



Causes And Consequences of Child Marriages in East Africa and South Asia

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Abstract

Despite being prohibited, child marriage remains a critical challenge, in many parts of the world, with devastating consequences in the lives of affected children. For example, the practice of child marriage affects over 60% of girls in Uganda, of which 15% are married by age of 15 and 49% by 18 years. In Nepal, 37% of women aged 20-24 are married before reaching 18 years of age, with child marriage disproportionately affecting girls. Likewise, in Bangladesh, a total of 51% of women aged between 20 and 24 are married before the age of 18 while 15% are married before turning 15. Within this context, Transform Aid International (TAI) together with four partner organisations in Nepal, Bangladesh and Uganda conducted child marriage research to explore and examine the underlying causes and consequences of child marriage. This qualitative research used purposive sampling followed by snowball sampling, and used three different methods viz. literature review, semi-structured interview, and focal group discussion for data collection. In total, 216 participants (children within marriages, their friends, siblings, parents and other stakeholders) were interviewed. 26 FGDs were conducted in which 133 people participated. Data analysis and reporting was completed using thematic analysis.

The findings demonstrate that there are both push and pull factors that cause child marriage. These include individual (such as early affairs, stigma on pre-marriage pregnancy, pregnancy (Uganda), school dropouts), to family (such as poverty and economic hardships, domestic violence and discrimination against girls, difficulty in getting a good match later and lack of safety and security of girls, lack of parental care and guidance), and social factors (peer influence and pressure, discrimination against girls in education, cultural practices and festivals, lack of legal enforcement, protection from sexual abuse and harassment (Bangladesh and Nepal), low wedding expenses, and dowry (Nepal and Bangladesh)). The study's findings also reveal changing trends, especially in Nepal and Bangladesh, in child marriage, with a shift from forcefully arranged to love based marriages, where children independently choose their life partners, and marry or elope.



4th GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

07 - 09 June, 2024

CAMBRIDGE, UNITED KINGDOM

This change has been triggered by increased accessibility to mobile technology, the internet, and improved transportation options between districts and villages. Surprisingly, the study finds that individuals in child marriages tend not to seek legal remedies due to fears of further trouble since child marriage is illegal, as well as a lack of awareness about legal options and police services. The study shows that consequences of child marriages are devastating in the long-term while there are dire consequences in the short run. Short-term consequences include school drop-outs, social isolation, marital rapes, domestic violence, health issues due to early pregnancy, denial of legal status of the marriage. Long-term consequences include falling into vicious cycles of poverty, separation, divorce and fragmented families, long-term health complications including mental health, and feelings of low confidence and dignity.

Keywords: Child, marriage, child-marriage, causes of child marriage, consequences of child marriage, Nepal, Bangladesh, Uganda