



EKIN SNY JMUN BACKGROUND GUIDE

COMMITTEE: UNICEF

CHILD MARRIAGE

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)

Description of the Committee

The United Nations established the United Nations Children's Fund on the 11th of December 1946 to meet the needs of children in countries devastated by the Second World War like China and European nations. The United Nations Children's Fund now works in 191 countries through a multitude of programs and national committees.¹



The committee focuses primarily on child survival and development, basic education and gender equality, HIV/AIDS and children, child protection, and policy advocacy and partnerships. With its second extension, UNICEF has created a medium-term strategic plan, starting in 2006 and expiring in 2013, to tackle these issues in a more organized way. The organization is in the process of creating a plan for the 2014-2017 period. UNICEF will coordinate these strategic plans with the United Nations Development Program, United Nations Population Fund, and UN Women.

UNICEF is also responsible for monitoring all child-related goals mentioned in the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) form a blueprint to tackle some of the world's biggest problems, especially related to health, poverty, and children. Children are emphasized in most of the MDG's. Children are the first to feel the effects of extreme poverty and hunger, poor sanitation, and the lack of health care. They are the first to die when the basic needs are not met instantly. Each child is born with the right to education, food, shelter, equality, protection, and, most importantly, survival.

Updated from UNA-USA Materials 2024



TOPIC: CHILD MARRIAGE

Introduction

Child Marriage is the marriage or informal union before the age of 18 between a man and girl or woman and boy. The United Nations calculated that nearly one in every three women, or 70 million women, in the developing world are married under the age of 18. And over 23 million of these women were married under the age of 15.2

UNICEF sees child marriages as clear violations of human rights. These children are deprived of education, and childhood and sent to an environment filled with limited opportunities, risk of violence, abuse, and poor health.

UNICEF sees child marriages as clear violations of human rights. These children are deprived of education, and childhood and sent to an environment filled with limited opportunities, risk of violence, abuse, and poor health.

Once married, these girls leave their education, and become pregnant. They easily catch dangerous viruses, and infection such as HIV/AIDs. Maternal deaths are a major component of mortality for girls. It leads to 70,000 deaths each year.³ As well, if the mother of the infant is under the age of 18, then the infant suffers a 60 percent a risk of dying.

Finally, child marriage results in separation from the bride's family and friends. The child bride will have no freedom to participate in activities, which will eventually have a great impact in her mental and physical well being.

Countries that have high rates of child marriage also want to end the practice. Many countries have set the minimum age for marriage at 18 (and in some countries, 16). However, such laws are difficult to enforce in countries that are based on religion, tradition, and community based practices. Declaration of Human Rights established that marriage should be a consensual choice.

The United Nations strongly supports the end of child marriage and declared 18 as the international minimum age for marriage. As well, in 1948 **the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** established that marriage should be a consensual choice.



Child Marriage threatens girls' health and welfare: 67 percent of Indian child brides are abused. Urmilla, in Dehra Village, was married at 13. She soon became pregnant and miscarried after her husband physically abused her.

Source: UNICEF/NYHQ2009-2230/KHEMKA

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlines the rights that all people have according to the United Nations. Child marriage is widespread in areas such as West Africa, South Asia, North Africa/Middle East and Latin America. Higher rates are in Niger, Chad, and Mali where nearly 70 percent of the girls are married at a young age. However, girls in India are more at risk of child marriage than in most countries combined. Finally, the number of child marriages will double to 100 million in the next ten years without action taken.⁴

Background

Child marriage usually occurs and is perpetuated due to social norms and customs and poverty. In order to ameliorate the problem it is imperative to combat it at these sources.
Social Norms and Customs

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF GIRLS

Child marriage is increasingly recognized as violation of the rights for the following reasons:

- Effectively ending their education
- Blocking any opportunity to gain vocational and life skills
- Exposing them to the risks of too-early pregnancy, child bearing, and motherhood before they are physically and psychologically ready
- Increasing their risk of intimate partner sexual violence and HIV infection.

Source: Crowe, Sarah. "Press Centre: Child Marriages: 39,000 Every Day." UNICEF. 7 March 2013.

A girl holds the honor of a family through the way she acts, speaks, and portrays her manners. However, some believe that her virginity is a symbol of honor for both the girl and her family. When girls first begin their menstrual cycle, parents often decided to start to prepare their daughters wedding. The parents believe that marriage is the best way to avoid their daughter from performing sexual activities with a man that is not her husband.

Unfortunately, girls are at much higher risk of being victims of intimate partner violence, especially those that marry a man of an older age. "The young girls are powerless to refuse sex and lack the resources or legal and social support to leave an abusive marriage," states Claudia Garcia Moreno, M.D., of World Health Organization, a leading expert in violence against women.⁵

Updated from UNA-USA Materials 2024



Once married, these girls carry a lot of pressure to be suitable wives, mothers, and daughters in law. Her husbands' family is now her family, which she has to serve in addition to her own.

