

# CHILD MARRIAGE: A FORM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Child marriage disproportionately affects girls around the world and denies their fundamental rights to health, safety, and education. Girls who are married before 18 are more likely to suffer from **intimate partner violence, including sexual, physical, psychological and emotional violence.**

In many cases, parents feel that marrying their daughters at a young age will protect them against the real threat of physical or sexual assault, and will safeguard family honour. In reality, **girls who marry at a young age are at a greater risk of experiencing various forms of violence, including sexual violence.**

Girls who married before the age of 15 are on average almost 50% more likely to have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence than those married after age 18.<sup>1</sup> The greater the age difference between girls and their husbands, the more likely they are to have little power and to experience intimate partner violence.<sup>2</sup>

Every year, **12 million girls are married before they turn 18.** Without accelerated progress, more than 150 million additional girls are likely to marry before their 18th birthday by 2030.<sup>3</sup> That's 150 million more girl children at risk of violence.



## To help protect girls from the sexual, physical and emotional violence that they may experience in early marriage, *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* calls on governments to:

- Integrate approaches to address child marriage into strategies to prevent violence against children and child sexual abuse.
- Empower and support families and communities to speak out against damaging social norms that result in gender inequality, childhood violence and child marriage.
- Put in place protective measures and emergency response services for girls at risk of child marriage and married girls, particularly those suffering from domestic violence. This should include the provision of safe houses and shelters, legal support and redress mechanisms.
- Arm child protection workers at the community level with an understanding of the risks of child marriage, the mechanisms for reporting cases, and how to connect girls and families to relevant services, such as health, child protection and justice.
- Ensure effective and timely referrals to health, child protection and justice services for families, girls at risk of marriage and already married girls, supporting them to break the cycle of early marriage and mitigate its impacts.

## We will not end violence against children as long as girls marry as children

Violence against children is widespread. Globally, **it is estimated that up to one billion children aged 2 to 17 years, have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year.**<sup>4</sup> Child marriage is internationally recognised as a human rights violation and a form of violence against children.

- In 2013, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the principal global policy-making body dedicated to gender equality and the advancement of women, **recognised child marriage as a form of violence and called for an end to it.**
- In 2015, UN member states adopted **the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include a target on both ending both child marriage (SDG 5.3) and violence against children (SDG 16.2). These two targets are crucially interlinked and one cannot be ended without addressing the other.**

An end to child marriage requires investment in programmes that tackle the root causes, in particular the norms and beliefs that discriminate by placing less value on girls and women than boys and men. It means strong legal and political frameworks which set the minimum age of marriage at 18, ensuring access to education and health services, and protecting girls' rights.

