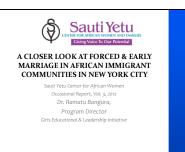


# Slide 2

# Tahirih's Forced Marriage Initiative In 2011, Tahirih launched the: • Forced Marriage Initiative • National Network to Prevent Forced Marriage in response to the findings of Tahirih's Survey on Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities in the United States. This webinar is part of a quarterly series.

# Slide 3




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## ABOUT SAUTI YETU

# Slide 5

Sauti Yetu means "OUR VOICES"

Sauti Yetu is a multi-service community organization dedicated to mobilizing African immigrant women to improve the quality of their lives, strengthen their families and develop their communities.

Sauti Yetu's direct services, public education, and advocacy promotes immigrant girls' safe transitions into adulthood, curbs violence in the family, and gives poor and low income immigrant women access to life skills and leadership opportunities.



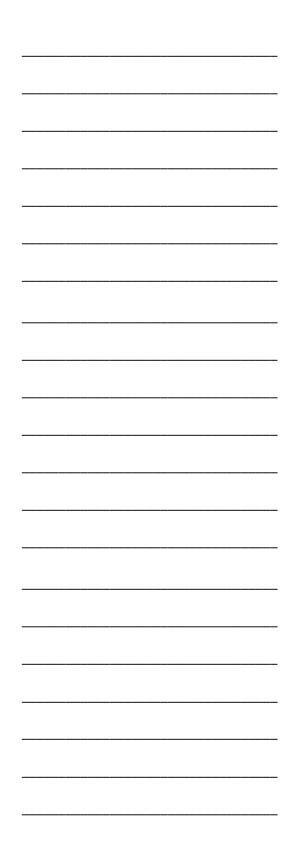
# Slide 6

# Programs & Services

Sauti Yetu provides culturally and linguistically responsive services in four program areas:

- Violence Against Women and Girls
- African Girls Empowerment Program/GELI
- Children and Family Services
- Preventing Female Genital Cutting





## **GELI Program Overview**

- Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and Families has a Girls Educational and Leadership Initiative (GELI) Program which provides academic and emotional support to immigrant African high school age girls (14-21 yrs. old).
- Through work in GELI and CFS they have encountered many challenging situations of early and forced marriages and have often struggled with the lack of adequate legal protections/protocols to help these girls.



# Slide 8

# Our first girls group

10 girls.

9 married.

7 versions of marriage.



# Slide 9



ABOUT THE REPORT


## The Purpose

- Inform emerging policies & practices on early & forced marriage
- Highlight the lived experiences of African immigrant and refugee young women facing pressures to marry



# Slide 11

## The Research

- Methodology

  Ethnography

  Semi-structured interviews

  Participant diaries

  Participant diaries

  Participant paction

  Research

  Focus groups

  Textual Analysis

  Case notes

  Client demographics

- Participants
   30 West African young women
- Ages 15-21
   15 unmarried
- 13 married
  1 unmarried -> married
  1 separated

# Slide 12



EARLY & FORCED MARRIAGE IN NYC


## New York Age and Consent Requirements

- 18 years or older: No consents required
   16 or 17 years old: Must present written consent of both parents
- 14 or 15 years old: Must present written consent of both parents and a justice of Supreme Court or judge from Family Court
- Under 14 years old: Marriage license cannot be issued



## Slide 14

## Child Welfare Issues

Endangering the Welfare of a Child NY Penal Code § 260.10: A person is guilty of endangering the welfare of a child when the person knowingly acts in a manner likely to be injurious to the physical, mental or moral welfare of a child less than 17 years old.

- Person can be any adult-not limited to parents or guardians
   Class A misdemeanor with minimum 1 year sentence
   Must "knowingly" act in a way that would injure welfare of child



# Slide 15

## Child Welfare Issues

- People v. Benut, 385 N.Y.S.2d 222 (1976).

