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When you think of child predators you may often think of how they deserve life in jail or they deserve the death penalty. According to some countries in the world their actions are perfectly fine as long as they are married to their victims. In the 20th Century and earlier, it was very common to see a very young girl wed to an adult male all around the world some of the most famous kings in the world had underaged wives or mistresses. Sometime in the 20th century these marriages became less likely to see. While this may have caused people to believe child marriage was abolished, some laws may state different. Child marriage regulations around the world that protect predators put their victims at risk of suffering lifelong physical and mental health issues.

Child marriages are widely known in the third world developing countries such as Africa, Sudan, India, Afghanistan, and even in some well developed countries like the United States. While marriages typically involve a young woman being promised, sold, or even just given to an older (most likely an adult), wealthier, or promising spouse, they do have cases where the victim is male, and the spouse is female. The main causes of the marriages according to Activists Lucia Hanmer and Marina Elefante are “Poverty, lack of education, social and cultural norms, conflicts and humanitarian crises (12).” Most instances of child marriage within the last decade were mostly because of cultural or

religious norms or poverty, but what does that have to do with child predators?

According to Charlotte Alter who interviewed Sara Tasneem, a victim of child marriage in the United States “She suspects that her husband, who was a new convert to the group, was enticed to the sect by the possibility of marrying a virgin (Alter 2017).” A 15-year-old girl believed that her marriage to a 28-year-old man was only agreed to because she was a virgin. A man handled the right to change his whole religion to gain permanent access to a child, whom he impregnated not even a full year later. Children around the world are being sold to adults for marriage as if they are property, with little to no real say so or choice. This is a huge violation of human rights. In most instances of arranged marriages, the parents meet with the potential spouse and get to know them, but it’s very easy for predators to disguise themselves and be who the parent wants them to be just to gain access to the child. As you probably know predators are great at pretending to be one thing in public and a completely different person when alone with the child. One example of this is in Charlotte Altar’s Article in the Times Magazine. People may say that Tasneems' father knew this would happen but there’s a possibility he didn’t. The man he met and the man that his daughter married could have been two completely different people. While some may think that’s this is illegal, or that it is statutory rape in the U.S. is not. “Statutory rape is when one of the parties to sexual activity is below the age of consent. It does not have to be forcible, because a minor is not legally able to consent. 18 U.S.C. Section 2243(a), on the Sexual Abuse of a Minor, applies when a person “knowingly engages in a sexual act with another person” who is between the ages of 12 and 16 and is at least four years younger than the perpetrator. 18 U.S.C. Section 2243(c)(2) allows a defense to this crime when “the persons engaging in the sexual act

were at that time married to each other.” This means that, at the federal level, child marriage is viewed as a valid defense to statutory rape. This law not only suggests that the federal government condones the practice of child marriage, it allows an adult to engage in sexual activity with children as young as 12, and gives sexual predators an incentive to force a child to marry them. The law can effectively turn child marriage into a “get out of jail free” card for predators.” (Equality Now 2021). How does this affect those children involved in these marriages?

While some may argue that the child now has a better home, is safer, and is financially stable that may not be entirely true. “Young girls usually have no agency when it comes to contraceptive use and their bodies are not ready to give birth - pregnancy and childbirth complications are very common among child brides and are sadly still the leading cause of death among 15-19-year-old girls worldwide. According to Girls Not Brides, girls before the age of 18 are also more likely to acquire HIV and experience domestic violence. (Population matters 2021 paragraph 4).” Where some would argue that the bride could just divorce the groom this is not as easy as it sounds. “Tasneem eventually managed to divorce her husband in the early 2000s and gained custody of her two children, but not without significant obstacles that she says were exacerbated by her youth at the time of her marriage — she hasn’t finished her education and had no savings, job or support. “It puts roadblocks in the way of their independence,” she says. “You have no rights as a 15-year-old.” (Alter, paragraph 6).” In Tasneem’s case, she was one of the lucky ones who got out, but a lack of proper education and early marriage makes the bride more dependent upon their husband to provide food, shelter, and other necessities, not to mention having to look after a child. Finding a job anywhere in the world without proper education is hard, and leaving a home where everything is provided for you but the conditions

aren't the best is sometimes the better option for these girls than leaving and not knowing what the future hold for them. Some women are also scared and feel like they have no choice but to stay. "Tasneem says her father concealed the marriage from her mother by demanding she tells her mom she was going to live with her dad permanently. "They made me call her and forced me to lie to her on the phone. And for me as a 15-year-old, that was horrible," she recalls, adding that her husband and father stood over her as she made the call. "I didn't feel like I had the power to stand up to all these adults." (Alter paragraph 4)." Most child brides do feel defenseless because of the age gap, inequality of the sexes, or the simple fact that they feel no one will listen simply because they're a child. So how do you help?

