

Policy Brief

May 2022



Child Marriage

Summary:

Child marriage is a violation of human rights, comprising the development of girls, putting them at risk of abuse and violence, and reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty. Despite attempts by Nepali government and non-governmental organizations to end child marriage, Nepal still has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. The Mohankanya Child Club at the Mohankanya Secondary School in Palpa decided to explore the issue of child marriage using art-based methods. They created a film based on real stories of young people, and have used this both to raise awareness amongst their peers, families and communities, and to open dialogue with local decision makers. They have also developed the following recommendations:

Key Policy Recommendations

- 1. Working directly with communities:** Young people are a powerful force to change attitudes, behaviors, and gender norms. Programs may encourage communities to discuss the underlying cultural norms that support child marriage, create committees to end child marriage and improve communication between parents and children.
- 2. Engage elders, community leaders, and religious figures:** Child marriage is an especially sensitive issue for devoutly religious communities. While many religious leaders have claimed they disapprove of marrying underage girls, in practice, many oversee these unions evidenced by the high incidence of child marriage. It is therefore essential that elders and community leaders – and especially religious leaders – receive training on the adverse effects of child marriage.
- 3. Launch public education campaigns:** The government can help begin changing behavior by raising awareness of the adverse effects of child marriage through training, workshops, and other educational campaigns to reach all important sectors of society, from community leaders to parents of schoolchildren, and everyone in between.

This research is part of the [Mobile Arts for Peace – MAP – project](#), which aims to strengthen peace by teaching young people to express their ideas and feelings through the creative arts and by highlighting the need to participate in the life of the community.

Introduction

Child marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty. It also restricts children's choices, changing their course in life and putting them at significant risk of abuse and violence. Most child marriages are forced marriages, where the consent of the child is not considered before the consummation of the union. While boys are affected by child marriage, the issue impacts girls in far larger numbers and with more intensity. With limited education and economic opportunities, child brides are often condemned to a life of poverty, social isolation, and powerlessness, infringing on their human rights, health, and well-being.

The National Civil (Code) Act 2017 defines child marriage as marriage before the age of 20, a practice that is banned in the Constitution of Nepal. In line the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the National Strategy to End Child Marriage aims to end all child marriage in Nepal by 2030. The strategy has put forward a plan to run a child marriage-free local level campaign and accordingly the work of declaring child marriage-free local level has also started. However, despite the initiatives initiated by governmental and non-governmental institutions, Nepal has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world and there are even some cases of young people getting married voluntarily before reaching the legal age. Crucially, there is an observable correlation between marriage and education, leading to the general assumption that girls attending school are less likely to be married at an early age compared with counterparts that have either dropped out of school or have not been in school.

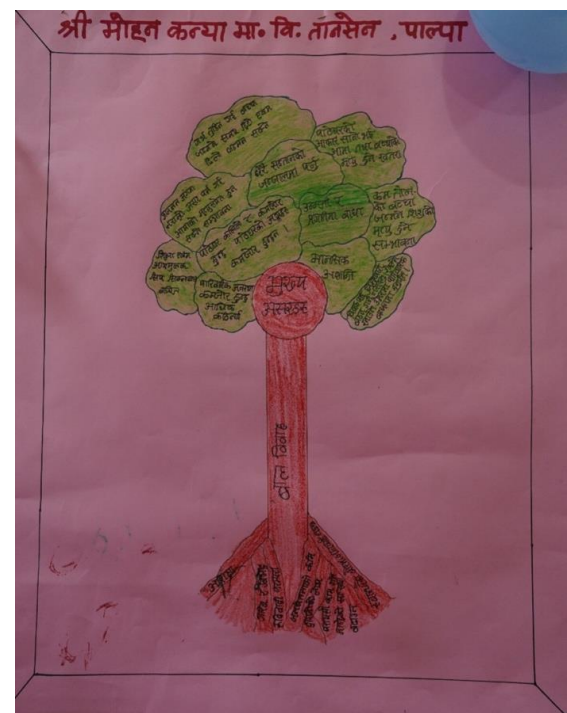
The research

Members of the Mohankanya Child Club approached the project in a number of ways:

Issue identification: First, they used a variety of art-based methods to share experiences and identify the issues. They then used the 'conflict tree' (pictured) to analyze the root causes and impact of child marriage.

Creating awareness: Drawing on these inputs, the young researchers decided to create an awareness drama against child marriage, using a member of the child club involved in child marriage as the main character.

Policy dialogue: Finally, the drama was presented to parents and local government representatives to gather their feedback.



Research Findings:

The Child Club of Mohankanya Secondary School found the following reasons for child marriage:

Economic reasons: Girls are either seen as an economic burden or valued as capital for their exchange value in terms of goods, money or livestock to the family. Therefore, the purpose of marriage is to ease the economic burden to the family. Thereby, it is not surprising that parents would marry off their daughter shortly after she has her first menstruation.

Control over sexuality: Child marriage is often regarded as necessary for controlling girls sexuality which is directly linked to family honor and status.

Custom and tradition also influences child marriage.

Security: In many cases, parents turn to child marriages in order to secure a future for their daughters. Situations of insecurity and acute poverty can prompt parents to resort to child marriage as a protective mechanism or survival strategy.

There is a **lack of knowledge** among the parents on reproductive health and the negative consequences of child marriage.

Education: child marriage causes young girls to drop out of school which will decrease the quality of human resources.

Poverty: Child marriage is linked with poverty. This is because it affects particularly the poorest in the population, and helps to reinforce cycles of poverty.

Also, there is a lack of reporting child marriages in different communities and geographical areas. This also supports and indirectly motivates in marrying early.

“We have created a film on child marriage. We have collected real stories from our friends. One of our friend married at the age of 13 years. Then she dropped out the school. We tried to convince her to rejoin the school, but after a couple of follow-ups, she agreed to rejoin the school. Then, we thought to make a film about child marriage. Our friend who got married in child age is one of the major actor in the video. Now, she realized that she made mistake. She shares her stories with other friends, and asks other friends not to get married in small age”.

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