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# CHILD MARRIAGE AND OTHER HARMFUL PRACTICES

A Desk Review of Evidence from South Asia





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**Developed by**

Clara Rodríguez Ribas for UNICEF ROSA and UNFPA APRO

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BANGLADESH: Dewanganj village

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South Asia is home to  
285 million child brides.  
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Global Programme to Accelerate  
Action to End Child Marriage



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child and forced marriage, together with female genital mutilation, polygamy and crimes committed in the name of so-called honour, have been identified by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as some of the most pervasive forms of harmful practices perpetrated on and against women and girls. These and other forms of harmful practices have negative consequences on the physical and psychological health and social and political rights of affected girls and their communities.

South Asia is home to 285 million child brides. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are working with partners across countries under the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. The objectives are to enhance investments in and support for married and unmarried girls and provide evidence for the benefits of such investments; engage key actors – including young people as agents of change – in catalysing shifts towards positive gender norms; increase political support, resources, positive policies and frameworks; and improve the data and evidence base. Through the implementation of initiatives under this programme in South Asia, questions arose about the interconnected nature of child marriage and other harmful practices present in the region. Were these programmes, in seeking to address the drivers of child marriage, having an impact on the persistence/existence of other harmful practices?

This study acknowledges that child marriage takes place in various forms and that these variations in child marriage practices are also linked to other harmful practices. This desk review collects data found through extensive searches of peer-reviewed and grey literature. It reveals whether or not there are established connections between specific forms of child marriage practised in South Asia and other harmful practices. It also describes

evidence of the impact that programmes seeking to address child marriage may be having upon other practices, such as dowries. By identifying these linkages – as well as the gaps in knowledge about the relationship between harmful practices and their drivers – it is hoped that programmes can be better informed about the potential impact of their interventions, and can reflect on whether these are desired effects or whether new considerations should be taken into account when designing them.

The review found interesting qualitative evidence on the relationship between polygamy and child marriage in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan. When grooms were married as young boys, grievances and desires to exercise their own will seem to be playing an important role in their decisions to take second or third wives. Moreover, there are strong correlations between the incidence of child marriage and the prevalence of polygamy, which merit further exploration.

Linkages were also found between so-called “honour” crimes and child marriage in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. One pathway revealed by research is the use of child marriage as a resolution to disputes – which may arise as a result of debt or criminal acts – whereby young girls are forcefully married into a family to pay off an honour crime. There are also extensive reports about young couples who were murdered after eloping, when planning to get married or when suspected of having illicit relationships, with families and communities often committing these crimes, justifying it as a need to restore their honour. The final pathway identified by research begins with an early marriage and, as a result of young girls' refusal to comply with the arrangement or discontent on the part of the groom and/or his family with the value of the dowry paid or other marriage-related issues, the girl falls victim to a so-called “honour” crime and may be assassinated or tortured or have acid thrown on her. Some of

these crimes fall within the scope of intimate partner violence (IPV), for which there is extensive evidence showing a higher incidence among women who were married as children than among other women. Studies have also found qualitative evidence of linkages between boys being forced to marry at a young age and them exercising IPV within their marriages. The evidence, however, varies across cultural settings, with some studies finding a lower incidence of IPV within watta satta exchange marriages in Pakistan than in other marriage practices in Pakistan, which points to the need for further localized research to understand these relationships.

The evidence reviewed also reveals important linkages between child marriage and dowry practices. The cultural aspects of these practices, namely dowry price variation according to a girl's age and the value placed on education and virginity, are closely linked with decisions made about whether to marry a girl at a young age or not. Cultural myths indicate that the longer a girl remains unmarried, the higher the risk of her not remaining pure and virgin and the longer she will spend gaining an education or knowledge. As a result of this construal, younger girls are deemed more pure and easier to control and socialize into new families; therefore, the dowry price demanded in child marriages is lower the younger the girl is, generating an incentive that is increased among poor and marginalized groups. There is also some evidence from Nepal that points towards elopements as a strategy to avoid the payment of a dowry and the financial burden attached to marriage celebrations, as well as a mechanism for young boys and girls seeking to escape household poverty, abuse and violence. The specific child marriage practice of baad in Afghanistan – namely when girls are exchanged between families and the payment of a bride price is omitted – indicates that dowries and bride prices play a role as drivers of child marriage.

Other assessments also point out that, by making child marriage illegal and extending girls' education, dowry prices are increasing, as girls can be married at only a later age now, and call for a consideration of these consequences when designing programmes. Rather than providing cash incentives for keeping girls at school, some studies argue that programmes that incorporate skills-building interventions seem to be more effective in delaying marriage and reducing or eliminating dowry payments than those focused on school retention alone.

Son preference, daughter aversion, female infanticide and the resulting imbalance in sex ratio have also been found to be linked to the practice of child marriage. Studies focusing on the motivations behind son preference find that the cultural practice of girls moving away from their parents' home and into a new family, coupled with dowry demands and other marriage costs, are important drivers of the desire to have sons rather than daughters, as sons will not only stay close to parents but also bring home human capital in the form of their bride. Another group of studies focus on the emerging demand for brides in some parts of India, which acts as a driver for the migration or trafficking of girls and women. As men are unable to find brides in their communities, including as a result of sex selection in favour of sons, traditional customs of marriage within ethnic groups or castes are being waived and brides are being sought in distant regions. Families from poor and rural communities find that "sending their daughters away" is a positive strategy that allows them to save on marriage costs. Scholars also argue that, even in cases in which dowries are being eliminated through new forms of marriage, this is not translating into more decision-making power and autonomy for women and girls; instead, this is opening up a space for trafficking under the guise of marriage.

A link between certain menstruation practices and taboos practised in South Asia and child marriage has also been established, albeit a little more loosely than the links with the practices described above. Menarche – the onset of menstruation – is tied to norms around a girl's role in society – and to her purity and honour. Parental fears about sexual abuse or "immoral" behaviour inform their decisions about marrying girls young. Menarche has also been linked by many communities in South Asia to the readiness of a girl to be married – even if girls continue to be kept uninformed about their sexual and reproductive health at this age because of taboos surrounding adolescent sexuality. The sociocultural construct of a girl's value and role is one of the main drivers behind both menstruation practices and child marriage, and further research is needed to unpack it.

Caste-based discrimination is linked to several harmful practices present in India and Nepal, including child marriage. Studies have shown that the prevalence of child marriage varies according to caste, with children in lower castes being more at risk. Although child marriage is practised across income levels, children of lower caste



communities in India are at higher risk of being married underage than children in higher castes because of marginalization and discrimination. There are also strong cultural norms regulating inter-caste marriage – although there is evidence that the sex-ratio imbalance may be challenging these norms in the face of “bride shortages” among certain communities. The practice of *deuki* or *devadasi*, which has been described as a marriage to temple deities, is also a form of child marriage and is mostly practised among the lowest castes. Girls offered as deities usually end up without any financial support and are frequently forced into ritualized prostitution as a mode of survival. The practice has been defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as a form of forced labour. Evidence therefore points to caste-based discrimination being a factor influencing and affecting the risk of child marriage – although its role as a driver remains unclear.

Some scholars and organizations argue that, in certain cases, forced child marriage is a form of child labour, with numerous intersecting points identified. These include the child’s lack of decision power to enter the union and their inability to leave the marriage, and the financial transactions surrounding both of these harmful practices that commodify children. There are also studies reporting specific child labour schemes that were designed as a response to the inability of parents from poor backgrounds to pay for their daughters’ dowry. Under the *Sumangali* scheme, parents send their daughters into bonded labour for a period of time, through which they can earn enough money to pay for a “decent” marriage. Child marriage is shown by evidence not to intersect completely with child labour, but there are certain forms of child marriage that do result in child labour.

Child marriage customs have also been identified as drivers of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Studies report how traffickers convince poorer families from communities that observe dowry practices to hand over their children with promises of dowry-free marriages and girls subsequently being forced into sexual exploitation and child labour. Sexual exploitation and trafficking are shown to be linked not only to the harmful practices of child marriage and bonded labour, but also to sex selection and female infanticide. As mentioned before, reports indicate that an imbalance in the sex ratio in some regions is one reason for the trafficking of young girls for the purpose of marriage.

These relationships between harmful practices are complex and non-linear, as reflected by the broad evidence cited throughout this paper and the diversity of findings. This review presents an extensive body of research that highlights the common drivers behind several harmful practices. However, the evidence also indicates that the way harmful practices are related – and the direction of these relationships – is very context specific and in some cases remains unclear.

The multiplicity of interrelationships between the harmful practices presented in this review supports a programmatic approach that understands early marriage decision-making as a process, rather than as an end point. All of these practices play a role in the decision-making process of child marriage and its perpetuation. A more profound understanding of these relationships will better equip programmes and policies that aim to eliminate child marriage, so that the underlying norms that perpetuate this practice can be effectively tackled. This report provides a sound basis on which to plan for this much-needed research.

# INTRODUCTION

Child marriage affects millions of young women and girls globally. Approximately 21 per cent of girls and women alive today were married before their eighteenth birthday (UNICEF, 2019c). During the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from 1 in 4 (25 per cent) to approximately 1 in 5 (21 per cent). In this period, an acceleration in the progress towards ending child marriage led to the prevention of 18 million child marriages. In South Asia alone, the probability of being married as a child decreased from nearly 50 per cent a decade ago to 30 per cent today – a reduction resulting primarily from progress in India (UNICEF, 2018).

Despite this important progress, South Asia is still home to 285 million child brides – representing 44 per cent of all child brides globally. In this region, between one- and two-thirds of women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 18 in Bangladesh (59 per cent), Nepal (40 per cent) and Afghanistan (35 per cent), although the proportion is somewhat lower in India (27 per cent; UNICEF, 2019c) and Pakistan (18 per cent; UNICEF, 2019b). However, in absolute terms, the largest number of girls married as children globally can be found in India, which has an estimated 223 million child brides, including 102 million who were married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2019a).

Child marriage leads to human rights violations with profound negative consequences, restricting children's choices, changing their course in life and putting them at significant risk of abuse and violence. The need to end child marriage has been recognized in international human rights instruments and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, which call for the elimination of all harmful practices including child, early and forced marriage by 2030 (target 5.3). To meet this target, global progress would need to be 12 times faster than the rate observed over the past

decade (UNICEF, 2018). This means progress needs to accelerate quickly and, therefore, the dynamics that come into play in the perpetuation of child marriage practices urgently need to be better understood.

Child and forced marriage, together with female genital mutilation, polygamy and crimes committed in the name of so-called honour, have been identified by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as some of the most pervasive forms of harmful practices perpetrated on and against women and girls. These and all forms of harmful practices are deeply rooted in social attitudes that undermine the value of women and girls based on stereotyped roles (CEDAW and CRC, 2014).

While child marriage predominantly affects girls, boys are also affected globally. In 2019, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that 115 million men in the world were married during their childhood (UNICEF, 2019c). Cultural practices lead parents to expect sons to provide financial care for the family – they add to family income and assets through their marriage and work and continue the family lineage by bringing a wife and children into their home. Sons may also perform important religious roles and defend the family honour, while girls need to be protected and defended, drain the family wealth through dowries and are ultimately a burden on their households (ICRW, 2006). As the evidence reviewed in this study illustrates, the pressures on boys to fulfil these roles are also linked to harmful practices, which in turn perpetuate child marriage.

Harmful practices such as child marriage have negative consequences on the physical and psychological health and social and political rights of affected girls and their communities. Child marriage exposes girls to numerous health risks. By being expected to be sexually active and bear

children before their body has fully matured, they are at a high risk of uterine prolapse, obstetric fistula and other maternal morbidities. These are compounded by young brides' limited access to, and use of, contraception and reproductive health services and information (IPPF et al., 2006). Studies have also shown that infants whose mothers have not reached the age of 18 have a 35 to 55 per cent higher risk of being pre-term or underweight than older mothers' infants (Perczynska and Coyle, n.d.). Girls' education is commonly interrupted when they are married early, placing them at an even greater disadvantage (IPPF et al., 2006).

