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Girls, Child Marriage, and Education in Red Sea State, Sudan: Perspectives on Girls' Freedom to Choose

AUTHORS

Samia El Nagar

Sharifa Bamkar

Liv Tønnessen

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Authors
Samia El Nagar
Sharifa Bamkar
Liv Tønnessen

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Graphic designer
Kristen Børje Hus

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List of Abbreviations

ACORD	Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
FGM	female genital mutilation
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NCCW	National Council for Child Welfare
NGO	non-governmental organization
SHHS	Sudan Household Health Survey Surveys
SORD	Sudanese Organization for Research and Development
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

Girls, Child Marriage, and Education in Red Sea State, Sudan: Perspectives on Girls' Freedom to Choose

Samia El Nagar, Sharifa Bamkar, and Liv Tønnessen

1 Introduction[1]

Child marriage is any formal marriage or informal union where one or both parties are under 18 years of age. Child marriage affects both boys and girls, but disproportionately affects girls. Each year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18, and that number is growing. Worldwide, 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday and more than one in three girls are married before age of 15 (UNICEF 2014a, 1). Although the largest numbers of child brides are in South Asia, most of the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are in Africa (African Union 2015a, 3). Sudan is among the African countries with a high prevalence of child marriage. In Sudan, 10.7% of women aged 15 to 49 were married before the age of 15, and 38s% were married before the age of 18 (CBS and UNICEF 2010).[2]

Child marriage is a human rights violation affecting children's and women's rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination, and freedom from violence and exploitation. Child marriage has harmful effects on young girls. Neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers, child marriage exposes young girls to a wide range of health risks. The minds and bodies of young girls are physically unprepared for sexual activity and childbirth, increasing the risks of maternal health complications. Early pregnancy increases the risk of both maternal and child mortality. Added to that, girl brides are more likely to suffer domestic violence and marital rape. Child brides are rarely allowed to continue their education. With limited access to education and subsequent economic opportunities, child brides and their families are more likely to live in poverty.

[1] We would like to acknowledge the collaboration of Women and Child Studies Center, University of Red Sea State. We appreciate the efforts of team of data collectors (Ali Mohamed Almin, Zainab Onor, Tagalsir Siralkatim, Ahmed Mohamed, and Marwa Abdelwahab) that patiently and enthusiastically undertook data collection, completed questionnaires, and assisted with interviews and focus group discussion. Their engagement in discussing the draft questionnaires and interview guide helped improve its relevance and cultural sensitivity. Their insights on the preliminary results are also appreciated.

[2] The figures vary among the states and are generally higher in rural than urban areas. According to the Sudan Household Health Survey (SHHS) of 2010, child marriage rate was 42.0% in rural areas compared to 29.1% in urban areas (CBS and UNICEF 2010). The prior 2006 SHHS showed that 14.6% of women ages 25 to 29 and 6.9% of girls ages 15 to 19 had married before the age of 15 (FMH and UNICEF 2006).

In recent years, child marriage has received great attention on international and national development agendas. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in September 2015, include eliminating child marriage as a key target for advancing gender equality by 2030. This goal may help sustain international attention and enhance political will at the national level in states with a high prevalence of child marriage. According to UNICEF's 2015 report *A Profile of Child Marriage in Africa*, the prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.[3] The fastest progress in reducing child marriage in Africa has been in the northern part of the continent.

Child marriage in Sudan has received heightened attention since late 2016 when it emerged as a recommendation from the UN after Sudan presented its Universal Periodic Report (United Nations 2016a; 2016b). In addition, the topic has recently come onto the public agenda in the context of reforming the Muslim Personal Law of 1991. That law sets the minimum age of marriage at *tamyeez* ("maturity"), which is 10 years old under the law. Furthermore, under the 1991 law, a woman needs a male guardian (a father, brother, or uncle) to contract her marriage. When the 1991 act was passed, the Islamic government of the time employed religious arguments to defend the legalization of child marriage. However, both government and civil society are now working for both legal and social change. In particular, the NGO Sudan Organization for Research and Development (SORD) has advocated for legal reform of the 1991 law's provisions on child marriage. The SEEMA Center has also turned its attention to child marriage, particularly by working with victims. In December 2015, the Sudanese government launched the African Union campaign to end child marriage in Africa (African Union 2015b). In addition, the National Council for Child Welfare (NCCW), under supervision of the Sudan's minister of social welfare, has formulated a strategy for abandoning the practice, which is in process of being endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers.

While there has been no legal reform of the Muslim Personal Law of 1991at the time of this report, the 2010 National Child Act defines "child" as a person below the age of 18. The 2010 law also includes provisions protecting children against all forms of discrimination, and, accordingly, it has been used as a platform to advocate for legal reform of the minimum age of marriage. However, this initiative has met resistance from religious conservative groups, who continue to argue that the practice of child marriage is in accordance with Sharia. On the

[3] Specifically, UNICEF was looking at the percentage of women ages 20 to 24 who were married or in union, before age 18, by African sub-region.

other hand, women continue to fight to end child marriage in Sudan, pointing to its multiple harmful effects, both nationally and sub-nationally. In Red Sea State, a handful of local NGOs, community-based organizations, and the Red Sea State Child Welfare Council have engaged in continual awareness raising efforts on the harmful effects of child marriage.

This report investigates child marriage in Red Sea State, which is located in Sudan's eastern region. Red Sea State is one of Sudan's most gender conservative areas, and 32.2% of married women ages 20 to 49 were married before age 18. Women in Red Sea State are frequently denied an education and pressurized to get married.[4] A staggering 89% of women there have been subjected to the harmful practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the name of tradition and culture.[5]

This report explores local communities' attitudes toward child marriage in Red Sea State.[6] The research is an addition to the very limited number of studies on the current situation of women and children's rights in eastern Sudan (see Fadllala 2007; Agnes 1998; Khalid 2013). To date, there is no research tackling child marriage in Red Sea State.[7]

The main objectives of the research are as follows:

- to understand the attitudes of the communities in the Red Sea State localities of Port Sudan and Haya towards the education and marriage of girls and boys;
- to gain insight into the arguments for and decision-making process behind child marriage;
- to cast light on the risks associated with child marriage, as perceived by the communities in Port Sudan and Haya;
- to highlight the experiences of girls who continue education instead of getting married; and
- to gain knowledge on how the local communities perceive awareness-raising campaigns to end child marriage.

[4] According to UNICEF (2014b, 31), 35.4% of school age girls in Red Sea State are out of school.
[5] The figures for child marriage and FGM are taken from a 2016 report by the Sudan Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and UNICEF (at 214, 221).
[6] The overwhelming majority of inhabitants in Red Sea State are Muslim.
[7] Although UNICEF and NCCW have recently issued the report *Study on Knowledge, Behavior and Practices Related to Early Marriage/Child Marriage in Six States in Sudan*, Red Sea State was not among the states selected for that study (Khalid 2013).

This research is significant because Sudan has categorized child marriage as a form of violence against women and has issued a national plan (2012–2016) to eradicate the practice. Child marriage is a top priority on the agendas of the NCCW and international, national, and local organizations. Our research findings suggest that child marriage is a culturally articulated form of denying girls' rights, including the freedom to decide whom to marry and when to enter into marriage. In the culture of the ethnic groups of Red Sea State, pubescent girls are stereotyped as being prone to promiscuous behavior that potentially damages the family and the ethnic group's honor.

Our findings suggest that attitudes towards child marriage in Red Sea State are slowly changing, as indicated by the fact that an increasing number of unmarried girls and young women are finishing school and entering universities. However, they do this at the social cost of being stigmatized as *agir* ("unfertile") or *bayra* ("not demanded for marriage"). And despite progress in changing attitudes, the practice of child marriage is still widespread, particularly in rural areas.

Several factors explain continuity of the practice of child marriage. First, it is a deeply rooted traditional practice. The most stated reason for practicing child marriage among respondents was tradition, called the *silif* in Red Sea State. Second, child marriage remains legal under the Muslim Personal Law of 1991, which means that any child marriage abandonment programs would contravene the law and would likely be aborted by religious groups. Against the backdrop of an authoritarian state that legalizes child marriage, it is difficult for anti-child marriage activists to advocate for the eradication of the practice without being seen as anti-government. This means that awareness raising campaigns in Red Sea State take a "soft" approach; activists do not speak in what the Sudanese would term a "loud voice." Third, although there are both national and sub-national calls to end the practice, no stakeholders have issued a comprehensive strategy to support raising awareness on the harmful effects of child marriage. Finally, there is a link between education and child marriage, and the lack of educational facilities and the poor quality of education provided to girls creates an obstacle to ending the practice. Specifically, the curriculum in schools does not empower girls and their families to challenge gender discriminatory norms in order to protect girls against the harmful effects of child marriage. It is interesting to note that while "poverty is a major factor underlying child marriage," according to UNFPA (2012, 12) and others, such as Girls Not

Brides (n.d.–a) and Parsons et al. (2015), it was not among the most cited reason given for the continuation of the practice in Red Sea State.[8] The main reason stated by our respondents was control of girls' chastity, something which is inherently linked to gender discriminatory norms and tradition of protecting the family and tribe's honor.

The findings in this report can be used to design interventions aimed at ending child marriage, especially interventions aimed at changing norms that continue to support the practice, as well as to promote the rights of girls and women to decide whom and when to marry.

2 Research methodology[9]

The research uses sampling survey data to explore the complex dimensions of the culturally sensitive topic of child marriage in Red Sea State. Data collection was undertaken from May to September 2016, using a clustered sampling survey.

Red Sea State has 10 localities. Of these, we purposely selected two for our study—Port Sudan and Haya—to highlight some variations between urban and rural settings. In each of these two localities, research sites were selected to ensure representation of various ethnic groups in the state. The city of Port Sudan, the capital of Red Sea State, is an urban area with approximately 500,000 residents and privileged by education, health, and transportation facilities. It also receives migrants from rural areas of Red Sea State, as well as from other states, giving it a diverse ethnic composition. Certain quarters of the city are dominated by Beja tribal groups and others by a mixture of Beja and other tribes. However, the Beja culture predominates in the city, and other migrant groups have adapted to this culture. The process of social change is also more evident in Port Sudan than in Haya. The Haya locality is located in a rural setting with limited infrastructure and facilities in comparison to Port Sudan. It is one of the pastoralists' temporary settlement areas. The Hadendwa, a conservative Beja sub-tribe, is the predominant group in Haya, but a few other ethnic groups also live there.

[8] For example, according to Parsons et al. (2015, 13), "When parents marry off their daughter, there are often economic and social reasons for them to make that choice."

[9] Six data collectors—three men and three women, all with data collection experience—assisted with the research. Prior to engaging in fieldwork, we held a discussion session to orient the data collectors with the purpose of the research, its conceptual framework, and the questionnaire. In regard to the questionnaire, we discussed the relevance of each question and its possible answers to the study. We made the decision to start with questions about attitudes towards education to ensure the cooperation of the community, since child marriage is a culturally sensitive and taboo issue that many are reluctant to discuss with outsiders. After fieldwork, members of the research team were encouraged to share their experiences.

Four sites were selected randomly in each locality in order to ensure the inclusion of different ethnic groups. For Port Sudan, we selected the city quarters of *Salalab, Daralnaeem, Daralsalam, and Daimarab. Salalab* includes the Beja, Beni Amer, and other groups from northern Sudanese tribes, while *Daralnaeem* is the setting for Beni Amer, Hausa and Nuba. *Daralsalam* is predominated by groups from the Hausa and Nuba tribes. The four neighborhoods chosen in Haya locality included Hay Janoub Alwarsha, Alhay Alshrgi, Alhaya Alghrbi, and Hayaljabal, and all are predominated by the Hadendwa tribe with few other ethnic groups.

The study included household members (of varying genders and ages), community leaders, girls in school, and girls who had dropped out of school. In addition, we included civil servants in relevant government institutions and activists of civil society organizations.

Due to the limits of time and budget, we obtained a total of 300 questionnaires from individuals in all areas. Of these, 225 questionnaires were completed during structured interviews in Port Sudan, since it is an urban area with diverse environments and individuals. The other 75 questionnaires were completed during interviews in Haya, since it has a relatively less diverse population. Most of the questionnaires were completed by data collectors during face-to-face interviews.

We took different approaches to reaching female and male respondents. The female data collectors systematically conducted interviews with females in houses, taking houses alternately in each block. As men are mostly not available at home until late at night, the men were interviewed in coffee shops or markets in their neighborhoods.

In addition, 69 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted: 31 with young and adult females in households, 25 with young and adult males and community leaders, five with NGOs activists (both male and female), four with females who had resumed their education after marriage, and four with government employees (both male and female). Also four semi-structured group interviews were undertaken, two with young females during their coffee gathering and the other two with young males. Finally, 20 group discussions were conducted in the research sites with female coffee groups in households, young males in cafés, and adult men in markets. Ten focus group discussions with school girls were also conducted. The

questionnaire, interviews, and group discussions were administered in the local dialect to ensure the subjects' participation and full understanding.

