

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF EARLY MARRIAGES IN UZBEKISTAN

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Resume: this article is devoted to the socio-psychological problems of early marriages, in particular, problems such as the causes of early marriages, the motives for creating early marriages, and respondents' opinions about the negative consequences of such marriages are analyzed. The main conclusions and recommendations for the prevention of early marriage and the preservation of the family are presented.

Keywords: marriage, family, early marriage, socio-psychological problems, age of marriage, reasons for early marriage, motives for creating early marriages, consequences of early marriages, negative consequences of early marriages, value system, life goals.

One of the main tasks in strengthening the institution of the family is to prevent potentially risky marriages. Early marriages certainly fall into this category. In practice, there is a need to study the socio-psychological, social and other consequences of this problem.

According to statistics, in 2017, almost 25 thousand girls got married at the age of 16-18, which is about 8% of the total number of women who got married, in some regions this proportion reaches 15%. In addition, if we take into account that a certain part of unregistered marriages are accounted for by women of this age group, then the proportion of early marriages will actually turn out to be higher than official statistics show.

For girls who married at an early age, the problems associated with pregnancy and childbirth, with their further professional employment, are especially relevant. First pregnancies at an early age are risky. In this regard, the prevention of teenage pregnancy is a necessary measure to improve maternal health. Early unwanted pregnancies can lead to serious health risks, including death. Pregnancy during adolescence is also dangerous for the child: in low- and middle-income countries, the number of stillbirths and deaths in the first week and first month of life is 50% higher among children born to mothers under the age of 20 than among those born who were born to mothers aged 20-29 years, and the younger the mother, the higher the risk. Rates of preterm birth, low birth weight and asphyxia are higher among children born to adolescent girls; all of these conditions increase the likelihood of a child's death or future health problems¹.

The problem of early childbirth for Uzbekistan is also extremely relevant. According to statistics, in 2017 in Uzbekistan, 23,125 girls gave birth at the age of 16-19, of which 1,205 already had two children at this age. The above circumstances necessitated a study aimed at studying the problem of early marriages. The main objectives of the study are: to study the causes and factors of early marriages; identifying the motives and level of awareness of participants in early marriages about their consequences; development of recommendations for the development of measures aimed at preventing early marriages.

To implement these tasks, a study was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods, content analysis in a number of regions of the republic.

The results of the study made it possible to develop practical recommendations, the implementation of which will contribute to the reduction of early marriages, including through public awareness of the negative consequences of these marriages.

In Uzbekistan, a legislative framework has been formed to regulate the marriageable age and related marriages. In general, its norms correspond to generally accepted norms of human rights, the protection of women and children, the recommendations of leading international organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, as well as recognized global conventions on human and child rights. Issues of early and related marriages are regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Family, Civil, Criminal, administrative codes, laws, regulations.

Until 2019, in Uzbekistan, the age of marriage for men and women was different and was 18 and 17 years, respectively. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan «On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan» adopted by the Legislative Chamber on August 17, 2019 and approved by the Senate on August 24, 2019 «the age of marriage for men and women is set at eighteen years».

The reason for the amendments was the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan PP-4296 dated April 22, 2019 "On additional measures to further strengthen the guarantees of the rights of the child",

¹From the Report of the Secretariat of the World Health Assembly, A65/13

according to which, from September 1, 2019, the minimum age for marriage is set for men and women in the Republic of Uzbekistan - eighteen years. This decision is extremely important not only from the point of view of protecting the interests of children, but also contributes to strengthening the norms of generally recognized international documents, conventions, in particular, ensuring compliance with the requirements of UNICEF, which considers the marriage of children under 18 as child marriage.

At the same time, according to the Family Code, if there are valid reasons, in exceptional cases (pregnancy, the birth of a child, declaring a minor fully capable (emancipation), the Mayor (khokim) of the district, city at the place of state registration of marriage may, at the request of persons wishing to marry, reduce marriageable age, but not more than one year.

At the same time, the legislation provides for the protection of persons who have not reached the age of marriage in the event that circumstances are revealed that are contrary to the interests of these persons. In particular, article 51 of the Family Code stipulates that «A marriage entered into with a person who has not reached marriageable age may be declared invalid. A person who entered into marriage before reaching marriageable age has the right to demand recognition of such a marriage as invalid».

