



ICRW International Center
for Research on Women



Here comes the bride...

Before her body is developed, she will be pregnant. Before she can finish primary school, she will be pulled out of class and forced to work at home. She will be abused physically, sexually and mentally. This reality is true of over 700 million women who were married as children. Child marriage is a traditional practice in which young pairs are formally or informally unified before they are 18 years old. Although illegal in India, 40% of all child marriages occur this country. Young women and girls are the ones who are most at risk, and as a result suffer health complications during pregnancies, lack access education, high risk for domestic violence, and have a high mortality and infant mortality rate. The underlying factors for this continued practice are dowries incentives, poverty, security, and low value of females.

The Problem

Child marriage is defined as as an informal union or formal marriage before the age of 18. UNICEF reports that that worldwide there are 700 million women who were married as children that are alive today (UNICEF Child Marriage). Both young boys and girls are victims of this traditions, but girls are more likely to be affected and suffer the most consequences when they are married at an early age (ICRW Child Marriage).

India is a state that is deep rooted in this tradition, in which 40% of child marriages occur (Sinah 2015). This marriage occur mainly in the southern rural poor states in such Bihar and Rajasthan. In these states, 60% of females marry as children. The government of India responded through passing the Child Prohibition Act of 2006, and set the legal marrying age of girls at 18, and 21 for boys (UNICEF Child Marriage). But this child marries continues to plague India as 18% of couples were married by the age of 15; and 47% were married by the age of 18 (State of the World's Children 2015).

"if a nonbriable police officer found out what was under way, the wedding might be interrupted mid-ceremony, bringing criminal arrests and lingering shame to his family." (Gorney 20011)

The Causes

At a glance, cultural traditions that have existed through generations are a catalyst for the continued practice of child marriages. However, there are underlying reasons that have influenced the continued practice that are rooted in gender roles, poverty, and security.

Dowries, or “bride price” is an incentive for families to gain additional income through receiving money from the family of the bride. Additionally, the price of a dowry is increased as the girl becomes older and more educated. This system therefore encourages the family of the bride to marry her sooner and a lower dowry price (UNICEF Child Marriage). Although dowries were prohibited in India by the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 (UNICEF Child Marriage), families continue this tradition illegally under the table. Due to weak enforcement of this law, families are able to hold weddings for their young children.

A rural poor family in poverty may view having a daughter as an economic burden, through being one more person to feed, clothe, and educate. Placing a negative value on girls encourages marry their daughter and have her sent off to live in another home.

An Indian family marries off their daughter at a young age because they feel it is the best way to secure the virginity or purity of the child. As the daughter gets older and is unmarried, she is at more risk to face physical or sexual assault (ICRW Child Marriage). Although some families would desire to wait until their daughter is older to marry, but they fear that by doing so she would be more vulnerable and cannot guarantee she would remain a virgin.



The Consequences

Child marriages are a “violation of child rights, and has a negative impact on physical growth, health, mental and emotional development, and education opportunities” (UNICEF Child Marriage).

As brides are pushed into the role of being a wife, young girls become sexually active at an early age which leads to pregnancy. As their bodies are underdeveloped for childbearing, they are more likely to have complications that puts the lives of the mother and infant in danger. This leads to high infant and maternal mortality rates. Infant mortality rates are as high as 76% for women who are under the age of 20 (UNICEF Child Marriage).

Brides are neglected an educations and is reflected in low literacy rates of women. As she is forced to drop out of school, brides are only able to attain low-skilled jobs and contribute less to the family income.

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INDIA: CHILD MARRIAGES



Brides are more likely to face domestic violence once married into another family and sent away from her home. The low value of women impacts how she is viewed in the household, in which 47% males and 45% females agree that wife-beating is justified (State of the World's Children 2015). As brides are sent away to live with the families of the husband, they are often placed in a new environment with no support system and feel alone.

"In many regions, parents arrange their daughter's marriage unbeknownst to the girl. That can mean that one day, she may be at home playing with her siblings and the next, she's married off and sent to live in another village with her husband and his family – strangers, essentially. (Gorney 2011)"

What You Can Do

Support the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and its work to encourage congress to pass further legislation such as the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act in 2012, and provided data to ensure that the public is informed and assured that efforts are effective.

Through further legislation, the government should authorize more funding as U.S. foreign assistance to organizations that continue to fight against Child Marriage such as UNICEF.

Through working organizations, such as UNICEF, programs that should be funded are those that promote the empowerment of girls through providing education in rural poor states, counseling, and contraceptives access.

Efforts must be made, through funded organizations, to facilitate the cooperation with the Indian government, local community leaders to ensure that Indian laws such as the Child Prohibition Act of 2006, and Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 are enforced.

Resources

- "Child Marriage." *UNICEF India*. n.d. Web. 18 Nov. 2015
- Educate Girls. "The Child Brides: Send Them to School Instead." Digital Image. *Global Giving*. n.d. Web. 18 Nov. 2015.
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- Sinah, Kouteya. "60 Million Child Brides." *My Choices*. 01 Mar. 2015. Web. 18 Nov. 2015.
- UNICEF. "Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse." *UNICEF*. 22 Oct. 2014. Web. 18 Nov. 2015
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