

Forum: Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (GA3)

Issue: Tackling the issue of child marriages

Student Officer: Christianna Giouchas

Position: Co-Chair

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage and forced marriage are both cases of abuse of children's rights and human rights. This prevalent and damaging practice harms a child's development and one's health and chances of success in life. And yet, according to the United Nations, it's estimated that 12 million girls are married off before the age of 18 every year, equating to an alarming 23 girls every minute¹. Additionally, approximately 650 million women in the world today were married before the age of 18¹. Around 21% of females worldwide marry during their childhood.²

Child marriage crosses ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries and may be found in nearly every part of the world, from Africa to the Middle East, Asia to Europe, and the Americas. Niger has the highest incidence of child marriage in West Africa, with 76% of the females being married before the age of 18³. In some Sub-Saharan African nations, such as the Central African Republic and Chad, more than half of all females marry before the age of 18³.

Child marriage is frequently the outcome of persistent gender inequity, affecting girls disproportionately, as child marriage is one-sixth as common among males as it is among girls worldwide⁴. It also deprives girls of their youth and endangers their health. Furthermore, girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to endure domestic abuse and are less likely to continue their education⁴. Economic and health outcomes in these countries are inferior to that of their unmarried peers, which are passed on to their children. That way, the country's ability to

¹ "Global Polycrisis Creating Uphill Battle to End Child Marriage – UNICEF." UNICEF, www.unicef.org/press-releases/global-polycrisis-creating-uphill-battle-end-child-marriage-unicef.

² "Fast Facts: 10 Facts Illustrating Why We Must #EndChildMarriage." UNICEF, www.unicef.org/press-releases/fast-facts-10-facts-illustrating-why-we-must-endchildmarriage.

³ "Niger." *Girls Not Brides*, www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/niger/.

⁴ "Child Marriage." UNICEF, www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage.

deliver quality healthcare and education services is put under severe pressure. Child brides frequently become pregnant during adolescence, when the risk of pregnancy and birthing difficulties increases. This practice can also isolate girls from family and friends, consequently negatively impacting their mental health.

Recognizing the causes that permit child marriage is required to solve it. While the practice's origins differ among countries and cultures, poverty, a lack of educational opportunities, and restricted access to health care all contribute to its persistence. Some families marry off their daughters in order to decrease their financial burden or earn money. Other families, on the other hand, may do it because they believe it will provide their girls with a better future or with the hope to safeguard them. Gender norms and prejudices, as well as the socioeconomic risk of pregnancy outside of marriage, support the practice.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Child marriage

“Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.” Child marriage is a critical factor of this topic since it is the main focus of the study guide and needs to be tackled.⁴

Cultural norms

Cultural norms are society's most widely accepted ideas, behaviors, and values. Cultural norms in child marriage refer to the prevalent attitudes, customs, and traditions that influence the acceptance or practice of marrying off children at a young age, which are frequently influenced by factors such as gender roles, traditions, family honor, or socioeconomic considerations within a specific culture or community.

Disempowerment

“Disempowerment is when you have no control over your life and no power to change things.”⁵ Child marriages deprive young girls of agency, autonomy, and the ability to make life decisions for themselves. Thus, this practice disempowers them.

⁵ "Disempowered." *Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disempowered.

Domestic abuse

“Domestic abuse, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence" can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.”⁶ Child marriage often exposes young girls to a heightened risk of domestic abuse and violence within the context of their marriages.

Social injustice

Social injustices involve how society treats certain people or groups in a biased manner. In the context of child marriage, it refers to the violation of girls' rights and well-being because they are pushed into young, arranged marriages, which prevents them from having opportunities for education, personal growth, and self-determination. Child marriage has long-lasting social and economic repercussions because it maintains gender inequity and denies girls their basic human rights.

Ecclesiastical law

“In contemporary terms, ecclesiastical law is the internal set of laws, rules, regulations and statutes that a church codifies to administer its own operations. These laws are permutations of the original ecclesiastical law — also called English law or canon law — that once governed much of the Roman Catholic empire when the Church was the arbiter of judicial decree.”⁷

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight goals that the UN Member States have committed to meeting by 2015. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted in September 2000, sets out a vision for world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality.

⁶ United Nations. "What Is Domestic Abuse?" *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse.

⁷ "What is Ecclesiastical Law? (with Pictures)." *My Law Questions*, www.mylawquestions.com/what-is-ecclesiastical-law.htm.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015, as a global call to action to eradicate poverty, protect the environment, and secure world peace by 2030, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals.

