

The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK)

Child marriage in humanitarian settings: Findings from girl-centred and girl-led research

CRANK research meeting 15 September 2021 – Key takeaways

[Child marriage in humanitarian crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making and solutions](#)

Julie Freccero, UC Berkley's Human Rights Center, and Clare Bangirana, Africhild, Uganda

- This is a three-phase initiative. It started with an evidence review, then formative research – that is, research that can be used to inform programme design (this presentation) – findings from which will inform a pilot model/programming guidance that will be evaluated at a later stage.
- The formative research looked at the risk and protective factors associated with the practice of child marriage, decision-making processes, the service and support needs of girls and their families, and community-driven solutions.
- The study took place in two refugee settings in Uganda and two urban refugee settings in Jordan.
- The majority of data was collected from girls – both unmarried and married – with youth advisory groups guiding the data collection activities. It also included data collected from caregivers and other key informants.
- The team held workshops to validate the information with girls in the communities after the data was collected.
- The findings show that girls and their caregivers need and want:
 - Financial support for girls and their caregivers (most common response in Uganda, one of the most common responses in Jordan) to help meet basic needs, offset economic incentives for child marriage and improve quality of life (eg, by accessing new clothing, phones and school/university). The pilot model will evaluate the impact of cash transfers in these settings.
 - The barriers to girls' education to be addressed (eg, school fees and other costs, resistance from caregivers to send daughters to school, load of household work, and protection issues such as sexual harassment by teachers or on the way to school).
 - Sensitization and awareness-raising on child marriage for girls, caregivers, and community members. This should involve a broad range of actors influencing decisions (in Jordan mainly parents, in Uganda broader family and community actors) through community events (in Uganda) and through social media and campaigns (in Jordan).

- Violence within the home to be addressed, as marriage can be seen as a way to escape violence (including being denied food and heavily forced domestic work) by girls, and a way for mothers to protect their daughters from their fathers' violence.
- Opportunities for positive peer influence, since this has a large impact on girls' decisions and feelings about child marriage.
- The data collection in Jordan was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and showed some of its impact, with girls saying they had seen many girls getting engaged/married during lockdowns. Reasons include avoiding wedding expenses, getting away from home when faced with increased household work and restrictions on their mobility, and seeing other girls being treated well by their husbands.
 - The two key things girls indicated they need and want during this period were counselling and psychosocial support. This includes individual counselling sessions and ways to engage with their peers, and education support for their continued learning, including tutoring and access to tools such as tablets for digital learning.

The power of a story: Girl-led child marriage action research in two humanitarian settings

(publication forthcoming)

Katherine Gambir, Women's Refugee Commission, and Dr. Abel Blessings Matsika, research consultant, Zimbabwe

- This study collected data from Zimbabwe (focusing on food insecurity and extreme weather) and the Philippines (internal conflict and natural hazards).
- The study aimed to understand the key drivers of child marriage, girls' needs and priorities, the adaptive capacities of girls, families and communities, and the impact of COVID-19 on decision-making processes.
- Multiple methodologies were used, with activities to validate the data conducted in the communities to ensure they lead the study findings.
- Utilised the tool/methodology "[SenseMaker](#)" – a storytelling tool that allows the narrator to analyse their own story in real time to give it deeper meaning.
- Key findings include:
 - Even in examples of forced marriages, respondents noted that the individual held most of the responsibility over the situation.
 - Underlying drivers for child marriage – like gender inequality – remained consistent across both humanitarian settings.
- The most identified needs of married girls were for education, livelihoods and psychosocial support.
- Country-specific findings in the Philippines showed:
 - Child marriage is often used to resolve violence/feuds between families.

- Child marriage is used to create new family units that would be eligible for additional/separate aid.
- Girls are more likely than boys to be agents of change, as they are less likely to see their stories as revealing efforts to “keep traditions”.
- Gender differences play out in different ways for girls and boys: girls are more likely to be engaged in child labour/trafficking whereas boys are more likely to be involved with activities like substance abuse.
- Country-specific findings in Zimbabwe showed:
 - Child marriage is closely linked to the control of girls’ sexuality, with a complex relationship between child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.
 - A unique driver in one context is the role of initiation rites in child marriages, where girls need to prove that they are women by getting married once the rites are completed (there are sharp increase in cases after the rites).
 - The COVID-19-induced lockdown amplified some pre-existing drivers related to livelihoods, gender-based violence and pregnancy, which are linked to girls being out of school.
 - The country has two different pathways to child marriage: love marriages where girls have some form of agency, and forced marriages.

Q&A – General

- *Ghida Anani, ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality [GA]*: Key takeaways from the session include the need to ensure effective, evidence-based and meaningful youth participation; that behavioural change that links child marriage and violence is key; and that we need to aim for greater coordination across sectors to address child marriage.
- *Julie Freccero [JF]*: There is a debate around the effectiveness of single- versus multi-component interventions, where their pilot model will focus on the most prominent findings of their research to ensure a targeted approach that can be evaluated.
- *Abel Blessings Matsika [ABM]*: It is crucial to ensure existing youth-led organisations are empowered, including by engaging girls and ensuring this engagement is not tokenistic. We need to trust children’s insights and their proposed solutions.
- *Abel Blessings Matsika [ABM]*: In Zimbabwe we have child parliamentarians and councillors at the local level. These positions are designed to foster civic participation by children and can be a good avenue for fostering child participation in articulating their concerns and how programming can best respond to them.
- *Satvika Chalasani, UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage [SC]*: One of the things that stood out from the study conducted in the Philippines and Zimbabwe is that drivers and pathways for child marriage are not all that different between development and humanitarian contexts, they are just weighed differently or selectively aggravated.

