

A group of young girls and women are gathered together, looking directly at the camera. They are dressed in traditional Indian attire, including saris and blouses. The background is a simple, light-colored wall.

Child Marriage: What Does it Mean for Girls?

**Launch of *Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram* and
National Consultation on Adolescent Health.**

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7 January 2014



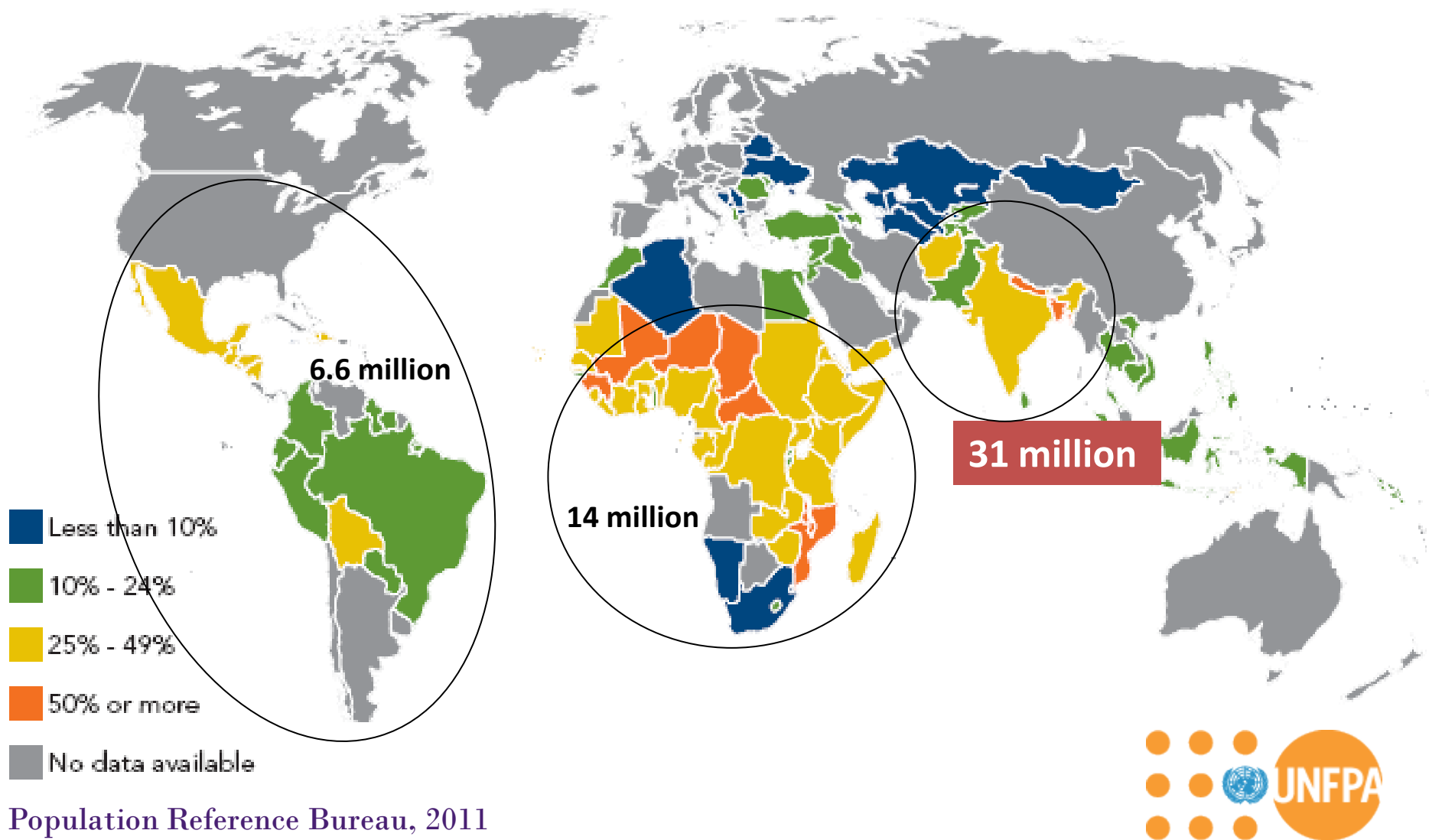
Overview

- Global realities
- Gross violation of rights
- Determinants of child marriage
- The Burden on adolescents
- Key Challenges
- The Way Ahead

