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## Child Marriage in South Asian Countries

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### ABSTRACT

Marriage is an important incidence in any society since it helps the existence of society. Sociologically marriage is an important factor because it obviously makes many relationships in society. Mature age is considered the most suitable age for marriage in the world but there is no exact age to enter marriage a girl in World, and it differs from country to country. When it is discussed early marriage, the attention always focuses on child girls because they absolutely become destitute with marriage. Having considered the issues related to child marriage, most countries have determined the marriage age to maintain the social security and protection of children. Mature age is highly considered for marriage because it is believed that he/she should be able to adapt the marriage life in both a biological and psychological manner. Especially one girl who become mature, will get an opportunity to enter marriage life thereby the girl should be able to take responsibility in marriage life otherwise the marriage life would be unpleasant, therefore, it is highly considered that marriage should not happen at an early age because it makes many difficulties for child aged girl. The majority of all over the world believe that marriage should occur when a girl becomes mature. Whenever a young girl enters marriage she has to relinquish education and other child rights vested by universal. Child marriage which occurs everywhere in the world even today has become a tremendous issue in developing countries like South Asia. And it has also brought many issues to the girls who entered early marriages. Understanding the negative impact of child marriage many countries have decided to stop by introducing legal actions. Although child marriage is constrained by law in many countries, there are many child marriage cases are reported worldwide. It is vitally important to understand the situation of child marriage in the world and Asian countries to solve this issue. This article aims to examine child marriage in South Asian countries and its nature.

**KEY WORDS:** Child, Child Marriage, Child marriage in South Asia, Child Marriage and its impact

## **Introduction**

It is important to understand the child through the definition. According to Oxford Dictionary Thesaurus & Word Power Guide (2007) defines a child as “1. a young human being below the age of full physical development, 2. A son or daughter of any age, 3. Derogatory and immature or irresponsible person”. A young person who has not yet reached puberty or reached the legal age of majority (lexico, 2021). The Free Dictionary defines a child as: “a person's natural offspring; a person 14 years and under. A "child" should be distinguished from a "minor" who is anyone under 18 in almost all states” (thefreedictionary.com, 2021). The Convention on Rights of the Child defines a child as “child is any person under the age of 18”

Many definitions for introducing a child can be found using the above term. Some countries have occasionally utilized different ages to initiate a kid into the country's legal system. As an illustration, a child is considered to be under the age of 18 years old in Sri Lankan law. Many definitions for introducing a child can be found using the above term. Some countries have occasionally utilized different ages to initiate a kid into the country's legal system. As an illustration, a child is considered to be under the age of 18 years old in Sri Lankan law. Nevertheless, other frameworks of law in Sri Lanka have used different ages to define a child to protect their child rights for example; The Sri Lankan Children and Young Persons Ordinance (1939) defines a "child" as someone under the age of 14 and a "young person" as someone between the ages of 14 and 16 (Unicef-irc.org, (n.d) ). Any age that has legal importance is referred to as a "legally permitted age." In order to preserve children's rights, Sri Lankan legislation has defined multiple legally permitted ages under various statutes. The minimum age of culpability (8 years), minimum age of work (14 years), minimum age of consent for sexual intercourse (16 years), maximum age of seeking maintenance (18 years), and maximum age of kidnapping from legitimate supervision (18 years) are all considered in this study (males 14 years and females 16 years) (Vidanapathirana, 2016).

## **What Does Mean Child Marriage?**

It is essential to clearly understand what does mean child marriage because marriage age is a crucial point for a human. Here, when it considers child marriage it is significantly important to focus on the early marriage of a girl who forces to marry early age would bring many difficulties for them. Therefore, it is needed to define and examine the current status of child marriage in the world. Child marriage is a phenomenon that has varied effects on girls and boys. In general, the number of boys in child marriages is significantly lower than that of girls over the world. In unequal partnerships, girl child spouses are also prone to domestic violence and sexual abuse. If they become pregnant, their bodies are not prepared for childbearing, thus difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth are common. Both males and girls are

frequently forced to leave education after marrying in order to enter the workforce and/or take on household responsibilities at home(unfpa.org, 2012).Child marriage is described as a girl or boy marrying before the age of eighteen and includes both legal and informal unions in which minors under the age of eighteen live with a spouse as if they are married(unicef.org, 2017).Accordingly, it is clearly pointed out that generally, less than 18-year-old a girl or a boy get into marriage is considered a child marriage.

