

Study Report

CHILD MARRIAGE IN PAKISTAN A TABOO



October 27, 2007.





**THIS REPORT IS DEVELOPED ON BASIS OF
SECONDARY MATERIAL SEARCH AND IS NOT
A PRIMARY BASED STUDY**



Table of Contents

Titles	Page #
Methodology	1
Defining Child Marriage	3
Prevalence of Child Marriage in Pakistan	4
Conclusion	10
Reasons for Child Marriage in Pakistan	12
Swara- A Fate Worse Than Death	16
Pait Likkhi, Watta Satta, Addo Baddo and Vulvar	20
The Effect of Child Marriages in Pakistan	21
Islam and Child Marriages	28
Combating Child Marriages: Policy Suggestions	30
Annexes	44

Table of Abbreviations & Acronyms


UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys

Methodology

This report focuses specifically on child marriages in Pakistan. It is based on secondary research, and can be seen as an archive of all the available material on the subject and a compilation of relevant aspects of the issue.

The report used domestic and international reports on child marriages as a basis for the research. These included studies by UNICEF, ICRW, IPPF and the Population Council (for a complete list of references see Bibliography). Local NGOs were also contacted and requested for whatever material they had available, which was found to be very scarce. Moreover, field interviews (questionnaire annexed) with women in slum areas who had been subjected to child marriage were used to gain a feel of the issue. Pictures were also largely taken first hand.





Perched innocently on her worn-out bamboo bed, Sumera watches her sisters in their naïve excitement as they cover her with the herbal upton, which will make her skin like 'creamy milk'. Her innocent robin eyes glimmer with anticipation as she pictures the sparkling red wedding dress her mother has prepared for her. It's more beautiful than anything she's ever owned in all her twelve or thirteen years. Her mother smiles at her, and then hides her face behind her veil to cover the tears that drip helplessly down her cheeks. She sees the sparkling wedding dress as a symbol of the handcuffs her daughter will hereafter wear...the handcuffs of tradition.

Defining Child Marriage

For the purpose of clarity in context, it is necessary that any discussion on child marriages begin by defining what an early marriage really implies. Universally, an early marriage entails matrimony where at least one, alternatively both, of the contracting parties is a 'child'.

The question that then arises is, till what age does a young girl, or boy, remain a child? Under the UN convention of human rights, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".¹ In Pakistan, however, under The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, a marriage is a child marriage if the male is under eighteen years of age and/or the female is under sixteen.² Therefore, what marriage is a child marriage varies slightly from country to country, based on the legal age at which a minor achieves majority.

Various human rights organizations, however, continue to campaign for a universal majority age of eighteen years; CEDAW in its General Recommendation 21, strongly suggested eighteen as the minimum age for marriage for both males and females.³



¹ Article 1, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, retrieved on 15th August, 2007, from <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

² *Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929*, retrieved on August 15th, 2007, from http://www.vakilno1.com/saarclaw/pakistan/child_marriage_restraint_act.htm

³ *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, General Recommendation No. 21 (13th session, 1994), retrieved July 31, 2007, from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm>

Prevalence of Child Marriage in Pakistan



There seems to be a dearth of material on Early Marriages in Pakistan. The topic is largely un-researched and even ignored. As early marriages are unregistered, their prevalence is hard to determine quantitatively. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that most births in Pakistan's rural areas are also unregistered, making it hard to determine the age of a child at the time of marriage. It is unquestionable, however, that the custom of child marriage is widely prevalent throughout Pakistan. Some illustrative statistics are available from small scale representative studies, and some assessment of the extent of the problem can be made from these.

According to UNICEF's country statistics, marking the period 1987 to 2005, total urban child marriages amounted to 21 percent of all children, total rural child marriages amounted to 37 percent and total average child marriages equaled 32 percent of children.⁴

According to 'The Uncharted Passage: Girls' Adolescence in the Developing World' 37 percent of all women aged 25-29 reported being married before 18; computations were based on DHS data since 1990.⁵

⁴ Pakistan statistics retrieved on August 1st 2007 from http://www.UNICEF.org/infobycountry/pakistan_pakistan_statistics.html

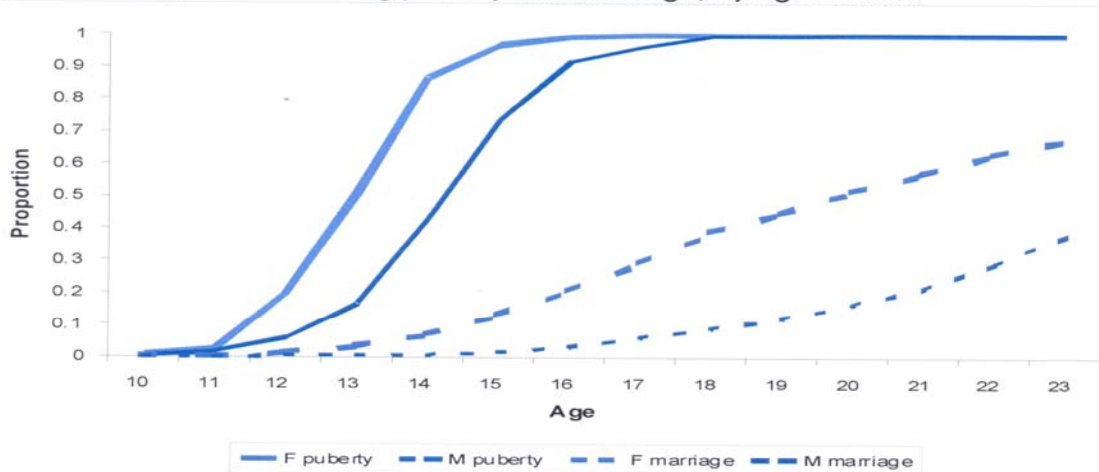
⁵ Barbara S. Mensch, Judith Bruce, Margaret E. Greene, *The Uncharted Passage: Girls' Adolescence in the Developing World*, p. 76

Early Marriage by Gender

The Population Council prepared a representative report on youth and adolescents in Pakistan, and published it in 2002. It was compiled after interviewing youth from different households; the younger cohort comprised of adolescents aged 15-19 and thus within the sphere of childhood. The study shows that early marriages affect girls far more than they affect boys; in the ages 11 to 21, a Pakistani female is far more likely to get married than is a Pakistani male.



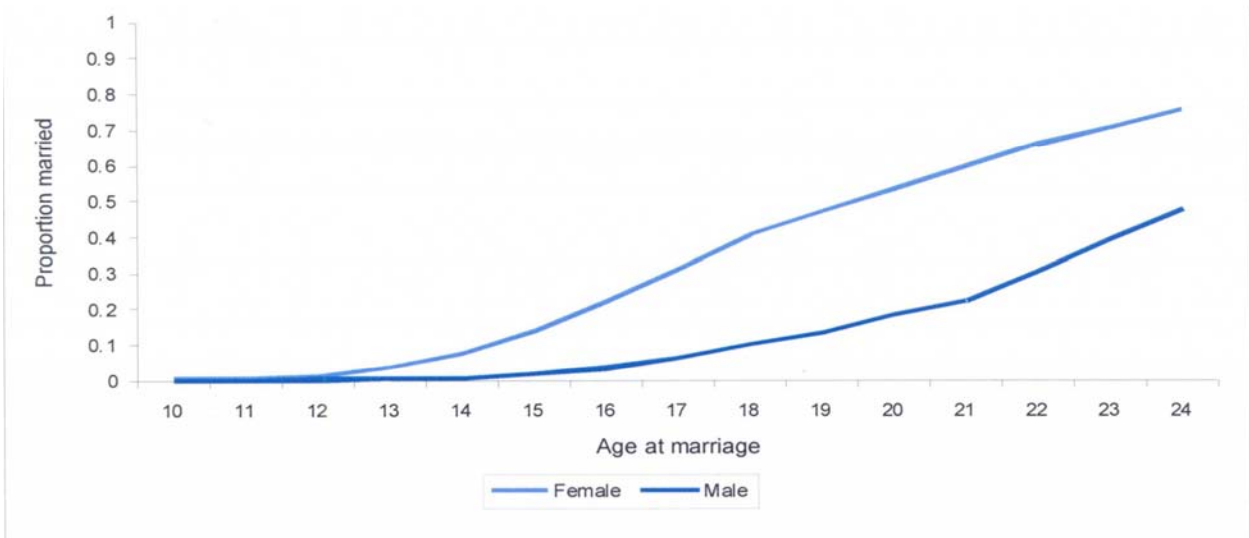
Figure 5.1 Proportion reaching puberty and marriage, by age and sex



Note: Age represents end of full year at that age; for example, "under 20" is read at age 19.

While a Pakistani female is likely to experience both puberty and marriage within the ages 11 to 21, for a male these events stretch over a longer period, beginning at 13 and extending well into the late twenties.⁶

Figure 5.2 Life-table analysis: Proportion of young people married, by age and sex



Note: "Age" represents end of full year at that age.



