ROMA WOMEN’S VIEWS ON FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

A Qualitative Study in Bulgaria
ABSTRACT

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Roma Women’s Views on Factors Influencing the Process of Child Marriage
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Child marriage is a global issue of human rights, gender equality and health. For example, the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals target to eliminate the practice of child marriages by 2030 in order to improve maternal health, reduce child mortality and promote gender equality.

Child marriages are one factor in the vulnerability of Eastern European Roma women. In the European Union, more than a quarter of girls with Roma identity are legally or traditionally married before the age of 18. Child marriages are most common among girls with less education and it has also been found that child marriages affect the schooling of Roma girls, thus creating a vicious cycle. Among the Roma, child marriages are a strong factor in group identity and a mechanism to prevent assimilation. The virginity of the bride is highly valued, as is the need to preserve it until marriage, which has commonly led to restrictions on movement and marrying daughters as a child.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of Bulgarian Roma women who were married as minors. The study aims at investigating which factors these women experienced as influencing the process of child marriage, as well as examine whom they believe to be involved in this process and what their role in that process is. Interviews were conducted with a semi-structured interview guide at three locations in Bulgaria. The research group consisted of 13 Bulgarian women with Roma identity. Data analysis was conducted by performing inductive content analysis.

The findings indicate that according to Roma women’s lived experiences there are factors, dynamics and people as components of the marriage process that influence conflict between traditional values and the demands of modern society, thus increasing the risk of child marriages. Childhood social stressors and family dynamics lay the foundation for future marriage decisions. When the trigger happens, girls tend make marriage decisions independently, initiated and encouraged by the boys. Marriage usually occurs by eloping, after which the parents have no choice but to accept the matter, and the negotiation phase begins and ends with the announcement of marriage in the community. These findings imply that the decision-making process of child marriages among Bulgarian Roma is changing. Where families and, especially fathers, negotiated marriage in the past, girls' own autonomy now plays a large part. The actions of the non-couple partakers during the initiation seem to be irrelevant. The role of parents has diminished as their role is mostly limited to accepting and arranging things in the best possible way when the marriage is already irrevocable.

Keywords: child marriage, marriage process, Roma
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FOREWORD

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, the number of child brides is approximately 650 million. Every day more than 41,000 girls worldwide are married as children. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals target to eliminate the practice of child, early and forced marriages by 2030 in order to improve maternal health, reduce child mortality and promote gender equality. Significant success has been achieved over the last decade in dealing with child marriages as 25 million cases have been prevented. However, the global progress should be twelve times faster to meet the objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 2018; United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 2017). Child marriages are a serious problem as they seriously compromise the right of children, and especially girls, to achieve their full potential by limiting schooling. As a result, their learning and future earnings will be put at risk, and girls may end up living in poverty. In addition, child brides often have more children during their lifetime and have them at younger age than their peers. They have limited decision-making ability and increased risk of confronting intimate partner violence. Their fundamental rights to health, equality and living free from exploitation are taken away which affects them all the way to adulthood (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; UNICEF, 2018; World Bank, 2017).

The Roma are Europe’s largest ethnic minority group, with approximately 10–12 million people, six million of whom live in the European Union (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], n.d.). They are also a large minority in Bulgaria. Officially 4.9% (~325,000) of the Bulgarian population are of Roma identity, although the Council of Europe estimates that the actual number is over 10% (~750,000). The exact number is hard to determine because many of them prefer not to declare themselves as Roma (Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance [ACIDT], 2011; European Commission, 2014). The prevalence of child marriages is generally low in Eastern Europe, but girls from marginalized populations are at risk. Even though the exact number of married Roma girls is undiscovered, the issue remains a reality (ACIDT, 2011; Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; UNICEF, 2018). In 2017, the official number of Bulgarian girls marrying before the age of 18 was 618 (National Statistical Institute. Republic of Bulgaria, 2018), but this is only part of the truth since child marriages happen outside the system because they are neither legal nor popularly accepted by the general population. Child marriages, however,
are not characteristic to all Roma groups in Bulgaria and the extent of this tradition varies from region to region (ACIDT, 2011).

In summary, the tradition of child marriages among the Eastern European Roma is a crucial global and European human rights, gender equality and health issue. At the European level, the situation of young Roma, and particularly Roma women, had deteriorated in 2017 in terms of education and employment (FRA, 2018). Extreme poverty and marginalization increase the inequalities faced by Roma women, and in many countries of the European Union their average situation has been surveyed to be worse than that of Roma men in the core areas of social life. Child marriages are one of the factors that make particularly Roma women vulnerable (FRA, 2014). Targeting the tradition of child marriage is important to improve future opportunities for Roma girls. Improving the educational attainment of Roma women could be an effective way to reduce their dependence on both men and government financial support (Illisei, 2013) and to improve their health. Up to now, far too little attention has been paid to child marriages among Roma. In addition, the research has tended to focus on outcomes and determinants of child marriage rather than the decision-making that leads to it. Since child marriage is not only a result, but a process (McDougal et al., 2018) it is important to understand what are the influencing and decision-making factors that lead to it.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of Bulgarian Roma women who were married as minors. The study aims at investigating which factors these women experienced as influencing the process of child marriage, as well as to examine whom they believe to be involved in this process and what their role in that process is. Through interviews with 13 participants from three different locations in Bulgaria, this study generates a fresh insight into Roma women’s views on the marriage process. The thesis begins by giving a brief overview of child marriages and the phases of marriage process and examining child marriages from a human rights perspective. The background concludes with a description of the status and marriage of Roma women in their community. The thesis describes the purpose of the study and its implementation, and finally presents the findings and suggestions for further possibilities.
2 BACKGROUND

Before proceeding to examine child marriage, it is important to define the term “child marriage”. It is commonly understood when referring to a marriage in which at least one of the parties is a child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child characterizes a child to be “every human being below the age of eighteen years”. In addition, the term “early marriage” is used in many studies, but it refers to marriage involving a person under the age of 18 in countries where the age of majority is attained earlier (United Nations Human Rights Council [UNHRC], 2014; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1989). Since the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child to be under 18 years of age, and the legal age of majority in Bulgaria is also 18 years (Commission of European Family Law, n.d.) the term “child marriage” is used in this paper to describe the phenomenon. Although Roma marriages often take place outside the official system and are not recognized by law, the term “marriage” is used in this study to refer all common life of the spouses, because among Roma, marriage is based on their own norms (ACIDT, 2011).

2.1 Child Marriages Globally

It is clear that child marriages do not only affect girls but have a broader impact on households and communities. Girls who marry as children are not able to reach their full social and economic potential. As a result, the health in the population levels deteriorates and the productivity decreases. Child marriages potentially increase the birth rate and thus change the age structure of the population, which can have an impact even on the country’s economic growth (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; World Bank, 2017). For families living in poverty and insecurity, marriage can be a way of ensuring the financial maintenance of girls, or a way to reduce the financial burden, for example by obtaining a “bride-price”. Child marriage can also be an alternative to education when the school system is weak or the possibilities are otherwise limited (Handa et al., 2015; McDougal et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2014). Lack of formal education is not only an important determinant (Nasrullah, Muazzam, Bhutta & Raj, 2013; Sabbe et al., 2013; UNHRC, 2014) but also a consequence of child marriages, because girls no longer go to school (Santhya et al., 2010; Sekine &
Girls are more likely to be illiterate the earlier they marry. In African context, it has been found that each year in child marriage reduces the probability of completing secondary school (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014).

Regarding sexual and reproductive health, child marriages are a leading contributor of adolescent pregnancies. Globally, 90% of the pregnancies of girls between the ages of 15–19 happen in marriage. Miscarriages, stillbirths and unwanted pregnancies are more common among girls who have married as children. Adolescent pregnancy is always a considerable risk (Nasrullah et al., 2013; Santhya et al., 2010; United Nations Population Fund, 2015) and sexual, reproductive and maternal health issue (Bell et al., 2018). For example, eclampsia and systematic infections during pregnancy as well as preterm labor, are more common in adolescents. Pregnancy at young age can also have adverse consequences for the children of these girls, as adolescent pregnancy is associated with low birth-weight and severe neonatal conditions (Ganchimeg et al., 2014).

Another significant aspect of child marriage is, that many young girls get married suddenly, and are not prepared to accept the role of marriage. Marriage can thus feel stressful (Montazeri, Gharacheh, Mohammadi, Alaghband Rad & Eftekhar Ardabili, 2016). Surprisingly, some girls may also feel satisfied with their parents’ decision to marry them as children (Nasrullah et al., 2014) or simply accept it because they were not able to override the decisions of their parents (Montazeri et al., 2016). Young couples are also at risk to fall into a dependency trap because they cannot bear the expenses of married life which can then lead to family disputes. This can add to the mental stress that girls are already experiencing due starting marital life and leaving their family and childhood, for which they were not in the first place mentally, emotionally and physically prepared. This transition tends to harm girls’ self-confidence and personal development and makes them further vulnerable (John, Edmeades, Murithi & Barre, 2018; Naveed & Butt, 2015).

2.1.1 Legal Aspects of Child Marriage

It is important to bear in mind, that under many international human rights treaties, all individuals have the right to marry with the free and full consent and in the presence of the competent authority and have the right to choose a spouse (UNHCR, 2014). In the
case of child marriages, the true consent of the girls is not possible due to lack of maturity (Sabbe et al., 2013; Turner, 2013). Because young girls lack competent life skills, they have poor autonomy. This factor plays a major role in decision-making when child marriages are contracted. Thereby, many women who were married as children believe that they were not capable to make the proper decisions about marriage when it happened (Montazeri et al., 2016).

Previous research suggests that social pressure and cultural norms have a strong influence on the practice of child marriage and therefore it is hard to target. Many parents encourage daughters to marry young because it is an accepted cultural practice. Patriarchal ideologies and stereotypical roles of women in communities support traditions that place women in a submissive position to men (McDougal et al., 2018; Montazeri et al., 2016; Nasrullah et al., 2014; UNHCR, 2014). Unmarried women may not have rights and are excluded from family and society (Montazeri et al., 2016). Laws that restrict the practice of child marriage face resistance because marriages are often seen purely as a family matter that the state should not interfere with (Nasrullah et al., 2014). Sometimes legal sanctions are even identified as deterrents that inhibit seeking help to prevent child marriage. Additionally, the social and financial risks for the family are often perceived as more acute than the laws against the practice of child marriage (McDougal et al., 2018; Montazeri et al., 2016).

Communities justify child marriages in many ways. Marriage is seen as protecting girls from social problems, such as unwanted attention by men and immoral behaviour. This mindset is strongly linked to the honour-based thinking that girls’ behaviour is the foundation of family honour. It can thus lead to the restriction of girls’ lives through the threat of violence by family members (Björktomta, 2019; Brum, Braiden & Heinonen, 2016; Sharp, 2015). In addition, as many girls move to live with their spouse and in-laws when they marry, adapting to a new situation is seen as easier the younger the girls are (Nasrullah et al., 2014). Parents tend to base girls’ readiness for marriage on signs of puberty and perceptions of emotional maturity rather than age (McDougal et al., 2018).
2.1.2 Phases of Contracting Marriage as a Child

Marital initiation refers to the phase where there is a discussion about whether a girl should marry or potentially wants to marry. Regarding child marriages, on a global level, the girls themselves rarely initiate marriage. Proposals for marriage may come from outside the nuclear family, for example from the groom’s side or from an extended family of the girl. Parents often negotiate marriage without the involvement of the girls. As a result, girls’ voice and choice are usually limited during the process (John et al., 2018; McDougal et al., 2018; Santhya et al., 2010). Girls who marry as children have no say in the choice of spouses and the timing of marriage. The chances of meeting a future husband in advance are limited to all young women, but especially to girls who get married early (Erulkar, 2013; John et al., 2018; Santhya et al., 2010):

The younger the girls, the stronger is the influence of the parents is when the marriage is in the negotiation phase, but also girls’ peers may express their support for marriage as child (Erulkar, 2013; McDougal et al., 2018; Montazeri et al., 2016). Parents may encourage girls to accept a marriage proposal by rationalizing it with benefits of marriage or religious reasons (Montazeri et al., 2016). Since girls are often not involved in marriage negotiations, their individual level psychological empowerment plays a smaller role in resistance than social resources and support. In particular, the support and appreciation of the father for the education of the girls is important when dealing with marriage proposals. An outside advocate, such as a teacher, may be beneficial source of information on the effects of child marriage and on mitigating the social consequences for family members when a marriage proposal is rejected (McDougal et al., 2018).

Girls are often not informed of marriage until the decisions have been made (Erulkar, 2013). Fathers are usually the final decision-makers about marriage, especially when the marriage is initiated and negotiated with an extended family or the groom’s family. Girls largely accept the parents’ decisions about marriage even if it is not their wish (Erulkar, 2013; McDougal et al., 2018) or accept that they are not mature enough to predict or evaluate the consequences of the marriage and leave it to their parents (Montazeri et al., 2016). Social pressure and traditions can also make girls’ parents incapable of rejecting marriage proposals and make them vulnerable as they move forward in the marriage process. Relatives can increase pressure by expressing concerns, such as stigma of unmarried
girls or the limited prospects for a future marriage. In these cases, girls’ mothers tend to direct decision-making or guide fathers to favor marriage (Erulkar, 2013; McDougal et al., 2018).

2.1.3 Child Marriage as a Human Rights Issue

Efforts to integrate global health policy objectives into the human rights framework and, more generally, to establish human rights as the basis for development goals, have increased. Human rights can be defined as universal moral rights that apply to all people, including children, simply because of their humanity (Tasioulas & Vayena, 2015). Child marriage is a clear violation of several rights enshrined in a number of human rights instruments (UNHCR, 2014). This is made clear, for example, in the United Nations’ (UN, 1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that men and women of full age should marry “only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”. Child brides have limited abilities to give free, full and informed consent, or even to be fully informed about the true nature of marriage. Because of the unequal power dynamics this applies even if the girl says she is willing to marry (Sabbe et al., 2013; Turner, 2013).

Marrying young violates girls’ rights to childhood, education and health, as they are stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), for example by limiting school accomplishment and deteriorating health. In addition, child and forced marriages are widely recognized as a form of gender-based discrimination. For example, the United Nations’ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1992) announced that traditional attitudes that place women in subordinate positions to men, such as child marriage, violate girls’ rights. Such practices thus increase the risk of gender-based violence in the form of control over women. As a result, girls and women are deprived of their fundamental freedoms and opportunities and even their political influence.

Child marriages often create substantial differences in age or power between spouses, which weakens the autonomy of girls who marry as children. The younger the girls are, the less understanding they have to express their opinions in marriage. Girls may face not only physical but also psychological and financial violence by their husbands. Girls who marry as children are more likely to experience intimate partner violence and forced first
sex in marriage than those who marry at older ages. Often, they have no knowledge of their sexual and reproductive health. The vulnerability of young girls puts them at risk of abuse and control and makes them many times incapable of ending their marriage. Young girls have no negotiation power with their husbands and in-laws (Erulkar, 2013; John et al., 2018; Naveed & Butt, 2015; Santhya et al., 2010; Turner, 2013; UNHCR, 2014). In some cases, child brides may even encounter conditions that can be considered as slavery based on the international legal definition of slavery and slavery-like practices (Turner, 2013).

2.2 Child Marriage Among Eastern European Roma

The following chapter focuses on child marriages in Eastern European Roma communities. Typical Roma marriage has its own characteristics that differ from the general population and influence the number of child marriages. Before explaining the specificities of Roma marriages, the social and economic situation of Roma women must be examined.

