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What are the Drivers of Child Marriage: A Case of Azerbaijan

CESD Press

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Baku, 2023

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes early marriages by gender group of regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Which factors cause early Marriages, and how early marriages lead to other problems. Districts in Azerbaijan have a higher rate of early marriages than cities. The Article considers the population distribution by sex, number and total ratios of officially registered marriages and divorces. 2005–2021 number of marriages by age groups of bride and groom, 2021, the number of marriages by age group of the bride and groom in the economic regions and administrative-territorial units Azerbaijan. This assessment identified more of the initial effects of early marriages and gender equality.

Child marriage is still a massive problem in numerous developing countries. The issue is more concentrated in countries of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper, through a literature review attempts to assess the situation, the consequences, and the colorful programs and recommendations for the reduction of child marriage. In this composition, it's corroborated that, the consequences of child marriage put the girls at threat of early gravidity with life-changing conditions. This paper suggests that each country should set up its own mid-term and long-term pretensions to bring about a significant reduction in child marriages.

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a global problem affecting millions of girls every year. According to UNICEF (2022), 12 million females are married before reaching the age of 18, which equates to 23 girls per minute or nearly one every two seconds. Child marriage is prevalent across all religious, ethnic, and cultural groups, and even in developed countries like the United States, where over 248,000 children were married between 2000 and 2010 (Equality Now, 2021). Poverty and rape resulting in pregnancy are some of the factors that make children vulnerable to child marriage (Equality Now, 2021).

Azerbaijan is also affected by child marriages, especially in rural areas, where 11% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 2% before the age of 15 (Girls Not Brides, 2021). The practice is persistent despite efforts to reduce it, and factors like tradition and culture, gender inequality, and poverty are some of the underlying causes (Asian Development Bank, 2019). In addition, teenage pregnancy is prevalent in different regions of Azerbaijan, and the violation of educational rights for teenage girls is a significant issue in some areas (UNFPA, 2014).

To combat child marriage, it's crucial to address the root causes, such as gender inequality and lack of education, as well as to provide access to sexual and reproductive health education and services (United Nations, 2020). Although the level of education among young people in Azerbaijan is rising, there is still a significant number of early marriages and teenage pregnancies in both rural and urban areas (UNFPA, 2014). Aqshin Mammadov (SRC, 2019) found that 21 thousand children were born from early marriages in Azerbaijan between 2010 and 2015 alone, and there are regions where the gender gap in education is significant (Sevinj Qarayeva, 2010). According to search of Aqshin Mammadov (SRC, 2019), In Azerbaijan 21 thousand children were born from early marriages in the country only between 2010 and 2015. Therefore, it's crucial to continue efforts to reduce child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and gender inequality in Azerbaijan and other countries worldwide.

The first paragraph of Article 176 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan states that forcing a person into marriage is punishable by a fine of two thousand to three thousand manats and imprisonment for up to two years. In the second paragraph of that article, a fine of three thousand to four thousand manats or imprisonment for a term of up to four years is applied for forcing a person under the age of marriage into marriage. Regardless of whether the perpetrator is a father and mother or other relatives, clear punishments are defined in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Aqshin Mammadov, SRC, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child marriage is a pressing issue in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and studies (UNICEF) (Equality Now,2021) (UNFPA) (SRC, Aqshin mammadov,2019) (Hajiyeva and Heydarova, 2020) have been conducted to examine its causes, consequences, and potential interventions. This literature review will synthesize the findings of several articles published on this topic and highlight the key themes and recommendations. According to Equality Now (2021) Each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. This is a common issue in the world including the Republic of Azerbaijan. This literature review aims to examine the current state of knowledge on child marriage in Azerbaijan, including the causes, consequences, and interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of child marriage.

Child marriage is prevalent in Azerbaijan, with an estimated 8% of girls married before the age of 18. According to UNICEF (Jamilya Aliyeva, Azizbek Ashurov and Hassan Mohtashami) report. Poverty, traditional gender roles and limited education opportunities contribute to the high prevalence of child marriage in the country. According to State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in 2021 this number was 0.25%.

In 2011, the Republic of Azerbaijan introduced a new regulation for the minimum marriage age. The legal age of marriage for both boys and girls was set at 18 years old, with no exceptions. But according to UNFPA Kabin marriages remain same. Mullahs made kabin marriages under the age of 18.

A study by Aghayeva and Guliyeva (2016) found that poverty, limited access to education, religion and patriarchal traditions were key factors contributing to child marriage in Azerbaijan. The authors noted that girls from poor families were more likely to marry early, as they had limited opportunities for education and employment. Ilhama Karimgizi (2021) approaches the issue a little differently and says that as another reason for early marriages, many young people think that they will gain the status of "adult" in society by marriage. Karimgizi also mentions that for many boys, marriage is a way to gain the respect of others in society. It changes from boy to

man. Patriarchal traditions, such as the practice of bride kidnapping, also perpetuated the cycle of child marriage in Azerbaijan.

According to *Girls not Brides* (2008), traditional beliefs view girls who didn't marry at a young age as "unmarried teenage girls". There is a slang word "Stayed at home" for girls who is not married early age in Azerbaijan. Aqshin Mammadov (2019) states similar issue, his study shows customs and traditions in Azerbaijan have massive impact on child marriages.

A study by Aliyev and Guliyeva (2018) found that child marriage had significant negative consequences for girls in Azerbaijan. The authors noted that girls who married early were more likely to experience domestic violence, have limited opportunities for education and employment, and have poorer health outcomes than those who married later. The study also highlighted the intergenerational impact of child marriage, as girls who married early were more likely to have children at a young age and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

In a study published in 2015, Aliyeva and Rustamova (2015) found that child marriage is prevalent in Azerbaijan, particularly in rural areas (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2011). Poverty and lack of education were identified as key factors contributing to the practice, with many families marrying off their daughters to reduce financial burdens. The study also suggests that child marriage has negative consequences for girls' physical and mental health, as well as their education and social development.

Similarly, a study by Musayeva and Guliyeva (2017) found that child marriage is a significant problem in Azerbaijan, with girls as young as 13 being forced into marriage. The study highlights the need for increased education and awareness-raising campaigns to combat the practice, as well as the importance of engaging with local communities and religious leaders to promote change.

