

# **CHILD MARRIAGE AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS**

**PROFESSOR TAHERA AHMED**  
**[tahera50@yahoo.com](mailto:tahera50@yahoo.com)**

PhD. Student of AUSN, Arizona, USA  
Faculty, Dept. of Public Health  
North South University  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Definition of Child Marriage
2. Child Marriage and International Agreements
3. Child Marriage and Basic Rights
4. Child Marriage and Reproductive Rights
5. Prevalence of Child Marriage
6. Child Marriage in Bangladesh
7. Adverse effects of Child marriage
8. Risks of Child Marriage
9. Causes of Child Marriage
10. Partners to Reduce Child Marriage
11. Interventions to Reduce Child Marriage
12. Ethical issues of Child Marriage
13. Work Plan

# CHILD MARRIAGE (CM)

- ◉ **Marriage between minors or under 18  
Either or both partners may be under 18**
- ◉ **Usually it is the girl who is below 18**
- ◉ **Prevalent in many Asian and African countries**
- ◉ **Cause of many Social, Medical, Economical, Psychological problems**

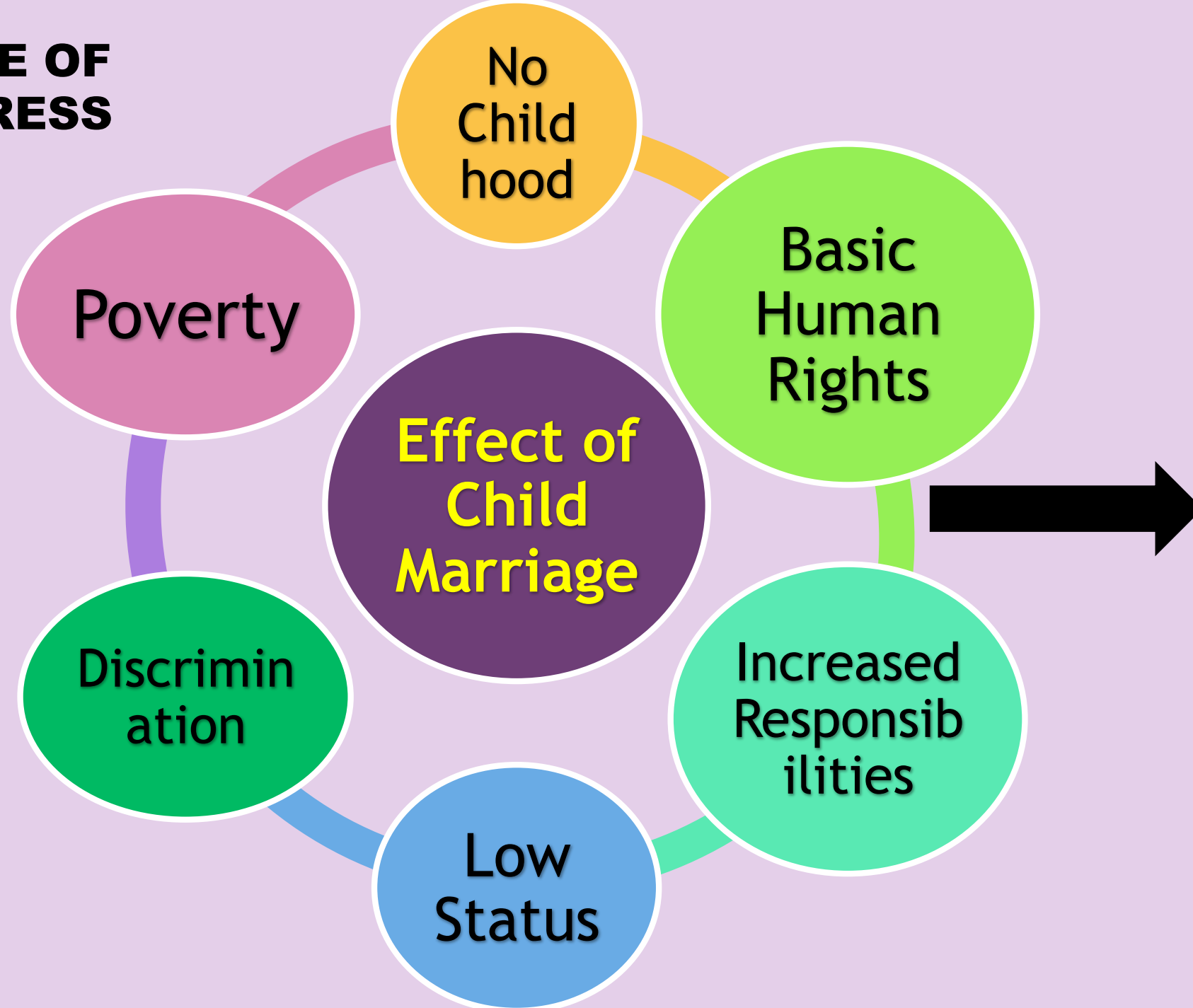
# CM AND INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

