



Tied in a Knot

Understanding Maintaining Factors of Child Marriage

Mapping Voices of Girls, Parents & Teachers



TALASH
Society for Inner Strength, Peace & Equality



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Ayesha Sinha
On behalf of Talash
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From the Team Leader

Talash has been working on preventing early, forced and child marriage for the past five years in four blocks of Malda district in West Bengal. The intervention aims at supporting adolescent girls to discover and nurture their inner power for combating life's challenges, including issues of early marriage and sexual abuse. The process intends to enhance their abilities to understand consent, make safer decisions and negotiate difficult situations, thereby developing their agency. During this period of intervention, we have observed through interactions that a large section of people – adolescents to adults – are fully aware about the legal age of marriage and the law against child marriage. Adults in most cases are aware of the impacts of early marriage as well. Even survivors of early marriage coming out of abusive situations and returning to their parental homes with children are not at all uncommon in our work areas.

We have observed that active adults who have been vocal about impacts of early marriage on girls' lives, later themselves married off their daughters before the legal age of marriage in the pretext of ensuring safety. Girls taking proactive roles in articulating their opinions against early marriage eloped with their boyfriends. We came across an incident where, being fully aware that her boyfriend has a wife and children, the girl still ran away and got married. She herself was one of the most active peer leaders. After her marriage, during a conversation, she expressed that she is aware that her marriage may not last for long. Yet, she mentioned, being with her beloved even for a brief while would offer her the gratification she was craving for.

In our experience, economic poverty, stated in most cases as one of the primary causes of early marriage, is not playing the pivotal role in many situations.

We have noticed anxieties and fears among parents about the safety of girls; insecurities about their future; as well as concern about family honour being compromised. We have experienced the apprehension of adults about adolescent girls being able to take care of their own selves. Voices from the fields about causes of early marriage reinforced our perceptions of gender and sexuality playing a crucial role, apart from other issues.

Against this backdrop, we felt the need to probe deeper about the reasons behind parents and girls themselves keeping the practice of underage marriage alive, in spite of being fully aware of legal aspects and impacts of early marriage on a girl's life. The current study was planned from the urge to decode the driving force of this social practice. Understanding the psychosocial factors that facilitate the practice of early marriage to continue is crucial, in our belief, to arrive at a clearer vision about the social custom, so that a more defined direction to the intervention can be chalked out. It is with that aim that this study was conducted and the findings confirm our hypothesis.

Ayesha Sinha

For and on behalf of the Talash Team

Executive Summary

Background & Rationale

Talash has been implementing the “**Preventing Early Marriage through Personal Safety & Wellbeing Education**” project within eight Gram Panchayats spread over four blocks in the district of Malda. Supported by UNICEF, Kolkata Field Office, and in collaboration with the District Administration of Malda, Talash started the process of implementation in 2012 and continued till 2015. This experience brought to the fore the possibility of communities holding hidden beliefs that do not necessarily get reflected in their stated reasons for marrying off girls before reaching the legal age of marriage. This prompted Talash to undertake a mapping exercise to understand the unspoken beliefs/ perceptions/ compulsions that determine community behaviour with reference to underage marriage of girls – to arrive at a deeper understanding of those hidden layers.

The main aim of the mapping study was to probe for unspoken belief patterns/ perceptions that guide community behaviour with reference to underage marriage of girls. Accordingly, the main questions were defined by the research team as follows:

1. What prompts parents to arrange underage marriage for girls
2. Why girls agree to such a marriage
3. Why elopement has become prevalent
4. Why girls comply with elopement

1.2 Methodology

A **cross sectional survey method** was adopted, using a questionnaire with four sections – with each section having an open-ended segment. For further corroboration, **focus group discussions** were also conducted with the same group of respondents. **A total of 138 girls in the age-group of 10 – 17 years** were covered as the population group directly affected by the practice; **74 parents** were covered as the secondary affected group; and **72 teachers** were covered as responsible community representatives. Areas with high incidence of early marriage and trafficking were deliberately selected as the locale for this study to increase its relevance. Tools were designed with special attention to the need to capture deep-seated psychological factors that remain unspoken.

Quantitative data have been analysed using both the simple Excel format and the more complicated ANOVA technique so as to retain any possible distinctiveness of responses. Qualitative data have been used for further corroboration.

1.3 Major Findings

1. People have endorsed factors/beliefs that they do not fully agree with – thereby indicating a possibility that there are invisible motivations underneath.
2. Negative factors of anxieties and apprehensions compel parents to yield to the custom of underage marriage for their daughters. No positive motivation prompts this behaviour.

Factors prompting parents to arrange an early marriage

- Adolescent boys go out in search of work at a very early age in Habibpur. Parents prefer to get them married before they go out to work in unknown territories.

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- Continuing a girl's education would need the parents to search for a more educated and older groom, who would also demand a higher dowry. This concern by parents acts as a fuelling factor for early marriage.
 - A significant section of the population in the mapping areas supports and encourages higher education for girls. Yet they, too, submit to the tradition as they do not find their voice powerful enough against the prevalent social customs. Female parents, in particular, have substantiated this point with their own lived experience.
 - Many male parents mentioned that getting a desired groom from their own caste is difficult. Inter-caste marriage is not acceptable in their community. So whenever there is a proposal from their own caste, they consider it unwise and risky to forego that. Thus, they opt for early marriages.
 - If the girl is married off within the same caste early, her physical appearance and sexual attractiveness are often less important. The assumption is that with age she will gradually bloom and become more attractive.
 - If left at home, the girl may attain sexual maturity and get involved in undesirable sexual encounters. This could result in bad reputation and loss of family honour.

1.4 Key Pointers

1. The sexual needs or desire of adolescent girls is an anxiety in all the four blocks. This leads to a state of near paranoia about any connection between adolescent girls and boys. Underage marriage is seen as the safest escape route from such a situation.
2. This anxiety results from the denial of a girl's natural sexual needs and her right to have them fulfilled. It is deeply connected with the traditional perception of girls and women as reproductive beings only, rather than as sexual beings and the institution of marriage is inseparably connected with this perception.
3. Girls also share this same view of marriage being necessary for sexual encounters to happen, so that elopement and marriage with the person of her own choice becomes inevitable in the absence of any open communication with parents about her own choice and preference.
4. Romance, eroticism and sexuality of girls are not accepted at all, even though the unconscious acceptance of these natural phenomena guide the practice of underage marriage – whether by parents or by girls themselves through elopement. This traditional denial is rooted deeply in the collective psyche of adults and gets manifested through the restrictions on girls' mobility, education and other forms of freedom of choice. **Interventions aimed at eliminating these restrictions, thus, address external behavioural manifestations only – without delving into the unconscious denial that causes such behaviour.**
5. The Traditional practice of denying equal status to children and the deep-seated conviction that parents know best results in the girls never being heard and heeded. This lack of communication results in further complications that facilitate underage marriage. Any intervention to change these behaviour patterns have to address these unconscious, unspoken factors therefore – not just awareness raising about the impacts of underage marriage. **It has come out very clearly from the mapping study that understanding of the ill effects of underage marriage do not necessarily result in actually refraining from the practice.**

1.5 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this mapping exercise, the thematic areas that must guide interventions towards prevention of underage marriage become clear. They are listed below:

1. There needs to be a strong focus on building up the agency of girls, along with their understanding of personal safety and wellbeing.
2. Simultaneously, work has to continue with adults to build their trust in the agency and ability of children, especially girls..
3. Develop an understanding among both adults and children, especially girls, about the existence of feminine eroticism and sexuality, along with romantic feelings, as 'natural'..
4. Explore the understanding of equality in relationship between parents and children, especially with girls so that their preference and choice with reference to life events, including marriage, are heard and heeded by parents.
5. Facilitate the process of evolving a language of communication between adults and children about love, romance, eroticism and sexuality – thereby changing the complete lack of dialogue that is currently the norm.

1 Introduction

1.1 Backdrop

The understanding of a 'child' as a person below or 18 years of age is a rather recent phenomenon, so that child marriage as we understand today cannot be said to have been prevalent before. Going by available historical references, marriageable age was fixed by tribal customs, mostly coinciding with the onset of puberty, i.e. with menarche for girls and the appearance of pubic hair for boys. This was a global phenomenon among ancient civilisations. Indian scriptures, however, reflect that a system of pre-puberty marriage for girls was also prevalent (in the form of 'Gouri dana' – a system of getting girls not older than eight to be married off, considered as a means to secure a place in heaven for the father), though cohabitation with the husband and conjugality would start only after menarche.

It is to be acknowledged that Europe has been leading the process of reforms in the age of marriage. The first reference to any question of consent with regard to marriage is just about 800 years old. It is in the 12th century that an influential jurist and founder of Canon Law in medieval Europe accepted 12 – 14 as the age of puberty and thereby of marriage, though the age of consent to marriage was fixed much lower at 7 years only. The first recorded age of consent law dates back to 1275 and was formulated in England as part of a rape law. The age of marriage in England and the rest of Europe stood at 12 for girls and 14 for boys at that point of time.

As far as India is concerned, the year 1921 constitutes the earliest available reference to any demand for legally fixing the age of marriage for girls and boys: Lala Girdhari Lal asked the ruling British government to enact a law prohibiting the marriage of girls below 11 and boys below 14. But the government refused to pass any such legislation, arguing that it was better for a private member to present such a Bill, because of the social backwardness of India. It would need many more attempts by private Indian members before the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1929, defining a girl under 14 and a boy under 18 to be a child. This law, however, had too many lacunae, needing a reform in 1938.

It was much later in 1955 that the Hindu Marriage Law would mark 15 for girls and 18 for boys as the legal age of marriage, though it did not specify any punishment in case of a violation. Also, this was not a secular law guiding marriages under all religions. It was as late as 1978 that the Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872, Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 were amended to fix the age of marriage at 18 for females and 21 for males. The Muslim Personal Law remained beyond this amendment. Also, this amendment failed to curb the actual practice of underage marriage.

True political will in eliminating the practice of early marriage through law was actually expressed only 10 years ago, when in 2006, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was passed. This law has enabling provisions to prohibit child marriage, with specific punishments for anyone abetting, promoting and solemnising such marriages. The law also has provisions to offer protection and relief to victims through creating particular mechanisms such as Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, and allows victims to annul such marriages even after attaining legal adulthood.

Marriage of both girls and boys at the onset of puberty, or even before – especially for girls – has thus been a long-time custom in this country and is deeply entrenched in social and community practices,

therefore. Defining the legal age of marriage and the enactment of a law to ensure the prohibition of underage marriage is a necessary step, of course, but is not sufficient in itself to eradicate such a deeply rooted practice as child marriage – which continues due to a complex set of factors.

The National Family Health Survey, Round 4 (2015-16), reflects that 40.7% women in the age bracket of 20 – 24 were married before the age of 18. The rural percentage of underage marriage for girls is 46.3%, while the urban share is 27.7%. Underage marriage continues to be a reality for males also, though at a considerably lower rate. The same report depicts that a total of 24% men aged between 25 – 29 years of age were married before the age of 21, with the rural/urban divide being 26.5% and 19.7% respectively.¹ Government of West Bengal lists Malda as the third highest district in terms of underage marriage for girls, with as high as 56.07% prevalence.²

It is against this backdrop that Talash has been implementing the “**Preventing Early Marriage through Personal Safety & Wellbeing Education**” project within eight Gram Panchayats spread over four blocks in the district of Malda. Supported by UNICEF, Kolkata Field Office, and in collaboration with the District Administration of Malda, Talash started the process of implementation in 2012 and continued till 2015. This experience brought to the fore the possibility of communities holding hidden beliefs that do not necessarily get reflected in their stated reasons for marrying off girls before reaching the legal age of marriage. For instance, in course of implementing this project, Talash discovered that people are aware of the legal age of marriage for girls; of the presence of a law against underage marriage, and even of the possible impacts of early marriage on sexual and reproductive health. But, such awareness has not led to the elimination of the practice. This is the understanding that prompted Talash to undertake a mapping exercise to understand the unspoken beliefs/ perceptions/ compulsions that determine community behaviour with reference to underage marriage of girls. This mapping exercise was carried out with the conviction that a deeper understanding of those hidden layers is indispensable to design an intervention that would address those tacit factors and usher sustainable change in community behaviour, therefore.