⁶ Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey*, p. 82-89, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf>

Early marriage by Area

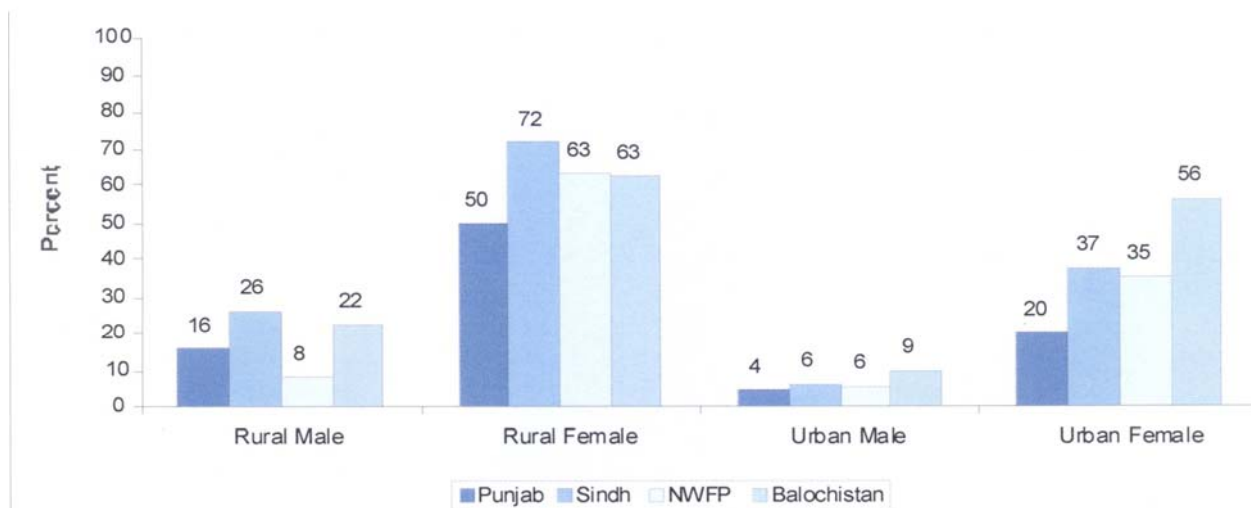
Early marriages are far more prevalent in Pakistan's rural areas than in its urban areas. In the aforementioned study it was found that 58 percent of rural females and 18 percent of rural males marry before reaching the age of 20, as compared to 27 percent of urban females and 5 percent of urban males.⁷

Alongside rural/urban differences in early marriage trends, there are also significant variations in early marriage statistics between and across Pakistan's four provinces. In the available statistics, Sindh shows the highest percentage of early marriages in rural areas, with 72 percent of females and 26 percent of males in the selected sample, married before 20. Sindh also has a high percentage of females in urban areas married by 20, reaching 36 percent.

Balochistan closely follows Sindh in terms of early rural marriages (22 percent of males and 63 percent of females married before 20), and has the highest percentage of urban early marriages, with 9 percent males and 56 percent females marrying before 20.

Punjab stands out as the province having the most females marrying at later ages in both rural and urban areas. Only 50 percent of the women in rural and 20 percent of women in urban areas of Punjab marry before twenty. The men in the urban areas of Punjab also marry late, with only four percent marrying before 20. NWFP has the record for the least percentage of rural men marrying early, with only 8 percent of men marrying before twenty. A much higher percent of rural women in NWFP, however, marry early equaling 63 percent.⁸

Figure 5.3 Percent of 20-24 year olds who were married before age 20

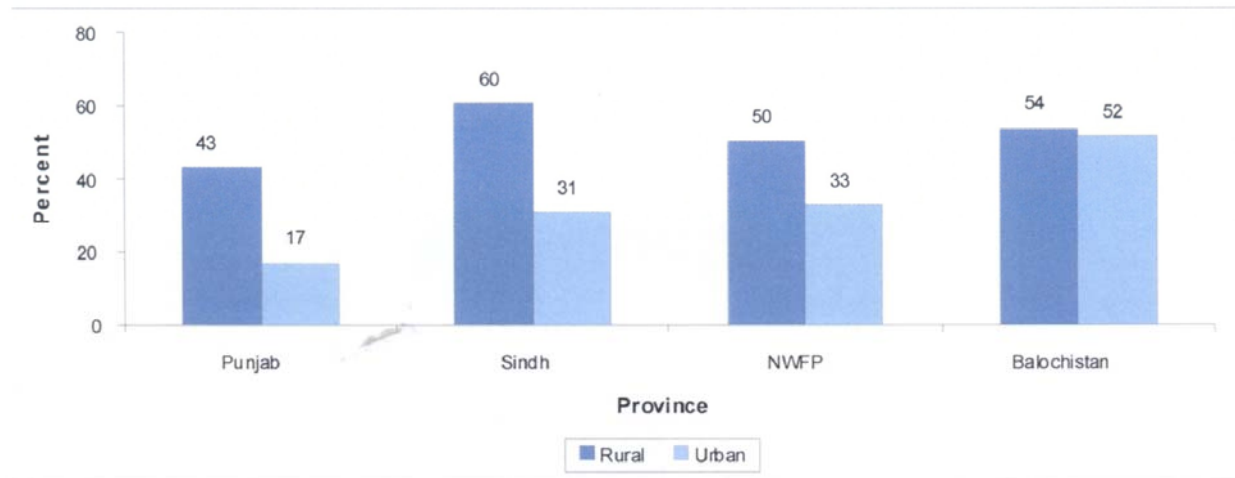


Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey*, p. 90,

⁷ Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey*, p. 89-90, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf>

⁸ Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey*, p. 89-90, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf>

Figure 5.4 Percentage of 20-24 Year old females who were pregnant before age 20, by current residence



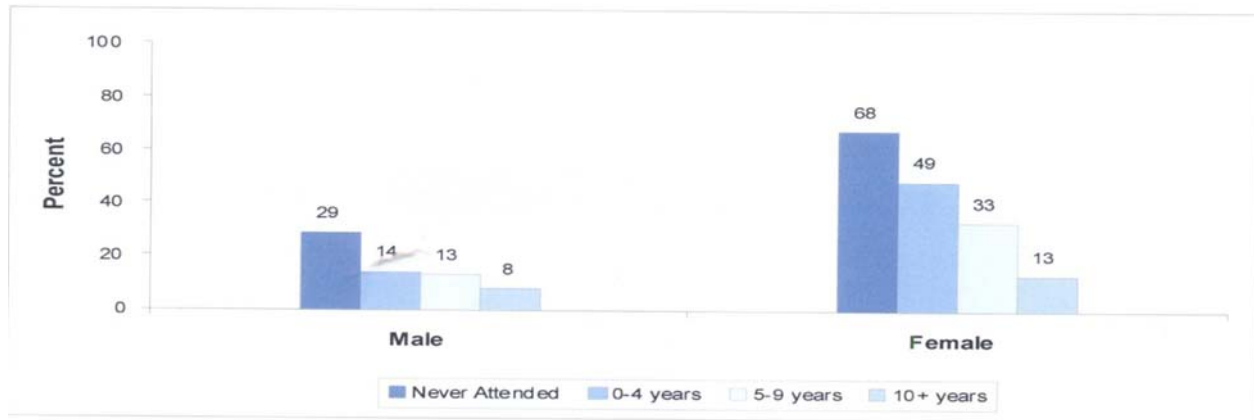
Early Marriages by Education Level

There is a strong correlation between early marriages and a lack of education. Research shows that in a selected sample, over 60 percent of the rural and urban Pakistani females who had never attended school were married before the age of 20. This was followed by a sharp decline in marriage age as the education level increased. Some attendance of primary school reduced the level of marriage from 68 to 49 percent for females, five to nine years of schooling reduced the percentage to 33 percent and over ten years reduced it to 13 percent. The pattern was similar for males, although not as strongly correlated; 29 percent of males who never went to school married before 20 as compared to the 14 percent who had some primary schooling and the 8 percent who had received over ten years of schooling.⁹



⁹ *ibid*, p. 90-91

Figure 5.5 Percentage of 20-24 Year olds were married before the age of 20, by education and sex



Population Council, Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey, p. 91

Conclusion



These statistics provide us with worrying figures regarding the issue. It is not just a problem that exists in remote areas of Pakistan, but is widely prevalent, affecting over a third of Pakistan's adolescents, and continuing in a vicious cycle to affect their children. Marriage, a cause of celebration around the world, becomes a black hole of misery when young children are married. Childhood is a time of innocence, adolescence a time of storm and stress, both stages where the child needs care and development opportunities. The environment that these children are subjected to in these delicate stages, forever scars their selves. The problem is real, and it is all around Pakistan.

Sacrificial Lamb



Nazia sits staring expressionlessly into nothingness while her mother recounts her young daughter's heart-wrenching story. She was only fifteen, maybe sixteen, when she was married to the son of her mother's sister. "Her aunt had no one to look after her house so we had no choice. After all, it was her aunt."