- ◉ Child marriage transgresses the articles of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, Basic Human Rights and Reproductive Rights.
- ◉ All country members of the UN have ratified these treaties.
- ◉ Yet thousands of minor girls are being married and entering a difficult life with limited opportunities.

# CM AND DEPRIVATION OF BASIC RIGHTS

- ◉ CM deprives the young brides of a childhood to be enjoyed by friends and family
- ◉ CM puts unnecessary pressures and responsibilities on girl brides
- ◉ CM further decreases the status of the girls
- ◉ CM encourages poverty and discrimination
- ◉ CM impacts on the development of the nation
- ◉ CM takes away the basic human rights of a child

# CYCLE OF DISTRESS



**Loss to the Nation**

# HUMAN VALUES

A few key principles of human values upon which societies have been established:

- ⦿ The innate dignity of human life
- ⦿ Respect and consideration for the "other"
- ⦿ The interconnection between humankind and the environment and thus the need to care for and preserve the earth
- ⦿ An attitude of non-violence
- ⦿ The individual and collective quest for peace and happiness

# ICPD-REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

1. The Right to Survival and Life
2. The Right to Liberty and Security of the Person
3. The Right to Equality, and to be Free from all Forms of Discrimination
4. The Right to Privacy
5. The Right to Freedom of thought
6. The Right to Information and Education



# ICPD-REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

7. The Right to Choose whether or not to Marry and Build and Plan a Family
8. The Right to Decide whether or when to have Children
9. The Right to Health Care and Health Protection
10. The Right to the Benefits of Scientific Progress
11. The Right to Freedom of Assembly and Political Participation
12. The Right to be Free from Torture and ill Treatment

Rank	Country Name	Girls Married before 18 (Percentage)	Rank	Country Name	Girls Married before 18 (Percentage)
1	Niger	<b>75</b>	11	Madagascar	<b>48</b>
2	Chad	<b>68</b>	12	Eritrea	<b>47</b>
3	Central African Republic	<b>68</b>	13	India	<b>47</b>
4	Bangladesh	<b>66</b>	14	Somalia	<b>45</b>
5	Guinea	<b>63</b>	15	Sierra Leone	<b>44</b>
6	Mozambique	<b>56</b>	16	Zambia	<b>42</b>
7	Mali	<b>55</b>	17	Dominican Republic	<b>41</b>
8	Burkina Faso	<b>52</b>	18	Ethiopia	<b>41</b>
9	South Sudan	<b>52</b>	19	Nepal	<b>41</b>
10	Malawi	<b>50</b>	20	Nicaragua	<b>41</b>

\* SOURCE: UNICEF STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN, 2013 - DATA FROM UNICEF MULTIPLE INDICATOR CLUSTER SURVEYS (MICS), DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEYS (DHS) AND OTHER NATIONAL SURVEYS, AND REFERS TO THE MOST RECENT YEAR AVAILABLE DURING THE PERIOD 2002-2011. SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS

# CM IN GB

Child marriage remains legal in Britain. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland Teenagers can marry at 16 with parental consent. In Scotland, they do not need consent.

