

Forum: United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

Issue: The Issue of Child Brides and Marriages in LEDC Nations

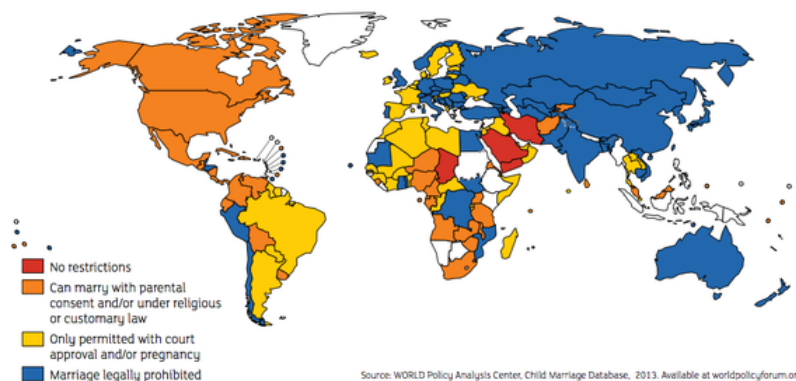
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Introduction

Child marriage is a union, either formal or informal, entered by a child under a certain age. This union, whether one or both parties are children, violates the rights of children. It also has widespread, long-term consequences such as violence, exploitation, and abuse, which affects the child involved, both physically and psychologically. Although child marriage affects both genders, it disproportionately affects girls who make up an overwhelming majority of children who are married. In the developing world, one out of three women under the age of 50 were married before they turned 18. One in seven women under the age of 50 were married before they were 15.

Child marriages were considered the norm throughout history. The long-believed presuppose the necessity of child marriages stem from a multitude of reasons relating to economic stability. Consequently, child marriage is still widespread today, but it is more concentrated in Less Economically developed countries (LEDC) such as parts of Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, Latin America, and Oceania.

With the global advancement to a better future, the practice of child marriage has been falling in most parts of the world. The most current data from UNICEF shows that about 21 percent of young women worldwide were married as children; this is a 25 percent decrease from 10 years ago.



Caption #1: Map of where girls under the age of 15 can get married

Definition of Key Terms

LEDC

LEDC is an abbreviation of Less Economically Developed Country, which is synonymous with the term developing country. LEDC is a country with a low standard of living, less developed industrial base and a low Human Development Index relative to other countries. Examples of LEDCs are Kenya, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

Dowry

Amount of parental money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband or his family in marriage, for she will reside in the husband's household. Dowry is most common in nations with inadequate male-biased inheritance laws and patrilineal societies, which expect women to live in or near their husbands family. It is a common practice in many parts of the world, especially in South Asia and several Middle East and North African countries.

Bride Napping (Bride Kidnapping)

Bride Napping is a practice in which a man abducts the woman he wishes to marry. Though the motivations behind this practice vary by region, the cultures with traditions of marriages by abduction are generally patriarchal with a strong stigma on sex or pregnancy outside marriages and illegitimate births. It is most prevalent in the Caucasus region, Central Asia, parts of Africa, and among people of Hmong in Southeast Asia, the Tzeltal in Mexico, and the Romani in Europe.

Age of Consent

The age of consent is the ages in which a person can be legally considered competent to consent to sexual acts. The purpose of the age of consent is to protect an underage person from sexual advances. Thus, an adult who engages in sexual activity with a person under the age of consent cannot claim that the sexual activity had consent. Such sexual activity may be considered child sexual abuse or statutory rape, with the person below the age of consent is regarded as the victim, and their sex partner is regarded as the offender unless both are underage.

Marriageable age

Marriageable age is the minimum age at which a person is allowed by law to marry. This age is approved either as a right or subject to parental, judicial, or other forms of approval. The 55 parties to the 1962 United Nations Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages have agreed to specify minimum age by statute law, to override customary, religious and tribal law and traditions. Moreover, the Convention reaffirms the consensual nature of marriages and to ensure the registration of marriages. Laws that set the minimum age of marriage are a step towards safeguarding children from being married before they are ready.

Sexual Maturity

Sexual Maturity is the capability of an organism to reproduce, and in humans, puberty encompasses the process of sexual maturation and adulthood is based on cultural definitions.

Age of Majority

The age of majority is the age that the law recognizes as a threshold of adulthood. This is the age where a minor ceases to be considered as such and terminate the control and legal responsibilities of their parents or guardians over them. The age of majority does not correspond to the mental or physical maturity of an individual.

