

Document Advocating Against Teenage Marriage

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1. Overview of child marriage in the Arab Region and the World:

About **one third** of women in the world are married before the age of 18; furthermore, records show that the highest rate of early matrimony is in South Asia. See:

<http://data.unicef.org/child-protection/child-marriage?q=printme#sthash.zjAYUzXl.dpuf>

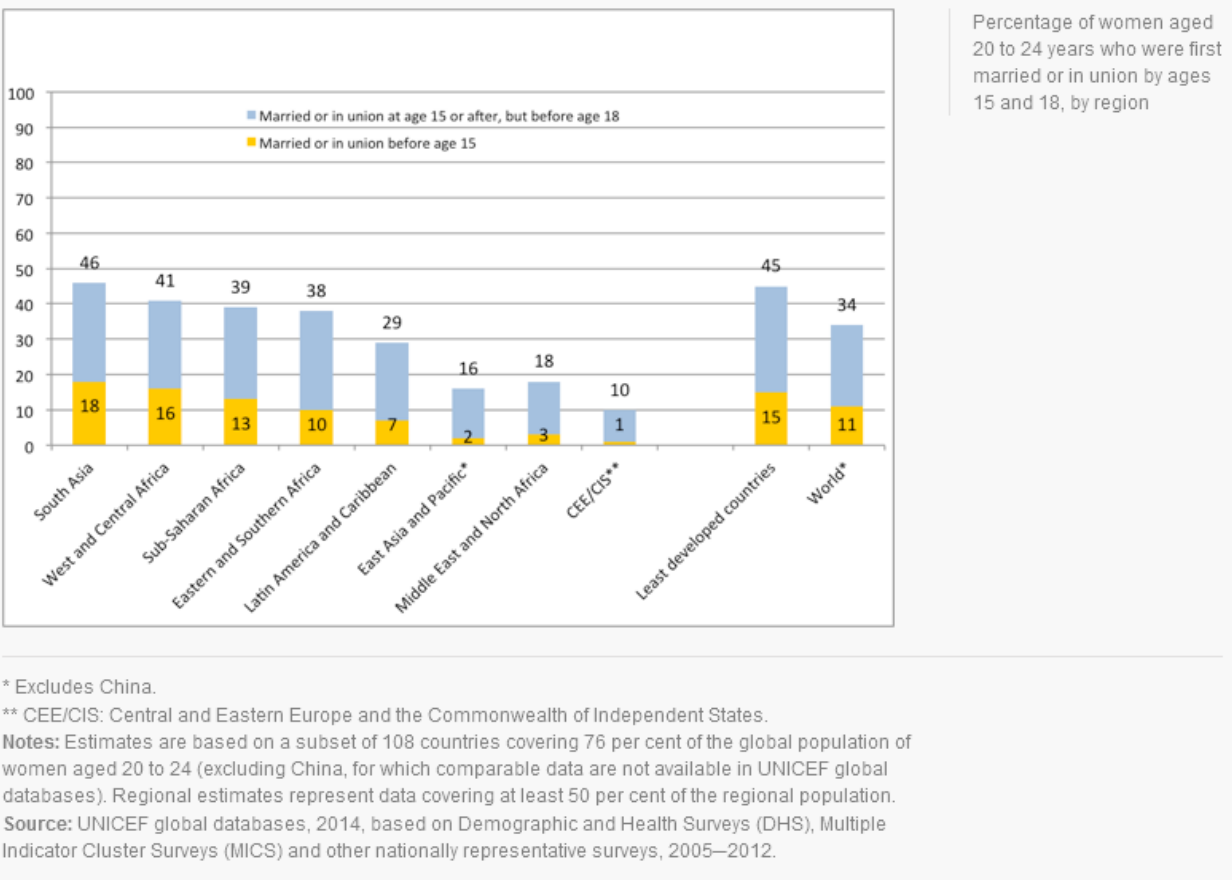


Table 1: Proportion of women married before the age of 18 among women aged between 20 and 24 years old by geographical region

International Context of early marriage

The choice of partner and appropriate timing for marriage is one of the most important life decisions that an individual should make for his/her self. No

other person is entitled to make, control and/or influence this decision. Based on that belief, the choice to wed must be associated with the individual's complete freedom and the absence of any element of coercion, hatred, fear or external pressure in the course of making this decision. It is acknowledged that in order for an individual to have the freedom and ability to consent they are required to be adults, 18 years of age or older. Most states agree on this principle, which is also reflected in International Human Rights Measures, precisely the Convention on the rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which banned child marriage, as well as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which called on all Member States in 1994 to work towards the elimination of child marriage and the enforcement of laws that guarantee the complete consent of minors.

