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**CHILD BRIDE PRACTICE RISING IN IRAN,
PARLIAMENT SEEKS TO LOWER
GIRL'S LEGAL MARRIAGE AGE TO 9**

by

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<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/379171/20120830/iran-child-marriage-9-years-old-sharia.htm>

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Hundreds of girls below the age of 10 are forced into marriage in Iran every year -- and the trend is experiencing a dramatic increase.

According to recent data released by Iran's Association of Children's Rights, the number of girls married in Iran under the age of 15 went from 33,383 in 2006 to 43,459 in 2009, a 30 percent increase in three years.

Right - Young Iranian girls

In addition, while 449 girls were married in 2009 before reaching the age of 10, as many as 716 girls were married under the age of 10 in 2010, a 59 percent spike in one year.

These alarming figures were accompanied by an official statement from the Iranian parliament's legal affairs committee that the Islamic Republic will push to lower the legal marriage for girls to 9 (before they even reach puberty) from the current 13.

The legal affairs committee of parliament told the press that they regard the law that prohibits girls below the age of 10 from being married off to be "un-Islamic and illegal," referencing Islamic scripture to which describes the Prophet Muhammad -- the perfect example of all Muslims -- marrying a 6-year-old bride, with whom he consummated the marriage when she was only 9 years old.

Mohammad Ali Isfenani, the chairman for the legal affairs committee, said matter-of-factly: "As some people may not comply with our current Islamic legal system, we must regard 9 as being the appropriate age for a girl to have reached puberty and qualified to get married. To do otherwise would be to contradict and challenge Islamic Sharia law."



As of right now, according to a 2002 ruling by the powerful Expediency Council ruling, girls below 13 and boys younger than 15 can only wed with their father's consent and the permission of a court.

But with the Iranian parliament pushing to lower brides' legal age, this minimal protection for girls between age 9 to 13 will also be stripped away.

More importantly, as there is no protection for the age of consent within marriage, these young girls have no means and rights to protect themselves against unwanted sex or pregnancy -- leaving some of them to die of painful childbirth when they are as young as 14.

These young brides rarely continue their education, and consequently have no choice but to completely depend upon their husbands' earnings. The life expectancy of these girls is cut exceedingly short, given the high mortality rate from childbirth injuries. Girls younger than 15 years old are five times more likely to die in childbirth.

Some of these girls are married off to settle debts, as deepening poverty within Iran leaves families with a large number of children with very few options. It is known that the younger the girl is, the higher the price of a child bride.

Moreover, should this worrying trend continue, child protection experts warn of a surge in mental illness, suicides, teenage runaways and girls turning to prostitution as such nuptials frequently end in divorce.

Farshid Yazdani, the spokesman for the Iran's Association of Children's Rights, said that child marriages are more common in socially backward rural areas often afflicted with high levels of illiteracy and drug addiction.

"Financial poverty of the families leads to children's marriages. However, cultural poverty and ignorance is also an element," Yazdani said.

However, Iran is not the only one with this phenomenon.

Ethiopia, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan and Niger are among the many countries that do not have adequate protection for girls to grow up without being forced into marriage.

According to the International Center for Research on Women, if present trends continue, more than 100 million girls in the developing world below the age of 18 will be married off over the next 10 years -- that is, 25,000 girls married every day for the next 10 years.

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