Maternal Mortality

Maternal mortality refers to the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of the pregnancy. From 2000 to 2017, the global maternal mortality ratio declined by 38 percent- from 342 deaths to 211 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the UN inter-agency estimates. While substantive, the rate of the decline is less than half the 6.4 percent annual rate needed to achieve the Sustainable Development global goal.

Most maternal deaths can be prevented if births are attended by skilled health personnel who are regularly supervised, have proper equipment and supplies, and can refer women promptly to emergency obstetric care when complications are diagnosed.

Reproductive Disorders

Reproductive disorders are disorders involving the reproductive system, including abnormal hormone production by the ovaries or the testes or by other endocrine glands. Such diseases can also be caused by genetic or congenital abnormalities, infections, tumors, or

disorders of unknown cause. It can cause reproductive tract infections, congenital abnormalities, cancers of the reproductive system, and sexual dysfunction.

History

Medieval Societies to Pre-Industrial Revolution

Before the industrial revolution, many parts of the world, women tended to marry immediately after reaching puberty in their mid-teens or some scenarios even earlier. This was due to the generally patriarchal society with a strong stigma on sex or pregnancy outside marriages and illegitimate births. With girls getting married as they gain the ability to reproduce, child marriage was a precision most family used for the legitimacy and purity of their daughters.

On the other hand, men tended to marry later since the norm of society was for married couples to establish a household by themselves. This usually meant that men remained unmarried until they have accumulated enough wealth to support a new home, and the girls would contribute to the family finances with a dowry.

Key Issues

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is defined as the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. Examples include violence, professional obstacles, and access to education. Some distinctions are empirically grounded, while others appear to be socially constructed. Gender inequality is experienced differently across different cultures. In the majority of the LEDC, culture is rooted in the patriarchy where women are considered as a commodity or as a burden.

Women's Rights

Child marriages violate a range of women's interconnected rights such as the equality on the grounds of sex and age, to receive the highest attainable standard of health, to be free from slavery, access to education, freedom of movement, freedom from violence, reproductive rights, and the right to consensual marriage. The consequences of these violations impact women, children, and the broader society.

Health

Child marriage threatens the health and life of girls complications from pregnancy, and childbirth is the leading cause of death about adolescence girls below the age of 19 in developing countries. These consequences are primarily due to the girl's physical immaturity wherefore the pelvis and birth canal are not fully developed.

Child marriage also threatens the life of offspring. Younger mothers have a higher risk of delivering preterm or having a low birth weight baby. Moreover, infants born to child mothers tend to have weaker immune systems and face a heightened risk of malnutrition.

Domestic Violence

Married teenage girls with low levels of education suffer a great risk of social isolation and domestic violence than more educated women who marry as adults. This is because after they marry, the girl typically relocates to their husbands' home and becomes a home keeper. This transition puts a strain cause she would have dropped out of school, losing the social support she once had. Moreover, the husband's family will have a higher expectation of submission due to the girl's age. The sense of isolationism and can have severe mental and health implications such as depression.

Significant age gaps between the child and her spouse make her more vulnerable to domestic violence and marital rape. Early marriage places young girls in an unsafe situation of being entirely dependent on her husband. Domestic and sexual violence has a life long, devastating mental health consequences for young girls since they are at their formative stages of psychological development.

Social Pressures

Brides families seek out any bachelor and marry their daughter. This is amplified in social upheavals such as war or major military campaigns often make sustainable groom a rare commodity. Moreover, a sense of social pressure causes of child marriages across the world. Parents fear the social stigma of a single adult daughter. This fear stems from the risk of crimes such as rape, which are not only traumatic but also lead to the acceptance of girls in marriage if she is not a virgin. Connected to the idea of virginity is the act of eloping, which can bring shame to families and also encourage child marriages.

Culture and Traditions

Child marriage has been maintained as part of culture and tradition for its assurance of girls' financial futures and its reinforcement of community dynamics. It is seen as a core part of the culture for its prevalence throughout the decades, if not centuries. But with that said, not all

cultural practices are positive. The solution is not to condemn all traditions, but to work with communities to change tradition from within. Child marriage is not linked to one religion, it happens to girls of Muslim, Hindu, or Catholic faith, as well as children from other beliefs.

Economic Insecurity

High rates of child marriage negatively impact a country's economic development because early marriages impact the girl's education and labor market participation. Some researchers and activists note that the high rates of child marriage prevent significant progress towards each of the SDGs and global efforts to reduce poverty due to its effect on educational attainment, economic and political participation, and health.

