

Forum: Special Conference 2

Issue: The issue of child marriage

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Introduction

Child marriage is a vicious violation of Human Rights, a tradition that started years ago and one that will continue to occur if measures are not put in place to stop it. This practice is known to largely affect women more than men, as 650 million women are currently bearing the consequences of child marriage, compared to their 150 million male counterparts. Due to this, millions of children are unable to exercise their right to choose their partner, which will inevitably affect their physical and emotional wellbeing as they go on in their life. One in every five girls is married, or in a union, before reaching the age of 18 (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2018). These girls often go on to become teen mothers, their education becomes restricted, and they become considerably more exposed to sexually transmitted diseases. All these circumstances end up affecting their health, economic prosperity and hinder the way they socialize.

Nevertheless, the idea that women should be able to choose their partners is not a radical one. Many countries agree on child marriage being a problem, however, most of them don't enforce the established to fight this cause. So, despite child marriage being condemned across the globe, child marriage is considered an illegal practice in very little countries.

As to what is causing this alarming practice, it can be said that child marriage is the consequence of many different factors such as poverty, gender inequality, gender-based discrimination, and lack of education as well as cultural norms, traditional practices and financial instability. In order to create a change around the world, regarding this issue, most, if not all, of these issues must be addressed.

Definition of Key Terms

Child

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (OHCHR, 2019).

Marriage

The legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a relationship.

Child Marriage

According to UNICEF, child marriage is a formal marriage or informal union before the of age 18. It must be mentioned that one or both partners must be under 18 years old for it to be defined as a Child Marriage. UN Women discusses that child marriage should be considered to be a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent because “one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner.” (UN Women, 2012)

Forced Marriage

Marriages in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union

Arranged Marriage

A marriage in which the husband and wife are chosen for each other by their parents or guardians with the couple having little or no say in the decision.

Dowry

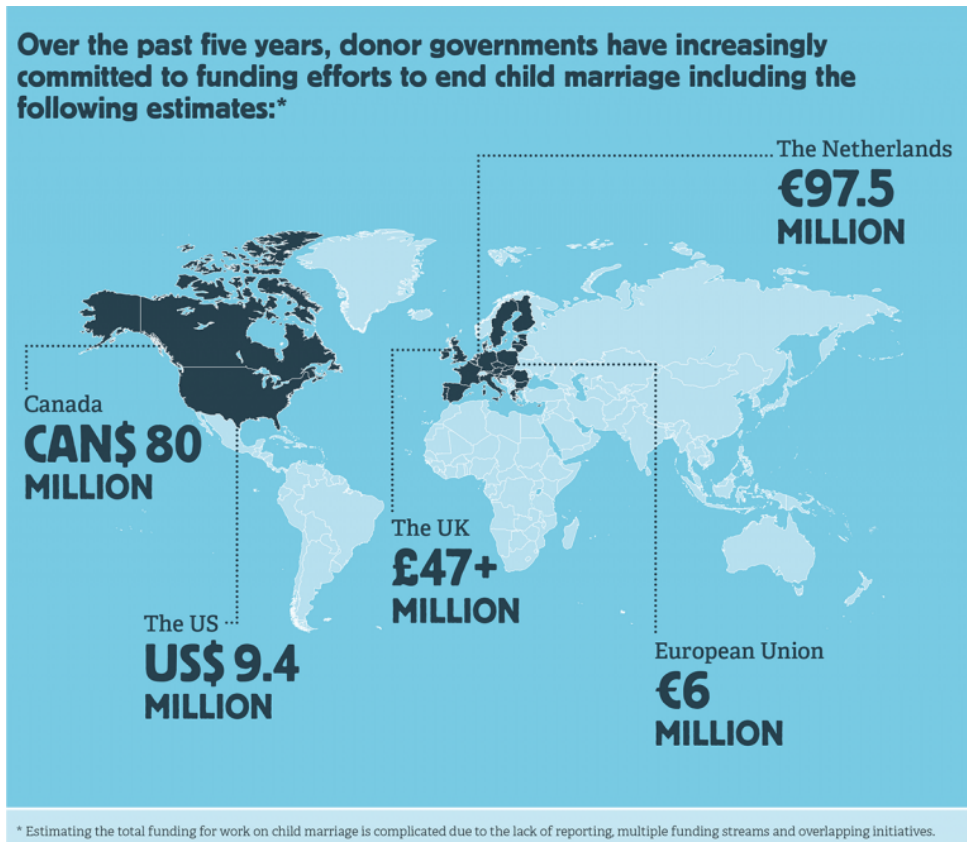
As defined by the “Dowry Prohibition Act” (1961), a dowry is any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage or by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to the marriage or to any other person at or before [or any other time after the marriage] in connection with the marriage of the said parties.