The wedding took place as her parents decided it would. Nazia was simply told. She remembers that she was scared before the wedding, but did not raise any objections. It is not a girl's place to do so. She was taken to her new home in another city by her aunt and husband. There she was beaten, repeatedly and over again with a thick wooden stick. She was starved, surviving only on the morsels she managed to steal from the kitchen while her aunt was away. Her husband left her from the very first day to go and see other women. Her aunt encouraged his affairs, especially that with their landlord's daughter. "He's my son," she would say "and he will do as he likes."

Nazia suffered all the worst indignities; she was tormented both physically and emotionally until she felt dead inside. Kept prisoner in her own house, she had no one to turn to. Her mother-in-law frequently threatened to kill her. Nazia recounts with a bitter laugh, how she once locked her in a room and put fire to it in an effort to burn her alive; her grandfather ran crying to her rescue. Nazia's parent's eventually caught wind of the torture their daughter was being subjected to and brought her home. They say she looked like a corpse in its grave when they saw her...weak and broken.

Nazia only stayed in her husband's house for three months, but the scars of her ordeal have been etched into her soul forever, not concealed in the least by her forced laughter and dazed look. She has now been in her parent's house for four years, trying to divorce her husband and hiding from the mother-in-law who still threatens to kill her. Educated only up to the seventh grade, she has no means of independence. Meekly, she suggests that she could learn to stitch. Defiantly she declares that she will never step foot in that house again. Perhaps, with a little more education and a few more years to grow and develop, Nazia could have become a doctor, maybe even an engineer. But the fate of many Pakistani girls is decided by tradition. They are not meant to be independent, strong and free. In Nazia's case they are not even meant to be human. And so the story continues: a delicate little flower is thrust into the thorn-bush of child marriage, mistreated, hurt and ruined. This girl child is just another soul ruined, for the sake of society's ills. She is just one more sacrificial lamb.

Reasons for Child Marriages in Pakistan

In Pakistan, traditionally, most marriages are arranged by the elders of the family. Choosing one's own spouse is seen as devious and such opportunities rarely exist for young people; marriage is not a romantic bond but simply a social requirement. The family unit is extended. Girls, once married, are often seen as child-bearers and homemakers rather than as individuals; they are the main victims in early marriage arrangements, often purposely married at young ages in order to make the most of their days of fertility and beauty.

Poverty

In examining the reasons for the prevalence of child marriages in Pakistan, poverty emerges as a widespread cause. Young girls, usually uneducated and confined to the home, are seen as a financial burden. Securing their marriage relieves families of the financial pressures of supporting their daughters. Moreover, marriage is often seen as a means of progressing financially, particularly when a poorer family has the chance to marry its child into a richer one. Furthermore, in a Pakistani marriage, the wedding generally entails a sum of money given to the girl's parents in exchange for their daughter. This sum of money is known as bride price. These bride prices commonly range from \$1,400 to \$5,000 and younger girls bring higher amounts.¹⁰ Similarly, the custom of dowry is largely practiced in Pakistan; the older the girl, the higher the dowry that is likely to be demanded.



Younger girls usually go with lesser dowry and are therefore less of a financial burden to marry.

Dowry is a gift of money or valuables given by the family of the bride to the family of the groom at the time of their marriage.

It has been observed that most countries, when steeped in social problems and strife, show acute symptoms of child rights abuses; when caregivers find it hard to take care of their children, child marriages increase.¹¹ In such situations young girls are often given in marriage to much older men who are financially well-off.

¹⁰ PAKISTAN: *Child marriages on the rise across rural Sindh*, retrieved on August 10th 2007, from <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=33985>

¹¹ UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001 p.6



Political and family ties

In Pakistan's feudal and political structures, child marriages often serve to cement political ties between different groups. Young children may be married off into powerful families in order to join the families for political gains. Similarly, they may be married to strengthen family bonds. Family is a very important component of Pakistan's social structure; when one asks a close relative for their daughter in marriage, it is often unthinkable to refuse.

Culture and Tradition

A number of Pakistani customs and practices condone Child Marriages. A wide-spread custom of the sort is Swara or Vani, the practice of giving young girls in marriage to solve feuds. Other customs such as exchange marriages also contribute to child marriages (See '*Swara- A fate Worse Than Death*' and '*Pait Likkhi, Watta Satta, and Addo Baddo*')

In the areas of Pakistan where child marriage is prevalent, communities are often closely linked, and expected to conform to the norms of society. Girls who are married late are often ridiculed and seen as un-marriageable. Indeed there is a set life cycle that young girls are required to follow; this life cycle is based on patriarchy and tradition, and any deviation leads to shame and disapproval.¹²

¹² IPPF, *Ending child marriage, A guide for global policy action*, p. 19

Subjugation of women

Pakistani girls are often raised to show respect to men and their in-laws, to obey and serve them. Girls in rural Pakistan, by the age of five, learn to ‘show an attitude of care and service towards men’.¹³ The younger the girl, the easier it is to condition her to the norms and expectations of her in-laws.

Protecting ‘chastity’

Child marriage is a way for families and societies to control girls’ sexuality and protect family honor.¹⁴ Once a girl is entrusted to her husband the parents are free of the burden of guarding their daughters from unchastely. Should a girl elope, become involved with a boy or adulterate, the family’s honor in the community is ruined. Any young, attractive girl is seen as the embodiment of boys’ lust and interest, and therefore to have her entrusted to a man lawfully is often the safest solution.

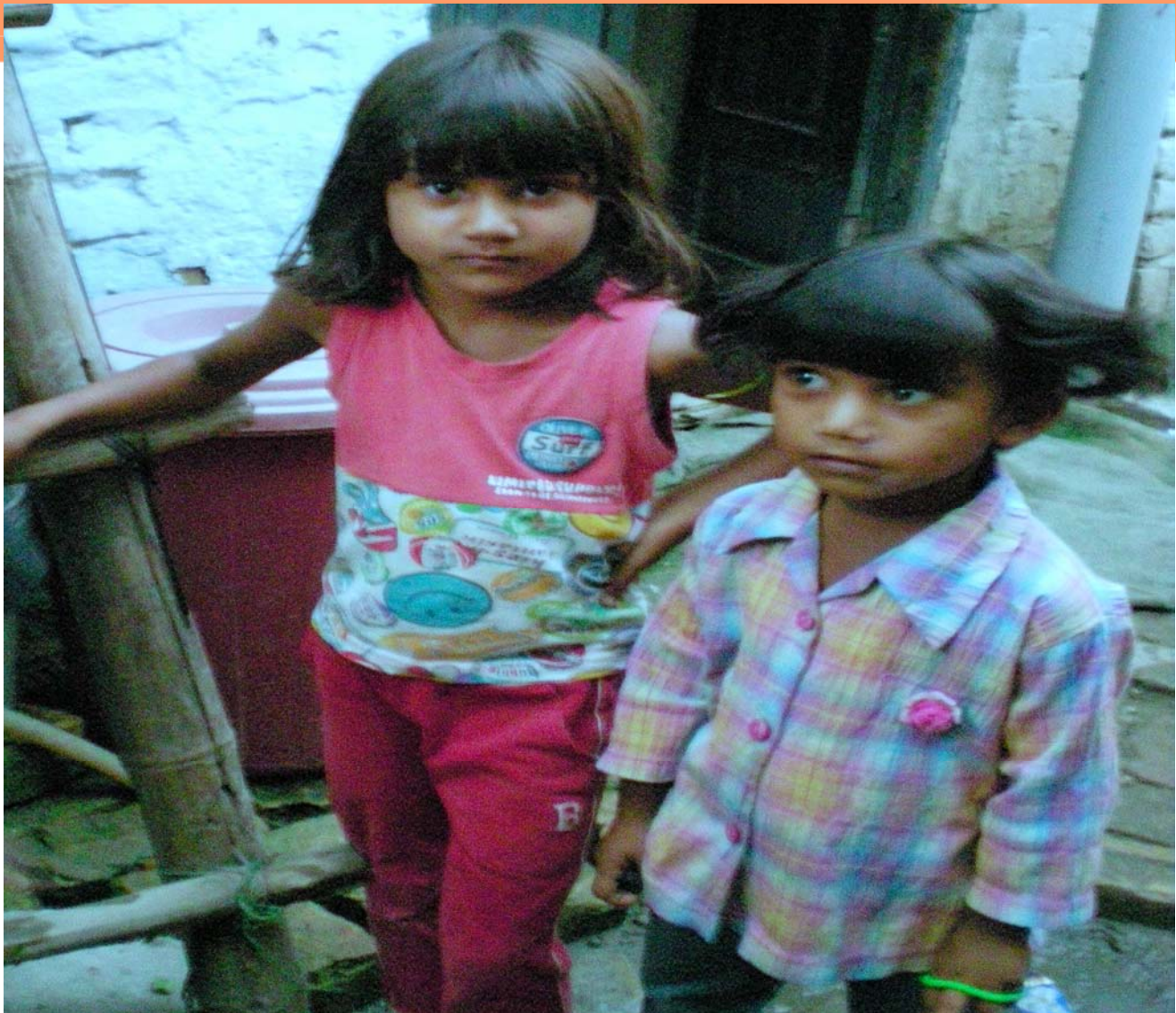
“Early marriage is one way to ensure that a wife is ‘protected’, or placed firmly under male control; that she is submissive to her husband and works hard for her in laws’ household; that the children she bears are ‘legitimate’; and that bonds of affection between couples do not undermine the family unit”.¹⁵



¹³ Government of Pakistan, Report of the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, 1989, quoted in UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001, pg 7

¹⁴ IPPF, *Ending child marriage, A guide for global policy action*, p. 19

¹⁵ Caldwell, John C. and Pat Caldwell, ‘Role of Marital Sexual Abstinence in Determining Fertility: A study of the Yoruba in Nigeria’, *Journal of Population Studies* Vol 31, 1, 1977, retrieved on August 20th, 2007, from UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001, p. 6



As a developing nation, Pakistan is stranded between modernization and tradition. As parts of its populace continue to move to the cities, and the desire for higher incomes leads more families to educate their children, more people are beginning to recognize the rights of girls and prefer later marriages. At the same time a large proportion of Pakistan's population remains isolated in rural areas from the modernization taking place in the cities; even people within cities continue to lack exposure to education and changing norms. Thus their tradition of child marriage continues to be perpetuated, perhaps even heightened from the fear of change.

