

Working to Prevent and Respond to Child Marriage Practices in Conflict and Displacement

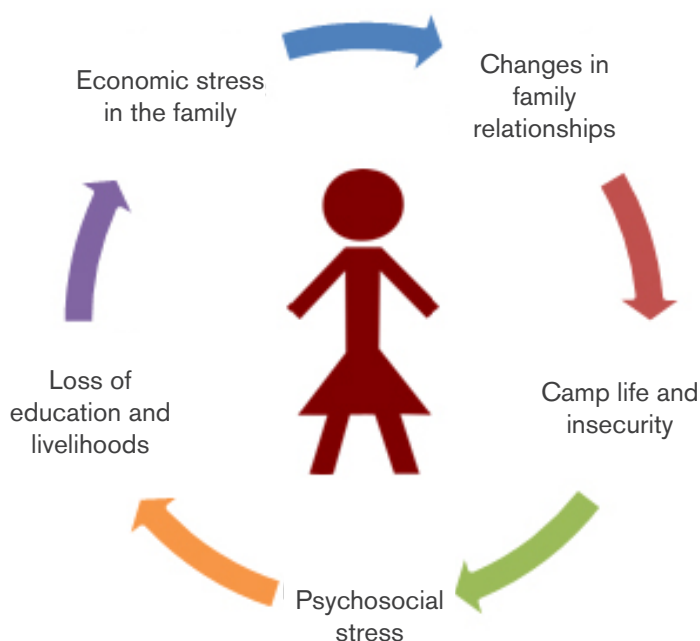
Child marriage is a violation of human rights, and severely impedes much-needed progress towards every one of the Millennium Development Goals. Yet, an estimated one in seven girls in developing countries is married before the age of 15. In South Asia and West and Central Africa, the rates are even higher: two out of five girls are child brides. Girls in poverty, who reside in rural communities, and who lack education are far more likely to enter a union before the age of 18. But what is the role of conflict and displacement in this picture?

Little is known for certain, about how conflict and displacement affect marriage and dating practices, or how humanitarian actors could better ensure the rights of adolescent girls at risk. This is why the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) is focusing on this issue.

The WRC has set out to better understand the unique risk and protective factors to child marriage following an emergency. Conflicts and natural disasters have the potential to diminish family and social networks, while increasing individual and family vulnerabilities to poverty. The WRC believes that examining and addressing these dynamics at the community level are essential to unpacking the motivating factors behind child marriage and early union. Initial research conducted by the WRC in Uganda supports this approach.¹

The humanitarian community can and should do more to understand factors that both promote and prevent child marriage practices following an emergency. The WRC is well positioned to conduct community-based research on this topic in such settings, and proposes that a research-to-action

Factors that may increase risks to child marriage following conflict and displacement



methodology can be used as a tool for change among communities that are experiencing higher rates of child marriage. Through the continued work of the WRC, we aim to further explore the role that conflict and displacement has in child marriage, and to actively partner with local actors during the research phase, to build awareness and collaboratively develop local solutions.

¹ Schlecht J, Rowley E, Babirye J (2013). Early relationships and marriage in conflict and post conflict settings: vulnerability of youth in Uganda. *Reproductive Health Matters* (41).

The Women's Refugee Commission's mission is to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.