<http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

Globally, 18 years is the legal age of marriage, yet many countries allow individuals younger than 18 to marry if parental and judicial authorities' consent is provided. More than 30 States allow the marriage of those 15 years of age or younger if their parents' approval was granted. Furthermore, a large number of countries allow the marriage of girls, under the same conditions mentioned above, at a younger age than those specified for boys, thus demonstrating that the early marriage phenomenon is influenced by gender.

Legal Age of Marriage in some Countries:

Arab Countries:

Islamic Sharia did not specify a certain age for marriage though it authorized Muslim religious figures to wed couples under the age of puberty, overlooking the civil status laws in Arab and Islamic countries which identified the minimum age of marriage. For example:

- 1) Article 5 of the Jordanian civil status law stated that in order for a marriage to be competent the groom and bride must be mature and the groom must be minimum 16 years old while the bride must be 15 years or older,
- 2) The first paragraph of article 20 of the Arab Emirates civil status law defines the legal age of marriage to be 18 years for boys and 16 years for girls,
- 3) The Syrian civil status law identified the legal age of marriage to be 18 year for boys and 17 years for girls. The marriage of boys aged 15 and girls aged 13 is also authorized only with the permission of the judge and the consent of the guardian.
- 4) While, the Tunisian civil status law defined the legal age of marriage to be 20 years for boys and 17 years for girls

The European laws also specify a minimum age of marriage, for example:

- 5) The French law determined the legal age of marriage to be 18 years for boys and 15 for girls,
- 6) And the German law determined 21 years to be the legal age for men and 20 years for women,

7) While the Swiss law specified the age of marriage to be 20 years for boys and 18 years for girls.

It should be noted that other religions (non-Christian and non-Muslim) have identified the legal age of marriage. In Jewish law, for example, they identified the marriage age of boys to be 13 and 12 for girls.

Even during the Roman era, the minimum marriage age was specified, 14 years for boys and 12 years for girls.

Early marriage in the Arab World

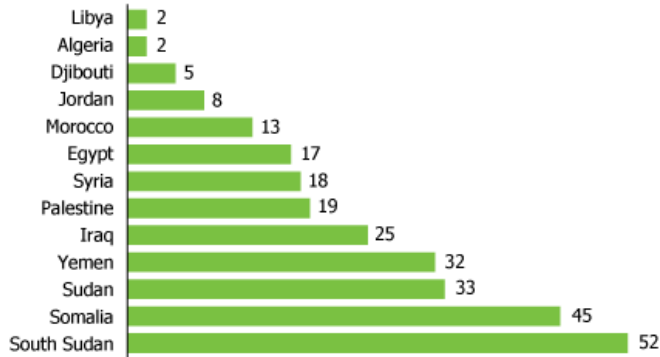
Recently, in March 2013, the World Health Organization issued a common press conference with the United Nations Population Fund and Non-Governmental Organizations advocating for women's and children's health, announcing that one out of seven girls are married under the age of 18 years. The study shows that more than 140 million girls are estimated to get married at a young age between the year 2011 and 2020, totaling around 39,000 girls daily⁽²⁾.

The highest rate of early marriages, which occur below 18 years of age, are in South Asia; their teenage marriage rate constitutes around half of the number of girls worldwide, followed by the South African Sahara, which constitutes one-third of girls globally⁽²⁾.

As for the Arab world, according to the Pan-Arab Program for Family Health PAFAM, the early marriage rates are higher in countries with low income (income below than 2,000USD per person in 2011), like Yemen (%32), Sudan (%33), Somalia (%45), South Sudan (%52). However, teenage marriage remains to be a rare phenomenon in countries like Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya(%2). Egypt is

seen to have the highest prevalence of teenage marriage in terms of its dense population (%17). (4)

Percentage of Women Ages 20 to 24 Who Married Before Their 18th Birthday, Selected Countries in the Arab Region



Note: Palestine refers to the Arab population of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Sources: Special tabulations by PAPFAM for Libya (2007), Syria (2009), and Iraq and Morocco (2011). The data for Jordan is from the 2012 Jordan Population and Family Health Survey. The data for remaining countries—Palestine (2004); Algeria, Djibouti, Somalia, and Yemen (2006); Egypt (2008); and Sudan and South Sudan (2010)—are from Childinfo, Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women, accessed at www.childinfo.org/marriage_countrydata.php, on May 10, 2013.

Graph #2: The rate of married women under the age of 18 who are now between the age of 20 and 24 years in some Arab countries.

In most of the Arab countries today, a reduction in child marriage rates is witnessed compared to what it was like in the past. Yet, Iraq, in particular, is showing a considerable regression in this area. A UNICEF multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS4), conducted on areas and regions in Iraq in 2011, reported the age group between 15 and 19 years to make up 22.41% of the entire population, the highest proportion among age groups, suggesting that Iraq is mostly a young

community where a high percentage of married individuals are from within this age group, 45.1% to be precise. This high percentage highlights the widespread of the phenomenon of forced marriage of minors, who constitute a high proportion of the population. Additionally, a survey conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning's Central Bureau of Statistics in cooperation with the Central Bureau of Statistics of Kurdistan and the ministries of health and women on ' knowledge, attitudes and aspirations of adolescent girls ', showed that the estimated number of girls in Iraq within the age group of 10-14 years was 1.9 million girls. According to these estimates, these girls represent approximately 6% of the total population. According to the results of this survey, the girls in this age group are distributed by 65.4% in cities and 34.6% in rural areas.

