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Chair of Gender Politics

Forced and Child Marriage:
towards the understanding and eradication of a social plague

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Alla Prof.ssa De Blasio,

per tutto il supporto offertomi durante questi mesi, senza il quale non avrei raggiunto questo obiettivo.

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Introduction

"Child, early and forced marriage is a harmful practice that violates, abuses or impairs human rights and is linked to and perpetuates other harmful practices and human rights violations."[1] As such, according to the United Nations' definition of child and forced marriage, it classifies as a human rights violation. In forced marriages one or both spouses do not or, when affected by physical disabilities or mental incapacities, cannot give free or valid consent to the marriage.[2] While it is true that both men and women, boys and girls are victims of child and forced marriage, the UN has firmly clarified that "such violations have a disproportionately negative impact on women and girls."[3]

"Forced marriages involve varying degrees of force, coercion or deception, ranging from emotional pressure by family or community members to abduction and imprisonment. Emotional pressure from a victim's family includes repeatedly telling the victim that the family's social standing and reputation are at stake, as well as isolating the victim or refusing to speak to her. In more severe cases, the victim can be subject to physical or sexual abuse, including rape."[4] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations on 10 December 1948, and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, entered into force on 9 December 1964, are precious guidelines on the topic of forced marriage and consent. While article 16(1) of the UDHR reaffirms the right to marriage for "men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion"[5], article 16(2) states that "Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses" [6]. Both of these articles were included in the 1964 Convention, which states in article 1 that "no marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person after due publicity and in the presence of the authority competent to solemnize the marriage and of witnesses, as prescribed by law." [7]

Child marriage can be defined as "the marriage of a person under 18 years of age."[8] As previously specified, this is a human rights violation as well, which, according to the United Nations Population Fund

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[1] United Nations, "Resolution 71/175, 2016 - Child, early and forced marriage", un.org, 19 December 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/175

[2] Forced Marriage Unit, "Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2017", gov.uk, 16 March 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730155/2017_FMU_statistics_FINAL.pdf

[3] Ibid.

[4] Stop Violence Against Women - A Project of the Advocates for Human Rights, "Forced and Child Marriage", stopvaw.org, http://www.stopvaw.org/forced_and_child_marriage

[5] United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages", ohchr.org, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/minimumageformarriage.aspx

[6] Ibid.

[7] United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages", ohchr.org, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/minimumageformarriage.aspx

[8] National Children's and Youth Law Centre, "End Child Marriage - Australia", lawstuff.org.au, May 2013,, http://www.lawstuff.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/15759/End-Child-Marriage-NCYLC-Research-Report.pdf

(UNFPA) "threatens girls' lives and health, and it limits their future prospects."[9]. As a matter of fact, girls who are victims of child marriage are more likely to be illiterate and to become pregnant at an early age, thus facing the complications of early pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood.[10]

The practice of child marriage remains outlaw in various countries all over the world, but "despite laws against it, the practice remains widespread: globally, one in every five girls is married, or in union, before reaching age 18. In the least developed countries, that number doubles – 40 percent of girls are married before age 18, and 12 percent of girls are married before age 15."[11]

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[9] UNFPA, "Child marriage - Overview", unfpa.org,, https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

I. A history of abuse: historical and descriptive elements of the obligation to marry

1.1 Gender inequality and poverty

Each year 10 million girls under the age of 18 are forced to marry. The causes that lead to forced marriage are complex and related to individual circumstances and contexts. The practice is driven by factors that include gender inequality, poverty, negative traditional or religious norms, weak enforcement of laws, and the pressure caused by conflict and natural disasters.[12]

Although gender roles differ between cultures and societies, gender norms generally work to the disadvantage of women of all ages. Girls and women still occupy a lower social status than men, and because women do not have the same standing as their male peers, they are not perceived as having the same skills or capabilities. This perception leads to discrediting both the role of women and the value of educating them and providing economic opportunities, inevitably contributing to the view that a 'good marriage' is the most important way to secure a girl's well-being.[13]

Gender inequalities also contribute to early marriage through their impact on formal legal systems. Countries like Nigeria and India, which have the highest number of child marriage, also have unequal laws of consent for boys and girls, reinforcing the idea that it is suitable for girls to marry at an earlier age than boys. Girls are pushed out of their homes and into marriage as they are seen as an economic burden. For families facing chronic poverty, marriage often seems like the best way to safeguard girls' futures and lighten their economic burden. Parents often feel like they have no other option than to watch their daughters marry and these ideas are communicated to their children. It is a common belief among parents with economic struggles that the only way to see their daughters happy and well-raised is to marry them off to a wealthy man who can provide them with better economic possibilities. In communities where economic transactions are integral to the marriage process, especially in rural or developing environments, a dowry or "bride price" is often seen as an income for families. In some cases parents decide to marry their daughters at a younger age to avoid incurring in more expensive dowries caused by old age.[14]

Communities whose female components are valued and are included as productive members of society have lower rates of child marriage. Educating girls, giving them the tools to build their life and skills does not only reduce child marriage, but also increases their economic productivity, resulting in a win-win situation.[15] These skills further promote also a change in the understanding, evaluation and improvement of

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[12] Juliette Myers, Rowan Harvey, "Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education", plan-uk.org, 2011, https://plan-uk.org/file/breaking-vows-efm-3462225pdf/download?token=RlE5iobL

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Girls Brides, "Poverty - Girls Not Brides", *Girls Not Brides*, 2019, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/poverty/

girls' value and participation in the labour market, consequently decreasing the perception of forced marriages as a welcome income for the aim of economic security. Economic development programmes should be conceived to provide girls with abilities for employment and entrepreneurship, further stretching to focus on saving and investing in safe places where their resources are not linked to or dependant on the approval of male relatives. The target of such programmes should focus on girls at risk of child marriage and already married adolescents, as these populations usually lack the access to economic opportunities. Through girls-targeting initiatives unmarried girls can work towards the reduction of the economical burden of the family that would lead to an hypothetical forced marriage, while married girls could contribute to the families' wealth and well-being. Flexible or part-time hours, conveniente locations and provision for safe transportations are all at the centre of the agenda towards women economic empowerment.[16]

Being child marriage often driven by economic causes, programmes and initiatives with the aim of providing income-generation opportunities or financial support positively contribute to the protection of girls from child marriage. Providing school enrolment can indeed offer protection to girls, but financial barriers may still prevent parents from enrolling their daughters. Loans, subsidies for school fees, scholarships can help families override such obstacles, further helping the shift of social norms around appropriate roles for both girls and boys for economic stability. [17]

[16] "Taking Actions To Address Child Marriage: The Role Of Different Sectors", *Girlsnotbrides.Org*, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/4.-Addressing-child-marriage-Econ-growth.pdf
[17] Ibid.

1.2 Negative traditional and religious practices and failure to enforce laws

Among the causes that justify forced marriage, one of the most prominent is linked to negative social and religious norms. Many cultural beliefs include the importance for the family to preserve and value the family's "honor" and the girls' "virginity", leading to parents pushing their daughters into forced marriages. Girls are usually married to older men according to the belief that their husband will provide a safeguard against "immoral or "inappropriate" behaviours, or that a marriage could consolidate relations between families, settle disputes and sealing deals over lands and properties.[18][19]

At the heart of religious forms of resistance, usually propelled by religious leaders, lie seven key drivers of religious resistance:

1. Marriage is seen as a religious ritual. Many religious communities and their leaders have established their value and identity thanks the role of arranging and performing marriages. Such leaders oppose political and legal regulations as this would cause a loss of status, money and influence.

2. Religious leaders are not always aware of the negative consequences of child marriage. The lack of awareness underpins their ongoing willingness to perform child marriage ceremonies and their opposition to legal regulations.

3. All the most widespread religions, like Islam and Hinduism have stories and texts that have been interpreted and used in order to support forms of child marriage. Hence, religious leaders are validated in their efforts to counter measures to end child marriage as they believe, supported by their community, that their religion requires it.

4. In an alarming majority of regions and religions, religious leader resistance is shaped by a religiously-driven condemnation of premarital sex, contraception and pregnancy befor or oustide of marriage. Religious leaders are thus led to allow and endorse child marriage as the solution to the situation.

5. Child marriage upholds and manifests patriarchal power, which many religious leaders fear and resist losing. The focus on marriage and family is a key concepts of patriarchal religions, all having a history of ordaining men as the ones having and retaining power.

6. In the light of the sexual taboos and patriarchy that are often underpinned by religion and religious leaders, child marriage can be seen as a mean of parental protection. This approach to security may quickly escalate in fragile, high-risk or conflict-ridden spaces where parental concerns for their children's increase.