Within cities females continue to face lack of exposure to education and changing norms. Thus their tradition of child marriage continues to be perpetuated, perhaps even heightened from the fear of change.

Swara- A Fate Worse Than Death

Child marriages are deeply embedded in Pakistan's customs and traditions. One such widespread tradition is, *swara*, alternatively called *Khoon-Baha*, *Vani* or *Sakh* depending on the area of Pakistan to which it is indigenous. *Swara* is the cruel, yet culturally sanctioned practice where girls are given in marriage as a form of dispute resolution. It is a prevalent form of child marriage, as many of the girls given as *swara* are children.

*"When sisters come together,
they praise their brothers.
When brothers meet,
they give their sisters away as
Swara
(A verse from a Pashto
wedding song)"**

*Ethnomedia and Development, 'Swara-the Human Shield', p.1



This custom exists in Pakistan's rural communities, sanctioned and prescribed by a *Jirga* or *Panchayat*, i.e. a council of elders from the community who form the local judiciary. Under the custom, when one party commits a crime against another party, the nearest virgin female relative of the offender is given to the victim's family as compensation for the crime. The receiving family takes over the girl as a punishment to the enemy. *Swara* usually requires one girl to be given but initially two or more are demanded and the aggrieved family selects from amongst the girls. By accepting the girls, the family is giving its forgiveness. The main sufferer in such a case of course, is the *vani*, often a young child who, caught in a whirlpool of helplessness, has no choice but to agree. Once a decision is reached as to which girl is to be taken, animals are slaughtered at a feast and it is announced that the dispute is formally settled.

The primary reason for giving *swara* is murder. *Swara* is also given in *sharam* or honor-related crimes, for example where a girl and boy elope. Other reasons include sodomy, sexual molestation, financial disputes and even petty disputes.¹⁶ The giving away of the girl is an occasion of sadness and misery. She is often deprived of her right to *Mehr* (the sum of money which the wife is entitled to receive from the husband in Islam). She is taunted by others hearing insults such as “Had you been a respectable woman, rice would have been cooked on your wedding.” and “Had you been a woman of honor people would have rendered songs on your wedding.”¹⁷

‘I was eight years old when I was given away as *swara*. My father had killed someone. It was not until two or three years later that I realized what my fate was. Others would point out this man to me and say that he is your husband. I did not understand and when I asked my mother she told me that I had been promised to him as a settlement for the murder my father had committed. She was sobbing at the time and when I asked why I had been given away she said that there was no other peaceful way to resolve the matter. I threatened that I would not go through with this and that I did not like what had been decided but she told me that what I liked or disliked did not matter; this was the decision of the elders of the family. When I was thirteen years old I was married to that man. My mother would cry before I left and would pray for my death. She knew that my life would be ruined once I went to that home.’*

Samar Minallah (Writer/Director), ‘*Swarra-Bridge Over troubled Water*’ [Documentary, Ethnomedia Communication for Development.

Child Marriages are very common in *swara* arrangements. The Marriage is usually decided before the girl hits puberty and she is taken in marriage once she does. The *Jirga* allows children to be taken as *swara* upon reaching puberty, but very often girls are taken even before. This is yet another action to take revenge on the offender. In actuality, families are often eager to give the youngest girl in marriage, in order to prolong the time period before she is taken. It is common to take the young girl to the *Jirga* where the aggrieved either accepts her or forgives the offender. This taking of the girl to a gathering is in itself a matter of shame for the family as women are usually not taken along to decide marriages. Even if the girl is granted forgiveness the scar of being *Swara* stays with her forever.¹⁸

Young Noreena’s father took his daughter to the *jirga* as part of the settlement for a crime committed by his parents. It was a petty dispute over division of water that led to the killing of three people for which Noreena was to pay the price. Her mother’s anguish reflects in her desolate eyes as she says “I was totally against this decision but was forced to agree at gun point. My Husband threatened to kill me if I did not give my daughter in *swara*...She is a small innocent child who has no idea what is going on. She does not yet realize that the rest of her life is going to be a torment and an ordeal.”

‘Noreena has already been married off at an age when she still enjoys playing with dolls’.*

Samar Minallah (Writer/Director), ‘*Swarra-Bridge Over troubled Water*’ [Documentary], Ethnomedia Communication for Development.

¹⁶ Ethnomedia and Development, ‘*Swara-the Human Shield*’, p. 83-85

¹⁷ Ethnomedia and Development, ‘*Swara-the Human Shield*’, p. 88

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.56-57

While swara was initially a symbol of peace in ending enmity between feuding families, today it has become closely linked to the concept of revenge (badal), with the daughter or sister given to the aggrieved family being ridiculed, abused and mistreated. Samar Minallah in her book 'Swara- The Human Shield', explains the concept behind Swara, i.e "Pukhtunwali...a native unwritten law that has been etched into the hearts and minds of its people, not to be eroded with the passage of time...Pakhtuns settle a loss by taking *badal* (revenge). This way of settling dispute is seen as maintenance of one's honor."¹⁹ The woman is helpless and voiceless. She does not protest but accepts her fate.



"There have been cases where even an unborn girl child has been promised in compensation. In Swabi, Akbar demanded a swara as compensation from Malik who had humiliated Akbar's sister. Malik, whose daughter Shaheen had not even been born promised to hand over his daughter to Akbar's son once she would be old enough. For such young girls it is often said '*Khaza lay yak or day, Ya gor*' (she has been tied to the post like an animal)."

Ethnomedia and Development, '*Swara-the Human Shield*', p57

*"I'm punished for the doing of my father.
The arrows of slander and insult pierce my soul.
People forget my name.
Everyone calls me Swara.
This is my sin, this is my fault.
This is my mistake, this is my guilt.
I was bargained a Swara.
I was disgraced."**

*Zaitun Bano, 'Swara', in '*Swara-the Human Shield*' by Ethnomedia and Development, p.103

¹⁹.ibid., p.38, 42-43

Though the custom of Vani was made illegal in 2004, the practice continues. No cases of Vani have been tried yet. Undoubtedly, these customary practices will be difficult to prevent. According to press reports, the Law and Justice Commission in 2004 came out with a draft amendment to article 366-C of the Pakistan Penal Code which makes the offence punishable by up to ten years imprisonment and a fine. Unfortunately this amendment has not been passed as yet, and no cases of swara tried.



In 2002, the chief justice of Pakistan declared vani and swara as un-Islamic and expressed concern over the rising number of these cases. The Chief Justices of high courts were all given instruction to ensure that trial courts do not allow for a woman to be given as compensation.

Amnesty International in Asia & the Pacific, *Child Marriages*, Retrieved on July 30th, 2007 from asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aproweb.nsf/pages/svaw_childMarriages

In March 2004, a case was brought in front of a judge in Dadu, Sindh province, regarding the sale of Akthiar, a 7-year-old girl to a 35-year-old man for marriage. The girl's mother appeared with her in court to protest the sale of her daughter, by her husband to Ali Hassan, a resident of Mazdoorabad Moholla in Dadu for Rs. 18,000 (300 USD). Akthiar managed to escape. Since then Ali Hassan has attempted to kidnap her back, and her mother is seeking protection for her daughter. An investigation into the incident was called for by the judge.

Amnesty International in Asia & the Pacific, *Child Marriages*, Retrieved on July 30th, 2007 from asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aproweb.nsf/pages/svaw_childMarriages

Pait Likkhi, Watta Satta, Addo Baddo and Vulvar

Exchange Marriage or Watta Satta is a tribal custom in Pakistan that often leads to young girls being given in marriage. Under the custom, brides are exchanged between two parties, “bartering bride for bride”. If, for example parents want to marry their son to some family’s daughter, they will give their own daughter in marriage to the other family’s son in return. If there is no daughter to exchange, a female relative may be bartered off instead.²⁰

The overall ratio of exchange marriages in Pakistan, according to a recent study is 10.9 percent.²¹ According to another study, exchange marriages account for a third of all marriages in rural Pakistan.²² Often, watta satta arrangements lead to the marriage of very young girls, if the girl is demanded or if an older girl is not available.

