



Policy Brief

Preventing Child Marriage to Save the Woman's Life

What is child marriage?

Child marriage, defined as marriage before age 18, is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, with little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty. Most child marriages are also forced marriages, where the consent of the child is not considered before the consummation of the union. While boys are affected by child marriage, the issue impacts girls in far larger numbers and with more intensity (UNICEF, 2005).

The seriousness of the issue

Child marriage is still a serious global problem. In the last decade, 58 million young women in developing countries—one in three—have been married before the age of 18, many against their will and in violation of international laws and conventions on women's rights (Donna & Frost, 2011). Even more disturbing, one in nine girls, or 15 million, has been forced into marriage between the ages of 10 and 14 (Hervish and Feldman-Jacobs, 2011).

In Indonesia, the UNICEF in 2010 stated that a percentage of 34.5% of girls in Indonesia get married under the age of 19 (UGM, 2011). Meanwhile, according to Data Indonesia Demographic Health Survey (IDHS) in 2007 showed 22% of women were married before the age of 18. Some areas in Indonesia such as in District Bondowoso (East Java Propinse) even showed higher early marriage rate, at 57%, and within one year 50% of marriages ended in divorce.

Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were first married or in union by age 18	
South Asia	46
Sub Saharan Africa	37
Latin America and Caribbean	29
East Asia Pacific	18
Middle East and North Africa	17
CEE/CIS	11
World	34

Source: UNICEF databases 2012, data from DHS, MISC and Other National surveys, 2002-2011

With limited education and economic opportunities, child brides are often condemned to a life of poverty, social isolation, and powerlessness, infringing on their human rights, health, and well-being. Investments in adolescent girls are critical. Ultimately, to meet goals related to poverty, education, gender equality, maternal and child health, and HIV and AIDS, government and communities must seriously put an end to child marriage.

Why Does Child Marriage Persist?

Economic reasons. Girls are either seen as an economic burden or valued as capital for their exchange value in terms of goods, money or livestock to the family. Therefore, the purpose of marriage is to ease the economic burden of the family. Thereby, it is not surprising that parents would marry off their daughter shortly after she has her first menstruation. By encouraging children to get married, girls actually come into a new circle of poverty, because they remain economically dependent on husband and parents. Especially, after their child is born, the economic burden of the family increases.

Not Synchronize between the laws. There're two laws relating with child marriage, Marriage



Law No.1/1974 and Child Protection Law No 23/2009. According to Marriage Law the minimum age of marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys while on Child Protection Law, Child defined as below 18 years old. Therefore when someone marriage in 16 years old mean violating the Child Protection law

Control over sexuality, child marriage is often regarded as necessary for controlling girls' sexuality which is directly linked to family honor and status.

Custom and tradition, another thing that also influences the child marriage are including socio-cultural reasons, such as the tradition of the parents to match their children when they are young, and the negative assessment (considered as a spinster) of married women over the age of 18 years.

Security, in many cases parents turn to child marriages in order to secure a future for their daughters. Situations of insecurity and acute poverty can prompt parents to resort to child marriage as a protective mechanism or survival strategy.

Lack of knowledge, among the parents on reproductive health and negative consequence of child marriage

Consequences of Child Marriage

Health, the majority of young brides have limited access to contraception and reproductive health services and information. They are exposed to early and frequent sexual relations and to repeated pregnancies and childbirth before they are physically mature and psychologically ready. Obstetric fistula is one of the most devastating consequences, affecting over two million girls and young women. Pregnancy related deaths are

the leading cause of mortality in 15-19 year old girls, and girls age 15 years or under are five times more likely to die than those over 20 (IPPF & UNICEF, nd). In addition, infant from mothers below 16 tend to be born premature and malnutrition.

Education, child marriage caused a young girls drop out from schools that will decrease the quality of human resources.

Poverty, child marriage is linked with poverty. This is because it affects particularly the poorest in the population, and helps to reinforce cycles of poverty. Child wives tend to have more children and fewer independent income options. Poverty ultimately fuels child marriage, which in turn perpetuates the feminization of poverty (IPPF & UNICEF).

