



OUR VOICES, OUR FUTURE:

Understanding Risks and Adaptive Capacities to Prevent and Respond to Child Marriage in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)



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Plan International is an independent humanitarian and development organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child, but this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion, and discrimination, with girls being the most affected. Working together with children, young people, and our supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and we enable children to prepare for – and respond to – crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national, and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. We have been building powerful partnerships for children for over 80 years and are active in more than 71 countries.

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

Transforming Fragilities Inc. (TF) is a Filipino NGO that focuses on research, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), capability building, and organizational development. It is composed of technical and management specialists and experts in peace and development, as well as cadres of provincial field researchers experienced in qualitative and quantitative data collection. They have come together to provide high quality monitoring and evaluation, research and learning, capability development, and organizational development support to local and international development agencies and to programs that help transform fragile communities and situations in Mindanao and select provinces in Luzon and Viasayas.

The Cynefin Company is an action research and development hub working at the limits of applied complexity science. We are an interdisciplinary team working with a distributed network of practitioners across the world. The Cynefin Company (formerly known as Cognitive Edge) was founded in 2005 by Dave Snowden. We believe in praxis and focus on building methods, tools, and capability that apply the wisdom from Complex Adaptive Systems theory and other scientific disciplines in social system.

Disclaimer: Use of photos in this report is only meant to represent children and girls in the Philippines. It is not intended to indicate experience of subjects with Child Marriage.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARCHES	Improving Availability of Reproductive Health Services in ARMM
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASRH	Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BCMS	Bangsamoro Conflict Monitoring System
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
CEFMU	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Unions
CFSI	Community and Family Services International
CP	Child Protection
DILG	Department of the Interior and Local Government
DRRM	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organization
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LGU	Local Government Unit
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MYDev	Mindanao Youth for Development Programme
NAP-WPS	National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security
NCIP	National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
NCMF	National Commission on Muslim Filipinos
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OCRG	Office of the Civil Registrar General
QIP	Quick Impact Project
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
SEM	Socio-Ecological Model
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristics
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TF	Transforming Fragilities
TJRC	Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission
UIC	University of the Immaculate Conception (Davao City)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VAW	Violence Against Women
WEF	World Economic Forum
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission

TERMINOLOGY

CHILD MARRIAGE

Child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) are any marriage or informal union, whether under civil, religious, or customary law, with or without formal registration, where either one or both spouses are under the age of 18 and/or where the full and free informed consent of one or both of the parties has not been obtained (Plan International 2021). The comprehensive term “child, early, and forced marriage and unions” encompasses a number of different scenarios:

“**Child marriage**” is a formal marriage or informal union in which at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age and where full consent is therefore lacking. The vast majority of child marriages are considered forced since the child has limited power to consent given their age, and other determinants.

“**Early marriage**,” which is often used interchangeably with “child marriage”, refers to marriages or unions involving a person under 18 in countries where the age of majority (meaning the age at which someone is considered an adult) is attained earlier than 18 or upon marriage. Early marriage can also refer to marriages where both spouses are 18 or older but other factors make them unready or unable to consent to marriage, such as their level of physical, emotional, sexual, and psychosocial development, or a lack of information regarding the person’s life options.

“**Forced marriage**,” which is where one or both partners, regardless of age, have not given, or been able to give, their full and free consent to the marriage or union and are unable to leave the marriage, including as a result of duress or intense social or family pressure. Forced marriage can involve physical, psychological, or financial coercion, and can occur in a variety of circumstances, such as human trafficking, or arranged and child marriages. Adults and children can experience forced marriage.

“**Unions**,” which are informal marriages or free unions that are to all intents and purposes equivalent to formal marriage, though without the legal status of a marriage.



These unions are often not formalized by the state or religious authorities, making it difficult to account for them and collect sufficient data on the issue. Several different terms are used to name and describe these unions, including consensual or self-initiated union, early union, and cohabitation.

For the purposes of this research and report, the term “**child marriage**” will be used to refer to any marriage, formal or informal union, or cohabitation, where at least one party is under 18. It considers that the vast majority of child marriages are forced given the power dynamics or a lack of alternative options.

ADOLESCENTS

Adolescence marks the transition from childhood to adulthood when a young person experiences a number of drastic changes in their body, mind and the way they relate to the world. Adolescents start to form stronger connections with peers, while seeking more independence from their parents and families. Whilst gender norms are shaped from early childhood, adolescence is a critical time to influence gender norms, roles, and expectations of young people as they become more solidified¹. While the changes that adolescents experience are universal, the understanding and definition of adolescence varies across cultural contexts.

Adolescence is the period from 10 to 19 years of age, along with the following age definitions: Early adolescence: 10 to 14 years; Late adolescence: 15 to 19 years (Plan International, 2020; Compact for Youth in Humanitarian Action).



IN 2019, PLAN INTERNATIONAL AND THE WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION (WRC) LAUNCHED THE CHILD MARRIAGE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS INITIATIVE.

It is a phased approach to delivering evidence-based and practice-informed programming to prevent and respond to child marriage in humanitarian settings. The Initiative consisted of girl-centered, community-grounded research in communities affected by conflict and displacement in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines; and in communities experiencing extreme food insecurity in Chiredzi, Zimbabwe. Guidance on how to prevent, delay, and respond to child marriage in humanitarian settings will be developed, leveraging lessons learned from this research and from Plan International and the WRC's programmatic experience and research (Hunersen et al, 2021; Robinson et al, 2021; WRC, 2021; and Leigh et al 2020), in addition to other relevant evidence. This report documents the research process and findings from the study conducted in the Philippines.

This study, carried out in the BARMM provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, and Sulu, was commissioned by Plan International in partnership with WRC and implemented in-country by Transforming Fragilities. It is an effort to investigate the needs and priorities of adolescents in selected localities in BARMM, with the overall goal of developing a tailored, girl-led, community-grounded approach to child marriage prevention and response that transforms girls and their communities from beneficiaries to engaged and empowered leaders.



01

BACKGROUND





CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is a human rights violation that intersects with other rights violations that disproportionately affect girls and women throughout their lives. These include, but are not limited to, the rights to a life free of violence; the right to the highest attainable standard of health; and the right to education (United Nations, 1989). It also has implications for a broader economic, social, and political development, as it curtails girls' freedom and decreases their likelihood of contributing to these spheres.

Child marriage has severe negative impacts at the individual, interpersonal, family, and societal levels (Glinski 2015; OHCHR). At the individual level, child marriage is associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes (Gage, 2013; Godha 2016). Research shows that married adolescent girls are less likely to use modern contraception before the birth of their first child, which increases the risks of early and unwanted pregnancies, STIs, and HIV (Ghoda, 2013; Santhya, 2007). Child marriage often correlates to less negotiating power in girls' relationships, including with regard to sex and other sexual and reproductive health decisions (Presler-Marshall and Jones, 2012). Girls who marry before the age of 18 are also at higher risk of physical, sexual, and psychosocial intimate partner violence (Kidman, 2017; Tenkorang, 2019; Yount et al, 2016). Child marriage is also associated with low educational attainment; however, the relationship is complex given that both child marriage and pregnancy are associated with being both a cause and consequence of school dropout (Psaki et al, 2019; Nyugen and Wodon

2012; Birchall, 2018). When girls become pregnant or get married, they are less likely to remain in school. At the same time, the likelihood of girls marrying and/or becoming pregnant is higher for girls who are already out of school (Birchall, 2018). Finally, research shows that married girls are more likely to experience social and physical isolation compared to unmarried girls, which leads to limited participation in decision-making and in the broader civic society (Glinski, 2015).

At the family and community level, child marriage is associated with early pregnancies and a high gravida, which lead to negative consequences for the mother's health, her children's health, and her family's well-being (Yaya et al, 2019; Glinski, et al, 2015). For example, child marriage is associated with not only maternal mortality and morbidity, but also infant mortality (Raj, 2013) and other adverse child health outcomes such as preterm birth, infant mortality, and child undernutrition (Fall et.al, 2015). Low educational attainment and high fertility rates among child brides lead to adverse outcomes for girls, their children and their family. Lower educational attainment and higher fertility rates are also associated with decreased participation in the formal labor market and lower lifetime earnings, leading to lower household welfare (Wodon et al, 2017).

Child marriage also has implications for a country's broader economic, social, and political development. When girls drop out of school, they face greater challenges to access economic opportunity affecting their own productivity and reducing their contributions to families, communities, and societies. When young girls' access to public life is restricted, they are less likely to contribute to social and political decision-making processes, which curtails their contribution to economic, societal, and political development (Glinski, et al, 2015).

CHILD MARRIAGE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS



GLOBALLY, APPROXIMATELY ONE IN FIVE ADOLESCENT GIRLS IS MARRIED BEFORE THEY TURN 18. THIS MEANS THAT 12 MILLION ADOLESCENT GIRLS ENTER INTO CHILD MARRIAGES EACH YEAR (UNICEF, 2020).

Despite progress being made globally to tackle child marriage (UNICEF, 2014; Lo Forte et al), child marriage rates are still increasing in some parts of the world, in large part due to crises and displacement (UNFPA, 2021; ICMCEC, 2013). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused school closures and extreme poverty to rise for the first time in 22 years, is also associated with increased child marriage rates (OCHA, 2021; UNICEF 2021). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) predicts that due to the impact of COVID-19 on girls' physical and mental health, access to education, and household and community economic instability, 10 million more adolescent girls may enter into child marriages by 2030, bringing the global total to more than 100 million by 2030 (UNICEF, 2021).

A growing body of evidence shows that the risk of child marriage is substantially elevated as a result of conflict and related displacement (Hunersen et al, 2020; Rialet, 2019; Buchanan, 2019; UNICEF, 2017; UNHRC, 2020). School closures, lack of services and/or inability to access these, insecurity, loss of livelihood, and increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are only few of the drivers of child marriage that are exacerbated in humanitarian contexts inclusive of conflicts, natural disasters, and disease outbreaks (OHCHR; Plan International and Girls Not Brides, 2020; UNICEF, 2021).

THE HUMANITARIAN SETTING IN THE PHILIPPINES AND BARMM

THE PHILIPPINES

In 2021, the Philippines was ranked the eighth most disaster-prone country among 172 nations and territories in the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV)'s World Risk Index. This index considers the risks of natural hazards such as earthquakes or cyclones, and calculates a society's capacity to respond to such events. As an island nation, the country has been consistently impacted by rising sea levels, typhoons, and earthquakes, as well as by armed conflict. Each year, the Philippines is hit with an average of six to nine typhoons (Blanc & Strobl, 2016), and the southern part of the country experiences protracted armed conflicts, making it the fourth most dangerous country for civilians in 2019 (Bergonia, 2019).

BARMM

BARMM is an autonomous region located in the Southern Philippines. BARMM was established in 2019 as part of a peace agreement reached after five decades of armed conflict between the Philippine government and Moro secessionists. BARMM is the poorest region in the Philippines; underdevelopment, poor governance, and inequitable wealth distribution are commonplace (Abuza and Lischin, 2020; ACAPS; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018).

Since 2012, 4.7 million people have been forcibly displaced by recurring armed conflicts and cyclical natural disasters in BARMM (OCHA, 2016). This research study focuses on the Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, and Sulu provinces within BARMM, which are affected by armed conflict and cyclical natural disasters.

ARMED CONFLICT AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BARMM

BARMM has experienced the most armed conflict, human rights violations, and displacement of any region in the Philippines. Since the 1970s the Philippine government, alongside the Moro community and an indigenous people known as "Lumad," has been fighting insurgent groups in BARMM. The government has also been in conflict with the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, which has been active throughout the country since the late 1960s. The NPA seeks to overthrow the Philippine government to establish a new state led by the working class and to end United States influence in the country.

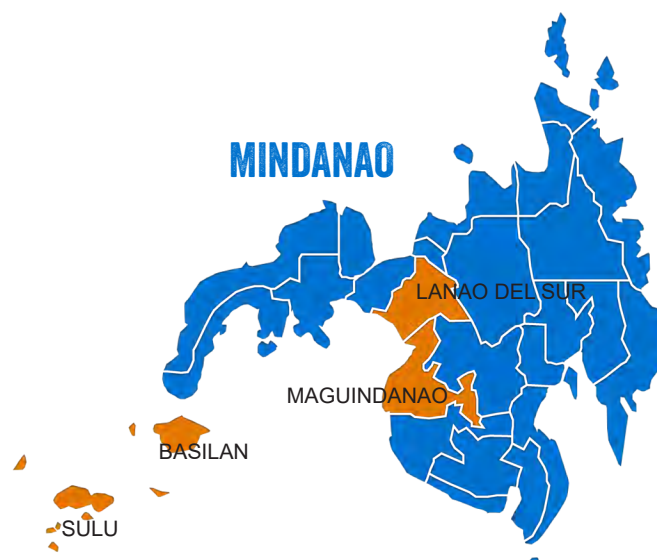
Between 2000 and 2013, approximately 3.5 million people were displaced in Mindanao due to conflict. The majority of these displaced persons were concentrated in BARMM (IDMC 2013), whose five provinces all rank poorly in the Subnational Human Development Index (SHDI). This index is a reference indicator that assesses

socio-economic development within a country, as well as its measures of income, health, and education. Despite decreasing overall poverty rates in the Philippines from 2006 to 2018, poverty rates in BARMM have increased by between 47.1% and 61.3%, and the gap between the national poverty rate and the rate in BARMM has widened (20.5% to 44.7%) (UNDP, 2021). Life expectancy (National Statistics Office, 2011), school enrolment (UNDP 2021), numeracy and literacy (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020), and income levels in BARMM (UNDP 2021) are the lowest in the country. As a result of COVID-19 and related containment actions, income and education measures are projected to worsen substantially (UNDP, 2021).

In 2008, conflict between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) resumed due to the suspension of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MoA-AD). The MoA-AD was a deal between the government and the MILF regarding the autonomous Moro homeland. As a result of the conflict, 750,000 people across Mindanao, particularly within BARMM, were displaced, leaving hundreds of thousands of people in evacuation centers, resettlement sites, or host communities (DSWD, 2009).

In 2012, peace negotiations between the government and the MILF resulted in the signing of a framework agreement. The agreement allowed for the creation of a new Bangsamoro political entity to replace ARMM by 2016. However, the agreement caused friction between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), an armed group that was first to claim the Bangsamoro people's right to self-determination. In 2013, the MNLF declared the independence of the "Bangsamoro Republik," because of their disagreement with the 1996 peace agreement (PhilStar, 15 August 2013). Shortly after, violence between the Philippine armed forces and the MNLF erupted in the city of Zamboanga. The conflict then spread to Basilan province, causing widespread destruction in Zamboanga and leaving approximately 120,000 displaced (NDRRMC, 1 October 2013).

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) are two other Muslim armed groups in BARMM. The ASG is an Islamic separatist movement that was formed by Abdurajak Janjalani and influenced by Al Qaeda. In 2012, the BIFF, a breakaway faction of the MILF, attacked Philippine armed forces in the Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces. The violence displaced up to 60,000 people. In 2013, an additional 20,000 people were displaced due to attacks by BIFF in North Cotabato (Rappler, 23 September 2013; Philippine Inquirer, 13 August 2013).



Maguindanao

Maguindanao is the province in BARMM that has been the most affected by armed conflict. Between 2000 and 2004, over half of the adult population was relocated at some point, and again in 2008. Between 2000 and 2010, four out of every five (82%) households in the province were displaced. Moreover, 75% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were displaced twice or more (WFP & Worldbank Group, 2011).

Lanao del Sur

Between 2000 and 2010, displacement affected almost half of all households (47%) in Lanao del Sur (WFP & World Bank Group 2010). The province is also experiencing a protracted crisis initiated during the Marawi Siege in 2017. Militants allied to an armed group called the "Islamic State" attacked the provincial capital of Marawi City on 23 May 2017. These militant groups included the Maute Group and ASG. The siege lasted for five months, resulting in the death of 920 militants, 165 soldiers, and 47 civilians. About 360,000 individuals from the city and adjacent municipalities were forcibly displaced (Amnesty International, 17 November 2017).

Basilan

In the island province of Basilan, approximately 80% of the population has been displaced by fighting in the past ten years, either as a result of clashes between government troops and the MILF or ASG, or periodic rido (clan feud).

Sulu

In Sulu, another island province in BARMM, communities also face recurrent and cyclical forced displacement that impacts thousands of families each year. Almost all of the conflict and insecurity in Sulu is caused by armed conflict between two armed groups based in Sulu, the MNLF and ASG, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) (UNHCR and IOM Philippines).

A more detailed presentation of each of these four (4) provinces and their respective emergency contexts can be found in Annex C.



DISASTERS

The Philippines is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to meteorological and seismic disasters (World Bank, 2005). The country's geographic location makes it prone to typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, mudslides, monsoons, and flooding. BARMM is not immune to these disasters and, in fact, bears the brunt of economic costs given that their impact is confounded by armed conflict, insecurity, and poverty (World Bank). For example, in 2012, Typhoon Bopha forced more than 1 million people in Mindanao to evacuate, and destroyed most of the region's coconut and banana plantations, which left thousands of people without a livelihood and ability to feed their families (IMDC, 2013).

CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE PHILIPPINES AND BARMM

THE PHILIPPINES

In 2009, the Philippine government passed the Magna Carta for Women, which aims to eliminate discrimination against women, especially those who face heightened marginalization, such as indigenous people, Moros, persons living with disabilities, and migrant workers (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2010). This law has significantly impacted women's rights despite coexisting

with old and oppressive laws that have deepened gender inequality in the Philippines. Although the country has made positive strides toward gender equality, there is evidence of a complex and contradictory overall picture - where the practice of child marriage continues to occur, especially amongst families experiencing extreme poverty and/or displacement due to humanitarian emergencies.

Progress toward eliminating child marriage in the Philippines has stagnated in the past decade. According to the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), the percentage of women aged 25-49 who reported being married by 18 remained at 15% from 2013 to 2017, a slight decrease from 19% in 1993. Approximately one in ten (9%) adolescent girls aged 15-19 had begun childbearing. Similarly, there has been no substantial progress in trends in adolescent pregnancy over the past decade. In fact, adolescent pregnancy increased overall from 7% in 1993 to 9% in 2017. Adolescent pregnancy in BARMM was comparatively higher in 2017, with prevalence rates of 15%-18% (with Soccsksargen at 15%, Northern Mindanao at 15%, and Davao at 18%). However, these statistics do not detail the prevalence of home-based births or instances of delayed birth registrations (or the lack thereof) (Philippine Statistics Authority and ICF, 2018).

THE PHILIPPINES

BARMM's population is predominantly Muslim and due to their autonomous governing system, its population follows a separate set of guidelines and rules influenced by Islam. The Family Code of the Philippines sets the minimum age to contract marriage at 18, but in BARMM, marriage legislation often falls under Presidential Decree 1083 or the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (PD 1083). Provisions under this law make it legal to solemnize (officiate) marriages for girls as young as 12, provided that the girl has attained puberty, determined by the onset of menstruation, and is petitioned by a wali (guardian) through the Shari'ah District Court. The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) has publicly opposed any amendment to PD 1083, as members of the newly established Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) parliament, may not favor legislation that alters the legal age of marriage, seeing it as an imposition of "Western" values on traditional and religious Moro norms (Richardson & Wilson, 2019).

As the Bangsamoro ethnic group makes up a large proportion of the BARMM population, Moro cultural practices also influence decisions related to courtship and marriage. A blend of Islamic and pre-Islamic elements manifests in their practices, creating a unique process for marriage that includes (a) that parents often have the last say in the decision to marry; (b) marriage is largely based on the community status of the family; (c) the female is not allowed to marry a male outside her family's social level or religion; (d) marriages can take place as young as 15 years old for the bride and 17 years old for the groom; and (e) the size of the dowry is dependent on the status of the bride in the community (including

educational attainment) and the capacity of the groom's family to raise a negotiated amount that matches this status. The practice demands that there is a transfer of a gift (financial or in-kind) from the groom's family to the bride's. These characteristics vary in rigidity along ethnic or tribal lines, and although these rules have been enforced in the past, they are now only observed to a certain degree (Perdon, 2013).

Instances of child marriage as a consequence of Moro tradition and perception of Islamic laws have been reported in several municipalities within BARMM (Pangcoga, 2016, pp. 68, 78-80); however, child marriage rates in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Basilan, have not been systematically documented and so the true prevalence of child marriage in these provinces remains unknown. According to the 2017 NDHS, the median age for first marriage is 22.5 years in the Philippines but 20.8 years in BARMM, and 2% of women were first married by age 15, and 15% were first married by age 18 (Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and ICF, 2018). However, the survey does not provide any data on the prevalence of child marriage in BARMM.

In October 2018, Representatives Bernadette Herrera-Dy and Edcel Lagman filed a bill in the Philippine House of Representatives seeking to declare the act of child marriage, its facilitation, and solemnization a "public crime." If enacted into law, the bill will explicitly void any child marriage and treat existing unions as invalid. Representative Herrera-Dy asked the NCMF and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to "work hard on generating consensus and binding changes on marriage practices" (Cervantes, 2018). This was because Muslims may not be covered when the bill is passed into law. For instance, Article 3 (1) of PD 1083 explicitly states that in any conflict between provisions of the Muslim Code and laws of general application, the former shall prevail. The bill has been approved by both Houses of Congress and is waiting to be signed into law.

Young women and girls in BARMM are the most affected group during violent conflicts (Dwyer & Guiam, 2013). They suffer from physical and psychological violence and their needs and priorities are not considered in program design. Intermittent displacement has interrupted their schooling and placed them in abject poverty, making them vulnerable to human rights abuses such as sexual harassment and assault. As a marginalized group, they are often pushed into harsh, menial labour to earn a basic income, among other challenges that prevent them from meeting their daily human needs and exercising their basic human rights (Dwyer & Guiam, 2013).

There is an urgent need to understand the risks, drivers, and consequences of child marriage among adolescent girls in BARMM, as well as the extent to which the existing ecosystem of support, care, and protection for adolescent girls, which is composed of resource persons (e.g., family, social workers, teachers) and institutions that operate at intersecting levels of the socio-ecological model, protects girls from child marriage

and meets the needs of married girls. This knowledge will better inform service providers to more effectively prevent and respond to child marriage in BARMM within the context of abject poverty, an enabling legal environment, and humanitarian crises.

A young girl in the foreground is wearing a black and white striped hijab and a black garment. She is looking upwards and to the right with a slight smile. In the background, several other people, mostly women wearing hijabs, are visible but out of focus. The lighting is warm, suggesting an indoor setting with artificial light.

02

METHODS



PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

There is a dearth of evidence showing what works and what doesn't in preventing and responding to child marriage, including how to best reach adolescent girls and the persons who influence them using appropriate programming, and how to address key drivers of child marriage at the individual, household, and community levels (Chandra-Mouli and Plesons, 2021; Rife et al., 2012). Malhotra and Elnakib's (Malhotra and Elnakib, 2021) systematic review, which assesses the effectiveness of child marriage interventions implemented over the past 20 years, concludes that single-component interventions, particularly, those focused on increasing adolescent girls' human capital and opportunities, may be more prudent for investment in terms of scale-up and sustainability compared to multi-component interventions. However, Chandra-Mouli and Plesons (Chandra-Mouli and Plesons, 2021) argue that additional research on the impact of implementation and evaluation challenges on multi-component intervention programming needs to be done before recommendations for action can be made. The evidence so far is nascent and even more ambiguous in emergency contexts (Chae and Ngo, 2017). Therefore, there is an urgent need to learn about the needs and priorities of adolescent girls in humanitarian settings in depth, including intersecting moderators and influencers of child marriage, to properly conceptualize programs that can effectively prevent child marriage and support married adolescent girls in humanitarian settings.

This study sought to establish an evidence base on the drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings, such as BARMM, and systematically document the needs and priorities of adolescent girls and the system of support required to prevent and mitigate risks of child marriage in humanitarian settings. This foundational research provides key learnings for practitioners to develop more tailored approaches, keeping girls and communities at the center of this work.



SPECIFICALLY, THE STUDY EXPLORED THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO PROVIDE EVIDENCE FOR FURTHER PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 01** What are the needs and priorities of adolescent girls living in BARMM?
- 02** What are the key drivers of child marriage in BARMM?
- 03** What assets and adaptive capacities do adolescents have that are promotive and/or protective of risk mitigation and positive health outcomes for girls?

04 What adaptive capacities or resources exist within families, communities, and systems to protect adolescent girls from child marriage? How can these capacities be leveraged to improve outcomes for both girls at risk of child marriage and those already married?

05 How do existing programs and services respond to the needs of adolescent girls in BARMM?

06 What are the key barriers and protective factors for adolescent girls in accessing and utilizing existing adolescent programming?

This study used a mixed-method participatory design and a girl-centered, community-based approach. A girl-centered, community based approach means that adolescent girls and adult community members were involved in aspects of research tool design, data collection activities, data analysis, and translation of findings to actionable community-driven solutions. Methods included a desk review, participant-led storytelling via Sensemaker®, participatory group activities with adolescent and adult community members, and key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant institutional stakeholders. The overwhelming majority of adolescents affected by child marriage are girls. As such, efforts were made to capture more perspectives from adolescent girls and women to center their experiences and needs. However, efforts were also made to capture the voices of adolescent boys to ensure that gender dynamics, power imbalances, and the impact of marriage on them also inform future programming and behavior change actions.

