



women's studies centre  
Freedom Dignity Equality



An Inquiry into the Causes and Consequences of Early  
Marriage Among

**Palestinian Girls in the Jerusalem District**

2017

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Early Marriage Among  
Palestinian Girls in the Jerusalem District**

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**Women's Studies Centre  
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## **Dedication**

**To...**

All women who participated in this study by sharing their experiences  
In order to contribute to ending girls' early marriage and putting an  
end to women's sufferance as a consequence of this phenomenon.  
Each person who participated in this study by revealing facts that  
contribute to raising the awareness of society of the negative effects  
of early marriage on women in particular, and on society in general  
To every girl and woman who is about to get married, we hope that  
they will consider their peers' experiences and learn from them

**We dedicate this study to all of you, with the hope of making change**

## Women's Studies Centre

### Freedom, Dignity, Equality

The Women's Studies Centre (WSC) is a human rights organization working on the promotion of gender equality and women's rights and human rights in the Palestinian society. Since its establishment in 1989, the WSC has worked on various programs and projects to empower women and build female capacities that are able to determine and fight for their needs. Together with the women's movement in Palestine, and out of a right based and development-oriented perspective, the WSC has strived restructure the social, economic, political and legislative matrixes in a way that ensures incorporating women in all aspects relating to development both as participants and beneficiaries. The WSC based its work on the principle of the right to gender equality. WSC contributed in meeting part of the Palestinian Women's movement in particular and the social movements in general by providing field studies on the status and needs of Palestinian women for the aim of setting programs to empower women and enable them to access and benefit from the various resources to fulfill their needs and have freedom, dignity and equality. The three main programs of WSC are: Women Empowerment and Development Program, Violence against Women and Children and Developing and Promoting a Culture of Equality. In addition, a fourth program is institutional Development of the WSC which focuses on constant advancement of WSC work with regards to both internal and external changes in order to empower the cadre to face the various challenges and utilize all available resources in the best way possible to achieve the desired goals.

## Gratitude and Thanks

The demanding fieldwork related to this study would not have been possible without the precious support of Mrs. Aida Issawi from the Women's Studies Centre and Mr. Samir Tamran, head of the guidance and special education unit in the Education Directorate of the Jerusalem District. We express our deepest appreciation for your support and contribution to every phase of this work. Special thanks goes to Mrs. Issawi for her great accomplishments coordinating the fieldwork and for her constructive remarks throughout the study. We also express our gratitude to the external reviewers who provided helpful comments through the process of development of the quantitative study questionnaire. The research team would also like to thank all the research assistants who helped arrange field interviews for the qualitative study's sample of girls who were married at an early age, mothers of girls who were married before the age 18, young men, school principals, educational consultants, religious and reform characters. In addition, we thank them for all of their work in the transcription and documentation of these interviews. We would especially like to thank Ms. Yusra Abu Rumeileh, Mr. Fadi Abed Rabbo, Ms. Inas Diwani, Ms. Humeida al Natsheh, and Ms. Raneen Sandouka. Finally, we extend our thanks to all the educational consultants who contributed in distributing questionnaires to high school students to accomplish the quantitative portion of this project. This study would not have been completed without the precious time, openness and dedication of all the participants of this study: girls married at an early age, their mothers, high school students, school principals, educational consultants, reform and religious characters. To all of you, we say thank you.



## **About this Study...**

**Sama Aweidah**

**General Director**

**Women's Studies Centre**

It has been a long journey since we started our combat against early marriage. It started in 1995 when we partnered with other community-based organisations to work together in a common developmental project in Palestinian rural areas, specifically in the villages of Nablus and Hebron. Our partners focused on health, agricultural and environmental development while we focused on cultural development, mainly on gender related issues. Working inside villages, we discovered enormous problems and encountered several challenges. One of the main problems we encountered was marrying girls at an early age which required dropping out of school even before completing primary education, which is supposed to be “compulsory”, yet no procedures are undertaken to enforce this regulation. Early marriage is indeed a serious problem, it is a violation of children's rights, their right to wellbeing, their right to play, their right to enjoy stable mental health and their right to decide their destiny without any pressure of any kind. We decided to start our battle with combatting early marriage. We immediately confronted great challenges. First, a society accustomed to marrying girls at an early age considering marriage as a means of “protection” or “shield” or even a “goal”. Then, there were religious challenges where we had to confront “Sheikhs” (religious scholars) who simply qualify early marriage as “Halal” based on the experience of Prophet Mohammed, who married Aisha whom they claim was nine years old (Although recent studies proved that she was nineteen). Even if these claims were true, one must consider that times and conditions have changed, so have the environmental and health conditions. We faced two kinds of protestors. Those who fought our principles because they were against their convictions. And those who fought us only to gain popularity among society for being the “ones” who defend and protect honor and religion. Such persons only long for an important social or political position, even if it would cost the welfare of the girls in our society. Despite all these difficulties, we continued our work. The funding organisation, Save the Children, at that time provided us with

great support. It announced that the program should be implemented as a whole package, otherwise it would be cancelled. We won the battle, and were able to work with male and female students along with their parents. We succeeded, yes, but not in stopping early marriage of girls. We succeeded in raising a big question regarding the validity and success of early marriages. There were some cases where we intervened directly and were able to put the wedding off. But, in general, we launched a long-term battle and it would take us years to see its results. Following this project, we created a long-term and an ongoing program in our centre, which is the “Female Child Rights” program. The “Female Child Rights” Program tackles gender-based discrimination among children. The program works with children to change their opinion of themselves and of others. It also aims to build a different culture where girls and boys are treated equally, where each boy and girl have the right to play, to eat, to receive health care and to have freedom of choice, etc. Our work was carried out in cooperation with parents, the school and clubs. Throughout our work, we always focused on the issue of early marriage because it has severe consequences, like depriving female children from their rights, and exposing them to potential danger and violence. We worked in the governorates of Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin and Salfeet. The road was not always paved with roses. Many people were against our actions. We became the target of some preachers in mosques who dedicated the sermon preceding Friday prayer to attack our thoughts and objectives. We did not give up, we continued our combat with faith and strength which we derived from the support of progressive political parties, and several community-based organisations. The Ministry of Education also supported our work and allowed us to implement our program in and through schools. Today and after all these years of struggle and work, we take a minute to assess our accomplishments. Where are we now? Are we following the right path? Does the issue of early marriage still stand as a problem in society? Are the motives the same or did they change? Are there any new challenges? In order to answer these questions and many others, we had to conduct a scientific research. We decided to start by the city of Jerusalem due to its increased problems resulting from the prevalent political situation. Part of Jerusalem is inside the wall and is directly under occupation, some parts are outside

the wall and each area has its particular situation either similar or different from areas in the West Bank or Gaza strip. This study is composed of two portions. The first portion is quantitative to assess the importance of the problem. The second is qualitative to investigate the nature of the problem and the factors related to it. The results of the study, both quantitative and qualitative, will help us coordinate our work towards combatting early marriage and provide useful information for building official and unofficial national agendas that aim to end this destructive phenomenon. It would not have been possible to accomplish this study without the valuable contribution of the research team. We hereby take this opportunity to express our thanks and gratitude to the distinguished research team: Dr. Hisham Abu Rayya, Dr. Yahya Hijazi, and Ms. Marlene Rabadi. We would also like to thank the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem, especially Mr. Samir Tarmar for his follow up as well as facilitating the process of the study. Finally, we extend our thanks to the Women's Studies Centre's team, in particular Ms. Aida al-Issawi, the director of "Female Child Rights" Program, whose contribution was indispensable for achieving this study.

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**This study was accomplished with the help and contribution of several parties. We would like to thank each person who contributed to this accomplishment, special thanks goes to:**

- Directorate of Education- Unit of Guidance and Special Education in Jerusalem/ our partners in this study.
- Women who shared their experiences within this study hoping to contribute to ending the phenomenon of early marriage and avoiding the suffering of other women.
- All field researchers in Jerusalem who worked tirelessly to collect these stories to raise awareness about the negative effects of early marriage.
- School principals, educational consultants, mothers of daughters who were married at an early age, religious and reform characters in Jerusalem, and high school students who provided us with the information needed to accomplish this study.
- Bread for the World Organization and the Secretariat Association, both great supporters of this study.

# Abstract

The issue of early marriage in the Jerusalem district is one of great importance due to its multitude of effects. There is little literature and few field studies regarding this issue despite the existence of several Palestinian organizations working on reproductive health, women rights' advocacy and support of women both socially and legally in the region. The current study aims to understand the reasons that lead Palestinian girls to early marriage and the consequences of early marriage in the Jerusalem district. It also aims to visualise the eventual role of community-based organizations in general and the Ministry of Education in particular to limit this phenomenon. The study is divided into two complementary portions. The first portion is quantitative as it examined the position of high school students (girls and boys) in Jerusalem toward early marriage in a quantitatively manner. This part was conducted based on the statistical analysis of questionnaires completed by 475 students (44.3% male, 55.7% female) from different classes across 11 schools situated in different locations. The second portion is qualitative, where we conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals and focus groups composed of women married before their 18th birthday, mothers of women married under the age of 18, young men, school principals, educational consultants, and religious and reform characters from the Jerusalem district. The second part constitutes the larger part of the study. The quantitative study demonstrated that the majority of male and female students support girls' marriage from age 18 and above. However, despite the male students' position that rejected early marriage, they were more understanding of the phenomenon than female students. Certain sociodemographic variables contributed to the students' support of early marriage in spite of their gender; these included low academic attainment of the students, having female relatives married under age 18, the economic deficiency of students' families, students' low self-esteem, and their dislike of their schools. The quantitative study also revealed that students' awareness toward the consequences of early marriage on girls was moderate. Male students were especially ill-informed of these consequences. Results also showed that students in general and females in particular rarely turn to educational consultants in their schools for help or advice if they felt they needed to share their problems with someone. The qualitative study uncovered a variety of causes and motives for marrying girls at an early age. Some of these motives included: poor economic situation of parents, low academic attainment of the

girl, family disintegration, parents' authoritarian methods, girls' seeking independence and freedom, girls' ignorance of the reality of marriage and its responsibilities, inability to make fateful emotional decisions, external influence of friends/relatives' experiences, means of protection for fear of the girl's libido and sexuality. Other motives: parents' ignorance of adolescence and how to deal with girls' problems during this stage, limited communication between school and parents, deficiency of activities in schools that empower female students' rights and combat early marriage, parents' strict religious practices, among others. Regardless of the disparities in motives and reasons behind early marriage, the results of the study showed that the participant girls and the mothers became aware –from experience- of the negative consequences and effects of early marriage, especially from the economic, educational, psychosocial, and physical health aspects. The study also indicated that religious and reform characters split into two groups. The first group has significant social experience and supports the idea of raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 years and above. This group is considerate of the suffering of girls who marry at an early age and the urgent need to raise the awareness of couples before marriage through rehabilitation courses that prepare them for marriage. These courses can become obligatory by instating them in the marriage contract as a pre-condition before registering any marriage officially. The other group is less considerate of the negative effects of early marriage, and sees no problem in marrying girls under the age of 18. However, it agrees that there is a need to help married and engaged couples, despite their age, be better prepared for conjugal life.



## 1. Early Marriage: Definition and Trends

Early marriage remains an unresolved abuse of human rights in many countries around the globe especially in developing countries, including the Arab Levant. Early marriage is

sometimes referred to in reports and studies as “child marriage” or “early enforced marriage” as a clear expression of disapproval of this phenomenon in some societies.

According to

statistics of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 34% of girls in developing countries (excluding China), were married under age 18, and more striking is that 11% were married under age 15 (UNICEF, 2013). In some countries, the percentage of girls married under age 18 can rise to 40% and above. For example, approximate statistics show that 41% of young married Ethiopian women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18, their median age of marriage approximately 15.1 years (Gage, 2013). In the same context, 57% of Afghan girls were married before their 16th birthday; 60-80% of them were forced into this union (Raj, Gomez, & Silverman, 2014).

In the next section, we will present the definitions of early marriage, the spread of this phenomenon in some countries and in Arab countries including the Palestinian Authority Territories, i.e. Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian Citizens of Israel.

### 1.1 Definition of Early Marriage

In Islam, marriage is defined as a union between a man and a woman based on a legal contract and on mutual consent. According to Al Dusuqi, marriage is “a contract between a man and a woman that establishes legal rights built on love, mercy, kindness and goodness.” (Al Dusuqi, 1203 Hijri, 15). Marriage also meets a spiritual and mental

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In this current study, we decided to choose the term “early marriage” since the aim of the study was to uncover the causes and consequences of this phenomenon, even if the girl was not forced into marriage by her parents as the expression “early enforced marriage” indicates.

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need that helps people find stability in different aspects of life (Mohammed, Al Sharbeen, Saladdin, 2013). The Latin Catholic Church defines marriage as “the covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, and which has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptised” (Catholic Church, 1983 224). In the general comment No. 28: article 3 (The Equality of Rights Between Men and Women), the United Nations stated that marriage is a union between two persons based on mutual consent (United Nations, 2008). In Palestine, marriage is defined according to the

Jordanian personal status law applied in Palestine, in article 2 marriage is: “a contract between a man and a woman where she becomes legitimately his wife in order to establish a family and make offspring” (Personal Status Law, 1976).

Despite major cross-cultural agreement in defining marriage, there is no definite agreement on the appropriate age of marriage. According to the UN Convention on Consent to

Marriage, the United Nations did not take a clear position toward the minimum age to enter into marriage, leaving this decision to states parties to determine what is for the best interest of their citizens. As stated in Article 2 of this convention which entered into force in 1962: “States parties to the present Convention shall take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage. No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses” (United Nations, 1964). On the other hand, states parties later agreed in several treaties to adopt the definition of a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years”, according to article one of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Hence, any form of marriage or engagement under this age has no legal force, as stated in Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 2003).

Many countries were committed to consider the age of 18 as the baseline legal age of

marriage. However, even western countries allow marriage below the age of 18 in exceptional cases as shown in Table (1.1), where the age of marriage is defined according to the local law and the exceptions approved by the legislator of the marriage register in those countries (Wikipedia, 2017). In addition, during the Regional Conference on Child Marriage held in Beirut in 2015, Appeals Counsel, Ms. Khalifeh, presented in details the civil laws applied in Arab countries related to the marriage of female minors. Table (1.2) shows the current situation in Arab countries (P.19).

Table 1.1: Age of Marriage in Some Western Countries

Country	Girls Age of Marriage	Exception
Italy	18	16
Holland	18	16
Spain	18	16
Austria	18	16
Germany	18	16
Sweden	18	--
England	18	16

Table 1.2: Age of Marriage in Arab countries

Country	Girls Age of Marriage	Exception
Syria	17	13
Jordan	18	15
Egypt	18 (marriage registration)	--
Iraq	18	15
Morocco	18	Below the age of capacity by a justified decision stating the interest and the justifying reasons
Yemen	Not specified in case the girl is physically and mentally ready for marriage	--
Libya	20	Below the age with a Court authorization
Algeria	19	Below the age with a judge authorization
Tunisia	18	Below the age with a judge authorization
United Arab Emirates	18	Below the age with a judge authorization
Bahrain	16	Below the age with the approval of the Shariaa Court
Kuwait	15 (marriage registration)	--
Sultanate of Oman	18	Below the age with a judge authorization
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	16 (Ministry of Justice)	Below the age according to some conditions
Qatar	16 (marriage registration)	Below the age with a judge authorization
Sudan	No minimum age	10 years with the judge authorization
Djibouti	18	Below the age with the judge authorization
Comoros Islands	18	Below the age with the judge authorization
Mauritania	18	Below the age with the judge authorization
Somalia	16	Below the age with the judge authorization
Palestine	15 in the West Bank and Gaza	9 years with the judge authorization

The possibility of exceptions provided by the legislator to the judges in Shariaa courts and churches explains the high rates of early marriage in different places (The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 2003). Judges, who share the same culture and are representatives of the same society, are often convinced by the reasons justifying early marriages, such as economic situation, difficulty to provide for the children, or claiming to know what is best for the girl or young man. Another reason or justification of early marriage is the political and armed conflicts prevailing in the Arab region including the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Aweidah, 2015).

## 1.2 Early Marriage in Palestine

While Palestine in general, and the Jerusalem district in particular, are not usually listed in international statistics in the same category as poor countries, such as Niger, Chad, Central African Republic, and Bangladesh, where early marriage rates vary between 60-75% (International Centre for Research on women, N.D.; UNICIF, 2013), Palestine and

Jerusalem are included under the same category as countries like Sierra Leon, Zambia, Nicaragua, Somalia and Nepal, where the rates of married girls under the age of 18 varies between 40 to 45%.

Article 5 of the Personal Status Law in Palestine specifies the minimum age of marriage, and defines the capacity to conclude a marriage, that “Both the fiancé and fiancée should be mature, the fiancé shall be 16 and above and the fiancée 15 and above” (Jordanian Personal Status Law, 1976). This item was amended later to the following: “The fiancé and fiancée shall be mature and shall be 18 years and above. However, the judge can approve the marriage if one of them was under 18 and above 15, and there was benefit from this marriage as decided according to instructions from the Supreme judge for this purpose”.

In Christianity, the Latin Eparchy Patriarchate specified the minimum age of marriage as 18 years of age according to Article 13 in Chapter Two. An adult is defined as “A person who reached 18 years of age, under of which he is considered a minor

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and should submit to his parent or guardian to run his affairs, except those that the law allows explicitly to handle themselves” (The Jerusalem Latin Eparchy Patriarchate, 1954, 9). However, it also allows the Church court to approve a marriage under this age according to the opinion of the judge or bishop. The Arab Evangelical Church, according to the Personal Status Law in Article 21 of Book 3/ Chapter One, marriage is allowed for whoever “is 18 years old, if male, and 16 years old, if female” (The Arab Evangelical Episcopal Church, 1954, 6). According to the Orthodox Byzantine Church, as item 2 of article 30 of the marriage chapter and its conditions

stipulates, marriage is allowed for “every girl who is 12 years of age, and man who is 14 years of age” (Byzantine Eparchy for Roman Orthodox Church, 1930). In an interview held in Beit Jala (November, 2016), Father Aktam Hijazin explained that ecclesiastical courts around the globe generally adopt the civil law as a reference to specify the minimum age of marriage, the same applies in Palestine.

Given that Palestinians on the Israeli side of the Green line are subject to Israeli laws, early marriage there is actually any marriage concluded under the age of 18 –according to the Israeli marriage law issued in 1950-. Hence, any marriage under the age of 18 requires a judgment from court, and in any case no marriage can be entered into force below the age of sixteen (Israel Knesset, 1950). In reality, 4000 women under 18 get married every year in Israel, and these numbers remain in fact inaccurate as many marriages are not registered nor documented in the State’s registers (Kaman Centre, 2014). According to surveys conducted by the Israeli Central Bureau for Statistics (2013), 62.2% of those married women are

Muslims, 27.8% Jews, 3.07% Druze, and 0.375% Christians.

