

## CASE STUDY

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### **ENABLING GENDER NORM CHANGE THROUGH COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF A TRANS-MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION INITIATIVE IN BANGLADESH**

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### **Abstract**

The Government of Bangladesh with UNICEF and partners launched a multi-phase trans-media campaign to end child marriage in 2017. At the heart of the initiative was an award-winning social norm-driven entertainment-education-based television series *Icchedana* (On the Wings of Wishes), which focused on adolescent empowerment and gender equality. The storyline centered around a girls' football team and portrayed the lives of a group of girls who face and overcome adolescent challenges. The media campaign was supplemented by on the ground social mobilisation and community engagement efforts in districts with high child marriage prevalence. This article presents a robust case study of this multi-layered social and behaviour change initiative. The findings draw on a longitudinal panel study to assess the effectiveness of the trans-media component and qualitative data gathered during field observation visits. The article builds on social norms, entertainment-education and gender theory to explain the broader gender related shifts that ensued as part of the change efforts aimed to end child marriage. Recommendations for future gender transformation and social norm change efforts are discussed.

**Keywords:** gender, social norms, child marriage, entertainment-education, trans-media, Bangladesh

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## Introduction

Ending child marriage is a priority issue in Bangladesh, with over one out of every two girls married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (BDHS 2014; 2019; MICS, 2019). Multiple initiatives at various levels are underway, demonstrating high-level commitment and concerted cross-sectoral collaboration between the government, development partners and civil society. Prompted by the Prime Minister’s pledge at the Girls’ Summit in 2014 to end marriages under 18 by the year 2041 and end marriages below 15 years by the year 2021, efforts have been scaled-up to accelerate progress. Bangladesh has the fourth highest prevalence of child marriage in the world and the highest in South Asia (UNICEF & UNFPA, 2016). Eliminating this harmful practice is critical for meeting national development plans as well as international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

Under the auspices of the Joint Global programme on Ending Child Marriage, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) partnered with the Government of Bangladesh, under the leadership of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) to spearhead a comprehensive response to end child marriage. Within this cross-sectoral initiative, an evidence-based, multi-layered social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategy was planned and implemented. The overarching goal of the communication strategy was to empower adolescents, their families and their communities with the knowledge, attitudes and skills to make informed choices about their future and engage communities to foster norm changes that promote gender equality and prevent child marriage.

## Literature Review

### Child Marriage in Bangladesh

As per the United Nations’ Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) the term “child marriage” is used to describe a legal or customary union between two people, of whom one or both spouses are below the age of 18. Child marriage remains a widespread and commonly accepted practice in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS, 2019) the rate of child marriage among women who are currently aged between 20-24 years is 59 per cent (under 18) and 22 per cent (under 15). Data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2019) indicate that among women aged 20-24 years, 16 per cent were married before age 15 and, over half (51 per cent) were married before 18. Approximately one in three young women age 15-19 years is currently married (33 per cent).

The districts with the highest prevalence rates are Rajshahi, Khulna, Rangpur and Barisal. There is some variance in the rates of child marriage based on place of residence, level of education and income. Women living in urban areas, belonging to wealthier households and having a higher level of education are less likely to marry under the age of 18, compared to those living in rural areas, from poorer families and with less education (MICS, 2019). Key child marriage indicators for Bangladesh are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Child Marriage Indicators

(%)	2013	2019
Percentage of women age 20-24 years who were first married or in union before age 15	18.1	15.5
Percentage of women age 20-24 years who were first married or in union before age 18	52.3	51.4
Percentage of young women age 15-19 years who are married or in union	34.3	32.9
Percentage of women age 15-49 years who are in a polygynous union	4.2	3.1
Percentage of young women who are married or in union and whose spouse is 10 or more years older,		
(a) among women age 15-19 years	20.4	30.8
(b) among women age 20-24 years	21.8	27.9

Source: Bangladesh MICS, 2013 and 2019

Child marriage is fuelled by several factors, including gender norms, poverty, socio-cultural practices, concerns for a girl’s safety and the low value attached to investing in girls’ education and future opportunities (ICRW, 2013; Kabir, Ghosh & Shawly, 2019). Gender inequality is the root cause of child marriage in South Asia and marriage is seen as a way of ensuring a girl’s chastity and protecting the family

honour by preventing sexual violence or premarital sexuality (ICRW, 2013). Child marriage impacts girls' health and well-being and leads to lower employment opportunities, higher levels of poverty and in most cases early child bearing (Islam, Islam, Hasan & Haque, 2016; Mathur, Greene & Malhotra, 2003).

