

Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program: Analysis of protective pathways in the Amhara region **Final Report**

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¹ BDS Center for Development Research has recently changed its name to Frontieri, as reflected in this report, but the organization conducted its work for the report while still operating under its previous name.

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ACRONYMS AND INITIALISMS

BCC	Behaviour Change Communication
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DS	Direct Support
IN-SCT	Improved Nutrition through Integrated Basic Social Services with Social Cash Transfer
ISNP	Integrated Safety Net Program
PDS	Permanent Direct Support
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Program
PW	Public Works
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TDS	Temporary Direct Support
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Child marriage is a human rights violation according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its prevention is covered in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ethiopia has made significant progress in recent decades in reducing the prevalence of child marriage: in 2005, 59 per cent of females aged 20–24 years were married or in a cohabiting union by the age of 18; this fell to 40 per cent by 2015. Nonetheless, the burden of child marriage in Ethiopia has not decreased further and remains high today, with approximately 4 in 10 young women first married or in union before their 18th birthday (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017).² While the child marriage rate in Ethiopia's Amhara region (43 per cent) is just above the national average (40 per cent), this rate is still more than five times that of the capital city, Addis Ababa (8 per cent) (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2014). Amhara also has the lowest median age at first marriage in the country, at 15.77 years versus the national average of 17.1 years (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016).

Several initiatives have been implemented in Ethiopia to reduce child marriage, but their efficacy is little understood as few have been rigorously evaluated. Social protection programmes, especially cash transfers, have increasingly been advocated globally as a means to reduce child marriage, however, existing evidence in this regard is both limited and mixed. A study by Hoddinott and Mekasha (2017) found that Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), a government social protection programme, successfully delayed the marriage of adolescent girls. The pathways of this promising impact are poorly understood, however. The present report, led by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti in collaboration with Frontier and UNICEF Ethiopia, thus aims to elucidate these pathways of impact using descriptive quantitative and qualitative data, drawing from the baseline survey and data collection of an ongoing impact evaluation among PSNP households in Amhara.

The report begins by discussing the context of child marriage in Ethiopia and develops a conceptual framework linking PSNP to reductions in child marriage. It then describes findings from primary data collected to provide insights into the pathways of impact. Some of the key findings are briefly summarized below.

Key findings

Prevalence of child marriage in the study sample:

- Nearly one in three females (32.2 per cent) currently aged 20–24 years and 41.4 per cent of females currently aged 20–29 years were first married as a child. The higher prevalence in the sample containing older females suggests that the prevalence of child marriage is declining. These percentages are lower than those calculated using the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data for the Amhara region, and possible explanations for this discrepancy include the following: First, the study sample is not representative of the Amhara population, as it includes only four *woredas*, whereas the DHS sample is representative of the entire region, and the incidence of child marriage within the region varies substantially due to the presence of 'hot spots' for child marriage. This could partially explain the difference in incidence rates if few or none of these hot spots were present in the four *woredas* studied. Second, the study sample includes only PSNP clients, who are poorer on average than the

² The child marriage rate is the proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before the age of 18.

overall population in Amhara, which could explain the discrepancy were the incidence of child marriage higher among better-off households. Third, the study sample includes a large number of direct support PSNP households, which have labour constraints and may therefore have increased incentives to retain adolescent girls to perform domestic and productive work. Finally, the lower rates revealed by the study could, in part, result from the effects of PSNP to date on delaying marriage.

- Qualitative findings show that in recent years there has been a decline in child marriage rates due to attitudinal shifts, improvements in school enrolment and attendance rates for girls, and greater community awareness of legal penalties.

Risk and protective factors for child marriage:

- Economic hardship and poverty were described as important drivers of child marriage. In some cases, financial vulnerability and poverty had reportedly led to arranged marriages for young girls, as a way for a household to both accumulate resources (through bride price) and reduce costs (of caring for an unmarried child).³ An inability to pay school fees may also force girls to drop out of school, at which point they may be pressured into child marriage.
- Orphans may marry earlier than other children, as child marriage is perceived as a means to help children become financially independent from the original family (as children are often perceived by their families as a financial burden and liability).
- The marriage of girls under 18 years of age is viewed as a means of their protection (and that of their virginity and family honour) and parents often must consider the trade-off between child marriage and other risks, such as social stigma and alienation, as well as the potential loss of family honour (in the event of premarital pregnancy). Girls who remain unmarried are believed to face greater risk of abduction and rape.

Perceptions of ideal age for marriage and causes of child marriage:

- Attitudes towards marriage are shaped by social and gender norms that emphasize the importance of the future roles and reproductive functions that girls are expected to embody as wives and mothers. Girls were generally described as being ready for marriage once they had begun to show physical signs of puberty. Several parents involved in the qualitative interviews (but few represented in the quantitative data) explained their desire to marry daughters quickly in the context of preventing sexual activity outside of marriage and protecting family honour.
- Respondents reported 16.6 years as the ideal marriage age for a girl, and 60 per cent of respondents thought that girls should be married before the age of 18.
- Numerous factors perpetuate attitudes in support of child marriage, including religious and cultural values that emphasize girls' sexual purity and chastity, and encourage early childbearing and high fertility among girls. Other factors include cultural marital norms that exert substantive influence over parental attitudes and decisions towards marriage, making them difficult to avoid or overcome.

³ In this report, the terms 'bride price' and 'bridewealth' are used interchangeably to refer to the cultural practice of the groom's family providing money, property or another form of wealth as a gift to the family of the girl/woman he is to marry.

- While some families reported poverty as an important factor driving child marriage, economic incentives and social aspirations related to wealth consolidation and improving one's social status in the community are more common underlying drivers.
- Child marriage is also sustained and reinforced by the limited voice and agency exercised by girls owing to gender inequalities and age-based discrimination. Seventy per cent of respondents believed that girls have no say in marriage decisions. Girls were often pressured and/or convinced to marry by their parents (using means sometimes bordering on coercion or emotional manipulation) and they largely acquiesced even if marriage was not their choice. Many girls/young women interviewed mentioned that marriage is typically 'forced upon' girls. Respondents perceived boys as having greater agency and control over marriage decisions, including when and whom to marry, and generally expected boys to marry later in life compared with girls.

Role of PSNP in reducing child marriage:

- While child marriage prevention is not an explicit objective of PSNP, the study's overall findings confirm that integrated social protection programming – such as PSNP plus complementary interventions – can reduce child marriage through several pathways.
- First, the cash component of PSNP has been found to be effective in mitigating poverty-related incentives to marry off girls, in increasing their school enrolment, and in inducing changes in household allocation of labour (domestic and productive activities) resulting in increased demands on girls' labour. These outcomes have spillover effects on delaying the marriage of girls as well as on their time use and schooling. In contexts where social norms remain supportive of child marriage, however, income-strengthening effects of PSNP may, in fact, enable poor families with daughters to accumulate the resources needed to cover the costs of a wedding and dowry, thus increasing the risk of child marriage for girls.⁴
- Second, by providing income to households, which in turn allows households to send girls to school, PSNP is also indirectly contributing to the creation of an enabling environment where girls have access to the information, life skills and support networks (teachers and peers) necessary to empower them to voice and exercise their choices regarding education and marriage. Teachers were also seen as key in preventing child marriage by promoting the importance of education, both among girls and their parents; educating girls about the negative consequences of early marriage; and serving as a point of contact for girls to lodge complaints of marriage proposals.
- Third, the complementary components of PSNP have been found to play an important role in shifting parental and girls' attitudes and beliefs around child marriage. Components such as behaviour change communication (BCC) sessions and interaction between PSNP clients and community social workers were effective in promoting the importance of girls' education, encouraging delays in marriage and pregnancy, and fostering commitments towards gender equality and positive gender roles and relations more broadly.⁵ It should be noted, however, that other programmes aimed specifically at addressing the issue of child marriage through community mobilization and BCC efforts have been operating in some study areas and may have contributed to these changes. Such programmes include the joint United Nations

⁴ The term 'dowry' refers to the cultural practice of the bride's family providing money, property or another form of wealth as a gift to the boy/man she is to marry.

⁵ BCC is a process that teaches, advises and motivates people to adopt and sustain healthy and positive behaviours and lifestyles.

Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

Several limitations to this study warrant discussion. First, using self-reported age at marriage may underestimate the actual child marriage rates, as some respondents may have reported a later age at marriage because of social desirability bias and/or fear of legal penalties. Second, it is plausible that respondents would tend to overestimate the positive effects of PSNP, and particularly their participation in BCC sessions on changes in attitudes and behaviour towards child marriage, owing to their stake in the programme. Respondents may have also inaccurately attributed changes to BCC sessions delivered through PSNP (as opposed to other awareness-raising interventions operating in study areas) as a result of limitations in respondents' ability to accurately recall their experience of past events. Finally, considering that the quantitative data are cross-sectional (i.e., they were collected at a single point in time) and that the study design does not allow for the construction of a rigorous counterfactual (all households in the sample participated in the PSNP), it is not possible to claim causality of the observed relationships between individual- and household-level characteristics (including PSNP participation) and child marriage outcomes. Similarly, given the nature of the qualitative research, it was possible to document only the perceived changes experienced by a small sample of respondents across two *kebeles* (wards) at one particular point in time. As such, qualitative findings are indicative only and findings cannot be applied to other settings. Further research is needed to identify and confirm the impact pathways proposed in the conceptual framework presented in this report.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to uncover potential pathways of impact of PSNP on child marriage outcomes. Findings demonstrate that an income strengthening PSNP intervention, when paired with complementary measures designed to improve families' knowledge and tackle harmful attitudes and norms, is a promising strategy to address child marriage. These findings highlight the opportunity to leverage the broad reach and scalability of Ethiopia's national social protection programmes, including PSNP, to more effectively address the high prevalence and burden of child marriage in the country.

To accelerate action to end child marriage, the design of PSNP and similar social protection programmes could be more effectively linked to child marriage objectives. This could be achieved by, for example:

- improving girls' retention in school by providing additional economic incentives to PSNP clients (e.g., cash top-ups, in-kind transfers) to reduce the opportunity costs of families investing in girls' education rather than marriage
- expanding social worker engagement with PSNP clients through home visits, to provide information on the importance of girls' education, and risks of child marriage and early childbearing, and to facilitate referrals to child protection case management for vulnerable girls and corresponding legal, health and counselling services
- integrating into existing BCC session curricula specific modules on child marriage prevention and gender equality more broadly.

At the same time, it is important to consider the fact that PSNP is essentially a cash- and food-for-work intervention; its main objectives are improving food security and nutrition and strengthening household resilience to shocks. As such, other types of social protection programmes may be better

suited to achieving child protection and human capital development objectives. As Ethiopia moves towards middle-income country status, this provides an opportunity to broaden the range of social assistance programmes, beyond PSNP, to specifically address the needs of vulnerable children and adolescents and aim to promote human capital development and delayed marriage.

Finally, a rigorous assessment of how a large-scale social protection programme such as PSNP can be efficiently linked to child marriage programming is needed. This represents a unique opportunity to further strengthen the evidence base on 'what works' to delay marriage and how successful strategies can be taken to scale. Such evidence will be useful in informing discussions within Ethiopia and internationally – including as part of Phase II of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (2020–2023) – to accelerate action and investments in this area and contribute towards achieving SDG 1 and SDG 5, and specifically Target 5.3.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia has made significant progress in recent decades in reducing the prevalence of child marriage. In 1980, 75 per cent of girls in the country were married before the legal age of marriage (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017). In 2005, 59 per cent of females aged 20–24 years were married or in a cohabiting union by the age of 18; this dropped to 40 per cent in 2015. Many children, however, particularly girls, remain at risk today. Ethiopia is ranked fifth in the world in terms of absolute number of child marriages (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2014).⁶ As in 2015, approximately 4 in 10 young women are first married or in union before their 18th birthday (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017).⁷ There are important regional differences in child marriage prevalence across Ethiopia: Afar is the region with the highest rate of child marriage (67 per cent), followed by Benishangul-Gumuz and Somali regions (both 50 per cent). While the child marriage rate in the Amhara region (43 per cent) is just above the national average, this rate is still more than five times that of the capital city, Addis Ababa (8 per cent) (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017). Amhara also has the lowest median age at first marriage in the country, at 15.77 years versus the national average of 17.1 years (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016).

Extensive research on child marriage in Ethiopia highlights that the drivers of child marriage are multifaceted and mutually reinforcing (Boyden, Pankhurst, & Tafere, 2012; Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009; Jones et al., 2019; Pankhurst, Tiemelissan, & Chuta, 2016; Tafere & Chuta, 2016). Child marriage is driven by poverty, as well as complex sociocultural dynamics, such as social and gender norms, which prioritize child marriage as a way to ensure that girls enter marriage as virgins, and reinforce family/ clan alliances through wealth consolidation.

Child marriage is recognized as a human rights violation in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The harmful traditional practice has serious implications for girls in particular – for their health, education, psychosocial well-being and economic security. Health-related consequences of child marriage include adverse maternal and reproductive health outcomes, increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, intimate partner violence, maternal mortality and increased suicidality (Clark, 2004; Anastasia Jessica Gage, 2013; Kidman, 2016; Nour, 2009; Santhya et al., 2010). Children born to girls and women who marry as children have an increased likelihood of being born prematurely or with low birthweight and poorer health and nutritional status (Adhikari, 2003; Raj et al., 2010). Other important risks of child marriage for girls include lower educational attainment, higher rates of poverty, and lower socio-economic status and agency (Delprato, Akyeampong, Sabates, & Hernandez-Fernandez, 2015).

The importance of ending child marriage is acknowledged in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – includes Target 5.3, which explicitly calls for countries to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”. Likewise, there is growing recognition that poverty is an important risk factor for child maltreatment, including child marriage (Butchart & Hillis, 2016). Consequently, income strengthening interventions, and social protection measures in particular, are increasingly recognized as key strategies for eradicating poverty (in line with SDG 1), promoting gender equality and, more specifically, improving girls’ schooling outcomes and reducing their exposure to risk of child marriage (in line with SDG 5 and Target 5.3).

⁶ According to 2017 population data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Ethiopia has 2,104,000 women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before the age of 18. See: Girls Not Brides, ‘Top 20 Child Marriage prevalence and burden’, <www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/atlas>, accessed 16 October 2020.

⁷ The child marriage rate is the proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before the age of 18.

Ethiopia has launched several policy and programme initiatives to realize the SDGs and in response to related international efforts towards this aim. The newly designed Phase II of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, for example, recognizes the explicit links between intergenerational poverty, financial hardship and risk of child marriage, and explicitly calls for governments – including the Government of Ethiopia – to leverage their national social protection programmes to accelerate efforts and investments to end child marriage. In reality, however, significant challenges remain to leverage social protection in the quest to eliminate child marriage by 2025 in Ethiopia, as called for by the Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

Recently, increasing attempts have been made to generate evidence on the efficacy of interventions aimed at preventing child marriage in Ethiopia. Even though rigorous evaluations of these programmes are relatively limited, available evidence shows the importance of supporting girls' education and empowering them to resist marriage and focus on alternative futures, as well as engaging communities – including parents, husbands and religious leaders – to shift discriminatory social and gender norms that perpetuate the practice of child marriage (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016). At the same time, evidence highlights that single sector programmes and micro-pilots, while important, have not been effective in addressing the scale of the burden of child marriage in Ethiopia. As a result, there are calls for the adoption of large-scale, multi-sectoral and integrated programming solutions to address the multifaceted nature of child marriage (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009).

Given their broad reach and proven scalability, social protection programmes – particularly cash transfer programmes – have increasingly attracted interest as promising strategies to address child marriage. A recent study by Hoddinott and Mekasha (2017) found that Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) has reduced the outmigration of girls aged 12–17 years residing in PSNP households, and this may have led to delayed marriage among adolescent girls under 18. The authors posit that increases in household incomes from PSNP and increases in labour demands may have enabled households to increase investments in girls' education and/or keep girls at home as substitutes for adult labour, with potential spill-over effects on delaying their marriage (J. F. Hoddinott & Mekasha, 2017). To date, however, evidence of the effects of social protection on child marriage outcomes remains limited and mixed, while the pathways of impact are poorly understood.

The present report aims to narrow the knowledge gap by exploring potential pathways through which PSNP and its complementary features may delay marriage among the extremely poor, food-insecure population. The report presents a conceptual framework and then examines relationships along the posited pathways using descriptive quantitative and qualitative data from the baseline survey and data collection of an ongoing impact evaluation of the Integrated Safety Net Program (ISNP) pilot in the Amhara region. The results of the study will inform advocacy and programming efforts within the fifth phase of PSNP (PSNP5) and complementary interventions such as the ISNP pilot, so that PSNP more intentionally addresses the problem of child marriage in future.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows: Section 2 presents statistics and trends regarding child marriage in Ethiopia, briefly discusses the key drivers of child marriage and summarizes evidence related to child marriage programmes in Ethiopia. Section 3 describes PSNP, while section 4 presents the conceptual framework that unpacks how PSNP may reduce child marriage. Section 5 summarizes the sample, study design and tools used in the current analysis, and section 6 presents results from this analysis. Finally, section 7 presents conclusions and recommendations for future research and programming.

2. CHILD MARRIAGE IN ETHIOPIA: TRENDS, DRIVERS, AND PROGRAMMES TO REDUCE THE PRACTICE

This section briefly summarizes the existing evidence on child marriage trends, drivers and legal and policy interventions in Ethiopia to explain the motivation for the present study.⁸

2.1 Laws on and trends in child marriage in Ethiopia

2.1.2. Current prevalence of and trends in child marriage

According to recent data from the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), the prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia, while still high, is decreasing. The proportion of females currently aged 25–49 years who experienced child marriage is 58 per cent nationally – down from 63 per cent in 2011 (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016). Median age of first marriage for females in Ethiopia is 17.1 years (estimated among women aged 25–49 years). According to the 2016 DHS report, characteristics correlated with a higher age at marriage include living in an urban area (19.3 years among females living in urban areas versus 16.7 years for those in rural areas) and a higher level of education (24 years among females with more than secondary education versus 16.3 years among those with no education). Median age of first marriage for females also varies by region, from a low of 15.7 years in Amhara to a high of 23.9 years in Addis Ababa (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016).

Among females currently aged 20–24 years, 14 per cent were married before the age of 15 and 40 per cent before the age of 18 (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016).⁹ The proportion of girls married before the age of 18 decreased from 59 per cent in 2005 to 40 per cent in 2015 (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017). From 2011 to 2016, the proportion of girls married before the age of 15 dropped from 8 to 6 per cent (reported among those aged 15–19 years) (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016). A higher proportion (17 per cent) of adolescent females aged 15–19 years in Ethiopia are married or in union compared with their male peers (1 per cent) (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016).

Compared with the Ethiopian regions with the highest rates of child marriage,¹⁰ Amhara has a child marriage rate (43 per cent) just a little above the national average (40 per cent) (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017).¹¹ Even though outdated, Ethiopian census data from 2007 suggest that there is extreme variation in child marriage prevalence at the *woreda* level within regions, and provide evidence of child marriage 'hot spot' *woredas* (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016). At the time the census was conducted, the Amhara region accounted for 11 of the country's 20 hot spot *woredas* for child marriage (calculated for all girls aged 10–17 years). Unfortunately, the lack of more recent census data means it is neither possible to confirm that *woreda*-level variation remains high nor that certain *woredas* in Amhara would still be considered child marriage hot spots. In fact, there is evidence that Amhara is among the four Ethiopian regions that have made the most progress in reducing child marriage from 1991 to 2016 (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017); Amhara's child marriage rate fell from 75 per cent of women aged 20–24 years married before the age of 18 in 1991 to 56 per cent in 2011, to 43 per cent in 2016 (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016; Central Statistical Agency & ICF International, 2012). Given this declining trend in child marriage in the region, it is possible that Amhara's *woredas* are no longer among Ethiopia's top hot spots for child marriage, although data from the present study cannot confirm this.

⁸ For a more exhaustive review of child marriage dynamics, see Presler-Marshall et al. (2016). Nevertheless, the child marriage rates cited in the present report are more up to date, since the report draws on 2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data; only 2011 DHS data were available at the time the Presler-Marshall et al. (2016) work was published.

⁹ This is the age group typically examined to determine child marriage prevalence, as focusing instead on girls currently under 18 years of age will underestimate prevalence, since girls in this group are still at risk of marrying before their 18th birthday.

¹⁰ Child marriage rates are highest in the Afar region (67 per cent), Benishangul-Gumuz region (50 per cent) and Somali region (50 per cent) of Ethiopia (2).

¹¹ These data are drawn from the 2016 DHS dataset and are therefore not comparable with the Ethiopian census data from 2007 reporting *woreda*-level variation in child marriage prevalence.

