



Save the Children

HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER
UC Berkeley School of Law

KING HUSSEIN FOUNDATION
مركز المعلومات والبحوث
INFORMATION AND RESEARCH CENTER



CHILD MARRIAGE IN CRISES



GIRLS AND PARENTS
SPEAK OUT!

EAST AMMAN AND
AL KARAK, JORDAN

INTRODUCTION

Many Syrian girls in Jordan get married when they are less than 18 years old. This is called child marriage. Child marriage hurts girls in many ways. Some girls may drop out of school. Some may struggle to earn money to care for themselves and their families. Some may be abused by their husbands. And some girls may have difficulty when they get pregnant or deliver.

Because of this, Save the Children and Plan International wanted to know more about how they (and other NGOs) could support girls and their parents and help them to delay marriage. So in 2020, researchers from the Human Rights Center and the Information and Research Center at the King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) came together to talk to girls and their parents in Jordan.

We wanted to learn 4 things:

1. Why do some girls get married young, while others wait until they're older?
2. How do girls and their parents make decisions about marriage?
3. What do girls and their families need to help them wait until they're older to get married?
4. What do girls and their parents think NGOs should do to help girls wait to marry? What can they do to help support girls who are already married?

In total, we talked to more than 100 girls ages 10-17 in East Amman and Al Karak. In Karak, we did fun activities together, like drawing, making paper flowers, and dancing. We also talked to 31 parents of adolescent girls. Here's what we learned together!

WHAT PUTS GIRLS AT RISK OF MARRYING EARLY?

NOT BEING IN SCHOOL

This was true for any reason, like not being enrolled in school or failing a grade level.

POSITIVE FEELINGS ABOUT CHILD MARRIAGE

For example, some girls think that marriage will make them happy and get them things they need, like food or money.

BELIEFS

For example, sometimes girls, parents, or community members think it's okay for a girl to marry if they think she is "mature", can handle housework and children, or has started her period, even if she is not yet 18 years old.

REBELLION

Some girls have rebellious attitudes towards their parents or other adults who advise them against early marriage and to stay in school.

POVERTY

Some girls marry early to have their needs met by a man and relieve their family of the burden of caring for them. Their family may also want the dowry money.

FAMILY NORMS & BELIEFS

In some families, it is common that women marry early, and some parents pressure their daughters to drop out of school and marry early.

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

Child abuse or mistreatment at home, neglect by parents, too much housework, or fighting with parents puts girls at risk.

GENDER NORMS & BELIEFS

For example, some families and communities believe that girls are a burden on the family. Others may believe it's not as important for girls to go to school.

PEER PRESSURE

Some friends are a poor influence because they marry young or pressure other girls to marry young.

COMMUNITY

Some community members and leaders encourage child marriage or treat girls badly if they refuse a marriage proposal or forced marriage.

THE MEDIA

Some media on TV, cellphones, and internet shows girls who marry young as having good lives and happy marriages.

THE LAW

Parents in Jordan can request an exception that allows girls to marry as young as 16.

WHAT PROTECTS GIRLS FROM MARRYING EARLY?

BELIEFS

For example, some girls and their parents believe a girl should wait until at least age 18 to get married.

NEGATIVE FEELINGS ABOUT CHILD MARRIAGE

For example, some girls think that child marriage will make them sad and stressed. Others think they will suffer because of too much housework, or that they will be abused, be lonely, or get pregnant too young.

DREAMS & AMBITIONS

Some girls have dreams and ambitions for their future, like finishing school, going to university, or getting a job.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Being enrolled in school protects girls from early marriage.

POSITIVE PEER PRESSURE

Some friends are a good influence and encourage a girl to stay in school and not marry too early.

BASIC NEEDS

Parents who are able to provide for their daughters' needs help to protect them from early marriage.

SUPPORTIVE PARENTS

Some parents encourage their daughters to stay in school and delay marriage, communicate well with them, treat them well and allow them to have some free time to play.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Some community members support girls to delay marriage. Others may help a girl if her parents try to force her to marry young.

REALISTIC MEDIA

Some media on TV, cellphones, and internet is realistic and shows how hard marriage can be for girls.

STRONG LAWS & POLICIES

Strong laws and policies against child marriage protect girls.

HOW DO GIRLS AND THEIR PARENTS MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE?

Girls: many girls can choose for themselves when and whom to marry. But many other girls have little or no say in the decision. They may feel pressured or forced by their parents to marry. Many girls fall somewhere in the middle where they make decisions together with their parents.

“I should marry now”

- I could escape from my difficult home life
- I might get things I need
- It would make my parents happy
- It would keep people from talking badly about me
- I could have more children



“I should wait”

- I might be abused by my husband
- I can't handle heavy housework or children yet
- I'll have difficulties if I get pregnant and give birth
- I might feel sad, lonely, or stressed
- I want to finish school and earn some money first