Statutory rape statutes

As defined by the law, statutory rape is the act of having sexual contact or engaging in sexual activity with a person who is not of legal age to agree. Whether a minor gives consent or not, it continues to be seen as a crime since "it is considered to be too young to legally consent to have sexual contact." ⁸

Marriage consent ages

The marriage consent age is the legal youngest age to marry.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Background

Child marriage is a traditional practice that takes place in many countries and promotes a serious violation of children's rights, as it prevents the integrity of a person, as well as their ability to decide their future on their own. Child marriage practices date back to the ancient world and are an issue that should be dissolved in the 21st century as a cultural and social institution. Women all over the world were usually married at a young age or shortly after puberty, before the Industrial Revolution. In societies with a large number of rural inhabitants, these practices had been going on during the 19th century. In societies where married couples were expected to establish their households, men tended to marry later.

Early marriage and adolescent childbirth were common in Ancient Greece as well as in the Roman Empire. In Greece, boys were expected to marry at the end of their adolescence. While, under the Roman Empire both, girls and boys, married between the ages of 12 and 14. ⁹

⁸ "What is Statutory Rape?" *WomensLaw.org*, 20 August 2021, www.womenslaw.org/about-abuse/forms-abuse/sexual-abuse-and-exploitation/sexual-assault-rape/basic-info/what-statutory.

⁹ "Roman Law and the Marriage of Underage Girls | Society for Classical Studies." | *Society for Classical Studies*, classicalstudies.org/roman-law-and-marriage-underage-girls.

However, marriages between men and women in Northwestern Europe have been marked by very late marriages that are commonly postponed into their 20s or even 30s. This has been going on since the 13th and 14th centuries, according to evidence available in England.¹⁰ The pattern was mirrored in English common law, which was the first in Western Europe to enact statutory rape statutes and marriage consent ages. Sexual contact with females under the age of 12 or 14 was criminalized in 1275, and a second ordinance with harsher penalties for those under the age of 10 was passed in 1576. The British colonial authority-imposed marriage age limits on Hindu and Muslim females in the Indian subcontinent in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Gendered effects of child marriages

Girls who marry young are more likely to have an early pregnancy and delivery, which can result in major health difficulties or even death. Pregnancy and delivery problems are the main cause of mortality for girls aged 15 to 19 in low- and middle-income nations, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).¹¹ Early marriage deprives girls of the skills and resources necessary to advocate for their own and their children's rights, perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality.¹²

While males might be married at a young age, marriage is more likely to influence a girl's life to a greater extent¹³. By reinforcing detrimental gender stereotypes and reducing girls' autonomy and decision-making capacity, child marriage prolongs gender inequity. Young brides are sometimes compelled to assume adult tasks and responsibilities before they are emotionally or physically prepared, which can have major long-term ramifications for their health and well-being. Child marriage must be prohibited in order to promote gender equality and preserve the rights and well-being of girls worldwide. Governments, civil society groups, religious leaders, and communities should work together to address the core causes of child marriage and promote alternatives that prioritize girls' education, health, and well-being.

¹⁰ "Age at Marriage and Marital Stability: Evidence from China." *SpringerLink*, 15 March 2023, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11150-023-09651-z.

¹¹ "Maternal Mortality." *World Health Organization (WHO)*, 19 September 2019, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality.

¹² "Child Marriage." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 31 January 2023, www.cfr.org/article/child-marriage.

¹³ "Do Today's Teens See Marriage and Children in Their Future?" *Institute for Family Studies*, ifstudies.org/blog/do-todays-teens-see-marriage-and-children-in-their-future.

Causes

Poverty

Poverty is one of the leading causes of child marriage. In many communities, families may view their daughters as a financial burden and may see early marriage as a way to reduce the financial strain associated with raising a daughter. This perspective can stem from cultural norms prioritizing male inheritance, where the responsibility of providing for daughters, including dowries and marriage expenses, falls on the parents. Additionally, some families receive a dowry or other financial incentives for marrying off their daughters at a young age. However, early marriage can perpetuate the cycle of poverty and gender inequality¹⁴.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is another key driver of child marriage. In many cultures, girls are seen as less valuable than boys due to deep-rooted gender biases and patriarchal norms. These prejudices are frequently the result of historical, societal, and economic reasons that promote male heirs, perpetuate gender disparities, and give girls and women lesser status and worth¹⁵. Also, due to the high levels of gender inequality in society, girls are sometimes considered less deserving of education or other opportunities and are expected to become caregivers and wives, which can limit their ability to make choices about their own lives and promote the decision of early marriage. These beliefs stem from entrenched patriarchal norms. Such norms reinforce traditional gender roles, emphasizing women's domestic roles and subservience. Gender inequality can also contribute to violence against girls and women, which can make early marriage seem like a means of protection. Families choose the option of early marriage as an attempt to protect their daughters from danger in communities where women and girls encounter high levels of violence. This perspective, however, fails to address the underlying causes of violence and instead, maintains the never-ending cycle of gender inequity.

¹⁴ "Child Marriage: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help End It." *World Vision*, 5 June 2020, www.worldvision.org/child-protection-news-stories/child-marriage-facts.

