

Child Brides

The Problem of Early, Forced Marriage

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Throughout the world, the problem of early, forced marriages of children is considered to be a violation of basic human rights. It has been estimated that 49 countries have a significant child bride problem.

Here is an overview of the problem of child brides and solutions to the issue of early marriages.

Saying No to Child Marriage

Breaking out of the tradition to marry young is difficult. These girls do not often receive support from their families to say no to marriage.

Additionally, cultural, economic, and religious aspects of the communities when they live make it nearly impossible for the girls to break free from marrying early.

The Problem of Child Brides and Forced Marriages

- **Egypt, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Pakistan, India, and the Middle East:** In the rural villages of these countries many young girls are rarely allowed out of their homes unless it is to work in the fields or to get married.

These uneducated girls are often married off at the young age of 11. Some families allow girls who are only 7 years old to marry. It is very unusual for a girl to reach the age of 16 and not be married.

- In **Afghanistan**, it is believed that between 60 and 80 percent of marriages are forced marriages.
- Even though the legal age to get married in **Egypt** is 16, and in **India and Ethiopia**, the age is 18, these laws are quite often ignored.
- **England and the United States:** The issue of child brides has also reached other countries such as England and the United States where secret illegal weddings are being performed.

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) found in a study, [Is Teen Marriage a Solution?](#) that marriages by teens in the United States jumped tremendously in the 1990s.

The awareness of early forced marriage and sexual abuse of young girls in the United States was increased by the April 2008 rescue of numerous children living on a ranch owned by a polygamist sect in Texas.

United Nations Report on the Violation of Basic Human Rights of Child Brides

According to "[Factsheet: Early Marriage](#)" (page 4), a report issued by the United Nations, these early marriage unions violate the basic human rights of these girls by putting them into a life of isolation, service, lack of education, health problems, and abuse.

The UNICEF paper states: "UNICEF believes that, because marriage under the age of 18 may threaten a child's human rights (including the right to education, leisure, good health, freedom of expression, and freedom from discrimination), **the best way to ensure the protection of children's rights is to set a minimum age limit of 18 for marriage.**"

UNICEF is opposed to forced marriages at any age, where the notion of consent is non-existent and the views of bride or groom are ignored, particularly when those involved are under age."

Poor health, early death, and lack of educational opportunities lead the list of problems attributed to child marriage.

- Child brides have a double pregnancy death rate of women in their 20s.
- In developing countries, the leading cause of death for young girls between the ages of 15 and 19 is early pregnancy.
- Additionally, from having babies too young, child brides are at an extremely high risk for fistulas (vaginal and anal ruptures).
- The babies of child brides are sicker and weaker and many do not survive childhood.
- Child brides have a higher risk of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases.
- These young girls are at an increased risk of chronic anemia and obesity.
- Child brides have poor access to contraception.
- These young girls have a lack of educational opportunities.
- Being forced into an early marriage creates a lifetime of poverty.
- Statistically, child brides have a higher risk of becoming a victim of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and murder.

Education is the most important key to helping end the practice of forced child marriages. Many believe that education may prove to be more successful in preventing child marriages than banning child marriages.

- Education of the parents is just as important as education of the children.

Education will broaden their horizons and will help convince parents of the benefits in having their children educated.

- It is important to provide education involving more than reading, writing, and math.

Teaching these young girls life skills, including reproduction and contraception information, how to have fun and how to play in sports, is proving to be a positive way to change the lives and futures of these adolescent girls.

- By providing more educational opportunities, India has been able to cut child marriage rates by up to two-thirds.

Girls who are able to complete primary school tend to marry later and have fewer children.

Source: [Chicago Tribune](#)

Ref.: <http://marriage.about.com/od/arrangedmarriages/a/childbride.htm>