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DREAMS

of Pakistani Children

In-depth conversations with 22 girls and 3 boys

Puja Kapai
Ravina Lalvani

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ABOUT THE ZUBIN FOUNDATION

The Zubin Mahtani Gidumal Foundation (also known as The Zubin Foundation (TZF) is a social policy think tank and charity named after Zubin Mahtani Gidumal.

Our mission as a charity is to improve the lives of marginalized residents of Hong Kong. We conduct research in the community and raise awareness both through policy recommendations and direct empowerment projects.

We are currently focusing on racial integration, the education of non-Chinese speaking children with special education needs and marginalized women and girls in the Hong Kong ethnic minority community.

As a registered charity in Hong Kong (IR 91/12344), we rely on donations from individuals, corporations and foundations to fund our work.

For more information, please visit: www.zubinfoundation.org or email info@zubinfoundation.org

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Plan International Hong Kong

Founded in 1937, Plan International is a development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls.

Plan International engages people and partners to:

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- Work with children and communities to prepare for and respond to crises and to overcome adversity.
- Support the safe and successful progression of children from birth to adulthood.

As a globally engaged organisation committed to making a lasting impact on the lives of the most vulnerable and excluded children while creating greater equality for girls, Plan International Hong Kong is most delighted to support this meaningful research initiative and join the discussion on how we might help Hong Kong Pakistani girls realise their dreams despite the constraining circumstances they face. To learn more about Plan International Hong Kong, please visit: <https://www.plan.org.hk/en/home/>

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Her research expertise lies in international human rights law, in particular, equality law and minority rights. She has led numerous research projects and served as a consultant on various aspects of social justice, including the rights of migrant workers, ethnic minority children, children with special education needs and domestic violence. She has published widely on these themes, including a comparative study on children’s rights education funded by the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF, a study on the experiences and help seeking behaviours of ethnic minorities and immigrant victims of domestic violence and a comprehensive report on the Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong 1997-2014 (which was presented to the then Chief Secretary and now Chief Executive of the HKSAR Administration, Mrs. Carrie Lam).

She has regularly appeared before the Legislative Council to present on issues impacting ethnic minorities, women and children as well as before the United Nations treaty bodies, including the Human Rights Committee and the Children’s Rights Committee in 2013 and the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2018 in their hearings on Hong Kong. Puja served as Expert Consultant to the Due Diligence Project on Violence Against Women for the Asia Pacific Region, which was presented to the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. She presently serves as a founding member of the Every Woman Every Where initiative at the Carr Centre for Human Rights, Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She is also on the board of various NGOs related to her fields of expertise.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 by-census¹ puts Hong Kong's ethnic minority population at 8%, of which 4.4% are foreign domestic workers. Of the remaining 3.6%, 14.5% of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are of South Asian descent. Excluding the larger Asian, non-Chinese ethnic minority groups such as Indians (6.2%) and Nepalese (4.4%), Pakistanis account for 3.2% of the total percentage of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

Significantly, ethnic minority youth are the fastest growing population group in Hong Kong, representing a substantial resource and talent pool for the role that Hong Kong is destined to play as Asia's international city in service of China's One Belt One Road policy agenda. Often misperceived as outsiders, an increasing number of ethnic minorities continue to be born in Hong Kong with nearly 37.4% of Pakistani children, 36% of Nepalese children and 18.6% of Indian children being born here, an increase of 120% since 2006. Moreover, over half of Pakistanis (54.6%) and Nepalese (51.1%) have resided in Hong Kong for more than 10 years.

Hong Kong's ethnic minority population is significantly younger than the general population. Hong Kong's ethnic minority community has a median age of around 36 years, 7 years less than the general population's median age of 43. The median age of Pakistanis is the lowest among all ethnic groups at just 25.8 years. Nearly a third of Pakistanis in Hong Kong (29.4%) are aged under 15 and nearly two thirds (63.5%) are aged 34 or below whereas just over half of the Nepalese (51.5%) and Indian (51.8%) populations are under 34, while 16% of both, Nepalese and Indians, are under 15.

In terms of sex ratios however, there is a significant imbalance of males to females among ethnic minority groups once we exclude the foreign domestic worker population, which is largely female. Among Asian ethnic groups other than Chinese, the disparities are greatest for Pakistanis and Nepalese with sex ratios of 1 348 and 1 074 respectively (males for every 1000 females), compared with 925 for the general population (males to every 1000 females).

Further disaggregated by age and gender, there is a high sex ratio in the age group under 15 with males significantly outnumbering females. Among Nepalese, the sex ratio for this group is 1303 whereas among Pakistanis, it is 1047. For the age group 15-24, the sex ratio is 1475 within the Pakistani population, and 1097 among the Nepalese.

Nearly half of Hong Kong's ethnic minorities reported speaking English at home while nearly a third reported speaking Cantonese as their home language. Indeed, in 2016, the majority (86.1%) of ethnic minority children aged 5-14 were able to read English while nearly two thirds were able to read Chinese. The proportion of those children who were correspondingly able to write Chinese and English were, however, slightly lower. 71.5% of Pakistani children were able to read Chinese.

¹ All figures are from the 2016 Thematic Report on Ethnic Minorities, *Hong Kong Government Census and Statistics Bureau*, <https://www.statistics.gov.hk/pub/B11201002016XXXXB0100.pdf>.

However, as *The Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong 1997-2014 Report*² (“*The Status of EM Report*”, commissioned by The Zubin Foundation and authored by Puja Kapai, of the Centre for Comparative and Public Law, Faculty of Law at the University of Hong Kong) highlights, equal access to opportunities for Hong Kong’s ethnic minority population remains elusive due to the numerous barriers and systemic gaps, which preclude this population group’s rise to its full potential. During the formative years of pre-school, primary and secondary schooling, ethnic minority youth find their dreams constrained as a result of unequal treatment, discrimination and a lack of equality of opportunities to succeed and excel. This, in turn, goes on to have deleterious effects on their prospects for a bright future in Hong Kong and in particular, leaves them vulnerable not only to many of the challenges faced by other HongKongers in general, but a whole slew of others that are brought on by the vulnerability and exclusion that dominates their lives in their formative years. Exacerbated by exclusion from critical spaces such as certain schools, fields of employment and living and social spaces, to foster and nurture their growth as young HongKongers, Hong Kong’s ethnic minority youth find themselves living life at the margins of society.

While the challenges faced by these communities were understood to be entrenched, the interrelatedness between different domains of discrimination and inequality, their systemic nature and their impact on poverty levels of ethnic minorities have only become more apparent recently in the years since the launch of the *Status of EM Report*. In general, the findings revealed that educational and socioeconomic disadvantages are closely interlinked, leading many of these patterns of poverty to manifest inter-generationally, locking ethnic minority youth into a cycle of multiple disadvantages.

The *Status of EM Report* highlighted two population groups warranting urgent attention and more nuanced treatment: the Pakistani and Nepalese ethnic groups. The circumstances of both groups in terms of education, labour force participation, poverty levels and family, health and social welfare, relative to the situation of other ethnic minorities, demonstrated an inextricable relationship between their life circumstances, and the distinct cultural contexts within which these particular communities are embedded.

Disaggregated by age, Pakistani (4.4%) and Nepalese (4.1%) children aged 3-5 tend to be less likely to be in school. Overall, 15.9% of Pakistanis had completed only primary education while just over a fifth (22.4%) have completed lower secondary (totalling 38.3%, nearly two fifths of the population). Among the Nepalese community, the corresponding figures are 5.7% and 17.4% (totalling 23.1%, nearly a quarter of its population). Moreover, while a majority of children aged 6-11 tend to be in school, ethnic minority males were less likely to be in school in upper secondary among the Pakistani and Nepalese population groups. This gap is reflected in the relatively low proportion of Pakistani (20.5%) and Nepalese (15%) youth aged 15-24 who have completed post-secondary education. However, at this level, a gender differential is also apparent with the proportion of male ethnic minorities aged 15 and over who had attended post-secondary education (56.8%) being twice as high as their female counterparts at 28.8%.

² Puja Kapai, *The Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong, 1997 to 2014*, The Zubin Foundation and Centre for Comparative and Public Law, Faculty of Law, The University of Hong Kong, September 2015, available at <http://www.law.hku.hk/ccpl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Research/Human%20Rights/StatusofEMComplete.zip>.

Because education is a multiplier right, the consequences of these patterns are far-reaching and intergenerational. Education enables the enjoyment of a range of other human rights, enhancing the chances of a person living a life of equal dignity. Given the startling global statistics reflecting that for two thirds of the world's illiterate population are women and that there are 4 million more girls than boys out of school.³ The impact of education of girls is profound in that it can directly affect their quality of life, challenges they encounter and how or whether girls are in a position to effectively respond to these challenges. Various studies have linked the education of girls to their age of marriage⁴, age at which they give birth to their first child, maternal mortality rates⁵ and their prospects for employment and poverty.⁶

Apart from the positive and life altering effects education can have on the girl child herself in terms of her own future, education is further linked to the future of her children.⁷ Literacy increases a woman's decision-making power, provides exposure to information on infant and women's health, and enhances her capability to access healthcare services. A literate mother is also usually more involved in the education of her children, reflecting greater concern for the development of her children's cognitive and language skills. She is also significantly less likely to participate in practices which discriminate against daughters, thereby enhancing the chances of daughters achieving higher levels of education. Literate mothers help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Also, consistent with other research, our findings show that despite "a small number of mothers who had attained secondary education and an even smaller number of whom were self-employed, providing tailoring services from their homes in Hong Kong ... [t]his small percentage of working mothers seemed to foster a slightly more open-minded context for a growth mindset towards female employment in the Pakistani community."⁸

Analysing the pre-intervention poverty situation of ethnic minorities by ethnic groups shows that among the 49,400 ethnic minority poor in 2016, South Asians accounted for 40.6% while

³ UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 'Girls' education - the facts'(2013) <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/girls-factsheet-en.pdf>.

⁴ Girls Not Brides has in the course of its work documented that girls without an education are three times more likely to marry by the age of 18 compared to girls with a secondary or higher education. See <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/education/> and Girls Not Brides, *Lessons Learned from Selected National Initiatives to End Child Marriage*, July 2015.

⁵ UNESCO reports that if all women completed primary education, there would be 15% fewer child deaths, whereas if all women completed secondary education, child deaths would be halved, saving three million lives overall. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death for girls aged 15-19 years in developing countries. Stillbirths and newborn deaths are 50% higher among mothers under the age of 20 than in woman who get pregnant in their 20s. See UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 'Girls' education - the facts'(2013) <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/girls-factsheet-en.pdf> and https://www.unicef.org/media/media_68114.html.

⁶ See World Health Organisation, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>, discussing economic and social consequences of early childhood marriage, which show that lower educational attainment results in lower levels of skills and opportunities for employment, child marriage reduces future earnings of girls by an estimated 9% by means of inducing poverty.

⁷ Mushtaq et al., (2016), Impact of Mothers' Literacy on the Morality, Education, Health and Social Development of their Children, Vol. 19(1) *Journal of Educational Research*, 61-72.

⁸ *Infra*, p. 40.

Pakistanis constituted about one-fifth (20.2%) of Hong Kong's poor.⁹ This puts the poverty rate for South Asians at 25.7% (one in four South Asians are living in poverty). This is down from 26.4% in 2011 but is accounted for primarily by the slight decline in poverty rate among Pakistanis, who continue to experience more than double the rate of poverty at 56.5% (albeit lower than in 2011 at 59.2%), before policy intervention. Thus, slightly more than one in two Pakistanis are living in poverty.¹⁰ The poverty rates for South Asian families with children is two and a half times (29.1%) as much as that of families without children (12.1%).¹¹ The poverty rate post-intervention remains highest among Pakistanis (56.5%), followed by Indonesians (23.0%), Thais (21.4%), Nepalese (13.6%), Filipinos (13.3%) and Indians (9.7%). Specifically, South Asians account for half of the total ethnic minority poor in Hong Kong while the post-intervention poverty rate for South Asian ethnic minority poor was 22.6% in 2011.

Relative to the overall poverty situation in Hong Kong, there are certain predictors of high poverty rates and distinguishing features of the poverty situation within the ethnic minority population. Firstly, 64.7% of ethnic minority poor were residing in working households. Among Pakistanis and Nepalese, the rate was overwhelmingly high at 80%. This compared with 50.3% of the overall poor population in Hong Kong. Second, more than half (50.5%) of ethnic minority poor households comprised of four or more members. Among poor South Asian households, this was true for 70% of the households while for poor Pakistani households, it was significantly higher at 85.9%. This compared with 34.4% households having more than four members among the overall poor population in Hong Kong.¹²

Education and Chinese language proficiency have been identified as the root causes of these circumstances in the past.¹³ This is borne out by the relatively higher rate of unemployment among Pakistanis and Nepalese as well as poor educational attainment and low skills set. Continuing educational challenges have mired the prospects for higher education among South Asian youth, only 10% of whom, aged 18-22, were pursuing degree level education, less than half of the rate for the general population (23%).¹⁴ The path for this is set much earlier in the lives of Pakistani youth. For example, 15.6% Pakistani youth were more likely to discontinue their education in upper secondary at around age 15.¹⁵ Comparing Pakistani student numbers entering school in Form 1 with those graduating from Form 6, the number halved.¹⁶ Only 20% of Pakistani students go on to attain post-secondary education, significantly lower than attainment

⁹ Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016, available at, <https://www.povertyrelief.gov.hk/pdf/Hong%20Kong%20Poverty%20Situation%20Report%20on%20Ethnic%20Minorities%202016.pdf>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* All figures represent the pre-intervention rates of poverty, unless otherwise stated.

¹¹ <https://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1617fs08-poverty-of-ethnic-minorities-in-hong-kong-20170608-e.pdf>.

¹² *Ibid.*, Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016.

¹³ *Ibid.* See also, Oxfam, *Hong Kong Inequality Report* (2018), available at, https://www.oxfam.org.hk/content/98/content_38422en.pdf.

¹⁴ See generally, Puja Kapai, *Status of EM Report*, especially Chapter 3 on Education of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong.

¹⁵ Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016, available at, <https://www.povertyrelief.gov.hk/pdf/Hong%20Kong%20Poverty%20Situation%20Report%20on%20Ethnic%20Minorities%202016.pdf>

¹⁶ Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016, available at,

levels among other ethnic groups.¹⁷ However, direct or indirect racial discrimination is also a prevalent factor as revealed by studies focusing on barriers to equal opportunities for employment among ethnic minorities.¹⁸

A Hong Kong Unison study in 2016¹⁹ found indirect racial discrimination on the basis of language given that 51% of the job vacancies advertised specified written Chinese language proficiency as a requirement of the job explicitly while 97% required spoken Cantonese. This was the case even in employment contexts where it was difficult to identify it as a genuine occupational requirement.²⁰ Another study foreshadows the prevalence of direct racial discrimination in the employment sector with 27% of ethnic minority respondents indicating that they faced rejection from an employment opportunity upon disclosing their ethnicity while 18% of them reported being rejected on account of their lack of proficiency in reading and writing Chinese (as opposed to their Chinese speaking and listening skills).²¹

These circumstances entrench ethnic minorities in conditions of poverty, which are often perpetuated inter-generation. For Pakistani households, given the larger household sizes and the generally male working population, for the working poor households (comprising a majority of the Pakistani households), one person is shouldering the burden of providing for 3.5 persons on average.²²

Disaggregating some of the data by gender and ethnicity, also alarming is that Pakistani women only comprised 19.0% of the labour force. Of those that were engaged in employment, 30.9% of them were operating at professional or associate professional levels – two and a half times more than the number for Pakistani men (70.9%). The gender disparity in employment significantly impacts the overall labour force participation rate among Pakistanis, at 50.1%, the lowest among all ethnic groups. In particular, the participation of Pakistani women in the workforce declines as their age increases. Just 810 Pakistani women are in the workforce compared with thousands among Pakistani males and their other Asian non-Chinese counterparts. This is likely the result of the fact that a significant number of Pakistani women are housewives, which may, in turn be

¹⁷ Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016, available at, <https://www.povertyrelief.gov.hk/pdf/Hong%20Kong%20Poverty%20Situation%20Report%20on%20Ethnic%20Minorities%202016.pdf>

¹⁸ See generally, Puja Kapai, *Status of EM Report*.

¹⁹ Hong Kong Unison, Chinese Language Requirements in the Hong Kong Job Market, May 2016, available at, http://www.unison.org.hk/DocumentDownload/Researches/R201605%20Job%20Ad%20Eective%20Summary_EN_G.pdf. See also, Hong Kong Unison, ‘Submissions to the Legislative Council Panel on Public Service on the Employment of Ethnic Minorities in the Civil Service, LC Paper No. CB (4)563/12-13(01)’ (Legislative Council, 15 April 2013), available at, <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr12-13/english/panels/ps/papers/ps0415cb4-563-1-e.pdf>.

²⁰ The Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 609, Laws of Hong Kong) (“RDO”) permits a defence of genuine occupational requirement in instances, where, in the absence of such a defence, the conduct would amount to indirect racial discrimination. Overall, however, the RDO is rather weak in terms of its protection against language-based discrimination due to the exemptions provided to educational establishments, for example, which excludes a specific medium of instruction from being subjected to scrutiny under this law. There are numerous other weaknesses in the law which have been extensively documented in other literature. See, Puja Kapai, *The Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong 1997-2014 Report*, Chapter on Equality and Non-Discrimination, available at,

²¹ See *The Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong 1997-2014*, Chapter 3: The Education of Ethnic Minorities, p.10, Puja Kapai, 2015

²² *Ibid.*, Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016.

influenced by a number of factors, some of which are reaffirmed by the findings of this research project. In the age groups 15-24 and 25-34 around a quarter of Pakistani women are engaged in employment. However, this number drops significantly to just half of that at 12.2% once marriage and children enter their lives. The situation differs however, for the Nepalese community, who have an overall labour force participation rate of 75.2%, while 63.2% of Nepalese women were active in the workforce.