If the number of early marriages is reduced to 10 percent, this will lead to a reduction in maternal and child mortality of up to 70 percent overall (Aqshin Mammadov, 2019). Studies about child marriage (Research Gate, Moghtaderi& Niazi, 2021), (BMC Women Health, Hosseini& Asadisarvestani, 2022), (UNFPA 2021) conclude early marriages increase the situation of suicide and divorce.

In a more recent study by Hajiyeva and Heydarova (2020) found that child marriage is still prevalent in Azerbaijan, despite efforts to combat the practice. The study suggests that poverty and traditional cultural practices continue to be key contributing factors, and that more needs to be done to promote girls' education and empower them to make their own choices.

UNICEF has supported awareness-raising campaigns to increase knowledge of the negative consequences of child marriage among communities, parents, and girls. Several interventions have been implemented to reduce the prevalence of child marriage in Azerbaijan. A study by UNICEF (2018) highlighted the importance of awareness-raising campaigns to increase knowledge of the negative consequences of child marriage among communities, parents, and girls. The study also noted the importance of community mobilization efforts, such as engaging with religious leaders and community elders, to change attitudes toward child marriage. Finally, legal reforms have been implemented to increase the legal age of marriage to 18 years for both boys and girls, as noted in a study by Rahimli and Mammadova (2020).

Community mobilization efforts have included engaging with religious leaders, community elders, and parents to change attitudes towards child marriage. Finally, legal reforms have been implemented to increase the legal age of marriage to 18 years for both boys and girls.

Child marriage is a complex issue in Azerbaijan, especially in mountainous and rural areas that is driven by poverty, patriarchal traditions, and limited access to education. Girls who marry early face significant negative consequences, including domestic violence, limited opportunities for education and employment, and poorer health outcomes. Interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of child marriage in Azerbaijan have included awareness-raising campaigns, community mobilization, and legal reforms. More research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions and identify new strategies to end child marriage in Azerbaijan. Overall, this literature suggests that child marriage is a significant problem in Azerbaijan, with poverty and traditional cultural practices playing a key role. While efforts have been made to combat the practice, more needs to be done to promote education and empower girls to make their own choices.

In the end, as Aqshin Mammadov (2019) mentioned in his search, the health status of future generations directly depends on the health status of future mothers. For this, the nation must be freed from the heavy "burden" inherited by historical traditions and some mental stereotypes.

DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN AZERBAIJAN

The demographic situation in Azerbaijan has undergone significant changes over the past few decades. According to the World Bank (2021), the country's population has been steadily growing, with an estimated population of 10 million as of 2020. Urbanization has also been on the rise, with around 55% of the population residing in urban areas. Figure 1 highlights population change of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Increasing rural population will increase child marriage, because rural areas have higher child marriage rate than urban areas. Additionally, the country is experiencing an aging population, with a declining birth rate and increasing life expectancy. This demographic shift could have significant implications for the country's economy and social systems (World Bank, 2021).

The country's population rose by 29418 people or 0.03 percent from the beginning of the year, reaching 10185784 people on July 1, 2022. 52.9 percent of the population lives in cities, while 47.1 percent lives in rural areas. There are currently 1001 women for every 1000 males. The population per square kilometer is 117 people. From January to July of this year, 61234 babies were registered by the region (city) Registration Departments of the Ministry of Justice, and this indicator was 12.3% per 1,000 population, with 52.7% of newborns being males and 47.3% being girls (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022).

In the first six months of 2022, 32589 deaths were recorded in the country, with the rate of deaths per 1000 inhabitants falling from 7,5 to 6,5 in compared to the same time the previous year (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022).

In the first half of this year, 28785 marriages and 7531 divorces were registered by the Ministry of Justice's region (city) Registration Departments, with the number of marriages increasing from 4.7% to 5.8% and the rate of divorces decreasing from 1.6% to 1.5% per 1000 population compared to the same period last year (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022).

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The competent agencies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Migration Service reported 1215 people arriving in Azerbaijan for permanent residence and 442 people leaving the country in the first half of this year, with a migration positive balance of 773 people (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan,2022).

The country's population increased by 7994 people or 0.1% since the beginning of the year, reaching 10127127 people on March 1st, 2021. The population density per square kilometer is 117 people (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan,2022).

53,0 percent of the population lives in cities, 47,0 percent live in rural areas, 49,9 percent are men, and 50,1 percent are women. At the moment, there are 1002 women for every 1000 males (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan,2022).