		Region					
		Kurdistan Region	%	South/Centre Iraq	%	Total	%
Age	15-19	2755	20.53	9618	23.02	12394	22.41
	20-24	2643	19.69	7404	17.72	10067	18.21
	25-29	2345	17.47	6481	15.52	8843	15.99
	30-34	1928	14.36	5708	13.66	7650	13.84
	35-39	1669	12.43	5321	12.74	7002	12.66

	40-44	1209	9.01	4232	10.13	5450	9.86
	45-49	873	6.50	3008	7.20	3888	7.03
	Total	13422	100	41772	100	55294	100

Table 3 shows the age distribution by categories and regions

It is noted in table 3 that the proportion of young ages, 15-19 years, represents the highest proportion of age groups in the country; making Iraq a young community. This category constitutes 22.41% of the population, which is the same age group teenage marriage girls belong to.

		Marital/Union status											
		Currently married				Formerly married				Never married			
		Kurdistan		South/Centre		Kurdistan		South/Centre		Kurdistan		South/Centre	
		Region		Iraq		Region		Iraq		Region		Iraq	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Age	15-19	255	3.4%	2060	7.7%	10	2.5%	70	4.1%	2490	45.6%	7488	55.9%
	20-24	1057	14.0%	4294	16.1%	31	7.6%	147	8.6%	1555	28.5%	2963	22.1%
	25-29	1600	21.2%	5115	19.2%	33	8.1%	191	11.2%	712	13.0%	1175	8.8%
	30-34	1499	19.9%	4759	17.8%	55	13.5%	228	13.4%	374	6.8%	721	5.4%
	35-39	1380	18.3%	4520	16.9%	89	21.9%	303	17.8%	200	3.7%	498	3.7%

40-44	1031	13.7%	3521	13.2%	83	20.4%	373	21.9%	95	1.7%	338	2.5%
45-49	729	9.7%	2402	9.0%	105	25.9%	393	23.0%	39	.7%	213	1.6%

Table 4 shows the rates of early marriages by categories and age groups

It is determined from table 4 that the percentage of married women and ex-married women within the age group 15-19 is 45.1%; a high rate which clearly shows the prevalence of underage marriage. In southern and central Iraq, only 55.9% of girls in this age group are unmarried.

It is worth mentioning, in this context, that the Minister of Planning and Development Cooperation in Iraq, Ali Al-Shokri, announced in July 2013, that Iraq has the highest underage marriage rates among the Nations of the world, which has reached 11%.⁽⁶⁾

The economic and social survey on families in Iraq in 2007 demonstrated that 21% of the girls are married before reaching the age of 19, compared with 15% in the years between 1997 and 2004. The Central Bureau of statistics showed in 2011 that 5% of Iraqi girls wed below the age of 15 years while about 22% of Iraqi girls marry under 18 years old.

It is thus established that the proportions and numbers of early marriages are staggering which calls to analyze and understand the reasons for the widespread of this phenomenon.

2) Reasons and motives for marrying off underage girls

Marrying off underage girls is a dangerous event that takes place in the name of religion and traditions. It has adverse consequences on the girl, the new-

born, and the whole family; in addition to that, it negatively impacts the general community on the long run.

There are many reasons for this phenomenon:

A- Poverty: one of the main causes of early marriage. With the deterioration of the living situation of Iraqis, after years of embargo imposed by the UN Security Council on Iraq until 2003, the International Food and Agriculture Organization estimated the poverty rate to include 71% of the population in 1995. The female child has become a financial burden on her family; therefore, parents may find marrying her off as an opportunity to reduce family expenses and gain dowry in return. But this practice is, in fact, depriving girls of the opportunity to learn and attain the skills and knowledge necessary to help them lift themselves and their families out of poverty. As a result of this widespread practice in the communities, girls hitting puberty becomes a fast track to motherhood, leaving girls and women, who get married at a young age, more likely to be vulnerable to domestic violence, maternal mortality, and other risks and difficulties.

