

MEDIA TREND ANALYSIS ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE: 2013–2018

March 2019



This March 2019 report was commissioned by the Kendeda Fund under a grant to CCMC and is a follow-up to two earlier reports described on the following pages.

We encourage other donors, policy makers, activists and journalists to share the findings with their colleagues and networks without needing permission. For more information, contact Kathy Bonk at email: kathybonk@mac.com

Cover photo credits: Stephanie Sinclair; Girls Not Brides; Daily Sun of the East West Media Group in Dhaka; and Hari Anggara, of the Malay Mail.



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“The name of Sajeda Akhter, an intermediate student of Barguna Government College, now stands for bravery, as she thwarted 107 child marriages, risking her life. After being saddened with the plight of females who got married in their childhood, Sajeda has decided her destination is to change the society by stopping such unwanted marriages. Sajeda, daughter of a rickshaw-puller, has set an example for others, showing her rare human quality, driven by the sufferings of other girls who got married in their childhood. Sajeda felt the need to stop early marriage after witnessing the deaths of many girls while giving birth to babies as well as her own sister’s agony in married life.”

As reported in *The News Today* in Bangladesh – 30 August 2018



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WITH KEY FINDINGS

This analysis of trends in media coverage of child, early and forced marriage is organized like two earlier reports in 2013 and 2015: around the formula of what journalists refer to as the Five Ws: Who, What, When, Where and Why, plus How.

Overall, this report shows that coverage has improved greatly in quality compared to the earlier studies. Highlighted throughout are findings that more stories:

- Featured girls as advocates and leaders,
- Included solutions and successes, and
- Focused on absolute numbers of child and early marriages in addition to rates in various countries.

In summary:

WHO – *the groups in the news* have stayed relatively constant over the past five years. The United Nations and its agencies UNICEF and UNFPA were mentioned more than other groups. Girls Not Brides jumped to #4 in 2018 from #11 in 2013, and Unchained at Last made the top ten list – a big jump from #20 in 2014.

WHAT – *the issues in the news associated with child marriage* are more diverse than in the past. Education (42 percent) and health (39 percent) continued to be the top issues mentioned in media coverage. Since 2013, there have been significant increases in references to “police,” in large part due to regular coverage, especially in India, of police involvement in stopping child marriages. The major shifts also included a 10 percent increase in stories with references to health, violence, human rights, police, pregnancy and poverty. Stories with references to pregnancy more than quadrupled, from 6 to 26 percent.

WHERE – *the countries mentioned in the coverage* remained about the same. Within the nearly 5,000 stories published in 2017 and again in 2018 media around the world, the most references were about India (16 percent of stories) and Pakistan (12 percent). India has an especially large number of media outlets and was often referenced in global media. Coverage over the past five years in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and South Sudan fluctuated according to whether these countries were spotlighted for wars, terrorism, elections, parliamentary upheavals or other breaking news stories.

WHEN – *the period covered in this report* is 2017 and 2018. It is the third in a series that started with a baseline media analysis in 2013 and another in 2015. This 2018 quantitative review found 4,977 stories of more than 50 words, down from the more than 6,000 stories in both 2013 and 2014. For the qualitative section of this report, 445 individual news stories of 500 words or more were read, analyzed and coded to track additional trends. These stories were from LexisNexis database of 2,300 media outlets worldwide and a regular Google featured search terms, child and early marriage.

HOW and **WHY** – *the quality of coverage improved*. While the number of stories specifically on child marriage was about the same over the past few years, those published in 2017-18 were more notable in featuring the girls themselves and the campaigns to help them.

Fully 80 percent of the child marriage stories done in 2017 had a hopeful tone likely leaving readers positive about possibilities for ending child marriage. Forty-two percent of these stories described successful projects and solutions. This is up dramatically from the 9 percent that mentioned solutions in 2013, a five-fold rise.

Only 12 percent of the stories in 2017 focused exclusively on the problem or its victims, as compared to 37 percent in 2013. This is real progress. Grim tales with overwhelming problems too big to solve tend to discourage reader/viewer engagement as shown by earlier research by the Aspen Institute and other messaging projects.

A number of the positive stories spotlighted involvement by religious and traditional leaders who spoke out against child marriage, usually in the context of African Union, United Nations or UNFPA meetings. First Ladies, celebrities and royalty were notably more outspoken as well.

Overall, the survey found fewer items in 2017 about global aspects of the issues. Most were based on a 2017 World Bank/ICRW report, *The Economic Impact of Child Marriage*, which generated global attention and dozens of stories spotlighting individual countries.

Coverage in the United States focused mostly on state legislative debates on measures to set a legal age for marriage. Many stories noted that the causes of child marriage are very different in the United States than for girls elsewhere in the world.

It is interesting that the underlying causes of child marriages were not discussed in all stories. About 70 percent named a cause while 80 percent looked more at the negative results for the girls and their societies. Stories that included causes mentioned more often issues of cultural norms, dowry demands, poverty, sexism and anxiety over family honor. A handful of stories described backlash against the drive to end child marriage, but the overwhelming majority were favorable to the movement.

RECOMMENDATIONS: As with earlier reports, this one suggests ways to expand and improve media coverage through communications strategies to advance advocacy and policy work. Ten recommendations emphasize the importance of making a special effort to include the voices of girls and young people in stories; to ensure that the important roles of parents are highlighted; to develop more consistent language on the underlying factors contributing to child marriage; to disseminate positive news stories, especially to elected officials and policy makers; and to prepare in advance responses to stories that could create a backlash around controversial cases.

For this report, 445 individual news stories of over 500 words and published in 2017, were read, analyzed and coded to track trends and compare to earlier reviews. In 2018, there were 2,300 media in the LexisNexis database which were the focus of the quantitative assessment. In addition, 2018 stories of 500+ words were scanned and tracked but not coded. See Page 26 for Methodology and Process.