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[18] Girls Not Brides, "About child marriage", girlsnotbrides.org, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/

[19] Girls Not Brides, "Child marriage around the world: Malawi", girlsnotbrides.org, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/malawi/

7. The resistance of religious leaders is strongly linked to the waves of religious fundamentalism. When religion is used as a dominant identity marker, social change is conceived as an attack on religion, leading to perceive social issues as proxy for an "anti religious agenda" aiming for multiple issues. [20]

Several religious organizations, such as AWET (Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust), SIS (Sisters in Islam) and IRW (Islamic Relief Worldwide) are currently working towards the eradication of active religious opposition to the creation of a legal framework against child marriage.[21] In Ghana the Youth Harvest Foundation links the Christian community of the country with the Muslim community, in the effort of reducing the impact of child marriage by supporting sexual and reproductive health and empowering the educational skills of young women. Similarly, Pakistan's Peace Foundation brings together Hindu and Muslim people with the aim of facing the issue in the least developed and rural areas of the country. World Vision International, on the other hand, is a Christian organization that gathers religious leaders from more than 45 countries, aiming at establishing an international and interreligious debate to bring together visions and objectives. The main actions of these organization revolve around few points, the first being respecting religious leaders' agency and the value of religion in order to establish a conversation and try to change together over time common practices. A positive framework approach, which allows religious leaders to identify themselves as potential assets with a championing identity, rather than criticizing the existing asset without providing an alternative approach.[22]

Interreligious communication and forums are of the uttermost importance, as only a comprehensive dialogue can lead to a comprehensive approach that is viable in different environments. Building critical thinking and critical masses, engaging with religious texts and discussing about sex and sexuality are all key points in engaging religious communities to swing in favor of ending child marriage without attacking their beliefs or values, as religion has already demonstrated to historically be key for social changes.[23] [24]

[20] "What Lies Beneath? Tackling The Roots Of Religious Resistance To Ending Child Marriage", *Girlsnotbrides.Org*, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/W11839-SU-Theology-Report.pdf
[21] Ibid.
[22] "AWET", *Awet.Org.Zw*, http://awet.org.zw/
[23] "Sisters In Islam: Press Statements " Child Marriage", *Sistersinislam.Org.My*, https://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?cat.41
[24] "Gender Justice", *Islamic-Relief.Org*, https://www.islamic-relief.org/
[25] Engaging Religious Leaders To Address Child Marriage: Challenges, Benefits And Strategies https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/events/learning-series/challenges-into-opportunities-religious-leaders-child-marriage/

1.3 Sexual and reproductive health: abuse and forced sexual relations

When girls get married at a young age, abuse and violence become part of their everyday life, more so than women who get married later on in their life. Violence and abuse are to be recognised not only on a physical but also on a psychological level, which is even more difficult to quantify. Social implications include marginalisation from society, linked to a lack of support systems which ultimately leads to a "lack of confidence and low self-esteem which in turn increases their powerlessness and vulnerability to poverty".[25] Young married girls experience significant lower rates of sexual and reproductive health when compared to their unmarried counterparts. In addition to an already critical situation, the lack of education prevents them from receiving proper sexual education in schools, leading in a higher sexual risks exposure and a poorer knowledge about safe sex and contraceptives. The main health risks young brides can incur into include obstructed pregnancies, obstetric fistula and HIV contraction.[26]

Despite improvements in the field of expanding access to HIV-prevention tools and treatments, the epidemic is worsening among young women. The general belief that marriage also aims to protect, or is effective in the effort of doing so, girls from HIV infection condones and encourages the practice of child marriage while recent scientific research show that indeed child wives are more vulnerable to HIV contraction.[27] Contributory factors include early marriage age, large marriage age gap, high rates of unprotected sexual activity, restricted access to information and negotiating powers. Marriage also increases sexual activity and the possibility of exposure and danger, particularly as many young brides are unable to negotiate safe sex (even when in possess of information on how to protect themselves) and are under pressure to prove their fertility. The lack of recognition and the reluctance to address the vulnerability to HIV of child brides is both negligent and discriminatory. Historical and traditional HIV prevention strategies focus on the "ABC" approach: abstinence, being faithful and using condoms. The flaw in this approach is clear to see, as many women are simple not in a position to negotiate their willingness to have sex or to use condoms, hence the ABC approach can be considered as a viable option only when implemented as a part of a framework approach that aims to rebalance gender biases.[28]

A United Nations publication on HIV and young people revealed that in Pune, India, "a quarter of women in an antenatal clinic had contracted a sexually transmitted infection (STI) and about percent were already HIV positive".[29] The majority were married, and more than 90% of them reported having sexual relations with their husband exclusively.[30] UNAID data shows that around "60 percent of new HIV infections in Africa [...] are among young women aged 15-24, and in parts of Africa and the Caribbean

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[25] Juliette Myers, Rowan Harvey, "Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education", plan-uk.org, 2011, https://plan-uk.org/file/breaking-vows-efm-3462225pdf/download?token=RlE5iobL

[26] Ibid.

[27] Judith Bruce, *Child Marriage In The Context Of The HIV Epidemic* (New York: Population Council, 2005).

[28] "Women And HIV", *Unaids.Org*, https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2019_women-and-hiv_en.pdf

[29] United Nations, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Youth Report HIV/AIDS And Young People* (New York, n.d.).

[30] Ibid.

young women are nearly six times more likely to be infected with HIV than young men".[31] These data mean that girls and women often engage in unprotected sex while being unable to access relevant or sufficient information and having little power to protect themselves or to negotiate. The UN Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa identified three main factors underpinning women and girls' vulnerability to HIV infection, being a "general culture of silence around sexuality", "exploitative transaction and intergenerational sex" and "violence against women".[32] When this factors conjoin with poverty, rooted gender inequality or myths and wrong beliefs, women become even more vulnerable to HIV infection. Such wrong beliefs include the tradition of "widow cleansing", especially rooted in Africa and Asia. This tradition require widows to have intercourse with stranger or relative, while other cultures force widows to marry a dead husband's brother; as tradition are expected to work, such traditional norms are likely to be passed to new generations.[33]

Complications arising from childbirth and pregnancy are among the leading causes of death for adolescent girls globally.[34] Hypertensive disorders, haemorrhage, systemic infections and obstructed labour are more frequently observed in girls aged from 15 to 19 than those older, and the rate dramatically increases for girls under 15 years old.[353637] In addition to childbirth complications, the difficulty in planning a pregnancy and restrictive abortion laws lead young mothers to resort to clandestine and unqualified abortion providers, thus increasing the potential risks. The data is generally unreliable, but Guttmacher institute estimates that between "8-11% of all maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortion".[38]

A systematic study on childbirth conducted by and Neal found that around 86% of cases of obstetric fistula occur in girls under the age of 18,[39] and a study conducted by the World Bank in partnership with the ICRW (International Center for Research on Women", calculated that over a "15-year period an estimated 2.1 million children could survive past age five and 3.6 million children could avoid stunting if child marriage was eliminated".[40]

[31] United Nations, UN General Assembly, *Declaration of Committment on HIV/AIDS: five years later - Report of the Secretary General*

[32] UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNIFEM, *Women And HIV/AIDS: Confronting The Crisis* (Geneva and New York)

[33] "Ending Child Marriage: A Guide For Global Policy Action", *Unfpa.Org*, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/endchildmarriage.pdf

[34] WHO, *Global Health Estimates 2015: Deaths By Cause, Age, Sex, By Country And By Region, 2000–2015* (Geneva, 2016).

[35] "Girlhood, Not Moterhood: Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy", *Unfpa.Org*, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Girlhood_not_motherhood_final_web.pdf

[36] Ganchimeg T, Ota E, Morisaki N, Laopaiboon M, Lumbiganon P, Zhang J, Yamdamsuren B, Temmerman M, Say L, Tuncalp O,Vogel JP, Souza JP, Mori R, on behalf of the WHO Multicountry Survey on Maternal Newborn Health Research Network. Pregnancy and childbirth outcomes among adolescent mothers: a World Health Organization multicountry study.

[37] Sarah Neal et al., *The Causes Of Maternal Mortality In Adolescents In Low And Middle Income Countries: A Systematic Review Of The Literature*, 2016.

[38] Susheela Singh et al., "Abortion Worldwide 2017: Uneven Progress And Unequal Access", *Guttmacher.Org*, 2017, https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/abortion-worldwide-2017.pdf.

[39] Neal, S., 2016, The causes of maternal mortality in adolescents in low and middle income countries: a systematic review of the literature, BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth (2016)

[40] Wodon. Q., N. Onagoruwa, and N. John, 2017, Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Child Health and Nutrition, Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.

The only way to move forward is through acknowledging where and how programmes aiming for the prevention of the development or spreading of such complications have failed in reaching vulnerable young women. Rebalancing rooted gender norms and codes of conduct on sexual relationships and gender inequalities is the key focus in order to reduce girls' vulnerability, also aiming to prevent the marginalization and the stigma affecting young women in need of treatments.[41]

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[41] "Ending Child Marriage: A Guide For Global Policy Action", *Unfpa.Org*, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/endchildmarriage.pdf

II. The aftermath: consequences of forced and child marriage

2.1 Adolescent pregnancy, early motherhood and health issues

"Women who are married as children are far more vulnerable to the profound health risks of early pregnancy and childbirth."[42] This is what the World Health Organisation stated in 2016 while addressing the connection between childhood, forced marriage and adolescent pregnancies and early motherhood. These pregnancies are often the result of forced sexual relations which occur immediately after the marriage; most of the time, they are unwanted and pose life-threatening risks for young girls all over the world.[43] At times, early pregnancies can be ascribed to an "expectation to prove their fertility and get pregnant"[44] of their partners immediately after they are married. Approximately "9 out of 10 births to young girls happen within marriage" and this is strictly connected to the fact that "married girls are in most cases expected to become pregnant immediately or soon after marriage"[45], which elevates the chances of girls inevitably experiencing maternity within marriage. Due to their young age, complications during pregnancy and childbirth are not unusual and are listed among the main causes of death for girls aged 15-19 in developing countries;[46] as a matter of fact, "adolescents aged 15–19 years are twice as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth as women aged 20 and over"[47], whereas "adolescents under 15 are five times more likely."[48] All these negative factors suffered by mothers have strong repercussions on their infant newborns, who are often not expected to survive[49]: indeed, aside from death, infants born to young mothers can suffer from various complications such as "preterm birth, low birth weight and asphyxia."[50]

Early pregnancies are not the only consequences of forced sexual relations within a forced marriage. Sexually transmitted infections such as HIV are also common and young girls are also more likely to contract HIV in comparison to unmarried girls of the same age due to their lack of knowledge about contraception and a "heightened sexual exposure, often with an older spouse who by virtue of age is more at

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[42] World Health Organisation, "Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries", who.int, 2016 http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/246283/9789241565042-eng.pdf?sequence=1

[43] Equality Now, "Protecting The Girl Child", cloudfront.net, 2014, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/equalitynow/pages/300/attachments/original/1527597531/Protecting_the_Girl_Child_1.pdf?1527597531

[44] Childmothers, "Child, early & forced marriage", childmothers.org, http://www.childmothers.org/issues/forced-marriage/index.html

[45] World Health Organisation, "Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries", who.int, 2016, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/246283/9789241565042-eng.pdf?sequence=1

[46] Ibid.