Given the sensitivity of the issue of child marriage among communities in BARMM, participatory activities did not focus directly on the topic of child marriage; rather, participants identified and prioritized their own needs, shared stories relating to their views on existing marriage practices within the community, and elaborated on existing resource persons and institutions that supported and protected adolescent girls in their communities.

Data was collected from January to April 2020. Some of the methods were adapted to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and in accordance with local government health guidance and the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF). KIIs in Maguindanao were facilitated online rather than in person, and interview guides were adapted to capture the impact of COVID-19 on decision-making pathways within households, and

how it enhanced or mitigated risk of child marriage, as well as to find out how external actors may engage in child marriage prevention activities. Participatory group sessions were held in-person with fewer than six or eight participants, depending on local government health guidance and according to IATF protocols.

STUDY JUSTIFICATION

This research contributes to the growing evidence on the needs and priorities of adolescents in humanitarian settings and will inform girl-centered, community-based approaches to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in the Philippines and globally. Participatory methods were selected to elevate the voices of adolescents to define their own challenges, identify risks and supports, and prioritize what should be addressed. These methods provided an opportunity for adolescents, caregivers, and other adults who are influential in girls' lives to define what it means to be well and resilient. The methodology sought to identify who contributes to adolescent resiliency from the broader child protection system in the study context. The methodology encouraged adolescents and caregivers to collaborate to define the child protection system in place, the critical linkages that exist to support them (that can be further strengthened), and adolescent-driven solutions to filling the gaps. Given that unequal gender norms and power dynamics underpin child marriage, an adapted social norms framework was employed for analysis. The adapted framework was used to understand how programming can disrupt risks and drivers of child marriage. It also explores how the adaptive capacities of adolescent girls, their families, and broader ecosystems support healthy trajectories for adolescent girls across all levels of the socio-ecological model, including social and structural factors inherent to humanitarian settings.

DESK REVIEW

From November 2019 to January 2020, a desk review of published articles; grey literature; and publicly available statistical data on child marriage prevalence, practices, and prevention and response programming in BARMM and within the Philippines was conducted. The desk review also included an assessment of the humanitarian situation in Mindanao, including recurring displacement due to both armed conflict and disasters. A total of 87 resources were reviewed. The desk review was used to help contextualize the research questions, methods, and study parameters.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KIIS)

KIIs were conducted with community-based organizations (CBOs), national nongovernmental organizations (NGO), international NGOs (INGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), service providers, UN actors, and government officials. KII guides were developed to provide insights on the needs and priorities of adolescents, child marriage

practices, and barriers and facilitators to accessing existing services and programming in target communities. KIIs were conducted with individuals purposively selected to provide insights on child marriage practices and/or programming among conflict-affected and displaced communities in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Basilan. KIIs in Lanao del Sur were conducted in person from January–February 2020. KIIs outside of Lanao del Sur were conducted from February 2020–April 2020 using a semi-structured guide and contextualized by partner organizations. Most KIIs were conducted one-on-one; however, one interview was conducted with three persons from the same organization. The length of the interviews was between 1 and 2 hours. All KIIs were conducted in locations with auditory and visual privacy as agreed upon by the interviewer and respondents, mainly in the respondents' offices. KIIs were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in the local vernacular by a trained notetaker during the interview. After the interview, the interviewer listened to the audio recording to complete and verify the verbatim transcription, which was then translated from the local language into English for analysis.

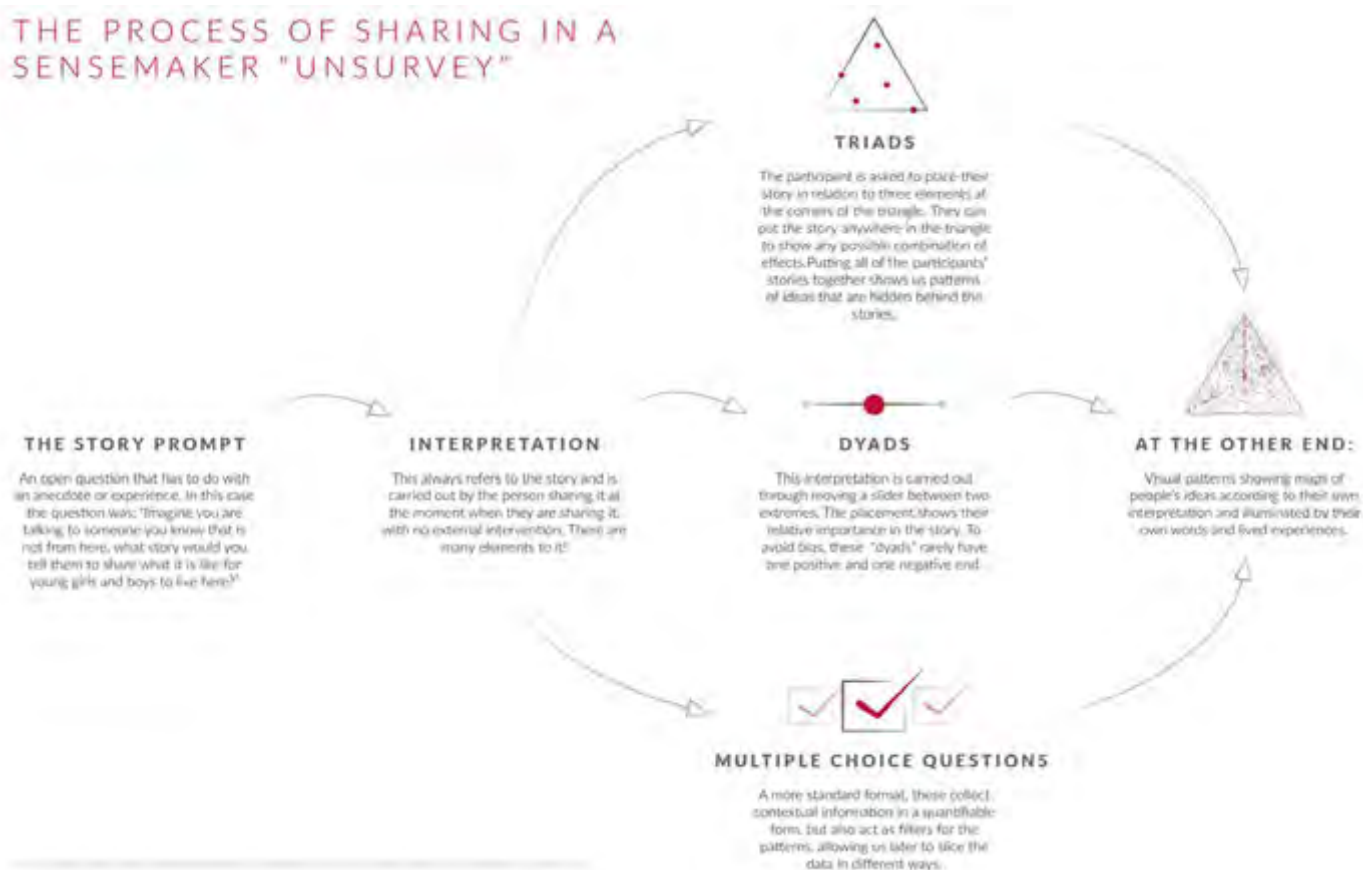
SENSEMAKER®

SenseMaker® data collection was conducted from 14 February to 6 March 2020. SenseMaker® is a mixed-method research and analysis tool that enables respondents, or storytellers, to document micro-narratives (short, open-ended stories) about their lived experiences. SenseMaker® is a girl-led research method

because it provides an opportunity for respondents to interpret or give meaning to their own story and to convey its importance using a signification framework. The signification framework is a set of questions based on the research questions, that allows the storyteller to analyze his/her own story (Van der Merwe SE et al. 2019). SenseMaker® was used to gather information and capture stories to better understand the needs and priorities of adolescent girls, the drivers of child marriage, and identify key support persons in their lives. It was also used to explore the adaptive capacities of adolescents, their families, and communities to care for and protect adolescent girls. By allowing the respondent to analyze his/her own story, SenseMaker® prioritizes the respondent's views within the analysis. This approach both a) lessens interpretive and cultural bias; and b) makes the research process more democratic by making the respondent's perspective central to the process. Responses to the signification framework generate a large amount of quantitative data points, or metadata, that enable researchers to harvest thousands of perspectives and facilitate pattern recognition.

The SenseMaker® interview tool (i.e., signification framework) was co-designed with married and unmarried adolescent girls, as well as with caregivers and other adult community gatekeepers. In order to identify the core concepts for use in the Signification Framework, a co-design workshop was held on 8 February 2020 in Iligan City, Lanao del Sur, BARMM, with 27 adult community members and 4 married and unmarried adolescent girls. Participatory group activities, such as group Anecdote

THE PROCESS OF SHARING IN A SENSEMAKER "UNSURVEY"



Circles (e.g., group storytelling) (“Anecdote Circles”, 2021) and Dream Mapping, were facilitated to generate dominant issues facing adolescents in the target communities. Participants then engaged in prioritization activities to rank the issues that emerged from the activities from most to least important. The core concepts were based on these issues and concepts identified by the desk review, research questions. The final assembly of the signification framework was translated from English to Tagalog (a majority local language) and built into the app-based software.

The SenseMaker® tool was pilot-tested with community members, including adolescents, prior to data collection. Data collection was conducted by a team of young male and female enumerators trained to work with the SenseMaker® app-based tool to collect stories through tablets. Male enumerators interviewed boys and men, while female enumerators interviewed girls and women. Stories shared by respondents were audio-recorded through the tablet. Then, respondents responded to a series of visual prompts and multiple-choice questions to analyze their stories and share demographic information. Interviews lasted approximately 15–35 minutes and were conducted in private locations inside or directly outside of the home. Enumerators also recorded salient points of each story in text, which was then uploaded onto the software. Although the focus of the research was primarily the stories told by adolescent girls, it was important to include all of the perspectives of community attitudes toward child marriage within the wider family, community, and society. Therefore, stories were also collected from adolescent boys, parents, and caregivers, and local faith and non-faith leaders.

PARTICIPATORY GROUP ACTIVITIES

Participatory group activities with adolescents aged 12–19, their parents or guardians, and other community gatekeepers (e.g., religious leaders, community leaders, teachers) were conducted to understand the strengths and limitations of the existing child protection system that cares for, supports, and protects adolescent girls in each setting. Activities were conducted from 6 March to 30 April 2020. Facilitators engaged respondents in participatory activities using tools designed to (1) help respondents explore the factors (or reasons) and influences that affect adolescent well-being in the local context through the Adolescent Well-Being Activity (World Vision); (2) encourage initial dialogue about adolescents who may not have the kinds of support or protective factors needed to thrive through the Spider Diagram or Web of Support Activity (World Vision); and (3) help participants explore and identify local assets that support and protect adolescents in their communities, again through the Spider Diagram or Web of Support Activity (World Vision). Participatory approaches were also used to facilitate an adapted version of the community mapping exercise (WRC and UNICEF, 2020) in which participants drew and located key community resources, as well as areas that may be unsafe for adolescent girls.

After creating each map, the facilitator moderated a discussion on access to services and gaps in services by asking about the places in the community where girls can and cannot go and recording the reasons given. (See Annex A for research tools.) The activities, which had previously been used in other humanitarian settings, were contextualized for use in BARRM.

Group activities were conducted in well ventilated rooms in NGO or local government buildings, and women’s safe spaces with visual and auditory privacy. Groups of boys and girls were further divided by marital status and age brackets: 12 to 14 years old, 15 to 17 years old, and 18 to 19 years old. Adult males and adult females were between the ages of 20 and 45 years old. Each group ranged from 4 to 13 respondents.

Female facilitators led research activities for adolescent girls and women, and male facilitators led research activities for adolescent boys and men. A trained notetaker audio-recorded the sessions, captured photo documentation of activity outputs (e.g., drawings, community mapping), and took written notes of respondents’ discussions in a documentation guide. Photo and written documentation and audio recordings were uploaded to a password-protected, encrypted, and secure server after each participatory session ended. Facilitators then synthesized findings in summary activity reports written in English.

SELECTION OF STUDY SITES

The research team used purposive sampling to select municipalities and barangays. To fulfil the research aim of contributing to the evidence base on the needs and priorities of adolescents and the drivers of child marriage in emergency contexts, the sampling frame was guided by the following considerations:

1. Selecting a mix of municipalities/cities/barangays that currently have adolescent programming and those without;
2. Selecting at least one urban area within each province for comparison and contrast with more rural settings within the same province, to better understand how different socio-economic contexts and access to social services influence findings;
3. Prioritizing areas experiencing intermittent or protracted humanitarian emergencies; and
4. Prioritizing areas where child marriage is known to be most prevalent.

Within each municipality, barangays whose populations were exposed to intermittent and/or protracted displacement, or that have households that served as hosts to displaced populations, were identified with support from community gatekeepers and invited to participate in research activities.

PROVINCE	MUNICIPALITY
Lanao del Sur	Marawi City Saguwaran Butig Piagapo
Maguindanao	Datu Saudi Ampatuan Mamasapano Datu Salibo Shariff Saydona Mustapha
Basilan	Sumisip Hadj Mohammod Ajul
Sulu	Patikul Parang

Table 1. Study locations of the child marriage research.

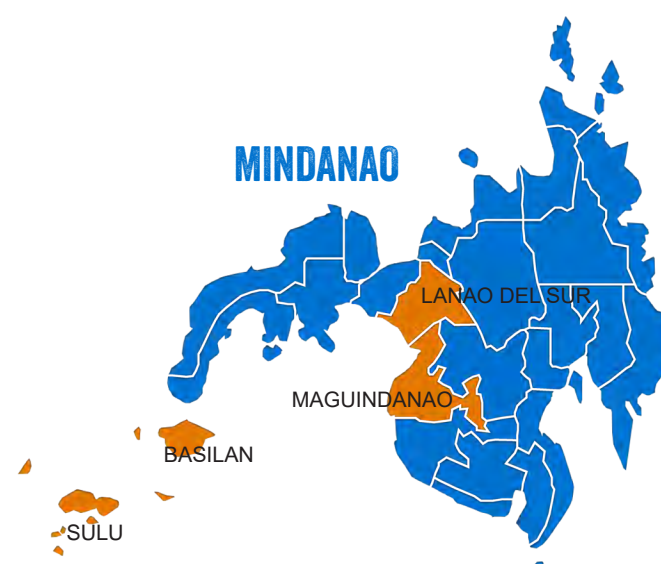
SAMPLING

Key Informant Interviews (KIs)

Service mapping was conducted to identify national NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, INGOs, MRLs, social service providers, UN actors, and government officials working to advance community and/or adolescent health and development outcomes in the selected study sites. Interviews were conducted with key informants (KIs) identified through this mapping until saturation was reached. The study targeted up to six KIs across the four target provinces per subgroup: (1) national NGOs, CSOs, and CBOs; (2) INGOs; (3) Muslim Religion Leaders (MRLs); (4) social service providers; and (5) UN actors and government officials.

SenseMaker®

Purposive and snowballing sampling were also employed for SenseMaker® to allow for disaggregation of the data based on key participant subgroups to achieve the target sample size for each subgroup, and to reach saturation. Male and female adolescents aged 12 to 19 years old; parents and guardians of adolescents; faith and non-faith leaders and other community gatekeepers (e.g., staff members of local health and social welfare offices and local clergy); and local government officials and members of CBOs (e.g., local chief executive, local government officials) were eligible to participate in SenseMaker®. The list of prospective participants per subgroup was identified by Plan Philippines' barangay contacts. Additional respondents per subgroup were identified via local CBOs such as facilitators running women's spaces and services. In order to reach additional married adolescents, data enumerators also employed snowball sampling whereby married adolescents were asked if they would feel comfortable referring enumerators to other married adolescents in the community. Participants were assigned sex (i.e., female, male, other) by the enumerator based on the participant's physical appearance and question responses. For clarity in this report, we assumed that the



assigned sex of the participant was equal to the gender (woman/girl as female, man/boy as male, other) of the participant and did not ask for explicit clarification on this point from participants. For example, data collected from assigned adolescent females are equated to data from an adolescent girl.

The sample size per subgroup ($n=50$) per province aimed to provide enough data points for visual patterns to emerge on the SenseMaker® data analysis dashboard. Therefore, the study aimed to collect a total of 2,000 stories, including 848 stories from adolescent girls, inclusive of girls who are unmarried, married, divorced, in informal unions, living with a disability, and identifying as diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). To note, based on guidance from Plan Philippines and Transforming Fragilities, enumerators did not collect information on participants' SOGIESC. In addition, the following data aimed to be collected: 424 stories from married and unmarried adolescent boys, 212 stories from men married to adolescent girls, 424 stories from adolescents' parents (male and female), and 424 stories from community leaders and gatekeepers (male and female).

Participatory Group Activities

For participatory group activities, purposive sampling was employed to allow for disaggregation of the data based on key participant subgroups to achieve the target sample size for each subgroup, and to reach saturation. Enumerators recruited participants from among SenseMaker® respondents after the SenseMaker® interviews were completed until the target sample size for each subgroup in each municipality was reached. The sample size per subgroup was designed to reach saturation and to represent the diversity of adolescent girls and of influential adults in their lives. Male and female adolescents aged 12 to 19 years old; parents and guardians of adolescents; faith and non-faith leaders and other community gatekeepers (e.g., staff members of local health and social welfare offices and local clergy);

and local government officials and members of CBOs (e.g., local chief executive, local government officials) were eligible to participate in the participatory group activities.

Overall, the study aimed to reach up to 560 participants for participatory group activities. The study aimed to engage up to 240 adolescent girls aged 12 to 19, including girls who are unmarried, married, divorced, in informal unions, living with a disability, and identifying as diverse SOGIESC. In addition, the study aimed to engage up to 160 married and unmarried adolescent boys aged 12 to 19, up to 80 adolescent parents and guardians (male and female), and up to 80 male and female community leaders and gatekeepers.

ANALYSIS

Analytical Framework

The conceptual framework that articulates the relationship between social norms and adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) outcomes (Pulerwitz et al., 2019) was used as a foundational analytical framework for the research. The framework was adapted from Cislaghi and Heise's social norms theory for health promotion in low-income countries (Cislaghi and Heise, 2018) that builds on Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Four elements are central to this framework and are critical to the interpretation of the data gathered in this report. First, power is a key element that underpins and enforces societal norms, as well as actions and health outcomes. Second, understanding gender roles requires an understanding at all levels of the socio-ecological system; this subset of social norms determines relevant rules of engagement, relationships, and responsibilities. They contribute to the formation of power relationships, which results in a range of threats and opportunities for initiatives. Third, the framework focuses on the numerous connections between domains (individual, social, resources, and institutional). At the intersections of these realms, opportunities for disruption, growth, and transformation exist. In other words, multilevel approaches that leverage these intersecting opportunities may improve ASRH outcomes. Fourth, social norms are central to the model because they have a significant impact on ASRH outcomes (Pulerwitz et al., 2019).

We adapted this framework to address the influence of crisis and humanitarian context on the drivers of child marriage in BARMM and the adaptive capacities, or resiliency, of adolescent girls, their families, communities, and wider ecosystems of support to mitigate risks of child marriage and respond to the needs of married girls. The adapted framework demonstrates the critical role of norms while also recognizing the critical role of systemic factors in the development and maintenance of dominance, shaping gender and other social structures, and affecting child marriage outcomes in crises. The humanitarian context was added to the original framework to address how structural and social factors inherent to

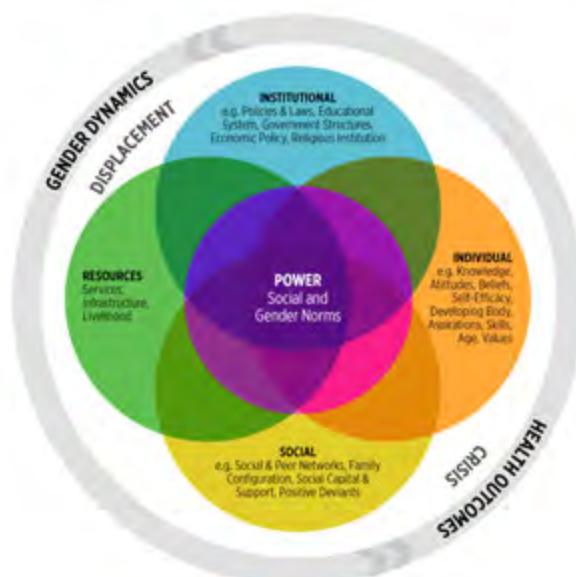


Figure 1. Adapted Conceptual framework highlighting centrality of social and gender norms, and power for child marriage in crises

humanitarian settings interact across all domains of the framework (i.e., individual, social, institutional, resources). Further, additional outcomes were added to assess how child marriage impacts all aspects of life, including health, protection, well-being, education, and economic domains. The adapted framework may be used for other formative studies on child marriage in humanitarian settings and as an approach to designing and evaluating child marriage programming.

KII Analysis

KIIs were recorded verbatim via written notes, transcribed, and then translated from the local language into English immediately after the interview. The research team developed, piloted, and implemented a codebook using an iterative process. Each transcript was uploaded to NVivo 12 Plus (QSR 2020) for thematic content analysis. Any discordances between coding were resolved through discussion-based consensus and/or adaptations of the codebook. Key themes were further explored across provinces and respondent affiliation to explore linkages in the data.

SenseMaker® Analysis

Following the completion of data collection and data cleaning, Cognitive Edge compiled a report highlighting key themes that emerged from patterns in the quantitative SenseMaker® dataset. The objective of the report was to support the research team in identifying subsets of the data for transcribing and translating into “storybooks” based on meta-data pattern analysis. Themes were defined in relation to the research questions of the wider programme of work and largely focused on the stories told directly by adolescent girls. Given the study’s aim, only stories and associated meta-data self-indicated as relating to marriage were included in the analysis.

In January 2021, community sense-making (or “participatory community analysis”) workshops were held

in Maguindanao with 14 adult community stakeholders (e.g., caregivers, Muslim Religious Leaders (MRLs), community leaders), 14 unmarried adolescent girls aged 13-19 years, and 8 married girls aged 16-19 years. The workshops aimed to co-analyze data with community members, and share and validate the findings to seek girl-led and community-grounded solutions to the challenges identified. During participatory community analysis, participants were asked to read selected stories and to share their own group interpretations based on open questions, such as: *“If these patterns continue without any change, what might be the implications?”* They were asked to contribute “insight to action” ideas around what might make things better in the context of the stories they were reading in answer to the question: *“What small change would work for you as a young girl or for young girls?”* The adults were then asked *“What actions or decisions could you make to enable the small changes the girls have requested?”*

In July 2021, Plan Philippines facilitated a virtual workshop with key BARMM institutional stakeholders to elicit feedback on research findings, and identify priority areas and next steps toward collaborative action to implement effective advocacy and child marriage interventions in BARMM.

Participatory Group Activities Analysis

Participatory group activities were documented during each session by a designated and trained notetaker via documentation guides and photos of the drawing and community mapping activities. After each session, written notes were translated from six local languages into English, and then summarized into a report. The research team analyzed the detailed activity reports using content analysis. This was used to contrast and compare how different subgroups of adolescents and adults across provinces define what it means for adolescents to be well and resilient; and to identify the supports (e.g., resource persons, institutions, programs, and services) that contribute to the child protection system in context, and barriers and facilitators to accessing these child protection supports and resources.

ETHICS

The study procedures received ethical approval from the University of Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (Reference no. FO_0059) in Davao City, Philippines. The research team obtained informed consent and assent prior to all data collection activities. Names and other identifying information used for recruitment were recorded in a separate document from study data and this document was shredded immediately following data collection. The study team provided an information sheet for each respondent with the research team's and Plan Philippines' contact information, and directions for anonymous reporting channels as per WRC's and Plan International's safeguarding policies. Activities were audio-recorded with the respondents' consent. Any names mentioned during the research activities were deleted during transcription. All appropriate measures were taken to ensure that data collection and

associated activities followed WRC's *Ethical Guidance for Working with Displaced Populations* (WRC, 2016), WRC's *Child and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy* (WRC), and Plan International's *Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People* (Plan International, 2017), and *The Practitioner's Guide to Ethical Conduct of Research on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings* (Robinson, 2020).

LIMITATIONS

Study limitations inherent to qualitative studies and relating to research implementation in humanitarian contexts and during the global COVID-19 pandemic exist.

First, despite engaging relevant community stakeholders and conducting community sensitization activities to introduce community members to the study, the researchers experienced challenges in identifying married adolescents, especially young married adolescent girls (12-14 years) and married boys (12-17 years). Therefore, the study did not reach its target sample size for married adolescent boys and girls per method. However, given the diversity of research methods utilized in the study, the researchers were able to triangulate findings from across methods to illustrate a clear picture of the needs and priorities of married girls in BARMM. Further, enumerators reported challenges in determining the exact age of participants. Due to social desirability bias, we expect that married adolescent girls reported being older than 18 years, therefore, it is likely that the study reached more married adolescent girls than those who self-reported as being married. Also, the study did not reach its target sample size of at least 10–15% of the total sample for people living with disabilities. Therefore, the study does not adequately document the unique needs and priorities of adolescents living with disabilities.

