



"SHE GOES WITH  
ME IN MY BOAT"

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT

# MARRIAGE IN BRAZIL

RESULTS FROM  
MIXED-METHODS  
RESEARCH

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# “Child Marriage in Brazil?!?”

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- In the LAC region, higher prevalence rates only in DR and Nicaragua (41% vs 36% in Brazil)
- 3d highest number of married girls (18 and under) in the world (UNICEF 2014, PNDS 2006)
- 88,000 children (ages 10-14) living with a partner in a “consensual”, religious or civil union (2010 census)

Ambiguity in the law regulating age of marriage allows for girls - and girls *only* - to marry before 14 in case of pregnancy

# Exploring Child Marriage in Brazil

Support from Ford Foundation

States with the highest prevalence: Pará (north), Maranhão (north east)

Exploratory research

- Mixed methods
- Partnerships with Plan International Brazil and Federal University of Pará



# Methodology

1. 50 Key informant interviews (International, Federal and State level)
2. 60 interviews, 6 FGDs in São Luis and Belém:
  - Married Girls (12-18)
  - Husbands of Married Girls (24-60)
  - Family Members of Married Girls
  - Protection Network
3. Survey in São Luis: 150 men, 150 girls



# Child Marriage: “*It just happens*”

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1. The term is neither recognized nor used
2. No one pathway, it is informal and little planned
3. Lack of physical coercion, but other forms are present
4. Girls’ average age at marriage *and* first birth is 15 (with men being on average 9 years older)



# Key Drivers



Families' desire to:

1. Control girls' sexuality, anticipating or responding to a pregnancy to protect family's reputation
2. Ensure the men's financial support for the girl and the baby

Men's preference for younger girls perceived as easier to control and more attractive

**Girls "choose" to get married within the context of limited educational and professional opportunities**

# Child & Adolescent Marriage - A Logical Framework

## Based on research results from Brazil

### Social determinants



### Marriage Consequences

#### Structural Factors

- Family, community - reinforcing gender norms beginning with socialization of girls vs boys, normalizing of girls' marriages
- Religion
- School
- Media

1 - An unwanted **pregnancy**: a family member wishes to protect the girl's and family's reputation and ensure the man's responsibility to care for the potential baby

2 - Desire to **control girls' sexuality** and limit perceived 'risky' behaviors such as casual sex/ sexual initiation and going out

3 - Desire for **financial security**

4 - An expression of girls' **agency** to leave the parents' home *in the context of limited opportunities and/or experiences of abuse*

5 - Prospective husbands' preference to marry younger girls / **men's greater decision-making power** surrounding marriage

Unequal gender norms that reinforce men's preferences /decision-making power throughout marriage and upon separation

#### Health

Early pregnancy (also a cause of marriage); maternal, newborn, child health problems; limited fatherhood engagement

#### Educational setbacks

Girls' limited mobility & social networks

#### IPV

And a range of controlling behaviors

*Inadequate/ discriminatory provision of services (also prior to marriage)*



# Consequences



1. Early pregnancy and related MNCH problems
2. Educational set-backs
3. Limitations to girls' social networks and mobility
4. Exposure to GBV including a range of controlling behaviors on the part of older husbands





# Future Directions

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## RESEARCH

- Explore agency and choice; the role of religion

## POLICY

- Address social determinants (esp. education and employment)
- Amend/enforce legislation

## PROGRAMS

- Transform social norms (esp. constructions of sexuality, relationships and masculinity)