Child Marriage Poses Serious Risks to Children

**PHYSICAL IMPACT**

- Women who marry before age 19 have a 23% greater risk of developing a serious health condition (diabetes, cancer, heart attack, or stroke).1
- Teen girls who marry tend to have more children, earlier, and more closely spaced. They are:
  - Much more (130%) likely to get pregnant than unmarried teens who live with a partner3
  - More likely to have their first child before age 184
  - 40% more likely to have a second birth within 24 months of their first5
  - Nearly 3x more likely to have at least 5 children6
- Young women and girls aged 16-19 face intimate partner violence victimization rates almost 3x the national average.7
- Overall, women who marry as children are more likely to seek and access health services, compared to women who married in adulthood.8

**SOCIAL IMPACT**

- Child brides tend to be isolated from support networks including school, friends, and family.
- The majority (70-80%) of marriages entered into when at least one person is under age 18 ultimately end in divorce.13
  - According to one study based on census data, 23% of children who marry are already separated or divorced by the time they turn 18.14
- These negative outcomes, combined with the economic impacts of child marriage which limit a woman’s ability to become financially independent, increase vulnerability to multiple victimization and often result in consequences becoming cyclical and intergenerational.

**ECONOMIC IMPACT**

- Child brides tend to come from poverty and remain in poverty.9
  - Girls who marry underage are up to 31 percentage points more likely to live in future poverty.10
  - For teen mothers, getting married and later divorcing can more than double the likelihood of poverty.11
- Earning potential and work opportunities are limited by interrupted education and low education levels. Girls who marry under age 19 are:
  - 50% more likely to drop out of high school
  - 4x less likely to graduate college12

**MENTAL IMPACT**

- Women who marry before age 18 are more likely to report stressful life events, and to present with significantly more psychiatric disorders, such as:
  - mood and anxiety disorders including major depressive disorder
  - antisocial personality disorder (prevalence nearly 3x higher)15
- Social isolation and feeling a lack of control over their lives can contribute to a child bride’s poor mental health. In fact, agencies working with girls facing or trying to escape forced marriages report that nearly all have contemplated or attempted suicide.16

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ENDNOTES

1 Compared with a study cohort of those who married between age 19 and 25. See Matthew E. Dupre and Sarah O. Meadows, “Disaggregating the Effects of Marital Trajectories on Health,” Journal of Family Issues (Vol. 28, No. 5, May 2007, 623-652), at pp. 630-636, and 646-647; see also Bridget M. Kuehn, “Early Marriage Has Lasting Consequences on Women’s Mental Health,” news@JAMA (August 29, 2011), posts by The Journal of the American Medical Association (“research has linked such early marriages to a higher risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections, cervical cancer, unintended pregnancy, maternal death during childbirth, and abortion; early marriage is also associated with malnutrition among offspring”).

2 See Naomi Seiler, “Is Teen Marriage a Solution?” (Center for Law and Social Policy, April 2002), at p. 8; see also infra, n. 3.


4 Id.


6 Id.

7 See loveisrespect.org factsheet.


10 See supra, n. 5, at 714. The author defined “early teen marriage” as marrying before age 16. Id., at 693.


12 See supra, n. 5, at 691.

13 See supra, n. 11, at 1820.


15 See supra, n. 8.

16 As observed by the Tahirih Justice Center’s Forced Marriage Initiative and other legal and social service-providers in the national Forced Marriage Working Group that Tahirih chairs.