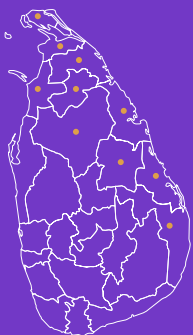


# LOST CHILDHOODS IN WAR:

## CHILD 'MARRIAGE' OR EARLY COHABITATION IN WAR AFFECTED DISTRICTS OF SRI LANKA

### MAIN FINDINGS OF THE BASELINE STUDY\*



**NORTHERN PROVINCE**  
Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaithivu, Mannar, Vavuniya

**EASTERN PROVINCE**  
Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara

**NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCE**  
Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa

### METHODOLOGY



Quantitative questionnaire to **340** victim survivors of early cohabitation/child 'marriages' from Sinhala and Tamil war affected communities



**60** indepth interviews with parties to early cohabitation/child 'marriages'



**20** interviews with stakeholders



**20** interviews with parents



Muslim early marriages were not included in the sample as **child marriages are recognized under Muslim law.**

### CHILD 'MARRIAGE' OR EARLY COHABITATION



'marriage' of a girl or boy before the age of 18 years



Informal union-child under the age of 18 lives with a partner as if married

**18**  
SRI LANKA

Minimum age of marriage under the general law for boys and girls

**12**  
MUSLIM LAW

Minimum age of marriage for Muslims is not stipulated. It is generally accepted that 12 years is the minimum age of marriage under Muslim law.

**CUSTOMARY MARRIAGES** are recognized as lawful. However they have to satisfy the essential requirements of a marriage. *Eg. capacity to marry*

### MARRIAGE BELOW THE AGE OF 15 YEARS

GIRLS ARE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO 'MARRY' OR COHABIT AT AN EARLY AGE

21%



OF GIRLS 'MARRY' OR COHABIT BELOW THE AGE OF 15

11.1%



OF BOYS 'MARRY' OR COHABIT BELOW 15

### MARRIAGE BETWEEN THE AGES 16 - 18

**78.4%**

OF GIRLS 'MARRY' OR COHABIT WITHIN THE SAME AGE GROUP

**55.5%**

OF BOYS 'MARRY' OR COHABIT BETWEEN 16-18 YEARS

IT IS MORE COMMON FOR THE GIRL TO BE UNDERAGE AT THE TIME OF 'MARRIAGE' OR COHABITATION THAN FOR THE BOY.<sup>[1]</sup>

### INCIDENCE OF CHILD 'MARRIAGE' / EARLY COHABITATION DURING THE WAR AND POST- WAR



Between 2012-2017 there was an increase from 4.4% to 8.9% in child 'marriages'.

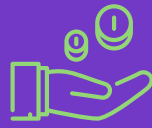
\* All numbers and percentages cited are in relation to the study's findings based on a sample of 340 cases.

## CAUSES FOR CHILD MARRIAGE\*



**55.4%**

of parties to child marriage/  
early cohabitation were  
employed in casual or  
temporary labour



**94.1%**

of the respondents earned  
below Rs. 25,000 per month



**86.5%**

were unable to support  
themselves financially



Illiteracy  
and lack of  
opportunities  
and facilities



**19.5%**

of the couples were 'living  
together' by 15 years



Deprivation  
of love and  
attention and  
peer pressure



Ignorance of  
the law

**33%** of couples  
were not aware of  
marriage laws



Lack of serious legal  
consequences

**70%** of couples did  
not face any serious legal  
repercussions for 'marrying'  
underage



Consent of  
elders in the  
community

**More than 50%**  
of the elders encouraged  
underage unions.

**69.1%** entered into  
cohabitation voluntarily

**19.7%** were forced  
by their parents

**7.4%** were forced  
by their partners



Customary laws  
and harmful  
religious practices



Gender inequality



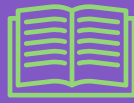
Climate of war -  
marriage seen as a form  
of protection for girls

\* All numbers and percentages cited are in relation to the study's findings based on a sample of 340 cases.

## CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD 'MARRIAGE' OR EARLY COHABITATION ON THE GIRL CHILD\*



**Separates the girl child from her family** and peers, it marginalizes her within the family and community



Diminishes her opportunities for education and social development - **95.6% discontinued their education** upon living together as husband and wife



Economically dependent on their parents or relatives- **86.5% unable to support themselves financially**



**Multiple health risks.** Eg. increased vulnerability to HIV, repeated pregnancies, low birth weight and infant mortality



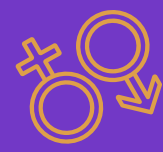
Affects their mental health



Gender based violence, including domestic violence



Separation



Sexual exploitation

## RECOMMENDATIONS



Steps should be taken to implement the current laws on marriage and statutory rape



