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UNICEF

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# UNICEF COMMITTEE

UNICEF, or the United Nations International Children's emergency fund, works in over 190 countries across the world to provide humanitarian and developmental aid and support to children. Catherine Russel is the 8th Executive Director and oversees the organization's work. It was created by the UN General assembly in 1946 to provide emergency food and healthcare to children and mothers. The aim of UNICEF is to work with others to overcome the obstacles such as poverty, violence, disease, and discrimination which hinder the development of children. (UNICEF) The UNICEF Executive board comprises of 36 members, representing the five regional groups of member states at the UN. It is coordinated by the Bureau, the president and 4 vice presidents. Each officer represents one of the five groups. UNICEF has reportedly saved more lives of children than any other humanitarian organization, with 90 million since 1990 ("Donate Now")

The main functions of the UNICEF include:

- Advocacy and Awareness: raises awareness for the rights and needs of children, ensuring that their voices are heard at both national and international levels.
- Emergency response: provides humanitarian assistance in times of crisis, such as natural disasters, pandemics, and conflict, to help protect children and support their families.
- Health and Nutrition: works to improve access to essential healthcare services, vaccinations, and nutrition programs.
- Education: promotes access to quality education for children to ensure they have the opportunity to learn and develop to their full potential.
- Child protection: advocates for the protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse, and discrimination, to work to create safe environments for children to grow up under.
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH): supports programs which try to improve access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene education, for better health access for children and their communities.
- Policy and Research: conducts research and analysis to inform policies and programs that benefit children, which advocate for evidence-based approaches to address their needs in an effective manner.

UNICEF helps to solve various global issues related to children. They work with partners, branches within the UN such as the WHO and UNHRC, as well as external charities and NGO's to provide essential resources to children and their families, such as clean water and sanitation, vaccines and life-saving immunization, food, protection from violence, and access to quality education.

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# TOPIC 1

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Child marriage relates to the marriage of a child – a person under the age of 18, with an adult or another child. The issue of child marriage, due to gender inequality, girls remain disproportionately affected by the practice. According to the official UNICEF site, the global prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one sixth compared to girls, with one in five girls married off in their childhoods. This issue is extremely concerning and demands urgent attention, as it robs girls of their childhoods, and has extremely negative connotations to their mental and often physical wellbeing, with rates of domestic violence and sexual abuse higher in child marriage cases. Girls who marry before 18 are said to be more likely to experience domestic violence. In the issue of child marriage, due to gender inequality, girls remain disproportionately affected by the practice. The date is completely unequal, with the global prevalence of child marriage among boys just one sixth compared to girls. One in five girls are married in their childhoods. It robs girls of their childhoods, has extremely negative connotations to their mental and potentially physical wellbeing. Girls who marry below 18 are said to be more likely to experience domestic violence. The issue of child marriage and education is that more often than not, children who are married off are unable to continue any forms of education. Due to the nature of this, child brides are often pregnant in their adolescence which causes risk to their and their offsprings' health. There have been many ways in which UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations have tried to tackle the global issue of child marriage: There are five key areas in which UNICEF aims to tackle child marriage. These include:

- support for development and participation of adolescent girls
  - strengthening legal systems to protect the rights of adolescent girls and boys
  - carrying out cutting-edge research to build a robust evidence base for advocacy, policies, programmes and tracking progress
  - strengthening services to help adolescents at risk of, or affected by, child marriage, particularly girls
  - raising awareness of the need to invest in and support girls, and shifting the social expectations that stifle their prospects.
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# HISTORY AND PAST UN ACTIONS

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1. Advocacy and Awareness: UNICEF advocates for prevention of child marriage through awareness raising campaigns, both globally and within specific countries. They work to raise awareness about the harmful effects of child marriage. 2. Legal reform: UNICEF supports efforts to reform child marriage laws and policies which help to raise the legal age of marriage. 3. Empowerment and Education: educating and empowering women and girls. Educating them helps to 4. Community engagement: UNICEF works with communities to help reform social norms and the attitudes that perpetuate child marriage. They do this through engagement with religious leaders, parents, teachers, and community members to educate people on the negative consequences of child marriage, particularly amongst girls.