The statistics of early marriage in the West Bank and Gaza Strip indicate that the rate of marriage contracts registered in 2014 for couples between ages 15-19 years is 41.2% (The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). These rates have barely changed and perhaps even increased compared to the last decade, as the rate of couples married under 18 then was 32.2%. The same report indicates that more than 50% of married women gave birth to their first child before their 19th birthday (al Shakhshir & Asi, 2004).

In Jerusalem, data collected by the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality in the Israeli Knesset (2016) showed that in 2015, 729 cases of early marriage were registered in the Ministry of Interior in Jerusalem, 477 of them were registered in East Jerusalem. More than 466 of these marriages were registered in non-accordance with the law's regulations on this matter. The committee's report implies that what increases this phenomenon is that the Police opened investigations for only 37 complaints out of 416 introduced on this issue.

Police attitudes towards such complaints have not changed much during the several past years. The Knesset Research and Information Centre concludes that the police investigated only a few cases out of the numerous complaints introduced between 2007-2009.

## **2. Motives and Causes for Early Marriage**

As stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child issued by UNICEF (2013), the most marginalised groups in society are girls who are married at an early age, this is in addition to the enormous damage that befalls them and their families because of such marriages. Several reasons might explain the continuity of this phenomenon in developing societies. The next section provides a summary of these reasons based on earlier studies related to this

phenomenon and on our analysis of the relation of this phenomenon with a system of psychosocial concepts prevailing in developing societies, accumulated throughout our expertise. Later, we will tackle the various consequences of early marriage.

### **2.1 The livelihood, economic and educational situation**

Studies (Mohammad et al., 2013) point out that there is a strong link between early marriage and poverty, the family's standard of living and the girl's educational level. Hence, poverty, financial status and educational deficiencies become both the cause and outcome of early marriages. This is part of what is called poverty culture maintenance. Impoverished families, especially big ones mainly composed of girls, in rural areas within developed societies might be encouraged to betroth their daughters

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at an early age to ease the financial load of raising a child (Yuskel-Kaptanog̃ & Akadli Ergocmen, 2014; Nasrullah, Muazzam, Bhutta, & Raj, 2014). Even in urban areas within developed societies, a girl might be deprived of a better future and obliged to submit to her family's intents by getting married at an early age if she is less educated (Clark, 2004). All studies state that an increase in the level of education for girls decreases the risk of being married at an early age, even for those living in poor rural environments. This also contributes to social development, since girls with high levels of education will also perform their social and motherly duties more efficiently (Yuskel-Kaptanog̃ & Akadli Ergocmen, 2014; Nasrullah et. al., 2014). A study by the Palestinian National Centre (2011) notes that in Palestinian society there is a negative correlation between a girl's educational level and early marriage. The median age at first marriage for girls with a university degree reached 23.7 in 2010 compared to 16.9 for girls with secondary education as the highest level of educational attainment.

## **2.2 Minimising the risk of dishonour**

Regardless of their religious and ethnic diversity, developing societies share the same over-emphasis on the virginity and chastity of girls, which are linked to the honour and reputation of the family. This applies for example in southern Asian states, Middle Eastern states and African states (Hervish & Feldman-Jacobs, 2011). Marrying a girl at an early age reduces the family's concern of potential premarital sexual relationships that may develop between the girl and the other sex during puberty. In such cases, marriage at an early age is considered a preventive agent in developing countries. In the family's conception, the benefits of early marriage overcome its disadvantages and is considered for the best interest of social units (family, neighbourhood, town, society, religion) that are linked to the collectivist existence of these communities, whilst neglecting the girl's interest and wish.

## **2.3 Variation in socialisation practices**

Societies differ from each other by their socialisation practices. According to studies, male children in developing countries are raised with self-assertion principles. These include

educational attainment, competition, and independence. Societies treat males with forgiveness when they make mistakes and slow their integration process towards their future roles as adults. Female children are raised toward compliance, meaning that obedience and responsibility for the care of others are central. Girls are also rushed to acquire their roles as adults (Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, & Sam, 2011); examples of this are through marriage and child rearing. This difference between raising girls and boys constitutes a pressure on girls to make marriage a priority and therefore not to resist an offer of marriage, even if it is too early in their lifetime. In the same context, this socialisation of girls does not inform them of the dangers of early marriage, nor do their parents consider these dangers.

#### **2.4 Misconception between sexual maturity and marital maturity**

One of the cornerstones of matrimonial life is maturity, as it is a vital component to building matrimonial relations and developing understanding, communication, caring, security and happiness in a marriage. There are two facets of maturity, both are complementary to one another. There is the physical-sexual maturity and the psychosocial maturity. The first is related to the full biological and operational growth of body organs for marriage. For girls, this means that her body has developed for pregnancy and child rearing. The second facet is related to psychology. This is the social, cognitive, behavioural maturity that allows girls to cope with all aspects of matrimonial life and the requirements of marriage with moderation. Some parents who marry their girls at an early age wrongly believe that sexual maturity is an indicator of their physio-sexual maturity as well as their psychosocial maturity. This makes girls ready to practice their roles as wives and mothers, according to their parents' ethnotheories. For instance, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as in other countries, the age of marriage for girls is linked to the time a girl reaches puberty (Al-Hakami & McLaughlin, 2016). There is major ignorance in this practice due to the fact that girls married at an early age are less capable of dealing with and adapting to matrimonial life and its requirements because they are not mature enough. In regards to sexual growth, studies show that the years between 20 and 30 are the most suitable

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in terms of fertility and the womb's readiness to pregnancy and childbearing (Mohammad et al., 2013). In contrast, the early and middle adolescence period, i.e. between the ages of 11 and 18, is considered the most turbulent in most cultures and societies (Chen & Farruggia, 2002). Pregnancy and birth during this period can be harmful for the girl's health (Patton, Coffey, Sawyer, et al., 2009).

### **2.5 The pattern of relationship with the parents**

the relationship with one's parents constitutes the main pillar that affects the socio-emotional development of male and female adolescents. It can therefore influence the propensity of a girl to early marriage. Studies have shown that the pattern of parenting affects this possibility. Parents with an authoritarian style (Darling & Steinberg, 1983) show little parental warmth towards their children and tend to impose their authority on them when intervening in their children's lives (this pattern is mostly prevalent in developing and collectivist communities). Authoritarian parents often deprive girls of their freedom of choice, and of making important decisions such as marriage. Being raised in such an environment, girls may be more inclined to get married early or follow their parents' wish to get married early. This can be the only way to be freed of their parents' control and cruelty (Mohammad et al., 2013). Regarding the expected timing to offer girls their autonomy, studies have shown that parents from collectivist societies tend to delay the autonomy of girls when compared to parents from individualistic societies (Chen & Farruggia, 2002). As a result, girls who grow up in these environments might feel relieved when they receive a marriage proposal at an early age, as the assumption is that they will go on to have a better life and someone to take care of them after marriage.

### **3. Consequences of Early Marriage**

According to experts, early marriage leads to a range of harmful effects on the young brides. Girls' educational, economic, physical and psychosocial prospects are all jeopardised when they marry as children.

### 3.1 Economic-educational consequences

Early marriage deprives girls of their basic right, as declared by international legislation and conventions, which is the right to education (UNICEF, 2013). With a lower level of education, a girl's cognitive efficiency decreases and she can be less capable of dealing with different aspects of social and family lives. Most cases of early marriage are linked to school dropout rates (Strat, Dubertret, & Le Foll, 2011), which also decrease a girl's chances of attaining higher education. Higher education helps a girl secure employment in the future and allows her to participate in the economic and social empowerment of her environment. If the motive behind early marriage is escaping financial deficiency, often early marriage increases financial problems (in most cases, the husband also comes from difficult financial conditions). This leads the household into further ignorance and poverty (Raj et al., 2014; WHO, 2012).

In general, it can be concluded that high prevalence rates of early marriage are correlated with less education for girls, which also decreases her potential participation in the labour force. In addition, there is an aggravation of the newlyweds' financial condition as well as a decline in the girl's societal status (Raj et al., 2014). Mothers who marry at an early age are incapable of assisting their own children with their education (Mohammad et al., 2013). Early marriage can also affect a girl's self-esteem leading to frustration, depression and anger of her surrounding social environment.

### 3.2 Psychosocial consequences

the psychosocial effects of early marriage are so numerous that we can only cite some of them in this study. According to studies, early marriage results in early pregnancy especially for the 15-19 year old age group, where pregnancy is more likely to happen than in the 12-15 year old age group. According to the World Health Organization report (WHO, 2012), an estimated 16 million cases of childbirth took place in girls married between the ages 15-19 all around the world, with 95% of these cases taking place in developing countries. Another study conducted in 42 developing countries, indicated that there is an estimate of one million cases of childbirth for girls married between the age of 12-15 years (Neal, Matthews, Frost, et al., 2012).

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Marriage can hitherto transform a female child to a child mother rapidly and without a preparation period (Goli, Rammoha, & Singh, 2015). Child mothers' insufficient life experience and her limited mental capacity to deal with her interactive roles as a mother, wife and human being, all lead to increasing her stress levels. This in return can lead to several family problems. For instance, some studies underline that child brides have difficulty carrying out all of their responsibilities, such as caring for their household acting as caregivers for their children and husbands, which leads to psychosocial conflicts with their husbands and their social surroundings (Strat et al., 2011). According to some studies, there are high rates of suicide inclination or suicide attempts among girls who married at an early age when compared to their unmarried peers (Gage, 2013b). These rates reflect the high pressure and stress that these girls suffer from when they suddenly become child brides or even child mothers. One of the drivers of early marriage is a girl's attempt to escape her parents' over-control.

However, studies indicate that there is a large spousal age differences between partners in cases where girls marry at an early age. Consequently, girls find themselves in a relationship with both power and maturity asymmetries. They discover that they moved from their parents' cruelty to another kind of dominance and control, one that deprives them of their independence and increases their feeling that they are of little or no value (Yuskel-Kaptanog̃ & Akadli Ergocmen, 2014). As previously mentioned, teenagers are not yet mature enough in their decision making abilities to enter a union based on ambiguous and immature elements. This leads to an incompatible marriage, from a psychological aspect, which increases the risk of a turbulent conjugal life filled with conflict, lack of harmony and incapacity to deal with life's failures and family problems. In such cases, the child bride is often subject to tyrannical and violent treatment and suffers from the potential social and psychological impacts of divorce (International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children, 2013; Strat et al., 2011). Relatedly, early divorce constitutes a pressure factor on the child bride causing fear and insecurity in addition to a feeling of failure, despair, depression and hopelessness. This feeling of despair and insecurity makes a girl subject to exploitation and domestic violence (Mohammad et al., 2013).

Early marriage can also have mental health consequences on minor spouses in the long run, even if the marriage continues onward. A detailed study was conducted in this context (Start et al., 2011) in the United States of America. It was conducted on a large sample (n=16.464) of married women, and found that 8.9% of them were married before their 18th birthday. The mental health of this group was compared to women who were married as adults (above 18 years of age). The results of the study showed that the possibility of suffering from mental problems for the girls married as minors is 1.5 times more likely than for females who married as adults. Girls who are married as minors also face a double risk of nicotine addiction, and a potential of 1.42-1.64 times higher chance of alcohol or drug addiction in addition to severe depression and anxiety disorders. Child brides have a double odd (exactly between 2.10 to 2.12) to suffer from panic disorder and psychosis (such as distrust and hallucinations).

### **3.4 Physical health consequences**

During the age from 10 to 19, female teenagers go through an important phase of physical-physiological development. They gain 30% of their weight and 20% of their height. This period is also considered very active for their brain development. Studies indicate that childbearing during this phase might increase the risk of malnutrition for child mothers because of the physiological changes related to pregnancy, breastfeeding and staying up late at night child rearing (Goli et al., 2015). One study stated that height growth stopped for 49% of pregnant female minors in Bangladesh while 40% suffered from weight loss (Rah, Christian, Shamim, Arju et al., 2008).

Likewise, another study (Goli et al., 2015) showed that Indian girls, who gave birth before they turned eighteen, had a significantly higher probability of being in the “thin” category. This pattern was also observed for associations between early childbirth and anaemia levels. This physical state can affect the baby who might inherit diseases, weight loss and anaemia. Moreover, child brides have a higher potential to be exposed to sexually transmitted diseases (Khan, Bhutta, Munim, & Bhutta, 2009).

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According to studies, early marriage for girls is significantly associated with a history of rapid repeat childbirth, increase in unintended pregnancy, miscarriages, incorrect use of contraception, in addition to ignorance, lack of knowledge in using contraception, inadequate advice concerning family planning and inadequate use of maternal health services (Godha, Hotchkiss, & Gage, 2013; Nasrullah et al., 2014). According to statistics delivered by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), minors' births constitute 11% of the total of births in the world, however these births represent 23% of the total diseases related to pregnancy and delivery among women across all age groups. Pregnancy and delivery-related complications are the leading cause of mortality for 15-19 year-old girls (Patton et al., 2009). The earlier the marriage is (under 18 years), the greater the chance of dying is for those girls because of pregnancy. It is five times more likely for those married under the age of 15 to die because of pregnancy. In addition, the risk of fatal and new-born's death is 50% more among mothers who bore a child below the age of 20, compared to those who give birth when they are above 20 years. This risk increases the younger the mother is (Chandra-Mouli, Camacho, & Michaud, 2013).

#### **4. Efforts to End Early Marriage**

In the previous section, we focused on the motives and reasons for early marriage in addition to the multiple problems that result from it. Some problems are economic-educational, psychosocial, and physical health. All those concerned with women's social, psychological and economic aspects agree that early marriage should be defined as a problem. This problem needs to be eliminated and addressed within a framework supported by theoretical, field and scientific findings. In the subsequent section, we will highlight the main solutions and treatments for early marriage as prescribed by different culture-based studies.

#### **4.1 The legal age of marriage should be raised to 18 years**

Several countries have endorsed measures and strategies to combat early marriage. One of these measures is modifying laws to raise the legal marriage age to eighteen years of age for both sexes. This reform also includes banning forced marriage, punishing the perpetrators of early and enforced marriages, and imposing obligatory registration of all marriages to enable monitoring (United Nations, 2014). Several countries issued legislation to indict any person who forces someone else into a union or who marries persons under the age of eighteen. The perpetrator is punished and sentenced to jail. An example on this is the Australian slavery law which considers “enforced marriage a dangerous form of exploitation and a crime in itself”, and is considered a practice similar to slavery according to the law. Any person convicted of practicing enforced marriage is sentenced to four years in prison”. (United Nations, 13, 2014). Another example, the Lebanese government which has issued legislation banning marriage under eighteen years of age. It is noteworthy to mention that in Lebanon there is no unified civil marriage law. Instead, each religion or sect has its own laws, and they all allow marriage before age eighteen (Protection of minors from early marriage: reality and the prospects, 2014). Many countries, including Lebanon, require the minimum age of marriage to be eighteen years and above, considering this step as a partial solution to end early marriage.

#### **4.2 Raising awareness towards risks of early marriage**

Many developing societies give great consideration to traditions and customs. They believe that if a girl is not married by the age of 14 or 15, this would lower her chances of getting married later. This status quo has led several countries to focus on raising awareness in societies in general, and among girls in particular, towards the risks of early marriage on a girl’s physical and mental health. One study (Protection of minors from early marriage: reality and the prospects, 2014), tackled the issue of parental ignorance towards the risks of early marriage on their daughters’ mental and physical health. These girls are victims of tradition and customs that encourage the marriage of

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female minors, especially in rural areas. In Palestinian society, researcher Abu Sabra (2010) recommended that it is important to raise society's awareness of the social, mental and physical risks of early marriage on both females and males. Al Sab'awi (2007) recommended that an awareness campaign be conducted in Iraq focusing on the mental, social, physical and cultural risks of early marriage on a girl and her future family. She also highlighted the necessity to educate girls about the importance to have a say in their marriage, and to raise girls' awareness towards the tasks and responsibilities of marriage. Although it is hard to scientifically assess the effectiveness of awareness raising in reducing the number of early marriages, a logical analysis leads to a positive conclusion, as is the case with other social campaign phenomena.

#### **4.3 Girls' education/ raising the level of compulsory education**

It is very important to educate girls as well as to extend the level of compulsory schooling to the end of high school, i.e. at the age of 18, as a means to delay early marriage. Many countries underline in their reports that some leading factors that contribute to the prevention of early marriage include girls' education, empowerment of women, provision of vocational trainings and scholarships, and development of life skills (United Nations, 2014). Civil society organizations have urged for increased emphasis on girls' education and empowerment to protect them against early marriage, especially in rural areas (Protection of minors from early marriage: reality and the prospects, 2014). A study carried out by Abu Sabra (2010), suggested that extending compulsory schooling to the end of high school leads to delaying marriage until age 18 years as a minimum. Moreover, special guidance programs in schools, especially in secondary school, contribute to encouraging girls to complete their high school and even to continue on to higher education. This consequently delays the age of marriage (Al Sab'awi, 2007). Other studies have also suggested offering financial support and incentives (i.e. buying books, uniforms and all school stationary), for girls to help them complete their education. This can be most helpful in areas where the economic situation of parents may be the cause for marrying their daughters at an early age (Kalamar, Lee-rife & Hindin, 2016).

#### **4.4 Empowering and engaging girls in the labour force**

As previously mentioned, literature states that economic factors are among the leading causes of the expansion of early marriage, especially in poor, marginalised and rural areas. Therefore, several studies have recommended that governments and civil society organizations develop training and rehabilitation programs for girls to increase their participation in the labour force. This will enable girls to be financially independent and can contribute to preventing early marriage (Al Sab'awi, 2007). In their reports submitted to the United Nations, several countries emphasised that providing vocational education opportunities for girls, in addition to soft loans, and assistance in marketing their productions can contribute to improving the economic situation for girls and their families. Organizations can also offer financial aid and incentives to the poorest families. All these factors can contribute to the reduction of potential early marriages (United Nations, 2014).

#### **4.5 Engaging the local community, religious scholars,**

and high-level leaders in endorsing measures and interventions: Implementing the measures noted previously might not be efficient if not accompanied by comprehensive plans to end early marriage. Such plans require the engagement of religious and reform characters and other socially influential persons to endorse strategies to limit early marriage (United Nations, 2014; Raj et al., 2014). These holistic plans must encompass the participation of all parties, such as relevant ministries, civil society organizations, traditional and political leaderships and religious leaders. The collective involvement of all stakeholders helps initiate a public dialogue and wide social mobilisation that can lead to informational awareness concerning this matter and spread a culture of a self-imposed ban on child marriage (Al Farshishi, 2015).

