

Gender Studies Collective (GEN-DER)
Flying Broom Women's Communication
and Research Association

is a member of "Turkish Network Against Commercial
Sexual Exploitation of Children", "Partnership Network
for Preventing Violence Against the Child"
and "Girls Not Brides".



GLOSSARY CHILD MARRIAGES & KEY CONCEPTS





A-Z

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A, B

Abortion: Aborting of an embryo or fetus with surgical operation for termination of pregnancy in case of an unwanted pregnancy or of a risk to the health of women and girls. Pregnancy at an early age poses a higher risk of injuries or death related to abortion.

Adolescence: The period of physical and emotional transition between the beginning of puberty and early adulthood; a period preparing the children for the future, developing their skills. Today, all over the world, millions of adolescents are married or with children.

Alimony: Owing to an early marriage and its illegal status, woman cannot demand alimony from the husband if they get divorced. The court cannot order an alimony payment due to the lack of a civil/registered marriage.

Best interests of the child: According to Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; “the best interests of the child shall be taken as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies.”

Betrothal in the cradle/Custom of Cradle Betrothal: It is unwritten contract made between families for their infants to marry each other in future. It is still practiced in Turkey. It is illegal.

Birth control: Marriage at a very early age poses a higher risk for children for sexually transmitted diseases as they do not have sufficient knowledge and experience regarding sexual and reproductive health. They are not able to decide to have a child or how many children to have.

Bride burning: A form of domestic violence against women in India; an attempt to murder or to injure a woman, mostly a newly married one, by scalding her with boiling oil; which is staged to make those injuries or death of the woman appear to be accidents. If the bride is not loved or approved by the husband's family, or is considered as disobedient, the family scalds her with boiling liquids and staged the incident to appear as its her own fault, as the result of her own clumsiness “while making food in the kitchen by pouring hot oil on herself”; such alleged accidents end up with injuries or death.

B, C

Bride exchange/Berdel: Although not as common as it was in the past, this still exists as a form of marriage. It is illegal. In fact it is a form of barter; an exchange for the sister of the future groom to the brother of the future bride is promised. In the practice of bride exchange the majority of the 'brides' are very young.

Bride kidnapping/Marriage by abduction: A tradition of forced marriage aimed mostly at young women. Men abduct the woman they want to marry by force and detain her. The woman, who is believed now as a disgrace, is forcibly married because she is made to believe that she has no other choice than marriage. It is a common practice in Central Asia.

Bridewealth: A practice that can be seen almost everywhere in Turkey. It has no legal validity. Families may marry off their girls in exchange for bride wealth, aiming at material profit gained from payment made by a groom or his kin to the kin of the bride for ratifying the marriage between them.

Child: Children are people who are accompanied by adults because they have not yet fully developed. Children are individuals enjoying indispensable rights. Children enjoy fundamental human rights despite their age; they are entitled to these rights throughout their childhood as well. These rights are indispensable, and cannot be suspended or transferred.

Child bride: Any marriage before completing the development is an 'early marriage'; every girl who is married off before reaching 18 is a 'child bride'

Child friendly city: A city where urban design keeps in mind the need for children to live in a healthy environment, play games, meet with their peers, and have access to fundamental rights, such as protection from violence.

Child friendly school: A school where students, teachers and other staff are enthusiastic to attend; which is open to participatory, shared, and outward development.

Child labour: deprives the children of their childhood, their health and education, by condemning them to a life they did not want. A child bride that is married off at a young age is often responsible for housework; she is forced to assist in family works, e.g. in the garden/fields; she is obliged to take care of the older members of the family (often persons with disabilities or elders); she is expected to take care of all children of the family along with her own children; she is expected to accept unconditionally her husband's sexual desires regardless of her consent. Considering the all above, a child bride is a child worker working for free in that regard.

Child marriage: A marriage the children are forced into;

- While they are still in childhood, without enjoying their childhood to the full extent,
- Before reaching a certain mental and physical level of development, and without having the necessary maturity for marriage,
- Before reaching an adequate level of knowledge and awareness regarding their rights and how to use these rights,
- Without being informed about the physical and emotional conditions that marriage will bring,
- Without being informed about the judicial status that they may gain or lose with marriage,
- By being under pressure, facing violence, threats, duress and intimidation,
- Where they have to be with someone they do not love, they do not want
- Where they have to be with someone much older than them
- Occurs before their 18th birthday

Child Rights Monitoring Committee of TGNA: A committee established in 2008 under the auspices of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, with the participation of representatives from all political party groups. The Committee's task is to raise awareness in the parliament by bringing forward issues raised by child rights advocates.