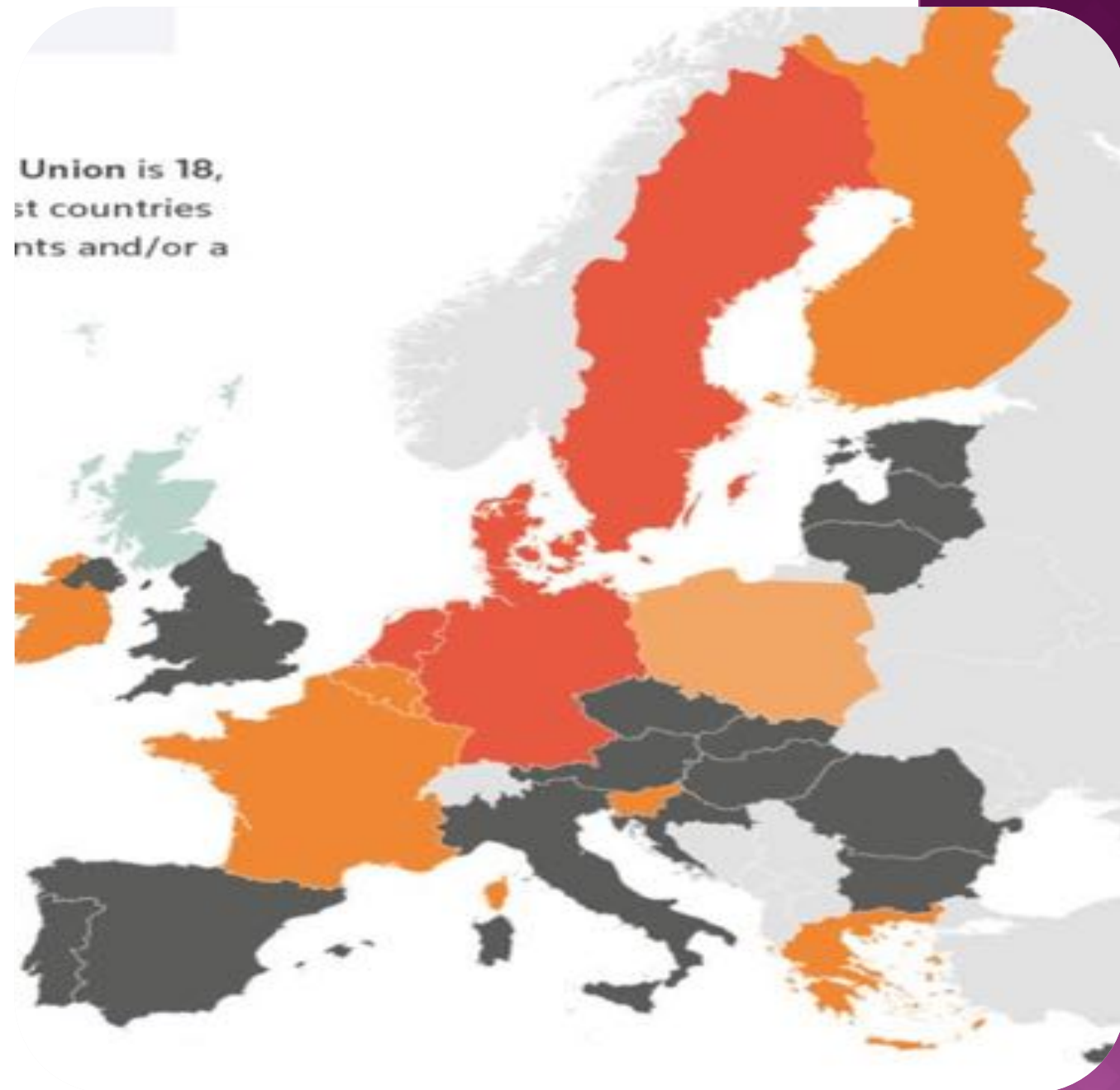
- ◉ The minimum age of 16 was set in 1929
- ◉ Nearly 2,000 young people in Britain, were wed before 18 between 2010 and 2015
- ◉ Bangladesh has taken steps to change its law to allow marriage at 16 referring to the British law.
- ◉ "The UK should practice what it preaches," said Mabel van Oranje, chairwoman of global advocacy group Girls Not Brides.
- ◉ British parliamentarian Pauline Latham has introduced a bill to raise the marriage age to 18 .
- ◉ Britain is spending about 39 million pounds to support reduction of CM in developing countries.

