

Issues Paper Series

# LOVE, FEAR and DISCIPLINE: Everyday violence toward children in Afghan families



Deborah J. Smith





Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Issues Paper Series

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February 2008

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## About the Author

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## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The **Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)** is an independent research organisation headquartered in Kabul. AREU's mission is to conduct high-quality research that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and facilitating reflection and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

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## Glossary

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>ailaq</i>         | spring and summer habitat and pasture land located outside of the main village                                     |
| <i>bota</i>          | bushes used for fuel for cooking and heating   |
| <i>bolani</i>        | flat pastry, usually stuffed with potatoes and leeks   |
| <i>charshak</i>      | tool used for threshing corn   |
| <i>chopan</i>        | shepherd   |
| <i>daya</i>          | traditional birth attendant  |
| <i>hasabani</i>      | Dari term meaning frustration and stress   |
| <i>jerib</i>         | unit of land measurement: one <i>jerib</i> equals roughly 1/5 a hectare  |
| <i>lehaf/brastan</i> | quilts   |
| <i>madrassa</i>      | religious school   |
| <i>malik</i>         | community leader (usually in rural areas)  |
| <i>naswar</i>        | tobacco preparation  |
| <i>qawm</i>          | often translated as tribe or clan, essentially means a kinship group that can range considerably in size and scope |
| <i>wahal</i>         | Pashtu term meaning “to beat” or any other act of physical violence  |
| <i>wakil guzar</i>   | community leader (usually in urban areas)  |
| <i>waliswali</i>     | district; often used to refer to the central town in a district  |
| <i>zadan</i>         | Dari term meaning “to beat” or any other act of physical violence  |

## Acronyms

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| AIHRC | Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission |
| AREU  | Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit        |
| INGO  | international non-governmental organisation     |



## Executive Summary

This paper discusses violence to children within the family unit. Data for this study, which are purely qualitative in nature, were collected across rural and urban areas of four Afghan provinces: Bamiyan, Herat, Kabul and Nangarhar. This research has not attempted to investigate extreme or unusual cases of violence; rather, it is concerned with the more “normal” forms of violence which are part of people’s everyday lives, i.e. “everyday violence”.

Violence directed at children in the family is divided into two categories: violence that is used as a form of discipline or punishment, and violence due to anger, stress or frustration on the part of the perpetrator. It is recognised that in reality there may be much overlap between these two categories; nevertheless, for the purposes of analytical clarity these two categorisations are useful.

### Key findings:

- In the communities where the research was carried out, violence toward children by family members is accepted: that is, widely used and recognised.
- To a significant degree, violence directed at children is not acceptable: that is, not approved of or seen as a good way to treat children.
- Many people would be keen to adopt non-violent means for disciplining their children, but most have very little knowledge of what these might be.
- Much violence directed toward children relates to how the adult is feeling, with adults under stress taking out their feelings of anger on their children or siblings.
- Violence toward children in the family is accepted as a normal part of parent-child relationships with little social judgement

made toward the perpetrators. Consequently, there is little fear of being ostracised or stigmatised for being violent to a child.

Five primary causes for continued or chronic violence to children in the family are identified:

- First, some people perceive corporal punishment as part of a good way to bring up children.
- Second, those who think corporal punishment should only be used in cases of extreme deviant behaviour, as a last resort or not at all know very few alternative parenting skills or methods for disciplining their children.
- Third, parents’ concern for their children’s future and fear that their children will not grow up to be useful members of the family and community, combined with a lack of alternative parenting skills or methods of discipline, encourage parents to use corporal punishment, even when they do not think it is the correct thing to do and doubt its effectiveness.
- Fourth, stress and frustration felt on the part of adults leads them to lash out at their children. Possible causes of stress and frustration in the family might include detrimental relationships between adults in the family and economic insecurity relative to a family’s material expectations.
- Fifth, as violence to children in the family is widespread and accepted as normal there is a lack of a generalised social judgement placed on this form of violence, allowing it to go unchallenged by the community.

The research found that individuals’ and communities’ opinions on the rights and wrongs of violence toward children in the form of corporal

punishment are not fixed. Instead, people are willing to discuss and debate the best methods with which to discipline their children and are open to having their minds changed. While it is unusual for the community to condemn members for “everyday violence” to children, many recognised the harm, both physical and psychological, violence to children can cause and felt that it was not the best way to discipline children.

Those parents with whom the research team spoke during this study remain deeply concerned that they are good parents to their children and will bring them up in the “correct” manner. Similarly, many of the respondents are able to understand and analyse their own situation and why violence happens to children in their families. This knowledge or awareness can be found among men and women, young and old, rich and poor, educated and illiterate.

### Recommendations:

- ***Build alternative parenting skills programmes appropriate for the local context.*** Any programme working to tackle violence toward children must first recognise that there is a general awareness in the communities of the negative consequences of violence to children and that violence is not necessarily the best way to discipline or encourage children. Sensitisation campaigns should therefore focus on informing people about alternative parenting skills.
  - These alternative parenting skills should be designed by organisations working in this field in close collaboration with different communities, in order to ensure that such alternatives are appropriate for the different Afghan contexts.
  - ***Draw on local resources.*** Influential people in the community including elders (both male and female), mullahs, community-based health care providers or teachers, can be useful in helping to transfer, teach and discuss alternative parenting skills in the communities.
- The research identified individuals in the community who were particularly opposed to violence to children. These individuals also could be identified by programmes aiming to overcome violence to children in the family and be used to spread messages of alternative parenting skills and knowledge of the harm that violence to children causes.
- ***Encourage broader community involvement.*** Programmes and campaigns need to encourage the community to make a generalised judgement that violence to children will not be accepted in their communities, and to intervene to support those who are violent to children to stop being violent to their children. (Even when people are stressed or feeling frustrated they are less likely to lash out against children if this behaviour does not go ignored and is not accepted as normal in the community.)
  - ***Teach families to handle stress without violence.*** Enhancing stress management skills and building a greater awareness of the effects of stress in the family would also greatly help to curb violence to children in the family.

# 1. Introduction

In 2006, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) launched a broad research project investigating the changing nature of family dynamics in Afghanistan, particularly how family structure and changing gender and generational roles and relations impact on levels of violence within the family. Studies undertaken have attempted to assess what types of family violence are seen as appropriate and legitimate by the community as a group, women as a group as opposed to men as a group, different generations and individual men and women. The research has aimed to identify and understand key stress factors or individual and societal characteristics related to violence and acceptance of violence among family members.

This paper deals with one subset of the research: violence to children within the family unit.<sup>1</sup> Data for this study, which are purely qualitative in nature, were collected across rural and urban areas of four Afghan provinces: Bamiyan, Herat, Kabul and Nangarhar.

This research has not attempted to investigate extreme or unusual cases of violence; rather it is concerned with the more “normal” forms of violence that are part of people’s day-to-day lives, i.e. “everyday violence”. While this study did not aim to quantify violence in the family, it found that violence to children in the family in its various forms is prevalent across all the sites where the research was conducted. Indeed, physical violence toward children was found to exist to varying degrees within all 61 case study families. From the stories told by community members it is safe to assume that most, if not all, children in these families and most likely in the wider community experience violence in the family to varying degrees.

Violence directed at children can be divided into two categories: violence used as a form of discipline or punishment; and violence related to anger, stress or frustration on the part of the perpetrator. These two categories are synonymous with concepts of controlled and uncontrolled violence. It is recognised that in reality there may be much overlap between violence toward children meant to discipline or punish in a controlled and deliberate fashion, and violence to children perpetrated by a person who is in a rage and has lost control. Nevertheless, for the purposes of analytical clarity these two categorisations are useful. Further, violence toward children was commonly talked about by the respondents in terms of these two categories.

With some slight variation in the types of violence children experience from province to province, the most common forms of violence identified were slapping, verbal abuse, punching, kicking, and hitting with thin sticks, electrical cables and shoes. Indeed, for many families this type of violence can be described as normal or everyday violence. Examples of extreme or more unusual forms of violence identified include shooting at children, tying them up, washing them in cold water outside during winter and public humiliation.

Many stories of violence to children were discussed at length and different perspectives and opinions on violence to children were collected. This information is analysed to yield understanding of:

- The reasons and causes of individual acts of violence and continued or chronic violence directed at children;

<sup>1</sup> Violence toward children is considered in this paper to include, “all corporal punishment, and all other cruel, inhuman or degrading” acts toward children (UN 2006, p.6).

- Who is violent to children;
- Who is seen to have the right to be violent to children and how adults feel about the appropriateness of such violence;
- How common violence to children is perceived to be; and,
- How violence to children is perceived to have changed over time.

This paper is focused on adults' perspectives and opinions on violence toward children, which are at times informed by their own experiences of violence as children. In focusing on adults' perspectives it discusses why parents are violent to the children in their families.<sup>2</sup> The research teams did not interview children for both practical and methodological reasons.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, certain forms of violence against children are not discussed in the paper. First, sexual violence to children was beyond the scope and methodology of the larger research project. Second, child marriage and forced marriage is not covered in this paper, but is discussed in another AREU paper from this project on marriage practices and their impacts on violence in the family. Third, the emphasis in this paper is predominantly on physical violence to children, with some discussion of verbal abuse. Issues of neglect and forced labour of children in the home are not discussed in any detail, predominantly because they were beyond the scope of the wider research project and also were mentioned rarely by respondents.

Based on the research findings, this paper makes several key arguments. First, in the communities where the research was carried out, violence toward children by family members is accepted,

widely used and recognised. In spite of this, to a significant degree, violence directed at children is not acceptable: it is not approved of or seen as a good way to treat children. Second, and as a consequence of the first finding, many people would be keen to adopt non-violent means for disciplining their children, but have very little knowledge of what these might be. Third, much violence directed toward children has more to do with how the adult is feeling, with adults under stress taking out their feelings of anger on their children or siblings. Fourth, violence toward children in the family is accepted as a normal part of parent-child relationships with little social judgement made toward the perpetrators. Consequently, there is little fear of being ostracised or stigmatised for being violent to a child. The development of alternative parenting skills, stress management skills and a more vocal critique (preferably coming from within communities themselves) of violence to children in the family would be the most effective ways of challenging this violence.

The following chapter discusses the research methodology and outlines the research methods used for data collection and analyses. Next, Chapter Three describes the eight different research sites. Chapter Four provides a brief overview of parents' hopes and aspirations for their children's future and the role of the children in the family, to describe the context in which violence to children takes place. Chapter Five describes the types and forms of violence that are common in the communities where the research was conducted. It also looks at the difference between disciplining girls and boys and discusses who is perceived as having a "right" to be violent to whom in the family. It also explores how members of the community are aware of the harm that violence causes to

<sup>2</sup> For a small study on corporal punishment conducted in Kabul in which children were spoken to but is more concerned with prevalence see: Fazel Jalil (2003). For information on the impacts of corporal punishment on children in Afghanistan, see Save the Children Sweden and Norway (2006).

<sup>3</sup> It was beyond the methodology and scope of the wider research project to speak to children. This would have required particular skills on the part of the research team which were not readily available and a quite separate methodology and approach to the communities would have been needed, which may have prevented other parts of the research taking place.

children. Chapter Six discusses differing attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment and gives examples where different members of the same family have very different opinions. The chapter also looks at how individuals' abstract opinions on violence toward children are at variance with their actual behaviours. Chapter Seven discusses the different reasons given by parents for using corporal punishment and presents some of the alternatives for disciplining children identified by the respondents. Chapter Eight discusses further causes of violence to children, focusing on how feelings of stress and frustration on the part of adults can lead to violence against children in the family. The ninth chapter starts to look at spaces for

change by discussing people's perceptions of how violence to children in the family has changed over time. The final and concluding chapter of the paper highlights the most important arguments and presents the policy and programme recommendations arising from the research.

It should be noted that while this paper focuses on violence to children in the family, the research teams also witnessed a great deal of love, affection and care by parents and other adults in the family toward children. Likewise, parents reported their deep concerns and high expectations for their children's futures, as evidenced in Section Four.



## 2. Methodology

*At that time her nephew sat with his back turned to us. When Mah Jan<sup>4</sup> saw him, she became angry with him and took a stick and started beating him on his back. Her nephew sat very silently, ready to accept the violence. Mah Jan beat him on his arms and back. The small boy was crying very softly and only tears were coming from his tired eyes. He tried to hide his hands under his sleeves. Mah Jan continued beating him and shouting at him, "You're not listening to me; this is your punishment." At that time I was numb, and I could only ask Leena to try and stop her from beating him. When Leena asked Mah Jan to not beat that child so much, Mah Jan stopped and came back to us. The boy was crying but very softly. I asked him to come to me, but he was afraid. He seems to be afraid of all people. When for the second time I asked him to come to me, and he still did not come, Mah Jan shouted at him and told him to come to me. After that he came to me and I kissed him and kept him beside me, but then he started crying more and more. It felt to me like it was the first time that someone had shown him love and kissed him. It was very difficult for me to control myself and stop my tears from coming, because that child was very innocent.<sup>5</sup>*

– Extract from the field notes of Saghar Wafa (research team member)

In each of the four provinces data were collected in one urban and one rural location. A different research team made up of two men and two women worked in each province. Across all four provinces, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with more than 200 men and women from 61 different families, with many interviewed more than once. In total, 319 semi-structured interviews were conducted with different members of the 61 families. Fifty-six focus group discussions were also facilitated, 28 with men and 28 with women. Among both the male and female focus group discussions, approximately half were conducted with younger people and half with older people.

At the beginning of the fieldwork period 46 key informant interviews were also conducted with individuals who are considered knowledgeable about the specific research sites. Concurrently, informal conversations were held with members of the families being researched and other community members. All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded using written notes that entered into (as near as possible)

verbatim transcripts of what was said by both interviewer and interviewee. Field notes were kept to record pertinent informal conversations and the field researchers' observations.

Issues of translation were significant throughout the research process, with translations of particular words and phrases discussed at length by the English speaking lead researcher and the Dari and Pashtu speaking researchers. The research team was keen to not only have a direct word-for-word translation but also to understand what is implied when certain words are used in Dari, Pashtu and Hazaragi compared with their English equivalents. For example, imperative to this research have been the translations of the Dari word *zadan* and the Pashtu word *wahal*, both of which are usually translated to the English word "beat". However, whereas in English the word beat means repeatedly punching or hitting someone and implies quite a severe form of violence, the words *zadan* and *wahal* cover any act of physical violence from one slap to a repeated beating with a stick or cable or stabbing someone with a knife. Whenever possible, the research teams asked respondents what

<sup>4</sup> All names in this paper have been changed.

<sup>5</sup> This family and the relationship between Mah Jan and her nephew are discussed in further detail in section 6.2. Also see family map four.

they meant when they used the word *zadan* or the word *wahal*. Nevertheless, it has not been possible for all the quotes used in this report or descriptions of conversations to contain these specifics. To keep the translation as accurate as possible, when the English word beat is used it is a direct translation of *zadan* or *wahal*; therefore, it should be taken to have the wider meaning contained in the Dari and Pashtu words, as is illustrated by this quote from a man living in a rural area of Kabul:

*Beating means beating and we do not need to talk about what is beating. If we beat with a stick or slap or maybe with something else, or maybe we pull their ears, so they are all the same. Some people beat with slaps and some of them beat with a stick.*

## 2.1 Building relationships between researchers and respondents

Researching the dynamics of power relations in the family involves entering worlds that are commonly conceptualised as private and beyond the realm of public scrutiny. Researching violence within the family requires probing into an area of this private realm that is seen as particularly beyond the public gaze. The extent to which family conflict is “not to be mentioned” depends on many factors including cultural identity, class, and personal attitudes. Talking outside (and often inside) the family about personal kin relationships can be perceived as disloyal, dishonourable, and at times unnecessary or even futile. As such, conducting quality in-depth research on violence in the family presents particular methodological challenges. Key to overcoming these challenges is a research methodology that prioritises trust-building, flexibility and responsiveness to the dynamics of the field and the data as they are revealed. It should also be remembered that researching violence in the family can be a distressing experience for those conducting the research as the quote at the beginning of this

chapter illustrates. This is particularly the case when building a relationship based on trust between researchers and research subjects, which is essential to the collection of in-depth qualitative data.

In building trust and rapport, the most important factors are time and how the field researchers are perceived by the respondents to the study. There can never be enough fieldwork time for conducting a study of this nature; however, having different teams working in each province allowed for each team to spend seven months working in two research sites. While having many researchers working on the same project has its downsides, as discussed below, collecting an equal amount of data using just one team would have required a total fieldwork period of two years or more. Rather than working in one site for three and a half months and then moving to the next site, both the rural and the urban locations in each province were studied simultaneously. This allowed the researchers to build relationships with the communities and families they were studying over a seven month period, rather than just three and a half months. There were also practical considerations for choosing to work in this manner. First, the researchers’ skills and abilities improved as time went on, and consequently they were working in both sites when their skills and abilities were the most developed at the end of the six month period. Second, as the research teams gained new insights into the dynamics of the families they were able to be responsive to this across both sites simultaneously. Third, if there were security concerns or other unforeseen or unavoidable events they could continue to work in the other location, which helped to prevent serious delays in the fieldwork.

Perceptions of the researchers by the families they studied are fundamental to the ability to build trust and rapport. How the research respondents see the researchers in relation to themselves influences what they are prepared to reveal about their lives and the way in which they will reveal it. When researching the private



realm of the family, being seen as an outsider has distinct advantages and disadvantages. Likewise there are also advantages and disadvantages to being seen as an insider. The research teams in each province were selected with this in mind: they were from or living in the province where the research was being conducted, they were of the same ethnic mix as those being researched, and as far as possible each team was made up of men and women of mixed ages and mixed marital status. This allowed for the researchers in some ways to be perceived as the same as those they were talking with. The researchers themselves also felt this sameness, making them able to empathise with those whose lives they were learning about. Researchers at times shared their personal stories, experiences of war and migration and conflict and co-operation within their own families. This mutual sharing of personal stories allowed respondents to feel understood and comfortable in sharing their own experiences.

However, in other ways it was important for the researchers to be seen as different, as outsiders. If researchers are seen as too closely linked to the communities they are working in it can make respondents less likely to talk openly, for fear that this person may judge them or share what they are revealing with other members of the community. It is often those who live most closely to us whom we would not want to share our "private" stories with. Status and standing in the community are dependent on what other community members know or think of us, therefore, it is likely to be more important for respondents to maintain a veneer of harmony in their families, to members of their own communities or those more closely linked to their own communities. In the context of the rural areas, the researchers were most usually seen as different in terms of their urbanised, educated and employed status. In the urban context these differences were at times less pronounced, however, the educational and economic status of the researchers in relation to some of those being interviewed allowed them to be seen as different on some levels. The women research-

ers were also on the whole seen as different due to their greater mobility and employment status. This was seen as an enviable position by the women they were speaking to rather than one to be looked down on or criticised. Efforts were made to ensure that neither researchers nor their families were known in the communities where the research was being conducted. (This proved to be quite a challenge in one province with four researchers living in different areas of the city.)

In relation to maintaining a degree of outsider status, the research teams did not seek introductions to the communities through NGOs who were already established in those areas for two reasons. First, this was done in case respondents became worried about the information they shared being passed on to NGO fieldworkers or the research teams becoming entangled in pre-existing power dynamics between NGOs and the community members. Second, this method was chosen to avoid being perceived as linked to an NGO who may provide some form of aid or assistance, and as such, to avoid being seen in the same light.

Outsiders are generally viewed as powerful either in terms of being there to give or to take in some way. This was clearly demonstrated during early meetings with community members when people would either stress their lack of material resources and directly ask for help, assuming that the outsider must be there to give, or be reluctant and resistant, assuming that the outsider must be there to take in some way. Often, hospitality on the part of the community clashed with these two reactions and gave the research teams time to explain the purpose of their visit. Indeed, to a degree the research teams were there to take in some way, in terms of information and time. However, it could be also said that the research teams gave in some ways, with some respondents commenting on enjoying the opportunity to talk about their difficulties or remember their lives.

In Bamiyan, Herat and Jalalabad the research

teams were employed by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). Perceptions of the AIHRC and its work also influenced how the researchers were perceived and what their role in the village was. The AIHRC was, in most research sites, well known.<sup>6</sup> The way in which the AIHRC was viewed by the communities varied from a body which was there to protect women from violence in their families and who had brought a positive change in the way family members relate to each other, to a body there to disrupt the family and encourage women to divorce their husbands. At times this negative perception of the AIHRC made members of the communities where the teams were working resistant to talk with the researchers about the relationships in their families and particularly about violence in the families. As such, in a number of the sites the researchers had to invest a great deal of time to assure the communities about the motivations for their work and that anything told to them would remain confidential and no further action would be taken on the part of the research team. However, where requested, the research teams had an ethical responsibility to refer people to other organisations who could provide more practical support; if they asked for direct help from the AIHRC the researchers would tell them to contact the office directly.

As stated above the data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and informal conversations and observations. The rationale for choosing these multiple open-ended and flexible methods was to give respondents an opportunity to define what they see as important in terms of gender and generational dynamics within their families and to be able to gently encourage people to talk about violence at the appropriate time and when they felt happy to. It was also necessary to adopt these methods in order to prevent inappropriate anticipation of the full range of experiences

being investigated on the part of the research team. The different data collection methods were also used to serve different purposes. In all research sites the research teams initially, and after introductions with the community elders (both men and women) had many informal conversations with different village residents and conducted key informant interviews with people knowledgeable about the communities. Key informant interviews were conducted with both those who worked with the communities, such as health care workers and teachers, and with those who lived in the community such as the *malik* or the *daya*. The aim of these interviews and informal conversations were to collect generalised information about the community, its history, politics and livelihood strategies and to help identify the case study families. The focus group discussions were used to elicit generalised information in regard to both the prevalence and acceptability of different types of violence within the family. The research teams used hand-drawn pictures of different scenes of family life, including aspects of violence, to encourage the participants to discuss different types of possible violence within the family. As far as possible, members of the same family were not present at the same focus groups so that individuals would feel more comfortable sharing their opinions and feelings (for practical reasons this was not always possible). Obviously, separate focus groups were held with men and women; the teams further divided the groups according to the age and position in the family. Older men and women, typically with adult married children, would be spoken to in one group. Younger men and women with children participated in separate groups as far as possible. In some of the groups with younger men and women, unmarried men and women participated as well. Likewise, some focus group discussions were held solely with unmarried or very recently married young people.