The consequences of harmful practices such as child marriage may be felt throughout girls' lives, as well as by their communities and society as a whole (CEDAW and CRC, 2014). Research on the drivers of child marriage and other harmful practices consistently finds that gender norms and prescriptions are at the source. Whether drawn from social customs or driven by poverty, the fact that girls and women have an inferior position in society is a primary cause. "Patriarchal control of and concerns with puberty, chastity, family honour, fertility, boy preference, arranged marriage and caste endogamy", all of which are recognized forms of harmful practices, "are at the root of many social customs and beliefs" (Jha et al., 2016).

The hypothesis driving this study is that, given these commonalities across harmful practices, by addressing the drivers of a specific practice, others may be affected too. More broadly, as social structures and power relations are modified, as information on the negative consequences of these practices becomes more readily available and as young people have greater agency, the

practice of child marriage, child labour, gender-biased sex selection, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices may change as well. How these changes occur, and whether they result in an increase or decrease in incidence or in isolated cases of resistance to their occurrence, remains to be fully understood.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (2015-2018) aims to enhance investments in and support for married and unmarried girls and provide evidence for the benefits of such investments; engage key actors - including young people as agents of change - in catalysing shifts towards positive gender norms; increase political support, resources, positive policies and frameworks; and improve the data and evidence base.

During the implementation of this programme in the South Asia region, where many harmful practices persist, understanding better the relationship between child marriage and other harmful practices may ensure quality programme design. Indeed, research on harmful practices and child marriage has sought to understand the drivers perpetuating different harmful practices, yet there is a paucity of studies that focus exclusively on the interlinkages between the various harmful practices present in South Asian countries and on child marriage in particular. In other words, child marriage and other forms of harmful practices are predominantly explored in an isolated manner by peer-reviewed articles and grey literature,- and there is a need to collect evidence presented through this variety of sources in a harmonized manner.

# OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this review is to take stock of the evidence available from South Asia on the potential intersections between different types of child marriage – and child marriage overall – and other harmful practices. It also collects evidence on the potential effects that child marriage prevention programmes may have on other harmful practices.

It is hoped that this exercise will help to more clearly identify gaps in the knowledge and, on this basis, inform the design of future research on the impact of ending child marriage on other harmful practices.

## **This desk review seeks to respond to the following questions:**

- 1.** What are the intersections between child marriage – in its various forms – and harmful practices?
- 2.** What evidence is there on the positive – and negative – consequences (including unintended consequences) that programmes on ending child marriage may have on harmful practices?

# METHODOLOGY

To identify and collect the evidence available that responds to the research questions, a systematic search for peer-reviewed and grey literature was conducted.

## I. Search for evidence

A set of terms were used in a variety of search engines to identify relevant literature. These included “child/early marriage” (and the various types of child marriage practices listed in Annex I) and “harmful practices”, as well as the various forms of harmful practices suspected of being interlinked with child marriage.<sup>1</sup>

Peer-reviewed research was identified through searches in Scopus and PubMed. Grey literature was identified through searches in Google, including Google Scholar, and institutional websites (United Nations agencies and key non-governmental organizations including Girls not Brides, Human Rights Watch, Plan International, Population Council, Save the Children and Young Lives). Snowballing was also conducted by reviewing key references in selected publications. The searches were complemented with resources previously compiled by UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO) and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA).

The searches were conducted only in English, although literature in French and Spanish was also reviewed when identified through snowballing. All searches were conducted during August and September 2019.

## II. Study selection

Results from these searches were screened to ensure compliance with two inclusion criteria: (1) studies had to refer to evidence on the relationship between child marriage and at least one other form of harmful practice and (2) studies had to refer to evidence from at least one South Asian country.

In total, the search and snowball exercise delivered over 150 peer-reviewed studies and grey literature sources. These were screened, duplicates were removed and studies that made specific linkages between child marriage and other harmful practices were selected.

## III. Evidence synthesis

Data from the selected studies were collated in an Excel spreadsheet, alongside reference details such as authorship, title, publication year and source. Once screened, studies were categorized to facilitate the synthesis of evidence on specific harmful practices. This information can be found in Annex III.

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<sup>1</sup> The full set of search terms and phrases can be found in Annex II.

## IV. Scope of research on harmful practices

Throughout this review, focus has been placed on those harmful practices identified as such in general comment No. 18 of CEDAW and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on harmful practices: “While the nature and prevalence of the practices vary by region and culture, the most prevalent and well documented are female genital mutilation, child and/or forced marriage, polygamy, crimes committed in the name of so-called honour and dowry-related violence” (CEDAW and CRC, 2014, para. 7).

In the case of South Asia, all of these practices are widely present, with the exception of female genital mutilation. Although there is evidence about the prevalence of female genital mutilation among the Dawoodi Bohra communities in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, information is very limited and no association with child marriage was found in the evidence reviewed. The relationship between female genital mutilation and child marriage in South Asia could therefore not be explored owing to insufficient evidence.

In addition to the practices described above, given how widespread dowry practices are in the region, a specific section of this review is dedicated to presenting the evidence on the linkages between dowries, bride price and child marriage: “Many other practices having been identified as harmful practices are all strongly connected to and reinforce socially constructed gender roles and systems of patriarchal power relations ... The practices include, but are not limited to, neglect of girls (linked to the preferential care and treatment of boys), corporal punishment, stoning, violent initiation rites, widowhood practices, accusations of witchcraft, infanticide and incest” (CEDAW and CRC, 2014, para. 9).

Although many of these are practised in communities living in South Asia, evidence on their prevalence, drivers and interlinkages with other practices is hard to obtain. With the strong exception of infanticide and sex selection – on which there is abundant research given their prevalence in South Asia – not enough evidence to report on was found on the other practices referred to in the quotation above. Virginity testing, for example, is practised among selected communities in India and Afghanistan; however, information is extremely limited and could hence not be included in this study.

The relationship between child marriage and three additional practices, which are not necessarily harmful practices but are widely present in South Asia and are shown to cause harm, have been included in this study. First, evidence on certain menstrual practices and taboos is explored and these are found to be strongly connected with gender roles and patriarchal power relations, much like the other harmful practices referred to by CEDAW and CRC. Second, caste-based discrimination has also been reviewed. Given how it is interwoven into social norms and practices across India as well as in Nepal and parts of Bangladesh, substantive research has been conducted on its drivers and linkages with other harmful practices, including child marriage – which this report captures. Finally, given the high prevalence of child labour in South Asia, as well as human trafficking, this study collects evidence on the relationship between these activities and child marriage.

Searches were also conducted to identify potential relationships between child marriage and other harmful practices, but since some of them are not prevalent in South Asia, and in other cases no results emerged from our searches, no analysis could be made on these relationships. The practice of cousin marriages, for example, which is widely practised in Pakistan under arranged marriages, was found by one study from 1992 to be more prevalent among women and men who were married before the age of 16 than those who married later (Sathar and Ahmed, 1992). However, no studies exploring this relationship further were found and hence this practice could not be captured in this review. The same occurred with virginity testing, for which evidence was found on the prevalence of the practice in countries such as Afghanistan and India, but no analysis of its relationship with child marriage was identified.

Other harmful practices for which evidence was searched for but were not included in this review owing to a lack of evidence included accusations of witchcraft, bachibazi (the sexual exploitation of boys) and camel jockey children. Evidence on other harmful practices that are not as relevant for the South Asia region was also searched for to exhaust any potential useful resources, but no evidence was found, including on birth superstitions and practices, cosmetic mutilations and modifications, eyelid incisions, binding of newborns and infants, uvula cutting, milk teeth extraction, incest, corrective rape, ritual killings, forced sterilizations, stoning, corporal punishment and sharia law punishments.

## V. Limitations

Although the purpose of this review is to present the evidence covering all of South Asia, there is notably limited information on the practice of child marriage and on other harmful practices in Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. This may be a consequence of the lower prevalence of child marriage in these countries than in other South Asian countries. Consequently, the evidence presented in this paper largely discusses trends in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

Child marriage practices take various forms in South Asia. Unfortunately, most articles and reports do not indicate the child marriage type experienced by the subjects of the study. There are some exceptions and these are noted in the review. When the specific form of child marriage that subjects of the study went through is not described, it is complex to infer this information based on contextual knowledge, as practices vary within families and communities. As a result,

throughout this review – and unless specified by the research being cited – reference is made broadly to “child marriage” when describing relationships with other harmful practices, encompassing all forms of the practice present in the study area.

Another limitation is the collection of evidence on how harmful practices affect boys and men. Most of the literature available from the region predominantly explores how child marriage and other harmful practices have a detrimental effect upon women and girls, with limited information collected on boys and men. As a result, with few exceptions, this review mostly references how child marriage and harmful practices intersect with regard to their negative consequences upon women and girls.

It should also be noted that, despite the strong efforts invested in being as exhaustive as possible in the search for evidence, there may be additional relevant information that may have been inadvertently omitted from this review.

# INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN CHILD MARRIAGE AND OTHER HARMFUL PRACTICES

*Harmful practices are persistent practices and forms of behaviour that are grounded in discrimination on the basis of, among other things, sex, gender and age, in addition to multiple and/or intersecting forms of discrimination that often involve violence and cause physical and/or psychological harm or suffering.*

(CEDAW and CRC, 2014, para. 15)

A large number of studies have looked into the drivers behind child marriage practices across countries. These indicate that social and cultural norms, including those related to religion, influence the age at which a girl is expected to marry. In addition, socioeconomic status, education levels and community context also affect the likelihood of a girl being married as a child. Financial transactions around marriage – such as bride price and dowries – are also associated with a higher prevalence of child marriage (Parsons et al., 2015).

Likewise, studies focusing on the drivers of other harmful practices have observed similar findings. In the case of female genital mutilation, sociocultural norms and conventions perpetuate the practice. Poverty and financial transactions surrounding marriage are also a factor, since circumcised girls are “easier” to marry off and may obtain a higher bride price than those who are not (Karumbi and Muteshi, 2017). With regard to sex selection, studies indicate that it is driven by deeply embedded discrimination against women such as marriage systems, family formation and property inheritance laws (OHCHR et al., 2011). Another study reviewing global evidence concluded that lower education, poverty and living in rural areas were common drivers of son preference, female genital mutilation and child marriage, while religion and patriarchy were identified as mechanisms that prevented resistance to them (Glover et al., 2018).

Research indicates that there are not only common drivers behind several harmful practices, but also common “resistance” factors. For example, Glover et al. (2018) found that awareness of the negative physical health consequences and women’s autonomy were identified as facilitating resistance to son preference, female genital mutilation and child marriage.

More often than not, child marriage is the outcome of the limited choices available to girls themselves, their families and communities (IPPF et al., 2006). When girls have choices, not just regarding who they can marry but also about who and what they can be, they marry later. The persistence of harmful practices – from caste-based discrimination to so-called honour killings and from sex selection to polygamy – are reflections of restrictions to the choices available for young women and girls.

This evidence drawn from countries across the world points towards a potential ripple effect, whereby changes in one harmful practice may produce changes in another, namely through the pressure exercised by these common drivers that these practices share. There is an indication that these relationships exist in South Asian countries as well, and hence an interest in knowing whether or not changes generated by child marriage interventions are associated with changes in other harmful practices (positive or negative) in the region. By collecting evidence from South Asia and presenting



it cohesively in one report, these relationships can be better understood, gaps in the knowledge can be identified and future programmes and interventions can be better informed.

A common challenge encountered in the study of harmful practices that must be acknowledged is the complexity in isolating variables to allow for the identification of the primary cause behind changes. Sudden shocks provoked by political change, economic downturn, civil unrest, armed conflict and natural disasters, among others, may be generating a push towards child marriage. Scholars argue that, as a result of the economic hardship resulting from climate-related events and disasters such as the Nepali earthquake or floods in Pakistan, poor families are resorting to dowries and child marriage as a coping strategy (Alston et al., 2014; Tong, 2015). In Sri Lanka, higher rates of child marriage were found in the conflict-affected areas of the north (Kottegoda et al., 2008). The displacement of people may also expose them to violence and trafficking exploitation, as social protection networks and the rule of law collapse (Deane, 2010; Ghosh and Kar, 2008). This way, we observe that exogenous variables place pressure on the exercise of harmful practices. Although these aspects are the focus of some studies, most of those reviewed in this paper do not account for economic, social or climate-related variables that may be playing a role in the relationship between child marriage and harmful practices.

