

CHILD MARRIAGE in Uganda

A Call for Urgent Action





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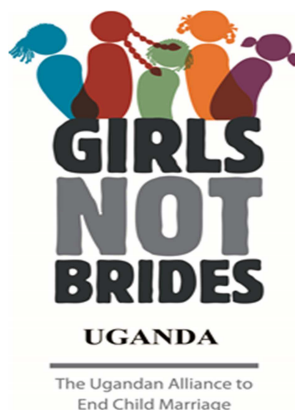
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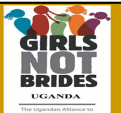
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[HTTP://WWW.GIRLSNOTBRIDES.ORG/CHILD-MARRIAGE/UGANDA/](http://WWW.GIRLSNOTBRIDES.ORG/CHILD-MARRIAGE/UGANDA/)



Joy for Children Uganda – Girls not Brides Uganda Alliance



CHILD MARRIAGE IN UGANDA: Urgent Action is needed



UGANDA HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST CHILD MARRIAGE PREVALENCE RATES IN THE WORLD.

Child marriage refers to any marriage of a child younger than 18 years old, in accordance to Article 1 of the Convention on the Right of the Child. While child marriage can happen to both sexes, it disproportionately affects girls.

Child marriage is now widely recognized as a violation of children's rights and a direct form of discrimination against girls who are often deprived of their basic rights to health, education, development and equality.

Forced child marriage is a life-changing reality for many of the world's girls. Some, young as 8 or 9 are forced to trade their childhoods for a life that can be defined by isolation, violence and illness.

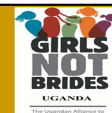
It is a practice rooted more in tradition than religious custom, and one that spans the globe, from Asia to Africa to America.

The number of girls who are married as children is astounding. According to UNICEF, in 2007 more than 60 million girls aged 20-24 worldwide had married before their 18th birthday.

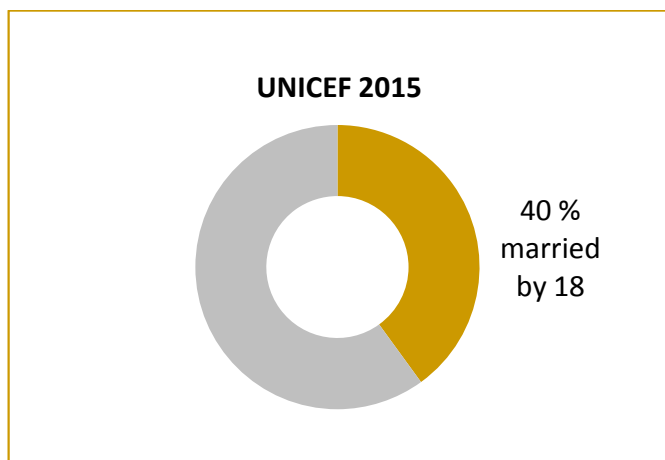
An ICRW review shows that rates of child marriage are highest in parts of Africa, and in South Asia, where one-half to three-fourths of girls are married before age 18.



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In Uganda, the rate of child marriage, 40%, is higher than the African average of 39%.



Child marriage prevalence is the percentage of women 20-24 years old who were married or in union before they were 18 years old.

A number of factors contribute to this high rate, including poverty, gender norms and expectations, culture and tradition.