[47] World Health Organisation, "Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries", who.int, 2016, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/246283/9789241565042-eng.pdf?sequence=1

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

risk of being HIV positive."[51] More specifically, young forcibly married girls are more likely to contract HIV for three main reasons: (i) early sexual debut; (ii) frequent unprotected sexual activity, in part due to the pressure to, once again, demonstrate the girl's fertility; and, (iii) the fact that the men these young girls are married to have often had multiple sexual partners, resulting in a higher risk of HIV infections.[52] It was estimated that, in 2016, "2.1 million adolescents aged 10–19 years were living with HIV"[53]; when considering this same age group, data report that "globally, there are roughly 250,000 new HIV infections among adolescents […] each year, which translates to about 29 every hour. Of these new infections, 65% occur among adolescent girls."[54]

Adolescent pregnancy negative effects also extend to the social and economic context, both for them and their communities. Unmarried pregnant adolescents usually have to cope with the stigma of their condition, further compounded by rejections by the rejection of parents, relatives and peers and threats of violence. In addition to that, young women that become pregnant before 18 are more likely to experience violence, both within marriage or any relationship. Furthermore, an estimated 5-33% of girls aged between 15 to 24 years old are found to drop out of school because of early pregnancies.[55] Based on their subsequent lower education attainment, to be further analysed in the following chapters, they are trapped in perpetuating circles of poverty, as child marriage and adolescent childbearing reduces future earning of the individual by an estimated 9%. This economic burden also reflects on a national level, as countries lose the annual income that young women would have earned over their lifetimes.[56]

Among the international organizations, the United Nations did not remain silent on this topic. In 2016, resolution 71/175 urged governments to "respect and protect the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health through the development and enforcement of policies and legal frameworks and the strengthening of health systems, including health information systems, that make universally accessible and available quality, gender-responsive, adolescent-friendly health services, sexual and reproductive health-care services, information and commodities, HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment and care, mental health services and nutrition interventions."[57] Despite this, data and statistics on this situation remain highly alarming worldwide.

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[51] Juliette Myers, Rowan Harvey, "Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education", plan-uk.org, 2011, https://plan-uk.org/file/breaking-vows-efm-3462225pdf/download?token=RlE5iobL

[52] Girls Not Brides, "Child marriage and HIV: Thematic brief", girlsnotbrides.org, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Child-marriage-and-HIV-18th-July-clean.pdf

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] "Adolescent Pregnancy", *Who.Int*, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy

[56] "Adolescent Pregnancy", *Who.Int*, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy.

[57] United Nations, "Resolution 71/175, 2016 - Child, early and forced marriage", un.org, 19 December 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/175

2.2 Education: tool or contributory cause?

Forced marriage and education are mutually connected. A concerningly high number of girls tend to drop out of school before they get married or immediately after, when "marital or domestic demands increase."[58] According to statistics, "A girl's level of education, […] affect[s] the likelihood that she will become a child bride"[59] and "tend[s] to lessen the probability that girls will marry before their eighteenth birthday."[60] Indeed, a study conducted by the International Center for Research on Women remarked that education is "the most important factor associated with child marriage"[61], more specifically, transition to secondary-level education is crucial in a girl's life when considering the effect that an early marriage can have on her future possible career aspiration:[62] it has been estimated that "child marriage reduces girls' expected earnings in adulthood by 9%"[63] and the World Bank has carried out a study in 15 countries in 2017 which revealed that "if women had not married early, the gains in earnings and productivity would have been $26 billion."[64]

Education plays a key role in preventing young girls from getting married too early: indeed, girls with no education at all are three times more likely to get married by the age of 18 compared to girls of their same age who have completed secondary or higher education cycles.[65]

The problem concerning education mainly lies in "the cost, quantity, quality and content of schooling"[66], which becomes a true obstacle even when educational opportunities are perfectly available: the aforementioned factors are essential in forcing a girl to drop out of school and get married, especially if the learning environment is not "girl-friendly"[67], meaning it is not "safe, accessible and inspiring."[68]

Throughout this paragraph, data form the World Bank 2017 Global Synthesis Report on Economic Impacts of Child Marriage, and other related documents, will be the main sources of study as to analyse the issue in its entirety.

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[58] Girls Not Brides, "Why governments must address child marriage to achieve quality education for girls", girlsnotbrides.org, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Child-marriage-brief-for-governments-attending-GPE-meeting_EN-Jan-2018.pdf

[59] UNFPA, "Marrying Too Young - End Child Marriage", unfpa.org, 2012, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MarryingTooYoung.pdf

[60] Ibid.

[61] Juliette Myers, Rowan Harvey, "Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education", plan-uk.org, 2011, https://plan-uk.org/file/breaking-vows-efm-3462225pdf/download?token=RlE5iobL

[62] Ibid.

[63] Girls Not Brides, "Why governments must address child marriage to achieve quality education for girls", girlsnotbrides.org, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Child-marriage-brief-for-governments-attending-GPE-meeting_EN-Jan-2018.pdf

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Juliette Myers, Rowan Harvey, "Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education", plan-uk.org, 2011, https://plan-uk.org/file/breaking-vows-efm-3462225pdf/download?token=RlE5iobL

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

Child marriage and early childbirth have proven to have a significant impact on the ability of adolescent girls to go to school. There is proof in some countries of almost a binary option to either go to school or get married early. Child marriage decreases educational chances for women, and the possibility of early marriage may be minimized by better educational and job opportunities for girls. That is why Brown[69], a scholar in gender studies, recommends looking at academic strategies to end child marriage, including measures to reduce girls' cost of transfer to high school. At the same time, the effect of child marriage on education has been carefully measured by very few studies. The main difficulty is that a girl (or her parents) sometimes mutually decide to marry early and probably drop out of school. Furthermore, child marriage can depend on the educational prospects of a girl, regardless of the mechanisms that affect those prospects. Simply put, the fact that in some nations, for many women, the choices are to pursue formal schooling or marriage, but not both, suggests that the causality between marriage and schooling goes both ways. Traditional gender roles and expectations influence educational prospects, especially in countries without compulsory education requirements. These may also be influenced by the academic abilities and interests of a child. For example, girls who may be poorer academically may face less negative effects from not pursuing their education (for example in terms of future earnings) and may have greater motivation to keep studying compared to girls who are academically stronger.

Such women may be more willing to marry early, or their parents may be more likely to have them marry early. Women who are less interested in pursuing their studies for other reasons may also marry early and may have dropped out of school in the absence of marriage. There is also a chance (as with any estimate) of the *missing factor* bias. Poor quality of education, for example, can lead to both abandonment and child marriage. The lack of adequate sanitation facilities for menstruating girls at school could impede their continuing education. Cultural practices may also play a role and may not be found in surveys. In addition to that, secondary schools are often less physically open to women. Transportation to and from school can cost money that girls or their families do not have. Education might also be hindered by the perceived safety of their families when children travel through new villages and towns, something that parents may not accept[70]. The first approach to evaluating the effect of child marriage and early puberty on educational attainment is to look at the answers to questions about why women have dropped out of school. In the literature, two approaches have been used to try to assess the effect of child marriage on schooling. The first approach is to rely on the reasons given by parents in the surveys for why their children have dropped out of school. The percentage of dropouts that tend to be due to child marriage or early pregnancy can then be determined. Based on data from the late 1990s for Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Togo[71], child marriages and early pregnancy account directly for between 5% and 33% of drop-outs for girls aged 15 to 24, depending on the country. Using similar data for Nigeria in 2006, Nguyen and

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[69] Gordon Brown, *Out Of Wedlock, Into School: Combating Child Marriage Through Education*, 2012.

[70] Priya Nanda et al., *Making Change With Cash? Impact Of A Conditional Cash Transfer Program On Girls' Education And Age Of Marriage In India*, 2016.

[71] Cynthia B. Lloyd and Barbara S. Mensch, "Marriage And Childbirth As Factors In Dropping Out From School: An Analysis Of DHS Data From Sub-Saharan Africa", Population Studies, 2008.

Wodon[72] found that child marriage (and to a lesser extent pregnancy) accounts for 15 to 20 percent of secondary-level dropouts, which are generally of the same order of magnitude. In addition, they show that if child marriage and early pregnancy could be eliminated, this could potentially reduce the gender gap in education by about half. The second approach relies on regression techniques with instrumental variables to measure the impact on girls ' education at the margins of child marriage.

Among other scholars, Field and Ambrus[73] used variability in puberty as the instrumental factor for age at first marriage, provided that in many cultural and religious traditions, like Bangladesh, women are often not allowed to marry until they reach puberty. In much of South Asia and parts of Africa, marriage-age social norms and the presumed gender role of a girl as a wife/mother are likely to play a more important role in determining the decision (most often made by the family) to marry rather than engaging in her education. However, this does not mean that, in the absence of child marriage, educational attainment would automatically increase or, more importantly, that higher educational attainment would, among other things, have a significant impact on future earnings, because the same social norms that led to child marriage could also restrict employment opportunities later in life, even in the absence of child marriage. This is so because child marriage and education are strongly linked to several endogenous factors of the community, rounding in a vicious circle. Nguyen and Wodon[74] use the current and historical prevalence of child marriage in Africa where a girl lives as a tool to note that, in the region, early marriage decreases the chance of schooling by 5.6 percentage points each year and the possibility of secondary school graduation by 6.5 percentage points, with an effect on the chances of at least any secondary education. At the same time, it must be understood that national projections can obscure local heterogeneity, also because of the difficulties encountered in gathering data. This is expressed in the study of three rural and predominantly Muslim communities in Burkina Faso by Gemignani and Wodon[75]. In one village, the inability to afford school is the main issue for households that do not send girls to secondary school. But in the other two villages, apart from the housing problems, the relationship between gender roles, religion and tradition plays a key role in restricting girls ' educational opportunities. There is a widespread perception in these two villages that adolescent girls should simply not go to public secondary schools. This heterogeneity also suggests that a desire to marry girls may lead to a dropout in these two villages, while a dropout for economic reasons may in some cases lead to a marriage at a young age in the first village.

The reasons given by parents in surveys for why their children have dropped out of school suggest that child marriage is a key factor. The following table provides a few examples of such measures in a subset of core countries.

