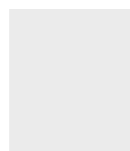


10

ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
ISSUE Considering the Impact of Child Marriage on the Female Population
SUBMITTED BY Gerda Balogh, Chair of the United Nations Women
APPROVED BY Vilmos Eiben, President of the General Assembly

Introduction

Marriage is often seen as an important turning point in life, a bond between two individuals that serves various social, economic, and personal roles. It fosters the development of families and provides a nurturing environment for raising children. However, marriage before the age of 18 can harmfully affect both parties of the union; this practice is known as child marriage. Young girls have been particularly impacted by it, which often results in serious negative effects on their physical, mental, and financial well-being. For instance, the health risks are severe for young girls who marry young. They may face serious complications during pregnancy and childbirth, which, in some cases, can result in tragic outcomes like maternal mortality. In countries where child marriage is prevailing, such as Niger, many young brides deal with painful conditions like obstetric fistula (a childbirth injury) due to early pregnancies. In addition, child marriage also takes a toll on education. Many girls forced into early marriages find their education interrupted, which greatly limits their prospects and restricts their career choices, causing gender inequality. This disruption not only hinders their aspirations but also keeps them trapped in a vicious cycle of dependency. This practice has deep historical roots, formed by cultural norms, financial hardships, and societal structures that have lasted for centuries and still exist in today's society. Despite international attempts to end child marriage, it still occurs in some countries, mainly located in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, where economic factors and customs continue to promote it. Tackling child marriage demands ongoing commitment and a multifaceted approach. It requires not only enforcing laws but also improving access to education and changing cultural perceptions. The fact that child marriage remains common demonstrates how difficult it will be to eliminate it.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Marriage - A formal marriage or informal union where at least one of the parties is under the age of 18. This practice is recognised as a human rights violation, often leading to long-term negative consequences for young girls.

Forced Marriage - A marriage where one or both parties have not freely consented, often associated with child marriage, as minors are usually unable to give full and informed consent.

Customary Marriage - Marriages performed according to local cultural or religious traditions rather than official legal frameworks. These marriages are often used to bypass laws that prohibit child marriage.

Legal Age of Marriage - The minimum age at which individuals can marry under national law, often set at 18 but might involve exceptions that allow younger parties to unify with parental or judicial permission.

MENA Region - Stands for the Middle East and North Africa, a region where child marriage is common.

Dowry System - Also known as bride price, a practice that is specific to certain cultures, where the bride's family sends a financial or material gift to the groom's relatives. Dowries may promote early marriage arrangements to relieve the financial burden on families.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) - Acts of violence directed at individuals based on their gender, including physical, sexual, and emotional assault, to which child brides are especially exposed

Maternal Mortality - The death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or soon after giving birth. The risk of maternal mortality from early pregnancies is greater and thus highly increased by child marriages.

Judicial Consent - Legal provisions that enable courts to approve marriages for minors, often circumventing the minimum legal age of marriage.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - A collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations, aiming to eliminate all harmful practices and customs, such as child marriage, by 2030.

Economic Empowerment - Playing a vital role in combating child marriage, economic empowerment provides tools to enhance the financial independence of individuals with a greater focus on women.