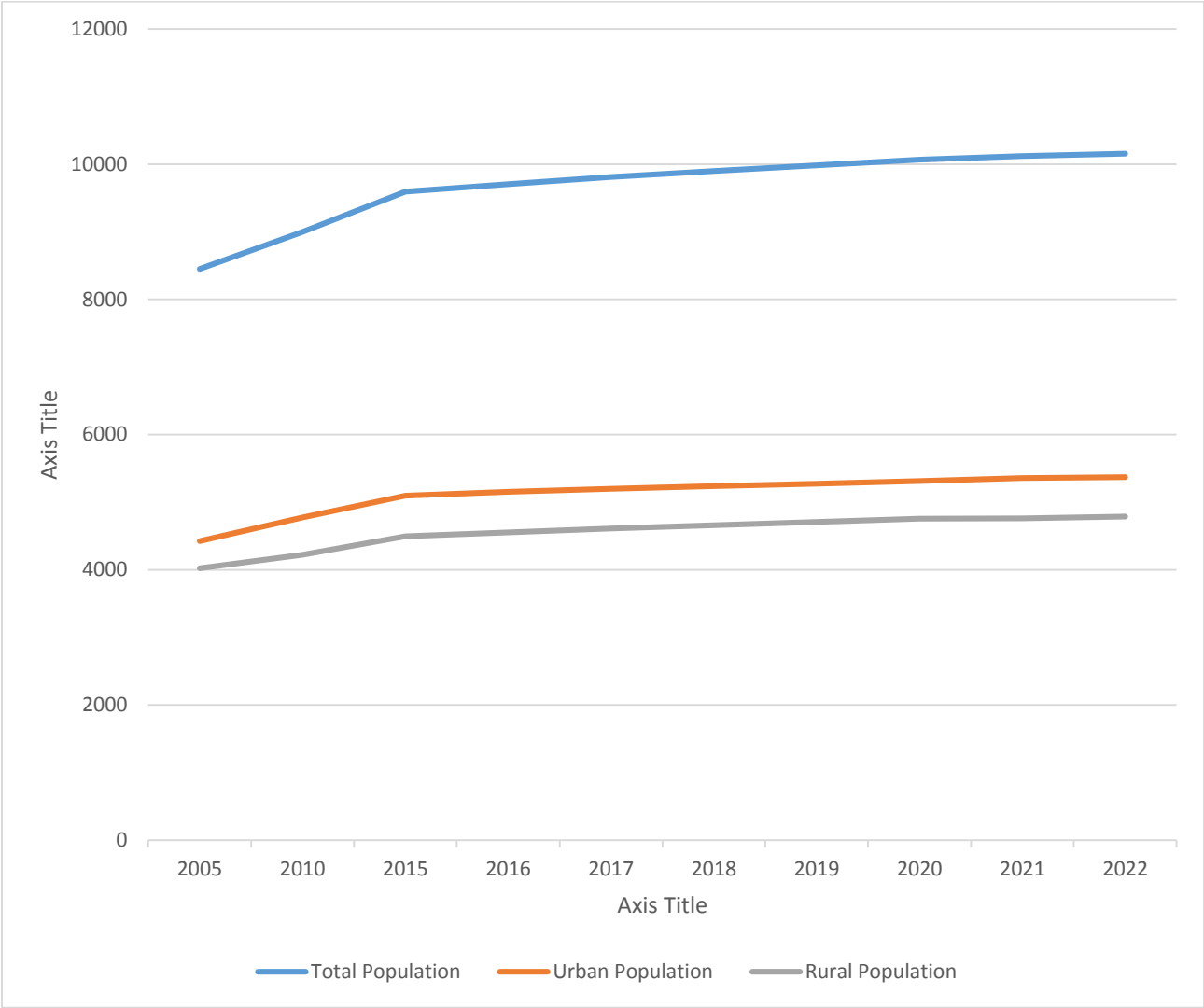
In the first two months of the current year, 20984 births were registered by the region (city) Registration Departments of the Ministry of Justice, and this indication was 13.0% per 1,000 people. There were 53,2% boys and 46,8% girls among the infants. There were 510 twins and 9 triplets among the babies (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan,2022).

Throughout January and February 2021, 13338 deaths were registered in the nation, or 8.2% of the population (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan,2022).

In January-February of this year, the region (city) Registration Departments of the Ministry of Justice registered 5672 weddings and 2417 divorces, with the number of marriages being 3,5 and divorces being 1,5 per 1000 people (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan,2022).

The competent agencies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Migration Service registered 395 people arriving in Azerbaijan for permanent residence and 47 people leaving the country in January-February of this year, with a migration-positive balance of 348 people (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan,2022)

Figure 1: Population change of the Republic of Azerbaijan
(at the beginning of the year, thsd.persons)



Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2022)

MAIN INDICATORS AFFECT CHILD MARRIAGES

Child marriage is a complex issue in the Republic of Azerbaijan, driven by a combination of factors including education, tradition and culture, gender inequality, poverty and the belief that girls are somehow inferior to boys. Rates of child marriage remain high in certain parts of the country, particularly in rural areas (UNFPA, 2014).

Education: Education is a key factor in preventing child marriage. According to Girls Not Brides and State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, it can be concluded that the median age of marriage for Azerbaijani women with low education levels is lower. If girls are educated, they have a decreased likelihood of getting married at an early age, and an increased likelihood of obtaining resources and opportunities that can enhance their quality of life. However, in Azerbaijan, girls' access to education is limited, particularly in rural areas where poverty and traditional attitudes toward gender roles can prevent girls from attending school (Girls Not Brides).

Tradition and Culture: Tradition and culture are also significant factors in child marriage in Azerbaijan. Patriarchal attitudes towards gender roles and the belief that girls should be married at a young age are deeply ingrained in highly religious and old-minded communities, especially rural areas. Families may view marriage as a way to secure their daughter's future or as a source of income from a dowry. In some cases, girls may be forced into marriage against their will (Girls First Fund, 2019).

When families or third parties benefit from selling a girl, the cultural practice of child marriage transforms into human trafficking. Sadly, this has become a business for mostly impoverished rural families who sell their daughters to wealthier families for marriage. This deprives girls of their agency and their ability to decide for themselves about marriage, which is a great loss (Human Trafficking Search, 2017).

Gender inequality: Gender inequality is another root cause of child marriage, with girls and women being undervalued and denied their rights. Girls are often seen as inferior to boys and their sexuality is viewed as a matter of "dishonor".

Poverty and insecurity, worsened by natural disasters and economic hardship, further exacerbate the problem, as girls have less access to resources and are more vulnerable to exploitation (UNDP, 2020).

Poverty: After the collapse of the USSR, independence and the war with Armenia, many families in Azerbaijan were in financial difficulties. Some parents marry off their daughters in hopes of leading a more prosperous life (Girls Not Brides).

Insecurity: Marriage is seen as protection and a cover of respect for women. By not going to school, it reduces the threat of being sexually active outside the house or being wearied while exchanging. Youthful girls walking alone to the academy are at threat of sexual exploitation or rape either of which would bring shame to the family and end any stopgap of marrying in the future. Child marriage also increases during times of philanthropic extremity or after a natural disaster. Refugee extremities, cataracts, earthquakes, wars and other times of extremity, push vulnerable families over the edge. Parents resort to marrying their youthful daughters to aged men as a way to cover them from violence, and poverty. The tradition of child marriage becomes mortal trafficking when families or third parties profit from the trade of a girl. What habituated to be an artistic practice has too frequently come a business where substantially poor pastoral families try to exchange their daughters for money to rich families in marriage. This takes down a girl's agency and denies them the chance to make their own opinions about marriage (Human Trafficking Search, 2017).

According to a study by UNICEF, child marriage in Azerbaijan is most prevalent among girls aged 15-19 from poor or rural backgrounds. The study also found that child marriage is linked to early motherhood, with girls who marry early being more likely to have children at a young age and being at higher risk of maternal and child health problems (UNICEF, 2018).