<sup>6</sup> The researchers would introduce themselves as employees of the AIHRC working on a research project managed and supervised by AREU. They did not ask employees of AIHRC who were already working in the area to introduce them to the communities, however.

In each urban and rural research site across the provinces, case study families were selected, using information gathered from key informant interviews and informal conversations, according to criteria of five families who had a reputation in their communities for being violent and five who had a reputation for being a harmonious family. The researchers further aimed to select families living in different household structures and having different economic and education backgrounds. However, while sampling is a relatively simple exercise, actual recruitment in the field always proves far more problematic. Consequently, the research teams were not, in all sites, able to identify and work continuously with the ten initially selected families. In other cases as interviews were undertaken and the family became familiar to the research team it became apparent on a few occasions that two of the selected families were in fact related and as such came to be seen as one family. Indeed, one family selected in the urban area of Bamiyan were related to a family selected in the rural area of Bamiyan and as such came to be seen as one large family.

Most research concerned with family relations takes the household as its unit of analysis. However, this research has been concerned with the influence of family relations more widely and as such takes into account how family members living in different households affect each others' lives and relationships. Similarly, particular relatives may have a significant influence on the dynamics and relationships within a household separate to their own. Furthermore, in the Afghan context it can be difficult to delineate the boundaries of a household. Typically a household has been described as a group of people who co-reside for certain purposes such as consumption, reproduction, socialisation, production and investment.<sup>7</sup> However, some of those the research teams met

throughout the course of this research lived in the same compound but described themselves as living separately, despite the fact that they may even have a collective income through farming the same piece of land. This presents a further problematic issue in using the household as the unit of analysis in the ever-changing nature of household structure. As an illustration, see Family Map 1<sup>8</sup> (Jahan Zeib family), where the research team interviewed five separate households to analyse the dynamics in the one family.

## 2.2 Methodology for analysis

Although the same methodology was implemented across all four provinces there remains a difficulty in conducting a comparative analysis based on the different provincial data sets. Two interrelated factors contribute to this. First, the different social norms of interaction apparent in the different provinces affected how open respondents were about levels of and types of violence in their families. Second, different research teams were used in the different provinces in order to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short time. However, the members of the different provincial teams not only came with varying levels of skills, abilities and aptitude for qualitative data collection but were equally affected by their own social and personal characteristics. These two factors combined lead to a situation whereby various opinions, emphasis and stories coming out of the data can no more be ascribed to the different social, economic, demographic or political history of a particular province than they can be to the socially prescribed way of communicating about certain issues in the province, or the behaviour, biases, skills and abilities of the research teams. Despite this, where significant variations are apparent between the provinces they are highlighted.

<sup>7</sup> See: Chant (1991) and Agarwal (1997).

<sup>8</sup> All family maps can be found in Annex 1, along with a key that explains the symbols used in the family maps.

It should be noted here that more data on violence toward children in the family were collected by the male research teams in their interviews and focus group discussions with men in the communities than by the women's teams with women. The reason for this is likely to be because male researchers and respondents alike felt more comfortable talking about violence to children than any other aspect of violence in the family. Consequently, male focus group discussions often started on this subject and dwelt longer on it. Similarly, a relative feeling of comfort led some male researchers to probe more into these issues and male respondents were more willing to open up about violence to children than, for example, violence between husbands and wives.

In order to be flexible to what was arising in the field, transcripts were continually reviewed and preliminary analysis of the data conducted. This allowed the research teams to identify areas where sufficient data had not been collected

and to ensure all the researchers were aware of new and unexpected themes coming out of the data collection. Throughout this process themes were identified and later in the analysis process, these themes were coded. The data were then analysed horizontally across all the transcripts. Simultaneously, vertical case study analysis of individual families and focus group discussions was undertaken in order to keep the data contextualised and to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics in individual families.

In order to help both the lead researcher during the analysis, and the readers of this paper understand the structure of the case study families, family maps have been drawn (see Annex 1). These were designed to visually represent both the structural relationships between individuals in the families and where each household is located. (They also show the complex nature of Afghan family structures.)

### 3. Context I: Research Sites

The research was conducted in four provinces: Bamiyan, Kabul, Herat and Nangarhar. One urban and one rural study site were selected for each province. The four provinces were chosen in order to capture as broad a selection as was feasible of the different geographical and social contexts of Afghanistan. It is recognised that the research was not conducted in either the northern or southern zone of Afghanistan. However, it would have been impractical to cover a greater number of provinces and still maintain the depth and quality of the data collected.

Both rural and urban locations were selected to be as representative as possible of each of the four provinces, as well as to capture the different experiences of war and migration typical of the populations. The presence of families from different wealth groups was also taken into consideration in identifying the study sites.

This section describes the research sites to help contextualise the findings of the study. However, specific details about individual sites are deliberately omitted to protect the confidentiality of the communities.

#### 3.1 Bamiyan Province

##### Rural

**Location and residents.** The rural research site comprises five small villages, all within easy walking distance from one another. Approximately 400 households reside across the five villages. The area is between one and two hours from Bamiyan city by car, depending on road conditions; roads can become impassable during winter. This area is particularly cold and experiences a good deal of snowfall in the winter months.

**Livelihoods and economy.** Among the rural areas where research was conducted, this is the poorest. Agriculture and animal husbandry are the main sources of livelihoods. The majority of residents have no more than six *jeribs*<sup>9</sup> of land. Wheat, barley and potatoes are grown, predominantly for subsistence and animal fodder rather than sale. Households also subsist on animal products such as yoghurt, butter, cream and milk. Selling animals and animal products provides some cash income. People spend the spring and summer months living on their *ailaqs* (area of land outside of the village used for grazing animals) to access better grazing lands for animals. Families also spend this time collecting *bota* (bushes) from the mountains, used as fuel for both cooking and heating during the winter. Both men and women participate in animal husbandry.

Carpet weaving, undertaken primarily by women and children, is the most important source of cash income. According to interviews, however, it is not indigenous to the area; it was brought to the area by returnees from Pakistan.

For most households, everyday survival is a struggle. A village elder makes this clear in his description of the economic variance among families:

*The poor are those who have nothing to eat and the wealthy are those who have a few livestock and some land and can subsist on that.*

**Health and education.** Only one school serves the five villages. Classes are mixed for girls and boys, which has implications for girls' attendance as they get older. Residents place a great deal of value on this school, built by an INGO in 2002, sending their children to attend regularly. Even families who move to their *ailaqs* during

<sup>9</sup> One *jerib* is approximately equivalent to one fifth of a hectare.

the spring reportedly appoint an adult to stay with the children in the village and ensure that they go to school.

Families are deeply concerned about the absence of medical services in the villages. The nearest clinic is two hours away by foot.

**Impact of conflict.** Taliban incursions into the rural areas of Bamiyan Province were particularly devastating in this research site, with many men killed and imprisoned. Families were forced to flee to the snow-covered mountains. Many old people and children died from the cold and lack of food. Houses and possessions were either burnt or bulldozed. The village, located close to a shifting frontline between the Taliban and Northern Alliance forces, suffered not only at the hands of the Taliban, but also when forces from the other side had to retreat.

During the Taliban reign, very few of the residents were actually able to migrate to Kabul, Pakistan or Iran. A village elder reported that those who did leave the country are now better off economically than those internally displaced. He described the latter group as “just like a bird making a nest for itself”, alluding to their struggle to rebuild their homes and their lives from scratch.

### Urban

**Location and residents.** There are approximately 500 households in the area. The residents originate from different districts of Bamiyan Province. Upon returning to their villages after 2001 at the fall of the Taliban many families found their homes and livestock destroyed. This combined with other incentives for them to live in Bamiyan city, primarily better access to services and employment.

**Livelihoods and economy.** Economic activities are more variable in the urban site compared to the rural area. Some wealthier

families own trucks or cars used for transporting goods and people; others own small shops. For most people, however, income-earning opportunities are limited to daily wage labour and carpet weaving. A number of families own land which they let for sharecropping; others are employed in the police, or work as guards for INGOs.

**Health and education.** Bamiyan central hospital and school are easily accessible to residents of this area.

**Impact of conflict.** Residents of this area had similar experiences of war and migration as those living in the rural research site as described above.

## 3.2 Kabul Province

### Rural

**Location and residents.** The rural location in Kabul Province is approximately 45 minutes drive from Kabul. The village is relatively large with approximately 320 households. The majority of the residents described themselves as Arab<sup>10</sup> and speak both Dari and Pashtu. There are a few Hazara families also, but all those interviewed for the study are Arab.

**Livelihoods and economy.** Families are of various wealth levels, including large landowners and those with no land, who are dependent on daily wage labour. Agricultural products such as wheat, potatoes, onions and fruits are used for subsistence and are also sold in Kabul. Animal husbandry is practiced and its products, such as yoghurt, are also sold in Kabul city by male family members. Some families have shops or operate handcarts on a daily basis. A number of households own cars which they operate as taxis to and from Kabul. A small number of women participate in economic activities, including tailoring and selling animal products locally.

<sup>10</sup> Groups identifying themselves as Arab in Afghanistan are among those claiming Sayed descent (Encyclopedia Iranica, 2001, p.499).

There are two shops and two mosques in the village.

**Health and education.** The village has a school for boys and girls with classes up to level six. However, the nearest school for level six and beyond is at least an hour away on foot. The closest health clinic is in the next village, approximately 30 minutes walking distance.

**Impact of conflict.** The village suffered greatly during both the period of the Soviet-Mujahiddin war and the proceeding civil war. People described how all the buildings and fruit-bearing trees were destroyed in the fighting. Families lost male members – mostly Mujahiddin – during the wars. The civil war also badly affected the village with different commanders fighting over land.

The vast majority of families fled the village during the Soviet-Mujahiddin war, mainly to Pakistan, but some to Kabul and a small number to Iran. Many village residents went to the same refugee camp in Pakistan and as such reported maintaining their own culture and social structure. People have returned at different times. Prior to the outbreak of civil war some families who had returned were then forced to leave again. Most families, although not with all members, have now returned.

### Urban

**Location and residents.** The site is typical of any urban area in Kabul which has sprawled up the side of the mountains. Unlike in the rural Kabul site, people from different ethnicities live in the urban location, the majority being Hazara, Pashtun and Tajik. Many of the people are returnees from either Pakistan or people who were internally displaced and some are longer term residents of the area who moved to Kabul two to three generations ago.

**Livelihoods and economy.** Some residents work as civil servants, others own shops, while many families rely on remittances from relatives living abroad. Some own land in other parts of

the country from which they derive income. There is a great deal of under- or un-employment. Some women and children are involved in carpet weaving.

**Health and education.** Private health services and one public health clinic are available in the area. There are two schools, one for boys and one for girls.

**War and migration.** The area was near the frontline during the civil war and as such many buildings were destroyed and most if not all the residents left the area.

## 3.3 Herat Province

### Rural

**Location and residents.** The village is located between one and a one-and-a-half hour drive from Herat city and is very close to the main road. All those living in the village are Tajik.

**Livelihoods and economy.** The rural area of Herat is observed to be the wealthiest among the sites visited. This was made clear to the research team in a key informant interview conducted with a female health committee member in the village:

*We have a chopan (shepherd) we can call poor. But even he is not that poor, because we give him our sheep to take care of. And at the end of the year for every ten sheep he looks after we give him one, as his salary. So in every year he gets at least 30 sheep. And the people also give him his living expenses.*

Agriculture and animal husbandry are the main sources of livelihoods. Generally families own significant amounts of land, a mixture of irrigated and rain-fed, and livestock. Most families have surplus produce which they sell, along with their animals and animal products. It is very common for young men from the area to work in Iran for periods of time; this is both in order to provide for their families and more

commonly, in order to raise money to pay for marriage expenses.

**Health and education.** There is a small school in the village but only up to grade five. The nearest school for older children is in the *waliswali*, approximately 20 kilometers away. Similarly, there is no health clinic in the village and the nearest health services are also at the *waliswali*.

**Impact of conflict.** Residents of the area were affected both by the Soviet-Mujahiddin war and the Taliban's control of Herat Province. At the time of the Soviet occupation the village was divided into two parties with half the village supporting the Soviet-backed government and the other half supporting the Mujahiddin. By the early 1980s, the conflict had forced all the families to leave the village. Some families went to Iran but the majority fled to a neighbouring province. Most households were unable to take anything with them except for some livestock. Families returned after seven or eight years.

Under the Taliban, some men were imprisoned, tortured or killed. Some joined the forces fighting the Taliban and left the village. However, families as a whole did not migrate out of the village at this time.

## Urban

**Location and residents.** The urban site covers a relatively large area and is located not far from the centre of Herat city. The majority of residents are Tajik, with the largest minority being Turkmen. There are a few Pashtun and Hazara families.

**Livelihoods and economy.** Overall families in the urban site are poorer than those in the rural area, although there is a range of economic situations: some are materially comfortable, while others have no regular income at all. The wealthier households tend to own shops or small businesses, such as brick making or flour milling. Some also own productive land in the rural

areas. Occupations of men from less economically secure families include owning vegetable carts, daily wage labour, driving taxis, working as security guards and cleaners; some are employed by the government, for example, the Afghan National Army. Women's economic activity is important in this area. Women supporting their households typically sew *lehaf* (quilts), smash pistachios and wash clothes for wealthier families. Carpet weaving is also done, primarily by women from Turkmen families. Remittances from male family members in Iran form an important part of economic survival for many families in this area.

**Health and education.** Residents have access to one health clinic and two others nearby. There is no school in the study site, but there are schools for both boys and girls close by.

**Impact of conflict.** The urban area was particularly badly affected by the Soviet-Mujahiddin war. It was heavily bombarded by the Soviet forces. Families interviewed had lost family members; others were severely injured or disabled. Residents were forced to flee at this time with some families moving from place to place in the city or different districts of Herat. A good number of families migrated to Iran and the Turkmen living in the area migrated to Turkmenistan. Many of those who left returned in the early 1990s and many new families, originally from other parts of Afghanistan, also moved to the area.

As was reported in the rural research site, migration to other countries during the Taliban regime was minimal. However, people reported family members being executed, imprisoned and beaten by the Taliban.

## 3.4 Nangarhar Province

### Rural

**Location and residents.** This rural research site represents a particularly large village. It



takes just over one hour by car to get to the village from Jalalabad city, including a 15- to 20-minute drive from the main road. Residents are all Pashtuns, but from different *qawms* (clans). There is a bazaar with several different shops in the centre of the village.

***Livelihoods and economy.*** Residents are from various wealth groups. The wealthiest own businesses and shops as well as land. Those in the lower-income groups work as drivers, daily wage labourers, or have small plots of land. Most of the people interviewed owned between two and ten jeribs of land. Wheat is the most important crop; cotton, maize and vegetables are also grown. Some families have two or three cows. A small number of women in the village are involved in paid work: one is a teacher, another a midwife and two are trained birth attendants. Other women work as seamstresses. A few people work in government and NGO offices. Many families have several income-generating activities, for example, one man reported that his family owns a small plot of land and a flour mill and he works as a mason. According to villagers' accounts, the community used to be wealthier when poppy was grown; however, most villagers have reportedly stopped cultivation. As in other research sites, male family members work in Iran or Pakistan as a form of household economic survival.

***Health and education.*** The village has a functioning clinic with both male and female medical staff, including a very active and dedicated midwife. There is a boys' school and a girls' school in the village. However, residents complained that the girls' school is only up to grade six and that it is difficult to recruit female teachers to work there.

***Impact of conflict.*** The Soviet-Mujahiddin war left most of the buildings in the village destroyed. Families lost members and most of the residents migrated to Pakistan, staying there for between 14 to 20 years. In some cases, families split up as a family survival strategy, with some members staying in the village to look

after what land and property they owned, while others moved to Pakistan.

### Urban

***Location and residents.*** The residents of the research site in Jalalabad city are from many different districts of Nangarhar as well as other provinces in Afghanistan. The vast majority are Pashtuns, but from different *qawms* with a few Tajik families.

***Livelihoods and economy.*** This is one of the poorer areas of Jalalabad city. There are, however, a small number of wealthier families. Among the typical occupations for men are: masons, daily wage labourers, porters, policemen, army soldiers, drivers, cart pushers and small shopkeepers. Some residents own small businesses as well as land for lease in the rural areas. Women's economic activities are minimal but some undertake paid work, such as sewing brastan (quilts), teaching or working in health centres. There is at least one female fortune teller in the area. Overall there are high rates of under- and unemployment. As in most of the other research sites families have members living and working in Pakistan and Iran.

***Health and education.*** There is no clinic in the area and only one school for boys and girls up to level six. However, being in the city there are other health facilities and schools nearby.

***Impact of conflict.*** Many of the current residents first came to the area during the Mujahiddin-Soviet war to escape the fighting in their home districts. Many families, however, were forced to flee again during this war, with some going to other districts of Nangarhar and others simply moving around the city to avoid the fighting. Some of the residents also migrated to Pakistan and stayed there for up to 20 years or more. The area was heavily bombarded and many households have members who died or are now disabled. Residents also suffered during the civil war and the Taliban rule. During the American bombing of Taliban positions, residents were again temporarily uprooted.



## 4. Context II: Parents' Hopes and Aspirations for their Children and the Role of Children in the Family

This section discusses the role of children in the family and parents' hopes and aspirations for their children.<sup>11</sup> The reason for doing this at this stage in the paper, and in this paper at all when the primary focus is the violence adults inflict on children, is to allow the reader to contextualise the stories which are told and the analysis of violence to children in the family, which is presented later in the paper. Examining parents' hopes and aspirations for their children and the roles that children are expected to play in the family enhances an understanding of adults' motivations for disciplining their children whether in a violent manner or not. It also balances the discussion of adults' violent behaviour to their children with the recognition that this is often motivated by feelings of love and concern.

The section begins by discussing parents' hopes and aspirations for their children's futures and in relation to this the high importance placed on education. It is argued that parents' aspirations for their children are closely related to their hopes, fears and expectations regarding Afghanistan's future. Throughout this discussion parents' differential hopes and aspirations for their girl and boy children are highlighted. It should be noted that while parents expressed generalised hopes that their children would be responsible moral adults, contribute to society and be economically comfortable, by far the most common and concrete aspiration parents

expressed for their children was that they would be well educated. Consequently in this section there is a more detailed discussion on education. Following this what children's roles in the family are, beginning with children's role in paid work, subsistence work outside the home and domestic work are briefly presented. Finally is a discussion regarding whom in the family is perceived to be responsible for children's upbringing.

### 4.1 Hopes and aspirations for children

*I think their marriages will be better than mine and I believe the country will have developed and at that time they will have a better life than me.*

- Middle-aged<sup>12</sup> man living in urban Nangarhar

The vast majority of parents had high hopes for their children's futures. When asked, almost without exception people said they believed their children's lives would be better than their own; this was particularly strongly expressed in Nangarhar and Bamiyan Provinces.

The reasons given for these aspirations were: there are more facilities now; children have opportunities for education now; and there will not be further war or the need to migrate in the future and Afghanistan will develop.

<sup>11</sup> As this paper discusses community attitudes and perspectives toward violence to children in the family, those children who are considered throughout the discussion are those considered to be children by the community. In the main this includes unmarried girls and boys below the age of approximately 16. Where applicable and relevant, more exact ages of the children being discussed are provided.

<sup>12</sup> The term "middle-aged" describes persons between the ages of about 30 and 45, who may have grown up children, some of whom may be married. The term "older" to describe a respondent means they are in their mid forties and above, and most likely have grown up children and grandchildren. Anyone below this age will be described as young. However, the researchers did not interview nor have focus group participants who were below the age of 18. Often, those to whom the teams spoke were not sure of their exact ages, which is one reason for using these more generalised descriptions.

Parents not only expected that their children would reap the benefits of these greater facilities and opportunities but they also expected their children to play a role in their communities and country's development, as Abdul Sabor (whose family is introduced more fully below) expressed: *I would like them to be educated and serve their county and people.*

It was far more commonly expressed that opportunities for education and the future development of Afghanistan would enable sons, rather than daughters, to find good jobs and have greater material wealth than their parents. However, several parents discussed their desires for their daughters to find good jobs and these were not necessarily families where women were already working. In the main parents' hopes for their daughters' futures were related to them having successful marriages. Mothers were especially concerned that their daughters would have good marriages; hoping, for instance, that their daughters' husbands would not have more than one wife and would be economically secure.

Older women described how they had been burdened with many difficulties and problems in their lives and both expected and hoped their daughters would have better lives than them. There were a small number of exceptions to this. For example, Bakhat Bibi, an older woman, who lives in a relatively poor household in urban Herat and whose daughter was already in a violent marriage believes her daughter will have a similar life to her:

*The daughter wears the mother's shoes. I think they will live like me and suffer as I have suffered in my life.*

Likewise, but on a more positive note, a small number of women recounted how they had had good lives and good marriages and simply hoped

that their daughters would be as fortunate as them.

Some women expressed the opinion that there was a general improvement in women's lives over time. For example, Zar Bibi, an elderly woman in rural Nangarhar, expressed the perspective that her life has been better than her mother's and that she expects her daughters' lives to be better than her own. She implied that the reason for this is because women have become more courageous and have more autonomy. She gave the example of girls being able to refuse marriage proposals now when they couldn't in the past.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of the high expectations parents have for their children's futures should not be underestimated. They demonstrate both a willingness and readiness for change coming from different communities; a desire to support their children in achieving these goals; that violent punishment disciplinary practices may well be administered with the best intentions, as explored below; and a more positive attitude toward Afghanistan's future than the image which is often presented.