Financial Security

Extreme poverty may make daughters an economic burden on the family, which may be relieved by their early marriage, to benefit not just the family but also to the girl. Poor parents view marriages as a means to ensure their daughter's financial security and protection.

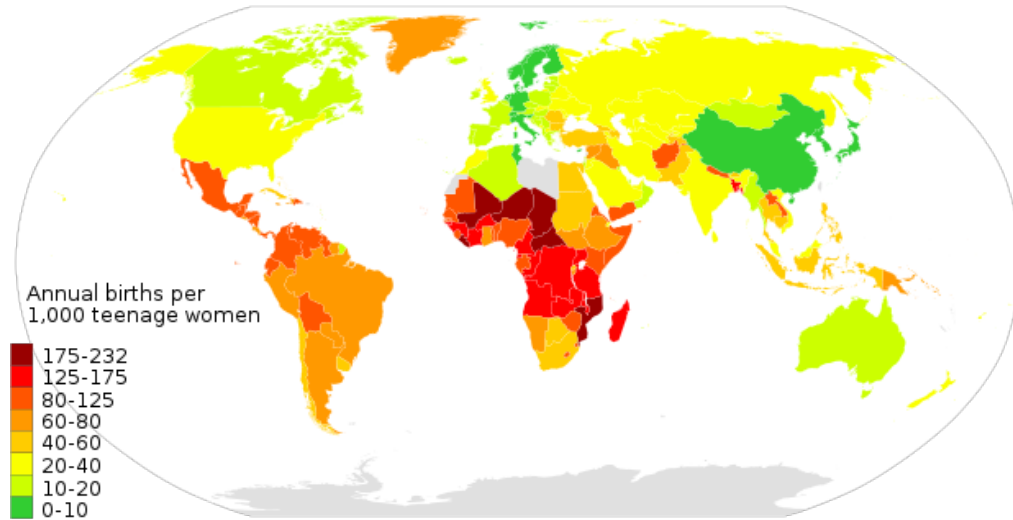
Education

Child marriage, education, and financial instability is a vicious cycle. Child marriage often ends with a girl's education. Uneducated girls are more at risk for child marriage, due to financial insecurity in their homes. Early marriage impedes a young girl's ability to continue her education. Without education, girls and adult women have fewer opportunities to earn income and become financially independent.

Lack of Health Education

The lack of knowledge about intercourse and health education is a result of the low levels of education that results from child marriage. The lack of knowledge is detrimental to the health of the child in underage marriage for several reasons. The first would be child pregnancies; statistics from the International Women's Health Coalition position child marriage as one of the leading causes of pregnancies before age 15. Moreover, to make the situation dire, the physical immaturity of girls 15 and younger leads to high-risk pregnancies and further complications during childbirth. Many of these pregnancies lead to prolonged obstructed labor with the potential of severe infections, hemorrhaging, and maternal death.

Caption #2: Birth rates per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years, worldwide.



Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is the social action in which women elaborate and recreate the circumstances that they were previously denied. Empowerment is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. People are empowered when they can access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as education, profession, and lifestyle. Feeling entitled to make your own decisions creates a sense of empowerment. Empowerment for women includes the action of raising the state of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training.

Empowerment, concerning women, means accepting and allowing other women who are on the outside of the decision making process into it. Women empowerment is crucial to reducing the prevalence of child marriage for the bases of child marriage is rooted in economic dependence on one's spouse. With women being responsible for their well being the distress the reliance on a male figure.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund is the United Nations agency responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children around the world. UNICEF's mandate is to address the long-term needs of children and women in developing countries. UNICEF stresses the fact that Marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights. It is one of the largest organizations monitoring the issue of child marriage.

Girls Not Brides

Girls Not Brides is an international non-governmental organization with the mission to end child marriage. Working towards their goal, Girls Not Brides intends to work alongside and facilitate other organizations with the same purpose. The organization's final goal Girls Not focuses on learning and research for child marriage and the effects of it, sharing the information, and ensuring it is received and used in decision-making.

Girls Not Brides focuses strategies into six categories: Government, Global, Community, Funding, Learning, and Partnership. In each group, strategies of longevity and integration into culture and communities play a large part.

Save the Children

The Save the Fund, commonly known as Save the Children, is a non-profit organization that strives to improve the lives of children through better education, health care, and economic opportunities, as well as providing aid in natural disasters, wars, and other conflicts. The organization promotes policy changes to gain more rights for young people, especially by enforcing the UN Declaration of the Rights of Child. Save the Children has general consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

International Center for Research on Woman

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is a global research institute that identifies women's situations in society. The organization translates these insights into a path of action that honors women's human rights, ensures gender equality, and creates the conditions in which all women can thrive.

