

Forum: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Issue #12-02: Measures to address the protection of minors regarding child marriage

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Introduction

Child marriage can be classified as the formal or informal union of two persons in which at least one of whom is under 18 years of age. This is an important violation of human rights and a serious form of abuse. However, it is still a very common issue around the world, particularly in developing nations. This could be due to poverty, religious or cultural traditions, illiteracy and/or the concern of the child remaining without a husband/wife for life. Considering the virtue of being children, they are known to not be capable of giving full consent. According to the foundation "Girls not brides", one in five girls in the world are married before they turn 18 years old. In addition, UNICEF confirmed that globally, a total of 115 million boys and men were married before they turned 18 years old. Keeping that in mind, over the years, foundations such as "Girls not brides" and "Save the children" function globally on the basis of diversity, collaboration, and collective action to solve this issue. These groups have demonstrated significant impact in bringing awareness to the urgency of this cause.

These premature marriages have been presented to be extremely impactful on a child's development. According to the World Health Organization, young brides are very often silenced victims of domestic violence with no way of advocating for themselves. Also considered a form of mistreatment, the sexual

and reproductive health of a minor is more likely to be violated during these forced or willful marriages. Confirmed by the United Nations, occurring more frequently with girls, these sexual intercourses with an experienced spouse are forced and lack consent from the younger partner. Since the underage female frequently lacks the knowledge and standing to negotiate for sexual health and contraceptive methods, the chances of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STI) increases, and with that the likelihood of a pregnancy at a young age. With a girl's body not being physically mature enough to carry a new being, the consequences of a delivery and other factors of pregnancy may lead to be devastating such as hypertension, anemia, premature birth, postpartum depression and even death during childbirth. In addition to the violations of physical, reproductive and sexual well-being, a minor's mental and psychological state is affected, as young kids are being excluded from having a deserved and suitable childhood and adolescence. With the lack of liberty, constant exploitation and exclusion from proper and complete education, along with the absence of employment guaranteeing financial independence, child marriage becomes a cycle of poverty and dependency.

Since boys and girls have major biological differences, the consequences of this matter can be different. Nevertheless both are forced to assume responsibilities they are not ready for. In the view of child marriage ending childhood, it only creates negative influences to a children's rights to education, health and overall safety.

Definition of Key Terms

Minors

For this committee, the definition of minor that we will be utilizing is that of the noun, which is "a person under the legal age of consent". This means that in the eyes of the law, this person is unable to make decisions for themselves regarding

their health, marital status, and overall activity in the economy. The age at which a person is no longer considered a *minor* varies between countries, and can even vary between provinces or states of the same nation.

Child marriage

Defined as either the force or willful marriage of two parties, in which one is under the age of 18. More often than not, the party under the age of 18 is female. The OHCHR (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner) claims that 650 million women alive today were married as children; and that every year

Teen pregnancy

This term refers to teenagers who have gotten pregnant during their *teen-years* (Below the age of twenty). This is most common between the 15 to 19 age brackets; however, some of these mothers can be as young as 10 years old. Rates of teen pregnancy have dropped significantly throughout the developed world due to the availability of birth control medication and prophylactic preservatives. This trend, however, is not worldwide; with some nations observing no change, such as Bangladesh.

Age of consent

The age of consent is the age at which the law deems a person capable of making a decision regarding sexual intercourse. These ages vary between nations, and sometimes even within different territories of the same nation. Some nations don't even have a legal age of consent. One of these nations is Yemen, in which sex is allowed once puberty has been hit, and the partners are married to each other.

Sexual transmitted diseases (STD)

A Sexually Transmitted Disease, also sometimes referred to as a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI); is often an infection's virus, bacteria, or parasites that is transmitted through sexual intercourse; some are curable, while others are merely tractable. The infectious nature varies depending on the disease. Some require direct genital to genital contact, while others can be transmitted from mouth to genital intercourse, or even the transfer of any form of bodily fluids.

Mental health

Mental health is the term coined to refer to a person's internal well-being, which enables them to cope with the stresses of everyday life, realize their own abilities, and be a productive member of society.

Religion

These are Nations that are those that have a comparably low industrial sector (also referred to as the Second Sector of the Economy), and have a low Human Development Index (HDI)* score. There is no universal determinant of whether a nation is a developing nation or a developed one, interpretation of external socio-political environments varies in different parts of the world.

Under Developing nations

A system of belief in something above humans and human comprehension, something which can be regarded as holy, sacred, or divine. There are many types of religion, such as monotheistic, polytheistic, and those that do not possess a god at all, and revolve towards a central idea or fundamental truth.