## 4.2 Hopes and aspirations for children: education

*I am an illiterate person; if I was literate today I might not face the many difficulties I have. I might have been an educated person and I might have had a good and comfortable life by the blessed education...I try to send my children to school to be well educated in the future and not to face the financial problems I am faced with.*

— Middle-aged man from urban Nangarhar

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed discussion of changes in girls roles in decision making around their marriages see AREU's issues paper on decision making for marriage and marriage practices.

*I hope that when my children grow up they will have an education and then they can work for our poor country.*

— Older woman speaking in a focus group in rural Nangarhar

The most commonly expressed aspiration for children by parents across the eight research sites was that their children, both boys and girls, should go to school and be well educated. This supports the findings from AREU's previous study on Education and School Enrolment (Hunte, 2006). Parents virtually without exception want their children to be educated and hold formal schooling in high regard.

Similarly, and again in concurrence with Hunte's (2006) findings it is, almost without exception, not a lack of desire for education that prevented people from sending their children to school. Instead, livelihood factors and the availability of suitable schools are the major hindering factors.

Improved material wellbeing and adults' own experiences of being illiterate were not the only factors motivating parents to send their children to school. Other perceived benefits included education being seen to make children grow up to be better parents themselves, giving an all-round greater knowledge and learning about how to behave in a good manner, are also important.

Some women whose parents did not allow them to attend school now feel bitter towards their parents for this restriction. Malika, who lives in a relatively wealthy family herself, and whose husband, brother-in-law and sister-in-law are educated expressed this sentiment:

*She [my mother] would say to us you are girls and you will get married and go to other people's houses...Now my brother is in grade nine in school and I tell my mother I will never forgive her for not letting us go to school.*

Malika is now, however, with the help of her own children teaching herself to read and write. One of her motivations for doing this is so she

can help her own children with their homework, as she explained:

*My daughters are going to school and whenever I asked them about their lessons they would say that we have studied until this page or the other. Whether they read correctly or incorrectly I didn't know; I couldn't understand. Then I said to myself it is not working like this and I have to learn how to read and write and then I started. At the beginning I read my daughters' books and then I read my husband's books and I learnt...the lines which I couldn't read I would underline with a pencil and when the girls returned from school...I would ask them. Then they told me and I learnt the first grade books. I have also studied the second grade books... I bought a blackboard with some chalk and I started writing on it...My daughters would say, 'Mum we do not study as hard for our maths as you study your Dari'.... If one can read then at least one can solve one's own problems; for women there are so many problems which they can not go and ask a man about. The children help a lot.*

This woman was one of those who reported that she wants her daughters to be well educated so that they can get jobs in the future.

The few examples found of parents who believe their daughters being educated will enable them to have some level of economic autonomy demonstrates that some people have expectations for their children which go beyond the culturally prescribed norms for gendered behaviour and roles.

Again concurring with Hunte's (2006) findings people often said that the reason behind their greater awareness as to the benefits of education is what they had seen and learned in other countries when forced to migrate. This quote below from a young man speaking during a focus group discussion in urban Kabul is typical:

*It was very difficult for girls to continue their education but they can now. The people did not allow their bigger girls to go to school but war with all of its disasters brought this freedom for ladies to continue their education and go outside.*

Experiences of migration being a catalyst for changing lifestyles and challenges to cultural norms has been a continual theme throughout this research project. It is addressed further in Chapter Eight of this paper and in other papers related to this research.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the desire most parents have for ensuring their children receive an education certain factors presented obstacles to this and particularly for girls. The largest obstacle for families and their daughters who are seeking an education are related to the norms of sex segregation and female seclusion. Children's responsibilities for household economic and domestic survival are important in this regard as well and are discussed below.

Girls' access to education is rarely restricted because family members do not perceive education for girls as desirable; instead obstacles are located in more practical considerations in light of these social norms of behaviour: for example, the lack of high schools specifically for girls in the rural areas and the lack of women teachers in schools. The most common reasons given as to why girls were not attending school beyond a certain age were: they shouldn't study with boys; there is no high school for girls in the village; they can't travel long distances to school for fear of what others will say about them; and the teachers in the school are men.

Although for many spoken with, these practical considerations which prevent girls from attaining a complete school education without conflicting with cultural norms of behaviour were upper-

most, others presented a slightly more confused picture of their opinions and attitudes. For example, Mumen, a man who works as a cook in urban Bamiyan told the research team why his elder daughter no longer goes to school:

*I don't think it is suitable for a girl who is engaged to go to school. If the custom changes, she will go to school – but the older girls do go to school now.*

As this quote shows initially Mumen says that he doesn't think it is right for a girl who is engaged to go to school. Later in the same sentence he says that his daughter does not go to school anymore because it would not conform to cultural norms rather than his personal opinion. He then goes on to indicate that these gendered norms are in fact beginning to change.

Others, such as Nazifa from Kabul city, an illiterate woman who lives in a poor household with her unemployed husband, his mother and his nine brothers and sisters, explained to the research team how societal pressure restricts girls from going to school. She implied that if these behavioural norms started to break down, people would be happy to let their daughters attend school:

*It was not our custom for girls to go to school and when one family follows those roles and customs in our area, other families will also do the same; otherwise people will say lots of bad things behind their backs. And because of that my father didn't let us go to school.*

These examples show how both cultural norms of girls' non-attendance at school above a certain age often clash with less conservative personal opinions and how even those who hold more conservative opinions themselves are questioning these cultural norms.

<sup>14</sup> Other papers based on the findings from this research include an AREU issues paper looking at decision making around marriages and marriage practices and how they impact on violence in the family, and a synthesis paper.

Some of those the research team spoke with had already challenged these norms of gendered behaviour which restrict girls' access to education above a certain age, and had supported their daughters in completing their schooling.<sup>15</sup>

### 4.3 Children's roles and responsibilities in the family

Both boy and girl children in most if not all households in the four provinces where the research was conducted have paid and/or unpaid work responsibilities. Daughters across all four provinces are expected to undertake domestic work, both to help their mothers and as a training for their future roles as wives and mothers. Some mothers reported doing their best to lighten their daughters' domestic work load to enable them to concentrate on their studies.

There is some evidence which points to boys assisting their mothers or aunts with domestic work if they do not have sisters, or sisters old enough to take on these roles. In the main, boys' unpaid household responsibilities were located outside of the house, such as collecting water, bushes or wood for fuel, running errands or taking care of animals. In some cases, in which families own shops, boys work with their fathers in the shop when not at school.

In several of the case study families, children are engaged in paid work, contributing to household survival, either in the house or outside: both boys and girls are engaged in carpet weaving in urban and rural Bamiyan and urban Kabul; girls are helping their mothers in making quilts in urban Herat, boys are selling foodstuffs on the streets in urban Kabul and Nangarhar; boys in

one family were working in a bakery in urban Herat. In most examples this work was combined with school attendance. Unfortunately, in some cases children had been taken out of school altogether in order to work full-time and support their families.<sup>16</sup>

Across six of the sites the situation was very similar with some children combining work and schooling, others not attending school at all and being engaged in paid work (boys) or unpaid domestic work (girls). Exceptions to this are the rural site in Herat, where no children were reported to be involved in paid work. One possible reason for this could be that overall the families living in this village tended to be wealthier than those in other areas. The other exception is the area of rural Bamiyan, where the substantial numbers of children, both boys and girls, are engaged in significant amounts of paid work in the form of carpet weaving. Indeed for many families having children who can weave carpets is a significant source of cash income and a primary form of household economic survival. Boys in this area also make a large contribution to household subsistence in the form of looking after livestock and collecting bushes from the mountains which are used for both cooking and heating. Despite this heavy workload it did seem that most young children do attend the village school, going to school in the mornings and working in the afternoons and evenings.

This section of children's work has shown that significant numbers of families find survival difficult without the contributions of children's labour. Similarly children, particularly girls, play a large role in domestic and other subsistence work within households. It was often stressed that girls not only have to perform domestic duties to contribute to the household they are

<sup>15</sup> The stories of these girls and families are further explored in AREU's synthesis paper on Family Dynamics and Family Violence.

<sup>16</sup> AREU is currently conducting research on household decision making around issues of child labour that will provide detailed information on children's work roles; papers from which will be forthcoming in 2008.

currently living in, but also as a process of training them to be good wives, daughters-in-law and mothers in the future. Ensuring children fulfil these roles was discussed by respondents as a reason for disciplining their children, at times violently. Despite the necessity either real or perceived of children's work, many families do manage to balance children's paid and unpaid work with their attendance at school, demonstrating how while immediate survival has to take precedence many parents do not lose sight of their children's futures in this process.

#### 4.4 Different family members' roles and responsibilities for bringing up children in the family

The ideal roles for men and women within the family would often be quite clearly defined by respondents, with men having the primary responsibility as the family's "breadwinner", and women having a clearly defined role inside the house undertaking all the domestic work. (In some cases this is not what actually happens, with many women contributing to their family's economic survival or being the primary breadwinner.) However, men and women's roles in regard to bringing up children in all areas beyond what comes under economically supporting children or doing domestic work for children, such as discipline; providing advice and guidance; care giving and so forth, were far less clearly defined. When the research teams discussed in either focus groups or individual interviews who in the family is responsible for bringing up and disciplining the children answers were roughly split between two perspectives across all eight research sites. First, that both parents had an equal responsibility and second that mothers have more responsibility but fathers still had a role to play. It should be noted that, as explained in the methodology chapter, more men discussed their roles and responsibilities toward children than women,

and also that it was more unusual for women to say that men and women had an equal responsibility for bringing up children. This in part can be explained by women seeing themselves as doing more day to day work in regard to maintaining children, whereas men were thinking more of the advice and guidance they might give to children. However, what is important here is that men see themselves as having a very large role to play in raising their children beyond providing for their material needs.

When it was said that mothers have more responsibility for bringing up children or disciplining the children the reason given for this was simply that mothers are at home more than fathers and so are the ones who are with the children. It was never said that women had any *natural* qualities that would make them more suitable carers of children than men.

There is evidence in the data supporting the notion that men expressed an ideal of being equally responsible for bringing up children, although in reality this did not always transfer into how much actual childcare work was done. The example in the quote below, from Saleema, a young woman living in Jalalabad, shows how this woman talks about the care her husband shows toward their son as an exceptional way for fathers to behave:

*I am eighteen years old and I have one son, whose name is Manon; he is very cute and I love him. My husband is also happy and loves him. When my husband comes home at night my son knows that he is his father and he hugs him and sometimes he sleeps with his son, so both of us are very happy.*

In an example from rural Kabul a man, who is father to eight young children, told the research team how he plays a large role in the day to day caring work for his children. Like Saleema, he implies that it is exceptional for men to undertake this type of childcare work:



*I love my children and I serve them myself because my wife is a little sick and she cannot hear also. So I usually wash their faces in the morning and I prepare water for them. Also I think that those people who think women should do all the work in the house they are wrong.*

People across all the provinces talked about others in the family who were responsible for bringing up and taking care of the children. Some people simply said that all adults in the family are responsible for the children. Beyond mothers and fathers, paternal grandmothers were reported to have the largest role to play, particularly in terms of taking care of and nurturing children; sons said that their mothers did nothing except for look after their grandchildren. Daughters-in-law reported their mothers-in-law helping a lot when their children were

small, often taking young children to sleep with them. Paternal grandfathers were also reported to play a significant role although this was talked about less often.

As might be expected many adults in the family take on the responsibility for bringing up children. This has important implications when selecting target audiences or participants for programmes or awareness campaigns aimed at education around alternative parenting skills. Of significance for similar reasons is the responsibility that men feel toward bringing up their children (even if in reality much of the actual work in raising children is undertaken by women in the family). The roles that different members of the family play in regard to children's upbringing are explored in further detail below, particularly in relation to discipline.



## 5. Perspectives on Corporal Punishment I: What is Accepted, Who is Beaten and Who has the *Right* to be Violent

*Beating [children] is very common, but it isn't the correct way. It is 100 percent wrong.*

— Older woman in urban Herat, speaking in a focus group discussion

In both the rural and urban areas of all four provinces where the research was conducted corporal punishment is accepted as a normal way to parent children. As such, using violence to discipline children is commonplace. This chapter begins by looking at the types and forms of violence which are accepted in the study communities. It discusses types of behaviour considered to be deserving of corporal punishment and then looks at people's differing attitudes toward using corporal punishment to discipline boy and girl children. The final section of this chapter discusses who in the family is seen as having the right to be violent to whom.

### 5.1 Types, forms and severity of corporal punishment

*Che dab nawi adab nawi*

*(If there is no stick there will be no discipline)*

- Pashtu proverb

As mentioned in the introduction, the research identified specific types of violence which are accepted and commonly used in response to "naughty behaviour": slapping, ear-pulling, verbal abuse, kicking, punching, beating with sticks or electricity cables or shoes and so forth. Of note is the fact that the use of electricity cables was extremely rarely talked about outside of urban and rural areas of Kabul and Herat. Beating with thin sticks (canes) and slapping children were the most common types of punishment reported by people across all four provinces. The only exception was Nangarhar, where using weapons against children was mentioned far less overall, and which had a

much stronger emphasis on slapping children. Hitting children on their feet with canes was also recommended and accepted, by some, as a form of punishment. Punching and kicking children and throwing stones at them were commonly talked about. Verbal abuse was not talked about so much, but this is related more to it not being seen as so important by respondents or not worth mentioning when they were asked how they discipline their children. When verbal abuse was talked about, people stressed that it was commonplace particularly for women to verbally abuse their children. Examples of verbal abuse reported are particularly severe.

For example, a middle-aged man from rural Bamiyan reported telling his children that he will bury them in the graveyard and Allah will take them from him. In another example an older woman in rural Kabul reported that her daughter-in-law tells her children that their father has gone to Iran and died. Threats of violence toward children were also used as a form of verbal abuse, for example, a middle-aged man from rural Bamiyan who is not particularly physically violent to his children told the research team how he threatened his daughter with tying her up and beating her until she couldn't move, because she had fought with the neighbour's daughter. Not only was little difference found between the types of punishments used against children in the different provinces, little difference was found between rural and urban areas or between poorer and more wealthy households.

The most common types of behaviour for which is accepted that children will be "beaten" range from perceived sexual impropriety<sup>17</sup> (particularly

for girls but also for boys to a certain degree) and theft to fighting with other children inside or outside the family; not engaging in productive work, for example, carpet weaving in the correct manner; being noisy; making a mess; getting their clothes dirty; not doing housework correctly; and refusing to go to school or study after school. The idea that children making noise and running around is not to be tolerated was a commonly, if not universally, held opinion. For example, one older woman from rural Nangarhar stated in a focus group discussion that children are so used to being beaten now that if they are not beaten they won't be calm or go to sleep. Behaviour that is perceived to damage the family's reputation was for many people particularly intolerable. Being naughty in front of guests, which might include trying to disturb an adult when they are talking to a guest and generally playing around in front of a guest for some parents was the only time they reported hitting their children. For girls beyond sexual impropriety not doing housework correctly was discussed most often as a reason for their mothers being violent to them. (Perspectives on what types of violence are acceptable and for what behaviours are discussed further in the chapter which follows this one.)

Violence toward children as a form of discipline or punishment can begin from a very early age, as this woman in her mid-twenties, with three small children, who lives in rural Herat explained:

*When my son throws water and wastes it, because we bring it with difficulty [I beat him], or I beat him when he makes everything messy or when he makes his clothes dirty... My first son is three years old and the second son is small.*

Corporal punishment being used against children as young as two or three is supported by state-

ments made by others across different research sites.

An indication as to the severity of violence children experience in these communities were the fears people held that through punishing children they could become seriously injured or even killed. One woman in urban Kabul, speaking during a focus group discussion with older women, suggested that people shouldn't punch their children as they may kill them by mistake. Examples were given as to when parents had seriously injured their children. Indeed a man speaking in a focus group discussion with younger men used potential medical costs as a reason not to beat girls (and women) too much:

*No one wants to beat their wives or daughters so that their arms and legs are broken because the medication is expensive. Because we are poor we are not able to afford it.*

Baserat, a middle-aged man with three young children living in rural Herat, wanted to give advice to people about how to avoid injuring children when punishing them:

*This is my advice to others: you can beat the children with a cane, because the cane causes a lot of pain but doesn't disable them.*

At other times, during focus group discussions, people talked about the violence they had administered to their own children. For example, a middle-aged woman from urban Nangarhar spoke about how she had beaten her daughter around the head and for some years after this her daughter complained of headaches. She went on to say she has now decided not to beat her children on the head anymore. In a focus group in urban Kabul an elderly woman from a poor family talked about how she had beaten her daughter around the mouth until her mouth bled. In another focus group in rural

<sup>17</sup> In the Afghan context, sexual impropriety may include such acts as smiling or talking to a member of the opposite sex who is not a member of the immediate family.

Kabul an older man, also from a poor family with eight children, talked about beating his adolescent son until his son's mouth was full of blood. He went on to say that he normally beats his children with a thin stick. Later in this focus group discussion the same man stated that he doesn't agree with beating children. This is a typical example of how violence toward children is accepted; people admit to being very violent to their children in a public forum but at the same time view violence as being unacceptable. This contradiction between what people see as the ideal way to treat children and how they actually behave with their children is explored in Chapter Six.

The examples given above illustrate the severity of violence that children may have inflicted on them. However, it should be noted that finding ways to inflict the most pain on children or beating people to just short of breaking their bones, as expressed in some of the quotes, is not generally seen as acceptable (also explored in Chapter Six).

## 5.2 Differences in using corporal punishment for girls and boys

In both interviews and focus group discussions people were keen to stress that the same types of corporal punishment are used to discipline girl and boy children. Likewise, they emphasised that boys and girls are treated equally when it comes to discipline more generally. Nevertheless, whether girls or boys are in reality "beaten" more often is debatable. On the whole it was reported that boys were "beaten" more often, although it should be noted that young men felt the strongest about this and their opinion is likely to be based on their own experiences of violence. The rationale given for why this might be, in light of the generalised assertion that boy and girl children are treated equally, is based on an assumption that boys are "naughtier" than girls because they have more opportunity to be naughty. The few examples

where it was argued that girls are beaten more than boys came from women, both young and old. It is likely that many men might be unaware of the levels of violence that girls receive from their mothers in the house, which would explain why it is only women who report higher levels of violence being directed toward girls.

Girl and boy children are, to a certain degree, punished for different types of behaviours, with boys being more commonly punished for fighting or not studying and girls being more commonly punished for not performing household duties properly. Other perceptions around girls being weak, pitiable or more easily frightened led to some people, predominantly older men, saying that they do not beat girls as hard as they beat boys.

## 5.3 Who is perceived to have the *right* to beat children in the family?

This section discusses who in the family is seen as having the *right* to be violent to children. However, what is meant by having a *right* is first clarified. There exists a difference between people perceiving someone in the family to have a *right*, as in an entitlement, to beat a child and perceiving violence on the part of that persons being morally just or acceptable. To illustrate this point a woman during a focus group discussion argues she has the *right* to beat her children and grandchildren and, if she wants to, to kill her own children. However, this does not necessarily mean she thinks killing her children is a morally correct thing for a mother to do.

As found with all aspects of family violence studied in this research, men are perceived as having more rights to be violent to others.<sup>18</sup> Maternal and paternal uncles, older brothers, fathers and grandfathers are all seen to be entitled to violently punish children. Younger brothers also have a right to be violent to their sisters. When discussed it was said, however, that sons-in-law did not have a right to beat children in their in-laws' family.

These rights or entitlements to be violent to children in the family do come with responsibilities attached, as a young woman from Nangarhar explained by arguing it is acceptable for her brother-in-law to beat her children because he cares for them and shows them affection as well. Indeed, there was a general expectation that uncles and grandparents could play a role in disciplining children.

Brothers are seen to have a particular responsibility in regard to disciplining their sisters, and in policing their behaviour to ensure that they behave in the correct gender ascribed manner. A striking example of this is a man in his late twenties who lives in Kabul City, Shakib (see Family Map 2 in Annex 1). Shakib is an unmarried college student who is the oldest son of Shakila. As well as his parents he lives with his youngest sister, who is 17, and his four younger brothers. He has three sisters younger than him who are all married and live with their husbands' families. Also living in the same compound are his father's brother; his wife, Malali; and their six daughters and three sons. The family is relatively wealthy. Shakib's father is a civil servant and the family has productive land in both Nangarhar and in Kabul Province, and a shop in the local bazaar. His uncle who lives with them is also a civil servant. All members of the household have had at least nine years of schooling including both generations. Shakib's sisters, like their mother, had to give up school when they were married.