Second, the majority of data collection activities were completed prior to the onset of COVID-19 and before COVID-19 related restrictions on movements were put in place. The full extent of the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage decision-making was not captured by this study, nor was it the intent. COVID-19 restrictions prevented the research team from convening participatory group analysis with community members in Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Basilan. Therefore, findings from the community co-analysis workshops discussed herein present the perspectives and insights of adolescent girls and adult community members living in Maguindanao only.

There was also a limitation to the analysis. Although the SenseMaker® sample size was large for a non-representative study, the sample size was still too small to allow for meaningful disaggregation by ethnicity and other factors by province and subgroup given that the researchers only worked with a subset of the data self-signified as relevant to marriage. Where possible, the researchers reported on disaggregated data by subgroup, geographic location, and other key characteristics (e.g., marital and displacement status, religious/ethnic identity).

03

FINDINGS



PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Overall, 2,203 community members, including adolescents, adults, and key stakeholders, participated in data collection activities. Slightly over 50% (n=1,151) of participants identified as female compared to 1,046 who identified as male. 1,049 participants were married, while 1,112 were unmarried. A total of 890 adults and 1,312 adolescents (12–19 years) participated. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the overall number of respondents by data method.

KIIs

A total of 26 KIIs were conducted with 29 individuals across different positions and types of organizations providing diverse services and programming in the study locations, as well as MRLs. The majority (24) were women, while five were men. The research team interviewed between six and seven KIIs in each province, including five government officials, eight staff from NGOs or CSOs, two staff from INGOs, nine social service providers, and two MRLs. In Lanao del Sur, among (n=7) KIIs, four staff from NGOs/CSOs, two staff from INGOs, and one social service provider were interviewed. In Maguindanao, among (n=6) KIIs, four

government officials, one staff from an NGO/CSO, and one social service provider were interviewed. In Basilan, among (n=6), one MRL, one government official, and four social service providers were interviewed. In Sulu (n=), one MRL, three staff from NGOs, and three social services providers were interviewed. Notably, in the Island Provinces (Basilan and Sulu), no INGOs were interviewed.

SenseMaker®

A total of 2,174 community members participated in SenseMaker®, including 1,127 girls and women and 1,047 boys and men across four provinces (see Table 3). The sample included 220 married girls and 57 married boys. For the co-design workshop, 13 community members participated, including three adolescents 12–19 years and 10 adults. Among the adults, one participant identified as living with a psychological disability. In addition, five implementing partners, including UN actors, service providers, and national and community-based organizations participated. Forty-eight community members were engaged in three participatory analysis sessions in Maguindanao. Participants included 22 married and unmarried girls, and 26 men and women, including caregivers and other influential adults, such as MRLs.

Table 2. Summary of respondents engaged by data method

	Female	Male	Married	Unmarried	Adults (20+ years)	Adolescents (12-19 yrs)			Total
Data Method						12-14	15-17	18-19	
SenseMaker®	1,127	1,047	1,049*	1,112	861	598	361	353	2,147**
Participatory Group Research Activities	230	197	254	166	154	65	95	113	427
Key Informant Interviews	24	5	N/A	N/A	29	0	0	0	29
	1,151	1,052	1,049	1,112	890	598	361	353	2,203***

* SenseMaker® married category includes 1 engaged, 40 widowed, and 29 divorced participants.

** Includes 13 participants who preferred not to disclose their marital status.

***Participatory group participants were recruited from among SenseMaker® participants.

Table 3. Summary of SenseMaker® Respondents by Municipality, Age, and Gender

LANAO DEL SUR										
Marawi										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	16	5	14	8	5	7	7	10	10	82
Females	34	15	18	1	1	2	5	6	4	86
Butig										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	15	9	8	10	9	8	5	7	11	82
Females	29	24	10	0	1	2	2	9	3	80
Piagapo										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	15	11	10	7	6	2	3	8	7	69
Females	34	18	18	1	2	2	4	7	5	91
Saguiaran										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	16	6	10	17	4	0	5	8	10	76
Females	29	13	23	0	0	4	4	8	6	87
MAGUINDANAO										
Mamasapano										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	21	16	10	5	7	6	3	16	13	97
Females	17	26	24	1	2	3	4	7	5	89
Shariff Saydona Mustapha										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	15	9	9	10	3	6	2	16	7	77
Females	27	12	12	3	0	4	3	3	1	65
Datu Salibo										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	12	14	13	9	5	8	5	9	9	84
Females	22	23	13	0	5	3	2	5	4	77

Datu Saudi Ampatuan										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	17	4	8	7	8	6	9	9	2	70
Females	28	23	14	3	5	7	4	5	4	93
BASILAN										
Sumisip										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	19	13	10	17	7	3	4	13	17	103
Females	45	23	21	6	1	2	4	6	7	115
Hadji Mohammed Ajul										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	22	10	12	4	13	5	4	15	13	98
Females	43	25	15	1	0	7	4	11	5	111
SULU										
Patikul										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	27	19	14	14	4	7	6	9	13	113
Females	44	18	25	1	1	5	2	13	10	119
Parang										
	12-14	15-17	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	36-39	40-49	50	Total
Males	19	8	11	13	10	3	7	7	18	96
Females	33	17	31	0	1	4	6	11	11	114

Participatory Group Activities

A total of 427 respondents (53.9% women and girls) were engaged in 47 participatory group research activities. The majority (n=273) were adolescents aged 12–19 years, while the remaining participants were adult caregivers, parents, community leaders, and other community gatekeepers. In Sulu, among the 427 participants, 32 were adolescent boys aged 12–19 years; 50 were adolescent girls aged 12–19; 16 were adult men caregivers/community gatekeepers; and 17 were adult women caregivers/community gatekeepers. In Basilan, among the 111 participants, 33 were adolescent boys aged 12–19 years; 42 were adolescent girls aged 12–19; 18 were adult men caregivers/community gatekeepers; and 18 were adult women caregivers/community gatekeepers. In Lanao del Sur, among the 118 participants, 26 were adolescent boys aged 12–19 years; 50 were adolescent girls aged 12–19; 22 were

adult men caregivers/community gatekeepers; and 20 were adult women caregivers/community gatekeepers. In Maguindanao, among the 83 participants, 17 were adolescent boys aged 12–19 years; 23 were adolescent girls aged 12–19; 24 were adult men caregivers/community gatekeepers; and 19 were adult women caregivers/community gatekeepers.

KEY CONCERNS FACING ADOLESCENTS

Data from across methods revealed a range of key concerns facing adolescents in BARRM. SenseMaker® and participatory methods provided opportunities for adolescents and adult community members to describe these concerns within their own context. Participants across groups and provinces identified child marriage

Child Marriage

Child marriage was elevated as a pressing concern of adolescents in BARMM through conversations with key informants, stories illuminated through SenseMaker®, and participatory group activities geared at identifying attributes of adolescent well-being and prioritizing protection risks for adolescents. When asked directly about child marriage practices in the communities where they work, all key informants affirmed that child marriage was prevalent.

“

Moderator (M): In your view, what are the most pressing issues facing communities in this setting?

Participant (P): *It is actually early marriage. It is because the young ones here, even if they don't like it, they are still married off. Considering the culture of the Muslims here, where there are fixed marriages, if the parents [have] decided, their children have no say about it anymore. Sometimes others enter into early marriage because they prefer it. (Government Health Official, Basilan, KII)*

Stories highlighting some aspects of “marriage” derived from SenseMaker® activities comprised roughly one-third of the total stories under analysis. Among the stories about marriage that were randomly selected, almost all were related to child marriage.

“

*We met in one of the streets somewhere. He visited our house. He said I had a friend that he likes and wants me to be the bridge between them. However, a few days after, I found out that the one he really likes is me. When we were dating for a little over two months, he said he wanted to marry me. A little over a month after that, we started living together. After Eid, we were finally married. That's it. I was 12 when we got married. My husband was older than 20. **(Married adolescent girl, 12-14 years, Maguindanao, SenseMaker®)***

“Married” was a common characteristic that participatory groups used to describe an adolescent “not doing well” in the adolescent well-being activity. However, the adolescent’s marital status was often shared only after further probing by the facilitator, asking questions such as “Is this adolescent married or unmarried?”

Three participatory groups (married adolescent boys 18–19 years from Lanao del Sur, married adolescent girls 18–19 years from Basilan, and female adult caregivers and community leaders from Basilan) specified that both the adolescent “doing well” and “not doing well” were married. In each group, the married adolescent depicted as “doing well” was supported financially by families suggesting that financial support may outweigh any negative effects of child marriage. The married adolescent boy group explained:

“

Sam is married, and it is not through parental or forced marriage. They [husband and wife] are both studying and receiving support from their respective families. Sam's parents have their own ready to wear business. (Married adolescent boys 18-19 years from Basilan. Adolescent Well-Being Activity.



Figure 2: Female Parents and community leaders, Kitango, Maguindanao. Adolescent Well-Being Activity. Group illustration of an 'adolescent doing well' is Marian a 15-year-old unmarried adolescent girl.

Choice in marriage decision-making and access to education were other factors that assuaged negative perceptions of child marriage among community members. In the adolescent boy group's explanation above, the group also associated adolescent well-being with marriage that was neither arranged nor forced, indicating that self-initiated marriages are perceived as more favorable than forced marriages. Participants in the co-analysis workshops noted that adolescent boys were more likely to initiate the marriage process and have power in their own marriage decisions than girls.

The group of female caregivers and community leaders from Basilan shared that the adolescent “doing well” was married due to “a fixed marriage or arranged marriage by parents;” while the adolescent not doing well was “forced to marry because of poverty and to financially support their family.” However, married adolescent girls from Basilan explained that the married adolescent girl “doing well” and her husband were “both from rich families”. These discussions suggest that choice in marriage decision-making, access to education, and financial stability may have modifying effects on community members’ perceptions about child marriage.

Conflict-Related Displacement and Insecurity

Many of the community member participants experienced conflict-related displacement, with nearly half either being displaced themselves or living with others who were displaced. Although not cited as frequently as economic factors as a risk factor for marriage, the dramatic impact of displacement on all aspects of life meant that it strongly emerged both in stories and discussions in the community co-analysis workshops, echoing findings from other data sources. During participatory community analysis, displacement was discussed in association with less parental guidance and greater chance of consensual and non-consensual sexual relationships and social interactions between adolescents. Data across methods indicate that displacement and insecurity make marriage more likely by interrupting education and livelihood. Data from KIs and SenseMaker® also indicate that displacement and insecurity increase girls’ risk of marriage by parents making the decision to marry their daughters off to protect family honor, consolidate political or resource power, and as gratitude for receiving shelter (see Conflict-Related Displacement and Insecurity under Section 4.4 Drivers of Child Marriage on page 37).

Adolescent Pregnancy

Adolescent pregnancy emerged as a key concern for adolescent girls as identified by KIs across provinces and as shared by SenseMaker® respondents. Most references to adolescent pregnancy were intrinsically linked to child marriage as both a precursor and a consequence. If a girl was not already pregnant prior to marriage, pregnancy closely followed marriage.



The girl was my classmate. She had a boyfriend who was the same age as us. One day, she and her boyfriend met at a public place, but they didn’t notice that a relative had followed them there. She became pregnant and when her family found out, they apprehended the guy and the two of them were forced to marry. Now, they are in Manila and the girl and her husband have discontinued their studies. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 18–19, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker)

KIs underscored the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education and services for unmarried girls due to stigma about adolescent girls’ sexuality, which can, in turn lead to unprotected sex and unwanted or unplanned pregnancy. According to KIs, early pregnancy particularly affected older adolescents 15–19 years. In the Philippines, abortion is illegal under all circumstances, and access to contraception for adolescents is limited. KIs in Sulu and Basilan noted that early pregnancy was a driver of school dropout among adolescent girls.

Early pregnancy itself did not emerge as a key challenge facing adolescents in BARMM in the participatory group activities. However, responsibilities as caregivers to “children” were often discussed in concert with discussions around child marriage. More than issues relating to marriage and children, participants emphasized the need for nutritious food. Notably, lack of “healthy foods”, “not enough food”, or “eating once a day” were the most frequently cited characteristics of adolescents who were “not doing well” in all provinces except for Sulu. An 18- to 19-year-old married adolescent girl from Lanao del Sur explained how child marriage negatively impacted her nutritional health: “I was married at the age of 14 years old. When I was not married, I ate three times a day.” Discussions about malnutrition and food insecurity intersected with discussions about poverty. In Sulu, participants cited “unhealthiness” or “sickness” as a key challenge facing adolescents who were “not doing well” in their communities.

Lack of Access to Quality Education

Lack of quality education was identified by over one-third (n=8) of KIs as a key concern of adolescents. Informants emphasized the importance of education on adolescent development outcomes throughout the interviews. Consultations with key informants, stories shared by community members, and participatory group activities associated school dropout as both a precursor and consequence to child marriage. Education was also a key theme that emerged during participatory group activities. Adolescents who were doing well correlated with having access to education and having supportive parents with the means to provide for their educational needs. Participants provided reasons why adolescents dropped out of school, including “armed conflict” (male and female caregivers and community leaders, Maguindanao); “They [parents] did not have the financial capacity” (female caregivers/community leaders, Maguindanao); “They [the family] did not have [a] livelihood and budget for education” (15- to 17-year-old unmarried girls, Lanao del Sur); “...to help earn a livelihood for the family” (18- to 19-year-old married men, Sulu). During discussions about adolescent well-being, a few adolescent groups also mentioned that bullying and harassment caused adolescents to drop out of school, citing child marriage and indigenous identity as key reasons for experiencing harassment at school. For example, Figure X depicts the drawing of an adolescent girl “not doing well” because she was married by her parents as a child so her parents could use her dowry to pay for farming expenses, which



Figure 3: Unmarried adolescent boys 18-19 years. Lanao del Sur. Group illustration of Mariyam, a 15 year old married adolescent girl 'not doing well'.

A participant shared the following description of Mariyam:

"While another group they named the adolescent not doing well Mariyam. Fifteen (15) years old. She was a child of hardship. Her parents were farmers. Due to poverty, her parents decided to marry Mariyam so that she could somehow help with household expenses and so that parents could have capital in farming through her "dowry" -- where this is the money to be given to them (the bride) from the future husband before they get married. But Mariyam suffered even more because of her marriage. She is embarrassed to go to school because she is said to be experiencing bullying at school. Mariam was told that she was too young to get married so she decided to stop studying. So now she is said to be a farmer and she can't buy what she wants to buy because what their family earns from farming is enough for their daily expenses. Mariyam's father died of an 'ulcer' because sometimes they only ate once a day. Today Mariyam and her husband work together to make a living."

led to her being bullied at school and subsequently dropping out.

Data also indicated that child marriage is a consequence of lack of access to education. KIs and SenseMaker® narratives revealed that multiple factors, such as early pregnancy, household and child-rearing responsibilities, and financial circumstances, led to an adolescent needing to leave school early in relation to child marriage.

Discrimination and Stigma

Data from across methods suggest that social stigma and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as bullying and harassment, were key issues confronting adolescents, especially adolescent girls, across BARMM. Findings indicate that adolescents were discriminated against based on varying factors, including their religious identity as Muslims, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, ability status, IDP status, marital status, childbearing status, and schooling status.

Among the challenges raised by KIs, many IDP adolescents experience bullying and harassment from the host community, especially by students in school. Respondents explained that these adolescents were targeted for harassment due to their displaced status

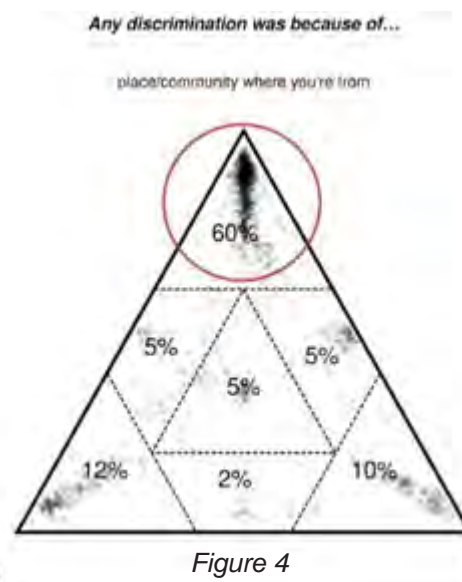


Figure 4

within the community. Data from the participatory group activities corroborates these findings. Displaced adolescent participatory group participants expressed a desire to be "bully-free." SenseMaker® data also illuminated how participants interpret discrimination. This can be seen in Figure 4, where place and community (60%) emerged as the most significant element of prejudice by far, while religion (12%) and ethnicity (10%) were far less pronounced. This finding corroborates KII data that displacement status and ethnicity are prominent sources of discrimination and stigma among community members. Further, some adolescent girl participatory group participants in Sulu reported facing discrimination by dominant ethnic/indigenous groups (e.g., the Tausug tribe, which is the dominant ethnic group in Sulu) due to their identity as members of a minority indigenous group, the Badjao tribe. Badjao adolescent participants shared that they did not attend school regularly and that some of them had dropped out of school due to bullying. KIs noted that Badjao adolescents were more likely to be married than Tausug adolescents.

In the SenseMaker® data, a relatively small number of respondents (n=11) said that they had left school directly because of bullying and discrimination. The theme of being afraid or embarrassed to return to school after being married or pregnant; however, appeared in the stories and in participatory community analysis even when it was not the direct cause of leaving school. During participatory community analysis, this theme was emphasized more by adolescent girl groups compared to the older adults group. Discussions among participants indicated that bullying or discrimination within the education system (or even just the fear of discrimination), especially in school, led married participants who might otherwise have continued in school, to drop out. Adolescent girls explained that when discrimination against their peers occurred, girls were unlikely to defend them out of fear that attempting to mitigate the harassment would make them a target for harassment as well. Details about the type of harassment and bullying (e.g., sexual, physical, verbal, psychosocial) were not uncovered through analysis.



I know someone who was married against her wishes. She stopped going to school regularly when she got pregnant because she was embarrassed that people would see her like that. When she was married, she kept crying and completely stopped attending school when she had a child. She went back to her province. We asked around about where she went and people say she went back to Marantao. When we asked people why she stopped going to school, they said she had gotten pregnant and was ashamed to face people because of that. Her husband is only 15 years old, also very young. She was embarrassed that we would see her pregnant and also embarrassed to face our teachers.”
(Unmarried adolescent girl, 12–14, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)

Data also suggests that bullying and stigma are experienced for reasons beyond IDP status, culture, and marriage; these include financial circumstances, skin color, and ethnicity. Adolescent participatory group participants across age groups from Maguindanao, Basilan, and Lanao del Sur reported that adolescents were bullied by their peers due to low socio-economic status.



Figure 5: Unmarried adolescent girls 15–17 years. Piagapo, Lanao del Sur. Group illustration of Ben, a 16 year adolescent boy ‘not doing well’. Participants provided the following information to describe Ben:

“He is bullied because he is poor”
 “Their house was burned down and they weren’t able to save a single item.”
 “He cannot attend class regularly.”
 “He had to stop schooling because they did not have livelihood and have no budget for education.”
 “His uniform is damaged, tattered, and smelled of burnt material, and they sleep in different locations.”
 “He only wears slippers because they do not have any money to buy for new ones and they live far away.”

Child Labour, Including Child Trafficking and Illicit Work

Child trafficking and illicit work emerged as related themes in KIIs and participatory group discussions, and illicit work was frequently mentioned in SenseMaker® stories. Findings from across data sources suggest that child trafficking is a consequence of lack of income-generating opportunities, and gender and religious discrimination. KIIs from Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, and Basilan explained that girls, especially married girls, are more likely than boys to be recruited for “domestic work” abroad to Muslim majority countries such as Thailand, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, or outside of their immediate communities, due to financial needs and gendered norms that expect girls and women to carry out domestic work. Among the 22 adolescent girls who were invited to participate in community participatory analysis in Maguindanao, two rescinded the invitation because they had travelled abroad to do domestic work, while one of them was processing her documents to travel abroad to do domestic work. It is unclear whether most adolescent girls travel legally or illegally to work abroad. KIIs explained the sexual, physical, and emotional violence that adolescent girls who experience trafficking may face:



Those [adolescent girls] aged 15–19 are especially vulnerable in my perspective. At this age, their physical features start to become adult-like, which makes them very vulnerable to trafficking. And because of lack of livelihood opportunities and the promise of a better future, they can easily be drawn to trafficking and be victimized. In my experience handling cases, some adolescents who are victimized by trafficking and rape would be very traumatized and find it difficult to cope. They return as changed individuals. In terms of the rape cases that we handle, sometimes three out of five involve children from indigenous people communities. (Government CSO, Maguindanao, KII)

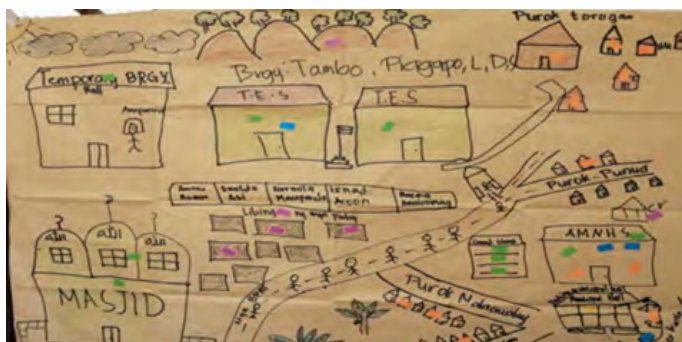
Because of poverty, families send their children abroad to work. Underage girls are able to get passports saying they are 18–20 years old. In Marawi, this occurs even more because of displacement. They work elsewhere in the Philippines, or abroad. Given the culture of Maranao, more of them go abroad. The Maranaos are an ethnic group known for their pride. If they do domestic work in the Philippines, it will hurt their family’s pride. Maybe only a few families will admit it, but you will only know that a person is working in a family setting when they post [share on social media] about their bruises. No one knows where they actually are. They could be with a family or a recruiter (UN Agency, Lanao del Sur, KII)

Findings from the community mapping activities indicate that few places in the community exist for adolescents, especially girls, to convene, interact, play, and socialize. Activities also highlighted that adolescent girls lack access to specialized support services in their communities. During the community mapping exercise, participants across age groups identified common places that were unsafe for adolescent girls. Places were deemed unsafe by participants due to the presence of conflict or violence, presence of military or armed group personnel, and because they are places where adolescent boys and girls mingle. In the provinces of Sulu (Nunukan, Kannaway, Mauboh, Gandalusi), Maguindanao (East Libutan, Kitango), and Basilan (Tuburan, Benembengan), unsafe spaces included roads, puente or bridges, town borders or checkpoints, and farm areas where government military/police and several non-government armed groups pass through or frequently have armed encounters. In other areas (East Libutan and Kitango, Maguinadnao), some respondents identified restaurants or eateries as unsafe for girls because military and armed groups also eat in these places at random times. At the same time, many of these places were cited by participants across age groups as being frequented by adolescent girls. Internet shops were cited as among the spaces that adolescent boys frequent. Adolescent girls reported that their parents do not allow them to go to internet shops, or “piso nets” (one-peso internet cafes), because these are “tight spaces” and their parents want to prevent them from interacting with boys in such close proximity. Adult and adolescent groups identified internet shops as unsafe and as places that were discouraged among Muslim communities because they are seen as a “breeding ground” for early/forced marriage given the perception that adolescents go there to mingle and access inappropriate sexual material on the internet.



Participants identified the following:

- Places frequented by adolescent girls (Pink): home, Madrasah, school
- Places where adolescents get SRH information (Red): rural health unit, barangay health center
- Places where adolescents get support and services (Orange): municipal hall, barangay hall, school
- Places where adolescents do not go/ that are not safe (Purple): Piso net/Internet shop, farm area



Lack of Supportive Relationships

Participatory group activities and SenseMaker® stories illustrate that adolescents lack social capital. Both of these sources of information suggest that adolescents have complicated and strained relationships with key influencers and support persons in their lives, primarily parents and peers. For example, and as discussed, participants explained the various reasons why adolescents face a high level of discrimination and harassment. A handful of SenseMaker® stories discuss friendly and supportive relationships with peers, but gossip and stigmatization are far more common themes in stories and participatory group activities. Peer pressure, usually referred to as “bad influences,”

frequently appears in the stories, community participatory analysis, and participatory group activities. “Lack of a social life” and “bad peer influence” were common themes that emerged during adolescent well-being activities across subgroups and provinces. In Sulu in particular, these themes were associated with deviant behaviors such as “skipping class”, and “vices” such as stealing, gambling, drugs, alcohol, and lying. This lack of trust in adolescents’ peers and friends sometimes led to the sub-theme that only parents are to be trusted:

“

I know two friends who live nearby—two brothers who both married early. Maybe their mother was too busy working for their future and for their needs. This is also the reason why they were neglected, since their mother was busy with work. They did not have a father anymore. They only had their mother. Now, they are married and have their own families. It’s not (inaudible) for me that it’s them, because for young people like me, the advantage of those who have families of their own already is that they start to think of ways of standing on their own two feet, but it’s not easy. For me, even if I still don’t have a family of my own, the most important thing is guidance, someone to help us think, to ask us about our worries, to find a way to provide our needs. Let’s say it’s difficult because we’re poor, material things aren’t as important for us young people. All the (inaudible), just so long as we are not neglected and we have no opportunity to think about doing bad things. Young people nowadays are pasaway (“hard-headed”). One problem [arises] and they start acting cocky, going amok, drinking, and spending time with the wrong friends. They’re lucky if they end up with good friends. That is really what’s important for us. Whether we have families or not, it’s really guidance. The ones who can help us think straight are our parents. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 18–19, Sulu, SenseMaker®)

Participatory group activities across subgroups and provinces emphasized the importance of parent-child relationships in supporting, caring for, and protecting adolescents. Lack of financial support and moral guidance from parents meant an adolescent was “not doing well.”

