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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF MEN IN CHILD MARRIAGE DECISION-MAKING IN RURAL UPPER EGYPT

HIGHLIGHTS

- Decisions regarding child marriage are largely controlled by male family members.
- Young men seek to marry child brides because they expect them to be obedient, fertile, and healthy.
- Fathers marry off their underage daughters to protect them against any misbehavior that would jeopardize the family's honor.
- Girls often have no choice but to succumb to their families' wishes and 'accept' to get married at a young age.

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BACKGROUND

Globally, one in five young women aged 20 to 24 years old get married before they turn 18 (UNICEF, 2023). While both genders are married off at an early age, girls are disproportionately affected by the negative consequences of child marriage. Classified as a pervasive practice, child marriage violates girls' human rights by robbing them of their basic rights to growth and development, health, education, and economic prospects. Furthermore, in their marital households young wives are subjected to long hours of unpaid labor, social isolation, exposure to violence, and early pregnancy and its associated risks (Davis et al., 2013).

In Egypt, the 2021 Family Health Survey indicated that nearly 18% of women aged 20–24 years old had married or were engaged to get married before they turned 18 (CAPMAS, 2022). While a number of interwoven factors hold this harmful social practice in place, in many societies like Egypt, the patriarchal organization of power *per se* can lend itself to permitting and condoning the marriage of girls under 18. Despite the huge volume of literature on child marriage drivers and consequences, there is much less evidence about who plays key roles in the decision-making process, and especially the roles that men play in perpetuating or preventing the practice. Understanding the dynamics of the child marriage decision-making process is thus fundamental to informing the design of policies and programs to end child marriage.

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to provide a concrete basis for interpreting the role of male in decision-making

in relation to child marriage in rural Upper Egypt through:

1. Better understanding of the decision-making process related to child marriage, with a focus on the role of men as prospective grooms, fathers, and brothers;
2. Examining the attitudes of fathers and young men regarding child marriage and the role of masculinity in shaping these attitudes;
3. Generating recommendations that could guide future work for the prevention of child marriage.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Within the context of child marriage and based on a framework designed by Newman and Too Many (2019) on female genital mutilation decision-making, there are several levels at which men can be involved in decisions related to child marriage:

- The prospective groom;
- The girl's father, brother or male guardian;
- Other male influencers who often are a wider group of social actors who shape decision-makers' views.

At the male-partner level, prospective or current husbands of adolescent girls may offer the financial resources and social security that encourage a girl's parents to venture into child marriage, putting the groom/husband in a clear position of power. On the girl's family side, fathers, brothers, and uncles (male custodians) exercise control over household wealth,

and well-established gender roles may dictate that a girl's marriage is first and foremost the male guardian's decision (Biswas et al., 2020). In addition, fear of leaving a girl with no potential male support in sight may push parents to marry off their daughters to secure a future for them. At the community/societal level, social norms accepting child marriage, male control over women, rigid gender roles, and traditional perceptions of masculinities place more power and control over decision-making pertaining to child marriage in the hands of male figures.

METHODS

The current study was conducted between March and July 2023 using three qualitative data collection methods, namely in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. These qualitative methods were used to explore the perspectives of adolescent girls, their families, and key stakeholders on the role of men in the decision-making process pertaining to child marriage. The study took place in four villages in Assiut and Sohag in Upper Egypt that were specifically selected on the basis of the high prevalence of child marriage.

Data was collected through:

- In-depth interviews with married and unmarried adolescent girls;
- In-depth interviews with young men, including the husbands and brothers of adolescent girls;
- Focus group discussions with fathers and mothers of adolescent girls who were married or unmarried;
- Key informant interviews with community leaders (i.e., religious leaders, marriage officiates, teachers, and matchmakers) and managers of child marriage programs.

A total of 80 in-depth interviews, 24 key informant interviews, and 14 focus group discussions were conducted. Regarding the participant characteristics, married girls were either graduates of middle school or vocational secondary schools. However, it is worth noting that school attainment among married girls was lower in Assiut compared to Sohag. While almost all interviewed married girls from Sohag had completed vocational secondary education, the majority from Assiut had completed either preparatory or primary education, while a few were illiterate. On average, the girls had got married at the age of 17, and all of them were homemakers. Husbands' educational attainment varied significantly from illiteracy to high school graduation. A few of them were currently students, while the majority were graduates of vocational high schools and working in blue-collar jobs. Most mothers were homemakers, while fathers were either farmers or wage workers.