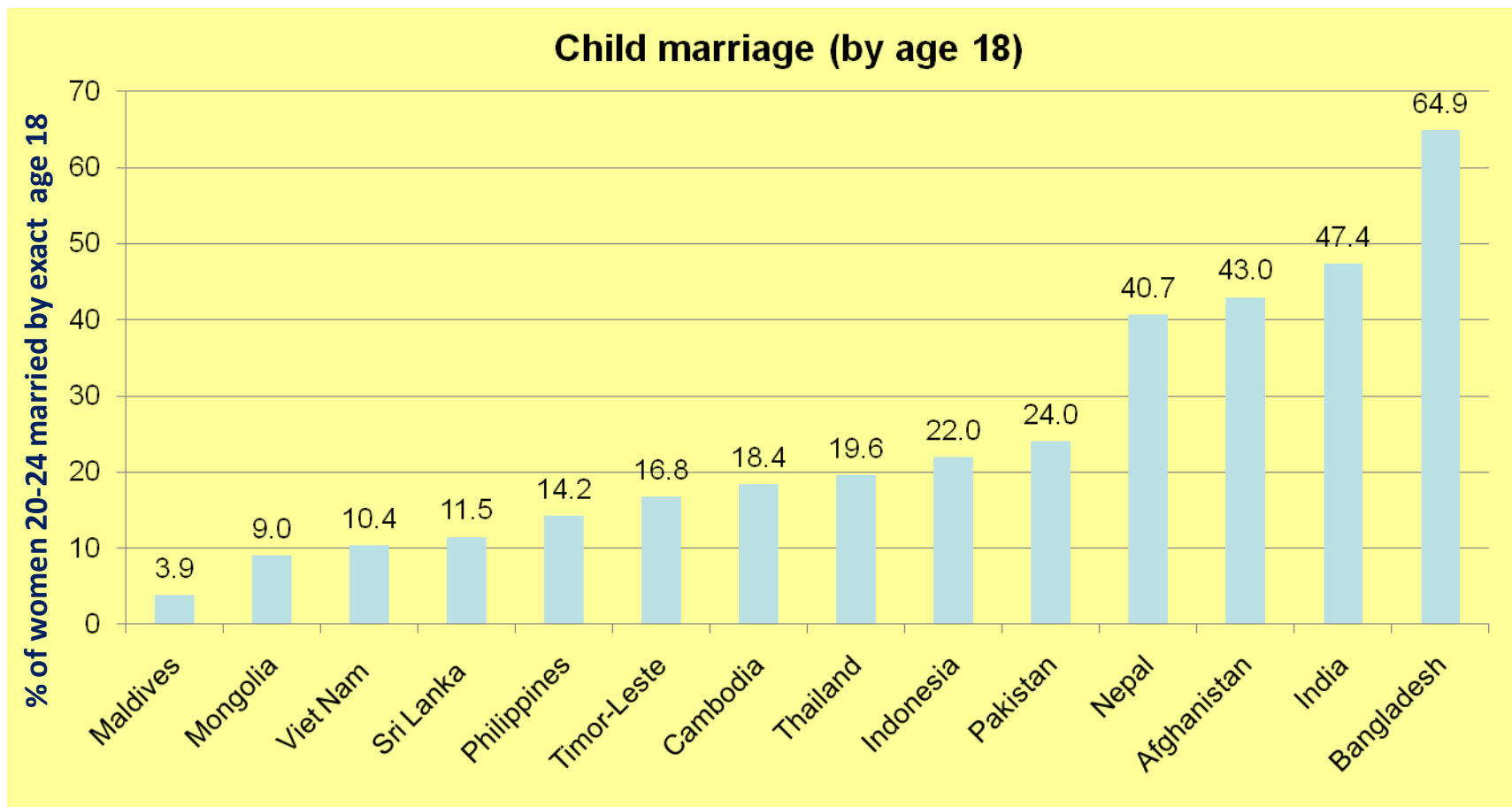
An Urgent Issue

- An estimated 100 million girls over next decade may be subject to forced and early (under 18) marriages that are both illegal and dangerous
- Millions more experience life-altering and life-threatening early, unplanned, and unwanted pregnancies
- About 16 million girls aged 15-19 give birth each year. In nine out of ten cases the girl is already married