Source: [Emma Batha](#) | [@emmabatha](#) | Thomson Reuters Foundation, Tuesday, 23 October 2018 00:01 GM

## AGE AT MARRIAGE IN GB

### AGE AT MARRIAGE IN Great Britain

- 16 -No consent required
- 16(Estonia)
- 16 but only applies to women (Poland)
- Lowest age not regulated
- Marriage only allowed after 18



# CM AND BANGLADESH

- Legal Age at marriage 18 according to 2029
- A vague new child marriage law in Bangladesh invokes the parental permission loophole setting no minimum age for marriage – an astounding turn of events that has human rights groups up in arms.
- The law sets no minimum age, for the parental consent clause. It merely states that a marriage may be granted for
- Over half of girls (52%) marry before the age of 18 in Bangladesh, and of those girls, 18% are younger than 15.
- The Bangladesh cabinet on Thursday approved the draft of the "Child Marriage Prevention Act 2016" keeping the minimum age for girls' marriage unchanged at 18 years.
- The cabinet, however, *incorporated a provision paving the way for marriage of minor girls under 18 years in special circumstances.*

# Situation of Married Adolescent Girls In Bangladesh

- ◉ **Early marriage, early pregnancy**
- ◉ **High MMR (double national rate), IMR (30-50% higher)**
- ◉ **50% adolescent mothers malnourished (BMI <18.5)**
- ◉ **Mean age at first pregnancy 18 years**
- ◉ **No involvement in decision regarding marriage**
- ◉ **Discontinued education immediately after marriage**
- ◉ **Married female adolescents lack awareness on RH issues**
- ◉ **Most married female adolescents unemployed**



# ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY



# \*IFRI STUDY HIGHLIGHTS RISKS OF ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY IN BANGLADESH

- Adolescent mothers and their babies face increased health risks in Bangladesh, according to a new study. The study was carried out by researchers from the Washington, D.C.-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). It found that adolescent mothers recovered more slowly, and often faced more health complications than more mature mothers.
- Adolescent mothers scored significantly lower on a scale of postpartum functional abilities, which measures a new mother's ability to take care of herself and her child in the weeks following childbirth, according to the study report.

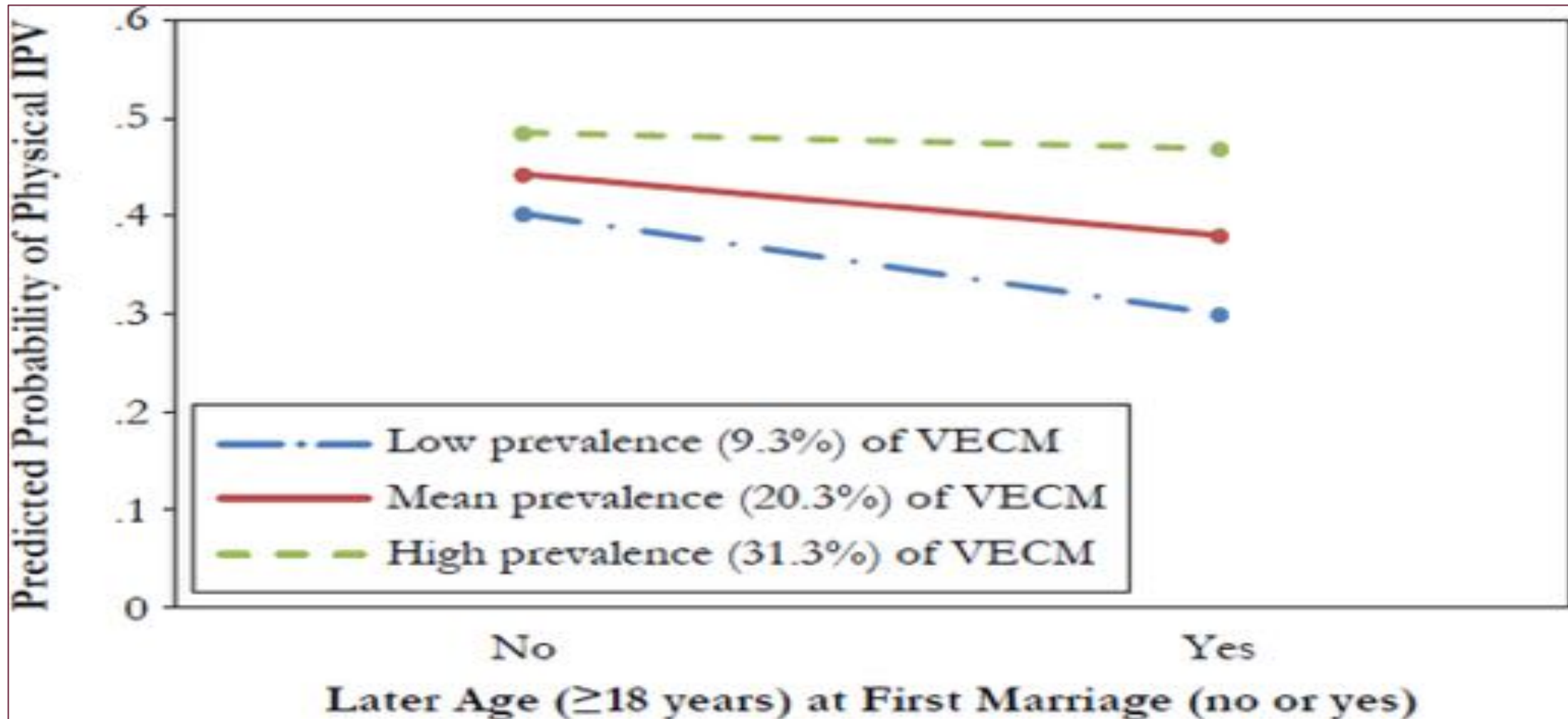
*\*Institut français des relations internationales  
The French Institute of International Relations*