Child participation: This means listening and paying attention to children's views and ensuring their participation in decision-making. It is necessary that children participate in decision-making process on any issue that concerns them.

Child pornography: Any representation, by visual, audio or written or whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for sexual purposes, ready for possession or distribution.

Child trafficking: The sexual and commercial exploitation of children for material benefit.

Civil Code: In Turkey minimum marriage age for women and men is 17. In fact, this age is still very early for getting married. The signature campaign initiated by the Flying Broom Women's Communication and Research Association with the aim of changing the law gained the support of 55 thousand people, who demanded the raising of the minimum marriage age.

Commercial sexual exploitation: is a commercial transaction that involves the sexual exploitation. Marrying off children is commercial sexual exploitation.

Committee on the Rights of the Child: It is a body of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by states that have ratified the Convention. It meets three times a year in Geneva, Switzerland.

Conditional Cash Transfer: A conditional help programme for the most impoverished segment of the population that due to economic hardships cannot benefit from the basic health and education services, cannot enjoy any kind of social security and do not have a regular income. It is an effective mean for the prevention of early marriages.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: CEDAW, as it is abbreviated, is an international convention, prepared by the UN and entered into force in 1981. Turkey ratified the Convention in 1984. The State Parties commit themselves to ensure elimination of discriminatory patterns and behaviours in all areas of life.

Convention on the Rights of the Child: It is a convention adopted by the UN in 1989, signed by Turkey in 1990 and entered into force in 1995. According to Turkish Constitution the terms of international conventions supervene domestic law; national laws must be regulated in accordance with these conventions.

C, D

Cousin marriage/Consanguineous marriages: This is still very common in Turkey. Women and men within the same family, who are considered as appropriate for each other, get engaged from an early age under the pretext that keeping property within the family is better or similar such excuses; marriage takes place soon thereafter.

Co-wife in polygyny: Generally in early marriages there is a big age difference between spouses. The husband, who is bored of his wife, sees no harm in finding a second wife by claiming that she fails in meeting his expectations or in getting pregnant due to her young age.

Death of mother and baby/Mother and infant mortality: The risk of death for both the mother and the baby, before and after childbirth, is four times higher among young pregnant women compared to the risk faced by pregnant women at a later age.

Declaration of the Rights of the Child: states the need for special protection to children, who have different physical, physiological, behavioral and psychological characteristics from adults, and who grow up and develop continuously. It also states that childcare is a public issue, and that everyone should undertake this responsibility with scientific approaches. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1959.

Disability: A physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that limits, interferes with or impairs a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions such as daily activities and interactions. Girl children may be married off so that they can take care of the men with disabilities

Discrimination: Patriarchal societies apply two types of discrimination as far as marriage is concerned. The first is pressure towards unmarried women; promotion of marriage as a kind of protection for women. The second derives from stereotypes towards married women who do not conform to the norms; women who do not conform the gender roles assigned to them are judged by society. This discrimination is continually reinforced through mainstream media.

D, E

Divorce: Marriage should end before the law. In the case of early marriages divorce within the first five years is relatively common. If the marriage is not formal, a legal divorce cannot take place, therefore child brides cannot enjoy the right of compensation or alimony.

Domestic violence: all acts of violence that occur within any domestic unit, regardless of family ties, whether or not the residence is shared. The risk of physical, economic, sexual violence is higher in child marriages. Awareness among child brides and knowledge of their rights are not enough regarding referral and protection mechanisms for the support.

Dowry: It describes house ware and ornaments, as well as clothing that have been collected for the girl children since their infancy, which are provided to them when they get married. Dowry not only amounts to an early announcement of marriage, but also ignores the right to not marry.

Drug addiction: Disappointment, loneliness, poverty, misery, violence, lovelessness, feeling unimportant, are among the reasons that can lead individuals married at a young age to drug addiction.

Early birth: The possibility of an early (premature) birth is higher among 19-year-old or younger women. The younger the age is, the higher the risk becomes, since the reproductive organs are not adequately developed.

Early marriage: According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child an individual under the age of 18 is a child. The marriage of such an individual, even if accepted by national law, is considered a child marriage.

Early pregnancy: The biology, physical weakness and small size of a young pregnant girl makes extremely hard to give birth to a child. This causes several difficulties that put her life in risk before, just after the birth, as well as later.

E, F

ECPAT International: An international network which organizes the fight for ending child pornography and child trafficking for sexual purpose and sexual exploitation of children.