Background Information

When evaluating the issue of child marriage, it is important to take into account all its different aspects; its causes, its consequences, how many people it affects and who is most impacted by it, in order to be properly informed on the subject. These aspects can include - but are not limited to - region, religion, gender, socio-economic status, political affiliation, etc.

Child Marriage statistics

- Globally, almost **400 million women** now aged 20-49 were married before the age of 18 (International Women's Health Coalition [IWHC], 2014)
- According to the UN, **37,000 girls under the age of 18 are married each day**. We now have the greatest number of married girls and girls at-risk of child marriage than ever before (IWHC, 2014)
- **1 in 3 girls** in the developing world are married before 18; **1 in 9** are married before the age of 15 (IWHC, 2014)
- If present trends continue, **more than 140 million girls** will be married before the age of 18 in the next decade (IWHC, 2014)
- The World Policy Center reports that 88 percent of countries have 18 as the minimum marriageable age, but allow younger children to marry with parental consent. (Global Citizen, 2018)
- Girls who have no education are three times more likely to marry before 18 than girls who attend secondary school or higher (Girls Not Brides, 2017)
- Child marriage **reduces girls' expected earnings** in adulthood **by 9%**. The World Bank estimated that losses in earnings associated with child marriage for 15 high prevalence countries could reach \$26 billion in 2015. (Girls Not Brides, 2017)
- By **2018**, the number of women who marry as children is down to **1 in 5** (UNICEF, 2017)



A map that shows the donor governments that have given money to combat child marriage as well as how many money they have donated. (Girls Not Brides - Sept 2016)



A map that shows the countries that have made changes in their legislation to combat child marriages since 2011 (Girls Not Brides - Sept, 2016)

Child Marriage History

Up until the 20th century, child marriages were considered the norm in various countries across the globe. Due to the average life expectancy of the time which almost reached 45 years, this practice was considered the most reasonable and efficient way to reproduce. Girls were usually married off once they reached puberty, or sometimes even before that, to ensure they would be able to produce offspring. However, as time passed and countries progressed, the average woman slowly began to receive more education and was granted human rights that she had previously been deprived of, such as the right to vote. Women started entering the workforce, their economic conditions improved and several advances in medicine were made, which caused the life expectancy to increase. Due to all these advancements, this practice started being questioned and became illegal in most developed economies around the world. However, in other underdeveloped countries, the practice of child marriage continues; in spite of protests and global resistance against it.

Causes of Child Marriage

Child Marriages occur for many different reasons; it can be due to gender-based discrimination and the belief that girls hold less value than their male counterparts or because said practice is the norm in the respective culture. Other aspects that inevitably factor in on this issue are lack of good education, economic status, and young age.