The following sections present an overview of the evidence available exclusively from South Asia on the direct and indirect associations between harmful practices. This review aims to provide a deeper understanding of how changes in the common drivers may affect each harmful practice differently, based on the data available.

The evidence has been organized around the predominant harmful practice the studies refer to. However, often, reports on one harmful practice make reference to others, illustrating how interconnected they are. Therefore, the evidence does not always fall squarely into one subsection and reference is made to other harmful practices where relevant. Each section starts with a description of the practice and why it is harmful, and its prevalence – with a focus on South Asia. It then describes the evidence available on its relationship with child marriage, with specific practices referred to where possible. Finally, where available, research on the relevant impact of child marriage prevention programmes is also described.

To set this study in context, the reader may find it useful to refer to Annex I, which presents an overview of the various forms through which child marriage is practised in the region.

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## I. Child marriage and polygamy

*Polygamy is contrary to the dignity of women and girls and infringes on their human rights and freedoms, including equality and protection within the family.*

(CEDAW and CRC, 2014, para. 25)

The impact of polygamy includes harm to the health of wives, which can be understood as physical, mental and social well-being, the material harm and deprivation that wives are liable to suffer and emotional and material harm to children, often with serious consequences for their welfare (CEDAW and CRC, 2014). Both women and girls find themselves in polygamous unions, with evidence showing that girls are much more likely to be married or betrothed to much older men than vice versa increasing the risk of both physical violence and violations of

their rights. Among co-wives, polygamy has been shown to cause deprivation, harm to their physical and mental health and their social welfare, and emotional and property damage to children, often with serious consequences for their well-being (Bhalla and Pearce, 2015).

Polygamy may also be a driver of poverty, particularly in rural areas, where the husband may be the sole income earner, resulting in numbers of children and wives competing for a small finite amount of resources (Von Struensee, 2005).

In these cases, a vicious cycle may be initiated, in which poverty resulting from the polygamous marriage becomes an incentive to marry daughters off at a young age (Bhalla and Pearce, 2015).

Despite its documented harmful consequences, polygamy is legal in many states across the world including in South Asia and, even where it is criminalized, these laws are not always enforced or do not act as a deterrent. In Pakistan, 3.2 per cent of the women in Punjab and 3.8 per cent of the women in Gilgit-Balochistan aged 15–49 years are in a polygynous marriage (Bureau of Statistics Punjab Planning and Development Board – Government of the Punjab, 2018; Planning and Development Department – Government of the Gilgit-Baltistan and UNICEF Pakistan, 2017). In Bangladesh and India, legal provisions regarding polygamy vary for Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Among Muslims in Bangladesh, polygamy is legal provided that certain provisions are met, such as seeking the approval of a local arbitration committee and treating wives equally. However, a Human Rights Watch study revealed that these legal requirements are rarely complied with or enforced (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Among Hindus, polygamy is illegal in India, but legal in Bangladesh. In Nepal, although polygamy is illegal, according to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey, 4 per cent of women and less than 2 per cent of men were in polygamous relationships (Ministry of Health – Nepal et al., 2017). National data sources in Nepal also indicate that the prevalence of polygamy seems to be increasing, from 480 cases reported in 2011/12 to 767 cases in 2013/14, although this could also be a reflection of a higher degree of awareness of its illegality among the population (Ghimire and Samuels, 2017). Surprisingly, data from 2013/14 show that 29 of the accused perpetrators of polygamy were boys aged 18 or younger and 11 of the victims were girls under 18 years of age, pointing towards the exercise of polygamy within child marriage (Ghimire and Samuels, 2017).

A comprehensive study on the incidence of polygyny<sup>2</sup> worldwide, drawing on data from 170 countries including from South Asia, indicates that women living where polygyny is practised are more likely to marry at a younger age than women in countries where polygyny is less frequent (McDermott and Cowden, 2018). A 2005 report by UNICEF reported that the proportion of women aged 20–24 who were married by 18 years of age and who were in polygynous unions, compared

with those in monogamous unions, decreases as the national prevalence of child marriage decreases (UNICEF, 2005). In other words, evidence indicates a correlation between the incidence of child marriage and polygamy.

Research focused on South Asia provides further evidence on the relationship between these harmful practices. Child marriage – and its practice as a forced or arranged marriage – leads to grievances among boys and men. These feelings may be expressed through violence towards their brides and families (Smith, 2009) and through the decision to take additional wives, this time of their own choosing, who are usually younger and more “modern” than those they were forced to marry initially (Ghimire and Samuels, 2014). These findings echo those found in other regions, further strengthening the evidence that links polygamy with child marriage practices (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2016).

For example, a 2009 qualitative study conducted in Afghanistan found that it was common for male respondents to describe their first marriage as forced, expressing feelings of resentment towards their families for marrying them young, and justifying their decision to take additional wives as a way to exercise their own choice (Smith, 2009). A 2014 study from Nepal found that men in polygamous marriages gave similar explanations to those in Afghanistan (Ghimire and Samuels, 2014). A baseline study and a four-year follow-up were conducted to study social norms and practices surrounding marriage and education. The authors found that, compared with the baseline, polygamous marriages seemed to be increasing. In all cases, men had arranged marriages when they were young and had chosen new, younger women as second wives. The explanation given was that the honour of the girl had to be safeguarded once it became known that the couple had fallen in love.

In Pakistan, according to Yilmaz (2011), it is customary for parents to arrange marriages for their sons at a young age, usually to a cousin, in order to keep the property within the family. When the boy reaches adulthood, he may choose to marry a second woman, this time of his own choosing (Yilmaz, 2011). This analysis echoes the results of the qualitative studies conducted in Nepal and Afghanistan. In a separate study, Lindholm (2008) found an association between the practice of polygamy among Pakhtun men in

<sup>2</sup> Several of the studies referred to in this review focus exclusively on polygyny, a specific form of polygamy – the practice of a man having more than one wife. However, reference is made to polygamy throughout the text to facilitate reading.

the Swat region of Pakistan and what he terms “the spirit of revenge”. In his analysis, he finds that a man’s decision to take a second wife is related to his desire to subdue and dominate his first wife – asserting his dominance in the relationship and household (Lindholm, 2008).

Evidence from studies in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan all point towards a relationship in which child marriage acts as a driver of polygamy. As mentioned earlier, polygamy also acts as a driver of poverty owing to the strain on household

resources. Conversely, poverty has also been identified as a driver of polygamy. Research from Bangladesh indicates parents of young girls may choose to marry them off to an elderly rich man, even if he already has other wives, as this is seen as an opportunity for a better future for them: “Poverty often is [a] fuelling factor behind child marriage, dowry and even polygamy which rolls like a vicious circle, beginning with early marriages leading to pre-mature pregnancy and large families” (Shahed et al., 2018).

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## II. Child marriage, so-called honour crimes and dowry-related violence

*Crimes committed in the name of so-called honour are acts of violence that are disproportionately, although not exclusively, committed against girls and women because family members consider that some suspected, perceived or actual behaviour will bring dishonour to the family or community.*

(CEDAW and CRC, 2014, para. 29)

So-called “honour crimes” are a form of violence in which mostly women and sometimes men are attacked based on accusations of sexual infidelity, resulting in death or disfigurement by acid attack or burning (CEDAW and CRC, 2014). The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women stated that these crimes are defined as such because the “ideal of masculinity is underpinned by a notion of ‘honour’ – of an individual man, or family, or community – and is fundamentally connected to policing female behaviour and sexuality” (Irfan, 2009). As such, honour crimes, rather than being viewed as criminal acts against women, are often endorsed by communities, as they are seen as a way through which the integrity of their norms (cultural, traditional, customary or religious) can be maintained.

Accurate statistics on the prevalence of honour-related violence are hard to obtain because of underreporting and limited information available about the motives behind the crime, but appraisals indicate the prevalence is worrying. The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan estimated that there were almost 1,100 honour killings in 2015 alone (Makisaka and Chingchit, 2017). Although victims of this practice are most often married adult females, records show that at least 170 minors were killed in the

**So-called honour crimes in Pakistan** are referred to in different ways in each province:

**Sindh:** karo kari

**Balochistan:** siyahkari

**Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:** tor tora

**Punjab:** kala kali

(Gauhar, 2014)

name of so-called honour in Pakistan in 2015 (The Nation, 2016). Other so-called honour crimes may not result in murder but have lifelong impacts on women and girls, such as throwing acid onto the body of a person with the intention of injuring or disfiguring them out of jealousy or revenge. Cases are reported in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, although there is little disaggregated data on the age of the victims and the motivations behind these attacks. One organization in Pakistan collecting data from media outlets identified over 550 cases of acid-burning crimes from 2005 to 2018; 112 victims were minors, and in 38 per cent (210) of all cases the perpetrator was the husband or an in-law (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2019). Girls who elope or refuse to comply with an arranged marriage are also

frequently reported as victims of honour crimes, including in Afghanistan (Nader and Nordland, 2017; The Observers, 2017), India (Bhalla and Pearce, 2015; Safi, 2019) and Pakistan (Ahmad, 2018; Khan, 2018).

Honour killings are justified by perpetrators as a result of various motives. These motives include caste; perceived immoral character (i.e. when the victims were considered rebellious or licentious, which sometimes extends to contamination by association, namely to children or other individuals associated with the person deemed to be acting dishonourably); and non-caste-specific illicit relationships, which usually refer to extramarital relationships. However, in many cases, the underlying reasons behind these crimes are economic in nature, rather than “honour” based. Research points out that the tradition of settling debt and disputes arising from murder, “moral” infringements or financial debt – whereby the family of a victim or those who have claim to a payment can resort to local tribal courts – generates an economic transaction and hence an incentive, whereby the local tribal leader is also entitled to a monetary share (Gauhar, 2014; The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF, 2018).

In some cases, the compensation for crimes or debt takes the form of an arranged forced marriage – frequently of underage girls. Swari/swara, vani and baad forms of marriage, in which women and girls are “traded” as peace offerings to settle a dispute upon the order of local tribal councils, are also considered honour crimes (Gauhar, 2014). Practised in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, swari/swara, vani and baad marriages are linked to blood feuds between different tribes and clans in which young girls are forcibly married to members of the enemy clan to compensate for a crime committed against a member of that clan (always by a male) and to end a feud. The girls who are involved in these practices often suffer maltreatment and abuse, living in a hostile environment where they are treated as daughters or relatives of the enemy (Rehan and Qayyum, 2017; Ventevogel et al., 2013). Here, the link between the harmful practice of crimes committed in the name of so-called honour and the custom of swari/swara, vani and baad forms of child marriage is most evident. Rehan and Qayyum’s 2016 study of over 4,000 cases in Pakistan revealed that 12 per cent of marriages were the result of blood-feud settlements (i.e. swari/swara and vani), while nearly 56 per cent were exchange marriages (watta satta) (Rehan and Qayyum, 2017). In the case of

baad, practised in Afghanistan despite being illegal, the prevalence of these exchanges has not been quantified. However, a 2007 report acknowledged the continued existence of the practice while characterizing it as “an exception – not a norm” (Centre for Policy and Human Development, 2007, as cited in Ventevogel et al., 2013).

Chesler and Bloom (2012) conducted a qualitative study on honour killings among Hindu and Muslim communities in India and Pakistan and found that across countries and communities the woman’s family was mostly responsible for conducting the killings, even in cases in which the victims were male. “This is to be expected”, they argue, “as it is women who are considered the keepers of male and family honour and responsibility to enforce society’s honour code falls on the women’s families” (Chesler and Bloom, 2012). The overwhelming majority of Hindu killings in the study were found to be caste-related, generally targeting young men and women shortly after they eloped and before they could have children.<sup>3</sup> According to the authors, across Muslim and Hindu communities in these countries, honour killings are a way to exercise control over marriage and reproduction, which in these cultures is critical to the socioeconomic status of closely knit communities, and the regulation of female behaviour is integral to this process and to maintaining honour (Chesler and Bloom, 2012).

