



OXFAM

TAKING SPACE:

A Snapshot of Child, Early, and Forced Marriage
– Insights from Oxfam and partners' work
in the Philippines





Women and girls have fundamental human rights. When they are forced to marry at an early age, these rights get violated. It also hinders them from enjoying good psychological and physical well-being.

Tanumbay from Maguindanao got married at age 10 to a man 20 years older than her. According to her, she was forced to marry at a young age to fulfill her sick father's wish. "I didn't want to marry, but I had no choice. It was my father's wish before he died."

PHOTO: APRIL BULANADI/OXFAM

Approximately **24%** of 1,058 respondents (997 females, 61 males) from Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi were married before the age of 18. **Of those who married as minors, child marriage disproportionately affected girls at 97 percent.**¹

Out of all the female respondents, 245 or 24.6 percent were married when they were minors (below 18 years of age). (See Figures 1 and 2 on Page 3)

Many adolescent brides experience health risks caused by frequently repeated pregnancies before they become physically and psychologically ready for responsible motherhood and child birth. Also, in many cases, girls drop out of school because of child marriage, pregnancy, and domestic chores.²

Some effects of child, early, and forced marriage:



Lost opportunity for education and work for women and girls



Maternal and infant deaths



The children of teen mothers are at greater risk of stunting and being underweight

Cover Photo: Anna Boloto, a youth leader who is changing lives by using her voice to end child marriage in Lanao del Sur. She chooses to "take space" in the discussions. She is a member of the #GirlDefenders coalition pushing for the urgent enactment of a law that will prohibit child marriage.

PHOTO: VINA SALAZAR/OXFAM

¹ Oxfam Pilipinas. ARCHES End of Project Evaluation Report (forthcoming in 2020)

² Based on Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM) research as cited in UNFPA (January 2020). Policy Brief. #GirlsNotBrides: Ending Child Marriage in the Philippines. Retrieved at: https://philippines.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_Policy_Brief_Child_Marriage_%282020-01-24%29%20%282%29_0.pdf