### **Methodology**

This study was expected to understand child marriage in south Asian countries thereby, collecting information from all the South Asian countries is not an easy task, therefore, the method to collect information relevant to this topic is secondary data. This study was done by using secondary data which were collected from different articles and research studies done in relevance to child marriage in South Asia.

### **world scenario of the Child marriage**

getting a clear picture of the world figures of child marriage is essential to understanding the reality of child marriage worldwide. Therefore, this section is focused to examine the world scenario of child marriage. Nearly half of young girls in South Asia and more than a third of young girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are married by the age of 18. The 10 nations with the highest rates of child marriage are Niger, 75 percent; Chad and the Central African Republic, 68 percent; Bangladesh, 66 percent; Guinea, 63 percent; Mozambique, 56 percent; Mali, 55 percent; Burkina Faso and South Sudan, 52 percent; and Malawi, 50 percent. Between 2011 and 2020, more than 140 million girls were expected to marry, based on existing trends. In addition, 50 million of the 140 million females who would marry before they become 18 would be under the age of 15. Child marriage is most common in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 35% of young women marry before the age of 18, followed by South Asia, where nearly 30% marry before the age of 18. Latin America and the Caribbean (24 percent, data not provided), the Middle East and North Africa (17 percent), and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (17 percent) all have lower rates of child marriage (12 percent)(EpidemiologyUnit, Ministry of Heath, 2013)

According to UNICEF's first-ever in-depth survey of child grooms, an estimated 115 million boys and men around the world were married as minors. One in every five children, or 23 million, married before the age of fifteen. According to the data, the Central African Republic (28%) has the greatest rate of child marriage among men, followed by Nicaragua (19%) and Madagascar (13 %)( unicef.org, 2019).

The following table shows the ten countries with the highest child marriage rate before 18 years in the world and ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage before 15 years old.

### The top ten countries in the world with the highest number of child marriage

No	10 countries with the highest rate of marriage before 18 years	%	10 countries with the highest rate of marriage before 15 years	%
01	Niger	75	Niger	36
02	The central African Republic	68	Bangladesh	29
03	Chad	68	The central African Republic	29
04	Bangladesh	65	Chad	29
05	Mali	55	Eritrea	20
06	Burkina Faso	52	Guinea	20
07	South Sudan	52	Nigeria	20
08	Malawi	50	India	18
09	Madagascar	48	Sierra Leone	18
10	Guinea	63	Ethiopia	16

**Sources: UNICEF, State of the World's Children: In Numbers: Every Child Counts, 2014**

The above data discuss the how extent to which child marriage has prevailed in the world. Most African countries and South Asian countries have become the most conducive home to practice early marriage in the world. The prevailing nature of child marriages does not make good sense among developed nations and educated societies. Because there can be seen many obnoxious results raise due to early child marriage. It is shocked that the factor is that 36% of child marriage has been taken before 15 years old in Niger. When it considering such kind of situation in South Asian countries, Bangladesh and India show the worst figures. In West and Central Africa, child marriage is a widespread violation of human rights that disproportionately affects females. Young brides are more likely to drop out of school and encounter physical dangers, particularly during pregnancy. Child marriage is a serious roadblock to sustainable development because of its social, health, and economic consequences. West and Central Africa is home to six of the top ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage. In the region, the average prevalence is still high: 41% of females marry before they turn 18 years old. ( unicef.org, n.d)

## **Discussion**

### **Child Marriage in South Asian Countries**

Concerning child marriage in the world context, it seems that a huge number of child marriages occur in African countries also other countries. The factors revealed that most child marriages happen in developing countries due to the lack of education, poor family background, and also there may be cultural factors. It is needed to examine the factors to perceive the reality of child marriage in South Asian countries. There are eight countries belonging to South Asia including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and the Maldives. South Asia has the world's highest rate of child marriage. Almost half of all women aged 20-24 years (45%) said they were married before they turned 18. Almost one-fifth of all females (17%) marry before they reach the age of 15. Child marriage is a violation of children's rights that exposes them to violence, exploitation, and abuse. India has the most brides in the world, accounting for one-third of the total. Bangladesh has Asia's highest child marriage rate (the fourth-highest rate in the world). Nepal also boasts one of Asia's highest rates of both boy and girl child marriage. (<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/child-protection/child-marriage>)