# IFRI STUDY

- Infants of adolescent mothers showed health risks, prevalence of underweight babies 22.4 per cent, in contrast to adult mothers' infants at 17.9 per cent.
- Overall, the research demonstrated that adolescent pregnancy is riskier for both mother and infant, even when maternal services are available and widely used. Risks range from greater risk of anaemia to low birth weight, affecting the lifelong well-being of a young mother and her child. Economic risks also weigh heavily on younger mothers, who demonstrate higher rates of early school dropout, which leaves them less empowered in the long term, and hence more vulnerable to sustained poverty.

# CM AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



Predicted probability of physical intimate partner violence (IPV) by age at first marriage before age 18 versus at 18 years or older, modified by village-level prevalence of very early child marriage (VECM), rural Bangladesh 2013–2014.

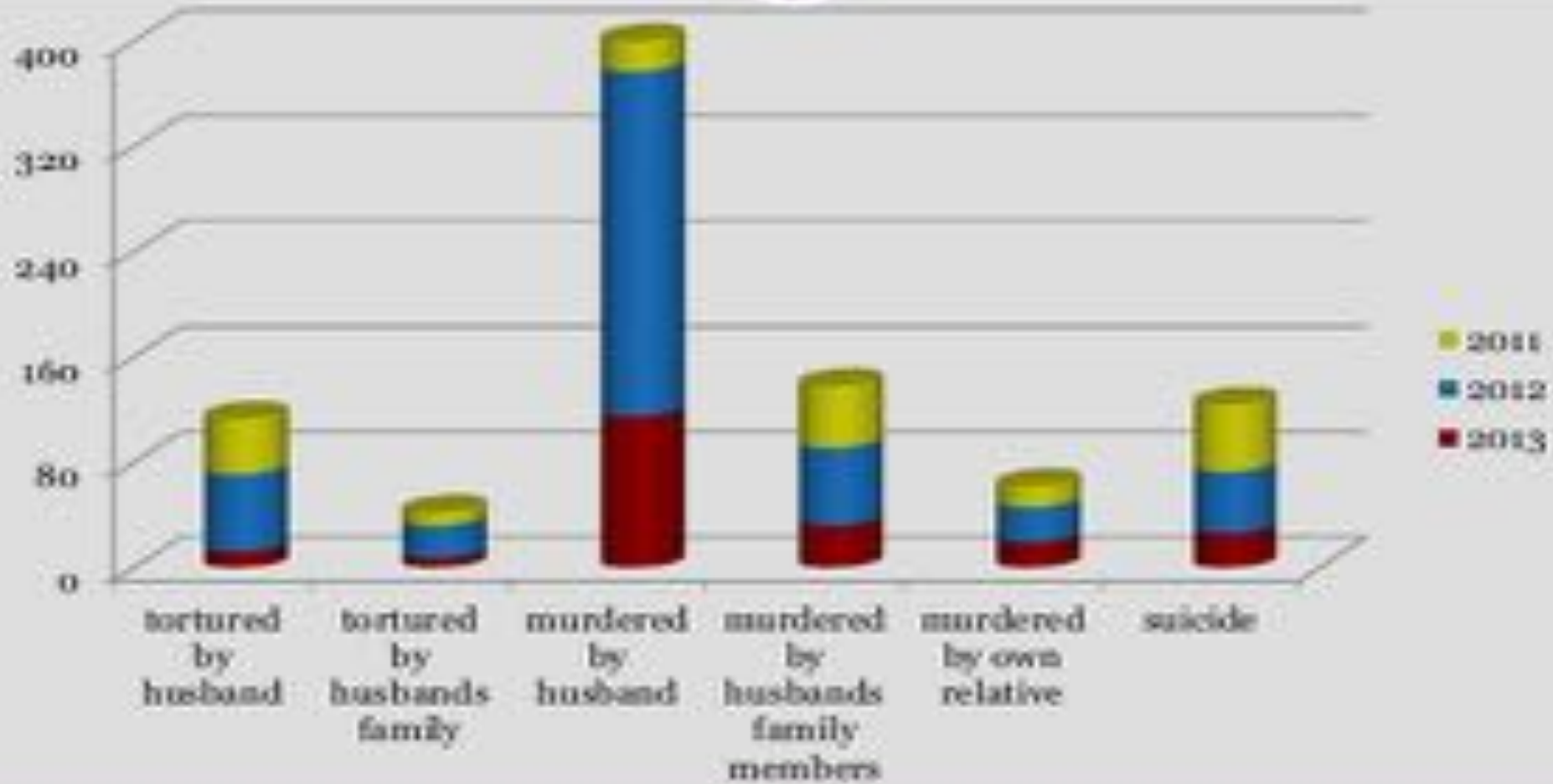
# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CM