Pedophilia

A person with sustained sexual attraction or inclination towards minors. More specifically, those at the pre-pubescent stage, which is often between the ages of 9 and 13.

General Overview

Countries throughout the world have different ages of consent throughout the population. Countries like South Korea have an age of consent of 20 years, while in the Philippines it is only 12. What governments and people do not realize is the injustice, challenges and problematic this number can be for teenagers. Lower age of consent does not only cause several traumatic issues for the teenager but also a higher increase of child marriage. This child marriage robs the brides of having a childhood and a violation of human rights. Nevertheless, this is not the only cause for child marriage. Things such as but not limited to poverty, cultural traditions, unequal gender norms, and religious laws. Most of this child marriage occurs in developing nations.

Age of consent and its effects

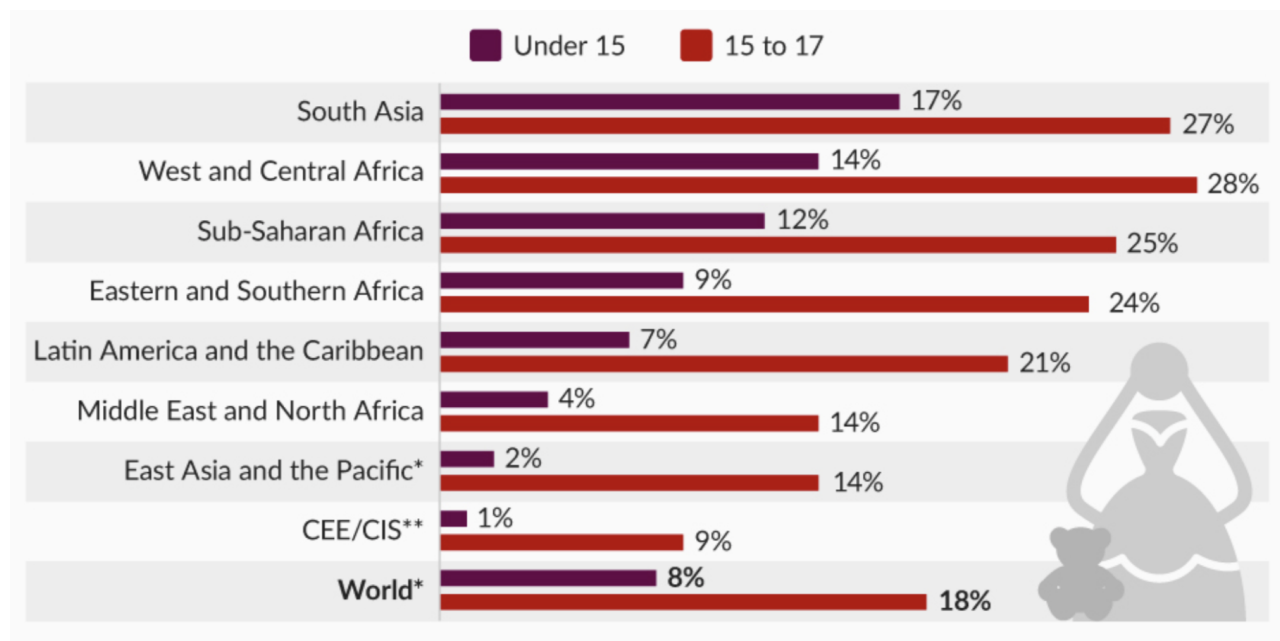
The age of consent has several negative effects on teenagers. For example; the promotion of sexual assault, rape, sexually transmitted diseases. Most STD and STIs in a country are found in people between the ages of 15-19. Latest on the transmission of this can cause horrible health effects for countries as a whole. Furthermore, the low age of consent encourages teenage pregnancies. These pregnancies not only put at risk the life of the baby but also the teenager carrying it. Plus, most of these children will not be able to grow in a household with both parental figures or even a stable environment. This comes to the fact that most of them are born accidentally or unwontedly. Later on, producing severe mental problems for the baby. However, there are still over 17 million girls who give birth yearly.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is the formal or informal union between two people before the age of 18. Currently, over 40 million from the ages 15-19 underage girls worldwide are married. Each year over 12 million girls get married before they

reach the age of 18 and about 4 million of them are below 14 years of age. This abuse toward the woman society robs the poor girls from being able to fulfill what is expected from a child and their innocence. These girls are forced into adulthood before they are physically or mentally ready.