Child marriage in the Republic of Azerbaijan is a complex issue that is driven by a combination of factors, including education, tradition and culture, gender inequality, and poverty. While progress has been made in reducing child marriage rates, the problem remains significant, particularly in rural areas. Efforts to prevent child marriage must address the root causes of the problem, including poverty, gender inequality, and traditional attitudes toward gender roles. By

promoting education, empowering girls, and challenging harmful gender stereotypes, we can work towards ending child marriage in Azerbaijan.

There are also other factors like religion, displacement, social status gender norms and bride kidnapping affect early marriages in Azerbaijan.

Religion: Cabin marriages based on a religious marriage contract are still performed by local mullahs, although they are not legally registered or recognized. These are often done regardless of the age of girls and put them at risk because they are not protected by law. The tradition of sighing includes temporary marriages sanctioned by religious authorities (Girls Not Brides).

Displacement: Following the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia (1988-1994), thousands of people were internally displaced in Azerbaijan. Although the current number of internally displaced persons (IDPs¹) is uncertain, these communities live in poor conditions and child marriage is sometimes used as a way out of poverty and overcrowding. Drop-out rates are particularly high among IDP communities, putting girls at greater risk of early marriage (Girls Not Brides).

Social status: Marriage is seen as a measure of social progress in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and some girls in the country consider it the best achievement of their life. Some parents marry off their daughters in the belief that they are helping them fulfill their life's mission as a wife and mother (Girls Not Brides).

Gender norms: According to a UNICEF (2014) study, traditional beliefs view girls who didn't marry at a young age as "unmarried teenage girls." The large number of men who migrate for work also fuels social pressure, and some parents welcome elchi (matchmakers) to marry their daughters to the first suitable candidate (UNICEF Azerbaijan, 2014, p. 10).

Bride kidnapping: Bride kidnapping cases have been reported in Azerbaijan, either due to the families' refusal or the forced abduction of young girls (Girls Not Brides). In situation of negotiation between families or just refusal of one party, groom wants to marry and kidnapp bride.

¹ IDP* *internally displaced person*

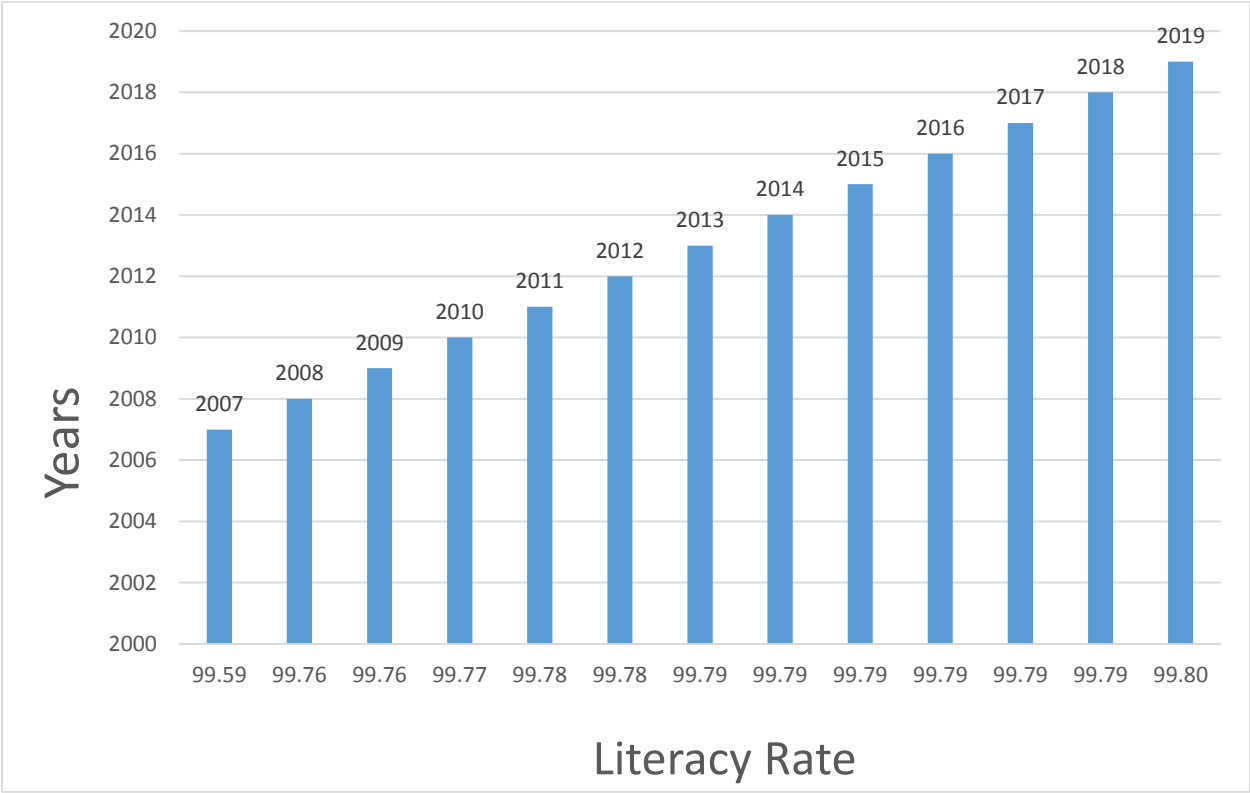
Sometimes parties do not have money for marriage costs or bride's age is not above 18 (this also increase child marriages in the country), bride kidnapping happen. In some situations, girl do not want to marry, but bride kidnapping happen (Kathryn Reid, 2022).. It is forcing of the bride for marriages. Bride kidnapping is an old way to marring, especially in Caucasus region. It is illegal and there are punishment for evidence of this situation by Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In some situations, the ages of parents can also affect child marriages. So that, because of old age, parents want to see their daughters or sons marriage (Nasiru A. 2011).

Literacy rate: The literacy rate has a significant impact on child marriage (Asian Development Bank, 2019). The literacy rate in Azerbaijan has remained consistently high over the past ten years. The literacy rate for 2019 was 99.8%, which is the same as in 2017 and a slight increase from 2016 (MacroTrends). Similarly, The World Bank reports the adult literacy rate in Azerbaijan as 99.8% for 2019, with no significant fluctuations in the past decade. Additionally, the adult literacy rate in Azerbaijan has been consistently above the long term average of 99.68% (YCharts). Therefore, it can be concluded that the literacy rate in Azerbaijan has remained stable and high over the past ten years. Figure 2 shows Literacy rate in Azerbaijan. It is slightly increasing over the years which is positive outcome for the country.

