

Save the Children's Programme to end Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancies in Malawi

Final Report

March 2022

Joar Svanemyr, consultant, Bergen

Vibeke Wang, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen

Wanangwa Chimwaza, College of Medicine, Blantyre

Effie Chipeta, College of Medicine, Blantyre

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abbreviations	4
Summary	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	10
Research design and methods	12
Chapter 2: Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy: drivers and changes	17
Perceptions of the prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy before and after COVID-19	17
Changes in driving factors contributing to a reduction in child marriage and adolescent pregnancies.....	19
Agents of change: Traditional chiefs and mother groups	25
Chapter 3: Save the Children’s interventions, how they respond to study findings, and possible adjustments	33
An overview of Save the Children’s programme in Mwanza	33
Perceptions of Save the Children’s programme in Mwanza	36
How Save the Children’s interventions correspond to the study’s findings	38
A discussion of possible adjustments and improvements to Save the Children’s programme ..	42
Chapter 4: Discussion	55
Trends.....	55
Poverty	57
Changing norms related to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy	58
Empowering girls to make informed decisions on sexual and reproductive health matters	61
Conclusion.....	63
References	65
Appendix 1: Interview guides and FGD guide	71

Appendix 2: Coding report	77
Nodes	77

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared in collaboration with the College of Medicine represented by Effie Chipeta, Wanangwa Chimwaza, and Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) represented by Joar Svanemyr and Vibeke Wang. We want to express our gratitude to Save the Children Norway (SCN) and Save the Children Malawi for preparing and implementing the study. We also want to extend our gratitude to Save the Children’s implementation partner organisations in Malawi, who helped facilitate data collection and contributed to the study by sharing their knowledge and experience. Furthermore, we want to thank community members for organising interviews and group discussions and the participants who shared their insights and experiences. Finally, we thank our research assistants, Ms. Gertrude Chatha, Ms. Wusani Phiri, Mr. Bright Mkandawire, and Mr. Andrew Wavisanga Mvula, for collecting and transcribing the data.

Abbreviations

APW	Association for Progressive Women
CADECOM	Catholic Development Commission in Malawi
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
CoM	College of Medicine
CRSA	Child Rights Situation Analysis
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GVH	Group Village Head
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
IDI	In-depth Interview
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PEER	Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research
SC	Save the Children
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SCREP	Securing Children's Rights through Education and Protection
SCTP	Social Cash Transfers Programme
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TA	Traditional Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
VSLA	Village Saving and Loan Association
WHO	World Health Organization

Summary

This report on teenage marriage and adolescent pregnancies in Malawi is based on the first (February 2020) and second fieldwork (January 2021) conducted as part of the implementation research commissioned by Save the Children Norway (SCN) and carried out in collaboration with the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Norway and the College of Medicine (CoM) in Malawi. Whereas the purpose of the first field work was to explore context-specific factors, including social norms that uphold child marriage and adolescent pregnancies in the communities where SC Malawi implements programmes, the purpose of the second fieldwork was to identify changes in driving factors, including social norms, that would reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancies and to examine SC's interventions and possible adjustments to its programme. The concept of social norms informed the data collection and the analysis.

This qualitative mixed-methods study of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy has at its core in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). In the focus groups, a vignette was embedded to explore community norms and various actors' influence on child marriage, including those of community chiefs and mother groups. The fieldwork was conducted in three villages – Kagonamwake, Ng'ozo, and Ngadziwe – located in the Mwanza district. The participants included adolescent girls and boys between the ages of 16 and 19, parents, key informants from the communities such as traditional leaders/chiefs, mother groups, child protection officers, teachers, youth groups, health workers, and officers representing various organisations in the community.

Findings

Study participants perceived child marriage, and to a lesser extent, adolescent pregnancy, to have become less common in their respective communities. However, participants reported adolescent pregnancy to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. This increase was attributed to school closures and families losing income. Overall, however, the study indicates that child marriage and adolescent pregnancy have become less socially acceptable. This finding suggests that traditional norms have started to change or have changed. Nevertheless, progress has been

uneven, and child marriage and adolescent pregnancies still frequently occur in many communities.

Poverty was identified as the primary driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy during our first fieldwork, and the second fieldwork corroborated these results. Peer pressure among girls to engage with men to obtain economic support and commodities is also an important driver. Peer pressure is linked to poverty, as girls from poor households have few opportunities to cover basic needs and obtain goods that may elevate their status. A third main driver of child marriage is adolescent pregnancy. Girls who enter into relationships with men often face negative norms concerning contraceptive use, thus making them vulnerable to unintended pregnancies, resulting in child marriage.

Changes in drivers

The study suggests that it is necessary to address poverty to reduce child marriage. Girls living in the poorest households are more likely to marry before 18 than those from wealthier households. These girls are also likely to be the least educated. Thus, there is reason to focus on improving the economic situation of the poorest households and empowering at-risk girls economically. These recommendations also apply to drivers of child marriage, such as peer pressure and adolescent pregnancy. Improving the economic status of the poorest households and the situation of the most vulnerable girls could also make them more resilient to peer pressure.

In order to reduce adolescent pregnancies, it is critical to combat child marriage. Doing so would include reducing peer pressure and transactional unprotected sex for basic needs by targeting the poorest households and the adolescent girls at risk. Furthermore, there is a need to increase access to contraception and change adolescents' attitudes and behaviour with respect to contraceptive use. In other words, a norm change on contraceptive use is essential.

Agents of change

This study finds that the opinions and behaviour of community chiefs matter more than those of mother groups in changing norms on child marriage. Therefore, community chiefs may play a prominent role as agents of norm change concerning child marriage (and most likely adolescent pregnancy as well).

Perceptions of Save the Children's programme

The study participants were positive concerning SC's contributions to reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancies in the three study sites – Kagonamwake, Ng'ozo, and Ngadziwe – located in the Mwanza district. The participants were familiar with many of SC's activities and associated three broadly grouped interventions with the organisation: 1) community dialogue and sensitisation; 2) stakeholder training and collaboration; and 3) interventions related to education, including financial support. Overall, the participants' familiarity with the SC's programme in Mwanza largely corresponds to SC activities outlined in official programme documents, which have included community dialogues, sensitisation, stakeholder training, and other forms of collaboration. However, it should be noted that some participants misattributed financial support to poor school children to SC. Financial support is not included in SC's programme.

How Save the Children's programme corresponds to our findings

First, there is a discrepancy between the study's findings and SC's focus on poverty, which we have identified as the primary driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. Few SC interventions directly focus on alleviating poverty at the household level, and the programmes do not intend to support at-risk adolescent girls economically.

Second, this study finds that continued efforts to address existing norms and build awareness are needed to reduce child marriage and teenage pregnancy. In addition, it suggests that chiefs have considerable potential to influence existing norms. Therefore, the mobilisation of traditional leaders as agents of change may be essential to reduce child marriage.

Third, SCN's 2019-2023 framework proposal to NORAD lists peer pressure as a factor contributing to child marriage. However, we found that SC's interventions targeted peer pressure to a minimal degree.

Fourth, SC is involved in outreach activities promoting the use of contraception. It has also trained youth community-based distribution agents and health workers in youth-friendly health services. Although there is some correspondence between programme activities and our findings regarding suggested changes to address adolescent pregnancy, there is a need to expand the reach and explicitly tackle the norms that discourage girls from seeking health services and contraception. For example, community sensitisation and dialogue meetings are appropriate means of addressing norms in communities where child marriage is still common and not subject

to sanction. In addition, community engagements may be used to address peer pressure and norms concerning contraceptive use.

Suggested adjustments

To address poverty as a driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, we recommend that SC expand or introduce support for girls' economic empowerment from poor households, enabling them to enroll (or re-enroll) in school. There is an urgent need to support vulnerable adolescents, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the economic empowerment of youth would help reduce pressure to obtain material resources since peer pressure encourages girls to initiate relationships with boys/men.

We also recommend strengthening the mobilisation and training of chiefs to address norms that sustain child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. Community chiefs are responsible for implementing by-laws and may change existing norms in support of child marriage. In addition, SC may intensify its community sensitisation programme and arrange more frequent community sessions to build awareness to sustain norm change. Finally, implementing organisations emphasised the need to handle the problems holistically, which means combining economic, social and legal approaches and targeting various community groups and stakeholders through coordinating efforts among various organisations working on child marriage and adolescent health programs.

Adolescents need access to contraception. Therefore, programme activities that make contraception more accessible should continue expanding. In addition, norms against girls' use of contraception should be addressed in community outreach activities. For parents, messages may focus on effective communication between parents and adolescent girls and the need to invest in and support girls.

Conclusion

This study has shown that people in the Mwanza region believe there has been a downward trend in the prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. This finding suggests that child marriage and adolescent pregnancy norms are starting to change or have changed. Positive changes are attributed to community sensitisation programmes and dialogues on the potentially harmful effects of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, the importance of girls' education,

stakeholder training, chiefs' engagement, financial and material support for at-risk adolescent girls, and collaborative partnerships.

Poverty remains the primary driver for adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Peer pressure is also a critical driver. These factors often compound since girls from poor households experience peer pressure to enter into relationships with men for economic reasons. Adolescent pregnancy is also a driver because it may lead to child marriage and informal unions for many girls, even though most girls who become pregnant do not marry. Nevertheless, there are still areas in the Mwanza region, such as in Ng'ozo, where child marriage continues to be common, and community members are inclined not to react negatively when girls marry before 18 years of age.

To further strengthen norms against child marriage and enable adolescents to protect their sexual and reproductive health, SC needs to improve the intensity and frequency of community education. These programmes need to improve access to contraception, address negative norms concerning adolescent contraceptive use, and address peer pressure among adolescents. In addition, SC should introduce or expand economic empowerment interventions to help girls continue school. Furthermore, SC should continue their work with local chiefs to ensure they are proactive and mobilising against child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2019-2023, Save the Children Norway (SCN) aims to scale up its work addressing child marriage and teenage pregnancies, including rolling out programmes in Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, Niger, and Nepal. These programmes focus on bringing health and child protection together. They also include an advocacy component targeting existing social norms.

This report is based on our first and second rounds of fieldwork conducted as part of the implementation research study commissioned by SCN and carried out by Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Norway and College of Medicine (CoM) in Malawi. CMI completed the inception report in October 2019 and the first fieldwork report in October 2020 based on the fieldwork carried out in January and February 2020. These two reports generated knowledge that may inform the programmes of SC and those of other organisations.

The study is organised around three key research objectives:

1. To explore context-specific factors, including social norms that uphold child marriage and adolescent pregnancies in the communities where SC Malawi implements programmes.
2. To identify changes in driving factors, including changes in social norms, which contribute to a lasting reduction in child marriage and adolescent pregnancies and explore how these factors (including social norms) can be changed.
3. To examine how SC's interventions correspond to these findings and how, if necessary, SC programmes should be adjusted.

This report explicitly addresses objectives 2 and 3 above. The first part of objective 2 – to identify changes in driving factors (including changes in social norms) that would contribute to a lasting reduction in child marriage – was partly covered in our report from the first fieldwork, which identified poverty as the primary driver and peer pressure as the second critical factor. For some girls, adolescent pregnancy leads to child marriage. Notably, the communities do not endorse child marriage, as no norms favour child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. However, other contradictory norms push girls toward risky sexual behaviour, leading to pregnancy and/or marriage. In this report, we rely mainly on the second fieldwork in answering the question: how

can these driving factors be changed? Research objective 3 looks explicitly at how SC's interventions align with our findings and possible adjustments to programmes going forward.

There is reason to believe that COVID-19 restrictions have affected adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Reports on increasing numbers of girls getting pregnant and marrying have come from most low- and middle-income countries, including Malawi (Rutgers 2021, UNICEF 2020, Save the Children 2020a).¹ One of the causes of this increase is the loss of jobs and incomes resulting from COVID-19, thus pushing parents and girls to see marriage as a means of alleviating poverty. Furthermore, COVID-19 restrictions have disrupted NGOs' and the Government of Malawi's (UNICEF, 2020) preventive activities. However, these statistics are preliminary, and it is too early to draw any conclusions based on these reports.

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that COVID-19 colours our data.² We have attempted to systematically take this into account by asking the participants to reflect on the situation before *and* after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We asked participants, for instance, about their perceptions of the number of child marriages and adolescent pregnancies before and after the start of the pandemic. The data collected during our first fieldwork and thus before the pandemic served to corroborate further findings concerning the impact of COVID-19 as some of the same questions were asked during both stages of the fieldwork.

The data collection and analysis are informed by the concept of social norms (see our report from the first fieldwork for more on this framework). The literature on child marriage norms and other harmful practices distinguishes between injunctive and descriptive norms. Injunctive norms refer to what people believe others expect them to do and what is socially acceptable and not acceptable. Descriptive norms refer to beliefs about common practice and what people typically do in a given situation (Cislaghi and Shakya 2018).³ The underlying assumption is that people generally act in ways they believe community members will approve of or in ways they think the majority will behave or act. However, injunctive and descriptive norms may not correspond to one another. The most influential norm may depend on a person's reference group, which is

¹ See also: <https://www.nyasatimes.com/disaster-malawi-records-over-40000-covid-19-teenage-pregnancies/>

² The second fieldwork was conducted in January 2021. However, due to COVID-19, the fieldwork was conducted by CoM researchers with the remote support of CMI. Similarly, CoM researchers lead this report's data collection, analysis, and initial write-up.

³ A closely related theory uses the distinction of *empirical expectations* (what I think others do) and *normative expectations* (what I think others think I should do).

understood as the group that the individual identifies most strongly with or whose opinion and reaction a person thinks is most important.

Furthermore, the literature distinguishes between social norms' direct and indirect influence (Cislagi and Heise 2018). Some norms are directly related to practice, such as whether child marriage is socially approved or disapproved. However, there may also be norms indirectly sustaining child marriage. An example is a norm that girls should not have premarital sex, thus encouraging the girl to enter into marriage to engage in socially approved sexual activity.

The first section of this report describes the research methodology. The second section delineates the findings on the second research question on the driving factors of child marriages and adolescent pregnancies. The second section also considers the relative influence of key agents. In the third section we focus on the third research question concerning SC's interventions and especially their compliance with our findings regarding changes in the drivers of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. We suggest adjustments to programme interventions and draw from the literature on "what works" in preventing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and the reflections of study participants on improving child marriage and pregnancy prevention programmes. In the last section we discuss our findings understood in the context of broader structural factors.

Research design and methods

In the same way as for the first fieldwork, we in the second fieldwork also draw on a mix of qualitative methods for the purpose of enhancing internal validity. During the second round of data collection, this included individual in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and vignettes. In the field we compared and assessed the suitability of the different approaches and techniques to ensure consistency in application and so that we could make necessary adjustments in the data collection tools.

Place of study

We conducted our fieldwork in the Mwanza district situated in the southern region of Malawi, where SC's most intensive programming to reduce adolescent pregnancies and child marriage has taken place. In Mwanza, the major ethnic group is the largely matrilineal Chewa. The second-largest ethnic group is the patrilineal and patrilocal Ngoni. Although our research sites

are comprised of a mix of ethnic groups, our study participants were predominantly Chewa. Inter-marriages are also relatively common between groups.

Based on consultations with implementing partners, we selected two villages – Ng’ozo and Ngadziwe – with a presumed high intensity of programme interventions. We were already familiar with these study sites from our first fieldwork. We selected a third village, Kagonamwake, to approximate a control, as it was presumed to be a low-intensity site in terms of programme activities. We aimed to reduce the risk that participants reflected on what programmes have told them is correct rather than on their actual beliefs and experiences and in this way to reduce social desirability bias. In selecting study sites (villages), we also considered variation in distance to urban centres and poverty levels, as the latter is the primary driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. During the first fieldwork, Ng’ozo had higher poverty levels than other sites. However, we found no significant difference between the sites in terms of trends and drivers.