Child marriage in Bangladesh: Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of Child Marriage in the world, with 2 of every 3 marriages involving a child. In 2005, 49% of women ages 25 to 29 were married by age 15. 51% of girls in Bangladesh are married before their 18th birthday, and 15% before the age of 15. This is contrasting to the statistics of boys, where only 4% are married before 18. However, the statistics between Rural and Urbanised areas also differ. While 54% of girls are married before their 18th birthday in rural towns, this statistic has a 10% decrease in urban cities. 2 thirds of women aged 20 – 24 marry before the age of 18 1 third of women aged 20 – 24 in Bangladesh were married by the age of 15 – according to a UNICEF report in 2011 The Child Marriage Restrict act (1929) – legal age of marriage in Bangladesh is 18 for females and 21 for males.

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# RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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There have been numerous developments globally with the issue of child marriage. According to the UNICEF official website, the practice of child marriage continues to decline. Today, one in five young women aged 20 to 24 compared to nearly one in four 10 years ago. While this statistic may seem positive, it still highlights how much further we have to go, and how much more work has to be done to eradicate this issue fully. Moreover, approximately 650 million girls across the globe alive today were married before their 18th birthday. And, as of 2018, no region in the world was on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goal target of eliminating child marriage by 2030. Despite a reduction in child marriage cases worldwide, due to external factors such as the repercussions of COVID-19, conflict, and the ongoing climate crisis, according to UNICEF Today, these could pose as a threat to the steady decline in child marriage practices. UNICEF Executive director Catherine Russell said that “Health and economic crises, escalating armed conflicts, and the ravaging effects of climate change are forcing families to seek a false sense of refuge in child marriage. We need to do everything in our power to ensure that their rights to an education and empowered lives are secured”.

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# PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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When addressing the issue of child marriage, a resolution should include the root causes of child marriage, especially in the case of young girls, which stem from rampant gender inequality in communities, cultures, and regions. The specific reasons for child marriage include local social norms which are practiced over numerous generations. Moreover, the issue of poverty must be addressed, as many families may result to child marriage to help alleviate household burdens and provide their children with, in their opinion, a better alternative, or better quality of life. Finally, and most importantly, a potential resolution must address the issue of lack of education about the dangers of child marriage in areas where this is not accessible. Possible solutions:

- Empowerment of women and girls who are at risk of child marriage, by educating them and providing them with the necessary support networks which they may lack
- Educate parents, guardians, family members, and surrounding community members on the dangers and disadvantages of child marriage, and the threat it poses on the development and wellbeing of children and young adults
- Encourage the widespread advocacy for supportive laws and policies across the world to push for the eradication of child marriage.
- Providing economic support and incentives to girls and their families, to provide them with a backbone and alleviate the effects of poverty

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# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. WHAT COULD BE THE POSSIBLE ROLES OF NGO'S AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS IN TACKLING THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE?
2. HOW CAN WE TRANSCEND SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS IN ORDER TO TACKLE CHILD MARRIAGE ON A GLOBAL SCALE?
3. HOW CAN UNICEF COLLABORATE WITH GOVERNMENTS AND/OR GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS TO PROVIDE VIABLE AND CONTEXT-SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS TO CHILD MARRIAGE?
4. HOW EFFECTIVE ARE EXISTING LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS IN THE PREVENTION OF CHILD MARRIAGE?
5. WHY ARE GIRLS THE MOST PREVALENT VICTIMS OF CHILD MARRIAGE? AND TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE ISSUE OF CHILD MARRIAGE STEM FROM GENDER INEQUALITY?



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## TOPIC 2

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Often, children are the victims of domestic violence throughout their childhood. Children who experience domestic violence often also victims of other forms of violence and mistreatment. Moreover, they are lost more likely to experience other forms of child abuse as well, such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. These harsh effects of multi-victimization require extensive attention.

Domestic violence against women is much more prevalent. There aren't many support systems in place to protect women in their homes, especially in third-world countries. For example, the country with the highest rates of domestic violence against women is India, with 35% of women experiencing violence in their homes. These cases sometimes only really come to light when partner violence results in the death of a woman.

Many long term effects of mental health problems arise even after the violence has stopped, or an intervention has been made. It can also impair brain development, in extreme cases, can damage areas of the nervous system, as well as the endocrine, circulatory, musculoskeletal, reproduction, respiratory, and immune system. These would have long lasting effects, and they can sometimes be life-long.

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# HISTORY AND PAST UN ACTIONS

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1. Raising awareness about the pressing issue of domestic violence, particularly against children, and advocating for changes in policies in order to protect children
2. Building skills and working with teachers and social workers to train them in detecting and reporting cases of domestic
3. Prioritizing the prevention of violence against children, as well as abuse within their homes, by encouraging and supporting positive parenting and the development of parental skills.
4. Promoting violence-free schools and communities, ensuring that children are raised in and are surrounded by areas which violence is not prevalent.
5. Working to protect children from all forms of violence not only in homes, but residential institutions and within the foster-care system.
6. Promoting social inclusion, particularly amongst children with disabilities, in co-operation with the European disability forum.

