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Kabul, Afghanistan, 29 July 2018 – Today, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) and UNICEF are launching the first-ever comprehensive study on child marriage in Afghanistan.

“This study is unique, it not only builds on previous studies, but looks at child marriage in Afghanistan from various angles, providing hence a comprehensive picture of this practice,” says Faizullah Zaki, Minister of Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled of Afghanistan.

The study findings, which was finalised under the leadership of MoLSAMD, shows that the security situation, poverty, deeply embedded beliefs and social norms put girls at a disadvantage. In general, there is a narrow understanding of the negative impact of child marriage on girls. Attention is often focused on the health-related impact of child marriage, with a limited understanding of the impact of child marriage on education, nutrition, and girls’/women’s participation in economic development.

Whilst there has been a reduction in child marriage in Afghanistan, it remains high. In fact, child marriage has dropped by 10 per cent over a span of five years.

“Child marriage is slightly declining in Afghanistan, and we commend the relentless efforts of the Government to reduce this practice and their strong commitment to child rights,” says Adele Khodr, Representative, UNICEF Afghanistan. “Yet, further consolidated action is needed by the different actors in society to put an end to this practice and reach the goal of ending child marriage by 2030.”

The study showed that in 42 per cent of households at least one member of their family got married before the age of 18. Yet, significant regional disparities exist, varying from 21 per cent of households in Ghor to 66 per cent in Paktia having at least one member who got married before the age of 18.

“Child marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and it robs children of their education, health and childhood,” says Zaki. “Since all parents want the very best for their daughters and sons, we must work together to put an end to child marriage.”

The study was carried out in five provinces of Afghanistan - Bamyan, Kandahar, Paktia, Ghor and Badghis – representing urban, semi-urban and rural areas. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study highlights multiple factors behind child marriage, complementing already existing studies. The study noted that in 78 per cent of households, fathers are the main decision makers on issues related to marriage, while 55.7 per cent of respondents agreed that those to be married must be consulted.

“Ending child marriage will break the inter-generational cycle of poverty and will give girls and women opportunities to engage and participate fully in their society,” says Khodr. “Getting all girls into school is a key element in reducing child marriage, and it is important to convince parents, especially fathers to send, and keep their daughters in school”.