

## FACTFILE Child marriage

### What is the issue?

- What are the dangers associated with child marriage?

### Facts

- According to UNICEF's estimates, over 64 million women aged 20–24 years were married or in union before the age of 18. In particular, large proportions of women marry as children in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Girls from poor households are more likely to be married as children. (Source: [http://www.childinfo.org/marriage\\_challenge.html](http://www.childinfo.org/marriage_challenge.html))

### Key points

- Child marriage involves the marriage of anyone below the age of 18. It is the marriage of a child to an adult or another child, and may be legally condoned by national laws.
- It is more usual for girls to be married to boys and men who are older than them while boys are more commonly married to girls of a similar age.
- Marriages may be arranged between two very young children as a means of maintaining or ensuring social, economic or political ties between families.
- Girls may be married to much older men who are more able to pay the dowries expected or demanded by a family. As such, girls are often the vulnerable party in child marriages.
- These marriages are often given legal sanction because of legislative loopholes that camouflage the sexual exploitation of children.
- It may be difficult to differentiate between forced marriage and child marriage, because this relies on finding out whether there was real and informed consent.
- Where the marriage of children aged under 18 is permitted by a national legal code, without the opportunity and means to give full and informed consent, that country is violating the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including Article 12 among others.
- Child marriage can help to deny girls' education (once married, girls tend not to go to school, and so they lose out on the benefits of education: better health, lower fertility, and increased economic productivity) and contribute to health problems – particularly those caused by inadequate education). Therefore a range of rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child may be violated as a result.
- It can also foster abuse, result in separation from friends and family, and fuel domestic slavery.

### Key quotes

- “Child marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty.” UNICEF, Early Marriage – A Harmful Traditional Practice: [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Early\\_Marriage\\_12\\_lo.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Early_Marriage_12_lo.pdf)
- “Child marriage is very common yet rarely spoken about: one in three girls in the developing world is married before she is 18 and one in seven marries by 15. At this rate 100 million girls will become child brides over the next decade...Child marriage perpetuates poverty and suffering.” Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.theelders.org/media/news/ending-child-marriage>