The problems of early and child marriages around the world are among the most acute in the field of protecting the interests, safety and health of children and adolescents. A UNICEF report states that as of June 7, 2019, 765 million people in the world were married by children. 115 million men and boys in the world were married under the age of 15, of which 23 million were under the age of 15. Such marriages threaten the lives and futures of girls around the world, depriving them of their autonomy in making decisions about their lives, interrupting their education, leaving them vulnerable to violence, discrimination and abuse, and preventing their full participation in the social, political and public spheres of life. Early marriages are also often accompanied by early and frequent pregnancies and childbirth, leading to above-average maternal morbidity and mortality.

The problem of early marriages concerns not only girls. A UNICEF analysis of 82 countries concluded that early marriage among boys is a worldwide phenomenon, from Asian and African countries to Latin America. Marriage robs boys of childhood. Young husbands are forced to take on non-childish responsibilities for which they are completely unprepared. They become fathers very early, they are forced to provide for their families from an early age, as a result they do not have the opportunity to get a good education and find a good job.

As part of the study of the problem of early marriage in 6 regions of Uzbekistan (Fergana, Kashkadarya, Namangan, Bukhara, Surkhandarya, Khorezm regions), a socio-psychological survey was conducted. A total of 521 respondents took part in the survey, of which 24.0% were men and 76.0% were women. The survey was conducted in Uzbek in the form of an interview. Most of the respondents are rural residents (74%), urban residents make up 15%, residents of urban settlements – 11%.

Most of the families surveyed registered their marriage at the registry office (92.4%). The rest either entered into a religious marriage (6.5%), did not formalize their relationship (1.1%). The most common reason for the lack of registration in the registry office is that respondents do not see the need for registration and believe that it is quite enough to marry in a religious ceremony (35% of those who are in an unregistered marriage). Another common reason is that at the time of marriage, one of the spouses (in most cases, women) did not reach the age of majority (29.4%). Considering that at the time of the survey (in 2017) the age of marriage for women was 17, we can conclude that this part of the respondents was under the age of 17. Another 12% of respondents said that their spouse does not want to marry at the registry office, and the same number noted that their spouse did not terminate the previous marriage. In general, respondents have a negative attitude towards unregistered marriages, 35% of respondents are sure that marriage without registration hinders strong family relationships, 18.5% believe that unregistered marriage does not ensure the rights of women, more than 15.1% indicate possible problems in paperwork, including when establishing paternity, 10% - uncertain legal status of the family by spouses, 5.6% - uncertainty in the future, 1.7% - lack of trust between spouses, 3.9% - property disputes in case of divorce, 2.8% - marital adultery and polygamy.

Table 1. Reasons why respondents married early %

THE REASONS	Men	Women
Love	52,4	40,4
On the advice of parents	42,9	41,4
At the request of parents	9,5	11,8
On the advice of other family members/relatives	3,2	7,9
At the request of other family members / relatives	3,2	2,5
Duetopregnancy	3,2	3,0

There was no other way	0,0	2,0
Because of the opportunity to create families with a good person	1,6	9,4

In most cases, before entering into an early marriage, the respondents were in the care of their parents (93.8%), rarely other relatives (5.2%), in isolated cases they lived independently (1.1%). To a certain extent, this is the reason for the results of the survey, which show that the decision of young people to marry in many cases is determined by parents and other relatives (62%). Most of them (86%) note that, when entering into marriage, they listened to the advice of relatives, and 14% believe that they fulfilled the requirement of relatives, which certainly indicates the presence of elements of coercion in concluding such marriages. The answers of men and women differ little, however, women are more likely to experience pressure from relatives and are less likely to marry by mutual inclination compared to men (Table 1).

In most cases, the initiators of consanguineous marriage are parents (43.4%) and other relatives (8%). Meanwhile, 67% of respondents claim that their parents did not know each other before marriage, 16% noted that their parents were friends, 17% answered that their parents were related. 28% of the respondents made this decision on their own, and men more often than women have the opportunity to make their own choice (Table 2)

Table 2. Initiators of early marriages, %

Initiators of early marriages	%
respondents themselves	28,3
spouse	20,2
parents	33,5
other family members	1,1
other relatives	7,0
mother-in-law / father-in-law	9,9
Total	100,0

When discussing the reasons why parents arrange for early marriage of children, it was often possible to hear the opinion that this is done in order to protect children. More than half of the respondents fully or partially agree with this statement (including 64% of men and 46% of women). But if we keep in mind that girls mostly enter into marriage before the age of majority, then we can most likely assume that we are talking about reputational risks. In an effort to prevent the «debauchery» of young people, parents believe that the best way is for children to acquire marital status. In addition, it is still widely believed that the main social role of women is housework, caring for children and other family members, but not a professional career, so girls do not have to receive the same education as boys. However, the majority of respondents fully or partially agree that parents use the marriage of their children for their own purposes, that is, they solve some of their problems without focusing on the interests of the children (Table 3).

