



**Oasis International School Model United Nations**

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Guiding Package

Topic (1) : Child Mariage

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## **Abstract:**

Humans around the world should have the freedom to experience life, love and to be able to choose the person they want to spend the rest of their lives with. Their wedding day should be a day full of joy and celebration. However for the 64 million girls younger than 18 who are forced into early marriage, their wedding day is the day they become victims. Child marriage ends a girl's childhood, her education, economic and social opportunities such as working, making friends and being independent. Married girls under eighteen are also at a higher risk of being physically and emotionally abused, of contracting HIV and other diseases. Due to the fact that these girls have not fully developed, they are five times more likely to die while pregnant or during delivery than women in their twenties and face higher chances of pregnancy-related issues. Not only does child marriage affect the life of the young brides themselves, but it also affects their children. According to statistics done by the "International Women's Health Coalition", 60 % of the children of child brides are likely to die in the first year of life or to be born with health problems<sup>1</sup>. In conclusion, countries and the United Nations should take a stand against this horrendous human rights violation that put lives and their futures in danger. Laws that prevent girls from obtaining their rights completely (such as providing good education) should be banned.

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<sup>1</sup> ANONYMOUS, *The Facts on Child Marriage*. Available on: <https://iwhc.org/resources/facts-child-marriage/>. Consulted on the 14th of August 2016.

## **Introduction:**

Child marriage is a human rights violation. It is the marriage of girls under a restricted age; this age differs from a country to another but is usually between 18 or 21 years old, until then it is pondered as an illegal marriage. Yet, still to this day, families are forcing young females into marriage. The reasons girls are married are diverse; some parents believe that through marriage, they are protecting their daughters and increasing their economic opportunities as the girls are now under the responsibility of their husbands. Others think that girls should stay home and serve men. However, what these parents do not know is that by marrying their daughters at such a young age, they are exposing them to many dangerous problems. When a girl is forced into early marriage, she faces many psychological, physical and emotional problems that will affect her life negatively. Child marriage leads to girls not getting the education they need in order to raise their children and participate in the country's economy. By ending these illegal marriages, the world can achieve the sustainable development goals. There will no longer be poverty, instead there will be good health and well being, as well as quality education, economic growth, gender equality and many more beneficial consequences.

## **Key Terms:**

- Child Marriage: Formal marriage or informal union before age 18, it is the same meaning for both boys and girls, although girls are the most affected.
- Human Rights Violation: It is to breach the basic human rights and freedoms to which all humans are considered to be entitled, it includes the rights to life, liberty, equality, freedom from slavery and torture, but also child marriage.
- Disease: A disorder of structure or function in a human body, especially one that produces specific symptoms or that affects a specific location and is not simply a direct result of physical injury.
- Psychological disorder: It is a disorder of the mind involving thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that cause either self or other significant distress. Significant distress can mean the person is unable to function; ie meet personal needs on their own, or are a danger to themselves or others.
- Child Abuse: A physical or sexual mistreatment towards children.

## Background information:

Child marriage has existed for centuries, rooted deeply in gender inequality, poverty and tradition, which is why it is common in many developing countries. This issue has also existed in ancient and medieval societies. Back in the day, it was considered normal for girls to marry before the age of 15 and at the start of their puberty for political and social reasons as well as multiple other reasons. Princess Emilia of Saxony was married at the mere age of 16 to a 48-year-old man. Marie Antoinette<sup>2</sup> married Louis Auguste at the age of 15. Based on the UN statistics, this issue takes place in every region of the world, regardless the culture, religion or ethnicity. However, the largest number of child brides live in South Asia, in countries such as India, Bangladesh where 66%<sup>3</sup> of child marriages occur, which will cause psychological pain to these girls, being abused by their husbands, risks of HIV, and many more as mentioned before. It is also believed after many studies, that about 15 million girls are married each year before the age of 18, which is equivalent to 28 girls every minute and 1 every 2 seconds. Although the percentage of girls getting married has decreased slightly over the past three decades, young females are still forced to marry young and the rates still need to go down. In 2014, The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, UNICEF released a data that shows that there is around 700 million women alive today that were married as children.

