

## Girls Just Wanna Be Kids

The United Nations has a goal to achieve gender equality by 2030. Ending female child marriage falls under this goal. Child marriage is a harmful practice that can threaten the psychological or physical health of young girls. It robs them of their freedom and choice, making it impossible for them to receive the proper education and childhood to which they are entitled. As a girl of ten years, it breaks my heart to think that girls my age are being sold into marriage so that their family has bread on the table. I am determined to help poor families who cannot afford to eat without restricting the freedom of their daughters, and this is my plan.

Child marriage is a global phenomenon, but the rates in Bangladesh are especially concerning. According to Human Rights Watch, Bangladesh has the fourth-highest rates of child marriage in the world. According to UNFPA, over half the girls in Bangladesh are married before age 18 and 15% are married at age 14 and under. This is regardless of the legal age of marriage in Bangladesh being 18 for females. This issue developed from poverty. Poor families may sell their daughter into a marriage with the son of more wealthy people when they cannot afford to feed her. They do this to make another family responsible for her care. The impact of child marriage is very severe. A young girl's partner often wants children. He may abuse her or force her into having children when she isn't physically or psychologically ready. This often has a detrimental effect on the girl and the newborn. According to UNFPA, this is globally the leading cause of death among female adolescents. Another impact of child marriage is that it robs a girl of her education and childhood. Many child brides drop out of school when they marry. Third, child marriage takes away a girl's right to choose when she would like to marry and to whom. These are atrocious human right violations, and everyone needs to understand that.

One innovative solution to child marriage is making education for girls more accessible. I can do this by adding incentives such as school supplies, free tuition, reduced prices on transportation and uniforms, or providing food supplements for families who participate. Educated girls have accurate information about their rights and laws against child marriage. According to ICRW, 60% of girls in Mozambique without education are married before age 18, whereas 10% of girls with secondary schooling and 1% with higher education are victims of child marriage. This solution would clearly have a positive impact, as the rates of child marriage amongst educated girls are drastically lower than those with no education. Another solution is raising awareness about child marriage to the government. Though there are already restrictions on the practice, the government will do their best to provide their citizens with more care and resources so that child marriage is not their only option. Involving the government would have a long-lasting impact, since the leaders of a country would have more power to make change over a sustained period than I do. One last solution would be to sensitize parents to their bias against the girl child. This is what causes families to marry off their daughters rather than their sons. They often subconsciously or deliberately think of their daughters as inferior to males, a mere burden to their family. They believe that their sons are worth more, which is blatant gender discrimination. If parents are informed about the cause and impact of these harmful decisions, they will become aware that they have more options than to send their daughter into an early marriage loaded with threats to her well-being. There are so many things we can do to end child marriage, but only once we choose to do them will our children be free.

Imagine that these girls were your sisters or daughters. Would you let them lose their freedom like 12,000,000 girls do every year? You need to care about this issue, or the childhood and education that everyone is entitled to is snatched away from 28 girls per minute. The more

people sit back and let this global issue persist, the more girls we lose to the detrimental impact of child marriage. No one should be poor enough to turn to this harmful practice as their only option. Imagine if you had to tell your 12-year-old daughter that you were paying the family of a 36-year-old man to marry the two so that you could afford to eat. You'd feel horrible. I care about this issue because both of my great-grandmothers were married under eighteen. I am also a girl the same age as some of the victims of child marriage. And as a human being, I know that this isn't ethically sound. You can help! To address this issue, you can donate to charities, lead protests, contact the government, or raise awareness through flyers or social media. You can also inform families about unhealthy biases against the girl child to ensure that they don't develop one. If we succeeded with this global goal, children would be saved from the harmful impact of a child marriage and every child could get education. Additionally, no family would be poor enough to have to practice child marriage. Everyone could have the childhood that they are entitled to and eventually choose if and when they'd like to marry and to whom. I hope that we succeed with this global goal and all children will be free. I additionally hope that more people will learn about child marriage and help end it. You've learned enough about child marriage to understand its unhealthy impact. Now, you have a choice. Will you sit back and let gender equality collapse before your eyes? Or will you help succeed with this global goal and protect our children from the threat of child marriage? Choose protection for our children today and help make the world a better place.

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