[72] Nguyen, M. C., and Q. Wodon. Impact of Child Marriage on Educational Attainment in Latin America and the Caribbean. Education Global Practice. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2017

[73] Erica Field and Attila Ambrus, "Early Marriage, Age Of Menarche, And Female Schooling Attainment In Bangladesh", *Journal Of Political Economy*, 2008.

[74] Nguyen, M. C., and Q. Wodon. "Estimating the Impact of Child Marriage on Literacy and Education Attainment in Africa. Education Global Practice". Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2017

[75] Gemignani, R., and Q. Wodon. Socio-Economic and Religious Factors Leading to Child Marriage in Burkina Faso. Education Global Practice, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2017

Table 1.1: Child Marriage and Pregnancies as Reasons for Not Being in School or Dropping Out

Sample/Question		Share (%)
Egypt, 2012	Reason for dropping out, secondary/TVET level	Child marriage: 28%
Mali, 2013/14	Reason for not being in school, girls ages 14-17	Child marriage: 7%
Nepal, 2011	Reason for dropping out of school, girls ages 12-17	Child marriage: 32%
Niger, 2015	Reason for dropping out, secondary level	Child marriage: 23%
Nigeria, 2011	Reason for not being in school, secondary level	Child marriage: 11%
Uganda, 2012	Reason for dropping out, upper secondary level	Pregnancy: 23%

As seen in the table, child marriage and/or pregnancy in the case of Uganda where it is used as a proxy, accounts for a significant proportion of adolescent girls leaving school or not. Subjective parental perceptions of the reasons for leaving school may understate the role of child marriage. Indeed, survey questionnaires on the reasons why a girl may have dropped out of school often include response methods such as parents not willing to allow a daughter to continue her studies (which may mask a desire to have a daughter married) or a child not interested in further studies (which may mask a desire on the part of a girl to get married). As an example of additional data on why women would drop out, indicating a greater impact of child marriage and abortion on children, a similar question was asked in Uganda about the key reasons for leaving school principals. Pregnancy and child marriage together account for two-thirds of the main reasons for abandonment at secondary level (27.6% for child marriage and 40.2% for pregnancy). As noted by Wodon et al.[76], this is not strictly comparable to the Uganda estimate based on the parental responses provided in the table, because in the questionnaire, questions were asked to the Principals of some schools about the main reasons for dropping out for boys and girls overall and not the reason for each child. This may inflate the role of pregnancy and child marriage in drop-outs, since the main reason stated by the Principal does not need to be the reason for all girls leaving school. It confirms, however, that child marriage and pregnancy are key factors in Uganda as well as in many other countries.

Dividing data gathered from adolescent girls according to their age, schooling status and marriage is also useful in order to have a more comprehensive idea of the issue. Perlman et al.[77] suggested the idea of such typologies for Niger. Typologies may help to outline the types of programs that may help adolescent girls to continue learning, whether at school or out of school. Perlman et al. typology considers four target groups and can be applied to different data sets in slightly different ways depending on the age groups available. When using data from surveys, it makes sense to define groups as follows:

(1) Girls aged 15-16 still in school and not married;

(2) Girls aged 15-16 out of school but not yet married;

(3) Girls aged 17-19 still in school and not married;

(4) Married girls out of school.[78]

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[76] Quentin Wodon, Minh Cong Nguyen and Clarence Tsimpo, "Child Marriage, Education, And Agency In Uganda", *Feminist Economics*, 2015.

[77] Perlman, D., F. Adamu, and Q. Wodon, editors. Vulnerability of Adolescent Girls in Niger: Insights from Quantitative and Qualitative Research. Education Global Practice. Washington, DC: The World Bank

[78] Ibid.

These four target groups are not exhaustive of the population of girls aged 15-19, but stem from the fact that in many countries with a high prevalence of child marriage, relatively few girls who are not in school and older than 16 are not married, and even fewer girls of any age who are married are in school. In most countries, the results suggest that once a girl is married, it is often difficult for her to stay in school because the proportion of married girls in school is usually very low. Further analysis also suggests that child marriage may have a more negative impact on schooling at primary than secondary level.

More estimates have been created thanks to the regression technique, in order to analyse the negative impact that child marriage has on completion of education, as in the following table in which sub-Saharan Africa, the Latin America and Caribbean region and the South Asian region have been taken into consideration.

Table 1.2: Impact of Child Marriage on Secondary School Completion for Girls

	Latin America and Caribbean	Sub-Saharan Africa	South Asia
Married at 17	-0.045	-0.046	-0.049
Married at 16	-0.087	-0.078	-0.095
Married at 15	-0.124	-0.099	-0.137
Married at 14	-0.158	-0.112	-0.176
Married at 13	-0.187	-0.119	-0.210
Married at 12/earlier	-0.213	-0.123	-0.240

The calculation for secondary enrolment for sub-Saharan Africa shows that marriage at age 16 reduces the likelihood of completion of secondary education by 7.8 percentage points. The sooner a person is engaged, the greater the negative impact appears to be. Estimates in Table 1.2 for the Latin American and Caribbean region and South Asia are larger than for Africa, partly because enrolment and completion rates in secondary schools are also higher. Calculations thus support the results indicated by the parents as to why their daughters had dropped out of school, and child marriage plays a key role.

The fact that child marriage restricts a girl's education can have a number of consequences, including for her children. One of these effects applies to career earnings. Nevertheless, beyond the importance of learning to gain knowledge and improve life earnings, it is also important to develop social skills and networks, with girls marrying early and potentially missing from those opportunities.[79] Better education for mothers is also important for their children, with a strong effect on early childhood development[80]. In addition to that, also intergenerational consequences at work are also present, with early-married women appearing to be less likely to complete secondary education themselves. Current analyses of the literature by Kalamar et al.[81] indicate that initiatives to promote education, including cash transfers, school vouchers, free school supplies, cuts in school fees, teacher training and life skills curricula, are among the most likely to benefit. In some cases, data is contradictory, but in many cases, these approaches are shown to minimize or

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[79] UNICEF, "Ending Child Marriage: Progress And Prospects", 2014.
[80] Amina Denboba et al., *Stepping Up Early Childhood Development: Investing In Young Children For High Returns*, (World Bank Documents, 2016).
[81] Amanda M. Kalamar, Susan Lee-Rife and Michelle J. Hindin, "Interventions To Prevent Child Marriage Among Young People In Low- And Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review Of The Published And Gray Literature", *Journal Of Adolescent Health*, 2016.

at least increase the age of child marriage at first marriage. Estimates of the impact of education on child marriage suggest that keeping girls in school may indeed have a significant beneficial effect, and the results are clearly shown in the following table.[82]

Table 1.3: Impact of Girls' Education on Child Marriage and Early Childbearing

	Impact of an Additional Year of Educational Attainment (Beyond Primary) on child marriage	Impact of an Additional Year of Educational Attainment (Beyond Primary) on early childbearing
Bangladesh	-0.041	-0.060
Burkina Faso	-0.071	-0.107
Democratic Rep. of Congo	-0.046	-0.031
Egypt	-0.054	-0.024
Ethiopia	-0.054	-0.060
Malawi	-0.037	NS
Mali	-0.126	-0.075
Mozambique	-0.070	-0.030
Nepal	-0.039	-0.032
Niger	-0.054	-0.126
Nigeria	-0.031	-0.036
Pakistan	-0.034	-0.028
Republic of Congo	-0.082	-0.089
Uganda	-0.072	-0.070
Zambia	-0.108	-0.046

For example, the figures of -0,041 and -0,060 for Bangladesh indicate that each year of additional secondary education reduces the risk of marriage before the age of 18 by 4.1% points and the risk of having a first child before the age of 18 by 6.0% points in that region. The idea is that holding girls in school longer can be an effective way of preventing the age at which girls marry or have their first child.

At the international level, actions have been suggested and undertaken. In 2016, the United Nations enlisted lack of education "among the root causes of child, early and forced marriage"[83], a phenomenon which "disproportionately affects girls who have received little or no formal education and is itself a significant obstacle to educational opportunities for girls and young women, in particular girls who are forced to drop out of school owing to marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and/or childcare responsibilities."[84] In the same resolution, the point was made that "educational opportunities are directly related to the empowerment of women and girls, their employment and economic opportunities and their active participation in economic, social and cultural development, governance and decision-making."[85] States were encouraged to "promote and protect the right of women and girls to equal access to education through enhanced emphasis on free and quality primary and secondary education, including catch-up and literacy education for those who have not received formal education or have left school early, including because of marriage and/or childbearing"[86] and to "remove barriers to education, including by ensuring that married

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[82] Wodon, Q., and A. Yedan. Impact of Child Marriage and Early Childbirths on Population Growth. Education Global Practice. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2017

[83] United Nations, "Resolution 71/175, 2016 - Child, early and forced marriage", un.org, 19 December 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/175

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

girls and boys, pregnant girls and women and young parents continue to have access to schooling, improving access to quality formal education and skills development, especially for those living in remote or insecure areas, improving the safety of girls at and on the way to and from school, providing safe and adequate sanitation, including for menstrual hygiene management, and adopting policies to prohibit, prevent and address violence against children, especially girls."[87]

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[87] United Nations, "Resolution 71/175, 2016 - Child, early and forced marriage", un.org, 19 December 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/175.