These circumstances necessarily have significant implications for ethnic minority women and their general life circumstances, for example, their financial independence²³, wellbeing and welfare needs are likely determined by accordingly.

For this reason, it is imperative to consider interventions which recognise these patterns, and disrupt this cycle to help build new futures for Hong Kong's ethnic minorities. Yet, it is vital also to recognise, as the *Status of EM Report* demonstrated, there are nuances in the circumstances of different ethnic groups across various spheres of life, ranging from education to employment to poverty, social welfare, marital and family life to crime and law enforcement, which cannot be ignored. These variances between ethnic groups' experiences bear telling features about the underlying contexts within which different ethnic minority communities are situated. This underscores the need for more in-depth research using an intersectional lens and to consider different ethnic groups' distinct circumstances. In terms of interventions, one size does not fit all groups. An enriched understanding of the features that distinguish their circumstances and the interrelationship between variables and factors common to particular groups can lead to the development of attenuated interventions to address the unique challenges which preclude equal access and participation in community life and opportunities in Hong Kong for these groups. These would prove far more effective than mainstream strategic interventions targeting specific challenges rather than locating the contextual, environmental and systemic factors that necessarily impact the success of such interventions.

In Hong Kong, in general, advocacy and intervention efforts both on the part of government and civil society organisations, have focused on the discriminatory practices which are thought to fuel the exclusion or marginalisation of ethnic minorities from equal opportunities. However, as the global level data demonstrates²⁴, exclusion from or limited participation in educational or employment contexts is also influenced by internal cultural factors occurring in particular cultural contexts. These work interdependently with external discrimination. They mutually reinforce constraints on vulnerable communities. In the case of women, given the gendered impact of cultural norms globally, regardless of which society we may be living in, in many cases, these factors determine the future life path for women and impact greatly on their

²³ Parsons, J., J. Edmeades, A. Kes, S. Petroni, M. Sexton, and Q. Wodon. 2015. "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13 (3): 12–22.

²⁴ Caner et al (2016) demonstrates the impact of patriarchal attitudes towards the education of girls and specifically coeducational education and attitudes towards early marriage of girls on the prospects of females completing tertiary education relative to their male counterparts. In Latin America, Stromquist (2001) highlights the nexus between poverty, patriarchy and the impoverishment of educational opportunities among girls. Their indigenous identity further entrenches them into the household with their life of chores, mothering and gendered life cut out for them early on in life, resulting in low levels of education among the rural poor. See Caner et al, 'Gender Roles and the Education Gender Gap in Turkey' (2016) and Stromquist, 'What poverty does to girls' education: the intersection of class, gender and policy in Latin America.

participation in the social and cultural life of the communities in which they are situated as well as the exercise of their individual autonomy and agency.

A significant challenge that has impacted women globally and particularly young girls is child marriage, a practice which is prevalent worldwide in distinct cultural or religious communities, both in the East and in the West. Child marriage is defined a formal or informal union taking place before the age of 18 which may or may not have occurred with the free and valid consent of one or both parties.²⁵ One in four children are married before the age of 18 globally.²⁶ In developing countries, the figure is one in three.²⁷ South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rates of child marriage. India alone accounts for one-third of the world's child brides simply on account of its massive population.²⁸ This is despite the existence of a law prohibiting such practices enacted three decades ago.²⁹ Girls who marry young are more likely to drop out of school and, conversely, girls who are not in school or have lower levels of education are more likely to be married young. In sum, child marriage is both a cause and a consequence of poor educational attainment levels among girls and women.³⁰ One additional year of schooling reduces the prospects of marriage before the age of 18 by 6%.³¹

In reality, however, there are multiple reasons why girls are not in school. Child marriage is one of those reasons and is itself fuelled by some of these reasons or factors but there are also others such as cultural, structural, societal forces. For example, financial or environmental factors may constrain possibilities for some children especially where there are limited resources or dangers which are more likely to impinge on girls compared with boys. A girl may be seen as contributing to household chores or child-rearing while parents are out to work. Therefore, sending her to school beyond the age of compulsory schooling represents an opportunity cost³² for the family in multiple ways. While some of these barriers, such as financial or opportunity costs, might affect boys too, their schooling is still viewed as an investment in future gain. The same applies as regards concerns regarding inappropriate peer influence or a corruption of cultural values.³³

Cultural forces create social norms around gender roles which undermine the agency of women and girls, impacting their decision-making freedoms and capacities to pursue their dreams. Societies and the communities therein informally enforce these prescriptions by imposing unwritten rules and expectations and meting out harsh consequences such as excluding, marginalising or banishing girls, women and their families if they breach these norms. These

²⁵ Plan International, United Kingdom.

²⁶ UN Girls Not Brides, 'Addressing child marriage through education: What the evidence shows' (2018) <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/addressing-child-marriage-education-evidence-shows/>

²⁷ UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). 2013. *State of the World's Children*. New York: UNICEF.

²⁸ Nguyen, M. C., and Q. Wodon. 2015a. "Global and Regional Trends in Child Marriage." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13 (3): 6–11.

²⁹ Scolaro, E., A. Blagojevic, B. Filion, V. Chandra-Mouli, L. Say, J. Svanemyr, and M. Temmerman. 2015. "Child Marriage Legislation in the Asia-Pacific Region." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13 (3): 23–31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Stromquist, 'What poverty does to girls' education: the intersection of class, gender and policy in Latin America' (2001), *Compare*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 39-56, DOI: 10.1080/0305792002003015.

³³ Caner et al, 'Gender Roles and the Education Gender Gap in Turkey' (2016) *Soc Indic Res* (2016) 129:1231–1254, DOI 10.1007/s11205-015-1163-7.

norms are sometimes formalised in the form of discriminatory laws³⁴, cultural or religious councils through edicts imposed on practising communities in countries of origin.³⁵ Often, even when families migrate, they carry these norms with them because they represent the yardstick against which their worth, value and success will be judged ultimately, whether or not they return ‘home’. Ethnic affiliates in the host country and family members, usually male but oftentimes, females too, routinely police and enforce these values. Male siblings and relatives are often enlisted into these efforts of moral policing and safeguarding the honour of the family. The concerns could apply to both sexes but girls are more likely to be the targets of parental pressures and ‘protection’ against such influences since girls and women bear the responsibilities for the carriage of cultural values inter-generationally.

In some of these contexts, the furtherance of girls’ education beyond a certain point is devalued and attitudes favour particular timeframes for the marriage of girls and childbearing.³⁶ To date, there has been some anecdotal evidence of Pakistani girls in Hong Kong being precluded from upper secondary education and primed to marry earlier.³⁷ The deprivation of education exposes girls and women to risks of other forms of deprivation, the most egregious being the stripping away of their human rights. Violence against women and girls, physical, economic, and psychological, is not uncommon in these contexts.

The *Status of EM Report* also detailed studies and submissions which demonstrate a rising pattern and awareness levels of domestic violence experienced by ethnic minority women in Hong Kong. In 2013, the rate of reported domestic violence experienced by ethnic minority women in Hong Kong amounted to 4.7% of the total number of domestic violence reports gathered in the territory.³⁸ Overlapping with this period, between April and December of 2013, the Family and Child Protection Services Unit (FCPSU) reported 3.4% of the total cases of domestic violence stemmed from the ethnic minority community.³⁹ In 2018, the figures have doubled at 9% just looking at the period between January and June 2018.⁴⁰ nearly double that of women in the general population.⁴¹ It is likely that this figure itself is only a tiny fraction of the actual cases. Hong Kong-based studies reveal distinct patterns surrounding the nature, type, prevalence and understanding of gender-based violence among Hong Kong’s ethnic minority girls with a focus on South Asian ethnic groups and what steps they would take, if any, to address deal with such violence. The findings highlight the role of transnational cultural and gender norms in influencing value systems of migrant populations and in particular, their impact

³⁴ Klugman, J., L. Hanmer, S. Twigg, T. Hasan, J. McCleary-Sills, and J. Santa Maria. 2014. *Voice & Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

³⁵ Faizunnisa, A., and M. Ul Haque. 2003. “Adolescent Reproductive Health: The Role of Agency and Autonomy.” *The Pakistan Development Review* 42 (4): 569–583.

³⁶ Gennari, F., A. Urban, J. McCleary-Sills, D. Arango, and S. Kiplesund. 2015. *Violence Against Women and Girls: Education Sector Brief*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

³⁷ Puja Kapai, *The Status of EM Report*.

³⁸ Financial Committee, LegCo 2014-15 Budget Meeting, LWB(WW)0410 Appendix, 0411.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Social Welfare Department, Statistics on child abuse, spouse/cohabitant battering and sexual violence, January to June 2018, available at, <https://www.swd.gov.hk/vs/english/stat.html>.

⁴¹ Puja Kapai, Submission, Legislative Council, Sub-committee on Domestic and Sexual Violence: Ethnic Minority Women, available at, http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/ws/ws_dv/papers/ws_dv20151006cb2-2184-1-e.pdf.

on the experiences on gender-based violence and its understanding among ethnic minority girls belonging to first, second or third generation families.⁴²

In a separate study on the *Help-seeking Behaviours of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence*⁴³, a sample of Hong Kong ethnic minority and immigrant victims of domestic violence experience a range of barriers, both internal and external, in seeking help and protection against violence. The cultural context within which ethnic minority women are embedded creates numerous barriers in their capacity and willingness to take steps against perpetrators. However, even among women who self-identify as victims of violence and seek assistance, the fear and threat of consequences both cultural, legal and societal for them personally, their children and their broader family network more extensively, and the barriers they face in terms of language, discrimination, culturally non-responsive approaches to the addressing domestic violence, and the precariousness of their financial and immigration position, often leaves them without any suitable recourse under Hong Kong's framework for legal protection or social services. Findings overall revealed a less than prepared response framework which saw many of the women opt to return to the perpetrator of violence for lack of other viable options.

The United Nations Committee for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Violence (CEDAW Committee) has singled out violence against women as the most prevalent threat and obstacle to the realisation of women's human rights. It impedes the participation of women (and girls) in civic, political and economic spheres.⁴⁴ Freedom from violence, public or private, is integral to the realisation of one's human rights.

Violence against women, the deprivation of access to education in full measure, early or forced marriage and other forms of gender-based discrimination in the work force and society more broadly, have been documented as contributing to the globally acknowledged phenomenon of the povertisation of women and girls.

It is against this backdrop of global data on the status of gender disparities across the board and the intersecting vectors of disadvantage which marginalise ethnic minority women and girls in very specific ways, that this research situates itself. The situation warrants an incisive inquiry and analysis to better understand the situation of ethnic minority girls and women in Hong Kong. In particular, it is vital to understand the prevalence of these trends among ethnic groups in our midst so that we can put into place measures to cultivate more gender equitable attitudes and norms.

⁴² Baig, Chan, and Huang, *Knowledge and Perceptions Towards Gender-based Violence of Minority Girls in Hong Kong*, (2017).

⁴³ Puja Kapai, *Delivering on the Promise of Equal Protection under the Law: Understanding the Experiences and Help-seeking Behaviours of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom*, Centre for Comparative and Public Law, The University of Hong Kong (2015), available at, <http://www.law.hku.hk/ccpl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Delivering%20on%20the%20Promise%20of%20Equal%20Protection%20under%2>.

⁴⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, *General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women*, 1992, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52d920c54.html> and *General Recommendation No. 35: Violence against women*, 2017, available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_GC_35_8267_E.pdf

These numbers bear many of the hallmarks for a population in crisis. Coupled with higher unemployment rates, lower incomes and single-income earning members in large households, the prospects for moving out of such entrenched conditions of poverty are virtually non-existent without specific, targeted forms of interventions that create sustainable upward social mobility for this group. The invidious mix of ethnicity/race, gender and class, among other forms of exclusion and marginalisation, single out Pakistani and the Nepalese population groups in Hong Kong for a life of significant disadvantage and left exposed to numerous vulnerabilities. For the purposes of effective planning, policy development and intervention, there is an urgent need to develop population projection models to make future predictions in terms of the anticipated population demographics based on current trends, including size, ethnicity, poverty levels, household size, employment prospects and industries, and gender-disaggregated implications for distinct ethnic groups given their vast intragroup differences.

The figures outlined above about the two population groups which stand out the most. This research opens up just such an inquiry pertaining to Hong Kong's Pakistani population, identified in the course of our work as a priority population group given the figures cited above, and the impact in terms of actual numbers. Their distinct circumstances call out for specific attention, understanding and interventions targeting Pakistani children and youth, and in particular, its women and girls. That said, however, as intimated above, it is important to bear in mind that there are significant variations in life experiences not only between different ethnic minority groups but also, within the same ethnic group. These differences are a function of various contextual and background factors, including country of birth, length of residence in Hong Kong, education, employment and marital status, education levels of parents and family size, among other things.

As we can see, there are gender, education, employment and occupational differentials within this community that are stark and startling on many counts. However, the figures alone do not tell the full story. We must simultaneously equip ourselves with a deeper level understanding of the context which the Pakistani community in Hong Kong is embedded in, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the inter-relationship between the figures and other factors gleaned from qualitative research. This will assist with the identification of the precise problem(s), issue(s) or challenge(s); their sources or drivers; and the key interventions required to achieve a tipping point to create a new normal.

As with many of the greatest social challenges of our time, the roots of problems faced by particular communities are often invisible to the wider community because the voices of those in need remain distant, muted or unheard. Voicelessness has no place in a modern cosmopolitan city which prides itself on being Asia's World City. Voicelessness, coupled with invisibility and crisis-level vulnerability, denotes powerlessness of a multi-dimensional variety – one which is all-consuming in its potential to oppress, destroy and crush the soul of communities. A world city must invariably lead by example, be a symbol for inclusion, and eradicate the roots of marginalisation. It is only when there is a concerted effort to bring visibility to their situation, to listen, and heed, that we can understand the complexities of the challenges they face as a result of systematic marginalisation.

Our first imperative therefore, as researchers, is to engage with the Pakistani community itself in order to formulate interventions based on their articulated dreams and aspirations, suited to their

unique cultural context. Recognising the individuality and agency of ethnic minority youth in Hong Kong as well as their potential for enriching Hong Kong's future, this research seeks to understand their needs, aspirations and dreams and identify the obstacles they face, both internal to their cultural contexts but also, the external environmental factors constraining them. Their responses are probed further to understand their projections of where they see themselves in the short and long-term, professionally, geographically and in their personal life. It examines their perceptions of the key challenges and constraints they face in terms of achieving their desired goals and aspirations. In doing so, it asks Pakistani youth to assess what their likely pathway for the future would be if they were unable to achieve their stated goal(s). The study also looks into what this group of youth would wish for if they had a magic wand that could instantly fulfil any one wish.

These are all issues which have a critical bearing on the prospects for the effective integration of ethnic minority youth into Hong Kong society but more importantly, for the protection and advancement of the human rights of all people, including ethnic minority women and girls. Analysing their responses, and drawing on their input, this report presents recommendations to tackle ongoing challenges unique to this community, including child marriage, limited opportunities for further education for women, entrenched poverty and violence against women.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research study are as follows:

- (1) To understand the dreams and aspirations of Pakistani girls and boys in Hong Kong;
- (2) To understand the distinct cultural context within which they are embedded and determine how and the extent to which the development and pursuit of such aspirations are affected by this context;
- (3) To understand practices around marriage and their impact, if any, on the dreams and aspirations of Pakistani girls and boys; In particular, to determine whether early / child marriage is practiced among Hong Kong's Pakistani population;
- (4) To explore the needs of Pakistani girls and boys in light of the above;
- (5) To make recommendations on programme development, policy and service interventions; and
- (6) To outline an agenda of areas for urgent action on the part of relevant government bodies pertaining to law and policy reform.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling

This research adopted a qualitative mixed method research approach comprising semi-structured interviews and the administration of a questionnaire targeting 25 Hong Kong Pakistani youth aged 14 to 22 who were either born in Hong Kong or had been resident in Hong Kong for at least three years preceding the interview. This age group was targeted as they represent the cohort most likely to be engaged in the process of currently determining the future directions of their life pertaining to education, employment, marriage and family. Based on anecdotal evidence and comparative research, they were also well within the cohort of ages which were more likely to present with relevant risk indicators of respondents who were at imminent, short-term or long-term risk of having some of the rights infringed upon, due to internal risk factors or external circumstances. The rights concerned include, the right to education, to determine one's own readiness for marriage and to choose one's partner in marriage, protection against child marriage and to pursue a vocation of one's choosing. The study recruited 22 females (particularly girls under 18), the primary stakeholders and beneficiaries of the work done by Plan International Hong Kong, the funder of the project. However, the research team also included 3 Pakistani males in the sample in addition to the females to serve as a point of comparison to better understand any gender-based nuances in the responses and patterns which emerged.

The research team of The Zubin Foundation reached out to its network and database, to recruit research participants, targeting those studying at Direct Subsidy Schools, government-aided secondary schools and those receiving services from service centres serving South Asian low-income families. It included outreach to attendees of its past events, those who have signed up for The Zubin Foundation's mailing list or are stakeholders of its various initiatives, including specific schools, NGOs, and youth centers. A total of 50 participants were invited to participate in the study using an invitation letter and parent/guardian consent form sent to 3 schools and 2 service centres, who then disseminated the call to its student communities. There was a 50% response rate. Ultimately, 25 Hong Kong Pakistani children from low-income families, attending district-based government schools with significant populations of Pakistani children and visiting district-based service centres popular with Pakistani families were successfully recruited.

