



SVRI Working Group 2 - Skills Lab #3:

Strategies to address
religious resistance to
ending child marriage

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Unpacking the 'suitcase' of resistance



- What does religious resistance look like?
- What is inside it and how can we unpack it?
- Do we throw religious resistance away entirely or repack it differently?



Think about your own context

In your specific country context, are formal faith leaders:

- 1) Active supporters to end child marriage
- 2) Resisting efforts to end child marriage
- 3) A mixed bag – we are seeing both
- 4) I don't know what faith leaders in my context think about this issue



Research study (Le Roux & Palm, 2018)

- Literature Review & Key Informant Interviews:
 - 12 countries, 15 organisations: Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Zimbabwe.
 - Across three faiths: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity

Limitations:

- It's not a toolkit – it's a background research report
- It was a small qualitative study
- LINK to FULL RESEARCH REPORT:
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360626382> What lies beneath Tackling the roots of religious resistance to ending child marriage





Key findings

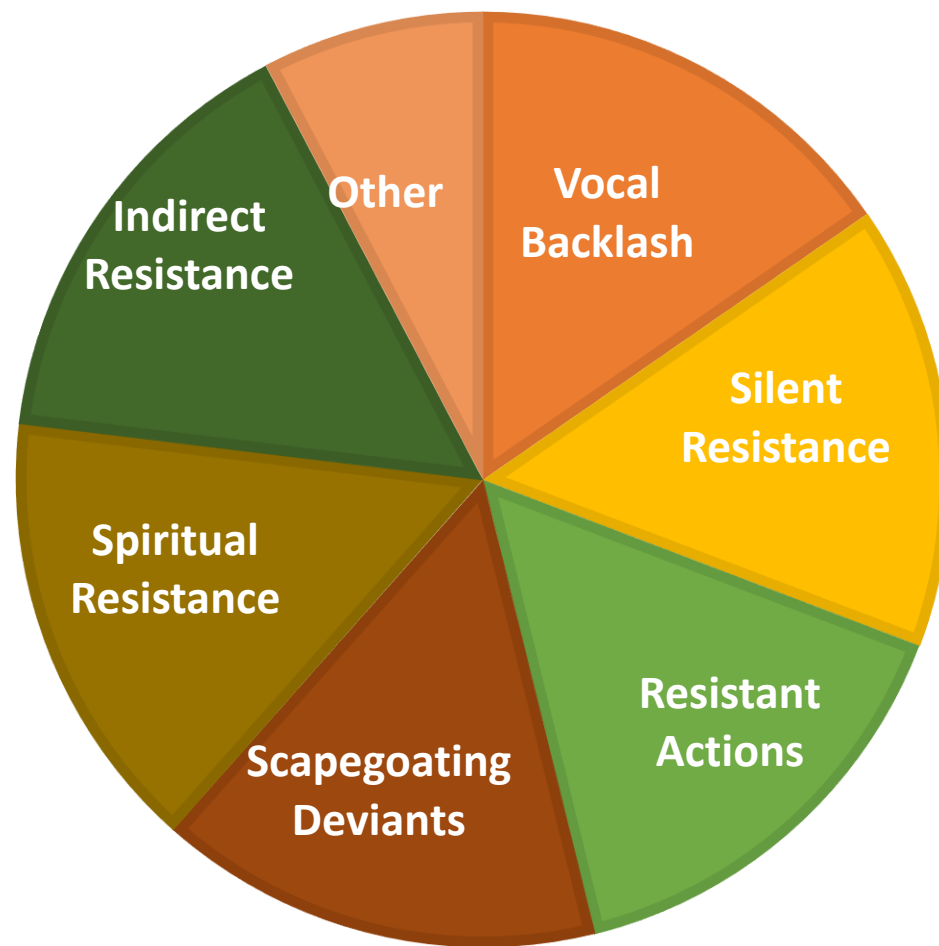
What are we seeing?





The wheel of resistance

How are religious leaders resisting?