2.2 Drivers of child marriage in Ethiopia

Child marriage is a complex problem that takes different forms and results from the interplay of social, cultural, religious and economic factors. Presler-Marshall et al. (2016) categorize three main types of marriage in Ethiopia: (1) arranged marriage; (2) marriage via abduction, which is more common in the south where 'bride price' arrangements are typical;¹² and (3) marriage by choice, which is more common in urban areas or when marriage takes place in late adolescence or early adulthood (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016). Child marriage practices in Ethiopia are also often context-specific, with many variations in customs and cultural traditions within and between regions.¹³ Child marriages in Ethiopia are often negotiated between families and seldom involve the child's consent (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009).

The drivers of child marriage in Ethiopia are multifaceted and often mutually reinforcing (Boyden et al., 2012; Pankhurst et al., 2016; Pathfinder International Ethiopia, 2006; Tafere & Chuta, 2016). Prevailing gender norms and religious beliefs that girls must be virgins at the time of marriage (to secure more prestigious marriages) represent a key sociocultural driver of child marriage among girls. Delaying marriage is believed to increase exposure to premarital sex, and carries the risk of stigma for both adolescent girls and their parents if the girls are not married off by late adolescence (Boyden et al., 2012; Coast et al., 2019; Pathfinder International Ethiopia, 2006). Relatedly, Jones et al. (2019) describe drivers of child marriage as being "rooted in attempts to control girls' sexuality and preserve cultural traditions" (Jones et al., 2019, p. 11). Marriage is also perceived as a means to secure a female's respectful role in society and facilitates her social recognition and inclusion (Pankhurst et al., 2016). Relatedly, Tafere and Chuta (2016) highlight how female and male trajectories increasingly diverge at puberty based on social and gender norms: girls are expected to cultivate a good social reputation and secure a good marriage; boys are expected to become financially independent (Tafere & Chuta, 2016).

Consolidating (or demonstrating) kinship ties and wealth through marriage has traditionally been an important driver of child marriage in Ethiopia. For instance, in drought-prone rural areas, including those in the Amhara region, where personal survival depends on collective efforts, marrying off girls early is a way to consolidate collective social ties and alliances, and to ensure that girls are provided for and their reproductive capacity controlled (Boyden et al., 2012). At the same time, environmental and climate-related changes, combined with population increases, have led to scarcity of land and livestock across Amhara, which has implications for child marriage dynamics. For instance, ethnographic research suggests it was more common in the past for rich families in Amhara to marry off their daughters early to seek alliances with other wealthy families and provide their children with land and cattle; this motivation is less widespread today in light of the aforementioned shortages (Boyden et al., 2012).

Poverty remains a common driver of child marriage (Boyden et al., 2012; Pankhurst et al., 2016). The relationship between poverty and child marriage is not always straightforward, however. For the poorest and most vulnerable households, child marriage is an important strategy for establishing economic security for the girl and/or the family. Risk factors for child marriage typically include low household wealth, parental death or absence, ill health of a parent, and drought (Pankhurst et al., 2016).

¹² In this report, the terms 'bride price' and 'bridewealth' are used interchangeably to refer to the cultural practice of the groom's family providing money, property or another form of wealth as a gift to the family of the girl/woman he is to marry.

¹³ For example, while the most common type of child marriage occurs during late adolescence (aged 15–17 years), in some settings, girls as young as 10 years of age may be married and required to stay in the house of their parents-in-law to be gradually introduced to the responsibilities of wifehood (this practice is known locally as *madeo*). In other cases, a married girl aged 10–14 years will often stay with her parents but will be periodically obliged to visit her parents-in-law until the two families agree on when she can start living full-time with her husband. This form of child marriage is known locally as *meleles*.

Poverty is also closely linked to schooling, which is an important protective pathway in reducing child marriage. Poor households may not have the means to send children to school, and school drop-out may lead to child marriage. Indeed, rigorous evidence from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa has found that increased educational attainment has led to delays in marriage (Behrman, Peterman, & Palermo, 2017; D. Hallfors et al., 2011). Adolescents in poor Ethiopian households may also be required to engage in wage labour to help supplement household income and/or perform heavy chores, which may conflict with school attendance (Jones et al., 2019). Evidence from the Young Lives study suggests that the marriage trajectory for girls often begins with an engagement in heavy wage labour, which causes missed school attendance and, ultimately, school drop-out; some other girls choose marriage as an escape from such heavy wage labour demands (Boyden et al., 2012; Pankhurst et al., 2016; Tafere & Chuta, 2016). In this way, school drop-out may precede child marriage but is not always the direct cause of child marriage.

On the other hand, the financial motives for child marriage may not be exclusively linked to poverty, as the examples of bride wealth and dowry demonstrate.¹⁴ Pankhurst, Tiumelissan and Chuta (2016) point out that while the practice of bride wealth is more common in the south of Ethiopia, and dowry more common in the north (including Amhara), it is actually the north that has higher child marriage rates. Poverty-driven motivations to receive bridewealth thus do not fully explain high child marriage rates in settings where the practice of dowry is more common (Pankhurst et al., 2016). There is some evidence, however, that child marriage may be motivated by a desire to reduce the amount of the dowry payment required, as lesser amounts are typically required for younger girls (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016).

Section 6.2.4 reports the findings on the drivers of child marriage in the Amhara region that were documented in the qualitative research conducted for this study.

2.3 Child marriage prevention initiatives

Child marriage prevention initiatives have increasingly been implemented globally. In the past few years, five rigorous reviews were undertaken to identify evidence regarding 'what works' to delay marriage globally, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries (Chae & Ngo, 2017; Kalamar, Lee-Rife, & Hindin, 2016; Lee-Rife, Malhotra, Warner, & Glinski, 2012; Malhotra, Warner, McGonagle, & Lee-Rife, 2011; Parsons & McCleary-Sills, 2014). The initiatives identified in the reviews generally consist of one or more of the following approaches: (1) empowering girls with information, skills and support networks; (2) educating and mobilizing parents and other community members; (3) enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls; (4) offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families; and (5) fostering an enabling legal and policy framework to end child marriage (Lee-Rife et al., 2012). Lee-Rife, Malhotra, Warner and Glinski (2012) identified evaluations of 23 programmes implemented from 1973 to 2009 and found that the most successful type of intervention in delaying marriage were those programmes focusing on both adolescent girls' empowerment and the provision of economic incentives to families (Lee-Rife et al., 2012).

Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa is more mixed. Some initiatives aimed at retaining girls in school or at their empowerment, such as in Uganda and Zimbabwe, have been successful in reducing child marriage and in delaying marriage (Bandiera et al., 2013; D. D. Hallfors et al., 2015). Other initiatives that focused on economic incentives, school incentives or integrated approaches had mixed results depending on the type of intervention (Sarah Baird, McIntosh, & Özler, 2011; Duflo, Dupas, Kremer, & Sinei, 2006) or beneficiary characteristics such as age or school enrolment status (S. Baird, Chirwa,

¹⁴ The term 'dowry' refers to the cultural practice of the bride's family providing money, property or another form of wealth as a gift to the boy/man she is to marry.

McIntosh, & Ozler, 2010; Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009). Finally, in some countries, approaches based solely on the provision of economic incentives to households did not delay marriage for girls (Dake et al., 2018; S Handa et al., 2015; Tanzania Cash Plus Evaluation Team, 2018).¹⁵

A number of initiatives have been implemented in Ethiopia specifically. As mentioned above, the legal age of marriage in Ethiopia is set at 18 years. Given the regulatory framework described in section 2.1, as well as multiple campaigns aimed at ending child marriage promoted by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and its partners, several initiatives were organized nationwide to raise awareness of legislation around child marriage and sensitize both urban and rural communities to the issue.¹⁶ These initiatives involved media campaigns; community dialogues aimed at shifting norms; empowerment activities for adolescent girls; interventions to improve schooling outcomes for girls; provision of economic incentives to households or to girls specifically (e.g., free school supplies); and actions to guarantee legal enforcement (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016).

Studies indicate that interventions focused solely on abolition of child marriage through punitive measures (e.g., fines, imprisonment) were usually counterproductive and tended to drive practices underground rather than change attitudes and norms (Mekonnen & Aspen, 2009; Muthengi & Erulkar, 2010), creating additional risks for girls and young women (Boyden et al., 2012; Camfield & Tafere, 2011). The results of the Hombrados (2018) analysis suggest that many women reacted to the introduction of the law by postponing the age of cohabitation. On the other hand, approaches focused on empowerment and community dialogue were, overall, effective in raising awareness about the legal age of marriage and in changing attitudes around child marriage, especially when traditional and religious leaders were involved in discussions (Anastasia J Gage, 2009; Anastasia Jessica Gage, 2013; Jones, Tefera, Stephenson, Gupta, & Pereznieto, 2014). Moreover, initiatives focused at empowering girls helped them to become more aware of their potential and their surroundings beyond traditional social norms, and increased the number of instances of resistance and opposition to child marriage (Ambelu, Mulu, Seyoum, Ayalew, & Hildrew, 2019; Tefera, 2013), leading in some cases to broader changes in the child–parent relationship (Berhanu et al., 2019). It has been shown that to be effective, however, awareness-raising approaches must also substantially involve parents and potential husbands (Jones et al., 2014; Tefera, 2013). Adolescent girls are only partially involved in marital decision-making processes and final decisions are usually in the hands of parents or guardians (McDougal et al., 2018). Moreover, marriage is still central to family formation and has a strong social value in Ethiopia (Berhanu et al., 2019) and it is often explored by parents as a way to ensure girls' long-term protection (Boyden, Pankhurst, & Tafere, 2013). Therefore, comprehensive approaches to ending child marriage aimed at shifting social and gender norms need to address all of these aspects.

Few of the child marriage prevention initiatives implemented in Ethiopia have been systematically evaluated, leading to a lack of detailed evidence about what works specifically in the country. To date, the most comprehensively evaluated intervention is the Berhane Hewan programme, a multi-component initiative with activities aimed at empowering girls through formal or informal education, and shifting social and gender paradigms at the community level. The quasi-experimental evaluation found that participation in the programme by adolescent girls and young women led to an improvement in several outcomes, including their friendship networks, school attendance, increased age at marriage, reproductive health knowledge and contraceptive use (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009).

¹⁵ These results should be interpreted with caution as the authors acknowledge limitations of their quantitative approaches in capturing marriage dynamics.

¹⁶ Campaigns promoted by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs include, most notably, the Ethiopian launch of the African Common Position on the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa (2015); the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, implemented in six regions of Ethiopia, including 30 woredas in the Amhara region (2015); and the National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children, launched in 2017.

The authors conclude that programmes that address the economic and social factors that promote child marriage and simultaneously focus on increasing girls' access to schooling are the most effective overall in delaying marriage in the Ethiopian context. The evaluation was significantly limited, however, in its ability to isolate programme impacts: The authors compared one treatment village with a purposively selected comparison village and estimated treatment effects without employing matching or other quasi-experimental methods to construct a credible counterfactual. Thus, estimated impacts may be real programme impacts or they may, in fact, have arisen due to underlying differences (e.g., in education, poverty rates, and parity) between treatment and comparison individuals/communities that existed prior to programme implementation and influenced marriage decisions.

Efficacy of interventions varies across contexts and age groups and this should be considered when designing future programmes. Moreover, interventions aimed at reducing child marriage should be combined with interventions focused on creating opportunities for adolescent girls through quality schooling, vocational training and employment, and access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care to counterbalance the social and economic implications for girls and their families resulting from delayed marriage (Boyden et al., 2012). This means that policies should be sensitive to the social and cultural aspects of these phenomena and take into account families' perceptions of 'losses' resulting from delayed marriage (Boyden et al., 2012). Indeed, a review of the existing evidence for Ethiopia underscores the need for additional rigorous and context-specific evidence to better understand what interventions (or programmatic features) are effective in delaying marriage in Ethiopia.

2.4 Social protection and child marriage

It is increasingly argued that social protection programmes, and cash transfer programmes in particular, can delay marriage. Evidence supporting this claim, however, is scarce (most evaluations so far have focused only on cash transfers) and pathways of impact are not fully understood. While some large-scale government cash transfer programmes in Kenya and South Africa have led to delays in sexual debut and childbearing (S. Handa, Halpern, Pettifor, & Thirumurthy, 2014; Heinrich, Hoddinott, & Samson, 2017), and these outcomes are closely linked to marriage, evidence on the ability of cash transfers to delay marriage is still limited (S. Baird et al., 2010; J. F. Hoddinott & Mekasha, 2017; P. Nanda et al., 2016). Indeed, several impact evaluations of large-scale government cash transfer programmes in Kenya, Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia have found no effects on child marriage outcomes (Dake et al., 2018; S Handa et al., 2015; Tanzania Cash Plus Evaluation Team, 2018).

In interpreting these mixed findings, it is important to consider the different types of social protection programmes implemented as well as the diversity of settings in which such programmes operate. For example, conditional and unconditional cash transfers, in-kind transfers and cash/food-for-work interventions have different objectives and design features. Consequently, these different types of programme will have varying potential to affect (directly or indirectly) child marriage and schooling outcomes. So far, most evaluations have focused on cash transfers, and further efforts are needed to generate evidence on other types of social protection programmes and their effects in delaying marriage.

Programme impacts may also be moderated by core programme design features such as programme objectives and targeting, conditionalities, transfer amounts and payment frequency. For example, if the transfer amount is low relative to household monthly expenditure, it will likely have a limited impact in reducing household poverty, in turn making it unlikely to reduce child marriage through the poverty alleviation channel. Poverty and child marriage linkages are further described in the conceptual

framework (see section 4). Additionally, who in the household receives the transfer (i.e., adolescent girl, caregiver or household head) has implications for how the payment is allocated and used and whether or not it mitigates incentives for child marriage. Finally, how objectives and messages related to child marriage are communicated to intended beneficiaries can also affect outcomes. For example, a conditional cash transfer programme in India structured as a one-time payment for families of girls who remained unmarried until the age of 18 had the unintended impact of increasing marriage rates after the age of 18, as some parents misunderstood the payment as a way to cover the cost of a dowry (G. Nanda, 2011).

While prevention of child marriage is not an explicit objective of PSNP in Ethiopia, a study by Hoddinott and Mekasha (2017) found that the programme delayed the outmigration of adolescent girls aged 12–17 years from PSNP households (J. F. Hoddinott & Mekasha, 2017). Potential reasons for this impact may include increased investments in girls' education, the need to retain girls to assist with domestic chores previously conducted by adult women (who now have public works responsibilities as a result of PSNP) or decisions to delay marriage (J. F. Hoddinott & Mekasha, 2017). Research on adolescents in Ethiopia led by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) initiative has also found that adolescent girls in PSNP households may act as substitutes for adult labour, including in domestic chores and on the public works sites. While this substitution effect may, on the one hand, have potential spillover effects on delaying marriage (Jones et al., 2019), on the other hand, it may be detrimental to girls' schooling and educational attainment (J. F. Hoddinott & Mekasha, 2017; Jones et al., 2019; G. Nanda, 2011).

Based on the limited available evidence of linkages between child marriage and PSNP, further research is needed to better understand the potential role that PSNP (and complementary interventions) can play in delaying marriage, and to unpack the channels through which these outcomes emerge.

2.4.1. Laws and policies on child marriage

Several legislative and policy initiatives have been set up to combat child marriage in Ethiopia. The Revised Family Code of 2000 (art. 7) sets the legal age of marriage at 18 years for girls and boys. Furthermore, the Criminal Code of 2005 (art. 648) criminalizes child marriage, with punishments of up to three or seven years' imprisonment where the child is aged 13 years or above, or under 13 years respectively (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016). The Criminal Code also criminalizes abduction (art. 586), early forced marriage (art. 648) and polygamy (art. 650).

In 2012, Ethiopia established the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting within the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs; in 2013, the National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children was launched in an effort to reduce the high prevalence of such practices, particularly in rural Ethiopia. These interventions aim to institutionalize national, regional and grassroots mechanisms and create an enabling environment for the abandonment of all forms of harmful traditional practices, by ensuring multi-sectoral programming to support women and children with prevention, protection and responsive services (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016). The End Child Marriage programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has been implemented in 30 *woredas* of the Amhara region (including 3 of the 4 *woredas* included in the present study).¹⁷ Taking a community-wide behavioural change approach, this programme aims to end marriage by targeting about 37,500 adolescent girls as well as their parents and the broader community. Moreover, on 14 August 2019, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth

¹⁷ *Woredas* (districts) are third-level administrative government units of Ethiopia. They are further composed of a network of *kebeles* (also known as wards or neighbourhood associations), which are the smallest units of government in Ethiopia.

Affairs launched a National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (2020–2024).¹⁸ This evidence-based, costed plan outlines strategies, interventions and expected results towards the elimination of these harmful traditional practices, an additional step forward in the country's commitment to achieving the SDGs.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROGRAM

The PSNP is the largest social protection intervention in Ethiopia, reaching an estimated 8 million beneficiaries PSNP and started in 2005 in response to chronic food insecurity in Ethiopia (Berhane, Gilligan, Hoddinott, Kumar, & Taffesse, 2014). The main objective of the programme is “to provide transfers to the food insecure population in chronically food insecure woredas in a way that prevents asset depletion at the household level and creates assets at the community level” (Berhane et al., 2014; Ethiopia, 2009; Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2010; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ethiopia), 2009). The programme provides support (cash, food and complementary benefits) to chronically food-insecure households and those vulnerable to environmental shocks and stresses.

3.1 PSNP4: Core programmatic features and innovations

PSNP clients fall into one of two programme streams: (1) a public works (PW) stream, which provides monthly cash-based wages for adults working during the lean season (typically for six months per year);¹⁹ and (2) a direct support (DS) stream, which provides cash payments, with no work requirement, to households with no members 'able to work'. Payments to DS clients are provided monthly over the course of the entire year. Most DS beneficiaries are recipients of permanent direct support (PDS) and include households with elderly people, people with chronic illness and people with disabilities, as well as vulnerable female-headed households with severe labour constraints. The fourth phase of PSNP – PSNP4 – introduced an additional DS category: temporary direct support (TDS), which transitions adult pregnant and lactating women from PW to DS status, thus exempting them from work requirements during pregnancy and until the child reaches 12 months of age. Adult caregivers of malnourished children aged 6–59 months are also eligible for TDS (even if not part of PSNP).

3.2 Complementary measures

Besides the core transfers, PSNP provides a range of complementary measures to facilitate linkages between clients and social services, and promote positive changes in clients' health and nutrition practices. For example, PSNP4 promotes several 'co-responsibilities' (also known as 'soft conditionalities') in health, nutrition and childcare practices, which clients are encouraged to fulfil.²⁰ These co-responsibilities include: (1) attendance at antenatal and post-natal check-ups and growth monitoring for infants and malnourished children (targeting TDS clients); and (2) participation in behaviour change communication (BCC) sessions on health, nutrition, and sanitation and hygiene practices.²¹ BCC sessions are also intended to include modules and messaging on gender equality,

18 The Roadmap was launched with technical and financial support from UNFPA, UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

19 Only a small fraction of participants (about 1 per cent of PW clients and 4 per cent of PDS beneficiaries) receive in-kind benefits or a mix of cash transfers and in-kind benefits.

20 The co-responsibilities are not formally enforced and do not carry punitive measures for clients; instead, clients are expected to fulfil their co-responsibilities on a voluntary basis.

21 BCC is a process that teaches, advises and motivates people to adopt and sustain healthy and positive behaviours and lifestyles.

women's rights and social development provisions. To date, however, some assessments of the PSNP have documented challenges in the implementation of core aspects of the programme, including weak and inconsistent delivery of BCC sessions, low-value cash transfers compounded by significant delays in the payment of benefits, and limited implementation of gender provisions, including issues with transitioning pregnant and lactating women to TDS (Roelen, Devereux, Kebede, & Ulrichs, 2017).

PSNP4 also includes a livelihood component designed to promote livelihood security and enhancement among PW clients across three domains: crop and livestock, off-farm, and employment.²² The livelihood package comprises training sessions in financial literacy, savings promotion, business/marketing skills and business plan preparation. Participation in the livelihood component is voluntary and focuses on targeting individual clients, mainly adult women and youth (aged 18 years and above), rather than households. An unconditional lump-sum grant (a one-off payment of US\$200) is also available to the poorest households for whom taking out credit to implement a business idea is not an option (an estimated 30 per cent of households). In practice, there is a mixed intensity of implementation of the various PSNP4 components across Ethiopia's *woredas* (J. Hoddinott, Gilligan, & Taffesse, 2010).

3.3 PSNP4 and child marriage programming

PSNP4 neither includes child marriage prevention as an intentional objective nor contains any explicit design provisions related to this issue. For example, this study's review of the training guides for the implementation of BCC sessions (Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Ethiopia), 2016) found that the official content of BCC modules omits messaging explicitly related to child marriage. The BCC content does, however, include messages on gender equality and gender norms, roles and relations, as well as the broader concept of child protection, all of which are closely related to the topic of child marriage. Likewise, the qualitative research conducted for the present study reveals that, in practice, BCC interventions delivered through the PSNP do disseminate messages related to the importance of delaying marriage and pregnancy, and encourage parents to support girls' education. Also, other initiatives being implemented as part of the PSNP do specifically address child marriage, even though this is not an intended objective of the programme. For example, in some target PSNP *woredas* in the Amhara region, **social workers** play an important role in rescuing girls from child marriage, and use co-responsibilities as a mechanism to discourage PSNP clients from engaging in harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and child labour. Importantly, other child marriage prevention interventions, including the DFID-funded End Child Marriage programme in Amhara, were being implemented in study areas at the time of the present research. Section 6 further discusses the 'unintended' positive effects of BCC sessions implemented as part of the PSNP and also changes potentially resulting from other interventions external to the PSNP.