Study participants

Seven FGDs were conducted with adolescent girls and boys between the age of 16 and 19, some of whom were in school and some of whom were out of school. Three FGDs were conducted with parents (both mothers and fathers). Furthermore, 22 key informants from the communities where the fieldwork took place were invited to participate in in-depth interviews (see Table 1 for an overview of study participants and data collection instruments). These included traditional leaders/chiefs, mother groups, child protection officers, teachers, members of youth groups, and health workers. An additional eight in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from organisations working in similar fields as SC, including adolescent health and child protection and education. Finally, we interviewed Blantyre Synod, an implementing partner to SC.

Table 1: Study participants and type of data collection instrument

Participant category	Data collection instrument	Number
Adolescent boys and girls	FGDs w/vignette	7
Parents	FGDs w/vignette	3
Key informants	Individual interviews	22
Representatives of operational organizations	Individual interviews	8

Data collection

The data collection for this report took place in January/February 2021. Four research assistants (two females and two males) each with five years of experience were supervised by a junior researcher from the College of Medicine in Malawi. Before the data collection began, these research assistants received training and were oriented on the study's objectives, research ethics, and the data collection tools.

The interview guide (Appendix 1) seeks to collect the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding the efficacy of projects and programmes implemented to reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancies in the respective communities. We sought, among other things, to explore whether programme activities are compatible with local norms and traditions, acceptable to the target populations, and whether the benefits and effects of the programmes are observable. We asked questions about SC's programmes at the end and the study participants were not told that the research team worked for SCN. This was an attempt to reduce the risk of participants biasing their response in favour of SC programmes.

All FGDs contained a vignette (cf. Appendix 1.) Vignettes are particularly appropriate when exploring community norms regarding sensitive issues such as child marriage, as they allow for clarifying people's judgments and make the questions appear less personal and threatening. Recall that we want to understand how social norms may change and lead to a reduction in child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. Based on the findings from the first fieldwork, including information about critical actors in the communities, we designed the vignette to tease out which community members are most influential in terms of attitudes, norms, and behaviour. The idea is that by learning whose opinions and behaviour matter, we can identify relevant reference

networks. We suppose these networks' opinions, views, and behaviours can be changed. If this is the case, the entire community's behaviours, beliefs, and norms are more likely to change.

The vignette portrayed a 25-year-old wealthy farmer who approached the parents of a 16-year-old girl and asked for her hand in marriage. The girl had dropped out of school because her parents could not pay for her education. The accompanying questions sought to capture parents' attitudes and asked how they would react to the marriage proposal.⁴

In the scenario, the chair of the mother group first advised the parents not to marry off their daughter. Half of the participants were then asked how their parents would react to the advice articulated by the chair of the mother group. Second, the village chief had heard about the parents' intention to marry off their 16-year-old daughter to the rich farmer and told them not to go ahead with the marriage. The other half of the participants were then asked how their parents would react. Finally, the scenario indicates that the parents eventually married off their daughter, and the participants were asked to explain how the community would respond to the marriage.

The scenario allows us to provide insights into the relative influence of chiefs and mother groups in the communities and their potential as change agents. We also made sure to ask participants about what we, based on our first fieldwork, assumed to be the least influential actor first.

Data analysis

All interviews and FGDs (except two) were recorded and transcribed verbatim by Chichewa-speaking research assistants. These transcriptions were imported and coded with NVivo12, a software for qualitative analysis (QSR International 2020). We employed thematic analysis to uncover “patterned response or meaning” in the data (Braun and Clark 2006). We were able to establish some overarching themes and codes based on the existing literature and reflections during the data collection process. However, we also inductively derived themes and codes from the data. The overarching questions guiding the coding process captured different groups' beliefs, opinions and perceptions of various aspects of adolescent pregnancies and child marriage. These included opinions about how factors promoting child marriage and adolescent

⁴ The vignette was adjusted after testing. A change was made from asking solely about how the father would react to ask about how the parents. This was because just referring to the father seemed to cause confusion among the study participants. Some made the point that this was a decision that the mother would make, while most seemed to think that this was a decision that most parents would make together.

pregnancy may be addressed. Each of the broader questions yielded a series of codes and sub-codes, allowing us to explore various themes and interrelationships in more detail. Specifically, our coding focused on how the factors identified in the first fieldwork that led to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy may be addressed through programming. For instance, some of the codes generated focused on poverty, peer pressure, pregnancy, and norms whose description was any interview abstract capturing how different actors are addressing these and how these factors can be addressed. We also generated codes capturing how SC responds to the suggested strategies for reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy (see coding report in Appendix 2).

Ethical concerns

All participants provided written consent to participate in the study. For participants younger than 18 years old, we obtained permission from the participant and a parent, guardian, or an adult who represented underage participants. The interviews were recorded when participants agreed and stored in password-secured computers. Furthermore, the interviews were anonymised when transcribed by leaving out any information that would identify the participant. The study was approved by COMREC, the ethical research committee of the College of Medicine in Malawi, and *Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata* (NSD).

Chapter 2: Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy: drivers and changes

Perceptions of the prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy before and after COVID-19

The first fieldwork found that the study participants believe child marriages have become less common. They also thought that marriages under the age of 16 were uncommon. By contrast, adolescent pregnancies were perceived as more common than child marriage. However, as with child marriage, the participants believed that it rarely occurred to girls under 16 years old. The second fieldwork largely corroborated the findings of the first fieldwork. However, it became clear that study participants thought that COVID-19 led to increased adolescent pregnancies. Furthermore, most of those who participated in the FGDs and key informants believed that the number of teenage pregnancies had escalated in the last 12 months.

P4: The children went home upon closure of the schools, and they just did as they wished at home. As such, when the schools reopened, a lot of them did not come back because they were pregnant. However, before COVID, there were a few pregnancies, maybe out of ten, there were only three or four children that got pregnant, but because of COVID, the number has increased.

P1: I am agreeing with my friends that have said that COVID 19 has brought a lot of problems, especially for school going girls. Basically, when we listen to the girls, they tend to say that there is no future in education as of now, so it's better they get married. This is what is increasing the number of pregnancies to be very high. (FGD parents, Kagonamwake)

As in the first round of fieldwork, several study participants associated a heightened risk of getting married with dropping out of school. Schools were closed during COVID-19, and children spent considerable time at home. Many participants associated the perceived increase in pregnancies during COVID-19 with more free time and the opportunity to engage in risky sexual behaviour. For example, several participants stated that the boredom of staying at home increased risky behaviour. Consistent with findings from our first fieldwork, we found that adolescent pregnancy and marriage were perceived to be more common among older adolescents in the second round of fieldwork. Those who were delayed with their school progression at primary and/or secondary school level were especially at risk.

Indeed it [COVID-19] has really affected this community; I am saying so because there are some other youths, be it boys or girls, that have ages that are not appropriate for primary or secondary schools, and with the closing of the schools, it drove them to... since they had nothing else to do,

they had nothing at all that they could be doing in their households. As a result, others just decided to go get married. (FGD boys, Kagonamwake)

Thus, there are indications that COVID-19 school closures may have acted as a driver of adolescent pregnancies. Despite poverty being the most critical driver of teenage pregnancies (cf. report two), few participants mentioned that poverty worked together with COVID-19 to push girls into pregnancy and child marriage. However, many participants pointed out that COVID-19 has resulted in many households' critical loss of livelihood. In turn, this may result in higher drop-out rates when schools finally re-open, as parents and guardians realise they can no longer afford their children's education or have become reliant on their work and contributions to the household.

When the time comes for us to open schools, parents tend to get prepared in terms of fees. Then a week later, the school is closed [due to COVID-19]. The parents may then use the money for fees to buy maize if the household has no maize, which makes it difficult or hard when the school reopens to pay school fees for the child. As a result, the child just drops out of school. (FGD boys, Ngadziwe)

Overall, there is less evidence that COVID-19 has affected the number of child marriages than that it has affected adolescent pregnancies, but this may also partially be due to the timing of the data collection. It is also possible that more girls have moved into informal unions that are not acknowledged as marriage by their parents. According to our report from the first fieldwork, even if most adolescent pregnancies do not lead to child marriage, many pregnancies do. While the participants identified the perceived increase in teenage pregnancies with more opportunity to engage in sexual relations, this is likely only part of the explanation. Similarly, the complaint that "girls do not listen to parental advice" (cf. report two) approximates a moral judgment of youths' behaviour and the reproach of individuals who do not consider structural factors influencing behaviour. There is thus a need to look more closely at other reasons girls enter into sexual relations.

We already know that girls from low-income families are more prone to engage in sexual relations and 'transactional sex' motivated by the assumption that in exchange for sex, they will receive material support and other benefits. A common distinction between 'ideal types' of transactional sex in the literature is between sex for basic needs, sex for improved social status,

and sex and material expressions of love (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Although we find evidence of all of these three types in Mwanza, and many relationships are based on a mix of these three types, sexual relationships initiated to cover basic needs appears the most common. This is closely linked with widespread poverty. Difficult living conditions and economic hardship are the underlying motivations for transactional sex. Another structural factor shaping a second common type of transactional sex is sex for improved social status associated with peer pressure and influence. In these latter cases, the motivation is not necessarily economic hardship, but rather a sense of relative deprivation stemming from exposure to consumer culture and a modern lifestyle (Baba-Djara et al., 2013; Stoebenau et al., 2013). Most such transactional sex in the context of Mwanza qualifies as risky sexual behaviour, as sex is usually unprotected and puts a person at risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

Changes in driving factors contributing to a reduction in child marriage and adolescent pregnancies

The major driving factors of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies were discussed in the report from the first fieldwork (cf. report two). This section seeks to identify changes in main driving factors that will lead *to a lasting* reduction in child marriage and adolescent pregnancies.

The first fieldwork identified poverty as the primary structural driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The second fieldwork corroborated these findings and shed light on how economic incentives drive child marriage. For example, parents or guardians struggle to provide for their children's basic needs and pay for schools because of economic desperation. In such situations, child marriage may be a relief to the family. In addition, in instances where the prospective in-law will provide for the parents, marriage may also be seen as a source of income. In our final study, we used vignettes to explore these dynamics further.

Low educational attainment increases the risk of child marriage (but is also an outcome of child marriage) (Klugman et al., 2014). Our vignette data from the second fieldwork indicate that poor parents may be inclined to accept marriage proposals, and girls from the most impoverished families may have few alternatives to marriage. The vignette portrayed a high-risk situation with a household experiencing economic desperation. In the vignette, a 25-year-old wealthy farmer wanted to marry a 16-year-old girl who had dropped out of school because her parents could not pay for her education. The study participants were asked how they believed most parents would

react to the farmer's proposal. Most of the study participants concurred that the parents would agree to marry the girl.

Most women would force the child to accept the marriage proposal because of the challenges they face at home. (FGD girls, Ng'ozo)

Her parents might accept [the marriage proposal] because the person is well-off, and they would like that he must share his wealth with them. (FGD girls, Kagonamwake)

As discussed in the report from the first fieldwork, study participants believed community reactions would be unequivocally negative when presented with a vignette conducted as part of our first fieldwork where Alex, the father of a 16-year-old girl, wanted to marry her off. This thus indicates that there are no strong injunctive norms prescribing child marriage (cf. report two). That vignette, however, did not contain any information about the economic situation of the household. Child marriage appears to be more acceptable if the driving force is understood to be a desperate economic situation. The girl's young age in the vignette should, however, make it less socially acceptable to marry. We learned in the first study (report from the first fieldwork) that it is more accepted for girls who have dropped out of school and close to 18 years old to get married, although child marriage is seldom expected.

We find that most study participants believe community reactions would be negative when parents disregard the advice given by the chair of the mother group and the village chief to marry off their underage daughter to a 25-year-old farmer. This confirms that no strong injunctive norms prescribing this kind of marriage, especially after influential community members have taken a stand against it. On the contrary, in most focus group discussions, participants believed that community reactions would be negative and prompt actions to dissolve the marriage by reporting the matter to the police or other relevant authorities in the community.

P2: So, in the case of this 25-year-old man, since he has married the underage girl, now, to be honest, we can say that action is being taken. Community members do not just stay idle. Child marriages are still happening, but there are others that are trying their best to put an end to this.

P3: When such a marriage takes place here, people do talk. But another thing is that it seems that such cases are investigated as an offense, and we hear that the case has reached the chief and that he is dealing with it. It is mostly the chiefs that enforce the laws that have been put in place so that child marriages should not occur. (FGD parents, Ng'ozo)

Notably, the girls who participated in the study were less inclined to think that community reactions would involve strong reporting measures. Beyond taking action to dissolve the marriage, community reactions typically included negative gossip and talk. Girls were prone to believe responses would amount to talk rather than action. The age difference between the two spouses was a recurring issue in such talk.

P6: They can say that the man is older, and the woman is younger. They were not supposed to get married because the younger one was supposed to go to school.

P3: Yes. We people talk a lot when someone has married an old person. We say that the parents marry off their young children due to greed for money. So that when the man finds money, he should give the father. So, such speeches burdens.

P5: They would say that the girl has married a man, an old man.

P2: They can say he has married her father.

P2: They can also gossip about the parents. (FGD girls, Ngadziwe)

P2: Because the man is old and the girl is young, they would say that the mother forced the girl to accept the proposal (FGD girls, Ng'ozo)

The participants did expect that all reactions would be adverse. Some also expected community members to understand the parents' decision and feel sorry for them.

P2: Everybody has the responsibility to take care of his family, so people feel sorry about you because it's like you fail your responsibility. (FGD parents, Ngadziwe)

A few even reported that the community's reactions would be positive because of the dire economic situation of the girl's family or as a preventive measure to avoid the shame of pregnancy outside of marriage (in this case indirectly driven by poverty since the girl had to drop out of school due to lack of resources).

P1: Some would say that she has found a good man to marry because the man can help her family (FGD girls, Ng'ozo)

P6: When other community members hear that the child of a certain family has found a partner they want to marry, other community members are happy about it. They say that the child has made a good decision, rather than that child behaving promiscuously and ending up getting pregnant when she does not have a stable partner. Most of the time, this is how we see people react to such news. (FGD 010 boys, Ngadziwe)

This may indicate that while there is a dominant social norm *against* child marriage, there are also norms stipulating that extreme poverty may buy you an exception, and that people accept that sometimes desperate conditions call for desperate measures.

There is reason to focus on improving the economic situation for the poorest households with children. Girls living in poverty are more likely to marry before 18 than girls from wealthier households. Girls from poorer households are also the least educated. For example, adolescents around 16-27 years old who are delayed in school and/or have dropped out of school are further at risk of child marriage. These adolescents often come from poor households that struggle with covering the costs of keeping them in school. Thus, it seems critical to target these at-risk girls' situations directly. In the next chapter, we will return to this question when discussing how SC can improve its programmes.

Peer influence is an additional crucial driver of child marriage also associated with other key drivers such as poverty and adolescent pregnancy. Peer influence may be converted to pressure when reinforced by poverty and thus combines with the need to access basic needs and material goods. For example, many participants confirmed that girls engage in sexual relationships for food, soap, and clothes their parents/guardians cannot afford.

It [peer pressure] is common because of poverty. As girls, when we go to school and see that our friends are from well-to-do families, and then it happens that we don't have books, pens, or school material. Then others just think that they should drop out of school and just stay at home rather than go to school [...] Therefore, some girls just think that maybe they should get married so that they get rid of those problems (FGD girls, Kagonamwake)

Some parents acknowledge the link between poverty and their children's reaction to peer influence.