Domestic Violence, child brides are often more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to take action against this abuse, it's happened because unstable of emotion and psychologic of the young couple.

Child Marriage and MDGs

child marriage directly inhibits the achievement of six of eight Millennium Development Goals. Simply, the people of Indonesia will not meet its commitments to reduce poverty if not addressing child marriage.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Girls are often not yet mature or skilled enough to properly perform household tasks or care for their husbands and children. Child marriage also deprives a girl of the valuable and necessary skills required to enter the labor market, therefore denying her the opportunity to help lift herself – and her family – out of poverty. In short, pulling

girls out of school and forcing them into early marriage ensures that poverty will be handed down from a mother to her daughter, and family to family, for generations to come.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

When a girl is pulled from school and forced to marry young, her personal development is stunted. She is left with few – if any – negotiation skills and therefore has limited decision-making power in her new household. Often uneducated and unskilled, many child brides are completely dependent on their husbands, in-laws and or parents to survive.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Although there have been many changes in society values, the family still has a big role in decision making process. Girls rarely have a voice to her opinion against forced marriage of his parents. Child marriage increases the girls' risk for physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Delaying marriage can increase girls' and women's decision making power and improve their reproductive health.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Infants born to young mothers are more likely to suffer low birth weight and premature birth, and are more likely to die. When a mother is under 18, her baby's chance of dying in the first year of life is 60 percent greater than that of a baby born to a mother over age 18. In addition, the risk of malnutrition in children born to mothers under age 18 is higher (Raj, 2010). Evidence exists that improved nutrition in infants leads to increased schooling and cognitive ability, which ultimately leads to increased lifetime earnings (Behrman, 2004).

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Child brides are often forced into early sexual activity and therefore early childbearing. Childbirth complications are the leading cause of death for girls ages 15 to 19 in developing countries. Their risk are twice comparing to women between ages of 20 and 24. The situation is even greater for girls under age 15, who are five times more likely to die from maternal causes (UNFPA, 2010). In addition, girls who are married young and pressured to have children before their bodies are fully developed are at greater risk for obstetric fistula, a debilitating medical condition often caused by prolonged or obstructed labor (the Population Council, 2004).

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases

According to UNICEF, girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are also more vulnerable to contracting life-threatening diseases as they are often given away in marriage to much older men who have an elevated chance of being HIV positive or having other sexually-transmitted infections because of prior sexual experience (AusAID, 2012). These married girls have frequent, unprotected sex with little ability to persuade their husbands to abstain or use a condom.



What can be done!

Listed below are some key recommendations that can help eradicate child marriage and mitigate its harmful effects on girls, their families and society:



Working directly with communities—women and girls, men and boys—is a powerful force to change attitudes, behaviors, and gender norms. Programs may encourage communities to discuss the underlying cultural norms that support child marriage, create committees to end child marriage, and improve communication between parents and children.

Judicial Review of Marriage Law No 1/1974 to change the marriage age. The Law stipulates that a girl cannot legally marry until she is 16 unless her father chooses her to marry at 15. However, in practice, a girl is often married off when she is considered 'physically mature', which can occur at a much younger age. Judicial review of marriage Law No. 1/1974 may reduce the prevalence of child marriage.

Engage elders, community leaders and religious figures. Child marriage is an especially sensitive issue for devoutly religious communities. While many religious leaders have claimed they disapprove of marrying underage girls, in practice, many oversee these unions evidenced by the high incidence of child marriage. It is therefore essential that elders and community leaders – and especially religious leaders – receive training on the adverse effects of child marriage. Given the influence of religion, approaching the issue through the enforcement of Sharia law may be an effective strategy.

Launch public education campaigns. The government can help begin changing behavior by raising awareness of the adverse effects of child marriage through trainings, workshops and other educational campaigns to reach all important sectors of society, from community leaders to parents of schoolchildren, and everyone in between.

References

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Website: www.ykesehatanperempuan.org
or

Email: ykesehatanperempuan@yahoo.com