Education

Education is one of the root causes that contributed to the predominance of child marriage. As there is very trivial importance placed upon the education of women, girls are not encouraged to attend school, therefore are not equipped with the tools to become financially and socially independent in the future and are more likely to be coerced into marrying at a young age. This is exemplified by statistics obtained from multiple organizations, which show that girls who aren't in school face a greater risk of becoming child brides. For instance, Girls Not Brides stated that "Girls who have no education are three times more likely to marry before 18 than girls who attend secondary school or higher." (Girls Not Brides, 2017). Additionally, The World Bank also places an emphasis on education, saying that "When girls have access to education, they develop the knowledge and confidence to make important life

decisions for themselves — including if, when, and who to marry.” (The World Bank, 2017)

Moreover, many young girls in third-world countries, often have to leave school during the weeks they are on their period because they don't have the hygiene supplies they need to spend the day at school.

Money

Because of the little value a woman's education holds, women are not expected nor prepared to work. As a consequence, girls are often viewed as an economic burden. Because they have less access to education or due to the fact that their education is not held to a high esteem, they are not likely to earn a substantial wage. So, they are often married off in order to have one less mouth to feed or also as a mean to settle ongoing debts or conflicts, acting as a replacement for currency. This is also known as a dowry, which is the property or wealth a woman brings to a marriage, often given from the bride's parents to the groom.

Young Age

Aside from economic wealth, many cultures place a lot of value on a woman's virginity. In these cultures, non-virgin girls are viewed as unsuitable candidates for marriage; therefore, families are more likely to marry off their younger daughters in order to ensure their virginity. Additionally, younger girls are more easily controlled and are more easily to mold into quiet obedient wives.

Protection

Due to this cultural emphasis on virginity around the world, marriage has also become a genuine way to protect women from violence, or otherwise unsafe, situations. This idea was explored in an article by the Washington Post which stated: “I photographed the wedding of Akhi's 13-year-old sister last year, and when I asked her mother why she was marrying her daughter off, she described not feeling comfortable to let her walk to the corner store because she would be harassed by men and boys” (Kirkpatrick, N., 2015). Child marriage has become a way mothers shelter their daughters from the violent world that awaits them outside, as the reporter wrote in his article: “Marriage is seen as a cover of respect and protection for

women. By not going to school, it reduces the risk of being sexually active outside the house or be harassed while commuting.” (Kirkpatrick, N., 2015)

Religion & Tradition

Moreover, cultural beliefs such as the one mentioned before stem from an even bigger cause: the religion and traditions that many cultures hold sacred. In many countries around the world, child marriage has become the norm for many girls, often viewed as another step in their journey through womanhood. Breaking this tradition could mean being cast out of the community or being shamed for having an “unmarried daughter” or one that has children out of wedlock.

Consequences of Child Marriage

Education

As well as being a contributing factor to the prevalence of child marriage, the education of millions of women also comes out affected as a result of it. Because of the role a girl acquires, both as a wife and as a mother, when she marries, she is expected to drop out of school in order to make time for it. As she goes on into this next chapter of her life, it is assumed that she will now take care of her children, her husband, her home and her extended family. Furthermore, there are also other social, practical and legal obstacles a mother or pregnant girl has to overcome if she intends to attend school, for example, if she has moved away from her previous home she may now be too far away to go to school. Also, the stigma surrounding pregnancy alone can cause a girl to drop out of school; some countries such as Tanzania have gone as far as to bar pregnant girls and mothers from educational institutions (Ratcliffe, R., 2017)

Physical Health Complications

On the other hand, due to their young age, girls are more likely to experience pregnancy or childbirth complications which in turn can put their life at risk; according to Girls Not Brides, “Complications in pregnancy are the leading cause of death in girls aged 15 - 19 globally” (Girls Not Brides, n.d). Secondly, girls who are married off when young are more prone to contract sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS, as according to Girls Not Brides 5,000 girls and young women acquire HIV every week (Girls Not Brides, 2012). This happens due to the girls’ young age and lack of physical maturity, the lack of power they have to negotiate safe sex with their

partner, the frequency with which they practice unprotected sex and the emphasis that is placed on these girls to prove and demonstrate their fertility. Thirdly, when married as a child, girls are exposed to intimate partner violence that is manifested physically, psychologically sexually and emotionally.