KEY FINDINGS

I. MEN'S DECISION TO MARRY

According to the research participants, the age range of marriage for men in the study communities varies widely. While some get married by the age of 18, many would not make this decision until they had completed compulsory military service and secured a job, in order to ensure financial independence. In some instances, this may not happen until men are in their mid-thirties.

Typically, young men do exercise considerable choice in the selection of their future spouse. However, the groom's mother may also play a vital role in selecting her future daughter-in-law, particularly if the son is working abroad. Also, in some instances men find potential spouses through friends, neighbors, or matchmakers.

“ Yes, there are young men who choose the bride for themselves. For example, if a guy meets a girl whom he knows well, and he knows her family, or she is a neighbor, and they were brought up together and he knows that she’s well mannered, he will keep an eye on her until he talks to his mother and father about proposing to her.”

(Brother, 20, vocational secondary education, unemployed, Sohag)

“ There are guys whose mothers choose [a bride] for them, and other guys who choose their brides for themselves. Usually, the mother goes to visit the bride-to-be’s family and brings a relative along. If his mother approves of the bride-to-be, the groom will then meet her. If he likes her as well, he will propose; if not, then it’s over.”

(Unmarried girl, 18, student at higher education institute, Assiut)

“ The male is the one who chooses his bride. If he likes someone, I will send his mother to go and see her. If the son is abroad or isn’t around, we the parents are the ones who go and meet a bride to-be, or we recommend him a bride who we believe is good.”

(Father, 51, vocational secondary education, worker, Assiut)

After selecting a prospective bride, men consult with first-degree relatives (e.g., mothers, fathers, elder brothers) or close friends before proposing to her. Often prospective grooms seek their parents’ approval of the wives they

choose; however, parents cannot force their son to marry a girl he does not like. In some instances, a young man could marry a girl even if his family does not approve of her.

“ If I choose a girl whom my parents don’t approve of, I will leave her and obey them. And if they recommend a girl whom I don’t like, I will say no as I have to like her.”

(Brother, 18, student in vocational secondary school, Sohag)

“ If my son tells me that there’s a girl that he likes and wants to marry, and I don’t like her, I would share my opinion and tell him that we aren’t happy with her and point out her flaws. However, the final decision is his.”

(Father, 49, illiterate, peasant, Assiut)

Why do some men prefer to marry child brides?

In all interviews, there was an agreement that a man should marry a woman who is younger than him. However, marrying child brides *per se* is mostly favored by less educated men and parents who have only one son, as they would

rather have him get married and start a family at an early age. When a key informant was asked about the characteristics of a man who would marry an underage age girl, she said:

“ The man who would marry her would either be illiterate or would have finished a preparatory school education, or maybe a vocational diploma at the maximum.”

(Female, 36, NGO program officer, Sohag)

“ Parents of an only child usually want to marry off their son as early as possible. This way, he will start a family and have a child who can support him. His mother would be happy to marry him off early as he is her only child, and they usually choose for him a younger bride.”

(Father, 62, vocational secondary education, retired, Sohag)

When probing the reasons that would prompt a man to marry an underaged girl, it was reiterated across all narratives that younger girls tend to be more obedient and submissive to their

husbands and can easily adapt to the habits of their spouses and their in-laws. A young girl is also expected to be more capable of helping her mother-in-law with household chores.

“ My son wants to marry early because he wants a son who is like a brother to him and because a young girl is usually obedient and almost like dough that he can bend and shape as he likes.”

(Mother, 38, primary education, homemaker, Assiut)

“ Because I raised her myself and I made it clear I am into her since she was 12 years old. When she turned 15, I proposed and we got engaged. After she turned 16, we waited for a year and then we got married when she was 17.”

(Husband, 37, illiterate, worker, Sohag)

Furthermore, there is a belief that a child bride is more fertile and may stay healthy despite giving birth to many children. Accordingly, she

would still be able to look after her husband when he gets old.

“ When a man is getting married, he goes for the younger bride because he wants her to give birth to, like, three children, while she’s still young. This way, his children will grow up with him.”

(Brother, 19, vocational secondary education, worker, Assiut)

When one man who had married a bride when she was under 18 was asked why he took this decision, he said:

“ To serve my mother and father and serve me as well. I want her to prepare everything so I can shower every night after I come back from work.”