The interviews were predominantly conducted by a female staff member of The Zubin Foundation, who is a clinical psychologist by training and of Indian background. She speaks Hindi, Urdu and English whereas she was supported by another staff member to provide Chinese translation if any of the participants preferred to speak in Cantonese. Participants were asked to indicate their preferred language of communication. All of them indicated they felt comfortable in communicating in English for the purposes of the interview.

In terms of the research procedure, participants were invited to attend a semi-structured interview either at their school premises in a classroom designated for use for the purposes of the research by their teachers or in a private room at the community service centre they frequented. These

selected settings might have influenced participants' willingness to proffer specific information, and the language they used to respond to the Questionnaire and Interview questions.

Upon referral of willing participants to TZF, a mutually convenient time was determined with the assistance of the school or youth centre for the purposes of coordination. On arrival, participants were introduced to the researcher who provided a brief overview of the study. Participants were invited to complete an informed consent form advising them of the details of the project, including the broad objectives of understanding the dreams and aspirations of Pakistani children in Hong Kong and the purposes for which their input would be used, i.e., to develop programs and interventions for their benefit, the research procedure and what to expect as well as their rights under the research process, including confidentiality and privacy of data, protection against unauthorized access and their rights to ask questions or withdraw from the process without adverse inferences being drawn. They were then asked to respond to the questionnaire which was administered in an interactive format to build a rapport with the participants and to ease them into the broad themes the study was focused on. Most participants were able to complete the questionnaire in 10 to 15 minutes. Next, participants were guided through a set of 10 questions in a semi-structured interview format, eliciting further responses depending on replies to earlier questions. This enabled the interviewer to follow the direction which the emergent themes of conversation naturally led to and to be guided by the research participants in terms of what they felt was important to share. The overall process took an between 30-45 minutes for participants in general.

The themes of the questions used for the interview were fairly broad and open-ended, including general questions about participants' family history and their own childhood in Hong Kong to more specific questions pertaining to their dreams, aspirations, goals in the short and longer term, challenges they face, issues they wish could be addressed with urgency, prospects for family life, and the cultural, religious or familial expectations about marriage and children.

Given the potential that some of the questions may touch on sensitive or very personal matters, keeping the flow of discussion as natural and seamless as possible was key to building a rapport and maintaining trust throughout the process. Sometimes this meant that not all topics received the same degree of coverage or 'air time'. However, as the process was participant-led, it was imperative not to linger too long on a theme which did not seem to elicit any significant response. For example, if a respondent was unable to respond to an interview question, the participant indicated, "no comment."

In terms of data recording, a mobile device was used to record the interview with the consent of the participants. The content of the interview was later transcribed in the Foundation's office and subsequently coded. Both the raw interview data files comprising the recording, the raw data from the questionnaires, the subsequent transcriptions and coding spreadsheet were kept strictly confidential, stored in a private secured password-coded laptop and only shared for research purposes between the Foundation's researcher and Pujja Kapai, the consultant engaged for this research study.

The sample size being small (n=25), the findings present rich qualitative data which offer deeper-level insights into prevailing circumstances, opportunities and constraints, internal and external, which influence the dreams, aspirations and future life trajectories of Pakistani children

in Hong Kong. As such, the findings, while not generalisable to the Pakistani population in Hong Kong as a whole, provide distinct insights which are often uncaptured through quantitative data approaches. Moreover, given the dearth of qualitative research in Hong Kong focusing on Pakistani youth, this data will serve as a resource for the contextualisation of various data available in quantitative terms.

One limitation however, is the lack of parity in terms of the inclusion of voices of Pakistani boys. Given that this group falls outside the specific focus of the funder of this study, it is hoped that the findings more broadly can propel interest in research funding for a more balanced sample to understand the nuances pertaining to the life experiences of Pakistani boys and the extent to which, if at all, and if so, in what ways, they mirror the experiences of Pakistani girls in Hong Kong as demonstrated by this study. This is particularly the case for findings pertaining to expectations and practices pertaining to early or child marriage, which have been found to affect boys too.

Research Instruments

The research used two main instruments during its course. The first was the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix 1), which was administered to participants using an interactive format at the beginning of the research process, eliciting background information about the participant's family context. Questions touched on age, gender, country of origin, religion, education, household family size, parental educational levels, parental employment status, and parental occupation(s). This served as basis for focusing the participant's mind on some of the themes that were to be touched on during the course of the interview and developing a rapport for interaction. It also served as a basis for drawing correlations between variables which could serve as predictors of particular tendencies. Specifically, the study hypothesised, for example, that the education levels and employment status of both parents were significant correlates for the prospects for further study for Pakistani girls, the likelihood they saw themselves engaged in employment, their choice of occupation, as well as determinative of the window for age and form of marriage and expectations for child bearing.

The second research instrument was the Interview Guideline (Appendix 2) for the semi-structured interview which comprised 10 questions with core themes for later analysis in conjunction with responses to the Demographic Questionnaire. The themes spanned current issues facing ethnic minorities in Hong Kong including education and language, the role and impact of culture and religion in their lives, on their dreams, the impact of gender on future life course, directions, and expectations of family in terms of marriage and children.

Data Analysis

The findings of the research study were analysed using Microsoft Excel. The responses to the Demographic Questionnaire and the Interview Guidelines were organised into a spreadsheet in the order in which the questions were asked. The relevant data was first transcribed into the Excel spreadsheet designed to capture the raw data, which was then recoded and entered into a separate spreadsheet on a thematic basis combining responses between the Demographic Questionnaire and the interview for each respondent. In the final cut, the broad patterns and

themes were identified with a view to discern opportunities, challenges and rights at risk and correspondingly, aspirations, dreams and desires and interventions or call to action.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter reports the data findings from this research study, beginning with a description of participants' characteristics and data validity followed by the research findings and presentation of analysis.

Participant Characteristics

There were 25 research participants recruited for the study. Of this sample of 25, 22 were female and 3 were male. Participants' age ranged between 14 to 22 years. 60% of the sample was born in Hong Kong while 40% was born in Pakistan, with their duration of residence in Hong Kong ranging between 3 and 22 years. Their educational levels varied widely. 16% of them were studying in Form 3 whereas nearly 50%, were evenly distributed between Form 4 and 5. 20% were currently in Form 6, 12% had graduated from Form 6 and 4% were in university. The spread suggests that age did not always correspond with year of study and that older children were at times studying in junior level classes. The male sample were in Form 3 and 4 while the female sample were spread across all categories with the majority (59%) of them currently in Form 5 and 6. This is a common phenomenon among Pakistani students who, despite living here in their early childhood years, migrate to Pakistan for a few years before returning again. This makes reentry into the Hong Kong education system at a level commensurate with their age unlikely due to the resultant language gap their absence from Hong Kong has contributed to. Nearly all participants were multilingual and spoke, between them, four to six languages including English, Cantonese, Urdu, Pashto, Punjabi, and Hindko. Figures 1 to 6 provide an overview of the participants' characteristics.

Figure 1: Participants' gender breakdown

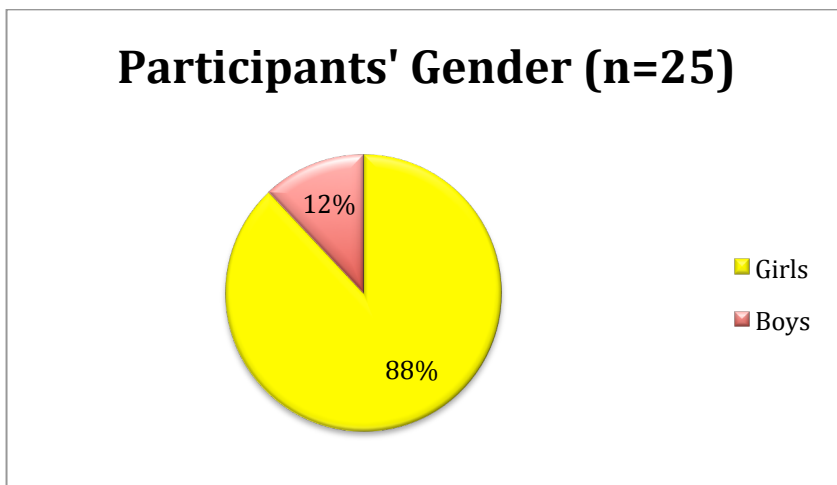


Figure 2: Participants by Place of Birth

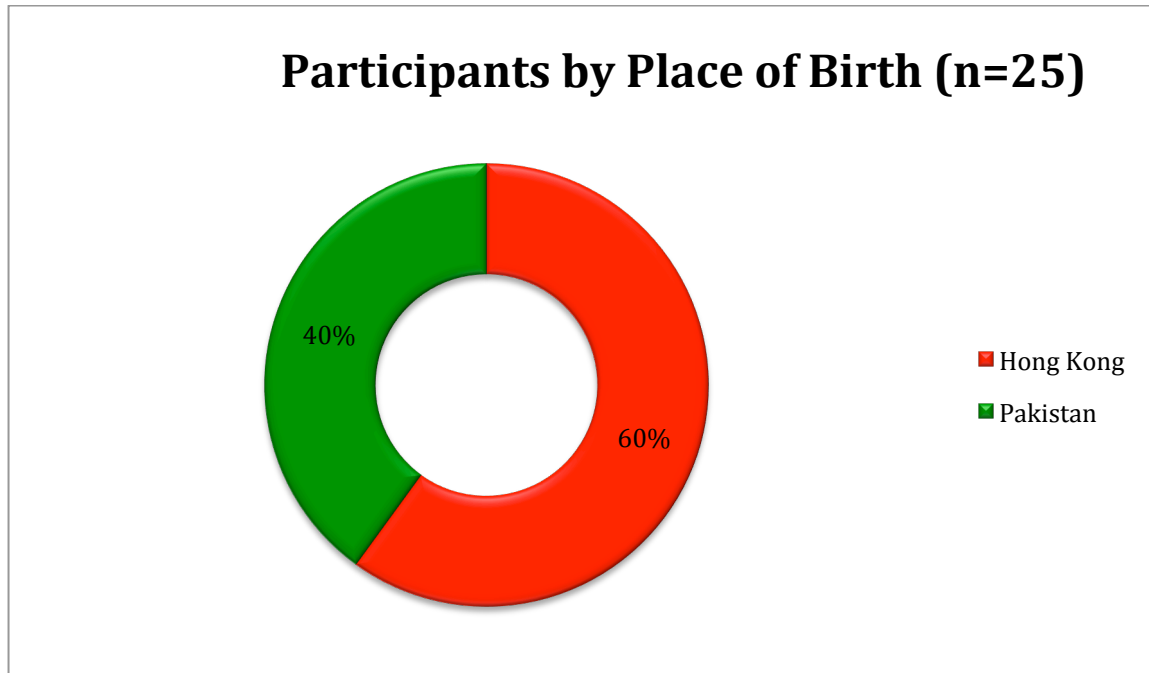


Figure 3: Participants' Age

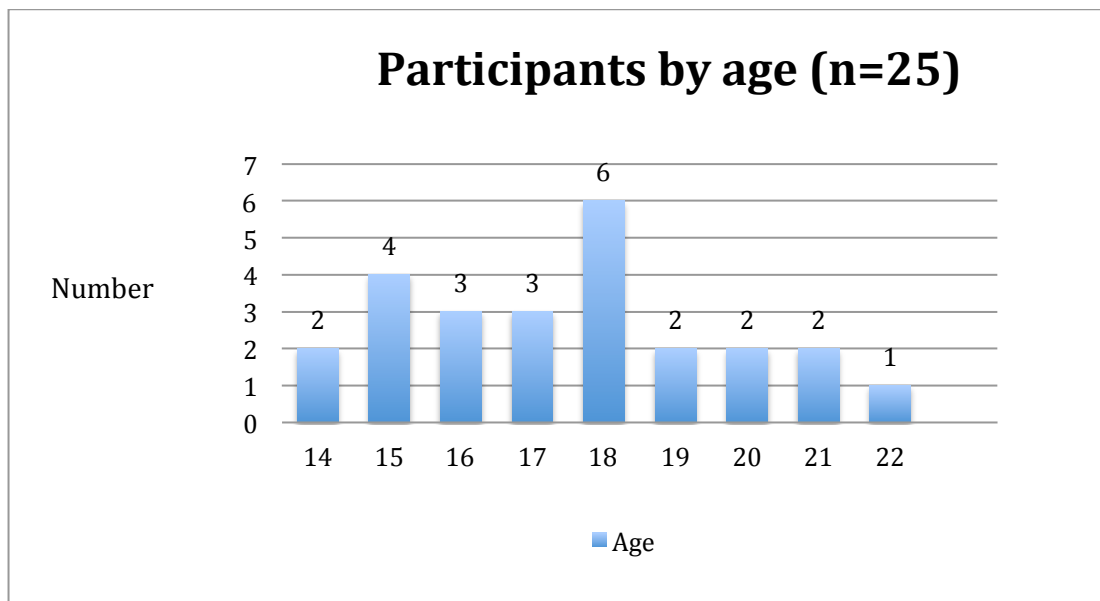


Figure 4: Participants' Current Educational Status

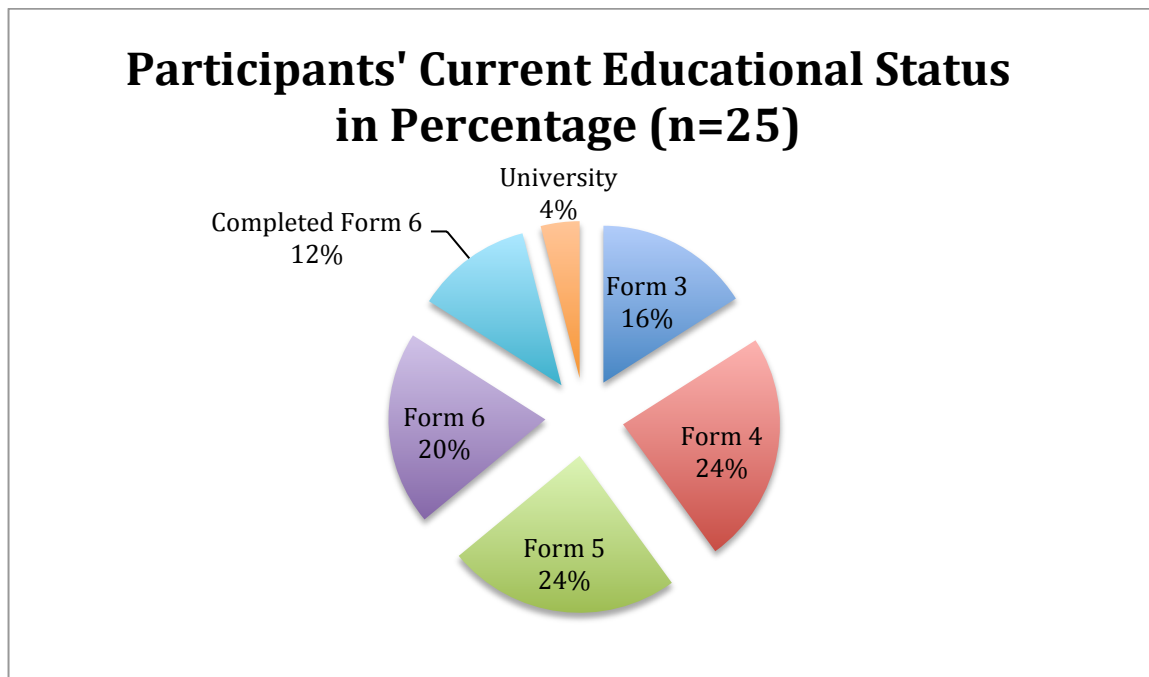


Figure 5: Educational Status by Gender (Male)

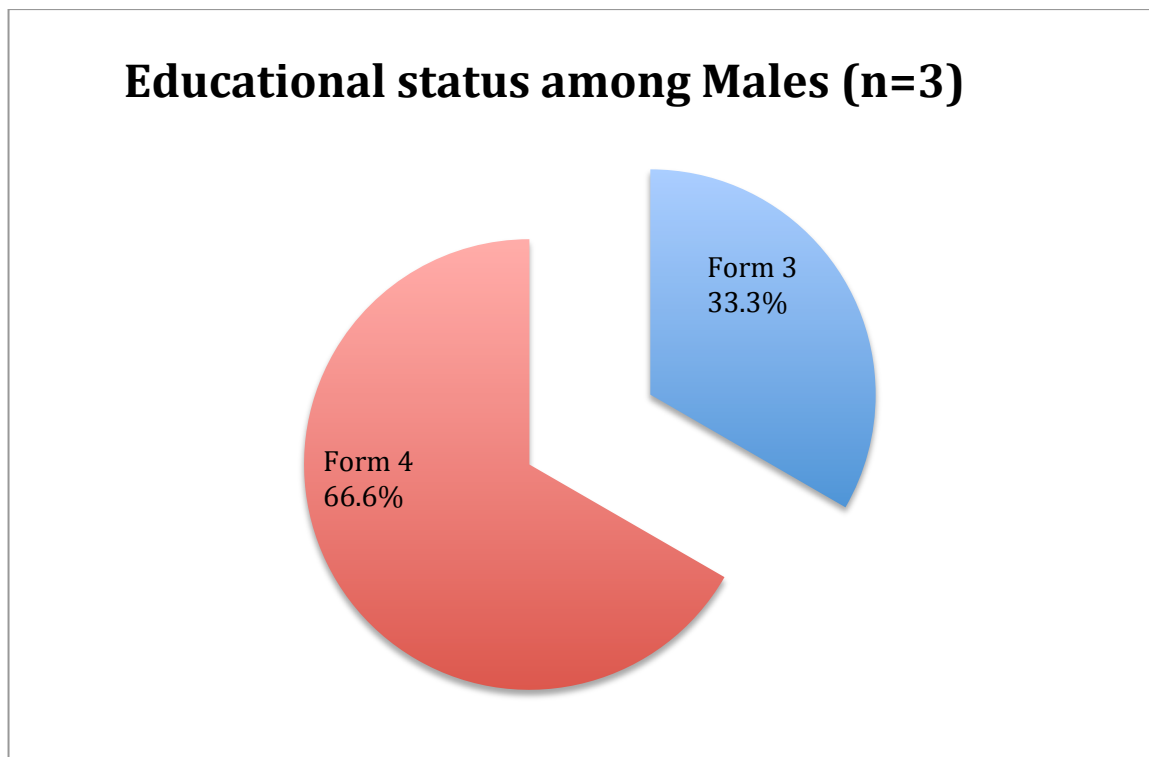


Figure 6: Educational Status by Gender (Female)