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# HISTORY AND PAST UN ACTIONS

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Statistics published by the National Council for Women in Egypt highlight the strikingly high levels of domestic violence in the country, with statistics as high as 86%. Furthermore, the divorce rate surpassed 220,000 in 2020, showing the link between violence and divorce. In 2021, a divorce case was recorded once every two minutes.

In Egypt, 40% of the population consists of children under the age of 18, 90% of which have experienced some form of domestic violence from their parents, guardians, or caregivers. This domestic violence can take the form of physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse. (American University in Cairo, "Child Marriage in Egypt")

Violence is a widespread method of discipline in Egypt, and is generally considered socially acceptable. The 2014 Demographic Health Survey (DHS), found that 93% of children in Egypt aged 1 – 14 were exposed to violence as a disciplinary practice. This could include psychological or physical punishment.

Moreover, due to the large refugee population in Egypt, there is also a large population of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). These children typically come from countries such as Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yemen, and Iraq. According to assessments by UNHCR, 46,800 refugee children in Egypt are considered severely vulnerable, and nearly 5,000 more considered 'at risk', these children include children out of school, child labourers, child spouses, and children with special needs. These children lack access to preventive and responsive child protection services and adequate justice systems in place to protect them.

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# RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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There are a number of recent developments in the issue of domestic violence involving children. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 30 – 60% of spouses who abuse their partners also abuse children in the household. Children exposed to violence at home are also 15x more likely to be assaulted than the national average in the US (The National Domestic Violence Hotline, "Domestic Violence Statistics").

However, in Egypt in particular, there have been numerous developments in the issue of domestic violence against children. 2021 saw a spike in not only cases of domestic violence against women and children, but also divorce rates. Due to lockdowns after the spread of COVID-19 in 2020, there was an alarming increase in reports of economical, physical, and emotional violence against women.

The Observatory of Crimes of Violence Against Women in Egypt recorded 813 cases of violent crime in 2021 which is a 50% increase from pre-COVID levels. On February 23rd 2021, local Egyptian media leaked a draft of the revised PSL, Personal Status Law, which was issued by the Egyptian Cabinet. This draft law added new regulations concerning marriage, child custody, and guardianship. It included the policy that the father is selected as the natural guardian of children, while the mother cannot even register the birth (Wilson Center, "Renewed Fight to Prevent Domestic Violence in Egypt").

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# PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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When addressing a resolution for the issue of domestic violence against children, it is imperative to consider all aspects of the child's life and recognise that abuse is not limited to the confines of the child's home. Educational facilities, as well as the surrounding community, need to be assessed when dealing with a domestic violence case against a child. This ensures that the child is protected from abuse of all forms across the board.

Additionally, the issue of mental health and wellbeing must be addressed when dealing with cases of domestic violence, as the effects can be carried over decades after the abuse has stopped. Adequate support systems in schools and communities need to be readily accessible for children dealing with the physical and psychological effects of domestic violence.

Another issue which must be addressed is the lack of awareness and education on issues of domestic violence involving children. Communities need to be educated on the short-term and long term effects of abuse on children, and advocacy for the eradication of physical punishment as a disciplinary means must be implemented.

Finally, the need for adequate legal policies and jurisdictions which protect and support children who are victims of domestic abuse must be widespread. Children should have the right to legal support systems to provide them with aid and protection.

Prioritising the protection of children in residential institutions and foster care, and providing adequate funding for these establishments to ensure that children are properly cared for and protected, and their rights are upheld. Providing support systems for refugee children to protect them from poverty, abuse, and child labour. Ensuring that social workers and counsellors are readily accessible and adequately trained to provide children with treatment and protection from harmful domestic situations. Educating families and communities in sustainable and alternative disciplinary methods to prevent violence and abuse.

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# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. To what extent do cultural and social norms have an effect on domestic violence cases involving children?
2. What efforts are being made by governmental organisations in Egypt to tackle the issue of domestic violence concerning children?
3. What are the legal consequences for the perpetrators of domestic violence against children in Egypt?
4. Is the issue of domestic violence involving children in Egypt equally prevalent in neighbouring countries and regions?
5. How widespread is the issue of domestic violence against children in Egypt? In what areas is this issue most prevalent?

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