#### **4.6 Empowering girls' decision-making capacities**

Several studies suggest that it is possible to change the dominant inherited culture that sees women only as a means of reproduction through several measures.

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These measures include empowering girls, enhancing their different life skills, reinforcing their self and social efficiencies. To achieve this, we need to provide women with tools that propel them towards ambition, professional and scientific competency. Such measures enhance girls' maturity and decision-making capacity to choose the right age for marriage (Kalamar, Lee-rife, & Hindin, 2016, Abu Sabra, 2010).

## **5. The Study: Problem, Objective and Questions**

### **5.1 Problem of the Study:**

After an extensive review of the literature on early marriage in the Jerusalem district, we found deficiency in literature and field studies tackling this phenomenon despite its importance and the existence of several Palestinian organizations working on reproduction health, women's rights and empowerment. The city of Jerusalem has an exceptional status compared to other Palestinian cities. Here, legal sovereignty is unclear. For instance, compulsory education is just ink on paper and the Israeli government is not committed to its strategy to "provide an educational seat for each pupil" (Nir Amim, 2016). Moreover, dropout rates in Jerusalem among Palestinian students are above 36% (Nir Amim, 2016), especially among high school students. This rate is the highest of all Palestinian cities and is associated with various reasons, such as losing aim in life, self-value and social delinquency. There are several reasons for school dropout rates among high school students who are already candidates for early marriage, especially if they drop out of school. Some of these reasons are: low academic attainment, absence of school spirit, a lack of educational support cadres in Jerusalem schools, students' desire to assist their parents economically, among others. Most reasons would be avoided if Jerusalem schools received additional funding for the development of educational and rehabilitation programs to encourage students to stay in school, as is the case in West Jerusalem (Hijazi and Masarweh, 2012).

Clearly, Israeli laws do not prohibit Palestinians in Jerusalem from marrying their daughters below age eighteen. Each year, we notice a continuous increase in the number of marriages under age eighteen registered in Shariaa courts. Simultaneously,

there is an increase in divorce cases reaching up to 40% of registered cases per year. It is noteworthy to mention that Shariaa court judges affirm that registering divorce cases does not occur after the marriage but can also occur prior to the wedding itself. Hence, registered divorce cases do not necessarily reflect the real divorce rate. According to Israeli statistics, Palestinian girls from East Jerusalem constitute the biggest portion of girls married under the age of 18 in Jerusalem. The number of girls married under 18 exceeds 400 every year. This high number highlights the ever-aggravating phenomenon, especially since literature shows that early marriage has adverse consequences on girls' health, psychology, social position and educational attainment. Early marriage also contributes to future economic hardship and extreme poverty, compared to couples who marry at an older age. This study is considered very important toward understanding early marriage as it adopts a multi-perspective approach.

## 5.2 Objectives:

**This study is composed of two complementary parts:**

**Quantitative part:** To better understand the phenomenon of early marriage in general, we carried out a quantitative study to explore the position of high school students, of both sexes (especially girls), in the Jerusalem District towards the phenomenon of early marriage. This portion of the study was based on a statistical analysis of questionnaires completed by a relatively large number of students.

**Qualitative part:** This part employs a qualitative research methodology based on conducting individual (face to face) and focal group interviews with women who were married before age 18, mothers of girls who were married before age 18, young men, school principals, educational consultants, religious and reform characters in the Jerusalem district. This portion is the bigger portion of the study. The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the different opinions on the phenomenon of early marriage in the Jerusalem district. It also provides propositions and recommendations that might contribute to the development of programs and interventions to prevent this phenomenon.

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### **Questions of the Quantitative Study:**

1. What is the appropriate age of marriage for girls according to the opinions of high school students? Is there any difference of opinion between male and female students?
2. What is the position of high school students towards early marriage? Is there any difference between the positions of male and female students?
3. Is there a correlation between the students' self-esteem, their relation to their schools and families and their position of early marriage for girls?
4. What is the level of awareness of students towards the adverse impacts of early marriage? Are there any differences between male and female students?
5. In general, if students face any personal problems, which bodies of social support do they turn to?

### **Questions of the Qualitative Study:**

1. What are the reasons and motives for a girl's early marriage from various points of view (married women, mothers, school principals, educational consultants, young men, religious and reform characters)?
2. What are the impacts and consequences of early marriage on girls from various points of view (married women, mothers, school principals, educational consultants, young men, religious and reform characters)?
3. What proposals could be useful for schools affiliated to the Palestinian Directorate of Education and civil society organizations in the Jerusalem District, to prevent the phenomenon of early marriage?

In the coming section, we will first present the quantitative study's methodology, results and summary. This will be followed by the qualitative study's methodology and results. Then, there will be a section combining the results of the two studies and recommendations to combat early marriage.

## **6. Methodology of the Quantitative Study**

### **6.1 Study Sample**

The sample of this study included students from the 10th, 11th and 12th grades from the schools of the Palestinian Directorate of Education in the Jerusalem district. The sample comprised of 475 students (44.3% male, 55.7% female) from the abovementioned classes selected from 11 schools which participated in the study (to preserve confidentiality, we will not reveal their names). Table 6.1 shows the sample's distribution according to various socio-demographic variables, such as type of place of residence, kind of habitation, level of religiosity, educational status, economic situation, etc. The sample was selected in a way to cover as much geographic locations as possible in the Jerusalem district. Therefore, the researchers selected people from the old city, Silwan, Ras al Amoud, al Tori, Shufat refugee camp, Anata, al-Issawiya, Shufat, Beit Hanina, Sur Baher and Kufr Aqab. It is noteworthy to mention that the students go to separated schools, as girls go to schools for females, and boys go to schools for males.

Table 6.1: Sample Distribution according to Socio-Demographic Variables

Variable	Variable Value	Number	Rate %
Sex	Male	211	44.4
	Female	264	55.6
Grade	Ten	54	11.4
	Eleven	277	58.3
	Twelve	144	30.3
Type of place of Residence	Private property	383	81.0
	Rented house	89	19.0
Kind of Habitation	With family	453	95.4
	With the father's family/ Mother's family	13	2.8
	Other	8	1.8
Number of Siblings	0-2	17	4.0
	3-4	208	48.5
	5 and more	204	42.6
Number of Sisters Only	0-2	257	58.4
	3-4	141	32.0
	5 and more	42	9.5
Father's Work	Employed	454	95.0
	Unemployed	21	5.0
Mother's Work	Employed	60	13.0
	Unemployed	415	87.0
Family's Economic Situation	High	67	14.3
	Medium	384	82.1
	Low	17	3.6
Religion	Islam	473	99.6
	Christianity	1	0.2
Level of Personal Religiosity	Not at all religious	9	1.9
	A little religious	53	11.2
	Moderately religious	356	75.4
	Very religious	54	11.4
Parents' Level of Religiosity	Not at all religious	4	0.9
	A little religious	27	5.7
	Moderately religious	292	62.1
	Very religious	146	31.1
A case of early marriage within the close family (sister, cousin, etc)	Yes	179	37.9
	No	293	61.1

## 6.2 Study Procedure

In this portion of the study, researchers used the quantitative method to investigate the phenomenon of early marriage and explore high school students' position towards it. For this aim, they used a structured questionnaire as a central tool for data collection. Access to the participant schools and classrooms in different locations was arranged with the help of the Head of the Guidance and Special Education Unit in the Directorate of Education. The study was carried out after a month and a half of the beginning of the first academic semester. A whole lesson was consumed during which the educational consultants distributed the questionnaires among students. The latter received guidelines from the Head of the Guidance and Special Education Unit who was the focal point between the researchers and the educational consultants.

Sometimes, the distributors of the questionnaires read out loud all the contents, or part of them, to the students. They clarified any ambiguous point, according to the needs and questions of students. Students were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could stop filling out the form at any stage. It was also explained that the information collected is for study use only and that responses were anonymous. They were also told that they could address the educational consultants if they needed any help. Students were informed that this study is being conducted in order to develop an intervention program and it is implemented by the Women's Studies Centre in cooperation with the Directorate of Education. After completion of the questionnaires, educational consultants collected them and passed them on to the research team.

## 6.3 Study's tool

The quantitative study was based on self-report questionnaires. The questionnaire was prepared after examining the available literature and some measurement tools that were developed to measure this phenomenon and all that is related to it. Moreover, the inclusion of some variables and questionnaire statements was based on the results of the individual and focal interviews conducted in the qualitative portion of the study. In

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addition, external reviewers, according to the scientific research regulations, arbitrated the questionnaire's

contents. After modifying the questionnaire according to the remarks of the reviewers, a pilot group was selected from two schools. Each pilot group consisted of 70 male and female students who filled in the questionnaire. The researchers carried out a statistical analysis in this phase, and some statements were modified according to the results of the analysis.

### **The final version of the questionnaire consisted of four sections:**

**1. Personal data:** The person filling the questionnaire wrote down their personal data such as sex, grade, academic attainment, number of siblings, parents' work field, religion, level of religiosity, and indicated their overall opinion towards early marriage according to a 5-point Likert scale.

**2. Second section:** It consisted of two parts: the first composed of nine statements exploring the students' acceptance of the concept of early marriage in general according to a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., "Early marriage protects the girl and her honour"). Using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Test, the result was a high score of consistency for the measurement built by the researchers to measure students' position towards early marriage ( $\alpha = .80$ ). The second composed of ten statements that explored students' position towards the potential impacts of early marriage. This section also used a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., "Early marriage is highly associated to the deterioration of the girl's physical health"). Using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Test, the result was a high score of consistency to the measurement built by the researchers to measure the impacts of early marriage based on students' point of view ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

**3. Third section:** It included three separate scales to assess the students' relation with their schools (seven statements were quoted and adapted from Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), assessment of their self-esteem (10 statements quoted and adapted from Rosenberg, 1965), assessment of parent-child relationships (7 statements that measure the quality of relations with the parents, quoted and adapted from Stattin & Kerr,

2000; and 8 statements to assess parental monitoring of their children, quoted and adapted from Wang, Dishion, Stormshak, & Willet, 2011). A sample item regarding the relationship with the school “I feel uneasy about going to school in the morning”. A sample item about one’s self-esteem “I feel I have several positive qualities”. A sample item about quality of relations with parents “My parents make me feel loved and wanted”. The 5-point Likert scale was used in all scales in this section. Using Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  Test, the result was a very acceptable score of consistence for all the scales:  $\alpha = .71$  for students’ position towards school;  $\alpha = .73$  for students’ self-esteem, and  $\alpha = .87$  for students’ quality of relations with their parents.

This section also included five questions that explored the places to which students turn when in need of social support or facing hardships (parents/siblings, friends, educational consultants at school, they solve their problems by themselves, other) according to a 5-point Likert scale.

**4. Fourth section:** It consisted of general open questions that explore the students’ views of the advantages of early marriage, and whether they consider that the school can undertake a role in order to prevent this phenomenon.

## 6.4 Analysis of results

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to enter data and analyse the study’s results. Frequency distribution was endorsed for the personal variables, such as sex, grade, economic situation, level of religiosity, etc. The Means and SDs were used for the studies various scales (position towards early marriage and its impacts, position towards school, self-esteem, and relation with parents).

The appropriate statistical tests were used to answer the questions of the quantitative study.

## 7. Results of the Quantitative Study

The quantitative study aimed to reply on the following questions:

1. What is the appropriate age of marriage for girls according to the opinions of high

- 
- school students? Is there any difference of opinion between male and female students?
2. What is the position of high school students towards early marriage? Is there any difference between the positions of male and female students?
  3. Is there a correlation between the students' self-esteem, their relation to their schools and families and their position of early marriage for girls?
  4. What is the level of awareness of students towards the adverse impacts of early marriage? Are there any differences between male and female students?
  5. In general, if students face any personal problems, which bodies of social support do they turn to?

Our answers to each research question based on the quantitative analysis are present below:

### **7.1 What is the appropriate age of marriage for girls according to the opinions of high school students? Is there any difference of opinion between male and female students?**

To answer this question, frequency analysis were calculated. Results showed that the majority of students are in favour of girls' marriage at 18 years and above. Table (7.1) demonstrates the students' answers on this question. T-test analysis indicated that there is no correlation of statistical significance between the student's sex and their reply on the appropriate age for marriage ( $t(471) = -1.16, p > 0.05$ ).

Table 7.1: Frequency distribution of students according to their opinions on the appropriate age of marriage

Appropriate age for marriage	Number of students	Rate %
Before age 18	21	4.5
Age 18	65	13.8
Age 19	48	10.2
Age 20	164	34.8
Above age 21	177	36.7
	<b>473</b>	<b>100%</b>

To make things clearer, it was important to explore whether the students’ answers regarding the appropriate age for marriage correspond with the level of their approval/rejection of early marriage in general. Table 7.2 shows that the majority of students (83.7%) oppose or severely oppose early marriage for girls. These results correspond with the opinion they expressed regarding the appropriate age for marriage for girls. Moreover, when asked if they consider that early marriage has any advantages, 11.6% of students said that early marriage has advantages while 88.4% considered there are no advantages for early marriage.

Table 7.2: Distribution of students according to their approval level of early marriage

Statement	Number of students	Rate %
Strongly disagree	228	48.2
Disagree	168	35.5
Neither agree nor disagree	44	9.3
Agree	27	5.7
Strongly agree	6	1.3
	<b>473</b>	<b>100%</b>

**7.2 What is the position of high school students towards early marriage? Is there any difference between the positions of male and female students?**

To know the students’ positions towards girls’ early marriage, Means and SDs were calculated for statements as they appear in the appropriate scale as demonstrated in Table (7.3) according to the student’s sex. Also, t-test was used to determine the

variation significance among Means, if found between sexes. First, we would like to point out that the Means for the various statements are low on the Likert scale, which corresponds with the students' opposition to early marriage as appears in Table (7.2). Results in Table (7.3) suggest that there are variations of statistical significance in favour of males in 6 out of 9 items related to their positions. Despite males' opposing position of early marriage, they were more understanding of the phenomenon than females, especially in relation to girls' protection, preserving her honour, protecting her from delinquency, harmony between the couple, girls' capacity to make an informed decision of marriage, and complying to the parents' wish by getting married.

Table 7.3: Means and the standard deviations for students' positions towards advantages of early marriage distributed according to the sex

The Statement	Male Students		Female Students		t-test	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Early Marriage protects girls	2.20	1.16	1.93	.98	2.64	<b>.009</b>
Early marriage preserves girls' honour	2.23	1.17	1.94	1.03	2.81	<b>.005</b>
A girl who marries after the age of 18 can be subject to ethical delinquency	1.91	1.10	1.41	.70	6.06	<b>.000</b>
A girl who married under the age of 18 adapts quickly to conjugal life	2.26	1.03	2.24	.95	.28	.778
Girls' marriage before age 18 helps enforce harmony between the couple	2.29	1.14	2.04	.94	3.70	<b>.000</b>
Girl's marriage opportunities decrease if she's over 18 years	1.81	.091	1.70	.88	1.36	.173
Marrying a girl who's under 18 brings joy and security to her husband	2.29	1.10	2.13	.97	1.75	.820
A girl under the age of 18 is capable of making an informed decision regarding marriage	2.09	1.15	1.86	1.03	2.31	<b>.022</b>
A girl should abide to her parents' desire if they decide to marry her under the age of 18	1.61	1.00	1.33	.69	4.57	<b>.000</b>

In order to define the sociodemographic variables that predict students' positive positions towards early marriage, Regression Analysis showed that there is a correlation of statistical significance between the student's academic attainment and their approval of early marriage (See Table 7.4). That is, the lower the level of academic attainment is, the more positive the position towards early marriage. Similarly, there is a positive correlation of statistical significance between the students' position towards early marriage and having a relative who married at an early age. The analysis also shows that there is a correlation between the family's economic situation and the students' positive positions. The lower the economic situation is, the more positive the students' position is towards early marriage, even though the relation was not of statistical significance.

Table 7.4: Regression Analysis to examine the relation between sociodemographic variables and students' positive position towards early marriage

Variable	Regression coefficient $\beta$	t-test	p
Sex	-.32	-5.25	< .001
Academic Attainment	-.11	-2.71	.007
Family's economic situation	-.13	-1.84	.06
Having a relative who married at an early age	.22	-3.54	< .001
			$F_{(4, 462)} = 11.69$
			$r = .30$
			$p < .001$

### 7.3 Is there a correlation between the student's self-esteem, their relation with their schools and families and their position of early marriage for girls?

Pearson's r was calculated to examine the relation between the students' self-esteem, their relation with their schools and families and their position of early marriage for girls, as it shows in Table (7.5). Results revealed a statistically significant correlation between students' view of their schools and their position of early marriage. The less

interested they were of their school, the more positive their position towards early marriage,  $r = -.17$ . In addition, the lower their self-esteem, the higher their support for early marriage,  $r = -.10$ . We could not find any relation between the students' relation with their parents and their position of early marriage.

Table 7.5: Pearson's  $r$  of students' self-esteem, relation with their families or school and their position towards girls' early marriage

	Student's position toward early marriage	Student's relation with his/her school	Student's self-esteem
Student's position toward early marriage	----		
Student's relation with his/her school	.17 <sup>-</sup>	-----	
Student's self-esteem	-.10 <sup>*</sup>	.22 <sup>**</sup>	-----
Student's relation with his/her parents	-.01	.32 <sup>**</sup>	.45 <sup>**</sup>

\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$

#### 7.4 What is the level of awareness of students towards the adverse impacts of early marriage? Is there any difference between male and female students?

To identify the level of students' awareness of the potential negative impacts of early marriage, we calculated the Means and SDs of the statements indicated in the suitable scale, as seen in Table (7.6), according to the student's gender. We also employed t-test to identify any variations significance, if found between sexes.

We would like to mention that the averages of the various statements were medium on the Likert scale. This signifies that the students have an average awareness of the impacts of early marriage. Results also show that there are variations of statistical significance in favour of females in 7 out of the 10 statements related to their positions towards the potential physical, psychological or educational impacts on girls. Male students were less aware of these impacts than females.

Table 7.6: “Means” and SDs of students’ positions towards potential impacts of early marriage, distributed according to sex.

