

# Childhood Marriage: A Detrimental Consequence of Poverty and Gender Inequality

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## **Abstract:**

Child marriage is sin which destroys the dream of tiny toys with that has an awful effect on the psycho-social development of the girl child. All around the world, young women are compelled to marry. Young girls are being coerced into marriage by their families or culture in many nations worldwide. For many years, UNICEF and other organizations have been trying to put an end to this practice, which typically causes young brides to face a variety of health concerns.

The decision to have the young girl marry the man of their choosing is made by the family in nearly all child marriage cases. For various reasons, families take this action. First and foremost, a large number of these young brides reside in nations known for their lack of access to food and other conveniences. Women find it hard to get any form of work in these areas, and the girls end up being just another expenditure for the impoverished family. The family perceives an opportunity to have someone else provide for their daughter's needs, such as food and care, when the girl gets married to a man, regardless of his age or financial status. Being married at such a young age exposes young brides to several abuses and difficulties. In the majority of civilizations, a woman is seen as a woman by the community's norms when she gets married. This implies that woman will have to take care of her husband's home, which typically entails doing a lot of hard domestic labor in less affluent areas.

**Keywords:** Child Marriage, impoverished, Psycho-social, Ignorance.

## **Introduction:**

Child marriage is a worldwide problem. It has terrible effects everywhere in the world and is driven by social standards, poverty, gender inequity, and insecurity. You may learn more about the prevalence, effects, and advancements made in the fight against child marriage here. (Brides, 2004)

The direct effects of child marriage are being felt by almost 650 million women worldwide. Although child marriage rates are gradually falling worldwide, progress isn't occurring quickly enough. By 2030, 150 million more females will be married if pre-pandemic rates continue. (UNICEF). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this may increase by a further 13 million girls (UNFPA).

Girls' rights to health, education, and opportunity are violated by child marriage. Any official or informal partnership in which one or both parties are younger than 18 is considered a child marriage. The primary cause of it is gender inequality. Before the age of 18, girls who formally get married or live together as though they were married are more likely to become pregnant at an early age, have serious pregnancy and delivery complications, contract HIV, and be the victims of domestic abuse. Millions of females and their offspring will have better health if child marriage is stopped. It's common for girls to drop out of school

after marriage in order to take care of the house, the kids, and the extended family. Married girls, pregnant girls, and young moms find it challenging to return to school for the same reasons, and occasionally as a result of official school or national policy. Girls who marry young lose out on the opportunity to acquire the abilities, information, and self-assurance necessary to negotiate, make wise decisions, find paid work, and lead independent lives. Girls and their families are more likely to live in poverty because they have limited access to economic and educational possibilities.

Girls' and women's own opportunities for development, stability, and change are restricted by systems that undervalue their involvement and contribution. At least six of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are directly hampered by child marriage. We can all look forward to a more equitable, safe, and successful future if child marriage is abolished and girls' rights are upheld.

Early marriage leaves girls without the information, abilities, and social networks necessary to sustain their family, maintaining their poor social standing and leaving their families open to an intergenerational cycle of poverty that impedes community development. Several studies have connected greater economic gains to investments in the education and development of girls. Lower birth rates, lower maternal and infant mortality, and higher female workforce participation are all linked to increased education for girls, and these factors raise a nation's GDP and per capita income. Therefore, child marriage affects not just the lives of young girls but also the expansion of the economy.

### **Operational Definition**

**Child Marriage:** A child marriage is when a woman is under 18 or a man is under 21

The first article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a “child” means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. Thus, it defines child marriage as ‘the practice of marriage of children under 18.

### **Child marriage as a toxic product of poverty**

Fifteen million females marry before turning eighteen each year. Child marriage is still a global problem in 2016. The practice is primarily motivated by economic position and destitution, but it also draws from cultural, traditional, and religious factors. Despite being acknowledged globally as a violation of human rights, including the human rights of children, it continues to occur throughout the majority of the world's regions and continents, both in the "developed" North and the global South. UNICEF estimates that if the current trend continues, there would be about one billion girls married off as minors by 2030, particularly in light of the continuing, serious refugee and migratory crises, which pose significant risks to women and girls. (Women, 2016)

- Low economic status is one of the key elements that contributes to early marriage. The likelihood of girls getting married early is greatly increased by higher poverty levels, which also translate into lower public welfare.
- It is difficult to eliminate the underlying reason of early marriage and the problems it causes. Reducing poverty and poor levels of education will require consistent, thorough planning and rules; they cannot be eliminated overnight. Moreover, business or higher education would be required to progressively lift girls out of poverty. (Istiqomah, 2023)
- Poverty has an impact on child marriage, Early marriage seemed to be substantially correlated with household economic position. They do this to get out of poverty and inherit some money from their husband.

- Financial restrictions were a contributing factor to the early marriage of parents living in the slums. The parents believed that their spouses would take care of the daughters financially and that they would become their responsibility.
- One factor that influenced the women's desire to marry early was family poverty. Two subthemes of family poverty are linked to child marriage: child marriage as a way to lessen financial stress and dropping out of school because of poverty.
- Child marriage is viewed in some cultures as a means of securing a girl's future and shielding her from sexual promiscuity or poverty. In other situations, it might be seen as a means of maintaining traditions or practices. Since these social and cultural practices are so embedded in the community, they can be very challenging to alter.