- **Domestic Violence:** under-age brides experience more physical or sexual violence because of young women's lower ability to resist and refute. eg interviews with 8,314 young women aged 20–24 years across five Indian states with the highest prevalence of under-age marriage found women married after 18 years of age were 1.24 times less likely than women married under-age to accept physical violence.
- An analysis of DHS data on women aged 25–49 years from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan over the past two decades also show that women who married at a younger age were more likely to experience violence than those who married at an older age
- It has been seen that higher individual schooling attainment , a longer duration of marriage , and high household wealth in childhood were protective against physical IPV. The respondent's knowledge of her father having beaten her mother was a risk factor for exposure to physical IPV.

STOP  
TORTURED  
WOMEN



# Statistics of family violence against women



# EMPOWERMENT AND AUTONOMY

- Lack of education and under-age marriage contribute to lower empowerment for women at the individual level throughout her life
- Husbands and mothers-in-law tend to exert greater control over younger women, may be less able to assert themselves .
- Being female and of a younger age, limits their ability to exercise autonomy during their childbearing years. Young mothers' lack of control over their own fertility increases the risk of numerous negative maternal and child-survival outcomes .

Source: Akanksha A. Marphatia, 'Women's Marriage Age Matters for Public Health: A Review of the Broader Health and Social Implications in South Asia' *Front Public Health*. 2017; 5: 269.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND CM

- ◉ Adolescent period is a critical developmental stage, with 50% of mental disorders presenting by the age of 14 years .
- ◉ Girls who are married off during adolescence also experience the physical and emotional effects of adolescence, and the effect on sound mental health .
- ◉ Early marriage and childbearing with morbidity eg fistula and still born babies, further stress mental well-being .
- ◉ Child Brides suffer from common mental issues such as depression, stress, and other neurotic disorders. eg:
- ◉ A cross-sectional survey of 3,000 women (18-45 years) in Goa, India found early age at marriage and childbearing, low levels of decision-making autonomy, family support, and sexual violence by husbands increased the prevalence of anxiety and depression .

Source: Akanksha A. Marphatia Women's Marriage Age Matters for Public Health: A Review of the Broader Health and Social Implications in South Asia Front Public Health. 2017; 5: 269.

# UNDERLYING CAUSES OF CM

- In early days Parents arranged betrothal of children for uniting two families. Reasons Different now. CM common in rural areas, **child brides have no voice.**
- **Poverty** one of the most powerful drivers of CM in Bangladesh now. Girls viewed as **financial burden.** Parents want less mouths to feed
- **Community pressures and norms** as part of tradition.
- **For protection, security and the support** of a male guardian
- **Honor** is a family issue - parents / relatives, want girls married early to grooms approved by the families.
- Sometimes girls who choose a partner against the wishes of their family may be punished or even killed

Source: Ahmed.T, 'Child Marriage: A Discussion Paper', Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics 2015; 6(2):8-14

# WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY?

## 1. Low Birth Weight:

April 2007 study published in the "International Journal of Epidemiology" found that teen age were 14 percent more likely to have a low-birth-weight baby compared to older mothers. Underweight Babies are at a higher risk for a number of problems that can affect their heart, lungs and brains. low birth weight is a serious condition and an important risks of teen pregnancy.