... if the parents had something dependable to do, something to earn an income through, the parent will be in a better position to support their children with their needs. Maybe the number of children copying what their friends do can be reduced to a small number. Because if they are being easily taken in by what others have, then it means that these children have unmet needs. While if their needs are met, there would be no need for them to copy what others are doing with their lives. So, to me, all these issues are interrelated, and the main cause is poverty. (FGD parents, Ng'ozo)

When a strong perception of relative or absolute deprivation combines with peer pressure and a lack of job prospects, many girls are discouraged from continuing school and encouraged to get married. Again, the girls from the poorest households appear to be the most at risk, as they are likely to be susceptible to peer pressure.

The children lack things that they need, and as a result, they engage in detrimental behaviours. The youths are getting into all these problems because of copying what they see. Mostly the youths from poor backgrounds see and copy from youths from well-to-do backgrounds. The well-to-do youths are the ones that seem to be pressuring the youths from poor backgrounds [...] (FGD parents, Ng'ozo)

One way to counter and change peer pressure to reduce the chance of child marriage may be to elevate the economic status of the poorest households and target the most vulnerable girls, thus making them more robust in the face of influence and pressure from peers. This suggested change reflects how linked the drivers of poverty and peer pressure are.

A third main driver of child marriage is adolescent pregnancies. According to our findings, most adolescent pregnancies do not lead to child marriage. However, many pregnancies do (cf. Report Two). Therefore, it is crucial to limit adolescent pregnancies to reduce child marriage. We are interested in identifying what changes in drivers of adolescent pregnancies may contribute to such a reduction. As discussed, this would include reducing peer pressure and transactional unprotected sex for basic needs by targeting the poorest households and the adolescent girls most at risk. Additionally, there is a need to increase the accessibility of contraception and to change adolescents' attitudes and behaviour regarding contraceptive use. To achieve this, norm change on contraceptive use is critical. Table 1 identifies the main drivers leading to child marriage and adolescent pregnancies, and which changes will be required to address these drivers. It also shows that adolescent pregnancy must be addressed both as a driver of child marriage, but also as a result of drivers such as poverty and peer pressure.

Table 2. Overview of main drivers and identified changes

Required changes in drivers	Main drivers		
	Poverty	Peer pressure	Adolescent pregnancy
Economic empowerment of the poorest households	X	X	X
Relief/support for adolescent girls most at risk	X	X	X
Improve access to contraceptives			X
Change norms on contraceptive use			X

Programmes aiming to change norms generally assume that existing norms drive practice. However, this study has found that child marriage is not the norm. This may suggest that a norm change among adults concerning child marriage has already occurred. We also note that norms do not support child marriage in the same way the norms indicate social disapproval of adolescent pregnancy. Some participants, including parents and other critical stakeholders, attribute teenage pregnancy and child marriage to children who misbehave, acting against their parents' advice. This means the girls' behaviour *conflicts* with dominant injunctive norms. However, norms encourage girls to engage in transactional sex for economic support among adolescents. Similarly, norms exist against adolescent contraceptive use. These norms indirectly contribute to child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

The girls participating in focus groups tended to think parents were responsible for pushing them into marriage for economic or moral reasons. Thus, norms with an indirect effect sometimes produce contradictory normative expectations, especially regarding adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. As discussed in the report from the first fieldwork, such expectations include:

- Many girls experience peer pressure encouraging them to have a boyfriend that can support them economically.
- Peers expect boys to have sex before marriage.
- Norms are against girls' use of contraception.
- Adults condemn premarital sex for girls and boys, but reactions to and sanctions against premarital sex and pregnancy are not strong.

We may add that other underlying norms and beliefs make girls vulnerable to child marriage and unwanted pregnancies. These include norms on the transition to adulthood, the social construction of adolescent sexuality, obedience to elders, religion, the centrality of marriage for girls' life projects, and the economic value of men versus women (Greene and Stiefvater 2019).

Will changes lead to a lasting reduction of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy?

Whether changes lead to a lasting reduction in child marriage and adolescent pregnancy is important both in terms of efficiency of efforts and reaching the end goal of ending child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. The above-suggested changes in both poverty and peer pressure have common denominators centring on empowering the poorest households economically and supporting girls. They target the primary driver and root cause of both child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, namely poverty. In Mwanza, poverty emerges as the dominant driver and interacts with other drivers such as peer pressure, adolescent pregnancy, and norms. We assume that improving the economic status of the poorest households is likely to be sustainable over time. Once behaviours change and child marriage and adolescent pregnancy rates decline, norms and attitudes are likely to change in accordance with practice.

The COVID-19 epidemic has, however, demonstrated the fragility of achievements in poverty reduction since many families have been impoverished due to its effects. This again led to an increase in the number of girls getting pregnant and possibly also seeking marriage or informal unions to solve the problems, suggesting that poverty is a stronger driver than norms (cf. Save the Children 2020a). Thus, empowering the girls from the poorest households by lifting the economic status of their households and supporting them directly makes sure to reach the girls most at risk. This change should effectively decrease the numbers of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in the short term and may also have an effect in the longer term as empowered girls can act as role models in their communities and set a new standard for behaviour.

[Agents of change: Traditional chiefs and mother groups](#)

An underlying premise for this study is that norm change leads to behavioural change.⁵ Nevertheless, there is still little systematic knowledge about how social norms change or can be changed in general (Eriksson, 2019) and more specifically concerning child marriage and adolescent sexual and reproductive health (Cislaghi and Shakya, 2018). Furthermore, norm change is hard to achieve due to the stability of norms. However, several studies show how norms tend to be persistent (Bicchieri et al., 2011; Dannals and Miller, 2017; Morris et al., 2015),

⁵ However, there is also the possibility that behavioural change may lead to norm change (Bicchieri and Mercier, 2014).

implying that once norm change has taken place and a new norm emerged, the new one may last. Thus, we assume that norm change on child marriage, adolescent contraception and sex, and girls' education will potentially contribute to a lasting reduction in child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

The remaining question is how norm changes may be achieved. A first step in shedding light on this question is to consider the relative influence of critical agents of change. In the report from the first fieldwork, traditional leaders emerged as decisive in effectuating change regarding child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The authority of chiefs in the communities has formally been contested over the years. However, a *de facto* operation of chiefs has continued despite a *de jure* reduction in their role. Traditional leaders still play a critical role in preserving cultural practices and overseeing almost all local matters (Eggen, 2011). Even after the suspension of traditional courts, chiefs can turn to traditional sanctions. For example, chiefs have used their power to set fines and social fees appropriate for those who breach the law (Dulani et al., unpublished).

The inclusion of traditional authorities in programmes to promote development and women's and children's rights are related to their proximity to the issues and respondents and to the high trust people have in them. For most Malawians, traditional leaders combine time-honoured and cultural functions with the function of government agents to mobilise subjects for development activities in their areas. They also advance the government's agenda in their respective regions. Moreover, Malawians have high trust in traditional authorities. According to the 2014 Afrobarometer Survey, Malawians are more likely to approve of the performance of traditional authorities than that of parliamentarians.⁶ The 2016 Local Governance Performance Index further reinforces this (see also Muriaas et al. 2019).

Despite many media reports about how some traditional leaders are actively working against child marriages in Malawi, there is little research about the chiefs' role in preventing child marriage. However, a recent study from two districts in Malawi found that enforcement of marriage laws and substantial fines imposed by chiefs and the police are reported to have the unintended effect of driving marriages underground (Melnikas et al., 2021). As a result, parents

⁶ Afrobarometer: <https://afrobarometer.org/countries/malawi-0>.

withdraw from marriages to avoid fines. Girls noted many drawbacks for girls who had been withdrawn from marriage, such as stigma, limited education, and livelihood opportunities (Melnikas et al., 2021). Our research suggests that community chiefs could be agents of norm change.

As already outlined in the data collection section, we designed a vignette to tease out which community members are most influential in terms of attitudes, norms, and behaviour. Findings from our first fieldwork fed into the design. The motivation was that by learning whose opinions and behaviour matter, we can also identify relevant reference networks and then whose opinions, views, and behaviours can be changed. Beyond the prominent role of chiefs, additional change agents in the communities emerging from the data collected during our first fieldwork were mother groups and child protection committees. Child protection committees comprise community members and law enforcers and are affiliated with the government. Mother groups are affiliated with schools and were formed as part of a government initiative to provide adolescent girls with an alternative support system to their families. Mother groups should be available in all schools according to government policy and work to help girls stay in school. Although not believed to be as influential as traditional leaders, mother groups and child protection committees were also mentioned by participants as vital in working against child marriages. During our first fieldwork, study participants reported that mother groups had a strong presence in the communities and actively reached out to girls and their families in adolescent pregnancy or child marriage cases.

P1: They come to school and call all the girls and counsel us saying that as girls, you are not supposed to have boyfriends; you must not have them because you might get pregnant while you are still young. (FGD girls, Chiwembo)

Accordingly, in the context of this project, it was relevant to explore whether mother groups had the authority to establish new norms and whose influence on norms was the greatest – that of chiefs or mother groups.⁷ Participants consistently referred to chiefs when asked about whom they think is the most influential in changing behaviours and preventing child marriage and

⁷ More time and resources could have allowed to have another group of respondents who could have been asked about the influence of child protection officers and committees.

adolescent pregnancy. However, mother groups and child protection committees were also mentioned.

P: There are two groups we are thinking about. The first group is the chiefs because, in every community, people are quick to adhere to decisions by their chiefs. The other group is the committees present in the communities like the mother group child protection workers. Sometimes they are present in every village (FGD parents, Ngadziwe)

FGD participants were presented with a hypothetical situation where a rich 25-year-old farmer offered to marry a 16-year-old girl who had dropped out of school because her parents were poor. Nearly all FGD participants agree after being presented with the scenario that most parents would react by letting their daughter marry the 25-year-old farmer. Consistent with previous findings, the predominant reason identified for this was poverty.

R: What happens sometimes is that one of the parents, be it the mother or the father, is greedy for the money that the man who wants to marry their daughter has so that they can also be eating this money. As a result, you find that they get their girl child to marry. (FGD 004 boys)

R3: When she [the girl] accepts that the situation would change at home with the assistance [of the rich farmer], what makes us get married is that we get to benefit from the money of the farmer. This makes us marry an old man who looks like our grandparent.

Ps: [Laughs]

P5: It's like that.

I: *Like what?*

P5: They [parents] would force them [to get married]. (FGD girls, Ngadziwe)

Upon having been presented with the first part of the story, it was thus established that parents would be inclined to react to the proposal by agreeing to marry off their underage daughter. Participants were then presented with two different versions of the vignette. In the first version, half of the participants were asked to indicate how the father, or in some cases both parents, would react when the chair of the mother group learns about the proposal and visits the father to let him know that he cannot allow the marriage to take place. In the second version of the vignette (administered to the other half), participants were told that the village chief who had received news about the proposal came to advise the father against the marriage. FGD participants were then asked about how the father would react to the advice and why.

Overall, the tendency was that neither a visit by the chair of the mother group nor the village chief would make the parents reconsider their initial decision to have their daughter marry, pointing to how difficult it might be to effectuate norm change, especially in the face of severe

poverty. Thus, both the chief and the chair of the mother group were seen as unduly interfering and spurring frustration.

P3: He [the father] may not welcome it [the chief's visit] because he and the spouse may want the child to get married, yet the village chief is refusing. The parents might tell the village chief that the child is not yours.

P4: It may depend on the way the father views his family. Maybe he will get support from it [marriage], and also maybe he does not have any hope of getting school fees for his child, so the best he can do is let the child get married. (FGD boys, Ng'ozo)

Drawing on personal experience, one participant recounted a story about how a young girl's parents reacted to the advice of a mother group member not to allow the child to get married:

P3: The parents that wanted to get their daughter married told her [the member of the mother group] point-blank that "you also have your own children and since you have your own children, go and attend to their needs. As for our children, let it be, we gave birth to them on our own." (FGD 010 boys)

Some participants believed that the chief could trigger adverse reactions to his or her advice, especially if he or she were perceived to communicate a double standard.

P2: If the chief, maybe he or she, is also involved in this practice of getting underage children married, people actually react by getting angry. They question this when they are told that they should not get their children married at an early age since they wonder why their children should be stopped from getting married while other peoples' children are not treated in a similar manner. (FGD parents, Ng'ozo)

However, in three of the ten FGDs, participants were inclined to believe that the visit and advice by the chief would make the parents reverse their decision and not accept the marriage in some cases. Groups of adolescent boys, girls, and parents offered similar responses. In one case, the ability of the chief to provide financial assistance and get the child back to school was part of the reasoning for the change:

The father might be able to agree [with the chief] because the child is young, and if the village head has said that the child must not get married, then they are supposed to find a way that the child must return to school. (FGD girls, Chiwembo)

Other participants explained that parents change their opinion and behaviour because of the chief's authority and ability to impose sanctions.

P1: The parents can accept what the village chief has told them because of being afraid of the chief.

P4: They can accept the chief's stand because they will be afraid that they might be chased away from the village. (FGD boys, Chiwembo)

P4: If the chief can go there with his or her strength as a chief, perhaps the parents can accept and not let the child get married. Because when the chief goes to tell the parents, he or she may talk about the fine, which can make the parents afraid and may just accept it. However, the child may end up deceiving the parents as she may still, in a hidden way, continue to go out with the man and eventually get pregnant. (FGD parents, Kagonamwake)

By contrast, there is less evidence of mother groups having similar authority as the chief as agents of change. Again, parents' reactions tend to be explained by their dire economic situation.

P: The people do not listen to them [the mother group]

P6: When the mother group approaches a household, they encourage the parents that their underage children should go to school. Still, the issue remains that due to the problems that are being faced at that household, maybe the parents are failing to care for the adolescents. (FGD parents, Ng'ozo)

P3: They cannot accept it [the advice from the chair of the mother group], they cannot at all agree with this because if the girl is to be married, it means that the man that wants to marry her can assist them with reducing the problems that they experience at that household, so stopping them [from marrying] cannot work at all. (FGD boys, Chiwembo)

In very few cases, parents were inclined to change their opinion about marrying off their daughter after the visit by the mother group chair. However, some participants admittedly referred to how the chair of the mother group could report a case to, for instance, the chief or the police, and how this could add weight to their advice. There were also instances where participants believed that the parents would act as if they accepted the advice offered but still go ahead with the marriage. In one case, the girl would marry against her parents' advice.

P: There are parents who tend to say that the child will go back to school upon being told by the people [mother group], however, after the [mother group] people go back, the parents may tend to reverse their decision.

P3: The mother group can go to the parents and explain to the parents that the child should not get married, and the parents may accept the idea very well. Upon the mother group leaving, the parents may call their child and explain to her that for her to get married is not a good thing. However, there are children that tend to be stubborn in ending their relationships. (FGD 009 boys, Ngadziwe)

Participants in one of the FGDs reported mixed beliefs about whether most parents in the community would accept the marriage. In this discussion, participants were also prone to believe that the father would welcome the advice of the chair of the mother group not to marry off the

girl. This may indicate that people who were already partially convinced that child marriage is not an option, not even in the direst circumstances, are more susceptible to accept the advice offered.

P2: The father would tell the mother group to speak with the child to continue school.

I: *But would the father let the marriage happen or turn the father's proposal down?*

P2: He would not allow the marriage to happen, he would agree with the mother group chairperson.

P4: He would agree with the mother group to cancel the marriage and let the child continue with her studies. (FGD girls, Ng'ozo)

Some of our data points to how fear of punishment may work as a deterrent to marriage and adolescent pregnancy and thus add to the authority of both mother groups and child protection committees. In case parents do not comply with their advice, there is always the risk of reporting the case to the relevant authorities for them to act.