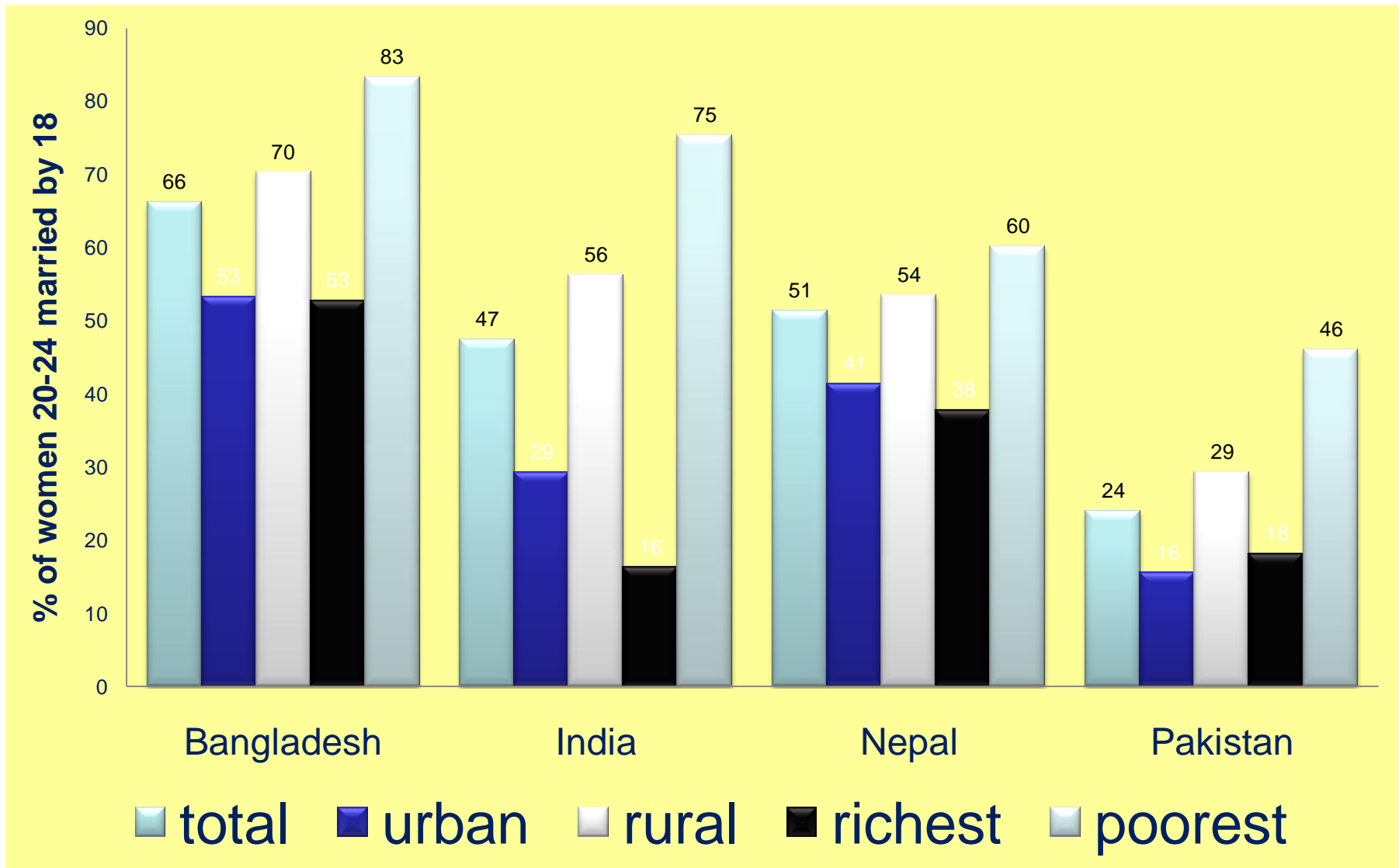
Child Marriage: Global Prevalence



Child Marriage in Asia



Child Marriage: Higher in Poorer Quintiles



Risks and Vulnerabilities

- Large populations of girls at risk of sexual exploitation inside and outside of marriage:
 - **Girls age 10-14 at risk of child marriage**
(i.e. living in areas with high prevalence of child marriage)
 - **Girls age 10-19 at risk of early and unwanted pregnancy** (i.e. living in areas with low age at first birth and low contraceptive prevalence)
 - **Girls 10-19 years already married/pregnant and/or given birth**