I. COVERAGE BY THE NUMBERS: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN

WHO: RANKING OF GROUPS FEATURED IN THE NEWS

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
UNICEF	2	2	1	1	1	1
United Nations	1	1	2	2	2	2
UNFPA	4	3	4	3	3	3
Girls Not Brides	11	4	6	7	6	4
African Union	-	5	3	4	7	5
Human Rights Watch	5	6	5	5	4	6
World Bank	-	10	11	8	8	7
Unchained at Last	-	20	17	16	9	8
Save the Children	7	8	8	6	5	9
PLAN International	8	7	7	9	10	10
World Health Organization	-	11	13	11	16	11
World Vision	10	15	12	12	11	12
USAID	6	9	9	10	12	13
ICRW	14	12	14	15	14	14
Population Council	12	13	10	13	13	15
UNDP	9	18	16	14	15	16
Too Young to Wed	15	16	15	17	17	17
Breakthrough	-	14	19	18	18	18
CARE International	3	21	20	20	20	19
Girl Up	-	19	18	19	19	20

UNICEF, the United Nations and UNFPA were the top groups making news about ending child marriage during the past six years and were featured in 28 percent of the 5,500+ stories in 2017 and 2018. Coverage quoting these organizations was about their activities: releasing reports, hosting meetings, launching campaigns and providing services to children and young people in targeted countries.

The profiles of Girls Not Brides, the African Union and the World Bank have increased steadily over the last few years. Here’s why:

- Girls Not Brides consistently pitched stories to media as part of a strategic communications plan that supports their overall theory of change. This along with their longer-standing with media as an established organization that supplies data and access to personal stories likely contributed to this shift.
- The African Union’s campaign to end child marriage continued to spread throughout the continent.
- The 2017 World Bank/ICRW report, *The Economic Impact of Child Marriage*, received global attention with dozens of stories about the cost of child marriage on specific countries’ economies.

Among the NGO community:

- Human Rights Watch topped the list of larger NGOs working on ending child marriage through a lens of human rights violations including trafficking and child abuse and by releasing country-specific reports and updates.
- Efforts to establish a legal age for marriage in the United States garnered significant media coverage as state legislatures debated and passed new laws thanks to campaigns by Unchained at Last and the Tahirih Justice Center.
- CARE, PLAN International, Save the Children, World Vision and the Population Council all had on-going global programs to end child marriage and were cited in many country-based stories.
- Too Young To Wed continued to be one of the smallest groups with the largest reach through coverage of their local skill-building trainings and partnerships with *The New York Times*, *BBC*, *National Geographic* and other major media.

WHAT: ISSUES RELATED TO CHILD MARRIAGE

	Total Global Stories in 2013 (6945)	Total Global Stories in 2014 (6436)	Total Global Stories in 2015 (4927)	Total Global Stories in 2016 (5574)	Total Global Stories in 2017 (5540)	Total Global Stories in 2018 (4977)
Education	49%	37%	53%	51%	47%	45%
Health	28%	34%	48%	45%	43%	42%
Violence	22%	35%	44%	41%	38%	38%
Human Rights	16%	29%	36%	33%	31%	30%
Police	11%	18%	28%	26%	23%	26%
Pregnancy	6%	8%	12%	12%	13%	25%
Poverty	13%	20%	26%	24%	24%	23%
Religion	17%	22%	28%	25%	23%	21%
Legislation	38%	18%	21%	21%	24%	20%
Equality	13%	18%	23%	22%	22%	19%
Rape	9%	13%	16%	18%	17%	18%
Culture	11%	13%	18%	16%	13%	14%
HIV/AIDS	5%	15%	20%	19%	16%	12%
Women’s Rights	11%	15%	19%	20%	16%	12%
FGM	3%	13%	17%	13%	10%	10%
Reproductive Health	4%	8%	11%	10%	8%	8%
Slavery	3%	7%	7%	6%	6%	8%
Trafficking	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Child Abuse	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	3%

The top issues mentioned in stories about child marriage continue this year to be education (45 percent) and health (42 percent).

Since 2015, there is a significant increase in references to “police,” in large part due to regular coverage, especially in India, of police involvement in stopping child, early and forced marriages.

In 2013, overall coverage of child marriage was at an all-time high with 6,945 stories, compared to 4,977 in 2018. The major shifts of what issues were associated with child marriage have been:

A 10 percent or more increase in references to girls’ health, violence, human rights, police, pregnancy and poverty between 2013 and 2018. References to:

- Pregnancy more than quadrupled, from 6 to 25 percent;
- FGM more than tripled, from 3 to 10 percent, but were down from 20 percent in 2015;
- Police more than doubled, from 11 to 26 percent;
- HIV/AIDS more than doubled, from 5 to 12 percent, but were down from 20 percent in 2015.
- Rape doubled, from 9 to 18 percent; and,
- Human rights nearly doubled, from 16 to 30 percent;

Less significant but still important increases came in other areas. References to:

- Slavery more than doubled, from 3 to 8 percent;
- Child abuse more than doubled, from 1 to 3 percent
- Reproductive health doubled, from 4 to 8 percent; and,
- Trafficking doubled, from 2 to 4 percent.

Since 2013, references to legislation fell from 38 to 20 percent. This is likely because the first round of legal advocacy on child marriage has shifted to enforcement of the laws.

The chief and people of the community...have come to the realization that child marriages have very negative effects on the future of female children in the community. As a result, the community is poised to formulate and enforce bylaws against the outmoded cultural practice and to protect the girls and allow them go to school and stay to complete and become responsible citizens of the community.”

Reported in the Ghana News Agency – 29 November 2017

WHERE AND WHEN: COUNTRIES MENTIONED IN COVERAGE

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Stories Worldwide	1637	2450	3228	3781	5211	6945	6436	4927	5574	5540	4977
Total Stories in the U.S.	632	771	636	716	875	1026	921	888	693	983	924
Countries Featured in all Stories											
India	116	368	637	945	1843	1140	1341	1120	716	1117	815
Pakistan	48	198	338	440	786	724	1421	931	633	539	589
Bangladesh	26	74	110	210	298	411	554	599	372	356	457
Nigeria	17	39	145	79	110	316	805	435	357	177	210
Afghanistan	60	172	168	227	230	286	355	220	203	127	182
Niger	10	32	22	31	59	90	174	188	109	162	139
South Sudan	2	7	3	14	42	79	230	149	41	47	122
Ethiopia	19	33	51	69	69	159	418	281	156	77	112
Mexico	36	38	50	56	53	87	119	115	11	14	92
Mali	4	19	9	25	32	88	163	116	71	108	65
Brazil	24	30	41	54	53	82	145	195	23	15	57
DRC	22	56	41	50	48	94	155	78	31	39	42

Within the 4,977 stories published in media around the world, the most references were to India (16 percent of stories) and Pakistan (12 percent). India has an especially large number of media outlets and is often referenced in global media.