P6: Mother groups counsel the girls not to get pregnant, and when they fail, they report to the police. (FGD girls, Chiwembo)

P1: this child protection worker looks for cases of child marriages and provides advice to the child and parents [...]. Once disagreements arise from the discussion with child protection workers, it's when the issue is taken further to the other organizations like Save the Children. (FGD parents, Ngadziwe)

As was established in the report from the first fieldwork, most people know that there is a minimum age of marriage and that marriage below 18 is illegal. Accordingly, many participants were aware that there might be repercussions for breaking national laws and community by-laws. The threat of punishment in the form of fines or arrest is thus often perceived as accurate.

P3: Okay, for the chief, the village tends to be his or hers, so when he or she commands or says something, it tends to happen. It happens, and things change. The police are coming in second because when they arrest the child, all the people end their relationships with young girls. This means the police have the power to make people listen in the area. (FGD parents, Kagonamwake)

Some participants even call for more severe punishments to further deter child marriage.

Although they are arrested, you find that within a short time, they have been released. This causes the community members not to be too fearful. While if they were handing out severe punishments, then the people in this community can become fearful that someone we maybe know was arrested for doing this or that, and currently, as we speak, that person is still in jail. (FGD 010 boys, Ngadziwe)

In sum, the above leads us to conclude that the opinions and behaviour of chiefs matter more than that of mother groups in changing norms and behaviours on child marriage. Therefore, chiefs can play a prominent role as agents of norm change favouring child marriage (and most likely adolescent pregnancy). This conclusion underlines how important it is to have the chiefs on board and include them in work against child marriage and teenage pregnancy. This is not to the detriment of the work of mother groups and child protection committees but rather a reminder of how all change agents need to work together.

Chapter 3: Save the Children's interventions, how they respond to study findings, and possible adjustments

This chapter examines how Save the Children's interventions correspond to our findings concerning the drivers of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and how, if necessary, SC should adjust its programmes. First, we outline SC's programme and interventions. Second, we discuss the study participants' perceptions of these in the Mwanza district. We are interested in finding out how perceptions correspond with actual interventions. Third, we address Research Question 2 and look at how well programme interventions and the participants' knowledge of these correspond with the changes we have identified as the drivers of child marriage. Fourth, we suggest adjustments to programme interventions by drawing on the participants' suggestions for improvements and existing literature from the field.

An overview of Save the Children's programme in Mwanza

Since 2016 Save the Children has implemented two programmes on combatting child marriage in Mwanza. The Norad Framework Agreement Programme titled Securing Children's Rights through Education and Protection (SCREP) was implemented in 2019 and reached 57 schools in the district by 2020 (Save the Children, 2020b: 5). Education of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy interventions have targeted three traditional authorities (Kanduku, Nthache, and Govati) and 274 villages. In addition, an EU-funded programme on combatting child marriages and human trafficking started in 2016 ended in 2019. The implementing partner Association for Progressive Women has been part of both programmes.

The EU project focused on the following objectives: Strengthen the resilience amongst children to prevent child marriages and human trafficking; strengthen the capacity of local community structures and civil society to prevent, detect and respond to child marriage and human trafficking; and strengthen coordination and collaboration of stakeholders at the district level to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable children (WULA, 2019: 11). The project interventions included other child-led clubs' training on child rights, national laws, and international instruments to build resilience. In addition, child-led clubs were supported to conduct awareness meetings. Support was also provided to hold social accountability sessions

between child-led clubs, community stakeholders, and district councils. Further activities included girls' camps, children's corners with recreational activities and training, and supporting role models to advocate for child rights at schools and community levels. A dialogue was also facilitated between mother groups and other stakeholders to bring children back to school.

Programme activities directed at strengthening local community structures and civil society included training of headteachers and child-led club patrons and matrons, meetings with traditional leaders and initiators and faith-based leaders, training for mother groups and community child protection committees, local civil society organisations, drama groups, and interactive awareness-raising on child rights. To strengthen the coordination and collaboration of stakeholders, district councils and public service providers received training and dialogue and facilitated joint actions between district councils and civil society organisations. The district child protection committees were trained, and support was given to conduct review meetings and conferences. The media was engaged in various ways to communicate messages and facilitate discussions on child marriages (Save the Children, 2019c).

Save the Children's *Framework Agreement Application to Norad 2019-2023* presents the new programme approach, stating that Save the Children and partners will contribute to change social norms and attitudes through community dialogue, social advocacy, and engaging stakeholders and community groups to prevent, identify and manage cases of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. It also stresses the training of teachers in delivering sexuality education and improving access to sexual and reproductive health rights information and services (Save the Children, 2018). As such, the recent SCREP programme aims to strengthen civil society to demand quality education "with a special focus on improving learning outcomes, inclusion, protection from child marriage and teenage pregnancies and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights" (Save the Children, 2020b: 5). The programme focuses on four key issues, with issue number two centred on the specific goal of "reduction of child marriage and teenage pregnancies in Malawi so that children will grow, learn and develop" (Save the Children, 2020b: 6 sic). The COVID-19 pandemic heavily affected programme interventions in 2020, and activities were adapted to the new situation.

In the *Annual Progress Report 2019* to Norad and the *Annual Progress Report 2020*, community dialogue is the main activity to address norms and mobilise community members in preventive

efforts and case management of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. Case management training targeted civil society organisations, mother groups, child protection workers, school governance structures, and health severance assistants to strengthen coordination. The aim was to strengthen the capacity of school governance structures, community health structures, and other community structures to prevent and respond to cases of child marriages and adolescent pregnancies. Activities also included civil society organisations engaging social welfare offices to deploy child protection workers in underserved areas and having traditional authorities withdraw children from child marriage. In addition, magistrates, prosecutors, and probation officers were engaged in increasing access to child justice by implementing child-friendly mobile courts.

Community dialogue sessions targeted various stakeholders, including traditional chiefs, initiation councillors, religious leaders, community-based organisations, mother groups, teachers, youth community-based distribution agents, parent-teacher associations, health service assistants, and school management committees. Panel discussions and interface meetings were held, and community awareness campaigns on laws and policies regarding child marriage and adolescent pregnancies were conducted. Media campaigns took place and included radio spots on national radio stations and community radio.

Other activities described are orientations of youth clubs to facilitate counselling on prevention of adolescent pregnancies. In addition, youth community-based distribution agents and health workers received training in youth-friendly services and sexual and reproductive health commodities to support sexual and reproductive health outreach clinics in hard-to-reach areas. This included providing access to HIV testing, counselling, and contraceptives (Save the Children 2019a, 2020b).

The EU-funded programme Combating Child Marriage and Human Trafficking and SCREP have in common a focus on stakeholder training and collaboration and strengthening local community structures and civil society. The main difference is the explicit focus in the SCREP programme on addressing adolescent pregnancy and barriers to adolescent sexual and reproductive health. There is also an added focus on case management training, case handling, and community dialogue.

Perceptions of Save the Children's programme in Mwanza

Our study shows that the study participants were overwhelmingly positive regarding SC's programme interventions to reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in the three study sites. Many of those who participated believed that these interventions had contributed to reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in their areas. However, the participants' positive assessment of SC programme activities should be interpreted with caution, as community members are likely to favour initiatives seeking to alleviate their problems and may not be comfortable criticising those initiatives. However, study participants' preconceptions are expected to be less consequential than mapping the participants' knowledge of SC activities. A risk in this regard is that participants may have difficulty distinguishing between the work of different organisations, as several organisations and implementing partners operate in the same areas. We observed that participants tended to confuse the work of various organisations in the area.

The study found that participants associated the following three broadly grouped interventions with SC: 1) community dialogue and sensitisation, 2) stakeholder training and collaboration, and 3) interventions focussed on education, including financial support. Implementing partners, key stakeholders, particularly chiefs, child protection officers, mother group members, and teachers appeared to be the most familiar with SC interventions. In addition, several adolescents and parents were also familiar with SC work.

1. Community dialogue and sensitisation

Community dialogue and sensitisation on risks of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy was the intervention most participants were familiar with. In addition, some participants explicitly mentioned the Scaling Child Rights through Protection (SCREP) programme. Participants reported the project to focus on educating communities about children's rights and the importance of educating girls. Participants in Kagonamwake, which was presumed to be a low-intensity site,⁸ also knew and acknowledged the programme.

⁸ A child protection officer working in GVH Kagonamwake confirmed that Save the Children was running many activities in the area.

When the SCREP programme came, they were responding to what we were telling them in interface meetings. Without this project of ending child marriages, I do not know how it would have been in this area. (FGD parents, Kagonamwake)

2. Stakeholder training and collaboration

Other interventions study participants commonly mentioned were stakeholder training and collaboration. Several participants referred to SC's training programme's focus on increasing knowledge and understanding among key stakeholders in the community, including chiefs, teachers, mother groups and child protection officers. Some also mentioned forging collaboration and interaction between the same stakeholders as an aim. The risk of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, dropping out of school, and how to follow up on these were mentioned as key focus areas of this work.

Save the Children, they are helping children learn graphs in schools and with education. They are also teaching mother groups on child protection and how they can protect children from gender-based violence and these issues on child marriages. And child protection committees, teachers, and many others are being taught on the issue of positive discipline [...] even the chiefs like group village headmen are invited to various meetings concerning these issues of child protection by Save the Children. (Child protection officer, Ng'ozo)

We have been attending their [Save the Children's] meetings as parents, and they advise us on the risks associated with early marriages to children of less than 18 years of age and the effect of not educating the girl child. So, they have helped us to know the benefit of educating children." (FGD parents, Ngadziwe)

Many participants stressed SC's willingness to engage the traditional chiefs, who reported that the organisation did not shy away from taking direct action when handling cases.

When the Save the Children-people hear that in the village there is a problem of forcing children to marry early, they go there as a group together with the traditional leader in that village. They approach the household where this happened, and you find that the marriage in question is dissolved. (FGD boys, Kagonamwake)

3. Interventions focused on education, including financial support to poor children

Many of the study participants were familiar with SC's activities on education. According to participants, SC has established child-led clubs and other projects to promote child rights and

inclusive education. For example, children who dropped out of school were followed up with and returned to school by child-led clubs.

Adolescents, parents, and key stakeholders also mentioned that SC was supporting children from poor households assisting them with school fees and material.

When Save the Children came, we saw children being paid school fees, being bought school uniform, school bags, and alike, meaning they are encouraging children to go to school, and even up to secondary school, children are being paid school fees. (IDI mother group member, Ng'ozo)

The study participants' familiarity with the SC's programme in Mwanza largely corresponds to its primary activities outlined in programme documents, including community dialogue, sensitisation and stakeholder training, and collaboration activities. As expected, participants recall interventions conducted as part of the *Combating Child Marriage and Human Trafficking* and the SCREP programme. Participants also attributed the intervention of extending financial support to poor schoolchildren to Save the Children. However, we could not find that this type of activity is referred to in programme documents, and we believe participants may have confused the implementing actors in the area.

Participants did not mention some of the interventions described in the NORAD framework proposal and progress reports as activities conducted by SC. Examples are media campaigns, some interventions targeting teachers and schools to improve learning outcomes (cf. Issue 1: Children learn and are safe), and some case management interventions. To the extent such activities did appear in our data, they were not explicitly associated with SC or its implementing partner, Association for Progressive Women. Although we asked open-ended questions, interviews focused on programme activities that appeared most central in addressing norms and critical drivers such as poverty, peer pressure and adolescent pregnancy.

[How Save the Children's interventions correspond to the study's findings](#)

The main drivers of child marriage and early pregnancy identified by this study are poverty in combination with peer pressure and low use of contraception. This sub-section will examine how Save the Children's interventions correspond to changing driving factors discussed in Chapter 2.

1. Poverty

Poverty is a major structural driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in Mwanza. Based on our data, it would be necessary to address the following with respect to poverty: (1) economic empowerment of the poorest households and (2) provide support to the adolescent girls most at risk. There is thus a need to address poverty at both individual and household levels. Thus, it is only natural that, when asked about the best way of addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, participants frequently refer to the provision of economic relief to the most deprived, interventions to enable adolescents and families to improve their income, and economic and material support to girls to help them continue school.

SC's economic support and empowerment efforts appear to be very limited. For example, a plan mentioned in the programme proposal to NORAD was to introduce village savings and loans, but this was abandoned (Save the Children 2018). The proposal also stated that "this project will draw lessons from the economic empowerment approaches being used to target teen mothers that are returning to school and the alternative livelihoods for girls who are withdrawn from child marriages" (Save the Children, 2018: 8-9). However, the annual reports for 2019 and 2020 do not include information about such activities. In addition, as noted above, study participants may have confused the SC programme with support provided by other organisations (Save the Children, 2019a, 2020b).

In conclusion, there is a discrepancy between the study's findings and SC's programme focus when addressing the primary driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy: poverty. As far as we understand, few SCREP programme interventions directly focus on alleviating poverty at the household level and supporting at-risk adolescent girls economically to enable them to continue school or return to school.

2. Norms

A key finding in this study is that norms favouring child marriage and adolescent pregnancy cannot be considered as a significant driver of these phenomena in the case of Mwanza. Rather both marriages before the age of 18 years and pregnancy occurring among adolescent girls are in most cases disapproved of and met with adverse reactions among community members and leaders. When girls younger than 18 marry, the couple and their parents are also frequently met with formal sanctions in the form of fees, withdrawal of marriages, and efforts to bring married girls back to their own families. However, the reactions are not equally negative everywhere. In

places where more people live in desperate poverty, people react by accepting and showing understanding when an underage girl is perceived to marry out of poverty. Some chiefs are said to not respond to cases of child marriage, and some even accept the goat or chicken gifted to the chief as compensation for his or her approval. Thus, continued efforts to address norms and build awareness are still needed.

Chapter 2 found that community chiefs have considerable potential to influence norms on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The mobilisation of traditional leaders as agents of change is thus critical. Save the Children has had a substantive focus on mobilising chiefs in programme interventions. Training and awareness-building among chiefs may turn chiefs into agents of change with a strong influence on community norms. When chiefs speak out clearly against child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and enforce by-laws by actively sanctioning those who do not comply, they send a strong message to the community. SC's case management training and handling activities are also relevant in this regard. We did not explore the potential role chiefs can play when it comes to peer pressure and adolescents' use of contraception, but for them to be change agents on those issues would require substantial training and value clarifications.

Mother groups and child protection committees/officers also emerged as vital actors in changing behaviour towards preventing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in the communities. SC's capacity building and mobilising additional change agents are essential to ensure critical stakeholders pull in the same direction and ultimately affect norm change. Our data, however, do not allow us to assess the importance of each of these actors separately. In addition, media campaigns and other outreach activities such as panel discussions and interface meetings with influential community leaders (e.g., chiefs) may also contribute to norm change. Again, however, the effects of such interventions are difficult to assess based on the data collected for this study.

According to its annual reports and evaluations, conducting community dialogue meetings and community awareness campaigns on risks of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy is a significant focus area in SC's programme. The main activity is to address norms. There seems to be a correspondence between Save the Children's interventions on norms and our findings concerning agents of change and their ability to affect norm change. Nevertheless, it appears that two factors might be emphasised more in the normative work: peer pressure and low use of contraception.

3. Peer pressure

Based on our findings, peer pressure contributes to girls having unprotected sex resulting in pregnancy and early marriage. As discussed in Chapter 2, peer pressure is strongly linked to poverty since both adolescents and parents report that girls feel pressured to get involved with men to obtain necessities and other goods. The practice also amounts to a descriptive norm among girls since they report that this is very common. Peer pressure as a driver can be addressed by economically empowering the poorest households and providing support to adolescent girls most at risk. Economic empowerment helps girls resist pressure to engage with men for economic reasons. However, we have already established that few SCREP programme interventions directly focus on alleviating poverty at the household level and supporting at-risk adolescent girls.