Overall, the literacy rate does not have a noticeable impact on child marriages in Azerbaijan. While the literacy rate has consistently increased, the number of child marriages does not follow the same pattern, fluctuating throughout the years with increases and decreases at different times.

Figure 2: Literacy Rate in Azerbaijan, in percentage



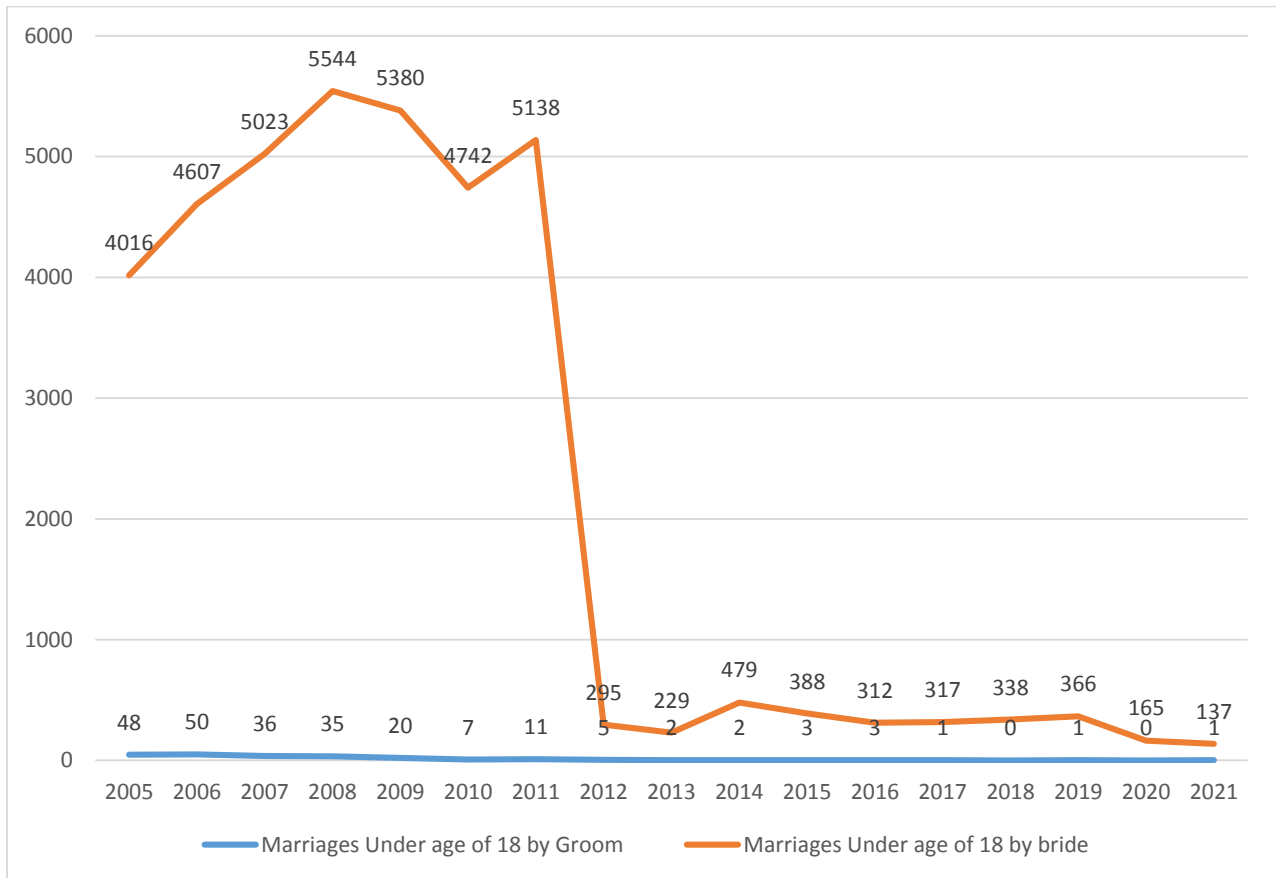
Source: MacroTrends

MARRIAGE OF BRIDE AND GROOM ACCORDING TO AGE GROUPS IN AZERBAIJAN

According to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in 2022, the proportion of males and females is 50/50. Below are tables Figure 3 showing marriages by age groups of groom and bride, including 2005-2021. The effect of the Regulation for minimum age in 2011 was seen as a strict decrease in marriages under the age of 18. It is important to know that the content below shows only registered marriages. There is no data about unregistered marriages including bride kidnapping, and religious marriages (Kabin marriages) .

Graph shows that period of 2005-2011 child marriages reached its maximum point. It is also indicate child marriages affect more girls than boys. In 2020 and 2021, there is a decrease of about 50% compared to the previous years. The reason for this can be attributed to Covid 19 and fact that people are not allowed to gather. It was not possible to make wedding ceremony.

Figure 3: Marriages by groom and bride under age of 18



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Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

¹ The main reason of notably decreasing in number of persons aged under 18 years old who enter into a marriage is that minimum age for marriage on men and women in Azerbaijan is determined to be 18.

MEASURES TAKEN BY AZERBAIJAN TO PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGES

Azerbaijan is a country that has been grappling with the issue of child marriage. The minimum age for marriage in Azerbaijan was raised from 17 to 18 in 2011 (UNICEF, Azerbaijan, the Rights of Children and Why They matter). This was done as part of the State Programme on Azerbaijan's Youth 2011-2015, following a UNICEF study on child marriage in Azerbaijan (UNICEF, Annual Report, 2011). The study found that child marriage was a pervasive problem in Azerbaijan that was driven by poverty, social norms, and inadequate legislative frameworks (UNICEF, Child Marriage, 2022).