Studies from Bangladesh highlight that the level of education of both girls and their partners are predictors of child marriage. Other factors include religious beliefs, geographical location and the groom's wealth or employment status, (Islam, Haque & Hossain, 2016; Talukder, Hasan, Razu & Hossain, 2020). For instance, the likelihood of child marriage is higher among men who have no formal education or little education, and women who are unemployed or unskilled workers (Kamal, Hassam Alam & Ying, 2015). Furthermore, daughters or daughters-in-law of educated mothers and mothers-in-law were more likely to marry later and delay childbearing (Bates, Maselko & Schuler, 2007). Muslim women living in rural areas had a greater likelihood of marrying before the age of 18 (Kamal, Hassam Alam & Ying, 2015).

The Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 2017 and prohibits marriage of girls under the age of 18 and boys under 21. However, the law makes an exception for marriages under "special circumstances" and in the "best interest" of the minor. This ambiguous provision leaves room for interpretation and poses considerable challenges for law enforcement. Ashadujjaman and Akter (2017) identified several issues fueling weak enforcement of the law. These included marriages without official registration, corruption among marriage registrars and irregularities or tampering with birth registration.

## Social Norms

Norms are broadly defined as social rules or prevailing codes of conduct. When people make decisions based on what other people do (descriptive norms) or what other people think should be done (injunctive norms), and not on what they individually want to do, it is considered a social norm (Bicchieri, 2006; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Mackie, 1996). Norms are shared among a group of people and cooperating or following these norms are rewarding or beneficial to maintaining social order (Bandura, 1977; Rimal & Real, 2005; Rimal, 2008). Failure to follow norms may result in sanctions, punishment or censure (Mackie, 2015; Rimal & Real, 2015). Bicchieri and colleagues (2014) explain norm constructs and how they relate to child marriage (see Table 2).

Table 2: Different Types of Norms

Norm Construct	Definitions	Examples
Empirical Expectations	Beliefs about what people do	All my neighbors marry their daughters as soon as they reach puberty.
Normative Expectations or Injunctive Norms	Beliefs about what other people think one should do	My neighbors think that one should marry one's daughter as soon as she reaches puberty
Descriptive Norm	A rule that people follow because they believe that others follow it ( <i>empirical expectation</i> )	Fathers marry off their daughters young because they believe other fathers also marry off their daughters young
Social Norm	A rule that people follow because they believe that others follow it ( <i>empirical expectation</i> ) and that others think it should be followed ( <i>normative expectation</i> )	Fathers marry off their daughters young because they believe other fathers also marry off their daughters young and, moreover, they believe other fathers think that girls should marry young (because girls should be pure and chaste)

Source: Bicchieri, Jiang and Lindeman, 2014, pp. 9-15

Communication is central to forming, transmitting or modifying norms and these prescribed or perceived behaviours are communicated through interpersonal or mediated sources (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). How individuals communicate plays a key role in the development of normative perceptions. Identifying and mobilising a core group of people who can become agents of change in their community can be more effective when these people belong to the reference groups or comprise of those whose approval and behavior matter (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Pulerwitz et al., 2019).

## Gender and Social Norms

Social norms surrounding child marriage need to account for broader gender norms and inequitable power structures (Connell, 1987, 2012; Connell & Pearse, 2014). Social norms theory is used to inform

programmes on ending deeply gendered harmful practices but change efforts have not fully addressed the intersections between social norms and power inequities that sustain norms (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019). While changing social norms requires change within reference group, gender norm change requires transformation of power hierarchies within families, communities and institutions (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019).

Gender norm change can be achieved through gender transformative approaches, which seek to actively challenge gender norms, by transforming roles, relations and power structures between men and women (Health Communication Capacity Collaborative, 2014). Ultimately, gender norm change is a political endeavor, aiming for equality and equity between men and women and goes well beyond ending a harmful practice or promoting well-being. Changing gender norms begins with fostering critical awareness but ideally should lead to ensuring equal access to resources, freedom, opportunity, power, agency, voice and sense of self-worth (Kraft, Wilkins, Morales, Widyono, & Middlestadt, 2014).