Media coverage about child marriage over the past five years in Nigeria, Afghanistan and South Sudan has fluctuated according to whether these countries were spotlighted for wars, terrorism, elections, parliamentary upheavals or other breaking news stories. The kidnapping of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram is one example. Another trend in 2017-18 that was greater than in other years was media reporting on child marriage in their countries alone and not as much about worldwide trends.

The Nigerian Association of Women Journalists speaks out, “calling on government at all levels to pay more attention to the plight of women and girls. A case in mind is that of the Chibok girls, some of whom are still in captivity with their current state not known.”

Reported in the News Agency of Nigeria – 2017



II. IMPROVED QUALITY OF NEWS AND FEATURE STORIES: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF HOW AND WHY

WHY: MANY MORE SUCCESS STORIES ABOUT EFFORTS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

Between 2013 and 2017, the proportion of success stories about efforts to end child marriage improved dramatically: from 9 percent to 42 percent among longer feature and news stories of more than 500 words. This is a five-fold increase in a relatively short period of time.

The very first story, posted on January 1, 2017 in Google News, featured a campaign organized by girls to stop child marriage.

12:00 AM, January 01, 2017 / LAST MODIFIED: 12:33 AM, January 01, 2017

Cycle race against child marriage

Thakurgaon schoolgirls join programme

Our Correspondent, Thakurgaon

Five groups of schoolgirls took part in cycling in different areas of the district yesterday as part of an awareness campaign against social menaces like child marriage, dowry, stalking, drug abuse and militancy.

Simultaneously, around a hundred youths participated in a mini-marathon in the district town for the same purpose.



Schoolgirls prepare to start cycling from Thakurgaon town to Baliadangi upazila in the same district as part of an awareness campaign against social evils, organised by Eco Social Development Organisation yesterday. Photo: Star

Throughout 2017, success stories featured:

- campaigns by UN agencies and governments, including local villages;
- girls and boys with their parents as organizing leaders in communities;
- workshops helping girls who are victims of child marriage recapture their lives and find support systems and training opportunities
- religious and traditional leaders taking strong positions against child marriage at public meetings and gatherings;
- the passage of new laws and policies;
- legal decisions that take strong positions on child marriage as a form of abuse;
- reports showing progress on stopping child marriages;
- girls who escaped and are recovering from early marriages and now leading successful lives as they help other girls through local advocacy programs; and,
- celebrities and filmmakers telling personal success stories about their experiences and commitments to helping others.

The increased number of articles about these success stories can reinforce readers' and viewers' attitudes that ending child marriage has positive outcomes for their children, family and community. All the success stories had hopeful messages.

One example was this piece that ran in several African outlets with a success story incorporated into the article:

To ensure her efforts were sustainable, Kachindamoto decided to change the law by ordering her 50 sub-chiefs to sign an agreement to abolish early marriages under customary law and dissolve any existing marriages within her jurisdiction.

With the new law, Kachindamoto has managed to terminate more than 850 child marriages and send all involved children back to school.

Malawian Female Chief Winning War Against Child Marriages



Theresa Kachindamoto, a Malawian chief who is slowly winning the war on child marriages and sexual initiations. AFKInsider.

Theresa Kachindamoto, a village chief in Malawi, has earned herself a reputation for being the top marriage terminator in the country for her firm stance against child marriage and sexual initiations that are common in Malawi.

WHY: STORIES FEATURING BOTH PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS ARE STILL HALF THE COVERAGE

Just under half (46%) of the 2017 stories reviewed and coded were focused on the problem and included solutions. This is nearly identical to the proportion of pieces reviewed in 2015 (45%) and lower than those researched in 2013 (54%).

Unlike earlier analyses that found that coverage contained mostly generic solutions with few specifics, many of the stories reviewed in this report and based on 2017 articles focused more on specific problems and examples of promising real-life solutions.

As in the past, these stories were often triggered by reports released by NGOs, UN agencies or governments. In 2017, many more were about campaigns being launched, religious leaders engaged, new laws adopted, or older ones strengthened.

For example, this news story focused on campaigns launched by local leaders who became champions of ending child marriage. The piece specifically linked dowries to early marriage – a factor of child marriage that is described in about 10 percent of stories.



The screenshot shows a news article from Hindustan Times, dated Sunday, Nov 11, 2018. The headline is "After prohibition, Bihar aims for dowry-free villages". The sub-headline reads: "Political analysts believe that after successfully imposing prohibition on liquor in Bihar, chief minister Nitish Kumar is now raising the bar in an attempt to emerge as a social reformer." The article is dated 10/15/2017 10:00:07 and is by Renuka Sengupta. The main image shows a group of people, including a man in a white shirt and a red turban, and women in pink saris. A caption below the image states: "Census 2011 reported 11% cases of child marriage among Hindus in Bihar as against 54% in 2001. (File photo)". The article text includes social media sharing icons and a summary: "PATNA After enforcing prohibition, Bihar is now planning to rope in panchayat representatives and religious leaders in its campaign against dowry and child marriage. Chief minister Nitish Kumar, who successfully championed the prohibition drive after returning to power in 2015, had announced last month that he would launch a campaign against child marriage and dowry on October 2 - Mahatma Gandhi's birthday."

THE TIMES OF INDIA
CITY

17-year-old fights to annul her child marriage

TNI | Updated: Jun 26, 2017, 12:30 IST



JAISALMER: Seventeen-year-old Sarita (name changed) is fighting tooth and nail to annul her child marriage that took place when she was only three years old. With the support of Dr Kirti Bharti, rehabilitation psychologist and managing trustee of Saarthi Trust, she gathered courage to challenge her child marriage in family court-1 of Jodhpur on Friday. Judge Rekha Bhargava of the family court-1 of Jodhpur issued notice to said-to-be husband of victim and directed him to appear in the court. On other side Sarita's in-laws pressuring her to come to her husband's place. Not only them but even the panch (leaders) of the community are asking her to go to her in-laws' place. Both Sarita and her mother, who is a widow are terrified.

Other themes that ran throughout 2017 media coverage of child marriage included girls fighting for their rights, with an emphasis on their struggles, but not on the results of their actions. Efforts to stop child marriage were included in the story, but not as a major focus.