ICRW conducts research and engages in advocacy around child marriage. As one of the first organizations to explore this issue, ICRW studied the impacts, roots, and solutions relating to child marriage. The organization's research has been designed to understand the scope, cause better, and consequences of child marriages to find the most effective solutions to prevent child marriage in different cultural contexts.

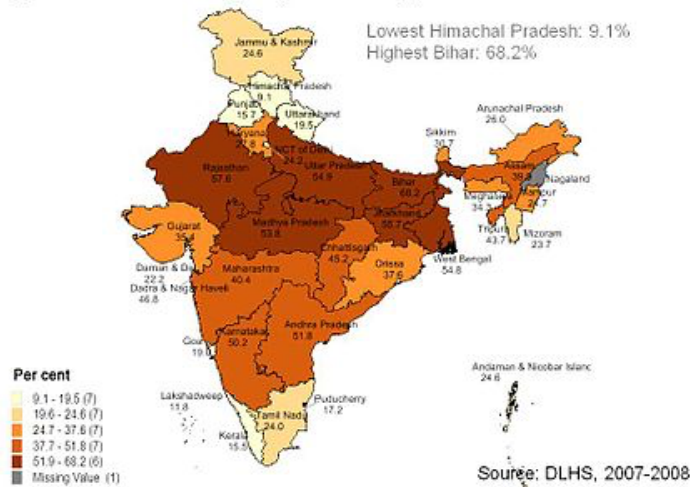
ICRW evaluates projects and programs to determine how and why they work, and this information is used to educate national and international policymakers on child marriage prevention. The United Nations have relied on ICRW research to inform the creation and improvement of policies and practices as well as to build better interventions.

India

In India, according to Indian Law, the minimum age for marriage is 18 for females and 21 for males. According to UNICEF, India has the highest number of child brides around the world, reaching 15.5 million young girls being wedded. Although this is the case, India has committed to eliminating child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Some attempts to improve the situation of child marriages include the program of Apni Beti, Apna Dhan (ABAD). This program is one of India's first conditional cash transfer programs giving mothers money incentives to keep their child unwedded till the age of 18. The ICRW evaluated this program throughout 2012 when the initial participants turned 18. Evidence shows that ABAD is useful in keeping girls in school and getting them immunized, but there is no substantial evidence for it working to prevent the marriage.

One in two women (age 20-24 years) in six states continue to get married before legal age of marriage



Caption #3: Child Marriage India by SDRC

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, 40% of girls are married before their 18th birthday. Child marriage remains deeply rooted in the traditions of the country and has been for centuries. The practice is due to religious beliefs, traditional norms, lack of education, and economic reliance. Customs such as bride nappings and unions between cousins perpetuate the practice. Although other countries have taken efforts to end child marriage by establishing laws that criminalize the practice, such actions have not occurred in Ethiopia.

Mali

Mali is the 5th highest nation in the world for child marriage. In Mali, 52% of girls are married before they are 18 and 17% of them before they are 15 years old. The legal age of marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys, but under customary and Sharia law, girls under the age of 16 are married. These young ages girls in Mali marry at is a result of culture and mostly financial dependence on their spouse. It is evident in Mali that child marriage is a hindrance to the productivity of the nation. A 2017 World Bank study estimates that ending child marriage in Mali could result in USD174. 8 million productivity gains. Out of 10 girls age 15 - 19, only 9 are literate. Although there are laws set in place for the minimum age of marriage by the government of Mali, it is densely argued that this law and many others relating to women are discriminatory in all aspects of family life and perpetuates marital inequality.

There are small steps in improving the situation in Mali. On October 11, 2015, First Lady of Mali Keita Aminata Maiga launched a national campaign to end the practice of child marriage in Mali.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
1962	<p>The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages</p> <p>The 55 parties to this Convention agreed to specify minimum age by statute law, to override customary, religious and tribal law and traditions. Moreover, the Convention reaffirms the consensual nature of marriages and to ensure the registration of marriages. Laws that set the minimum age of marriage are a step towards safeguarding children from being married before they are ready.</p>
1985	<p>Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment</p> <p>The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the United Nations, that aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world. The first article in this treaty relates to the legislative laws and punishment for child marriages.</p>

Convention on the Rights of the Child

1989 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

1979 The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. Described as an international bill of rights for women, it was instituted on 3 September 1981 and has been ratified by 189 states.

