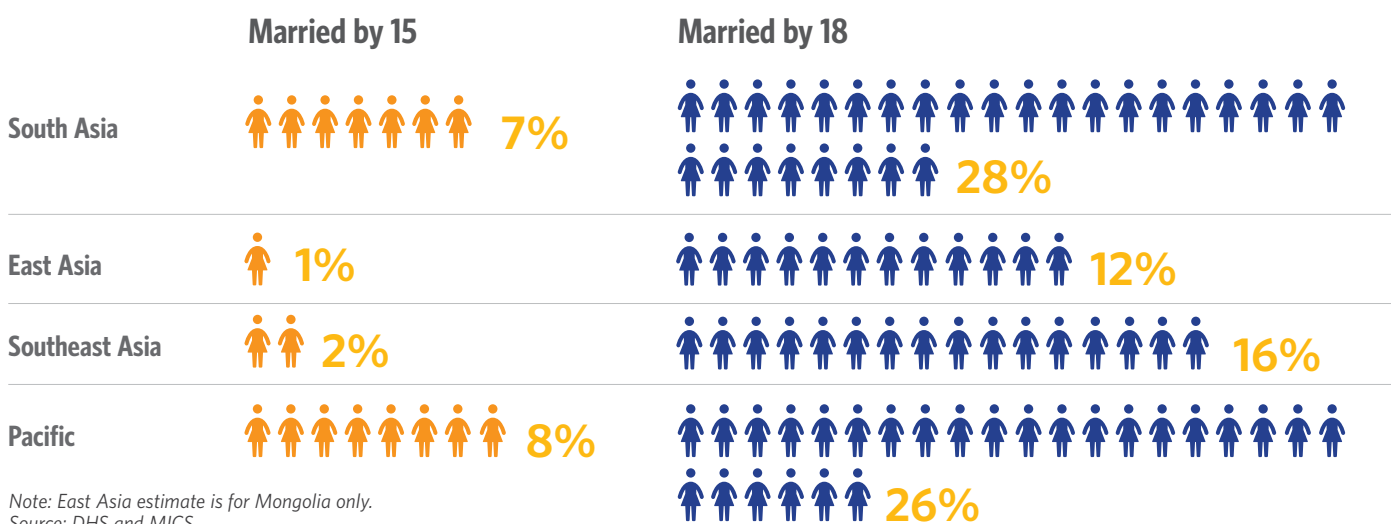


DIVERSITY OF TYPES OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND EARLY UNION IN ASIA PACIFIC



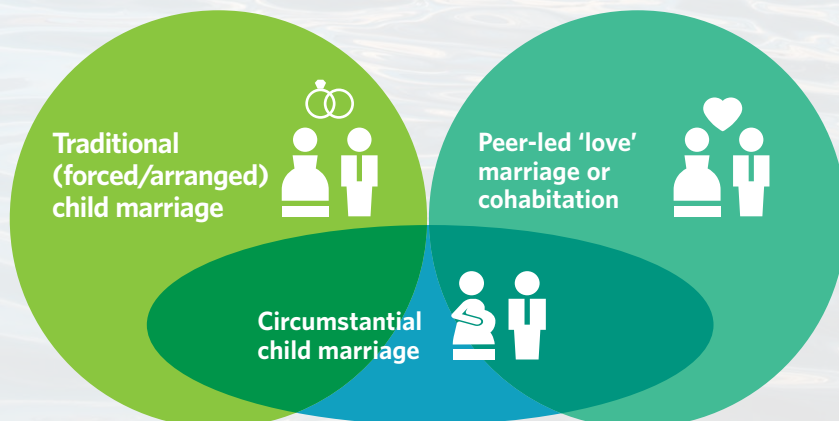
In the Asia and the Pacific region, **23 million adolescents aged 15-19** years are currently married or in union; over 80% are girls, 15 million of whom live in South Asia. Across the region, **1 in 8 adolescent girls** aged 15-19 years, and **1 in 50 boys, are currently married** or in union.

PROPORTION OF WOMEN AGED 20-24 YEARS MARRIED/IN UNION BY AGE 15 AND 18



*Note: East Asia estimate is for Mongolia only.
Source: DHS and MICS*

THE ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION SHOWS A GREAT VARIETY OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND EARLY UNIONS



No/forced consent
Consent due to social pressure/stigma
Full consent



WHAT ARE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CHILD MARRIAGE/EARLY UNIONS?



HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION!

Traditional, forced/arranged child marriage

- Common in South Asia;
- Much of the policy focus has been on this form of marriage.

- Typically non-consensual;
- May be associated with dowry or bride price and with large age disparities between spouses;
- Driven by gender norms that define and value girls as child bearers and mothers, while placing very high value on girls' chastity or virginity before marriage with considerable stigma associated with premarital sexual behaviour and pregnancy.

'Love marriage'/union (peer-led)

- By consent and usually with a peer;
- Couples may decide to cohabit or marry early as part of their romantic or sexual relationship;
- It might be the way to be sexually active in the context of conservative social norms prohibiting sex before marriage;
- May follow an intended or unintended pregnancy, as a way of avoiding stigma associated with premarital childbearing;
- Implies girls' agency and choice.

