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جي روڪڻ گڏ ڳوٺاڻي سطح تي

سجاول، صوبو سنڌ

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## BEYOND TRADITION: BUILDING A PROTECTIVE FUTURE FOR GIRLS IN PAKISTAN

Key Highlights of Endline Evaluation Report  
Prevention of Child Marriage Pakistan



## 1. Background

Child marriage remains a critical challenge in Pakistan, driven by entrenched social norms, poverty, gender inequality, and limited access to education. Girls in rural and marginalized communities are disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks to their health, education, and long-term well-being.

In response, Islamic Relief Pakistan (IRP), with financial and technical support from UNICEF, implemented the Prevention of Child Marriage Project across four districts: Quetta (Balochistan), Sujawal (Sindh), Rawalpindi (Punjab), and Swat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). The project adopted a faith sensitive and community led approach, grounded in Islamic Relief's Channels of Hope methodology. It engaged religious leaders, interfaith platforms, community influencers, adolescents, and families to reshape norms, strengthen protective systems, and link at risk girls to essential services.

This independent endline evaluation, conducted by GLOW Consultants, provides a comprehensive assessment of the project's results, effectiveness, and lessons learned. The evaluation employed a rigorous mixed-methods design, comparing intervention communities with non-intervention control areas to identify changes attributable to the project.



## 2. Methodology at a Glance

The evaluation used a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to assess change and understand pathways to impact.

- 1,568 household survey respondents, including
- 780 married women (25-49 years)
- 788 young women and men (15-24 years)
- Focus Group Discussions with women, men, adolescent girls, and boys
- Key Informant Interviews with faith leaders, community influencers, government officials, and project staff

Findings were assessed against OECD-DAC criteria and adhered to UNICEF, UNEG, and safeguarding standards.

Findings were triangulated across sources and assessed against the OECD-DAC criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, impact, and coherence. Special attention was paid to ethical standards, safeguarding, and the meaningful participation of women and adolescents.



Figure 1: Data Collection with a women right holder in Quetta (Photo Credit: GLOW)



### 3. Key Achievements and Evidence of Success

#### 3.1 Strengthened Institutional and Community Prevention Systems

The project successfully established multi-level prevention systems linking institutional engagement with community level action. Interfaith child protection forums at national and provincial levels strengthened coordination among religious leaders, government institutions, and civil society.

At community level, trained religious leaders and focal persons led sustained dialogue and counselling. These efforts translated into more visible and functional prevention mechanisms. Among youth aged 15–24 years, 61.4% in intervention areas reported that accessing services for children was easy, compared to 33.0% in control areas, demonstrating stronger coordination and clearer pathways to support. *"When leaders from different faiths speak together, communities understand that protecting children is a shared value."* Interfaith Forum Member.

Ease of accessing service for children in your community (%-Youth 15-24 Yrs)