% of child marriage from 2005-2013



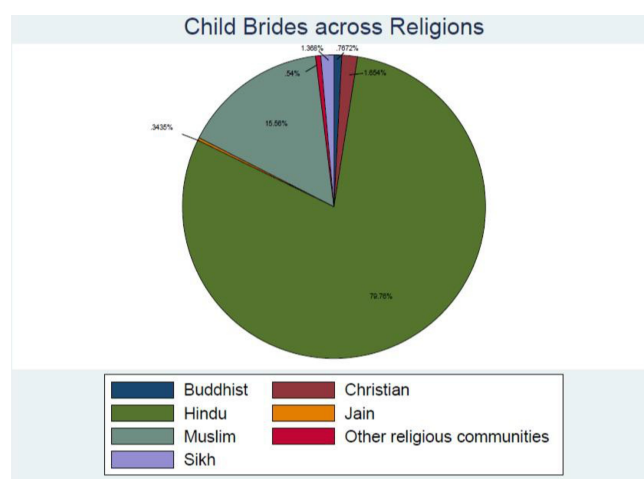
Effects of child marriage

Child brides are most commonly deprived of education, health, and safety. Nonetheless, these are not the only negative effects produced by this act. Such things as violence, pedophilia, sexually transmitted diseases, and teen pregnancies are promoted and more liable to happen. Countries with a higher percentage of child marriage also have an increase in abortion, child abuse and school dropouts. This school dropouts and deprivation of education causes the young girls to grow up without the knowledge to get a job and produce an income when older. Later on this issue causes a cycle of poverty in the country which correlates to the fact that most child marriages occur in low-income countries. For example, more than two-thirds of all Yemen's girls are married before the age of 17. Manifesting how there are not only present negative

effects produced to girls but also a long term which affects countries as a whole.

Culture and religion

Religion and culture is most often blamed for child marriage. The perception of marriage for several religions is that it will provide protection. Not only this correlates with gender inequality and biased norms, but also poverty. Most women are married at a young age to prevent the risk of poverty and have a man as a safety shield. With the low educations, they are provided with, creating a future for themselves is practically impossible which just adds to the list of reasons for child marriage. This is believed and supported in religions such as Muslims and Hindus. For example in India, where 40% of child brides reside, most of them are Hindus and Muslims. In Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, most of them are Muslims and a small amount catholic. Furthermore, child marriage is not tied directly to faith, but more to the cultural leader. This happens because cultural marriages most often happen in religious ceremonies. These religious leaders can promote or impede this idea. Cultural leaders who have advocated against and toward the innocence of young children have proven to be effective.



Major Parties Involved and Their Views

India

India presents the largest number of child brides in the world. It is estimated by UNICEF that at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married yearly, taking up one-third of the global total. Currently, over 16% of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 are married, and according to the organization Girls Not Brides, over a quarter of Indian girls are married by age of 18. In the nation, it is estimated that girls who reside in remote areas or come from lower-income families are more vulnerable, and a higher proportion of child brides are those with little or no schooling. This current poverty desperate Indian parents to find a wealthier spouse. However, a negative trend of poverty is shown in the Indian economy. As demonstrated by the United Nations, when a girl or boy is married as a kid, she or he is more likely to drop out of school and eventually lack knowledge and skills. Therefore, they are not present in the labor market and ultimately can not help their nation's social and economic development. The UNICEF perspective to stopping child marriage in India acknowledges the problem's complexity, as well as the sociocultural and structural elements that contribute to the custom.

Chad

Chad is the world's third-largest country that has the greatest rate of child marriage, with 70% of young girls being married. According to the EDS MICS 2014-2015 report data, 70% of girls under the age of 18 and 29% of girls under the age of 15 are married. Married girls are frequently excluded from school, robbing them of an adequate education and productive engagement in development.