B. Political and Social Reasons: After the transition that occurred in 2003, due to the occupation of Iraq by the American forces and the topple of Saddam Hussein regime, poverty rates increased which, in turn, led to increased incidents of early marriage; disregarding the law, State bodies and civil society organizations, although this act is a violation of human rights and a violation of international charters and treaties signed by Iraq. The graph of this phenomenon escalated in the 10 years following the establishment of the State of democratic Iraq, which was formed a year after 2003.⁽¹⁰⁾

In relation to applicable laws, the Civil Status law in Iraq, no. 188 of 1959, is fairly consistent with the international laws that call for a minimum age of marriage when the individual completes 18 years of age (as the law prohibits marriage of girls under 15 years old, and gives appreciation to judge and parental consent in marriage of a girl between 15 and 18 years). However, the legitimacy that confer on written contracts outside the courts, especially those from the offices of religious leaders, are considered haven for parents who want to marry off their underage daughters, and men who want to marry girls under that age. Additionally, the contractual approval of the “Sayid”, clergyman, became a necessity in the current Iraqi community, a legitimate contract, held in a family court, cannot be given without it.

In this context, article 41 of the Iraqi Constitution states that all Iraqis are free in their personal beliefs, based on their religions, doctrines or choices, as long as they are abiding by the law.

Regarding the new draft law

As for the new draft law, in this domain, it is based on the principles of the Ja’fari (Al-Fakih) jurisprudence for Shi’as, which was founded by Imam Ja’far Al-Sadiq, the sixth Shia Imam. The main chapters that provoked the anger of jurists and lawyers, in addition to reducing the legal age of marriage of women from 18 years to 9 years, are: permitting polygamy, preventing the wife from leaving her home, and restricting the rights of the wives’ inheritance and divorce. It also includes dropping the legal age of marriage for boys from 18 to 15 years, and preventing the marriage of Muslim men to non-Muslim women, unless temporary, as in ‘fun marriage’.

Legal expert, Azhar Alsharbat, explains that this Bill causes great injustice to the Ja'fari women, especially the young ones. She added that the most serious constitutional violations that mFarred the law was the establishment of an independent judicial authority of the Iraqi judiciary, called the Supreme Council of Al-Jaafari. Human Rights Watch called on the Iraqi Government to withdraw the Al-Jaafari civil status draft law, and guarantee the protection of the Iraqi legal framework of women and girls, in order to be in line with the international obligations of Iraq. The Deputy Executive Director of the North Africa and Middle East Division of the Human Rights Watch, Joe Stork, declared that while the Government claims to support equal rights for all, the adoption of this law represents a disastrous and discriminatory step for Iraqi women and girls, since this civil status law will only perpetuate the fragmentation of Iraq. They also warned that the Bill violates the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified in Iraq in 1986, by granting fewer rights to women and girls, hence discriminating based on gender. The bill also violates, according to CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Iraq in 1994.

The absence of policies and rule of law contributes to the high rates of child marriage, as a result of the loss of their rights, and the youth also lose:

- the right to education,
- the right to protection from physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse, rape and sexual exploitation,
- the right to the highest attainable standard of health,

- the right to rest and leisure and to participate freely in cultural life,
- the right to parental care,
- the right to work.

Importance of education:

The human element is considered among the core elements that the developmental processes in all societies depend on. There can be no development without human resources; hence, the importance of mobilizing these resources, which is only possible through education. Since the human resources are an important element in the various fields of life, attention to education is required because it works on building and strengthening productive human forces.

Accordingly, education is considered a crucial factor in sustainable human development, a component of economic well-being and a means of social status, which upgrades societies to advanced cultural levels in different aspects of life. Educating females, in particular, is one of the factors affecting development. However, education does not only mean providing a person with reading and writing skills, it is beyond that; it is the development of humans from all aspects. In other words, educating an individual means the development of their talents and creative qualifications, thus the human becomes the means in itself, the most effective way to generate productive forces for the community and for human lives. This human, who is dependable and open-minded, is the only one capable of contributing to the development of the community. Therefore, as long as the children in schools continue their education to higher levels, that would influence

the development of the local community. Despite the importance of education, there are constantly traditions and customs that continue to control the behaviors of individuals, notwithstanding the effects of education, consequentially impeding the development of societies, e.g. early marriage. Early marriage denies girls from their right to education and/or the continuation of it because the nature of the social upbringing embedded in the parents' minds the idea that the most suitable education for girls is the house and everything related to it. Therefore, there's no need for girls to go to school or continue in their schooling.

This has a negative impact on the social development, because adhering to such habits and coercing girls to marry at a young age results in mothers remaining illiterate and naïve; all of which is reflected, of course, in the upbringing of their children.