Most child marriages are arranged with a dowry. However, when the dowry is insufficient, the child bride is blamed often. Dowry is a form of payment which families are required to pay through large amount of cash, gold, or even livestock. There have been incidents when, due to non-sufficient dowry, the husband and in-laws have tortured, and even murdered the child bride.

In 1961, the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in India, which stated that the death or extreme harm of the bride because of an insufficient dowry is punishable with at least seven years in prison.⁶

Other attacks consist of bride burning, eve teasing, and acid throwing. Bride burning consists of the murder of the wife or daughter in law due to insufficient dowries. Eve teasing is the act of public sexual assault of the women by various men. Finally, acid throwing when themajority of the time the husband or the entire family throw acid at the wife's face to reinsure that there will be no cheating in a relationship.

“Forcing children, especially girls, into early marriages can be physically and emotionally harmful. It violates their rights to personal freedom and growth. Yet until now there has been virtually no attempt to examine child marriage as a human rights violation in and of itself.”

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of
UNICEF



Christina Asima says she had no choice but to marry last year at age 12 to help care for younger siblings after her mother abandoned the family. But she says her husband was abusive, so she left him, and now must look after her 8-month-old son, Praise, alone.

Source: Jennifer Ludden/NPR

Poverty

Education is the key to solving any problem, but it is often too expensive for parents to provide. Many girls stay home to learn the basic customs especially because if a girl was going to be married, the girl would waste time in school. Instead, they invest all the money in their son's education. The mothers stay home with their daughters and teach them the basic customs needed in marriage such as cooking, sewing, cleaning, and taking care of the elderly.

Updated from UNA-USA Materials 2024



Often the parents receive a large amount of payment in the form of a bride price paid by the husband-to-be in form of livestock. Marrying a daughter off leaves the parents one less responsibility, one less mouth to feed. Most communities marry off their daughters to promote fertility. A girl that is married off at the age of 14 is guaranteed to have more children than a girl who starts having children at the age of 24.

Current Situation

The practice of child marriage continues today in various countries and cultures. According to the United Nations, “One in three girls in developing countries (excluding China) will probably be married before they are 18.”⁷

In Yemen, an 11-year-old girl fled from her home when she was forced to marry an elder man. The young girl spoke powerfully against such acts and about her experience. “I’m not the only one. It can happen to any child.”⁸

Most girls at such age are unaware of the situation in which they are in, or what environment they will be entering. Some might die from the abuse they are given, and others will commit suicide.⁹

In Saudi Arabia, a 12-year-old girl named Fatima was ‘sold’ into a marriage for \$10,500 to a man four times her age because her father was addicted to drugs. But with help from her uncle, Saudi partners, and an organization called Equality Now, Fatima was able to obtain a divorce.¹⁰

Following this case and others, the government of Saudi Arabia is drafting a law to prevent child marriage.¹¹

International Action

UNICEF has successfully initiated two programs in the regions with the highest child marriage rate, **South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa**.

The Meena Initiative is located in South Asia and is named after a young cartoon heroine of a multimedia package. It is a discussion on gender discrimination within childhood. It covers issues such as son preference, unfair treatment of girls in the family, their lesser access to health and education services, harmful traditional practices such as dowry and sexual harassment, as well as early marriage.

STATISTICS

Between 2011 and 2020, more than 140 million girls will become child brides.

If current levels of child marriages hold, 14.2 million girls annually or 39,000 girls per day will marry.

Of the 140 million girls who will marry before the age of 18, 50 million are under the age of 15.

Source: Crowe, Sarah. "Press Centre: Child Marriages: 39,000 Every Day." UNICEF. 7 March 2013.

The Sara Adolescent Girl Communication Initiative is stationed at 10 Eastern and Southern African countries. It is a radio series that stresses the importance of education in a child's life. Other issues that the program covers is HIV/AIDS, domestic workload, female genital mutilation and early marriage.¹²

Sub-Saharan Africa

Analysts have noticed two different groups of countries. In the first group, the rate of underage child marriage is increasing (Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Senegal), and the second group has slightly weakened the rate of child marriage (Cote d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Liberia, and Mali). Over 40 percent of women have entered marriage by the time they reached the age of 18. Many of these brides are the second or third wives of polygamous households. Although there are very few girls that are married in their teens, there is still a strong focus on the spread of HIV/AIDS.¹³

Asia

The marriage patterns in this area are much more diverse. Some nations have lower child marriage rates, but there are many countries such as Bangladesh, and Afghanistan where 50% of the girls are married under the age of 18. In 1929, the Child marriage Restraint Act was passed in India due to the fact that 47% of Indian women were married before the legal age of 18. It forbids the marriage of a male older than 32 or a female younger than 18 to be married. However, according to the Muslim Sha'ria law, a girl can legally marry at the age of nine, and it can be lower if her guardian believes that she is sexually mature.