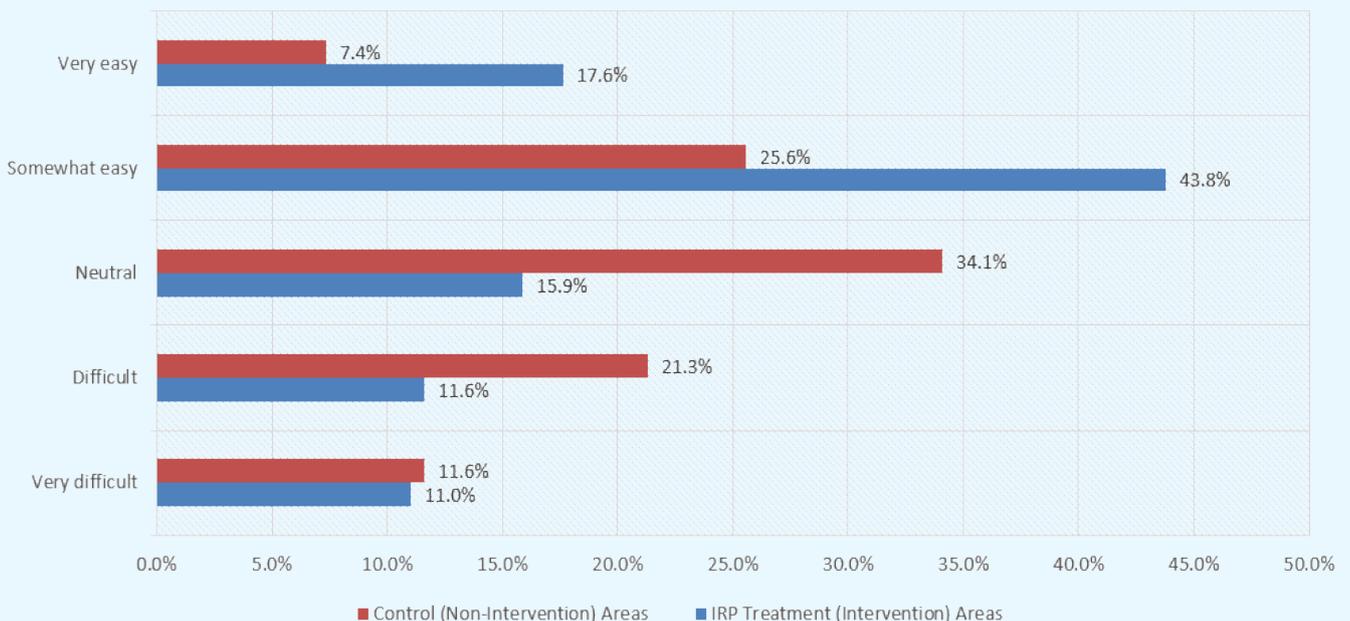


Figure 2: Ease of accessing services for children in your community (%-Youth 15-24 Yrs)

### 3.2 Meaningful Shifts in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Dialogue

Awareness and openness to dialogue improved substantially in intervention communities. The proportion of respondents who viewed child marriage as a risk increased from 36.15% at baseline to 68.0% at endline in treatment areas, compared to only a 3.9 percentage-point increase in control areas. Acceptance of child marriage also declined. Among married women, 41.0% in intervention areas reported that child marriage is not acceptable, compared to 32.2% in control villages. At the same time, 66.9% of women in intervention areas stated that families delay marriage by sending children to school, compared to 52.3% in control areas, highlighting education as an increasingly accepted alternative.