The impact of early marriage on social development for girls (a field study in the city of Mosul):

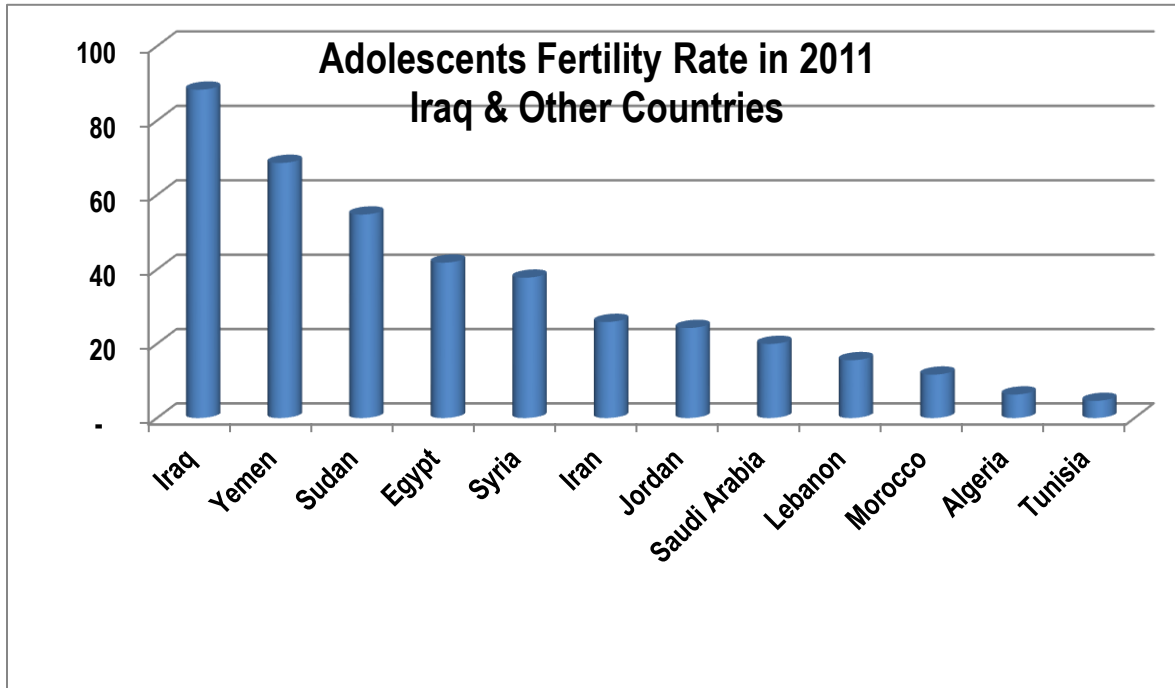


Table 5 shows the fertility in several countries of the region

		Region							
		Kurdistan Region				South/Centre Iraq			
		Ever attended school				Ever attended school			
		Yes		No		Yes		No	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Age	15-19	2531	91.9%	224	8.1%	7664	79.7%	1954	20.3%
	20-24	2055	77.8%	588	22.2%	5731	77.4%	1673	22.6%
	25-29	1615	68.9%	730	31.1%	5092	78.6%	1389	21.4%
	30-34	1249	64.8%	679	35.2%	4779	83.7%	929	16.3%

	35-39	1095	65.6%	574	34.4%	4522	85.0%	799	15.0%
	40-44	641	53.0%	568	47.0%	3387	80.0%	845	20.0%
	45-49	285	32.6%	588	67.4%	1880	62.5%	1128	37.5%

Table 6 shows the women who enrolled in schools earlier in their lives according to their age group

It is noted that the relative percentage of school attendees under the category of minors in Kurdistan recorded reaching 91.9%, while this percentage reached 79.7% outside the territory.

3. Consequences and Implications

Often girls in patriarchal societies suffer from discrimination and coercion; they are frequently powerless, unable to defend themselves or speak up about their misery. Therefore, girls fall victims of this fact to various social, economic and cultural practices so abuse becomes a normal duty that the wives and girls have to bear.

About half of the girls (53.02%) between 15 and 19 years of age are subject to early childbearing, as shown in the table below:

	Ever given birth		Total
	Yes	No	

			No.	%	No.	%	
Age	15-19	Kurdistan Region	136	10.7%	129	11.5%	265
		South/Centre Iraq	1134	89.3%	996	88.5%	2130
	20-24	Kurdistan Region	833	18.7%	255	23.6%	1088
		South/Centre Iraq	3616	81.3%	825	76.4%	4441
	25-29	Kurdistan Region	1431	23.0%	202	28.2%	1633
		South/Centre Iraq	4791	77.0%	515	71.8%	5306
	30-34	Kurdistan Region	1466	23.9%	88	21.5%	1554
		South/Centre Iraq	4665	76.1%	322	78.5%	4987
	35-39	Kurdistan Region	1396	23.4%	73	22.1%	1469
		South/Centre Iraq	4565	76.6%	258	77.9%	4823

		Iraq					
40-44		Kurdistan Region	1072	22.5%	42	17.5%	1114
		South/Centre Iraq	3696	77.5%	198	82.5%	3894
45-49		Kurdistan Region	800	23.2%	34	19.3%	834
		South/Centre Iraq	2653	76.8%	142	80.7%	2795
Total							36333

Table 7 shows the percentage of women and girls who have given birth to children by age groups.

