

A Social Norms Perspective on Child Marriage: The General Framework¹

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1. Introduction

Child marriage² is on the decline, but it is still a widespread practice. It occurs in many different areas of the world, from Africa to the Asian subcontinent. It is a violation of human rights—more specifically, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child—and it has very harmful consequences: (1) even when the marriage is not forced, young girls are often too immature to give their well-reasoned consent to the marriage (Gaffney-Rhys, 2011; Mikhail, 2002); (2) by taking away childhood and the chance of an education, child marriage inhibits girls’ personal development and makes learning and practicing a profession extremely difficult (Amin, Diamond, Naved, & Newby, 1998; Mikhail, 2002); (3) girls risk sexual abuse and violence by their husbands (Raj, Saggurti, Lawrence, Balaiah, & Silverman, 2010); and (4) early pregnancies increase risks of disease and even death of mother or child (Mahavarkar, Madhu, & Mule, 2008; Raj, 2010; Raj & Boehmer 2013).

With an eye to abandoning it, there has been much research on child marriage, both empirical and theoretical. Scholars have developed tools to measure different aspects of child marriage and to monitor and evaluate progress in ending child marriage, and they have developed theories about the origin and persistence of this practice. While there has been substantial progress in child marriage research, we believe that the existing research suffers from three problems. First, there are too many explanations of child marriage, and it is not clear how the different determinants identified by these explanations are supposed to fit together. Second, explanations of child marriage often lack theoretical rigor. Child marriage is referred to as “culture”, a “practice”, an “institution”, a “custom”, a “convention”, a “social norm”, or a “moral” imperative, but there is no theory behind it.³ Related to this is the third problem: There

² Child marriage is a marriage in which at least one of the spouses is less than 18 years old. In most of the cases, it is the girl who is still a child. Child marriage is also more problematic for girls. Therefore, we focus on girls in this paper, although for simplicity we will still talk about child marriage.

³ For instance, in their very interesting review of programs to end child marriage, Malhotra, Warner, McGonagle, & Lee-Rife (2011) write: “efforts ... attempt to change underlying *social norms* that perpetuate the *practice* of child marriage” (p. 6, emphasis added); “parental education and community mobilization attempt to change *social norms* and forge a more supportive, less punitive environment for girls and families who are willing and ready to change

are many measurement tools available for Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) of progress in ending child marriage, but these instruments also lack rigorous theoretical backing.

In this paper, we offer a general theoretical framework that can, first, help integrate the different explanations of child marriage and, second, guide the development of measurement tools indispensable for child marriage M&E. Our theoretical framework is based on insights into how individuals make decisions. The collective practice of child marriage is ultimately a cluster of individual behaviors, so that, if we want to understand it, we have to understand why individuals behave in certain ways. One important aspect of people's behavior is that it is often influenced by what other people do and by what other people think should be done. When behavior is influenced in that manner, it is called a *social norm* (Bicchieri, 2006, 2014). We argue that a theoretical framework that incorporates a social norms perspective is a useful guide for child marriage M&E.

In the second section, we introduce a simple model that explains the behaviors of individuals—including the behaviors that sustain the practice of child marriage—by the *preferences* they have, the *options* they have to choose from, and the *beliefs* they have about these options. In the third section, we argue that collective practices like child marriage can be sustained by two kinds of preferences, namely *unconditional* and *conditional preferences*, and two kinds of beliefs, namely *nonsocial beliefs* and *social expectations*. Measuring both unconditional preferences and conditional preferences and nonsocial and social expectations allows you to determine whether a collective practice is a social norm or not. In the fourth section, we discuss different types of practices (customs, moral rules, conventions, social norms, etc.), we show why it is crucial for designing interventions to understand what type of practice child marriage is, and we conclude that child marriage M&E has to elicit the preferences and beliefs that allow us to distinguish between these practices. We also show that collective practices can be sustained by false beliefs. Because informing people about the falsity of these beliefs can contribute to ending child marriage, we argue that it is important that child marriage

the *custom* of early marriage” (p. 13, emphasis added); and “child marriage prevention programs ... aim to change deeply entrenched *social and cultural* practices” (p. 24, emphasis added). But what is the difference between a “practice”, a “custom”, and a “social norm”, and what does it mean for a practice to be “social” or “cultural”?

M&E includes measuring the things that make these beliefs false. The last section contains a conclusion.