According to estimates, at least 1.5 million girls under the age of 18 marry each year in India, making it the country with the most child brides in the world, accounting for a third of the global total. Currently, over 16% of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 are married. While the percentage of girls marrying before the age of 18 has decreased from 47% to 27% between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016, it is still too high (<https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/end-child-marriage>). In Bhutan, Child marriage is still prevalent, according to UNICEF's most recent data, with 6.2 percent of the population married by the age of 15 and 25.8 percent married by the age of 18.5 years old ([www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bhutan\\_statistics](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bhutan_statistics)). Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country with a population of over 163 million. The majority of Bangladeshis adhere to Islamic principles and beliefs, which can be seen in a variety of socio-cultural behaviours. In light of such ideals, Bangladesh's tradition of legalizing child marriage is an issue that requires a comprehensive yet rigorous solution. Bangladesh currently ranks fourth in the world and first in Asia in terms of child marriage (Arnab and Siraj, 2020) According to UNICEF, 29% of Bangladeshi girls marry before the age of 15, and 65% marry before the age of 18 (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/09/child-marriage-bangladesh>)

According to data from the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18, 3.3 percent of girls under the age of 15 are married off, while 18.3 percent of females under the age of 18 are married off, according to Qamar Naseem, a rights activist from Peshawar. Across the country, about 4.7 percent of boys under the age of 18 are married off, he added. According to Naseem, child marriage is significantly

higher in Pakistan's newly combined tribal areas, where roughly 35 percent of all child marriages occur(<https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-how-poverty-and-exploitation-drive-child-marriages/>).

UNICEF estimates that 21% of Pakistani girls are married by the age of 18, and 3% before the age of 15. Child marriage is most common in the country's poorest and most disadvantaged groups, and it has disastrous consequences: Girls who marry are more likely than other girls to drop out of school, they have larger pregnancy-related health risks than women, and their children are more likely to have health problems. Domestic abuse is more common among married women than it is among unmarried women. Furthermore, child marriage further impoverishes households(<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/09/time-end-child-mariage>). According to available data on child marriage in Afghanistan, between 30 and 40 percent of women get married before they reach the age of 18( National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (2011- 2012.).Afghanistan ranks 170th out of 189 nations on the UN's Gender Inequality Index, making it one of the most difficult locations in the world for women and girls to live. More than a third of Afghan girls marry before they become 18, and nearly a tenth marry before they turn fifteen([www.worldvision.ca/stories/gender-equality/choose-to-challenge-child-marriage-Afghanistan](http://www.worldvision.ca/stories/gender-equality/choose-to-challenge-child-marriage-Afghanistan)).

In Nepal, 41% of women aged 20 to 24 marry before they reach the age of 18. In South Asia, the country has the third-highest rate of child marriage (<https://nepal.unfpa.org/en/node>).Nepal has a high rate of child marriage. The percentage of women between the ages of 18 and 22 who married as children is 38.5 percent, however, it has been steadily declining over time. The proportion of girls marrying before the age of 15 has similarly decreased. Child marriage is linked to a lower level of wealth, education, and labour force involvement. However, they are merely correlations, not causative effects. Information on the trend in child marriage over time, where it is most widespread in a country, and what the features of girls marrying young are essential to building programs and policies to minimize child marriage (Chata,2016 ).

According to census data of Maldives, 95% of the children have never been married. Child marriage occurs in the country, albeit in small numbers, with only 0.60 percent of minors (106 children aged 15-17) married at the time of the Census. This equates to 106 children aged 15 to 17-year-old who was married at the time of the census. The indicator "percentage of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before the age of 15 and before the age of 18" revealed that child marriage is slightly less prevalent among the 20-24-year-old population than among the present child population (15-17 years). 0.35 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before they turned 18( National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance & Treasury, 2014). Under Sri Lankan common law, underage marriages are prohibited,

and the legal age for marriage is 18. The Department of Census and Statistics in Sri Lanka reported the following (on the proportion of the married population) in 2012. There are 104,176 married citizens between the ages of 15 and 19, with 85,392 females (82 per cent) and 18,784 males (18 per cent). A total of 3530 married females under the age of 15 have been reported, while no men have been reported (<https://www.ecpat.lk/child-marriage>). By the age of 15, child marriage rates in Sri Lanka are at 2%, and by the age of 18, they are at 12% (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia->). Under the common law of Sri Lanka, underage marriages are prohibited. The legal age is 18 years old. However, the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA), which has been in effect for decades, permits Muslim community leaders, who are predominately male, to decide on the marriage age (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia>).