¹⁵ *Just a Moment..*, www.oecd.org/gender/Executive%20Summary.pdf.

Tradition and Culture

Tradition and culture can also contribute to child marriage. In some communities, marrying off daughters at a young age is perceived as a way to preserve traditional values and customs. Cultural beliefs surrounding female purity, family honor, and gender roles heavily influence the practice of child marriages.

Premarital sexual activity may be shunned in such groups, and female sexuality may be viewed as a possible threat. Early marriage is recognized as a method of controlling and regulating female sexuality, by ensuring that females follow prescribed standards and cultural expectations. Moreover, the perceived purity of young girls is closely correlated with the reputation of the family. Families and communities think that by marrying them off at an early age, they can keep control over the girls' choices, secure their compliance with established gender norms and protect their honor and maintain the perceived integrity of the family name.

Lack of Education

Lack of education is another key driver of child marriage. When girls are not in school due to their living conditions, religion, or economic barriers, they may be considered less valuable than boys and may be married off at a young age. Additionally, girls not in school may not have the knowledge or skills to resist early marriage or make life choices.

However, education can be a powerful tool for preventing child marriage and empowering girls. Girls are more likely to delay marriage and have greater control over their lives when educated. They would also have more job opportunities because of the knowledge, skills, and qualifications they gained through education. Thus, being able to live financially, enhances a woman's independence. Financial emancipation is of utmost importance since it allows individuals to make their own financial decisions without relying upon others, thereby creating a sense of personal autonomy and control over their lives. In addition, financial independence provides for individuals' ability to meet their own needs and contribute to the community. It offers a stronger sense of confidence and security, as individuals have more experience dealing with unforeseen financial difficulties. Education can also help to change attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and the value of girls by providing both girls and boys with knowledge and critical thinking to question traditional ideas and stereotypes, which can help to reduce child marriage

over time.¹⁶ Since firstly, education promotes tolerant, inclusive views toward women and minorities and secondly, as already mentioned, education increases economic opportunities for women.

Conflict and Displacement

Conflict and displacement can also lead to child marriage. When families are forced to flee their homes due to conflict or natural disasters, they are more likely to marry off their daughters at a young age, because it protects them from potential risks in unstable environments. The lack of resources disrupted social structures and limited access to necessities contribute to the increased vulnerability of girls, making them more susceptible to early marriage in an attempt to mitigate the challenges of displacement. Addressing the underlying removal factors, such as providing humanitarian aid, shelter, and economic support, is crucial in reducing the likelihood of child marriage in such situations. Additionally, displaced girls may be at increased risk of violence, including sexual violence. The reason behind this is the severe impact on social support structures, insufficient living circumstances, lax law enforcement, and the dissolution of conventional standards due to the disruption. Early marriage may, therefore, be perceived as a way to protect them.¹⁷

Lack of Legal Protection

A lack of legal protection intensifies the phenomenon of child marriages, as traditional or cultural norms can undermine laws prohibiting the practice. In many countries, deeply ingrained traditions and cultural practices may supersede legal frameworks. This allows child marriages to persist, as communities may prioritize preserving their customs over enforcing legal protections for children. Girls face a higher risk of child marriage due to discriminatory social norms in many societies. In addition, girls might not have access to legal protections or may not be aware of their rights. When the law does not protect them, they are more vulnerable to early marriage and do not have the necessary resources to resist it. Furthermore, their families and communities

¹⁶ "Child Marriage and Education." *Girls Not Brides*, www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-and-education/.

¹⁷ *Girls Not Brides - Girls Not Brides*, www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1439/Child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings-1.pdf.

may exert greater pressure, influenced by traditional or cultural practices, to conform to child marriage norms. The absence of legal consequences further amplifies this pressure.

However, when girls know their rights and laws, they can challenge societal and cultural expectations, resist parental pressure, and assert autonomy. This awareness enables girls to make informed decisions, advocate for themselves, and actively participate in shaping their own lives, including the choice to delay marriage until they are ready.

Consequences

Health risks

Child marriages put young girls at risk of experiencing severe health complications. They are often forced to have children at a young age, which puts immense stress on their bodies. As a result, they are more likely to experience pregnancy-related complications, such as obstructed labor, fistula, and even death. Child brides are also more vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS¹⁸. They are often married to older men who may have had multiple sexual partners, increasing their risk of exposure to STIs. Child brides are also less likely to have access to healthcare, which can exacerbate health problems.

Economic Disadvantage

Child brides are often forced to leave school and are unable to participate in the workforce. As a result, they can't earn a living, support themselves and their families. Instead, they are dependent on their spouses, thereby, making it even harder to leave the cycle of abuse. They are also often married to older men who may not have the financial means to support their families, due to limited employment opportunities, and lower levels of education or skills, leading to further financial hardship. Child brides are at a higher risk of experiencing poverty, which can have long-term consequences for their health and well-being.

