecht et al., 2013).

### (h) Other factors

The immediate impact of a natural disaster can impact child marriage, but recovery after disasters is a long-term process, and effects on marriage practices can likewise persist (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2015). A study by the IFRC found that the way poverty is (or is not) addressed in the post-disaster context impacts gender-based violence. Ongoing poverty and desperation may force the adoption of negative coping strategies, even if they had been initially resisted, such as child/early marriage or transactional sex, increasing vulnerability to traffickers and other criminals (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2015). An online survey of humanitarian workers inquiring about actions in recent emergency responses to address the risk of child marriage in the aftermath of disasters found that more than a third had not even considered any, and only 40 per cent had incorporated child marriage strategies as part of the response (Van der Gaag, 2013). Even prior to a disaster or disaster response, disaster mitigation significantly reduces the probability of child marriage because disaster mitigation and preparedness will lessen the devastating shocks of

the disasters, reducing the need to then enter into child marriage (Dewi and Dartanto, 2019).

Only a small proportion of the qualitative data available on child marriage in humanitarian settings includes the perspectives of children themselves on prospective marriage as children. CARE has reported that girls' limited perceptions of future opportunities beyond marriage, particularly in uncertain humanitarian settings, factors into their acceptance of early marriage (Boender, 2018). During the 2014–2016 Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa, teenage girls reported that the prolonged closing of schools and sense of diminishing future opportunities led them to want to go ahead and start their own families (Save the Children, 2015). Girls in other settings report feeling pressure to marry young. Older unmarried girls among the Syrian refugees in Jordan reported feeling rejected by their families, for being an added burden and a source of worry regarding the protection of their honour (Spencer, 2015). Adolescent girls in Syria reported feeling increased pressure to marry early due to the conflict and humanitarian crisis (UNFPA et al., 2017). Syrian refugee girls in Lebanon reported that getting engaged removed pressure from potential suitors and made them feel safer (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2015). Young refugee girls in Jordan felt that marrying young was part of their culture, and the majority did not feel that there were any negative consequences of child marriage (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2015). A 2017 report on children's perspectives and engagement in humanitarian emergencies found that "children's overwhelming priority was safety" (World Humanitarian Summit Advisory Group on Children, 2017). Following concerns about safety and security, they were also troubled by the lack of certainty and fear for the future. Following the conflict in Sierra Leone, children prioritized education highest overall, as well as safety and protection concerns and poverty (World Humanitarian Summit Advisory Group on Children, 2017). Girls were significantly more concerned, twice as much as boys, about sexual violence and exploitation, and "early or forced marriage" and "unwanted/teen pregnancy" (World Humanitarian Summit Advisory Group on Children, 2017). A study in northern Uganda found that forced early marriage was among the top concerns that made children feel unsafe (World Humanitarian Summit Advisory Group on Children, 2017). A study on very young adolescents in humanitarian settings found that early marriage was named as a particular concern by girls in Ethiopia and Lebanon (WRC et al., 2014).



### 3. Drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings within South Asia

The literature on child marriage in humanitarian settings in South Asia is notably slimmer, though it encompasses several countries, including Bangladesh and Nepal, the focal countries of this study. The most commonly discussed drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings, in conflict settings and/or in natural disasters, are presented below.

#### (a) Economic insecurity

Economic insecurity, exacerbated by humanitarian crises, was the most frequently cited driver of child marriage in humanitarian settings in South Asia. This was prominently the case in Bangladesh, where an increasing number of disaster events are caused by glaciers melting in the Himalayas, increased monsoon precipitation and intensity of cyclones (Huq, 2002). Shifts in temperature and weather patterns resulting from climate change have destabilized agricultural production and livelihoods in rural Bangladesh, leading to a number of adaptation strategies, including an increase in child marriage (Alston et al., 2014). In contexts where rural agriculture and livelihoods fail, climate change is also driving increased migration to cities, where limited job availability and low wages contribute to economic pressure on families, further fueling child marriage (Sundaram, 2017). Climate refugees are often forced to live in impoverished conditions, such as in the slums around Dhaka, exacerbating protection- and economic-oriented drivers for child marriage.

A 3-year research study on the gendered impacts of climate change in Bangladesh found that changes in climate are creating significant economic hardships. This has led to dowry being viewed by the families of young men as a form of capital accumulation (Alston et al., 2014). For the families of girls, dowry has become a significant burden, which increases with the age of the girl. Forty-five per cent of respondents reported that girls were now being forced into child marriages as a direct result of climate events and subsequent poverty (Alston et al., 2014). Child marriages of girls appear to be short-term solutions designed to ease both the food security and future financial pressures on families.

Human Rights Watch reports that despite frequent natural disasters in Bangladesh, the government has an inadequate safety net for families affected by them, compounding the poverty that drives child marriage (Barr, 2015). Often, those affected by a disaster were already living in extreme poverty. A natural disaster can push a family from barely

managing to a position where child marriage becomes part of a survival strategy (Barr, 2015). The fear of river erosion, in particular, was cited as directly contributing to decisions by families to marry their girls (Barr, 2015). Families think that if their house is swept away it will take time and money to rebuild and for them to become established enough to find husbands for their daughters; meanwhile the girl is getting older and the dowry is going up (Barr, 2015). Having a house gives a family importance in the eyes of prospective in-laws, but losing it means less status for the girl and less bargaining power in arranging a marriage (Barr, 2015).

This is even more true for women-headed households. A study of single mothers rearing children in Bangladesh showed that women-headed households were already more likely to reside in less desirable areas of the riverplain, and that flooding and erosion forced them from bad to worse land and eventually into involuntary low-wage work (Weist, 1998). Their higher baseline vulnerability puts them at increased risk of economic insecurity, which can drive child marriage. A 2019 study exploring the relationship between extreme weather events, sexual violence and early marriage in two districts in Bangladesh that were vulnerable to extreme weather events found that early marriage of daughters is a coping strategy, minimizing household expenses to facilitate payment of damage-related expenses (Ahmed et al., 2019).

Economic insecurity was also named as a key driver for child marriage among Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh. Economic difficulties were reported to force adolescents into adult roles, including marriage, sooner (Ripoll, 2017). Parents reported that they have no incentive to delay their daughter's marriage since she cannot make any financial contribution to household income and only represents a burden (Mamun et al., 2018). Families marrying away a daughter can then sell any excess relief goods for cash (Mamun et al., 2018). As in other settings, the younger the girl, the lower the amount of dowry demanded by the groom's family (Mamun et al., 2018).

Following the 2004 tsunami, families in Sri Lanka married off young daughters, often to tsunami widowers, primarily so that they could receive state subsidies and benefits for marrying and starting a family (International Center for Research on Women, 2013). This was notable because early marriage is not commonly practised in Sri Lanka, illustrating the significance of economic insecurity as a driver. In India, the Government of Tamil Nadu offered wedding subsidies to tsunami-affected families who had lost assets, livelihood and cash during the tsunami, leading to a spate of marriages among

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adolescent girls in the weeks that followed (Murthy and Sagayam, 2006). Plan International reported that the economic impact of the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal meant that many families felt they could not afford to keep their daughters and saw marriage as a viable option for girls (Tong, 2015).

The ongoing drought in Afghanistan provides an additional example of disaster-precipitated economic insecurity driving child marriage. World Vision reports that the current drought and resulting food insecurity in Afghanistan is leading families to marry daughters for revenue in the form of bride price (Ghafary, 2018). In a rapid assessment in Badghis, Afghanistan, over 50 per cent of surveyed households cited child marriage as a coping strategy for food insecurity and reduced family income (Ghafary, 2018). Many families were already in debt, hoping to pay it off with crops that they were unable to harvest due to the drought (Parker, 2018). UNICEF reported that the loss of assets and livestock, resulting in even heavier family debts, were the primary factors forcing some families to decide between subjecting the entire family to starvation or giving up one or more children into marriage and/or servitude to creditors (Parker, 2018). As a consequence, both the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF have reported increases in child marriage (Parker, 2018; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2018).

### (b) Physical insecurity

Physical insecurity was the second most frequently cited driver for child marriage, particular in relation to conflict-affected settings, but also in contexts of displacement. As mentioned above, physical insecurity is largely a driver for the child marriage of girls, particularly with regards to sexual violence, but conflict can drive marriage for boys as well, in some settings.

A 2012 study employing a microlevel event-centred approach to study the influence of armed conflict on demographic behaviours in Chitwan Valley, Nepal, found that the threat of increased harm resulted in a higher likelihood of young people marrying (Williams et al., 2012). In particular, in the month following a major gun battle, respondents had about a 29 per cent higher probability of marrying (Williams et al., 2012). This was supported by the finding that ceasefires decreased the likelihood of marriage by more than 50 per cent (Williams et al., 2012). Political events also had a positive and significant effect on marriage; in the month after a destabilizing political event, marriages increased by about 28 per cent (Williams et al., 2012). The study concluded that because unmarried young people occupied an unstable social position and were the

most vulnerable target of conscription and violence, they responded to both instability and the threat of harm by marrying (Williams et al., 2012). In contrast, ceasefires brought stability and a cessation of violence, so people might not have felt as desperate to marry (Williams et al., 2012).

In Afghanistan, Women for Afghan Women reported increases in child marriage when insecurity increased. Fear of rape and kidnappings drove parents to marry daughters, as they believed the daughters would be more safe in their husband's house (Lemmon, 2014).

A Bangladesh study found that early marriage of daughters is a coping strategy following severe weather events, to protect daughters from sexual violence, especially in temporary shelters, which would harm both the family's and daughter's reputation and prevent future marriage (Ahmed et al., 2019). Respondents in recent qualitative research with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh also indicated that a lack of perceived security for women in camps was a driver for child marriage (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2018). Concerns about the sexual security of young girls and women are exacerbated by conditions of violence and insecurity in the camps (Ainul et al., 2018). Parents report concerns about poorly constructed shelters and the distance girls have to travel to use the toilet (Mamun et al., 2018). Respondents believed that marriage would afford their daughters greater protection, both physically and because men are less likely to harass a married woman (Mamun et al., 2018).

### (c) Gender norms and adolescent sexuality

Concerns about girls' sexual purity are expressed as a matter of honour in South Asia. In conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka, families worried about daughters' vulnerability. They perceived threats to their daughters' honour following the breakdown of protective social networks due to conflict and displacement, placing women at higher risk of sexual and physical violence (Kottegoda et al., 2008). A study of 560 individuals in conflict-affected districts found that 31 per cent of the sample married between the ages of 15 and 18 years, whereas the national average age at marriage for women was 25 years (Kottegoda et al., 2008). Given the lack of privacy in the camps, Rohingya refugee parents in Bangladesh fear "love-relationships" more than they did in Myanmar (Mamun et al., 2018). Rohingya parents' fears for their daughters' sexual purity and involvement before marriage in an illicit relationship, with related implications in terms of reduced marriageability, act as motivations for arranging child marriages for their girls (Ainul et al., 2018).



A girl in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

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### (d) Human trafficking

In Sri Lanka, children were reportedly forced into marriages to avoid being abducted and/or recruited by groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Girls Not Brides, 2018; Lemmon, 2014). Among conflict-affected populations in Nepal, abductions by Maoists of school-aged adolescents increased the probability of female marriage before age 15 (Valente, 2011). CARE reported that the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal led to a rise in child marriages and trafficking, as criminals targeted orphaned children, and some families tried to protect their daughters through marriage (Girls Not Brides, n.d.).

### (e) Barriers to education

In Bangladesh, where child marriage rates increased in the wake of Cyclone Sidr in 2007, the government found that it was common for those adolescent girls who had lost an academic year of school due to the cyclone's impact to be forced into marriages (Lemmon, 2014). A 2018 study in a flood-prone area of Bangladesh showed that women and men with few years of schooling got married at an earlier age compared to adolescents in other areas (Atiqul Haq and Ahmed, 2018). Though schools in Nepal officially reopened on 31 May 2015, following the April earthquakes, thousands of classrooms were destroyed and in need of repair, preventing return for hundreds of thousands of children (Tong, 2015). A 2019 study, however, found that the timing of school dropout and marriage are not independent decisions that occur sequentially, but are rather closely related and made jointly (Population Council for UNICEF ROSA, 2019). The study identified a set of shared underlying factors, including poverty, cultural and gender norms, and girls' ability to return to schooling, which fed into the joint decision-making process. This study was not conducted in a humanitarian setting, and further work is required to understand how humanitarian crises interact with the other factors underlying school and marriage decisions.

### (f) Weakening of social institutions

Weakening of social institutions did not appear prominently in the South Asia literature as a contributory factor to child marriage in humanitarian settings. The only direct reference to the weakening of social institutions was a study of a conflict-affected area of Sri Lanka, where the families surveyed reported that the breakdown of protective social networks due to conflict and displacement cause them to worry about daughters' vulnerability and honour (Kottogoda et al., 2008).

A driver frequently reported by Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is the absence of strict marriage law enforcement, which was present in Rakhine State, including enforcement of the age of marriage (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2018). The lack of government enforcement, the absence of rules and the informality of marriage practices in the camps made it easier to marry a daughter at a preferred younger age than it was in Rakhine State (Ainul et al., 2018; Mamun et al., 2018).

### (g) Self-initiation

Though self-initiated child marriage was mentioned anecdotally in relation to the Nepal earthquakes, the only data comes from a study by the Central Department of Population Studies conducted in late 2015, which found that about 23 per cent of those who married after the earthquake disaster were under the age of 18 years (Central Department of Population Studies, 2016). The reasons this group reported for marrying below 18 years were that it was their own wish (81.4 per cent) and tradition (18.6 per cent) (Central Department of Population Studies, 2016).

### (h) Severity of impact

Two studies in Nepal suggest that the severity of impact of a humanitarian crisis may affect marriage. Valente (2011) used regression techniques to show that exposure to increased intensity of conflict in Nepal was associated with an increased probability of marriage before 15 years of age. Following the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, a study found that crisis-hit districts had the highest rate of marriage in the months following the earthquake (4.8 per cent), followed by severely hit districts (2.9 per cent), compared with 1.2 per cent in the less affected Kathmandu Valley, though this data was not disaggregated by age (Central Department of Population Studies, 2016).

## C. Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

### 1. Displacement of the Rohingya

The Rohingya are one of the few Muslim ethnic minorities in Myanmar, living predominantly in northern Rakhine State, near the Bangladeshi border. Northern Rakhine State comprises three townships: Buthidaung and Maungdaw in the far north of Rakhine directly abutting Bangladesh (see Map 1, in green) and Rathedaung (in pink) just next to them. The vast majority of Rakhine Muslims live in these three townships.

**Map 1**  
Rakhine State, Myanmar



The Rohingya have long been subject to violence from the Buddhist Burman majority, including government-sponsored violence. In 1978, Operation Nagamin sent government soldiers to Rakhine supposedly to identify illegal immigrants. The soldiers' widespread use of rape and murder in Rohingya communities sent 200,000 people fleeing to Bangladesh. Though most returned, nearly 300,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in the early 1990s fleeing rape, torture, summary killings, confiscation and destruction of homes and property, destruction of mosques and religious persecution. In 2012, violent riots broke out following the murder of a Buddhist Rakhine woman. Homes were burned, and 100,000 people were displaced, including refugees fleeing to Bangladesh and to IDP camps across Rakhine State. Anti-Rohingya propaganda and groups spread across the country.

In October 2016, the army and police in Myanmar began a crackdown against Rohingya in Rakhine

State in response to a series of attacks on several border police posts in Maungdaw. The government response targeted entire villages, including arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial killings, gang rapes, brutalities against civilians and looting. Hundreds of Rohingya had been killed by December 2016. Over 90,000 Rohingya were displaced because of the violence, including around 65,000 who fled to Bangladesh between October and January. Smaller incidents of violence continued throughout the following year.

In August 2017, following years of persecution and violence, the Myanmar military and border guard police engaged in a widespread and systematic attack against Rohingya communities. On 25 August, a radical group called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (or ARSA) allegedly attacked police posts in northern Rakhine State, killing 12 Myanmar security personnel. That same day, Myanmar military forces and border guard police initiated a widespread response across northern Rakhine State. Satellite imagery and

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reports from refugees suggest a coordinated, widespread military campaign followed throughout Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships, including burning of villages, destruction of property and violence against civilians including sexual violence against women and girls. Many Rohingya fled their homes at the front of the violence. Reports of troops and assets being brought into the region prior to 25 August suggested that the government actions were long planned and not the (disproportionate) response they claimed it to be.

The extreme violence resulted in the death of approximately 7,800 Rohingya people and the

mass exodus of survivors (Parmar et al., 2019; *Rohingya Emergency*, 2018). Around 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh in a relatively short time, joining 300,000 refugees already living there, many without official refugee status. The established refugee camps at Kutupalong and Nayapara, in Cox's Bazar District just inside Bangladesh, swelled and more than 20 new camps were spontaneously formed. Most grew in a cluster around the original Kutupalong camp in Ukhiya District, forming the Kutupalong mega-camp, the largest refugee consolidation in the world (*IOM Bangladesh Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM)*, 2019). A map of the camps is presented below in Map 2.

## Map 2 Rohingya refugee camps and spontaneous relocation sites in Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh



Source: Azad et al. (2019)



## 2. Child marriage in Rakhine State

Data from the Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of 2015/16 indicated that nationally, 16 per cent of girls in Myanmar are married before the age of 18 and 1.9 per cent are married before the age of 15 (Table 2; Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports and ICF, 2017). In terms of median age at marriage, there are no trendlines to compare over time, but it is worth noting that, among the cohorts of women, aged 45–49 to 25–29 (data are not presented for women 10–24 and 15–19), the median age at first marriage ranges from 24.3 to 24.6, suggesting that it has not varied much over the past few decades. Child marriage prevalence was not given for Rakhine State specifically, but median age of marriage was reported as 20.3 years for women and 23.7 years for men. The last Myanmar MICS, conducted from 2009 to 2010, found that nationally 7.4 per cent of young women aged 15–19 are currently married, 6.5 per cent in Rakhine State (*Myanmar Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2009–2010 Final Report*, 2011). Girls Not Brides

(2017) reports that 16 per cent of girls in Myanmar are married by the age of 18, with a lower median age in Rakhine State. A 2017 Gallup Poll found that 7 per cent of boys and girls combined were married by 18, 4 per cent of boys and 10 per cent of girls (Diego-Rosell and Larsen, 2017).

Ongoing ethnic conflict – particularly in Shan, Rakhine and Kachin States – has resulted in significant internal and external displacement and increased the risk of child marriage. A desk review by World Vision International of child, early and forced marriage in Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia suggests that migration, both internal and external, within and outside Myanmar, is a risk factor for child marriage. The study cites UNICEF that “the protracted situation of forced displacement in Rakhine and Kachin/Northern Shan States has placed boys and girls at disproportionate risk of violence, neglect and abuse, including sexual exploitation, trafficking and early marriage. Adolescents represent a significant proportion of the displaced populations” (UNICEF, 2019).

**Table 2**  
Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2015/16

DHS Year	2016
<b>Per cent of women 20–24 who were married by:</b>	
15	1.9
18	16.0
<b>Median age at first marriage, according to current age</b>	
15–19	a
20–24	a
25–29	24.6
30–34	24.7
35–39	24.6
40–44	a
45–49	24.3
<b>Per cent who have begun childbearing, age 15–19, all women</b>	
	6.5

Note: a Omitted because less than 50 per cent of the women or men began living with their spouse or partner for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group.

Source: Myanmar Ministry of Health and ICF, 2017

### 3. Child marriage among Rohingya refugees

Anecdotal evidence and several recent qualitative studies have found increases in child marriage among the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. In October 2017, UN Women published a gender brief on the Rohingya refugee crisis response in Bangladesh (*Gender Brief on the Rohingya Refugee Crisis Response in Bangladesh*, 2017). The brief reported anecdotal evidence that child marriage is commonly practised among Rohingya people. It also reported that women and adolescent girls between the ages of 13 and 20 years newly arriving from Myanmar typically had two to four children each, and that some of the 13- to 20-year-olds were pregnant when they arrived. The October 2017 report from Social Science in Humanitarian Action, funded by UNICEF, reported evidence that child, early, and forced marriage was commonplace among the Rohingya population and that both child marriage and polygamy had been increasing among Rohingya populations due to the scarcity of men and to economic difficulties, which meant girls were forced into adult roles sooner (Ripoll, 2017).

Oxfam, Action Against Hunger and Save the Children published a gender analysis of the Rohingya response in August 2018, which found that child marriage was highly prevalent in both the Rohingya camps and local communities, with an increase in polygamy seen in the Rohingya community (*Rohingya Refugee Response Gender*

*Analysis: Recognizing and Responding to Gender Inequalities*, 2018). The report documented cases of child marriage and forced marriage involving girls as young as 15 years, which was attributable to poverty and displacement.

The Population Council conducted a qualitative research study on marriage and the sexual and reproductive health of Rohingya adolescents in 2018, in which respondents reported a strong preference for child marriages for girls but not for boys, which was attributed to religious teachings (Ainul et al., 2018). Girls were considered eligible for marriage as soon as they reached puberty and boys only after they started earning. The study found that child marriages are on the rise, facilitated by the informality of marriage practices and absence of rules in camps, in sharp contrast to the severe restrictions and fees imposed in Myanmar. One quantitative study by Innovations for Poverty Action and UNICEF (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2018) found that 62 per cent of female respondents in the camps and 59 per cent in the host community were married by age 18, and almost 19 per cent of female respondents in the camps and 24 per cent in the host community reported being married by the age of 15. Their qualitative findings indicated an increase in the rate of child marriage in the camps, due in part to the easing of the strict prohibition of child marriage, which had been strictly enforced in Myanmar, as well as economic distress and a lack of perceived security for women in the camp.



Rohingya refugees rest on the shore after crossing the Naf River to Bangladesh on makeshift rafts made from logs, bamboo poles and empty jerrycans.

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## 4. Child marriage in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, child marriage remains a common practice though there is evidence of declining trends from 1994 to 2014 (Dietrich et al., 2018). The country had the highest prevalence of child marriage in the region with 19.3 per cent of 20–24-year-old women married by age 15 and 59 per cent married by age 18, according to the 2017/18 DHS (NIPORT and ICF, 2019). In that same survey, the median age of marriage for 45–49- and 40–44-year-olds was 15.3, rising to 17.2 among 20–24-year-olds. While there are no data published for 15–19-year-olds, it would be reasonable to assume that the median age would be somewhere over 17. That said, marriage of girls 16–17 increased by 35 per cent from 1991 to 2007 in Bangladesh, suggesting that, while there are overall declines in child marriage, there may be some concentration of child marriage among older teens. Along with declines in child marriage in Bangladesh, the percentage of 15–19-year-olds bearing children declined from 30.8 per cent in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2017 (Raj et al., 2012).

The 2019 MICS found that 15.5 per cent of women aged 20–24 were first married before age 15, and 51.4 per cent prior to age 18 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Bangladesh, 2019). The percentage of women aged 15–19 who were currently married was 32.9 per cent. In Chittagong Division, which includes Cox’s Bazar District, where the Rohingya camps are located, the numbers were slightly lower. Of women aged 20–24, 10.6 per cent were first married before age 15, and 44.1 per cent prior to age 18. Of women aged 15–19, 27.5 per cent were currently married.

Analysing DHS 2011 data, Islam et al. (2016) examined regional determinants of child marriage across different sociodemographic characteristics at the division level in Bangladesh. Building on other research, Islam and colleagues hypothesized that regional variations in child marriage could be attributed to a variety of factors (see Figure 1):

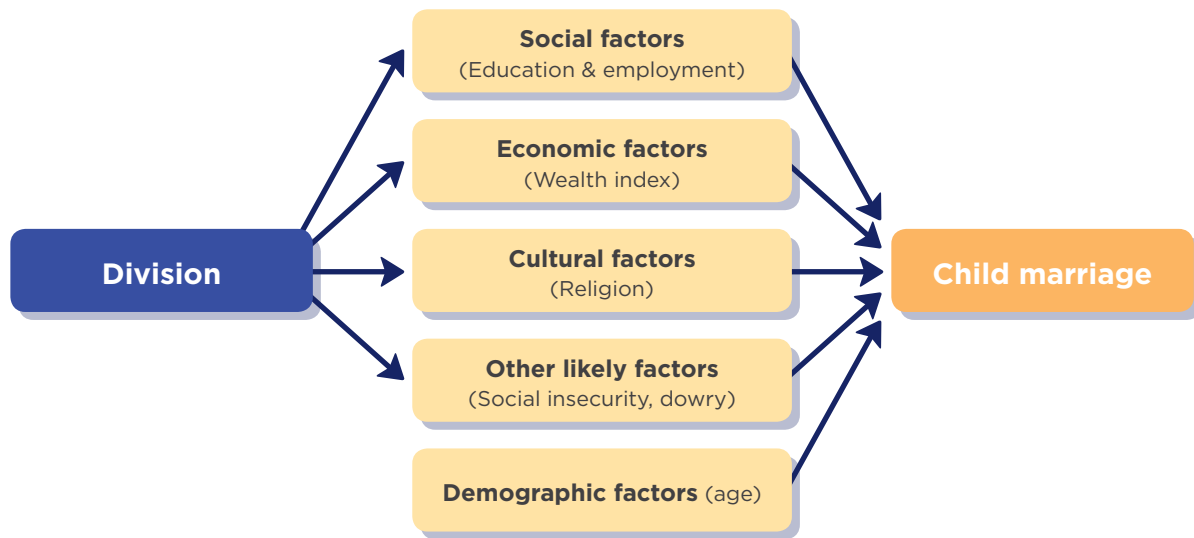
- Social factors, including the education level of young women and the education level of their fathers. Research conducted by International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) and Plan International (2013) found that girl’s education had a strong negative association with child marriage: 86 per cent of women with no education were married before 18 years of age, compared with 26 per cent of the women who had completed secondary or higher education. Kamal et al. (2014) reviewed Bangladesh DHS data from 1993 to 2011 and concluded that the odds of marrying girls under 18 were 93 per cent

lower for more highly educated men than men with no education. Raj et al. (2014) found that in Bangladesh, primary education was not protective against child marriage, while secondary education was protective. In Nepal primary education was only protective against marriages of girls under 14, while secondary education was protective against child marriage. Field and Ambrus (2008) showed that a 1-year delay in marriage in Bangladesh was associated with a 0.22 year increase of schooling, a 5.6 per cent increase in literacy and an increase in use of preventive health services.

- Economic factors, such as poverty rates and wealth indexes, are correlated with child marriage rates. Islam et al. (2016) concluded that “poverty is one of the dominant causes of child marriage. In many cases, parents cannot afford educational expenses for their children, which motivates them to arrange earlier marriage for their daughters. In addition, economic pressures related to dowry payments (the younger the bride, the lower the dowry) also work as a contributing factor to child marriage (Plan International, 2013; ICDDR,B and Plan International, 2013).” Employment rates among young women could also be a factor. Kamal et al. (2014) and ICDDR,B and Plan International (2013) both found that the rate of child marriage was 57 per cent among employed girls and 70 per cent among unemployed girls. Dietrich et al. (2018) found that in Bangladesh, wealthier households and those with a larger number of working members were less likely to have married children in the household.
- Cultural factors, including gender norms and religion, also play a determining role. “Traditional gender norms such as the social and cultural values placed on morality, female virginity, and family honour are also influential as child marriage is often perceived as a means of controlling female sexual behaviour and untoward attention towards young females by men” (ICDDR,B and Plan International, 2013). Additionally, religious and/or faith affiliation can significantly influence child marriage practices. Muslims in Bangladesh, for example, are more likely to practice child marriage than those of other religions (Dietrich et al., 2018; Kamal et al., 2014).
- Other likely factors including social insecurity, dowry, “threats and child trafficking” and other factors could also contribute to regional variation in child marriage across divisions in Bangladesh (Islam et al., 2016).



**Figure 1**  
Conceptual framework for examining regional variation in child marriage in Bangladesh



Islam et al. (2016) also found that the 2011 Bangladesh DHS confirmed that respondent's education (respondents were ever-married women aged 12–49 years), employment status, husband's education and wealth index were all inversely associated with the prevalence of child marriage. A study by HDRC (2011) also found that education increased girls' age at marriage, by increasing their confidence and their ability to make decisions about marriage and childbearing. Education of both women and girls has the effect of increasing age at marriage for girls. The same study also observed that a higher incidence of civil conflict and lower levels of development in the areas of education, employment and health care were associated with higher rates of child marriage.

Another analysis of the 2011 Bangladesh DHS by Hossain, Mahumud and Saw (2016) found that the rates of those marrying at 13–17 years were higher in rural areas (76.2 per cent) compared with urban areas (66.3 per cent). Interestingly, the rates of girls marrying at 12 or younger were actually slightly lower in rural areas (5.4 per cent) than in urban areas (5.6 per cent). Uneducated women were more likely to be married early than those with secondary and higher education. Child marriage was especially pronounced among women with uneducated husbands, among Muslims and among those from poor economic backgrounds.

Plan International (2013) reported that the causes of child marriage include poverty, low education, lack of security both at home and in the public space, dowry, traditional norms and related social pressure, and parents' anxiety about protecting their daughter's chastity until marriage. Plan International

(2013) found that poor health due to early pregnancy, an inability to manage a relationship in the marital home and stopping education were the most common outcomes of child marriage in Bangladesh. Consistent with these findings, the Center for Reproductive Rights (2010) revealed that higher rates of unwanted pregnancy, complications associated with early pregnancy, discrimination and violence, little or no ability to leave abusive partners and an inability to secure legal and social support were major consequences of child marriage. Field (2004) reported similar findings and argued that "these individual outcomes suggest a number of larger social consequences of early marriage, including higher population growth, greater spread of disease and a higher incidence of orphans."

Yount et al. (2016) conducted a study of 77 villages in rural Bangladesh to examine associations between child marriage and IPV. They found 69.9 per cent of 20–24-year-old women had married before 18, and 44.5 per cent of 15–19-year-olds surveyed reported incidents of physical IPV. In their main-effects models, marrying at age 18 or later protected against physical IPV and child marriage before 15 was a risk factor for physical IPV. The level of physical IPV observed in Yount et al.'s study cohort is similar to that of ever-married women (49.6 per cent) found in the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Report on Violence Against Women Survey (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2016). However, data on the incidence of physical IPV experienced by ever-married women in the past 12 months show that higher rates of physical IPV are observed in younger cohorts, with the highest among the 20–24-year-old age group (28.1 per cent), followed by the 25–29-year-

old age group (24.5 per cent), 15–19-year-old age group (23.8 per cent), 30–34-year-old age group (23.4 per cent), 35–39-year-old age group (20.8 per cent), 50–54-year-old age group (17.0 per cent), 40–44-year-old age group (16.5 per cent), 45–49-year-old age group (15.5 per cent), 55–59-year-old age group (13.7 per cent) and the 60+-year-old age group (13.2 per cent), suggesting that there is a correlation between age and incidence of physical IPV (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

## D. Earthquake-affected communities in Nepal

### 1. The 2015 earthquakes

At midday on 25 April 2015, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake shook Nepal. The earthquake's epicentre was located in Gorkha, northwest of Kathmandu. An hour later, the following day and again a couple of weeks later, major aftershocks followed with magnitudes from 6.6–7.3. The earthquakes shook apart homes and triggered landslides that devastated rural villages in addition to damaging some of the most densely populated parts of

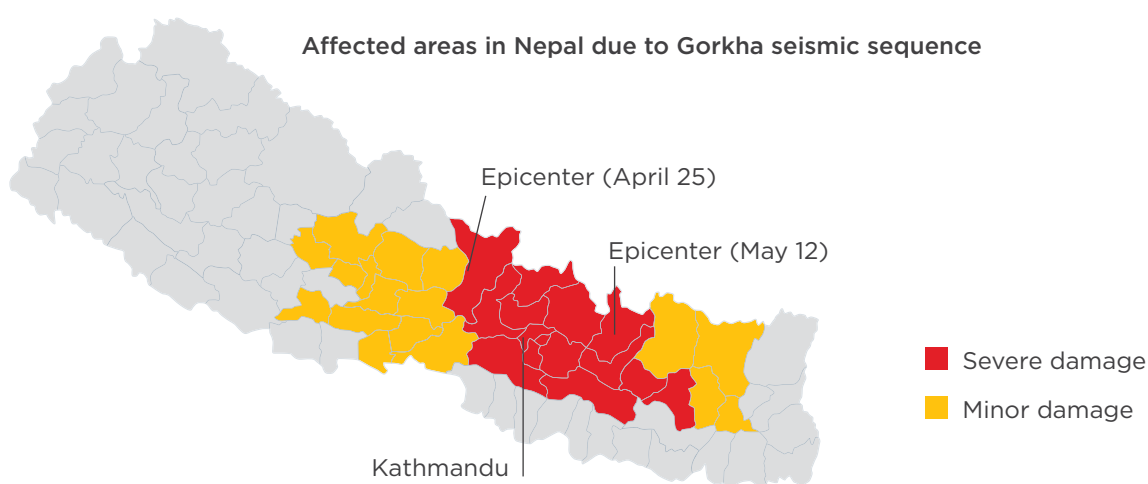
Kathmandu. The earthquakes killed nearly 9,000 people, injuring 22,000, and damaging or destroying 800,000 homes (Taylor, 2016). Over 8 million people were affected, including 2.8 million that were displaced for lengths of time varying from a few weeks to months or even years (USAID, 2015).

Situated adjacent to the Himalayas, much of Nepal is in a seismically active region, but large earthquakes are infrequent. The last significant earthquake before 2015 was in 1988. Most people were unprepared for a disaster of this scale, and many structures were not constructed to withstand a quake. Central Nepal was most heavily affected. Infrastructure damage was widespread, including 1,200 health clinics and 8,000 schools.

Thirty-one out of the 75 districts of Nepal were affected. Districts north of Kathmandu and lying between the epicentres of the first and second earthquake, on 12 May 2015, were the most severely affected (Chaulagain et al., 2018). An estimated 5.4 million people live in the 14 districts categorized by the Government of Nepal as the most affected. The most affected districts are located in the Central and Western mountains and hills, including Kathmandu Valley, largely in Province 3 (see Map 3 and Table 3; Central Department of Population Studies, 2016).

### Map 3

#### Districts most affected by the earthquakes in Nepal



Source: Chaulagain et al. (2018)

**Table 3**  
Summary of casualties and damage due to the Gorkha earthquake

District	Fatalities		Injuries	Number of Residential Buildings		Number of Health Fatalities		Number of Damaged School Buildings	Number of Government Buildings	
	Male	Female		Collapsed	Partially Damaged	Collapsed	Partially Damaged		Collapsed	Partially Damaged
Sindhupalchowk	1,497	1,943	1,753	63,885	2,751	74	23	546 (98%)	710	37
Kathmandu	622	600	7,952	43,502	56,024	11	52	187 (63%)	85	277
Lalitpur	69	108	3,051	17,444	8,064	19	20	149 (75%)	217	198
Bhaktapur	119	214	2,101	18,900	9,054	6	20	137 (100%)	5	51
Gorkha	215	233	952	59,527	13,428	40	39	495 (100%)	227	36
Sindhuli	5	10	230	18,197	10,028	15	44	451 (81%)	92	231
Rasuwa	312	344	771	11,368	267	21	6	98 (100%)	8	4
Okhaldhunga	10	10	61	10,031	3,107	15	15	228 (69%)	18	38
Makwanpur	16	17	229	20,035	17,383	39	20	361 (68%)	46	177
Kavre	129	189	1,179	49,933	23,714	55	76	548 (92%)	48	31
Dhading	340	393	1,218	81,313	3,092	69	37	587 (97%)	93	58
Nuwakot	461	638	1,050	75,562	4,200	55	44	485 (100%)	15	14
Dolakha	84	85	662	48,880	3,120	52	31	363 (92%)	517	-
Ramechhap	17	23	134	26,743	13,173	33	33	151 (32%)	54	56

Source: Gautam and Rodrigues, 2017

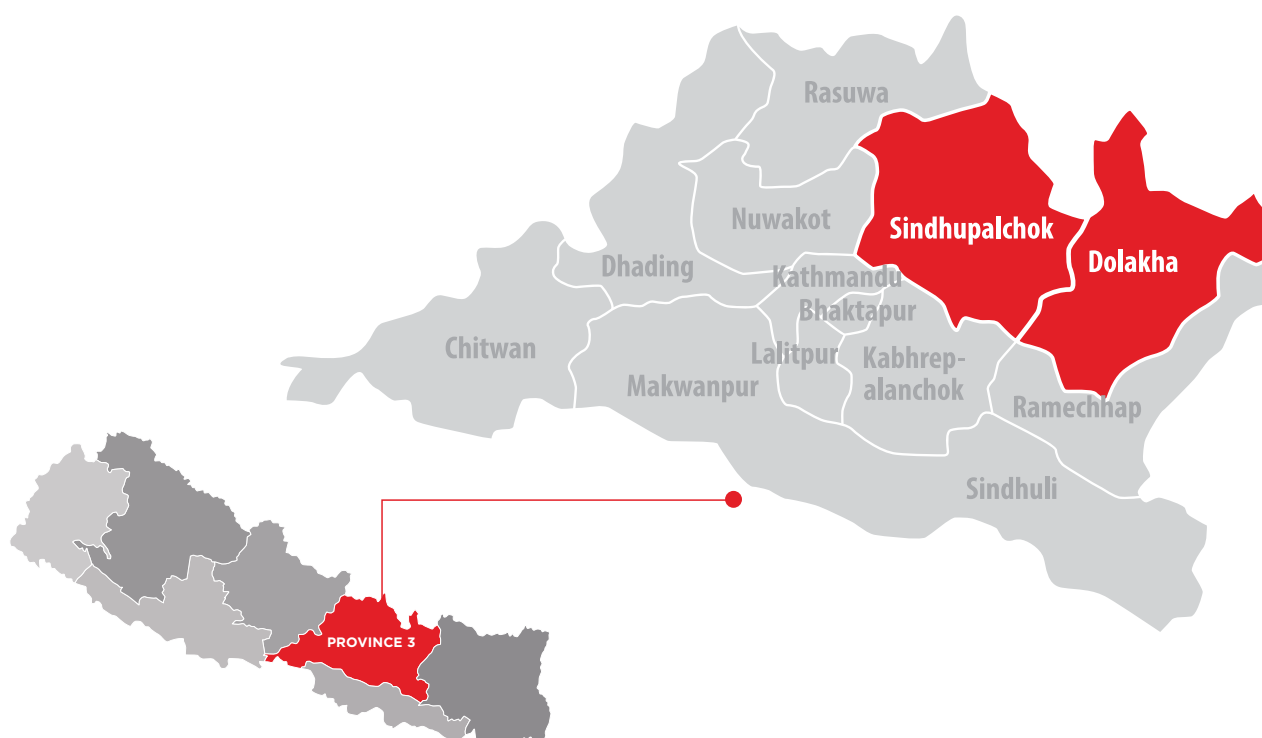
Two of these districts were chosen for the study: Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha (Map 4). Both are within a day's drive of Kathmandu, north of the capital, abutting the Himalayas. Both were heavily affected by the earthquakes, but with some variability in their ethnic makeup, migration trends and religiosity, among other factors.

Sindhupalchowk had a population of 287,798 as of the 2011 census (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014a). Most of its households are dependent on agriculture. About 60 per cent of the population are indigenous. As their first language, 53.4 per cent spoke Nepali, 32.6 per cent Tamang, 5.9 per cent Newari, 2.7 per cent Sherpa, 1.7 per cent Hyolmo/Yolmo, 1.2 per cent Danuwar and 1.1 per cent Thami (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014b). The district includes sparsely

populated mountains and more densely populated hilly areas. A 2018 report gave the adult literacy rate as 50.5 per cent, with 46.6 per cent of children below 5 years being malnourished (Land Management and Cooperative Agriculture and Food Security Project, 2018).

Sindhupalchowk suffered heavy casualties from the earthquakes, with the death of more than 3,550 people and injury of thousands more. Steep and narrow roads and a profusion of landslides slowed rescue efforts, and electricity and communications were cut off across in the district, isolating residents. Of the 66,688 houses in the district, 64,565 (96.8 per cent) were fully or partially damaged (Land Management and Cooperative Agriculture and Food Security Project, 2018).



**Map 4****Location of selected districts for the study: Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha, Nepal**

Dolakha had a population of 186,557 as of 2011 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014a). Of these, 65.2 per cent spoke Nepali, 15.8 per cent Tamang, 8.0 per cent Thami, 4.6 per cent Sherpa, 2.3 per cent Jirel, 2.0 per cent Newari and 1.0 per cent Sunuwar as their first language (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014b). It is a district with a strong religious affiliation, and is known for the temple of Dolakha Bhimeshwor. About a third of the district lies in the High Himalayas, 40 per cent in High Mountains and the last quarter in mid-mountain/hilly areas. About 47 per cent of the total populations are indigenous.

As in Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha's geography contributed to the damage and hindered the response. A Sociodemographic Impact Study

conducted after the earthquakes found that some 50,000 public buildings were estimated to have been damaged by the earthquakes and 100 per cent of its inhabitants were affected (Central Department of Population Studies, 2016).

## 2. Child marriage in Nepal

Consistent with other countries in South Asia, Nepal has experienced declines in rates of child marriage during the last two decades, though it still has the second highest rate in South Asia, behind Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2018). As Table 4 shows, in 2016, 39.5 per cent of ever-married women aged 20–24 years were married by age 18, with 7.0 per cent married by 15.

**Table 4**  
Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data, 2001–2016

DHS Year	2001 <sup>1</sup>	2006 <sup>2</sup>	2011 <sup>3</sup>	2016 <sup>4</sup>
<b>Per cent of women 20–24 who were married by:</b>				
15	-	10.2	10.1	7.0
18	-	51.4	40.7	39.5
<b>Median age at first marriage, according to current age</b>				
15–19	-	a	a	a
20–24	16.8	17.9	18.9	19.0
25–29	16.9	17.3	17.9	18.5
30–34	16.7	17.3	17.6	17.8
35–39	16.6	16.9	17.4	17.4
40–44	16.4	16.8	17.2	17.7
45–49	16.1	16.5	17.2	17.5
<b>Per cent who have begun childbearing, age 15–19, all women</b>	21.4	18.5	16.7	16.7

## Notes:

1 Ministry of Health [Nepal], New ERA, and ORC Macro. 2002. *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2001*. Calverton, Maryland, USA: Family Health Division, Ministry of Health; New ERA; and ORC Macro. Retrieved from: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR132/FR132.pdf>

2 Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) [Nepal], New ERA, and Macro International Inc. 2007. *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2006*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Health and Population, New ERA, and Macro International Inc. Retrieved from: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR191/FR191.pdf>

3 Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) [Nepal], New ERA, and ICF International Inc. 2012. *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Health and Population, New ERA, and ICF International, Calverton, Maryland. Retrieved from: [https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR257/FR257\[13April2012\].pdf](https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR257/FR257[13April2012].pdf)

4 Ministry of Health, Nepal; New ERA; and ICF. 2017. *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Health, Nepal. Retrieved from: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR336/FR336.pdf>

- Data are not included in the report.

a Omitted because less than 50 per cent of the women or men began living with their spouse or partner for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group.

Although still quite high, these rates had fallen in 5 years from 40.7 per cent of 20–24-year-old women married by 18 and 10.1 per cent married by 15. Median age at first marriage increased from 17.5 for 45–49-year-old women, to 18.5 for 25–29-year-olds and 19.0 for 20–24-year-olds. Although data for median age at first marriage for 15–19-year-old girls are omitted, the percentage of girls in this age group who have begun childbearing has fallen from 21.4 per cent in 2001 to 16.7 per cent in 2016 (though the rate of decline appears to have flattened between 2011 and 2016).

Analysing data from the Nepal DHS 2011, Pandey (2017) assessed risk factors for child marriage in Nepal, using the Social Relations Framework.

According to this “gendered relations place women in subordinate social positions and limit their capabilities to exercise their full potentials [...] Girls’ early marriage, limited autonomy to choose their partners in marriage, and lack of education are some of the consequences of gendered social relations.” Pandey found that about one-third of the women were married before they attained 16 years of age and 78 per cent were married before they attained 20 years of age, which is the legal age for marriage in Nepal. The odds of marrying before attaining age 16 was significantly higher for Madeshi and Low Caste Hindu women compared to the High Caste Hindu women. Regionally, girls from the Eastern Region were at lower risk of child marriage than girls in the Central Region. Girls in the Far

Western Region were most at risk of marrying before the legal age of 20. In terms of education, the odds of marrying after 16 increased with more education. “Those with secondary education were almost three times as likely to marry after attaining age 16 compared to those without any education. *If they were educated beyond grade 10, they were 38 times more likely to marry after attaining age 16 compared to their counterparts without any education*” (Pandey, 2017 [emphasis added]).

An analysis of the Nepal MICS 2014 by Sekine and Hodgkin (2017) showed that married girls were 10-times more likely to drop out of school than their unmarried peers. Among women aged 20–24, 40 per cent said that marriage was the leading reason to discontinue their education. Women who were married as children were not only more likely to have dropped out of school but to “have no formal education, reside in a rural setting, live in poverty, or have an uneducated household head, and they tended to be older adults, Dalit or Muslim” (p. 6).

Also analysing Nepal DHS 2011 data, but looking at adolescent marriage (marriage of boys and girls aged 10–19 years), Guragain et al. (2017) found significant regional disparities for adolescent marriage, with percentages of married boy and girl adolescents higher in the Western Mountain subregion compared to other regions. Examining wealth indexes, the study found that a significantly higher percentage of girls to be in the poorest (16.3 per cent), poorer (16.0 per cent) and middle (16.2 per cent) quintiles than in the richest quintiles.

A 2012 study of child marriage in Nepal conducted by Plan Nepal, Save the Children and World Vision International-Nepal used a mixed-methods approach (combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies) to survey 649 households in 15 districts in Nepal, and to conduct 31 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 25 key informant interviews (KIIs). Key findings included:

- Among 20–24-year-olds the overall prevalence was 46.2 per cent (52.3 per cent among women and 33.8 per cent among men).
- Child marriage was most prevalent among the illiterate, the *Janajati* (indigenous ethnic groups) and the Dalit (the so-called untouchables in the Hindu caste system).
- It was most often the parents who decided upon the marriages (55.9 per cent of cases for boys, and 63 per cent for girls).
- According to household heads, the major causes of child marriage were family pressure (32.1 per cent), children’s own desire (32.1 per cent) and the need for support in carrying out household activities (14.2 per cent).

Those who married as children said the main causes were parental pressure (52.7 per cent for boys and 67.1 per cent for girls) and need for support in carrying out household chores (45.2 per cent for boys and 1.2 per cent for girls).

- Food security was correlated with age of marriage in the sample households, with the percentage of early marriages decreasing as food insecurity decreased (91 per cent of food-secure people married above the age of 19).
- The people who married young suffered physical health-related consequences.
- Educational consequences of child marriage included dropping out of school (67.1 per cent of boys and 33.1 per cent of girls) and not being able to study because of the need to care for a child (24.7 per cent of boys and 45.9 per cent of girls).

Rabi (2014) found that there is a high correlation between poverty and child and adolescent marriage. “Prolonged lack of income and poverty can have a significant impact on household decision-making, where a girl child is viewed more as a liability than an asset.” Poverty and lack of access to education are also linked with higher rates of child marriage. The Nepal Multi Indicator Cluster Survey showed that marriage before 20 significantly decreased a girl’s access to education, with more than 3 in 10 girls married below 20 having had no access to education. This, in turn, has poverty implications: labour market analysis in Nepal shows that female labour force participation increases progressively with levels of educational achievement. On the other hand, girls married before 20 “are at significantly higher risk of experiencing educational deprivation and subsequent lower income levels; illiterate mothers are more likely to have a negative impact on the education of their children, which perpetuates the cycle of educational deprivation and impedes the upward intergenerational social mobility” (Rabi, 2014). Dietrich et al. (2018) found that wealthier households in Nepal – as well as those with household members who were more educated – were less likely to have underage married household members.

A CARE multimedia report “Dads Too Soon: The Child Grooms of Nepal” (CARE, 2015) points out that Nepal is one of only eight countries in the world where more than 10 per cent of boys are married before the age of 18. In Western Nepal (where child and adolescent marriage rates are the highest in the country), Kapilbastu district is a hotspot for child marriage, with many child grooms. Among married girls, 26 per cent are wed by age 14 and 86 per cent wed by age 19. Of married boys, 12 per cent are married by age 14 and 62 per cent by age 19.





Rohingya refugee Golbahar, 14, sits behind the sewing machine she uses at a UNICEF-supported sanitary towel manufacturing project in Kutupalong refugee camp, Cox's Bazaar District, Bangladesh.

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# Chapter 3

## Methods

The study incorporated three main methodological approaches: (1) a desk review (results of which are provided in the preceding Background section and the Discussion section); (2) quantitative household surveys of a stratified sample of Rohingya refugee households in Bangladesh and earthquake-affected households in two districts in Nepal; and (3) qualitative interviews incorporating KIs, FGDs and in-depth interviews (IDIs) in both Bangladesh and Nepal.

### A. Desk review

The desk review drew from four main sources. First, peer-reviewed literature was identified by searching three academic databases: PubMed, PsycINFO and Scopus. Second, grey literature was identified from a range of organizations working on child marriage and related issues. These documents included research reports, programme reports, evaluations, web articles and data briefs, from organizations including Action Against Hunger, CARE International, Council on Foreign Relations, Girls Not Brides, The Global Fund for Women, Human Rights Watch, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children, UNFPA, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, UN Women and WRC. Third, the 2016/17 Publications Catalogue from the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage was reviewed (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). Finally, an Annotated Bibliography produced by UNFPA, including select resources on child marriage in conflict and humanitarian settings, was reviewed (UNFPA, 2017). The references of all the documents identified were also examined for additional sources.

Relevance of the identified articles was assessed using the following inclusion criteria: articles available in full text, published in English and published within the past 15 years. Initially we included only documents which focused on child marriage in South Asia as a region, or a selected

country in South Asia (particularly Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan or India) and which focused on humanitarian settings in South Asia. Given the relative scarcity of articles that included both criteria, we chose to include a selection of articles that focused either on child marriage in non-humanitarian settings in South Asia or articles that focused on child marriage in humanitarian settings outside of South Asia. Inclusion of research articles required inclusion of primary data analysis of qualitative or quantitative research with a focus on (a) prevalence rates, (b) measures of social norms, (c) measures of risk factors for, and drivers of, child marriage, and (d) descriptions of interventions focusing on child marriage in humanitarian settings.

Database searches were conducted using the search terms merging three concepts: (“Child marriage” OR “early marriage”) AND (“conflict” OR “refugees” OR “war” OR “humanitarian” OR “disaster” OR “climate change”) AND (“Bangladesh” OR “Nepal” OR “South Asia” OR “Rohingya” OR “Rakhine” OR “Myanmar”). The search words relating to Myanmar, Rohingya and Rakhine were included as the main study population in Bangladesh (along with Nepal, one of the two selected countries for the study) are Rohingya refugees from Rakhine State, Myanmar, and we felt some literature on child marriage in the population would be relevant. A total of 302 articles were initially identified in the database search. After screening for relevance, date, language and full text, 34 peer-reviewed articles were selected for inclusion.

Grey literature was found by identifying NGOs working on child marriage and searching their available literature, as well as analysing other sources cited by them. Grey literature also included government documents and reports. A total of 182 documents were identified in this category and 91 were included in the review. In addition, 16 documents from other sources (news and magazine articles, weblog posts) were also identified, and seven were included. Thus, of the 484 articles reviewed, 142 documents were included in the final review.

## Methods

The UNFPA–UNICEF Publications Catalogue and UNFPA Annotated Bibliography were reviewed for documents that met the above inclusion criteria. The Publications Catalogue included no publications focused on humanitarian settings, but listed 25 articles discussing child marriage generally in South Asia, Bangladesh and Nepal, of which four were included in the review. The Annotated Bibliography included 13 general overview studies and research papers, of which 11 had already been identified by the search. Of the five articles in the section on the Asia Region, three had already been identified. One additional article was included in the review, and the other was excluded as it focused exclusively on Tajikistan.

## B. Ethical and contextual considerations

In both contexts the study team engaged with local research partners both to aid in implementation and ensure local perspectives were incorporated into the study. In Bangladesh we partnered with Community Partners International, which already had years of experience working in the Rohingya camps, including with an extensive network of Rohingya community health volunteers. They facilitated the recruitment of Rohingya surveyors of the same language and culture as respondents to ensure that respondents would be comfortable with interviewers. In Nepal, the study team partnered with the Center for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities. Based in Lalitpur, all of the center's Nepali staff have years of experience conducting research throughout the country, including in the provinces targeted for this study.

In order to ensure protection of human subjects, the study was reviewed by three Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). The study was first reviewed by the IRB at JHU, which served as the IRB of record. Local IRB reviews were conducted at BRAC University in Dhaka and in Nepal by the National Health Research Council in Kathmandu.

In Nepal, the study team found the combination of these two reviews sufficient, as the population being studied was themselves Nepali, and thus their interests could be appropriately represented by the National Health Research Council. In Bangladesh, however, the population of interest was Rohingya refugees, who were new arrivals to Bangladesh. To incorporate their views, the study engaged in a

community consultation process, in addition to the IRB reviews. For the community consultations, the study team focused on informing the community of our research goals, discussing with them their thoughts and priorities, and obtaining their consent to proceed with the research. Rohingya facilitators led conversations with groups of men and women community leaders (separately). Both groups supported the research, suggesting that it was an important topic for their community, and offering their assistance in its implementation.

In both Nepal and Bangladesh, the study team conducted extensive consultations with community members and other stakeholders to review the study goals and objectives, target populations, and quantitative and qualitative research methods and instruments. In Bangladesh, for example, these discussions focused on the content of the household questionnaire, and also how to maintain consistent translation of the questions into Rohingya, which lacks a written language.

Tools for the study were adapted from prior WRC and The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health research. The tools have been modified and refined over their implementation in six other country settings. Core elements of the tools are consistent across each of the contexts to ensure comparability. In that vein, some elements of the quantitative tools were based on indicators from the DHS and MICS.

An important change in this study from prior work was the inclusion of boys. Prior studies had only included adolescent girls; however, because Nepal has a notable prevalence of child grooms and because of anecdotal information from the Rohingya camps that boys were also marrying young, adolescent boys were included in both settings. Adolescent boys were included in the adolescent survey, IDIs and FGDs.

As with each study, for Bangladesh and Nepal the tools were further adapted to ensure their appropriateness for the context, such as modifying answer options for major marriage decision-making influences. In Bangladesh, some minor adjustments were made to account for the camp setting and to reflect the predominance of arranged marriage. In Nepal, where self-initiated marriage is much more common, a few questions were added to capture more information about this phenomenon, and also about the role of social media.