Child Marriage and Education

- A **third of women** aged 20-24 in the developing world were married as children
- Predominantly an issue in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, yet **1 in 5 females in East Asia and the Pacific** is married before the age of 18
- Girls who marry early often **abandon formal education** and become pregnant
- Evidence shows **the more education a girl receives**, the less likely she is to marry as a child



The Loss of Rights for Adolescent Girls

Rights irremediably lost

- Experiencing forced sex
- Having a child under the age of 18
- Suffering Harmful practices
- Being infected with HIV

Rights costly to recover

- Interrupted education can be remediated through catch-up programs but at a high cost

Rights delayed

- No control over earnings even though adolescent work is legally allowed and highly prevalent

The Underlying Causes

- Gender inequality
- Obstacles to human rights
- Poverty
- Sexual violence and coercion
- Poor implementation of laws
- National policies restricting access to contraception, age- appropriate sexuality education
- Lack of access to education and reproductive health services
- Underinvestment in adolescent girls' human capital



Global Survey ICPD Beyond 2014 : Key preliminary findings for Asia- Pacific

Key Barriers

Issues regarding SRHR	% countries
Prevailing local customs / social practices	32.5
Lack of cultural acceptability	32.5
Low status of women / woman's empowerment	27.5
Opposition of spouse / partner	25.0
Low literacy rates / level of education	22.5

Structured deep rooted inequality:

Girls from birth lack the same perceived value as boys

- **Unequal gender norms** put a much higher value on boys and men than on girls and women.
- **Poor investment:** families and communities discount the benefits of educating and investing in their daughters' development.
- **A safeguard against premarital sex:** girls' perceived value may shift once they reach puberty
- Transfer of 'Protection' of girls from sexual harassment and violence from father to husband.
- **An economic burden :** a means for settling familial debts / disputes, or securing social, economic or political alliances.
- **Customary requirements** - dowry or bride prices :lower dowry for younger brides.

Girls- An Economic Burden:

- ✓ **Bangladesh:** *World Vision Study 2012*
- ✓ **Poverty / Dowry** was the most widely cited cause of child marriage
- ✓ **Lack of education / School drop-out.** 72% of girls drop out of secondary level education as a direct result of early marriage (*2010 study by Save The Children Bangladesh*).
- ✓ **Attitudes and values.** Girls are seen as an unproductive, economic 'burden'
- ✓ **Birth registration**, or the lack of, means that the ages of the couple to be married can easily be falsified by parents, children and the marriage registrar.
- ✓ **Lack of awareness** of parents, kazi (marriage registrar) and fathers or leaders of the negative health and protection consequences of child marriage for girls and boys was also frequently cited as a cause of child marriage

Challenges: Harmful Practices

- Diverse range of harmful practices with life threatening often irreparable consequences impacting health and survival of girls
- Patriarchal systems and structures; persistent impunity and poor reduction of neglect, discrimination, abuse, violence.