2.2.1 The Situation of Roma women

The situation of Roma women is largely related to the traditions of child marriage. Poverty, social exclusion and inequality have a strong impact on the Roma population in Europe (European Commission, 2018a) and among them, especially women carry a stigma. Many of them live in poverty in segregated communities without the basic conditions for a normal life. Values and rituals as well as power relations are clearly defined in the Roma culture and communities (ACIDT, 2011; Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015) and therefore, in many Roma families, grandparents and parents are the highest authority and their decisions are rarely opposed. Parents’ views define the boundary between childhood and adulthood and their opinions are often respected even in personal family matters (Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; Kyuchukov, 2011). In addition, Roma groups are strongly patriarchal. Gender inequality, male dominance and the subordinate role of women in Roma communities create barriers to Roma women’s decision-making capacity. Women have limited decision-making power in families (Colombini, Rechel & Mayhew, 2011; Logar, Pavlic & Maksuti, 2015; Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015; Stojanovski, Jancevic, Kasapinov,
Stamenkovic & Jankovic, 2017). In the most conservative Roma communities, women have a duty to obey their husbands and care for children and households. Women’s authority increases with age, but young girls are in a subordinate position and often must obey even their younger brothers (ACIDT, 2011).

Roma children do not always attend school even if given the opportunity. Parents may find it more important that children, and especially girls, help in the house and care for their younger siblings when immediate family survival is the biggest concern. As a result, Roma women widely lack even primary education and therefore do not have the skills or access to employment (Coe & Cvorovic, 2017; Jarcuska, Bobakova, Uhrin, Bobak & Babinska, 2013; Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015). Partly because of this, for example, in Serbia and Macedonia over 80% of Roma women are unemployed (Stojanovski et al., 2017). In Roma communities, the practice of child marriage is most common among girls with less education and living in poorer households. In Bulgaria, the level of education of Roma girls is the most significant and distinctive factor for early start of marital life (ACIDT, 2011; Hotchkiss, Godha, Gage & Cappa, 2016).

2.2.2 Characteristics of Roma Marriage

Since child marriages among Roma are unofficial and unregistered, their prevalence is difficult to estimate. However, they still exist. The survey results reveal that across the European Union, approximately 2% of Roma girls in the age group of 10–15 are traditionally married or cohabiting. On average, 24% of Roma girls in the 16–17 age group are legally or traditionally married (FRA, 2014). Child marriages are evident for example in Serbia, where 57% of Roma women between the ages of 20–49 were married for the first time before the age of 18, and 16.9% before the age of 15. The magnitude of these figures becomes clearer by saying that the corresponding figures for the general population are 6.8% and 0.8% (UNICEF, 2014). Marriage is a strong factor in group identity and a mechanism to prevent assimilation among traditional Roma. Child marriages are a way to keep the group united and compact. As previously demonstrated in the global context, also in Roma communities, child marriages are founded on the idea that girls remain protected from harmful knowledge and experiences when they are married young (ACIDT, 2011; Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; Kyuchukov, 2011).
Several traditions that are typical to Roma marriages have a negative impact on the age of marrying. First, among conservative Roma, virginity is considered to be the most important attribute of the bride. Girls who have “lost their virginity” before marriage, or who cannot prove to be virgin, are at risk of discrimination as well as verbal and physical abuse of the community. They may also lose their chances of getting married. As a result, they may not have a place in the community because motherhood is an important part of Roma women’s lives. In addition, the girl’s family may be ridiculed and required to make payments to the groom’s family if the girl is not a virgin (ACIDT, 2011; Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015). Because of this, traditional Roma parents still monitor girls’ behaviour and restrict their movement (Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; Kyuchukov, 2011). The need to preserve the virginity of girls has thus commonly led to early school withdrawals and the practice of child marriage. In general, Eastern European Roma men also tend to marry younger than the general population, and therefore the age difference between spouses is usually small (ACIDT, 2011; Hotchkiss et al., 2016; Kyuchukov, 2011).

Another example of tradition that negatively influence the age of marrying is the ancient “bride-price” tradition, which has been preserved among Eastern European Roma. The “bride-price” is paid by the groom’s family as compensation for the girl’s family when she leaves her parents’ home to get married. Some Roma interpret the amount paid as an appreciation for virginity, not as a bride’s price. Traditionally, the grooms’ parents also pay for the wedding party (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007). Further, the “bride-price” determines the social status of children born in wedlock and is a way of protecting girls from mistreatment by their new families. In some sub-groups of Roma, this tradition has also led to a series of bride exchanges between the groups in order to get the “bride-price” back to the clan. Girls are valued differently, and a bride of equal value is expected in return (Pamporov, 2007).

A third tradition, common to Roma, is “stealing the bride” or “elopement”, which girls often take an active part in. Elopements are often attempts to avoid parental marriage contracts, but at same time increase the number of child marriages as the goal is the first sexual intercourse which legitimates such marriages (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007). Young couples tend to run away together and stay overnight with the groom’s female relatives. The girl’s family is then informed that the marriage has taken place and the
families agree on the details of the celebrations (Pamporov, 2007). In traditional Roma families parents negotiate and bargain the terms of the marriage. In many Roma groups, boys’ fathers make decisions about who is asked to marry, and girls’ fathers respond these proposals. Today, however, there is a growing trend that young couples create families, not their parents. In any case, the patriarchal mentality remains a considerable part of the Roma communities (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007).
3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The tradition of child marriage in the Eastern European Roma is a crucial global and European human rights, gender equality and health issue. Child marriages are one of the factors that make particularly Roma women vulnerable (FRA, 2014). Since child marriage is not only a result, but a process (McDougal et al., 2018) it is important to understand what is the process of initiating and executing child marriage, and who are the decision-makers during this process. Previous research has tended to focus on outcomes and determinants of child marriage rather than the influencing and decision-making factors that lead to it.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of Bulgarian Roma women who were married as minors. The study aims at investigating which factors these women experienced as influencing the process of child marriage, as well as examine whom they believe to be involved in this process and what their role in that process is.
4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

The material for this study was collected in the form of interviews in order to examine the views and lived experiences of Bulgarian women with Roma identity. The aim of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of people’s own experiences and perceptions. A qualitative method provides an effective way to study and explain real-world problems and understand how people see reality in their natural context (Moser & Korstjens, 2017a; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018), which is why it was a natural choice as the method for this study.

4.1 Sample

Finding the most appropriate sample for this study began with the question: “what is the best sampling method and who are the best informants?” (Elo et al., 2014). Purposeful snowball sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2017b) was conducted to select participants in this study, because Bulgarian Roma are often marginalized and hard to reach. In practice, participants were referred by those with access to them. A representative of the small foundation called ”Sazidanie”, located in Sofia, Bulgaria assisted in the practical implementation of study by contacting key persons, who were religious leaders of Roma communities, and they further approached and recruited suitable candidates for the interviews.

In order to gather the best information on the subject, participants in this study were deliberately selected (Elo et al., 2014; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c). The selection criteria for the participants were; that they were Bulgarian women with Roma identity, have married as minors, preferably after 2000, but are now adults and voluntarily willing to share their experiences for the purpose of research. After considering a number of other options, no more exclusion criteria were set, because there was a risk that participants would be too difficult to identify, which could thus limit the sample size. In addition, it was believed that these criteria would be sufficient to provide suitable participants and relevant information. The aim was to interview as many Roma women as possible with the given time and resources. The number of participants was difficult to predict since it depended, for example, on the time available of key persons and how many Roma women were reached.
and recruited. The characteristics of the participants are described more detail in the findings chapter and in appendix 1 (Participant Characteristics).

4.2 Data Collection

The data analysis process began with a reflection on what could be the best way to collect information on child marriage among Roma. The use of a questionnaire as an option to collect data was excluded because Roma women are often uneducated and there is a great potential for misunderstanding when using written text. The interview method was deemed as the best data collection method because it offers a way to interact directly with the participants and allows them to express their views freely. In addition, because previous studies provided limited up-to-date information on the subject, making it difficult to predict the direction of responses (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2018), the flexibility of conducting the interviews was seen as an advantage.

Interview Guide

In order to collect the same information from all participants, an interview guide was created (see appendix 2: Interview Guide). After reviewing relevant literature on the research topic, four phases were identified in contracting child marriages: preparing for marriage (Kyuchukov, 2011), the marital initiation (McDougal et al., 2018; Santhya et al., 2010), the negotiation phase (John et al., 2018; McDougal et al., 2018) and the decision on marriage phase (McDougal et al., 2018). The creation of the interview guide began by identifying these phases and selecting them as the main themes. The next step was to identify the subordinate themes and connect them to the main themes. The literature provided many topics related to child marriage. Some of them, such as parties of the negotiations and decision-making (John et al., 2018; McDougal et al., 2018), were considered universal and were therefore selected as sub-themes. Because marriage in Roma culture has characteristics, such as “elopement” and paying the “bride-price” (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007), studies that provide important insights into the traditions of Roma marriage were further explored. According to the literature, some traditions had already begun to recede at the time of previous research, but they were included in the guide to examine if they still exist and eventually to obtain additional information
The interview guide was piloted by interviewing an older Bulgarian woman with general knowledge on Roma issues. The purpose of the pre-interview was to find out how the themes and related questions are understood, how time consuming the interview is and how it goes with the interpreter. The pre-interview indicated that the questions were suitable to obtain a rich narrative, so no changes were made to the interview guide.

Conducting the Interviews

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researcher in May 2019. Five participants took part in individual interviews, four were interviewed in pairs and one group interview consisted of four women. Interviews were conducted in three locations in Bulgaria. The first was the Roma settlement of a big city, which is a good example of a segregated, urban Roma neighbourhood. It is one of the largest Roma settlements in Bulgaria, and in the whole Europe, with an estimated 25 000–50 000 inhabitants. Other locations were a small Central Bulgarian village with a population of 1 300 inhabitants, where the Roma live among the general population, and a town near Plovdiv, with approximately 15 000 inhabitants and segregated Roma settlements.

The interview guide directed the discussion during the interviews, but the purpose was not to conduct rigorous question-and-answer interviews but rather to have natural and encouraging dialogue. Therefore, the interview guide was designed deliberately flexible and as unstructured as possible. This enabled the guide to be further developed during the data collection if new relevant issues were to arise at that phase and thus help to reveal the richness of the phenomenon (Elo et al., 2014; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c). The benefit of face-to-face interviews was flexibility. During the interviews the questions could be repeated and clarified (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). In addition, more depth could be acquired by adjusting the questions in the discussions (Bengtsson, 2016). Some participants were more willing to share information than others, and the interview created a situation where it was possible to seize the opportunity as it happened.

Special caution was given to non-judgmental and non-directive approach, as vulnerable
groups need to be treated with special consideration (Moser & Korstjens, 2017b). The researcher behaved courteously and showed respect to the participants’ values and beliefs and their wishes for conducting interviews. Because some topics related to marriage, especially child marriage, can be sensitive in nature, the wording of the questions required special care. For instance, direct references to sensitive issues, such as love and sex, were excluded from the guide because they are taboo in Roma culture. They were considered during each interview on the basis of its development. The participants were able to steer the course of the interview (Moser & Korstjens, 2017c). Sensitive topics, such as sexuality, were only raised if the participant was open and seemed willing to answer delicate questions. In any case, participants were reminded that there was no need to answer questions that felt uncomfortable.

The themes were sequenced from common topics that were easy to discuss, such as childhood, into deeper ones as this was believed to alleviate possible anxiety among participants. In the beginning of the interview many participants were reserved, but in most cases the atmosphere became relaxed after a while and interviews evolved more into a dialogue. The participants were free to choose the environment that suited them best (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2007; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c). Some participants wanted company for the interview, and this was taken into account and allowed. As a result, the original plan to conduct only individual interviews could not be implemented. The participants found the fact that the situation was not easy for the researcher as a mitigating factor. Social cues, such as motivational vocal sounds, body language and rewarding words seemed to encourage participants to deepen and share their thoughts (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2018).

The contact person from the co-operating organization acted as an interpreter in interviews. All participants spoke Bulgarian. One of them spoke English but occasionally needed an interpreter. The interviews were recorded on a small tape recorder provided by the contact person. It was tested beforehand and deemed as capable of recording normal speech within the room.
4.3 Data Analysis

There are several qualitative data analysis methods. Different options were considered, and after a careful investigation into which method would suit this study best, inductive content analysis was selected. In inductive content analysis, concepts are derived from the data by scattering it into smaller units, coding them and grouping them into categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c). Content analysis has the advantage of being able to deal with any type of written text and does not set criteria for the number of informants (Bengtsson, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017b). According to Elo & Kyngäs (2007) another great benefit of content analysis is that a big volume of written data can be processed, which is often needed in interviews. Content analysis is also a particularly useful way of providing evidence on sensitive topics and giving voice to vulnerable populations (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c) which were also very important considerations. The analysis was based on the phases of the content analysis study, namely the preparation, organization and reporting of the results proposed by Elo et al. (2014). The following is a brief description of the process.

Preparation Phase

Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2018) emphasize the importance of focusing on a narrow phenomenon and only on topics that answer the purpose of the study even if the material raises other interesting issues, and this was kept in mind throughout the analysis process. As suggested by Moser & Korstjens (2017c), preliminary data analysis began at the same time as the interviews as field notes were made on the initial impressions. Informal discussions were held on child marriages with the previously mentioned religious leaders to gain insights into the phenomenon and its prevalence in their communities.

The data recorded on the tape were transcribed verbatim to produce explicit transcripts (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c). The researcher started transcribing in Bulgaria immediately after the interviews and continued in Finland. To ensure that the data represent the information correctly (Elo et al., 2014) participants’ speech and translation were compared by the researcher to identify potential errors. The interviews lasted 45–80 minutes each. Transcripts were typed in Arial font, size 12, and space between lines was 1.5. The final review contained a total of 46 A4 papers. As Moser &
Korstjens (2017c) point out, data transcription is not a passive act, so the goal was at the same time to immerse the author in the interpretation process. Therefore, writing notes on emerging thoughts continued during transcription.

The basic decision in content analysis is the choice of unit of analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). Complete interviews were selected as units of analysis because they were the most appropriate context for meaning units during the analysis. In order to find meanings, patterns and deeper sense of the whole (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c) the ready transcripts were read and re-read through several times. To describe all aspects of the content (Elo et al., 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2018) initial impressions, notes and headings were written on the margins each round. During this open coding (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007), the preliminary headings were compiled in a list into separate sheets.

To identify the meaning units, the data were reviewed by focusing on what could be the smallest unit in the text that contains information and insights relevant to the purpose of the study. In order to maintain the meaning units large enough to contain relevant meaning, individual units were reduced to be single sentences or constellations of a few sentences (Bengtsson, 2016; Elo et al., 2014). The meaning units were initially collected and grouped into content areas (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003) based on the interview guide. To ensure that all aspects of the content were taken into account in relation to the purpose of the study (Bengtsson, 2016), the initial headings were revised, and the original transcriptions were read and compared to the list of meaning units. Each meaning unit was separated from the original data by coloring it to find unmarked data. If unmarked text was not relevant for the purpose of the study, it was excluded.

**Organization Phase**

Data abstraction continued by condensing the located meaning units, which means that the number of words was reduced, but the essential message was maintained. Shorter units were continually reviewed to ensure that the core message of the text was preserved. During this process some of the meaning units were further divided in parts because it was not intended that each of them would have multiple meanings (Bengtsson, 2016; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Relying on the impressions of the whole, the condensed
meaning units were labelled with descriptive codes to gain new insights into the data. Again, the codes were compared to the interview texts to ensure that they fit the context (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Graneheim & Lundman, 2003).

The codes were further organized into categories. Graneheim & Lundman (2003) suggest that categories express the manifest content of the text. The codes were compiled as a mindmap and compared on the basis of differences and similarities. The initiative categories were then transferred to a table where the codes were further reviewed by asking the questions “who, what, when or where?” and evaluating which codes seem to apply to the same topics and therefore fall into the same categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). This continued until no code was between categories nor fit into more than one category (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). If too many different codes were grouped, they were regrouped (Elo et al., 2014). During the process, the categories were reviewed and renamed several times, and some were combined until it was reasonable and possible, and a rational explanation was obtained (Bengtsson, 2016; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Table 1 gives an example of the analysis process.