1.2 Research Concerns, Methodology & Constraints

The main aim of the mapping study was to probe for unspoken belief patterns/ perceptions that guide community behaviour with reference to underage marriage of girls. Accordingly, the main questions were defined by the research team as follows:

1. What prompts parents to arrange underage marriage for girls
2. Why girls agree to such a marriage
3. Why elopement has become prevalent
4. Why girls comply with elopement

A **cross sectional survey method** was adopted, using a questionnaire with four sections – with each section having an open-ended segment. For further corroboration, **focus group discussions** were also conducted with the same group of respondents. **Girls in the age-group of 10 – 17 years** were covered as the population group directly affected by the practice; **parents** were covered as the secondary affected group; and **teachers** were covered as responsible community representatives.

Areas with high incidence of early marriage and trafficking were deliberately selected as the locale for this study to increase its relevance. Accordingly, the study has been conducted in **four Gram Panchayats across four blocks of Malda district** – Baidyapur in Habibpur block, Sripur II in Ratua II

¹http://rchiips.org/nfhs/pdf/NFHS4/WB_FactSheet.pdf fhs/factsheet_nfhs-4.shtml; p 2

²https://wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_about.php

block, Deotala in Gazole block and Bhabuk in Old Malda block. A total of **138 girls, 74 parents and 72 teachers** spread over these geographical locations have been respondents in this study.

Tools were designed with special attention to the need to capture deep-seated psychological factors that remain unspoken. The questionnaire had four segments to capture the two sets of realities through which underage marriage happens: marriage arranged by parents and girls eloping on their own to marry or marrying underage out of self-choice. The first two segments of the questionnaire focused on marriage arranged by parents and the other two on girls choosing to marry themselves.

- Each set of questions had two types of questions: close-ended and open-ended
- Each segment had a brief storyline as prompt
- Against each prompt, a set of belief statements were presented and the participants were instructed to indicate how far they agree with or contradict each of these belief statements on a score scale ranging from -10 to +10, with the minus sign representing contradiction.

The first sub-segment in the first set (1.1.1 in Table 1 in Appendix) presented belief statements that are likely to be held by parents as those guiding their practice of arranging early marriage for their daughters. The second sub-segment (1.1.2 in Table 1 in Appendix) presented the belief statements likely to be maintained by girls for complying with such a parental decision. The first sub-segment in the second set (1.2.1 in Table 1 in Appendix) presented belief statements that girls possibly hold, which prompt them to comply with the act of elopement. The second sub-segment in the second set (1.2.2 in Table 1 in Appendix) presented possible belief statements among parents that allow them to maintain a state of non-action with reference to underage marriage.

1.2.1 Data Collection & Processing

The Data Collection team consisted of Talash team members trained in data collection, and thirteen trained counsellors with research skills from the *Jadavpur University Centre for Counselling Services & Studies in Self Development*. The close-ended data were collated in excel sheets whereas data from open-ended questions and focus group discussions were collated through the snowball technique to arrive at common themes/ commonalities from the varied responses.

1.2.2 Workflow

For each participant the workflow was as follows:

Brief Explanation about the Survey → Close-ended questionnaire filled with respective belief scores → Collecting responses to open-ended questions → FGD → Follow-up (where feasible).

1.2.3 Data Analysis Protocol

During data analysis, we intended to keep track of inter-individual differences and distinctly different voices which would have otherwise been lost in the quantitative analysis, since their representation would be statistically insignificant. The quantitative analysis provided us with a quick summary description (descriptive statistics) of complete data. Consequently we could arrive at quick meaningful insights which can guide our future policy decisions. This data can be used as a gross monitoring device to see time-to-time changes in the scenario (time-to-time trend analysis).

Initially we pooled the total data obtained from all the four blocks of Malda covered in this study to identify the general trends (normalized mean belief score with respect to each belief statements) in the form of grouped bar charts. This helped us to compare which beliefs are playing more significant roles for each group (girls, parents and teachers). As the second step, we performed one-way (single factor) ANOVA analysis to see whether responses obtained from the four different blocks were similar, or any

block presented significantly different patterns with respect to certain belief statements. This analysis helped us to explore another factor – variation in prevalent belief systems because of different location in the socio-geographic-economic-cultural milieu. This helped us to contextualize the data. Such ANOVA analysis was a later addition as significant insights obtained from qualitative analysis prompted us to go in for further statistical analysis.

1.2.4 Constraints

The mapping has been conducted within a specific geographical and socio cultural backdrop. We worked within a limited time frame, with restricted financial and human resource. This would be more robust if conducted among a wider population, with added time dimension and longitudinal follow-up.

Also, belief statements were formed on the basis of initial group discussions and from our own experiences of working with this population. During the focus group discussions, many new belief statements surfaced, which was not there in the pre-determined questionnaire. A new study with emerged belief statements included, covering a larger geographical area and population would be more effective and convincing.

1.3 Participants' Profile

As already presaged, this mapping exercise has been conducted with adolescent girls within the age range of 12 – 17 years; their parents, particularly female parents; and their school teachers. Most of the girls are school going, with a few dropouts. The respondents were almost equally divided between Hindu and Muslim communities, with majority of them belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe segments. Fifty-five of the 138 adolescent girls interacted with were from BPL families, while another 20 girls were from families with a monthly income of less than Rs 2000, but possessing no BPL cards. Among the girls from non-BPL families, only 10 are from families with a monthly income of Rs 5000 – 8000, while the rest are from families with an average monthly income between Rs 2000 and Rs 5000. With the average family size ranging between five and seven members, such monthly incomes are indicative of resource-constrained situations.

In almost all the families interacted with, fathers and/or brothers are the principal earners. They are mostly farmers with small land holdings (2-5 *bighas*). A considerable number of families also earn their livelihood as landless labourers working in someone else's land. Seasonal migration of male family members to other states to work as labourers under a labour contractor, most often a man from a neighbouring village, was found to be another source of income earning. This migration is particularly seen among families in the Sripur II Gram Panchayat (GP). In the other GPs there is a mix of both farmers and men migrating for work. Of the 138 girls interacted with, approximately 25% have their mothers working. Mothers are mostly working as ICDS workers (helpers) or cooking mid-day meals in schools as part of some Self-Help Groups (SHGs). A small section of women also work in the fields, assisting their husbands and sons. There are still others who bind *beedis* to earn whatever they can for their families.

Few of the girls (20 of 138) interacted with are also involved in economic activities to support their families. These girls are all from families that have an income of less than Rs 2000 per month. They earn from *beedi* binding, working in the fields along with their families and from tailoring – with *beedi* binding being the most common.

2 Significant Findings

2.1 Overview of Major Findings

The mapping exercise has brought forth deep insights about the maintaining factors of child marriage, an overview of which are presented first – before going into the detailed analyses. In the entire process, a conscious attempt has been made to capture different voices – the voice of dissent, of difference, as also the voices signifying commonalities.

One interesting point to note is that there seems to be 'unspeakable' factors underlying the expressed versions of beliefs. We have found that people have endorsed factors/beliefs that they do not fully agree with – thereby indicating a possibility that there are invisible motivations underneath. For endorsing any factor, one may have either positive motivations/ drive or negative apprehensions.

In this overview section, responses have been collated under each key enquiry.

2.1.1 Factors prompting parents to arrange an early marriage

- **Early entry of boys into the labour market:** Adolescent boys go out in search of work at a very early age in Habibpur. Parents prefer to get them married before they go out to work in unknown territories. Parents believe such a marriage to be a safeguard against their sons choosing unsafe means for satisfying their sexual needs – which seems to be a huge concern. Thus, parents look for a girl younger to the boy, who is automatically below the legal age of marriage, since so is the boy.
- **The marriage gradient:** If left at home, girls would need to enrol for higher education. More education with growing age can become challenging for parents to get eligible grooms for their daughters. Parents seem to be deeply influenced by the societal notion of the marriage gradient as per which the groom is required to be superior to the girl in education, earning, and family lineage. So, continuing a girl's education would need the parents to search for a more educated and older groom, who would also demand a higher dowry. This concern was specially expressed by parents of Gazole.
- **Lack of importance about education and self reliance:** There is a difference of opinion about the above point. A significant section of the population in the mapping areas supports and encourages higher education for girls. They believe that in present days girls, too, are required to develop skills for self reliance. Yet they, too, submit to the tradition as they do not find their voice powerful enough against the prevalent social customs. Female parents, in particular, have substantiated this point with their own lived experience.
- **Difficulties in getting a desirable match:** This has been expressed by male parents in Habibpur. They mentioned that getting a desired groom from their own caste is difficult. Inter-caste marriage is not acceptable in their community. So whenever there is a proposal from their own caste, they consider it unwise and risky to forego that. Thus, they opt for early marriages.
- **Insignificance of physical appearance:** If the girl is married off within the same caste early, her physical appearance and sexual attractiveness are often less important. The assumption is that with age she will gradually bloom and become more attractive. That makes negotiations easier for the girls' parents.

-
- **Family honour at stake:** If left at home, the girl may attain sexual maturity and get involved in undesirable sexual encounters. This could result in bad reputation and loss of family honour. She could also be an easy target for male youth in the community, so that the safety of the girl could be hampered.

The above points clearly indicate that the negative factors of anxieties and apprehensions compel parents to yield to the custom of underage marriage for their daughters. No positive motivation prompts this behaviour.

2.1.2 Factors compelling girls to agree to early marriage

- **Centrality of marriage:** As per social norms, marriage is the most significant event in a girl's life cycle. Marriage determines her safety, dignity, identity and social status. Across all social boundaries, marriage is considered to be the most important part of the lives of young people. Both men and women are encouraged to aspire to it from a young age, each in his or her own way. This centrality of marriage is also accompanied by specific norms around marriage, which dictate what an 'ideal' marriage is, and what is not. Marriage is so central that young adults are often eager for it as well. There is often a deep desire for the romance associated with the act and the ritual of marriage itself. Often, the dreams of young people are limited to those that can only be accessed through marriage. However, we have found a strong contradiction about this point. Population got divided in this regard. One group believes in this social norm, while another group strongly contradicted this idea. According to them, it is necessary for girls to work towards self reliance today and marriage will happen anyway.
- **Sexuality:** Control over women's sexuality is central to patriarchal norms prevalent in a society also divided by economic class and caste. Societal value places a premium on the virginity and chastity of young women, such that even a forced sexual encounter is seen as tarring the image of the woman, leaving her less worthy of marriage. These attitudes mean that adolescents themselves do not see sex before marriage as an option. Marriage seems to be the only option for a socially sanctioned and honourable sexual life. Since social norms create a rigid environment, parents who seek control – as well as young people who wish to exercise their sexual agency – have little choice but marriage.
- **Gender norms about social roles:** Women are socialised to believe that their primary role in society is in relation to others – as a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a wife and a mother. These norms restrict women from having aspirations beyond marriage.
- **Fear of not getting desired groom:** Girls seem to believe that their parents are incapable of marrying them with their desired or deserving groom. So whatever choice their parents make, they accept it with the fear that if they do not agree, they may remain unmarried for life.

It was striking that neither the girls nor their parents mentioned that marriage is a way out of hunger and starvation – thereby contradicting the prevalent privileging of economic poverty as the major reason behind underage marriage of girls.