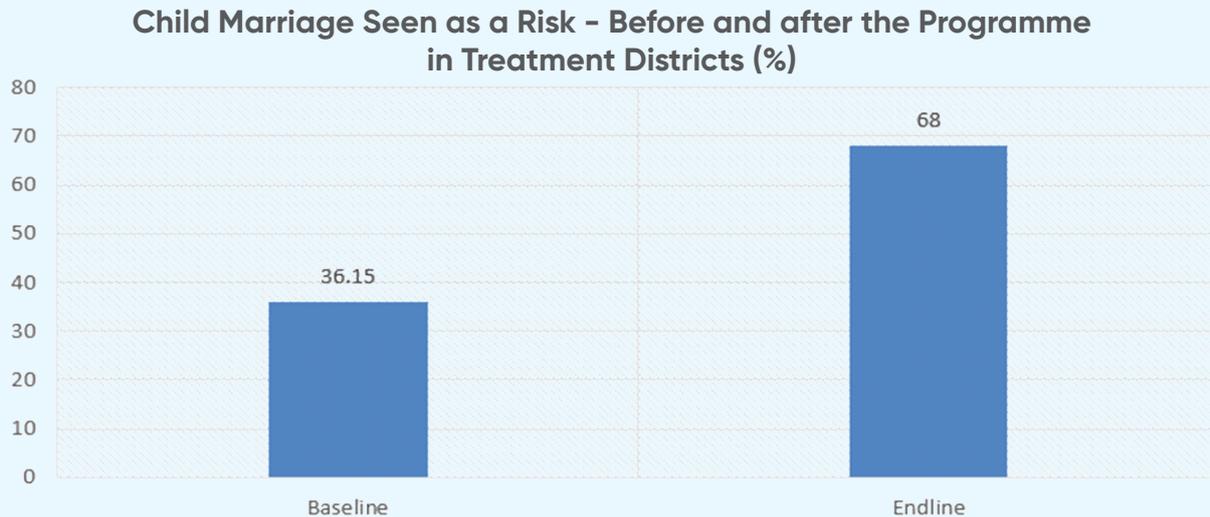


Figure 3: Child Marriages Seen as a Risk

### 3.3 Faith-Based Engagement as a Catalyst for Change

Faith engagement proved to be a decisive factor. In intervention areas, 22.0% of women believed that more than half or nearly all faith leaders disapprove of child marriage, compared to only 5.8% in control areas. Conversely, perceptions that less than half of faith leaders oppose child marriage were far lower in treatment communities (40.7%) than in control villages (62.4%).

A particularly notable achievement was the project's engagement with the Islamic Ideological Council and senior religious scholars. The project supported the development of authoritative religious guidance that included issuance of a Fatwa from Jamia Darul Uloom Karachi (Mufti Taqi Usmani) promoting child protection. *"When guidance comes from respected religious institutions, families listen more carefully."* Religious Leader

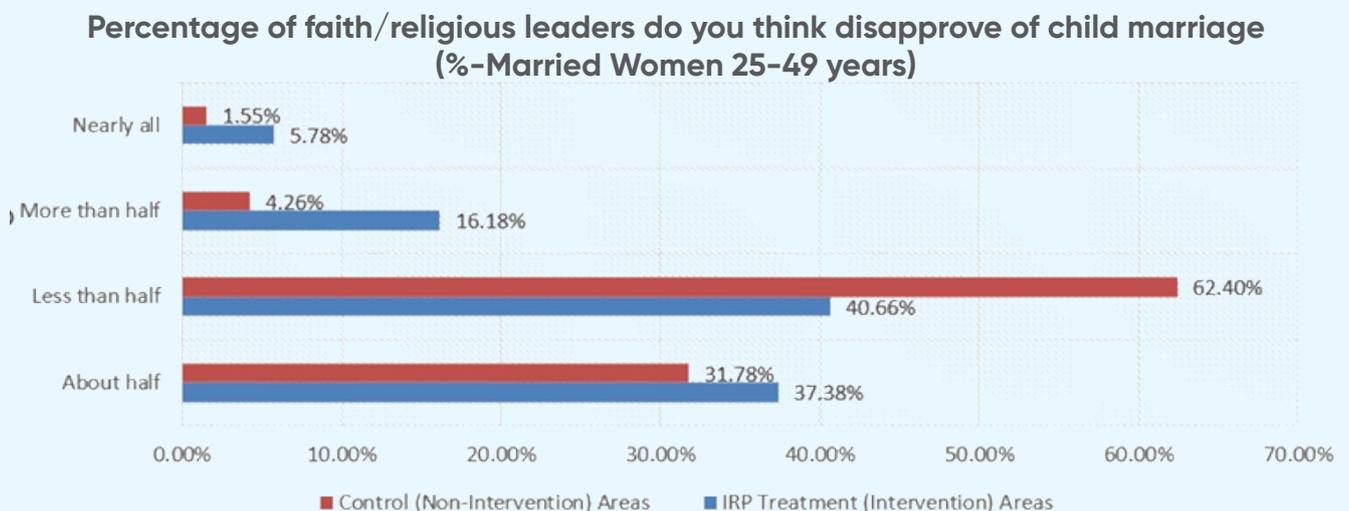


Figure 4: Percentage of faith/religious leaders do you think disapprove of child marriage (% - Married Women 25–49 years)



