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Marriage before the age of 18 is a reality for many girls and boys. Despite sanctions on early marriage, this harmful practice is still present in many countries around the globe, and Azerbaijan is no exception.

Marriage is a joyful time, but the practice of early marriage gives no cause for celebration: each time it happens, it means a child’s, and in most cases girls’, childhood is cut short and her fundamental rights are compromised.

The right to ‘free and full’ consent to a marriage is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – with the recognition that consent cannot be ‘free and full’ when one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision determining the rest of her life. Also, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects a child’s right to express their views freely, the right to protection from all forms of abuse and the right to be protected from harmful traditional practices – hence the prohibition of early marriages. The CRC states clearly that every person below 18 years-old is a child, thus, any marriage when one of engaged parties is below 18 is considered a early marriage. This is a specific example of early marriage.

This report presents a qualitative assessment of the early marriage situation in Azerbaijan showing that this phenomenon not only takes place, but is increasing in some of the regions of Azerbaijan. The assessment also examines the most common reasons for this harmful practice as well as shows the serious consequences of early marriage on the entire life of young people. The assessments suggest that many factors interact to place a child at risk of marriage. Poverty, protection of the chastity of girls and the provision of stability during unstable social periods are seen to be significant factors in determining a (mostly) girls risk of becoming married while still a child.

The silenced voices of many young girls and boys forced into marriage before their eighteenth birthday signify deprivation of childhood and discrimination. Victims of early marriages are exposed to serious health problems, including death of young mother and her child, deprivation of education and personal development, which leads to social and employment marginalization and an ongoing cycle of poverty, domestic violence and discrimination.

Ending the practice of early marriage is critical if we are to make progress in efforts not only to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals but most importantly to save the health and lives of many Azerbaijani children, ensuring their bright and healthy future. But this will require unambiguous political commitment, visionary leadership and advocacy to address many of the cultural practices and behaviours that place girls at many risks.

We must work to change attitudes in families and in society at large, extend opportunities for childhood learning and education, offer appropriate support to families and children, and seek to have all children – girls and boys – recognized as valuable members of society rather than economic burdens.

Our intention is to raise awareness of the situation and, where necessary, to stimulate positive actions for change of the lives of Azerbaijani children.

Foreword

Mark Hereward
UNICEF Representative, Azerbaijan
The protection of children's rights and freedoms, their access to quality education and medical services meeting high standards, their coverage with comprehensive care, creation of necessary conditions for their upbringing in highly moral and social environment, their formation as personality and honest citizens comprise the priority directions of Azerbaijan’s state policy. The socially oriented policy which was founded by Heydar Aliyev and continued today by the Country President, Ilham Aliyev promotes the formation a healthy family institution in the country.

Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, the First Lady of the Country, President of Heydar Aliyev Foundation, and parliamentarian by having a regular focus on women’s and children’s issues has mentioned during the 3rd Congress of Azerbaijani Women, that the biggest resource of the country is its intellectual potential. However, having said that, some families do not allow their daughters to complete even their secondary school education. In Mrs. Mehriban’s view, this is an unacceptable case. In fact, in every civil country, the improvement of all children’s education, culture and health services, and creation of equal opportunities for everyone is crucial in the country without any discrimination. In some families the removal of a child from the education due to the fact that she is a baby girl and engaging her in an early marriage causes a feeling of pity. Although negative physical, social and economic impacts of these kinds of cases are undeniable truth, some parents are largely mistaken in forcing their children to build such marriages. By forcing their daughters to enter an early marriage, the parents while thinking that they have resolved their problems are facing in fact with greater problems. A girl who has no education, who is unable to protect herself and does not know her own rights falls into a more complicated situation. She completely loses her opportunities to grow up like a personality and is isolated from the society.

In this respect, the goal in a joint project between UNICEF Azerbaijan and the State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs with respect to research on early marriages is to prepare impact mechanisms in order to protect our daughters who are in such situations. According to international normative documents, children’s marriage is considered as violation of human rights. Article 16 of Universal Declaration on Human Rights says: “Both men and women who come to maturity age are entitled to build a family by marrying each other without any racial, national or religious limitations. However, marriage can only take place “on free and full consent of both sides”. If one of the sides has not yet obtained a maturity age and is not capable to make a decision on his/her future spouse, such consent cannot be “full and free”. With respect to this problem, in order to strengthen the legal framework, according to the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs has made its proposals to Milli Majlis to determine the age of 18 as the marriage age for girls.

Moreover, the draft Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence prepared by the Committee and submitted to the Milli Majlis also stipulates the establishment of special women asylums. Our young girls who fall into such complicated situations are in need of serious social-psychological support. At these centers professional social and psychological support should be provided, the social rehabilitation for women should be conducted and opportunities should be created for them to gain new professional skills. In some countries, including in neighboring Turkey, the rich experience collected in this aspect is also being learned carefully.

Early marriage problems cannot be resolved only by state structures. The society itself should make its efforts and struggle to eliminate the stereotypes, not stay ignorant toward these cases and facilitate the processes by overseeing them. Because only after having obtained the maturity age, our daughters’ building families means a more perfect basis. Let’s not forget that Azerbaijani women have always distinguished themselves with their education, positions that they hold in families and by being exemplary mothers.
Child/early marriage is as marriage of children or adolescents under 18, for it is the age stipulated by the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as the upper limit for child protection.\(^1\)

The international standards perceive the early marriages as violation of human rights. The Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found family'. However, the marriage has to take place 'only with free and full consent of the intending spouses'. The consent cannot be 'free and full' when one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Azerbaijan in 1992, states that betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect and all necessary action, including legislation shall be taken to specify a minimum age of marriage. Commission recommends 18 as the age when an individual is fully mature and can make an informed decision about such an important step in life as marriage.

Early marriages were a fairly common practice in the pre-Soviet era of Azerbaijan history. Then, their prevalence decreased sharply during the Soviet regime. Over the recent years experts and social activists raised the alarm about the increasing prevalence of early marriages in Azerbaijan. The concrete data that would prove the experts’ assessment right or wrong were scarce. Therefore the State Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs, with the support of UNICEF Azerbaijan and in cooperation with the International Centre for Social Studies (ICSS), carried out the study which provides a situation analysis of the nature of early marriages in Azerbaijan, including its causes and consequences.

The research has adopted a cross-regional and multi-methodological pattern and has applied qualitative approach which included such methods as: focus groups, semi-structured interviews with key informants and in-depths interviews with persons who entered into early marriages or parents of such persons.\(^2\) The total number of respondents from the focus groups, specialised informants as well as persons who entered into the early marriages and parents of persons who enters into those kinds of unions amounts to 488. The aforementioned types of study covered 4 regions of Azerbaijan: Baku-Absheron, Lenkaran, Guba and Aghstafa. The regions were chosen based on their diverse socio-ethnic cleavages, different degree of economic prosperity, traditionalism and religiosity of their inhabitants.

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1. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 1: A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.
2. For the definitions of the applied methodologies see Annex 4 – Terms and definitions.
1.1
Prevalence and Reasons of Early marriages

Regionally, the greatest number of early marriages, as assessed by focus-groups, occurs in Lenkaran and Absheron, followed by Guba. Aghstafa closes the list. The actual data are difficult to obtain as some of the marriages are based on kabin, performed by the local mullah, thus not officially registered. Despite the fact that an agreement between the state and the mosque obliges the mullah to require the marriage certificate or age certificate from the bride and groom before the kabin, usually the religious marriage ceremony is conducted without documenting the age of betrothed.

In the cases the study came across during the interviews the marriage took place out of the girls will or due to parents’ pressure. Noteworthy is the fact that parents rarely object to the girls’ will to marry in their teens. The number of cases where the marriage was contracted against parents’ will constituted the minority. Usually, parents endorse girl’s decision, perceiving the early marriage as her fate or destiny. Nevertheless, in overwhelming majority of the researched cases it is the parents and next of kin who make the ultimate decision about the marriage of adolescent girl.

It was established that factors which triggered the increasing prevalence of early marriages in Azerbaijani society, however of different origin and importance, are mutually related and closely interwoven. They can be divided into two groups of factors: cultural-psychological and social-economic.

The first group comprises such traditional attitudes towards the family institution and gender like: woman’s predestination to marriage, importance of girl’s chastity and the family’s honour. People succumbed to the miscomprehended religious norms and strongly paternalist model of the family. Marriage and childbearing are again perceived as the major accomplishments women can achieve in their lives.

When examining the factors that made people agree, or even strive to marry their offspring as early as possible, an entire complex group of social and economic reasons was distinguished. The contemporary process of economic and social transition that takes place in the country, as well as the recent war with Armenia, and influx of refugees from Chechnya, could be listed among the reasons. Through early marriages people strive to overcome poverty or better their economic and social status. Economic uncertainty, reinforcement of nepotism and hormat (traditional bribery system) made people seek support in the extended families and the backward looking social norms. Early marriages, especially marrying off minor girls is perceived as indicative of stability and even prosperity of the family conventionally titled as “a big nest”. At present, eagerness to marry is determined by “big nest’s” opportunities to provide newly-weds with social guar-
antees and ease their lives in different aspects ranging from purchase of an apartment in a newly erected building, to obtaining higher education or getting prestigious job.

The collected data exposed very high degree of acceptance for the early marriages both among the members of the families in which the early marriage took place and in the society as the whole. Among the relatives and acquaintances just insignificant minority of the interviewed condemned the marriage, while more than half welcomed this event and above quarter proved to be neutral. This high degree of social endorse to early marriages reveals how little the knowledge about the negative consequences of the phenomena is. It also shows the deeply rooted traditional perception that the marriage is a synonym of the social advancement.

1.2 Negative Consequences of Early marriages

Overwhelming majority of respondents referred to various negative consequences of early marriages for the adolescent spouses, institution of the family and the society as the whole. Their prevalence increases the infant and maternal mortality, raises the number of divorces and curtails female educational attainment.

Child bearing is an integral part of women’s role in Azerbaijani society, and the family exerts strong pressure on the newly-weds in this regard. Early pregnancy and childbirth bares an increased risk of dying, increased risk of premature labour, complications during delivery, low birth-weight, and a higher chance that the newborn will not survive. Although the statistics are clear concerning the risks and negative consequences of early pregnancy and childbirth, there are many stereotypes in Azerbaijani society that not only endorse the childbearing by the adolescents but even tend to perceive the puberty and adolescence as more appropriate time for childbearing then adulthood.

The data on the childbearing among the teenagers as well as the infant and maternal mortality among women below 18 are scarce. The overall infant mortality in 2001-2006 amounted 43 for every 1,000 live births, while the maternal mortality rate in 2007 was 35.5 per 1,000,000 live births. Furthermore – the mortality indicators tended to rise over the last few years, despite the noted economic growth and relative political stability of the
country. The increase of child bearing among adolescents can be one of the reasons for the growth of infant and maternal mortality in Azerbaijan.\footnote{According to DHS data, the probability of an infant dying before his/her first birthday is about 1.8 times higher for mothers < 20 than mothers 20-29 in Azerbaijan.}

The low level of education further impairs the status of the adolescent wife. In absolute majority of studied cases of early marriage women did not continue their education after marriage. In most cases, young wives had to discontinue their studies in the secondary schools. At the same time over 70 percent of men who enter the marriage with the adolescent girls, have the secondary education completed. The wide educational gap between the spouses is not conducive for the relation based on partnership and equality. Furthermore the Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey shows that children of better educated mothers are almost always better off than their peers whose mothers have completed basic education or less.

Young women have a subordinate status in the marriages and are exposed to acute forms of marital control exercised by their husbands. In the research done for the 2006 Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey 89.4 percent of women age 15-19 stated their partners insist on knowing where they are at all times. Only a small fraction (4.2 percent) of young wives is not exposed to any form of marital control.

The adolescent wives, who encounter problems within their marriage, suffer acute loneliness and isolation. Girls are separated from their relatives, for the traditional family system, characterized by the extended families, makes the wife join the family (and the household) of her husband. Therefore, if she encounters problems in her marriage, or is exposed to intra-family violence, she has hardly anyone to support her. It is difficult to determine the actual scope of the domestic violence prevalence. Women may not want to disclose issues of domestic violence. Collection of such sensitive information requires the establishment of a rapport between the interviewer and the respondent\footnote{Demographic and Health Survey, Azerbaijan 2006, p. 211.}, which is not always possible. In order to understand the level of secrecy surrounding the problem it is sufficient to say that 42 percent of women that admit they have experienced physical or sexual violence, has never told anyone about that and 57 percent never sought help.\footnote{Ibid.}

The body of research on early marriages phenomena worldwide shows that those kind of unions prove to be unstable and end with divorce or wife abandonment, which has negative consequences not only for the woman but also for the children born in those
relationships and raised by the lonely mothers. However, the tendency was not clearly shown in the research conducted for Azerbaijan. It is hard to assess the actual number of early marriages that end with divorce, as many of the unions are not officially registered for the adolescent age of the girls.

Divorce or abandonment often plunges a woman into poverty, as she usually assumes sole responsibility for dependent children. Married young, she is under-educated and has few income-generating skills. The situation becomes even more difficult when the marriage was not officially registered and the mother cannot claim alimony for the children and herself when the union does not exist any longer.

1.3 Recommendations

The profound understanding of reasons for the early marriages rising prevalence is very much needed for the apt countermeasures to be planned and implemented. The report presents three groups of recommendations, which refer to:

1. the current legislation acts that need to be amended;
2. the role of state institutions that have to increase their efforts in combating the phenomena;
3. the need for awareness-rising campaigns which inform widely about the negative consequences of early marriages as well as promote the institution of marriage as the union of equal partners.

As far as the current Azerbaijani legislation is concerned, the minimum age for marriage as well as the upper age, until which the education is compulsory require sharp amendments.

The Azerbaijani applicable law in regards to the minimum age for the spouses stipulates that the woman should be 17, and the man 18 years old. Furthermore, under special circumstances, and with the consent of the parties and their families, the age limit can be lowered by the Executive Committee (ExCom) to 16 and 17 for girls and boys respectively. As the prevalence of early marriages is on the rise, many believe that the latter are the official age limits.

The Azerbaijani legislature should reconsider the minimum age for the marriage, stipulated in the Family Code and change it to 18 years for both man and woman. Also the organ eligible to lower the age of the future spouses should be changed from the ExCom based at the district level to the applicable court. Last but not least, the list of reasons for which the marriage age can be lowered, should be limited, inter alia prolonged business
There is a discrepancy in the Azerbaijani Law regulating the age until which education is mandatory. According to the Constitution of Republic of Azerbaijan, the school education is currently compulsory for classes 1-11, while Law on Education envisages a reduction of the compulsory education to 9 years. Reduced compulsory school age is exceptionally low in comparison with other countries.\textsuperscript{6}

The Azerbaijani legislators should consider the European standards in this regard. The low age of the mandatory education creates environment conducive for the early marriages. The “completed” education gives the children and their parents’ wrong idea of the child becoming an adult and thus ready for marriage. The legislative changes should concur with teachers’ active stance in regards to school drop-outs monitoring.

The Demographic and Health Survey from the year 2006 shows that only 21 percent of the married women are employed.\textsuperscript{7} Therefore apart from the strong need of legislative changes in regards to the marriage age and the compulsory education, there is also need for apt legal provisions for gender balanced labour market. The positive discrimination in employment process has to be introduced, so that women can earn their living, and be independent from their partners. The opportunities for the young women should be broaden, so that marriage does not appear as the only way to proceed in life. Education, extra curricula activities and vocational training have to be promoted among the young girls. Schools and municipal organs have to play more active role in that respect.

Under the current legislation, early marriages fall into what amounts to a sanctions limbo. It is prohibited in the existing civil and common law, but at the same time is widely condoned by customary and religious laws and practice. Therefore the law enforcement, social and educational institutions should play more active role in combating the phenomena.

The law enforcement organs should be relentless in pursuing the cases of unregistered marriages, while in cases of unregistered early marriages, where only one of the partners is under age - prosecute the adult for the sexual intercourse with the minor. Furthermore, the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic “On Police” mandates the policemen to take an array of measures “aimed at preventing violation of rights of minors”. It is important that the law

\textsuperscript{6} I.e. in Denmark, Italy, Switzerland the education is mandatory for children age 7-16, in Poland 7-18.

\textsuperscript{7} Demographic and Health Survey, Azerbaijan 2006, p. 191.
enforcement organs take more active stance on the implementation of both the Criminal Code and the Law “On Police”.

The municipal institutions could also launch locally based awareness campaigns about the negative consequences and unlawfulness of the early marriages.

The state has to set up a structure of the psycho-social services at both the regional and district level to assist victims of early marriages and forcible bride abduction. Moreover, shelters for victims of bride abduction and domestic violence should be established at the regional level.