The structured interviews involved close-ended questions about the usual ages of marriage in the community, attitudes of women and men in the community towards education and child marriage, how decisions about child marriage are made, the consequences of child marriage, and problems faced by the unmarried girls who continue their education. In addition, we included questions about the interventions for raising awareness about child marriage implemented in their neighborhoods. The questionnaire was completed during individual interviews, according to their availability and consent.

The semi-structured interviews involved open-ended questions. Both these semi-structured interviews and the group discussions built on and complemented the structured interviews, specifically on questions related to the problems and implications of child marriage. Interviews were conducted with employees of NGOs and government institutions (including NCCW, the Girls Education Unit of the Ministry of Education, the Red Sea State Television and Radio Corporation, the Ea'tanena Women's Development Society, the Oon Organization, and the Abu Hadia Organization for Community and Women's Development) in order to learn about activities related to the abolishment of child marriage. Also, three interviews were undertaken with females who had dropped out of school, but then returned to school after marriage in order to solicit their experiences of decision-making and the factors that influenced their return to school after marriage.

Finally, ten focus group discussion was conducted with girls in primary school (which has eight grades for girls, ages 6 to 16). It concentrated on the girls' intentions to continue their education and the factors influencing their decision to pursue education and/or marriage.

3 Child marriage: Causes, consequences, and drivers of change

UNFPA (2012, 11) defines child marriage as "a legal or customary union" before age 18. Although child marriage affects both boys and girls, the practice disproportionately affects girls. Numerous countries legally allow marriages of girls at a young age, usually with a lower minimum age than for boys. Each year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18, many of whom are married to much older men (UNICEF 2014a, 1)

Child marriage is condemned by a range of international and regional conventions, protocols, resolutions, and platforms, including the UN Resolution on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (United Nations 2016c), which recognizes "child, early, and forced marriage" as harmful practices that violate, abuse, and impair human rights. Child marriage is synonymous with "early marriage," as both terms refer to marriages where one or both of the parties to the marriage are under the age of 18 (although this also depends on the legal definition of "child" in a particular country). Forced marriages, on the other hand, also include marriages where the parties are over the age of 18 but have not consented to the marriage. In this report, we have chosen to use the term "child marriage" to discuss child and early marriage collectively; the report does not focus on forced marriage—although child marriage is by definition always forced (since a child cannot give consent to marry).

Child marriage is a harmful traditional practice and a form of violence against women. It could even be characterized as a form of slavery that negatively affects girls and women's reproductive health, education, and economic opportunities by placing them in bondage to a spouse not of their choosing. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states that marriage should be "entered only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses" (article 16.2). However, an element of coercion is nearly always involved in child marriages (whether in Sudan or beyond): parents, guardians, or families pressure or force children into marriage, sometimes even colluding with others to do so. Child brides and grooms have little say in when or whom to marry.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (CRC) defines a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years" (article 1). Sudan ratified the CRC in 1990, and this convention has been instrumental in advocacy for child rights in Sudan. Although the CRC does not specifically address child marriage, it provides a number of norms and protective measures for children that collectively provide an enabling framework for tackling

child marriage. The resolution is important in defining a child as younger than 18 years old. In many communities with a high prevalence of child marriage, puberty is the defining benchmark between childhood and adulthood, rather than the CRC's international standard of 18 (UNICEF 2001). In Muslim countries that apply Sharia law, puberty is signified by the start of the menstrual cycle for girls. Although a marriage may be arranged during the pre-pubescent stage, such a marriage is not supposed to be consummated before puberty is reached. However, Sudan's Muslim Personal Act of 1991 sets the age of "maturity" (*tamyeez*) at ten, even though many children have not even reached puberty by this age. On the other hand, the National Child Act of 2010 defines a child as a person younger than 18, but makes no mention of child marriage.

The condemnation of child marriage is most strongly expressed in the UN Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979 (CEDAW), which is widely recognized as the women's bill of rights. CEDAW explicitly addresses key areas of women's rights, including the age of consent to marry. Article 16.2 calls upon states to legislate a minimum age of marriage that applies to both men and women: "The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage." The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the expert body that monitors CEDAW, has issued a general recommendation stipulating 18 years as the minimum marriage age for both men and women (CEDAW Committee 1994, 36).

Similarly, article 6 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (also known as the Maputo Protocol) clearly provides that men and women should have equal rights when it comes to marriage (African Union 2003). Among other things, the protocol requires marriage only by consent of both parties, a minimum age of marriage of 18 years for women, and marriage registration. Sudan is among a select few countries that have neither signed nor ratified CEDAW. Sudan has signed the Maputo Protocol, but has not ratified it. This makes the CRC the most important international human rights treaty in Sudan in relation to advocacy for a minimum age of marriage of 18.

Child marriage prevails across countries, regions, cultures, and religions. Child brides are found in every region in the world, including in the Western world. However, 30 of the top 41 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are African Union countries

(African Union 2015a, 3). Sudan is among these countries with a high prevalence of child marriage.

The origins of child marriage are multidimensional and deeply rooted. Accordingly, the next subsections begin by providing background information on gender discrimination in Sudan, which is at the ultimate root of practices such as child marriage that are harmful to girls and women. It then goes on to address some of the specific drivers of child marriage as a unique social phenomenon, followed by a discussion of some of the harmful consequences of the practice. This section ends by discussing some current interventions against the practice of child marriage.

3.1 Gender discrimination in Sudan

This section presents the factors and processes perpetuating child marriage in Red Sea State within the context of gender discrimination. Policies and laws at Sudan's national level shape and influence gender discrimination in Red Sea State, as decentralization processes have not been implemented to give Sudanese states autonomy. Thus, to understand the drivers and dynamics of child marriage in Red Sea State, we also need to consider and highlight gender discrimination at the national level.

3.1.1 National level gender discrimination in Sudan

Sudan's current government came to power through a coup d'état in 1989, which instigated a process of Islamization based on the assumption that Islamic and Arabic beliefs represented the foundation of the country's national identity and should define its legal, political, cultural, and economic systems. Leaders called this "the civilization project" (*al-Mashru al-Hadari*). As in many other political projects in the region, the "woman question" has been a driving vessel in this project (Hale 1997; Nageeb 2004; Tønnessen 2011). In particular, Sudan's codification of the Muslim Personal Law of 1991, described by activists as a backlash to women's rights, has played a particularly important role in attitudes towards women in the country and continues to be a contested piece of legislation.

The principal elements of the Muslim Personal Law build on the principle of *qawama*, which is roughly translated as "male guardianship." Islamist lawmakers understood the principle of

qawama is very much linked to the ideal of a male breadwinner.[10] A man's spending of his means to support the women in his family justifies his wife's duty to obey him, and articles 91 to 95 of the law expressly require a wife to be obedient to her husband, as well as to care for and be faithful to him. Because of the requirement of obedience, a man can deny his wives the right to work outside the home, and a woman is considered disobedient if she leaves the matrimonial home without her husband's permission (unless conditions for doing so are provided for in the marriage contract), or refuses to travel with her husband without an acceptable reason.[11] On the other hand, the Muslim Personal Law entitles a wife to a dowry (*mahr*), to maintenance (*nafaqa*), to receive permission to visit her parents and relatives, and to not be physically or psychologically harassed.[12]

Two issues related to male guardianship are particularly contested in Sudan. First, under the law, both parties must consent to a marriage, yet a female needs a male guardian (*wali*) to validate the marriage (article 25). Article 33 even gives the guardian the right to invalidate a marriage that has been contracted without his permission, *unless* the woman is pregnant.[13] Second, the age of consent for marriage is "the age of *tamyeez*" ("maturity") which is interpreted as 10 years of age (article 40(3)). *Tamyeez* is the stage where "a person is not an adult but is a child who is able to show a degree of independence and knowledge" (Abdel Halim 2011, 9). This part of the law is inherently interlinked, according to women's rights activists, since (a) a child cannot give consent at the age of 10 (which makes any marriage at that age forced) and (b) the fact that a male guardian can contract a child into marriage facilitates the continuation of child marriage in Sudan.

At the time the Muslim Personal Law of 1991 was adopted, lawmakers argued for marriage at *tamyeez* in order to prevent illicit sexual relations. Sex outside of marriage is forbidden in Islam. Since women develop sexual urges at puberty, early marriage is the Islamic solution to

[10] For example, the wife is entitled to financial maintenance (*nafaqa*) up to six months after a divorce. The husband is financially responsible for the children even when they are in the custody of the mother. A father is financially responsible for his daughters until marriage and for his sons until they can provide for themselves. In addition, a woman inherits half the amount of property that her brother inherits. The reasoning behind the inheritance law is that the husband is the breadwinner of the family. A woman's inheritance is thus considered her own property, while a man's inheritance will be used to fulfill his financial obligations to his family.

[11] As a direct consequence of the stipulations on obedience, the concept of marital rape does not exist within the law. If the conditions stipulated are met, the wife is not allowed to deny her husband sexual intercourse (Tønnessen 2014).

[12] A man is allowed to marry up to four wives, although he has to treat all his wives justly and equally (article 51(d)). The law also stipulates that the husband should provide separate housing for his wives, unless they agree to live together in the same home (article 79).

[13] The guardian has to petition the court within one year of after the marriage has been consummated.

deal with the risk of fornication. From an Islamic point of view, the "sexual chaos" (*fitna*) of modern day societies, where there is little or no gender segregation in schools and workplaces, can be traced back to the abandonment of early marriage, as exemplified in the promiscuous West. Early marriage allegedly ensures that sexual relations happen only within marriage. Supports of the Muslim Personal Law point to a *hadith* (reported in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim) that describes the Prophet Muhammad's betrothal to Aishah when she was six years old. Evidence also suggests that they married (and the marriage was consummated) when she was nine years old, thereby establishing a practice that girls can enter puberty as early as the age of nine. In contemporary Sudan, this interpretation of Islam is highly contested by both women inside the government and independent women activists, who claim that this *hadith* has a weak chain of transmission and that it is a patriarchal and wrongful interpretation of Islamic sources.

Nonetheless, although gender discrimination has persisted through history in both public and private spheres, notable progress is being made in a few areas. For example, an increasing number of girls and women are receiving an education. The share of females six years old in primary level in 2011 and 2012 reached 81% (Sudan Federal Ministry of Education n.d., 26). Although Sudan has the highest rate (24%) of out-of-school girls before last grade of primary level in the Middle East and North Africa region in 2014 (UNICEF 2014b, 38), females constitute 48.8% of bachelor's degree students and 44% of diploma students in public and private universities (Elnagar et al. 2011, 95).

In addition, women are becoming ever more visible in the formal and informal sectors of all kinds of economic activities, including those traditionally dominated by men, such as engineering, medicine, and street vending. Women even outnumber men in teaching and in civil service. Women, specifically in urban areas, are active in political parties and NGOs. Since the introduction of a requirement of 25% reserved seats for women in Sudan's national and sub-national legislative assemblies in 2008, women are now more present than ever in political decision-making at both the national and state levels. This increased presence of women in the public sphere has led to calls for women's rights and freedoms, as well as the condemnation of gender discrimination and gender-based violence, despite the fact that Sudan has not ratified CEDAW. The international community supports the mobilization, advocacy, and lobbying initiatives of women's rights activists in Sudan and neighboring countries, including work on child marriage, FGM, and women's political representation.

However, progress towards gender equality is more apparent among those of the educated middle class in central Sudan and in and around the capital than in other regions, which have been struck by armed conflicts and chronic underdevelopment. Sudan still has high illiteracy (48%), particularly among women, and women's economic participation is still very low (21%) compared to men (54%). Women also have limited political participation and low educational attainment outside of urban areas and in disadvantaged states. The majority of women engage in unpaid work and in informal sector activities that lack legal protection (Elnagar et al. 2011). This limits women's participation in decision-making and reinforces unequal gender power relations within families.

Furthermore, progress in Sudan on the specific issue of child marriage has been limited. Despite international and domestic pressure for making 18 the minimum age of marriage, the Muslim Personal Law of 1991 remains unchanged. Neither the National Strategy for Women Empowerment nor the National Family Strategy of 2009 even mentions child marriage. Although the 2010 National Child Rights Act includes provisions against discrimination of the girl child, it does not mentions child marriage specifically. However, the 2010 Child Act does define a child as a person below the age of 18, and since the 2010 Child Act is to take precedence over all other laws, women inside and outside of the government are of the belief that a reform of the Muslim Personal Law with regards to child marriage is inevitable. NCCW continues to tackle child marriage through awareness raising, but with a low profile. A strategy to eliminate child marriage, which was initiated by NCCW, is still waiting approval by the parliament. There are a few NGOs, especially SORD, that call for the end of child marriage. According to SORD, however, it is not enough to merely raise the minimum age of marriage to 18; Sudan must also get rid of male guardianship in marriage. There is need for more advocacy to reform discriminatory laws. (Badri and Al-Husseni 2014,19).