3.4 PSNP effects

Comprehensive evaluations of PSNP over the years have found that the programme contributes, to some extent, to improving food security and raising livestock holdings among participating households (Berhane et al., 2014), leading to their improved economic security and resilience to seasonal food and income stresses. In addition, the PSNP has been shown to increase school attendance rates and reduce child labour (though these results vary by gender and age, with adverse effects documented among girls aged 6–10 years) (J. Hoddinott et al., 2010). **The programme is also increasingly exploring means and mechanisms to improve access to and use of basic services, especially for its poorest clients, who remain vulnerable to ill health and malnutrition.**

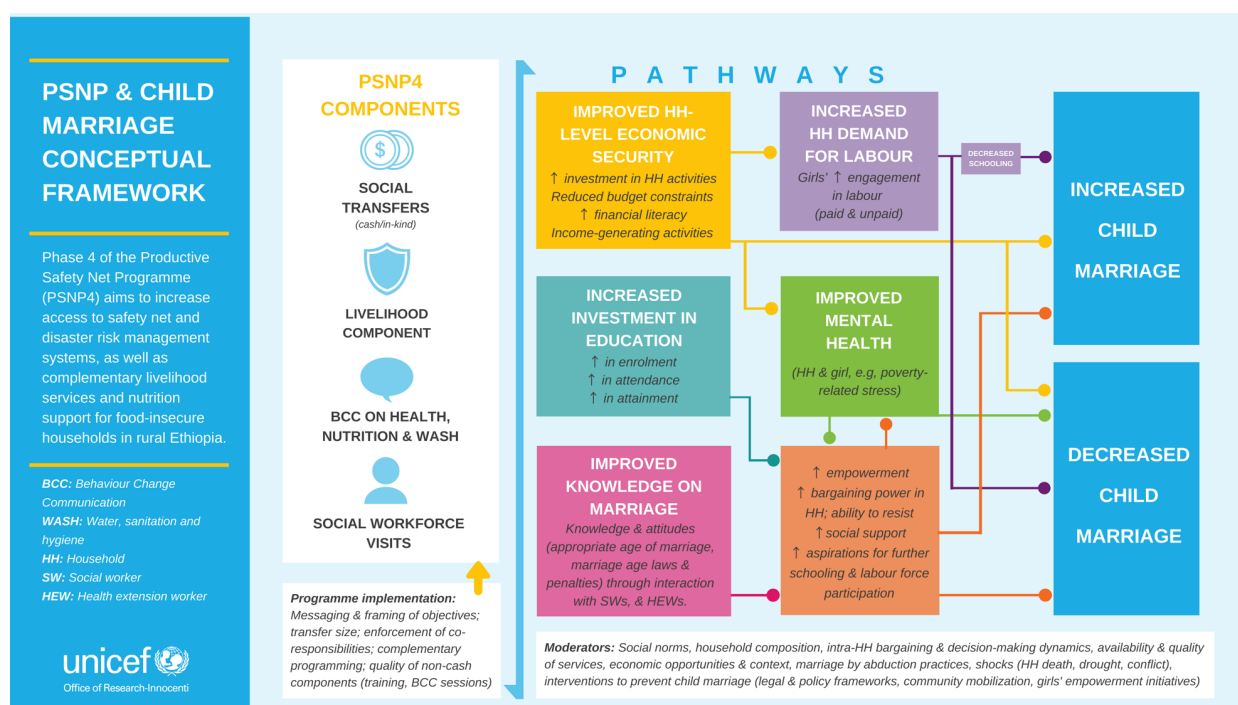
²² The livelihood component replaces the earlier Household Asset Building Program (HABP).

UNICEF has supported the Government of Ethiopia to implement, within the PSNP framework, two pilots aimed at promoting the development of an integrated system of social transfers and basic social services, including access to health care, education and health insurance. The Improved Nutrition through Integrated Basic Social Services with Social Cash Transfer (IN-SCT) pilot project has run from 2015 to 2018 (Gilligan et al., 2019), while the Integrated Safety Net Program (ISNP) was launched in 2019 in the Amhara region. Building on the PSNP4 innovations, the ISNP pilot focuses on an expanded and strengthened case management approach to link PSNP clients to essential services in health, nutrition, education and child protection through social workers and implementation of co-responsibilities. ISNP will also facilitate enrolment into community-based health insurance for PW clients and enable access to fee waivers for PDS clients. Moreover, a digital management information system will be developed to manage monitoring data for various programme components and facilitate referral activities related to the case management system. The analysis on child marriage presented in this report draws on the baseline survey data and qualitative research from an ongoing impact evaluation of the ISNP pilot. Importantly, at the time of the research, the additional ISNP activities had not yet begun, and so the analysis focuses on assessing pathways of impact related to regular PSNP activities only.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: PSNP AND POTENTIAL PATHWAYS TO DELAYING MARRIAGE

This section presents the conceptual framework used to inform the analysis described in the remainder of this report. The channels through which the PSNP is expected to have an effect on child marriage are multiple and complex. For the present analysis, potential pathways of impact are clustered across three domains: economic security, girls' education, and knowledge of and attitudes towards child marriage. Figure 1 illustrates these pathways, which are then described in detail in the discussion that follows.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of pathways of impact of the Productive Safety Net Program on child marriage



4.1 Improved economic security

Poverty may serve as a 'push factor' for child marriage by: (1) pushing girls out of the household due to scarce resources and an inability to provide for them; (2) providing an incentive to marry off girls to receive bride price payments; (3) creating an incentive to marry off girls earlier, as younger girls typically require the smallest dowries (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016); and/or (4) creating an environment lacking in alternative education or employment opportunities for girls. Alternatively, adolescent girls themselves may initiate child marriage to escape intense wage labour necessitated by household poverty (a 'pull factor').

The increased economic security provided by the PSNP may reduce pressure on families to marry off adolescent girls in several ways. First, the improved income from PSNP (from both the cash transfer and increased economic activities) may alleviate the financial burden of caring for an additional adolescent.²³ In contexts where the household, in response to extreme poverty and income shocks, uses child marriage as a coping strategy, improved economic security may directly mitigate the need

²³ Transfers may alleviate households' liquidity constraints, thereby enabling them to invest in productive assets and inputs to boost their economic activities, which in turn may increase household income.

to marry off girls. Participation in the livelihood component of the PSNP may further improve income-related benefits for households, with positive spillover effects on delaying the marriage of female adolescents. Similarly, the additional income from the PSNP may reduce the relative incentive to marry off girls to receive bride price, or enable households to save more money for a dowry, and therefore delay the age at marriage. These effects may be more or less likely depending on the level of the cash transfer received. The lower in value the transfer, the less likely this channel will materialize.

Second, the growth in the economic activities and increase in demands for labour (on PW sites) is expected to affect the allocation of work (both productive and care activities) within the household, with important gender and age dimensions. Previous studies have suggested that PSNP work requirements may induce households to draw adolescents into labour activities (J. F. Hoddinott & Mekasha, 2017; Jones et al., 2019). This may include PW labour on behalf of the household (although PSNP guidelines state that individuals must be aged 18 years or over to participate, the rules are not always enforced) or domestic chores in place of adult women, whose time is taken up with PW responsibilities. In this way, PSNP may increase the demands on adolescent girls' time and increase the incentive for households to retain girls to fulfil the household's paid and/or unpaid labour needs, thus delaying their marriage.

Finally, greater income and intra-household shifts in work allocations could also have unintended effects on girls both in terms of child marriage and broader well-being outcomes. For example, improved financial standing and potential accumulation of resources can enable poor households to cover the costs of a wedding and dowry, and/or enhance a daughter's 'prospects' for attracting marriage proposals, thus increasing the likelihood of child marriage.²⁴ Likewise, in contexts where child marriage is considered a 'community norm' and a vehicle for poor households to improve their social status in the community, financial benefits from the PSNP may not be sufficient to outweigh the potential social risks and opportunity costs associated with postponing a daughter's marriage (e.g., social alienation, loss of kinship protections) (44). Increases in work allocations may induce (older) girls to marry and leave the household so as to avoid increases in work burdens and claim their adult status and independence through marriage. Finally, changes in girls' time-use patterns may potentially lead to negative consequences for their education outcomes and future opportunities.

4.2 Increased investment in girls' education

Studies have found that girls' schooling and educational attainment can protect against child marriage through three core channels. First, evidence from several countries in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that increased school attainment delays the marriage of girls (Behrman et al., 2017; D. Hallfors et al., 2011). In Ethiopia, rates of child marriage have simultaneously dropped as school enrolment for girls has increased (Presler-Marshall et al., 2016). PSNP has been found to increase school attendance among boys and older girls (with some adverse effects observed among younger girls) (J. Hoddinott et al., 2010). Likewise, increased educational attainment can improve future earning potential, and marriage may be delayed to better realize this potential. Conversely, the likelihood of child marriage may increase if a girl has already dropped out of school and thus has no competing demands on her time.

The second important channel is that school attendance may increase girls' access to social and support networks (e.g., peers, teachers, girls' clubs) and improve their agency and confidence to seek help should they be at risk of forced marriage. The final channel is that education may enhance girls' knowledge and awareness of risks of child marriage and pregnancy at an early age, as well as empower them to express and exercise their choices regarding marriage, education and family planning, among

²⁴ For example, additional income may enable the family to save money for a daughter's dowry in those communities where this custom is practised.

other matters. Moreover, research from Ethiopia has shown that older girls are better able to exercise agency, sometimes even opposing parents with respect to marriage decisions (Pankhurst et al., 2016).

4.3 Improved knowledge of and attitudes towards child marriage

The potential impact of the PSNP on decisions about when girls will marry depends largely on the nature of intra-household decision-making processes. Decisions and behaviours related to child marriage are shaped by many factors, including sociocultural norms and customs related to gender roles and marriage, individual and household attitudes and preferences, and intra-household bargaining dynamics.

4.3.1 Shifts in knowledge of and attitudes towards child marriage

A major driver of child marriage in Ethiopia relates to gender norms and cultural values emphasizing the importance of protecting girls' reputation and virginity until marriage. Threats to these include not only sexual violence, but also adolescents' potential choice to engage in premarital sex, the risk of which increases with age. There are thus strong household incentives to marry girls early to protect individual- and family-level social standing in the community and family honour. These community-driven norms and attitudes are unlikely to change via exposure to the PSNP alone in the short term. But exposure of PSNP households to complementary and integrated programming measures such as BCC sessions, co-responsibilities and social worker engagement may, in turn, influence household (and community) knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to child marriage, gender equality and the importance of girls' education. Moreover, in the longer term, PSNP may influence gender norms via the schooling pathway. That is, exposure to PSNP may increase school attendance, and increased educational attainment is associated with more equitable gender norms and girls' empowerment (Barker et al., 2011).

4.3.2 Household bargaining dynamics

The effects of complementary programme components – such as increased schooling, increased access to health services and greater interaction with health extension workers, economic empowerment and financial literacy – could lead to girls developing heightened aspirations for the future as well as greater agency and bargaining power in the household. This, in turn, may increase their ability to influence decisions regarding marriage. Greater access to independent income and increased social networks resulting from PSNP and participation in its livelihood component may also strengthen the economic empowerment of mothers (or female caregivers). In turn, a mother's enhanced voice and bargaining power in household decision-making may improve her ability to assert her preferences regarding a daughter's marriage. Likewise, the programme components aimed at increasing access to health services fostered by health extension workers may provide adolescents and mothers with more information on health and increased support, strengthening their agency and choices regarding health and family planning.

An increase in girls' agency may, however, also have ambiguous effects. For one, the intertwined effects of economic security and improved schooling outcomes may result in girls' greater awareness of their rights to education, health, bodily integrity and future aspirations. The same effects may also lead to increases in girls' self-esteem and confidence to express their own voice and choices with regard to marriage decisions and schooling preferences – thus delaying marriage. On the other hand, the PSNP-induced increase in the adolescent work burden may incentivize an adolescent to leave the household and marry. Neither of these channels is likely to be realized, however, if decisions about marriage are largely taken by parents.

Finally, decreases in poverty-related stress (which is exacerbated by the cost of caring for an unmarried girl child) may improve the psychosocial well-being of households, with positive spillover effects on intra-household dynamics and decision-making. Greater hopefulness and heightened aspirations among parents and children alike, combined with economic security and greater ability to plan for the future, may lead to families having more perceived choices with regard to child marriage decisions. Subsequently, adolescents' agency to express their preferences regarding marriage may also improve, including their ability to refuse and/or postpone marriage proposals (McDougal et al., 2018).

In the case of PDS households with adolescent female members, if it is assumed that PDS households engage in farm activities only marginally or not at all, the effect of PSNP on child marriage is likely to operate mainly through the increased cash channel and awareness-raising interventions such as BCC sessions. The same three core pathways identified in the framework for PW households would hold, with the exception of the labour-demand implications. As for households mostly composed of elderly people or individuals with disabilities, the effect of PSNP on child marriage would be irrelevant. For PDS households with a limited supply of members 'able to work' – such as female-headed households with many children – the effects could be the same as those outlined for PW households, with different possible outcomes for individual households depending on who makes the decisions, intra-household bargaining dynamics and economic structure.

4.4 Moderating factors

Finally, PSNP effects on child marriage are dependent on and moderated by various contextual and operational factors. These include: (1) programme design features (e.g., messaging about and framing of objectives; transfer size and predictability; enforcement of co-responsibilities; complementary programming and linkages to services); (2) household composition (e.g., family size, number of girls) and shocks (e.g., death of household members, orphanhood, drought); (3) sociocultural context (e.g., gender roles, age-related power relations, marriage norms and customs, girls' perceived value in society); (4) ongoing interventions to prevent child marriage (e.g., legal frameworks, community mobilization, girls' empowerment initiatives); and (5) availability and quality of services and socio-economic opportunities (e.g., prices, infrastructure/access to markets, employment).

5. STUDY DESIGN AND TOOLS

5.1 Study objectives and sample

Data used in this study come from the baseline survey and data collection of a mixed methods impact evaluation of the ISNP pilot in Ethiopia's Amhara region. To examine ISNP impacts on participants, a prospective, quasi-experimental, longitudinal, mixed methods impact evaluation was designed and led by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and Frontieri. The baseline survey was conducted from December 2018 to February 2019. The present study aims to descriptively examine how the PSNP may affect child marriage and test those pathways of impact posited in the conceptual framework (see section 4). At the time of the baseline survey, implementation of ISNP pilot activities had not yet begun. The data therefore explore and document the effects of regular PSNP4 programme components only. In addition, the study explores, in micro-settings in Amhara, child marriage dynamics including common perceptions, knowledge of laws and attitudes towards child marriage.

The analysis drew on quantitative data from surveys administered to the (female) primary caregiver of children in each household.²⁵ Respondents were asked to report on characteristics and activities of all household members. Qualitative research involved a set of 15 matched in-depth interviews (30 in total) with heads of households and girls/young women aged 12–24 years. These were used to capture local dynamics around child marriage, including social norms, preferences, expectations and barriers to its prevention, as well as the role of the PSNP in delaying child marriage. Additionally, key informant interviews were undertaken with *woreda*-level representatives of the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs as well as development agents and community social workers working at the *kebele* level in the Dewa Chefa and Libo Kemkem *woredas* respectively.

The quantitative evaluation sampled PSNP households in two treatment *woredas* (Dewa Chefa and Libo Kemkem) and two comparison *woredas* (Artuma Fursi and Ebinate). The households in the two treatment *woredas* were recipients of ISNP benefits while the comparison *woredas* included only regular PSNP clients. The qualitative fieldwork was conducted in two treatment *kebeles* (Gula and Shemo), one in each of the two treatment *woredas* (Dewa Chefa and Libo Kemkem respectively). The qualitative sample selection was stratified to include households with characteristics to help us exploring specific issues. In particular, we included: (1) households with at least one unmarried adolescent girl aged 12–17 years; and (2) households with at least one girl who was married at the age of 15–19 years (who may not be living in the parental home). Across these categories, both the parents (mainly female caregivers) and the girls/young women (married and unmarried) were interviewed.

In particular, interviews were conducted of matched samples of: (1) parents in ISNP/PSNP households; and (2) daughters who had left their original family to marry (including those who had moved to non-PSNP households).²⁶

5.2 Study instruments

Quantitative surveys administered to households captured information on household composition and dynamics, food security, child nutrition, morbidity, economic well-being, access to services, and women's savings, empowerment and social support. In addition, two modules were designed to capture information on child marriage. A module on **in-migration and outmigration of the household**

²⁵ The sampling was based on the original sampling strategy applied for the baseline survey and data collection of the ongoing impact evaluation of the ISNP pilot in Amhara. The research team decided to interview female primary caregivers of children since they are typically best placed to answer questions related to their children's health, nutrition, care and protection, as per the main objectives of the ISNP impact evaluation.

²⁶ This could include girls who had been married either through an arranged marriage or of their own free will.

for marriage among females aged 12–24 years was administered to collect information on child marriage prevalence. In the second marriage-related module, respondents were asked about their **perceptions, knowledge and attitudes** towards child marriage.

The module on **in-migration and outmigration of the household for marriage among females aged 12–24 years** referred to the five years prior to survey administration to capture information on a number of areas, including marriage. On in-migration, respondents were first asked to list all girls aged 12–24 years who were currently part of their household, and then to confirm whether these girls had been born in the household. For any girls not born in the household, respondents were asked at what age the girl had joined the household and the main reason for her joining the household. The 18 response options available included joining the household to live with parent/other adult, to be near school, to live with spouse/marriage, to look for employment or to live with relatives. On outmigration, respondents were first asked to list all girls aged 12–24 years who had been part of their household for six months or more in the last five years, but were no longer part of the household. For each girl they listed, respondents were asked her age when she left the household, her relationship to the household head, and when she left and why. The same response options were used as for the in-migration questions.

In the module on **perceptions, knowledge and attitudes** towards child marriage, respondents were first asked, 'What is the ideal age a girl [boy] should get married in your opinion?', separately for girls and boys, followed up each time with a question about why they thought this is the right age to marry. Next, respondents were asked at what age adolescent girls usually marry in their community. Respondents were then asked who in their household decides when (at what age) a girl should marry, followed by a second question about who *should* decide in their opinion. Next, respondents were asked who decides when a girl marries in other households in the same community, and then who *should* decide in their opinion. For all of the questions on who decides, response options included the father alone, the mother alone, the parents together, the person who is getting married, the parents with the person who is getting married, peers, household head (if not a parent) or other relatives. To assess knowledge of child marriage, respondents were asked whether there is a legal age of marriage in Ethiopia; if the response was affirmative, the respondent was asked, separately for girls and boys, the legal marriage age. Finally, to assess attitudes towards child marriage, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed (using four Likert scale options: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) with the following statements:

- Most of the people in this community expect girls to marry before the age of 18.
- Marrying early avoids social stigma.
- If girls do not get married early, their families will not be respected in the community.
- Girls should have the final decision over their decision to marry.
- Girls should have a say whether or not they want to marry.
- Girls should have a say about who they want to marry.
- Marrying girls at a young age can help provide them security.
- Marrying girls young can help prevent sexual violence, assault and harassment.
- Marriage of girls under 18 years sometimes happens for financial reasons.
- Marriage of girls under 18 years mostly happens because there is a lack of education and job opportunities.

- Unmarried girls should have access to contraception/family planning services.
- Married girls should have access to contraception/family planning services.

The purpose of the qualitative research component was to deepen the quantitative inquiry into child marriage by providing an in-depth and nuanced contextual understanding of child marriage dynamics and customs. Using the qualitative data, the research team also attempted to explore the pathways and mechanisms through which PSNP affects client perceptions, decisions and behaviours towards child marriage, as identified by the quantitative data.

The semi-structured in-depth interviews had two broad and interrelated objectives. The primary objective of the qualitative research was to explore common norms and attitudes around age of marriage, as held by adolescent girls (married and unmarried) and their parents, while also identifying key factors contributing to the practice of child marriage. The research team also explored how social and gender norms and underlying cultural and religious values perpetuate attitudes in support of child marriage. The matched interviews (also known as intergenerational interviews) were undertaken to better understand how individual experiences, perspectives and expectations of child marriage vary between generations within a family and contribute to decisions around child marriage. A secondary objective of the qualitative research was to explore and map potential pathways through which the PSNP and its complementary components may delay marriage for girls. This involved modules to assess how economic, educational and attitudinal pathways (as described in the conceptual framework) specifically affect the intermediary outcomes – at the individual, household and community level – necessary to delay and prevent the marriage of girls.