- Particularly common in Southeast Asia where pregnancy (often unintended) leads to circumstantial or 'love marriage';
- Becoming more common in South Asia;
- Not enough attention has been given.

Arranged and circumstantial marriage

'Love marriage'/union and circumstantial marriage

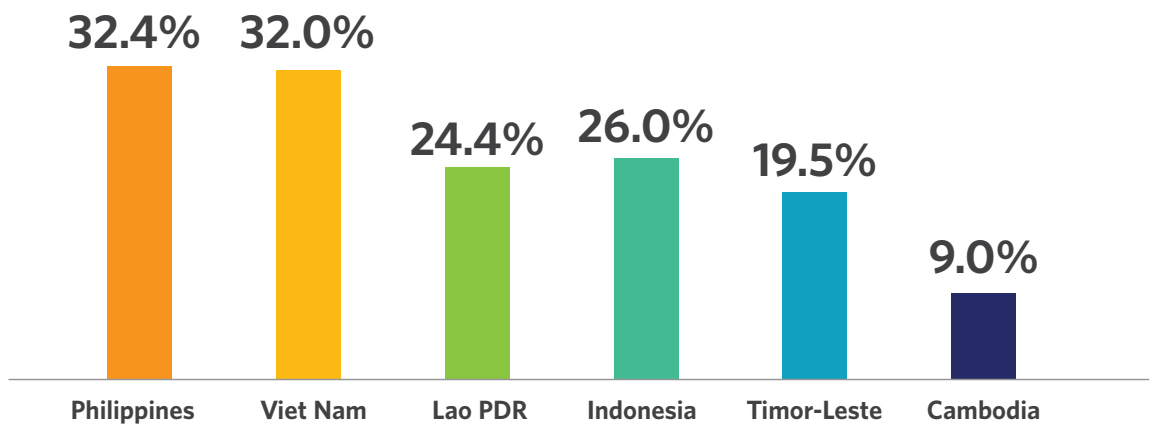
Circumstantial child marriage

- With or without the girl's consent, in response to unintended pregnancy outside of marriage, or sexual violence;
- Can either be **arranged** or **decided by couples themselves**;
- In the context of significant sociocultural disapproval of sexual activity and/or pregnancy outside of marriage, girls may be pressured or forced to marry to avoid social sanctions, stigma and discrimination.



WHAT PROPORTION OF ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES OCCUR BEFORE MARRIAGE?

In Southeast Asia, between **9-32%** of adolescent pregnancies under 18 were conceived prior to marriage or co-habitation.¹



There is also evidence, particularly from Southeast Asia, that a significant proportion of adolescent pregnancies occur before marriage; particularly so in the Philippines (32.4%), Viet Nam (32.0%) and Lao PDR (24.4%) for girls under 18. Premarital pregnancy often leads to circumstantial child marriage to avoid social sanctions associated with premarital pregnancy and/or sexual activity in conservative settings.

¹ UNICEF and UNFPA (unpublished data).



WHAT ARE KEY DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE/EARLY UNIONS?



Socio-cultural and religious norms



Gender inequality



Poverty



Low school participation and access to quality education

In the context of changing sociocultural and gender norms, girls' increasing agency with respect to their own sexuality, and young people's increasing experience of dating and premarital sexual activity, young couples may decide to cohabit (in some contexts referred to as 'informal marriage') as part of their early intimate relationships. Where community attitudes remain conservative, young couples may enter a more formal union or marriage as a way of legitimising a relationship and avoiding stigma.




HOW DO CHILD MARRIAGE AND EARLY UNIONS AFFECT THE LIVES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS?

1 Early pregnancy

2 Gender-based violence

More commonly associated with forced marriage

3 Low educational attainment

4 Limited employment opportunities

“ I have talked to them, and they told me to get married when they heard that I was pregnant. Many families demand their daughters not to have sex before marriage. They can love but they cannot have sex.

Young female student, Viet Nam

“ After marriage, I have no time to meet friends except going to the field for plantation.

19-year-old woman, married, Lao PDR





TAKE ACTION



Greater consideration of the context-specific pathways and influences on child marriage and early union is required, recognising that not all unions are forced or arranged;



Policy and programmatic responses to consensual peer unions, and circumstantial marriages, need to be different to those focused on traditional child marriage;



Effective approaches must consider girls' agency, the context of adolescents' intimate relationships, and their sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and service needs to enable healthy and informed decision-making;



Careful enforcement of age of marriage legislation to recognise the agency of older adolescents of similar age to consent to marriage or union under the age of 18;



Recognise that stigmatising or criminalising adolescent sexual activity may contribute to child marriage, as young people may seek (or be coerced into) marriage as a way of legitimising an intimate relationship.

For more information, see the full report United Nations Population Fund 2021. 'My Body is My Body, My Life is My Life: Sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in Asia and the Pacific.'



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