## C. Quantitative survey

The quantitative research comprised a cross-sectional household survey coupled with 1–2 adolescent interviews per sampled household. In each household, a survey was conducted with the female head of household or other adult female aged 18–49 that could speak about the household members. The household-survey tool centred around a household census, including the age and marital status of all occupants, as well as follow-up information on the marriages and living arrangements of adolescent members of the household, household sociodemographic information, marriage perceptions and exposure to interventions on child marriage or targeting adolescents. The household survey took approximately 30–45 minutes to complete, varying according to the number of household members.

From the household roster included in the household survey, up to two respondents between the ages of 10 and 19 years were selected and invited to participate in an individual survey. One boy, regardless of marital status, was randomly selected from the list of male household members between the ages of 10 and 19, if there were any. One girl, regardless of marital status, was also selected from the list of female household members between the ages of 10 and 19, if there were any. If there were no eligible participants of one gender, two could be selected from the other gender, if there was one who was married and one who was unmarried. In this manner, one household survey was completed in each household, as well as a minimum of one and maximum of two individual adolescent interviews.

The individual adolescent survey tool collected sociodemographic information and risk factors, household of origin characteristics, marriage perceptions, barriers to programme engagement, health and service knowledge, and intervention exposure. The individual adolescent survey took approximately 35–40 minutes to complete per respondent.

### 1. Sampling plan

In both countries, the sample was stratified and a two-stage cluster sampling with probability proportional to size was utilized to select households. In Bangladesh, the targeted sample of 1,200 households was stratified between 400 registered refugee households, those who arrived in Bangladesh prior to 1995, and 800 FDMN households, who arrived after October 2016 and were not granted refugee status by the Bangladesh government. The study aimed to interview 400 households among the registered refugees and 800 among the FDMN, for a total of 1,200 household surveys. For the individual survey, 1–2 individual surveys were conducted per household, for a minimum sample of 1,200 and a maximum of 2,400 (see Table 5).

In the first sampling stage, blocks were used as the primary sampling unit. The camp population list provided by the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Needs and Population Management was used, which divides the entire camp population into roughly evenly sized blocks. The sampling frame included all camp blocks, from all 34 of the camps in both Ukhiya and Tecnaf Upazillas. For the FDMN strata, 40 blocks were selected, with sampling proportional to size. For the refugee strata, 25 clusters were chosen.

For the second sampling stage, households were the sampling unit. A random direction was chosen from the centre point of the block, and households were selected by identifying the next nearest doorway. For the FDMN clusters, 20 households were selected per block. For the registered refugee clusters, 16 households were selected. A smaller cluster size was used because the registered refugees comprised a smaller population and there were fewer blocks of registered refugees.

In Nepal, the sample was evenly stratified between Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha Districts. In each, 30 clusters of 20 households were chosen, for a total of 600 households per district. Each district is divided into wards, which served as the primary sampling unit. Clusters were chosen proportionate to size. The residence closest to the centre of the district was chosen as the starting place, and subsequent households were chosen by identifying the next nearest doorway.

**Table 5**  
Quantitative sample by population strata, by country

		Bangladesh		Nepal	
		Registered refugees	FDMN	Sindhupalchowk	Dolakha
Household sample	Target	400	800	600	600
	Actual	397	768	607	600
Adolescent sample	Target	400–800	800–1,600	600–1,200	600–1,200
	Actual	573	1,405	715	716
Population		38,391	877,162	287,798	186,557
Total Primary Sampling Units		26 blocks	1,937 blocks	103 wards	74 wards
Total households		7,822	204,343	66,688	45,688

Source: IOM Bangladesh Needs and Population Monitoring (2019, February)

## 2. Data collection and analysis

Prior to inclusion in the sample, each household visited was screened for a few key inclusion criteria. In both settings, households were screened for: (a) at least one woman aged 15–49 years who had lived in this household for at least 1 month in the past year; (b) at least one adolescent aged 10–19 years who had lived in the household for at least 1 month in the past year; and (c) that the household has lived in that location for at least 1 month. In Bangladesh, households were also screened for arrival before 1992 or after October 2016. In Nepal, households were also screened for residence in the district during the time of the earthquake.

Surveyors visited households in teams of one man and one woman, to ensure that each respondent was interviewed by a surveyor of their own gender. If a household was unoccupied, it was replaced. If the female head of household or another adult woman was not at home at the time of the first visit, two subsequent visits were attempted. If, after three visits, an eligible participant could not be reached, the household was replaced. If a household declined to participate, the refusal was documented and the household was replaced by continuing to the next nearest doorway.

Data were collected on computer tablets, using Magpi software (Version 6.1.1, Magpi, 2019). Data were collected offline and uploaded to a secure server nightly. Quantitative data were cleaned and analysed using Stata/IC (Version 15.1, StataCorp LLC, 2019) statistical software. Preliminary findings were discussed with in-country partners for their insight and feedback, and to prioritize areas for further analysis.

## D. Qualitative interviews

Among the respondents participating in the individual adolescent survey, a subset including both married and unmarried adolescents, and some of their parents, were selected for invitation to participate in a qualitative IDI. Those selected for IDIs were identified at the time of the quantitative survey. If they agreed to participate in the qualitative component, a researcher contacted them to schedule the IDI at a later time. IDIs were conducted with both married (43) and unmarried (27) boys (35) and girls (35). Only those adolescents aged 15–19 were invited to participate. A smaller number (22) of parents of married children were also invited to participate.

KIIs were conducted with 20–25 individuals purposively selected to provide insights on child marriage practices among the target population, including community leaders, religious leaders, local police and service providers. FGDs were conducted with married and unmarried boys and girls, as well as parents, service providers (education, legal, health, adolescent oriented services), and 20–24-year-olds. A total of 38 FGDs were conducted (16 in Bangladesh, 22 in Nepal) with 6–10 members each, for a total of nearly 300 participants.

### 1. Sample size

Participants for FGDs and KIIs were purposively selected to obtain an array of different perspectives. IDIs were conducted with a subset of household and individual adolescent survey respondents, for a total of approximately 50 IDIs. A breakdown of qualitative sample sizes and target respondents is included in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
Qualitative samples country

Method	Bangladesh	Nepal
<b>Key informant interviews</b>	<p><i>n</i> = 21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 religious leaders</li> <li>6 community leaders</li> <li>2 camp-in-charges</li> <li>2 local police</li> <li>1 UNHCR staff</li> <li>1 army officer</li> <li>4 Rohingya service providers</li> <li>1 Bangladeshi service provider</li> </ul>	<p><i>n</i> = 25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 religious leaders</li> <li>6 community leaders</li> <li>3 Children and Women's Board (<i>1 Central level and 1 per district</i>)</li> <li>2 local authorities</li> <li>1 Dept. of Women and Children</li> <li>1 Ministry of Women and Children</li> <li>3 Police, Women and Children's Cell (<i>1 Central level and 1 per district</i>)</li> <li>1 Ministry of Home Affairs, Disasters Division</li> <li>2 marriage registrars</li> <li>2 juvenile Justice</li> </ul>
<b>Focus group discussions</b>	<p><i>n</i> = 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 mothers/mothers-in-law</li> <li>1 fathers/fathers-in-law</li> <li>1 married girls 15-19</li> <li>1 married boys 15-19</li> <li>1 unmarried girls 15-19</li> <li>1 unmarried boys 15-19</li> <li>1 women 20-24</li> <li>1 men 20-24</li> <li>1 <i>talim</i> (religious education) providers</li> <li>1 traditional birth attendants</li> <li>4 service provides (health, education)</li> <li>1 host community mothers</li> <li>1 host community adolescent girls</li> </ul>	<p><i>n</i> = 22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 mothers/mothers-in-law</li> <li>2 fathers/fathers-in-law</li> <li>2 married girls 15-19</li> <li>2 married boys 15-19</li> <li>2 unmarried girls 15-19</li> <li>2 unmarried boys 15-19</li> <li>2 women 20-24</li> <li>2 men 20-24</li> <li>2 teachers/education staff and health service providers</li> <li>2 Child Protection Committee members and Women's Committee members</li> <li>2 adolescent/children's club</li> </ul>
<b>In-depth interviews</b>	<p><i>n</i> = 43</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 married boys 15-19</li> <li>10 married girls 15-19</li> <li>6 unmarried boys 15-19</li> <li>5 unmarried girls 15-19</li> <li>6 fathers/fathers-in-law</li> <li>6 mothers/mothers-in-law</li> </ul>	<p><i>n</i> = 49</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11 married boys 15-19</li> <li>12 married girls 15-19</li> <li>8 unmarried boys 15-19</li> <li>8 unmarried girls 15-19</li> <li>6 fathers/fathers-in-law</li> <li>4 mothers/mothers-in-law</li> </ul>

## 2. Data collection and analysis

All interviews were conducted in private, by an interviewer of the same gender as the respondent. If there was not a private space available in the home, interviews were conducted at a nearby location, such as a school or community centre. Interviews were audio recorded using a handheld digital recorder with permission of the respondent. Interviewers used a semi-structured guide to direct the interview. Different interview tools were created for each interview type and respondent category, but focused around the same central

domains. KIIs lasted approximately 30 minutes, IDIs lasted 45 minutes to an hour and FGDs lasted about an hour.

Qualitative interviews were transcribed and translated into English immediately after the interviews took place. Each transcript was reviewed and coded by two individuals, using Dedoose analysis software (Version 7.0.23, 2016) and examined using content analysis methods. Preliminary findings were discussed with in-country partners for their insight and feedback, and to prioritize areas for further analysis.

## E. Limitations

Though this study has a number of strengths, there are of course also several limitations.

The sample size, while large in comparison with many studies of child marriage, is nevertheless too small to allow extensive disaggregation and subgroup comparisons within the sample. The approximately 1,200 households in each country sample were stratified, equally across the two districts in Nepal, and 2:1 across FDMN and registered refugees in Bangladesh. When those, for example, are disaggregated into households with and without child marriage, the child marriage group is notably smaller, limiting the statistical power of some comparisons. Although the sample was ethnically and religiously homogeneous in Bangladesh, there were several religions and numerous ethnicities and castes represented in the Nepal sample. They were too numerous to allow meaningful disaggregation along ethnicity/caste lines, though variations in cultural traditional between groups may impact child marriage practices, which is reflected to some extent in the qualitative data.

Another limitation applicable to both settings was the challenge of determining the exact ages of participants. Both populations have communities without consistent birth documentation, although it is better in Nepal. Some households in both communities were without key documents: in Nepal some were destroyed inside damaged or demolished houses; and in Bangladesh they were sometimes left behind or destroyed in flight. In both communities, there are some individuals who do not know their exact ages. Although this is less common among the current adolescents than among the older generations, it is still the case for some individuals.

Finally, when researching a sensitive topic like child marriage, social desirability bias may lead some respondents to increase their reported age. The study team tried to minimize this by using relatable interviewers (in Nepal they were all from Nepal and in Bangladesh they were all Rohingya refugees, and in both countries largely between 20- and 35-years-old) and thoroughly introducing the study, including making clear that this was a learning exercise and no individual cases of child marriage would be reported to the authorities. The study team considered including a module to assess age, such as has previously been developed and used by UNICEF, but it was lengthy and cumbersome, and also not likely to engender trust. After conducting formative research and numerous qualitative interviews, as well as thousands of

adolescent surveys, the survey teams in both countries felt fairly confident in the ages that were reported and did not feel that age deception was a persistent problem.

In Bangladesh, the decision to work with Rohingya data collectors was both a benefit and limitation. Themselves refugees and members of the community, they were easily trusted and could move freely in the target communities. However, many of them had limited survey experience. All had participated in some form of data collection and documentation previously, but not all had worked on a formal research study. Training sought to account for their varied skill levels, but cannot fully account for the skills developed by long experience.

The crowding in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh also made privacy a challenge. With large families often living in one or two rooms, and limitations on where adolescent girls, in particular, can travel, it was at times difficult to find a place where a respondent could talk freely, without fear of being overheard. Surveyors made a committed effort to ensure privacy, but it sometimes entailed meeting respondents at locations other than their home (when possible), or asking other families to leave the home during the interview.

Though, in theory, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are neatly delineated by where they live, the study team discovered over the course of the study that mixing was much more prevalent than anticipated. While the two official refugee camps were almost exclusively inhabited by registered refugees, among the extension sites, where FDMN have settled, a number of sampled households reported that they were registered refugees. In the registered camps, only two households did not identify as registered refugees. In the FDMN camps, however, 151 households out of 768 (20 per cent) identified as registered. While the study team knew from formative research that some movement out of the registered camps occurred, this kind of mixing exceeded expectations, which suggests that perhaps the question was misunderstood. After examining the data and discussions with local partners, it was decided to disaggregate the data by camp, rather than by reported status. In retrospect, a question should have been included on a household's date of arrival in Bangladesh.

In Nepal, the study team was fortunate to work with a highly experienced team of surveyors, and while they were all local to the country, most were not local to the two surveyed districts. It would have been ideal to work with community members;





Hossenara, 16, is a Rohingya girl living in the camps at Cox's Bazar. She was married off when she was 13-years-old. Now she has an 18-month-old baby.

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however, it was not feasible to find an adequately trained team from the target areas in the available time. The study team had experience in many parts of Nepal, and had experience working with the local implementing partner.

A potential limitation of the Nepal portion of the study was the relatively long period that had elapsed since the crisis in question. The study was conducted from late August to early September 2019, which was 4.5 years after the earthquakes in April 2015. Because some of the effects of the earthquake were short lived, such as economies that had recovered, schools that were repaired, and services and programmes that were only available in the region for a year or so, the study relied on respondents' recall of the impact of these events. Some of the adolescents in the targeted adolescent group, ranging from age 10 to 19, would have been too young for marriage in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. It is thus possible that the effects of the earthquake as captured in the study are diluted. Though recall bias can go in either direction, the impact of the earthquake on child marriage is more likely to have been underestimated than overestimated.

An unanticipated limitation encountered during study implementation was the shortage of

married boys in Dolakha District. The majority of married adolescents had migrated for work, most to Kathmandu, or sometimes out of the country. As a result, it was difficult to identify an adequate number of married boys to interview, and the sample that remained behind may not be representative of the whole group. Ultimately, the study reached its target number of IDIs; however, we were unable to conduct an FGD with the group in Dolakha. The study team did attempt to track down some of the married boys in Kathmandu, by obtaining contact information from their families in the district, but ultimately were only able to reach two adolescents and interview one. It is therefore quite possible that a perspective is missing from or underrepresented in his study – that of married men who migrated for work.

Finally, the timing of the earthquake and of a new marriage law in Nepal represent a particular limitation. The law raising the age of marriage for girls to 20 went into effect not long after the 2015 earthquakes. This was accompanied by a national campaign educating communities about the law and about the adverse consequences of child marriage. Because this took place in the period between the earthquake and this study, it is difficult to tease out the separate impacts of these two events.



Saida, 17, is a child bride in Bangladesh who was forced into marriage. Sadly, now she is regularly beaten by her husband.

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# Chapter 4

## Findings

In this chapter, key findings are presented, first for Bangladesh and then for Nepal. Each country section is divided into 14 subsections presenting findings by thematic area. The section begins with respondent characteristics and a brief highlight of major findings. Prevalence of child marriage and spousal age gap data are then presented, followed by drivers and moderators of child marriage. Options for delaying marriage and community perceptions of child marriage are discussed in the middle of the section, followed by findings on the marriage experience, pregnancy and childbirth, violence and marriage termination. The final subsections for each country consider the effects of the different humanitarian crises on child marriage.

### A. Bangladesh

#### 1. Respondent characteristics

In Bangladesh, 768 FDMN households and 397 registered refugee households were interviewed in the quantitative survey. Among those households, a total of 6,789 household members were listed on the household rosters. Characteristics of the household members are presented in Table 7. The population was predominantly young, with 42 per cent below the age of 15, and 69 per cent below the age of 25, with slightly more females (52 per cent). Just over one-third of the sample was married, 35 per cent of FDMN and 39 per cent of registered refugees. FDMN had lived in their current dwelling for an average of 20 months (which for many represented their entire time in Bangladesh), and registered refugees for an average of 30 months.

**Table 7**  
Characteristics of household members in the household survey roster in Bangladesh

	FDMN (n = 4,656)		Registered refugees (n = 2,133)		Total (n = 6,789)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	2,262	48.6	1,007	47.2	3,269	48.2
Female	2,393	51.40	1,126	52.8	3,519	51.8
<b>Age</b>						
<10	1,081	23.2	418	19.6	1,499	22.1
10–14	990	21.3	404	18.9	1,394	20.5
15–17	573	12.3	268	12.6	841	12.4
18–19	453	9.7	202	9.5	655	9.7
20–24	177	3.8	120	5.6	297	4.4
25≤	1,367	29.4	721	33.8	2,088	30.8
Unknown	15	0.3	0	0.0	15	0.2
<b>Marriage status</b>						
Unmarried	3,019	64.8	1,292	60.6	4,311	63.5
Married	1,636	35.1	839	39.3	2,475	36.5
Unknown	1	0.02	2	0.1	3	0.04
<b>Duration (months)</b>	<i>mean (range)</i>	21.2 (1–132)	<i>mean (range)</i>	30.2 (1–336)		

## Findings

A total of 1,978 adolescent surveys were conducted, including 573 registered refugees and 1,405 FMDN. Interviews were conducted with 1,035 girls (52 per cent) and 933 boys (47 per cent) between the

ages of 10 and 19. Forty-one per cent of participants were below the age of 15 and 9.5 per cent of the total were currently married. Adolescent survey respondent characteristics are included in Table 8.

**Table 8**  
Characteristics of adolescent survey respondents in Bangladesh

	Registered Refugees (n = 573)		FMDN (n = 1,405)		Total (n = 1,978)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	269	46.9	664	47.3	933	47.2
Female	300	52.4	735	52.3	1,035	52.3
<b>Age</b>						
10-14	253	44.2	555	39.5	808	40.9
15-17	197	34.4	461	32.8	658	33.3
18-19	123	21.5	384	27.3	507	25.6
<b>Marriage status</b>						
Single	535	93.4	1,231	87.6	1,766	89.3
Engaged	5	0.9	17	1.2	22	1.1
Married	32	5.6	155	11.0	187	9.5
Separated	1	0.2	2	0.1	3	0.2
<b>Child marriage (married before age 18)</b>	15	2.6	87	6.2	102	5.2

Eighty qualitative interviews were conducted, including 43 IDIs, 21 KIIs and 16 FGDs, split evenly between genders (see Table 9). Each FGD included between 6 and 10 participants from the target group. Most interviews were with Rohingya respondents, however the army and police officers,

Camp-in-charges (the Bangladeshi administrator in charge of each of the camps, also referred to as CICs), and one service provider were Bangladeshi FGDs. were also conducted with a group of host community mothers and a group of host community adolescent girls.

**Table 9**  
Qualitative interviews conducted in Bangladesh

IDI		KII		FGD	
Unmarried boys .....	6	Religious leaders .....	4	Unmarried 15-19-year-old girls.....	1
Unmarried girls .....	5	Male community leaders.....	2	Married 15-19-year-old girls.....	1
Married boys .....	10	Female community leaders.....	4	Unmarried 15-19-year-old boys.....	1
Married girls .....	10	Camp-in-charges.....	2	Married 15-19-year-old boys.....	1
Mothers .....	6	Police officers.....	2	20-24-year-old women .....	1
Fathers .....	6	UNHCR .....	1	20-24-year-old men.....	1
		Rohingya service providers.....	4	Mothers of adolescents .....	1
		Bangladeshi service provider .....	1	Fathers of adolescents.....	1
		Army officer .....	1	Host community mothers.....	1
				Host community girls 15-19 years.....	1
				Female service providers.....	2
				Male service providers .....	2
				Talim provider.....	1
				Traditional birth attendant .....	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>



## 2. Prevalence of child marriage

Reliable estimates for child marriage prevalence among the Rohingya prior to their displacement to Bangladesh do not exist. At the national level, Myanmar has consistently reported a lower prevalence of child marriage than Bangladesh, with the last DHS (2016) reporting it at 16 per cent. Unfortunately, while it is known that the child marriage rates vary between states and ethnic groups in Myanmar, there is no reliable way to disaggregate these national rates to Rakhine State or to the Rohingya.

Within this study, the proportion of 20–24-year-old FDMN married before the age of 18 can provide an indicator of child marriage prevalence among the Rohingya population in Rakhine State, as those marriages most likely would have occurred prior to displacement. We note, however, as shown in Table 10, that the sample of 20–24-year-olds is notably

smaller ( $n = 297$ ) than the sample of 10–19-year-olds ( $n = 2,890$ ), as households with 10–19-year-olds were specifically targeted in the sample design while households with 20–24-year-olds were not. Thus, the confidence intervals for child marriage prevalence among 20–24-year-olds are wide.

Among respondents aged 20–24, child marriage before age 15 was very uncommon, with only one woman identified in the sample of newly displaced Rohingya. It was also uncommon among the registered refugees, again with just one woman identified. There were no 20–24-year-old men married before age 15 in either the FDMN or registered refugee populations. Marriage before age 18 was more common in both populations, for women, but not for men: there were no cases of men marrying before age 18 among 20–24-year-olds in either population. Among women aged 20–24, 6.7 per cent of registered refugees and 10 per cent of FDMN had been married as children.



Yasmin (left), 12, a Bangladeshi national, and Showkat (right), 15, a Rohingya refugee, both attend a UNICEF-supported adolescent club in Lambasia refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The club brings together children from both refugee and host community populations to discuss issues that are common to them all, such as early marriage, relationships with boys, and dangers like drugs and trafficking.

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**Table 10**  
Percentage first married or in union before age 15 and before age 18 in Bangladesh

		Age 18–19			Age 20–24			Age 18–24		
		Percentage married before age 15	Percentage married before age 18	Number of members age 18–19 years	Percentage married before age 15	Percentage married before age 18	Number of members age 20–24 years	Percentage married before age 15	Percentage married before age 18	Number of members age 18–24 years
Registered Refugees	male	0.0	4.1	97	0.0	0.0	60	0.0	2.5	157
	female	0.0	13.3	105	1.7	6.7	60	0.6	10.9	165
	total	0.0	8.9	202	0.8	3.3	120	0.3	6.8	322
FDMN	male	0.5	9.4	202	0.0	0.0	117	0.3	6.0	319
	female	0.4	14.3	251	1.7	10.0	60	0.6	13.5	311
	total	0.4	12.1	453	0.6	3.4	177	0.5	9.7	630
TOTAL		0.3	11.1	655	0.7	3.4	297	0.4	8.7	952

In comparison, child marriage among 18–19-year-olds shows a marked increase. This age group includes individuals married after the FDMNs' arrival in Bangladesh, which occurred just under two years before this survey. In this age group, there are increases in child marriage for both men and women, with 13.3 per cent of registered refugee women and 14.3 per cent of FDMN women married before age 18, as well as 4.1 per cent of registered refugee men and 9.4 per cent of FDMN men. Marriage before age 15 remained very low in this age group. While prevalence increased for both men and women, it is particularly notable among men, who had no child marriages in the 20–24-year-old group.

Nearly all of those currently married in the 10–17-year-old group were 15–17-year-olds (see Table 11). Among registered refugees there were no married 15–17-year-old boys but 8.9 per cent of 15–17-year-old girls were married. There were more child marriages among FDMN, with 3.1 per cent of FDMN boys and 9.4 per cent of FDMN girls currently married. As adolescents of this age have not yet completed their risk of child marriage, the proportion currently married is not a measure of child marriage prevalence, but does give an indication of the trend in the population. For example, the presence of currently married 15–17-year-old FDMN boys evidences a continued increase in child marriage in that group, though the prevalence may ultimately prove to be higher than the proportion currently married at the time of the study.

**Table 11**  
Percentage currently married in Bangladesh

		Age 10–17		Age 10–14		Age 15–17	
		Percentage currently married	Number of members age 10–17 years	Percentage currently married	Number of members age 10–14 years	Percentage currently married	Number of members age 15–17 years
Registered Refugees	male	0.6	313	1.1	189	0.0	124
	female	3.8	366	0.5	220	8.9	146
	total	2.4	679	0.7	409	4.8	270
FDMN	male	1.8	734	1.1	472	3.1	262
	female	4.4	821	1.4	512	9.4	309
	total	3.2	1,555	1.2	984	6.5	571
TOTAL		2.9	2,234	1.1	1,393	5.9	841

Qualitative interviews supported quantitative findings that child marriage prevalence increased following the exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh in 2017. The increase in child marriage prevalence in the 18-19-year-old group over the 20-24-year-old group is consistent with the displacement of the FDMN cohort, and their arrival in Bangladesh. The proportion of 15-17-year-old adolescents currently married shows that child marriage is continuing in the camps. A slight decrease in child marriage following the first 1.5 years in camp is consistent with qualitative findings, described below, that camp policies prohibiting child marriage were established and enforced after that time. A follow-up study would be required to definitively show the trend in child marriage. The increases in child marriage in the registered refugee population, in addition to the recently displaced FDMN population, suggest intermarriage between the two groups, which was also supported by qualitative interviews.

Numerous respondents specifically discussed an increase in child marriage prevalence.

*“There were no child marriages [among Rohingya] in Burma. After fleeing to Bangladesh, child marriages increased.” – FGD with male service providers (#47)*

*“It’s been nearly two years since we arrived here in Bangladesh. We see many marriages between boys and girls aged less than 18. Arriving here, such kinds of cases are increasing because it seems like a lawless country to us.” – FGD with female service providers (#60)*

*“In Burma, we have to live in fear of the government so we could not move freely and had to live in fear and anxiety, and it took a long*

*time to get marriage permission. After fleeing here, we don’t need to fear anyone. Before the announcement from the CIC, many child marriages had taken place.” – FGD with fathers (#46)*

*“In Burma, child marriages were not allowed. In the law of Burma, one was allowed to marry at the age of 18 and 20. But here [in the camp], even the marriages of 13-year-old girls and 12-year-old girls are being arranged because they are not safe.” – IDI with married female girl 15-19 (#28)*

*“Now, CIC doesn’t allow child marriages. CICs announced that before the age of 18, no one would be allowed to get married. That’s why child marriages are decreasing.” – KII with male service provider (#80)*

Quantitative findings on the prevalence of polygamy are consistent with anecdotal reports from the camps. Approximately 11 per cent of currently married male adolescents between 15 and 24 are in polygamous marriages, and between 3 and 8 per cent of female currently married adolescents (Table 12). There were no instances of polygamy reported among adolescents aged 10-14 (the sample only include 15 marriages in this age group). Rates were similar across both the registered refugee and FDMN populations, with the exception of more 15-19-year-old FDMN girls in polygamous marriages. Though intermarriage with the host community was reportedly rare, in an FGD with host community mothers, they commented on a couple cases of Bangladeshi men marrying an additional Rohingya wife and the perception of the host community that the influx of Rohingya is leading to an increase in polygamy in the host community (FGD #49).

**Table 12**  
Percentage of married adolescents in polygynous unions in Bangladesh (95% CI)

	Registered refugees (n = 132)		FDMN (n = 292)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>10-14</b> (n = 15)	0% (0, 84.2)	0% (0, 97.5)	0% (0, 52.2)	0% (0, 41.0)
<b>15-19</b> (n = 261)	11.1% (1.4, 34.7)	7.4% (2.1, 17.9)	8.3% (2.8, 18.4)	6.2% (2.7, 11.9)
<b>20-24</b> (n = 148)	11.1% (1.4, 34.7)	7.7% (1.6, 20.9)	10.7% (4.0, 21.9)	2.9% (0.1, 14.9)

## Findings

Although reliable estimates of polygamy in Rakhine State are not available, anecdotally polygamy was rare following a national law prohibiting the practice, which was strictly enforced. Thus, the rates of polygamy observed in this sample likely represent an increase. Qualitative respondents noted that when the camp authorities implemented new restrictions on child marriage, they also restricted polygamy.

*“During the last one-and-a-half years, when the CIC sits in the office, he enforced a marriage law. According to this law, girls need to be 18 and boys need to be 20 to get married and polygamy is not allowed. After enforcement of the law, people can no longer do whatever they want.” – IDI with married boy (#19)*

### 3. Spousal age difference

The vast majority of boys married someone very near their age. All of the male married registered refugees married someone between zero and four years older than them, and most of the male FDMN married either someone younger or zero to four years older (Table 13). Among 15–17-year-old and 18–19-year-old female registered refugees, about half of both groups married someone five to nine years older, and about half zero to four years older. More than 80 per cent of FDMN girls in both age groups married someone zero to four years older, though a few married someone younger, whereas no registered refugee girls did.

Marrying someone 10 or more years older was uncommon for all age groups. It was more common

for women; there was only one man recorded to have married a wife ten or more years older. Among women, the proportion increased with age. Those aged 20–24 were more likely to marry someone ten or more years older: one-third of registered refugees and half of FDMN. This proportion dropped to less than 1 per cent for the younger age groups, with the registered refugees less likely to marry someone in that age bracket than FDMN.

More than three-quarters of male adolescents who married as a minor married a spouse who was also a minor, as opposed to less than 40 per cent of female adolescents. These data are supported by qualitative findings that girls are more likely to marry an older husband, while boys are more likely to marry someone younger, but most often within a few years of their age.

Further elucidating these findings, the mean spousal age difference, presented in Table 14, indicates that on average 15–19-year-old boys marry someone within a year of their age, whereas girls in that age group marry someone about 3 years older. Among those married as children, the spousal age gap is slightly higher for registered refugee girls (about 3 years) than for FDMN girls (about 2 years), further supporting the finding above that the FDMN are more likely to marry someone closer to their age than registered refugees. Among 20–24-year-olds, on average men marry someone 3 years younger and women someone 3 years older, with similar gaps between the populations. There were no notable differences in mean spousal age difference between adolescents married as children and those married at 18 or above.

**Table 13**  
Distribution of spousal age gap in Bangladesh

	Registered Refugees						FDMN										Total
	male		female				male					female					
	0–4 yrs older	n	0–4 yrs older	5–9 yrs older	10+ yrs older	n	spouse younger	0–4 yrs older	5–9 yrs older	10+ yrs older	n	spouse younger	0–4 yrs older	5–9 yrs older	10+ yrs older	n	
Age 15–17 currently married	0.0	0	55.6	44.4	0.0	13	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0	8	4.5	81.8	13.6	0.0	29	50
Age 18–19 married by 18	100.0	4	42.9	50.0	7.1	14	22.2	72.2	0.0	5.6	19	2.9	82.4	11.8	2.9	36	73
Age 20–24 married by 18	0.0	0	33.3	33.3	33.3	4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	16.7	50.0	33.3	6	10
Age 18–24 married by 18	100.0	4	41.2	47.1	11.8	18	22.2	72.2	0.0	5.6	19	2.5	72.5	17.5	7.5	42	83



**Table 14**  
Mean spousal age difference for married 15–24-year-olds in Bangladesh (95% CI)\*

	Registered refugees		FDMN	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Married &lt;18</b>				
15–19 (A)	1.0**	-2.8 (-4.2, -1.5)	0.6 (0.2, 1.0)	-1.8 (-2.3, -1.3)
15–19 (H)	0.5 (-1.3, 2.3)	-3.4 (-4.3, -2.5)	0.5 (-0.5, 1.5)	-2.1 (-3.7, -0.6)
20–24 (H)	--	-3.0 (-11.6, 5.6)	--	-8.8 (-24.4, 6.8)
<b>Married 18+</b>				
15–19 (A)	0.7 (0.3, 1.1)	-3.5 (-5.2, -1.8)	1.4 (0.9, 1.8)	-1.5 (-3.1, 0.0)
15–19 (H)	1.0 (0.1, 1.9)	-3.0 (-3.9, -2.0)	0.2 (-1.0, 1.4)	-3.4 (-4.4, -2.4)
20–24 (H)	3.4 (2.4, 4.3)	-3.0 (-4.0, -2.1)	2.8 (2.2, 3.5)	-3.4 (-5.6, -1.3)

Note:

\* The value reported is the adolescent's age at time of marriage minus their spouse's age at time of marriage. A negative value indicates that the spouse is older.

\*\* There was only one observation.

(A) denotes data from the Adolescent Survey; (H) denotes data from the Household Survey.

## 4. Drivers of child marriage

Although conflict and displacement were not directly named as the most notable drivers of child marriage, most of the drivers discussed resulted from or were impacted by them. Displacement in particular was an overarching theme that exacerbated existing drivers of child marriage and created an enabling environment for the leading drivers of child marriage to take hold. Most of the drivers had to do with the camp setting specifically.

### (a) Lack of marriage restrictions

Although a lack of marriage restrictions may not actively promote child marriage, in this case it was a leading contributory factor and the one that was most discussed in the qualitative interviews. Respondents reported that the initial lack of structure in the camps and absence of enforcement of marriage laws resulted in an increase in child marriages in the first 18 months following displacement. Arriving in Bangladesh, most Rohingya reported that they were initially unaware of the legal age of marriage. Even at the time of this survey, two-thirds of FDMN reported that they did not know the legal age of marriage in Bangladesh.

Child marriage laws were strict, and readily enforced, for Rohingya when they were living in

Myanmar. The Rohingya, unique among ethnic groups in the country, had to apply for special permission to marry from the Na Sa Ka Border Immigration Authority (a state agency charged with defending the border and enforcing the restrictions on the Rohingya population), and pay for a marriage licence. This permission was difficult to get and took some time, often 6 months to 1 year. Myanmar also strictly enforced a prohibition on marriage before age 18. Though there were anecdotal accounts of families paying bribes to have a daughter's age increased on her registration papers, child marriage was nevertheless uncommon for girls and extremely rare for boys. The perception of freedom to marry at will in Bangladesh inspired many families to arrange marriages before returning to Myanmar, where they would once again be strictly regulated.

*"In Burma, there is law that doesn't allow marrying anyone under 18-years-old. This is the rule of law. After coming to Bangladesh, no one stopped us from marrying under 18-years-old. That's why I got married when I was under 18-years-old." - IDI with married boy 15-19 (#16)*

*"After we came here, there was no law for the marriage for one year. People arranged marriages whether [their children were] 15-years-old or 18. They didn't look at age. Many child marriages took place." - IDI with father of an adolescent (#36)*



Yasmin Ara, 15, prepares to start work on a sewing project as part of a group of about 20 girls learning livelihood skills in Kutupalong-Balukhali mega-camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

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*“We were not allowed to get married before 18 while we were living in Arakan. Arriving here in the camp, there were no rules or restrictions for up to 18 months and many of the Rohingya got married at 15, 16, 17 and less than 18. And now, the CIC ordered them not to get married until they are 18-years-old.” – KII with religious leader (#76)*

Respondents also noted that marriages were not formally documented in the camps, so it was difficult to enforce marriage laws. Marriages were recorded in the context of household registration and ration cards, but there was no formal mechanism: no formal permission was required and the marriages were not legal with regards to Bangladeshi law. The informality of the camp setting made it easy to ignore any rules that were established in the camp. Furthermore, many families arrived lacking documentation, making it possible to lie about ages. So even after CICs began restricting marriage to those over 18 years, families could get a religious leader perform the ceremony, without the knowledge or permission of the CIC, or simply lie about the intended couple’s ages. Some respondents also reported that CICs would change ages on registration cards if given a bribe. Though some child marriages did continue via these avenues, respondents reported that there was still a significant decline after the CICs took a stand against child marriage.

*“Yes, there is restriction. But people aren’t afraid of it because it isn’t so strong as in Myanmar.” – FGD with unmarried girls aged 15-19 (#50)*

*“No one checks here. We find some [CICs] ask for money for the marriage permission here. They take money to change the age of girls. For example, if a girl is 13 years old, her age will be changed if they are given money. Neither girls nor boys are safe.” – IDI with unmarried boy age 15-19 (#4)*

*“If we can register the marriage through the CIC then the CIC will check and determine the age of the girl and the boy. However, if the Rohingya families want to avoid the registration process and they decide not to register but only follow the religious law then there is nothing much we can do. Although there is a mechanism to punish them, but once the marriage takes place we don’t see much effort to take punitive measures. Everyone tries to stop such [child] marriage but once such marriages take place we haven’t seen much effort to do anything about it.” – KII with UNHCR (#54)*

## **(b) Discriminatory gender norms and prohibition of adolescent sexuality before marriage**

Daughters were at a heightened risk of child marriage. Though parents discussed their concerns in terms of safety and preserving family honour, their motivations were grounded in social norms that control adolescents’, particularly girls’, sexuality and reproduction. Child marriage is often seen as a way of preserving girls’ sexual purity (virginity), the breach of which outside of marriage is tightly linked with familial shame. Lack of security, increased interactions between boys and girls, and protecting family honour are all facets of discriminatory gender norms and the policing of adolescent sexuality that were noted frequently by respondents as contributing to child marriage.

Parents’ concerns for daughters’ safety most often related to the insecure construction of their shelters, primarily constructed of bamboo poles and plastic tarpaulins, the density of camps, with shelters abutting one another, and the exposure of girls as they walk to and from water pumps, latrines and bath houses. The crowded exposed life in the camps was contrasted with the protected life behind compound walls in Myanmar. Examples of harassment, assault and rape in the camps were discussed, both as discrete cases and as looming fears. Fathers expressed a strong sense of anxiety around protecting daughters, and a desire to marry them as soon as possible so that they would be under the protection of husbands. One married girl captured this weight felt by parents, saying that *“having a daughter was like having a load of 80 backpacks”* (#28). Respondents noted that married women were less frequently targeted or harassed than unmarried women.

*“Since we fled to Bangladesh, we have lived in tents which are entirely made of plastic. So we have great difficulty looking after [our children] when they become adolescents because there is no security and we fear that someone could make a mistake or violence towards our daughters. Although our daughter is under 18, we give her marriage when we get a proposal from another family in hope that the husband would take care of her and her life would be better after she got married.” – IDI with father of an adolescent (#33)*

*“They get married earlier because they have no safety. The shelters are very miserable here and women can easily have violence committed against them by breaking the plastic wall of the shelters.” – KII with service provider (#53)*



## Findings

*“The reason the Rohingya virgin girls are given marriage at early ages here is not having any fencing and security here in the camp.” – IDI with unmarried girl age 15–19 (#7)*

Some respondents also addressed the specific fear of human trafficking. They discussed girls being forcibly taken from their homes, kidnapped and sold. This was attributed both to living among strangers from many different places in the camps, such that your neighbours might be unknown to you, and also to their precarious status in Bangladesh.

*“We need to protect our children from human trafficking because it is not our country.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#21)*

Others recalled experiences with militants in Myanmar, a driver of child marriage prior to displacement, the memory of which was sometimes associated with child marriage in the camps as well. A virgin girl past menarche is considered to be in a precarious position; parents believe it is better to marry her “before she is spoiled”.

*“My marriage was arranged early in Burma because there was a clash on 9 October 2016. At that time, military soldiers raped and kidnapped girls and they sexually harassed and tortured them. So, our parents arranged marriages of grown-up girls, whether they were old enough or not, even if they were 12- or 13-years-old. Our parents arranged our marriages to escape from the hands of the military.” – IDI with married girl age 15–19 (#28)*

*“We needed to come here because the virgin girls were raped by the Myanmar military in Myanmar. So, people are afraid of keeping virgins in the family and let them get married at any age like 15, 16 years old.” – IDI with married girl age 15–19 (#31)*

Parents also expressed distress at the increased interactions between adolescent boys and girls in the camps. In Rakhine State, they were carefully separated from each other, largely by keeping girls past menarche within family compounds. In the camps, despite many girls being kept inside most of the time, full separation is not achievable and parents fear that boys and girls meeting will lead to inappropriate flirtations or relationships. This was also associated with the perceived rise in self-initiated love marriages, though in reality love marriages were still rare. Respondents also reported that the proliferation of adolescent marriages and increased relations between boys and girls set an example that parents feared they would follow, motivating some parents to marry their children before they did the same.

*“We are living in overcrowded shelters so people think that girls could go the wrong way, so they are arranging their marriages early.” – IDI with unmarried boy age 15–19 (#4)*

*“Our shelters in the camps are overcrowded and they can easily see each other, so they fall in love. That’s why many child marriages took place for a year.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#16)*

*“My daughters were grown up. Daughters of some people have boyfriends but daughters of some people don’t. I worried my daughters would do wrong things by seeing others, so I thought it would be better to arrange their marriages early before they lost their dignity and shamed us.” – IDI with mother of an adolescent (#42)*

Reputation is critically important in the Rohingya community, and even the perception of impropriety can shame a family and ruin a girl’s marriage prospects. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend is looked down upon, and flirting or even talking to someone of the opposite sex can negatively impact a girl’s reputation in the eyes of the community.

*“Some parents of girls want their daughters to get married early because they don’t want them to lose their dignity. If their daughter falls in love with someone and he doesn’t want to marry then her dignity would be lost, so they want to arrange their [daughter’s] marriage before she is 18 years old.” – FGD with Talim (religious education) providers (#56)*

*“In Bangladesh, mobile phones are very available, almost everyone has cellular phone. If a girl talks with her brother over phone, her family thinks that she is talking with her boyfriends. It’s also applicable for boys, like boys are calling their girlfriends. Thinking about these issues, the guardians do marry them off.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#15)*

Both parties needn’t be involved for someone to be shamed. A boy or girl publicly teasing someone of the opposite sex can create an impression of a relationship, causing pressure for them to marry. Parents are afraid that daughters will be physically forced into a “shameful” act or that sons will be “overtaken by lust” and commit a crime.

*“We have seen a few cases where daughters are being threatened or teased and as a result the family wants to arrange for their early marriage. There is a taboo in this community that it is very difficult for a girl to find a groom if there is a scandal out of these eve-teasing [public sexual harassment] incidents. Hence, families want their daughters to be married at an early age.” – KII with service provider (#77)*



*“As the son becomes uncontrollable at the adult stage, we want him to get married with a pious girl, we worry that he will fall in the trap of any bad behaved girl although he is of young age. Actually, we don’t want him to get married. Seeing his behaviour, we made him get married at the age of 17 years.” – IDI with father of an adolescent (#35)*

*“They encourage young boys to get married to avoid rape cases, harassment and other sins. They give the example if the boys get married early, there will be no rape cases.” – KII with service provider (#78)*

Adolescents who are caught in a sexual affair are quickly married to limit the damage to their family honour. Girls who are found to be pregnant are immediately forced to marry the father of the child. If he is unable or unwilling to marry her, it is unlikely that anyone else will. This extends even to victims of rape – girls are often forced to marry their attacker or be labelled unmarriageable.

*“If a boy and a girl have an affair before marriage, the parents mostly give the girl in marriage to that boy. If the parents can’t do that, her life will be destroyed.” – FGD with traditional birth attendants (#45)*

*“Some youth who fall in love with each other get pregnant committing sexual relations before their marriage. She can be given in marriage to the guy who is responsible for that pregnancy. She can’t be given in marriage to another guy, except to the one who is responsible for that pregnancy. Other guys don’t want to marry her.” – IDI with father of an adolescent (#37)*

*“The husband with whom I got married had a first wife. He tried to marry me by forcing me. I became pregnant wrongly by him. At that time, I couldn’t see his characteristics whether he was good or bad because I was already pregnant. Finally, I had to marry him to save my dignity as no one will be interested in marrying me during the pregnancy.” – IDI with married girl age 15–19 (#27)*

### **(c) Means of distributing aid**

The distribution of food aid and shelter allotment were also discussed as motivators for child marriage. Shelter and food distributions rely on UNHCR registration, which assigns a Family Counting Number (FCN) to each household. Following a marriage, a new FCN can be obtained, which results in a separate aid distribution. Respondents noted that when UNHCR announces

a new registration effort, there is a rash of marriages preceding it to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain a separate FCN. This is true for marriages of all ages, but also includes child marriages. Large families in particular see this as a way of obtaining more overall aid for the family and are sometimes motivated to marry one or more children early to relieve resource stress. Respondents recounted that aid is based on an average household size of five, and while rations are doubled when that number reaches a certain threshold, households with six or seven people have fewer rations per person, and thus have more motivation to marry a child early. The same logic applies to non-food aid and shelter.

*“If they are given marriage earlier, they can have their own ration cards and can live their life happily. This is a kind of aid to their marriage.” – KII with religious leader (#76)*

*“We are conducting new FCN registration in camps. Now, suddenly there is a spree of marriages; underage boys and girls [...] Because, if they start new families, then they will get new cards and separate relief. This is the intention [...] When there is a new marriage, that means they will get a new family card. When they get a new family card, then they will get separate humanitarian aid and assistance.” – KII with CIC (#66)*

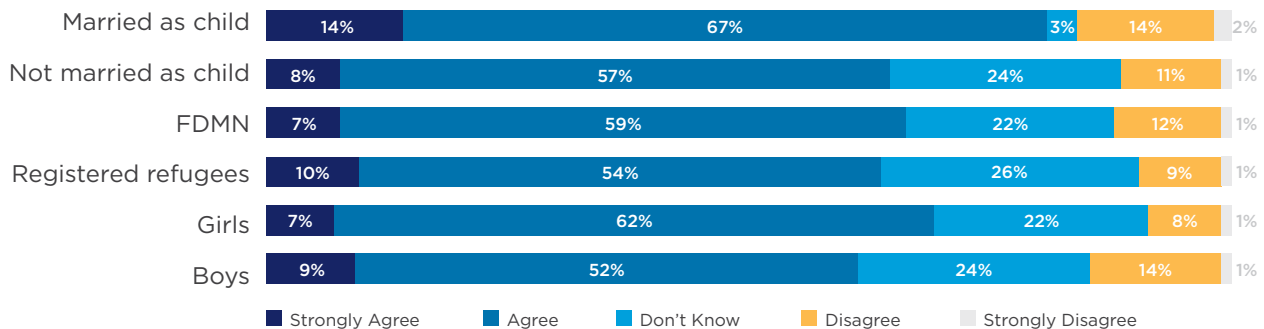
*“If they married and made a separate family card, they could get rations and other aid from WFP [World Food Programme] and other NGOs. So some parents arrange the marriages of their children early in the hope of getting more aid.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#20)*

*“In the same way, if [a son] can bring a bride, they can make one more ration card [...] Although we eight members are in one family, we can divide the family into two families after getting married and get rations to live their lives well. This is a kind of advantage and there are many other advantages like that.” – FGD with male service providers (#55)*

*“Let’s say there are six, seven members in one family, there is a boy in that family who is less than 18 but seems to be at a fair age physically. He is given marriage because one family gets one house, one food card, everything one, one. The father thinks that, if he marries his son, he will get one extra house, card, get more rice and it will be easy for them to live in the house. So, such kind of boys are also given marriage though they are less than 18.” – IDI with father of an adolescent (#37)*

## Figure 2 Adolescent perceptions regarding the link between marriage and resources in Bangladesh

Getting married helps my family get more resources (food, aid, money)



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.000$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.054$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.000$

Quantitative data was consistent with the prospect of additional aid driving child marriage. Adolescents married as children were notably (15 per cent) more likely to agree that getting married helps their family to gain resources (see Figure 2). Adolescent girls were also 10 per cent more likely than boys to agree. There was little difference between FDMN and registered refugees; both largely agreed.

Ration cards were mentioned in relation to marriage in several other contexts. One respondent mentioned that a man may marry a second wife to set up another household and receive additional food aid. Another described a bride's parents paying her portion of the family rations to the groom's family after she moves in with them following the wedding. Several respondents mentioned selling rations to pay for dowries and wedding expenses. Two respondents reported that separate ration cards are denied to married children and to children born in child marriage, though UNHCR denied this. A few respondents said that ration cards do not really affect marriage decision-making in any way.

The tight living quarters were also discussed as a driver of child marriage – as the limited space available for multiple family members meant that space was at a premium. If a son was to bring home a bride, a daughter, who would leave to join her husband's household, would be married to make room. Getting married also presented the opportunity of establishing a new household, including building a new shelter.

*"We are only given 15 or 13 foot shelter. We are living in it as if we have no relationship with our children. In that small shelter, we bring brides for our sons, we also have our grown-up daughter*

*in it, no respect can be maintained, living like animals in the small shelter. So, we have to give our daughter marriage as fast as possible to save dignity." – KII with community leader (#68)*

*"The parents give marriage to their children in an early age because it is difficult to stay together many people in a little tent [...] the tents are too small to live so that we want to get married as soon as possible to get separate shelters." – IDI with unmarried boy (#6)*

### (d) Economic insecurity

Economic insecurity was associated with child marriage in several additional ways beyond aid distribution. Dowry arose in discussion of child marriage for both boys and girls. With so few opportunities for employment or other sources of income, the families of adolescent boys looked to dowry as a source of income. Parents of girls sought to marry their daughters early because younger girls have to pay less dowry.

*"After coming in Bangladesh, people have no property and no income in the camp so they want to get dowry from the bride's parents in the marriage." – FGD with 20–24 year men (#44)*

*"The boy's parents think if they give marriage to their sons, they will get some money as dowry from the bride's family." – KII with religious leader (#73)*

*"Some poor parents also give the children marriage at an early age when they get the chance because they are unable to give much dowry to the bridegroom." – FGD with 20–24-year-old men (#44)*

Child marriage in the camps was also viewed as a cost-saving measure. Because it costs much less to marry in camp than in Myanmar, parents were motivated to marry their children before they return and have to pay more. This is all the more important as they have lost their property and wealth and even upon returning will not have the means to pay. Marrying daughters young was seen as a means of reducing a family's resource burden, as brides typically move to join the groom's family.

*"To get marriage permission, it cost us a lot of money and people still have that thought in their mind. When they arrive here as victims, they are always afraid of the huge cost of marriage that they will need when they return back to Myanmar. But here, they can get freedom at marriage. So, they are getting marriage as much as they can without seeing whether they less than 18 and over 18." - FGD with married girls age 15-19 (#51)*

*"Parents of daughters have to buy clothes, have to support them and have to feed them. These things became a huge burden for the parents. So Rohingya parents and also girls get ready for early marriage. They become ready for the marriage though they are not old enough because they cannot wear well and they cannot eat well and also parents cannot afford their expenses." - IDI with married boy age 15-19 (#17)*

*"From the women's side, it is like that; for instance, there are three, four children in one family. Although a girl is not at the age of 18, it is understood as there are many children, if one of the girls is given marriage among them, there is one family member less. The responsibility becomes lighter for the parents. So, they give their daughters even though she is less than 18. Like that way, it is understood that they become at the right age of marriage." - IDI with father of adolescents (#37)*

Some parents married their daughters young in hopes of giving them a more financially secure future. Girls themselves also view marriage as a

potential means of achieving a better life. A couple of respondents commented that marrying children young is a sort of retirement plan. Marrying children early means they will have children early, who can help take care of their parents and grandparents.

*"Often parents think if they can marry off their daughter to someone economically solvent, the daughter's future will be safe." - KII with service provider (#77)*

*"The benefit of early marriage is that they get children before they get old and they will support their parents." - FGD with married girls age 15-19 (#51)*

The quantitative data showed some difference in economic status between households with and without child marriage. Both male and female heads of households were more likely to be employed in households with a 10-19-year-old who had not been married as a child than in households with a married 10-19-year-old (see Table 15). There was no meaningful difference in employment type for male heads of households, but female heads of household were more likely to work in the home in households with child marriage, and more likely to engage in paid day labour outside the home in households without child marriage. No difference was seen in shelter types, likely due to the limited options in building supplies available in the camp, and the restrictions on many types of construction. An inventory of household goods was also conducted, however there were few items whose ownership was correlated with child marriage. Cookstoves were more likely to be owned by households without child marriage (46 per cent versus 36 per cent) and tube wells, though rare overall, were more likely to be found in households without child marriage (45 per cent versus 0 per cent). Households without child marriage reported higher average monthly incomes 3,990 Bangladeshi Taka (-\$47) versus 3,430 Taka (-\$40), but they also reported higher expenses, so there was little difference between net incomes (both were negative).

**Table 15**  
**Correlation between head of household employment and child marriage in Bangladesh**

	No Child marriage	Child marriage	P-value
Male head of household employed	43.5%	33.3%	0.169
Female head of household employed	42.2%	30.2%	0.046

## Findings

### (e) Lack of alternatives

The lack of opportunities in camp was frequently discussed as a leading driver for child marriage. The lack of opportunities for education, and the difficulty in getting jobs were mentioned most, but the general lack of options and uncertainty were also discussed. Some parents saw the lack of other opportunities as leaving only the option of marriage and others saw the lack of school and jobs as an opening for troublemaking, leading them to promote marriage to keep their children from going astray. Some adolescents specifically mentioned the inability to fulfil their goals and dreams as a reason for getting married young.

*“Due to the displacement from our country, the people have nothing to do here in the camp so even the children decide to get married.” – IDI with unmarried girl age 15-19 (#9)*

*“What else will they do except marriage if there is not any opportunity for education, making money, [or other] activity?” – KII with community leader (#63)*

*“Rohingya families may be inclined to marry their children at an early age because they are growing up without education and jobs, so parents think it would be better for children to give them marriage to control them.” – KII with religious leader (#73)*

*“Though I had many dreams, I could not fulfil them. So, I got married.” – IDI with married male adolescent (#16)*

The lack of alternatives was more pronounced for poor girls, who have few marriage options due their family’s inability to pay an attractive dowry. Because younger girls pay smaller dowries, marrying young may be considered their only option for marriage. Orphans were also mentioned as having fewer options. Among adolescent survey respondents, 16.5 per cent of adolescents not married as children had lost one parent, compared to 21.6 per cent of those who were married as children. Adolescents married as children were also twice as likely to have lost both parents, 13.6 per cent as opposed to 7.7 per cent of those not married as children. Qualitative respondents noted that adolescents without parents sometimes marry in hope of finding a more stable living situation.

*“As the daughters of poor families, they arrange the marriages with whatever they can afford.” – IDI with married girl age 15-19 (#28)*

*“Those who have no parents get early married in the hope that they would get dependable place.” – IDI with mother of an adolescent (#43)*

Among the lack of alternatives, the lack of educational opportunities for adolescents in the camps was referenced most frequently. They had been unable to complete their schooling in Myanmar, and now had no prospect to do so in Bangladesh.