Arrests of perpetrators and parents participating in underage marriages, legal battles, Supreme Court and lower court decisions and police preventing these child marriages, were stories that ran throughout 2017 around the world including in the United States, Australia, Germany, the U.K., Sweden and Denmark, among other countries. For example, this story from Pakistan was typical of others with problem/solution themes with the following headline: Pakistan cracks down on men trading young daughters to settle debts and disputes.

Justice

Pakistan cracks down on men trading young daughters to settle debts and disputes

GlobalPost
May 25, 2017 2:00 PM EDT
By Nelia Inayat




As mentioned earlier, success stories about efforts to end child marriage all left readers with hope for the future. However, the problem/solution category of stories included themes of hopelessness in 20 percent of the pieces reviewed.

For example, one story connected the plight of young widows and early child marriages by focusing on problems and challenges along with possible solutions. But, readers were left feeling hopelessness, for the young widows quoted, that not much can be done to improve their lives.

The piece went on to comment:

The women are also subjected to severe discrimination and abuse, which is so internalised by them that they are unmoved by it.

HYDERABAD

Child marriage victims endure widowhood too

Swathi Vadlamudi

HYDERABAD, JUNE 24, 2017 01:06 IST
UPDATED: JUNE 24, 2017 01:07 IST

SHARE ARTICLE | f | t | e | p | o | PRINT | A | A | A

Alcohol, accidents claim lives of young men

The link between child marriage and early widowhood could never be starker. Almost all the women who attended a meeting at the International Widows Day on Friday at L.B. Stadium, were victims of child marriage and eventually loss of partner.

WHY: STORIES ONLY ABOUT PROBLEMS DROPPED SIGNIFICANTLY

The problem-only stories have dropped significantly over the past five years: from 37 percent of stories in 2013 to 12 percent in 2017.

Most of these stories were about reports of increases in child marriage, assessments of legislation or comparisons of regional numbers. An occasional “victims” story appeared about young girls who were beaten by husbands, dropped out of school or were forced into sex trafficking.

For example, a UNICEF report on West and Central Africa focused on the increases of child marriage in various regions:

The headline in the associated press release focused on increases and much of the media coverage followed this lead:

AT CURRENT RATES OF REDUCTION, IT WILL TAKE OVER 100 YEARS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA.

Their press release did include some information on declines in child marriage by noting:

Five countries in the region – Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Ghana and Rwanda – stand out with declines in the practice ranging from 40 to 60 percent over the past 25 years.



Yes, these pieces raised awareness of the problem, but too often left readers and viewers with a feeling that the problem is so big, that they cannot do much to help curb the practice.

There is no question that progress has been made on the shift to success stories. Most of the 2017 pieces reviewed for this updated report now featured personal stories, positive photos and the voices of girls and champions working to end child marriage.

Year	Number of Stories	Success Stories	Problem/Solution Stories	Problem-only Stories
2017	5540	42%	45%	12%
2015	4927	27%	45%	25%
2013	6945	9%	54%	37%

TRENDS ON CAUSES, IMPACT, FOCUS AND HOPE

This 2017-18 analysis of child marriage global media coverage included several additional specifics in its qualitative assessment. Specifically, this review of 445 stories with over 500 words appearing in 2017 looked at the proportion of news pieces and features that:

- left the reader/viewer with hope or hopelessness;
- featured a single country, put the reported country in the context of a global picture or focused on ending child marriage from a strictly global perspective;
- included the voices of girls;
- referred to parents in a positive or negative light;
- reported the causes or factors of child, early and forced marriages as defined by media; and,
- provided other trends that could inform the community of advocates working to end child marriage.

HOPE OR HOPELESSNESS?

As mentioned in several sections above, a feeling of hope for the future was a part of all the stories about success. These included stories about:

- girls fighting for and achieving new legal rights;
- reports on significant decreases in the numbers of child marriages;
- young women, who after escaping a marriage during their childhood, are now working to help other girls (and boys) change the culture of child marriages;
- religious and traditional leaders who oppose child marriage and are succeeding in bringing others into their campaigns; and
- communities successfully working to end child marriage.

80%
STORIES WITH HOPE
20% FEELING OF HOPELESSNESS

Stories including both the problems and the solutions generally were positive leaving readers/viewers with a feeling of hope. Overall, of the 445 stories reviewed, 80 percent included language of hope for the future with examples of stopping child marriage and 20 percent reflected hopelessness and despair. Of the 80 percent indicating hope, 51 percent included language about problems and solutions.

As would be expected, all the stories that focused only on the problems of child, early and forced marriage, left readers, listeners and viewers with feelings of hopelessness.

ELEMENTS INCLUDED IN STORIES

In 2017, of the 445 stories included in this study, 333 (75 percent), focused just on the situation in an individual country and did not reference other countries or global comparisons. Many of these stories focused on legislative activities.

For example, all but a handful of stories appearing in media from the United States were about state legislative activities. This is a trend throughout American media where local newspapers or television coverage is predominately about local or state concerns. The global coverage of ending child marriage followed this pattern with a local focus as well.

This trend can have a positive impact on policy change in communities and countries. Studies by the Pew Research Center and others have reported that people in the United States get most of their information from local news sources and that these are trusted more than national media. This is likely true for countries around the world. The lines of these stories included:

- legislation in each country that sets the age of marriage at 18 years with coverage on the United States, Australia, Germany, Turkey, several Caribbean countries, Sweden and Denmark.
- court rulings that stopped child marriages or established child marriage as a form of child abuse;
- high-level officials and respected elders announcing their opposition to child marriage and working to end the practice;
- religious and traditional leaders reaching out to other community leaders and developing programs to end child marriage;
- campaigns launched by UNICEF, UNFPA, PLAN International, and CARE, among others, and local groups, including law enforcement;
- cash-transfer programs in the pilot stages and about to grow; and
- workshops and training programs that support adolescents and raise public awareness.

Stories that included global trends (20 percent) tended to appear in outlets with broader world-wide audiences including:

- wire service stories by the *Associated Press* and *Thompson Reuters* that were more broadly focused: for example, on the release of a World Bank/ICRW report on the economic impact of child marriage policies;
- broadcast and cable outlets on international satellite services including CNN, CNN International, BBC and Public Radio International;
- British and American media that have traditionally catered to global policy audiences especially *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post* and *The Economist*.