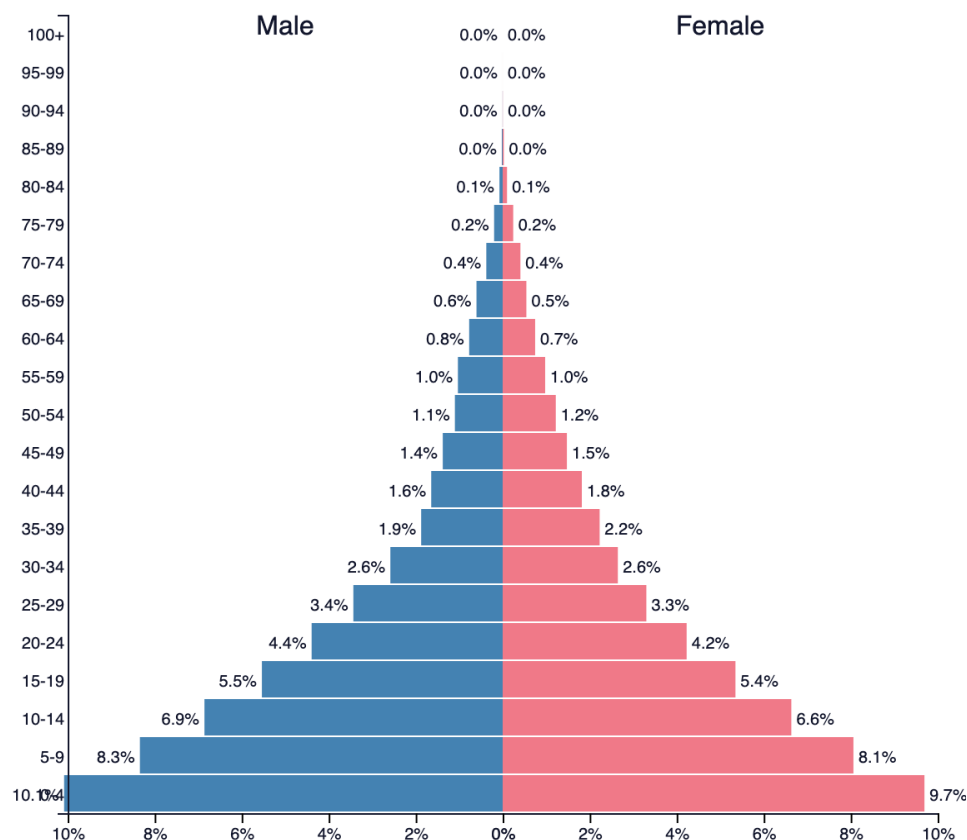
Some decisive factors affecting the child marriage topic are poverty with the low status of women in the nation. In addition to the union with minors, the practice of Female genital mutilation (FGM). This is for non-medical reasons,

partial or entire removal of external female genitalia or other harm to the female genital organs, which has no benefit to a woman's health. These detrimental practices are particularly prevalent in rural areas, and its repercussions only serve to perpetuate the poverty cycle. Although, Chad is one of the countries that launched a nationwide campaign to abolish child marriage in 2015, which was backed up by commitments from all levels of government and the signing of an ordinance outlawing the practice.

Niger

In Niger, 76% of females marry before they turn 18, and 28% marry before they turn 15 (UNICEF). In villages such as Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder, child marriage is particularly common. In some areas, girls as young as ten years old are married, and only a few young women remain single after the age of 25. Niger is one of the nations that closely experiences extreme poverty. In addition, the country's population is growing at quick rates, taking into account that on average a Nigerian woman has seven to eight children. Therefore the Nigerien population pyramid is expansive. This means that the younger age groups have bigger percentages of the population, with each age group being smaller or proportional to the one before it. These pyramids are most common in societies with high reproductive rates and shorter life spans than the general population. With that being said, parents that have trouble financially use marriage as a solution to not have to worry about young children and their needs.

Nigerien population pyramid in 2020



Bangladesh

In order to get married in Bangladesh, women must be 18 years old and men must be 21 years old. Over half of Bangladeshi women currently in their mid-twenties were married before they turned eighteen. Nearly a quarter of those were under the age of 15. When a girl reaches puberty, her parents are concerned about her sexual purity. According to a local research, they have a genuine or imagined fear of sexual violence when their children reach adolescence, so parents elect to marry off their daughter. However, many married young girls are subjected to and tolerate physical and sexual mistreat. Considering social customs, about 33 percent of adolescent girls believe it is acceptable for a husband to physically abuse the wife. In addition, a majority of

people in the nation believe that child marriage it is not in any way a form of sexual violence.

Saudi Arabia

Due to the normalized male guardianship over women and as the nation has no laws against it, the practice of child marriage is prevalent in Saudi Arabia. For young girls, the father or closest male figure gets to make all the decisions including when and who the girl must marry. Before 2018, women were not allowed to drive, attend football matches or even attend university, get surgery, or work without permission from a male guardian. With Saudi Arabia having no minimum age for marriage, the Girls not Brides foundation highlighted cases in which ten and eight-year-old girls wedded two men in their 60s. However, more recently in 2019, child marriages under the age of 15 were outlawed completely, and additional laws are in place for those aged 16 to 18. This means that for the union of a 16-18, the case must go under a special court to make sure the minor is not being harmed in any way.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
Ancient Rome	In Roman times marriage did not involve romance for most of the time. Instead it was the result of a family accord. Men typically married in their mid-twenties, while women wedded when still in their early adolescent years.