Save the Children's proposal to Norad lists peer pressure as one of many factors contributing to child marriage (Save the Children, 2018: 2). However, no activities are addressing this issue. The proposal states that it "is also important to elevate the voice of children and adolescents themselves about the risks they are facing" (Save the Children, 2018: 15), but "risks identified" focus on violence and child abuse and do not include peer pressure. According to the annual reports, interventions that participants talked about, such as community meetings and girls' clubs, have incorporated talks and discussions about peer pressure as a challenge. However, it does not appear that SC have discussed widely ways to address peer pressure (Save the Children, 2019a, 2020b).⁹ This seems to be an issue that it would be good to raise discussions about both between adolescents and between parents and adolescents. Open discussions may allow adolescents to find better ways to deal with the pressure and to correct misconceptions about what others believe about them. In sum, there are few overlaps between Save the Children's interventions and our findings on the need to address peer pressure and adolescents' low use of contraception.

⁹ The Annual Progress Report 2020 states, "group discussions were used to identify and discuss drivers of child marriage. During discussions, key drivers of child marriage and teenage pregnancies identified included the following: Indefinite school closure which resulted into some learners losing hope and interest in school, peer pressure amongst children and young people and Parents/guardians forcing children into marriage" (Save the Children, 2020b: 58, our emphasis).

Among the interventions that can reduce adolescent pregnancy (and indirectly child marriage) discussed in Chapter 2 are improved access to and use of contraceptives. In terms of adolescent pregnancy both as a challenge itself and a driver of child marriage, we highlighted in the report from the first fieldwork widespread misconceptions about hormonal contraception and norms that signal social disapproval of adolescents who use them. We did note though, that several participants at one site (Ngadziwe) claimed that outreach activities had resulted in more adolescents using contraception.

According to Save the Children's Annual Report for 2020, Save the Children is involved in outreach activities promoting contraception for adolescents. Orientations for youth clubs helped to facilitate counselling of youth in the communities about preventing teenage pregnancies. In addition, the program trained youth community-based distribution agents and health workers in youth-friendly health services and sexual and reproductive health commodities. Save the Children also supported sexual and reproductive health outreach clinics in hard-to-reach areas. Our interviews do not allow us to assess the reach and effect of these activities. However, findings suggest a need for expansion (Save the Children, 2020b). Although there is some correspondence between programme activities and our findings regarding suggested changes to address adolescent pregnancy, there is clearly a need to explicitly tackle norms that discourage girls from seeking health services to ask for contraception.

[A discussion of possible adjustments and improvements to Save the Children's programme](#)

This section discusses how SC may adjust its programmes. We will do so concerning the literature on “what works” to prevent child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and to promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Additionally, we will draw on the recommendations from study participants on strengthening programmes seeking to reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

Recent literature reviews on the prevention of child marriage programmes concur that the number of high-quality intervention studies has been limited. However, a substantial increase in such studies has been observed in the last years (Svanemyr 2020b, Malhotra and Elnakib 2021a, Malhotra and Elnakib 2021b).

1. Girls' empowerment

The existing literature suggests that girl empowerment approaches had the highest success rate, but with a wide range of approaches and interventions (Svanemyr 2020b). Intervention studies with this approach that turned out to be unsuccessful had several known weaknesses such as a short implementation period, limited resources, too little training of participants, and lack of programmatic focus. In an extensive independent systematic literature review, Malhotra and Elnakib (2021a) concluded that only three of the seven empowerment-focused multicomponent interventions showed positive findings (and only one medium-high quality study). Only two studies showed mixed results, and two studies showed no effect. The one high-quality study with positive results was an adolescent women's empowerment intervention in Uganda providing vocational training and information on sex, reproduction, and marriage. Four years after the intervention, adolescent girls in treated communities were more likely to engage in income-generating activities. In addition, adolescent pregnancy and early entry into marriage/cohabitation had fallen rapidly (Bandier et al. 2020).

Some recommendations from our study participants may be categorised as girl empowerment interventions, even though they were framed as measures to help youth resist peer pressure:

We need to teach the youth on issues of independence. They should learn more about self-esteem and have more lectures on decision-making because peer pressure means someone is making decisions on your behalf. So, youth should learn more about the advantages of making decisions on their own. (IDI social welfare officer, Mwanza)

The establishment of youth forums or clubs where young people could meet, provision of guidance and counselling of the youth, fostering parent-child open communication, and use of role models (to encourage young people to remain in school) were also mentioned to address peer pressure.

Notably, the establishment of youth clubs is a standard part of girl empowerment programmes. Study participants indicated that such forums would help keep the youth busy and serve as a place to influence each other positively.

We can have the youths, and maybe in youth clubs, they can be able to call other youths, maybe adolescents, to be providing them with guidance. The youths too, maybe they need to be assisted by an organisation, and that organisation can be mentoring the youths so that they can also reach

others younger than them and mentor them as well. All this is done to empower the youths with skills so that they are not easily taken away by peer pressure. (FGD boys, Ngadziwe)

A study in two other districts in southern Malawi found that girls' clubs provided a forum where girls could access accurate sexual health information and that "girls were empowered with knowledge about gender norms and roles which enabled them to successfully challenge discriminatory gender norms at home" (Manda et al. 2021: 9). Lessons from girl empowerment programmes suggest that high frequency and high attendance levels with many participants coming back for each session can be vital to obtaining changes in norms and behaviours (Svanemyr, 2020b).

Based on positive results from other studies and the perception of youth clubs among study participants, the establishment of youth clubs is a component that SC could consider strengthening.

Study participants mentioned the use of role models as a source of encouragement for girls as a possible way to address peer pressure. The use of role models is also often included in girl empowerment programmes. In addition, participants expressed belief in using local role models to encourage young people to go to school and get an education.

I think we can convince these people by using role models. It helps. But maybe the role models should be from the same community. They should look for someone whose status was very poor at first [...] Maybe was not doing well in class but because of hard work [this person] is now doing well. Maybe, maybe it may help. (IDI teacher, Ngadziwe)

The organisations should employ people in the village so that other youth should admire and work hard to also be able to do that. (FGD parents, Kagonamwake)

SC might build on these findings and expand the "pool of role models" or "outside experts" to provide education/information to promote an alternate vision to adolescent motherhood (Nash et al., 2019). Role models should deliver positive messages on delaying marriages and avoiding adolescent pregnancies and the educational, financial, and employment benefits of these. In this way, they would foster girls' aspirations for school completion and economic independence.

2. Economic support and economic empowerment.

Chapter 2 discussed how poverty is the primary driver of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in Mwanza. Many participants reported that direct financial support to deprived children from poor households had enabled many children to return to school. However, participants also pointed to more comprehensive economic empowerment initiatives to provide financial security for households and even entire communities.

The literature on economic approaches to child marriage prevention focuses primarily on interventions at the individual level, such as conditional and unconditional cash and asset transfer, and various ways of supporting girls to continue education through economic support and incentives (Svanemyr 2020b). However, concerning norms as a driver, a question not much studied is whether financial support may incentivise behaviour change without affecting peoples' attitudes and gender norms. If so, this may limit the effect of the intervention to individual beneficiaries so that it is not sustained beyond the duration of the programme.

Findings concerning the effectiveness of economic approaches are inconsistent. For example, one review found them the most effective, others least effective in reducing child marriage (Svanemyr 2020b). The literature reviews do not explain these variations in outcomes, but they may differ in design, scope, and context. For example, a review by Population Council concluded that economic approaches had the highest failure rate when used as the sole approach. In contrast, interventions coupled with another approach had a higher success rate (Chae and Ngo 2017).

2.1 Economic support to schoolgirls

In several of our group discussions and interviews with key informants, parents and adolescents, participants suggested that paying school fees and buying school uniforms, writing materials, and other basic needs such as soap and clothes encourage children, primarily from poor households, to complete their education. In almost all group discussions and individual interviews, participants suggested addressing poverty by ensuring economic empowerment of the youth or their caregivers. For example, participants called for building skills that would help community members establish businesses or improve the outcome from harvests. Another common suggestion was to link vulnerable youth to organisations that can support them.

...if there is no relative that can help, through different organisations, we tend to make sure we link them to social welfares office. Because sometimes there tends to be funding that can assist children in going to secondary school. So, our role is to link up those people that are not capable so that they should not drop out of school (FGD parents, Kagonamwake)

Importantly, Malhotra and Elnakib (2021a) found that interventions supporting girls' schooling through cash or in-kind transfers show the most apparent pattern of success in reducing child marriage: 8 of 10 medium-high quality studies showed positive results in terms of delaying child marriage.

One of the studies of high quality and with positive findings was conducted in Malawi and has inspired much of the work on the effect of cash transfer that has followed. Baird et al. (2010) found that an average offer of US\$10/month conditional on satisfactory school attendance – plus direct payment of secondary school fees – led to significant declines in early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and self-reported sexual activity among programme beneficiaries after just one year of programme implementation. For programme beneficiaries who were out of school at baseline, the probability of getting married and becoming pregnant declined by more than 40% and 30%, respectively. A later study on longer-term effects found that conditional cash transfers produced sustained improvements in education and fertility for initially out-of-school females. However, significant declines in HIV prevalence, pregnancy, and early marriage observed during the programme among recipients of unconditional cash transfers evaporated quickly after the cessation of support (Baird et al. 2019).

Duflo et al. (2015) investigated a school-based HIV prevention programme in Kenya. They presented evidence that the efficacy of providing adolescent girls information on how to reduce their exposure to pregnancy risks is more significant when reinforced by education subsidies (providing two free school uniforms over the last three years of primary school).

The studies on economic support that this approach is effective. Therefore, Save the Children should consider introducing such support and carefully combine it with other activities *in each site*.

Adolescent pregnancy contributes significantly to school drop-out and poor school completion rates among adolescent girls. Some study participants emphasised that bringing girls back to

school through economic support was important. Several organisations provide bursaries to secondary schools in Malawi, with packages ranging from school fees and cash to materials (books, writing materials, school bags, uniforms, and food). A bursary system is implemented through the constituent development funds at the local constituency level, mainly directed at students in secondary schools. However, several participants reported poor coordination among various organisations doing similar work. Thus, there seems to be a need to improve the coordination and collaboration between organisations to help avoid duplication of efforts and leverage the available resources. Efforts to support schoolgirls economically should consider how the support given complements or adds to the existing bursary system.

It was not part of this study to examine Save the Children's advocacy work at political level, but there is a need for civil society to collaborate to ensure that education is universal, more accessible, and free. This means abandoning school and examination fees and providing free teaching and learning materials.

2.2. Economic empowerment of youth out-of-school, families, and communities

Participants across all groups indicated the need to empower youth and their caregivers and entire communities to help their members become self-reliant. When reflecting on how to best address poverty to reduce adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, many study participants suggested equipping youth with skills to become self-sufficient, economically empowering caregivers to support their children's needs, and addressing poverty at the community level. A range of measures was suggested as possible ways of empowering caregivers, including providing loans to start-up businesses. Some of the suggestions above may be worth considering.

They should be assisted with various social protection programmes that are there. For instance, cash transfers, VSL [village savings and loans] etc., so that they may be cushioned. They should not be helped in bits, for example, just because they have been offered one initiative, then they must not access the other, no. They should be targeted with the whole content [bundle] so that they are efficiently supported and able to get out of poverty. (Child protection officer, Kagonamwake)

Before launching initiatives in this area, organisations should consider how they can complement (and coordinate with) the government's Social Cash Transfers Programme (SCTP) model currently operational in all districts in Malawi. SCTP involves an unconditional transfer targeted

to ultra-poor, labour-constrained households. The main objectives of the SCTP are to reduce poverty and hunger and to increase school enrolment. The SCTP has generated a wide range of household impacts across most social and economic domains (Brugh et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2010). For example, a report on the effects of Malawi's SCTP on community dynamics indicates the impact on the household economy whereby many families reported that they were able to enrol their children in school, renovate their homes, buy clothes and reduce visible signs of poverty, enhancing their dignity. In addition, the SCTP has been found to reduce negative risk-coping strategies, such as absenteeism and withdrawing children from school (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2015). The impact is measured in monetary terms (consumption, savings and debt repayment) (The Transfer Project, 2017).

The rural communities in Malawi are mostly comprised of subsistence farmers. Various approaches have been tested to alleviate poverty and build competence, capacity and profits in farming in comparable settings. One is establishing agricultural cooperatives as small-scale farmers pool resources to improve production and linkages to markets (Paos, 2018; Bolton, 2019; Sizya, 2001; Wanyama et al., 2018). Agricultural cooperatives would directly benefit rural households in tackling poverty, creating food security and contributing to the empowerment of women (Meador and O'Brien, 2019; Lecoutere, 2017; Woldu et al., 2013).

Another approach is Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) programmes, which promote entrepreneurship development in rural communities. These programmes provide small loans on variable terms and conditions. The purpose is to alleviate poverty, increase household security through savings, offer loans to investments and other needs, and create a social fund to relieve members experiencing emergencies.¹⁰ In this regard, SC's programme proposal to NORAD (2019-2023) mentioned that "[t]he programme will establish socio-economic (VSLAs) and psychosocial support groups to increase retention of re-admitted students in school" (p.19), and "[t]he project will collaborate with [...] the Development Fund of Norway in areas of economic empowerment (VSL)" (p.23). Studies in Nigeria, Ghana and Zambia have documented promising results (Nnama-Okechukwu, 2019; Mwansakilwa, 2017, Sienso et al., 2021). No participant mentioned that the organisation offered VSL, and according to the 2020 Annual Report, VSL was not implemented. It was

¹⁰ <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/CARE-VSLA-Report-Uganda-EcoDevel.pdf> 1

...proposed to completely remove this activity and replace it with a new activity which will allow for direct support of teen mothers and their babies, including those withdrawn from child marriage. This would help to support teen mothers who face a lot of economic challenges when re-enrolled back to school to support themselves and their children (Save the Children, 2020b: 64)

This change of approach seems to align with our recommendation above to focus on supporting girls.

In Mwanza district, CARE international, Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM) in Malawi, and Farmers Union Malawi¹¹ implement agriculture and economic empowerment programmes. However, some participants pointed out that there is a tendency for several organisations to work on the same issue, which may lead to neglecting other pressing issues. For example, one study participant stated, “I think the interventions are supposed to be looking into every aspect, but the best the NGOs can do is to sit down together and map” (IDI Implementing organisation, CAMFED). This stresses the need for collaboration and coordinated action between actors.

To reduce poverty at a structural level requires structural interventions. It, for instance, includes a change to financially sustainable crops, improvement of roads and transport, and better logistics to improve farmers’ access to markets. However, we consider that such interventions are beyond the scope and reach of Save the Children’s programme.

3. The mobilisation of chiefs and the enforcement of by-laws

In a comparative study of resistance to child marriage reform in Sudan and Zambia, which like Malawi, have patrilineal and matrilineal ethnic groups, Muriaas and colleagues (Muriaas et al., 2018) found that including traditional leaders in comprehensive campaigns prevented counter-mobilisation. Through inclusion, traditional leaders gained a sense of ownership over the policy. In addition, they were trained to increase their understanding of the practice. Significantly, the strategy did not threaten traditional leaders’ power – as law reform only challenged current practices – or their position as administrators of the law. Nevertheless, our data confirm that chiefs have a critical role in influencing decision-making regarding child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. In group discussions and individual interviews, participants emphasised

¹¹ Source: Non-governmental Organization list provided by Mwanza District Social Welfare Office

the need to engage chiefs to address factors that sustain child marriage and adolescent pregnancies. Save the Children was praised for their work with the chiefs. Even though there is evidence that chiefs have contributed significantly to change practices, our data show that there are still chiefs who ignore or accept child marriages and adolescent pregnancies to varying degrees. Although few references were made to chiefs openly condoning the behaviour, some did not comply with measures to reduce child marriages and adolescent pregnancies. Others were selective in their enforcement of by-laws.

