



**Samina, 14, Kanakpur**

Samina was married last year. She was 13. Her husband was 19.

“I saw my husband for the first time on our wedding day,” explains Samina, who has never attended school.

She is seven months pregnant and is spending her last trimester at her mother’s bare one-room home in Kanakpur, in Rautahat District in southern Nepal. More than one out of five women in this area were married before the age of 15.<sup>18</sup>

She is discouraged from leaving the house and spends her days cooking and cleaning. Her husband works as a carpenter. “If I have a girl, I want her to be educated,” she says.

Samina Khatun, 14, with her husband, 20, seen here in the background. He works as a carpenter in India and is visiting her for few days.



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**ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN NEPAL**

Priyanka Singh, 20, leads a ‘neighbourhood walk’ talking to villagers about child marriage and its consequences. Read her full story ‘Empowered Adolescent Girls’.

Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia – for both girls and boys. Although the legal age of unions for both sexes is 20, more than a third of young women aged 20-24 report that they were married by the age of 18, and just over one in ten by 15.<sup>1</sup> Nepali boys are among the most likely in the world to be child grooms. More than one in ten is married before they reach 18.<sup>2</sup>

Child marriage is a human rights violation, restricting children’s choices, changing their course in life, and putting them at significant risk of abuse and violence. A UNICEF study found that one in three married girls in Nepal had been subjected to sexual violence by their husbands, while one in six reported physical violence.<sup>3</sup>

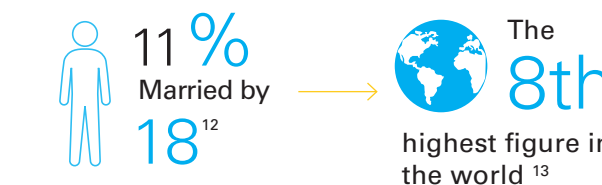
A child’s education is also significantly affected, with married girls in Nepal 10 times more likely not to be in school than their unmarried peers<sup>4</sup> and married boys often pressured to begin working to support the family.<sup>5</sup> Girls’ right to health also comes under threat. Just over one in eight Nepali women had babies before the age of 18,<sup>6</sup> which puts them at a higher risk of death or injury during childbirth.

The reasons behind child marriage in Nepal are complex. Poverty, the low value attached to daughters, and lack of access to education are contributory factors, while the caste system and patriarchal culture similarly play a role. It increasingly appears that teenagers are choosing

their own partners and may even elope. In some cases, parents encourage adolescents to initiate their own marriage to avoid the high costs associated with dowry or wedding.<sup>7</sup> Adolescents may also choose to elope as sexual expression outside of marriage is not acceptable,<sup>8</sup> to avoid forced or arranged marriage or to escape from difficulties at home.<sup>9</sup>

The devastating earthquakes of 2015 also led to fears that child marriage could increase. Studies in other countries have shown<sup>10</sup> that in disasters or crises, as families lose homes and livelihoods, parents are more likely to marry off their children in a bid to protect them and secure their futures.

**AMONG NEPALI WOMEN AND MEN AGED 20-24**



**IF PROGRESS IS ACCELERATED IN NEPAL**

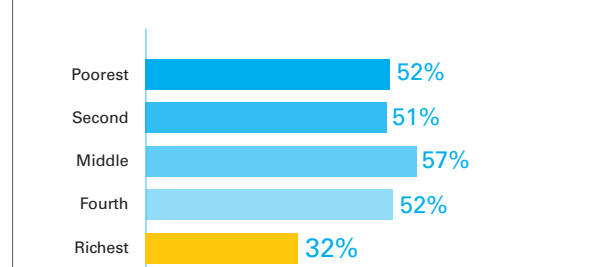
the prevalence of child marriage of women aged 20-24 could drop to a **third of today’s levels by 2050**<sup>14</sup>

**MORE THAN A QUARTER OF WOMEN**



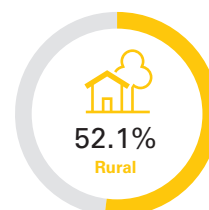
**WOMEN LIVING IN THE RICHEST HOUSEHOLDS ARE THE LEAST LIKELY TO HAVE MARRIED AS CHILDREN<sup>16</sup>**

Percentage of women aged 20-49 married before age 18 by wealth quintile

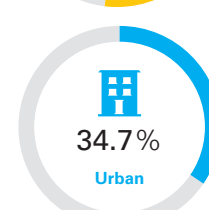


Note: Confidence intervals are not available at this time. Caution should be used in interpreting values, as apparent differences may not be significant.

**WOMEN LIVING IN RURAL AREAS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE MARRIED AS CHILDREN**



**COMPARED TO THOSE IN URBAN AREAS<sup>17</sup>**





Young girls in Basantapatti, Nepal listen carefully to the causes of child marriage and its consequences.

In 12 countries with some of the world's highest rates of child brides, UNICEF and UNFPA have joined forces through a Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. For the first time, existing strategies in areas like health, child protection, education, and water and sanitation, are coming together to form a unique holistic programme with shared plans and goals.

Working in partnership with governments, civil society organizations and young people themselves, methods that have already been proven to work will be taken to scale. The programme was officially launched in March 2016 and aims to reach more than 2.5 million girls within the first four years. Donors include the British, Canadian, Dutch and Italian governments, as well as the European Union.

UNICEF and UNFPA joined forces in 2015 in Nepal to support interventions to end child marriage. Together they work with adolescent girls and boys in their communities to empower and protect them; and with a range of actors, from national policy makers to villagers, to create supportive environments for change.



## MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES FOR CHANGE

**He takes every opportunity he can: Friday prayers, lessons for the 600 pupils who attend his Madrasa and religious ceremonies...**

"A child has immense possibilities," says Imam Aslam Jamali Alquasmi, to the assembled crowd near the mosque in Rajpur Farhadwa. "All we need to do is provide them with the right environment."

For the 34-year-old, that must never include marriage. Aslam Jamali is on a mission to change attitudes in his community, where unions under the age of 18 have been commonplace.

"If you have an early marriage, there is the chance that the bride might not even live - she might die during childbirth," he explains.

"We are not outside the system; we are in the system - so we need to comply with the law."

He takes every opportunity he can: Friday prayers, lessons for the 600 pupils who attend his Madrasa and religious ceremonies. He even intervenes personally. Recently, he stopped the marriage of a 10-year-old girl.

"I talked to the family," he says. "We discussed the causes of child marriage and we also talked about the effects. I convinced them to wait until the girl is more than 20."

He has just been nominated as president of the district inter-religious faith committee, after he joined Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian leaders for training supported by UNICEF, to discuss what their religious texts say about child marriage.

"We have a lot of work to do," he says, "But together we are strong."



## RESPONSIVE HEALTH SERVICES



Midwife Radhika Sharma examines a pregnant patient in UNFPA-supported Kanakpur Health Clinic. Radhika has been a mid-wife in the community for 25 years.

Kanakpur health post is one of only three health centres in Rautahat District certified as adolescent-friendly. Here are some reasons why:

**ACCESS TO INFORMATION:** The centre has an information corner for adolescents, covering issues from HIV to marriage. UNFPA research has shown that teenagers often find it difficult to ask questions about sexual and reproductive health, especially in a traditional health centre setting.

**SPECIALIST TRAINING:** Health workers are trained by UNFPA to provide a non-judgmental and confidential service.

"We talk about issues like menstruation and the physical, mental and social issues that come up during adolescence," says lead midwife Radhika Sharma, 43, who has been working at the centre for 25 years.

**FAMILY PLANNING:** "We talk a lot about family planning and the spacing of children," explains Radhika. "This is especially important for girls who are already married as children."

**SAFE MOTHERHOOD:** Pregnant young brides are closely monitored during antenatal visits and can give birth at the health post. Only three in five women in Nepal complete the four antenatal visits that are recommended, while just over half give birth in a healthcare centre.<sup>20</sup>

"Girls who get married young tend to have children young," says Radhika. "They often have high risk pregnancies."

Young mothers also return after the birth to check up on the baby's health and to receive support with breastfeeding.



Priyanka Singh (right), 20, leads a neighbourhood walk talking to villagers about child marriage and also distributing informative posters about it.



## POSITIVE LEGAL AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT

In 2016 the Government of Nepal launched the National Strategy to end child marriage, with support from UNICEF and other partners. The plan aims to end child marriage by 2030, with particular focus on the most-affected districts.

**It has six strategies:**

- » Empower girls (including economic empowerment)
- » Provide quality education for girls
- » Engage men and boys
- » Mobilize families and communities to change social norms
- » Strengthen and provide services
- » Implement laws and policies

The Nepal government organized the Nepal Girl Summit to follow the landmark London Girl Summit in 2014 to reaffirm their commitment to end child marriage by 2030.

**Ensuring a consistent legal framework to end impunity for child marriage.**

A recent review<sup>19</sup> of the legal provisions relating to child marriage in Nepal revealed that gaps in these provisions, as well as inconsistencies with other laws, have undermined efforts to address child marriage. Recommended changes include i) making child marriages void ab initio (invalid from the outset), ii) defining "free and full consent", iii) reviewing the types of punishments, fines and compensation imposed, and iv) increasing the statute of limitations for reporting child marriage, currently set at just three months.

## 5 KEY ROUTES TO CHANGE

### The Global Programme will:

- 1 Empower adolescent girls at risk of and affected by marriage
- 2 Work with families and communities to promote positive behaviours towards girls
- 3 Ensure that health, education, protection and other systems are responsive to the needs of girls
- 4 Support governments to create a positive legal and policy environment to end child marriage
- 5 Use and build the data and evidence on what works to end child marriage



Imam Maulana Mohammed Aslam Jamali Alquasmi speaks to students and villagers after Friday prayer about child marriage.



## EMPOWERED ADOLESCENT GIRLS

**"We go around the community and we speak to them about child marriage..."**

The teenage girls of Basantapatti are out on the streets: Knocking on doors, stopping women on their way to the market and handing out flyers.

At their helm is 20-year-old Priyanka Singh.

"We go around the community and we speak to them about child marriage," she explains. "We also put posters up on houses with information about child marriage and its consequences. It includes the legal age for marriage and where to go and who to tell if there are incidents."

Priyanka is the leader of one of the 30 girls' groups in Rautahat District, Nepal, supported by the government's District Women and Children's Office, and UNFPA. A total of 900 girls are members.

Priyanka receives special training as part of UNFPA's Rupantaran (Transformation) programme, to facilitate weekly sessions for her

band of 20 girls, to learn about topics like violence, sexual and reproductive health, child marriage and negotiation and decision-making skills. Afterwards, they head out to spread their message to the community.

"It is important to start a dialogue and to speak up for ourselves," says Priyanka. "Families often want to marry their daughters early because of poverty, unemployment or because the cost of dowry will rise as girls grow older."

Partly for these reasons, the girls are not always welcomed when they turn up at people's doors. Some also consider them too young to be authoritative. However, Priyanka believes change is already afoot.

"People are more aware of the causes and the consequences of child marriage," she says. "Girls are now aware themselves that child marriage is not good."