REPORTING ON CAUSES AND UNDERLYING FACTORS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

This analysis also included a look at how the media reported the factors related to child, early and forced marriage. Interestingly, the causes or factors of child marriage were not in all stories. About 70 percent of the stories (305) named an associated factor. A much higher number, about 80 percent, included the negative impact of child marriage referencing stunting of education, effects on overall health, risks from early child birth, including high death rates among teen-agers, increased domestic violence and potential for trafficking.

Twenty-four different causes were cited in the stories reviewed for this analysis. Journalists generally focused on top issues facing their communities. The most prominent cause reported was cultural norms and traditions with 94 mentions in about 30 percent of the pieces.

The causes cited in the 305 individual stories (of more than 500 words) that included references to the reasons for child marriage and in the journalists' chosen words were:

Tradition and Cultural Norms (94 mentions)	Prevent Rape (5)
Poverty (80)	Family Child Abuse (4)
Pregnancy (36)	Climate Change (3)
Parents and Dowry (33)	Sanitary Napkins/Menstruation (3)
Sexism, Misogyny, Patriarchy, Inequality (32)	Sold to Buy Brother a Wife (2)
Trafficking (18)	No Birth Registration (2)
Wars and Conflicts (14)	Food Insecurity (2)
Sharia Law, Religion (12)	Unbalanced Sex-Ratio (1)
Protection from Rape (11)	Cover for Gay Son/Husband (1)
Immigration and migration (9)	Control Daughter's Sex (1)
Lack of Awareness/Ignorance (7)	Lack of Toilets (1)
Cost of School Fees (5)	Husband Needs Green Card (1)

It is important to note that several important studies have concluded that the root causes of child, early and forced marriages are misogyny and patriarchy. For example, in a recent report, *Early and Child Marriage in India: A Landscape Analysis* by the Nirantar Trust with support by the American Jewish World Service, researchers concluded:

“Early and child marriage is a symptom of a deeply fractured and unequal society. When asked why people decide to marry their children early, causes like “dowry,” “poverty” and “fear of sexual violence” are mentioned. While these may be factors that influence decision-making around marriage, they are not the root causes. The root causes are structural inequalities and direct decision-making factors; dowry and other such explanations are ultimately symptoms of those deeper problems. These underlying structures are an interplay of patriarchy, class, caste, religion and sexuality, which lead to complex realities that then influence decision-making.

In this [Nirantar] report we identify seven root causes of early and child marriage: the economics of marriage; sexuality; gender norms and masculinity; educational and institutional gaps; the centrality of marriage; risk, vulnerability and uncertainty; and age as an axis of power. While some of these exist in the current discourse around the issue, others are additions made through this study.”

A third of the 2017 stories (32 percent) that were read and coded for this report included references to sexism, misogyny, patriarchy or inequality as the cause of child marriage or quoted experts using the terms. However, journalists often used the words cause and factors interchangeably without making a distinction.

Reasons cited by media as causing child marriage included a broad range of issues, some that are interrelated and could be grouped together in the following ways:

- **cultural norms & misogyny** with religion, ignorance, Sharia Law and controlling sex;
- **poverty** with dowry, school fees and food insecurity;
- **pregnancy** related to rape, or pre-marital sex;
- **violence** with war, conflicts, migration and trafficking under a human rights umbrella;
- **immigration** associated with culture among new immigrants; and,
- a grouping of emerging issues such as climate, sanitary napkins or, in the United States, actions related to Green Card rules or immigration issues.

Nearly all of these stories listed one or two specific causes that were usually related to local conditions. About 10 percent of the stories included a more comprehensive listing of the root causes of early, forced or child marriage, as written succinctly in the *Ghana News Agency*:

The causes and drivers of child marriage include religion, education, geographical location, teenage pregnancy, wealth acquisition, bride wealth betrothal and family breakdowns and parenting challenges.

In a 1,265-word story about child marriage in Central America appearing in *The Christian Science Monitor*, the reporter had more space to explain causes for child marriage:

Guatemala has the largest economy in Central America, but also some of Latin America's worst poverty, malnutrition, and maternal mortality rates. Inequality is especially stark in rural areas, home to many indigenous groups who historically have been subjected to exclusion and racism. Access to jobs, health care, and education are limited. More than half of the girls in these areas marry before age 18.

The reasons involve a complex mix of poverty, lack of opportunity, tradition, and beliefs that girls' value comes from bearing children. Increasingly, advocates say, girls themselves see marriage as an escape.

The piece included an assessment by local experts:

The law is a good idea, but "it's attacking the symptoms, not the real causes," says Saúl Interiano Ramirez, the founder of Asociacion Coincidir, an adolescent-rights group working to change social norms and strengthen girls' networks.

Another example of a more in depth description of underlying factors appeared in the *Gulf News* in United Arab Emirates about a Supreme Court decision in India with the headline: *Indian judiciary scores with proactive ruling on child marriage*. The piece included the following excerpt on causes:

One reason for girl child marriages is that a girl is customarily considered a financial burden, which explains why female infanticide is a problem in India despite strict laws in place. Another major reason is the abiding patriarchal fear that girls would be led "astray" as the years went by and that their "market" value would diminish. That patriarchy is itself responsible for the commodification of girls is not seen as much of a contradiction here.

PORTRAYAL OF PARENTS AND GIRLS

Of the 445 stories reviewed, about 40 percent or 182 pieces included references to parents. Of these, 28 percent (51 stories) referred to parents in a positive light with, 72 percent (131 stories) describing parents in a negative tone often portraying them as responsible for forcing their daughters to marry.

Fewer stories, 141 or 32 percent of the total, included the voices of girls, their stories or quotes. Only a handful of pieces included boys. However in the success stories, girls and boys are often mentioned as working together to end child marriage.

The following is a typical example of how parents, especially fathers, were portrayed in a majority of pieces that mentioned parents. However, mothers were often portrayed as helping their daughters and wanting them to have a better life. On September 29, 2018, the *New Zealand Herald* reported the following story:



Minu was set to become a child bride at her parents insistence. Photo / Mike Scott

When Sanjay Sahani received an offer for his oldest daughter to be married to a young man from another village, it seemed like the gods were smiling on him.

Not only was the boy's family waiving Sanjay's obligation to pay a dowry, it would be one less mouth for him to feed. With a sick wife, five children and a meagre income as an auto rickshaw driver, life is tough for Sanjay. Sending Minu off to live with another family would make a huge difference to the family's life.