2.3 Honor-based violence

Honor-based violence (HBV) has attracted global attention and has cross-national relevance.[88] [89] An estimated 5,000 honor killings take place around the world every year.[90] HBV consists of threats or mental and physical abuse and, in extreme cases, even murder, and may occur when a girl or a woman breaks or is suspected of breaking the normative systems that her family adheres to.[91] [92] Honorary norms are part of the lives of many people who have different religious or secular beliefs, as well as differences in ethnicity, socio-economic status, language and country of origin and residence. Violence, most often against women, can be committed by the closest family members, making the violation of trust and the consequences of this type of violence unquestionably profond for the family system.[93]

Honor-based violence is considered as a violation of the human rights, as the crime includes both the kind of abuse committed by the perpetrators and the excuses used by perpetrators to justify their actions. In the context of honor, what is at stake is "women's chastity, family loyalty, high social esteem and, if necessary, the defense of reputation through violence. [...] That right and allegiance to pride must be earned through correct behavior (defined by local customs) and the reputation of a man and his family (especially the women of the family) must be maintained and defended". Being also known as 'honor-based abuse', HBV is often mistaken for domestic abuse: the difference lies in the fact that honor-based violence "is committed with some degree of approval and/or collusion from family and/or community members, in response to perceived immoral/shameful behaviour, which is deemed to have breached the honor code of the family or community."[94] [95]

Crime types associated with HBV may be of different types. Sex-selective abortion and female infanticide are strongly linked to the perception of the woman as less important than the man, a belief that leads to abort or kill an unborn female or a little girl. While Western countries have managed to tackle the problem, other countries still lack the legal framework and/or the ability to enforce such laws. In addition to

[88] Korteweg, A. C., & Yurdakul, G. (2010). *Religion, culture and the politicization of honour-related violence: A critical analysis of media and policy debates in Western Europe and North America.* Gender and Development Programme Paper Number 12: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

[89] Kulczycki, A., & Windle, S. (2011). Honor killings in Middle East and North Africa: A systematic review of the literature. *Violence Against Women.*

[90] World Health Organization. (2012). *Understanding and addressing violence against women.* Femicide: World Health Organization.

[91] Wilson, M., & Daly, M. (1992). The man who mistook his wife for chatell. In H. Barkow, J. L. Cosmides, & J. Tooby, *The adapted mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[92] Mojab, S., & Abdo, N. (2004). *Violence in the name of honour: Theoretical and political challenges*. Istanbul: Bilgi University Press.

[93] United Nations. (2011). *Impunity for domestic violence, 'honour killings' cannot continue—UN official.* UN News Center: United Nations.

[94] Ijzerman, H., & Cohen, D. (2011). Grounding cultural syndromes: Body comportment and values in honor and dignity cultures. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 41.*

[95] Herts Sunflower, "Honour based abuse, forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation", hertssunflower.org, https://www.hertssunflower.org/information-for-professionals/honour-based-abuse-forced-marriage-and-female-genital-mutilation.aspx

that, Western countries-based individuals may still shield the true reasons for abortion by travelling to other countries where the lack of regulations allows them to perpetrate such crimes. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is one of the most urgent issues related to HBV. FGM consists in surgical procedures aimed to the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia. It is estimated that about 140 million women and girls have experienced FGM globally, 92 million of them in Africa. FGM is particularly prevalent in Central African societies where the prevalence rate is 40%, but other countries still have not been able to perfectly cope the problem, as, for example, around 66,000 women have experienced FGM in the United Kingdom only. [96]The World Health Organization has classified FGM in four categories:

1. Type 1 — Clitoridectomy: Partial or total removal of the clitoris

2. Type 2 — Excision: Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minor, with or without excision of the labia majora.

3. Type 3 — Infibulation: Narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer labia, with or without the removal of the clitoris.

4. Type 4 — Other: All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for nonmedical purposes, e.g., pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterizing the genital area.[97]

FGM usually takes place at different ages, with no main guideline. However, the majority of such mutilations appear to happen between 5 and 8 years of age. [98]FGM has a major impact on the health and well-being of the victims of the operation. The treatment is extremely painful and anesthetic is often not used. As the treatment is often done by untrained clinicians under unsterilized settings, the technique may have serious health consequences at the time and later in life for survivors of various types of infections. In fact, approximately 10% of girls die from the immediate consequences of FGM and 25% face early death as a result of long-term consequences.[99] A girl who has been exposed to FGM may have trouble sitting, standing or walking; she may have issues with the bladder and may have problems urinating; thus, she will spend more time in the bathroom; menstrual complications are also normal. Women who have suffered from FGM may have a history of frequent or extended school absences and may be unwilling to be clinically tested. In order to support FGM, several common reasons are given. These include the fact that FGM "purifies" the girl and preserves her chastity, it fulfils religious requirements (even if no religious text has been found to support FGM), it create a sense of belonging to the community, it is often conceived as a rite of passage and it is wrongly believed to make childbirth safer for both the mother and the child.[100]

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[96] Roberts, Campbell and Lloyd, "Honor-Based Violence: Policing And Prevention", 2013.

[97] World Health Organization. (2012). *Female genital mutilation key facts.* Online at: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/

[98] UNICEF. (2010). *Global databases based on data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Demographic and Health Survey, and other national surveys, 1997–2009.* New York.

[99] United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office. (2011). *Multiagency practice guidelines: Female genital mutilation.*

[100] Ibidem

Honor-based violence is strongly related to forced marriage. Two of the main features of HBV in women's later life include the dowry and the bride price. While at first sight these may seem minor problems, at a closer look they entail psychological and social pressure. A dowry is a financial settlement to be paid by the bride's family to the groom's one in order to find a suitable marriage and to ensure it. In some cases the bride's family might fail to meet the dowry, and new brides can incur in abuse, harassment or even be killed because of the disrespect towards financial difficulties by the groom or his family. In a similar way, the bride price also allows the perpetration of HBV. Having the groom's family pay a sum to the bride's family allows the spreading of the belief that, through this transaction, the man can buy the woman and basically own her, leaving room for violence and abuse. [101]

In forced marriage, the woman (and sometimes the man) do not or cannot express their consent to the marriage. Coercion tools include mental, cognitive, physical and financial pressure to force the marriage, and in addition to that some individuals do not even know they have a free choice to choose a partner. In order for a marriage to be authentical, it must present three features: agreement (of both parties), selection (the free choice to accept or reject the marriage) and equality (between partners), while forced marriages often show none of these features.[102] Forced marriage has a significant impact on survivors and can lead to significant physical and emotional issues for victims. It entails physical and psychological violence as well as social isolation by the partner or his or her family. Emotional and physical violence may arise as the woman is beaten, embarrassed and forced to live as a part of the groom's family, away from her roots and family. Women are often prevented from socializing with other individuals, from having a job or simply educational opportunities. This is part of social isolation, which also includes in case the victim is unable to speak the language of the country she lives in, leading to being prevented from knowing her legal rights and being able to communicate with the legal authorities.[103] For this reason, social isolation is particularly rarely reported, and victims usually come to the attention of authorities because of other actions including escaping from home, drug abuse and self-harm. In addition to that, social pressure also has a predominant role. Not having the possibility to socialize, sometimes even to speak the language, or being prevented from leaving home or contacting support agencies because of the shame it would bring on the family, suicide is often the only solution to escape from such traps. In case women manage to leave the house and flee from their marriage, their parents and the groom's family often try to locate them and ensure their comeback also with the use of bounty hunters. The situation of the woman is further worsened as once they are reassured to their groom, they may become victim of physical and sexual attacks, ultimately culminating in their killing.[104] [105]

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[101] Roberts, Campbell and Lloyd, "Honor-Based Violence: Policing And Prevention", 2013.

[102] Gill, A., & Anthia, S. (2011). *Forced marriage: Introducing a social justice and human rights perspective.*

[103] Department for Children, Schools, and Families. (2009). *Forced marriage—Prevalence and service response*. Research Report No. DCSF-RR128.

[104] Gill, A., & Anthia, S. (2011). *Forced marriage: Introducing a social justice and human rights perspective.*

[105] Chesler, P. (2010). Worldwide trends in honor killings.

III. The next step: policies and initiatives of the present and of the future

3.1 Illiteracy and lack of education

As previously analysed, forced and child marriage is strongly linked to education. One of the subsections of SDG 4 reads: "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations".[106] One of the main goals in UNESCO agenda is making education global and inclusive, however gender inequality is an enormous disadvantage on that level and it puts the development of a country at serious risk. To prevent that from happening, the Education 2030 agenda approaches the danger of inequality ensuring that "girls and boys, women and men, not only gain access to and complete education cycles, but are empowered equally in and through education". UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women and UNHCR focused on this same goal and gathered in 2015 at the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea, acknowledging that great progress had been made but much more had to be made to get to having complete education for all. An urgent agenda was set, a single and renewed, ambitious and inclusive plan of action that guarantees peace, tolerance, human fulfilment and sustainable development, leaving no one behind and eradicating poverty, giving the chance of full employment to all. The agenda includes 12 years of free and equitable education, a quality primary and secondary education, 9 years of which are compulsory. The turning point to the current situation is inclusion and equity, which are to be obtained through addressing marginalization and exclusion.

Those are, in fact, the main obstacles to a full participation and achieving great learning outcomes. These goals are to be obtained by all or they cannot be considered as obtained. That is the reason behind the changes in education policies, which focus on the most disadvantaged ones. Gender sensitive policies will eliminate discrimination and violence in schools. They will give stronger inputs and measurements of progress are to be applied. Teachers are to be empowered, making sure they are qualified, motivated and supportive. These will foster creativity and knowledge, as well as providing basic literacy and numeracy and giving precious interpersonal and social skills. In this way, the adults and citizens of tomorrow are going to be able to make healthy, informed, conscious decisions and respond to the challenges of the world, an enormous gift to themselves and to others. Considering the world as a whole, gender parity seems to have been achieved at primary and secondary level education but not tertiary. That said, taking into examination regions or single countries it has been shown that there are still many children out of school, especially girls. Even though in the last 15 years the gender disparities have significantly decreased, the gap in primary

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[106] "SDG 4: Ensure Inclusive And Equitable Quality Education And Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities For All", *Sdgcompass.Org*, 2015, https://sdgcompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Goal_4.pdf.

education is still quite wide: 5 million more girls are out of school than boys. The disparity also varies from subject to subject. For example, regarding mathematics, girls are clearly at a disadvantage at upper primary level in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.[107] One of the main factors which determines girls' access to education is poverty: in Nigeria, only 4% of poor girls in the Western region can read, as opposed to 99% rich girls in the South-Eastern region.