The Statement	Male Students		Female Students		t-test	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
The couple regret their decision after an early marriage	3.56	1.00	3.73	.92	-1.94	0.53
Divorce rates increase as a result of early marriage	4.01	.94	4.03	.90	-.20	.841
Early marriage contributes to polygamy	3.58	1.02	3.56	.85	.40	.758
Early marriage leads to violence against the wife	2.28	1.09	2.28	.95	-.00	.996
Early marriage affects the girl’s potential completion of her studies	3.98	1.15	4.20	.99	-2.24	<b>.025</b>
It is easy for a man who marries a girl under 18 to control her behaviour	3.15	1.23	3.40	1.23	-2.22	<b>.027</b>
Early marriage can raise infant mortality	3.39	1.14	3.63	.93	-.244	<b>.015</b>
Early marriage contributes to the deterioration of the wife’s physical health	3.64	1.16	4.12	.93	-5.03	<b>.000</b>
Marrying a girl at an early age can be unjust to her	3.82	1.19	4.05	1.05	-2.21	<b>0.28</b>
Early marriage is considered the main reason for exposing married women to violence	3.21	1.11	3.43	1.01	-2.18	<b>.03</b>

### 7.5 In general, if students face any personal problems, to which bodies of social support do they turn?

Table (7.7) demonstrates that male and female students have a low tendency to turn to educational consultants to discuss personal problems. They prefer addressing their parents or friends to help them in solving their problems or they solve them by themselves. The Means of their answers were higher compared to “turning to an educational consultant”. Results also show that there is a clear difference between males and females in regards to levels of turning to educational consultants for help. Males have a higher tendency to do that than females. As shown in Table (7.7),

there is no difference of statistical significance between males and females in regards to addressing unofficial parties (parents, siblings, or friends) for help and guidance.

Table 7.8: Means and SDs of students' preference when in need of help or guidance

The Statement	Male Students		Female Students		t-test	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
I discuss my problems with my parents or siblings	3.10	1.31	3.27	1.21	-1.46	<b>.145</b>
I discuss my problems with my friends (male, female)	3.30	1.27	3.52	1.26	-1.80	<b>.07</b>
I discuss my problems with the educational consultant at school	2.02	1.25	1.62	.92	4.03	<b>&lt; .001</b>
I solve my problems alone	3.75	1.06	3.28	1.14	4.53	<b>&lt; .001</b>

## 7.6 Summary of the Quantitative Study Results

Results of the quantitative study showed that the majority of students support early marriage from 18 years old onward. There is no correlation between the students' sex and their opinion on the appropriate age for marriage. Nevertheless, male students who were against early marriage were also more understanding of this phenomenon than female students (although the overall level of understanding was low).

They were most understanding that marriage can protect a girl's honour, protect her from delinquency, create harmony between the couple, that girls at that age are able to make informed decisions regarding marriage and that she should abide by her parents' wish to marry her. Moreover, results indicated that there is a correlation between the students' academic attainment and their approval of early marriage. The lower the academic attainment, the more positive students' position towards marriage was. It was also noted that there is increased acceptance of early marriage when there is a female relative in the family who was married at an early age. There was a correlation between the family's economic situation and the students' positive opinion towards early marriage. That is, the lower the economic situation, the higher the approval of early marriage. Another correlation existed between the students' relation with their school and their position toward early marriage; the less affection they feel toward

their school, the more positive their position would be toward early marriage. Similarly, the lower the self-esteem of a student, the more he/she approves of early marriage. No relation was detected between the students' relation with their parents and their position toward early marriage. The study found that students have a mediocre level of awareness of the impacts of early marriage on girls. Results showed there are differences in favour of girls in 7 out of 10 statements related to their positions toward the potentially adverse consequences of early marriage on girls, on the physical, psychological and educational levels. Male students appeared to be less considerate of these impacts than girls. Although students of both sexes spend most of their daytime in school, they appear less motivated to discuss their personal problems with educational consultants. They prefer turning to their parents or friends to solve their problems, or they rather solve them by themselves. Results demonstrated a clear disparity between males and females when asking for help from the educational consultants, with male students displaying higher tendency to do so than females. In the coming section, we will discuss the qualitative study. This study aims to explore the phenomenon of early marriage from the point of view of married girls, mothers, school principals, educational consultants, young men, religious and reform characters.

## **8. Qualitative Study**

### **8.1 Study sample**

The study sample included women who were married under the age of 18, mothers whose daughters were married under the age of 18, young men to have their say on the matter, school principals, educational consultants, and religious and reform characters. Participant women. The study was conducted on 24 women who were married at an early age. They live in different locations and come from different cultural backgrounds. They are all from the Jerusalem district including the old city, Shufat refugee camp, Beit Hanina, Sur Baher, Wadi al Joz, Sheikh Jarrah, Um Tuba, al Tori, al Tur, Jabal al Mukabber, Silwan, Ras al-Amoud, Samiramis, Anata, and al Issawiya.

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This geographic variation helps tackle varied cases of early marriage and different opinions that differ according to the surrounding environment. Among the 24 participant women, individual interviews were made with 12 women, and one collective interview with two focal groups, each consisting of 6 women. All women are Muslims, despite fruitless efforts to integrate Christian women in the interviews. The researchers gave the participants forms to fill about their personal background, with guidance from the research assistants. The questions were about their age, place of residence, age of marriage, level of academic attainment when meeting their partner, their self-confidence and personality when taking the decision to get married, age when separated (in case of separation), number of children, age with the first childbirth, highest grade completed in school, economic situation, economic situation of the parents when she got married, age of husband when married, his academic attainment, his family's economic situation when he was married, and level of satisfaction from marriage. We hereby provide a description of the women participants in the individual and focal groups' interviews: The age of the participants varied between 16 and 31 years at the time of the interview (Mean = 19.71, SD = 3.20). 58.3% of the participants met their life partners at the age of 16 or younger, the rest (41.7%) between the age of 16 and 18 years. 45.8% of the participants married at the age of 16 years or below, 50% married between the age of 16 and 18 years, only one participant was more than 18 years when married (she was part of the focal groups). Moreover, 41.7% of the participants live in a privately owned house, 12.5% declared living with their husbands' families, a similar percentage live in a rented house. The academic attainment of 83.4% of the participants when they met their partners was average or above (The academic attainment of 33% of the participants was very good or excellent). 47.6% of them declared that their self-confidence and self-esteem when taking the decision of marriage was average or below, the self-confidence of 52.3% of them was above average and excellent. To mention that 70.8% of the participants are still married, 29.2% (n = 7) are divorced. Based on Mann-Whitney Test, the self-confidence of the divorced women at the time of their marriage was lower than

that of their peers who are still married ( $z = 3.30$ ,  $p = .001$ ). In addition, 28.6% of the divorced women ( $n = 2$ ), were separated from their husbands in less than a year, a similar percentage were separated after a year or two of marriage, the rest between 2 and 5 years after marriage. Concerning the married women, 52.9% are married since two years or less, the rest since 2 to 5 years and above. Additionally, 54.16% of the participants have from one to four children; 71.4% of mothers gave birth to their first child at the age of 17 years or less, 21.4% gave birth for the first time at the age of 18, one participant gave birth for the first time when she was older than 18 years. Only 8.3% of the girls completed 12th grade, a similar rate of the girls have a vocational training, another similar rate are currently working (Secretarial work or in kindergartens). The economic situation of 70.8% of the participants' households is average or below, a similar rate concerns the economic situation of the participants when they first got married.

Moreover, 87.5% of the participants' fathers and all mothers do not have a high school degree nor a vocational training; 95.8% of these parents are still married.

It is noteworthy to mention that 58.3% of the participants have sisters or relatives who were married under the age of 18 years.

The age of the participants' husbands at the time of marriage varied between 19 and 30 years (Mean = 23.25, SD = 2.92), 45.8% finished high school, 91.7% have no higher degree or vocational training, 45.8% of them had an economic situation above average or excellent according to the participants' estimate.

Finally, the satisfaction of 37.5% of the participants of their marriage is very low, 25% of their satisfaction was above average and excellent. Based on Mann-Whitney Test, it appeared that the satisfaction of the divorced participants of their marriages was lower than their peers who are still married ( $z = -3.47$ ,  $p = .001$ ). It is worth mentioning that there were no significant variables in the personal background of the participants in the individual and focal group interviews.

Participant mothers. Interviews were made with 18 Muslim mothers from different areas in the district of Jerusalem. Those mothers married one or more of their

daughters under the age of 18 years. The mothers were distributed into two focal groups, one included 7 mothers, the other 11 mothers. The mothers filled out forms to answer questions about their personal background, with the guidance of the research assistants. They answered questions about their age, age when married, age of their husbands at the time of marriage, currently married or divorced, educational attainment and their economic situation. The age of the participant mothers was between 38 and 63 years old (Mean = 48.28, SD = 6.36). 61.1% of them met their partners when they were 17 or younger, the rest (38.9%) when they were 18 and above, 44.4% of them were married at the age of 17 or below. The age of their husbands when married was between 18 and 50 years (Mean = 24.74, SD = 7.21). All participant mothers are still married and have been married since 18 to 47 years (Mean = 28.75, SD = 8.24). Only 11.11% of the mothers have a high school degree, a similar percentage have a vocational training (in sewing). The economic situation of 94.1% of them was average or below.

Participant young men. Interviews were made in one focal group with eight Muslim young men from different areas in the Jerusalem district. According to the data provided through the forms about their personal backgrounds, their age range was between 20 and 25 years (Mean = 22.50, SD = 2). All of them are single, completed their high school, are or were university students. The economic situation of 37.5% of them is below average or low, the economic situation of the rest (62.5%) is average or above average.

School principals and educational consultants. Seven individual interviews were conducted with school principals from different areas in the Jerusalem District.

The participant principals have experience in school administration ranging between 7 and 12 years. One focal group interview was conducted and included seven educational consultants in schools from different areas in Jerusalem. The work experience of the educational consultants ranged between 1 to 16 years.

All participants were Muslims.

Religious and reform characters. One focal group interview was conducted with eight religious and reform characters (one of them works in the Shariaa Judiciary, two of them are Christian clerics). They come from different areas in Jerusalem.

One individual interview was held with a judge from the Ecclesiastical Court.

## 8.2 Sample recruitment procedures

This study used three methods to find and recruit women who were married under the age of 18 (who were not over 24 years of age and whose marriages had not exceeded 5 years). First method: we were able to recruit women for individual interviews (face to face) through civil society organizations in the Jerusalem district (these include: Dar al Ri'ayeh Society, Saraya Centre, Societal Work Centre, Hind al Husseini College, the African Community, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Al Munasara Network, Shufat Feminist Centre,

Family Planning & Protection Society). After explaining the objective of the research, these organizations were able to identify the suitable candidates for the sample from their beneficiaries. The mechanism of communication with these organizations was through activities' coordinators and feminist programs in the different areas, who –in their turn- contacted or visited civil society organizations to introduce the study and the target group. Follow-up with civil society organizations was intensive, and it was not easy to convince women to participate in this study.

Second method: We referred to acquaintances, family and friends with contacts of women suitable to be recruited for the study's individual interviews. We expected that due to the existing relationship with these contacts, it would be easier to convince them to participate. However, the outcome was opposite to our expectations. These personal or kinship relations in most cases were a preventive factor not an encouraging one.

Third method: We were able to recruit girls who participated in the focal groups' interviews with the help of an assistant in the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem

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and through schools who open their doors for students to finish their education after marriage. In coordination with and with help from the principals of the candidate schools, we met with two groups, one in Shufat camp, and one in Sur Baher.

We addressed the aforementioned organizations in Jerusalem to help us in recruiting parents whose daughters were married under the age of 18.

The organizations selected from their beneficiaries women who accepted to participate in the study's focal group interviews. Parents of the girls who were married under age 18 and who participated in the individual interviews also joined these meetings.

We were able to recruit young men with the help of civil society organizations who work with youth (these include: Palestinian Vision Organization, Abna' al Quds Club, Burj al Laqlaq). These organizations were cooperative and assisted us in recruiting young men between the ages 18 to 25 years from Jerusalem. Despite our efforts to recruit young men from different backgrounds, the group we met was composed mainly of intellectual and university students.

Finally, we recruited school principals and educational consultants through the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem. Religious and reform scholars were recruited through contacting several important persons who have their social position in Jerusalem city.

It is important to mention that all male and female participants in the study, engaged in the study by their own will, without any external pressure. We also ensured the confidentiality of their participation and that none of their personal information and data would be published. It is also important to note that ethics approvals to conduct the study were granted by the Women's Studies Centre and the Directorate of Education.

### 8.3 Interview guide

A research team developed the questions of the study's interviews and they were audited by external reviewers. In general, each individual interview lasted between an hour to an hour and a half, while group interviews lasted between two to two and a half hours. At the start of each interview, all the participants introduced themselves, including researchers, research assistants and participants. Afterwards, the subject and objective of the study were presented. The interview questions were thoroughly arbitrated by the Women's Studies Centre and the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem, before beginning fieldwork.

Individual interviews with women who got married under the age of 18.

The questions of the individual interviews tackled two stages of the girls' life.

#### **First stage: The acquaintance phase and making the decision of getting married.**

##### **Questions included:**

“How did you meet your life partner?”

“Why did you decide that you were ready to be in a relationship at that time?”

“Did you love each other? What were the signs that you love him and that he loves you back?”

“Did you face any problems during the acquaintance phase?”

What kind of problems?

Examples? How did you overcome these problems?”

“What was your understanding of marriage and its responsibilities at that time?”

Did your perspective of it change afterwards? Examples?”

“Why didn't you delay your marriage until you were 18 (or until you completed twelfth grade)?”

“How did you prepare for your marriage (Accommodation, furniture ...)?”

Were there any disagreements between you two? How did you overcome them?”

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**Second stage: Implications of marriage. Questions included:**

“Before marriage, what was your understanding of a honeymoon? Where did you get this perspective from? (Friends...)”

“Did you enjoy your honeymoon? Would you have liked that your honeymoon lasted longer? Why?”

“What are the most significant problems that you faced during the beginning of your conjugal life?”

“How did you decide that it was time for having the first baby? Did someone put pressure on you?”

“How did your perspective of marriage change after having your first baby?”

“If you can go back in time, would you have delayed getting married until you were older? Why?”

“If you are separated, what is the cause of the separation? And what are the implications of the separation on you?”

“Would you allow your daughter to get married if she’s under the age of 18? Why?”

Group interviews with women who got married under the age of 18. The questions of the group interviews with the focal groups also focused on two stages.

**First stage: The acquaintance period and making the decision of getting married.**

For example: “Let’s talk about the acquaintance period: How did it all start? How were you introduced to your future husband?”

“What were your motivations to get married?”

“Why didn’t you delay your marriage until after the age of 18 (or until completing twelfth grade)?”

**Second stage: Implications of marriage.**

For example: “Disagreements happen between all married couples, when did your first disagreement occur? What was it about, and how did you deal with it?”

“When people face problems and difficulties in life, they sometimes ask for help from others. Did you ask for help from anybody? Who was this person? In what matters

did you ask for their help?”

“From your point of view, if you look back, were you really ready to get married at that age? What were your expectations of the people around you to do?”

“From your own point of view, what makes the experience of a child marriage a successful one? Do you know a case like that?”

Group interviews with mothers whose daughters were married under the age of 18. The questions of the group interviews with the participant mothers in the focal groups tackled two stages.

### **First stage: Motives for early marriage.**

#### **Questions included:**

“What was your motive to marry your (last) daughter before the age of 18? Why?”

“How old was her husband at that time?”

“In your opinion, what are the benefits of early marriage? Is that based on your or others’ experience?”

“In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of early marriage? Is that based on your or others’ experience?”

“How do you estimate that your under 18 years old daughter is ready for marriage and its responsibilities?”

### **Second stage: Implications of early marriage.**

#### **Questions included:**

“In your opinion, what are the implications of school dropout (if it happened) before completing high school, on your daughter?”

“In your opinion, how do you judge today your decision to marry your daughter when she was still under the age of 18? Would you have changed your mind back then, and why?”

A group interview with young men. The questions of the group interview with young men participating in the focal groups tackled two themes.

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**First Theme: Motives for early marriage.**

For example:

“What do you think is the motive for parents to marry their daughters off before the age of 18?”

“In your opinion, what are the benefits of early marriage for girls?”, “Based on your experience in your family, (if such a case happened in your family), or on others’ around you?”

“In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of girls’ early marriage?”, “Based on your experience in your family, (if such a case happened in your family), or on others’ around you?”

“In your opinion, what are the advantages of early marriage for men (for example between the ages of 18 and 21)? “Based on your experience in your family, (if such a case happened in your family), or on others’ around you?”

“How do you judge that a girl who’s under the age of 18 is ready for marriage and its responsibilities?”

**Second Theme: Implications of early marriage.**

For example:

“What are the implications of school dropout (if it happened) before finishing high school, on your sister or relative, if she gets married at an early age?”

“How do you estimate if your sister/relative is happy in her early marriage or not? (If she’s happy with herself, her children, husband, family...?)”

“If you were to marry now, would you look for a girl who’s under 18? Why?”

Individual interviews with school principals. The interviews tackled diverse questions about the school’s general environment and the phenomenon of early marriage among the girls.

For example:

“Is there a social worker at the school? What kind of problems do the girls come and seek advice for?”

“Do you know how many girls drop out of school in order to get married? Which grades have the highest rate of girls’ dropout in order to get married?”

“What are the characteristics of the girls who get married before finishing their education, in terms of their personal and educational information, their parents’ social, economic, and cultural background?”

“How does a girl’s marriage reflect on the rest of her class mates, do you have any examples?”

“Are you notified if a student is getting engaged or married? What do you do in this case? How do you try to persuade the student or her parents to repeal the idea of marriage?”

“How do you assess the role of the Ministry of Education in preventing or encouraging this phenomenon? Please explain your answer.”

“Does the parents’ committee play a role in such cases? Do you think that it should be involved in this matter and how?”

Group interview with educational consultants. As in the interview with the principals, the interview with the educational consultants was also about diverse questions regarding the general environment of the school and the phenomenon of early marriage among the girls.

For example:

“What are the characteristics of the girls who get married before finishing their education, in terms of their personal and educational information, their parents’ social, economic, and cultural background?”

“Does the school organise outreach activities, workshops or lectures for parents or students, about early marriage? Who organises these workshops? Do you consider that the school can have a role in order to prevent this phenomenon?”

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“There are students who get married and continue their education, what’s your opinion about this matter/what are its implications?”

Interview with religious and reform characters. The group interview with the religious and reform men tackled diverse questions about the phenomenon of early marriage.

For example, they were asked:

“What is your definition of early marriage? And what is your personal opinion of it?”

“On what base do parents get the legitimacy to marry their daughters at an early age?”

“Do you know what is the rate of early marriage cases (under the age of 18) in Jerusalem or in the area you live in? In your opinion, what is the average age of the couples?”