Many international agreements outlaw child marriage such as the Convention on the Rights of Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 also called to eliminate child marriage.

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<sup>2</sup> Last queen of France prior to the French revolution

<sup>3</sup> THORN, Craig. *10 countries still allowing child marriage*. Available on: <http://www.therichest.com/rich-list/most-shocking/10-countries-where-child-marriage-still-flourishes/> consulted on the 20 september 2016

## **Major countries and organizations involved:**

### **Organizations:**

Child marriage, a phenomenon that is present all around the world. Each country is involved, whether they support it or act upon it, they should all react and stop this phenomenon from propagating. Several organizations were then created in order to prevent children from marrying young, such as:

#### 1. UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (Global)

UNICEF is an organization established by the UN aiming to provide equal access of services and care that can make all the difference in children’s lives, by working on gender fairness and equality, as well as trying to solve problems that children face from sickness, poverty, as well as having their basic rights such as education. Child marriage is one of the main problems that they are trying to solve. The agency has launched a global initiative fighting child marriage, which aims to reach more than 6 million girls in 12 countries where rates of wedding involving under-18s are high. The UK and EU’s supported programme aims to increase girls’ access to education and health care, educate parents and communities on the dangers of child marriage, increase economic support to families, and strengthen laws enforcing a minimum age of marriage.

#### 2. UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund (Global)

UNFPA works to expand the possibilities for women and girls to lead a healthy and productive life. According to the foundation, the number of girls that have died from childbirth and health problems decreased. They also advocate for the rights of young people and work to empower them with knowledge and skills to protect themselves and to make informed decisions to be able to contribute to the economy.

#### 3. UN Women (Global)

The UN Women was created in July of 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly. Their main goal is to eliminate the discrimination against women and girls, to empower women and to achieve equality between women and men. The UN Women trust funded to end violence

against women notably in Cambodia, Gambia, Guinea, Ethiopia, as well as lead global initiatives to prevent such problems.

4. ICRW<sup>4</sup> (Founded in the United States)

ICRW's mission is to empower women, advance gender equality and fight poverty in the developing world. It is leading efforts to find solutions that will eliminate the harmful practice of child marriage and provide support to already married adolescents. They are the co-founders of the organization called "Girls Not Brides", as well as they are establishing a multi-year strategy to prevent child marriage in developing countries and promote the empowerment of girls at risk of child marriage. Furthermore, they wrote a book called "How to End Child Marriage" giving solutions and information about child marriage and how to stop it all over the world aiming to raise awareness.

5. Breakthrough (Based in India and the United States)

Breakthrough is a global human rights organization working towards making violence and discrimination against women and girls unacceptable. The organization plans to build youth and community support to end young marriages and to train young people especially men and boys to stand against early marriage. They also raise awareness between communities in India about the consequences of early marriage through arts, media, and pop culture. In addition, they focus on gender and sexuality that include challenging norms and breaking taboos.

6. CARE (Global)

It is a global organization aiming to end poverty all around the world as well as having social justice and mainly gender equality. Preventing child marriage is one of their main goals. CARE works with families, communities and local organizations to minimize the harmful impacts of child marriage through educational and behavioral change programs.

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<sup>4</sup> International Center for Research on Women

7. Egyptian Foundation for Advancement of the Childhood Condition (Founded in Egypt)

The Egyptian Foundation for Advancement of the Childhood Condition works to improve legal conditions concerning children's rights in Egypt. This foundation is apart of a global partnership called "Girls Not Brides" of more than 600 civil society and organizations committed to end early marriage and to enable girls to fulfill their maximum potential.

8. Forward (Based in the United Kingdom)

This International non-governmental organization was founded in 1983 and is considered one of the leading campaigns that seek to safeguard the health of African girls and women. They tackle FGM, child marriage and gender based violence through educational workshops, support programmes and information sharing.

9. Girls Not Brides (Global)

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of more than 600 organizations from over 50 countries in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, Europe and North America committed to ending child marriage in many different ways. They work directly with girls and child brides in their communities to bring attention to this neglected problem.

10. Save the Children (Global)

Save the Children works around the world to develop programmes to protect children and prevent child marriage along with other forms of risk for child abuse, trafficking, and exploitation.