“

Their parents should advise and guide the young generation and make an effort to teach them spirituality and faith. Nowadays, the majority of the younger generation focuses on technology and social media. Parents should teach children how to be God-fearing. This is something the younger

generation lacks. Also, parents need to open up and be cautious and mindful about parenting their children. Outside the house, or even inside, there are many distractions and attractions. (Female caregivers and community leaders, Basilan)

During participatory group analysis, married girl participants emphasized that lack of trust between an adolescent and her parents or other family members drives adolescent girls to look for a sense of belonging outside the home through marriage. They explained that unsupportive parents and family often believe community rumors around dating and premarital relationships instead of consulting their children and discussing these concerns with them. In order to protect family honor, parents force their daughters to marry. SenseMaker® stories also revealed that domestic abuse, mainly from parents, caused girls to seek comfort and shelter from a husband, rather than continue enduring abuse within the home.

High-Risk Behaviors

High-risk behaviors, particularly illicit drug use, emerged through the KIs and participatory group activities as a challenge facing adolescents, particularly boys. Illegal drug use was the most common issue KIs from Sulu and Basilan reported that adolescents face, particularly adolescent boys 15–19 years old. Participatory group activities portrayed illicit drug use, smoking, gambling, and other high risk behaviors, as a challenge that only affected adolescent boys. These behaviors were seen by participants as a precursor to joining gang-type groups that engage in criminal and socially deviant behaviour, such as stealing. Participants explained that parents of these boys are often separated from their children, no longer alive, lack a stable source of income, and/or are unable to fulfil their children’s needs.



Unmarried adolescent boys 15-17 years. Maguindanao. Adolescent well being activity. Group illustration of an adolescent boy ‘not doing well’.

KEY CONCERNS OF MARRIED GIRLS

Study findings indicate that child marriage has devastating consequences for married girls that negatively affect their positive development trajectories, such as cyclical poverty, early pregnancy, school dropout, adverse health outcomes for the girls and their children, and adverse mental health and psychosocial outcomes due to isolation and stigma. Out of the 543 stories about child marriage, approximately half (45%) interpreted that their own story was negative or very negative, indicating the dire effects of child marriage on adolescent girls, their families, and communities. Moreover, most of the stories that participants interpreted as positive still centered on the concerns of adolescents.

Cycle of Poverty

Although data implies that most parents and some girls see marriage as a means to alleviate poverty and unlock opportunities for girls, SenseMaker® and participatory group data shows that child marriage perpetuates a cycle of poverty for girls and their families. Data indicates that many married girls and their husbands are not financially stable prior to marriage, and have children before they are able to become financially independent. Stories describe married girls returning to their paternal families' homes because they are unable to provide basic needs for themselves and their children. KIs explained that married girls, in particular, are more likely than unmarried girls and boys to be recruited for domestic work abroad or outside of their communities due to financial needs and gendered norms that expect girls and women to carry out domestic work.



Since I was small until I came of age, I was already doing laundry for a living. I am now married, but we still do not have a stable source of income. We always borrow money. My husband does not have work, so sometimes we have to borrow money for food. I do other people's laundry in order to pay our debts in the sari-sari store. Sometimes I attempt to borrow money from people but they do not lend to me anymore. (Married adolescent girl, 12-14 years, Sulu, SenseMaker®)

I am 19 years old. I married early. My husband doesn't have work and we have not been able to get our own place. I hope someone gives us a scholarship. We don't have work either and it's hard not to have any livelihood. We don't want to keep relying on our parents. For our child's future as well. (Married adolescent girl, 18-19 years, Sulu, SenseMaker®)

School Dropout

Patterns from SenseMaker® stories revealed that most girls desire to continue their studies after marriage and complete their education in order to improve their lives

and assist their families. Other girls see marriage as a strategy or path toward continuing their education, sometimes with the support of husbands or in-laws. However, findings from across data sources illustrate that many married girls are forced to discontinue their studies due to lack of financial resources to pay school fees, household obligations as a new wife, and child rearing. Some SenseMaker® stories also show that married adolescent boys may also drop out of school to focus on earning money to support their family, which lowers the family's earning potential and once again traps them in a cycle of poverty. As mentioned, some married girls drop out of school to avoid harassment as well as feelings of embarrassment and shame, which can be especially difficult for girls who are being forced to marry.



I used to attend school, but I stopped when I was in Grade 8. I was married at an early age because of a false rumor. My mother thought about marrying me to this guy because my dignity as a woman has been ruined by these rumors, so I had to marry to put a stop to them. My husband now liked me then when we were still in school and these rumors spread accusing us of doing things that we did not do. That's why I thought of discontinuing my studies and just agreeing with the marriage. Now, both my husband and I are jobless and I am relying on my parents for support. Sometimes I get scolded because if I had focused on my studies and avoided befriending boys, this would not have happened to me. But when I was still in school I wasn't dumb or anything like that, as I used to get passing marks. If the overall score was 100, I would get a 64. I did not continue my studies anymore because I feel ashamed. If people knew how those rumors made me feel at the time, maybe they would feel pity for me too. (Married adolescent girl, 15-17 years, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)

Adverse Health and Well-Being Outcomes for Married Girls and Their Children

SenseMaker® and participatory group data indicates that due to societal and familial pressures to bear children immediately after marriage, married girls face adverse reproductive health consequences such as maternal morbidity. In addition, some married girls shared experiences of miscarriage and child mortality. Stories indicate that adverse physical health consequences of pregnancy also incur mental and psychosocial health repercussions. Furthermore, married girls shared stories about marital challenges due to abuse and neglect from their husbands, and at times abuse from their in-laws and other members of their husbands' families. Some married girls separated from or divorced their husbands to escape abuse, often returning to their parental homes for support.



I have a husband and we had a child before but the child died. It was hard for me and I cried after that but we have another child now who is alive and well. My husband is a fisherman and there are times that we need to borrow money from others but we pay them off when we get the money. I also sell fish for a living. Our child has not started schooling yet. (Married adolescent girl, 18-19 years, Sulu, SenseMaker®)

Stigma and Social Isolation

The findings from SenseMaker® stories and community participatory analysis indicate that married and/or pregnant girls face heightened stigma. Data implies that since child marriage and pregnancy are not necessarily valued highly societally, especially as marriage is often used to mitigate shame, some girls face double discrimination and stigma from their family as well as their peers. For example, girls may be married off by their parents at a younger age in order to end rumors in the community, after which they face bullying and harassment for their predicament in school. Stories shared by adolescent girls also indicated that girls often submitted to forced marriages resulting from their parents' desire to control their sexuality, partly because they did not want to experience stigma from peers about their perceived deviant sexual behaviors, whether these were true or not. Married girls shared stories about being ridiculed and emotionally abused by their husbands, in-laws, their husbands' siblings, and in a few stories such as the one below, their husband's other wives.

Study findings also suggest that married girls endure social isolation from family, peers, and the wider community as a consequence of being married and/or pregnant. Girls' stories about marriage explain how they left their paternal home to live with their husband and/or husband's family, thereby distancing themselves physically and emotionally from their family support network. Data also suggests that social isolation may lead to other deprivations such as limited economic opportunities and other productive community engagements. For example, data triangulated from across methods affirm that many married girls do not attend school nor do they have access to informal education structures. This finding implies that married girls are not only separated from their peers, but also from learning opportunities, which limit their employment opportunities and access to school-based social services and programming, such as health education and psycho-social counseling. Further, stories illustrate married girls as primary caregivers for children and family members, as well as being responsible for domestic work.



I was 18 years old when I married. This is our story. First, we started dating and then he formally went to my house to court me, and then we lived together and had a child. After I gave birth to our child, he started messing around [with another woman/women]. Our child was only 4 months old when he left us. My child and I kept moving places because there were instances when I didn't live with my parents. When my child was about 8 months, we went to Zamboanga. I had to sacrifice by going to work, renting a boarding house, after which we came back to Jolo and I left my child with my parents. I went back to work in Zamboanga after that. It's hard for my child to stay there because they could not be properly cared for. I did whatever job that was necessary to provide for my child. I left my child with my parents. After I found work, I also found another husband but he ended up being the same as the other one, rather odd in terms of attitude. It was okay at first, he was kind and diligent at work, but it came to a point where he was after all unable to accept that I had a child so we separated. It was all okay with me, such is fate, I had to accept even if it hurts. It's okay as soon as my children are with me, I am also happy for them. (Enum: So you separated too? But does he know that you're pregnant?) Yes, he probably knows because I went to Jolo when I was about 6 months pregnant before coming back to Zamboanga. He got back together with his [other] wife. (Enum: He had a wife?) Yes, and it was okay with me. I was the one who asked for a divorce because his wife does not like having a rival. She humiliated me in the KCC [mall] but our husband defended me and told her not to hurt me because I'm pregnant. For me, it's fine if she humiliated me in front of many people, I shrugged it off even if it hurts. I could not do anything, I am the second wife after all, so I had to accept being the loser. So even if I was pregnant, we parted ways.

Now, my older sibling who works in Saudi also helps me a bit. He/she supports my parents and also gives me and my children a little something to feed ourselves with. My sibling and I had talked about me finding work after I give birth, but you can't progress without any help from others and it's hard to find income.

Actually, I am happy that we're no longer together. Less headaches. After all, I have my child and another one that's coming so I just hope we get through all of the challenges. If there is someone who will help me get back to school, perhaps through a scholarship, I would also want to do that for my children's future so that they don't experience what I had gone through. The fact

that I ended up making a broken family. That's pretty much it for me. I hope someone helps us but I'm happy that my children are with me. If someone could help us through a scholarship or livelihood program, that would be a big help.
(Married adolescent girl, 18-19 years old, Sulu, SenseMaker®)

DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Findings reinforce that child marriage is underpinned by gender inequality created and perpetuated by harmful gender norms and patriarchal power dynamics that expose girls and women to gender discrimination and other negative outcomes, such as child marriage. Although underlying drivers of child marriage remained consistent (e.g., gender discrimination, poverty), the intensity of the drivers varied across settings, reflecting their diverse populations and nature of crisis (e.g., conflict, displacement, COVID-19 containment measures). Findings from SenseMaker® and data from KII revealed that key drivers of child marriage in BARMM intersect across individual, social, institutional, and resource domains of the adapted Social Norms Framework for ASRH Outcomes. Study findings illustrate how conflict-affected and displacement contexts exacerbated drivers, while new risks emerged. Key drivers included controlling adolescent sexuality to mitigate the threat to family honor; sense of duty to the family; adolescent girls' limited power in decision-making; poverty and lack of alternative opportunities; interpretations of the Qur'an such as text which mentions marriage (e.g., Hadith); and an enabling legal

environment. Other factors participants identified as elevating the risk of child marriage were misconceptions about married life, and technology and social media. KIIs conducted during COVID-19 in Maguindanao suggested that COVID-19 exacerbated existing drivers of child marriage in the province (e.g., poverty, lack of access to education, lack of income generating activities and alternatives). Data also revealed drivers unique to Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, including consolidating and expanding political and resource power, and resolving clan feud and violence. Drivers unique to IDPs included humanitarian assistance and marriage to relatives to show appreciation for shelter.

Limited Decision-Making Power among Adolescent Girls

Data from SenseMaker® stories and KIIs indicate that many adolescent girls in BARMM were deprived of power and control over decision-making on matters that affect their lives, including deciding when and whom to marry, due to prevailing gender and social norms that discriminate against girls and women. KIIs and stories suggest that girls' behavior, sexuality, physical bodies, socio-emotional health, and access to resources and opportunities are controlled by parents and subsequently by husbands. This plays out in the marriage decision-making process, including customs of dowry.

Meta-data patterns from SenseMaker® indicated that individuals were believed to hold reasonable amounts of influence and responsibility within the context of their stories. However, this was complicated by stories showing strong indications that even if a young woman does not want to get married, it is usually not her choice. For example:



I am 13 years old. When my husband's family went to our home [to ask for my hand in marriage], I was in school. I came home to find them [my husband's and my families] sitting and talking in the sala ("living room") with some money placed in a chest and some other items. I asked my mother what this was about and later learned that it was my engagement. My mother lied to me saying that it [the money] was only for paying debts when in fact, the money in the chest was my dowry. I believed her at the time because I was young and I thought that my mother would not lie to me. I started to suspect eventually because people would tease me saying that I was about to get married, but I did not believe them. I was about to go to school when she gave me an allowance that was more than what I was used to. When I asked her why I was given 50 pesos, she did not respond. When I was in school, I heard people saying that I was about to get married and they were congratulating me for it. When I came home, I saw a box that had the word 'gown' written on it. I asked my mother who was getting married, and she answered that it was me. I was shocked because to my knowledge, that money was only payment for a motorcycle, but she said it was payment for my marriage. The wedding day finally came and I could not help but cry, even during pictorials, because I could not accept that I would be married at such a young age. A few days after my marriage, I was still not used to the fact that I had a husband. I was always used to sleeping beside my mom and dad, and my tears started to well when I heard them say that I could not sleep beside them anymore because I was already married. I could not accept that I already had a husband. I was shy around him and also angry. That's because I found out that my husband was the reason I had to get married. It turned out that he had had a crush on me for a while so he devised a way to get [sic] me. When I went back to school, my friends asked me if I was the one who got married, but I denied it and hid the truth because I was afraid of what they would say. There was even a rumor that I was married early because of my own doing. Since I got married, my friends have started avoiding me. I am sad because they don't want to play with me anymore because I'm already married. **(Married adolescent girl, 12-14 years, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)**

SenseMaker® data (shown below) shows strong patterns indicating that the bulk of the responsibility (54%) for what happened in their stories was assigned to individuals at the same time as the outcome of events was considered as pre-ordained (accepted as fate) (43%). This also leads to paradoxes and contradictory elements in the discussion of power and choice in marriage decision-making.

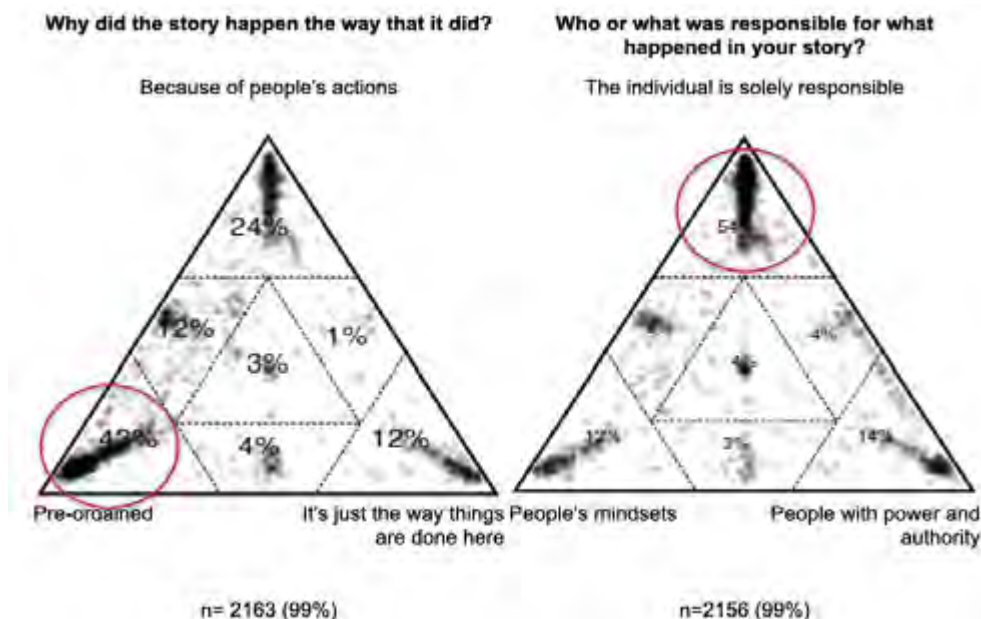


Figure 9: On the triad on the left, there is a large cluster of stories (43%) in the left-hand corner indicating that participants thought events were pre-ordained, while on the triad on the right there is another large cluster (54%) at the top associated with the belief that the individual was responsible for what happened in the stories.

Analysis of the SenseMaker stories during community participatory analysis corroborated the research team's inference that the stories told in the first person were usually passive, reflecting a distancing from personal agency (as per the above Figure 9 Why did the story happen the way it did?); whereas many of the stories told in the third person attributed more agency to young people, emphasizing how deliberate choices and actions lead to marriage. Among the stories told, a common trope was that young girls did make a choice through their actions in the lead-up to a marriage decision that was actually being made on their behalf. Data from across methods illustrate that if a girl engages in a relationship with a boy, or if there is even an assumption of a relationship, her parents will force her into marriage. The marriage is seen as her "doing" and therefore responsibility is attributed to her through the way her story is shared throughout the informal networks within the community.



What I can tell you right now is the story of a young girl who married early, which was known because the girl's mother knew about her relationship and kept scolding her child, saying she had to study first, but the girl did not listen. The girl's mother sought the boy and the boy became afraid, saying he had no immediate plans to marry the girl because she was still young and in school. However, because the girl would not listen to her mother, who kept telling her to study first, their parents had a talk and they were married. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15–17 years, Maguindanao, SenseMaker®)



Dating is not allowed, so parents will marry them. They used to kill the children if they found out they were dating. Parents are arranging marriages, [and would] rather that they [the children] get married early. Morally it is accepted to marry young. Parents are forced to say yes [to the marriage] because the [family's] reputation has been damaged. There are still forced marriages. (NGO, Lanao del Sur, KII)

Most KIIs mentioned that adolescents "lacked agency" and decision-making power over their own marriages. Rather, parents were the primary decision-makers in adolescents' lives, including in the decision to marry. A few KIIs expressed that adolescent boys held more power over their marriage decisions compared to adolescent girls.

Misconceptions about Married Life

A few KIIs explained situations in which adolescents chose to marry as children. KIIs mentioned that if adolescents chose to marry without parental interference, it was often because the adolescent girl had unrealistic expectations about marriage, such as that marriage would be an escape from poverty and/or abuse in her parental home. It was noted in the KIIs that adolescent girls' idealistic conceptions about married life did not come to fruition. This finding was also evident in the SenseMaker® stories, participatory community analysis, and, to a lesser extent, participatory group activities. During participatory community analysis, all subgroups expressed the desire for increased understanding and

empathy of the realities of married life. Adolescent and adult participatory group participants explicitly stated that adolescents chose marriage to evade a life of poverty. A married adolescent boy, aged 18–19, from Lanao del Sur shared, “Chito [fictional name of an adolescent “not doing well” in his community] got married because it was his choice. Because he was hard up in life, he preferred to have a wife because his paternal family had a financial shortage.”

Self-Sacrifice and Sense of Duty

Many of the narratives collected through SenseMaker® and participatory discussions indicate that adolescent girls possess a sense of duty to their parents and family unit that rationalizes any fears, objectives, or hesitations they have about their forced marriages. Stories discussed young girls regaining and/or supporting family honor by self-sacrifice out of a sense of duty to their parents. This sense of duty and self-sacrifice toward the adolescent girls’ parents and family units is inextricably linked to feelings of shame which present in different forms throughout the study findings. Participatory groups identified adolescents’ “negative values” and “bad habits” of violating strict sexual norms, such as dating and engaging in other improper behaviors due to environmental and peer influence, as drivers of child marriage.



I am 18 years old. When I was still studying, I lived with my aunt in Jolo. I would join the sayawan (community disco) and go home late. Because I lived with my aunt, she spread rumors about me. She said I was not really serious about my studies and I was just going out with guys. I was studying well and wanted to repay my parents, but she made me look bad. She wanted me to marry so that she could take my dowry, because money is the only reason why she supported my studies in the first place. What I was afraid of when I was still living with her was that she might spread false rumors about me to my parents. I couldn't do anything about it because if I answered back, they would say I was disrespectful, so I had to accept how things were. I decided to go to my boyfriend's place. ... when you're not doing anything wrong but you suddenly become the bad guy because of some person's words. I just didn't want to diminish my image in the eyes of other people just because of some unpleasant rumors. I didn't like that, so I had no choice but to go to his [boyfriend's] house. I had to discontinue my studies. ... I wasn't able to go back to school. When I arrived at their place, I was so thankful because my mother-in-law accepted me. They said, 'Come in, hija ('daughter'). What happened to you?' So I told them about my situation with my aunt. She only replied, 'There's little we can do about that, but you will eventually marry my son.' I

am really grateful that my husband accepted me. I hope someone can help me continue my studies. It's difficult to go to school with only one or two pesos as your baon ('pocket money'), not even enough to pay for the fare. For now, my husband and I have a kid, and I still am not able to continue my studies. But I am still hoping that I'll be able to continue and eventually finish my schooling someday, to find work and finally repay my parents for all they've done. I also want my husband to be able to go back to school. [I] also [want] livelihood for my parents. This is our life here. Even rice is hard to come by. (Married female, 18–19, Sulu, SenseMaker®)

In the stories, daughters were inclined to accept marriage to relieve the financial burden on their parents, thereby allowing their parents to better provide for the girls’ siblings. The SenseMaker® data revealed that adolescent girls and women perceive their child marriages as pre-ordained, or part of their destiny. This finding was complicated by an adult community member who participated in the community participatory analysis:



Every situation [that] happens is in Allah's destiny, but there could be three types of destiny. First is the destiny pre-ordained by God (like your health, your life, blessings). Second is the destiny that you decide on your own (for instance being in a premarital relationship, or a vehicular accident because of your reckless driving). Third is forced destiny—you don't want it to happen but the people around you force you to do it, like the concept of forced marriage. It is haram ('forbidden') [or] not allowed in us, because it was clearly stated that the women should be consulted about it first. And yet, she was forcibly destined to go through with the marriage because the family and our community continue to practice it. (Adult participant, Community co-analysis workshop, Maguindanao)

Parental Decision-Making in Marriage

Across all data sources, (SenseMaker®, FGDs, and KIIs) parents were identified as the key decision-makers in child marriages. Findings indicate that parents have continued the traditional practice of forcing marriages between their daughters and mostly older adolescents. Forced marriages between adolescent girls and young men (19–25 years) were commonly cited, while forced marriages to older men were also mentioned. One NGO key informant in Lanao del Sur shared an incident in which parents forced their 10-year-old daughter to marry a 90-year-old sultan and head of the barangay and become his 30th wife. Reasons for forcing daughters to marry differed across stories and KIIs based on participants’ locations. In Lanao del Sur and to a lesser

extent in Maguindanao, parents forced their daughters to marry to consolidate and expand political power and resource power (e.g., land).

“

It could be for political reasons that [child] marriages are arranged. The politician will influence the family to marry. The mayor wants to have a strong route into the municipality. All of his younger brothers and older brothers have married into the families in barangays, so they get the vote and so [their] political life will be extended.
(NGO, Lanao del Sur, KII)

In contrast, it was almost the reverse in the group of adult participants in the community participatory analysis sessions; parents felt a lack of influence and control (or protection) due to young people having more of a choice in current times. According to different age groups that took part in the community participatory sessions, mobile phones hampered parents' ability to monitor their children's communications on social media.

Controlling Adolescent Sexuality to Preserve the Threat to Family Honor

According to SenseMaker® stories and some KIIs, child marriage is a manifestation of adults' perceived need to control adolescent girls' sexuality, which itself comes from strong social norms around what is and isn't acceptable in terms of young people's relationships. KIIs explained that parents fear their adolescent daughters' sexual behavior will tarnish their family's honor, and will therefore force them to marry as children to avoid rumors spreading in the community. KIIs and adolescent girls' stories explained that rumors can be sparked by girls holding hands with boys. In Muslim communities, zina, or sexual relations, between unmarried people is considered unlawful. Across provinces, adolescent girls shared stories of how actual or presumed sexual relations with boys resulted in their forced marriages to the boys by their parents. A 12–19-year-old adolescent girl from Maguindanao shared, “I was rumored to have eloped... I was opposed to a marital arrangement. I left home, but everything was to no avail, I was still made to marry.” Although many girls expressed discontent with their marriages, many girls seemed to rationalize the forced marriages as a fair punishment and/or a means to rectify any deterioration to her family's dignity.

“

I used to attend school, but I stopped when I was in Grade 8. I was married at an early age because of a false rumor. My mother thought about marrying me off to this guy because my dignity as a woman had been ruined by these rumors, so I had to marry to put a stop to them. My husband

liked me back when we were still in school and these rumors that spread accused us of doing things that we did not do. That's why I thought of discontinuing my studies and just agreeing to the marriage. Now, both my husband and I are jobless and I am relying on my parents for support. Sometimes I get scolded because if I had focused on my studies and avoided befriending boys, this would not have happened to me. But when I was still in school I wasn't dumb or anything like that, as I used to get passing marks. If the overall score was 100, I would get a 64. I did not continue my studies anymore because I felt ashamed. If people knew how those rumors made me feel at the time, maybe they would feel pity for me too.
(Married female, 15–17, Marawi (Lanao del Sur), SenseMaker®)

Key informants also revealed that parents and community leaders responded to teenage pregnancy, dating, elopement, and rape using marriage as a kind of punitive measure for socially deviant behavior, to avoid further conflict, and to save the girl's family from shame. For example, adolescent girls who are sexual violence survivors are forced to marry their perpetrators to avoid bringing shame to their families and communities.