Fig. 1. Frequency Distribution of Married Respondents by Age

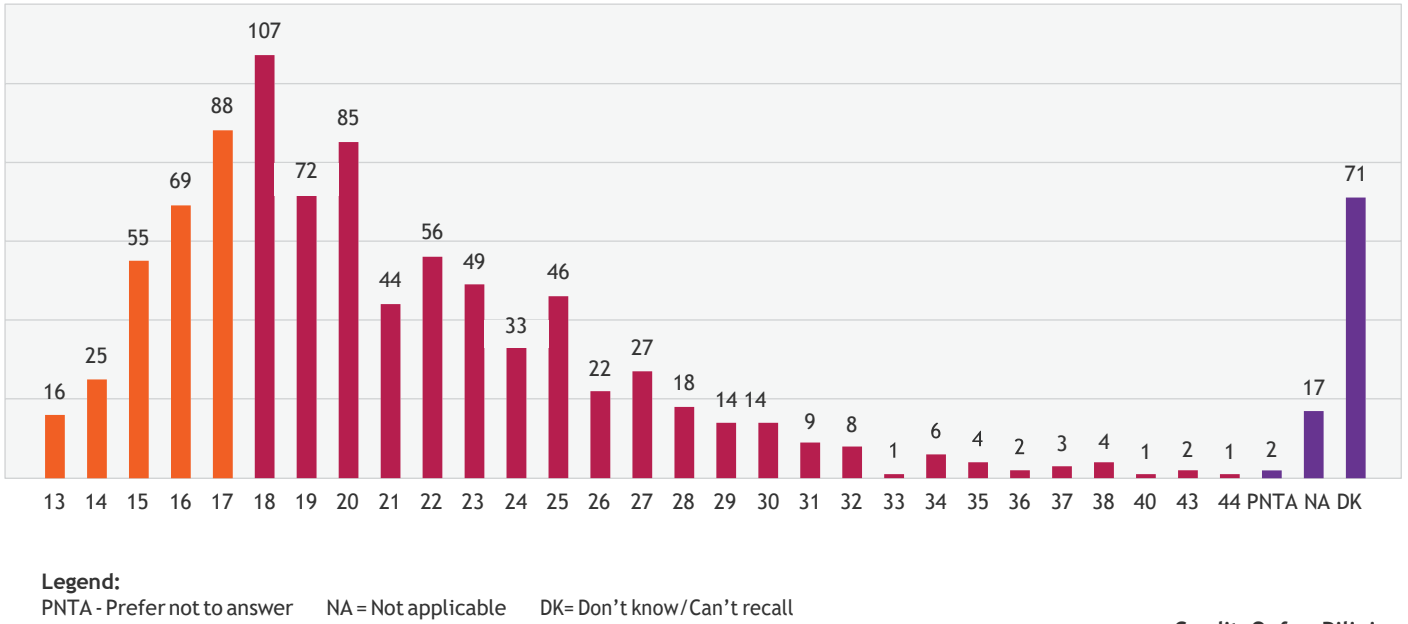


Fig. 1. shows the distribution of age by marriage among respondents. Of the 1,058 respondents, there were 253 cases of child marriage, or 24 percent (see orange bars). Of the 253 cases, 245 were female, while only eight were male.³

Fig. 2. Percentage Distribution of Female Respondents Who Were Married as Minors (below 18), by Age.

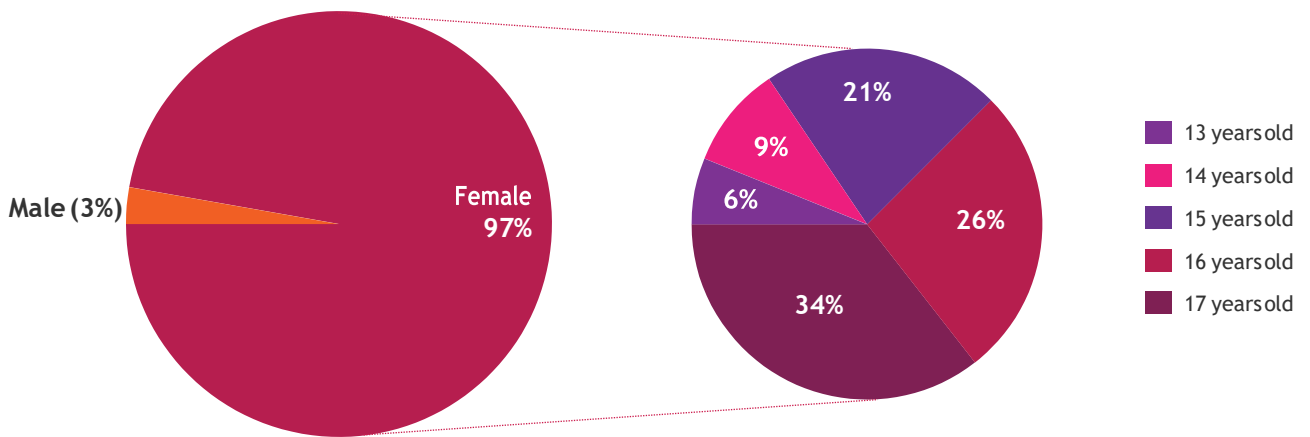


Fig. 2. shows the age-disaggregated data of female respondents who married between ages 13-17 years. This shows the percentage of respondents who married as minors from the matched dataset (253 respondents). Of the 245 females who were married as minors, 60 percent were married at 16-17 years, and 6 percent were married at 13 years.

³ Results were derived from a survey undertaken as part of the ARCHES End of Project Evaluation.



Incidents of child marriage increase in areas excessively affected by persistent poverty, disasters, armed conflict, and other crisis situations.

Salma Pandac got married when she was 17. She stopped going to school since then. Life was difficult for her since her husband's income as a farmer is not enough to sustain their daily needs.

"I am worried about my child and his nutrition. He always gets sick. We don't feel safe in the evacuation center." Their situation got even worse when the Marawi Crisis happened. Salma was pregnant with her eldest child during the height of the crisis.

