

## Child Marriage Key Messages<sup>1</sup>

### Background

This document has been developed to support Child Protection (CP) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) actors provide basic messaging on child marriage within communities as well as to provide CP and GBV actors with basic tips for responding to child marriage. 'Child marriage' refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. According to many international agreements, marriage that occurs before the age of 18 is a violation of human rights and a harmful practice, even if the legal framework or religious laws allow it.

If you are a service provider and require support with child marriage programming and/or these messages contact your sub-national CP and/or GBV AoR coordinator or the national CP AoR Coordinator Kristen Hayes [krhayes@unicef.org](mailto:krhayes@unicef.org) or the national GBV AoR Coordinator Kibrom Girmay [kgirmay@unfpa.org](mailto:kgirmay@unfpa.org)

### Key Messages for Community

#### Key Messages for children and adolescents

Delaying marriage until boys and girls are adults can be beneficial, for example:

- You have the best opportunity to grow into successful adults and to make the best choices if you don't get married until you are an adult
- You can develop important skills if you focus on yourselves whilst you are children and delay marriage until you are adults. These important skills will be useful for you, your families and your communities later
- You are more likely to finish school if you delay marriage. School provides a safe space to play and learn and finishing school will help both boys and girls earn money when they are older
- If you delay marriage you are often able to spend more time with your friends and family as you are not busy managing a household and earning an income
- Marriage is an important step waiting until adulthood to get married allows you to make sure that it is the right decision for you. When you are older you will know what is best for yourselves and that this is the right decision. When you are older you will also be able to better care for your husband or wife and family.

Getting married early can have many harmful impacts on boys and girls such as:

- Young girls are at high risk of delivering babies too early—before the baby is ready to come out. Getting pregnant before you are 20 can lead to serious medical complications. You may need an operation to help birth the baby or they risk serious harm to the girl and baby.
- If you marry before you are an adult it is likely that you will miss some years of schooling and as a result have limited skills, knowledge and experience compared to your friends
- Boys who marry before they are adults are often expected to financially provide for the household which can be stressful, particularly if you do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to earn an income as you left school early
- Girls who marry before they are adults often do not get to see their friends and family as much as you are busy with caring for a household
- Girls who marry before they are adults are more likely to experience violence in the home and are often forced to have sexual experience that they do not want and are not ready to have

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<sup>1</sup> As outlined in the Background the purpose of this document is to provide basic messages and quick tips on early marriage for CP and GBV actors. These messages are intended to be used alongside other Global and Myanmar specific guidance on child marriage prevention and response.

## Key Messages for adults and caregivers

There are a number of benefits of delaying marriage for individuals until they are over the age of 18, for example:

- By delaying marriage and focusing on their own development, children can develop important life skills and become more independent which will benefit their families and communities in the future
- Girls and boys are more likely to complete their education if marriage is delayed. Helping girls and boys stay in school and avoid child marriage generates benefits that extend across entire societies. Low educational attainment and child marriage can combine to prevent girls and boys from making a decent living later on in life, which negatively impacts on living standards and wellbeing of all households and communities
- Delaying a first pregnancy until a girl is at least 20 years of age helps to ensure a safer pregnancy and childbirth. It reduces the risk of her baby being born prematurely and/or underweight.

There are a number of harmful consequences for children as a result of child marriage, for example:

- Getting married at a younger age will likely restrict girls freedom. Girls who get married young usually do not get to see their friends as much and are not allowed to attend school anymore.
- Girls and boys who marry young are often pulled out of school and miss important years of their education. Because of this, they will have limited knowledge, skills, and experience to negotiate adult marital roles.
- Marrying girls can sometimes be seen as a means to protect girls against violence. However girls who marry at a young age are actually more likely to experience sexual, emotional, and physical violence in their marriage. The larger the age difference, the more likely they are to experience violence. Girls who marry young are more likely to describe their first sexual experience as forced.
- Childbearing is frequently expected after marriage, with first births being the riskiest for young adolescent mothers. For instance, girls who become pregnant at an early age often have difficult deliveries because their pelvis is too small. This could lead to needing an operation to deliver the baby. Pregnancy at this time is very dangerous, and doctors recommend that girls finish puberty and adolescence before attempting to have children. The younger the mother is, the greater the risk to her and her baby.
- Boys who marry early may also face increased financial pressure and responsibilities, which can negatively impact their mental health.
- Every child has the right to be protected from Gender Based Violence, including child marriage which is a form of GBV. Child marriage is a human rights violation however despite laws against it, the practice remains widespread.
- If your son or daughter has already married before the age of 18, he or she still has the same rights as other children, such as the right to healthcare and education. Encourage your children that are married to join schools, alternative education programmes or vocational training. The skills and knowledge they gain will benefit them and their own children for life.

## Guidance for Service Providers- steps for responding if a child tells you they are married or about to get married

### Remember

- When engaging with children and young people always use age-appropriate language that is adapted to the developmental (physical, psychological, social and emotional) capacities of children and young people.
- Whilst delivering services, including these key messages on child marriage, service providers should not proactively identify or seek out children who are married, or imminent marriage cases, but rather be available in case an adult or child asks for support.
- It is not the immediate role of a service provider, who receives a disclosure of child marriage, to directly intervene with the child or the caregiver to stop the marriage from happening or continuing. Such an approach can have harmful unintended consequences for the girl you are trying to help and is potentially dangerous.
- Child marriage is a form of Gender Based Violence and therefore it is important to follow the [step-by-step Pocket Guide for humanitarian practitioners on 'How to support survivors of gender-based violence'](#)

- It is important that all service providers understand what services, including CP and GBV services, exist in their area so they can safely refer individuals when needed.
- When engaging with children service providers should be nurturing, comforting and supportive

### **Steps to follow for service providers who are not Child Protection or Gender Based Violence practitioners:**

1. Introduce yourself. Ask how you can help. Practice respect, safety, confidentiality and non-discrimination
2. Provide up-to-date and accurate information about any services and support that may be available to the child. If there is a GBV referral pathway inform the child and/or caregiver about available GBV services and refer if given permission by the survivor
3. Obtain informed consent from the caregiver and child for referral to GBV service if those disclosing child marriage are seeking services.
4. If disclosure is received from a child, without the presence of a caregiver, the informed consent process will be different dependent on their age
  - a. If the child is between the ages of 6 and 11, you will obtain informed assent—an agreement from the child that they want to receive services. You will then have to get informed consent from the child's caregiver. If the caregiver is not supportive or if reaching out to the caregiver is deemed to not be in the adolescent's best interest, another trusted adult (according to the child) can provide written consent for services.
  - b. The same process applies to adolescents aged 12 to 14. However, depending on the maturity of the adolescent, their consent for services can be given 'due weight', meaning that consideration can be given to their views and opinions based on factors such as their age and maturity.
  - c. For adolescents ages 15-17, informed consent/assent must be obtained from the girl
  - d. Do not share information about the child or caregiver or their experience to anyone without explicit and informed consent. Do not record details of the incident or personal identifiers

### **Steps to follow for Child Protection and GBV caseworkers**

1. The steps within the [Interagency GBV Case Management Guidelines](#) 'GBV Case Management Guidelines for Early Marriage' should guide the response if a child tells you they are married or about to get married.