Dowry-related violence – such as when a husband or his family considers a dowry insufficient – is also perpetrated in the name of so-called honour. In 2011, 8,618 cases of dowry-related violence were reported in India (UN-Women, 2012) and 7,079 incidents were reported in Bangladesh, with 325 of the latter resulting in death (Adams, 2015). Unfortunately, these figures are not disaggregated by age and hence it is impossible to determine how many of these victims are children and adolescents. However, numerous studies have been conducted on intimate partner violence (IPV), which encompasses a proportion of dowry-related violence when this occurs within an already sanctioned marriage. These studies shed light on the close relationship between the age at marriage and the probability of experiencing IPV. Findings from a multi-country study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2005) indicate there is a direct correlation between child marriage and domestic violence, specifying that women and girls – and especially those aged 15 to 19 years – are at higher risk of physical or sexual violence by their partners (The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> For more details on the linkages between caste-based discrimination and child marriage, see section VI, “Child marriage and caste-based discrimination”.

Scholars argue that IPV, dowry-related violence and honour killings are all a result, at least in part, of widespread gender inequality (Wodon et al., 2017). A number of studies conducted in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan support the fact that child marriage is a well-established risk factor for the incidence of IPV. In Bangladesh, dowries are often found to be the cause of a lot of domestic violence in the north-eastern region of the country (Shahed et al., 2018). Raj et al. (2010) and Speizer and Pearson (2011) found that women in India who were married as adolescents remained at an increased risk of marital violence into young adulthood. In Nepal, compared with women married aged 20 years and after, those married by the age of 15 have a three times greater chance of experiencing physical and sexual abuse (Pandey, 2016). In addition, in Pakistan, Nasrullah et al. (2014) found that, compared with adult marriage, child marriage was significantly associated with controlling behaviours and any form of spousal violence (physical or emotional), emotional violence and physical violence, including severe physical violence.

In Bangladesh, IPV is so commonly associated with dowry practices that the term “dowry death”, referring to women and girls who are murdered or driven to suicide owing to dowry demands, is now commonly used (Adams, 2015). Bangladesh has the highest prevalence worldwide of very early child marriage and a very high prevalence of IPV, and numerous studies have researched dowries as a principal driver of IPV, finding a strong relationship between them (Adams, 2015; Schuler and Islam, 2008; Yount et al., 2016). A different study from Nepal found that women with low levels of educational attainment and child brides were significantly more likely to experience IPV than their more educated counterparts or women who were not married in childhood (Atteraya et al., 2017). That study also found that IPV rates were much higher among underprivileged castes and ethnic groups, including in the Terai region, which has some of the highest rates of child marriage in the country (Atteraya et al., 2017).

Boys also suffer the consequences of cultural norms and expectations, including child marriage. A qualitative study on child marriage in India assessed the pressure boys felt in complying with parents’ expectations (Sharma et al., 2015). It found all too frequently that boys married at an early age do not have a viable and sustainable source of income to support themselves and their expanding families, creating stress and shame, which may lead to violence. In some cases, the young couple depends on one or both of their

fathers to shoulder some of their responsibilities, which may lead to further pressure for young husbands to “control” their wives and make them follow the norms of the parents (Sharma et al., 2015). This study sheds light on what the possible drivers are behind the increased incidence of IPV in child marriages. This is supported by research by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) conducted in Bangladesh, which reports that young men exposed to “male dominance” norms were more likely to justify IPV and to treat their wives accordingly (Naved et al., 2017). These findings signal the potential value of addressing honour crimes, IPV and dowry-related violence through comprehensive strategies that tackle underlying norms around masculinity.

It is important to note that the relationship between IPV and child marriage is not the same across countries and cultures in the region. A study published in 2010 looked into the relationship between IPV and the watta satta form of marriage, which accounts for more than two-thirds of marriages in Pakistan (Jacoby and Mansuri, 2010). This form of marriage, practised also in Afghanistan (where it is known as badal), entails the simultaneous marriage of siblings from one household with siblings from another household. Usually exercised as a way to avoid dowry payments or the division of inheritable property such as land, the practice is also associated with retaliation, as the brides in each marriage are expected to be treated equally (Ventevogel et al., 2013). Therefore, if a husband mistreats his wife in this arrangement, it will be expected that his brother-in-law will retaliate in kind against his sister. Through an analysis using the 2004 Pakistan Rural Household Survey, Jacoby and Mansuri found that, in fact, women in watta satta marriages have substantially and significantly lower probabilities of marital estrangement, domestic abuse and major depressive episodes than those under other marriage practices (Jacoby and Mansuri, 2010). In this way, cultural practices such as watta satta appear to act as an informal way of protecting daughters from violence. This form of exchange marriage can then be seen as a mechanism to coordinate the actions of two sets of in-laws, each of whom wishes to restrain their sons-in-law, but only has the ability to restrain their sons. With sufficient evidence pointing towards a close relationship between honour crimes, dowry-related violence and child marriage, there is a strong ground on which to build future research that explains the directions of these relationships further.

### III. Child marriage, dowry and bride price

*Marriage payments come in various forms and sizes but can be classified into two broad categories: transfers from the family of the bride to that of the groom, broadly termed as “dowry,” or from the groom’s side to the bride’s, broadly termed as “brideprice”.*

(Anderson, 2007)

A dowry is a “gift” of money or property given by the bride’s family to the husband prior to marriage. Scholars agree that the practice reflects a devaluation of women and girls, compounded by their exclusion from owning, controlling and making decisions about productive resources in the household (Srinivasan, 2005). Dowries lead to discrimination in different areas against daughters and makes them vulnerable to various forms of violence, including girls being unwanted, sex-selective abortion or abandonment and mistreatment of baby girls (Singh, 2013).

Despite being outlawed in most countries, dowry practices are widespread in South Asia, predominantly among Hindu populations in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, but also, and increasingly, among Muslim populations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India (Alston et al., 2014). Estimates indicate that financial transfers in relation to marriage in South Asia amount to six times the annual household income (Rao, 1993).

Evidence indicates that dowry practices perpetuate child marriage owing to various factors. Younger brides typically command smaller dowries, in part because they are considered easier to control, train and socialize in the ways of the marital home and are less likely to resist. This “lower price” generates

an incentive for parents to marry their daughters at an earlier age and for grooms to search for younger brides (Sharma et al., 2015). Furthermore, in communities where the practice is customary, families have less of an incentive to send girls to school, as they will not see a return for this investment once the girls get married and move to another household. As a result, several studies find that child marriage is more common among financially poor families, which may even resort to marrying girls at the same time to help reduce the family burden of high marriage ceremony expenses (Amin, 2011; Huda, 2006; ICRW, 2016; IPPF et al., 2006). However, this relationship between income and child marriage prevalence is complex, with other factors coming into play including rigid gender norms, religion, prestige and safety (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). In fact, more than 30 per cent of females in the wealthiest quintile in South Asia married before the age of 18 in 2013, showing that child marriage is not confined to poor households (UNICEF, 2014).

Economic status and the role of women and girls as income earners – or their portrayal as sources of economic strain for the household, given their inability to provide financial income or receive inheritance – is an issue that comes up often in the context of studies on child marriage and other harmful practices. Research finds that women’s increased access to paid employment influences the desire and ability of both a woman and her parents to postpone marriage. The evidence, however, is non-conclusive. A qualitative study conducted in Bangladesh, India and Nepal found that rather than a woman’s engagement in paid work, it was the nature of the work and her level of education that made early marriage less likely (Verma et al., 2013). Another study from India found delays in marriage occurring concurrently with the increased income-generating capacity of women and girls (Sharma et al., 2015).

In the case of Nepal and Bangladesh, the respect and prestige attached to dowry practices is seen as an explanation for the expansion of such

Dowry and bride price terminologies in South Asia		
	Dowry	Bride price
Afghanistan	jehez	walwar, teyana, sherbaha
India	dahej, jahez, aannpot	
Bangladesh	joutuk	pawn
Nepal	dowry	
Pakistan	jahez	mehr/wulvar/lub

practices, which were once practised only by Hindu communities but are now also found among Muslims (Karim et al., 2016). Reports indicate that the burden of dowry payments is higher for poorer families; although they usually pay a lower amount of dowry in the form of less expensive goods and lower cash amounts, it is nevertheless quite substantial relative to their income. To reduce the burden of these payments, poorer and usually lower caste families tend to marry their daughters earlier. In fact, non-marginalized castes in Nepal who practice dowry payments are found to have a lower incidence of child marriage than marginalized castes (Karim et al., 2016).

Elopement marriages have also been documented as a way of avoiding dowry payments, with cases reported in Nepal in which the parents even played a part in encouraging the children to elope to avoid the financial costs associated with weddings (Karim et al., 2016). The evidence on this relationship, however, is quite scarce. On the other hand, the threat that the potential elopement of children may pose to the honour of parents and their communities is well documented to be a driver of decisions by parents to marry their children (Ghosh, 2011). In fact, the fear of elopement is associated with the risk of delaying marriage – especially when these delays may be related to a girls' education, when she may have more contact with boys and men and be more exposed to social media (Ghimire and Samuels, 2017; Karim et al., 2016). The stigma attached to "love marriages" derives from the assumption that they are the consequence of a prior illicit sexual relationship. Although a rise in marriages through elopements – including child marriages – has been documented in India (Chowdhury, 2007; Kapila, 2011), Nepal (Ghimire and Samuels, 2014) and Bangladesh (White, 2017), there also seems to be a socially constructed exaggeration of how prevalent this practice is, which adds to parents' fears and hence strengthens its role as a driver for child marriage (Allendorf, 2013; Ghosh, 2011).

Dowry prices have also been linked to daughter aversion. Diamond-Smith et al. (2008) studied fertility trends in Tamil Nadu, India, and found that daughter aversion, fuelled primarily by the perceived economic burden of daughters owing to the proliferation of dowries, is playing a larger role in fertility decision-making than son preference. There is an ongoing debate among scholars on whether or not the marriage squeeze – described in more detail in the next section – has driven a rise in dowry prices. This has been observed in

India, Bangladesh and Nepal in the past decades; however, some scholars indicate there is no hard evidence that there has been an increase in dowry prices across South Asia (Logan and Arunachalam, 2014). Regardless, as described by the evidence cited here, dowry practices have been quite clearly associated with the commodification of girls and women, on the one hand, and have been a driver of child marriage, on the other.

A similar practice to dowry payments present in some regions of South Asia is that of "bride price", which is a payment by the groom and his family to the bride and her family. Particularly prevalent in Afghanistan and in the Gilgit-Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces of Pakistan, bride price is found to be an important source of income for the bride's family and hence becomes an incentive for marriage, particularly among poor communities (UNFPA, n.d.). As in the case of dowries, high bride prices may lead to debt, in this case for grooms and their families.

The economy of bride price, which decreases in value as the age of brides increases, has been associated with child marriage, with parents marrying off their daughters at an early age to gain more income or to offset the debt generated by a son's marriage (Solotaroff and Prabha, 2014). Another qualitative study from Afghanistan, based on interviews with 200 girls, showed that getting a high bride price was a major reason given by parents for marrying them off young (ICRW, 2016). Other economic reasons were given, including giving girls in lieu of debts (known as baad) and exchanging girls (known as badal) so that neither family had to pay the bride price. A 2009 report by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission stated that out of the 1,662 families in the study who referred to child marriages in their families, 1,494 (90 per cent) of these marriages involved girls in their families, with 55 per cent of having taken place to solve families' economic problems and 30 per cent being exchange marriages (AIHRC, 2009). Interestingly, a different study also from Afghanistan found that, despite female household members citing economic pressures as the main reason for marriage, no correlation was found between actual levels of income and debt and the prevalence of child marriage (The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF, 2018). The authors suggest that the perception of an insecure financial future or a lack of employment opportunities may be the driver of child marriage – even more so than poverty itself.

