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Child Marriage

Despite several new policies child marriage is an issue that is still prevailing in our society. Typically, it is common in developing countries yet is still practiced in most of the developed countries as well. Child marriage is a union of two parties who are both underage and in some cases at least one of them is underage. In most countries, girls are the ones who are underage and are forced to marry a person who is significantly older than them. It is estimated that almost 12 million girls are married every year who are under eighteen. Specifically in the US, the legal age of getting married for two individuals either heterosexual or homosexual is seventeen or eighteen years old. However, many states allow child marriage at ages lower than seventeen years old with parents consent. According to the data obtained by many advocates and PBS Frontline, there were over more than 200,000 children married in the year 2000 who were under eighteen. This is alarming as America is considered a progressive developed country and yet still, it lacks in providing basic rights to children and adolescents.

Several cases of child marriages are reported yet no action has been taken to stop these marriages. One case that was under the spotlight and put people in an ethical dilemma was Sherry Johnson's case (*Opinion | 11 Years Old, a Mom, and Pushed to Marry Her Rapist in Florida - The New York Times*). As explained earlier many states allow child marriage after taking consent from parents Sherry also fell prey to this law. Johnson grew up in Tampa which was located in Florida. Her childhood was full of tragedies as she was raped repeatedly by the church bishop and deacon. She was also raped by her mother’s second husband. As a result, she became pregnant at the age of 10. As she was minor, her pregnancy was not recognized until she was near giving birth. To avoid criminal charges, her mother forced her to marry the deacon who was one of the people who raped her. Although in this case, one responsible judge did not issue a marriage license yet the second judge registered the marriage, because child marriage was legal in Florida. When she was seventeen, she had six children due to which she had to leave school so that she can take care of them. This jeopardized her education and her chance to build a successful future. However, with the help of Legal aid society, she applied for a divorce and started working as an activist to restrict child marriage. It is due to her efforts that the state had put a limit on age to marry yet still, there is no ban on child marriage. Similarly, Genevieve Meyer was also married to a 43-year-old man when she was just 14 years old (“She Was an American Child Bride. Now, Genevieve Is Fighting to Stop It from Happening to Others”). Another worse aspect of her story was that she was unable to file for divorce as she was not legally permitted to. This highlights the loopholes in our current laws that a child can get married yet has no right to file for divorce.

 The main reason for parents letting their children get married at an early age is that their daughter gets pregnant. In many countries, there is an increasing trend of taking dowry from girl’s parents. Due to this reason, many people are involved in child marriage so that they can take dowry and can maintain their hold on a child bride. Also, poverty is another reason that parents allow the early marriage. When parents are unable to bear their child expenses they let them marry. Most of the time, parents let their daughter get married to a person who is significantly older than her just to get some money. This is known as the bride price or bride token. Another most important reason for child marriage is religion. In many religions, it is commanded to let their child marry when they hit puberty. To follow religion, people force their children to marry early. Additionally, culture, slavery and social pressure are other reasons that lead to child marriage. In many countries such as India and Bangladesh, the main reason people let their daughters marry early is a sense of fear (Ahmed). As in these countries, rape is very common, so to protect their daughters from rape, they force them to marry. Although, parents do this to protect their child, yet they forget that child marriage will make their child's lives far worse than they can imagine.

According to my opinion, there should be a ban on child marriage as this could lead to teen pregnancies that can be very dangerous for both the mother and a child. Furthermore, this could also increase the risk of diabetes, stroke and several other physical illnesses. Also, due to early marriage, children are unable to get proper education which can result in children likely to live in poverty. Moreover, many cases are reported in which girls are subjected to violence and sexual abuse by their spouses. Although according to the law, this sexual abuse is considered as statutory rape yet still this law is not applicable if the parties involved are married. The constant sexual abuse and violence result in deteriorating physical and mental health. Specifically, girls who are forced to marry at a young age have limited work opportunities due to their lack of education. It is therefore mandatory that US policymakers should work more on the loopholes in our policies and prohibit child marriage to protect our future generation.

**Work Cited**

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