



16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Day 2

The world must take urgent action to end child marriage. Child marriage is a violation of girls' rights and a danger to girls' health, safety, education and future. Despite these dangers, 1 in 5 girls in the world are married before the age 18, and over 650 million women alive today were married as children.

Why must we end child marriage now?

- ✚ Girls who marry as children are less likely to receive medical care during pregnancy than women who marry as adults, which puts the other and the children's health and lives at risk. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death among adolescent girls.
- ✚ The pressure to become pregnant once married can be intense, and child brides end up having many children to care for while still young themselves. In 2013, UNFPA research revealed that 20,000 girls under age 18 give birth each day in developing countries. This amounts to 7.3 million births a year. Unfortunately, if all pregnancies are included, not just births, the number of adolescent pregnancies is much higher.
- ✚ Girls who marry in childhood are at greater risk for forced marital sex and intimate partner violence than same-age peers who marry later.
- ✚ Girls with no education are three times as likely to marry or enter into union by 18 as those with a secondary or higher education, according to research in 2012.
- ✚ The vast majority of child brides are expected to give up school to assume adult roles including house work, child care and attending to a husband's needs.
- ✚ In some contexts, child marriage is considered the best of bad options. During conflict or forced migration, adolescent girls are often married off early as a form of protection in a desperate situation. Other times, it is viewed as a path that financially unburdens the family, preserves its honor and protects an adolescent girl.

- ✦ Empowering girls with access to quality education, health care, justice, information and tailored services to the individual child and families are key to ending child marriage.
- ✦ Approximately 248,000 children at least as young as 12 were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2010.
- ✦ In 2010, a 17-year-old girl married a 65-year-old man in Idaho.
- ✦ One of the oldest people to marry a child was a 74-year-old in Alabama. His bride was 14. (The state later raised its minimum marriage age to 16).
- ✦ Child marriage, or marriage before 18, was legal in all 50 U.S. states until 2018, when Delaware and New Jersey became the first two states to end this human-rights abuse. This, after Unchained at Last and Zonta International spent the last three years working tirelessly — and seeing legislators in state after state reject or water down legislation to end child marriage. Child marriage remains legal in 48 states and is happening in the U.S. at an alarming rate. Recent research revealed that nearly a quarter-million children as young as 12 were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2010 – mostly girls wed to adult men.