## 2. Premature Birth:

When women give birth in their teen years, they are at higher risk of the baby being born early, or prematurely. A study published in the "British Medical Journal" in November 2014 found that premature birth was significantly more likely for teenage mothers than for women who deliver in their 20s or early 30s. Being born prematurely is the leading cause of death for infants and young children.



# RISKS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

3. **Anemia:** Teen mothers often suffer from anemia when pregnant. Anemia during pregnancy can lead to risk of premature birth, difficulties during labor and delivery. With severe anemia, the baby's development may be affected.
4. **Postpartum Depression:** Teen mothers are twice as likely to have postpartum depression compared to adult mothers, according to a May 2014 article in "BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth." Postpartum depression can cause sadness, difficulty sleeping and anxiety. In severe cases, the mother may try to hurt herself or the baby.
5. **Care:** So it's important to see a skilled birth attendant in the first few months of pregnancy and follow the advice including diet and rest. The pregnant girl should be accompanied by responsible family members. Birth Planning Is important to ensure safe delivery and follow up care.

*Sources:* MedLine Plus: Teenage Pregnancy Center for Disease Control: About Teen Pregnancy

# PARTNERS IN ZERO TOLERANCE TO CHILD MARRIAGE

- ◉ **The Elders:** The Elders are a group of independent global leaders launched by Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg in July 2007. The group offer their collective influence and experience to support peace building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity
- ◉ **Girls not Brides:** *Girls Not Brides* is an alliance of more than 500 civil society organisations from over 70 countries. These organizations aim to end child marriage to help girls to fulfil their potential
- ◉ **White Ribbon Alliance:** Works globally in countries to advocate for women's reproductive rights including Child Marriage reduction.
- ◉ **Plan International:** Plan works in 51 developing countries for the achievement of gender equality and girls' rights.

# PARTNERS (CONTD.)

- ◉ **CARE – Global:** CARE is an international humanitarian organisation, which focuses on working for impoverished women. Their mandate includes directly addressing child marriage through targeting education for girls.
- ◉ **ICRW – USA:** International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is advocating for the United States to become more involved in curbing child marriage. ICRW works with the United States Congress and the administration to bring more national and international support to end this harmful practice.
- ◉ **Save the Children – Global:** Save the Children works around the world to prevent child marriage along with other forms of child abuse, trafficking, and exploitation.
- ◉ **World Vision – Marriage Later/Studies First Programme– Bangladesh:** World Vision works towards the provision of global education for children who are at risk for exploitation, early marriage, and lower income-earning potential

# ETHICAL/MORAL ISSUES OF CM

- ◉ We have seen some of the negative effects of Child Marriage on the individual , family , community and national level
- ◉ *What are our ethical and moral obligations?*
- ◉ **How do we address:**
- ◉ **Poverty vs CM**
- ◉ **Security vs CM**
- ◉ **Tradition vs CM**
- ◉ **Gender disparity vs CM**
- ◉ **Other ethical issues and CM**

# SOME INTERVENTIONS

## MULTI SECTORAL APPROACH: INDIA

- ◉ District-level, government-led multi-sectoral intervention to address child marriage in Jamui, Bihar and Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, implemented by MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child (NGO)
- ◉ **WHO Evaluated the Intervention:** The findings reveal the intervention succeeded in creating a cascade effect to stimulate concerted action at block and village levels, with inter-sectoral convergence at the village level.
- ◉ **The Success Factor:** an experienced committed partner NGO, context-specific design, and a flexible and responsive approach to implementation
- ◉ **MAMTA** accommodated additional undertakings for mutual partnerships
- ◉ **Key Challenges:** Lack of clear directives and institutional support for collaboration. Differing viewpoints of district leaders on strategy, community resistance . lack of supplemental staff upon expansion of efforts

Source : Chandra-Mouli et al. Reproductive Health (2018) 15:118 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-018-0552-1>