“

Some of the girls we talked to during the intervention in Marawi told us that when there are abuses, they are afraid to talk because they are afraid that the sultanite or iman (moral or spiritual leader) will intervene and tell the girl's or boy's parents. They [sultan or iman] will talk to them [the parents] about reconciliation and enforce marriage to settle the case. For example, if a man rapes a girl, she'll be forced to marry him. Even in court, the lawyer will say, 'Just marry the girl to settle the case.' Or tell the parent of the boy 'Just pay the parent of the girl, so we can get rid of the case.'
(NGO, Lanao del Sur, KII)

Poverty and Lack of Access to Stable Income-Generating Activities

Findings from across data sources demonstrate how poverty and lack of access to stable income-generating activities were key drivers of child marriage in BARMM. Poverty and lack of livelihoods were also the most commonly cited drivers of child marriage by KIIs across provinces and participatory group participants. Adult and adolescent participatory group participants probed by facilitators about child marriage cited economic factors as the primary driver of child marriage. A participant from the female caregivers and community leaders group in Lanao del Sur explained: “Parents marry off their daughters early to lessen their household expenses, because she [their daughter] would then have to live separately, with her own household.” KIIs explained the intrinsic

link between poverty and education that leads to child marriage: poverty alone does not cause child marriage; however, lack of resources to pay for school due to lack of access to income-generating activities leads to girls dropping out of school. Without an education, girls are left with few alternatives to child marriage.



I would say survival is the most important thing, especially for displaced individuals. But generally, access to livelihood is a priority. Livelihood may equate to children, especially girls, going to school. And when they are educated and well informed, they are able to say 'no' or make better decisions for themselves. It also gives them opportunities to do or pursue other things in life. If they are stuck in poverty, their only choice would be to go abroad (and give in to trafficking) or to get married early.
(Government CSO, Maguindanao, KII)

SenseMaker® narratives exposed a more complex relationship between poverty and child marriage. Poverty was the cornerstone of many stories about child marriage. As reinforced by KIIs, in families that lacked resources to pay for school fees, girls were forced into child marriages or were driven to accept them out of a sense of duty to provide for family members, as seen in Figure 10. Both married and unmarried participants who analyzed the study data focused on discussing the pattern between duty and livelihood, particularly mentioning the role of parents. Stories also shed light on other practices and norms that propelled girls into marriage. Stories revealed that some parents still depended on dowry or the marriage payment custom as a means of survival. Dowries incentivized parents to force their daughters to marry in order to receive money, jewelry, or other resources from the husband's family in exchange for their daughter's hand in marriage.



I had a classmate back in Grade 6. We found out that her father was sick and was confined at a hospital. She chatted with me and said that they could not afford to pay the hospital bills, so her younger sister had to be married. Her younger sister did not want to marry. She was too young and was smart and diligent in her studies. Their hospital bill was around 50,000 pesos. Her little sister had no choice but to agree to the marriage. She was married with a dowry of 50,000 pesos, and all of it was just enough to pay for the hospital bill. The girl only finished up to Grade 5 and does not want to go back to school because she is embarrassed to be married at such a young age. But I think she should not be ashamed because the marriage was not her decision in the first place, and her father passed away eventually. They paid 50,000 pesos for her father's bills, but he still died. That made her think that there is no point in her going back to school because she used to be diligent and worked hard but it did not benefit her.
(Unmarried female, 15–17, Lanao del Sur)

Lack of Access to Quality Education

Across data sources, lack of access to quality education emerged as a major driver of child marriage. A few KIIs mentioned that although school buildings exist in rural and conflict-affected areas, there are no teachers or resources in school. Even where quality education was available, data showed that adolescent girls faced barriers to accessing an education, primarily due to lack of finances to pay for school fees. In the SenseMaker® findings, lack of financial resources emerged as a major factor influencing an adolescent's ability to attend school. Among SenseMaker® participants, 719 (one-third of the total) responded that they were not in school because of financial worries.

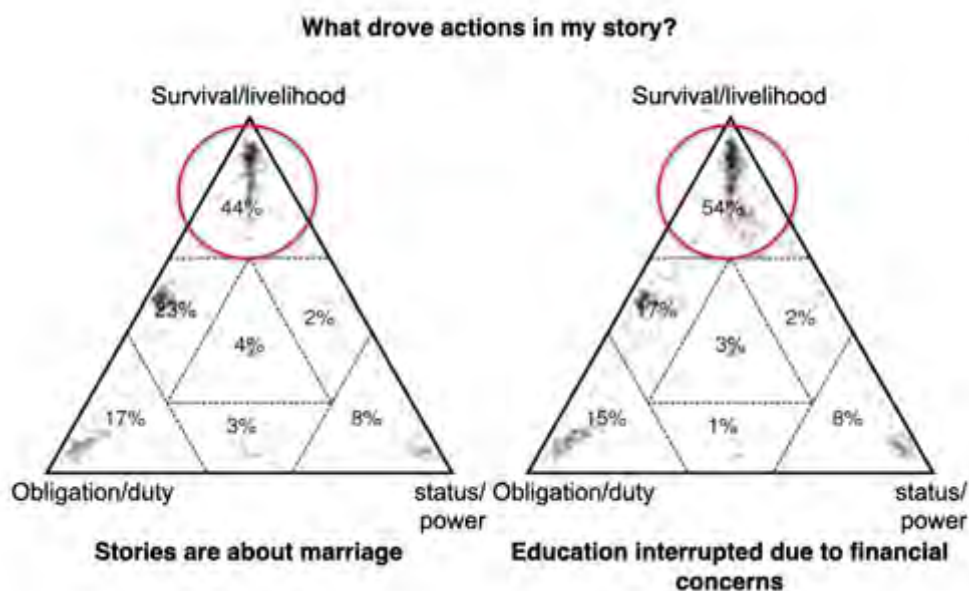


Figure 10: The interpretation of stories on the triads above shows that survival is a major driver of action overall (44% on the triad on the left, filtered to show stories referring to marriage specifically). Survival is especially strongly felt in stories where the participant's education was interrupted by financial concerns (54% on the top of the triad on the right). This shows the potential connection between the factors of duty, marriage, survival, and interrupted education.

In the stories, this financial need is associated with multiple factors, from the cost of education to the need to contribute to the family income. During community participatory analysis, inability to pay for school fees was one of the most frequently mentioned drivers of child marriage. Dropping out of school to contribute to household income was supported by a sense of duty to provide for other family members, a topic discussed during participatory group activities and community participatory analysis. Participants discussed that adolescents leave education as a way to support their families, either through marriage or work, often in farming, selling vegetables or other goods, seaweed farming, or driving. Female adults and adolescents (married and unmarried) from Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao noted that the eldest daughter, in particular, experiences pressure to provide for her family, including for her younger siblings. An unmarried adolescent girl from Lanao del Sur explained that the adolescent depicted as “not doing well” in her community is the eldest child. “If she does not profit from her sales, they [the family] skip a meal.” At the same time, groups of adolescent girls and female community leaders described an adolescent “doing well” as an only child.

SenseMaker® and KII findings clearly indicate that lack of education is intricately linked to marriage. When girls dropped out of school for any reason, their parents forced them into marriage. Adolescent girls tended to comply with these forced marriages because they believed their only alternative to education was marriage. Notably, six of the eight married adolescent girls who participated in the community participatory analysis sessions shared that they were married off by their parents because they could no longer pay their school fees. The girls shared that they “agreed” to their parents’ decision for them to marry because without an education they believed they had no better alternatives.

Technology, Social Media, and “Love Marriages”

KII and Sensemaker® stories reveal a complex relationship between social media, technology, and child marriage decision-making pathways. Data indicates that adolescents’ technology and social media use leads to either forced marriages by their parents, or adolescents choosing to marry in response to making social connections through social media. Eight KIIs in Sulu, Lanao del Sur, and Maguindanao expressed that the ubiquity of technology and social media has driven child marriages because adolescents are meeting online and subsequently getting married. As such, these informants blamed adolescents’ “deviant” use of social media and technology as facilitating their marriages, implying that adolescents would not have met, and subsequently married if they had not used social media. One KI shared results from a recent study on extremism and child brides reporting that:

“

During the height of displacement [due to the Marawi Siege], people would share Facebook posts of members of the Marawi Siege Group and comments of support would be from girls. This was happening on social media. The girls attracted by this are not vocal in public spaces, but there is support coming from them. We don’t know what their role is in the group. (UN Agency, Lanao del Sur, KII)

In contrast to most KIIs, who specified that parents arranged child marriages for their daughters, these informants expressed that adolescent social media use was responsible for child marriages. A few KIIs from Maguindanao noted that adolescents’ increased use of social media and technology during COVID-19 may have increased the frequency of adolescents meeting with the opposite sex, and subsequently becoming married. In response to the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage practices, a KI from Maguindanao stated:

“

Because they are home and do not have much to do, they spend most of their time online or on cellular phones, chatting with people they may or may not know. To alleviate stress and boredom, they tend to look for online companions, or maybe even meet with them. When the parents find out, they are forced to marry them off, especially if they find out they have a ‘text mate’ or are seeing someone. (Government CSO, Maguindanao, KII)

Data indicates that using this type of technology is often identified as a personal choice that results in relationships, rumors, eloping, and child marriage.

“

She was 18 years old when she got married (her parents disagreed with the idea of marrying at an early age because she was still studying). She ran away from home with her boyfriend (now husband), and is currently living with her manugang (‘in-laws’). Way back when she was still a teenager, she was not studying well, not focusing well. Instead she was focused on her phone, texting, etc. Then there, she met her husband. After a two-month relationship they decided to get married. She was from Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and transferred to Butig, where her husband lives. She has stopped schooling because she is currently pregnant. She can’t visit her hometown because she’s afraid that her husband will be beaten. She also regrets the life she chose. (Married female, 18–19 years, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)

In the SenseMaker® data and findings from the participatory group analysis, the drivers of child marriage were not seen to be the rumors or associated social pressures but technology itself, since the prospect of marriage once a relationship starts is accepted as inevitable. As noted by an adult female participant during community participatory analysis, “Love equals marriage.” Data indicates that adolescent-initiated marriage, referred to by participants as “love marriage,” is not socially valued and can lead to stigma against people who enter into it, as they are considered immature and unprepared.

“

I was attending school when I got married. I was in Grade 7. I continued my studies despite the financial difficulties. Now I am in Grade 9. I got married because of using my cell phone, texting, that's how it happened. They [my husband's family] asked me to marry him. So there was nothing I could do. You can't do whatever because [pause]. So now I'm married but we don't have a child yet. I don't know how to walk [far distances]. We are facing hardships, but I will still continue my studies. I want our life to be better. From this world until the next. May peace be with you. (Married female, 15–17, Maguindanao, SenseMaker®)

“Initially, the person I got together with was my classmate. We found each other on Facebook and our relationship flourished there (we got to fall for each other there), and so I got to marry her. We started an RTW (ready-to-wear) business in Cebu, then we returned home (to Lanao del Sur) and used the profits we made to start a farming business ('kambasok'). That's it. (Married male, 18–19, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)

Adult co-analysis workshop participants in particular noted a lot of nervousness and fear around the use of mobile phones and their inability to control or monitor their children's online activities. All groups discussed this factor as something pervasive and difficult to change.

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Nowadays, children have access to cell phones, laptops, Facebook, and parents are not familiar with using these gadgets (or the internet). Some of us cannot even read a text message. This is difficult to change because we need to allow our children to have access to these gadgets for their schooling (and for them not to be ignorant). It has a strong influence because they meet boys or girls on Facebook or on their cell phones and they go on a date and they start engaging in a relationship. (Adult workshop participant, Maguindanao)

As discussed above, parents were identified by participants as the primary decision-makers in child marriages; however, SenseMaker® and KII data also revealed a few incidents of “love marriages.” KIIs described “love marriages” as marriages between adolescents that occur when adolescents express a strong emotional connection to their intimate partner and elope to affirm their marital commitments to one another. In stories, community members often referred to “love marriages” interchangeably with eloping. The stories, KII, and participatory group discussions regarding girls eloping attest that girls have decision-making power in their willingness to become married. However, it remains unclear how parents, peers, and broader social norms shape adolescent girls' decision-making to elope given the tradition of arranged child marriages, and sense of duty and obligation to marry at the family, community, and societal levels, such as to relieve girls' families from financial burden and avoid inflicting disgrace on their families for “inappropriate” behavior with males.

Although participants also shared stories about adolescent boys being forced by their parents into child marriages, in the overwhelming majority of the stories it was adolescent girls who were more likely to marry spouses who were older, and adolescent boys were more likely to demonstrate power in decision-making over their marriages compared to girls. Stories revealed that boys sought permission to marry from girls' parents even if the girls did not want to marry the boys. In these cases, the parents agreed to the boys' propositions and forced their daughters into marriage.

“

One of the problems for women here is that they get married early even against their will. It happened with my classmate. I just got back from Manila then and I was surprised to learn upon my return that she was already married. What's worse here is that if someone comes to your home to signify their interest in you, you cannot refuse. Sometimes the older sister does not want to get married, so the youngest ends up getting married instead. That's what happened to her. Her older sister had a boyfriend and my classmate did not, so she ended up getting married because there were no issues with her. The one who came to their house was really keen on finding a wife so she had no choice but to agree, even if it was really against her wishes. The feeling that you are still so young and yet you're already married, that's hard. Because of what happened to my classmate, she avoids us and hides whenever we see each other. We saw that she had lost her confidence. The marriage was supposed to be a secret so she was surprised that we found out. We really saw in our classmate's case that it was really against her will. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15–17 years, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)



*This story is about early marriage. He is an adult male. They are in a relationship. They plan to get married but the parents of the girl are against him as a boyfriend. So, the girl ran away from their family. The girl's parents cannot do anything but let their daughter get married to the boy, whether they like it or not. They got married without the presence of the girl's parents. **(Married male, 20–24, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)***

*Here in our barangay, the problem for young people is that we live in a conflict area, inside the SPMS [Shariff Aguak, Pagatin, Mamasapano, and Shariff Saydona] box, where skirmishes happen often, so people evacuate often. In the evacuation center, you meet all sorts of people. The young ones have no separation anymore, so they meet and get together with girls and the opposite sex. Sometimes they can't help but become attracted to each other. That's where texting starts and it eventually leads to marriage. So that's when early marriage and teenage pregnancies happen. That's what's happening here in our place since in the evacuation center there are opportunities to meet and be together. Then you find out after a while that a young girl has become pregnant. The other thing about marrying early is that the boy and girl are still young, not knowledgeable about livelihood, and therefore have a hard time trying to earn a living. And when they marry, they stop going to school. So, they lose the opportunity to attend school of course, with the girl pregnant. In terms of livelihood, they are still immature. So what their parents do is help them with daily needs. These are the problems here in our place since conflict happens often. **(Married male, 18–19, Maguindanao)***

Varying Interpretations of the Islamic Belief around Child Marriage

Findings across data also show contradictory community perceptions about child marriage: child marriage is to be desired while, simultaneously, married children are looked down upon and stigmatized. Religion emerged in subtle and implicit ways through the participatory analysis discussions as well as within the SenseMaker® stories. Religion supported a range of perspectives in SenseMaker® stories, from an argument for child marriage (because it is sunnah, or to avoid temptation) to an argument against it (mentioning the explicit fatwa or legal religious opinion issued against child marriage). Participatory group activities emphasized the importance of Islamic faith in their daily lives to adult community members across provinces, adolescents in Sulu, and unmarried adolescent boys aged 18–19 in Lanao del Sur. Being a faithful and devoted Muslim was considered a positive adolescent attribute, whereas adolescents who were not following the Islamic faith and tenets were

considered “not doing well” and deviating from the norm. At the same time, adolescents with children and those already married were largely considered to be “not doing well.”



Figure 11: Married and unmarried adolescent boys, 12–14 years old. Lanao del Sur. Adolescent Well-Being activity. Group illustration of an adolescent boy ‘not doing well’.

Participants explained that “the child is praying to Allah (God) and asking for help because he is not doing well. Usman was separated from his parents who are working in Manila and he lives with his aunt. Usman could not study because his parents send money that is enough only for their daily expenses. His aunt handles the money. Usman now works as a tricycle driver so he can buy his basic needs. He is righteous and religious despite the hardship he experienced.”

Some KIs and SenseMaker® narratives posit that community members interpret Islam and the Qur’an in a way that condones and encourages the practice of child marriages. In their stories, some adult community members shared that they married their children in accordance with their Islamic faith. KIs shared that community members believe that Islam promotes child marriage due to their misinterpretations of passages in the Qur’an regarding the acceptable age of marriage. KIs clarified that community members were misinterpreting the Qur’an and that Islam does not promote child marriage. KIs expounded that there are many interpretations of what is in the Qur’an, especially regarding the age of marriage, and there are different schools of religious thought about the right age of marriage.



I have a child who was married young, at 18 years old. She was married to a 26-year-old. I had her marry at a younger age because of our Islamic belief that it is sunnah (recommended) to marry early as ‘siyap kanu agama tano agama Islam’ (an act of keeping the tenets of our Islamic faith). At the moment, they have one child and are experiencing financial hardship because they both do not have jobs. This is where I will end my story. (Married male, 40–49, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker®)

Tackling religion will be a main barrier [to implement child marriage programming]. Even the topic of gender equality is a no-no in the context of our religion. When I conduct gender sensitivity training with community leaders, they would always say, ‘Don’t push western mentality concepts on us.’ They resist change, that’s how I see it. And it is because of how religious text has been interpreted [regarding] the role of men and women. If communities are not prepared and open, it is difficult to introduce new ideas or make them understand. Even when I talk to the MILF and the military, I am often challenged. They open up [the topic of] polygamy and start very insensitive conversations or arguments. [It’s a] good thing I have learned how to counteract such conversations, using human rights perspective on Islam and focusing on gender justice. Sometimes it is also the use of words; rather than gender equality, I use gender justice. (Government CSO, Maguindanao, KII)

Enabling Legal Environment

Data from KIIs mentioned that conflicting laws relating to child marriage and the lack of a clear law addressing child marriage were barriers to mitigating child marriage in communities. A few KIIs shared their advocacy activities to pass legislation that officially eliminated child marriage in the Philippines and the necessity for such a law, so when program staff implement child marriage mitigation and response in communities they have legal grounds to do so. A KII from Lanao del Sur explained the discrepancies among the laws relating to the legal age of marriage:



There is a Philippine law that says we can marry at 18 years without parental consent. The Presidential Decree for Muslims, which Muslim Filipinos are subject to, says that Muslim Filipinos can marry at age 15 for boys and once they reach puberty for girls. They have been lobbying to change that code and the code is now pending.

Religious leaders don’t want that law to be changed. In the Qur’an you don’t actually see the age. For Bangsamoro, it’s [child marriage] legally and culturally accepted. BARMM is in a state of policymaking, but change has to be made at the national level, as well. (NGO, Lanao del Sur, KII)

In response to the facilitators’ prompting on who is responsible for driving change on the challenges identified in the SenseMaker® data, adults who contributed to data analysis discussed the need for legislation as a potential top-down support for driving a change in social norms at the community level. The targets of possible legislation that emerged in the discussions; however, did not always promote adolescent well-being or gender equitable principles. In the group of unmarried adolescents for example, the introduction of legislation “against eloping” was discussed, which shifts the target of the discussion from child rights violations to the adolescents’ “choices.”

Adult, married girls, and unmarried girls who engaged in participatory analysis were not familiar with existing national laws and local guidelines, including fatwa that either prevent, discourage, or allow marriage among children. Participants knew that the “concept” of child and early marriage is acceptable and a common practice based on discussion with an ustadz (Islamic teacher) or a religious leader in their community. Among their key recommendations is for religious leaders to discuss and conduct consultations on how child marriage is affecting children and identity activities to address this concern.

Displacement and Insecurity Contexts

Study findings suggest that existing drivers of child marriage, such as poverty and lack of income-generating activities, lack of access to quality education, and family honor, were amplified in displacement and humanitarian contexts. KIIs also shed light on risks of child marriage unique to displacement contexts.

Poverty, Lack of Income-Generating Activities, and Lack of Access to Quality Education

KIIs emphasized that abject poverty was a key driver of child marriage in crises as families experienced heightened barriers to survival. They explained that displaced parents lack stable income-generating opportunities that can provide most of the basic needs of their families, and are therefore more likely to force their daughters to marry to lighten some financial burdens. SenseMaker® narratives and participatory group activities corroborated this finding. Stories affirmed a greater degree of poverty among families where parents lost their livelihoods due to displacement arising from violent conflicts. Stories and KIIs implied that marrying off adolescent girls offered dowry as well as resource and political protection rewards by establishing marital ties to wealthy and/or politically influential families, thereby easing the burden of parental responsibility and sheltering. For example, in Lanao del Sur, KIIs shared that clan and family pressures to marry were exacerbated

during displacement or violence. They noted that after the Marawi Siege, families married off their daughters and young female relatives at the behest of their clan leaders, so their clans would become larger and have more influence.

“

Before the Marawi Siege, my family was still complete. My father worked as a fisherman and sold his goods in Marawi. When the siege happened, we were displaced. We sold eggs for a living, walking from house to house. When we went back here to our village, I was still single and I learned that they [my parents] wanted to marry me off. I was studying Arabic at the time and had to stop. I was in Grade 4. When I first learned that they wanted to have me married, I did not want to agree. But my parents wanted someone religious for me, so that's the reason I agreed to it. We were married. I ignored him at first because it was a parental marriage. Sometimes we quarrelled because I still did not know him well. I was still studying Arabic then, but I had to stop eventually because he could not support my studies anymore. Now, my husband works as a farmer and goes back to the province during harvest season. Sometimes, I accompany him. Sometimes we stay there for up to seven days during harvest and come back home when the planting season is over. Sometimes, he also drives to earn a living. (Married adolescent girl, 12–14, Lanao del Sur, SenseMaker)

Data imply that displaced adolescent girls and those living in conflict settings also experience heightened barriers to accessing quality education due to harassment by host community members, lack of availability, and lack of educational resources. As discussed above, when adolescent girls discontinue school, they are more likely to marry.

“

There are some peer networks and safe spaces within schools. Some schools are good and stable, but in general, especially in conflict-affected areas where schools are not monitored, they are bad. Families are trying their best to send children to Marawi City because schools there are better quality compared to rural schools. Those left behind are poor. (NGO, Lanao del Sur, KII)

A group of unmarried 12–14-year-old adolescent girls living in transitory sites in Lanao del Sur highlighted the acute need for education and income-generating activities for displaced families. During the Adolescent Well-Being group activity, they shared illustrations and profiles of adolescents living in the transitory shelter

and host community. The adolescent who is “doing well” was described as a resident of a barangay with a loving family, nurtured and cared for, able to study in a good school, with parents who have a stable income, and who has her own bedroom in a house and land owned by her family. In contrast, the adolescent described as “not doing well” lived in a transitory site due to armed conflict in Marawi.

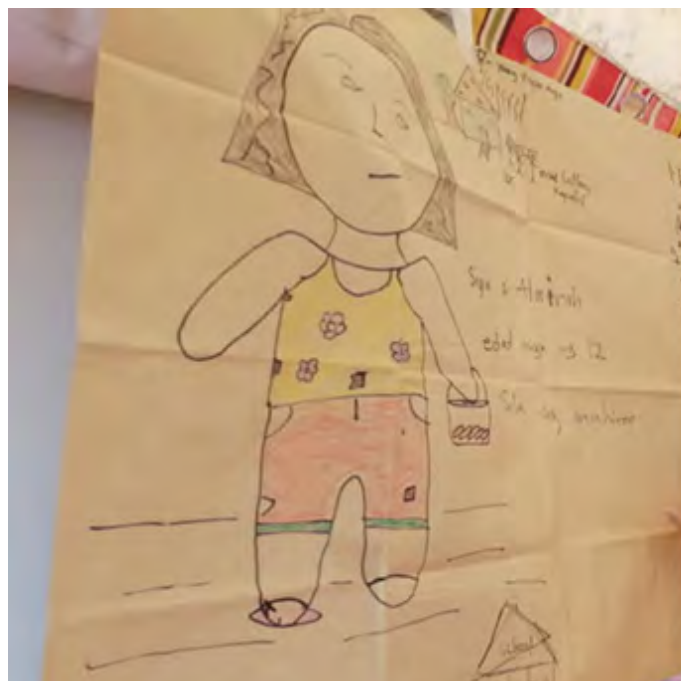


Figure 12: Drawing on an adolescent girl ‘doing well’ created by displaced adolescent girls 12–14 years old in Marawi, Lanao del Sur during the Adolescent Well-Being Activity.