Helping put an end to the laws on child marriage will take a huge effort, but it can't be done unless we inform everyone that things like this are legal all over the world, including America, in the year 2021. "The 2015 Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Act (Marriage Act) of Malawi raise the minimum marriage age for girls from 15 to 18, gives equal status to both spouses, and includes a new requirement to register marriages with the government. This represents an important step toward amending the Constitution, which still allows girls and boys from 15 to 18 to be married with parental consent. On January 20, 2016, the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe made marriage under the age of 18 illegal in a groundbreaking case brought by Loveness Mudzuru and Ruvimbo Tsopodzi, two former child brides. They argued that as the 2013 Constitution had set the minimum age of marriage at 18 and called on the state to ensure that "no children are pledged into marriage," the Zimbabwean Customary Marriages Act of 1951 was unconstitutional and discriminatory, as it allowed girls as young as 16 to be married with parental consent, while the legal age of marriage for boys was 18. The Constitutional Court ruled that all marriages before the age of 18 are illegal, including customary ones, and struck down the

section of the Marriage Act allowing girls to marry at 16. The Pakistani Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2004 criminalizes the act of giving females for marriage as part of a compromise in dispute settlement between families or clans, known as sawra. The Gambia's Children's Act of 2005 provides that “. . . no child is capable of contracting a valid marriage, and a marriage so contracted is voidable.” In September 2012, Swaziland's prime minister announced the government's intention to enforce the newly adopted Children Protection and Welfare Act by prosecuting those who carry out the practice of Kwendizisa, which is the arranged marriage of a girl child to an adult man by a parent or guardian. Before the enactment of this law, customary practices like the Kwendizisa were allowed as long as they did not conflict with the constitution. While sexual activity with a minor girl was criminalized as statutory rape, it went unsanctioned when it occurred within the bounds of marriage. And marriage was legal for girls aged 15 and older in accordance with the 1920 Girl's Protection Act. With the passage of the Children Protection and Welfare Act in 2012, perpetrators face statutory rape charges and a monetary penalty of R20,000 (\$2,400). The new law also penalizes parents and guardians who collude with adult men to orchestrate a child marriage. Offenders face prison terms of up to 20 years (Lucia Hanmer and Marina Elefante 22).” Some countries have started to pass more and more laws giving equality to both spouses, and raising the age of marriage to 18, but most still allow it. Spreading the word on social media, informing yourself and friends, protesting, and even sharing experiences if you're a survivor can call bring light to this situation and help end it.

Equality is a huge conversation in America right now, gender equality, race equality, LGBTQ rights equality, so why not push for child equality, lets push for the right to protect children from predators and harmful laws that protect the abuser and harm the victim. In

America, we are very fortunate to have public education. Not all people like public education and some say it could be better but some countries don't have public education only private, or they don't allow women to have schooling. According to the Unwomen website "Women make up more than two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate people (Paragraph 2, bulletin 1)" as of 2012. More than 530 million women on earth if there were 7.086 billion people on the earth in 2012, and 3.5 billion of those were women, this means there's a little less than 16 percent of women who were uneducated. This may not seem like a lot but this lack of education can lead to those child marriages or poverty. Some ways of helping could be going out and volunteering help for building schools, donating, sharing knowledge or teaching what you know to those less fortunate, tutoring, and raising awareness of this inequality and lack of education to women around the world. Starting programs that help these children become more independent, financially stable, or even a program that houses former child brides

Child marriages around the world help protect predators and can cause great physical and mental health issues to their victims. Poverty, lack of education, religious views, social views, and world regulations are all causes of child marriages.

Fighting for equal education and laws for child brides will help put an end to this madness. Volunteering to build schools, spreading the word about these laws and issues will all help liberate children from these harmful marriages and their unjust ways. Just because some child marriages have a happy ending doesn't mean they all do. This is a violation of human rights and most girls are too fearful to speak up for the fear of their livelihood or their lack of

knowledge about the violation of their basic rights. So speak up for them, be their voice, or their ear. Make a difference.

Works Cited

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