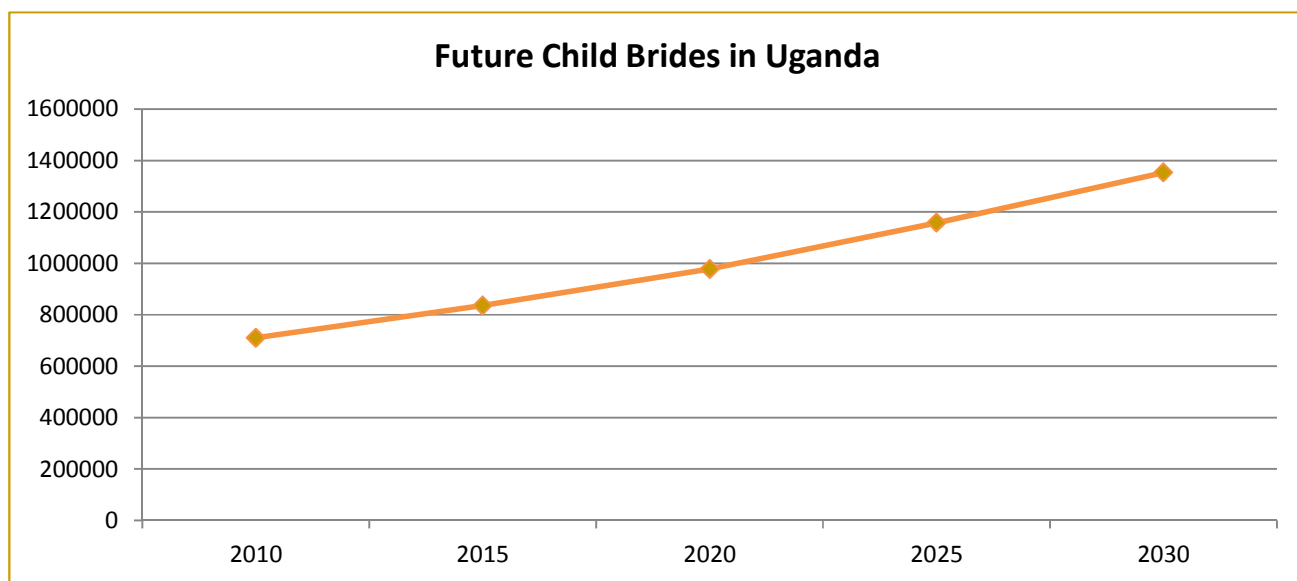
Uganda falls among the 15 worst African countries with high numbers of child brides; it is in the eleventh position while Niger tops the list at 75% followed by Chad with 72%.

While child marriage is common in Uganda, prevalence is highest in Northern (59%), followed by Western (58%), Eastern (52%), East Central (52%), West Nile (50%), Central 2 (46%), Central 1 (41%), Southwest (37%), and Kampala (21%), according to UNFPA.

Almost two million Ugandan minors are forced or lured into alleged marriage, according to an African human social development report presented at the Women Deliver Conference in Kuala Lumpur in June 2013.

According to the study, the countries with the worst child marriage scores also have the highest maternal mortality ratios, the highest pregnancy rates, and constitute the greater majority of people living with HIV.

According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), if present trend continue, 1,353,000 of the young girls born between 2005 and 2010 will be married/ in union before age 18 by 2030. This calls for urgent programmes to prevent that from happening.



CAUSES OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage continues to be a reality for many of Uganda's girls.

Child marriage has many causes: cultural, social, economic and religious. In many cases, a mixture of these causes results in the imprisonment of children in marriages without their consent.

Poverty

Poor families sell their children into marriage either to settle debts or to make some money and escape the cycle of poverty. For such families, marrying their daughter at an early age essentially is a strategy for economic survival; it means one less person to feed, clothe and educate.

Girl's Sexuality

In Uganda, marrying a girl young presumes that the girl's sexuality, therefore the girl's family's honor, will be "protected" ensuring that the girl marries as a virgin. The imposition of family honor on a girl's individuality, in essence robbing the girl of her honor and dignity, undermines the credibility of family honor and instead underscores the presumed protection's actual aim: to control the girl.

Gender Discrimination

Child marriage is a product of cultures that devalue women and girls and discriminate against them. Discrimination, according to a UNICEF report on "Child Marriage and the Law," often manifests itself in the form of domestic violence, marital rape, and deprivation of food, lack of access to information, education, healthcare, and general impediments to mobility.



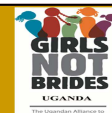
Inadequately Enforced Laws

The Uganda Constitution (1995) and the Penal Code set the legal age of marriage or engagement in sexual acts at the age of 18. Chapter 4 of the Constitution provides for the protection and promotion of fundamental and other human rights and freedoms for all Ugandan citizens with specific provision for the protection of women and girls. While Article 31 provides for the right to marriage and family formation, it criminalizes child marriage and spells out 18 years as the minimum age at which men and women should marry.