Quote from session: “She is a real 12 years old girl and sells fried bananas in a subdivision. If her supply is not sold out, she is scolded by her mother. She is prohibited from eating the fried banana and ends up getting hungry. She uses the school supplies she receives from humanitarian aid and asks to be taught by her friends. Sometimes she sits outside of her classroom while selling her bananas so that she can listen to the lesson inside. The relief goods that they receive from the DSWD [Department of Social Welfare and Development] has already stopped and her parents still cannot find new jobs. They used to be farmers. As an eldest child, her family relies on her and the profits from her sales are used to buy rice and viand.” **Displaced AGs, 12–14 years old, Adolescent well-being activity, Lanao del Sur**



She is a real 12-year-old girl and sells fried bananas in a subdivision. If her supply is not sold out, she is scolded by her mother. She is prohibited from eating the fried banana and ends up getting hungry. She uses the school supplies she receives from humanitarian aid and asks to be taught by her friends. Sometimes, she sits outside of her classroom while selling her bananas so that she can listen to the lesson inside. The relief goods that they receive from the DSWD [Department of Social Welfare and Development] have already stopped and her parents still cannot find new jobs. They used to be farmers. As an eldest child, her family relies on her, and the profits from her sales are used to buy rice and meat. (Displaced adolescent girl, 12–14 years old, Adolescent Well-Being Activity, Lanao del Sur)

Family Honor

Community member participants and KIs from Lanao del Sur identified evacuation centers and transitory sites that provide temporary shelter for displaced populations as places where people could meet, but also where sexual harassment could occur. KIs elaborated that sexual harassment put girls at higher risk of marriage because some parents force their daughters to marry to overcome social stigma and family shame incited by rumors of sexual harassment.

Child Marriage Risks Unique to Displacement Contexts

Compensation for Shelter

KII data suggests that displacement may increase girls' vulnerabilities to marrying relatives. Families displaced by the Marawi Siege and other armed conflicts sought shelter and support from relatives. KIs in Lanao del Sur reported that parents had forced their daughters to marry the host family's sons as gratitude for sheltering their family.



Because of gratitude, if the IDP has a daughter and the host family has a son, they arrange the marriage as a thank you. In a normal setting most of the houses are open, without specific rooms. There is no privacy for girls. This is also [the case] in evacuation centers. Some houses only have a cloth separating the families [who stay there]. The families all sleep together. Some host houses also have this, with many people sleeping in the same house, and it continues today. It's also [the case] in transitory centers. They are designed for one

family only. Those with girls around 16 years old, they have no privacy. IDPs and host communities, especially in the host area, have encountered young women who are 15 years old getting married. (NGO, Lanao del Sur, KII)

Humanitarian Assistance

KIs also associated humanitarian assistance distributed by international and national aid agencies as a driver of child marriage for displaced families. A few KIs from Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao noted that humanitarian assistance coordinated by the humanitarian sector incentivized parents to marry off their daughters in order to form a separate family unit that would receive its own aid package.



Whenever there is conflict and displacement, it is important that they [the families] are able to access services. This is where child and forced marriages usually happen. Because displaced families receive one pack of aid or supplies, parents would marry off a daughter so that she could have access to her own separate supply pack, as she would then be counted as [being part of] a separate household. Survival is the main goal in these situations. (NGO, Maguindanao, KII)

ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT, CARE, AND PROTECTION FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Despite systemic gender and social norms, and contextual factors that perpetuate child marriage in BARMM, adolescent girls, their families, and communities have remained resilient even if resiliency means raising children as a single adolescent mother. The existing capacities of resource persons and institutions operate at intersecting levels of the adapted social norms framework for ASRH that support, care for, and protect adolescent girls in BARMM.

Adaptive Capacities of Adolescent Girls

Although study data and community participatory analysis discussions illustrate that parents/caregivers, harmful social and gender norms, and contextual factors (e.g., socio-economic inequality, legal environment) influence adolescent girl decision-making, SenseMaker® data indicates that adolescent girls have potential to overcome challenges and spark positive change in their communities. From the SenseMaker® data, adolescent

girls showed a higher likelihood than boys to be agents of change, as they were less likely than boys to see the stories they shared as revealing efforts to “keep tradition.” This pattern is not unique to adolescent girls, but very closely reflects a pattern seen among women in general, pictured in Figure 13. Overall, SenseMaker® data revealed tension between tradition and radical change (i.e., wanting things to change), particularly among females. One-third (30%) of both female and male narrators indicated that people in their story wanted things to change; however, more female narrators (37%) wanted incremental or some change (i.e., taking the good, losing the bad) compared to 27% of male narrators. The biggest gendered difference, however, was that male participants were more than twice as likely (17%) to share stories where keeping tradition was emphasized compared to female participants (8%). This gendered difference appears to transcend age, as the pattern associated with adolescent boys was very similar to the overall male pattern. Moreover, in the SenseMaker® data, married boy and girl participants aged 12–14 did not share any stories that they signified as being exclusively about keeping tradition, indicating that young married boys and girls may be allies in shifting gender and social norms that perpetuate child marriage. Still, caution is advised in generalizing based on this because the number of people belonging to the category is rather small.

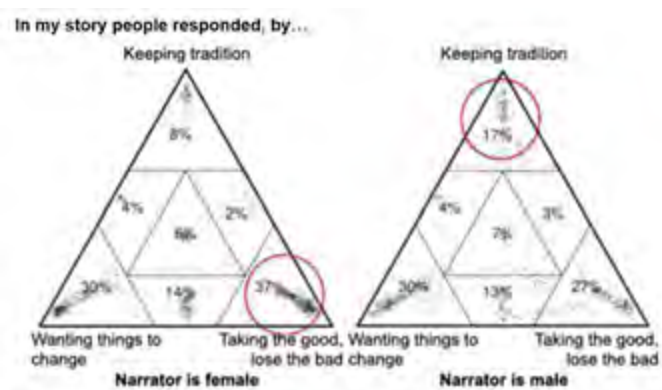


Figure 13. Triad measuring respondents' propensity for change filtered by women/girls and men/boys.

The patterns in Figure 13 show that SenseMaker® participants felt they lacked both the support and the motivation to make things happen (5%) in the stories that they shared. This same pattern applies to adolescents' placement of their stories in the triads and in the content of their stories. Lack of support and motivation suggests that building stronger connections among adolescents and support persons and other resources is crucial to leveraging existing capacities of adolescent girls to ensure their healthy and safe transition into adulthood. Similarly, the image shows that there is a lack of both the knowledge and the motivation to make things happen in the stories that participants shared (8%). Therefore, it's possible that programs that build adolescent girls' assets (e.g., knowledge and skills such as numeracy, literacy, financial literacy, problem-solving, etc.) may help fill the

gap between knowledge and motivation for that group. Finally, the figure also shows that adolescents lack both knowledge and support (6%), which can be mitigated by empowerment workshops that aim to bolster adolescent girls' decision-making power and freedom of expression. Additional analysis shows that there is a gendered difference here, although not one of age, with men feeling they had more motivation in their stories (32%), and women feeling they had more knowledge (23%), but the combined presence of many factors was equally low for both genders.

Data from KIIs and stories suggest that adolescent girls bear the brunt of responsibility in caring for children and family members, and in household responsibilities. For example, stories told by adolescent girls describe girls as responsible for taking care of younger siblings and dropping out of school to support their mothers in household chores. Yet their stories also illustrate how adolescent girls, including those facing displacement and conflict, are resilient. Stories illustrate adolescent girls' survival and coping skills in the face of economic instability, displacement, conflict and protracted insecurity, lack of family support, and disrupted or lack of basic services. In some cases, marriage itself was an indication of the ability to survive and adapt using available means. Stories also indicate the capacity to leave a marriage under conditions of pressure. Adolescent girls shared stories about divorcing or separating from their husbands due to economic, physical, and psychological abuse. Further, evidence from SenseMaker® and participatory group activities suggest that many young people want to create different ways of being for future generations by ensuring their own children do not face the financial and marriage hardships that they did.



Figure 14: The placement of stories on this triad shows that even though there is a sizeable cluster of stories associated with having motivation in the story (27%) and an equally large number of people found some support in their stories (29%), the number of stories where both support and motivation were present is far smaller (5%). There is a similar pattern between knowledge (18%) and support (29%), and between knowledge (18%) and motivation (27%).



*I was young then but I can still remember when my mother died and my father remarried. He could no longer provide for me because he had many other children, and I started living with my aunt. I stopped going to school when I was in Grade 6 because we could not afford it anymore, and I worked in restaurants to help my aunt. Eventually, I decided to live with my grandmother. They married me off, but my husband and I separated after a few months because I did not like it and it was an arranged marriage. When my husband and I separated, I went back to my father's house and studied through ALS [Alternative Learning System] but had to stop again after a few months for financial reasons. I went back to live with my aunt again and I am helping her with work. Now, I am planning to go to my other aunt's place because she has a tailoring shop. After that, I will go to Manila and work there because they have a grocery store there. **(Married female, 12–14 years, Lanao del Sur, Marawi)***



*My husband and I met because of my aunt. Her boyfriend happened to be my husband's friend at the time. It happened because I used to always accompany my aunt whenever she met up with her boyfriend. One day, we didn't notice that our uncle had followed us, so I had to marry this guy. I didn't like him but I had no choice because they said that what we did was a humiliation to our clan. I cried and yelled that I didn't want to do it, but there was nothing I could do. It took two years before we finally had a kid because I really didn't love him and I wasn't thinking about having kids yet. I knew that I wasn't mature enough for that. I wanted to do things and enjoy life. However, eventually I realized that I had to accept what was already here. That's why we had a kid after two years. Now we have two kids and one of my kids might start going to school next year. My husband doesn't have permanent work so I want to work overseas for them, but my children are still really small. I don't want them to experience what I went through. I want to give them a good life so that we might be able to taste abundance and get out of poverty like other people. **(Married female, 18–19 years, Sulu)***

Greetings of peace! I was 18 years old and studying in the Notre Dame of Jolo when I met my now husband through Facebook. Eventually, we met up and started going out on dates. One day, my father saw us together. I was scared and I didn't know what to do. That's when I thought



*perhaps we should just live together. I was afraid of going back home because my older brother might punish me. My boyfriend then took me to his home and we were wed. Thank God my husband is a good man. However, I can't say the same for his mother and sister. They make up stories about me and spread false rumors about me to our neighbors. I don't answer back or make a fuss about it. Good thing my husband is good and does not neglect me. I will finish school, In Shaa Allah. I will find work afterwards. If I ever have children, I will make sure they don't have the same experience as my husband and I. I am also thankful to my parents even though it was painful for them that I married early. **(Married adolescent female, 18-19 years, Sulu)***

Adaptive Capacities of Parents and the Wider Family Unit

Parents

Data shows that parents play a pivotal role in caring for, supporting, and protecting their daughters. During the Adolescent Well-Being activity, groups across provinces identified parents as central to, if not completely responsible for, adolescents' overall well-being. Participants across groups described parents as primary sources of and responsible for their children's moral and religious guidance as well as financial, health, psychosocial, and educational support to adolescents. Participants portrayed parents of adolescents "doing well," such as mothers who were teachers or parents who owned their own businesses, as having stable income and livelihoods. These parents also provided stable and safe housing for the family.



*Parents need to have a good understanding of the personality and behavior of their children and define what behavior is appropriate in the home. Parents should not blame anyone else for the behavior of their children, as the primary source of influence and upbringing is the parents. We should be careful, be mindful of our actions or words toward children in order to give them proper models and guidance. **(Female caregiver/ community leader, Participatory Group Session, Basilan)***

*[Parents are] the main source of giving the right information and guidance to children and the right place to share problems. **(Married adolescent girl, 15–17 years old, Participatory Group Activity, Sulu)***

SenseMaker® data and participatory community analysis discussions, and to a lesser extent participatory group activities, identified parents as protectors against child marriage. All groups who analyzed data during community participatory analysis sessions felt that parents were crucial in avoiding child marriage, whether in terms of educating and trusting their children (adult group) or involving their children in decision-making (young married adolescent girl group). SenseMaker® stories also indicated a pathway for behavior change around forcing children and adolescents into marriage. Adult parents expressed regret for forcing their daughters to marry as children. In terms of impacting change, the graph below Figure 15 indicates that, for this cohort of adolescent girls 12–19 years, it is especially important that their parents, especially their mothers (440), hear their stories. To a lesser extent, adolescent girls also wanted government officials (267) and social workers (244) to hear their stories. For girls under 19 years, data suggests that mothers (440) held more influence than fathers (300) in adolescent girls' stories. During community participatory analysis, there was a general desire among adults as well as young people for more educational support to raise awareness of the lived experiences of young people who have been impacted by child marriage.



Parents have the important role of guiding their children who are addicted to Facebook, which is what caused them to marry early. (Married adolescent girl, 12–14 years old, Participatory Group Activity, Sulu)

Family and Relatives

The support role of relatives who are not parents is somewhat ambiguous in the data. They are cited in KIIs, stories, and the participatory community analysis as possible positive influences, supporters, or mediators between the parents and child when there are disagreements, as buffers for financial hardship, hosts to displaced relatives, or caregivers to their nieces, granddaughters, and young sisters. They are also cited as sources of health information. Unmarried adolescent girls from Lanao del Sur and Basilan who participated in the participatory group activities identified female relatives, including mothers, aunts, elder sisters, and grandmothers, as sources of SRH information.

In other circumstances, SenseMaker® participants described extended family members (e.g., aunts, uncles) as the originators of harmful rumors and pressure. Data describe scenarios where there are other potential family dynamics at play, for example, between siblings, whether it is fear of a brother's punishment, or love and tension between sisters. The young women and girls during participatory community analysis identified a

need for trust-building in the context of intergenerational relationships, particularly emphasizing the relationship between young people, family, and the community.

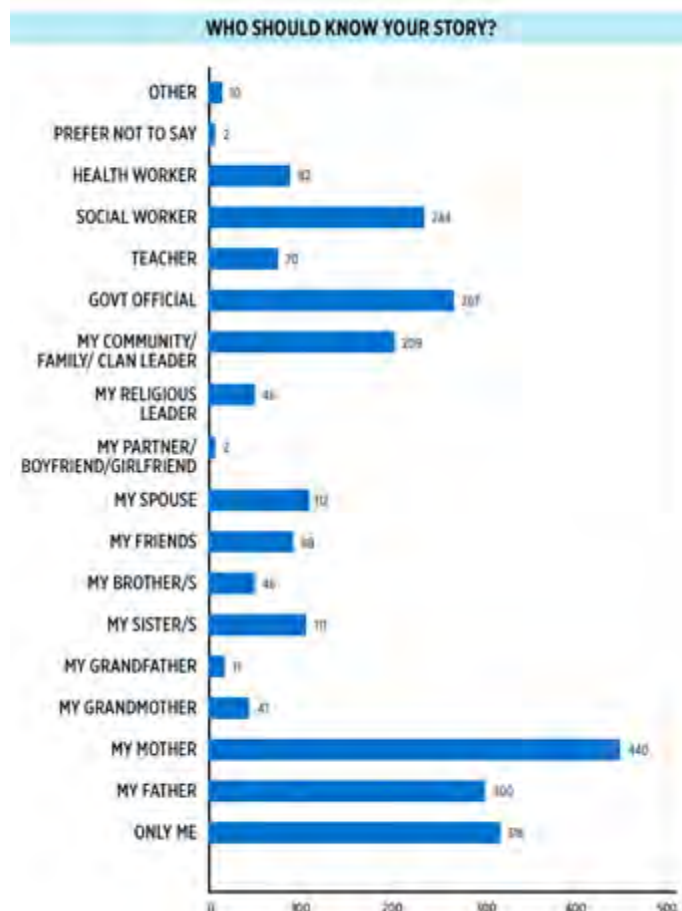


Figure 15: Among 846 adolescent girls 12–19 who responded, there was a strong pull for their parents to hear their story, especially mothers (n=440). Other key adults included fathers (n=300), government official (267), and social worker (244).



The most memorable story for me is about the trust issue between parents and children because it will really affect the life of a young girl. (Married female, 18 years old, Participatory Community Analysis)

“There should be trust among family members. Try to confirm or validate whatever rumors or stories are going around first, before believing them. (Adult community member, Participatory Community Analysis)

Adaptive Capacities within the Wider Ecosystem of Support

Community Leaders

Barangay officials such as chairmen and captains were cited by all participatory group participants as a

resource for adolescents during the Web of Support activity. Participants shared that the barangay chairman has knowledge about the needs of adolescents in his community and is therefore responsible for identifying and providing solutions to a range of issues. An unmarried girl aged 15–17 from Sulu explained: "...because he [barangay chairman] is the one who knows best what the problems of children are in the whole barangay, he is the one who should talk to people not to join the Abu Sayyaf Group [terrorist group] and to change their lives for the better." An unmarried girl aged 18–19 from Lanao del Sur mentioned that the barangay chairman in her community "gave jobs to young people, including those out of school, for example, being a blacksmith." Similarly, participatory groups from Basilan and Sulu identified the mayor as a key support for adolescents because according to a married girl aged 18–19 in Sulu "he is the leader and should know what is the situation of the livelihood of his people."

Law Enforcement, Military, and Community-Based Peacekeeping

KIs and participatory group sessions suggest that layers of protection to shield adolescent girls and their families from armed-conflict and terrorism exist in communities. Participatory group participants, mostly adolescent boys and men in Basilan and Sulu, identified the Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and Barangay Peacekeeping Action Team (BPAT), as the primary sources of protection in communities. An unmarried girl aged 15–17 in Sulu explained that the PNP is "responsible for stopping illegal drugs in our place and for arresting those carrying guns." According to a female caregiver/community leader in Sulu, the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU), a paramilitary arm of the AFP, chooses members among volunteers from within a province to "fight against terrorists who recruit children." Participants also mentioned the BPAT when discussing resources and support in their communities. BPAT is composed of barangay officials and tanods or village watchmen, and is coordinated by local police to maintain peacekeeping, law, and order through self-policing at the barangay level.

Muslim Religious Institutions

Although many SenseMaker® and participatory group participants perceived religion as supportive, if not promotive, of child marriage, they also identified religious institutions, including Masjid and Madrasah, and MRLs, as community assets available to adolescents. During participatory group sessions, adolescents across provinces identified the Masjid and Madrasah as safe places in the community where adolescents could frequently visit and receive support and services, primarily education, counseling, and Islamic guidance (See Figures 16 and 17 for Community Mapping activity images). Young unmarried boys in Lanao del Sur and adolescents in Maguindanao also identified the Masjid as a place where adolescents are taught the Islamic principles of SRH. As previously mentioned, being a "good Muslim" is highly valued in communities. Participants associated adolescents who are religious,

such as those who "wear a hijab," "perform prayer five times a day," and who are "respectful and righteous," with other prized identities, such as being "well-mannered," "well-behaved," "respectful," and "helpful." According to KIs, MRLs and Muslim religious scholars, particularly those who were trained in the Middle East and/or who are literate in Arabic, are highly influential leaders in the community. They explained that religious leaders influence how the community interprets religious texts, including those relating to the age of marriage, as well as other social norms that affect decision-making in the household.



Unmarried girls 12-14. Maguindanao. Community Mapping activity



Married adolescent girls 15-17. Lanao del Sur. Community Mapping Activity.

Figures 16 and 17: Adolescent girls across provinces identified the Masjid and/or Madrasah as safe places for adolescents in the community.

Education System and Teachers

There are multiple connections between marriage and education. Marriage, as referenced in the participants' stories, often interrupts education, but is also sometimes a support for continuing education in terms of offering resources, especially in the stories participants interpret as positive. Simply put, those who can go back to education even after being married are happier. Supportive spouses play a very important role in facilitating this, and for many young women, committing to a marriage can often be driven by the need to secure an education in the future, if, for example, their parents can no longer afford to support them financially.



*My first cousin had to marry early because her parents were having a hard time. Her husband was doing well financially and their parents made sure they had their own place to live. My cousin is now in school and her in-laws are supporting her studies. My cousin married early because they [her parents] could not afford to spend for her studies and would sometimes tell her to stop going to school, so our aunt ultimately decided to marry her off to someone. That's how she got back to school. **(Married female, 15–17, Lanao del Sur)***

*I know someone who is young but is already married and has a child. They [she doesn't mention if they are male or female] are working for their spouse and child, so that they can have money to buy milk for the child. They can't go back to school anymore because they have a child already and I feel bad for them. I will not become like them because I am studying really hard and am in Grade 6 now. I want to help my parents because my mom does other people's laundry and my father is a carpenter. I want to finish my studies so that I can help my siblings, too. **(Unmarried female, 12–14, Sulu)***

Continuing education could create better support in the long term, something that leads many families to make sacrifices in order to keep their children in school. Throughout the participatory group analysis, this manifested in discussions around the trade-offs between marriage and living one's dreams.



We only walk to school and back. Sometimes when we're late, we don't bother attending the classes. If there's a school project and we can't afford to buy it, we borrow money. Sometimes, we skip school and gather seaweed to sell. I have nine other siblings, but four of them died...I help with [gathering] the seaweed to buy personal needs for school. My parents do it to purchase our daily needs at home. I also help them with those once in a while. Sometimes, when I'm having a hard time with activities in school, I skip classes and attend to the seaweed. I also skip classes when my mother or my siblings are not feeling well. When I return to school, my teacher becomes angry with me, but I try to explain the situation. Sometimes there's nothing to wait for because the seaweed is too immature to yield seedlings. If there's nothing to eat, we endure. Sometimes we just pick up seaweed when the tides aren't

*too strong. We look for coconut shells to turn into charcoal and we have money to buy coffee and sugar. I hope we can be given a scholarship so that I can finish my studies and repay my parents' hardships. **(Unmarried female, 18–19, Sulu)***

Teachers were one of the most frequently cited sources of support for adolescents by married and unmarried adolescents across provinces during the Web of Support group activity. An unmarried girl aged 12–14 in Sulu said: "They [teachers] are the ones who teach good manners because many [adolescents] now fight back against their parents, are hard-headed and cut classes, but with the teacher they [adolescents] are fearful and follow them." As mentioned, adolescent girls also cited "teacher" as a "good" and "stable" profession during the Adolescent Well-Being activity. Teachers have the potential to be key actors in child marriage programming as role models, and to facilitate trust-building between parents and children.

Government Health and Social Service Institutions

According to KIs across provinces, government institutions lead the provision and coordination of primary health and social services available to adolescents and their families in BARMM. Several distinct programs were cited by KIs, and to a lesser extent by participatory group participants, as providers of primary social services to communities, including to adolescents. KIs across provinces referenced the DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), a conditional cash transfer program for the country's "poorest of the poor" families aimed to improve the health, nutrition, and education of children ranging from newborns to 18-year-olds. A KI explained that under this program, families are given a monthly stipend conditional on their children attending school and receiving regular health check-ups at the barangay health center. She continued that DSWD implements a broad set of social service programs, such as the 4Ps and the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP). During the Web of Support activity, adolescents identified the DSWD as a source of support for adolescents in the community. Participants across all subgroups in Maguindanao and married girls 18–19 years in Lanao del Sur explicitly mentioned the 4Ps program. A few KIs mentioned that under the 4Ps program, youth development programs target adolescents and youth aged 15–24 with "information and awareness-raising sessions"; however, no additional information was provided about the scope of these programs.

KIs and participatory group participants identified the government institution, such as municipal governments, barangay centers, barangay health centers, and the Department of Health (DOH), that provide health and social services to adolescents and their families. Participatory group activities across subgroups and provinces cited the integrated provincial health office (IPHO), municipal rural health unit (RHU), and/or mostly the barangay health center/station (BHS) as sources of

support for adolescents and their families. The IPHO, RHU, and BHS are administratively part of the local government unit (LGU) structure but operate as part of the DOH. They provide family planning, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV/AIDs and other health-related services targeted at women and girls. In Lanao del Sur, KIs cited the government-run social work and child protection programs of the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) of Marawi City. A KI in Lanao del Sur mentioned a “one-stop shop” that includes child protection services at a health facility in Marawi City that is available to host communities and adolescents living in nearby evacuation centers. The Technical Education Services Development Authority (TESDA) was also cited as a prominent resource for adolescents among Sulu participants, and among participants in Lanao del Sur to a much lesser extent. According to a KI in Basilan, TESDA provides standard vocational technology education as well as values formation specifically for adolescents.

INGOs and NGOs

KIs and participatory group participants discussed how INGOs and NGOs also support, care for, and protect adolescent girls. Participatory group participants, mainly adults in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, reported that families also receive support from INGOs and humanitarian agencies such as “the Red Cross” (International Committee of the Red Cross or ICRC), UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), Oxfam International, Action Against Hunger, Plan International, Save the Children, and Community Family Services International (CFSI). Both married men aged 16–19 and male caregivers/community leaders in Maguindanao cited Save the Children as an organization that provides safe spaces for children in evacuation sites. Participants across groups in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur cited a handful of NGOs, including the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (commonly known as “ACTED”), a French humanitarian relief organization (male caregivers/community leaders, Maguindanao); Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan Program (PAMANA), a socio-economic and infrastructure program for conflict-affected communities (female caregivers/community leaders, Maguindanao); Ideals, Inc., an alternative law NGO that provides legal support to victims of armed conflict and military abuse (female caregivers/community leaders, Maguindanao); EcoWeb, an NGO that focuses on environmental degradation and climate change, poverty, conflict and strained social relations, and poor governance; and Balay Mindanao, a Mindanao-based NGO that provides “improvements needed in school, such as renovating school buildings and school supplies for children” (female caregivers/community leaders, Lanao del Sur). Adolescents in Basilan cited “NGOs” as sources of support for adolescents in the community; however, they did not provide any additional information.



Figure 18: Unmarried adolescent boys 12-14. Basilan. Web of Support Activity.