Even though most countries have laws requiring girls to marry at the age of 18, child marriage is nevertheless common in South Asia. The majority of marriages are planned by parents and local leaders, either with or without the girl's agreement. Child marriage is perpetuated by several causes, including a high value put on girls' sexuality, gender discrimination, gaps in national laws, inadequate implementation of child marriage prevention laws, illiteracy, low access to school, poverty, and conflict and natural disasters. These systemic factors that influence child marriage are described further down (Tina, Ravi & Ellen, 2013).

### **Child Marriage and its social impact on society**

It is important to attain child marriage and its social impact on society with a view to ascertain the reality behind child marriages. The majority of child marriage cases are reported in South Asian countries which is an awkward situation and has created a black spot in these countries. Child marriage poses a serious health threat. Psychologically, women who were married as youngsters are more prone to experience Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression symptoms ([https://www.equalitynow.org/long\\_term\\_impacts\\_child\\_marriage](https://www.equalitynow.org/long_term_impacts_child_marriage)). Child marriage, a kind of early and forced union, is rooted in damaging traditional norms (and practices that have been passed down through centuries, wreaking havoc on the lives of girls, their families, and society as a whole. It is a dangerous practice that seriously jeopardizes the girl child's best interests. Child marriage is more common in impoverished households and those with lower levels of education, as well as in fragile states affected by natural disasters and conflict (World Vision, UK, 2013.). In South Asia, child brides frequently marry considerably older males, who are more likely to be HIV positive than younger men because they have had unprotected intercourse with several or high-risk partners (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2012). Young girls who married before the age of 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped, or intimidated by their spouses, according to an

Indian study. They were also three times more likely to say they had been forced to have sex against their will in the past six months( International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2007.). According to recent research in Bangladesh, girls are frequently subjected to domestic abuse if they fail to match the needs and expectations of their husbands and family members in the areas of housework and sexuality. This includes dowry disputes, which are a common source of severe acts of violence against girls, such as mental torture and physical abuse. Young men in Bangladesh have spoken up against the pressures of early marriage, blaming their aggressive behaviour toward their spouses on their lack of preparation for marriage and family life( World Vision, UK, 2013.). Girls' poor worth is intimately linked to the lack of investment in their future. Girls are removed from school once their marriage is finalized, and they are less likely to be educated than boys. In Pakistan, studies have found a link between education and marriage age. Many studies have also shown that teenage married girls' access to formal and informal education is severely constrained due to household and child-rearing duties, as well as discriminatory gender norms that do not value girls' education (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2005).

Child marriages frequently result in an early pregnancy, which can lead to a variety of health issues. She will be unable to cope with changes in her body and sexual behaviours that occur during puberty if she does not have adequate awareness of these topics. Even elderly women are no longer capable of adequately guiding her. During pregnancy, delivery, and the post-delivery period, older women used to keep a close eye on the situation. However, today's elderly ladies lack the information and positive attitude that women did in the past to seek qualified medical personnel ( <https://blog.ipleaders.in/child-marriage-impacts-consequences-effects-girl-child>).

## **Conclusion**

It is evidently visible that early marriages have become a tremendous issue in South Asian countries due to economic problems, lack of awareness, and other social factors. When it is considered the factors that impact child marriages, unawareness and poor economic condition of the family have been toughly caused to promote of child marriages. Even though all the South Asian countries have imposed the minimum age for marriage in terms of control of early marriage, a considerable number of child marriages occur in South Asia. Concerning this calamitous situation, there should be a practical mechanism to avoid child marriage not only in South Asian countries but also in other countries in the world. Most probably this teaser has created many arduous problems among married children. Althoughmany International Non-Governmental Organizations and other government institutions work towardminimizing the amount of early marriage, it seems that some religious activist



has been a problematic hurdle to controlling this circumstance. Children are the most important future investment in any society therefore, there should be a conducive environment to well grow in society without any troubles for children all over the world. But, children in developing countries, are always facing many troubles make by people in society. It is a timely need to block all access to work against children in these countries. Child marriage does not occur consent of children, it leads by elders of the family. Indeed, this kind of environment smashed whole the child world. Therefore, all authorities should come to one platform to make a concrete solution to minimize early marriages.

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