3.1.2 Gender discrimination in Red Sea State

Red Sea State, in eastern Sudan, is characterized as a state recovering from conflict and burdened with problems, including poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and limited social services (Abdel Ati et al. 2011, 5–12). About 57.7% of households in Red Sea State live below the poverty line (IMF 2013, 11).

Red Sea State has 1,396,110 inhabitants, of which 44% are female. Nearly half (45%) of the state's population lives in rural areas. The population is a collection of tribes, dominated by the Beja tribe and its sub-tribes (Hadandawa, Bishariyin, Amrar, and Beni Amir). The Rashaida constitute another significant ethnic group in the state. The state is characterized by internal migration due to poverty, drought, and famine. In addition, migrants from the Northern Sudan and the River Nile states come to Red Sea State for the economic opportunities available due to commerce and ports (Abdel Ati et al. 2011, 11). Red Sea State also receives influxes of internally displaced people from South Sudan, Darfur, and the Nuba Mountains, who are driven from their homes by conflict and poverty (ibid., 3).

The Beja people are governed by customary law (*silif*), which regulates all aspects of their lives (Al-Nagar, Tønnessen, and Bamkar 2017, 7). *Silif* "is considered as part of an individual's identity, respect and adherence to the *silif* system is not negotiable" (Sahl, Elkarib, and El Mutalib 2004). Furthermore, as Sahl, Alkarib, and Mutalib explain (2004, 6–7),

> [It is the] tribe that is accountable for the behaviors of its members and not the individuals themselves. Each tribe is empowered to question its members regarding the different aspects of the *silif* in case of any violation. The behavior of members of each tribe is blamed on their tribes and not the individuals who have broken the *silif*. The tribe then announces that the individual is no longer socially committed to it and, consequently, has no right to claim any further treatment under the *silif* system.

For purposes of this report, it is important to understand that *silif* also determines women's rights within the tribe. As Al-Nagar, Tønnessen, and Bamkar explain (2017, 8),

> [W]omen are traditionally not allowed to participate in public decision-making and politics, and they are denied access to land and livestock. . . . Among the Beja and other tribes . . . , girls and women are responsible for domestic chores and their public movement are greatly restricted. The practice of child marriage is regarded as part of the s*ilif*.

However, changes are brewing. More girls are obtaining an education and women are increasingly entering the work force. For example, Hadendwa women, especially widows and divorcees, who are displaced in towns usually work as housemaids (Fadlalla 2007). As well, women engage in work outside home, as teachers, doctors, and state government employees (Abdel Ati et al. 2011, 21). The 2016–2017 education statistics show that there are more female than male teachers in Port Sudan. In addition, in urban areas an increasing number of

girls are attending school and sometimes their number is even higher than boys. However, the rural areas statistics show how *silif* traditions continue to force girls out of schools. In Haya, the 2015–2017 statistics show that over 30% of girls who attend first grade drop out by fourth grade, and this drop-out rate can reach up to 70% by sixth grade. Despite visible changes among Beja communities in urban areas, many *silif* values are still prevalent, especially those related to women roles. The Hadendwa tribe remains the most conservative and resistant to change (ibid., 2).

Women still face barriers of discriminatory laws and traditions, as well as resistance from both religious and tribal conservative actors. In a group discussion connected to prior research, two young women explained, "In Port Sudan, there are still spaces in the market where women are not allowed to go. Girls are forced to marry husbands chosen by their families" (Sahl, Elkarib, and Mutalib 2004, 10).

3.2 Specific drivers of child marriage

The literature on child marriage identifies several root causes and exacerbating factors that contribute to child marriage, including gender-discriminatory norms rooted in patriarchal values and ideologies, the lack of educational and economic alternatives to child marriage, and exacerbating social factors such as poverty, economic instability, conflict, and humanitarian crisis. In addition, most countries where child marriage is prevalent lack laws that could protect children against the practice and ensure their human rights (Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003; ICRW 2011; Myers 2013, 17–18; Backlund and Blomqvist 2014, 19; Save the Children 2014; Svanemyr et al. 2015).

Our study specifically looks at the following factors relevant to the persistence of child marriage:

- laws legalizing child marriage,
- the education of girls,
- poverty and the economics of marriage, and
- gender inequality and discrimination.

3.2.1 Laws that legalize child marriage

In 146 countries, state or customary laws allow girls younger than 18 to marry with the consent of parents or other authorities (UNFPA 2012, 12). Although an increasing number of countries have set a minimum age of marriage at 18, many of these countries provide exceptions to the minimum age if the parents consent, the court authorizes the exception, or the girl is pregnant. In Muslim countries, child marriage is often legitimized within the frame of religion. For example, in Iran, girls and boys can be married as young as nine years. In Saudi Arabia and Sudan the legal age of marriage is 10 years (Mortimer 2015). These young ages are based on a conservative interpretation of Sharia, which arguably allows child marriage upon puberty. Islamist lawmakers in Sudan argue that marriage at puberty (which has been interpreted as 10 years old) prevents out-of-wedlock births, "sexual chaos" (that is, *fitna* or "promiscuity"), and immorality.

Nonetheless, legislative changes alone are not enough to change the practice of child marriage. Although an increasing number of countries have introduced a minimum age of marriage at 18, implementation lags behind and oftentimes there is little government effort to promote public awareness of new laws (ICRW 2011, 4; Myers 2013, 18–19). In India, for example, marriage before the age of 18 has been illegal for about three decades, yet about half of all girls still marry before 18 (UNICEF India, n.d.). In Nigeria, a legal limitation on the age of marriage has not fundamentally altered the practice (Toyo 2006). In short, while reform of the legal and policy framework is necessary, it is an insufficient part of the answer (Malhotra et al. 2011).

The lack of impact of such laws is related in part to child marriage being a deeply entrenched cultural and religious tradition (Faizunnisa and ul Haque 2003; Prettitore 2015). Nevertheless, in the Muslim world advocacy to abolish child marriage is beginning to arise that uses Islamic arguments to condemn the practice (Bang 2016). For example, in a report to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2013, the Musawah Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family (Musawah) challenges the ways in which Muslim governments invoke outdated and contested interpretations of Islamic laws to justify child marriage or to justify why change is not possible.

3.2.2 Education for girls

A lack of education for girls is both a cause and effect of child marriage. There is substantial evidence that child marriage is an important factor leading girls to curtail their education (see, e.g., Field and Ambrus 2008; Nguyen and Wodon 2012). Lloyd and Mensch (2008), using data from the late 1990s for Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Togo, find that for girls ages 15 to 24, child marriage and pregnancies directly account for between 5% and 33% of school drop-outs, depending on the country. Using similar data for Nigeria for 2006, Nguyen and Wodon (2012) find that child marriage accounts for 15% to 20% of school drop-outs, which is of the same order of magnitude. Additionally, according to Nguyen and Wodon (n.d., 3; citing Nguyen and Wodon 2012), "if child marriage and early pregnancies could be eliminated, this could potentially reduce the gender gap in education by about half."

The lack of school facilities contributes to the prevalence of child marriage (ICRW 2011, 50–51). If school locations are at a significant distance from home, this raises concerns about the safety of young girls, particularly when they reach puberty. As a consequence "many families opt to end a daughter's schooling rather than put at risk her safety by sending her to school" (ICRW 2011, vi). Parents may even feel it is in their daughter's best interest to marry at a young age, as it will protect her against physical or sexual assault.

For example, a study from Tigray in Northern Ethiopia shows that girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys when they reach puberty (Mjaaland 2013). To continue schooling after eight grade, many students must move from home to the nearest city. Since girls are considered sexually mature when they reach puberty around the age of 15, parents are often concerned that their daughters will get a boyfriend at school and be "broken" if they lose their virginity or become pregnant. Parents are committed to ensuring their daughters' reputations and their own respect in the community.

On the flip side, education is believed to reduce the risk of child marriage (Jain and Kurz 2007, 2). According to a report by Equality Now (2014, 35), "girls who are more educated marry later, have children later, and are more likely to earn an income and contribute to their nation's economy." There is reason to believe that the decline in child marriage among girls under the age of 15 in a number of African countries is (at least partly) linked to more girls going to school, since girls living in poor or rural areas who drop out of school have no real

opportunities, other than to marry and have children. According to UNFPA (2012, 4), "child marriage is the outcome of fewer choices. Girls who miss out or drop out of school are especially vulnerable to it—while the more exposure a girl has to formal education and the better-off her family is, the more likely marriage is to be postponed."

3.2.3 Poverty and the economics of marriage

Poverty and economic transactions are key to understand the prevalence of child marriage (Nour 2009, 53). According to UNICEF (2016, 38), girls from poor households are twice as likely to be married during childhood than those from rich households. In the developing world, more than half of the girls from the poorest households are married before age 18 (UNFPA 2012, 36). This reality is underscored by global data showing that women and girls with greater means marry later (World Bank 2011, 153).

The economic benefits of marriage itself also contribute to child marriage (Parsons et al. 2015). Families may reap immediate financial rewards from marrying their daughters early. In some places, the costs of marriage are lower when the bride is a child. For example, in India and Bangladesh, the dowry amount increases with a girl's age and thus girls' families are pressured to marry their daughters early (ICRW 2011, 37). In other place, such as in the Middle East, traditions such as bride wealth create incentives for child marriage, as younger brides are considered to have greater value (UNICEF 2001, 6). This drives poor families to marry off their daughters early to increase economic stability (Vogelstein 2013). In other words, "[f]or poor families, with little money even for food and basic necessities, marrying their daughter early is an economic survival strategy" (Smaak and Varia 2015, 4).

Once daughters are married, the financial responsibility to care for them shifts to the husband (unlike with sons). As such, marrying girls during childhood reduces the economic burden of their families of birth (Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003, 6; Myers 2013, 24; Khalid 2013, 28). Sometimes child marriage can also create political or ethnic alliances: "By marrying their daughter to a 'good' family, parents also establish social ties between tribes or clans and improve their social status" (Nour 2009, 53; see also Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen 2015). However, even if parents have economic or social reasons to marry off their daughters, these short-term economic reasons do not serve the long-term interests of girls (Parsons et al. 2015).

3.2.4 Gender inequality and discrimination

The drivers of child marriage listed above must be understood within the context of gender inequality and discrimination against girl children that is often embedded within the religious and cultural norms related to dowry, bride wealth, and protection of girls' sexuality (Karam 2015). Child marriage persists for many reasons, including poverty and the lack of educational opportunities, but ultimately it happens to girls because they are female. In essence, child marriage is driven by "traditions and gender-discriminatory norms rooted in patriarchal values and ideologies" (Svanemyr et al. 2015). According to Girls Not Brides (n.d.–b), "At its heart, child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are somehow inferior to boys and men." Child marriage is practiced in order to control their sexuality. "Parents also believe that marrying their daughters young protects them from rape, premarital sexual activity, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections" (Nour 2009, 53). Added to that, the marriage of girls at or near puberty is important for maximizing fertility (Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003, 5; Backlund and Blonqvist 2014, 17). According to Girls Not Brides (n.d.–b),

> Child marriage is also driven by patriarchal values and the desire to control female sexuality . . . . Families closely guard their daughters' sexuality and virginity in order to protect the family honour. Girls who have relationships or become pregnant outside of marriage are shamed for bringing dishonour on their family.

In other words, virginity is key to marriage and to securing the family's good reputation.

3.3 Consequences of child marriage

The negative consequences of child marriage are wide ranging UNICEF (2001, 9). Child marriage violates the children's basic human rights. A girl's freedom is curtailed when she is denied the right to decide whom and when to marry. Further, being married young deprives a girl of her fundamental rights to education, sexual and reproductive health, and safety.

3.3.1 Educational attainment and labor force involvement

Education is widely considered to be one of the most important factors in delaying the age of marriage for girls. Girls with no education are three times as likely to marry by 18 as those with a secondary or higher education. Marriage and pregnancy have been identified as some of the key factors forcing girls to leave school (Field and Ambrus 2008; UNFPA 2012;

Nguyen and Wodon 2012; Lloyd and Mensch 2008). Early childbearing and a lack of access to continued educational opportunities limits a child bride's chances of employment and, in turn, her productive value to society (Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003, 10; Mann, Quigley, and Fischer 2015, 35). In turn, this limits her choices and life opportunities, as she is more likely to be financially and socially dependent upon a male breadwinner and to be deprived of her agency to make choices about her body, her sexuality, and her reproductive health and rights (McClearly-Sills et al. 2015, 70).

When girls marry young, their opportunities to learn reading, mathematics, and other life skills are replaced by a process of socialization into submissive wives (Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003, 7–8; Mann, Quigley, and Fischer 2015, 35). De Silva-de-Alwis (2008, 36) explains, "After marriage, young married girls' access to formal and even non-formal education is severely limited because of restrictions placed on mobility, domestic burdens, childbearing, and social norms that view marriage and schooling as incompatible."

