

# Child Marriage and DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Child marriage limits young girls' skills, resources, knowledge, social support, mobility and autonomy. 🌿 Young married girls have little power in relation to their husbands and in-laws. 🌿 They are therefore extremely vulnerable to domestic violence, abuse and abandonment. 🌿 Violence may include physical, sexual or psychological abuse.<sup>1</sup>

AP Photo / Emilio Morreale



## CHILD MARRIAGE VIOLATES GIRLS' HUMAN RIGHTS

**ICRW and its partners conducted a survey on the well-being of adolescents in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand, India in 2004.** The survey found that girls who were married before 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped or threatened by their husbands than girls who married later. They were three times as likely to report being forced to have sex without their consent in the previous six months.<sup>2</sup>

The ICRW survey also revealed that girls who were married before 18 consistently reported being less able than young

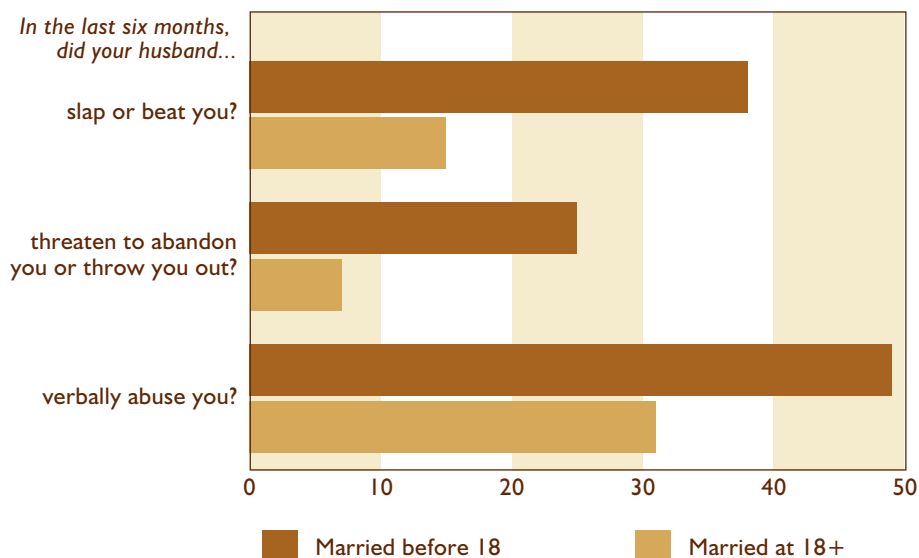
women married after 18 to talk to their husbands about the use of contraception, when they wanted to have children and how many children to have.<sup>3</sup> When asked if they never, sometimes or usually participated in decisions about aspects of their lives, women who had married as girls were more likely than those who married later to respond "never."<sup>4</sup>

## CHILD MARRIAGE IS COMMONLY ABUSIVE

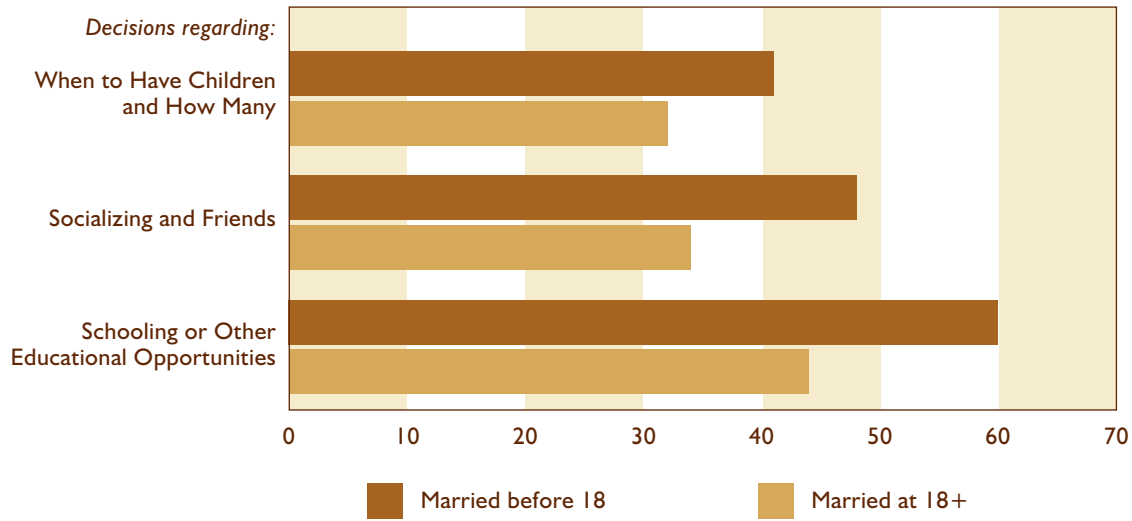
**Other studies have also documented the link between child marriage and domestic violence:**

- Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence than their peers who marry later.<sup>5</sup> For example, in Peru, where more than half of women report having experienced physical or sexual violence, child marriage has been found to increase a woman's chances of being abused.<sup>6</sup>
- Girls who marry early are more likely to believe that a man is sometimes justified in beating his wife than women who marry later. For example, in Kenya, 36 percent of girls married before 18 believe that a man is sometimes justified in beating his wife, compared to 20 percent of married women.<sup>7</sup>
- Child brides often show signs symptomatic of child sexual abuse and post-traumatic

*Young Women's Experience of Domestic Violence, by Age of Marriage, in Bihar and Jharkhand, India*



### Married Women Who Say They Never Have Decision-Making Power in their Household, By Age at Marriage, in Bihar and Jharkhand, India



stress. Such symptoms include feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and severe depression.<sup>8</sup>

- Girls with low bargaining power in the household are more likely to experience violence by an intimate partner. Women with low levels of education and adolescents ages 15 to 19 are at higher risk of violence than better educated or older women.<sup>9</sup>

Ending child marriage must be a priority in the global effort to end violence against women.

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<sup>2</sup> ICRW (2005). Development Initiative on Supporting Healthy Adolescents (DISHA) Project. Analysis of quantitative baseline survey data collected in select sites in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand, India. Survey conducted in 2004. The percentage of young married women reporting domestic violence in the previous six months. Sample size (n) = 998

<sup>3</sup> ICRW (2005).

<sup>4</sup> ICRW (2005). The percentage of young married women reporting no sway in household decisions. Sample size (n) = 998

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF (2005). *Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice*. UNICEF: New York. This analysis was conducted for Cambodia, Colombia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, Turkmenistan and Zambia. Among the countries in this study, India was found to have the highest overall rate of domestic violence.

<sup>6</sup> Flake, D. (2005). "Individual, Family, and Community Risk Markers for Domestic Violence in Peru." *Violence Against Women* 11(3): pp. 353-373.; WHO (2005). *Summary Report: WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women*. World Health Organization: Geneva.

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF (2005).

<sup>8</sup> Khan, N. and M. Lynch (1997). "Recognizing Child Maltreatment in Bangladesh." *Child Abuse and Neglect* 21(8) pp.815-818.

<sup>9</sup> WHO (2005).

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# Child Marriage and EDUCATION

Child marriage is associated with lower levels of schooling for girls in every region of the world and is a barrier to international development goals.<sup>1</sup> 🌱 A lost opportunity for education is not only harmful for girls, but has wide-reaching repercussions for their children and communities. 🌱 Educating girls creates many positive outcomes for economic development and poverty reduction by improving a girl's income-earning potential and socio-economic status.



AP Photo / Kamran Jebreili

## CHILD MARRIAGE IMPEDES GIRLS' EDUCATION

**The education a girl receives is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry, according to ICRW analysis in 18 of the 20 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage.<sup>2,3</sup>** The chart shows regions of the developing world and the percentage of girls who marry by 18 by their years of schooling.<sup>4,5</sup> In all regions, girls with higher levels of schooling are less likely to marry as children. In particular, girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry as children when compared to girls who have little or no education.

Girls may be married at young ages due to a lack of other alternatives, such as educational or economic opportunities, or girls may be pulled from school to be married. In the Amhara region of Ethiopia, 30 percent of girls who were not in school said that the primary reason was marriage.<sup>6</sup>

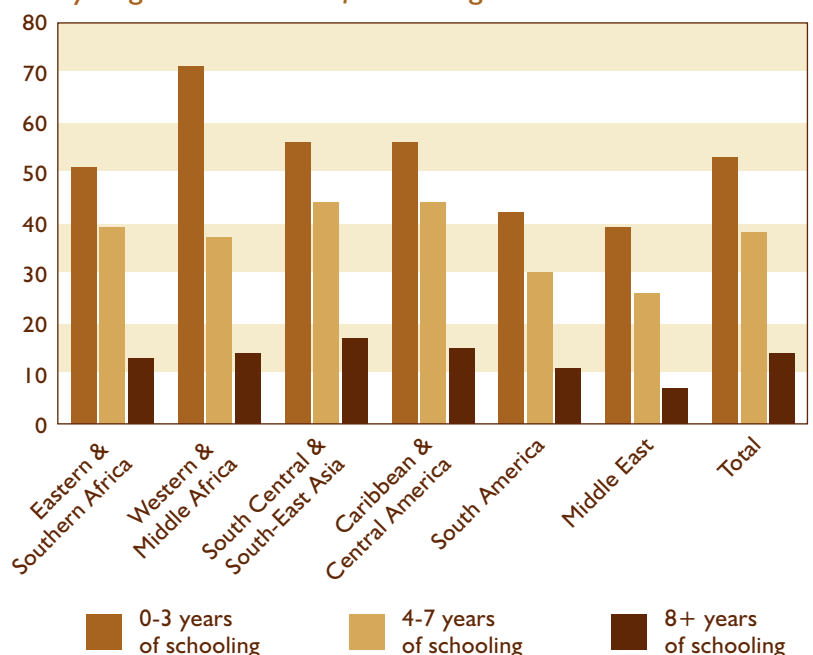
After marriage, young girls' access to formal and even nonformal education is severely limited because of domestic burdens, childbearing and social norms that view marriage and schooling as incompatible.<sup>7</sup>