Other chiefs are at the forefront promoting these vices. It can happen that you have conducted a community meeting sensitising the people on the two subjects. But soon after you are done with the meeting, you feel you have done the job [sensitisation], the chiefs advise their subjects to ignore what was advised during the meeting. (IDI child protection officer, Kagonamwake)

Some chiefs were said to accept bribes to ignore child marriages.

Another problem is that according to our culture, when a girl finds herself a man or husband, they have to come in front of the chief to be known. However, chiefs are not taking a role to ask how old the girl is, to know if she is old enough. Here in Mwanza, the chief tends to receive things from the couple, so chiefs just receive the things and thank the people without showing interest to see how old the child is. (FGD parents, Kagonamwake)

Many participants pointed to the importance of by-laws. All groups of participants perceived threats of punishment and fines (at times mentioned in combination with imprisonment) to work as a deterrent to child marriage. Enforcement of by-laws is the responsibility of traditional leaders. Still, participants pointed out that chiefs sometimes neglected their duty. As a result, most cases reportedly went unpunished in some communities.

The chiefs must try to enforce the by-laws set against young girls. They should make sure that they work and to everyone, not just a certain individual. Not just because this is the chieftainship clan, and the by-laws must not be applied but when it is another family, the by-laws should apply. (IDI Child protection officer, Ng'ozo)

I feel that for change to occur then, the by-laws need to be enforced. (FGD parents, Ng'ozo)

There were also reports of village heads being more lenient in imposing fines than higher-level chiefs due to close relations with community members.

For the lower chiefs, it is hard for them to impose stiff punishments since they are our uncles or they are related to the people in their village in different ways. As a result, when they demand

compensation from village members, they can be told that we will pay you later. (FGD parents, Ng'ozo)

A recent study from Malawi found that when the police and/or the chiefs imposed fines, it led some parents to withdraw the marriage or hide marriage ceremonies by moving them out of view of the community (Melnikas et al., 2021). Unfortunately, we received no such reports in our study, but we cannot exclude the possibility that it happens, which would warrant careful monitoring to capture unintended consequences.

Due to the chiefs' decisive role in preventing and ending child marriages and adolescent pregnancies, SC should continue their work with chiefs to ensure they are proactive and involved in mobilising against the practices.

Training and supporting chiefs at the various chieftaincy levels (village, group village head, traditional authorities) appears essential. Save the Children should continue their work with chiefs to ensure they are proactive and mobilising to prevent child marriage. Save the Children may also explore how Chiefs can be mobilised to address peer pressure and norms against contraceptive use among adolescents.

Training and mobilisation of chiefs should be combined with a clear strategy on community education with community support, alignment of by-laws with formal laws and policies, and enhanced multi-sectoral collaboration approaches.

4. Community sensitisation, dialogue programmes, and campaigns

Community mobilisation and community conversations and dialogues are very common in programmes to prevent harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. However, it should be noted that the scientific evidence on the effect of this approach on child marriage rates is very weak (Svanemyr 2020b). One reason is that it may be difficult to single out the effect of this approach which is often used in combination with others. The main implication is that more rigorous monitoring and evaluation is needed to learn which approaches are effective in various settings. Nonetheless, our findings suggest that Save the Children's community awareness programme, together with other similar measures (by other organisations), has contributed to positive changes in norms around child marriages and adolescent pregnancies (also see report two). Even though some community sensitisation already takes place, most

participants stressed the need for organisations and other stakeholders to continuously sensitise communities on risks associated with child marriages and adolescent pregnancy and create awareness of by-laws.

...the committees, like the mother group, child protection [committee], CBCC [preschools], and many others, should continue to teach people about child protection and child marriages. When doing their meetings, which they used to conduct before, they should also continue so that everybody should get the message. And again, we as committee members are supposed to teach people about the available by-laws so that everybody is aware of those. (IDI Child Protection Officer, Ng'ozo)

In almost all interviews and discussions, participants stressed the need to reach out broadly.

The other thing is having more sensitisation because people have to know. The girls have to know what it is about going to school and what to do when they meet challenges. It is an issue of empowering the communities. (IDI implementing organisation, Tikambe Youth Organization)

It was pointed out that SC should intensify their visits to the communities. As one participant stated, “They should implement and repeat their different activities frequently because they are indeed helping us to prepare for our future” (FGD boys, Kagonamwake). The participants called for more frequent community sessions to further build awareness, and some participants stated that sometimes it takes too long before SC returns to a village. These participants recommended that SC visit more frequently, follow up on activities, and keep building awareness in the communities about the importance of preventing child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and keeping girls in school.

It is critical to engage key stakeholders and create an enabling environment so that adolescent girls and boys can effectively act on the messages they receive for a community education programme to be successful (Nash K. et al. 2019). Parents’ involvement in programme design and implementation targeting adolescents has positively resulted in girl empowerment programmes (Svanemyr 2020b). To this end, SC could expand its work with mother groups, child protection officers, parents/caregivers, especially mothers, and the broader community of influencers (chiefs and religious leaders). SC’s community education programme must be tailored to address the specific roles of key target groups in addressing child marriages and adolescent pregnancies. Specifically, for parents, messages should focus on effective

communication between parents and adolescent girls, ensuring that the girls feel valued, stressing the importance of investing in and supporting girls, as well as of teenage use of contraception.

Research shows that it is essential for policymakers and others developing programmes to curb child marriage and other human rights campaigns to consider messenger effects and the potential for a backlash among those who already oppose changes (Muriaas et al. 2019). More specifically, campaigners may need to consider cultural backgrounds such as kinship systems and other population characteristics in identifying the most effective messenger for any campaign. Tailoring programmes based on this type of research may well be vital to doing no harm. The research was conducted in Malawi, used experimental survey data, and found that certain messengers were more effective than others in promoting campaigns to end child marriage. Messages from a traditional female authority were most effective overall, with the female parliamentarian coming second. The authors explain the finding by pointing to Malawians' high trust in traditional authorities – coupled with their perceptions that women are competent on gender-based issues. Among matrilineal groups, male messengers caused a backfire effect – there was lower support for banning child marriage if a traditional male authority or male parliamentarian advocated the reform than if there was no endorsement. Among patrilineal groups, the most effective endorser was the male parliamentarian, who was more effective than the control (Muriaas et al. 2019). This raises concerns that campaigns might have limited or even negative impact, but also shows that the most effective endorser depends on the group hearing the message.

Promotion of contraception and sexuality and reproductive health services

The interviews and FGDs indicate that participants are most familiar with SC's work to prevent child marriages and keep girls in school (which may also reduce adolescent pregnancies). By contrast, the participants observed limited interventions to end adolescent pregnancies. However, as discussed in the report from the first fieldwork, there is a need for more information on modern contraceptive methods and access to methods preventing teenage pregnancies. In addition, most parents believe that if they allow their children to use contraception, they are encouraging them to prostitute themselves. Therefore, more significant efforts are needed in

Malawi to address negative norms concerning adolescent contraceptive use and misconceptions about health effects (Kaphagawani and Kalipeni 2017; Kok et al. 2010).

Many adolescents believe contraception can harm their health. Nevertheless, a few of the younger participants suggested the need to provide contraceptives to girls so that the girls are protected from getting pregnant.

I see that the intervention that they did not implement last time around was the provision of contraceptive methods. Like here, the practice of people being promiscuous is very common. So, for those people that are unable to abstain or avoid engaging in this type of behaviour, they can introduce the provision of contraceptive methods as well as sensitise the people on these methods so that those in need of such methods can have the option of choosing the method that is appropriate for them. As a result, this can reduce the cases of unwanted pregnancies here. (FGD boys, Ngadziwe)

Save the Children should consider further strengthening the collaboration with the health sector and other organisations to promote contraceptives and to change related norms.

School interventions

According to the Save the Children’s programme proposal to Norad, interventions targeting schools and teachers are a major part of its programme. These activities are presented in the annual reports under “issue 1,” grouping together efforts to improve learning outcomes of children and not under “issue 2,” which contains efforts by the programme to address child marriages and teenage pregnancies (Save the Children, 2018). Such activities can encourage girls to continue their education but were not discussed much within interviews and group discussion. The literature is also short on the effect of interventions *in schools* to promote girls’ education as an approach to reduce child marriage. Systematic reviews have found that such programmes that do not include an economic component (cash transfer, free uniforms, etc.) receive poor evaluations (Svanemyr, 2020b). Malhotra & Elnakib (2021a) concluded that no evaluations examine the impact on child marriage of supply-side interventions such as more secondary schools or female teachers, better curricula and skills, or more accessible transportation. This is an area that calls for more research and more rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

In the global arena, many actors promote comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for both in-school and out-of-school adolescents (UNESCO 2018). However, very few educational

programmes for the prevention of HIV and pregnancy have demonstrated significant results in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of behavioural changes (Fonner et al. 2014; Denford et al. 2016). Effective and comprehensive sexuality education in Malawi would require a significant investment in training and follow-up of teachers, provision of materials, and curricula revisions to ensure consistent quality teaching in all grades (Likupe et al. 2021). Save the Children may include teachers to build acceptance for adolescent contraceptive use and address misconceptions and false ideas about adverse effects. In addition, training teachers (patrons and headteachers) on psychosocial support, child-focused and gender-sensitive pedagogy, child rights, and child protection could continue and even expand.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This section discusses the implications of our findings and how the main drivers identified in this study are addressed in the literature on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

Trends

Study participants at the sites visited during the first and second fieldwork concur that they have observed a decline in the prevalence of child marriage and early pregnancies in the programme area. Participants attributed this mainly to an increased number of programmes addressing child marriages and adolescent pregnancies in Mwanza district, increased awareness of the importance of keeping girls in school, and efforts by traditional leaders to prevent and end child marriages through the implementation of by-laws. Overall, the findings indicate that child marriage and adolescent pregnancy have become less socially acceptable in the communities suggesting that norms have changed or are starting to change (cf. report from the first fieldwork). This also implies that at least some of the measures implemented to reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancy have successfully effectuated this change in the district. Other factors such as increased access to education for girls and changes in the economy may also have contributed to reduce child marriage rates, but our study does not allow us to assess the relative weight of such factors.

The trends at the national level, however, are not clear. Adolescent pregnancy declined from 330 per 1000 in 2000 to 260 per 1000 in 2010 (Kaphagawani, 2016) but increased the following years. The percentage of women between the ages 15 and 19 who have begun childbearing rose

from 25.6 to 29.0 (Self et al. 2018). Age-specific fertility rates¹² among women aged 15–19 only decreased by 11% (152 to 136 per 1000 births) compared to at least a 19% reduction for all other five-year age groups of women during the same period (Malawi demographic and health survey 2015–16, quoted in Self et al. 2018). An increasing level of adolescent pregnancy has been found in Africa in general. Kassa et al. (2018) argue that this could be related to a higher detection rate in recent years.

However, participants in this study reported a rise in the number of adolescent pregnancies in the past 12 months. Many participants believed this increase was linked to COVID-19. The strict mitigation measures to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including school closures and stay-at-home orders, were associated with increased idleness and loss of income-generating opportunities for adolescents and parents. According to the study participants this has resulted in adolescent high-risk sexual behaviour, unintended pregnancies, and parents' inability to continue paying for children's education. The perception of the participants aligns with a Malawi government-led COVID-19 rapid assessment on teenage pregnancies and child marriages which has recorded 13,000 cases of child marriages and over 40,000 cases of teen pregnancies during the COVID-19 period (from March to July 2020). This estimate represents an 11% increase in teenage pregnancies compared to the same period in 2019 (UNICEF 2020). Thus, the pandemic has exacerbated an urgent need for support and economic empowerment for vulnerable adolescents.

Child marriage rates in Malawi have steadily declined for more than a decade, and the trend continues. In 2013-2014 the percentage of girls married by 15 years of age was 9% and by 18 years 46% (MICS¹³ 2013-2014; UNICEF database 2016). Data from the last Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2015/16 suggest that 42% of women aged 20–24 were married before their 18th birthday (National Statistical Office [Malawi] and ICF, 2017). This increased age is consistent with trends observed in other countries in the region. We do not have data on child marriage trends during the COVID-19 period, neither nationally nor globally. However, there is reason to believe that rates will increase in the near future.¹⁴

¹² Includes women with more than one child.

¹³ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.

¹⁴ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/>

Poverty

We have in the preceding chapters brought forward some suggestions for how SC can contribute to reducing poverty and help overcome challenges the poorest and most vulnerable population groups are facing. According to a UNICEF report, 63% of children in Malawi experience multiple dimensions of poverty (UNICEF, 2016). Poor and rural girls are more commonly married at a young age than the wealthier and those living in urban areas. These findings are consistent with data from other countries (UNICEF, 2016). Child marriage is often valued and seen as the only way to alleviate households' financial burden. Even if a decrease in child marriage has been observed and norms supporting child marriage are no longer a driving force, economic deprivation hampers further progress in large parts of the population.

Participants linked COVID-19 to an increase in poverty rates. In times of economic hardship, such as under the current COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to change norms, build capacity among community members, and implement laws and by-laws will be undermined by deprivation, pushing girls into relationships with men having unsafe sex.

Poverty drives girls out of school and pushes girls to seek relationships with men for economic motives with little decision-making power. They are neither in a position to dictate the conditions under which they have sex nor to decide on the use of condoms or contraceptives. Peer pressure works in combination with poverty as girls pressure each other to seek men to cover basic needs, obtain commodities that will elevate their status, or help finance education. It should be noted that even though parents disapprove of girls seeking men for economic support, what is commonly termed "transactional sex" is a "traditional" practice in the sense that it is very common and has always been so not only in Malawi but also in most of sub-Saharan Africa (Stoebenau et al. 2016). Poulin (2007) emphasises that money and gift transfers in sexual partnerships are part and parcel of the courting practices of young Malawian women and men. Transfers are as much about the expression of love and commitment as they are about meeting the financial needs of women or the acquisition of sex for men.

We discussed poverty at the household level as a driver in Chapter 2. Many studies have reported income level as one of the main determinants of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. In their review, Malhotra and Elnakib (2021b) point out that studies from many countries have

found that girls from poorer families marry more often than girls from wealthier families.¹⁵ Undoubtedly, the economic empowerment of indigent households would mitigate the effect of poverty on children born in those circumstances, hence breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. It should be noted, though, that Malhotra and Elnakib (2021) found quite strong evidence that supporting girls is more effective than supporting families:

Results suggest that supporting girls' schooling through cash or in-kind transfers is proving to be in fact the most successful channel for delaying their marriage among the programmes evaluated to date and by far more effective than economically supporting their families or motivating them through cash or in-kind incentives (p. 860).

The reason why supporting girls is more effective than supporting their families is not apparent, but it may be that families receiving unconditional, not earmarked support have other priorities higher on the list than supporting girls' education, particularly in the absence of norms clearly against child marriage. The effect of programmes for economic development on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy rates has not been investigated to the best of our knowledge.

[Changing norms related to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy](#)

Our findings confirm general disapproval of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. People react negatively when adolescents get pregnant and marry. This signals that social norms have started to change. Community non-acceptance and open disapproval of child marriages and adolescent pregnancies signal a change in injunctive norms. By contrast, there is a minor change in descriptive norms (empirical expectations) because many think both child marriage and adolescent pregnancy are still common.

