

ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN THE PREVENTION AND ENDING OF CHILD MARRIAGES

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Child marriage is a global concern that is deeply entrenched into systems, and is defined by the African Union as “a harmful practice which severely affects the rights of a child and further deprives the child from attaining other aspirations like education.” In this practice girl children are often commodified in providing income to families that are poor through dowry payments. Men frequently decide who and when girl children marry, giving the girl child no say in the decision, and finding herself in a marriage, often with an age gap of 20 years or more. These patriarchal values are sometimes supported by women in the same communities, and this leaves girls with no support. This paper highlights the importance of engaging men and boys to explore how they can contribute to ending child marriages.

2. DISCUSSION

Male caregivers influence the lives of girls and exert considerable impact on girls' development and opportunities. Programmes for girls should identify opportunities to strategically engage fathers in being champions for their daughters' safety and well-being. Drawing on previous efforts to involve men and boys to understand and work towards eliminating child marriages in some countries in Asia and the Middle East, we produced a training manual to address child marriages in the African context by working with men and boys. This presentation will introduce the manual, and share lessons learnt from the manual development process and accompanying stakeholder meetings.

3. CONCLUSION

Child marriages have a negative impact on the lives of young girls, whose aspirations are destroyed by being “wives” at an early stage. Work involving men in gender equitable and

non-violent parenting should shed light into dynamics of child marriages and how men can play a role in protecting the girl child.