Child marriage, exploring choice and agency- Notes from the World Cafés

Content

World café 1 Adolescent sexuality in relation to Child Marriage in Indonesia

Presenter: Mies Grijns
Note taker: Yvonne van der Kooij

First round: challenges

We discussed the challenges of working on the theme of adolescent sexuality. In Indonesia working with youth on this topic can be quite challenging because it is so hard to talk about sexuality in general. Not only with youth themselves but also because of taboos and cultural constraints of speaking openly about this with adults, parents, teachers and even healthcare workers within a conservative context. Besides this, we discussed how there seem to be more negative consequences for girls who are dating and/ or are involved in sexual relations than for boys. Girls have to protect their honor and also the family's name. Because of this girls are more easily pushed into an early marriage in order to protect that honor.

We also discussed mobile mobility amongst youth. Young people have access to social media and the internet (even in rural villages in West Java where we work....*). This also leads to more exposure to dating and romance possibilities, giving youth a chance to be out their parents' control. This all creates a broader context for young people to engage in sexual encounters. At the same time access to sex education and SRHR services is limited. This is again leading to more teenage pregnancies which can also become a reason for early marriage. The challenge then again is how to frame sex education and again how to talk about sexuality in general in a conservative setting.

Second round: Lessons learned

In this round, we discussed the need for sex education and how a (online) knowledge platform can be of help. In the situation of West Java we found that there is hardly any information about SRHR available to youth, especially those who are not married. Even if health care services are available to provide information or give access to contraceptives, the problems remain that unmarried girls (and boys) are not allowed to use these facilities. Even at government level the taboo exists to talk about sexuality in Indonesia. There being national manuals to better implement sex education but these often do not reach the communities. While young people have access to mobile phones a lot and providing sex education online seems a good starting point, we should be aware that there are also dangers that come with this. Through the internet young people might easily find porn and access to a lot of misinformed knowledge. This setting makes it harder to control what is seen as good sex education.

Radio programs that are focused on teenagers, might be another option, but the participants at this table have no clear idea about what is already available in Indonesia. This approach would probably be most helpful if it could be linked to a discussion group, where questions can be further discussed.

Another issue we discussed is how there is often less focus on alternatives to child marriage. Economic opportunities for girls might be limited and in case of teenage pregnancies, legal abortion is often not an option. These are issues that should receive greater attention in child marriage prevention programs.

Also, it's important that NGOs work together on the ground. Often there are many small-scale initiatives and best practices but the real challenge remains how to scale it up within a country but maybe even broader.

Third round: Recommendations

During the last round, we spoke about including parents better in programs to prevent child marriage. But also thinking about those girls that are already married. Don't just focus on prevention part. Also, what can we do to support those that are affected. The lack of knowledge for girls that are married and have to be a wife and a mother is also a big issue. Especially when it comes to knowing their rights and ins and outs of motherhood. Besides this, organizations should share their best practices and collaborate more. Also think about accessibility and how to reach those most vulnerable and isolated youth. In the village in West Java that we work in we look at the geographics of a village and its neighborhoods to see how we can best include different groups (married girls, school going youth, dropouts). Furthermore, we should keep in mind that for every program we should take enough time to contextualize the program in its region because there are already so many differences within one community.

* We are both involved in research on child marriage in rural West Java. At the same time, we are involved in setting up a learning and support centre for adolescents, including married girls. This is done by the Java Village Foundation in cooperation with local staff that is trained by the Yes I Do Alliance in Sukabumi.

World café 2 Role of Community Bylaws in addressing Child Marriage

Presenter: Joyce Brummelman
Note taker: Annemarie Middelburg

Before each session there was an introduction of the Girls Advocacy Alliance (Defence for Children, Terre des Hommes and Plan Netherlands) and an explanation on community Bylaws. The examples from Liberia show that bylaws can address many different aspects of life, including child marriage. **Byelaw is codification of social norm in community.**

