

AGE
16-24

Child

marriage



What is child marriage?

Child marriage is when a girl or boy gets married when they are under the age of 18. Usually, the marriage takes place between a girl and an older man. It can also be between a girl and a boy. But the effect of child marriage is much greater on girls than on boys.

Why does it happen?

There are many reasons why some older men want to marry girls. Usually it's about tradition, culture and old-fashioned ideas about women and men.

Sometimes girls get married because they're pregnant, or because families want them to be married before they get pregnant.

Parents may also put pressure on young people to marry because of custom or because they are poor.

What's wrong with child marriage

Child marriage harms a girl's health, education, safety and happiness. When girls are married at a young age, it often means that:

- ▲ **Girls stop going to school.** Without a good education, girls are less likely to find a decent job and earn a living.
- ▲ **Girls get pregnant at a young age,** before their bodies are ready. This increases the risk of complications, illness and even death.

- ▲ **Girls are at greater risk** of getting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) because they are not fully developed.
- ▲ **Girls are at risk of violence** – emotional and physical – because of the unequal power relations between a girl and a man.
- ▲ **Girls are often cut off from** their families and friends who are still at school.

Girls who get married at a young age aren't free to make their own choices or become independent adults. Young brides have many responsibilities: being a mother, doing housework and taking care of their husbands, with no time or freedom to look after themselves or plan ahead.

Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and their dreams for the future. But delaying child marriage until a girl is ready means that she can make her own decisions in life.

How can we stop child marriage?

There isn't one solution to end child marriage. Adults and young people must all work together.

Young people can play their part. You and your friends can make a difference by helping to change attitudes and beliefs within your community. There are many ways you can do this, including:

- ✓ **Speaking out** in your community against child marriage. If girls stay at school, they're more likely to marry later, be

healthy and safe, and earn money. That benefits girls, their families and their communities – everybody!

- ✓ **Valuing** girls and understanding that they have the right to make their own decisions in life. This means that – like men and boys – girls can choose if they marry, who and when. They have the right to decide who they have sex with; and how many children they have and when. And girls have the right to safer sex: to use a condom to protect themselves against STIs, including HIV.
- ✓ **Telling** your teachers, parents and community leaders if you see a young girl being forced into marriage.
- ✓ **Reminding** people who push girls into marriage that they might be breaking the law and could get into trouble with the police.

Adults who want to end child marriage have changed laws to make it illegal in many countries. They also work with young people to make sure that the voices of girls and boys are heard when major decisions are made, like changing laws and policies. You can read about these efforts here:



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