Two limitations experienced in the research need to be highlighted. First, PSNP effects and pathways were captured anecdotally in the qualitative data collection; it was possible to document only the perceived changes experienced and interpreted by a small sample of respondents across two *kebeles*, focusing on their unique experiences at one particular point in time. As such, qualitative findings are indicative only and findings cannot be applied to other settings. Further research is needed to identify the elements of PSNP4 programming that are ultimately critical to reductions in child marriage. In addition, it should be underlined that pathways could not be analysed using quantitative data as the PSNP had already been fully implemented in the region (and in the study *woredas*). It was therefore not possible to construct a valid counterfactual to allow investigation of the causal pathways through quantitative analysis. Second, at the time of the research, other child marriage prevention interventions (e.g., community mobilization campaigns) unrelated to the PSNP were also being implemented in the study locations. The research team was unable, however, to analyse the distinct effects of the different programmes and establish the extent to which the other (non-PSNP) awareness-raising interventions may have contributed to changes in child marriage outcomes.

5.3 Training and data collection activities

Enumerators and qualitative researchers received instruction on ethical data collection and informed consent at data collection training sessions.

From December 2018 to February 2019, Frontieri administered the baseline survey in four *woredas*: Dewa Chefa and Libo Kemkem (treatment arm); Artuma Fursi and Ebinate (comparison arm). Enumerators collected quantitative data through computer-assisted personal interviews using tablet computers equipped with SurveySolutions software for data capture.

Qualitative fieldwork took place from December 2018 to early January 2019. Two sub-teams of qualitative researchers (each consisting of six researchers and one team leader) were deployed simultaneously to collect data in the two treatment locations, first interviewing key informants at the *woreda* level, before moving to the *kebele* level to interview community members.

Quantitative interviews lasted approximately 1 hour per household and qualitative interviews approximately 1.5 hours per individual. Questionnaires and qualitative interviews were administered in the local language (Amharic).

5.4 Ethical guidelines

The research team adhered to the Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research, as outlined in the *Belmont Report*. Informed consent was obtained from all adult interviewees (aged 18 and over), while parental/caregiver consent and adolescent assent was obtained for all adolescent participants aged 12–17 years. Informed consent provides for: (1) knowledge of the objectives and content of the study; (2) privacy and data security; (3) voluntary participation; (4) the right to refuse or skip any questions without consequences; and (5) details of a source who can follow up complaints or provide further information on the study. Ethics approval for the study was granted by the Amhara Public Health Institute.

5.5 Measurements, data analysis and interpretation

Quantitative data were pooled from treatment and comparison groups from the impact evaluation baseline survey and then analysed cross-sectionally (i.e., data on individual- and household-level characteristics and on child marriage outcomes were collected at a single point in time).

An important caveat to this analysis is that it is not possible to assess the impact of the PSNP on marriage attitudes, decisions and behaviours, or on pathways that lead to child marriage outcomes. This is because all households in the sample (i.e. both treatment and comparison groups) receive the PSNP. The main study in fact aims at assessing the impact of plus components in addition to the PSNP. Using baseline data, the research team conducted a **descriptive analysis to examine attitudes and perceptions, using quantitative data and qualitative interviews** on how PSNP may have affected these attitudes and decisions. This analysis builds on existing research that compared PSNP and non-PSNP households to suggest that PSNP affects child marriage (J. F. Hoddinott & Mekasha, 2017).

The research team examined characteristics of households in the sample and then summarized child marriage outcomes at both the household and individual level.

First, the team summarized household-level characteristics for the combined sample of households with women currently aged 20–24 years. Characteristics examined included gender, age, literacy and marital status of the household head; household size, share of children under 15 years relative to household size, share of elderly aged 65 and over relative to household size; total number of livestock owned 12 months before the survey took place, expressed in tropical livestock units (TLU) and logged; logged hectares of land owned by the household; number of months the household experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months; total number of non-farm business enterprises owned; and whether the PSNP household is a PW client (as opposed to a PDS client).

The quantitative analysis was performed using three groupings of households that contain or had recently contained a girl or woman currently aged 12–29 years: those with a female currently aged 12–24 years, aged 20–24 years and aged 20–29 years. The researchers then further disaggregated

households with girls/women in these age ranges into households with a female currently aged 12–29 years residing in the household; households that had contained a female currently aged 12–29 years who had been a household member but who had since left; and a combination of the two (households with a female currently aged 12–29 years who still resides in the household or who had left the household in the last five years).

The research team reported the incidence of child marriage at the household and individual level for the different samples constructed using current household membership/residency, as the following: (1) households with a female aged 12–29 years currently residing in the household; (2) households with a female aged 12–29 years who had left the household in the last five years; and (3) households with a female aged 12–29 years who currently lives in the household or who had left the household in the last five years.

Child marriage outcomes at the individual level were also summarized for females in each of the following age categories: 12–24 years, 20–24 years and 20–29 years. The purpose of this was to examine what proportion of females in each age category were married as a child and currently residing in the household; were married as a child and had left the household in the last five years; or fell under the two preceding outcomes combined. Child marriage outcomes at both the household and individual level were reported for all six samples illustrated. Finally, the various proportions were compared to the 2016 DHS data.

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data. This approach allowed the team to organize and structure the data into themes, and evaluation questions were developed to unpack the stories and important topics within the data. Two datasets were used for the analysis: (1) verbatim transcripts of the interviews conducted during the fieldwork; and (2) the analytic summaries for each household included in the in-depth interviews, summarizing the key findings of the interview as well as field notes and contextual observations captured by researchers during fieldwork. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in the local language (Amharic) before being translated into English.

The analysis of qualitative data was conducted in two phases. First, the research team conducted an in-depth review of the transcripts and summaries to become familiar with the data, develop an overall understanding of participants' narratives and begin to identify emerging themes in the data. Second, a coding framework was developed to code the data and identify patterns in key areas of interest to the programme and the study. A code book was created using a priori themes from the interview guides and supplemented with themes that emerged during data analysis (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Weber, 1990). The team also identified illustrative quotes in the transcripts to reflect key themes and findings. Transcripts were analysed using ATLAS.ti software. Initial coding structures were developed by the lead qualitative analyst and then shared with an additional two coders for recording purposes. In this way, the final coding structure was validated, ensuring consistency in the application of codes (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998).

6. RESULTS

Section 6.1 discusses the study sample characteristics, and then section 6.2 reports quantitative and qualitative findings related to the prevalence of child marriage, to common attitudes towards child marriage, and to underlying risk factors and drivers that influence common behaviours regarding child marriage in the study locations. Finally, section 6.3 discusses how the PSNP may reduce child marriage, examining the economic, education and attitudinal pathways presented in the conceptual framework (*see section 4*).

6.1 Sample characteristics and bivariate analyses

The main analyses were conducted on households containing any female aged 20–24 years (N=446), as members of this age group have already completed their exposure to child marriage. That is, analysis of the group that includes girls under 18 years of age may underestimate child marriage, since some currently unmarried girls may yet marry before their 18th birthday.

Table 1 reports baseline characteristics of households for the pulled sample and by type of participant (i.e., PDS and PW) and the statistical difference of the characteristics between PW and PDS. In the sample, 39 per cent of households were headed by a female, and the average age of the head of household was 51 years. Only 17 per cent of household heads were literate, and 59 per cent were married. On average, 1 in 3 household members are children under 15 years of age, 1 in 10 are elderly, and the average household size is approximately 5 members. Sixty-four per cent of households are PW clients, while the remainder are in receipt of PDS (not reported in the table). PDS and PW households have substantially different characteristics. Compared with to PW households, PDS households are more likely to be headed by females, have older household heads and higher mean ages, and have a lower proportion of children but a larger share of elderly members. On average, PDS households have more individuals with disabilities, elderly members and boys, and fewer members overall.

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of households (households with a female aged 20–24 years)

	All	PDS	PW	P-value of diff.
Head is female	0.39	0.47	0.35	0.013
Age of head	50.96	54.10	49.17	0.004
Head is literate	0.17	0.19	0.16	0.441
Head is married	0.59	0.48	0.66	0.000
Share of children (under 15 years) in the household	0.28	0.24	0.30	0.002
Share of elderly (65+ years) in the household	0.12	0.18	0.08	0.000
No. of people with disabilities	0.37	0.57	0.25	0.000
No. of adults aged 65+ years	0.35	0.57	0.22	0.000
No. of girls under 6 years	0.34	0.30	0.36	0.298
No. of boys under 6 years	0.35	0.29	0.39	0.076
No. of girls aged 6–17 years	0.62	0.56	0.65	0.330
No. of boys aged 6–17 years	0.68	0.47	0.81	0.000
Mean age of the household (years)	26.84	30.28	24.87	0.000
Household size	5.20	4.74	5.46	0.004
No. of rooms per person	0.32	0.37	0.29	0.000
Land owned by the household	0.53	0.52	0.53	0.785
No. of livestock owned one year ago (TLU)	0.69	0.72	0.67	0.697
No. of months of food insecurity	3.21	3.36	3.13	0.359
Total number of non-farm enterprises owned	0.15	0.12	0.17	0.193
<i>N</i>	446	284	162	

Note: P-values are reported from Wald tests on the equality of means of PDS and PW participants for each variable. Standard errors are clustered at the *kebele* level.

6.2 Setting the scene: A snapshot of child marriage dynamics in the Amhara region

6.2.1. Prevalence of child marriage in study locations

First, the prevalence of child marriage among girls, at both the household and individual level, is examined quantitatively. Table 2 reports prevalence figures for different samples. The first is the typical sample used for estimating child marriage statistics, which is composed by households that contained a female aged 20–24 years at the time of the survey. The second sample is obtained using the information from a specific module on females aged 12–24 years at the time of the survey, who had left the household in the last five years. From this sample, only those females aged 20–24 years who had left for marriage purposes are considered. The third sample combines these two samples (households that currently had a female member aged 20–24 years, and households that had had a female aged 20–24 years who had left the household in the last five years).

In addition, prevalence is also reported for the other two age ranges: 12–24 years and 20–29 years. It is important to stress that, while the 20–24 years age group is the one that best reflects child marriage prevalence, rates for the other two age groups are informative – though should be interpreted with caution. While the 12–24 years age group may underestimate prevalence (many girls may yet marry

before the age of 18), the 20–29 years age group will include older females who married as girls 10–15 years ago, thus representing an outdated picture.

At the household level (Table 2), among households that had a female aged 20–24 years at the time of the survey (N=446), 35.7 per cent currently contained a female who was married as a child (*column 2*). Examining the second sample (households that had a female aged 20–24 years who had left the household in the last five years; N=184), 16.3 per cent of households had experienced an adolescent female leaving the parental home to marry when she was under 18 years of age (*column 4*). Finally, examining the third sample (comprising of households with a female aged 20–24 years still living in the household and households with a female aged 20–24 years who had moved away for any reason; N=619), 31.3 per cent of households either currently contained a female who was married as a child or had experienced a female leaving for child marriage (*column 6*).²⁷

Table 2. Child marriage prevalence among females by age group (household-level)

Age of female at time of baseline survey	Household has female married as child (currently residing in the household)		Household has female married as child (left the household in last 5 years)		Household has female married as child (currently residing in or out of the household)	
	N (1)	Percentage (2)	N (3)	Percentage (4)	N (5)	Percentage (6)
12–24 years	1,915	0.146	411	0.338	2,154	0.194
20–24 years	446	0.357	184	0.163	619	0.313
20–29 years	933	0.437	244	0.172	1,133	0.395

In Table 3, individual-level prevalence of child marriage is examined and compared with prevalence calculated using the 2016 DHS data. Among females aged 12–24 years currently living in study sample households, 9.9 per cent were married as children (this age group includes many girls still at risk of exposure to child marriage through to their 18th birthday, and may thus underestimate the prevalence of child marriage; *column 2*). Among those females currently aged 20–24 years in study households, nearly one in three (32.2 per cent) was married as a child. Further, among those females currently aged 20–29 years in study households, 41.4 per cent were married as children. The higher prevalence in the sample containing older females suggests that prevalence of child marriage is declining.

Child marriage prevalence calculated using the DHS data for Amhara is higher than in the study sample, particularly for the age group 12–24 years (9.9 per cent in the study sample versus 42.7 per cent in Amhara, as calculated using the DHS data). Among females with completed exposure, 32.2 per cent of females aged 20–24 years in the study sample were married as children versus 43 per cent of those in Amhara; 41.4 per cent of females aged 20–29 years in the sample were married as children versus 53.1 per cent of those in Amhara. There are multiple possible explanations for this discrepancy in child marriage rates, including any or all of the following. First, the study data cover only four *woredas*, whereas the DHS data cover many more and are representative of the entire region. As previously explained, the incidence of child marriage across Amhara varies considerably, with evidence of child marriage ‘hot spots’ scattered in the region (*see section 2.1.2*). If the *woredas* in the study sample contained none of these hot spots, this could also explain the lower prevalence rates in

²⁷ Sample sizes in columns 1 and 3 do not sum to N in column 5 as households may be represented in both columns 1 and 3 (i.e., the household currently contains a female in the age range and the household also had a female in the age range leave the household in the last five years).

the sample. Second, the study sample includes only PSNP clients, who are poorer on average than the overall population in Amhara, which could explain the discrepancy were the incidence of child marriage higher among better-off households. Third, compared with DHS samples, the study sample includes a larger number of PDS households, which generally have more elderly members and/or labour constraints and may therefore have increased incentives to retain adolescent girls to perform domestic and productive work. This is supported by the figures in Table 4, which show how child marriage prevalence is statistically larger among PW households compared with PDS households. Finally, these lower rates revealed by the study could, in part, result from PSNP effects to date on delaying child marriage.

Table 3 also reports the incidence of females who had left study households for marriage reasons is examined in column 4. Among these females, 52.9 per cent of those aged 12–24 years had specifically left the household for child marriage reasons (including the portion of the sample who could have left already married, having married as a child).²⁸ Among those aged 20–24 years, 17.8 per cent had left the household to marry while still a child.

Table 3. Child marriage prevalence among females by age group (individual level)

Age of female at time of baseline survey	Females married as child (currently residing in the household)		Females married as child (left household in last 5 years)		Females married as child (DHS data)	
	N (1)	Percentage (2)	N (3)	Percentage (4)	N (5)	Percentage (6)
12–24 years	2,494	0.099	278	0.52.9	949	0.427
20–24 years	466	0.322	129	0.178	277	0.430
20–29 years	982	0.414	-	-	594	0.531

²⁸ A higher percentage of females than reported may have been married as children *before* leaving the household, but information is available only on the reason why females had left the household, and not also on whether they had married as a child *before* leaving.

Table 4. Child marriage prevalence by type of support (females aged 20–24 years)

	All	PDS	PW	P-value of diff.
Household level				
Household has female married as child (currently residing in the household)	0.314	0.250	0.349	0.033
Household has female married as child (left the household in last 5 years)	0.255	0.226	0.274	0.549
Household has female married as child (currently residing in or out of the household)	0.313	0.249	0.353	0.010
Individual level				
Females married as child (currently residing in the household)	0.322	0.280	0.346	0.144
Females married as child (left the household in last 5 years)	0.178	0.118	0.218	0.1279
Females married as child (currently residing in or out of the household)	0.291	0.242	0.319	0.0442

Note: P-values are reported from Wald tests on the equality of means of PDS and PW participants for each variable. Standard errors are clustered at the *kebele* level for the analysis at the household level, and at the household level for the analysis at the individual level.

In the qualitative research, respondents were asked about the perceived prevalence of child marriage in their communities. In particular, respondents were asked about the typical age at which girls and boys marry, and whether they perceived a problem with girls marrying in adolescence or younger and, if so, why. In line with the quantitative findings, respondents highlighted a decline in child marriage rates in recent years due to attitudinal shifts, facilitated in part by greater community awareness of both legal penalties and the harmful effects of child marriage on girls' development and future opportunities (see section 6.3.2).²⁹ In Libo Kemkem *woreda* in particular (specifically Shemo *kebele*), several girls and their parents reported a rising marriage age (18+ years), which was often attributed to penalization of child marriage and the greater value placed upon girls' education.

Nevertheless, despite efforts to reduce child marriage in the Amhara region, the practice remains a major concern in the Dewa Chefa and Libo Kemkem *woredas*.³⁰ Respondents in qualitative interviews in both *woredas* reported that the common age for girls to marry is between 13 and 17 years, with most girls marrying at 15 years of age. According to the qualitative data, boys typically marry in their twenties.

"In this community, most girls get married when they are 15 years old."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Early marriage is a major concern in our area. We are engaged to protect early marriage and even terminate it when it happens and provide awareness creation. Many parents are engaged in early marriage while their daughters are 11 or 12 years of age. We had terminated three weddings last year because the brides were underage."

²⁹ According to study respondents, legal penalties may involve fines and/or imprisonment for parents and/or individuals who solicit marriage proposals.

³⁰ Interview questions and responses referred to the term 'early marriage' and translations of the interview transcripts reflect this terminology; the main text of the report, including the analysis, refers instead to 'child marriage', as per UNICEF practice.

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

“Unlike girls, who are forced to marry before the age of 18, most boys get married between the ages of 19 and 29 years.”

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

“This is our main challenge in the woreda, because the community [keeps being engaged] in a harmful cultural practice and also does not have awareness ... girls are sometimes married at 10 years of age.”

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Dewa Chefa

Moreover, in some communities, very young girls (in some cases, as young as 6, 7 or 8 years of age) are reportedly being married in accordance with local customs and the socially accepted marriage age of their village (locally described as *ankelba* or *dogobe*).

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: “In this community, some girls get married even when they are at the age of ‘*ankelba*’ or ‘*dogobe*’.”

Interviewer: “What do you mean by ‘*ankelba*’ and ‘*dogobe*’?”

Parent: “It means the girls get married even when they are at an ‘infant age’. That means when they are at the age of 8, 9, 12 years old.”

It is unclear whether such ‘marriages’ among very young girls take a purely ceremonial form, with girls remaining in their parental home until they reach puberty, or whether they are expected to immediately move in with the groom’s family. There is some indication that very young girls are not expected to leave their parental home when they enter into marriage, but rather leave home later, with important positive implications for their health and schooling outcomes.

“For example, I was married when I was 6 years old. First there was a kinship formation and the next year I was formally married. When I turned 12, I moved to live in my own house, with my husband, leading my own life.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

While child marriage is still common, both parents and girls/young women alike responded that they do not necessarily view the practice in a positive light. In particular, young women who were married as children perceive child marriage as a violation of their rights and an experience that has diminished their opportunities for education and self-development. This aspect is further discussed in section 6.2.2.

“In our culture a girl can be given for marriage even when she is 7 years of age. But we say that girls are considered physically and mentally ready for marriage when they turn 14 or 15 years of age.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: “Did you feel this was a good age for you to be married?”

Married girl, Dewa Chefa: “I didn’t think it was a good age. I wanted to stay unmarried for longer because I didn’t see any good thing in it. Even I had a plan to continue my education but unfortunately my family strongly decided on the issue.”

“We want to get enrolled and continue our education and be successful. But our fathers never allow this and force us to get married and become mothers early.”

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: “What would have happened if you had insisted on waiting to get married at a later age?”

Married girl, Libo Kemkem: “I would have been happy, I would have completed my education and I could have married one I would love.”

6.2.2. Attitudes, knowledge and perceptions regarding child marriage

6.2.2.1. Attitudes and perceptions

Next, respondents’ attitudes towards child marriage are examined, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data. Table 5 reports the indicators for respondents’ views of the ideal age for females to marry and of norms in their community, for all households in the study (column 1) and for the restricted sample of households with a female aged 20–24 years (column 2). Overall, the indicators are very similar for the two groups. The average age reported as the ideal age a girl should marry is 16.6 years – below the legal marriage age. Further, 60 per cent of all respondents (56 per cent of households with a female aged 20–24 years) thought that girls should marry before the age of 18. A much smaller proportion, only 8 per cent, of all respondents (4 per cent of households with a female aged 20–24 years) thought girls should marry before the age of 15. The typical age at which adolescent females in the community are said to marry is in line with the age reported as the ideal age for marriage. Similarly, the proportion of females said to marry before the age of 18 is in line with the reported ideal marriage age.

Table 5. Ideal age for marriage (all households)

	All households	Households with a female aged 20–24 years
	Mean (1)	Mean (2)
Ideal age a girl should marry	16.60	16.73
Ideal age a girl should marry: Under 18 years	0.60	0.56
Ideal age a girl should marry: Under 15 years	0.08	0.04
Age at which females usually marry in this community	16.63	16.77
In this community, females usually marry before 18 years of age	0.60	0.57
In this community, females usually marry before 15 years of age	0.10	0.10
<i>N</i>	5,355	536

Table 6 reports the reasons for reporting a certain ideal age for marriage (column 1), by those who reported the ideal age as over 18 years (column 2) and those who reported it as under 18 years (column 3), and tests which reasons prevail for reporting over or under 18 years as the ideal age for marriage (column 4).³¹ Overall, the most commonly reported reasons are physical maturity (56 per cent) and mental maturity (31 per cent), followed by alignment with the age at which everyone marries (26 per cent). Those respondents reporting physical and mental maturity as reasons for their reported ideal age

³¹ This question allowed the respondent to report up to three reasons.

for marriage were more likely to report the ideal age as over 18 years. Conversely, those reporting the reason as alignment with the age at which everyone marries were more likely to report the ideal age as under 18 years (33 per cent) than over 18 years (17 per cent). The legal age is reported as a reason almost exclusively by those respondents who reported the ideal age as over 18 years (14 per cent versus 1 per cent).

