

Underage marriage



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1. Introduction

Underage marriage is a social problem that still exists in many regions of the world. Child marriages are also still very common in North and East Syria and hole Syria. The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria advocates for the rights of children and women and prohibits underage marriage, but it is still a problem in society. This problem, which stems from a patriarchal mentality, must be overcome, as it has many negative consequences for women and society as a whole. In the following report, we will focus on the reasons and the impact of underage marriage on young women and society.

2. Underage marriage

Underage marriage is a social phenomenon based on the marriage of girls at a young age, i.e. under 18 years, before they reach physical and psycho-emotional maturity. Child marriage opens the door to the worst types of violence, exploitation and child trafficking. It affects women and girls, their families and communities in different ways, having negative effects on all aspects of the lives of women, from the social, to the economic and health and education experiences of women. Therefore, early marriage is considered a violation of both human and child rights, depriving girls of a future in which they can realize their dreams and strengthening the cycle of oppression and harm towards women in society as a whole. There are more than 720 million married girls worldwide who are under the age of 18.

3. Reasons for the spread of the phenomenon of underage/child marriage

3. 1: Poverty

Poverty is considered one of the most important reasons for the spread of this social problem. Parents marry off their daughters to ease their financial burden, and many marry off their daughters to rich people to improve the family's financial situation. The women are used like a trade object for profits.

3. 2 Customs and traditions prevailing in the society

The status of women and their role are marginalized in many societies, and their wishes and opinions are not taken into account. Many conservative societies marry off their daughters based on outdated patriarchal customs, traditions and mentalities in which girls are seen as vehicles of shame and/or honor for the family. It is believed that women are the bearers of the family's prestige and honor and this must be protected. Sexual activity by women/girls before marriage is seen as dishonorable and to avoid this, girls are married very early. Harassment and physical or sexual assault are considered moral deviance, often blaming the woman. In cases of sexual assault and rape, many girls are forced to marry their perpetrator or rapist to protect the family from social shame or stigmatization, without regard to the psychological consequences for the girls.

Especially in rural areas, marriages to establish blood ties between families are common, and in some cases girls are handed over as compensation when a member of the family from which

the girl comes has killed a member of the other family.

Underage girls are the victims of these traditions. Many men deliberately seek a very young bride in order to have many children and enjoy her youth as long as possible. Men often choose very young women to educate them according to their imagination and make them obedient. The cultural idea that women of mature age will no longer receive marriage proposals and will forever remain a single, becoming a burden, creates fear and pressure on the girl to choose the first best marriage option at a very early age.

3.3 Unknowledge

One of the factors that also lead to child marriages is ignorance in society about the consequences. It is also the case that the level of education can directly determine the likely age of marriage of a girl. For example, if she is more educated, she is less likely to marry early. It is also the case that early marriage prevents a girl from achieving a good level of education, because after marriage, society imposes restrictions and expectations on her that prevent her from going to school. When the girl marries or gets engaged, the husband or engaged man has the right to prevent her from attending school, thus weakening her and making her unable to gain her independence.

3.4 War

It is well known that women and children are the main victims of conflicts and wars, where they are physically, psychologically and politically exploited and are often victims of human trafficking. We have seen that in times of war, if women have not organized their own self-defense mechanisms, they are often captured as “spoils of war” and war slaves. For young girls, in most cases, this means forced marriage in violation of their human rights. Parents’ fear that something like this could happen to their daughter often leads them to marry her off as a preventive measure. The number of marriages of minors has increased by a large percentage during the ongoing Syrian crisis. The worsening political crisis and instability in the region led to a lack of access to education, poorer economic conditions, and an increased risk of molestation, rape, sex trafficking, and prostitution. All of these conditions led families to arrange early marriages to protect their young girls from these risks.

4. Effects of underage marriages

4.1 Health risks of underage marriages

Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death for married girls aged 15 to 19. During pregnancy, there are often problems getting proper medical care and there is a risk of excessive bleeding. 70,000 girls die from this each year. In addition, the risk of death for children of teenage mothers is 50% higher than for children of mothers who give birth after the age of twenty.



Risks in pregnancy and during childbirth

Pregnancy in itself puts a strain on a woman's body, a body that is considered mature and ready for the birth of a child. Because the body of a growing girl is still undergoing many changes, developments and growth, the normal stress on the birthing body is greatly increased with early pregnancy. The rate of pregnancy complications increases three to five times, and the maternal mortality rate is much higher, as are the rates of miscarriage, premature birth, pregnancy-related hypertension, and iron deficiency/anemia.

Compared to adult women, adolescent girls have a higher risk of dying during childbirth, mainly due to postpartum hemorrhage and obstetric arrest. Because of the smaller pelvis of adolescent girls, permanent damage occurs with long-term consequences that exacerbate other social problems. The much higher rate of emergency cesarean deliveries in younger pregnancies leads to additional complications and exacerbates many of these risk factors for both mother and child.