2. A simple model: preferences, options and beliefs

Child marriage does not lack explanations. If anything, child marriage has too many explanations. Here is a list of explanations that have been given for the origin and persistence of child marriage (see for instance Jain & Kurz, 2007; Loaiza & Wong, 2012; UNICEF, 2001; Verma, Sinha, & Khanna, 2013):

1. **Conciliation:** Marriages are primarily an instrument to bring families closer together rather than to make spouses happy.
2. **Why-Educate:** Parents are too poor to pay for the girl's upbringing, and marriage means one less mouth to feed. Moreover, there are no decent schools in the neighborhood, and there are no jobs for women.
3. **Dowry:** Parents have to pay higher dowries or accept lower bride prices for older girls. Potential grooms, or their families, prefer young brides.
4. **Safeguard:** If (good) grooms are scarce, it is best to marry whenever a (good) possibility arises.
5. **Chastity:** Parents want their daughters to be chaste, and there is a risk that girls who grow older lose their virginity outside marriage, because they might have love affairs or they might be harassed. Here are some variants of the Chastity explanation:
 - **Ignorance-about-Chastity:** Parents overestimate the risk of love affairs (and harassment).
 - **Chastity-Norm:** Daughters are expected to be chaste, and the slightest suggestion of premarital sex would ruin the reputation of both daughter and parents.
 - **Ignorance-about-Chastity-Norm:** Parents overestimate the extent to which others expect them to have chaste daughters.

6. **Conformity:** All girls are getting married young. Here is a variant of the Conformity explanation:
 - **Ignorance-about-Conformity:** Parents overestimate the number of girls that are getting married young.
7. **Tradition:** Child marriage is just a “custom”, a “tradition”, part of people’s “culture”.
8. **Housewife:** People, girls included, believe girls should be good wives and mothers, and their well-being and personal development is less important.
9. **Ignorance-about-Harm:** People underestimate the harm child marriage causes.
10. **Docility:** Girls lack the capabilities to defend their own interests.
11. **Law:** There are no laws forbidding child marriage or, if there are, they are not enforced. Here is a variant of the Law explanation:
 - **Ignorance-about-Law:** The laws forbidding child marriage are not known.
12. **Juliet:** Children themselves desire love and marriage.

This is a long list of explanations. This explanatory abundance, however, does not by itself imply that the child marriage literature is confused and inconsistent. Different explanations may apply to different regions and to different times. Moreover, child marriage in one specific region at one specific time can have multiple correct explanations, because there are many factors that influence it. The items listed are thus better interpreted as partial explanations rather than grand, encompassing theories of child marriage. However, we still need an encompassing theory to develop a systematic approach to monitoring change in child marriage. But the theory needs to be sufficiently general so that it can include all the partial explanations listed.

To build such a general theoretical framework, let us start with a simple economic model of behavior and gradually add complications. According to economists, people behave in a certain way because they maximally satisfy their *preferences* given their *limited options*. For instance, the Why-Educate explanation—that further educating girls is costly and not useful given the lack of schools and jobs—assumes that parents *prefer* to have as much food, clothes and other goods as possible, but that their *options are limited* because the money they have and the opportunities to earn money are limited. Since there are no schools and no jobs for women, educating one’s daughter will not bring in money. The Dowry explanation fits the *preference-satisfaction-given-limited-options* mold too. To understand people’s behavior we thus need to

understand both people's preferences and the options they have when trying to satisfy these preferences.

Now, the preferences of parents are of course not purely *self-regarding*, as many economists would have it. Parents also care about their daughters: They want them to find a good husband, to be good wives, to have children, to be happy, etc. They want that for their daughters, not necessarily because they will get something from it. In other words, parents have *other-regarding preferences*: preferences about the well-being of others rather than their own well-being. Other-regarding preferences also play a role in explaining child marriage. According to the Safeguard explanation, if grooms are scarce and parents want their daughters to enjoy the bliss of marriage, they will marry them off when the opportunity arises. This means that parents maximally satisfy other-regarding preferences given the limited marriage options they have. Likewise, if the slightest suggestion of premarital sex would ruin the reputation of one's daughter and thus the chance for her to ever get married, it is in her own interest to be married off early, and some parents do so for the sake of their daughters—this is a variant of the Chastity-Norm explanation. Since preferences—self-regarding and other-regarding—play an important role in explaining the behavior of the parents, child marriage M&E must carefully elicit these preferences.

If parents care about the well-being of their daughters, you might wonder, why don't they take into account the immense harm child marriage may cause? Of course, parents need to make trade-offs: They don't want their daughters to be harmed, but they also want a marriage for them, and they want food on the table, etc. The fact that early marriage has harmful consequences limits the *options* parents have: They cannot have both an early marriage and avoid harm. Hence, they cannot satisfy all their preferences. However, there might be more to it. According to the Ignorance-about-Harm explanation, parents might be making the wrong trade-off because they underestimate the harm child marriage causes. In other words, parents' *beliefs* about the options are false. Since they do not know about the harmful consequences, they might think they have the option of a harmless child marriage. This complicates matters a bit, but not too much: To understand people's behavior, we need to understand not only (1) people's *preferences* and (2) the *options* they have in trying to satisfy these preferences, but also (3) the false *beliefs* they hold about their options (see Table 1). To change a practice like child marriage, you have to change

preferences, options or beliefs. For monitoring and evaluating change in child marriage, you have to measure (changes in) preferences, options and beliefs.