Marrying off a girl under 18 is illegal in India, and Minu was 14 at the time. But Sanjay was counting on the fact that he lived in a tiny village outside the city of Muzaffapur in Bihar, a backwater province. Here, things could – and would - be done the old way, without government officials poking their nose into private business. So Sanjay set about making preparations for his oldest daughter's wedding.



Priyanca, 20, left, Minu, 17, and Gayatri, 50, who helped her. Photo / Mike Scott



Not for Sale: 'We are getting a wedding free' - father Sanjay Sahani fights against growing awareness of child marriage

What follows is an assessment of the coverage by looking at successful strategies, backlash challenges, trends in 2018 and recommendations for the future.



III. SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

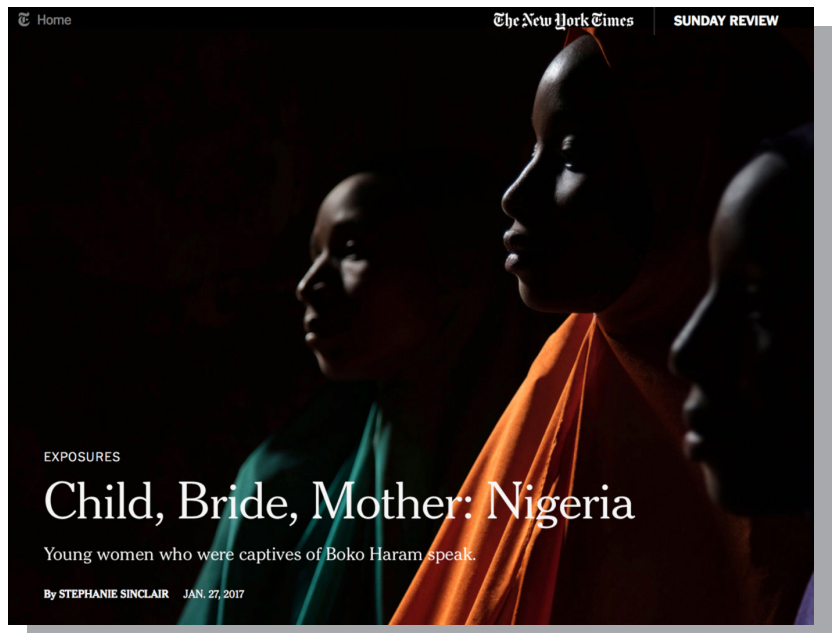
In the 2013 initial media analysis done for the Ford Foundation, we made several recommendations for strategies to improve news and feature coverage including:

- moving beyond awareness of the problem to placement of more pieces about solutions and successes;
- highlighting countries with the highest numbers of child marriage as well as those with the highest rates;
- targeting media outlets with global audiences including *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, *Associated Press*, *The Guardian*, *BBC*, *CNN*, *AFP*, *Public Radio International*, etc., with an emphasis on quality and depth of reporting rather than number of stories.

Each of these actions resulted in better, more in-depth media coverage of child marriage. In many cases, coverage helped with advocacy work and directly led to policy change.

For example, *The New York Times* and Ford Foundation partnered with Too Young to Wed on the project, “Child, Bride, Mother: Nigeria” (January 2017). It focused on the most vulnerable girls in war-torn Borno state and the experiences of the girls abducted and forced into marriage. Their stories, photographs and videos have been viewed by millions of readers and continue to be posted on the *Times* website.

In 2018, two Nigerian former child brides featured in *The New York Times* Nigeria project came to the United States and shared their harrowing experiences and resulting successful transition stories at high-level meetings in Washington, D.C. These included meetings on Capitol Hill hosted by 35 women members of the House and Senate and at the Department of State as well as in New York City with UN agencies and journalists. A Congressional resolution has been introduced, noting that thousands of additional girls remain in captivity and the importance of programs to help end forced child marriages in war-torn areas. Renewed efforts toward passage are expected in the next Congress.



Another example is the June 2017 report, *The Economic Impact of Child Marriage*, by the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women. It was initiated by Girls Not Brides with support from the Gates Foundation and the Child Investment Fund. Outreach to reporters in press releases noted:

Child marriage will cost developing countries trillions of dollars by 2030, says a new report published by the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). In contrast, ending child marriage would have a large positive effect on the educational attainment of girls and their children, contribute to women having fewer children and later in life, and increase women's expected earnings and household welfare.



Coverage of the report lasted several months and went viral across hundreds of media platforms throughout Asia, Africa, South America and other countries with high numbers of child marriages. The report also linked ending child marriage with positive health outcomes for countries.

According to the report, ending child marriage would also reduce rates of under-five mortality and delayed physical development due to a lack of appropriate nutrition (stunting). Globally, the estimated benefits of lower under-five mortality and malnutrition could reach more than \$90 billion annually by 2030.

A 2018 example of a communications strategy in Malaysia around a drumbeat of activities included the Girls Not Brides global meeting in Kuala Lumpur where journalists were invited to learn more about the issues and members conducted media workshops on how best to tell their stories. A few months later, there was a high-profile case covered by media along with local

groups of girls in Malaysia targeting their members of Parliament with petitions and a march which resulted in media coverage and dynamic photos of their activities:

A November 2018 story by the *Malay Mail* had the headline: *In third UN review, Malaysia to be grilled over death penalty, child marriages, FGM*, it quoted top policy makers:

Last month, Deputy Prime Minister and women's minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail had said that the proposal to increase the marriage age to 18 has been presented the Conference of Rulers, as most limits are subjected to state laws.

During the summer of 2018, *The New York Times* featured the issue of child marriage in a piece with the headline: *11 and Married: Malaysia Spars over an Age-Old Practice*. Since then the *Malay Mail* has done a series of stories about child marriage and the potential for policy change.

These are just a handful of examples of how strategic communications can be used for policy changes to help end child, early and forced marriages. Hopefully, the advocacy community will continue to be strategic and measured as more journalists show an interest in continued coverage of the issue.





IV. BACKLASH CHALLENGES

Since UNICEF’s first report in 2001 and the founding of Girls Not Brides in 2011, media coverage about child, early and forced marriages has been generally supportive and positive. Granted, five years ago news pieces focused primarily on the problems, statistics and sad stories of victims. As noted in other parts of this report, by 2017, media coverage had shifted to featuring problems, solutions and success stories with fewer than 1-2 percent of the pieces mentioning people or institutions that sanction child marriage.