1. What are the challenges?
   - **What happens if the chief that signs the bylaw is choosing a girl as his next wife?**
   - Many bylaws are very often not written down – this bylaw from Liberia is quite an exception – which might be a problem.
   - What is necessary is to gain trust and raise awareness on the need to stop child marriage, to make sure it will be adopted in the bylaw.
   - **What is the relationship between bylaw and regular laws adopted by the government? Government laws are not really implemented, while bylaws are being implemented. Bylaws also refer cases to the police, so they supplement each other.**
   - Are the fines high enough (5.000 Liberian dollars - 35 euro for child marriage)?
   - What happens when community members cannot pay the fine? Joyce explains that they will probably settle it within the community.
   - What should we do with wealthy families for whom it is not so difficult to pay a fine? Rich members of the communities can do whatever they want, they will just pay the fine.
   - **Who enforces / monitors the enforcement of the bylaw? Joyce explains the informal structures in communities, the role of the town-chief and sub-chief.**

2. What are the lessons learned?
   - **Bylaws are not the starting point, but the end of the process of awareness raising campaigns with different actors (religious leaders, family heads, chosen municipality leaders) reaching consensus which is formalized in a bylaw.** For example, in the Mali context, the municipality (*commune*) has the authority to adopt bylaws. First, they worked on bylaws in the field of FGM, now they are also working on introducing bylaws in the field of forced marriage.
     - Lesson learned: create first relationship of confidence. You work with all actors together and in the end if they are convinced about the importance, then it results in a bylaw. Sometimes it takes a lot of time, sometimes it goes faster. Parents are for example more easily to convince to keep girls in schools.
   - **In the whole procedure, the sanctions are less important. The process and reaching the consensus is most important.** The pressure comes from the community. An example of a harsh sanction in relation to FGM is that you cannot light a fire (which means that you cannot cook).
   - Villages that are declared child marriage-free: we need to realize that this is not the ending point.
   - Amref explains their alternative right of passage (ARP) approach in relation to FGM. Their main lesson learned is that elderly need to be involved. If you lose them, they will become suspicious and can hamper the impact in terms of norms change.
   - Religious leaders need to be involved.

- **Transparency is important after the adoption of the bylaw.** If there is a fine, and the fine is paid, what is the money used for by the 'authority'? In a village in Mali, at a *commune,* they invested the traditional authority leader account for the implementation of the byelaw (making signposts for traditional leaders).
- Creating an enabling environment is important.

What are the recommendations?
- We need to be aware that bylaws are often put in place as kind of a structure that everybody is used to, to avoid the difficult discussions about changing norms and values and practices.
- **Focus not only on bylaws, also focus on strengthening on formal structures and addressing issues on the ground, having a multi-sectorial approach working with other partners.**
- There needs to be follow-up on the implementation of the bylaws: what happens after a year or two?
- A problem in relation to forced marriage is that you might not have forced child marriage, but you will have forced pregnancies. If she gets pregnant, she needs to marry. Bye law might potentially lead to this negative effect.
- **Byelaws should never stand on its own, but should be part of a larger strategy.**
- A multi-faceted programme where you do community reflections on norms and reflections and critical reflections on potential negative effects of byelaws and how you are going to avoid that/deal with that. What is the realistic timeframe, what are the counterforces? Then bylaws are a good force.
- Byelaws are too easy to put in place, because it is important to realize that we are not done yet when the bylaw is adopted.
- **Bylaws should be a real expression of the social norm that has shifted; not a superficial norm or a way to achieve a social norm in a community.**
  Evidence-based interventions (Save the Children – learning in action / Action Aid – generational dialogue / Men Engage – masculinity

World café 3 Edutainment and Child Marriage

Presenter: Katinka Moonen
Note taker: Karen van Zaal

Social norms are shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a valued reference group. They can be defined as a rule of behaviour that people in a group conform to because they believe: most other people in the group do conform to it; and most other people in the group believe they ought to conform to it. Oxfam has intensified its work on social norms and uses multiple strategies to do so. Entertainment-education – edutainment- is one of these strategies that has proven to be effective to change attitudes and behaviours and potentially edutainment can also contribute to changing social norms.

Edutainment uses stories and the richness of drama to challenge norms in a particular context. To design and contextualize the storyline of edutainment and create realistic drama, we use extensive formative research. At this world café, we present to you a research based case on decision making around child marriage. The attitudes of four characters around the marriage of a young girl will be the starting point for developing an edutainment storyline, together with you following the usual steps of design

ROUND 1:

Firstly, we discussed together the case as presented by the research to determine similarities and differences in attitudes and find the potential for change. The case is based on the results of qualitative research, and focusses on the position of 4 characters in a marriage decision making process of a young girl (as you can see below).