## **Entertainment-Education**

Over the past two decades Entertainment- Education (E-E) has evolved to embrace new media, approaches and issues, and continues to be on the cutting edge of social change initiatives. Historically defined as the process of purposely designing and implementing mediated messages to both entertain and educate, with the aim of changing knowledge, attitudes, norms and behaviours, E-E today is seen as an integrated approach tying together mediated and ground-based responses (Singhal, Cody, Rogers & Sabido, 2004). E-E efforts are increasingly using participatory methodologies and community engagement to foster social change (Singhal & Rogers, 2004). The adaptability of the approach can be attributed to three themes, namely the emphasis on increasing equity, affirming the power of narrative and expanding opportunities for dialogue and participation. E-E has the potential to address people's needs, model healthy behaviours, create demand, increase access to services and support community engagement (Storey & Sood, 2013).

There are several advantages of using entertainment-education-based dramas over other forms of audio-visual materials. Foremost, the narrative appeal of E-E allows the audience to relate to the mediated characters and form emotional bonds with them over time (Wang & Singhal, 2016). E-E relates to the head and heart and audience members often feel the character or that situation is familiar, real and could be their story, or the story of their neighbour. Audience members begin to identify with the character and their actions and over time feel they too can do it (Sood, 2002). Role modelling is key to promoting socially desirable behaviours (Bandura, 1977). Importantly, E-E is well suited to address complex issues as it allows layered treatment of multiple themes (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004).

## **Social and Behaviour Change Initiative**

The SBCC approaches for this initiative comprised of three pillars – 1) trans-media, 2) community engagement and social mobilisation, and 3) advocacy and capacity building. The trans-media component included mass (television, radio and film), folk and social media. Drawing on multiple platforms and formats through consistent messages and common themes allowed for greater reinforcement. The trans-media campaign assets drew on entertainment-education approaches and were framed with a social norms' lens.

The community engagement and social mobilisation pillars included Fathers Groups, Courtyard Discussions, Community Dialogue and mobilisation of elected representatives and influentials. The third component, advocacy and capacity building, included both national and local level advocacy to influence decision makers and capacity building of sub-national partners. The mass and social media assets were rolled out as a multi-phase national campaign. The community engagement leveraged communication networks through interpersonal channels and was carried out in the high prevalence focus areas through partnership with local non-governmental institutions, civil society organisations, networks of local and religious leaders as well as governmental agencies and frontline workers. The following section details the trans-media and the community engagement components.

## ***Trans-Media Assets***

### *Dhol Campaign*

The *Dhol* (a traditional drum) trans-media campaign was launched in July 2017. The initial phase included five public service announcements (PSAs) aimed at reminding audiences of the legal age of marriage, triggering action to stop child marriages by a range of stakeholders (e.g., grooms, bystanders, marriage registrars) and creating public pressure around non-acceptance of child marriage. This built on the construct of injunctive norms by prompting an alternative narrative around perceived pressure on parents to get their girls married before the age of 18.

Phase II of the campaign continued with the theme of the *Dhol* and the creative approach shifted to presenting stronger evidence through real-life actions by ordinary citizens (such as a cyclist, a school principal and a youth activist) who are advocating for change in their communities. This was built on the construct of descriptive norms and showcased ordinary individuals, who took action against child marriage. Campaign assets for both phases included nine public service announcements on television accompanied by outdoor materials (posters, billboards, wall paintings and mega signs) and social media presence through Facebook and YouTube. A total of 12 television channels and 13 radio stations (Government and private) aired these spots *pro bono* and private sector sponsorship exceeded one million US Dollars. As of December 2020, the PSAs have reached 147 million viewers on social media. The campaign won numerous awards including the Humanitarian Award by the Accolade Global Film Competition, USA and several accolades at the Bangladesh Brand Forum Commward.

Using the traditional *Dhol* as a symbol for garnering attention and voicing protest, the campaign suggested raising a beat for everyone to rally together in order to raise their voices and report any incidents of child marriage. The aim was to trigger an easy and highly visible action that reflected increasing public intolerance against child marriage. The call to action was simple - pick up the phone and call 109, the national helpline number. According to MOWCA, an estimated 50,000 adolescents called the helpline after viewing the television spots.

### *Icchedana: Adolescent Drama Series*

UNICEF with the Government - MOWCA and Ministry of Information (MOI), PCI Media (PCI) and Asiatic MCL launched *Icchedana* (On the Wings of Wishes), an adolescent-focused drama series. The storyline centres on a girls' football team and comprised an initial season of 26 episodes, continuing with another 52-episodes over a second phase. The story design workshops included adolescents from diverse backgrounds such as those living with disabilities, belonging to marginalized communities, girl and boy scouts, their parents, and community leaders. The story depicts the problems of adolescent girls (and boys) in a small village named Hathmathali and shows how they acknowledge and resolve those problems. Individual episodes dealt with different issues, ranging from child marriage, to sexual harassment, school drop-out, girls' empowerment, menstrual hygiene, physical and mental health, nutrition and sports.

