



Child marriage: A harmful tradition

- An estimated **10 million girls** are married every year before they reach 18ⁱ, the age below which people are defined as children by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The practice of child marriage has been rooted in the traditions of many communities for generations and remains largely unchallenged. It happens across religious groups, although no religion formally endorses child marriage.

Child marriage: a global problem

- **1 in 3 girls** in the developing world is estimated to be married before 18; **1 in 7 girls** before 15.ⁱⁱ
- Girls from **poor families** are nearly twice as likely to marry before 18 as girls from wealthier families.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Child marriage occurs **around the world**: 46% of girls under 18 are married in South Asia; 38% in sub-Saharan Africa; 21% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18% in the Middle East and North Africa^{iv}.

Why does child marriage happen?

- **Tradition:** Child marriage is a traditional practice that in many places happens simply because it has happened for generations.
- **Gender roles:** In many communities where child marriage is practiced, girls are not valued as much as boys – they are seen as a burden.
- **Poverty:** Where poverty is acute, giving a daughter in marriage allows parents to reduce family expenses. Where a dowry or ‘bride price’ is paid, it can be welcome income for poor families. Where the bride’s family pay the groom a dowry they often pay less money if the bride is young and uneducated.
- **Security:** Many parents marry off their daughters young because they feel it is in her best interest, often to ensure her safety in areas where girls are at high risk of physical or sexual assault.

What is the impact of child marriage on girls?

- **Health:** Child brides face higher risk of death and injury due to early sexual activity and childbearing. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s^v.
- **Inter-generational impact:** When a mother is under 18, her baby is 60 percent more likely to die in its first year of life than a baby born to a mother older than 19^{vi}.
- **Education:** Child brides usually drop out of school and are denied the opportunity to complete their education, significantly reducing their ability to earn an income and lift themselves and their children out of poverty.
- **Safety:** Child brides are more likely to suffer domestic violence and sexual abuse^{vii}.
- **Child marriage is a serious human rights violation** that denies girls their rights to consensual marriage, education, health, and the right to live in safety. It contravenes both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Why is it important to address child marriage?

- **Urgency:** If we do not take action against child marriage, it is estimated that over the next decade 100 million girls will marry before they are 18. That’s a staggering level of lost potential.
- **Child brides have been neglected by the international community:** Child marriage is a widespread practice that violates the rights of children around the world, yet little coordinated action has been taken to address it, perhaps because it is linked to sensitive issues of tradition and culture.
- **Reduce global poverty:** Child marriage directly impacts six of the eight Millennium Development Goals – the international community will not fulfil its commitments to reduce global poverty unless it tackles child marriage.

About Girls Not Brides

- *Girls Not Brides* is a global partnership of **more than 170 non-governmental organisations from across 30 countries** that work to tackle child marriage at the grassroots, national and global levels.

ⁱ Population Council, 2004



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

- ii UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2011*
- iii International Centre for Research on Women, 2007
- iv Ibid.
- v UNFPA, *State of World Population*, 2005
- vi UNFPA, *State of World Population*, 2005
- vii UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2011*