Shakib's mother explained the rights her son has over her daughters in this regard:

*My son does not let his sister wear short clothes when they want to go to school or outside; if they do not accept he beats them...A few days ago my daughter was baking bolani [a flat, stuffed pastry] when my son came back from college; he came in the kitchen and took a bolani. When my daughter saw him she*

*started shouting and threw out the pot of oil in which she was cooking bolani. When my son saw that reaction he took a cable and beat my daughter very hard until her feet and hands were black. I said good, beat her because she disrespected you. [If] today she disrespects her brother, in the future when she goes to her husband's house she will do this with her in-law's family. My son dislikes arguments; he wants that others should listen to whatever he says otherwise he will become angry.*

A similar example comes from rural Bamiyan. Momina is the daughter of the second wife of Juma Ali (see Family Map 3). She lives with her mother, who lives separately from Juma Ali, and his other two wives. They are a relatively wealthy rural family owning land and livestock and a flour mill. Momina's mother, while having no sons herself, sees Momina's half-brothers as playing a role in teaching Momina to be subservient to men in the family, as this quote from an interview with her illustrates:

*I have beaten her but only for the reason of back chatting with her elder brother. For example, yesterday morning her elder brother told her to repair his sock but Momina replied that she wouldn't and told him, "Do it yourself. You have a wife now tell your wife to do this for you."...When I heard what she said and that she had spoken like this to her elder brother, I beat her and told her "You answer your brother like this and don't do what he tells you?"*

Older brothers also have a right to beat their younger brothers. One man from rural Bamiyan Province reported that his brother, who is 15 years older, had beaten him when he was a child. He said that his brother's beating must have been for his benefit and that he is grateful that his brother beat him when he did. Similarly Nazir, a 21-year-old man from rural Bamiyan, reported beating his younger half-brothers and

<sup>18</sup> See AREU's forthcoming synthesis paper on family dynamics and family violence and issues paper looking at marriage practices and how they affect family violence.

being proud of it, to ensure they behave properly and will therefore not damage his reputation.

Whereas men from a young age have rights to be violent to a wide range of children in their families women are generally seen as only entitled to be violent to their own children, both boys and girls, and to their children's children. There were a few exceptions to this general opinion in which it was mentioned that sisters could beat their younger sisters and even more rarely that sisters-in-law could punish each others' children.

Women's entitlement to be violent is essentially based on their status as mothers. As a middle-aged woman in rural Kabul explained:

*A mother has the right to beat her daughters because she gave birth to them, but she doesn't have the right to beat her daughter-in-law.*

Or as this young woman from Bamiyan explained, the community would condemn a woman who does beat her daughter-in-law:

*People don't consider it bad when a mother beats or gets angry at her [daughter]. But if she beats her daughter-in-law, people think it is very bad. People say that so and so is beating her daughter-in-law every day.*

It should be noted there was slight disagreement with this general consensus that a mother-in-law doesn't have the right to beat her daughter-in-law.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the fact people state a woman does not have the right to beat her daughter-in-law does not mean it does not happen.

Momina's mother also explained why she never beat her co-wife's children, on the grounds that they are not her children:

*No, I haven't beaten the boys because they are the children of another person. If I beat them then I will have to answer for myself in the next world about this.*

## 5.4 Recognition of the harm caused to children experiencing violence

Despite a general agreement among those spoken to that violence to children in their communities is commonplace, there is also recognition of the harm that physical violence does to children. Not only is short- and long-term physical damage recognised but so too are the detrimental psychological effects the violence can have on children. As one man from rural Bamiyan stated, "They [children] should be beaten but not so much that they sustain trauma spiritually or physically."

In some of the most extreme examples of violence toward children, causing long-term physical harm, people related stories of how parents had killed their children accidentally when beating them or attempting to beat them, or how they had disabled them. For example, a group of young men in urban Kabul told a story of how a child had fallen off the roof of his house when he was trying to run away from his father's beating. In a focus group discussion with older men in rural Bamiyan, a story was told about a boy whose father had beaten him with a *charshak* (tool used for threshing corn) for not working hard enough in the fields. It was explained how the boy's leg was badly injured. They saw the futility and irony in this man's punishment because now his son is an adult disabled by the beating he received and unable to do any physical work.

Less noticeable physical effects violence can have on children were also highlighted. For example, an older woman, in a focus group

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law see AREU's forthcoming synthesis paper on family dynamics and family violence.

discussion in rural Nangarhar, told the research team how her husband used to hit her son around the head when he was small. She went on to explain how her now grown-up son has constant headaches, which she relates to the beatings he received as a child. The husband now very much regrets what he did. Negative psychological and emotional effects of corporal punishment were discussed in the focus groups. For example, an elderly man from urban Bamiyan explained how he knows of a young man in his area who is "crazy". He learned that this man had been beaten a lot as a child and believes this to be related to the young man's current condition. Others reported that if children are beaten too much they will grow up damaged. Asghar, a very poor and semi-literate man living in urban Bamiyan, explained that he thinks that beating children will make them "lose their intelligence". He went on to tell the research team how his father used to beat him and how the beatings never helped him to study well. A middle-aged man, Muhammad Hassan, told another personal story. Muhammad Hassan has three small children and reported that he rarely beats them; however, he reported once losing his temper with his young son and slapping him across the face very hard. He described how since this event his son has lost his confidence. Muhammad Hassan now tries to encourage his son and is trying to rebuild his confidence.

Two of the most interesting and perceptive comments on the potential long-term harm caused through violence to children were made by two women living in urban Bamiyan. First, Gul Jan, a young woman who has five sons and one daughter and lives in Bamiyan city, asked what will happen to her daughter in her future husband's house if she has been beaten in her own mother's house. Fauzia, a middle-aged woman who has had no education and lives in a poor household in the same area as Gul Jan, recognised the long-term damage violence towards her daughter could cause in terms of

making her daughter a perpetual victim of violence:

*If I beat her, her husband will beat her when she gets married so it is not good...If I beat her, her husband, sister-in-law, mother-in-law and her father-in-law will beat her in her house and she will become oppressed.*

This woman's husband, Hasan Zawar, also argued that using violence to discipline children is not good. He grew up in a very violent home himself and experienced quite sadistic violence at the hands of his paternal uncle. Despite such opposition to violence to children, Hasan Zawar reported that his wife beats the children a lot and he himself said he slaps the children and has beaten his son very badly three times, which he now regrets. This contradiction between people's ideals regarding child discipline and what actually happens in the home is explored in detail in the next chapter.

This chapter illustrated that violence toward children in the family is accepted; people are willing to share in the public forum of a focus group discussion the severe types of violence they have subjected their own children to. It also showed that people are keen to treat boys and girls equally when it comes to corporal punishment, although there is some difference in people's perceptions as to whether boys or girls are beaten more often. The chapter looked at who has the right to beat whom in the family and concluded that male family members have more rights to be violent. Women are generally viewed as only having the right to violently punish their own children. Finally, this chapter discussed how, despite the prevalence of violence to children in the family, respondents in all the research sites also recognised the harm that violence does in different ways. This knowledge of the harm caused by violence to children no doubt informs people's differing opinions regarding corporal punishment, which are examined in the chapter that follows.



## 6. Perspectives on Corporal Punishment II: Ideals versus the Reality

While the previous chapter described types and forms of violence this chapter is concerned with people's opinions on what forms of violence are acceptable and whether violence as a form of discipline or punishment is acceptable at all. Perspectives on these issues vary from person to person as well as within an individual's own conceptions of what morally correct punishment for children should be. It is important to note that no significant trends could be discerned on the basis of respondents' age, gender, educational status, or whether living in urban or rural areas. Instead, individual characteristics and life experiences had a greater role to play in formulating people's opinions. Where slight differences have been seen in the data between different groups of people this is pointed to.

Not only are individual perceptions and opinions on violence to children varied, ambiguous and contested, there is also frequently a disjuncture between what people say at different times and how they behave. Indeed, people at times would say they don't agree with hitting or beating children and then go on to tell a story of how they have beaten the children in their family. This chapter explores these contradictions and draws out reasons for their existence, with the aim of understanding how agencies might intervene to change attitudes towards and practices surrounding child discipline.

Community discourses regarding the acceptability of corporal punishment fall into three categories. One argues that corporal punishment should only be used as a last resort; a second views it as altogether acceptable; and a third sees all forms of violence to children as unacceptable. These three viewpoints are discussed below and attention is drawn to the contradictions in what individuals say at different times and the inconsistency between their statements and what actually happens in their families. It is important

to note that there was rarely agreement in the focus groups between all the participants; instead people of very similar socio-economic, educational and demographic characteristics had different perspectives and opinions on the acceptability of corporal punishment.

### 6.1 Corporal punishment as a last resort

The most common viewpoint expressed by people from all socio-economic and demographic groups is that corporal punishment should be used as a form of discipline only if verbal warnings have not worked. Some older men spoken to in rural Kabul were more specific, stating that a child should be warned two or three times before they are hit or beaten with a stick:

*We should talk and advise them and then we will give awareness to them, and after the third time that we have advised them we will take a belt or stick and we will beat but not so much that we break some parts of their body.*

Others, like this young woman from urban Nangarhar, who has five children, expressed the opinion that advice is always best, but if that doesn't work or the children have done something very wrong they should be slapped:

*I think advising is good, because beating makes children worse. If they do something really bad it is fair to slap them across the face to scare them and to ensure that they won't repeat the mistake, but at first they should be advised; if they understand their mistakes then they shouldn't be beaten. Children are like flowers, if they are beaten it will affect their health and their mind and they won't be able to learn anything.*

Many people, therefore, argued that violence *should* only be used as a last resort. However, even in discussions in which the general opinion was that violence *should* only be used if advising the child has not worked, there were certain types of behaviour on the part of children that were seen as so deviant that extreme violence would be the only applicable punishment. Although not talked about a great deal (most likely because it isn't an everyday event for most families), perceived sexual impropriety was something which those who did talk about felt deserved the most severe of punishments. For example, a group of older women talking in urban Bamian argued that it is acceptable to severely beat their daughters "so that she wouldn't be able to get up" for "talking and joking with strange men". During the same discussion another woman argued that death is the ultimate punishment for this behaviour on the part of children:

*They are beaten so much, when a son goes and does something wrong with someone's daughter or vice versa...When someone's son or daughter commits some mistake like a sexual relationship, their grandparents, maternal uncle, paternal uncle and brother beat them. So we should beat them so much that he or she wants to be killed rather than live in this situation...So in this case death is better than life.*

It is important to note that this woman was discussing both boys and girls. Indeed, people not only expressed their concerns regarding the potential for their daughters to behave in a manner that could bring shame on the family, but also their sons.

In a focus group discussion with older women in urban Kabul similar opinions were expressed:

*It is acceptable for a brother to kill his sister if she has a relationship with a man. It is also acceptable if a mother and father kill their daughter if she has a relationship with a man.*

However, there was disagreement with this point of view; another woman in the group said after this it would be better if her parents married her to the man she loves.

## 6.2 Corporal punishment as a "good" form of discipline

Other men and women spoken with, who were fewer in number than those who believed corporal punishment should only be used as a last resort, expressed the opinion that corporal punishment is an acceptable and effective way to discipline children for a far wider range of behaviours. An extreme example of this perspective was this older man's opinion during a focus group discussion in rural Nangarhar:

*If we did not beat our children when they were small, it would have been impossible for them to become doctors, engineers, etc.; the blessing of those beatings is that some of our youth are educated now.*

As expressed above, for some the use of physical violence is only viewed as acceptable for behaviours which are perceived as particularly deviant, such as stealing, smoking, and gambling. However, others expressed the opinion that it is good to punish children, using violence, for more normal everyday behaviour such as being noisy, fighting with other children, and for not doing domestic work or not doing it properly.

Across all the provinces ensuring children study hard and attend school is extremely important for all those parents the research team spoke with. For those who viewed violence to children as an appropriate form of punishment this was an area in which they thought it appropriate to beat children in order to "encourage" them to study. An extreme example of this is Mah Jan's treatment of her nephew and previously her son, when he was a child (see Family Map 4 in the

Annex).<sup>20</sup> Mah Jan is an older woman who lives in one room with her six-year-old nephew. The nephew's father died and his mother has remarried and lives in another province. Previously, two of the nephew's brothers also lived with Mah Jan, but they both ran away due to her violent treatment toward them. Living in the same compound but as a separate household are Mah Jan's only son and his wife. Mah Jan presents herself as a strong independent woman, who sent her son to Iran during the Mujahiddin war and stayed by herself working as a civil servant. Mah Jan has much to feel bitter about in her life, including a loveless marriage as a second wife, in which her husband virtually ignored her and preferred his first wife. This is the reason Mah Jan only has one child. Mah Jan owns some land which is let to a sharecropper and this is how she supports herself. As the extract at the top of the methodology section describes, Mah Jan's violence to her young nephew can be quite vicious. She was also similarly violent to her son when he was a child. The primary reason given by Mah Jan for her terrible treatment of her nephew is to make him study. This is the same reason she gave for being violent to her son also. This short extract from an interview with Mah Jan illustrates the degree of violence which she sees as acceptable for punishing a six-year-old child for not attending school:

*When children do not listen to their elders they should be beaten by their elders. Like I beat my nephew recently because he did not go to school. His teacher sent a message to me and informed me about how he had been absent from school for two days. So I went to the school and my nephew was there. I asked my nephew where he had been over the last two days, when he was not in school. But he didn't say anything, so I took a ruler and started beating him until he told me that he had been on the road playing with other children. I beat him in front of his teacher and his classmates. And his teacher wanted to cry*

*when I was beating him. And the other students were quiet and no one was saying anything. I beat my nephew with a ruler on his head and back until his forehead was injured and his head was bleeding. I am sure it was necessary to beat him, because after this he will never miss school again, when he remembers that beating. Sometimes beating children is good for their future. If I beat my nephew it is for his own good, because I want him to be a doctor or an engineer, not a daily worker.*

All the adults in this family are violent to the children in the family and the relationship between Mah Jan and her daughter-in-law and her son has completely broken down. Some of these issues will be returned to in Chapter Eight, which looks at reasons for violence to children that are beyond discipline.

Most of those who expressed a positive opinion of corporal punishment stressed that children should only be slapped or beaten with a small stick. In some cases kicking and punching were seen as acceptable and in the odd exception hitting with cables was also viewed as an acceptable form of corporal punishment. Despite this it was virtually a universal opinion that children should not be injured through these beatings. Although, in one other case a young woman in a focus group discussion in urban Herat, like Mah Jan, felt injuring children was part of the punishment. She argued that boys should be black with bruises after being punished for naughty behaviour. The other participants in this focus group did not agree with this opinion.

### 6.3 All violence to children viewed as unacceptable

In spite of violence to children being obviously prevalent in these communities a significant number of those interviewed and participants in focus group discussions across all the provinces hold the opinion that adults in the family should

<sup>20</sup> Mah Jan and her nephew are referred to in the field note extract at the beginning of the methodology section.

not be violent to children. There were two reasons given for not approving of the use of corporal punishment. The first is related to how effectual corporal punishment is and the second concerns moral objections to corporal punishment.

Box 1 illustrates how individuals from different areas, both urban and rural, recognised that corporal punishment is not necessarily effective. These opinions had been informed by people's personal observations and experiences. Stories were told to provide evidence of this about how sisters', brothers-in-law's or sisters-in-law's children who had been beaten a lot were still very badly behaved children. A young woman in Kabul pointed to how violence doesn't necessarily make children into better adults, explaining how her husband's brother has beaten his sons since they were six and seven years old and now both of these boys are drug users. Other people used their own experiences of "beating" their children to explain why violence toward children doesn't work. Noor Bibi, a middle-aged woman living in a quite wealthy family in urban Herat, who has four young sons and a daughter,

explained how she hits her children with a stick for being noisy, but went on to say the children only behave well for a few minutes and then they become worse than they were before.

In a focus group discussion with younger men in rural Bamiyan, a man told a story of how his uncle (mother's brother) caught him with snuff and gave him a stern telling off for this. The young man stated, "His scolding really worked; beating and scolding are really effective." There was a general recognition among the rest of the group as to the contradiction in this statement and they turned to him and said it would not have actually worked if his uncle had beaten him; "words are more effective than beating", and if the uncle had beaten him he would have become "stubborn and pig headed".

A further reason for the ineffectualness of beating, which was expressed by an older woman from Herat city, is how the normalisation of violence to children in the family prevents it from having the desired effect of making children realise they have done something very wrong:

### Box 1. Arguments for why violence doesn't work

*If he doesn't learn from advice, he won't learn from beating either.* — Young man, rural Bamiyan

*I think the people have to advise in all situations because if a child is not interested to go to school we can't send him to school by force.* — Older man, rural Kabul

*I think if a child is doing something wrong her mother shouldn't beat her, so maybe she will do the action again, but if a mother advises her children I think they won't do that action again.*

— Older woman, rural Nangarhar

*If we beat him today for one cup it is for sure that the next day he will break ten cups.*

— Middle-aged man, rural Kabul

*No, beating is not good, it is not good, it makes them worse...It makes them resist more and refuse to accept their parents' advice. It is better to tell them using good words.*

— Older woman, urban Herat

*No, because if the child is beaten from two years old until eight years old, then no one can prevent that child [from doing anything] because that child was beaten so much when he/she was too young and now the child is not afraid of anything because beating is worse for anything. Then that child doesn't listen to anyone. We have to teach them and advise them.*

As the quotes in Box 2 illustrate, people had objections to beating children on moral grounds. These quotes express the opinions that violence toward children offends God, children shouldn't be treated like animals and just because adults can't understand small children is not a reason to beat them. As discussed previously there are methodological difficulties in comparing the data from one province to another. However, it is interesting to note that participants in focus group discussions conducted in the urban area of Kabul with young men were particularly opposed to violence toward children, with only some very slight disagreement in the group to this general

consensus. However, with such a strong feeling of anti-corporal punishment coming from this group, it is suspected it may have more to do with the age and marital status of these men than other demographic or social factors. Most, although not all, of the men in these focus group discussions were in their early to mid-twenties and unmarried; as such, it is likely they would have identified themselves more with children receiving violent punishment rather than with adults administering it.

One woman respondent from rural Nangarhar and one man from urban Nangarhar both reported not only objecting to violence to children but also how they try to tell others in their community that it is wrong. A *daya* in the village in Nangarhar, who herself is a woman in her mid-thirties with five children from the ages of 16 down and whose household is economically comfortable, told the research team that she never beats her children except by slapping them occasionally and thinks that advice is the best way to discipline them:

## Box 2. Arguments for why beating children is morally wrong

*Aghar atfal khod ra bezanam arsh khoda shor mekhorad (If I beat my children God's sky will shake).* – Majeed, older man, rural Bamiyan (see Family Map 9)

*Children aren't animals that should be beaten; by beating them they will become worse.*

– Young woman, rural Bamiyan

*Most of the families are beating their children with slaps and shoes and sometimes they beat them harder but I do not agree with them because their children are small and they don't know what they should and what they shouldn't do, so parents should guide and advise them. If they do something wrong it is best if we advise them and if they don't accept it we should get angry with them. Beating is not good and it has a very bad effect on them.*

– Young unmarried woman, urban Nangarhar

*In my point of view we should love the children because they are like flowers; we should take care of them. If they do something wrong we give them advice, I am 100% sure that they accept our advice, and you know what the people think, they think that beating children is acceptable because they are small and they can't understand us. It is common that the people beat their children.* – Young woman, rural Nangarhar

*No, never. I do not agree with beating children; the best solution is giving advice and I say to other women to advise their children. They will grow in a proper way in the future to work in the society and because of them our country will develop.*

Abdul Sabor, originally from Kunar Province but now living in Nangarhar city, is fiercely opposed to any form of violence toward children (see Family Map 5). Abdul Sabor was a policeman during the Soviet-Mujahiddin wars and was badly injured during aerial bombardments. He is still disabled from injuries to his leg. He is a *wakil guzar*, but earns no income from this. Although the family is relatively poor, it owns some land farmed by a sharecropper. The family invested in an ice shop that recently collapsed financially throwing the household into struggles and debt. As a young boy Abdul Sabor and his brothers were forced to go out to work when their father refused to support them and went and lived with his other wife, leaving Abdul Sabor, his brothers, sisters and mother to fend for themselves. Both Abdul Sabor and his brother have been to school, although Abdul Sabor did not enrol until he was eleven with the encouragement of the school teacher. All of his children who are old enough attend school.

There is conflict between the women in this family and it was reported that Abdul Sabor is violent to both his wives.<sup>21</sup> However, Abdul Sabor is quite fiercely against the beating of children, as he expressed to the research team when they asked how he disciplines his children:

*I speak their language. I think beating a child is not a good action. I advise my children instead. I also don't like other people to beat their children, because it does not have any*

*benefit. Beating children just makes them worse, so children should be advised.*

He provides an example of when he tried to educate his neighbour as to the wrongness of being violent to children. In this case Abdul Sabor's son was beaten quite harshly, at least more severely than just a couple of slaps by the neighbour (unfortunately it is unclear in the data what prompted the neighbour to do this). Abdul Sabor said he didn't want to fight with the neighbour over children.<sup>22</sup> Instead he explained how he indirectly convinced his neighbour that beating children is not a good or effective thing to do.

Abdul Sabor's second wife, Sabrina, emphasised how strongly her husband objects to any type of violence in the family by telling the research team when they asked her if he ever beats the children:

*No, never, he wouldn't even beat them with a flower. If he discovered that I beat the children he would beat me. He doesn't beat the children at all.*

Like many others who expressed objection to using violence to punish children, Abdul Sabor was reported by a family member (his first wife) of beating the children, if only on one occasion. She explains how her mother-in-law told Abdul Sabor that the children from the different wives were swearing at each other over a game of marbles and in response Abdul Sabor slapped the children. This disjuncture between people's opinions on the rights and wrongs of violence toward children and how they behave is explored further below.

<sup>21</sup> The dynamics between the adults in this family are further explored in AREU's synthesis paper on family dynamics and family violence.

<sup>22</sup> From the data collected, both through this research and that of AREU's research project on customary law, conflicts between both neighbours and extended families due to fights between children are quite common.

## 6.4 Disagreements within families

Obviously not everyone in the same family agrees on the best way to discipline children and the appropriateness of using corporal punishment. This section explores some of the families where there are sharp disagreements between different family members. The first two examples look at disagreements where the men in the family are opposed to violence and the women think that children need to be beaten to be well disciplined. Then two examples are discussed in which the women in the family disagree on how to punish children. Finally, two examples are provided in which men in one family disagree on how to discipline their children. Beyond further demonstrating the great deal of difference in people's attitudes regarding the disciplining of children and the rights and wrongs of corporal punishment, this section also demonstrates that the reasons for violence are far more complicated than the often touted polemic that people are violent due to their educational or economic status.