2.1.3 Why girls comply with elopement

- **Parental restrictions & control** – a paradox: Often during interventions, girls talked about parental restrictions and control, and stated this as a cause for running away. During focus group

discussions also, girls of Ratua II mentioned that marrying off is a way to get rid of parental control and restrictions. But in our data, **some girls have strongly contradicted this point also, stating that this is not at all a cause for elopement or agreeing to marry early.**

- **Desire to be with the man of choice:** Girls seem to believe that their parents would not be able to arrange their marriage with a desired and deserving groom. Thus choosing a person on her own and elopement seem to be the strategies suitable to meet their needs.
- **Love: a strong motivation for early marriage:** Falling in love was marked as a positive inspiration for marriage – along with the centrality of marriage in the psychological space of adolescent girls. But, a significant number of girls and parents also contradicted this concept of love being the motivating factor for elopement and marriage. This indicates that there could be other possible ‘unspeakable’ reasons under the cover of love.
- **Lack of understanding and communication:** There is a gap in open communication among parents (either/both) and daughters about their ideas of marriage. Data from this mapping study suggests that girls do not consider getting married as equivalent to being in her ‘own’ home; but parents believe their daughters desire and look forward to finding their ‘own’ home. According to parents, this wish is one of the significant reasons for elopement and marriage, though not corroborated by the girls. This is just one indicator of near total absence of free discussions between parents and girls about likes/dislikes, aspirations/dreams and fantasies. Thoughts about their choice of groom are never discussed. During adolescence changes that take place in body, mind and psyche is a taboo to discuss. Thus girls stay with the notion that their parents would not understand them; while parents believe that they would not listen to adults.
- **It is possible that sexuality plays a pivotal role.** There is no space for adolescents to voice out their sexual desires without being shamed or facing severe consequences. **Prevalent familial and societal norms create a rigid environment where young people who wish to exercise their sexual agency have little choice outside marriage. Our data also align with this notion, as mothers have expressed anxiety about the sexual maturity and desire of adolescent girls.**
- **Unaware that they are valued – another paradox:** Girls grow up with the social message that they are a burden for their families. Their socially prescribed primary role is to become a wife, which would provide them with greater dignity and esteem. They learn that being at the parental home is not honourable after a certain age. However, it is important to note that girls and parents both agreed to the statement that higher education is important and the monetary aspect is not an issue in arranging underage marriage for their daughters. Thus, it is not that parents do not value their daughters and many of them actually may not consider their daughters as a burden at all.
- It has, therefore, emerged that **there is need for further probing in this area – to try and understand why girls undervalue themselves in their natal families, as also their perception of their value in their marital homes.** It is possible that girls’ being made aware of being valued by their parents, that marriage is not the only goal of her life and she has other roles to play, might lead her to reconsider the choice of elopement.
- **Opinions are sharply divided with reference to other belief statements** as the cause of elopement. Statements like influence of friends or early sexual maturity are two such instances of debate.

2.1.4 Why elopement has become prevalent – Understanding Parents’ Voices

Three basic thought patterns emerged from the data:

- **The Safety Factor:** Prevailing perception that marriage provides social safety and dignity, and also acts as a safeguard against sexual violence.
- **Economic Advantages:**
 - A section of participants were of the opinion that if a girl runs away, she actually helps the family by decreasing the expenditure.
 - A section of participants were found to believe that if the girl runs away with an economically better-off groom, she will be entitled to get a share of her in-law’s property.
 - In families with several daughters, if one of them elopes, parents feel relieved that the expenses for one marriage are saved.
- **Social Consequences:** If a girl is left at her parental home unmarried for long, a range of challenges can arise:
 - Girls may marry someone from a different caste
 - May fall in love and enter into a romantic engagement
 - Undesirable incidents can occur, which would involve the violation of social norms, some of which might have unpalatable impact

Taking the voices of the girls and their parents together, it may be pointed out that there seems to be **unconscious social sanctions for girls getting involved in romantic relationships and choosing to elope**. Parents seem to unconsciously overlook the fact of their daughters becoming romantically involved and this act of overlooking actually plays a pivotal role. **It is almost as if parents tacitly approve of their daughters’ affairs by choosing to look away**. Some voices from the parents testify to this hypothesis, as reflected below:

‘... Actually we as parents may not be able to bring such a good match ourselves. It would be beyond our reach and affordability.’

‘Girls today go out to school; they are aware of the world outside, they get to know so many people ... Their choice is becoming different from ours. We will not be able to bring grooms of their choice at all.’

Parents’ Voices from Focus Group Discussions

It is possible that such a belief pattern also compels parents to refrain from either interfering in a growing affair, or checking the background of the boyfriend at an early stage – so as not to jeopardise the affair in any way. It seems that being ignorant acts as an unconscious defence - an ‘unspeakable’ factor that facilitates elopements.

Complete absence of any dialogue between parents and their daughters about marriage or aspirations about life partners has also emerged as a significant ‘unspeakable’ factor in facilitating underage marriages. Girls comply with marriages arranged by parents even when they are not happy

with the arrangement from the anxiety that they may not be able to create a better option for themselves. When girls get involved romantically, parents choose to look the other way with the belief that they cannot find a better life partner for their daughters. **This absence of dialogues** not only facilitates the continued practice of early marriage, but **is also used by traffickers to lure parents and girls alike.**

2.2 Data Analysis Details

This section captures the details obtained from analysing the data, i.e. the information collected through the analysis of both close-ended and open-ended questions.

2.2.1 Quantitative Statistical Analysis

Bar Charts are presented below to compare the normalised belief scores of each of the three groups of participants: Girls, Parents and Teachers. Each Bar Chart is followed by a Table capturing the statistical observations and interpretations of the scoring of the belief statements. For all Charts and Tables, overall responses of all three categories of respondents have been superposed in the same plot and measured on the same scale for ease of comparison.

Policy 1: Agreement Only Mode: Beliefs evoked by Prompt A – Story I

(Ref: Table 1 Segment 1.1.1 & 1.1.2 of Appendix)

Participants were to indicate their agreement score to 19 pre-determined statements (B1-B19 of Table 1 Segment 1.1.1 & 1.1.2 of Appendix). However, there was also an open response option for those who had opinions not captured by these 19 sentences. These open-ended responses have been presented separately in the qualitative analysis section.

IA.1 What prompted Taslima’s parents to arrange her marriage?

This evoked the beliefs B1-B11 (Table 1 Segment 1.1.1 of Appendix)

Chart IA.1 (Agreement Mode: Story 1)

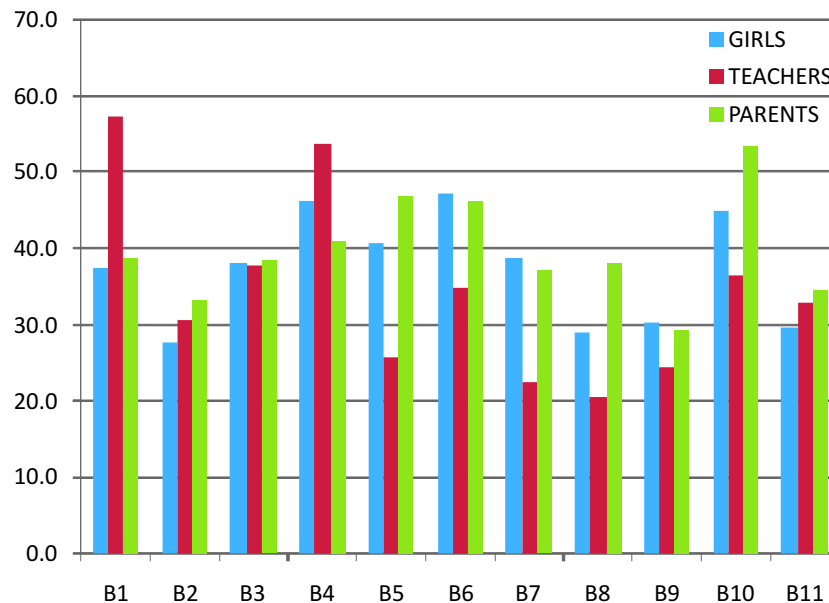


Table: IA.1

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Highest Belief Score – Teachers :</p> <p>B1 : 57.4%</p> <p>B4 : 53.8%</p>	<p>Teachers: B1 & B4 are mostly similar beliefs. It reflects the anxiety that loosing an eligible groom is not a better choice as parents might not get one afterwards. This surfaces their lack of confidence about the agency of girls. Marriage is considered as the key aspect in a girls’ life. Teachers are worried that girls may not get another choice afterwards.</p>
<p>Highest Belief Score – Parents:</p> <p>B10 : 53.2%</p>	<p>Parents: Parents’ response expresses anxieties about family honour and reputation. They seem to strongly believe that their daughters may break social norms and put them in trouble. Their apprehensions are centred around the sexual maturity of their daughters. They fear that girls may not be able to control their hormonal trigger and may feel compelled to engage in romantic alliances.</p>
<p>Highest Belief Score – Girls:</p> <p>B6 : 47.3%</p>	<p>Girls: Girls have given a very high score to B6; even more than parents or teachers. Girls have expressed anxieties about losing honour, or being violated before marriage. Social norms place a premium on the virginity and chastity of young women, such that even a forced sexual encounter is seen as tarring the image of the girl, leaving her less worthy of marriage. Early marriage, they felt, works as a safeguard against these. They even scored B6 more than B10 as they have fears that they may not be able to retain chastity.</p>
<p>Lowest Belief Score Obtained for following statements:</p> <p>B9 :</p> <p>Teachers : 24.3%</p> <p>Parents : 29.2%</p> <p>Girls : 30.2%</p> <p>All 3 categories (Girls, Teachers & Parents) have given least scoring in their belief scores</p> <p>B8 :</p> <p>Parents : 38.1%</p> <p>Girls : 28.9%</p> <p>Teachers : 20.6%</p>	<p>All three categories of respondents have expressed least belief in the statement that girls are meant for domestic work only and they hardly need to go for higher education. Girls are married off to overcome adult anxieties of losing out on eligible grooms or losing their honour. Adult anxieties override their rational thinking. The negative emotions of the fear of breaking social norms, and the tension of losing out on better opportunities force parents to get their daughters married early – rather than any positive motivation.</p> <p>Girls are not aware that their parents and teachers also share the same opinion that girls are not meant only for domestic work. Adults find it difficult to share their anxieties with girls. Girls will be more empowered if they could be openly informed what in reality drives parents to opt for early marriages.</p> <p>With reference to B8, both girls and teachers do not consider that only to have a better life, in respect to food and basic daily needs, it is important to get married early. But parents partially agree to this response, since to them it implies a sense of security.</p> <p>Both B8 & B9 are positive motivations, but these are not driving forces. Anxiety is driving parents more into negative motivation.</p>

Policy 1: Agreement Only Mode: Beliefs evoked by Prompt B – Story I
 (Ref: Table 1 Segment 1.1.1 & 1.1.2 of Appendix)

IB.1 Why Taslima agreed to this marriage

This evoked the beliefs B12-B19 (Table 1 Segment 1.1.2 of Appendix), as presented below:

Chart IB.1 (Agreement Mode: Story 1)

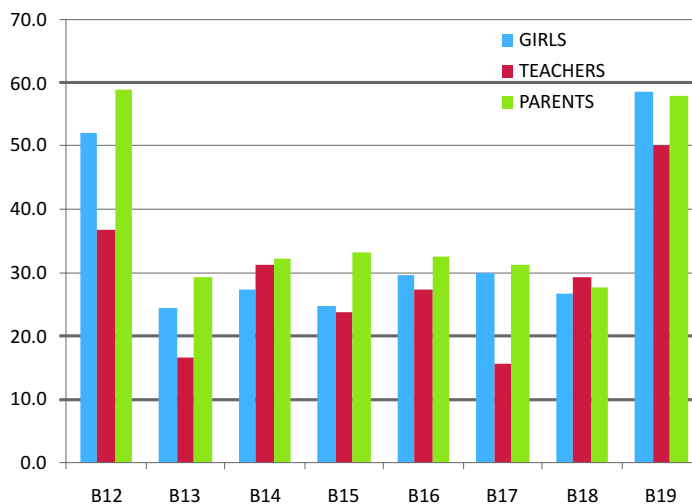


Table: IB.1

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Highest Belief Score Obtained for following statements:</p> <p>B12: Parents: 58.8% Girls : 52.1%</p> <p>B19 Girls: 58.6% Parents: 57.8% Teachers : 50.3%</p>	<p>Parents here actually contradicted to some extent with their response to the previous belief where they acknowledge that girls are not meant only for domestic work; but they consider that husbands play a vital role in girls’ lives. They somewhat at a deeper level believe that the husband’s house is the ultimate destined place for a girl. Girls also partially believe this point, though teachers are not very convinced of this belief.</p> <p>All three categories believe in this statement that parents are the best advisors and they always take the right decision on behalf of their daughters’ life. Girls also believe that parents are always right. This prevalent perception brings forth the question of girls’ agency. Girls are perceived as dependents, thus incapable of taking control over their own lives.</p>
<p>Least Belief Score Obtained:</p> <p>B13: Parents: 29.5% Girls: 24.3% Teachers: 16.7%</p> <p>B17: Parents: 31.2% Girls : 30% Teachers: 15.8%</p>	<p>All three categories gave least belief score to the statement that they do not get married to get rid of their parents’ restrictions as they well know that even after marriage they will face restrictions from their in-laws’ families.</p> <p>All positive motivations are thereby in contradiction and are predominated by negative anxieties.</p> <p>Girls and parents are agreeing to some extent that marriage increases the value of girls.</p>

Policy 1 – Agreement Only Mode, Prompt B – Story II (Ref: Table 1 Segment 1.2.1 & 1.2.2 of Appendix)

The 11 statements were pre-determined where participants were to indicate agreement score. There was an open response option for those who had other opinions. These open-ended responses have been included in qualitative analysis.