Mohammad 40 and Ghulam 11 at their engagement in Ghor province, Central Afghanistan. When asked how she felt, Ghulam said she did not know this man and had no feelings for him
Source: UNICEF/NYHQ2009-2230/KHEMKA

However, an ambitious program is in progress of introducing itself in India. It will increase the value placed on girls and increase the age at marriage. Governments of Rajasthan, Kanatka, and Haryana (areas in which there are high rates of child marriages in India) have created an incentive for low-income families. A girl, once born, has nearly 78 dollars in a saving account given by the government. If by the age of 18 she is not married, she is allowed to collect her sum, which increases every year. The idea is to postpone marriage till the age of 18, and once she collects her money she is able to use the grant for their dowry.¹⁴

Middle East and North Africa

Early marriage is less common in this area than the Sub-Saharan and South Asian regions, but it is still prevalent. Yemen governments Sharia Legislative have blocked attempts to rise the marriage age to either 15 or 18 because it is un-Islamic. Similar to India and Pakistan, Muslim Activists in Yemen argue that some girls are ready for marriage at the age of 9. However, the Yemeni law allows the girl to be married at any age.¹⁵

North America, Europe, and Oceania

Very few children are married at a young age in these regions. Only four percent do in the United States, and one percent in Germany.¹⁶ Some parts of Central and Eastern Europe accept child marriage at the age of 16, specifically the Macedonia and Roma peoples.¹⁷ In Oceania, the area that include Australia and New Zealand, the average age at which women are married is over 20, except for areas such as Solomon Islands and Marshall Islands where they are married at 18.¹⁸

Recommendations for Creating a Resolution

Evidence shows that the more education a girl receives, the less likely she is married as a child. Improving the educational system in these countries that practice child marriage, is one step closer to a brighter, and safer future for children. Improving education also eliminates the gender gaps these children have. Access to education should be free, so families do not have to worry about their financial situations.

Delegates may want to consider the following solutions:

- Improving education for girls in primary and secondary school
- Changing international or nations' laws to protect child brides or stop them from becoming brides in the first place
- Creative ways to change cultural norms without disrespecting or disregarding native culture
- Raising the legal age of marriage to 18 in all countries
- Educating parents on the benefits of keeping girls in school



Questions to Consider:

1. What are your nation's laws in regards to child marriage? What are ways that you can
2. strengthen your nation's policy?
3. Are there any programs in your country that provide assistance to the child marriage process?
4. How does domestic violence affect girls in early marriages in your nation?
5. What are the main drivers of child marriage, and how should it be tackled?
6. What are some of the challenges to reducing child marriage in your country?
7. What role can men play in helping to end child marriage in your community? What role can women play?

Updated from UNA-USA Materials 2024





RESEARCH AID

The UN Declaration of Human Rights provides an in-depth description of the human rights that should be provided to all people:

- **Declaration of Human Rights**, http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/2007/hrphotos/declaration%20_Eng.pdf

The Millennium Development Goals outline the UN's major policy goals, which include child protections and rights:

- **Millennium Development Goals**, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

For more information on political, economic, and other statistical information for your country, look at your country's CIA Factbook profile:

- **CIA World Factbook**, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

For more information on political, economic, and other statistical information for your country, look at your country's BBC Country profile:

- **BBC Country profile**, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/>

Read the latest news and developments in the realm of child marriage here:

- **Child Marriage, Current Events**, <http://www.care.org/work/womens-empowerment/child-marriage>

Updated from UNA-USA Materials 2024



TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Dowry: is a form of payment that families are required to pay through large amount of cash or even gold as something to bring to a marriage.

Eve Teasing: the act of public molestation of the women by various men.

Bride Burning: the murder of the wife or daughter in law due to insufficient dowries.

Acid Throwing: the husband or the entire family throw acid at their wife's face to reinsure that there will be no cheating in a relationship.

Meena Initiative: Media package that covers issues such as son preference, unfair treatment of girls in the family, their lesser access to health and education services, harmful traditional practices such as dowry and sexual harassment, as well as early marriage.

Sara Adolescent Girl Communication Initiative: a radio series that stresses the importance of education in a child's life. Other issues that the program covers is HIV/AIDS, domestic workload, female genital mutilation and early marriage.

Updated from UNA-USA Materials 2024