	Definition	Examples
Preferences	Somebody’s ranking of all possible options according to their desirability.	Preferring more money to less; preferring a happy child to an unhappy child.
Options	The set of available courses of action (with their implications) somebody can actually choose from. People’s options are limited.	Sending girls to school or trying to get them a job might not be options.
Beliefs about options	The beliefs somebody holds about the set of available courses of action or their implications.	The belief that girls have love affairs, and thus that delaying marriage while preserving virginity is not an option.

Table 1. The definitions of what preferences, options and beliefs about options are, with examples.

3. Different kinds of beliefs and preferences: the importance for social norms

The Chastity explanation is ambiguous in several ways. When talking about other-regarding preferences, we interpreted the Chastity explanation as saying that parents marry off their daughter early because they care about her well-being and are afraid that if she does not get married early, she might have love affairs and ruin her chance of a decent marriage. However, there are other versions of the Chastity explanation. Parents might not really think about their daughters’ well-being, but they might just think it would be morally bad for the daughter to have premarital sex. They might have a *moral preference* for chaste women, be it their own daughter or any other woman. This moral preference is based on the belief that women should be chaste. The latter is a *normative belief*, namely a belief about what *should* be done—and what *should not* be done.

It might get even more complicated. Perhaps parents marry off their daughters early, not because parents believe that daughters should be chaste, but because parents believe that others believe daughters should be chaste, and parents do not want to go against the normative beliefs of others. Beliefs about what others think should be done are called *normative expectations* (Bicchieri, 2006), in contrast with beliefs about what should be done, which we can then call *personal* normative beliefs, since they are personal opinions.⁴ While personal normative beliefs are first-order beliefs, normative expectations include second-order beliefs: beliefs about what other people believe, that is, “beliefs about beliefs” (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 15; 2014, Ch.1). More specifically, normative expectations include expectations about other people’s normative personal beliefs.

But there is more to normative expectations than beliefs about other people’s normative beliefs. Let us return to child marriage. Parents might have normative expectations of all sorts. They might just think others would disapprove of delaying marriage, because of the chastity issue. But parents might also expect others to punish them in all sorts of way, by gossiping about them, by socially excluding them, etc. Expectations of punishment are also normative expectations and they have an obvious impact on people’s behavior.

People rarely care only about what others *think* should be done: They also care about what other people *do* (Bicchieri & Xiao, 2009). When deciding when to marry off their daughters, parents will be influenced by when other parents are marrying off their daughters. Beliefs about the behavior of other people are called *empirical expectations* (Bicchieri, 2006). Think of it like this: That others *behave* in a certain way is something “empirical”; that others believe one *should* behave in a certain way is something “normative”. Empirical and normative expectations are both beliefs about others; we call these beliefs about others *social expectations*.

The personal belief that one should behave in a certain way is not a belief about other people—not a “social” belief. The same can be said about the (false) beliefs about the harmful consequences of early marriage. We call the latter *factual beliefs*, in contrast with both personal normative beliefs and social expectations.⁵ Like personal normative beliefs, factual beliefs are

⁴ Note that in this context the terms “beliefs” and “expectations” are synonymous.

⁵ In our terminology, factual beliefs are beliefs about “facts” or “things”, rather than about people and values. Note that factual beliefs in this sense can still be factually wrong though (see later). Note also that we do not call

“nonsocial”; like empirical expectations, factual beliefs are “non-normative”. The table below summarizes what we just said and illustrates the two dimensions according to which we can categorize beliefs: their being social or not, and their being normative or not.

	Nonsocial beliefs	Social beliefs/expectations
Non-normative beliefs	Factual beliefs	Empirical expectations
Normative beliefs	Personal normative beliefs	Normative expectations

Table 2. Classification of beliefs according to their being social or not, and their being normative or not.

	Definition	Examples
Factual beliefs	Beliefs about reality other than about people’s behavior and thought	An older girl will not find a good husband.
Personal normative beliefs	Beliefs about what one should do	I should marry my daughter as soon as she reaches puberty.
Empirical expectations	Beliefs about what people do	All my neighbors marry their daughters as soon as they reach puberty.
Normative expectations	Beliefs about what other people think one should do	My neighbors think that one should marry one’s daughter as soon as she reaches puberty.