The First International Day of the Girl Child

2012 The first International Day of the Girl Child on October 11 focusing on preventing child marriage.

Child Marriage on U.N Human Rights Council's Agenda

2013 The U.N. Human Rights Council puts child marriage on its agenda for action. The U.N. General Assembly declares child marriage to be a barrier to development.

Sustainable Development Goals

2015 The United Nations Population Fund estimates that 1 in 3 girls marry by age 18 and 1 in 9 marry by age 15. One target of the Sustainable Development Goals commits all countries to act to end child marriage. The SDGs, are intended to be achieved by the year 2030, and are part of the UN Resolution 70/1, the 2030 Agenda.

Most Current Data from UNICEF

2018 The most current data from UNICEF (2018) shows that about 21 percent of young women worldwide (aged 20 to 24) were married as children

Target Date to End All Child Marriage

2030 2030 is the Sustainable Development Goals' target date for all countries to end child marriage.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The International Community has stressed local and national governments to enforce laws and policies to end child marriage. As a result, the practice is now illegal in the majority of countries in which it occurs. But even as countries change the laws, national governments are learning that child marriage will not end by command. Child marriage is deeply rooted in society, and economic circumstances, which make it very difficult to end the practice. Unless there is a change in societal values, advocates for the eradication of child marriage will always fear physical or social retribution.

For this reason, some national governments have started tackling the issue by working with local and international non-governmental organizations who are trying to empower women and children as well as changing the discriminatory social norms that give preference to boys.

For the past ten years, all the assessments of child marriage conclude to the same thing: Ending child marriage requires governmental commitment and societal commitment. In 2011, ICRW conducted a meta-evaluation of child marriage prevention programs, and it found that “a set of strategies focusing on girls’ empowerment, community mobilization, enhanced schooling, economic incentives, and policy changes have improved knowledge, attitudes, and behavior related to child marriage prevention.” The analysis of successful child marriage prevention programs shows that they frequently are holistic and focus both on child marriage and the need to develop the potential of girls and women. Although that is the cause long run, in the short term, some of the most successful projects provide parents with economic incentives to keep their daughters enrolled in school. Other plans provide families with alternative ways to earn money rather than receiving financial benefits from giving their daughters in marriage.

Possible Solutions

Child Marriage is a practice perpetuated by people, and it is motivated by societal, cultural, and financial fears. For this harmful practice to cease, the international community must look for solutions that are holistic for there to be change in the long term future.

Child Marriage occurs most frequently in Lower Economically Developed countries. The environment in which child marriage occurs is influenced by the government, culture, and local community. For this reason, a fundamental part of the solution towards child marriage should be **on changing the perceptions and norms of marrying at a young age in areas where the issue is most rapid**. The change in attitude is a critical part of the solution since, in most of the LEDCs where child marriages occur, it is an accepted social norm, and there is no concern about the issue. This lack of interest can be seen by the fact that in some countries where child marriage is the norm, legislation that protects children from early marriage is non-existent. Even with these laws, child marriage will not end by decree. As an extension to stressing lawmakers and government to place and enforce legislation, there should be an encouragement to open discussions in the community and have relevant professionals talk about children's rights, child development, and the importance of allowing girls to complete their education before they are married or have children.

Arguably, the most crucial part of the solution is the empowerment of the girls themselves. The leading cause for child marriage is financial dependance a woman has on her husband. Traditionally, society has deemed that women could not work to find an income, and their role in life is domestic. Because of this connotation in LEDCs, women don't have to economic and educational opportunities and, as a result, lack of confidence and experience in being self significant.

For this reason, solutions should **strengthen social and educational policies and services that provide viable alternatives to marriages**. These efforts enhance economic opportunities for girls. Lead discussions with children and adolescents about their hopes and aspirations, and ask them to consider how they may jeopardize these aspirations if they marry before 18. A survey of a variety of prevention programs found that initiatives were most effective when combined with efforts to address economic constraints, education, and limited employment for women.

If prevention is not possible, the international community should still support girls and provide material, spiritual, and emotional support to families who are struggling in the face of adversity. Moreover, improve access and better support services for the women who have been married as children and facilitate childcare for child mothers seeking support.

Questions A Resolution Must Answer

1. How will programs, especially financial support for women, be funded?
2. How to change the perception of child marriage in religion and society?
3. How to empower young girls and married women?
4. How can effective previous programs improve or maintain?
5. Who will take care of the health issue caused by child marriage?
6. Who will track the effectiveness of the implemented program?

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