  New York court found father, brankin Morris Ben Benu, gality of endangering the wetfers of the culti. Father arranged for the maniage of his 13 year old daughter, Fathma, to a 17 year old spouse. Father made his partners and enlable for the marriage ceremony, procured a person to scientificate the marriage and gase the couple money to leave NY. Father sacket perioduction in the marriage instrated that the knowingly played an active tide in the ceremony and thus endangered the veilbre of his minor child.

  Onlid's concent or inansing was NYO 1 acklerate.

Main point: In New York, parents may be found criminally responsible for endangering the welfare of their child by arranging the minor child's marriage particularly if the child is under 14 years old.



## Officiating & Documenting the Marriage

- · Elder family members
- · Religious leaders
- Community leaders (cultural and social associations, etc.)
- Abroad in absentia of one or more parties
- Rarely are marriage certificates obtained



# Slide 17

## Early Marriage Trends

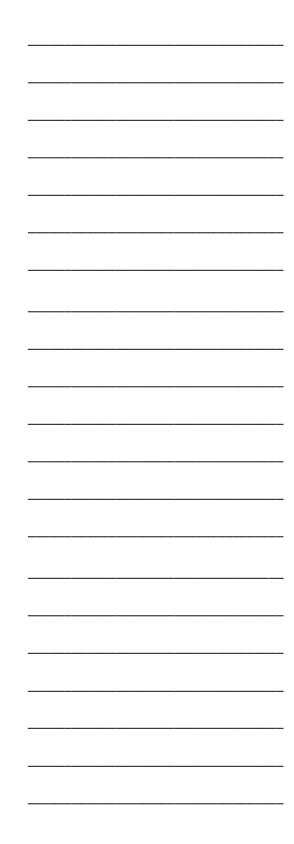
- Polygamous families
  Polygamous families
  Age difference in the marriage that is substantial
  Marriage occurs both here and abroad
  There would be implications for the extended family members if the marriage is unsuccessful
  Girlis married young and have no support (parents are deceased or they are an unaccompanied minor)
  Marriage occurs with girls not in school/intervention may occur elsewhere ie: hospital
  Marriage to usually consensual on the part of the young woman to escape some other form of abuse
  They have children very early on in the marriage
  Withen they are married under 18 they may have previously met their spouse

# Slide 18

## Prevalence in NYC

- · No research available on prevalence
- · What we know
- New York City is home to 172,709 African born people (2011)
   Of the youth served in our youth program GELI, nearly 30% identify as married or engaged
- Three of the Hotspots are among the most heavily represented in Sauti Yetu's clients





## Why is the decision made?

### Family/ Community

- Stability and secured future for child and grandchildren
- Prevention of any behavior that might embarrass the family
- Securing bonds with other families
- Support in old age

- Girl
  Stability and secured future
  Increased stature in the
  family and community
  Peer pressure
  Increased freedom of
  movement
  Staying in good graces of
  family and community
  Extensive support with child
  rearing and household
  duties/events

## Slide 20

## How is the decision made?

- · Families may make the initial choice of a potential spouse
- The young woman may have a say on whether she likes the man or not
- The young woman may have the option of choosing a spouse as long as he meets the parameters of the family

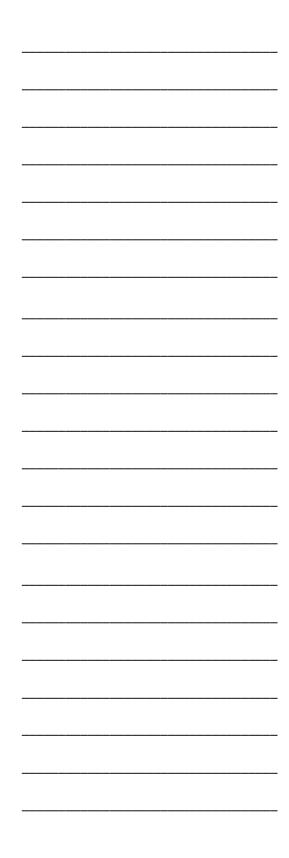


## Slide 21

## **Some Considerations**

- Some immigrant and refugee African families in the US do not realize that they are breaking the law by having their daughters marry too young.
   These parents may not be aware of the proper legal procedures they are required to follow based on the girls age. This transpires because early marriage is prevalent in some African countries.
   Not all situations of early or forced marriage have a victim (young girl) and perpetrator (parents). In some instances the young girl is ambivalent about getting married and would not mind having an arranged marriage but would like to wait or finish school.