**TABLE 1. An Example of the Analysis Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Unit</th>
<th>My grandmother was really tough. Until eight o’clock I was allowed to go out and after that I needed to stay at home.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condensed Meaning Unit</td>
<td>My grandmother was strict, and I had limited time to be out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Restriction of movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Category</td>
<td>Restrictions imposed by parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Parents’ attempts to keep their daughters pure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Factors, dynamics and people as components of the process influencing conflict between traditional values and the demands of modern society, thus increasing the risk of Roma child marriages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the number of the categories was quite large after grouping the codes, the subcategories were formed and were then merged into five main categories (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Graneheim & Lundman, 2003) which were named after content characteristics (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Because the data were rich with underlying meaning at
the interpretative level (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Graneheim & Lundman, 2003) abstraction continued and as a result, one theme was formulated to combine these meanings. The theme was created by grouping all the main categories together.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

The author of this thesis was committed to follow the ethical guidelines issued by the Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity [TENK], 2009). Ethical thinking guided the research process at all phases. Financial and social harm, or any other damage to participants was avoided by carefully handling and storing confidential information and presenting the findings in a respectful manner and by avoiding prejudiced manifestation.

Permissions

No ethical vetting was performed. However, prior to commencing the study, the ethics clearance was clarified. The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics in Finland has published guidelines that should be followed. Humanistic, social and behavioral research must adhere to ethical principles to ensure that participants have the right to self-determination and privacy, to prevent harm and to protect information. Ethical review is only required for precisely defined research configurations (TENK, 2009) that were not applied in this study. Numerous internet searches were conducted on potential national or local research ethics advisory boards in Bulgaria. According to the European Network of Research Ethics Committees (n.d.) there are requirements considering multi-centre trials on drugs and biomedical research. The Bulgarian-speaking person conducted searches with the same results Subsequently, through researcher’s contacts, Bulgarian actors, referring to the director and lawyers of a particular Sofia hospital, confirmed the same requirements. Therefore, the ethical research permission was sought from the co-operative foundation (see appendix: 3: Application for a Permission for Research).

Regarding the Participants

Participants were given an oral explanation of the nature and objectives of this study to
ensure that participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. All questions were answered honestly and to the best of the researcher’s ability. All participants were informed that the data collected were to be anonymised, used only for the purposes of this study and related publications, and later disposed of. Written informed consent was obtained containing the same information (see appendix 4: Informed Consent Form in English). The informed consent letter was translated by the official translation agency into Bulgarian (see appendix 5: Informed Consent Form in Bulgarian). The consent letter was built according to the instructions of “Informed Consent Form Template for Qualitative Studies” by World Health Organization (WHO, n.d.). Separate written and oral consent of participants was requested for the tape recordings. Participants were informed that they had the right to leave the study at any time and were also given a genuine opportunity not to answer questions that might have made them feel uncomfortable.

The WHO (n.d.) does not encourage incentives that exceed the costs of participating in research. Participants in this study did not receive any reimbursements or incentives. They were offered small snacks and beverages as a compliment gesture. The key persons were offered lunch as a thank-you for their time and effort. The expenses were not high in the local context. The researcher had no competing interests and did not receive financial support for the job.

**Data Protection**

Data protection is the most important area of privacy protection and an important principle in the research ethics. From the research ethics perspective, privacy includes the protection of research data, data storage and research publications (TENK, 2009). To ensure a detailed understanding of the new European Union Data Protection Rules (European Commission, 2018b), they were carefully examined. The Data Protection Rules define personal data as “any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person”. The processing of personal data that reveals racial or ethnic origin is prohibited, but anonymised data is not considered as personal data. Therefore, the collection of material for this study did not lead to the establishment of a personal data register under the Personal Data Act. However, ethnicity has been identified as an indicator that may entail higher ethical risks. When examining the views of specific ethnic group, it is inevitable to mention their ethnic identity. The anonymity of the data ensures that nothing can be associated
with identifiable persons, thus preventing them from being harmed.

As previously reported, interviews were tape recorded for the transcripts. The tapes, and afterwards the transcripts were code-numbered to ensure privacy and complete anonymity of the participants (Moser & Korstjents, 2017b). Only the necessary information was collected to minimize the data (European Commission, 2018b) so no personal information, such as name, was requested or stored. During the transcription, all references to names and other identifiable information were removed. Only the researcher has processed the collected material. The interviews were without delay transferred from the tape recorder to the researcher’s personal computer, which is password protected. When the transcriptions were complete, the recordings were deleted.

4.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Regarding trustworthiness, Graneheim & Lundman (2003) argue that the use of concepts in qualitative research differs from quantitative research. Though there is no consensus on the concepts that should be used when examining the trustworthiness of content analysis study (Bengtsson, 2016), according to Elo et al. (2014) terms such as credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability and authenticity are often presented as the core of the trustworthiness regarding it. Trustworthiness incorporates issues at all phases of the study (Bengtsson, 2016; Elo et al., 2014). Elo et al. (2014) have developed a checklist for researchers to build the trustworthiness of content analysis study (see appendix 6) which was followed in this study in order to increase trustworthiness.

In order to obtain a reliable and adequate background, several literature searches were conducted, mostly between autumn 2018 and early 2019. The searches were restricted to academic articles in English since year 2010 and began by framing different word combinations and researching various online databases (see appendix 7: Literature Search Terms). Some articles were found in the reference lists of the studies under view. In addition, information on child marriages was collected from the reports and websites of major global health actors, such as the World Bank and the European Union, as well as organizations working among the Roma in Bulgaria. Two Bulgarian publications (Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance and Pamporov) were included
because they provided valuable insights into Roma marriage customs, although they did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Credibility deals with the research process (Bengtsson, 2016). Graneheim & Lundman (2003) highlight the importance of selecting the most appropriate data collection method to ensure the credibility of content analysis. The best method provides the best possible answers to the research problems and ensures the trustworthiness of content analysis (Elo et al., 2014). Preparation phase of this study, containing data collection method, sampling strategy and selection of appropriate unit of analysis (Elo et al., 2014; Graneheim & Lundman, 2003), is described extensively. Piloting the interview guide helped to determine the suitable interview questions (Elo et al., 2014; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2018) and ensured that the interview guide was appropriate. As described earlier, the themes of interview guide are based on previous research. Depending on the cultural context, and with minor modifications if necessary, the interview guide may be considered useful in similar studies, factor that concerns with the dependability of the study, and in its part guarantees the transferability of the findings to other settings. The interview guide is attached to the study to increase credibility.

With regard to credibility, one strategy to ensure it in this study was data triangulation, meaning that to gain different perspectives in the matter under dissimilar conditions (Elo et al., 2014; Graneheim & Lundman, 2003; Moser & Korstjens, 2017d) interviews were conducted in three different locations. The context of the study is described, and participants have been accurately characterized and identified to increase the dependability and transferability of the findings (Elo et al., 2014; Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). In addition, participants are numbered and listed in the appendices. It can be concluded that the participants in this study have the best knowledge of the matters related to the purpose of the study (Elo et al., 2014) and the sample is therefore appropriate. The sample size of this study can be considered relatively small and it may have negative impact on credibility. On the other hand, after completing all interviews, no substantial new information was produced so it was concluded that the saturation point was reached (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2018, Moser & Korstjens, 2017c).

Potential risk factors were considered when designing the study. Male interpreter and interview situation with an unknown foreigner can produce socially desirable answers
(Moser & Korstjens, 2017c), because some topics, such as love related issues, are taboos among Roma, even in families (Kyuchukov, 2011). As recommended by Elo et al. (2014), the interview guide was left as unstructured as possible, which allowed the interviews to develop naturally, and the flexibility to respond to participants’ needs. The interpreter was largely familiar with Roma culture and customs and was therefore a valuable asset during the interviews. His knowledge secured a culturally sensitive approach in the meetings with key persons and participants. Without the involvement of contact and key persons, the access to research settings would have been impossible. The use of an interpreter was mandatory as very few Roma speak English. Its purpose was not only to ensure smooth interviews but also to make sure that that the participants’ views were fully understood.

Dependability deals with the consistency of findings. According to Graneheim & Lundman (2003), consistency can suffer if data collection extends over time. In this study, interviews were conducted within a short period of time. It ensured that the questions remained same at each interview session, but at the same time gave the process a chance to live when participants presented new insights. Some participants wanted to participate in interviews in pairs or groups, and later it turned out that because of that some answers were rather superficial, and the contribution of some of the participants was lower. The researcher is aware that the presence of other people during the interview may have influenced some responses. On the other hand, particularly during the group interview, it was conveyed that the responses of other participants encouraged some others to talk about difficult and sensitive topics.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, a detailed and transparent explanation of the construction of the categories is presented (Elo et al., 2014; Moser & Korstjens, 2017d). An example of the abstraction process is provided to give the reader an insight of the analysis process (Bengtsson, 2016; Elo et al., 2014). With respect to the reporting phase, the content and hierarchy of categories are clearly presented. The table provides an overview of the categories and they are reported in text format in the same order. Conformability of the study means that the data correspond to the information provided by the participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2017d). To increase the conformability of this study, and to guarantee that the findings are based on the data (Bengtsson, 2016; Elo et al., 2014; Moser & Korstjens, 2017d), appropriate meaning units are represented in the findings as
representative quotes to indicate the relationship between the data and the findings. To confirm richness of the data (Elo et al., 2014) examples of quotes are provided from all participants. Additionally, the findings provide detailed information on how each participant responded.

One important aspect of credibility is the researcher’s self-awareness. The great advantage of the researcher in this study is familiarity with interviewing on sensitive topics, dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds and working with an interpreter. In addition, the researcher has spent a lot of time in Bulgaria and has therefore acquired a basic knowledge of language and culture. To explore the context and deepen the understanding (Moser & Korstjens, 2017d) of Roma culture, the researcher had several discussions with the interpreter. The basic knowledge of culture helped the researcher to adopt the suitable approach during the interviews. Basic knowledge of Bulgarian significantly improved the reliability of transcripts. The authenticity of the study refers to the range in which the researcher “fairly and faithfully show the range of realities” (Elo et al., 2014). Because the author has no background in conducting the research, a lot of resources were given to perform content analysis accurately and faithfully describe it.

According to Graneheim & Lundman (2003), there is always some interpretation in data processing. A diary and reflective notes (Moser & Korstjens, 2017d) were kept to examine the researcher’s own conceptual lens, settings and considerations at different phases of the research in order to help self-reflection and avoid bias. To increase the credibility of the data, the researcher transcribed the interviews carefully and without haste (Bengtsson, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017c) The material was read and re-read several times to become familiar with it and to understand the whole (Bengtsson, 2016; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). To avoid misinterpretations and memory distortions, the researcher repeatedly returned to written interviews to obtain the correct interpretation (Elo et al., 2014). Overall, the design of the study can be considered to meet the criteria of basic trustworthiness. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which indicates their validity.
5 FINDINGS

As discussed above, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of Bulgarian Roma women who were married as minors. The aim was to investigate which factors these women experienced as influencing the process of child marriage, as well as examine whom they believe to be involved in this process and what their role in the process is. The main findings are provided in this chapter.

5.1 Participant Characteristics

Based on the interviews, the findings contain the views of 13 female participants, with a mean age of 24 years. The participants were married in the traditional way between the ages of 13 and 17. Ten of them had one or more children. Most of them (12 participants) had conducted the elopement. One had been in an arranged marriage during her first marriage and one participant was "stolen" by her husband. The age differences between the spouses were generally not large (a maximum of 6 years) and in some cases the other party was even younger than the participant. Two of the participants were divorced. For more details and participant identification numbers, see appendix 1 (Participant Characteristics).

5.2 Categories

The data generated one theme and five categories with multiple sub-categories. As can be seen in Table 2, the main finding was that there are factors, dynamics and people in the marriage process that influence conflict between traditional values and the demands of modern society, thus increasing the risk of Roma child marriages. This theme was repeated in all categories.
TABLE 2. Theme, Categories and Sub-categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Getting married</th>
<th>Parental involvement in the process</th>
<th>Making marriage known to the community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors, dynamics and people as components of the process influencing conflict between traditional values and the demands of modern society, thus increasing the risk of Roma child marriages</td>
<td>Social stressors in childhood</td>
<td>Unconventional family structures</td>
<td>Initiation of marriage</td>
<td>Parents’ actions and emotional reactions</td>
<td>Negotiations on practical issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Childhood responsibilities</td>
<td>Triggers to initiate elopement</td>
<td>Parental acceptance of the situation</td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropping out of school</td>
<td>Execution of marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>External partakers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Formalizing marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on categories, the discussion of findings is divided into five chapters, under which the findings of the sub-categories are examined. Finally, a summary of the findings is presented.

5.2.1 Social Stressors in Childhood

Childhood social stressors are described in three sub-categories, which are Unconventional family structures, Childhood responsibilities and Dropping out of school. Taken together, these findings provide the context for the study, and contain factors that influence later decision-making concerning marriage.

Unconventional Family Structures

Participants’ childhood family situations were often unstable. More than half (participants 1, 2, 5, 9, 11, 12 and 13) reported growing up in extended family structures with grandparents living in the same household or in very close contact with family. Many of them were raised by grandparents at least partly, even if they had also a parent or both in their lives, and many referred to their grandparents as parents. The following comments illustrate the importance and prestige of grandparents. One participant (9) stated: "For me,
mother and father were my grandparents.”

I lived with my grandmother and grandfather since baby. They took me. My grandmother really wanted to take care of me and just took me there.  
(participant 13)

Some (participants 2, 9, 11, 12 and 13) lived with their grandparents separated from one or both parents for different reasons, such as a divorce. Several participants (1, 2, 10, 11 and 12) expressed that one or both parents lived in other locations within the country or even abroad, in the latter case because of work. One participant (11) lived abroad with her family for several years but returned to Bulgaria alone as a minor. There were some suggestions (participants 2, 9 and 12) that the death of a parent or parents’ divorce negatively affected communication within the family. The remaining parent could live elsewhere, or even in the same apartment, but without interest in the child’s life. Participants (9 and 12), whose parents had divorced, reported that communication with their mother had been totally prevented. One of them (participant 9) expressed strong feelings about being rejected in the step family because she was treated differently from his father's other children with his new wife. Less than half of the participants (3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) indicated having lived with both parents throughout their childhood.

My mother found another husband and lived with him in other part of the city. I lived with my grandmother.  
(participant 2)

My granny and grandpa didn’t allow me to keep contact with my mother because my step mother was also living in the house.  
(participant 9)

**Childhood Responsibilities**

Most participants (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 12) claimed that in their childhood families, mothers were primarily responsible to care for children while fathers were at work. For example, one participant (7) reported that: "My mother was staying home with us.”

They both went to [other country] after I got married. Before that my father was there and my mother stayed here [to care for children].  
(participant 10)
In some cases, this caretaker role of mothers shifted to daughters when they were old enough. None of the participants indicated that their brothers had taken care of them, but one of them (3) and her smaller siblings had been cared for by their older sister. Two participants (2 and 4) bore a great deal of responsibility for their siblings from a very young age. It was reported that children sometimes make big decisions about their lives, as two participants (9 and 11) had been allowed to decide on living and quitting school as minors.

I was going to school, for the first grade. I was taking care of my sister but when she was going to sleep – she was a baby – I was going to school and went back when she was waking… I left the baby to sleep alone.
(participant 4)

I decided that I will not go back to [other country]. And they left without me. I stayed in Bulgaria with my friends and we went to cafes and that was what I wanted.
(participant 11)

Dropping Out of School

Participants were asked about their level of education. In Bulgaria, school is compulsory for children aged 7–16. Basic education consists of grades 1–8, and compulsory education is completed in upper secondary schools (4–5 years). The vast majority of participants did not complete the school as only one them (participant 12) completed upper secondary school. One participant (7) never attended school. When asked about the reason for dropping out of school, almost half (participants 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 13) simply stated that it was because of getting married and/or getting pregnant. Only one participant (1) had returned to school after leaving it. She expressed that studying is difficult since she must take care of her baby and no support is available. Two participants (10 and 13) were considering returning to school, and thus completing compulsory education. One of them (participant 13) had divorced, and now planned to graduate, encouraged by her evangelical congregation.