There is a significant difference between the women of Kurdistan and women outside the territory. The high number of early births may lead to deterioration in the health of women, especially minors.

The percentage of early marriages is escalating, despite the warning of the Ministry of Women in 2010 that girls between 15 and 18 years are more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth compared to women between 20 and 24 years. The following statistics open doors to the issue of minors who are victims of death during pregnancy or childbirth. The complications of pregnancy and childbirth are

the leading cause of death in this age group, from 15 to 19 years, because girls are pressured by their families and society to have children shortly after marriage. This makes them more vulnerable to the risks of early pregnancy and the frequent problems of premature birth, which lead to high blood pressure during childbirth and other risks. In this context, the World Health Organization warns of violence against pregnant women by their husbands all over the world. The pregnant teens are not exempt from domestic violence, quite the contrary, and several studies in this area show that family violence is exacerbated during pregnancy. Violence during pregnancy may have direct consequences on women's health, including severe bleeding, premature delivery, and abortion, along with serious psychological problems that add to the child's health. There is also an increased risk of prenatal mortality and low birth weight.

Health problems faced by adolescents as a result of early marriages:

Psychological:

- Psychological disorders at puberty include attention deficit disorder and emotional disorders,
- The emotional disorders include mood swings, anxiety, depression, cognitive disorders and physical disorders, epilepsy, loss of appetite, nervousness and schizophrenia,
- Depression has been reported as the top mental illness among adolescents. It affects women more than it affects males by (1/2). It is a dangerous illness that may lead to unhappiness, an inability to work and possibly suicide.

Physical:

Adolescence is a fast physical growth accompanied by increased nutritional requirements needed to increase body mass and enhance the storage of nutrients. It increases the body's need for nutrients in the following cases:

-The age of puberty, especially in female adolescents, needs more iron and iodine by 10% compared to adolescents-in pregnancy, especially during the last half of it and during the breastfeeding phase.

Therefore, it is advisable to postpone the first pregnancy after marriage, or at least until after the age of 18 years. It may be difficult to feed adolescents adequate quantities of food, especially in poor households during activities and sports such as swimming, running and playing ball, which results in a lack of certain nutrients, particularly iron and iodine. Food sources with these nutrients are a must.

Some concerning facts:

-15 million births to teenagers is about 11% of all births annually worldwide.

-The global rate of adolescent births is 65 births per 1,000 teenage girls.

-Iraq's fertility rates for teenagers is high, equivalent to 88 per 1000 births in the age group of 15 to 19-year-old according to the World Bank statistics for 2011.

-The Maternal mortality rate is 19 per 100,000 cases according to statistical report 2010 of the Ministry of Health in Kurdistan, while 120 in 1999 (according to the UNICEF report).

-There is an increased risk of prenatal mortality and low birth weight.

-5.5% of girls were married before 15 and 23.4% were married before the age of 18 as noted by the Ministry of Planning of the Iraqi Government.

-Global statistics indicate that pregnancy related deaths are the leading cause of mortality in the world; the mortality rate rises from 2 to 5 times when the age group rises from 18 to 25 years.

Violence during pregnancy:

The World Health Organization highlights the spread of violence against pregnant women by their husbands all over the world. Several studies in this area draw that family violence is exacerbated during pregnancy.

-Violence during pregnancy may have consequences on women's health, including severe bleeding, premature delivery, abortion, and forced abortions as a result of pregnancy without marriage. Violence against women is one of the effects of unequal power relations between men and women in communities that reflect the disparities of early marriage, lack of access to information, the option of controlling fertility and pregnancy issues, and forced pregnancy in marriage.

-Minors bear the consequences of sexual assault or sex outside of marriage, and one of the causes is the inability to access information on contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health in general. This results in difficulties and other factors. The minors will face a great deal of complications and deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth, as the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics-FIGO stated.

Factors affecting minor's pregnancy and birth:

Biological factors:

The rise of serious problems concerning blood pressure during pregnancy

-Minors are at higher risk during birth due to the incompleteness of the pelvis' growth, especially in length and size, to the extent that their bodies are often an unbearable burden of pregnancy due to the immaturity of the pelvic bones and the disparity between the size of the pelvis and the head of the fetus.

-There is a high risk of anemia during pregnancy, due to the lack of certain substances found in food, such as iron, folic acid and vitamin A.

Social and cultural factors:

-A Woman's role in society is measured by her ability to reproduce. Women are subject to a lot of pressure by their family and husbands' family and community as a whole, to prove their fertility as quickly as possible due to social statuses.

Girls usually do not have an opinion when it comes to getting pregnant as it is not a social norm; the decision of her getting pregnant is usually taken by the older lady in the family which is the mother in-law.