IIB.1: What kind of feelings prompted Seema to take this step?

This evoked the beliefs B20 – B23 (Table 1 Segment 1.2.1 of Appendix)

Chart IIB.1 (Agreement Mode: Story 2)

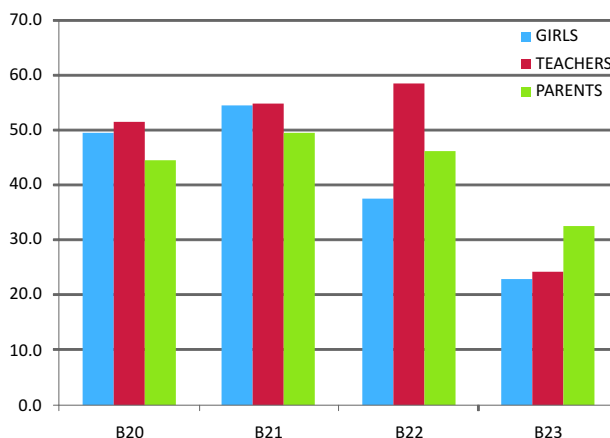


Table IIB.1

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Highest Belief Score Obtained for the following statement: B21: Girls : 54.4% Teachers: 54.7% Parents: 49.6%</p> <p>B22: Teachers: 58.6% Parents: 46.1% Girls: 37.4%</p> <p>Lowest Belief Score Obtained for the following statement: B23: Parents: 32.6% Teachers: 24.2% Girls : 22.8%</p>	<p>Girls and teachers both gave high value to the statement about love being the cause of elopement. Parents also moderately agree to this.</p> <p>According to the belief score of this statement, teachers are anxious about parents marrying off their daughters with inappropriate grooms. But contrary to this, girls hardly believe in this statement. They do not think that parents will force them to get married to any other person. Parents also moderately agree to this statement.</p> <p>In this statement, all three categories unanimously agreed that parents’ restrictions are not the reason for getting them married early. Girls are of the opinion that parents will not understand the value of love. Love is an ‘unspeakable’ factor and cannot be discussed openly.</p>

Policy 1 – Agreement Only Mode, Prompt A – Story II (Ref: Table 1 Segment 1.2.1 & 1.2.2 of Appendix)

IIA.1 What are the perceptions of Seema’s Parents

This evoked the beliefs B24 – B30 (Table 1 Segment 1.2.2 of Appendix) – indicating beliefs of the respondents about the mindset of the Parents on Girls Eloping.

Chart IIA.1 (Agreement Mode: Story 2)

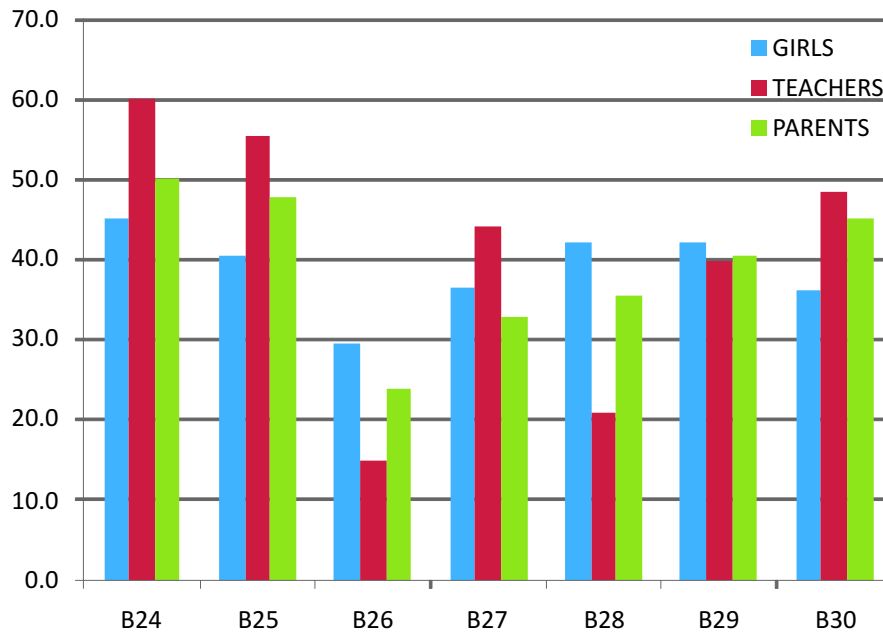


Table IIA.1

Observations	Our Interpretations
Highest Belief Score Obtained: B24: Teachers: 60.3% Parents: 50.1% Girls: 45.1%	Both teachers and parents strongly believe that peer pressure/influence is harmful and facilitates or encourages a girl’s elopement. Even though less number of girls believe in this, the percentage is still not insignificant at all.
Least Belief Score Obtained: B26: Teachers: 14.9% Parents: 23.9% Girls: 29.6%	All three Categories believe that parents are not incapable of finding desirable grooms for daughters. So that cannot be the reason for the girls eloping from her home.

Policy 2: Contradiction Only Mode

At the beginning, we did not have any plan to analyse data in this mode, as mentioned in Methodology, A set of questionnaire was given based on prompts, where participants were to indicate their Degree of Agreement with each statement based on terms of a belief-score (zero to ten: least to full agreement). However, the field reality turned out to be different. The prompts led participants to express not only a less degree of agreement, but also a contradiction.

Prompt 2 discussed that girls choose to marry early in order to get away from parents' control and restrictions. Most of the girls strongly disagreed to the degree of 20 out of 100. Parents and teachers also disagreed but the degree was 1 out of 100. Prompt 1 highlighted the issue that parents opt to marry off their daughters early, thinking physical charm will be less with age. Teachers agreed to the degree of 8 out of 100; while girls tended to disagree fully (-37%). Some parents also believed in contrary (-35% to -40%). Teachers on the whole showed a low degree of agreement. (Here the minus scores indicate that the agreement is on the contrary).

Thus the question emerged whether it was necessary to break up the division (equal, not equal, equal to contrary) to understand the voices with clarity. This unexpected outcome raised the need to have a contradiction prompt. One policy for data representation could have been to simplify the analysis as agreement to the degree 'zero' i.e. agreement to the contrary i.e. whatever not agreed upon marked by the degree 'zero'. Given this situation, we decided to break this further to check contradiction through negative marking or the use of the minus sign (-10 to +10). Participants, who believed in contrary, had a negative belief and did not agree to the prompts/ statements – this meant that their belief was not even disagreement, but they held contrary beliefs. This is why the Contradiction Only Mode was used to focus on the negative beliefs. All positive beliefs were considered as 'zero'. Hence belief score reflected positive scores for all negative beliefs, i.e. zoomed in on the relative distribution of negative beliefs.

Policy 2: Contradiction Only Mode

Prompt A – Story I (Table 1 Segment 1.1.1 & 1.1.2 of Appendix)

The first 19 statements likewise were pre-determined, but here the participants were to indicate contradiction score. There was an open response option as earlier for those who had other opinions, with such responses being included in qualitative analysis.

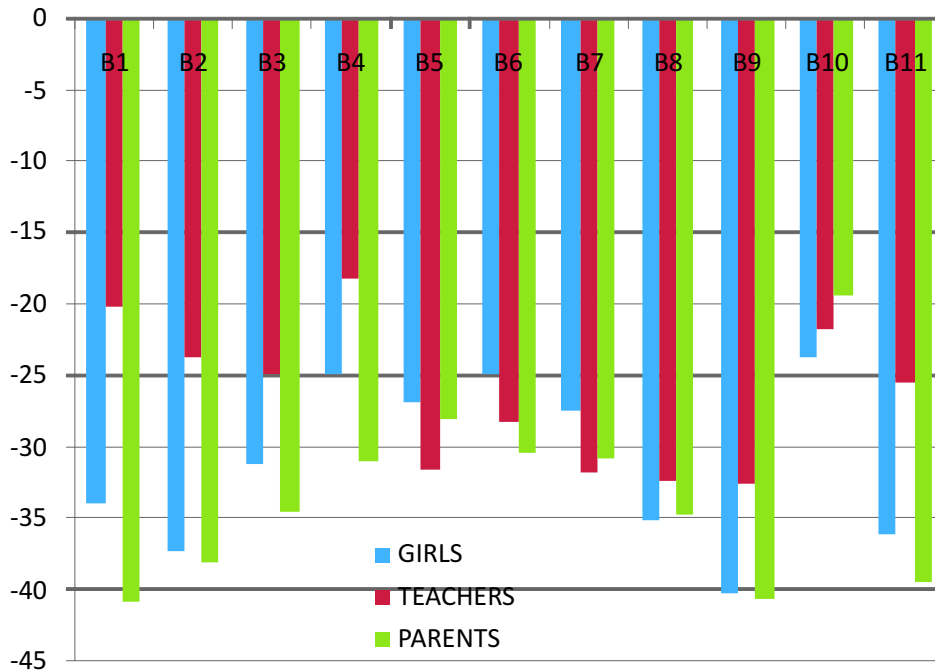
Following charts represent the normalised belief score against each belief statement (B1-B19 vide Table 1 Segment 1.1.1. & 1.1.2).

Overall responses of all three categories of respondents (girls, teachers, parents) have been superposed in the same plot and measured on the same scale for ease of comparison.

IA.2 What prompted Taslima's parents to arrange her marriage

In the following chart, all belief scores have negative values, indicating a contradiction to the original statement presented to participants/ respondents.

Chart IA.2 (Contradiction Mode: Story 1)



B1 - B11 indicate beliefs of the respondent about the mindset of parents.

Table IA.2

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Highest Belief Score Obtained for the following statements:</p> <p>B9: Girls : 40.3% Parents : 40.6% Teachers : 32.6%</p> <p>B1: Parents : 40.8% Girls : 33.9% Teachers : 20.1%</p>	<p>Parents and girls strongly contradicted this statement that higher education is not important for girls as their primary role is domestic household activities. They both gave value to higher education for girls and did not agree that girls are only meant for doing household work.</p> <p>Teachers also contradicted to this statement but to a lesser extent.</p> <p>Parents and girls gave more value to education than marriage. Here actually it came out that girls are also to some extent aware that even their parents give importance to education. In table 1.2 (Agreement Mode) we observed those who agreed to those beliefs showed a relatively lesser score of agreement (less than 30%)</p> <p>Parents contradicted this statement strongly as they do not marry off daughters only because they are getting an eligible groom. In this section, teachers contradicted to a lesser extent – which also indicates that most teachers are anxious about not getting an eligible groom afterwards. Teachers think that parents are giving away their daughters in early marriage for not losing the opportunity they have received. Girls moderately contradict this statement as they do not believe that parents go for early marriage only because they got an eligible groom.</p>

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Least Belief Score Obtained for the following statement:</p> <p>B10: Parents: 19.3% Teacher : 21.8% Girls :23.7%</p>	<p>In the agreement mode, teachers appeared to agree with this statement (more than 60%). But analysis revealed that some teachers in fact voiced against that belief. This 20% contradiction was not represented in Policy 1 (Agreement Mode - Table 1.2: Chart 1.1)</p> <p>All three categories showed least contradiction in this statement; especially the parents. Maximum parents are not convinced and have a strong belief that girls would not be able to control their sexual urge if kept unmarried for a long time. A very nominal number of girls and teachers contradicted this statement.</p> <p>But there was a significant section of these three categories who actually contradicted this statement. Their voices were getting lost in the agreement mode. In all three categories this voice of contradiction (around 20%) was missing.</p> <p>This analysis thereby opens up another possibility - during intervention, we may engage with these voices since that would be less challenging. These voices can actually be developed to become local change agents.</p>

Policy 2 - Contradiction Only Mode, Prompt B - Story I (Ref: Table 1 Segment 1.2.1 & 1.2.2 of Appendix)

IB.2 Why Taslima agreed to this marriage?