The little knowledge on the negative consequences of early marriages, as well as a mistaken belief in the value of marriage regardless of the ages of spouses, and superstitions about greater fertility of teenage girls in comparison to women in their twenties, are the undeniable factors which contribute to the rise the prevalence of early marriage. Therefore, an intensified awareness campaign is needed to increase the level of knowledge about the maternal health and other negative consequences of early marriages.

Furthermore, the problem of early marriage derives also from the paternalistic model of the family and male dominated society, hence, there is a need for a wider social campaign and debate on the gender equality and partnership in marriage.

Early marriages are destructive social phenomena but it can be effectively uprooted from the Azerbaijani society provided that a comprehensive set of countermeasures ranging from legislative amendments to women empowerment is applied by the state organs.

Formerly, the country was illiterate, and girls showed no interest in sciences and education. They dreamt of being a wife and an affectionate mother. (FFG. 40-55. Lenkaran)
The institution of family and marriage is a complex social phenomenon. The shape of this institution is a result of interplay between economic indicators, political, cultural and social factors as well as ethnicity, religious norms, dogmas, theories and innovations.

The basic difference in family patterns identified was between the traditional familist system and the modern individualist systems. The traditional system is characterized by extended families, communal households, polygamy, authoritarian exercising of power by the patriarachies, young age at the time of marriage, spouses chosen by elders, absorption of the newly-wed into an existing household, and no non-household role or identity for women. In the individualist system, which is the norm in industrialized countries, the situation is quite opposite. In the familist model, fertility is deliberately maximized by marrying girls off immediately after puberty. The family is the unit of economic production and is the only or primary source of wealth, social status and security for its members. In Azerbaijan, the familist model was the one that prevailed in the past, and is very much dominant nowadays.

The institutions of family and marriage, as well as every other such social phenomenon, have their roots in the past. In the case of Azerbaijani history, three periods exerted particular influence on the shape of the modern family. They can be identified as the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Each of them is characterized by an active redefinition of gender norms and the status of women in society.

In the pre-Soviet period, Azerbaijani girls usually married at the age of 14-18 while boys married at 18-22. Among the poor, selling young girls aged 10 to 12 into marriage to elderly men was not uncommon. Two types of marriages were dominant at that time: arranged marriages and bride abductions. Arranged marriages were based on an agreement between two parties representing the interests of the families of the bride and the groom, in which neither the bride nor the groom had any official say but eventually gave their full consent to the marriage. As far as bride kidnapping is concerned, there were two types of abductions. The first, called ‘to unite and run away’, was performed with the girl’s consent, the second one was against girl’s (and sometimes parents’) will. Upon marriage, the man gained full authority over his wife and children, though more commonly it was the mother-in-law and the older women of husband’s household who ruled over the everyday life of the young bride.

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11 Ibid, p. 82.
The Soviet period, despite its many shortcomings and defects, proved to be a system that promoted a certain type of emancipation, emphasized the importance of educating women and encouraged social activity amongst Azerbaijani women. Over the 70 years of the Soviet period, many features defining the status of women in Muslim society, such as dressing in paranja, polygamy and early marriages almost ceased to exist. Mass illiteracy and deprivation of women from participation in political and economic life in society became a distant memory. The level of literacy and social activity of Azerbaijani women increased significantly over the Soviet period. It is enough to say that the level of female education and general literacy among those aged 15-24 in Azerbaijan in 1994 amounted to 99.9 percent, while at the same time in Turkey only 70 percent.\textsuperscript{12}

The aforementioned modernization of the Azerbaijani society during the Soviet period rendered a certain liberalization of the traditional institution of the family. Nevertheless it could not entirely replace the patriarchal features inherent to the familist model of the family, deeply rooted in Azerbaijani traditions. Such elements as arranged marriages, kindred marriages, prevalence of the extending families, devotion of women to family, child bearing and child care remained very much intact despite the advances of the Soviet era.

Moreover, the female emancipation of the Soviet era was somewhat superficial. Although the process of Sovetisation in Azerbaijan, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, involved large-scale integration of women into the economic and political life of the society, professional women were also expected to observe strict sexual standards (the notion of namoos) and carry out onerous domestic duties. The phrase ‘Azeri in Private, Soviet in Public’ reveals the contradictory ideologies that governed the lives of Azeri women under the Soviet system, and the ‘double burden’ they carried combining home and workplace duties.\textsuperscript{13}

The Soviet system, with the emancipation of women, increased the mobility of an individual, disintegrated the family model and left a sad legacy of ‘social orphans’. There are around 14,600 children, including children with disabilities, living in various state residential institutions in Azerbaijan. Few of these children are orphans. Most of them have at least one living parent but the families are, for whatever reason, unable to care for them.

These children are denied the right, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to grow up in a family environment, and are often vulnerable to neglect, abuse and exploitation. The constant growth of the number of children in such institutions since 1995 (+30%)\textsuperscript{14} can be observed. Since GDP growth in the country can be also noted since 1996-1996, the difficult economic conditions of families is certainly not the sole reason for the recourse to public care. The disintegration of families and the collapse of the collectivist welfare system inherited


\textsuperscript{13} Hayat F., Azeri Woman in Transition, Op. cit., p. 4 and following.

\textsuperscript{14} For a detailed analysis see NGO “Initiative for Development”, Children’s Rights and possibilities of the De-Institutionalisation reform. Study on Institutionalised Children in Azerbaijan, realised under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the support of UNICEF, Baku, 2005, p. 11 and following.
from the Soviet time have to be considered as important co-causes of the trend.15

About one million refugees and displaced persons (54.9 percent of whom are women), numerous widows, and significant losses among the males of reproductive age are tragic consequences of the war with Armenia. The post-Soviet economic transition contributed to the migration of males to foreign countries.

Thus, the latest history of Azerbaijan caused people to succumb to the values of extended, paternal families for such a model ensures social and economic support, very much needed at this juncture.

The concept of the 'big nest' family, which provides social, economic, emotional and physical support to its members, became even stronger in the turbulent times after the collapse of the USSR.

Reverting to old traditions entails the dominant role of the males as breadwinners, as well as the marginalization of women, whose role has been once again reduced to household chores. It is of particular concern that early marriages, which seemed to be a relic of the past, have become more and more popular nowadays.16 The research and interviews, revealed the existence of such old practices like beshikde kobek kesdi – the old custom during which two parties (families, relatives, friends) betroth their new born children.

It is not uncommon to hear that the phenomenon of early marriages derives from Islam, which endorses early marriages. However, contrary to a popular misconception, Shariah Law does not specify the exact age of marriage. It stipulates fixed standard of mental maturity or sound judgment. There is clearly a difference between attaining puberty and physical aptitude on one hand and maturity and the qualification to manage life on the other. According to the Koran, married life necessitates that both husband and wife are enlightened and sensible. It is not, therefore, served by the marriage of children.17

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17 See Koran Verses: “Prove orphans till they reach marriageable age; then, if you find them of sound judgment, deliver over unto them their fortune; and devour it not by squandering and in haste lest they should grow up. Whosoever (of the guardians) is rich, let him abstain generously (from taking of the property of orphans); and whosoever is poor let him take thereof in reason (for his guardianship). And when you deliver up their fortune unto orphans, have (the transaction) witnessed in their presence. Allah suffices as a Reckoner.”[Al-Nisaa’ (The Woman); verse 6]; Children in Islam. Their Care, Development and Protection. Al-Azhar University International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, UNICEF, 2005, p. 9.
Although one must have understanding of the difficulties encountered by Azerbaijani society over the last decades, and appreciate that certain coping mechanisms had to be developed, one cannot accept all of these outright. Early marriages – meticulously scrutinized in this report – are social phenomena which bare only negative consequences for the persons in marriage, their children, the institution of the family and for society as a whole. Therefore one should gain a profound understanding of the causes of early marriage as well as measures which would prevent the occurrence of early marriage in the future.

‘Early marriage’ is the marriage of children or adolescents under 18, for this is the age stipulated by the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as the upper limit for child protection.  

In January 2007, when the government of Azerbaijan presented its periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), experts expressed their concern about the rising prevalence of early marriages. Unfortunately, they had no statistics or research to prove their statements. To date there have been very few attempts to systematically study the issues of early marriages in Azerbaijan. Therefore the State Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs, with the support of UNICEF Azerbaijan and in cooperation with the International Centre for Social Studies (ICSS), carried out the study which strives to outline the main reasons why early marriages still occur and in some areas seem to be on the rise. The report is concluded by identification of the areas of concern, and it goes on to stipulate the measures that need to be undertaken.

Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1: A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.
Goal and Purposes of the Study

This study aims to provide a situation analysis of the nature of early marriages in Azerbaijan, including its causes and consequences.

The study specifically aims to:

1. Present a basic understanding of the nature, extent, causes and consequences of early marriages in target areas.
2. Examine the experience of both urban and rural communities with regard to the practice in target areas.
3. Draw attention to the nature of early marriage in Azerbaijan and provide a forum for those impacted by the practice to express their views.
4. Outline the gender specific aspects of the practice, and analyse their impact on social relationships at the local level.
5. Analyse the current referral mechanisms and protection systems to react to and prevent early marriages, as well as any potential gaps or shortcomings in the current systems.
6. Propose clear recommendations for the improvement of legislation, policy and practice relating to the prevention of and response to early marriage in Azerbaijan.
3.2 Methodology

The research has adopted a cross-regional and multi-methodological pattern and has applied a qualitative approach which included such methods as: focus-groups, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and in-depths interviews with persons who have entered into early marriages or with the parents of such persons.

The total number of respondents from the focus-groups, specialised informants as well as persons who have entered into early marriage and parents of persons who have entered into those kinds of unions amounts to 488.

In accordance with the designed methodology, the data have been collected through the following methods and procedures:

40 focus-groups have been formed and interviewed in four target regions: Baku/Absheron, Guba, Lenkaran and Aghstafa; 10 focus-groups in each of these regions. In each region data from gender divided focus-groups have been collected in the following age groups: 13-15 years old; 16-17 years old; 18-20 years old; 21-24 years old; 40-55 years old. On average, each focus-group consisted of 8 participants; the total number of group participants amounted to 320. Depending upon the gender and age of focus-group participants, a rough list of questions and topics has been compiled to be discussed in a group (see Annex 1).

78 interviews have been conducted with key informants, including: 1) Local authorities; 2) NGO activists; 3) Social researchers (sociologists, gender researchers, psychologists); 4) School teachers; 5) School psychologists; 6) Legal experts; 7) Health professionals; 8) Government officials from related ministries; 8) Police; 9) Religious leaders. (For a template of the questionnaires and list of interviewees, see Annex 2).

19 For the definitions of the applied methodologies see Annex 4 – Terms and definitions.
51 interviews with persons that have entered into early marriages and 39 interviews with parents of individuals who have married early have been conducted in four regions. (For a template of questionnaires and a list of those interviewed, please see Annex 3).

Given the applied methodology, the study strives to provide a qualitative data on the nature of the researched problem. The interviews have been conducted only with a limited number of the respondents. It is due to the fact that the research touches upon sensitive issues that people are reluctant to discuss. It was difficult to obtain the information and at the same time avoid being intrusive. The gathered data are not representative for the whole country. However, it gives a snapshot of the complexity of early marriages problem and strives to define the ways forward in combating the phenomenon.

Primary data have been collected in 4 regions of Azerbaijan: Baku-Absheron, Lenkaran, Guba, and Aghstafa. These regions were selected for the following reasons:

a. Baku-Absheron: Baku is the country’s capital, the most industrialised and urbanized city; at the same time Absheron is a region characterized by very traditional culture and high religiosity. Additionally, the region is inhabited by refugees and IDPs whose opinions and perceptions we wanted to include in the research;

b. Lenkaran is generally considered one of the most ‘traditional’ regions of Azerbaijan and is recognized by some as the area where the practice of early marriage is especially common;

c. Guba is characterised by its multiethnic and multicultural diversity;

d. Aghstafa and other western parts of Azerbaijan alike, is ethnically homogeneous and characterised by a relatively low level of religiosity.
International Standards

Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that ‘Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found family’. However, the marriage has to take place ‘only with free and full consent of the intending spouses’. The consent cannot be ‘free and full’ when one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) states that betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age of marriage. The commission recommends 18 as the age when an individual is fully mature and can make an informed decision about such an important step in life as marriage.

Also, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Azerbaijan in 1992, stipulates that 18 is the age when an individual becomes an adult. Article 1 of the Convention states that ‘child’ means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. Furthermore, the Convention obliges the parties to assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. The views of the child should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

As for the regulation of the age of marriage by the current international legislation, it would be appropriate to mention the UN Convention “On Consent to Marry, Minimum Marriage Age and Registration of Marriage” dated November 7, 1962, ratified by the Republic of Azerbaijan on May 31, 1996. The Convention says that countries which are signatories shall prevent early marriages on their territories and apply measures against those infringing on these provisions. Article 3 of the Convention reaffirms that the contraction of marriages will be through official bodies with an appropriate registration process. Also, the Convention notes that as far back as December 17, 1954 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution which states that family and marriage traditions, practice and custom of some countries come into conflict with the Declaration on Human Rights. It stresses that member-countries shall do their best to put an end to this practice.

21 Full text of the Convention can be obtained from the web-site: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm
Domestic Legislation

4.2

In order to contextualise the survey data, the study examined Azerbaijan’s national legislation with regards to early marriages and protection of minors.

4.2.1 Minimum Age of Spouses

According to the Azerbaijan domestic legislation, legitimate are only marriages contracted officially. Marriage is not allowed between close relatives, fosters, as well as in case when one or both partners are already married or mentally ill. There are two main conditions for official marriage to be contracted: it has to take place on voluntary basis and the age of future spouses has to be in line with the legislation. Under Article 10 of the Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic, marriage age for male is 18; for female – 17. The Family Code requires that a marriage shall be contracted 1 month after presenting an application.

However, Article 10.2 of the Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic says that “for valid reasons, an appropriate body of executive power, on the request of those willing to marry but not reaching marriage age, is entitled to reduce this age by 1 year maximum”. For the same reasons, the mandatory period of 1 month from the application to marriage contraction can be shortened. The marriage can be even contracted the day when a marriage application is presented.

The valid reasons for lowering the minimum marriage age and/or shortening the time between application and marriage contraction are stipulated in the Civil Registrar’s Office Procedures of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic dated October 31, 2003, #145. Article 3.9 of these Procedures states that long-term business trips, leaving for permanent residence, common children, pregnancy of the woman entering into marriage, serious disease of those willing to marry or that of their close relatives, draft/conscription are the very valid reasons. The cases have to be authenticated (warrant, health certificate, birth certificate, etc.).

The Family Code, which allows girls to marry at the age of 16, is inconsistent with the Azerbaijani legislation pertaining to child’s rights. Article 1 of the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic dated May 19, 1998 “On Children’s Rights” reads as follows: “Rights and duties of children, as specified in this Law, apply to a person under 18”. In other words, the Law includes persons under 18 in the category of children. Meanwhile, the Family Code determines the marriage age at 17 and, on exceptional cases, allows for 16 to get into marriage. There is a legal discrepancy even within the Family Code, which on one hand stipulates the marriage age below 18, while on the other hand, its Article 49.1 considers those under 18 as children.
4.2.2 Parental Rights and Duties

The study shows explicitly the undeniable role of parents in the problem of early marriages’ prevalence. As far as the legislation regarding parental rights and duties are concerned the Article 60.1 of the Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic stipulates that rights of parents cannot come into conflict with interests of children. Also, Article 60.2 of the same Code holds that when performing their rights parents shall withhold from actions detrimental to spiritual, physical and psychical health of children. No misuse, insult or humiliation; nor cruelty, coarseness or disdain are admissible with respect to children. Parents guilty of violating rights of their children are answerable to the law. According to the Articles 64.01, 64.04 and 64.05 of the Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic, should a parent fail to perform its duties properly or misuse them, treat its children brutally or pressure them physically and psychologically, he/she may be deprived of the parental rights.

The Azerbaijani legislation provides the base for children to protect their rights and interests inter alia effectively refuse parents’ decision about the early marriage.

Article 51.5 of the Family Code says that when children’s rights and legal interests are infringed, including cases where one of the parents fails to perform his educational or parental duties or misuses them, a child, in an attempt to protect its interests, has the right to apply to an appropriate body of executive power (tutorial or trustee organ). Aged 14, a child is entitled to appeal to the court. Nevertheless the cases of children pursuing their rights through the legal path are unheard of. Responsibility arising from parents’ misuse of their duties is specified as administrative delinquency in the Administrative Delinquencies Code of the Azerbaijan Republic. Specifically, Article 51 of the ADC provides a warning or an imposition of a fine on parents for failure to perform their duties with respect to underage children.