From the Middle Ages

In India with the states and governments being established, the political system evolved and modified civilization progressively. It changed the way people lived from a simple to a more complicated state, severely constraining the concept of liberty. Therefore, Women lost their rights and were forced to follow specific laws.

1978

The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 was modified in India, raising the legal marriage minimum age for girls from 15 to 18 years and for boys from 18 to 21 years.

1980s

UNICEF registered that one in three girls were married before 18 years of age.

September 2011

The foundation Girls Not Brides was launched from governments, foundations, and international organizations. This has the goal to reach a society where girls and boys have the same status and are capable of reaching their greatest potential.

- 2015-2017 In regions where the foundation Save the Children served, child marriage rates fell by 11%.
- January 2018 The National Human Rights Commission held a regional conference on child marriage in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. In order to raise awareness about the current laws preventing child marriage and to identify hurdles to its successful implementation so that course corrections could be suggested.
- 2016 The Global Programme to End Child Marriage was developed by UNICEF and UNFPA in collaboration with UNFPA. The initiative has impacted over 12 million teenage females with life-skills education and academic performance support, strengthening young girls in danger of marriage or already married.
- September 2020 The UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage report was released adapting practices due to COVID-19 pandemic.

June 28th, 2021

The Save the Children foundation and International Rescue Committee held an online webinar in order to discuss the challenges and solutions to avoiding and addressing to child marriage in humanitarian circumstances.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Several measures have been taken by the UN not only to prevent child marriage but also young age of consent in underdeveloped countries. For example, a new initiative has been started to protect millions of young girls from child marriage. This initiative announced on International Women's Day has a purpose to put an end to this global issue by the end of 2030 and protect the rights of these vulnerable girls. This initiative has been mostly taken by UNICEF (UN children's fund) and UNFPA (UN Population Fund). This announcement is part of an effort to prevent girls from getting married at a young age and support those already married in over 12 countries located in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East where the rates are the highest. Furthermore, they would like to establish and enforce laws that promote 18 as the minimum marriage age. This would help young girls in several ways including the possibility to reach their full potential in the educational field.

Additionally, in 1964, the United Nations held a "convention on consent to marriage, the minimum age for marriage and registration of marriages". This convention aimed to promote universal respect and protection of the human right to all these girls who are pressured into being married. Later on, in 2015, the UN recognized forced marriage as a national human right violation. There were

10 articles present, discussed and established in the convention. These were things such as but not limited to;

- All marriages shall be registered in an appropriate official register by the competent authority.
- No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses.
- No marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person after due publicity and in the presence of the authority competent to solemnize the marriage and of witnesses, as prescribed by law.
- Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Considering the magnitude of this worldwide issue, many organizations and parties have worked to put efforts in solving it. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund has expressed to that ending child marriage is critical for the empowerment and well-being of kids, and for that reason, UNICEF works with partners and nations to address this human rights violation wherever it occurs. In India, UNICEF recognizes the complexities of the issue, as well as the societal and institutional factors that contribute to the practice. However, in 2019, the organization, its partners, and the Indian government have worked on multiple ways to progress with projects regarding the matter. Firstly the expansion of the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* national programme adding 64

districts to the scheme. This permitted 5.4 million girls and 2.4 million boys to obtain access to knowledge, gender-responsive resources, and life-skills programs. Therefore, allowing more children to learn their rights and generate independence, which avoids getting minors stuck under such circumstances. Still, having 80 districts accessible to this information is not close to being enough, considering the nation counts 718 districts.

Also, with information on the dangers of child marriage, parenting skills, and teenage concerns, 33 million parents and community members were reached. In addition to a total of 120 youth-led organizations built to improve teenage engagement skills and provide a link between district officials and adolescents. With these details being transmitted through families, more parents can be aware of the situation and not only review their family actions, but help report situations around. Furthermore, creating a connection between teens and law officials give more opportunities for minors to give an account of what is possibly happening to them in the scenario of child marriage. To be as effectful, this such work has to be spread all over the nation while reviewing religious, cultural and economic aspects that may increase the occurrence of the issue.