Mental Health Complications

Physical health aside, a girls' mental health is also put under strain as a consequence of the stress that child marriage brings. Child brides are put under an immense amount of pressure from both their husbands and families to play a particular role of housewife and mother; this forces them to constantly put others and their wellbeing before themselves and their own mental health. The sexual violence and early pregnancy mentioned before also have a permanent effect on these girls' psyches. As stated by Girls Not Brides, "In the United States, women who were child brides were three times more likely to develop an antisocial personality disorder than those who married as adults." (Girls Not Brides, n.d)

Exploitation and Trafficking

Child marriage has also become a vehicle used for exploitation and trafficking, which is another way in which a girls' safety is compromised. According to Girls Not Brides, "In the Solomon Islands, children are reportedly sold for marriage to foreign workers of logging and mining companies." (Girls Not Brides, n.d). Additionally, this same organization has found that in India, child marriage is used as a way by traffickers to transport girls from one place to another. They do this by offering favorable conditions to poor families, such as exonerating them of paying a dowry or promising a cash reward, if they are able to arrange a marriage. Regarding sexual trafficking, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, is a prime example of how child marriage changes a girls life permanently and pushes them down a dangerous path, as "Most victims of child commercial sexual exploitation child prostitution were married before the age of 15. The route to exploitation starts when they run away from abusive marriages"

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Nigeria

Nigeria currently has an alarming child marriage rate of 77%, making it the country with the highest rate of child marriage globally. (UNICEF, 2017). In Nigeria, the prevalence

of child marriage is distributed rather unevenly throughout the land, with the North West region earning a figure as high as 76% and the South West region having only 10%. (Girls Not Brides, n.d) . Although data has shown there has been a 9% decline in child marriage since 2003 (Girls Not Brides, (n.d)), there is still a long way to go, as the Nigerian Constitution states no minimum age for marriage and the Child Rights Act (2003), which establishes the age of marriage to be 18 years-old, has only been accepted by 23 of the 36 Nigerian states. (UNICEF,, 2017). One of the main causes because of which this issue is so prevalent in Nigeria is the deteriorated state of their education system. In Northern Nigeria, parents have stated that the education their girls are or could be receiving is so poor that it cannot be considered a feasible alternative to marriage (Aliogo, U. & Azeezit, A., 2016)

Towards the end of 2015, a Technical Working Group on Ending Child Marriage was formed; this group is made up by 30 members whose aim is to “develop and implement a holistic multi-sectoral strategy for ending child marriage in Nigeria, as well as raising awareness, encouraging behaviour change, and ensuring the monitoring and evaluation of laws and policies”. A year later, on November of 2016, the African Union welcomed Nigeria as the 17th country to launch their campaign to end child marriage; it was on this same day that The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development launched a national strategy to help Nigeria end this same problem.

India

India is the country with the highest amount of child brides around the world, as it is estimated 27% of the girls in India are married before the age of 18. Inside India, the rates of child marriage vary between states, but it is known that the states with the highest ones are Bihar and Rajasthan, with a rate of 69% and 65% respectively (Girls Not Brides, n.d). The driving causes of child marriage in India are mostly poverty and the practice of dowries, the patriarchal control over woman's sexuality and body as well as the poor educational opportunities that exist for girls in India. According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act passed in 2006, the legal age for marriage for women is 18 and 21 for men; this act establishes punishments for those who encourage said practice and also creates “Child Marriage Protection Officers”. Furthermore, it includes the right to annul a marriage if it is found that either parties are ineligible for marriage but relies on parents to report the act, which may deem it partially ineffective. The Indian government has also used cash incentives, such as the Apni Beti Apna Dhan programme to encourage parents to educate their daughters and prevent them from marrying them off. This programme offers girls below

the poverty line financial assistance, by depositing a certain amount of money in the name of the child and she will gain access to it after she turns 18 and has passed matriculation examinations. In 2013, the Ministry of Women and Child Development drafted a National Action Plan to prevent child marriages, however, the plan has not yet been finalized. India has also been selected by the UNFPA and UNICEF as one of the 12 countries to take part in their global programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

