

HONOR DIARIES

Child/Forced Marriage

FACTSHEET



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Defining Child Marriage

Child marriage occurs when one or both of the spouses are below the age of 18.¹ In developing countries, child marriage is widely practiced.² Child marriage is a human rights abuse – it constitutes a grave threat to young girls’ lives, health, and future prospects.³ The right to a 'free and full' consent to a marriage is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Consent cannot be 'free and full' when the bride is a young girl.⁴

Why It Matters

- Child marriage perpetuates a cycle of gender inequality, domestic abuse, maternal mortality, health problems, and poverty.^{5 6}
- **Inequality:** Younger girls are particularly vulnerable to being married to men who are significantly older or men who have multiple wives.⁷
- **Domestic Abuse:** Many child brides are abused by their husbands and families. As a result, many opt for self-immolation and other forms of suicide.⁸
- **Maternal Mortality:** Complications related to childbirth and pregnancy are the leading cause of death worldwide for girls ages 15 to 19.⁹

¹ “Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage.” The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2012, pg. 10

<http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

² *ibid.* pp. 22–26; Early Marriage: Child Spouses. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2001. <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest7e.pdf>

³ “Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage.” The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2012, pg. 10

<http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

⁴ “Child Marriage and the Law: Legislative Reform Initiative Paper Series. Division of Policy and Planning.” *The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)*, January 2008. Pg. 5, 12

[http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Child_Marriage_and_the_Law\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Child_Marriage_and_the_Law(1).pdf)

⁵ “How to End Child Marriage: Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection.” *International Center for Research on Women*. 2007. Washington DC <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/How-to-End-Child-Marriage-Action-Strategies-for-Prevention-and-Protection-Brief.pdf>

⁶ “CARE to Congress: End Child Marriage and Protect Human Rights for Girls Around the World.”, *CARE*, July 15th, 2010.

<http://www.care.org/newsroom/articles/2010/07/child-marriage-testified-20100715.asp>

⁷ “How to End Child Marriage: Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection.” *International Center for Research on Women*. 2007. Washington DC <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/How-to-End-Child-Marriage-Action-Strategies-for-Prevention-and-Protection-Brief.pdf>

⁸ “Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action.”, *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012.

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf

⁹ “CARE to Congress: End Child Marriage and Protect Human Rights for Girls Around the World.”, *CARE*, July 15th, 2010.

<http://www.care.org/newsroom/articles/2010/07/child-marriage-testified-20100715.asp>

- **Health Problems:** Girls who have babies also have a high risk of suffering from obstetric fistula – a condition that causes incontinence.¹⁰ Girls with fistula are often abandoned by their husbands and isolated from friends and family.¹¹
- **Poverty:** Girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor.¹²
- **Education:** Child brides are almost always forced to drop out of school.¹³

Who Is Affected?

- More than **60 million** girls worldwide are child brides.¹⁴
- More than **100 million** girls are expected to marry in the next decade.¹⁵
- In **South Asia**, **48%** of women between 15 and 24 are married before age **18**.¹⁶
- In **Afghanistan**, **57%** of girls are married by the age of **16**.¹⁷
- In **Afghanistan**, where *Sharia* (Islamic law) is influential, girls can legally marry at age **15**.¹⁸ In **Bangladesh**, **66%** of girls are married before age **18**.¹⁹
- More than half of the girls in **Mali**, **Mozambique**, and **Niger** are married before age **18**.²⁰
- In **Malaysia**, Muslim girls under the age of **16** can marry with the permission of the *Sharia* court. The minimum age for non-Muslim girls is **18**.²¹

¹⁰ "New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs." *International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)*, April 2007

<http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/New-Insights-on-Preventing-Child-Marriage.pdf>

¹¹ "Child Marriage: What we know?" ,Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/341/facts.html>

¹² "Too Young to Wed: Education & Action Toward Ending Child Marriage." *International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)*, 2006.

<http://www.icrw.org/files/images/Child-Marriage-Fact-Sheet-Poverty.pdf>

¹³ New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) April 2007, pg. 8

<http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/New-Insights-on-Preventing-Child-Marriage.pdf>

¹⁴ "State of World Population: Child Marriage Fact Sheet." *United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*, 2005.

http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ "New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs." *International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)* April 2007

<http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/New-Insights-on-Preventing-Child-Marriage.pdf>

¹⁷ "Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action." , *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)*, *United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*, *Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)*, *Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012.

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf

¹⁸ "Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action." , *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)*, *United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*, *Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)*, *Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012.

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ "Too Young to Wed: Education & Action Toward Ending Child Marriage." *International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)* 2006.