As for legal status of children, it is important to touch upon institutions of tutelage and trusteeship. Article 136 of the Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic provides commentaries on introducing tutelage and trusteeship with respect to children who are parentless with a view of bringing them up and/or educating and thus protecting their rights. More specifically, Article 136.2 of the Family Code says that trusteeship is applied to children under 14; tutelage to children aged 14 to 18. Legal principles of trusteeship and tutelage are specified in Articles 33, 34, 35, 36, 37 and 38 of the Civil Code of the Azerbaijan Republic.
4.2.3 Right to Education

Under Article 15 of the Law “On Education” of the Azerbaijan Republic dated October 7, 1992, the universal education is classified into three levels:
1. primary education (I-IV grade); 2. basic education (V-VIII grade); 3. secondary education (IX-XI grade). As to the education age, Sub-Section 15.1 of the Law provides that the education age is 6, while Article 15.5 states that education is compulsory up to VIII grade (this is now IX grade).

Thus, education until 14 is mandatory for all children. In spite of this Article 15.6 sets out specific requirements for students who have completed basic education to study in the secondary education, schools of art, technical schools and technical colleges. It means that anyone must receive education until the age of 16. Nevertheless, there are problems in the enforcement of 11-year compulsory education.

Article 15.2 of the same law is more specific on this issue by saying that a child who reaches 14 may leave the school pursuant to the school charter. The age of 14, by which education can be ceased, is very low where 11-year education is not enforced and creates an environment conducive for the early marriages. As the Law “On Education” is currently discussed at the Milli Majlis of the Azerbaijan Republic, the momentum should be used to change the stipulations on the age of mandatory education.

4.2.4 Schools and Teachers

School and teachers can play significant role in combating the early marriages. Their role could be twofold. First, school could effectively monitor the school drop-outs that are closely associated with the prevalence of early marriages. Second, providing the extra-curricula activities, would broaden the children’s horizons and make them look beyond the traditional social patterns, according to which marriage is the accomplishment, one should strive to achieve regardless the price.

Article 41.1 of the Charter of Primary School of the Azerbaijan Republic, approved on the basis of the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic, stipulates that the school, within its powers, shall detect minors in social distress, those evading school hours in order to help them get general education. Under the Charter for Secondary Schools, teachers are entitled to show interest in out-of-school activities of pupils, help them, where appropriate, to ensure their social security.

The regulations, however very encouraging, are insufficient to undertake effective measures against school drop-outs and early marriages.
4.2.5 Law Enforcement Bodies

Law-enforcement bodies are aptly positioned to prevent and penalise early marriages.

Actions of the Azerbaijani police are regulated by the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic "On Police". Some changes and amendments regarding protection of rights and interests of minors have been introduced into the Law. A clause "actions aimed at preventing violation of rights of minors" has been added to Article 3 of the Law to comply with amendment dated 30 December 2005. Another change has been made in Article 13 of the same Law to specify duties of policeman. Thus, a clause "take measures aimed at preventing violation of rights of minors" has been added to the list of general duties of policeman. Besides, two new Articles have been included in the Law to protect interests of minors. These are Article 15.1 – "Duties of policeman regarding prevention of violation of rights of minors" and Article 19.1 – "Rights of policeman regarding violation of rights of minors".

Article 19.1 clearly specifies police duties related to prevention of violation of minors’ rights:

1. take measures against persons who involve minors in crimes, prostitution and other immoral actions; who commit illegal actions against minors; against parents and other persons who fail to perform their educational and pedagogical duties, to comply with the legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic;

2. take measures aimed at removing causes and cases conducive to violation of rights of minors; provide appropriate recommendations to respective state bodies, organizations and structures;

3. take measures against parents and other legal persons, as well as senior officials who fail to perform their duties or negatively affect upbringing and education of minors, make them to comply with the respective legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic; provide appropriate recommendations to respective state bodies, organizations and structures.

The legal provisions for the police actions related to protection of minors are quite broad but the implementation of aforementioned regulations is limited.
4.2.6 Sexual Intercourse with the Minor as a Criminal Offence

In vast majority of early marriages in Azerbaijan only the bride is adolescent, while the groom is over 18. Therefore, the latter bares the legal responsibility for the act. Article 152 of the Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic states that sexual intercourse between an adult and a person under 16 or actions of sexual nature are punishable for 3 years of imprisonment. Article 153 of the Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic provides an appropriate punishment for immoral actions, without using force, against a person under 14. Since majority of the early marriages are not officially contracted and registered, the adult person in the union can be prosecuted for a criminal offence in accordance with the aforementioned law.

In accordance with law, the forcible bride abductions, which still take place in the country, qualify as kidnapping and fall under Article 144.1 of the Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic providing 5 to 10 years of imprisonment. Furthermore, Article 150.2.3 of the Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic says that forcible actions against a person or persons with sexual purposes or paedophilia are punishable for 5 to 8 years of imprisonment; if these actions are taken against a person under 14, under Article 150.3.3, stipulates 8 to 10 years of imprisonment.

Yet again, however the legislation gives appropriate tools to penalise men who marry adolescent girls, the cases of actual prosecution of the acts are unheard of.

4.2.7 Single and Adolescent Mothers

As the majority of early marriages are unregistered and often fall apart quickly the problems of single mothers, right to alimony and social assistance arise. Article 57 of the Family Code of the Azerbaijan Republic refers to the rights of underage parents, stating that they have the right to live with their children and take part in their upbringing. Article 57.2 stipulates that if underage parents failed to enter into marriage, they are entitled to act independently as fathers/mothers only upon reaching 16. Trusteeship may be applied to bring up children of parents under 16. Underage parents are entitled to apply to court to establish the fact of paternity/parenthood.

4.2.8 ‘Commission for Protection of Interests and Rights of Minors’

The Commission for Protection of Interests and Rights of Minors was set up in Azerbaijan pursuant to the decision #735 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated July 25, 2002. The
Commission is currently chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. Powers, working principles and structure of the Commission are regulated by the Charter of Commission for Protection of Interests and Rights of Minors approved under the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic dated May 31, 2002.

Article 1 of the Charter specifies the main objectives of the Commission. These include educational influence upon minors, protection of their rights and interests, control over their behaviour, non-admission of illegal actions as well as coordination of central and local government activities. The commission operates not only at the central but also at the regional and local levels, where the commissions answer to the appropriate executive powers. In accordance with Article 3 of the Charter, each commission has to have child psychologist among its members.

The goals and objectives of the commissions are specified rather vaguely, thus in its current shape the Commission cannot be perceived as a viable tool for combating the phenomenon of early marriages.

The domestic legislation proves to be too ambiguous and contradictory at times to prevent or combat the phenomenon of early marriages and problems that are associated with their prevalence. The role of the state organs has to be specified more clearly in regards to the early marriages problem.

One shall strive that legislation not only responds to the contemporary social problems, but also that it is accurately implemented. At this juncture many legislative regulations, however enable to tackle the problem of early marriages, are not implemented.
Many girls from our school got married this year. In our 10th grade only 2 girls are not engaged, while 6-7 girls got married. (FFG.13-15. Absheron)
5.1 Prevailing Tendencies

Many informants recognize that no reliable early marriage data are available in Azerbaijan. This is explained as due to the fact that under the existing law, no early marriages under 16 for girls and 17 for boys are allowed, so the information of this kind is carefully concealed by marriage participants and their families. Religious nuptials, which tend to replace the state registration of marriage, provide no information of this sort. Finding it difficult to provide specific statistical data on the subject, sources operate on the basis of approximate estimates and personal observations.

If one resorts to the information provided by the State Statistical Committee, qualitative indicators that prove the rising prevalence of early marriages can be found. For example, over the last two decades the child birth rate for women in age groups 15-19 and 25-29 became inverted. The number of child births among 25-29 year old women has systematically decreased, while the number of children born by 15-17-year olds has been on the continuous rise. Between 1980 and 1996, the number of children born by women 15-19 has almost tripled. Also, the number of children born out of wedlock is rising. From 1990-2004, the number of children born under non-registered marriages rose from 2.6 to 20.3 percent, which indicates both the corrosion of the institution of the family and the rising prevalence of early marriages.

As far as the issue of the prevalence of early marriage is concerned, the opinions of focus-groups’ participants were divided. Some believe that early marriages are widespread, while others consider them to be rare. Informants’ estimates about the rate of prevalence ranged from 3-5 percent to 80 percent of all marriages.

If one applies the gender-age filter of focus-groups, girls aged 13-17 were among those convinced about the widespread nature of early marriages, while men aged 21 to 24 and 40 to 55, regarded it as a rare phenomenon.

At the same time, all participants from all focus-groups have agreed that cases of early

22 There was a sharp increase in child births in 1997. The analysis of the economic and political situation in the country suggests that the years 1996-1997 provided a period of relative stability since the collapse of the USSR and Azerbaijani independence in 1991. Azerbaijan and Armenia signed the cease-fire on 12 May 1994 and the political landscape of Azerbaijan stabilized with the presidential elections in 1995, won by Heydar Aliyev. The economic indicators such as GDP indicate economic growth in Azerbaijan since 1996. The increase of child births can be observed not only in the age group 15-17, which is of interest to the authors of this report, but in the age groups of 18-19 and 20-24, where child births are most common. The number of child births in the 20-24 age group increased from 46,432 in 1996 to 48,239 in 1997, to decrease once again to 45,467 in 1998. See: Demographic indicators of Azerbaijan…, Op. cit. p.180.

23 Data obtained from: Demographic Indicators of Azerbaijan 2007. See also: Early marriages: the crisis of the society or the law? Musavat, August…” [I would need the date when the article was published] 2008.
marriages take place in their respective areas. The majority of respondents know about such cases, and provide examples from their personal or indirect experience.

Regionally, the greatest number of early marriages, as assessed by focus-groups, occur in Lenkaran and Absheron, followed by Guba, with Aghstafa last. Noteworthy is the fact that focus-group participants from Lenkaran and Absheron are confident of the widespread nature of early marriage. Differences of opinion about early marriage prevalence are as follows:

a) Aghstafa: most focus-group participants believe that early marriages are not widespread.
b) Baku-Absheron: most focus-group participants from Baku tend to think that early marriages are not widespread, while most Absheron focus-group participants are of the opposite opinion.
c) Guba: views were divided; some participants were adamant about the increasing number of early marriages; others held the opposite view.
d) Lenkaran: most focus-group participants insisted that early marriages are widespread.
Most informants agree that early marriages prevail in the rural locality. The majority of those interviewed concur with the view that early marriages are widespread in the southern regions of the country – Lerik, Yardimly, Masally, Lenkaran, on the border with Iran, in mountainous remote villages, as well as in Absheron, Sabunchu, Nardaran, Garadagh and Azizbekov districts of Baku.

Speaking about Lenkaran, Arzu Jafarli, an informant from the local NGO noted “early marriages are widespread in the southern regions of the country, since cultural and historical prerequisites, as well as religious influence are strongly pronounced here. Illegal marriages of this kind make up 25 percent of all marriages in the region”.

At the same time, many sources stress a trend toward early marriage becoming more geographically widespread. Some of them noted that while, in the past, early marriages took place only in some regions of the country, today their prevalence has considerably expanded and is not strictly confined to rural areas.

Chart 2:
Do you think the early marriages are becoming more widespread in your region?

Data based on interviews with 488 respondents
Currently 50% of girls do not finish school and marry very early. This is typical for Baku and the regions. Teacher from Baku suburban school

5.2 Attitudes to Early marriages

The older generation, especially in rural areas, appreciates early marriages. They could not even have different views on this issue. They say that a girl should be married, and if she passes a certain age and does not marry, it is a tragedy. If to take the society as a whole, its attitude is neither positive nor negative. There is no visible reaction among the society when such cases occur. But the youth have a more negative attitude. If a girl gets married, even at the age of 18 when she has such a right under the law, it is perceived by many young people as ridiculous. (FFG.21-24. Lenkaran)
As viewed by participants of focus-groups and key informants, public attitudes towards early marriages vary from negative in some circles of intelligentsia and the urban population to positive and encouraging among the rural population, especially in the southern regions of the country. In rural areas the definition of being ready for marriage is very different from the one stipulated in applicable legislation. The definition of girls’ readiness for marriage, common in rural areas, is very much in line with an old Azerbaijani saying: ‘If a girl runs the household and raises stock, she is ready for marriage’. Most respondents tend to think the public is largely positive about, or at least indifferent to the problem, perceiving it as a personal issue of the family. Youth participants of focus-groups believe that while parents, relatives and neighbours are positive about early marriages, their teachers and peers disapprove of it.

The collected data reveal that acceptance for early marriages is very high both among the members of the families in which the early marriage takes place and among the society as a whole. Among relatives and acquaintances, only an insignificant minority (18 percent) condemned the marriage, while more than half (55 percent) welcomed this event and above a quarter (27 percent) proved to be neutral.

The general acceptance of early marriages is even higher. The majority of respondents (59 percent) are convinced that the local population approve of early marriages; just 22 percent believe that the local population disapprove of the phenomenon.

Chart 3:
Perception of early marriages in the society
The level of acceptance to early marriages differs if you are using the terms interchangeably please refer to both, if one looks at the problem from a regional perspective. The regional comparison shows that out of the researched regions, Guba society is the least tolerant/appreciative towards early marriages.

The overwhelming majority of respondents refer to various negative consequences of early marriages. It is evident that they harm not only the adolescent girls and their future children but also have a negative impact on the institution of the family and on the society as a whole. It will be difficult to combat the prevalence of the phenomenon when the attitude towards the early marriages is so positive. The high degree of approval of the early marriages proves the lack of knowledge about the negative consequences of the phenomenon.

It is well known that adolescent pregnancy, early childbearing, and motherhood have negative socioeconomic and health consequences. Adolescent mothers are more likely to have complications during labour, which result in higher morbidity and mortality for themselves and their children. Moreover, childbearing during the teenage years frequently has adverse social consequences, particularly on female educational attainment, because women who become mothers in their teens are more likely to curtail education.24

Early marriages are the culmination of different factors. Sometimes the marriage is contracted because of the girl’s genuine will to marry; more often marriage is a result of pressure exerted on her by her parents, or as the result of abduction. These factors are surprisingly intertwined, and the line between the girl’s motivation to marry, abduction, and parents’ compulsion is sometimes very thin.

6.1 Early marriages as the Will of Girls Themselves

We liked each other very much. The boy sent his matchmakers, and my father and mother gave their consent. They knew that we liked each other.

Young woman who married at the age of 16 (V18.Lenkaran, Dashtalygdjar)
6. WHO DECIDES ABOUT MARRIAGE?

There are cases where early marriage is the manifestation of a girl’s desire: she had fallen in love and wanted to marry. Our research revealed that in 42 percent of cases, early marriage was the result of a free choice and the desire of the girls themselves. The decision was made without any pressure from their parents.

Although the statistics presented in this way might appear encouraging, the reality is by far less heartening. First of all, it should be noted that cases when the adolescent girl wanted to marry and the parents objected to the idea on the grounds of her young age are almost unheard of. There are cases of parents objecting to a certain candidate but not to the idea of early marriage per se.

Parents are afraid that the girl could have problems finding an eligible suitor in the future and perceive the early marriage as the daughter’s destiny, which they would not like to interfere with. Others fear her flight with a future husband as this would stain the honour of the girl and the whole family.

Furthermore, the girls are raised in a certain mentality in which marriage and motherhood are pictured as the greatest accomplishments of a woman’s life. Thus, it is not surprising that adolescent girls gravitate towards the idea of marriage. The high percentage of respondents pointing at the girl’s will as the reason for the early marriage should not be perceived as the emancipation of women, but rather as abiding by very traditional norms and values. It shows the social belief that girls are predestined to marry anyway, and that the honour of the girl and of the family is highly valued.

6.2 Bride Abduction

Another topic of focus-group discussions was the abduction of under-age girls. The nature of the phenomenon and the attitudes of the population towards it were of our particular interest during the discussions with the respondents. Most participants believe that abduction cases do exist but it is not typical for their region. Even though the majority of abductions occur with the girls’ consent, forcible kidnapping is not unheard of. The respondents said that the main reason for abduction is love which cannot be reaffirmed through normal marriage due to the lack of consent from the family of one of the spouses; sometimes it is entangled with the poor financial status of the groom and a lack of funds to celebrate a wedding.

The analysis of in-depth interviews with participants of early marriages or their parents indicates a relatively high number (19 percent) of early marriages accompanied by abduction. In most cases, the abduction took place with the consent of the girl.
I liked this boy very much, and he liked me. My father said that he would never give me to this man. I could not live without him. Therefore, I ran away with him.

Young woman, who voluntarily ran off to marry at the age of 15 (V21. Lenkaran)

Chart 5:
Is this marriage the result of bride abduction?

- Yes, with girl’s consent: 13%
- Yes, without girl’s consent: 6%
- No: 81%

Just 6 percent of the researched cases were forcible abductions without the girl’s consent, where either the father arranged the abduction because the daughter categorically refused to marry, or the girl was abducted against her own will and the will of her parents. When relatives agree and the girl does not agree to marriage, she is greatly disadvantaged, since she cannot oppose her family and public opinion, nor return home. Very often, she is forbidden to return home due to her stigmatization by those close to her who view her as disgraced.

