

The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK)

Transforming gender and social norms to prevent child marriage and advance gender equality

CRANK research meeting 23 March 2023 – **Key takeaways**

Key takeaways

- **Gender and child marriage are relational issues**, so we need to work with diverse stakeholders in a synchronised way to drive change, including within and beyond child marriage.
- **Gender-synchronised approaches intentionally engage with girls, boys, women, men and gender non-conforming people in all their diversity** to transform the gender norms that drive risk and inequality, and to rebalance power.
- **Girl- and women-led organisations are central** to efforts to address child marriage and gender inequality. Other stakeholders also need to be engaged as allies – rather than as protectors – from the outset and at multiple levels for sustained change at scale.
- **Norms change needs to be reflected in programme activities and measurement**; we need:
 - More interventions focused on institutional and systems-level change (rather than individual-level change).
 - More rigorous evaluations on norms change and male engagement.
 - To use mixed methods to track change over time (quantitative) and understand context-specific nuances (qualitative).
 - To identify proxy measures indicating impact, particularly where time or resources for programme evaluation or research are limited.
 - To offer safe spaces for reflection, with appropriate support and referral mechanisms when asking about (gender-based) violence.

Nankali Maksud, Senior Adviser Child Protection, UNICEF

- Ensuring social and behaviour change is key to addressing child marriage. The field has made significant progress in understanding, addressing and monitoring social norms, and successful approaches we can learn from and adapt to our own country contexts.

José-Roberto Luna Manzanero, Technical Specialist Adolescents and Youth, Child Marriage, UNFPA

- Gender-transformative approaches are the gold standard for gender programming. These approaches:
 - Address the root causes of gender inequality.
 - Address the gender roles, relations and norms shaping inequalities.
 - Redistribute power and resources in favour of girls, women and other groups who have been marginalised based on their gender.

- Gender is a relational element – interventions cannot just focus on men or women, we need to work with everyone in a synchronised way (simultaneous or sequentially).
- Gender-synchronised approaches are the intentional intersection of gender-transformative efforts reaching girls, boys, women, men and gender non-conforming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. They engage people in challenging the harmful and restrictive constructions of masculinity and femininity that drive gender-related risks and inequalities, and hinder health and wellbeing.
- We need research and measures to see what approaches and programmatic examples can be impactful for social and gender norms change, to learn from the evidence.

Anne Sprinkel, Project Director, Tipping Point, CARE USA, and Dr Ruchira Tabassum Naved, Health System and Population Studies Division, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh

- The Tipping Point evaluation was a three-arm cluster randomised control trial, understood as the gold standard of impact evaluations. The three arms included a “heavy package” of interventions, a “lighter” one and a control group.
- The results in Bangladesh show that the “heavy package” of interventions:
 - Had an impact on social norms and the risk of child marriage.
 - Could see a positive impact across intermediary measures such as self-efficacy and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health.
- Girl-led efforts – for example, through peer advocates – are not enough for broader change: girls need allies in their communities (parents, teachers, etc.) to be engaged in an intensive way for sustainable change and change at scale.
- To avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes, language on community support should be focused on allyship, not the protection of girls’ rights
- Girl- and women-led organisations are crucial as they are ready to take on the cause – important for donors to focus on for funding.
- The understanding of “youth-led” needs to evolve, to really ensure this means a shift of resources and power.

Margaret E. Greene, Executive Director, GreeneWorks, and Manahil Siddiqi, University of Washington School of Public Health, Department of Health Systems and Population Health

- There is a system of social and gender norms that upholds child marriage.
- Over 2000-21, only 12 studies looked at the impact of interventions on child marriage and on the social norms influencing child marriage.
- Core components of comprehensive norms shift interventions include:
 - Engage community members from the onset, at multiple levels.
 - Confront power imbalances, both gender-related and intergenerational.
 - Create safe spaces for reflection.
 - Offer a platform for positive norms and narratives.

- Assess norms and change.
- There is a lot of discussion around norms in the child marriage field, but few interventions to address them.
- Despite aiming to change norms, most programmes do not engage with the reference group influencing a certain set of norms, and only five programmes monitored norms/attitudes beyond those of adolescent girls.
- The evidence shows there is a disconnect between the impact of interventions on norms change versus on child marriage.
- If norms change is a programme goal, it needs to be reflected in activities and in measurements, specifically designed for the norms one wants to change – validated instruments for quantitative measurements are needed.

