

ISSUES AROUND CHILD MARRIAGE



Image: ICRW Library

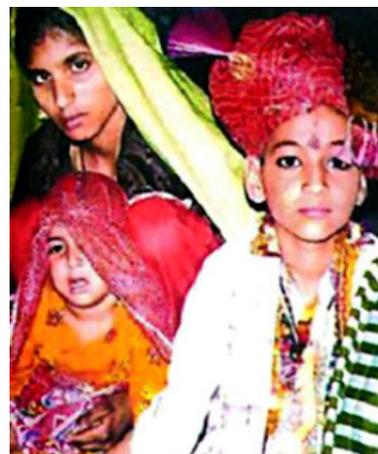


Image: ICRW Library

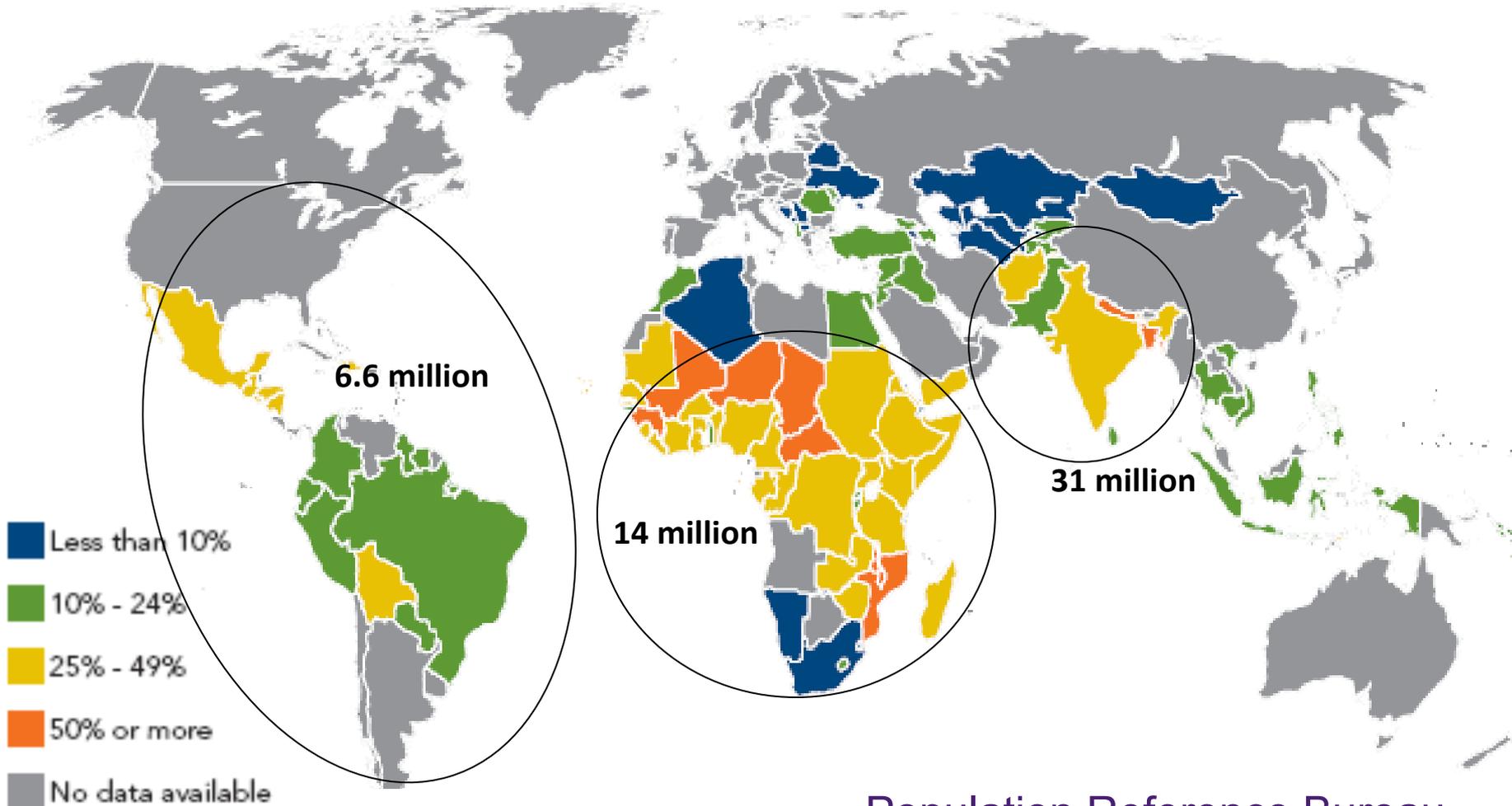


Madhumita Das
ICRW

Definitions of child marriage

- Most jurisdictions set a minimum age at marriage, that is, a person must attain a certain age to be legally allowed to marry.
 - Although most age restrictions are in place, but child marriage remain common in parts of the world.
 - Age and other requirements vary between countries from 14 to 21
- Marriage is also influenced by how a community defines **age at maturity** or the threshold of adulthood
 - impacted mostly by the physical and sexual growth of girls as well as the norms that exists and encourage practices

Everyday more than 25,000 girls under the age of 18 are married world wide.



What happens to girls who are married off early?

- Worst form of child labour mainly within the household
- Denial of freedoms
 - Denied educational and economic opportunities
 - Drop out of school
- Higher risk of death and injury due to early sexual activity and childbearing
- More likely to suffer domestic violence and sexual abuse within marriage
- Child brides are likely to be more vulnerable to morbidity and death
- Risk for HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Cervical Cancer

Girls are not valued as people who have rights.

The many reasons why child marriage occurs

Normative and structural factors, such as

- Tradition and the role of the family in child marriage
 - parent's responsibility to marry their daughters and protect her chastity
 - security of young girls from vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.
 - Marriage is seen as a remedy to protect young girls from potential danger
 - primary roles for women are that of a wife and mother
 - getting an education is linked to getting a job
 - to get a younger girl to help the elder woman in household chores.

The lack of security at home and in public spaces affects poorer girls more.....

- Poverty & child marriage
 - Girls in poorer families are more vulnerable to early marriage
 - expenses associated with a daughter's marriage lead to child marriages
 - less dowry for younger girls
- Education & child marriage

While social norms favouring early marriage are common, there are certain context specific factors that play an important role.

- declining sex ratio (decline in proportion of girls) has promoted the practice of *Atta Satta* which involves the exchange of a daughter for a daughter in law in marriage.

Despite the norms, fragmented programs and inadequate policies, the problem of child marriage can be addressed!