*(I)n our community people don't challenge the religious leader, they are very much conscious about, you know, after this, **what happens if they don't follow the God rules....** So, that can be a fear that the people, they're a bit afraid to challenge the religious leader because now maybe there will be problems, you know, in the next life if we are not just obeying what the rules are?*

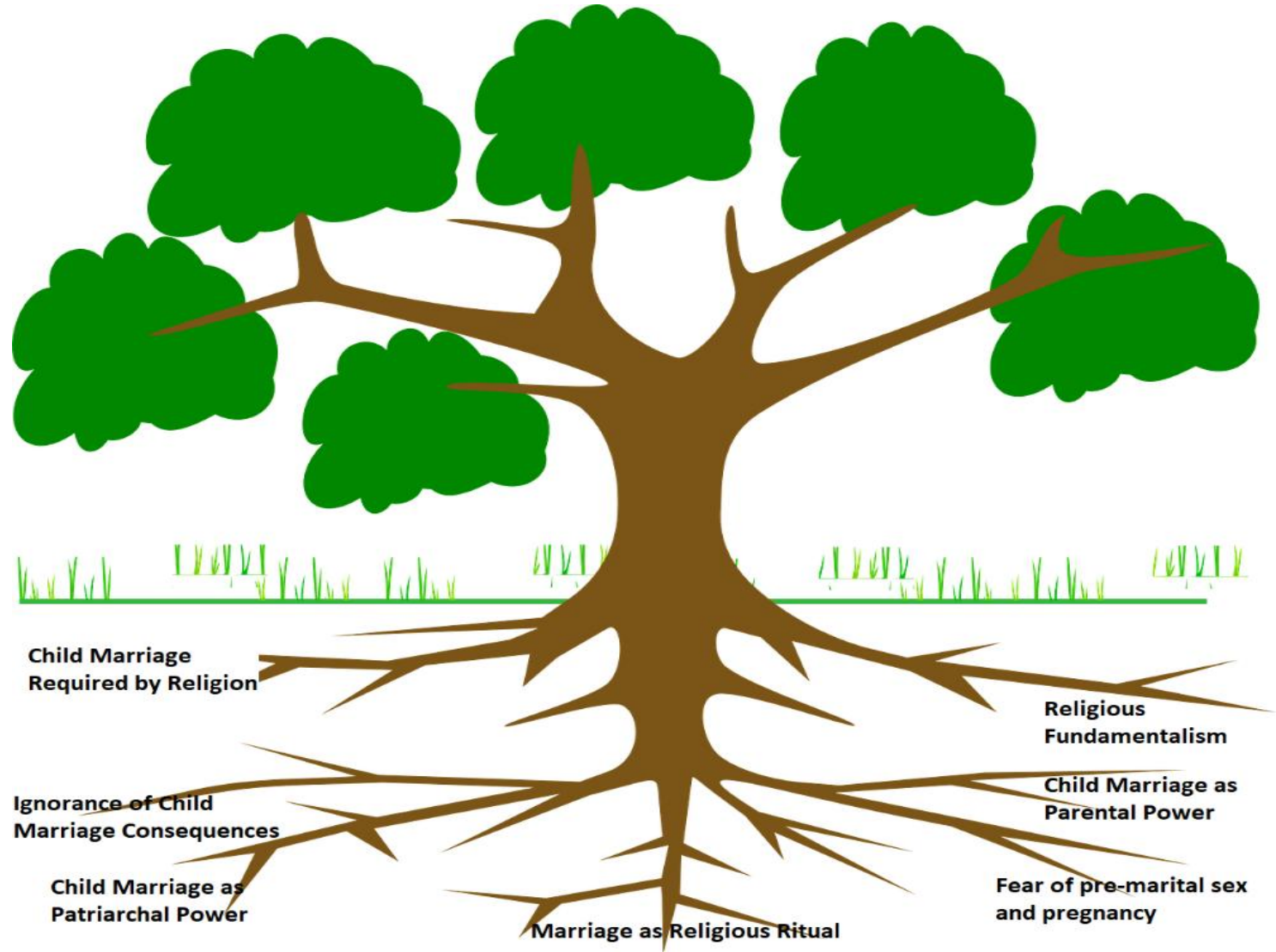
(Habibur, Bangladesh, 23 April 2018)