PHOTO: APRIL BULANADI/OXFAM

Lessons learned from Oxfam's various projects related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence (GBV) show that many factors can further exacerbate inequalities experienced by women and girls.⁴ Disasters are some of these factors.

- Disasters increase the risk of sexual and reproductive health concerns and gender-based violence affecting women and girls due to **disrupted access to reproductive health information and services**, and changes in the individual's environment, including reduced safety and security.

Imagine the girls who experience child, early, and forced marriage in these situations. Think about what happens if they become pregnant at an early age or experience forms of violence during a disaster. These situations compound the vulnerabilities of women and girls; thus these need to be addressed.

During the Marawi Conflict, internally displaced persons (IDPs) experienced stresses that put them at-risk. Some IDPs engaged in child, early, and forced marriage as a form of coping.⁵

- In the on-going crisis, cases concerning gender-based violence among IDPs increased. There were incidences of GBV perpetrated in evacuation camps and host homes.
 - » There are varying reasons for early marriages among IDPs, according to Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation (AMDF) and the Mindanao State University Community Development Department (MSU-CD). A significant number of the respondents (around 20 percent or 393 IDPs) said that they married early because of the **"difficult life" in evacuation centers**.
- Among displaced populations, young men and women are the most vulnerable to various forms of violence. **IDPs who were interviewed⁶ said that violence against displaced women and girls occur in evacuation centers and host homes.** It was also found that there is no proper reporting mechanism for GBV cases among IDPs.
 - » When cases are reported to the police or the Barangay Peace Action Teams (BPAT), these are settled amicably between and among the families of the victim and perpetrator, or through the Ijma and Taritib, the Meranao traditional conflict resolution process.
 - » **In some instances, especially those involving minors, GBV cases are settled through marriage, thus adding to the incidence of child, early, and forced marriages.**

⁴ de la Cruz Bekema, R. J. (2019). Braving Disruptions, Building Relationships: Lessons on promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and addressing violence against women and girls in the Philippines. Oxfam Pilipinas. Available at: <https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/policy-paper/braving-disruptions-building-relationships-lessons-promoting-sexual-and> Last accessed: 2 March 2020.

⁵ Latip-Yusoph, S. (2018). A Gender Snapshot of The Marawi Conflict. START Network, Uny-Phil Women, Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation, Oxfam. Available at: <https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/policy-paper/gender-snapshot-marawi-crisis> Last accessed: 2 March 2020.

⁶ Respondents were from Saguilaran, Lanao del Sur.

Lastly, using qualitative methods and guided by a transformative research methodology, Oxfam identified social norms that jeopardize the sexual and reproductive health, safety, and rights of women and girls in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and Caraga.⁷

The following are some of these norms:

- Across both BARMM and Caraga, participants in the study shared how child, early, and forced marriage was considered by parents as an acceptable response to finding out their children have been sexually active, especially when these children become pregnant;
- One of the strongest and most prevalent norms informing the behaviors of communities as well as service providers in a way that restricts women and adolescent girls from accessing SRH information and services was that women and girls who are sexually active before marriage are considered “immoral”; and
- Fertility norms were also widely held where participants in both regions felt that couples should have children right after marriage, and that larger families are common and socially desirable.

These norms also interact with and are reinforced or weakened by a range of influencing factors including conflict, poverty, conservative religious beliefs, education, and technology. With these norms, girls who experience child, early, and forced marriage or those who may experience it may become more at-risk or adversely affected.



Child, early, and forced marriage has to end. It is a grave violation of human rights and a serious public health issue. We have to work together to address norms that foster a culture of violence. When *we take space in discussions*, we also make a stand on ensuring women and girls live healthy, secure, and dignified lives.

Susan (not her real name), who married early, and her child. They are from a Teduray tribe in Maguindanao.
PHOTO: APRIL BULANADI/OXFAM

FOR ENQUIRIES

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⁷ Valerio, K. and A. Parvez Butt. (2020). Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Mindanao, Philippines: A study of how discriminatory norms jeopardize the sexual and reproductive health, safety, and rights of women and girls in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and Caraga, Philippines. Available at: <https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/policy-paper/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-mindanao-philippines> Last accessed: 4 June 2020.



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