“Because marriage in rural Pakistan is often arranged by parents well in advance of the actual ceremony, sometimes when the principals are still children, care must be exercised in categorizing watta satta relationships. An intended exchange may not be operational at the time of the marriage. In particular, if there is a sufficiently large age gap between the two couples, the second couple may not yet be married and, possibly, not even born!”²³

Another custom that contributes to child marriages is Pait Likkhi, (literally written on stomach), a custom in tribal regions and rural areas of Pakistan where two families agree to marry their children before they are born or are still very young. The actual marriage takes place when groom and bride are slightly older. Most women get married between the ages of 13-16. The majority of men were aged 18-25 at the age of marriage. Marriages are often organized by the village elders when the prospective spouses are children - the practice is called pait likkhi (Pait means stomach and likkhi means written; literally written on stomach) and solemnized years later. Many of the villagers believe that these marriage customs are Muslim and that the rights and obligations of husband and wife follow the Sharia (Islamic Religious Law).²⁴

A similar custom called Addo Baddo also exists in the tribal and rural regions of Pakistan; families agree to marry their daughters to boys of other clans when they are children.²⁵

²⁰ Wikipedia, *Watta Satta*, retrieved on August 30th, 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watta_satta

²¹ Myra Imran, *Survey Findings, Arranged marriages outmatch love marriages*, retrieved on August 20th, 2007 from http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=67912

²² Myra Imran, *Survey Findings, Arranged marriages outmatch love marriages*, retrieved on August 20th, 2007 from http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=67912

²³ *ibid.*, p. 4

²⁴ Wikipedia, *Pait Likkhi*, retrieved on August 30th, 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pait_Likkhi

²⁵ Wikipedia, *Addo Baddo*, retrieved on August 30th, 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Addo_Baddo

The Effect of Child Marriages in Pakistan

Bride prices are another contributor to child marriage, In Balochistan, this system of bride price is known as *vulvar*; The groom pays money for a proposal to the parents of the girl. The amount of *vulvar* varies in different marriages.²⁶

Violation of Human Rights

Child marriage is a travesty of justice at all levels. It is in direct opposition to human rights laws and laws concerning the rights of children. A child marriage is a matrimony that takes place without the consent of the child/children. This may be because the child is directly forced to agree; alternatively it may be because the child is so young that he/she does not have the authority and sense of judgment to make a decision. In this case the child's innocent compliance is blindly submitted as proof of his/her acceptance.

Millennium Development Goals

Child marriage poses an obstacle for many of the Millennium development goals-eradicating poverty and hunger (MDG 1); achieving universal primary education (MDG 2); promoting gender equality (MDG 3); protecting children's lives (4); and improving health (5, 6).

UNICEF, *Child Protection and Information Sheet, Child Marriage*, 2006, retrieved on August 1st, 2007 from http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Child_Marriage.pdf



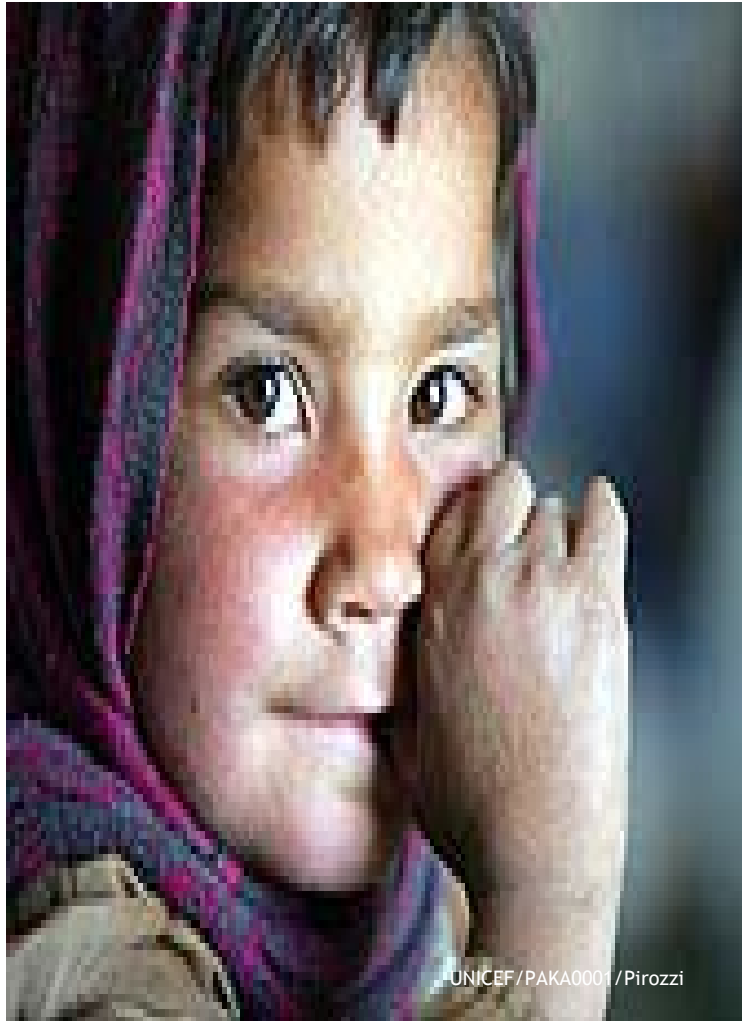
²⁶ Human Development Foundation, *General Description of the District Zhob*, retrieved on August 31st, 2007 from <http://www.yespakistan.com/HDF/zhob/Zhob.asp>

Effect on the Child's Development

The marriage itself has far-reaching, life-destroying consequences for the child/children concerned; it leads to a “denial of childhood and adolescence, curtailment of personal freedom and the lack of opportunity to develop a full sense of self-hood as well as the denial of psychosocial and emotional well-being, reproductive health and educational opportunity”²⁷

Once a child marriage takes place, a young girl or boy is seen as a grown woman or man, with the same responsibilities as an adult. It therefore entails the robbery of a childhood, and the deprivation of the development that the child would have experienced had he or she been given the chance to simply grow.

Education is immediately stunted, particularly for young girls. Studies of early marriages in Pakistani girls show a direct relationship between education and the age at which children marry (see back to ‘How Common is Child Marriage in Pakistan?’).²⁸ Parents stop children’s education when they feel it is time to get married. Moreover, they often prevent girls from studying at all, seeing no point in educating someone whose ultimate purpose is to get married and bear children. Girls are thus denied a basic upbringing and a chance in developing themselves. Their intellectual development is stunted; they have the chance to develop a life of their own and learn to be independent; they never have the luxury of their own friends and social life. This also contributes to their later subjugation: an uneducated woman with no means to support herself will often put up with terrible domestic situations for lack of an alternative; her destroyed self-esteem will further prevent her from taking action.



²⁷ UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001, p. 9

²⁸ Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey*, p. 91, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf>

Domestic Life

In Pakistan a married girl is expected to move to her husband's house upon marriage and live there with her spouse and in-laws. Males however, stay in their own parents' home with their brides joining them. Marriage thus requires significant adjustments for the young girl, first making her leave her own family home and then accept another family's home as her own. She often has to live in slave-like conditions, being treated badly by her in laws, with no one from her own family there to support her in her young age. Moreover, a study found that younger girls are more likely to have to live with their in laws than older girls; 81 percent of young married adolescents lived with their in laws while only 70 percent of slightly elder girls lived with their in laws.²⁹

Early marriage often leads to significant age difference between the spouses. This often has significant implications for the power structure of the households; an already subjugated young wife is further dominated due to her lesser age. While younger girls are preferred for their beauty and youth, boys are often preferred at older ages as they are more likely to be financially better-off. Moreover, customary preferences, practices such as *swara*, considerations such as political allegiances between families and economic promises to the bride's parents often lead to young attractive girls being married off to far older men.