Table 6. Reasons for ideal marriage age for females (all households)

Reason	All	Ideal age reported as over 18	Ideal age reported as under 18	P-value of diff.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Everyone marries at this age	0.26	0.17	0.33	0.000
Will have finished desired schooling	0.16	0.19	0.14	0.013
Will be physically mature enough	0.56	0.66	0.49	0.000
Will be mentally mature enough	0.31	0.42	0.24	0.000
Will be time to start having children	0.19	0.20	0.19	0.440
To be financially independent	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.057
It is the age expected by the community	0.09	0.07	0.11	0.002
It is encouraged by religion	0.07	0.04	0.09	0.001
It is the legal age	0.06	0.14	0.01	0.000
To avoid premarital sexual relationships	0.06	0.02	0.09	0.000
No reason	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.489
N	5,361	2,154	3,197	

Note: P-values are reported from Wald tests on the equality of means of respondents citing ideal age for marriage as over and under 18 years for each variable. Standard errors are clustered at the *kebele* level.

Table 7 further examines attitudes regarding various statements about female adolescents and marriage decisions and motivating factors. Overall, there appears to be heterogeneity in respondents' answers, and opinions on social norms and financial and physical security are areas that divided respondents. Responses were disaggregated by the reported ideal marriage age for girls (under 18 versus 18 and over). Respondents who indicated the ideal age for marriage as under 18 years were more likely to agree with statements that indicated the main reasons to be associated with social norms. Respondents who indicated the ideal age of marriage over 18 instead were more likely to agree with statements that put girls wellbeing and autonomy as main factors related to marriage.

Table 7. Agreement with statements related to marriage of females, by reported ideal age for marriage (all households)

Statement	All	Ideal age reported as 18 and over	Ideal age reported as under 18	P-value of diff.
Most people in this community expect girls to marry before the age of 18	0.62	0.41	0.76	0.000
Marrying avoids social stigma	0.50	0.38	0.59	0.000
If girls do not get married early, their families will not be respected in the community	0.52	0.40	0.60	0.000
Marrying girls at a young age can help provide them security	0.63	0.55	0.69	0.000
Marrying girls young can help prevent sexual violence, assault and harassment	0.62	0.49	0.70	0.000
Girls should have a say in whether or not they want to marry	0.72	0.83	0.65	0.000
Girls should have a say about whom they want to marry	0.71	0.84	0.63	0.000
Marriage of girls under 18 years sometimes happens for financial reasons	0.53	0.52	0.53	0.763
Marriage of girls under 18 years mostly happens for financial reasons	0.60	0.60	0.59	0.677
Unmarried girls should have access to contraception/family planning services	0.50	0.54	0.48	0.024
Married girls should have access to contraception/family planning services	0.72	0.78	0.67	0.000
N	5,362	2,154	3,198	

Note: P-values are reported from Wald tests on the equality of means of child marriage and non-child marriage households for each variable. Standard errors are clustered at the *kebele* level. 'Agreement' as reported in this table refers to all those who indicated that they 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement.

Qualitative research was used to further unpack the quantitative results, by examining the expectations of adolescent girls and their parents concerning the appropriate age of marriage. Respondents were also asked when (at what age) a girl or boy is considered physically and mentally ready for marriage in their community. The qualitative data generally correspond with the quantitative findings: Most of the sample reported that the ideal marriage age for girls is between 15 and 18 years of age.

Girls were generally described as being ready for marriage once they had begun to show physical signs of puberty (i.e., enlarged breasts, menstruation) and an interest in the opposite sex. Such attitudes towards marriage are shaped by social and gender norms that emphasize the importance of the future roles and reproductive functions that girls are expected to embody as wives and mothers.

"She [is ready] when she starts seeing menstruation and she has the ability to become pregnant."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa: "When she turns 10 years of age, we say she is ready."

Interviewer: "How do you reach this conclusion?"

Parent: "We don't see anything [special], except [her] breasts grow bigger."

Some respondents, primarily females who were married at a young age, associated girls' readiness for marriage with psychological maturity and confidence to perform reproductive and domestic duties.

"Our experience tells us that a girl is ready physically and mentally for marriage at 15 years of age. At this age the girl usually prepares herself by owning her own assets, [is] capable of taking care of herself, being healthy, and psychologically ready for marriage. This gives her the confidence to form her family."

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

Sociocultural (and gender-related) values emphasizing the importance of sexual purity and girls' chastity, often linked to religious customs, were cited as underlying factors informing attitudes towards child marriage. Girls' sexuality is closely linked to family honour; marriage is therefore viewed as a means of preserving a girl's virginity while maintaining her safety and social standing in the community (and that of her family). Several parents in qualitative interviews (9 per cent in the quantitative data) also explained their desire to marry daughters quickly in the context of preventing premarital sexual activity (and subsequent familial shame and various risks for daughters). Linked to these factors, interpretations of Islam and sharia law also often determine marriage age in some communities. According to community interpretations of sharia law, girls as young as 8 years of age may be considered ready for marriage.

"Our culture also forces us to let her get married at that age [15 years] because a girl might be exposed to unnecessary relationship with a male."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"The husband beats and divorces her if she is not a virgin. If the girl is a virgin, they stay together and pursue their life. People need girls to get married early because of this. They fear that she might lose her virginity if she stays unmarried."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"Sharia says don't wait until a girl becomes late for marriage. This is because she may start a business [engage in sexual activity] with a male outside of marriage and she may have a baby."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: "In this community, when is a girl considered physically and mentally ready for marriage?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "According to the sharia, the age is 8 years."

Interviewer: "When you sold [your daughter] at the age of 8 ... do you think that her body was capable of being married?"

Parent: "Yes. She can be capable. If she is less than 7 years, we don't say ok.... Because it is according to sharia: if a girl reaches the mentioned age, she starts to look out for the male. So, before she does it, we will let her marry."

In some contexts, marriage readiness is indicated not by age but by whether or not a girl attends school, and if and when her family receives a marriage proposal (referred to locally as *lejihn le lije*).³² For example, if a girl is not enrolled in school, she may be considered ready for marriage.

“She has to attend her education first and after that, she can marry. Unless the parents are very poor, they give priority to education.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: “In your opinion, what is the right age for a girl to marry?”

Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa: “If someone asks her family for marriage, they sell her. We don’t count age.”

“‘Nesib’ means culturally there are occasions when girls are requested for marriage.... Unless a chance or fortune for marriage comes for her, can a girl go for marriage? That happens only if the boy requests her for marriage. You know, without any requests, it’s impossible to marry.... We worry about our female children and we do not want them to grow up with us because they may experience bad behaviours due to lack of education. We want them to be engaged or to marry very soon.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

The study also found that marrying females at a later age than is socially acceptable in the community may incur social sanctions and place families, and girls in particular, at risk of social stigma, gossip and potential discrimination from others in their social group. Similarly, for some girls, being married is perceived as socially desirable, and an important avenue through which girls can claim adult status in the community and respect from community elders.

“People say prostitute and galemota [tramp] if a girl gets married at a later age. People say nothing if a boy gets married at a later age.”

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

“If she is over 20 years of age, people think that she has some health problem. They say that if she has no problem, she would have been married and have a child [by now].”

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

“When you get married younger, adults respect you.”

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

Respondents were also asked what age is considered the ideal age for boys in their community to marry, and why. Findings revealed important gender differences. The general consensus is that boys can/should be older when they marry, with most respondents citing between 18 and 30 years as the appropriate age for boys to marry. Boys are typically considered ready to marry when they have acquired certain wealth and assets and can support their families financially, in line with common gender norms that define men’s primary role as economic provider. Whereas girls are typically married at a certain age, boys have more freedom to decide when they will marry based on their personal preferences and choice.

³² This translates as ‘allow me your daughter to my boy’, which is a way of asking for a girl’s hand in marriage in the local culture.

"A boy younger than 18 years cannot support his family."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: "What is considered to be the ideal age to get married for boys? Why?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa: "It should be at the age of 20. If he gets married at the age of 20, he may give birth to children; thus, he needs to know how to raise his children and learn how to manage his family. If he gets married at the age of 20, he won't be confused and face challenges.... He can easily work, plough on his land or plant and protect his chat [a local crop]."

Interviewer: "At what age do most girls get married in this community?"

Married girl, Libo Kemkem: "At 15 years of age."

Interviewer: "At what age do most boys get married in this community?"

Married girl: "Boys can [get married] at every age as they wish."

Importantly, while boys are generally not as vulnerable to child marriage as girls, socio-economic factors such as family wealth or the loss of a parent (typically the father) can heighten boys' exposure to child marriage.

"If he has wealth he may get married at 15 years, but if he does not have wealth he may wait until he reaches 20 years of age."

– Parent of married girl, Libo Kemkem

"Families who have better life and [are] wealthy may [marry early] their son for the sake of maintaining resources such as land."

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

"In our community, a boy who does not have brothers, who is misbehaving, or who grew up with his mother without any discipline may [be pressured into] marrying at the age of 18 or even at the age 17, if he is ready. [But] the boy who grew up with his father does not get permission to marry before he turns 20."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Finally, perceptions of and attitudes towards the practice of child marriage seem not to differ substantively between girls/young women and their parents. This is unsurprising given that attitudes and norms related to marriage and gender are often the result of upbringing, and children typically observe and internalize the attitudes of their parents by demonstrating similar outlooks on marriage. The qualitative research was unable to establish how parental education may shape parents' attitudes towards (and potential disapproval of) child marriage.

6.2.2.2 Knowledge of child marriage laws

Next, the main respondents in all households were asked about their knowledge of child marriage laws in Ethiopia. According to quantitative data, only 8 per cent of respondents said they were aware of a legal marriage age for girls and boys (Table 8). Among those who reported that there is a legal marriage age for girls (either for girls only or for girls and boys; N=1,371), 80 per cent correctly identified the legal age for girls. Further, this rose to 93 per cent among respondents who reported the ideal marriage age as over 18 years versus 61 per cent among respondents who reported the ideal age as under 18

years. While this difference is significant at $p < .01$, it is worth highlighting that a large proportion of people who knew the legal marriage age for girls nevertheless reported the ideal age for marriage as under 18 years. This suggests that, while important, knowledge of the law alone is not a sufficient condition/element for decreasing prevalence of child marriage.

The proportion of respondents able to correctly identify the legal age of marriage for boys is even lower (32 per cent). Such a low level of knowledge of the legal marriage age for boys is unsurprising given that efforts to improve community knowledge and awareness of marriage laws have predominantly focused on girls, owing to their greater vulnerability to child marriage and higher prevalence.

Table 8. Knowledge of child marriage laws, by reported ideal age for marriage (all households)

Knowledge	N	All	Ideal age reported as over 18	Ideal age reported as under 18	P-value of diff.
Respondent knows there is a legal marriage age for girls and boys	5,362	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.354
Respondent knows the legal marriage age for girls	1,371	0.80	0.93	0.61	0.000
Respondent knows the legal marriage age for boys	439	0.32	0.34	0.31	0.672

Note: P-values are reported from Wald tests on the equality of means of respondents citing ideal age for marriage as over and under 18 years for each variable. Standard errors are clustered at the *kebele* level.

Qualitative research confirms the quantitative findings related to legal literacy. Overall, respondents in qualitative interviews generally demonstrated a weak awareness of the legal age of marriage in Ethiopia. Many respondents had never heard of the legal marriage age, and some simply assumed it was the socially accepted age of marriage in their village (often 15 or 16 years of age). Those who had accurate knowledge of the legal age of marriage explained that it was often simply ignored by people in their community, despite their awareness of legal penalties for practising child marriage. While not explicitly mentioned by respondents, this may be partly explained by the context, in which social costs of delayed marriage may outweigh legal sanctions against child marriage (or the probability of their imposition). Section 6.3.2 reveals, however, that when properly enforced, laws and legal penalties have positive effects on delaying or cancelling marriage requests.

“The ideal age to get married for girls is 15 years old.... Below this, now days it is illegal.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“The community has awareness about the ideal age of marriage. The legal age for marriage is 18 years and more.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: “Do you think the communities have awareness about the right age to get married?”

Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Dewa Chefa: “Yes, they know. That is why they practise early marriage in secret. If they did not know it, they may practise it ‘naked’ [in the open]. They know the regulations very well.”

"Most parents who are illiterate marry their daughter at the age of 11 or 12 years old by force. But the legal age for marriage is 18 years old."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

6.2.2.3 Knowledge of consequences of child marriage

While respondents may have attitudes supportive of child marriage, they often demonstrated a strong understanding of the negative impacts of child marriage and associated sexual debut on girls' well-being. For example, respondents overwhelmingly cited sexual and reproductive health (SRH) complications experienced by young married girls, from painful intercourse to pregnancy at an early age, characterized by obstructed labour, fistula, haemorrhaging, stillbirth and/or maternal death. Marriage to an older man heightens a girl's risk of contracting STIs and also diminishes her ability to assert control over sexual activity or family planning. Childbirth at an early age is also understood to carry health risks for the infants born to young mothers, resulting in high rates of child malnutrition and even mortality.

"There is a problem like death during childbirth, poor health, gemigna [fistula] during sexual intercourse, dropping out from school, being displaced to other home, having disagreements with parents and husband. Girl who marries early may feel sad when she sees her friends going to school. They are also exposed to beating by their husbands."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

"There is a problem like complication during pregnancy, she may die during delivery and she may commit suicide because she may lack knowledge on how to look after her children when she gets married too early."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Girls getting married early have endured skinny babies. I tell you this from my observation."

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

All interviewed girls/women who had married young described domestic life in a child marriage as a source of grief and mental anguish for girls: Young brides may be subjected to poor or abusive treatment by their new families/husbands, burdened by overwhelming household and childcare responsibilities, and at times unable to move freely without their husband's supervision. Depression and suicide were frequently mentioned, and girls were said to habitually return to the parental home or end the marriage.

"If a girl is married, she is not allowed to move alone from place to place by her husband. Also, I dropped out from school when I got married."

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

"One girl, her age is 13 years old.... Her family married her by force [to a] 70 years old man. She became mentally ill as a result."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Therefore, if a boy who marries a very little girl what do you think may happen to her? If she marries at the age of 9 or 10, she suffers a lot, she loses her soul, and she loses her appetite and even if she eats something, she feels discomfort. She does not sleep at night. You know

that sleeping is [important for being] healthy.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

It was also well understood by respondents in the study that child marriage and childbearing can lead to diminished opportunities for girls by disrupting their schooling and restricting their mobility (a result of familial control and childcare/domestic responsibilities), thereby limiting their earning potential. Such limitations can perpetuate ‘poverty traps’, as women are unable to contribute financially to either the household or their individual welfare. Testimonials from girls married as children confirm these adverse effects on their capabilities and opportunities for development.

“My daughter dropped out of school. She was Grade 4 when she got married, she become responsible for house and children while she was a child. She could not play with her peers.”

– Parent of married girl, Libo Kemkem

“No, I do not go to school. After all, I can’t even imagine getting enrolled in school. Of course, I was only registered to start first grade and left due to marriage. But if it is the will of God, I wish one day I get the opportunity to get enrolled.”

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

“I don’t have economic security and I am [not] allowed to go out and work outside my home in the labour market. When I want to visit my family, I have to go with my husband.”

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

These findings indicate that social expectations and cultural marital norms exert substantive influence over people’s attitudes towards child marriage, making them difficult to avoid or overcome, despite awareness of the risks and negative impacts of child marriage.

6.2.3. Child marriage decision-making dynamics

To understand further the drivers that shape people’s behaviour towards child marriage, the research team assessed child marriage decision-making dynamics and actors. Respondents were asked which household members decide when (at what age) a girl is ready to marry, and whether girls and boys have any input to the decision, including the ability to refuse marriage proposals. The team also sought to identify the underlying reasons leading to decisions to arrange marriages for children, and factors that may improve families’ choices and agency in delaying or cancelling proposed child marriages. Overall, the pathways of marital decision-making are complex and can involve various actors; societal and cultural norms exert strong pressures on parents to practise child marriage, while gender norms and inequalities limit the potential power of girls to influence, and voice their choices about, marriage-related decisions. These findings are examined in detail below.

Qualitative responses show that, overall, arranged marriage remains the customary norm in the study locations, with the groom and his family typically initiating such a marriage. A girl’s parents will tend to negotiate the marriage with the groom’s family, with the girl often only informed after the decision to move forward with the marriage has already been made.

“There is arranged marriage in this community. Parents arrange the husband [for their daughter] and they force her to marry him.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“The parents of both sides, particularly fathers, would agree to arrange the marriage without the knowledge of their children. A boy and a girl should keep or [be] forced to keep the parent’s consensus and get married when they reach 15 years.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“Some family marry their daughter, below 18 years old, secretly. For example, last time a girl, 13, was arranged to get married with a man, about 70, but she refused the wedding and when she travels alone to run away from the examination before the marriage, she was sick. The girls do not know what is happening.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

The quantitative data confirm the qualitative findings regarding attitudes about who should make marriage decisions (Table 9). Moreover, there is consistency in responses related to who actually makes decisions and ideals around who *should* be making marriage decisions. When asked about who makes marriage decisions *in practice* and then about who, in their opinion, *should* make marriage decisions, the majority of respondents reported that parents – either together or individually – are those who lead decisions about when females marry (70.4 per cent of respondents) and whom they marry (61.7 per cent).³³ A minority of respondents think that it is the female who is getting married who should make decisions about when to marry (29.5 per cent of respondents) and whom to marry (38.1 per cent), either alone (column 4) or in consultation with her parents (column 5). Answers around who *should* make marriage decisions closely mirror those about who *in practice* makes the decisions: most respondents report that only parents should make decisions about when females marry (67.5 per cent of respondents) and to whom (58 per cent). Interestingly, the figures suggest that respondents believe females are given more voice – whether deciding alone or with their parents – about whom to marry (38.1 per cent of respondents) than at what age to marry (29.5 per cent).

Table 9. Decision-making about marriage of females (all households)

	Father alone (1)	Mother alone (2)	Parents together (3)	Female who is getting married (4)	Parents and the female who is getting married (5)
Who decides at what age a female in this household should marry?	0.073	0.044	0.587	0.181	0.114
In your opinion, who should decide at what age a female should marry?	0.058	0.013	0.604	0.191	0.133
Who decides at what age a female in this community should marry?	0.065	0.008	0.614	0.198	0.114
Who decides whom a female in this household marries?	0.062	0.030	0.525	0.223	0.158
In your opinion, who do you think should decide whom a female marries?	0.051	0.008	0.521	0.240	0.177

³³ Figures obtained by adding columns 1, 2 and 3.

Similarly, in the qualitative data it emerges that parents are primarily viewed as the key (or, often, the only) decision makers regarding the marriage of females, but fathers – as the typical head of household – are those who generally have the final say on a marriage proposal.

“The boy sends elders to her parents for negotiation and discussion, after parents discuss and accept, they set the wedding day and they get married.”

– Parents of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“Parents usually decide when a girl is ready to get married.

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“When we are gathered for honouring the day together, the boy’s father asks the girl’s father if he would give his daughter for marriage. When he agrees they proceed with the engagement.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

In some communities, according to the qualitative data, mothers can veto marriage decisions; women typically have limited influence over marriage decisions, however. Even when mothers may prefer that their children do not marry, they rarely contest their husband’s choices and preferences, indicating a possible fear of backlash in the form of marital conflict or violence. In Dewa Chefa, in particular, more mothers reported complete deference to their husband’s wishes regarding the marriage of daughters.

Interviewer: “Who decides when a male should be married in your household?”

Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: “Mother; because mothers think more for their boy, unless he is married, he may go away [leave the family] and mother wants her son to be around her. Fathers think about girls. Even if her mother refuses, her father can still decide on the girl’s marriage.”

“Of two decision makers the father makes the final decision. Our mothers are soft hearted, feel pity for their daughters, but she encourages the girl to accept decision.”

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

“It is the leader of the household or the father who decides this. Once my husband decides this I cannot contradict what he decides because I am his wife. How can I deny accepting my husband’s decision?”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Relatives of the prospective bride and groom, and community elders sometimes have influence over parental decisions to marry a girl.³⁴

“The fathers are usually deciding this kind of arrangement. Besides, Qadi [religious leader] in the community has a tremendous influence. If a father of a boy or a girl has died, the immediate relatives from father’s and mother’s side are allowed to decide.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

³⁴ As respondents were asked to report only the household’s main decision maker in relation to the marriage of females, the quantitative data show only a very small proportion of households where other relatives are the main actors in the decision process. On the other hand, the qualitative data allowed nuances of the decision-making dynamics to be captured.