As discussed in the previous section, Abdul Sabor is intensely opposed to violence to children. However, his first wife Rahima believes that children should be slapped or beaten with a sandal if they do not do as they are told. She also reports that she will shake the children and verbally abuse them, and as the quote below shows she obviously beats her children quite badly. During his second wife, Sabrina's, interview she did not talk about how she treats her children, as she chose to talk about the beatings she has received from her husband, the conflicts and physical fights between herself and her co-wife and the destructive relationship between her and her mother-in-law. Although she did not discuss this herself, Abdul Sabor stated that both of his wives beat the children with sandals, sticks and anything they can lay their hands on.

Ironically both Abdul Sabor and his wives reported that one of primary reasons for him beating them is if they are violent to the children, as the quote from Rahima makes clear:

*Yes, once it happened, I had beaten him [her son] across his back and his back was blue and then his father got upset with me and told me not to beat the children this much. His father doesn't like us beating the children and neither should we use bad language to our children. Once my daughter did something wrong and I used bad language to her, I told her to go and die. My husband slapped me across my face and warned me not to use this kind of bad language again.*

Abdul Sabor confirmed this, saying that the only thing he and either of his wives argue about is the children, when his wives swear at or beat the children.

There is also disagreement between Abdul Sabor and his brother, Mansor. Mansor, like many others, believes that if children don't accept advice then it might be necessary to slap them across the face or throw a sandal at them. He confirmed that his wife has the same attitude to disciplining the children as he does.

The second example of a family where the husband and wife disagree on how to bring up the children live in the rural area of Bamiyan. This is a far smaller household than that of Abdul Sabor. Gul Bakht (see Family Map 6) lives with her mother-in-law, her husband, Nawrooze, and their two daughters, aged five and one, and their son aged three. Nawrooze makes money working as a casual labourer, teaching children in the mosque and sometimes working in the electricity workshop. The family has two donkeys, the house they live in and no other assets such as land or livestock. Gul Bakht beats her young children and this is reported both by her and her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law also says that Nawrooze does not know how much Gul Bakht beats the children. As Gul Bakht

explained, her husband takes a very different stance and feels that children shouldn't be beaten when they are young:

*My husband has lots of patience; if the children are being naughty he doesn't tell them to be quiet. I am telling him that you make the children's habits bad...I told him that you are really destroying the behaviour of the children because you say nothing to them. He says that they are children and you can not make them quiet with beating. My husband doesn't beat his son and daughter and as you see my son is asking for his father.*

Nawrooze himself was badly beaten by his own father and this evidently feeds into his opinion that children shouldn't be beaten.

Malali, who is the aunt of Shakib mentioned earlier (Family Map 2), struggles with witnessing the violence which Shakib and his mother inflict on her niece, feeling she can only intervene and offer her niece support to a limited degree, as this excerpt from an interview with her makes clear:

*A while ago his [Shakib's] sister wanted to go to the public bathroom and her mother was not at home. I asked her if she is alone I can send my small son with her to drop her near the public bathroom. But she said no I don't need [him]. I can go. She was wearing a half sleeve shirt with pants. On the way Shakib saw her with that dress and he brought her back home. He started punching her and kicking her back. When I heard I came and stopped Shakib from beating her. I took my niece to my room, she was crying and she was in my room... In the evening when her mother came home and heard about this she also started beating her with a shoe. I think is very bad to beat the grown up daughter like this. But this time I did not do anything because I do not want to interfere in her [Shakila's] personal issues. But when she is not there I do, because I love my niece very much, like my daughters. I could*

*stop Shakib from beating her, but I cannot stop my sister-in-law from beating her daughter.*

It should, however, be noted that Malali believes her children behave much better than Shakila's and whereas her sister-in-law and her nephew beat her niece for not dressing properly and the like, she says her daughters always dress properly. Malali also recognises how the violence in her sister-in-law's family has caused the "bad" behaviour of the children.

A woman in her early sixties who lives in a large extended family in rural Nangarhar expressed similar sentiments regarding how she feels when she hears her younger co-wife beating her children:

*I get very upset when people beat their children; many people do this, however, in my opinion advice is a lot better. I do not beat them but Marghlara does beat them, the other night Marghlara beat her son and I was upset for the whole night.*

These two examples illustrate the emotional upset that people, who may feel powerless to intervene, go through when witnessing other members of the family being violent to children in the family.

Amina, a relatively well educated woman in her early twenties, told the story of one of her relatives during a focus group discussion, which demonstrates not only how family members may have different opinions and exhibit different types of behaviour toward children, but also how aunts and uncles will defend their nieces and nephews. It also illustrates how public humiliation can be in some cases used as a tool to protect children:

*I'll tell you another story; one of my sister's in-laws is a Qari (person who memorises the Holy Quran). He has a nephew who is eleven, whose father died and whose mother has married her brother-in-law. One day Qari was at his home but his nephew was in the*



madrassa. His nephew's teacher told him, "I talked with Qari, I mean with your uncle, before and I need a Holy Quran. He told me to send you to get it." After few minutes Qari's nephew went to his uncle's house to get it. When he entered his house his uncle, Qari, wasn't at home so he took the Quran and gave it to his teacher. You know when his uncle found out that his nephew had taken the Quran and given it to his teacher he became very angry. He called his nephew to come to his house and when he came his uncle took a pipe and he beat him as hard as he could, as a result his back was bleeding. The nephew went to his home and he showed his back to his stepfather. His stepfather didn't pay any attention to him and said to him that "it is not related to me; you deal with your own problems". Then he went to another uncle's home and showed his back saying, "Look my uncle hurt me and when I complained to my stepfather he said go away this is your problem not mine." When this uncle heard this and saw his nephew's back, he took his nephew and went to bazaar and told all the people, "Please do not join the madrassa because my brother teaches there, so if you people admit your sons then your sons will be hurt and injured like my nephew." Then he brought his nephew to my home. You know all the members of the family cried because of that child and especially I cried a lot.

These examples illustrate how different family members who have similar demographic, educational and economic backgrounds can have different opinions and attitudes regarding corporal punishment. It also shows how where possible, within the limits of social norms which view relationships between parents and children as a private arena that outsiders cannot enter into, members of the wider family such as aunts and uncles provide support to children who are being abused. In the final example, although we don't know anything more about the relationships between these uncles of the boy, it seems that the one uncle was willing to take a family

dispute to a very public arena in order to protect his nephew and other children from violence.

## 6.5 Internal conflicts and contradictions

The phenomenon of people saying that they think any form of violence to children is wrong and then one of their family members, as in Abdul Sabor's case, reporting that they do in fact beat the children or have done so in the past, was common. However, what happened even more frequently was people themselves expressing the opinion that violence to children is wrong and then going on to relay stories of when they had beaten their children.

For example, Shakib, whose family was introduced earlier, not only is extremely violent to his younger sister, but also freely admits to beating his younger brothers. During a focus group discussion he argued that he does not agree with beating children:

*But I do not agree with him, I think it is better to be kind with children and beating is not good and it is also harmful for their health. I think it is better to talk to them and advise them. If we like and love children and we're kind to them, they will be close and friendly with us and if we are not kind to them it has influence on their future. I think we should never punish children.*

It should be noted that what Shakib said in the focus group discussion was not just to agree with what others in the group were saying, even if it was the majority viewpoint, as the man speaking before him had just stated that he thinks beating children is good for discipline and explained how he beats his children.

Despite the staunch support Shakila, Shakib's mother, offers her son regarding his right to beat his sister, later on in the same focus group discussion she argued that violence to children in the family is wrong and shouldn't happen:

*No, I think it is not good [beating] because children understand by saying and showing them things.*

Again Shakila was not simply agreeing with what others had said in the group and was in fact responding to comments made by another respondent who stated that she beats her grandchildren hard if they make themselves dirty or break something.

The abstract opinions which people give often contradict the way people behave as in Shakib, Shakila's and to some degree Abdul Sabor's cases, indicating a great deal of confusion and personal conflict over disciplining children. Why this might be is explored in the next chapter.

A further illustration and perhaps even more indicative of this internal conflict is the way people's abstract opinions changed during interviews or focus group discussions. For example, a woman speaking during a focus group discussion with women all in their early 40s in urban Herat began by telling the group that she disapproves of violence toward children. She also made it clear that she is taking an all-encompassing definition of violence:

*[A] mother doesn't have to use violent ways but she has to tell her daughter that the thing she did isn't good and it is better not to do it again...Say something like scolding her, or beating her. These are violence towards children...The mother shouldn't be so stubborn with her daughter and if her daughter is doing something wrong she has to say to her daughter slowly that you did this thing it was wrong and it is better not to do it again.*

However, only a short while later during the same discussion, the same woman expressed a contradictory opinion:

*From two years old until eight years old... When the child isn't eating correctly at lunch-*

*time for example the child is making a mess of the dishes of the tablecloth on the floor... The child should be beaten until he/she knows the right and left hand... Not every time [should a child be beaten] for everything. The child should be beaten once a week until eight years old.*

In another example, Nooria, a young woman with three children from a relatively wealthy family in rural Herat, explained that she and her husband beat their children when they are noisy, make a mess and fight. She argued that beating them is at times necessary. Shortly thereafter, she went on to praise her niece, who is her age and lives with them, for not beating her offspring. Just by being strict, she reportedly maintains control and commands respect from her children.

As these examples illustrate, there is uncertainty about the best ways to discipline children and large contradictions between people's abstract opinions about this and how they actually behave toward their children. This highlights the internal struggles faced around violence to children. Many but not all people expressed the view that violence to children is always wrong and only acceptable in extreme circumstances or as a last resort, but their actions run counter to this view. Similarly, but on a more general level, the opinions of the community given both in focus group discussions and individual interviews commonly express a negative opinion of corporal punishment and violence toward children more generally. However, at the same time people stated that violence to children is very common. A more vocalised disapproval from the community of acts of violence toward children would help in overcoming the common acceptance of acts of violence which many do not see as right.

The next two chapters pose reasons for this disjuncture between abstract opinions and what actually happens.

## 7. Reasons for Violence to Children I: Fear and a Lack of Alternatives

Corporal punishment continues to be widely used despite opinions that it is not good for children and a generalised knowledge of its negative consequences and its lack of effectiveness. This chapter argues that there are two dominant and interrelated motivations for this: parents' fears for their children's futures and second, the idea that keeping children frightened of adults makes them behave well. Parents are extremely frightened of their children not growing into good, useful moral adults. For example, for virtually all the parents the research teams spoke to, ensuring that their children studied hard and got a good education was uppermost in their concerns. Since violence has been used as the primary way to discipline children many adult family members are frightened of not using corporal punishment in case this will lead to their children not behaving correctly or not turning into the adults they want them to be. The common, if not universal, assumption that in order to discipline children they should be frightened was expressed to the research teams. Alongside this is the idea that if a beating is severe enough children will never forget how it felt and, therefore, not repeat their "bad behaviour".

Despite this it can also be clearly seen that many parents simply do not want to be violent to their children and often regret it later. (This sense of regret does not just relate to corporal punishment or this form of more controlled violence but also to violence to children on the part of adults when they feel stressed, frustrated or angry. This form of violence to children is discussed in Chapter Eight.) The second part of this chapter therefore argues that parents are looking for (though perhaps not actively) alternative ways to discipline their children. In the final section of the chapter the few alternatives which were mentioned by respondents are high-

lighted as keys to alternative parenting skills that people may be willing to learn.

### 7.1 Keeping children in fear

The quotes in Box 3 are just a sample of the numerous times men and women from all the provinces talked about their desire to ensure their children were frightened of them.

Indeed the data reveal that keeping children in a state of fear is believed to be the only way to make them behave. For example, a young man during a focus group discussion in Nangarhar proudly told the team that he beats the children so hard so that they are always frightened of him. This now means that when he comes home they are all so frightened of him that they become instantly quiet. This is a situation in his family he is proud of and he believes he is doing the right thing for his children.

Even many of those who stated they did not want to beat their children, or would only beat their children lightly, still spoke about finding ways to keep their children frightened. For instance, a participant during a focus group discussion held with young men in Nangarhar asked the question that if fathers are not allowed to beat their children how will they make the children frightened of them. During other discussions, comments such as children shouldn't be beaten but they should be frightened and beating is the best way to do this, were made.

Rarely did respondents counter the idea that children should be kept in a perpetual state of fear. One of the very few people to do this was Samandar (see Family Map 7), a man in his early thirties who lives with his six young children, his widowed mother, one married brother, his wife

### Box 3. Adults use violence to ensure children fear them

*Parents shouldn't beat their children so much that they sustain injuries. They should beat them so much that they get frightened.* — Older woman, Bamiyan city

*I make them frightened by beating, so that they learn the lesson for the future. They will not be naughty in the future.* — Middle-aged man, Bamiyan city

*Children should be frightened of someone in the house or somebody should beat them in the house sometimes.* — Middle-aged woman, rural Herat

*Yes it is the best way for upbringing of children; if they're not afraid they don't accept the parent's advice.* — Middle-aged man, rural Herat

*In my opinion parents should not beat their children, they should make them afraid. And their children should be afraid of them and not smoke and drink and not use chewing tobacco [naswar] and not play in the road with other street boys.* — Middle-aged woman, rural Kabul

*I think whether it is the government or a family there should be one person who everyone is afraid of.* — Older man, urban Kabul

and their three children and one unmarried brother. Samandar's family as he says himself are in a good economic position. Education is of paramount importance to Samandar. This opinion is in part because he was unable to go to school himself, as there wasn't a school in the village at the time. He has an alternative way for encouraging his own children to go to school, as he explained:

*I always tell my children and the children of my brother to learn their lessons and go to school regularly. I buy them books and notebooks and tell them they shouldn't waste their time, because if they don't get an education they will become labourers and there is no benefit in labouring. I order them not be naughty and keep silent when they act up. I don't frighten them by saying, "Keep quiet otherwise the cat will come or the dog will come and eat you." I don't make them afraid. I teach them good things. Some people don't*

*prevent their children from being naughty. I ask them what they learnt when they went to school. I say, "Learn your lesson and be a good child."*

Samandar most of the time expressed strong objections to violence in the family to either women or children. This is because he witnessed his father viciously beating his mother when he was a child and would intervene to try and protect her.<sup>23</sup> Although he did at one point in the interview state that children, once they reach the age of 12 or 13, can be slapped.

## 7.2 Parents' fears

As discussed in Chapter Four, and not surprisingly, parents are deeply concerned for their children's futures and adamant that their children should get as much education as possible and become responsible adults who

<sup>23</sup>The relationships and history of violence in this family are discussed in detail in AREU's issues paper on marriage practices.

contribute to both their families and society more widely. While many people felt that children have more opportunities and facilities now than they did when they themselves were children, it was also expressed that there were more bad influences in society now than there were when they were children. Parents are not just worried that their children, of all ages, will misbehave in school, or fight with the neighbour's children and other typically "naughty" behaviour; they are worried that their children will become thieves, drug users, drinkers and gamblers. As such, parents' fears about what will happen to their children if they are not well disciplined were quite extreme.

One very clear example of this is people's fears about their daughters' futures in their marital homes. Women expressed their reasons for beating their daughters in terms of their fears that if their daughters didn't learn how to do household work properly they would be abused in their husbands' houses when they get married:

*She beats her daughter over the housework so that when she gets married she will be able to do the housework. If the daughter can't do the housework in her husband's house, they will abuse her and say to her "damn your parents because they didn't make you learn the housework".*

— Older woman speaking in a focus group in rural Bamiyan

*When the daughter doesn't work at home or moves wrongly, her mother beats her. People don't consider it bad. Because when she goes to her husband's house if she doesn't know the housework, her mother is condemned, for she has not tried to make her daughter learn the housework. So mothers beat their daughters at home and the people don't consider it bad.*

— Middle aged woman speaking in a focus group in rural Bamiyan

As these two quotes show women don't only perceive themselves to be protecting their daughters from future abuse and violence, but

they are also protecting their own reputations. This perspective on why daughters need to be beaten contrasts sharply with the perspective presented in section 3.4 in which it was expressed that beating a daughter will make her a perpetual victim and susceptible to violence in her husband's house.

Indeed, protecting the family's reputation and honour more generally is another reason people are deeply concerned about the behaviour of their children. This has been illustrated previously in regard to extreme corporal punishment being seen as acceptable for sexual impropriety and the role that brothers are expected to play in policing their sisters' behaviour. However, it also relates to more simple everyday matters, for instance if children fight other children in the streets or in the village it can make parents embarrassed and feel that their reputation has been damaged. Similarly, as expressed in Chapter Three, some men would be particularly angry with their children if they did not behave "correctly" in front of guests.

Concern for children's futures and fears about their behaviour do not of course automatically lead to more violence toward children, however, very few alternative forms of discipline were suggested in the data. Instead some respondents expressed that they did not have alternatives or could not think of what else to do.

### 7.3 Looking for alternatives

*We actually don't know anything else, no advice, just beating is the only way to improve a child.*

— Young man, rural Nangarhar

Abdul Ghalib is a 50-year-old man who lives with his wife, Snawbar, who is 12 years younger than him, his married son and daughter-in-law, who have a son and a daughter, and a further six children all under the age of 18 (see Family Map 8) in the rural area of Nangarhar. All the children have been to school and Abdul Ghalib

himself studied until sixth class. Snawbar has never been to school however and is illiterate. They have one *jerib* of land in the village but the main family income comes from the flour mill owned by Abdul Ghalib and his work as a mason.

His younger brother Abdul Fataa lives nearby in the same village with his wife Shafiqah who is a *daya*, and their two sons and three daughters, who are all under the age of 18. Abdul Fataa's household is slightly wealthier, it appears, than his brother's, owning five *jeribs* of productive land and having a partnership in a shop in Peshawar. Abdul Fataa also works in the *waliswal'*s office. Like his brother's children, all his children attend school; he himself was educated until tenth class and then when the family moved to Pakistan, attended a *madrassa* there.

Like many other men spoken to in this area both brothers do not think that using corporal punishment is a good way to bring up children:

*I advise them that the wrong actions that they are doing are not fair. Beating can not make the children right. Beating can be dangerous for children in the future in their behaviours. Hitting can not improve children. (Abdul Ghalib)*

*No one hits or punishes [the children], but my wife shows them the right way and motivates them to behave well and not to behave badly. (Abdul Fataa)*

However, Abdul Ghalib relayed a story of beating his son "a little" for refusing to go to his English language course. After telling the story the research team asked him how he felt about this and he expressed both regret and not knowing what else to do when children are disobedient:

*I was sad [after hitting my son]. I do not know what to do with the children if they do not accept what I say then they test my patience... Bringing up children is really difficult, we try*

*to treat them well, but sometimes they do a lot of naughty actions.*

This expression of not knowing how else to discipline children was articulated in both focus group discussions and in individual interviews with family members. This young woman speaking in a focus group in urban Nangarhar demonstrated her concern at not being able to control her children without using violence:

*Beating [children] is not good but what can we do if they are naughty all the time... we become impatient...we can't train them in a good way.*

Similarly, Bas Bibi from rural Nangarhar, in her early thirties who has four young sons and two daughters and is pregnant again, also expressed this concern in regard to how to discipline children without hitting them:

*I'm not happy to beat them but what can I do, they are naughty and when I beat them they stop whatever they are doing...When I beat them I become sad.*

Despite this sense of frustration both Bas Bibi and her husband Nasruddin assert they are not as violent to their children as their parents were to them and they never beat them with sticks. This family is also very poor, with only Nasruddin working as a casual labourer to support not only his wife and children but his parents, his unmarried younger brother and sister and his married brother and their son. None of the adults in this family had any education.

Shameemgul, a young woman living in the village in Herat, whose family is much wealthier and better educated than Bas Bibi's family, expressed a similar frustration:

*[I] slap or beat my children with a stick sometimes...No, beating is not good, but sometimes it is better to beat them, I don't think it is better, but sometimes we have to beat them, because we get angry. But advice is better.*

Equally concerned about trying to avoid being violent to his children is Majeed, a young man living in the village in Bamiyan (see Family Map 9). Majeed lives with his wife Kameela and their four surviving children (one boy and one girl have died) all under the age of 12. Like Bas Bibi, Majeed and his wife are both very poor, owning no land or livestock. Majeed works as a farmer for others in the summer and works in the mosque in the winter. While Majeed admits to beating his children, both he and Kameela do not hide the fact that Kameela beats them even more than him. Majeed expressed regret at hitting his children. When asked by the research team how he feels after he has beaten his son he responded:

*I feel regretful. I say to myself that he is a child and he doesn't know about anything. I shouldn't have beaten him; he might be able to do that work.*

As these short descriptions of people who feel regretful for being violent to their children show, people from different demographic groups and different social and economic backgrounds would be happy to find alternative ways to discipline their children.

## 7.4 Alternatives to corporal punishment and learning new parenting skills

Corporal punishment, as highlighted earlier, was used to discipline children in all the families interviewed by the research teams, to varying degrees. Beating children was also confirmed by focus group participants to be commonplace in their communities. As the section above illustrates people would be willing to find other means that could be used for disciplining children in their families. Nevertheless, beyond advice it was very rare that people provided

other examples of how they disciplined their children.

However, a few suggestions were made. Abdul Sabor explained to the researchers how when his son's teacher had come and told him he should make his son "scared", instead of beating him had sent him as a punishment to collect grass for the cow. At the time it was raining, making it a more arduous job.

A contemporary of Abdul Sabor in Jalalabad told how his young daughter wanted to follow her mother to the clinic and was crying and wouldn't stay in the house. Instead of hitting his daughter he explained how he just held on to her until she calmed down and her mother was out of sight.

Two young women who teach in village schools, one in Herat and one in Nangarhar, both explained how when the children in their family do not behave properly they don't talk to them for a while to let them know that they are upset with them.