I got pregnant meanwhile and I felt very sick so I couldn’t attend school regularly, so I stopped. I couldn’t finish.
(participant 10)
I am going to school now. It is a bit difficult, I am on individual schedual. I go only to exams. I have to take the child with me to the school. Everybody is busy. And I need to take care of my child.

(participant 1)

Two of the participants (2 and 3) expressed that school attendance ended prematurely because it became impossible to attend school. The above-mentioned obligations to care for siblings led to lagging in studies. As one of them (participant 2) told: “My mother had to go to work and I had to take care of my sisters.” In one case (participant 4), the father decided to take her out of school at the first grade because of her illness. As stated earlier, sometimes participants (9 and 11) themselves had decided not to attend school anymore.

…until the 5th grade. --- I didn’t have parents. Because of that I was thinking that there is no reason to go to school and graduate.

(participant 9)

5.2.2 Parents’ Attempts to Keep Their Daughters Pure

This section is divided into three sub-caterogories. They illustrate the restrictions imposed by parents, parents’ reasoning for these restrictions, and girls’ responses to them. Restrictions and their sources are important factors in deciding on the child marriage among Roma.

Restrictions Imposed by the Parents

Participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 13) had a general perception that they had some restrictions, mostly regarding movement, as children and teens. In all these cases, participants reported that they were either not allowed to go to the places they wanted, meet their friends freely, or most commonly, had limited outdoor time. In two cases (4 and 10) the participants experienced restrictions also on school attendance. One participant (10) was allowed to be free and meet friends, but when the parents found out that there were also boys in the party, restrictions on movement occurred. On the other hand, two participants (3 and 9) reported a total lack of control by parents, also concerning school. There were no mid-range answers. One participant (9) felt that the lack of control was due to a lack of interest from her father and grandparents in her life, which caused her great
feelings of insecurity.

I was having friends, not boyfriends, but just friends. When they realised there was a boy, they wanted me to stop going to school. (participant 10)

They were not that kind of strict parents. They let me to go everywhere without restrictions. (participant 3)

Restrictions on movement were often maintained through violence or its indirect thread. Some participants (1, 2, 4 and 11) expressed being shouted at and disciplined, while others (participants 8 and 10) reported violence if, for example, they were late. One participant (8) commented: “If I was not home at eight my father was beating me, slapping me.”

I have an older brother. --- He was the one who was all the time shouting to me, restricting me, putting discipline. (participant 11)

Parental Reasoning for the Restrictions

According to the participants, their parents had many different reasons for limiting their movement. Most participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12) expressed that parents mainly sought to prevent them from getting married too early. One participant (2) reported: “My mother said not to get married too early.” This goal was largely linked to parents’ expectations that participants would study and graduate. Parents feared that marriage would end schooling prematurely. Parents’ wishes and ideas about the importance of studying were repeated in several responses (participants 1, 5, 10, 11 and 13). They argued that parents thought their daughters had a chance to study and should use it. Parents also wished their daughters better opportunities in the future if they studied.

They wanted me to study because I speak fluent [foreign language] and I had a possibility to study. (participant 11)

One participant (5) pointed out that the age issues were important for parents because they wanted to prevent unnecessary mistakes in their daughter’s life. She described a daughter’s marriage as a loss for the family. Marriage and children at a young age were
considered even a “prison” that limits girls’ opportunities in life.

It was also about the age… If a small girl, at 13 to 14 years old, gets a baby, she is locking herself in the family life and can be like a slave there.
(participant 5)

The same participant (5) stated that the parents justified the restrictions by tradition but continued that the reason was the appreciation of virginity. Talking about this issue one participant (9) said: ‘Virginity is very important here.” Many other participants (1, 2, 7, 8, 9 and 10) also noted the importance of virginity although parents did not always explicitly mention it. As one of the participants (8) stated: ”It was all about the boys”.

Tradition that we follow strictly is, that a girl should keep her virginity. That’s why if a girl gets married and it happens that she is not a virgin it is a great shame for the parents. Being a virgin is a source of pride also for the girl.
(participant 5)

Although virginity is considered important, several participants (5, 6, 7 and 9) expressed that sexual issues were too sensitive to talk about for their parents and themselves. Only one participant (5) stated that she had conversations on sexual issues with her mother, even though it was very embarrassing for both. The silence of sexual issues also led to total infamilriaty with, for example, birth control (participant 9).

She found a time to sit with me and to explain me those things, although it was embarrassing also for her.
(participant 5)

He was bigger than me --- and probably he knew something about how to protect himself, or us, from pregnancy, but I didn’t know anything.
(participant 9)

Girls’ Responses to the Restrictions

Like most young girls, participants also wanted to meet friends and people of the opposite sex. Restrictions imposed by parents made it difficult but young couples created complex and creative solutions to keep contact. Most of the participants (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13) announced that they were dating secretly their future husbands. One participant (2) reported that: “When grandmother fell to sleep, I went out to meet him secretly.”
Parental regulations were circumvented, for example, by creating secret signals (2, 5, 7 and 8), such as whistlings, and in more modern ways. Social media was a way for many (1, 6, 12 and 13) to interact with boys. As one participant (13) stated: "We were chatting in Facebook". There were suggestions that the participants found the restrictions unreasonable, so they did not consider keeping the girl forcefully at home as a good approach. This led to general disobedience (participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13), such as going out secretly or lying to parents, in order to meet boys, or even to get to school. Two participants (1 and 2) resorted to harder means in their quest for freedom. They reported to have blackmailed and threatened their parents to be able meet their boyfriends.

I lied to them that I broke up with my boyfriend to let me go to school, but I was still dating him secretly.
(participant 10)

I told them that I will not go to school, that I will stay in home and I will… blackmailing. And with no… I left her without choice.
(participant 1)

5.2.3 Getting Married

This section describes the initiation phase and impulses and factors leading to marriage. In this study, the execution of marriage generally meant elopement. Elopement refers to a marriage that is performed in secretive and sudden way. This section also looks at the actions of the different partakers involved in the process.

Initiation of Marriage

The marital initiation refers to the phase at which marriage is proposed and it is discussed whether it should take place. Participants were asked to describe events and decision-making related to the initiation of marriage. Although the events that triggered marriage were often boisterous, which is discussed in the next section, the innermost motivation to marry was mostly (participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12 and 13) love, or longing for it, or desire to be with the boy. As one participant (1) put it: “I just… we just fell in love and we decided that.”
It was more like I needed someone to love me and to get attention. Those are things I didn’t get from my parents’ house.
(participant 9)

Since spontaneous actions often came as a surprise even to the participants themselves, dating times were usually short. Although some couples (participants 2, 5, 8, 10, and 11) dated for a year or two, there were several stories (participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12 and 13) of very short dating times. One participant (13) had met her future husband only once before their marriage.

And it was enough for me that... four months of knowing him... It was enough for me to understand his parents and him and his brother and everything about them.
(participant 1)

Most participants first mentioned that the decision to marry was taken jointly, but additional information made it clear that generally boys proposed marriage and girls agreed. One participant (13) commented: "We decided to get married. He was suggesting that we run away." Only one participant (2) reported to having initiated her marriage. One participant (3) expressed that the initiation was entirely single-minded as the boy decided to "steal" her and then prevented her from leaving.

So, he came and kidnapped me... Finally, they grabbed me and put me to the car --- He said that: “No, you came here and I’m not letting you out anymore”.
(participant 3)

One participant (13) had a different story since her first marriage was arranged. The initiative for marriage came from the groom’s family and was taken forward by her grandparents. The participant expressed that she had no wish to marry but eventually her grandparents convinced her to do so by highlighting the good aspects of marriage, such as keeping her close to home as the groom lived next door.

I didn’t want to marry and none of my people wanted it. But afterwards my grandmother and grandfather agreed with it. They calmed me.
(participant 13)
Triggers to Initiate Elopement

Most participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13) reported that triggers to marry were closely connected to the restrictions imposed by parents. Worsening intergenerational relationships encouraged many participants (2, 4, 10, 11, 12 and 13) to move forward in the process. Some participants (2, 4 and 13) directly reasoned decisions to marry by overly strict parental rules. They argued that generally poor intergenerational relationships led to a final dispute that triggered the elopement. In general, the decisions to elope were often (participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13) made spontaneously and without planning or after a very brief consideration. Some participants (1, 2, 4, 10, 11 and 13) expressed that the decision to marry came as a surprise even to themselves. For example, one of them (participant 10) commented: “They [parents] didn’t know that we will run away. We didn’t know either.”

--- really heavy disagreement. So, I ran out and said that I am not coming back, and I will get married. And I went to him.
(participant 2)

A few participants (2, 4, 10 and 11) claimed that the parents did not accept their boyfriends, or their families, which led to heavy disputes and thus encouraged girls to make decisions about the future of their relationships. In two cases (participants 2 and 11), while trying to separate the couple, parents tried to resolve the situation by choosing a new groom who they accepted. It affirmed the girls’ decision to marry because they had no other way to avoid the situation. As previously discussed, parental restrictions were sometimes combined with punishments and violence. Therefore, in one case, the reason to elope was purely fear. Participant (10) stated that she decided to elope because she did not dare to go home after her disobedience. One participant (9) found out about pregnancy, which made marriage the only possible choice for the couple, although neither of them wanted it. The couple felt that there were no alternatives because pregnancy was a clear sign of premarital sex and loss of virginity.

My parents were thinking to give me to someone else. I didn’t want to, so I ran away. Without it, I probably wouldn’t have got married. I married him so they wouldn’t give me to someone else.
(participant 11)
After a few dates I got pregnant, so we had to marry. After I realised that I was pregnant, there were not any other possibilities. (participant 9)

Execution of Marriage

As noted earlier, most participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 [in her second marriage] and 13) conducted elopement. The participants agreed that the marriage took place immediately after the elopement and being together over night. One participant (6) commented: ”After we ran away, we were married.” Although not always explicitly stated, it means that the marriage is valid after the first intercourse. The following comment (participant 1) illustrates this view, as it was stated when discussing on how couples traditionally have moved to live together after the engagement party: “For us it wasn’t like that because we did our job before that.” After the elopement, there were no alternatives because the marriage had come into effect. More than half of the participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 11) described the impossibility of cancelling marriage and portrayed that the loss of virginity weakens the girl’s value in the marriage market, and therefore diminishes her chances for the future, for example regarding the choice of spouse. When asked about the dissolution of the marriage after it came into effect through eloping, one participant (11) bluntly stated: ”That is impossible.” On the other hand, one participant (12) felt that divorce did not affect on her status.

Even though marriage decisions were often spontaneous, there were also expressions of short planning (participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 13) because young couples were plotting how to accomplish elopement. These plans consisted of organizing practical matters, such as where to go and how. None of the participants reported any negotiations about later life together. The elopements themselves mainly followed the same pattern; the couple met secretly somewhere and went to the boy’s female relatives for a day or a few days (participants 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13). Three participants (2, 4 and 5) moved directly to the groom’s home and one (participant 1) traveled to meet the boy in another location.
We made a plan before that and one day there was the wedding of some other friend. He took me from the wedding. We came to the village to some friends. We spent a day with friends. In the evening we went to my husband’s home and we stayed there.
(participant 5)

When somebody run away it means that they go to some village to the relatives or friends. --- To his grandmother for four days and came back. First, we went to his house.
(participant 11)

More than half of the participants (2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13) reported that the groom’s family members were not aware of the plans, but there were also phrases, such as: ”the boy’s parents always know” (participant 8). In any case, most participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) stated that the boy’s relatives, generally referring to the mother-in-law, had no difficulties accepting marriage, in many cases even happily. For example, one participant (8) said: ”I was taken very nicely. Even until this point, they have treated me very respectfully.” Only one participant (11) reported that her mother-in-law did not accept her, and two (participants 12 and 13) reported problems, such as violence and over-control by the mother-in-law, later in marriage.

When we got married, he [husband’s brother] was at work and his wife called him: “Congratulations you have a sister-in-law now.” And he was in the night shift and at two o’clock in the night he came home and bought chocolate and Coke and we had a small congratulation party.
(participant 3)

External Partakers

The findings show, that miscellaneous group of other people were involved when the marriage was initiated and executed. Because the relatives of the participants were not aware of their actions, these people were mostly relatives and friends of the grooms. Their activities ranged from practical involvement to psychological influence. Male partakers took part in physical activities, such as acting as a driver or assisting with "stealing the bride" (participants 3, 6 and 8), but their role also included supporting or encouraging the boy (participants 3 and 10). One participant (6) stated: "He came by a car with some friends and took me here." The psychological influence mostly occurred when there were moments of hesitation. A few participants (1, 3 and 4) stated that the groom’s female relatives supported them. These actions included consolation, such as comfort in times of
fear, and attempts to encourage and convince the girl that marriage is worthwhile.

His grandmother came and said: “Oh please, you are so nice, and we like you so much. Why don’t you stay here to be our daughter-in-law?” She tried to comfort me.
(participant 3)

The peers were not a big factor in marrying. Only three participants (9, 10 and 13) indicated that their friends would have played any role when marriage came to the fore. However, in one case (participant 10) the elopement occurred at the same time with a friend and for another (participant 13) a friend tried to prevent the marriage from happening. For one participant (9), a friend offered a “listening ear”.

I wasn’t alone. I was with one friend of mine, one girl, and we both ran away with our boyfriends and got married.
(participant 10)

Only she knew. ”Don’t go, don’t go”. She tried to convince me not to marry.
(participant 13)

None of the participants reported that the officials intervened during the process of marrying. One participant (9) reported that later, when she gave birth, her grandparents had to sign the baby’s papers in the hospital because she was herself a minor.

5.2.4 Parental Involvement in the Process

In the case of parental involvement in the marriage process, two sub-categories were identified. This section goes through the parents’ first reactions and, finally, the marriage approval.

Parents’ Actions and Emotional Reactions

Participants expressed that their parents discovered their marriages in two ways. Only three participants (1, 10 and 13) reported telling themselves. One participant (10) commented: ”I called to say that I’m married.” In many cases (participants 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 11) parents found out or guessed what had happened and searched them out when given
the opportunity. After eloping and hiding for a while the couples usually returned to the boy’s home.

They called me, looked for me. I told them that I ran away with a boy. They came after me to [other town].
(participant 13)

My mother came with her sister, and at some point my aunt pulled me aside and asked "Are you here by your own will or have you been forced?” but I said I want to be here.
(participant 3)

The parents’ emotional reactions to marriage varied greatly. One of the most common reactions was reported to be anger (participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13). Parents showed anger in different ways. Some participants (1, 2, and 4) expressed that they were shouted at, but in some cases the anger erupted as violent acts. For example, one participant (1) described how her father broke the door and, in another case, the participant’s (4) mother was afraid to go home to face her husband’s rage and possible violence. Many parents insisted that their daughters (participants 1, 2, 3, 7, 10 and 13) return home, but they refused. Two participants (7 and 10) were then forcibly taken home and kept behind lock. Some participants (1, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9) noted that the fathers in particular were disappointed. As one of them (participant 8) put it: "Mother’s heart was forgiving but my father was harder”. Overall, all participants reported that their parents were upset and disappointed, even sad, about how things went.

