

Child giving birth to child

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Child marriage is a truly global problem that cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. Child brides can be found in every region in the world, from the Middle East to Latin America, South Asia to Europe.¹

Child marriage can be defined as “any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing”.²

In Bangladesh the legal age for marriage is 21 for boys and 18 for girls. This was established with the national Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929. However, the authorities rarely intervene to stop child marriages and parents continue to marry off their daughters secretly. Despite this legislation, the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey has found that the average age for marriage of girls is 16.4 years.³

Bangladesh has the fourth-highest rate of child marriage in the world - 65 percent of all girls are married by age 18.⁴

Child marriage means early sexual activity and, in most cases, early childbearing. Despite widespread recognition that childbearing in the adolescent years is harmful to both mother and child, it is common in large parts of the developing world. In Chad, Guinea, Mali and Niger, where child marriage is prevalent, half of all girls give birth before their 18th birthday.⁵

Adolescent childbirth is dangerous for the infant as well as for the mother. The underdeveloped bodies of girls can lead to complications during childbirth and the death of the child. Infants born to adolescent mothers are much more likely to die than those born to women in their 20s. Births resulting from child marriages are said to be “too soon, too close, too many”.⁶

Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage of girls under the age of 15 years in the world, with 29 percent of girls in

Bangladesh married before age 15 years, according to a UNICEF study. Two percent of girls in Bangladesh are married before age 11 years. Successive, inaction by the central government and complicity by local officials allows child marriage, including of very young girls, to continue unchecked, while Bangladesh's high vulnerability to natural disasters puts more girls at risk as their families are pushed into the poverty that helps drive decisions to have girls married.⁷

Children getting married & becoming pregnant early may produce various complications for the mother & the infant as they are not prepared physically, mentally & physiologically. Mother may develop preeclampsia, eclampsia, hyperemesis gravidarum, VVF, can get STI, HIV, malaria, abortion, PPH etc. Maternal mortality obviously increases. IMR & perinatal death also increases. Premature low birth weight, sepsis, birth injuries, perinatal asphyxia & it's complication are also markedly increased. More than 2 million adolescents are living with fistulas.⁸

The problem with children delivering children is that the young mothers are at a significantly higher risk than older women for debilitating illness and even death. Compared with women >20 years of age, girls 10-14 years of age are 5-7 times more likely to die from childbirth, and girls 15-19 years of age are twice as likely.⁹

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Despite International agreements and national laws, marriage of girls <18 years of age is common worldwide and affects millions. Child marriage is a human rights violation that prevents girls from obtaining an education, enjoying optimal health, bonding with others their own age, maturing, and ultimately choosing their own life partners. Child marriage is driven by poverty and has many effects on girls' health. To stop child marriage, policies and programs must educate communities, raise awareness, engage local and religious leaders, involve parents, and empower girls through education and employment.¹⁰

Ending child marriage requires a multifaceted approach focused on the girls, their families, the community, and the government. Culturally appropriate programs that provide families and communities with education and reproductive health services can help stop child marriage, early pregnancies, and illness and death in young mothers and their children. United effort & community participation is a must to stop this.

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