But when activities related to ending child marriage have been positioned in a “zone of controversy,” opponents have surfaced and are quoted, giving voice to another side of the story to some conservative or extremist- leaning readers. This was especially the case during legislative debates in a variety of countries including the United States.

For example, the Trinidad and Tobago *Guardian* did ongoing coverage in 2017 of the debate around amendments to the country’s marriage bill with headlines such as: *Gamesmanship and Child Marriage and Stop Putting Party before Country*. Comments by legislators who either voted against the measure or abstained were quoted: “Those views [of groups opposed to ending child marriage] have been criticized but they are real, they are part of our multicultural society and we must give an air to those views.”

In the United States, as state legislators examined and worked to update their legal age of marriage, issues including abortion, military service and parents’ rights have been put forward by opponents of stricter laws limiting marriage to people 18-and older.

Extremist religious customs and interpretations have continued to play a role in creating barriers to ending child marriage. In the United States, *World Religion News* commented on the scandals around Roy Moore, an Alabama Supreme Court Justice and U.S. Senate candidate who was caught up in a series of sexual assault charges. Their coverage pointed out:

Some conservative religious groups do sanction or support the marrying of young girls. In some evangelical Christian, Orthodox Jewish, and Mormon communities, there are “courtship” rituals that help younger members find older, parent-approved spouses. This is meant to create tight-knit communities, but can also be used by predatory men...

...More conservative religious groups have clear gender roles. Women are meant to stay at home and take care of the children. Men are the primary breadwinners. Therefore, it is easier for a woman to be wed at a younger age since they can maintain those responsibilities as soon as they reach puberty.

The (U.K) *Independent* published a news report from Israel about police stopping a wedding of a 14-year old girl moments before the ceremony started and noted:

A 2016 report by Israeli parliament of the Knesset’s Law and Justice Committee found 716 underage marriages in 2014/15. Of these 517 were performed under sharia law, with the rest mostly in Jerusalem’s ultra-Orthodox community. However, it found only 37 of these cases were investigated.

A rather snarky comment was posted by a conservative commentator about linking ending child marriage to a broader set of issues:

Earlier this week, speaking at the CARE National Conference, Chelsea Clinton highlighted issues facing young girls in today's world. Among those issues was child marriage: Linked to issues like ... climate change? Sure, Chelsea. Fat chance.


However a thoughtful opinion piece appeared in the *New Indian Express* with a headline that asked: "Is child abuse being normalized?" The author pointed out that "there is a conscious attempt to normalize pedophilia." She gave several examples of countries without a legally defined age for marriage where religious laws dominate the culture.

Another point of view on *openDemocracy*, a U.K. based political website, challenged child marriage as a form a slavery in the estimates released by the U.N. International Labour Organisation (ILO). The piece pointed out:

Likewise, with child marriage, plenty of children from predominantly non-White countries are said to have been forced into marriage, implying that the cultural backwardness of their societies leaves the Western world little choice but to lift them up and rescue them. For if the West won't intervene, who will? But in the UK, 'children' aged over 16 can get married so long as their parents' consent. How, then, are they not also victims of modern slavery, victims of 'cultural backwardness'?

Fortunately, in 2017, only a handful of examples of news stories and commentaries could create a backlash against the movement to end child, early and forced marriages. It will be important for the advocacy community to monitor these narratives and either be prepared with a quick response if warranted or make a conscious decision to ignore opposition forces.

For example, in late 2018, there were several setbacks, one highlighted in the extremist right-wing outlet *Breitbart* about the German high court rejection of efforts to end child marriage among those sanctioned in other countries. In Iran, the parliament rejected efforts to raise the age of marriage after opposition by religious groups. The action was first reported by the Iran Human Rights Monitor and picked-up by several outlets throughout the region.



BASIC RIGHTS

Iran's Parliament Rejects Motion To Raise Legal Age Of Marriage

By Iran HRM — Last updated Dec 25, 2018

Iran's parliament rejected a motion to raise the legal age of marriage, the state-run Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday.

According to the Vice Chairman of the Judicial and Legal Committee, Yahya Kamalipour, the motion was rejected after religious authorities and sources of emulation vehemently opposed it.



V. 2018 MEDIA TRENDS

For this report, stories about child marriage in 2017 with 500+ words were carefully read, tracked, coded and analyzed. Stories in 2018 of 500+ words were read more quickly, scanned and tracked but not coded due to constraints on time and resources. These are some of the trends that appeared in the 2018 stories:

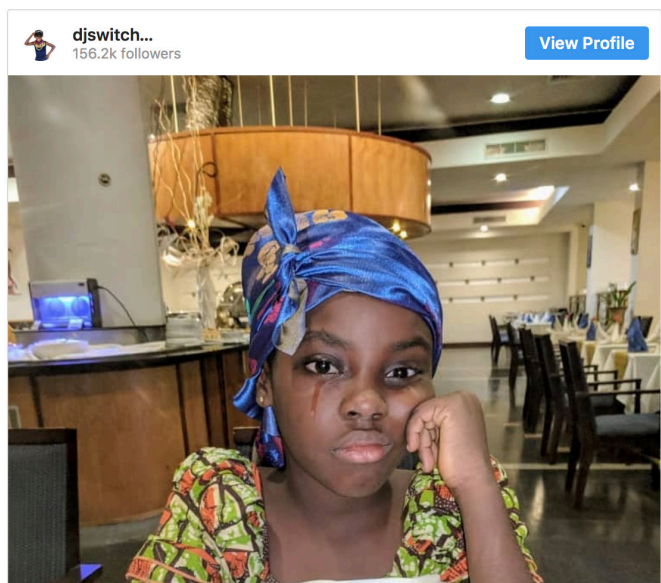
- The overall numbers of stories worldwide remained about the same in 2018 with only a slight change over other years;
- Education, health and violence were the issues most cited in stories about child marriages;
- The United Nations and its agencies continued to receive the most coverage the NGOs Girls Not Brides, Human Right Watch, Unchained at Last, Save the Children and PLAN International remained in the top ten list;
- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh topped the list for countries mentioned in media stories around the world;
- The Girls Not Brides conference in Malaysia spurred coverage that focused on the need for strong legislation and enforcement. A round of stories appeared on the CHANGE petition calling for legislation to end child marriage that garnered 12,000 signatures.
- Coverage in the United States continued to be primarily on state legislative actions but with more in-depth features focusing on women’s personal stories than on political legislative battles;
- A United Nations report on the global decline of child marriage was picked up around the world. It noted, however, the declines are not fast enough;
- More stories featured adult women who were in forced child marriages and examined the impact on their lives. Many are now dedicated to ending child marriage in their communities;
- Religious leaders working to end child marriage continued to get media attention with a focus on their building networks of leaders across faith communities;
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were used as a news hook and a way for policy-makers to justify taking bold actions with resolutions proposed in the European Union and a host of other countries;
- The Day of the African Child garnered media coverage, enough to encourage groups to continue doing media outreach for this and other UN designated days. UNFPA broadened its reach beyond the UN with actions around Valentine’s Day;
- More stories appeared linking child marriage to climate change and food security beyond the handful of pieces in 2017;
- First Ladies and royalty were more outspoken and committed to take action;