However, the already existing laws are not enforced and implemented; instead, traditional and religious laws often allow marriage as soon as puberty has started, which puts young girls at stake of being married.



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Trafficking

Poor families are tempted to sell their girls for marriage and prostitution, as the transaction enables large sums of money to change hands.

Insecurity in the Face of Conflict

When families live in unsafe regions, parents may genuinely believe that marrying their daughters is the best way to protect them from danger. In war-affected areas of Northern Uganda, a girl may be married to a warlord or another authority figure because parents think that security at home is assured by marrying off the young daughter.

Tradition and Religion

In many communities, parents are under pressure to marry off their daughters as early as possible in an effort to prevent her from becoming sexually active before marriage; a woman who does so brings dishonor to her family and community.

Because marriage often determines a woman's status, parents also worry that if they don't marry their daughters according to social expectations, they will not be able to marry them at all. Forced child marriage also is a route to cementing family, clan, and tribal connections or settling obligations.

Gender Roles

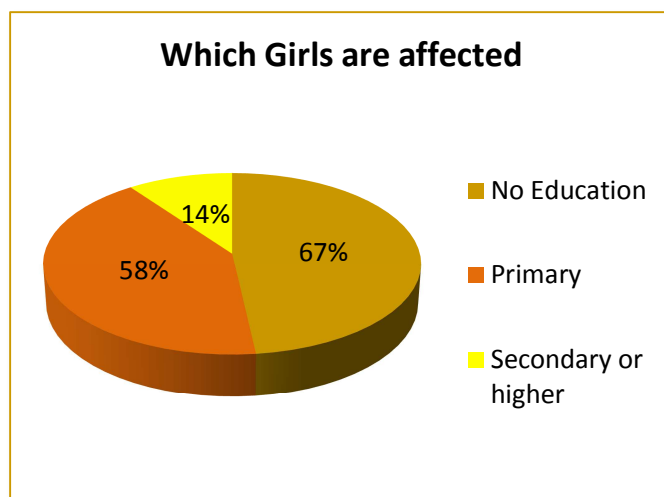
In many communities where child marriage is practiced, girls are not valued as much as boys – they are seen as a burden. Therefore, it's difficult to change parents' attitudes towards child marriage that girls who avoid early marriage and stay in school will likely be able to make a greater contribution to their family and their community in the long term.

Security

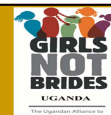
Many parents marry off their daughters young because they feel it is in her best interest, often to ensure her safety in areas where girls are at high risk of physical or sexual assault.

Education

Low educational attainment is linked with early marriage. According to the Uganda Demographic Health Survey of 2006, education is associated with the prevalence of child marriage in Uganda. 67% of women aged 20-24 with no education and 58% with primary education were married or in union at age 18, compared to only 14% of women with secondary education or higher.



The government's policy change to universal primary education in 1997 has encouraged parents to keep their daughters in schools and while they expressed a desire for more education for their daughters, they also raised concerns about sexual exploitation of students by teachers, lack of supervision, and poor examples set by teachers and other students.



IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE



Child marriage is a human rights violation.

It has major impacts across various areas. Child brides are often disempowered, economically and socially dependent on their husbands, and deprived of their fundamental rights to education and health.

Human Rights and Justice

Child marriage is a serious human rights violation affecting children's and women's rights to health, education, equality, and non-discrimination and to live free from violence and exploitation.

These are rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

In Uganda, child marriage is prohibited; the constitution doesn't allow marriage before the age of 18. But laws are not enforced and according to cultural and religious traditions, marriage is possible as soon as the girl menstruates for the first time.

Poverty

Poverty is one of the main causes and at the same time a result of child marriage. Child marriage traps girls and their families in a cycle of poverty. Child brides are more likely to be poor and to remain poor. Giving a daughter in marriage, allows parents suffering from poverty to reduce family expenses because it means one less person to feed, clothe and educate.

Girls who marry young usually drop out of school without even completing their primary education. They haven't had the chance to gain necessary knowledge and skills which could help lift them and their families out of poverty. They give birth early and their children are more likely to undergo the same fate.