Domestic Violence

Child brides are more likely to experience domestic violence and abuse. They are often married to older men who exert control over them and may use verbal and mental

¹⁸ "Three Things You Need to Know: Child Marriage and HIV." *Girls Not Brides*, 1 December 2018, www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/child-marriage-and-hiv/.

abuse and physical violence to maintain that control. Since they are wedded to older males, child brides are more exposed to sexual assault and exploitation. They have little agency and control over their life, making it challenging to negotiate healthy sexual behaviors. Furthermore, they frequently lack support networks, leaving them lonely and without means to exit abusive settings. They are often forced to engage in sexual activities with their husbands, even against their will.

Mental Health Effects

Child brides often experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. They are forced to leave their families and communities, which can be traumatic and overwhelming. Child brides are also often married to men who are much older than them, leading to a power imbalance and a lack of autonomy, and tend to isolate themselves from the outside world due to toxic relationships. All of these factors can have a significant impact on a young girl's mental health and well-being. Child brides often experience feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair, which can lead to long-term mental health issues.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

India

Child marriages are a significant problem in India, with an estimated 27% of girls getting married before the age of 18¹⁹. The Indian government has taken several steps to address the issue of child marriages. In 2006, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was enacted, which makes it illegal for girls under the age of 18 and boys under the age of 21 to get married²⁰. The law also provides penalties for those who promote or participate in child marriages. The Indian government has also launched several programs and initiatives to prevent child marriages and support girls who are at risk of getting married at a young age. For example, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) program aims to improve the status of girls

¹⁹ "Ending Child Marriage and Adolescent Empowerment." www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/end-child-marriage.

²⁰ "Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021." *IPleaders*, 30 January 2023, blog.ipleaders.in/all-about-the-prohibition-of-child-marriage-act-in-india/.

in Indian society and promote gender equality. Despite these efforts, child marriages continue to be a problem in India, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities.

Bangladesh

Child marriage is a major issue in Bangladesh, where it has been a long-standing societal concern. Despite attempts to reduce child marriage, Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. According to UNICEF data, 51% of Bangladeshi girls marry before the age of 18, and 18% marry before the age of 15²¹. With parental approval, the legal marriage age in Bangladesh is 18 for males and 18 for females²². The Bangladeshi government, in collaboration with non-governmental groups and foreign organizations, has been striving to end child marriage. Laws have been passed to raise the minimum marriage age and reinforce penalties for violators. Campaigns and initiatives have also been established to educate communities about the negative impacts of child marriage and to promote alternatives such as girls' education and empowerment.

Nigeria

Child marriage is defined in Nigeria as the marriage or union of persons under the age of 18. According to UNICEF, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child brides in the world, with over 23 million women and girls married young²³. The Nigerian government has begun to address the issue of child marriage. The Child Rights Act of 2003 establishes the legal marriage age at 18 for both boys and girls, however, implementation and enforcement vary by jurisdiction. As of September 2021, only 26 of 36 Nigerian states had implemented the law, indicating the need for more measures to guarantee its countrywide adoption²⁴. Child marriage is being combated in Nigeria through awareness programs, activism, and community participation. They also promote girls' education, economic prospects for families, and the empowerment of girls and women.

²¹ UNICEF, www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/4526/file/Bangladesh%20Child%20Marriage%20report%202020.pdf.pdf.

²² "Condoning Child Marriage in Bangladesh: A Step Backwards." *OHRH | Oxford Human Rights Hub*, ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/condoning-child-marriage-in-bangladesh-a-step-backwards/.

²³ UNICEF, www.unicef.org/chad/media/246/file/Child-Marriage-in-WCA-At-a-Glance.pdf.

²⁴ "Child Marriage Remains Prevalent in Nigeria." *Human Rights Watch*, 10 February 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/17/nigeria-child-marriage-violates-girls-rights.

United States

Child marriage is legal in most US states with parental consent, despite the minimum age for marriage being 18. Girls as young as 12 in Virginia, 13 in New Hampshire, and 14 in Alabama can legally marry with a parent's signature. Child marriage is not uncommon in the US, with almost a quarter of a million children as young as 12 marrying between 2000 and 2010²⁵. Some states in the United States have taken steps to combat child marriage by raising the minimum age for marriage and implementing stricter requirements and protections for minors who wish to marry. For example, Delaware and New Jersey have recently passed laws that prohibit marriage before the age of 18 with no exceptions. Other states, such as Virginia and Texas, have also passed laws that make it more difficult for minors to marry.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF has been working to prevent child marriage and promote girls' education and empowerment around the world. According to UNICEF, child marriage affects more than 700 million women and girls worldwide, with one in every five girls getting married before the age of 18²⁶. To address the issue of child marriage, UNICEF has been working with governments, civil society organizations, and communities to raise awareness about the harmful effects of child marriage and promote girls' education and empowerment. UNICEF has also been advocating for laws and policies that protect girls from child marriage and provide them with access to education, health care, and other services.