*Icchedana* was designed as an evidence-based trans-media initiative. The series was simultaneously telecast on government and select private sector television and radio channels from September 2018. The show was adapted for viewing on social media as well, ensuring cross-linkages across all media platforms – television, radio and Internet. Season 2 was launched in December 2019 as part of the 16 Days of Activism to end Gender Based Violence. Subsequently, a message development workshop for Season 3 was completed and the content was developed. A docu-drama was also produced for screenings in hard-to-reach areas. *Icchedana* won a Bronze Telly Award, reaching over 67 million people online and an estimated 39 million viewers in the first two seasons according to the Television Point Ratings.

## **Social Media**

The social media campaign leveraged UNICEF's large online following. As of December 2020, UNICEF Bangladesh's Facebook page engaged over 8.9 million people, the second highest after the global UNICEF page. A separate handle for the child marriage campaign **#RaiseTheBeat4ECM** was created on the UNICEF Facebook page with the aim of engaging adolescents. The social media campaign also promoted the PSAs

that were simultaneously telecast on TV channels. In addition, a campaign promoting the TV drama series on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube was launched in August 2018. The campaign assets were also streamed on Bongo BD, Bangladesh's largest video-on-demand streaming service. The campaign has engaged over 97 million (i.e., viewers who comment, like or share).

## **Folk Media**

Folk performances were held in selected areas in seven high prevalence districts. Folk performances are popular in rural communities and serve as interactive cultural events that attract audiences from across generations, gender and segments of society. Different forms of folk music such as *Baul*, *Gombhira*, *kobi-gaan* (poet's competition), *pot-gaan* (pot-song), *Dhamail*, and *Jari-Shari* were used to communicate positive practices.

## **Community Engagement and Social Mobilisation**

To complement the trans-media campaign, ground-based community engagement interventions on adolescent rights were implemented in 15 *Upazilas* of seven high child marriage prevalence districts and four city corporations reaching more than 320,000 adults and adolescents. The mobilisation efforts included local leaders and administrative officials including district commissioners and government frontline workers. The main community mobilisation components are described in the following section.

### **Adolescent Radio Listeners Groups (ARLGs)**

Girls and boys get together once a week to listen to and discuss an adolescent and life skills-based radio program. The listener groups provided a platform for group listening followed by peer dialogue and mentoring. The radio programmes included components such as a phone-in-program, magazine, radio drama serial and quizzes.

### **Community Dialogue**

Community dialogue sessions were conducted with the community-based child protection committee (CBCPC) and included elected Ward Members, Imams, women leaders, household heads, members of community-based organisations, health and family planning frontline workers, NGO volunteers or health educators, and adolescents. Community Dialogues provided a platform for intergenerational dialogue between community elders as well as youth members.

### **Fathers Groups and Courtyard Sessions**

The purpose of the parent's groups was to raise awareness and generate dialogue on child marriage. Fathers were considered a key participant group, as they are primary decisions makers when it comes to decisions about marriage. Also, given the prevalent gender norms, it was important to address men, while also channelling the influential role of mothers and extended family members. The meetings are held either on a monthly basis or every two months and are implemented by local volunteers. The mothers' groups meet separately at Courtyard Sessions.

### **Social Mobilisation**

Union *Parishad* members, Marriage Registrars (*Kazi*), and Imams were sensitized on child marriage. The orientation emphasized the important role of local leaders in preventing child marriage. District and *Upazila* Authorities and NGOs facilitated the orientation. A Ward Development Committee guideline was also developed to engage local governance structures. CBCPC members at the union level were trained and play an important watchdog role in the community to advocate against child marriage.

## Research Design

Measuring change and tracking the effect of the multi-level communication initiative was built into the design and development of the strategy. The research, monitoring and evaluation partner for this initiative was the BRAC University James P. Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH).<sup>1</sup> The evidence base for this initiative relied on several research studies. The central piece was a longitudinal panel study, which included a baseline, midline, end line and a three-cohort rapid assessment. In addition to the longitudinal study, a social norms module was included in the national real-time monitoring system (UNICEF, 2018). This was the first time a national level monitoring survey included in-depth measures of child marriage related norms. The findings from this study helped sharpen the delivery and design of sub-national activities. Forthcoming rounds of the survey will allow for normative shifts to be systematically tracked.