"Sometimes relatives may suggest to parents if the proposed husband is a good opportunity or a bad one based on the wealth he owns."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Girls, on the other hand, are rarely involved in marriage initiation and have limited say and involvement in marriage negotiations. As previously mentioned, the majority of girls first hear of their own engagement only once it has already been agreed, and have very limited choice as to whether and whom to marry. In the qualitative interviews, girls/women (including those who were married as children) and their parents expressed similar outlooks regarding girls' limited agency to express their marriage preferences.

Interviewer: "Can you decide when and who to marry in your future?"

Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "I do not; it is the decision of my parents."

"My father decides this. I couldn't say any word to him. Our culture rules us to obey our fathers and his decision."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

"Girls to be married have no input on the decision because when we marry her we bless her."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: "Did she have an input in the deciding process?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa: "No, she just listens while we talk."

Interviewer: "You didn't consider her consent?"

Parent of married girl, Dewa Chefa: "We didn't need her consent. When she turned 15 years old, she should get married."

"I don't know exactly why our families do this, but they force us [unwillingly] to get married earlier than otherwise even when we are underage. Majority of girls in our locality engage in marriage without our will. When I got married even, I did not know who would become my husband and simply my family decided on my behalf and without my consent. I engaged in marriage two times and each time my family decided on the issue without my involvement."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

In some cases, girls were described as having the ability to express their intentions regarding marriage, but they frequently lacked the agency required to carry them out. As a result, girls were often pressured and/or convinced by their parents (sometimes bordering on coercion and emotional manipulation) to marry, and they largely acquiesced even if marriage was not their choice. Many girls/women interviewed mentioned that marriage is typically 'forced upon' girls. It also emerged from the qualitative interviews that girls without fathers (or those living with stepfathers) were more likely to have limited voice and agency, and be forced to marry as children. Further research is needed to understand why this is the case.

"Parents usually decide when a girl is ready to get married. For example, when I get married my parents asked about my preference. And I refused to get married early. But my stepfather said we cannot accept your decision. They forced me to marry early."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

Married girl, Libo Kemkem: "I got married at the age of 16 years old."

Interviewer: "How was the decision made to marry you at that time?"

"Married girl: "My stepfather does not want me to live with them and to support me. He argues with my mother always. He wants to marry me early. Both my mother and my stepfather decide to marry me by force. Then I disappeared from home and I went to my aunt's house for 3 days. My mother cried and she begged me to return home and I decided to get married early to make my mother happy and to make her life peaceful. My mother received 3,000 birr for the bride price before I got married."

"Actually, I was married last year, I argued with my parents not to marry me, but they told me that my husband will support my mother and 'please just say ok to the marriage and make us happy'. In addition, my uncle advised me to agree with my parents, and then I agreed not to violate my uncle's advice and words."

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: "Can you explain how parents deny their children a choice and force them to marry?"

Married girl, Dewa Chefa: "What parents do is they first politely try to convince their children by saying, do not be worried, we will not force you and we really care about you. Feel free to say no, as this is your right, which is called 'mashibelbel' locally. They try their best to convince their child to accept their request for marriage. Most of the time the child will be convinced. But if the child insists on refusing, they finally arrange the wedding, hiding the child and finally they marry the child by force."

At the same time, several respondents cited girls choosing to marry as children and either eloping or asserting themselves beyond their parents' control. These marriages, often described as being based on love, may be interpreted as a direct demonstration of girls' autonomy in marital decision-making (McDougal et al., 2018).

"Girls themselves want to marry. Most of the time families do not force them. The girls themselves insist on getting married when they need."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"Girls themselves fall in love and go away with males sometimes earlier than 15. In that case, we cannot do anything except letting her go. Nevertheless, family never lets a girl before 15 years of age by their own motive."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Turning to boys, respondents – girls, in particular – perceived boys as having greater agency and control over marriage decisions, including when and whom to marry. This is not a universal advantage, however: Boys without parents seem to have less bargaining power over marriage decisions, while education appears to be an important protective factor for boys, enabling them to delay marriage until their schooling is complete.

"Boys have much more control. Even when his parents find a potential wife, he can ultimately decide. He can also initiate a proposal through elders."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: "Who decides the boy is ready to get married?"

Married girl, Libo Kemkem: "He decides by himself. If he is a student, he can say 'I will get married when I finish my education'. He can decide when he is ready to get married and which girl he wants to marry."

"Sometimes, even when the boy does not want to get married, parents force their son to marry early. For example, our neighbour married their [adopted] son by force to a girl.... The boy has no parents and his host family married him to a girl who has no family and her age was less than 18 year. After some months he spurned his wife."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Finally, it appears that both parents and girls have limited capacity to refuse marriage proposals for several reasons. For parents, social pressures and cultural marital norms are difficult to overcome, and may restrict them from perceiving alternative choices regarding child marriage. In this way, parents may believe they have no voice or agency to delay or cancel marriage proposals. As previously discussed, parents interviewed expressed fear of backlash in the form of social stigma and alienation, as well as concerns over the potential loss of family honour associated with delayed marriage. Delaying and/or cancelling marriage proposals may also compromise a daughter's future marital prospects, which was expressed as another concern for parents.

"When a man asks the girl for a marriage [parents] believe that they have to give her. Because they fear, if they refuse and lose that chance, they may not get someone to ask them again. That is why all families sell us immediately to a person who asks them first. Even in early ... ages [13 years old]."

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

"They can [refuse]. But I don't know anyone who refused the proposal. If [family] refuses, no one asks girl again for marriage."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"They engage in early marriage for the purpose of prosperity. Parents do not want to miss the chance if a boy is rich. They fear when she grows up, she will leave the family to make kinship [gitegit] with that family, and therefore they propose to marry her when she is still too young."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

The researchers also found that the initiation of marriage by the groom's family, combined with economic incentives (i.e., receipt of *macha berr*), can expose the girl's parents to social pressures to accept and move forward with a marriage proposal.³⁵ According to traditional customs, the groom's family's expenses must be repaid if the girl breaks the engagement, which can be a barrier for poorer families in delaying marriage or cancelling marriage proposals.

"If the bride or a girl wants to refuse marrying the boy, the cost that his family has spent has to be repaid through the mediating of elders in the community [*kaadi*] but if the boy does not want to marry, he can leave without any problem."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

³⁵ *Macha berr* is a local term used to denote the practice of bride price or bridewealth.

With regard to girls' ability to refuse marriage, although some girls reported having the ability to voice their refusal of a marriage offer, in practice girls' refusals are often ignored and the marriage enforced. Girls' lack of agency appears to be due to the strict social constraints placed on girls, compounded by their vulnerability to violence and reliance on marriage as a means of protection and support.

"Yes, they can refuse but most families can't accept that, especially for girls it's difficult to refuse but boys could refuse."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"Even if she doesn't want the marriage, her father sells her unwillingly by using physical punishment on her."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"For example, the boy asks her [the girl] and waits for her response. If she is not willing, he may force her or may rape her."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Sometimes they discuss the issue with their sisters and aunts and they sometimes refuse to be married. Unfortunately, most of the time their refusal is denied and girl will be forced by the parents to marry."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

Several respondents – primarily parents – stressed, however, that girls cannot be forced to marry and have the right to refuse proposals (this does not mean, though, that parents do not first seek to arrange daughters' marriages) and that some girls had been able to voice and realize the decision not to marry. In such cases, girls' psychological empowerment (self-efficacy, self-esteem, aspirations) and skills in expressing their choice not to marry (usually associated with education and access to support from teachers and peers) were found to be effective in resisting marriage. Appreciation of and support for girls' continued education was the most commonly noted reason for delaying marriage. This is further discussed in section 6.3.2.

"I know one girl in our community, who refused to be married. She was very young and Grade 8 student. Her parents treated her as if they respect her refusal. However, later on, they had forced her to get married after processing the preparation of the wedding ceremony without her knowledge. The husband she was married to was daikon and he did some spiritual conjuration that tied her with him without her will. Finally, she was capable of overcoming his conjuration, and she divorced him and continued her education. Now she is Grade 11 student. I have witnessed when they married her without her recognition and consent."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

"My cousin was asked to get married, by her parents, at her early age. At that time, she was attending Grade 8 in school. She refused the marriage, but her parents could not accept her refusal and insisted on the marriage. They also received a gift from the husband, called 'Eji-Mensha'. After she confirmed that her parents were not going to change their decision about this marriage, she decided to migrate from her village. Finally, she completed her education and now she got the job and helps her parents economically."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

“Previously it was the right for parents to decide about her, however, now a day it is the responsibility of the kids to decide whether to marry or not. Most of them are engaged in school and have the chance to discuss with teachers about the issue.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“If a girl is educated, she can decide by herself to get married. If a girl is not educated, she cannot decide by herself to get married. The decision is on her parents’ hand and they force her to get married.”

– Parent of married girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: “Do relatives and neighbours intervene to decide when boys or girls engage to marry?”

Married girl, Libo Kemkem: “Yes they do. In my case they were refusing and suggested that I should continue to learn.”

6.2.4. Household-level factors associated with the practice of child marriage

Household-level characteristics associated with child marriage were investigated using qualitative methods. The use of quantitative data instead could, in fact, mislead the interpretation of the elements associated with child marriage. Both child marriage and PSNP could potentially be affected by and, at the same time, affect a number of characteristics. The reporting of characteristics is thus problematic and susceptible to the incorrect interpretation of driving factors.

When asked to cite factors that motivate families to marry their daughters earlier than the age, they may consider ideal for marriage, respondents mentioned a complex set of socio-economic drivers that sustain the practice of child marriage. First, economic hardship and poverty were described as important factors in child marriage, especially by key informants and less so in interviews with adolescent girls and parents/household heads. In some cases, financial vulnerability and poverty reportedly led to arranged marriages for young girls as a way for families to both accumulate resources (through bride price) and reduce costs (of caring for an unmarried child). An inability to pay school fees may also force girls to drop out of school, at which point they may be pressured into child marriage, as discussed previously.

“Unless the parents are very poor, they give priority to education.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“Most of the time their reason to engage in early marriage is related to economic conditions.... Let me tell you one story that happened in this kebele. There was wedding we had terminated due to early marriage. And mother of the bride said that she didn’t feel any regret for terminating the wedding. She said: ‘I saw the man is old enough and I can imagine what challenges and problems may face my daughter if I let her marry this man. I thought I might kill my daughter for the sake of avoiding my economic problem.’ Then after, we included them in IGA [income-generating activities] activity, because economic factor is the main cause for early marriage.”

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

“The parents with poor economic status, who acquire support from their daughter’s spouse through farming their land, are happy to be getting prestige in the community with their daughter’s marriage. On the other hand, economic problems are most significant reasons to

encourage parents to let their daughter to marry early.”

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Dewa Chefa

Second, orphans have been described as marrying earlier than other children, and the loss of a parent (the father, in particular) exacerbates the risk of child marriage. In such cases, respondents perceived and justified child marriage as a means to help children become self-sustaining (as children are often perceived by their families as a financial burden and liability) as well as an avenue for creating kinship/ support ties and improving the social standing of caregivers and orphaned children.

“Unless the parents have some sort of a problem, they won’t sell their daughter. For example, there are girls who do not have father, mother and if the boy believes that he can teach her, grow or protect her by himself, the girl may be given to him with the assumption that he may support her because she has a family problem. However, girls who have a father and a mother are not allowed to marry below the age of 15 if they are asked.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

“If girls have no family [orphan girls] they get married early, to make kinship [getigit] and for the sake of wealth for herself and the family.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“For example, my father in law forced me to get married because he did not want to help, raise and educate me.”

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

Third, social and economic aspirations (compounded by poverty status) maintain the practice of child marriage in the study communities. In addition to alleviating economic hardship, child marriage was frequently referred to as an important means of economic expansion for both poor and wealthier families, and a way to forge kinship ties with those of similar or superior social standing. Such alliances offer opportunities to increase and consolidate wealth and boost a family’s social status, while also strengthening the future socio-economic security of both the daughter and family, and increasing access to financial support in times of hardship. Importantly, considering that marriage is a means of heightening or reinforcing social standing, girls from relatively better-off families may be just as vulnerable to child marriage as those from poorer families, even though the specific drivers for their marriage may differ.

“The parents are interested to get money from the husband or his family. They do not worry that much about the girl. They also seek the land and other property that their girl will own after marriage.”

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

“Before they die [parents] want their daughter to be part of a rich family.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“They practise this kind of activity [child marriage] for the sake of wealth and to duplicate their ‘macha’ which is prepared by both families, to distribute family wealth to all family members and to wed their daughter before they die.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Families wed their daughter earlier than the ideal age to make kinship, for the sake of wealth and culture."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Families marry their daughter earlier than the ideal age due to several reasons; her parents feel proud, peer influence [when they see their friends who are married], the sake of the wealth and to make kinship [getigit]."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"The [marriage] is arranged between families with a similar social status. This is to strengthen friendship and to widen network of relatives in the community. They [marriage proposals] are usually examined [at] the kinship level, [while considering] wealth status and other socially important factors.... For example, the poor families couldn't involve in this kind of relationship with rich ones."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Fourth, the marriage of girls under 18 years of age is viewed as a means of their protection, and parents often must consider the trade-off between child marriage and other risks, such as social stigma and alienation, as well as the potential loss of family honour (in the event of premarital pregnancy). Respondents also stressed the risks to girls who remain unmarried: Abduction and rape of unmarried girls remains prevalent in many areas and can lead to mental and physical trauma, STIs and unwanted pregnancy; girls who have premarital sex can face ostracization and violence. Marriage is thus perceived as a form of protection for girls against sexual violence.

"If the girl shows some physical changes for instance change of breast size, parents think that she may cause problems and bring disrespect for the family in the community."

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

"Parents push the boy to get married when they feel scared that he may cause unwanted relationship and they do not want to be accused for that condition."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

"If you do not get married you might be kidnapped or sexually violated by someone. But if you are married you are protected. We say 'husband Ye Shibo Atir New Yibalal'. This means that husband is called a wire fence."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

"Fear of STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] including HIV if the girl stays unmarried for long, or she may leave the house with somebody and doing such activities is taboo in our locality. Some families advise their children and send them to school rather than letting them marry early. In addition, parents fear that some friends may motivate their children to have boyfriends and may contract HIV or have a child following their peer pressure, which may make them embarrassed in their future life. Because of this, parents tend to get their child married early."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

Finally, the possibility of adverse outcomes is viewed as heightened when girls are not in school – leading parents and girls to conclude that beginning adult life through marriage and motherhood is preferable to staying at home if not in school.

"We worry about our female children and we do not want them to grow up on us for they may experience bad behaviours due to lack of education. We want them to be engaged or to marry very soon."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"Families marry their daughter early when she fails to pass school grade and when they can make a kinship with rich family."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interestingly, however, dropping out of school is not necessarily seen by all as a precursor to child marriage, owing to attitudinal shifts and growing access to alternative work opportunities for out-of-school girls.

"Previously families marry their daughter by force too early but now there is no early marriage even if she fails or drops out from school"

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: "In your family who will decide whether a girl is ready for marriage or not?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "People will come who are looking for marriage and we will respond to them that in our family children are students so we are not volunteering to give them for marriage unless they fail or are unsuccessful in their education. By the way, currently there is no such kind of issue. Even if girls fail education, they will go to urban area to search for jobs."

6.3 Examining pathways identified in the conceptual framework

This section explores potential pathways through which PSNP and its complementary components may affect child marriage outcomes for girls. First, qualitative analysis is used to examine the economic pathway outlined in the conceptual framework (*see section 4*). This is followed by a discussion of the findings related to the educational and attitudinal pathways – and how these specifically affect the intermediary outcomes necessary to delay and prevent child marriage among girls. Further, the researchers assess whether and how PSNP participation contributes to the perceived changes in the views, attitudes and, ultimately, behaviour of parents and girls towards child marriage.

6.3.1. Economic pathway

This section explores qualitatively the key channels through which the economic effects of PSNP participation can affect the likelihood of girls being married during adolescence. Overall, the results show that improved economic security of households participating in PSNP can lead to mixed effects (both positive and unintended) on child marriage outcomes, confirming the existence of several channels.

Improved economic security can decrease the risk of child marriage in three main ways. First, qualitative data show that a greater influx of cash reduces families' financial burdens, improving their ability to keep daughters in school and alleviating economic pressures to marry them off in order to cope better with poverty and income shocks. Both PW and PDS clients reported that part of their PSNP payments is consistently used for school-related expenditures (e.g., supplies, textbooks, pens, clothes), thereby enabling girls to remain in school for longer. Parents also confirmed that additional income is used to cover children's food and health care costs, with potentially positive spillover effects on girls' human capital and broader welfare.

"The PSNP payment is used to buy educational materials and clothes for all children."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"[PSNP] decreased economic hardship. I usually borrow money to send my children to school, then I repay debt with the PSNP transfer. [The PSNP payment] decreases early marriage because girls attend school."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"It helps me to get health treatment for her and I can buy her food."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Second, the PSNP participation somewhat affects the allocation of work within households, with implications for girls' time use and child marriage outcomes. There is some indication that increased demands on adult labour as a result of PSNP participation cause adolescents to be drawn into labour activities (both domestic chores and on PW sites). Several caregivers stressed that girls are required to help with household work when adults are engaged in PW activities; there is also a suggestion that children are expected to work with adults on PW sites. The need to address such labour demands may have informed parental decisions to keep adolescent children at home rather than encourage their outmigration through marriage or employment in the cities (although this was not explicitly mentioned in interviews). Even if marriage is delayed via changes in labour demands, children's participation in domestic chores and/or PW activities as labourers has potentially adverse effects on their participation in school and learning outcomes (in addition to encroaching on their time for leisure, study and play).

"Some parents recognize the importance of education or deter early marriage to secure children's domestic help and financial assistance through future employment after education."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Sometimes they only give us 25 birr, we work the full month as a family. I also participate with my father [in public works] but I do not get paid. They calculate the payment as family and give us this money."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"If I want to work on PSNP she [daughter] performs household work."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Third, anecdotal evidence suggests that parents may retain girls in the household to maintain (or augment) the cash transfer amount, as this is based on household size.³⁶ While such decisions may lead to positive outcomes in terms of delaying the marriage of girls, this strategy is unlikely to facilitate sustainable changes over time as it may do little to transform parental and girls' attitudes in support of child marriage.

Support is also found for some of the unintended effects on child marriage resulting from improved economic security, as hypothesized in the conceptual framework. It was reported that, in some communities, extreme poverty may act as a barrier to the marriage of girls where parents are unable to meet social expectations for a dowry. The additional income from PSNP may enable families to

³⁶ Information provided by UNICEF Ethiopia staff based on conversations with community members. According to the partial family targeting approach, up to five PW participants in the household are eligible for the monthly transfer; with DS, only one payment is provided, for the eligible member.

accumulate the resources (cash and/or assets) needed to cover the costs of a wedding and dowry (or bride price). Likewise, the financial security resulting from regular participation in a safety net programme such as PSNP can enhance daughters' prospects of receiving marriage proposals.

"It is surprising that the society is considering the PSNP as a warranty. Even when a girl is asked for marriage, the membership in the PSNP is considered as criteria to be married. This should be corrected and PSNP should not be considered as a pension and a livelihood mechanism."

– Development agent, Dewa Chefa

"She also needs to provide [gifts] to the male family. She may not have a chance to get married if she is poor or not having something to provide to the male fiancé. She is not preferred for marriage if she or her family doesn't have land.... Unless she and her family meet suitor's family interests and preconditions, the wedding will not take place."

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

"The poorest people are sending children to school because they didn't have sufficient resources to marry children at their early ages."

– Social worker, Libo Kemkem

Socio-economic gains made through wealth consolidation obtained via marriage and through bride price may outweigh monetary benefits received through PSNP. The qualitative research found that bride price remains an important traditional custom in the study locations. The bride price may consist of money, livestock, land or other goods given by the groom's family to the bride's family upon the couple's engagement.³⁷ The groom's family is also expected to offer substantial gifts and/or money (*macha berr*) when requesting an engagement. *Macha berr* (also called *Ye Eji-Mensha* in certain settings) is given to a girl's family during betrothal and is considered a promise to marry.

"For example [the] groom's parents may bring sheep, cattle and any materials they can buy.... They bring a bride price called 'macha berr'. This is money give[n] to girl's parent for the purpose of requesting the girl to marry their boy."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Both parents from the bride and groom side present dowry for each other. Both families give money, farmland, and different materials to boy and girl who get married to set up their house. The boy family gives money to her family for betrothal [*macha*]."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"It is called 'Ye EjiMenisha', which is the money given to the girl's family during marriage negotiations as a gift."