Diverse Range of Harmful Practices

Impact on Girls' Survival & Well-being

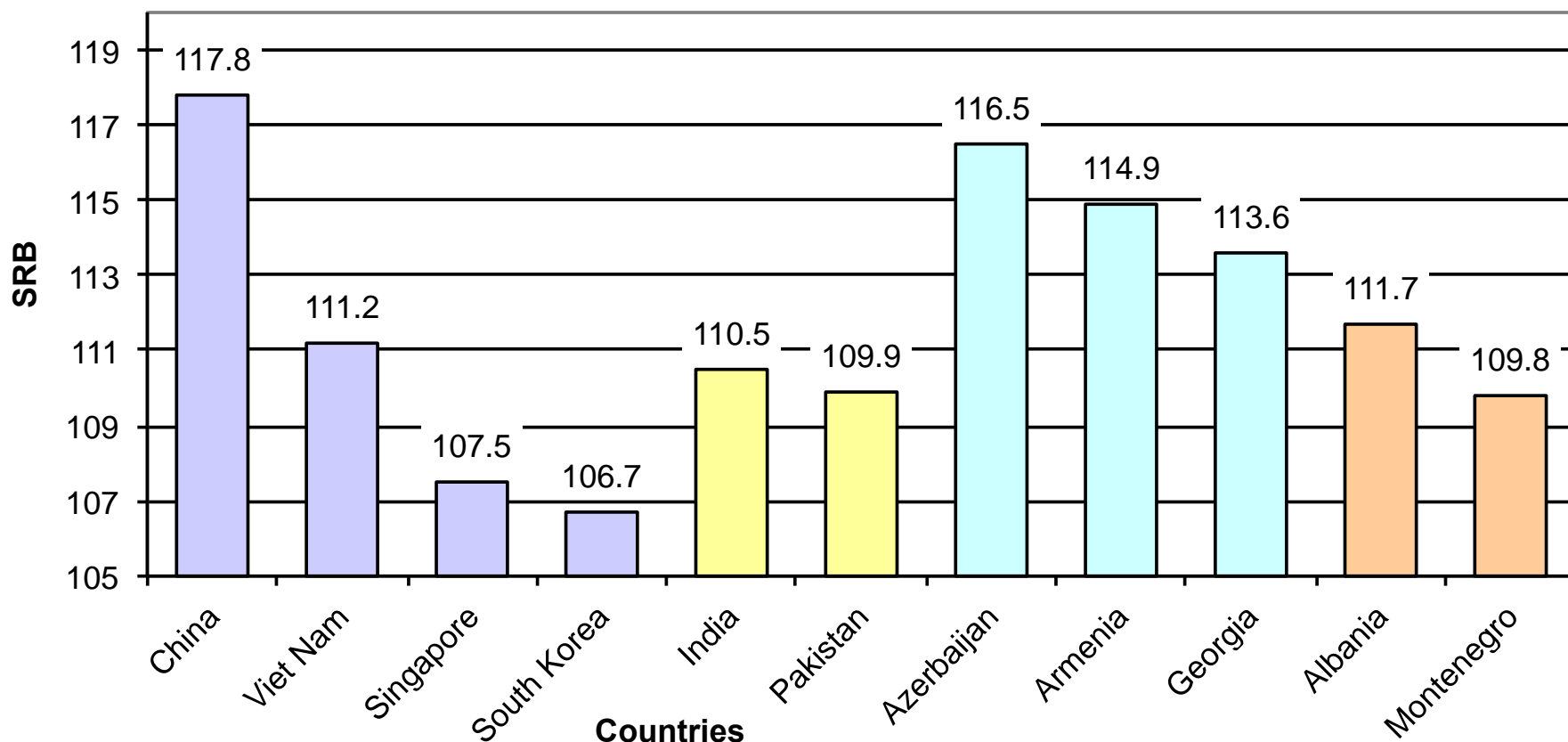
- **Gender biased sex selection**
- **Infanticide**
- **Dowry**
- **Customary practices**, including :
 - female genital cutting/mutilation;
 - honour killings;
 - *devadasi* or *dueki* ,
 - *niyogi* (the marriage of a widow to the deceased husband's younger brother),
 - *vani and swara* (forced marriages of girls in compensation /settle debts or disputes

5Ds of Son Preference

- Deeply rooted in patriarchal culture and religious beliefs
- Detrimental impact on women's and girls' health & well being
- Drives gender biased sex-selection → skewed sex ratios at birth
- One in five men in India desire more sons than daughters
- A manifestation of gender discrimination and inequality

To combat the practice, need to understand men's views on son preference and gender equality and how linked to men's conceptions of manhood.

Skewed Sex Ratio at Birth



Gender Biased Sex Selection:

Emerging Consequences

Consequences for women

- **Increased exploitation** of women, trafficking, violence.
- **Pressure on girls and women to marry** and bear children
- **Less political voice**

....and on society

- **Change in marriage patterns** and family structures
- **Potential increase in antisocial behavior:** social unrest, crime, aids prevalence, migrations, violence

Consequences for men

- **Delayed marriage** among men
 - Increased resort to prostitution, trafficking, etc.
- **Increasing competition** among unmarried men
 - Impact on savings and education investments
- **Increase in involuntary non-marriage**
 - Impact stronger among the vulnerable men: poorer, less educated, from remote areas
 - Inability to perpetuate the family line