A number of evaluations and assessments of child marriage prevention programmes have pointed out that by increasing the educational attainment of girls, dowry prices may be escalating. Educated girls increase dowry value, as a better education raises the requirements for a suitable husband, which may justify the demand for a higher dowry to be paid to the groom's family (Geirbo and Imam, 2006; ICRW, 2016). Educated girls are also perceived to be "riskier" to marry, as they may be less submissive or ready to accept the norms and ways of the groom and his family (Sharma et al., 2015). Moreover, studies point out that, since dowries were banned in India, average dowry prices have risen in real terms and the practice has expanded to communities and regions where the practice was previously uncommon (Anderson, 2003). All this evidence points towards the fact that initiatives to delay marriage, including through education, may be inadvertently generating an incentive for dowry prices to increase, as girls become more educated and are older by the time they are allowed to be married by law.

Increases in dowry prices may also be an unplanned effect of female empowerment programmes. Case studies from India (Rozario, 2002) and Bangladesh (Amin, 2011) indicate that access to microcredit may have facilitated the inflation of these payments. These programmes entailed the payment of a monetary stipend in India or an in-kind transfer of cooking oil in the case of Bangladesh, provided girls stayed in school and unmarried until the age of 18. In both cases, evaluations showed that programme beneficiaries were more likely to marry during their eighteenth year than non-beneficiaries, suggesting that parents were postponing the marriage of their daughters just long enough to receive the conditional transfer. Moreover, the financial transfer was widely used to pay for dowry and marriage expenses and instead of being invested in girls' education or other needs as expected by the programme design (Amin et al., 2016a). Echoing these findings, beneficiaries of microcredit under Grameen Bank schemes in Bangladesh reported dowries as one of the most common expenditure items: "Women would make jewellery for their daughters, to be given as dowry or used as cash for dowry items or for wedding feasts" (Amin, 2011).

Further analysis of skills-building programmes in Bangladesh indicates that providing girls with additional income-generating opportunities and skills could be crucial for offsetting the increased financial burden that their delayed marriage may place on their family (ACNielsen, 2005). Cash transfer interventions are likely to be most effective when targeting groups of younger adolescent girls who have a longer period of time to be engaged with skills-building, awareness-raising and education programmes (Solotaroff and Prabha, 2014). A more recent study that evaluated the impact of three community-based skills-building programmes to delay child marriage among adolescent girls in rural Bangladesh found similarly encouraging results (Amin et al., 2016b). Participants acquired negotiation skills that allowed them to delay or cancel marriage plans by their parents, as well as to discuss marriage without dowry arrangements.

Given the close relationship between child marriage and dowry payments, evidence from programmes whose objective is to eliminate dowries may prove useful in tackling child marriage. In their study on the motivations behind giving and receiving dowries in Bangladesh, Geirbo and Imam (2006) pointed out that, instead of addressing dowries directly, advocacy efforts would benefit from targeting the causes behind the motivations for giving and receiving dowries. In this regard, livelihoods programmes have great potential, they argue: "If a girl and her parents are confident that she will be able to support herself in case of a divorce, [dowry] will lose its importance as a security measure" (Geirbo and Imam, 2006). This is supported by Amin and Bajracharya (2011), who conclude from their research that the costs of marriage are drivers of social change. Based on results from Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, they recommend that "programs to promote healthy transitions to adulthood ... [should] take into account manifestations of marriage costs and their correlates ... both in terms of understanding change that is already under way, and for designing programs to bring about change" (Amin and Bajracharya, 2011).



## IV. Child marriage, sex selection and female infanticide

*Sex selection can take place before a pregnancy is established, during pregnancy through prenatal sex detection and selective abortion, or following birth through infanticide or child neglect. Sex selection is sometimes used for family balancing purposes but far more typically occurs because of a systematic preference for boys.*

(OHCHR et al., 2011)

Sex selection in favour of boys is a symptom of pervasive social, cultural, political and economic injustices against women, and a manifest violation of women's human rights (OHCHR et al., 2011). This practice is intrinsically linked with the drivers of child marriage, including discrimination against girls and women and the persistence of gender roles that restrict girls and women to family and household roles (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2019).

It is widely known that son preference has led to an imbalanced sex ratio in several countries (Sinha, 2016). In South Asia, India is a striking example, where estimates based on data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4 2015–16) reveal that 5.3 million sex-selective abortions took place between 1980 and 2016 (Abbamonte, 2019). This has led to a phenomenon referred to as the “marriage squeeze”, whereby there are not enough potential brides for the number of grooms who wish to get married. The effect of this marriage squeeze has been the object of an ongoing debate among scholars, with diverse interpretations on how it should be measured, given the particularities of the marriage market in India, such as the age gap between brides and grooms. In this context, India's positive population growth rate translates to a large number of females available in the marriage market to marry men from older cohorts, which in turn helps in lessening the negative marriage effects of a higher sex ratio at birth. Regardless of how its impact is measured, it is commonly agreed that the sex-ratio imbalance is a driver of child marriage. In a recent study commissioned by UNFPA in India, Kaur et al. (2016) stated that the impact of the marriage squeeze on the marriage market is having diverse effects across the country in terms of the proportion of additional marriageable men per woman. More pronounced consequences are found in those areas where the sex-ratio imbalance is more severe, indicating the need for a context-specific understanding of the relationship between sex selection and child marriage (Kaur et al., 2016).

Kaur (2010) studied the impact of this marriage squeeze in India on marriage trends in neighbouring Bangladesh. She found that the demand for brides in adverse sex-ratio states in India is a pull factor when Bangladeshi parents, particularly from poor backgrounds, see the migration of their daughters as a cost-saving strategy. “Sending them away” allows them to avoid paying a dowry, save on a wedding celebration and save on other costs associated with looking after and educating girls. Kaur argues that this is fuelling the practice of child marriage, with this trend being referred to as “marriage migrants”.

In a separate paper, Kaur also theorizes that the shortage of women in India, as well as in China (where the one-child policy has led to an imbalanced sex ratio), may reinforce gender roles such as reproduction, domestic work and care work (Kaur, 2013). As more men search for potential brides, parents and communities may fear that the security of women and girls is at greater risk and hence may be inclined to return to child marriage as a form of protection. In this way, many of the gains made in the past decades for women's empowerment are at risk of being reversed.

Some studies suggest that the adverse sex ratio is helping reduce demands for dowries, as there are more men searching for brides. In a research paper from 2011, Sauttman attempted to model what would happen to the age at marriage and dowry prices if the “marriage squeeze” in India became more evident. She concluded that, considering the demographic trends, namely as the surplus of men in the marriage market becomes more evident, we could expect dowries to halt their rise and for the age gap at marriage to eventually stabilize or begin to increase again (Sauttman, 2011). Chiu et al. (2010) and Larsen and Kaur (2013) confirm this model, finding that gender imbalances in fact reduced net dowry

payments, particularly in areas where there are bride shortages. However, other studies show that, even in cases in which dowry demands are being relaxed, this is not necessarily being replaced with more autonomy for women and girls. "In fact", Jha and his colleagues warn us, "in some cases 'marriage migration' may be a form of 'marriage trafficking'" (Jha et al., 2016). More detailed evidence on the linkages between child marriage and dowry prices, as well as trafficking, is provided in sections III ("Child marriage, dowry and bride price") and VII ("Child marriage, child labour and trafficking").

As described in the introduction, child marriage prevention programmes implemented in South Asia in the past decades have helped reduce the prevalence of the practice significantly – particularly for younger girls. However, some scholars maintain that, in the absence of comprehensive approaches, piecemeal strategies may be bringing about negative consequences. Delaying marriage, and the associated reductions in fertility and average family size, may have exacerbated gender-biased sex selection (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2017). Indeed, studies have shown that the primary reason behind son preference in some communities is the fact that daughters leave the household after marriage. Sons, after all, are

an insurance against divorce and are providers of care as parents age (Chavada and Bhagyalaxmi, 2009). As the number of desired children goes down, the pressure to deliver a son becomes more urgent and sex selection may increase.

In the same line, some scholars claim that, with other aspects of marriage practices remaining unchanged (caste, kinship, descent and inheritance norms), marriage at a later age may have added to women's autonomy but has made daughters more of a burden (John et al., 2016). Suarez (2018) theorizes that, when parents strongly prefer sons, some may seek to dispose of their unwanted daughters through child-bride marriage, female infanticide or sex-selective abortion. By raising the cost of child-bride marriage relative to infanticide or abortion, the author argues, policies that raise female marriage age induce such parents to substitute this with the other disposal methods mentioned. The author finds empirical backing for this relationship in a northern state of India (Suarez, 2018). Another study conducted in India also concludes that a preference for sons could be a factor behind men marrying younger women and may also be contributing to a pattern of hypergamy, that is, women marrying socially superior men (Edlund, 1999; Gadi et al., 2018).

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## V. Child marriage, menstruation practices and taboos

*In many places around the world, a girl's first period, called menarche, is believed to be a sign that she is ready for marriage, sexual activity and childbirth.*

(UNFPA, 2019)

Certain menstruation practices and taboos risk leaving girls vulnerable to a host of abuse acts, ranging from exposure to violence and danger as a result of isolation to child marriage, sexual violence or coercion, or early pregnancy. While menstruation is one indication of biological fertility, it is frequently mistaken as a sign of girls reaching mental, emotional, psychological or physical maturity (UNFPA, 2019).

A number of taboos and social and cultural restrictions concerning menstruation persist across the world, including in the South Asia region. Menarche is tied to norms about the role of girls in society, who may suddenly see their

movement restricted either out of fear of their relationships with boys and men or because they are considered "dirty" while menstruating. In Hindu communities in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, an unmarried menstruating girl is often not permitted to go out of the house or to school for a week and, for Muslim girls, the same notion of being considered "dirty" during menstruation exists (Garg and Anand, 2015; Karim et al., 2016).

A research study by CARE (Karim et al., 2016) focusing on Nepal and Bangladesh recounts how, once they have had their first period, girls in Hindu communities of Nepal are usually not allowed to

leave the house without a male companion, even if this means it is a 5-year-old brother who is supervising the teenage girl. Girls from the Dalit caste are not permitted to move freely outside their homes or have contact with boys once they reach the age of 10, while Muslim girls are not allowed to leave their homes (Karim et al., 2016). This practice is also seen in Afghanistan, where girls also reported menstrual-related restrictions regarding food, reduced participation in sports and limited opportunities to bathe (Kirk and Sommer, 2006).

Research indicates how menstrual taboos have negative implications for adolescents' education and role in society, as well as the consequences of poor menstrual hygiene that result from these practices. Parental fears about sexual abuse and the value placed upon girls' chastity can mean that, for unmarried girls, movement is often restricted after menarche, a reality which can also interfere with schooling (Kirk and Sommer, 2006). This is compounded by cultural expectations that menstruating women and girls should remove themselves from public spaces, which has led to classes taught by female teachers being discontinued for several days at a time and to girls missing school every month during their period, as evidenced by studies from Nepal (Bista, 2004). In Afghanistan, it is estimated that 30 per cent of female students stay home on days they are menstruating (UNESCO, 2012). Not only does this disrupt the learning process, with a compounded effect on girls' education, but it may simultaneously perpetuate negative messages about what is expected of women and girls (Kirk and Sommer, 2006; Kumar and Srivastava, 2011).

In many cultures, including in South Asia, the social norms that dictate the "right time" for a girl to marry are reinforced by religious beliefs about the piety of marrying a girl before menstruation begins. Studies have also shown that the age of menarche is also a predictor of child marriage (Roest, 2016). "Piety" is linked with girls' sexual "purity" and thus marrying earlier is the primary way to control girls' sexuality. Among some ethnic groups present in Nepal, the belief that girls and their parents will go to heaven if the girls are married off before they reach puberty – or get their first period – is a strong incentive for child marriage (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Despite this link between menarche and marriageability, girls are kept uninformed of their sexual and reproductive health, as discussing menstrual practices is considered taboo: "As they are not prepared for puberty, girls are profoundly unprepared for marriage, deprived of basic education regarding their sexual and reproductive health and expected to submit to their spouses' sexual needs" (Karim et al., 2016).