The State Programme on Azerbaijan's Youth 2011-2015 was a government initiative aimed at improving the social and economic well-being of young people in Azerbaijan. The program focused on areas such as education, employment, health, and culture, with the goal of providing greater opportunities and support for young people to achieve their full potential. Some of the specific objectives of the program included increasing access to higher education, creating more job opportunities for young people, promoting healthy lifestyles, and fostering cultural development and creativity. The program was implemented through a variety of measures, including policy reforms, targeted investments, and public awareness campaigns. Overall, the State Programme on Azerbaijan's Youth 2011-2015 reflected the government's commitment to investing in the country's future by investing in its young people (Government of Azerbaijan, 2011).

The regulation for the minimum marriage age in Azerbaijan has been enforced since 2011 and is aimed at helping to prevent child marriage. This regulation is in line with international human rights standards, which recognize marriage before the age of 18 as a fundamental violation of human rights (UNICEF, Child Marriage, 2022). The new regulation has helped to ensure that children in Azerbaijan are given the opportunity to grow and develop before they enter into marriage.

In Azerbaijan, child protection services are established at the national and local levels. The State Committee for Family, Women, and Children's Affairs is responsible for national-level protection services, while the Ministry of Education and local government authorities oversee local-level services. These services include counseling, legal assistance, and shelters for victims of child marriage.

In addition, Azerbaijan has worked with international organizations such as UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) to combat child marriage and promote gender equality. These organizations have supported the development and implementation of laws and policies to protect children from child marriage, as well as provided technical assistance and training to government officials, civil society organizations, and community members.

It is important to note that while the regulation has been put in place, child marriage is still a problem in Azerbaijan. According to UNICEF, 8% of girls in Azerbaijan are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, Annual Report, 2011). This highlights the need for ongoing efforts to prevent child marriage and protect the rights of children.

In conclusion, Azerbaijan has taken steps to address the issue of child marriage by raising the minimum age for marriage to 18. While this is a positive step, more needs to be done to ensure that children in Azerbaijan are protected from this harmful practice.

This change in the law was aimed at protecting the rights of children and promoting gender equality in the country. However, despite the new regulation, child marriage remains a significant problem in Azerbaijan. Poverty, limited access to education, and patriarchal traditions are some of the factors that contribute to child marriage in the country (PEWRESEARCH, 2016).

In 2021, the number of marriages in Azerbaijan by age group showed that the majority of marriages involved brides and grooms aged between 20 and 34 years old. While this is a positive development, it is important to continue to monitor and address issues related to child marriage in Azerbaijan (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan).

It is worth noting that child marriage is a violation of human rights and can have significant negative consequences for the health and well-being of children, particularly girls. It is essential to promote awareness of the negative consequences of child marriage and to empower young people, particularly girls, through education and access to resources.

In conclusion, the Republic of Azerbaijan introduced a new regulation for the minimum marriage age in 2011, setting the legal age of marriage for both boys and girls at 18 years old. While progress has been made, child marriage remains a significant problem in the country. It is important to continue to address the root causes of child marriage and promote awareness of the negative consequences of this harmful practice.

MARRIAGE DISTRIBUTION BY AGE GROUPS AND REGIONS IN AZERBAIJAN IN 2021

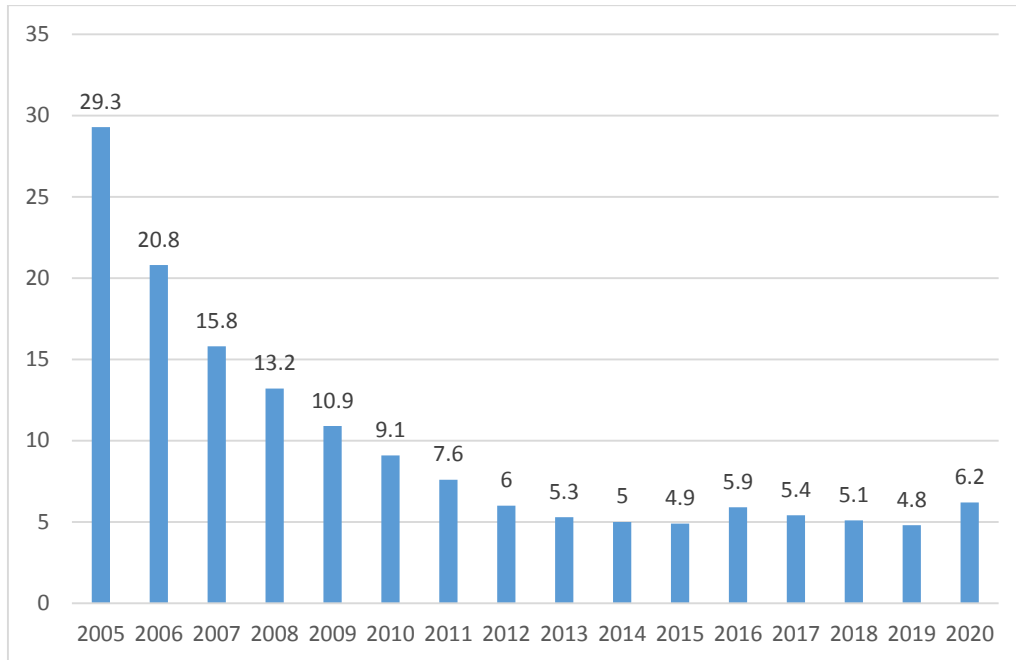
In 2021, the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan reported a total of 118,675 marriages in the country. Of these marriages, the majority (72.8%) involved brides and grooms aged between 20 and 34 years old. The average age of brides was 26.4 years old, while the average age of grooms was 29.1 years old.

The economic regions with the highest number of marriages were Baku, which had 46,985 marriages, followed by the Absheron economic region with 13,799 marriages. The lowest number of marriages was recorded in the Upper-Karabakh economic region, with only 330 marriages in 2021.

When looking at the administrative territorial units, the city of Baku had the highest number of marriages, with 44,163 marriages in 2021. This was followed by the city of Ganja with 6,130 marriages, and the city of Sumgait with 5,407 marriages (United Nations, 2014).