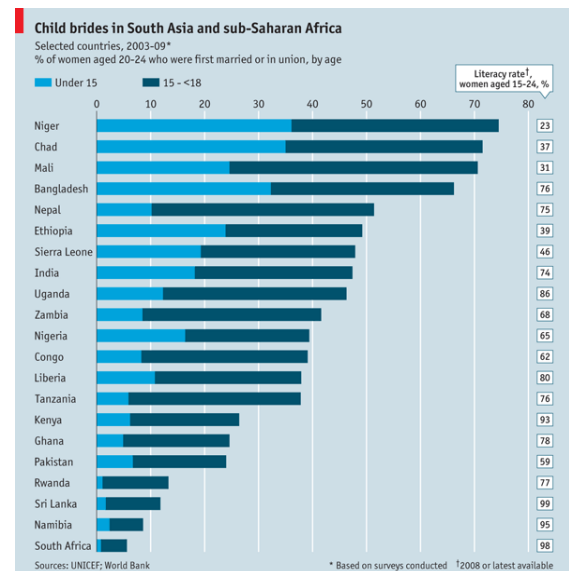
General Overview

Child marriage includes various forms, such as forced and customary marriages, which typically bypass or occur outside of the legal framework. Since the majority of child marriages involve adolescents who are incompetent to give their full conscious approval, there are some major concerns about this custom. It is deeply soaked in cultural and traditional approaches, widely practiced in areas like Sub-Saharan Africa, with countries like Niger, Chad, and Mali having some of the highest rates. The marriage of daughters is also considered a relief from economic stress since a family believes early marriage will make their daughters financially secure. Equally, countries in South Asia, for instance Bangladesh and Nepal are no exception to the same problems arising from socio-economic pressures, as well as customs, compelling poor families to send their daughters early to their future. Despite the fact that many countries have legally prohibited child marriage, in the Middle East and North Africa the cultural and religious practices continue to endorse it. Countries like Yemen and Iraq have religious interpretations and long-established traditions that are influencing communities to give young girls away in marriage. While nations such as India and Indonesia have taken measures to reduce the rates of child marriage in Southeast Asia, the practice is still alive in some rural areas and within certain ethnic communities and minorities like Romas in Europe. Additionally, child marriage is also made possible by specific legal loopholes, such as the use of parental or judicial consent, which empowers child marriages even in circumstances in which minimum age regulations are in place. And while many countries have set the minimum legal age at 18 for marriage, exceptions occur. Parental and judicial consent were originally intended to provide flexibility for unique circumstances, such as unplanned pregnancies or cultural practices. However, they often reflect societal norms that prioritize family interests over individual rights, enabling harmful practices to continue and undermining the protective purpose of these regulations.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In South Asia, child marriage is a prevalent problem and regimes such as Afghanistan and Pakistan are finding it difficult to introduce measures to tackle it. Afghanistan ranks as one of the nations which are most severely impacted by the issue of child marriage, which is made worse by rigid cultural standards and instability in politics. Girls' human rights, including but not limited to access to school, were further undermined by the Taliban's supremacy, exposing them further to early marriages.

On the international arena, the United States and the United Kingdom have been very active in combating child marriage. These countries make a substantial contribution through overseas aid, awareness campaigns, and support for international initiatives. Similarly, the Netherlands stresses that education and economic empowerment are some of the key tools to deal with the very roots of child marriage and heavily relies on the collaboration with non-governmental organisations.



HISTORICAL MILESTONES

People have been fighting against child marriage for years to ensure that all individuals have the right to choose when and whom to marry. A pivotal moment came in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasised the necessity for free and full consent in marriage. In 1962, the Convention on Consent to Marriage urged all member states to set a legal marriage age. Fast forward to 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals included a key objective to end child marriage by 2030, highlighting the global commitment to this cause.

The Indian government took action in 2023 to increase the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21. This adjustment aligns with international requirements and demonstrates increasing consciousness of the importance of protecting the rights and prospects of its young people. Numerous voices unite to uphold the idea that everyone has the freedom to independent choice, whether it concerns marriage or life in general.

IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES

Child marriage has complex, long-lasting effects. Considering that early pregnancies significantly increase maternal death rates and expose young brides to gender-based violence, the hazards are especially severe from a medical point of view. Economically, child marriage

limits girls' access to education and vocational training, keeping families and communities in cycles of poverty. Socially, the practice entrenches gender inequality, undermines efforts toward community development, and deprives societies of educated and empowered women.

This global phenomenon affects millions worldwide, with over 650 million women married as children. One in five girls worldwide face this issue, with the highest percentage in sub-Saharan Africa (31%) and South Asia (45%). Early marriages lead to severe health risks, including maternal mortality and childbirth complications, along with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) due to lack of sexual health awareness. Education is often interrupted, and many girls drop out of school, limiting their economic independence and future opportunities. Child brides often experience social isolation, dependency, domestic violence, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. And while the negative effects of child marriage primarily impact girls, there are also several disadvantages for boys. For example, early marriage creates pressures for young males to provide for their families, leading to often irrelevant responsibilities. Also, even though boys may continue their education more frequently than girls, they still encounter significant emotional and financial challenges.

Major Parties Involved

Yemen: The country has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the Middle East, as nearly one-third of women aged 20-24 get married before 18, and 7% before 15. Poverty, cultural norms, and conflict exacerbate this issue, especially in governorates like Al-Jawf, Hajjah, and Hodeidah.

Sudan: Sudan faces severe problems with child marriage due to deeply rooted social norms and economic hardships with 34% of girls marrying before 18, and 12% before 15, particularly in regions like East Darfur (57%) and South Darfur (56%). Poverty, gender inequality, cultural norms, and limited education worsen the issue, and despite recent legal reforms setting the marriage age at 18, child marriage in Sudan remains a severe issue.