Figure 5: FGD with women right holder in Quetta (Photo Credit: GLOW)

### 3.4 Increased Agency and Voice of Adolescent Girls

The project contributed to tangible improvements in girls' agency. Among married women in intervention areas:

- 64.9% felt able to participate and voice opinions in community messaging (vs. 39.9% in control areas)
- 77.1% felt confident advocating to end child marriage, compared to 55.0% in control villages

Girls also reported greater confidence in expressing educational aspirations and delaying marriage decisions. *"Now we can say we want to study first. Before, no one asked us."* Adolescent Girl, Intervention Area

Feeling confident advocating for ending child marriage in your community  
(% - Married Women 25-49 years)

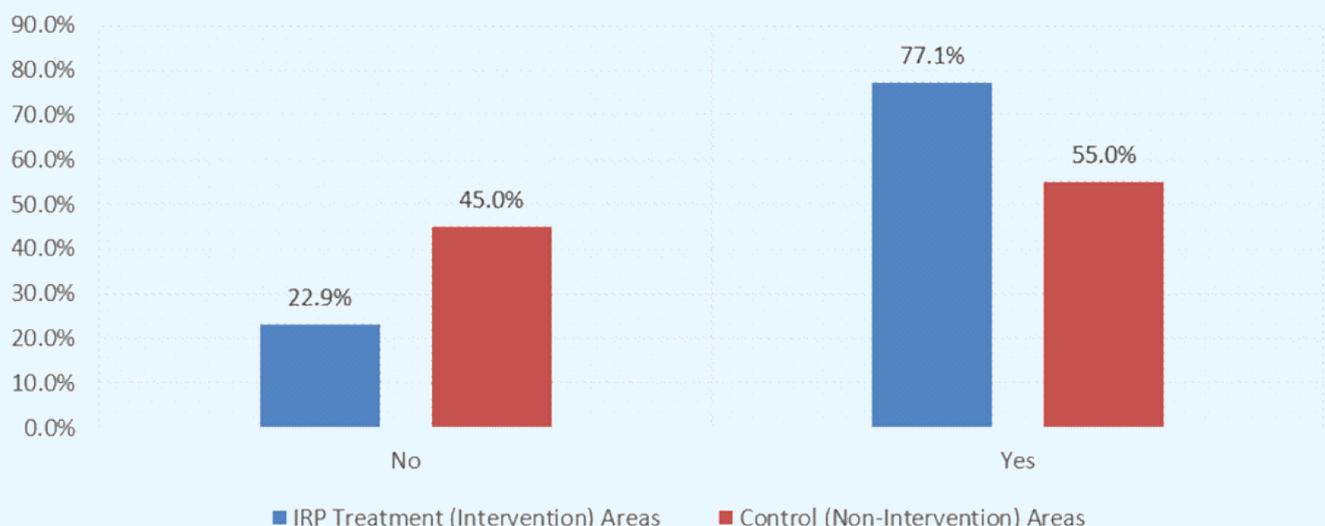


Figure 6: Feeling confident advocating for ending child marriage in your community (% - Married Women 25-49 years)

### 3.5 Practical Support and Alternatives for At-Risk Girls

Beyond dialogue, the project linked girls at risk to education, skills training, and social protection services. These alternatives influenced household decision-making. Quantitative data show that perceptions of forced marriage as a response to refusal declined from 21.4% to 11% among women in intervention areas, and expectations of physical violence fell from 5.5% to 2%, indicating reduced fear and increased room for negotiation.

### 3.6 Positive Shifts in Social Perceptions and Reduced Fear

Acceptance of girls' refusal to marry early increased markedly. 62% of women in intervention areas reported that "nothing would happen" if a girl refused marriage, compared to 46.9% at baseline. Similar declines were observed among men. These shifts reflect early but meaningful normative change.

### 3.7 Trust Built Through Integrated Safeguarding

Safeguarding and PSEA messaging strengthened trust. Women in intervention areas were significantly more likely to feel safe participating, reinforcing sustained engagement and dialogue.