“If parents go to judiciary to register the marriage of their daughters who are under the age of 18, do you try to convince them to take their time and delay the marriage? Or do you think that there is a need for a section in the Shariaa court/church to provide advice in this case?”

“In your opinion, what are the reasons of divorce in cases of early marriage? Are they different from the reasons of divorce in a regular marriage?”

“Do you see a role for the Shariaa court/church or a need to prevent the phenomenon of early marriage? How?”

The individual interview with the ecclesiastical judge focused on the same subject and contents.

To mention that all the interviews were recorded (with the consent of all male and female participants), then they were transcribed with the help of research assistants. The research assistants faced some difficulties in the transcription process, especially with the group interviews. For example, the atmosphere of the interview with the religious and reform men was chaotic and disordered with interactions from one person to another during the dialogue and discussion. In addition, the

discussion lacked concentration, the participants tackled out-of-context matters and sometimes evaded answering specific questions. In what concerns interviews with school principals, the timing of the individual interviews was sometimes inappropriate, as they were busy dealing with school matters during the interview. They were often interrupted by the school staff (secretaries, teachers) which caused distraction when they were trying to answer our questions.

#### **8.4 Analysis method of the interviews**

The recorded interviews with the different participants (girls, mothers, young men, school principals, educational consultants, religious and reform characters) were transcribed and analysed using the Thematic Analysis method. The thematic analysis is a common method of analysis that identifies, analyses and reports patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The main subject of this study is understanding reasons/motives for early marriage, implications of early marriage, and strategies to prevent it from the participants' point of view. Therefore, these three points constituted the three themes of high significance in data analysis. More detailed themes were identified through these main themes. In case an

independent content was found, it was tackled individually. To ensure the highest credibility of this analysis strategy, the researchers implemented an analysis on a sample of interviews, each on their own, then combining their views to identify the patterns through

documentation based on evidence from interviews. The following steps were implemented in content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008):

1. Familiarising with interviews' data through attentive reading and review of the text.
2. Searching for sub-themes and associating them with the core themes through recurrent readings, contemplation and summarising of the text. If no association was found, then we tackle the sub-themes each by itself.
3. Review of sub-themes by means of discussion among the researchers.
4. Clarification by citing chosen extracts from the text. It is to mention that we left the extracts cited in this study unidentified in order to keep the confidentiality of the participants.

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## 9. Results of the Qualitative Study

Reasons for early marriage as expressed by the participant girls in the individual and the focal groups interviews:

### 1. Economic Situation and welfare status

The indicators of the economic and cultural background of most of the girls state that they come from large families, parents are uneducated, their economic situation is categorised as average or below, and most of them depend on the father's modest income only. However, none of the girls participating in the individual interviews indicated that the reason for her early marriage was the economic situation of her parents. The neglect of the participant girls to this important factor is strange, it might be spontaneous or it can be an indicator that another reason was stronger than the economic situation. We believe that there were other reasons dominating the girls' mind during the time of the interview to make them neglect the economic factor, because during the focal groups' discussion, some girls said that the reason that motivated them to marry at an early age was the economic situation of their family and their desire to have a better life. One participant said:

"I hate living in the camp, so I thought about getting married to get out of the camp, and so it was." Another girl said: "We are 8 girls in the house, my father is poor so he would marry each one of us off as soon as she finished 9th grade because he cannot provide for all of us nor pay for our education". Another participant said: "... My husband has everything: his own house, car, he even finished Tawjihi (high school).... (She doesn't know what she liked about him, maybe she was just looking to fill in the economic gap and deprivation)."

### 2. Educational Attainment

As previously mentioned, the educational attainment for 83.4% of the participants in individual and focal interviews when they met their life partners was average or above average (educational attainment for 33% of the girls was very good or excellent). Thus, we can conclude that the educational level is not a central reason for girls in deciding

to get married at an early age. Most of them simply did not have any ambitions to complete their education or other reasons made them drop out of school. One girl said that she stopped her education right after her engagement: “The day after my engagement, I left school. I didn’t want to go to school anymore”. She left out of her own will although her husband insisted and encouraged her to continue her education, but she had another vision of life: “I wanted an easy life and to spend the most time possible with my husband.” Another girl said: “My father always used to say that a girl ends up in the kitchen. You have to get married. All girls in our family get married at an early age, even my step sisters got married like that. That’s why my father made me leave school at 9th grade, although I liked going to school.” Another girl said that she was forced to leave school before 12th grade because some boys harassed her in the street. Her uncles put pressure on her father to stop her from attending school: “My uncles put pressure on my father until he made me leave school, even though I am good at school and I like it.”

### **3. Affinity and proximity:**

Some girls who participated in the individual and focal interviews mentioned that their marriage came as a result of their previous relation and proximity to their future husbands, as they were living close by. This proximity gave the girls a feeling of security and comfort assuming that they will live close to their parents after marriage and stay under their care. One girl said: “What most encouraged me to get married was that my husband was related to my sister’s husband. She is the one who talked to my parents about the proposal without even asking me. I didn’t object because I knew I would be close to my sister.” Another girl’s narrative: “My husband was my brother’s friend and he used to visit him often in our house. When he proposed, my father refused to marry me off at this early age, but I insisted and asked my brother to help me convince my parents. My mother was not against the idea and when she saw my insistence, she also tried to convince my father. I told my parents that I want this man and I am ready for marriage. With this, my parents finally agreed.” Another girl’s story:

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“My future husband was our neighbour, his home close to ours. I was motivated to get married to him because I would be living close to my mother, as if I was staying in my parents’ home.”

#### **4. Family disintegration,**

liberation from parents’ dominance and search for independence:

Family disintegration or escaping parents’ authority was one of the main factors leading to early marriage for several girls who were interviewed face to face. Some explained that the main reason that drove them to get married at an early age was escaping family disintegration, like escaping the harassments (sometimes sexual) of a step mother or a step father. One girl talked about her experience with sadness saying: “My step father controlled our lives in every way. My mother used to take us with her to her work as a cleaner in Jewish settlements. We would see inappropriate things for children, like people getting drunk, staying out late at night. Therefore, I didn’t hesitate with the first marriage opportunity I received because I wanted to escape this difficult reality I was stuck in. After my father sexually harassed me, he was arrested, and there was no one else to protect me or provide emotional comfort for me. My mother treated me violently and cruelly.” Another girl’s story: “My step mother was the reason behind my early marriage. She kept pressuring my father to marry me off, like her daughters who got married at an early age.” One girl said: “My father said I have to get married. We were living away from my mother, with our father and his wife. So I was forced to accept the marriage proposal. We were engaged for one year because I hadn’t yet reached puberty. My father kept telling my fiancé “she will eventually hit puberty”. I was married two months after my first menstruation.”

One of main reasons for marriage, among the girls interviewed, was to escape parents’ control and seek freedom and independence. They expressed that with statements like:

“Marriage means going out”, “I can do whatever I like”, “I can learn to drive, buy a car, and go out with my friends wherever I want”, “I thought when I get married, I will be

free and can go wherever I like and do whatever I want”, and “I thought marriage was all about love, caring, outings, and getting the newest mobile model in market.”

### **5. Abiding and obedience to the parents’ wish:**

The main reason to early marriage was not to abide to the parents’ wish for many of the girls mentioned in this study. On the contrary, we noticed that in many cases the parents were the ones to object to the marriage proposal against their girl’s wish. In one case, the girl said: “In our house, my mother is the breadwinner and she was against the idea of my marriage. I asked my uncle and his wife to help me convince my mother to convince my father. When my future husband turned 20, he made the Umrah , so my father felt more reassured. I took advantage of this opportunity to convince my father to approve of our marriage. I was 17 at that time. My father tried to convince me to postpone the wedding until I was in first or second year of university. Finally, I was convinced, but then another man proposed to me and my father agreed.

I immediately called the man I wanted and told him to come right away to ask for my hand in marriage, although he had proposed to me that we postpone our union until I was 20. I insisted on marrying this man and things worked out eventually although there were many difficulties. Like when the man and the men of his family came to ask for my hand in marriage, my grandfather refused their proposal, but I came out and said that I agree to marry him, and I did.” In other cases, we notice that the girl felt powerless and had no choice but to submit to her parents’ orders: “A man asked for my cousin’s hand in marriage but he changed his mind when she refused to wear the hijab (head scarf). My father talked to the man and told him that he has a daughter. He introduced us to one another and it ended up in marriage. My father was a nervous man and I was scared of him, that’s why I said yes even though I didn’t like the groom.” Another girl said: “We are eight girls and my father is poor. He would marry each one of us off after she finished 9th grade because he cannot provide for all of us or pay for our education.” Several girls said that they did not want to get married but they were pressured by their parents. Some girls suffered

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from a health problem, like leukaemia or extra weight, which could influence her potential for marriage in the future. For fear of this, parents married off their daughters when the first chance presented itself.

Whether a girl was married of her own will or she had to submit to her parents' wish, in both cases turning back was very hard. Most parents would insist that their daughters stay married and they only accepted the idea of separation after the long sufferance of their daughters. Some of the girls interviewed said that they wanted to end their relationship with their partner for various reasons (they were cheating on them, they did not get along, the men had bad habits like drug addiction or dating other girls). However, these girls were completely aware that it would be almost impossible to end their engagement especially if the act of marriage was concluded. Divorce after marriage was as impossible as calling off an engagement. One of the girls interviewed said to us: "Everything happened so quickly...I hesitated at the beginning then after the engagement and signing the marriage contract, I realized that I cannot go back because it would be impossible to call the engagement off." Another girl said: "My father would not have agreed to call the engagement off, I had to accept this marriage. But I knew that I would eventually get a divorce, because I couldn't love him." Another girl said in pain: "In our society, divorce is considered a disaster. This is way I didn't do anything despite my husband's actions. He was a drug addict. The night of our wedding, I made him swear that he would stop buying drugs, and he did. The following day, he wanted drugs and he made me go buy them because he had sworn not to do so. I was very scared and I hated myself when he dragged me to an Israeli drugs shop, I was the only women wearing the hijab. I hate that he consumes drugs and alcohol. I regret so much marrying an addict. I regret that I didn't finish my education. Separation was not easy on me."

## **6. Lack of awareness of what marriage is, its responsibilities, and incapacity to make fatal emotional decisions:**

The majority of the interviewed girls, individually or in focal groups, said that they met

their future husbands through traditional ways, such as through relatives, neighbours, the groom's mother searching for the suitable bride. Yet, some of them met their future husbands through social media like Facebook and chat programs. In all cases, they admitted that their concept of marriage and their understanding of its responsibilities was shallow and immature.

For example, one of the participants said: "I was honestly jealous from my cousin who got engaged. So I convinced my mother to intervene by convincing my father to accept the marriage proposal, especially that I was very close to my cousin, and her fiancé and the groom who proposed to me were friends too. This gave me a feeling of security."

Another lady said: "The first time I sat with the young man, I felt he was a calm person, not troublesome, and tender. I felt comfortable towards him and that's why I accepted his proposal." Another lady told her story: "I met my husband through Facebook.

We came from the same village and he knew me personally. I had met him a few times before we made acquaintance on Facebook. I wanted to marry him because we were attracted to one another. He is a good guy and reasonably religious. I was attracted to his physical appearance. So, I married him because I loved him and his feelings were mutual. Every love story ends in marriage."

When we asked the girls about the qualities they wished to find in their life partners and what are the determinants of a successful marriage, their answer were

outstandingly shallow and limited, especially those who have recently got married and at an early age. Their answers were limited to one word and were sometimes awkward, such as "He should love me and care for me", "Religious and well-mannered",

"Happiness", "I should solve my problems alone without anyone intervening", "I don't know", "Love and caring", "Trust and understanding", "I have no reason to say No", "When I am married, I can be free and go wherever I want", "Outings, picnics and restaurants". This shallowness was also evident in their description of the concept of marriage and associating it with the honeymoon, one girl said: "My friends told me that the honeymoon is so much fun. I enjoyed my honeymoon, we went to Turkey for 4 days, but it was not extraordinary as I was told", another girl said: "Honeymoon turned out to be silly and not as I expected."

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When they were asked if they understood the responsibilities of marriage, their answers proved that many of them had narrow horizons, one said with a smile: “I thought marriage was about getting a wedding gown, preparing the wedding party and living a love story. I had no idea there were responsibilities for marriage. I was in shock from marriage and its enormous responsibilities.” Another lady said: “If I knew marriage would entail this much responsibilities and duties, I would have postponed my marriage till I was 20 at the least. This way, I would have lived part of my life for myself.” Another girl said with a big sigh: “It’s hard... all the responsibilities are hard and deprived me from doing many things for myself”.

The personal backgrounds of the participant girls indicated that their self-esteem was low and their personality immature when they made the decision to get married.

The interviews affirmed this, for example one girl told us: “I am not sure if I were able to make an informed decision of getting married... But I agreed and got married.”

Another said: “I was young and unable to decide. My father took the decision for me.”

Another said: “I agreed because I was young, ignorant and not aware of the responsibilities that marriage entails. I was happy

because the groom had a Jerusalem ID and I always wanted to live in Jerusalem.”

## **7. Influence by society’s culture and others’ experiences:**

All the girls interviewed individually or within focal groups agreed that early marriage under the age of 18 is common among girls in their environments. Some of their statements were: “it is common in... (place of residence) that a girl gets married at the age of 14. I was 14 so I agreed to get engaged. If I waited until I was 20, I would have missed my chance to get married. If a girl is not married while she is still little, she would have less and limited options”. Another incentive for these girls was having classmates who were engaged or married, as well as relatives married under the age of 18 years. Some said: “There were four girls who were engaged in my class”, “After the summer vacation, before entering 10th grade, 3 girls came back to school engaged”, “I was honestly jealous from my classmates who were engaged. They were telling us about

gifts and outings. I wanted to get engaged,” “A lot of girls got engaged then dropped out of school. My friends said engagement was nice and a different life”, “My sisters got married at an early age, and now is my turn”. Girls who live in communities where early marriage is already rooted in their culture, and who are influenced by the experiences of their friends and relatives, abolished the idea of consulting the educational consultant, teacher or principal at school. They did not think of consulting any of these persons even if they were forced to get married. In most cases, the school knows about a girl’s marriage or engagement late, as declared by school principals and educational consultants (their declarations will be cited later in this study). For example, one participant said: “I wish one of the teachers or educational consultants talked to me about the importance of staying in school, even if I got married. I would have completed my education and not have wasted my life.” Another girl said: “The consultant talked to me and said do not rush yourself into marriage. You are a good student, finish your education. But I did not listen to her.”

Implications of early marriage according to the participant girls in individual and focal groups’ Interviews:

### **1. Economic and living standard:**

While investigating the personal background of the girls’ in this study, it was indicated that the economic situation of 70.8% of them was average or below average.

We noticed that this description was not accurate, because when visiting the girls in their homes to conduct the individual interviews, we found that they all live in small houses. These houses consisted of one bedroom, a small living room, one bathroom and kitchen. Their houses are either rented or they were living with their families or husbands’ families. In some cases, the husbands come from the West Bank, consequently they cannot work in West Jerusalem because they do not have an Israeli work permit. Some girls expressed their bad economic situation by statements, such as: “We did not go for a honeymoon because we did not have any money left”, “I wish I can learn to drive but we have no money,” “We hardly go out because my husband

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does not work,” and “My parents help me with the expenses of the house because my husband does not work, he has no permit.” Moreover, most of the girls did not have any vocational training, as a result, they are unemployed, which further aggravates their economic situation.

## **2. Education:**

The educational attainment of the girls who were married at an early age was not a main determinant for them to choose marriage. However, most of them did not complete their studies after marriage because of their new status as married women, according to the outcomes of the individual and focal interviews. Some girls wanted to finish their education, they even put it as a condition for their husbands before marriage. But, things changed after marriage and they never completed their studies for various reasons. For instance, some of them could not manage both the responsibilities of conjugal life and high school education, some were under the control of their husbands or their parents who refused to let them attend school. In the few cases where some girls completed their education, it was with great difficulties. Some of the statements of the girls: “After marriage, my husband stopped working. I decided to go back to school and finish Tawjihi. I had my first baby girl at that time and I found it very difficult to leave her with my mother until I came back from school at around 4 p.m. I left her alone each day for 8 hours. It was also difficult to do my homework, my chores and conjugal responsibilities. It was very tiring. I used to wait until my husband and daughter slept, then I clean the house and prepare food for the next day then study. It was exhausting but I was determined to get my high school degree.” Another girl said: “I could not reconcile between my marriage and education so I left school. Back then, I did not realise the importance of education. After marriage and becoming pregnant, I realized that I have to go back to school. What will it be like when I cannot help my son in his studies in the future! But my husband refused to let me go back to school.” Another girl said: “I tried to continue my studies after marriage, and I got assistance to help me with studies.

However, my husband's parents convinced him that I will see myself superior to him if I finish my studies, so he did not allow me to continue my education." Some girls talked about the school treatment with them after marriage: "If I knew that the school principal would not give me the chance to complete my studies, I would have delayed my marriage till after Tawjihi." Many girls from 10th grade were engaged and married during the summer vacation. When they asked the principal if they could come back to school, her answer was 'No'. However, some girls did come back but without announcing their marriage because it is prohibited. Moreover, some girls who continue their education after marriage do not feel embarrassed next to their single classmates because the marriage remains as a confidential issue between them and the school. The school also makes them vow not to talk about conjugal issues with their classmates. Other girls do feel embarrassed because their marriage hardly stays a secret in school, and they feel that other students talk about the sexual life of the married students.

### **3. Psychosocial impacts:**

As we previously mentioned, the motive for marriage for some girls was to escape their parents' cruelty and control and to seek independence and freedom. In reality, these girls escaped their parents' authority only to fall under their husband's control. Because of the age difference, most husbands treated their wives as children, took their freedom and controlled their lives.

During the individual and focal interviews, girls expressed their opinions about this matter, saying: "My husband controlled my every move, always asking where I am and what am I doing. Although during our engagement, I thought I will have more freedom with him than what I had with my family." Another girl said: "I thought marriage was freedom and independence, but now I am a bird living in a cage...every move I make is controlled and I have to justify any step I want to make." One girl confessed: "I did not enjoy my honeymoon although we went to Turkey. I did not let him touch me the first night so he had doubts that I had pre-marital relations before him. So, I had to agree to have sex with him to prove that I am still a virgin. He took

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what he wanted from me against my will". Another said: "He threatened me to marry another one (if I don't bring babies). I used a contraceptive for a while without telling him to feel at ease. Then, I told him. He did not like that and made me stop using contraceptive because he wanted to have kids."