For a current example of religious resistance to child marriage from Pakistan – explored in this session – see:

<https://religionnews.com/2014/05/16/muslim-clerics-resist-pakistans-efforts-end-child-marriage/>



The roots of religious resistance



(Le Roux & Palm 2018)



Seven Roots: An inter-connected web

- **Marriage as religious ritual** - “it’s our turf, so hands off”
- **Ignorance of child marriage consequences** - “it doesn’t harm anyone”
- **Child marriage as explicitly ordained by religion** - “God says it’s okay”
- **Fear of premarital sex & pregnancy** - “No sex please or what a mess”
- **Patriarchal power** - “being wives & mothers is girls’ destiny anyway”
- **Parental Protection & Power** - “I said so and you belong/to me”
- **Religious fundamentalism** - “you want to destroy our religion”



Child marriage as protection or prevention

“within the Muslim society we have very, very low tolerance of, what do you call it, sex before marriage. You know the approach is that, if you know of two people that are engaged in sexual relations you know this has got to be rectified by marrying them off in a way, I think the understanding is that, you know, to minimise whatever sins have already been done.” (Rozana, Malaysia, 20 April 2018)

“Some families told us actually “I didn’t want to marry my girl but I felt fear about my religious leaders reaction and my community’s religious reaction and then I understand it better for my girl to take this marriage”...we have some interview with religious leaders and they talk with us about why it was so important for them these issues and why girls need to be married and then it is about the control of the girl’s sexuality and the girl’s body.” (Viviana, Brazil, 3 May 2018)



.....or solution

“This marriage can be like a protection for the girl and for the boy. For the girl it can be protection from the romance of people and it can protect her from the community and for the boy it can like kind of be protection for him to do something haram (forbidden)” (Mohammad, Lebanon, 30 April 2018)

“(So) it is a belief to rather send off a child to get married when they are still pure, than for you to let them sleep around, (or) who will marry them in the end?” (Hope, Zimbabwe, April 2018)

“When it comes to religious leaders..., they really don’t understand. They don’t have the information. We tend to think that because they are religious leaders they know. (But that is not the case)” (Kidest, Ethiopia, 20 April 2018)



Interactive small groups discussion

**In what ways do you see
religious leaders resist ending
child marriage in your contexts
and what roots do you think
inform that resistance?**

Strategies to address these resistance roots

- Respect religious leader agency
- Build critical mass for support
- Use an integrated and comprehensive approach
- Create positive framing for religious leaders
- Engage theologically e.g. with sacred texts
- Talk about sex and sexuality more widely
- Decide carefully about engaging with (macro) politics



“I think the most important thing is whenever you approach someone, ...do not go to them and act as if you are accusing them of doing something wrong. Yes, the most important thing is to open, to engage with someone you sit down, you talk, you hear their side of the story... Hear where they are coming from, the reasons why they do certain things and hear from them of what benefit are those things, and then maybe just discuss the advantages and disadvantages of what it is that they are doing.”

(Hope, Zimbabwe, 20 April 2018)



Some emerging tips from practitioners

- Do background research first – don't just make assumptions
- Carefully select religious leaders to engage – don't pick at random
- Choose your entry point carefully – avoid 'red flag' issues
- Use existing avenues of engagement – not parallel systems
- Be sensitive with terminology – don't insist on your language





Interactive small groups discussion

*What do you see as working in
your context to address religious
resistance to ending child
marriage or to mobilise religious
leaders to act for change?*

#It's Complicated

- Context is key – it cannot just be a ‘one size fits all’, if x, then y model
- Child marriage is not just one thing; are different types and rationales
- Religions are diverse, vary across region & are contested internally
- The adolescent girl sits across many risk categories & must participate
- Use an asset based – not a ‘liability’ model of religious leader action