### **The Pandemic Degenerated Child Marriage Globally**

**Economic impact:** Families found it challenging to meet their basic necessities as a result of the pandemic's severe economic collapse, which exacerbated unemployment and poverty. Due to the severe economic slump, families saw marrying off their daughters as a method to reduce financial pressures.

**School closures:** Many parents were unable to continue funding their daughters' education due to the economic consequences. Their financial load is lessened when they get married off. **Parental death:** Since family members may find it difficult to support a female orphan, the loss of a parent due to COVID can also raise the possibility that she will be married off. (Ria Ernunsari, 2023)

### **Gender Inequality and Child Marriage**

Gender inequality and patriarchal systems—systems run by and for men that place less value on girls due to their sex—are the primary causes of child marriage. Girls and women are discriminated against and have their needs, participation, and rights denied by gender inequality and the social norms, economic models, and political structures that uphold and sustain it. It restricts their access to economic and political engagement, as well as health care, including education about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Additionally, it raises their chance of encountering gender-based violence (GBV) and restricts their authority over their own bodies, including when, when, and with whom to marry.

Poverty, lack of educational opportunities, the effects of climate change, and insecurity exacerbate this. Girls' experiences of gender inequality are exacerbated by child marriage, which also has a detrimental effect on their rights and standard of living. Their kids are also affected by this. We cannot accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) until discrimination is eradicated and all girls are allowed to exercise their agency, or make and act on their own decisions.

Gender inequality must be eradicated in both public and private spheres in order to stop child marriage. For girls and women to have the same status as boys and men, it entails changing gendered norms and redistributing power at all levels.

### **Ways to prevent it**

**Religious leaders** can encourage change in their communities by exercising their moral influence. They can support alternate rites of passage that honor girls' maturation without necessitating marriage and fight against early marriage.

**Together with community leaders**, they can support the provision of resources and support to avoid child marriage and assist in identifying and intervening in cases of it in collaboration with community leaders.

Marriage isn't always the answer to adults' problems; parents and other adult relatives should take the initiative to provide young females additional choices in life.

Several strategies are needed to address child marriage. Social norms and perceptions of girls and women can be altered by those underlying causes and efforts. Enforcing laws that forbid child marriage, bolstering child protection institutions, and giving girls access to economic, medical, and educational possibilities are all crucial.

### **Indian Government Efforts to Prevent Child Marriage**

The Indian government has taken important action to end child marriage after realizing how serious the problem is:

1. According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), girls must be 18 years old and boys must be 21. Additionally, it imposes severe penalties on individuals who arrange child marriages.
2. A government program called Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) was started to reduce gender inequality and advance girls' education.
3. The goal of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program is to safeguard children's rights while also enhancing their nutrition and general health.

### **Sustainable Development Goals and Child Marriage**

By 2030, governments worldwide have pledged to eradicate child marriage by means of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Learn the essential messages you can use to hold governments accountable for their commitment to ending child marriage and how the SDGs connect to child marriage. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 objectives that outline global development priorities from now until 2030, were adopted by UN member states in 2015. They are a global call to action focused on the realization of human rights that aims to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee that everyone lives in peace and prosperity.

- By 2030, "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilations," according to Target 5.3.
- If we do not put an end to child marriage, we will fail to meet eight of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Under the SDGs, 193 nations have committed to preventing child marriage by 2030.

**Giving girls priority in order to accomplish the SDGs:** A worldwide issue that transcends nations, cultures, and faiths is child marriage. Approximately 650 million of today's women and girls were married when still young. By 2030, 150 million more girls will be married unless we step up our efforts. The primary causes of child marriage gender inequality, poverty, insecurity, and the dearth of social and economic possibilities for girls—must be addressed in order to achieve this. Given that these concerns are covered by several SDGs, it is clear how comprehensive the work being done daily by the child marriage movement to eradicate child marriage is. We must urge development actors working across these goals to address child marriage if we are to genuinely eradicate it. By demonstrating how the various objectives relate to child marriage, we can persuade them to take this action.

### **Conclusion:**

The likelihood of girls becoming young brides was considerably higher for those living in poverty. Poverty and a lack of knowledge cannot be solved overnight; long-term, thorough planning and legislation are required. When someone gets married before becoming 18, their human rights are infringed. Despite laws designed to prevent it, this detrimental conduct continues in many countries. Child marriage can cause

serious, chronic pain. Young brides are less likely to continue their studies and are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse.

Ending child marriage will need a number of reforms, such as bolstering and implementing laws against the practice, promoting gender equality, and guaranteeing community support for girls' rights. However, youth also need to be empowered to understand and assert their rights. This entails providing them with platforms for involvement and engagement in civic and community life, as well as chances for education and skill development, as well as correct information regarding their sexual and reproductive health. These kinds of opportunities and information have the power to transform lives. With the right information, girls and other vulnerable youth can speak out for themselves and even convince their families to postpone or cancel engagements.

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