Table 3. Different kinds of beliefs, with examples.

We will see later that, for designing programs to end harmful practices, the most important distinction is that between nonsocial beliefs and social expectations. We call people’s preferences that are conditional on social expectations *conditional preferences*, in contrast with *unconditional preferences* like self-regarding, other-regarding and moral preferences. The latter

empirical expectations “factual” beliefs, even though empirical expectations are beliefs about people’s behaviors and people’s behaviors are also facts.

are not conditional on others doing or thinking the same as you do. The concepts of conditional preferences and social expectations allow us to clearly define what a *social norm* is. Briefly, a social norm is a collective practice sustained by empirical and normative expectations and by preferences conditional on both these expectations (Bicchieri, 2006, p. 11).

This definition should be further specified in the following ways. First, not all social expectations matter for social norms. When a father's preferences about his daughter's marriage are conditional on his expectations about what others do and think, he does not care about what people do and think in other countries or far away villages. He will care about what certain people do or think, namely those belonging to his *reference group*. The reference group of the father in our example might include other fathers in his village, or the village elders, perhaps also the women. Who exactly belongs to people's reference group is an empirical issue, and we will say more on mapping reference groups later. Second, it will rarely be the case that everybody in one's reference group will behave and think in the same way. But it is enough that many people do or think in a certain way for people to be influenced. *Exactly how much conformity* is necessary to influence one's behavior is again an empirical issue, but it is easy to think of social norms as being based on expectations about at least the majority. Finally, strictly speaking, the term "social norm" refers not to people's behavior but to the rule to behave in a certain way. The following diagram summarizes what has been said.

What is a social norm?

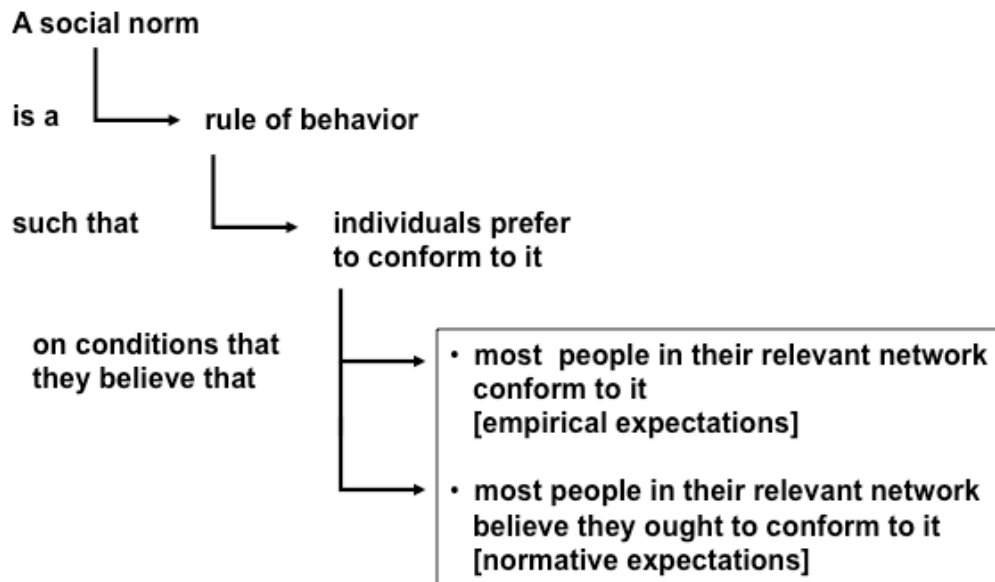


Figure 1. The definition of a social norm. Source: Bicchieri (2012).

Not everybody's preferences are conditional on their social expectations and not everybody is equally sensitive to social expectations. Sensitivity to social expectations is often due to a lack of agency or *autonomy*. Autonomy is the ability and desire to make one's own choices, to choose what one really wants, and to reflect on what one might want (Bavetta & Navarra, 2012, Ch. 3; Chirkov, Ryan, & Sheldon, 2011), rather than having others make choices for you and decide for you what you want. In short, autonomy is *self-determination* or *personal freedom*. Not all people are equally autonomous. Hence, many child marriage programs aim at empowering women (e.g., Sood, Shuaib, & Nambiar, 2007)—at increasing their level of autonomy—so that they can abandon harmful social norms and perhaps even take the lead in the collective process of change. Hence, autonomy too should be measured in child marriage M&E.

The importance of social expectations to the existence of norms indicates that behaviors as well as beliefs are interrelated. To understand certain parents' decision to marry off their daughter early, you have to know what other parents are doing and thinking. Now, parents are not the only actors that sustain child marriage. In fact, child marriage is sustained by many behaviors performed by many actors, as is illustrated in the diagram below. Monitoring progress

in ending child marriage thus requires monitoring the preferences, options and beliefs of all these different actors.

