



Woman in Development and Politics

Behind the Scenes of Early Marriages: Lived Experience of Girls under 18 in Married Life (Saqqez County)

Fazilat Khodamoradi¹ | Hossein Mirzaei²

1. Corresponding Author, MA Student, Department of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: fazilat_khodamoradi@atu.ac.ir
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: hossein.mirzaei@atu.ac.ir

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type:</p> <p>Research Article</p> <p>Article history:</p> <p>Received: 9 March 2025</p> <p>Received in revised form: 1 May 2025</p> <p>Accepted: 13 July 2025</p> <p>Published online: 23 July 2025</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Marriage is not a straightforward social phenomenon, despite its unambiguous legal definition. Marriage is not restricted to a relationship between two individuals; rather, it incorporates the union of two families and broader social networks and has varying meanings across various cultures. Early marriage is one of the significant topics in social studies, examining the cultural, economic, and psychological consequences of such unions. From a social studies perspective, early marriage (marriage before the legal or customary age of a society) can play a crucial role in shaping social structures, women's rights, and the cultural development of communities.</p> <p>Despite the studies conducted on early marriage, there is limited information available on how girls who have experienced or are close to marriage perceive and experience it. There is a scarcity of research that has examined the perspectives and attitudes of women toward various aspects of marriage in cultural contexts where early marriage is prevalent. Therefore, it is essential to address the social and cultural dimensions of early marriage, with a particular focus on the lived experiences of females who have been child brides and have not yet completed their childhood. In this regard, the current research meticulously and thoroughly explores the multifaceted experiences of children who have entered into matrimony while under the age of 18.</p> <p>Methodology</p> <p>This study employs a phenomenological approach to conduct a comprehensive and meticulous analysis, investigating the diverse layers of the lived experiences of children under 18 in marital life. The researcher's objective is to comprehend the experiences of females in early marriage, their perceptions of gender roles, and the consequences of this decision in the broader context of their lives. By employing "purposeful sampling," the following criteria were established for participant inclusion: residing in Saqqez, being of Kurdish ethnicity, and being under 18 years of age having encountered early marriage. Accordingly, eleven females under the age of 18 who had experienced early marriage were selected for interviews. The participants' average age was 17, and they had married at an average age of only 16. All but two of these individuals rated their economic circumstances as low. They were all homemakers who had not concluded their high school education after their marriage. The data collection strategy employed in this study emphasizes the utilization of in-depth interviews and individual interview techniques. After each interview, which was conducted in Kurdish, was documented, the researcher transcribed the data and translated it into Persian. The researcher transcribed the interviews after they were recorded and analyzed them using Moustakas' phenomenological analysis method.</p> <p>Results</p> <p>The primary themes that emerged from the data analysis are as follows: Illustrations, entry scenarios, considerations and gender/sexual roles, reactions of those in their vicinity, and the obstacles associated with early marriage. These themes were analyzed and interpreted on three distinct levels: textual, structural, and composite. The researcher initially provided a textual description of the participants' experiences, utilizing meaningful phrases and themes (textual description). These themes and phrases were also employed to compose a descriptive account of the context or background that influences the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (structural description). The researcher concluded by offering a</p>
<p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>Child Marriage, Early Marriage, Lived Experience.</i></p>	

composite description.

Three scenarios emerged during the interviews with child brides: “Mam and Zin, Consent and Love,” “The Dreamland, Understanding Marriage and Parental Roles,” and “Context, Culture, and Family Beliefs.” These scenarios were identified as contributing factors to the early marriage of young females. Gender considerations and roles encompass two sub-themes: “The Role of Spouse, Perception of Motherhood, Responsibilities, and Expectations” and “Confronting Gender Roles (Commercial Gaze or Self-Suspension).” The third theme derived from the narratives of the child brides pertains to the perceptions and understandings they had of themselves as an objective entity and how others regarded them. Marriage is regarded as a critical stage for these individuals, who were not prepared to assume gender and sexual roles. They require the support of those in their immediate environment to find an opportunity for self-recovery and to navigate this transition with minimal emotional, psychological, and relational stress. Two sub-themes are present in the responses of those in their vicinity: interventionist behavior and supportive behavior. The final theme highlighted by the child brides in their narratives was the challenges they faced upon entering early marriage. These challenges encompassed all facets of the girls' lives, including unfulfilled dreams, multiple forms of violence, sexual challenges ranging from lack of awareness to disillusionment, child motherhood, economic hardship, lack of private space, control issues, psychological crises, inability to break away from previous relationships, and child widowhood. Ultimately, child marriage is influenced by the concurrent interplay of the system of sexuality, class, gender, and ethnicity, rather than by isolated factors. Their disagreeable and challenging experiences as child brides are significantly impacted by these intersections.

Conclusion

Therefore, the narratives presented indicate that the children are incapable of adapting to their new circumstances and experience a profound sense of helplessness. Even if they are given the opportunity to rebuild themselves in the future, they will often become troubled and distressed women and mothers. The well-being of children is jeopardized by child marriage, which has devastating implications for a girl's life and imposes substantial costs on society. Therefore, it is essential to address the factors that influence the lives of females and compel them to marry at a young age by ensuring that they have the opportunity to make informed choices and that they can flourish in a safe and violence-free environment. Additionally, it is imperative to provide emotional and psychological support resources to children and their families, as well as to reduce the cultural and gender norms that perpetuate inequality and deprive women of their agency. Poverty reduction programs should be accompanied by simultaneous shifts in girls' aspirations and values, and educational policies should be adopted to encourage girls to stay in school and pursue their studies. This will assist females in identifying and realizing their aspirations and capabilities. It is also imperative to review and effectively implement government programs, policies, and laws to ensure that support is provided not only to those at risk but also to those who have already married at a young age and have been deprived of education due to marriage. These individuals should be empowered in terms of their psychological, emotional, and social well-being.

Cite this article: Khodamoradi, F., & Mirzaei, H. (2024). Behind the Scenes of Early Marriages: Lived Experience of Girls Under 18 in Married Life (Saqqez County). *Women in Development and Politics*, 23(2), 355-388. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jwdp.2025.391794.1008524>



© The Author(s).

Publisher: The University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jwdp.2025.391794.1008524>