11. Humanium Help the Children (Global)

Humanium is a non-governmental organization dedicated to stop violations to children's rights worldwide. They provide education on children's rights and support children in many countries around the world as well as try to put an end to forced marriage



### Other organizations:

12. Forum for African Women Educationalists (Founded in Tanzania)
13. Saarthi Trust (Founded in India)
14. Girls UP (Founded in USA)
15. Seyaj (Founded in Yemen)
16. The Coexist Initiative (Founded in Kenya)
17. The Knowledge Hub on Child Marriage (Founded in India)
18. Vasavya Mandali (Founded in India)
19. World Vision – Marriage Later/Studies First Programme (Founded in Bangladesh)

### Countries:

Here is the ranking of different countries involved from all around the world, based on the UN statistics:

Rank	Country Name	% girls married before 18
1	Niger	75
2	Chad	68
3	Central African Republic	68
4	Bangladesh	66
5	Guinea	63
6	Mozambique	56
7	Mali	55
8	Burkina Faso	52
9	South Sudan	52
10	Malawi	50
11	Madagascar	48
12	Eritrea	47
13	India	47
14	Somalia	45

15	Sierra Leone	44
16	Zambia	42
17	Dominican Republic	41
18	Ethiopia	41
19	Nepal	41
20	Nicaragua	41

*\* Child marriage prevalence is defined as the percentage of women 20-24 years old who were married or in union before age 18.*

*Source: UNICEF State of the World's Children, 2013 - data from UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys, and refers to the most recent year available during the period 2002-2011. Source: United Nations*

Based on the UN statistics, here are the 10 countries with the highest numbers of child marriage:

- India : 10,063,000 women
- Bangladesh: 2,359,000 women
- Nigeria: 1,193,000 women
- Brazil : 877,000 women
- Ethiopia : 673,000 women
- Pakistan: 600,000 women
- Indonesia : 458,000 women
- Democratic Republic of the Congo : 291,000 women
- Mexico : 260,000 women
- Niger : 244,000 women

\* Women aged 20 to 24 years old who were married before they were 15<sup>5</sup>.

Briefly, here are the major countries that are related to child marriage:

1. Niger:

Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, 3 in 4 girls married before 18, which is 75% of all the Nigerian women. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and the World Bank have stated that ending child marriage in Niger could save the country more than \$25 billion between 2014 and 2030. The legal age for marriage there is 15 years old. Some propose to change it to become 18 years, but it is still not confirmed yet. In 2014, Niger held the African Union Campaign to end Child Marriage, which concerns married, and unmarried women. It is one of 12 countries selected to be part of UNFPA and UNICEF's global program to accelerate action to end Child Marriage.

2. India:

47%<sup>6</sup> of the Indian women marry before they reach 18 years old, however; very few marry before the age of 15. India is a member of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC). The legal age for marriage is 18 for women, and 21 for men, according to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) of 2007. The PCMA establishes penalties for those who do not prevent child marriages by creating Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, yet there are still some who get married between the ages of 15 and 18. The ministry of Women and Child Development aiming to prevent Child Marriage drafted a plan, but it has not been finalized yet. India is also one of 12 countries selected to be part of UNFPA and UNICEF's Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

3. United States of America:

Even though child marriage isn't that frequent in the US compared to other countries such as Niger, yet it is still present. There is no official data indicating the percentage of child

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<sup>5</sup> ANONYMOUS, *Child Marriage around the World*. Available on: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/>. Consulted on the 14th of August 2016.

<sup>6</sup> ANONYMS. *Child marriage around the world: India*. Available on: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/india/>. Consulted on the 20th of september 2016

marriage in the US, but one of the “Girls Not Brides” members stated that there are up to 3000 cases of forced marriages in 2011. The US government identifies this problem, and there are many organizations established in this country, such as Breakthrough and ICRW, trying to prevent child marriage locally but also all around the world. The legal age of marriage changes from state to state but it varies around 13 and 19 years old.

#### 4. United Kingdom:

Just like the US, the UK faces many cases of forced marriage but compared to other countries they are very few; from 5000 to 8000 cases per year. Their legal age of marriage varies between 16 and 18 years old. Breaking the law could lead to many penalties such as seven years in jail. To prevent this, they have established several organizations such as “Forward” as they also have a “Forced Marriage Unit” helpline to deal with these cases of forced marriage.