And later, after one week, we came back to his mother’s house and my mother came immediately and dragged me home. One week I was locked home.
(participant 10)

When I got married with [husband’s name] my father got ill for a week. He stayed in bed, was really depressed... didn’t eat or drink anything.
(participant 3)

There were some comments (participants 5, 8 and 9) about being rejected by parents because they felt offended or ashamed after marriage took place. It was suggested (participants 5 and 9) that the shame was due to the feeling that the parents could not keep a young girl under control or safe. In one case the participant (5) thought that: "The problem is always that we run away without permission and we are small.” Rejection took the
form of, for example, a refusal to meet (participant 9) or attend the marriage celebrations (participants 5 and 8). Whilst two participants mentioned that the situation calmed down soon, after parents accepted the situation, for one (9) the experiences of rejection and abandonment continued for a long time.

For about a year my relatives did not want to know me. We didn’t even talk. We were just passing each other on the street and did not talk anything. My grandmother and grandfather, everybody, all my relatives. They were offended... my father is still keeping distance. --- They were offended that I was small and pregnant. It was embarrassing that they couldn’t keep me safe.

(participant 9)

Parental Acceptance of the Situation

As discussed earlier, sexual intercourse by the loss of virginity creates a situation where the alternatives are gone for girls. It also applies to the ability of parents to change the situation. Even though some participants (1, 2, 3, 7, 10 and 13) reported that parents took, or wanted to take them home, in reality parents had no way to undo what had happened.

I was with him and this means that... once I ran away, my parents had no use for me anymore.

(participant 10)

Parents can’t practically do anything when ”it” is done. They just need to accept it, happily or unhappily.

(participant 2)

Despite the great emotional reactions and even harsh actions of parents at the beginning, the vast majority of participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13) stated that their parents approved the situation relatively fast, within a few days or weeks. Some participants (4, 5, 6 and 7) indicated that one of the groom’s family members officially proposed and apologized, after which the situation calmed down. As one participant (7) commented: “My father appeared and took me back. His [husband’s] parents came and made an official proposal.” Almost half (participants 1, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 10) experienced that fathers were the decision-makers who had the final word in forgiveness. Some participants (4, 7 and 8) described that female relatives sought to calm and convince fathers to accept the situation.
My father gave permission that I really get married... After he gave permission my mother took me, and we went back to his [the groom’s] house (participant 10)

5.2.5 Making Marriage Known to the Community

This section of the findings reveals the importance of wedding traditions and the role of celebrations in the marriage process. It consists of four sub-categories dealing with negotiations, celebrations, wedding related symbols and formalizing marriage.

Negotiations on the Practical Issues

The majority of participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12 and 13) claimed that marriage negotiations consisted only of practical arrangements, such as the organization of celebrations. Discussions usually started as soon as the situation calmed down and were dealt with by the couples’ parents. In the case of arranged marriage (participant 12), naturally, the negotiation took place in advance. One participant (1) indicated that parents sometimes also want to ensure that the different traditions of the other family are respected and therefore attach importance to the negotiations. The beverage and food arrangements were emphasized (participants 1, 3, 4, 11, 13 and 14). Commenting on celebrations, one participant (11) stated: "There should be a lot of food. Everybody will talk it later." What comes to the "bride-price" tradition, which has flourished in Roma culture in the past, participants were unanimous in their view that the tradition is fading, and none of them had been paid for. One participant (11) indicated that the tradition still lives in some remote villages.

My parents married me when I was 15... His parents decided and came to ask for me. After the arrangements they came with music to ask me. (participant 12)

In some more distant villages, we know that there are cases of girls being sold but no one here in the nearby villages does it. (participant 11)

Otherwise, economic matters played an important role in the negotiations. The financial
situation of the families greatly influenced the type of celebrations and these issues were discussed between families. On the other hand, it was suggested (participants 1 and 11), that the celebrations provide an opportunity for families in a better financial position to present their potential.

A woman’s side has usually been preparing for an engagement party and man’side wedding but nowadays weddings are not so common, so families share the expenses.  
(participant 5)

People are showing their possibilities in weddings, parties... here it’s like: ”wow, they made the big wedding”.  
(participant 1)

Celebrations

In the past both engagement and wedding parties were traditionally held, but it was claimed (participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12 and 13) that wedding parties are now commonly dropped off. This is supported by the fact that only a few participants (1, 5, 10 and 11) had both celebrations held. Some participants (1, 4 and 11) suggested that the engagement party has a greater role to play as it declares marriage to the community. As one participant (11) put it: “Everybody is wearing their best. The news is spreading that there is a new bride.” One participant (1) even directly stated that the couple cannot just live together without this official announcement to the community. Therefore, after approval, parents usually had an urgent need to decide on the celebration, although some parents (participants 8 and 9) refused to organize a party in their anger. The celebrations were held quickly, one week or, at the latest, one and half months after the elopement (participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 13).

They didn’t even make any wedding or engagement party because my father was very angry.  
(participant 8)

All participants started cohabitation in the boy’s parents’ household. Some of them (participants 1, 4 and 12) expressed that part of the celebrations is, that the girl’s family ”gives” her to a new family. This includes rituals and customs that underline her transition to a new family. This is supported by some participants’ (1, 3, 4 and 12) description of
how the celebrations began at the bride’s home, and later the groom arrived with his party and music to fetch the bride, after which the entourage walked through the neighbourhood declaring the marriage and ended up in the groom’s house.

The groom is preparing the music and orchestra and some guests, and they go to take the girl from home.
(participant 1)

They came with the music and lots of guests to take me. Parents give the bride to the grooms’ relatives.
(participant 12)

Symbols

Some important issues with a symbolic value were raised regarding celebrations. Most participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 12) emphasized the importance of at least one, but preferably multiple, dresses as a part of the celebrations. These dresses, for their part, symbolize leaving home (participants 1 and 3) and their colours indicate the joy of the situation (participants 1, 4, 10 and 11). Some (participants 1, 2, 3 and 10) claimed that it is the duty of the groom’s mother to buy dresses for the bride. It was reported (participants 3 and 12) that marrying without a dress brings shame on the bride and her family. While one participant (5) noted, that at least one fancy dress is important even in a bad financial situation, another (participant 12) mentioned that her party was not the real engagement party because she only had one dress.

She was asking me: ”Why you are crying?” I said: ”I don’t have anyone to buy a dress with. My family will come. It is shameful for us.” She went to her husband and said: ”[Participant’s husband] is getting married and his wife’s parents are coming. She is with the same dress as when she left her home”.
(participant 3)

In wedding the first dress is that from engagement party. After that we came back to my house and I needed to dress myself... this is in the morning when the guests come.
(participant 1)

The importance of virginity and its emphasis also arose in connection with the celebrations. The participants described different ways of telling the community that the girl was a virgin when her marriage took place. One participant (4) pointed out that the brides’
purity plays an important role throughout the celebrations and if the bride is a virgin, the
groom’s family has more obligations as a party organizer. Two participants (1 and 4)
described the red flower as a symbol of the bride's virginity. The groom’s parents give it
to the bride’s parents. Sometimes (participants 4 and 5) the sweet rakia (strong drink)
does the same thing. As one participant (5) put it: "Sweet rakia is the main proof of the
situation."

In the engagement party the man’s parents have to give my parents a red
flower. I was child actually, I was... because I was a virgin. They should
give a red flower because of that.
(participant 1)

Some participants (5, 6, 7, 8 and 11) referred to the bed sheets that prove the girl’s vir-
ginity. According to them, the sheets of the first intercourse are presented at the party and
those who want to see them must pay. Most of them continued that the tradition is too
personal and embarrassing, and therefore they did not follow it at their own party. On the
other hand, one participant (11) reported that the tradition was in use at her engagement
party.

Not everywhere, but still people keep sexual purity in a very high standard.
Not everybody and not everywhere, but still some people follow the tradi-
tion of sheets that prove [virginity].
(participant 7)

We don’t have flowers but there are sheets from the wedding night. Sheets
are put to a big plate and everybody throw money on the top. We got the
money.
(participant 11)

Formalizing Marriage

Roma marriages often happen outside the official system. In this study, only two partici-
pants (5 and 8) reported to be legally married. It was important to them for religious rea-
sons. Four participants (1, 2, 4 and 11) planned to formalize their marriages and one (par-
ticipant 10) indicated that they might do so in the future. One participant (3) did not find
legalization to be of any benefit. As she commented: " We have the same family name,
so it would not change anything." Those who saw the benefits of formalizing marriage
described them in different ways, such as religious reasons mentioned above (participant
5, 8 and 11). Two participants (4 and 9) acknowledged that after marriage was officially legalized, the family would also be official in the eyes of the law, which affects, for example, the position of children.

We want to sign because my aunt had a vision from God that we should make a legal marriage. It pleases God more.  
(participant 11)

5.3 Summary of the Findings

In summary, participants of this study encountered many social stressors, such as unconventional family structures, during their childhood. The role of grandparents in the upbringing of children was emphasized, and some participants grew apart from either one or both parents. Stereotypical gender roles strongly guided the responsibilities of family members. As girls, some participants had to do housework and care for their smaller siblings. A couple of them were allowed to make independent decisions about their living or schooling. These factors, together with marrying as a child, had a negative impact on participants’ school attendance. Only one participant had completed compulsory school, while the majority had dropped out of school prematurely.

In most cases, parents restricted the participants’ scope of life in childhood. Contrary to this, two participants reported complete lack of control by parents which caused feelings of insecurity. Parents established restrictions for example on the importance of going to school and preventing marrying as a child. Protecting the virginity and sexual purity of girls emerged as the reason for restricting their movement. However, at the same time sexual issues were too sensitive to discuss. Parental restrictions led participants to create solutions for meeting friends and boys, most often in secret. The restrictions caused conflicts between participants and their parents. Most reported that their decision to marry was due to parental restrictions. Worsening intergenerational relationships or open conflicts often led to moving forward in the process. In two cases, participants decided to elope, and therefore to marry, because they did not want to marry a boy chosen by their parents. Marriage decisions were often spontaneous or made after very short consideration which is why dating times before marriage were often short. The innermost motivation to marry was almost always love or desire to be with a boyfriend.
The male party was mostly more active in the initiative to marry, while part of the participants was to agree. One participant had been in an arranged marriage and another was kidnapped on the boy’s initiative. However, most participants eloped, which means they ran away with the boy for a day or few days. There was a consensus among the participants that marriage would be executed after having eloped and been together overnight, namely after the first intercourse has taken place. More than half of the participants expressed that it would be impossible to cancel the marriage afterwards. It would degrade the chances of a future marriage because the loss of virginity diminishes the value of a girl.

Few outsiders played any role in the marriage process when it happened by eloping. For example, the role of peers was marginal and no interventions by officials were reported. Marriage was generally well accepted by the boys’ parents and family, whereas for the girls’ parents it often came as a surprise, which is why they went through strong emotions, such as anger. In most cases, after a short period of time, the girls’ parents had no choice but to accept the marriage. The fathers’ role was emphasized in approval. After approval families entered the negotiation phase and the role of parents grew. The marriage negotiations consisted of practical matters related to the celebrations. The "bride-price" tradition was no longer reported, but many other symbolical traditions associated with the celebrations indicate the bride's virginity and her moving into a new home. The main purpose of the celebrations is to make the marriage known to the community, while the legality of the marriage was not considered particularly important.
6 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lived experiences of Bulgarian Roma women who were married as minors. The aim was to investigate which factors these women experienced as influencing the process of child marriage, as well as examine whom they believe to be involved in this process and what their role in the process is. The findings suggest that child marriages among Bulgarians with Roma identity are undergoing a slow process of transformation since parents' attitudes are changing and their role in the marriage initiative is diminishing. The risk of Bulgarian Roma girls to end up married as a child remains high because of the factors, dynamics and people in the marriage process influence conflict between traditional values and the demands of modern society. For reasons of clarity, the discussion follows the structure of the findings.

Social Stressors as a Basis for Marrying as a Child

The findings of this section support previous studies (e.g. McDougal et al., 2018; Santhya et al., 2018) and demonstrate a link between childhood social stressors and child marriages. The concept of family in Bulgarian Roma communities seems to extend beyond the idea of a nuclear family; family as a concept encompasses family members other than parents and children, and grandparents often play a parental role. Extended families are most common in research interview sites compared to some other Bulgarian locations (ACIDT, 2011), so regional differences may be possible. Grandparents have a strong authority over their children and grandchildren, as they even have the power to take children from their parents. It can therefore be assumed that in Roma families, authority increases with life experience. Power relationships seem to be rarely questioned, as was reported also by Bosnjak & Acton (2013) and ACIDT (2011).

Previous literature (ACIDT, 2011) states that among Bulgarian Roma, widowed or divorced people are helped to raise their children by their extended families. The findings of this study further support the idea that the relatives are either willing or obliged to help, as single parents often received help from their parents. On the other hand, these factors also underlie the fact that Roma children often grow in unstable conditions. Almost half of the participants had grown apart from one or both parents in some part of their
childhood. Family structures and dynamics were in some cases reported to be complicated due to new spouses of parents and complex housing arrangements. It can be assumed that often Roma children do not get a model of a normal relationship which can affect their perception of marriage. Both of those whose parents had divorced lived with their fathers and both had lost contact with their mothers because communication was not allowed. This study did not take into account the "clans" of the participants, but a possible explanation for this may be that in some Roma sub-groups children are the property of their father’s family (ACIDT, 2011). Unfortunately, the participants often described their childhood quite mechanically but some of them deepened their reflections and expressed the feelings of insecurity in their early childhood due to the uncertainty and mixed family dynamics surrounding them. As one participant expressed, she sought protection and love, that she could not afford at home, in a sexual relationship which ended in marriage.

Globally, child marriages are common in communities with patriarchal thinking (e.g. McDougal et al., 2018; Montazeri et al., 2016; Nasrullah et al., 2014). In accordance with the current findings, previous studies (e.g. Colombini et al., 2011; Logar et al., 2015; Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015) have demonstrated that traditional gender roles are strong in Roma families. Although many mothers also worked, women were usually responsible for childcare and housework, while fathers provided families. When the daughters were old enough, the responsibilities of mothers were sometimes transferred to them. In some cases, the responsibilities of young children were enormous, such as taking care of a small baby. In a way, Roma women and girls are imprisoned by gender inequality because they are expected to participate in housekeeping even at the expense of schooling and childhood.

Participants of this study also made decisions on living and studying that could be considered age-inappropriate and have far-reaching consequences on an individual’s life. These findings support Bosnjak & Acton’s (2013) notion that Roma family structures offer strict rules of conduct but also a high degree of autonomy. Participants were required to obey certain regulations but given the freedom to decide on important issues, such as schooling, at a very young age. At the same time, for Roma parents homework and childcare as a topical issue may be more important than children’s schooling (e.g. Coe & Cvorovic, 2017; Jarcuska et al., 2013). As mentioned in the background chapter, poor educational attainment is both a determinant and an outcome of child marriages and these
findings corroborate it. Comparison of findings with other studies (e.g. Nasrullah et al.,
2013; Sekine & Hodgkin, 2017; UNHCR, 2014) establishes a strong link between educa-
tion and child marriage. Participants’ education ended prematurely for a variety of rea-
sons but was often associated with marriage. Their responses and attitudes revealed that
quitting school is a normal consequence of marrying among Roma girls. Unfortunately,
these findings confirm that "marriage seals the educational chances” for Roma girls, as
Bosnjak & Acton (2013) pointed out. Going back to school seems difficult after leaving
and is seldom supported by family or society. One participant received support from her
church in her quest to return to school. The exact reason for leaving school because of
marriage was rarely mentioned in this study, but quite certainly it has to do with married
women’s gender roles and expectations, possibly set by mother-in-laws; a married woman
is expected to take care of the home. Further, the instability of life and household respon-
sibilities make schooling difficult for many Roma girls.