It is worth noting that the legal minimum age for marriage in Azerbaijan is 18 years old for both men and women. However, children between the ages of 15 and 18 are allowed to marry with parental consent (PEWREASERACH, 2016). Child marriage is often linked to poverty, which remains a significant issue in Azerbaijan (UNFPA, 2012). Poverty is a condition characterized by insufficient income, lack of access to basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter, and limited access to social services. In Azerbaijan, 5.9% of the population lives below the national poverty line as of 2021, and 20% of the population is either poor or close to the poverty line (Asian Development Bank, 2021), (Baku Research Institute, Toghrul Veliyev, 2022). Poverty rate represented in Figure 4. The State Program on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development (SPPRED) aims to identify the causes of poverty in Azerbaijan and use various indicators to measure its extent (International Monetary Fund, Azerbaijan Republic, Poverty Reduction Paper, 2003).

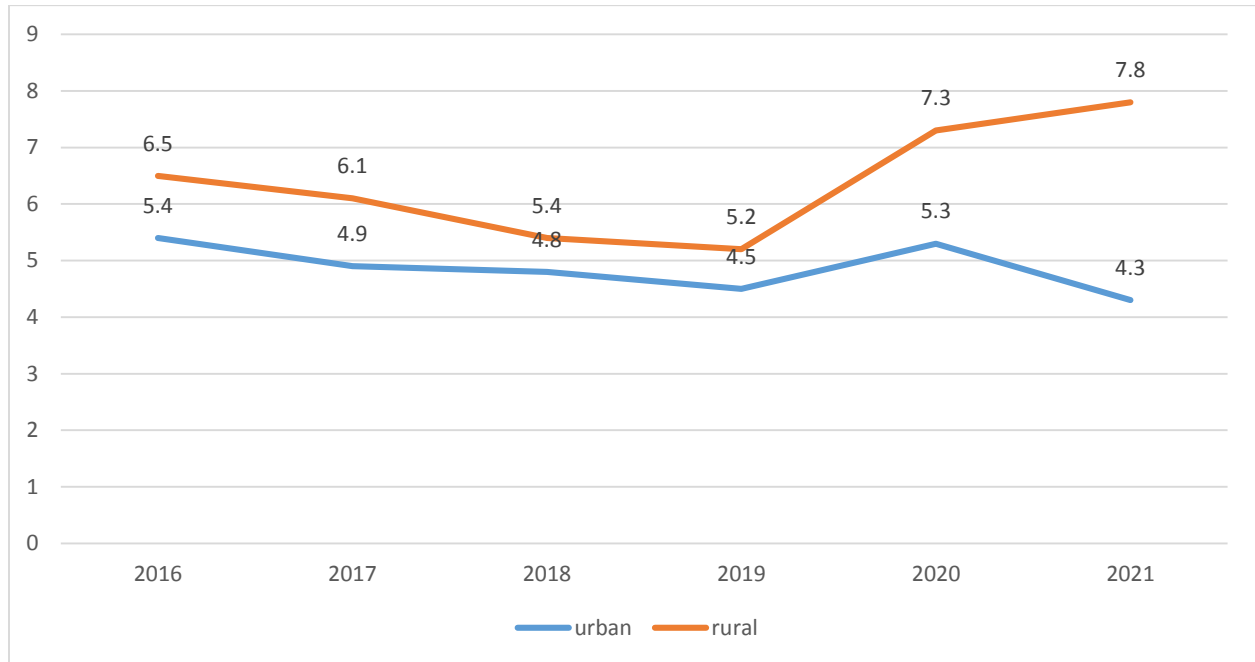
Figure 4: Poverty Rate in Azerbaijan (As a percentage of the total population)



Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Poverty rate and child marriage are directly proportional (Girls Not Brides), but there is no official data in State Statistical Committee showing poverty rate by regions. Data available 2016-2021 poverty rate by living place, in percent. Figure 5. Graph shows while poverty rate decreased in urban areas, it is increased in rural areas over the years. This can be concluded that child marriage still remain issue.

Figure 5: Poverty Rate by area, in percent



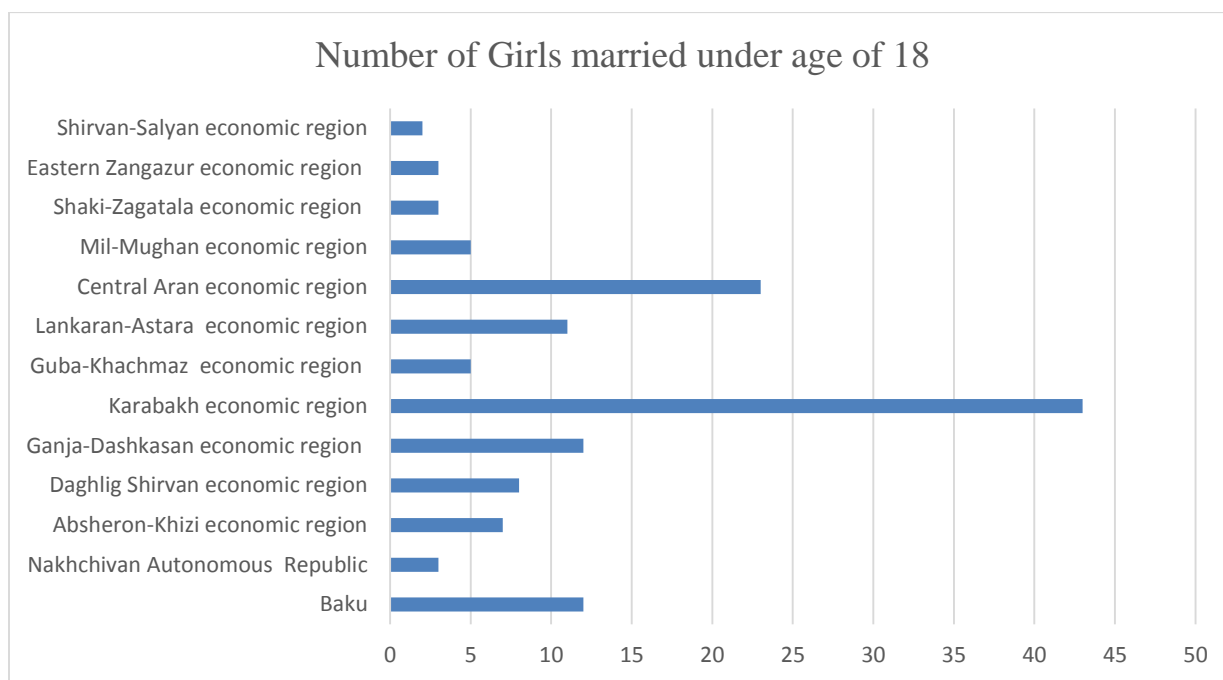
Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Overall, the data shows that the majority of marriages in Azerbaijan involve brides and grooms aged between 20 and 34 years old. The economic region of Baku has the highest number of marriages, while the Upper-Karabakh economic region has the lowest. It is important to continue to monitor and address issues related to child marriage in Azerbaijan, particularly in areas where poverty remains a significant challenge.