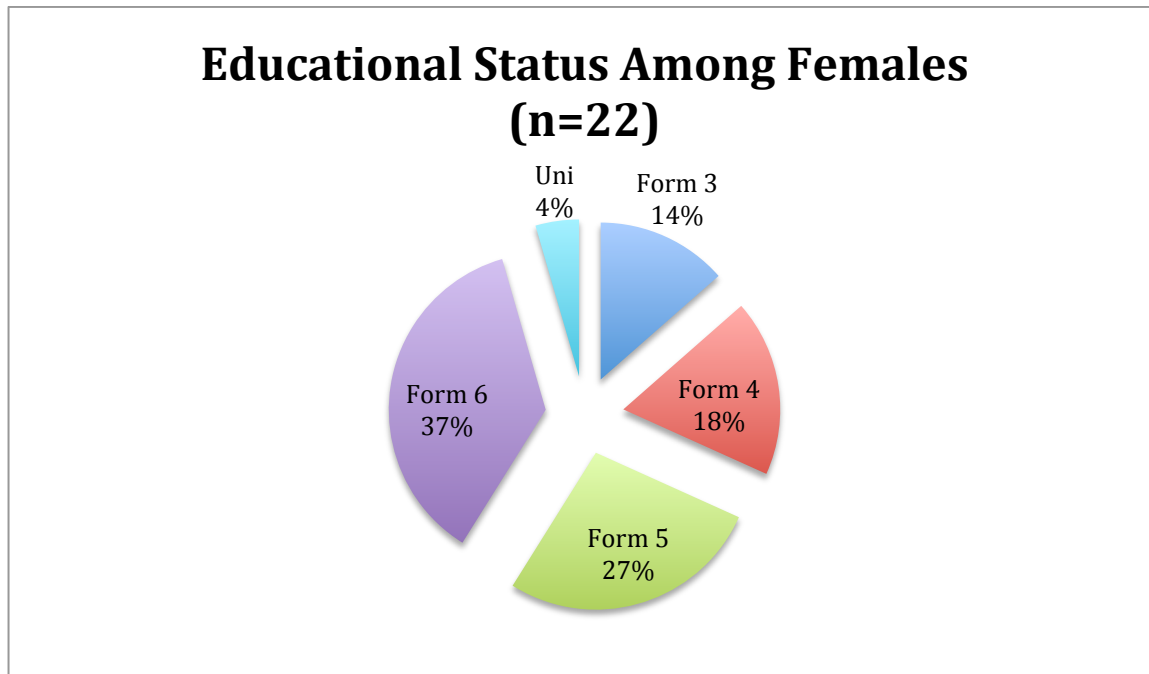


Figure 7: Mothers Educational Background

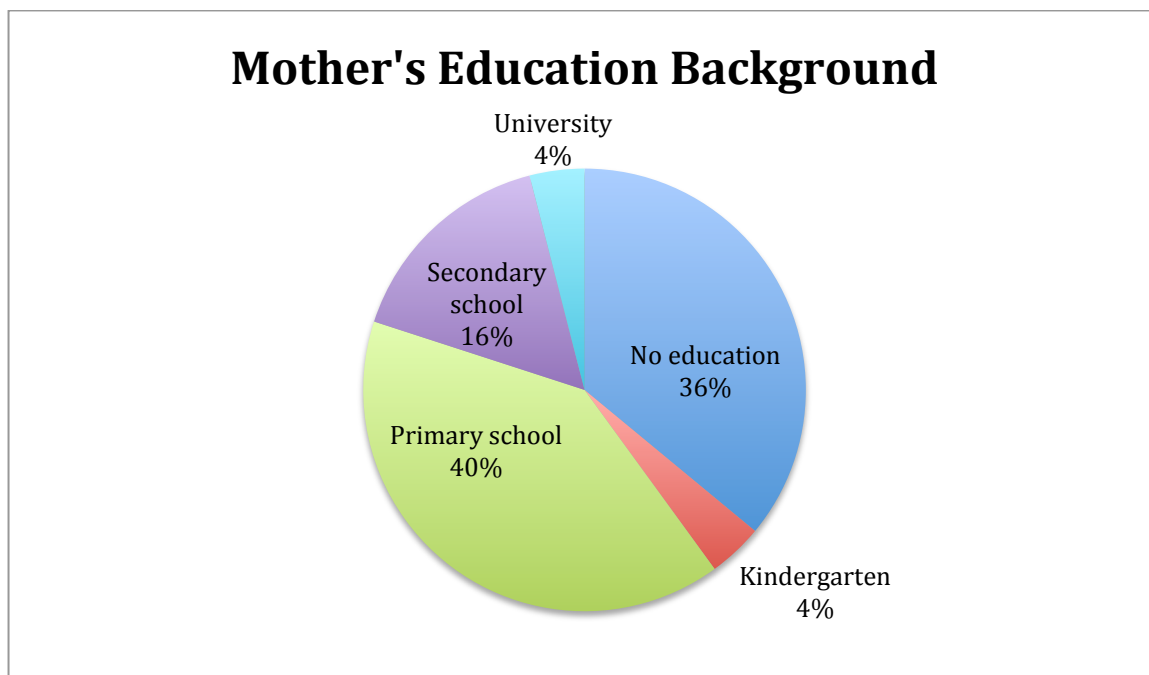


Figure 8: Fathers Education Level

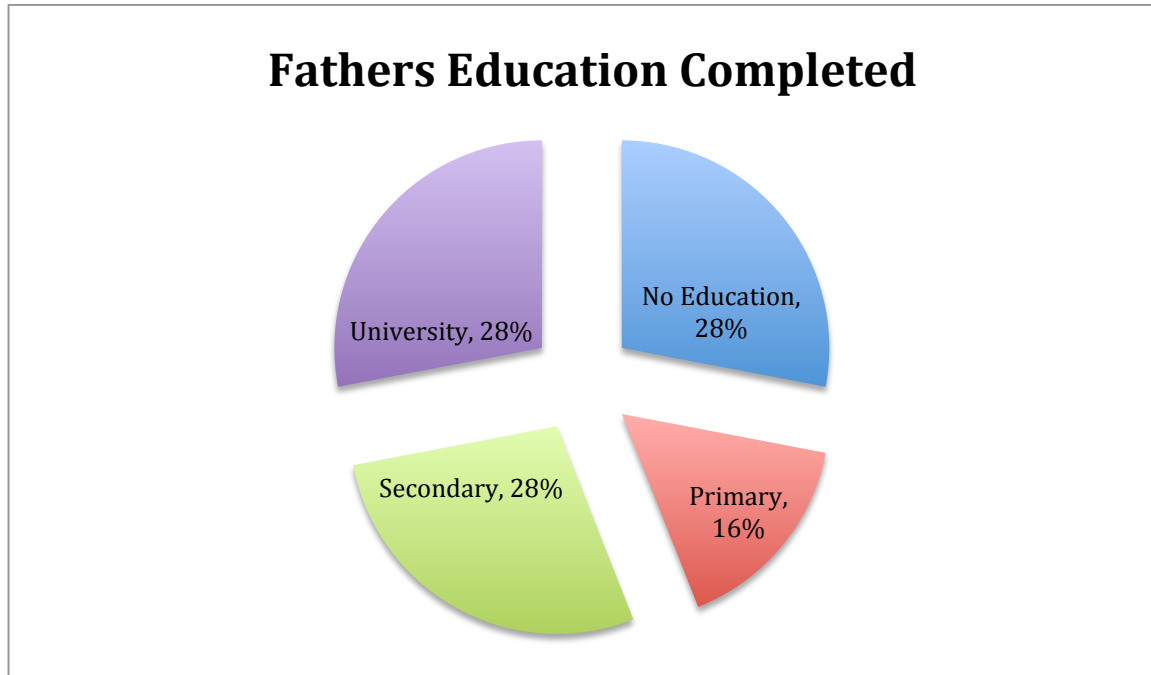


Figure 9: Parents Occupation

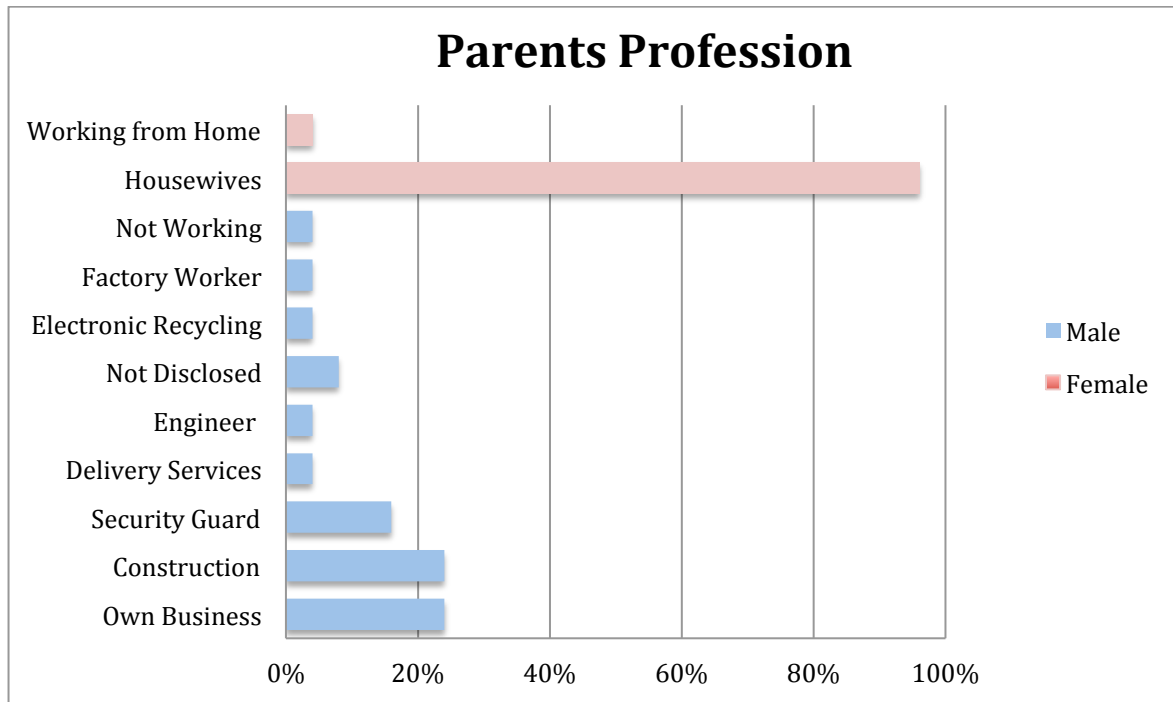


Figure 10: Participants Aspirations

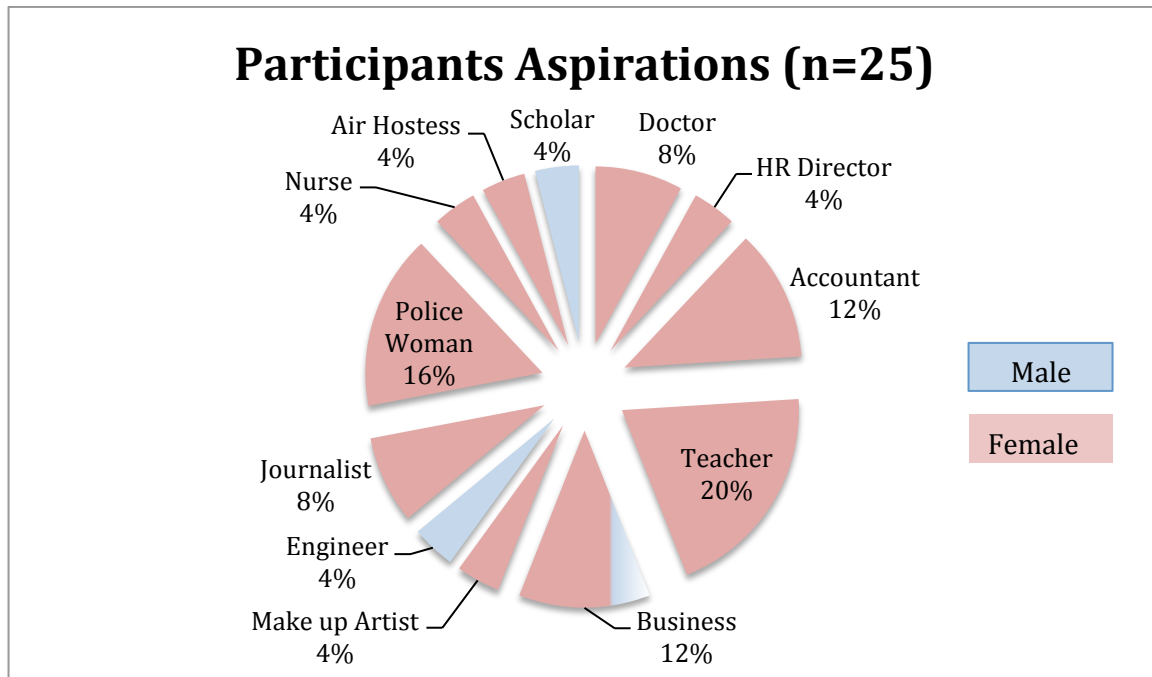


Figure 11: Family Marriage Expectations of Participants

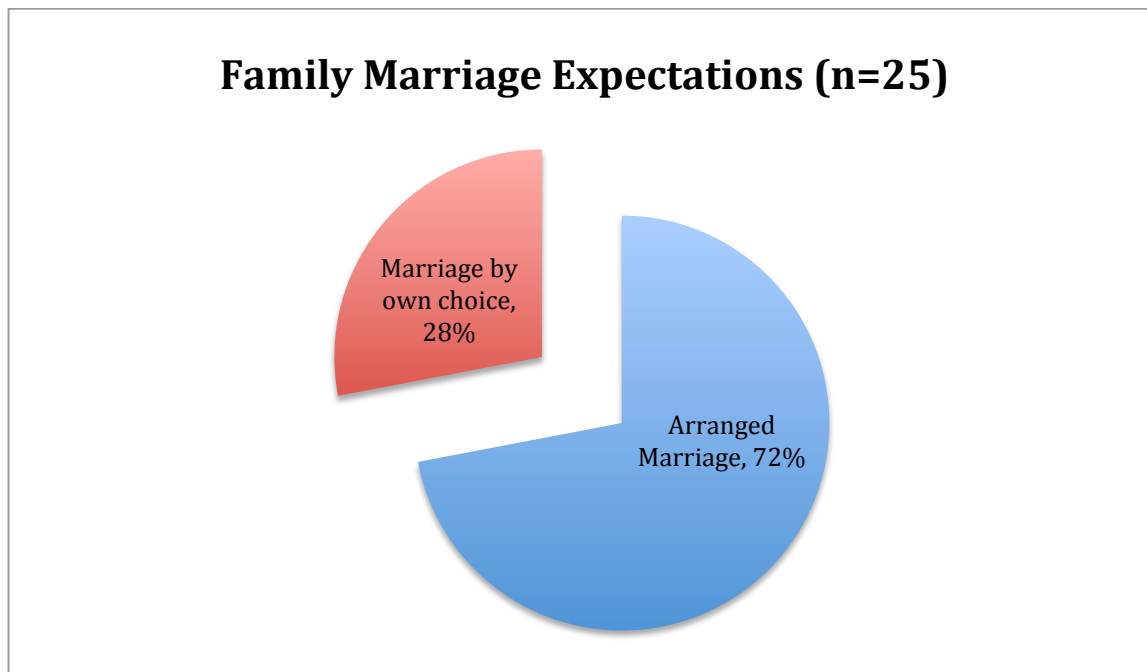
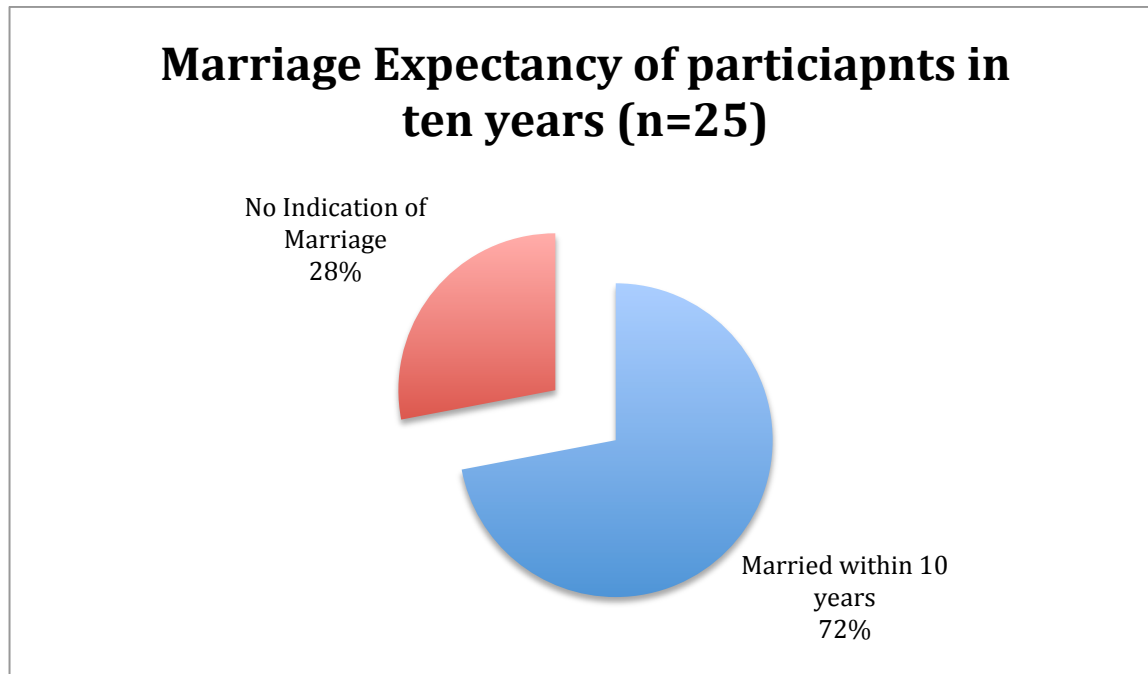


Figure 12: Number of Participants who indicated marriage in the next 10 years



Data Validity

As detailed in Chapter 2 on Methodology, the interview process comprised two parts, the first entailing the administration of the questionnaire and the second, being the semi-structured interview. Around one third of the participants (36%) spent less than 30 minutes completing the two-part process; 28% spent between 30 to 40; nearly a quarter (24%) spent between 41 and 45 minutes while the remaining 8% spent more than 45 minutes for completion. All interviews were completed within an hour.