Risks to the newborn

A risk to the newborn is an increased likelihood of malformations and/or lack of growth. Exhausted mothers are more likely to give birth to premature and underweight infants, and the infant mortality rate is higher.

Isolation and depression

Child marriage means the loss of childhood, the loss of the opportunity to play and make friends, and the feeling of rejection due to the age difference. The child also has to carry burdens that he cannot cope with, which leads to a breakdown and lack of self-confidence, which in turn leads to isolation and depression.

4.2 Social Effects

Most people choose to marry early because they want stability and a home of their own. But what happens if the marriage is too early? People often ignore the consequences and problems of having to take on so much responsibility at such a young age. Most early marriages are between young girls and much older men, often setting the stage for domestic violence and physical danger to the women. This leads to lasting psychological effects and mental disorders in the girls involved. Early marriage, therefore, cannot be considered a private or personal problem, but rather a societal and social problem with many negative effects on society, the institution of the family, and social development.

Young girls are essentially forced to skip or suppress their adolescence, an important phase of life characterized by discovery. Most girls suffer from numerous social problems resulting from early marriage. When this important stage of development is suppressed, it leads to the loss of their social identity, lack of education, and inability to properly raise their children. All of this, in turn, leads to new and long-term problems in society. At home, the girl's lack of life experience can lead to problems in domestic life, in the experience of motherhood, and in childcare. Since they are still children themselves, they may not be able to adapt to adult conversations, deal with the new family, and follow new customs. Such problems exacerbate tensions with the new husband and family which often leads to violence against them.

Economic and education Effects

A family suffering from poverty sees child marriage as a redemption from this poverty for the girl and also for itself through the dowry to secure the family's future needs and cover accumulated debts. This aspect of marriage, which provides economic security for the family, combined with the girl's lack of independence, ensures that she becomes tied to household chores and economically dependent. Underage marriage contributes to young people dropping out of school. The nature of social upbringing has shaped the idea that the proper place for a girl is her husband's house, so it is not necessary for her to complete her education. However, there is an urgent need to promote and protect them and give them the opportunity to enter the labor market and achieve financial independence.

Even if the young woman enters the labor market afterwards, she does not have a high school diploma, which leads to low wages. The negative economic impact of underage marriage affects all aspects of their personal lives and the life of society in general.

Psychological effects on the children of a minor mother

The immaturity or overload of the still very young mother in a child marriage affects her children. For the reasons mentioned above, the marriage of a minor leads to the development of health and psychological problems and thus represents a burden for the entire society and the children.

5. Prohibition of child marriage under international conventions

In order to prevent the spread of the problem of child marriage, which is considered a violation of the rights of the child, several agreements and treaties have been concluded in different countries, which prohibit early marriage and classify it as a crime and a violation of the rights of the child.

Here are some examples are listed:

1. **Kaido International Treaty**: where it criminalizes marriage and child betrothal and confirms its illegality in Article 162 (betrothal and child marriage have no legal basis, and accordingly, the necessary legislation must be taken to determine the minimum age for marriage).
2. **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** affirm the prohibition of girls' marriage in Article 21 (Prohibition of child marriage and the engagement of boys and girls before the age of 18 years).
3. **CEDAW** (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) Among its most important provisions: abolishing all penalties and provisions that discriminate against women, guaranteeing all their legal rights, cancelling all laws and traditions that restrict women, and ensuring the development of women in all areas and fields of life.
4. **Convention on the Rights of the Child**: The United Nations General Assembly adopted



the 1998 Convention on the Rights of the Child and it entered into force in 1990. It aims to provide an exemplary campaign for children and ensure their protection and development in a healthy, natural and social manner and respect for their freedom and dignity without discrimination of sex, religion, ethnicity or any affiliation. Among its most important provisions: the best interests of the child shall be given primary consideration for all policies, measures and procedures taken relating to the child. Taking into account the right of the child to exercise his rights and his participation in all rights related to him. Commitment to the equality of all children without discrimination in any form, and also work to preserve and develop the child.

5. The **Women's Law** of the Women's Commission in the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria: With the outbreak of the revolution in Rojava and the active participation of women in it, it was able to analyze the problems of society, especially in relation to women, and the reasons for the breakdown of social relations due to the basic structure of society, namely the family and its failure to form on a solid basis. In this context, the Women's Council has agreed to formulate a law that upholds the rights of women and the family in general. For this reason, the Women's Council has drafted the Women's Law, which establishes a set of principles and moral controls, as well as a mechanism to hold parties who violate the law accountable. One of the main issues the law focused on was the marriage of underage girls.

6. Equality and education to prevent child marriages

It is necessary to sensitize both women and the whole society about the consequences of child marriages, so that the stereotypical view prevailing in society can be changed. Educating the public about the legal age of marriage and sexual and reproductive health, as well as the effects of child marriage and urging parents to wait until their daughters are adults to marry is very important.

To counteract this social problem of child marriage, gender equality must be achieved at an early stage. Women's liberation must be advanced so that girls and women can participate in economic, social and political life without discrimination.



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