(Husband, 21, illiterate, worker, Sohag)

Since marrying a virtuous, well-mannered woman was narrated as a prime concern for all men, some men choose to marry an underage girl to ensure that she was not previously engaged or in a romantic relationship with another man. In the same light, some husbands indicated that

they would marry their close relatives before reaching the legal age, as they already knew them and their families, and thus they would not need to do a premarital background check before proposing.

“ The most important reason is to marry a respectable girl who has had no previous relationships. Any girl above 18 usually has a phone and has probably talked with other guys. Thus, he would rather go for the safer option and choose a girl under 18, or even under 17.”

(Brother, 18, preparatory education, farmer, Assiut)

Are husbands/prospective husbands aware of the risks associated with marrying a child bride?

While a few husbands asserted that marrying underage girls did not expose them to any risks, most respondents were aware of the potential challenges husbands of child brides could face. According to some men’s stories, a child bride’s young age, immaturity, and her limited commu-

nication skills leave her unable to adequately bear marriage responsibilities, such as carrying out household chores and caring for her husband and children. Those risks tend to be more pronounced when there is a large husband-wife age gap. A husband from Assiut stated:

“ It depends on the girl; if she’s young and cannot bear any household responsibilities, this can lead to divorce and many problems, and this is common.”

(Husband, 24, primary school education, plasterer, Assiut)

A brother of an adolescent girl commented:

“ [There may be challenges] because she’s young and immature, and she cannot judge things properly or even deal with her husband at this age. She also doesn’t have the capacity to raise kids if she gives birth soon after marriage.”

(Brother, 18, secondary school student, Sohag)

Almost all respondents were cognizant of the negative health consequences child marriage could bring for the girls and how this would in turn put their husbands under financial strain. Some husbands explained that their wives had

experienced dangerous complications during pregnancy and childbirth, such as anemia, severe bleeding, and repeated miscarriages, due to their young age and immature bodies. A husband from Sohag shared his experience:

“ She got pregnant soon after we got married. Afterwards, my life became miserable. She needs a doctor every minute. My daily earnings are all spent on her. By the time she has to give birth, we won't have any money. I don't know what to do.”

(Husband, 37, illiterate, street vendor, Sohag)

Another husband observed serious health risks for his underage wife:

“ My wife faced some risks in her pregnancy because she is young. She had to go through a C-section and couldn't have a natural birth. This is because she is young; her body was too fragile and couldn't bear the pregnancy and childbirth.”

(Husband, 28, illiterate, street vendor, Sohag)

The legal implications of marrying an underage girl were also brought up in the interviews with husbands. A common scenario is that a hus-

band fails to obtain a birth certificate for his child given that the marriage was not officially registered due to his wife's young age.

“ When I got married, my wife got pregnant soon after and we were blessed with a boy. For three years, I couldn't get a birth certificate until I legalized my marriage and obtained a marriage contract. Issuing him the birth certificate was quite burdensome; we had to go to the health center and police office and we had to do many procedures to register him because the certificate wasn't issued at the time he was born.”

(Husband, 28, illiterate, street vendor, Sohag)

“ The risks that husbands [involved in child marriages] face are related to the children. If you have children, you won't be able to register them. Then they cannot go to school and their movement will be restricted. However, fathers of child brides face more risks because at any point in the marriage, their daughters could get abandoned and he will not be able to do anything.”

(Brother, 20, high school diploma, driver, Sohag)

II. MARITAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS WITHIN THE CHILD BRIDE'S FAMILY

The proposal stage

Typically, after a prospective groom ensures that the potential bride is “decent” and comes from a reputable family, either he or one of his family members approaches the child bride’s parents to check whether there is initial inter-

est. In most cases, the suitor’s mother and sister are the first to visit the potential bride’s family to check on the girl, while in other instances the groom’s father accompanies his son on the first visit.

“*My cousin’s wife got me a suitor who lives in her family’s neighborhood. She told him about me, and his mother and sister came to visit us at home. The next day he came and I sat down with him.*”

(Married girl, 19, illiterate, homemaker, Assiut)

If the suitor is not a cousin or an acquaintance, males in a bride-to-be’s family including her father, brothers, and uncles will thoroughly investigate his reputation and his financial situation

prior to making a decision. In households where a father is deceased, the girl’s brother or paternal/maternal uncle takes over the responsibility of accepting or refusing a suitor.