UNICEF has also created a number of programs and efforts to help girls who are in danger of marrying at a young age stay in school and achieve their aspirations. The "Girls' Education and Gender Equality" initiative, for example, offers girls access to school and life skills training, whereas the "UNFPA-UNICEF Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage" intends to eliminate child marriage in 12 countries by 2021.

Girls Not Brides

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of civil society organizations that work to end child marriage and promote girls' rights. They work in over 100 countries around the world to raise awareness of the harmful effects of child marriage, advocate for laws and policies that protect

²⁵ *Child Rights & Sexual Abuse Statute of Limitations Reform* | Child USA, childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-Report-on-Child-Marriage-in-the-US.pdf.

²⁶ "Child Marriage." *UNICEF*, www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage.

girls' rights, and support programs that empower girls and their families. Girls Not Brides also works to mobilize communities, engage religious leaders, and build partnerships with governments and other stakeholders to prevent child marriage²⁷.

The Knowledge Hub (KHub)

The Knowledge Hub (KHub) is a web-portal dedicated only to the subject of child marriage, created to meet the rising need for evidence-based methods for child marriage prevention in India and surrounding countries. It enables simple access to genuine resources for developing the policy and programmatic environment on the subject at the state and national levels, as well as their grassroots implementation. The aim of KHub is to develop new evidence that will demystify the vast base of strategic and technical information that currently exists, as well as to establish a repository of existing knowledge on current conditions.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
10 December 1948	Submission of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
20 November 1959	Establishment of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child
26 July 1989	Adoption of Convention on the Rights of the Child
15 September 1995	Submission of "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action"
18 September 2000	The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formed, with MDG 3 intending to improve gender equality and empower

²⁷ "Girls not Brides", *Girls not Brides*, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>.

	women, so addressing child marriage indirectly
1 December 2006	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act enacted in India
22 September 2011	Girls Not Brides, a global collaboration to eliminate child marriage, was formed with the goal of bringing together individuals and groups dedicated to solving child marriage throughout the world.
19 December 2011	Submission of resolution “A/RES/66/170”
1 January 2016	Child marriage embedded within the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals
March 2018	The first US states to criminalize child marriage established the bare minimum age of marriage at 18 with no exceptions
June 2018	New Jersey implemented regulations raising the minimum marriage age to 18
May 2019	Pennsylvania implemented regulations raising the minimum marriage age to 18
2020	The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the problem of child marriage, with increasing rates reported as a result of circumstances such as school closures, economic challenges, and damaged support networks.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

International Day of the Girl Child Resolution (A/RES/66/170)²⁸

A/RES/66/170 was submitted by the General Assembly in 2011. This resolution condemns child, early, and compelled marriages as human rights violations with serious implications for people and society. It urges Member States to tighten laws and policies to prevent and address child marriage. The significance of learning, autonomy, and having access to comprehensive reproductive and sexual wellness services for girls is emphasized in the resolution. It also highlights the importance of partnerships and cooperation among governments, civil society, and global organizations to address this issue successfully. The resolution has played a proactive role in raising global awareness, mobilizing action against child marriage, and recognizing child marriage as a violation of human rights. A/RES/66/170 has prompted many countries to enact laws and policies to prevent child marriage, indicating a positive response to the call for tighter legal frameworks. Be that as it may, A/RES/66/170 has some limitations including its limited enforcement mechanisms and challenges in changing deep-rooted cultural practices and norms. Additionally, disparities in resources and capacities among member nations hinder uniform implementation and progress in addressing child marriage.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child²⁹

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, established in 1959, is a cornerstone document that promotes children's rights and well-being. While it does not reference child marriage specifically, it promotes the values of safeguarding children from harm and supporting their normal development. Child marriage violates the rights of children to health, schooling, and safety from dangerous activities, which runs counter to these ideals. While the Declaration of the Rights of the Child establishes a broad foundation for children's rights, following international documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it also expressly identifies child marriage as a violation of children's rights. Together, these agreements lay the groundwork for lobbying opposing child marriage and protecting children's rights and welfare across the world. The Declaration has had a significant impact on the development of international human rights law. Many international treaties and conventions have been based

²⁸ "International Day of the Girl Child" *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/724510?ln=en.