- In Nicaragua, 45 percent of girls with no education are married before they turn 18, compared to 28 percent of girls with primary education, 16 percent of girls with

a secondary education and 5 percent of girls with higher education.<sup>8</sup>

- In Mozambique, some 60 percent of girls with no education are married by 18, compared to 10 percent of girls with secondary schooling and less than 1 percent of girls with higher education.<sup>9</sup>
- In Senegal, 41 percent of girls with no education are married as children, whereas only 14 percent of girls with a primary education marry as children.<sup>10</sup>

*Percent of Girls Who Marry Younger than 18, by Region and Years of Schooling*



## EDUCATION DETERS CHILD MARRIAGE

**Educating adolescent girls has been a critical factor in increasing the age of marriage in a number of developing countries, including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.<sup>11</sup>** In India

and Pakistan, increased school enrollment has likewise been associated with a decline in marriage among girls younger than 14.<sup>12</sup>

Programs that provide or increase educational and economic opportunities for girls can help delay marriage. Working with parents to delay marriage can be critical in getting girls educated. For example,

- The Christian Children's Fund's (CFF) Naning'oi Girls Boarding School project in Kenya delays age of marriage of Maasai girls by encouraging parents to "promise" their daughters to school, instead of promising them in marriage. Parents of children in the Naning'oi promise to enroll their daughters for eight years of school. A strong sense of honor keeps parents from breaking this promise. The Naning'oi girls' school has a 98 percent completion rate.
- The Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) International has been working to increase girls' education in Zimbabwe since 1993. CAMFED provides locally managed safety net funds to support vulnerable girls to attend school. To increase community support for girls' education, CAMFED program staff work with parents to delay the marriage of their daughters until they have completed school.<sup>13</sup> Parental support in delaying marriage has proven necessary to keep girls in school.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2005). *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*. Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries. Cynthia B. Lloyd, Ed. Committee on Population and Board on Children, Youth, and Families. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, p. 432.

<sup>2</sup> Jain, Saranga and Kathleen Kurz (2006). ICRW research on prevalence and predictors of child marriage in developing countries. In progress.

<sup>3</sup> Notes: Countries included in the analysis are Niger, Chad, Bangladesh, Mali, Guinea, Central African Republic, Nepal, Mozambique, Uganda, Burkina Faso, India, Ethiopia, Liberia, Cameroon, Malawi, Nicaragua, Nigeria and Zambia. Researchers were not able to gain permission to use and analyze data from Eritrea and Yemen at the time of publication. Potential determinants of age at marriage considered in the analysis include region, type of place of residence (urban vs. rural), wealth, religion, ethnicity, education, spouse's education, polygyny, age gap, childhood place of residence and number of siblings.

<sup>4</sup> The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Note: The chart presents data of women ages 20 to 24 years, who were married before age 18. Data includes Demographic Health Surveys for all countries available in the listed regions. The total includes all recent DHS surveys.

<sup>6</sup> Erulkar, A., T. Mekbib, N. Simie and T. Gulema (2004). *The Experience of Adolescence in Rural Amhara Region Ethiopia*. UNFPA, UNICEF, and Population Council. Population Council: New York.

<sup>7</sup> Mathur, S., M. Greene and A. Malhotra (2003). *Too Young to Wed: The Lives, Rights and Health of Young Married Girls*. ICRW: Washington D.C.

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<sup>10</sup> UNICEF (2005).

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# Child Marriage and HEALTH



Child marriage means early sexual activity and, in most cases, early childbearing. 🌿 Despite widespread recognition that childbearing in the adolescent years is harmful to both mother and child, it is common in large parts of the developing world. 🌿 In Chad, Guinea, Mali and Niger, where child marriage is prevalent, half of all girls give birth before their 18th birthday.<sup>1</sup>

## CHILD MARRIAGE ENDANGERS THE HEALTH OF GIRLS

### Girls are not physically suited for giving birth.

When this is combined with a lack of power, information and access to services, married girls experience much higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity than women who give birth. Girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s, and pregnancy is the leading cause of death worldwide for women ages 15 to 19.<sup>2</sup> The chart shows the maternal mortality rate for young women ages 15 to 19, compared to women ages 20 to 34 in select countries.<sup>3</sup>

Adolescent childbirth is dangerous for the infant as well as the mother. The underdeveloped bodies of girls can lead to complications during childbirth and the death of the child. Infants born to adolescent mothers are much more likely to die than those born to women in their 20s.<sup>4</sup>