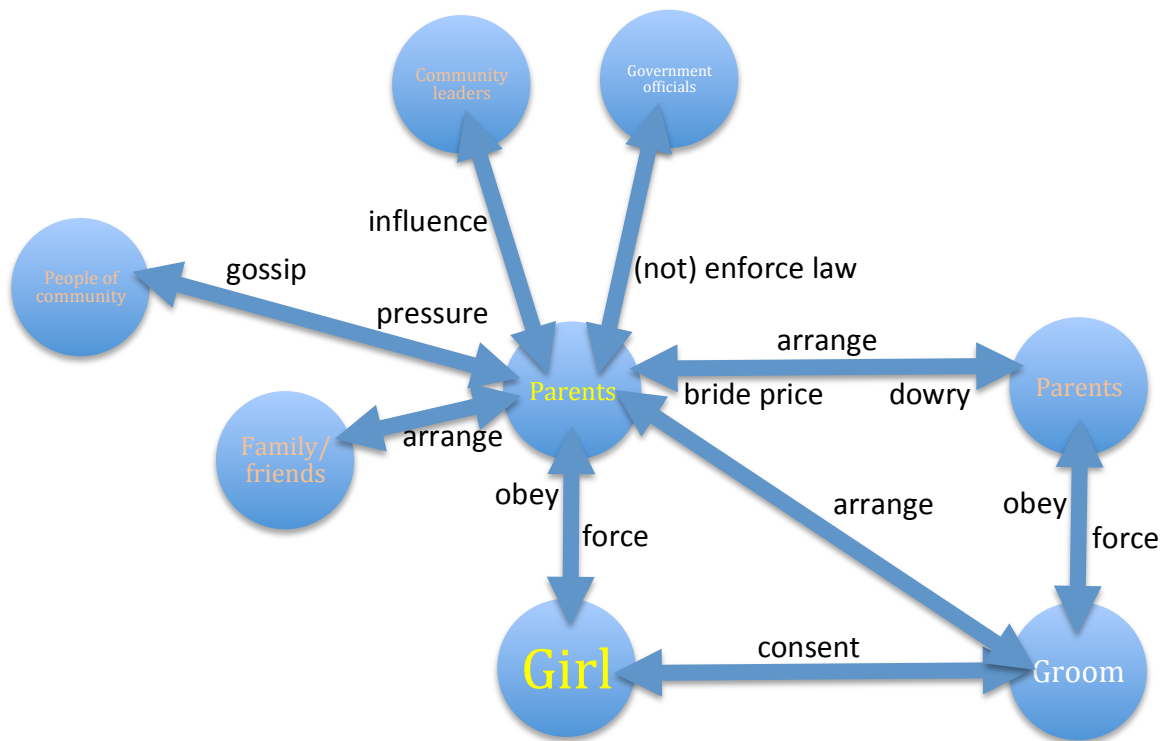


Figure 2. Different people (“actors”) doing different things (“behaviors”) that have an impact on child marriage (the “practice”). The actors in red constitute the reference group of the parents.

4. Different kinds of practices, and false beliefs

Scholars sometimes conclude too quickly from the fact that a practice is widespread that it must be a “social norm”. However, not all collective practices are social norms, as our discussion of the different explanations of child marriage should have illustrated. By merely observing a collective practice like child marriage, we do not know what is the nature of the practice, because we do not know why people endorse it.

First, as the Why-Education and Dowry explanations illustrate, the practice of child marriage could be sustained by self-regarding or other-regarding preferences, in which case we would call it a *rational response*. For instance, all parents might be just calculating that it would cost too much money to keep their daughters at home. If all parents think like that, you can

observe a homogenous collective practice that is the result of each individual calculating what best fulfills his or her interest.

Second, child marriage might be just something that is done in certain communities. The reason for it might have been long forgotten, but people still do it because that is what they have been taught. In that case, we would call child marriage a *custom*.

Third, child marriage could also be sustained by moral preferences, based on personal normative beliefs, which would make it a *moral rule*. If child marriage is due to parents holding the *normative personal belief* that women should be chaste, it is a moral rule; if child marriage is due to parents having the *normative expectation* that others hold that women should be chaste, it is a social norm.