Iran: Although child marriage is relatively uncommon in Iran as opposed to some other countries, it is nevertheless an ongoing issue, particularly in rural areas. Legal loopholes make it possible for weddings among minors to be granted permission by parents or the court. Religious and cultural customs frequently oppose attempts to change these rules.

Afghanistan: Afghanistan has a high rate of child marriage, which is fuelled by traditional cultural norms, poverty, and insecurity. Recently, the Taliban's control has further

restricted girls' rights, including education and public appearance, making young girls far more susceptible to early marriages.

Tunisia: With child marriage rates as low as 2%, Tunisia is an example of success. Other countries now look to the country as a model due to its more robust legal framework and enforcement.

Egypt: Egypt's Child Law, ratified in 2008, aims to protect children and ensure their rights. It determines anyone under 18 as a minor and guarantees them safety from violence, neglect, and exploitation, along with access to healthcare and opportunities to embrace. The law prohibits child labour under 16 and sets 18 as the minimum age for marriage. However, objectives like this often struggle against cultural traditions, such as unofficial marriages. Adults who jeopardise children face fines or jail time, but penalties remain weak in some areas. While the law is a step forward, further actions are needed to create real change for Egyptian children.

United States of America: The USA firmly subsidises initiatives against child marriage through foreign aid and programs by organisations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). These concentrate on education, economic empowerment, and health programs in regions like the Middle East where child marriage is prevalent.

United Kingdom (UK): A global advocate for ending child marriage, the UK funds initiatives to combat the issue through its Department for International Development (DFID) and promotes gender equality and education in affected regions.

Netherlands: A key supporter of international actions addressing child marriage, the Netherlands emphasises the importance of education and economic empowerment for girls through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and multilateral organisations to address the issue.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund: The UNICEF is a global organisation campaigning against child marriage, providing resources for education, healthcare, and legislative reforms in affected countries, especially in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.

Save the Children: It is a nonprofit organisation (NPO) that raises awareness and implements community-based solutions to protect girls from child marriage on the international arena.

United Nations: The UN supports international efforts to end child marriage by 2030 through organisations like UN Women and programs aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Timeline of Events

13th Century - England introduces statutory rape laws, setting the minimum age for marriage.

1948 - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the United Nations, recognising the right to free and full consent to marriage and rejecting forced and child marriages

1962 - The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages embraced by the United Nations General Assembly, urging member states to set a minimum age for marriage.

1989 - Adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the United Nations General Assembly, underlining the protection of children from harmful practices, including child marriage.

2008 - Egypt enacts the Child Law, prohibiting marriage under 18.

2013 - The Girl Summit hosted by the United Kingdom in collaboration with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), focuses on ending child marriage and female genital mutilation globally.

2015 - The United Nations assesses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5.3, which aims to eliminate child marriage by 2030. In the same year, they declare child marriage as a human rights violation.

2016 - The Netherlands launches the Marriage: No Child's Play program, a multi-country initiative aimed at addressing the root causes of child marriage and empowering girls through education.

2016 - Tanzania raises the legal marriage age from 14 to 18, owing to a movement led by activist Rebeca Gyumi.

2016 - The Southern African Development Community adopts a Model Law to combat child marriage across the region.

2017 - Yemen reports that over 32% of women aged 20-24 got married before the age of 18.

2018 - Delaware becomes the first U.S. state to prohibit child marriage entirely.

2019 - The African Union founds its Campaign to End Child Marriage, focusing on the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) and Sub-Saharan regions.

2019 - New Jersey follows Delaware in banning child marriage completely.

2020 - The United States passes the End Child Marriage Act, which strengthens the United States' support for international programs targeting child marriage.

2021 - UNICEF and Save the Children publish a report highlighting that 10 million additional child marriages may occur by 2030 due to COVID-19 disruptions.

2022 - The United Nations calls for accelerated measures to eliminate child marriage by 2030 during the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66).

2023 - India raises the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 to align with the best international practices.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

DOMESTIC INITIATIVES BY THE DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Efforts to fight child marriage have strengthened internationally, with countries enforcing targeted domestic strategies alongside international programs. In Bangladesh, the National Action Plan (2018–2030) aims to eradicate child marriage by 2041. This effort is supported by the Child Marriage Restraint Act (2017), which raised the legal marriage age, and initiatives like the Tottho Apa Project, which uses information technology and a national helpline (109) to raise awareness and prevent child marriages. In Ethiopia, national strategies underscore expanding educational opportunities for girls and engaging communities to shift societal norms. Local

programs involve parents and leaders in dialogues about child marriage, promoting education and vocational alternatives for girls. Nepal has implemented a comprehensive action plan addressing the root causes through education, legal reforms, and gender equality promotion. Awareness campaigns target both urban and rural areas to reshape cultural perceptions. In Zambia, a national strategy mobilises government ministries, NGOs, and community organisations to address the underlying issues of child marriage with traditional leaders playing a fundamental role in changing cultural practices. Globally, the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme, launched in 2016, targets high-prevalence countries like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Nepal, empowering millions through education, health services, and advocacy. These corresponding actions at governmental, community, and international levels demonstrate a growing commitment to protecting girls' rights and ending child marriage sustainably.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO END CHILD MARRIAGE (2016)

