

CHILD MARRIAGE

WHAT IS CHILD MARRIAGE?

Child marriage is a formal or informal union, including religious or customary marriage, of anyone younger than 18 years. Incidence of child marriage has been shown to increase as instability increases, making girls living in conflict or crisis settings particularly vulnerable to the practice¹.

CURRENT STATISTICS ON CHILD MARRIAGES

- One in five girls are married before age 18. This is an average of tens of thousands of girls every single day².
- If present trends continue, more than 140 million girls will be married before the age of 18 in the next decade³.
- Globally, almost 400 million women now aged 20-49 were married before the age of 18.
- Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world with 31% of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18 compared with only 2.2% of males⁴.

KEY DRIVERS

Child marriage continues to be a reality for many girls because of the following key factors:

- Poverty exacerbates child marriage in that families see child marriage as an opportunity to benefit financially from the bride price they receive for their daughter.
- Child marriage in Zambia is driven by traditional practices and beliefs, and the low social status assigned to women and girls. Initiation ceremonies for girls who reach puberty prepare them for marriage and gender responsibilities as defined by culture.
- Cultural practices such as polygamy also drive child marriage in Zambia, as young girls are married off to older men who are respected in their communities⁵.
- Lack of access to education contributes to the likelihood of child marriage.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGES

- Child marriage puts girls at an increased risk of sexual, physical, and emotional gender-based violence.
- Child brides are more likely to get sexually transmitted infections including HIV.
- Demands of early motherhood affect the social wellbeing of girls and deny them their right to enjoy their childhood.
- Child brides miss out on education and economic opportunities that have potential to lift them and their families out of poverty, hence child marriage perpetuates a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty.
- Child brides are likely to drop out of school, curtailing opportunities and realization of their full potential.
- Child marriage and teenage pregnancy expose girls to early childbearing and greater risks of life-long fertility with significantly higher maternal and infant morbidity and mortality.

1 <https://iwhc.org/resources/facts-child-marriage/>

2 <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

3 <https://iwhc.org/resources/facts-child-marriage/>

4 Central Statistical Office (CSO), Ministry of Health (MOH), and ICF International. 2014. Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS) 2013-2014.

5 <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/zambia/>

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL POLICIES TO END CHILD MARRIAGES

The Zambian legal system is dualist in nature and, as a result, marriages can take place in accordance with either customary or statutory law:

- The Marriage Act of Zambia lays down the formalities for concluding a civil or statutory marriage. Section 10 of the Act provides that each party to an intended marriage (not being a widower or widow) must be 21 years or above to be eligible for marriage. Section 10 further provides that if any party to an attending marriage is underage, such must obtain written consent to marry from their parents or guardians, and that where such consent is denied, they may apply to the High Court for consent.
- According to the Penal Code Amendment Act of 2003, defilement or sex with anyone younger than 16 is prohibited.
- The Zambian government has instituted a national response to address child marriage by launching a multi-stakeholder anti-child-marriage campaign. Structures to fight child marriage have been put in place including a civil society coalition against child marriage, a ten-member ministerial committee led by the Ministry of Gender.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN ZAMBIA?

- An information and communication strategy should be aimed at reaching the local communities and should be conducted continuously. Local people should be engaged in spreading clear messages informing people that child marriages are illegal stating also the resulting consequences for anyone found wanting.
- Statutory and customary laws concerning child marriage need to be harmonized.
- Sexual reproductive health and rights outreach through sensitization programmes to prevent teen pregnancies and explain impacts of early marriage is needed.
- Awareness-raising at community levels involving chiefs, ndunas (headmen/women), religious leaders and councilors is needed.

- A re-enrolment education policy for pregnant girls and child mothers is needed.
- Statutory laws to reduce gaps should be strengthened through legal analysis and use of the media to highlight problematic areas.
- Laws should be enforced by prosecuting perpetrators and rescuing children.
- Safe spaces and children's clubs are needed to develop skills and create awareness of risks associated with child marriage.

MINISTRIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN ZAMBIA.

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| • Ministry of Gender and Child Development | • Plan International |
| • Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs | • Population Council |
| • Advocacy for Child Justice (ACJ) | • Programme for Vulnerable Woman and Children (PVCW) |
| • Anglican Street Children's Programme | • Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSI) |
| • Bakashana | • Research Advocacy & Evidence Application Network (REAPNet) |
| • Camfed | • Save the Children |
| • Charity Centre for Children and Youth Development | • Sishemo Foundation |
| • Continuity Zambia Organization (C-Z-O) | • Society for Women and AIDS in Zambia (SWAZ) |
| • DECENTLIFE ZAMBIA | • VSO |
| • Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) | • Women and Law in Southern Africa, Research and Educational Trust (WLSA) |
| • Generation Alive | • Women for Change |
| • Global Family Network | • World Vision |
| • GoYe Therefore | • YWCA |
| • Hope for Africa | • Young People's access to quality Health, Academic, Social and Economic Support in Zambia (Y-PHASES) |
| • Keimu Health Fitness | • Young Women in Action |
| • Lakeshore Hope and Relief Zambia (LHRZ) | • Zambia Aged People's Association (ZAPA). |
| • Law and Development Association (LADA) | |
| • Lifeline / Childline Zambia | |
| • Maboshe Memorial Centre | |
| • Madzimawe Foundation | |
| • Musokotwane Compassion Mission Zambia (MCMZ) | |