*“What else will they do here, as they fled to the camp from halfway through their education. There are no schools in the camp for adolescents. So, they get married saying that our destiny is broken/spoiled. In many places in the camp, I heard many adolescents say themselves that they should get married as there is no other way.” – KII with female service provider (#62)*

*“There is no chance for education in the camp so the parents give marriage to their children when they become an adolescent without caring about their age.” – IDI with unmarried boy age 15-19 (#6)*

*“Those who are not able to study get married simply because they have nothing to do.” – IDI with mother of an adolescent (#41)*

*“Here in the camp, their life is being murdered without education. If they got such an opportunity to learn then I can tell that they would not think to get married early.” – KII with female community leader (#69)*

*“Here Rohingya young refugees don’t have access to such educational platforms like schools and universities. If they had access to education, child marriages would not take place. Surely, it will decrease.” – KII with male service provider (#78)*

One unmarried adolescent explained that as she had to give up her dream of studying, getting married became her new dream:

*“I have a dream to study, but I don’t have an opportunity to study here in the camp. When I was in Myanmar, I could go to school freely. Now, I don’t have a chance to study in the camp. When I couldn’t achieve my goal of studying, I stopped it. Then, when my parents want to give me marriage, it has become another dream for me. As I couldn’t finish my education, I want to get married because it is another dream for me.” – IDI with unmarried girl (#10)*

Respondents also commented that people with less education are more likely to marry early, or to marry their children early. There was a strong perception that uneducated individuals do not know right from wrong, and do not understand the implications of child marriage. Community leaders, religious leaders





In Bangladesh, Nazma, 14, worries that climate change will turn her into a child bride.

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and service providers expressed this most strongly, but some adolescents and their parents espoused the same view.

*“The uneducated parents give marriage to their children without thinking about their future.” – KII with female community leader (#69)*

*“We can see that adolescents get married here under the age of 18 years. Moreover, marriage age is different between educated people and uneducated people as educated people get married above 18 years and uneducated people get married under 18 years because of the different understanding and lack of knowledge.” – KII with CIC (#66)*

*“Most of our community are uneducated and got married at a young age because of a lack of knowledge. They didn’t understand about the impact of early marriage in life.” – KII with female service provider (#79)*

*“The boys who are uneducated get married young because they can’t differentiate what is wrong and what is right.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#19)*

The presumption that people with less education had less understanding of the implications of child marriage was not confirmed by the quantitative data, which showed no difference in mean years of education for the male or female heads of household in households with child marriage and those without. Neither was there any difference in the level of education achieved by adolescents who were married as children compared with those who were not. While in many settings those who had married as children would have completed less school (Sekine and Hodgkin, 2017), in this unique setting, where schooling is not available for adolescents, educational attainment was universally limited, erasing the differences that might otherwise be observed.

#### **(f) Mobile phones and social media**

Though self-initiation of marriages remains uncommon in the Rohingya camps, mobile phones are frequently mentioned in association with self-initiation. Cellular phone use is much more widespread in the camps than it was in Rakhine State, where the network coverage was limited. As a result, adolescent phone and social media use has increased substantially. Several respondents noted that parents see their children’s use of phones and

## Findings

social media to contact members of the opposite sex as a sign that they are ready to get married. Even the perception of such behaviour can also be a driver for marriage. Parents, adolescents and community leaders all cited mobile phones as a way youth initiate relationships. One member of the host community noted that Bangladeshi boys contact and initiate relationships with Rohingya girls via mobile phones.

*“We didn’t have mobile phones in Myanmar because there was no network. As mobile phones are available here, they [adolescents] use them to communicate between them [...] by exchanging phone numbers as friends.” – FGD with unmarried girls aged 15–19 (#50)*

*“Often, they use technology, i.e. social media, to build such romantic relationships.” – KII with UNHCR (#54)*

*“In love marriages, there is no need for the introduction [by family], they introduce themselves and talk themselves over the phone.” – KII with religious leader (#73)*

residents were unaware of prior to that time. Respondents reported that there was a notable decrease in child marriage following this change, though it still continued at lower levels. Respondents mentioned a variety of consequences for not abiding by rule, including imprisonment, fines and withholding ration cards, but UNHCR and camp authorities denied such measures would be taken.

*“We got married up to 1 year [in the camps] because there was no rule regarding marriage for the Rohingya. There was no limit on age. People 18 years old, even 80 years old 70 years old got married at that time. Now, a law is announced by the CIC from block to block not to get married before the age of 18. Although they turn 18 years old, they need to go to the CIC and get permission to get married. Or they can’t get married. Now it becomes the same as Myanmar. When the marriage permission comes in hand, we can get married. The illegal marriages decreased to one-third after that announcement by the CIC. Due to that announcement, we hope that people won’t get married at an early age.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#12)*

## 5. Moderators of child marriage

### (a) Education regarding and enforcement of national marriage laws and camp policies

The perception of absent marriage rules predominated in the camps for the initial 18 months of displacement. At that time (March 2019), respondents reported that camp authorities announced a restriction on marriage prior to the age of 18 and prohibited polygamy. This was consistent with Bangladeshi national law, which most camp

Even several months after this change, however, not all camp residents were aware of the age restriction: the household survey indicated that over half of the FDMN did not know about the legal age of marriage in Bangladesh, but almost all of the registered refugees did. The perception from the perspective of the adolescents with regards to the legal age of marriage is also seen to be varied based on length of time in Bangladesh (FDMN knew less about legal age of marriage in Bangladesh than registered refugees), and length of time away from Myanmar (registered refugees knew less about legal age of marriage in Myanmar than FDMN) (Table 16).

**Table 16**  
Adolescents’ perceptions of legal age of marriage in Bangladesh

	Registered refugees		FDMN		Actual legal age of marriage
	Mean reported	% Do not know	Mean reported	% Do not know	
Legal marriage age for girls in Myanmar	18.0	82.4%	18.0	12.8%	16* (18 for Rohingya)
Legal marriage age for girls in Bangladesh	18.1	13.1%	18.4	66.0%	18^
Legal marriage age for boys in Myanmar	18.5	81.0%	19.3	14.4%	18
Legal marriage age for boys in Bangladesh	21.2	13.44%	21.8	66.8%	21^

Notes:

\* The legal age for girls was raised to 18 in July 2017.

^ The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 includes a loophole where a court can allow child marriage in “special cases” without defining what those cases might be.

## (b) Uncertain future

Uncertainty regarding their displacement in Bangladesh, particularly around its duration, was cited by a few respondents as a moderating influence on marriage, including child marriage. Several discussed wanting to return to Myanmar before marrying, for reasons including the desire to ensure a match that would be from the same area of Rakhine State, the desire to pursue further education after returning, and wanting to have an established household prior to marrying.

*“Although the parents arrange a marriage for their adolescent son, he does not feel ready to get married because he has ambitions to study when he can return to Myanmar with rights and dignity. Otherwise, he wants to get married after building a house in their own compound in Myanmar after he has returned.” - FGD with 20-24 years old men (#44)*

## (c) Economic instability

Though most often working as a driver, in some cases the costs associated with marriages were also reported to act as a potential moderator against child marriages. Respondents indicated that the high costs associated with dowries and the marriage process itself lends itself to families not being able to afford to marry their daughters, particularly if families are economically insecure. Still, some families are said to pursue this – given the high societal pressure – even if it means accumulating debts due to the lack of earned income in camp settings. Girls are reported to be in particularly high demand if their families are rich, which is said to encourage an early marriage, whereas poorer girls are said to be less in demand and can remain unmarried for longer. Some respondents, however, indicated that this may have changed due to camp settings, where poorer girls are also getting married because dowry and ceremony costs are reportedly smaller.

*“After coming to Bangladesh, traditions have changed [...] while we were in Burma, we had to give big dowries, but here we don’t need to give it in the camp. And the daughters of poor families arrange the marriages with whatever they afford.” - IDI with married adolescent (#28)*

## (d) Rape

In a highly discriminatory and cruel twist, being raped by an unknown assailant acts as a moderator against child marriage for girls. Girls and women who are victims of sexual violence are often made to marry their attacker, if the attacker is

known. Those assaulted by unknown assailants, such as soldiers during the violence in Rakhine State, are reportedly considered marred and thus unmarriageable. Because so much of the August 2017 violence was public, respondents noted that word easily travelled around the community as to who was no longer “flawless”.

*“The unmarried girls who were raped are not married by others because the boys abhorred them for being raped. There is a saying in our language “Don’t eat what the dog touches.” - IDI with unmarried boy age 15-19 (#3)*

*“What will we do? We just keep them sitting in their houses because nobody will get married with that raped/bad-named woman. Mostly, the boys like to marry flawless girls. The lives of raped women are completely ruined.” - IDI with married girl age 15-19 (#22)*

The general consensus among respondents seemed to be that the life of a raped woman or an unmarried pregnant woman is destroyed and her honour (as well as her family’s) is ruined: she is said to be shamed, discriminated against, isolated from the rest of the community. Depending on the economic status, the outcome in terms of marriage is said to vary: if she is rich, she may still marry, but if she is poor, respondents indicated that she must remain unmarried, marry the man who got her pregnant, or potentially marry someone who is already married, divorced, old or sick.

*“If a girl from rich family was raped, she could find a husband, but if the girl is poor, she would not be married by an unmarried person. She must marry an old or married person or remain unmarried forever.” - FGD with Talim (religious education) providers (#56)*

*“We Muslims can’t have physical relationships before the marriage. If anyone got pregnant before marriage, no one will marry her. She will be treated as an outcast from society.” - IDI with female married adolescent (#25)*

A few equated raped women to boys having gunshot scars and wounds in terms of affecting their ability to get married.

*“If a boy or a girl was injured by gunshot or raped, he or she will worry whether anyone will marry him or her. If they were married, they also worry whether their spouse will do something or will break up with them if he or she hears about it. They worry about it.” - IDI with married girl age 15-19 (#25)*





Mona BK, 16, from a marginalised and remote community in far-western Nepal, received a marriage proposal after the earthquake in 2015. But she refused. Two of her elder sisters were forced to marry young. With no regular income source and land for farming, her parents struggle to make a living.

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## 6. Decision-making

### (a) Marriage considerations

Many respondents noted the importance of traditional practices and religious beliefs in determining adolescents' eligibility for marriage. The Rohingya community's interpretation of Islam is that a girl is ready to marry after menarche, however most respondents reported that culturally a girl is considered eligible until a couple of years following menarche. For boys, there was not a specific physical marker but rather their marriage eligibility was based on perceived physical maturity coupled with the perceived ability to support or care for their spouse and future family.

*"Girls usually grow up around the age of 12, 13 and 14 but they are not ready to get married. If she is healthy and her physical appearance is strong, she could be ready at the age of 16. If she*

*is not healthy and physically not so strong, then she must be over 18 years old to be ready for marriage." - IDI with father of an adolescent (#46)*

*"We understand that he is ready to get married if he is physically fit although he is less than 18, he has enough money and is well educated. How the community understands biologically is his body size is also well developed or he has enough money and is physically strong." - IDI with unmarried boy age 15-19 (#2)*

When asked to put a number on the most desirable marriage age for marriage, for girls, the most desirable age was between 17 and 18 years across all populations (Table 17). For boys, it ranged between 19 and 22 years. The prevalence of marriage at younger ages than the stated ideal is testament to the strength of the social norms and family pressures to marry children before the ideal age they have set for themselves.



**Table 17**  
Desirable age of marriage in Bangladesh

			Girls	Boys
Household	Registered Refugees	Households without child marriage	17.79	20.87
		Households with child marriage	17.33	20.43
	FDMN	Households without child marriage	17.63	19.91
		Households with child marriage	17.63	20.20
Adolescent	Registered Refugees	Married as a child	17.93	21.54
		Not married as a child	17.87	22.15
	FDMN	Married as a child	17.83	20.16
		Not married as a child	17.65	19.47

Schooling and jobs both play a significant role in a family's decision regarding when an adolescent should marry. The lack of alternatives for adolescents in the camps was frequently discussed as a key consideration when making marriage-related decisions. Respondents noted that child marriage becomes the default option for adolescents who lack opportunities to attend school, obtain jobs, or participate in income-generating activities and, unfortunately, many adolescents in the camps fall within this category.

*“Child marriage in the Rohingya community is not happening with the willingness of the parents, it is because of the situation. In camp, there is no opportunity of education or income which is why children are not improving. They are being driven to corruption and when parents realize that then they marry them off at an early age. But at the same time that decision becomes a bad choice for the children as they don't understand the responsibility of a family and that's how breakups happen.”*  
– KII with female community leader (#67)

Both household and adolescent survey respondents were asked about the factors that influence decisions regarding the age of marriage (see Tables 18 and 19). For both FDMN and registered refugees, the most important influences by far were religion and family honour, both before and after displacement. Religion or family honour were named the current primary influence on decisions regarding the age of marriage by two-thirds of both adolescents and female heads of household in both populations. Conflict

and displacement were important additional influences named by both adolescent and female head of household FDMN but were negligible for registered refugees. Registered refugees were more likely to cite money/resources as a key additional influence. Security was an important additional factor for both populations currently, but did not play a major role prior to displacement. Citizenship was a key factor for about twice as many registered refugees as FDMN. This is understandable given that their displacement has been protracted, whereas the FDMN have been in Bangladesh a much shorter time and many still hope to return. Interestingly, half of FDMN said the primary influence now is the same as that prior to displacement. This proportion was less for registered refugees.

Similarly, religion and family honour were the top two influences for both households with child marriage and those without. Interestingly, religion was the primary factor in a notably higher proportion of households with child marriage than those without, both before and after displacement. Family tradition, while not playing as much of a role overall, was less important in households with child marriage. Conflict and displacement tended to play less of a role in households with child marriage. Security was not a chief primary concern for either group, but as an additional influence, it was considered more important in households with child marriage, on the other hand, was notably less important than in households without child marriage. Again, half of FDMN said the primary influence now is the same as that prior to displacement.

**Table 18**  
Factors that influence the age at which people marry, by population  
in Bangladesh (%)

	Current primary influence (Female head of household)		Additional influences (Female head of household)		Primary influence prior to displacement (Female head of household)*		Current primary influence (Adolescent)		Additional influences (Adolescent)		Primary influence prior to displacement (Adolescent)*	
	Refugee	FDMN	Refugee	FDMN	Refugee	FDMN	Refugee	FDMN	Refugee	FDMN	Refugee	FDMN
Religion	<b>34.2</b>	<b>46.6</b>	<b>69.8</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>36.5</b>	<b>42.1</b>	62.5	61.4	51.7	47.6
Family honour	<b>37.1</b>	<b>25.2</b>	59.0	60.2	16.9	18.9	27.1	27.8	<b>70.7</b>	<b>63.3</b>	17.2	16.3
Family tradition	<b>8.5</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>48.4</b>	<b>35.4</b>	5.6	6.9	7.3	9.4	<b>45.0</b>	<b>35.1</b>	8.6	12.1
Money/resources	<b>8.4</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>23.4</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>28.0</b>	5.2	3.1
War/conflict	<b>0.0</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>10.2</b>	0.0	1.4
Displacement	<b>0.6</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>31.3</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>26.1</b>	1.7	9.0
Security	<b>1.4</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>44.3</b>	<b>39.2</b>	1.7	2.3
Citizenship	<b>2.6</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>10.9</b>	8.6	4.2
Other	<b>6.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>0.5</b>	0.0	0.5	0.0	1.7
Same as before					<b>39.3</b>	<b>47.6</b>					<b>14.8</b>	<b>49.5</b>

Notes:

\* In first nine rows number represents the percentage of respondents reporting that the primary factor now is not the same as before.

**Bold** text indicates statistically significant difference between registered refugees and FDMN with  $p \leq 0.05$ .



A group of girls play a board game at the UNICEF-supported Adolescent Club as it meets in the Kutupalong makeshift settlement for Rohingya refugees in Ukhiya, a sub-district of Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh.

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**Table 19**  
Factors that influence the age at which people marry, by child marriage status in Bangladesh (%)

	Current primary influence (Female head of household)		Additional influences (Female head of household)		Primary influence prior to displacement (Female head of household)*		Current primary influence (Adolescent)		Additional influences (Adolescent)		Primary influence prior to displacement (Adolescent)*	
	Households without child marriage	Households with child marriage	Households without child marriage	Households with child marriage	Households without child marriage	Households with child marriage	Households without child marriage	Households with child marriage	Households without child marriage	Households with child marriage	Households without child marriage	Households with child marriage
Religion	44.0	53.2	<b>66.0</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>53.2</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>56.9</b>	<b>61.0</b>	<b>74.5</b>	46.9	64.5
Family honour	29.2	36.0	59.8	65.8	18.7	11.3	27.7	26.5	65.1	71.6	16.2	19.4
Family tradition	8.7	4.5	<b>39.1</b>	<b>25.2</b>	5.7	8.1	9.0	4.9	38.0	38.2	12.0	6.5
Money/resources	5.9	3.6	30.6	27.0	9.1	9.7	8.2	3.9	30.9	26.5	3.1	6.5
War/conflict	2.1	0.0	12.6	10.8	4.3	0.0	0.6	1.0	7.9	11.8	1.1	3.2
Displacement	2.7	0.9	<b>25.7</b>	<b>16.2</b>	4.3	0.0	2.2	2.0	22.4	19.6	8.6	0.0
Security	4.0	1.8	<b>47.1</b>	<b>58.6</b>	2.9	3.2	1.9	2.9	40.2	49.0	2.4	0.0
Citizenship	0.9	0.0	<b>10.5</b>	<b>3.6</b>	7.3	3.2	1.6	0.0	<b>14.0</b>	<b>6.9</b>	5.2	0.0
Other	2.3	0.0	0.3	0.0	5.4	4.8	1.0	1.0	0.3	1.0	1.6	0.0
Same as before					44.9	44.1					<b>38.9</b>	<b>50.0</b>

Notes:

\* In first nine rows number represents the per cent of respondents reporting that the primary factor now is NOT the same as before.

**Bold** text indicates statistical significance between registered refugees and FDMN with  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Adolescents were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements to assess their opinions on marriage (see Figure 3). There was widespread agreement with most statements among both registered refugees and FDMN populations. Very few notable differences were observed between the registered refugee and FDMN populations. The notable exception was the statement about marriage improving relationships between refugees and members of the host community; registered refugees were much more likely than FDMN to agree or strongly agree with that statement (55 per cent versus 39 per cent). This was the only statement on which a notable portion of all groups strongly disagreed.

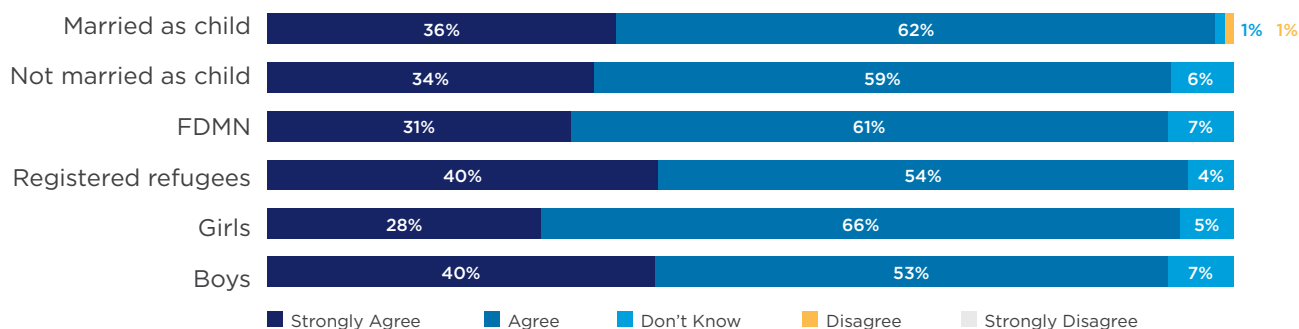
Respondents married as children were notably more likely than those who were not to agree or strongly agree with the statement about marriage helping them to overcome challenges they face (81 per cent versus 64 per cent). They were also slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree that marriage with someone in the host community is a way out of bad conditions in refugee settings (69 per cent versus 63 per cent), potentially indicating that they are more

likely to seek marriage as a way to deal with difficult times. Adolescents married as children were also more likely to agree or strongly agree that marriage helps their family by producing children (80 per cent versus 64 per cent).

Boys were more likely than girls to strongly agree that marriage is important for maintaining family honour (40 per cent versus 28 per cent). Considering that respondents discussed girls more frequently in conjunction with family honour than boys, it is notable that girls were less likely to strongly agree. Though overall a similar combined proportion agreed or strongly agreed, boys were also more likely than girls to strongly agree that both boys (39 per cent versus 25 per cent) and girls (50 per cent versus 25 per cent) should complete school before they marry. Among unmarried adolescents, boys were much more likely to strongly agree that they feel prepared to be married (33 per cent versus 9 per cent). Boys were also more confident that they would be able to make more decisions about their life after they are married (27 per cent versus 13 per cent)

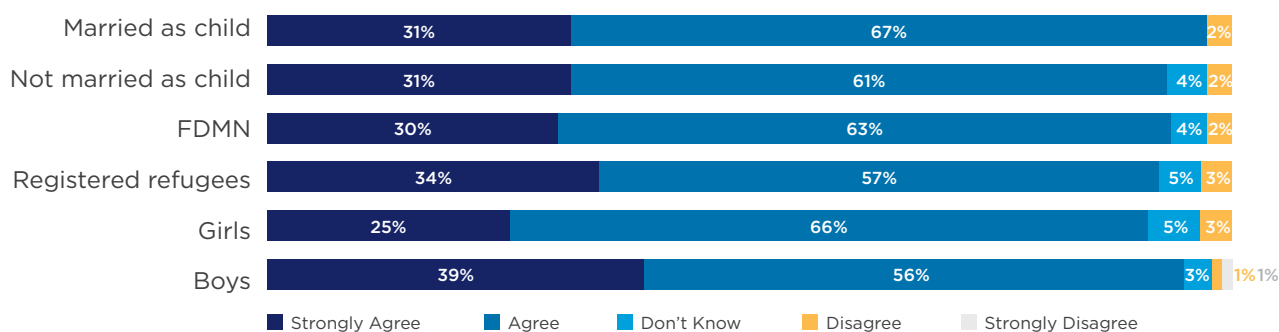
**Figure 3**  
**Adolescent perceptions about marriage in Bangladesh**

Marriage is important for maintaining family honour and reputation.



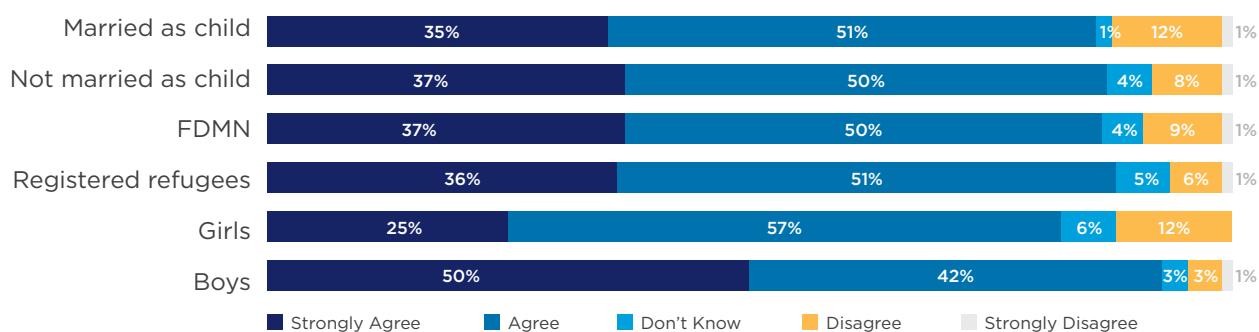
Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p < 0.001$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.004$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.169$ .

Girls should complete school before they marry.



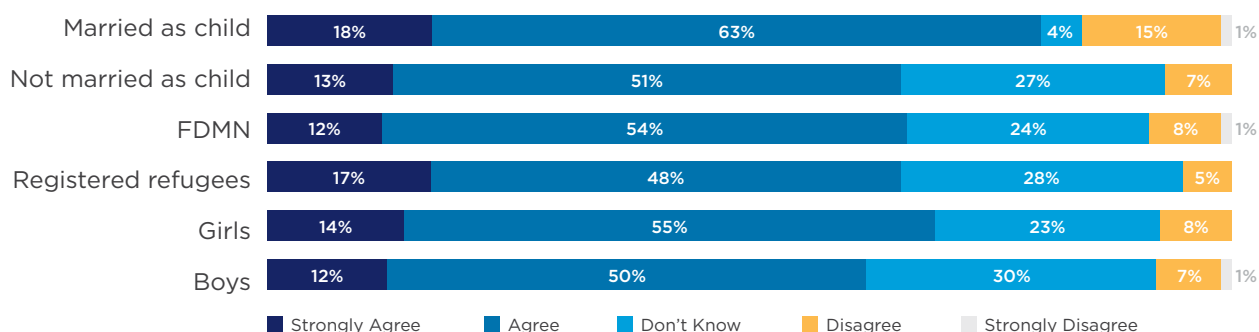
Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p < 0.001$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.199$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.352$ .

Boys should complete school before they marry.



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p < 0.001$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.418$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.382$ .

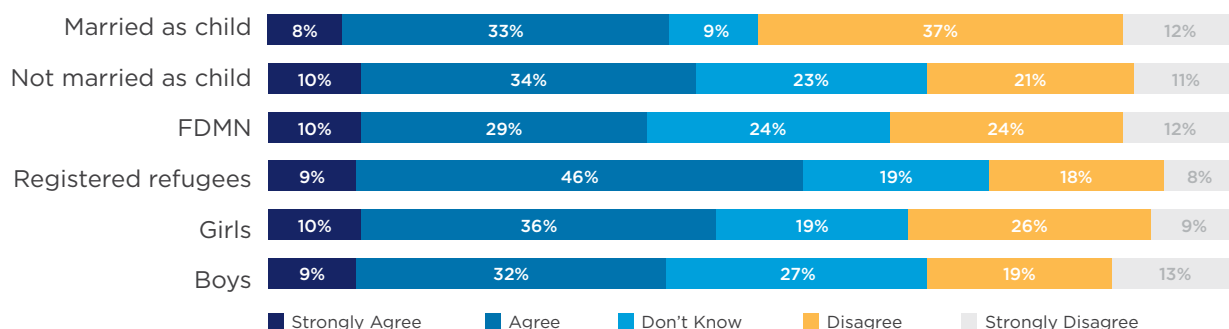
Marriage would help me to overcome some of the challenges I face.



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.004$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.003$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.001$ .

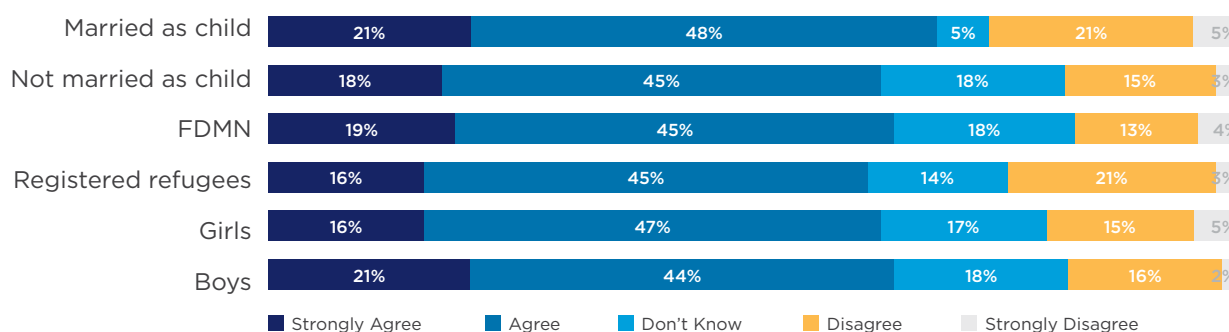


Marriage between refugees and members of the host community leads to stronger community relationships.



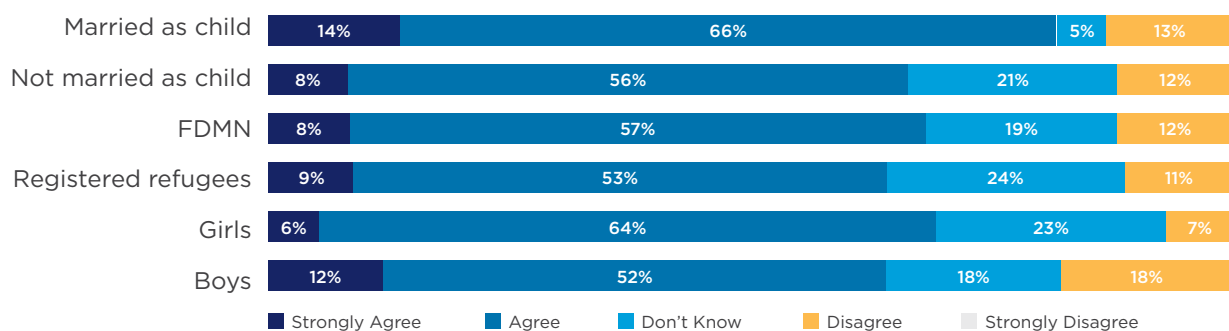
Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.000$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p < 0.001$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.001$ .

Marriage with someone in the host community is a way out of bad conditions in refugee settings.



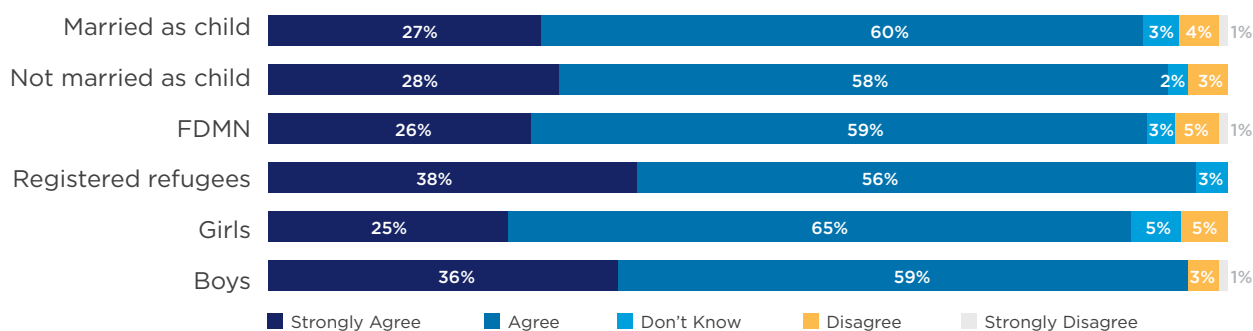
Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.001$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p < 0.001$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.022$ .

Getting married helps my family by having children/producing heirs.



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p < 0.001$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.166$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.003$ .

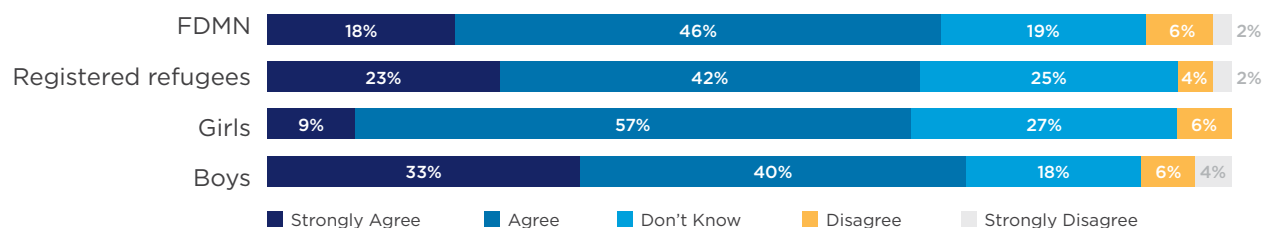
I was prepared to become a wife/husband at the time I married.



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.020$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.596$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.890$ .

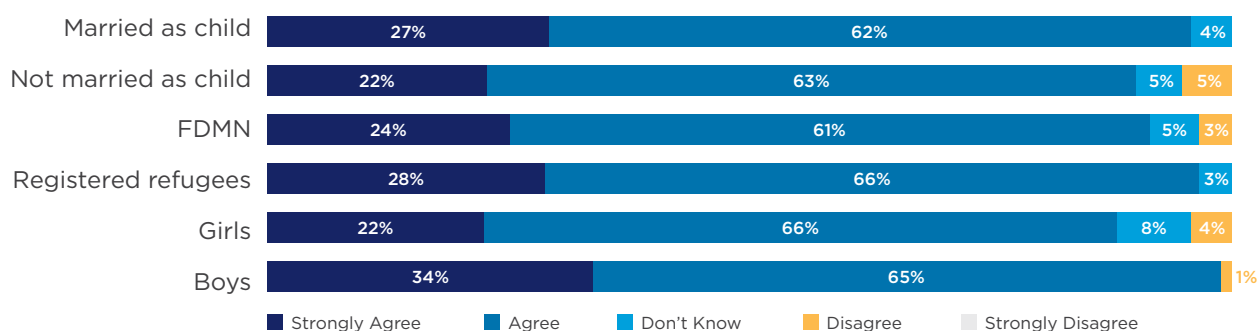
## Findings

I feel prepared to become a wife/husband.



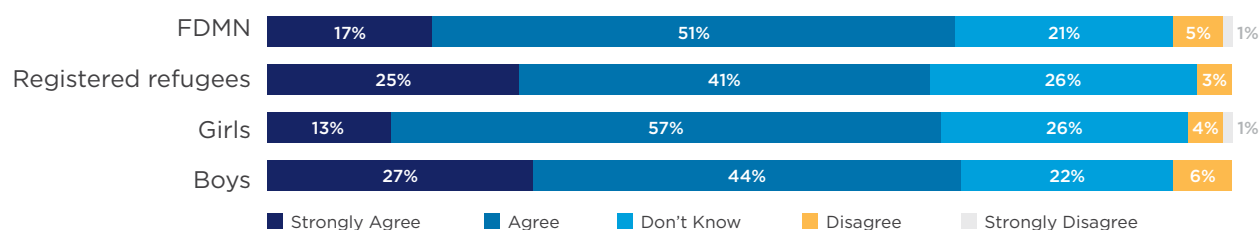
*P-values: boys versus girls  $p < 0.001$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p < 0.001$ .*

I was able to make more decisions about my life after I married.



*P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.007$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.721$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.581$ .*

I will be able to make more decisions about my life when I become married.



*P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.000$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p < 0.001$ .*

### (b) Family roles

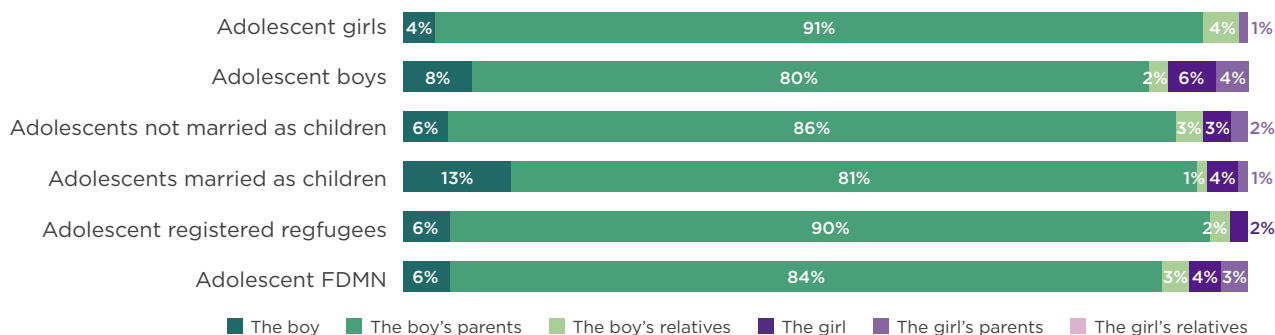
Parents and elders are consistently reported to be the primary decision makers, for both boys and girls. Both quantitative and qualitative respondents agreed that adolescent involvement in the decision-making process is extremely limited, if present at all. More than 80 per cent of both adolescents and female heads of household, across both populations, reported that the parents are the primary decision makers regarding age of marriage (see Figures 4 and 5). Adolescents also overwhelmingly agreed that their parents should be the ones making decisions about the age at which they marry (see Figure 6). Qualitative respondents noted that in Rakhine State the extended family had a role in marriage decision-making, which has declined after displacement, as many families are now separated.

Among adolescents married as children, about twice as many saw themselves as the primary decision makers than those not married as children: 13 per cent compared to 6 per cent for boys and 7 per cent compared to 3 per cent for girls. Though girls married as children are more likely to be the primary influence, boys are still twice as likely to do so.

Boys were more likely than girls to name themselves as the primary influence on the age of marriage. Regarding girls' age of marriage, 8 per cent of boys said boys were the primary influence as compared to 4 per cent of boys naming girls the primary influence. Girls agreed: 8 per cent named boys the primary influence and only 3 per cent said girls were the primary influence on girls' age of marriage.

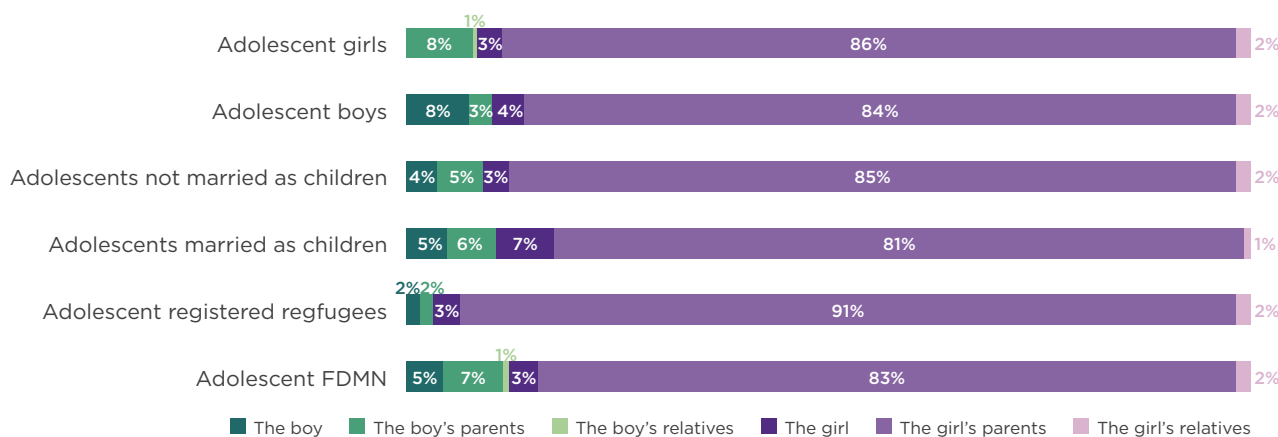
*"Mostly, the decision for marriage of the adolescent is done by parents in Rohingya community culture." – KII with male community leader (#61).*

**Figure 4**  
Primary influence on boys' age of marriage in Bangladesh



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p < 0.001$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.061$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p = 0.003$ .

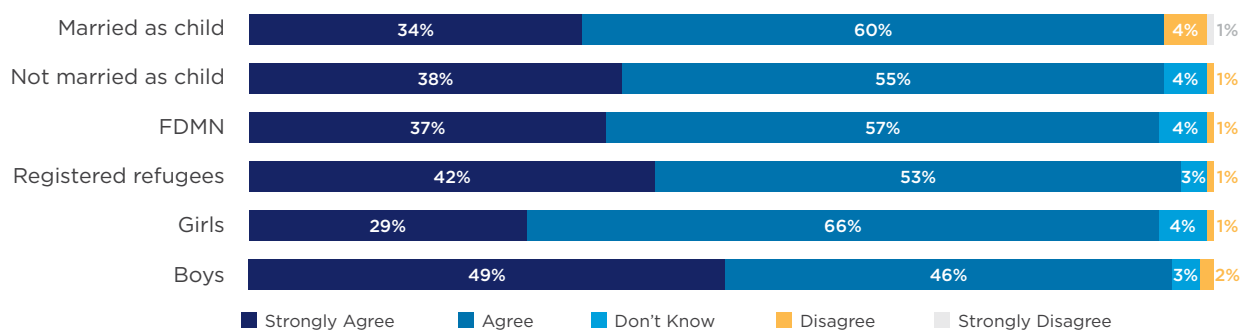
**Figure 5**  
Primary influence on girls' age of marriage in Bangladesh



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p = 0.000$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.312$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p < 0.001$ .

**Figure 6**  
Adolescent views on parents' role in marriage decision-making in Bangladesh

The age at which I marry is a decision that my parents or relatives should make for me.



Note: P-values: boys versus girls  $p < 0.001$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.016$ ; registered refugees versus FDMN  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 20**

Percentage of ever-married Rohingya adolescents directly involved in the choice of their spouse in Bangladesh

	Registered refugees			FDMN		
	Male	Female	P-value	Male	Female	P-value
10-14	-	-	-	-	50%	-
15-19	40.0%	49.0%	0.538	57.7%	35.7%	0.022
20-24	70.6%	56.3%	0.526	36.7%	50%	0.107

**Table 21**

Married Rohingya adolescents' participation in marriage decision-making in Bangladesh

		Registered refugees			FDMN		
		Male	Female	P-value	Male	Female	P-value
Decision to marry	Decided independently	11.1%	26.1%	0.357	34.9%	26.1%	0.242
	Decided with family	88.9%	60.9%	0.124	60.6%	61.4%	0.924
	Did not participate	0%	13.0%	0.255	4.6%	10.2%	0.193
Choice of spouse	Decided independently	33.3%	16.7%	0.297	31.8%	30.7%	0.880
	Decided with family	66.7%	58.3%	0.663	57.6%	51.1%	0.428
	Did not participate	0%	25.0%	0.097	10.6%	13.6%	0.571

Some respondents, particularly adolescents, noted that there was an increase in self-initiated marriages among adolescents in Bangladesh, as compared to Myanmar. Parents and community elders expressed that this was because adolescents are less likely to obey parents and elders in the camp setting where some traditional systems and roles have been disrupted. Adolescents thought it was because boys and girls had more opportunities to meet and fall in love in the camps.

Even in the case of self-initiated marriages, adolescents are unlikely to elope. Rather, if they form a love attachment they approach their parents for permission to marry. Love marriages and particularly self-initiated marriages without the parents' permission are not widely accepted.

Respondents also noted that when adolescents feel they are ready to marry, boys in particular, they will begin to flirt, which is a signal to the parents that they must marry them soon, before they cause "trouble".

*"If a boy and a girl love each other, they tell their parents and seek their permission. And then their parents ask religious leader to read their Nekah (marriage approval according to the rules of religion). Marriages are taking place this way." - IDI with unmarried boy age 15-19 (#4)*

*"Although there are such kinds of [love] marriage, we can't control it here in the camp. People don't listen to others' advice. When we were in Myanmar, most people respected and followed our [community leaders'] advice, but here in the camp people don't take others' advice." - KII with female community leader (#69)*



### (d) Choosing spouses

Respondents identified the key factors in spouse selection as age, the family's social and economic status, educational attainment, ability to complete gender-specific tasks associated with marriage, and cultural and religious background. When determining which potential spouses are considered eligible, many respondents noted that they should be of the appropriate age- though what was considered "appropriate" differed slightly among respondents. In general, 18 was reported to be the most desirable age for girls, and between 19 and 21 for boys. Furthermore, several respondents noted that the family's status in the community is important when determining eligibility of prospective partners, as is their financial status. Many respondents noted the importance of education in a potential spouse. Respondents consistently reported adolescents with higher levels of education are considered ideal partners and are often prioritized over those with less education. Gender-specific roles, such as a man's ability to financially provide for a family and a woman's ability to complete housework and care for

children and parents, were also mentioned by parents as important traits for a child's potential partner.

*"Before giving a child in marriage, we verify the age of bride and groom according to our religion and law. If they are at the perfect age, we investigate the habits and characters of the parties, whether they follow religious rule and law, whether my daughter will be peaceful in that family, what is his qualification. Verifying all these things, we give our daughter and son marriage." – IDI with Father (#32)*

More than two-thirds of registered refugees reported that they knew their spouse prior to marriage by living in the same camps in Bangladesh (Table 22). FDMN were much more likely to not know their spouse before marriage, about a third, compared to less than 7 per cent of registered refugees, suggesting quickly arranged marriages. FDMN married as children were more likely to marry someone from the same village in Myanmar, compared to FDMN not married as children (24 per cent versus 15 per cent).

**Table 22**  
Prior connection between potential spouses in Bangladesh

	Registered refugees			FDMN		
	Not married as children	Married as children	P-value	Not married	Female	P-value
Did not know each other	4.4%	6.7%	0.754	34.5%	32.2%	0.748
Close relatives	17.4%	20.0%	0.839	17.2%	17.2%	1.000
Same village in Myanmar	4.4%	6.7%	0.754	16.1%	25.3%	0.134
Same camp in Bangladesh	73.9%	66.7%	0.630	26.4%	19.5%	0.280

Cultural and religious background was also reported to be a major consideration. Rohingya reported exclusively marrying Muslims and generally other Rohingya within the camps. Respondents noted that it was rare for Rohingya to marry Bangladeshi persons.

*"No intermarriages take place with host communities because we will be in trouble during repatriation, we cannot bring them with us to Myanmar. If our girls get married with the host community, neither we can bring them to our country nor the Bangladeshi government will keep [our daughters]. For that reason, we don't get married with host communities." – KII with male community leader (#70)*

## Findings

### (e) Dowry

Despite the economic insecurity prevalent in the camps, both the traditions of dowry and gifting bridal gold remain integral to marriage. Dowry and bridal gold amounts have decreased, however, and were disregarded in some unions. The decrease in exchanges in some cases resulted in adolescents seeking out potential partners from families that are able to provide higher dowry or bride prices. The majority of households reported that dowry and/or bride price (typically in the form of gold) was paid in adolescent marriages. Even with the decreased standards, adolescents from poor families still found it difficult to marry.

*“In spite of having good manners, good habits and dignity, the son or the daughter from a poor family cannot easily get married today. Most of the people are interested in dowry for the marriage.” – FGD with married boys age 15–19 (#57)*

## 7. Options for delaying marriage

Options for delaying marriage were not widely reported. The lack of education and work opportunities undermined strategies that might have been employed to delay marriage prior to displacement. Boys in particular were reported to use education as a rationale for delaying marriage in Rakhine State, however, this was less relevant in the camps. The desire to get some form of education was reported to be extremely strong among both boys and girls and the larger community as a whole. Education is reported to be perceived as an opportunity towards a better self – increased income, a career, the ability to support family, increased knowledge and higher respect in the community. Respondents indicated that the age of marriage is therefore older for educated individuals compared to uneducated youth. The lack of educational opportunities for adolescents was reported as a concern by both boys and girls and their parents. Some NGOs are reported to be providing some limited forms of training and informal education.

*“If parents want to arrange marriage for a young boy, but the boy does not want to get married, because he may want to continue his studies or to do a job or he maybe wants to learn about religion. Or he wants to be fit physically for marriage. Maybe these are the reasons.” – FGD with fathers of adolescents (#46)*

*“Let’s analyse child marriages. Compare child marriages taking place between girls who are studying and girls who have nothing to do. You will find the result. Compare between those*

*who have job and jobless. If you open diploma schools or university, nursing training and sewing training, then you need not to tell them not to marry early. To stop it, you must have a sustainable long-term plan.” – KII with male service provider (#78)*

A few respondents noted that adolescents would run away if their parents tried to force them to marry, resulting in decreased pressure from parents in an effort to keep their children in the household. Several respondents did note, however, that it was more common for parents and elders to respect a boy’s desire to delay his marriage than for them to respect a girl’s desire to delay her marriage.

*“If he wants to delay the marriage, he shows many reasons such as he is young and has not finished his education yet, he has no money, no house, no income. He will say there is nothing good in marriage at this young age. He will also say to let him finish his education first. Then, he will be qualified enough to know how he can manage his wife and life. He always wants to say that he will marry only when he is able to manage everything properly/peacefully.” – KII with male religious leader (#76)*

Some community leaders and religious leaders also reported counselling parents against marrying their children at young ages.

*“If someone approaches me to marry child at a young age, I won’t let it happen. I will explain to him the bad sides of the early marriage. It affects the health of oneself, children and life falls into risk. And, I will also explain to him that getting married at a proper age causes no problems and it offers a good health of child and a healthy life. That would be my advice on this.” – KII with female community leader (#67)*

## 8. Perceptions of child marriage

Within the community, child marriages are not viewed favourably. Couples married as children are reported to have “low social status”. Respondents reported that the community does not believe that there are advantages associated with child marriages, particularly when it comes to the health of the couple and their children. Upon marriage, boys, they indicated, would not be able to complete their education and, as a result, would face challenges in getting a job and providing for their family. Girls, they reported, would get pregnant early, likely have a difficult delivery and would be less likely to be knowledgeable on how to best care for the child. They stated that both would lack maturity and, as a result, would likely have difficulty sustaining their relationship as well

as the relationship with their families. Respondents reported that this would therefore likely lead to conflicts between couples and with in-laws.

*“If they married before the proper age, the changes after their marriage are that they will have the same habits which they had before marriage. They will have fights between themselves and with their family because they are not mature. They could not attend enough education. They would not know how to respect their parents as they are uneducated. And he would not know how to value his wife and the wife would not know as well. They could not advise the neighbours because they married at a very young age.” – IDI with father of an adolescent (#36)*

*“The life of youth who marries early is always very bad, always quarrelling, fighting, no mutual understanding between wife and husband, don’t know how to respect the parents-in-law, difficulties because of no income, become short tempered, and their life is in a very bad position.” – KII with male religious leader (#79)*

*“There are many disadvantages of child marriage. There will be fighting between husband and wife.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#17)*

Adolescents commonly discussed early marriage as a barrier to the pursuit of their education and other dreams, either because of a reported shift in focus towards family and children or because the husband might not allow the wife to continue her education.

*“To be educated or successful, we have to focus on our education or job fully. At that time, if we have to focus on marriage and focus on fulfilling the family needs or if we have to focus on making future plans for our children, we will have to give up our dream automatically.” – IDI with unmarried boy age 15–19 (#4)*

*“After I got married, if my husband will allow me to study, it will be a help for my life. It will be a misfortune for me if my husband will not allow me to achieve my goals after marriage. Marriage will be a help when my husband allows me to achieve my goals. If not, marriage will be a misfortune for my life.” – IDI with unmarried girl age 15–19 (#9)*

Despite the negative perceptions by both adults and adolescents, respondents did not mention any active ongoing community efforts to block child marriages from happening. Some households reported having participated in educational programmes for parents and adolescents, and 83 per cent of respondents indicated that they had

been told that marriage before the age of 18 was harmful since arriving in the camps. While almost all of the reported perceptions regarding child marriages were negative, these perceptions alone do not seem sufficient to prevent child marriages from occurring. Given the continued practice of child marriage in the community, the problems that child marriages are presumed to address evidently outweigh the perceived negative impacts on the couple married.

## 9. Marriage experience

Displacement was widely reported to have had a negative impact on the marriage experience. Economic and physical insecurity were the most commonly cited reasons for unhappiness in marriage. Interviewees mentioned cramped shelter conditions, their status as refugees, movement restrictions as contributing to unhappy and unsatisfying marriage experiences. The difficult conditions were reported to cause strain within marriages and decreased satisfaction within marriage. Respondents also cited increased domestic violence and IPV in the camps, among both adult and child marriages. Community leaders noted that the marriage process itself is not as happy as before because of the lack of resources. Wedding festivities are shorter and involve fewer people than they did in Rakhine State. They are no longer always celebratory affairs.

*“A woman gets married with a husband only hoping that he will give her food, clothes and everything she needs in her life. Likewise, the husband also hopes that his wife will make him happy, control their children, look after his parents. But it doesn’t come true here in the camp because he cannot fulfil her wishes like giving shelter, clothes, compound, toilet and income for the family as he has no activity. In that case, the love of the bride decreases and finally the marriage won’t work.” – FGD with unmarried boys age 15–19 (#59)*

*“Marriage is important for life and it is international human nature and it is as important as food for life. Marriage is happening here without any happiness and satisfaction. There are many losses due to marriage.” – KII with community leader (#61)*

Several respondents discussed an increase in polygamy following displacement, due to the lack of restrictions governing marriages in the camps. This is in contrast to the regulations in Rakhine State where one was prohibited from marrying a second spouse unless a formal divorce had been obtained or the first spouse had died. Around 8 per cent of FDMN quantitative survey respondents reported

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that their spouse had another spouse, in contrast to 10 per cent of registered refugees. Among child marriages, this proportion was lower with 7.6 per cent respondents of child marriages citing that their spouse had another spouse compared to 9.3 per cent of respondents from non-child marriages.

*“As we gave our son marriage at early age, he may get another wife when he becomes older. This is also a problem for them.” - FGD with female traditional birth attendants (#45)*

Respondents widely agreed that couples married as children have a more negative marriage experience than those who marry at older ages. Difficult pregnancies and risky deliveries were frequently mentioned as common experiences for married girls. Child marriages were also reported to experience higher incidence of quarrels, domestic violence and divorces, due to immaturity and lack of understanding of married life.

*“If they get married at a young age, they must face many difficulties. As they are young, they don't have knowledge. They won't have a good understanding between them. They won't listen to parents and obey them. So, they will be sad.” - FGD with fathers and fathers-in-law (#46)*

Approximately 80 per cent of newly married Rohingya couples in the camps live in the groom's family shelter, though about 10 per cent establish a new household, enabling them to obtain separate food rations instead of adding household members to an existing household ration card.

Respondents were also asked about the differences between married and unmarried life. Everyone mentioned increased responsibilities for both men and women after marriage as men have to work and provide for the family, while women have to take care of the household and children. Women were also cited to have an additional role of caring for their new in-laws. Married girls frequently mentioned having limited time to spend with their parents and siblings, as their focus was now on their spouse, children and in-laws. Adolescents also mentioned that marriage confers more respect and a higher status in the community and that married individuals are more involved in community work, another new responsibility. Due to these increased responsibilities, married adolescents discussed feeling a loss of freedom after marriage.

*“If a girl and a boy married, they are not thought as children anymore in the community. Before the marriage, they were children. If they did any wrong, they were forgiven at that time. If they married, their levels are promoted as adults and people respect them.” - IDI with unmarried boy age 15-19 (#4)*

*“It is very different between married and unmarried women. Before marriage, we had lived, eaten and visited as freely as we wished. When we become responsible after getting married, we can't go to visit anywhere because we need to remain with the responsibility.” - IDI with married girl age 15-19 (#22)*

*“In the family of her parents, she didn't need to do anything. When she becomes the bride of other family, she needs to do all kinds of domestic work like cooking, sweeping and other things.” - FGD with male service providers (#55)*

### (a) Roles within marriage

Respondents highlighted that marriage roles and boundaries are clearly outlined according to gender. There was a general consensus on the roles of a wife and husband. Respondents noted that women are home-bound and are responsible for daily chores and housekeeping. Interviewees also added that men are responsible for providing for the family. Respondents mentioned the importance of being taught these responsibilities by their parents and through observation of how their parents and the community run their families. Some respondents also discussed the importance of both wife and husband following religious teachings.