– Parent of married girl, Libo Kemkem

Although the precise size of payment varies according to the economic status of the groom's family, the economic value of the bride price (whether money or physical assets) can be quite significant. The custom thus provides an important economic incentive for parents, particularly those in poorer

³⁷ Land rights in Ethiopia are officially governed by the public land tenure system, however, it is quite likely that customary land tenure systems at the community level allow for land to be inherited and transferred informally between families through marriage.

circumstances, to accept marriage proposals. Bride price money can also be used to cover the cost of the wedding or to accumulate assets (including livestock) used for household income generation. There is also a correlation between child marriage and bride price, as virginity is a highly prized trait that can result in substantial payments for younger girls.

Interviewer: "Is there anything that girl gives to her husband?"

Married girl, Dewa Chefa: "Yes, she does. She gives her virginity as a gift. This is a common belief in the community."

Interviewer: "Is there a payment for the practice of 'macha'?"

Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem: "Yes, it is well practised. Even these days we had accused someone of giving 3,000 birr to marry a girl at the age of 12 years. He asked for forgiveness and received back his money after we gave him awareness."

"[The] groom's parents may bring sheep, cattle and any materials they can buy ... they also bring a gift called 'macha birr'. Money is given to girl's parents for the purpose of requesting their boy to marry the girl ... they pay 4,000 birr. At beginning, when the boy's family asks to marry their daughter, they give half of the total amount of 'macha birr'. After complete the agreement they give the remaining amount of money as the bride price."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

6.3.2. Education pathway

In this section, the research team assesses to what extent and how the PSNP – by enabling girls' participation in school through income-strengthening measures – is addressing some of the structural and social drivers of child marriage. Overall, both the quantitative and qualitative analysis confirms that girls' education acts as a key protective factor in myriad ways, and that the PSNP makes an important contribution to this outcome. Financial support provided through PSNP enables poor parents to keep girls in school. By facilitating girls' participation in school, PSNP also indirectly contributes to the creation of an enabling environment where girls have access to information, skills and support networks, and are empowered to seek legal protection and build their capacity to remain in school and resist pressures to marry. These specific pathways and intermediary outcomes are discussed in detail below.

Qualitative research shows that girls' education acts as a key protective factor in several mutually reinforcing ways.

6.3.2.1 Empowering girls through knowledge and information to exercise their choices

Schooling emerges as a crucial factor in boosting girls' knowledge, voice and decision-making autonomy in relation to marriage. Schools, and teachers in particular, are critical avenues via which girls can access information about their right to education, and knowledge about various risks associated with child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Many of the girls/women interviewed, both married and unmarried, confirmed that schools are an important (and often the primary) means of receiving SRH and family planning information. In some cases, girls also acquire SRH information through their interactions with health extension workers.

Interviewer: "Where did you learn about family planning?"

Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "I receive information about family planning from school."

Family planning is controlling and spacing childbirth and protects us from being exposed to poverty. If a family has two to three children, the children will be healthy, and not exposed to different illness.”

“I heard information about family planning from health extension worker and school. If somebody has many children, he or she cannot manage their expenses for daily consumption, clothes and other things. If the family has small number of kids, they may reduce costs for different consumption and activities.”

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

“I received information about family planning, control and spacing childbirth. When spacing childbirths mothers can care properly for their children. This changed my view about early marriage.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Girls who were attending school at the time of their interview also reported having access to girls’ clubs (and peer support groups). These platforms reportedly allow girls to openly discuss with their peers topics related to important aspects of their adolescent lives (e.g., child marriage, SRH, family planning, aspirations related to education), a practice usually not encouraged at home. In some cases, children were educated about child marriage via loudspeaker announcements during school breaks and/or by teachers in the classroom. Such information reportedly had an empowering effect on girls in the study communities, as many respondents had either reported their parents to a teacher for arranging child marriage or knew someone who had. This highlights the critical importance of girls remaining in school not only for educational attainment and greater employment opportunity, but also to engage in open peer-to-peer discussion about critical topics in a safe environment.

“We discuss about early marriage at school in girls’ clubs. I discuss with my best friend not to practise early dating.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“We heard information about early child marriage from school, from teachers and school clubs. I also learn from the radio programme on life skills transmitted in our school on Saturday.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: “Have you ever heard about the policies and rule on early marriage?”

Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: “Yes, I heard it from police, teachers and kebele administrators. In the school there is a message passed through microphone.”

The study did not capture full details about girls’ clubs such as whether they operate in all schools in the study locations, or the specifics of their structure and functions. Further research is required to map these aspects in detail. It should be noted, however, that in some communities (mainly in Dewa Chefa *woreda*) such education and dialogue can be difficult to initiate in schools owing to discomfort around, or fear of, discussing the subject matter. In one case, this appeared to be caused by the fact that the group comprised girls who were unfamiliar with one another. Moreover, according to several respondents, information about child marriage is not imparted in all schools; in some communities, schools are not perceived as institutions that raise awareness about child marriage or offer support and protection to girls facing child marriage. The study did not identify any awareness-raising and information interventions related to child marriage that were addressed to boys specifically.

Interviewer: "At school, do you have access/participate in girls' clubs where you can openly discuss early marriage, sexual and reproductive health, family planning, aspirations related to your education?"

Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa: "We fear each other to discuss this."

"We were not from the same area ... we are too shy to have this kind of discussion."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: "Did the school in your community develop any mechanisms that help prevent early marriage ... to happen, or to minimize its incidence rate?"

Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa: "No, this kind of support is not available here. What we usually do is that we go to school. Attend classes. Play in the playground and go home at the end. No one in the school tell us do this and that."

6.3.2.2 Strengthening access to social networks and support to resist marriage

When girls are at school, they can more easily engage with external support networks, which can intervene on behalf of girls to cancel marriage proposals. Teachers and peer support networks also provide essential social resources to build the individual skills and psychological strengths (self-efficacy, self-esteem, aspirations) that girls require to express their choice not to marry. Although parents sometimes cited changing attitudes as a driver for children choosing their own marriage partners, several mentioned children's resistance to marriage in favour of education. This is confirmed by the number of girls who asserted themselves by asking teachers to intervene in child marriage plans.

"Recently, the young generations are starting to resist arranged marriage for different reasons, for example, for being able to attend school, and become self-sustainable before marriage. Boys and girls are starting to [choose] their future partners by themselves."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"The one and major change is girls' empowerment. Creating females [able to] resist or refuse marriage is also considered as key change. Creating girls that report to our office or schools of being forced to marry early is also part of the change. Even informing about their friends if they face marriage is a change."

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

"For example, last year one family planned to marry their daughter at the age of 16 years and then she reported it to her teacher. The teachers intervened with the police and the marriage was interrupted."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"I was planning to wed my daughter. Then she refused the marriage and she reported [me] to her teachers. The teachers come to me and told me that I should not wed my daughter early. I agreed with them and stopped the marriage. Now she is back in school."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Respondents in both *woredas* overwhelmingly pointed to teachers as key focal points in raising awareness of child marriage and discouraging and preventing its practice. Teachers promote the importance of education among girls and their parents, and encourage girls to remain in school.

They serve as a point of contact for girls to lodge complaints of child marriage, and frequently engage with parents and government officials to halt the practice, while also educating girls and parents about its negative consequences. It is unclear from the study to what extent the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage has played a role in strengthening teachers' capacity in child marriage prevention, or whether other government-run initiatives have also contributed to positive effects.³⁸

"The teachers tell parents not to commit early marriage on their children. There are parents' meetings at which teachers tell parents not to marry their children early."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"In our school we have a teacher who teaches us about effects of child marriage. One of our teachers teaches us to continue our education. He advises us to study and become a professional in the future so that we can help ourselves and our family."

– Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

"Yes, I have a little information, teachers try to inform girls to continue their education. But no one accepts and gives ear for the issue due to the attitude, custom, and traditional practice in our locality."

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

"Most of [girls] are attending their school and our daughters are growing now. God bless them. For example, if my daughter is not attending school, maybe she would be married by now. Teachers advise them not to marry early and attend their school."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"I heard information about harmful traditional practices, female genital mutilation, HIV/AIDS and early marriage from teachers and social science books for Grade 5–6."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

The importance of peer support to girls in resisting marriage and remaining in school is illustrated by the following story recounted by a girl from Shemo *kebele* in Libo Kemkem, in which peers were able to influence parents' plans to marry off their daughters.

"Sometimes we were discussing about [child marriage] in the class. During that time if there is a girl who is approached for marriage, she will cry and tell us about her situation. She tells us as her families are organizing this marriage and will separate her from her friends and schools. Then we decide to notify our teachers in order to advise her families when they come school. And then all students will tell their families to stop letting their daughter to marry. All students will tell them, why don't she attend her school and also, she is not willing for the marriage because she is crying and refusing, therefore why are you forcing her to marry.... If she is a clever student, we inform her families that she is a very clever student and will support her, families and country in large. So please let her continue the education and support her to stay at school."

– Married girl, Libo Kemkem

³⁸ For instance, the education component focusing on teachers' capacities is implemented as part of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage only in Dewa Chefa *woreda*, but the qualitative research has uncovered positive effects in both Dewa Chefa and Libo Kemkem *woredas*.

6.3.2.3 Awareness of penalties and in-school mechanisms to report child marriage

As noted above, mechanisms to report child marriage and gain access to legal support are largely available and accessible through schools in both *woredas*. In Libo Kemkem, a key informant revealed that all schools have 'appeal boxes' through which girls can anonymously report risks of child marriage. Both girls and parents are relatively well aware of the existence of grievance mechanisms, and several respondents reported that girls are using these to report and appeal against marriage proposals. When girls report risks of child marriage to their schools, either anonymously or to their teachers, the complaints are referred to responsible agencies at the *kebele* and *woreda* level, including *kebele* officials, the education department, the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and, finally, the police and the justice department. In some cases, parents and male suitors alike can be jailed for arranging child marriages; such penalties have led to a decline in child marriage in some communities, as reported by respondents in the qualitative analysis.

Interviewer: "Do you or your daughter know where to appeal if she is faced with forced marriage?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "She can tell her teacher, and the teacher would report the case to the *kebele* leaders if her parents forced her to marry. And the *kebele* would discuss the issue with her family and punish that family if parents are not willing to terminate the wedding."

"Now it has changed, even parents are penalized and go to jail when they force their girl to get married at the age of 16 years old. In these past three years there was no report of early marriage in our community."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"In schools if a girl accuses her parents for forcing her to marry, they can even be jailed for two or more weeks."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"If she does not want the marriage, she may put the person in jail."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: "Have you ever seen a girl who submitted her complaint to school, court or to anyone else to avoid being married?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "Yes, my daughter after hearing gossip from the society that, I, her mother was going to marry her to someone, reported me to teachers in her school, even though I did not plan to marry her, it was just a gossip."

Interviewer: "Do you know where to appeal if you are forced to marry early?"

Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "No I don't, but I know a case about friend who is one year older than me, she is 14 years old. Her family tried to force her to get married when she was in Grade 4 and she reported this to her teacher and the teacher threatened her parents that he will accuse them to officials. Then they gave up their idea and now she is still in school. She is Grade 6 now."

It is important to note, however, that most communities reported that the practice of child marriage continues irrespective of people's knowledge of the law and potential penalties. It is therefore apparent that visible and consistent legal enforcement, accompanied by legal literacy and broader awareness-

raising efforts about harmful effects of child marriage, is a necessary component of official child protection efforts.

Finally, because information, support networks and reporting mechanisms are largely available through schools, out-of-school girls are denied critical resources regarding child marriage and SRH, and may lack access to 'safety nets'. Interestingly, a key informant from the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs in Libo Kemkem revealed that the Government of Ethiopia is working on setting up a mechanism (girls' forums at *kebele* level) to enable out-of-school girls to stay informed and access legal support. So far, girls' forums have been established in three *kebeles* in Libo Kemkem.

Interviewer: "Do you know where girls can appeal if they are forced to marry early?"

Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "She can present her complaint to the teachers and police. She can also report to the kebele."

Interviewer: "Do you think every girl in your community know this?"

Unmarried girl: "Those who are being educated know but the rest do not."

6.3.3. Improved knowledge and attitudinal shifts pathway

PSNP may contribute to changing norms and attitudes regarding harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and to reducing the social pressures that promote a culture of child marriage. The general consensus among respondents was that their participation in the PSNP had positively improved knowledge of and altered attitudes towards child marriage, among both parents and girls; in some instances, participation had influenced parents to postpone the marriage of their daughters.

While child marriage prevention is not an explicit objective of PSNP4, the programme promotes changes in community discourses and attitudes regarding the value of girls' education and importance of delaying marriage. It does this through BCC sessions as well as through the engagement of social workers in case management and in monitoring co-responsibilities related to education and child protection. The contributions of these various components were examined using the qualitative data.

6.3.3.1. Participation in BCC sessions influences community attitudes towards girls' education and child marriage

As previously noted, BCC components delivered as part of the PSNP are not explicitly designed to address child marriage prevention objectives since their official content is intended to focus on health and nutrition practices. At the same time, the research found that, in some villages, BCC sessions delivered as part of PSNP play an important role in addressing social factors (norms, values, knowledge and attitudes) that perpetuate the practice of child marriage in several ways. First, according to several respondents – mainly caregivers who participate in these meetings – BCC sessions deliver messages about harmful social practices, including child marriage, domestic violence and substance abuse, and promote positive attitudes towards gender equality and women's rights to health, education and protection.

Second, participation in BCC sessions was cited as a key mechanism in shifting underlying beliefs related to girls' value in society and the importance of education. The general consensus among respondents from participating families was that, by promoting greater demand for schooling, participation in BCC sessions had positively altered attitudes among parents and girls alike regarding the importance of delaying marriage to ensure that girls remain in school. Many respondents in Libo Kemkem stressed a newfound importance placed by communities on girls remaining in education, partly as a means of increasing girls' life skills and improving their employment prospects.

"The PSNP programme has a good impact on the community behaviour. They usually provide education on different community issues including the problems of early marriage. For instance, I asked my 12-year-old daughter whether she is willing to marry at this moment. She said she would marry, but I used my knowledge obtained from PSNP, and I advised her to continue her school instead and that she is not yet qualified for marriage. So, the education provided by PSNP has brought changes to our behaviour toward child marriage."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Because of what we learn at every PSNP meeting about education more people are [planning] to teach their children rather than pushing for marriage. We are now focusing more on education."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"It [PSNP] decreased the risk related to early marriage ... PSNP has been promoting importance of girls' education, increasing demand for schooling and enhancing girls' empowerment and importance of gender equality."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Married girl, Dewa Chefa: "I don't participate in the BCC sessions. But my mother did."

Interviewer: "What did she say after attending the programme?"

Married girl: "She encouraged me to study hard. She feels regret for not being able to go to school. And she also feels regret because she had forced me to engage in early marriage."

Interviewer: "Does PSNP advise you to pursue your education?"

Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "Yes, they also tell us to continue our education. They advise us that education is more useful for us than getting married. They also tell us that first we should learn and that we can get married later. They say that nothing is more important than education."

"The BCC session changed the community view on the ideal age for girls to get married. Now the families do not marry their daughter early, all girls found in the community attend their school. BCC promotes gender equality, importance of learning, decision making, respect and resilience in the family and in the community."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

"Participation in PSNP influenced my parents' perception of early marriage, and changed the attitude of my parents to keep children at school for longer."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

In some villages, BCC sessions also deliver information about family planning and SRH, which may also contain messages about risks related to child marriage and pregnancy at an early age (e.g., fistula) and benefits of waiting (e.g., lower risk of poverty). As already discussed, respondents demonstrated a good understanding of the negative effects of child marriage on girls' health and reproductive outcomes.

"For example, I heard information on risks related to early marriage and teen pregnancy, fistula, prolonged labour and death. I heard this from health care providers, kebele leaders and social workers. Teachers also give us the real example about one student who was Grade 6. The family proposed to marry her but we interrupted the marriage. After some time has passed, they married her and she died during delivery [of her child]. BCC sessions

implemented by the PSNP also deliver information on risks related to early marriage and early pregnancy.”

– Married girl, Dewa Chefa

Involving parents and other community members (including boys and young men, who are most likely to marry adolescent girls) in community meetings and training sessions has also been highlighted as critical: Respondents stressed that BCC sessions had been effective in promoting attitudes in support of gender equality. In turn, this may have positively influenced fathers’ views on the marriage of their daughters and enhanced mothers’ agency and skills to negotiate delayed marriage for their daughters.

“The participation of my father in the PSNP changed views on gender equality. He respects my mother and discuss with her to ensure all children attend school regularly. In our family there is no problem in sending children to school!”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“My father participated. He was trained that girls should not be exposed to child marriage and they should go to school.”

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: “Did the new information gained from the BCC sessions helped you have a better say in the household on early child marriage?”

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: “Yes my children heard what I am saying on early marriage. I told them what I have gained from the training. We do not practise early marriage in the house.”

Community elders and religious leaders – who typically wield enormous influence within the study communities in regard to social norms and expected behaviour – were reported to commonly take part in BCC sessions and were exposed to information about the negative consequences of harmful traditional practices. As a result, they were found to be helpful in dissuading parents from child marriage and in encouraging children’s education. Positive effects on community elders and religious leaders may, however, stem from their exposure to community mobilization and legal literacy interventions delivered as part of other initiatives (e.g., the DFID-funded End Child Marriage programme, Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs initiatives) rather than BCC sessions delivered as part of PSNP (which target PSNP clients rather than the broader community).

“Now days religious leaders create awareness in the community to prevent girls from risks related to early marriage.”

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

“There is radical change in attitude of religious leaders related to early marriage.”

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

“Previously they [religious leaders] were opposing our activities. They were not welcoming. Especially deacons prefer early marriage. Even kebele leaders were engaged in early marriage. But now days things have changed and there is good atmosphere. As an institution we believe creating awareness is more fruitful than punishment. I often show films to the community about harmful conditions of early marriage while peoples are gathered for different meetings.”

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Dewa Chefa

Interviewer: "Are there members in the community who encourage early marriage?"

Respondent: "No, most of them discourage child marriage and encourage education. When a girl is married, she terminates her school, and the elderly members usually condemn the parent."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Religious authorities are not only disseminating anti-child marriage messages in many Amhara communities, but they are also refusing to marry underage girls, which may have contributed to reduced rates of child marriage.

"These days the church also joins the movement against early marriage. They refuse to bless the wedding. The awareness created has become fruitful.

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Libo Kemkem

"Sometimes priests ask the bride how old she is and they may reject the wedding if she is younger than 18 years."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

While respondents reported that BCC interventions delivered through the PSNP had increased awareness among households and communities of the risks of child marriage, and facilitated attitudes more inclined to delay marriage, these findings should be interpreted with caution. First, it was not possible to establish to what extent the attitudinal shifts among community elders and religious leaders had been influenced by BCC sessions implemented through the PSNP or by other awareness-raising efforts to end child marriage. At the time of the research, a variety of community mobilization interventions (e.g., community discussions, community facilitation, life skills training sessions, drama and radio campaigns) were also being delivered in the study locations as part of the DFID-funded End Child Marriage programme. It is quite plausible that respondents may have confused the two programmes and inaccurately attributed positive changes to PSNP (rather than to other sensitization interventions in operation) owing to their stake in PSNP and issues with recalling past events accurately. Second, it is unclear what specific messages and activities related to child marriage are being delivered through the PSNP BCC session curricula in the field, the type of audiences to whom these messages are being delivered, and whether and how the content of child marriage messaging varies in different *kebeles*. Further analysis of the BCC sessions delivered as part of the PSNP is thus required to better understand these positive but unintended effects. It would be useful also to map the various initiatives delivered by the End Child Marriage programme in target *woredas*.

6.3.3.2 Interaction with social workers, and co-responsibilities in education

Community social workers have been found to play an important role in influencing people's awareness of and attitudes towards education and child marriage by disseminating information and advice about the importance of keeping children in school, and risks of child marriage and pregnancy at an early age. Although counselling related to child marriage and education is not necessarily a focus of the community social worker's mandate and work responsibilities, respondents reported receiving advice from social workers during PSNP paydays and home visits, leading to positive effects on parental views on these issues. In some cases, community social workers are involved in intervening in child marriage situations and reporting girls at risk of child marriage to the relevant authorities.

"The participation of my parents in the PSNP changed their view to send their children to school. Social worker visits PSNP client home to trace children who do not attend school."

– Unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: "Who works to prevent early child marriage in the community in relation to safety net programme?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "Female development groups, and if I can mention name of the person, Melke is active and creates awareness about difficulties of early marriage. Melke is the social worker in the community."

Interviewer: "Do you think their work is effective?"

Parent of unmarried girl: "Yes, they teach us very well, and now there is a change."

Interviewer: "How about the social worker, do they consult or train you on the protection of child marriage?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: "Yes, they teach us and we are happy with their advice. They tell us about birth spacing. If you give birth frequently, you may even die. If a girl is exposed to child marriage and she gives birth, it is bad for both."

Interviewer: "Does the social worker explain the importance of education to your family?"

Unmarried girl, Dewa Chefa: "Yes, they teach them. They tell them that they should support their children so that they learn. They also tell them that early marriage is harmful."

Respondents participating in the PSNP also related programme co-responsibilities to requirements to send their children to school regularly as well as disengage from harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and child labour. This was also confirmed in the key informant interviews with social workers tasked with encouraging clients to fulfil these co-responsibilities and with monitoring their compliance.