A number of scholars focus on Nepal, where harmful practices associated with menstruation are prevalent (Amatya et al., 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Karim et al., 2016; Ranabhat et al., 2015). The chhaupadi custom, practised in the mid- and far-western hills of Nepal, requires girls and women to be isolated during their menstruation and after giving birth. The practice has been shown to increase the risk of reproductive tract and genital infections due to poor hygiene linked to a lack of access to clean water (Ranabhat et al., 2015). During menstruation, women are usually also forbidden from consuming dairy products, meat and other nutritious foods for fear that the women will spoil them, and therefore survive on a diet of dry foods, salt and rice. All of these consequences are compounded when isolation is imposed on postpartum women. In fact, anaemia and emaciation among women are found to be two times higher in chhaupadi-practising areas than in other areas of Nepal (Amatya et al., 2018).

Menstrual taboos and practices in South Asia reflect that women and girls are routinely discriminated against and this affects their access to education, their ability to contribute productively, their income and their representation and leadership in decision-making in the home and community (Julliard et al., 2017). Globally, if all girls had a secondary education, there would be two-thirds fewer child marriages (UNESCO, 2012), yet data show that more than 60 per cent of women (age 20–24) with no education were married before the age of 18 (Girls not Brides, n.d.). Schuler et al. (2006) state that "marital strategies among the poorest are, above all, strategies for economic survival, and poor families tend to see the costs of education and delayed marriage for daughters as high and the outcomes uncertain". However, as pointed out by Bajracharya et al. (2019), it is difficult to identify the direction of the relationship between educational attainment, particularly secondary school completion, and child marriage. Does delayed marriage cause less school dropout? Or does school attendance cause delayed marriage? Or both? (Bajracharya et al., 2019). In fact, studies from countries in the region point towards contradictory evidence on this relationship, with the association between educational attainment and child marriage being more evident in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, but less so in Afghanistan and to an even lesser extent in Pakistan, where girls are largely excluded from the formal schooling system (Bajracharya et al., 2019).

In Nepal, in central Terai – located in the lowland region in the southern part of the country – enrolment rates of female students are the lowest of any region in the country at primary and secondary levels, as are the net attendance rates of girls in primary education. Here too, the proportion of women aged 20–24 that married before the age of 18 is the highest (23 per cent) of any region (65.8 per cent for women aged 20–49; Central Bureau of Statistics – Nepal, 2011). Although chhaupadi is mostly practised in the far

western areas of Nepal, there is also evidence of its practice in the plains of Terai, where migrants have brought their traditions with them (National Planning Commission Secretariat – Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Nepal, 2015; White et al., n.d.). Here, menstrual taboo practices, high rates of child marriage and a high prevalence of dowry practices are all present, yet the way they are related to each other and the sharing of common drivers remains to be explored by future research.

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## VI. Child marriage and caste-based discrimination

*Caste discrimination is based on perceptions of impurity and pollution associated with those identified as belonging to low-caste groups. Discrimination leads to extreme exclusion and dehumanisation of caste-affected communities.*

(United Nations General Assembly, 2016)

The caste system is present across South Asia, particularly in India, Nepal and to a lesser extent the Hindu communities in Bangladesh. Scheduled castes experience the worst socioeconomic conditions and are deprived or severely restricted in the enjoyment of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (United Nations General Assembly, 2016). Moreover, rigid social norms of purity and pollution related to caste are enforced through strict prohibitions on inter-marriage. In many affected countries, strong social barriers against marriage between “lower” and “higher” castes are in place. When inter-marriages take place, the condemnation, particularly from dominant castes, can be quite severe, ranging from social ostracism to acts of punitive violence (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011). Regardless of whether the marriage is inter-caste or not, evidence highlights that IPV is experienced at much higher rates by women from underprivileged castes and ethnic groups (Atteraya et al., 2017)

The likelihood of child marriage happening has been shown to vary according to caste (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). Children of lower caste communities in India are at a higher risk of being married underage because of marginalization and discrimination (Human Rights Watch, 2016). In Nepal too, research shows that belonging to a scheduled caste is a compounding factor

for child marriage. In this context, poor Muslim households do not experience the same pressure to pay dowries and spend high amounts on a daughter’s wedding as Hindu Dalits and other excluded castes (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Singh and Vennam, 2016; UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). Owing to their social and economic marginalization, excluded castes face more economic hardships than non-marginalized castes; thus, the economic drivers are especially relevant to their circumstances and, not surprisingly, they are more likely to practice child marriage than families from non-marginalized castes (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018). However, as pointed out in a recent review by UNICEF and UNFPA, although several studies find differences between different religious groups, the results are inconclusive. In some studies, Muslim girls are found to be at a higher risk of being married underage than girls of other religions, while others find that they marry later (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2018).

It is interesting to note that a new dynamic, presented by the imbalance in sex ratios present in some regions of India, has led to an increase in the bride market (described further in section VII, “Child marriage, child labour and trafficking”) and to the acceptance and practice of inter-caste marriages. Mishra (2013) conducted research in the region of Haryana where notions of caste regulate social interactions. She found that,

in the wake of shortage of brides owing to an imbalanced sex ratio, a rise in inter-caste and inter-ethnic marriages is being observed, mostly in the form of cross-region unions, and are accepted in the face of necessity. While some studies indicate that brides brought from other regions and castes, and their children, risk being seen as having brought dishonour to their husband's family and, as such, as very vulnerable to abuse, this study found this to be largely untrue in Haryana (Mishra, 2013). However, research conducted in the south of India indicates that, while such unions have the potential to challenge practices such as caste endogamy and dowry payments, they also reinforce unequal gender norms that maintain male privileges (Srinivasan, 2017).

Research also documents cases in which couples transgress sociocultural norms around inter-caste marriage by eloping (Allendorf, 2013; Ghimire and Samuels, 2014). In contrast with arranged marriages, which support the caste system by ensuring that spouses are of the same caste, elopements are marriages whereby the couple marries without the knowledge or consent of their parents and hence pose a risk to the continuation of family, caste and kinship lineage. As such, they can be met with strongly adverse responses by their families and communities, particularly if these elopements are inter-caste (Allendorf, 2013). Interestingly, research conducted in Nepal indicates that a large majority of couples that elope are between 13 and 17 years of age and so elopement contributes to the rates of early marriage (Ghimire and Samuels, 2014). While evidence from Bangladesh and Nepal indicates that elopements are more likely to be child marriages,

love marriages – when the couple obtains parental consent prior to their union – are less likely to be child marriages (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2019).

The practice of *deuki* in Nepal or *devadasi* in India is also closely linked to caste-based discrimination. It entails the “marriage” of girls to temple deities and is usually practised among poor families – frequently from the Dalit caste – in the hopes of gaining protection and good favour from the Gods or because their parents sell them to wealthier couples seeking the same holy approval (Torri, 2009). After offering the girls to the temples, neither the parents nor the couples who bought them provide any financial assistance or have additional contact with *deukis*. With no one to support them, they are frequently forced into ritualized prostitution as a mode of survival (Yogi, 2012).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee of Experts identified *devadasi* as a form of forced labour, as per the definition of ILO Convention No. 29. It is understood that this harmful practice involves young girls being dedicated to temples without their consent and being forced into offering sex to the community (United Nations, 2017). A study by Anti-Slavery International on the practice of ritual sexual slavery or forced religious “marriage” found that 93 per cent of *devadasi* were Dalits and 7 per cent from scheduled tribes (indigenous) in India (Black, 2007). Although there no direct link has strictly been identified between child marriage and the practice of *devadasi*, these harmful practices share underlying drivers, namely the lack of value given to girls, the vulnerability they are exposed to given their lack of agency and poverty, compounded by caste-based discrimination (Turner, 2013).

## VII. Child marriage, child labour and trafficking

*The term “child labour” is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental health development. Whilst child labour takes many different forms, there is a heightened priority to eliminate the worst forms of child labour – including all forms of slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour; the use, procuring or offering of a child for sexual exploitation; and the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities.*

(Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182 – ILO, 1999)

Cultural practices surrounding child marriage, coupled with economic hardship, may place children into labour, removing them from school and the protection of their families. In turn, working children often live away from their families in situations where they are exposed to violence, abuse and economic exploitation. Their vulnerable situation puts them at risk of trafficking, with such children frequently falling prey to promises of a better life. In addition, child marriage and its associated harmful practices also directly expose children to trafficking, with such children falling prey to deceitful promises by traffickers.

Estimates from national surveys from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka suggest that the total number of working children in these countries is more than 29 million and the number in child labour (5-17 years old) is close to 17 million (ILO, n.d.). The highest number of child labourers is in India (5.8 million), followed by Bangladesh (5 million), Pakistan (3.4 million) and Nepal (2 million) (ILO, n.d.). When it comes to the purposes behind the trafficking of children, official records from India based on reports from rescued victims and accusers indicate that the vast majority are trafficked for forced labour (over 50 per cent), followed by sexual exploitation, prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation (40 per cent), domestic servitude (2 per cent) and forced marriage (2 per cent) (National Crime Records Bureau, 2016).

Some scholars and organizations argue that child marriage can be in and of itself a form of forced child labour: “Forced labour should therefore apply to child marriage whenever it can be established that a child has been exploited by being forced to engage in sexual relations, undertake domestic duties in the home or work outside the home, for the benefit of the spouse or the spouse’s family,

if they have not voluntarily offered to do so and are unable to refuse or to leave the marriage” (Turner, 2013). Warria (2017) explores in detail the relationship between forced labour and forced child marriage, identifying numerous points of intersection between these two practices. For example, children who are trafficked and children who are forced into marriage are not likely to have given their free, full and informed consent to enter these relationships and, within these relationships, the child does not become an equal decision maker and is not allowed to give consent in matters affecting them: “Child trafficking and child marriages are both characterized by financial transactions or gains, in cash or in kind, leading to the commoditization of children” (Warria, 2017). From these studies, it emerges that, in certain situations, child marriage may be a form of forced child labour and that, in some cases, child labour supports and acts as a driver of child marriage.

A direct way in which child labour and child marriage intersect is when a child is placed on bonded labour in order to pay for dowry and other marriage-related costs (Musa and Olsen, 2018). A good illustration of this relationship is the Sumangali scheme, present in the Tamil Nadu state of southern India. It consists of an arrangement made by textile industries and women and girls from poor backgrounds, whereby they engage in work at the mill factories for a period of three years, after which they – or their parents – receive a lump-sum payment as retribution for the work. Parents then use this money as a dowry and to cover the wedding costs of their daughters. They are usually girls under 18 years of age, as this allows a sufficient number of working years to earn a sufficient amount of money before reaching the ideal marriage age of 20-21. However, reports indicate

that many employees look even younger, possibly as young as 12 years old (IDSN, 2015; Solidaridad – South & South East Asia, 2012). Often, these girls are not allowed to leave the factory premises and live off very small stipends of money throughout the three years, and there have also been reports of companies firing them shortly before the end of the three years to avoid paying the lump-sum fees (Solidaridad – South & South East Asia, 2012).

A second avenue through which child labour and child marriage are linked occurs when, following a child marriage, the bride is forced to do domestic or other forms of labour (such as working in the family fields or taking care of livestock). By virtue of being trapped in the marriage by an adult decision maker, and having no power to exit the union, the work of this child may constitute child labour (Deane, 2010). Unfortunately, as analysed in detail by Musa and Olsen (2018), the data available to quantify the number of children engaged in forced labour as a result of child marriage are very limited.

The evidence on the relationship between child marriage and child labour is complex and not always linear. A district-level research project on child marriage in India showed that children who provide household income by engaging in some form of work may be protected against child marriage, since families are less willing to marry off someone bringing an income to the household (Srinivasan et al., 2015). However, a separate study from Pakistan found that child marriage was lower among unemployed women (Male and Wodon, 2016; UNICEF and UNFPA, 2019), indicating that, in this case, no association was found between child marriage and child labour. In another study from Pakistan, Ali et al. (2014) conducted a statistical analysis based on a sample survey of 392 respondents from the city of Peshawar. In this opinion-based study, respondents expressed strong correlations between trafficking, on the one hand, and swara forms of child marriage, honour killings and bride price on the other (Ali et al., 2014).