*“As the boy gets married, he needs to obey everything that the religion says to do. He is also responsible for every support that is needed in the family. He is also responsible for everything what the wife needs. He must also obey the parents' words.” - IDI with unmarried boy aged 15 to 19 (#03)*

Nearly all the respondents agreed that the ability to fulfil one's marriage roles was impacted by one's age. The majority of respondents mentioned that young boys and girls are unable to carry out the roles of a husband and wife effectively because they do not understand their responsibilities and viewed them as still being childish. Respondents indicated that this was largely due to the disruption in education, especially for boys. A majority of respondents also noted that young boys and girls are not physically healthy enough to take on the marriage roles such as being parents. Respondents also added that a young boy would not be healthy enough to take care of his pregnant wife at such a young age.

*“After becoming pregnant, I couldn't take care of myself. I didn't know how to live healthy.” - IDI with married girl age 15-19 (#28)*



There was a general consensus among respondents that the marriage roles have been impacted by the camp settings. Most respondents mentioned that displacement has reduced parents' ability to provide for their families in terms of education, food and income, as well as clothes. A few respondents also noted that there are changes to family dynamics, including weaker family ties, a rise in arguments between family members, and increase in polygamy and divorce. There is also a reversal of roles as more women enter the workforce, sometimes in lieu of their husband.

*"The spouses can't fulfil their roles in the camp. When we were in Myanmar, we could wear many kinds of dresses as we wished. But now a wife can't get good clothes in the camp because the boy has no work for income to fulfil the roles as a husband. When we were in Myanmar, we had our own houses and properties so that we could do everything as we wished but after coming in Bangladesh, we can't get enough food and we can't get clothes in the camp because the husband has no income. We have many difficulties in the camp life." - IDI with married girl age 15-19 (#27)*

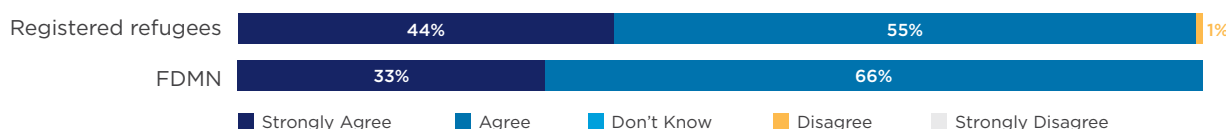
Married girls, in particular, noted that the camp has not impacted marriage roles significantly, because they are still doing the same work as before, and are still obligated to obey their husbands and in-laws, particularly in families that do not allow women to leave the house for work.

*"While we were in Burma, we also had to obey father-in-law and mother-in-law. We had to get permission from our husband and obey him. Now, we also have to obey here. We had to obey in Burma. Nothing is impacted." - IDI with married girl age 15-19 (#25)*

Household respondents almost universally agreed with statements related to traditional patriarchal gender roles and viewpoints (Figure 7). Registered refugees were more likely to strongly agree with expressions of traditional gender roles. Interestingly, they were also more likely to strongly agree that boys and girls should have the same opportunities for education.

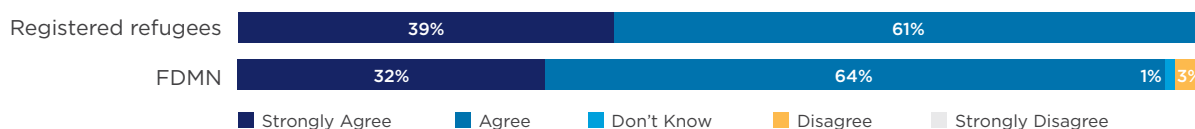
**Figure 7**  
Female heads of households' perceptions about gender roles and marriage responsibilities in Bangladesh

A woman's most important role is to take care of the home, the children and cook for the family.



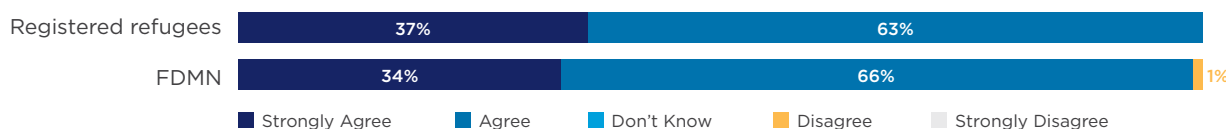
$p < 0.001$

A son's education is more important than a daughter's education if financial resources are scarce.



$p < 0.001$

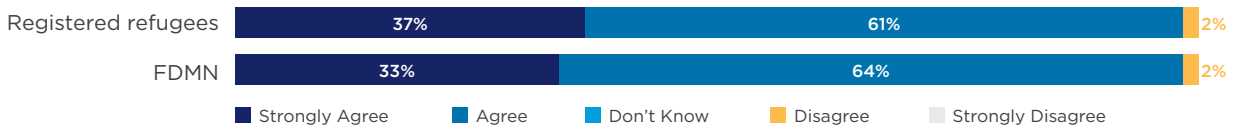
A woman's main role is to be a wife and mother.



$p < 0.001$

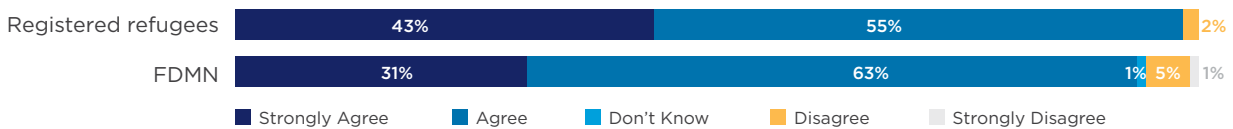
## Findings

A man's main role is to be a husband and father.



$p < 0.001$

Girls and boys should have the same opportunities for education.



$p < 0.001$

## 10. Pregnancy and childbirth

A minority of the adolescents surveyed directly and included in the household roster had children. Among the 1,035 female adolescent respondents aged 10–19 surveyed, 3.67 per cent ( $n = 38$ ) had given birth and 3.1 per cent ( $n = 31$ ) refused to answer. Of the nearly 3,000 adolescents aged 10–19 listed on the household roster, only 3 per cent were reported to have a child, including 29 (2 per cent) boys and 55 (4 per cent) girls. All but two boys were married, consistent with reports of high stigmatization of having a child outside of wedlock. Premarital pregnancy is particularly detrimental to a girl's prospect of marriage unless she is to marry the man who impregnated her (regardless of circumstances) or pays someone else to marry her. Some alluded to abortion being an encouraged option for unmarried girls, but respondents were inconsistent in their understanding of its legality.

*"I tried to do an abortion because I felt embarrassed to have a pregnancy before marriage. The doctors from MSF [Médecins Sans Frontières] told me that abortion was impossible and they advised me to marry the person responsible for my pregnancy and not to do an abortion because it was risky for me." – IDI with married girl age 15–19 (#27)*

*"Sometimes, the unmarried girls can also get pregnant. If she wants to make abortion at 2/3 months pregnancy, we help her by taking her to the hospital for successful abortion. We can help up to that. During the delivery, we can help her as a [traditional birth attendant] by our traditional way to give birth to the baby. We can help up to that if she really wants to keep the baby. In such kind of delivery, we can help her openly in public. We can help her very secretly so that nobody can hear about it. We can help the married one obviously, but we can help the*

*unmarried one secretly like that so that nobody can hear about the pregnancy." – FGD with traditional birth attendants (#45)*

The mean age of first birth was lower among couples who married as children, at 17.4 years old, compared to 18.3 for couples who married at age 18 or 19. The household survey pointed to a similar trend, where the mean age of the first child among those who were married as children was lower at 17.25 compared to couples who were married later, at 19.49 years old. Respondents confirmed that early pregnancy often occurred in child marriage, and reported that it was associated with a host of health-related complications for the mother and child including difficult pregnancy, delivery-related complications such as miscarriages, associated morbidities and disabilities, and death. While respondents stated that it was vital that preparations for a successful pregnancy be made, this responsibility was stated to be gender biased: ensuring the good health of the expectant mother and the child, and receiving appropriate prenatal care were reported to be almost exclusively the mother's responsibility. However, respondents also reported that young couples do not have the capacity nor the knowledge to seek or provide care for the mother's or baby's health.

Many respondents noted that the pace at which pregnancies occurred, as well as the overall number of total births, followed a much faster timeline in camp settings than in Myanmar. In Rakhine State the Na Sa Ka (local government authority) had strictly enforced a two-child policy for the Rohingya, to repress the Rohingya population. In camp, however, with no such stringent rule, respondents reported that most women became pregnant soon after getting married; the age of the first pregnancy for a woman was therefore reported to be conditional on the timing of the marriage. The desire for pregnancy consisted of a wide array of reasons according to respondents including, religion ("it is Allah's

decision”), fulfilling a woman’s duty, preventing a husband from straying too far, strengthening a couple’s relationship, adding joy into their lives, eventual family support from the children and a concern that not getting pregnant post-marriage will lead to diseases.

*“There was a law in Myanmar for us not to have more than two children. If a girl married after the age of 18, they used to have their first child after 3 years and their next child 3, 4 years after the first baby. After arriving in Bangladesh, we have no such kind of limitation of getting two, three babies. We can have a child whenever we wish.” – IDI with unmarried boy age 15–19 (#22)*

Contraceptives were accepted by both adolescents and older community members, particularly the Depo-Provera injection, but a few respondents mentioned access issues in the camps, with long lines cited as one barrier. Respondents also indicated a particular need for increased awareness around contraceptives and family planning for couples married as children, who were considered to have had less access to, or knowledge of, those topics. Respondents were positive towards health providers and considered them trusted sources of information on family planning. Women-friendly spaces, clinics and health centres were mentioned as offering education, family planning resources and care during pregnancy and delivery. However, several barriers to access were discussed, including geography, cost and discrimination against young couples.

*“If they want to have birth control, I will advise them to have “Depo Injection ” and advise them to have vaccination if they want to get pregnant. I will advise them to go the doctor, advise them*

*not to quarrel and be healthy. I will also advise them to take the help of a traditional birth assistant for the pregnancy and make her aware of the place where they live.” – IDI with father of an adolescent (#34)*

*“In an early marriage, the husband will not understand about family planning so they will make children as much as possible because he doesn’t understand the advantages and the disadvantages of pregnancy in early age and he will not know how to take care of the children. Someone who gets married at the perfect time, he will understand everything about family planning and they will not get pregnant annually because they know the disadvantages of early pregnancy. The uneducated couples do not understand about family planning like educated couples.” – FGD with 20–24 year men (#44)*

When asked about puberty, pregnancy and childbirth (see Table 23), boys reported having somewhat more knowledge than girls in several areas, including knowing how to keep a woman healthy during pregnancy and danger signs during pregnancy. Notably, adolescents married as children had much higher exposure to knowledge about pregnancy. This suggests that education about pregnancy is much harder to access for those that are unmarried. Only about 40 per cent of unmarried adolescents said they had received information on how to become pregnant or stay healthy while pregnant, compared with 80–90 per cent of adolescents married as children. Two-thirds of adolescents knew about the dangers of early childbirth and the importance of birth spacing, including more than 90 per cent of adolescents married as children.



Mothers discuss the negative outcomes of child marriage in Dewanganj, Jamalpur, Bangladesh.

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**Table 23****Adolescent experiences and perceptions related to ageing, pregnancy and and childbirth in Bangladesh (% agreement)**

	Registered refugees				FDMN			
	Girls	Boys	Not married before age 18	Married before age 18	Girls	Boys	Not married before age 18	Married before age 18
I feel comfortable with the changes that occur in my body as I shift from being a child to an adult.	92.0	94.4	93.0	100.0	<b>79.3</b>	<b>89.5</b>	83.7	90.8
I have received information about how to become pregnant.	<b>39.7</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>86.7</b>	38.2	42.6	<b>37.0</b>	<b>90.8</b>
I know how to keep my/my wife's body healthy when I am/she is pregnant.	<b>30.0</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>40.1</b>	<b>30.6</b>	<b>82.8</b>
I am aware of danger signs during pregnancy, which would require me/my wife to go to hospital.	<b>30.3</b>	<b>46.5</b>	<b>36.6</b>	<b>86.7</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>79.3</b>
It can be harmful to a woman's body to have children when she is too young.	<b>65.3</b>	<b>72.9</b>	68.6	86.7	<b>60.4</b>	<b>64.8</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>93.1</b>
It can be harmful to a woman's body to give birth to children too close together.	67.3	68.0	67.2	93.3	<b>61.9</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>60.1</b>	<b>90.8</b>
There are ways to prevent or delay pregnancy.	44.3	45.0	<b>43.4</b>	<b>93.3</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>83.9</b>
I have someone I trust, who I can get information about my health from.	<b>50.0</b>	<b>63.6</b>	55.6	86.7	<b>47.5</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>80.5</b>

**Bold text indicates a statistically significant difference between groups  $p \leq 0.05$ .**

## 11. Divorce

Of 190 adolescent survey respondents who had ever been married, only three (two girls and one boy) indicated that they were divorced, while none were separated or widowed. Of the three who responded as divorced, two adolescents had mentioned that it was their decision to divorce while one girl who married at age 15 indicated that it was her parents' decision to end the marriage. Based on the household roster, out of 253 adult marriages recorded, 6.3 per cent had ended in divorce while out of 122 child marriages, 3.3 per cent had ended.

A majority of respondents indicated that divorces are more prevalent in the camps compared to Rakhine State. Marriage, and divorce, were highly regulated by the government in Myanmar, so the process of termination is much easier now in the camps. Respondents mentioned that divorce was usually initiated by men, although the number of women initiating them is higher than it was in Rakhine State.

*"Yes, it happens very often after coming from Myanmar. Back in Myanmar, it happened very rarely because of the government pressure, but here in camp, the government does not pressure which is why it happens all the time." – IDI with female community leader (#67)*

*"It was very difficult to divorce or break-up the marriage after fighting between a husband and a wife in Burma because they needed to give answers to the authorities. They are free here now. For example, a boy goes to work and finds a girl. He likes her and then he will beat his wife and send back to her parents. He will live with another girl. That's why fights have increased here." – IDI with unmarried male adolescent (#04)*

When asked about the causes of divorce in child marriages specifically, nearly all respondents cited young couples lack understanding about each other, married life and the consequences of divorce. Some interviewees also cited the



lack of income among young married couples as the cause of termination of child marriages, and some the higher incidences of quarrels and domestic violence among child marriages compared to adult marriages. Not specific to child marriages, respondents also cited extramarital affairs among both men and women, though with a higher prevalence among men, as a common cause for divorce. This was also cited as an effect of displacement, with affairs happening more frequently in the crowded camps where there is ready opportunity to meet and interact with many new people. A few respondents also commented on the inability of a husband to fulfil the needs of his wife, such as food, shelter, income and clothes, as a potential cause of divorce.

Economic insecurity in the camps put an added strain on marriages. Interviewees mentioned that some divorces occurred once the dowry money ran out or when the groom and his family demanded more dowry from the bride and her family, which they are unable to provide. Similarly, one respondent mentioned a case where the bride demanded more bridal gifts from the husband as an excuse for terminating the marriage.

Other causes of marriage termination reported less frequently included infertility of the wife or when the husband learns that his wife was raped or suspects that she was, or when a husband gets a disfiguring or disabling injury. A couple of respondents also noted that due to displacement, marriages were occurring between people of different towns and postulated that these might not last as long as other marriages.

When asked about the divorce process, many respondents mentioned that, compared to Myanmar, the process now is much cheaper as they did not have to pay fines or bribe the authorities in Bangladesh. Respondents also felt that they now had the religious freedom to end their marriages according to the religious rules instead of the laws in Rakhine State, which involved many authorities like the police and the court. Among the marriages of 20 adolescents on the household survey roster that had ended, 30 per cent had ended formally with a divorce while 35 per cent ended via informal separation (5 per cent ended with death of a spouse, and means of termination was unknown for 30 per cent).

*“People should follow the rules and law of government in both getting married and ending marriage in Rakhine State and we have documentation in the process of marriage-related issues. But there is no such kind of documentation and agreement here in the camps. Therefore, we don't need to follow any rules for ending marriage. Community leaders and parents of both sides talk and agree to a solution then end the marriage. These are different from Rakhine State.” – KII with male community leader (#61)*

Interviewees described four major components of the termination process in the camps. The first was the reconciliation process where the parents and elders try to reconcile the couple, though this process is seen as trying to keep marriages together, and favouring the husband. When the couple insist on a divorce, the religious tradition of saying “Talaq” is followed to end their marriage. The next stage is the involvement of the CIC, who oversees this process and also provides marriage counselling during the termination process. Once the divorce is finalized, a settlement is reached where monetary compensation may be provided by either party, depending on who initiated the termination. If the husband initiates the divorce, he may have to return the dowry and the wife will keep the bridal gold, while the wife has to return the gold or pay compensation if she initiates the divorce. One CIC also mentioned that a community justice system has been created to help with the settlement process.

*“We have introduced a sort of a justice committee consisting of three learned people, three Imams, three women, one majee and one representative – in total, a team of 11. This team will hold meetings and determine about a woman's dues, ensure subsistence support/alimony, support for small children if there is any, etc. They reach some kind of settlement according to their social context.” – KII with CIC (#65)*

Following divorce, respondents noted that it is much easier to remarry in Bangladesh than it was in Myanmar, though men are more likely to remarry than women. In Bangladesh, divorcees are not subject to the Myanmar rule that they must wait 3 years before re-marrying. Negative health outcomes for women are also associated with divorce, including anxiety, depression and thoughts of suicide.

## 12. Violence

It was violence that drove the Rohingya into Bangladesh, and so the experience of that violence continues to colour their experience even after displacement. Many respondents recollected the violence they faced prior to fleeing and noted that they were subject to continued violence even during the journey to Bangladesh. Despite hardships and security issues in the camp, most felt problems in the camps were far outshadowed by what they had already experienced. The violence in Myanmar included direct attacks on individuals, injuries resulting from indiscriminate shelling, destruction of property and sexual violence. The memory of that violence, particularly sexual violence towards young women and especially virgins, impacted parents' desire to marry daughters earlier than they otherwise would have.

*"We had a time of fleeing from Myanmar to Bangladesh. At that time, the Myanmar government committed many different kinds of persecution. During the violence, our women were raped by the military, border guard police, Rakhine and other Buddhist extremists. The raped women didn't remain there and arrived here in Bangladesh. Some died there in Myanmar."* – IDI with father of an adolescent (#37)

*"How could we describe our losses? In my opinion, there is no community in the world who are persecuted like the Rohingya. We lost everything. No forms of persecutions are left that we didn't suffer. If I would start talking about it, I*

*would not finish even after 2 days. They burned us alive, they killed us, they shot us and they slaughtered us and many kinds of widespread barbaric tortures against the Rohingya."* – IDI with a married boy age 15–19 (#20)

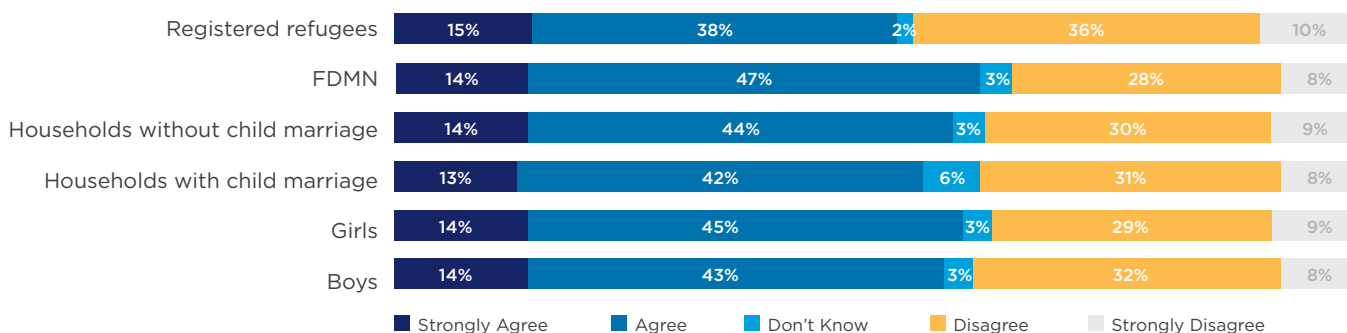
*"We needed to come here because the virgin girls were raped by the Myanmar military in Myanmar. So, people are afraid of keeping virgins in the family and let them get married at any age, like 15, 16 years old."* – IDI with married girl aged 15–19 (#31)

*"We all are safe since fleeing to Bangladesh. We have only a few problems with the bathrooms and toilets here, but living here is safer than Burma."* – IDI with unmarried adolescent girl age 15–19 (#11)

Within the camp community, qualitative respondents reported that violence at the household level is seen as common, but it is widely viewed negatively. This was somewhat at odds with the quantitative findings. Female household survey respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "Physical violence (such as hitting, beating, slapping, etc.) is sometimes the only way to solve a disagreement with your spouse" (see Figure 8). Among registered refugees, just over half strongly agreed (14.5 per cent) or agreed (37.7 per cent) as opposed to 46 per cent that disagreed or strongly disagreed. Among FDMN 61 per cent strongly agreed (13.9 per cent) or agreed (47.0 per cent), as opposed to 36 per cent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**Figure 8**  
Female heads of households' perceptions about domestic violence in Bangladesh

Physical violence (such as hitting, beating, slapping, etc.) is sometimes the only way to solve a disagreement with your spouse



Note: P-values: registered refugees versus FDMN  $p < 0.001$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.507$ .

Numerous respondents commented on the perceived link between violence and education – with those with less education seen to be more likely to engage in domestic violence. Poverty and violence were also commonly associated. Respondents also noted that domestic violence is most frequently initiated by men, and that women have little power to stop it.

*“The people don’t think that physical torture between a wife and husband is good. They always think badly of it.” – IDI with an unmarried boy (#5)*

*“The uneducated people always keep quarrelling.” – IDI with a married girl (#22)*

*“[Violence] has increased day by day here because people don’t have properties or incomes here. People didn’t have any difficulty for livelihood in Myanmar because most of the people had their properties and businesses for income. Poor families always have violence and rich families have no problem at all.” – IDI with a married boy (#19)*

*“If men torture the women, they don’t have power to go against the men. Men do whatever they want and people accept that and don’t listen to the women.” – KII with female community leader (#67)*

The majority of respondents reported that violence, both in the community and in the home, was more prevalent in the camps than it had been in their villages in Myanmar. The difficulty of life in the camps, particularly the lack of education and employment, was associated with the increase in violence. Beyond the financial implications of not having work being confined at home was listed as a potential cause of violence. Too many people in small shelters is a source of irritation, leading to conflict. Living in close quarters with neighbours was also discussed as a cause of violence. The increased interactions with strangers within the camps, from differing townships, living side by side was noted. Many discussed the emotional cloud of camp life – trauma from their past experiences, frustration with their current situation, despair about their future, as stressful, making it easier for negativity to spill over into violence. Further, some referenced the absence of Myanmar laws, including those prohibiting violence within communities and homes, as creating an enabling environment.

*“After coming to Bangladesh, [domestic violence] is increasing and it is not decreasing. The conditions of the people are getting worse day by day and quarrels and fights are increasing.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#14)*

*“Here, we need to live with many different kinds of people from different places. We don’t respect one another according to their status because we don’t know each other. No one tolerates one another. So, many problems occur.” – FGD with unmarried boys age 15–19 (#59)*

*“While we were in Myanmar, we had much less quarrels because we had our own responsibility of work. But here, we have no opportunity of work and need to stay all time in the small shelter seeing the faces of each other.” – IDI with an unmarried boy age 15–19 (#3)*

*“Now in the camps, there are fights between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, and fights with sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, they sometimes fight with neighbours because our shelters in the camps are overcrowded and if we throw rubbish in front of others’ shelters, we will have quarrels about it. We may have fights with neighbours even for throwing the dish-washing water outside. Many people are living together so we have these fights.” – IDI with mother of an adolescent (#70)*

*“People are very sad so sometimes they fight. If people are in a sad mood, they easily are tempered.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#20)*

*“In Myanmar, they had laws for that. Although they got married, they couldn’t beat their wives. Although they gave marriage at an early age, cheating the authorities, they couldn’t persecute their wives. The persecution of wives became more here because here there is no law, no one to protect them.” – FGD with Traditional Birth Attendants (#45)*

Financial difficulty was also cited as a cause of violence by most respondents. The lack of employment opportunities in camp, and subsequent lack of income, was listed by most respondents as a leading cause of domestic disputes, including both quarrels and violence. Couples that married as children were reported to be more likely to have financial troubles and for those troubles to lead to violence. Insufficient dowry, such as a family being unable to pay what was promised, or a groom’s family later asking for more, was also mentioned as being associated with violence.

*“If you don’t have money after getting married, there will be fights between husband and wife.” – IDI with unmarried boy (#4)*

*“There is much confrontation and violence in the relationship of a husband and wife who got early marriage because of financial problems.” – KII with female community leader (#79)*





An adolescent shows her mother how to call '109,' the number of a child marriage prevention helpline in Dewanganj, Jamalpur, Bangladesh.

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*"If you could not fulfil their demanded amount of dowry, they persecute their daughter-in-law."  
- FGD with Talim (religious education) providers (#56)*

*"I don't like the behaviours of my son-in-law and he persecutes my daughter very much. He asks for 10,000 Taka but I cannot afford to pay even 1,000 Taka. For this, he will beat my daughter."  
- IDI with mother of a married adolescent (#42)*

Domestic violence was reported by community leaders and service providers to be more prevalent among younger married couples, particularly those married as children. However, married adolescents themselves did not report violence in their relationships. They discussed many sources of quarrels, but not any physical violence. Because domestic violence is reportedly common in the community as a whole, it is likely prevalent in child marriages as well (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2018). Many respondents discussed that couples married at a young age do not know their roles and responsibilities in marriage or in the community, leading to tension, quarrels and potentially violence. Respondents also reported that couples married

young do not know how to communicate well, exacerbating conflict. Both men and women were considered responsible for quarrels, but men were generally the perpetrators of violence when it occurred.

*"After coming to Bangladesh, the amount of domestic violence has increased, mostly among child marriage." - FGD with male service providers (#47)*

*"The adolescents who get married earlier always quarrel. They don't have the sense to be patient if one of them gets angry. They don't know how to handle if they become sick because they get married earlier at the young age. They are impatient of each other and quarrel." - KII with female service provider (#62)*

*"If they are under 18 years old, they will fight each other and they have to break up their marriage. If both the boy and the girl are under 18 years old, they are not mature so there will be more fights in the family. It will not be a happy family." - IDI with married boy (#14)*



Having multiple spouses or wishing to end a marriage were also named as causes of domestic violence. Husbands with more than one wife were reported to be more likely to beat their first wife if she objected to or questioned his decision. Violence was also noted in households where one of the parties wanted to end the marriage.

*"[Domestic violence] has increased because of the polygamous situation of people in the camp. For example, when the first wife asks the husband about his second wife, he shows anger and fights her [...] The husband beats the wife cruelly." – IDI with mother (#39)*

*"People are getting married more than once. When the first wife talks about it to the husband then the husband shows anger and beats the wife at once. Getting married to two or more wives is the main point of causing problems in the camp." – FGD with married boys age 15-19 (#57)*

*"If one wants to leave a marriage, he or she will scold and abuse the other without any reason." – KII with female community leader (#69)*

Conflict is generally resolved within the community. If a married couple fights, parents from both sides will meet, and try to resolve it within the family. If they cannot reach resolution, they approach community elders, local Majee (Rohingya community leader) or Imam (religious leader). If that fails, as a last resort they will appeal to the CIC (Bangladeshi official). Respondents were reluctant to resort to CIC involvement because they "do not want to defame" their community (FGD with mothers #48). Respondents also noted that strangers are reluctant to intervene, as their input will not be welcomed, and could lead to further conflict. A couple of respondents discussed the Women's Majees, who serve as mediators and peacemakers in the community.

*"If such kind of quarrels occur, parents from both sides firstly compromise from the side of husband and then from the side of wife. Then, they admonish and mediate both the wife and husband. If the parents are unable to resolve it, they invite the block Majee and religious Imam to solve the problem. If they also aren't able to resolve it, they go to CIC and solve the problem as the CIC decides." – IDI with father (#37)*

There were a few reports of NGOs working to curb the prevalence of domestic and gender-based violence in particular.

*"There were many such fights in Bangladesh before. Now it has decreased after the coming of an NGO. I don't know its name. They told us about gender-based violence. They told people not to do this. They told us about the abuses against females by eyes, by mouth and by hands from males. They tell us that if a wife doesn't want to have sex, but her husband does it without her desire, it will be a rape. They tell us like that. Two of their female volunteers come to every block of the camps and educate people about gender-based violence. I think it is decreasing now." – IDI with the mother of an adolescent (#40)*

### 13. Services

Many respondents noted the availability of family planning services and services related to reproductive health, pregnancy and childbirth. Respondents reported that local NGOs, health centres and health posts were open to both men and women, regardless of their marital status; however, girls often had more difficulty accessing them because of restrictions on their mobility. Nearly 64 per cent of adolescents surveyed reported that they had been to the health clinic, with more registered refugees than FDMN (76.1 per cent versus 58.9 per cent) and more adolescents married as children than those not married as children (73.3 per cent versus 63.4 per cent).

Approximately 80 per cent of those who went to the health clinic reported feeling comfortable with the care received, with no major differences in distribution by refugee or marital status. More girls than boys reported being comfortable with care received: 84 per cent versus 79 per cent. Of those who reported being uncomfortable with the services provided, long wait times, disrespectful service providers and ineffective care were reported as the most common reasons for adolescents' feelings of discomfort (Table 24). Boys were much more critical of services than girls, with substantially higher proportions of boys complaining of disrespectful providers, feeling unsafe, expensive services, unsanitary conditions and the distance to clinic. Girls were more likely to view services as ineffective.

*"In our camp, we have many medical services which give treatments to the people. There are some clinics [...] for pregnancy. We get vaccination of two times one after one for pregnancy. Sometimes, the medical team comes to us and refers us to the clinics if we suffer any disease and we get medicines from the hospitals." – IDI with unmarried boy age 15-19 (#3)*

**Table 24**  
Reasons for adolescents' discomfort with care received at health facilities in Bangladesh

	Refugees (n = 96)	FDMN (n = 150)	No CM (n = 230)	CM (n = 16)	Girls (n = 81)	Boys (n = 163)
% of adolescents who reported feeling comfortable with the services received.	77.0%	81.0%	79.6%	78.4%	<b>84.2%</b>	<b>76.2%</b>
<b>Reasons provided by those who were not comfortable*:</b>						
Service providers were not respectful	71.9%	61.3%	65.7%	62.5%	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>69.9%</b>
I did not feel safe	51.0%	42.0%	47.0%	25.0%	<b>35.8%</b>	<b>50.3%</b>
Long wait times	83.3%	78.0%	80.4%	75.0%	81.5%	79.1%
Services provided are ineffective	63.5%	56.0%	69.6%	50.0%	<b>70.4%</b>	<b>54.0%</b>
Services are too expensive	15.6%	9.3%	12.2%	6.3%	<b>4.9%</b>	<b>15.3%</b>
Unsanitary/poor physical environment	12.5%	16.0%	15.2%	6.3%	<b>0%</b>	<b>22.1%</b>
Clinic is too far	<b>13.5%</b>	<b>25.3%</b>	21.7%	6.3%	13.6%	23.9%
I felt ashamed	9.4%	12.0%	11.3%	6.3%	12.4%	10.4%
I felt afraid	12.5%	10.0%	11.3%	6.3%	11.1%	11.0%
Other	1.0%	2.0%	1.3%	6.3%	0%	2.5%

## Notes:

\*Percentage is out of adolescents who reported being uncomfortable with the care received.

**Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between groups with  $p \leq 0.05$

CM = child marriage

Various respondents noted that NGOs were implementing an array of education and awareness programmes designed to educate community members about the effects of child marriage. About half of household survey respondents had participated in educational programmes for parents or adolescents, 58 per cent of registered refugees and 48 per cent of FDMN. Two-thirds of respondents reported receiving information specifically about the effects of child marriage, 59 per cent of FDMN and 78 per cent of registered refugees. For both populations, the most common means of receiving this information was via community meetings (86 per cent) and pamphlets (25 per cent). Action Contre la Faim, BRAC (formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), the Bangladeshi NGO Friendship, the IOM, MSF, the water and sanitation oriented NGO-FORUM and the WFP, were named by respondents as organizations that provided information about the negative effects of marriage. Furthermore, 83 per cent of household respondents reported being

told that marriage before the age of 18 was harmful, 78 per cent of FDMN and 94 per cent of registered refugees reported receiving this information.

Approximately a quarter of adolescents aged 10–19 reported participation in educational programmes, including 29 per cent of girls and 23 per cent of boys. One-third had specifically received information or education about the effects of marriage on children, 44 per cent of registered refugees and 28 per cent of FDMN. Similar to the household respondents, 88 per cent of adolescents who had received such education received it via community meetings and 18 per cent via pamphlets (see Table 25). However, among the adolescents, social media played a larger role, with 19 per cent reporting having received education through that medium. The most common providers of the information were BRAC (26.5 per cent) and IOM (18.1 per cent) for FDMN and MSF (15.8 per cent) for registered refugees. Interestingly, the adolescent survey found that 54.5 per cent of adolescents

married as children received information about the effects of marriage on children, while only 31.6 per cent of those not married as children received this information. A total of 84 per cent reported having been told that marriage before the age of 18 was harmful, with 84 per cent of adolescents who did not marry as children and 74 per cent of adolescents who did marry as children receiving this information.

*“The NGO staff who work around here always educate and remind us not to get married earlier, explaining that it would cause advantages and disadvantages [...] When the people heard that, they say that this is good for them.” – IDI with married female adolescent (#30)*

**Table 25**  
Means by which adolescents received information on the effects of child marriage in Bangladesh

	Refugees n = 253	FDMN n = 396	No CM n = 591	CM n = 55
Pamphlet	19.8%	17.4%	18.2%	20.0%
Community Meeting	91.3%	86.4%	88.1%	90.9%
Radio	<b>11.9%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	7.4%	3.6%
TV	<b>28.9%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	14.8%	14.6%
Social Media	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>11.9%</b>	19.9%	10.9%
Other	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>13.6%</b>	11.3%	10.9%

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between groups with  $p \leq 0.05$ .  
CM = child marriage

Life skills training sessions were the most commonly attended type of education programmes for parents and adolescents, with 48 per cent of refugees, 38 per cent of FDMN, 41 per cent of adolescents aged 10–19 who did not marry before 18, and 48 per cent of adolescents aged 10–19 who married before 18 accessing this type of training. Other training attended included awareness-raising programmes (27 per cent refugees, 18 per cent FDMN) and community presentations (28 per cent refugees, 24 per cent FDMN). A minority of respondents reported attending other types of educational programmes, including those on hygiene, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and child marriage. Participation rates did not vary much between registered refugees and FDMN or adolescents who married as children and those who did not.

The majority of adolescent survey respondents reported that educational activities, life skills training and job training activities were the most important for them to participate in (Table 26). Boys were much more likely than girls to desire job training (74 per cent versus 39 per cent) and also more likely to want to participate in peer programmes (14 per cent versus 9 per cent). Adolescents not married as children were more interested in both education activities (89 per cent versus 72 per cent) and job training (56 per cent versus 44 per cent) than adolescents married as children, but adolescents married as children were more likely to desire psychosocial support (42 per cent versus 36 per cent) highlighting the need for support for married children in addition to programmes seeking to prevent child marriages.

**Table 26**  
Activities in which adolescents feel it is important for them to participate in Bangladesh

	No CM	CM	Girls	Boys
Educational activities	<b>88.8%</b>	<b>71.6%</b>	86.9%	89.0%
Job training/ apprenticeship	<b>56.2%</b>	<b>44.1%</b>	<b>39.4%</b>	<b>73.5%</b>
Psychosocial support	35.8%	42.2%	35.2%	37.2%
Life skills training	64.8%	61.8%	64.7%	64.5%
Peer programmes (inc. adolescent clubs)	11.9%	8.8%	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>
Other	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>4.9%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between groups,  $p \leq 0.05$   
CM = child marriage

Adolescents married as children reported having nearly an hour less free time per day, compared with their peers. (3.1 hours versus 3.9 hours). Overall, boys and girls reported having the same amount of free time (3.8 hours). This held true for adolescents not married as children (3.9 hours for both boys and girls), but for those who were married as children, boys had less free time – 2.9 hours as opposed to 3.2 for married girls. Furthermore, newly arrived refugees reported having more free time (4.0 hours) than registered refugees (3.5 hours). This free time was largely reported to be in the afternoon (28.2 per cent) and evening (24.5 per cent) for adolescents of all marital statuses. Girls were more likely to report free time in the afternoon (40.7 per cent) while for boys it varied (36.4 per cent).

Most respondents discussed the lack of formal educational opportunities in the camps, particularly for adolescents above primary school level. Monetary support for sending children to school was uncommon, with only 7.7 per cent of household respondents reporting that they received support, including 10.8 per cent of those married as children and 7.9 per cent of those not married as children. The adolescent survey found that only 4.5 per cent of adolescents reported receiving financial support to attend school, with a similar distribution among both those married as children and those not, and similar rates between boys (4.7 per cent) and girls (4.4 per cent). Furthermore, only 26 per cent of adolescents reported participating in educational programmes outside of school, 36.6 per cent

of those married as children and 25.5 per cent of those not married as children, illustrating the lack of essential educational programming in the camps. Among those who reported attending other educational programmes, supplemental educational programmes and life skills training programmes were the most attended.

*"[...] schools are very important for unmarried girls and boys. There are many schools now and these schools are for young children. They don't teach them there well but these are schools for playing. Now, there is no school for the children of our age. It's very important." – IDI with married adolescent male (#16)*

Adolescents who were not married as children reported the most common barriers to accessing services as one's mother or father being uncomfortable with them accessing services (23 per cent for each) and having other responsibilities (20 per cent) (Table 27). Similarly, for adolescents married as children, their father being uncomfortable with them accessing services (30 per cent), having other responsibilities (27 per cent), their mother being uncomfortable with them accessing services (20 per cent), and not being interested in services provided (21 per cent) were the most common barriers. Over half of boys reported having no barriers (56 per cent). The most common barrier reported by boys was having other responsibilities (21 per cent). Girls' barriers were most likely to be objections by parents.



**Table 27**  
**Barriers to participating in community programmes in Bangladesh (% affected)**

	Refugees	FDMN	No CM	CM	Girls	Boys
None	45.0	41.5	<b>43.3</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	<b>55.5%</b>
I am not interested	19.0	17.8	18.0	20.6	18.9%	17.2%
Mother* is not comfortable	21.3	22.8	22.5	19.6	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>15.2%</b>
Father* is not comfortable	23.7	22.6	22.5	30.4	<b>30.7%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
I have other responsibilities	21.5	20.1	20.2	26.5	19.5%	21.3%
School	<b>22.3</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>1.0</b>	14.0%	15.2%
Programmes are too far away	10.3	13.2	12.5	9.8	<b>14.4%</b>	<b>10.1%</b>
Other	0.5	1.0	0.8	2.0	1.0%	0.8%

Notes:

\* Or female/male head of household.

**Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between groups,  $p \leq 0.05$

CM = child marriage

Furthermore, while several respondents noted that there are educational and awareness programmes being implemented, many others reported a lack of educational and awareness-based programmes, illustrating limited capacity of these programmes in reaching all those who are vulnerable to child marriage.

*"I heard that there is an NGO (Switzerland) working on the prevention of child marriage. But now, there is not any NGO working about preventing child marriage here in the camp. But now we come to know that there should be an NGO very important in the camp level to work on children marriage." – FGD with male service providers (#55)*

When asked about service gaps and requests for additional programming, girls most frequently asked for additional gender-based services, including gender-based violence education and more women-specific safe spaces. Boys requested adolescent boy-specific clubs. They cited the women-friendly spaces as an option for adolescent girls, with no counterpart for them. Adolescent boys reported that while they were able to attend child-friendly spaces, they felt those spaces catered to younger children, and thus they lacked spaces to gather that were specific to them. Married boys particularly felt out of place at child-centred venues.

*"There is no such space for us. It is for young children and girls. For the boys from age 12 to*

*15, there is school or club for them...There are no places for the persons of my age. It will be good for us if any NGO will arrange a club or a place where we could converse or we could share our feelings with friends." – IDI with married boy age 15–19 (#20)*

## 14. Effects of displacement

Though the impact of displacement on the Rohingya was largely negative, some positive outcomes were discussed. One major positive effect mentioned by most respondents was religious freedom. Whereas in Myanmar, the Rohingya were a persecuted religious minority, with restrictions on practice of religion, in Bangladesh they are able to practice religion freely. Their ability to attend the mosque, make the call for prayers, or to namaz (pray) five times a day is uninhibited. Respondents mentioned that they were also able to study religion freely, as the community established madrasas (religious schools) for children to attend and also Arabic schools to learn language. Rohingya interpretation of Islamic law permits child marriage, which they are also able to more freely practice in the more permissive environment of the camps.

*"People here can pray five times namaz free in the mosque and they can learn religious things freely. When we were in Myanmar, we couldn't pray freely, and the mosques were locked by the government." – IDI with mother of an adolescent (#43)*

## Findings

Negative effects of displacement were more commonly discussed. Respondents reported that the disruption of social institutions, such as the lack of a justice system in the camps, resulted in more quarrels and violence in the households, compared to life in Myanmar. Some respondents reported that the lack of restrictions in the camps also led to children being less obedient.

Several aspects of housing and family dynamics were discussed as having changed following displacement. Respondents complained that the current housing structure gives women less privacy and that living conditions are tight and cramped compared to their larger homes and family compounds in Myanmar. Moreover, in Bangladesh they have to share spaces with and live among people from other communities, which reportedly led to increased security concerns and community quarrels. The role of extended families has also decreased, as families no longer live near each other.

Displacement also impacted gender roles. Men's chief responsibility as breadwinner was disrupted given the limited employment opportunities in the camp and the universal reliance on distribution of food aid. Women's roles expanded, with a greater share of women leaving the house to work or volunteer and more opportunities to participate in community leadership (though still the minority). The changes in women's roles were not universally welcomed, and a conservative element in the camps threatened the families of women who worked outside of the home for several months in early 2019. They viewed unmarried women working as a particular affront and in some cases beat their fathers.

Economic insecurity was widespread. Most families are dependent solely on rations for sustenance. Numerous respondents conveyed their dissatisfaction with the rations and reported that they are insufficient to feed their entire family. Respondents recalled having to abandon their property and accumulated wealth when fleeing to Bangladesh, erasing established reserves. With limited employment available, most families have very minimal funds available for expenses not covered by aid, like transportation, communication, clothes and other household needs. Men's inability to provide for their families' needs was reported to lead to frustration and depression, contributing to community and household quarrels.

*"In our country, we had enough to give charity and financial help to others but here we have to take charity and financial help from others." - IDI with married boy age 15-19 (#15)*

*"There are more quarrels in the camp because [men] can't make enough money for their family and need to be always in the house. There in Myanmar, we could go to our economic activity, fish breeding pond, or go to the farms. Here, we stay in the house the whole day and start quarrels saying bad words to one another." - IDI with father of an adolescent (#34)*

*"In Burma, husbands could earn. Their living was good so there were no quarrels. After coming here, quarrelling has increased because they cannot earn money. Money is important for human beings. If they have money, they will be happy. Now, they are jobless and stay at home most of the time and look for an excuse to quarrel." - IDI with unmarried girl (#11)*

Displacement also resulted in increased concern regarding physical insecurity. Some respondents mentioned that the location of some shelters was undesirable for certain vulnerable groups like children and girls due to fears over child trafficking and sexual harassment. Girls visiting shared wells, bath houses and latrines at night were frequently repeated concerns. Respondents also cited the location of the shelters as unsafe due to potential negative effects of the monsoon such as landslides and floods. A couple of respondents also mentioned fear of robbery in the camps.

*"While we were in Burma, we had own houses in our own compound. We were secure. We didn't have to fear to go out the backyard even at 3 a.m. We were secure and safe. Today, after coming to Bangladesh, we don't have our own houses, own toilet, own bathroom or own fence. There is no security for us. Only Allah can protect us." - IDI with married boy age 15-19 (#28)*

*"When it is raining here, the water runs in from every side of the tent. We also face floods and landslides during the heavy rain. We are seeing many tents destroyed by the rainwater in our block and around the camps." - IDI with father of an adolescent (#33)*

Many respondents spoke in particular about the impact of displacement on children. Interviewees described the lives of the children as being lost because they are unable to either start or continue their education and there are not any alternatives for children in the camps. Children's futures were described as uncertain or lost.

*"Our children's education and lives are completely collapsed. We are very sad because our children are jobless and helpless here in the camp." - IDI with mother of an adolescent (#43)*



In Hakimpara Refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Tasmin (right), a Bangladeshi student, helps her friend Rajima (left), a Rohingya refugee, with her studies. Both students are 10-years-old.

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Interviewees also reported that the health of the community has deteriorated following displacement. The main causes of the decline in health status identified by respondents were the rise in diseases due to climatic and housing conditions in Bangladesh and worsened mental health. Some also recounted loss of lives during the journey from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Many respondents discussed the loss of peace and happiness due to displacement.

*“When we became refugees, we are living like animals. In the camp in half acre of land there are almost a hundred families living. When we were in Myanmar, one house stood in a half acre of land. Therefore, people are suffering many kinds of troubles physically and mentally in the overcrowded camp.” – FGD with 20–24-year-old men (#44)*

*“We are also suffering many kinds of diseases here such as cholera and diarrhea, and other diseases, because there is no proper sanitation in the camps.” – IDI with father of an adolescent (#33)*

Displacement had a notable impact on marriage, as has been described in the previous sections. Marriages were also said to be less happy following displacement. Due to the lack of space and money in Bangladesh, respondents commented that the marriage process has been scaled down and is much shorter now. Weddings are no longer multi-day affairs. Fewer relatives attend and wedding

feasts are scaled back. Moreover, some said that people are less happy during their marriage because of their refugee status, as their living conditions have deteriorated and they also lack the financial resources to sustain the family, compared to their life in Myanmar. Many respondents reported an increase in child marriages following displacement. In the household survey, about half of FDMN identified conflict and displacement as an influence on the age of marriage. Half of both FDMN and registered refugees also identified security as an influential factor.

*“Even though we need to take permission and need to spend money in Myanmar, we celebrated the wedding ceremony with a reception and travelling with boats and felt very happy too. But most people get married here with sorrow because we cannot make efforts to marry happily because of the financial issue. Some people held marriage ceremonies secretly.” – KII with male community leader (#61)*

*“[In Myanmar] although a girl was above 18 or at the age of 22, 23, 25, we could keep her in the house without giving marriage because our houses were big, we have fencing and protection. People couldn't criticize them with any bad name. After arriving here, as we have people from all three townships, we can't see the age, we can't live our lives here as we wish. As everything is affected, our marriage is also affected by displacement.” – IDI with unmarried boy (#2)*

## B. Nepal

### 1. Respondent characteristics

In Nepal, 1,207 households were interviewed (607 Sindhupalchowk, 600 Dolakha). Among those households, 5,994 household members were listed on the household roster. Characteristics of the household members are presented in Table 28. Approximately half (54.6 per cent) of the population was below the age of 25 and slightly more than half were female (52 per cent). A total

of 45 per cent were married. Most had lived in the same location for approximately two decades.

A total of 1,431 adolescent surveys were conducted, split nearly evenly across the two districts (Sindhupalchowk 715, Dolakha 716). Interviews were conducted with 772 girls (54 per cent) and 659 boys (46 per cent), between the ages of 10 and 19. Of these, 58 per cent of participants were below the age of 15 and 3.1 per cent were currently married. Respondent characteristics are included in Table 29.

**Table 28**  
Characteristics of household members on the household survey roster in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk (n = 3,054)		Dolakha (n = 2,940)		Total (n = 5,994)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	1,467	48.0%	1,378	46.9%	2,845	47.5%
Female	1,587	52.0%	1,560	53.1%	3,147	52.5%
<b>Age</b>						
<10	372	12.2%	379	12.9%	751	12.5%
10–14	576	18.9%	620	21.1%	1,196	20.0%
15–17	358	11.7%	365	12.4%	723	12.1%
18–19	158	5.2%	129	4.4%	287	4.8%
20–24	166	5.4%	146	5.0%	312	5.2%
25≤	1,415	46.3%	1,296	44.1%	2,711	45.2%
Unknown	9	0.3%	4	0.1%	13	0.2%
<b>Marriage status</b>						
Unmarried	1,676	54.9%	1,681	57.2%	3,357	56.0%
Married	1,375	45.0%	1,256	42.7%	2,631	44.9%
Unknown	3	0.1%	3	0.1%	6	0.1%
<b>Duration (months)</b>	<i>Mean</i> (range)	20.4 (0–65)	<i>Mean</i> (range)	17.9 (0–43)	<i>Mean</i> (range)	19.2 (0–65)





Rewati Thalal, 19, holds her 16-day-old baby, Purnima. Rewati married her husband two and a half years ago in an arranged marriage. She is a student in grade 12.

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**Table 29**  
Characteristics of adolescent survey respondents in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk (n = 715)		Dolakha (n = 716)		Total (n = 1,431)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	329	46.0%	330	46.1%	659	46.1%
Female	386	54.0%	386	53.9%	772	54.0%
<b>Age</b>						
10-14	398	55.7%	435	60.8%	833	58.2%
15-17	242	33.8%	235	32.8%	477	33.3%
18-19	75	10.5%	46	6.4%	121	8.5%
<b>Marriage status</b>						
Single	686	95.9%	699	97.6%	1,385	96.8%
Engaged	0	0%	1	0.1%	1	0.1%
Married	29	4.1%	15	2.1%	44	3.1%
Separated	0	0	1	0.1%	1	0.1%
<b>Child marriage</b>	21	2.9%	14	2.0%	35	2.5%

Ninety qualitative interviews were conducted, including 49 IDIs, 20 KIIs and 21 FGDs, split evenly between districts and genders (see Table 30). Dolakha had one less IDI with a married boy, and

an FGD was not conducted with married boys, due to the difficulties of identifying married boys to interview. This challenge is discussed in the discussion section.

**Table 30**  
Qualitative interviews conducted in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk	Dolakha	Kathmandu	Total
<b>IDI</b>	n = 25 6 married boys 6 married girls 4 unmarried boys 4 unmarried girls 3 fathers 2 mothers	n = 24 5 married boys 6 married girls 4 unmarried boys 4 unmarried girls 3 fathers 2 mothers		n = 49 11 married boys 12 married girls 8 unmarried boys 8 unmarried girls 6 fathers 4 mothers
<b>KII</b>	n = 9 2 community leaders 2 religious leaders 5 government	n = 8 2 community leaders 2 religious leaders 4 government	n = 3 3 government	n = 20 4 community leaders 4 religious leaders 12 government
<b>FGD</b>	n = 11 1 married boys 1 married girls 1 unmarried boys 1 unmarried girls 1 men 20-24 1 women 20-24 1 fathers 1 mothers 3 service providers	n = 10 0 married boys 1 married girls 1 unmarried boys 1 unmarried girls 1 men 20-24 1 women 20-24 1 fathers 1 mothers 3 service providers		n = 21 1 married boys 2 married girls 2 unmarried boys 2 unmarried girls 2 men 20-24 2 women 20-24 2 fathers 2 mothers 6 service providers

## 2. Prevalence of child marriage

Nepal historically has had high prevalence of child marriage, among both boys and girls, though this has declined in recent years. The national rate is somewhat misleading, as rates vary a great deal between areas of the country. In Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha, child marriage prevalence is typically below the national average.

This study found relatively low rates of child marriage in the two districts studied (see Table 31).

Using the traditional indicator, the proportion of men and women aged 20–24 who married before the age of 18, we found that 3.4 per cent of men aged 20–24 in Sindhupalchowk and 9.1 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 18. In Dolakha, 5.4 per cent of men aged 20–24 and 6.9 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married before 18. In both districts marriage prior to the age of 15 was extremely rare. There was only one married girl younger than 15 identified in Sindhupalchowk District.

**Table 31**  
Percentage first married or in union before age 15 and before age 18 in Nepal

		Age 18–19			Age 20–24			Age 18–24		
		Percentage married before age 15	Percentage married before age 18	Number of members age 18–19 years	Percentage married before age 15	Percentage married before age 18	Number of members age 20–24 years	Percentage married before age 15	Percentage married before age 18	Number of members age 18–24 years
Sindhupalchowk District	male	0.0	6.8	74	0.0	3.4	89	0.0	6.1	163
	female	0.0	13.1	84	1.3	9.1	77	0.6	10.6	161
	total	0.0	10.1	158	0.6	6.6	166	0.3	8.3	324
Dolakha District	male	0.0	7.6	66	0.0	5.4	74	0.0	6.4	140
	female	0.0	9.5	63	0.0	6.9	72	0.0	8.1	135
	total	0.0	8.5	129	0.0	6.2	146	0.0	7.3	275
TOTAL		0.3	0.0	9.4	287	0.3	6.4	312	0.2	7.8

In order to better capture the effects of the recent earthquakes, the proportion of adolescents aged 18–19 who had married prior to the age of 18 was also measured. Marriage before the age of 15 was again uncommon. There was, however, a slight increase in the proportion of child marriages, for both men and women, in both districts. This is supportive of the qualitative evidence that described a bump in child marriage following the 2015 earthquakes.

For adolescents aged 10–17, nearly all of the marriages were in the 15–17-year-old age group (Table 32). As adolescents of this age have not yet completed their risk of child marriage, the

proportion currently married is not a measure of child marriage prevalence, but does give an indication of the trend in the population. The proportion of 15–17-year-olds currently married is much less than the proportion of 18–19-year-olds married before the age of 18, but we do not know by how much that will increase by the time the 15–17-year-old cohort reaches age 18. Still, the low rates may be indicative of the end of the bump in child marriage that followed the earthquakes. The proportion currently married was similar to the prevalence of marriage before age 18 among the 20–24-year-olds. The proportion currently married was slightly higher in Sindhupalchowk than in Dolakha.



**Table 32**  
Percentage currently married in Nepal

		Age 10–17		Age 10–14		Age 15–17	
		Percentage currently married	Number of members age 10–17 years	Percentage currently married	Number of members age 10–14 years	Percentage currently married	Number of members age 15–17 years
Sindhupalchowk District	male	0.7	421	0.0	271	2.0	150
	female	2.1	513	0.3	305	4.8	208
	total	1.5	934	0.2	576	3.6	358
Dolakha District	male	0.2	465	0.0	294	0.6	171
	female	1.7	520	0.0	326	4.6	194
	total	1.0	985	0.0	620	2.7	365
TOTAL		1.3	1,919	0.1	1,196	3.2	723

The qualitative data supported a declining trend in child marriage. More than a quarter of qualitative respondents specifically reported that the prevalence of child marriage is declining. Within the overall decline, the patterns of child marriage are also changing. There is a decline in marriage before age 15 and a decrease in arranged child marriages. Several respondents noted that as very early marriage and arranged child marriages decline, those that persist are largely elopement by older adolescents.