Finally, even if child marriage would depend on social expectations, it is still possible that it is not a social norm, because it is at least theoretically possible that it would depend on empirical expectations only. Practices that depend on empirical expectations only are called *descriptive norms* (Bicchieri, 2006, 2014). Driving on the right side of the road is an example of a descriptive norm or, more specifically, a *convention*. Americans prefer to drive on the right side on the road because they expect most other people to do the same—an empirical expectation. If most others would drive on the left side, people would also prefer to drive on the left. Driving on the right side of the road is not a social norm because people's driving on the right side is not conditional on their normative expectation that others believe they should drive on the right side. People might in fact expect that others think that one should drive on the right side, but they would still drive on the right side even if they did not expect others to care: They drive on the right side because they have an empirical expectation that others do so as well, and this is a sufficient motivation, since they do not want to crash into people. Child marriage is probably not a convention like driving on the right side of the road. There are conventional aspects to child marriage: The parents of girls have to coordinate with the parents of boys (or with men) on when to marry. But there clearly are normative aspects too—think of the chastity norm: normative expectations matter too.

The following diagram summarizes what has been said: It clearly shows how we can categorize different kinds of practices based on the different kinds of preferences and beliefs that sustain them.

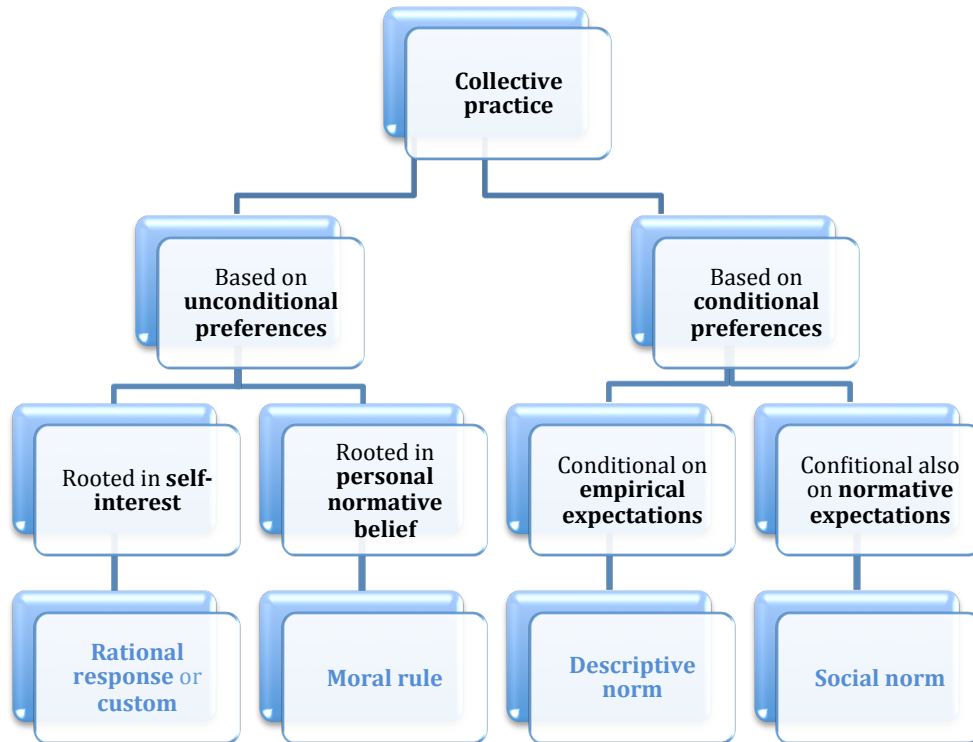


Figure 3. Categorization of collective practices based on preferences and beliefs. Adapted from Bicchieri (2012).

	Definition	Examples
Rational response	A rule that people follow because they reason it maximally satisfies their preferences	Fathers marry off their daughters young because girls are a financial burden
Custom	A rule that people follow more or less blindly but which would be abandoned if no longer in their own interest	Fathers just marry off their daughters young because it is a tradition and nobody thinks much about it.
Moral rule	A rule that people follow because they believe that it should be followed (<i>personal normative belief</i>)	Fathers believe that girls should marry young because girls should be pure and chaste.
Descriptive	A rule that people follow because	Fathers marry off their daughters young

norm	they believe that others follow it (<i>empirical expectation</i>)	because they believe other fathers also marry off their daughters young.
Social norm	A rule that people follow because they believe that others follow it (<i>empirical expectation</i>) and that others think it should be followed (<i>normative expectation</i>)	Fathers marry off their daughters young because they believe other fathers also marry off their daughters young and, moreover, they believe other fathers think that girls should marry young (because girls should be pure and chaste).

Table 4. Different kinds of collective practices, with examples.

Although the reader might feel overwhelmed by the scholarly distinctions we introduced, it is of great practical importance to know whether child marriage is a rational response, a custom, a moral rule, a descriptive norm or a social norm. If child marriage is a rational response, the incentives need to be changed—as economists know very well. If child marriage is a custom, it is fairly easily abandoned: If people realize that the reason why a certain custom was once established no longer holds at present, they will abandon it.

