



4. Child Marriages

It is estimated that 21% of girls in Pakistan are married before the age of 18.



Child marriage in Pakistan is connected with tradition, culture, and customary practices. It sometimes involves the transfer of money, settlement of debts or exchange of daughters (Vani / Swara or Watta Satta) sanctioned by a Jirga or Panchayat (council of elders from the community).

Pakistan is a member of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), which adopted a regional action plan to end child marriage. The regional action plan is to be implemented in 2015 – 2018.

DRIVERS

Social and gender inequality, a desire to control women's sexuality and protect family honour, economic hardship and lack of awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage are common driving factors.

LEGAL AGE OF MARRIAGE

Pakistan's Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) 1929 sets the legal age for marriage to 16 for women and 18 for men.

In April 2014, the Sindh Assembly unanimously adopted the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, increasing the minimum age of marriage to 18 and making marriage below 18 a punishable offence. A proposed similar nationwide bill was unfortunately struck down by Pakistan's National Assembly in 2014.

In Punjab, a Bill introducing harsher penalties for marriage under the age of 16 was also adopted. However, it does not increase the age of marriage to 18.

In a recent series of rulings, the Council of Islamic Ideology, a constitutional body which gives Islamic legal advice to the Pakistani Government, declared that Pakistani laws prohibiting child marriage are un-Islamic. The rulings were widely criticised.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ADVOCACY

Pakistan is a member of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), an inter-governmental body which has adopted a regional action plan to target child marriage. Pakistan was among the first States to propose a target to end child marriage by 2030 in discussions of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, a major inter-governmental process that helped to shape the next set of international development goals.