The educational effects of child marriage affect not only the girl herself, but also the overall economy. Because child marriage reduces education attainment for girls, it may also reduce labor force participation directly (because of a lack of agency for child brides) or indirectly (because of the impact of early marriage on education attainment and on fertility) (McCleary-Sills et al. 2015).

3.3.2 Health of mothers and children

Child marriage also has negative health complications. Child marriage "encourages the initiation of sexual activity at an age when girls' bodies are still developing and when they know little about their rights or their sexual and reproductive health" (Girls Not Brides, n.d.–c). Consequently, girls suffer psychosocial and emotional problems from forced sexual relations (UNICEF 2001, 9).

Child marriage is associated with other health complications and dangers as well. Neither physically or emotionally ready to give birth, child brides face health risks with early pregnancy and childbirth. Once married, girls face intense social pressure to prove their fertility, which results in too soon and too many pregnancies. According to Nour (2009, 54), girls between ages 10 and 14 are five to seven times more likely and girls between ages 15 and 19 are twice as likely to die during childbirth. They are at an even greater risk for other

problems arising from early sexual activity and pregnancy, such as eclampsia, postpartum hemorrhage, sepsis, HIV infection, sexually transmitted disease, malaria, and obstructed labor (ibid.). For example, girls younger than 16 usually have small pelvises that are not mature enough for childbearing; consequently, they have an 88% chance of having an obstetric fistula—a hole in the birth canal caused by labor that can leave the girl with urinary or fecal incontinency (ibid.). Furthermore, mothers younger than 18 have a 35–55% higher risk of delivering preterm or having a low-birthweight infant (ibid.). These problems are further exacerbated by entrenched gender inequity and discrimination that are manifested in poor quality of health services specifically discriminatory practices by male staff against young girls (Myers 2013, 28).

3.3.3 Safety

Child marriage is associated with increased exposure to sexual and gender-based violence because the marital relationship is based on the power of one spouse over the other. Young wives are vulnerable to domestic violence, abuse, divorce, and abandonment (ICRW 2006). According to Myers (2013, 30; citing Jenson and Thornton 2003), "Women who marry young are more likely to be beaten or threatened, and to believe that their husbands might be justified in beating or raping them." A study from Egypt reports that nearly 30% of married women who entered marriage as child brides become victims of violence at their husbands' hands, and 41% of women married as child bribes are report beatings during pregnancy (Koons Family Institute 2013, 13).

3.4 Interventions against child marriage

The practice of child marriage is slowly declining, according to UNICEF. "Progress is most dramatic when it comes to the marriage of girls under 15 years of age" (UNICEF 2014a, 4). Globally, the percentage of young women ages 20 to 24 who were married or in union before age 15 declined from 12% in 1985 to 8% in 2010 (UNICEF 2014a, 4). The change has come as a result of interventions aiming to encourage abandonment of the practice by addressing the perpetuating factors, and these efforts have differed among countries and specific contexts.

Girls Not Brides (n.d.–d), a transnational organization working to end child marriage worldwide, has developed a theory of change that includes four categories: (i) empowering girls, (ii) mobilizing families and communities, (iii) providing services, and (iv) establishing

and implementing laws and policies. Ending child marriage requires mutually reinforcing efforts across these areas. At the same time, however, attitudes towards child marriage are heterogeneous, as illustrated by a case study of rural Muslim communities in Burkina Faso (Gemignani and Wodon 2015) that finds important differences in drivers of child marriage between communities. This suggests that policy and program responses to child marriage should take into account local conditions—including those pertaining to religion and gendered norms—if they are to be successful (Karam 2015).

Most interventions towards ending child marriage can be placed within one of the above four categories. These interventions may target girls at risk of child marriage, communities, religious and tribal leaders, and/or political decision-makers. Not only must successful interventions target all these groups of people, but they also must rely on a combination of international, national, and local actors who are committed to pressing for the end of child marriage.

The international dimension of change is key in many aspects. First, international law can influence national and local policymaking to end child marriage. For example, a significant body of research suggests that states that ratify CEDAW adopt more women's rights policies compared to states that have not ratified the convention (see, e.g., Stetson 2008). Second, states may be more likely to adopt policies on child marriage when their international donors support the change; that is, the international context may provide material incentives for states to enact policy change (Adams 2007; O'Brien 2013; Kang 2016). Third, international actors may be able to directly affect the practice of child marriage, for instance, by funding women's advocacy activities, by engaging in awareness-raising and other outreach activities, and by providing financial and technical assistance for drafting bills and other legal measures. For example, Mann, Quigley, and Fischer (2015, 38) explain that through support from the UK and Canadian governments, the Zambia government and Zambian NGOs were able to develop programs for combating child marriage.

Changes in law and policy are key (Jones et al. 2014, v–vi). However, the effect of legal change can be ambiguous, and different fields of scholarship view the driving forces of such change quite differently. Law and economics scholars assume that social control is achieved primarily by the state through the legal system, and that governments are the chief source of rules and enforcement mechanisms (Posner 2003). This is based on an assumption that

individuals are rational actors and alter their behavior in the face of legal incentives—an assumption that requires laws to be evenly and predictably enforced (which is often not the case in countries where child marriage is practiced). Nonetheless, legal and policy change can sometimes create an enabling environment for advocates. Particularly in the context of authoritarian states, a national strategy on child marriage or a legal change on the minimum age of marriage gives both international and national organizations the political and social space to design appropriate interventions.

Law and society scholars recognize examples of successful deterrence-based strategies, but also recognize that in some instances the threat of a criminal penalty has a limited impact. For example, when laws are antithetical to the norms of a social group, the pecuniary costs may have limited power to deter behaviors (Tyler 1990). The influence of social groups may be powerful when there are strong social sanctions such as withholding or conferring signs of status and respect, or withholding access to material resources (Posner 2000). Social, moral, and religious norms may be intimately intertwined in complex cultural systems and (if at odds with legal norms) may generate resistance to complying with legal regulations (Mackie and Lejeune 2009). Similar studies on other harmful traditional practices suggest that legal and policy changes are symbolic and communicate a new state-backed norm that can act as a catalyst for social change and provide an "enabling environment" for ending child marriage (UNICEF 2010). The power of this catalyst depends on the readiness to change of individuals in the community (Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2006).[14]

Gender-based and theories of change scholarship recognizes that a deep-rooted, discriminatory, and harmful traditional practice such as child marriage will only change if gender norms change. Most awareness raising projects aim to change social/religious/moral norms from "below" and from "within" the culture. The theory of change underpinning these awareness-raising initiatives builds on the idea of critical mass. Once a critical mass of individuals manifests public support for abandonment of the practice, social pressures can lead additional individuals and families to adopt the new norm; change can then proceed

[14] In a study on the abandonment of FGM, Shell-Duncan and Hernlund (2006) identify five stages of change: willing adherent, contemplator, reluctant adherent, willing abandoner, and reluctant abandoner. "Willing adherents" are those who favor continuation of FGM and continue the practice in their families. "Reluctant adherents" personally favor abandonment, but continue the practice because others have not yet become persuaded to abandon the practice. "Contemplators" continue the practice, but are experiencing ambivalence and question aspects of the practice. "Reluctant abandoners" personally support the practice, but have abandoned it because other people or social pressures have forced them to stop. "Willing abandoners" personally favor abandonment of FGM, and have been able to act on this preference.

spontaneously and will be sustained over time. Role models are critical in catalyzing such norm change processes (Myers 2013, 36; UNICEF 2001; Badri and Al-Husseni 2014, 27). Role models "do not hesitate to deviate from the customary practice of child marriage. They do face potential stigma and exclusion but articulate a resolve to educate their daughters and even allow them to pursue careers beyond completion of schooling" (ICRW 2011, vi).

The thinking around child marriage abandonment has a strong resemblance to theories of change regarding other harmful practices, particularly FGM. Here Gerry Mackie's (2000) social convention theory is important. Mackie argues that FGM and other harmful practices must be understood as "a matter of proper marriage" (at 254). One individual cannot give up the practice unless other members from intermarrying groups do the same. Mackie predicts that if a critical mass of people in one community were to agree to stop FGM—and publicly declared this—the normative change would potentially spread to other communities and lead to a shift in social conventions that would "help bring female genital mutilation to an end" (Mackie 1996, 999). On other harmful practices, Mackie and LeJeune (2009, iv) state,

> [P]arents want what is best for their children. It is this most basic value that motivates a parent's decision to continue the harmful practices, since failure to comply with the social convention brings shame and social exclusion to girls and their families. Once an alternative to the social convention becomes possible within a community and people realize that the community might be better off jointly abandoning the practice, it is this most basic value—to do what is best for their children—that also motivates communities to abandon the harmful practice.

Ending child marriage requires interventions both "above" (such as changes in laws and policies) and "below" (at the level of communities that engage in the practice).

4 Findings

4.1 Child marriage: A practice in Red Sea State that robs children of their agency

4.1.1 Childhood and child marriage reinforce gender inequality

During the interviews we conducted, respondents stated that childhood ends between 10 and 14 years old for both girls and boys, depending on the physical growth of their bodies. One interviewee reported, "Childhood ends with puberty, and that differs among girls and between boys and girls." Signs of puberty are generally understood in Sudan to include, for example, the development of breasts and the start of the period for girls and the development of a deeper voice for boys. Very few individuals we interviewed defined a child as anyone younger than 18, and all of those who did so were highly educated men or women. Even a young female university graduate stated that the defining line between childhood and adulthood is 15 years. It is evident that individuals in Red Sea State are not aware of the Red Sea State Child Law that defines a child as a person younger than 18 years. Rather, the perception of childhood is influenced by prevalent norms and traditions, as well as by the Beja group's religion. Further, interviewees considered both pubescent girls and boys to be ready for marriage.

Table 1. Age of marriage for boys in Red Sea State, Sudan, per the opinion of interviewees in researched communities

Age of Marriage for Boys	Females (181 respondents), %	Males (119 Respondents), %
7–10 years	0	0
11–14 years	3.3	3.4
15–17 years	16.0	14.3
Above 18 years	80.7	82.4
Total	100.0	100.0

Tables 1 and 2 show the respondents' reports on the age at which most girls and boys in their communities get married. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they stated that boys in the communities marry at older ages than girls. More than 80% of male and female respondents interviewed asserted that boys in their communities marry above 18 years of age, yet several interviewees noted that girls are sometimes married as young as seven years old. In a group discussion, one woman stated, "Girls may (even) be betrothed the day of their birth."[15] Although a betrothal at birth does not typically mean that the resulting marriage is consummated before puberty, the practice of contracting a girl's marriage at infancy reflects the low value of girls

[15] Group discussion, Haya, 23 May 2016.

and women in the community, as it denotes that girls are a commodity that parents want to get rid of as soon as possible.

Table 2. Age of marriage for girls in Red Sea State, Sudan, per the opinion of interviewees in researched communities

Age of Marriage for Girls	Females (181 respondents), %	Males (119 respondents), %
7–10 years	2.2	0.8
11–12 years	10.5	42.9
13–15 years	21.5	20.2
16–17 years	33.7	26.1
18 years and above	32.0	10.1
Total	100.0	100.0

Considering that child marriage is the norm, those reporting the age of marriage for girls as above 18 seem to be suggesting that a change is underway. About 10% of male and 32% of female respondents reported that females in their communities marry after 18 years. The difference in the percentages of males and females who reported this reflects differences in the extent to which males and females recognize the changes in their communities, which is likely due in part to the fact that there are higher percentages of females than males at all educational levels (see appendix).

A few females and males in discussion groups noted that the age at which individuals (both male and female) marry in urban areas differs from the age at which they marry in rural areas. For example, in urban areas, men usually cannot afford to marry until they are above age 30, but in rural areas young males work and stay with family so they can afford to marry at younger ages. In rural areas, females also tend to marry younger, in large part because they are often forced to drop out of school (because of distance, cost, or available facilities) and they have few other options available to them after they do so. The educational facilities and infrastructure in rural areas are very poor or nonexistent, and there are no efforts to motivate girls and their families to prioritize girls' education. Thus, child marriage is outcome of fewer choices, as noted by UNFPA (2012).

4.1.2 Norms and expectations support child marriage

Drivers of child marriage in Red Sea State relate to controlling the chastity of girls, and the majority of female and male respondents mentioned this as a reason for child marriage (see

table 3 below). However, the real reason for protecting girls appears to be to protect the families from being stigmatized, ostracized, and dishonored by their communities, *not* to protect the girls themselves. In a group discussion, a man clearly spelled out,

> If girls are not married and are allowed to continue their education, they may be immoral and dishonor the families.[16]

The second reason for child marriage shows the influence of traditions. The *silif* restricts the freedom of women and girls in the name of protecting the family and tribe's honor. Approximately 40% of both male and female respondents to our survey confirmed that child marriage is done to comply with traditions. These respondents stood for maintaining traditions and were thus not yet ready to change or challenge prevalent norms. In short, although Red Sea State has experienced socio-economic development, some values of *silif* system still prevail (see Abdel Ati et al. 2011).