*“In recent times, child marriage is on the decline. It has been like 2–3 years. In the past, child marriage was very common.” – KII with a Marriage Registrar from Sindhupalchowk District (#25)*

*“Child marriage has declined in the recent years.” – KII with official from Police Women’s Cell in Dolakha District (#59)*

*“There is a decrease in the number of people marrying under the age of 14 and 15 years.” – KII with Women, Children and Senior Citizen Section in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

*“Child marriage in the form of arranged ones cannot be found at current times. Earlier, during our times, child marriage was very common.” – FGD with Women’s Savings and Credit Cooperative in Dolakha District (#7)*

*“Child marriage cannot be found in case of arranged marriage, however in case of eloped marriage, adolescents can be found marrying*

*at an early age. Parents don’t force their children into child marriage in this community however children themselves elope at an early age.” – FGD with Women’s Savings and Credit Cooperative in Dolakha District (#7)*

Child marriage is more commonly practised in some communities than in others. Qualitative respondents reported that child marriage remains highest in the Tamang and Dalit communities. The Dalit, also known as “untouchables” or “Panchama,” fall at the bottom of the Nepali caste system. They constitute about 15 per cent of the population, and almost half of Dalits in Nepal live below the poverty line (Pasic, n.d.). Tamang are the largest ethnic group of Tibetans who live in Nepal, constituting about 6 per cent of the population and living primarily in the hill districts surrounding Kathmandu (“Tamang People,” 2020). According to household survey respondents, the prevalence of marriage under the age of 18 was the highest among the following ethnic groups: Terai Dalit, followed by the Hill Dalit, and the Magar (third largest ethno-linguistic groups of Nepal representing 7 per cent of the population). Qualitative respondents also reported that elopement was highest among the Tamang community, which could contribute to rates of child marriage in that group as elopement is correlated with earlier marriage age.

*“People generally get married through elopement [in the Tamang community]. If they like someone, they elope with them and get married. The parents have no say in this.” – FGD with women aged 20–24 in Sindhupalchowk District (#27)*

*“Mostly, early marriage was seen in the Tamang*



community compared to Brahmin and Chhetri community.” – KII with Women and Children’s Board Officer in Lalitpur (#87)

“But still in Majee, Pahari and Dalit communities, children get married at the age of 15–16 years, but marriage in early age is not performed in Chhetri, Brahmin communities these days.” – KII with female Community Health Volunteer in Dolakha District (#41)

“Before the earthquake, [adolescents] married at 16/17 but now it has increased a bit. [...] A programme that encouraged marriage only after the age of 20 with a slogan “bihebari 20 barsa pari” (which means marriage should be done after the age of 20 years) was conducted a couple of times [...] That’s why girls and boys marry later these days.” – IDI with married boy in Dolakha District (#9)

There are mixed perceptions on the effect of the earthquakes on the prevalence of child marriage. Slightly more interviewees felt that the rates of child marriages remained the same prior to and following the earthquakes, compared to those who felt that child marriages had increased following the earthquakes. However, both groups agreed that the number of elopements were on the rise in both Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha and this was seen as a driver of the perceived increase.

Generally, respondents from Dolakha commented that the earthquakes resulted in a delay in marriage age. The delay in marriage was associated with more widespread acceptance of the importance of education, for girls. This change was driven in part by the success of many awareness programmes that were organized by the government and NGOs after the earthquakes. In contrast, respondents from Sindhupalchowk largely agreed that the earthquakes had no effect on the age of marriage in the district. Moreover, during the household survey, none of the respondents mentioned the earthquakes as having a primary influence on decisions about the age at which people married, though 13 per cent of households cited the earthquakes as an additional influence on decision-making.

### 3. Spousal age difference

In both districts, male adolescents were most likely to marry someone younger or very near their own age (0–4 years older). While the majority of female adolescents married someone zero to four years older, in both districts, a notable proportion married someone more than four years older. No girls aged 15–17 had married someone 10 or more years older, but several 18–24-year-old women had. Between two-thirds and all of 15–19-year-old boys who married as minors married a spouse who was also a minor, as opposed to approximately one-third of 15–19-year-old girls (Table 34).

The findings from this study were consistent with those from the 2014 MICS survey, which found that spousal age difference is generally not large in Nepal and marriage to a much older husband is not very common (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). MICS did not include disaggregated data for the spousal age difference for 15–19-year-olds in the Central Mountains region because they identified fewer than 25 marriages in that age range. Among 20–24-year-old women, 17 per cent married someone younger, 57 per cent someone 0–4 years older, and 25 per cent 5 or more years older.

**Table 33**  
Distribution of spousal age in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk District								Dolakha District								Total
	Male			Female					Male			Female					
	Spouse younger	0–4 years older	Number	Spouse younger	0–4 years older	5–9 years older	10+ years older	Number	0–4 years older	5–9 years older	Number	0–4 years older	5–9 years older	10+ years older	Number		
age 15–17 currently married	0.0	100.0	3	0.0	70.0	30.0	0.0	10	100.0	0.0	1	66.7	33.3	0.0	9	23	
age 18–19 married by 18	20.0	80.0	5	9.1	45.5	45.5	0.0	11	100.0	0.0	5	50.0	16.7	33.3	6	27	
age 20–24 married by 18	0.0	100.0	5	0.0	50.0	16.7	33.3	6	50.0	50.0	4	25.0	25.0	50.0	5	20	
age 18–24 married by 18	11.1	88.9	10	5.9	47.1	35.3	11.8	17	75.0	25.0	9	40.0	20.0	40.0	11	47	

## Findings

**Table 34**

Percentage of adolescents married as children whose spouse was also a minor at time of marriage in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk		Dolakha	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
15-19-year-olds from adolescent survey (n = 35)	66.7%	33.3%	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>
15-19-year-olds from household roster (n = 46)	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	75.0%	33.3%
20-24-year-olds from household roster (n = 17)	100.0%	83.3%	75.0%	25.0%

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between groups,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

The mean spousal age difference indicates that on average male adolescents aged 15-19 marry someone within a year of their age, whereas female adolescents of that age marry someone 2 to 4 years older (Table 35). It appears that the spousal age

gap is slightly higher for girls in Dolakha than for those in Sindhupalchowk. For 20-24-year-olds, on average men marry someone 2 years younger and women someone 2 years older, with similar gaps between the two districts.

**Table 35**

Mean spousal age difference for 15-24-year-olds\* in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk		Dolakha	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Married &lt;18</b>				
15-19 (A)	-1.0 (-2.1, 0.1)	-2.8 (-4.1, -1.5)	0	-3.4 (-5.1, -1.8)
15-19 (H)	-0.6 (-1.6, 0.4)	-2.2 (-3.3, -1.1)	0 (-1.5, 1.5)	-3.9 (-5.8, -2.0)
20-24 (H)	1.67 (-0.4, 3.7)	-0.3 (-4.2, 3.5)	0.5 (-1.5, 2.5)	-3.0 (-6.7, 0.7)
<b>Married 18+</b>				
15-19 (A)	1.5 (-2.0, 5.0)	-5.2 (-9.0, -1.3)	0	-5.0 (-43.1, 33.1)
15-19 (H)	1.3 (0.6, 2.1)	-3.2 (-6.2, -0.3)	1.5 (-0.1, 3.1)	-1.4 (-4.1, 1.3)
20-24 (H)	2.0 (0.6, 3.0)	-2.4 (-3.5, -1.3)	1.8 (0.6, 3.0)	-1.9 (-3.3, -0.4)

Note:

\* The value reported is the adolescent's age at time of marriage minus their spouse's age at time of marriage. A negative value indicates that the spouse is older.

(A) = From adolescent survey; (H) = From household survey roster.

## 4. Drivers of child marriage

Because the earthquakes happened amid a declining trend in child marriage prevalence, changing patterns in child marriage, and around the same time as a national law change and education campaign, it is difficult to ascertain the relative impact of various drivers and moderators of child marriages that might be attributed to the earthquake. Several factors, however, were routinely discussed throughout the qualitative interviews. The most commonly reported drivers associated with child marriage were self-initiation; social media; effects of the earthquakes, including lack of education and economic insecurity; and norms regarding adolescent sexuality.

### (a) Self-initiation

Respondents almost universally reported an increase in the number of “love” marriages and elopements in recent years, with respondents in Sindhupalchowk mentioning this trend more often than respondents in Dolakha. Love marriage is the term used for marriages initiated by the parties themselves, rather than arranged by their families. Elopement is a subset of love marriages, when the parties marry without parental permission, often by travelling to another location for a time. The increase was attributed to increased adolescent interaction, coupled with an increase in adolescent agency. Married boys noted that adolescents often engaged in “love” marriages with those they had met at school or through work. Social media, discussed below, was frequently mentioned with regards to love marriages and elopements.

Additionally, older respondents reported that adolescents often pursued marriages after seeing their peers married.

*“Now boys and girls marry of their free will with the girl/boy of one’s choice or after falling in love, without considering religion and caste and kin. There is condition where a girl is sufficient for boy and boy is sufficient for girl. The trend of marrying solely on the decision of the individual, without asking anyone, has increased. Such trends are the influence of mobile phones, Facebook and friends. I think things are changing accordingly with the changing time.” – KII with government official in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

*“These days, [adolescents] make their own decision to marry. If the elder people in their family do not agree with their choice, they marry without their parents’ consent, on their own.” [All other participants nod and agree.] – FGD with unmarried girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#44)*

Quantitative data confirmed that the prevalence of elopement was quite high in both districts, and among both boys and girls. Adolescents married before age 18 were more likely to elope than adolescents married at age 18 or 19 (Table 36). Among child marriages, elopements were equally likely across the two districts, but slightly more common in Dolakha among adolescents marrying at age 18 or 19. Boys were more likely to elope than girls at any age in Sindhupalchowk, and below age 18 in Dolakha.

**Table 36**  
Elopements among 15–19-year-olds in Nepal (%)

	Sindhupalchowk		Dolakha	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Married <18	85.0%	100%	86.7%	100%
Married 18+	55.6%	66.7%	87.5%	85.7%

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between groups,  $p \leq 0.05$ .



Anjali Darain, 13, listens to her grandfather Dil Bahadur Darain speak about his son, daughter-in-law and grandson who died during a 2015 earthquake in Salyantar Village, Dhading, Nepal.

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Adolescents identified several factors as drivers for elopement, in particular. They discussed elopement as a means of avoiding an unwanted arranged marriage. It was also mentioned as an outcome of parents not approving of a love union. Some adolescents referred to a desire to escape bad conditions at home, including neglect and violence. Others discussed not being able to wait until the legal age of marriage (20 years). Both boys and girls discussed elopement as being initiated by either or both parties.

*“In my family, I was not treated well. Therefore, I married at an early age.” – IDI with married girl age 15–19 from Sindhupalchowk District (#19)*

*“In some cases, when guardians do not approve, the boy and girl run away because they do not want to lose each other.” – FGD with service providers in Sindhupalchowk District (#69)*

*“Who knows, we didn’t care about [religion or parental approval]. We liked each other and could not wait, and at just 18 years of age eloped and got married.” – FGD with married boys age 15–19 in Sindhupalchowk District (#90)*

*“I dominated the decision more.” – IDI with married girl age 15–19 from Sindhupalchowk District (#79)*

## (b) Social media

Adolescents’ use of social media was almost universally associated with child marriage by both adolescent and adult respondents. However, the adolescent survey indicated that out of 1,431 respondents, only about 40 per cent had access to Internet. In Sindhupalchowk there was little difference in access by gender (49 per cent girls versus 42 per cent boys), as compared to Dolakha, where boys had significantly more access (38 per cent versus 24 per cent). Out of those with access to Internet however, most used social media: occasionally (50 per cent), once a week (19 per cent) or daily (20 per cent). It should be noted that there were significant differences in utilization by gender in Sindhupalchowk, with the proportion of “never” users being much higher for girls (22 per cent) compared to boys (6 per cent).

Still, social media and access to mobile phones have become major mediators through which couples meet and interact, particularly in Sindhupalchowk (Table 37). Many respondents pointed to this relatively new phenomenon as an accelerator for love marriages and elopements, whereby individuals can search for their partners on their own, and this, despite geographical distances. Facebook in particular was mentioned by respondents as a tool through which couples have got to know one another and forged connections, above and beyond their relationship with the people within their own communities.



**Table 37**  
**Communication with spouse via social media prior to getting married in Nepal**

	Sindhupalchowk	Dolakha
Girls (% yes)	<b>88.2%</b>	<b>43.8%</b>
Boys (% yes)	<b>100%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
Total (% yes)	<b>92.0%</b>	<b>44.4%</b>

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

This increased freedom in relationships, mediated by social media, has allegedly increased the possibility of rapid marriages and elopements according to qualitative interviews, although no significant correlation between access to Internet service and child marriage was seen in the household survey ( $p = 0.214$ ), with no differences between districts. Qualitative respondents however frequently mentioned that the Tamang community and the Terai Belt in particular had a high prevalence of elopements and child marriages, closely linked to increased online presence.

*“After growing up, these days, they meet in Facebook, meet in person, talk and marry. In our generation, there was practice of asking girl’s hand for marriage. These days, they use Facebook. Some of them run away after liking boy through Facebook. Some of them do not run away even though they use Facebook. Some do not want to run away. Some run away after reaching the age of 15, 16.” – IDI with a mother in Sindhupalchowk (#5)*

The role of parents, as well as considerations related to caste and religion, have therefore been reduced and are considered secondary to the individual’s preference of partner. The role of lamis – the facilitator and mediator connecting two families and their prospective partners – has also been reduced.

*“Before, marriage use to take place after it was initiated by the relatives, now all these things are fading. Now they search for their potential partner on their own through Facebook, mobile and friends and then get married. Now they are getting married after falling in love. Now there is no role of relatives and parents in the marriage. Now everything is done by the Facebook and cellular phone.” – KII with Women, Children and Senior Citizen Section Officer in Sindhupalchowk (#23)*

The affordability and ease of accessibility of mobile phones were also mentioned frequently. Access to mobile phones and social media reportedly increased drastically after the earthquakes, contributing to a rise in self-initiated marriages. Some respondents suggested that increased access has led to the over-engagement with social media among youth. A respondent mentioned that children as young as 10-years-old are routinely using mobile phones and social media. Other negative aspects of social media mentioned by respondents include the propagation of fake identities with people lying about their age or pretending to be single.

*“The numbers of self-initiated marriages have increased after the earthquake. One of the reasons for this increment is easy access to mobile phones and Facebook. Earlier people didn’t used to have mobile phones so people used to elope after initial interaction in schools and Jatras [type of festivals involving street carnival]. Lately, access to mobile phones and Facebook has become much easier, which resulted in increased interactions among adolescents and self-initiated marriage at a young age. Even extramarital affairs have increased a lot due to Facebook. Access to Facebook becomes easier since the time of the earthquake.” – FGD with women’s savings and credit cooperative in Dolakha District (#7)*

*“Due to being an uneducated community, children have taken up the wrong path and they have misused technology. As a result, the trend of children getting married at an early age has increased.” – KII with Women and Children Welfare Center official in Sindhupalchowk District (#1)*

## Findings

Generally speaking, respondents stated that the age among those who marry after having met through social media is younger than couples getting married through arranged marriage procedures. As a result, social media has prompted an increasing prevalence in early marriages, as opposed to arranged marriages that occur at allegedly suitable ages. It comes as no surprise then that some respondents blamed social media for promoting quick marriages and elopements, stating that people marry strictly based on initial attraction – at times without even meeting up in person – instead of being thoughtful about their choice in partners and the long-term commitment they are about to make.

*“They talk in Facebook, they talk like almost every day, but they don’t think of long term, they think they will marry the person based on the attraction, they take hard and fast decision, they don’t know the actual character of the boy because the decision of marriage was hard and fast decision, there are cases of girl trafficking too.” – IDI with unmarried girl in Sindhupalchowk (#84)*

The adolescent survey confirms this, with over half of the 1,431 respondents agreeing (49.48 per cent) or strongly agreeing (14.12 per cent) that social media has caused adolescents to elope.

### (c) Lack of education

Consistent with findings elsewhere, quantitative analysis from both Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha found that adolescents married as children had nearly 2 fewer years of education, on average. The mean educational attainment of adolescents who were not married as children was 10th grade (mean = grade 10.0), 1.8 years higher than that of adolescents who were married as children (mean = grade 8.2) (Table 38). Differences were greater for Sindhupalchowk District than Dolakha District. In Sindhupalchowk District, girls married as children had 1.9 years less education and boys had 3.1 years less education. Among those who were not married as children, 81.6 per cent had a secondary level of education or higher, while only 48.9 per cent of those who were married as children had a comparable level of education (Table 39).

**Table 38**  
Mean educational attainment of 15–19-year-olds, in years of formal education in Nepal (95% CI)

		Boys	Girls
Sindhupalchowk District	Adolescents married as children	6.9 (4.8, 9.0)	8.3 (7.0, 9.7)
	Adolescents not married as children	10.0 (9.7, 10.2)	10.2 (10.0, 10.4)
Dolakha District	Adolescents married as children	8.3 (6.1, 10.4)	8.9 (7.8, 10.0)
	Adolescents not married as children	9.7 (9.5, 9.9)	10.0 (9.7, 10.2)

**Table 39**  
Median age at first marriage by education in Nepal (95% CI)

	Primary (Grade 1–5)	Lower secondary (Grade 6–8)	Secondary (Grade 9–10)	Higher secondary (Grade 11–12)
Sindhupalchowk Women	17.9 (16.5, 19.3)	16.8 (15.2, 18.5)	18.5 (17.2, 19.8)	19.3 (18.3, 20.2)
Sindhupalchowk Men	17.6 (16.0, 19.2)	18.4 (17.1, 19.6)	20.3 (18.7, 21.8)	18.7 (17.5, 19.9)
Dolakha Women	19.0 (17.0, 21.0)	17.1 (16.3, 17.8)	17.1 (16.2, 18.0)	18.7 (17.6, 19.7)
Dolakha Men	20.0*	19.3 (18.1, 20.4)	17.9 (17.1, 18.7)	19.5 (16.4, 22.6)

Note: \* There was only one individual in this category in our sample

In addition to associations between an adolescent's educational attainment and child marriage, the educational attainment of their parents is also associated with an increased risk of child marriage. Low levels of educational attainment by both the male and female heads of household appeared to be associated with higher rates of child marriage (Table 40). In households without child marriage, the male head of household had an average of 7.1 years of education, whereas the male head of household had an average of 5.2 years of

education in households where child marriage was present. Similarly, the average level of educational attainment of female heads of household was higher among households where there was no child marriage, with a mean of 6.2 years of education, than in households where child marriage was present (mean of 3.5 years). The proportions of male and female heads of household that had completed secondary school were also notably higher in households where there was not any child marriage.

**Table 40**  
Correlation between parental education and child marriage in Nepal

	Male head of household mean years of education	Male head of household completion of secondary education	Female head of household mean years of education	Female head of household completion of secondary education
Adolescents not married before 18	7.1 years (CI 6.8-7.4)	21.2%	6.2 years (CI 5.7-6.7)	6.2%
Adolescents married before 18	5.2 years (CI 3.9-6.5)	8.5%	3.5 years (CI 2.5-4.5)	0%

$p = 0.036$   $p = 0.134$

One of the major effects of the earthquakes was the disruption of education with school closures. The earthquakes resulted in infrastructure damage to numerous schools in the region, which prevented many adolescents from accessing educational opportunities. While some schools were repaired and reopened quickly, others were closed for up to a year. Several respondents noted that marriage is often the only alternative for adolescents not currently enrolled in school.

*"After we drop our education, there is no alternative than to get married. There is only hope of getting a good job when we study. Once we drop our studies, at least when we get married, our parents might get some help with household chores. So, we got married at an early age." - FGD with married boys age 15-19 in Sindhupalchowk District (#90)*

The earthquakes also disrupted critical infrastructure resulting in the temporary suspension of several social services and programmes focused on education. Respondents reported that the resulting decline in community-level education among adolescents and parents contributed to a lack of knowledge about the negative effects of early marriage. Community leaders, service providers and government officials reported that a lack of knowledge among parents about the effects of child marriage was associated with the practice.

*"One of the reasons could be lack of education among people. Some people lack proper awareness about the hazardous impacts of child marriage on the health of girls, so they marry their children at an early age." - FGD with Women's Group participants in Dolakha District (#7)*

### (d) Economic insecurity

As in many other situations, poverty and economic instability were identified as drivers of child marriage. One of the most common examples referenced was parents marrying their children as a way to alleviate the financial pressure of educating or caring for a child, particularly daughters or households with many children. Some parents sought to marry their child to someone of a higher economic status, in an effort to ensure more economic stability in their child's future. Some adolescents were motivated to marry for this same reason.

*"In poor households, marrying off their daughter as soon as possible can be a great financial relief. So, such households where parents are constantly facing financial constraint, paired with lack of education among them, is also another cause of child marriage." – FGD with a women's savings and credit cooperative in Dolakha District (#7)*

*"In some cases, parents [...] will marry off their daughter after looking at the boy's property; if they find a suitable boy, they will marry off their daughter if the boy is rich." – IDI with a mother from Dolakha District (#56)*

*"Even if the guardian doesn't want their daughter to get married, girls will marry if they see any rich man. It means there is a weak financial condition in the house. The guardian also tries to set the marriage of their daughter with the boy who is financially strong." – KII with a marriage registrar from Sindhupalchowk District (#25)*

*"Poverty is the main cause of child marriage. Girls are usually attracted to elope because they compare their parent's poverty, their unfulfilled wishes with their neighbours and they try to fulfil their wishes and desire by marrying the boy who is rich. Poverty usually leads to child marriage." – KII with female service provider in Sindhupalchowk District (#41)*

Destruction of houses and property and disruption of livelihoods from the earthquakes resulted in additional financial strain. For some parents, this added pressure to marry a daughter.

*"Families are poor, the earthquake has demolished their houses, there is lack of food. At that time, in such conditions, if someone from a nice family comes with the marriage proposals then they prefer to marry off their daughter for better livelihood." – KII with a judge in Juvenile District Court in Dolakha District (#33)*

Analysis of heads of households' employment showed potential association between employment or lack thereof and child marriage. Of heads of households without a child marriage, 90.8 per cent were employed, as opposed to 83.0 per cent of those with a child marriage ( $p = .078$ ). Analysis of the type of employment of the head of household of adolescent survey respondents found that households with child marriage had a higher percentage of heads working in agriculture/farming or day labourer positions (79.3 per cent), compared to households where child marriage was not present (60.9 per cent). Heads of households without child marriage were more likely to run their own business, shop, or stall (11.0 per cent versus 2.9 per cent).

No meaningful difference was observed in the monthly incomes of households with or without child marriage. However, analysis of household net income (reported monthly income minus reported monthly expenditures) found that the average was negative for households with child marriage, (-574.5 Nepali rupees, -\$4.80) and positive for those without (1,660.3 Nepali rupees, \$13.90). Analysis of household wealth, measured by housing structure and materials and household possessions, produced no significant findings.

### (e) Meeting basic needs

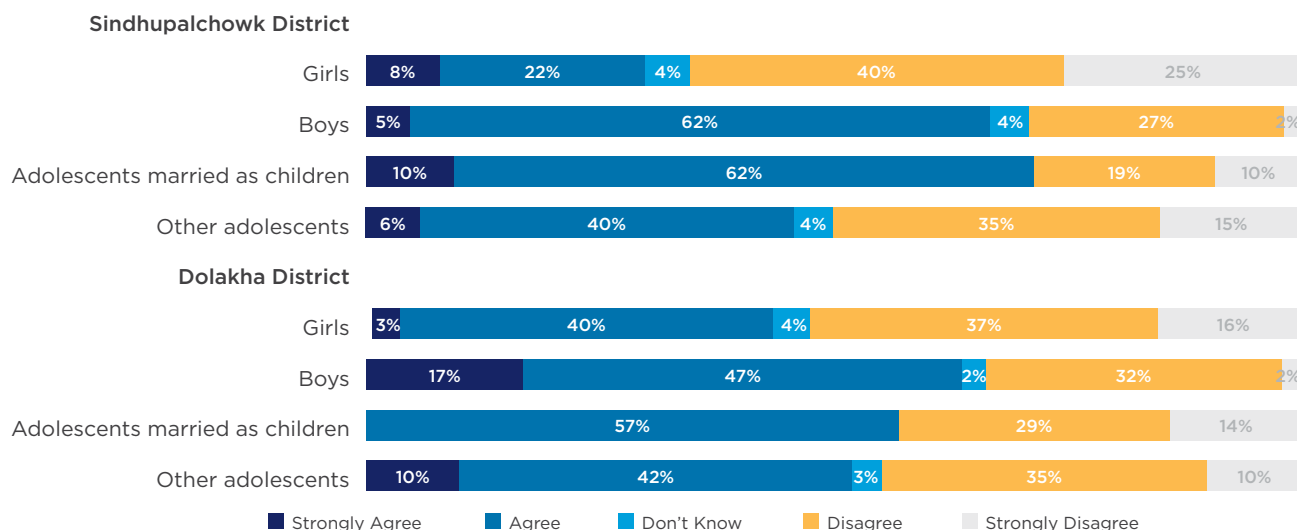
Married and unmarried adolescent interview respondents reported that some adolescents would pursue child marriage in an effort to secure shelter, food, clothing and other basic needs following the earthquakes. In both districts, adolescent quantitative survey respondents were more likely to agree with the statement "Getting married helps my family get more resources" if they were in child marriages (Figure 9), though the margin was larger in Sindhupalchowk District. Boys were also much more likely to agree than girls, in both districts. A few government respondents and one community leader in Sindhupalchowk reported that though it is possible that some marriages could have been arranged to increase a household's access to government aid, child marriage rates overall were not associated with the distribution of aid or relief supplies following the earthquakes.

*"I used to think that, "Now, my house is broken, I wish I could get married with him. Possibly his house is better than mine. If I get married to him, I might get to stay in a better house." Possibly this happens to everyone these days. Also, I used to feel that I am not able to eat a delicious full meal in my own house but might be if I get married to him, I might get to eat delicious food in his house." – IDI with a married adolescent girl in Dolakha District (#2)*



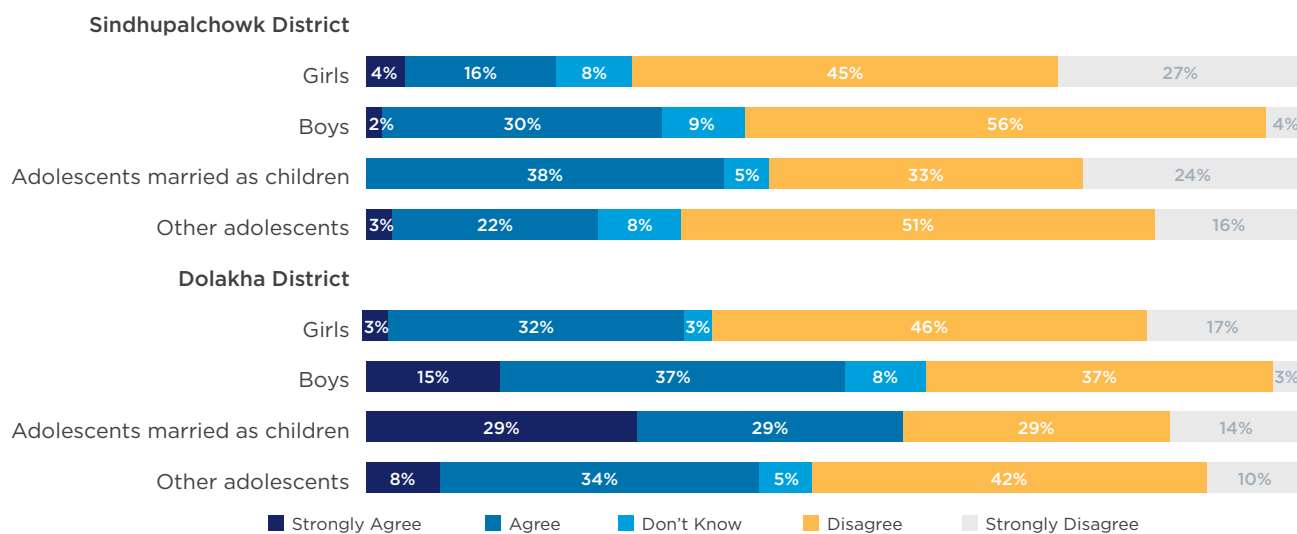
**Figure 9**  
Adolescent perceptions of marriage, related to the earthquakes in Nepal

Getting married helps my family get more resources (food, aid, money)



Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk boys versus girls,  $p < 0.001$ ; child marriage,  $p = 0.241$ ; Dolakha boys versus girls,  $p < 0.001$ ; child marriage,  $p = 0.575$ .

Marriage provides comfort and security after experiencing a disaster or crisis.



Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk boys versus girls,  $p = 0.000$ ; child marriage,  $p = 0.267$ ; Dolakha boys versus girls,  $p = 0.000$ ; child marriage  $p = 0.059$

## Findings

Additionally, both adolescents and service providers in Sindhupalchowk noted the association between parental neglect and early marriage, as those neglected often left their homes and pursued marriage to re-establish a feeling of security. Respondents noted that this was often observed in cases where children lost one or both parents in the earthquakes, where parents were “distracted” or “neglectful,” or preoccupied with newfound financial stressors related to the effects of the earthquakes. When asked whether marriage provides comfort and security after experiencing a disaster or crisis, adolescents married as children were more likely to agree than those who were not. This was particularly true in Dolakha District, where 29 per cent of those married as children strongly agreed, as opposed to 8 per cent of those who were not. Once again, boys were more likely to agree or strongly agree than girls, with the larger margin in Dolakha District (52 per cent versus 35 per cent).

*“It was a state where parents were unable to pay much attention to their children. Therefore, the trend of getting married at an early age by eloping increased.” – KII with Women and Children Welfare Center official in Sindhupalchowk District (#1)*

## (f) Displacement

As Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha were badly damaged, many people lived in temporary shelters following the earthquakes. Some lived by their damaged homes, but others were displaced to temporary camps or settlements, for months or up to a year. Parents expressed concerns about the safety of their children while living in these settlements. Several respondents noted an increase in child marriage among families in relocation camps.

*“After the earthquake, those who have a grown-up son or daughter got affected because they didn’t have a place to live as their house was destroyed by the earthquake. They were worried where shall they go, what shall they eat and where to live. They were scared that someone would do something bad to their grown-up children. The parents thought that they would be safe if they were married. They were scared that their daughter would get affected by bad influences and their sons would do something bad. That’s why they decided to do early marriage of their children. A few were married at an early age*



Sarina Tamang, 10, holds a baby from her neighborhood in Chuchhepati camp, Kathmandu. Six months after the devastating earthquake in 2015, schools remained closed and children like Sarina passed their time idling around in the camp.

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*by their parents.” – KII with community health volunteer in Sindhupalchowk District (#41)*

Government officials and service providers in Sindhupalchowk noted that there was an increase in the number of elopements in these camps as well, as adolescents lived in closer proximity and were able to interact with a more diverse pool of potential partners. There was also an influx of boys and men from other districts who arrived in Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha for reconstruction efforts. Some respondents reported that the increase in adolescent interactions also led to increases in inter-caste and inter-ethnic marriages.

*“During the earthquake everyone shared their space in the community and stayed together which gave them an opportunity to know each other and communicate. As a result, compared to the earlier days, the number of elopement cases has increased considerably.” – KII with government official from Sindhupalchowk District (#1)*

### **(g) Gender norms and adolescent sexuality**

Respondents reported that increased proximity to and fraternization with members of the opposite sex, as occurred in displacement sites, is associated with marriage, as family honour is often called into question when adolescents are seen engaging with the other sex prior to marriage. Additionally, respondents noted that girls who become pregnant prior to marriage are often pressured to marry before the community learns of the pregnancy. Multiple respondents reported that parents arrange marriages to prevent their child from eloping, as elopement is considered to dishonour the family.

*“Boys are restless from the age of 13. If a boy starts roaming around with girls then it will create an uncomfortable scenario in the society. So, if we get our son married we will be relieved. If a boy starts flirting with girls then it looks bad in the society. I think 13–22 years is the age in which boys should get married.” – IDI with the mother of an unmarried adolescent in Dolakha District (#56)*

*“They marry children at an early age thinking, if [she] runs away after growing up, it will bring shame to the family. So, they might marry her when she is young and in control.” – FGD with Child’s Club members in Dolakha District (#70)*

*“Most of the parents are worried about self-initiated marriage or elopement that would be*

*detrimental to the family prestige, hence they decide to marry off their children early.” – KII with male religious leader in Sindhupalchowk District (#15)*

*“If she gets pregnant before marriage it is a must to get married.” – KII with a marriage registrar in Dolakha District (#36)*

Some respondents noted that there is an association between the quality of the prospective partner and child marriage. Parents reported that families could identify better partners for their children while the adolescents are younger, as the “good” partners tend to get married first. Additionally, elders’ desires to expand the family lineage were reportedly associated with early marriage, as there is a prominent association between early marriage and early childbearing in the community. Findings related to pregnancy and childbirth are presented in a later section. Finally, having one’s children married is often considered to be a great honour among parents. Several adolescents noted that pressure on parents to marry their children is associated with child marriage.

*“Fearing that daughters might run away with a lower family, they get her married early when they find a boy from a good family.” – FGD with service provider in Sindhupalchowk District (#69)*

*“Grandparents always want their grandchildren to get married at an early age so that they can see their extended generation of offspring.” – KII with community leader in Dolakha District (#11)*

*“Then there is social pressure also. My daughter is studying for a Bachelor in Business Study. But everyone tells me “Why are you not getting your daughter married? You should get her married first.” – FGD with service provider in Sindhupalchowk District (#69)*

Increased incidences of rape and trafficking of girls were reported following the earthquakes, particularly in Sindhupalchowk District. Sindhupalchowk has historically had higher rates of trafficking and both the risk and prevalence of trafficking was perceived to be higher after the earthquakes, whereas Dolakha District is perceived as having little to no trafficking. Government officials, community leaders, service providers, and parents in Sindhupalchowk all noted that some child marriages were arranged to mitigate the effects of this physical insecurity. They noted that these marriages protected young girls from trafficking and violence in the region.



## Findings

*“After the earthquake, for some time there was a change. At that time, a number of organizations came, with good and bad intentions. As a result, some girls were cajoled and taken to some bars, brothels and massage parlours in Kathmandu. Due to this reason, parents married off their daughters early. Some eloped themselves and settled in the same village. This district has a past with issues of girl trafficking. Hence, the fear increased all the more in the common people.” – KII with government official from Sindhupalchowk District (#1)*

*“Girls might be a victim of trafficking, this is a fear in every household, and parents aren’t there in the house all the time so they tend to get their daughter married because they feel that they can’t protect their daughter.” – IDI with unmarried girl in Sindhupalchowk District (#84)*

### (h) Household composition

Not having a consistent female decision maker in the home was found to have some association with child marriage occurring in that household. Among adolescents who were not married as children, 97.7 per cent had an adult female decision maker present in their household, while 91.4 per cent of adolescents who were married as children had a female decision maker present. Similarly, losing one or both parents was associated with a higher risk of child marriage. Among adolescents who were not married as children, only 5.3 per cent had lost one or both parents whereas 22.9 per cent of adolescents who were married as children had lost one or both parents. Though data are extremely limited ( $n = 2$ ), losing a mother presented the highest risk of child marriage, illustrating the need for additional research to assess the impact of losing one’s parent(s) on the incidence of child marriage.

## 5. Moderators of child marriage

The impact of child protection programmes, increased educational opportunities, availability of income-generating activities, insufficient funds needed to be considered eligible for marriage, negative perceptions surrounding early marriage and legal restrictions were all mentioned by respondents as factors that disincentivized child

marriage or worked to moderate the rate of child marriage. Respondents cited awareness of legal restrictions, increased educational opportunities for girls and increased adolescent agency as the most effective moderators.

### (a) Awareness of laws regarding and implications of child marriage

After the earthquakes, Nepal passed a law increasing the age of marriage to 20 for girls as well as boys, and established new penalties for violating the law, which went into effect in late 2018. Nepal implemented a social awareness campaign in conjunction with this change. This campaign served to increase the awareness of both the legal age of marriage and the consequences of early marriage. Numerous respondents referred to activities associated with this campaign, or knowledge gained from it. Local government officials attribute a decline in child marriage following the earthquakes to the impact of this campaign.

*“Before the earthquake people used to get married earlier than nowadays but these days’ people get married only after the legal age. The earthquake brought the public awareness along with it. There were many programmes from NGOs, INGOs [international non-governmental organizations] and the government, because of which there have been many improvements.” – FGD with fathers in Dolakha District (#78)*

*“The reason for decline after the earthquake is due to the launch of awareness and skill generating trainings. And we’ve also helped to make the programme effective by working in coordination with them.” – KII with Government official in Sindhupalchowk District (#25)*

When household survey participants were asked if they had received information or education about the effects of marriage before the age of 18, there was no difference between households with child marriage and those without. However, among adolescents, there was a noticeable difference, with fewer adolescents married as children having received this information compared to adolescents not married as children (Table 41). Boys were also less likely than girls to report receiving information on the effects of child marriage.



**Table 41**  
Households and adolescents receiving information on the effects of child marriage in Nepal

	No child marriage	Child marriage	Girls	Boys
Households in Sindhupalchowk	82.8%	80.0%	N/A	N/A
Households in Dolakha	77.9%	78.4%	N/A	N/A
Adolescents in Sindhupalchowk	82.1%	71.4%	<b>87.3%</b>	<b>75.4%</b>
Adolescents in Dolakha	80.5%	64.3%	<b>83.7%</b>	<b>76.1%</b>

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Qualitative analysis found that this increased awareness has contributed to the increase of reporting of child marriages. Both unmarried adolescents and government officials reported that programmes increasing the awareness and comprehension of existing legal restrictions of child marriage have resulted in a decreased incidence of the practice. Increased awareness of the effects of early marriage was also reported to have contributed to a decline in the practice. When asked if they believed that there were any advantages of early marriage, many respondents reported that there are no advantages. Quantitative analysis found no evidence of an association between child marriage and a person being told that there were negative effects associated with the practice.

*“Recently, reporting of child marriage can be seen as increasing compared to the past, however; it doesn’t reflect that the rate of child marriages has increased. It rather reflects the increase in the awareness level of the people.”*  
– KII with official from Police Women’s Cell in Kathmandu (#89)

*“In the past, people married in early age because of ignorance. But now, after hearing about the law, they do not practice early marriage very much.”* – KII with religious leader from Dolakha District (#76)

*“Now the benefits of marrying at a young age are nothing. Marriage at a young age does not bring honour to society, and education may be delayed. You have to leave the company of friends and go away. The responsibility of family and society increases. You don’t get respect and dignity from family and society. Learning is insufficient. They will be unable to earn a living. There are only disadvantages; there is no benefit at all.”* – KII with service provider in Sindhupalchowk District (#41)

Child Protection Committees, women’s groups and adolescent groups were most frequently mentioned as conducting or supporting child marriage related programming. Street dramas and training sessions were the most common types of interventions.

*“Women’s development had opened an adolescent club where they taught us about child marriage.”* – IDI with married adolescent girl in Sindhupalchowk District (#79)

*“The [Child Protection] Committee provides various trainings and it works for the awareness generating purpose in order to prevent child marriage.”* – KII with a marriage registrar in Sindhupalchowk District (#25)

*“The drama is done to give good advice and suggestions. Even in our school, many have married in early age and stayed at home leaving study after marriage. The drama is done to give a message so that they do not marry in early age.”* – FGD with Child’s Club members in Dolakha District (#70)

Though there was a surge in programmes and services following the earthquakes, many of these have since ended. Some respondents reported that they were unaware of such activities in their area. Government officials in Sindhupalchowk District mentioned plans to start programmes addressing child marriage in the near future.

*“An organization used to provide education to adolescents. They used to inform people between the ages of 10 to 19 that it was wrong to marry before 20. And this organization used to conduct awareness programmes regarding health, and reproduction at the health camp.”* – FGD with married adolescent girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#72)

## Findings

*“Child marriage is a big problem of society. But no programme has been conducted here to end it.” – FGD with service providers in Sindhupalchowk District (#69)*

*“Now programmes are not in operation. There are no programmes in operation to reduce child marriage. But in the coming days, the municipality and Municipal Police shall make such programmes and such programmes shall be taken in each and every wards. Classes against child marriage shall be conducted in each and every street. Legal knowledge should be included in the existing curriculum of the school, in order to ensure that children are well informed. There are some programmes regarding the end*

*of child marriage but no such programmes are in operation here.” – KII with Women, Children and Senior Citizen Section Officer in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

Quantitative respondents were asked to name the legal minimum age for marriage for males and females and data show that the means across households with and without child marriages were similar, and the medians were the same for girls and close for boys (Table 42). These data illustrate that knowledge of the legal age of marriage did not vary across the two districts, or between adolescents who were married as children and those who were not married as children, with little evidence that this knowledge serves as a moderator for child marriage.

**Table 42**  
Adolescent perceptions of legal age of marriage in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk				Dolakha			
	Mean		Median		Mean		Median	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Adolescents not married as children	20.1	21.8	20	21	20.2	21.8	20	20
Adolescents married as children	19.8	22.2	20	22	19.9	20.7	20	20

### (b) Education

Recent years have seen a shift in gender differences in school enrolment with an increase of educational prioritization for daughters. Qualitative respondents reported that increased educational opportunity, and awareness of the importance of education, has contributed to the delay in marriage among adolescents, particularly for girls. These changes were attributed to an influx of NGOs and programmes following the earthquakes, which put an emphasis on the importance of girls' education.

*“We can see change in families' priority to education. Before they gave preference to their son's education and they didn't educate their daughters but now it has changed and both the girls and boys go to the school.” – KII with religious leader in Sindhupalchowk District (#15)*

*“Also, the children are being educated. As a result, they too have certain goals in their mind and can decide that they would get married at only a certain age. The parents too understand this and*

*thus don't force their children for marriage these days. There is no longer the compulsion to get married at a certain age anymore. Parents are no longer intimidated by other people (of their son's/ daughter's age) getting married. The youth set certain goals for themselves like they'd complete a certain level of education, do something and then get married at a certain age, and there is no coercion from the parents' end against this.” – FGD with women aged 20–24 in Sindhupalchowk District (#27)*

*“There was education before, but education wasn't so important. It wasn't like that the girls should study, pursue their higher education. Parents used to send their sons to school, but not the daughters. Only a few of the daughters used to go to school. After the earthquake, even the daughters started studying and after studying and being a bit matured, they started to get married around 19–20 years even if they did it themselves or by running away. Now the eligible marriage age is 20–24 years mostly.” – FGD with 20–24-year-old women in Dolakha District (#82)*

In the household survey, female heads of households were asked if they agreed or disagreed that boys and girls should have the same opportunities for education. Female heads of households with child marriage were slightly more likely to agree (96.78 per cent said “strongly agree” or “agree”) than those of households without adolescents who were married as children (91.498 per cent reported “strongly agree” or “agree”).

Adolescents married as children were much less likely to be enrolled in school than adolescents who were not married as children. Among adolescents who were not married as children and not currently enrolled in school, being needed at home and

a lack of interest were identified as the primary reason for dropping out of school (Table 43). Similarly, being needed at home (28 per cent), the costs associated with schooling (24 per cent) and marriage (24 per cent) were identified as the most common reasons for not attending school among adolescents married as children. Girls were more likely than boys to list marriage (15 per cent versus 2 per cent) and being needed at home (28 per cent versus 19 per cent) as the primary reason they left school.

Of those that replied “other,” two-thirds of both boys and girls specified that they were uninterested in attending school.

**Table 43**  
Primary barriers to attending school in Nepal

	No child marriage	Child marriage	Girls	Boys
Marriage	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>24.1%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>
Cost	20.9%	24.1%	18.9%	25.6%
School damaged or destroyed	0%	3.5%	<b>0%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>
Distance to school	14.9%	6.9%	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>11.6%</b>
Needed at home	22.4%	27.6%	<b>28.3%</b>	<b>18.6%</b>
Other	32.8%	13.8%	<b>22.6%</b>	<b>32.6%</b>

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Analysis of financial aid distributed with the intention of increasing adolescent enrolment in school found that though provision of aid may be a moderator for child marriage, there is not enough evidence to conclude that there is an association between the two variables. Girls were slightly more likely to have received financial support to attend school (59 per cent versus 53 per cent).

### (c) Adolescent agency

There has been an observed increase in adolescent agency over the past several years, giving adolescents a say in whether or not they want to marry. In some cases, adolescent agency, coupled with a desire to become self-sufficient, has resulted in an observed decrease in child marriage among adolescents. Performing well in educational studies

and securing a good job are perceived among community members and elders as acceptable reasons for adolescents to delay marriage.

*“In the past, there was practice of early marriage. Now, they study. Some of them say, “We will not marry unless we can be self-reliant.” – IDI with mother from Sindhupalchowk District (#39)*

*“If an adolescent gets occupied in some job or education and is acquiring good academic scores, no parents forces them to marriage. In contrast, those who score low academic grades or do not have proper jobs have no reason to delay their marriage. So, yes, education and occupation are key things which can help adolescents delay their marriage.” – KII with government official in Dolakha District (#13)*

## 6. Decision-making

### (a) Marriage considerations

Qualitative respondents reported that the age of marriage eligibility has shifted in recent years. In previous years, adolescents were considered eligible for marriage after reaching physical maturity, which for girls was defined by menarche. However, in recent years, respondents report an increasing number of adolescents, both boys and girls, delaying marriage until they consider themselves self-reliant, in terms of education or employment. When asked about the most desirable age for marriage, the mean age reported by female heads of household was over 20 for both men and women, with a mean age of 21.3 for girls and 23.7 for boys in Sindhupalchowk and a mean age of 21.6 for girls and 24.2 for boys in Dolakha. Analysis of the adolescent survey produced similar results. In Sindhupalchowk, the mean desired age of marriage was 21.5 for girls and 23.4 for boys and, in Dolakha, the mean age was 21.5 for girls and 23.5 for boys. Both boys and girls reported a mean higher than 21 years for the desirable age of marriage for girls, with both reporting a higher desirable age for boys.

*“Some marry off their daughter soon after menstruating because they believe doing that will put them in good terms with God. But now such practices have come to an end. In the past people used to believe they should marry their daughter off as soon as they menstruate but now they consider age to be an important factor. Today girls get married usually when they are 18 years of age.” – IDI with mother from Dolakha (#55)*

*“In this community, education level and financial status are the two most important factors considered for marriage, and after crossing 20 years of age with proper education and financial capability, they are considered ready for marriage by family members and community people.” – KII with female service provider (#73)*

Respondents from both the household and adolescent surveys indicated that there are several factors that influence the desired age for marriage, presented in Table 44. When asked if the factors affecting eligible age for marriage had changed following the earthquakes, 99 per cent of household survey respondents and more than 80 per cent of adolescent survey respondents reported that the factors were the same before and after the earthquakes. Among the respondents that reported differences, family honour (34.9 per cent in Sindhupalchowk and 60.7 per cent in Dolakha) and family tradition (34.2 per cent in Sindhupalchowk and 18 per cent in Dolakha) were reported as the primary influences prior to the earthquakes. In Dolakha, those are the same two factors most commonly prioritized now as well but, in Sindhupalchowk, “love” is now reported as the primary factor by 56 per cent of respondents.

Family honour, family tradition and love were the most significant influences on decisions about the age of marriage as named by both male and female adolescents. Girls were almost twice as likely as boys to name family honour as the primary influence (27 per cent versus 15 per cent). A third of both boys and girls named love as the primary influence.



A peer education group in Nepal listens to a session on child marriage, led by Priyanka Singh, 20. She also led a neighborhood walk talking to villagers about child marriage and posting stickers on houses to raise awareness about the issue.

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**Table 44**  
Factors that influence the age at which people marry in Nepal (%)

	Current primary influence for girls (Household)		Current primary influence for boys (Household)		Primary influence (Adolescent)		Additional influences now (Adolescent)	
	SP	DL	SP	DL	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Religion	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.6</b>	0.3	0.3	1.6	1.5	14.6	11.5
Family honour	<b>28.5</b>	<b>31.5</b>	26.6	27.1	<b>26.7</b>	<b>14.6</b>	40.7	41.7
Family tradition	<b>9.8</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>40.9</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>36.1</b>	44.2	42.8
Money/resources	<b>1.1</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>9.0</b>	2.9	1.7	16.1	12.4
War/conflict	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Natural disaster	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.3
Displacement	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Security	<b>0.6</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Citizenship	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>
Dowry	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.9	0.2	2.2	1.5
The law	0.5	0.2	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>3.3</b>	5.8	5.3
Love	<b>56.0</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>20.0</b>	33.4	34.0	<b>42.9</b>	<b>49.2</b>
Other	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>	0.5	0.2	1.3	0.5

Note: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

SP = Sindhupalchowk

DL = Dolakha

Adolescent respondents were asked to either agree or disagree with a series of statements about marriage, presented in Figure 10. Married adolescents agreed that they felt prepared to become a husband/wife at the time of marriage, though boys agreed more strongly than girls in both districts. There was a stark contrast with unmarried adolescents, who indicated strongly that they did not feel prepared to marry. There was widespread agreement among both groups that marriage would allow them to make their own decisions, though

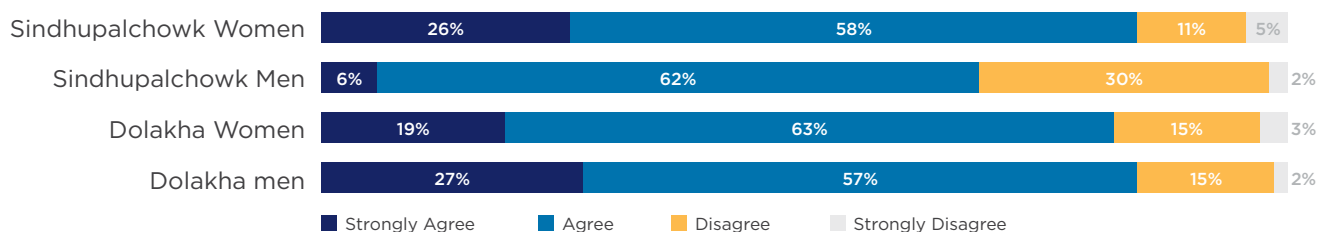
married boys were the most likely to strongly agree (>50 per cent of married boys as opposed to <50 per cent of married girls).

There was very strong agreement that both boys and girls should finish school before they marry, however this did not mean they should stop when they marry if they have not finished – there was strong disagreement that for both boys and girls that they should not stop attending school when they are married.

Findings

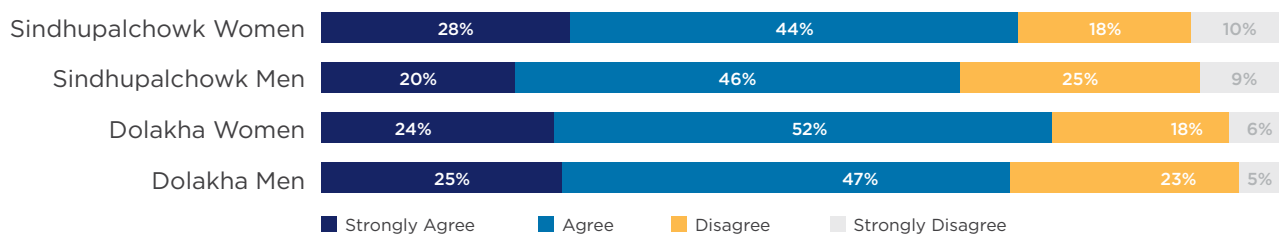
**Figure 10**  
Adolescent perceptions about marriage in Nepal

Marriage is important for maintaining family honour and reputation.



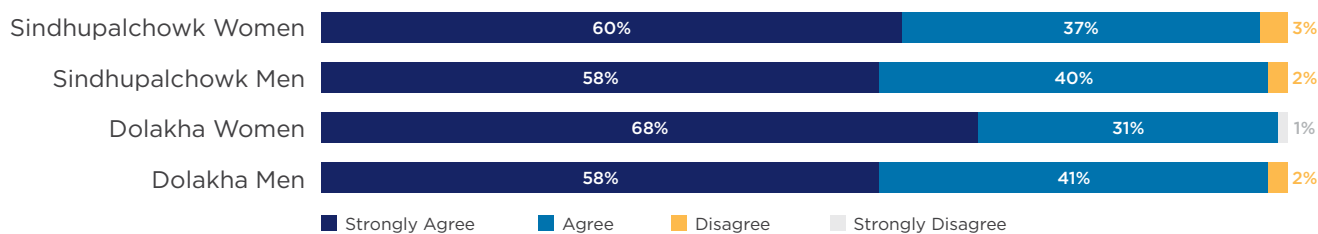
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p < 0.001$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p = 0.070$ .

The age at which I marry is a decision that my parents or relatives should make for me.



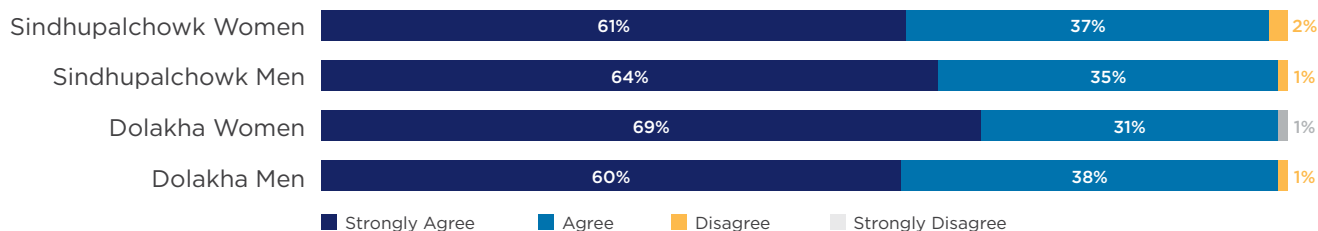
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.036$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p = 0.355$ .

Girls should complete school before they marry.