The other alternative to corporal punishment sometimes offered was to give children money to encourage them to behave and to do their work properly. One young woman speaking during a focus group discussion in Herat city rationalised this as being particularly beneficial for boys:

*Giving money to children is good because they think that if they do good things they will get some money or something. It is especially good for boys for their future; it will teach them how to earn money.*

Nothing is surprising about these examples except for the fact that they were so rarely suggested as alternatives to corporal punishment or as methods for disciplining children more generally.





## 8. Reasons for Violence to Children II: Losing Control

The opinion that corporal punishment is needed in order to discipline children and make them into good, useful adults is only one explanation for why adults are violent to their children. This chapter discusses some of the other causes of violence to children. First, it discusses how stress, frustration and anxiety, usually summed up in the word *hasabani* in Dari, causes adults to be violent to their children. It argues that children can all too easily become victims of adults feeling anxious, upset and angry. Second, it discusses some of the reasons given by respondents to the researchers which might heighten stress levels within the family and in turn increase the risk of violence to children.

### 8.1 How adults' feelings determine levels of violence

Even when children have done something considered naughty it is the adult's anger that may lead them to beat a child. Likewise, there is a general recognition from those spoken to that the severity of a punishment for "naughty acts" is dependent on the mood and character of the adult more than on what the child has done. This was clearly recognised by those the research teams spoke with:

*It depends on the parent's mood. Some parents are impatient and beat their children for small things.*

- Older woman, Bamiyan city

*It depends on a person. If a person is tolerant, he will not beat his child. But if a person is intolerant like me, he beats his child.*

- Young man, rural Bamiyan

Stories were told, especially by women, of quite severe acts of violence against children because

the parent was feeling stressed, angry or irritable. It was illustrated how frequently the severity of the punishment does not relate to what a child has done but how the adult is feeling. Indeed, this was made clear in the way that adults would talk about violence toward their children.

The expression "I became angry" was frequently used, by both men and women, and said before relaying a story of violence to children. It was rare that people would say "my child was being naughty and so I hit him"; instead it would be "my child was being naughty and I became angry and hit him". This quote is typical of what was said numerous times to the research teams:

*My husband and I beat our children sometimes when they make us angry...when they make noise or fight with each other and make everything messy.*

Rasul, a young man from rural Bamiyan, spoke about getting angry with his nephew for not inviting some guests to the house when he was told to. Rasul explained how in his rage he injured his daughter rather than his nephew:

*I got angry. I wanted to beat Haji M. Jalil's son with the rope but it missed and I hit the neck of my daughter with it by mistake. Suddenly the rope injured my daughter's neck and I was very sorry for it.*

Another common expression used by people when talking about beating their children is "I beat them with whatever I can lay my hands on", indicating that they will beat children with any object that can be used as a weapon. As this man speaking in a focus group discussion explained, beating with "whatever comes to my hands" indicates that someone has lost control:

*Some people are emotional and beat their children with whatever comes to their hands. But*

*some people who aren't emotional think about what to beat their children with.*

Some of those spoken to were able to identify what things make them feel stressed, or anxious or frustrated. Samandar (see Family Map 7) explained how he brings home his frustrations at what has happened to him outside the home:

*There is the village and sometimes things happen with people there that make me angry. When I come home in this mood, I get angry at home with the children's noise and then I call their mother and we have a problem or I beat the children.*

As was pointed to in the introduction, while separating the use of violence for discipline and violence out of rage or frustration is useful analytically, in reality both are often combined in one act of violence against a child. What might be seen by many as an act of naughty behaviour deserving of a slap causes an adult in the family who is feeling frustrated or stressed to severely beat a child. Similarly, people could not always distinguish between these two types of violence to their own children. For example, Mah Jan (Family Map 4) talked about beating her son because she was tired after work. However, at the same time she justified her beatings to both her son and her nephew in terms of disciplining them:

*Parents love their children and I also love my son but when I come home tired from work and my son did not listen to me I would start beating him...Yes I beat him like I beat my nephew with sticks, shoes and with punches and slaps. When I became angry I beat him. Like now I ask my nephew to go to school and not play with other boys in the road...As I told you when I became angry I beat him with everything that came to my hands.*

Mah Jan attempts to justify her violence to the children in terms of disciplining them when the primary cause for her violence is her own feelings of anger, rage and frustration. However,

others recognise when violence for discipline becomes uncontrolled violence, as this woman expressed in her expectation for her sister-in-law to have stopped her from beating her daughter when she lost control because she was angry:

*Last week my daughter told me, "I am not going to school without any reason" so I emphasised to her that she should go to school but she didn't accept me so I beat her by slapping her and beating her with shoes and with everything. Afterwards I said to my sister-in-law, "Why didn't you stop me when I was beating my daughter? I was angry at that time – you should have stopped me."*

This recognition that parents' own emotional state is what leads them to be violent to their children was also recognised by Kamila, a very poor woman living with her husband and three young children. They share their house with her three brothers-in-law, their wives and children:

*When the children make noise I also start to beat them and become angry with them but the children don't know what is good for them and what is not, because they are small and every time the parents stop them they don't accept, but it is not their fault. They are not grown up enough to know what is good and what is bad for them. But now I am impatient.*

The last quote also expresses this woman's self criticism and upset at beating her children because she hasn't got the patience to tolerate them. She went on to explain how this situation then causes conflict between her and her husband, who becomes angry with her for beating the children. This is a similar concern to that expressed regarding not wanting to use violence to discipline children but not being able to imagine alternatives. As a young man from the same area of Nangarhar summed up, "I become sad. What can I do when I lose my patience and I punish them with slaps, and with everything?"

### 8.1.1 Taking out frustrations with others on the children

A number of the women who the research teams spoke with highlighted the link between their relationships with the adults they live with – husbands, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, co-wives—and how they treat their children. Rafia Jan's story (see Family Map 10) of how she knocked her six-year-old son's tooth out because she was cross with her husband is a clear illustration of this. Since Rafia and her husband married in 1989 they have always had to struggle financially. Her husband now makes a living buying yoghurt from wealthier families in the surrounding villages and selling it in Kabul. Rafia's eldest son is currently unemployed; previously he had done casual construction work and sold a few vegetables in the bazaar. They are landless and one of the poorest families in the village. Neither Rafia nor her husband has a formal education. Rafia Jan has had a difficult life. While she reports her first husband, Jan Agha's brother, being kind to her she also reports him beating her at the insistence of his mother. Indeed she had a particularly difficult relationship with her mother-in-law. Regardless, she appears to now be relatively happy in her marriage and she reports that her husband does not beat her. Rafia, while saying that beating children is wrong, explained why despite this opinion she still beats her children:

*Beating children also is not good. When I had my first daughter I beat her a lot when she was very small but now I know that we should not beat children because they do not understand. So parents should not beat their children. But when my husband fights with me and I'm angry I beat my children. And when I'm tired from doing housework I beat my children very hard if they do not listen to me. Once I had washed the clothes and it was three thirty and I was very tired. My husband had been doing construction work at home. When I finished the clothes and without giving me any break to drink tea, he asked me to cook food for dinner. I said ok after having some tea I*

*will cook. But he didn't listen to me and asked me to cook food now. I became angry and did not say anything to him. At the same time my son came to me and I asked him to wash his face, I told him to take water and wash his face but he didn't listen to me and asked me to do it. I was angry with my husband, but I couldn't say anything to him so I took a big stone and I threw it at my son and shouted to him, do what I am telling. I am not your servant. Unfortunately, the stone broke one of his teeth and his mouth was bleeding.*

Not only is this story illuminating for identifying how she takes out her frustrations with her hard work or the demands of her husband on the children, but also for the insight she has into her own behaviour.

Another example of this phenomenon is Nadia, the third wife of Juma Ali, whose co-wife is Momina's mother (see Family Map 3) and lives in rural Bamiyan. She explained how when her mother-in-law used to pressurise her she would react by beating her children:

*I don't always become angry with them, but sometimes when my mother-in-law became upset with me then I would beat my children and if there wasn't a stick I would punch and kick them...when she became angry with me I would beat my children and I would say to them that it is all because of you that I am suffering here.*

### 8.1.2 Assumptions about children's responsibility for adults' violence

Despite widespread recognition of the levels and severity of violence to children being determined by how the adult is feeling at a particular time there was a contrary commonly expressed opinion that if a child is being beaten, the child must have done something wrong. This assumption was clearly demonstrated in people's responses to pictures, described in the methodology chapter, shown in focus group discussions

#### Box 4. Perceptions of children's responsibility for violence committed against them

*I think it shows a boy with his father and that man wants to frighten his son because maybe he has done something wrong, like being disobedient and his father wants to beat him.*

– Older man responding to picture, rural Kabul

*I think this boy made a mistake and because of that his father wants to beat him. Because nowadays most of the boys are hashish addicts and they smoke and do very bad things. And maybe that boy also is one of them and his father or brother knows that and now he wants to beat that boy. If a boy has good manners his father or brother will never beat him.*

– Young woman responding to a picture, urban Kabul

*Sometimes children make their mothers lose their patience and this encourages the mother to beat her children.* – Older woman, Jalalabad city

*Children make their parents angry; they have to beat them.* – Young woman, rural Herat

which portrayed violence to children. If the participant interpreted the picture to be one of an adult being violent to a child, invariably the response would state that the child must have done something wrong. The first two quotes in Box 4 clearly indicate this. The last two quotes in this box illustrate how the responsibility for adults losing their patience is at times placed on children. It is the children who have made the adults angry or lose their patience. This is yet another discourse about violence to children in the family which contradicts many of the other more concerned attitudes discussed earlier.

It is at this stage important to look at some of the reasons given by those spoken to as to what might be causing adults to feel frustrated, angry or stressed and as such be violent to their children.

## 8.2 Indirect effects of economic insecurity

It should be stated from the outset that this research did not find more or less violence in relatively poor, uneducated families or in families with lots of children. Nevertheless, this

is not to say that poverty or high numbers of children living in one household are not contributing factors to violence. This section will discuss some of the opinions given by respondents in the community as to why they might be feeling stressed or frustrated.

Rasul, a 35-year-old man from a relatively economically comfortable and influential family living in rural Bamiyan, has five children. He pointed to how a weak economy can heighten the stress a person feels which can then result in violence to children:

*The basic reason for violence in my family was a weak economic condition and the family environment. When I used to come home I would see someone standing on my door asking for their debt so I would get angry at my children and wife for very small things. I would threaten my children instead of talking to them softly.*

This is a man who thinks there is a place for corporal punishment in the family. However, he recognises, as this quote illustrates, how outside factors which affect an adult's emotional state may cause them to be violent to children. In the

quote he points to a weak economic condition as being one of these outside factors. However, Rasul's family is not a poor family and in fact they own considerable land and livestock in comparison to others in the area. It is a particular economic difficulty that is making him stressed in this instance, not poverty per se. Times of economic insecurity can be faced by all people whether relatively rich or poor.

While economic problems can cause people particular stress, and to feel frustration or even powerlessness, other factors also create these feelings in people. For example Shakib, who is particularly violent to his younger siblings, as are his parents, is from one of the wealthiest families spoken to across all four provinces. Shakib himself explains that when he comes home from college and feels tired and hungry he is more likely to beat his brothers and sisters. The research team suspected that Shakib was not actually attending college and is probably simply unemployed, another potential reason for him to feel frustrated and powerless.

Unemployment was given as another reason for why men might feel stress and frustration which may lead to them be violent to their children. Kaleema, introduced in section 6.2, explained how her husband's unemployed status not only means he is in the house more often and therefore has more opportunity to beat the children, but that he feels "bored" at home:

*My husband is jobless, he is always at home. When the children do something wrong he beats them and if I say anything to him he beats me with slaps and shoes...he says I am bored at home because all the time I am at home.*

Living in large extended families was also raised as a reason for increased stress in the family which could lead to increased violence to children, as a young man from urban Kabul

explained during a focus group discussion, "women and children compete for space". It should also be noted, however, that members of extended families may offer support to victims of violence, as Shakib's aunt Malali does to his sister. Likewise, it was reported that grandmothers would prevent mothers from beating their children too severely.<sup>24</sup>

Bar a couple of exceptions, people living in Jalalabad city gave high fertility rates as a reason for violence to children due to feelings of stress or frustration. Perhaps this was mentioned more here as many families do live in particularly cramped conditions.

To reiterate, economic stress, joblessness and cramped living conditions were identified by respondents as potential causes of stress and frustration. In section 6.1 women's frustrations caused by their relationships with others in the family were also highlighted as a particular cause of violence toward children in the family. However, the stress, frustration, anger or powerlessness that individuals might feel can be caused by a wide variety of factors. Consequently, not only is it inaccurate to attempt to blame particular family circumstances, such as poverty, for violence toward children it is also futile in attempting to find ways to overcome or reduce violence to children.

Instead this paper contends that it is more important to find reasons for why people are violent to children when they feel stressed or frustrated. One reason for this relates to a lack of awareness of stress management techniques and secondly that while violence to children remains accepted, if not acceptable to all, people are likely to continue expressing feelings of rage or anger through violence.

Therefore, it is argued that a more general change in attitudes toward violence to children

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion on differing household structures and their impacts on violence in the family see AREU's forthcoming Synthesis Paper on family dynamics and family violence.

in the family is needed. Violence to children needs to be conceptualised not only as unacceptable but also dishonourable and something to be avoided at all costs; something which is not tolerated by the community.

Attitudes toward violence as well as levels of violence do appear to have changed overtime. The following section explores these changes in order to identify spaces for further change in the future.

## 9. Ways Forward I: Spaces for Change

This section asserts that both community-wide attitudes toward violence and individual behaviour to children are open to change. It first examines how violent behaviour to children can change across generations in one family. Second it discusses change in levels of violence toward children in the family more generally and people's perspectives on how and why levels of violence have changed over time in their communities. Finally, it discusses how individuals have changed their own behaviour to children and for what reasons. This not only shows how attitudes and behaviours have changed but also provides insights on how negative attitudes and behaviours might be changed in the future.

### 9.1 Change across the generations in one family

In many examples people's opinions and attitudes regarding disciplining children and violence to children more generally have been influenced by their own experiences of violence as children themselves. It was common for people to report having experienced violence during their childhood and not wanting to repeat such actions with their own children. A few people reported that they had not experienced violence from their parents and wanted to treat their own children the same. Still others, and this was more uncommon, spoke about the violence they had received at the hands of their parents and either directly praised this or it was evident that they were continuing to treat their own children in the same manner.

A young man speaking in a focus group discussion in Nangarhar expressed the first perspective, explaining that he does not and will not repeat the actions that were done to him by his father:

*I have a nephew at home. He is little boy and I never beat him, because it is a very bad habit to beat children. I have the experience when I*

*was child of my father beating me and I will never repeat what my father did with me.*

Assadullah, the brother-in-law of Abdul Ghalib (Family Map 8), provides another example of this. He talked to the research team about the abuse he received at the hands of his father, describing one event from when he was ten years old. At the time he had gone to the river and when he returned back his father was angry with him and beat him very badly. Assadullah is obviously still very upset by how his father treated him:

*I still remember that beating and sometimes I become sad because, why did my father beat me, instead of advising me.*

Assadullah tries to not be the same with his 15 children. He reports always keeping little gifts for them in his pockets to encourage them to behave. However, he also told the research team how he does sometimes beat his children. In one example, he beat his son in the bazaar. This beating was severe enough that the men around him came and pulled him off his son. Therefore, while his ideal may be not to behave as his father did, at times he loses control and is violent to his children.

Zia, a man in his late thirties with some education and from an economically comfortable family living in Bamiyan city, expressed a similar sentiment. He described how his father used to beat him and how he doesn't want to behave like this with his own children. His brother, Younos, who is 15 years older than Zia, has a different attitude and is exceptionally violent, not just to the children but also to the women in the family. Younos reported that he is violent toward both the women and the children in the family, including his brother's wife and children, by slapping them, hitting them with shoes, threatening to kill them and punching and kicking them. He said that he injured Zia's

unborn child's hand by punching and kicking Zia's wife while she was pregnant.

Despite this, at one point in the interview he remembered how violent his father was not only to him and his brothers and sisters but also to his mother. He described how much he and his siblings all hated their father and how he doesn't want his children to feel the same way about him. However, Zia not only reported how violent Younos is but also that the children in the family don't like or respect him:

*Maybe he beats them [the children] 20 times a day. Whenever they do naughty acts, the head [Younos] beats them. The oldest of my children is six or eight years old and the rest are younger. When they see the head coming they don't say our uncle is coming they say ongag [a disrespectful Hazaragi word].*

Other people we spoke to were much more open and honest about behaving toward children as they had been treated themselves. For example a man in a focus group with younger men in Nangarhar expressed the belief that people behave with their children as their parents behaved with them:

*We always threaten our children, because the same actions have been done with us and we repeat the same what our fathers did with us in the past and this process transfers from one generation to the other.*

Similarly Malali, from Shakib's family, reported that not only are Shakib and his mother violent to the younger children but also Shakib's father is violent. Malali described the violence as a family characteristic:

*As I told you it is like a family habit to beat their children. My brother-in-law [Shakib's father] also beats his children. Like my sister-in-law and their son Shakib, he also beats them by punching and slapping them...I mean that in some families beating is like a habit and it is transferred from one generation to*

*another generation like inheritance. So in my brother-in-law's family also beating is like a habit and all of them have this habit and I am sure that when Shakib marries he will beat his wife also. Because it is like a habit and he has become used to that.*

Violent behaviour can be learnt from parents who are violent or growing up in a violent family can encourage people to not be violent to their children. However, others the research teams spoke with explained how their parents had not been violent to them as children and how they wanted to treat their children the same.

Noorullah, a man in his late thirties who lives in the village in Kabul Province with his six sons and three daughters, was keen to demonstrate that he is not violent with his children and explained that the reason for this is because his father was never violent to him:

*I swore that my father had not beaten me one day. He was really kind and I think because of him I am also the same.*

Another example of this situation is Ghulam Nabi, a man in his early forties living in rural Herat. He reported beating his children but always regretting it as his father never beat him:

*I started [beating them] when they were seven years old...I feel very regretful afterwards... Because when I was a small child I never got beaten by my father and I should follow that... Beating is a bad solution for the children.*

What the data revealed and these examples have illustrated is that there is not a straightforward link between growing up in a violent family and then being violent as a parent. Instead the situation is far more complex, with some automatically copying their parents' behaviours and others deliberately trying not to behave towards their children as their parents behaved toward them.



## 9.2 Change over time and in individual attitudes and behaviours

In spite of the often-reported incidences of violence toward children found in the communities where the research was conducted, there is a general consensus that this type of violence has decreased over time, especially within the last generation or so. See Box 5 for examples.

A slight anomaly to this general consensus came from people living in both rural and urban areas of Nangarhar, where a noteworthy number, if still in the minority, of those who discussed this issue expressed the opinion that violence to children in the family had actually increased over the last generation. The reason for this peculiarity in terms of either perception or actuality is unclear. The explanation given by this group of people, both men and women, was that they believed children to be naughtier these days. The reason given for why children are naughtier was simply that they have more

opportunities to behave badly and they have less respect for their elders. Consequently, the reasons given for an increase in violence to children are related to change in children's attitudes and behaviours rather than changes in adults.

The majority of those from all of the provinces who stated that violence to children had decreased believed this was due to the changing behaviour of adults rather than children. Only occasionally was an improvement in children's behaviour mentioned. Several reasons were given as to how and why adults' behaviours had changed. Some of these were very general statements like people are less ignorant or people have become aware that beating is not the best way to discipline children. Some were more specific and identified what had caused this general change in attitude.

One of the most common reasons given for this change in attitude was that people have travelled and "seen other people and the world around them". External migration to Pakistan

### Box 5. Perceptions of a decrease in violence toward children

*Now they don't beat, but in the past they used to. The people have become better nowadays, they control themselves very well. They don't make an issue of a small matter because they have been to different parts of the world.*

– Excerpt from a focus group discussion in rural Bamiyan, with younger men

*Before parents beat their children a lot, but now they do not beat them very hard. The children are not beaten now because they go to school. Before there weren't any schools and if there was a school they couldn't go because of the civil war.*

– Excerpt from a focus group discussion in rural Kabul, with older women

*People of the past punished and beat their children a lot, because there was ignorance...People of the present still beat their children, but the punishment has reduced. I do not say that people do not beat their children now, but the amount of punishment has decreased.*

– Abdul Ghalib from Daya's family in rural Nangarhar

*Yes our era was very bad; when I would make a mistake, others would beat me. I myself would beat my son with a rope when he was small. I don't beat my grandchildren as much as I would beat my sons. I beat my grandchildren with just one or two slaps.*

– Older woman, rural Bamiyan

and Iran was mentioned as a significant opportunity for learning and changing behaviour patterns. The quote below from a young woman speaking during a focus group discussion in Kabul city describes this generalised change due to external migration, however, she also pointed out that some individuals did not change their behaviour simply through migration:

*I think since the civil war has started and people moved to Pakistan and Iran they learned something from them and got some knowledge from there. Especially village people who went to Iran and Pakistan. Their mind has changed and they do not beat their children now. But there are some families who went to these countries but still they beat their children, like my brother-in-law who I talked about before.*

People often talked about how those who left have returned with new ideas and ways of doing things. Many of those spoken to in Bamiyan Province, where most people had been internally displaced and not travelled abroad, expressed the same perspective:

*It [violence to children] has changed since the past because the people hadn't seen the city and the other people in the world and that is why they used to beat the children more than now. I hadn't seen the village of Danish which is not more than half an hour distance.*

Migration was not only stressed as a way in which the community as a whole had learnt to treat children differently, but individuals also talked about how it has affected them personally, as this middle-aged man from Bamiyan city explained:

*I have beaten my son three times badly. I used to beat them a lot. But now I have seen the*

*world and different people, I don't beat my children.*

(It was also mentioned a few times by men from Herat and Bamiyan that because their children had also become more worldly that if they beat and abused them too much they would run away to "the city" or to Iran.)