If child marriage is a descriptive norm or a social norm, however, things are more complicated. Then people’s preference to engage in it depends on social expectations. Since people’s behavior depends on what others do and think, they will not change their behavior unless others do so as well. This might sound as if they are trapped, since nobody will ever want to be the first one to change behavior and hence change is impossible. However, change can occur, but it must occur collectively, in a coordinated way (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014; Mackie, 1996). If everybody changes at the same time, change is possible while conditional preferences are satisfied. Hence, the entire reference group needs to participate in the change. You cannot adopt a piecemeal approach, starting with a few individuals and hoping to expand gradually.

Moreover, if a practice is a social norm rather than a descriptive norm, normative expectations will matter. To change a social norm, it is important to change normative expectations. In the case of child marriage, this might mean that one has to change not only people’s personal normative beliefs that child marriage is good but also their normative expectations that others think that child marriage is good.

Finally, whatever kind of practice child marriage is, it is possible that it is based on *false beliefs*, which opens new routes for intervention. Note that preferences cannot be false. As the Latin saying goes: *De gustibus non est disputandum*—there is no disputing about tastes. But you can dispute beliefs.⁶ From an M&E point of view, this means that it is important to measure not only beliefs but also the things that prove these beliefs right or wrong.

All sorts of beliefs related to child marriage could be false. People's factual beliefs may be false. For instance, a father's belief that an unmarried girl's integrity and purity is doomed to be damaged may be false. A father may also falsely believe that the law permits child marriage.

Similarly, people's social expectations can be false. First, their empirical expectations can be false: A father might falsely believe that almost everybody marries off his or her daughters young; this father might seriously underestimate the number of later marriages. Second, people's normative expectations can be false: A father might overestimate the number of people who believe that chastity is so important that one should marry off one's daughter young. The case of a social norm sustained by normative expectations that are actually false is a very odd one. In the very extreme case, everybody thinks that others endorse the practice but, in fact, nobody does: There is total discordance between people's normative expectations and their personal normative beliefs. Because everybody thinks he or she is the only one who privately does not endorse the practice, everybody will publicly claim to endorse the practice, hence reinforcing the social norm. The situation in which a norm persists because many people are ignorant about other people's true beliefs is called *pluralistic ignorance*.

That collective practices, be it norms or rational responses, can be based on false beliefs is important for interventions. If any of the factual beliefs people hold are false, the possibility to inform them about the truth is a powerful tool, although there is often a problem of how to do this credibly. Similarly, if social expectations are incorrect, you have a powerful tool to change the practice: You can inform people about how wrong their social expectations are.

⁶ It may be difficult to say of personal normative beliefs that they are wrong, because these beliefs do not refer to concrete facts or concrete people that we can at least in principle observe. Factual beliefs and social expectations, however, can clearly be false.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we constructed a theoretical framework that can guide Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) of progress in ending child marriage. M&E is difficult because there are so many explanations of child marriage. However, we have shown how a general framework can be built on the basis of a simple model that explains the behavior of individuals in terms of the *preferences* they have, the *options* they face and the *beliefs* about these options they hold. We have gradually complicated this model by introducing different kinds of beliefs—nonsocial and social—and different kinds of preferences—unconditional and conditional. Child marriage has proven difficult to curb, and one of the reasons is undoubtedly the fact that it is sustained by conditional preferences: preferences conditional on expectations about other people’s behaviors and thoughts. In other words, people care about what others do and think. When this is the case, we call the practice a *social norm*. Social norms require special interventions and, to monitor and evaluate these interventions, we need special measurement tools.

Let us conclude by previewing our work on applying our theoretical framework to measurement from a social norms perspective. The simplest way to elicit people’s preferences and beliefs about their options is through surveys. Fortunately, two large-scale household survey programs provide us with a wealth of data on beliefs and preferences relevant to a number of practices that have an impact on people’s health and well-being, namely (1) USAID’s Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and (2) UNICEF’s own Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). They also provide some data relevant to child marriage as a social norm. In addition to the DHS and MICS, smaller country-specific surveys have been conducted, usually as part of the M&E of a program to end child marriage (e.g., Maharjan, Karki, Shakya, & Aryal, 2012; Sood et al., 2007). These smaller surveys provide data that is even more interesting from a social norms perspective. However, there are still gaps. Our theoretical framework serves exactly to fill these gaps.