B12 - B19 indicates the beliefs of the respondent about the mindset of the Girls (vide Table 2.1 of Policy 2 for details of Belief Statements)

Chart IB.2 (Contradiction Mode: Story 1)

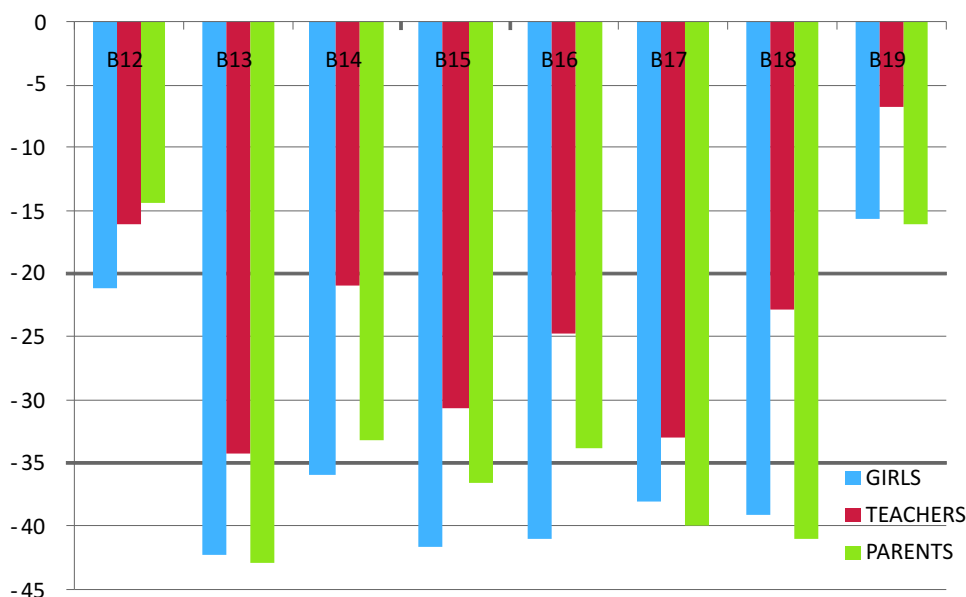


Table: IB.2

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Highest Belief Score Obtained by the following statements:</p> <p>B13: Parents: 42.8% Girls: 42.2% Teachers :34.1%</p>	<p>Both girls and parents contradicted the statement strongly that early marriage is a way for the girl to escape from control and restrictions of parents. They are aware that even after marriage there will be restrictions over mobility, among other things. Teachers also contradicted this statement partially.</p> <p>This shows similar response as in Policy 1 where all three categories showed least agreement to this statement as the reason behind early marriage.</p>
<p>Least Belief Score Obtained for the following statement:</p> <p>B19: Teachers : 6.8% Girls : 15.6% Parents: 16%</p>	<p>Teachers expressed the least contradiction to this statement. Only a handful of teachers contradicted that parents are the best well-wishers of their daughters and the most efficient decision makers for their daughters' life. Even the percentage of girls' and parents' contradiction shows a low count. Most respondents in all three categories believe that parents are the best decision makers for their daughters.</p> <p>From this belief score it appears that parents, teachers and girls alike lack faith in the girls' agency and have questions about the capacity, competence and intention of girls.</p>

Policy 2 - Contradiction Only Mode, Prompt B - Story II (Ref: Table 1 Segment 1.2.1 & 1.2.2 of Appendix)

IIB.2 What kind of feeling prompted Seema to take this step?

Chart IIB.2 (Contradiction Mode: Story 2)

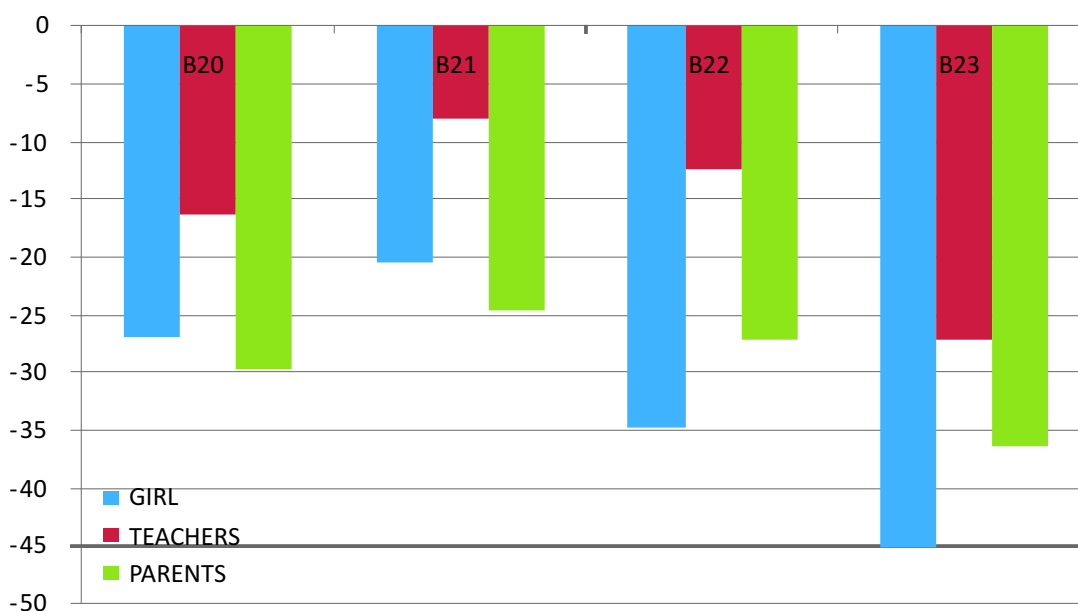


Table: IIB.2

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Highest Belief Score Obtained by the following statement:</p> <p>B23: Girls : 45% Parents: 36.3% Teachers: 27.3%</p>	<p>All three categories strongly contradicted the statement that girls opt for elopement to escape from parental control and restrictions. Parents especially contradicted the maximum, whereby they expressed that they do not think that girls elope to get rid of strictures.</p>
<p>Least Belief Score Obtained:</p> <p>B21: Teachers: 7.9% Girls: 20.4% Parents: 24.5%</p>	<p>Least contradiction came to the statement that deep love between a girl and her boyfriend is the real reason behind elopement. In Policy 1 also we have seen that maximum number of teachers and girls gave a very high belief score to this statement, as they immensely value the aspect of love. Parents partially contradicted this statement as a few of them do not agree that love is of such importance.</p>

Policy 2 - Contradiction Only Mode, Prompt A - Story II (Ref: Table 1 Segment 1.2.1 & 1.2.2 of Appendix)

IIA.2 What can be the feelings of her Parents?

B24 – B30 indicates beliefs of the respondent about mindset of parents on girls’ elopement (vide Table 1 Segment 1.2.2 of Policy 1 for details of Belief Statements).

Chart IIA.2 (Contradiction Mode: Story 2)

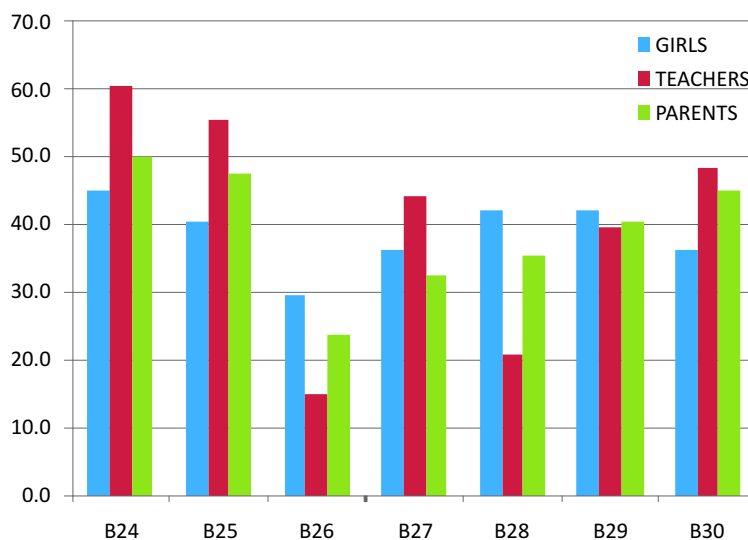


Table: IIA.2

Observations	Our Interpretations
Highest Belief Score Obtained in the following statement: B26: Parents: 49.5% Girls : 40.7% Teachers: 35.4%	The statement says that the girl would prefer to run away from home as she thinks that her parents are not capable of arranging the desired or deserving groom for her. All three categories contradicted this strongly, indicating that they do not believe parents to be incapable.
Least Belief Score obtained in the following statement: B24: Teachers: 9.1% Parents: 23.7% Girls: 25.4%	Minimum number of teachers contradicted this statement, indicating that they primarily agree that the influence of peer groups instigate girls to flee from home. Most respondents from all three categories have expressed the belief that girls take such a drastic step under peer influence.

Policy 3: Combined Mode: Agreement and Contradiction both on the Same Graph

In the combined mode we have captured contradicting responses with a negative sign and retained positive responses as they are. We then algebraically summed up the belief scores of all respondents against each belief statement, which led to some positive responses and some negative responses being mutually cancelled out. None of the positive or negative responses was squashed to zero value. Thus this representation is not merely an algebraic summation of the agreement and contradiction modes; it is a completely different perspective on the said data where we can observe and compare the net positive or negative belief score against each statement on a single chart. This enables us to compare the overall responses of the groups of participants (girls, teachers and parents) against the said belief statements.

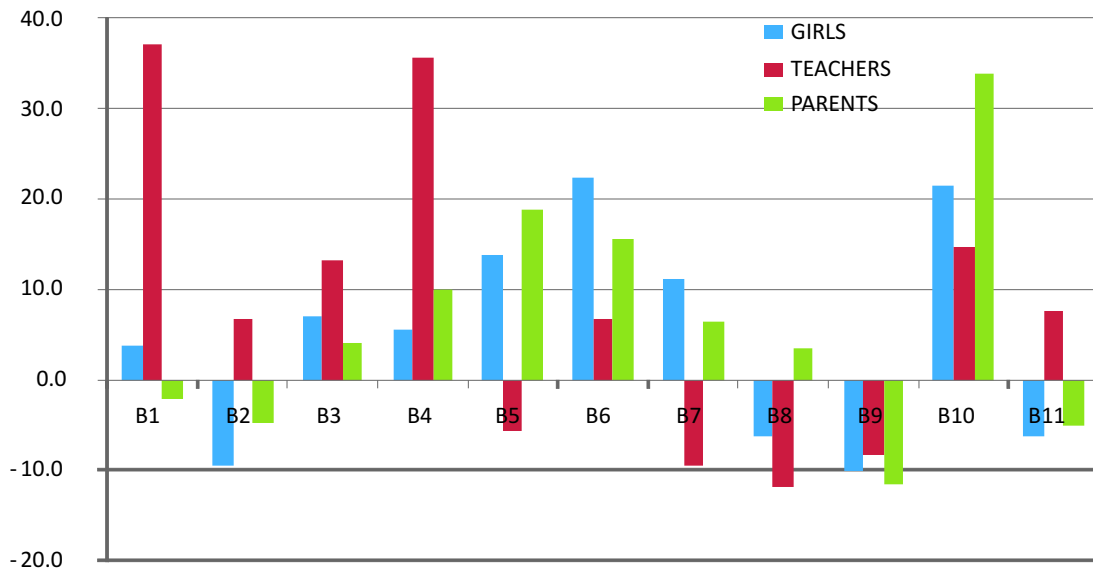
Prompt A – Story 1 (Table 1 Segment 1.1.1 & 1.1.2 of Appendix)

The first 19 statements likewise were pre-determined, with the participants needing to indicate both agreement and contradiction score. The following charts represent the normalised belief score against each belief statement (B1-B19 within a 0-100 scale).