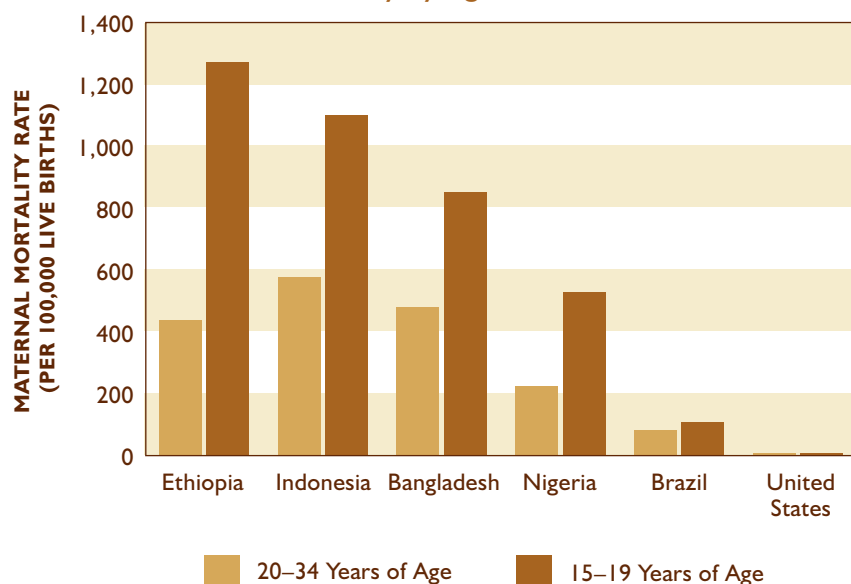
## CHILD MARRIAGE FACTORS INTO THE SPREAD OF HIV AND AIDS

### Another serious health risk to adolescent married girls is HIV/AIDS infection.

Growing evidence from sub-Saharan Africa shows that married girls in the region are at greater risk of HIV infection than sexually active, unmarried girls. One study from Johns Hopkins University found higher HIV rates among married women in rural Uganda (18 percent) than young unmarried women (15 percent).<sup>5</sup> A study in Kenya and Zambia by University of Chicago researchers found that among 15- to 19-year-old girls who are sexually active, being married increased their chances of having HIV by more than 75 percent.<sup>6</sup> These studies investigated a limited number of girls in a select number of countries. Further research is needed to fully understand the connection between child marriage and HIV infection.

Existing research suggests that one reason why married girls may be more vulnerable to HIV is because they have little option to change their sexual

*Maternal Mortality by Age in Select Countries*





behavior in response to knowledge about HIV. For example, when asked how HIV knowledge changed their behavior, unmarried girls in Zambia and Kenya were much more likely than married girls to report that they stopped having sex in response to knowledge about HIV risk (18 percent in Kenya and 27 percent in Zambia). In contrast, married girls do not have the option of abstaining from sex. The Kenya and Zambia study found that unmarried girls were more likely

in polygamous unions, where adolescent girls can be the second or third wife of an older man. There is evidence that the earlier a girl marries, the more likely her husband is to be significantly older than her.<sup>9</sup>

Ending child marriage will eliminate a significant source of health risks for girls.

## *Painful Consequences: Obstetric Fistula*

Early childbearing can lead to serious health problems, such as obstetric fistula. Obstetric fistula results when a young mother's vagina, bladder and/or rectum tear during childbirth, a condition that causes urine and feces leakage. It can occur when a young woman with underdeveloped physiology gives birth. Fistula patients are commonly poor women, ages 15 to 20, many of whom report early marriage.

Source: United Nations Population Fund (2003). *Obstetric Fistula Needs Assessment Report: Findings From Nine African Countries*. UNFPA: New York.

to report condom use than married girls. This makes sense because research shows that men are more likely to use condoms outside of marriage than with their wives.

Married girls responded to information about HIV by asking their husbands to be faithful — something that they have little or no power to enforce. Despite taking this action, 30 percent of married girls in the Zambia survey felt they were at “moderate” or “great” risk of contracting HIV, compared to 18 percent of sexually active unmarried girls.<sup>7</sup>

Young married girls can be at risk of contracting HIV and AIDS if their husbands are significantly older and therefore more likely to have contracted HIV or AIDS in their lifetime. Large age gaps between husband and wife are common in some regions of the world. In central and western Africa, one-third of young women in their first marriages report having a partner that is at least 11 years their senior.<sup>8</sup> A large age difference between the spouses is particularly prevalent

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# Child Marriage and POVERTY



IFAD / Anwar Hossein

Child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries and is often concentrated among the poorest households within those countries. 🌿 It is closely linked with poverty and low levels of economic development. 🌿 In families with limited resources, child marriage is often seen as a way to provide for their daughter's future. 🌿 But girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor.