Emergency hotline: A telephone number that allows individuals faced with the threat of early marriage to call and ask for protection or health, psychological and legal support. In Turkey the only helpline, which can be used in such cases and in similar situations of violence, is Alo 183, introduced by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

Family: A social unit of two or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption and having a shared commitment to the mutual relationship. Engaging and marrying off children before they grow up constitutes an abuse of parental responsibility. The family with children is responsible for protecting the children and preparing them for the future and not for making them vulnerable to exploitation, violence, lack of education, diseases etc.

Family planning: Children forced to early marriages have almost no knowledge about the importance of family planning and the necessity of contraception methods. The majority of the couples who demonstrate uncontrolled reproduction behaviour have the early marriage background.

Family practice and palliative care: A practice within the framework of the welfare state, which ensures that all citizens shall benefit from health services. One of the duties of family physicians is to observe whether child marriages occurred in families for which they are responsible, as well as to inform the relevant authorities of the situation in order to prevent these.

Family reunification: refers to the situation where family members join another member of the family who is already living in another country. This is a safe and legal channel for migration and for granting asylum or resettlement. However, there are cases where people are inclined, for example, to marry to a German or someone living in Germany in order to get residence permit. The age limit of 18 years has been imposed so that to prevent the women being forced to marry at an early age from being exploited by trafficking. Family reunification is practiced in some European countries.

F, G

Famine: Poverty and famine, especially in less developed countries experiencing alarming hunger, are one of the reasons of the families to force their girls into early marriages. Families who want to unburden themselves of the responsibility of taking care of their girls or who want to save their daughters from famine and misery marry their daughters off at an early age.

Flying Broom: A women's organisation, the complete name of which is Flying Broom Women Communication and Research Association. Since 1996 Flying Broom has been working on strengthening women, promoting democracy and advancing civil society. In 2006 it has added to this work the topic of child marriages by bringing the issue to the agenda across the country and by raising awareness for it.

Forced marriage: Compulsion to marriage by the society and the family by means of violence, extreme insistence, intimidation, duress, emotional pressure and threats.

Forms of abuse: There are emotional, physical, sexual and economic forms of child abuse. Girl children in early marriages may be victims of all forms of child abuse.

Forms of marriage: Prearranged marriages, marriages by abduction, blood money/fasliya/blood compensation marriages are still a reality in Turkey. In addition to these, there are newer forms of marriages, such as marriage abroad for immigration purposes, or marriages on TV shows.

Freedom: The ability of a person to make their own decisions on individual, social, political, economic matters etc. Likewise, marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent.

Game: Girl children have the right to live their childhood, therefore they have the right to play games. A forced marriage at the play age constitutes a breach of this right.

Gender: Socially constructed characteristics of women and men like norms, roles and relations attributed of and between the groups.. Gender corresponds to culturally and socially constructed roles. These roles determine behavioral patterns, responsibilities, order sharing, access to resources and privileges.

G, H, I

Girl children's poverty: Since girls married at a young age are deprived of education and employment opportunities, and since marriage does not offer economic guarantee, poverty is often the case. As for the poverty inside the family houses, it can be described as one of the basic motives of the family to marry off their children.

Girls not Brides: A global network to end child marriage. Flying Broom is a member as well. The network is based in the UK.

HIV/AIDS: The transmission of HIV/AIDS and other STIs is spread through early marriages, moving from high-risk behavior populations to the general population; since the girls are especially vulnerable to HIV because of their biology and their heightened risk can increase when they become child brides married to older, more sexually experienced males; while lacking the power to negotiate safer sex or to reach prevention mechanisms. HIV prevalence among people married at a young age has been growing. Yakın Ertürk, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, has noted that strategies against HIV/AIDS should be developed in a way that combines efforts to raise the legal marriageable age and to make forced marriages illegal.

Honour: One of the excuses put forward by families in order to marry off their girl children. Girl children are seen as family's burden of honour.

Honour killings/Honor based violence: A form of victimization exposed by women and girls on account of their gender, the homicide of them by male members of the family for vindicating the honor.

Imam marriage: Imam marriage is conducted according to religious principles. It is more correct to say 'religious ceremony' instead of 'imam marriage' so as not legitimize it. If only a religious ceremony without the civil marriage take place, the union is not considered valid.

Incest: Sexual abuse of the child by her/his father or by her first degree male relatives who live in the family. Incest may be both a cause and a consequence of early marriage.

I, J, L, M

International Day of the Girl Child: 11 October

International Day for Prevention of Child Abuse/World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse: 19 November.

Juvenile justice system: This is one part of a broad range of means to prevent child criminality, and includes child courts along with the police, prosecutors and employees of the court, as well as official institutions and organizations such as penal institutions. Institutions of the juvenile justice system that deal with services related to health, education, social support and welfare work in collaboration with public or civil institutions and organizations that provide preventive and protective services, such as support to the victim and the witness.