Launched in 2016, the Global Partnership to End Child Marriage connects over 1,000 organisations across more than 95 countries to protect girls from the threats of early marriage. It aims to enquire about harmful norms, empower girls, and advocate for women's rights. This partnership of the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) and UNICEF has raised awareness, affected policies, and promoted cooperation among governments and NGOs, especially targeting high-risk countries like India and Ethiopia. However, challenges like poverty and cultural traditions continue. By addressing these core causes, the collaboration seeks to build a world where every girl can live freely.

UN RESOLUTION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS (2023)

In 2023, the United Nations extended women's and girls' rights with impactful resolutions. The UN Security Council urged the Afghan Taliban to immediately lift restrictions on women in Afghanistan, while Amnesty International emphasised the necessity for accountability. In July 2023, the Human Rights Council handed in resolutions tackling forced marriage, promoting girls' education, and preventing violence against women in custody. These measures are vital since over 340 million women and girls are projected to live in extreme poverty, 110 million may remain out of school, and 614 million in conflict zones face heightened risks like food insecurity, which affects one in two women there. Later on, the General Assembly reaffirmed commitments to gender equality, concentrating on climate change and access to social services. These efforts underscore the global urgency of combating discrimination and inequality. While progress is evident, challenges persist in providing accountability and meaningful change for women and girls worldwide.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

STRENGTHENING LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS

Laws prohibiting child marriage often exist but are poorly enforced, allowing the practice to persist. Strengthening laws and closing loopholes that would enable exceptions for judicial or parental consent may contribute to ending child marriages. Additionally, creating national action plans and establishing clear penalties for violators can enhance enforcement.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Cultural and social norms often reserve child marriage due to misinformation or a lack of understanding regarding its dangers. Collaborating with local chiefs and community groups to create awareness campaigns can help reinforce solutions to this issue.

Awareness campaigns are not just important; they are crucial in the fight against child marriage. By educating communities and changing hard-core perspectives, we can empower girls and protect their futures. These campaigns effectively inform people about the legal age of marriage, the health risks associated with early marriage, and the rights that every girl owns. This knowledge is a powerful tool that leads to a collective rejection of harmful practices that threaten the youth. Moreover, by engaging community leaders and peer educators, we can create a network of support that resonates within local populations, challenging and reshaping cultural norms. The vision of a safe world for women can become a reality through various methods such as consistent advocacy and education. Whether it is done via media engagement, workshops, educational materials, or powerful collaborations with NGOs like Girls Not Brides and government agencies, these campaigns can reach and resonate with everyone.

COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Families often see child marriage as a solution to financial burdens or as a means of protecting girls. Community initiatives should aim to educate parents about the dangers of child marriage and promote alternative options such as vocational training for their daughters. For instance, community-driven programs in rural Yemen that incorporate education, and economic incentives could be discussed.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR FAMILIES

Financial difficulties often force families to marry off their young daughters. Implementing conditional cash transfers (CCT), microfinancial options such as small loan alternatives and

community finance choices, and skill development programs for families could lessen their economic reliance on early marriage.

Economic empowerment is a key strategy to combat child marriage, addressing the poverty and lack of opportunities that contribute to this practice is apt to be useful. In Bangladesh, conditional cash transfer programs have shown that \$1,000 invested results in \$1,078 in delayed marriages and increased schooling. The BAKILA (Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents) programme has reduced child marriage rates by 23% among participants. In its garment sector, girls with job prospects reported staying in school longer. In Uganda, employment/livelihood skill training has led to increased employment for young women, decreasing the number of early marriages. NGOs like Girls Not Brides emphasize the integration of economic interventions with educational programs to combat child marriage. World Vision provides financial support and life skills training, contributing to lowered child marriage rates. UNFPA and WHO advocate for financial literacy and access to savings accounts to prevent child marriage.

PROVIDING SUPPORT SERVICES FOR GIRLS AT RISK

Girls at risk of child marriage often lack access to safe spaces and support. Another key approach can be creating shelters, counselling centres, and healthcare access for vulnerable girls while training social workers to help them seek protection. For Example, programs by Save the Children and the United Nations that offer protection to vulnerable girls in Yemen and Afghanistan may be utilized to a further extent.