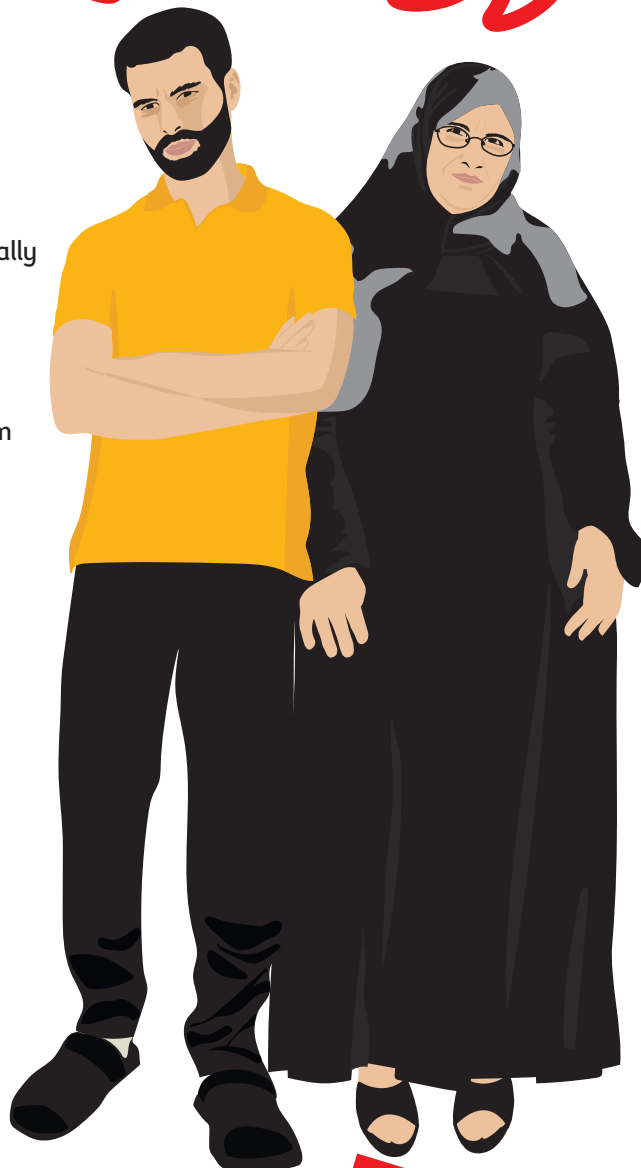
HOW DO GIRLS AND THEIR PARENTS MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE?

Parents: parents are often involved in marriage decisions for their daughters in some way. This is especially true for fathers, but also mothers.

“She should wait”

“She should marry now”

- It will help us financially
- It will relieve the burden of caring for her
- She will be safer from harm or deviation



- She should finish school and earn some money first
- She will have poor health and difficulty having babies
- She might be abused by her husband
- She won't be able to manage heavy housework and care for children
- She might have problems in her marriage and get a divorce

WHAT DO GIRLS AND PARENTS THINK NGOS CAN DO TO HELP?



SENSITIZATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING

- Offer programs for girls, parents, and community leaders about why child marriage and early pregnancy hurt girls. Teach them all girls, even married girls, should finish school.
- Offer training, lectures, and activities for married girls. Make sure they know about them.
- Hold programs during community events, meetings, campaigns and lectures at centers, or in schools.
- Use videos, social media, and stories from older girls who have experienced child marriage.
- Sensitize community and religious leaders and help them to sensitize their communities on why girls should delay marriage.
- Encourage parents to be supportive of their children. Teach them how to talk to them about early marriage. Teach them not to use strict rules and punishment to keep them from marrying young.



EDUCATION

- Support education for all girls – married and unmarried.
- Give them money for school costs and university scholarships.
- Help them find safe ways to get to school, especially if schools are far away.
- Help with things that keep girls out of school. For example, 1) parents or husbands who don't think girls need to go to school, 2) girls who are stubborn and don't want to go to school, 3) schools that don't accept married or pregnant girls, and 4) too much housework or childcare duties.
- Offer other options besides traditional schools for married and unmarried girls, including alternative basic education programs and vocational training.



ECONOMIC NEEDS

- Give girls and their parents financial help, such as cash to parents if they keep their daughters in school, cash to married girls to care for their children, and spending money to girls.
- Help married and unmarried girls and parents find good, safe work.
- Help with things that prevent girls from working, like family members and husbands who don't want them to work or heavy home and childcare duties.

WHAT DO GIRLS AND PARENTS THINK NGOS CAN DO TO HELP



HEALTH

- Help young, unmarried girls to be able to access sexual and reproductive health care.
- Help girls of all ages get information about their bodies and sexual health when they want it.
- Make sure girls have good access to family planning and care when they are pregnant or giving birth.
- Help with things that prevent girls from getting sexual and reproductive healthcare or education. This might be that they don't know where to go for care, that they feel shy or afraid to go for care, or their parents or husbands don't want them to get care.



PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

- Offer all girls counseling and support groups to teach them how to cope with stress and trauma.
- Help girls have healthy friendships through activities they enjoy, like games, art classes, and sewing. Have social activities to help married girls make friends.
- Offer married girls support with parenting. Counsel them on problems in their marriages, what to do if they are being abused, how to get a divorce, and where to get support.



PROTECTION

- Make girl-only safe spaces. Use them to hold sensitization activities and let girls spend time with their friends. Teach girls they can go there if they are being abused or forced to marry.
- Find ways to make communities safer for girls and teach girls and parents safety strategies.
- Help parents to protect their daughters from harmful traditions, norms, and pressure to marry young.
- Offer advice and support for married girls whose husbands or in-laws are abusing them. Help them get counseling services, go to the Family Protection Department, or return to their parents' home if they like.
- Teach husbands how to treat their wives.
- Have community leaders and NGO staff help find married girls who are being abused or mistreated.



LAW AND POLICY

- Change laws that say it's okay for girls to marry between 16-18 if they have special permission.
- Find better ways to monitor and ensure that all girls under age 18 are going to school.

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