²⁹ "Declaration of the Rights of the Child." *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/195831?ln=en.

on it, notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely adopted human rights document in history.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1996)³⁰

This comprehensive resolution, adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women, covers gender parity and the empowerment of women. The Platform for Action acknowledges child marriage as a violation of the human rights of girls and highlights the need of ending this destructive practice. It advocates for initiatives to promote equitable access for girls to education, healthcare, and legal assistance, as well as actions that avoid child marriages and help impacted girls. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has had a significant impact on the promotion of gender equality and women's rights and has been a catalyst for many international and national policies and programs that aim to empower women and girls.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)³¹

This legally binding convention specifies children's rights and nations' responsibility in order to protect and implement these liberties. Article 16 of the Convention underlines that the age minimum for marriage ought to be 18 years old and asks for laws, education, and public awareness efforts to avoid child marriages. It emphasizes the need of protecting children from all sorts of abuse, especially child marriage. The Convention has been an important milestone in the recognition of children's rights and has played a crucial role in promoting and protecting the rights of children worldwide. It has been widely ratified, signaling a global commitment to safeguarding children's well-being, though challenges remain in ensuring its full implementation and addressing violations effectively.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)³²

This historic declaration declares the intrinsic rights to which every human being is entitled. While it does not specifically reference child weddings, Article 16 emphasizes the

³⁰ "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action." *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/250223?ln=en.

³¹ "Convention on the Rights of the Child" *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/71657?ln=en.

³² "Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)." *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/565005?ln=en.

significance of free and complete agreement in marriage, underscoring the fact that marriage must be agreed upon with both parties' permission. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued in 1948, is a fundamental document that laid the foundations for rights recognition and protection all over the world. It has been used to hold governments and other actors accountable for human rights violations. The principle of equal rights, dignity, and justice is promoted in this framework. Nevertheless, the global full implementation of these rights and their fulfillment remains a challenge.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

US states outlawed child marriage

While child marriage has historically been legal in multiple states in the United States, attempts to address the issue have resulted in legislation changes in many places. Delaware was the first state in the United States to outlaw child marriage, with no exceptions. Its Governor John Carney signed an ordinance into law in May 2018 that developed the minimum age for marriage at 18 years old, with no exceptions³³. Prior to the passage of this law, children as young as 16 could marry with parental permission and judicial approval in Delaware.

Several other states in the United States have followed Delaware's lead and embraced evaluations aimed at eradicating child marriage. In June 2018, New Jersey implemented regulations raising the minimum marriage age to 18 with no exceptions. Pennsylvania endorsed an identical law in May 2019, creating the minimum age for marriage at 18 with limited exceptions for 16 and 17-year-olds. In the years subsequently, numerous states have made attempts to bolster their laws against child marriage.

Overall, prohibiting child marriage in certain U.S. states is a step forward in addressing this issue, supporting children's rights, and working toward a society that values the well-being and empowerment of all persons, regardless of age or gender. By setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 with limited or no exceptions, these laws aim to protect children from the harmful consequences of early marriage. These actions contribute to the establishment of clear legal frameworks, raise awareness on this issue and help protect children's rights and well-being. However, the enforcement and monitoring of compliance may result in restrictions. Additionally, laws in some states still allow exceptions for minors aged 16 or 17, which may leave room for

³³ "Delaware Expected To Be The First State To Ban Child Marriage Outright." *NPR*, 3 May 2018, www.npr.org/2018/05/03/608351312/delaware-expected-to-be-the-first-state-to-ban-child-marriage-outright.

potential risks and exploitation. Ongoing efforts to strengthen laws, improve education and awareness, and provide support services are essential to fully address child marriage in the United States.

Child marriage embedded within the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2016, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are global goals endorsed by UN member states that will guide international development operations utilizing 2030. Goal 5 of the SDGs focuses mainly on gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Goal 5's Target 5.3 effectively seeks child marriage. The following are the target states:

"Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation." ³⁴

Child marriage is recognized as a significant obstacle to gender equality and overall development in the SDGs. Included under Goal 5, it calls for concerted efforts to end child marriage and protect the rights of girls. The incorporation of child marriage in the SDGs highlights its global significance and emphasizes the need for coordinated actions, policy changes, and resource mobilization to prevent child marriage and empower girls. It reflects the international community's commitment to addressing this issue as part of the broader agenda for sustainable development.

It was crucial to have child marriage included in the Sustainable Development Goals so that it could be promoted at an international level. By recognizing child marriage as a significant barrier to sustainable development and gender equality, the SDGs have sparked increased awareness among governments, organizations, and communities worldwide. This inclusion has created a platform for international dialogue, advocacy, and action, fostering a collective commitment to addressing child marriage's root causes and consequences. It has led to the formulation of targeted policies, programs, and resource allocation to prevent child marriage, protect girls' rights, and empower them with education and opportunities. The SDGs are bringing together diverse stakeholders and mobilizing their efforts to reach a common goal catalyzed by the global movement for ending child marriage.

³⁴ "Ending Harmful Practices." *Equality Now*, 1 November 2022, www.equalitynow.org/end_harmful_practices/.

Governments moved to raise the age of marriage

In recent years, governments all over the world have taken shifts to raise the marriage age in order to address the issue of child marriage and defend children's rights. While precise initiatives and progress vary from one nation to another. Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon represent important examples.