Sometimes the abduction forces parents to marry their daughters off, even against their will. Due to a fear of staining the honour of the girl and the family, they give the girl to the
man she was abducted by. If the girl was agreed with the abduction, and mutual love was the main reason for such behaviour, one can still be hopeful of the happiness of the union shaped in that manner. But in cases of abductions conducted against the girl’s will, the marriage will have disastrous consequences for their physical and mental health.

I was forcibly kidnapped without my consent. (...) I tried to run away 3 times, but they caught me. They threw me into a dark room and gagged me. I remained there for 3 days. When they heard that my parents were looking for me in the vicinity, they moved me to another place. During one month they kept me in seclusion in different places. (...) it was too late... They started the preparations for the wedding. Young woman who fell victim to forcible abduction at the age of 15: (V30. Aghstafa).

There is lack of accurate statistical data on the prevalence of bride abduction. The informants are in agreement that there are no grounds to suppose that this phenomenon is widespread. Even if it does occur, it is rather an imitation of abduction either to gain parents’ consent for the marriage or save wedding expenses.

It is interesting that the cases of forcible abduction, rare but always widely discussed, make the parents justify the marriage of the adolescent girls even more. They reason that through the early marriage they protect their daughters from being forcibly kidnapped.

Parents gave me in marriage with someone whom I did not want to get married with because I liked another person. It was violent and forced kidnapping. Woman-refugee from Armenia, forcibly married at the age of 16 (V32. Absheron)
6.3 Marriage under Parents’ Compulsion

Only 17 percent of the researched cases of early marriage were contracted without the final consent of the girl’s parents. However, one must bear in mind that this includes both voluntary flight of girls and forcible abductions. The latter are analysed later on in the report.

Chart 6: Did parents consent to the early marriage?

The high percentage of parents that consent to the girl’s will to marry before she has reached adulthood leads to another common factor of early marriages – parents’ anxiety to marry their daughters as soon as possible and to the first eligible candidate.

A couple of stereotypes contribute to the fact that parents want to marry off their daughters as soon as possible. One is the premature fear of the girl becoming a spinster, while the other is the utter conviction of the society about a woman’s predestination to marry.

‘Teenage spinsters’ One of the most common reasons is the fear that if the girl fails to marry in her early teens she may fail to marry altogether. If the girl is single 2-3 years after
graduating school, she is already reputed to be a spinster. Therefore, the girls should take advantage of the very first chance to marry, and parents of 9-10th graders welcome the elchi (matchmaker) and agree to marry their daughters off.

Old custom and tradition, in our area people consider a girl turning 17 years of age as remained at home. (V48. Absheron)

‘Predestination to marriage’ There is always a certain set of values that parents convey to their children. In case of the Azerbaijani society the notion of a woman’s predestination to marriage and motherhood is a rudimentary value that passes through the generations. Following the patriarchal model of the family, girls are raised with the belief that marriage is the biggest accomplishment of their lives, something they should strive to achieve, regardless of their age or uncompleted education. In the majority of cases, girls do not object when parents decide to marry them off early, and because their mindsets have been shaped by the aforementioned values, they perceive marriage as the natural course of events in their lives. As the informants say, if girls are raised in such a way, it is natural that when they reach puberty they dream about marriage, not about education. This type of upbringing can be classified as a delicate form of psychological "compulsion" to marriage.

To a certain extent, my parents have forced me to get married. However, I was also not so determined to object to it. A new life seemed interesting to me. I assumed marrying would be an interesting thing. (V15. Lenkan, Sutamurdov)

The scale of the pressure exerted on girls and the degree of compulsion to marry differ. As stated above, in many cases the type of upbringing is sufficient to make a girl agree to early marriage. Sometimes, however, that upbringing does not suffice to compel a girl to marry early. In those cases, parents either resort to more acute forms of psychological compulsion or proceed with the marriage, regardless of their daughter’s objection.

In some cases parents threaten the girl, in that if she fails to marry now, she will not marry at all; they will not support her education, and she will be punished. This kind of treatment also reveals the "gender inequality" as the girls are not treated like independent individuals that can decide for themselves, nor do they have their own will, their own dreams and their own aspirations. The compulsion to marry infringes on girls’ rights and reinforces the paternalistic form of the family.
The point is that I had no right to protest. Even my protest did not bring any result.

Woman married off at the age of 15 (V47. Absheron, Nardaran)

In our in-depth interviews with early marriage participants and their parents, we strived to assess to what extent early marriage is the girls’ own desire and free choice. 58 percent of early marriage cases are the results of parents’ pressure exerted on girls. In-depth interviews revealed that 31 percent (one in three) of the early marriages arranged by parents were contracted despite the girl’s objection. The remaining 27 percent of early marriages were contracted due to the parents’ initiative in this regard, but the girls complied with their parents’ will without objection, or agreed to marry because of the inability to oppose their parents.

Chart 7:
Was the marriage freely chosen by the girl?

Yes 42%

No, it was the result of parents’ pressure 58%

Data based on interviews with 488 respondents
This was a choice made by my parents. They did not force me. It was just my father’s rule: ‘I give you in marriage with this person. It ought to be done’. I was a child at that time, without knowledge about what my family is. My father said it must be done and I did it.

Woman married off at the age of 17 (V27. Absheron)

More in-depth analysis of who is the ultimate decision-maker on the issue of the girl’s early marriage revealed that although 42 percent of the girls got married based on their own will and desire, only in 23 percent of the cases were they the ultimate decision-makers. In the rest of the cases (except for forcible abduction of brides) it is the members of the girl’s family who make the final decision about contracting the early marriage. In 54 percent of the cases it is the father, which underscores the patriarchal model of the average Azerbaijani family, where the father is the head of the family and decides about major family issues. Yet, there were cases when the decision about a girl’s marriage was undertaken by the mother or grandmother/grandfather. This occurred mainly due to the absence of the girl’s father, as he had died or been divorced.

What my father said was always most important. Our parents always told us that they knew better what was good for us. And we never argued with them. When my father came to a decision nobody was able to change his opinion... The choice of my spouse was also made by my parents. (...) I gave my consent.

Woman married off at the age of 17 (V12. Lenkaran)
On the whole, in the overwhelming majority of cases the girl’s family is the ultimate decision-maker. Therefore the reasons which drive parents in their decision to marry off their adolescent daughters came under our close scrutiny. The results of the analysis are presented in the next chapter of the report.

Chart 8:
Which family members are responsible for the final decision about a girl entering into marriage?

- Father: 53.5%
- Mother: 7%
- Girl herself: 23%
- Grandparents: 6%
- All family members: 10.5%

Data based on interviews with 488 respondents
A girl is a huge burden, like a bag of salt. Azerbaijani proverb

The main reason was that the boy was able to make an honest living. It’s not about some extraordinary possibilities for this boy, but the fact that he had a stable income and was able to maintain a family. (V14. Lenkaran, Girdani)

Analysis of focus-group discussions, interviews with key informants, as well as in-depth interviews with early marriage participants and their parents made it possible to single out reasons for early marriages. However interrelated and complex they are, it is possible to divide them into two main groups. One is group is informed by the traditions and culture of Azerbaijan, while the other is correlated with the social and economic condition of the Azerbaijani society. Both are intricate and multifaceted.

Chart 9: Motivation of parents for girl’s marriage

Data based on interviews with 488 respondents

The diagram shows that the most frequent parents’ motive is care for the daughter’s future, indicated by 45 percent of respondents. 29 percent of respondents singled out
traditions as major motives for early marriage. The notably percentage of respondents referred to a poor economic situation of the family as the motive for marriage of minor daughters - only 7 percent.25

What's interesting is that parents' motives vary from region to region. In the Aghstafa region, the majority of respondents indicated that "economic problems" as well as consent with their "daughter's will" were the main reasons for early marriages. The Baku-Absheron zone presented an entirely different gradation of motives. The overwhelming majority, especially in Absheron villages and settlements, stated that the "observance of traditions" is the main reason that makes parents endorse the idea of early marriages. The "observance of tradition" also plays an important role in Lenkaran where it is mentioned equally as often as observance of "daughter's will". In the Guba region, the "economic problems" per se were not mentioned, but 82 percent of respondents indicated that early marriage is the best way to "ensure the daughter's future", which indirectly means economic stability.

Those regional differences should be taken into consideration by the governmental institutions and civil organizations, when shaping the awareness campaigns and undertaking specific measures that seek to decrease the early marriage phenomenon.

The general interdependence between parents' social and economic position and the acceptance of early marriages has proven to be true for Azerbaijan as well. The lower the level of parents' education the higher degree of acceptance for early marriages, perceived as the "observance of tradition" or "respect for the daughter's will". The same applies for the religiosity of the family. The highly religious parents are more likely to perceive early marriages as the "observance of tradition". A difficult economic situation inclines parents to justify the early marriage as a measure for overcoming poverty and economic problems.

7.1 Tradition and Culture

7.1.1. Woman's Predestination to Marriage

The perception of women's predestination to marry has been discussed at length in the previous chapter of the report (see 5.2 Marriage under parents' compulsion). Given the

25 The analysis does not take into consideration the cases where early marriages occurred without participation and consent of parents, by means of voluntary or forcible abduction of brides without parents' knowledge.
patriarchal concept of the Azerbaijani family and the conviction of the society that women are predestined to marry and raise children, parents feel that they are responsible for setting up the girl for adult life in the appropriate manner.

The age at which a woman is already considered a spinster is exceptionally low in Azerbaijan. Parents fear that if they miss the first opportunity to marry the girl off she may deprive her of marriage altogether. Therefore they endorse the early marriages of their adolescent daughters.

In our region if a girl becomes slightly aged people worry that she has remained at home, she has not married. A girl at the age of 18-19 is considered a spinster. That’s why it is believed that people would knock on the door and ask for marriage only once or twice, never the third time. Therefore, they say if someone is asking your girl for marriage this is her fate (kismet), give the girl to marry him!

A focus-group participant from Lenkaran (aged 40-55)

7.1.2 Honour of the Family and Girl’s Chastity

The mentality of the Azerbaijani people places a ban on premarital liaison. Premarital virginity is highly valued. The informants explain that parents are concerned by the heightened interest of their daughters in sexual life. Thus, they perceive early marriage as a way to protect the girl from premarital sex.

Marriage in general is perceived to be the step towards maturity and wedlock is supposed to ‘save’ the spouses, especially the young wife, from bad habits and evil temptations.

Had the girl surrendered her virginity before marriage, her chances for marriage would fall off sharply. Furthermore, the honour of the entire family would be stained and even the purity of the younger sisters (if she has any) would be put in question.

The parents’ fear about their girl’s virginity is sometimes so high that they decide not to send her to school when she reaches puberty in order to decrease the number of temptations and dangers she is exposed to. Since 14 is the maximum age until which education is compulsory in Azerbaijan, there is no legal consequence for parents banning their daughters from going to school.
Do you know why nowadays lads prefer to marry minors, schoolgirls? Because when they communicate with girls at 25-26 years old and learn that girls have had male friends or just simply have had some experience, they react negatively and never want to marry such girls. For this reason, they prefer to marry school girls who have no experience of contacts with males.
(FFG.13-15. Lenkaran)

7.1.3 Mentality

A certain portion of the informants indicate a role of local and regional customs and norms conducive to early marriages. Elena Kasumova, an expert on gender issues explains, "Early marriages, especially on the part of the girl, were ethically standard within the framework of Muslim tradition. The protracted process of emancipation during the Soviet period raised marriage age limits and gave impetus to the education of the young generation. Following the break-up of the USSR, Soviet morals and social standards collapsed to give the way to forgotten old ones." The traditions, as viewed by many informants, entrust women with the sole function in society – the role of “custodian of hearth”. Therefore, parents marrying their daughter off believe that they are assisting her in fulfilling her life's major mission: to perform as wife, mistress and mother.

I say again that giving girls in early marriages is a custom of our village. They will not study or work. What will they do at home? Let them go in marriage. (P34. Nardaran)

7.1.4 Religion

Many informants note a connection between traditions and religious values. According to Hagigat Mammedli, a sociologist and activist in women organization: “Places with a strongly pronounced religious factor, for instance, the Masally zone, are renowned for numerous early marriages”.

However, religiosity of Azerbaijani society is disputable. Decades of Soviet influence made the Azeri society lean towards atheism or agnosticism at the very best. Therefore, many informants assessed that the religious factor in itself is inferior as a reason for early marriages. They point out that tradition and custom are the primary drives of early marriages.
However, if people are asked about the origin of those traditions they tend to point to religion. On the other hand, one can observe an increased religiosity in some circles of the society. It is usually a response to the Westernization of Azerbaijan and depreciation of older values. This type of religiosity and conservatism is rarely an inheritance received from previous generations. In the majority of cases, it is a refuge from the depreciation of values in the contemporary society.

The common understanding is that Islam allows early marriages. It reveals very superficial and traditional comprehension of Islam and Shariah. However, Shariah Law does not specify the exact age of marriage, it stipulates fixed standard of mental maturity or sound judgment. There is clearly a difference between attaining puberty and physical aptitude on one hand and maturity and the qualification to manage life on the other. According to the Quran, married life necessitates that both husband and wife are enlightened and sensible. It is not, therefore, served by the marriage of children. Many of the informants stated that, "Islam attaches great importance to education, and calls on one to study, but not to create a family in childhood".

When enquired about the kabin (religious marriage contracted by mullah) of minors, informants put the blame on misinterpretation of Islamic dogmas and mullahs' ignorance. One of the interviewed theologians emphasized that Islam gives specific instructions regarding kabin and strongly underlines the husband's responsibilities towards his family. “Under this principle, a man shall support and provide for his woman and children for the rest of his life, but it is rarely conveyed by the mullah during the kabin nowadays”.

There is a custom in Azerbaijan that if a girl has been ‘touched’ (i.e. intimate contact, communication, etc.) by a man, she should marry this person. (MFG.21-24. Absheron Kurdekhana)

There are some families who consider early marriages as a means of making profit and money. That is why they give their daughters in marriage with rich, well to do men who are 10-15 years older than the girls. This is considered as one way to escape financial difficulties. (FGF.21-24. Baku)

26 See Koran Verses: “Prove orphans till they reach marriageable age; then, if you find them of sound judgment, deliver over unto them their fortune; and devour it not by squandering and in haste lest they should grow up. Whosoever (of the guardians) is rich, let him abstain generously (from taking of the property of orphans); and whosoever is poor let him take thereof in reason (for his guardianship). And when you deliver up their fortune unto orphans, have (the transaction) witnessed in their presence. Allah suffices as a Reckoner.”[Al-Nisaa’ (The Women); verse 6]. Children in Islam. Their Care, Development and Protection. Al-Azhar University International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, UNICEF, 2005, p. 9.
7.1.5 Wife’s Obedience

As stated before, the family structure in Azerbaijan is based on the patriarchal model, with strong dominance of the male and a clearly defined role for the woman, which demands from wives a strict obedience and subordination to their husbands. Thus, the independent sense of self that a girl may develop during adolescence is seen as undesirable. The younger the bride, the greater the chances are of conditioning her into the appropriate subservient behaviour.

In the case of early marriages in Azerbaijan, the average age of girls on the date of their marriage in the cases surveyed is 16.1, while the average age of husbands is 24.4 (age of husbands ranges between 16 and 32). Thus, average age difference is 8.3 years. In 34 percent of cases (in every third marriage surveyed), the age gap between husband and wife amounted to over 9 years. The share of cases where age difference between the spouses did not exceed 5 years is just 18 percent.

It has to be stated that a big difference in the age of spouses is not conducive for a stable relationship, based on partners’ equality. An unequal division of powers in marriage is likely to be exacerbated where the husband-wife age gap is wide.

Boys marry young girls because they want to dictate their will. (FFG.21-24. Absheron)

7.2 Social and Economic Reasons

Azerbaijani society, with the turbulent modern history of its country, which includes the collapse of the USSR and gaining independence, the collapse of the economic system and the war with Armenia, often looks upon marriage as a family-building strategy or economic arrangement. According to those standards, marriage should lead to an improvement of the economic condition or promotion in the social hierarchy. If that is to be achieved, even for the price of marrying off a minor child, many parents do not hesitate over contractual marriage.

28 Ibid.
7.2.1 Poverty

According to the majority of informants, the difficult economic conditions, especially among the refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), contributes considerably to the rise of early marriages.

"Economic problems make people cultivate a strategy of economic survival and adaptation. Creation of these marriages is one of the most effective means of survival and adaptation to existing conditions. Poor families are seeking to marry their daughters off as quickly as possible, since they are in no position to maintain and educate them." - says an informant.

The adolescent girls cannot provide for themselves, as they cannot be employed because of their minor status. Therefore, parents struggling with poverty decide to marry their daughters off to transfer the responsibility for their financial support to the newly established families.