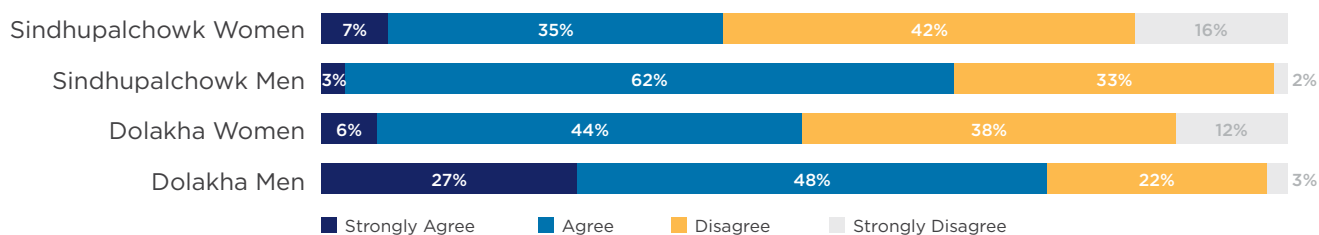
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.353$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p = 0.001$ .

Boys should complete school before they marry.



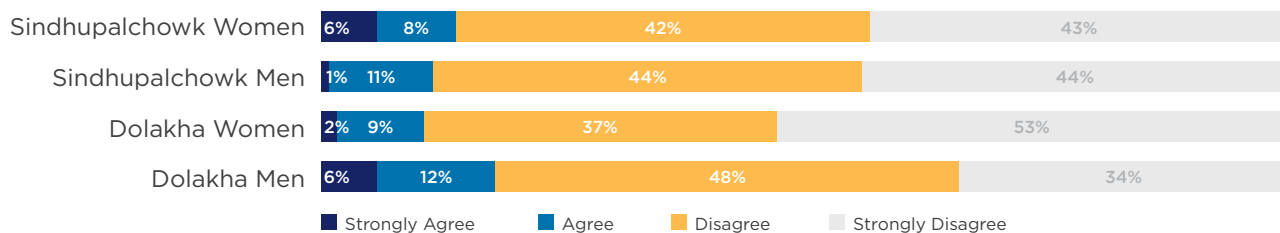
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.225$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p = 0.006$ .

Marriage would help me to overcome some of the challenges I face.



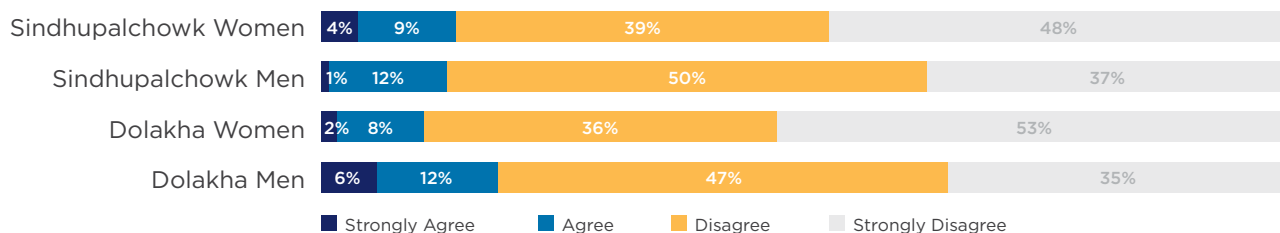
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p < 0.000$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p < 0.001$ .

Boys should not attend school once they are married.



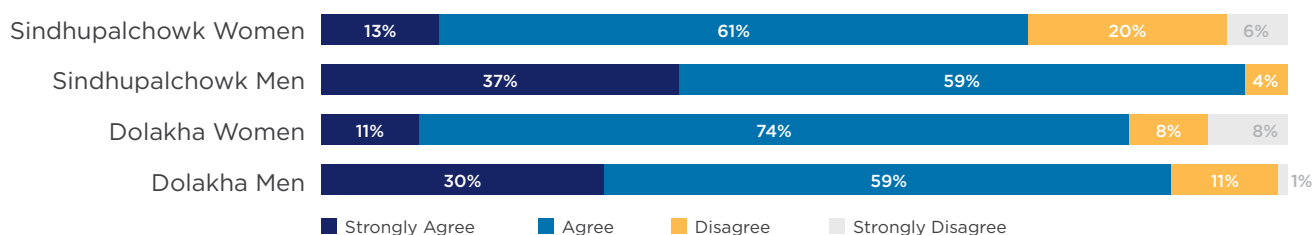
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.005$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p < 0.001$ .

Girls should not attend school once they are married.



Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.002$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p < 0.001$ .

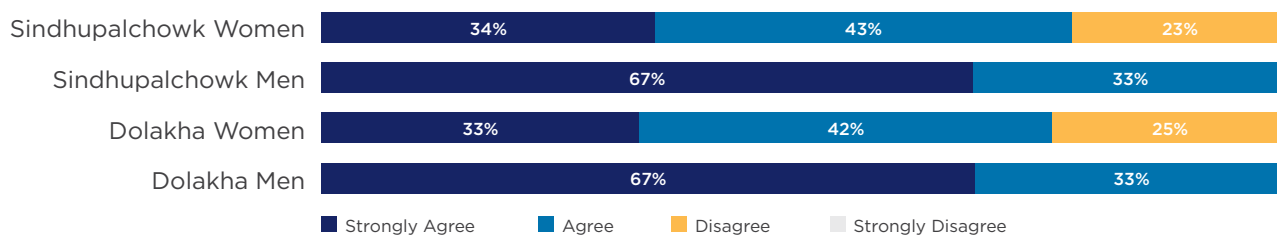
Getting married helps my family by having children/producing heirs/continuing the family legacy.



Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.000$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p < 0.001$ .

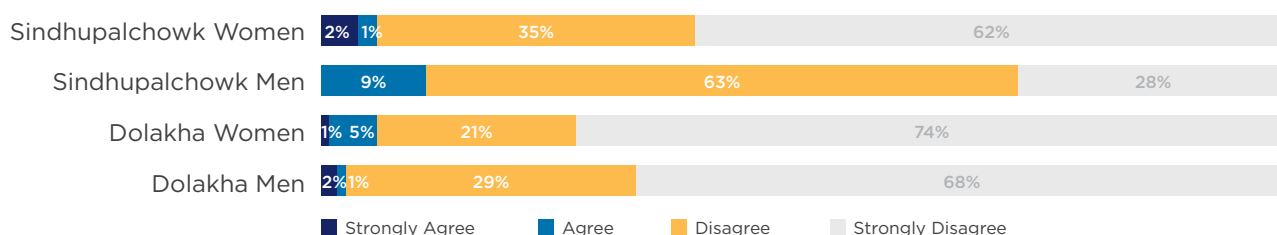
## Findings

I was prepared to become a wife/husband at the time I married.



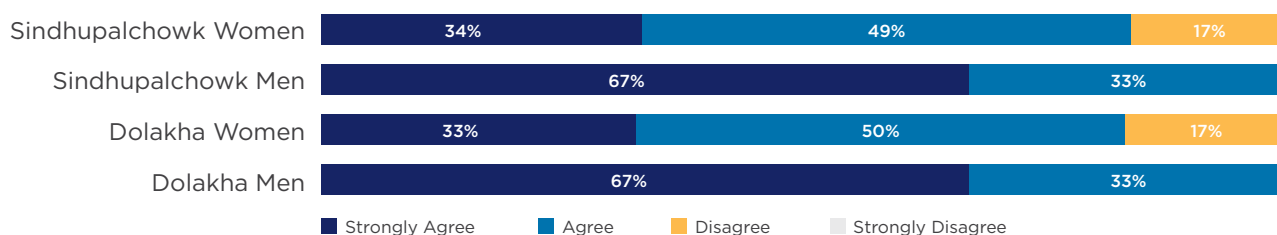
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.132$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p = 0.112$ .

I feel prepared to become a wife/husband.



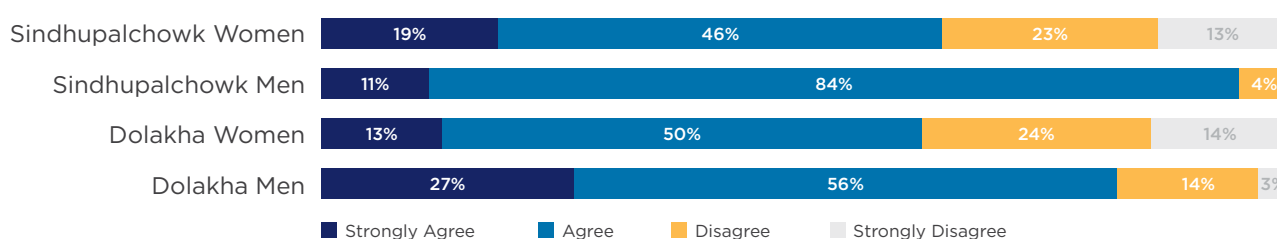
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p < 0.001$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p < 0.001$ .

I was able to make more decisions about my life after I married.



Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p = 0.154$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p = 0.140$ .

I will be able to make more decisions about my life when I become married.



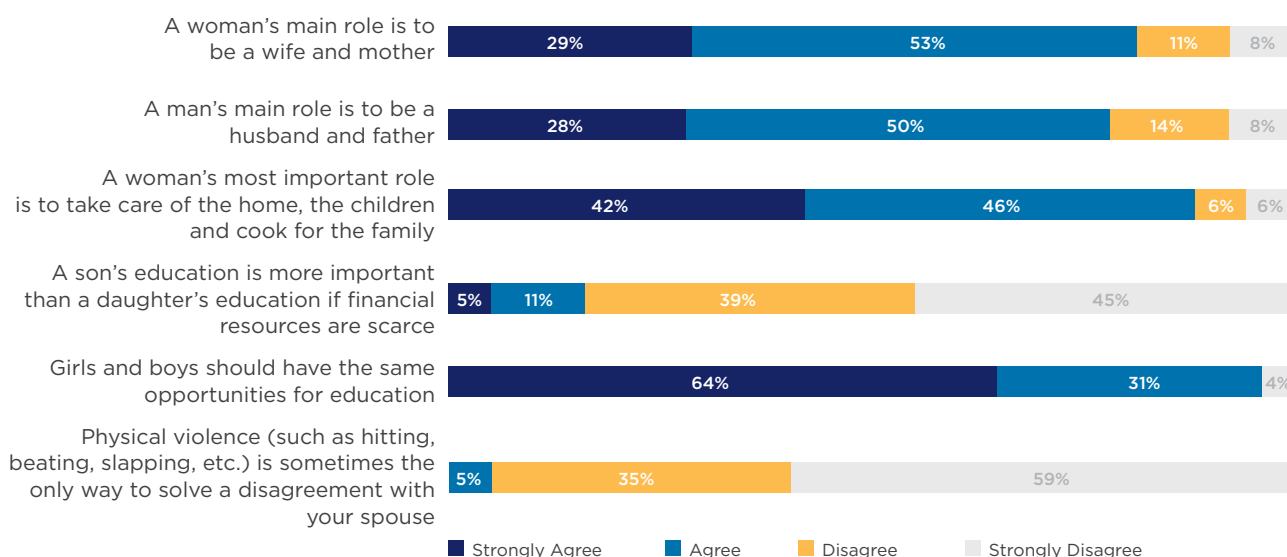
Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk women versus men  $p < 0.001$ ; Dolakha women versus men  $p < 0.001$ .

Female heads of household were also asked to agree or disagree with questions related to perceptions about marriage roles and responsibilities (Figures 11 and 12). The majority of female heads of household in both Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha agreed that women’s roles were “to be a wife and mother” and “to take care of the home, the children and cook”. However, they

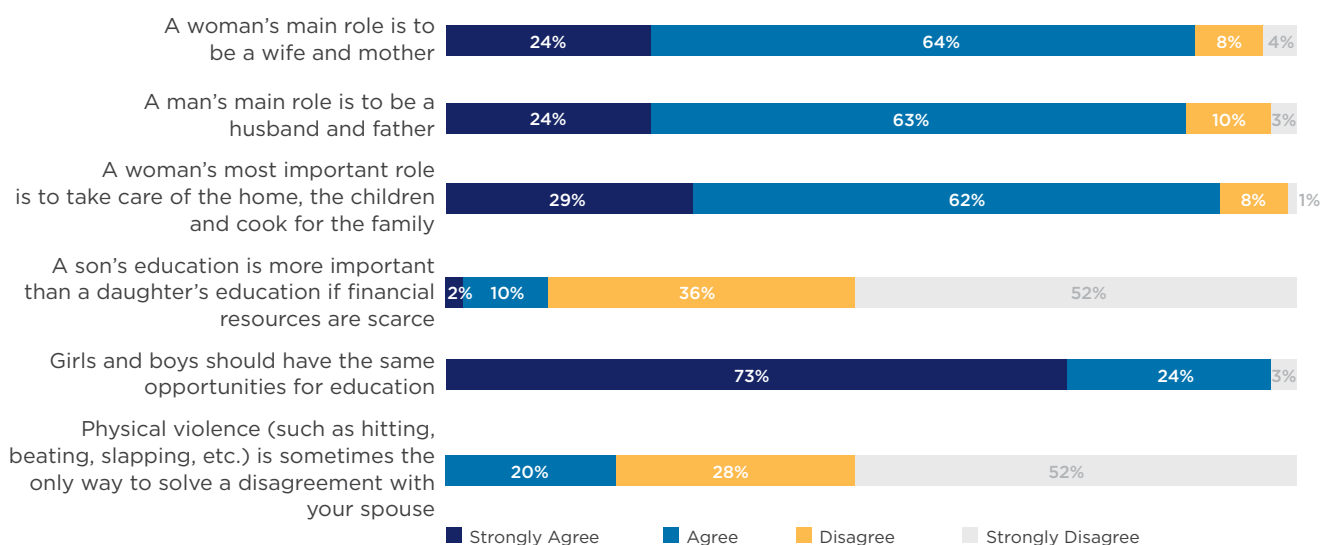
strongly disagreed with a son’s education being more important than a daughter’s and strongly agreed that girls and boys should have the same opportunities for education- further illustrating the increase in prioritization of girls’ education. Female heads of households strongly disagreed that physical violence was the only way to solve an argument.



**Figure 11**  
**Perceptions about gender roles and marriage responsibilities in Sindhupalchowk District in Nepal**



**Figure 12**  
**Perceptions about gender roles and marriage responsibilities in Dolakha District in Nepal**



## Findings

### (b) Adolescent agency and self-initiation

The notable recent increase in adolescent agency was one of the most standout findings and was discussed to some extent by nearly all qualitative respondents. Both boys and girls are increasingly demonstrating a high level of autonomy in their decision-making process. Their relationships with their parents reflect this agency, with most adolescents being able to freely choose their partners or speak up if they disagree. In contrast to Bangladesh, where boys clearly had more agency in marriage decision-making, in Nepal girls also discussed being able to make their own marriage decisions. This greater freedom, lauded by many respondents, has contributed to adolescents largely being the primary decision maker regarding their relationships, particularly for decisions regarding elopements, with parents playing more of a secondary and coordinating role. Even arranged marriages take into account the willingness of the couple to get married. This is in stark contrast to the past, where parental choices were prioritized. The tone of a few parental respondents however pointed to a feeling of helplessness, with parents indicating that they did not have a choice but to agree to their children's decisions.

*"In early days, parents used to be happy with the marriage while at present boys and girls are happy with the marriage." – FGD with mothers in Sindhupalchowk District (#46)*

*"Now, marriage is all about the couple's future. Marriage is all about finding a life partner and spending the rest of the lives together, how to make a family and all. That is why it is not all about the parent's decision and their rights. Getting married or not should be one's decision. After I get married, I have the responsibility towards my partner, I have to get a job to sustain the family and even the bride has to see about her future. That is why the bride and groom should have full control of decisions over their own marriages." – KII with community leader in Dolakha District (#74)*

*"Nowadays, people choose their partner first then talk to their parents. The bride and the groom first decide about their marriage plans, inform their parents. Though the decision is solely taken by the bride and the groom, the parents still ask their children to take further steps to make the matrimony formal between two families." – FGD with married girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#72)*

*"In our community, most of the time the girl herself chooses a compatible mate." – FGD with male child's club members in Sindhupalchowk District (#65)*

*"I will get to decide but my family will be involved in the decision-making process too." – IDI with unmarried girl age 15–19 in Dolakha District (#50)*

In contrast to the qualitative findings, where both boys and girls expressed that they prefer to make their own decisions, the majority of adolescent quantitative survey respondents (10–19-year-olds) in both districts agreed (46.5 per cent) or strongly agreed (23.9 per cent) that their parents or relatives should decide on the appropriate age for marriage. Slightly more girls agreed (48 per cent versus 45 per cent) or strongly agreed (26 per cent versus 22 per cent) than boys.

*"Nowadays, since eloping is a more common practice, the boy and the girl decide on their own." – FGD with married girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#72)*

*"Everyone prefers eloping and taking decisions themselves." – FGD with married girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#72)*

A number of respondents commented that adolescents today are generally more 'aware' and 'mature' and therefore have the capacity to make decisions regarding their relationships based on love or want. Adolescents expressed a desire to be in charge of their lives. From the adolescents' perspective, there was a strong belief in their ability and capacity to be a spouse. Accordingly, the increase in agency was linked to an increase in both love marriages and elopements.

Household surveys in both districts confirm this finding. The majority of the married 15–19-year-olds reported their marriages were self-initiated, including 100 per cent of the adolescents married as children and 89 per cent of adolescents who married at age 18 or 19). Fewer married girls reported their marriages to be self-initiated than boys, 83 per cent compared to 92 per cent. Slightly more adolescents in Sindhupalchowk District self-initiated than in Dolakha District (89 per cent versus 83 per cent).

*"I think your own decision is very important, because you are the one getting married and committing to spend your whole life with them." – IDI with unmarried girl age 15–19 in Sindhupalchowk District (#84)*

Yet, the stronger agency demonstrated by adolescents also led to some regrets – some adolescent respondents indicated that in hindsight, they were not ready to get married when they did and would have preferred to advance their education, or that they were not thoughtful in their choice in partner. Adult respondents reported a

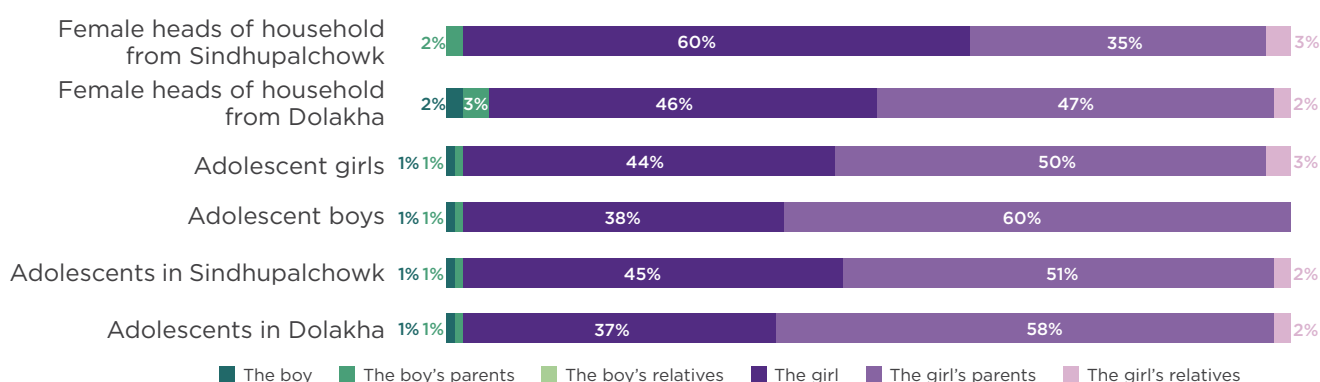
perception within the community that self-initiated marriages and elopements are not well-thought out and that couples are not clearly thinking about their future. This negative perception of elopement extends to the larger community, with respondents stating that elopement has not benefited the community in any way, with a perception that trends in polygamy, conflicts between couples and dissatisfaction within families are on the rise.

*“No, I was not eligible. I did not have a good income, I was not educated and I was underage to be married. However, we met and liked each other and then got married. Even though I knew that I was not eligible for marriage.” – IDI with married boy age 15–19 from Dolakha District (#21)*

### (c) Family roles

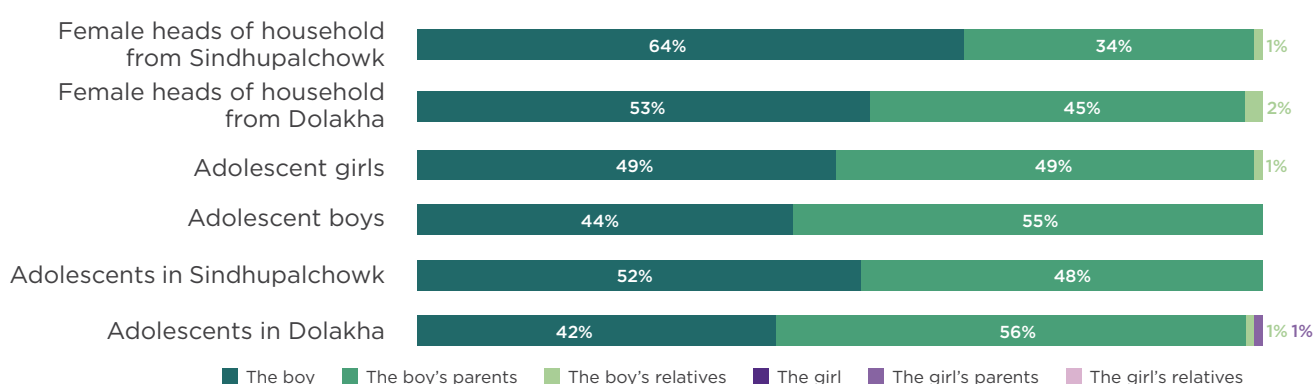
Though qualitative findings show that adolescent agency plays a significant role in marriage decision-making, quantitative data confirms that parents are still important figures (Figures 13 and 14). Female heads of household in both districts reported that the adolescent was the primary decision maker more often than their parent, however, adolescents reported the opposite. As reported by adolescents, 44 per cent of both girls and boys name themselves as the primary decision maker. The quantitative data clearly shows that adolescents play a significant role in marriage decision-making, but that parents, too, still have a role.

**Figure 13**  
Primary influence on girls’ age of marriage in Nepal



Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk versus Dolakha Households:  $p < 0.001$ ; Adolescent girls versus boys:  $p < 0.001$ ; Sindhupalchowk adolescents versus Dolakha adolescents:  $p = 0.096$

**Figure 14**  
Primary influence on boys’ age of marriage in Nepal



Note: P-values: Sindhupalchowk versus Dolakha Households:  $p < 0.001$ ; Adolescent girls versus boys:  $p = 0.011$ ; Sindhupalchowk adolescents versus Dolakha adolescents:  $p = 0.003$ .

## Findings

Qualitative respondents agreed that although there is an increase in adolescent agency and decision-making power among adolescents, parents still play a role in marriage.

*“Parents have a huge role, but children choose their partners. The rest of the procedures are all managed by the parents. Marriage is a huge social event and many things should be considered, like from the religious aspect, social aspects, financial aspects. Hence the ultimate role would be of the parents.” – KII with religious leader in Sindhupalchowk District (#15)*

*“For marriage, parents have to ask with their children whether they have someone who they want to marry and children usually share about their partners to their mothers. Then discussions on whether to marry their children with the person of their choice or not start within family. If everything went well, marriage occurs. If children don’t have anyone of their choice then parents seek a potential spouse for their children through relatives as it is better to perform marriage with someone familiar.” – KII with male community leader in Dolakha District (#11)*

## (d) Choosing spouses

Adolescents no longer rely on their family to introduce them to potential spouses (see Table 45 below). The adolescent survey asked participants to identify how they met their spouse, with a third reporting that they met their spouse through social media. Social media was the most common way of meeting spouses for both boys and girls, and those married before age 18 or after. In Sindhupalchowk, 10 per cent of girls did not know their spouse prior to marriage, compared to 0 per cent of the boys. In Dolakha, it was not possible to make a meaningful comparison due to the small number of married boys (2). Other reported methods by which adolescents met their spouses are presented in decreasing order: live in the same village (17.8 per cent), attend the same school (15.6 per cent), their spouse is a relative (13.3 per cent), and did not know their spouse prior to marriage (8.9 per cent). These data illustrate the shift from arranged marriages to love and self-initiated marriages, as also observed in the qualitative data.

**Table 45**  
How adolescents met their spouses in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk District				Dolakha District			
	Girls	Boys	Married <18	Married 18+	Girls	Boys	Married <18	Married 18+
I did not know my spouse	9.5%	0%	<b>0%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	7.1%	50.0%*	7.1%	50.0%*
Relative	9.5%	25.0%	14.3%	12.5%	7.1%	50.0%*	14.3%	0%
Same village	19.1%	12.5%	23.8%	0%	21.4%	0%	21.4%	0%
Same school	19.1%	25.0%	19.1%	25.0%	7.1%	0%	7.1%	0%
Met via social media	38.1%	25.0%	38.1%	25.0%	35.7%	0%	28.6%	50.0%*
Other	4.8%	12.5%	4.8%	12.5%	21.4%	0%	21.4%	0%

Notes: \* There were only two individuals in this category

**Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .



*“Now the time has changed. In old days there was practice of arranged marriage, marrying to the girls selected by the parents after looking at the girl’s kin and family and whether she is of the same religion and caste, now all these things have disappeared.” – KII with Government official in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

Although there is an increased number of adolescents pursuing inter-caste marriages, the majority of adolescents still tend to marry within their caste and religion. Among married adolescents listed on the household roster, 76.6 per cent were married within the same caste. Among adolescents married as children, 73 per cent were married within the same caste (80.6 per cent in Sindhupalchowk and 63 per cent in Dolakha). There was little difference by gender, with 79 per cent of girls and 73 per cent of boys marrying within caste.

Similar findings emerged from analysis of the adolescent survey: overall 68.9 per cent indicated that their spouse was someone in the same caste. Of the adolescents married under the age of 18, 74.3 per cent indicated that they married within their caste (85.7 per cent in Sindhupalchowk and 57.1 per cent in Dolakha). Two-thirds of girls and 80 per cent of boys married someone from the same caste. These data support the qualitative findings that many adolescents still choose spouses within their caste or religion, with a higher percentage of respondents in Sindhupalchowk marrying within their caste or religion, as compared to Dolakha.

*“Yes, I will give emphasis to caste because in our society there is a trend of marrying within the same caste; if we marry in different castes then everyone in society gossips and does not accept easily.” – IDI with unmarried girl age 15–19 in Sindhupalchowk District (#20)*

*“Usually in our ethnic group it is considered as good if they marry within the same religion, customs and traditions. We have a tradition that we should get married in same caste and religion rather than another caste and religion.” – IDI with married girl age 15–19 in Sindhupalchowk District (#43)*

There is also an increasing trend of choosing prospective spouses based on their educational status and career prospects rather than their financial status. Additionally, one’s behaviours, health and family reputation are considered by their prospective partner and their family. However, qualitative analysis found that women’s ability to complete domestic work and begin childbearing is still one of the primary considerations for men and their families. Finally, one’s age is considered when determining potential spouses: both that they are

of the legal age to marry and that women are old enough to begin childbearing shortly after marriage.

*“As stated earlier, age, caste, religion, education and the girl’s ability to work are the determining factors of her marriage.” – FGD with married adolescent girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#72)*

*“They consider whether girls are of suitable age or not, their physical appearance, whether they have completed education or not, her behaviours and the family history, how wealthy they are and number of children, sons in the family.” – Mother of an adolescent in Sindhupalchowk District (#39)*

### (e) Dowry

A common opinion among the respondents was that dowries are generally no longer required by the groom’s family and have overall become a less common tradition. Should the bride’s family be economically capable, and has the desire to provide gifts to the couple, particularly in the name of the daughter’s prestige, they can do so – however, the majority of respondents were insistent that it is not a requirement and that there are no direct consequences awarded in the absence of dowries. Many respondents called dowries “gifts,” indicating a transition in how dowries are viewed.

*“Here we don’t talk much about dowry. Neither do we have a culture of giving and taking dowry here. They will give dowry to their daughter solely based on their wills. If they don’t want to, then there is no compulsion to give, and here people don’t ask for dowry either. However, we have a culture of giving something for the prestige of the daughter. However, we don’t demand a dowry forcefully.” – IDI with unmarried adolescent girl in Sindhupalchowk District (#32)*

This was confirmed with quantitative surveys, which indicated that no dowry or bride price was paid in 90.4 per cent of the 73 marriages among 15–19-year-olds listed on the household roster. Dowry was also overwhelmingly rejected as being an influence in decision-making regarding the age at which girls and boys get married, with no differences prior to and after the earthquakes.

Yet, a smaller number of respondents indicated that although these gifts are not a requirement, certain expectations silently still persisted, with the potential for daughters-in-law to be mistreated if parents did not provide dowry and grooms accepting dowries even if they did not explicitly request it. As a result, families who are less economically secure are more vulnerable to the silent pressure and are willing to go into debt to

## Findings

host a large wedding and provide dowries for their daughters.

*“People spend without restrictions. I said earlier that it depends on the caste. Parents spend no matter how much debt they are in.” – FGD with mother of adolescents in Sindhupalchowk District (#91)*

*“No matter how many loans parents are into, they spend. They marry their daughter properly.” – FGD with mother of adolescents in Sindhupalchowk District (#91)*

Respondents provided variation in the process of dowry-giving, with apparent regional differences, as well as differences by caste, community and educational level. The region of Terai, in particular, commonly provided dowries. Among the Thami communities, dowry-giving has increased even though it has generally decreased in other communities. In the Sherpa communities, dowries are only given and brought to the groom’s home after the couple’s baby is born. The expectations among Brahmin and Chhetris is that a dowry is given, particularly for arranged marriages, even if it is not openly asked for.

*“In case of arranged marriage, the practice of dowry system is quite high among the Chhetri and Brahmin community compared to the tribal community. However, we have been speaking on this matter of preventing the dowry system and it has come down a bit. We have been trying our best to control such trend. Yet still they continue for the family’s honour.” – KII with community leader in Sindhupalchowk District (#17)*

Nepali elopements do not tend to include dowries, although some parents mentioned that they still provide them without designating it as a dowry, per se, but rather to help their daughters settle into their new homes. This desire to assist their daughters was a common theme that emerged, with some respondents insisting that dowries should not be provided to the groom but, rather, the money should go to the daughter’s education.

*“What I want to say is [...] I think we should educate our girls. It is absolutely useless to provide her with utensils. She cannot eat those utensils nor carry them around. We can give her some money instead which will help her, we don’t give utensils. [...] Yes, why should we give things to her family? We should provide for our daughter and our son-in-law.” – IDI with mother in Dolakha District (#56)*

A wide variety of items might be included in a dowry, including household items such as furniture,

plates and utensils, gold and jewellery. There were some variations among respondents as to whether money was considered to be an acceptable item in a dowry. Additional items mentioned included animals and alcohol, particularly among the Tamang communities. The economic constraints due to the earthquakes also changed the dowry practice from providing money to non-monetary items instead, and some even sought marriage proposals without any dowry demand.

Overall, despite silent expectations and lingering societal pressure, dowries are said to be on the decline. This is said to be associated with the increasing trend in self-initiated marriages as well as the increasing focus on education for girls.

## 7. Options for delaying marriage

Continuing education and finding a job were both mentioned nearly universally, by both girls and boys, as the best strategies for delaying marriage. In particular, those who performed well in schools, and those considered to have stable, well earning jobs had more ability to delay their age of marriage. Going abroad for work was mentioned as an option by a few respondents, though this is easier for boys as respondents reported age requirements for girls to legally travel abroad for work.

*“At first it is essential to increase their level/quality of education. There shall be awareness as well. There shall be self-awareness among themselves that they will be in trouble if they marry at a small age. It is important to have full knowledge of the law. Legal education is necessary in order to ensure that family is also aware. They have to make their financial aspect strong by doing jobs.” – KII with Children and Senior Citizen Section Officer in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

Both boys and girls also mentioned the importance of adolescents clearly conveying their wish to delay their marriage to their parents.

*“If they want to marry late at first they have to tell their parent.” – KII with Children and Senior Citizen Section Officer in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

*“They should study well and get employed. In the meantime, they should also communicate this to their parents and convince them that they want to study and get employed.” – FGD with mothers of adolescents in Sindhupalchowk District (# 9)*

The key seemed to be financial independence – this is what the ability to delay really hinges on. If you can make your own money and support yourself, then you have options.

*"If they are independent and are capable of looking after their family members, obviously they can delay their marriage." – KII with Women and Children's Board Officer in Lalitpur (#87)*

*"If you are employed, then there is no compulsion of getting married." – FGD with unmarried girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#44)*

*"One has to be independent." – FGD with married boys in Sindhupalchowk District (#90)*

Other strategies for delaying marriage that were mentioned by adolescents included: lying about already having a partner/relationship; convincing parents that marriage before the adolescent is of legal age is wrong; telling parents adolescents do not yet have the skills needed for marriage (such as the ability to care for and manage a household); running away; calling the 1098 child helpline.

*"They have many options; they can convince their parents for continuing their study, having a job. Along with that, if they are not heard, they can dial 1098 and register complaints. 1098 is a child helpline, which works in preventing child marriage." – KII with official from Police Women's Cell in Kathmandu (#89)*

*"You can say, 'You have spent so much educating me. I want to give my salary to you first.'" – FGD with unmarried girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#70)*

*"If do not want to marry, they can run away from there for some time to be safe from marriage." – FGD with unmarried girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#70)*

*"If it does not work after that, she can tell the parent of the boy whom she is going to be married that she does not want to marry now." – FGD with unmarried girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#70)*

## 8. Perceptions of child marriage

In general, parents and government officials interviewed from Dolakha District frowned upon child marriages. They perceived children who marry early to be immature and as not having the ability to understand married life and its responsibilities.

When asked about the advantages of child marriages, respondents perceived that child marriage definitely confers a lot of disadvantages and many could not name any advantages to such a union. However, a few advantages did emerge, primarily pertaining to arranged child marriages. When a child is married off early, the parents are

relieved of their parental duty of having to find a partner for him or her later. When married young, the probability of having children earlier is also higher and hence is seen as positive for grandparents who get to see their grandchildren for a longer period of time and the children are, in turn, able to support the family in the future as well. Mothers of married sons reported being pleased at having extra help to complete household chores, in the person of a daughter-in-law. Adolescents commented on the general increase in love and happiness in families as people come together as one unit.

Nearly all respondents mentioned that there were many disadvantages to child marriages. The disruption to education for both boys and girls was much discussed, resulting from the need to either stay at home or find employment, due to increased family responsibilities after marriage. A couple of parents of children who married early said that they wished their children had continued their education instead, as it would have helped their family financially.

*"Look at my son, he was a grade 7 student when he discontinued his schooling and brought my daughter-in-law. He has given me a lot of stress. At least, if he would have studied up to grade 10 then it would have been a little relief for me, I would have thought my hard work had paid off." – IDI with father in Dolakha District (#81)*

Implications on employability were also raised, particularly for boys who lacked the skills or education to obtain high-paying jobs. For girls, a chief disadvantage was having to stop their education. As a result, couples who marry early often face financial hardships from an early age, leading to a lower quality of married life in general. Adolescent girls discussed the increased difficulty in achieving their goals, as their dreams are prioritized behind the needs of their family.

*"They say that a daughter-in-law cannot fulfil her dreams and desires [...] That happens if we are really thinking to do something in life. Our in-laws want us to work in agricultural fields. But if we want to study and do something in life they say that daughter-in-law cannot study and cannot do any other work. That is the major disadvantage." – FGD with married adolescent girls in Dolakha District (#64)*

Many adolescents discussed the loss of freedom associated with marriage. This was especially true for girls who had to leave their homes to move into their in-laws' household and live with them. Freedom of movement and choice of clothing were commonly mentioned losses. Child marriage was also associated with difficulties in pregnancy and childbirth.





Gulshan Khatun, Elisha Khatun and Sushmita Majhi (from left) wait in line for kerosene in Kathmandu, Nepal. Six months after the devastating 2015 earthquakes, many schools remained closed or some children would need to skip school to queue for kerosene.

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*“You might be pressured to have kids right away. These days women don’t prefer to give birth right away after marriage, they tend to wait for 2 to 3 years, but women give birth early in marriage because of pressure from the family and her husband [...] you won’t have any sort of freedom, I want to wear pants and T-shirt, follow the trends but I won’t get to because my in-laws might not like it.” – IDI with married girl from Sindhupalchowk District (#79)*

## 9. Marriage experience

Following marriage, most couples reside with the groom’s family. Though couples who elope may run away for some months, they generally return eventually to live with the groom’s family. Some rare exceptions were noted, such as if a bride’s household does not have any male children.

*“Generally, wife moves to husband’s house but in some cases where the wife’s family doesn’t have a male child then the son-in-law changes his permanent residence and settles in the wife’s house. However, cases as such are very rare.” – FGD with Child’s Club members in Sindhupalchowk District (#65)*

The change in roles following marriage was widely discussed. Both married and unmarried adolescents commented on the increase in responsibilities after marriage. This also meant that those married had less free time, and could spend less time with their friends.

*“After being married, one has to stop hanging out with friends a lot, plus they don’t have time either. They have to make time for family and family responsibilities.” – FGD with men aged 20–24 in Sindhupalchowk District (#66)*

Many respondents commented on the changes for the bride, in particular, noting that while at home she may have been considered a child, with limited responsibilities, but in her in-laws’ home she was considered an adult, responsible for cooking, cleaning and caring for her in-laws. Married girls reported that their responsibilities increased following marriage. Major additional responsibilities include taking care of their new family members and increased social responsibility. Several respondents commented that younger brides often had a harder time with this adjustment and in their relationships with their mothers-in-law. Brides who found it difficult to adjust to their new role were sometimes met with harsh words and possibly even blows.

*“There won’t be freedom like that of the maternal home after getting married. There will be additional responsibilities of the family.” – FGD with married adolescent girls in Dolakha District (#64)*

*“In their parents’ house, their parents never said or used any harsh words to them, but now they find it harsh and bitter. After marriage, in her husband’s house, they might have to listen to a lot of harsh comments. The in-laws might have asked her to do a lot of physically challenging work and she might be doing those as well.” – FGD with mothers of adolescents in Sindhupalchowk District (#91)*

*“The daughter-in-law might experience physical and mental effects while living under another’s [domination].” – FGD with service providers in Sindhupalchowk District (#69)*

Both boys and girls discussed desiring to continue their education after marrying, however in most cases, they found that despite that desire, they were unable to do so. This was particularly true for girls who rarely, if ever, had the opportunity to return to school after marriage. Boys generally left to work. Girls reported leaving school due to a lack of time for studying in light of their new responsibilities, others felt ashamed, or became pregnant and thus found it difficult to continue.

*“If you got married while receiving your education and if you want further access to education, then you may consult with your husband about it. You both should be able to support each other.” – IDI with an unmarried girl in Dolakha District (#57)*

*“It was difficult for me to continue my education going to the same school. I felt ashamed that people would talk ill of me.” – IDI with a married girl in Dolakha District (#68)*

*“We had decided that we would continue our education after marriage. But, I didn’t.” – IDI with a married girl in Dolakha District (#58)*

*“He told me he will take me to Kathmandu, he will bear my education cost. He told me he will make me an engineer just like him. After that he got transferred so his income was not enough. Then I took beauty parlour training; he told me to open a parlour in Kathmandu. Then I became pregnant, so I returned back to my village.” – IDI with a married girl in Dolakha District (#52)*

The earthquakes had a significant impact on the marriage process. Interviewees commented that prior to the earthquakes, marriage used to be a 4–5-day celebration. However, with the rebuilding of homes and disruptions to employment, families were faced with considerable financial constraints. As a result, in the period after, weddings were shortened to simpler, 1-day events.

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*“Not everyone had a house, they had to rebuild at that time, so due to financial constraints marriage was done at a low budget. If there were no earthquake problems, then everyone would have done according to their wish.” – KII with religious leader in Sindhupalchowk District (#15)*

Because those marrying as children are married before the legal age of marriage, they are unable to legally register their marriage. This had numerous ramifications for their married life.

Without a registered marriage, it is more difficult for children to receive a birth certificate; in fact, several respondents thought that it was not possible. The certificate is required for their children to attend school.

*“Parents are not above 20 years of age, so their marriage is not registered [...] If parents’ marriage is not registered, it will be difficult to admit the child in the school.” – FGD with mothers in Sindhupalchowk District (#46)*

*“If the marriage is not registered they can’t receive the birth certificate of their children and admit them to school.” – KII with community leader in Sindhupalchowk District (#17)*

In addition, girls who have not yet received a citizenship certificate through their father cannot do it through their parents’ name once they are married. However, to do it through their husband’s name requires a valid marriage certificate. Without a citizenship certificate, employment opportunities are scarce.

*“Once the girl is married, she can’t apply for citizenship from her parents’ name. To get the certificate from her husband’s name, she needs a marriage certificate, which she can’t obtain legally. This is such a burden for the girl and troublesome as well. Though the marriage was carried out as per the societal norms and values, the legal entities don’t approve such marriages where they are of illegal age. This also impacts the girl’s job opportunities as she can’t apply without a citizenship certificate” – KII with official from the Police Women’s Cell in Dolakha District (#59)*

*“Without marriage registration they will not get employment. Even they cannot find a job and marriage registration will cause a problem. That is the difficulty of getting married at a young age.” – KII with Female Health Volunteer in Dolakha District (#73)*

Lack of registration also precludes couples from other legal rights and benefits. There were some

reports that marriage registration was also required to receive earthquake relief.

*“Due to the lack of evidence of necessary documents and support, women lag from receiving legal assistance.” – KII with Women and Children Welfare Center officer in Sindhupalchowk District (#1)*

*“If the marriage is not registered they won’t be recognized as husband and wife according to our law. As a result, they can’t relish their legal rights as a married couple.” – KII with religious leader in Dolakha District (#22)*

*“There was a Dalit couple and both the husband and wife were 16-years-old and they came for the marriage registration and they also needed earthquake relief. The ward official told them that it is not possible for them to get the marriage registration and they could be taken into custody for a crime of child marriage. When he said that, the couple told him they were married long back and it was not possible for them to be separated now. And when asked why did they get married at 16 years they replied that they fell in love and got married and they will not separate. They have a problem for marriage registration, birth registration, and they will not get any support from the government either.” – FGD with female community health volunteers in Dolakha District (#78)*

## 10. Pregnancy and childbirth

A minority of the adolescents included in the household roster had children. Of the more than 2,000 adolescents aged 10–19 listed on the household roster, only 19 (0.9 per cent) were reported to have a child, including 4 boys and 15 girls. All of them were married. These data support qualitative analysis, which found that young women who get pregnant outside of marriage are pressured to marry immediately, to avoid scrutiny from community members.

*“Neither society nor family accepts the pregnancy before marriage. This kind of incident often turned out as a devastating event in the life of unmarried girls. Inquiries are made with the girls to find the man with whom she got pregnant with and [they] are married later.” – KII with female government official in Dolakha District (#13)*

The mean age at first birth was approximately 2.7 years lower for adolescents married as children (mean = 17.48) than those who were married over the age of 18 (mean = 20.25). For girls, the mean birth age dropped from 20.2 to 17.3 years and

for boys from 20.3 to 18.0 years. There was little variation between districts. These data support qualitative findings: when asked about the effects of early marriage, several respondents noted that early marriages lead to early pregnancies, as family planning resources are often not utilized and beliefs about their effectiveness vary.

*“Early marriages lead to early pregnancies and the female will not have a fully developed reproductive system, because of which, the chances of miscarriage are high. Mother’s health will deteriorate. Problems like these can occur. That is why it is a disadvantage.” – KII with male community leader in Dolakha District (#74)*

*“Many children are born due to early marriage. If they were intelligent and could understand, they would have used family planning measures and given birth to fewer children but if they are not intelligent, they would face economic problems due to the birth of many children.” – KII with female service provider in Sindhupalchowk District (#41)*

Of the 772 girls aged 10–19 who participated in the adolescent survey, 10 girls had given birth (1.3 per cent). Of the 10 girls who had given birth, all were married: eight as children and two after the age of 18. All gave birth within the first 2 years of marriage. Three of the girls gave birth to their child at the same age at which they were married, getting pregnant either before or immediately after they were married, while the remaining seven gave birth approximately a year after they were married. These data support the qualitative findings that “within 1–2 years of getting married [women] give birth” (IDI with unmarried boy in Dolakha District (#4)).

None of the 10 births recorded among adolescents resulted in neonatal death, but the sample size is too small to draw any conclusions about neonate mortality. However, analysis of qualitative data found that many respondents noted that there is an association between early marriage/childbearing and increased adverse health effects during pregnancy and childbirth.

*“While giving birth at early age, the body becomes very weak. It gets difficult to deliver a child. The child from a young mother could even die. Apart from this, the mother’s whole uterus can expulse out while giving birth at an early age. Women usually experience blood loss to a larger extent while giving birth at an early age.” – IDI with a mother in Sindhupalchowk District (#45)*

When asked about services sought during pregnancy, all of the female adolescents reported having sought some sort of care. The most commonly cited provider of services was from a doctor at a government hospital (50 per cent), followed by services from a nurse (30 per cent), from a doctor at a private hospital (20 per cent), from a health assistant (10 per cent) and/or from a midwife (10 per cent). A Section Officer from the Women, Children and Senior Citizen Section in Sindhupalchowk District described efforts to increase accessibility of antenatal and delivery services:

*“Our municipality is providing free services to the pregnant girls and women. The municipality has provided free ambulance service and free service in the hospital. Here, we don’t have any obstruction in providing service to them; they can approach easily. In order to remove the practice of home delivery we have provided free ambulance service. This will keep both mother and child safe and decrease the number of home deliveries. They will also receive additional information or counselling regarding the health. Which will benefit the girls and women and shows the work the municipality is doing.”*

Community perceptions surrounding the desired number of children are changing, as members of the older generations are encouraging their children to have fewer children to avoid the financial pressures associated with providing for several children.

*“In earlier days, they used to have dozens and dozens of children. These days it’s better to have two children.” – IDI with father in Sindhupalchowk District (#63)*

Notable gender differences were observed in adolescents’ familiarity with puberty, pregnancy and childbirth (Table 46). While >85 per cent of boys in both districts expressed comfort with the changes they were undergoing related to puberty, only two-thirds of girls did. Only 50–60 per cent of unmarried adolescents said they had received information on how to become pregnant or stay healthy while pregnant, compared with about 90 per cent of those who were married – suggesting that information about pregnancy is not shared until after marriage. Knowledge about the dangers of early childbirth and the importance of birth spacing were fairly high across the board.

**Table 46**  
Adolescent experiences and perceptions related to ageing, pregnancy and childbirth in Nepal (% agreement)

	Sindhupalchowk				Dolakha			
	Girls	Boys	Not married as children	Married as a child	Girls	Boys	Not married as children	Married as a child
I feel comfortable with the changes that occur in my body as I shift from being a child to an adult	<b>67.9</b>	<b>91.8</b>	78.8	81.0	<b>64.3</b>	<b>86.4</b>	74.2	85.7
I have received information about how to become pregnant	60.1	51.4	<b>55.2</b>	<b>85.7</b>	60.1	54.2	<b>56.7</b>	<b>92.9</b>
I know how to keep my/ my wife's body healthy when I am/ she is pregnant	<b>76.9</b>	<b>63.2</b>	70.2	85.7	71.2	67.0	<b>68.7</b>	<b>100</b>
I am aware of danger signs during pregnancy, which would require me/ my wife to go to hospital	<b>66.3</b>	<b>67.2</b>	66.1	85.7	<b>73.1</b>	<b>81.2</b>	76.3	100
It can be harmful to a woman's body to have children when she is too young	94.0	94.2	<b>94.2</b>	<b>90.5</b>	94.0	92.4	93.2	100
It can be harmful to a woman's body to give birth to children too close together	<b>90.4</b>	<b>82.4</b>	86.3	100	92.2	89.7	90.9	100
There are ways to prevent or delay pregnancy	<b>68.4</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>62.4</b>	<b>90.5</b>	67.9	68.8	67.8	92.9
I have someone I trust, who I can get information about my health from.	92.8	96.7	94.5	95.2	<b>92.2</b>	<b>73.3</b>	83.6	78.6

Notes: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Several adolescents, both married and unmarried, and parents emphasized the need for prospective parents to be physically, mentally and financially ready to have children. Additionally, participants noted the importance of saving money to prepare for the costs associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

*"She should be mature physically and mentally so that the process of giving birth won't have impact on her health. In addition, girls should be economically capable for supporting the nutritional requirement after giving birth to child." - IDI with unmarried girl from Dolakha District (#16)*

*"The most important preparation is economic preparation. We need vehicles to transport pregnant women to hospital. We need to pay doctors' fees. So, we need to prepare finances." - IDI with mother from Dolakha District (#56)*

Furthermore, several respondents discussed the importance of pregnant women maintaining proper nutrition, and adherence to special diets, if they are to have a safe delivery and healthy baby.

*"What food can a pregnant woman digest, which will give [proper nutrients to her] body? Food that does not affect the child should be arranged and made ready. Like, there is trend of feeding pregnant women ghee. We have to ensure we have sufficient ghee stored." - IDI with father from Dolakha District (#71)*



## 11. Divorce

Qualitative interviews indicate an increasing trend in separation and termination of marriages, with differing rates by caste. Getting married at an age that the community depicts as being “early,” including child marriages, is thought to contribute to this high prevalence. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, norms have allegedly shifted such that there is an increasing ability among Nepali individuals to make decisions for themselves, and do this confidently, instead of having to be acquiescent in unhappy marriages. However, stigma associated with divorces and termination of marriages is still predominant. Many of the qualitative responders dismissed questions regarding termination, stating that divorces simply do not happen within their communities. This was particularly apparent in Sindhupalchowk.

*“Divorce is very rare here. In spite of being dissatisfied, they are compelled to live together due to fear of their prestige in the society. Many have lived by enduring even though they are not content.” – FGD with service providers in Sindhupalchowk District (#69)*

This was confirmed with the quantitative surveys: among adolescents 10-24-years-old listed in the household roster, 184 had been married at some point, and four had had a marriage end. All four were child marriages, two among the 15-19 age group and two in the 20-24 age group. One girl, married at age 16 (now age 24), had a marriage terminated by the authorities (in Myanmar), and two boys and one girl had a marriage end when one spouse left.

The community views divorce very unfavourably and makes concerted efforts to prevent marriages from ending. As a result, divorces tend to be considered only as the last option. This stigma has reportedly led to some women staying in their union, even if unpleasant or violent, for fear of criticism or ostracization.

*“Generally, society doesn’t easily approve couples getting divorced. They try their best to persuade couples to compromise to some extent and continue staying together. First marriage is perceived as eternal and communities believe that first marriage should be honoured. Due to this, family and society don’t encourage couples to get divorced.” – FGD with women’s credit and saving cooperative group members in Dolakha District (#7)*

For marriages that are not registered, the community not only weighs in, but serves as arbiter. Community members will try to resolve the conflict

or facilitate divorce negotiations. This is particularly relevant for child marriages, where legal action is difficult to take or may lead to ramifications such as being charged for child abuse or child marriage. In these instances, the police may get involved and either carry through with the charges or help mediate the process. For registered marriages, divorces do not necessarily have to follow a legal process but legal action is nevertheless recommended, as it is most effective when it comes to issues such as child custody and division of property.

Among the many causes credited for divorces, extramarital affairs, domestic violence and substance use (particularly alcohol), as well as a lack of partnership and respect within the couple were reported to be the biggest contributors. Married children were seen to lack partnership and maturity, resulting in conflict between the couple.

*“When marrying at an early marriage, with the maturity in age there will be change in one’s aspiration, they may not find their husband and wife of their expectation and as a result a boy may leave the girl and may marry another woman, resulting in bigamy. Girls also leave children and marry another person.” – KII with a Women, Children and Senior Citizen Section Officer from Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

The effectiveness of child marriage termination by authorities remains unclear, as they largely seem to be dependent on filed complaints, which are rare. Although local authorities do seem to break child marriage ceremonies apart, interview respondents indicated that children can choose to stay together by running away, eloping and marrying once they have reached legal age. Implementation therefore seems lacking, with complaints of child marriages rarely being filed. There were no cases of termination by the authorities among those interviewed, and only one among quantitative survey respondents.

*“No prosecution can be initiated until someone makes complaints against the child marriage. They don’t go searching for government authority in order to make complaints against the child marriage. When a complaint is filed, only then is a legal proceeding implemented.” – KII with a Women, Children and Senior Citizen Section Officer in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

When complaints are filed, the authorities generally try to settle the matter in the community first, by separating the children. In some cases, charges may be brought against the family and against a spouse if one party is of age. Children may also be protected by being held at a rehabilitation centre.

## Findings

*“If a complaint is made regarding the child marriage, both parties are summoned, separated and handed over to the respective family in the presence of court and district police office.” – KII with a Women, Children and Senior Citizen Section Officer in Sindhupalchowk District (#23)*

*“If anyone is found guilty of marrying under the age of 18 years then it will be considered a child marriage or forced marriage. As a result, the concerned party will automatically be charged with rape as per the arrangements according to the National Code of 2018.” – KII with an Assistant District Attorney in Sindhupalchowk District (#3)*

Other than the involvement of authorities, ending a marriage can occur through various approaches. Respondents mentioned the tendency of parties dissatisfied with their marriages to “disappear” or move away, as opposed to seeking a divorce, in order to avoid the complexity of the legal system as well as the stigma of divorce. Several respondents reported this option to be favoured by men as they view the legal process of termination as favouring women. Other means of ending marriages included women returning to their parental home, or the couple not living together for 3 consecutive years. However, formal divorces through legal proceedings (for non-child marriages) are increasingly used as compared to relying solely on elders or heads of communities to separate couples.

Rules around compensation are also varied with a seeming lack in coherence: some respondents mentioned that women need to be compensated by men post-divorce, whereas others stated that this is wholly dependent on whoever files for divorce first. Compensation also seemed to include a wide variety of options, including property, gifts, items and money. The Tamang community in particular seems to abide by the “Jaar” tradition, whereby the new husband needs to pay the ex-husband a certain amount in exchange for his wife. Respondents also provided interesting insights with regards to gender dynamics in the termination process. Some indicated that there were no apparent gendered differences overall, whereas others mentioned that women have the upper hand, with their ability to file for divorce at a much higher rate than men. Yet, women remain a vulnerable group, not just because of the gendered power dynamics in divorces but also because they are required to think about logistics, for example, who will take care of the children while they are needed in court?