Furthermore, some girls mentioned that they were exposed to betrayal and forms of violence (beating, cursing, yelling, rape) from their husbands. A girl said that her husband betrayed her, those were her words: "I know that my husband has other relationships and that hurts me a lot." Another girl discovered that her husband betrayed her in their honeymoon: "We spent our honeymoon while my husband was sending SMSs to his girlfriend." Another lady said: "My husband is always yelling at me. When I see that he is mad, I stay away from him." Another said: "I once threatened him with a knife. He used to force me into sexual intercourse because I did not want to (he raped me)."

The young age of the brides made it more likely for their in-laws to have control over them. For instance, one girl said: "I did not have a say about anything. They chose my wedding gown, the hairdresser, the wedding hall, everything. They just let me choose the songs."

Another mentioned: "I did not see my house nor the furniture before the wedding. I did not choose anything. His mother and sisters chose everything. Of course, I did not like that." Another said in pain: "We were not partners in the preparations, we were just guests. I used to object but I was always asked to keep quiet."

The interference of the family-in-law was not only related to the marriage preparations but also to the household and the bringing up of children. Because of the brides' young age and their lack of experience, they often had to ask for help from their mothers or their mothers-in-law. Even if they did not ask for help, it was imposed on them under the pretext that they did not know how to care for a baby or manage a house.

This increased the interference of the family-in-law in the lives of the newlyweds. One of the girls said in the interview: "I always receive criticism from my mother, my husband, my mother-in-law and my sisters-in-law."

They are not pleased with anything I do. I do not know why they wanted me for their son, and why my parents let me get married. I have to try and learn. But they do not let me do anything my way.”

Another girl said: “My mother-in-law helps me with everything although I like to try and learn by myself.” Another girl said: “I do not have freedom in my own house. Everyone interferes in everything I do; I am so tired of this.”

Another child bride said: “I wish to make decisions on my own; it is my only wish now. If they consider me so little, why did they marry me to their son!”

In many cases, early marriage can end in a divorce. Several girls said in the interviews that divorce is a much bigger pain and sufferance. Divorce makes them suffer from the pain of separation in addition to their social reputation when they are looked upon as young divorced women. According to some, the pain of separation was so severe it made them think of suicide, as one girl said: “I tried to commit suicide more than once.” Another girl said: “I am still young and I do not deserve what happened to me. I keep thinking why did this happen. Divorce caused me so much sufferance.” It is also possible that some parents impose severe restrictions on their divorced daughters. They forbid them to leave the house alone, they remain prisoners until they get married again. If the child brides decide to continue in their marriage, despite its hardships, their sufferance lingers on.

Some expressed this sufferance by statements, like: “I did not have a normal life. I bore responsibility at a very young age. I did not enjoy the best years of my life,” and “I cannot sleep at night because of a constant feeling of anxiety. My mental state is terrible.”

Furthermore, many of the girls (divorced or not) expressed their dissatisfaction from their conjugal life. They all regret wasting the best years of their lives and wish to go back in time to refuse to marry at an early age. They used statements, such as: “I am not happy in my marriage. If I can go back in time, I would not get married this soon”, “Marriage is the biggest mistake of my life,” “I lost my life in a failed marriage”. Many of them expressed their wish to not let their daughters get married before completing their high school or university education. One girl said: “I am not satisfied with my

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marriage, and I won't allow my daughter to get married before finishing her university education." These child brides address their advice to all girls to take their time before making the decision to get married, and to delay getting married until they are mature enough and ready for this big responsibility. Example of their advices: "My message to all women: every woman is a jewel, she brightens more when she invests more in herself. You can marry at any time, so do not rush into marriage. I advise you to finish your education. Education makes you shine like a jewel, and you can shine wherever you go."

#### **4. Physical and health impacts:**

Several girls mentioned during the interviews the physical and health impacts of early marriage, especially those related to pregnancy and childbirth. Many of them had repeated miscarriages. According to the doctors, the reason was that adolescents' bodies are "unready" for childbirth. One girl said to us: "I immediately got pregnant then had a miscarriage. I was pregnant four more times and each time I had a miscarriage. When I went to see a doctor, he started cursing my parents for marrying me off at this age. My body was not ready yet. I had my first menstruation two months before my wedding." Another lady said: "I had two miscarriages.

The doctor said I was too young. I was pregnant again and had two girls. I suffered a lot". One of the participants is only 23 years old and she has three children and is pregnant with the fourth: "I always feel tired and have no energy.

My mother-in-law tells me that I am lazy. I am not lazy, I am just tired. I also have Anaemia".

Mothers' motives to marry their daughters before the age of 18, as expressed in the focal groups: The outcomes of the interviews indicated that some of the motives for mothers to marry their daughters under age 18 correspond with the girls' motives for early marriage, Specifically, the low economic status of their household- one of the mothers said: "We are a family who came from Jordan. We lost everything in order to maintain the Jerusalemite ID, that's why we were living in a small house and our

economic situation was very bad.”; Escaping the cruelty and domination of the father and his family- one of the women said that she helped her daughter get married because of this reason. She said: “I encouraged my daughter to get married because her father was very strict and wouldn’t allow her to go out.” Another woman said: “My husband made my daughter live at her grandmother’s to take care of her. It was very difficult for my daughter because she didn’t want to be stuck at her grandmother’s. So when her cousin asked for her hand in marriage, we (me and her) immediately accepted, because it was the only way to get rid of the responsibility of looking after her grandmother.”; and influence by the social culture and beliefs prevalent in their environment- this was expressed using one phrase: “A girl is made for cooking even if she goes to Mars”

**In addition to these reasons, analysing the contents of the mother’s interviews resulted in the following specific reasons:**

### **1. Fear of an arranged marriage within the extended family:**

A number of mothers said that they rushed their daughters into getting married in order to eliminate any possibility for male relatives within the extended family to ask their daughters for marriage; and that is for various reasons. For example, one of the participants said: “My motive for marrying my daughter at an early age was to put an end to the endless marriage proposals from my husband’s family to my daughter. I did not want her to get married to one of them because they live in the West Bank. I didn’t want my daughter to go through the same difficulties I had because my husband has a Palestinian ID and I hold the Jerusalemite ID. Many problems happened because I refused to marry my daughter to one of her cousins, so when a man from Jerusalem proposed to her, I immediately accepted, to put an end to this matter.”

### **2. Protecting the girl’s honour and reputation due to her beauty or to some defect:**

A number of mothers were motivated to marry their daughters off at an early age because of their daughter’s beauty and self-admiration. Some girls took great care of

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their appearances which increased their mothers' concern and drive to protect them. One of the mothers expressed this fear saying: "I was in favour of marrying my daughter at 15 years old because she was very beautiful and romantic. Every time she went shopping, she got herself in trouble. Everyday people came to our house asking for her hand in marriage.. I thought a lot about marrying her off, because it's much better for her to be married than to make troubles. Even if she gets divorced it isn't an issue, it's still better than causing trouble and brining disgrace to the family."

Another woman said: "My daughter got married when she was 16.5 years old. My daughter was very beautiful and had a model-like body. She was proud of herself because everybody praised her body and looks. After completing secondary school, she went to Jerusalem to continue her high school education. However, she got into so much trouble; so I made her come back. Her uncles didn't allow her to continue school, so she stayed at home and then a man proposed to her and they got married. After two years, they got divorced. She continued her education afterwards and got married again, thank God."

Some mothers mentioned that a new procedure was endorsed by one of the municipality-affiliated schools in Jerusalem. The procedure was orienting girls towards taking care of their beauty, how to use eyeliner and so on. Consequently, girls became more concerned, sometimes obsessed, about their looks while mothers became more concerned about their daughters. On another level, some mothers' motive to marry their daughters at an early age was because they had a certain defect. One of the participant mothers in the research said: "I married my daughter off at the age of 18 because she was overweight. Every time people came to our house to see her, changed their mind because of her overweight. That is why when a man accepted her as she is and proposed to her, I accepted immediately because it could have been her only opportunity. However, my daughter didn't want to. I made a deal with her and told her to get married and I will be responsible of raising her children until she finished studying. Now I take care of her kids while she continues her school. She lives next to me."

Another woman said: “My daughter had a huge burn scar in a certain area of her body. A man who was suffering from a kidney problem proposed to her. We felt that they were convenient for one another. She got married for a month and a half, when she discovered that he was a drug addict. They were divorced.”

### **3. Fear of the girl’s delinquency regardless of her beauty or defect:**

A majority of the mothers were obsessively concerned about their girls’ propensity to delinquency because of various social determinants such as the need to travel to school or befriending girls with a negative influence. This fear led mothers to marry their daughters off at an early age to protect them from potential dangers threatening their honour and reputation. They said: “I was concerned about her because she was emotional and impulsive. The house in which girls are being raised is never trouble free.” and “The environment of our neighbourhood and its bad reputation.” “I was concerned about my daughter from the stories she told about her friends and which reflected their bad conduct.”

### **4. Limited understanding of the concept of marriage and marital maturity:**

When we asked the mothers how they estimated that their daughters were mature and ready for marriage, their answers were specified and limited to the concepts of sexual/physical maturity, strong personality, and ability to carry out household chores. They expressed their opinions on this with statements such as: “She should be mature,” “to be physically mature,” “to be mentally mature,” “She would be reasonable,” “She should be ready for house chores,” “She should be able to keep the family secrets”. They also believe that early marriage makes it easier for their daughters to adjust to their husbands’ habits and his family’s.

Implications of early marriage according to the participant mothers in the focal groups: It was concluded from the interviews conducted with mothers that they all agree on the negative impacts of early marriage on their daughters, on the educational, economic and psychosocial levels. On the education level,

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few girls were able to complete the Tawjihi after marriage. For those who did, it was only possible with the support and care of the mother and/or mother-in-law. Some mothers said these statements: “I am the one bringing up her children, because she’s studying and she lives next to me”, and “I am not going to suffer with a young daughter-in-law... I’m finally done raising my son, why should I bring a girl to bring up all over again!” or “She lost her source of power, which is her certificate. Now she can be no good, neither to herself, nor to her children”, or “The brain stops developing, or develops very slowly, after marriage, whereas the girl who continues her education, keeps her mind active”.

On the economic level, mothers mentioned that their daughters’ situation is below average or bad. Most of them do not work because they do not have any vocational rehabilitation. On the psychosocial level, the mothers confirmed their daughters’ suffering in most cases, as they fell under the authority of their husbands:

“Her husband is very suspicious and jealous; he does not let her leave the house”. Some husbands married again because they found out there is no chemistry between them and their child brides: “Now, he decided to get married again because back then he was just a teenager”. Some mothers talked about the violence of the husband: “He beats my daughter a lot. She suffered since the beginning of her marriage.” Some of the girls’ words to their mothers: “Mother, this is not the man of my dreams”.

Furthermore, many girls lack the experience to know how to deal with children, one of their mothers said: “She’s been married for 12 years, she has 3 boys and a girl but unfortunately she does not know how to treat her children, especially her eldest son. She feels he is like her big brother. She makes problems until now.”

Another negative impact of early marriage is what the mothers described as dissatisfaction of marriage and the feeling of unhappiness. This lack of security contributes to creating conjugal disagreements which could lead to divorce at an early age. Although we did not ask in this study for mothers whose daughters were eventually divorced, around a third of the participant mothers talked about their daughters’ divorce who married at an early age. They said: “Separation was a big shock

for my daughters and for me. She is still a little girl and now she has to tolerate society's stigmatised view of her because she is a divorcee." Many of the mothers expressed their deep regret for marrying their daughters off at an early age, especially after witnessing the psychosocial effects of such a marriage on their daughters. They said: "I only feel deep regret for taking part in destroying my daughter's childhood by marrying her off at an early age," or "If we can go back in time, we would not have married our daughters off very early," or "If I can go back in time, I would have let my daughter live her childhood, to play more and be a clueless teenager, so that she does not feel that marriage stole the happiness her unmarried peers feel."

**Reasons for early marriage and an overview of the school environment, as expressed by school principals and educational consultants in focal interviews:**

The outcomes of the interviews conducted with school principals and educational consultants support the chain of reasons that push girls towards early marriage and/or push parents to marry off their daughters. These reasons include:

**1) Low economic situation and the welfare status of the household:** This was expressed by statements like, "Their low economic situation," "There might be many girls in the family and their father wishes to marry them off at an early age to reduce the financial burden," "A high rate of child brides come from difficult social backgrounds.";

**2) Educational attainment:** The academic performance of the girls might be good or bad and it does not constitute a main factor that leads to early marriage, and other reasons intervenes for early marriage such as the physical appearance of the girl, whether she was extremely beautiful or lacked beauty. One of the principals said: "Girls who get married at an early age are either beautiful or not beautiful, good or bad at school, there are no specific characteristics". One educational consultant said: "What most characterizes child brides is their outer beauty. The prettier the girl, the quicker her parents marry her off, because they fear for her.";

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**3) Family disintegration or escaping parents' authority to seek freedom and independence:** They expressed this element in statements, such as: "Turbulent family situation", "The existence of family disagreements or parents' separation, living with a step father or a step mother," and "Escaping her social situation believing that in marriage she can be independent.";

**4) Protection of the girl's honour and reputation:** One educational consultant said: "Parents consider marriage a protective shield for their daughters. Once she is married, she becomes under the responsibility of her husband.";

**5) Concern about the girl's delinquency:** One educational consultant said: "Some female minors might get involved in premarital relations, which is a big concern for parents who decide to marry their daughter early to protect their honour." One of the school principals agreed on this saying: "With the popularity of social media, it is easy to be introduced to guys and fall in love. This is one of the reasons that push parents to marry off their daughters.";

**6) The influence of society's culture and beliefs, and influence of other friends' experiences:** Some principals mentioned that girls, and even mothers, tend to be jealous of one another and are influenced by the opinions of others. This leads girls to think about marriage with their mothers' encouragement. One of the principals said: "From my experience, one girl's marriage in a class could lead to several consecutive marriages simply because of the other girls' jealousy and that of their mothers'. Mothers feel like they are in a competition with whose daughter gets married first. This is the criteria of a mother's success in some communities." Another principal said: "The girls' jealousy and their mothers' arises if one of the girls in the class gets engaged. Last year, 8 stu-

dents out of 20 got engaged after one of their classmates got engaged.”;

**7) Ignorance of the real meaning of marriage and the responsibilities associated to it in addition to the inability to make fatal emotional decisions:** The school principals and educational consultants affirmed that “Girls at this age are not mature enough to handle marriage and its responsibilities”. Their decisions are often impulsive and sexually driven.

**In addition to the abovementioned reasons, principals and educational consultants suggested more reasons that contribute to early marriage:**

**1. Parents’ inability to deal with the emotional and social problems associated with adolescence:**

Some parents cannot deal with the emotional changes that their daughters go through during adolescence. Consequently, they decide to get rid of this burden by marrying them off at an early age, according to one of the educational workers.

**2. Limited communication between the school and parents:**

Parents often refrain from including the school/educational consultant in the marriage of their daughter, and the school is only informed after the marriage takes place. For example, all school principals –without exception- and most of the educational consultants, affirmed that they were not consulted or even informed of the parents’ decision to marry their daughters. The school is informed about the marriage from other students, when an invitation is sent to the principal and the teachers, or when the parents ask for permission for their daughter to be absent to prepare for the wedding. One of the school principals interviewed said: “In general, the school is not informed of the parents’ decision to marry their daughters. Then we are surprised when the parents ask for a vacation for their daughter to prepare herself for her engagement or wedding.” She added: “Even if they inform us, it would be extremely difficult to make them change their minds.” One of the educational workers said: “Some girls tell us about the marriage when it is done, as news and not as a consultation.”

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Good communication between schools and the students' parents is a very important tool that can contribute to the reduction of early marriages. Officially, the educational consultant's mission is confined to subjects such as "Academic attainment, students' relationship with one another, students' relation with their parents, students' exposure to violence or molestation". Nevertheless, some educational consultants mentioned that they try to convince the girl and her parents to call off or postpone the marriage, if they knew about it beforehand.

One educational consultant said in the interview: "I had two experiences in this matter. In the first case, I managed to convince the parents to postpone the marriage until the girl finishes the Tawjihi. They were very cooperative. In the second case, the parents rejected my interference in this matter. There are some girls who share this matter with us and ask for advice." Another educational consultant said: "One student consulted me when a man asked for her hand in marriage. She was in 10th grade. With the cooperative attitude of her parents, we managed to delay the engagement until the end of 11th grade, and the wedding took place when she completed her Tawjihi". In some cases, the parents are the ones who ask for the intervention of educational consultants at school to convince their daughters to refrain from marrying at an early age: "Some parents are against early marriage. Today, we see insistence from the students themselves. Parents come asking us to help them convince their minor daughters to change their minds and refrain from marrying until they finish school." On a personal and intellectual level, school principals and educational consultants estimate that the appropriate age for marriage is between the age when they finish high school and when they finish their university education or post-graduate vocational training. Hence, when consulted, they are keen to advise the girl and her parents to delay marriage until after high school at the least. In all cases, all school principals and consultants consider the level of their intervention very limited when it comes to the marriage of one of their students. They expressed this with a tone of despair and helplessness: "Parents consider this a very personal issue and no one has the right to interfere... this is her destiny and nothing can change their minds," said one school principal.

### 3. The limited role of the parents' committee:

All school principals affirmed the absence of an active role for the parents' committee in issues of early marriage. Parents consider this subject a personal one to be decided by the girl and her parents. There are some parents who are members of the committee and who have married their daughters at an early age. This reduces the credibility of their intervention in the prevention of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, some parents complain about the presence of married students next to their unmarried girls in the classroom. They fear that their daughters will be exposed to sensitive issues related to conjugal life from their married classmates. For example, according to a school principal: "There are side effects of having married students in the classroom. For instance, some might discuss their personal conjugal problems and other details of their conjugal life with their classmates. Some parents object about the presence of married students in the same classroom as their daughters. They do not want their girls at this age to be exposed to marital issues."

Schools are caught between this conflict of interest: a girl's right to education even if she is married, and the side-effects her presence in class could have on her classmates. The schools do not have much of a choice in the matter except to try to impose rules and conditions to regulate the presence of married students in schools.

Most principals agreed that married students have the right to continue their education while respecting certain rules and conditions. One principal said: "We have regulations in the school for the students who continue their education after marriage. These regulations stipulate that the married student should keep her married life private to herself and avoid discussing it with her classmates. We have agreements and regulations for all students, and some more for married students to teach them commitment and order." Another principal said: "There is a clear message in the school that married students are treated the same way as other students, they do not have any privileges. We also ask married students to sign a paper where she vows to commit to the school's regulations and respect attendance by not skipping school days."