The baseline survey was conducted in 2017 to gauge the existing knowledge, attitudes, practices, and social norms on child marriage. A midline and rapid assessments were conducted during the programme implementation in 2018. Following the broadcast of the first series of *Ichchedana* (26 episodes) an end line survey was conducted in late 2019. At baseline, a total of 1,164 households with four respondents per household ( $n=4356$ ) were interviewed. Respondents were randomly selected from households in three high prevalence districts (i.e., Tangail, Nilphamari, and Kushtia). In each household four family members were interviewed to include both parents and a male and female child aged between 10-19 years of age. A total of 3,905 respondents from 1,102 baseline households were reached at end line, accounting for levels of attrition. Finally, this article also draws on qualitative data and insights gathered by the first author over two field visits to Bangladesh in 2019. The data collection included key informant interviews with government officials and institutional partners; focus group discussions with parents, adolescents and community leaders, and observations of community engagement initiatives in two districts (Kushtia and Bhola) and Mirpur, an urban settlement outside Dhaka. The findings are reported in the following section.

## Findings

In this section, we compare findings over time (between baseline and end line) and by level of exposure (none, low and medium).<sup>2</sup> Overall, exposure to the show was low with 50 per cent ( $n=1,970$ ) of the respondents having no exposure, 22 per cent ( $n=852$ ) with low exposure and 28 per cent ( $n=1,083$ ) falling under medium exposure. Adolescent girls reported highest levels of exposure (57 per cent) followed by adolescent boys (50 per cent). Adults (mothers and fathers) were less likely to be exposed than adolescents. District-wise comparison show that *Ichchedana* was significantly more popular in rural households in comparison to their urban counterparts.

## Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice

In order for change to occur, it is critical know about the benefits or harmful consequences of certain behaviors. The findings indicate that respondents' knowledge on the legal age of marriage improved significantly both over time and by level of exposure. Knowledge of the consequences of child marriage were high at both baseline and end line, though a decline was noted over time. This negative trend was found for knowledge of harmful consequences of child marriage as well as legal consequences of exchanging dowry. At end line, about 94 per cent ( $n=3,677$ ) respondents recognized the harmful consequences of child marriage, which was about 98 per cent ( $n=4,247$ ) at the baseline. Similarly, about 87 per cent ( $n=3,823$ ) respondents could recognize legal consequences of dowry at the baseline, which was reported by 77 per cent ( $n=3008$ ) at end line (see Table 3).

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<sup>1</sup> The findings are extracted from the research commissioned by UNICEF Bangladesh and conducted by BRAC University JPGSPH. The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of the BRAC JPGSPH research team in leading the design, data collection and analysis for the longitudinal study.

<sup>2</sup> Exposure was measured based on four criteria; whether the respondents had: (1) heard of *Ichchedana*, (2) watched any of the 26 episodes, (3) received SMS-reminders to watch *Ichchedana*, and (4) received phone-call-reminders to watch *Ichchedana*. The group with "no exposure" to *Ichchedana*, had not heard about or watched the show and did not recall receiving any phone or SMS reminders. Those who had "low exposure" included all respondents who had either heard of the show or watched it, or they recalled outreach efforts. The "medium exposure" group included respondents who had watched the show (direct exposure), had heard of it (indirect exposure) and recalled phone or SMS outreach efforts.

**Table 3: Knowledge Regarding Child Marriage**

	Baseline	Endline	P Value	Endline (by Level of Exposure)			P Value
	N=4356	N=3905		No	Low	Medium	
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)		N=1970 Freq. (%)	N=852 Freq. (%)	N=1083 Freq. (%)	
Knowledge of legal age of marriage for girls and boys	2117 (48.6)	2115 (54.2)	0.000***	995 (50.5)	498 (58.5)	622 (57.4)	0.000***
Legal consequences of child marriage for parents	3952 (90.7)	3481 (89.1)	0.017*	1721 (87.4)	771 (90.5)	989 (91.3)	0.001***
Legal consequences of child marriage for adolescents		2838 (72.7)		1427 (72.4)	630 (73.9)	781 (72.1)	0.632
Legal consequences for adult groom if the bride is a child		3342 (85.6)		1639 (83.2)	737 (86.5)	966 (89.2)	0.000***
Harmful consequences of child marriage for adolescents	4247 (97.5)	3677 (94.2)	0.000***	1823 (92.5)	804 (94.4)	1050 (97.0)	0.000***
Legal consequences for exchanging dowry	3823 (87.8)	3008 (77.0)	0.000***	1496 (75.9)	670 (78.6)	842 (77.8)	0.236
Note: (a) asterisks indicate statistical significance (***) for P-value ≤ 0.001, ** for P-value ≤ 0.01, and * for P-value ≤ 0.05), (b) P-value in column 3 compares the baseline and end line statistics and P-value in column 7 compares the statistics by different levels of exposure to the show, (c) Chi-square test was performed for the categorical variables, whereas, t test and proportion test are performed for the continuous variables, (d) missing values are omitted for measuring the percentages, hence, in some cases the frequencies do not add up to total baseline or end line sample sizes.							