## Immigration changes things...

- The threat of "American-ization" adds more incentive
- · Decisions are made transnationally
- Marriage used as an immigration tool and a factor in spouse choice
- Poverty complicates the decision to marriage



# Slide 23

## Risk Factors

- Country of Origin, date of arrival, urban vs rural, and level of acculturation
  Family history (polygamy, early marriage, age difference between parents)
  Ittle support or family/community connection (unaccompanied minor)
  Pattern of behavior problems
  Lack of concrete future plans
  Idealized view of marriage
  Economic status of household



# Slide 24



**OUR RESPONSE** 


## What do the girls want?

- Education
- Postponed marriage
- Some independence
- Family & community approval
- ...it all



# Slide 26

# Where do the girls go for help?

- Teachers
- Family Allies
- · Youth organizations
- Hospitals

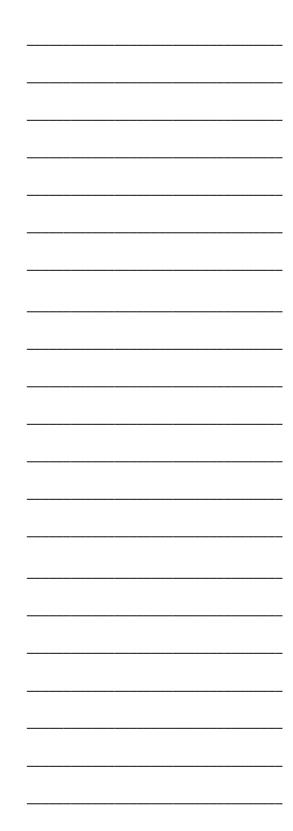


# Slide 27

# Look beyond the marriage

- Is this really a housing issue? An immigration issue? An issue of income? A parenting issue?
- Relieve pressure to marry by addressing the real issue





## Ask the right questions

"They don't know my culture. They think I can just say no and it's that easy." —Binta (age 16)

- 18 doesn't change things
- If she is married, her health, social, educational, and economic needs are different
- Assess the family relationships



# Slide 29

## Use the community

- Find an ally within the family or community
- Family mediation to negotiate best interests
- Parents are not always the enemy
- Find out who is making the final decision



# Slide 30

# Promote future plans

- Secondary education most strongly associated with reduced prevalence of child marriage
- Decisions of whether or not to consent to marriage depend largely on the prospects young women see for their futures




## A marriage might already be in process if...

- Travel date to Country of Origin set (especially at odd time)

  Change in family dynamic

  Wishful statements beginning with, "If you were married..."

  Sudden interest in girl's appearance

  Buying expensive cloth or clothing

  Encouraged to communicate with an older man frequently

  Change in income

- Change in income



## Slide 32

## Keep in mind:

- She may not always know she is getting married
- If she does know, she may not tell you
- She may already be married and be keeping a secret



# Slide 33

## Recommendations for future work

- Community dialogue & mediation
- Culturally-specific coordinated interventions
- Targeted resources and opportunities
- · Community-specific data collection




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# Slide 35

	For information on upcoming webinars, trainings, and news about forced marriage in the United States, please sign up for the:
	National Network to Prevent Forced Marriage
	Forced Marriage Newsletter
	at Tahirih's website:
	www.tahirih.org/advocacy/policy-areas/ forced-marriage-initiative/
	Or contact: FMI@tahirih.org
V / V	TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER.