Table 3. Reasons for the child marriage of girls, based on respondents from Red Sea State, Sudan

Reasons for child marriage	Females (181 respondents), %	Males (119 respondents), %
Marriage is protection for girls	61.9	52.9
To comply with traditions	39.2	41.2
If girls get old they are stigmatized as *agir* or *bayra*	10.5	32.8
To have many children	16.0	4.2
To reduce family economic responsibilities	7.7	13.4

Participants in the research also reported that girls are married during childhood to avoid being stigmatized as old, *agir* ("unfertile"), or *bayra* ("not demanded for marriage"). In particular, male respondents of all ages, in both rural and urban areas (including some highly educated men) shared this view. For example, the male director of a girls' primary school in Port Sudan stressed,

> The complications of child marriage are easier for me to tolerate than having my daughter stigmatized as *bayra*. I married my first daughter at 14 years of age and will not hesitate to do the same for her sisters.[17]

[16] Group discussion with young men, Port Sudan, 24 May 2016.
[17] Interview with male school director, Port Sudan, 26 May 2016.

This statement suggests that men are concerned with their image even if it comes at the expense of their daughters. This implies a lack of recognition of girls' fundamental human rights.

In addition, such responses suggest that communities impose a stigma on individuals and families that do not comply with prevailing norms, which are male dominant. As of yet, education has failed to effectively challenge such norms, and even some women hold to them. The priority for all appears to be to satisfy group expectations. Girls are married early to maximize fertility, as is the case in India (ICRW 2011, 3). The high number of children enhances the father's position and increase the tribe's population.

As table 3 shows, a small percentage of male and female respondents mentioned that families marry their girls young to reduce economic burdens. Many of those interviewed stressed poverty as a reason and explained that some families profit from their daughters' marriages when the bridegroom's family is wealthy. Members of the bride's extended family also benefit from this wealth, in particular, that which is paid in the form of livestock and shared among the family. This is in line with some literature (Mathur, Grene, and Malhorta 2003; Myers 2013; Khalid 2013).

The marriage itself can also create economic linkages. For example, a man might use marriage as a means of supporting poor relatives. After the man marries his niece or cousin, for example, he might then offer support to the bride's family, for example, by providing jobs to his in-laws. Not only does this show the linkage between child marriage and economic need, but it also shows how difficult it may be for a daughter to get out of child marriage, since by doing so she may be depriving her family of an economic benefit. Social norms give low value to girls and suggest that girls' rights can be sacrificed for the interest of the family. Nonetheless, during a group discussion, one woman contradicted this view by explaining, "We do not marry our girls for poverty. Girls are not an economic burden. They have no demands, and they help with domestic responsibilities."[18]

The interviews also added another factor perpetuating child marriage—socialization. During one interview, an educated, middle-aged man noted, "Marrying girls during childhood

[18] Interview with middle-aged woman, Haya, 25 May 2016.

enables the husband to socialize her to be submissive and obey him and his family."[19] A young man also stressed, "Marrying a small girl enables the husband to socialize her not to discuss issues with him and not to disagree with him and not to do anything without his permission."[20] A wife's obedience to her husband is stipulated by the Muslim Personal Law of 1991 and is inherent in the Beja *silif* system.

4.1.3 Children, especially girls, have no choice about their spouses

The ability of a girl or boy to participate in the decision of who and when to marry is inextricably related to the child's right to influence her or his future life. Unfortunately, children rarely have a choice about their marriage and for girls this lack of choice is particularly profound. This subsection discusses our findings regarding who is consulted about child marriage and who actually decides on the marriage in Red Sea State, Sudan.

Consultation about child marriage

Children—whether male or female—are not consulted prior to being married off. The father is always consulted on his child's marriage, but to determine who else has the ability to consult on a child's marriage, we asked our respondents to identify those other family members whose opinions would matter. The most important noticeable result in table 4 below is the recognition both male and female respondents gave to the role of mothers, grandmothers, and aunts in marriage consultations, as traditionally women have no recognized role in decision-making processes.

Table 4. Family members consulted prior to child marriage, based on interviews in Red Sea State, Sudan

Which relatives are consulted prior to a child's marriage?	Boy's Marriage		Girl's Marriage	
	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
Uncles	85.0	69.7	85.6	63.0
Mother and Grandmothers	41.4	30.3	45.3	60.5
Aunts	32.0	21.8	36.5	28.6
Brothers and Sisters	37.0	38.7	47.0	39.5

Uncles have the primary consulting role in girls' marriages, although mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and even siblings may also be consulted. For boys' marriage, the findings show that all kin are consulted, however with some variations. The results show that marriage of both girls

[19] Interview with middle-aged, educated man, Port Sudan, 28 May 2016.
[20] Interview with young man, Haya, 28 May 2016.

and boys is a family concern, as traditionally it is done to protect family's honor. The higher percentage asserted consultation of uncles, as the research communities are patriarchal. In addition, legally and traditionally, males (specifically fathers and uncles) are the guardians of females. Women appear to support men in depriving their daughter's rights in the name of "protection" and "family honor." As mothers and grandmothers, women reinforce gender discriminatory norms.

If a proposal of marriage comes from a tribal leader, there is usually no consultation with anyone, since turning down a tribal leader would create embarrassment for the entire immediate and extended family. As an educated, middle-aged man explained, "If an old sheikh asks for marriage of a very young girl, nobody can say no."[21] Rather, such a marriage is considered to be in the interest of the girl, as it will give her an elevated social position.

As table 5 below shows, one-third of females and two-thirds of males who participated in our study indicated that girls are consulted prior to their marriages. Most of those who responded in this way were educated and from Beja, Hausa, or northern Sudan groups. As the table shows, respondents in the urban area (Port Sudan) were much more likely to suggest that girls are consulted prior to marriage than were respondents in more rural area (Haya).

Table 5. Consultation with girls prior to their marriage, as reported by respondents in Red Sea State, Sudan

Are girls consulted prior to being married?	Total		Haya (rural)		Port Sudan (urban)	
	Females Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Females Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Females Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
Yes	61.3	33.6	16.0	24.0	68.6	40.6
No	38.7	66.4	84.0	76.0	31.4	59.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As figures 1 and 2 below show, male respondents who indicated that girls are not consulted prior to being married represented a variety of educational levels and ages. Male respondents with a secondary or university education were more likely to say that girls are consulted prior to marriage. In addition, younger male respondents were more likely than older respondents to say that girls are consulted prior to marriage. Similar trends emerged among female respondents who had more education. This suggests that the more education parents have

[21] Interview with middle-aged man, Port Sudan, 22 May 2016.

received, the more likely they will consult their children regarding their marriages. In addition, the figures suggest that that some young men and women who are likely to become future parents are in favor of consulting girls.

Figure 1.

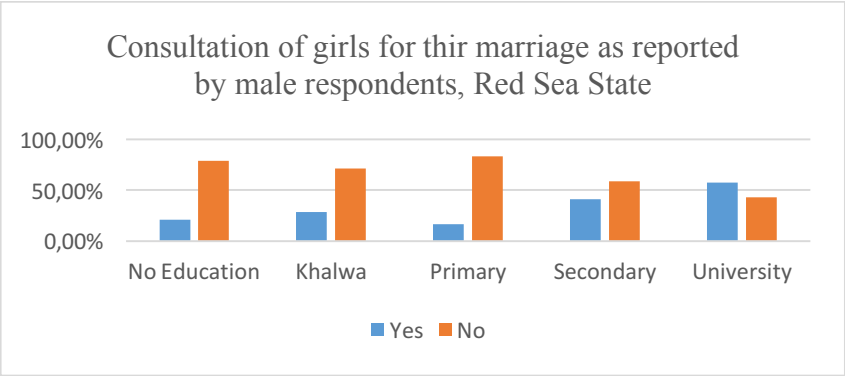
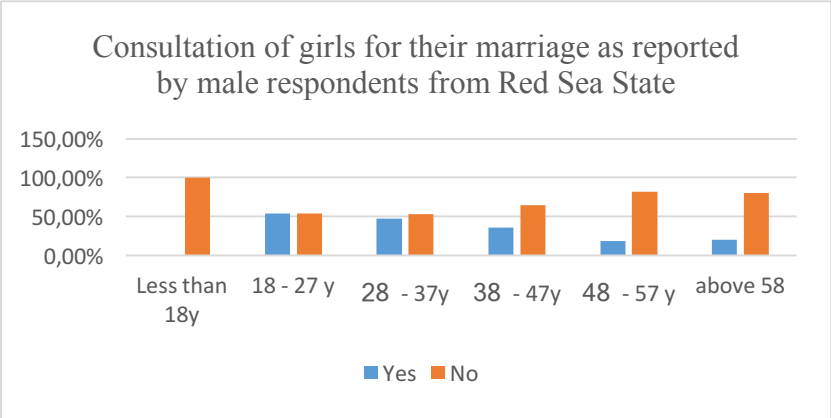


Figure 2.



The actual percentages of individuals who believe in consulting a girl prior to marriage may actually be lower than this data indicates, however. A challenge with those who said girls are consulted prior to marriage is that traditionally "consulted" merely means "informed." Because women have the responsibility to inform their daughters that they are getting married, many respondents replied that girls are consulted prior to marriage, even though they are not actually asked for their opinion or approval.[22] In short, even when "consultation" occurs, girls are not given any choice. This deprivation of the right to decide when and who to marry is an everyday practice experienced by girls and women throughout Sudan and is

[22] Similarly, Jones et al. (2014, v) explain that girls in Ethiopia are only informed about their marriages.

based on normative beliefs that women are weak and unable to make their own decisions. Importantly, those do not think girls should be consulted before marriage do not believe girls have the right to make this decision. Nonetheless, some parents seriously consider giving their daughters the opportunity to choose husbands—even from outside the extended family and ethnic group.

The participants' responses to questions about consultation of girls in marriage show how gender discriminatory norms ignore the human rights of girls and women. Men treat girls and women as commodities that they can exchange without consideration of their preferences. This even runs contrary to the Muslim Personal Law of 1991, which stipulates consent of both parties for a marriage. According to article 34(1) of that law, the marriage of a pubescent woman shall be concluded by her guardian with her permission and consent to the husband and the dowry.

Since others make the decision concerning marriage without consulting the girl involved, we raised the question about the opportunity girls have to refuse marriage. Our findings reveal that girls have no realistic opportunity to refuse a marriage arranged for them, but are obliged to be submissive and accept restrictions imposed on them by their families.

Table 6. Reasons why girls cannot refuse marriage, based on interviews in Red Sea State, Sudan

Reasons a Girl Cannot Refuse Marriage	Female Respondents (%)	Males Respondents (%)
She is not allowed to reject her family's decision	47.0	47.1
Her families do not consider her opinion	24.9	51.3
She knows her families' financial conditions will not allow her to continue school	16.0	10.1
She knows her family would not encourage her to continue her education	16.0	6.7
She knows an education will be of no use to her	1.1	5.9
She knows marriage is more important than education	5.0	.8

As table 6 above shows, over 47% of males and females interviewed explained that girls do not refuse marriage because they know they are not allowed to disobey their families. In this regard, there are no differences between the responses of females and males in Port Sudan and Haya. In an interview, one married girl said, "I wanted to continue education but had to

accept marriage as I could not disobey my parents."[23] Even boys may have to deal with their families' expectations, as indicated by a young man in an interview:

> I knew my cousin was not interested in marrying me and I was not interested in her but we married because we were not able to go against our families' decision. But we could not continue for more than a year; we got divorced.[24]

Girls are often in a particularly difficult position because they know that their families will not consider their preferences, even if they refuse. This was confirmed by 56% of females and 58% of males in Haya, and 19.9% of females and 40.6% of males in Port Sudan. The lower percentages holding this view in Port Sudan suggests that attitudes towards girls' rights may be changing in urban areas.

Other reasons girls cannot say no to marriage relate to education and show that girls have few opportunities for schooling or are often raised to believe that education will provide little benefit to their lives. Some women interviewed stated that certain girls who want to continue their education may refuse to marry; when this happens, their mothers have to persuade or even force them to accept marriage in order to avoid a family crisis.

Deciding who to marry

More than 80% of male and female respondents to our survey explained that boys and girls are usually married to close cousins or relatives from their tribe. As a young man from a rural area said, "It is known to us since childhood that you have to marry your cousin."

According to our survey, more female (48.6%) than male (27.7%) respondents reported the possibility of marriage outside the tribe for boys; only 15% of male and 36% of female respondents reported this as a possibility for girls. A middle-aged woman explained, "We prefer marriage of close relatives to preserve our tribal traditions and to keep wealth within the tribe". Such comments reinforce the importance of child marriage for securing tribal bonds and traditions, as noted by Mathur et al. (2003).