Labour participation: Women who are married at an early age have difficulty in benefiting from job opportunities; they are employed as cheap labour working in unsafe conditions, because they did not have the opportunity to complete their education or professional training.

Law on Child Protection/Child Protection Law: Regulations of the procedures and principles in relation to the protection of children, who are in need of protection and of children who are inclined to criminality, in order to guarantee their rights and welfare.

Loss of mother: When the girls who lost their mother or live separately whereas their father remarried, are badly treated by their stepmother, they think that they are not wanted at home and therefore the marriage seem like an answer to their hurting situation. They may see marriage as salvation, without knowing what they may experience in and after marriage.

Malnutrition: An adolescent woman needs 2500 calories a day. In pregnancy she should get 50 more calories per gained kilo. Malnourished mothers give birth to children, which are on average eight centimeters shorter.

Marriage: The legally or formally recognized union of two people, whose physical, mental, and cognitive skills are in a certain maturity level, as partners in a personal relationship, in which they choose each other to enter into marriage with their free and full consent. See “wedding” below.

M, N

Marriageable age/Age of consent for marriage: is the minimum age allowed by law to marry. International standards set the minimum age of marriage at 18. Apart from this, for individuals, who want to get married and for whom there are no obstacles in that regard, one cannot say there is an “ideal marriage age,” because the age at which one feels ready to get married may vary from one individual to another. Adults can marry at any age they wish.

Marriage annulment case: Individuals who are forced into marriage can file for a marriage annulment case. Marriage annulment cases differ from divorce cases; the annulment declares that the marriage never existed and was never valid.

Migration: describes any person who moves usually across the borders due to a range of purposes. The migration of a family or an individual in order to live elsewhere willingly, as well as, as a result of a forced displacement or in other words forced migration, are important factors that lead to child marriage.

Motherhood: Early marriage means early motherhood. Child brides, who are married off before they have adequate level of physical, emotional, mental development, find it difficult to play suddenly the role of motherhood in an appropriate way, as is expected by the society. They experience a lot of physical and psychological problems until they grow up enough so as to handle this role.

Negligence: The failure to meet the basic physical and emotional needs of a child, such as nutrition, shelter, protection and love and care. It may have negative effects on the child’s health and development.

Neighborhood pressure: Girls may decide to marry at an early age because they are pressured by the society for not being a “spinster”, “unmarried and lonely”, “exposed to more dangers”; or because for avoiding this pressure. This is also a form of forced marriage.

Network against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A network of non governmental organizations and individuals established in Turkey with the aim of eliminating child trafficking, child prostitution, pornography and all kinds of commercial sexual exploitation of the child.

N, O, P

“No to Child Marriages Platform”: It is a platform which was established by 63 NGOs and university departments from 14 provinces, aiming at raising awareness about child marriages in Turkey and mobilizing relevant institutions and people for the solution of this social problem.

Non-formal education: Education given to those who have not benefited from formal education in various fields including reading, writing and professional training. Many women who were married off at an early age and being deprived of education opportunities can benefit from non-formal learning.

Notification obligation/Mandatory reporting: Whoever witnesses any kind of child abuse, including child marriage, has the obligation to notify the relevant authorities. It is very important for the prevention of child marriages.

Obligatory education/Compulsory education: An uninterrupted 12-year period of compulsory education is very important for the protection of girls from early marriage.

Obstetric Fistula: A severe childbirth related complications related to child marriage. It occurs as a result of a prolonged delivery since physical weakness and small size of a young pregnant girl, it is hard to give birth to a child. This causes the girl's perineum tears, leaves hole between the vagina and bladder, and sometimes also the rectum. This causes the girl to lose control over her bladder and bowels and this causes a foul smell, the girl is ostracized by society and her husband, who divorce her in the end.

Opinion leader: Attitudes of people such as the mukhtar, imam, teacher, midwife of the residential area may be distinctive in marriages. These leaders can prevent early marriages or, on the contrary, cause them to happen.

Pedophilia: The sexual feelings directed towards children of any sexes. A number of academics define child marriage as the “institutionalized pedophilia”.

Panic attack: A mental disorder caused by marriage at an early age, among other factors.

Partnership Network for Prevention of Violence against Children: This has been established with the support of UNICEF, aiming to facilitate and support rights-based monitoring and advocacy activities for the prevention of violence against children, which is conducted by national and local NGOs, universities, and professional organizations advocating children rights in Turkey.