Adila Gul, a widow in her mid-forties who lives with her parents in rural Kabul Province, highlighted the role that the media can play in changing people's perspectives:

*Year by year people's minds change. This year people understand more things than last year, and next year they will learn more and know more than this year. So year by year people's minds develop and they get new things and know about new things through TV, news and going to other places.*

Similarly 27-year-old Khalil, from Kabul city, talked about how he learnt that beating was a wrong thing to do through watching Iranian television:

*I learnt many things from Iranian TV and I know that we shouldn't beat children. If they are doing something wrong and they disobey we should find the reasons for this.<sup>25</sup>*

Schooling for children was also identified by respondents as a reason for the decrease in the level and severity of violence to children. In particular this was stressed in the rural area of Bamiyan where the research was conducted. This is likely to be because a primary school had quite recently been built there. Two reasons were expressed as to why sending their children to school had decreased violence. In this first instance Rahim, from rural Bamiyan, expressed his belief that children behave better now

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that opinions of the popular media in general were often far more negative than these two and are discussed in more detail in AREU's forthcoming synthesis paper on family dynamics and family violence.

because of the good influence schooling has on them:

*If I said I never beat my children what would you think? But there are lots of differences. In the past there was no school, but now we have a teacher and a school and they teach our children good behaviour and they discipline the children. They tell them not to fight, say salaam to elders and in your home, pay full attention to your cleanliness and so forth. Now the children are more polite than in the past.*

This man's brother, Nazir, in comparing his own upbringing to that of his children's, also emphasised the civilising effect of having a village school:

*Now we don't beat our children for these things. I don't know maybe we weren't good to our parents so they used to beat us or we love our children more so we don't beat them so much, or now the children have become good and they don't do wrong things...I don't know the reason for this matter. Now our children tell us the story of their school, for example they say that today, I stood in front of the class and talked to my classmates, or they tell us what marks they got.*

Individuals expressed different ways in which they personally had learnt to change their behaviour toward their children. A woman in her mid-thirties with two elder married daughters and two young daughters and a son, who lives in Kabul city, explained how when she got a job working in a kindergarten she was given several trainings on how to treat children. She went on to say that since these her behaviour toward her own children has changed. She said that before the trainings she used to beat her children using sticks and by slapping them.

Another woman, Deba, who is also a teacher in the local school in her village in Herat, told of how through personal experiences with disciplining children in her class she learnt that violence to children is not a good form of discipline. She

explains how there was a young girl in her class who never paid attention and so Deba would punish her and beat her. Eventually the girl stopped coming to school. After some weeks the girl returned and Deba decided to invest more time in trying to encourage her to work harder. Deba explained that this strategy did indeed work and now she tries to use encouragement with her other students.

Sadiq, a man in his mid-twenties who lives in rural Nangarhar Province and has five children under the age of ten, explained how he learnt that being violent to children was wrong through studying Islamic books:

*I treat them kindly and I make them understand verbally that this is action is good or that action is bad for them. I hit them with slaps when they did something wrong before, but when I studied the Islamic subjects and then I learned from the Islamic books that elders should be respected and we should be kind to our children.*

He also provided examples of when he had recently advised his children instead of hitting them.

This chapter has demonstrated that often respondents believed that levels and severity of violence to children in the family have decreased. It should be underlined that everyone who expressed a belief that violence to children had decreased saw this as a positive thing. This again reinforces the primary assertion of this paper that while violence to children in the family is accepted it is not wholly acceptable.

By discussing the things people perceive as having caused positive changes in levels of violence in their communities as well as identifying factors which have acted as catalysts for individuals to change their own behaviour, it is possible to identify spaces in which further change could be encouraged. Migration and the media were both highlighted as having offered the opportunity for people to see how different

communities treat children and expose people to new ideas. Similarly, for one woman it was specific training received through her job as a kindergarten teacher that changed her ideas about how to bring up children. For a school-teacher it was her own personal experimentation

with different forms of disciplining children that led her to change her behaviour and for one man it was his self study of Islamic books. Opportunities for children to go to school were also recognised as a way of both giving children a more disciplined and structured life overall.

## 10. Ways Forward II: Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has presented and discussed the multiple opinions on and attitudes towards violence to children in the family. It discussed possible reasons for violence to children within the context of these opinions and attitudes, coming from adults who are frequently the perpetrators of such violence. The last chapter identified spaces for change in the levels of violence children experience at the hands of adult family members, by looking at how levels of violence to children are perceived to have changed over time and how individuals' attitudes and opinions on this violence have been formed.

Key to understanding violence to children in the family is conceptualising the difference between violence to children being accepted (seen as commonplace, normal behaviour in most families) versus being perceived as acceptable (morally good behaviour on the part of adults toward children). While it is unusual for the community to condemn its members for "everyday violence" to children, many of the people interviewed by the research teams recognised both the harm violence to children can cause and felt that it was not the best way to discipline children.

Throughout the paper it has been clearly illustrated that adults are aware of the harm, both physical and psychological, that violence can cause to children. They are deeply concerned that they are good parents to their children and will bring them up in the "correct" manner. Similarly, it has been shown how many of the respondents are able to understand and analyse their own situation and why violence happens to children in their families. This knowledge or awareness can be found among men and women; young and old; rich and poor; educated and illiterate.

It was found that individuals' and communities' opinions on the rights and wrongs of violence toward children in the form of corporal punishment are not fixed; instead people are willing to discuss and debate the best methods in which to discipline their children, with not only people from similar backgrounds disagreeing but individuals open to having their minds changed throughout the course of a discussion. The paper also highlighted the disjuncture between individuals' abstract opinions and how they may actually behave. This disjuncture can be generalised to the community as a whole, with violence to children being commonplace while the majority of people believe violence to children is unacceptable or only acceptable in certain circumstances. Certain individuals in the community were particularly opposed to any form of violence to children and these individuals were willing to talk to others about these opinions and try to change the behaviour of others.

It is often assumed that the arena of the family is the hardest space to enter in order to overcome violence to children, as is clearly expressed in the United Nations Secretary-General's Report on Violence against Children (2006): "Challenging violence against children is most difficult in the context of the family in all its forms. There is a reluctance to intervene in what is still perceived in most societies as a 'private' sphere." This may be true, but it does not preclude people being willing to discuss violence toward children in their families and communities. Throughout the process of the data collection for this research, it became evident that in a comfortable environment, with facilitators who are trusted, men and women of different backgrounds were willing not only to discuss violence to children in the family but also to discuss particular acts of violence they have perpetrated on their own children.

## Five primary causes identified for continuing violence to children in the family:

- First, some people do perceive corporal punishment as a good way to bring up children.
- Second, those who think corporal punishment should only be used in cases of extreme deviant behaviour, as a last resort or not at all know very few alternative parenting skills or methods for disciplining their children.
- Third, parents' concerns for their children's futures and their fear that their children will not grow up to be useful members of the family and community, combined with a lack of alternative parenting skills or discipline methods, encourage parents to use corporal punishment, even when they don't think it is the correct thing to do and are doubtful of its effectiveness.
- Fourth, stress and frustration felt on the part of adults leads them to lash out at their children. Possible causes of stress and frustration in the family include detrimental relationships between adults in the family and economic insecurity relative to a family's material expectations.
- Fifth, as violence to children in the family is widespread and accepted as normal there is a lack of a generalised social judgement placed on this form of violence, allowing it to go unchallenged by the community.

## Policy and programme recommendations:

- Any programme working to tackle violence toward children must first recognise that there is a general awareness in the communi-

ties of the negative consequences of violence to children and that violence is not necessarily the best way to discipline or encourage children. Sensitisation campaigns should therefore focus on informing people about alternative parenting skills.

- These alternative parenting skills should be designed by organisations working in this field in close collaboration with different communities, in order to ensure that such alternatives are appropriate for the different Afghan contexts and would be adopted by the many different types of Afghan families and communities. It should be ensured, therefore, that alternative non-violent parenting skills should be applicable to the Afghan family context.<sup>26</sup>
- Alternative parenting skills need to be transferred, taught and discussed in communities directly. Influential people in the community would likely be the best to do this, including elders (both male and female), mullahs, community nurses or teachers.
- The research identified individuals in the community who were particularly opposed to violence to children. These individuals could be identified by programmes aiming to overcome violence to children in the family and used to spread messages of alternative parenting skills and further spread knowledge of the harm that violence to children causes.
- Programmes need to encourage communities to intervene to support those who are violent to children to stop being violent to their children.
- Programmes and campaigns need to encourage the community to make a generalised

<sup>26</sup> Alternative parenting skills and methods for discipline children were discussed with stakeholders (the vast majority being Afghan themselves) during working group discussions at a conference in Kabul, organised by AREU and at workshops in Bamiyan, Herat and Nangarhar organised by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in partnership with AREU. Suggestions were made as to what forms of non-violent parenting would be applicable for the Afghan context.

judgement that violence to children will not be accepted in their communities. (Even when people are stressed or feeling frustrated they are less likely to lash out against children if this behaviour does not go ignored or is accepted as normal in the community.)

- Enhancing stress management skills and building a greater awareness of the effects of stress in the family would also greatly help to curb violence to children in the family.<sup>27</sup>

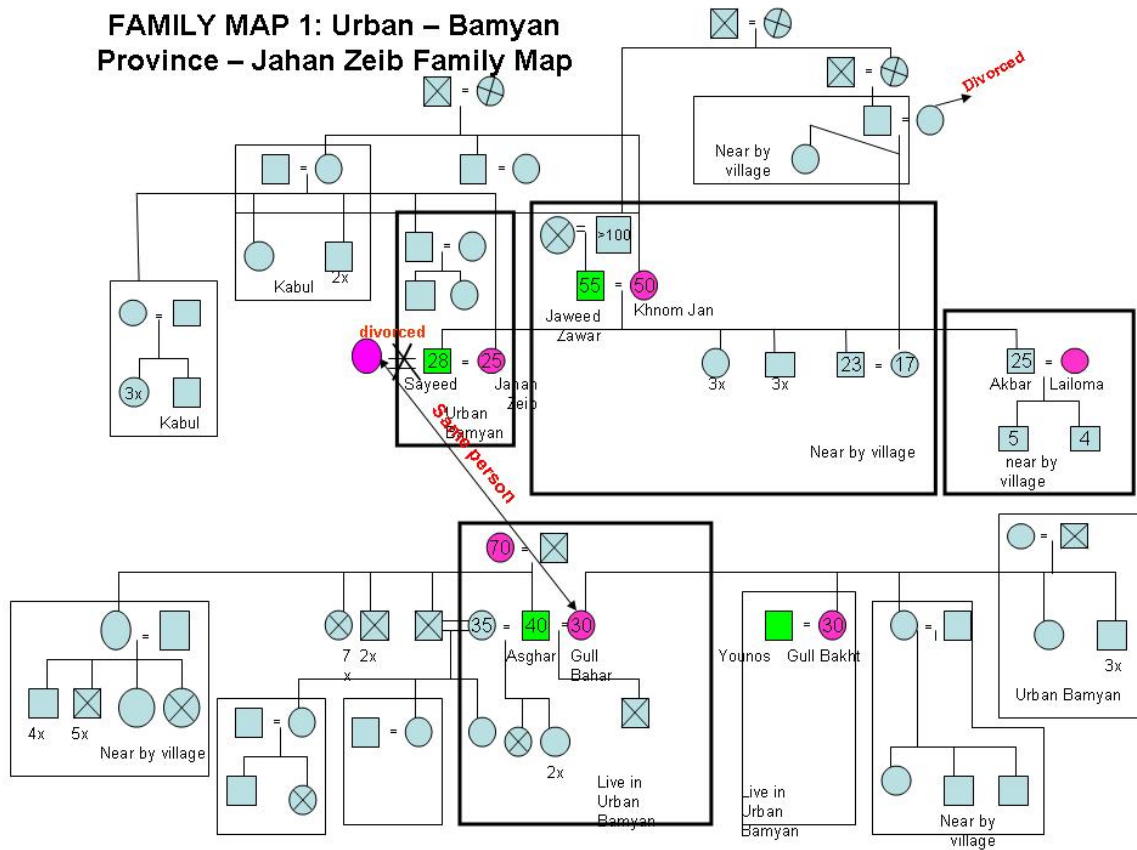
<sup>27</sup> While this research did not focus on Afghanistan's national level policy in regard to violence toward children in the family, and hence does not offer corresponding policy recommendations, the author would also strongly recommend changes in the law to specifically outlaw violence to children in the family. Afghanistan became a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on 27 April 1994, but the provisions of the Convention have not been codified in Afghan law. The Convention holds that States Parties "shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child" (Article 19:1); "shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children" (Article 24:3); "shall ensure that: (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Article 37); and "shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child" (Article 39) (U.N. General Assembly, *Document A/RES/44/25* (12 December 1989)). For a fuller discussion of these issues see Global Initiative to end all Corporal Punishment for Children (2006), *Ending Legalised Violence Against Children*: [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org).



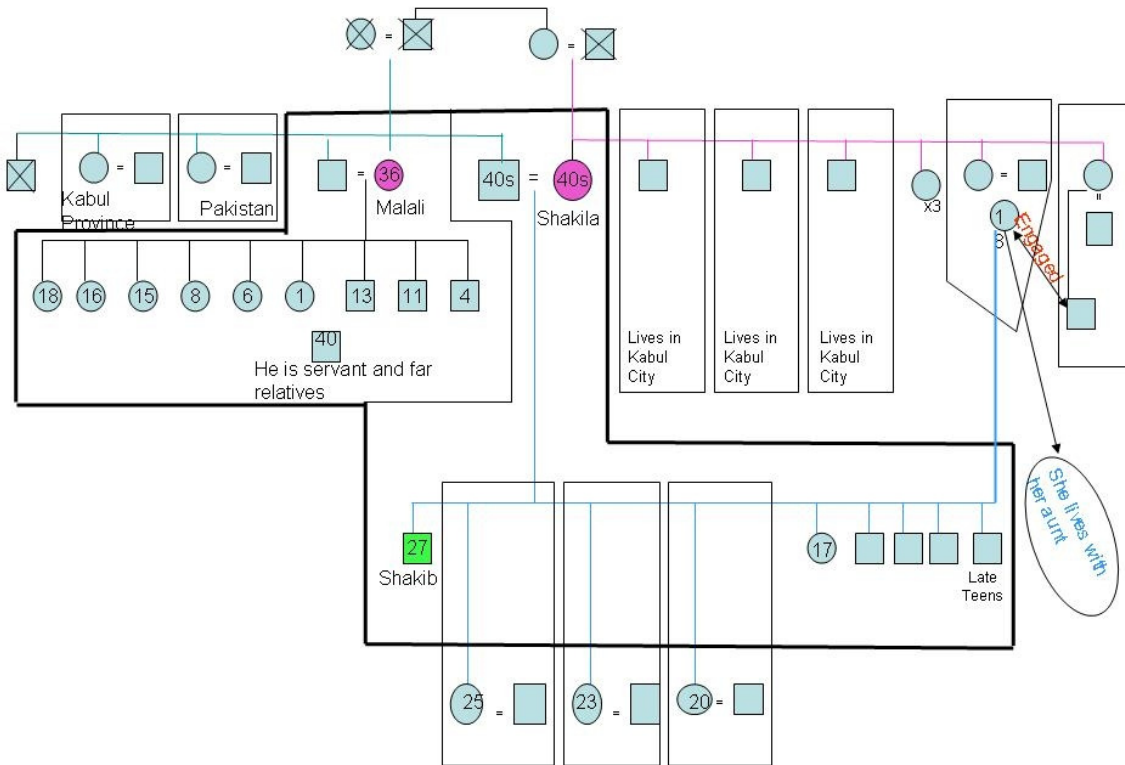




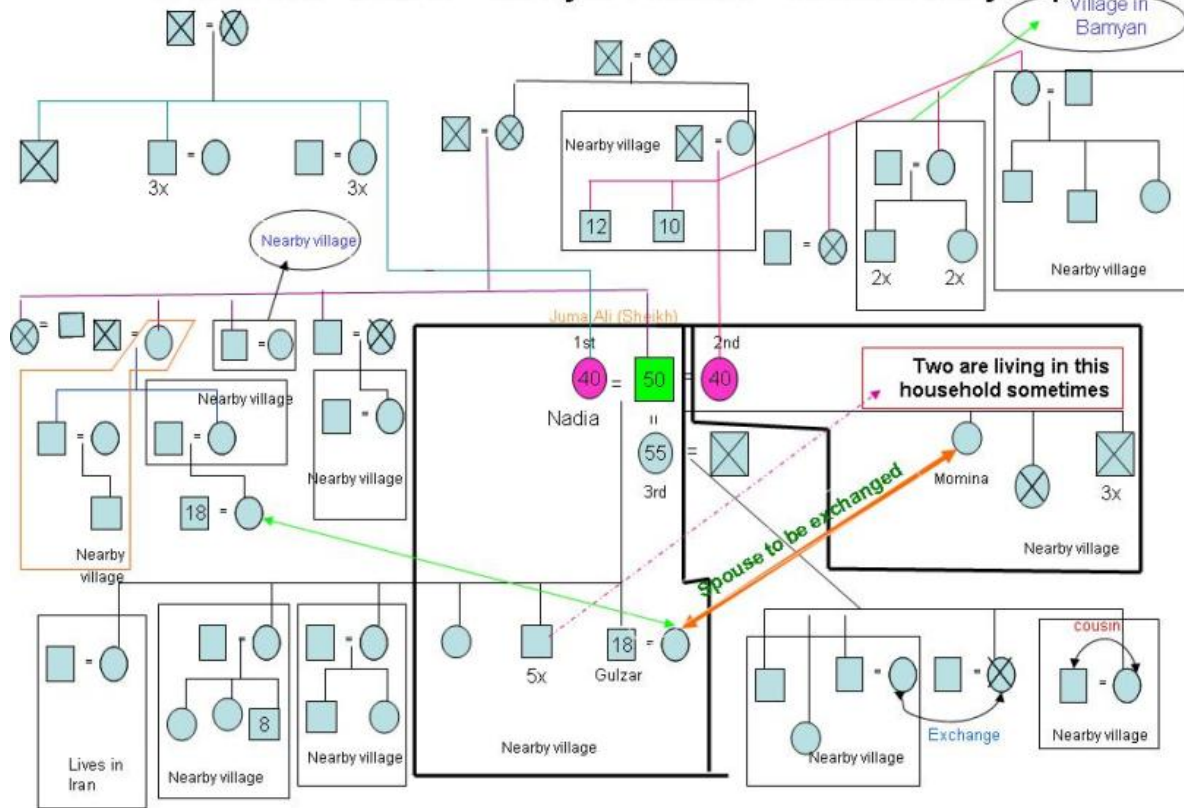
**FAMILY MAP 1: Urban – Bamyan Province – Jahan Zeib Family Map**



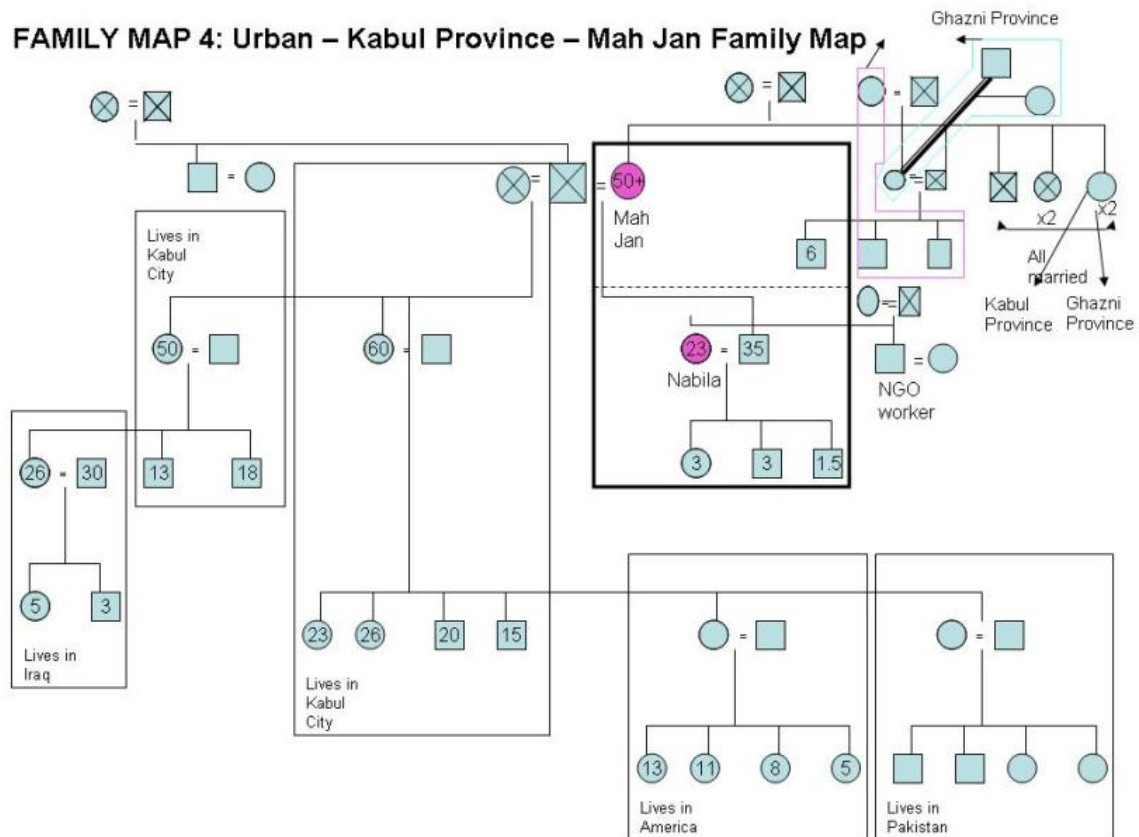
**FAMILY MAP 2: Urban – Kabul Province – Shakib Family Map**