Overall responses of all three categories of respondents (girls, teachers, parents) have been superposed on the same plot and measured on a common scale for ease of comparison – as in the earlier charts.

IA.3 What prompted Taslima’s parents to arrange her marriage

Chart IA.3 (Combined Mode: Story 1)



Statements B1 - B11 indicate the beliefs of respondents about the mindset of parents, the scores for which are presented in the Table below:

Table IA.3

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Comparative Belief Score Obtained from the following statements:</p> <p>B1: Agreement : Teachers: 37.2% Girls: 3.6%</p> <p>Contradiction: Parents: 2%</p> <p>B4: Agreement: Teachers: 35.6% Parents: 10% Girls: 5.5%</p>	<p>In this statement, teachers strongly agree to the fact that it is better to get girls married off as soon as they get an eligible groom. In sharp contrast, the agreement percentage of girls showed a minimum score.</p> <p>In case of B1 we observe that the net belief scores of parents & girls are near baseline, when we refer to Chart 1.1 (Agreement Mode) & Chart 2.1 (Contradiction Mode) together. We have observed that here the positive and negative voices almost cancelled out each other. That is, the whole population of girls & parents seem to be split regarding their opinion about B1.</p> <p>Interestingly, this could be a point of entry during intervention for this distinct population. This phenomenon can be observed among both girls & parents, mostly female parents. It is necessary to explore how far girls are aware of the opinion of their mothers. We can also investigate why the teachers, mostly male, seem to show an overall different opinion (net agreement).</p>

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>B10: Agreement: Parents: 33.9% Girls: 21.4% Teachers: 14.7%</p>	<p>All 3 categories agreed to some extent to this statement that parents are anxious of losing an eligible groom, as they fear of not getting another choice afterwards. It followed the same concept of B1. But the sentence was framed in a negative approach, focusing mainly on the anxiety part. Negative statements evoked slightly more concern.</p>
<p>B9: Contradiction: Parents - 11.5% Girls - 10.1% Teachers - 8.3%</p>	<p>This statement says that girls may get provoked and break social norms, driven by sexual desire or attract unwanted attention of neighbourhood boys, if they are left at home for too long after reaching sexual maturity. Parents are anxious about losing family honour and reputation. Among all three categories, a considerable number of parents agreed with this statement. Overall, parents have a net agreement score higher than other belief statements. Parents seem to be most concerned about this issue. This has emerged as one of the key reasons for early and child marriage.</p> <p>However, all 3 categories agreed that education is important and they unanimously contradicted that girls are meant for household responsibilities only. Taking all three groups together, the net contradiction score is 10%.</p>

IB.3 Why Taslima agreed to this marriage

Statements B12 - B19 indicate the beliefs of respondents about the mindset of girls.

Chart IB.3 (Combined Mode: Story 1)

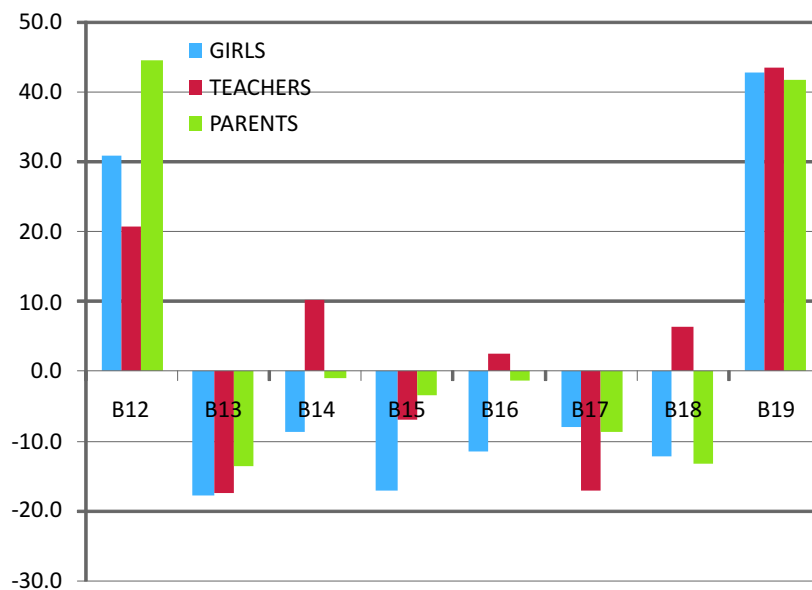


Table: IB.3

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Comparative Belief Score obtained from the following statements: B19: Agreement: Teacher: 43.5% Girls : 43% Parents: 41.8%</p> <p>B13: Contradiction: Parents: 13.4% Girls : 17.9% Teachers: 17.5%</p> <p>B17: Teachers: 17.1% Girls: 8% Parents: 8.8%</p> <p>B15: Girls: 17% Teachers: 6.9% Parents: 3.4%</p>	<p>All 3 categories believe that parents are well-wishers and they look forward to what is best for their children. So they are the best decision makers for their daughters.</p> <p>The least Belief Score has been obtained from all three categories of respondents who contradicted that early marriage is a solution to get rid of parents’ control and restrictions. Restriction of parents has not emerged as a major reason; yet socially this is expressed most often, may be because it is a convenient excuse. In reality, this statement could be a cover up, beneath which there is a possible layer of ‘unspeakable’ factors.</p> <p>Overall, none of the groups agreed that marriage adds much value to the life of a girl.</p> <p>None of the three categories of respondents fully agreed that marriage brings security to a girl’s life.</p>

Prompt B: Story 2: (Table 1 Segment 1.2.1 & 1.2.2)

The 11 statements were again pre-determined where participants were to indicate agreement as well as contradiction scores. The following charts represent the normalised belief scores against each belief statement (B20 – B30 within a 0-100 scale). As before, overall responses of all three categories (girls, teachers, parents) have been superposed in the same plot and measured on a common scale for ease of comparison.

IIB.3 What kind of feelings prompted Seema to take this step

Statements B20 – B23 indicate the beliefs of respondents about the mindset of the girls.

Chart IIB.3 (Combined Mode: Story 2)

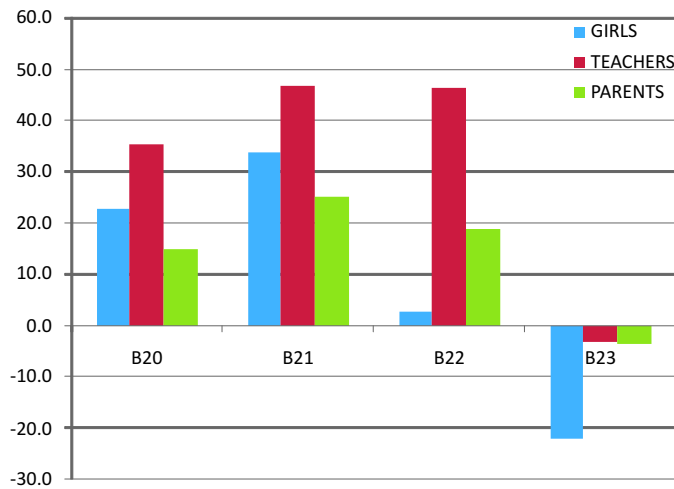


Table: IB.3

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Comparative Belief Score Obtained from the following statement:</p> <p>B21: Agreement: Teachers – 46.8% Girls – 34% Parents – 25%</p> <p>B22: Agreement: Teachers – 46.3% Parents – 18.9% Girls – 2.7%</p> <p>B23: Contradiction: Girls – 22.2% Parents – 3.8% Teachers – 3.1%</p>	<p>All three categories agreed that love is the primary factor behind girls eloping.</p> <p>There is a significant contradiction among the girls about the statement that parents may arrange their daughter’s marriage with a groom that the girls may not like. The anxiety is to validate the concept of love. Another considerable anxiety between girls and parents are that their choices of the groom may not align. There is no open discussion or dialogue about these issues, because of cultural inhibitions.</p> <p>Open and consistent discussion about the issue over a period of time may ensure convergence of opinions between girls and parents at some point. Both parties need to be flexible and open about discussing the needs and expectations of each other.</p> <p>Restriction of parents is no cause for elopement. Girls themselves are not keen to come out of the restrictions. A portion of girls value the imposed control and restrictions with the belief that this is good for them. Yet, at times, they are afraid of feeling claustrophobic or choked by the rigid norms that they have to adhere to.</p> <p>Cohesive and shared belief systems between girls and parents are of great significance. Difference of values and communication gaps exist between the two generations. Opportunists and traffickers take advantage of the situation and such penetration will continue to increase unless these gaps are addressed.</p>

IIA.3 What can be the feelings of her Parents

B24 – B30 indicates the beliefs of respondent about mindset of parents on elopement of girls (vide Table 1 of Policy 1 for details of Belief Statement)

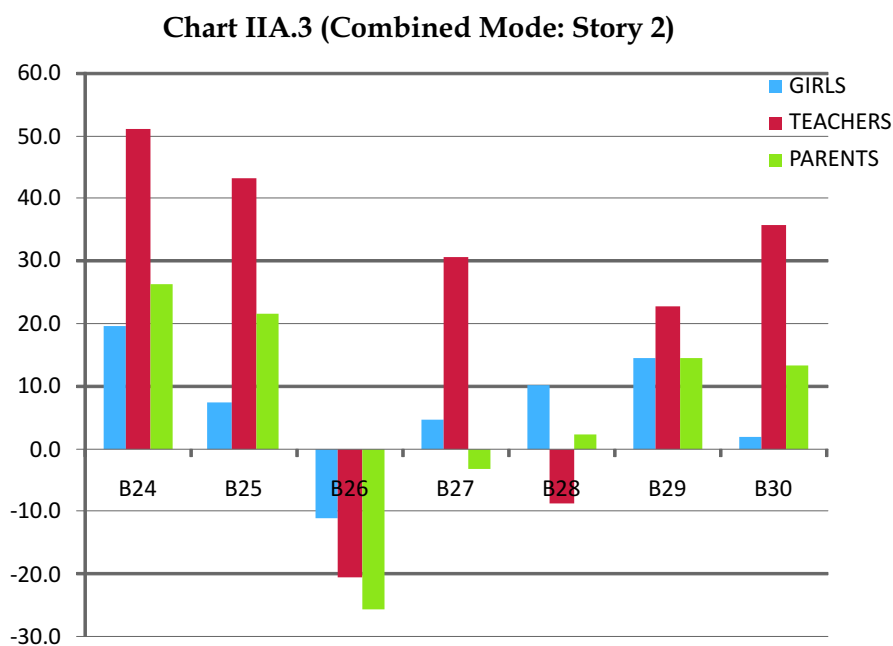


Table: IB.3

Observations	Our Interpretations
<p>Highest Belief Score Obtained:</p> <p>B24: Agreement: Teachers: 51.1% Parents: 26.4% Girls: 19.6%</p>	<p>The community belief is that girls are heavily influenced by their peers. Girls also agree to this statement to some extent. But there is a significant contradiction among a section of girls. They do not consider this to be a valid reason. Some girls perceive friends as more reliable and understanding, whose opinion is to be valued. But as the score indicates – not all girls are in agreement with this. This point needs to be probed further to get a clearer understanding.</p>
<p>B30: Contradiction: Teachers: 35.7% Parents: 13.2% Girls: 1.8%</p>	<p>The second reason is much stronger and more positive, but the girls are equally divided on this. There are two factors working here: 1) Girl is not yet ready but parents are arranging for marriage; 2) Girl is ready for marriage, but parents are not thinking about their daughters’ marriage that time.</p> <p>There is a lack of symmetry in the value system between girls and parents regarding eligibility, choice and time of marriage. Both parties have anxieties, but there is no sharing. Certain social norms are prohibiting the dialogue. To begin with, if cohesion in the family can be achieved, a major change can take place.</p>

Observations	Our Interpretations
B27: Teachers: 30.7% Girls: 4.8% Parents: 3.2%	Teachers believe strongly in the statement. But girls and parents are not fully convinced. Community believes that boys possess an additional power to impress, influence and take girls in their stride. Teachers, in particular, assume that boys possess special skills about this. But parents and girls have contradicted to this. This creates an ambience of ambiguity. The prevailing myth that girls are helpless when attracted to boys, and that boys hold special power to entice girls; so that girls become even more vulnerable in society. This myth in reality creates a deep, hidden attraction at the unconscious level, which becomes an internalised barrier against building any kind of resistance.