# EDUCATION AND CM

- **Cross-Sectional Time Series Analysis of Associations between Education and Girl Child Marriage in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, 1991-2011 research**
- **Secondary education associated with reduced girl child marriage in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. However not enough to eliminate CM**
- **Programs and an environment supporting girls' and women's social and economic empowerment, in conjunction with improved girl education, will be required to eliminate girl child marriage in South Asia**

Source: Anita Raj et al , PLOS ONE | [www.plosone.org](http://www.plosone.org) 9 September 2014 | Volume 9 | Issue 9 | e106210

# NUTRITION AND CM

- ◉ Even with specially designed projects, adolescent women demonstrate less autonomy, combined with less decision-making power to buy food.
- ◉ However, these risks can be avoided by preventing adolescent pregnancy.
- ◉ Through reduction of child Marriage, Bangladesh can reduce the related health and socio - economic liabilities.
- ◉ Very important to strengthen family support and interventions for pregnant child brides so that younger mothers are able to care after their own health as well as the health of their child. Mothers of child brides could monitor the well being of their daughters.

Source: 'The nutrition and health risks faced by pregnant adolescents: Insights from a cross-sectional study in Bangladesh', was written by Phuong Hong Nguyen, Tina Sanghvi, Lan Mai Tran, Kaosar Afsana, Zeba Mahmud, Bachera Aktar, Raisul Haque and Purnima Menon. It was published in an article in the journal 'PLOS ONE'. 18 September, 2017 00:00 00 AM



# CASH TRANSFER TO DELAY CM

- The Kenya Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children project on pregnancy and early marriage among females aged 12 to 24 (2007 to 2011)
- Evaluation after 4 years of implementation: Findings: 1,549 females included in the study. Though the program interventions reduced pregnancy by five percentage points, no significant impact on early marriage.
- Impact on pregnancy worked by increasing the enrollment of young women in school, financial stability of the household and delayed age at first sex.
- The Kenyan program is similar in design to most other major national cash transfer programs in Eastern and Southern Africa.
- Although the goal of the program was on poverty alleviation, it had an important impact on transition of adolescent girls into adulthood.

Source: Sudhanshu Handa, et al Impact of the Kenya Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children on early pregnancy and marriage of adolescent girls; Soc Sci Med. 2015 September ; 141: 36-45. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.07.024.

# SO.....?

- ◉ Some things worked and some did not.
- ◉ Combination of different partners and a flexible approach gave better results
- ◉ Primary education alone will not affect CM. Secondary education with livelihood options might result in quicker reductions
- ◉ Cash transfers reduced child pregnancies
- ◉ Support of family and community needed
- ◉ Awareness of adverse effects of CM essential
- ◉ Its everyone's headache. Not Government alone.

# Work Plan - 5 Years

## Advocacy Programme

- Link up with advocacy programmes undertaken directed at key stakeholders and targeted population to raise awareness on the detrimental effects of child marriage and child pregnancy.

## Involvement of Local Elected Representatives

- Local leaders should be urged to act as a watchdog to prevent child marriage in their area and also to make sure the pregnant adolescents have access to quality services .Promise to make entire villages CM free.

# Work Plan - 5 Years

## Partnerships

- Work together with those who are already involved in Zero Tolerance Of CM eg: Girls not Brides, White Ribbon Alliance, Bangladesh, Plan International, Government Departments, Development partners.

## Media

- The media to be involved and committed to play their part as active citizens in the prevention of CM child pregnancies.

# Work Plan - 5 Years

## Best Practices

- Link with innovative and successful projects either at home or abroad. Exchange ideas and challenges faced.

## Bangladesh Bioethics Society:

- Involve BBS in promoting Zero tolerance to CM and use relevant events, advocate through articles in the Bangladesh Journal Of Bioethics, among others



- ✓ **PROTECT YOUR CHILD.**
  - ✓ **DONT AGREE TO CM AND ABUSE.**
- !!OTHERWISE YOU WILL LOSE YOUR DAUGHTER!!**





***TENTH YOUTH LOOKING BEYOND  
DISASTER (LBD10) TRAINING WORKSHOP:  
ETHICAL DISASTER RESILIENCE FOR OUR  
GLOBAL COMMUNITY***

***Date: 13- 15 April 2018  
Venue: Istanbul Turkey  
Organised by: AUSN and BETIM***