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#### **4. Absence and vagueness of the role of the Ministry of Education:**

School principals and educational consultants agreed that the Ministry of Education does not have a clear policy regarding early marriage. Moreover, the Ministry not paying any attention to this phenomenon could contribute to its expansion. One of the principals said:

“The Ministry of Education monitors the grades and the academic process more than anything else.” Another principal said: “To be honest, the Ministry of Education does not have a clear policy towards preventing child marriage. The Directorate of Education has a policy that encourages married girls to re-enrol in schools. We see that this policy protects the girls’ right to education but at the same time it encourages early marriage. A married child won’t lose her right to education by getting married, this could be understood as an encouragement to this phenomenon, in one way or another.” One of the educational consultants said: “The Ministry of Education has no clear or systematic policy towards early marriage. It only focuses on the academic aspect. The absence of a role of the Ministry encourages child marriage.”

#### **5. Lack of school’s activities to empower students’ rights and prevent early marriage:**

All school principals confirmed that there are few or no activities organised in schools with the aim of promoting girls’ awareness towards marriage and liberating them from the urge to get married quickly. One school principal said: “Sometimes we tackle the issue of early marriage in the lesson of “educational guidance”. Other times, the school’s teachers talk about it.” Another said: “During the school year, we have the medical days within a common program with the social affairs department. This program is entitled “Towards a better life” and it aims to raise girls’ awareness about health issues. Within this program, they often bring up the dangers of early marriage from a health perspective.” An educational consultant said: “We conduct some enriching activities. We train students to express their feelings in proper ways. Early marriage can be interpreted as a means to compensate for a lack of emotional support.”

The absence of such activities could be due to the lack of specialised competencies or potentials. It can also be due to the state of despair among school principals and educational consultants because of the huge effect of parents' social heritage that prepares girls to get married at an early age. An educational consultant said:

"Parents need help in re-orienting their beliefs towards early marriage." Another one said: "Parents should participate in the awareness raising activities. But in schools, there is no significant participation of parents." A school principal said: "I do not think activities and workshops can contribute to preventing early marriage, because it is already rooted in the prevalent culture of the region. I feel all this work and efforts are in vain because parents' mentality will not change. They will keep convincing their daughters that they should marry after 10th grade." Some school principals and educational consultants were totally against these awareness raising activities, they said: "I am against raising awareness towards two issues: drugs and early marriage; because we should not raise the curiosity of students and make them think of these two issues. As we all know, adolescence is all about experimenting."

### **Reasons and implications of early marriage as expressed by the interviewed young men in the focal group:**

We mentioned earlier that we tried to recruit young men from varied academic and intellectual backgrounds. But in reality, we only managed to recruit a group of young men who were university students. Some of the reasons of early marriage as expressed by the participant young men converge with those reported earlier, including:

**1) Submission to the parents' wish:** In their opinion, parents present to their daughters a very positive image of marriage to convince them to accept it, such as "Your future husband will make you live a wonderful life and provide you with everything you ask for.";

**2) The economic situation:** In their words: "Most families in Jerusalem live under difficult economic conditions. The families are often composed of a big number

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of children, of both sexes. Parents cannot pay for their daughters' education, so they marry them off to reduce the burden.”;

**3) Family disintegration,** escaping parents' authority and seeking freedom and independence: According to the interviewed young men, when there is no communication, confrontation and dialogue between parents and their daughters, the girls tend to look for relations outside their family. They seek another relationship that can compensate for the lack of parental affection and make them feel they have more freedom;

**4) Protection and fear of the girl's honour and reputation:** As stated by a young man about drivers of early marriage: “Parents fear for their daughters and believe that in their husband's home, they will be protected and secure.”;

**5) Fear of a girl's delinquency:** According to one of the young men, parents' tend to marry their daughters off quickly because of “the stories they continuously hear about ethical delinquency among girls and boys, which makes them concerned about dishonouring their family.”;

**6) Ignorance of the concept of marriage and its responsibilities and inability to make fatal emotional decisions:** The interviewed young men affirmed that girls are usually motivated to get married by an impulsive immature decision. They said girls do not have strong characters at this age and they are influenced by various romantic television series, such as Turkish series that are very popular these days, and also by social media, like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, etc. Further to this, parents are concerned about their daughters' honour and reputation and they tend to quickly marry them off if they found about their little adventures;

**7) Influence by the society's culture and experiences of friends:** Young men believe that the environment surrounding the girl reinforce the idea of early marriage. Since an early age, girls always accompany their mothers to attend weddings, which enhances her interest in marriage and weddings. Moreover, having friends who got married at an early age enhances a girl's ambition for an early union.

In addition to the abovementioned reasons, the young men brought up in their interviews two more drivers that were not mentioned directly in the interviews with the girls, mothers, school principals and educational consultants. Specifically:

**1. The parents' level of strict religiosity:** Some parents tend to marry their daughters at an early age for belief that this protects her and thus respects religion. However, according to these young men who witness cases of early marriage in their families, this has nothing to do with religion but they are customs and traditions interpreted as religious acts. Moreover, these practices gain credibility when looking at experiences of parents and grandparents who were married at an early age and had successful marriages. Hence, they believe they can transfer their experience from one generation to another. According to the young men, this is considered ignorance and is unjust towards girls. They added that people who follow a conservative interpretation of Shariaa do not represent religion and they are 'ignorant' trying to impose measures that were fit in another period of time, different from the current modern time.

Success of early marriage in the generations of "their grandparents" was due to several factors that do not exist now, like women's maturity and the surrounding environment.

**2. The demographic need:** The Palestinian society in Jerusalem is under occupation which imposes measures to drive Palestinians out of the city. Therefore, some communities encourage early marriage as a means to contribute to increasing the Palestinian population in the district of Jerusalem as a means of resistance against occupation.

As to young men's motives to look for a bride under 18 years old, the interviewed young men mentioned three main motives:

1. **Lack of awareness, low academic level and influence by the social heritage;**
2. **There is a perception that girls who are married off early are easier to mould as per the desire of the patriarchal household. These girls are more likely to submit easily and be moulded according to their husbands' desires;**
3. **Psychological security for the young man, especially for men who believe the**

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**elder the girl is, the more the chances she will meet other men through her life.**

The young men interviewed did not mention any advantages of early marriage except for one case, which is if the girl was escaping difficult family conditions such as parents' divorce. They even reluctantly proposed this advantage because they said even in this case, it would be better to support and empower the girl to open other horizons for her than early marriage. According to the young men, early marriage has numerous adverse consequences on the girls, which include:

**1. Economic and educational consequences:** Girls lose their right to continue their education and potential to acquire life and vocational skills that increase their contribution to labour force and empower her social status.

**2. Psychosocial consequences:** early marriage takes away the girl's childhood and her right to live a normal life in its different phases. She can also be subject to early divorce which could lead to the deterioration of her psychosocial life.

**3. Health related consequences:** She is subject to early pregnancy, miscarriage and physical fatigue that her body is too young to bear.

In the same context, these young men considered that young males' marriage (between 18 and 21 years) is not a good idea. They believe that men at this age are not mature enough, intellectually and socially, to share their lives with girls, which will cause many conjugal problems. In addition, men at this age are not financially independent so there are two options for financial resources, either to borrow money or depend on the parents. The latter choice will contribute to their suffering from psychological burdens and an increase in conjugal problems because of possible parental interference.

All the participant young men agreed that the minimum age of marriage for girls should be 20 years, and for men 26 years of age. When asked about their personal preference and priorities when choosing their life partner, they said they think about marrying girls who have finished their university education or are in the final years of their university education. That is because they believe there will be no intellectual

bonding between a man who finished his university education and a girl who has not. Also, a man in his 20s is not yet financially stable and cannot marry a young girl because if she thinks about continuing her university education, this could cause a financial burden on her husband. Finally, they agreed that the criteria for choosing their life partner are mutual understanding and completing one another intellectually and emotionally. According to them, sharing is the basis for a successful marriage. We could conclude that intellect and education contribute to building more reasonable and responsible young men. This can help in preventing young men from considering marrying girls under the age of 18. The young men we interviewed shared with us a personal experience that can be used in the future as a means to limit early marriage for girls. The idea was about school students who participated in a summer camp for vocational training for males and females. This is how they described the experience they witnessed: "After finishing the training and returning home, one of the girls who participated in the summer camp found out that a man asked for her hand in marriage and her father wanted her to say yes and get engaged. The girl, who has just graduated from the summer camp, refused the idea completely. She asked for advice from the trainers who advised her to discuss the matter more with her parents and use dialogue. The girl was confident that it would be extremely hard to change her parents' mind. Therefore, she decided to directly contact the man who proposed to her. She explained to him that she did not want to marry at this age and that she has ambitions to finish her education and find a job. Marriage was not a priority for her now. The matter was over then."

#### **Early marriage from the point of view of religious and reform characters:**

The meeting with the religious and reform men was not easy due to their social position, knowledge in religion and reform, and language competency. Since the beginning of the meeting, a heated debate started amongst the members of the group about the idea of "considering marriage under the age of 18 an early marriage", and whether there was a doctrinal or religious need to modify this view due to the numerous failing experiences in reality.

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Nonetheless, it is noted that individuals (Muslims and Christians) with social experience and rich judicial doctrine (people working in Judiciary or heading reform councils for resolving conjugal problems before addressing Shariaa courts), support the idea of raising the legal age of marriage to 18 years and above. An employee in Shariaa Judiciary (we refrain from direct reference to him to preserve the confidentiality of information) said that he was in favour of raising the legal age of marriage to 20 years and above. According to the statistical data for this group, 4 out of 10 Muslim girls get married under age eighteen. Moreover, there are undefined rates of couples who face various problems that require the intervention of several parties and many marriages end in divorce. This situation is a key cause of concern for this group. According to this group, they not only encourage raising the legal age of marriage, they also find it necessary to raise the awareness of engaged couples about marriage and its responsibilities. This can be done through organising rehabilitation courses to prepare engaged couples for marriage. Attendance of such courses can be a pre-condition for concluding a marriage contract. This was also the opinion of an ecclesiastical judge (we also refrain from direct reference to him to ensure the confidentiality of information). He said that the phenomenon of early marriage is very limited in the Christian society. The churches' position about this matter is very clear and conclusive: it does not allow marriage under the age of 18. In some cases where the church allows an early marriage, the couple has to get the permission of the bishop and the parents' approval. The parents should also be aware of the consequences of an early marriage on their daughters. The church also adopts the principle of rehabilitation courses as a pre-condition to conclude a marriage.

On the contrary to this perspective, the other group was less involved in social reform and their approach was more traditional and typical. This group has no problem at all with girls marrying under age 18 (even if it were their daughters). In their opinion, parents have no right to prevent their daughters from experiencing conjugal life and motherhood at this age. They argue that the age of the girl is not a measurement of the success or failure of a marriage (in terms of its continuity and not ending in divorce).

There are many girls who got married under the age of 18 and had successful marriages. On the other hand, many women got married after age 18 and experienced unhappy and failed marriages. They also believe that the girls' maturity readiness to build a family and take up household and child rearing responsibilities are factors that contribute to the success of a marriage. These factors are not related directly to a girl's age. This group pointed out that few parents ask for consultation on this matter, however when they do, they usually advise them to take it slowly, to check the qualifications of the groom, and the emotional and physical readiness of the girl for marriage. They insisted that their advice is not based on their rejection of marriage under age 18 but in order to help couples make the right decision, especially if the girl does not wish to go to school or continue her education, or if her family's living and economic situation was bad. Moreover, this group considers that divorce and conjugal problems occur because of reasons that are not related to the girl's young age, but because of other reasons that can occur among couples who got married when they were older. These reasons include social media, mobile phones (was the highest rate), extra-marital relations, and parents' interference in the couple's life. This group believes there is a necessity to help engaged and married couples to be better prepared for marriage, despite their age. They are more preoccupied by the high rates of divorce, separation and family disintegration than they are by outlawing marriage under age 18. According to them, early marriage is a cultural practice based in religion and traditions.

## **10. Summary and discussion of the qualitative and quantitative findings**

The Qualitative study was essential to understanding the phenomenon of early marriage in the district of Jerusalem. The study aimed to identify the motives and reasons that drive girls and their parents towards early marriage. In addition, the study identifies the impacts of early marriage from the points of view of the girls, their mothers, school principals, educational consultants, religious and reform men.

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The study also explored the position of young men from early marriage and whether the Ministry of Education had a role in preventing this phenomenon.

Based on the analyses of individual and focal group interviews, we will summarise the results of the qualitative study. We will begin with the motives and reasons for early marriage, its impacts and consequences, and finally we will present a chain of recommendations addressed to the Palestinian Directorate of Education in particular and Jerusalemite civil society organizations in general, to end this phenomenon.

We will include, when possible, the results of the quantitative study as well. Motives and Reasons for Early Marriage Various as they are, reasons and motives for early marriage were interwoven despite the different points of view in this study. Some opinions were somewhat particular and had an impact on the understanding of the overall reasons and motives. Following is a summary of the primary forces that fuel early marriage:

**1. Low economic status:** The cultural and economic background indicators of the girls' families indicate that most of them come from large families, the mother and father are

uneducated, their economic situation categorised as average or below, and the father as the only breadwinner with his modest income. The interviews with the mothers indicated that they were motivated to betroth their daughters who were not yet 18 years for the same economic motives their daughters mentioned. The school principals and educational consultants gave the same opinion. The correlation between low economic conditions and early marriage was also present in the outcomes of other studies in different cultures (Yuskel-Kaptanog̃ & Akadli Ergocmen, 2014; Nasrullah et al., 2014).

This correlation was supported by the results of the quantitative study which affirmed the existence of a correlation (even though statistically weak) between the family's economic situation and the students' positive attitude towards early marriage.

**2. Low educational attainment:** Earlier studies indicated a correlation between a girl's low academic attainment and her tendency to marry at an early age.

In the Palestinian society, the Palestinian National Centre (2011) released a study stating that the median age at first marriage in 2010 for girls who have a university degree, was 23.7 years compared to 16.9 for girls with a secondary degree at the highest. This corresponds with our qualitative study which shows that the positive attitude of high school students towards early marriage is linked to their low academic attainment and their negative relations with their school. However, the situation was different for the girls we interviewed who were married at an early age. The level of academic attainment for 83.4% of them when they met their life partners was average and above. The results of the interviews with school principals and educational consultants also indicate that there is not a strong correlation between the girl's educational attainment and her tendency to get married early. They said that the level of academic attainment for girls who marry at an early age can be low or high. In both cases, there are other drivers of early marriage. It can be considered that drivers of early marriage can be more related to culture and family customs than to education.

**3. Affinity and proximity:** This motive was only mentioned by the girls who were interviewed within this study. They said that they were ready to marry at an early age because they knew their future husbands beforehand because they had lived close by. This made them feel more secure and comfortable assuming that they would live close to their parents and remain under their care. This can also be a result of their social upbringing that shapes their approach towards early marriage, and in this case towards accepting early marriage.

**4. Family disintegration, escaping parents' authority and seeking freedom:** Some girls who got married at an early age mentioned that they did so to escape the family disintegration they had long suffered from. Some girls escaped a stepfather who had sexually harassed them. Another reason was seeking freedom and independence, as some girls assumed that marriage was all about the freedom to make choices. The mothers interviewed agreed with this saying that they partially agreed to betroth their

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daughters off to help them escape their father's dominance and control and to live a stable conjugal life.

However, the quantitative study did not result in any correlation between the students' relation with their parents and their position towards early marriage. This can be due to the limited relational scale used in the study.

**5. Abiding and obedience to the parents' wish:** The main reason for early marriage was not to abide to the parents' wishes for many of the girls mentioned in this study. On the contrary, we noticed that in many cases the parents were the ones to object to the marriage proposal against their daughter's wishes. Despite that, some parents exerted a lot of pressure on their daughters to make them accept the marriage. Most of these girls suffered from medical problems, like a diagnosis of Leukaemia or overweight, which could affect their chances of getting married at a later stage. Some parents feared their daughter would not get a chance to get married at all because of a disease in the family. Therefore, they were ready to marry their daughters off at the first opportunity that presented itself. Whether the girl got married only to comply to her parents' wishes or by her own will, turning back was almost impossible in both cases. The parents' acceptance of separation was very limited and the girl was obliged to continue in her marriage even if she was suffering. This situation corresponds with previous studies that indicate that girls in developing societies are often raised to be obedient, caring, responsible and devoted to their marriage and motherhood (Berry et al., 2011).

**6. Lack of awareness of what marriage is, its responsibilities, and inability to make fatal emotional decisions:** Psychological literature considers adolescence the most troubled phase in a person's life (Chen & Farruggia, 2002). The qualitative study demonstrated that the girls' concept of marriage and its responsibilities as well as their decision to get married was shallow, immature and confused. For instance, when asked what qualities they were looking for in their partners, most of the girls' answers

were shallow especially among girls married recently at an early age. Their answers were also shallow when asked if they were aware of the responsibilities that marriage entails. It is also noted that the girls' self-esteem was low and their character immature when they made the decision to get married. This corresponds with the result of the quantitative study which highlights a correlation between the students' self-esteem and their position towards marriage; the lower their self-esteem, the higher their support of marriage. Moreover, school principals and educational consultants confirmed that often girls' decisions at this age are impulsive and sexually driven, in addition to their characters not being well-built during adolescence.

**7. Influence by society's culture and others' experiences:** It was clear among all the girls' interviewed that they were directly or indirectly influenced by their surrounding environment, culture, and experiences of friends or relatives.

The results of the quantitative study showed that 40% of the students questioned had at least one relative who married under age eighteen. This indicates that this practice in itself is not rejected by society on the cultural level. It also indicates that girls are often influenced by the experiences and opinions of their relatives who were married beforehand.

**8. Concern about arranged marriages within the extended family:** Some of the mothers interviewed mentioned that they rushed into marrying their daughters to eliminate any potential marriage proposal within the extended family or relatives, and that is for different reasons.

**9. Minimising the risks of delinquency and dishonouring the family:**

Several mothers said they rushed into marrying their girls because of the latter's beauty, self-admiration and increased care of their appearances. These reasons created fear for mothers over their daughters. Other mothers were concerned about some problems their girls suffered from (such as overweight, burn scars, etc.) That is why they accepted the first proposal of marriage for their daughters. Some mothers were

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obsessively concerned about their daughters' safety and feared for their delinquency. This fear originated when some girls needed to travel to reach school or fear that their daughters might befriend girls with a negative influence. The outcomes of the interviews with school principals and educational consultants affirmed these findings based on their experience and knowledge of early marriage cases. The quantitative search results were similar to these results. The young men's positive position toward early marriage was linked to cultural elements that can be the outcome of the belief that a girl might have more tendency to delinquency if she marries late. These findings are also similar in other developing societies where the puberty of girls is linked to concepts of reputation, honour and fear of ethical perversion. The solution according to those interviewed to avoid these problems was early marriage (Hervish & Feldman-Jacobs, 2011).