I have nine daughters, but there is no man in the village for my daughters to marry; all of them left in search of employment and a better living. A woman from Bilesuvar

7.2.2 Care for Daughter’s Financial Future

A more common reason for early marriages is not only the acute poverty but also the genuine will of parents to marry the daughter off to the most eligible candidate who will ensure prosperity for the wife and future family.

"As a matter of fact, the marriage is a contract made on a sort of market with its own demand-supply rules", - says Ali Abbasov, an expert on gender issues. "Parents would like to become related to a well-to-do family. When marrying their daughters off, they put the responsibility for their economic conditions on the new family. This is explained as care for their daughter and aspiration to provide her a better living".

The comparison of the material wealth of bride and groom families at the time of marriage sheds some light on the role of economic factors in determining the phenomenon of early marriages in Azerbaijan.

In 37 percent of cases girls married men from more well-to-do families; in 49 percent of cases the economic situation of both families were similar, and only in 14 percent of cases did girls marry men from families poorer than their own. Thus, there is a higher probability of early marriages between economically well-off men and adolescent girls from less prosperous families.
Parents claim that the only aspiration they had been guided by was to ensure their daughter’s happiness, which for them means a traditional woman’s happiness in the form of a prosperous family. "A principal idea is that parents must arrange their children’s life properly. The task of the head of the family is to identify the best path that will lead to the material welfare of his children" says Arzu Jafarli, an NGO activist from Lenkaran.

Note that under-age girls themselves are frequently guided by economic motives when entering into marriage. Indirectly though, it proved correct that in cases where marriages came as a result of free choice, they decided in favour of more well-to-do men rather than the less affluent ones (47 percent against 21 percent respectively).
Nowadays there are families with high economic possibilities. However, they force their underage girls to get married. They want to give their daughters to the families of their friends or companions. In this way, they want to extend their social network. They expect to increase their sphere of influence by giving their girls in early marriages. (FFG. 21-24. Baku)

7.2.3 Demographic Problems

A considerable portion of informants note an influence of demographics.

The process of economic transition, which takes place in Azerbaijan, revealed sharp differences between men and women’s mobility. The unstable labor market and slim employment opportunities in the rural areas made scores of men migrate to Russia and other countries. Thus the number of male population in the countryside dropped visibly and currently the number of men aged 25 and older is less than women. Therefore, parents are doing their utmost to marry their daughters off.

In this situation, according to common perception, a girl has no opportunity to choose a longed-for bridegroom. She has to give her consent to the first one who comes along, for the probability of someone else to seek her hand in marriage is very low.

My marriage was contracted because of my parents’ intention to embrace a befriended family into the family circle.
Woman given in marriage at age 14 (V34. Absheron)
7.2.4 The Importance of ‘Big Nest’

Informants are unanimous that marriage has always been reputed by Azerbaijani families as a central and socially significant event both for parents and their children, especially daughters. When married, the young woman is alleged to raise her social and personal status; the earlier she marries the earlier the social promotion occurs.

In-depth analyses of the interviews showed that often parents’ desire to establish bonds of kinship with friends and acquaintances made them marry their daughters off to relatives and fellow-countrymen.

According to Elena Kasumova, an expert on gender issues, “Early marriages, especially marrying off minor girls is perceived as indicative of stability and even prosperity of the family, conventionally titled as “a big nest”. This patriarchal type of family with hierarchically determined “family plead” and ties with distant relatives have always been typical for Azerbaijan. It forms the base for nepotism and clan-oriented relations. At present, eagerness to marry is determined by “big nest” opportunities to provide newly-weds with social guarantees and ease their lives in different aspects ranging from the purchase of an apartment in a newly erected building, to obtaining higher education or getting a prestigious job”.

My husband did not want to agree to marry our daughters off. I was the initiator of the marriages. We were displaced persons. We had 4 children. Only my husband had a job and we had a lot of financial difficulties. I thought that early marriages would lighten our burden. (P22. Absheron, Khirdalan, IDP)
One underage girl was given in marriage in Sutamurdov village. The girl became pregnant. A check-up showed that she had twins. Soon, her family saw that she could not endure the pain, and some of her blood vessels had broken. The girl was taken to Baku, but doctors there did not accept her and she returned to Lenkaran. One day the girl was found in a puddle of blood. She could not give birth to the children. Her family was devastated. (FFG.40-55. Lenkaran).

Early to marriage and early to rise makes no harm.
Azerbaijani proverb
8.1 Harming Health of Mother and Future Child

In Azerbaijan, as in many other countries, childbearing soon after marriage is integral to the woman’s social status. The family exerts strong pressure on the newly married couple to begin childbearing quickly. Early marriages are no different in this respect.

The risks of early pregnancy and childbirth are well documented: increased risk of dying, increased risk of premature labour, complications during delivery, low birth-weight, and a higher chance that the newborn will not survive.\(^{29}\)

Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for 15-19-year-old girls (married and unmarried) worldwide. Mothers in this age group face a 20 to 200 percent greater chance of dying in pregnancy than women aged 20 to 24. Those under age 15 are five times as likely to die as women in their twenties.\(^{30}\)

Evidence shows that infant mortality among children of very young mothers is higher – sometimes two times higher – than among those of older peers the same in Azerbaijan see Executive summary.\(^{31}\) A stronger likelihood of low birth-weight in infants has been recorded among adolescent mothers more than among older peers. Low birth-weight babies are 5-30 times more likely to die than babies of normal weight.\(^{32}\) If a mother is under 18, her baby’s chance of dying in the first year of life is 60 percent higher than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19.\(^{33}\)

Although the statistics are clear concerning the risks and negative consequences of early pregnancy and childbirth, there are many stereotypes in Azerbaijani society that not only endorse childbearing by adolescents but also tend to perceive puberty and adolescence as more appropriate times for childbearing than adulthood.

Key informants of the conducted research such as physicians, school psychologists and teachers point out widely spread and erroneous (from a medical standpoint) stereotypes, which are supportive of early marriage practice. It is believed that there is noting wrong with early motherhood, on the contrary – adolescent girls are believed to be more fertile.

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and better positioned for motherhood than, for example, 25-year-old women. It has also been noted by the informants that the majority of the population is hardly aware of the negative consequences of early marriages.

The data on the childbearing among the teenagers as well as the infant and maternal mortality among women below 18 are scarce. The overall infant mortality in 2001-2006 amounted 43 for every 1,000 live births, while the maternal mortality rate in 2007 was 35.5 per 1,000,000 live births. Furthermore – the mortality indicators tended to rise over the last few years, despite the noted economic growth and relative political stability of the country. The increase of childbearing among adolescents can be one of the reasons for the growth of infant and maternal mortality in Azerbaijan. According to DHS data, the probability of an infant dying before his/her first birthday is about 1.8 times higher for mothers < 20 than mothers 20-29 in Azerbaijan.

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The proportion of teenagers who have begun childbearing is 4 percent in urban areas compared with 10 percent in rural areas. Teenage childbearing varies significantly across regions, ranging from 3 percent in Absheron and Baku to 12 percent in Lenkaran.34


Source: SSC www.azstat.org

Curtailed Right to Education

Early marriage inevitably denies school age children their right to the education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future well-being of their family and society. Adolescent girls who marry either drop out of school immediately or just finish their current educational institution. Only 2 percent of married girls continue their education. The high percentage of school dropouts is negative for girls and women as it decreases their social adaptability and makes them entirely dependent on their partners or husbands, but it is also bad for the society, for the low educational level of the society impedes its development and prosperity.


per 100,000 live births

Source: SSC www.azstat.org
As is seen, in the absolute majority (86 percent) of studied cases of early marriage, women did not continue their education after marriage. On the date of marriage, some of them had finished school education, whereas most of them had to give up their studies. In most cases, young wives had to discontinue their studies in secondary schools, yet in some cases, this occurred at the stage of technical secondary school or higher education.

However, it has to be stated that in some parts of Azerbaijani society the entire perception of the importance of girls’ education is somewhat distorted.

My mother says that I need to get married. She does not permit me to go to school. She says that educated girls have too much freedom in the city and engage in bad behaviour. Therefore, if there is an appropriate groom, she will marry me off. (FFG.13-15. Aghstafa).
Many parents value a daughter’s proficiency in performing the household chores higher than the education they obtain in schools. To some extent, it is determined by the fact that in the patriarchal Azerbaijani society, the woman is predestined to marry and enter motherhood, an important task, which she has to be adequately prepared for. On the other hand, the fear for a girl’s chastity is so high that parents perceive the school environment as a direct threat to female purity. They strive to confine the girl’s world to the narrowest circle possible and then marry her off.

Most focus-group participants (girls aged 13-17), especially from Absheron and Lenkoran, believe that their parents would give them in marriage rather than decide on their further education. The double social standards for the education of boys and girls become evident when one compares the level of education of spouses at the time of marriage. Only a third of girls who enter into early marriages have completed secondary education, while some have graduated only primary school (6 grades). At the same time, over 70 percent of men who enter marriage with the adolescent girls have secondary education completed.

Chart 14:
The educational level of females and males by the time of early marriage

Data based on interviews with 488 respondents
The wide educational gap between spouses is not conducive to the relationship based on partnership and equality. Furthermore, the inequality between the husband and wife is redoubled by the fact that in many marriages the age-gap between the spouses is also significant. The uneducated adolescent wives are prone to domestic violence and deprived of professional development.

According to the data presented in the 2006 Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey, the likelihood that a woman has experienced violence tends to decrease with education. For example, 18 percent of women with basic secondary or less education have experienced physical violence since age 15 compared with 9 percent of those with higher than secondary specialized education.36

8.3 Male Dominated Family Model & Marital Control

During the research on Women’s Empowerment and Demographic and Health Outcomes, conducted as part of the 2006 Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey, it became clear that women from the age cohort 15-19 are the most marginalized in terms of household decision-making. The female respondents were asked whether they participated in decisions on their own health care, on making major household purchases, on making household purchases for daily needs, and on visits to family friends or relatives. Only 21 percent of women from the 15-19 age cohort participated in all four types of decisions.37

Some girls do not study, and thus, seek to marry instead.
(FFG.13-17. Lenkaran)

37 Demographic and Health Survey, Azerbaijan 2006, Women’s Empowerment, p. 197.
This marginalization of young women in the decision-making process is not only negative from the women empowerment perspective, but it also has harmful consequences related to women’s health. The researchers determined a relationship between the extent to which a woman participates in decision-making and the degree of acceptance to domestic violence. Women who were less involved in the decision-making process were at the same time more tolerant towards abusive behaviour from their husbands. Furthermore, those women who do not participate in the decision-making process are less likely to receive proper reproductive health care.

As illustrated in the chart, the women who don’t participate in the decision-making (79 percent of women age 15-19) are by far less likely to receive proper reproductive health care, which is of utmost importance for the health of the mother and the child.

The following paragraphs will illustrate the dangers to which the mother and child are exposed to in the case of childbearing during puberty. Their seriousness is astounding, even without the knowledge that these adolescent girls are discriminated against by their husbands and deprived of the proper reproductive health care.

The first indicator of marital violence is the degree of marital control. Attempts by male spouses/partners to closely control and monitor their female counterparts have been
found to be among the most important early warning signs, as well as a strong correlation to violence in a relationship. Controlling behaviors most often manifest themselves in terms of extreme possessiveness, jealousy, and attempts to isolate the woman from her family and friends.

The research done for the 2006 Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey (AzDHS) revealed that women age 15-19 are the most exposed to marital control. For example, 89.4 percent of them state that their partners insist on knowing where they are at all times.

Chart 16:
Reproductive health care by women’s participation in decision-making

Source: 2006 Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey
In order to determine the degree of marital control by husbands of their wives, women who were married or formerly married were asked in the AzDHS whether or not their current (last) husband exhibits each of the following controlling behaviours: (1) becomes jealous or gets angry if she talks to other men; (2) accuses her of being unfaithful; (3) does not permit meetings with female friends; (4) tries to limit contact with her family; (5) insists on knowing where she is at all times; and (6) does not trust her with any money. Because the accumulation of such behaviours is more significant than the display of any single behaviour, the proportion of women whose husbands display at least three of the specified behaviors is highlighted. 39

Only a small fraction (4.2 percent) of young wives is not exposed to any form of marital control, while every second woman age 15-19 is exposed to at least three of the above-mentioned forms of marital control. To make matters even worse, teenage women are more likely to experience force at the time of sexual initiation. 40

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8.4 Isolation, Domestic Violence, Abandonment

Adolescent wives who encounter problems within their marriage suffer acute loneliness and isolation. Girls are separated from their relatives because the traditional family system, characterized by extended families, forces the wife to join the family (and the household) of her husband. Therefore, if she encounters problems in her marriage, or is exposed to intra-family violence, she has hardly anyone to support her.

Furthermore, adolescent wives are surrounded by people who endorse their situation. The social attitude towards wife beating is one of the most illustrative examples. The 2006 Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey gathered information on women’s and men’s attitudes toward wife beating. Women and men were asked whether a husband is justified in beating his wife under a series of circumstances: if the wife burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses sexual relations. The chart below presents the number of women and men who agreed with at least one specified reason as the justification for violence. However women age 15-19 are less likely than older women to agree that a husband is justified in beating his wife in any circumstances, men of the same age as well as those from the age cohort 20-24 and 25-29 (their husbands) agree much more often that wife beating is justified at times. As the acceptance of husbands’ violent behaviour increases among women elder then 19, one may assume that mothers-in-law justify the marital violence exercised by their sons.

She has no choice. Regardless of her happiness or satisfaction, she must live with her [husband’s] family. We have no such word as ‘divorce’. (P34.Absheron, Nardaran)

The perception of the society is that a girl who got married accomplished the main goal in a woman’s life and performs the duties she is predestined to do: motherhood and taking care of the household chores. Therefore, there are a lot of cases where minors are still married, despite their dissatisfaction with their family life. These cases reached 11 percent of the total number of researched cases.

It is difficult to determine the actual scope of the prevalence of domestic violence. Women may not want to disclose issues of domestic violence. Collection of such sensitive information requires the establishment of a rapport between the interviewer and the respondent, which is not always possible. In order to understand the level of secrecy surrounding the problem it is sufficient to say that 42 percent of women that admit they have experienced physical or sexual violence have never told anyone about it and 57 percent never sought help.

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My sister already had 2 kids when she got divorced from her husband at 15. She was 13 when she gave birth to her first child. (FFG.21-24. Absheron)

Many women would have taken the decision to leave their husbands earlier had they known it would be supported by their relatives and community. The support they need is not only of a psychological nature but also a financial one. As discussed above, women who marry during adolescence usually have problems with social adaptability due to the low level of education.

I was the initiator of divorce. As I said, I had created a family with an unloving person. In my 11 years of living with this person I experienced a lot of violence and insults. My children were deprived of a normal life. From an interview with young woman married off at age 17 (V43. Baku)

All the same, early marriages prove to be unstable and end with divorce or wife abandonment, which has negative consequences not only for the woman but also for the children born in those relationships and raised by lonely mothers. Worldwide research indicates that children from divorced families show decreased social adaptability, while their negative experiences from childhood often cast a shadow on the families they create themselves when reaching adulthood.

It is hard to assess the actual number of early marriages that end in divorce, as many of the marital unions are not officially registered due to the adolescent age of the girls.

Our marriage was done by a mullah on the basis of kabin. He did not ask me my will. They gave me a piece of paper and asked me to sign it. After the marriage I did not stay with my husband for even a year. I had a very bad life there.

Interview with forcibly abducted girl at the age of 15 (V30.Aghstafa, village)

Many of the marriages are registered only after the birth of the first child. Although in most cases (81 percent) at the time of the survey, a couple had been married and kept residing jointly, and approximately 18 percent of early marriages studied ended in divorce. Some of the unregistered marriages are based on kabin, performed by the local mullah. Despite the fact that an agreement between the state and the mosque obliges the mullah to require the marriage certificate or age certificate from the bride and groom before
I was a young wife. I knew very few things and was unskilled. Members of my spouse’s family made a lot of trouble for me. His old mother together with his sisters exploited me as a slave, and if I did not handle it well, they would even beat me. They beat me very severely, especially on my head. Young woman, voluntarily fled at the age of 15 (V16. Lenkaran).

The analysis of divorce based on the interviewed cases frequency by regions indicates that early marriages break up most frequently in the Baku-Absheron zone (28 percent). Figures for the Aghstafa, Lenkaran and Guba regions stood at 20 percent, 13 percent and 0 percent respectively. Beyond any doubt, these figures do not do justice to the real extent of early marriages’ break-ups but they allow concluding that early marriages in the Baku-Absheron and Aghstafa regions are less sustainable in comparison to the Lenkaran and Guba regions.

Data based on interviews with 488 respondents
The main reason for the marital union to fall apart is domestic violence. The young girls are exposed to the brutal behaviour of their partners, and susceptible to it in cases of violence experienced by their mothers and sisters-in-law.