The first thing the participants noticed is that the boy wants to choose his wife himself, and that he prefers an educated wife. Can this be used as a positive factor or not? As most girls are uneducated, due to the boy wanting an educated wife, uneducated girls are pushed out and might even become more vulnerable. So, using this position of the boy in a storyline creates opportunities as well as risks: If the boy wants to delay the marriage for the girl to finalise her education, he will inform his parents. His parents will then inform the parents of the girl, what does this do to the vulnerability of the girl? If her parents say no to this delay and the marriage is cancelled, the girls is endangered as she will be married off to another man. To avoid this the focus could/should therefore be on the parents of the boy: they could be potemtial blockers, but can become positive influencers.
Between the girl and the boy there is no (private) communication. Maybe in secret, but this is not according to the norms. The girl does not have any voice. A focus can therefore also be on her, to empower her. And on the parents of the girls, to educate them too.
Looking at this case the obstacles are not easily overcome. In the story, we need an additional influencer. One therefore can involve another actor. For example, a well-respected family member, or religious leader that respects the position for a girl to first finalize her education before entering into marriage.

In conclusion, we came to the following starting points for the edutainment strategy:
- Boy = positive, we can use his energy to influence other actors.
- Girl = work on the empowerment and agency of the girl

- Parents = without possible external actor, this could be a failure.
- How to set the problem into an opportunity: The boy is negotiating the marriage.

ROUND 2:

Secondly, we defined our audiences and finetuned the message so it speaks to our audience. The new group discussed the importance of a community based intervention, to address the marriage decision making process where it happens. The targeted audience would be the community members, in particularly young boys and girls and their parents.

Then we discussed the importance of a message that speaks to the audience, and we came to some criteria for message development. First, the message towards the audience must be positive; for example, 'We are with you', or 'You do not stand alone'. Second, the message should always be realistic, including possible risks and barriers that the role model will encounter and how he/she deals with that. Third, the message should be tested (and ideally developed) with people in the community. One needs to test the script and a pilot session of a theatre play or radio/tv series.

Finally, we drafted messages to challenge existing norms that could support the position of the boy that wants an educated girl, as defined in round 1:

- Girls can be smart but respectful
- Parents can delay marriage of their daughter without losing dignity
- Delaying does not mean inappropriate behaviour of girl
- Prolong the engagement is an option

ROUND 3:

In the third and final round, we explored risks when developing a storyline presenting the case. In summary, we came to the following actions that can mitigate risks:

- Your intervention needs to be based on solid research of knowledge, attitudes and norms of your targeted audience.
- Your characters need to be real, not overromanticized, and need to face the same obstacles as in real life. Showing the perspective: it is possible to overcome all the obstacles
- You need to test your script and your first episode/theatre play
- Use champions of change to promote your edutainment intervention and back it up ☾local influencers
- Co-creating the intervention with all relevant stakeholders is important (in fact it is a process where you already get their buy in)
- If you work with a well-known person to promote your product, always check background of this person: is he/she behaving according to what you are trying to say with your product?

World café 4 Examining the utility and ethics of universalist frames in child marriage research, policy and programmes

Presenter: Esther Miedema
Note taker: Katie Hodgkinson

'Will the real expert please stand up?'

This world café explored a multitude of issues, combining challenges, lessons learned and recommendations. Topics included:

- Questioning who is "local"**.** Who classes as an insider, and who classes as an outsider and what are the benefits and disadvantages of each of these positions?

  - What are the ethical considerations surrounding a white/western researcher conducting research in developing communities?
  - Examples were given of somebody from Kathmandu going to rural communities and being classed as an outsider and not "local," and the implementation of a programme by a locally based organisation in a in a rural village in Africa , but the programme still not meeting the needs and desires of the community it was supposed to work with due to different understandings and practices.
  - The challenge posed was that if you are seen as a more knowledgeable "outsider" – the expert - communities can blindly follow your ideas, and lose their own solutions.