Registration services should be made more accessible



Campaign to create awareness on child 'marriage' and its consequences to create social change



Provide training for government officers involved in child protection



Steps should be taken to improve social and cultural activities of children to encourage healthy social relationships



Provide sexual and reproductive education to children through the school curriculum to prevent early sexual relations, teenage pregnancies early cohabitations and child 'marriage'



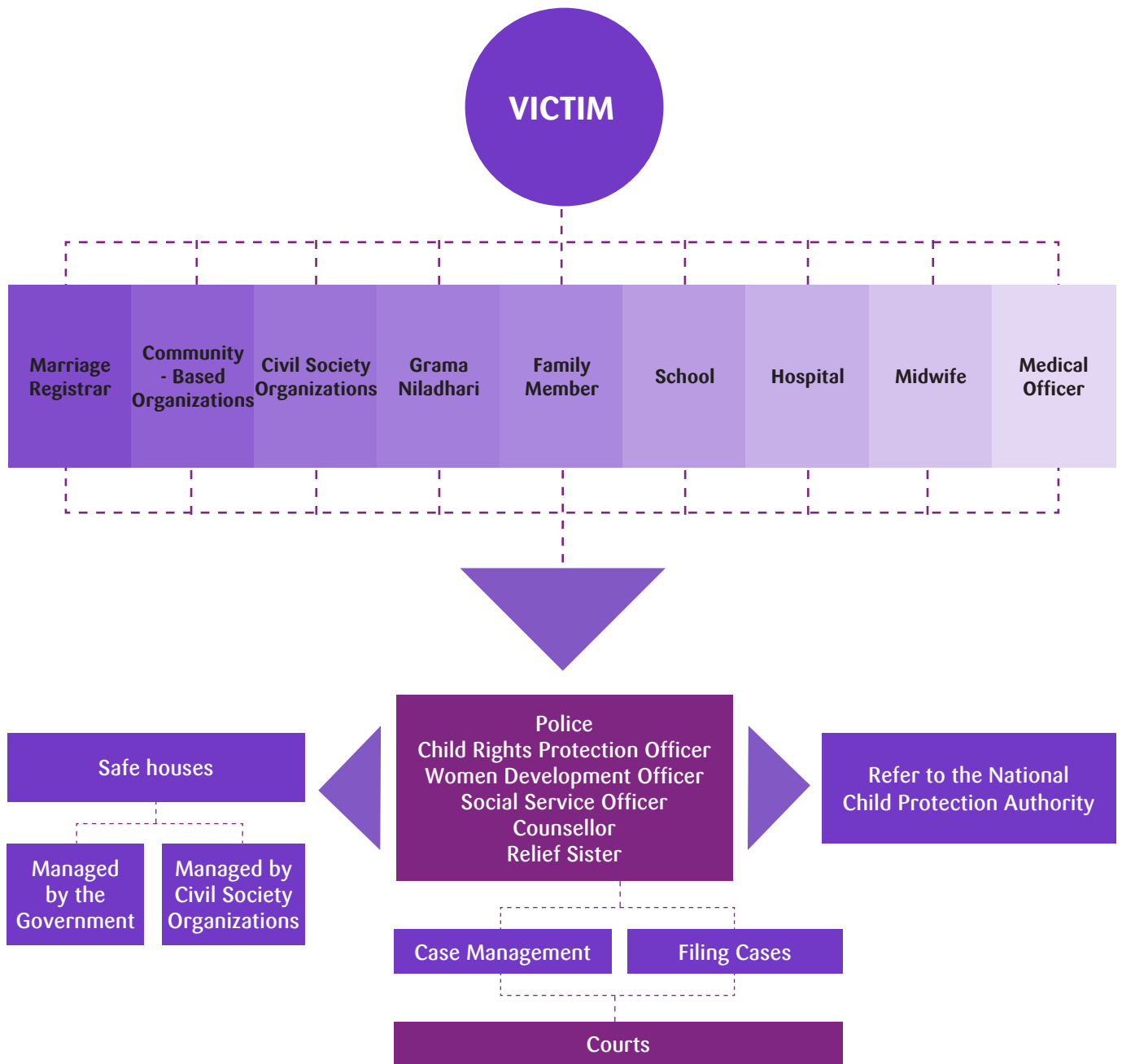
Mobile visits by those in charge of Child Development Committees and child protection can be utilized to provide advice



Counselling must be made available to couples in early cohabitation/ child 'marriage'

\* All numbers and percentages cited are in relation to the study's findings based on a sample of 340 cases.

# REFERRAL PATHWAY



**1929**

Child line Sri Lanka

**HELPLINE TO REPORT UNDERAGE MARRIAGES OR CHILD ABUSE**

Listen, Respond, Rehabilitate set up by the National Child Protection Authority.