Divorce or abandonment often plunges a woman into poverty, as she usually assumes sole responsibility for dependent children. If she married young, is under-educated and has few income-generating skills, her poverty may be acute. 44

The situation becomes even more difficult when the marriage was not officially registered and the mother cannot claim alimony for the children and herself when the marital union does not exist any longer.

Therefore, stronger legislative provisions in regards to registration of marriages (also those based on kabin) are needed in order to decrease the phenomenon of early marriages, which now seems to be on the rise, but also in order to provide economic protection for the mother and child in case the marital union ceases to exist.

It was the initiative of my husband to get divorced. (...) At the moment my kids and I are staying in my mother’s home where my mother, my brother and my sister are living. Our situation is not as good as in previous years. My dad died and our income is less than it used to be. Young woman married off at the age of 16. (V47.Absheron, Nardaran)

The soviet era in Azerbaijan, despite its many shortcomings, stood for progressive attitudes in regards to gender equality, and the emancipation of women. Unfortunately, current developments and the democratisation processes that have taken place in the country have failed to sustain those achievements, and have allowed the restoration of old attitudes towards the institution of the family and have made a revival of such a negative social phenomenon like early marriages possible.

Operating on the data of the conducted research, it can be stated that the phenomenon of early marriages is notably spread in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the collected data do not allow one to precisely assess the prevalence of this phenomenon. Data available bears out the fact that the practice of early marriages is widely spread, especially in villages of the Absheron peninsula (not only among the native population but also among refugees and forced migrants) as well as in the southern (Lenkaran) and northern (Guba) regions. The western zone (Aghstafa) seems to be less troubled by the phenomenon.

Factors that triggered the increasing prevalence of early marriages in Azerbaijani society, despite being of different origin and importance, are mutually related and closely interwoven. They can be divided into two groups of factors: cultural-psychological and social-economic.

The first group comprises such traditional attitudes towards the family institution and gender alike: a woman’s predestination to marry, the importance of a girl’s chastity and the family’s honour. People succumbed to the miscomprehended religious norms and strongly paternalistic model of the family. When examining the factors that made people
agree, or even strive to marry off their offspring as early as possible, the study distinguished an entire complex group of social and economic reasons for the early marriages to occur. The contemporary process of economic and social transition that takes place in the country, as well as the recent war with Armenia, and influx of refugees from Chechnya, could be listed among the reasons. Through early marriages, people have strived to overcome poverty or better their economic and social status. Economic uncertainties, reinforcement of nepotism and hormat (traditional bribery system) have made people seek support in the ‘big nest’ families and the backward looking social norms.

The above outlined picture of the intertwined causes of early marriages prevalence shall be by no means regarded as the justification for the phenomenon. The array of negative consequences of the early marriages speaks for itself. Early marriages harm the health of the minor mothers and their children. Early marriages prove to be unstable and contribute to the corrosion of the institution of the family. They decrease the level of women’s education, and consequently the level of education of the entire society, which in turn aggravates the society’s ability to progress. Therefore, the profound understanding of reasons for the early marriages rising prevalence is very much needed for apt countermeasures to be planned and implemented.

9.1 Recommendations – Legislation

Changing the Law On the Minimum Age of Spouses

The Azerbaijani applicable law in regards to the minimum age for the spouses stipulates that the woman should be 17, and the man 18 years old. Furthermore, under special circumstances, and with the consent of the parties and their families, the age limit can be lowered to 16 and 17 for girls and boys respectively. As the prevalence of early marriages is on the rise, many believe that the latter are the official age limits.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that 18 is the age when a human being reaches adulthood. Furthermore the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Woman (CEDAW) recommends that the minimum age for marriage of both men and women should be 18, it commented that, “When men and women marry, they assume important responsibilities. Consequently, marriage should
not be permitted before they have attained full maturity and capacity to act.” Also, in regards to different ages for marriages for men and women the CEDAW Committee observed that “as such provisions assume incorrectly that women have a different rate of intellectual development from men, or that their stage of physical and intellectual development at marriage is immaterial, these provisions should be abolished.”

The Azerbaijani legislature should reconsider the minimum age for the marriage, stipulated in the Family Code and change it to 18 years for both man and woman. Also the organ eligible to lower the age of the future spouses should be changed from the ExCom based at the district level to the applicable court. Last but not least, the list of reasons for which the marriage age can be lowered, should be limited. The prolonged business trip or conscription is not sufficiently significant reasons for contracting the marriage before reaching adulthood.

Mandatory Education

Azerbaijani law makers must review European standards when it comes to compulsory education. The low age of the mandatory education creates environment conducive for the early marriages. The age limit of 16 years for compulsory education gives children and their parents’ a wrong impression of children becoming an adult and thus ready for marriage.

Moreover, it is recommended that the laws provide for the government to implement certain programmes to support girls’ continuing education in technical schools and universities and strengthen control to prevent drop-outs in compulsory education.

Women-Friendly Labour Market

One of the reasons why marriage, including early marriage, is perceived as the only way for women to proceed in life is the fact of very limited possibilities for women professional development ergo economic independence. According to the 2006 Azerbaijan Demographic and Heath Survey data, 21 percent of currently married women were employed in the 12 months preceding the survey. For women in the age group 15-19 the employment rate amounted only 2 percent.

Therefore, the legal provisions for gender-balanced employment in both state institutions

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46 Ibid.
47 Health and Demographic Survey, Azerbaijan 2006, Women’s Empowerment and Demographic and Heath Outcomes, p.191
and private enterprises should be introduced as soon as possible. Introducing “gender quotas” and affirmative action for women’s employment in the male dominated sectors should also be considered.

9.2 Recommendations – Institutions

School Drop-Outs Monitoring

Given the fact that only 2 percent of girls continue their education after marriage, the systematic monitoring of school drop-outs is necessary, as it is one of the best indicators of the early marriages prevalence.

Teachers should prepare age and gender specific reports about the number of children that attend classes. The collected data should be age and gender specific and could be used:

1. to provide information about the school drop-outs to the relevant local authorities, that combat the phenomena of early marriages
2. to provide the Ministry of Education with information about the scope of the problem, to allow the Ministry to prepare adequate countermeasures
3. to inform a broad audience about the drop-out prevalence and stigmatize the phenomena.

I was a college student when we created a family. At first, my groom was against my education, he even decided to take me out from college. But I asked him several times to permit me to complete the college and get a diploma. Eventually, he gave his permission under the following condition: he walks me to college and back and I will not work after graduation. I agreed as I had no other chance. I was already given to him, and I obeyed him. (V13.Lenkaran, Siyavar)
Scholarship Programs & Promotion of Secondary and Higher Education for Girls

Since education is one of the most effective methods of combating early marriages, promotion of education, especially among girls, is pivotal to the expansion of life priorities and broadening the horizons of the adolescent girls. For this to happen, the campaign, which promotes education and informs about educational possibilities and profits, should be launched.

Furthermore, the mechanism of state-funded scholarships for female university students and secondary school pupils should be established. The scholarships role would be two-fold: they would promote education among girls and help financially the children from the poorest families, who drop out from schools for the lack of funds.

Raising Extent and Quality of Schools’ Response to Early Marriage Cases

Taking into consideration that the school is an institution which has a substantial influence on a family’s opinion, it is necessary to strengthen educational and informational work at schools directed at raising awareness of pupils and their parents about illegality and negative consequences of early marriages.

The school administration should use all resources available to halt the high drop out of girls from school, and temper parents’ attempts to marry their adolescent children off.

Parents-Teachers Associations (PTA) should play more active roles in combating early marriages and promoting the importance of education for both boys and girls. The PTAs should also identify the families where the poverty is so acute that the early marriage might seem a solution. Social welfare assistance should be granted for those families.

Cooperation with district education departments, ExCom and law-enforcement bodies are very much recommended.

Strengthening the Role of Youth Organisations

As many girls consent to marriage for lack of other perspective in life, it is important to revitalize the youth organizations, which play an important role in shaping young people’s minds. There, the youth could broaden their perspectives, find hobbies, freely mingle with their peers and learn different skills in an out-of-school environment. The organizations such as Scouts could promote more modern paths of family, where the marriage is not an inevitable step which is to be taken after graduation (or even earlier), but rather an informed decision of choosing a life partner.
The State & Municipal Institutions’ Involvement in Combating the Phenomenon

In Azerbaijan, early marriages fall into what amounts to a sanctions limbo. It is prohibited in the existing civil and common law, but at the same time is widely condoned by customary and religious laws and practice.

In spite of the fact that early marriages are an infringement on the existing legislation, there is no mechanism or institution that would be in position to execute that law effectively, or punish anyone for the breaching of it. There is a need for a more active approach on the part of municipal bodies to the process of birth and marriage registrations in their areas.

First of all the law enforcement organs should be relentless in pursuing the cases of unregistered marriages and in cases of the adolescence of one of the spouses - prosecute the adult partner for the sexual intercourse with the minor. The Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic states that sexual intercourse between an adult and a person under 16 or actions of sexual nature are punishable for 3 years of imprisonment.

Furthermore, the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic “On Police” mandates the policemen to take an array of measures "aimed at preventing violation of rights of minors". It is important that the law enforcement organs take more active stance on the implementation of both the Criminal Code and the Law “On Police”.

The municipal institutions could also launch locally based awareness campaigns about the negative consequences and unlawfulness of the early marriages.

The Close Cooperation Between the Municipal Institutions and the Local Religious Leaders

The increased religiosity of the Azerbaijani society will be most probably rising continuously in the years to come. Therefore it is important to establish a good basis for cooperation between the state and the mosque. Since Islam, unlike i.e. Christianity, is not a very centralised institution in regards to the hierarchy of the mullahs and religious leaders, only the locally based cooperation will yield results.

The local state authorities and the mullahs should strive to see that Kabins (should the couple wish to proceed with the religious nuptials) should be preceded by the official registration of the marriage. Such an approach ensures that the minimum age of spouses is observed and all kabins are registered.

The religious leaders are also greatly positioned to underline the role of marriage and

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equity of spouses, examples of which are plenty in Koran and Shari’a law. Through religious sermons, mullahs can reach out not only to the youth but also to the parents – the ultimate decision-makers, when it comes to marriage.

For 15 years my children have not been living with me. My husband took them away from me by force. I wanted to commit suicide. I have taken 189 pills. I tried to kill myself three times. I could not reconcile myself with loss of my children.
Young woman married off at the age of 17 (V43.Baku).

Consultative Service of Psycho-Social Support for the Victims of Early Marriages and Forcible Bride Abduction

The survey reveals that early marriages and bride abduction lead to psychological trauma of the fragile psyche of girls. Currently there are very few institutions and organisations where girls with such problems could turn to get specialized psycho-social aid. Therefore it is important to create consultative services of psycho-social aid to assist victims of early marriages and forcible bride abduction. Composed of psychologists, social researchers, lawyers and local women’s rights activists, these services may provide necessary aid to victims of early marriages and bride abduction. The local departments of social welfare should be directly responsible for creating such cells of psycho-social aid in their municipalities. The additional training on counselling for the adolescent victims of bride abduction and domestic violence should be provided to the social workers at the municipal level.
Moreover, shelters for victims of bride abduction and domestic violence should be established at the regional level. The shelters should be able to accommodate both women who seek refuge from their abusive partners, as well as single mothers with children. Professional social workers, capable of providing appropriate counselling should be employed in regional shelters throughout the country.

I am very dissatisfied with my life. Maybe I am the most unhappy person in the world. My life is something that consists of work as a day laborer. At nights I serve my two crippled children, aged step-mother and my spouse. What I can say? I am ill-fated. If I was to decide today, I would not act in such a way.

Young woman who voluntarily fled at the age of 16 (V29. Aghstafa)

9.3 Recommendations – Awareness-raising

Awareness-Raising Campaigns

The little knowledge on the negative consequences of early marriages, as well as a mistaken belief in the value of marriage regardless of the ages of spouses, and superstitions about greater fertility of teenage girls in comparison to women in their twenties, are the undeniable factors which contribute to the rise the prevalence of early marriage.
Therefore, an intensified awareness campaign is needed to increase the level of knowledge about the maternal health and other negative consequences of early marriages. The platforms and means of the campaign should be carefully selected. Given the fact that in the vast majority of cases it is the parents that take the initiative in this regard, and very often even compel the girl to get married, they should be the primary target group of the campaign.

As the urban and rural populations are driven by different factors when deciding about early marriages, the campaign should be also tailored accordingly to the different audiences.

Although mass media should be the main platform for the campaign, the awareness raising lectures should be also incorporated into the secondary school curricula, for one should remember that in 42 percent of the cases the early marriages were freely chosen by the girls.

Promotion of Gender Equality

The problem of early marriage derives from the paternalistic model of the family and male dominated society. Women’s role is being once again confined to the household and that of childbearing. The value of a subservient wife is on the rise. Therefore, there is a need for a wider social campaign and debate on the gender equality and partnership in marriage.

Girls should devote their lives only to such things as motherhood or washing.
(FFG.18-20. Lenkaran)
Focus-group is a unique qualitative method of survey based on group discussions of a certain set of themes or questions relevant to study (in our case, the extent of the spread and consequences of early marriages).

Specific purposes of focus-group were as follows:

a. To study perceptions and views of individuals on the phenomenon of early marriages and bride abductions; the extent of spreading, reasons and consequences of early marriages, gender conceptions, views on family and gender relations;

b. To research a set of interpretations and meanings as implied by people belonging to different sex-age groups, to identify social contexts (influence of parents, society, local traditions, etc.) as factors affecting the early marriage tenacity;

c. To explore group discourses dealing with early marriages and bride abductions and thus gain an understanding of this behaviour and its consequences, not merely to describe the model.

40 focus groups have been formed in under-mentioned regions of Azerbaijan (Baku-Absheron, Lenkaran, Guba Aghstafa). Ten focus groups in each of these regions. In each region data from gender divided focus-groups have been collected in the following age groups: 13-15 years old, 16-17 years old, 18-21 years old, 21-24 years old, 40-55 years old. Depending on gender and age of focus-group participants, a rough list of questions for group discussions has been developed (list of focus-groups by regions and compilation of discussed questions are enclosed in Annex 1).

Each focus-group consists of circa 8 participants and thus, 320 persons were covered by focus-groups. Table 7 represents coded data on focus-groups disaggregated by region, age and sex.
List of focus groups carried out in four target regions of Azerbaijan

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<th>FG #</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Region</th>
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General List Of Questions For Discussion In Focus Groups

Early marriages in Azerbaijan

Introduction: First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the participants of this meeting. My name is ______________. I am in charge of holding of interviews and working group discussions for the purpose of special study on the problem of early marriages in Azerbaijan. This study is being carried out by the State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs and UNICEF. We believe that the discussion of this problem with you will enable us to get acquainted more closely with relevant views on early marriages and attitude toward this problem in the society. I would also like to emphasize that we won’t deal with problem of wrong or right answers in these discussions. We are interested only in your opinions and views. Therefore, please feel at ease and express your candid views. I have the list of questions I would like to discuss with you, but in the course of discussions you may raise new subjects for discussions and issues that you think are pertinent to the subject of discussion. My assistant will help me by keeping a record and type-recording of our discussions. I would like to assure you that in spite of these writings and records, our discussions will be kept secret; eventually your names will be coded and kept secret. Please feel at ease and imagine that you are among your friends. Finally, I would like to let you know that opinion of each of you is of utmost importance for us. Therefore, I would like to ask each of the participants of this discussion to express their views and establish contacts with all the participants of the discussion. Do you have any questions before we start our discussions?

“Melting of the Ice “:

First of all, we have to get to know each other more closely. I suggest that you introduce yourselves and tell your name and type of occupation one after another. The subject of today’s discussion is early marriages. To be precise, please take into consideration that early marriage is a marriage of children under 18. So, let us begin.

Focus Groups (adults 21-24, 40-55 years)

I. Degree of prevalence of early marriages in your region

1. How would you estimate the degree of prevalence of child (till 18 years) marriages and early (till 21 years) marriages in your village/town/region? Can you provide approximate percentages of child and early marriages among your relatives, neighbours, colleagues?
2. Do you know personally about such cases of early or early marriages in your district, among friends and relatives? If so, can you tell us about it in more detail?
3. Have early marriages tended to increase or decrease over the last 5-6 years? Why do you think so?

II. The reasons for early marriages and their consequences

4. What are the main causes and factors (social, economic, cultural - psychological) for the spread of early and early marriages in the given region over the last several years?
5. What sort of families usually resort to the practice of early marriages? Consider economic situation, social status, family structure, level of education, occupation and religion.

6. Why, in your opinion, do some parents aspire as soon as possible to give their daughters over to marriage, even before they have reached adulthood?

II. The attitude and estimation of child and early marriages and bride kidnapping

7. What, in your opinion, are the optimum and minimal age ranges for men and women to marry?

8. What, in your opinion, is the attitude of local people in your area to early and early marriages? Do they regard it as a normal phenomenon or do they condemn it?