Despite the reportedly female-friendly process of termination proceedings, respondents stated that women are more vulnerable following divorce. The reputation of women is allegedly tarnished post-

termination: she is judged for getting a divorce, as well as for any subsequent actions she takes, such as getting re-married. As a result, respondents indicated that women tend to move back to their parental home after a marriage has ended more than men, who are encouraged to get married again. Education plays a big role here – with educated women faring better than uneducated women who had relied on their ex-husbands financially and otherwise. Many women spoke about their desire to be independent, free and to work to support themselves after the marriage has ended. A few respondents spoke about the availability of organizations that help women with skill development to help them enter the workforce.

## 12. Violence

The communities interviewed, on the whole, perceive violence (both IPV and non-IPV domestic violence) negatively. However, depending on the severity of the violence, minor disputes tend to be ignored because these are seen as part of family life. There is also a general fear that intervening in family disputes can backfire. In contrast, respondents indicated that more serious incidents involving physical violence will be handled by the community and organizations.

*“It is like the well-known quote ‘husband and wife’s fight is like fire on the haystack.’ In other villages and communities, if the married couple fight and we try to mend their argument, instead we get scolded and kicked out of their houses. For that moment, we would be like their enemies trying to fix their situation.” – IDI with a father in Sindhupalchowk District (#63)*

The majority of female heads of household disagreed (31.3 per cent) or strongly disagreed (55.49 per cent) with the statement “Physical violence (such as hitting, beating, slapping etc.) is sometimes the only solution.” However, by district, nearly four times the number of respondents in Dolakha agreed (19.9 per cent) or strongly agreed (0.2 per cent) with the same statement compared to respondents from Sindhupalchowk (5.2 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively). More respondents from Sindhupalchowk mentioned they would intervene during disputes compared to respondents from Dolakha. However, respondents from both Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha commented that when the community gets involved, they tend to start blaming the parties involved instead of resolving the matter and thus the role of the community at times makes the situation worse.

Violence is perceived by the interviewees to be prevalent in both Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha, but differs by area and community, with respondents reporting higher prevalence of violence among





Two girls in Sindhupalchowk, Nepal help clear the rubble and wood from one of their family's homes, which was fully destroyed in the first of two 2015 Nepal earthquakes that occurred in just over two weeks.

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## Findings

the Tamang community and in the Terai region. A number of respondents reported an increase in violence following the earthquakes. In non-IPV, verbal abuse is perceived to be more common than physical violence. The most common forms of non-IPV reported were between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, followed by violence between brothers over land rights.

*“After the earthquake acts of violence have increased because the economic condition of the people has decreased. As the economic problems of people have increased so the fight between husband and wife also has increased accordingly. These fights are because of economic problems that they have been facing after earthquake. That’s why the domestic violence has increased to some extent [...] The husband drinks alcohol almost daily and scolds, abuses and beats his wife.” – FGD with unmarried boys age 15–19 in Sindhupalchowk District (#65)*

Both IPV and non-IPV were perceived to be common in child marriages, largely due to immaturity among young couples and economic hardships faced at an early age that result in arguments and fights. Respondents named increased financial struggles and shared living spaces as the primary causes. Misunderstandings between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were perceived to be a major cause of violence in households with child marriage.

Economic insecurity, especially due to hefty loans and stress, was frequently reported as contributing to violence among couples. Other less common causes include negative family dynamics such as suspicions and general unhappiness, the dowry system, polygamy and shared living spaces. Although both men and women were blamed for quarrels, women were reported to experience the majority of domestic violence.

*“Many people took loans to complete rebuilding activities. People got burdened with loans after the earthquake. I have witnessed one couple, they had very huge amount of loans and the husband was having a hard time saving money to pay the loan. They always got into verbal and physical fights due to issue of money. In the end, that couple divorced each other.” – IDI with married girl in Dolakha District (#8)*

Alcohol, primarily consumed by men, was cited by numerous respondents as a source of many instances of violence. Several respondents noted an increase in alcohol consumption following the earthquakes, used as a coping mechanism to deal with the trauma of the event and the resultant

economic hardships. Respondents saw the increase as driven by the availability of relief funds. Loans and grants intended for rebuilding were sometimes used to purchase alcohol instead.

Conflicts are generally resolved within the community. The first level of resolution is within the family. Minor fights are either tolerated or discussed within the family. The second level of resolution involved the society elders. They will discuss the issue and find the root cause of the problem and attempt to resolve or advise the family not to fight again. The third level of resolution is at the community level by various organizations like the Women’s Group or Municipality Office. The fourth level of resolution is by higher authorities, such as the police. At this level, only the few major violent cases are reported. Serious arguments that result in physical violence or, in extreme cases, murder are dealt with by community leaders and organizations such as the police, members of the Mother’s Groups or the Community Reconciliation Centre in the Ward Office.

Respondents perceived that many cases of domestic violence do not get reported. Though they reported that it is now easier to make reports to authorities like the police compared to in the past, some feared that the number of reported cases seen are probably fewer than in reality, as women feel they must tolerate their situation or fear the consequences of coming out to discuss about their issues.

*“We look after the cases that gets reported but inferring to my observation, numerous cases of violence among women still remained to unveil and women won’t report those due to fear of disruption of their family dynamics.” – KII with Government Official in Dolakha District (#13)*

## 13. Services

### (a) Health services

Of the 1,431 adolescent survey respondents, 94.2 per cent of boys and 88.3 per cent of girls indicated that they had been to a health clinic in the area. Quantitative analysis found that boys were slightly more likely to access health services. However, qualitative analysis found that the health services provided tend to be targeted towards women, with health posts providing “pregnancy tests, family planning devices, and pregnancy related services” (IDI with father in Sindhupalchowk District #63). Of those who had been to the health post, 92.9 per cent indicated that they felt comfortable with the services that they received. Additionally, qualitative analysis found that though health services are provided regardless of marital status, married female adolescents are less likely to access



services than their unmarried counterparts, as they need to obtain permission from their husbands or in-laws. Furthermore, respondents noted that reproductive health programming has resulted in increased knowledge surrounding sexual health and pregnancy, though the perceptions around the effects of this type of education are mixed.

*“Whether it’s a health services or any other services, being a married person, it is difficult to access such services, first we have to reach the place and, secondly, we need permission from the family to get those services. These things can be a problem.” – FGD with men aged 20–24 in Sindhupalchowk District (#66)*

## (b) Support for education

In Sindhupalchowk, 64.3 per cent of households and 39.1 per cent of households in Dolakha indicated that they had received monetary support to send their child(ren) to school. Similarly, of the adolescents surveyed, 67.8 per cent in Sindhupalchowk and 44.1 per cent in Dolakha reported receiving monetary support or resources to attend school. Adolescents not married as children received a higher percentage support than those married as children in Sindhupalchowk (68.2 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively). The percentage of adolescents not married as children who received support was similar to the percentage of adolescents married as children in Dolakha (44.2 per cent and 42.9 per cent, respectively). However, qualitative analysis found that though educational assistance programmes were implemented following the earthquakes, most were not sustainable and have since been discontinued.

*“It was available till recently. We searched for them too. That kind of programme was here from the district at that time. If he/she has reached 16 years of age but doesn’t know any skills and stays at home doing nothing, the government had brought a programme for adolescents like them. That programme would send them to school to study.” – FGD with women aged 20–24 in Dolakha District #82*

## (c) Community programmes

Both household and adolescent survey respondents were asked about their participation in community programmes. When asked about participation in educational programmes specific to parents, the majority of parents (84.4 per cent) indicated that they had not participated in such training. Of those who had, participation in awareness-raising programmes was the most common (71.1 per cent), followed by community presentation attendance (21.4 per cent) and life

skill training programme participation (10.7 per cent). In Dolakha, many respondents also reported participating in parent programmes offered at local schools. The average Sindhupalchowk participant had attended educational gatherings 1.5 times in the past month, whereas the average Dolakha participant only attended gatherings 0.3 times. Qualitative analysis found that awareness-based or educational programmes are commonly implemented alongside, or in conjunction with, other social service programmes.

*“If we talk about such things, there are schools and colleges; different locality has youth clubs for social activities initiated through the local budget. However, such programmes are initiated from a broader perspective, not just to address the issue on child marriage.” – KII with female government officer in Lalitpur (#87)*

Among the participants of the household survey, 86.1 per cent of respondents in Dolakha and 80.3 per cent of respondents in Sindhupalchowk received information that marriage before the age of 18 is harmful. A total of 80.2 per cent indicated that they had received information or education about the effects of child marriage. Of the possible formats assessed, radio (46.6 per cent) and conversations with friends (46.5 per cent) were cited as the most common, followed by TV (28 per cent) and community meetings (20.9 per cent). Most respondents (80.2 per cent) did not know which organization(s) were providing the information. The following three organizations were most frequently identified: Tuki, Save the Children and Suhaara. Qualitative respondents reported that the nationwide child marriage prevention programmes and strategies have resulted in a decreased incidence of child marriage. Furthermore, there is some evidence of a shift in values and perceptions among the community members.

Among the participants of the adolescent survey, 85.5 per cent of girls and 75.7 per cent of boys reported receiving information or education about the effects of early marriage. School lessons were the most common source of this information, followed by radio, TV, and conversations with friends (see Table 47). Social media, pamphlets and community meetings were not common sources for information about the effects of early marriage. Qualitative analysis found that the number of educational programmes specific to child marriage increased following the earthquakes. Additionally, the majority of qualitative respondents reported that these educational programmes focused on the negative outcomes associated with child marriage and the benefits of keeping children and adolescents in school.

**Table 47**  
Sources of information about the effects of early marriage in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk				Dolakha			
	Girls	Boys	Adolescents not married as children	Adolescents married as children	Girls	Boys	Adolescents not married as children	Adolescents married as children
Pamphlet	5.6%	2.4%	4.4%	0.0%	<b>14.2%</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	11.2%	0.0%
Community meeting	5.3%	8.5%	6.8%	0.0%	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	6.7%	11.1%
Radio	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>56.0%</b>	37.9%	40.0%	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>41.0%</b>	46.2%	22.2%
TV	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>59.7%</b>	36.0%	46.7%	44.3%	42.2%	43.7%	22.2%
Social media	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	13.7%	26.7%	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>	10.6%	11.1%
School lessons	<b>90.2%</b>	<b>97.6%</b>	<b>94.0%</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>82.0%</b>	<b>92.8%</b>	<b>87.8%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>
Conversations w/ friends	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	21.2%	33.3%	<b>47.7%</b>	<b>35.9%</b>	42.8%	22.2%

Notes: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

*“There were no public awareness-oriented programmes before the earthquake. Now, after the earthquake, because of public awareness-oriented programmes about marriage and other matters, the age of marriage might have increased. I think this programme is the reason for a decrease in child marriage and marrying at the age of 20 to 22 after the earthquake.”*  
– FGD with Child’s Club members in Dolakha District (#70)

A total of 78 per cent of adolescents reported that they had not participated in educational programmes outside of school. Participation was similar among married and unmarried adolescents, with 77.8 per cent of unmarried adolescents (78.2 per cent in Sindhupalchowk; 77.4 per cent in Dolakha) and 71.4 per cent of married adolescents (76.2 per cent in Sindhupalchowk; 64.3 per cent in Dolakha) not accessing educational programmes outside of school.

Among the quarter who had attended programmes, didactic education programmes were the most commonly attended, with similar participation levels

for both girls and boys (77.4 per cent and 75.9 per cent, respectively), but higher among adolescents who were not married as children as compared to those who were married as children (77.1 per cent and 70 per cent). Participation in educational programmes was followed by peer programmes, including children’s clubs and adolescent clubs (26.6 per cent) and life skills training (11.7 per cent). Job training programmes (2.5 per cent) and psychosocial support programmes (5.5 per cent) were not very common. Most adolescents, 97.3 per cent, felt that their participation in these programmes benefited them (56.5 per cent felt they benefited “a little,” and 40.8 per cent felt that they benefited “a lot”), including 97.2 per cent of unmarried adolescents and 100 per cent of married adolescents.

Among those interviewed, educational and income-based training opportunities were preferred to other programmes. Programmes targeting adolescents with low socioeconomic status or other vulnerable traits, for example, programmes increasing educational enrolment of orphans, were reported to be particularly effective in reducing the incidence of child marriage.

### (d) Post-earthquake services

Several programmes were implemented after the earthquakes to aid with reconstruction and mitigate the negative effects of insecurity. Several respondents noted the implementation of programmes establishing safe spaces for those affected by the earthquakes, and how these programmes served to increase awareness of human trafficking risks following the earthquakes.

*“Red Cross had an awareness programme related to trafficking. These programmes were adolescent and youth focused. Such programmes are beneficial to the youth. And similar type of programmes, awareness related programmes should be brought to the community.” – FGD with men aged 20–24 in Sindhupalchowk District (#66)*

Respondents also noted that aid was distributed at the household level, to assist families in rebuilding their homes following the earthquakes. Qualitative analysis found that though post-earthquake services and programmes appear to have an impact on the number of child marriages, they do not appear to affect the number of elopements among adolescents.

*“Eloping is still prevalent. The programmes were conducted after the earthquake. Ironically, the rate of eloping has increased after the earthquake.” – FGD with married girls in Sindhupalchowk District (#72)*

### (e) Barriers to access

There are barriers to accessing services in the region. Qualitative respondents reported both a gap in available services and an overall lack of access to, and availability of, programmes aimed at increasing access to education, focusing on skills-based training and providing adolescents with small investments to start their own small businesses.

*“For the married ones, skills to work should be taught. Health education should be given in every village. They should be taught to develop skills. For the ones who want to study it will be better if somebody paid school fees for them. It would be better if trainings are given to do vegetable farming.” – IDI with married girl in Sindhupalchowk District (#19)*

Of the adolescents surveyed, “school” was identified as the greatest challenge they faced when attempting to attend programmes established in the community (Table 48). School was reported as a greater barrier among boys than among girls. The second most common barrier reported was that their mother/female head of household was not comfortable with them accessing services: this perspective was more common among girls than boys. A similar trend was observed among females and males who cited their father/male head of household as not being comfortable as a barrier. A lack of interest was the least reported barrier to participation.

**Table 48**  
Barriers to attending established programmes in Nepal

	Sindhupalchowk		Dolakha	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
I am not interested	6.7	1.2	11.4	7.6
Mother/female head of household is not comfortable	<b>23.6</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>13.6</b>
Father/male head of household is not comfortable	<b>23.1</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>13.9</b>
I have other responsibilities	15.0	7.0	20.2	26.1
School	26.2	31.9	<b>30.8</b>	<b>43.3</b>
Programmes are too far away	<b>20.7</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>16.1</b>
Other	4.7	2.7	0.8	0.6
No barriers	<b>22.0</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>37.3</b>	<b>28.5</b>

Notes: **Bold** text indicates a statistically significant difference between districts,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

## 14. Effects of the earthquakes

Most respondents vividly described the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes that affected them and their community. The most commonly cited consequence of the earthquakes was the collapse of essential infrastructure such as housing, health posts and schools which resulted in poor housing conditions, poor health outcomes and death, as well as disruption to education.

*“After the earthquake in 2015, when there was no houses and they lived open space, the financial situation was also weak. It was difficult for them to get food and clothing. People could not provide education to their children. At that time, girls, students and children suffered depression as well.” – KII with female government official in Dolakha District (#93)*

Respondents reported that more community members left to seek employment outside their community, either in other cities in Nepal, like Kathmandu, or in other countries, like India. The migrants were primarily young men, mainly driven by the effect of the earthquakes on their livelihoods. Women were less likely to travel abroad, but some did seek work in Kathmandu. Greater impact was felt by those running businesses compared to those performing agriculture, with the latter still being able to remain in their hometowns. Reconstruction also led to some new jobs being available in the affected communities, particularly in construction.

*“Only older age people stay in the community and are involved in agriculture. Others who can read and write go to Kathmandu for earning [...] The trend of foreign employment and shifting to towns for earning has increased more than before.” – KII with female service provider in Sindhupalchowk District (#42)*

*“After the earthquake, most of the married boys left for abroad and their wives and children moved to Kathmandu for better education.” – FGD with men aged 20–24 in Sindhupalchowk District (#66)*

The economic insecurity following the earthquakes led to an increase in women working outside of the home. The roles of men and women within marriage largely remained the same, but both parties took on additional responsibilities in order to rebuild their homes and families. Some women began working when husbands migrated for work, and some to help offset the substantial loans taken out to cover the costs of rebuilding.

*“After the earthquake, both of them equally shared the burden when it came to work.” – FGD with unmarried boys age 15–19 in Sindhupalchowk District (#65)*

*“Family responsibilities have increased, often the men are unable to stay at home. There is a need [for women] to go out to work, even to pay the home loans. As a result, women have to be more active in home affairs.” – FGD with married boys in Sindhupalchowk District (#90)*

A common theme across the respondents was the financial burden caused by the earthquakes. With losses of property, jobs and livelihood, their financial status has reduced compared to before the earthquakes. The Nepali government had provided relief funds to its citizens to help recover some costs of building and for daily essential expenses. NGOs were also distributing cash or relief packs to temporarily aid them with the situation.

However, some respondents interviewed mentioned that in the post-earthquake phase, due to the relief funds from various channels as a result of the earthquakes, violence (both IPV and non-IPV) had increased in prevalence. With the relief funds and cash assistance, family members argued over available relief funds. Moreover, some ended up spending that relief fund on intoxicating substances like alcohol which resulted in increased violence in the community and at homes.

While some communities were able to remain in their homes, or at least within their communities, others were temporarily displaced, for as long as





Foreground, left to right: Classmates Sujata Bhatta, Urmila Adhikari and Angeela Shrestha smile upon seeing each other at Kuleshwor Awas Secondary School in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, for the first time since two major earthquakes hit in April and May 2015.

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a year. Respondents discussed security concerns at the displacement sites, especially for women. IPV, rape and trafficking were all discussed in the context of the shared living spaces and insecurity posed by the temporary living conditions. As discussed above, these concerns contributed to an increase in child marriage among the communities that were displaced.

Though the effects of the earthquakes on child marriage were not as clear cut as the impact of the humanitarian setting was in Bangladesh, some impacts were identified as contributing to child marriage. In addition to the impact of displacement, difficult conditions were also seen

to contribute to an increase in elopement among adolescents. Reconstruction brought with it an expansion of Internet connectivity, and the resulting increase in social media use associated with an increase in love marriages. The added pressure of economic insecurity led some families to seek spouses for their children, to ease the burden within their own household and try to secure a better situation for their child. Interrupted education due to damaged schools may also have contributed to child marriages. In contrast, post-earthquake programming, particularly that which emphasized girls' education and education about the consequences of child marriages, likely had a moderating effect on child marriage.





A girl carries a large bag of relief supplies in the village of Majherchor in Borguna District, Bangladesh.

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# Chapter 5

## Discussion and Recommendations

In 2019, UNICEF ROSA and UNFPA APRO commissioned a study on child marriage in humanitarian settings in South Asia. The study looked at natural disaster and conflict-affected settings to assess whether humanitarian crises have an impact on the prevalence and patterns of child marriage, as well as to further understand the drivers of child marriage in emergencies. Understanding the linkages within and between drivers as well as identifying context-specific mediators and moderators of these will inform programming and policy recommendations to support adolescents and young people in all their diversity.

### A. Summary of key findings

Two sites were selected for the study, one in Bangladesh and one in Nepal. The current crisis of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh was selected to reflect a conflict-affected situation. Though some Rohingya populations have lived in Bangladesh since 1978 and another cohort arrived in the 1990s, the most recent wave of arrivals began in 2016 and their displacement is expected to be protracted. Two earthquake-affected areas in Nepal were selected to provide insight into the impact of natural disasters on child marriage. A magnitude 7.8 earthquake occurred in Nepal on 15 April 2015. Though rebuilding and recovery are still ongoing, the vast majority of those displaced by the earthquake were estimated to have returned to their homes within one to two years.

This study used a mixed-methods approach, collecting household roster information, and conducting structured surveys with adolescents and qualitative interviews and focus groups with various stakeholders. In Bangladesh, the study covered 400 registered refugee households and 800 FDMN households, as well as 573 individual adolescent registered refugees and 1,405 FDMN adolescents. In Nepal, 600 households from each of two districts, Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha, were included, as well as 715 adolescents from Sindhupalchowk and 716 from Dolakha. The authors also conducted KIIs in Bangladesh and Nepal with community leaders and civil society, FGDs with adolescents, their family members and community members, and IDIs with

adolescent boys and girls and their parents. The study aimed to estimate the population-level rates of child marriage in affected communities, as well as to understand the drivers of child marriage, changes in patterns of child marriage and how the different crises were perceived as contributing to or alleviating the drivers of child marriage.

### 1. Bangladesh

Child marriage is clearly present among the Rohingya communities displaced into Bangladesh, with strong indications that the prevalence increased among FDMN during the first 2 years after their arrival, until Bangladesh child marriage laws were more strictly enforced in the camps. Among adolescents aged 15–19, 13 per cent of FDMN boys and 23 per cent of FDMN girls are currently married, with 8 per cent of registered refugee boys and 22 per cent of registered refugee girls currently married. There are very low rates of marriage before age 15 for both populations, even for girls. That child marriage is more prevalent among current 15–19-year-old FDMN than among 20–24-year-olds suggests a recent increase in child marriage, after arriving in the camps. This is particularly notable for boys, as there were no 20–24-year-old men in the sample married before age 18, but 13 per cent of FDMN boys aged 15–19 were married. A similar, though smaller, increase was also seen among registered refugees, suggesting intermarriage of children between the FDMN and registered refugee communities. Increased child marriage prevalence among the Rohingya in Bangladesh is consistent with previous investigations of child marriage in the camps (Gender brief on the Rohingya refugee crisis response in Bangladesh, 2017; Ripoll 2017; Rohingya Refugee Response Gender Analysis: Recognizing and responding to gender inequalities, 2018; Ainul et al., 2018).

In addition to providing information on the prevalence of child marriage among Rohingya communities in Cox's Bazaar, this study identifies several key drivers of child marriage: gender discrimination, inadequate implementation of laws and camp policies, and economic insecurity. These drivers influence Rohingya life in the camp setting and contribute to an enabling environment that allows child marriage to occur.

### (a) Gender-based discrimination

Large differences in spousal age and arranged marriages could suggest diminished autonomy and decision-making power of adolescent girls with respect to the selection of spouses. However, the spousal age difference is only a few years and the gap is closing. Evidence of a potential shift in these norms related to the recent displacement is noticed in a difference in spousal age between those refugees that were part of the first wave of displacement and those more recently displaced (FDMNs). More recently displaced adolescents are more likely to marry someone closer to their own age, with girls generally marrying someone only a few years older. Within the Rohingya community after displacement, Rohingya parents have the leading role in deciding both when their children will marry and to whom. Traditionally, Rohingya girls are considered most eligible for marriage in a specific window – starting a couple of years after menarche and declining a few years later; a trend also observed in other parts of South Asia (Dietrich et al., 2018; Karim et al., 2016). Whereas menarche marks a girls' transition into womanhood signifying her physical ability to give birth and therefore fulfil her duty as a woman, boys are considered to be eligible for marriage when they are physically mature, and ideally, when they have the ability to earn money. This latter preference is limited in the camp setting.

Expectations about what it means to be a woman and fulfil gendered roles in Rohingya communities underpin the social norms that drive parents to marry their daughters. Husbands are seen as primary earners and the family representative within the community. Wives are seen as responsible for childbearing and all aspects of running a household, including domestic chores and hosting of in-laws. Even with some shifting of roles in the camp setting and new opportunities for women's participation in community organizations and in the workforce, their participation in life outside of the home is not universally accepted. Divorces and in-couple conflicts favour men over women, with more men having extramarital affairs or marrying multiple wives. Men are also able to divorce and remarry immediately if they choose to do so, whereas women are more likely go back to their parental home and not get re-married.

Child marriage is often seen as a way of preserving the sexual purity (virginity) and honour of families

by controlling the girl's reproduction and sexuality. Lack of security and parents' concerns about their daughters' physical safety and sexual purity were noted frequently by respondents as contributing to marriage decision-making. Concerns about security in the camps, mainly related to the density of shelters, composition of new communities of "strangers," and flimsy shelter construction, caused parents to fear for their daughters, and further restrict their movements within the camp to avoid interactions that could bring shame on the family. As a means of protection for young girls, parents see husbands as better able to provide physical security for daughters, and respondents reported that married women are less frequently targeted for harassment.

The community's intolerance of expressions of adolescent sexuality, particularly for girls, means that unmarried adolescents engaging in relationships, victims of a sexual crime, or even those perceived to have breached propriety can cause the family to lose standing and damage marriage prospects for the adolescent girl. Often masked by concerns about physical safety and security, the underlying control and management of the girl's sexuality and ability to control her own reproductive life remains at the centre of this deeply rooted, socially driven form of gender inequality.

Gender-based discrimination contributes to women being valued less in society and reinforces patriarchy whereby wives require permission to access essential life-saving services, such as health care and social services for IPV. Most respondents were largely favourable towards the services available in camp, although access was limited, especially for women and adolescent boys and girls. Though there are many services in the camps that target women, it can be difficult for married women to attend, as their husband's permission is required, and women are discouraged from spending much time out of the home. Community norms, such as expecting girls to stay inside the shelter after menarche and prior to marriage, made it more difficult for unmarried girls and women to access sexual and reproductive health services, and thus their knowledge on those topics was more limited than those who were married. Adolescent boy respondents, in particular, noted a lack of adolescent-friendly services targeting them specifically, as well as a convening space where they felt comfortable to meet.



## (b) Inadequate implementation of laws and camp policies

Knowledge and enforcement of child marriage laws is particularly pertinent in refugee settings where individuals move between countries with different marriage laws, or different levels of enforcement of those laws. Overall, there was a lack of knowledge among respondents related to the Bangladeshi legal age of marriage as well as a lack of enforcement of the governing child marriage law that facilitated an enabling environment for Rohingya to marry their adolescent children, according to their religious faith and a tradition that was stymied in Rakhine State. Displacement from Rakhine State where child marriage rules were strictly enforced, to Bangladesh, where national marriage laws were not immediately announced or enforced, meant religious ceremonies proliferated. These were largely reflected only in UNHCR records for family registration, staying well outside of the Bangladeshi legal system. This contributed to a surge in child marriage for the first year and a half following displacement. Directly preceding the study period, new enforcement policies were implemented in response to this surge. Since this potential moderator was implemented a few months before data collection, its full effect could not be thoroughly assessed. Many respondents noted, however, that the prevalence of child marriage began to drop as a result of the change. Lack of clarity and enforcement of child marriage laws in the country of displacement does not appear to be a driver in prior research on child marriage in South Asia, but was one of the leading factors contributing to the increase in child marriage prevalence in the Rohingya communities in this study.

Camp policies regarding aid distribution were a notable driver of child marriage. Aid was distributed according to an average household size of five people, which led to some families using child marriage as a strategy for seeking additional food aid, particularly if the family was larger than five members. Marrying a daughter, who then joins her husband's household, reduces the number of people sharing rations in the household of origin. Similarly, if a newly married couple establishes a new household, instead of joining the groom's family, the new couple qualifies for their own aid distribution, enabling them to share rations with their families while also increasing the share of rations in both households of origin. Humanitarian aid itself serving as a driver of child marriage is a new and troublesome finding, with important ramifications for how future aid is distributed in communities where child marriage is practised. This underscores the importance of monitoring unintended consequences of aid policies and programmes.

## (c) Economic insecurity

Economic insecurity among families was exacerbated due to displacement, as refugees lost their livelihoods and ability to earn money. Economic insecurity as a driver of child marriage is consistent with prior research in South Asia, as this was the most common driver identified in the review of the existing literature in Chapter 2 (Ahmed et al., 2019; Alston et al., 2014; Barr, 2015; Ghafary, 2018; Huq, 2002; Parker, 2018; Sundaram, 2017; Tong, 2015; Weist, 1998). This driver arose most commonly in conjunction with male adolescents and their families looking to dowry as a source of income and parents marrying their children because they could not afford to keep them in the house. While some respondents also mentioned a lack of funds (for dowry, bride gold and wedding festivities) as a reason to delay marriage, by and large, economic insecurity was a stronger driver than a moderating factor.

Economic insecurity directly arises from the lack of alternatives in the camp, with no formal education after primary school and scarce job opportunities. Both adolescents and their parents discussed seeing marriage as the only option for adolescents, given the lack of opportunities and uncertainty about the future. Education and job opportunities were also the only two alternatives listed by adolescents as viable options for delaying marriage, though much more so for boys than for girls. Lack of alternatives, including job opportunities and education, is consistent with previous research in the region (Karim et al., 2016; Roest, 2016). Although this linkage is complex, and not unidirectional (Population Council for UNICEF ROSA, 2019), a 2014 study found that Bangladeshi girls who left school due to Cyclone Sidr in 2007 were more likely to be forced into marriage and Bangladesh adolescents whose schooling was cut short due to flooding also married at an earlier age (Atiqul and Ahmed, 2018; Lemmon, 2014).

## 2. Nepal

Child marriage prevalence was moderate in both Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha Districts. In both, the proportion of adolescents married before age 18 was higher for girls than boys: 3 per cent of men age 20–24 and 9 per cent of women in Sindhupalchowk and 5 per cent of men 20–24 and 7 per cent of women in Dolakha. The proportion of 15–19-year-olds currently married was slightly higher: 5 per cent of boys and 10 per cent of girls in Sindhupalchowk, and 4 per cent of boys and 9 per cent of girls in Dolakha. Rates were lower than the latest available MICS survey (2014) which found that, in the Central Mountain Region (including

## Discussion and Recommendations

Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha), 17.6 per cent of women aged 15–19 years were already married (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The disparity could be because the trend was declining in these districts, as reported by qualitative respondents. There were very low rates of marriage before age 15 for both populations.

In addition to providing information on the prevalence of child marriage among earthquake-affected districts of Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha, this study identifies several underlying drivers in this context and how these are shaped by disaster-related displacement. Key drivers illuminated in this study include gender-based discrimination, systemic poverty linked to caste and racial discrimination, adolescent agency, education and economic insecurity. Moderators of child marriage include a supportive legislative environment.

### (a) Gender-based discrimination

Traditional gendered norms of marriage still prevail. Boys' eligibility for marriage is determined by education, employment, and financial status, whereas for girls, while those factors may also be considered, health and the ability to care for the home and in-laws are considered more important. Interestingly, respondents reported an increasing trend towards delaying marriage and seeking educated women as opposed to traditional "homemakers" in the last few years. This may be a direct result of shifting normative effects from the earthquake as adolescents increasingly harness their own agency to reinforce the importance of education, emphasized in government and NGO programmes post-disaster.

Control of adolescent girls' reproduction and sexuality is a deeply entrenched social norm and practice, and respondents referred to the preservation of family honour and prestige as key reasons for child marriage. Engaging in premarital sex or becoming pregnant while unmarried are morally unacceptable and would lead to family shame and poor matches for the girls. There is some evidence to suggest that the widespread use of social media as a platform for self-initiated selection of marriage partners and the rejection of dowries marks potential shifts in this social norm that may have been further accelerated by the earthquake.

Lastly, some respondents said that marriage was a way of avoiding or escaping neglect or violence at home, securing basic needs or seeking comfort following the trauma of the earthquake. As rates of alcoholism rose, domestic violence was noted as a common occurrence and a correlate of the trauma and influx of funds via aid and loans for rebuilding. Among families that were displaced, concerns about security and honour in crowded relocation sites and concern about risks of trafficking motivated some to marry children early, particularly daughters.

### (b) Systemic poverty linked to caste and ethnic discrimination

Child marriage is more commonly practised in some communities than in others. Prevalence of child marriage was perceived by respondents to remain highest in Tamang and Dalit communities, which is consistent with prior reports (Child Marriage in Nepal, 2012; Kafle, 2016; Why child marriage persists in Nepal, 2014). Constituting over a fifth of the population of Nepal, the Dalit and Tamang communities are minorities that are disproportionately affected by poverty and systematic discrimination that restricts or denies access to resources, including education and livelihood opportunities (Pandey, 2017). Quantitative findings showed that child marriage prevalence was indeed highest for boys in the Tamang and Dalit communities and highest for girls among the Dalit and Magar.

### (c) Agency and self-initiated early marriage

Adolescent agency was the most notable driver of child marriage identified for both boys and girls. This phenomenon, resulting in an increased proportion of love marriages, is widely recognized, both by respondents and in previous reporting (Aryal, 2007; Child Marriage in Nepal Research Report, 2012; Choe et al., 2005). Some parents responded to their children's increased agency with pride that their children were educated and mature enough to make their own decisions, while others met this phenomenon with resignation, reflecting that they have lost the ability to make decisions for their children. Love marriages have become more common and are now more prevalent than arranged marriages in some areas. Prevailing social norms governing the unacceptability of premarital

sex and higher social status attributable to married adolescents may also increase the social desirability of early marriage among peers. Elopements, in particular, may have increased following the earthquake, as adolescents sought comfort in new relationships, left difficult conditions at home, and tried to make plans for a less certain future.

Though this increase in adolescent agency is widely acknowledged, these decisions are not always perceived as being in young people's best interest. This issue was brought up most often in relation to social media use. Internet access has dramatically expanded in the last few years, with increasing levels of connectivity and decreasing costs of cellular phone usage. Although only 38 per cent of adolescent survey respondents reported having access to the Internet (37 per cent of girls and 40 per cent of boys), it was reported by both adolescents and adults to be a key factor in the increase in elopements. Using social media, and Facebook in particular, adolescents can meet people outside of their village or school, opening up new opportunities for relationships, and contributing to the increase in love marriages and elopements. Some adolescents made commitments without ever having met in person. Some of the adolescents who married after whirlwind social media driven romances later expressed regret about their decisions, most commonly girls. As noted in the existing literature (Kenny et al., 2019), increased access to mobile phones and social media platforms may have contributed to sustaining models of child marriage within these communities.

#### **(d) Education**

The disruption of protective systems for children, including the closure of schools due to earthquake damage, was one of the most noted earthquake related drivers. Low levels of educational attainment of the male head of household appeared to be associated with higher rates of child marriage. In households where there was no child marriage, the average level of educational attainment for female heads of households was nearly three years more. This is in line with existing research, which shows that the mother's education level is a protective factor for child marriage (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2019). This suggests a gradual intergenerational shift of normative values regarding the importance of education for girls and the benefits of delayed marriage. Directly after the earthquake, there was an increase in NGO and government programming opening up a diverse array of opportunities to

learn about the negative consequences of child marriage. This furthered the ongoing shift in gender differences in school enrolment with an increase in prioritizing the education of daughters.

#### **(e) Economic insecurity**

Increased economic pressure was one of the most noted earthquake-related drivers. Destruction of houses and property and interruption of livelihoods from the earthquake resulted in additional financial strain. For some parents, this directly related to decisions made to marry daughters early. For some adolescents, decisions to marry revolved around the fulfillment of basic needs, such as food and shelter. Once the immediate threats of the crisis subsided, traditional migratory work patterns surfaced as adolescents and young adults from this area have long migrated to Kathmandu, or internationally, for work opportunities. However, in the wake of the crisis, the rate of migration increased following the earthquakes' disruption of the local economy (Wilson et al., 2016). Some adolescent boys married before leaving, or used the relocation as an opportunity to elope.

#### **(f) Supportive legislative environment**

The recent change in the legal age of marriage in Nepal and accompanying education and awareness campaign were reported by qualitative respondents to have had a moderating effect on child marriage. All respondents were aware of the change, and most either knew of or had participated in activities associated with this campaign. This change reinforced the already declining trend in child marriage in the target districts and made it more difficult to ascertain the impact of the earthquakes and recovery on child marriage (Raj et al., 2012).

Of note, although child marriage overall is on a downward trend in these districts, there are varying patterns within this trend. Arranged marriages before the age of 18 years are decreasing, particularly for those before 15. This shift is consistent with previously reported trends (Raj et al., 2012). At the same time, love marriages and elopements among older adolescents are increasing. The trend is driven in part by the increase in the legal age of marriage and in part by the notable increase in adolescent agency in marriage decision-making noted in the previous section. This may be one area that saw a change specifically related to the earthquake - with reports of increased elopements following.



Hossenara, 16, is a Rohingya girl living in the camps at Cox's Bazar. She was married off when she was 13. She is now a mother to an 18-month-old baby. Hossenara's husband had been in jail for the last eight months, and her mother-in-law had kicked her out of their house.

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## B. Contextual comparison of drivers and moderators of child marriage

By design, the study focused on sites with disparate characteristics to learn from comparisons between two different humanitarian contexts in South Asia: a protracted displacement, whose impetus was conflict and oppression, and a relatively recent natural disaster. This contrast was built into the design in order to facilitate comparisons. It is apparent from the study that these two situations are indeed different when it comes to their effects on child marriage, despite high rates of displacement in both. There are significant differences arising from the impetus of the crisis – conflict or natural disaster – and from the short-term versus the protracted nature of the crisis. There were several factors that interacted to sustain or moderate the practice of child marriage in both settings, including social norms that perpetuate gender and racial inequality, economic insecurity, a protective and supportive policy environment, and education. The mechanisms for each were largely dependent on context with the nature and duration of humanitarian crisis enabling an environment in which pre-existing drivers are amplified or altered and new moderators may be introduced.

### (a) Known primary drivers of child marriage do not fundamentally change during disasters but may shift in importance, being amplified or moderated

A major finding from this study is that the underlying, deep-seated drivers of child marriage that have been identified in existing research do not fundamentally change during crises. This study confirms the enduring importance of economic insecurity, physical safety and social norms as drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings. The drivers of gender-based discrimination, inadequate implementation of laws and camp policies, and economic insecurity were noted as particularly strong for Bangladesh. In Nepal, the drivers of gender-based discrimination, systemic poverty linked to racial discrimination, adolescent agency, education and economic insecurity were strongly apparent. As discussed below, although these fundamental drivers are still present, the nature of the crisis and the response can amplify or minimize certain drivers. Any new drivers that appear, such as the impact of food distribution on child marriage, are not as deep seated and are more circumstantial in nature, and may therefore be easier to address.

### (b) Gender-based discrimination and shifting social norms in crisis

Social and gender norms remain important as a driver of child marriage and the study outlines a number of areas where norms around control of adolescent sexuality and reproduction, in particular for girls, together with other discriminatory gender norms, continued to play a significant role in determining the age of marriage. The way gender-based discrimination manifests is culturally and contextually specific. In the wake of a crisis, expectations about what it means to be a woman, wife and mother or a man, husband and father, can sometimes shift from traditional gendered roles directly as a result of trauma and displacement related to conflict or natural disaster. However, the study shows that social and gender norms may change both positively and negatively, and rapidly, in humanitarian settings. Discrete, traumatic events have been shown to cause large shifts in social and gender norms and this study confirms significant shifts in gender norms in the study sites.

As demonstrated among adolescents in Nepal, the widespread use of technology and social media directly following the earthquake created an environment where adolescents were comfortable with exercising their agency to delay marriage to seek out other opportunities or to choose their own spouse and reject dowry. The earthquake appears to have coincided with a shift in family dynamics, contributing to a relaxation in social norms regarding arranged marriage and family formation. Parents noted that they did not have the time to devote to their children or their children's marriage prospects, potentially contributing to a decline in arranged marriages that was already evident before the earthquake. The study was not designed to determine whether this was a pre-existing trend or a direct result of the earthquake, but qualitative evidence suggests that the earthquake itself may have served as a catalyst for a change in patterns of family dynamics contributing to an ongoing decrease in arranged marriage and an increase in self-initiated marriages. Respondents noted an increase in adolescent agency and an increasing sense among young people to make decisions for themselves.

Formal education for adolescents was not available and social media was not as widely used in camp settings in Bangladesh. Although social media was involved in the minority of cases of child marriage in Bangladesh, it is a notable change from the extremely limited availability of Internet in Rakhine State prior to displacement.

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In Bangladesh, concerns over flimsy or densely situated shelters, increased interactions between boys and girls, and newly formed communities of “strangers” drive parents to seek out ways to control adolescent reproduction and sexuality through marriage or other restrictive and harmful practices. This trend is often amplified by threats and actual incidents of sexual violence against unmarried girls engaging in relationships or those involving the perception of a breach of propriety. In Nepal, domestic violence in the home was a driver of adolescent-led marriages, whether as a result of feelings of parental neglect or actual harm to the child. Concerns about violence and trafficking motivated some families to arrange for their daughters to be married early. To note, arranged marriages still remain the norm among Rohingya, but are declining in Nepal. In some places, love marriages are now more common. This shift has happened over one generation – in Nepal most adolescents’ parents’ marriages were arranged.

### (c) Adolescent boys

The lack of physical security for all-female households was cited as a driver for marrying boys younger in Bangladesh, in which case the woman married a boy in order to keep the family safe. Safety continues to be salient for girls, as discussed above in the section on family honour, but the effect on child grooms is a new finding.

Even with an increase in the number of child grooms or boys at risk of marriage in both Nepal and Bangladesh, there is evidence that boys are not being targeted for programming. Boys noted feeling left out and lacking programming of their own, leading to less understanding about the concerns regarding child marriage, and frustration with the lack of opportunities they see offered to girls, which may lead them to be less supportive of programmes for girls. This lack of engagement is a lost opportunity to engage boys in their own right about the risks of child marriage and to provide opportunities that would prevent them from marrying as children. This was found in Bangladesh where boys are also facing trauma and marginalization within the refugee community and also in Nepal where the migration of boys to cities breaks links with families and recovery efforts and may result in lost opportunities to support boys in their own right.

### (d) Honour and family duty

In both contexts, while represented as concerns about physical safety and security, control over adolescent girls’ sexuality and reproduction remained central to narratives about preserving family honour. Physical insecurity and, in particular,

the threat of sexual violence are frequently noted as contributing factors for child marriage in settings both within and outside of South Asia (Ainul et al., 2018; Ahmed et al., 2019; Innovations for Poverty Action, 2018; International Center for Research on Women, 2013; Lemmon, 2014; MacDonald, 2005; Mamun et al., 2018; McAlpine et al., 2016; Mourtada et al., 2017; Schlecht, 2016; Zabel, 2016).

A strong sense of duty to family and honour were key elements of child marriage dynamics in the two study sites, reflecting the institution of marriage in South Asia as one that joins families, not individuals, and confers inter- and intrafamily roles and responsibilities. Parents have a duty to keep their children safe; children have a duty to contribute to the family, to play a part that is community oriented and focuses on the good of the family as a whole, over and above the needs and interests of any individual. Further, the marriage partners have a duty to continue the lineage, which may be threatened in a crisis situation. In Nepal this was being de-emphasized as adolescent agency increased, as noted above, with the increase in elopements that were contrary to parents’ wishes, the increase in social media-driven elopements and inter-caste marriages. There may be a need to explore more deeply the qualitative data to better understand the underpinnings of honour, duty and sense of family as they relate to drivers of child marriage and changes in child marriage in humanitarian settings.

#### (i) Protecting honour may lead to increased child marriage

The literature often discusses honour with respect to adolescent sexuality and sexual and gender-based violence but the idea of honour expressed by respondents in this study, particularly in Bangladesh, is more nuanced.

In the face of perceived and real threats to physical security, families seek to protect a girl’s honour as a means of protecting the family’s honour. The physical lack of safety is considered a reason and justification for child marriage in a camp setting with close-by shelters, in contrast to the high-walled secure compounds in Rakhine State. This driver assumes even greater importance as parents struggle with their inability to protect their family physically, including a girl’s honour. Adolescent girls’ sexuality and safety represent the honour and integrity of the family. This suggests that when the family’s own existence and safety is under threat, parents and families may become even more concerned with protecting that honour.

#### (ii) Providing food and income for families

In Nepal, the qualitative findings highlight the importance of feeding and supporting one’s family.

While traditionally associated with economic insecurity, decisions to migrate, marry and find work are also deeply rooted in the idea of duty to the family. The recognition by boys in Nepal, for instance, that only so much food that can be farmed on a small piece of arable land after the earthquake necessitating a relocation to Kathmandu reflects monetary need. However, the decision to relocate, to send remittances and to seek new opportunities is also underpinned by the desire to ensure that everyone has enough to eat. This act reinforces an earlier migration pattern of older adolescents migrating to support their families at home (UNICEF, 2019).

Duty is also reflected in how parents view their relationship with their children and their responsibilities around marriage and protection, especially of adolescent girls. In both study sites parents expressed feeling a duty to protect their children, including by providing sustenance, which may also lead to increases in child marriage. For families with boys, somewhat regardless of age, bringing a dowry into the family may increase their chances of survival, while marrying off a girl reduces the number of mouths to feed in a household. In Bangladesh, in particular, many of these drivers appear to have become more important. In the face of economic insecurity, families report marrying off girls in order to ensure they are fed by someone else, or marrying off boys to gain a dowry.

### **(e) Economic security**

Respondents in both study sites noted the lack of economic opportunities in their communities. Economic insecurity as a driver of child marriage is consistent with prior research in South Asia, as in fact this was the most common driver identified in the review of the existing literature in Chapter 2 (Ahmed et al., 2019; Alston et al., 2014; Barr, 2015; Ghafary, 2018; Huq, 2002; Parker, 2018; Sundaram, 2017; Tong, 2015; Weist, 1998). This is particularly felt by populations that endure structural caste and ethnic discrimination that restricts economic, educational and vocational opportunities. In Nepal, caste and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by poverty and systematic discrimination that restricts or denies access to resources, including education and livelihood opportunities. In Myanmar, the Rohingya people are systematically marginalized to the lowest rung of society, and subject to routine threats and acts of violence.

Following displacement, economic insecurity among Rohingya families was exacerbated as refugees lost their livelihoods and ability to earn money in the camps. This lack of economic opportunity may have led to earlier marriage as

parents of boys seek dowry payments and parents of girls seek a way to decrease the amount of resources needed to feed their families. This sentiment was echoed in Nepal, where marrying early, either as decided by the parents or by adolescents themselves, revolved around the fulfillment of basic needs. Also in Nepal, the lack of economic opportunities led to migration, particularly of boys, and may have prompted early marriage, so that boys were accompanied, or served as a reason to elope. Although a lack of funds for dowry and wedding-related events was noted as a reason to delay marriage, economic insecurity was a stronger driver than moderating factor. A lack of opportunities to study and work might lead young girls and boys to see marriage as a natural alternative. If they cannot study, what else should they do but marry?

### **(i) Distribution of aid has unintended consequences**

There is a significant body of research detailing the adverse consequences of poorly designed aid-distribution programmes and the Bangladesh field study provides an additional example. The design of food aid targeted at five-member households appears to have led to an increase in child marriages. Creating new households, particularly for those with more than five members, increases the amount of household aid given to families. The policy of meting out aid to family units can therefore have severe adverse consequences when it comes to child marriage.

### **(f) Social media and self-initiation**

Increasing anecdotal evidence suggest that social media has contributed to the rise of self-initiated marriages in South Asia. This study is the first to confirm a link and provide qualitative evidence that details the shift that allowed this change to occur in Nepal. As discussed in the findings section on drivers of child marriage in Nepal, parents noted the lack of time they had to devote to their children following the earthquake and also the lack of attention they could pay to arranging marriages. The earthquake might have been a catalyst allowing for adolescents to interact more freely, to meet and communicate, in the midst of a disruption in family norms, thus leading to a rise in self-initiated marriages. These discussions reveal the tension between family duty or honour and a trend towards increasing agency of young people. Further research is necessary to understand how norms of family formation and a sense of family duty may be eroding or changing in Nepal. Where parents formerly played a significant role in arranging matches and thus took greater responsibility for supporting the married couple, a decreased role for parents in arranging

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marriages for their children may lead to a decreased sense of shared responsibility for the outcome, and subsequently less support for their married children.

The quantitative data indicate that adolescents are using social media more frequently and the qualitative data point to self-initiated marriages arising due to these interactions. However, in Bangladesh, the actual number of marriages resulting from these interactions appears to be small, while in Nepal, about a third of adolescents reported meeting their spouse on social media, a higher share than by any other means. More work is needed to understand the extent to which social media is contributing to changes in marriage patterns.

### (g) Impact of legislation

There is an ongoing debate as to whether legislation has any impact on harmful practices such as child marriage or whether social norms exert greater influence on individual and community decision-making. The study provides a few examples where legislation clearly exerted an influence. These examples do not discount the role of social norms, but rather show that normative beliefs and legislative frameworks interact in various and sometimes unintended ways to affect patterns of child marriage.

Upon arrival in Bangladesh, there was a significant delay in assigning a status to the Rohingya population fleeing Rakhine State, Myanmar, and an associated delay in determining which laws applied to them, particularly with respect to child marriage. In Rakhine State, the Rohingya people had been subject to laws prohibiting early marriage and polygamy, as well as laws restricting the number of children they could have. Once in Bangladesh, respondents noted feeling freed from these restrictions, and there was an increase in child marriages, polygamy and a drive to have more children. The informality in the camp reinforced these patterns as formal marriage registration was impossible to obtain. Respondents reported having marriages conducted by religious authorities and camp authorities were not inclined to intervene. When camp authorities began to enforce laws regarding child marriage, the age of marriage increased and child marriages declined. It is clear from this example that laws – when strictly enforced – do work to prevent child marriage in certain cases, even where religious and social norms would have children marry earlier.

In contrast, the example of Nepal offers a cautionary tale with respect to laws designed to

prevent child marriage. Immediately following the earthquake, Nepal enacted a law raising the official age of marriage for girls to 20. Campaigns helped to raise awareness of the law and were considered to have contributed to the decline in arranged child marriages. While intended to protect young girls and to reduce adolescent birth rates, the law might also have created incentives for young people to elope, and the study provides evidence to support this conclusion. The rise in self-initiated marriages in Nepal might have resulted from a number of changes, including increased access to social media, but might also be attributable to the intolerance of adolescent sexuality outside marriage in conjunction with the high legal age of marriage. The high age of marriage laws in Nepal creates a large gap between the onset of puberty and the ability to express adolescent sexuality in a socially and legally sanctioned manner. This mismatch of social norms in favour of early marriage, adolescent sexuality and legislative priorities could have created an incentive for adolescents to elope or self-initiate marriage, suggesting that laws must be better tailored to the context and any potential unintended consequences addressed.

### (h) Humanitarian crises: Nature, duration, and patterns of displacement

The regions in Nepal included in this study were affected by an acute rapid-onset natural disaster. The 25 April and 12 May earthquakes and the major aftershocks that followed affected over 8 million people. Within one year, nearly all 2.8 million people displaced by the earthquake were back in their own communities, and rebuilding was well underway. Although it will take many years for Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha districts to fully recover from the earthquakes, they are well on their way, barring, of course, additional events. In contrast to this acute event, the crisis affecting the Rohingya is chronic and the displacement protracted. While the violence precipitating their initial flight was acute – with state forces attacking villages in October 2016, and then again in August 2017 – there is a long history of structural oppression and build-up of threats to these acute events. Fleeing villagers took days to weeks to arrive in Bangladesh, where they still remain in camps. Although many efforts are being made regionally and internationally to enable their return, as of yet, conditions do not allow the Rohingya to return safely and with dignity, and there is no clear date for when that will be possible. Consequently, their displacement is protracted and of unknown duration.

The literature review conducted to support this study reveals limited research on child marriage



in humanitarian settings, particularly in South Asia and particularly in the context of natural disasters. While climate and disaster-related displacement may share some similar features to conflict-related displacement, there are some important differences. Seen as an “act of god,” the Nepali earthquakes were unexpected, with limited preparedness planning in place to mitigate the shocks to essential health and social service systems and infrastructure. In stark contrast, the violence against the Rohingya people was an act of genocide; it was conscious, planned and targeted specifically at them as a group of people and their way of life (Messner et al., 2019; Parmar et al., 2019). As a result, the Rohingya face the additional trauma of oppression and genocide with displacement across international borders and limited protections under host country laws.

### (i) Conflict versus natural disaster

The conflict, associated displacement and ensuing impacts on child marriage patterns in Rohingya communities in this study suggests that conflict may exert particular forces leading to changes in child marriage. The study indicated the increased perception of threats associated with trauma and displacement, insecurity and lack of physical boundaries in the camp setting, threats against honour and a subsequent reliance on child marriage as a form of maintaining family honour, as well as safety and security. In contrast, natural disasters may bring economic strife, but, at least in this case, are less associated with perceived existential threats. While there was a short period of encampment for those in the earthquake zones, and the risks of physical security and the need to protect girls from sexual assault were present, the short-term nature of displacement and relatively more rapid recovery may have prevented these perceptions from having a lasting impact as a driver of child marriage. However, the trauma and displacement associated with the earthquake does appear to have had an impact on self-initiated marriages.

Destination in humanitarian contexts – whether it be a different country or perhaps a different location in the same country – is important and the norms and values that displaced persons encounter in destination locations could impact child marriage patterns. As the Bangladesh study data show, Rohingya refugees were freed from the restraints imposed by the Myanmar government and child marriage rates appeared to increase until the Bangladesh government began to enforce laws against child marriage in the camps. This enforcement of existing and new regulations, coupled with the education programmes in the camps to promote anti-child marriage messages, began to reduce child marriage rates in the camps.

### (ii) Short-term disaster cycle versus protracted crisis

The selection of the Nepal earthquake-affected sites was intentional in order to examine child marriage in a setting that was affected by a natural disaster, where the acute incident was hypothesized to have long-term effects on patterns of child marriage, and that patterns of child marriage could continue to be affected by the earthquake long after the event. However, this was found not to be the case. The affected population was displaced temporarily – mostly internally – but then returned to live in, or near, their communities of origin. Many constructed temporary shelters in or alongside their damaged homes. Those who were displaced did not travel far, and most were able to eventually return to their community of origin, with the return to some semblance of normality quite quickly after the earthquake.

In contrast, the Rohingya crisis is protracted and is expected to be unresolved for some time. The Rohingya faced discrimination and violence in Myanmar, an escalation of which led many of them to flee to Bangladesh, and they continue to face violence and instability in their current situation. Despite the best attempts of responding agencies, refugee camps are unfamiliar, often lack organization and legal structures (at least initially), and can magnify threats to marginalized populations, even the perception of which appears to have affected child marriage patterns.

Whether these differences are a result of the length of the crisis or its other characteristics is unclear, but the comparison does suggest that short-term versus protracted crises may have differential impacts on child marriage.

### (iii) Migration and displacement

Unlike other forms of migration, displacement (or forced migration) tends to increase poverty and economic insecurity, as the study findings from Bangladesh and Nepal illustrate. More research is needed to understand these dynamics. However, it appears that when a community is socially and culturally disposed to child marriage as a solution to problems arising from external threats and economic insecurity, in particular in new, unsafe surroundings, child marriage may offer a solution to some ills, real or perceived. This is shown by the reported rise in child marriage immediately following the earthquake in Nepal and upon arrival of displaced Rohingya populations in Bangladesh.