Challenges: Violence Against Women and Girls



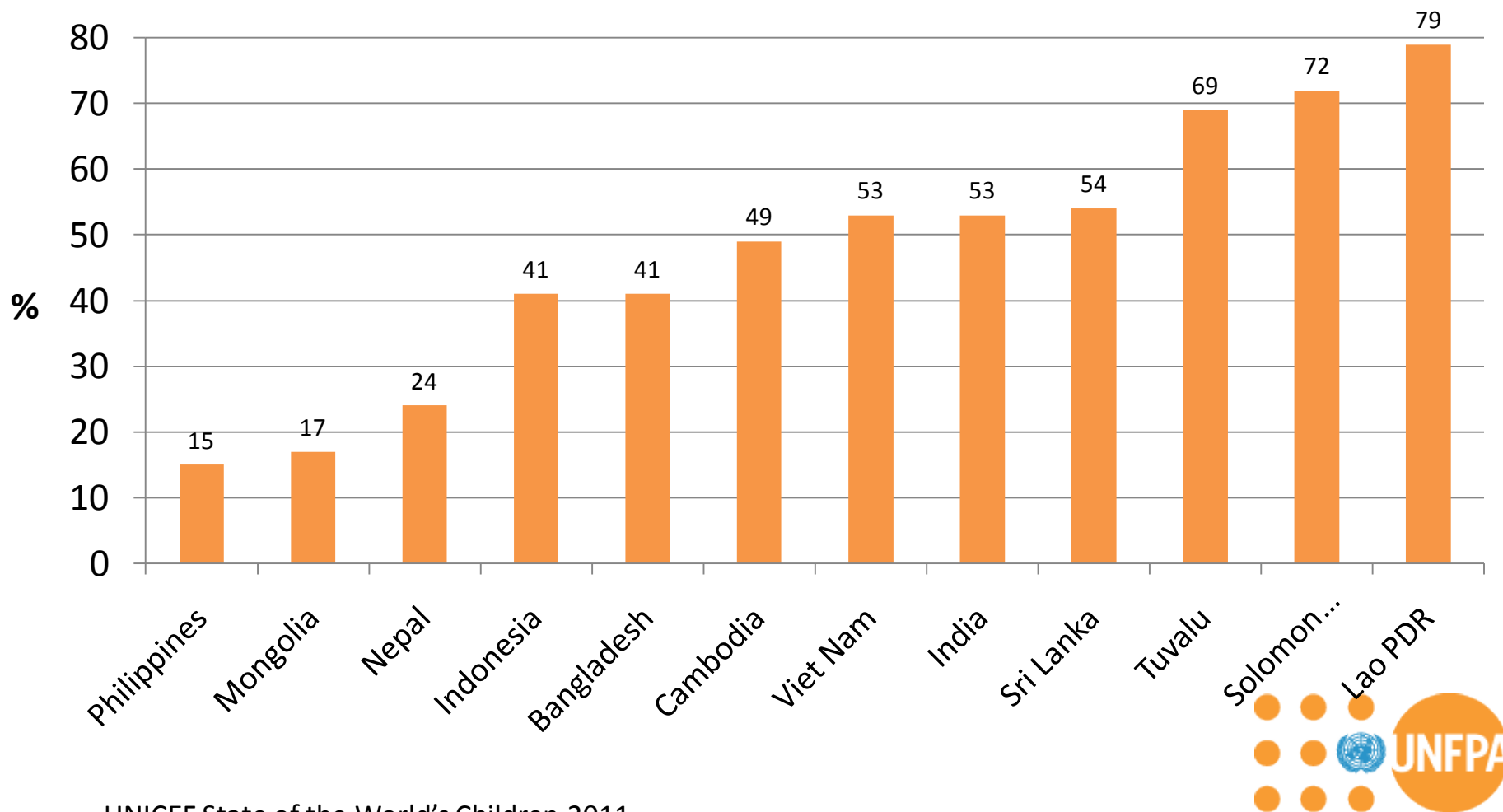
VAWG: Widespread Problem Across the Region

Percentage of ever-partnered women, aged 15-49, reporting physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner

	Ever	Last 12 months
Bangladesh (city)	53%	30%
Bangladesh (province)	62%	32%
Kiribati	68%	36%
Maldives	20%	6%
Samoa	46%	22%
Solomon Islands	64%	49%
Thailand (city)	41%	21%
Thailand (province)	47%	23%
Viet Nam	34%	9%

High Levels of Acceptability of Violence

Adolescents girls aged 15–19 who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances



Challenge: Poor Prevention and Response to Violence against Women and Girls

- Higher risk for girls of violence, early pregnancy, HIV infection, maternal death or disability,
- Denial of timely equitable, appropriate services
- Negligible change in mindsets and behaviour



Drivers for Violent Behaviour by Men and Boys

- Men who reported having perpetrated violence against a partner were significantly more likely to have:
 - Experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse as a child, or witnessed the abuse of their mother
 - Gender-inequitable attitudes
 - Practices that reflect idealized notions of male sexual performance, such as having multiple sexual partners and engaging in transactional sex

UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, 2013



Challenges: Legal Reform

- All countries have adopted laws designed to regulate child marriage proliferation and prevalence
- Poor vital registration systems
 - Birth and Marriage registration limited



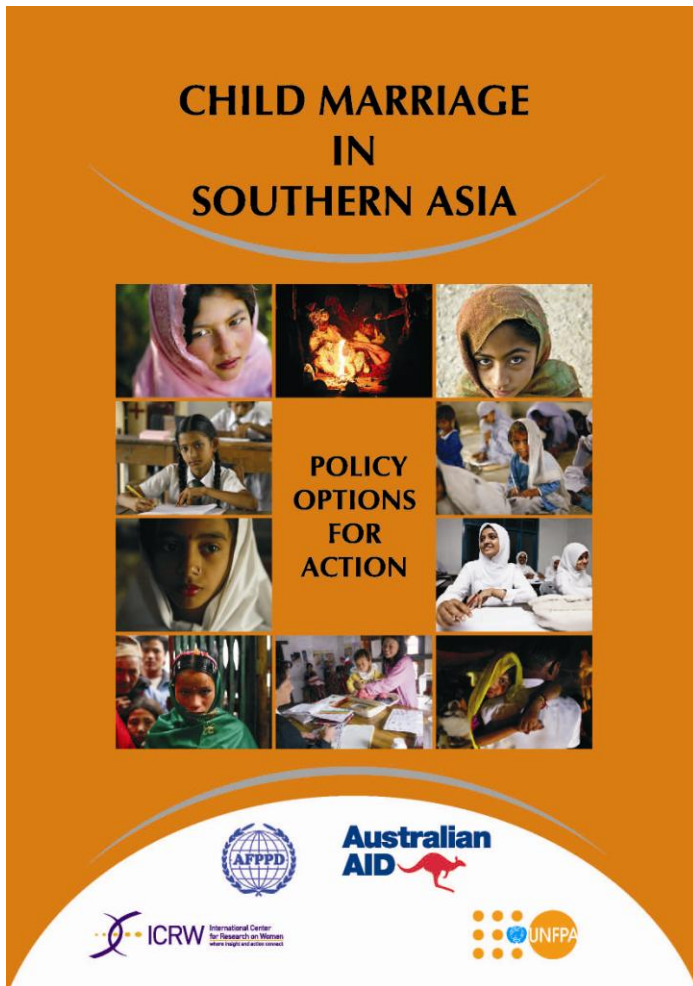
CSW 2013: Agreed Conclusions

Review, enact and strictly enforce laws and regulations concerning the minimum legal age of consent and the minimum age for marriage, raising the minimum age for marriage where necessary, and generate social support for the enforcement of these laws in order to end the practice of child, early and forced marriage;



Challenges:

Leadership by Policy makers/ Parliamentarians



- Despite past efforts, limited results in policy implementation
- Limited follow up and linkages across sub- regions
- Gap in high level positioning by parliamentarians on harmful practices



The Way Ahead...RKSK!

“What is needed is a new way of thinking about the challenge of adolescent pregnancy. Instead of viewing the girl as the problem and changing her behaviour as the solution, governments, communities, families and schools should see poverty, gender inequality, discrimination, lack of access to services, and negative views about girls and women as the real challenges, and the pursuit of social justice, equitable development and the empowerment of girls as the true pathway to fewer adolescent pregnancies.”

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

Executive Director, UNFPA

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations





Thank You

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