ANOVA (Analysis of Variants):

This is a statistical analysis which helps to investigate whether data obtained from one or two groups is significantly different from the overall emerging trend obtained from other groups. The P value obtained as an output of analysis indicates how far this differentiation/distinction is statistically significant. E.g. if $P < 0.05$ it implies that with 95% confidence we may infer that one group is significantly different from the rest. Again if $P < 0.01$ it implies that with 99% confidence we may infer that one group is significantly different from the rest.

We performed the ANOVA analysis to see whether participants from different blocks (Habibpur, Ratua II, Old Malda, Gazole) hold similar opinions, or one or more blocks hold significantly different voices. Some belief statements reflected significantly different voices, which are enlisted in Table 1.1 & 1.4 along with respective P values.

Story I: Taslima is 15 years old. Her parents have arranged her marriage with her consent. She has stopped going to school. What prompted Taslima's parents to arrange this marriage?

Response of Girls:

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
B9	0.009	Ratua II (negative)	Girls of Ratua II particularly contradicted this belief statement that girls are meant for domestic chores only and they hardly need to go for higher education. Girls, in fact, gave more value to education than marriage. Parents also gave value to higher education and did not agree that girls are only meant for doing household work. Here actually it came out that girls are also to some extent aware that even their parents give importance to education.

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
B10	0.013	Ratua II (negative) Old Malda (positive)	Ratua II & Old Malda differed in opinion with reference to the belief that girls may not be able to control their sexual urges if left unmarried for long after reaching sexual maturity. Old Malda strongly agreed to this belief statement. Ratua II on the other hand has contradicted. Girls in the Ratua II block seem to have more faith in their capacity of making informed choices in life, rather than being driven by instinct or biological need. But in Old Malda, girls have expressed anxieties about girls being unable to control their hormonal trigger, feeling compelled to engage into romantic alliances. These girls are apprehensive about such alliances compromising family honour and reputation.
B12	0.002	Habibpur (positive)	Habibpur has strongly agreed that marriage gives proper identity. So it is a responsibility of the wife to keep her husband family oriented. They consider that the husband plays a vital role in a woman's life. At a deeper level, they believe that the husband's house is the ultimate place for a girl. Boys also partially believe in this point. Before migrating to other parts of the country in search of work, adolescent boys also prefer to get married to avoid making mistakes in trying to satisfy their sexual needs.
B15	0.003	Habibpur (positive) Gazole (negative)	In Habibpur, girls strongly believe that social security is attained from marriage, whereas girls of Gazole have strongly contradicted this belief. That academic development & economic independence are equally important for the girls in Gazole also emerged through the FGD.

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
B5	2.43E-06	Ratua II (positive) Gazole (negave)	<p>Parents in Gazole assign more independent identity to their girls, whereas Ratua II parents are more sceptical about the agency of their girls. They strongly expressed the anxiety of elopement risks being higer, because they believe that girls are incapable of taking the right decisions, and are more vulnerable, tehrefore. Gazole parents, on the other hand, have more faith in the independent agency of girls.</p> <p>In this respect a stark similarity can be seen among the girls and parents of Gazole as they both seem to value independence and personal academic development of girls as higher than attaining social security through a marital status.</p>
B10	0.009	Habibpur (positive) Gazole (negative)	<p>Habibpur strongly expressed the anxiety that girls may break social norms and put their parents in trouble, if not married early. Their apprehensions are centred on the sexual maturity of girls. They fear that girls may not be able to control their hormonal trigger and may feel compelled to engage into romantic alliances. But parents of Gazole have more faith on the capacity of self regulation of their girls.</p>
B15	0.001	Ratua II (positive) Gazole (negative)	<p>Ratua II has strongly expressed the concern of ensuring the social security of girls through marriage, whereas the parents of Gazole are more inclined towards the independence of girls. The rate of girls' education in Gazole is higher and is valued more as the parents are more enlightened.</p>

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
B5	0.006	Ratua II, Old Malda (positive) Habibpur, Gazole (negative)	<p>Ratua II and Old Malda agree with the statement, implying that they consider it better to get their daughters married early, lest they get carried away if left behind. But</p> <p>Habibpur & Gazole contradicted. Habibpur contradicted because adolescent boys there go out other places in search of work at a very young age, which is the reason behind parents getting their daughters married at a young age - not because they disbelieve the capacity of the girls to control their sexual urges. As for Gazole, parents there are more liberal and progressive and they give importance to self development.</p>
B13	0.005	Ratua II, Old Malda (positive) Habibpur, Gazole (negative)	<p>In Ratua II & Old Malda, teachers agreed to this belief that girls get married at an early stage to get rid of parental restrictions. In Ratua II, parents have also been found to consider their girls to be more vulnerable and have less confidence on the agency of girls. Parental control is strong, therefore. Teachers believe that girls consider early marriage to be an escape route from such control. In Ratua II, elopement cases are also high as parents there are extra sensitive about the love affairs of their daughters. They are not very comfortable with the idea of their daughters choosing their own partners and having a relationship before marriage. So parental restriction is high.</p>

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
			<p>But teachers in Habibpur and Gazole once again contradicted this belief. As already indicated, Gazole parents are more liberal and they believe that their girls have a strong agency of their own. Overall, parents in Gazole are more confident of their daughters' abilities. Whereas in Habibpur, parents give away their daughters in early marriage because the adolescent boys there get married before going in search of work to different locations. Parental control is not a factor.</p>
B17	0.003	<p>Ratua II, O.M. (positive)</p> <p>Habibpur, Gazole (negative)</p>	<p>Ratua II and Old Malda agree with this belief as they do not support the concept of love affairs and consider such involvements to be one of the prime factors for elopement. Like parents, teachers also believe that romantic involvements decrease the honour and dignity of girls and that the real value of women lie in marriage.</p> <p>But Habibpur and Gazole contradicted this belief. In Habibpur, as presaged earlier, adolescent boys get married at a very young age before leaving in search of work. So, teachers in Habibpur do not consider that marriage increases a girl's value, but stresses that it has more to do with the socioeconomic situation involving migration for work.</p> <p>In Gazole, according to the teachers, since the parents are progressive themselves, they give equal importance for the self development of their girls. They have more confidence on the agency of their girls.</p>

Story 2: 14 years old Seema has fled with Sontu from the neighbourhood. We hear that they have got married. What kind of feeling prompted Seema to take this step?

Responses of Girls:

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
B21	6.44E-05	Ratua II (negative)	<p>Except for B26, it came out clearly from these belief statements that girls do not believe that love is the key factor behind elopement. They do not consider parental pressure to be a reason either. Even peer influence as negative has been contradicted by girls. That means, girls in Ratua II do not think girls to be too naïve and ignorant to understand this. But in FGD, they have paradoxically mentioned parental restriction to be one of the major reasons behind elopement. So, some 'unspeakable' factors must be within their minds.</p> <p>As for belief B26, in Habibpur where adolescent boys go out of their place at a very early age – marriage for both girls and boys happens early. Girls believe that they would not get a suitable groom at a later stage; and even if they do – the dowry factor would be very high, which is a major concern for both the girls and their parents. Also, getting a groom from the same caste has been mentioned as a major challenge.</p> <p>But Gazole contradicted this belief as their parents are relatively progressive. Thereby, the girls get positively influenced.</p> <p>As for B27, Ratua II contradicted the belief statement that girls are naïve or ignorant. They consider girls have independent agency of their own.</p>
B22	1.06E-05	Ratua II (negative)	
B23	0.015	Ratua II (negative)	
B24	0.001	Ratua II (negative)	
B26	0.0005	Habibpur (+ve) Gazole (-ve)	
B27	0.004	Ratua II (-ve)	

Responses of Parents:

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
B23	0.073	Ratua II (positive) Gazole (negative)	At Ratua II elopement rate is higher than at Gazole. That could be because parents of Gazole are more liberal and they believe and give importance to the self development factor of girls. In Ratua II parental restrictions are more as their faith in the agency and capability of their daughters is far less. So, the risk of elopement is high in Ratua II.

Responses of Teachers:

Belief Statement	P Value of the ANOVA Test	The Group/Block that significantly differs from the rest	Interpretations/Insights
B21	0.002	Ratua II, Gazole, Old Malda (strongly positive) Habibpur (low and negative)	Habibpur Teachers do not much believe love to be a strong enough reason for elopement. For them, one main cause of early marriage is the need to ensure caste-matching marriage. This tradition is still is very much prevalent. They consider tradition to be the basis of marriage rather than love. They also believe that early marriage is a natural defence against trafficking.
B22	0.0002	Ratua II, Old Malda, Gazole (Strongly positive) Habibpur (low and negative)	In this case as well, Habibpur teachers do not agree that girls can have any individual concept or will - thereby questioning the agency of the girls. Rest of the blocks also have this anxiety, but at a lower level in comparison to Habibpur.
B24	0.011	Habibpur (low and negative)	The prevalent custom in this block of both girls and boys getting married under the legal age of marriage - prior to adolescent boys migrating for work - acts as a prevention to elopements.

2.3 Qualitative Analysis

2.3.1 Responses of Girls on Story 1

Habibpur Block

- **Joining the workforce early:** Boys at a very young age migrate as labourers from this block. Parents prefer to get the boys married before migrating to unknown territories. The newly married couple migrates together since this is viewed as a safeguard against the young boys getting into unsafe sexual encounters in a foreign land. To ensure such unions, the groom's family lends money to the bride's family, so that the latter feels obliged to marry their daughters off before reaching the legal age of marriage. This emerged from the response of 30% of the participants.
- **Getting a groom is difficult:** As per the response of 50% of the respondents, Chowdhuries from Bhojpur in Bihar constitute the majority of the population in this block and it is difficult for them to find grooms from the same caste. So, whenever parents get a suitable groom from the same caste, they marry their daughters off – even if the girl is still underage.
- **Limitations of Parents:** In Habibpur, girls believe that parents might not be able to get them an eligible, desirable or deserving groom because of financial and social limitations.
- **Education valued:** Interestingly enough, 30% of the respondents spoke in support of higher education for girls and against underage marriage. They emphasised that girls are capable of making the right decisions when allowed to have proper education.

Ratua II Block

- Responses from this group were non-specific and vague, which might be a pointer to a poor cognitive level. Still, 20% of the total participants spoke against child marriage.
- They are aware that early marriage is harmful, yet give in to social norms, unable to resist.
- One participant got emotionally evoked and spoke strongly against child marriage at first, but preferred to stay silent later on.
- The group agreed that education for girls is important.
- **New Insight:** We have developed a significantly different insight from this group. During discussion they stated restriction and control of parents as a major reason for elopement. But in the individual survey rating, they strongly contradicted this statement. This helped us understand that they may not be voicing out their 'real' opinion or belief – leaving us to wonder what makes them uncomfortable in voicing their real beliefs.

Gazole Block

- **Elopement justifiable:** Girls expressed that elopement is better than surrendering to child marriage. They are not only against child marriage, but also voiced that agreeing or surrendering to child marriage cannot be justified in any way. But, they also believe in the centrality of marriage in a woman's life.
- **Basic Need:** According to them, getting married to meet basic needs is never justifiable.
- **Husband as Protector:** They do not consider the husband to be their protector or as a symbol of

protection. As per their conversation, they think marriage can never provide the assurance of safety or guarantee that the girl will not be physically, mentally or sexually assaulted.

Old Malda Block

- **Younger girls more attractive:** Girls here are aware of the need to be attractive for a suitable groom to be found. They believe that with growing age, they will get less attractive. The less the age, the girl will be more sexually attractive and active.