Education

Education is a basic human right and essential for social and economic development. Child marriage often means the end of education for girls. After getting married, girls usually drop out of school. Out of school and in marriage, child brides are denied their right to education. They don't have the possibility to learn the skills that could help them earn an income and lift them and their children out of poverty. Child marriage is a major barrier to progress on girls' education.

Health, Physical and Sexual Abuse

Child marriage can have devastating consequences for a girl's health. It encourages the initiation of sexual activity at an age when girls' bodies are still developing. Neither physically or emotionally ready to become wives and mothers, child brides are at greater risk of experiencing dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth, becoming infected with HIV/AIDS and suffering domestic violence.

When a girl marries as a child, the health of her children suffers too. The children of child brides are at substantially greater risk of perinatal infant mortality and morbidity, and stillbirths and newborn deaths are 50% higher in mothers younger than 20 years than in women who give birth later.

Out of fear of her parents and the social stigma as well as the poverty associated with being

single; many child wives are compelled to remain in a loveless and violent marriage.

Deprivation of Childhood and a Future

More than anything else, early marriage deprives girls of their childhood. They are thrust into the full burden of domestic responsibility, motherhood and sexual relations rather than playing with friends, dreaming about a career or fretting about a school exam.

Young married girls move away from their parents' home to live with their husband and his family, where they have no friends, no support, and little say in their own lives or in household matters.

Research shows that young married girls often are isolated and powerless. They are unable to negotiate or obtain support for issues in their own interest. And they're frequently exposed to violence and threats of abandonment and divorce.

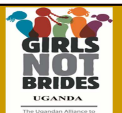
Inability to Plan or Manage Families

Because they are also children, young or immature mothers exercise less influence and control over their children, and have less ability to make decisions about their nutrition, health care and household management.

Creation of child wives generation: Children whose mothers were married early tend to marry early; thus creating generations of child wives.

Marital instability

Because of the age differences and the attendant poor communication, many early marriages end up in divorce or separation.



ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN UGANDA: WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

A range of approaches is needed to address child marriage. Ending child marriage requires a shift in social and cultural norms, economic and educational empowerment of girls, better enforcement of existing laws, and policy advocacy and actions.

Education and Empowerment

Education is one of the most powerful tools to enable girls to avoid early marriage and fulfill their potential. The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 and have children during her teenage years. Educated girls develop skills, knowledge and are empowered to claim their rights.

In Uganda, although primary and secondary education is supposed to be free, schools are underfunded and have to charge school fees in order to survive. Poor families often marry their girls off when they can't afford paying school fees anymore.

In order to end child marriage, parents and the wider community have to understand why it's

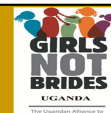
necessary to invest in the girl child's education. Girls, who at least have completed their primary education, will more likely be able to contribute to their family's income as they have gained the required knowledge and skills.

