

# Child Marriage

**Child marriage threatens the lives, wellbeing and futures of girls around the world.**

Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. While the prevalence of child marriage has slightly decreased worldwide – from one in four girls married a decade ago, to approximately one in five today – **the practice remains widespread**. **Before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 100 million girls were expected to marry before their eighteenth birthday in the next decade.** Now, up to 10 million more will be at risk of becoming child brides as a result of the pandemic.

**HerRights joins other organizations focused on gender rights and sustainable development in calling for global action to end this human rights violation by 2030.**

**Child marriage is the result of entrenched gender inequality**, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one sixth that among girls.

Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and threatens their lives and health. Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school. They have worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers, which are eventually passed down to their own children, further straining a country's capacity to provide quality health and education services.

Child brides often become pregnant during adolescence, when the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth increases – for themselves and their infants. The practice can also isolate girls from family and friends and exclude them from participating in their communities, taking a heavy toll on their physical and psychological wellbeing.

**Because child marriage impacts a girl's health, future and family, it imposes substantial economic costs at the national level, with major implications for development and prosperity.**

Addressing child marriage requires recognition of the factors that enable it. While the roots of the practice vary across countries and cultures, poverty, lack of educational opportunities and limited access to healthcare perpetuate it. Some families marry off their daughters to reduce their economic burden or earn income. Others may do so because they believe it will secure their daughters' futures or protect them. Norms and stereotypes around gender roles and marriage age, as well as the socioeconomic risk of pregnancy outside of marriage, also uphold the practice.

**Child marriage is estimated to cost economies at least 1.7% of their GDP.** It increases total fertility of women by 17%, which hurts developing countries battling high population growth. The elevated fertility rates pose significant costs to national economies through demands for basic services by ever-increasing populations. It delays the demographic dividend that can come from reduced fertility and investments in education. **The associated cost to the global economy is trillions of dollars in purchasing power parity between now and 2030.** Child marriage disrupts the accumulation of human capital due to its associated school dropouts, withdrawal from labor markets, and adverse effects on the health of young girls. It perpetuates extreme poverty and hinders efforts to achieve economic growth and equity.



Ahed, 18, lives in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. "I want to tell the world that we girls are capable of doing many things that you thought we couldn't. I've heard boys say that we are deserve, and we're only created to work in the home. But I know that girls deserve the same rights in society. We have the right to work and to education... the right to be protected from violence, the right to vote, the right to be protected from early marriage, and the right of choice when it comes to choosing a partner."

## Further Reading

- <https://idronline.org/article/gender/child-marriage-in-bihar-why-does-it-persist>
- [https://www.equalitynow.org/learn\\_more\\_child\\_marriage\\_us](https://www.equalitynow.org/learn_more_child_marriage_us)

This information was compiled as a public resource by HerRights Global, March 2023



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*Nonprofit committed to ending gender violence and facilitating social justice*