2.3.2 Responses of Parents to Story 1

Habibpur Block

- They stated that child marriage is a tradition and it will continue to be one.
- Most of the participating parents were not literate.
- Male parents expressed considerable amount of anxiety around trafficking.
- Boys elope with neighbourhood girls and get married much ahead of the legal age of marriage in this block. This is because boys migrate as labours in other states at a very early age and want to marry a girl of their own choice before they go.
- Parents also prefer to get their sons married before they step out to unknown lands. Parents are aware of and concerned about the sexual desire of boys and believe that marriage is a socially acceptable way to meet the sexual needs of their sons.
- Interestingly, sexual needs of daughters are also duly valued by parents. So they prefer to marry off their daughters during adolescence as well.

Ratua II Block

- **Fear of Incest:** Participants expressed their fear of incest by the brother-in-law (elder sister's husband) or by a male cousin as one of the causes of early marriage in this area.
- **Loss of voice:** One female participant shared that with early marriage, a girl loses her own identity, her ability to express an opinion and to take her own decisions. She expressed that she has decided not to give away her daughters in marriage before they reach the legal age of marriage. She has three daughters, aged 7, 9 and 13.
- **Disobeying Parents:** Girls are expected to obey their fathers. Even though the fathers value higher education, they have expressed deep anxiety about elopement. This fear leads the fathers to value education and marriage equally. They mentioned that if girls obey and regard family and social rules, girls can be allowed to carry on with their education.
- **Parental control and restrictions:** Parents here believe that restrictions of the parents are compelling girls to elope. In the quantitative survey this emerged as one of the concerns of parents. Girls verbally expressed this as a major factor during FGD, while in quantitative survey they have contradicted this statement.

Gazole Block

- **Self Reliance:** Parents here have expressed that developing a girl's earning capacity before marriage is of great significance. After marriage, pursuing these skills could be challenging, as there is a possibility that the girl will get entangled with household responsibilities.
- **Education:** One participant shared that if girls desire, they must be allowed to carry on with education even after marriage.

Old Malda Block

- **Happily Married:** One participant shared that she herself was married off at 13. She is now in her 30's and she has lived her life happily. She expressed that she does not find early marriage to be a problem. For her, there is nothing wrong with this social custom.

2.3.3 Responses of Girls to Story 2:

- **Control and restrictions** of parents stated as a major cause of elopement.
- **Love** is considered as the most valid reason for elopement. Being loved and cared for as well as romantic liaison is one of the driving factors, as stated by them.
- **Getting married to someone of one's own choice** is better than being married to an unknown person. They seem to have less confidence on the choice of groom by their parents.

2.3.4 Responses of Parents to Story 2:

- **Nature of Girls:** Male parents expressed that by nature girls are drawn into provoking boys and entangle them into romantic relationships. Thus, marrying them off early will help to retain balance in society.
- **Lack of confidence:** Girls hardly rely on the ability of their parents to get them married. Parents think that girls have less confidence on their parents that they can give away their girls in marriage.
- **Peer influences** instigate girls to resort into elopement.
- **Lack of acceptance:** Parents never understand the element and value of love. If a girl is deeply in love, she has no other option but to elope.
- **Dowry:** More educated and well established the groom, more the demand of dowry. Girls sometimes feel that they can save their parents from this pressure by marrying on their own.

2.3.5 Responses of Teachers to Story 1 & Story 2:

- Common patterns were noted in the responses from teachers in Habibpur and Gazole, while Ratua II & Old Malda held similar opinion. There is a distinct differentiation between these two sets of teachers.
- **Perception of the 'Other':** Most of the teachers are not local, they travel from urban areas to the schools. To capture their voice, 'Parents are mostly illiterate and uneducated. They do not have any vision about their children's life. Thus they can only choose the option of marriage.' A strong sense of differentiation between 'we the educated' and 'they the illiterate poor' has been observed during their discussion.

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- **No option:** Girls have no option, as parents do not understand them, neither do they accept their choice of partners. During this age, they have hormone triggers, thus elopement or marriage is the only option left for the girls.
 - **Elopement predestined:** They considered elopement as common and as destiny, which cannot be changed.
 - **Taking Steps:** There are instances, where teachers have intervened in cases of early marriage. They faced questions like who is going to take the responsibility of the girl afterwards. Today or tomorrow, marriage is the only option for girls. Teachers themselves could not visualize any other role for the girls. Thus, they experience a sense of discomfort in taking a step to stop incidents of early marriage.
 - **Supportive of Early Marriage:** One of the teachers argued in support of this social custom. He expressed full agreement with this custom. He said, 'This has been there historically. Certainly, there are deeper reasons for this custom. We have no business to stop this'.
 - **Opposition to the Custom:** A large number of teachers, however, expressed that this is a very important issue but they are not ready to take the responsibility of becoming proactive. They perceive themselves as helpless outsiders who cannot take part in local affairs.

2.4 Key Pointers

Taking all these responses from Focus Group Discussions, as also to open-ended questions together, and combining them with quantitative analyses, following significant points emerge:

1. **Underlying anxieties:** Sexual needs or desire of adolescent girls is an anxiety in all the four blocks. This leads to a state of near paranoia about any interaction between adolescent girls and boys. Even a conversation is viewed with suspicion, as if that would lead to an affair and social norms may break as the girl may not be able to control herself. Underage marriage is seen as the safest escape route from such a situation.
2. **Lack of trust on agency of girls:** Lack of understanding and trust in the society exists about girls' ability to control her desire. She is been seen as incapable of restraining herself and would be wooed easily by boys. It is not believed that even if they are trained, she can develop skills of restraining herself. Thus control, restrictions and finally marriage at an early age seems to be sole solution.
3. **Denial of female desire and inability to develop coping mechanism:** This anxiety results from the denial of a girl's natural sexual needs and her right to have them fulfilled. It is deeply connected with the traditional perception of girls and women as reproductive beings only, rather than as sexual beings and the institution of marriage is inseparably connected with this perception. Reproduction must happen only within marriage and girls must protect their virginity to protect the purity of the paternal blood in their children. These thoughts do not operate at the conscious level, but as internalised convictions that regulate external behaviour in the form of arranging early marriage for daughters.
4. **Marriage, en-route to fulfilment of desire:** Girls also share this same view of marriage being necessary for sexual encounters to happen, so that elopement and marriage with the person of her own choice becomes inevitable in the absence of any open communication with parents about her own choice and preference. Girls feel compelled to elope because they are afraid that parents would

never accept their choice of a partner. This becomes particularly evident from the differential of value attached by girls to 'love' as a factor for elopement and the parents' denial of love and romance as a significant factor.

5. **No acceptance of romance:** Romance, eroticism and sexuality of girls are not accepted at all, even though the unconscious acceptance of these natural phenomena guide the practice of underage marriage – whether by parents or by girls themselves through elopement. This traditional denial is rooted deeply in the collective psyche of adults and gets manifested through the restrictions on girls' mobility, education and other forms of freedom of choice. This denial is most evident in the fact that adolescent boys migrating for work are married off to ensure that they do not get into unsafe sexual practices when away from home. Male sexual needs and desire are recognised, therefore, and addressed positively. For girls, the recognition comes only in the form of fear and anxiety – rather than through acceptance as something natural. **Interventions aimed at eliminating these restrictions, thus, address external behavioural manifestations only – without delving into the unconscious denial that causes such behaviour.**

6. **Girls' voices not heard:** Traditional practice of denying equal status to children and the deep-seated conviction that parents know best – as expressed by both girls and their parents, as also by the teachers – results in the girls never being heard and heeded. This lack of communication results in further complications that facilitate underage marriage. Girls do not question parental choice of grooms, even when they are not happy with such a choice, or with the timing of the marriage. **A denial of the girls' agency – not just by the parents, but also by the girls themselves – lies at the root of such compliance.** The other side of this same coin is that girls would rather elope and marry before they reach the legal age of marriage, than talk to parents about their choice of partner and negotiate. Again, both the compliance and the defiance of girls are expressed behaviour that are prompted by unspoken and mostly unconscious beliefs. In case of compliance, the denial of agency and self-confidence and in the second – the fear of her agency in making a choice not being accepted by parents. Any intervention to change these behaviour patterns have to address these unconscious, unspoken factors therefore – not just awareness raising about the impacts of underage marriage. **It has come out very clearly from the mapping study that understanding of the ill effects of underage marriage do not necessarily result in actually refraining from the practice.**

3 Way Forward: Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this mapping exercise, thematic areas that may guide interventions towards prevention of underage marriage become clear. They are listed below:

1. **Enhancing agency of girls:** There needs to be a strong focus on building up the agency of girls, along with their understanding of personal safety and wellbeing – to enable them to take informed and safe decisions about their life events, including marriage.
2. **Developing trust among adults about children's agency:** Simultaneously, work has to continue with adults to build their trust in the agency and ability of children, especially girls. The deep-seated, unspoken beliefs that guide parental decisions denying any agency to their daughters even when they actually value girl children needs to be addressed to build up such trust.
3. **Accepting existence of female sexuality:** Develop an understanding among both adults and children, especially girls, about the existence of feminine eroticism and sexuality, along with romantic feelings, as 'natural'. This can only be done by sustained work to deconstruct deeply entrenched gender perceptions and beliefs that are neither spoken nor questioned. Only through that it may be possible to break the silence around the romantic feelings, eroticism, desires and dreams that every girl naturally has.
4. **Understanding and sharing of children's voices:** Explore and develop understanding of equality in relationship between parents and children, especially with girls so that their preference and choice with reference to life events, including marriage, are heard and heeded by parents.
5. **Promoting dialogue between children & adults:** Facilitate the process of evolving a language of communication between adults and children about love, romance, eroticism and sexuality – thereby changing the complete lack of dialogue that is currently the norm. Deeper understanding of the local culture and knowledge would have to guide such a process and the intervention would have to be sustained long-term, since it would be a departure from the current culture of utter non-communication.

4 Appendix

4.1 Table 1

BELIEFS	QUESTIONS
	<i>15 year old Taslima's parents have arranged her marriage. She is happy with this decision and has stopped going to school, awaiting the D-day.</i>
1.1.1	<i>What prompted Taslima's parents for arranging this marriage?</i>
B1	Since the groom is eligible it is better to marry her off
B2	She may not be as attractive with growing age
B3	More the age more the dowry
B4	An eligible groom could be difficult to get again
B5	She may get into affairs and could run away, if kept back at home for long
B6	If she is stays at home for a long time without getting married, she may loose her honour
B7	With growing age she will have her own opinion and it could be difficult for her to adjust with a new family
B8	Marriage may offer her with a better life
B9	Higher education is not much needed, as the primary role of girl is to look after her household
B10	If left at home for a long time without getting married, she may not be able to control her sexual desire
B11	It is better to marry her off now, as the groom's family have chosen her at the first glance
1.1.2	<i>Why did Taslima agreed to this marriage?</i>
B12	Husband's house is the ultimate safe and destined place for her
B13	The early she gets married the early she will be free from her parents restrictions
B14	Groom's family instantly approved/liked her
B15	It is better to get married early as marriage ensures safety for women
B16	Marriage is always fun as it is an opportunity to get dressed up
B17	Marriage increases value of a girl in the society
B18	It is better to get married as he groom's family have liked her instantly
B19	Parents always wishes the best for her life so wha tever decision they take on behalf of her will be the ideal one
	<i>Seema is 14 years old. She fled away with a guy from her locality named Shontu. It is being heard they have got married eventually.</i>
1.2.1	<i>What kind of feeling prompted Seema to take this step?</i>
B20	Parents will neither agree nor understand, so it is better to elope
B21	Shontu loves Seema very much

B22	Parents will forcefully give her away with someone whom she may not like
B23	She will finally feel independent to come out of her parents restrictions
1.2.2	<i>What can be the feelings of her Parents</i>
B24	Seema's friends are a bad influence on her
B25	Neither she has clarity about what would be good for her nor would she listen or comply to elders suggestions
B26	Parents are economically poor, thus are incapable marry off their daughter
B27	She is a fool. She can be easily influenced to flee from home.
B28	If sexually matured, no one can stop her, she will flee to get married

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Notes



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