Social Media and Technology

Although social media (e.g., Facebook) and mobile phones were cited by participants across methods as drivers of child marriage, mobile phones and other “gadgets” were prized resources that contributed to the identity of an adolescent “doing well” in the Adolescent Well-Being activity across subgroups and provinces.

Social Media and Technology

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KII data indicates that social media may have also mitigated the risk of child marriage for girls. A few KIs from Maguindanao pointed to increasing visibility of child marriage cases on social media as a way to warn government agencies about the issue. KIs noted that posting about child marriage on Facebook is a way to increase awareness about and validate the seriousness of the issue.

Gaps in the Existing Child Protection System

Despite existing capacities of resource persons and institutions that work to support, care for, and protect adolescent girls, data illuminates deficits in BARMM’s child protection system. These include adolescent-centered programming, humanitarian programming and services, child marriage programming, and effective strategies to reach adolescent girls through information, programming, and services.



M: Have you recognized a change in the incidence of CEFM cases since COVID-19? Increase or decrease?

P: There have been visibly more posts on Facebook about early marriages. I see it personally in my Facebook account, posts from my friends. It is worrying, but the other side of it is that it's serving as evidence in the discussion about the occurrence of early marriage. Through these social media posts, it's becoming visible that CEFM is a real issue, and not just something that's made up for discussion purposes or by civil society and organizations who advocate for women's rights. It really happens. Just look at Facebook. (NGO, Maguindanao, KII)

Gaps in Holistic Adolescent-Centered Programming

Findings imply that there is a lack of adolescent-centered programming in BARMM. Data from across sources illustrates that existing adolescent programming focuses on raising awareness and disseminating information at the population level, rather than creating holistic and multi-sectoral interventions that are co-designed with adolescents to meet their specific needs and priorities while considering their diversity (i.e., adolescent-centered programming). While most KIs confirmed that adolescent programming was available in their provinces, any programming they described was not tailored to meet the diverse needs of adolescents taking age, gender, ethnicity, ability, marital status, parental status, and schooling status, among other factors, into consideration. Notably, SenseMaker® and participatory groups did not mention “adolescent” or “adolescent-centered” programming in discussions regarding resources and supports available to adolescents in the community. Further, study participants did not mention adolescent-led programming, or adolescents being consulted for more than one stage of these programs. For example, they did not mention being engaged in adolescent groups, participating in project design or analysis consultations, or youth advisory forums.

In Maguindanao, KIs shared information about only a few adolescent programs that targeted particular subgroups of adolescents, including older adolescents and out-of-school adolescents. However, no information was shared regarding program effectiveness, reach, frequency, length, or whether the programs were co-designed with adolescents themselves. KIs shared that the Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission (BHRC) implements advocacy programs targeted at adolescents and youth starting at 15 years old. Activities include anti-bullying awareness, labor law basics, violence against women and children (VAWC), and other children's rights-related topics. The BHRC runs a regular radio program that addresses children's rights in Islam. A KI noted that DSWD implements Unlad Kabataan (directly translated as “youth development or growth”), “a comprehensive

program for out-of-school youth that builds on their personality development and positive lifestyle promotion, population awareness and family life orientation, and economic development” (Government Social Service Provider, Maguindanao). Another KI shared that the Maguindanao Provincial Government is drafting a three-year provincial youth development plan outlining a strategy to implement specific activities and interventions for youth aged 15-30 years old in Maguindanao, as well as a provincial youth code. According to the KI, the youth code, once passed, will serve as a longer-term policy framework.

Data shows that access to adolescent and adolescent-centered programming in Basilan, Sulu, and Lanao del Sur is extremely limited. One KI in Basilan referenced that most adolescent programming was led by the government, particularly the RHUs. However, other KIs noted that the RHUs' adolescent programs are inactive due to lack of funding. Participatory group participants in Basilan mentioned that LGUs such as Isabela City periodically conduct awareness activities around child marriage, teen pregnancy, and child rights. Sulu KIs cited actors working on adolescent programming outside of the government. The CSO Sug Educators Forum, Inc.; local NGO Bansag Babae (“proud women”); and Sulu Provincial Women's Council (SPWC) provide awareness-raising and education programs around SRHR, children's rights, child marriage, GBV, and livelihoods. However, participatory group activities suggest that community members are not familiar with these adolescent programs. TESDA, the vocational technology training program for adolescents, was the only NGO program cited by Sulu participants. Notably, one KI in Maguindanao mentioned the involvement of adolescents in the design and implementation of the Marawi CSWDO's child and youth program focused on children in conflict with the law.



The child and youth welfare program involves children in conflict with the law. We mobilize youth in the community to develop the sessions and prepare the programs. There is an information and education campaign to empower youth and let them understand the different contexts and different laws protecting them. (Social service provider, Lanao del Sur, KII)

Programs are all the same. There are no specific, needs-based services for young adolescents. The issues are maternal health, child health care, and family planning. There is no ARH [adolescent reproductive health]. Unmarried girls go to the hospital and pretend they are having a stomachache, and by the time you do the ultrasound you know that they are about to give birth. They usually arrive with their mother or older sister. (NGO, Lanao del Sur, KII)

Gaps in Humanitarian Programming and Services Available to Adolescents

Humanitarian programming and services available to adolescents is another gap that emerged in the data. KIs discussed gaps in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, while informants from Sulu and Basilan did not share specific programming needs for displaced persons or gaps in services or programming as they relate to natural disasters and violence. KIs in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao identified a lack of mental health and psychosocial support services, quality education, livelihoods, and recreational programs available for displaced and conflict-affected adolescents. As noted above, conflict-affected and displaced communities lack access to quality education, which has detrimental and long-term health and development repercussions for adolescents, their families, and communities. A few KIs from Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao noted that during the height of the Marawi Siege, response activities and programming such as recreational activities for displaced adolescents were available; however, despite the prevailing need for adolescent programming in these protracted crisis settings, only a few humanitarian actors have remained operational in Marawi. A KI in Lanao del Sur highlighted the importance of adolescent programming as a preventive mechanism against adolescents being recruited to extremist groups who often target adolescents who are “idle.” Both adolescent boys and girls are at risk of recruitment by extremist groups; a few KIs in Lanao del Sur explained that girls who are recruited are at risk of child marriage. They explained that no programs exist to target girls who are at risk for recruitment or girls who have returned. Notably, no groups from Basilan or Sulu cited INGOs or national and international humanitarian agencies as sources of support for adolescents in the community.

Gaps in Child Marriage Programming

Data did not uncover any programs operating in BARMM that had the primary aim of preventing and mitigating risks of child marriage or responding to the needs of married girls. Although study participants identified programming across provinces that addressed certain aspects of child marriage, the only program cited by KIs with the specific aim of preventing and responding to child marriage in BARMM was Oxfam International's Creating Spaces to Take Action on Violence Against Women and Girls (“Creating Spaces”); however, the project had already been completed at the time of data collection. Creating Spaces was implemented by Oxfam International and its Filipino partners, UnYPhil-Women and the Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. According to KIs, the project included advocacy and lobbying, community organizing, awareness raising, and income-generating support.

Participants did not identify any child marriage programming in Basilan or Sulu. KIs noted that some programs in Basilan and Sulu integrated advocacy and awareness raising about GBV, including child marriage, in their broader adolescent, health, and/or protection programming. KIs noted that many of the interventions were short-term and dependent on unreliable funding

streams. The lack of programming for adolescents and CEFM programming was more pronounced in Sulu than in other provinces. A few KIs cited the Improving the Availability of Reproductive Health Services in ARMM (ARCHES) project, implemented by Oxfam International and its Filipino partner Pinay Kilos (PINK), as a child marriage program being implemented in Sulu; however, the program's primary aim is to provide better access to SRHR services and not to prevent and respond to child marriage. Other KIs based in Sulu confirmed that there were no CEFM programs operating in the province. Notably, participatory group participants across provinces did not mention child marriage programming during discussions about resources and supports for adolescents in their communities.



First, they [humanitarian actors] support essential needs like WASH [water, sanitation, and hygiene], shelter, and food. Later, they will realize factors that are missing like education and protection. Although members of working groups are pushing for this on site, they see the emerging issue of CEFM. It's not mainly addressed. It's always at the latter part and not addressed during the initial response. Now, it's not being addressed either. Few organizations and agencies are supporting CEFM. Only those who advocate for GBV and other protection issues are the ones supporting CEFM. Health, recreation, education [groups]—all of them need to work on this. There is a subgroup working on girls' issues that includes CEFM. (Humanitarian INGO, Lanao del Sur, KI)

Barriers to Reaching Adolescent Girls through Information, Programs, and Services

Study data shows that there are a range of barriers to reaching adolescent girls through information, programs, and services across the domains of the adapted Social Norms Framework for ASRH. The key barriers preventing adolescent girls from accessing and using existing programming include lack of adolescent-friendly services, lack of coordination across institutions, lack of sustainable funding, and insecurity.

Lack of Adolescent-Friendly Services

KII data indicates that a lack of adolescent-friendly services prevents adolescent girls from using services and accessing information. KIs across provinces pointed to “shyness” due to lack of comfort or confidence in using services and/or lack of knowledge that services and programming exist in their communities. A few KIIs noted that even when program staff conduct door-to-door adolescent outreach, adolescents will hide from them and therefore will not receive knowledge about the availability of services and programs. A KII from Basilan explained that it is particularly difficult to reach adolescents through health programming because:



When health is the point of discussion, for example, in our preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) activities, which we do for 15–17-year olds, it is still a challenge for us because they refuse to participate, or they hide from us. (Government Health Officer, Basilan, KII)

KIs also mentioned service providers' and parents' attitudes. Service providers' attitudes, or negative responses of local government/service providers toward GBV reports, deterred adolescents from reporting GBV, including child marriage cases. This included dismissing GBV cases without due process, not formally recording incidents, or informally settling disputes. According to KIs, these patterns led to a growing negative perception among community members toward reporting GBV cases or accessing services, which may have also led to adolescents' reluctance to participate in programming. Another primary barrier cited by KIs was parents' unwillingness to allow their children to attend adolescent programming; however, a rationale was not provided.

Lack of Coordination across Institutions

KIs across provinces discussed how a lack of coordination across institutions and agencies was a key barrier to reaching adolescent girls through programming and services as discussed by KIs across provinces. KII data imply that while institutions may have coordination lines and processes in place, any coordination is focused on an exchange of information and reiteration of roles rather than collaborating on broader social change strategies and development goals to build a more coordinated effort to address child marriage and other adolescent issues. A governmental CSO from Maguindanao explained that in addition to the lack of data on child marriage cases overall, the lack of coordination among the PNP and the government social service agencies responsible for aggregating child marriage cases also results in erroneous and incomplete data:



Data gathering and reporting would be the main challenge. If we do not take steps for active case finding, there would be zero reports. In the Maguindanao PNP, they have a pink blotter of GBV cases [a police record of cases involving women and children, managed by officers in charge of the women's desk, whose tasks include safeguarding the privacy and sensitivity of cases]. But despite that, only two municipalities have reports. We know the cases are not at zero in the other areas. We fear that parties are choosing to settle their complaints or choosing to not report at all. Zero, however, is still data. What does it mean and what actions do we need to do given that? (Government CSO, Maguindano, KII)

Lack of Sustainable Funding

Another common barrier expressed by almost all KIs was the lack of sustainable funding for programming and services targeted toward adolescents. As noted above, RHUs, the primary actor responsible for implementing adolescent programming in Basilan, were unable to do so due to insufficient funding. Corruption may be one reason for this. A few KIs mentioned corruption and reported that individuals responsible for implementing adolescent programming siphoned off money and that there were "dummy beneficiaries." A government KII from Maguindanao explained her experience with previous programs:



Mostly it would just be picture taking and no actual sessions conducted. Others on the beneficiary list are even just dummy families/beneficiaries. (Government, KII, Maguindanao)

Insecurity and Threat of Violence

Insecurity and threat of violence were other key barriers discussed by KIs across provinces. KIs in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao noted that protracted violence and displacement disrupted service provision. KIs mentioned an inability to recruit providers and program staff, as well as high staff turnover, because staff do not feel safe due to threats of violence and insecurity, including "armed encounters by the armed forces and the lawless elements here..." (Government, municipal health, Basilan, KII). Insecurity causes demand-side barriers as well. Adolescents do not seek services or programs due to fear of violence. A government official in Basilan explained: "There is a challenge in terms of receiving information and services with regard to the peace and order situation, since they cannot freely access education due to the unsafe environment." An NGO practitioner from Maguindanao shared that adolescents whose families are involved in clan or family violence do not leave the home and therefore do not have access to services or programming: "[B]ecause of rido (clan conflict) as well. If one's family is involved in rido, then family members would avoid going out for safety reasons."

04

DISCUSSION





This study identified key concerns of adolescents, key drivers of child marriage, and adaptive capacities within adolescent girls themselves and their existing ecosystem of support that have the potential to mitigate the risk of child marriage in BARMM. Findings indicate that most of the key concerns of adolescents, such as discrimination and stigma, lack of quality education, and early pregnancy, can be both drivers and consequences of child marriage. The lived experiences of adolescents in BARMM are partially shaped by their contexts of crushing economic inequality, gender inequality, displacement, and conflict that impede adolescent girls from navigating to and negotiating for resources. Despite these complex and tumultuous circumstances, key informants and community members, including adolescent girls, who analyzed the study data identified concrete solutions across all domains of the adapted Social Norms Framework for ASRH to respond to child marriage and meet the needs of married girls in their communities.

This study contributes to a growing evidence base that existing risks of child marriage are exacerbated in displacement and conflict-affected contexts, while new risks unique to displacement that predispose girls in particular to marriage may also exist (Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 2021; Leigh et al, 2020, Hunersen et. Al, 2021). Findings also indicate that power in decisions to adhere (or not to adhere to) existing norms around child marriage underpin social norms and marriage practices in BARMM. At the same time, data demonstrates how gender norms in BARMM largely limit adolescent girls' voices in decision-making. Study data supports that the drivers of child marriage are underpinned by patriarchal systems and gender relations that marginalize and restrict opportunities for girls and women (Greene and Stiegvater 2019). Findings concur with those of a recent multi-country child marriage study

conducted in South Asia that showed that child marriage is a form of gender discrimination that disproportionately affects adolescent girls compared to adolescent boys (Leigh et al, 2020). Data shows that when adolescent girls deviate from appropriate rules of interaction, relationships, and roles ascribed to them such as by dating or having premarital sex, they may be forced by their parents into child marriage. Findings show that adolescent boys are also forced into marriage; however, they often have more agency in their marriage decisions. SenseMaker® and KII data and community participatory analysis illustrate that due to gender norms shaping power relationships within the family unit and society, girls feel a sense of duty to their parents, family, and wider community to sacrifice their own aspirations and comply with marriage.

Indeed, findings show that as adolescents leverage new ways to interact with one another (e.g., via social media and texting) that deviates from existing norms, social norms begin to fluctuate, creating unease within the wider community. Findings corroborate existing evidence indicating that some adolescent girls (and boys) are asserting power and choosing to marry under 18 years of age (Leigh et al, 2020). However, according to Greene and Stiefvater 2019, the power to decide is shaped by social norms and unequal power relationships that discriminate against adolescent girls' well-being and healthy transition into adulthood. Findings illustrate that girls decide to marry because they perceive it as the only alternative or as the best alternative to the challenges they face as unmarried adolescent girls. A girl's choice to marry is fueled by misconceptions that marriage will ameliorate the challenges (e.g., poverty, abuse, lack of access to quality education) she faces. However, findings clearly indicate that the decision-making power she holds is fragile and short-lived. Married

life often brings discrimination, school dropout, poverty, child labor, isolation, abuse, and neglect. Multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches that disrupt and leverage opportunities in the individual, social, institutional, resources, and humanitarian domains may have the potential to transform deeply entrenched social and gender norms that hinder adolescent girls' potential to live happy, healthy, and meaningful lives free from violence and the threat of violence, and participate fully in the economic, civic, educational, and social realms of society.

In this study, drivers were more pronounced or manifested differently depending on the context, which corroborates a recently published child marriage research brief (Psaki et.al, 2021). For example, poverty (specifically, lack of household income to pay for school fees resulting in school dropout) emerged as an underlying driver in each province. However, in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, child marriage was perceived as a means to consolidating political and resource power, while these drivers did not arise in the data from Basilan and Sulu. Findings imply that some underlying risks of child marriage are heightened for displaced girls and those living in conflict-affected contexts. However, new drivers that emerged during displacement (e.g., humanitarian assistance) may be more easily addressed by external intervention compared to the underlying drivers, which are anchored on deeply rooted social norms and unequal power dynamics. Structural interventions, such as modifying humanitarian assistance to disincentivize families to marry off their daughters, will not address the root causes of child marriage; however, these straightforward actions may reduce child marriage risks.

THIS STUDY IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING KEY DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE AMONG DISPLACEMENT AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN BARMM:

- 01 limited decision-making power among adolescent girls;
- 02 self-sacrifice and sense of duty;
- 03 controlling adolescent sexuality to preserve family honor;
- 04 poverty and lack of access to stable income-generating activities;
- 05 lack of access to quality education;
- 06 varying interpretations of the Islamic belief around child marriage; and
- 07 an enabling legal environment

Further, data demonstrates gaps in adolescent-centered, humanitarian, and child marriage programming which hinder effective outreach to adolescent girls and persons who influence them. In order to address key drivers of child marriage, the existing ecosystem of support for adolescents, including the adaptive capacities within adolescent girls, their families, and communities that care for and protect girls, must be strengthened.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE GIVEN THAT BARRIERS AT THE SOCIAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND RESOURCE LEVELS HINDER ADOLESCENT GIRLS' OPTIONS TO REALIZE THEIR FULL AUTONOMY TO MAKE AND ACT ON THEIR DECISIONS.

Therefore, structural interventions at the social (social and peer networks, family configuration, social capital and support, positive deviants), institutional (policies and laws, education system, government structures, economic policy, religious institution), and resources (livelihood, income levels) are necessary to dismantle the drivers underpinning child marriage-gender discrimination and economic inequality. Structural interventions are interventions at the social, institutional, and resource levels that alter power relations between dominant and marginalized groups (Blankenship, 2006).

Together with adolescent girls, adult community members, and institutional stakeholders in BARMM, the following needs and priorities, including solutions to address the key drivers of child marriage, were identified. As noted above, these solutions should be complemented by economic and political interventions that aim to create an enabling socio-economic and legal environment, so girls and women can exercise their full decision-making autonomy, including access to equal education, health, civic, and economic opportunities.

GENDER NORMS AND MARRIAGE DECISION-MAKING

Findings suggest that gender norms shape power relationships that undermine adolescent girls' decision-making power to choose when and whom to marry. Instead, a girl's parents are the key decision-makers in her life. Her parents' decisions are molded by existing norms, which they comply with when marrying off their daughter. Other adults such as elders, clan leaders, MRLs, traditional leaders, and other community leaders influence and reinforce these norms given expectations

that girls will fulfil their gendered roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers. Data indicate that adolescent boys are also forced to engage in child marriage but to a lesser extent than girls, and findings indicate that they have higher decision-making autonomy over their marriage decisions than girls. For example, SenseMaker® stories portray incidents of adolescent girls declining marriage proposals from boys, and in turn, adolescent boys asking girls' parents' permission and support in order to force the marriage. Nonetheless, adolescent girls have the potential to bolster their decision-making power with support from their parents, peers, and other adults who are influential in their lives. As mentioned, parents, especially mothers, are primary sources of support for adolescent girls, including married girls. Community members identified intergenerational/parent-child workshops as a means to improve communication, understanding, and trust among family members.

Despite the strong influence community rumors about actual or perceived premarital relationships between adolescents have on catalyzing child marriages, study data across methods indicate that communities have the potential to serve as a support for adolescent girls, including married girls. Both adult and adolescent community members who engaged in participatory analysis expressed the desire for increased understanding of and empathy for the realities of married life. Participants suggested that local workshops with religious and community leaders could be promoted to bring about a common understanding of the adverse consequences of child marriage. These local workshops have the potential secondary benefit of providing clarity around issues where there is ambiguity, such as bringing awareness to the fatwa against child marriage. Any programming must be gender-transformative to address power inequities between genders and promote girls and women to positions of social and political influence in the community. Gender-transformative interventions and programming create opportunities for community members to challenge gender norms that perpetuate violence against women and girls, such as child marriage.

CONTROLLING ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY TO PRESERVE FAMILY HONOR AND SENSE OF DUTY

Findings show the ways in which preservation of family honor as a reason to protect adolescent girls' sexuality was a key driver of child marriage in BARMM. Data demonstrated how parents forced their daughters to marry as a consequence of real or perceived dating or intimate relationships with the opposite sex. Rumors of an adolescent girl holding hands with a male peer could result in child marriage. Adolescent girls show compliance toward the wishes of their parents out of duty. They often agree to marriage with little to no resistance and perceive the marriage as a self-sacrifice for the good of their family.

Although parents' attempts to preserve family honor supersede any detrimental consequences of child marriage, data suggests that parents, especially mothers, have an untapped capacity to mitigate girls' risk of marriage. Parental support and guidance are essential for adolescent girls' healthy development. With necessary education and support materials, parents can educate their children about comprehensive and age-appropriate SRH, including power dynamics and healthy relationships. Disrupting harmful norms that lead to strict control over adolescent sexuality through comprehensive sexual education and gender-transformative programming may diminish girls' risk of child marriage.

Adolescent girls who participated in community participatory analysis did not explicitly mention a personal or collective desire for change as illustrated in SenseMaker® data. However, the need for trust-building in the context of intergenerational relationships, particularly emphasizing the relationship between young people, family, and the community, was identified. Behavior change programming, including intergenerational dialogues, parental counseling, and girls' asset-building approaches, were mentioned as individual- and social-level solutions to strengthen existing adaptive capacities of adolescent girls to mitigate risks of marriage.

CULTURE AND RELIGION

Findings indicate that Islam and local cultural traditions are the foundations of the community and provide tremendous support and resources to adolescents and their families, such as safe spaces, faith, and sense of identity. However, verses in the Qur'an have been interpreted by some scholars as that of having power and gender dynamics that discriminate against women and girls, and in turn, allowing the practice of marriage for girls upon menstruation (as young as 12 years) and for boys as young as 15 years. Though still a highly debatable topic, this interpretation has been buttressed by certain traditional and religious leaders. Data across methods illustrates that this interpretation has become the societal norm and is reinforced by those in power (e.g., MRLs, traditional leaders, community leaders).

Concurrently, the study suggests that these leaders have enormous capacity to influence parents and community norms. Given Islam is a dominant presence and influence in community members' lives, including with regard to marriage decisions, MRLs have tremendous potential to act as champions to mitigate adolescent girls' risks to marriage and support the economic, psychosocial, health, and educational needs of married adolescents. They can be engaged as agents of change to educate and spread awareness about the fatwa that supports marriage after 18 years. Notably, MRLs who participated in participatory group data analysis expressed motivation to take action by increasing awareness about child marriage in their communities.

PEER SUPPORT

Although findings show that adolescents, especially those who were displaced or married, largely lacked social capital and peer support, opportunities to increase social capital among adolescent girls exist. Uniformly, the need for alternatives to marriage in order to ensure some security or resources for continuing studies was mentioned during community participatory analysis, stories, and participatory group activities. During community participatory analysis, helping other girls to not “make mistakes,” such as marrying, dropping out of school, or engaging in “inappropriate” sexual behavior, was a focus of discussions. This has to do with perceptions of young people’s control over their situations, as well as with the stigma of child marriage and premarital relationships. However, increased connection and healthy relationship building with peers could still provide support.

Strengthening and expanding existing safe spaces in the community where dialogue and discussion on child marriage and other SRH issues can be facilitated has the potential to strengthen adolescent girls’ social capital among peers. Community participatory analysis facilitators observed that adolescent girls would be eager to participate because of their usually limited opportunity to express and share their opinions. Most of the school-based groups or organizations feel available “only” to top-ranking students, and other adolescents felt that they were not as welcome to join. Further, both married adolescent boys and girls who participated in the SenseMaker® data collection tended toward wanting drastic change, which suggests that adolescent girls’ peers may be amenable to gender-transformative change that would disrupt the pathways to child marriage.

ADOLESCENT INTERACTION: LOVE MARRIAGES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Cell phones (e.g., texting) and social media (e.g., Facebook) were seen as drivers of child marriage, particularly by adult community members and KIs. For these community members, cell phones and social media are tools adolescents use to connect with the opposite sex, which leads to adolescent boys and girls interacting in person through dating and/or intimate relationships, resulting in marriage. Adults expressed frustration over adolescents’ use of social media and cell phones partly because of their loss of power over adolescent media behavior in the context of advancing technology and shifting social norms. Marriage may be forced, or self-initiated by the couple (a “love marriage”). Although interacting with the opposite sex via technology and in person is considered socially deviant, when adolescents want to get married, there is little resistance to the marriage from their parents. Although social media and technology were ridiculed by some community members and KIs, cell phones and technology were also referenced as an asset, particularly as a mode to



access information for schoolwork, educational materials during COVID-19 lockdowns, and to reach adolescents to provide SRHR information.

Given the ubiquity of cell phones in the hands of adolescents, practitioners may consider supporting communities to implement mobile ASRH programs and service delivery interventions, and create solutions for alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school adolescents, including married girls. Mobile interventions should be co-designed with adolescent girls, parents, and other influential adults, to prevent any distrust in programming. Further, NGOs and INGOs should support community leaders to hold community-led workshops on adolescent online safety guidelines to mitigate online harassment and bullying and other child protection

concerns and open-dialogue discussions to mitigate distrust between adults and adolescents around cell phone and social media use.