## CHILD MARRIAGE IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED TO POVERTY

**Child marriage is highly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia, the two most impoverished regions of the world.<sup>1</sup>**

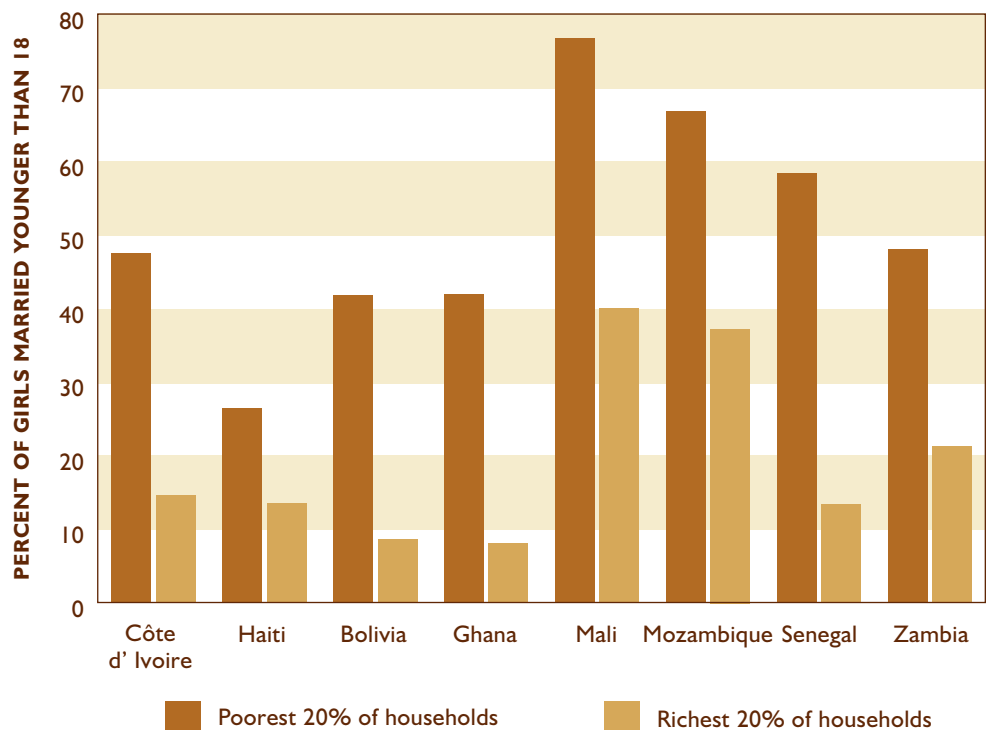
- More than half of the girls in Bangladesh, Mali, Mozambique and Niger are married before age 18. In these same countries, more than 75 percent of people live on less than \$2 a day. In Mali, 91 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day.<sup>2</sup>
- Countries with low GDPs tend to have a higher prevalence of child marriage. Chad has a GDP of \$1,600 per capita, and 71 percent of girls in the country are married. By contrast, South Africa has a GDP per capita of \$11,100, and 8 percent of girls in the country are married.<sup>3</sup>

In almost all developing countries, child marriage is more common among the poorest people than the wealthiest. Recent research

shows that household economic status is a key factor in determining the timing of marriage for girls (along with education and urban-rural residence, with rural girls more likely to marry young). In fact, girls living in poor households are approximately twice as likely to marry before 18 than girls living in better-off households.<sup>4</sup>

In Côte d'Ivoire, a target country for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), girls in the poorest

**Child Marriage in the Poorest and Richest Households in Select Countries**



## Child Marriage in Afghanistan

20 percent of households are three times as likely to be married as girls in the richest 20 percent of households. In Senegal, a Millennium Challenge Account (MCA)-eligible country, girls in the poorest 20 percent of households are more than four times as likely to be married as girls in the richest 20 percent.<sup>5</sup>

### POVERTY OFTEN DRIVES CHILD MARRIAGE

**Poor countries and families have few resources to support more healthy alternatives for girls, such as schooling.** In settings as diverse as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, India and Malaysia, families cite economic reasons for marrying girls early.<sup>6</sup> Poor families may see a daughter as an economic burden to be shed through marriage as early as possible.

Similarly, economic gains through the marriage of a daughter may also motivate poor families. In Ethiopia, parents said that they married their young daughters for economic reasons.<sup>7</sup>

In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, marrying girls is paired with exchanging wealth between the bride's and groom's families—in the form of a dowry or a bride price. Such practices can also give poor families an incentive to marry their daughters young.

Ending child marriage may help achieve the poverty reduction and development goals of U.S. foreign assistance programs.

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<sup>2</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2005).

<sup>3</sup> CIA World Fact Book. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/fact-book/> September 2005. Note: GDP values from 2004.; ORC Macro, 2005. MEASURE DHS STATcompiler. <http://www.measuredhs.com>, September 2005. The percentage of women ages 20 to 24 who were married by exact age 18. Note: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the value of goods and services produced in a country during one year. It is used as a general measure

The high incidence of child marriage in Afghanistan is directly tied to poverty and low levels of development.

Afghanistan's legal minimum age of marriage is 16. Yet nationwide, 16 percent of children are married before 15; 52 percent are married before 18. Girls make up most of the children married at these young ages. Figures vary by region: In some rural provinces, up to 30 percent of families reported placing girls into marriage before age 15.

Poverty is a large driver of child marriages. In five of the six provinces included in the study, the majority of parents who married their daughters by age 15 said that they did so for economic reasons. In some cases, girls are married off to pay debts to shop keepers, or a girl may be exchanged for her brother's wife — as the bride price.

The majority of child brides were married to significantly older men with other wives. Some girls were widowed or left to care for elderly husbands while still very young. None of the child brides had ever attended school.