Several factors have contributed to the shift in individual attitudes and social norms underpinning child marriages. Participants referred to the following factors: non-governmental organisations implementing interventions against child marriage and adolescent pregnancy; the influence of community leaders and reinforcement of by-laws; the legal reform prohibiting child marriage; community structures such as child protection committees and mother groups; and collaborative efforts among organisations, the police, community leaders and parents. In addition, community sensitisation and education were reported to have increased awareness

¹⁵ They also note, however, in that regard that “most of the quantitative literature has more accurately generated a body of consistent findings on the ‘correlates’ of child marriage rather than on its ‘drivers.’” (Malhotra and Elnakib 2021b, p. 32).

about the harmful effects of child marriage and the importance of letting girls continue their education. Training local stakeholders such as traditional leaders, teachers, and mother's groups was also important since they will pass on what they learn to the community. Participants reported that people had changed their opinions and attitudes due to such interventions. Therefore, it is plausible that these activities have contributed to the observed change in injunctive norms.

In some poor areas of Mwanza, adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are quite common. In such contexts, girls who get pregnant or marry, and their families, do not meet adverse reactions in the community. This indicates that descriptive norms, i.e., the perception that child marriage is common, influence how parents and other community members react. When many children marry due to poverty or other reasons, community reactions are less severe. However, even some chiefs were reported not to react when they learned about adolescent pregnancy or child marriage cases, or even to accept bribes to turn a blind eye toward the incident, which indicates that there is still some way to go before norms consistently change across Mwanza district.

Although there is a clear signal that injunctive social norms relating to child marriages have started to change, norms that sustain practices still exist. It has been widely reported that traditional social norms are typically slower to change, especially in rural areas. As discussed in the first report, some norms indirectly put girls at risk for unwanted pregnancies and child marriage. For example, adolescent girls believe it is common to seek men or accept men's proposals to become their girlfriends to benefit economically from such relations. In addition, girls report that they feel pressure from peers to follow their example of entering sexual relations. This suggests that it is both an injunctive and descriptive norm among adolescent girls to engage with boys or men, which conflicts with the more dominant injunctive norm in the community. Adolescents who believe that their peers engage in riskier sexual behaviour are more likely to engage in such behaviour themselves (Van de Bongardt et al., 2014). Girls must handle this squeeze and mixed pressure, which is made even more difficult by another norm prohibiting communication between youth and parents about sexual issues.

Negative norms concerning adolescent use of modern contraceptives make it difficult for girls to protect themselves. Such norms are more generally related to the broader community's view on adolescent premarital sex and female sexuality. Women are expected to wait to have sex until

they are married. Adolescent girls' sexuality must be controlled to avoid unintended pregnancy not only because it is an economic problem, but also because such a pregnancy makes it visible that the girl has had sex without being married, which can be a source of shame for her family (Varga, 2003, Svanemyr, 2020a). To make it socially acceptable for adolescent girls to have sex outside marriage might be a tall order. What has made contraceptive use acceptable among some parents is a pragmatic acknowledgment that adolescents, for various reasons, will continue to have sex no matter what the adults tell them and that they should be protected from risking pregnancy and consequences such as dropping out of school and economic hardship. For adolescents to feel comfortable going to local health clinics to ask for contraception, they must not fear being condemned by the health workers, and it must be the case that being seen at the clinic does not give them a bad reputation. Targeting health workers to ensure that youth-friendly health services are available is a vital element. Community awareness building is essential to prevent negative social sanctions from peers and adults.

Whereas some of the literature on social norms aims to understand the importance of peer *influence* on sexual behaviour such as the use of condoms (cf. Fearon et al., 2015), there are fewer studies on explicit and *direct peer pressure* towards having sex. Some interesting exceptions are based on studies in South Africa (Selikow et al. 2009; Widman et al. 2016). Van de Bongardt et al. (2014) argue in their review of quantitative studies on the relation between norms and adolescent sexual behaviour that direct peer pressure should be considered as a distinct type of norm since explicit social pressure motivates people to conform by offering potential social gains (e.g., acceptance, respect, popularity, or high status). Their meta-analysis of ten studies (mainly from the USA) concluded that more peer pressure to engage in sex was significantly related to more sexual activity. A critical future research question continues to be why and how some adolescents resist dominating negative norms.

Even though social norms related to child marriage has received a steadily increasing amount of programmatic and scientific attention the last decade, we still have limited knowledge about how to address them, as highlighted by two authors who have published extensively on this issue:

In spite of some evidence on the role that social norms play in influencing adolescents' sexual behaviour, little is available on what works to change social norms to improve adolescents' SRHR in low and mid-income African countries (Cislaghi and Shakya 2018: 43).

Fostering an enabling legal and policy environment should be combined with other efforts to maximise effect (Kalmar et al. 2017; Wodon et al. 2017). There are many indications that legal reforms and how new laws have been communicated and promoted have significantly effectuated changes of norms related to child marriage in Malawi. The 2016 Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Act (Marriage Act) consolidated multiple marriage regimes, set the minimum marriage age in Malawi to 18, and included 10-year imprisonment for violation of the law. Already in 2016, national survey data showed high support for a law banning child marriage (see Muriaas et al. 2019), thus making it more likely that the law should succeed in inducing behavioural change. The legal reform process was accompanied by multiple awareness-raising and sensitisation campaigns initiated by the government, NGOs, and CSOs. The law has helped build awareness and understanding about girls' rights to delay marriage, and we find that there is considerable knowledge about the minimum age of marriage. Our findings are supported by a recent study finding that the law has had a preventive effect and has been used to enforce desired norms around child marriage by withdrawing girls from marriage (Melinikas et al. 2021). It has been critical that national legal reform has been complemented by implementing local by-laws in reaction to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

Empowering girls to make informed decisions on sexual and reproductive health matters

Study participants emphasised poverty and peer pressure as the main factors that need to be addressed to prevent adolescent pregnancy. We know, however, that it is a challenge for girls all over the world to make informed decisions that will protect their sexual and reproductive health and help them avoid infections and unwanted pregnancy, let alone abuse and violence. Managing peer pressure and sexual desire is also a matter of self-identity, self-control, awareness of rights and duties, and gendered power imbalances. So let us go beyond norms directly related to sexual behaviour and contraceptive use. Another question is how gender norms function as a root cause of child marriage and unwanted pregnancy. Norms that tell girls and women to be obedient to men, silent, and domesticated, to accept to be treated as sexual objects, to remain in their houses to take care of children and housekeeping, and not to express themselves sexually remain crucial

underlying factors that need to be discussed in the communities to empower women to take more control of their lives and bodies.¹⁶

At the heart of these issues, there is a need for gender-transformative programming that addresses structural factors that make girls vulnerable and disempowered. Some argue that more structural and environmental approaches are needed to promote youths' health in low-income countries. To help overcome some of the concerns associated with these types of programmes, it is recommended that multiple sectors collaborate to design and evaluate such programmes and finance them (Sommer and Mmari 2015). Malhotra et al. (2019: 13) argue along the same lines, stating that there is a need to expand the scope of adolescent reproductive and sexual health-related social norms programming to encompass interventions focussed on the scale and impact of structural drivers. Social norms programming on adolescent reproductive and sexual health is intimately linked to social and behavioural change programming.

Our findings align with evidence that multi-sectoral programming and responsiveness to the needs of adolescents can result in shifts in social expectations and societal behaviours regarding girls and marriage. Multi-sectoral interventions aiming to address harmful social norms and improve gender-equitable norms (a higher value for girls) are likely to improve child marriage outcomes. To change gender norms and overall social structures is long-term work and requires political action at many levels. Civil society organisations have a critical role in pushing for reforms in that sense.

Improving girls' access to education is vital for improving women's position and status in society. Low levels of education are both a cause and an effect: girls dropping out of school have few alternatives to seeking to establish themselves with a man, but many end up getting pregnant without being married. Low educational attainment is consistently associated with adolescent pregnancy (Yakubu and Salisu 2018). According to a World Bank report, keeping girls in school is one of the best ways to avoid child marriage, end poverty and achieve economic growth and equity. Each year of secondary education reduces the likelihood of marrying as a child before 18 by five percentage points or more (World Bank & ICRW 2017). On the other hand, dropping out

¹⁶ For instance, a survey in Mangochi and Nkhata bay districts in Malawi found that 88% and 73% believe that “[a] woman should always obey her husband”, 78-79% that “[a] woman should tolerate violence for the sake of her family”, and 67% that “[i]t is a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant” (Kelly et al. 2017).

of school and completing fewer years of education negatively affect the education and health of the mother and her children. As such, adolescent girls should be encouraged to attain secondary level education and/or beyond, for the sake of their ability to earn a living.

Conclusion

This study has documented that people in Mwanza believe there is a downward trend in the prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies in the Save the Children programme area and that norms concerning child marriage and adolescent pregnancy have changed or are starting to change. Positive changes have been attributed to community sensitisation and dialogues on the harmful effects of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and the importance of girls' education; stakeholder training; chiefs' engagement; financial and material support for at-risk adolescent girls; legal reforms and the implementation of by-laws; and collaborative partnerships. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a perceived increase in adolescent pregnancies due to closed schools and loss of income for many families. This increase has been confirmed by survey data, whereas we have less information on the effect on child marriage rates.

Poverty was the primary driver for adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, with peer pressure being another main driver. They often combine since girls from destitute households experience explicit peer pressure to enter relationships with men for economic motives. Adolescent pregnancy is also a driver because it leads to child marriage or informal unions for many girls, even though most girls who become pregnant do not marry. Nevertheless, there are still areas in Mwanza where child marriage continues to be quite common and where community members do not react negatively when girls marry before 18. This indicates a need to continue and expand efforts to address norms along with poverty and peer pressure. The chiefs were found to have power and authority and a key role in changing norms through their communication with the communities and responsibility to enforce by-laws. However, some chiefs were passive, or even approved some child marriages.

To further strengthen norms against child marriage and to enable adolescents to protect their sexual and reproductive health, Save the Children needs to improve the intensity of its programmes. For example, the frequency of the community education programme contributes to improving access to contraception, addresses negative norms concerning adolescent

contraceptive use, and adds components addressing the critical issues of peer pressure among adolescents. In addition, Save the Children should introduce or expand economic empowerment interventions to help girls continue school, resist peer pressure, and continue their work with chiefs to make sure they are proactive and involved in mobilising against adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

References

- Baird, S., Chirwa, E., McIntosh, C., & Özler, B. (2010). The short-term impacts of a schooling conditional cash transfer program on the sexual behavior of young women. *Health economics*, 19(S1), 55-68.
- Baird, S., McIntosh, C., & Özler, B. (2019). When the money runs out: Do cash transfers have sustained effects on human capital accumulation? *Journal of Development Economics*, 140, 169-185.
- Bicchieri C., Muldoon R., Sontuoso A. (2011). Social norms. In Zalta E. N. (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Winter 2018. ed.).
- Bolton, L. (2019). The economic impact of farming cooperatives in East Africa. K4D Helpdesk Report 535. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.
- CARE-VSLA-Report-Uganda-Eco-Devel.pdf [Internet]. [cited 2017 Dec 8]. Available from: <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/CARE-VSLA-Report-Uganda-EcoDevel.pdf>
- Chae, S., & Ngo, T. (2017). The global state of evidence on interventions to prevent child marriage. New York: Population Council.
- Cislaghi, B., & Shakya, H. (2018). Social Norms and Adolescents' Sexual Health: An introduction for practitioners working in Low and Mid-income African countries. *African journal of reproductive health*, 22(1), 38-46.
- Dannals J. E., Miller D. T. (2017). Social norms in organizations. In Hitt M. A. (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of business and management*.
- Denford, S., Abraham, C., Campbell, R., & Busse, H. (2017). A comprehensive review of reviews of school-based interventions to improve sexual health. *Health psychology review*, 11(1), 33-52.
- Dulani, B., Benstead, L., Muriaas, RL, & Wang, V. Does Gender Matter in Evaluation of Chiefs' Performance? Unpublished manuscript, January 8, 2021.
- Eriksson, L. (2019). Social norms as signals. *Social Theory and Practice* 45(4) 579-599.

- Fearon, E., Wiggins, R. D., Pettifor, A. E., & Hargreaves, J. R. (2015). Is the sexual behaviour of young people in sub-Saharan Africa influenced by their peers? A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine*, 146, 62-74.
- Fonner, V. A., Armstrong, K. S., Kennedy, C. E., O'Reilly, K. R., & Sweat, M. D. (2014). School-based sex education and HIV prevention in low-and middle-income countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *PloS one*, 9(3), e89692.
- Greene, M. E. and Stiefvater, E. (2019). *Social and gender norms and child marriage: A reflection on issues, evidence and areas of inquiry in the field*. ALIGN: London
- Kelly, Christine A., Andrea J. Melnikas, Sajeda Amin, James Mkandawire, and Hamza Daud. (2017). "More Than Brides Alliance: Baseline report, Malawi." New York: Population Council.
- Kaphagawani, N. C., & Kalipeni, E. (2017). Sociocultural factors contributing to teenage pregnancy in Zomba district, Malawi. *Global public health*, 12(6), 694-710.
- Klugman, J., L. Hanmer, S. Twigg, T. Hasan, J. McCleary-Sills, and J. Santa Maria. (2014). *Voice & Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
- Kok, M., Tolani, M., Mtonga, W., Salamba, et.al. (2020). Enabling and hindering factors of health surveillance assistants' roles in the provision of contraceptive services in Mangochi, Malawi. *Reproductive health*, 17(1), 1-13.
- Lecoutere E (2017). The impact of agricultural co-operatives on women's empowerment: Evidence from Uganda. *Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management*
- Likupe, G., Chintsanya, J., Magadi, M., Munthali, A., & Makwemba, M. (2021). Barriers to sexual and reproductive education among in-school adolescents in Zomba and Mangochi districts, Malawi. *Sex Education*, 21(4), 450-462.
- Malawi Social Cash Transfer Programme. A comprehensive summary of Impact. Research Brief. November, 2017.

- Malhotra, A., & Elnakib, S. (2021a). 20 years of the evidence based on what works to prevent child marriage: a systematic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health*.
- Malhotra, A., & Elnakib, S. (2021b). Evolution in the evidence base on child marriage. UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 2021,
- Manda, W. C., Pilgrim, N., Kamndaya, M., Mathur, S., & Sikweyiya, Y. (2021). Girl-only clubs' influence on SRH knowledge, HIV risk reduction, and negative SRH outcomes among very young adolescent girls in rural Malawi. *BMC public health*, 21(1), 1-12.
- Meador J. E, O'Brien D, (2019). Placing Rwanda's agriculture boom: trust, women empowerment and policy impact in maize agricultural cooperatives. *Food Security*.11:869–880.
- Melnikas, A. J., Mulauzi, N., Mkandawire, J., & Amin, S. (2021). Perceptions of minimum age at marriage laws and their enforcement: qualitative evidence from Malawi. *BMC public health*, 21(1), 1-12.
- Miller, Candace & Tsoka, M.G. & Reichert, Kathryn. (2010). Impacts on children of cash transfers in Malawi. *Social Protection for Africa's Children*. 96-116.
- Morris M. W., Hong Y.-y., Chiu C.-y., Liu Z. (2015). Normology: Integrating insights about social norms to understand cultural dynamics. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 129, 1–13.
- Muriaas RL, Wang V, Benstead L, Dulani B, Rakner L. (2019) Why the Gender of Traditional Authorities Matters: Intersectionality and Women's Rights Advocacy in Malawi. *Comparative Political Studies*. 52(12):1881-1924. doi:[10.1177/0010414018774369](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018774369)
- Muriaas, RL, Tønnessen, L. & Wang, V. (2018) Counter-Mobilization against Child Marriage Reform in Africa' *Political Studies* 66(4): 851-868. doi:[10.1177/0032321717742859](https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717742859)
- Mwansakilwa C, (2017). Village savings and loan associations and household welfare: Evidence from Eastern and Western Zambia. *African Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics* Volume 12 Number 1 pages 85-97.