[23] Interview with 17-year-old married girl, Haya, 25 May 2016.
[24] Interview with young, divorced man, Port Sudan, 7 Sept. 2016.

4.1.4 The benefits of bride wealth create incentives to marry off girls

We raised the issue of bride wealth (*mahr*) with respondents for two reasons. First, bride wealth has religious, legal, and traditional significance. Religiously, it is a mandatory payment by the groom to the bride, some of which is given at the time of marriage and some of which is held for her to receive later in the case of divorce. In addition, *mahr* legally must be given to the bride. As a long-standing tradition, *mahr* is composed of money and a variety of gifts that promotes the social and economic relationships of the bride and groom's families. Secondly, child marriage in many countries has an economic aspect. Often, "[f]amilies seek to benefit from marriages of their daughters by gaining cash, livestock and other items" (Mann, Quigley, and Fischer 2015, 36). A small percentage of male (12.6%) and female respondents (2.8%), reported that the *mahr* is only a nominal payment made during the process of contracting a marriage. The rest considered bride wealth to be a more significant provision of money and/or gifts in exchange for accepting a girl or woman's hand in marriage.

A substantial percentage of male respondents (78.2%) asserted that families discuss bride wealth during the marriage contracting process, suggesting that families are concerned with the financial benefits of their daughters' marriages and the adherence to tradition. On the other hand, over 55% of female respondents indicated that families do *not* discuss bride wealth. The responses by women seem to indicate that there are some variations among families. Some may not discuss bride wealth, since they know that the tradition has a stronghold and grooms' families usually abide by this tradition without being asked to do so. An elderly woman who was interviewed explained,

> We do not discuss bride wealth in girl's marriage, because the main concern is the protection of girls and the families do not want to put barriers to the processes.[25]

Those respondents who indicated that families discuss bride wealth emphasized that fathers, mothers, grandparents, and even sometimes aunts and uncles play a role in decisions about how much bride wealth to accept in return for marrying off a girl (see table 7). However, some respondents noted that the composition and the amount of bride wealth is specified according to traditions and customs, as reported by 44.5% of male and 40.3% of female respondents.

[25] Interview with elderly woman, Haya, 23 May 2016.

Table 7. Family members taking part in decisions about bride wealth, as reported by respondents in researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

Who or what influences the decision of how much bride wealth to accept?	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
Bride's father	38.1	44.5
Bride's mother	9.4	50.4
Bride's uncles	7.7	0.8
Bride's aunts	0.6	0.8
Bride's grandparents	2.2	31.1
Bridegroom's family	22.1	8.4
Local traditions and customs	40.3	44.5

Individuals who participated in the group discussion with non-Beja groups emphasized that some families request gold or other gifts, so that they can be "given to the bride to wear or to buy things for her house."[26] But Beja tribal members indicated that girls have no share in the bride wealth.[27] In rural areas, bride wealth often comes in the form of livestock, which is distributed among family members.

A middle-aged, illiterate man gave another explanation: "As marriages are between relatives, the assumption is that the bridegrooms' families abide by tribal rules for bride wealth."[28] Thus, bride wealth is an expectation that should be fulfilled. That means the economic benefits of the families from girls' marriage are secured by traditions.

4.1.5 Families may impose conditions on marriage to protect girls

As table 8 below shows, 53% of female and 59.1% of male respondents explained that girls' families do not put any conditions on marriage. More respondents in Haya (60% of both males and females) than in Port Sudan (40%) indicated that bride's families do not put conditions on marriage. This is because families in rural areas know that the groom's family will pay what is expected by tradition, but in urban areas commitment to tradition differs, and some families may have developed non-traditional expectations for bride wealth.

Nonetheless, some families do place conditions on the marriage of their daughters. For example, they may insist that their daughter continues to live with them or that she should have a separate kitchen and expenses, if she is living with her in-laws. Both types of

[26] Group discussion with individuals from non-Beja groups, 10 Sept. 2016.
[27] Focus group discussion with Hadenbdwa males, Haya, 15 Sept. 2016.
[28] Interview with middle-aged, illiterate man, Port Sudan, 10 Sept. 2016.

conditions are meant to protect the marriage. As one father explained, "We marry our girls young, but we keep them with us until they learn how to manage their marital lives."[29]

Table 8. Conditions families place on their child daughters' marriages, as reported by respondents from researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

Conditions a Child Bride's Family May Place on Her Marriage	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
The married children will live with the bride's family after marriage	21.5	26.1
The child bride will have separate living conditions from the in-laws	18.8	12.6
The husband will work with the child bride's family	1.1	16.0
The groom's family will provide a gift of gold to the child bride	6.6	8.4
No prior conditions	59.1	53.8

The bridegroom's family can also put conditions on the traditions that must be observed during the marriage arrangement, according to one-fifth of female and two-fifths of male respondents, respectively. For example, 21.5% of female respondents and 26.1% of male respondents indicated that some in-laws insist that the bride live with them. Whether the bride's family or her husband's family places conditions on the marriage, the existence of such conditions reinforces the patriarchal societal norms in Red Sea State, which have the aim of controlling girls' lives even after they marry.

4.1.6 Tribal leaders defend discriminatory norms, but their influence might be declining

Since tribal leaders are the gatekeepers of the *silif* system that maintains gender discriminatory norms, we also asked the extent to which tribal leaders participate in decisions about the conditions place upon marriages.

Table 9. The role of tribal leaders in determining child marriage conditions as reported by respondents from researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

What role to tribal leaders play in determining the conditions of marriage?	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
No interference	12.7	10.9
Tribal leaders facilitate marriage negotiations	27.6	33.6
Tribal leaders obligate families to traditions and customs	59.7	55.5
Total	181	119

[29] Interview with a young man, Haya, 25 May 2016.

The findings presented in table 9 above show that the tribal leaders have major roles in negotiating marriages and in maintaining tribal traditions and customs. Very few respondents reported that tribal leaders have no role, although one man interviewed in Port Sudan asserted that tribal leaders only interfere when a disagreement arises.[30] There are no significant differences between rural and urban areas in the responses to this question, probably because in urban areas there emerged some young tribal leaders who have been trying to maintain to some extent the rural leaders' roles.

At the same time, some individuals suggested that the power of tribal leaders may be on the decline, at least in urban areas. For example, one man interviewed stated, "The role of tribal leaders in urban areas is becoming weak as compared to rural areas."[31] An educated woman similarly explained, "Recently there are some families introducing new practices in marriage in urban areas and not resisted by their communities' leaders."[32] Abdel Ati et al. (2011) confirms the changing role of the *silif* system headed by tribal leaders.

In particular, some tribal leaders—especially the young ones who have acquired a secondary or tertiary (university) education—approve societal changes that are beginning to occur, including the education of girls and the delay of their marriages. However, our interviews revealed that other tribal leaders resist these changes and discourage education for girls and women.

4.1.7 People in Red Sea State are somewhat aware of the negative effects of child marriage, although more work could be done

Communities' perception of the consequences of child marriage

We sought to understand how individuals in Red Sea State perceive the implications of child marriage. As indicated in table 10 below, a good portion of respondents did not see any problems with child marriages of bosys, although some respondents did note that boys who marry young may seek a second wife, divorce early, or refuse to comply with their in-laws' condition of cohabitating. It is noticeable that a higher percentage (56.0%) of females in Haya compared to Port Sudan (29.5%) reported that boys may take a second wife, suggesting that

[30] Interview with a middle-aged man, Port Sudan, 23 May 2016.
[31] Interview with a middle-aged, educated woman, Port Sudan, 23 May 2016.
[32] Interview with a young man, Port Sudan, 6 Sept. 2016.

the practice of polygamy is more prevalent outside of the urban center of Port Sudan. Over 60% of male respondents in Haya and female and male respondents in Port Sudan asserted that boys who marry during childhood divorce early.

Table 10. Problems related to boy child marriages as reported by respondents from researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

Problems related to boy child marriage	Haya (rural)		Port Sudan (urban)	
	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
No problems	20.0	28.0	25.6	18.8
Some take a second wife	56.0	30.0	29.5	29.0
Some divorce early	56.0	68.0	67.3	66.7
Some refuse to live with in-laws	32.0	16.0	9.6	17.4

Table 11. Problems related to girl child marriages as reported by respondents from researched communities in in Red Sea State, Sudan

Problems related to girl child marriage	Haya (rural)		Port Sudan (urban)	
	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
No problems	28.0	40.0	34.0	15.9
Some are divorced early	40.0	50.0	51.9	59.4
Some have difficulties sharing a house with in-laws	32.0	16.0	32.7	20.3

The findings in table 11 show that divorce is a major problem related to girl child marriage, as reported by about half of respondents in both rural and urban areas. These figures suggest that the males and females in the researched communities realize that child marriage has negative social consequences.[33] This finding diverges from research on child marriage in Khartoum, which concludes that there is lack of knowledge about the consequences of child marriage (Badri and Al-Husseni 2014, 24).

Nonetheless, it appears that at least some respondents may be more concerned about the effects of a girl's child marriage on the husband and family than on the girl herself. For example, a female teacher interviewed explained, "The problems with child marriage are that the girls may not be aware of the husbands' rights and may not be able to manage the

[33] In addition, divorced females are stigmatized by their communities and their families (fearing misconduct by them) closely monitor them

relationship with in-laws."[34] This statement emphasizes concern for husband and in-laws, not for the girl.

Even though many respondents are educated and live in urban settings, the interviews did not highlight problems related to the girls' individual rights, such as being deprived of education, losing opportunities for self-development, and being able to work. This indicates that girls' rights are not yet part of the cultural norms of the communities researched in this study. Importantly, none of the respondents noted violence as a problem in child marriages. Physical violence may not exist in all child marriages (for example, among Beja groups such violence is prohibited by tradition—although it could occur in secret). However, all practices related to child marriage are forms of violence, even if communities do not recognize them as such, since they take away the right of a child to control what happens to the child's body.

Table 12. Health problems suffered by girls after marriage as reported by respondents from researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

Health problems of married girl children	Haya (rural)		Port Sudan (urban)	
	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
Obstructed labor	76.0	84.0	78.8	60.9
Death of mother during child birth	24.0	66.0	48.1	42.0
Infertility	16.0	10.0	12.2	8.7
Other health complaints	28.0	28.0	20.5	27.5

Literature dealing with child marriage emphasizes health issues as a major consequence and risk of the practice (see, e.g., Girls Not Brides, n.d.–c; UNICEF 2001; Nour 2009), and our study confirms this. More than three quarters of all respondents reported obstructed labor, and about half of respondents noted maternal mortality. About one quarter of all respondents mentioned frequent health complaints, and a little over 10% of all respondents mentioned infertility.

As table 12 shows, high percentages of respondents in both rural and urban areas associated obstructed labor with child marriage. However, fewer respondents in Port Sudan than in Haya related maternal mortality to child marriage. This is likely because maternal deaths are higher in rural areas, since the people there are poor and have limited access to health services

[34]Interview with female teacher Haya, 27 May 2016.

(Myers 2013). In addition, some respondents in urban areas seemed to recognize that maternal mortality is related to multiple factors (and the age of the mother is only one of the factors).

Our data shows that families know about health risks related to child marriage. If families know the risks of child marriage, but still continue the practice, it is evident that girls and women have a low value in their communities.

4.2 Education and child marriage: A complex, but critical relationship

Child marriage is one of the main factors that discourages a girl from continuing her education (Field and Ambrus 2008; Lloyd and Mensch 2008; Nguyen and Wodon 2012). On the flip side, educated girls and women are less likely to marry young. Given this important relationship between child marriage and education, the next subsections explore the perspectives of respondents from Red Sea State on these issues.

4.2.1 Girls drop out of school for a variety of reasons

About 40% of female respondents and 36% of male respondents, related school drop-out to child marriage. However, there were important variations between rural and urban respondents, as demonstrated in table 13 below. Lower percentages of males than females in both rural and urban areas asserted that girls leave school for marriage, almost certainly because they do not want to admit that a practice that promotes their dominance and interests has a negative impact on women. On the other hand, very high percentages of rural women relate girls dropping out of school to child marriage, not only because this is their reality, but also because they understand traditional marriage to be a better alternative than education for girls. In general, more rural respondents attributed girls' drop-outs to other factors prevalent in rural areas, such as the distance of schools from home. Other factors related to both urban and rural areas, such as the high cost of education and the fact that some schools are mixed gender. These factors indicate that the school system itself discourages girls' education.