Parents’ Attempts to Keep their Daughters Pure

Consistent with the literature (e.g. Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; Kyuchukov, 2011; Sedlecky
& Rasevic, 2015), this study found that restricting a daughter’s movement is one way of
controlling her and her actions and is still a common practice among Roma in Bulgaria.
The findings suggest, that the traditions that emanate from glorifying virginity are im-
portant reasons to restrict the movement of girls. Honour-thinking that arises from the
patriarchal ideology (Björktomta, 2019; Brum et al., 2016) influences in the background
when girls’ area of activity is being restricted. It can be argued that a girl's sexuality is a
matter of honour to herself and her family and therefore, the loss of virginity, or even the
possibility of it, is a disgrace to parents. Among Roma, the restrictions are specific to girls
and are intended to keep them sexually pure and can be maintained by violence. However,
in contrast to previous studies (Kyuchukov, 2011; Nasrullah et al., 2014), the need to keep
the girls "pure” did not manifest as pressure to marry them at the young age. On the
contrary, parents were worried that the girls would get married too soon. This demon-
strates that attitudes towards child marriages in the Bulgarian Roma communities are un-
dergoing changes.

The findings further confirm that sexual issues are taboo and generally too sensitive to
talk to parents (Kyuchukov, 2011). It can be assumed, that a girl’s ignorance on sexual
issues can create uneven power relationships or expose her to abuse and unwanted pregnancy. Although spousal age gaps were not abnormally large, which is supported by the previous research (e.g. Hotchkiss et al., 2016), in some cases, the spouse was reported to have been of legal age at the time of marrying, which inexorably raises questions about the couple's different level of development. Marriage and children at young age were referred to as a "prison" but due to taboo aspects, parents have no ability to influence their daughters' values and thinking about sexual issues and sexual health. In this study, the restrictions were vaguely justified by tradition or hope that the girl would not marry too early, and it can be interpreted that the real impact on girls’ values and understanding on why getting married at a young age is not good, was lost. Parents seem to have a good intention of preventing child marriages, but at the same time they lack parenting skills and the means to bring out the reasoning, because the underlying norms create tremendous pressure and prevent intergenerational dialogue.

The restrictions of movement can have a negative impact on school attendance (Hotchkiss et al., 2016; Kyuchukov, 2011) as was reported also by a few participants in this study. On the other hand, it is interesting and promising to note that many Roma parents value education, which is evidenced by the fact that in some cases restrictions on movement were justified by schooling. It further indicates that some parents recognize the benefits of education. Long-term progress can be seen in this regard, as already Kyuchukov (2011) described a significant step in the attitudes of Roma parents towards education. Parents’ aspiration seems to be their daughters’ best and some of them recognized education as an opportunity to improve their quality of life. However, the findings suggest that while parents have an idea of the importance of education, for some reason it may not be passed on to their daughters. In addition, although reported by only one participant, it might be that the importance of education is no longer applied if the girl's sexual purity is at stake. In that sense, the appreciation of education is still superficial, and traditions are considered more important. Social pressure makes parents vulnerable when they try to prevent marriages (Erulkar, 2013; McDougal et al., 2018).

Even the strict restrictions imposed by parents do not mean that the participants did not demonstrate their autonomy. In general, the study found that parental restrictions make Roma girls come up with ways to get around them. Even if participants seemingly obeyed their parents, resistance took place beneath the surface. During the marriage process this
was the first time that girls demonstrated strong autonomy by developing means to meet boyfriends regardless of parents' will. Similarly to McDougal et al. (2018) participants, who took the lead to their own hands, also voiced the actions they would take if they were denied from meeting a boy. In some cases, participants openly opposed parents and exercised their power, for example by threatening them. In these cases, the parents seemed to have little power or ability to respond to the girls' ultimatums, which once again raises questions about parenting skills.

**Getting Married in Roma Way**

Globally, girls rarely initiate marriage or even participate in the negotiations (John et al., 2018; McDougal et al., 2018; Santhya et al., 2010). Therefore, it is interesting that in this study most participants had conducted the elopement. This is certainly explained by the increase in the number of young Roma who prefer to decide on their spouse (Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015). In the current study, young Bulgarian Roma desired to marry on the basis of love and therefore the voice and choice of the participants were visible throughout the process. The triggers to elope, and thus to marry, were mainly due to the participants own affections and emotional experiences. The restrictions experienced by participants tightened intergenerational relationships and, in a manner, the girls took advantage of it and dared to make the decisions to move forward despite the parents’ opposition. In many cases, decisions were spontaneous or very briefly considered. Expressions of suddenness may suggest that the girls have not been able to reflect on the long-term consequences of the decision and have no realistic idea of what marriage means, probably due to the young age and immaturity (Sabbe et al., 2013; Turner, 2013) as well as the lack of a marriage model.

It is noteworthy that almost all participants first stated that the decision to marry was made together with a boyfriend, but afterwards it became apparent that in most cases the marriage was initiated by the boy. It can thus be suggested that boyfriend’s initiative encourages girls and gives them an impetus to be active in the process. These findings are in accord with McDougal et al. (2018). Many participants expressed that they did not share their plans with anyone. In this study, out-of-couple persons had barely any part in initiating marriage when it happened by eloping. However, there was one case in which the involvement of a friend probably reinforced the girl’s intention to proceed with
marriage plans as they decided to elope together. On the other hand, in another case, the friend’s opposition did not influence the decision to elope. Caution should be exercised here as little was reported about the presence of friends, but it seems that other partakers’ suggestions are effective in supporting the girls’ own preferences, but not so much if they are the opposite. Because the girls’ families were not aware of the plans to marry, the outside influencers were usually relatives and friends of the male party, but also their role was surprisingly limited. So, the culture of secrecy regarding the elopements is likely to have the effect that outsiders have only little to say about it.

Previous studies (e.g. Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; Pamporov, 2007) have described the elopement as a typical way for Roma to marry, and highlighted girls’ active and willing participation in it. The findings of this study are in line with those of previous studies. Interestingly, even though one of the participants described how she was kidnapped, she eventually ended up telling her female relatives that she had volunteered with the boy. It was a little unclear how reluctant she was in the end, even though she initially opposed the boy. As in previous research (McDougal et al., 2018; Sharp, 2015), in some cases, the elopements were specifically designed to find away around parental choice of partner, or possibly even the risk of forced marriage. Some parents seem to have thought that the only option to separate their daughter from the unsuitable company was to marry her to a groom candidate which they found appropriate. These plans came as a surprise to the girls, and it was suggested that it severely limited their alternatives. One participant even said that she would not have married otherwise, which indicates that parents’ actions may lead to child marriage – which was initially opposed by both parties.

In this study, dating times were often short before marrying. In one case the couple met only once before eloping. Interestingly, this did not seem to be a problem for the participants, but more a common thing. This can be assumed to be due to prohibition of dating (Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015) and therefore Roma girls probably are not even expecting more. The elopements in this study followed surprisingly similar patterns and, in some cases, participants even told their stories in a third person or passive form, which gave the impression of them telling an example story. The narratives of the participants from the big city differed from those of a smaller town and village. They demonstrated more of their own autonomy and initiative before the elopement, such as ultimatum to parents, and did not describe travelling to another town as a part of the elopement. It may be that
urbanization makes people more exposed to the influence of the surrounding society, but it is also possible that in larger circles it is just easier to hide.

As mentioned several times, the sexual purity of girls is highly valued in the Roma culture (Bosnjak & Acton, 2013; Sedlecky & Rasevic, 2015), a finding corroborated in this study. Therefore, the act of sexual intercourse, or more specifically, the first officially credited act, puts marriage into effect – a tradition that has existed in many cultures throughout history. This was agreed by the participants and is consistent with previous research (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007). Study suggests that, for the Roma, the consummation of marriage is a way of socially legitimating it. Consequently, the consummation of marriage, meaning the loss of virginity, is also strongly associated with the irreversibility and finality of the elopement. The elopement causes a situation where intercourse is believed to have taken place during the couple's overnight stay together. It leaves all partakers with no alternatives, except to continue the marriage. Dissolution of marriage in the eyes of community after the elopement was even described as impossible. Although this study, among others (e.g. ACIDT, 2011), reveals that also divorce is possible among Roma, dissolution of marriage has such a long-lasting impact on the lives of young girls, such as the loss of value in the marriage market, that participants did not consider it as an option immediately after eloping. Another fact is, that at this point the participants did not even want to withdraw because they had got what they wanted.

The communities have invisible rules and expectations that guide the lives of individuals and maintain certain types of constraints. As has become clear, the Roma in Bulgaria appreciate abstinence from premarital sex, which also affects the expected behaviour of community members. Some participants expressed external obligations to marry, meaning that unspoken social rules and norms created pressures that were too strong to resist. One participant was encouraged to marry at the age of 15 with a boy who was considered suitable by her grandparents. In her case, the marriage proposal came from the boy’s family. Although the participant was not willing, her grandparents rationalized the benefits of marriage and encouraged her to consent, which is in line with previous research (McDougal et al., 2018; Montazeri et al., 2015). Her experience for its part demonstrates the strong role of grandparents in the Roma communities. Another participant faced community pressure as she felt obliged to marry because of her pregnancy. Comparison of these findings with other studies (McDougal et al., 2018; Montazeri et al., 2016) affirms
that social norms, social pressure and socio-cultural values as a whole are crucial to maintaining child marriages. One of the most surprising findings is that legal authorities do not appear to be interested in the marriages of Roma girls since none of the participants reported any interventions by officials in their marriage processes. Unfortunately, only one participant was asked directly, so this finding need to be interpreted with caution.

Parents’ Actions in the Process

Roma parents in this study did not resort to authorities to find their missing daughter. This is probably due to a general distrust towards the authorities (Colombini et al., 2011; Hotchkiss et al., 2016) and a strong desire to keep the community tight (ACIDT, 2011). Only a few participants contacted their parents themselves to announce their marriage as soon as the elopement occurred, but many parents tried to find their daughter. In reviewing the literature, no information was found in the immediate reactions of the parents after the marriage has begun by eloping. In this study, parents experienced intense emotions, such as anger and disappointment. As one participant stated, a girl's marriage is a loss for the family. From time to time, those feelings erupted in violent acts. Some parents again resorted to limiting their daughter’s scope of life. One form of emotional violence (Björktomta, 2019; Brum et al., 2016), practiced by parents after the elopement was rejection. In one case, the use of silence as a means of pressure continued for a long time. At this phase, most participants again demonstrated strong autonomy and openly defied their parents. It could be argued that because of the virginity related traditions, girls know that they have a reasoning to stay and are therefore in a stronger position. They use the irreversibility of marriage to get what they want, which means to be with a boy.

Although some parents seemingly exercised their power and took their daughter back home, these findings suggest that the pressure exerted by the community is too great to be resisted even by parents. It is impossible also for them to cancel marriage after intercourse has happened. This finding is supported by previous research (ACIDT, 2011, Erulkar, 2013; McDougal et al., 2018). It can thus be assumed that by accepting marriage, parents restore the honour of the family, because it gives a valid reason for the loss of daughter's virginity. Therefore, disapproval and disorganization of the celebrations can be used to punish a daughter for her actions. Consistent with the literature (ACIDT, 2011; McDougal et al., 2018), the findings of this study show that the father’s role in the
acceptance of marriage is emphasized while at the same the role of female relatives is often to appease him. This can be explained by the strong patriarchal culture and the power relations between women to men. These findings reflect those of McDougal et al. (2018) who also found that sometimes mothers convinced fathers to agree on their daughter's marriage and therefore retained his role as the final decision-maker.

On the other hand, the situation after the elopement seemed to be easier for the boys’ families. The boys always stay at home, so their families do not experience loss due to marriage. When talking about their husbands' families, participants often referred to mother-in-laws and their strong role in the acceptance of marriage. This is in line with prior studies (e.g. Bosnjak & Acton, 2013) which note that when a Roma woman receives the status of a mother-in-law, her strength in the family increases. Certainly, the strong role played by mother-in-laws in the stories is also related to the fact that Roma girls, when they marry, move from their home to a groom’s family home. They have to deal with their mother-in-laws the most, because traditional gender roles make women responsible for housework. It can be thus suggested that the well-being of a married girl depends greatly on her relationship with her mother-in-law. Some participants referred to problems with their mother-in-laws later in marriage, which may indicate the stress of the transition (John et al., 2018; Naveed & Butt, 2015) or little bargaining power with the in-laws (Turner, 2013).

**Making Marriage Known to the Community**

The study found that the negotiations about the celebrations began very soon after the elopement, which underlines the importance of making marriage known to the community and so to get its final approval. For the sake of family honour, it is important that the community knows that the couple is married, and that the approval of the community has been obtained in an appropriate manner. It is likely that the celebrations are held very soon after the elopement for the same reason. In some cases, the negotiations began only after a formal apology, and thus an initiative, from the boy's family. This approach ensures that the groom, and therefore the marriage, are formally approved. According to the findings, the engagement party is particularly important as it justifies marriage in the eyes of the community. It was even suggested that living together would not be acceptable if there were no celebrations. In this light, it is easy to see why some parents saw it as an
appropriate punishment to not organize the celebrations.

Interestingly, the role of external features, such as food and beverages, was highlighted when families negotiated about the celebrations. In addition to the size of the party, the food service was mentioned as the subject of a long discussion in the community. A big celebration and admiration from the guests are likely to be important because marriage means family continuation and change of position of the couple in the community when they become adults through marriage. Big celebrations also raise the family’s status in the community as it was claimed that celebrations are a way of demonstrating financial opportunities. In line with ACIDT (2011), this study found that the groom’s parents are usually obliged to pay for the wedding celebrations, but also that this practice is changing because the engagement and wedding parties merge. Financial possibilities determine the type of celebrations that can be organized. This is reflected in the fact that in poorer village settings it was more important to have at least some sort of party, whereas in wealthier larger towns, party size seemed to matter more for both participants and their families.

Prior studies (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007) have referred to the payment of the "bride-price" among Roma and noted that tradition is slowly disappearing. The findings of this study further support the observation that the practice of paying for the bride is fading among Bulgarian Roma. None of the participants was paid for. However, there are still some elements that symbolize the "bride-price" and further the girls’ sexual purity, such as the red flower that the groom’s parents give to the bride’s parents as a symbol of her virginity. Among symbols like the red flower and sweet rakia, the glorification of virginity lives in the tradition, in which the virginity of girl is proved by presenting the wedding bed sheets. Even though some participants claimed that this practice is shameful, and they refused it, the sheets still prove virginity in some cases. This further reflects the idea that the honour of a girl, and thus of her family, depends on her virginity and sexual abstinence (Björktomta, 2019; Brum et al., 2016). If the virginity is lost, the limits of social behaviour have been crossed and shame occurs.

As indicated earlier, all participants moved to their in-laws’ home. Roma marriage celebrations underline this transition to a new family. Some participants expressed that during the celebrations, the girl's family hands her over to a new family. Given the patriarchal structure and gender roles of the Roma communities, along with the bride-price tradition,
this undoubtedly provokes thoughts of the girl as a family property (ACIDT, 2011, Pamporov, 2007). On the other hand, the antiquated tradition of a father giving the bride away is a part of the weddings throughout the West. According to ACIDT (2011) and one participant in this study, the time between the engagement and wedding parties was previously ”a trial period” when the couple lived together and got to know each other. Thereby, the reason for many dresses used at celebrations is not just vanity. Reminiscent of past traditions, the various dresses used during the celebrations continue to be a symbol of the girl’s transition to a new family. For this reason, the first dress at the wedding is the last from the engagement party. In most cases, the groom’s mother is obliged to buy the dresses and it was suggested, that if this does not happen, it would be a disgrace to the girl and her family. It seems that it is a source of pride for the bride and her family that, symbolically, she does not enter marriage in ”the same dress as when she left home”, as was one of the participants stated. Explanation for this may be that the groom’s family must show their appreciation for the girl, and her purity, by providing her party dresses and accessories.