In the diagram below, we add some of the existing survey questions to the categorization shown earlier, and we also fill a gap left by these surveys. By doing that, we get a true diagnostics of collective practices:

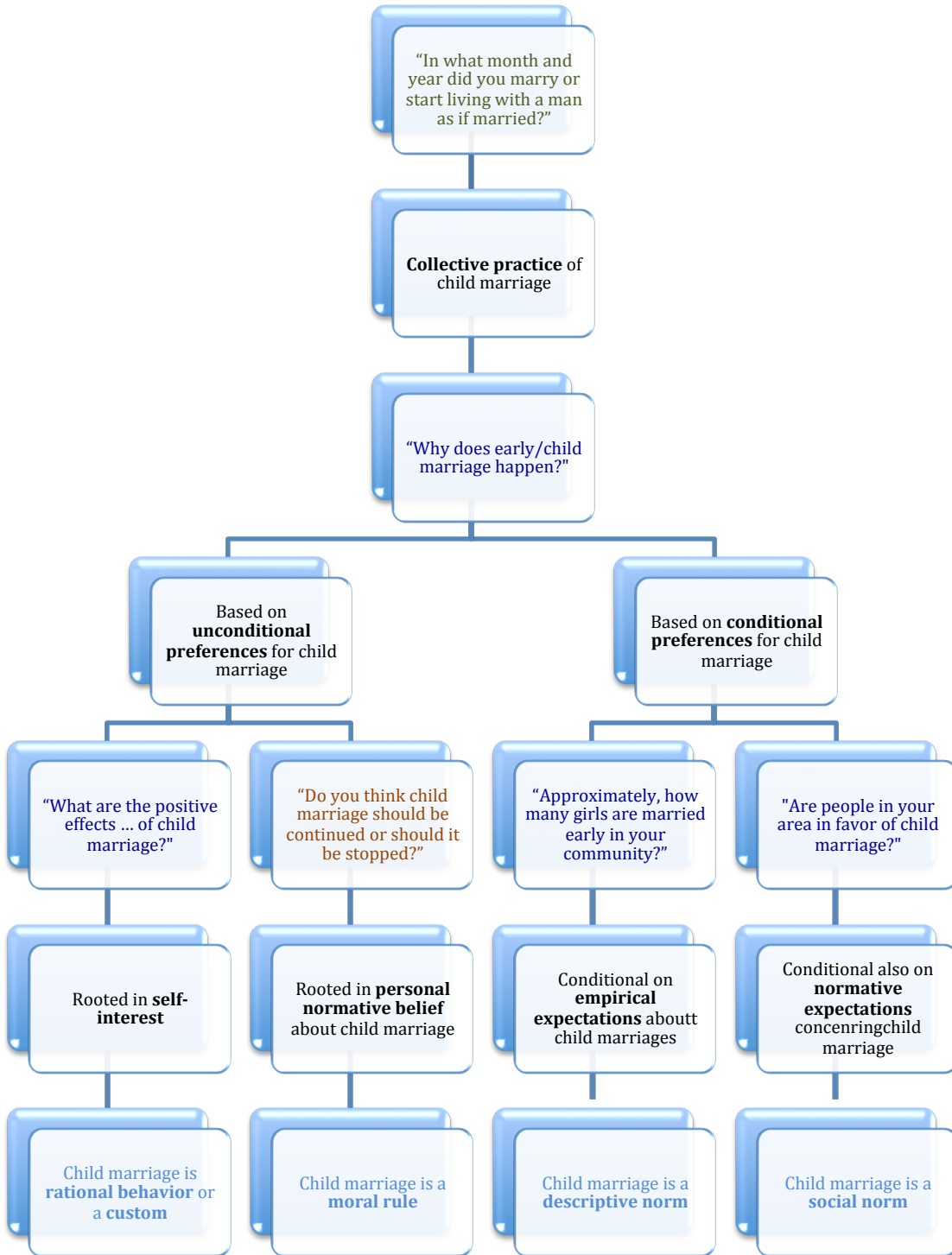


Figure 4. Diagnostics for child marriage. Based on C. Bicchieri (2012). The green question is a MICS question, the blue questions are Sood et al. (2007)'s and Maharjan et al.'s (2012) and the orange question is our addition.

Obviously, these are merely the bare bones of a diagnostics that has to be much more elaborate. A more elaborate diagnostics requires a more thorough analysis of existing surveys on child marriage from a social norms perspective. Our theoretical framework can serve to indicate gaps in the surveys and to offer suggestions on how to fill them. Finally, because child marriage is a sensitive issue, the reliability of surveys is often a problem and we need to think of ways to improve it. We also have to consider alternatives to surveys, like laboratory and field experiments. These are all issues we are working on. It is our strong conviction that theory should guide measurement, and that measurement should guide policy. In that way, the social norms perspective can make a difference for child marriage.

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