End Child Marriage
11 October 2012

Child marriage

Child marriage is the formal marriage or informal union of a child, defined as under age 18, either with an adult or another child. It happens to both girls and boys, although girls are affected more often. Globally, it is more prevalent in rural than urban areas.

In South Asia

Nearly half or 5 in 10 young females is married prior to the age of 18 and nearly 1 in 5 is married by age 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of women married before 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: State of the World’s Children 2012, data refers to the most recent year available during the period 2000-2010

Risks: A vicious cycle of consequences

- Are at higher risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation
- Are more vulnerable to ill-health, HIV and AIDS, and maternal and infant mortality
- Are more likely to become pregnant with the infant’s risk of dying in the first year being 60% greater than those born to adult mothers
- Are more likely to experience limited life options and development opportunities
- Are less likely to attend secondary school and more vulnerable to being out of school
- Are more vulnerable to a life of poverty: the lack of an education reduces the chances of finding a better quality job
- Often face social marginalization due to discriminatory social norms and beliefs about child brides
- Are less likely to be able to participate in community activities and to negotiate sexual relations, contraception and childbearing

Child brides
Education: The foundation for a brighter future

Giving a girl an education can be the best deterrent to child marriage, enabling her to break free from a vicious cycle of poverty and ill-health and become empowered to make choices about her life and make greater contributions to her community. Research indicates that:

Educated girls are more likely to have better income as adults, marry later, have fewer and healthier children, have stronger decision-making powers within the household, and have more self-esteem.

Knowledge about sexual and reproductive health can decrease maternal and infant mortality and morbidity.

Having a secondary education can increase civic participation and help to combat violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, including human trafficking.

The more education a girl receives, the less likely she is to marry as a child. Yet in South Asia, 7.3 million girls of primary school age and 15.0 million adolescent girls of lower secondary school age are out of school as of 2010, the majority of whom are from excluded or disadvantaged groups.

Join us in the fight against child marriage and urge governments to ensure that all girls and boys receive the education and future they are entitled to.

Sources


To learn more about South Asia UNGEI, email us at rosa@unicef.org