Syria

Child marriage in Syria was already an existent issue before its humanitarian crisis, with 17.7% of Syrian women between the ages 20-25 having married before the age of 18 (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS], 2006). However, it has now evolved into a bigger issue for Syrian girls due to Syria's current war climate. Displaced families, forced to move during the war, often have a hard time providing for their children and fear for their wellbeing - particularly for the sexually violence girls might endure; as a consequence, some parents come to the conclusion that their daughters will be less exposed to physical or sexual assault if married, with them also viewing marriage as a way to provide financial stability and 'protect' their daughter's virginity and 'honour' (UNICEF, 2014) . For Syrian Girls in refugee communities such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey, figures on registered marriages involving an underaged girl have increased steadily. In 2011, the rate was 12%, it continued increasing reaching 18% in 2012 and 25% in 2013, finally reaching its peak in 2014 with 32% (UNICEF, 2014) On the other hand, according to Save the Children, Syrian girls are also often used as pawns to facilitate the entry of Syrian men into Jordan, as married men are more easily accepted into the country; other girls are forced to marry Jordanian men as means to obtain sponsorship and be able to move out of the camp with her family (Save The Children, 2014) Because of the particular characteristics of these marriages, they are often short-termed and unregistered, meaning that girls are not able to receive protection nor compensation for her or her children after the marriage has ended. In these situations, a child bride's mental health may also become compromised as young divorced girls are usually stigmatized and cast out of communities. The Syrian conflict has, up to this day, left at least 3 million children out of school, and left a quarter of the schools damaged or destroyed (Save The Children, 2015) This hinders their opportunities and, for girls, increases their chances of getting married as a child. In Syria, the legal age for marriage for women is 17 years and 18 for boys; religious leaders are however able to use their authority to permit certain exceptions.

Brazil

According to the State of the World's Children in 2016, Brazil harbors 3,034,000 child brides, making it the country with the highest absolute number of child brides in Latin America and ranking as the fourth highest worldwide. In contrast to other countries with high numbers regarding child brides, child marriage in Brazil is mostly found outside of ritualised or otherwise religious environments; marriage at young age is seen as a way to secure financial stability and also to ensure a man will take equal care and responsibility of his children. In Brazil, as in many other countries, this decision is seen as the best alternative when faced with the limited educational and occupational opportunities available in the country. As stated in Brazilian legislation, girls and boys can legally marry by the age of 16 with the consent of both parents, despite the law stating 18 as the legal age of marriage. Regardless of the prevalence of child marriage in this national, policymakers their agendas have shown no effort to tackle this issue.

Bangladesh

Although Bangladesh has showed signs of progress, its rates are still considered one of the highest worldwide, with 52% of girls marrying before the age of 18 and 18% by the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2016), which is the highest rate involving girls under that age. Among the drivers of this issue are poverty, parents' desire to protect their daughters from violence, the need to secure economic and social security, as well as the the long-standing religious and cultural beliefs, beliefs that many hold sacred. Dowry is also a main cause in Bangladesh, as prices often increase with age, causing poorer families to marry their daughters off at extremely young ages. Natural disasters further exacerbate child marriage in many regions of the country, due to the frequent floods that pass through the land and the river erosion, the economic instability these factors bring pressure many families to make their daughters drop out of school and marry. In Bangladesh, the minimum age for marriage is 18 for women and 21 for men, however, the Child Marriage Restraint Act, passed in 2017, included a loophole which lets a court deem a marriage legal and, therefore, allow child marriage in "special cases". This act does not give an explicit definition of what constitutes a special case.

