

The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK): Gender-transformative approaches to ending child marriage

CRANK launch meeting 11 March 2021 – Key notes

Introduction to the CRANK

Dr Faith Mwangi-Powell, CEO of *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*, Nankali Maksud, Coordinator of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, and Dr Satvika Chalasani, Technical Specialist Adolescents & Youth, UNFPA

- The CRANK aims to respond to a need for improved coordination for a harmonised research agenda on child marriage, by ensuring that evidence generated is not duplicating already existing/ongoing evidence, that it responds to prioritised needs and that it is made available to the right people at the right time.
- The CRANK will host quarterly meetings and share biannual digests to give an update on the field of child marriage research, including by tracking ongoing research by those who have signed up to the network.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has upended many of our plans and forced us to adapt approaches to end child marriage – learning from these adaptations and from what works at scale has become even more important as we need to accelerate action to be able to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and end child marriage by 2030.
- This first meeting of the CRANK focuses on evidence around gender-transformative approaches to end child marriage, how we work with girls and women as well as boys and men for impact. This is the week of the International Day for Women and the month of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women – really putting the spotlight on gender and the need for transformative change.

Twenty years of the evidence base on what works to prevent child marriage (Global)

Anju Malhotra and Shatha Elnakib

- There has been a large increase in evidence on child marriage in the last 20 years, however, most is still focused on policy advocacy, i.e. why we should be addressing child marriage, rather than how to do it and how to ensure we reach the SDGs.
- The review looked at the effects on child marriage in 30 evaluations to see which interventions had a positive/null/negative effect.
- The review separated between high/medium/low quality of evaluations, based on the predefined criteria of e.g. sample size, randomisation, modelling, etc.
- The number of evaluations has increased over time, before 2011 most were on multicomponent interventions whereas later there has been an increase in evaluations of single component and multi-arm interventions.

- Overall, single component interventions were found to have a more positive impact compared to multicomponent interventions, which showed few positive long-term effects.
- One reason for the lack of results from multicomponent interventions might be that structures to scale up these programmes are missing. Further, one needs to consider whether the girls/communities want – and have the capacity – to take up all services/interventions offered to them, and whether the implementation agency/organisation has the skills to deliver on all aspects of a multicomponent intervention.
- The most positive effect was seen among conditional cash or in-kind transfers for schooling support. The results of transfers directly to girls showed positive results such as staying in school and delaying pregnancy, but did not show anything on norm change, which might require more time.
- The evaluations on community engagement did not separate out male engagement, and hence this review cannot specifically talk to usefulness and relevance of these specific approaches.
- It is important to determine gender transformation from the results of an intervention not by its intention, especially as some interventions also might have unintended negative consequences which are rarely recorded.
- Enhancing girls' human capital and skills was seen to be the best route towards transformation, as this allows for change on several levels, e.g. more girls in school which in turn can change norms. However, even if there were effects on knowledge, attitudes and practices, there might not necessarily be longer-term impacts of empowerment programmes.
- Going forward, it is important to look at research on a systems level, to see where components on child marriage can be integrated, e.g. what is the impact of more teachers and the quality of education?
- Considerations need to be given to the fact that we need to reach at least 25% of all girls at risk in an area/country to enable transformative change. We might need to rethink who focuses on what in terms of interventions: if smaller organisations, rather than reaching a small number of girls through direct implementation, could work together with the government and ensure that they are held accountable for the implementation; or if they can utilise their specialisation (e.g. about the local context in the case of community-based organisations) to ensure scale-up of programmes with a demonstrated effect.
- The findings are based on a review where child marriage was seen as the end point, whether the intervention was found effective or not. However, the interventions might have other positive effects, and might also impact e.g. knowledge, attitudes and practices even if no direct impact on child marriage prevalence.
- Many of the interventions in themselves did not focus on child marriage specifically, but did include measures on this in the evaluations: this is a monitoring issue which shows it is possible to advocate for the integration of child marriage indicators into already ongoing government-led efforts, to ensure better data and evidence on what works.

- Currently working on a paper on the implementation part of the interventions looked at. However, not all evaluations list the implementation process.