While the findings on knowledge of child marriage reflect a positive trend, it is noteworthy that almost half of the respondents did not know the legal age of marriage. Likewise, close to a third of the respondents did not know about the legal consequences of child marriage. This finding points to existing knowledge gaps that need to be addressed by future efforts.

Attitudes are important precursors to behaviour and social change. Attitude related questions asked at end line were significantly more positive among respondents with “medium exposure” compared to those with “no exposure.” In terms of more favourable attitudes and perceptions related to preventing child marriage, the data indicate statistically significant increases both over time and by level of exposure. The positive trends are significantly correlated with higher levels of exposure, education, and wealth. Attitude shifts were noted by parents and local leaders. For example, Union Parishad members in Daulutpur *Upazilla* shared that there was a perceptible change in how people perceived marriage of girls under 18. This was also expressed by community members in Bhola.

Notably, respondents reported taking actions to prevent child marriage increased from 7 per cent ( $n=309$ ) to 10 per cent ( $n=401$ ) between baseline and end line and reports of taking action against child marriage were higher by level of exposure. Respondents who reported taking actions to prevent child marriage were higher by level of exposure and over time. Table 4 provides information on reported actions and incidence of child marriage.

**Table 4: Actions and Behaviour Regarding Child Marriage**

	Baseline	Endline	P Value	Endline (by Level of Exposure)			P Value
	N=4356	N=3905		No	Low	Medium	
				N=1970	N=852	N=1083	
ACTION							
Actions taken to prevent child marriage in the community	309 (7.09)	401 (10.3)	0.000***	169 (8.6)	99 (11.6)	133 (12.3)	0.002**
BEHAVIOUR							
Child marriage happened in their family in last one year	208 (4.8)	564 (14.4)	0.000***	288 (14.6)	116 (13.6)	160 (14.8)	0.734
Child marriage happened in their community in last one year	1926 (45.7)	1553 (39.8)	0.000***	743 (37.8)	363 (42.6)	447 (41.3)	0.027*
Note: (a) asterisks indicate statistical significance (***) for P-value ≤ 0.001, ** for P-value ≤ 0.01, and * for P-value ≤ 0.05), (b) P-value in column 3 compares the baseline and end line statistics and P-value in column 7 compares the statistics by different levels of exposure to the show, (c) Chi-square test was performed for the categorical variables, whereas, t test and proportion test are performed for the continuous variables, (d) missing values are omitted for measuring the percentages, hence, in some cases the frequencies do not add up to total baseline or end line sample sizes.							

Qualitative insights also confirmed that people were taking active steps to prevent marriages. In some cases, it was parents and in other cases local leaders, were stepping up to end child marriage. An example is the Union *Parishad* Chairman from Pragnpur Union in Kushtia District who has played an active role in preventing several marriages and was recognised for his efforts and commitment. A group of fathers also shared instances of how they had intervened and stopped child marriages and proudly declared that in the past six months no child marriages had taken place in their area. They also explained that previously puberty was seen as a sign of readiness for marriage but now there was increased awareness about the dangers of marrying girls before they reach adulthood. The fathers also noted that girls themselves were more wary about marrying early, especially when they saw the physical changes and responsibilities early pregnancy brought on.

## Social Norms

A key objective of the research was to move beyond measuring individual change and examine the effectiveness of E-E at a broader social level. The assessment included measures for social norms constructs such as descriptive norms (doing what others do), injunctive norms (doing what others think one should do) and outcome expectations (social rewards or punishments). To assess the drivers of these descriptive norms, respondents were asked whether they approve of child marriage and also what they perceive is the opinion of their family, friends, and community regarding child marriage. Respondents’ personal and family perceptions of disapproval of child marriage increased significantly over time and also by level of exposure. Community level perceptions about disapproval of child marriage decreased over time and were not affected by exposure. These findings indicate that exposure to the show is associated with higher levels of disapproval of child marriage at the personal and family level, but this did not hold true at the community level, indicating a discrepancy between self-reported approval and perceived approval at the community level.