"The clients are strongly advised to focus on their children[s] education and their children should only focus on their education."

– Social worker, Libo Kemkem

"Sending their children to school, health check-up, using health centre, early marriage and avoiding harmful tradition, and other environmental protections are their co-responsibility."

– Social worker, Libo Kemkem

"We tell the clients that the purpose of the support is given to enable them to teach their children and get necessities for their children. Moreover, advice is given to the parent that education is the way to his children to get out of poverty."

– Social worker, Dewa Chefa

There is some indication that changes in attitudes and perceptions resulting from BCC sessions and interaction with social workers, in combination with other government efforts, may contribute to delaying the marriage of girls. Given the nature of the qualitative research, however, it was possible to document only the perceived changes experienced by a small sample of respondents across two *kebeles* at one particular point in time. As such, further research is required to identify behavioural changes in the practice of child marriage in Ethiopia over time.

"Yes, the programme has brought good behavioural change in the community."

– Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem

Interviewer: "In your opinion, do you think these BCC sessions are changing people's views on the ideal age for girls to get married?"

Parent of unmarried girl, Libo Kemkem: “[Girls] study and graduate. After they attend the training they graduate and have jobs.... The community view changed on girls’ early marriage.... There are girls who have finished their school and hold their own jobs.”

“There are eight *kebeles* that are free from early marriage to tell you with confidence. This change comes due to our effort through creating awareness and fair justice. In general, the main tool to come up with this change is awareness creation and attitudinal change. We need to work hard in capacity building. In addition, we need to build capacity in schools and with students.”

– Representative of the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Dewa Chefa

6.3.3.3 Changes in household bargaining dynamics and psychosocial welfare

Provided that they have access to PSNP wages and income, adult females may also be empowered by the programme, through increased financial resources and increased exposure to community groups and social networks facilitated by the PSNP, with implications for household bargaining dynamics and, consequently, child marriage decisions. When examining this pathway, the quantitative data present a complex picture of women’s roles and influence over decision-making processes in the household (Table 10).

Using bivariate analyses, the researchers examined the relationship between characteristics related to women’s empowerment and child marriage outcomes, among adult female respondents in households with a female aged 20–24 years. Of the 12 indicators proxying for women’s empowerment, only 2 revealed a statistically significant difference between households that had experienced child marriage and those that had not. This indicates a limited correlation between adult women’s empowerment and child marriage outcomes.

It was found that women are more likely to have a say in how to spend PSNP money in those households with no child brides: 65 per cent of households without child marriage reported women having a say in PSNP spending versus 53 per cent of households with child marriage. Yet, respondents from households with child marriage reported higher levels of women’s decision-making ability compared with respondents in households without child marriage (a score of 5.84 versus 5.46; $p < .05$).³⁹ This finding suggests that women’s self-perceived decision-making ability may not directly translate into delayed marriage for daughters, perhaps due to women’s inability to influence marriage decisions despite having the power to make other household-level decisions. Alternatively, women may enjoy high levels of decision-making power within the household but still hold attitudes in support of child marriage.

In addition to decision-making power in the household, the team examined other measures that represent dimensions of empowerment, including women’s agency, social support, savings, community group membership, locus of control, having people to borrow money from, and belonging to an *iddir*. Well-being indicators including life satisfaction and stress were also examined. No differences in child marriage rates were found with respect to these empowerment and well-being indicators.

³⁹ Decision-making ability is defined as a woman’s self-reported position on a hypothetical ladder from 1 to 10 describing her ability to make decisions in her household, for example, decisions about what to spend money on, decisions about her children’s education or health, or decisions as to whether or not she should work.

Table 10. Possible pathways: Women's empowerment (adult female respondent in households with a female aged 20–24 years)

Possible pathway	All	Non-child marriage household	Child marriage household	P-value of diff.
Woman has a say in how to spend PSNP money	0.61	0.65	0.53	0.003
Woman is part of 1+ groups	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.810
Woman has savings	0.17	0.18	0.16	0.652
Enhanced Life Distress Index (0–39)	7.74	7.61	8.02	0.570
Satisfied with life some/most/all of the time	0.46	0.45	0.48	0.482
Medical Outcomes Study Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS) score (unstandardized)	2.86	2.83	2.90	0.353
MOS-SSS score (standardized)	46.38	45.85	47.56	0.353
Agency score (6-30)	3.12	3.07	3.23	0.447
Woman's level of control over her life	5.45	5.37	5.64	0.173
Woman's level of decision-making ability	5.58	5.46	5.84	0.047
No. people who would lend woman 100 birr in an emergency	2.10	2.07	2.17	0.463
Woman belongs to <i>iddir</i>	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.882
<i>N</i>	512	352	160	

Note: P-values are reported from Wald tests on the equality of means of child marriage and non-child marriage households for each variable. Standard errors are clustered at the *kebele* level.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite important progress in recent decades, child marriage persists as a prevalent human rights violation in Ethiopia, with approximately 4 in 10 young women first married or in union before their 18th birthday (UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017). The Amhara region has both the lowest median age at first marriage in the country and a child marriage rate that exceeds the national average of 40 per cent. Several initiatives have been launched to address child marriage in Ethiopia, but rigorous evaluations of their efficacy are limited and pathways of impact are poorly understood. Of particular interest to policymakers is understanding how programmes with a national reach, such as the poverty-targeted Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), can affect child marriage outcomes. To explore this question, the study used data from the baseline survey and data collection of a mixed methods impact evaluation of the Integrated Safety Net Program (ISNP) pilot in the Amhara region. The analysis builds on existing research that found that PSNP delayed marriage among female adolescents.

7.1 Prevalence and key drivers of child marriage

The results show that nearly one in three females (32.2 per cent) currently aged 20–24 years and 41.4 per cent of females currently aged 20–29 years were married as a child. The higher prevalence in the sample containing older females suggests that the prevalence of child marriage is declining. At the same time, attitudes commonly expressed by parents/caregivers and adolescent girls remain broadly supportive of child marriage. The majority of respondents thought that girls should be married before the age of 18. Girls were generally described as ready for marriage once they had begun to show physical signs of puberty and mental maturity as well as an interest in the opposite sex.

Numerous factors perpetuate attitudes in support of child marriage, including religious and cultural values that emphasize girls' sexual purity and chastity, and encourage early childbearing and high fertility among girls. The findings also reveal that cultural marital norms exert substantive influence over parental and girls' attitudes and decisions towards marriage, making them difficult to avoid or overcome. While poverty is reported as an important driver of child marriage for some families, economic incentives and social aspirations related to opportunities to consolidate wealth and improve one's social status in the community more commonly sustain this harmful traditional practice. Moreover, child marriage is further sustained and reinforced by the limited voice and agency exercised by girls owing to gender inequalities. Seventy per cent of respondents believed that girls have no say in marriage decisions. Girls' weak bargaining power and limited capacity to refuse marriage are often exacerbated by a lack of educational and employment opportunities restricting alternative options and life choices outside of marriage.

The results reveal extremely limited knowledge of the legal age of marriage in the country. As evidence from other studies has shown (Hombrados, 2018), raising the legal age of marriage from 15 to 18 years in Ethiopia caused reductions in child marriage, suggesting that knowledge of the law is another important factor in determining child marriage outcomes. Thus, interventions aimed at improving community awareness of laws relating to marriage could be extremely beneficial.

7.2 PSNP role in delaying child marriage

Turning to the assessment of the effects of the PSNP, the study's overarching finding confirms that even though reducing child marriage is not an intended objective of the PSNP, the integrated programming can have protective effects against child marriage outcomes through several (mutually reinforcing) pathways.

First, the findings suggest that the cash component of PSNP can reduce pressures on families to marry off girls, through the following channels: mitigating poverty-related incentives to marry off girls; increasing school enrolment for girls; and changing the household allocation of labour for domestic chores and productive activities, increasing the need for girls' labour. Nonetheless, some evidence was also found that the cash component of PSNP, and associated economic incentives, can have unintended effects on girls, increasing child marriage. This is because the additional income from the PSNP may enable poor families to accumulate the resources needed to cover the costs of a wedding and dowry, and improve their daughters' prospects of receiving marriage proposals. In addition, the economic strategies by themselves are unlikely to affect long-term and sustainable changes in behaviour related to child marriage, since they may do little to transform deep-rooted norms and attitudes held by those families in support of child marriage. Without complementary awareness-raising efforts, these norms and attitudes are likely to remain unchanged.

Second, the qualitative research confirms that the education pathway acts as a key protective factor for girls in several ways. Regular participation in school directly reduces the likelihood that girls are married at a young age. By financially supporting girls to remain in school, PSNP also indirectly contributes to the creation of an enabling environment where girls have access to information about the risks of child marriage and pregnancy at an early age, as well as opportunities to build their life skills, and support networks of peers and teachers. For instance, girls' clubs emerged as an essential platform for empowering girls to seek legal protection and exercise their choices regarding school and marriage, even in the context of the pervasive cultural and social restrictions operating in Amhara. Teachers were also reported to be key in preventing child marriage, as they often promote the importance of education to girls and their parents, disseminate information about the risks of child marriage, and serve as a point of contact for girls to lodge complaints of child marriage.

Finally, the team explored the complementary components of the PSNP (delivered through ISNP): BCC sessions, interaction between PSNP clients and community social workers, and co-responsibilities in education. These were found to play an important role in shifting parental and girls' attitudes and beliefs regarding child marriage by promoting the importance of girls' education, encouraging delayed marriage and pregnancy, and fostering commitments towards gender equality and positive gender roles and relations. It should be noted, however, that other programmes specifically aimed at addressing the issue of child marriage through community mobilization and BCC efforts, which were operating simultaneously in the study locations, may have contributed to these changes. Further research is needed to distinguish between 'unintended' positive effects of BCC sessions delivered as part of PSNP and possible spillover effects of other BCC and community mobilization interventions operating in the study locations.

There are also several limitations to this study that warrant discussion. First, using self-reported age at marriage may underestimate the actual child marriage rates, as some respondents may have reported a later age at marriage because of social desirability bias and/or fear of legal penalties or perceived threats to their PSNP eligibility. Second, it is plausible that respondents would tend to overestimate the positive effects of the PSNP, and particularly their participation in BCC sessions on changes in attitudes and behaviour towards child marriage, owing to their stake in the programme. Respondents may have also inaccurately attributed changes to BCC sessions delivered through the PSNP (as opposed to other awareness-raising interventions operating in study areas) as a result of limitations in respondents' ability to accurately recall their experience of past events. Given the nature of the qualitative research, it was possible to document only the perceived changes experienced by a small sample of respondents across two *kebeles* at one particular point in time. As such, qualitative findings are indicative only and findings cannot be applied to other settings. Further research is needed to identify and confirm the impact pathways proposed in the conceptual framework presented in this report.

7.3 Policy and programming recommendations

This report presents evidence that the PSNP, through its income-strengthening and awareness-raising channels of complementary programming, is a promising strategy for addressing child marriage. These findings highlight the opportunity to leverage the broad reach and scalability of Ethiopia's national social protection programmes, including the PSNP, to more effectively address the high prevalence and burden of child marriage in the country.

At the same time, while PSNP offers the opportunity to scale up responses to address the high burden of child marriage, the programme is essentially a cash-for-work intervention aimed at promoting household food security and resilience to shocks. Linking the existing PSNP design to child marriage programming calls for significant policy and programming efforts. Consequently, other types of social protection interventions, beyond the PSNP, may be better suited to achieving child protection and human capital development objectives. As Ethiopia moves towards middle-income country status, this provides an opportunity to expand the country's social protection system to include a broader range of social assistance initiatives, beyond PSNP, that specifically address the needs of vulnerable children and adolescents and aim to promote human capital development. A medium-term goal should be the introduction of a new cash transfer programme tailored specifically towards girls' and boys' human capital accumulation and facilitating their safe transition into adulthood. Over the short term, however, efforts should be made to capitalize on the design innovations of the next phase of the PSNP – PSNP5 – including the strengthening of the gender-transformative agenda and linkages to complementary services for women and girls, including education, given their indirect importance in curbing the practice of child marriage.

Subject to these caveats of the PSNP and its objectives, the following recommendations are made to help ensure that, in future, both PSNP and complementary programming (including ISNP) accelerate action to end child marriage in Ethiopia:

- 1. Broaden objectives of social protection programming to address human capital development,** to advance national goals around poverty reduction and stopping the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Child marriage leads to several adverse health, social and economic outcomes, both among the individuals married as children and their future children, and impedes gains in human capital development and poverty reduction. Broadening programme goals and objectives will highlight complementary gains to be made when investing in human capital development and delaying marriage.
- 2. Provide additional economic-strengthening programming to vulnerable PSNP households** to further reduce the economic pressures and opportunity costs that drive child marriage, and increase households' demand for education for girls. The PSNP caseload can be leveraged to identify females aged 10–19 years at risk of child marriage and provide their households with cash transfer top-ups and in-kind benefits (e.g., school supplies and uniforms) until they complete their education. In contexts where economic strategies by themselves are unlikely to overcome the opportunity costs and discriminatory gender norms that hinder support for girls' education, labelling and messaging can be used to encourage parental commitment to girls' schooling. Initiatives such as labelled cash transfer top-ups and in-kind benefits should be rigorously tested to assess the effects of the increased transfer value on school enrolment and retention outcomes. An alternative strategy to direct top-ups for households is to provide capitation grants to local schools serving PSNP families. This could be jointly coordinated with the Ministry of Education.

3. Building on the aims of Ethiopia's National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (2020–2024) as well as the progress of Phase I of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (2016–2019), several steps can be taken, including the following:
 - a. Continue to invest in **improving quality of education and expand access to curricula on child marriage prevention** at upper primary and secondary schools.
 - b. Leverage funding from the School Grant Program to scale up interventions in schools in PSNP *woredas* that focus on **girls' and boys' empowerment, life skills and sensitization efforts** to combat child marriage.⁴⁰ Specifically, the availability of girls' clubs in schools (and/or gender clubs that also involve boys) should be expanded. Active participation in these platforms by girls and boys should be encouraged to enable them to gain information and advice related to risks of child marriage and to exercise their choices regarding schooling and marriage, build their life skills, and strengthen their voice and agency.
 - c. **Train teachers and other relevant school staff to provide referrals** for girls at risk of or affected by child marriage to relevant services, including legal aid, case reporting, psychosocial support and counselling services.
4. **Develop specific interventions for out-of-school girls** (both married and unmarried) to ensure that they have access to the information, skills and support networks required to help them make informed choices about marriage, family planning and skills development. In Ethiopia, an estimated 4.5 million girls of school age are currently out of school. Once a girl leaves school, the window before she marries is short. Timely measures are thus required to encourage and support girls to return to formal schooling and/or provide them with alternative learning pathways to gain skills and assets to strengthen their livelihoods and health capacities, reduce the risk of pregnancy at an early age, enhance their autonomy and agency, and expand their employment and livelihood options. The Ministry of Education and UNICEF are embarking on a study to assess the situation of adolescent girls in Ethiopia who have dropped out of school and map their needs for support. This evidence should inform the design of context-specific social protection and child marriage prevention interventions in this area.
5. **Review the content of BCC modules delivered through the PSNP** to explore to what extent and how child marriage is discussed in BCC sessions and identify target groups. At a minimum, BCC content and messaging should avoid inducing any unintended adverse effects on household behaviours or gender relations as a result of discussions about child marriage. Based on the findings of this review, relevant stakeholders should assess the feasibility of incorporating a specific module on child marriage prevention in the existing BCC session curricula. These changes can be introduced initially through the ISNP pilot to assess feasibility before their broader replication within the PSNP. The scope of messaging can be expanded to include information for households about the harmful effects of child marriage; the linkages between pregnancy at an early age, poor nutrition outcomes and intergenerational poverty effects; and the benefits of alternative options for girls beyond marriage and early childbearing. Considering that gender inequality remains a root cause of child marriage, **BCC**

⁴⁰ The School Grant Program is implemented by the Ministry of Education and funded under the General Education Quality Improvement Program for Equity (GEQIP-E) by the World Bank and development partners.

session conversations should be framed with a human rights and gender-transformative lens.

This would involve methods to encourage participants to reflect on discriminatory norms, beliefs and practices that harm women's and girls' rights, including child marriage, female genital mutilation and gender-based violence, as well as unequal distribution of power in intra-household decision-making and unequal access to resources. The participation of all PSNP household members in BCC sessions (including boys and young men, who are most likely to marry adolescent girls, and fathers of adolescent children) is critical to promote gender-equitable attitudes in support of girls' education and delayed marriage as well as a commitment to gender equality more broadly. The new BCC module needs to be tested for its effects on awareness and behaviour related to child marriage and gender-equitable attitudes; the results should inform the potential replication and scaling up of the approach within the broader PSNP.

6. **Expand further the role of the social workers** in the ISNP pilot *woredas* to provide, through home visits, more structured information to PSNP households about the importance of education and delaying marriage. UNICEF and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs can also test the feasibility of expanding the mandates of social workers to include providing referrals to child protection case management for the most vulnerable families and girls at risk of or affected by child marriage, and facilitating linkages to corresponding legal, health, psychosocial and counselling services. Social workers already have large caseloads and cover many aspects of well-being; this recommendation may therefore only be feasible if accompanied by further expansion of the social worker workforce and more capacity building and training.
7. **Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation frameworks of national child marriage prevention efforts** to enable the timely and robust tracking of indicators related to the capacity of social protection programming to respond to the needs of the poorest girls and their families. In particular, resources should be committed to track the specific indicators related to social protection and child marriage outcomes set out in the results framework of Phase II of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (2020–2023).⁴¹ This evidence should be used to inform decision-making regarding child marriage policy and programming.

7.4 Future research recommendations

Finally, a rigorous assessment of how a large-scale social protection programme such as the PSNP can be efficiently linked to child marriage programming is needed. This represents a unique opportunity to further strengthen the evidence base on 'what works' to delay marriage and how successful strategies can be taken to scale. Such evidence will be useful in informing discussions within Ethiopia and internationally – including as part of Phase II of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (2020–2023) – to accelerate action and investments in this area and contribute towards achieving SDG 1 and SDG 5, and specifically Target 5.3.

In light of the aforementioned limitations to the present study and additional gaps in the existing evidence base, the following are recommended as priorities for future research:

⁴¹ The specific indicators are as follows: (1) Proportion of females aged 10–19 years who are benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes using UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage resources and other resources; (2) Total number of females aged 10–19 years who are vulnerable (at-risk, have disabilities, refugees, out of school, etc.) in programme areas; and (3) Proportion of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection.

- 1. Research is needed to explore to what extent and how information about child marriage is being imparted in schools;** who are the target groups; and what effects this is having on (1) knowledge and attitudes towards marriage among both girls and boys, and (2) adolescent empowerment and access to resources to intervene in the event of child marriage risks. Specifically, research should map the existence – and performance – of gender clubs in schools. New research should also examine the variety and quality of activities used to deliver life skills education and to promote active participation in gender clubs by girls and boys, and seek to understand the gendered impacts of programming.
- Specific to PSNP, future research should seek to understand **what specific messages and activities related to child marriage are being delivered through the PSNP BCC session curricula** in the field, the type of audiences to whom these messages are being delivered, and whether and how the child marriage messaging content varies across *kebeles*. It would be important to assess whether and how the boys, young men and fathers from PSNP households are engaged in these discussions and what impact this has on dominant gender attitudes and marriage norms, household power dynamics, and inclusion of women and girls in decision-making. Such an assessment is also needed to understand to what extent capacities and gender attitudes have changed among front-line workers, such as health extension workers and social workers, engaged in the delivery of BCC sessions and other awareness-raising interventions.
- 3. Longitudinal studies are needed to identify the behavioural changes in child marriage over time,** including how decisions are made and how attitudes and economic factors influence these decisions. These longitudinal study designs can observe the timing of new marriages and household-level characteristics associated with child marriage in a prospective manner. Study samples should include variability in socio-economic status (a limitation of the present study is that all PSNP households are extremely poor) to better understand the dynamics of how assets and economic factors affect marriage decisions. To understand these relationships in the future, cohort studies should be designed now, or resources could be used to support and expand existing studies that allow examination of these questions, such as the Young Lives study. Nevertheless, while the Young Lives can help to uncover changes in dynamics around economic factors and marriage decisions over time, it is not set up to understand causal impacts of PSNP on these outcomes.
- 4. Studies are needed to understand impacts of the regular BCC programming implemented as part of PSNP** (beyond the ISNP pilot, currently being evaluated by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti). From a study design perspective, it will be challenging to find a credible counterfactual with which to perform rigorous impact evaluations. Quasi-experimental methods may be possible, if new BCC programming is planned and there is variability in how and where it is rolled out, which can be exploited in the study design.
- The present phase of the PSNP – PSNP4 – is set to end in 2020, and discussions are under way regarding future changes to the programme. The roll-out of the PSNP5 provides an **opportunity to design rigorous impact evaluations** to understand the contribution of different components to child marriage outcomes.

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