In this global framework, child marriage is a key issue. Child brides are a lot more likely to drop out of school and more than 41,000 underage girls marry every day. The lack of education means the girls who do not complete their studies will not be able get a job; ending child marriage and allowing women to pursue jobs and careers could generate more than $500 billion each year.[108] Taking their children out of school to be wed is usually a decision made by parents for many different reasons. Mainly it is because the family cannot afford to keep their daughter in school, either for tuition fees or because the school is too far away and it is difficult to send their child there or because the sanitation facilities for menstruating girls are not well-equipped.[109] Girls getting married are often expected to drop out, so girls who do not receive quality education are 3 times more likely to be married at a young age than women with a secondary or higher level of education and over 60% of women between the ages of twenty and twenty-four with no education were married before eighteen.[110]

What also influences the decision of taking girls out of school has to do with religious and cultural views. In many countries girls' lack of education is determined by the traditional gender roles and expectations for them to be a wife and a mother, causing education not to be considered as necessary for them. Women are often seen as unfit to pursue certain careers which are more suited for men, such as leadership positions. In some countries, women are even regarded as less important and do not end up receiving proper education. The lack of schooling for women can be thought of as a cycle: not enough education leads to no empowerment or awareness and therefore nobody takes action to provide women and girls with education.[111]

Thus, the issue of girls not being granted education is very heterogeneous and varies between different countries and different cities. A concrete example is the study done in 2017 of three rural and Muslim majority villages in Burkina Faso. "In one village the inability to afford school is the main issue for households not sending girls to secondary school. But in the other two villages, apart from the affordability issues, the interactions between gender roles, faith, and culture play a fundamental role in limiting girls' education opportunities. There is a widespread perception in those two villages that adolescent girls should

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[107] "Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Review: Meeting Our Commitments To Gender Equality In Education", *Ungei.Org*, 2018, http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/GEM_Report_Gender_Review_2018(1).pdf.

[108] "Girls' Education", *World Bank*, 2017, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation#1.

[109] "Economic Impacts Of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report", *Documents.Worldbank.Org*, 2017, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530891498511398503/pdf/116829-WP-P151842-PUBLIC-EICM-Global-Conference-Edition-June-27.pdf.

[110] "Education - Girls Not Brides", *Girls Not Brides*, 2018, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/education/.

[111] "Gender Inequality And Its Causes", *Womenunlimited.Org*, 2017, https://www.womenunlimited.org/gender-inequality-and-its-causes/.

simply not go to public secondary schools. This heterogeneity also suggests that the desire to marry girls may lead to drop-outs in these two villages, while drop-out for economic reasons may in some cases lead to marriage at a young age in the first village."[112]

[112] "Economic Impacts Of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report", *Documents.Worldbank.Org*, 2017, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530891498511398503/pdf/116829-WP-P151842-PUBLIC-EICM-Global-Conference-Edition-June-27.pdf.

3.2 Social and political initiatives: the role of the United Nations

Child marriage has always been at the centre of the international agenda. The United Nations are strongly committed to the eradication of the issue, further propelling the efforts through the creation of CSW, the Committee on the Status of Women. While dealing with several topics concerning the well-being, empowerment and self-affirmation of women, the agenda constantly includes as a key topic the one of forced and child marriage. [113]

The issue of forced marriage was first addressed officially by the United Nations in 1995, during the aforementioned 'Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace' in Beijing, which led to the creation of the 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action'. In this document, annex II, chapter IV, section D - 'Violence against women', strategic objective D.3. - 'Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking', article 130 (b)[114] urges governments to "Take appropriate measures to address the root factors"[115] of women trafficking, "including external factors, that encourage trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of commercialized sex, forced marriages and forced labour in order to eliminate trafficking in women, including by strengthening existing legislation with a view to providing better protection of the rights of women and girls and to punishing the perpetrators, through both criminal and civil measures[.]"[116]

In the early 2010s the issue became relevant once more in the views of the United Nations. In 2013, Resolution 68/148 used for the first time the term "Child, early and forced marriage"[117], which later became the official wording for the topic worldwide. The Resolution, adopted on December 18th, 2013, was the first step towards the eradication of forced marriage around the world: it solicited to convene on that same session a "panel discussion on child, early and forced marriage worldwide"[118] and requested the Secretary-General to "prepare an informal summary report on the panel discussion."[119] The following year, Resolution 69/156 addressed for the first time the "harmful"[120] nature of forced and child marriage, its connection to "deep-rooted gender inequalities"[121], and its role in preventing education and opportunities for girls.[122] The majority of the solutions proposed in Resolution 69/156 were considered again for inclusion two years later for Resolution 71/175 and expanded. This document contains important solutions proposed by the United

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[113] "Commission On The Status Of Women", *UN Women*, https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw.

[114] United Nations, "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", un.org, 15 September 1995, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] United Nations, "Resolution 68/148, 2013 - Child, early and forced marriage", un.org, 18 December 2013, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/148

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] United Nations, "Resolution 69/156, 2014 - Child, early and forced marriage", undocs.org, 18 December 2014, http://undocs.org/A/RES/69/156

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

Nations, among which there are a) "raising awareness of the harmful consequences of child, early and forced marriage, including among men and boys"[123]; b) the encouragement of "relevant United Nations entities and agencies, regional and sub regional organizations, within their respective mandates, civil society and other relevant actors and human rights mechanisms to continue to collaborate with Member States in developing and implementing strategies and policies at the national, regional and international levels to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage, as well as to support those who were married as girls and boys"[124]; c) requesting "States to promote and protect the right of women and girls to equal access to education through enhanced emphasis on free and quality primary and secondary education, including catch-up and literacy education for those who have not received formal education or have left school early, including because of marriage and/or childbearing."[125] These three clauses show how Resolution 71/175 stands today as the most complete UNGA resolution on the topic of child, early and forced marriage.

One of the main point upon which Resolution 71/175 is based is the idea that "deep-rooted gender inequalities and stereotypes, harmful practices, perceptions and customs, and discriminatory norms are not only obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights and the empowerment of all women and girls but are also among the root causes of child, early and forced marriage, and that the persistence of child, early and forced marriage places children, in particular the girl child, at greater risk of being exposed to and encountering various forms of discrimination and violence throughout their lives"[126]

In the same years when the United Nations adopted the resolutions on child, early and forced marriage, many organisations also theorised and devised different ways and plans to bring the problem to an end. For instance, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) teamed up with the global partnership 'Girls Not Brides' in order to evaluate programs and strategies specifically devised to "delay or prevent child marriage."[127] This study led to the definition of five strategies implemented in four programs, called "Promising Programs".[128]

The five strategies are:

a)   "Empower girls with information, skills and support networks";

b)   "Educate and rally parents and community members";

c)   "Enhance girls' access to a high-quality education";

d)   "Provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families";

e)   "Encourage supportive laws and policies".[129]

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[123] United Nations, "Resolution 71/175, 2016 - Child, early and forced marriage", un.org, 19 December 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/175

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

[127] International Center for Research on Women, "Solutions to End Child Marriage", icrw.org, https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/19967_ICRW-Solutions001-pdf.pdf

[128] Ibid.

[129] International Center for Research on Women, "Solutions to End Child Marriage", icrw.org, https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/19967_ICRW-Solutions001-pdf.pdf

These strategies were recognised as common elements in the 'Promising Programs', which were actually carried out in four States (Ethiopia, Egypt, India and Senegal) in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[130] The programs, called 'Berhane Hewan', 'Ishraq', 'Maharashtra Life Skills Program' and 'Community Empowerment Program', while still feasible today, showed that the most efficient combination of the five strategies among the evaluated programs is a mixture of a) girls' empowerment and b) education of parents and community members.[131]

The United Nations profused relevant literature focused on the whole issue of forced marriage, and equality in general, but they also addressed the sub-issues of the situation. During the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the United Nations became more and more concerned about the topic of honor-based violence. In 1995, the 'Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace', which took place in Beijing from September 4th to 15th in Beijing, China, which, among others, addressed the need for forced marriages to be halted[132], saw the birth of the 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action'. Said declaration "identified 12 critical areas of concern which require urgent action to achieve the goal of gender equality"[133]; notwithstanding the presence of only 12 main focal points, other "forms of violence against women not explicitly mentioned"[134] were taken into consideration and developed in the following years. From June 5th to 9th 2000, the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly, known as Beijing+5, "met to agree further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action"[135]. Along with many implementations, "governments recommended more specific or focussed actions than those of the Platform and also addressed areas which had emerged or become more prominent since the Beijing Conference, including marital rape [and] crimes of honor."[136] Despite these recommendations, honor-based violence still "cuts across a number of cultures and communities"[137] and, in cases, still goes unrecorded.[138]

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[130] Promising Programs: https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/19967_ICRW-Solutions001-pdf.pdf

[131] International Center for Research on Women, "Solutions to End Child Marriage", icrw.org, https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/19967_ICRW-Solutions001-pdf.pdf

[132] United Nations, "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", un.org, 15 September 1995, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf

[133] United Nations, "The United Nations Work on Violence Against Women", un.org, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/news/unwvaw.html

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Herts Sunflower, "Honour based abuse, forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation", hertssunflower.org, https://www.hertssunflower.org/information-for-professionals/honour-based-abuse-forced-marriage-and-female-genital-mutilation.aspx

[138] Ibid.

3.3 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and child marriage

The commitment of the United Nations did not end with CSW. Six of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015[139] were strictly connected to the eradication of child and forced marriage in order to resolve worldwide issues such as hunger and poverty, gender inequality, maternal health and achieving universal primary education.[140] With the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 the issue of child marriage has been put once again on the foreground, more specifically as regards Goals 3, 4 and 5: respectively, "Good Health and Well-being", "Quality Education" and "Gender Equality".[141] The third Goal, "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"[142], notes that "[s]ignificant strides have been made in increasing life expectancy and reducing some of the common killers associated with child and maternal mortality" and "the spread of HIV/AIDS", all of which are closely related to child and forced marriage and are listed as its consequences. By 2030, the UN has set as a goal ensuring "universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes."[143] The fourth Goal, "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning",[144] states that while "major progress has been made towards increasing [...] enrolment rates in schools particularly for women and girls"[145], "103 million youth worldwide lack basic literacy skills, and more than 60 percent of them are women" and, as previously seen, girls who get married early in their life are more likely to drop out of school. Official reports of the UN, though, show that "about two thirds of countries in the developing regions have achieved gender parity in primary education".[146] Lastly, the fifth Goals ties together the previous two: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"[147] is the focal point of our discussion. The United Nations believe that "providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large"[148] and among its targets there is the

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[139] "United Nations Millennium Development Goals", *Un.Org*, https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/.