A study sample recorded that, on average, the younger the girl is the greater the age difference is likely to be between her and her spouse. It was seen, for example that a female who is married prior to the age of 15 will have a husband who, on average, is seven years older. However, if she marries after 18, the spousal age difference is likely to be less than five years.³⁰



²⁹ Population Council, Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey, p. 94-95, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf>

³⁰ Population Council, Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey, p. 92-93, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf> , see **annex 1**

Figure 5.6 age difference between spouses, by sex and age at marriage



Freedom of choice

According to custom, Pakistani marriages are generally arranged by parents, elder relatives and the local community. Young people, females in particular, have little say in when they marry and who they are married to. Moreover studies show that younger girls have less of a chance to express their disapproval of a marriage decision than do older girls.³¹

Domestic Violence

Child marriage is one of the most prevalent forms of violence against women. It leads to estrangement from family at a very young age, before a child is strong enough to live by itself. It represses individual freedom and curtails the right to pursue healthy activities. Child marriages can also result in bonded labor, slavery, sexual exploitation and domestic violence- 50 percent of the perpetrators of violence are male relatives.³² Early marriage is also often associated with wife abandonment, divorce and separation.³³



³¹ Population Council, Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey, p. 90, retrieved on August 1st, 2007, from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf>

³² *Human Right for Women and Children*, Centre of Strategic Planning for Development in Pakistan April 2005 Issue no. 1

³³ Bruce J., C.B. Loyd and A. Leonard, *Families in Focus: New Perspectives on Mothers, Fathers and Children*, The Population Council, New York, 1995, retrieved on August 1st, 2007, from UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001 p 12

Reproductive and Sexual Health

A married female in Pakistan does not have the liberty to refuse sex; she will often have to consent even if unwell. She may also not demand sexual protection. Studies show that the use of contraception is very limited in Pakistan and that younger girls are less likely to be able to use it than older women; in the Pakistan Reproductive Health and Family Planning Survey (2000-01) only 5 percent of adolescent females reported using contraception as compared to 12 percent of the older females.

Unprotected sexual relations with young girls lead to premature pregnancies; apart from the emotional trauma of such an occurrence, girls between 15 and 19 are also twice as likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth as women in their twenties³⁴. In fact, pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of death in 15-19 year old girls world-wide.³⁵ The condition is exacerbated by the fact that use of antenatal services by married young people is scarce across Pakistan. Moreover it is even less used by adolescents than by older women; a study found that younger females (aged 15-19) reported a birth at home more than did older females (78 percent as compared to 70 percent). At their first birth, the younger females were and less likely to have a medical person (24 percent compared to 32 percent).³⁶

A study investigating the prevalence of gynecological morbidities in Pakistani women found that uterine prolapses were significantly higher among women who married at ages below or equal to sixteen years. "Young" Pakistani women report an immense burden of reproductive ill health, especially those who began sexual activity at an early age."³⁷ Obstetric fistula, which results when a young mother's vagina, bladder and/or rectum tear during childbirth, often occurs to young women during childbirth. Fistula patients are commonly poor women of young ages below 20.³⁸

Pregnancy and marriage are closely related in Pakistan, most marriages are almost immediately followed by a pregnancy. In a study by the Population Council, 5 percent of the adolescent females aged 15 reported being pregnant, followed by 8 percent aged 16, 13 percent aged 17 and 20 percent aged 18. The study further found that more girls are likely to be pregnant at earlier ages if they live in rural areas, and have low education and socio-economic status: all factors also contributing to early marriage. The highest level of

³⁴ United Nations Population fund, *State of World Population 2005: The Promise of Equality, Gender Equity, Reproductive health and The Millennium Development Goals*, UNFPA, New York, 2005, p 50, retrieved on July 31 2007 from http://www.UNICEF.org/protection/files/Child_Marriage.pdf

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey*, p. 100-101, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf> , see **Annex 2**

³⁷ Sajjan F, Fikree FF. Department of Community Health Sciences, The Agha Khan University, Karachi, PMID: 12117218, retrieved on June 30th, 2007 from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?Db=PubMed&Cmd=ShowDetailView&TermToSearch=12117218&ordinalpos=15&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum

³⁸ Source: United Nations Population Fund (2003). *Obstetric Fistula Needs Assessment Report: Findings from Nine African Countries*. UNFPA: New York quoted in ICRW, *Too Young to Wed*

adolescent pregnancy and motherhood was found in Balochistan and the lowest in NWFP. Taking another more accurate sample, it was seen that 42 percent of females give birth before age 20.³⁹

Children born to very young mothers are often unhealthy and weak; they are almost twice as likely to die as children born to older mothers.⁴⁰ Unprotected sexual relations also cause sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV Aids; teenage girls are more susceptible to such infections for a number of biological factors.⁴¹

Figure 5.7 Percent of adolescent females (aged 15-19) who are mothers or pregnant with their first child, by various categories

Category	Mother	Pregnant w/ first child	Total	N ^a
Current age in years				
15	3.0	1.6	4.6	754
16	5.7	2.4	8.1	489
17	10.8	2.2	13.0	489
18	17.0	3.2	20.2	591
19	25.3	4.2	29.5	424
<i>N</i>	2,750	2,739	2,750	2,750
Province				
Punjab	10.7	2.7	13.4	1,169
Sindh	13.7	2.7	16.4	754
NWFP	9.6	1.2	10.8	463
Balochistan	13.7	4.9	18.6	358
<i>N</i>	2,744	2,739	2,744	2,744
Residence				
Rural	13.9	3.2	17.1	1,646
Urban	5.4	1.1	6.5	1,098
<i>N</i>	2,744	2,739	2,744	2,744
SES				
Low	20.7	3.8	24.5	532
Low-mid	13.4	3.5	16.9	593
High-mid	8.2	1.8	10.0	698
High	5.1	1.0	6.1	799
<i>N</i>	2,625	2,621	2,625	2,625
Educational attainment				
Never attended	19.0	4.6	23.6	1,152
Less than primary	10.4	1.6	12.0	390
Completed primary	3.3	0.9	4.2	877
Completed secondary	3.5	0.4	3.9	327
<i>N</i>	2,747	2,742	2,747	2,750

^aMarginal N for "percent mothers."

³⁹ Population Council, *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-2001, A Nationally Representative Survey*, p. 98-100, retrieved on August 1st 2007 from <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/ayp0102.pdf>, see Annex 3

⁴⁰ United Nations, *Adolescent Reproductive Behavior: Evidence from Developing Countries*, Vol. II., UN Population Studies No. 109/Add.1., New York, retrieved from UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001 p. 11

⁴¹ UNICEF, *'Too old for toys, too young for motherhood'*, New York, 1994, retrieved from UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001 p. 105

Effects on Society

Early marriage is a widespread phenomenon in Pakistan, affecting a third of its adolescents, and therefore leading to multiple harmful social and economic consequences for society as a whole. By extending girls' child-birth spans it increases the size of the population⁴². In an already overpopulated country, this poses a serious problem. Moreover, it leads to a less educated populace and therefore lower productivity, lower employment and lower income. Early marriage increases human rights violations and also creates many health problems. If young girls are married to older men, they are widowed early and become an economic burden. Early marriage contributes to poverty, especially among women, and also among families as less-educated women cannot contribute to the household income.



⁴²UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest, Early Marriage*, 2001 p. 2

Islam and Child Marriages

In Islam, marriage is a means by which a man and woman can care for each other in a manner that is legitimate and pure, procreate and live in peace and tranquility. It is a means of emotional and sexual gratification, and also a form of worship as it represents obedience to Allah. The contract of marriage is a solemn covenant, and for the covenant to be valid, certain conditions must exist. First and foremost of these condition is that there must be consent of both the parties.⁴³

Notable Islamic scholars have emphasized that, "marriages without the consent of both partners are not valid under Islamic law, so sex within forced marriage is rape and parents and religious leaders who force couples to wed are abetting sex crimes". While no section of the Quran or Hadith specifies an appropriate age for marriage, reference is made to age of marriage as the age of "sound judgment" and "maturity", both physical and mental. In fact, marriage in Islam is not encouraged unless a man can cater for the wives' and children's health, religious, educational and socio-economic needs. Islam is therefore against early marriage or marriage without the mutual consent of the partners.⁴⁴

"Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of Allah, and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice... (Between accepting the marriage or invalidating it) (Ahmad, Hadith no. 2469)"⁴⁵



⁴³ *Marriage in Islam*, retrieved on 20th, 2007, August from <http://www.jannah.org/sisters/marr.html>

⁴⁴ *Epilogue to Childhood Encounter*, 01 April 2001, retrieved on August 20th, 2007, from <http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=268&Language=1>

⁴⁵ Zafar Khan, *Are Child Marriages allowed in Islam?* retrieved on August 20th, 2007, from <http://www.islamawareness.net/Marriage/Child/>

All Sunni schools of thought⁴⁶ agree that forced marriages are strictly forbidden in Islam, as Islamic Marriages are contracts between two consenting parties referred to as *mithaq*. It has been quoted from Muhammad, “...the virgin shall not be married, until her consent is obtained.” The Prophet (PBUH) also gave women the power to annul their marriages if they were married without their consent. “When a man gives his daughter in marriage and she dislikes it, the marriage shall be annulled”.⁴⁶

Islam also lays down strict rules for the rights of girls in marriage, in opposition to the cruel treatment that young girls are usually subjected to in child marriages. The husband is responsible for the wife’s maintenance, ensuring her privacy, comfort and independence. The prophet is reported to have said: “This world is just temporary conveniences, and the best comfort in this world is a righteous woman.” (Muslim).⁴⁷ The wife is entitled to a marriage gift that is her own, known as ‘*mahr*’. The wife is also entitled to be treated with equity, respect, kindness and consideration.⁴⁸



⁴⁶ Wikipedia, *Islam and Children*, retrieved on August 20th, 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_children#Marriage

⁴⁷ Dr. Muhammad ‘Ali Al-Hashimi, *The Muslim and His Wife* (An Excerpt from the Book “The Ideal Muslim: The True Islāmic Personality of the Muslim as Defined in the Qur’ān and Sunnah”), retrieved on August 20th, 2007, from http://wefound.org/texts/Ideal_Muslims_files/hiswife.htm

⁴⁸ *Marriage in Islam*, retrieved on August 20th, 2007, from <http://www.jannah.org/sisters/marr.html>

Combating Child Marriages: Policy Suggestions

While child marriages are so rampant in our society, it is surprising to see the inadequate services available for the survivors of this tragedy. There are few public service centres which people can approach for assistance and support in such cases. There are also very, very few NGOs/CBOs or Government Agencies that address this issue in any major or substantive way. There are organizations that work on other issues such as rape, child sexual abuse, swara, vani, domestic violence - and may deal with the issue of child marriage as an additional dimension.