Ethiopia

According to the State of the World's Children in 2017, Ethiopia is home to 2,104,000 child brides (UNICEF, 2017), ranking fifth on the top ten list of "Countries with highest absolute numbers of child marriage globally". Ethiopian law states the legal age of marriage

to be 18 for both men and women, however these laws are not always enforced. This country's criminal code puts in place punishment for the perpetrators of this practice, nevertheless, there is currently no national or regional system that successfully registers births, marriages, divorces or deaths, leaving little tools with which authorities can prove if a girls is underage. Child marriage in Ethiopia is perpetuated by poverty, poor economic opportunities and lack of acceptable education.

Girls not Brides

Girls Not Brides is known as one of the world's largest self-funded NGOs working towards helping young girls and child brides.. This organization has been able to make notable progress due to its significant social media presence, which has aided to bringing awareness on the issue, and to its ability to connect with both local and national governments and convince them of aiding countries such as Pakistan, India and Indonesia. As a results, Girls not Brides has been able to reform 13+ policies on topics such as women's rights, gender equality and more. In their *Girls Not Brides strategy 2017-2020*, they list their desire to encourage governments and relevant ministries to take action against child marriage and to empower civil society organizations, which they state are key partners to governments efforts.

Girls Not Brides is currently working in association with 1000+ members organizations across the globe, these vary in size, locations and the type of work they do, which is all done around the needs and demands of a certain community.

United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA)

The UNFPA is an agency whose goal is to work hand-in-hand with governments and other public-welfare based partners in order to spread awareness on crucial humanitarian issues and protect human rights in every way possible. This organization has also highlighted the need to protect of underage girls in child-marriage-related situations, and has also lended its efforts in policy making regarding the issue.

Examples of the UNFPA's achievements include the Action for Adolescent Girls Programme with specialized in creating job opportunities for teenage girls, therefore helping girls avoid marrying, and the global programme created in collaboration with UNICEF, known as Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. .

UNICEF

For the past several years, UNICEF has been working fervently to combat gender inequality and child marriage by addressing the gender-specific disadvantages girls face daily. UNICEF strives to empower adolescent girls that are married or at risk of being so by providing them with life skills and helping them build support systems that aid them and get them through school. UNICEF also believes in educating and mobilizing adults, which are normally the ones that have the final say in crucial situations. In this way, UNICEF has become one of the leading organizations on the subject of child marriage and gender equality. Their *Preventing Child Marriage* programme gained recognition for its ability to engage and work with domestic partners, therefore opening up access to education and justice and at the same time have policy makers and prominent legislators work with local-based governments and focusing on protecting endangered girls from violent situations.

On the other hand, UNICEF is also the driving force for many other NGO's or organizations, as they provide evidence-based and up-to-date information, rates and reports on the current state of the world.

Girl UP

Founded in 2010, Girl UP is an independent NGO created in the United States that has partnered with the United Nations Foundation to successfully provide developing nations with funding, programme and various other initiatives as well as encouraging young girls to engage in conversation and help them be actors for change to help them empower women and eradicate child marriage.

This organization has also made US child marriage legislation one of its priorities, having dedicated abundant organizational efforts to helping pass 3 pieces of legislation regarding gender equality in US Foreign Policy Engagements. Girl UP also has another victory under their belt, stating one of their biggest accomplishments as the March 13th victory, the date on which the US House of Representatives passed the highly-anticipated child marriage legislation as part of the Violence Against Women act in 2017.

Saarathi Trust

Based in India, the country with the highest absolute number of child brides and gender-equality violations, Saarthi Trust is one of the many organizations in India working

towards creating safe environments for women, usually focalizing on the issue of child marriage. This organization, founded by award-winning female rights activist Kriti Bhat, has been focused on providing psychological support for women that are already part or possibly involved in child marriages, also campaigning to erase stigma around this issue by putting up educational programs for parents, offering job opportunities for teenagers and providing funding for cases in which parents decide to sell their daughters. Additionally, they have also set up more hotline booths in order to offer easy access to women in dangerous situations.

