

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.khaama.com/child-marriage-and-domestic-violence-a-curse-for-afghan-society-6010/print/>

Child Marriage and Domestic Violence A curse For Afghan Society

By Dr Florance Ebrahimi

4/18/2014

The rights of women and girls, including freedom from child marriage and domestic violence, have generated emotionally charged debates in Afghanistan over the past decade. Such debates often focus on personal opinions and experiences, or on the varied interpretations of religious teachings on marriage. But not much has been achieved on the ground regarding these issues. Child marriages still remain common phenomena in Afghan society. According to the recent Afghan Ministry of Public Health's Mortality Survey, conducted in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan including a nationally representative sample of 24,032 households, 53% of all women in the 25-49 age group were married by age 18, and 21% of the women were married by age 15. A 2012 global study by the United Nations Population Fund put Afghanistan among 41 countries in the world that reported 30% or more of its women in the 20-24 age group married by age 18. Child marriages expose girls to early pregnancy and childbirth, which entail significant risk of damaging health consequences for girls and their children. Afghanistan has one of the highest levels of maternal deaths in the world. The World Health Organization and other UN agencies estimate that at 460 pregnancy-related deaths for every 100,000 births Afghanistan has the second highest level of maternal deaths outside sub-Saharan Africa. The recent Afghanistan Mortality Survey found that of every five Afghan women who died in their reproductive years, two deaths were pregnancy-related. One Afghan woman will die every two hours from pregnancy-related causes and one in every 50 Afghan women will die because of pregnancy. The study also found that adolescent pregnancy and motherhood pose serious health concerns.

Afghanistan's minimum age of marriage for girls is 16, or 15 with the permission of the girl's father or a judge, well below the internationally recommended standard of 18. A number of countries with large Muslim populations, including some in Afghanistan's region, have taken steps to set a minimum age of marriage of at least 18, with some allowing exceptions in narrow circumstances. These include Bangladesh, India, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Oman, Algeria, and the United Arab Emirates. Several Muslim countries had even done so before UN bodies had called for an 18 minimum age for marriage. Afghanistan is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which in 2008 adopted the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. The Plan of Action stresses the importance of special legislation to ensure effective participation by women in all fields of life. It calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, including preventing early and forced marriages by all possible means. And it recognizes that early and forced marriages are an impediment to improving the health, education, political participation, social justice, and well-being of women. It's a proven fact that the risk of domestic violence is particularly heightened in cases of child marriage. The case of Sahar Gul, an Afghan girl forcibly married in 2011 at age 13 or 14, received global attention when her in-laws were convicted for beating and torturing her after she resisted being forced into prostitution. The case returned to the news when a court threw out their 10-year sentence after just one year. Child marriage and domestic violence are related phenomena.

In Afghanistan, the threat of prosecution for the "moral crimes" of zina (sex outside of marriage) or running away pose a barrier to those seeking help for forced marriages and domestic violence. When women and girls try to leave abusive relationships or run away to escape forced marriage, their parents, brothers, fiancés, and husbands frequently accuse them of zina or running away. Male family members, knowing that their own behaviour will not be subject to legal scrutiny, can easily use such accusations as a weapon. They can accuse a woman of zina or running away, and have her arrested by authorities willing to accept the allegations at face value. Afghan judges, prosecutors, and police continue to treat running away as a crime, despite the absence of this offense in Afghan statutory law, sometimes charging it as "attempted zina." A number of studies outside Afghanistan have also shown a direct relationship between the age of marriage and domestic violence. For instance, according to the World Health Organization, women and girls especially those aged 15 to 19 years are at higher risk of physical or sexual violence by their partners.

Child marriage and domestic violence threaten the health and rights of Afghan girls and women, and puts their children's lives at risk. So integrated efforts are required from all the sections of the society to tackle this issue. Number of steps can be taken like – Reinforce and expand efforts to implement the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW law), including protections against child marriage and domestic violence. Develop new initiatives to improve recruitment and retention of female police officers, and ensure that all police Family Response Units are staffed by female police officers. Set the minimum age for marriage at 18 for both girls and boys. Launch a country-wide awareness campaign about the negative impacts of child marriage including information about the risk of maternal death, fistula, and infant death or poor health. Revise Afghanistan's zina laws to harmonize them with Afghanistan's international legal obligations, and clarify through an administrative decree that running away should not be treated

as a crime under Afghan law. Until Afghan law is reformed, impose an immediate moratorium on prosecutions for moral crimes.