

# ISSUE FACT SHEET: CHILD MARRIAGE

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Every 30 seconds, 13 girls under the age of 18 are married.\*

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Why are some girls married when they are very young?
2. Who should have the final say about when a girl is old enough to marry?
3. How young is too young to be married?
4. How does marriage keep girls safe?

## DEFINITION

UNICEF defines *child marriage* as a formal marriage or informal union before age 18.

## OVERVIEW

Child marriage is the future for millions of girls born in developing countries. Despite the fact that many nations have laws setting 18 as the legal age for marriage, 14 million girls under 18 will be married this year. That's 38,000 girls who will be married today.\*\*\* Unfortunately, while child marriage is often meant to protect girls, for girls aged 15 to 19 one of the leading causes of death is childbirth.

When girls go to school for at least eight years, they are less likely to be married as children, they stay healthier, have fewer and healthier children, earn more income for their families and send their own children to school.

## RELATED FACTORS: POVERTY

Girls born into poverty are more likely to marry young. In some cases, parents see no value in educating their daughters, but in many cases they simply want to

protect their daughters. But child marriage offers little in the way of protection. It is actually a leading factor in violence against girls.

Families living in poverty often do not have the resources to care for all of their family members. Agreeing to a girl's marriage at a young age relieves the financial burden of her care and may also bring a dowry to the family.

## RELATED IMPACTS: EDUCATION

Regardless of why families agree to child marriage, once girls are married they usually stop attending school and their education ends. Their value is in their service to their home and in bearing children, and the cycle of poverty, violence, and ignorance often continues.

## WHAT'S WORKING

So what can be done? How can we keep girls safe, in school, and free to wait until adulthood to marry?

The answer is difficult. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), child marriage is of great concern but little has been effective in combating it. This is especially true in poor communities when marriage can help alleviate the financial burden of a child living at home.

While there is concern, there is also hope. With the support of their families, many young girls are staying in school longer and ending repeated cycles of poverty. These girls are the face of change. They are determined to gain an education and build a different future for themselves and their families. Providing these girls and their families with the support they need, such as schools that are safe and schools that provide food for students, will continue to foster progress toward change.

## RESOURCES

- UNICEF at [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org) and [www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_58008.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html)
- World Health Organization at [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- Girls Not Brides at [www.girlsnotbrides.org/why-does-it-happen/](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/why-does-it-happen/)
- See Additional Resources Guide for other resources, including relevant videos (found in the Resources section).

### \*\*\* A Note on Statistics

Statistics regarding child marriage change over time as new information becomes available. See Statistics Used in Girl Rising (found in the Resources section) for updated data.