#### 5. Egypt:

17%<sup>7</sup> of girls in Egypt get married before the legal marriage age; 18 years. This is due to the traditions in Egypt that force each girl to dedicate her life for her husband, as they are also prevented from going to schools and being educated. The country is currently working on a strategy to decrease child marriage by 50%<sup>8</sup> during the following 5 years.

### **UN Involvement:**

The UN took many initiatives in order to eliminate child marriage from all around the world. It promotes programs designed to end child marriage, and present all the needed information about the risks of child marriage, and women’s rights. Moreover, they provide help for the young girls and families all around the world. In 2013, a resolution passed stating that child marriage is a human rights violation, therefore the UN is hoping to prevent the existence of early, child, and forced marriage. In order to ensure the success of their goal, many advocates from several organizations, such as Girls Not Brides and WYWCA (World

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<sup>7</sup> Anonyms. *Child marriage around the world: Egypt*. Available on: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/egypt/> consulted on the 20th of september 2016

<sup>8</sup> Anonyms. *Child marriage around the world: Egypt*. Available on: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/egypt/> consulted on the 20th of september 2016

Young Women's Christian Association), will collaborate with the UN to make sure that no child is being married. They added that each child should be free and have the right to education and take their own decisions by themselves. Over 100 countries co-sponsored this resolution (Reaffirming the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, as well as the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences)<sup>9</sup> such as Ethiopia and South Sudan, yet others refused to co-sponsor especially in the region of South Asia like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The UN created different organizations and launched many campaigns, such as the UNPA, UNICEF and UN Women. These organizations were involved to take action in regards to the issue of child marriage. Their aim is to end child marriage by 2030. They insist on the fact that children are supposed to be highly educated, free, choose their partner on their own bearing in mind that it is a hard decision. Child marriage may lead to death while giving birth, HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, it is considered to be a big responsibility, and hurts the economy, which leads to an international cycle of poverty.

### **Possible solutions:**

- Educate girls in order to give them the opportunity to understand different aspects of marriage and to have knowledge about their rights and how to stand up for what they believe in. They can be educated at schools, but in the case of many where they cannot go, there should be specific places and clubs where they discuss these topics with professional public speakers. There is also presence of “the safe space programmes”; such as the one called “Campus Pride”, which can teach girls about services they can access in their community as well as building girl's self confidence.
- Try to work with the other party of the marriage, which are the men and boys. In many communities, men think that they have the upper hand and that they hold the power over women. Making them understand that each person is entitled to the determination of their own faith. This should be a concept taught to young

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<sup>9</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 december 2013.  
[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/148](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/148)

kids at school, but for the adults, they should discuss in the same “clubs” that will be established by organizations in several countries. We should raise awareness about child marriage, and make men understand that child marriage causes many problems in different aspects such as economically, socially, and health wise. For instance, the girls may get a disease like the HIV, they may also be beaten up and abused which will cause later on physical and psychological pain.

- Get religious and traditional leaders to talk to men and boys knowing that they have a huge impact in influencing the citizens in many communities. They can spread the message that child marriage damages women and girl’s lives more than it benefits them.
- Establish and implement laws and policies as well as registering births and marriages to make sure that the legal marriage age is respected and followed.

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. How can we end Child Marriage?
2. Does your country have laws preventing children from being married?
3. What is the restricted age for legal marriage in your country?
4. What is the percentage of the girls married in your country?
5. Are there any active organizations created to prevent the spread of child marriage in your country?
6. Is there any action taken against child marriage in your country?
7. Has your country helped other countries prevent child marriage?
8. What are the consequences of child marriage on both psychological and physical health?
9. What are the benefits to ending child marriage?

## Useful Links

- <http://www.care.org/work/womens-empowerment/child-marriage>
- <https://iwhc.org>
- [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_68114.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_68114.html)
- <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>
- <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/03/new-un-initiative-aims-to-protect-millions-of-girls-from-child-marriage/>
- <http://data.unicef.org/child-protection/child-marriage.html>

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