9. Do you see any positive features of early marriages? If so, what are they? Do you any negative features of early marriages? If so, what are they?

10. Should parents encourage or forbid their daughters to marry at an early age? Should they remain neutral?

11. How do you estimate the general degree of prevalence of phenomena such as bride kidnapping, especially with regard to underage girls?

12. Do you think that such cases usually occur by force or with the consent of the girl?

13. What factors, in your opinion, push some people to kidnap underage girls as brides?

14. Do you know personally about cases of underage girls being kidnapped for marriage in your district? If so, tell us about them in more detail.

Focus Groups (girls 13-17)

I. Respondents’ awareness of the problem of early and early marriages

1. Do you know about such phenomena as early and early marriages? If so, tell us what you know. How do you know about this: from neighbours, friends, parents, newspapers, radio or TV?

2. Do you suppose there are many such marriages in your area?

3. Do you know about cases of marriage amongst your female friends younger than eighteen? If so, give us some details about what happened? Did they want this marriage to take place? What was the age of their spouse? Describe the quality of their lives. How do their husbands and their parents relate to them?

II. How, in the opinion of respondents, their relatives, schools and local communities regard early and early marriages

4. What do you think: are your parents more interested these days in your further study or do they prefer to marry you off as soon as possible?

5. Do your parents want you to finish school? Do they want you to continue towards higher education?

6. Can your parents marry you off without your desire and consent?

7. Can they do it before you have reached 18 years of age?

8. Can they marry you off with a man who is much older than you without your consent?

9. How would your relatives, teachers and friends feel about you getting married before you had finished school?

10. How would your relatives, teacher and friends regard your desire to drop out of school and get married?
III. The respondents’ attitudes towards early and early marriages

11. What do you think: is it normal and possible for a girl to get married before she is 18 years of age? Do girls want to get married before they have reached 18 years of age? If not, why? If so, why?
12. How would you personally act if your parents decided to marry you off against your will?

IV. The desired goals and plans for the future

13. What would usually girls prefer if they had a choice: to drop out of school and get married, to continue their education and then work or to work towards a higher education?

V. Views on marriage

14. What age do you think is most appropriate for marriage? What should be the approximate age for your future spouse?
15. In your mind, what is primarily required to be happy in a marriage?

VI. Kidnapping of underage girls

16. How do you in general estimate the degree of prevalence and scope of such phenomena as the kidnapping of underage girls?
17. What do you think: should such cases usually occur with the consent of the girl or by the use of force?
18. What factors, in your opinion, push people to kidnap underage girls?
19. Do you know personally about cases of kidnapping of underage girls in your district? If so, tell us about them in more detail.

Focus Groups (boys 13-17 years)

I. Respondents’ awareness on the problem of early and early marriages

1. Do you know about such phenomena as early and early marriages? If so, what do you know and from where: neighbours, friends, parents, newspapers, radio and TV?
2. Do you think there are many such marriages in your area?
3. Do you know about cases of marriage amongst your friends younger than 18 years old? If so, give us more detail as to how it happened. Did they desire this marriage? What was the age of their spouse? Describe how they live? How do their husbands and their parents relate to them?
II. How, in opinion of respondents, their relatives, schools and local communities regard early and early marriages

4. How, in your mind, would teachers at your school regard the fact that your schoolmate had stopped going to school and was married off?
5. How would your relatives, neighbours and friends regard this fact?
6. What percentage of parents, to your mind, can marry off their daughters without their consent?
7. Could your parents marry you off without your desire and consent?
8. Could they do it before you had reached 18 years of age?
9. How would your relatives, teachers and friends feel about your decision to get married?

III. The respondents’ attitude towards early and early marriages

10. What do you think: do young men regard it as normal for a girl to be married off before she had reached 18 years of age?
11. How would a young man act if his parents decided to marry him off against his will?

IV. Desired goals and plans for the future

12. What goals and objectives do you plan to achieve in the next 5-6 years?

V. Views on marriage

13. What age do you think is most appropriate for marriage? What should be the approximate age for your future spouse?
14. In your mind, what is primarily required in order to be happy in a marriage?

VI. Kidnapping of underage girls

15. How do you estimate the degree of prevalence and scope of such phenomena as the kidnapping of underage girls?
16. Do you think such cases usually occur with the consent of the girl or with the use of force?
17. What factors, in your opinion, push the people to kidnap underage girls?
18. Do you know personally of cases of underage girls being kidnapped in your district? If so, tell us about them in more detail.
Annex 2

Data from Semi-Structured Interviews with Key Informants

The semi-structured interview is the most widespread method of data collection used for qualitative analysis. This type of interview with key sources makes it possible to collect data not only on the extent, to which early marriage has spread or is spreading, but also opinions and orientations inherent in families and communities.

The purpose of a semi-structured interview with key sources is to gain a more accurate understanding of the social contexts engendering early marriages. The survey and interviews with key sources were performed on the basis of the criteria and indices as follows:

1. Assessment of the extent to which early marriage has spread or is spreading;
2. Analysis of the fundamental causes of child and early marriages;
3. Assessment of this phenomenon;
4. Forecasting of changes in the near and distant future and assessment of development prospects;
5. Practical recommendations.

Including: Special modules are developed for 1) doctors; 2) teachers, school psychologists, social workers; 3) lawyers; 4) representatives from local executive power bodies and NGOs, experts form various state and non-governmental institutions, religious leaders. As mentioned below, the special questionnaires have been developed for these interviews.

78 sub-structured interviews have been conducted with informants, including 1) local executive power body representatives; 2) NGO activists; 3) social researchers (psychologists, sociologists, gender researchers; 4) school teachers and school psychologist; 5) doctors; 6) legal experts; 7) religious leaders; 8) representatives for various ministries. Of them, 49 interviews were held in Baku and Absheron, while others in 5 regions of Azerbaijan (Aghstafa, Shamkir, Lenkaran, Guba, Genje. The list of informants is enclosed.

Table 8. Distribution of experts and key sources by basic categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Categories Of Experts And Key Sources</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Workers in the educational system, teachers, school psychologists</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Health experts, physicians</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gender specialists, sociologists, psychologists</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Representatives of ministries, departments and other state organizations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Local political representatives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Representatives of NGOs (women’s, youth, education)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lawyers, legal experts</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Religious figures</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
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Table 9. List of sources for the Study on Early/Early marriages in Azerbaijan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name of Informant</th>
<th>Occupation/Profession</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Novella Jafaroghlu</td>
<td>NGO for the Rights of Women, Head</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Khosrov Orujov</td>
<td>Sociologist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>Echun Abdullayev</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4</td>
<td>Nazir Guliyev</td>
<td>Child Rights’ Protection NGO, Lawyer</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td>Gunduz Ismaylov</td>
<td>Department of State Committee on Religious Affairs, Head</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L6</td>
<td>Matanat Muslumgazy</td>
<td>Media Rights NGO, Head</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L7</td>
<td>Sadagat Pashayeva</td>
<td>NGO, Lawyer</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L8</td>
<td>Sabira Alizadeh</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L9</td>
<td>Enur Sultanov</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L10</td>
<td>Agil Alasgaroglu</td>
<td>Theologist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L11</td>
<td>Garaakhmad Yusifov</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L12</td>
<td>Davin Shirinov</td>
<td>Political representative from Aghstafa</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L13</td>
<td>Khanlar Mehdiyev</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
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<td>L14</td>
<td>Alm Shamaradzeh</td>
<td>Mulah</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
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<tr>
<td>L15</td>
<td>Anur khanym</td>
<td>Political representative from Guba</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hay Naib</td>
<td>Mulah</td>
<td>Guba</td>
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<tr>
<td>L17</td>
<td>Chimnaz khanyem</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Guba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L18</td>
<td>Telman mualim</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Guba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L19</td>
<td>Enur Sultanov</td>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>Guba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L20</td>
<td>Hikmat mualim</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Guba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L21</td>
<td>Fatma Aghirmizayeva</td>
<td>NGO Worker, Activist</td>
<td>Guba</td>
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<tr>
<td>L22</td>
<td>Natavan khanyem</td>
<td>Regional Education Department</td>
<td>Guba</td>
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<tr>
<td>L23</td>
<td>Yusif Bakirov</td>
<td>NGO for the Rights of Children</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L24</td>
<td>Malahat Hasanova</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L25</td>
<td>Arzu Jafarfi</td>
<td>NGO, Activist</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L26</td>
<td>Raffa Malikova</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Shamkir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L27</td>
<td>Emira Maharramova</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>L28</td>
<td>Echun mualim</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Shamkir</td>
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<tr>
<td>L29</td>
<td>Roza Farzaliev</td>
<td>NGO leader</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L30</td>
<td>Nigar Mansimova</td>
<td>Children’s Rehabilitation Center, Head</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L31</td>
<td>Zemfira Mehdezadeh</td>
<td>Education Specialist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L32</td>
<td>Firdovs Aslanov</td>
<td>Psychologist, Education Expert</td>
<td>Shamkir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L33</td>
<td>Jahan mualim</td>
<td>Executive Committee Department, Deputy Chief</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L34</td>
<td>Bahar Hajyyeva</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
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<tr>
<td>L35</td>
<td>Fikrat Afandiyev</td>
<td>Philosopher</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L36</td>
<td>Khatri Maharramova</td>
<td>Ministry of Internal Affairs, Head of Department</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L37</td>
<td>Aisaba Mirzayeva</td>
<td>Youth NGO, Leader</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name of Informant</td>
<td>Occupation/Profession</td>
<td>Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>----</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>L38</td>
<td>Matanat Garakhanova</td>
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<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L39</td>
<td>Jamila khanyim</td>
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<td>Absheron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L40</td>
<td>Afag Isgandarova</td>
<td>&quot;Yuva&quot; NGO, Activist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L41</td>
<td>Ilhama Sultanova</td>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L42</td>
<td>Rahila Guliyeva</td>
<td>Civilian Registrar's Officer</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<td>L43</td>
<td>Mehriban Zeynalova</td>
<td>NGO, Leader</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L44</td>
<td>Dilara khanyim</td>
<td>IDP, Community Leader</td>
<td>Absheron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L45</td>
<td>Yelena Gasmova</td>
<td>Expert on Gender Issues</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L46</td>
<td>Parvaz Rahimova</td>
<td>Lenkaran Medical Healthcare, Physician</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L47</td>
<td>Ainun Jamrammedova</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L48</td>
<td>Maliahat Hajiyeva</td>
<td>Youth and Sport Ministry, Lenkaran Department, Deputy Chief</td>
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<td>L49</td>
<td>Rufat Askarov</td>
<td>NGO, Leader</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L50</td>
<td>Rahim Seyfullayev</td>
<td>Local NGO Member, Liman Municipality Officer</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L51</td>
<td>Ziya Ismayilov</td>
<td>Southern Regional Ombudsman Center, Head</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L52</td>
<td>Esminra Turhida</td>
<td>Southern Human Rights Resource Centre, Director and Farsi teacher at a secondary school in Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L53</td>
<td>Anonymous; the interviewee refused to disclose her name</td>
<td>Political Representative from Lenkaran</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L54</td>
<td>Tural Shiriyev</td>
<td>A village secondary school, history teacher</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L55</td>
<td>Hayi Gani Sadi</td>
<td>Lenkaran Representative of the Caucasus Clergy Managerial Office, Chairperson/Akhund</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
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<tr>
<td>L56</td>
<td>Sevin Allahyarova</td>
<td>Baku State University, Gender studies</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L57</td>
<td>Enura Eynalova</td>
<td>School psychologist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L58</td>
<td>Aida Musayeva</td>
<td>Baku State University, Psychologist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L59</td>
<td>Oksana Azimova</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L60</td>
<td>Ali Abbasov</td>
<td>NAS, Professor, Expert on Gender Issues</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L61</td>
<td>Ulviya Mikailova</td>
<td>Education NGO, Leader</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<td>Mushfig Jafarov</td>
<td>Youth NGO, Leader</td>
<td>Ganja</td>
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<td>Hagigat Mammedli</td>
<td>NGO, Leader</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L64</td>
<td>Minaia Valieva</td>
<td>School psychologist</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
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<td>L65</td>
<td>Yulia Aliyeva</td>
<td>Gender expert, sociologist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<td>L66</td>
<td>Sajda Abdulvaghabova</td>
<td>NGO, Director</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<td>L67</td>
<td>Ulviya Mammadova</td>
<td>Soros Foundation, Expert on Women and Gender Issues</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L68</td>
<td>Gamar Javadiy</td>
<td>Theologist</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<td>L69</td>
<td>Ruhangiz Husinova</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>L71</td>
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<td>NGO, Leader</td>
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<td>Rustam Alasgarov</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<td>L73</td>
<td>Fidan Farajova</td>
<td>Expert on Gender Studies</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<tr>
<td>L74</td>
<td>Dilara Mehdi</td>
<td>NGO, Leader</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions for Sources

Dear ____________ !

We are bringing to you notice that Azerbaijan Republic State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs and UNICEF carry out “Study of the phenomenon of early marriages in Azerbaijan”. The core objective of this study is to strengthen efforts on prevention of early marriages. Within the framework of the study, expert survey is being carried out. We invite you to participate in this survey.

I. The degree of prevalence of early marriages in your region

1. How would you estimate the degree of prevalence of child (up to 18 years old) and early (up to 21 years old) marriages in your village/town/region? Could you give us an approximate percentage of marriages in your area which are child and early marriages?
2. Have the numbers of early marriages in your area tended to increase or decrease over the last 5-6 years? Why do you think so?
3. In what areas and regions, in your view, is this phenomenon most prevalent?

II. Reasons for early marriages and their consequences

4. What are the main causes and factors (social, economic, cultural-psychological) for the spread of early and early marriages in the given region over the last several years?
5. What sort of families, with regard to economic situation, social status, family structure, educational level, occupation, and religion, usually resort to the practice of early marriage?
6. Why, in your opinion, do some parents aspire as soon as possible to marry off their daughters, even before they have reached adulthood?
7. What role does religion play in the prevalence of this phenomenon?
8. What role do national and local traditions and customs play in the prevalence of this phenomenon?
9. What role does the economic situation of families play in the prevalence of early and early marriages?
10. Among the factors which you have listed, which would you say are the most important?
III. Attitudes and estimation

11. Do you see any positive aspects of early marriage? If so, what are they?
12. Do you see any negative aspects of early marriage? If so, what are they? In your opinion, what is the attitude of local people to early and early marriage? Do they regard it as a normal phenomenon or do they condemn it?
13. How would you estimate the degree of prevalence of bride kidnapping, especially with regard to underage girls?

Module 1. (For doctors)

14. What effect does early marriage have on spouses’ general and reproductive health and psychological conditions?
15. How do such marriages affect the health of a young mother and her child?
16. To what extent are girls and boys educated about the intimate aspects of marriage?
17. What role do medical institutions play in preventing early marriages, and what role do they play in educating the local population about possible negative health consequences of early marriage?

Module 2. (For teachers, school psychologists, social workers)

18. What effect does early marriage have on one’s ability to continue and finish one’s education?
19. How does early marriage affect one’s ability to work and start a career?
20. How do schools usually respond to cases of early marriages within the student body?
21. Do teachers or the school director in your school undertake any action if a female student has been given over to marriage by her parents? If so, what actions might they take?
22. How do you evaluate the role of the school in preventing early marriage?
Module 3. (For the lawyers)

23. What role does legislation play in the issue of child and early marriage? What legislative initiatives, in your opinion, should be undertaken in order to improve the situation with regard to early and early marriages?
24. To what extent are people informed about marriage law, human rights and laws concerning the rights of children, etc.?
25. What, to your mind, are the major shortcomings and gaps in existing legislation with regard to child protection and the prevention of early marriage?
26. What legal consequences of early marriages have you encountered in your practice?
27. What steps should be taken to minimize the instances of early marriage?

Module 4. (Local executive power, NGO and Experts)

28. How would you assess the activities of various state institutions and NGOs with regard to the issue of early and early marriage?
29. What, in your opinion, are the state and civil organizations’ priorities in dealing with this problem?
30. What concrete measures and steps, in terms of programs and projects, can and should be undertaken to prevent the situation from worsening and ultimately improve it?
31. How do you predict the situation will change in the near and distant future?
32. How can we get the government to pay more attention to issues of social policy and working with youth, with regard to the issue of early and early marriages?

Module 5. (For religious figures)

33. Do you think it is acceptable for girls under the age of 18 to marry?
34. How do religious figures generally regard early marriage?
35. How should we view this issue within the Muslim tradition?
Annex 3

Data on In-Depth Interviews

The purpose of these interviews was to create a social and psychological portrait of early marriage participants, including social (level of education, income, social status, etc.) and psychological (personality traits, intra-family relations, values, perceptions, etc.) indices.