[140] Juliette Myers, Rowan Harvey, "Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education", plan-uk.org, 2011, https://plan-uk.org/file/breaking-vows-efm-3462225pdf/download?token=RlE5iobL

[141] United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals - 17 goals to transform our world", un.org, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

[142] United Nations, "Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages", un.org, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/

[143] United Nations, "Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages", un.org, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/ .

[144] United Nations, "Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning", un.org,, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/

[145] Ibid.

[146] United Nations, "Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", un.org https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

elimination of "all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation".[149]

Meeting all the targets and indicators related to these Goals is key in order to solve the issue. Indicators are fundamental in order to correctly understand how to act on a practical level, starting from the first obstacle such analysis usually have to deal with: gathering data. Not always data is given, is true or easy to collect, and the indicators pave the way in order to develop a clear understanding of the issue. Then, target are the practical focus of actions, the requirements to meet in order to tackle child marriage. The answer to child marriage shall start from a global framework of measures, provisions and initiatives rooted in the SDGs.[150]

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[149] Ibid.

[150] Girls Brides, "Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs) - Girls Not Brides", *Girls Not Brides*, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Child marriage continues to represent a major challenge worldwide. The main aspects that contribute to this issue are the immense spread of it, both in higher-income and lower-income countries, and its complexity. These two sides of the same coin are extremely correlated one to the other, as the nuances of the issue and the many different ways in which women are coerced into forced marriage contribute to a capillary diffusion. No country is immune, and this two causes lead to one inevitable consequence: the steps taken in order to face the issue are not always effective. If the measures undertaken by governments try to tackle one of the causes of forced marriage, the others would still rampantly lead to the nullification of the efforts. With this in mind, initiatives such as the "Promising Programs" of ICRW and "Girls not Brides" are to be seen in another light, enabling us to draw some concluding remarks. The main point highlighted by this initiative is that any measure taken in order to deal with forced marriage has to be embedded in a larger framework that is able to include several branched initiatives. Forced marriage cannot be stopped by dealing with one cause at the time, but the approach has to be comprehensive and able to destroy the roots of the issue. Educational support, financial aid, religious empowerment, legal protection are among the pillars of this fight, and none can be really effective without the presence of the others.

Normally, there would be no need to conclude by explaining why it is now more necessary and urgent than ever to end forced marriage. But normally there would be no forced marriage or any type of gender inequality. For this reason, a concluding explanation is due. The first, most obvious reason is moral, ethical. As all humans are equal, no individual shall exercise physical or psychological coercitive power on the other. However, this reason seems to not be enough. Hence, other factors may come into play when explaining why this social plague needs to be stopped now. One of the most striking example is the sanitary side of the issue. Effectively reducing the spread of forced marriage will positively affect the well-being of women on a physical and psychological level, of the newborns and of the society as a whole. HIV and other STDs infection rates would drastically drop in the countries that suffer the most from them and their sanitary system would be relieved. In addition to that, the educational side of the issue would be positively affected, reducing dropout rates and contributing to the progress and wealth of the society as a whole. On the other hand, even the most cynical analyst will have to agree on the fact that empowering women and ending forced marriage will lead to an incredible boost to the economy of each single country. As women are able to participate in existing markets and have a meaningful participation in economic decision making, the international community would be one step closer to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals ranging from gender equality to ending poverty, ensuring health and promote productive employment for all. The gender gap is estimated to cost to the economy

around 15% of GDP, and if the female employment rate in countries such as the OECD countries was to match that of Sweden, the GDP would grow by over USD 6 Trillions.

Gender equality is now more urgent than ever. This would be just the first step in a never ending battle, but that would be a huge step that would lead to a chain reaction that could positively affect all kinds of fields, from economical to sanitary to social. Ending forced and child marriage is the key to a more equal world.

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Matrimonio Infantile e Forzato: comprendere e debellare una piaga sociale

Le Nazioni Unite definiscono il matrimonio infantile e forzato, ossia il matrimonio di persone sotto i 18 anni, come "[...] una pratica che viola, abusa o compromette i diritti umani" e che mette a rischio la vita e la salute delle ragazze, limitando il loro potenziale futuro. La caratteristica di tale pratica è che uno o entrambi gli sposi non possano esprimere libero consenso al matrimonio. Nonostante sia uomini che donne siano vittime di tale crimine, l'ONU sottolinea che tali pratiche hanno un maggiore impatto negativo su donne e ragazze. Il matrimonio forzato implica l'utilizzo di strumenti di coercizione e di imposizione che vanno dalla pressione psicologica alla reclusione della vittima o all'abuso sessuale. La Dichiarazione Universale dei Diritti dell'Uomo (1948) e la Convenzione sul Consenso al Matrimonio (1964) affermano l'assoluta necessità per entrambi gli sposi di essere liberi di esprimere il loro consenso, sia privatamente che nelle sedi prescritte dalla legge. Nonostante la maggioranza dei paesi e dei loro governi abbia criminalizzato questa pratica, globalmente una ragazza ogni cinque è costretta a sposarsi prima dei 18 anni, numero che raddoppia nei paesi in via di sviluppo.

Ogni anno 10 milioni di ragazze sotto i 18 anni sono costrette a sposarsi. Le cause di questa pratica sono numerose, complesse e legate a differenti contesti e circostanze che includono povertà, norme religiose e falle nell'applicazione delle leggi. In tutto il mondo, con magnitudo diversa, le norme di genere impongono la visione della donna come svantaggiata rispetto all'uomo. Tale percezione scredita le abilità delle donne al punto di compromettere il loro potenziale economico ed educativo, fattori che contribuiscono alla visione che contrarre un "buon matrimonio" sia la maniera migliore di assicurare il futuro alla donna. L'ineguaglianza si estende al punto da impattare sul sistema legale, come in Nigeria ed India dove l'età del consenso è differente fra ragazzi e ragazze. La suddetta pratica rafforza l'idea che le ragazze possano sposarsi prima, portando i genitori a credere che l'unica maniera per assicurare un futuro alle figlie sia quella di farle sposare. In aggiunta a ciò, in alcuni ambienti rurali o in via di sviluppo, le transazioni economiche come il "prezzo della sposa" sono integrate al processo e sono spesso viste come un introito per la famiglia dello sposo, portando i genitori a concedere la figlia in giovane età per evitare di incorrere in una dote più onerosa in futuro.

Nelle comunità dove la componente femminile è valorizzata e riceve un'istruzione di qualità, il tasso di matrimonio infantile è notevolmente ridotto mentre la produttività economica ne beneficia, in quanto incoraggiare lo sviluppo delle abilità delle donne porta alla riduzione della percezione del matrimonio come salvaguardia del loro futuro. Tutti i programmi che mirano allo sviluppo economico, per essere efficaci, devono includere possibilità per lo sviluppo delle capacità delle donne, fino a considerare la creazione di sistemi per renderle indipendenti dai parenti uomini. I punti chiave di tali programmi propongono contratti

lavorativi part-time od orari flessibili, trasporti sicuri, borse di studio e sussidi scolastici, allo scopo di abbattere le norme sociali e di raggiungere la stabilità economica.

Una delle cause fondamentali del matrimonio forzato è l'impatto delle norme religiose. Molti credo avallano tale pratica in virtù dell'importanza di mantenere la verginità della ragazza e l'onore della famiglia, che organizza matrimoni con uomini più anziani allo scopo di proteggerle da comportamenti "immorali" e di consolidare i rapporti fra famiglie. Alla base delle forme religiose di resistenza all'abbattimento di tale pratica ci sono sette fattori:

1. Il matrimonio è un rituale religioso, e i leader religiosi si rifiutano di abbandonare il loro ruolo di "sensali" in quanto causerebbe una perdita di status e influenza;

2. I leader religiosi non sono sempre coscienti delle conseguenze del matrimonio infantile;

3. I testi delle religioni più diffuse, come l'Induismo, sono sempre stati interpretati in favore del matrimonio infantile, validando quindi la pratica;

4. Nella maggioranza delle religioni il rapporto sessuale precedente al matrimonio, insieme all'uso di contraccettivi, è fortemente opposto dai leader che in cambio propongono il matrimonio forzato come soluzione;

5. Il matrimonio infantile tutela e mantiene il potere patriarcale che i leader religiosi non vogliono perdere, in quanto la maggioranza delle religioni si basa su una gerarchia patriarcale;

6. L'ambiente rurale o in via di sviluppo comporta spesso rischi per le ragazze. Tale contesto porta i genitori a considerare il matrimonio infantile come un mezzo di protezione;

7. Il cambiamento sociale è concepito come un attacco alla religione. Discutere di questioni sociali è visto come discutere di argomenti "anti religiosi", e per questo è fortemente opposto dai leader.

Diverse organizzazioni religiose come l'IRW (Islamic Relief Worldwide) stanno attivamente lavorando all'eradicazione di tale pratica tramite l'istituzione di un dibattito che miri a cambiare la situazione mantenendo il rispetto per le autorità religiose, rendendole anzi paladine di un cambiamento positivo.