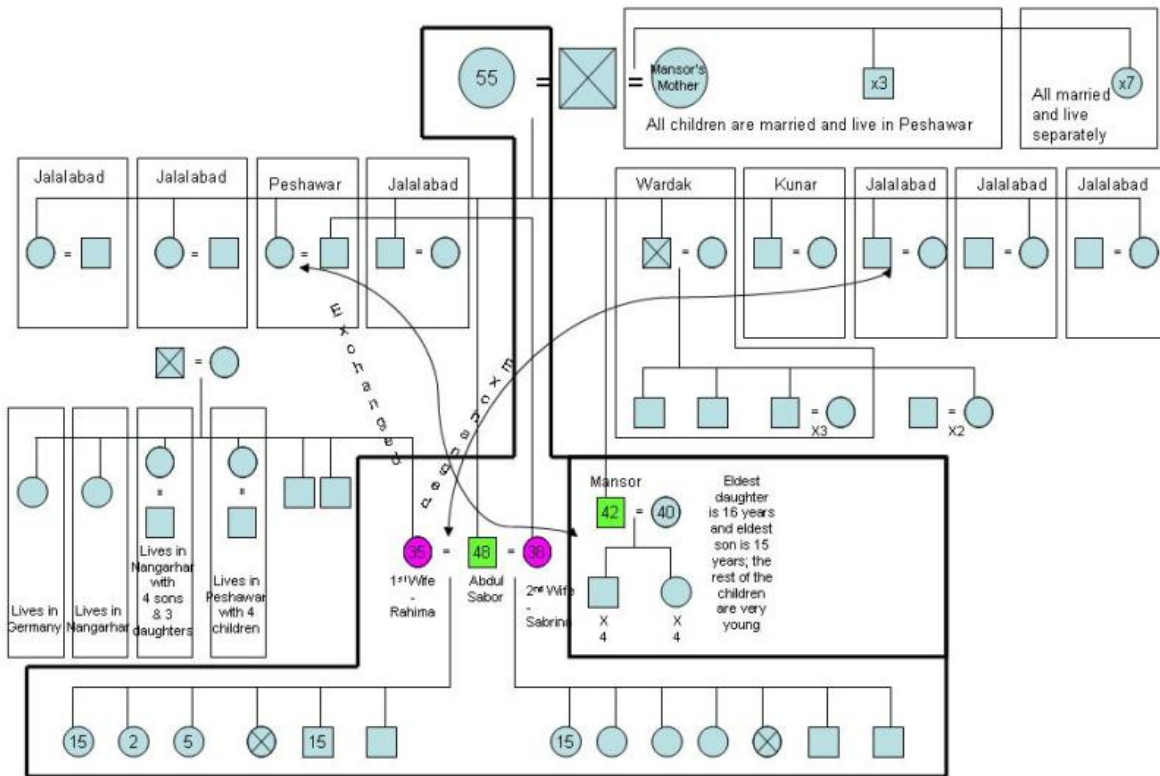
**FAMILY MAP 3: Rural – Bamiyan Province – Momina Family Map**



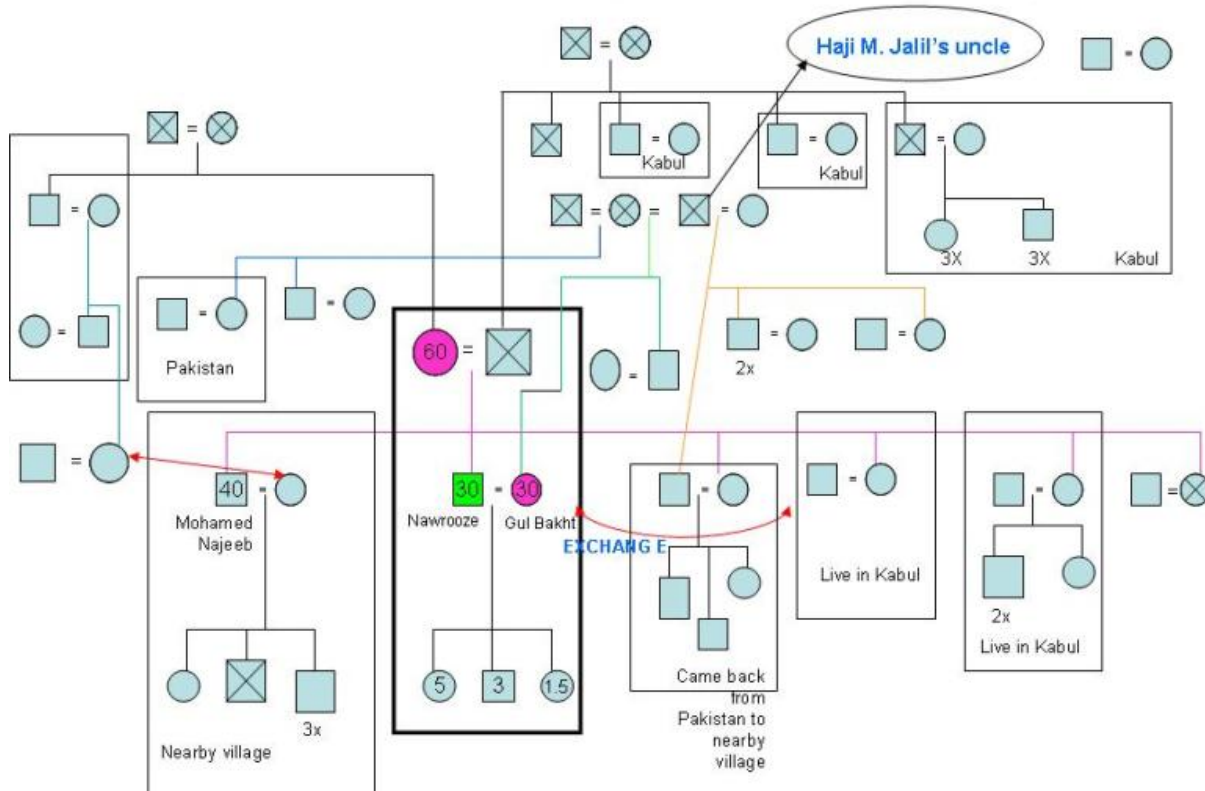
**FAMILY MAP 4: Urban – Kabul Province – Mah Jan Family Map**



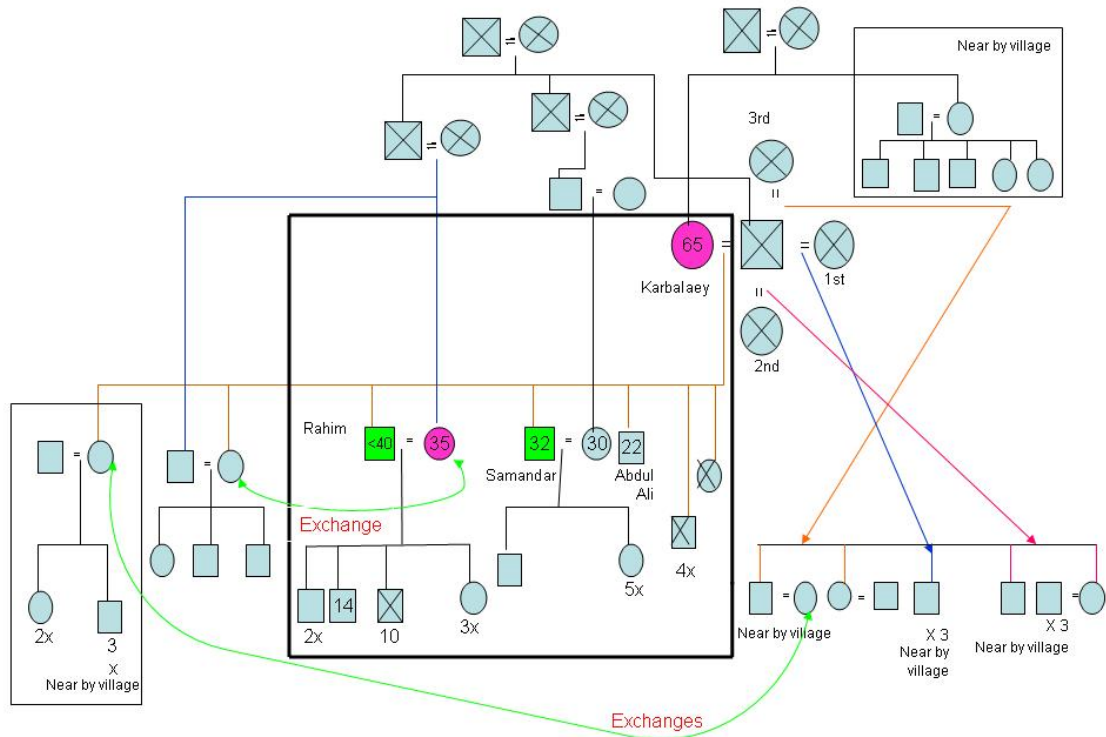
### FAMILY MAP 5: Urban – Nangarhar Province – Abdul Sabor Family Map



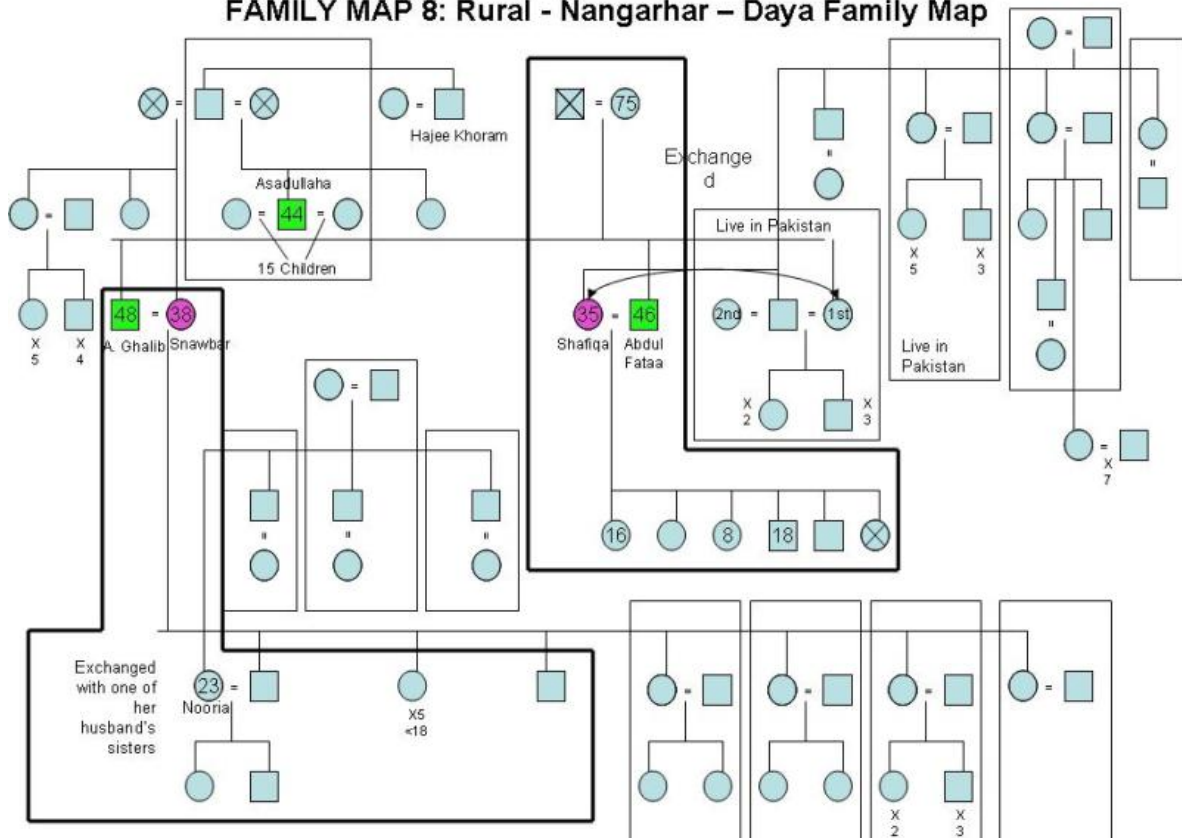
### FAMILY MAP 6: Rural - Bamiyan – Gul Bakht Family Map



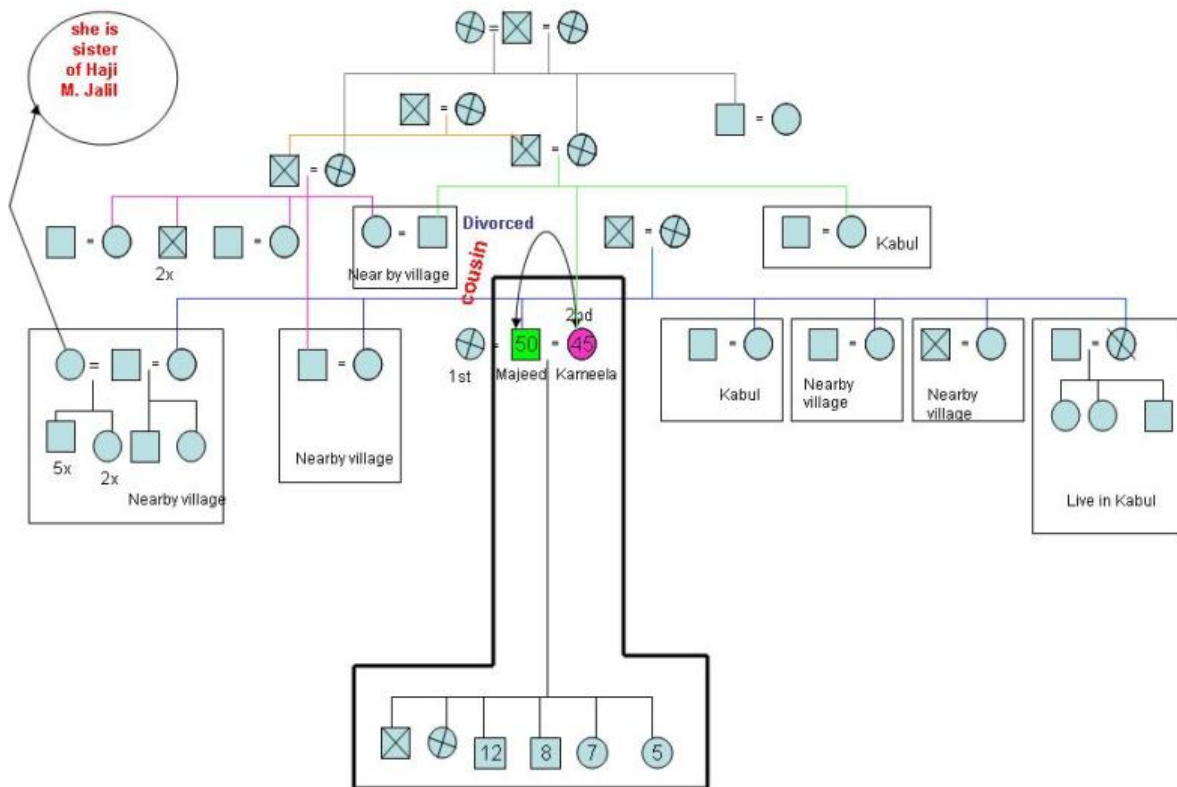
**FAMILY MAP 7: Rural – Bamyan – Samandar Family Map**



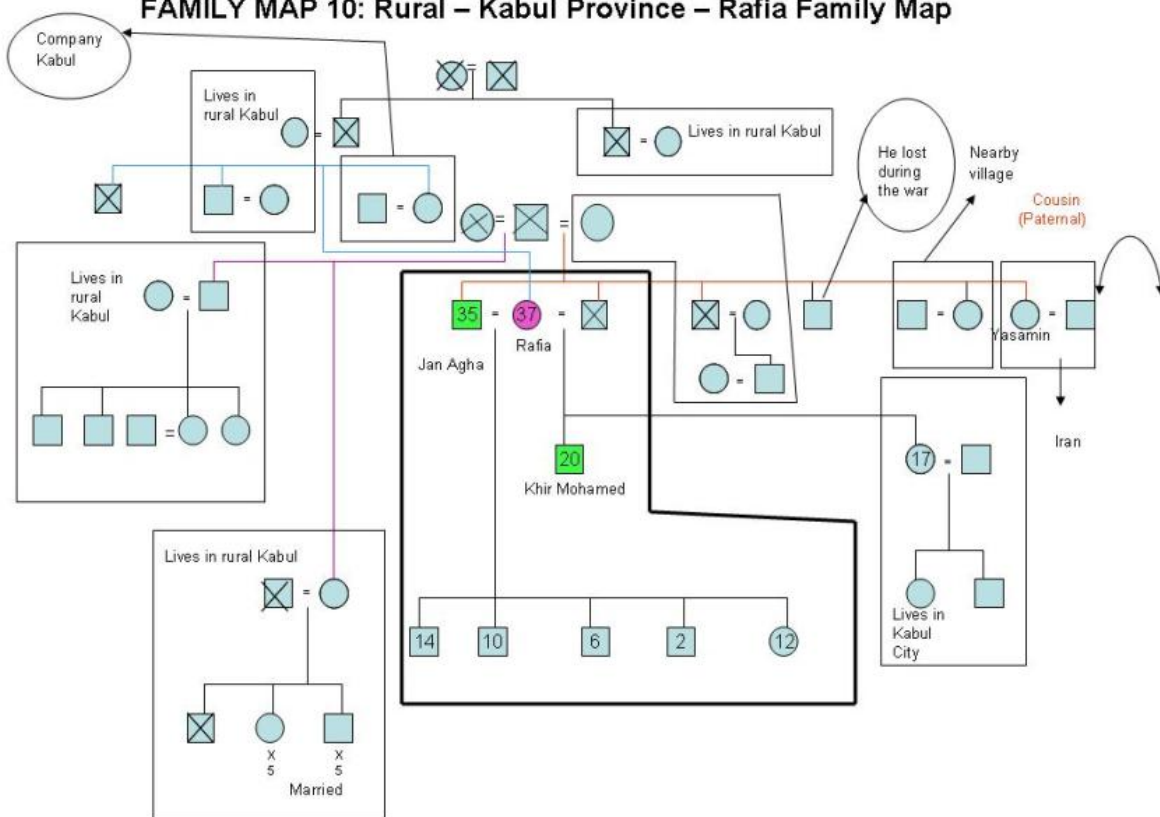
**FAMILY MAP 8: Rural - Nangarhar – Daya Family Map**



**FAMILY MAP 9: Rural – Bamiyan Province –Majeed Family Map**



**FAMILY MAP 10: Rural – Kabul Province – Rafia Family Map**





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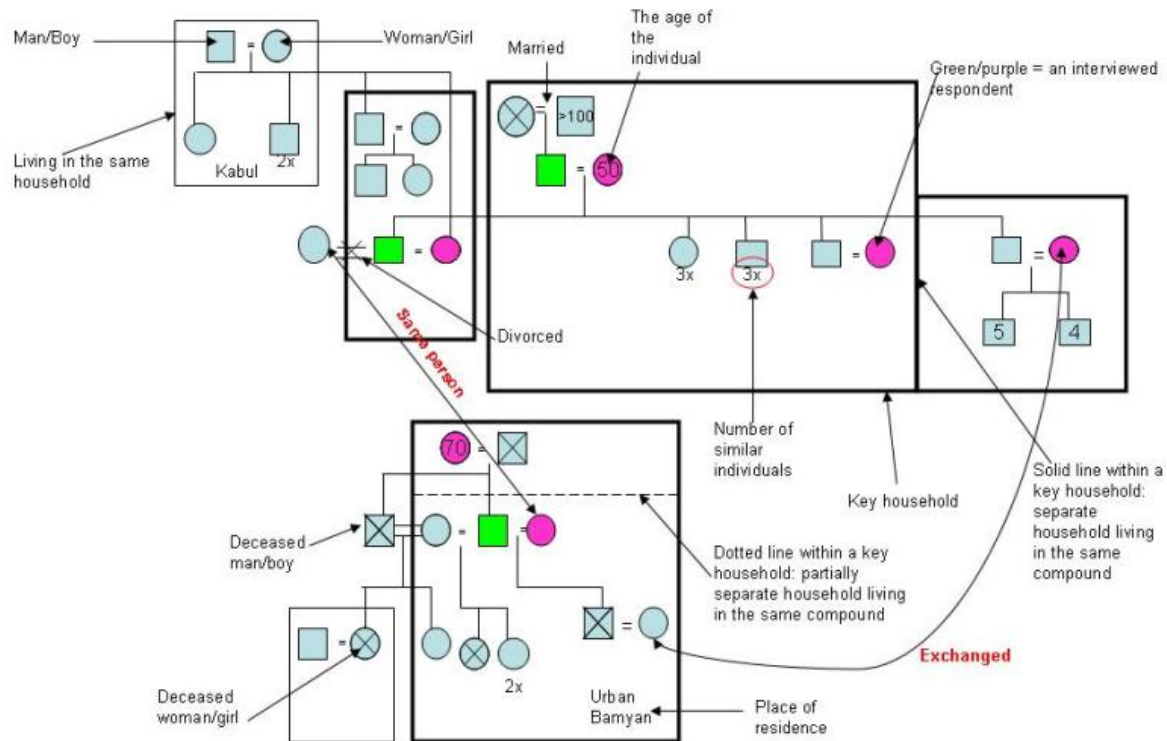
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## ANNEX 1: Family Maps and Key

# KEY FOR FAMILY MAPS



\* For some of the more extended families, not all family members have been included in the family maps. Only key household members have been included in these maps.



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