

## When Young Women Get Married, Their Lives Are Cut Short – Here Are The Facts

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On International Women's Day we put up the post, "9 Facts That Prove Women Are Not Equal To Men," which highlighted a lot of the information provided by the Clinton Foundation's Full Participation Report. We read the comments, and it seems like a lot of you want to know what marrying young has to do with gender inequality.

Here's the answer:

UNICEF reports that 1 in 4 women worldwide are married before they turn 18. When a woman marries young, the trajectory of her life can be completely interrupted: She's likely to be less educated, make less money and have children earlier (with more complications and risks) than her peers who marry later on. This is true for women in every country in the world.

Though child marriages are considered a human rights violation, the practice is still widespread in developing nations, often because it's steeped so deeply in cultural tradition and because the union can be considered a lifeline for a poor family (either through compensation from the groom's family or the insurance that their daughter is well-settled in the care of another family).

Suzanne Petroni, Senior Director of Gender, Population and Development at The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) says that child marriages (defined as marriages involving an individual under the age of 18) are one of the most glaring human rights violations occurring today.

"When you look globally at the issue: 1 in 3 women in the developing world are married by 18, and 1 in 9 are married before turning 15," Petroni says. "Girls with only primary education are twice as likely to be married before they turn 18 and girls with no education are three times as likely."

For the latter, the young marriages can occur with women who are just hitting puberty.

According to Petroni, following these marriages, young women are often expected to prove fertility early on, and studies show that early pregnancy is a leading cause of health complications and death for both mothers and children.

Petroni says it's not often noted that the majority of under-aged pregnancies occur within marriages to significantly older men. These girls have not been given thorough information or the skills to negotiate contraceptive use. "They're at a higher risk for sexual and physical violence and haven't had the time to develop the social skills for healthy relationships."

Ultimately, entire communities suffer as well, Petroni says, when young women are unable to use their most productive years (young adulthood through mid-twenties) to contribute to their local economies.

"[Women who are married young] are the ones left out of development programs. So they need more attention," Petroni says. "Really, when you talk about child marriage, it's girls who's aspirations and opportunities are being forfeited."

Want More Money? Wait To Get Married.

And in the United States, young marriages are more likely to end in divorce, especially for people who never finished high school.

According to *Knot Yet: The Benefits and Costs of Delayed Marriage in America*, a report by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the National Marriage Project and the RELATE Institute, the rise in the age of marriage in The United States is one of the most important social developments in recent years with numerous social and economic benefits for all parties involved.

"Later marriage tends to mean richer women, especially among the college educated, even after controlling for other factors," the study says. "By the time they reach their mid-thirties, there is an \$18,152 difference in annual personal income between college-educated women who marry before age twenty and those who wait until thirty or later."

The study finds that college-educated women who choose to marry later are generally more successful in marriage: they see significantly higher combined household incomes later in life (due to the time and energy put into their careers during their early twenties) and they're significantly less likely to have their marriages end in divorce.

"In general, couples who wait till their mid twenties or later enjoy more maturity and financial security, both factors that make it easier to sustain a lifelong marriage," the study says.