- Discussions of the power imbalances that are always present in development research and practice. Even when we include local researchers or conduct participatory work, the methodology and theories still generally come from/are designed in the West.
- Time and money constraints are major challenges to addressing the questions raised above as both kinds of constraints have a big impact on the extent to which ethical considerations can be taken into account and acted on, for example there are significant restraints in doing participatory action research and creating space for local validation of findings.
- We questioned who is deciding what the issues are? Are rigid international standards too restrictive and are they preventing real issues from surfacing? For example, are we getting too hung up on age? There is a significant difference between a 12-year-old and a 17-year-old marrying early but these are often grouped together. At the same time, there is very little difference between a 17 yo and am 18 yo marrying, whereas the latter is deemed acceptable.
- We discussed that fact that girls *do* get married; sometimes this is not forced but is an informed and agentic choice. Yet it is not necessarily a *free* choice.
- Some solutions to ethical questions and challenges included: Ensuring that local communities are driving change; local validation of research and programmes both before and after implementation; continuous collaboration between "Western" and "non-Western" Universities and organisations; changing the direction of money flows, so that local organisations have the decision-making power; and gender-transformative approaches that go beyond lowering rates of child marriage.

World café 5 Divorce after Child Marriage

Presenter: Anke van der Kwaak
Note taker: Lincie Kusters

Child Divorce is a phenomenon noticed a lot in the Middle East for instance Jordan and Indonesia, but has hardly been studied or mentioned in programmes and literature around child marriage. What does it mean that child divorce occurs a lot in Indonesia? Who decides about the divorce? Are girls empowered because they chose for divorce? What will they face after the divorce? Will they marry again? Lots of questions that need further investigation. The *Yes I Do* programme (an alliance of Plan, Amref, Rutgers, Choice for youth and sexuality and KIT, active in 7 countries to prevent child marriage, teenage pregnancy and FGM/C) observed the phenomenon of child divorce during a baseline study conducted by KIT together with national researchers. Several cases were identified, specifically in Indonesia which made YIDA decide to further investigate on child divorce. During an operational research in three regions of Indonesia; Sukabumi, Rembang, Lombok Barat, 30 girls have been interviewed about their divorce. Causes varied why girls got divorced, for instance economic migration of partners, misconceptions about marriage and love, sexual dissatisfaction and violence created divorce. Still many girls remarry after divorce. Some preliminary findings were shared. During the world café several other contexts (Nepal, Sierra Leone, Malawi, Bangladesh and Ethiopia) were discussed amongst participants about why child divorce occurs or does not occur.

Round 1: What are the challenges in relation to child divorce?

Challenges:

1. Young people want to marry at a young age, and are not knowledgeable of the marriage and non-prepared.
   Staying with one person and the responsibilities in marriage they are not ready and divorce.
2. Young girls are married and divorced often more than once at a young age, which makes them more vulnerable
3. Child marriage often leads to school drop-out, divorce will not lead to entering school again
4. In case girls have children, the children are also vulnerable due to economic (& social) instable situation.
5. Often the legality is at stake: It is easy to get married, illegal papers are made to legitimize marriage; just a fake letter will do
6. Divorce can be caused due to economic migration opportunities.
7. West Africa totally different context, pre-marital sex and divorce is also taboo so divorce is not seen that often (Niger & Mali).
8. Sierra Leone divorce is happening as well, due to economic migration.
9. Domestic violence related to marrying and divorcing young
10. Girls are often happy after the divorce but keep searching for another husband or work
11. There is no program for divorced girls

Round 2: What are lessons learned?

Lessons learned

1. Premarital pregnancy in Indonesia is a taboo but not being a divorced woman.
2. To talk about child marriage as an one-off event does not reflect the reality; it changes the whole discourse
3. Repeated child marriage and repeat divorce seems a reality, we need to know how much this occurs in other parts of the world
4. Girls hardly get back to school after divorce.
5. Risky to get divorced when you depend on family-in-law, especially when you have children you can't go back to your own family.
6. Little emphasize on the sexual desires of young people. is a big reason for young people to marry in Indonesia.
7. Choice and voice of girls need to be studied how does it relate to child divorce. Sometimes it is a choice, sometimes not.
8. Child marriage, divorce and violence are interrelated, but also divorce and migration (which reflects the variety of causes and agency)
9. Important to engage important actors like religious leaders, teachers and parents

10. Girls get married to be protected, the rule of law does not exist (Bangladesh).

Round 3: What are the recommendations?