The pathways through which children become victims of child labour, child marriage, trafficking and/or slavery are sometimes blurred. According to the ILO, child trafficking entails the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations General Assembly, 2000). While for some children the entry into trafficking schemes may be given by false promises of better futures or work, for others what appears to be

a traditional marriage may be the entryway into forced labour or forced sex work and trafficking. A comprehensive review commissioned by the organization Anti-Slavery International found that trafficking appears to be the form of slavery most readily associated with marriage (Turner, 2013). Other studies also point towards a pervasive trafficking modality in South Asia, where traffickers convince poorer families from communities that undertake dowry practices to hand over their children with promises of dowry-free marriages, with girls then forced into sexual exploitation and child labour (Ali et al., 2014; Deane, 2010; ECPAT International, 2014; Ghosh and Kar, 2008; Turner, 2013). A rapid assessment of commercially sexually exploited children in Bangladesh showed that more than half had been forced or trafficked into the industry, lured by false promises of jobs or marriage (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2010). Reports from Bangladesh highlight specific cases in which trafficking victims are lured into the sex trade through promises of marriage or sold to brothels once married to a husband who did not demand a dowry from the girls' parents (INCIDIN Bangladesh, 2002; Jahan, 2011). Studies from India also point towards child trafficking within the country and trafficked children from abroad, who are usually forced to work in brothels and nightclubs or enter into coerced marriages in Uttar Pradesh, where markets for "purchased" Bangladeshi wives are well established (Blanchet, 2008). Early in 2019, numerous media reports in Pakistan covered the story of a bride-trafficking scheme whereby women and girls were married to a Chinese man under promises of monthly remittances and visas, only to later find that their daughters were forced into domestic servitude or sex work and prohibited from leaving China (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Data from South Asia on the matter of marriage markets and how they may affect women under 19 years of age is quite scarce. However, these types of schemes mirror trafficking networks already present in other Asian countries, such as Myanmar and Cambodia, which affect women as well as girls as young as 13 years old and are partly driven by the imbalanced sex ratio in China that resulted from the one-child policy (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Recent studies also illustrate how changes in perceptions of the role of women and girls and their potential contribution to household income have generated shifts in the channels through which girls are trafficked. In the tea-plantation regions of northern India and Bangladesh, false promises of jobs in distant locations are the dominant form of deceit, with marriage "now hardly used to traffic females" (Ghosh, 2014).

The sex trade and trafficking are linked not only to the harmful practices of child marriage and bonded labour, but also to sex selection and female infanticide. Reports from India indicate that the imbalance in the sex ratio in some states is emerging as one reason for trafficking young girls for the purposes of marriage (CHILDLINE India Foundation, 2007). States with highly imbalanced sex ratios have a number of reports of girls being sold as sexual brides and, in some cases, girls may be forced to serve as a wife to two or three brothers (ECPAT International, 2011). In an analysis of the adverse consequences of sex selection and gender imbalance in India and China, Kaur (2013) highlights bride trafficking, which involves the abduction and luring of women and girls for marriage into high sex-ratio areas. As women from poorer backgrounds or rural areas migrate for work or to marry men from other regions, men living in poor rural areas are left without brides. As a result, a marriage market emerges, driven by a demand for brides – which turns into trafficking of women and girls – from other countries or across regions. These marriages may result in higher vulnerability to violence, as

women from lower castes are married into other castes and ethnic groups, and may even be the start of a series of trafficking transactions into sex work or other forced marriages (Ali et al., 2014; Gazi et al., 2001).

The complexity in capturing the relationship between child marriage, child labour and child trafficking – and the various routes through which children may find themselves in one or more of these situations – has also been associated with the complexity in measuring elopement as a form of child marriage. When children disappear from communities, their parents may think that they have eloped to get married, when in fact they may have been lured into a fake marriage or abducted and trafficked into sex work. Conversely, and as a study by Ghosh and Kar (2008) points out, a clear case of trafficking cannot be established just by the disappearance of any person. In some cases, disappearances are linked to elopement, but to treat all missing stories as cases of elopement or cases lacking evidence would be inappropriate (Ghosh and Kar, 2008).



# DISCUSSION

The studies reviewed in this paper clearly show the presence of linkages between sociocultural gender norms, son preference, sex selection, sex-ratio imbalance and child marriage. The studies point to a relationship between polygamy and child marriage, intersected by experienced (or feared) poverty. Grievances suffered by young boys forced into child marriages are also shown to be a driver of polygamous unions and provide a basis on which to further explore whether efforts to abolish polygamy may have an impact on child marriage practices, and vice versa.

Patriarchal social norms linked to the practices of polygamy, dowry payments and bride price, and sex selection are an important driver behind so-called honour crimes and the retribution through violence in South Asia, which are, in turn, drivers shared with child marriage. There is an indication, which merits further exploration, that when working to tackle the underlying gender roles and norms through child marriage prevention programmes, there could potentially be an impact on these forms of gender-based violence. Conversely, given that the mere threat of dishonour and violence may be sufficient to convince parents to decide to marry their children at a young age, programmes working to change social norms and tackle violence may be able to influence decisions around child marriage (Alston et al., 2014; Srinivasan et al., 2015).

Evidence from the region clearly identifies notions of chastity, purity and what is considered the “proper” role of women and girls in society to be closely linked with both child marriage and menstrual taboos and practices. Nonetheless, evidence on if, and if so how, programmes that seek to end child marriage are affecting menstrual practices and taboos is not available. Given that child marriage and harmful menstrual practices and taboos share cultural conceptions of chastity as drivers, their relationship should be the focus of future research.

The role of caste-based discrimination in driving child marriage has also been explored. The low value given to members of scheduled castes, particularly girls, is reflected manifestly in the practice of deuki and devadasi. Child marriage is shown to be compounded by caste-based discrimination and its consequences.

When it comes to child labour and trafficking, child marriage is shown to act as a “pull factor”, driving parents to make choices about the future of their children, usually directing them inadvertently towards harmful and even violent futures.

Despite the volume of evidence reviewed, the direction of the relationship between child marriage and harmful practices remains unclear. Are child marriages in India reinforced by the sex-ratio imbalance or are child marriages – and the customs surrounding them – a driver of sex selection? Are dowry prices increasing because of the reduced number of girls in the marriage market or are they increasing because of other, unrelated, factors such as inflation? Programme evaluations do reveal that interventions seeking to raise the age at marriage should work to avoid unintended effects on the dowry market and, as a result, inadvertently encouraging daughter aversion. However more in-depth analysis, including on the impact of programme interventions and their unintended consequences, is needed to understand these relationships better.

The complexity in identifying not only the relationship between child marriage and other harmful practices, but also the directionality of these relationships, mirrors the conclusions drawn by UNICEF and UNFPA's study on drivers of child marriage (2019). They conclude that it may not be poverty in and of itself that drives decisions around child marriage, but rather the perception of poverty and uncertainty about the future. For example, a qualitative study among married

women in Bangladesh found that the cultural meanings and social dynamics of marriage in the context of poverty and the vulnerability to economic crisis are persistent constraints to later marriage and childbearing, even in families of empowered women who were aware of the risks and disadvantages of early marriage and childbearing (Schuler and Rottach, 2010). We see that, although there is clear evidence about the relevance of poverty in the exercise of child marriage practices, this relationship is not linear, with perceptions playing an important role as well. Against this backdrop, programmes seeking to address child marriage and other harmful practices should take into consideration the perception of the positive outcomes that changes

in these practices may have for parents, daughters and communities as a whole.

These relationships are complex, with evidence indicating that harmful practices cannot be eradicated by addressing a single driver. As concluded from the UNFPA and UNICEF (2019) study, a narrow focus on one approach is not enough to bring about desired results in ending child marriage. Indeed, as long as women are socially constructed to be dependants, and concepts of purity and honour remain connected to women's identity, even as they gain economic opportunities, dowry prices are likely to continue to escalate and child marriage practices may persist (Rozario, 2002; Sharma et al., 2015).

# CONCLUSION

This desk review sought to answer two specific questions: (1) What are the intersections between child marriage – in its various forms – and harmful practices in South Asia? and (2) What evidence is there on the positive – and negative – consequences (including unintended consequences) that programmes on ending child marriage may have on harmful practices in South Asia?

The volume of evidence presented highlights the close-knit relationships between child marriage and other harmful practices in South Asia. In some instances, there is a good indication that child marriage is either a precursor to or an outcome of the other harmful practices reviewed, yet in other instances the association remains unclear.

Poverty is identified as an important driver behind the practices of polygamy and child marriage, while the practice of caste-based discrimination also strongly intersects with poverty. Sex selection has been identified as a source of decision-making around polygamy and as a driver of child marriage. Sex selection is also shown to be an outcome of the low value given to girls, which in turn has been shown to encourage menstruation practices and taboos and increase dowry prices and honour crimes. The intricate relationships between harmful practices are further exemplified by dowry prices, which evidence shows drive child marriage and dowry crimes and also have strong ties with poverty. Child labour may occur as a result of a lack of choices available to address dowry demands and is hence directly linked to poverty, while child marriage is shown to act as a driver of human trafficking. These dynamics take shape in different forms across subregions, communities, religious groups, castes and countries in South Asia.

As regards the evidence about the impact that child marriage prevention programmes may be having on harmful practices, it is quite limited

and inconclusive. Studies reveal that, while these programmes may have an influence on dowry price and sex selection, this relationship requires further examination. This review also points to the need to conduct additional research on the connection between programmes seeking to address menstrual taboos and child marriage. By having an impact on girls' schooling and addressing social norms about girls' value, menstrual hygiene programmes could potentially have an effect on the incidence of child marriage, although this remains to be studied. Unfortunately, no programming evidence linking child marriage with the remaining harmful practices reviewed in this study were found. However, the evidence about the common shared drivers across these practices provides a good foundation on which to continue exploring programmatic interactions and effects.

Many of the harmful practices explored in this review have common drivers. Although practices vary across countries, subregions and communities, socioeconomic, cultural and religious aspects always come into play. The value of girls within society, the space given for their voice, and the choices offered to them and the support systems in place to allow them to exercise these choices all have an impact on the exercise of the harmful practices studied in this review. The evidence on the interlinkages between the various forms of harmful practices against women and girls and childhood marriage indicates that, by addressing common drivers in an attempt to reduce the impact of one harmful practice, other harmful practices may also be affected. The close linkages between practices of *badal*, *swari/swara* and *vani* and so-called honour crimes, for example, is quite well established in the literature. There are also strong indications about the interconnected nature of dowry practices, son preference and child marriage, on the one hand, and polygamy and child marriage, on the other, although the interactions between these harmful practices are not always fully clear

from the evidence available. Clear links have also been established between child labour and trafficking and child marriage, and there is a strong indication that caste-based discrimination has a compounding effect on child marriage. There is, however, a need for more contextualized research to understand these relationships more profoundly and how changes generated by programmes for the prevention of child marriage (e.g. on the perception of a girls' value) may have positive effects on more than one of these practices.

A recommendation that emerges from this review is that child marriage prevention programme evaluations – as well as evaluations of other programmes related to harmful practices in the region – should incorporate the assessment of unintended effects or unforeseen consequences of their interventions. The limited programming evidence on the effect of interventions addressing one harmful practice upon other harmful practices highlights the need for this approach. This may allow researchers and policymakers to better capture the relationship and interactions between child marriage and harmful practices, leading to more targeted, efficient and cost-effective interventions.

In addition to this broad recommendation, the following specific areas of research have been identified as knowledge gaps:

- **Child marriage and harmful menstrual practices and taboos.** Evidence indicates that the sociocultural construct of a girl's value and role is a main driver behind both menstruation practices and child marriage. However, there is insufficient analysis that explains how the two are related and how they interact. Further research is needed to unpack the linkages between harmful menstrual practices and taboos – such as chhaupadi – and child marriage, including through an analysis of if, and if so how, programmes on the prevention of child marriage are influencing these harmful menstrual practices, and vice versa.
- **Child marriage prevention programme implications for son preference.** There is some evidence indicating that, as a result of bans on child marriage or of the extended education of girls, dowry prices may be going up, which, in some communities, is translating into a higher burden on girls. In other words, the results of programmes seeking to eliminate child marriage may be having an effect on the value of girls, which in turn may be having an impact on son preference. This is an important issue that merits more evidence-based research.