Timeline of Events

Date

Description of Event

November 7th, 1962

The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages is passed by the OHCHR. It states that both men and women are entitled to the right of marrying whom and whenever they choose.

1990

The African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child. Created because the AU (African Union) believed the Convention of the Rights of the Child missed many economic and socio-cultural aspects that are particular to Africa. It also emphasizes the need of including African culture and their values when dealing with such rights.

October 11th, 2012

First International Day of the Girl Child takes place, which puts its focus on preventing child marriage.

2013

Child marriage is put on the UN Human Rights Council's agenda for action. It is declared to be a barrier to development by the U.N. General Assembly.

2014

1st report OHCHR report on child, early and forced marriage. It creates international human rights standards on child, early and forced marriage. 70+ civil organizations vouch their support and contribute to it.

2013	Ethiopia launches a national strategy and action plan to end child marriage
2015	Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals is set
2015	Countries such as Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia develop national initiatives, strategies and plans on how to end child marriage.
2016	Launch of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Efforts to End Child Marriage in 12 countries.



A timeline of events during the years 2011-2015 that have marked a step forward to ending child marriage. (Girls Not Brides - Sep 2016)

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris, 10 December 1948 (UN Resolution A/RES/217(III)[A])

Which states that men and women of full age are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during a marriage and at its dissolution. A marriage shall take place only with the free and full consent of the intending parties.

The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 9 December 1964

It declares that no marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties. Minimum age for marriage should be specified by the States (no less than 15 years) and they should all be registered by the competent authority.

Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989

A human rights treaty which establishes the civil, economic, political, social, cultural and health rights of children; it also provides a definition as to what is considered a child. The Convention defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen unless the age of majority is attained earlier under national legislation.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women in New York 18 December 1979

It states that the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect. All necessary action, including legislation, should be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to compel all governments to require the compulsory registration of marriages in an official registry. In 1994, the general recommendations of the Committee were that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both men and women.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, July 1, 1990

Prohibits child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys. It insists on the action and cooperation from governments to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years in all local and international legislation.

First-ever resolution on child, early and forced marriage is adopted at the Human Rights Council. (2013, September)

The resolution was co-sponsored by a cross-regional group of over 100 countries. It stressed the need to include child, early and forced marriage in post-2015 international development agenda. The resolution became a crucial milestone in global efforts to eliminate child marriage. It recognized child, early and forced marriage as involving violations of human rights which “prevents individuals from living their lives free from all forms of violence and that has adverse consequences on the enjoyment of human rights, such as the right to education, the right to the highest attainable standard of health including sexual and reproductive health.” Several countries with high rates of child marriage adopted

the resolution including Ethiopia, Honduras, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Yemen. However, many South Asian countries with significantly high rates of child marriage did not comply with the proposal – specifically Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

Human Rights Council Adopts 2015 Resolution to End Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings (2015, July) [A/RES/70/138]

Resolution recognized child, early and forced marriage as a violation of human rights and calls for strengthened efforts to prevent and eliminate this harmful practice and support married girls. It was co-sponsored by 85+ countries, including ones with high rates of child marriage. It included an important call to action as States prepare to adopt and implement the Sustainable Development Goals and target 5.3 on child marriage.

Human Rights Council Adopts 2017 Resolution to End Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings (2017, June)

This resolution recognized child marriage as a violation of human rights and calls for strengthened efforts to prevent and eliminate this harmful practice and support married girls, including in humanitarian contexts. It was co-sponsored by 85+ countries, including ones with high rates of child marriage. It calls upon States and various other actors to take specific measures to address child marriage, and for the first time says that these efforts are particularly important in humanitarian contexts, because this is when girls are most exposed and vulnerable to it. It furthers the debate on child marriage in the UN by acknowledging the basic need for access to justice, sexual, reproductive health, civil registration/vital statistics in these situations as ways to address child marriage.. In addition, it also and, acknowledges that gender inequality is the root cause of child marriage. It points out the necessity of a web portal containing information on child marriage in humanitarian settings and calls out the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to create said portal. A written report on the issue of the 41st Session of the Human Rights Council (2019, June) is requested from the department of the High Commissioner along with an update on the June 2018 report. It encourages to keep the issue of strengthening the effort to prevent and eradicate child, early and forced marriage on the Human Rights Council's agenda.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Throughout the years, States and organizations have progressively taken legislative measures to both combat and eradicate child, early and forced marriage around the world. These measures include treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