“*My father initially took part in the decision-making and my uncles also supported my father on that. A girl cannot get married without her uncles asking about the suitor first. Before any marriage takes place in our family, this should happen first.*”

(Married girl, 19, vocational secondary education, homemaker, Assiut)

“*A suitor proposed to my sister when she was 16. My father had passed away, and my mother accepted because she found him to be well-off with good living conditions. However, my siblings refused and said that she can’t get married for another two years.*”

(Unmarried girl, 18, preparatory school education, unemployed, Assiut)

While fathers or male guardians have the authority to make the final decision when it comes to a girl's marriage, other family members, such as brothers and grandfathers, can influence the decision-making process. For example, the brothers of the bride can play a role through asking about the reputation and financial situation of the prospective husband. In some families, brothers will also contribute to the

costs of marriage of their sisters and may even postpone their own marriage until their sisters get married. A girl's mother might also have a strong influence by intervening to convince her husband to either proceed with or delay the girl's early marriage. Noticeably, this was more common in interviews with respondents from Assiut than Sohag.

“Of course, he has an important role in asking about the suitor and gathering enough details about him. He asks about his whereabouts and who he spends his time with.”

(Brother, 22, university student, Assiut)

“I spend most of the time home while my son goes around the village all the time and knows everyone. If he tells me that the suitor isn't suitable, I will surely listen to his advice.”

(Father, 60, illiterate, peasant, Sohag)

“My father wants to marry us off to any suitor, but my mother is opposing him. She had a difficult life with our father and doesn't want us to end up like her.”

(Unmarried girl, 19, vocational secondary education, unemployed, Assiut)

“My uncle did not want to marry off his daughter, but his wife kept pushing and insisted that the suitor was decent and well-off. My uncle wanted his daughter to complete her education but eventually the girl got married and now she is pregnant and is in a bad condition as she has to sit her exams. She has hypertension and anemia and it is risky. Hence, while some fathers have upper hand others don't.”

(Mother, 37, primary school education, homemaker, Assiut)

The marriage process

The dowry (*mahr*) and wedding gift (*shabka*), both paid by the groom's side, are key issues

in the marriage negotiations, as fathers want to ensure that the groom-to-be is financially capable of securing a comfortable life for their daughters. A mutual agreement is reached

based on the financial status of both families and the norms within both the child bride's family and the surrounding community. The bride's age, however, does not play a role in determining the amount of dowry, according to the study participants. As with marriage discussions around adult women, negotiations and decisions on the dowry and other financial matters related to a girl's marriage are usually confined to men from both families, including the groom, his father, the bride's father and sometimes the uncles of brides or grooms.

As child marriage is illegal under Egyptian law, couples cannot issue a legal marriage contract if the bride is below the legal age of 18. Accordingly, families resort to a marriage officiant or a "sheikh" in their community in order to arrange a religious marriage that is known as "Sunnah marriage," and wait until the child bride turns 18 to officiate the marriage. In the presence of the child bride's father, the groom usually writes a check for a certain agreed upon amount which he gives to the girl's father to protect the child bride's rights and serve as a deterrent in

case problems arise before legalizing the marriage. The above process usually involves the male stakeholders only; the child bride and female family members are not involved in such discussions.

Do girls have a say in decisions around their marriages?

Once the girl's father approves of the suitor, the girl is consulted. However, if a father/male guardian disapproves of a suitor, it is very unlikely that the marriage will take place even if the girl is in favor of him. Perceptions of the extent of girls' participation in decisions around their own marriage varied largely across participants. Overall, most participants agreed that a father or a male guardian cannot force a daughter into an unwanted marriage. However, the extent to which girls were making informed decisions was questionable, as some girls had to submit to their parents' wishes regardless of their own opinion, while others accepted just to be like other girls in the family who had got married.

A 19-year-old adolescent girl who had married as a child spoke about the decision-making process:

“ *I was doing the laundry when he came and asked for my father. I was passing by and he saw me and I'm not used to that. My father came to meet him, then he asked me to greet him, and I was confused because I never come out when there are strangers. After some time, his mother and aunt came to propose, and I was shocked as I had no idea about the whole matter. I asked my father, and he said that he asked about him and found him to be respectful and from a good family.* **”**

(Married girl, 19, primary school education, homemaker, Assiut)

A father from Sohag said:

“ Nobody forces his daughter to marry a certain suitor. You cannot force your daughter to get married, and you have to consult her even if the suitor is her cousin. The girl has to choose her future husband by herself, because she is the one who will end up living with him. Even if he has tons of money, it’s over if she says no.”

(Father, 52, able to read and write, farmer, Sohag)

An unmarried girl commented:

“ She accepts because she finds all her friends got married and her family accepts marrying off underage daughters. It’s usually a norm within her family. What applies to them would apply to her as well.”