Source: Tufts University Feinstein International Famine Center (2004).

of a country's economic activity and wealth. GDP per capita is the value of goods and services produced in a country per person in that country—or average wealth generated per person in the country.

<sup>4</sup> The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2005). *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries. Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries.* Cynthia B. Lloyd, Ed. Committee on Population and Board on Children, Youth, and Families. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, p. 432.

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# Child Marriage, LAWS & CIVIL SOCIETY ACTION

USAID / L. Larrigue



Child marriage is outlawed in many developing countries and a series of international agreements and conventions also forbid the practice. 🌿

Despite nearly universal consensus that child marriage is harmful, the practice continues because of insufficient resources, lax enforcement or ingrained cultural traditions. 🌿 However, communities are mobilizing to take a more active role in working with families to end child marriage.

## GOVERNMENTS PROHIBIT CHILD MARRIAGE

**At the international level, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to “free and full” consent to marriage and determines that this standard is not met when a person is not mature enough to make an informed decision.<sup>1</sup>** The International Convention on the Rights of the Child does not directly address the problem of child marriage, although it upholds the right of children to be protected from harmful traditional practices. The 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child prohibits marriage under age 18.

At the national level, most countries with high rates of child marriage have legally established the minimum age of marriage at 18 to end the practice. For example, in 12 of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage, the legal age of marriage is 18 or older: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua and Uganda.<sup>2</sup>

## COMMUNITIES MOBILIZE TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

Yet child marriage persists because these countries lack the resources, and sometimes the political commitment, to enforce the laws. Nevertheless, governments and local civil society organizations in a number of countries are actively

working to discourage the practice by raising community awareness of the adverse consequences for girls, running programs that provide girls with alternative choices and demanding more effective enforcement of the laws.

- The government of **Bangladesh’s** secondary school enrollment program provides parents with monetary compensation for the loss of their daughters’ domestic and agricultural labor and requires parents to sign a statement of commitment not to have their daughters marry until they reach age 18. It also covers the cost of school fees and books for girls to remain in school. As a result, girls’ school enrollment doubled between 1994 and 2001, and girls’ age of marriage increased.<sup>3</sup>
- In **Ethiopia**, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture together with USAID-funded projects are supporting an initiative to delay the age of marriage through economic incentives that keep girls in school and provide life skills training. In a number of cases, the local parent-teacher association and Girls’ Advisory Committee, working with local government officials, has intervened with parents and religious elders who had arranged early marriages of girls as young as 10 and persuaded them to cancel the marriages and keep the girls in school.<sup>4</sup> The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association campaigns for communities, local governments and religious institutions to observe the legal age of 18 for marriage.
- Nongovernmental organizations from six **West and East African countries**, with support from the United Kingdom-based Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women

## Minimum Legal Age of Marriage for Girls in the 20 Countries with the Highest Rates of Child Marriage<sup>1</sup>

RANKING	COUNTRY	MINIMUM LEGAL AGE OF MARRIAGE FOR GIRLS
1	Niger	15
2	Chad	15
3	Bangladesh	18
4	Mali	18
5	Guinea	17
6	Central African Republic	18
7	Nepal	18
8	Mozambique	18
9	Uganda	18
10	Burkina Faso	19
11	India	18
12	Ethiopia	18
13	Liberia	15
14	Yemen	15
15	Cameroon	15
16	Eritrea	18
17	Malawi	18
18	Nicaragua	18
19	Nigeria	Not Available
20	Zambia	No Minimum

and Girls, met in Burkina Faso in February 2003 and issued a declaration calling on African governments, civil society organizations and the international community to work to end child and forced marriages.<sup>5</sup>

- In **Morocco**, the national government recently raised the age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18, the same age as boys. The government also organized a large-scale media campaign—involving Islamic law experts, intellectuals and political representatives—to raise awareness of the new law and encourage changes in behavior.<sup>6</sup>

- In **India**, the Supreme Court recently handed down a decision requiring married couples to register their consent to be married and their age with local authorities, to better enforce the law establishing 18 as the minimum age of marriage. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, the government has launched a program to increase awareness about the legal age of marriage, change values and attitudes about child marriage, and deny eligibility for government jobs to people marrying before age 18.<sup>7</sup>

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# Child Marriage BY THE NUMBERS

The negative consequences of child marriage are numerous yet its prevalence is staggering. 🌿 Each statistic represents a girl robbed of her ability to reach her full potential, deprived of education and meaningful work, threatened by illness, disease and even death. 🌿 Ending child marriage will protect girls and ensure a brighter future for them, their families and their communities.