### 3.8 Efficient and Sustainable Model of Delivery

The project leveraged existing faith and government structures, reducing duplication and improving efficiency. 45.9% of youth in intervention areas believed that government can help reduce or eliminate child marriage, compared to 31.8% in control areas, reflecting clearer institutional roles and coordination. However, structural constraints persist: 65.7% of women in intervention areas (and 61.2% in control areas) agreed that financial stress increases pressure for early marriage, underscoring the need for longer-term, multi-sectoral responses.



Figure 7: Key information interview with head of Islamic Ideology Council in Islamabad (Photo Credit: GLOW)

## 4. Challenges, Lessons, and Evolving Needs

The evaluation also identified important challenges and lessons:

- **Structural drivers persist:** Poverty, limited access to secondary education, and economic insecurity continue to underpin child marriage decisions.
- **Short project timelines limit depth:** While early outcomes are clear, deeper normative and behavioral change requires longer-term engagement.
- **Awareness creates new demands:** As communities become more aware, demand increases for tangible alternatives like education, skills, and referral pathways. Future programming must anticipate and respond to these evolved needs.
- **Operational linkages can be strengthened:** While strategic alignment with government priorities was strong, formal coordination with education, health, and social protection services could be enhanced to create a more integrated support system for girls and families.

## 5. Strategic Recommendations for Future Action

Based on the evidence, the evaluation proposes nine strategic recommendations to guide future programming:

1. **Institutionalize Faith Based Platforms:** Formalize interfaith child protection forums within government and religious institutions to ensure sustained coordination and advocacy beyond project cycles.
2. **Transition to Action Oriented Models:** Shift from awareness focused programming to integrated models that directly link norm change with access to secondary education, vocational training, and social protection for at-risk girls.
3. **Invest in Adolescent Empowerment:** Strengthen adolescent focused components, including life skills, mentoring, and safe spaces, to consolidate and expand gains in girls' agency and voice.
4. **Deepen Capacity of Community Leaders:** Provide ongoing technical support and formalize referral pathways for faith and community leaders to government protection, education, and welfare services.
5. **Embed Safeguarding at the Core:** Maintain safeguarding, PSEA, and accountability as non-negotiable, integrated components of all community engagement.
6. **Adopt Longer Term Programming:** Design child marriage prevention initiatives as multi-year, phased programmes to enable durable normative and behavioral change.
7. **Anticipate Evolving Community Needs:** Proactively plan for and respond to the increased demand for services and support generated by successful awareness-raising.
8. **Strengthen Learning and Adaptation:** Establish systematic feedback loops with communities and stakeholders to enable adaptive, evidence-informed programming.
9. **Enhance Operational Coherence:** Formalize linkages between child marriage prevention efforts and parallel programmes in education, health, and social protection through joint planning and referral protocols.

## 6. Conclusion

The Prevention of Child Marriage Project has demonstrated that a faith sensitive, community anchored approach is highly effective in shifting norms, building protective systems, and empowering girls in Pakistan. The project laid a strong foundation for change by combining religious legitimacy, sustained dialogue, and practical support.

The early impacts, including stronger community structures, more open dialogue, increased girls' agency, and positive shifts in social expectations, are significant and promising. They provide a robust evidence base for scaling and adapting this model.

Sustainable prevention of child marriage requires a long-term commitment. The journey must continue by addressing the deep-rooted structural drivers of the practice and ensuring that normative change is consistently reinforced by accessible services and opportunities for every girl.



Figure 9: FGD with right holder in Sujawal (Photo Credit: GLOW)



Figure 8: Key information interview with faith leaders in Rawalpindi (Photo Credit: GLOW)



For further information, please contact

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*This summary is derived from the independent Endline Evaluation Report conducted by GLOW Consultants for Islamic Relief Pakistan and UNICEF. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the independent evaluators.*