Connecting Girls' Agency and Social Norms Change: Implications for Practice (Bangladesh and Nepal)

Sadhvi Kalra, CARE Tipping Point

- A 16-18-month multicomponent intervention with a baseline and end line to capture outcomes on girls' lives – arm 1 will be on the full intervention, arm 2 a light intervention (still multicomponent) and arm 3 is a control group.
- The research builds on a mixed methodology, with a quantitative survey and qualitative focus group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews, to assess agency, relations and structures impacting girls' lives.
- The approach is based on CARE's social norms analysis plot framework for coding and assessing the data.
- Initial findings show that about half of girls think they have a say in e.g. decision-making and that they can negotiate to be allowed to go places. However, there are restrictive factors in place, such as norms prevalent among parents on e.g. the suitability of girls going out anywhere other than to school.
- Parents tend not to hold any norms around girls' collective action (whether positive or negative). Girls are motivated and interested in collective action, but the findings did not show any change in terms of practices.
- The research looks at girls' perceptions and actions – e.g. participation in financial decision-making within the household – to get a fuller picture of girls' agency.
- The Tipping Point programme aims to build on the recorded confidence of girls in themselves to support them to become agents of change, alongside allies in their communities.
- The research looks at norms at an individual level – among girls and families – but the interventions also work with service providers and government officials to ensure norms change also on a structural level. It is important to keep in mind that these structures and institutions are made up of individuals.

Yo Quiero, Yo Puedo (Mexico)

Maricarmen Ramirez

- Child marriage might be seen as the only opportunity in life for some girls – and hence they turn to the practice to gain status/value in society.
- This programme focuses not only on preventing child marriage, but also on gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights, with the aim of making girls agents of change in their communities.
- The programme works with girls directly, and also with families, community members and through media campaigns: efforts to support one another.

- Workshops are hosted with various stakeholders to create an open space for dialogue and to allow for norms change.
- The programme has led to organisations signing commitments to ban child marriage in their communities and there is a greater acceptance for the concept of gender transformation. Robust alliances created with community and traditional leaders have provided the necessary space for girls' engagement.
- What is needed for change is longitudinal, constant work. Hence, community-based organisations have a key role to play, with a particular understanding of the situation for marginalised populations such as Indigenous people, as well as of local variables linked to child marriage, such as the trading of girls for money.

Na'leb'ak (Guatemala)

Karla Rax Choc

- Using the “Abriendo Oportunidades” approach developed by Population Council, ensuring a gender analysis and a participatory model of implementation
- Working with girls and young women (aged 8-25 years) through safe spaces that are facilitated by peer mentors, with sessions on e.g. rights, and the importance of critically reflecting on gender roles for transformation.
- The programme also supports the girls with diversified agriculture, to ensure sustainability for the girls and their families. In addition to supporting their nutrition, crops are sold and profits have been used by the girls to pay school fees and to purchase supplies.
- The girls set up plans for their own learning and goals to ensure they have opportunities and aspirations beyond child marriage.
- The programme also focuses on engagement of local leaders, as their buy-in is crucial for the support of girls and the overall approach. The ongoing engagement has led to community members changing their perception of the programme, also among members that were initially very reluctant to its aims.
- The programme is also engaging some mayors to support the activities and some of the girls have been participating in community meetings to ensure their voices are heard, they also advocate on a political level for the improvement of education and health services in the communities.
- The girls reached are often from the most marginalised, Indigenous communities who in general receive little support from the government. So, the interventions are key in providing alternatives to child marriage and are likely to have a big impact on the girls' lives.

Research updates

Janna Metzler (WRC):

- The Women's Refugee Commission has recently released studies looking at the prevalence and drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings, specifically in four different conflict-affected

states in the [Arab States region](#) and in two different contexts in [South East Asia](#). Studies were conducted in partnership with John Hopkins University and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. Here:

- A [practitioner's guide](#) to the ethical conduct of research on child marriage in humanitarian settings.
- In collaboration with King's College London, currently working on two different Delphi studies, the results of which should inform a shared learning agenda for the Arab's States Region and the East Africa Region. Looking into these studies to understand and identify the way in which research is being used, and to underline the importance of research in programme and policy development, looking to identify gaps in the current evidence base and priorities for those regions and filling that evidence. Also looking at research capacity and different ways to do research in those regions. Elements of those studies will look at regional responsiveness to the prominent drivers and programmatic approaches in those regions. Both studies are underway, first round for the Arab States Region is starting now and East Africa Region study is scheduled for May 2021.

Gaston Kampungu, Dzaleka refugee camp: Highlights the need for evidence and programmes that respond to the experiences of child marriage in refugee camps, and particularly a focus on orphan girls and girls with disabilities that need specific support.

Eline Versluys research consultant with *Girls Not Brides*: Starting a study in Francophone West Africa on the impact of COVID-19 on adolescent girls and specifically looking at linkages between child marriage and education. This will include a compilation of promising practices in mitigating the effect of COVID-19 on girls' access to quality education.

Suzanne Petroni, consultant from the US: Working with several partners on a supplement that will come out soon in the Journal of Adolescent Health in October 2021. Focus on the diversity and complexity of child marriage, primarily the drivers that perpetuate the practice in particular contexts, but also how the consequences of child marriage may differ for women depending on those contexts. This will also include a paper from UNICEF on the impacts and projections of COVID-19 and child marriage and there will be an additional supplement available, which Margaret Greene from Greenetworks is working on.