Le ragazze che si sposano in giovane età sono più facilmente soggette a vari tipi di violenza di tipo fisico e psicologico, con implicazioni sociali che spaziano dalla marginalizzazione all'incremento della vulnerabilità alla povertà. Queste ragazze sono soggette a tassi più bassi di salute riproduttiva rispetto alla media, situazione ulteriormente marcata dalla mancanza di educazione e da maggiori rischi di contagio da HIV e complicazioni nella gravidanza come la fistola ostetrica. Il matrimonio infantile, nonostante la convinzione che aiuti a proteggere dalla contrazione di Malattie Sessualmente Trasmissibili (MST), al contrario rende le donne più vulnerabili a causa del fatto che il matrimonio porta ad un maggior numero di rapporti sessuali che si verificano senza protezioni. Uno studio dell'ONU condotto in una clinica in India ha rivelato che un quarto delle donne presenti avevano già contratto una MST, e che il 90% tra quelle sposate

avevano avuto rapporti solo col proprio marito. Attualmente più di 2 milioni di adolescenti hanno contratto l'HIV, in maggioranza ragazze. La situazione non varia in altre zone in via di sviluppo, contribuendo ad una generale "cultura del silenzio" ulteriormente aggravata dall'impossibilità per le donne di documentarsi e proteggersi adeguatamente.

Le complicanze della gravidanza e del parto sono fra le maggiori cause di morte fra le adolescenti. Ipertensione, emorragia e infezioni sono riscontrabili più frequentemente in ragazze incinta dai 15 ai 19 anni rispetto ad altre fasce d'età; il tasso aumenta notevolmente al di sotto dei 15 anni. In aggiunta a ciò, dall'8 all'11% delle morti legate a gravidanze sono causate da aborti clandestini, mentre uno studio della World Bank calcola che in un arco di 15 anni più di 2 milioni di infanti sarebbero sopravvissuti se il matrimonio infantile fosse stato abolito in tempo. L'unico modo per alleggerire il peso di questa piaga è comprendere dove i programmi di sensibilizzazione hanno fallito, mirando ad un ribilanciamento delle norme di genere e di condotta sessuale.

Nel caso del matrimonio forzato, il 90% delle gravidanze sono causate da rapporti non consensuali e pericolosi per la vita della donna, dovute al costume di dover "dimostrare la propria fertilità". La giovane età delle ragazze implica il 200% del rischio in più di morire durante il parto rispetto alle donne adulte, tasso che sale al 500% nel caso di ragazze minori di 15 anni. Le ripercussioni di una gravidanza giovanile non colpiscono solo la madre, in quanto anche i neonati possono soffrire di asfissia, basso peso alla nascita e nascite premature. Gli effetti negativi delle gravidanze adolescenziali colpiscono anche il contesto sociale ed economico. Soggette a stigma sociale, le ragazze incinta prima dei 18 anni sono più soggette a violenze ed abusi e abbandonano più frequentemente gli studi, portando ad un circolo vizioso di povertà che riduce le loro possibilità di guadagno di circa il 9%, con effetti devastanti sul piano nazionale.

Come evidenziato dall'UNESCO, le disuguaglianze di genere sono un enorme ostacolo al raggiungimento di un livello adeguato di istruzione. Per questo l'agenzia dell'ONU, congiuntamente ad altre commissioni, ha sviluppato la "Education 2030 Agenda", che si concentra sul prevedere 12 anni, di cui 9 obbligatori, di istruzione equa e gratuita. Tale obiettivo sarà raggiunto tramite l'*empowerment* degli insegnanti, l'eliminazione della discriminazione nelle scuole e la valorizzazione delle abilità individuali.

Nonostante la disparità di genere si sia ridotta negli ultimi 15 anni il divario rimane preoccupante, soprattutto per quanto riguarda l'educazione di livello terziario e in particolar modo nelle zone in via di sviluppo. In questo contesto, il matrimonio infantile gioca un ruolo chiave in quanto causa di un tasso più alto di abbandono scolastico. Ogni giorno ci sono circa 41,000 nuovi casi di matrimonio infantile, ed è stato calcolato che se si ponesse fine a questo fenomeno l'economia mondiale crescerebbe di più di $500 miliardi ogni anno. La decisione di abbandonare la scuola è causata da vari fattori, tra cui i costi, le difficoltà di trasporto, il frequentare un ambiente non adatto, insicuro e che non ne valorizza i prospetti educativi. A ciò contribuisce l'inadeguatezza del sistema igienico, la percezione del pericolo nel percorrere lunghe tratte, il ruolo delle tradizioni e delle religioni, e le gravidanze spesso causate da rapporti sessuali avuti all'interno del matrimonio contratto in giovane età. Viene quindi a crearsi un circolo vizioso, in quanto le ragazze senza

un'educazione sono 3 volte più soggette a matrimoni infantili, fenomeno che contribuisce all'abbandono dell'istruzione.

La stretta correlazione fra questi due fenomeni ha portato gli esperti a evidenziare come in alcuni paesi si sia giunti addirittura ad una scelta binaria: ricevere un'istruzione o sposarsi. Le ragazze vengono quindi implicitamente spinte a rendersi conto dell'estrema difficoltà, o impossibilità, che avrebbero nel perseguire un futuro accademico, portando loro e le loro famiglie a ripiegare sul più sicuro matrimonio. Vari studi si sono concentrati sull'enorme impatto che tale fenomeno ha sulla sfera economica e sociale dei paesi in via di sviluppo, in particolare nel continente asiatico ed africano, evidenziando la trappola sociale in cui le giovani donne si trovano. In paesi in cui ognuno dei fattori sopracitati è aggravato da instabilità sociali e politiche e da una diffusa povertà, non è solo importante promuovere un accesso egualitario al sistema scolastico, ma prevedere anche metodi di reinserimento per coloro che hanno lasciato la scuola, creare un adeguato sistema igienico, migliorare la sicurezza del tragitto verso l'istituto e nell'istituto stesso.

Un ulteriore aspetto della violenza di genere strettamente correlato al matrimonio infantile è quello della violenza o delitto d'onore. Ogni anno più di 5,000 donne muoiono a causa di questo genere di abusi in cui l'autore si sente legittimato da norme tradizionali e sociali che includono la difesa della reputazione sociale, la castità della donna e la lealtà della famiglia. La differenza tra violenza d'onore e abuso domestico è riscontrabile nel grado di connivenza o approvazione della famiglia o dei membri della comunità in risposta ad un comportamento considerato immorale o contrario alle norme della famiglia o della società. La violenza d'onore si articola su più piani, come l'infanticidio, la violenza fisica o psicologica e le varie pratiche di mutilazione genitale, dalla clitoridectomia all'infibulazione. Alcune delle norme sociali che avallano l'utilizzo della violenza includono il pagamento della dote: l'idea stessa di una transazione pone la donna alla stregua di un oggetto o di un animale, portando a giustificare un eventuale atteggiamento punitivo in caso di "disubbidienza"; alla stessa maniera, un pagamento non ultimato della dote porta spesso a casi di delitti d'onore. Il matrimonio forzato stesso rappresenta un atto di violenza, in quanto un matrimonio per essere definito "autentico" deve possedere tre elementi: libertà di scelta, accordo delle parti e uguaglianza fra le stesse. In questa pratica nessuno di questi elementi è presenti; contemporaneamente un eventuale rifiuto da parte della donna di sottostare a tale norma porterebbe disonore sulla famiglia e sulla comunità.

L'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite è da tempo impegnata nella lotta contro il matrimonio infantile. Con la Dichiarazione di Berlino del 1995 si gettano le basi per varie risoluzioni adottate dall'organizzazione, tutte mirate all'eradicazione di questo fenomeno. Tra le più importanti ricordiamo la A/68/148, in cui troviamo la prima definizione di "forced marriage", la A/69/156, la prima risoluzione ad analizzare il forte collegamento del fenomeno con le disuguaglianze di genere e l'istruzione, e la A/71/175, il documento ONU più completo ad oggi sull'argomento. Quest'ultima si concentra sull'implementazione ad ogni livello di strategie e politiche atte a migliorare la situazione delle bambine e delle donne ponendo enfasi su istruzione, diritti umani e abbattimento degli stereotipi e delle ineguaglianze di genere. In aggiunta alla

produzione di numerose risoluzioni, le Nazioni Unite hanno istituito la commissione CSW (Committee on the Status of Women), che include mensilmente nella propria agenda la lotta al matrimonio infantile. L'organizzazione ha deciso di continuare la sua lotta anche attraverso gli SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) del 2030, obiettivi internazionali per raggiungere uno sviluppo sostenibile. In particolare i "Goals" che mirano all'eradicazione di questo fenomeno sono il 3°, attraverso il miglioramento dei sistemi di assistenza sanitaria riproduttiva e l'inserimento di programmi nazionali di supporto; il 4°, che si concentra sul raggiungimento di un'istruzione egualitaria; il 5°, che si concentra sul raggiungimento dell'uguaglianza di genere e sulla lotta al matrimonio infantile e alla mutilazione genitale. A supporto del lavoro delle Nazioni Unite ci sono numerose organizzazioni, come l'ICRW, che in partnership con "Girls not Brides" ha creato i "Promising Programs", strategie che sono state implementate negli ultimi decenni in Etiopia, Egitto, India e Senegal e che dimostrano che tutti i punti analizzati finora sono le cause principali del matrimonio forzato e quindi le più urgenti da risolvere.

In conclusione è importante rimarcare la diffusione di questa piaga sociale e la sua complessità. La capillarità e l'interconnessione fra le varie cause non lasciano nessun paese immune dal fenomeno e spesso nullificano gli sforzi intrapresi. Normalmente non ci sarebbe bisogno di concludere ribadendo le ragioni della lotta contro questo fenomeno, ma in una società egualitaria e giusta lo stesso fenomeno non avrebbe motivo di esistere. Il primo lampante motivo è morale, etico, in quanto nessun individuo dovrebbe esercitare un potere coercitivo, sia fisico che mentale, su un altro individuo. A seguire, l'enorme impatto sul sistema sanitario, sulla salute delle madri e dei figli deve rimanere al centro degli sforzi della comunità internazionale in quanto il fenomeno inficia il benessere della comunità intera. In aggiunta a ciò, una maggiore inclusione delle donne dal punto di vista dell'istruzione e conseguentemente del lavoro creerebbe un'enorme spinta economica di cui tutti i paesi beneficerebbero. L'uguaglianza di genere è ora più urgente che mai. Si tratta di una battaglia infinita di cui il matrimonio forzato non è che un primo, importante passo, la chiave per un mondo più uguale.