

Strengthening Child Protection Systems in Bhutan

Protecting children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect



The cost of not addressing child protection issues

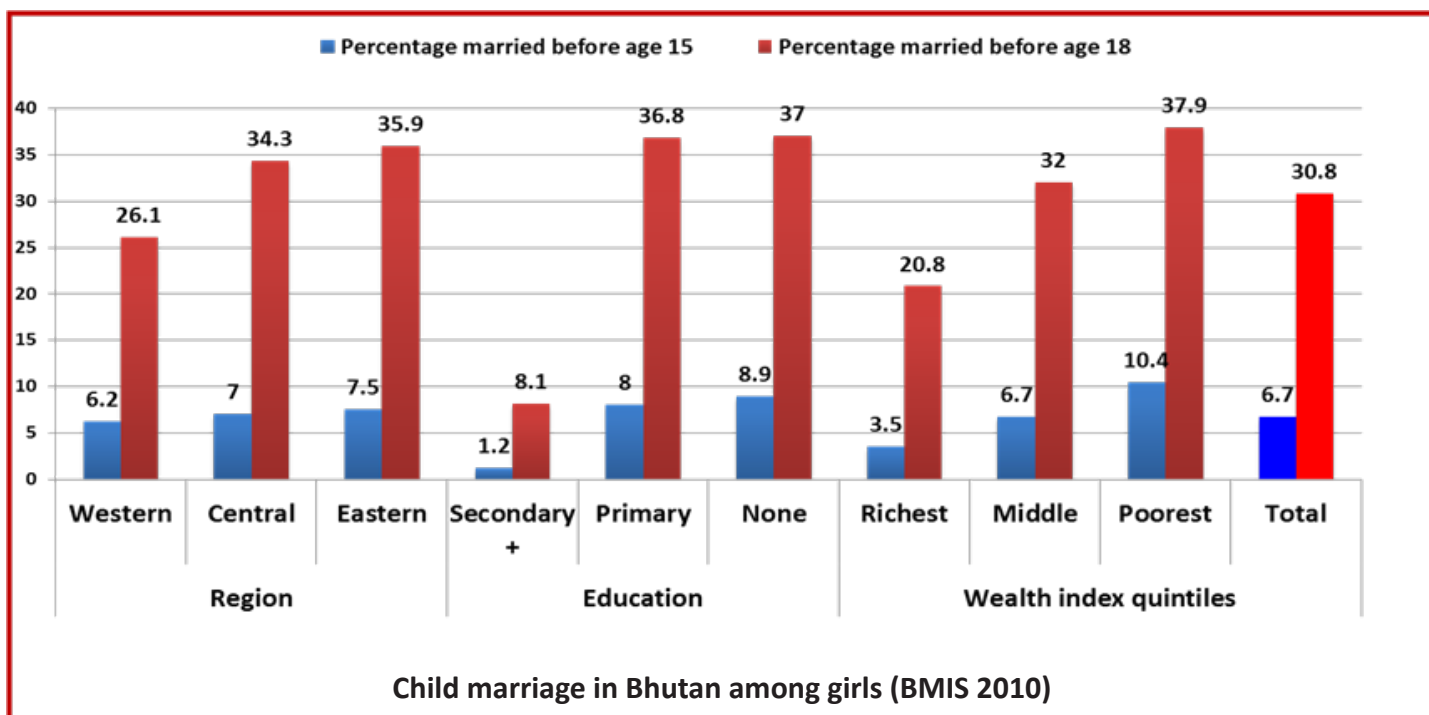
- It hampers development. Children experience learning difficulties and perform poorly at school;
- They may have low self-esteem and suffer from depression, which can lead to risky behaviour and self-harm;
- Could lead to internalizing violent behaviour as a way of resolving disputes and repeat the pattern of violence and abuse among own spouses and children;
- Serious economic and social costs both in terms of lost potential and reduced productivity.



Situation of Children in Bhutan:

(from *Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey 2010*)

- Children comprise 42 per cent of Bhutan's population
- 18.4 per cent of children aged 5 to 14 years are engaged in child labour; 13.5 per cent of them are out-of-school
- 68 per cent of women report an acceptance of domestic violence
- 21.3 per cent of children aged 2 to 9 years live with disabilities, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities
- Corporal Punishment in schools, though banned, continues to be widely used as a method of discipline
- 30.8 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years are married before age 18



All children need a protective environment where they are free from violence, exploitation and unnecessary separation from their family



Are some children more vulnerable than others?

- Violence, exploitation and abuse occur in all settings – home, families, schools, care and justice systems, workplace and communities.
- Higher levels of vulnerability are associated with children with disabilities, orphaned children, indigenous, and other marginalized groups. Other risks are associated with children living and working in the street, living in institutions and detention.



Strengthening Child Protection Systems in Bhutan – What needs to be done?

- While **legislative frameworks** - namely, Child Care and Protection Act, 2011; Child Adoption Act, 2012; Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013 - have been enacted, implementation is still a challenge.
- Systematic capacity development of service providers working with children.
- Establish new and strengthen **existing services** for children and women in need of protection, including strengthening the response and reintegration services.
- Implement **preventative programmes** and engage young people as champions to create awareness on child protection and encourage opportunities for open dialogue on child protection issues.
- Generate knowledge and evidence on child protection.
- Strengthen **inter-agency collaboration** among child protection system actors, especially among the justice, security and social sectors for support to children in justice process and reintegrating into society.
- Increasing focus on prevention programmes and strengthen children's life skills, knowledge and participation.
- Strengthen the protective role of families and communities and initiate social and behaviour change interventions through influential communication channels and actors and community outreach programmes.

Key partners

- National Commission for Women and Children
- Bhutan National Legal Institute
- Royal Bhutan Police
- Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs
- Ministry of Labour & Human Resources
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Education
- Dratshang Lhentshög
- Civil Society Organizations, such as RENEW and Bhutan Youth Development Fund
- Bhutan Nuns Foundation
- Children, Families and Communities
- Youth networks and community volunteers
- Parliamentarians
- Media

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Preventing** and **responding** to violence, exploitation and abuse is essential to ensuring children's rights to survival, development and well-being.
- Integrating child protection into the national planning process including in education, health and labour.
- Implementation of legislations towards creating a protective environment for children in Bhutan is key.

Contacts and references:

Shaheen Nilofer, UNICEF Representative, Bhutan Country office; Email: snilofer@unicef.org
Aniruddha Kulkarni, Child Protection Specialist; Email: ankulkarni@unicef.org