In general, participants appeared responsive and willing to answer the questions candidly, including those about barriers, experiences about family systems, struggles at school or home, and acceptance levels of Hong Kong people towards them. There was however, a distinct difference between what participants felt comfortable sharing while the recording device was on compared with their sharing once the formal research process had been concluded and the recording device switched off. Some of the conversations touched on themes related to the hardships they faced in their lives while others engaged with the interviewer about the purpose of the research. In many instances, the participants were more willing to share their thoughts on marriage and sex education. There were however, those who were reluctant to disclose in-depth information about family members or issues of marriage both during the interview process or after its conclusion. They expressed that they had never been asked such questions before. These participants seemed anxious and provided more general responses, as opposed to detailed answers to questions. On the whole, however, research participants all completed the entirety of the process, were responsive, and the data varied depending on their level of comfort with the theme under discussion and their willingness to disclose what they considered to be veering on

the personal. This is a limitation which is to be expected given the sensitivities surrounding some of the topics touched on by the questions. As such, given the completion rate, this reluctance on the part of a small number of the participants does not impact the data's validity overall. The participants were assured that if any question made them uncomfortable or they were unwilling to answer, they could move on to the next question or stop at any time for a break or terminate the process. These options were never availed of. Participants were agreeable to continue and complete the process in all instances.

In light of this, the data collected can be deemed valid and provides rich, qualitative insights into the experiences related of Pakistani children in Hong Kong.

Key Findings

The Role of Culture

Several themes emerged from the interviews. The most pertinent of these is the influential and overarching role of culture and its distinct impact on the lives of Pakistani girls and boys in Hong Kong. Participants regularly referred to their culture or particular values or expectations stemming from it as a reference point for some of their response to the questions discussed. This tendency was most salient in response to questions about expectations about marriage partners, age of marriage and their dreams. A small number of participants confirmed that cultural norms were deeply embedded within the Pakistani family context and that their currency dictated all realms of life as strong adherence was expected.

Interplay Between Culture and Religion

While religion plays a significant role, based on this data pool, it appears to be practiced differently between Hong Kong-born Pakistanis compared with Pakistan-born Pakistanis. This variance reveals a nuanced but distinct body of intra-cultural value systems which are used to judge the authenticity or veracity of Pakistanis remaining 'true' to their identities despite making a home in Hong Kong. For example, one participant said, "*Our culture is different, those born here in Hong Kong are different Muslim, they are not very religious, they don't follow Islam.*" The message in essence was that Hong Kong Pakistani Muslims are of a modernised variety and they are different in terms of both, culture *and* religious practice. Interestingly, we see here the conflation of religious and cultural norm expectations, where religious values, typically considered fixed, are culturalised. Religious ideals are thus rendered fluid by being conflated with culture, which itself evolves as it interacts with other social phenomena. This perception of difference between Pakistani Muslim identities depending on the family's migration history influences the intergenerational carriage of Pakistani and Islamic norms and values and also, acceptance and rejection of identities people of one's own background (known also, as the in-group). For the same reason, however, all Pakistanis as a whole are all perceived by out-group members (those who are not Pakistani) to be deeply religious, and culturally conservative (another instance of the conflation between cultural, ethnic and religious identities).

In some cases, religious norms and expectations form the basis for the cultural values which shape the lives of Pakistani children. Pakistan-born Pakistani children and youth were more

likely to be brought up in a relatively more stringent environment of cultural and religious norm adherence. The comment made by the participant above reflects this to some extent. Although Hong Kong-born Pakistani children and youth were also demonstrably constrained in overlapping respects, the extent and impact of the imposition in distinct areas such as education, employment and marriage seemed varied and sometimes, negotiable. This is an important distinction because it suggests root factors relating to integration as having an impact on the evolution of Pakistani cultural norms as they are enculturated into Hong Kong life.

This is affirmed by the difference in the sense of belonging described by the sample with manifest distinctions between those born in Hong Kong as compared with those born in Pakistan. Moreover, place of birth and length of stay in Hong Kong also affected participants' attitudes, perception, thinking and judgments on a range of issues. Many participants, particularly those born in Hong Kong referred to Hong Kong as their home whereas this group considered Pakistan a foreign land, given that they only visited the country occasionally. For the Hong Kong-born Pakistani youth, visiting Pakistan triggered feelings of disconnection primarily due to divergences in their perceptions of self, their identification as a Hong Kong Pakistani as opposed to the Pakistani identity as represented by their extended family, including their cousins, and peers.

For example, they found that being from Hong Kong, they were more open-minded and had been exposed to a wide range of opportunities and experiences, in particular, in terms of education, when compared with their counterparts in Pakistan. Indeed, a few participants shared that many of their cousins consider them too modern or not as 'traditional' as they are since they were studying in co-educational schools in Hong Kong, which was not the norm in Pakistan. There also appeared to be a sense that they were better off in Hong Kong when compared with their peers in Pakistan, with almost a third expressing the view that they were living a better life in Hong Kong, particularly in terms of education and employment opportunities. One participant shared that, "*In Hong Kong we have many opportunities to go to Universities through the school.*" Another participant recalled life when he still resided in Pakistan up until three years ago and said, "*[I] didn't know about the internet in Pakistan, didn't have a mobile phone in Pakistan. My mother sold her bangles to buy me a phone in Hong Kong. I feel big and educated compared to my other friends in Pakistan.*"

It is very important however, to bear in mind the impact and significance of religion in the overall life satisfaction levels and resilience demonstrated by Pakistani youth. In our recent research study, #*Hongkonger*⁴⁵, we found that 84% of ethnic minority youth in Hong Kong are always or mostly happy. Previous studies looking at the link between religiosity and its impact on personal wellbeing, life satisfaction and resilience competence have shown a positive correlation between the two sets of variables.⁴⁶ A study conducted in Hong Kong looking at

⁴⁵ Puja Kapai and Gunjali Singh, #*Hongkonger: Ethnic Minority Aspirations, Challenges and Identity*, Centre for Comparative and Public Law and The Zubin Foundation, September 2018, available at, https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/da2d17_15ec7967235d4fe69ffe5ae78dc8dc5b.pdf

⁴⁶ Good, M. and Willoughby, T., 2006. The role of spirituality versus religiosity in adolescent psychological adjustment. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 35 (1), 41 55; Kim, S.W. and Esquivel, G., 2011. Adolescent spirituality and resilience: theory, research, and educational practices. *Psychology in the schools*, 48 (7), 755 765. See also, Jackson, B. and Bergeman, C.S., 2011. How does religiosity enhance well-being? The role of control. *Psychology of religion and spirituality*, 3 (2), 149 161.

Mainland China born Chinese, Hong Kong born Chinese, Hong Kong born and overseas born ethnic minorities in Hong Kong found a statistically significant correlation between these variables.

In particular, the findings show that students with non-Chinese cultural and religious backgrounds report higher levels of life satisfaction compared with their non-religious Chinese peers. Moreover, gender stands out as a significant correlate as well reflecting that female non-Chinese students who are religious and studying at junior levels are inclined towards more positive self-appraisals of their life satisfaction rates compared with other groups.⁴⁷ The study also confirmed that non-Chinese ethnic groups, even in the face of poverty, challenges in the education system with Chinese language learning, and generally unfavourable living conditions socially, held a much more positive outlook, viewing these negative life events differently. Spirituality, religiosity and a strong in-group social network greatly enhances the resilience demonstrated by ethnic minorities in the face of such challenges because they serve as a stabilising force directing their cognitive energies towards non-materialistic aspects of evaluating life and success.⁴⁸ These value systems equip them with a sense of purpose in life and the ability to contextualise and assign meaning to different life events and adversities in light of the bigger picture.⁴⁹ A shared understanding among their community affiliates of their identity, their values and their approach to life and what is important at the end of the day, all contribute to the strengthening of minority identities⁵⁰ and further build this resilience.⁵¹

For the purposes of discussion, cultural and religious norms are therefore, referred to as ‘cultural values’ more broadly in the remainder of this report.

Cultural Values: Gendered Expectations and Differentials

In particular, the findings reveal and detail the gendered nature of cultural norms and their impact on diverse aspects of life ranging from expectations pertaining to education, employment, marriage related customs and child-bearing as well as preparing for gendered responsibilities in their future. Although nearly half of the participants reported that girls and boys were treated equally in their families, a fifth of the sample indicated that boys tend to have more freedom. Moreover, a fifth of the participants specifically mentioned gender-differentials in the treatment of boys and girls as well as the influence of such cultural norms on the choices and constraints they face. Responses elicited from the sample across all of the interviews and therefore, suggest gender-role consistent norms, expectations and constraints. These were reinforced in both sets of participants, whether born in Hong Kong or Pakistan.

⁴⁷ Celeste Yuen, Celeste Y.M. Yuen (2013) Ethnicity, level of study, gender, religious affiliation and life satisfaction of adolescents from diverse cultures in Hong Kong, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16:6, 776-791, at 784. DOI:10.1080/13676261.2012.756973, available at, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2012.756973>.

⁴⁸ Oishi, S., et al., 1999. Value as a moderator in subjective well-being. *Journal of personality*, 67 (1), 157 184, cited in Yuen, *ibid*, at p. 786.

⁴⁹ Davis, T., Kerr, B., and Kurpius, S., 2003. Meaning, purpose, and religiosity in at-risk youth: the relationship between anxiety and spirituality. *Journal of psychology and theology*, 31 (4), 356 365, cited in Yuen, *ibid*, note 38.

⁵⁰ Diener, E., et al., 1999. Subjective well-being: three decades of progress. *Psychological bulletin*, 125, 276 302, cited in Yuen, *ibid*, note 38, at p. 787.

⁵¹ Pernice-Duca, F.M., 2010. An examination of family and social support networks as a function of ethnicity and gender: a descriptive study of youths from three ethnic reference groups. *Journal of youth studies*, 13 (3), 391 402, cited in Yuen, *ibid*., note 38, at p. 787.

More specifically, participants described gender-based differentials in terms of access to education beyond a certain age, expectations to help around the home with chores, grooming to acquire skills to manage household responsibilities, expectations relating to age of marriage, dress as well as socialisation and hobbies. For example, when daughters get married, the family must give a dowry. The males were expected to be the breadwinners while the females were expected to run the household and maintain a family life. *“I’m the eldest sibling, have to help with house chores and do my homework,”* said one female participant. Girls tend to be subjected to more stringent norm policing, typically reinforced by fathers, uncles or older male siblings. In terms of gendered constraints, one participant stated, *“Girls are forced to be married, are not allowed to study further or work without family’s approval,”* while another shared that, *“Boys have more freedom. I was engaged at an early age, my brother was not.”* In terms of social life and integration, another participant shared that, *“Girls have more restrictions, cannot stay out late, cannot work in certain professions, restrictions on clothing and making friends.”* A participant shared that she was *“Not allowed to go to camps/concerts or social events because parents would think their daughters are talking to boys.”* One fifth of the participants battled with traditional values and felt unable to maintain a cheerful youth life. They felt burdened by the many cultural expectations of behaving appropriately to save face and maintain their own and their family’s dignity by avoiding behaviours that would lead to shame. They described these as constraining their ability to have much of a *“Social life, especially with non-Muslim friends.”* Many of these constraints seemed to disproportionately impact Pakistani girls. For example, *“culturally, [they] were not supposed to socialise or engage with friends outside of the Pakistani community”*, they *“[had] to report home every day at 4pm after school. If I’m late, I would get scolded at by my father. I have to ask him if I want to go somewhere or do something.”* They described these conditions as stress inducing.

These restrictions relating to how girls were expected behave, dress and present themselves often affected opportunities to engage in certain activities. One participant expressed, *“[I] Can’t go to the gym, have to dress according to my cultural norms.”* According to some female participants, they were forbidden from participating in sports or going to the gym due to parents’ concerns that doing so would require them to dress inappropriately. The expectation was for girls not to follow current fashion trends as these were culturally unsuitable and not conservative enough.

Participants’ reported diverse expectations for girls at homes versus outside the homes. According to female participants, girls are expected to help with household chores and were taught related skills in preparation for raising and maintaining a family. In terms of household responsibilities, elder female siblings have to help with household chores, often starting their homework very late into the night and completing it fairly late. Some girls conveyed the difficulties they faced in trying to manage daily household chores and their homework, reporting that they often completed homework only after midnight. *“Girls need to help with house chores, and focus on their studies. Difficult to maintain good grades cause parents keep asking to do things at home,”* one participant said. She added, *“During exam time, I have to help my mother with house chores, finish by 9pm and study until 12am. It’s tough.”* Similar expectations to help out at the expense of schoolwork are not imposed on boys. Female participants expressed these ‘pressures’ made it harder for them to excel with grades and they had to put in much more effort all around to prove themselves.

If girls seemed to spend time on their schoolwork, parents or relatives, particularly authoritative male relatives like fathers or uncles would tell them that they had spent enough time. A male participant said, “*Girls are not expected to work.*” Likewise, female participants affirmed that the education of boys was often prioritised and valued more than the pursuit of education for Pakistani girls. This imbalance between the sexes has bred some resentment with one female participant lamenting, “[*parents*] *give boys a lot more love and freedom compared to girls.*” A contrasting view, however, was a female participant who shared that she felt very close to her father, who cherished her because he knew that one day soon, he would have to give her away.

Significantly, a majority of the female participants were of the view that, “*Islam supports gender equality, protects women.*” One of them described the Hijab as a sacred, “*protective piece of clothing and that, when worn, is associated with a sense of belonging and freedom.*” Only a small number of the female participants presented to the interviews wearing a Hijab. Those participants who dressed in a Hijab proudly and voluntarily would wear their Hijab every day and stated that the Hijab gave them a sense of belonging. Whereas the remaining of the female participants stated that if they were in Pakistan they would have to wear the Hijab to preserve family honour and for religious reasons. A few participants mentioned that they are well acquainted with the Quran, the religious text of Islam, and had educated themselves about their rights as a practicing Muslim girl living in Hong Kong. They shared that on many occasions, have felt overwhelmed and restricted by the pressure of conforming to expected cultural norms that were not listed in the Quran. Participants wondered about their rights and wished they could openly have discussions with parents. However, some participants were concerned about upsetting their parents by discussing a sensitive topic. They wished to do so but without causing offense to their parents. However, raising doubts was unacceptable, “*It is important to educate both the parents and the girls to show them that you do not always have to say yes to your parents. Should be able to stand up for themselves.*”

One female participant shared that, “*in Islam, there is no forced marriage.*” As such, parents must seek the consent of children before marriage. However, as this participant came from a family where her grandparents and parents had both had a love marriage, may hail from understanding and practicing a form of Islam considered ‘too liberal’ in the eyes of more conservative or ‘traditionalist’ believers. Thus, it may be down to historical practices in individual families. For example, one participant who shared that her parents were very supportive of her education said, “*My parents are different. My aunt got married at 30. She completed her education. My father’s side believes that dreams are important.*”

While some of the participants were aware that the general population in Hong Kong perceive Islam to be *the* constraining factor, many felt that Pakistani culture *as practiced* imposed constraints due to its interpretation of religious values rather than such constraints being manifest within Islam itself. To this end, participants indicated the “[*n*]eed to address parents, make them understand.” Their frustrations with the somewhat traditionalist interpretations of Islam and the constraints it disproportionately places on girls is evident from one participant’s remark, where she shared that, “*I rather be called a brown girl, than be asked do you marry at a young age? It makes me think differently about my own culture.*” This theme of expectations around marriage in terms of age of marriage and choice of marriage partners recurs throughout most interviews and is discussed in greater depth in the sections below.