Other initiatives were taken to prevent forced marriages in countries as varied as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey. These different nations have included hotlines for help and connections to services that provide direct assistance to girls. Specifically in 2017, in the southeast of Turkey, the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality along with UNICEF worked on investigating the reasons and cases of child marriages, as well as implementing prevention strategies. With the aim of reaching 50,000 children and 50,000 parents, by the end of the same year, with capacity-building programs, the program generated 960 service providers. With the success for the following year, via

community-based preventative initiatives aimed primarily at men and boys, approximately 100,000 parents and children were reached. Just like Turkey, Bulgarian family centers have used UNICEF-funded better understanding of the causes of child marriage to develop programs to prevent child marriage. In addition to improving access to secondary education for Roma girls. Also, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the curriculum 'Empowering Roma children and families to exercise their rights' was enforced by a Roma institution with UNICEF support. This worked to mobilize Roma communities, organizations, and groups to progress rights of children, with a special emphasis on terminating child marriages.

Regarding Latin America and the Caribbean, since 2017 a regional program has been implemented by UN WOMEN, UNFPA and UNICEF. The initiatives involve activities such as breaking the silence regarding girl's rights, promoting the empowerment of girls and the transformation of damaging gender stereotypes. In addition, align new different foundations on international standards and encourage strategies and laws that address the factors that lead to early unions. This scheme is used to ensure that today's girls, who will be adults in 2030, have the opportunity to reach their full potential. From the initial five countries, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, to the others who later got involved in regional activities, the program demonstrated success. In the same year legal exceptions at the minimum age of marriage (18) were banned by El Salvador and Guatemala. Also, Colombia started taking action on a National Development Plan (2018-2022) that includes a goal aimed at preventing child marriage and early unions. Finally, girls' organizations have been established in the Dominican Republic, and national youth leadership workshops have been arranged to enhance girls' autonomy and establish connections between attendees. Having nations worldwide

actively create programs and use past action as base for new projects indicates progress in terminating the big problem, child marriage.

Possible Solutions

Ending the problem of child marriage includes several issues to tackle. This includes poverty, educating, awareness, empowerment, inequality, religion and many more. Nevertheless there are several possible solutions to end the worldwide problem.

Solutions to end this problem consist but are not limited to, educating young girls with information and skills to prevent and teach about this issue. Provide economic support to these young women and their families to ensure they will be able to finish school and fulfill their full potential. This will later on help them when trying to get a job and prevent them from getting married just for economic benefits. Furthermore, encouraging and enforcing laws respecting age of consent, and legal marriage age in countries all over the world. Strengthening the legal system will help protect their rights and their innocence. This will also restrain them from making a mistake at a young age which they might not be comfortable or regret further in life. Creating marches, and protests is another possible solution for this issue. This can help rallying the larger community to promote women empowerment. Additionally helping with the thought of needing men to be protected.

Lastly, as mentioned before, one of the largest reasons for child marriage is religion. Nevertheless, in these situations religious leaders can become our allies to end this. Religious leaders play several roles, but an important one in this situation is that they have the power to establish in communities which behaviors are acceptable and which should not be done. They are looked up by thousands of people which makes their word important for several communities. Creating inspiration and ideologies for several young women and their

surrounding families. Working with them and being able to influence their powerful voice could prevent millions of young girls who will get married in the future because of their religion and culture.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The matter of protecting minors regarding child marriage falls under the 3rd Sustainable Development Goal (SDG); good health and well-being. This goal set by the United Nations aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all people at all ages. As discussed through the issue bulletin, due to multiple reasons such as poverty, cultural traditions, or the concern of the child remaining without a husband/wife, child marriage is very common in many countries. The union of a minor presents to have extreme negative impacts on a children's rights to education, health and overall safety. The debating of the matter is of ultimate importance in order to guarantee the overall rights of a child and attaining our SDG.

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Appendix

- I. Detailed description on preventing child marriage and its consequences

<https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/child-marriage>

- II. Report on Saudi Arabia's moves to ban child marriage due to their high rates

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/gcc/saudi-arabia-moves-to-ban-child-marriage-with-a-new-ruling-1.955310>

- III. Description of child marriage by UNICEF

<https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>

- IV. Article and report of age of consent around the world

<https://www.theweek.co.uk/92121/ages-of-consent-around-the-world>

- V. Consequences of religion with respect to child marriage

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/child-marriage-and-religion-0>

- VI. How to save children and its devastating effects ending childhood

<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-marriage-a-violation-of-child-rights>

- VII. UNFPA-UNICEF global program to prevent and end child marriage in the near future and restore childhood

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