Some steps which could be taken in order to combat and stop child marriages are:

1) Creating an Effective Human Rights Framework

A human rights framework is a powerful tool for preventing child marriages and empowering girls who are vulnerable to such practices. Governments who ratify international human rights conventions are bound to provide a basic level of human rights to their citizens.⁴⁹ While Pakistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Child in 1990, which prohibits child marriage, there have been few steps taken by the Government to ensure that such practices do not take place.



Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 16 (1): Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to find a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2): Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3): The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Universal declaration of Human Rights, retrieved on August 1st, 2007, from <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

⁴⁹ IPPF, *Ending child marriage, A guide for global policy action*, p. 21

What the Law of Pakistan Says

Under The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 a child is a person who, if a male, is under eighteen years of age and, if a female, is under sixteen years of age (The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, effective July 15, 1961, changed the age of marriage eligibility for girls from 14 years to 16 years). The Act prescribes a simple imprisonment of up to one month and/or a fine of up to Rs.1000 for an adult conducting or directing a child marriage (unless he proves that he had reason to believe that the marriage was not a child marriage) and any person having charge of the minor, who does any act to promote or permit the marriage or negligently fails to prevent it. A female violator however is not sent to jail and is simply fined.⁵⁰ The Pakistan Penal Code (articles 310 & 338-E) also prohibits the sale and underage marriage of Girls.⁵¹

If a child marriage is discovered, a complaint can be lodged to the local union council, or any other authority. Magistrates can also issue stay orders to stop an upcoming early marriage.

Child marriages, when discovered, do remain valid under the law; however their continuity is based on the consent of the minor boy or girl when they become adults. The provision of revoking child marriages is also available under the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act of 1929, under which a marriage can be dissolved if conducted in childhood.⁵²

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Under Article 12 children have the right to have their views taken into account in matters that concern them

Article 24 calls for the abolition of traditional practices that can damage the health of children

Article 28 bestows the right of education

Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls, *Early Marriage, Whose Right to Choose?* retrieved on August 1st 2007, from www.eenet.org.uk/key_issues/gender/emarriage_choose.pdf



⁵⁰ *Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929* retrieved on August 15th 2007, from http://www.vakilno1.com/saarclaw/pakistan/child_marriage_restraint_act.htm

⁵¹ Amnesty International in Asia & the Pacific, *Child Marriages*, retrieved on July 30th 2007, from asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aproweb.nsf/pages/svaw_childMarriages

⁵² Mohammad Kamran, *Parents to be prosecuted in child marriage cases*, retrieved on August 20th, 2007 from http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C01%5C29%5Cstory_29-1-2006_pg1_3

Legal reform

The law on restricting child marriages is mild, imposing only minor punishments on perpetrators. Moreover the loops in Pakistan's legal system provide gaps for violators to pass through, for example, by changing the age of the girl on her marriage certificate or simply using social status to step up above the law. It is therefore of utmost importance that, in dealing with child marriages, the gaps in the law be identified and dealt with.

In any strategy to create a transparent human rights framework, the following steps are absolutely vital:

- All births must be registered.
Reports suggest that birth registration in Pakistan is as low as 20 percent of all births.⁵³
- All marriages must similarly be registered
- The punishments imposed on those who sanction, arrange, direct and solemnize child marriages, as well as on any adult taking part in a child marriage must be made harsher and exemplary.
- Training should also be given to local government and judiciary to instruct them on the importance of vehemently combating child marriages and how to respond effectively to child marriage situations.

The following suggestions on law reform were made by IPPF in their report "Ending Child marriage, A guide for Global Policy Action":

- Amend/Introduce new legislation on child marriage; enforce mechanisms to guarantee eighteen as the minimum age of marriage for both males and females and to guarantee consent and impose appropriate sanctions on violators.
- Review/amend National family and marriage laws and policies which discriminate against girls in order to enhance their independence.
- Enforce the registration of all births and marriages to effectively implement child marriage laws.
- Work towards removal of all reservations on International conventions, such as CEDAW.
- Ensure that all reports to key International human rights treaty bodies have a distinct focus on measures taken towards reducing child marriages.

⁵³ Staff report, *Birth registration as low as 20% in Pakistan*, retrieved on August 23rd, 2007 from http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_18-2-2005_pg7_52

Daily Times

Courts mandated to impose 'cost' for frivolous litigation

Staff Report

“The LJCP took serious notice of unfortunate practices of ‘wani’, ‘swara’ (compensational marriages for dispute resolution) and child marriage. It reviewed the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 and recommended that punishment for an adult male who married a minor girl should be six-month imprisonment and fine.

It said facilitators of such marriages should also be awarded the same punishment and violators of court injunctions against child marriages should be jailed for one year and fined Rs. 25,000.

It recommended amendments in Majority Act 1875 to fix a uniform majority of age of 18 years. It also recommended amendments in the Guardian and Wards Act 1890 to give guardianship of minors to mother and father equally.”

Retrieved on 20th August, 2007, from
http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C07%5C28%5Cstory_28-7-2007_pg7_12 Saturday, July 28, 2007



2) Researching the Issue

There is a significant deficiency of available material on child marriages in Pakistan. This stems from a lack of awareness of, as well as a lack of interest in, the subject; while child and female rights have been analyzed from other perspectives such as domestic violence and child education, child marriage in its own right has been largely ignored. This domestic apathy has also led to some lack of awareness in the international community; in many globally centered reports on child marriage, Pakistan occupies a minimal role, possibly due to the lack of data available.

Any attempt to put forward strategies for dealing with child marriage requires research on the topic. It is only by studying the problem that contributory factors can be identified and then combated. Both government and civil institutions working for child marriages should incorporate researching the issue at all levels into their plans.

In its report “Ending Child marriage, A guide for Global Policy Action”, the IPPF recommended that the following priority questions be used to guide any research on child marriage:

- What are the determinants of child marriages in hotspot areas?
- What is the impact that laws have on the practice of child marriage?
- What is the impact of child marriage on the health of young women and infants?
- What are the indicators needed to measure child marriage intervention programmes?
- What are the links between child marriage and key development concerns including education, maternal and child health, gender equality, poverty and HIV?



3) Creating Awareness

It is important that awareness of the issue be created among the population. Adolescents need to be informed of their rights, but most importantly, parents need to be informed of their responsibilities towards their children, and how child marriage is a violation of these responsibilities. As most child marriages are arranged by parents and family elders, it is necessary to initiate dialogue with them and inform them of the effects of such practices. Teachers and health officials can play a vital role in disseminating such information. The dangers of child marriages should be incorporated in the school curriculum for children. For parents, these should be explained through parent and teacher seminars. Doctors and nurses of the area should talk to parents about the health risks of early child birth.

Public awareness programs should be started on a wider scale, targeting all communities, especially those in rural areas. Community organizations should be given the task of enforcing such programmes. The participation of all key stakeholders should be ensured, so that parents, children, health officials, teachers and authorities can work together to end this destructive practice.


Through awareness sessions, social norms and traditions which uphold child marriages must be eroded away. Cultural and religious groups should be involved in such efforts, so as to change the mindset of the people. Community programs should be supported and uprooted, as traditions have to be changed from the grass-root level.⁵⁴

“Tostan Taps Tradition to Prevent Child Marriage

Tostan, an international nongovernmental organization based in Senegal, uses a combination of non-formal education and social mobilization to advance its goal of empowering communities and reducing the practices of child marriage and female genital cutting (FGC). Local facilitators teach education sessions which include child marriage-related issues such as sexually transmitted infections, AIDS, birth control and birth spacing. Those who take part in the education program pass on their new knowledge to the rest of the community as well as to other villages through inter-village meetings. Public discussions are held with the community to seek its support in denouncing harmful practices, including early marriage. The program also taps into African tradition—dance, poetry, theater and song—to convey messages and gain the buy-in of stakeholders, including girls who may be targeted for early marriage and people who have influence over those decisions. *Tostan's* model for peaceful social change is based on the belief that communities themselves must consciously and actively pursue the process of change from within. The program was able to bring about change in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors in 90 intervention villages, and these were reinforced by a public declaration by approximately 300 villages against child marriage and FGC.