Decisions

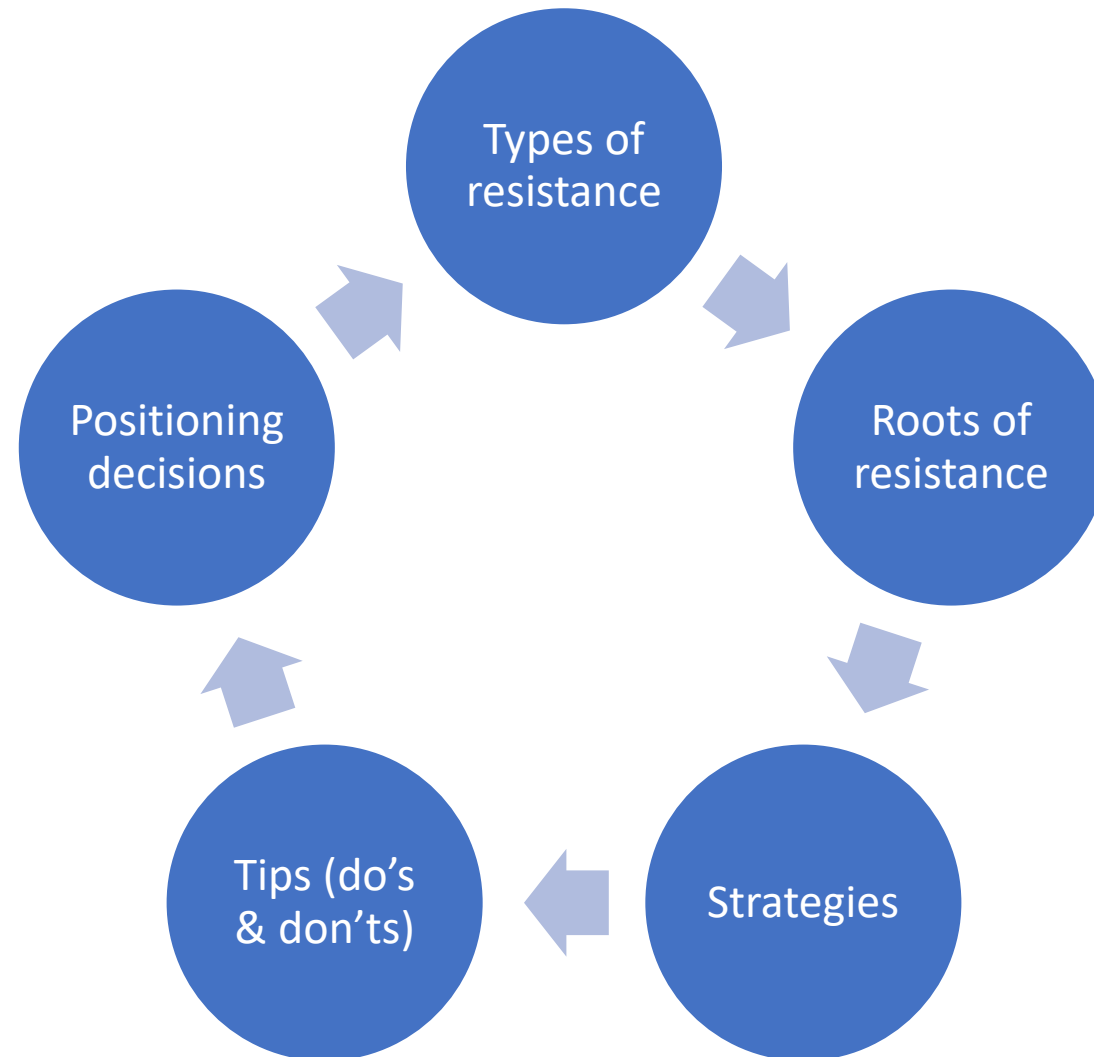


Do's



Don't's

Making the Connections





Thank you

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&

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