In addition to the feelings of insecurity that accompany displacement, migration as a solution to the economic and physical insecurity due to a crisis may prompt child marriage in and of itself. Few interviews were conducted with boys who had



Sadia Akter, 11, stands in front of the bamboo and plastic house where she lives with her family in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

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migrated following the earthquake, but evidence indicates that labour migration following the earthquake may have prompted earlier marriages to occur. In a multi-country study of the drivers of child marriage in South Asia, utilizing several decades of DHS and other data and a review of literature, Dietrich et al. (2018) found that migration (in their study presumed to be largely voluntary though often driven by economic insecurity), whether internal or international, affects child marriage in several ways:

*“First, families with migrant members are usually economically better off and therefore able to pay higher dowries. This implies that they can afford to wait and marry off their daughters later. At the same time, children living in migrant households are exposed to social remittances, which [...] may influence the decision-making of the household to avoid harmful practices [...]. Being exposed to outside values may indirectly relate to child marriage decisions, for instance, by emphasizing the added value of education for children, particularly for girls.” (p. 13)*

Overall, they concluded from their review of literature that “migration is associated with a decrease in poverty and an increased awareness of the possible negative impacts of child marriage,” while offering the caveat that “the effect of migration on child marriage depends on the destination country as well as on common beliefs and values of communities at the place of origin” (p. 13).

Follow-up work with the individuals who migrated would be useful to understand how migration and family formation may be related, especially in the context of humanitarian situations.

### **(i) Ethics of research in humanitarian settings**

Finally, this study has highlighted the ethical and logistical difficulties of conducting research on child marriage in humanitarian settings. In Bangladesh, the lack of relevant ethical boards with representation from the groups to be studied presented a challenge for researchers on how to ensure that the communities were bought into the research and would benefit from it. The researchers in this study

took great efforts to ensure community buy-in and local ethical approval in both Nepal and Bangladesh. This is a vital step in ensuring that marginalized populations are protected in the research process and in disseminating findings to the study populations. These processes and recommendations will be shared in a separate document.

## C. Recommendations

The following section outlines recommendations for future research, policy and programming suggested by the study and discussion of the findings above.

### 1. Research

#### (a) Ethical research on child marriage in humanitarian settings

This study has confirmed the lack of research on child marriage in humanitarian settings, in particular in natural disaster affected contexts. It is notable that the dearth of research in the area of child marriage in humanitarian and emergency situations may in part be due to the complicated ethics around doing research with marginalized and vulnerable populations. Human-subjects boards that evaluate ethics of research have recently come under fire for approving research in developing or humanitarian situations that they might not approve in the Global North, raising concerns about the extent to which such research can be considered ethical. For this study, great care was taken to ensure that respondent communities had a voice in consenting to and learning from the research to which they were party. As discussed above, these lessons will be written up separately, but it is noted here that any future studies in humanitarian settings must be equally cautious in subjecting vulnerable and marginalized populations to research.

#### (b) Gaps in research

While some research gaps were identified, the study generated an understanding of the persistence of the deep drivers of child marriage across different contexts. Although this may suggest a need for more research, given the consistency of the deep drivers of child marriage across different settings, and the ethical challenges of surveying marginalized populations, it is recommended that future studies focus on implementation research, and what works to effectively programme to end child marriage, rather than research on drivers of child marriage in humanitarian contexts. Evidence presented in this study of the potential for unintended consequences in the delivery of aid underscores the importance of responding to

humanitarian situations with programming that is adapted to the specific context.

However, four areas identified for further research which are not yet well addressed in studies on child marriage in emergency settings and which merit further study are: migration and displacement, social media, natural disasters, and social norms change.

With regard to migration and displacement, a limitation of this study is the inability to know about other populations that have been affected by these crises, but which are not included in the geographical study areas. The boys who migrated to Kathmandu and could not be reached, the Rohingya girls married to members of the host community, and the refugees who dispersed to other places are all populations whose stories we do not know and whose voices were not included in the present study. Both the Nepal and Bangladesh study findings suggest that migration and displacement affect patterns of child marriage. This might include marrying early in order to take a bride to the city for a migrating worker, or the real and perceived threats to family and community security and honour that are associated with forced displacement. The study was not able to fully explore these topics and they merit further research.

As noted in the discussion on the influence of social media, this study has shown evidence of a trend towards social media driving self-initiated marriages among young people, a trend that was previously reported anecdotally. Further work is necessary to understand the extent to which this is changing marriage patterns or is in practice only affecting a small number of young people and their families.

Child marriage in natural disaster affected settings remains understudied. While a proliferation of research on refugees has prompted the above call for caution with respect to vulnerable populations, the study findings, including on the increase in young people's agency, decline in arranged marriages and linkages between use of social media and self-initiated marriage in Nepal, raise questions about the impacts of natural disasters on marriage and family formation. Whether or not these changes in young people's agency, decline in family arranged marriages, self-initiation and use of social media were a magnification of an existing trend or the result of the emergency and its aftermath, and how these changes affect patterns of child marriage are an important area for further research.

This study identified a number of ways in which harmful gender and social norms were affected both positively and negatively by the crisis in each setting. More work needs to be done to

understand the changes in social and gender norms that occur in humanitarian settings and lead to lasting change in prevalence of child marriage in impacted communities: what causes these changes, how they impact patterns of child marriage and whether long- or short-term effects can be expected to result.

## 2. Programming

As this study has identified, the response to child marriage in humanitarian settings needs to be flexible and adapted to each specific context. As the underlying drivers of child marriage shift in importance in a crisis, becoming exaggerated or moderated, existing child marriage programming may need to be scaled up or scaled back, or significantly altered to remain relevant and effective in the changing environment. As such, recommendations for child marriage programming reflect the need to respond quickly and effectively, to put in place adaptive programming that reflects the varying needs of vulnerable populations, as well as to avoid or adjust programming interventions that create unanticipated adverse incentives or unintended consequences.

This study has shown that drivers such as economic and physical insecurity – both real and perceived – become much more important in humanitarian crises as determinants for decision-making around marriage. This study provides evidence that marriages may be happening earlier than planned as families see the receipt of dowry or the movement of a family member to a new household as a way of providing for their families and ensuring adequate access to food. Similarly, the lack of physical and social boundaries when homes are destroyed by a natural disaster, when social media facilitates more interaction between girls and boys, or when a family compound is lost and a tent in a crowded space replaces it, could lead parents and adolescents to feel their security, safety or honour is threatened. Programmatic interventions that seek to bolster economic and/or physical security in humanitarian situations should therefore be quickly scaled up to reduce the likelihood that these drivers will increase in importance and impact, leading to more and/or earlier child marriage.

In the case of social norms, the study shows that these can change very quickly in an emergency, both positively and negatively, and in unexpected ways. When these norms shift, programming needs to be nimble and adaptive in order to effectively support communities. In the study settings, norms around arranged versus self-initiated marriage, expectations around what it means to be a woman and women's roles, and the acceptability of young unmarried and married girls engaging in activities

outside the home were seen as shifting, although not universally. In some cases, girls' activities were more curtailed than usual due to physical insecurity, leading to lower utilization and less effective delivery of health services. In other cases, an increase in women working outside the home was seen as necessary to provide for families facing economic insecurity. Either way, ensuring the safety of women and girls was seen as paramount and providing adolescent girls with tools to navigate working outside the home, pressures to elope and the experience of family formation at a young age, would be important components of needs-driven, adaptive programming.

Finally, programming must address the needs of boys. This need was clearly expressed by respondents in the case of Bangladesh, but was also evident in Nepal, including for boys who were migrating for work and entering into early marriages linked to outmigration. Boys are getting married, boys are on social media and are courting girls; their engagement is critical to build healthy relationships and communities where girls and women are valued and respected. However, in the context of adolescent sexuality and child marriage, boys are often seen as a “problem” and early marriage aims to fix that potential problem of boys expressing their sexuality, just as it aims to prevent girls from doing so. Boys must be engaged in their own right and for their own benefit as boys also suffer consequences of child marriage, as both child grooms and as husbands of underage brides. As this study showed, in the Bangladesh context, ignoring adolescent boys affects them – they feel undervalued and left out, and lack resources to cope – as well as adolescent girls. Without their own dedicated interventions that address gender and social norms that support child marriage, boys are less likely to support programming that targets girls. In the Nepal setting, boys may also be missed in programming, especially if they have chosen to migrate.

## 3. Policy

With regard to policy, the question of the influence of laws on child marriage and the interaction of laws and policies with social norms and religious practices, particularly in humanitarian settings, was clearly raised in this study. The findings point to the need to continue to monitor the impact of legislation on child marriage, including how laws are being enforced, how they are being perceived and received by members of communities, in particular those impacted by humanitarian crises, where there are gaps in enforcement or knowledge of the law, and ultimately, whether they are effective at stemming child marriage. While there may not be either space or a need to conduct thorough legal reviews, specifically in humanitarian settings, it is clear from the study





A child is dressed for her marriage ceremony in Kurigram, Bangladesh.

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that the non-enforcement of laws, or disagreement about which laws apply, can create an enabling environment for child marriage in these settings.

In addition, there is mounting evidence that child marriage is not a uniform practice across or within countries, and this study confirms this view. In both study sites, several different types of marriage were identified, including polygamous marriage, child grooms marrying older women, marriages of children close in age, arranged and self-initiated marriages, and marriages between displaced persons and members of the local or host community. The stereotype of a young girl marrying a significantly older man still exists in practice, but does not represent the full heterogeneity of patterns and experiences that constitute child marriage in South Asia, in humanitarian settings and beyond. Laws and policies that aim to address and prevent child marriage must better recognize these differences, as well as the different contexts in which they are applied.

Advocacy and legislative reform are needed to better account for different patterns of child marriage in legislation, including to recognize the potential for adolescent agency, how it impacts child marriage, and how existing and proposed

legislation, financing and enforcement may impact adolescent self-determination. In particular, in places where adolescent sexuality is taboo, but the age of marriage is high, such as in Nepal following the earthquake, laws have the potential to create adverse incentives, in some cases leaving adolescents to choose between family commitments, honour and duty, love and the law.

Finally, the study identified the continued need for efforts around implementing and improving civil registration. Qualitative evidence from both countries indicated the need for reinforcing civil registration in emergencies. Not being registered, and therefore not knowing their age, impedes enforcement of a minimum age of marriage. It also can hinder their ability to attend school, receive health services and obtain social protection benefits. Birth registration is not carried out in the Rohingya camps and there is very low registration in both Bangladesh and Nepal. Marriage registration not only protects the family, but is also usually required for birth registration. Marriage registration, when complete, is a more effective way to monitor and measure child marriage than household surveys. These services should continue to be offered even in humanitarian settings to ensure continuity and ensure children and young people are able to realise their rights.





Tamanna, 16, hugs her mother outside their home in Bhasantek, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Tamanna works with adolescents and is involved in community organising to stop issues plaguing her community, like child marriage.

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# Appendix

## Appendix One: Quantitative Survey Instruments

### Bangladesh Household Survey Tool

#### HOUSEHOLD SURVEY INSTRUMENT Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings

SECTION 1: INTERVIEW CONTEXT [This first set of questions is to be filled out by the interviewer with the respondent's help when needed]		
A01	Camp ID	[ ][ ]
A02	Block	[ ][ ]
A03	Household ID	[ ][ ]
A04	Respondent ID number	[ ][ ][ ]
A05	Interviewer ID number	[ ][ ]
A06	Date of interview (autofill)	[ ][ ][ ][ ] 2019 DD MM
A07	Person interviewed	Female head of household.....0 Other over 18yrs.....1 Other below 18yrs.....2
A08	Interview start time (autofill)	[ ][ ][ ][ ] HH MM
A09	Was anyone else present during this interview?	No.....0 Yes.....1 → skip to B01
A10	Who was present?	Child 10 years or younger.....0 Female older than 10 years.....1 Male older than 10 years.....2
A11	How long have you lived in [current location]? All years should be multiplied by 12 to get the correct number (1 year = 12 months, 1.5 years = 18 months)	[ ][ ] Months (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if no response)

Appendix

**SECTION 2: LIST OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS**

First complete, on a separate paper form, a list of the names for all individuals who have been members of this household for more than one month, within the past year. The list will be used to guide the collection of data on household members, but will be destroyed after the interview. In the order of the household list, proceed with B02 and B03 vertically. Once B02 and B03 are complete for all members, make sure to probe for additional members: Those with disabilities, those that are not currently at home, or any infants, small children or others who may have recently moved out (such as girls who may have been recently married). Then, ask questions B04-B06 for each member one at a time.

B01. Line no.	B02. What is the relationship of (name) to the head of household?	B03. Is (name) male or female?				B04. What is (name)'s month and year of birth?		B05. How old is (name)?	B06. Is (name) married?			
		M	F	DK	RR	Month	Year	Age	No	Yes	DK	RR
01	(head of household)	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
02	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
03	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
04	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
05	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
06	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
07	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
08	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
09	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
10	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
11	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
12	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
13	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
14	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99
15	---	1	2	88	99	---	---	---	0	1	88	99

* Codes for B02: Relationship to head of household:	01 HEAD 02 SPOUSE / PARTNER 03 SON / SON IN LAW 04 DAUGHTER / DAUGHTER IN LAW	05 GRANDCHILD 06 PARENT 07 PARENT-IN-LAW 08 BROTHER / SISTER 09 BROTHER-IN-LAW / SISTER-IN-LAW	10 UNCLE/AUNT 11 NIECE / NEPHEW 12 OTHER RELATIVE 13 ADOPTED / FOSTER / STEPCHILD	14 SERVANT (LIVE-IN) 96 OTHER (NOT RELATED) 99 DONT KNOW
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<b>SECTION 3: LIST OF ADOLESCENT HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS</b>							
<i>Identify all individuals from Section 2 roster who are male or female aged 10-24, respondent. Complete C01-C16 for each adolescent.</i>							
<b>C01.</b> Line number from Section 1							
<b>C02.</b> Has (name) ever attended school?	0 = No → skip to C05 1 = Yes 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C03.</b> What was the highest level of school (name) attended?	1 = Preschool 2 = Primary 3 = Secondary 4 = Post-secondary 5 = Higher 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C04.</b> What is the highest grade or year of school attended?	[ _ ] Grade (fill 88 if don't know, fill 99 if refused response)						
<b>C05.</b> How many times has he/she been married?	0 = None → skip to C16 1 = Once 2 = More than once 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C06.</b> How old was she/he when she/he married her/his first spouse?	_ (age in years) 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C07.</b> Was this marriage before or after leaving Myanmar?	0 = Born in camp 1 = Before 2 = During journey 3 = After arrival in camp 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C08.</b> Was a dowry or bride price/received for this marriage?	0 = No 1 = Yes 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C09.</b> Is she/he currently married or in a union?	0 = No 1 = Yes, married 2 = Yes, living with partner 88 = DK 99 = RR  <b>1 or 2 → skip to C11</b>						
<b>C10.</b> How did the previous marriage end?	0 = Death 1 = formal divorce 2 = informal separation 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C11.</b> Does (name) currently live together with their spouse?	0 = No 1 = Yes 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C12.</b> In whose household do they live?	0 = Groom's household 1 = Bride's household 2 = Formed new household 3 = Joined other family members 4 = Other 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C13.</b> How old is (her/his) spouse?	_ (age in years) 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C14.</b> Besides (Name from roster), does (spouse) have any other spouses or partners or live with any other person as if married?	0 = No 1 = Yes 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C15.</b> Was (name from roster) directly involved in the choice of (her/his) spouse?	0 = No 1 = Yes 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C16.</b> Has she/he had a child?	0 = No → skip to D01 1 = Yes 88 = DK 99 = RR						
<b>C17.</b> At what age did she/he give birth to his/her first child?	_ (age in years) 88 = DK 99 = RR						

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SECTION 4: HOUSEHOLD SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION			
<i>First I would like to ask you some questions about the head of the household. Then I will ask you some questions about yourself.</i>			
D01	What is your relationship to the head of household?	Head Spouse/Partner Daughter/Daughter-in-law Grandchild Parent Mother-in-law Sister Sister-in-law Aunt Niece Other Relative Adopted child/Foster child/Step child Servant (live-in) Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D02	What ethnicity is the head of the household? Or to what ethnic group does the head of household belong?	Rohingya.....0 Rakhine.....1 Chittagonian.....2 Hindu.....3 Kaman.....4 Daginet.....5 Mro.....6 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D03	What religion is the head of the household	Muslim.....0 Hindu.....1 Budhist.....2 Christian.....3 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D04	What township is the head of the household from originally?	Maungdaw.....0 Buthidaung.....1 Rathedaung.....2 Sittwe.....3 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D05	What is the highest level and grade or year of school ( <i>insert name of head of household</i> ) attended?	None.....0 Preschool.....1 Primary.....2 Secondary.....3 Post-secondary (Institute).....4 Higher.....5 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	[ ] Grade (fill 88 if don't know, fill 99 if refused response)
D06	Did ( <i>insert name of head of household</i> ) work outside the home prior to leaving Myanmar?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to D08
D07	What was the most recent and main occupation of ( <i>insert name of head of household</i> ) prior to leaving Myanmar?	Agriculture/Farming.....0 Domestic work.....1 Teacher.....2 Translator.....3 Health worker/volunteer.....4 Other NGO staff.....5	



		Shop/stall.....6 Services for hire (Cooking, Sewing, Laundry).....7 Waste collection.....8 Religious leader.....9 Maji.....10 Day laborer.....11 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>D08</b>	Is the head of the household working currently?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to D10
<b>D09</b>	What type of work does the head of the household currently do?	Agriculture/Farming.....0 Domestic work.....1 Teacher.....2 Translator.....3 Health worker/volunteer.....4 Other NGO staff.....5 Shop/stall.....6 Services for hire (Cooking, Sewing, Laundry).....7 Waste collection.....8 Religious leader.....9 Maji.....10 Day laborer.....11 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>D10</b>	What was the highest level of schooling you attended?	None.....0 Preschool.....1 Primary.....2 Secondary.....3 Post-secondary (Institute).....4 Higher.....5 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>D11</b>	Did you ever work outside the home in Myanmar?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to D13
<b>D12</b>	What kind of work did you do?	Agriculture/Farming.....0 Domestic work.....1 Teacher.....2 Translator.....3 Health worker/volunteer.....4 Other NGO staff.....5 Shop/stall.....6 Services for hire (Cooking, Sewing, Laundry).....7 Waste collection.....8 Religious leader.....9 Maji.....10 Day laborer.....11 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>D13</b>	Are you working currently?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>D14</b>	What kind of work do you do now?	Agriculture/Farming.....0 Domestic work.....1 Teacher.....2 Translator.....3	

Appendix

		Health worker/volunteer.....4 Other NGO staff.....5 Shop/stall.....6 Services for hire (Cooking, Sewing, Laundry).....7 Waste collection.....8 Religious leader.....9 Maji.....10 Day laborer.....11 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D15	Which of the following best describes the shelter you live in?	Bamboo and tarpaulin shelter with dirt floor .....0 Bamboo and tarpaulin shelter with concrete floor .....1 Bamboo and tarpaulin shelter with tin roof.....2 Bamboo and tarpaulin shelter with tin roof and concrete floor.....3 Bamboo and tarpaulin shelter with concrete floor and latrine in house..4 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D16	Which of the following items do you own?  <i>[Check all that apply]</i>	Mobile phone.....0 Cookstove .....1 Electric fan.....2 Electric light.....3 Tools for shelter improvement .....4 Solar system.....5 Laptop or tablet .....6 Sewing machine.....7 Tube well.....8 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D17	What is the household's primary source of cash income?	No cash income.....0 NGO volunteer stipend.....1 Other paid work.....2 Remittances from relatives.....3 Cash aid from humanitarian organization.....4 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D18	What is the average household monthly cash income from all sources of income?	[               ] {Amount in taka} (fill 888888 if don't know; fill 999999 if refused response)	
D19	What was the average household expenditure last month?	[               ] {Amount in taka} (fill 888888 if don't know; fill 999999 if refused response)	→ if less than D18, skip to D21
D20	How is the difference between your monthly income and monthly expenses covered?	Debt.....0 Sale of food aid.....1 Sale or barter of non-food assets.....2 Barter or services.....3 Lifestyle changes.....4 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D21	The next question asks about difficulties doing certain activities because of a physical or mental disability. Does anyone in your household have moderate to severe difficulties?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to D24
D22	Who experiences these difficulties?	Me.....0 My mother.....1 My father.....2 A sibling.....3 My child.....4 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88	

Household Questionnaire - Bangladesh  
Principal Investigator Courtland Robinson IRB #9467  
v3 20 April 2019

		Refused response.....99	
D23	What kind of difficulty do they experience? <i>[Read responses to participant and select all that apply]</i>	Seeing, even if wearing glasses.....0 Hearing, even if using a hearing aid.....1 Walking or climbing steps.....2 Remembering or concentrating.....3 Caring for themselves, such as washing all over or dressing.....4 Communicating, either expressing themselves or being understood.....5 None of the above.....6 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D24	How many times has this household moved within the past 12 months?	<input type="text"/> Times moved (fill 00 if never moved; fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
D25	What is the registration status of this household?	Not registered.....0 Registration pending.....1 Registered as refugees.....2 Registered as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals.....3 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	

SECTION 5: MARRIAGE PERCEPTIONS								
<b>Read the following to the participant:</b> "Now, I am going to read you several statements about marriage. To respond to each statement, I would like you to please indicate if you 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'feel neutral', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree' with each statement. Some of these statements could be considered sensitive, but remember all answers are anonymous and you do not have to answer every question. If you are confused at any point, please let me know."								
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know	Refused response	
E01	"A woman's most important role is to take care of the home, the children and cook for the family."	1	2	3	4	88	99	
E02	"A son's education is more important than a daughter's education if financial resources are scarce"	1	2	3	4	88	99	
E03	"A woman's main role is to be a wife and mother."	1	2	3	4	88	99	
E04	A man's main role is to be a husband and father.							
E05	"Girls and boys should have the same opportunities for education."	1	2	3	4	88	99	
E06	"Physical violence (such as hitting, beating, slapping, etc) is sometimes the only way to solve a disagreement with your spouse"	1	2	3	4	88	99	
E07	At what age do you think people in your community should marry?	<b>FEMALES</b>			<b>MALES</b>			
		<input type="text"/> Age (years) (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)			<input type="text"/> Age (years) (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)			
E08	Currently, in your community, what is the primary influence on decisions about the age people become married?	Religion.....0 Family honor.....1 Family tradition.....2 Money and/or resources.....3 War and/or conflict.....4 Displacement.....5 Security.....6 Citizenship.....7 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99						
E09	What else influences decisions about the age people become married <i>[Select all that apply]</i>	Religion.....0 Family honor.....1 Family tradition.....2 Money and/or resources.....3 War and/or conflict.....4 Displacement.....5						

Appendix

		Security.....6 Citizenship.....7 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E10	Are these the same factors that influenced decisions about the age people became married prior to displacement?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to E11
E11	In your community, what primarily influenced decisions about the age people become married, prior to displacement?	Religion.....0 Family honor.....1 Family tradition.....2 Money and/or resources.....3 War and/or conflict.....4 Displacement.....5 Security.....6 Citizenship.....7 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E12	In your community today, who most significantly influences the age that a <u>boy</u> will marry?  <i>[Select all that are mentioned]</i>	The boy.....1 The boy's parents.....2 The boy's relatives.....3 The girl.....4 The girl's parents.....5 The girl's relatives.....6 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E13	In your community today, who most significantly influences the age at which a <u>girl</u> will marry?  <i>[Select all that are mentioned]</i>	The boy.....1 The boy's parents.....2 The boy's relatives.....3 The girl.....4 The girl's parents.....5 The girl's relatives.....6 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E14	In your community, is there typically an age difference between the bride and the groom?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to E15
E15	In your community, what is typically the age difference between the bride and the groom when they get married?	Bride is older than the groom by at least 1 year.....0 Groom is older than the bride by less than 5 years.....1 Groom is older than the bride by 5-10 years.....2 Groom is older than the bride by more than 10 years.....3 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E16	Who does this household ask to perform the marriage ceremony?	Government officials.....0 Religious leader.....1 Community leader.....2 Parents/relatives of those engaged.....3 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E17	What is the legal, minimum age of marriage for girls in Myanmar?	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
E18	What is the legal, minimum age of marriage for girls in Bangladesh?	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
E19	What is the legal, minimum age for marriage for boys in Myanmar?	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
E20	What is the legal, minimum age for marriage for boys in Bangladesh?	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	



SECTION 6: AVAILABLE SERVICES			
F01	Have you ever received any information or education about the effects of marriage on girls and boys below 18 years of age?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
F02	Have you ever participated in educational programs for parents or adolescents?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to F06
F03	What types of educational programs have you participated in?  [Select all that are mentioned]	Life skills training.....0 Awareness raising program.....1 Community presentation.....2 Other (specify): _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
F04	What format did you receive this information?  [Select all that are mentioned]	Pamphlet.....0 Community meeting.....1 Radio.....2 Television.....3 Social media.....4 Other (specify).....5 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
F05	Do you know which organization provided this information to you?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Please specify the name of the organization: _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
F06	Have you ever received financial support—money or resources—to send your children to school?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
F07	How many times in the past month have you attended any educational gatherings?	[ ] Times (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
F08	Have you ever been told that marriage of girls and boys before the age of 18 is harmful?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>Read to respondent:</b> We are done with the survey. Thank you for your time today.			

## Nepal Adolescent Survey Tool

SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ][ ]-[ ][ ][ ][ ]

**INDIVIDUAL SURVEY INSTRUMENT (Ages 10-19)**  
**Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings**

SECTION 1: INTERVIEW CONTEXT		
<i>[This first set of questions is to be filled out by the interviewer with the respondent's help when needed]</i>		
A01	District	
A02	Cluster Number	[ ][ ]
A03	Household Number	[ ][ ]
A04	Interviewer Number	[ ][ ]
A05	Date of interview	[ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ][ ] 2019 DD MM
A06	Interview start time	[ ][ ] [ ][ ] HH MM
A07	Gender of respondent	Female.....0 Male.....1 Other.....2
A08	Was anyone else present during this interview?  <i>[Interviews should be conducted individually with each adolescent. Please only proceed if it is not possible to obtain this level of privacy and the respondent or another individual is insistent upon being present—please circle “yes” for this question]</i>	No.....0 Yes.....1
A09	Who was present?	Child 10 years or younger.....0 Female older than 10 years.....1 Male older than 10 years.....2
A10	How long have you lived in the household you currently live in?	[ ][ ] Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)

SECTION 2: ADOLESCENT SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND RISK FACTORS		
<i>Read the following to the participant: “We'll start with some basic information about your life”</i>		
B01	How old are you today?  <i>Probe: How old did you turn at your last birthday?</i>	[ ][ ] Age (years)
B02	In what month and year were you born?	[ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ][ ] MM YYYY  (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)
B03	What is your marital status?	Single.....0 Engaged.....1 Married.....2 Widowed.....3 Divorced.....4 Separated.....5 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99  → skip to B11 → skip to B07 → skip to B05 → skip to B05 → skip to B05
B04	Whose decision was it to divorce/separate?	Mine.....0 My spouse's.....1 Mutual.....2 In-laws.....3 Parents.....4

Individual Questionnaire  
Nepal 2019

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SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ][ ]-[ ][ ][ ][ ]

		Authorities.....5 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B05a	At what age did you first marry?	[ ][ ] Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
B05b	How old was your spouse when you got married?	[ ][ ] Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
B05c	Was your spouse of the same caste or a different caste?	Same.....0 Different caste.....1 Spouse was mixed caste.....2	
B06	When you first married, when was your marriage contract registered with the state?	The marriage was not registered.....0 Immediately.....1 Within 1 year.....2 Between 1 and 2 years.....3 After 2 years.....4 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B07	Did you participate in the decision to get married?	I decided by myself.....0 I decided with my parents/other family members.....1 I did not participate.....2 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B08	Did you participate in deciding who you should marry?	I decided by myself.....0 I decided with my parents/other family members.....1 I did not participate.....2 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B10	How did you know your spouse/fiancee before getting married?	I didn't know my spouse before getting married.....0 Relative.....1 Same village.....2 Same school.....3 Met via social media.....4 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	<i>If answer 1, go to B10a, otherwise go to B11</i>
B10a	How were you related?	First cousin (son/daughter of aunt/uncle).....1 Other cousin).....2 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B11	Do you currently work outside the home?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B14
B12	What kind of work do you do?	<Match to HH D06>	
B13	How are you compensated for your work?	Not at all.....0 Cash.....1 In-Kind Goods.....2 In-Kind Services.....3 Other.....4 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B14	The next question asks about difficulties doing certain activities because of a disability. Do you have moderate to severe difficulties?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B16
B15	What kind of disability do you experience?	Seeing, even if wearing glasses.....0 Hearing, even if using a hearing aid.....1 Walking or climbing steps.....2 Remembering or concentrating.....3 Caring for themselves, such as washing all over or dressing.....4	

Individual Questionnaire  
Nepal 2019

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SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ][ ]-[ ][ ][ ][ ]

		Communicating, either expressing themselves or being understood...5 None of the above.....6 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B16	Were you born into this household?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B18
B17	Did you marry into this household?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B18	Has either of your parents passed away?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B20
B19	Which of your parents passed away?	Mother.....0 Father.....1 Both.....2 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B20	Are you currently in school?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B24
B21	Who made the decision you should not go to school?	Me.....0 My father or father-in-law.....1 My spouse.....2 My mother or mother-in-law.....3 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B22	What is the primary reason (you/they) made this decision?	Marriage.....0 Cost (school fees/transportation).....1 School damaged/destroyed.....2 Distance to school is too far.....3 Lack of safety in transit to school.....4 Language of instruction not appropriate.....5 No certificate offered for completion.....6 Lack of safety/discrimination in schools.....7 I am needed at home.....8 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B23	What other reasons (you/they) made this decision?	Marriage.....0 Cost (school fees/transportation).....1 School damaged/destroyed.....2 Distance to school is too far.....3 Lack of safety in transit to school.....4 Language of instruction not appropriate.....5 No certificate offered for completion.....6 Lack of safety/discrimination in schools.....7 I am needed at home.....8 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B24	Do you have access to the internet?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B28



SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ][ ]-[ ][ ][ ][ ]

B25	How often do you access social media?	Daily.....0 Once a week.....1 Occasionally.....2 Never.....3 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B28
B26	If married: Did you communicate with your spouse via social media prior to getting married?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B27	Is social media an important means of meeting potential spouses?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
B28	Have you ever given birth?  <i>If male → skip to C01</i>	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to C01
B29	At what age did you first give birth?	[ ][ ] Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
B30	How many live children do you have?	[ ][ ] (Number of children) (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
B31	Sometimes it happens that children die. It may be painful to talk about and I'm sorry to ask about painful memories, but it is important to get correct information. Have you given birth to a baby who was born alive but later died?  <i>If No, probe: Any baby who cried or showed signs of life, but later died?</i>	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to B31
B32	How many girls died?	[ ][ ] Total number of girls who died (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
B33	How many boys died?	[ ][ ] Total number of boys who died (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
B34	To be sure I understand correctly, how many births have you had?  <i>Check by summing answers B30, B32, and B33 to confirm B34 is the accurate number.</i>	[ ][ ] Total number of births (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
B35	During your pregnancy, from whom did you seek care?	Doctor at a hospital.....0 Doctor at a community health center.....1 Private doctor.....2 Nurse.....3 Midwife.....4 Traditional Birth Attendant.....5 None of the Above.....6 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	

## SECTION 3: HOUSEHOLD OF ORIGIN CHARACTERISTICS

**Read the following to the participant:** "Next I'd like to ask you more about the household you grew up in. This might be different from where you are living now."

C01	When you were growing up, how many people in your household of origin were under the age of 18?	[ ][ ] People (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
C02	What is the highest level of school that your father, or male head of <u>your household of origin</u> attended?	None.....0 Primary (Grade 1-5).....1 Lower Secondary (Grade 6-8).....2 Secondary (Grade 9-10).....3 Higher Secondary (Grade 11-12).....4 Above HS.....5	

SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ][ ]-[ ][ ][ ][ ]

		Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>C03</b>	What was the last occupation of your head of household of origin prior to the 2015 earthquake?	Agriculture/Farming .....0 Domestic work .....1 Teacher.....2 Health worker/ health volunteer.....3 NGO staff.....4 Shop/stall.....5 Services for hire (Cooking, Sewing, Laundry).....6 Religious leader.....7 Day laborer.....8 Military.....9 Other (specify) _____ Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>C04</b>	Is the head of your household of origin working currently?	No .....0 Yes.....1 Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to C07
<b>C05</b>	What type of work does the head of your household of origin currently do?	Agriculture/Farming .....0 Domestic work .....1 Teacher.....2 Health worker/ health volunteer.....3 NGO staff.....4 Shop/stall.....5 Services for hire (Cooking, Sewing, Laundry).....6 Religious leader.....7 Day laborer.....8 Military.....9 Other (specify) _____ Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>C06</b>	Was there a female head of household consistently present in your household of origin?	No .....0 Yes.....1 Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>C07</b>	What is the highest level and grade or year of school that your mother, or female head of your household of origin attended?	None.....0 Primary (Grade 1-5).....1 Lower Secondary (Grade 6-8).....2 Secondary (Grade 9-10) .....3 Higher Secondary (Grade 11-12).....4 Above HS.....5 Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	
<b>C08</b>	Is your mother/female head of household from your household of origin working currently?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	→ skip to C11
<b>C09</b>	What does your mother/female head of household currently do?	Agriculture/Farming .....0 Domestic work .....1 Teacher.....2 Health worker/ health volunteer.....3 NGO staff.....4 Shop/stall.....5 Services for hire (Cooking, Sewing, Laundry).....6 Religious leader.....7 Day laborer.....8 Military.....9 Other (specify) _____ Don't know .....88 Refused response.....99	

SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ]-[ ]-[ ]-[ ]

<b>C10</b>	How many times did your household of origin move within the past 12 months?	[ ] [ ]	Times (fill 00 if never moved; fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
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SECTION 4: MARRIAGE PERCEPTIONS							
<b>Read the following to the participant:</b> "Now, I am going to read you some statements about marriage. To respond to each statement, I would like you to please indicate if you 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree' with each statement. If you are confused at any point, please let me know."							
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know	Refused response
<b>D01</b>	Marriage is important for maintaining family honor and reputation.	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D02</b>	The age at which I marry, is a decision that my parents or relatives should make for me.	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D03</b>	Girls should complete school before they marry.	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D04</b>	Boys should complete school before they marry.	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D05</b>	Marriage would help me to overcome some of the challenges I face.	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D06</b>	Boys should not attend school once they are married.	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D07</b>	Girls should not attend school once they are married.	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D08</b>	Social media causes adolescents to elope	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D09</b>	Marriage provides comfort and security after experiencing a disaster or a crisis	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D10</b>	Getting married helps my family get more resources (food, aid, money)	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D11</b>	Getting married helps my family by having children/producing heirs/continuing the family legacy	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D12</b>	<b>IF PARTICIPANT IS MARRIED:</b> "I was prepared to become a wife/husband at the time I married."  <b>IF PARTICIPANT IS UNMARRIED:</b> "I feel prepared to become a wife/husband."	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D13</b>	<b>IF PARTICIPANT IS MARRIED:</b> "I was able to make more decisions about my life after I married"  <b>IF PARTICIPANT IS UNMARRIED:</b> "I will be able to make more decisions about my life when I become married."	1	2	3	4	88	99
<b>D14</b>	At what age do you think people in your community should marry?	<b>FEMALES</b>			<b>MALES</b>		
		[ ] [ ] Age (years) (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)			[ ] [ ] Age (years) (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)		
<b>D15</b>	In your community, what primarily influences decisions about the age people become married?	Religion.....0 Family honor.....1 Family tradition.....2 Money and/or resources.....3 War and/or conflict.....4 Natural disaster.....5 Displacement.....6 Security.....7 Citizenship.....8 Dowry.....9 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99					

SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ][ ]-[ ][ ][ ][ ]

D16	What else influences decisions about the age people become married?  <i>[Select all that are mentioed]</i>	Religion.....0 Family honor.....1 Family tradition.....2 Money and/or resources.....3 War and/or conflict.....4 Natural disaster.....5 Displacement.....6 Security.....7 Citizenship.....8 Dowry.....9 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D17	Is this the same factor that influenced decisions about the age people became married prior to the 2015 earthquakes?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→skip to D19
D18	In your community, what primarily influenced decisions about the age people become married, prior to the 2015 earthquakes?	Religion.....0 Family honor.....1 Family tradition.....2 Money and/or resources.....3 War and/or conflict.....4 Natural disaster.....5 Displacement.....6 Security.....7 Citizenship.....8 Dowry.....9 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D19	In your community today, who most significantly influences the age at which a <u>boy</u> will marry?  <i>[Choose all that apply]</i>	The boy.....0 The boy's parents.....1 The boy's relatives.....2 The girl.....3 The girl's parents.....4 The girl's relatives.....5 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D20	In your community today, who most significantly influences the age at which a <u>girl</u> will marry?  <i>[Choose all that apply]</i>	The boy.....0 The boy's parents.....1 The boy's relatives.....2 The girl.....3 The girl's parents.....4 The girl's relatives.....5 Other (specify) _____ Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D21	In your community, is there typically an age difference between the bride and the groom?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	→skip to D23
D22	In your community, what is typically the age difference between the bride and the groom when they get married?	Bride is older than groom by at least 1 year.....0 Groom is older than the bride by fewer than 5 years.....1 Groom is older than the bride by 5-10 years.....2 Groom is older than the bride by more than 10 years.....3 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
D23	What is the legal, minimum age of marriage for girls?	[ ][ ] Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
D24	What is the legal, minimum age for marriage for boys?	[ ][ ] Years (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	



SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ]-[ ]-[ ]-[ ]

SECTION 5: BARRIERS TO PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT			
<b>Read the following to the participant:</b> "I'd like to ask you some questions about activities outside of the home."			
E01	Who <b>primarily</b> decides what activities are appropriate for you to do outside of the home?	I do.....0 I do in collaboration with another family member .....1 My spouse does.....2 My Mother/ female head of household.....3 My Father/ male head of household.....4 Other male relative(s).....5 Other female relative(s).....6 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E02	What activities are important for you to participate in? <b>[Read options aloud to participant and circle all that are mentioned]</b>	Educational activities.....0 Job training/apprenticeship.....1 Psychosocial support.....2 Life skills training.....3 Peer programs (inc. adolescent clubs) .....4 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E03	How much free time do you have each day? We would like to know the number of hours during which you are not in school, working, or doing domestic work.	[ ] Hours (fill 88 if don't know; fill 99 if refused response)	
E04	During what time of day does this free time occur?	Morning.....0 Afternoon.....1 Evening.....2 Varies.....3 Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	
E05	When programs are established in this community, for adolescents like yourself, what is the greatest challenge you face in attending? <b>[Circle all that are mentioned]</b>	I am not interested.....0 Mother/ female head of household is not comfortable.....1 Father/ male head of household is not comfortable.....2 I have other responsibilities.....3 School.....4 Programs are too far away.....5 Language.....6 Other (specify)..... Don't know.....88 Refused response.....99	

SECTION 6: HEALTH AND SERVICE KNOWLEDGE						
<b>Read the following to the participant:</b> "Now, I am going to read you eight statements about health. To respond to each statement, I would like you to please indicate if you agree or disagree with each statement by responding "yes" or "no". If you are confused at any point, please let me know."						
		No (Disagree)	Yes (Agree)	Don't know	Refused response	
F01	"I feel comfortable with the changes that occur in my body as I shift from being a child to an adult."	0	1	88	99	
F02	"I have received information about how to become pregnant."	0	1	88	99	
F03	"I know how to keep my/ my wife's body healthy when I am/ she is pregnant."	0	1	88	99	
F04	"I am aware of danger signs during pregnancy, which would require me/ my wife to go to hospital."	0	1	88	99	
F05	"It can be harmful to a woman's body to have children when she is too young."	0	1	88	99	
F06	"It can be harmful to a woman's body to give birth to children too close together."	0	1	88	99	
F07	"There are ways to prevent or delay pregnancy."	0	1	88	99	
F08	"I have someone I trust, who I can get information about my health from."	0	1	88	99	

Individual Questionnaire  
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SURVEY ID NUMBER: [ ]-[ ]-[ ]-[ ]

<b>F09</b>	Have you ever been to the health clinic in this area?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know......88 Refused response......99	→ skip to G01
<b>F10</b>	Did you feel comfortable with the services you received at the health clinic in this area?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know......88 Refused response......99	→ skip to G01
<b>F11</b>	Why were you not comfortable with the services you received at the health clinic?  <i>[Circle all that are mentioned]</i>	Providers were not respectful.....0 Did not feel safe.....1 Long wait times.....2 Services provided are ineffective.....3 Services are too expensive.....4 Unsanitary/poor physical environment.....5 Clinic is too far.....6 Felt shame.....7 Felt fear.....8 Other (specify)..... Don't know......88 Refused response......99	

SECTION 7: SERVICES			
<b>G01</b>	Have you received any information or education about the effects of being married before age 18?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know......88 Refused response......99	→ skip to G03
<b>G02</b>	What format did you receive this information?  <i>[Circle all that are mentioned]</i>	Pamphlet.....0 Community meeting.....1 Radio.....2 Television.....3 Social media.....4 Other (specify)..... Don't know......88 Refused response......99	
<b>G03</b>	Have you ever participated in educational programs for adolescents outside of school?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know......88 Refused response......99	→ skip to G06
<b>G04</b>	What types of programs have you participated in?  <i>[Circle all that are mentioned]</i>	Education.....0 Job training/apprenticeship.....1 Psychosocial.....2 Life skills.....3 Peer programs (inc. adolescent clubs).....4 Other (specify)..... Don't know......88 Refused response......99	
<b>G05</b>	Have you benefited from participating in these programs?	No.....0 A little.....1 A lot.....2 Don't know......88 Refused response......99	
<b>G06</b>	Have you ever received financial support—money or supplies—to attend school?	No.....0 Yes.....1	
<b>G07</b>	Have you ever been told that marriage of children before the legal, minimum age is harmful?	No.....0 Yes.....1 Don't know......88 Refused response......99	
<b>Read the following to the participant:</b> We are done with the survey. Thank you for your time today.			

## Appendix Two: Qualitative Interview Guides

### Bangladesh IDI guide for married adolescents

#### In-Depth Interview Guide *Married Adolescents*

**Complete interview details:**

Date (dd/mm/yyyy):      |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|

Start time      |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|                      End time      |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|

Camp:            |\_\_|\_\_|

Interview #:      \_\_\_\_\_

Audio file #:     \_\_\_\_\_

Interview venue:                      \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of notetaker:                      \_\_\_\_\_

Name of transcriber: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of transcription: |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|

**READ ALOUD:**

Thank you again for agreeing to talk with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your thoughts and feelings about marriage, and how your experiences and practices related to marriage have changed after coming to Bangladesh. I encourage you to speak honestly and openly with me about these issues. I know that some of these topics can be sensitive and we can stop anytime if you need to take a break, or we can change topics if things are too difficult to speak about. Our conversation will take about an hour and will be audio recorded so that we can make sure we understand everything that you share with us today. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Topic 1: Introduction

1. I know that you already shared some information about yourself during the quantitative interview, but I'd like to start by getting to know you a little better. Please start by telling me what an average day is like for you as a married girl/boy living here.
  - A lot of people in this region have had their daily lives affected by displacement. Could you tell me how experiencing conflict has affected any of these things you do every day?

*[NOTE: Give the respondent the opportunity to talk briefly about their life. Let them know that you'll come back to some of these issues later in the interview. This is a chance to build rapport and let the conversation get started.]*

### Topic 2: Marriage eligibility

These next questions are about marriage. First, I'd like to ask you about marriage in general:

2. What is the perception in your community of when a girl is ready to get married? And a boy?  
*Probe:*
  - Age, Physical features, Biological considerations
  - Family
  - Religious considerations, Culture, Traditions, Origin
  - Household skills
3. Around what age do most girls in your community get married? Boys?
  - How is this the same or different from before you came to Bangladesh?

### Topic 3: Decision-making

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about decisions regarding your marriage.

4. How old were you when you got married? Did you feel ready to get married at that age?
  - Why did you feel ready/not ready?
5. Who was involved in making that decision that you would get married? Who was involved in deciding who you would marry?
6. What considerations were taken into account when deciding you should get married?  
*Probe:*
  - How has the removal of legal controls (and their enforcement) changed practices?
  - How does getting aid factor into marriage decision making?
  - How has the Bangladeshi community around the camps affected marriage practices?
  - How does your refugee/FDMN status affect marriage decision making?

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v2 20 April 2019



- How do concerns about security affect marriage decision making?
  - How does the experience of violence or rape affect marriage decision making?
  - How does pregnancy affect marriage practices?
  - What role do economics play in marriage decision making?
  - How have religious practices changed here in the camp and how has that affected marriage?
7. What advantages come from being married? What are the disadvantages?
8. What characteristics were considered important when choosing your husband/wife?  
*Probe: Nationality, age, marriage status, SES*
9. Describe the process of getting married here in the camp. How is this different from how marriages occur in Rakhine State? What do these differences mean?

#### Topic 4: Marriage Experience

Now I'd like to ask you a bit about married life.

10. How did your life change after you got married?
- How did your responsibilities in the family or in the community change?
  - How did your relationship with your family change?
  - Did you move? If so, when did that occur in relation to your marriage?
11. What are the roles you feel you have to fulfill as a wife/husband?
- How are these different from the activities of your peers who are not married?  
*Probe: Education, employment, social status*
  - How has camp life affected your role as a wife/husband?
12. In some cases, married couples fight or show anger toward each other. Sometimes this includes physical harm. Do you see this happening among your peers who are married?
- What is the community perception about violence between spouses?
  - Have you had any negative sexual experiences with your husband?
  - How has the amount that married couples show violence toward each other changed since you came to Bangladesh?
  - Is violence common between other people in the household? How has this changed since coming to Bangladesh?
13. If you wanted to leave your marriage, what could you do?
- Is it different for men and women?
  - What is the process for ending a marriage in this community?
  - Does it happen?
  - How is this different from options in Rakhine state?
  - What would happen to you if your marriage ended?

#### Topic 5: Childbearing

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These next questions are about pregnancy and children.

14. Do you have any children? How old were you when you/your wife had your first child?
  - At what age do girls in your community generally start having children?
15. What do you think is necessary for a girl to do before she gets pregnant? What makes someone prepared to have children?
16. Tell us about your experience with your/your wife's pregnancy?  
Probe: What about it was easy? What was difficult?
17. Did you/she seek medical care for your/her pregnancy and delivery? If so, where did you/she seek this medical care?
  - a. How did you feel about the care you/she received?

Topic 5: Access to services
-----------------------------

18. What services currently exist in this community for girls/boys your age?  
*Probe:* Health services, GBV, education, adolescent clubs
  - Can you use the same services as single girls/boys?
  - Which of these services do you use?
  - Which would you like to use?
  - What benefits do you get from these services? How do they help you?
  - What problems do they cause? What problems do they fail to address?
  - What helps you access services or prevents you from accessing them?
  - How has your use of them changed after getting married?
19. What other services do you think would be important for married girls/boys your age?

Topic 6: Closing
------------------

20. Before we finish today, is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a married adolescent girl/boy living in this area?

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me. We are very grateful for your participation.

## Nepal KII guide for community leaders

### CMHS, Nepal Key Informant Interview Guide *Community Leaders*

#### **Complete interview details:**

Date (dd/mm/yyyy):     |\_|\_|:|\_|\_|:|\_|\_|\_|\_|

Start time   |\_|\_|:|\_|\_|                      End time   |\_|\_|:|\_|\_|

Interview #: \_\_\_\_\_

Audio file #: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview venue: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of notetaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of transcriber: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of transcription:   |\_|\_|:|\_|\_|:|\_|\_|\_|\_|

#### **READ ALOUD:**

Thank you again for agreeing to talk with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your perspective on marriage in this community, and how your experiences and practices related to marriage have changed since the 2015 earthquakes. I encourage you to speak honestly and openly with me about these issues. Our conversation will take about an hour and will be audio recorded so that we can make sure we understand everything that you share with us today. Do you have any questions before we begin?

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### Topic 1: Introduction

1. Please describe your role in the community.
2. We are interested in learning about marriage practices in communities affected by the 2015 earthquakes. To begin, can you explain norms and customs around marriage in your community?
  - How do adolescents learn about relationships and how do they meet their prospective spouses?
  - Who decides whether an adolescent is ready to get married?
  - What factors are considered before an adolescent is deemed ready for marriage?
  - At what age do most people get married in this community?
  - Who facilitates the introduction between a potential wife and husband?
  - What are views around dowry and/or bride price in this community?
  - How long does the marriage process typically take?
  - Are there often kin relationships between spouses?
  - What is the role of the internet and social media?
3. How have marriage practices changed since the 2015 earthquakes?
  - How has age at marriage been impacted?
  - How well do those getting married know each other before the marriage?
  - How has facilitation of the introduction between potential spouses changed?
  - How did the provision of aid and services following the earthquakes factor into marriage decision making?
  - How has displacement following the earthquakes affected marriage practices?
  - How do concerns about security affect marriage decision making?
  - How does the experience of violence or rape affect marriage decision making?
  - How does pregnancy affect marriage practices?
  - What role do economics play in marriage decision making?

### Topic 2: Drivers and consequences of child marriage

4. We are trying to understand the drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings, and how humanitarian crises affect existing reasons for marrying children early. Can you tell us reasons why families affected by the 2015 earthquakes may be inclined to marry their children at an early age?
  - What are economic advantages of marrying early?
  - What are some social advantages (social status, education, social life/friends)?
  - What are health-related advantages?
  - Does marriage offer protection? How so?
  - Does marriage offer comfort
5. How has the earthquake affected youths' own decisions to marry?
  - How has the prevalence of self-initiated marriages changed?
  - How has the prevalence of elopement changed?

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6. In your experience, who would you consider are the primary decision-makers in this process?
  - What role do the bride and groom play in marriage decisions?
  - What role do parents play in this decision? Grandparents?
  - What role do other members of the community play in this decision?
  - How are these decisions made?
  
7. In your experience, what are some of the challenges faced by children who are married at a young age?
  - Is marriage registration a challenge for those who marry early? How so?
  - Do children who marry at a young age face problems accessing health services?
  - Are young married couples more likely to experience violence in their relationship?
  
8. How do families cope with these challenges?
  
9. What options does an adolescent have if they do not feel ready to get married, or want to delay their marriage?
  
10. If someone wanted to leave their marriage, what could they do?
  - Is it different for men and women?
  - What is the process for ending a marriage in this community?
  - Does it happen?
  - What would happen to someone if their marriage ended?
  - What happens when the authorities break up a marriage?
  
11. How have changes in marriage laws affected marriage practices?

Topic 3: Closing
------------------

12. Before we finish today, is there anything else you would like to share about marriage in this community?

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences. We are very grateful for your participation.

## Nepal FGD guide for service providers

**CMHS, Nepal**  
**Focus Group Discussion Guide**  
*Service Providers*

**Complete interview details:**

Date (dd/mm/yyyy):      |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|

Start time    |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|                      End time    |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|

Interview #: \_\_\_\_\_

Audio file #: \_\_\_\_\_

# of Participants:                      \_\_\_\_\_

Group description:                      \_\_\_\_\_

Interview venue:                      \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of notetaker:                      \_\_\_\_\_

Name of transcriber: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of transcription: |\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|:|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|\_\_|

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## Introduction

Welcome to our group discussion. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be moderating today's session. Joining me today is \_\_\_\_\_, who will be taking notes. This is an open discussion, and we want each person to participate. The goal is to have everyone contribute to the discussion. We encourage you to express your thoughts and opinions freely. I might interrupt at points during the discussion to make sure we have enough time to cover all topics. If you don't understand a question, please let us know. We are here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. I would like to use a recording device to record our discussion because the note taker will not be able to write down all that you say. We also ask that everyone speak up so that the recording can pick up your voice. You will not be identified by name in any of the notes from this session. When we transcribe the audio recording, any names on the recording will not be written down.

Here are a few ground rules before we start:

- First, please turn all cell phones to silent.
- Please speak clearly so that our tape recorder can pick up your voice.
- Please speak one at a time.
- Please do not have side conversations
- Please give each other a chance to speak
- There are no right or wrong answers, and we will have different points of view. We encourage you to talk to each other, to add thoughts to others' comments, and to share reactions or disagreements with respect.
- And we ask that you please respect the privacy of everyone here and do not share the content of this discussion outside this room

## Topic 1: Drivers of child marriage

1. What are the main reasons why people in this community choose to marry their children at an early age?
2. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to marrying at an early age?
3. What are the main reasons why people in your community choose to marry their children at an early age?
4. What options does an adolescent have if they do not feel ready to get married, or want to delay their marriage?
5. What impact has the earthquake had on marriage practices in your community?

## Topic 2: Marriage Experience

6. How do children's' lives change after marriage?
  - How do responsibilities in the family or in the community change?
  - How do relationships with their family change?
  - How will decision-making around their life change?
  - Where do they live?

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7. In some cases, married couples fight or show anger toward each other. Sometimes this includes physical harm. Do you see this happening among young married couples in this community?
  - What is the community perception about violence between spouses?
  - How are conflicts/disputes resolved?
  - How has the amount that married couples show violence toward each other changed since you came to Bangladesh?
  - Is violence common between other people in the household? How has this changed since coming to Bangladesh?
  
8. If a child wanted to leave their marriage, what could they do?
  - Is it different for girls and for boys?
  - What is the process for ending a marriage in this community?
  - Does it happen?
  - What would happen to the child if their marriage ended?

Topic 3: Interventions/programs
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9. What services exist for children and adolescents in this community?
  - What barriers exist to accessing these services?
  
10. What programs or interventions exist in this community to prevent or mitigate the impact of child marriage?
  - How long have they been implemented?
  - Who do these interventions or programs target?
  - What benefits result from this programming?
  - What unintended consequences do they have?
  - How do you measure the degree to which they have been successful?
  - To what extent do they address the drivers of child marriage?
  - In your opinion, how well have they been implemented?
  - How did the earthquake affect access to these services?
  - What other services were available following the earthquake?
  
11. How does being a married child affect access to child/adolescent programming?
  - Can married adolescents use the same services as single girls and boys? Do they?
  - Are married adolescents treated differently than single adolescents?
  - What about youth who are pregnant/parents?
  - Does access vary by gender?
  - Which services is it easier for married adolescents to access?
  - How do service providers treat them and how does it differ from non-married children?
  
12. What other services do you think would be important for married girls/boys?

Closing
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Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences. We are very grateful for your participation.

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# end child marriage

**A voice. A chance. A future.**