Roma marriages mostly occur outside the official system. In this study, it was more important that marriage is approved in the community than its legal existence. Only a few participants saw any benefits on legalization. Many Roma women and their children are deprived of the benefits of legal marriage, such as inheritance, because they do not legalize their marriages and therefore the Bulgarian society does not recognize them. Emphasizing the importance of legalizing marriage could have a positive effect on the number of child marriages. Pamporov (2007) noted that since the end of the communist era (1989), evangelical churches have gained a foothold among the Bulgarian Roma and their teachings have replaced some traditional models of marriage. Similarly, in this study, for some participants who were members of evangelical churches, legalizing marriage was important because the church and their own faith demands it. This raises the question of whether small charismatic churches have more influence on the teaching of values and norms than the official system and how it could potentially be leveraged on a larger scale.

About the Process in General

Social and cultural norms, values and traditions strongly guide Roma behaviour, and therefore subsidize the process which leads to marriage as a child. McDougal et al. (2018)
found similar patterns in Ethiopia and India. As can be seen, the existence of social stressors in childhood is clear, and together with slowly accumulating pressure between children and parents, they often create a situation where marriage is likely to occur. Roma children often live in unstable, or even unpredictable, early childhood environments as families can be dysfunctional and children are sometimes relatively carelessly transferred from one living environment to another, which affects their schooling and family relationships. As a result, girls are vulnerable, and the risk of child marriage increases. Loss of a parent, regardless in which manner they are incapacitated, aggravates the risk of child marriage (McDougal et al., 2018), and individuals who grow in precarious conditions are more likely to seek early pairing and reproduction (Barbaro & Shackelford, 2016).

Even though many participants took care of their home and their siblings, these findings do not support the idea of an actual marriage preparation phase, as it was reported by Kyuchukov (2011). Otherwise, the phases of contracting child marriage identified in the previous studies are also evident in the case of the Roma child marriages, namely the initiation of marriage (McDougal et al., 2018; Santhya et al., 2010), the negotiation phase (John et al., 2018; McDougal et al., 2018) and the decision of the marriage phase (McDougal et al., 2018), albeit in the vast majority of cases in this study, the order was not as straightforward. In the case of arranged marriage, the process followed the sequence of steps defined in previous research, so it may be that the old traditions live on when marriages are initiated by others than a couple. There was only one such case, so this finding needs to be interpreted with caution. Speaking of the elopements, due to participants’ own autonomy and motion through the process, the negotiation phase started usually after the marriage was already initiated and executed. Because couples made spontaneous decisions, the role of outside partakers in the marriage initiation and execution was marginal. The role of the parents strengthened as negotiations began and they were conducted under their direction. These findings suggest, that making marriage known to the community can be added as one phase in the marriage process among Bulgarian Roma, because it plays such an important role.

This study found that Roma girls are left without parental guidance in their marriage decisions. First, because the decisions are often made secretly and second, because parents are incapable of communicating with them. All partakers' actions were strongly guided by cultural expectations, values and norms. It must be taken into account that underaged
girls are not, by law or by development, capable to make well-informed decisions about marriage, or to give informed consent to it (Sabbe et al., 2013; Turner, 2013). Therefore, girls' autonomy is also a risk in the case of elopements. On the other hand, autonomy indicates their empowerment, but it also can cause an increase in the number of child marriages, though parents seem to be more and more against them. It is clear that the expression of adolescent sexuality is limited in Roma culture. Therefore, consistent with McDougal et al. (2018), this study refers that marriage demonstrates one of the few ways for young people to practice physical relationships. In the battle to reduce child marriages, this must be kept in mind.

Roma parents’ actions before and after marriage have commonalities with different forms of honour-based violence, such as symbolical and emotional violence, recognized by Brum et al. (2016) and Björktomta (2019). Strict gender roles, language of honour, limiting the scope of life and being rejected, are all elements of honour-based violence and more broadly regarded as gender-based violence. As discussed in the background chapter, among Roma, women in particular carry stigma and suffer discrimination (e.g. FRA, 2014) and the concept of honour places young girls even at more vulnerable position by limiting their scope of life. These factors raise intriguing questions regarding how the Bulgarian authorities address the disappearance of Roma girls from schools or their child marriages, and therefore also honour-based violence. Despite the laws, it seems that, for example, health workers and teachers do not often intervene in Roma activities. General attitude in Bulgaria, according to the author's experience, is that there is no point in interfering with Roma issues, referring to the fact that negligence ‘often has basis on stereotypes based on the ethnicity (Colombini et al., 2011; Hotchkiss et al., 2016). After all, the authorities do have the means and tools to intervene, which are not always used. On the other hand, in this study, Roma parents also did not seek help from the authorities. It seems that marriage is also perceived as a family affair (Nasrullah et al., 2014), as evidenced by the fact that its formalization is not considered important either.
7 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER POSSIBILITIES

This thesis was undertaken to examine which factors Roma women experienced as shaping the process of child marriage and seems to be the first study to explore the lived experiences of Roma women on the subject. The findings help us to understand the dynamics and factors that construct the path for girls to marry as a child among Bulgarian Roma. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is, that although the marriage process among Bulgarian Roma is undergoing a transformation, as parents have begun to recognize the importance of education, increased autonomy for the girls maintains child marriages. Both Roma parents and girls are trapped between the demands of modern society and the requirements of traditions and values. The requirement of sexual purity shreds good intentions when adolescents begin to crave the expression of their sexuality, and as a result, community pressure and traditional values force parents to accept child marriage.

Roma are an ethnic group with different values, norms and traditions than the surrounding society in Bulgaria. As was stated earlier, traditions are a way to keep the community intact. Modern society should respect the traditions of minorities. However, as Illisei (2013) has asked; should it be acceptable for Roma women to have fewer rights and freedom than women in general population, simply because a minority group's different traditions need to be respected. In Bulgaria, the different manners of Roma are tolerated or overlooked also because of negligence. Roma girls’ rights to education, health and equality should not be undermined neither in the name of tolerance or negligence. Balance should be found where the traditions and values of Roma are respected without violating the rights of Roma women.

These findings confirm that Roma children often grow up in precarious conditions which increases the risk of child marriages. The establishment of a long-term plan to improve their situation should therefore be a policy priority. Given that the Bulgarian Roma live in poverty in the poorest country in the European Union (European Union, n.d.), it is a fact that resources are scarce and difficult to target. However, another fact is that without external help, the number of stressors experienced by Roma children cannot be reduced. They have a negative impact on girls’ education, health and child marriages in particular,
and thus limit their future prospects. On a larger scale, Bulgarian society as a whole loses its potential to boost the country's economic growth due to the lack of education for a large minority (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; UNICEF, 2018; World Bank, 2017).

Brum et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of implementing awareness programmes for both service providers and communities to tackle honour-based thinking, which also has a strong connection with the tradition of child marriages among Roma. A further study with focus on attitudes of authorities, such as teachers, is suggested to examine how they can be influenced so that they see the importance of addressing early school leaving of Roma girls and child marriage. After all, they are in a role where the authorities first discover these matters. An outside advocate could also be a valuable asset when tackling marriage initiations (McDougal et al., 2018). Further, awareness programmes should be implemented to enable Roma girls to understand both their human and sexual rights so that they can channel their empowerment into ways other than marrying. Approaches, such as comprehensive sexuality education (International Conference on Population and Development, 2014), that emphasize empowerment and consider culture could be one option. According to these findings, Roma parents lack the means to influence their daughters' opinions and values. Thus, they would benefit from guidance, for example, in managing intergenerational conflicts and how manage and direct their daughters in more constructive way. Due to the diversity of families, the strong role of grandparents should also be taken into account.

The tradition of child marriage makes particularly Roma women vulnerable (FRA, 2014). However, while this tradition is an important global and European human rights, gender equality and health issue, it unfortunately receives little publicity and research attention. All in all, more research is needed to promote the well-being of Roman women. As indicated earlier, previous research has tended to focus on outcomes and determinants of child marriage rather than the influencing and decision-making factors that lead to it. This is an important issue for future research. Further research could address, for example, men's or parents' perceptions of the child marriage process and the factors that influenced it. It would also be interesting and useful to investigate how marrying as a child has affected how these women raise their own daughters.
This study corroborates the ideas of McDougal et al. (2018), who called for holistic intervention on child marriages. Increasing girls’ autonomy and awareness of their rights is an important element when dealing with child marriages. However, these findings indicate that girls’ autonomy can also lead to unwanted behaviours and lead to opposite results. So many underlying factors and dynamics in the marriage process influence the conflict between traditional values and the demands of modern society, and thus increase the risk of Roma girls to marry as a minor. Greater focus on these underlying factors could produce interesting findings that would help prevent child marriages among Eastern European Roma and thus improve the status and well-being of Roma women.
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APPENDIX 1. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Grade when left school</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>big city</td>
<td>back in school</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>big city</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
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<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>never in school</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>before graduation</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>smaller town</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>smaller town</td>
<td>10th grade</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>smaller town</td>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15 and 17</td>
<td>smaller town</td>
<td>finished compulsory education</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>smaller town</td>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2. Interview Guide

Background information
- age
- age of getting married
- family background
- number of children
- educational background
- employed/unemployed

Preparing for marriage
- possible engagement at a young age
- restrictions of schooling and/or moving by the parents
- learning different kind of skills that are needed in family life
- participant’s own thinking about marriage beforehand
- discussions about marriage in advantage
  - family/community/peers

Marital initiation
- marriage proposal
- participant’s own activity/opinion/agency
- possible “bride-stealing”
  - initiation / partakers

Negotiation
- negotiating parties
- participant’s voice on possible terms/spouse/timing
- special terms (for example “bride-price”)
- duration of the negotiations
- possible “bride-stealing”
  - consequences / negotiations

Decision to marry
- final decision maker
- participant’s voice
- wedding ceremony
APPENDIX 3. Application for a Permission for Research

Name of person in charge of the research activity: Marjo Aleksandrova
Address: xx
Phone and email: xx
Student / Master’s Degree in Global Health / Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
Supervisors: Pamela Gray and Heikki Paakkonen

Name of the study (preliminary):
Roma Women’s Perceptions on the Process of Contracting Child Marriage in Bulgaria

Background:
The survey results suggest that in the European Union around 2% of girls with Roma identity aged 10 to 15, and 24% in the age group of 16 to 17 are legally or traditionally married. Child marriage tradition among Eastern European Roma is important global and European human rights, gender equality and health issue. Extreme poverty and exclusion raise the inequalities Roma women face. Child marriages is one the components which make Roma women especially vulnerable (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

In the Roma settlements child marriages effect on girls’ school attendance. Child marriage is the most common among girls with less education (Hotchkiss, Godha, Gage and Cappa, 2016). Additionally, it has been a common practice among traditional Roma to limit girl’s education in order to preserve their chastity (Kyuchukov, 2011). Globally child marriage is a leading contributor of the adolescent pregnancy (United Nations Population Fund, 2015) and effects negatively in the health of child brides and their children (Ganchimeg et al., 2014). Boosting the educational level of Roma women by tackling child marriages could be an effective way to decrease the dependency of them on both men and state financial assistance (Illisei, 2013) and to increase the health status of them.

Marrying girls as minors is justified by protecting them from social problems and harmful knowledge. Child marriage is a strong factor of the group identity and a mechanism to prevent assimilation. Among Roma virginity of a bride is highly valued and the need to preserve it until wedding commonly results in as a tradition of child marriage (Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance [ACIDT], 2011; Nasrullah, Muazzam, Bhutta & Raj, 2014; Kyuchukov, 2011). Low autonomy of girls has a major role in decision-making when child marriage is contracted (Montazeri, Gharacheh, Mohammadi, Alaghband Rad & Eftekhar Ardabili, 2016).

From the previous research four phases of the process of marriage can be identified and they are preparing for marriage (Kyuchukov, 2011), marital initiation (McDougal et al., 2018; Santhya et al., 2010), negotiation about marriage (ACIDT, 2011, McDougal et al., 2018) and the decision to marry. Globally, a girl’s voice tends to be limited during these phases (McDougal et al., 2018). Traditionally Roma girls are prepared for marriage in the early puberty and ordinarily a wedding ceremony takes place when a girl is 13 to 14 years old. Marital initiation and negotiation in Roma communities contain many traditions, such as “bride-price” and “bride-stealing” which affect negatively in the age of marriage (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007).
APPENDIX 3/2

In traditional Roma families parents negotiate and bargain the terms of marriage. In many Roma groups father of a boy makes a decision whom to ask for marriage and father of a girl answers. However, nowadays it is a growing trend that family is created by a young couple, not by the parents. Girls may be active partakers when “bride-stealing” takes place. Patriarchal mentality is anyhow still considerable part of the Roma communities (ACIDT, 2011; Pamporov, 2007).

Goal of research activity:
Up to now, far too little attention has been paid to both child marriage among Roma and on the process of contracting child marriage. As child marriage is not only an outcome, it is important to understand this process of initiating and contracting marriage and to find out how Roma women see the roles of different partakers during this process.

This study aims to explore Roma women’s own views on the topic. It could be beneficial information for policy makers and non-governmental actors when developing timely and culturally sensitive interventions to raise awareness and change attitudes among Roma on child marriages.

Summary of research activity:
The study will be conducted in co-operation with the foundation called “Sazidanie”, which is a small foundation taking place in Sofia, Bulgaria. It targets to keep Roma children in school and to acquire education. Through this foundation it is possible to create connections to the other NGOs working among Bulgarian Roma.

The background of the study is based on literature review on the relevant databases. The data for this study will be collected by semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews by a researcher in the end of March or start of April 2019. A person who knows both English and Bulgarian, probably the contact person from co-operating organization, will act as an interpreter.

Participants of the study will be selected by purposeful snowball sampling. It is one of the most practical ways of reaching populations that are hard to access (Bowers, House & Owens, 2011, 2011), as it may be with Roma people. In this study the contact person from co-operating foundation recommends and contacts the “key persons” who are active among Roma communities and they will refer, approach and recruit the participants to the study. The participants are Bulgarian Roma women who have got married as minors (less than 18 years old) but are now adults and are voluntarily willing to share their experiences. The aim is to interview as many Roma women as possible. The number of the participants is impossible to predict. It will depend on available time and on how many Roma women can be reached and recruited to the study.

The interview guide will direct the discussion during the interviews, but the purpose is not a strict question-answer interview. The guide assists to collect information on same topics from all the participants. The interview guide of this study is deliberately loose in order to develop it during the data collection if new relevant issues occur in that phase (Moser & Korstjens, 2017a) and to give space for the narratives of the participants. The themes of the interview guide are designed basing on the previous literature on child marriage and on the four stages identified in the process of contracting marriage. Subordinate questions have emerged from the traditions connected to marriage among Roma. The interviews are going to be tape recorded to write the transcripts.
APPENDIX 3/3

Analysis of the data will be done by conducting an inductive content analysis. The method was selected because it can be used when dealing with all kinds of written text and there are no criteria for the number of informants. In the content analysis the views of the participants are described by organizing the key concepts and themes which occur from the narrative data. They are analysed in order to identify meaningful subjects answering the research questions, and the data are presented in themes and words which make interpretations possible (Bengtsson, 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017b).

Description of the applicable ethical research principles:
Human dignity and privacy are going to be respected in relation to the participants and when reporting the results of this study. The privacy and anonymity of the participants are the highest priority (Moser & Korstjents, 2017b). No personal information, like name, of the participants will be collected and the data will be minimized, meaning that only the necessary information will be asked (European Commission, 2018b).

It is important that participation in the study is voluntary and is basing on informed permission (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, 2002). This secures freedom and self-determination of the participants. The participants of this study will be provided with the adequate oral information about the nature and aims of this study. Additionally, the participants will be informed that the collected data will be anonymised, used only by the author to the purpose of this study and later erased. The participants will be notified that participation in the study is voluntary and that they have the right to depart from the study any time. Written informed consent with same information is going to be obtained. This all will be done in a neutral manner to avoid pressure. The consent letter is written in a language and at a level the participants can understand. The consent letter will be translated to Bulgarian by official translation service.