**10. Insufficient understanding of the concept of maturity and readiness for marriage:** Most mothers who were interviewed had insufficient understanding of the concept of maturity and readiness for marriage. When the researchers asked them how they estimated that their daughters were ready for marriage, their answers were restricted to concepts of sexual maturity, puberty, strong character, and competence of household chores. They also believed that early marriage would help their daughters to quickly adapt to their husbands' lifestyle and his family's. This misconception also exists in other studies where sexual maturity and puberty are seen as a sign of readiness for marriage in families who betroth their daughters at an early age. The assumption is that sexual maturity is a positive indicator of a girl's overall maturity: physically, sexually, and psychosocially, and therefore her readiness for marriage and motherhood (Al-Hakami & McLaughlin, 2016).

**11. Parents' inadequate comprehension of adolescence and incapability to embrace their daughters' social and emotional problems:** Parents who are incapable of dealing with their daughters' problems in this age propel them into early

marriage. This reason was exclusively mentioned by school principals and educational consultants. This reason is also linked to the insufficient understanding of parents of the concept of maturity and readiness for marriage as previously mentioned.

**12. Lack of communication between the school and parents:** Parents often hid the marriage of their daughters from the school and educational consultants. The study showed that communication with the school is very important in reducing potential cases of early marriage. Some educational consultants said that if they were told about the marriage early enough, they tried to convince the girl and her parents to call off the wedding or at least postpone it until the girl completed her education. Moreover, school principals and educational consultants believe that the appropriate age for marriage is between end of high school and end of university or vocational training. Therefore, the educational consultants in the schools have the motivation to convince parents and their daughters to delay the marriage if they were consulted in the right time. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative studies both indicate that girls rarely go to educational consultants at school to ask for advice. They also show that both male and female students have a low tendency to discuss their personal problems with educational consultants. Females are even less motivated to consult educational consultants than males.

**13. The limited role of parents' committees:** All school principals confirmed that parents' committees do not have any role in addressing early marriage. Parents consider early marriage a personal issue between parents and their daughters with which they have no right to interfere. It can be that some members of the committees have had their daughters married at an early age which makes it less likely that they take part in combating this phenomenon. Nevertheless, many parents complain of the presence of married students in the same classrooms as their daughters. They are concerned that their daughters will learn about sensitive issues related to conjugal relations from their married counterparts.

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**14. Absence and vagueness of the role of the Ministry of Education:** Both school principals and educational consultants said that the Ministry of Education does not have a clear policy to prevent early marriage. The Ministry does not show any interest in the issue of early marriage which could contribute to the increase of this phenomenon. School principals and educational consultants think that by allowing married girls to continue their school education, the Ministry is protecting their right to education, but it is simultaneously indirectly encouraging others to marry at an early age.

**15. Lack of school activities that empower girls:** All of the school principals confirmed that there are few or no activities that are organised in schools with the aim of promoting girls' awareness towards marriage and liberating them from the urge to get married quickly. The absence of such activities could be due to the lack of specialised competencies or potentials. It can also be due to the state of despair among school principals and educational consultants because of the huge effect of parents' social heritage that prepares girls to get married at an early age. Curiously enough, some school principals and educational consultants were totally against such activities for fear of raising the attention of girls toward early marriage. On another note, it is expected that students refer to educational consultants at school to provide professional advice for students and help them face difficulties in decision-making about important personal issues, such as marriage. However, the quantitative study demonstrated that teenagers prefer to ask for advice from non-official parties and they refused to address educational consultants for such issues. These results correspond with previous studies (Tatar & Milgrim, 2011, Hijazi 2014).

**16. The parents' level of strict religiosity:** some parents tend to betroth their daughters at an early age for belief that marriage protects her and thus it is a practice respecting religion. However, according to young men who have witnessed cases of early marriage in their families, this has nothing to do with religion but instead with

customs and traditions interpreted as religious. Moreover, these practices gain credibility when looking at experiences of parents and grandparents who were married at an early age and had successful marriages. Hence, they believe they can transfer their experience from one generation to another. According to the young men, this is considered ignorance and is unjust towards girls. They added that people who follow a conservative interpretation of Shariaa do not necessarily represent religion and that they are 'ignorant' trying to impose measures that were created in another period of time, different from the current modern one. Success of early marriage in the generations of "their grandparents" was due to several factors that do not exist now, like women's maturity and the surrounding environment.

**17. The demographic need:** The Palestinian society in Jerusalem is under occupation which imposes measures to drive Palestinians out of the city. Therefore, the objective of early marriage is to contribute to increasing the Palestinian population in the district of Jerusalem as a means of resistance against occupation. This finding was supported by Aweidah (2015) who said that early marriage increases in areas suffering from wars and armed conflicts.

### **Impacts and repercussions of early marriage**

The participant mothers and their daughters in the present study expressed their experience-based knowledge of the negative impacts of early marriage on the economic, educational, psychosocial, and physical levels. The participant young men were also aware of such impacts or part of them. Before thoroughly tackling the impacts of early marriage, we would like to point out some interesting points: First, both the quantitative and qualitative studies gave compatible results in regards to youth's awareness of the impacts of early marriage on girls. The results showed that youth have an average awareness of the impacts of early marriage. Results also showed that there are differences in favour of girls in 7 out of 10 statements related to their position toward the potential negative impacts on girls, from health, psychological

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and educational aspects. Male students were less comprehensive of these impacts than females. This leads to the conclusion that there is a need to increase the level of awareness of male and female students in regards to the negative impacts of early marriage on girls.

Second, the quantitative study showed that most students support marriage of girls from age 18 and above. There was no relation between the student's gender and the suggestion of the appropriate age for marriage. However, despite male student's disapproval of early marriage, they were more understanding of the phenomenon than females, especially when it comes to girls' protection from delinquency, possible harmony between the married couple, fear of dishonour, girl's ability to make a decision about marriage, and abiding to the parents' wish to marry their daughter. In the qualitative study, young men also supported marriage of girls after their 18th birthday (exactly from age 20 and upwards), while they were not tolerant at all of the idea of marriage below age 18, except in rare and socially complicated cases.

Researchers asked young men about their personal opinion and standards when choosing their life partners, they answered that they would be looking for girls who finished their university education or are in the last years. They believe that there would be no intellectual compatibility between a man who finished his university education and a girl who did not. Moreover, if they look at it from an economic aspect, a man in his twenties would not be able to pay for his young wife's education if she decides to continue her university education. They added that they would choose a person with whom they feel harmony and completeness intellectually and emotionally. It can be concluded from the qualitative study that students' education and intellect open their horizons and raise their social and personal view of life. These factors contribute to preventing young men from marrying girls who are under age eighteen.

Third, curiously, religious and reform scholars were divided into two groups. The first group was composed of men (Muslims and Christians) with social experience and rich judicial doctrine (people working in Judiciary or heading reform councils for resolving conjugal problems before addressing Shariaa courts). This group supports the idea of

raising the legal age of marriage to 18 years and above. A senior employee in Shariaa Judiciary indicated that he is in favour of raising the legal age of marriage to 20 years and above. According to the statistical data for this group, 4 out of 10 Muslim girls get married under age eighteen; this statistics corresponds with the answers of 37.9% of students in the quantitative study to the question if they had a relative married at an early age. Moreover, there is an undefined rate of couples who suffer various problems and ask for reform council's interference. Many marriages end in divorce which is a big concern for this group. According to this group, they not only encourage raising the legal age of marriage, they also find it necessary to raise the awareness of youth about marriage and its responsibilities. This can be done through organising rehabilitation courses to prepare engaged couples for marriage. These courses can become a condition to fulfil before concluding a marriage, as is the case in ecclesiastical practices. The second group was less interested in social or judicial reform. It was more typical, traditional and patriarchal with no consideration to the impacts of early marriage on girls. This group has no problem at all with girls marrying under age 18, even if it were their daughter. In the opinion of the members of this group, parents have no right to prevent their daughters from experiencing conjugal life and motherhood at this age. In their opinion, maturity and girls' readiness to build a family and take up household and child rearing responsibilities are factors that contribute to the success of a marriage. These factors are not related directly to a girl's age. Moreover, this group considers that divorce and conjugal problems occur because of reasons that are not related to the girl's young age, but because of other reasons that can occur among couples who married at a higher age. These reasons include social media, mobile phones, extra-marital relations, and parents' interference in the couple's life. This group believes there is a necessity to help engaged and married couples to be better prepared for marriage, despite their age. They are more preoccupied by the high rates of divorce, separation and family disintegration than they are by prevention of marriage under age 18. According to them, early marriage is a culture related to religion and traditions.

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It can be concluded that there is a potential to cooperate with the first group in combating early marriage. Another important step is to determine how influential the second group is and even to try using the first group to influence the second group towards changing their position and developing a culture more sensitive to female suffering in a patriarchal society.

**We will now present the negative impacts and repercussions of early marriage according to the results of the qualitative study.**

**1. Economic impacts and standards of living:** According to the study, the economic situation of the families of 70.8% of the girls was average or below. This description was not accurate, because when visiting the girls in their homes to conduct the individual interviews, we found that all of them live in small houses. These houses consisted of one bedroom, a small living room, one bathroom and kitchen. Their houses are either rented or they were living with their families or husbands' families. Moreover, most of the girls did not have a vocational training and as a result, they are unemployed, which further aggravates their economic situation. As a result, it can be confirmed that low economic standards can be a motive to early marriage. It can also be a result of it which enhances the poverty culture maintenance, as mentioned in other studies (Nasrullah et. al., 2014; Raj et al., 2014; Strat et al., 2011).

**2. Educational impacts:** The educational attainment of the girls who were married at an early age was not a main factor for them to choose marriage. However, most of them did not complete their studies after marriage because of their new status as married women. Some girls wanted to finish their education; they even put it as a condition for their husbands. But, things changed after marriage and they never completed their studies for various reasons. For instance, some of them could not manage both the responsibilities of conjugal life and high school education, some were under the control of their husbands or their parents who refused to let them attend school. In the cases where some girls finished their education, it was with great difficulty.

Moreover, some girls who are continuing their education after marriage feel embarrassed next to their single classmates because their marriage hardly stays a secret in school. They feel that other students talk about the sexual life of the married students. The mothers interviewed confirmed the negative impacts of early marriage on girls on the educational level. According to them, few girls were able to finish their Tawjihi after marriage and it took a lot of effort and support from the mother and/or mother-in-law. Other studies also confirm that a girl's early marriage results in low levels of her academic attainment. Consequently, there is less chance of her participation in the labour force and her social position becomes of a lower level as well (Raj et al., 2014).

**3. Psychosocial Impacts:** As previously stated, the motive for marriage for some girls was to escape their parents' authoritarianism and to seek independence and freedom. In reality, these girls escaped their parents' authority only to fall under their husband's control. Because of the age difference, most husbands treated their wives as children, took their freedom and controlled their lives. Furthermore, some girls mentioned that they were exposed to betrayal and violence (beating, cursing, yelling, rape) from their husbands.

The young age of the brides made it more likely for their in-laws to have control over them and make all the choices related to marriage preparation and house furnishing, for them. The control of the family-in-law was not only related to the marriage preparations but also to the household and the upbringing of children. Because of the brides' young age and their lack of experience, they often had to ask for help from their mothers or their mothers-in-law. Even if they did not ask for help, it was imposed on them under the pretext that they did not know how to care for a baby or manage a house. This increased the interference of the family-in-law in their lives.

In many cases, early marriage can end in divorce. In this study, 29.2% of the girls were divorced. Even though in this research, we did not look for mothers of daughters who are divorced, a third of the mothers interviewed said their daughters were divorced.

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Many girls said in the interviews that divorce is a much bigger pain and causes suffering. Divorce makes them suffer from the pain of separation in addition to their social reputation when they are seen as young divorced women. Many even thought about suicide.

Furthermore, many of the girls (divorced or not) expressed their dissatisfaction from their conjugal life. They all regret losing the best years of their life and wish to go back in time to refuse marrying at an early age. These girls addressed a message to all girls to take their time and delay marriage until they are physically and mentally mature. Mothers of these daughters also felt regret and sorrow for marrying their daughters before age 18. These findings correspond with the overall negative psychosocial impacts of early marriage mentioned in various other studies (Gage, 2013b, Goli et al., 2015, Raj et al., 2014; Strat et al., 2011).

**4. Physical and health impacts:** During the interviews, several girls mentioned the physical and health impacts of early marriage, especially those related to pregnancy and childbirth. Many of them had more than one miscarriage. According to the doctors, the reason was their inability to bear child because of their young age. These findings correspond with the results of other studies (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2013; Godha et al., 2013; Nasrullah et al., 2014).

**Recommendations to prevent the phenomenon of early marriage:**

The adverse consequences and fallouts of early marriage for girls require implementing a series of integrated and coordinated politicised and programmatic procedures that aim to limit the phenomenon of early marriage. Following are a number of recommendations and **treatments on different levels:**

**Recommendations for the Ministry of Education:**

We recommend that the ministry should adopt a long-term strategy to confront the phenomenon of early marriage. The strategy may include:

1. Reviewing the curriculum of all educational stages to make the necessary amendments on the subjects and concepts that encourage early marriage explicitly or implicitly.
2. Preparing an annual program of vital and innovative activities to combat the phenomenon of early marriage. It should be compulsory for all schools affiliated with ministry to apply this program.
3. Improving the quality, methods, and diversity of educational subjects to comprehend the scientific and social changes surrounding students in addition to adopting a mixed-gender educational system from an early age.
4. Ensuring the necessity to amend schools' curriculums so that they include the subjects of sex and family education. It is also important to cancel curriculums and practices that reinforce the women's reproductive role only. Instead, they should highlight women's productive, social, and political roles.
5. Ensuring the necessity that the curriculum, in all educational stages, includes the subject of "family". This subject should explain what is meant by family, the rights and duties of each family member, and how to deal with problems that arise among the family members, in addition to the foundations of a happy family.
6. Conducting compulsory rehabilitation training workshops for both male and female educational workers on the subject of early marriage. Moreover, there should be emphasis on their important role in limiting this phenomenon.
7. The ministry should tackle the issue of the low academic attainment of female students. It can start by opening up opportunities for education and vocational training and to facilitating females' admission to vocational training schools.
8. Designing programs for empowering female students and their daily life skills such as self-affirmation, communication, and decision making.
9. Providing students of both sexes with some skills that family needs, like financial management, skills of carrying out house chores such as cooking, cleaning the house, raising children, and committing to social responsibilities, etc.

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### **Recommendations dedicated for schools:**

1. Working with teachers, mentors and the educational staff and qualify them to raise the awareness of female students about the hazards of early marriage. This can be achieved through different complementary courses. In the same context, educational workers should especially be trained on the subject and how to deal with it.
2. Conducting workshops that tackle the potential health and mental implications on girls married at an early age. These workshops should be implemented either through different phases throughout the year, or in one week of intensive work.
3. Including interactive means in the educational and awareness raising activities, like hosting girls who were married at an early age to talk about their negative experience (reality simulation). This contributes to developing female students' concept of early marriage away from illusions and fantasies.
4. Using variant and innovative educational methods, including the production of short films or a piece of theatre that outsets a debate on the subject of early marriage. The spotlight of these productions should be on the responsibilities of a married woman (like the difficulty of childbearing and childcare), so they become familiar with the amount of responsibilities awaiting them after marriage.
5. Organising one week per year to raise awareness on the subject of early marriage and its implications, through expressive artworks that include contests of the best drawing, or best article, or graffiti, etc., about the adverse consequences of early marriage.
6. Implementing educational and awareness raising efforts with girls through workshops that aim to empower girls and reinforce their decision-making abilities in different aspects of life.
7. Organising activities like educational and entertaining summer camps and trips that do not incite parents' concern. These trips contribute to fill the girls' free time especially during summer, the high season of engagements and weddings. Hence, it is an opportunity for the girls to rediscover and develop themselves as well as to have other interests than marriage.

### **Recommendations and activities for parents:**

1. Educating and rallying parents' committees on the subject of early marriage.

In addition, recruiting these committees to fight this phenomenon through the implementation of awareness raising programs for parents that could be conducted by the team of educational workers within the school. They could also be conducted by experts within mass activities.

2. Producing a short documentary film that discusses the issue, its causes and effects, and to show it to the parents in schools or in community institutions.

After the screening, a discussion should be opened. However, it is vital that the discussion is managed by experts or specialised persons in the issue of early marriage, its health, psychological, social and legal repercussions.

3. Initiating debates between parents who oppose and those who support marriage under the age of 18. This method gives an opportunity for each party to display their justifications which subsequently opens the door for discussions and dialogue.

### **Recommendations for non-governmental and feminist organizations:**

1. Including programs and activities in the annual agendas of feminist and human rights organizations as well as the Forum of Combating Violence Against Women, to prevent the phenomenon of early marriage. For example, such organizations can organise an advocacy campaign to put pressure on the Palestinian Authority to pass a law to raise the age of marriage to 18 years, and to activate the penalties against anyone who violates the law.

2. Organising an annual awareness campaign in all the schools of the Jerusalem district to raise the awareness of male and female students on the dangers of early marriage.

3. Recruiting religious, reform scholars and community leaders against the phenomenon of early marriage because they constitute an important part of the society and have significant influence on the Palestinian society.

4. Educating and raising awareness among young men, because they are the real partner in the process of getting engaged and married.

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5. Increasing the number of hotlines that provide help and guidance for the girls who inquire about the subject of marriage. It is also important to publicise these lines with every possible means. The numbers of the hotlines should be distributed in schools and residential communities.

**Recommendations for the Palestinian Political Level:**

1. Endorsing the Personal Status Law which was prepared years ago but was not endorsed because of the obstruction of the legislative council. It is also essential to adopt international treaties and conventions as a reference for marriage-related issues.
2. Raising the legal age of marriage to eighteen years at the least. Legal sanctions should be prescribed against lawbreakers.
3. Extending the period of compulsory schooling to twelfth grade and taking legal measures against anyone who deprives his children of education. This measure helps delay marriage until at least age 18.
4. Instating a condition into the marriage contract, that the couple should undertake a rehabilitation course about marriage and its responsibilities before concluding their marriage contract.
5. Providing economic support for needy families can enhance economic security and thus aid in curbing early marriage. To achieve that, a strategy must be introduced to reconsider financial incentives such as small income-generating projects, providing loans, etc.
6. Offering free consultation services from the Palestinian Authority and Jerusalem based organizations for families facing problems. Family integration has a vital role in limiting early marriage, because girls think they are escaping family problems by getting married quickly.

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