Giovanna Lauro, Deputy CEO, Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice

- Child marriage is a relational issue, we cannot put the burden on girls to end this practice, we need various community actors to be engaged.
- Delaying age of marriage is not enough – we also need to change norms in terms of how boys/men relate to girls/women in marriage (in child marriages and beyond).
- Engaging boys is also a child protection concern in terms of addressing the issue of boys in child marriages, who are most often married to equally young girls.
- The review conducted is not systematic, as there are so few rigorous evaluations on boys’ engagement. Rather, it looked at all available studies of programmes that work with boys on child marriage and related norms: 26 interventions were reviewed, focused on sub-Saharan Africa¹ and South Asia, most in English or French, and most interventions focusing on individual-level change rather than institutional/systems-level change.
- No intervention worked directly with boys who were married, and some interventions focusing on sexual and reproductive health had a main focus of information around sexual health rather than norms around sexuality.
- We need to continue to build the evidence base in this field, and expand the scope beyond individual-level interventions and beyond sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Q&A

Giovanna:

- It is important to contextualise interventions, our understanding of what norms are prevalent and connected to each other, and what reference groups are important in different contexts.
- It is essential to measure norms and norms change, but the short time frames of some programmes means we need to be realistic about what we can measure: maybe focus on proxy measures on the way to impact.

Margaret:

¹ The CRANK usually avoids the term “sub-Saharan Africa” because of its racialised and colonial history. In this case, we use it to reflect the geographical region covered by this research, as described by the researcher.

- Systematic reviews tend to focus on quantitative measures, to allow for comparison across contexts and different interventions – but you could argue that the norms is the one field that most requires qualitative understandings, as it is about things like values.
- What priority interventions should we focus on? Boys and men are often the most important reference groups to change norms (including parents), so it is key to look at interventions that engage them – including interventions engaging boys as future partners/spouses.

Anne:

- Working with a research institution to do an in-depth evaluation/study on social norms may not be possible for all organisations, but it is still key to do some form of formative research, using existing tools, or at least ask one question around norms in the communities where we work – this will over time strengthen the field and our understanding.
- There are several ethical considerations when doing research with a control group, as they are not involved in any interventions. There are interventions planned in the control group areas in both Bangladesh and Nepal.
- Another ethical consideration is whether to ask about the experience of violence or not: if these questions are asked, it is important that systems are put in place for at least psychological first aid.

Ruchira:

- Study participants highly appreciated the study, and that they had space to talk about their experiences: it is not about only extracting information, but offering a space for participants to express themselves, in addition to referring them to available resources and support if needed.
- We need mixed methods: we cannot capture everything in quantitative data, though this is important to track change over time. To understand the nuances, we also need qualitative data, which might be difficult to get at a large scale.

Resources shared:

- Bhandari, N. R. (2022) [Communicating challenges and dreams of young girls through Mithila Art in Nepal.](#)
- Burgess, R., A., Sheibani, F., Kelly, I., Jeffrey, M., Gumbonzvanda, F., Lewis, G., Ashraf, A., Connor, C., Mombeshora, S., Gumbonzvanda, N. (2023) ["Bringing and end to the silence: Identifying priorities and solutions to addressing the mental health consequences of child marriage"](#), *Health Policy and Planning*.
- Care (n.d.) [Tipping Point: Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning resources.](#)
- Rialet, J., Greene, M. E., Lauro, G. (2022) [Boyhood and child, early, and forced marriages and unions: An evidence review](#), Washington, D.C.: Equimundo and New York: UNFPA.
- Robinson W.C., Hunersen, K., Leigh, J., Elnakib, S., and Metzler, J. (2021) [A Practitioner's Guide to the Ethical Conduct of Research on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings](#), New York, NY: Women's Refugee Commission.

Sedlander, E., Bingenheimer, B. B., Long, M. W., Swain, M., Rimal, R. N. (2022) "[The G-NORM Scale: Development and validation of a theory-based gender norms scale](#)", *Sex Roles*, 87:5-6.

Sood, Suruchi, Kostizak, K., and Stevens, S., (2020) [Participatory research toolkit for social norms measurement](#), New York, NY: UNICEF

The Social Norms Learning Collaborative (2021) [Social norms atlas: Understanding global social norms and related concepts](#), Washington, DC: Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University.

The Social Norms Learning Collaborative (2021) [Monitoring shifts in social norms: A guidance note for program implementers](#), Washington, DC: Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University.

UNICEF (2021) [Defining social norms and related concepts](#)

Platforms for collaboration and learning:

[ALIGN Social Norms Learning Collaborative](#)

[Global Network on Mental Health and Child Marriage](#)