

# AROUND THE WORLD

Liz Gilbert / David and Lucile Packard Foundation



Throughout the developing world, millions of girls are married while they are still children. 🌿 The practice of child marriage spans diverse cultures, and each child bride has her own unique story. 🌿 Yet those who have suffered its indignities share a common thread that transcends circumstances, cultures, countries and continents.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

*Takia, age 12, married at age 9 in Niger*

**Takia lives in Niamey, Niger’s capital.**

Her father has seven children by three wives; Takia’s mother died in childbirth. Because of her family’s poverty, her father believed the only way to guarantee a secure future for his daughters was to marry them off.

“One day my father told me I was to be married. I was never asked how I felt. It was my duty to respect his decision.”

She is unsure about her husband’s age, but a local youth organization estimates he is around 50. He waited until Takia was 11 before consummating the marriage. She gave birth to a daughter, Layla, that same year.

“I would have wanted to wait and find the one I love. But now it is too late. I prefer not to think about it. It is difficult for me, and for the whole country.”

*Rakiya, age unknown, married at 12 in Nigeria*

**Rakiya was betrothed at 11 and married at 12.**

Her husband repeatedly raped her, and her father beat her into submitting to her husband. She became pregnant soon after she wed and delivered her first child two months before her 13th birthday.

At 20, Rakiya was widowed with five children and a sixth on the way. She sold everything to feed her babies. When nothing was left, she sold herself. After four years in the sex trade,

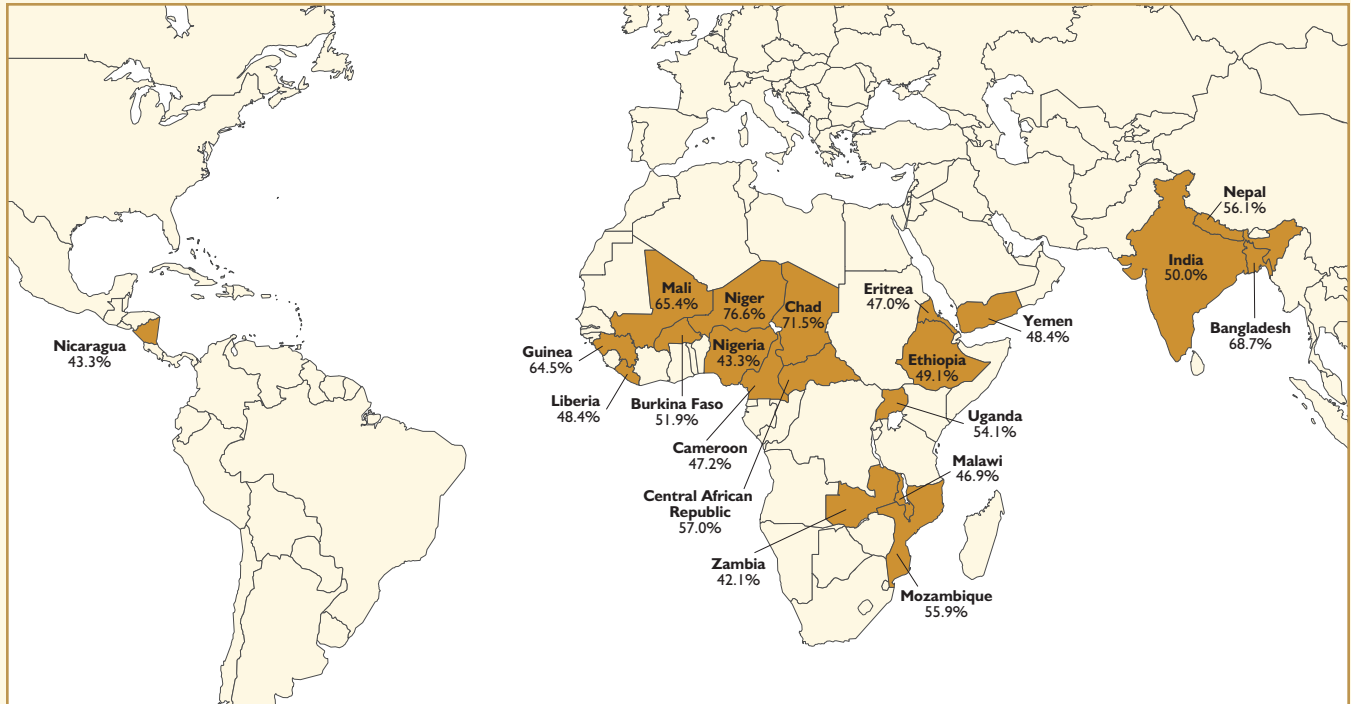
she resolved to find another way. Now Rakiya sells bean cakes by the side of the road.

“The ignorance of our people” leads to child marriage, Rakiya says. “They believe the girl will spoil, not knowing it is wrong.”

## Top 20 Countries with Highest Rates of Child Marriage<sup>1</sup>

RANKING	COUNTRY	PERCENT MARRIED YOUNGER THAN 18
1	Niger	76.6
2	Chad	71.5
3	Bangladesh	68.7
4	Mali	65.4
5	Guinea	64.5
6	Central African Republic	57.0
7	Nepal	56.1
8	Mozambique	55.9
9	Uganda	54.1
10	Burkina Faso	51.9
11	India	50.0
12	Ethiopia	49.1
13	Liberia	48.4
14	Yemen	48.4
15	Cameroon	47.2
16	Eritrea	47.0
17	Malawi	46.9
18	Nicaragua	43.3
19	Nigeria	43.3
20	Zambia	42.1

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*Rebeca, age 20, married at age 14 in Bangladesh*

**Rebeca's family agreed to marry their 14-year-old daughter because they were desperately poor**, and the 39-year-old groom was willing to waive the customary dowry requirement. So Rebeca was forced to leave school.

The first few months, Rebeca avoided sex by screaming whenever her husband came near her. But eventually, he had his way — and he infected her with a sexually transmitted disease (STD) he contracted while working away from home. Rebeca had surgery twice for uterine ulcers. She did not attribute her physical problems to an STD, but to marrying an older man at such a young age.

Asked why she thought her parents had arranged this marriage, she answers "what benefit will come from speaking of it now? This marriage should be considered good, and I will not think about whether it is really good or not. I have to stay here."

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> ICRW (2005). Analysis of Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data. Most recent surveys for all DHS surveyed countries. Rankings are based on data in which women ages 20–24 reported being married by age 18.

Note: Some countries that appear to have very high rates of child marriage — for example, Afghanistan — do not have adequate data and therefore do not appear on this list.

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To learn more about child marriage, contact the **International Center for Research on Women**

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