Table 13. Reasons girls drop out of school, as reported by researched communities in rural and urban areas of Red Sea State, Sudan

Why do girls drop out of school?	Haya (rural)		Port Sudan (urban)	
	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)

They marry	80.0	26.0	34.0	18.8
Education is too costly	20.0	42.0	49.4	31.9
They do so to give their brother(s) a to attend school	12.0	18.0	7.1	7.2
Schools in the area are mixed gender	8.0	4.0	3.8	15.9
Schools in the area are a long distance from home	16.0	20.0	4.5	17.4
Education is not important for girls	8.0	14.0	10.3	13.0
It is more important that girls attend *khalwa* to learn how to read the Koran than that they attend school	20.0	20.0	13.5	23.2
Girls are needed to help at home	8.0	26.0	5.3	5.8

Other reasons girls drop out of school relate to gender discriminatory norms and expectations, for example, the need for girls to engage in domestic work, the preference of educating boys over girls, the supposed insignificance of education to girls, and a preference for *khalwa* for girls. In a group discussion, one women explained, "The heavy burden of domestic work does not give girls time to study, and when they fail, they leave the schools."[35]

In short, child marriage is not the sole factor, but is one of many factors that contributes to girls dropping out of school. This is an important consideration in designing interventions for ending child marriage, since to be effective, any intervention not only needs to deal with the practice of child marriage itself, but also needs to advocate for improvement of educational policies and curriculum in a way that motivates parents and communities to value and encourage the education of their girls. A new norm needs to be established that puts a higher value on educated, empowered girls than on young, married girls. This is well-indicated in the theory of change advocated by Child Not Brides (n.d.–d).

4.2.2 Girls and women face challenges if they continue their education without marrying

The acceptance of child marriage is a basic gender norm that was maintained among the majority of individuals surveyed as part of this study. Because of these embedded norms, females who continue their education at secondary schools and universities have adopted new norms that support education and oppose child marriage and the community sanctions they face. Girls and women who continue their education cross boundaries of tradition, and this may create risks and problems for them and their families. In this section, we discuss how these individuals and their families are perceived.

[35] Group discussion with female coffee group, Port Sudan, 27 May 2016

Importantly, over 80% of female respondents in this study indicated that there are no problems with a girl or woman continuing her education. This suggests that those adapting new norms are not influenced negatively by those who cling to more traditional norms. However, as tables 14 and 15 below show, some individuals still think that females face problems when they delay marriage and continuing their education. One child marriage-related challenge for girls who complete primary and secondary education without marrying is stigmatization as *agir* ("unfertile") or *bayra* ("not demanded for marriage"). Of the male respondents to our survey, 33.6% indicated that girls would be stigmatized in this way for completing primary school, and 41.2% indicated that girls would be so stigmatized for completing secondary school. However, male respondents viewed this as a challenge more frequently than female respondents.

Table 14. Challenges facing girls who complete primary school without marrying, as reported by researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

What challenges do girls face when they complete primary school without marrying?	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
The girl will have difficulty marrying	12.2	6.7
The girl will be stigmatized as *agir* or *bayra*	13.8	33.6

Table 15. Challenges facing girls who complete secondary school without marrying, as reported by researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

What challenges do girls face when they complete secondary school without marrying?	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
The girl will have difficulty marrying	12.2	20.2
The girl will be stigmatized as *agir* or *bayra*	13.8	41.2

Another challenge facing females who complete their primary and secondary education is that some think their marriage opportunities will be reduced. This was clearly reiterated during two group discussions with men who explained,

> Marriage to educated girls is avoided by both young men and their families because educated girls are selective and resist marriage to cousins according to traditions. They prefer to marry educated men only. They may not accept the restrictions imposed by a husband. They demand a specific style of living.

> And they may not be as obedient to husbands and their families as [younger, uneducated] girls.[36]

On the other hand, some women interviewed asserted that young women who continue their education have no such problems. Some of these girls married after their graduation. Others stressed that their families are proud of them. One middle-aged, educated mother explained, "Educated, unmarried young women have no problems if they get opportunities to work and benefit their families."[37]

Another female noted that the real problem is not their education, but whether they will be able to engage in meaningful employment following graduation: "The problem for some is that they are not allowed to work."[38] A Beja post-graduate female student stressed, "My father is not worried about my marriage; he allowed me to continue my post-graduate study but warned me never to think of getting a job."[39]

From the tables 15 and 16, higher percentages of males than females mentioned stigma as a consequence of a female continuing her education. This is most likely because many men in Red Sea State do not continue their own educations, but rather work as unskilled laborers in the port. Since most men are for the marriage of girls, they thus propagate a stigma about educated females. In addition, educated females prefer to marry educated men and therefore tend to refuse to marry their illiterate cousins. Nonetheless, greater percentages of women than men thought a girl would have a harder time getting married, which likely reflects their actual life experiences. Male cousins (the preferred groom by families) may not be interested in marrying girls who continue their education.

As is evident from table 16, families of girls who continue their education may also be exposed to problems. One such challenge for these families is that their daughters will not be demanded for marriage. One-third of male respondents in Port Sudan and 38% of male respondents in Haya stressed that families of daughters pursuing an education live with insecurity that their daughters will not marry. A significant percentage of both male and

[36] Two group discussions with young men, Port Sudan, 28 May and 7 Sept. 2016.
[37] Interview with educated mother and her employees, Port Sudan, 21 May 2016.
[38] Interview with young woman, Haya, 22 May 2016.
[39] Interview with young female post-graduate, Port Sudan, 9 Sept. 2016.

female respondents asserted that a daughter's chances for marriage are reduced when she continues her education, suggesting that she is stigmatized as *agir* and *bayra*.

Other respondents indicated that families who pursue education for their daughters are trying to change traditions, which is viewed negatively in some communities. Because of the social sanctions within the tribe against families that try to challenge traditions and adapt new norms, some young women have to look outside their local communities for marriage opportunities. In an interview, one man explained, "Girls who continue education mostly marry outside the tribe, as their cousins and relatives look for small girls. In addition, educated young women mostly expect to be married to educated men."[40]

Table 16. Consequences faced by families that allow their daughters to continue their education without marrying, as reported by researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

Consequences faced by families that allow their daughters to continue their education without marrying	Haya (rural)		Port Sudan (urban)	
	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
Their daughters both marry and work	56.0	28.0	51.9	20.3
They are considered to be trying to change tribal traditions	36.0	32.0	26.9	11.6
They live with the insecurity that their daughters will not marry	0.0	38.0	14.7	33.3
Their daughters have reduced opportunities to marry	20.0	34.0	18.6	49.3

However, the fact that several respondents listed such concerns does not mean that families that allow their daughters to continue their education actually suffer such problems. As table 16 also shows, a high percentage of female respondents in both Haya and Port Sudan had a positive perception about families allowing their daughters continuing their education. Over half of female respondents in Haya and Port Sudan perceive these families as successful because their daughters marry and generate income. However, the percentages of male respondents who considered this positive consequence is much lower than the percentages of female respondents. Males generally do not approve economic independency of women, as it challenges the base of their dominance and some educated females try to maintain their ability to make independent choices throughout their marriages.

[40] Interview with young, educated man, Haya, 23 May 2016.

4.2.3 Change is brewing: Role models and other supporters of girls' education

Over 80% of both male and female respondents indicated that unmarried, educated girls and women live in both Haya and Port Sudan. These girls and women have exercised their agency to succeed in education. Almost always they have been able to do this because of supported from their families. During interviews, we identified some girls and families that have challenged traditions and succeeded in overcoming negative stigma. For example, a young female university graduate woman explained, "My mother, a Beja, was very strong. She refused to circumcise and marry us [three daughters] at childhood and insisted we continue our education to the university level."[41]

While mothers traditionally play a role in forcing girls to drop out of school and accept marriage, mothers can also act as role models by planning for their daughters' education and influencing (or even resisting) fathers to support girls continuing their educating and avoiding child marriage. For example, consider the case in Box 1.

<text box>

Box 1. The example of a strong, educated mother

I am educated and a primary school teacher. My husband is a wage earner. At a very early stage, we were approached by a cousin for the marriage of my eldest daughter. I refused and convinced my husband to let our daughters continue their education. My in-laws keep harassing us to marry off our daughters. My husband tried to please them and insisted on marriage, but I am resisting and working hard, giving private classes in order to afford the financial costs of their education. Our daughter is in the university and wanted to study media, which is not acceptable to women in our community, but I encouraged her. There are mothers in our extended families who were able to follow my way and let their girls continue until university.

<end text box>

This mother is educated and thus able to serve as a role model for her daughters and for other mothers in the community. However, other supportive parents have more diverse backgrounds. Some parents are illiterate and have been deprived of education; thus, they want to provide their daughters with better opportunities. For example, a middle-aged, uneducated mother noted, "I was forced to leave school, and I suffered. I decided not do that to my daughters. They are now in school and they will continue to the highest level

[41] Interview with young university student, 5 Sept. 2016

possible."[42] The following case reiterates the influence of being deprived of an education on parents' decisions to send their girls to school.

<text box>

Box 2. The decision to change the family's educational course

My husband and I are illiterate, but we suffered because we were deprived of education. That is why we decided to let our children continue their educations. Our son is not interested, and he has dropped out, but we are supporting our two daughters. We wanted them to be educated and mature when they get married. Many times, we have been pressured by uncles to force our daughters out of school, and they suggest cousins for marriage. But I refuse and remind my husband of cases of girls in our community who were divorced at a very early stage of marriage. Our second daughter is in primary school, and I will support her until she finishes university. Some parents in our family and neighborhood are following our way as my elder daughter has several of her classmates continuing with her.

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Even a more distant relative can support a girl in continuing her education. For example, a female university lecturer related,

> My maternal uncle opposed my marriage and insisted that I continue my education. He supported me until I graduated and did my PhD. My uncle continued to support all girls of the family to continue their educations.[43]

Girls who succeed in continuing their education are not only motivated and supported by their parents and other family members, but they themselves also motivate their families through their strong personal commitments to continuing school. As the story below illustrates, girls are agents who are ready to forgo many needs to overcome the barriers to obtaining an education, including the pressure to marry.

<text box>

Box 3. The cost of a girl's education

I am 18 years of age, in my first year of university. Seventeen years ago, my family moved from a rural area to Post Sudan because of poverty. My father has been sick since my childhood. My family is supported by my brother, and he has tried to negotiate my marriage several times. However, I have refused and my mother has supported me. I studied in schools supported by a school fee program, and I used to go to school with minimum needs, so as not to burden my brother with any education costs. I got a secondary school certificate and applied for a diploma as its fee is low. My family has not been able to pay even the low

[42] Interview with middle aged illiterate mother, Haya, 26 May 2016.
[43] Interview with female university lecturer, 7 Sept. 2016.

diploma fee, but my mother struggled to find support from a non-governmental organizations and she succeeded. I try to do without many daily needs. I walk for at least two hours, since dawn, to the university, using same dress every day, and I do not worry about food. My aim is to finish the diploma and then find a job to support my family and the education of my younger sister.

<text box>

In summary, some girls are able to resist pressure from their extended families to marry young, especially if they have support from parents or other relatives. At the same time, girls can encourage their parents and other relatives through their own motivation to continue their educations.

4.2.4 Married girls often have limited educational opportunities

Child marriage is a cultural norm that will take time to change, but even married girls can have better alternatives in life and future prospects if they have the chance to further their education after marriage. Table 18 shows the percentage of different demographic groups that believe girls have the opportunity to continue their educations after marriage. Overall, many male and female participants in the survey *do* see an opportunity for married girls to go back to school, although more females than males thought this was possible. These responses may indicate females' concern with maintaining the ability of females to continue their educations, which is often an unrealistic goal, given the limitations of educational facilities and the hold of traditional beliefs. Interestingly, while the group with the highest percentage thinking education is possible for married girls was females in Port Sudan, the group with the lowest percentage thinking this was possible was males in Port Sudan. This suggests that even males in urban area maintain the traditional gender discriminatory norms that do not approve wives' movement outside of homes. This is expected, as many men who did not continue their own educations are migrants from rural areas and work as unskilled workers or in petty trades. Retaining the *silif* system helps them to maintain their dominance over women.

Table 17. Educational opportunities for married girls after marriage, as reported by respondents from researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan

Do married girls have educational opportunities after marriage?	Haya (rural)		Port Sudan (urban)	
	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)

Yes	60.0	58.0	73.1	33.3
No	40.0	42.0	26.9	66.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The initiative of the Adolescents' School in Port Sudan is evidence of the commitment from some activists to address the violation of children's rights. The school has classes for males and females and is open in the afternoon to allow girl-housewives to attend (since by this time they will have completed their main household chores). The individuals who set up the school have made efforts to recruit married girls, and the students include married and divorced females, as well as never-married females. Some female students have succeeded in completing the primary level of education and have enrolled in secondary schools. The students we met look forward to attending university and/or obtaining jobs.[44] The experiences of two female students are highlighted in the box below.

<text box>

Box 4. Getting back to school after marriage

Student A. I am now 17 years old. My uncle initiated my marriage to my cousin four years ago when I was in fourth grade. But my family conditioned my marriage on me continuing my education, and my cousin agreed. When I found out about the opportunity of this afternoon school, I talked to my husband about my intention to go to the school and he permitted me—fulfilling his promise to my family.