<http://www.icrw.org/files/images/Child-Marriage-Fact-Sheet-Poverty.pdf>

- In **Iran**, the legal age of marriage for girls is age **13**.²² In 2009, more than **43,000** girls under age **15** were married in Iran.²³
- In **Sri Lanka**, there is a dual legal system – the minimum age for non-Muslim girls is age 18, while Muslim girls are allowed to marry at age **15**.²⁴
- In **Saudi Arabia**, there is no minimum age for girls to marry. There are more than **5,500** child brides below the age of **14**.²⁵
- In **Yemen** **52 %** of women are married before they are 18²⁶

In The West

- In **Canada**,²⁷ **Australia**,²⁹ and the **United Kingdom**,³⁰ hundreds of teenage girls are flown abroad to **South Asia**, the **Middle East**, and **Africa** and forced into marriage.
- There are approximately **1000** cases of forced marriage a year in **Australia**.³¹
- There are up to **8000** cases of forced marriage annually in England.³²

²¹ Thin Lei Win, "Child Marriage Persists in Progressive Malaysia", *Thomas Reuters Foundation*, August 3rd. 2011, <http://www.trust.org/trustlaw/news/child-marriage-persists-in-progressive-malaysia/>

²² "Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action." , *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf

²³ Robert Tait, "Alarm as hundreds of children under age 10 married in Iran." , *The Telegraph*, August 26th, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9500484/Alarm-as-hundreds-of-children-under-age-of-10-married-in-iran.html>

²⁴ "Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action." , *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf

²⁵ "More than 5,000 child brides in Saudi Arabia." , *Gulf News*, November 2012. <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/more-than-5-000-child-brides-in-saudi-arabia-1.1101605>

²⁶ "Yemen: Child Marriage Spurs Abuse of Girls and Women", *Human Rights Watch*, December 8th, 2011 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/08/yemen-child-marriage-spurs-abuse-girls-and-women>

²⁷ It's a Choice: Frequently Asked Questions. <http://www.forcedmarriages.ca/faq/>

²⁸ Raveena Aulakh, "Forced to Wed: They think they're doing what's best for the child." *The Star*, November 14th, 2009.. <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/725781--forced-to-wed-they-think-they-re-doing-what-s-best-for-the-child>

²⁹ Barbara Miller, "Government to Outlaw Forced Marriages." ABC AU News. April 2nd, 2012. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-04-02/forced-marriage-an-issue-in-australia/3926708>

³⁰ Asif Mehmood, "UK Announces Crackdown on Forced Marriages." , *The Daily Times*. June 9th, 2012. http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012%5C06%5C09%5Cstory_9-6-2012_pg1_5

³¹ Neda Vanovac, "An Estimated 1000 Cases of Forced Marriage a Year in Australia." , *Herald Sun*, December 4th, 2012. <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/an-estimated-1000-cases-of-forced-marriage-a-year-in-australia/story-fndo48ca-1226529937974>

³² Alan Travis. "Forced marriages in England could number 8,000" , *The Guardian*, December 12, 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/12/forced-marriages-england-number-8000>

- **Karma Nirvana**, a UK forced marriage hotline, receives **500** calls a month.³³
- There were **3, 443** cases of forced marriage in **Germany** according to the latest date.³⁴
- A majority of the cases of forced marriage reported in the UK involve **South Asian** families. But there have been cases involving families from **East Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.**³⁵
- The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organization helps **Middle Eastern** women and girls living in the **United Kingdom** who are forced into marriage.³⁶ Several girls are in their early teens – the youngest girl helped was **9** years old.³⁷
- Many of the girls flown abroad and forced into marriage are from **Pakistan.**^{38,39}
- A recent study found that there were **3000** cases of forced marriage in the US in the last two years alone.⁴⁰

Why Does It Happen?

- Girls are viewed as objects in deeply patriarchal societies. Families consider girls a burden and marry them off early as possible.^{41,42,43, 44}

³³ "Jasvinder Statement", *Karma Nirvana*, <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/honour-network>

³⁴ "New Abuse Figures: Forced Marriages in Germany More Prevalent than Thought " *Der Spiegel*, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/new-abuse-figures-forced-marriages-in-germany-more-prevalent-than-thought-a-796760.html>

³⁵ "Multi-agency Practice Guidelines: Handling Cases of Forced Marriage.", *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*. 2009.pg. 10 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/35530/forced-marriage-guidelines09.pdf

³⁶ "Advice for Women and Girls" *Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organization (IKWRO)*. 2011. <http://ikwro.org.uk/ourservices/advice-for-women-and-girls/>

³⁷ Poonam Teneja, "Forced Marriage: Girls aged five among 400 minors helped." *BBC Asian Network*, March 29th, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17534262>

³⁸ Raveena Aulakh, "Forced to Wed: They think they're doing what's best for the child." *The Star*, November 14th, 2009. <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/725781--forced-to-wed-they-think-they-re-doing-what-s-best-for-the-child>

³⁹ Poonam Teneja "Forced Marriage: Girls aged five among 400 minors helped." *BBC Asian Network*, March 29th, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17534262>