- **Elopement, fears related to girls' honour and child marriage.** As described in this study, elopement is increasingly cited as a form of child marriage among certain communities in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. However, some academics argue there is also a socially constructed exaggeration of how prevalent this practice is, which adds to parents' fears and hence strengthens elopement's role as a driver of child marriage. There is therefore a need to better understand whether elopements represent an increasingly common form of child marriage or whether there is a social construction around the fear of a child's elopement, which influences parents' decisions about child marriage.
- **Harmful practices, child marriage, and boys and men.** There is, notably, limited evidence on how child marriage and other harmful practices affect boys and men, and even less evidence on how these harmful practices interact to affect the lives of boys and men. Research in this field could help better develop an understanding of drivers and consequences, and ultimately inform programming for the elimination of harmful practices.

The multiplicity of relationships between harmful practices presented in this review supports a programmatic approach that understands early marriage decision-making as a process, rather than as an end point (McDougal et al., 2018). In this process, harmful practices come into play through the following pathways: the isolation driven by menstrual taboos and practices or caste-based discrimination, the measurement of a value of a girl's worth as reflected in the dowry negotiations or in sex selection, the condonement of honour crimes in relation to a woman or girl's fulfilment of expected roles (or their treatment as commodities through which prices for others' crimes can be paid), and the grievances generated by child marriage among boys and the cultural expectations of their role in society and the relationship of these expectations with polygamy. All of these practices play a role in the decision-making process of child marriage and its perpetuation. A more profound understanding of these relationships is needed to better equip programmes and policies that aim to eliminate early marriage, so that the underlying norms that perpetuate this practice can be effectively tackled. This report provides a sound basis on which to plan for this much-needed research.

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# ANNEX I: CHILD MARRIAGE PRACTICES IN SOUTH ASIA

*Child marriage refers to both formal marriages and informal unions where one of the partners is under the age of 18.*

(UNFPA and UNICEF)<sup>4</sup>

Child marriage is any marriage in which at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age and it takes place through various practices present in South Asia. These may or may not be initiated by the girl and boy/man concerned and may or may not be forced. The following is a compilation of the various marriage practices present in South Asia and the countries where they are found.

## Forms of child marriage in South Asia

Child marriage	Practice	Practice subtype	Geographical presence
<b>Arranged marriages</b>	Cousin marriages		Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
	Dispute-settling marriages	<i>Baad</i>	Afghanistan
		<i>Vanni or swari(a)</i>	Pakistan
	Exchange marriages	<i>Atta satta</i>	India
		<i>Badal</i>	Afghanistan
		Betrothal/ <i>pait likkhi</i>	India, Nepal, Pakistan
		<i>Watta satta</i>	Pakistan
Honour safeguarding		Bangladesh, Sri Lanka	
<b>Bride kidnapping</b>	Bride kidnapping		Pakistan
<b>Self-choice marriages</b>	Circumstantial		Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka
	Self-initiated marriages	Elopements	Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
		Gandharva	Nepal

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/child-protection/child-marriage>

## I. Arranged marriages

These marriages are arranged by parents or other older relatives, potentially without the consent of their children, and may be arranged for a variety of reasons: to forge economic alliances with better-off families, to secure their children's future, parents wanting to see their children settled before they themselves are old, to maintain social esteem including to avoid losing family honour and/or girls' sexual purity owing to a lack of social protection (i.e. girls being more at risk of sexual harassment and abuse outside marriage), and to avoid the fear of girls being unmarriageable in later years.<sup>5</sup>

### A. Cousin marriages

- A cousin marriage is an arranged marriage between people with common grandparents or other fairly close ancestors. It is usually arranged for economic, religious or cultural reasons, or to maintain alliances and exchanges between biologically related groups.<sup>6</sup> In Bhutan, children may be "engaged" to a relative as early as on their third day of life during a birth celebration festivity, when families agree to encourage the marriage between their children in the future.<sup>7</sup>
- Practised in Afghanistan, Bangladesh,<sup>8,9</sup> Bhutan, Nepal,<sup>10</sup> Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

### B. Dispute-settling marriages

#### 1. Baad

- In this instance, child marriage is conducted with the aim of strengthening ties between rival families and settling disputes. This also includes the "offering" of daughters to families of murdered victims as a way to settle debts, as included in the code of Pashtunwali in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>
- Practised in Afghanistan.

#### 2. Vanni or swari(a)

- Also known as *dand* or *baba* marriages, these are marriages in which a daughter is offered to an individual, family, tribe or clan to settle a blood feud, or is offered in appeasement for a wrong committed by her family. Girls and women in these situations live in hostile environments in which they are often treated as the enemy.<sup>12</sup>
- Practised in Pakistan.

### C. Exchange marriages

#### 1. Atta satta

- Girls are often married off at puberty when they are deemed most "productive" and can take care of children and conduct housework. The labour of young brides is central to some rural economies. The practice of *atta satta* sees two extended families exchange girls through marriage so that neither family is worse off in terms of household labour.<sup>13</sup>
- Practised in India.

<sup>5</sup> Pathfinder International (2006). *Pathfinder International Annual Report 2006*. Watertown, MA.

<sup>6</sup> Also practised as marriage between children of different tribes, known as *addo baddo* in the Sindh province of Pakistan.

<sup>7</sup> This practice in Bhutan is known as *serga mathang* or *khotkin*. Dorji, L. (2003). *A Tradition Under Change: Marriage in Eastern Bhutan*. Monograph Series: No. 3. Bhutan: Centre for Bhutan Studies.

<sup>8</sup> Hossain M.B., and others (2017). *Context of Child Marriage and Its Implications in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Department of Population Sciences, University of Dhaka.

<sup>9</sup> Mobarak, A.M., Kuhn, R., and Peters, C. (2013). Consanguinity and other marriage market effects of a wealth shock in Bangladesh. *Demography*, vol. 50, No. 5, pp. 1845–1871.

<sup>10</sup> Simpson, B. (2004). Acting ethically, responding culturally: framing the new reproductive and genetic technologies in Sri Lanka. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 227–243.

<sup>11</sup> UNAMA and OHCHR (2010). *Harmful Traditional Practices and Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan*. Kabul: UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

<sup>12</sup> Hodgkinson, K. (2016). *Understanding and Addressing Child Marriage*. Amsterdam: HER Choice Alliance.

<sup>13</sup> Girls not Brides (n.d.). Child marriage in India. Retrieved 16 September 2019 from <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/india/>



## 2. Badal

- This is a practice whereby a settlement is agreed for girls to be married off within or between families, either before birth or as young as 2 years old. It involves the exchange of daughters between families and is often carried out as a way of avoiding a dowry payment. It is common in badal for the exchanged girls to face similar treatment, so if one is beaten, the other is also beaten in revenge.<sup>14</sup>
- Practised in Afghanistan.

## 3. Betrothal/pait likkhi

- This involves two families agreeing to marry their children while they are still infants or even before they are born in order to “secure” their future.<sup>15</sup> Once they reach puberty, *guana* or “send-off” ceremonies take place and they are sent to their husband’s home to commence married life.<sup>16</sup>
- Practised in Pakistan, Nepal and India.

## 4. Watta satta (“give-take”)<sup>17</sup>

- This practice involves a marriage exchange of a brother–sister or uncle–niece pair in one household with a family pair in another household, usually in a different clan. Couples are often engaged at a very young age, sometimes even before birth, but marriage is usually held off until the girl reaches puberty (usually defined as the age of menarche). *Watta satta* marriages do not require a dowry and take place most frequently in poorer families. The idea is to establish reciprocity and accountability across the two families, especially to prevent violence and abuse. As such, the relative age of the bride and groom is not considered important and girls are often married to older men. The practice can put girls in precarious situations, as if one husband is abusive towards or divorces his wife, the husband in the other family is likely to do the same as a form of revenge.<sup>18</sup>
- Practised in Pakistan.

## D. Honour safeguarding

- Young girls who engage in premarital sex are married off as a way of “safeguarding” their honour. Girls who are victims of sexual violence may also be forced to marry the perpetrator – a choice seen as a better option than the girls being seen as “loose” or “immoral”. In such cases, either marriages take the form of cohabitation and are legalized later or families falsify documents to facilitate the marriage.<sup>19</sup>
- Practised in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

## II. Bride kidnapping

- Christian or Hindu girls – usually between the ages of 12 and 25 – are abducted, converted to Islam and married to the abductor or third party.<sup>20</sup>
- Practised in Pakistan.

<sup>14</sup> Girls not Brides and Equality Now (2017). *Protecting the Girl Child: Using the Law to End Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Related Human Rights Violations*. New York, London and Nairobi: Equality Now.

<sup>15</sup> In Pakistan, the practice is known as *pait likkhi* or *paitlikkhi*, which literally means “written in the stomach”. Nasrullah, M., and others (2014). Knowledge and attitude towards child marriage practice among women married as children—a qualitative study in urban slums of Lahore, Pakistan. *BMC Public Health*, vol. 14, 1148. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-1148>

<sup>16</sup> Girls not Brides (n.d.). Child marriage in India.

<sup>17</sup> Bhutta, R.N., and others (2015). Dynamics of watta satta marriages in rural areas of southern Punjab Pakistan. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 3, pp. 166–178. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2015.312018>

<sup>18</sup> Jacoby, H.G., and Mansuri, G. (2010). Watta satta: Bride exchange and women’s welfare in rural Pakistan. *American Economic Review*, vol. 100, No. 4, pp. 1804–1825. See also Hodgkinson (2016). *Understanding and Addressing Child Marriage*.

<sup>19</sup> Girls not Brides (n.d.). Child marriage in Sri Lanka. Retrieved 16 September 2019, from <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/sri-lanka/>

<sup>20</sup> Iqbal, A. (2014). 1,000 minority girls forced in marriage every year: report, 8 April. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1098452>

### III. Self-choice marriages

#### A. Circumstantial

- These marriages often take place in response to unintended pregnancy, which may arise from a chosen sexual relationship or from sexual coercion or assault. They are driven in many cases by adolescents who view marriage as the only sanctioned space to explore romantic relationships, express their sexuality and gain some adult autonomy. In other cases, marriage becomes the only feasible “choice” after an unintended pregnancy.<sup>21</sup>
- Practised in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

#### B. Self-initiated marriages

Such marriages occur both with and without parental consent. There are reports of girls in schools initiating their own marriages due to “love” and “self-initiation”, with or without parental consent.<sup>22</sup>

##### 1. Elopements

- Elopements entail a couple running away secretly for the purpose of getting married, often without parental consent. Some couples who elope do so in response to social pressures that are averse to their union.<sup>23</sup> They may disappear for a short time, perhaps a few days, and then return to seek their parents’ approval. Under the threat of public embarrassment, the parents are likely to accept the union. In some cases, the elopement is followed immediately by formal marriage in a church or civil ceremony.<sup>24</sup>
- Practised in Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan (Kalash community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Sri Lanka.

##### 2. Gandharva

- This practice involves “winning” a girl by impressing her with some performance. A boy who wishes to marry a girl meets her away from her family and describes how he will take care of her. If the girl is convinced, she goes to the boy’s home as his wife. There are no marriage rituals and there is no dowry, no involvement of the girl’s family, no previous knowledge of the boy’s status, no love and no dating, but still a married life is started.<sup>25</sup>
- Practised in Nepal.

<sup>21</sup> Plan International (2008). *Accelerating Efforts to Eliminate Child, Early and Forced Marriage In Asia: Emerging Interventions and Strategies*. Bangkok: Plan International Asia Hub.

<sup>22</sup> Plan Asia and ICRW (2013). *Asia Child Marriage Initiative: Summary of Research in Bangladesh, India and Nepal*. Bangkok: Plan Asia Regional Office.

<sup>23</sup> Senanayake, K. (2017). Reasons of female children for elope with boyfriends in Anuradhapura district of Sri Lanka. *Medico-Legal Journal of Sri Lanka*, vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 6–11.

<sup>24</sup> This practice is referred to as *bagnu* or *bagaunu* in Nepal. Allendorf, K. (2013). Schemas of marital change: from arranged marriages to eloping for love. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 75, No. 2, pp. 453–469.

<sup>25</sup> Plan Nepal, Save the Children and World Vision International Nepal (2012). *Child Marriage in Nepal: Research Report*. Kathmandu: Plan Nepal.