According to State Statistical Committee, there is only one registered child marriage by groom. This number is 137 for brides in 2021. Figure 6.

Due to the size of the graph, it is not possible to place it in the study. *See data*¹

Figure 6: Number of girls married under age of 18 in 2021



Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

¹ https://www.google.com/url?client=internal-element-cse&cx=002449251119581805858:w_qefvfkpmu&q=https://www.stat.gov.az/source/demography/en/006_11en.xls&sa=U&ved=2ahUKEwism_qLucn-AhXHhP0HHWvgC04QFnoECAEQAQ&usg=AOvVaw3SJ5HMKxgkeiCazPIdziOI

CHILD MARRIAGE LEADS OTHER PROBLEMS

Child marriage is a union, whether formal or informal, that takes place before an individual reaches the age of eighteen (UNFPA). It is a violation of children's human rights and a form of gender-based violence that robs children of childhood. Child marriage can negatively impact a child's education and increase their vulnerability to violence, discrimination, and abuse.

Problems that will happen after child marriages are almost the same in Azerbaijan as all over the world.

Child marriage is a global issue that affects millions of girls each year (United Nations). It is a violation of human rights and a major obstacle to social and economic development. While the practice of child marriage affects both boys and girls, it disproportionately affects girls (UNFPA, 2023). Child marriage has an impact on girls' health, education, and social development.

One of the most significant problems caused by child marriage is the detrimental impact on girls' health. In developing countries, pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death among girls aged 15 to 19 (UNFPA, 2022). Child brides are at higher risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, including obstetric fistula, which can cause chronic incontinence and other debilitating medical conditions. Child brides are also more likely to contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV (UNFPA, 2022) (WHO, 2022).

Child marriage also has a negative impact on girls' education. Girls who marry young are less likely to complete their education, which limits their future career opportunities and social mobility (UNFPA, 2022). Education is a key factor in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth, and child marriage undermines these goals by limiting girls' access to education.

Furthermore, child marriage has a negative impact on girls' social development. Young brides are often isolated from their family and friends, which can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Child brides are also more likely to experience domestic violence and

abuse, as they are often married to older men who have greater power and control over them (UNFPA, 2022).

In addition, child marriage perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces harmful gender norms. Girls are often viewed as inferior to boys and are expected to fulfill traditional gender roles, such as taking care of the home and raising children. This limits their agency and autonomy, and perpetuates cycles of gender-based violence and discrimination (UNITED NATIONS, 2014).

Overall, child marriage is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach to address. Governments, civil society organizations, and communities must work together to promote girls' education, increase access to healthcare services, and challenge harmful gender norms. It should be known that, child marriages do not happen suddenly. Before that they are engaging their future bride or groom. Usually, this happens one or two (sometimes more) years ago before marriage. By addressing the root causes of child marriage, root causes vary across different countries and cultures, and its causes are diverse. However, poverty, lack of education, and inadequate healthcare are common factors that sustain this practice. In some cases, families choose to marry off their daughters as a means of reducing their financial burden or generating revenue (UNICEF, 2023). It is possible to create a world where all girls have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMANDATIONS

The purpose of this research is identify child marriages in Azerbaijan. Demographic situation in The Republic of Azerbaijan, reasons of child marriage, indicators of child marriage, what problems child marriages may cause in the future, measures taken by the government to prevent this and other solutions are shown in the study.

Early marriage remains an actual problem in terms of its effect on the family gene pool of Azerbaijan. In order to prevent child marriages in Azerbaijan, first of all, serious educational work should be carried out in the district and rural areas, in schools. At the same time, teachers, religious figures, influential people of the region and parents (especially fathers) should be involved in educational work, and people should be given the right information about this. It goes without saying that when this happens, the parent will be aware of what they are pushing their child to, both medically, religiously, and scientifically. When people are fully informed, they will understand the consequences of forcing their child into early marriage. The main goal of education should be to instill that early marriage is not only a violation of the law, but also poses a threat to human psychology, especially the health of young girls, and leads to great consequences.

Azerbaijani government took measeures, such as regulation for minimum marriage age, The State Programme on Azerbaijan's Youth 2011-2015, and Azerbaijan has worked with international organizations to combat child marriage and promote gender equality. Overall, this steps had positive affect on decreasing child marriages and increasing gender equality.

Introducing special temporary measures such as financial incentives and scholarships for low-income families with female children, encouraging delayed marriage. Plan national advocacy and education programs to raise public awareness of girls' rights. Create multisectoral partnerships between state and nongovernmental organizations to tackle the problem of child marriage in a thorough and all-encompassing way can reduce child marriage index.

If educational work is conducted only among children and students, it will not be effective. Because no matter how much new information is given to the schoolchild, he or she still remains dependent on his parents in the environment at home.

In addition, the rule of law and functionality must be ensured in this area. In order to solve the problem of marrying girls off from education, the criminal and administrative responsibility of the relevant persons should be widely reflected in the legislation. In addition to the Criminal Code, the Civil and Family Codes, as well as the Law on Education, contains articles that establish special legal responsibility and prevent early marriages. These laws should be further improved and their implementation should be expanded, so that those who allow young girls to be married by being distracted from education and subjected to violence - whether parents or and the religious figures who cut the Kabin should feel the legal responsibility and not allow it. Also, civic responsibility should be increased, social-psychological rehabilitation assistance should be provided to girls who were subjected to violence through early marriage, regular trainings should be held in schools about the bitter consequences of early marriage and domestic violence, the abnormal effect of early marriage in most cases, family relations and the nutrition of the born children should be highlighted. Educational materials should be prepared that reflect the possible problems.

Health status of future generations directly depends on the health status of future mothers. For this, people need to liberate themselves from the heavy burden inherited by historical traditions, and mental stereotypes.

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