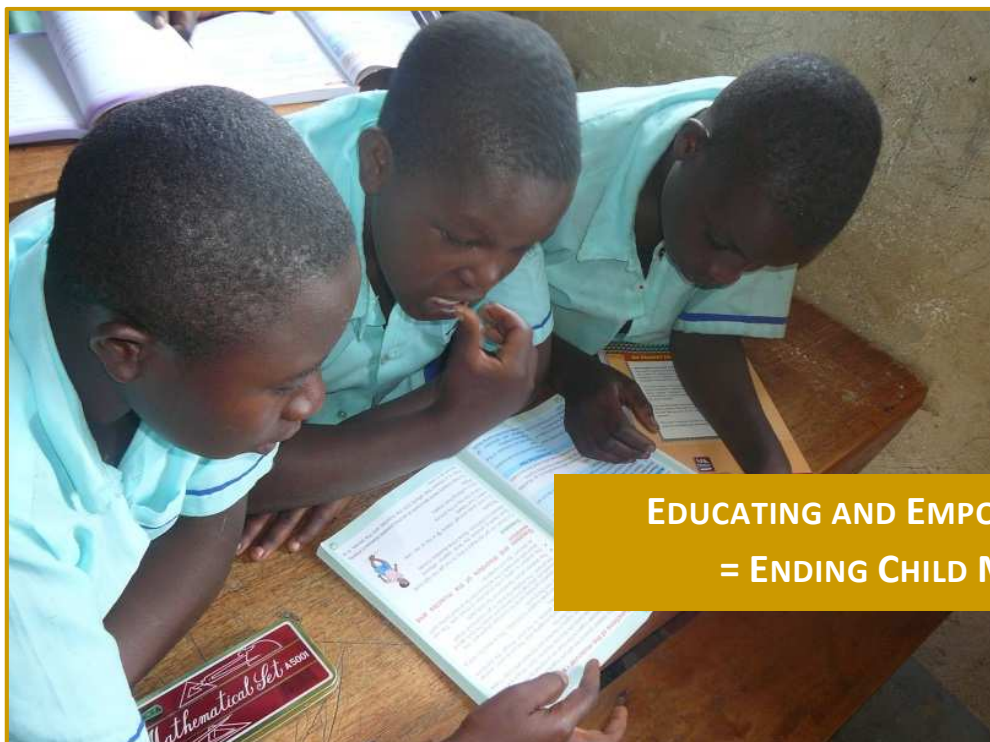
Joy for Children Uganda has been implementing a project in Western Uganda called *Girls not Brides Empower Project* which combines education and economic empowerment. With the aim of providing incentives for families, goats have been given to vulnerable girls. The family can keep the goat and use it to generate income under the premise that the girl completes primary education.

Economic empowerment of girls and their families is crucial to keeping girls in school and ending child marriage. Economic skills training through self-sustaining endeavors like animal breeding, candle making, soap making, etc. can give a family the lift they need to keep a girl in school and delay marriage, thus breaking the cycle of poor health and poverty that is linked to early marriage.



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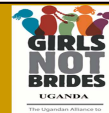




EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING GIRLS
= ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE



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Social and Cultural Norms Change – Mobilizing Communities

Without commitment of the wider community, child marriage can't be prevented. Traditions can't be changed easily; gender discrimination is deeply rooted especially in rural Uganda.

Joy for Children Uganda has successfully involved communities in dialogues through drama performances and music. Radio talk shows pointing out the negative impacts of early marriages and emphasizing the importance of education can also be an effective tool to sensitize communities.

Legal Reform and Policy Action

There are laws in Uganda which prohibit marriage under the age of 18. However, other laws provide loopholes; for example, the Marriage Act of 1904 which allows marriage below the age of 21 years as long as a letter of consent is given by parents/ guardians. The Customary Marriages Act 1973 sets the age of consent at 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys.

Additionally, existing laws to prevent gender discrimination and child marriage are poorly enforced and more concerted effort by stakeholders across many areas is needed to enforce the upholding of these laws.

On the Day of the African Child in June 2015, the Government of Uganda launched a National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy. One main focus is on reviewing government policies; promoting and implementing government policies and laws; and stipulating the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in policy and law enforcement.

National Alliance unites vs. Child Marriage:

In order to fight child marriage on a broader level, joint effort is needed. Child rights organizations in Uganda have formed a national alliance against child marriage: *Girls Not Brides Uganda*, hosted by Joy for Children Uganda.

The national alliance is part of the global partnership Girls not Brides of more than 450 civil society organizations from over 70 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential.

By establishing a nationwide partnership, *Girls Not Brides Uganda* members aim to start a dialogue at local, regional and national levels. Local and religious leaders, teachers, parents and children are brought together to discuss the harmful impacts of early marriages and to put emphasis on the potential of girls.

The work of organizations striving to end child marriage shall be better coordinated and access to funds facilitated.

Girls Not Brides Uganda is following up on the commitments the Government has made.

Ending child marriage, promotes not only the empowerment of girls, but is also essential for the general economic and social development of a country. Girls, who are married off and thereby denied their right to education, cannot contribute to the improvement of their communities without better education. Thus, child marriage drains countries of the innovation and potential that would enable them to thrive.

The future status of Uganda is critically dependent on the wellbeing, health, and educational status of its children!

Let Girls be Girls, NOT Brides!



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