The role of social norms in upholding the practice of child marriage was evidenced in the fact that while respondents felt that they and their friends and family members approved of preventing child marriage, they felt the community at large were supportive of child marriage. On the positive side, perceptions that the prevalence of child marriage was declining accompanied by low levels of empirical expectations, where respondents felt that “others” in their family, friends and community expected them to support child marriage despite their own misgivings. A majority of the respondents did not anticipate any rewards or sanctions from society to approve of child marriage. Compared to the baseline, a significantly higher portion of respondents at the end line believed that the prevalence of child marriage for both boys and girls has declined over the last year (see Table 5).

Table 5: Normative beliefs Regarding Child Marriage

	Baseline	Endline	P Value	Endline (by Level of Exposure)			P Value
	N=4356	N=3905		No	Low	Medium	
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)		Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	
<b>SOCIAL NORMS (Descriptive)</b>							
Respondents who disapprove child marriage	4206 (96.6)	3822 (97.9)	0.000***	1908 (96.9)	838 (98.4)	1070 (98.8)	0.016*
Respondents who believe their family disapproves of child marriage	4135 (94.9)	3788 (97.0)	0.000***	1916 (97.3)	836 (98.1)	1070 (98.8)	0.019*
Respondents who believe their social networks disapprove of child marriage	4029 (92.5)	3607 (92.4)	0.831	1797 (91.2)	788 (92.5)	1022 (94.4)	0.007**
Respondents who believe their community disapproves of child marriage	3504 (80.4)	2950 (75.5)	0.000***	1491 (75.7)	642 (75.3)	817 (75.4)	0.978
<b>SOCIAL NORMS (Injunctive)</b>							
Respondents who believe their society (i.e., family, friends, or community) expects them to approve child marriage		107 (2.7)		73 (3.7)	15 (1.8)	19 (1.8)	0.001***
Respondents who believe their society (i.e., family, friends, or community) expects them to approve of dowry		297 (7.6)		179 (9.09)	58 (6.8)	60 (5.5)	0.001***
Respondents who think there are rewards (of tangible or intangible nature) if s/he refuses to engage in child marriage	2924 (67.1)	1274 (32.6)	0.000***	605 (30.7)	281 (32.98)	388 (35.8)	0.015*
Respondents who think there are negative consequences (of tangible or intangible nature) if s/he refuses to engage in child marriage	1324 (30.4)	881 (22.6)	0.000***	423 (21.5)	200 (23.5)	258 (23.8)	0.255
Note: (a) asterisks indicate statistical significance (** for P-value ≤ 0.01, * for P-value ≤ 0.05), (b) P-value in column 3 compares the baseline and end line statistics and P-value in column 7 compares the statistics by different levels of exposure to the show, (c) Chi-square test was performed for the categorical variables, whereas, t test and proportion test are performed for the continuous variables, (d) missing values are omitted for measuring the percentages, hence, in some cases the frequencies do not add up to total baseline or end line sample sizes.							

## Gender Norms

Child marriage cannot be addressed without taking into account broader gender norms and practices. The survey assessed key gender related attitudes, behaviours, perceptions, and social norms that are closely associated with child marriage. These included beliefs around girls' education, protection from sexual harassment, mobility, reliance on financial support from girls and decision-making. Table 6 summarises some of the shifts in attitudes towards gender norms.

**Table 6: Attitudes Related to Gender Norms**

Attitude	Time (Frequencies in %)			Level of Exposure (Frequencies in %)			
	Baseline	End line	<i>p</i> value	No	Low	Medium	<i>p</i> value
Think sons should continue education over daughters, in case of financial restraints	38 ( <i>n</i> =1644)	25 ( <i>n</i> =974)	0.000***	26 ( <i>n</i> =511)	26 ( <i>n</i> =220)	22 ( <i>n</i> =243)	
Think it is shameful to depend on a daughter's income in old age	37 ( <i>n</i> =1588)	29 ( <i>n</i> =1134)	0.000***	33 ( <i>n</i> =640)	28 ( <i>n</i> =2)	24 ( <i>n</i> =255)	0.000***
Think marrying off an adolescent girl is a solution to protect her from sexual (harassment/eve-teasing)		18 ( <i>n</i> =694)		19 ( <i>n</i> =374)	17 ( <i>n</i> =142)	16 ( <i>n</i> =178)	
Think girls should have equal rights in parental property		86 ( <i>n</i> =3351)		83 ( <i>n</i> =1631)	85 ( <i>n</i> =721)	85 ( <i>n</i> =917)	