(Unmarried girl, 19, vocational secondary education, unemployed, Assiut)

On the other hand, some girls do succeed in convincing their parents to postpone their marriage.

“ If a suitor proposes and the father approves of him while the daughter refuses, the daughter’s opinion will usually prevail because she is the one who will live with him. Sometimes, some people will interfere and try to convince her. However, it isn’t common now to force your daughter to get married.”

(Unmarried girl, 18, vocational secondary education, unemployed, Assiut)

A 19-year-old girl from Sohag, who was engaged, explained that she had decided to postpone her marriage until she completes her education. Interestingly, she added that her father supported her decision although other family members disagreed.

“ I refused and indicated that I didn’t want to get married until I finish my diploma. It was my decision, but my father disapproved [of the decision to marry] as well. My grandmother and uncles wanted me to get married, but my father refused.”

(Unmarried girl, 19, secondary school student, Sohag)

While child brides may have a say in accepting or refusing a suitor, they are totally excluded from discussions related to their financial rights regarding the marriage. As mentioned above, decisions on the amount of dowry and financial

assurances for protecting the girl's rights (e.g. deferred dowry payment) until the marriage is legally registered are made entirely by the girl's father and male family members.

“ We asked a sheikh to come to arrange for a Sunnah marriage after we did the tests. I didn't know anything about the person who was assigned to do that, or his job. I didn't know anything and I didn't even sit with them. I was only asked by my father to stamp my fingerprint on the papers because I am illiterate. I didn't know anything about the guarantees either.”

(Married girl, 19, illiterate, homemaker, Assiut)

“ On the marriage day, a marriage officiant came home to arrange the Sunnah marriage. I wasn't present during the marriage vows, and I was only asked to sign when they finalized the discussions.”

(Married girl, 19, primary school education, homemaker, Assiut)

“ The fathers of the bride and groom are the ones who are responsible. Females do not get involved in those discussions, and nor do the groom or the bride have a say. Our uncles were asked to contribute to the discussions, so my father can consult them. However, the final say is left to the fathers of the groom and the bride.”

(Married girl, 19, vocational secondary education, homemaker, Assiut)

III. PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND RISKS OF CHILD MARRIAGE AMONG GIRLS' FAMILIES

Why would a father agree to marry off his daughter before age 18?

A combination of factors and circumstances may prompt a family to opt for marrying off their daughter before she turns 18. The concept of securing protection for a girl, known as *sutra*,

was recurrent in almost all narratives as a key factor underpinning fathers' decisions to marry off their underage daughters.

“ Marriage is sutra for a girl because she’s now with her husband so nobody will talk about her whereabouts or comment on how she is dressed. She’s now a married woman and her father is no longer responsible for her.”

(Unmarried girl, 18, secondary school student, Sohag)

“ If a father has several daughters, he will want to marry them off as marriage is sutra. A father will not live long enough for them, so he is keen about his daughters’ sutra.”

(Husband, 18, secondary school student, Assiut)

Poverty was one of the most cited factors prompting a father to marry off his underage daughter. A high dowry could serve as a motivating factor for a father to marry off his daughter before reaching the legal age. Also, in large

families with more than one daughter, fathers may resort to marrying off one daughter at an early age as a way to reduce the financial burden and prepare for the marriage of her sisters.

“ If a suitor is well off and has money, the father will approve of the marriage and let him marry his daughter despite any other problems he has.”

(Husband, 30, post-secondary institute, construction supervisor, Sohag)

“ A father prefers to marry off his daughter at an early age because if he has other daughters, then she will clear the way for the rest to get married as well. Marriage ensures safety and sutra for the girl too. If the father is an old man, he wants to marry her off before anything bad happens to him, and this will also lift the financial burden off his shoulders.”

(Brother, 18, vocational secondary school student, Sohag)

Consanguinity was another factor that was associated with child marriage. Several fathers indicated that they would only marry off their daughters at the age of 14/15 if the suitor was

a cousin or a relative, to avoid any uncertainties that could arise without legal documentation of the marriage.

“Certain families are used to marrying off their daughters at an early age. Usually, a man will marry one of his cousins early.”

(Father, 51, vocational secondary education, worker, Assiut)

“Relatives also get married at an early age. Even if a girl is still young, she can marry her cousin.”