There is also a distinct recognition of the prevalence of an acute degree of disparity between opportunities for girls in Pakistan compared with Pakistani girls in Hong Kong. Commenting both on prospects for education and possibilities for freely developing friendships, one female participant said that *“In Hong Kong I can study and make co-ed friends. In Pakistan, wouldn’t have studied that long.”* Another female participant reinforced this view, stating that, *“Life is different compared to friends in Pakistan. My thinking is totally different. Their aim is to get married, don’t value education, don’t have a future for themselves. Girls need to be strong. If I was in Pakistan, I would marry sooner too.”* Another female participant expressed that, *“If I was in Pakistan, I would have to wear a Hijab or Burqa.”*

In terms of socialising and safety, one participant was of the view that, *“In [Hong Kong], most girls can go anywhere safely. In Pakistan girls are not allowed to go out alone. Girls must be accompanied by their fathers or brother cause of the so called, “boys.”*

In describing several differences between the lives of girls and boys in Pakistan, one female participant shared, *“Life [here] is more different to girls compared in Pakistan, young boys marry older girls for passports. There are not much [sic] opportunities in rural areas, girls study up to Form 3-4. Girls in Pakistan are forced into marriage - girls from poor families marry very soon. A 15-year old girl marries a 25-year old man.”* Another female participant reinforced this view, stating, *“Life is different from those in Pakistan. My cousin sister who is 16 years old is not allowed to go to school. She will marry in her early 20s.”* In many ways, then, these quotes reflect that Hong Kong Pakistani females recognise and cherish the opportunities and liberties they enjoy in Hong Kong, which they appreciate as being different from the lives they would have led had they remained in Pakistan.

Gendered Cultural Values: Impact on Dreams, Education and Marriage

All participants expressed their desire to work and pursue their dreams. All but one of the participants expressed ambitions for a range of professional goals including becoming doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants, businessmen and women, air hostesses, engineers, journalists, fashion designers, actresses. By far, the most popular of all choices was the desire to become a policewoman. During these interviews, for many participants, it was the first time they had been invited to express their unrestrained aspirations outside of the frames of culture and traditional family or gender role expectations. Instead, they stepped into the shoes of individuals who had the space and freedom to dream of becoming anything they wanted to in life. These were powerful moments during the interviews, as they represented an innate individuality and potential for developing these aspirational professional identities. Dreams and aspirations, therefore, know no gender among the Pakistani youth community here.

Despite this universal goal of pursuing a career and following their passion, nearly a third of the participants expressed that girls are generally discouraged from studying after the age of 14 years. Many female participants shared that they had to persuade parents to permit them to complete their secondary education. This step takes much courage for girls as they are well aware about the delicate role of education given its close nexus with age of marriage and marriageability of educated Pakistani girls given their Hong Kong upbringing. Some shared that they would be faced with unpleasant reactions or consequences expressing their desire for further study. For example, one participant reported that the discussion pertaining to extending her

education often turned into a quarrel. Another shared that, *“Growing up, the more I would study the more people around me (uncles, aunts) would say it’s enough.”*

There was some ambivalence about whether their goals of education to a higher level or choice of profession would be fully supported. In particular, there were several references to specific professions deemed unsuitable for girls to pursue, including becoming an airhostess, policewoman or opening a beauty parlour. Nearly a third of the female participants shared various reservations about their pursuits expressing their potential incompatibility with the script of a good Pakistani woman. For example, one said, *“[I] wish to become either an air hostess or work in a parlour. My parents don’t think it’s good for girls to become an airhostess. Need family support to do thing [sic].”* Another shared, *“[I] wish to become a fashion designer, but not allowed; [it] does not suit our [people’s] culture. Will have to showcase clothes that are not accepted by my culture and society.”* In the case of those wanting to join the police force, participants shared it would *“not [be] allowed, parents say it’s too dangerous.”* In this manner, girls felt that their dreams were constrained by the need to ensure that the image was acceptable and fit the expectations of their parents, extended family and society. This illustrates how Pakistani girls’ dreams are limited in range and possibilities by these cultural ideals and expectations about appropriate professional aspirations for women. In this sense, their potential for professional and personal growth as women is subjected to an arbitrary standard, requiring the approval of a broad network of kin, and one which is distinctly, gendered.

Around a fifth of the female participants however, shared that their parents were supportive of their desires to pursue their education and have a good future. For some of them, it meant the possibility of putting marriage off until a reasonable time (defined as not crossing age 27 or so). However, this was not generally the norm for this group of participants. Even for one of the participants who expressed that her father was supportive of her education⁵² even where her mother and other relatives felt women need not pursue an education because of their future designation as housewives, she was engaged without her consent at 15.

The three males in the sample all said they would like their wives to be educated. It is not clear however, what level of education they meant when articulating this. In some other ethnic minority circles in Hong Kong, being educated means being a university graduate. Relative to the Pakistani community however, where completion rates for university education are fairly meagre, it is probable that this refers to completing secondary education. In many instances, Pakistani female participants expressed a desire to have a husband who would be supportive of their desire to work or study further. They recognised that, *“After marriage a lot of men won’t let their wives work or go out late without them because they are afraid they might meet someone else.”*

On the whole, there seemed to be little discussion of any disruption to boys’ educational plans or their aspirations. On the account of the female participants and in general, the degree of support the male participants alluded to from their parents, it appeared that Pakistani males in general were afforded a wider latitude in terms of freedoms to socialise, choose their careers, pursue further education, and were provided with time and support to pursue these interests. This seems

⁵² It is worth noting that this particular father was a university graduate whereas the mother had only completed a primary level education, both in Pakistan.

to be broadly underscored by the view that men bear the responsibility as the family's breadwinners to ensure a stable and secure future and the recognition that this can be achieved through education.

This inequality between the sexes seems to be reinforced at certain schools in Hong Kong. Several female participants indicated that they noticed different treatment and expectations of boys and girls at the Islamic School. Several participants also alluded to knowing girls in other schools where they appeared subjected to a more traditionalist set of Islamic norms pertaining to education, marriage and socialisation. This theme resurfaces in the context of marriage issues, particularly as regards the issue of forced marriage, discussed in the section below.

Apart from culturally-influenced role stereotypes which impede the pursuit of specific educational or career goals however, in many of the interviews, participants indicated that there were several other barriers that presented challenges in the realisation of their dreams and aspirations. For example, some shared that teachers advised them against pursuing particular careers such as medicine or nursing due to the insurmountable challenge of mastering the Chinese language, which was a must for these professions in their view. In other instances, participants themselves worried that their poor abilities in the Chinese language would limit the opportunities they would have both, in terms of higher education opportunities and the fields they enter into. These were very real concerns to them.

Marriage: Rules of Engagement

Several participants reported that it was common for Pakistani children to be engaged early in life, particularly girls. The theme of gendered marriage norms also played out significantly in the lives of Hong Kong Pakistani girls and women. For many of the girls in the sample, proposals had been coming in since as early as age 10. There is a very strong nexus between access to education and marriage for Pakistani girls, even in Hong Kong. Studying beyond a certain age is uncommon and marital proposals or an impending marriage are frequently the reason why. Several participants identified the ages of 14 to 15 as the times when Pakistani girls would typically be engaged or "*encouraged into marriage.*" One participant shared, "*I know of girls in Hong Kong between the age group of 14-16 who are married to men ten years older to them and pregnant but [don't] return to [Hong Kong] until they're 18 or else they will be questioned about their pregnancy.*" Some others, however, drew a different timeline stating that Pakistani girls typically marry between the ages of 20 and 22. A few others stretched that timeline out to suggest that the ages between 25 and 30 are a '*decent age*' for marriage for girls while for boys, it could be up to 35 years. However, among the male participants, the ideal age for marriage for girls was early 18-22 while for boys was 25 or 26, after which, it became a matter of the family's reputation. Most female participants commented that boys were allowed to marry after the age of twenty-five and culturally did not face as much marital pressure from family members when compared with girls. Male participants agreed with this view, adding that, "*Pressure is on girls, but [there are] less expectations of girls to do something with their life.*" There was a clear consensus however, that girls in Pakistan were required to marry much earlier, typically between the ages of 16 and 18 if not earlier.

A number of the participants mentioned childhood engagements, confirming their widespread prevalence as a cultural facet practiced among Hong Kong Pakistani families, including

participants who alluded they themselves had been engaged during their childhood. Among this sample, 3 of the females reported they had been engaged at varying ages, at an age when they were too young to consent (2 and 8 years of age) or despite, coming of age, they did not consent and felt pressured into getting engaged at age 15. The reported age of engagement varied for this sample with 2 years being the youngest age a participant in this sample had been engaged and 15 was the oldest age of having been engaged. For most of them, however, there was little knowledge or forewarning about the engagement and in the case of the toddler, there was no understanding whatsoever of what this ceremony entailed. Engagement, however, does not necessarily mean other life events cannot take their course, such as education, employment, etc.. However, there is an expectation that the girl will shoulder the burden of upholding the ‘honour’ of two sets of family expectations, including those of her fiancé and his family.

Consanguineous marriages (cousin marriages) also appear to be a fairly common practice or expectation within the community, highlighted by a majority of the participants. However, none of the 3 engagements have survived and all have been broken off due to different reasons. In the case of the girl who was engaged at age 2, when she was 15, her parents pushed for her to marry her fiancé. She refused so her father threatened to abandon the family if she did not oblige. The girl refused to comply and the father left home soon after.

Moreover, there was frequent reference to girls being engaged to men who were ten years’ their senior. Many participants shared that they had seen this fate among numerous girls around them. Within the sample, one of the female participants is 18 and is married to a partner of her choosing from Pakistan, however. She married against her parents’ wish, which was to have her marry her cousin. However, her husband lives in Pakistani and she is awaiting his arrival in Hong Kong once the paperwork is approved. She continues to go to school.

Forced or Arranged?

When asked what the expectations are around their marriage and who would be choosing their prospective spouses, 7 (6 female; 1 male) participants said they could choose their own marriage partners. Of this group, a few also said that if their parents found someone for them, they would also consider those options.

The majority of the sample however, offered insights which suggest a fairly limited role for Pakistani children to choose their life partners. The degree to which children were permitted to be involved in the decision varied. Some participants said that they were not permitted to choose as this was a realm strictly within the purview of parents. In some cases, it was expressed that the father would choose the partner. Additionally, in the case of a couple of participants, the mother or the father declined proposals stating that the girls were too young or needed to study further. Therefore, the balance of power was not necessarily tilted always towards the father. Each family and their underlying context, structure and value system appears to be unique.

Others shared that while their parents will select a partner, they would be invited to approve or consent to the choice. Others yet expressed that there was merely an illusion of consent and that they would never say no to their parents. For some, this came from a place where they harboured a firm belief that it was better or ‘*right for parents to choose*’ while others shared they were subjected to indirect pressure or threats to accept. For example, one participant’s father had

threatened to disown her when I refused to marry her father's sister's son because if she had said no, he would never speak to them again and he loved them very much. Another girl's father left home for good, abandoning her mother and brother when she rejected his proposed choice of a spouse.

When asked whether forced marriages happen in the community, several participants expressed knowledge of other girls in Hong Kong who had faced forced marriages. Some alluded to the girls as studying at 'other schools'. Some participants reported incidents of Pakistani girls being enticed to travel to Pakistan for a holiday but were instead introduced to potential marriage partners whilst there. Others yet, reportedly travelled to Pakistan single but returned to Hong Kong engaged or have been engaged previously, and travel to get married. Another participant commented, "*Yes it happens, even in Hong Kong. [I have] seen some of my sister's classmates – they're 17-18 years old, married to fat guys in Pakistan. These girls don't even know the guy, parents arranged the marriage. When girls from [Hong Kong] go, they already have an idea that she is going for marriage. She is already ready in her mind. Marriages also take place for visas. The girl doesn't have a choice but to keep the man. Parents might take her in the middle of her education. She studied until primary 6, she got married.*"

This quote highlights a range of patterns underlying the phenomenon, some of which were reinforced by views shared by other participants. For example, that marriages are often arranged for visa purposes so that Pakistani men from Pakistan can come to Hong Kong, and that girls will often have very little notice of the possibility but when they are taken out of school or make a sudden visit to Pakistan, they usually know what is coming. And in most of the cases, they do not have a say in this process and very often, the men do not seem like they would be the girls' own choice.

The family that receives the proposal is supposed to accept the proposal. According to the participants, if either party rejects a marriage proposal, that family suffers much disgrace from extended family members which results in long-term disputes or feuds between their families in Pakistan. Thus, to save face, most marriage proposals are accepted to maintain good family relationships. Nevertheless, participants reported a few cases where the prospect of early or a particular marriage was used as a threat to warn the to-be-married daughter to accept the proposal or risk their younger sibling being prevented from further study. "*My parents want my elder brother and I to marry at the same time. I will put my happy family before my working life.*" "*I will likely get married at the same time as my sister, depending on my sister's interest in academics.*" A number of participants stated that when placed in such a decision-making quandary, a girl is more likely to agree to the marriage proposal. "*At first, they had chosen someone for me, were pushing me to say yes and then scaring me to say no. I felt useless after my engagement, that I couldn't stop it or stand up for myself – felt so demotivated, loss focus after my engagement.*"

These views represent a wide variance in practice across families. But in general, it would seem that parents are the ones who make the choice and very few children have a say. The arrangements, depending on how they occur and the extent to which the child is involved and a willing participant who has agency to decide impacts whether the marriage itself is considered forced or arranged. These terms, however, remain fairly fluid given the potential for circumstances to change very quickly in the face of expectations, pressure, subtle or overt threats

and the desire for Pakistani children to preserve family honour and not to bring shame to their parents and extended family.

What this often also means however, is that there is a constant struggle between competing norms travelling transnationally. Pakistani girls in Hong Kong marrying Pakistani men from Pakistan means that their new households of marriage will require the delicate balancing of more orthodox Pakistani values. The level of orthodoxy will depend where in Pakistan the husband comes from, city or village. Likewise, when a Hong Kong Pakistani male marries a woman from Pakistan, his household will integrate some orthodox values which the Pakistani wife will bring with her. However, typically, values of the male head of household tend to prevail. Therefore, while a Pakistani woman marrying into a Hong Kong Pakistani man's household may bring orthodox values, if the family here is more liberal, then the wife is usually expected to embrace and pass down these values to her children.

Asked how they felt about these arrangements, one participant shared, *"I'll be okay to marry earlier if not forced into it."* Other participants expressed that they have not talked about it with their families or do not want to think about it. The explanations participants provided for this resistance to confront the question ranged from *"It's a distraction from education,"* to *"I don't want to know what my parents have planned";* *"I have no specific feelings about marriage";* *"I don't believe in love."* Others yet express a sense of fear or doom. Participants shared that, *"I've always known I can never find someone on my own - my family would kill or beat him. I'm too scared to have feelings for anyone,"* while another confided, *"When we get married, we feel we're being punished, not having our parents' blessings. This is what is stuck in my mind and doesn't make me want to get married. Honestly, don't want to get married, can't see myself being with someone."* Each of these, in their own ways, reflect a distortion of the social construct of marriage and its underlying meaning in terms of relationship with one's spouse. It indicates a tacit acceptance of an inevitability or an avoidance strategy to put off what they know they cannot change in terms of outcome. These attitudes towards marriage imbue a long-term relationship with negativity in the form of fear, lack of voice and choice or lack of emotional attachment from the get-go, which could be unhealthy and have life-long consequences.

In discussing how they respond to such circumstances, most participants expressed various constraints which preclude them from doing anything to thwart the arrangements. They were conditioned to respond in ways that would ensure they save face, protect their family honour and reputation, especially their parents' reputation by standing by their choices. Societal expectations and their weight in terms of burdening parents if the children opposed parental authority and the potential 'sanctions' and embarrassment experienced in the community heavily influenced children not to take steps that would be contrary to parental interests or that would put them through this societal shame. One female participant said, *"If I tell someone I'm being forced into marriage, it would be really embarrassing for me so I would tell others that I chose him. It was not forced. No one will come out willingly and say they were forced. No parent would say they forced their daughter to marry. Usually guy doesn't know that the girl is being forced. Marriages are done for visas. Majority of the time, the guy doesn't care."* Another shared, *"I wouldn't tell people I'm forced into marriage unless I know that person really well. I would rather say it just happened. I don't want them to think my parents are like this. I don't want people to think I'm suffering a lot. Don't want to say anything wrong about my parents. Parents are just affected by the society."* This causes many Pakistani girls to suppress their individuality and independence

by practicing cognitive dissonance or being culturally conditioned to believe that seeking for help or sharing problems outside of their home is a sign of weakness, and that individual suffering is a form of resilience.

A couple of participants shared that marriage was also used as a tool to counter weak educational performance. One female participant lamented, *“If you don't study hard, you will get married - they treat marriage as a punishment, not something you should enjoy with your spouse.”* Alternatively, it is used as a threat to force girls into compliance with expected norms of social and cultural behavior or as a punishment for defying these norms in the first place. *“If girls get into trouble, caught talking to a guy on social media: solution is marriage.”* Thus, while age or conditions around choice of spouse or marriage may be negotiable, the use of other forms of tacit or explicit pressure or engagements as a way to ‘lock in’ future life partners appeared to be a prevalent practice, norm, or *tactic*, depending on individual family circumstances.