Positive changes in attitudes around gender were noted over time and by level of exposure, though not all of these changes were statistically significant. When examined by other background variables those with higher education and wealth held significantly more positive perceptions. Adolescent girls scored a significantly higher mean score on positive attitudes towards both boys' and girls' education at end line compared to baseline. There was a significant increase in beliefs at end line that girls are not responsible for sexual harassment/eve-teasing (baseline mean score 9.2, end line mean score 11.6). Mobility for mothers of adolescents and adolescent girls improved significantly from baseline (14 per cent, *n*=589) to end line (21 per cent, *n*=803). Similarly, significant increases are found by level of exposure. The per cent of "medium exposure" group (23 per cent, *n*=253) compared to 19 per cent (*n*=377) among the "no exposure" group were supportive of mobility for girls.

These changes were also reflected in the qualitative data. Listening to a group of fathers and grandfathers share their aspirations for their daughters showcased how men were beginning to envision the future of girls beyond marriage and household roles, seeing them as having equal rights and opportunities as their male siblings. Many men wanted their daughters to become teachers or doctors; but one father stood up and proudly declared that he would support his daughter to become not just a teacher, but a female religious teacher (*maulana*), a respected role normally restricted to men.

## Discussion

Gender-transformative approaches move beyond individual level change and address the social norms, attitudes, systems and structures that lead to gender inequities. Importantly, such efforts foster critical awareness, promote decision-making and agency while increasing access to information, education or economic resources (Kraft, Wilkins, Morales, Widyono, & Middlestadt, 2014). While the focus of this initiative was on ending child marriage, our analysis shows that the approach was holistic and aimed at promoting gender equality and adolescent empowerment.

The findings show an increase in positive attitudes towards investments in girl's education and a decline in beliefs that sons should continue education over girls. These are significant markers of how girls are valued in families and societies. It is important that they are tracked over time and constructs, such as decision-making, employment, political participation and access to resources are evaluated.

It is also necessary to focus on boys as brothers, future grooms, fathers, community members and elders to systematically challenge gender inequality (Greene, Perlson, Taylor & Lauro, 2015). Notable changes are already underway, for instance boys who are involved in the clubs demonstrated better understanding of girls' rights and equality issues in society and greater respect towards women as a whole.

Furthermore, adolescents shared that after joining the club they felt more comfortable and confident when interacting with people including peers of the opposite sex.

The campaign is innovative and it is the first time an evidence and social norms theory-based effort has been executed in such a strategic manner in Bangladesh. Such large-scale digital and mass media engagement is a meaningful milestone for social change efforts. However, a major limitation of the trans-media initiative is the low levels of exposure and engagement. Social media on the other hand, fared exceptionally well.

A notable feature of this strategy was the strong partnership among stakeholders. Asiatic MCL, a leading private-sector creative agency, headed the creative strategy and media production. To ensure global standards PCI Media provided mentoring support to Asiatic MCL. BRAC University (JPGSPH) carried out the research, and Drexel University provided technical assistance for the evaluation component. This collaboration brought together global and national partners under one platform by building on their respective strengths and expertise.

*Ichhedana*, built national capacity in designing, implementing and assessing theory-driven and evidence-informed trans-media SBCC programs, and provides a model for other developing contexts. Ongoing collaboration with partners strengthened ownership and required advocacy, engagement and commitment. The *Dhol* Campaign was instrumental in advancing private sector partnerships and laid the foundation for *pro bono* airtime for the broadcast of the television series on the government channel and four private channels. UNICEF carefully screened all sponsors for the show. This provides a robust example of the partnership process required for future SBCC initiatives.

In conclusion, change in gender norms take time and programmes must continue for empirical change (Henderson-Riley, Sood & Sani, 2019; Usdin, Scheepers, Goldsmith & Japhet, 2005). Our article charts a catalytic process that has begun to spark important changes in gender norms in Bangladesh. It is imperative that the momentum is sustained and the shifts in gender norms and how they impact girls, boys, women and men are assessed over time.

*Disclaimer:* The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Government of Bangladesh, UNICEF or other partners.

## Endnotes

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Neha Kapil (formerly Chief, Communication for Development UNICEF Bangladesh) and Tania Sultana (Communication for Development Specialist UNICEF Bangladesh) led the ideation, planning, design and implementation of the project. Ami Sengupta authored the strategy document and Suruchi Sood provided guidance for the research and evaluation. The authors would like to acknowledge the UNICEF Bangladesh team especially colleagues from Communication for Development field-office teams; Communication, Advocacy and Partnerships; Child Protection; Research and Evaluation; Education and Gender Sections.

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