ICRW, *New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs*, 38

⁵⁴ ICRW, *How to End Child Marriage, Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection*, p. 1



“Booking’ Practice Substitutes School for Prospective Grooms

In 1999, Christian Children’s Fund’s (CCF) Margery Kabuya started a program to prevent child marriage among Kenya’s Maasai tribe through an approach that taps into Maasai traditions and compensates for the economic incentive of marrying girls. In the Maasai culture, baby girls are promised as wives to men before they are even born—a practice called “booking.” The project, called the Naning’oi Girls Boarding School, substitutes the traditional practice of booking girls for marriage with booking them for school instead. Naning’oi works within the framework of the dowry system, where the school represents a man in search of a young bride. Well respected members of the Maasai community become “suitors” on the school’s behalf, offering gifts to a girl’s father in exchange for committing to his daughter’s attendance at the boarding school. To date, 350 girls are enrolled and more than 500 additional infants and girls have been booked, waiting until they are old enough to attend school.”

ICRW, *New Insights to Preventing Child Marriages, A Global Analysis of Factors and Programmes* (April 2007), p. 39

4) Recognizing Adolescence

In Pakistan, adolescence is frequently sidelined and undervalued. Most adolescents are expected to make a transition from childhood to adulthood directly, without the inclusion of the necessary phase of their life when they are in between. It is this stage which is most important for the development of the child, and it is at this time that the child begins to decide the course that he or she will walk in life. Marriage at this time is therefore damaging at a number of levels.



In Egypt, a project in the *Moqattam* settlement (a garbage collecting community) offers 500 pounds to girls who delay marriage till the age of eighteen. This scheme gives incentive to parents and provides girls with the means to support their education or any other activity that they may wish to pursue

Barbara S. Munch, Judith Bruce, Margaret E. Greene, *the Uncharted Passage: Girls' Adolescence in the Developing World*, p. 81

It is important that adolescence be recognized as a separate sphere of policy, and provisions be made to meet the needs of children during this time. Moreover, it is vital that the adolescence experience of girls be recognized as distinct from that of boys. Girls' adolescence in Pakistan is rarely their own; their decisions are made and enforced by their parents. Making parents and caregivers aware of the importance of this stage, and the nurturing that children require during it is therefore a vital step in combating child marriage. Public policies must be built upon the understanding that what happens to girls is generally not their free will.⁵⁵ Finally, dealing with the sexuality of adolescents in a manner that is both healthy and acceptable by society is important. Sex in Pakistan is not sanctioned outside of marriage, and therefore teaching adults how to handle their sexual urges should be a part of delayed marriage programs.

⁵⁵ Barbara S. Munch, Judith Bruce, Margaret E. Greene, *The Uncharted Passage: Girls' Adolescence in the Developing World*, p. 79



5) Removing Gender Inequality:

Educating girls must be a top priority for tackling child marriages. As was discussed earlier, the age at which a girl marries in Pakistan is directly linked with her education level. Education makes girls capable of standing on their own two feet and therefore demanding that they make their own decisions. Once in a marriage, girls are better able to withstand any torture from their in-laws and husband if they do not have a sense of dependence. Not only does education free girls economically, but it also gives them self-confidence and self-assurance. Women in Pakistan are plagued with low self worth, feeling it their duty to sacrifice themselves for the sake of men and also their in laws. Education shows them the alternative picture. It also informs them of their rights, and what they are capable of achieving.

Girls must also be empowered economically in more direct ways. More employment opportunities must be created for girls. Micro-credit and micro-enterprise schemes should be directed towards young girls. Vocational trainings and capacity building must be provided to them, endowing them with those skills that are marketable in the context of their own economy.

Furthermore, girls must be empowered physically. Self-defense classes, physical strength training and sports can give girls a great feeling of power and independence. Their bodies, which throughout their adolescence are seen as lustful objects to be kept hidden within four walls, should become a source of strength for them. Girls must be provided with spaces where they are free to venture out and exist in a healthy, nurturing atmosphere.



Delaying Marriage in India

The Life Skills Education Program in India, run by the Institute for Health Management, Parched, works with marginalized individuals, families and communities. The one-year life skills course was started based on the idea that empowering girls improves their health and social status. The intervention achieved impressive results after two short years, raising the median age at marriage to 17. **Additionally, thousands of adolescent girls have been transformed in a culture that relegates them to second-class citizens.** Girls who completed the life skills course exhibit more self-confidence, speak without hesitation and fear, are more independent in daily activities and are better prepared to influence decisions about their own lives, including marriage. The course curriculum focuses on self-sufficiency and covers a wide range of practical lessons, from using the post office to the negative health and social consequences of early marriage. Much of the program's success and sustainability depends on community involvement. IHMP invites parents to participate in various ways throughout the intervention. Actively involving parents helps retain girls for the one-year duration of the course. The community helps recruit qualified teachers from within their villages, and in some cases, community members persuade wary parents to allow their daughters to participate. Local leaders are kept apprised of the program's progress and offered numerous opportunities to observe activities.

ICRW, *Success on the ground, reducing child marriage*, retrieved on August 21st, 2007, from http://www.icrw.org/docs/2006_cmtoolkit/cm_factsheets_success.pdf

6) Supporting Married Adolescents

In efforts to combat early marriages in the future, the generation of adolescent girls who are already trapped in the shackles of child marriage must not be forgotten. Outreach programs should focus on providing these girls with the resources and information to live the rest of their lives in a healthy, safe and productive manner.

Health programs must be initiated for the physical well being of these girls, who, without the requisite information could spend the rest of their lives paying for mistakes they had no choice but to make. Contraceptive awareness, HIV protection and safe childbirth methods must be brought to these adolescents.

Community Transformation in Ethiopia

Reforming entrenched cultural beliefs about child marriage does not come easy, but communities in Ethiopia are coming together as a powerful force for change. Pathfinder International/Ethiopia collaborates with local partners to form early marriage cancellation committees, which involve all levels of civil society. **Girls' clubs educate girls about harmful traditional practices such as early marriage as well as reproductive health and other life skills.** These clubs empower girls to act as peer educators and serve as a support network for girls trying to escape early marriage. Girls in these clubs frequently report the planned early marriages of friends to the head of the club or a women's association representative, which triggers efforts to counsel parents to prevent the marriage. If parents persist in marrying their young daughters, early marriage committees will take legal action.

Pathfinder also provides scholarships to promote educational opportunities for young girls whose marriages have been cancelled. Recognizing that legal enforcement alone cannot change deep-rooted traditions, Pathfinder and its partners also have engaged faith-based organizations and leaders who wield enormous influence within communities. **Pathfinder invites religious leaders to participate in early marriage committees and conducts workshops to educate them on the negative consequences of harmful traditions.** In one year, Pathfinder and its partners prevented more than 12,000 marriages: The success of these holistic interventions demonstrates that change is possible

ICRW, *Success on the ground, reducing child marriage*,
retrieved on August 7, 2007, from
http://www.icrw.org/docs/2006_cmtoolkit/cm_factsheet_s_success.pdf



Awareness sessions should be organized with the aim of convincing these adolescents that their lives did not end with marriage and are not restricted with their four walls of their houses. Educational and economic opportunities must be made available to married girls.

Moreover, along with physical and economic support, emotional support must also be given. Help-lines, counseling and therapy should be provided for damaged girls escaping hard marriages in order to rehabilitate them psychologically. Shelters must be created to provide a safe haven for girls who are victims of domestic violence.



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Annexes

Figure 5.8 Person who attended at first birth, for all ever married who have had a child

Birth attendant	15-19 year olds		20-24 year olds	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Relative/friend	10.2	37.7	18.7	27.0
Traditional attendant	81.2	63.2	56.1	56.2
Medical person	19.4	23.8	29.6	31.9
<i>N</i>	35	292	194	985

Note: The three most cited answers included. Multiple responses possible.

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Sample Questionnaire

- What is your name?
- What is your age?
- What was your age when you got married?
- What is your education level (if any)?
- Why did you cut your education short (if you did)?
- What were the circumstances surrounding your marriage
- What was your response to the decision?
- Did you protest and if so how were your protests heard?
- What was your understanding of the concept of 'marriage' at the time you got married?
- How did your life change after you got married?
- Approximately how many hours of household work did you have to do?
- Did you live with your in-laws? If so how did they treat you?
- How was your husband's attitude towards you?
- Did you feel unprepared to undertake the responsibilities of a married woman?
- Did others around you understand that you were simply a child or did they hold the same expectations of you that they would from an older woman?
- How did the marriage impact your 'childhood'? Was it cut off immediately?
- Were you given the option of continuing your education?
- Were you given the option of working?
- How long after the marriage did you have a child (if applicable)?
- Did the early birth cause health problems (if applicable)?
- Were you given the option of not having a child?
- In your view are child marriages harmful and why? Would you marry your children early?

*This is an unstructured questionnaire and was used in an informal manner in order to allow the interviewee to feel more comfortable and be more open. The interviewer frequently deviated from the questions to further explore issues that were raised.