Factors related to the delivery of health services:

Many scientific studies reveal that girls between 15 and 19 years old are more vulnerable to risks threatening their lives and the life of their children.

-Minors fail to seek care during pregnancy and face difficulties, especially in environments where young women are unable to take decisions and act freely in order to pay attention to their own health.

-Minors lack the knowledge regarding the consequences of early pregnancy.

- They can't handle the high cost of the services they need.
- They prefer dealing with females when receive health care.

Potential Physical and Health effects of teenage mothers:

- Menstrual disorders and delayed pregnancy
- Tearing of the vagina and adjacent organs as outcomes of intercourse and birth
- Increased rate of osteoporosis in an early age, due to the lack of calcium
- Continuous vomiting during pregnancy
- Increased abortion rates and premature births, either due to a default in female hormones, or the lack of acclimatization of the uterus during pregnancy, resulting in repeated uterine contractions and consequently vaginal bleeding
- A sharp rise in blood pressure, which may lead to kidney failure and bleeding, as well as cramps
- Increased Caesarian operations, due to complicated births
- Increased Mortality rates due to various complications of early pregnancy
- Pelvic bone abnormalities appear due to early pregnancy

Physical effects on the health of children of teenage mothers:

- Fetal asphyxia takes places in the mother's womb as a result of severe deficiencies in the fetal circulation

-Premature birth and associated complications, such as respiratory failure due to incomplete growth of the lungs, digestive disorders, delayed physical and mental growth

-Increasing rate of cerebral palsy

-Blindness and deafness

-Death as a result of infections

The potential psychological effects of teenage mothers:

Emotional deprivation of parental affection and the deprivation of living their childhood, had they not been teenage mothers their upbringing would have passed peacefully and they would have grown up to be proper human beings. Thus, the deprivation of experiencing this stage leads to reliving their childhood through mental illnesses, such as hysteria, schizophrenia, depression, anxiety and personality disorders, when subject to pressure

-Sexual relations disorders between the two spouses resulting from a lack of understanding by the teenage mother to the nature of the relationship, leading to the failure of the relationship, and lack of adjustment due to marital problems, and the lack of understanding from the wife of what marriage is and its responsibilities

-Addiction as a result of high pressure, as a kind of escape

-Post-traumatic effects (the wedding night), a set of psychiatric symptoms ranging from symptoms of depression and anxiety when exposed to such experiences.

Fear is a normal condition in children, and those below the age of puberty, as fear

of the dark, strangers and distance from their parents, these feelings fade after puberty. So the fear and its consequences, will be experienced the teen if married at a young age

-Involuntary closure of the vagina of those of a young age (a psychological illness), promoted by the fear (anxiety) of the physical intensity of the pair, a condition requiring medical intervention

-Susceptibility to certain psychological illnesses during the postpartum period (as a result of her risk of developing mental illnesses before pregnancy)

-Incomplete mental maturity regarding decision-making and its consequences at the level of child care, and the relationship with the husband and his relatives.

The psychological effects on the children of teenage mothers:

-A sense of deprivation, where the teenage mother of the minor cannot do her work as a mature and complete mother

-Psychological disorders lead to mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and depression as a result of the presence of a child in a heterogeneous social environment

-Lack of mental growth as a result of the absence or weakness of proper educational care, thus lacking her educational duty towards her children.

A Summary of the health consequences of underage marriage and birth by Dr. Bayan Kader Rasoul:

Escalating divorce rates:

On one hand, the phenomenon of early marriage, in addition to the economic independence of working women, on the other hand, (which after 2003 has seen a big jump in salary and perks as financial grants and loans were given), adding to the growing unemployment rate and the difficulty of obtaining individual housing outside the frame of family homes and other factors, are the cradle to the escalating divorce rates in Iraq, which have reached large numbers. A field study by researcher Saja Abdul Ridha, with the guidance of the Civil Status Court Judge of the people's Court in Baghdad, shows the increase in the marriages of minors in the first month of 2010 until the fifth month of that year. The study showed that in the first month experienced 10 marriages of minors out of 46 cases. In the second month, she observed an increase to 47 marriages of minors out of 132 cases. A larger increase took place in March reaching 87 marriages of minors out of 281 cases. April reached 100 marriages of minors out of 297 cases. Finally, the fifth month of 2010 showed a great increase indicating that 36 out of 50 cases within the first four days were marriages of minors.

The study showed that the majority of respondents were aged between 15 and 17 years. Reaching almost five months, the cumulative number of cases of minor's marriages reached 244 out of 746 marriages occurring in the family court in the People Area (Eastern Baghdad). This study emphasizes on the fact that the rate of underage marriages of the ages mentioned above is continuously increasing. This rate represents approximately 30% of the total number of marriages.