(Husband, 30, post-secondary institute, construction supervisor, Sohag)

Fear of losing future marriage opportunities was also cited as a factor that pushes parents to marry off their daughters at an early age. According to social norms, girls remaining unmar-

ried beyond their mid-twenties are perceived negatively by their communities and are even referred to as “spinsters.”

“The problem here in Upper Egypt is that if a girl reaches 25 years old without getting married, she is considered a spinster.”

(Husband, 30, post-secondary diploma, construction worker, Sohag)

“Some families have the inherited traditions of marrying off their daughters at an early age. They believe it is better for their daughters to get married rather than stay at home. If she gets older, she may miss her chance to get married.”

(Unmarried girl, 18, vocational secondary education, unemployed, Assiut)

Are girls' fathers/male guardians aware of the risks associated with child marriage?

Fathers are well aware of both the legal and health risks of child marriage. According to respondents' stories, the primary risk was the absence of an official marriage contract to ensure protection of the child bride's rights in case of a divorce or the husband's death. In such cases, a bride's father usually bears the financial and social consequences of the unregistered marriages. On health risks, several fathers and

brothers mentioned risks related to pregnancy and childbirth such as miscarriages, anemia, and pre-eclampsia. It is noteworthy that fathers and brothers were more concerned about the legal consequences that could arise from child marriages than health risks and indicated that legal risks were the main deterrent that would keep them from marrying off their daughters/female siblings at an early age.

“ If he divorces her, she has no rights and her children won’t have any rights either as they aren’t registered and don’t have birth certificates.”

(Father, 43, vocational secondary education, worker, Sohag)

“ If any marital problems occur and she gets divorced, her father is the one who bears it all, because she has no proof [of a legal marriage].”

(Father, 52, illiterate, peasant, Assiut)

“ It once happened here in our village. A husband passed away before the marriage was legalized, and his family put the wife out of their house when she was pregnant. When the child was born, he was registered under the girl’s father’s name. The child was her brother and son at the same time.”

(Brother, 22, university student, Assiut)

“ [Child brides] can face several risks during pregnancy; she might experience preeclampsia because of her young age.”

(Father, 51, vocational secondary education, worker, Sohag)

“ A girl can die from having sex and getting pregnant at this young age. She is still young and her body cannot tolerate this at such a young age.”

(Brother, 18, student, Sohag)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study confirm that, in line with the patriarchal norms which underlie most marriage decisions in rural Upper Egypt, fathers/ male guardians are the primary decision makers as to when a girl gets married and to whom. Other family members such as mothers, brothers and uncles could play a role in influencing the father's decision. Poverty and fear about the girl's reputation push fathers to marry off their underage daughters while misconceptions about masculinity along with inequitable gender norms drive men to seek marrying child brides to ensure their subordination. Lack of financial, cognitive and social capital undermine girls' negotiating power and push them to accept marriage at an early age, sometimes without their full consent. However, in some instances when girls have enough agency and skills, they are able to mobilize support from other family members and manage to stop an early or unwanted marriage from happening.

Accordingly, the following recommendations are suggested to curb child marriage in rural Upper Egypt:

- As men have the upper hand when it comes to the marital decision-making process in rural Upper Egypt, interventions to end child marriage should target fathers, young men and adolescent boys. These men could be reached through religious institutions, workplaces, youth centers, and schools.
- Messages targeting fathers and young men should focus on challenging gender stereotypes, fostering husband-wife communication, and raising awareness of the health and legal risks of child marriage.
- The engagement and active participation of men in targeted interventions need to

be incentivized through the portrayal of role models who actively challenge gender norms and resist child marriage in a given community.

- Efforts should be made to amend the current marriage law to allow for penalizing religious leaders who officiate those marriages, as well as fathers who marry off their underage daughters.
- Support mechanisms (e.g., child protection committees and hotlines) should be made known to girls who are at risk of child marriage.
- School curricula should raise girls' awareness of the risks of child marriage, their legal rights and encourage them to complete their secondary and higher education and pursue an active role in society.
- Safe spaces that provide social and economic empowerment opportunities should be made available for adolescent girls in rural Upper Egypt. This would enable girls to raise their voices and enhance their status within their families and communities.
- Financial assistance with school fees and supplies may be considered as a strategy for encouraging parents from poor families to keep their daughters in school and hence delay their marriage.
- Social and traditional media should challenge inequitable gender norms and stereotypes, highlight the risks of child marriage, and promote girls' education and active participation in various public domains.
- Implementation science research is needed to identify more effective interventions that change social norms and men's gender attitudes, and that contribute to the abandonment of child marriage.

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