Recommendations
1. Programs needed to target child marriage as a process, rescuing girls from child marriage may not help if there are few other options.
2. Look into why girls get married again after divorce? What are the reasons behind it? Look at the drivers behind child marriage and divorce.
3. Looking at the different levels of agency not only from prevention
4. Interventions raising awareness about implications and effects of child marriage and divorce amongst boy and girls.
5. Mapping out needs, expectations and aspirations of girls
6. Violence need to be addressed not the case now in YIDA program
7. Economic empowerment amongst girls... under which circumstances does it increase their agency?
8. Engagement of many influential actors
9. To further study divorce and causes of migration

Questions to further explore:
10. How are girls stigmatized when they divorce, is that the reason why they get married again?
11. Do many divorced girls end up in prostitution?
12. Do girls get married to obtain a higher status, to improve their social position, and get divorced after?
13. Religion how it influences child marriage and divorce? Sanctioned by religion??
14. The younger age of marriage chance of divorce becomes higher?? (USA data)
15. Economic empowerment?? Is it improving the situation of girls?? It can also cause early school dropout.

World café 6 Between Marriage and the Market

Presentor: Sajeda Amin
Note taker: Marlijn Lelieveld

The discussion evolved around issues like dowry, transactional sex and livelihood.

1) Challenges
- Dowry increases when girls are older and more educated
- How to address livelihood with girls at a young age, for instance 12 or 13? They have to be seen as potentially productive and girls need to have aspirations
- Girls are expected to take up a role of caregiver and housekeeper. In some countries girls are also expected to move in with their family in law who want her to help in the household. How to bring change but also respect the culture?
- Lack of meaningful youth participation. Children are seen as incapable of making their own decisions
- Early child birth limits the opportunities of girls

2) Lessons learned
- We have to work on expanding the set of choices step by step, rather than aiming for a big change at once
- In-depth understanding is required of the local way of thinking and why parents see child marriage as the best future for their children
- Stakeholders have to be involved in all stages of the project
- The economic value of educating girls has to be stressed to postpone marriage
- Nudges could be building blocks for behavior change
- Changing social norms take time, often longer as the project duration
- We have to focus on sustainability of project activities and analyze factors contributing to sustainability

3) Recommendations
- The costs calculation of girls needs to be changed through for instance nudges or career counselling
- Girls need to be provided with role models
- Vocational training needs to focus on skills that are in demand in the local market
- We have to create new spaces for girls in the market (example: solar charging stations)
- We should not forget married girls
- We have to delay child birth through amongst others CSE

World café 7 Child Grooms? Towards broadening and nuancing understandings of child marriage using recent research from Nepal

Presenter: Rory Bowe
Note taker: Claire Thomson

During this World Café session, many engaging ideas were put forward surrounding approaches to child grooms.

Round 1, Challenges:
This round examined the numerous factors related to child marriage of boys, including the effect on encouraging migrant labour, the reinforcement of gender roles, and lack of alternative life pathways. There were various challenges raised during the discussion, particularly surrounding the difficulties of engaging with a topic that is under represented and under researched in comparison to child brides, and in understanding the difference in agency between boys and girls in child marriage. Participants also discussed the difficulties in finding a space for boys to meet and discuss feeling and experiences with child marriage, and how to provide accurate education that can empower boys to translate their knowledge to action to help them avoid child marriage. The importance of context, similarly to child brides, was emphasized as the situation is different in different settings and can not be treated with universality.

Round 2, Lessons Learned:
The second group had consensus on that the challenges of child grooms were centred around broader social norms, and that programmes would need to engage with the root causes of child marriage. In addition to the root causes of child marriage, the discussion also engaged with the challenges of addressing child grooms due to the complicated position they hold in society, caught between conflicting positions of privilege and oppression. There was also an in-depth discussion surrounding the challenges of engaging a group of mixed boys (some already married, others not) in empowerment sessions. The participants made the argument that mixed groups are harmful during a needs assessment stage of a programme, but are useful as a means of creating critical reflection and common ground between community members later. In addition, participants argued for ensuring it was locals instituting the changes in their communities, not foreigners.

Round 3, Recommendations:
The third session encountered difficulties in making concrete recommendations largely due to lack of knowledge surrounding child grooms. Therefore, the major recommendation from this round was for more research into child grooms, and extending understandings of marriage, manhood, boys own motivations for early marriage, and societal roles and relationships between families, members of the opposite sex, and community. The other recommendation provided was using the community means for acquiring knowledge, attitudes, and skills as the basis to implement an intervention.