Student B. I am now 16 years old. I was married to my cousin when I was in fourth grade. I was not consulted, but I accepted, even though I had a dream of continuing to the university and working in media. When I heard about the afternoon school, I discussed with my husband my intention of resuming my education. He accepted, and I have now been in school for two years and will continue. I have decided that if I get daughters I will never force them out of school.

<end text box>

However, not all females have the opportunity to go back to school after marriage. Respondents indicated that the reasons females do not continue school after marriage relate tend to relate to a lack of accessibility to education opportunities and a lack of acceptance by families and communities to the idea of married girls continuing school. This confirms some of the reasons stated by De Silva-de-Alwis (2008, 36). As table 18 suggests, the most important factor keeping married girls from continuing their education is the husband's

[44] Interview with founder and head of Adolescents' School, Port Sudan, 18 Sept. 2016.

refusal to allow them to do so. Respondents also pointed to the community's resistance to married girls returning to school, along with concerns about child care.

Table 18. Reasons girls discontinue their education after marriage

Why do married girls discontinue their education?	Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
Their husbands do not allow them to attend school	18.2	37.8
Married girls get pregnant/have children	14.1	24.1
The community does not accept married girls attending school	8.3	10.9
Schools themselves do not allow married girls to attend	1.7	1.7
Married girls believe they have no use for an education after marriage	1.1	9.2

Respondents confirmed that the opportunity for girls to resume education often depends on their husbands. For example, a woman in a group discussion stressed, "The decision for girls to resume education is in the hands of the husbands, and most of them refuse."[45] One young, educated woman confirmed,

> Husband are mostly not cooperative. I got married in my first year of university, and for five years now I have trying to convince my husband to go back to the university. He is refusing. Young girls have no way to convince stubborn husbands.[46]

This is similar to the case in Ethiopia, where the ability of a girl to continue her education after marriage depends on her husband's support, which is rarely given; in addition, married girls are constrained by the expectation that they fulfill their domestic roles as "good wives" (Jones 2014, vi).

We also heard from participants who told us that some schools will not enroll married girls. Some respondents told us that teachers—specifically female teachers—resist allowing married girls in schools.

The responses suggest a lack of concern for a girl's right to an education, as well as the persistence of male-dominance attitudes. In addition, it is evident that many do not understand the importance of education to the lives of girls and women.

[45] Group discussion, Port Sudan, 7 Sept. 2016.
[46] Interview with young educated woman, Port Sudan, 6 Sept. 2016.

4.2.4 Girls themselves want to continue their education

Ten focus group discussions were conducted with girls in both Haya and Port Sudan to solicit their thoughts about child marriage and education. The discussion included girls ages 11 to 16.[47] The girls recognized the prevalence of child marriage in Red Sea State. For example, one girl noted, "A girl can be married before reaching puberty."[48] Many girls mentioned that girls from their classes had been married off and emphasized that these marriages were "against their will."

These girls also recognized the connection between getting married and continuing an education. Some acknowledged that married girls could return to school, but explained that school authorities often restrict their interaction with students and monitor them. Girls in rural areas girls noted that families sometimes prevent married girls from returning to school. Most of the participants in the group discussions were aware that girls are often not allowed to continue their education. Yet, some asserted,

> We have the interest and great opportunities to continue our education, if we are not surprised by decisions from our families that we have to quit school.[49]

These girls believe they have no choice but to accept their families' decision; they are not aware that as individual human beings they also have the right to choose their lives. None of the girls who participated in the group discussions had heard of child rights laws, either in the Red Sea State or at the national level.

In spite of the challenges they face, many of the girls demonstrated very favorable attitudes toward education and several asserted that girls should be allowed to continue their education through the university level. Very few said they would be satisfied only to have a secondary education. Some emphasized,

> Girls should be allowed to continue because there is a difference between educated and uneducated young women. The former have good understanding. They know the right and wrong things and can manage their lives better.[50]

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[47] Primary school in Sudan is composed of eight grades, and children may attend primary school starting at six years old. However, some children are not enrolled until they are older than six, and others repeat academic years because of the burden of domestic responsibilities or the poor educational facilities in the schools themselves. Thus, children in primary school may be up to 16 years old.
[48] Focus group discussion with primary school girls, Haya, 22 May 2016.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

Some are convinced that they will continue their education because their parents encourage them and they have elder sisters in secondary schools and at universities. For example, one girl in Port Sudan asserted, "I am sure I shall continue to the university as my parents are educated and my sisters are in university."

Unfortunately, other girls expressed feelings of pessimism and disempowerment. They are interested in continuing their education, but they are not sure they will have their families' continued support, and they expect to be forced to discontinue their education and get married at any time.

5 Conclusion: Intervening to end child marriage

Child marriage in Red Sea State is a gender discriminatory practice perpetuated by patriarchal norms. While both boys and girls in Red Sea State are often forced to marry during childhood, without being given the opportunity to choose whom or when to marry, the practice of child marriage affects girls more significantly than boys.

First, girls are more likely than boys to be forced into marriage at a young age. Some boys are able to resist or delay their marriages, but girls do not have this ability because of prevalent gender-based norms. In addition, even when boys are forced to marry early, this occurs to allow them to exercise dominance, have many children, and enhance their social positions. On the other hand, girls are forced to marry early because they are not trusted and are stereotyped as being prone to have premarital sexual relations damaging to the family or community's honor. Similarly, the practice of bride wealth and the view that girls need to marry young to be socialized to be obedient and submissive to their husbands reinforce norms that support male dominance and women's subordination. While other factors like poverty and lack of access to education are important drivers identified in the general literature, by policy makers internationally and nationally and also seen in the responses of the interviewees in this study, the most important driver identified in this study has to do with tradition and what is perceived as protection of girls through marriage. There is, however, a need for more studies on drivers of child marriage in Red Sea State. This report is based on a limited number of respondents in Haya and Port Sudan and we need to be careful to generalize our findings beyond the groups of respondents.

While some girls and women continue their schooling and even pursue higher education, they do so at a high social cost of being stigmatized as *agir* or *bayra* and being marked as undesirable for marriage. Those girls who are able to pursue an education almost always have strong support from their parents or other family members. As more and more adults recognize the benefit of educating girls, more and more girls will be able to attain an education. This in turn may help abate the practice of child marriage, since educated girls are less likely to be forced into marriage.

However, more attention to this issue is needed. Actors engaged in raising awareness for ending child marriage are very limited in Red Sea State and primarily include one government institution (the Red Sea State Council of Child Welfare) and a few NGOs, such as Oon Organization, Ea'tanenaa Women's Development Society, and Abu Hadya Association for Women's Development. The work on child marriage was negatively affected after international organizations such as Save the Children Sweden, ACORD, and Oxfam were expelled from eastern Sudan in 2012 (BBC News 2012).

Government employees and activists from NGOs who participated in this study confirmed that there is a concern for child marriage in the region and, accordingly, some interventions have been implemented. For example, the Red Sea State Council of Child Welfare has conducted educational sessions on child marriage at the local level, mostly in connection with advocacy and awareness-raising sessions for abolishing female genital mutilation (FGM). NGOs also host awareness-raising sessions on child marriage in some areas of Port Sudan and Haya. Among our respondents, it seems that those residing in rural Haya, particularly men, are more exposed to interventions on child marriage than those in urban Port Sudan. However, the drivers of child marriage are present in rural and urban areas of Red Sea State and consequently interventions must reach communities in both places.

Most efforts to tackle child marriage are undertaken rather timidly, in great part because organizations fear resistance by tribal leaders in Red Sea State communities that strongly cling to the practice. In addition, no state or national laws support intensive interventions against the practice, and, in fact, the national government has taken a low profile approach to the problem, which thus far has achieved no tangible results. It also seems that the international community is not putting enough pressure on decision-makers to end child marriage.

Only about one-third of male and female participants in this study knew about the rights of children when it comes to marriage, and even fewer (27.6% of males and 26.1% of females) recognized the harmful effects of child marriage. Even those few who understood these harmful effects asserted that ending the practice would go against community norms and traditions. Some participants in the study even argued that information provided about harmful effects was merely created to challenge the religious aspects of child marriage.[51] Such responses indicate that perhaps the approach of current interventions and strategies are not effective. Such interventions aim to delivering messages (child marriage is harmful) as noted by Bedri and Al Husseni (2014,18) more than changing discriminatory gender norms. Here, much can be learned from the experiences used for FGM abandonment campaigns, according to Mackie and LeJeune (2009).

These responses suggest that more efforts are needed to educate communities about the harmful effects of child marriage. At the same time, however, the responses suggest that any interventions must be sensitive to the cultures and communities in which child marriages take place. Efforts to build trust must always precede efforts to communicate. At their heart, the same values that traditional communities assert in support of child marriage—the desire to build strong communities and protect girls and families—also support doing away with the practice. Girls who wait until they are ready to be married and in the meantime receive a good quality education make better wives, mothers, employees, and community leaders.

[51] There were no significant gender differences in the responses.

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Appendix: Demographic data on respondents

Tables 19 and 20 provide a descriptive profile of respondents to the survey in Red Sea State, Sudan.

Table 19. Age, education, occupation, and marital status of all respondents

	Females (181)		Males (119)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Age				
Younger than 18	12	6.6	3	2.5
18–27 years old	60	33.1	26	21.8
28–37 years old	48	26.5	19	16.0
38–47 years old	44	24.3	34	28.6
48–57 years old	10	5.5	27	22.7
Older than 57	7	3.9	10	8.4
Education				
No education	21	11.6	19	16.0
Khalwa[52]	14	7.7	21	17.6
Primary school	53	29.3	24	20.2
Secondary school	53	29.3	34	28.6
University	37	20.4	20	16.8
Post-university	3	3.2	1	0.8
Occupation				
Student	6	3.3	3	2.5
Salaried employee	25	13.8	28	23.5
Wage worker	15	8.3	31	26.1
Farmer/herder	4	2.2	12	10.1
Unemployed	23	12.7	17	14.3
Self-employed worker	17	9.4	25	21.0
Housewife	79	43.6	–	–
Others	12	6.6	3	2.5
Marital Status				
Single (never married)	40	22.1	41	34.5
Married	117	64.6	62	52.1
Divorced	18	9.9	7	5.9
Widowed	6	3.3	9	7.6

[52] Religious classes

Table (20) Age, education, occupation, and marital status of respondents interviewed in researched communities in Red Sea State, Sudan by gender by rural- urban area

	Haya (Rural) (75)		Port Sudan (Urban) (225)	
	F	M	F	M
Age	%	%	%	%
Younger than 18	4.0	2.0	7.1	2.9
18–27 years old	48.0	26.0	30.8	18.8
28–37 years old	20.0	18.0	27.6	14.5
38–47 years old	20.0	32.0	25.0	26.1
48–57 years old	8.0	14.0	5.	29.0
Older than 57	0.0	8.0	4.5	8.7
Education				
No education	20.0	10.0	10.3	20.3
Khalwa	4.0	12.0	8.3	21.7
Primary school	16.0	16.0	31.4	23.2
Secondary school	28.0	40.0	29.4	20.3
University	28.0	22.0	19.2	13.1
Post-university	4.0	0.0	1.4	1.4
Occupation				
Student	8.0	2.0	2.6	2.9
Salaried employee	40.0	36.0	9.6	14.5
Wage worker	8.0	16.0	8.3	33.3
Farmer/herder	12.0	16.0	0.6	5.8
Unemployed	4.0	14.0	14.1	15.9
Self-employed Worker	12.0	16.0	9.0	27.6
Housewife	16.0	0.0	48.1	0.0
Others	0.0	0.0	7.7	0.0
Marital Status				
Single (never married)	20.0	30.0	22.4	37.7
Married	68.0	60.0	64.1	46.4
Divorced	8.0	6.0	10.3	5.8
Widowed	4.0	4.0	3.2	10.1

Child marriage is any formal marriage or informal union where one or both parties are under 18 years of age. Child marriage affects both boys and girls, but disproportionately affects girls. Each year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18, and that number is growing. Worldwide, 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday and more than one in three girls are married before age of 15. Although the largest numbers of child brides are in South Asia, most of the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are in Africa. Sudan is among the African countries with a high prevalence of child marriage. In Sudan, 10.7% of women aged 15 to 49 were married before the age of 15, and 38s% were married before the age of 18.

Child marriage is a human rights violation affecting children's and women's rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination, and freedom from violence and exploitation. Child marriage has harmful effects on young girls. Neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers, child marriage exposes young girls to a wide range of health risks. The minds and bodies of young girls are physically unprepared for sexual activity and childbirth, increasing the risks of maternal health complications. Early pregnancy increases the risk of both maternal and child mortality. Added to that, girl brides are more likely to suffer domestic violence and marital rape. Child brides are rarely allowed to continue their education. With limited access to education and subsequent economic opportunities, child brides and their families are more likely to live in poverty.

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cmi@cmi.no
www.cmi.no

P.O. Box 6033,
N-5892 Bergen, Norway
Jekteviksbakken 31, Bergen

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