In terms of the likely grooms and brides, usually, they would be someone from Pakistan. As shared by many participants, marriage was often a deal entered into to enable a Pakistani man to obtain a visa, which was their ‘ticket’ to enter Hong Kong. For girls, there tends to be a significant age gap between them and the prospective groom. On the other hand, the age gap was not an issue that came up with male participants in Hong Kong although some participants shared that it was common in Pakistan for younger men to marry older women if that meant an opportunity to migrate to the city or to an overseas jurisdiction like Hong Kong. Many participants expressed that they were expected to marry their first cousins. In a couple of cases, participants indicated their family did not wish for them to marry in the family. It was unclear why. Some participants expressed a specific preference on the part of parents for someone Pakistani, Muslim and one participant indicated the groom would need to be of the same caste as her and nobody else would do according to her family.

Female participants mostly expressed they are looking for life partners who would support their dreams and aspirations for a career or at least, to permit them to work. They also described other values they looked for in a partner: they should be financially stable, respectful, not doubt their wives, understanding and educated. There were, however, a couple of female participants who maintained that they had no particular expectations of marriage or their partner, except that he should be well-educated. Only one participant ‘required’ that her partner *“should like me for who I am, take an interest in me.”*

For reasons pertaining to differences in the practice of cultural values and the exposure to a more open value system in Hong Kong, these marriage patterns denote a major culture gap for all those involved. In the case of one of the participants who is engaged, she regularly experiences the huge culture gap between her ways and those of her fiancé and his family. According to her, their mindsets diverge significantly. She uses a different approach to think about things and identify solutions. From her perspective, what she does is considered ‘*wrong*’ from her fiancé’s and his family’s point of view. Despite the dissimilarities between Pakistani youth and Pakistani born Hong Kong youth, the common thread uniting these groups was an alliance of marriage with Pakistani roots, bringing very two distinct cultures into a proximal relationship.

Breaking Through Gender Role Stereotypes

There were generational culture gaps between the thought processes of parents and youth participants. Today, there are greater discrepancies between mothers' and daughters' educational levels. Daughters have surpassed primary school, are in secondary school and some are negotiating a university education. Most of the participants' mothers were described as being traditional housewives, who were primary-school educated, except for a small number of mothers who had attained secondary education and an even smaller number of whom were self-employed, providing tailoring services from their homes in Hong Kong. This small percentage of working mothers seemed to foster a slightly more open-minded context for a growth mindset towards female employment in the Pakistani community. Evidently, daughters in the Pakistani community value the importance of an education and are willing to work hard to secure their dreams and ambitions. *"I don't want to lose education."* *"Even if I fail once, I'll try again and again."* *"I want to become a nurse or a psychologist. If that doesn't work, then maybe a professor."* For some participants, their parents shared their desire for a secure and stable future and recognised the role of education in achieving this. The contradictions inherent in the life cycle in negotiating a balance between cultural expectations and their own desires for a secure future which incorporates their personal aspirations requires a seismic shift for parental attitudes and willpower to help reconcile these notions.

Despite these challenges, however, in general, the participants reflected an understanding of the cultural constraints and fear for their futures operative on their parents' impositions on them for their own good. Most expressed their filial loyalty and some shared, that their relationships with their fathers was growing more loving as the fathers realised that eventually they would have to give away their daughters. In this sense, fathers were more open in expressing affection towards their daughters in these times.

However, a handful of participants reported experiencing some form of emotional, verbal or physical abuse and indicated that abuse was mostly directed towards females in their homes in moments of noncompliance with parents' wishes.

Many of the female participants hope to bring about a culture shift for themselves, and change their life course from engaging in what are described as the traditional gendered roles prescribed for women as "housewives" or "dependent," on men. They too, just like other women around the world, aspire to become professional, independent women. *"I'm a positive person, confident about myself, If I try, I will be successful, "I won't give up."* *"I will do other things I'm good at."* *"Open my own restaurant or become a teacher."*

For many of them, however, the pursuit of education was closely tied to their aspirations for a quality life, free from poverty and a comfortable living environment. Several participants described Hong Kong as an expensive city in terms of housing. The lives they had led thus far reflected the major financial challenges they faced. They grew up watching their fathers work longer hours to meet daily expenses. Many said they would like to be employed to give their parents and families a healthier lifestyle, which for some participants, meant living in private housing in Hong Kong.

There was also an intra-generational shift when children compared their future with the lives they witnessed their elder siblings living. Several of the participants' elder brothers worked in the construction industry, as security guards, while a small number of participants' brothers were

businessmen. They varied in educational levels from form four to university. The differences between the eldest and youngest siblings typically was that the siblings in between, particularly girls, appeared to be significantly more ambitious about completing an education and pursuing various job opportunities including working at an NGO, applying to nursing school, working as a teacher, or working part time and studying, demonstrating that the younger generation of Pakistani children are more ambitious. Moreover, younger sisters who witness their older sisters marrying while in secondary school or right after completing secondary school are at a turning point of negotiating their education rights and age of marriage, many looking to postpone it to after the age of twenty-two.

Many of the participants concluded that a lack of education in Hong Kong would most definitely lead to unemployment, leaving them dependent on one income-earning family member, decreasing chances of living in private housing, increasing poverty, and living similar lifestyles as their parents. For many participants, the prospects of continuing this trend in the near future was distressing. *“Becoming a construction worker like my father.” “Life will be very hard, same as construction worker, it scares me.”* When asked to describe their greatest fears, some of them relayed poverty or becoming entrenched in their current way of life as salient fears.

A Fork in Their Lives: One Path Leading to their Dreams Fulfilled and the Other, Unfulfilled

After exploring participants’ dreams, when asked where participants considered they would be in ten years assuming their dreams were not fulfilled, a third of the participants said that they would be married with children and pursuing their dream jobs, providing for their parents or families. A small number shared that life without a job would be difficult and others confessed that they would part with their dream jobs to embrace motherhood. In terms of their fears, some of the participants feared *“Not being successful, not being able to provide for the family.” “Parents not being supportive.” “Not having a dream occupation.” “Poverty.” “I would feel stressed. If married, lots of arguments. Hope I have the freedom to work after marriage and wear clothes I like. I cannot imagine just being a practical house wife.”*

The dreams they harboured seemed to provide a false sense of security in which participants felt imprisoned but safe. Dreams were almost perceived as protecting them their inevitable realities such as marrying earlier than twenty-four, not completing an education, husbands not permitting wives to work, feeling unhappy, a lack of family support and most crucially, female participants were most concerned about being married to uneducated men who they felt no connection with, whom they received no love and respect from and in the worst case, were not decent men. In terms of other fears the participants shared worries about, *“Being useless and dependable on other people,” “Just being a housewife”, “I would be home, crying, cooking food, doing house-work or arguing.” “Bad life. If I have to marry before I want to, it’s fine,”* fearing, “Poverty,” or, “Having to return to Pakistan.”

Experiences of Discrimination and Acceptance Continue Unabated

A majority of the participants shared that despite considering Hong Kong home, they experience exclusion and reported a number of instances of discrimination encountered personally or which other family members (mothers and siblings) faced. A majority of the participants reported being treated similar to refugees and isolated because of their association with or adherence to Islam

and their strict family upbringing. “[I have] to hide the Hijab for fear of discrimination.” “Cause we wear the Hijab most local people make faces at us. They think we are bad.” Another shared, “My mother and I have experienced discrimination publically on public transport. We were travelling on the bus during the rains. My mother accidentally pushed a local girl. She responded, retarded.” One lamented, “[We have] been in Hong Kong all my life. People still discriminate, and disrespect by saying things such as, you smell bad, go away from here.” “On public transport, people cover their noses.” In particular, participants singled out the older Chinese generation in Hong Kong as being the main culprits, “Older generation people treat us like we are from another planet consuming their stuff and resources but no, we are born in Hong Kong, we are part of Hong Kong.”

Greatest Fears

A wide range of fears were expressed by Pakistani children and youth in Hong Kong. While some of these fears expressed are natural to many children – feeling abandoned, lonely or not having the support of one’s family, the majority expressed fear of failure and not fulfilling their dreams. Failure seemed therefore to represent primarily two kinds: *cultural*, which entailed disappointing parents or family in terms of cultural expectations (particularly for girls) and *professional*, in terms of failing to fulfil their own dreams and aspirations. Other fears expressed included the fear of being stereotyped, perceived negatively on account of their culture and beliefs, living a life of poverty, dependency or being ‘*just a practical housewife*’.

If They Were Granted Any One Wish...

When asked if they had a magic wand, what would they wish for, all of them wished to change facets of their environment, social, cultural and economic, which go to the very core of their lived experiences in Hong Kong. For example, the majority shared they wish that the discrimination against them would stop. They wished their religion of Islam was better understood so that they would not feel the weight of the negative stereotypes attached to being Muslim in Hong Kong. Put together, however, life at the intersection of being a Pakistani Muslim youth, was particularly grueling because this invariably influenced their life course in terms of the kind of fields they could enter into, their access to equal opportunities in employment, particularly for high-paying jobs, and the quality of life they could then lead. In this sense, they felt teachers, employers, and the general population needed to enhance their cultural sensitivity and understanding so that they could rid themselves of the biases they carry. One participant said, “I don’t want to feel bad about myself and culture. I want people to know our culture and understand us.” Another shared she wished we could, “Erase all the negative thoughts about being a Muslim.”

A significant number of the interviewees wished for opportunities for greater wealth generation so that they could provide a better future for their families, live in bigger homes and have respectable jobs. They felt more money would also earn them wider respect in terms of social standing. Although they felt the government could do more to provide welfare for families, they expressed the need for the government to go beyond providing funding. In that sense, they wished they would be treated equally but also recognised and wished that they could be better at learning Cantonese. To that end, they wished teachers would adopt new approaches that were tailored to their effective learning by providing a motivating school environment.

One third of the respondents wished their parents would be more open-minded. They wished they could communicate more effectively with parents to educate them about the need for a cultural shift in their mindset. This was highlighted primarily in connection with the lifestyles of Pakistani girls with respondents stating that such a cultural shift was needed to help parents understand the need to better integrate with their sociocultural environment in Hong Kong and that this could only come about by empowering their girls to do what was best for their future. This required allowing them to complete their education *before* marriage but also, creating the necessary space and environment within the family, to enable girls to pursue and excel in their studies whilst at school.

In essence, this wish-list represents the thrust of the entire report and the integration of all the views expressed. Pakistani children aspire to have their fundamental freedoms recognised and to have equal opportunities for access to education, employment and prospects for achieving their dreams. At the same time, they understand that their cultural and religious identities as Pakistani Muslims impact their realities in significant ways putting many of their dreams out of reach and for some of them, particularly the girls, practically unrealisable. The barriers are two-fold and multidimensional – they are internal and external barriers.

For Pakistani girls, the cultural and religious values are interpreted in a way to constrain and limit their freedoms in many ways. Pakistani girls bear the burden of honouring their families and their lineage through their actions, values and propagation of Islamic values and teachings to their offspring. They are desperately seeking to change this. For Pakistani boys, they shoulder many burdens too, primarily of bearing the sole breadwinning responsibility for the family but also, to perform other roles of masculinity entrenched within Pakistani culture. At the same time, from the perspective of outsiders to Islam, Pakistani children represent backwardness or orthodox values, fundamentalism, and a threat to our lifestyle in Hong Kong.

Yet, from everything that they have shared in the course of the study, it is abundantly clear that this outsider script and perspective is entirely misplaced. Pakistani youth of Hong Kong *represent the best vehicle for achieving cultural integration and upward social mobility* for the Pakistani community. This can best be done by supporting these children and their families from their very early days to facilitate this process, step by step so that their values develop in tandem with the societal values we value and uphold in Hong Kong: equal respect and non-discrimination towards all. This means protecting equal rights and dignity of persons of all backgrounds, regardless of culture, religion, gender or other markers of difference.

Summary and Analysis of Key Findings

1. Pakistani children represent a rich community with many talents and assets. More specifically, they are a fast-growing population group and one which is a vast talent pool for Hong Kong's future growth. Pakistani children typically speak 4-6 languages, including English and Chinese. Their multilingualism is a huge asset to enable Hong Kong to connect to the rest of Asia.
2. Pakistani children live in large, single-income households where mothers tend to be housewives. Several participants shared their desire for upward social mobility, by breaking free from a life of poverty and being able to afford private residential housing. For the boys, this means working hard to ensure they do not become security guards or construction workers like their fathers or older male siblings. For the girls, they are most keen on breaking through the stereotype that Pakistani women should remain housewives. They have a belief that this change will happen for them and that their generation will be different.
3. Pakistani children, both girls and boys, just like many other Hong Kong children, aspire to enter into a range of professions to serve Hong Kong and build their futures here.
4. However, although Pakistani males and females both express reservation or concerns about whether they will be able to achieve their dreams, for most female Pakistani women and girls, the primary hindrance is a culture in which girls are engaged in early childhood, their partners are chosen for them, and working after marriage is not generally permitted. Certain professions are also off-limits for girls as they are seen as incompatible with Islam or Pakistani culture. Some children, however, reported that teacher-expectations and belief in their ability, particularly in terms of learning Chinese to a sufficiently advanced level, affected their choice of profession. Despite the potential hurdles, most of them had several 'back-up' professions they would aim for. They refused to relent even in the face of such challenges. This was particularly noticeable among the girls, who appeared very resilient despite the multi-level barriers they were required to endure. The majority of female Pakistani children would like to complete their education and marry after the age of twenty-four, securing employment to contribute to their families and provide better care for their parents in the future.

Despite the lack of acceptance of their dreams by those around them in the case of Pakistani girls and the discrimination and exclusion they face on the whole from Hong Kong's ethnic Chinese, Pakistani children remain resilient. Those trying to negotiate with their parents to allow them to pursue additional years of education want to be exemplars for other Pakistani youth and children. They are preparing to be agents of change for their community.

5. Pakistani children grow up in a strong, interconnected family context which is centered around and deeply influenced by cultural and religious norms. Family is very important to them and the influence of extended family network and community values are substantial. In general, Pakistani girls and boys both recognise the divergence in gender roles and stereotypes which determine their life course. These norms affect mostly girls,

particularly in the area of education, employment, and most crucially, marriage. Marriage-related cultural norms apply to both male and female Pakistanis, however, in this sample, only the females brought up concerns about early engagement and forced marriage whereas the males did not.

6. Given the prevalence of early engagement and marriage among Pakistani girls, education beyond Form 4 or 5 is typically constrained, with prospects for university education being virtually non-existent for most. Despite this, however, the girls do apply for university courses in the hope that they may be permitted to continue their studies after their engagement or until their marriage, if not after. No parallel constraints appear to apply to the Pakistani males interviewed. However, it was notable that none of the sample's older siblings had entered tertiary education and most male siblings were in employment after secondary school in construction. Some joined their father's businesses. Older female siblings were reportedly married and also did not enter into tertiary education.
7. Pakistani children are conditioned to believe and accept that their parents will choose their spouses. This was described varyingly as being in the best interest of children or best for societal reasons in case the marriage or alliance were to breakdown (in the event of an early engagement). However, a small minority of Pakistani girls felt that while parents have the authority to choose their spouses, parents should (according to Islam) or would seek their consent as well.
8. Pakistani children, both male and female, aspire to have partners who are well-educated, respectful and religious. For the girls, it was very important that their partners would allow them to work after marriage. Most of the girls interviewed expressed this desire.
9. Observations from our current research findings have established that there is a trend of male and female Pakistani youth from Hong Kong marrying Pakistanis from Pakistan. There is an established trend of male and female Pakistani youth from Hong Kong marrying Pakistanis from Pakistan. This is widely practiced and the objective appears to be for the marriage alliance to serve as a basis for obtaining a Hong Kong visa, and eventually, the right to work or stay here. These arrangements mean that once married, there is a constant struggle between competing norms which travel transnationally with the spouse from Pakistan. Pakistani girls in Hong Kong marrying Pakistani men from Pakistan enter into new households of marriage which require the delicate balancing of more orthodox Pakistani values which the male spouse from Pakistan is likely to bring with him. The level of orthodoxy will depend where in Pakistan the husband comes from, city or village. Despite her Hong Kong upbringing and somewhat more liberal thinking or values, culturally, it is typical for the values of the male head of household to prevail. This will present various challenges for women negotiating their own identities in their new household, from how to dress to whether they are allowed to go out of the house unaccompanied by male family members to the activities they pursue post-marriage, such as further education or employment. While a woman from Pakistan marrying into a Hong Kong Pakistani man's household may bring orthodox values, the wife is usually expected to embrace the man's way of life and as such, life in Hong Kong may bring unexpected freedoms for her. However, in most instances, women from Pakistan tend to be less well-

educated and unlikely to be able to avail of the broader community support and access she might be able to draw on here. Restrictions around their socialisation also limits most of their interaction to phone-based communication. This accessibility gap is confirmed in previous studies.⁵³

10. The majority of Pakistani children expressed fear of failure and not fulfilling their dreams. Failure for them is meaningful in two contexts: the *cultural* and *professional*. When asked if they had a magic wand, all of them wished to change facets of their environment, social, cultural and economic. These go to the very heart of their everyday lived realities in Hong Kong. Their wish-list for change characterises their indispensable future potential: Pakistani children aspire to have their fundamental freedoms recognised and to have equal opportunities. They are seeking support for themselves and their families from their very early days. They wish to be respected, independent and active members of Hong Kong society and wish to contribute in uplifting not only their families but also, Hong Kong. They see themselves as indelibly etched into the future history of Hong Kong.

⁵³ Puja Kapai, *Delivering on the Promise of Equal Protection under the Law: Understanding the Experiences and Help-seeking Behaviours of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom*, Centre for Comparative and Public Law, The University of Hong Kong (2015), available at, <http://www.law.hku.hk/ccpl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Delivering%20on%20the%20Promise%20of%20Equal%20Protection%20under%2>.