The recorded tapes, and afterwards the transcripts, will be coded to protect the privacy and to assure the full anonymity of the participants. The confidentiality of the participants will be respected, and the results are going to be reported in a way that individuals cannot be identified. The materials which are collected in this study will be handled only by the researcher. The interviews are without delay moved from the audio recorder to the researcher’s personal computer, which is password protected, and transcripted as soon as possible by the author. Tape records will be wiped out immediately after the transcription is ready. All the materials are used solely for the purpose of this study. After the study is completed all the materials are appropriately deleted. Separate written consent is going to be asked for tape recording of the interviews.

European Union Data Protection Rules define personal data as “any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person”. Processing the personal data which reveals racial or ethnic origin is prohibited, but it does not apply when it is necessary for archiving purpose of the scientific research. Anonymised data is not considered personal data, so collecting material to this study will not lead to the establishment of a personal data register such as referred to in the Personal Data Act. However, ethnic origin is identified as an indicator that may entail higher ethical risks (European Commission, 2018b). To explore the views of Roma women it may be inevitable to mention their ethnic identity also during the interview. By anonymising the data, it will be ensured that anything cannot be connected to identifiable persons.
APPENDIX 3/4

Possible problems emerging in the data collection phase of this study might be dealing with multiple key persons and working with an interpreter who may unfortunately be a male. Answers may be socially desirable (Moser & Korstjens, 2017c) as some topics, like love related matters can be taboos (Kyuchkov, 2011). The anxiety of the participants can be mitigated by commencing the interview with general topics that are easy to discuss and choosing a quiet and comfortable location without interruption (Birks, Chapman & Francis., 2007). This will be an objective when conducting the interviews. Taboo aspect needs to be considered when reporting the results.

On the other hand, the interpreter is familiar with the Roma culture and can therefore be a valuable asset as the basic understanding of the culture is a way to ensure the employment of suitable approach during the interview. Additionally, the access to the research setting may be impossible without the contact and key persons’ involvement (Birks et al., 2007). The loose interview guide also enables flexibility during the interviews if the personal needs of the participant requires it. Because very few Roma people know English the use of an interpreter in this study is obligatory, not only to communicate during the interview but also to assure that their consent is fully informed and voluntary.

The advantage of the researcher in this study is a long experience as midwife and therefore familiarity with the interviewing, dealing with multicultural people and sensitive topics as well as in working with an interpreter.

Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2018:</td>
<td>background to be completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January-February 2019:</td>
<td>finalizing the research proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>constructing the interview guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March-April 2019:</td>
<td>the interviews in Bulgaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the data analysis starts simultaneously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April-June 2019:</td>
<td>analysis of the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-December 2019:</td>
<td>finalising the thesis and the maturity test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2019</td>
<td>reporting the results to the &quot;Sazidanie&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendices

Interview Guide
Informed Consent Form

REFERENCES


APPENDIX 3/5


APPENDIX 4. Informed Consent Form in English

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This informed consent form is for women with Roma identity in Bulgarian settlements who are invited to participate in research which is tentatively titled as: "Roma Women’s Perceptions on the Process of Contracting Child Marriage in Bulgaria”.

Marjo Aleksandrova  
Student in Master’s Degree Programme in Global Health Care  
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, Finland  
In co-operation with the foundation “Sazidanie”, located in Sofia, Bulgaria

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:  
• Information Sheet  
• Certificate of Consent

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form.

Introduction:

I am studying Master’s Degree Program in Global Health in Diaconia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland. As my thesis I am doing research on the Roma Women’s own views on the process of contracting marriage as minor. I invite you to be part of it.

This consent form may include words that are hard to understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will explain. If you have questions, you can ask them any time.

Purpose of the Research:

Marriages which are contracted as minor are relatively common among your community. The aim of this research is to explore how you as a woman in Roma community describe the process which led you to marry as minor and how you see the roles of the different partakers during that process. I believe that you can help me by telling me your personal experiences. Your own story might give valuable information for this research.

When research is ready this knowledge could help organizations, which are working among your community to find ways to prevent marriages as minors and in the best case to increase school attendance level in your community.

Type of Research Intervention:

Being part of this research will contain your participation in one individual face-to-face interview with me which will take approximately two hours.
APPENDIX 4/2

Participant Selection:

You are invited to take part in this research because of your experience as a Roma woman who has got married as minor. You can give much knowledge on the process of contracting marriage in your community.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. It is your choice if you participate or not. You have the right to depart from this research at any time.

Procedures:

You are invited to help me to learn what are your own perceptions and experiences what comes to contracting marriage as minor in your community. If you accept, I request you to participate in an interview with me.

During the interview I will sit down with you and an interpreter who knows Bulgarian and English. If you do not want answer to some of the questions during the interview, you can freely tell it and we will move on to the next question.

If you give a permission the interview will be tape recorded. I will make additional notes to my papers. All the information you give is totally confidential, and no one else except me will have access to any information documented during the interview.

The audiotapes will be moved to my personal password protected computer without delay and then deleted from the recording machine. The recordings will be destroyed after I have typed them in written form. These written documents will be used only for the purposes of this research and will be deleted after I have analysed them.

You will not be identified by name in any of the materials.

Duration:

Research takes place approximately nine months in total from now. After this interview your participation is no longer needed during research.

Risks:

I am requesting you to share some very personal experiences with me. It may feel unpleasant to talk about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to do so. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question or for refusing to take part in the interview.
APPENDIX 4/3

Benefits:

This research will not produce direct benefit to you, but your participation is expected to help me to understand how marriages as minors are contracted in your community and who you see as active partakers during that process. This may later help your community.

Confidentiality:

Me, or the interpreter, will not share any information about you to anyone. The information that is collected will be kept totally private. Any information about you will have a code on it instead of your name. Your name will not be mentioned anywhere during research or in the report of it. Only the researcher will know what your code is, and that information will not be given to anybody.

Sharing the Results:

The knowledge that I get from this research will be shared to the foundation “Sazidanie” in form of the report. The results are going to be published as my thesis to give other interested people opportunity to learn from the research. You will not be identifiable in the report of this research.

Who to Contact:

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact:
Marjo Aleksandrova
[email address of the researcher]
CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

I am invited to participate in research about contracting marriages as minors among Roma communities in Bulgaria.

I have read the above-mentioned information, or it has been read to me. I have had the possibility to ask questions about it, and any questions I have asked were answered satisfactorily.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

I give permission to tape record the interview: yes / no

Name of the Participant:

Signature of the Participant:

Date:

Statement by the researcher

I have precisely read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands it.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about research. All the questions asked by the participant were answered honestly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been pressured to give the consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this informed consent form has been provided to the participant.

Name of the person taking the consent:

Signature of the person taking the consent:

Date:
ФОРМУЛЯР ЗА ИНФОРМИРАНО СЪГЛАСИЕ
Този формуляр за информирано съгласие е за жени с ромска идентичност в български селища, които са поканени да участват в проучване, условно озаглавено: "Разбиранията на ромските жени относно процеса на сключване на детски брак в България".

Марьо Александрова
Студент в магистърска програма по „Глобално здравеопазване“
Университет за приложни науки Диакония, Хелзинки, Финляндия
В сътрудничество с фондация „Съзидание“, разположена в София, България

Този формуляр за информирано съгласие има две части:
- Информационен лист
- Удостоверение за съгласие

Ще Ви бъде предоставено копие от целия формуляр за информирано съгласие.

Въведение:
Обучавам се в магистърска програма по Глобално здравеопазване в Университета за приложни науки Диакония в Хелзинки, Финландия. За дипломната си работа правя проучване върху собствените виждания на ромските жени относно процеса на сключване на брак като непълнолетно лице. Каня Ви да вземете участие в него.

Този формуляр за съгласие може да съдържа думи, които са трудни за разбране. Моля, помолете ме да спра, докато преглеждаме информацията, и аз ще обясня. Ако имате въпроси, можете да ги зададете по всяко време.

Цел на проучването:
Браковете, сключени от непълнолетни лица, са сравнително често срещани във Вашата общност. Целта на настоящото проучване е да изследва как Вие, като жена в ромска общност, описвате процеса, който Ви е довел до това да се омъжите непълнолетна и как Вие виждате ролите на различните участници по време на този
процес. Вярвам, че можете да ми помогнете, като ми разкажете за Вашия личен опит. Вашата собствена история би могла да даде ценная информация за това проучване.

Когато проучването е готово, тези познания биха могли да помогнат на организация, която работят с Вашата общност, за да открият начини за предотвратяване на браковете на непълнолетни лица и, в най-добрия случай, да увеличат нивото на посещаемост в училище във Вашата общност.

Вид интервю на проучването:
Да сте част от това проучване означава да вземете участие в едно индивидуално интервю лице в лице с мен, което ще отнеме приблизително два часа.

Избор на участници:
Поканена сте да се включите в това проучване поради опита Ви на ръмска жена, която се е омъжила непълнолетна. Можете да дадете много информация относно процеса на сключване на брак във Вашата общност.

Доброволно участие:
Вземането на участие в това проучване от Ваша страна е напълно доброволно. Вие избирайте да участвате или не. Имате право да се оттеглите от това проучване по всяко време.

Процедури:
Поканена сте да ми помогнете да науча какви са Вашите собствени разбиращия и опит по отношение на сключването на брак като непълнолетно лице във Вашата общност. Ако приемате, Ви моля да вземете участие в интервю с мен.

По време на интервюто аз ще седя с Вас и лице, което знае български, и английски език. Ако не желаете да отговаряте на някои от въпросите по време на интервюто, можете свободно да го кажете и ще преминем към следващия въпрос.
Ако дадете Вашето разрешение, интервюто ще бъде записано. Аз ще правя допълнителни записки в документите ми. Цялата информация, която предоставите, е изцяло конфиденциална и никой друг освен мен няма да има достъп до документиранията по време на интервюто информация.

Записите ще бъдат незабавно преместени на моя защитен с парола персонален компютър и след това ще бъдат изтрити от записващата машина. Записите ще бъдат унищожени, след като съм ги напечатал писмено. Тези писмени документи ще бъдат използвани единствено за целите на настоящото проучване и свързани с него публикации и всички данни ще бъдат изтрити, след като съм ги анализирал.

Няма да бъдете идентифицирана по име в никой от материалите или в доклада.

**Продължителност:**
Проучването ще се състои в продължителност на приблизително девет месеца общо считано от сега. След това интервю Вашето участие няма да бъде повече необходимо по време на проучването.

**Рискове:**
Моля Ви да споделите малко от Вашия доста личен опит с мен. Възможно е да Ви е неприятно да разговаряте по някои теми. Не е необходимо да отговаряте на въпрос, ако не желаете да го направите. Не е необходимо да давате причина за това, че не отговаряте на даден въпрос или че отказвате да вземете участие в интервюто.

**Ползи:**
Настоящото проучване няма да има директни ползи за Вас, но се очаква Вашето участие да ми помогне да разбера как се сключват бракове от непълнолетни лица във Вашата общност и кого Вие смятате за активни участници по време на този процес. Това би могло да помогне на Вашата общност по-късно.

**Конфиденциалност:**
Аз или лицето, работещо като устен/писмен преводач, няма да споделя никаква
информация относно Вас с никого. Събираната информация ще бъде съхранявана изцяло поверително. Всяка информация за Вас ще бъде обозначена с код вместо с Вашето име. Вашето име няма да се споменава никъде по време на проучването или в доклада или статиите за него. Единствено лицето, изготвящо проучването, ще знае какъв е кодът Ви и тази информация няма да се предоставя на никого.

Споделяне на резултатите:
Информацията, която аз ще получа от това проучване, ще бъде споделена с фондация „Съзидание“ под формата на доклад. Резултатите ще бъдат публикувани като моя дипломна работа, за да предоставят на други заинтересовани лица възможност да извлекат познания от проучването. Също така съществува възможност след завършване на проучването да публикувам резултатите, например, в статии в списания. Вие няма да бъдете разпознаваема в нито една от фазите.

С кого да се свържете:
Ако имате някакви въпроси, можете да ги зададете сега или по-късно. Ако желаете да зададете въпроси по-късно, можете да се свържете с:
Маръо Александрова
УДОСТОВЕРЕНИЕ ЗА СЪГЛАСИЕ

Поканена съм да участвам в проучване относно сключването на бракове на непълнолетни в ромските общности в България.

Прочела съм гореизложената информация или тя ми беше прочетена. Имах възможност да задам въпроси за нея и на въпросите, които зададох, получих задоволителни отговори.

Давам съгласието си доброволно да участвам в това проучване.

Давам разрешение интервюто да бъде записано: да / не

Име на участника:

Подпис на участника:

Дата:

Декларация на лицето, изготвящо проучването

Прочел/а съм на глас точно информационния лист на потенциалния участник и, до колкото ми е възможно, направих така, че участникът да го разбере.

Потвърждавам, че на участника беше предоставена възможност да зададе въпроси относно проучването. На всички зададени от участника въпроси беше отговорено честно и по възможно най-добрия начин. Потвърждавам, че лицето не е било принудено да даде съгласието си и съгласието е било дадено свободно и доброволно.

Копие от това информирано съгласие е било предоставено на участника.

Име на лицето, вземащо съгласието:

Подпис на лицето, вземащо съгласието:

Дата:
APPENDIX 6. Checklist for Researchers Attempting to Improve the Trustworthiness of a Content Analysis Study (Elo et al., 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of the content analysis study</th>
<th>Questions to check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation phase</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection method</td>
<td>How do I collect the most suitable data for my content analysis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is this method the best available to answer the target research question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Should I use either descriptive or semi-structured questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-awareness: what are my skills as a researcher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do I pre-test my data collection method?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling strategy</td>
<td>What is the best sampling method for my study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who are the best informants for my study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What criteria should be used to select the participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is my sample appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is my data well saturated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting the unit of analysis</td>
<td>What is the unit of analysis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the unit of analysis too narrow or too broad?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization phase</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorization and abstraction</td>
<td>How should the concepts or categories be created?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there still too many concepts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there any overlap between categories?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>What is the degree of interpretation in the analysis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do I ensure that the data accurately represent the information that the participants provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representativeness</td>
<td>How to I check the trustworthiness of the analysis process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do I check the representativeness of the data as a whole?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporting phase</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting results</td>
<td>Are the results reported systematically and logically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are connections between the data and results reported?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the content and structure of concepts presented in a clear and understandable way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can the reader evaluate the transferability of the results (are the data, sampling method, and participants described in a detailed manner)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are quotations used systematically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How well do the categories cover the data? Are there similarities within and differences between categories?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is scientific language used to convey the results?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting analysis process</td>
<td>Is there a full description of the analysis process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the trustworthiness of the content analysis discussed based on some criteria?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 7. Litterature Search Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CINAHL®fulltex (EBSCO)</td>
<td>Roma OR gypsy OR gipsy AND early marriage OR child marriage OR traditional marriage OR teenage marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roma OR gypsy OR gipsy AND challenges OR human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roma OR gypsy OR gipsy AND discrimination OR equality OR women’s rights or challenges or barriers or difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PubMed</td>
<td>Roma people OR gypsy OR gipsy AND child marriage OR early marriage OR teenage marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Scholar</td>
<td>Roma people and child marriage and position of woman and discrimination and early marriage and chastity and virginity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Search terms used in the databases (child marriage among Roma)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CINAHL®fulltex (EBSCO)</td>
<td>decision making OR decision-making process OR decision-making models AND child marriage OR forced marriage OR child brides OR early marriage OR teenage marriage adolescent pregnancy OR teenage pregnancy AND health outcome OR reproductive health AND mortality OR risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Scholar</td>
<td>decision-making and child marriage impact of child marriage consequences of child marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Search terms used in the databases (child marriage and the process of contracting it or impacts of child marriage)