These are just a few of the global efforts to raise the marriage age to avoid child marriage. Many other nations have either enacted or are in the process of enacting measures that increase the minimum age for marriage and preserve adolescents from early and forced marriages. These changes to the law are essential for preventing child marriage and corresponding national laws with international norms and commitments.

Various factors, such as implementation and enforcement mechanisms in different Member States or Communities, can influence the effectiveness of measures to reduce child marriage under the SDGs. Overall, enforcement may be challenged in certain regions due to scarce resources or cultural resistance, which has resulted in a favorable impact. Significant progress has been achieved in reducing child marriage by many countries which have actively supported the call for action of the Sustainable Development Goals. By raising awareness, promoting policy changes, and mobilizing resources, the SDGs have provided a framework for successful interventions, leading to a reduction in child marriage rates and an improved focus on protecting the rights and well-being of girls. Continued efforts and collaboration are necessary to ensure sustained progress and achieve the ultimate goal of ending child marriage globally.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Education and Awareness

Promoting girls' access to decent education is a critical component of preventing child marriage. Education empowers girls and provides them with the information and skills they need to make educated life decisions. Societies can stop the downward spiral of destitution and prejudice that often leads to underage marriage by supporting girls' education. It is critical to address hurdles such as violence against women, social conventions, and financial limits in order to guarantee educational possibilities are readily available, safe, and of high quality. Furthermore, awareness programs aimed at communities, families, and individuals are critical for changing attitudes and challenging the societal acceptability of child marriage. These efforts should underline the negative effects of child marriage on girls' well-being, health, education,

and future opportunities, while also promoting the benefits of postponing marriage and gender equality. However, it is really challenging to change people's pre-existing beliefs about child marriages and resolve the ongoing stereotypes they have, as they are deeply rooted in history, cultural norms, and society as a whole.

Comprehensive Support Systems

It is critical to provide comprehensive support networks for in-danger girls and victims of child marriage. This involves offering safe spaces, therapy, medical care, legal representation, and financial assistance. Community-based efforts, such as mentoring programs and social networks, are critical in giving girls the support, expertise, and resources they need to avoid child marriage. Collaboration with local groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social workers can aid in the development of solid referral networks so that survivors are given access to essential resources. These networks of support should also address the underlying causes of child marriage, such as impoverishment, gender inequity, and a lack of social safety. However, comprehensive support systems would be hard to implement as child marriages are deeply integrated into cultural and traditional practices in some societies. Challenging these norms and beliefs can be met with resistance and opposition.

Economic incentives and livelihood opportunities

One critical method to combat child marriage is to give families financial incentives and career opportunities. As mentioned, poverty and economic insecurity are well-known reasons for child marriage. Communities may address this by implementing initiatives focused on poverty reduction, vocational training, and income-generating activities.

Communities could economically empower families by providing viable alternatives to child marriage, such as skill training and work opportunities. This would help them to see education and other possibilities for their children as a means to a brighter future rather than forcing them to marry young. Financial incentives, such as conditional cash transfer programs or scholarships, might also be considered by governments and organizations to encourage families to prioritize their children's education and well-being above early marriage.

While providing economic incentives and livelihood opportunities can be a valuable approach to combat child marriage, it does have limitations. It is crucial to implement such interventions alongside a comprehensive strategy that addresses the underlying social and cultural factors contributing to child marriage. In order for deep cultural and traditional changes to be possible, it is not enough simply to provide a financial stimulus. In addition, if the focus is

on vocational training for girls only, there may be a risk of misunderstanding gender stereotypes. Priority should be given to education, empowerment of girls and boys, and engagement of communities in the fight against harmful practices. Ensuring the implementation of laws and policies that protect children's rights while taking a humanitarian approach is essential in effectively addressing child marriage.

Engaging religious and community leader

Religious and community leaders have considerable power and may play an important role in addressing the conventional attitudes and practices that promote child marriage. Engaging religious leaders in awareness campaigns, workshops, and training sessions can assist in promoting concepts of gender equality, human rights, and the harmful consequences of child marriage within religious frameworks. These leaders can influence community views and behaviors by highlighting the value of education, women's empowerment and emancipation, and consent within spiritual teachings. Similarly, community leaders, such as elders and powerful personalities, may be valuable partners in the fight against child marriage. Collaborating with them in order to create and implement community-based bylaws or pledges against child marriage can reinforce social norms prohibiting the practice while establishing community-driven preventive and protection measures.

Even if engaging religious and community leaders can be a powerful approach to combat child marriage, it still has limitations. Some religious leaders may hold conservative views that perpetuate gender inequality or endorse child marriage as part of cultural or religious practices. Efforts to challenge harmful norms could be hampered by resistance or a lack of support from influential leaders. Additionally, engaging leaders alone may not be sufficient to address the complex web of social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to child marriage. Securing those efforts to challenge deep-rooted beliefs and practices is more than just token participation. Involving comprehensive engagement in the community, education, and empowerment of girls and women is crucial.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action." *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/250223?ln=en.