, which states that both men and women have equal rights in a marriage, during one and at its dissolution, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which first defined a child as any human being under the age of 18, and also recommended the age of marriage to be 18. These treaties serve to protect vulnerable young children from being forced into situations they would otherwise not be a part of. However, with the passing of the years, it became clear that more steps needed to be taken in order to make a relevant impact in the lives of all the children, especially girls, suffering from this practice.

In 2013, the Human Rights Council adopted the first-ever resolution on child, early and forced marriage, this resolution was co-sponsored by 100+ countries and was adopted by many that had high rates of child marriage such as Ethiopia, Honduras, Sierra Leone, etc. This resolution was followed by two others in the next four years, which were adopted in 2015 and 2017. Both were adopted by the Human Rights Council and numerous other countries, with the latter emphasizing on the need for assistance and enhanced efforts in humanitarian contexts. Another key milestone in the fight against child marriage took place in 2015, with the incorporation of Goal 5.3 in the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda, this goal stands to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations” (United Nations [UN], 2015)

Among other previously attempted solutions there is the compulsory registration of marriages which, in one case, was seen in India in 2017, when the Supreme Court of India put The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 into action. Additionally, various other countries like Malawi and Guatemala have taken legislative measures to raise the minimum legal age to marry.

In previous years, organizations such as UNICEF, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, have also stepped in to help, having offered support to hotlines and referrals to services that offer direct support to girls in countries as diverse as Azerbaijan, Bosnia, etc. UNICEF has also teamed up with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in a pledge to end child marriage by 2030; currently they are helping to do so by “increasing girls’ access to education and health care services, educating parents and communities on the dangers of child marriage, increasing economic support to families, and strengthening and enforcing laws that establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage.” (UN, 2016)

Possible Solutions

Educational programs should be created to inform boys on the importance of the education of young girls and women, in order for them to understand the grave consequences created by this tradition they are raised to partake in. This should also be put in place because in many communities, it is the men that have the power and make decisions.

In educational environments, supplementary workshops should be supplied for girls struggling in STEM subjects, which are key for progress. Additionally, we should also promote workshops that deal with subjects such as art and literature; these are subjects that are non-science related and are usually not available in low income schools. Thus, girls will be provided a wider range of professions and will be able to find what they are truly passionate about in an easier and more efficient way. This emphasis on helping women find the subject they are invested in is key, as it is more likely a girl will stay in school and subsequently understand the importance of education if she is involved in subjects she is legitimately interested in. Moreover, informational programs should be put in place to teach parents the importance of educating their daughters and the value it brings with it. Education is a very productive way of breaking the poverty cycle and ending gender-based discrimination. Breakfast and/or lunch should be provided in schools to alleviate parents of the burden of feeding their children; it encourages parents to send them to school.

Furthermore, hygiene supplies, such as tampons, should be supplied in school facilities for girls to be able to go to school when on their period.

Also, developed/First-world countries should be asked to engage with whatever material they can provide: donations of either money or school materials, new or used, but in good state. This should be done in order to dismantle any barrier, such as lack of school supplies, that may exist that impedes women from going to school.

On the other hand, national laws should intertwine with international laws, preventing countries from enforcing their own beliefs on the rights of their people. This local legislation should be enforced, which should state that the age of consent is 18. Furthermore, religious and/or traditional leaders should be encouraged to speak out against child marriage and advise parents not to do so. This will inevitably have a big impact as many religious communities' norms are influenced by the guidance of their leaders.

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Appendices

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