CHAPTER 4

Recommendations

1. **Schools:**

- a. *Raise Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness:* Two-way training and workshops for teachers and parents (Chinese and non-Chinese) to create a culturally sensitive school environment where there is greater understanding of diverse value systems. This would be a critical venue and safe space within which to bust harmful myths and racial and religious stereotypes.
- b. *Keeping Children in School:* Raise the bar beyond the minimum age of schooling (Year 9). Provide financial incentives through scholarships, curriculum or afterschool support for children to encourage them to complete matriculation (Year 12).
- c. *Life Enrichment Course:* Introduce a life enrichment course as a form of personal, social and health education in which topics which are generally not covered in other subjects can be covered, including sex education, reproductive health education, gender stereotypes, child abuse and violence against women, preparing for further education or employment (including leadership, networking, communication, and organisational skills), negotiating cultural and professional demands and expectations, nurturing healthy personal, romantic and professional relationships, dealing with death and tragedy, building resilience, understanding our roles and responsibilities as individuals, family members, neighbours and citizens, and the importance of work-life balance. This can be offered as a series of workshops to upskill students outside of regular school curriculum time but requiring each student to complete at least 3-4 modules.
- d. *Parental Engagement:* A series of workshops for parents (both fathers and mothers) to understand the school's expectations, the role of the school and the responsibilities of parents in facilitating their children's educational development and growth as well as coverage of other topics including relationships, a healthy home environment, dealing with conflict and inter-generational differences.
- e. *Career Counselling & Mentorship:* Appoint or designate a staff member as the school's career counsellor who can offer counselling, guidance and mentorship or enlist appropriate persons from within the school's alumni, parental or professional network, to offer such a support system for all students.
- f. *Parent-Teacher Meetings:* Goals and expectations of both, the school as well as parents should be openly discussed in order to better understand any circumstances which may potentially interfere with or impact the education of children in the care of the school. These discussions should be duly noted in a formal record for review with the students concerned from time to time in the

course of the Life Enrichment Course or Career Counselling & Mentorship scheme. This would enable proper planning and a more conducive approach to facilitating a smooth transition for students from one stage to the next in terms of their future planning.

- g. *School Counsellors*: Training of school counsellors on the particular circumstances of the Hong Kong Pakistani population, the factors (social, economic, cultural and religious) that may affect the life trajectory and developmental stages of children. Developing appropriate protocol, tools and resources for counselling, assessment of risk and threat levels, reporting to school management, medical or law enforcement professionals in a range of circumstances, understanding and anticipating potential risks arising from particular interventions and responding to these with the child's safety and health as the foremost consideration and priority above all else.
- h. *School Management*: Observe closely repeated or consecutive absences and maintain regular communication with the family to understand reasons for the absences. Maintain a record of the absences and of conversations explaining circumstances. Once children are back at school, schedule a check-in to ensure the reasons appear consistent with the how the child presents themselves and make a note of the conversation. Develop appropriate policies and protocols, tools and resources for assessment of risk and threat levels, and corresponding action, including reporting to school management, medical or law enforcement professionals in a range of circumstances, understanding and anticipating potential risks arising from particular interventions and responding to these with the child's safety and health as the foremost consideration and priority above all else.
- i. *Review and Revise Protocols*: Consistently debrief and evaluate tools, resources and actions taken to determine areas for improvement to enhance the safety of the child.

2. **Social Workers at Schools, IFSCs and FCPSUs, NGOs**

- a. *Raise Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness*: Mandatory training and workshops to create culturally appropriate screening mechanisms, risk assessment and interventions. This would depend crucially on eliminating biases, harmful stereotypes and myths. Training should be grounded in research and data on the particular circumstances of the Hong Kong Pakistani population, the factors (social, economic, cultural and religious) that may affect the life trajectory and developmental stages of children.
- b. *Culturally Sensitive Engagement and Service Delivery*: Developing suitably sensitive protocol, tools and resources for counselling, assessment of risk and threat levels, and corresponding action, including reporting to medical, law enforcement or other professionals in a range of circumstances, understanding and

anticipating potential risks arising from particular interventions and responding to these with the child's safety and health as the foremost consideration and priority above all else.

- c. *Observation and Regular Follow-up*: Observe closely repeated patterns and maintain regular communication with the family to understand and record recent developments in their circumstances. Schedule regular check-ins, particularly where children are involved and observe how the child presents themselves and make note of the conversation and observations. Bear in mind, in particular, the underlying or subtle cues that may be hidden due to cultural or other factors and may require additional trust-building to surface.
- d. *Review and Revise Protocols*: Consistently debrief and evaluate tools, resources and actions taken to determine areas for improvement to enhance the safety of the child.

3. **Non-Governmental Organisations / Community Centres**

- a. *Raise Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness*: Mandatory training and workshops for staff, including management to create a culturally sensitive community environment where there is greater understanding and respect for diverse value systems. This would be a critical venue and safe space within which to bust harmful myths and racial and religious stereotypes.
- b. *Protocol Risk Assessment and Action*: Develop culturally appropriate policies and protocols, tools and resources for assessment of risk and threat levels, and corresponding action, including reporting to social worker, IFSC or FCPSU or medical or law enforcement professionals in a range of circumstances, understanding and anticipating potential risks arising from particular interventions and responding to these with the child's safety and health as the foremost consideration and priority above all else.
- c. *Review and Revise Protocols*: Consistently debrief and evaluate tools, resources and actions taken to determine areas for improvement to enhance the safety of the child.
- d. *Cultivate Resources and Network*: Work with service user networks to draw on them to serve as their own cultural ambassadors. Invite them as 'experts' on various aspects of their experiences and to share how they overcame challenges, worked the system and overcame various barriers. At the same time, enhance their visibility and showcase their leadership as role models for others in their community to learn from and be inspired by.
- e. *Develop Life Enrichment Courses*: Introduce life enrichment courses for families, targeting women and girls but also men and boys as a form of personal, social and health education in which topics which are generally not widely discussed within the community, including sex education, reproductive health education, gender

stereotypes, child abuse and violence against women, preparing for further education or employment (including leadership, networking, communication, and organisational skills), negotiating cultural and professional demands and expectations, nurturing healthy personal, romantic and professional relationships, dealing with death and tragedy, building resilience, understanding our roles and responsibilities as individuals, family members, neighbours and citizens, and the importance of work-life balance. This can be offered as a series of workshops for upskilling the broader community but with a focus on ethnic minorities from various communities to integrate their cultural knowledge with the available resources and networks in Hong Kong.

4. **Working with Mosques and Cultural or Religious Bodies**

- a. *Raising Awareness*: Engaging the Imams to raise awareness with their members about the status of the Pakistani population and their life experiences in Hong Kong, highlighting some common barriers to achieving a quality lifestyle. Recognising the role of religion and culture in building strong, resilient communities and particularly, its role in guiding Hong Kong Pakistani youth in connecting with their heritage and sense of self and identity. Recognising the prevalence of harmful myths and stereotypes around gender, culture and religion. Examining how life in Hong Kong is different but is still conducive to ensuring the development of a healthy Pakistani Muslim identity but there is a responsibility to do this in an integrative manner. In addition, raising awareness specifically about:
 - i) What the Holy Qu’ran says about girls’ education;
 - ii) The link between education and poverty; and
 - iii) Education of a daughter as a means of educating a family.
- b. *Enhance Opportunities for Cross-cultural Dialogue*: Invite people from the Chinese community in Hong Kong to join members of the organization in activities or special occasions and functions to enable them to experience cultural, religious and community values and better understand the community. Encourage members to partake more fully in Hong Kong life, and in particular, to learn the language and take advantage of the opportunities for a better lifestyle that are offered here.
- c. *Commending family champions*: Who have supported their daughters’ education., making it financially possible and acceptable in the community. In principal, educating a daughter means educating a family.
- d. *Harness Cultural and Religious Knowledge to Educate Members About Commitment to Equality*: Present role models from within the community, discuss current issues especially, topics that are taboo to cultivate a more enlightened understanding of the role of community members in supporting each other, dealing with hardships and ensuring that culture or religion are not misused as tools for oppression or the denial of the rights and freedoms duly entitled to all.

Offer platforms and safe spaces for families, including women and girls, men and boys to discuss reproductive health education, gender stereotypes, child abuse and violence against women, negotiating religious, cultural and professional demands and expectations, nurturing healthy personal and professional relationships, dealing with death and tragedy, building resilience, understanding our roles and responsibilities as individuals, family members, neighbours and citizens, and the importance of work-life balance. Designate specific sessions for youth-oriented discussions to enable a cross-generational dialogue and engender understanding.

5. **The HKSAR Government should consider the following:**

- a.* Greater access to all-girls secondary schools: girls are more likely to be able to continue their education in an all-girls school environment.
- b.* Keeping girls safe: All children, including ethnic minority girls, should feel safe in their homes. A particular effort should be made to understanding safety issues that may arise in the case of forced marriages.
- c.* Keeping girls in Hong Kong: the government should track all children leaving and entering Hong Kong and when there are long absences, these should be investigated.

EPILOGUE

Given the associations between Islam and the life experiences of most of the participants in this research study, the research team and stakeholders from across NGO, academic and government, engaged with **Chief Imam Mufti Muhammad Arshad** to better understand the findings and their implications for the Pakistani Muslim community. The conversation touched on many central themes which emerged from the research findings. With a view to eliminating misperceptions around the tenets of Islam, in particular, in relation to gender, this section documents a conversation between the Chief Imam and Shalini Mahtani of the Zubin Foundation as well as members of the audience.

The Qu’ran on Education

Imam Arshad: No society can make progress unless both genders play their role in development. If half of the population stays behind, how can society progress? Islam is not a new religion. It is 1,400 years old, which reflects its influence. There was a time when it ruled more than half the world even in territories as far and wide as Europe, Africa, Asia and a significant number of its followers continue to exist all over the world even today. There are 57 Muslim-dominated countries in the world and they are producing both male and female professionals. My own daughter recently completed her education in Nursing.

There are many verses of the Qu’ran, which invite people to get an education. The first word or revelation that was made to the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him (PBUH)) was to read. This was the instruction without any reference to a difference for males or females.

Any person who performs good, male or female, will have a good life here and hereafter. “Good” is read as including education. The Prophet introduces himself as a teacher. Many great women have played a role in the progress and development of society throughout humanity. Moreover, there is no difference in giving or getting an education.

Take the example of the Prophet’s own life. He said that seeking knowledge is a compulsion on every male and female. The Qu’ran has arranged for the education of males and females without any discrimination. An educated woman or girl, who is in the way of seeking knowledge, will achieve great heights on the basis of this knowledge. They may have made different institutions for males and females in terms of education – however, there is no Muslim country where education for females is currently prohibited.

The Qu'ran On Marriage, Love and Family Honour

Marriage is the subject of a verse in the Qu'ran. IT attributes equal power to males and females. No Islamic marriage can be performed without the consent of males or females. The words that are used are the same for both parties.

Love cannot be controlled through religion or culture. If a girl or a woman says that she will offer herself or stay with this man, it is considered that she has expressed her consent. If the male accepts her expression of consent, this is considered to be marriage, which is viewed as an offer and acceptance in the eyes of Islam. The only condition for the marriage contract is that the male should offer some dowry to the girl. The rest is down to individual preferences of having an Imam present or a traditional or other ceremony.

*Viewed from the perspective of the Islamic religion, marital matters are not a matter of family honour per se. Both males and females have the right to reject or consent to a marriage. This is between the families. When conflicts arise, as a matter of religion, Imams tell parents **not to force** children but rather, to look after their education and to care for them to enable them to develop their thinking so that they may decide for themselves.*

*In terms of age of engagement or marriage, in Islam, when males and females become adults, they may enter into marriage. This is denoted by puberty. No marriage before puberty is acceptable. Nobody should marry before this time. Moreover, this is not a compulsion. When someone reaches the age of puberty, it is not that they **must** get married. It is the minimum age for marriage, nor is it prescriptive. Moreover, where a father has arranged for the engagement of his daughter when she was a child, when she becomes an adult, she has the authority to reject this arrangement.*

The Prophet's daughters married at ages 15, 18, and 20 respectively. His wife was 17 or 18. The rest of the women he married were either widows or divorced.

In general, the Qu'ran requires Muslims to follow the rules and regulations of the society in which Muslims reside. In Hong Kong, the age of consent is 16 and parental permission is required whereas young persons who achieve the age of 21 may marry of their own free will. In Pakistan, they may marry before the age of 18 but in Hong Kong, the Imam has not presided over marriages before the age of 18.

On marriage between first cousins, Islam has permitted this practice but does not require it. In some Islamic countries, this has been banned, for example, in Iran. Only one of the daughters of the Prophet married her cousin.

Both males and females have the right to seek a divorce under Islamic marriage laws. It comes down to the marital contract entered into at the time of marriage. She should request that clause with the power to exercise her right to seek a divorce into the marital contract. A husband may also delegate this power to his own wife if he so wishes.

These insights into the tenets of Islam on Education, Marriage, including age of marriage, consent, family honour and divorce are instructive and help address any misunderstandings

within the Muslim community but also, the wider community of stakeholders in Hong Kong. This also sheds light on the fluidity between religious belief frameworks and cultural practices. With respect to education and marriage, in the context of the Muslim diaspora that was the subject of this particular study, cultural practices have been entangled with religious edicts, leading to the culturalization of religion and vice-versa. This breeds confusion, misunderstanding but most significantly, can have a detrimental impact on girls and women, who are made to sacrifice various opportunities, rights and access to a life of their dreams, on account of Islamic culture which has been developed independently by the communities rather than strictly enforced by religious institutions and their leaders here in Hong Kong.

This distinction as to the sources of these beliefs, their accuracy and their prevalence in practice, is of vital importance as we consider the context for the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations. In particular, it is of great significance to have the voice of the Chief Imam to give weight to the relevance of the recommendations made under the teachings of the Qu'ran. It also serves to challenge the distortions in practice and belief systems thought to be authentic in terms of Islamic religious practice. However, on the other hand, it does present its own challenges given the Islamicisation of cultural practices within the Pakistani community in Hong Kong. Necessarily, this has an effect on non-Muslim Pakistani communities here and warrants further study and examination as we move forward with this work.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Consent Form

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Dear Parents/Guardians

Your child/children has agreed to participate in the research study, *Dreams of Pakistani Children*, conducted by The Zubin Foundation in partnership with Center for Comparative and Public Law (CCPL), The University of Hong Kong. The purpose of this study is to explore the needs of the girls/boys in order to provide insight to develop a program for them.

Since you are the parent of the student participant, for the purpose of this research, we would like to ask your permission to allow your child/children to participate in this research, which will be conducted at school.

Your child/children's participation may include taking part in an interview to obtain information about your child/children's dreams for their future and experiences growing up in Hong Kong. During the interviews, the participants' discussion will be audiotaped. Participants may request to review the audiotape. We will erase the entire audiotape or parts of it upon request. Even if you agree to allow your child/children to participate now, you may change your mind later and withdraw. If you inform us that you have changed your mind, we will delete the materials we have recorded pertaining to your child/children.

We will ensure that the information participants provide to us will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Further, participants will have the right not to be included in any analysis that is produced, and if we find out that a participant does not wish to be included, we will act according to that wish. Access to interview notes and audiotapes is restricted to the research team. Any information obtained in this study will remain strictly confidential, and will be used for research purposes only. Any personal identities and school information will be coded in the record and thus the participants' confidentiality will be fully protected.

These records will be destroyed within 1 year.

Participation in this project is voluntary. No action on your part is required if you give consent for your child/children to participate in the study; however, if you do NOT wish to give consent, you are requested to make this known to your child/children's school by writing to Ravina Lalvani at (ravina@zubinfoundation.org) or calling The Zubin Foundation Office (25409588)

Thank you.

Appendix 2 Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Questions

Dreams of Pakistani Children – Research Project

Funded by Plan International HK
(Internal working document)

Background Information

1) Name						
2) Date of Interview						
3) Time of Interview						
4) Age						
5) Gender						
6) Date of Birth and Location						
7) Name of School						
8) School year						
9) Languages: N=none, L=little, W=well	English	Urdu	Hindi	Pushto	Cantonese	Mandarin
• Speaks						
• Reads						
• Writes						

Family Information

	Mother	Father
10) Place of Birth		
11) Education level		
12) Occupation		

13) Languages Mother: N=none, L=little, W=well	English	Urdu	Hindi	Pushto	Cantonese	Mandarin
• Speaks						
• Reads						
• Writes						
14) Languages Father: N=none, L=little, W=well	English	Urdu	Hindi	Pushto	Cantonese	Mandarin
• Speaks						
• Reads						
• Writes						
15) How many siblings?	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
Age?						
Place of birth						
Education levels						
Occupation						
16) Languages Siblings: N=none, L=little, W=well	English	Urdu	Hindi	Pushto	Cantonese	Mandarin
• Speak						
• Read						
• Write						

General Interview Questions

1) What are the issues that you face in Hong Kong in all areas of life? Education? Social Other?	
2) What solutions would address these problems?	
3) If we could help solve one problem (and we had a magic wand) what would that be?	
4) What do you dream of becoming?	
5) Where will be you in 10 years? • If dream comes true? • If dream doesn't come true?	
6) What are you most afraid of?	
7) What are you most excited by?	
8) How are men and boys	

and women and girls treated in your family?	
9) Will you choose your husband/wife?	
10) Are there expectations surrounding your marriage? If yes, what are they? How do they compare with those of a sibling or a peer in HK? How does this make you feel?	
11) Anything else you would like to share?	