Interviews were conducted in the Baku, Absheron, Guba and Aghstafa regions. To search for respondents, information was used as provided by participants of focus-groups in these regions, as well as by other local residents, including school teachers, local NGOs and respondents themselves. Interviews were conducted on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

Semi-structured questionnaires were used for the interviews, with open questions intended for two categories of respondents: participants of early marriages and their parents. Questionnaires were compiled so that a greater portion of information obtained from each category of respondents could be integrated into a single data base. The confidentiality of participants has been protected by replacing the names of all participants with speaker identifiers.

There were 90 in-depth interviews in total, 51 of which were with participants of early marriages; 39 with relatives of early marriage participants. A coded list of interviewees, including age and region, as well as question route is given below.

The termination of field work was followed by the transcription of all 90 interviews, of which two computer data bases were compiled, one of which includes the responses of early marriage participants, while the other includes the responses of parents.

With the intention of obtaining quantitative data on the subject, answers to identical questions during interviews with both categories of respondents were coded to make a unified data base within the SPSS program. This data base provided information on about 90 cases of early marriages in four target regions. It is true that 90 cases are unlikely to provide a complete picture of the phenomenon explored in these regions and certainly not of the country as a whole. In this respect, the analysis of quantitative data obtained is not sufficient to clarify the causes of, the extent of spread the spread of, and the ultimate consequences of early marriage in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, this analysis is sure to enable experts to make their findings and conclusions, coupled with qualitative analysis, more reliable and sound.
Social-demographic background of early marriage participants’ families

Information was obtained on 90 early marriage cases by means of in-depth interviews. It is distributed by target regions as follows:

Table 10. Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guba</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baku-Absheron</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the type of locality where families of women entered into early marriage reside, cases were distributed as follows:

Table 11. Type of settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
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</table>

12 interviews in the Baku-Absheron region were conducted with respondents from families of refugees and IDPs in order to obtain information about the phenomenon of early marriage within this category of Azerbaijan’s population.

When adjusted for the fact that the target regions cover areas with a compact residence of ethnic minorities, 15 cases of early marriages pertain to women who have one or two parents of an ethnic minority. In 6 cases, both parents are Talyshes; in 2 cases – Lezgis; in 2 cases – Budugs. The remaining 5 cases pertain to mixed parent families.
Table 12. Mother’s education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>70,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special secondary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Chart 1:
Level of education of mothers of girls married off as children

Data based on interviews with 488 respondents

Table 13. Father’s education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special secondary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0</strong></td>
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</table>
Table 14. Parent family’s economic situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15. Number of children in parent family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of children</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below organizes the distribution of cases by the date of their occurrence. This table indicates that 11 cases explored pertain to the years 1972-1991, i.e. during the Soviet period. We have considered these cases in order to obtain additional empirical information to identify trends in the phenomenon of early marriage.

Table 16. Distribution of cases by year of marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972 – 1991</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 – 1996</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 – 2004</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 – 2007</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 17. Girls’ ages at the time of marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 18. List of respondents to in-depth interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Coding Number (P = Parent, V = Early Married Person)</th>
<th>Interviewed Person (Age, Name)</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>35 years old, Aghstafa, Poylu village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>P2</td>
<td>50 years old, Guba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>P3</td>
<td>45 years old, Guba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>P4</td>
<td>55 years old, Guba, 1st Nugadi village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>P5</td>
<td>50 years old, Irada, Aghstafa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>P6</td>
<td>42 years old, Ziba, Absheron, Pirakashkul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P7</td>
<td>45 years old, Aghstafa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>43 years old, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>P9</td>
<td>36 years old, Aghstafa, Poylu village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>P10</td>
<td>46 years old, Mashtagha district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>V1</td>
<td>22 years old, Guba, Mzammad village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>V2</td>
<td>16 years old, Guba, 1st Nugadi village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>V3</td>
<td>18 years old, Guba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>V4</td>
<td>23 years old, Guba, 1st Nugadi village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>V5</td>
<td>17 years old, Guba, 1st Nugadi village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>V6</td>
<td>16 years old, Guba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>V7</td>
<td>16 years old, Guba, Zardabi village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>V8</td>
<td>21 years old, Guba, Zardabi village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>V9</td>
<td>28 years old, Guba, Yenikand village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>V10</td>
<td>23 years old, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>V11</td>
<td>24 years old, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>V12</td>
<td>20 years old, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>V13</td>
<td>22 years old, Lenkaran, Syavar village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>V14</td>
<td>19 years old, Lenkaran, Girdani village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>V15</td>
<td>19 years old, Lenkaran, Sutamurdov village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>V16</td>
<td>18 years old, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>V17</td>
<td>23 years old, Lenkaran, Mamustaa village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>V18</td>
<td>29 years old, Gubaniz, Lenkaran, Dashtaljar village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>V19</td>
<td>30 years old, Nigar, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>V20</td>
<td>28 years old, Samira, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>V21</td>
<td>27 years old, Fatima, Lenkaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>V22</td>
<td>19 years old, Nardaran district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>V23</td>
<td>20 years old, Nardaran district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>V24</td>
<td>38 years old, Nardaran district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>V25</td>
<td>26 years old, Gunai, Baku</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>V26</td>
<td>52 years old, Jamila, Baku</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Coding Number (P = Parent, V = Early Married Person)</td>
<td>Interviewed Person (Age, Name)</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>V27</td>
<td>22 years old, School clerk</td>
<td>Absheron, Pirakashkul district</td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>V28</td>
<td>18 years old, Ainur</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>V29</td>
<td>46 years old, Javidan</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>V30</td>
<td>32 years old, Sahla</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>V31</td>
<td>19 years old, Sevda</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>V32</td>
<td>35 years old, School secretary</td>
<td>Absheron, Pirakashkul district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>V33</td>
<td>43 years old, Baghdagul</td>
<td>Absheron, Pirakashkul district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>V34</td>
<td>30 years old, Bahar</td>
<td>Absheron, Khirdalan district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>V35</td>
<td>22 years old</td>
<td>Absheron, Pirakashkul district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>V36</td>
<td>25 years old</td>
<td>Guba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>V37</td>
<td>18 years old</td>
<td>Guba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>V38</td>
<td>17 years old</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>V39</td>
<td>19 years old</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>V40</td>
<td>22 years old</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>V41</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>V42</td>
<td>18 years old</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
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<td>53</td>
<td>P11</td>
<td>58 years old</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
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<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>V43</td>
<td>36 years old, Sanubar</td>
<td>Baku (daghli makhlas)</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>V44</td>
<td>23 years old</td>
<td>Absheron, Pirshagha district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>V45</td>
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<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>P12</td>
<td>43 years old</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>P13</td>
<td>39 years old</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>P14</td>
<td>42 years old</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>P15</td>
<td>46 years old</td>
<td>Baku</td>
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<td>61</td>
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<td>V46</td>
<td>42 years old</td>
<td>Aghstafa</td>
</tr>
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<td>V47</td>
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<td>Nardaran district</td>
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<td>P18</td>
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<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>P19</td>
<td>52 years old</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>P20</td>
<td>57 years old, Flora</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>P21</td>
<td>42 years old, Guidana</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>P22</td>
<td>47 years old, Rahila</td>
<td>Absheron, Pirakashkul district</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>V48</td>
<td>26 years old, Gunel</td>
<td>Absheron, Khirdalan district</td>
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<td>P23</td>
<td>42 years old</td>
<td>Absheron, Pirshagha district</td>
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<td>72</td>
<td>P24</td>
<td>49 years old</td>
<td>Baku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>P25</td>
<td>44 years old, Takhmira</td>
<td>Lenkaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>P26</td>
<td>47 years old, Ganira</td>
<td>Lenkaran, Sutamurdov village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Questions for In-Depth Interviews with Participants of Early marriages

On a commission from Azerbaijan Republic State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs and UNICEF, we are involved in exploration of the problem of early marriages in Azerbaijan. With this end in view, we hold interviews with different people who would help us in assessment and understanding of this problem. I have with me the list of questions I would like to discuss with you. But, in the course of discussions you may raise new subjects for discussions and issues that you think are pertinent to the subject of discussion. With your permission, I will keep a record and type-record of our discussions. I would like to assure you that in spite of these writings and records, our discussions will be kept secret, eventually your names will be coded and without you agreement your names will not be released. Please feel at complete ease.

**First, tell us about yourself and your family:**

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where were your parents born?
4. What kind of education did your parents receive?
5. What is/was their occupation?
6. Which ethnic group or groups are your parents from?
7. To what extent is your parent family religious?
8. To what extent does your parent family observe and celebrate ethnic, local and national traditions?
9. How strict were your parents with you and your brothers and sisters?
10. How was your family's financial situation before you got married?
11. How many brothers and sisters do you have? What are they doing now?
12. Was there any intra-family violence in your family? If yes, what was the reason for this and what happened?
13. Who made the decisions concerning the important family issues (father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, other; solely, both parents, all family, other) in your family? How did they make these decisions?
14. How many years of education did you have before marriage? Did you continue with your education after marriage? What level of education do you have now?
15. Would you like to continue your education? If not, why?
16. How many years have you lived in this city/village?
17. What is your occupation now?
18. How would you describe your financial situation at present?
19. How many children do you have? How old are they? Do they have any problems with their health or mental development? If so, can you tell us some more about this issue?

Please give some more details about the circumstances of your marriage:

20. How old were you when you married?
21. What induced you to get married at an early age? Was it your choice? Did your parents consent to your marriage? Did they pressure you? Would you say that they forced you to marry?
22. Which of your family members made the final decision to marry you off?
23. What motives were behind the decision of your parents/senior members of family to marry you off (financial situation, old traditions and customs, someone's influence from outside the family, other)?
24. What was the role of other relatives, neighbours, friends, etc., in your getting married? How did they perceive your marriage (did they welcome it, condemn it, or were they neutral)?
25. Give us some more details about how you were married off.
26. How would you estimate the financial situation of your husband/his parent family at the time of your marriage? What about that of his parents?
27. Describe your spouse at the time of your wedding. What was his educational level?
28. Was your marriage done through the registrar's office or on the basis of Kabin?

For interviewer: if a respondent has officially married off with him, ask questions 30-33 and then move to question 41. If the respondent has been divorced, move to question 34.

Let's talk about your present family situation:

29. Are you currently married to this man now?
30. If so, what is your spouse doing now? Do you live together with him or does he live and work in another city/country? If he lives separately, how long ago did he leave and how frequently does he visit the family? Does he support you financially?
31. Do your husband’s parents (if they are alive) live together with you? What is their attitude towards you and your children? Do they support you?  
32. Are you satisfied with your marriage and your new family? Would you say that you love your husband and you are happy in your family life?  
33. Tell some more details about your family life.  
34. If you have been divorced, how did this happen? What was the reason of your divorce? Who was the initiator of the divorce?  
35. Where and with whom you do live after you got divorced?  
36. Who do your children live after the divorce with? Does your former spouse help you and your children financially? Does he involve himself in their education and does he assist as problems arise? Do his parents help you?  
37. Tell more details about your present life.  
38. Where does your former spouse live now? If he lives in another city/country, how long has he lived there? Does he have a new family there?  
39. Do you regret the divorce with your husband? If so, why?  
40. Would you like to get married again? If so, do you think there is a realistic chance of this happening? If not, why do you not want to remarry?  

Finally, I am interested in your opinion concerning early marriage:  

41. Why do you think some parents aspire to marry off their daughters as soon as possible?  
42. To what extent are early marriages common in your city/village? What is the attitude of local people to early marriages?  
43. Do you regret having got married at an early age? If so, why? If not, why?  

Questions for comprehensive interview with the parents of women who had entered into early marriages  

On a commission from Azerbaijan Republic State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs and UNICEF, we are involved into exploration of the problem of early marriages in Azerbaijan. With this end in view, we hold interviews with different people who would help us in assessment and understanding of this problem. I have with me the list of questions I would like to discuss with you. But, in the course of discussions you may raise new subjects for discussions and issues that you think are pertinent to the subject of discussion. With your permission, I will keep a record and type-record of our discussions. I would like to assure you that in spite of these writings and records, our discussions will be kept secret, eventually your names will be coded and without you agreement your names will not be released. Please feel at complete ease.  

First of all, please give some information about yourself and your family:  

1. Since when have you been living in this city (village)? Where were you born?  
2. How old are you?  
3. Since when has your husband (wife) lived in this city (village)? Where was he born?  
4. How old is he?  
5. How long have you been married?  
6. Your and your husband’s education.
7. Where do you and does your husband work?
8. In your view, how has the financial status of your family changed during the last 5-6 years?
9. Your and your husband’s national identity.
10. How religious are you and your family? To what extent do you and your family follow religious ceremonies?
11. To what extent does your family follow national and local traditions?
12. Who takes and how are the most important decisions in your family taken (you, your spouse, your (your spouse’s) parents and others; solely by you; by both parents, by all family members, other response).
13. Tell us more on upbringing of children in your family. How demanding were you and your husband (wife) towards children?
14. Did conflicts on children, their upbringing, education, marriage and other issues occur between parents and how often did they occur? If that was the case, tell us more about that. In your view, what was the reason for these conflicts? Who was right, who was wrong? How were these conflicts solved? In cases like that did parents commit violence against children? Can you give concrete examples?
15. How many children do you have? Tell us more about them: Please provide information on their sex, age, education. Where and with whom do they live currently? What is their family status? What do they do currently? If they work, where do they work and in which occupation are they involved?

Please tell us more on how your daughter entered into marriage:

16. How old was she when she was married?
17. Before getting married, how many years had she studied at school? How many years had she studied at school at a time of getting married?
18. What instigated her to enter into marriage at such an early age? Was it her own choice? What was your and your husband’s (wife’s) attitude to that? Did you approve of your daughter’s marriage? Did you try to dissuade her from getting married, pressurize her into or from getting into marriage? If that was the case, due to which reasons and guided by which arguments were you doing that? Tell us more about that.
19. Which of your family members made ultimate decision about your daughter’s marriage? Could you tell us what were the motives behind the decision to marry off your daughter (financial status, traditional cultural values, desire to guarantee her security and future, other motives)?
20. What role did other relatives, neighbors, her girlfriends, acquaintances play in your daughter’s marriage? In your view, what was their attitude to your daughter’s marriage (welcomed, condemned or remained neutral)?
21. How did you estimate the financial status of your daughter’s husband and his parents when he got married?

What were his parents?

22. What was your daughter’s husband when they got married? What was his educational background? What was his age?
23. Was their marriage registered in vital registration system or sanctified by mullah?

Questions about your daughter’s current family status:

24. How many children does your daughter have? How old are they?
25. Is your daughter officially married with that person?
For Interviewer: if respondent’s daughter is officially married with that person, ask questions 26-29, afterwards move to question 37. If respondent’s daughter has been divorced, move to question 30.

26. If that is the case, what does her husband do for living? Do they live together, or does he live and work in another city (country)? If they live separately from each other, when did her husband leave and does he visit them frequently? Does he render material support to his family?

27. Do parents of your daughter’s husband (if they are alive) live together with them, or separately? How do they treat your daughter and her children? Do they help them anyhow?

28. Is your daughter content with her marriage and family life? Can you say that she is happy in her personal life?

29. Did your daughter continue her education after getting married?

30. If your daughter has been divorced, when did it happen? What caused their divorce? Who was the initiator of the divorce?

31. Where and with whom has she lived after having divorced? Who have her children lived after divorce with?

32. Does your daughter’s ex-husband render material support to her and her children? Does he participate in upbringing of children and the solution of encountered problems? Do his parents render assistance to your daughter and her children? Does your daughter need your help? If she does, do you and your husband (wife) help anyhow your daughter and her children?

33. Where does your daughter’s husband live currently? If he lives in another city (country), when did he move there? Does he have a new family?

34. In your view, does your daughter regret that she has been divorced from husband? If yes, then why?

35. In your view, would your daughter like to get married again? If yes, then how realistic is it? If no, then why doesn’t she want to get married?

36. Do you (your husband) want your daughter to get married again?

Finally, I would like to get your views on early marriages:

37. Why, in your opinion, do parents try to marry off their daughter as early as possible?

38. To what extent are early marriages spread in your city (village) and what is the attitude of inhabitants towards this issue?

39. Do your regret that your daughter got married early? If you do, then why? If you don’t, then why?
Annex 4

Special Terms and Definitions

A focus group - is a unique method of qualitative research which involves a group of people discussing a specific set of issues, problems or research questions.

F.F.G. 13-15. Lenkaran - a focus group, which involves females of 13-15 years old from Lenkaran.

M.F.G. 40-55. Absheron - focus group, which involves males of 40-55 years old from Absheron.

Semi-structured interview – interview which involves predefining a range of questions or topics to be addressed in the interview but being flexible enough to allow the respondent to initiate new topics or expand on relevant issues.

In-depth interview – loosely structured interview aimed to enable the respondent to talk in detail about the relevant issues.

Triangulation - using of different techniques of data collection and analysis to establish validity in qualitative research.
Annex 5

List Of Charts

Report

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Annexes

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