Canonlaw.info, www.canonlaw.info/a_tooyoung.htm.

"Child Marriage and Education." *Girls Not Brides*, www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-and-education/.

"Child Marriage and Gender." *Girls Not Brides*, www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-gender/.

"Child Marriage: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help End It." *World Vision*, 5 June 2020, www.worldvision.org/child-protection-news-stories/child-marriage-facts.

"Child Marriage." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 31 January 2023, www.cfr.org/article/child-marriage.

"Child Marriage." *UNICEF*, www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage.

"Child Marriage Remains Prevalent in Nigeria." *Human Rights Watch*, 10 February 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/17/nigeria-child-marriage-violates-girls-rights.

"Condoning Child Marriage in Bangladesh: A Step Backwards." *OHRH | Oxford Human Rights Hub*, ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/condoning-child-marriage-in-bangladesh-a-step-backwards/.

"Controversies in Philanthropy: What Is Social Injustice?" *Controversies in Philanthropy: FSSO 119-100 Fall 2021*, scalar.case.edu/fsso-119-philanthropy-/what-is-social-injustice.

"Convention on the Rights of the Child" *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/71657?ln=en.

"Declaration of the Rights of the Child." *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/195831?ln=en.

"Delaware Expected To Be The First State To Ban Child Marriage Outright." *NPR*, 3 May 2018, www.npr.org/2018/05/03/608351312/delaware-expected-to-be-the-first-state-to-ban-child-marriage-outright.

"Disempowered." *Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disempowered.

"Do Today's Teens See Marriage and Children in Their Future?" *Institute for Family Studies*, ifstudies.org/blog/do-todays-teens-see-marriage-and-children-in-their-future.

"Egypt: Marriage in Ancient Egypt." *Egypt Travel Guide - Tour Egypt*, www.touregypt.net/featurestories/marriage.htm.

"Ending Child Marriage and Adolescent Empowerment." www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/end-child-marriage.

Girls Not Brides - Girls Not Brides, www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1196/ACPF-Importance-of-min-age-of-marriage-legislation-May-2013.pdf.

Girls Not Brides - Girls Not Brides, www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1439/Child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings-1.pdf.

Girls Not Brides - Girls Not Brides, www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/867/IRW-Islamic-persepctive-on-CM.pdf.

Girls Not Brides - Girls Not Brides, www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/901/Working-with-religious-leaders-Girls-Not-Brides-2019.pdf.

"Global Polycrisis Creating Uphill Battle to End Child Marriage – UNICEF." *UNICEF*, www.unicef.org/press-releases/global-polycrisis-creating-uphill-battle-end-child-marriage-unicef.

"International Day of the Girl Child" *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/724510?ln=en.

Just a Moment.., www.oecd.org/gender/Executive%20Summary.pdf.

"Maternal Mortality." *World Health Organization (WHO)*, 19 September 2019, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality.

McDaniel, Spencer. "At What Age Did Ancient Greek Women Typically Marry?" *Tales of Times Forgotten*, 9 March 2023, talesoftimesforgotten.com/2023/02/28/at-what-age-did-ancient-greek-women-typically-marry/.

"Preventing Child Marriage." *UNICEF*, www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/child-marriage.

"Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021." *IPleaders*, 30 January 2023, blog.ipleaders.in/all-about-the-prohibition-of-child-marriage-act-in-india/.

"A Qualitative Study Exploring Child Marriage Practices Among Syrian Conflict-affected Populations in Lebanon." *BioMed Central*, 14 November 2017, conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13031-017-0131-z.

"Three Things You Need to Know: Child Marriage and HIV." *Girls Not Brides*, 1 December 2018, www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/child-marriage-and-hiv/.

UNICEF, www.unicef.org/albania/media/1031/file/Child_marriage_report_2018.pdf.

UNICEF, www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/4526/file/Bangladesh%20Child%20Marriage%20report%202020.pdf.pdf.

UNICEF, www.unicef.org/chad/media/246/file/Child-Marriage-in-WCA-At-a-Glance.pdf.

UNICEF, www.unicef.org/media/86311/file/Child-marriage-the-law-2020.pdf.

United Nations. "What Is Domestic Abuse?" *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse.

"Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)." *United Nations Digital Library System*, digitallibrary.un.org/record/565005?ln=en.

"What is Ecclesiastical Law? (with Pictures)." *My Law Questions*, www.mylawquestions.com/what-is-ecclesiastical-law.htm.

"Why It Happens." *Girls Not Brides*, www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/why-child-marriage-happens/.

WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization, www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/va/va001en.pdf.