- *Clare Lofthouse, Plan International [CL]:* Sometimes a girl's choice to get married is actually outside her agency, as there are underlying factors impacting their choice (such as violence in their home, small living space, etc.). This is not said to take away their agency, but to highlight that we need to recognise all influencing factors.

Q&A – Social and gender norms

- *JF:* The importance of norms came out across both settings (Uganda and Jordan) – especially through perceived stigmas among girls of them becoming “too old” to marry (linked to perceived bad/deviant behaviours).
- *Audrey Taylor, Human Rights Center [AT]:* Findings around social norms are similar to those emerging in development contexts. It is key to note that parents and girls reiterated the importance of continuing awareness-raising activities in humanitarian settings.
- *Katherine Gambir [KG]:* Traditions and cultural norms are emerging as a driver in the Philippines, where child marriage is seen as a sensitive topic, especially among traditional and cultural leaders due to their interpretations of religious scripts. It is key to engage with them on adopting a more feminist approach to the scripts.
- *ABM:* The importance of initiation rites in Zimbabwe is closely connected to norms around marriage as the ultimate life goal for girls. It is common for men to identify a girl to marry at celebration ceremonies after the rites are over, which is why it is key to work with traditional leaders who are the custodians of many of these practices.

Q&A – Donor/funding engagement

- *Jean Didier Missilou:* Big challenge for our organisations in obtaining grants to better lead work to end child marriage. There is less impact because we do not have enough financial resources.
- *JF:* Several practitioners were interviewed in the first phase of the project, with many noting the issue of short-term funding cycles as a challenge because it does not allow for long-term planning and programming or for long-time research/evaluation plans. There is a need to engage with donors to highlight the importance of this.
- *CL:* There is a need to link different funding streams together, to overlap silos between work on gender-based violence and child protection to ensure a comprehensive approach to address child marriage.

Q&A – Cash transfers

- *Katja Isaksen, Plan Norway [KI]:* Several evaluations on economic support interventions to prevent child marriage show mixed results in terms of efficacy. However, these studies suggest that economic support is what girls express they want and need. It is important to now look at whether cash transfers which are not conditional on education attendance can be effective in humanitarian settings.

- SC: Emerging consensus on “cash +” interventions – cash is necessary but not sufficient: you need the complementary investments in girls’ skills and in the family environment, etc.
- JF: There is a lack of evidence on the impact of cash transfers in humanitarian settings. A review from 2018 looked at different cash transfer programmes, of which four touched on child marriage as a secondary effect. These showed a neutral or slightly positive impact.
- *Lara van Kousterik, Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage [LK]:* We are working on an evidence review on cash transfer interventions. We are developing a conceptual framework for the effects of cash transfer interventions on girls’ agency and decision-making processes for child marriage in different contexts.

Q&A – Research gaps

- SC: There is a research gap of programmatic evaluations from humanitarian settings, particularly from protracted/long-term crises where impact evaluations should be more possible.
- AT: The third phase of the project presented in the first study will pilot an intervention co-developed by partners and will evaluate its impact in a protracted humanitarian context.

Webinar resources

All webinar resources are available on the [meeting page](#). These include the meeting agenda, recordings, presentations, research reports and key messages.

Additional resources

- [The Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds \(AMAL\) Initiative](#) (CARE, UNFPA) was designed to meet the needs of pregnant adolescents and first-time mothers in areas affected by crisis, while simultaneously addressing the communities’ understandings of gender, power, and social norms.
- [Building on community knowledge – Building interventions on existing gender and sexuality information-sharing in communities](#), More Than Brides Alliance.
- [Control and agency: A child marriage practitioners guide to understanding new findings on girls’ agency and decision-making](#), More Than Brides Alliance.
- [Unpacking marriageability – “Marriageability” across settings where child marriage is common](#), More Than Brides Alliance.
- [Working with parents – Rethinking programmatic interventions](#), More Than Brides Alliance.
- Input for the More Than Brides Alliance products were gathered through innovative research methods, including [youth-led research](#) in which girls themselves lead the research process and its follow-up.
- Oxfam Novib in collaboration with the More Than Brides Alliance are working on a youth-led research study in which five girls are trained to coordinate their own research. In this research, girls look at their economic place in society and how this may influence norms and values that may

influence child marriage. For background reading about the methodology check the [MTBA website](#). Likely publication date, late September 2021.

- [Creative Institute Nepal](#) (CIN) are working to end child marriage in small areas of western Nepal, in marginalised Madhesi communities. CIN have been working with 400 adolescent girls and young women on their right to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), creating family dialogue, involving religious leaders in campaigns against gender-based violence and child marriage, supporting girls' education and sending money to girls' families. CIN have stopped child marriage in at least four of their focus areas. They have developed 10 adolescent empowerment clinics, through which they have mobilised adolescents as the changemakers and resisters of stereotypical social norms and values. CIN is also using the SenseMaker methodology.