Support services for girls at risk of child marriage are vital in addressing immediate needs and empowering them to make informed decisions. These services include shelters, counselling, and legal assistance, crucial for protection in areas where girls face a 20% higher risk of child marriage, such as conflict zones. UNICEF's programs have reached over 21 million girls with life skills training and sexuality education, helping delay marriage. Health services, including sexual and reproductive care, are critical in preventing early pregnancies and associated health risks. For example, Plan International collaborates with UNHCR to offer case management services for girls, especially in refugee settings like Niger, where tailored interventions are necessary. Economic empowerment programs, such as those run by UNICEF, provide financial support to families, thus decreasing the likelihood of child marriage. Legal advocacy by UNFPA and UNICEF strengthens laws in countries like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and India.

Bibliography:

[Child Marriage in Yemen: A Mixed Methods Study in Ongoing Conflict and Displacement | Journal of Refugee Studies | Oxford Academic](#)

[Yemen - Girls Not Brides](#)

[Child Marriage in Sudan | Child Marriage Data Portal](#)

[South Sudan Country Profile – AU Campaign to End Child Marriage | AUCECMA.ORG](#)

[Official Statistics: One Fifth of All Marriages in Iran are Child Marriages](#)

[Iran Reports Increase In Child Marriages](#)

[New Research Shows Rise In Child Marriages In Iran | Iran International](#)

[Afghanistan - Girls Not Brides](#)

[Child Marriage in Afghanistan | Child Marriage Data Portal](#)

[Child Marriage in Tunisia | Child Marriage Data Portal](#)

[Tunisia - Girls Not Brides](#)

[Child Marriage in Egypt | Child Marriage Data Portal](#)

[New federal law aims to accelerate action to end child marriage in the U.S. - Girls Not Brides](#)

[Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024 - Tahirih Justice Center Tahirih Justice Center](#)

[Child Marriage in United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Child Marriage Data Portal](#)

[DevTracker Programme GB-GOV-1-301058](#)

[Girls Not Brides the Netherlands becomes 8th official Girls Not Brides National Partnership - Filles, Pas Epouses](#)

[The Netherlands - Girls Not Brides](#)

[Child Marriage Reduced by Millions Globally - KIT](#)

[UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage](#)

[Child-marriage-country-profiles-2021.pdf](#)

[Ending Child Marriage | Save the Children International](#)

[Ending Child Marriage in Sierra Leone | Save The Children](#)

[New UN initiative aims to protect millions of girls from child marriage](#)

[Ending Child Marriage | UNICEF USA](#)

[UN Declaration of Human Rights](#)

[UN Treaty Collection](#)

[United Nations](#)

[Child Protection Law and Policy](#)

[Egypt: Law No. 12 of 1996 Promulgating the Child Law Amended by Law No. 126 of 2008 | Refworld](#)

[UNICEF Girl Summit 2013](#)

[SDG Tracker](#)

[Dutch Government Initiatives](#)

[Child-marriage-country-profile-Yemen-2021.pdf](#)

<https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/1821/file/%20MENA-CMReport-YemenBrief.pdf.pdf>

[African Union Initiative](#)

[U.S. Legislation on Child Marriage](#)

[UNICEF Report](#)

[New UN initiative aims to protect millions of girls from child marriage](#)

[UN Women CSW66](#)

Charting Brighter Futures for Girls: Ending child marriage by 2030 - UNICEF Data for Action Blog

Increase in minimum age of marriage for women to 21 years two years after Bill is notified: Centre - The Hindu

Supreme Court Review 2023: On Marriage - Supreme Court Observer

<https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/sites/unicef.org.indonesia/files/2020-06/National-Strategy-on-Child-Marriage-Prevention-2020.pdf>

RecommendationsForActionEbook.pdf

Charity Organization for Children

[Gec_learning_brief_child_marriage_final.pdf](#)

Community-based empowerment program to delay marriage: Results from the More Than Brides Alliance intervention in India, Malawi, Mali and Niger - PMC

[CRANK_poster_Economic_empowerment_NJ6NqbC.pdf](#)

World Bank Document

Provide services - Girls Not Brides

8 ways to address child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings - Girls Not Brides

Child Marriage in Humanitarian Crises: Girls and parents speak out on risk and protective factors, decision-making, and solutions | Save the Children's Resource Centre

Child Protection Law and Policy

<https://learningpartnership.org/resource/child-law-egypt-document-english>