## THE PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

**100 million:** Number of girls worldwide who will be married before 18 in the next decade.<sup>1</sup>

**51 million:** Number of girls (ages 15 to 19) married worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

**82%, 75%, 63%, 57% and 50%:** The percentage of girls in Niger, Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Uganda, respectively, who marry before 18.<sup>3</sup>

**39%:** The percentage of girls in the Amhara region of Ethiopia who marry before 15.<sup>4</sup>

**66%, 12%:** The proportion of girls among Nigeria's poorest 20 percent and richest 20 percent, respectively, who will marry before 18.<sup>5</sup>

## CHILD MARRIAGE, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

**5:** Girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than those in their 20s.<sup>6</sup>

**2 million:** The number of women worldwide suffering from obstetric fistula, a debilitating complication of childbirth especially common among physically immature girls.<sup>7</sup>

**6,000:** The number of adolescents infected daily by HIV.<sup>8</sup>

**2-6:** The number of times girls ages 15 to 19 are more likely to contract HIV (for biological and social reasons) than boys of the same age in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>9</sup>

**60%, 10%, 1%:** The share of girls in Mozambique with no education, secondary schooling and higher education, respectively, who are married by 18.<sup>10</sup>

"Ironically,  
marriage is  
becoming a risk  
factor for HIV,  
and many women  
are infected by  
their only  
sex partner,  
their husbands.  
In many societies,  
the biggest  
risk factor is  
marriage at an  
early age,  
always with  
an older man."

—DR. PETER PIOT  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNAIDS

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# Child Marriage AROUND THE WORLD

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."

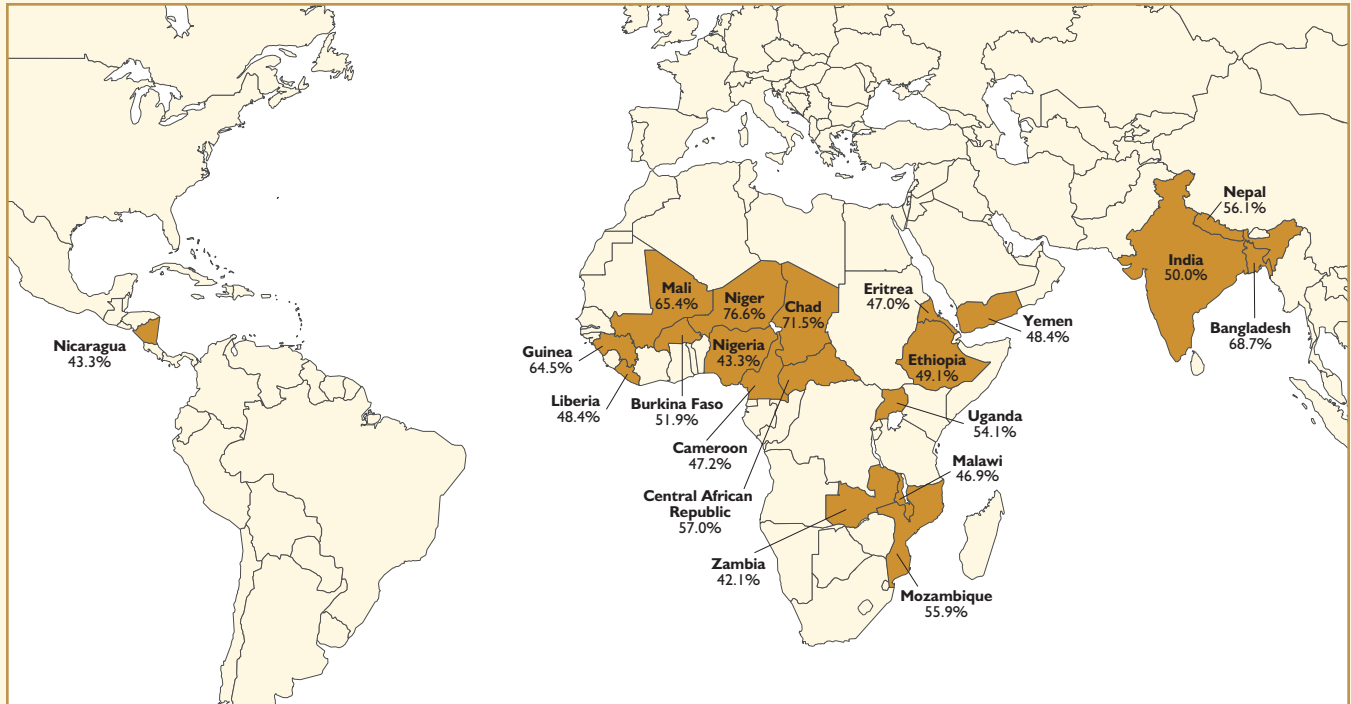
## Top 20 Countries with Highest Rates of Child Marriage<sup>1</sup>

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





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



*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."

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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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Success on the Ground

# REDUCING CHILD MARRIAGE

**Although the practice of child marriage is deeply rooted in traditions and cultural beliefs, it is possible to change the practice within a community over the course of a few years. Following are two examples of interventions that have worked to delay the age of marriage.**

## DELAYING MARRIAGE IN INDIA

Like so many girls from Maharashtra, Janabai would have been married by 15 and a mother soon after. She would have been plagued by the myriad problems that come with child marriage and deprived of opportunities to fulfill her potential. Instead, her life took a more promising direction thanks to an innovative program that delays marriage for a growing number of girls in India.