- Nash, K., O'Malley, G., Geoffroy, E., Schell, E., Bvumbwe, A., & Denno, D. M. (2019). "Our girls need to see a path to the future"--perspectives on sexual and reproductive health information among adolescent girls, guardians, and initiation counselors in Mulanje district, Malawi. *Reproductive health*, 16(1), 1-13.. doi: 10.1186/s12978-018-0661-x.
- Nnama-Okechukwu C. U, et al (2019). An Impact of Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) in Nigeria. *African Population Studies*. Vol 33. Issue 2
- Paos M, (2018). Agricultural Cooperative Societies and Poverty Reduction in Zambia: The Case of Kamangango Farmers' Cooperative Society Limited in Kaoma District. *World Journal of Research and Review (WJRR)* ISSN:2455-3956, Volume-7, Issue-1, 2018
- QSR International Pty Ltd. (2020) NVivo (released in March 2020), <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>
- Rutgers. (2021) I feel that things are out of my hands. How COVID-19 prevention measures have affected young people's sexual and reproductive health in Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Rutgers, Utrecht.
- Save the Children (2020a) The Global Girlhood Report 2020: How COVID-19 is putting progress in peril. London.
- Save the Children (2020b) Norad Annual Progress Report 2020. Malawi. Framework Agreement 2020-2023: Leaving No Child Behind. Save the Children Norway.
- Save the Children (2019a) Norad Annual Progress Report 2019. Malawi. Framework Agreement 2020-2023: Leaving No Child Behind. Save the Children Norway.
- Save the Children (2019b) Annex VI. Final Narrative Report. EU Contract No: EIDHR/2016/378-937.
- Save the Children. (2018) Leaving No Child Behind. Framework Agreement Application to Norad 2019-2023. Save the Children Norway.
- Selikow, T. A., Ahmed, N., Flisher, A. J., Mathews, C., & Mukoma, W. (2009). I am not "umqwayito": A qualitative study of peer pressure and sexual risk behaviour among young

- adolescents in Cape Town, South Africa. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 37(2_suppl), 107-112.
- Sienso, G., Nasow, A. K. K., & Lambongang, M. (2021). Participation, Income Effect and Challenges of Village Savings and Loans Program in Garu and Tempene Districts of the Upper East Region, Ghana. *Asian Journal of Agricultural Extension, Economics & Sociology*, 123-135.
- Sizya M.J. The Role Co-Operatives Play in Poverty Reduction in Tanzania. Paper Presented at the United Nations in observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October 2001
- Sommer, M., & Mmari, K. (2015). Addressing structural and environmental factors for adolescent sexual and reproductive health in low-and middle-income countries. *American journal of public health*, 105(10), 1973-1981.
- Stoebenau, K., Heise, L., Wamoyi, J., & Bobrova, N. (2016). Revisiting the understanding of “transactional sex” in sub-Saharan Africa: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Social science & medicine*, 168, 186-197.
- Svanemyr, J. (2020a). Adolescent pregnancy and social norms in Zambia. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 22(6), 615-629.
- Svanemyr, J. (2020b). Literature review on effects of interventions to reduce the prevalence of child marriage. *CMI Report*, 2020(02).
- UNESCO. (2018). *International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach*. UNESCO Publishing, New York.
- UNICEF. (2020) Malawi COVID-19 Situation Report 20 October 2020.
<https://www.unicef.org/media/84831/file/Malawi-COVID-19-SitRep-21-October-2020.pdf>
- Van Rooyen C, Stewart R, de Wet T. The Impact of Microfinance in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review of the Evidence. *World Dev*. 2012 Nov 1;40(11):2249–62.
- Varga, C. A. (2003). How gender roles influence sexual and reproductive health among South African adolescents. *Studies in Family Planning*, 34(3), 160–172.

- Wanyama F.O et.al (2018). Encountering the Evidence: Co-operatives and Poverty Reduction in Africa. *Journal of Co-operative Studies*.
- Widman, L., Choukas-Bradley, S., Helms, S. W., & Prinstein, M. J. (2016). Adolescent susceptibility to peer influence in sexual situations. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 58*(3), 323-329.
- Woldu T et al. (2013). Women's Participation in Agricultural Cooperatives in Ethiopia. Ethiopian Development Research Institute. Working Paper
- World Bank & International Centre on Research on Women (ICRW). Child Marriage will cost Developing countries Trillion of dollars by 2030. Washington D.C. June 2017.
- WULA (2019) Combatting child marriages and human trafficking project in Mwanza and Neno districts. End of project evaluation report. Lilongwe: WULA Consultants.

Appendix1: Interview guides and FGD guide

1. Guide for individual interviews with key informants

Child protection officers, GVH, village chiefs, heads/members of women's group, heads/members of youth group, teachers, health workers, other informed community members.

Second fieldwork, January 2021.

* * *

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. My name is XXX XXX. I am a researcher/student at the College of Medicine in Blantyre. Our research project seeks to improve our understanding of why many girls get pregnant or marry at a low age and how adolescents can be helped to avoid unwanted pregnancies and marriage.

Interview information

(record the information at the beginning of the interview, if interview not recorded, take notes)

Name of interviewer _____

Date of the interview _____

Place where interview took place: _____

Step 1: Obtain consent to participation from all respondents before beginning the interview (Present the information letter and the consent form).

Step 2: Obtain consent to use the recorder.

Step 3: Begin the interview.

Introduction

Ask for

Participant's age

Educational level

Civil status

Number of children

Work or source of income

For a start, let me ask how common do you think it is for girls in your community to **get pregnant** before they are 18 years?

Probe: Do only a few, many, or most girls get pregnant before 18?

And how common do you think it is that girls get **married** before they are 18 years old?

Probe: Do only a few, many, or most girls marry before 18?

Are you involved with any program or activity to prevent child marriage and early pregnancies?

Please describe your activities and achievements.

Mapping actors and activities to reduce/prevent CM and their achievements.

(If the respondent said she/he is not involved with any prevention program or activity in the beginning:)

Does anyone work to prevent marriage below 18 and adolescent pregnancies in your village? If so, who? What do they do?

What is the position of the community leaders concerning child marriages and adolescent pregnancies?

Probe *(ask the same for all these groups):*

- Position of village chief
- Position of teachers
- Position of health workers,
- Position of church leaders?

Is there a mothers' group in this village?

What has the mother group done to stop child marriages?

What has it done to stop adolescent pregnancies?

Is there a child protection committee in this village?

What has the committee done to stop child marriage?

What has the committee done to stop adolescent pregnancies s?

Do you think the various people and groups we have talked about have changed peoples' opinions about **child marriage**?

If no: Why have people's opinions not changed? How do you explain that?

If yes: How do you explain that?

Do you think the various people and groups we have talked about have changed peoples' opinions about **early pregnancies**?

If no: Why have people's opinions about this not changed? How do you explain this?

If yes: Why do you think people's opinions have changed? How do you explain this change in opinion?

Who do you think have **most** influence on community members' attitudes and opinions about child marriage and adolescent pregnancies?

Why is he/she/they most influential?

(If not mentioned in previous responses:)

Do you know if Save the Children (SC) *(and/or implementing partner)* is working here?

What do they do? What are the activities they are running?

What do you think about their work and their approach?

What are your views/opinions regarding SC work?

Probe:

SC contribution to change peoples' opinions about child marriage?

SC contribution to change opinions about adolescent pregnancies?

If no change: Why not? What should they have done to change people's opinions/what should they have done differently?

If, there is change: How did they change people's opinions?

What is the most important thing they have done?

In your opinion, do you think SC has contributed to changing peoples' behaviour concerning child marriage in any way? Are there fewer child marriages due to SC's work in this area?

If no: Why not? What should SC have done to change people's behaviour concerning child marriage/what should they have done differently?

What about adolescent pregnancies? Are there fewer adolescent pregnancies taking place due to SC activities?

If no: What should SC have done to change people's behaviour concerning adolescent pregnancies?

If yes: What are the reasons they managed to change peoples' behaviour(s)?

What is the most important thing they have done?

How do you think Save the Children could/should improve their program?

How do you think SC should work to end child marriage in the future?

How do you think SC should work to reduce adolescent pregnancies in the future?

The way forward

What more do you suggest should be done to prevent CM?

We have learned that **poverty** is an important reason for girls to marry early. How do you think community leaders and organizations can address this problem?

How can people be encouraged/convinced to delay marriage even if they are poor?

Another factor we have learned that is important is **peer pressure**. How should organizations and community leaders help young people deal with influence and pressure from their peers?

Finally, we would like to ask some questions related to **Covid-19** (corona).

Has Covid-19 in any way affected the number of child marriages taking place? If so, how?

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on adolescent pregnancies?

Has Covid-19 affected the number of adolescent pregnancies? If so, how?

How can organizations help the community deal with Covid-19?

That was all our questions. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your contribution.

2. Guide for FGDs

The following is the guide used for FGDs with parents, while a slightly different guide was used for FGDs with adolescents.

Second fieldwork, January 2021.

* * *

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. My name is XXX XXX. I am a researcher/student at the College of Medicine in Blantyre. Our research project seeks to improve our understanding of why many girls get pregnant or marry at a low age and how adolescents can be helped to avoid unwanted pregnancies and marriage.

Interview information

(record the information at the beginning of the interview, if not recorded, take notes)

Name of interviewer _____

Date of the interview _____

Place where interview took place: _____

Step 1: Obtain consent to participation from all respondents before beginning the interview (Present the information letter and the consent form).

Step 2: Obtain consent to use the recorder.

Step 3: Begin the interview.

Introduction

Ask for

Participant's age

Civil status

If they have children

Mapping the situation

For a start, let me ask how common do you think it is for girls in your community to **get pregnant** before they are 18 years?

Probe: Do only a few, many, or most girls get pregnant before 18?

And how common do you think it is that girls get **married** before they are 18 years old?

Probe: Do only a few, many, or most girls marry before they are 18?

Vignette

To the participant: We will not read you a short story and then ask what you think will happen to the people involved.

Step 1:

A 16-year-old girl is living with her mother, father, 3 brothers and 3 sisters. The girl had to drop out of school because the family is poor and not able to pay for her education. A man who is a 25-year-old farmer who is quite well-off has asked her to marry him.

Question: How would most mothers and fathers react in such a situation?

Step 2:

Version 1 *(to be told and asked half of the respondents)*

The **chair of the mothers' group** learns about the case and goes to see the father say he cannot let his girl marry.

Question: **How** would the father react? Will he still let the girl marry? **Why** would he react like that?

Version 2 *(to be told and asked the other half of respondents)*

The **village chief** learns about the case and goes to see the father to tell him he cannot let his girl marry.

Question: **How** would he react? **Why** would he react like that?

Probes:

In your opinion, will the father ultimately agree to the marriage of his daughter?

Why?

What (if anything) might drive the father to agree to the marriage?

What (if anything) might drive the father to say no to the marriage?

Do you think the father should agree to the marriage?

Step 3:

Let us say the girl marries the man.

Question: How would people in the village, such as his neighbors, react?

Mapping of actors and activities to prevent CM and their achievements.

Does anyone work to prevent marriage below 18 in your village? If so, who? What do they do?

Does anyone work to prevent adolescent pregnancies in your village? If so, who? What do they do?

If not mentioned, probe:

Mothers groups

Child protection officer/committee

Organizations (NGO/CBOs)

What is the position of the village chief concerning adolescent pregnancies?

Child marriages?

Do you think the various people and groups we have talked about have changed peoples' opinions about adolescent pregnancies?

If no: Why have not people's opinions about early pregnancies changed?

If yes: Why do you think people's opinions have changed? How do you explain this change in opinion? What have they done to make this happen?

Who do you think have **most** influence on community members' attitudes and opinions about **adolescent pregnancies**?

Why is he/she/ most influential?

Do you think the various people and groups we have talked about have changed peoples' opinions about **child marriage**?

If no: Why not? How do you explain that?

If yes: How do you explain that? What have they done to make this happen?

Who do you think have **most** influence on community members' attitudes and opinions about **child marriage**?

Why is he/she/ most influential?

Do you know if Save the Children (SC) (*and/or implementing partner*) is working here?

If yes: What are your views/opinions regarding SC work?

Probe:

Has SC contributed to changing peoples' opinions about child marriage? If so, how?

Has SC contributed to changing opinions about adolescent pregnancies? If so, how?

If there is change: How did they change people's opinions? What is the most important thing they have done?

If no change: What do you think they should have done differently?

The way forward

We have learned that **poverty** is an important reason for girls to marry early.

How do you think community leaders should address this problem?

What about organizations?

How can people be encouraged/convincing to delay marriage even if they are poor?

Another factor we have learned that is important is **peer pressure**.

How should community leaders help young people deal with influence and pressure from their peers?

How should organizations help young people deal with influence and pressure from their peers?

Finally, we have a few questions about covid.

How have **covid** affected adolescents in your community?

Do you think **covid** has had any impact on adolescent pregnancies? If so, how?

In your opinion, has **covid** had any impact on child marriage? If so, how?

This was our last question. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Appendix 2: Coding report

Coding report – SC Malawi study second round

Nodes

Name	Description
Adolescent pregnancy - achievements	Achievements made by programs in reducing the number of AP.
Adolescent pregnancy - reactions	How community members, chiefs and other react to and deal with cases of AP.
Adolescent pregnancy prevalence and trends	Statements about how common adolescent pregnancy is.
Adolescent pregnancy - reasons, drivers, causes	
Boys - how to work with them	
Cases	Statements about cases where girls married or got pregnant in participants' communities.
Chiefs role in prevention of CM and AP	
Child marriage - achievements	Achievements made by organizations and others in reducing the number of girls marrying.
Child marriage - reasons, drivers, causes	

Name	Description
Child marriage prevalence and trends	Opinions about how common child marriage is.
Child protection committee	Activites, achievements, challenges
Church and religion	Statements about the position and influence of the religion and religious authorities.
Covid	About the effect and impact of Covid, and what can be done to reduce negative consequences and to prevent covid from spreading further.
Influence of various actors	Statements about the relative influence and impact of actors such as chiefs, committees, organizations, etc.
Info about IO	Information about Interview Object and the organization he/she works for.
Mothers' groups activities and role	
Norms - How actors try to change them and what they achieve	Information about programs and activities aiming at changing norms for child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, contraceptive use, school dropout, etc.
Peer pressure - how actors address them	How organizations, programs, activities try to address peer pressure to marry early or have sex.
Peer pressure and norms - what should be done	
Poverty - how	

Name	Description
organizations address it	
Poverty - how to address	How organizations and others can address the problem of poverty leading to CM and AP
Programs - achievements	What participants think about the result of programs and activities to curb CM and AP
Programs and organizations - Info about activities	Statements about programs and organisations trying to prevent CM and AP
Save the Children	statements and opinions about their programs and results
School and education	Any statements related to school and education such as reasons for drop-out, the importance of education, access, quality, etc.
Suggestions for what more should be done	
Teachers, health services and workers, police	What teachers and health workers do in relation to CM and AP
Vignette	parent node
Reactions to chief	
Reactions to marriage	How community members will react if the girl marries the man.
Reactions to mother group member	
Reactions to proposal	On how parents would react to the man's proposal to marry their

Name	Description
	daughter.