Peer education: Unofficial educational events that are conducted by trained and eager young people together with their peers (young people at the same age, in the same environment or sharing common interests) aiming development in terms of knowledge, attitude and skills and raising awareness on how to protect their health by their own. Peer education can be used as a means to prevent marriage at an early age, which is a period where role models are more influential.

Polygamy: In the Turkish context it is more correct to use the term “polygyny” as only men can have many wives at the same time - even if it is illegal. In such marriages the “cowives” are generally minors, because it is thought that only at such ages women can tolerate this “tradition”.

Prenuptial agreement: It is an agreement made before the marriage, a prenup establishes the property and financial rights of each spouse in the event of a divorce including many provisions such as division of the movable and immovable properties, as well as the savings. New Turkish Civil Code entered into force in 2002, sets an equal division of property acquired during marriage in case of divorce.

Prostitution/ Sex Work: Prostitution/sex work is an occupation, where sexual services are offered in exchange for payment. Such transactions are based on the voluntariness of the parties involved. Sex worker or sex work terms cannot be applicable to children. Sex work is not the synonym for human trafficking and sexual exploitation. However, these three issues are conflated mostly and the sex work is considered in the same way the trafficking or sexual exploitation, which are human rights abuses and crimes, are considered. Unlike the sex work, forcing people into sex in exchange for money by coercion or duress is not a person's own choice. Child brides can be forced into sex trade by their husbands in that regard as a form of trafficking. Unlike that, in some cases, when they became adults, the fact that they are abandoned by their husband or being forced to leave the house or the impoverishment and inability to take care of their children they face, or the fact that they could not find a job because they are uneducated and unskilled; they deprive of the chance to make a living for themselves. As a result, they did not have any other option but working as sex workers by choice and by consent.

R, S

Rape: A sexual attack against physical integrity. Women who are victims of rape may be married off immediately, at the same time –especially in extended families- are married off immediately in order to prevent this crime.

Refugee: Persons, who were forced to flee their own country because of persecution, war, violence, discrimination etc. and seeking asylum in another country. It is known that marrying the children early is a very common practice in refugee camps.

Right to choose: All people have the right to freely choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent. In marriages at an early age the majority of women are not the ones who “choose” but rather the ones who “are chosen”.

Right to education: One of the fundamental human rights of women. In Turkey, as of 2013, between the people 15 years of age and over, the percentage of illiterate women is 8.4, while the same percentage of men is 1.7.

Sabancı Foundation: A foundation which has been working since 2010 on the issue of child brides with NGOs and donors; it provides support for the strengthening and enhancing of the activities conducted at the local, national and international level for ending child marriages.

Schooling of girls: It is one of the most important steps for the prevention of child marriages. Attending the school regularly without dropping out postpones the marriages, and therefore it frees the girls from being child brides.

Sex/Biological Sex: Certain physiological or biological characteristics that are assigned at birth defining humans as female or male.

Sex selective abortion: The forced abortion performed because of the predicted sex of the fetus is female; this occurs most frequently in patriarchal societies, where there is a strong gender bias that manifests in a preference for sons.

Slavery: involuntary servitude or subjection to others. Forcing individuals to marry at an early age is a form of modern-day slavery.

S, T, V, W, U

Suicide: The intentional taking of one's own life. One of the reasons for suicide among women is forced marriage at early age.

Toys: fosters growth and learning. The selection of toys, which are not gendered, (instead of dolls and tea sets for girls; STEM toys and toy vehicles for boys etc., toys which are gender neutral or not gender stereotypic should be preferred) will prevent early marriages indirectly.

Trauma: Child marriage is a major psychological trauma for the girls, who are forced to marry to a groom much older than them with whom in most cases they have not met before. After experiencing her first, early and forced sexual activity in an early marriage, the girl carries the memory of this sexual trauma throughout their lives,

Vaginismus: A sexual disorder, caused by deficit of knowledge and experience on sexual physiology and anatomy, which is mostly related to sexual activities at early marriage; defined as a recurrent or persistent involuntary contraction of the perineal muscles surrounding the outer third of the vagina, in case of a vaginal penetration attempt with any kind of organ or object due to stress.

Wedding: The legally or formally recognized union of two people, whose physical, mental, and cognitive skills are in a certain maturity level, as partners in a personal relationship, in which they choose each other to enter into marriage with their free and full consent. See "marriage" above.

Human Rights of Women and Girls: Women's rights are human rights; which women and girls are entitled to enjoy and which are violated more on the basis of the perceived gender of women.

Unemployment: Owing to early marriage or the other reasons related to it, women, who are not able to access quality education and gain professional skills, can not participate in formal and paid employment; even, they are not counted as unemployed.

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund; an agency of the United Nations that specializes in supporting the implementation of the rights of children.

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