The Life Skills Education Program is run by ICRW's research partner, the Institute for Health Management, Pachod (IHMP), a nongovernmental organization that works with marginalized individuals, families and communities. IHMP's research in the Marathwada region revealed that the median age at marriage for girls was a mere 14.5 years, alarmingly low especially when compared to other areas in Maharashtra.

The one-year life skills course is premised on the idea that empowering girls improves their health and social status. The intervention achieved impressive results after two short years, raising the median age at marriage to 17. Additionally, thousands of adolescent

girls have been transformed in a culture that relegates them to second-class citizens. Girls who completed the life skills course exhibit more self-confidence, speak without hesitation and fear, are more independent in daily activities and are better prepared to influence decisions about their own lives, including marriage. With her newfound confidence, Janabai prevailed upon her parents to delay not only her own nuptials but those of her two younger sisters.

The course curriculum focuses on self-sufficiency and covers a wide range of practical lessons, from using the post office to the negative health and social consequences of early marriage. Janabai not only learned the importance of education, she also learned how to persuade her parents to allow her to continue her schooling. She completed her 12th standard exam and aspires to become a teacher.

Much of the program's success and sustainability depends on community involvement. IHMP invites parents to participate in various ways throughout the intervention. Actively involving parents helps retain girls for the one-year duration of the course. The community helps recruit qualified teachers from within their villages, and in some cases, community members persuade wary parents to allow their daughters to participate. Local leaders are kept apprised of the program's progress and offered numerous opportunities to observe activities.

By building local capacity, enrollment in IHMP's life skills course has grown dramatically. In its first year, 300 girls were enrolled. By the second year, more than 2,000 girls were enrolled throughout rural and urban Maharashtra. And the numbers continue to climb. Even decision makers are taking notice. The government of Maharashtra is scaling up IHMP's life skills model to improve girls' reproductive and sexual health across rural areas within the state.

Most important, IHMP's life skills program is empowering girls like Janabai to dream a hopeful future. "I have changed a lot because of this program," she says. "I feel I can overcome any difficulty, do any work and realize my dreams."



**Innovative community programs help reduce child marriage by teaching life skills to girls.**

## COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION IN ETHIOPIA

Alitash's parents promised to give their daughter in marriage when she turned 8 years old, a common practice in Ethiopia where 60 percent of girls are married before the legal age of 18. But when a local women's association learned of her impending marriage, the community convinced her parents that allowing their daughter to receive an education would enable her to earn a better living. As a result, her parents cancelled her wedding, and today she is in school with the possibility of a full life ahead of her.

Reforming entrenched cultural beliefs about child marriage does not come easy, but communities in Ethiopia are coming together as a powerful force for change. In the Amhara and Tigray regions, where child marriage prevalence hovers around 80 percent to 90 percent, grassroots efforts are engaging entire communities in the fight against early marriage and the promise of empowering girls.

Pathfinder International/Ethiopia collaborates with local partners to form early marriage cancellation committees, which involve all levels of civil society, including *kebele* (ward) administration officials, women's associations, religious leaders, health officials, teachers, parents and the girls themselves. Seada, an adolescent girl from Amhara, evaded two marriage proposals because her aunt enlisted the help of her local early marriage committee. When word of a wedding arrangement reaches the committee, it is reported to the *woreda's* (district) women's affairs department, which responds with legal action through law enforcement or legal representation. Seada's reluctant parents were persuaded to prevent the marriages.

Seada remains in school and participates in the girls' club, another key to preventing child marriage. Girls' clubs educate girls about harmful traditional practices such as early marriage as well as reproductive health and other life skills. These clubs empower girls to act as peer educators and serve as a support network for girls trying to escape early marriage. Girls in these clubs frequently report the planned early marriages of friends to the head of the club or a women's association

Girls' clubs educate girls on harmful traditional practices and empower girls to report early marriages to community members.



representative, which triggers efforts to counsel parents to prevent the marriage. If parents persist in marrying their young daughters, early marriage committees will take legal action.

On the legal front, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), a nonprofit women's advocacy group, educates community leaders, law enforcement and judicial bodies about Ethiopia's revised Family Law, which raised the legal age for marriage from 15 to 18 and established a penal code criminalizing harmful traditional practices. EWLA also provides legal aid and shelter to girls who run away from their homes to avoid child marriage. The National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia, the Federal Ministry of Justice Women's Affairs Department, regional women's affairs bureaus, and women's associations of the Tigray and Amhara regions work in partnership with Pathfinder International to stop the practice of early marriage through community- and policy-level interventions. Pathfinder also provides scholarships to promote educational opportunities for young girls whose marriages have been cancelled.

Recognizing that legal enforcement alone cannot change deep-rooted traditions, Pathfinder and its partners also have engaged faith-based organizations and leaders who wield enormous influence within communities. Pathfinder invites religious leaders to participate in early marriage committees and conducts workshops to educate them on the negative consequences of harmful traditions.

In one year, Pathfinder and such partners as EWLA prevented more than 12,000 marriages: 9,000 in Amhara and 3,000 in Tigray. The success of these holistic interventions demonstrates that change is possible.

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