**NAME: ONIWAIYE GRACE OLUWASEUN**

**MATRIC NO: 19/LAW01/218**

**COLLEGE: LAW**

**COURSE: COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH (GST 122)**

**TOPIC: CHILD MARRIAGE: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND SOLUTIONS.**

According to UNICEF, Child marriage is defined as a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18 and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married. Child marriage affects both girls and boys, but it affects girls disproportionately, especially in South Asia.

According to statistics from UNICEF, South Asia has the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Almost half (45%) of all women aged 20-24 are reported being married before the age of 18. Almost one in five girls (17%) are married before the age of 15. There is also the conception that child marriage only happens to the girl child but it also happens to the boy child but it is less than girl child marriage.

Child marriage violates children’s rights and places them at high risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. India has the largest number of child brides in the world- one-third of the global total. Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in Asia (the fourth highest rate in the world). Nepal has also one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia for both boys and girls.

Child marriage has many causes: cultural, social, economic and religious. In many cases, a mixture of these causes results in the imprisonment of children in marriages without their consent.

Poor families sell their children into marriage either to settle debts or to make some money and escape the cycle of poverty. Child marriage fosters poverty, however, as it ensures that girls who marry young will not be properly educated or take part in the workforce.

In certain cultures, marrying a girl young presumes that the girl’s sexuality, therefore the girl’s family’s honour will be protected by ensuring that the girl marries as a virgin. The imposition of family honor on a girl’s individuality. In essence, robbing the girl of her honour and dignity, undermines the credibility of family honour and instead underscores the presumed protection’s actual aim which is to control the girl.

Child marriage is a product of cultures that devalue women and girls and discriminate against them. This discrimination often manifests itself in the form of domestic violence, marital rape, and deprivation of food, lack of access to information education, healthcare and general impediments to mobility according to UNICEF.

Although many countries such as Pakistan have laws against child marriage, the laws are not enhanced. In Afghanistan, a new law was written into the country’s code enabling Shiite or Hazara communities to impose their own form of family law-including permitting child marriage.

The consequences of child marriage include:

Child marriage effectively ends a girl’s childhood, curtails her education, minimizes her economic opportunities, increases her risk of domestic violence, and puts her at risk for early, frequent, and very high-risk pregnancies.

Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s and face higher risk of pregnancy-related injuries, such as obstetric fistula (an abnormal connection between the rectum and the vagina).

Child brides are often unable to negotiate safer sexual practices and are therefore at a higher risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

The negative consequences of child marriage reach beyond the girls themselves. Children of child brides are 60 percent more likely to die in the first year of life than those born to mothers older than 19, and families of child brides are more likely to be poor and unhealthy (International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC).

UNICEF considers five entry points to accelerate these changes and solutions to end child marriage and they are:

1. to increase agency and resources for adolescents especially girls at risk of and affected by child marriage.
2. to enhance legal and development policy frameworks for an enabling environment that protects the rights of adolescent girls and boys.
3. to increase the generation and use of a robust evidence base for advocacy programming and learning progress.
4. to enhance systems and services that respond to the needs of adolescents at risk of or affected by child marriage.
5. to increase social action. Acceptance, and visibility around investing in and supporting girls, and shifting social expectations relating to girls, including by engaging and men.

The 2006 *Nepal Report on Child Marriage* includes the following testimony from a child bride:

“I was married to a nine-year-old boy when I was three. At that point in time, I was unaware of marriages. I don’t even remember my marriage event. I just remember that I was too young and was unable to walk and they had to carry me and bring over to their place. Getting married at an early age. I was destined to suffer a lot of hardships. I had to carry water in a small clay-pot in the mornings. I had to sweep and swap the floor every day.”

“Those were the days when I wanted to eat good food and wear pretty clothes. I used to feel very hungry, but I had to be satisfied with the amount of food that I was provided. I never got to eat enough. I sometimes secretly ate corns, soybeans. etc. that used to grow in the field. And if I was caught eating, my in-laws and husband would beat me up accusing me of stealing from the field and eating. Sometimes the villagers used to give me food and if my husband and in-laws found out, they used to beat me up accusing me of stealing food from the house. They used to give me one black blouse and cotton sari torn into pieces. I had to wear these for two years.”

“Never did I get other accessories like petticoats, belts etc. When my saris got torn, I used to patch the up and continue wearing them. My husband married three times after me. At present, he lives with his youngest wife. Since I married at an early age, early child-delivery was inevitable. As a result, I now have severe back problems. I used to weep a lot and consequently, I faced problems with my eyes, and had to undergo an eye operation. I often think that if I had the power to think like I do now, I would never go to that house”

“I also wish I had not given birth to any children. Retrospective sufferings make me wish not to see my husband again. Nevertheless, I do not want him to die because I don’t want to lose my marital status. (This is an excerpt from the original report).

In conclusion, according to UNICEF, child marriage is declining (63% in 1985 to 45% in 2010) in South Asia, with the decline being especially marked for girls under 15 (32% in 1985 to 17% in 2010). The marriage of girls aged 15-18 is however still commonplace, so more efforts are needed to protect older adolescents from marriage.