LIVELIHOODS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

KII, participatory group, and SenseMaker® data indicate that livelihood training, coupled with income-generating opportunities and/or conditional cash transfer to keep girls in school, may mitigate the strong economic driver to marry off children. However, these external resources and interventions must be coupled with gender-transformative programming to ensure income does not perpetuate harmful gender norms that limit girls' access to economic opportunities and wealth generation. Further, dowry and perceptions of girls as “financial burdens” to the family must be dismantled if such interventions aim to drive sustainable social change in communities. During participatory community analysis, participants across groups recommended involving government agencies in programming to mitigate child marriage. Such discussions largely focused on livelihoods trainings, income generating opportunities, and cash transfers.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

Findings highlight that education is highly valued in communities. A desire across generations exists for adolescents to pursue education and many aspire to achieve advanced degrees. Education is also a mediator of child marriage. Data across methods imply that girls in school are less likely to marry than girls out of school. Once a girl drops out of school, usually due to her parents' inability to pay school fees, she is forced into marriage as the only alternative to education. Government programs, such as the 4Ps, should be expanded to ensure quality education is accessible to all children under 18 years. Policies and social and behavior change programming should be implemented to ensure that marginalized groups, such as displaced, minority, pregnant, and married adolescents, are not ostracized in school.

05

RECOMMENDATIONS





This study illuminates adolescent girls' potential to overcome challenges and lead change in their communities with support from the existing ecosystem that supports adolescents. However, gaps and weaknesses in this support system remain and external support from feminist organizations, CSOs, NGOs, government agencies, INGOs, and other key actors is required to: 1) fill the gaps and strengthen the existing ecosystem of support for adolescents; and 2) create an enabling socio-economic and legal environment that dismantles the patriarchal systems that uphold existing power relations and prevents the perpetuation of harmful gender norms against women and girls, such as child marriage.

THEREFORE, COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMMING COMPLEMENTED BY INTERVENTIONS TO STRENGTHEN AND FILL THE GAPS IN THE EXISTING SUPPORT SYSTEM, AND POLICIES THAT PROMOTE GENDER AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EQUITY ARE NEEDED TO MITIGATE THE DRIVERS AND IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN BARMM.

Community-led programming builds on existing community strengths and provides an opportunity for girls and boys to participate in decision-making through community-driven solutions. A community-led approach would better ensure that prevention and response services are tailored to meet the specific needs and realities of adolescent girls and address child marriage drivers that manifest differently in each community. Study findings clearly demonstrate that a deep contextual knowledge of and expertise in addressing the norms and behaviors that underpin and drive child marriage (i.e., gender and socioeconomic inequality) at every level (i.e., individual, social, institutional, resource) are necessary to address the practice. Therefore, feminist organizations, and those working to address gender equality, should play a key role to guide and participate in child marriage prevention and response initiatives.

Child marriage awareness-raising programs and girl empowerment programs are not sufficient to prevent and respond to child marriage alone. Child marriage programming must be community-led and complemented by tailored interventions that fill programming and service gaps for adolescents, their families, and communities. Given that economic inequality and gender inequality underpin child marriage, interventions and policies must not only target the individual and social levels, but also advance socio-economic equality and gender equality in BARMM.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

This study documented factors at the individual, social, institutional, and resource levels that drive child marriage in BARMM and the adaptive capacities of girls, their families, and communities to mitigate those risks. Therefore, multi-sector humanitarian and development actors should better involve and coordinate with communities to help them prioritize which types of approaches - social (social and peer networks, family configuration, social capital and support, positive deviants), institutional (policies and laws, education system, government structures, economic policy, religious institution), and resource (livelihood, income) - they will implement. Feminist organizations, CSOs, NGOs, government agencies, INGOs, and other relevant actors should coordinate with communities to: 1) ensure communities affected by displacement and disasters have the capacity, human and financial resources, tools, and coordination skills necessary to meet their community-led program goals; 2) ensure programming is designed to achieve gender-transformative change; and 3) strengthen and fill gaps in the existing ecosystem of support for adolescents (e.g., comprehensive sexuality education, MHPSS services, formal and informal education).

The study recommends the following urgent, coordinated, multi-sector humanitarian-development program efforts:

01

SUPPORT COMMUNITIES TO DESIGN, IMPLEMENT, AND EVALUATE COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMMING IN DISPLACEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- 1.1 Local government units, national and community-based feminist organizations, and INGOs should strengthen communities' capacity to design, monitor, and evaluate their community-led program through participatory, strengths-based, capacity-building approaches.
- 1.2 Humanitarian-development practitioners, including NGOs and feminist organizations, should collaborate with communities to ensure that community-led programming is gender transformative and advances gender and socio-economic equality. According to community participatory analysis groups, programming should break down harmful social practices, specifically to dismantle the power of gossip and rumour, and address bullying and discrimination.
- 1.3 Donors and the BARMM government should invest in community-led programming that not only builds girls' assets, including their aspirations to pursue education, civic, and economic opportunities, but also addresses their social and economic situation.

- 1.4 Findings illuminate the diversity among adolescent's needs and priorities; therefore, all actors - feminist, national, governmental, non-governmental, community-based - working to prevent and respond to child marriage in the BARMM must ensure that programming is based on up-to-date and accurate adolescent-led needs and capacity assessments to inform programme design, including establishing safe and ethical mechanisms to obtain this information. Adolescent-led needs and capacity assessments will provide an opportunity for adolescents to elevate their needs and capacities to drive child marriage programming. *See more in [Plan International's \(2020\) Adolescents in Crisis Programming Toolkit](#).*
- 1.5 Experienced practitioners who facilitate community-led programming design should ensure that boys and men are engaged as key allies in ensuring all adolescents live free from violence and the risk of violence. For example, KIs and participatory community analysis groups recommended that community champions such as Muslim Religious Leaders, community leaders such as Barangay officials and traditional leaders, are engaged as facilitators to convene discussions with boys and men to promote positive masculinities that engender gender equality and economic equality. Key religious councils, including the Bangsamoro Darul-Ifta, Committee on Dawa'h and Masajid Affairs, and Hayatul Ulamah of the Philippines should collaborate with government agencies and feminist organizations to facilitate discussions around child marriage among religious and traditional leaders and to develop key messaging on child marriage that reflects children's rights in Islamic households.

02

STRENGTHEN AND FILL GAPS IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' CAPACITIES TO MITIGATE RISK AND ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

Note: Humanitarian, development, and government actors working with communities to co-design adolescent girl asset-building programming should use the latest evidence on intervention effectiveness to inform programme design.

- 2.1 Government actors, such as BARMM's Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Social Services and Development, should fill gaps in programs and services for married and pregnant adolescent girls. For example, these actors should provide direct assistance and support services to facilitate married and pregnant girls' continued access to education, livelihoods, and health care that includes sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.

- 2.2 Humanitarian, development, and governmental programming should consider increasing adolescent girls' access to safe spaces in their communities; where they can safely interact, play, and build their peer network; learn; and access information and services that are tailored to their needs. Given limited evidence on the effectiveness of adolescent safe spaces to mitigate gender-based violence, including child marriage, in humanitarian settings, additional research is needed prior to scale up.
- 2.3 Bangsamoro Youth Commission and the Provincial, City, Municipal, and Barangay Sanggunian Kabataan (Youth Councils) should include child marriage as an urgent concern in the Bangsamoro's Youth Development agenda. In collaboration with LGUs, INGOs, NGOs, and CSOs, communities may consider adolescent-led, peer-to-peer interventions such as mentorship or peer networks to build trust among adolescents and mitigate the high level of discrimination and bullying. A budget should be allocated for the implementation of an information campaign and youth peer education to increase children and young people's awareness and support their adaptive capacities to address the risks and prevent child marriage. See [Raising Voices SASA! community mobilization approach for preventing violence against women and associated tips for contextualising in humanitarian settings](#).
- 2.4 Humanitarian, development, and governmental programming should consider co-designing life skills sessions for married and unmarried adolescents to counter the perceived idealism of marriage, intimate partner, and familial violence associated with driving child marriage, as well as to combat the high risks that adolescent girls face of intimate partner violence (IPV) in marriages. Content should be gender-transformative and unpack gendered roles and responsibilities, financial readiness for child rearing, healthy relationship development and communication for joint decision-making, improve SRH knowledge and access, and teach how to seek support and help when needed. Life skill sessions could be linked to specialized services that seek to strengthen and support young married couples to create healthy relationships and reduce the risks of abuse and neglect of married girls. The available evidence on the effectiveness of life skills programming to prevent child marriage is mixed; therefore, additional research on the effectiveness of life skills programming to prevent and respond to child marriage in humanitarian settings is needed prior to scale up.
- 2.5 The Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) should fulfill its government mandate to ensure adolescents receive comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) including on topics such as: sexuality, power dynamics in relationships, safe sex and pregnancy, maternal

healthcare, and contraceptives and family planning; in addition to strengthening self-care, mental health awareness, and how to mitigate, identify, and seek support for all forms of violence. The expanded CSE programming to parents and caregivers should be co-designed with adolescents, their parents, and caregivers, as well as influential community members, MSSD, MBHTE, Ministry of Health and its Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM-BARMM), and Bangsamoro Darul-Ifta to be context appropriate to ensure uptake. Support for developing the curricula can also be found in *Plan International's Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programme Standards, Conversations That Matter*, and the *Adolescent and Parenting Life Skills Package*.

03

STRENGTHEN THE EXISTING CAPACITIES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS' FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT AND CARE FOR ADOLESCENTS, INCLUDING THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- 3.1 The government-run conditional cash transfer and social protection program, Social Welfare and Development Reform Project, or "4Ps", should be expanded to include targeted outreach to adolescent mothers and young caregivers, and offer income-generating opportunities, such as women's savings groups and small business loans, for the most vulnerable households.
- 3.2 Parenting interventions should include evidence-based curriculum tailored to the context of and based on communities' needs. Therefore, curriculum topics may include child protection, positive parenting, children's rights, the rights of girls and women, and parenting in Islamic households; discussion groups on positive parental roles in child marriage decision-making; skills building to support parents in disseminating positive SRHR messaging and information at home; addressing the role of adults in perpetuating rumors that lead to child marriage; and strengthening parent-child relationships to increase trust. See [Plan International's guidance Adolescent and Parenting Lifeskills in Crises](#), and also [Champions of Change Programme Modules on Inter-Generational Dialogues](#).
- 3.3 The technical support of the Ministry of the Interior and Local Government through LGUs should strengthen the link of formal and informal community structures that respond to protection concerns across development and humanitarian sectors, such as child marriage, intimate partner violence, and bullying cases in communities that are exposed to recurring emergencies, ensuring that the rights and best interests of the child are adhered to.

- 3.4 To address insecurity and threat of violence, women-led CSOs and humanitarian and development NGOs should implement peace building programs that strengthen community-based peacekeeping structures, so health and social service providers and program staff, as well as adolescents and their families feel safe to work and participate in services and programs, respectively.

04 **STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES OF SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENTS THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:**

- 4.1 The Regional Sub-Committee for the Welfare of Children (RSCWC) should act as the coordinating body for communities, feminist organizations, CSOs, NGOs, government agencies, INGOs, and other key actors to oversee program and policy initiatives that promote adolescent well-being and coordinate the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs for adolescents in displacement settings across the region.
- 4.2 The Regional Sub-Committee for the Welfare of Children should strengthen coordination between national and INGO service providers (both development and humanitarian sectors) and government agencies with regard to adolescent programs in order to increase investments to, integration of, and learning from child marriage programming.
- 4.3 The CPGBV WG should support coordination between CP and GBV humanitarian agencies with BARMM policy and programmatic actors to ensure that reinforcing or integrated programming meets the needs of girls, families, and the community during and after crisis and displacement.
- 4.4 The Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education should leverage existing tools and INGO partnerships to improve student and teacher retention and education outcomes for adolescents in BARMM. Further, the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education should increase investment in both education and economic engagement for adolescents, to ensure that learning and life skills opportunities are inclusive and accessible for adolescents, particularly those most marginalized, such as married adolescent girls.
- 4.5 The Ministry of Social Service and Development through the CEFM Task Team of the CPGBV WG and LGUs, should ensure that preparedness plans are in place ready for future large-scale, humanitarian disasters or renewed conflict-related displacement to ensure that a functioning child protection and referral system can be quickly reinforced, and that child marriage prevention is prioritized within the wider humanitarian response.
- 4.6 The Ministry of Social Services and Development should collaborate with feminist organizations, NGOs, and INGOs to strengthen the capacities of service providers to address specific child protection and gender-based violence (CPGBV) risks such as child marriage. This may include activities such as values and attitudes clarification training for direct service providers to ensure adolescent-friendly health and social services
- 4.7 Humanitarian actors should increase economic opportunities in tandem with support services to improve access to temporary shelter and transitioning to permanent residences, so displaced families are not pushed to rely on host families for shelter.
- 4.8 Humanitarian actors should augment the current mechanism for humanitarian assistance that incentivizes parents to marry their daughters to form a separate family unit that receives its own aid package. Registration processes of households where one spouse is under 18 years, should be reviewed and revised to deter such occurrences.
- 4.9 Humanitarian actors should strengthen GBV risk mitigation and prevention programming in evacuation centers and transitory sites to prevent sexual harassment against displaced girls and women to improve the overall safety of these sites.

05

STRENGTHEN THE ENABLING SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT THROUGH APPROACHES THAT CAN HELP DISMANTLE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEMS THAT PERPETUATE HARMFUL GENDER NORMS AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- 5.1 Donors, BARMM policymakers, service providers, NGOs, INGOs, CSOs, and other organizations should invest long-term funding and human capital to implement programming that dismantles patriarchal systems and structures, promotes economic equality, and addresses gender discrimination. This programming should be coordinated by the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) and Bangsamoro Women Commission (BWC). Donors and BARMM government budgets should increase funding and investment for long-term child marriage prevention and response programming including for robust program evaluations. This includes community-led programming and cross-sectoral actions to better coordinate strategies to prevent, delay, and respond to child marriage, which may include the use of

conditional cash transfers in conjunction with other services, such as education, health, livelihoods, and MHPSS services.

- 5.2 The BARMM Rapid Emergency Action on Disaster Incidence (READi), the Ministry of the Interior and Local Government Review should enhance disaster risk reduction and contingency plans to include the sharing of pre-positioned assistance and distribution plans to ensure equitable access to resources among displaced and host communities.
- 5.3 The Ministry of Social Services and Development and the Regional Sub-Committee for the Welfare of Children should coordinate across sectors to establish and monitor a database on the incidence of child marriage in BARMM. Actions should be coordinated together with the Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC); the Local Committee Against Trafficking in Person and Violence Against Women and Children and specifically in BARMM with the CPGBV WG.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS

Research findings show that child marriage is generally an accepted practice in BARMM, despite the high level of stigma and bullying toward married adolescent girls. Findings also suggest that BARMM's existing legal framework at the time of data collection created an enabling environment for the perpetuation of gender inequality as girls, women, communities, and institutions lacked the legal support to reject harmful gender norms, which exacerbate the risk and incidence of child marriage.

On July 6, 1987, the Office of the President signed into law The Family Code of the Philippines, setting the legal age of marriage at 18, with the exemption of Muslim Filipinos and indigenous groups, which were able to practice customary marital laws that permit child marriage.

On December 10, 2021, the Office of the President passed Republic Act No. 115961 (R.A. 115961), which prohibits marriage for persons under 18 years, and imposes penalties for violations of the law. The law also includes specific measures to facilitate the implementation of programs to prevent child marriage. This law was enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives after data collection and analysis activities were completed; however, evidence generated from the study can be used to inform how the law should be implemented to ensure it creates a supportive environment for girls, families, and communities that advances gender equality and mitigates adolescent girls' risk to child marriage, while ensuring already married girls are not further harmed.

The following policy recommendations aim to ensure that the new bill and overall policy environment support evidence-based approaches to mitigate and respond to child marriage in BARMM. All policies should be supported by long-term and sufficient economic, human, and structural resources to ensure effective implementation and widespread awareness.

06

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS FOR THE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 115961 SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- 6.1 BARMM Parliament, regional government agencies, LGUs, and donors should allocate funding and other necessary resources for accountability mechanisms and the socialization of the Republic Act No. 115961 to increase awareness and knowledge of applicable laws and policies among local actors and across communities in the BARMM.
- 6.2 Local Government Units at the provincial, city, municipal and barangay levels should pass an ordinance adopting and localising the implementation of R.A. 115961. The ordinance should include awareness raising campaigns on the R.A. 11596 to increase knowledge on the updated child marriage legal framework. The ordinance should also include programming to prevent child marriage and respond to girls at-risk of child marriage or girls who are already married, including those in displacement settings. Further, it should outline strategies to strengthen the existing community child protection mechanisms including case management processes to better support girls.
- 6.3 BARMM regional government agencies such as the Parliament; Ministry of Social Services and Development; Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education; and Ministry of Interior and Local Government should coordinate to make sure that the Republic Act No. 115961 does not further harm girls who are already married or who have ever been married. Proposed changes to the law should be informed by the lived experiences of married girls to ensure that their needs and priorities are addressed, and that they do not further stigmatize, isolate, and limit the rights of married girls. In collaboration with feminist organizations, NGOs, communities, and with girls directly, they should identify possible unintended consequences of the application of the Republic Act and strategies to protect girls who are already married.
- 6.4 Women-led and feminist CSOs, youth organizations, UN organizations, and humanitarian actors should advocate for restorative justice practices that protect adolescent girls throughout the legal process. Restorative justice includes

a range of informal strategies to increase the involvement of families and communities in responses to crime. These actors should engage adolescent girls to ensure that mechanisms are in place to prevent married adolescent girls and adolescent mothers from further stigmatization and isolation.

- 6.5 Married girls, their families, and community, traditional, and Muslim religious leaders should be engaged to lead the design, implementation, and monitoring of such mechanisms to ensure they are context specific and relevant to the needs and priorities of married girls.

07

ADVOCATE FOR AND IMPLEMENT STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE POLICIES THAT PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EQUALITY, SUCH AS UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE, THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- 7.1 The BARMM government, Plan International Philippines, UN agencies, and donors should invest in training, programs, and flexible funding that engages adolescent girls and women, with boys and men as allies, to enhance their civil and advocacy skills so that they can meaningfully contribute to the design and implementation of policies relevant to them. Women-led and feminist CSOs, youth organizations, and other national humanitarian actors should use participatory, strength-based training approaches to build the capacity of adolescents and communities to drive child marriage advocacy. This should be done in tandem with multi-disciplinary government agencies at the provincial and regional levels to develop and implement economic and social change policies. The BARMM government should also strengthen the role and engagement of adolescents in community-based and regional monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to help promote their own protection.
- 7.2 Any policy aiming to address child marriage in BARMM should address the economic systems and structures that perpetuate persistent gender and socio-economic inequality. Such policies may include structural economic policy interventions that promote gender equality, such as those which increase girls' and women's access to formal and informal education and learning opportunities and entry points to equitable workforce participation and compensation.

08

ENHANCE FEMINIST-LED ADVOCACY AND REVIEW ALL OTHER REGIONAL POLICIES AND REGULATIONS THAT WILL PROHIBIT CHILD MARRIAGE AND ADDRESS INEQUITABLE GENDER NORMS THROUGH THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- 8.1 Key BARMM ministries, government leaders, youth-led organizations, and CSOs should coordinate with feminist organizations to ensure child marriage policy and advocacy drives equitable economic and social change. Advocacy should be inclusive of married and out-of-school adolescents as well as Muslim and Indigenous Peoples, and displaced communities.
- 8.2 BARMM ministries should support community-led advocacy whereby child marriage advocates and women-led and feminist CSOs collaborate with MRLs, traditional and community leaders, and adolescents themselves to advocate for programming that strengthens children's rights and feminist approaches to child marriage legal frameworks.
- 8.3 BARMM parliament should review the Gender and Development Code and other policies related to prohibition of child marriage, promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, adolescent pregnancy prevention and implementation of Republic Act 11313 (the Safe Spaces Act), and elimination of gender-based sexual harassment and ensure that these are aligned with the implementation of RA 115961. Based on the review, parliament could propose recommendations to amend Presidential Decree 1083 that would introduce safeguards to ensure that best interest and welfare of children and adolescents are maintained in the implementation of RA 115961.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study helped fill the evidence gap on the complex and intersecting drivers of child marriage among diverse humanitarian contexts in BARMM, and uncovered the adaptive capacities of adolescent girls, their families, communities, and wider systems that are protective against child marriage risks. The study also illuminated the importance of dismantling socio-economic inequality and gender inequality. However, research gaps still remain. The study proposes the following research recommendations based on evidence gaps uncovered in this study:



01

Researchers should use findings from formative studies to work together with communities, including adolescents, to implement rigorous evaluations of community-led child marriage programs to build an evidence base on what works and what does not work to end child marriage and respond to the needs of married girls in crises. Evaluations should be designed to assess which intervention components are effective, and evaluate longer-term impacts of the intervention on health, well-being, economic, and civic outcomes for girls and their families.

02

Additional research is needed to determine a causal pathway between adolescent social media use and child marriage. Additionally, there is a need to further understand the decision-making process of adolescents and their families in initiating, exploring, rejecting, or accepting child marriage.

03

Additional formative research is needed to better understand the lived experiences of these adolescent girls once they reach their place of work, so practitioners can deliver targeted programs and services to meet their needs and implement preventive measures and alternative opportunities.

04

A key consequence of child marriage is school dropout, which has detrimental intergenerational impacts on earning and health outcomes for girls and their families. However, there is a dearth of evidence on effective strategies to facilitate married girls' access to education in humanitarian contexts. Formative, action-research is needed to understand sustainable solutions to keep displaced, married girls in school.

05

A prevalence study on child marriage in BARMM should be conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority in partnership with the Council for the Welfare of Children at the provincial levels to inform the design of targeted gender transformative programming for the most at-risk communities (e.g., displaced, low-income, and out-of-school adolescents). Study findings should be leveraged to increase resources to communities with the highest levels of need and risk through evidence-based recommendations for policy and program reforms.

06

The study uncovered a clear deficit of community spaces where adolescent girls (and boys) can safely play, interact, build their social capital, learn and receive tailored programming and services based on their needs; however, additional research is needed to determine whether adolescent girl safe spaces is an effective approach to prevent and respond to child marriage in humanitarian settings. Evaluations of adolescent girl safe spaces should also investigate the extent to which safe spaces can foster peer-to-peer relationships by building trust across diverse adolescent subgroups and serve as a platform to counteract the high level of bullying, discrimination, and stigma within the community.

A young woman with a gentle smile, wearing a blue hijab and a white long-sleeved shirt, stands in a school hallway. The hallway has a polished floor and green-painted walls with black metal railings. Large windows on the left side of the hallway let in bright natural light, showing green trees outside. In the top right corner, the number '06' is displayed in a large, blue, stylized font with a white outline and a speckled texture.

06

CONCLUSION



STUDY FINDINGS CONFIRM THAT CHILD MARRIAGE IS UNDERPINNED BY GENDER AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITY, WHICH LIMIT ADOLESCENT GIRLS' VOICES IN THEIR OWN LIFE DECISIONS.

This study contributes to a growing evidence base that existing risks of child marriage are exacerbated in displacement and conflict-affected contexts. While new risks unique to displacement that predispose girls in particular to marriage may also exist, this study helped to fill the evidence gap in terms of understanding the needs and priorities of adolescent girls affected by conflict and related displacement by working with adolescent girls and community members. It discovered eight key drivers of child marriage in BARMM, including key drivers unique to only some parts of the region:

1. conflict or disaster related displacement;
2. limited decision-making power among adolescent girls;
3. self-sacrifice and sense of duty;
4. controlling adolescent sexuality to protect family honor;
5. poverty and lack of access to stable income-generating activities;
6. lack of access to quality education;
7. differing interpretations of Islamic beliefs around child marriage; and
8. enabling legal environment.

The study also demonstrated that conflict related displacement and other humanitarian crises exacerbated these risks to child marriage.

They are forced to agree to child marriage due to parental, peer, and environmental pressures, sacrificing their own aspirations out of a sense of duty to their parents and family. Most adolescent girls have a sense of ownership toward their decisions around child marriage, with some initiating their own child marriages, perceiving it as an alternative to facing poverty, child labor, or stigma and believing that it is a common and acceptable practice within Islam.

Notably, findings also indicate that adolescent girls are resilient and possess potential to overcome challenges and lead changes in their communities. From the SenseMaker® data, they show a higher likelihood to act against harmful socio-cultural norms than adolescent boys, who were more likely to be inclined to “keeping tradition.” This also reflects that boys and men are the power holders within a patriarchal society. A gender-transformative, community-led approach to preventing and responding to child marriage in BARMM could help tap into this potential. In order to do so, governments, feminist organizations, CSOs, NGOs, INGOs, and other key actors must coordinate to implement interventions and policies that strengthen the system of support for adolescents and advance gender and socio-economic equality in BARMM.

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OUR VOICES, OUR FUTURE:

Understanding Risks and Adaptive
Capacities to Prevent and Respond to Child
Marriage in the Bangsamoro Autonomous
Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)