In return, figures issued by the Supreme Council of the Judiciary show that divorce rates have been steadily increasing since 2004, which saw 28,690

divorces. In 2005, the number of cases stretched to 33,384 cases, then 35,627 in 2006, and continued to rise in 2007, the years of sectarian tension, reaching 41,560 cases. In 2008, there was a marked increase in the divorce rate as it reached 44,116 cases, culminating in 2009 with a peak of 61,466 cases. The year that followed saw a slight decrease, but it didn't last for long. The year after that regained the previous rates. Although the problem's diagnosis by the Ministries and the commissions of the House of Representatives competent social issues is that there are no radical solutions to the issue of under aged marriages, however, taking note that the grounds for divorce are summarized in three chief factors, 'early marriage due to clan influences', and 'unemployment' and the 'housing crisis'.

4. Measures and Steps Taken

The difficult conditions in Iraq did not hinder the United Nations Population Fund from assisting the Ministry of Health with the promotion of its priorities, which include the implementation of strategies for maternal and child health care as well as reproductive health. This may be done through the formulation of a four-year action plan (2011-2014) regarding reproductive health, consisting of the following:

- To enhance the efficiency of primary health-care programs and systems resources to provide comprehensive systems for reproductive health
- Raising the employment potential of women and the youth in areas that lack the services that appear sensitive to gender, age differences and other social and psychological services.

The national development plan (2010-2014) and the national health strategy call for the conformation of the primary health care approach as an effective and fair provision providing basic health services for everyone, and especially for women, children and the youth. It also calls for the completion of the hospital-based rules and regulations, through following a balanced, preventive, and therapeutic approach with appropriate referrals. In order to move forward in achieving the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development as well as the fifth objective of the Millennium Development Goals, the “Reproductive Health and Maternal Health” Program aims to face Iraq’s challenges to move forward in Reproductive Health and Rights, especially to mothers and women in experiencing the cycle of life, with focus on family planning and emergency obstetric care. It also aims to disseminate reproductive health services in underserved areas, through interventions designed to change societal behavior by targeting individuals and communities and the empowerment of women in marginalized areas.

This plan included all the national partners (in the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government) of the Ministry of Health, Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil society organizations (such as professional unions and others), Parliamentary committees, as well as academic circles, research centers, universities, and United Nations partners, such as WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Program.

UNICEF developed the rules to end child marriage worldwide and supported the adoption of a law banning child marriage in 2006, and during that time supported the development and implementation of a national strategy on

child marriage aimed at coordinating programs and policies to address the causes and consequences. In 2011, the 34 country offices raised reports on the efforts addressing child marriage through social and economic change as well as legal reforms. (9)

As it turns out the development of legal measures with the support of local communities, the presence of alternatives to life, particularly education, and empowering communities to discuss a resolution ending child marriage has produced positive results in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, India, the Niger, Senegal and Somalia. According to the overall statistics, Iraq will be at the forefront of the states on the list of early marriage statistics of the United Nations, which is expected to reach around 50 million underage marriage cases in the world by 2020, this figure will be 100 million by 2030, if the situation remains as is.

Strategic recommendations: policy and legislation

1. Establish a National Committee to draw up a population policy and its implementation, headed by the Prime Minister and a number of Ministers concerned with ensuring the mobilization of the formulation of the population policy. Clear objectives and visions should fit the principles of human rights and gender equality in order to ensure the health of the whole community.
2. Emphasize on marriage through a social researcher creating awareness on a minor's pre-marital life and marriage, highlighting the importance of thinking before marriage and the various aspects pertaining to marriage, including social, economic, and health by stressing on a statement of the medical committees' view on the eligibility of the girl to be married.

3. Prevention and awareness strategies promoting women's health in general and reproductive rights in particular.
4. The governmental and civil society organizations drawing a media policy to inform the people about aspects of this phenomenon.
5. Conducting a plan of work and seeking work against violence against women in accordance with the Iraqi Ministry of Health.
6. Formation of policies and programs that encourage late marriages and late pregnancies, as well as expand the economic and educational opportunities for women and girls.
7. Working on increasing the proportion of government expenditure on health (increasing the budget of the Ministry of Health), particularly reproductive health programs.
8. The Government should work towards and strive to introduce a national strategy for the development of women in the Kurdistan region 2014-2024, which received third States on reproductive health as follows: reproductive health policy through the established life stages/that are activated in Kurdistan.
9. In the absence of a law forbidding underage marriage, the Kurdistan regional Parliament amending the amended civil status law No. 15 of 2008, prohibiting underage marriage.
10. Activation of the Compulsory Education Act and the completion of the Foundation for girls, which is the minimum completion of ninth grade.

11. The budget allocated by the Government and Parliament to combat illiteracy and provide opportunities for wider study for married girls to complete school education programs and other stages in case the first recommendation was not applied.

12. Legislation gives the right to an educational institution, specifically a social researcher, to communicate with students who are married in order to find out the causes and motives of the marriage and the child's educational future.

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