⁴⁰ "Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities in the United States 2011 National Survey Results" *Tahirih Justice Center*, September 2011 <http://www.tahirih.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/REPORT-Tahirih-Survey-on-Forced-Marriage-in-Immigrant-Communities-in-the-United-States-September-20115.pdf>

⁴¹ "Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action." *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf

⁴² "New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs." *International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)* April 2007 <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/New-Insights-on-Preventing-Child-Marriage.pdf>

⁴³ "The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics." *Department of Economic and Social Affairs., United Nations*, 2010. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW_full%20report_BW.pdf

⁴⁴ see notes 45 and 46

- Women are often traded as commodities or a way to settle a dispute. For instance, in **Pakistan**, ‘vani’ is a tribal custom in which young girls are given as child brides to settle feuds and disputes.⁴⁵
- The practice is culturally and religiously condoned. Clerics, imams, and other religious authorities conduct child marriages in traditional Islamic ceremonies.⁴⁶

Laws and Law Enforcement

In the East

- Statistics about child marriages are incomplete – families often circumvent the law by deliberately not registering underage marriages.⁴⁷
- However, though most countries have laws that regulate marriage, the laws may not be applied and few prosecutions are ever brought against lawbreakers.⁴⁸

In the West

- In **Belgium, Norway and Germany** have recently added criminal penalties for forced marriage.⁴⁹
- Forced marriage will soon become a criminal offense in **England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Australia**.^{50,51}
- In **2011, Scotland** passed legislation to provide help with those threatened with forced marriage and those already in a forced marriage.⁵²
- In the **UK**, there is a forced marriage unit and a forced marriage hotline.

⁴⁵ Barbara Plett, “Forced Marriage Tests Pakistan Law.” *BBC News*. December 5th, 2005.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4499028.stm

⁴⁶ “Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action.” *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012.

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf; “Top Saudi cleric: OK for young girls to wed”, *CNN*, January 7th, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/01/17/saudi.child.marriage/>; Robert Tait, “Alarm as hundreds of children under age 10 married in Iran.” *The Telegraph*, August 26th, 2012.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9500484/Alarm-as-hundreds-of-children-under-age-of-10-married-in-Iran.html>

⁴⁷ “Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Policy Options for Action.” *International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)*, 2012.

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Child_Marriage.pdf

⁴⁸ “Early Marriage: Child Spouses.” *The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)*, 2001, pg., 8 <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest7e.pdf>

⁴⁹ Heather MacIntosh, “Forced Marriage in Canada?”, *Democratic Development and Human Rights*. March 2011, pg. 4 http://www.chumirethicsfoundation.ca/files/pdf/ForcedMarriage_MacIntosh20110315.pdf

⁵⁰ Muhammad Abdul Bari “Forced marriage is criminal, but criminalizing it is not the answer.” *Al-Jazeera*, June 25th, 2012 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/06/2012622112715670229.html>

⁵¹ “Government to Outlaw Forced Marriages.” *ABC News Australia*, April 2nd, 2012

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-04-02/forced-marriage-an-issue-in-australia/3926708>

⁵² “Forced Marriage – What Is Forced Marriage?” Government of Scotland

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/violence-women/forcedmarriage>

- However, victims do not usually report forced marriages to the authorities because of fear and isolation from their families and communities.^{53 54}

What Can You Do?

- **Campaigns:**

Girls Not Brides – <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>
[Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of more than 190 non-governmental organizations committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential.](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/)

The Elders – <http://theelders.org/child-marriage>.
The Elders bring together organizations working locally, nationally and internationally to build a global partnership to end child marriage.

The Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organization –
<http://ikwro.org.uk/>
The IKWRO provides advice and support to Middle Eastern women and girls living in the United Kingdom who face honor based violence, domestic abuse, and forced marriage.

The Forced Marriage Unit – <http://www.forcedmarriage.net>
The Forced Marriage Unit in the United Kingdom provides advice, information, and contacts for people who are being forced into marriage.

- **Videos:**

Girls Not Brides – Together we can end child marriage: Building momentum in South Asia: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWig9kCzm1Y>

⁵³ Neda Vanovac, “An Estimated 1000 Cases of Forced Marriage a Year in Australia.”, *Herald Sun*, December 4th, 2012. <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/an-estimated-1000-cases-of-forced-marriage-a-year-in-australia/story-fndo48ca-1226529937974>

⁵⁴ “Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities in the United States 2011 National Survey Results” *Tahirih Justice Center*, September 2011 <http://www.tahirih.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/REPORT-Tahirih-Survey-on-Forced-Marriage-in-Immigrant-Communities-in-the-United-States-September-20115.pdf>

CNN - Child Brides - A global problem:

<http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/bestoftv/2012/06/01/mann-child-brides-problem.cnn?iref=allsearch>

- **More Information**

United Nations Population Fund - Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage

<http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>