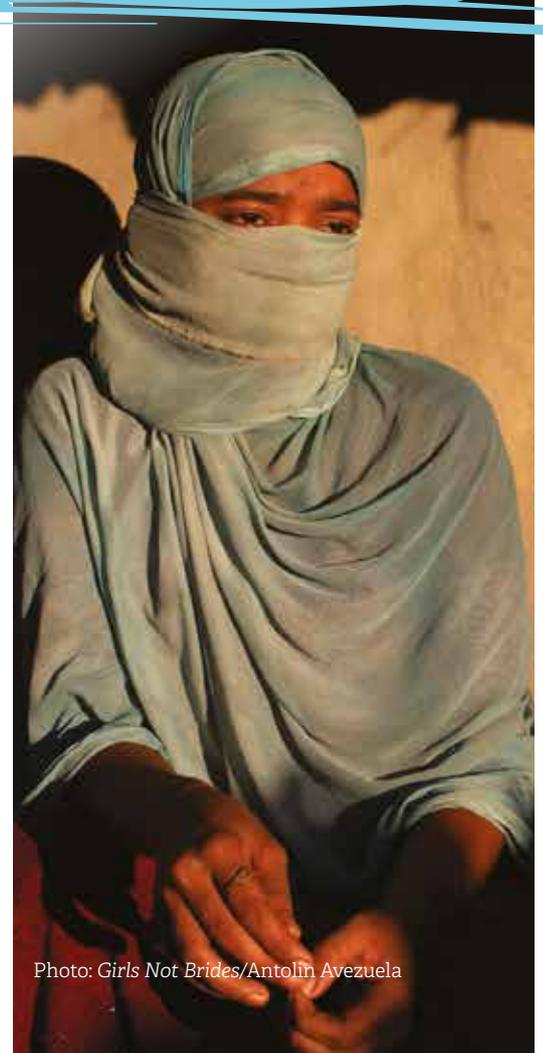


Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Antolin Avezuela

## Harmful social and health consequences of child marriage include:

- Physical and sexual violence.
- Emotional and psychological violence.
- Complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth.
  - These are consistently among the leading causes of death for 15- to 19-year-old girls globally.<sup>5</sup>
  - Common complications of childbirth such as hypertensive disorders, haemorrhage, premature labour, systemic infections, and obstructed labour are more likely among girls aged 15 to 19 than those just a few years older, and those aged under 15 are at even greater risk.<sup>6,7,8</sup>
- Poor educational and economic opportunities, limited freedom to make decisions about their own lives and bodies, and limited social interaction with their peers and community.
- Evidence shows that ending child marriage would reduce intimate partner violence by more than 10% in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria and Uganda.<sup>9</sup>

## Child marriage and the Out of the Shadows Index

Child sexual abuse – defined as any activity that involves a child for the sexual gratification of another person, or any sexual activity before a child has reached the national age of consent – affects children in every part of the world yet traditionally a culture of silence and shame has meant too little action has been taken.

**The Out of The Shadows Index aims to raise awareness of child sexual abuse with governments, policymakers, the private sector and civil society by highlighting gaps and identifying good practices to address child sexual abuse.** It provides a measure of the response to the issue across 60 different countries, and highlights the gaps that must be addressed.

The Index explicitly measures governments' responses to child marriage in its analysis of a country's legal framework. This makes it an important tool for the child marriage community: offering a set of new information to influence decision-makers and achieve change.

The Index includes a digital hub with:

- **A data visualisation tool which displays each country's research results**, and compares results between countries and across regions and topics
- **Downloadable two-page country profiles** that report the scores in each category, assess where progress has been made, and what more needs to be done
- **A downloadable Excel-based interactive model that gives an in-depth assessment of the capacity to address child sexual abuse and exploitation across 60 countries**

This information can be used to inform advocacy with different stakeholders, such as government, the media and the private sector. The information can showcase what still needs to happen, and to outline the steps for action that each stakeholder must take to end child marriage and child sexual abuse.

Updated versions of the Index will be published periodically, showing progress over time.

## Further information

### **INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children**

identifies a select group of strategies that have shown success in reducing violence against children. The different strategies come under the themes of: implementation and enforcement of laws; norms and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic strengthening; response and support services; and education and life skills.

**INSPIRE Handbook:** The implementation handbook that provides details on how to implement the INSPIRE interventions.

**Girls Not Brides Theory of Change:** *Girls Not Brides* integrated the collective expertise of more than 150 member organisations, partners and other experts to develop a collective Theory of Change which maps out the critical strategies to end child marriage and support married girls.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Rachel Kidman, 2017, **Child marriage and intimate partner violence: a comparative study of 34 countries**. International Journal of Epidemiology, Volume 46, Issue 2, 1 April 2017, Pages 662–675

<sup>2</sup>UNICEF, 2014, **Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children**

<sup>3</sup>UNICEF, 2018, **Child marriage database**

<sup>4</sup>Hillis S, Mercy J, Amobi A, Kress H., 2016, **Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: a systematic review and minimum estimates**. Pediatrics 137(3): e20154079.

<sup>5</sup>WHO, 2016, Global health estimates 2015: deaths by cause, age, sex, by country and by region, 2000–2015, Geneva: WHO

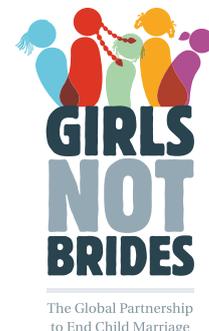
<sup>6</sup>UNFPA, 2015, **Girlhood, not motherhood: Preventing adolescent pregnancy**. New York: UNFPA

<sup>7</sup>Ganchimeg T et al., 2014, **Pregnancy and childbirth outcomes among adolescent mothers: a World Health Organization multicountry study**. BJOG, 2014, 121(Suppl. 1):40–4

<sup>8</sup>Neal et al., 2016, **The causes of maternal mortality in adolescents in low and middle income countries: a systematic review of the literature**.

<sup>9</sup>World Bank and International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2017, **The Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Brief**

***Girls Not Brides* is a global partnership made up of more than 1200 civil society organisations from over 100 countries, committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their full potential.**



Published in September 2019 by  
*Girls Not Brides*

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