2. Meet Ghana's award-winning DJ - aged just 11

At the age of 11, Erica Tandoh, also known as "DJ Switch", has blazed a trail in Ghana. In June, she became the youngest person to win the country's annual DJ award.

With **140,000 Instagram followers**, she uses social media to talk to her fans and publicise what she does:

She has also shared more socially conscious posts including campaigning against child marriage:



[View More on Instagram](#)



9,163 likes

djswitchghana

GIRLS ARE NOT BRIDES. In another comfort zone of talent; ACTING and felt so emotional. LET'S END CHILD MARRIAGE NOW!! @gpchildmarriage thank you @unfpa for this great opportunity, @UNICEF @preventchildmarriage e @girlsnotbrides1 @ @child.marriage_mhjc 🙏🙏

- The 2017 World Bank/ICRW report, *The Economic Impact of Child Marriage*, continued to receive media coverage as a “new” report and was mentioned in many of the longer pieces (1000+ words) about child marriage in specific countries.
- Media coverage appeared to be increasing in Middle Eastern media with attention to the situation in countries including Egypt and United Arab Emirates;
- Media reported doing their own research on the numbers of child marriages. This was done by *The Guardian* in the U.K., the *Arizona (USA) Republic* and the *Kansas City Star* for Missouri and Kansas;
- Setbacks were reported in Germany and Iran.
- End of the year stories included states in the USA that raised the age of marriage.
- Increased stories about using social media as advocacy for ending child marriage. For example, on December 24, 2018, the BBC (left) ran a piece on the popular use of Instagram focusing on DJ Erica Tandoh who has gone viral with comments on ending child marriage on social media along with massive coverage in mainstream global media.

The Guardian, *The New York Times*, the *Associated Press*, *CNN* and *Reuters* each did regular and enhanced reporting on child marriage and related issues.

Outlet	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
The New York Times	0	3	3	1	10	13
The Guardian	12	6	29	28	16	18
CNN	11	3	8	6	9	15
Reuters	0	1	16	13	12	4
Associated Press	2	6	9	12	17	16



VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this media analysis, groups working to end child marriage might want to incorporate the following communications strategies into their advocacy and policy change work:

- Continue pitching success stories of promising efforts to reporters, especially around young people and others taking actions to end child marriage;
- Make a special effort to encourage reporting that includes the voices and images of actual girls empowered to take a stand against child marriage in partnership with other stakeholders working together to end child marriage. Keep in mind that the onus of stopping child marriage should not be placed on the girls but rather on a range of advocates.
- Positive portrayals of parents will be important elements for successful campaigns. Advocates should work to place stories that show children, parents and family members working together to end child marriage. Stories showing parents as the opposition or pitting girls against their parents could create unnecessary controversy and potential backlash.
- Continue to encourage advocacy journalism and the reporters who have demonstrated through their stories, images and articles a keen understanding of the negative impacts of child, early and forced marriages;
- Work to cultivate additional reporters who have not filed stories on child marriage and pitch to them ways to explore different aspects of the issue targeting those who cover economics, the environment, culture, politics, education, health care or other related issues receiving less attention;
- Make efforts to point out to reporters and other audiences the *root causes* of child marriage – patriarchy, misogyny and gender inequality. Other *factors*, including poverty, economic insecurity, etc. have a role to play, but the low status of women and girls in society and lack of power over their own lives are the underlying drivers. (See page 16.)
- Develop more consistent language on the factors underlying child marriage so that reporters can easily and in a short sentence or two explain the causes. Likewise, draft and share simple and succinct messages around the benefits of ending child marriage that journalists can use regardless of time or word limits placed on their stories;
- Disseminate positive media coverage to policymakers and elected officials as a way to build and reinforce their support. Success stories will help with new donors who can see positive outcomes from donations, grants or investments.
- Social media can have a significant impact especially when done in collaboration among many groups. Photos, symbols, graphics and clever comments used in postings can increase activities by supporters, bring in new activists and help messages go viral.
- Always be prepared for possible backlash around controversial cases. Don't let negative stories linger without a response and always ask for corrections if stories have inaccurate information.



METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

For the quantitative reports in this analysis, the Who, What, Where and When sections, CCMC used the LexisNexis global news database of English language media. In 2015, more than 2,600 major daily newspapers, wire services and transcripts of broadcast outlets and media website platforms from around the world were in the system. In 2018, there were 2,300 media in the database. The focus on quantity of stories was chosen to measure the number of informative articles with the most reach and saliency.

The primary search term was *child marriage* as the constant across the three earlier quantitative reports. The terms *forced* or *early marriage* were used as secondary terms. Unless otherwise noted, the searches were limited to stories of 50 words or more.

For the qualitative reports and content analysis, the How and Why sections, CCMC staff analyzed 425 individual news stories of more than 750 words for its first report for the Ford Foundation in 2013. A second analysis was done from January 1, 2014 to August 31, 2015, to provide a snapshot of coverage as an update with stories of 500 or more words. For this report, 445 individual news stories in 2017 of more than 500 words were read, analyzed and coded to track additional trends. These stories were from both LexisNexis and a regular Google featured search term, *child and early marriage*.

Girls Not Brides and the American Jewish World Service have in-house tracking systems of media coverage that they made available for this review. Several interesting trends emerged from these articles that provided important insights for this report.

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