Table 3. Opinion of respondents about the motives of parents when entering into marriage of children, %

	Completely agree	Partially agree	Do not agree	Difficult to answer
Early marriages are for the protection of children				
All respondents	18,9	31,3	45,4	4,4
Men	28,8	35,6	32,2	3,4
Women	15,8	30,0	49,5	4,7
A woman does not need to have a higher education				
All respondents	23,1	40,8	33,7	2,4
Men	41,7	28,3	25,0	5,0
Women	17,4	44,6	36,4	1,5
Parents use their children's marriages for their own ends				
All respondents	19,8	38,3	35,5	6,5
Men	24,6	38,6	29,8	7,0
Women	18,3	38,2	37,2	6,3

Among the respondents (women and men), only 29% chose their own life partner (Table 4). 33% of the respondents accepted the decision of their parents without objection, including 44% of men and 30% of women, 4% did not see any point in resisting the will of their elders, and men had 2 times more such answers than women.

Table 4. Reaction of respondents to the decision to marry, %

Typesofreactions	Men	Women	Total
Yes, there was resistance at first	15,9	27,0	24,3
Yes, at first there was dissatisfaction	4,8	10,8	9,4
There was no point in resisting	6,3	2,9	3,7
No, there was no resistance or discontent	44,4	29,9	33,3
The family was made by my choice	28,6	29,4	29,2
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Another 9% (among women 11%) were dissatisfied with the decision of their parents, but put up with it. 24% of the respondents tried to resist marriage (including 27% of girls and 16% of boys). Trying to express their dissatisfaction, young people most often turn again to their parents (58% of those who tried to resist forced marriage) or less often to other relatives (4.5%). In rare cases, respondents tried to find sympathy from friends (3.4%) or even from their future spouse (2.2%). Only one respondent in the sample said that he applied to the organization, however, apparently, this appeal was not effective. However, 30.3% of respondents did not make any attempt to prevent unwanted marriage.

Figure 1. Reasons why respondents do not seek help to prevent unwanted marriage, %



In many cases, young people do not even think about the fact that it is possible to oppose the will of their elders - 54% of those who did not want to enter into early marriage answered this way (Figure 1). Other reasons for the passive behavior of young people are the lack of knowledge of who to turn to (17%), the reluctance to turn to official institutions (8%) and the lack of confidence that someone can help in this situation. The awareness of respondents in the premarital period about the risks that await people when entering into early marriage is low. Only 45.6% of respondents believe that they had a comprehensive understanding of the possible negative consequences of such a marriage, 43% had incomplete information, 11.4% had no information on this issue. Of course, without increasing the proportion of those who are aware of the consequences of early marriages, it is impossible to achieve significant results in solving this problem. However, given that in most cases the decision to marry is made by parents, the main target group of work to raise citizens' awareness of the negative consequences of early marriages should be directed specifically at them.

The role of official institutions in informing young people about marriage and family matters is very modest (Table 5). More than a third of respondents (36%) received relevant information in educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities), 16% - from medical workers. Quite rarely (9.5%), respondents named other authorized bodies, most of the survey participants received information from unreliable and incompetent sources - from friends and acquaintances (17%) and from relatives (17%).

Table 5. Sources of information on the negative consequences of early marriages, %

Sourcesofinformation	Share
Onthestreet	8,9

Fromfamilymembers, relatives	17
Fromfriends, acquaintances	8,5
In school/college/university units	36,2
Frommedicalstaff	16,2
From representatives of authorized organizations	7,7
Difficulttoanswer	3
Heardinthedia	0,9
Himself/a was/a witness	0,9
Fromthefamilycenter	0,9
Total	100

Starting a family at an early age in many cases changes the way of life - 49% of respondents think so, including 53.8% of women and 34.4% of men. At the same time, 37% of respondents believe that marriage forced them to abandon their life plans. Marriage primarily hinders the continuation of the education of young people - almost 70% of respondents from among those who could not realize their intentions said this. At the same time, 20.3% were unable to master the desired profession, 50% were forced to refuse to receive higher education. Every fourth respondent is sure that marriage prevented the opportunity to find a job for hire (30.4%) or start a business (6.5%). It should be emphasized that the abandonment of life plans affects women more than men, especially when it comes to continuing education.

Table 6. Opinion of respondents about changes in their or their spouse's life plans after early marriage, %

The impact of early marriages on life plans	%
Couldn't get into college	50,0
Prevented from mastering the desired profession	20,3
Interfered with employment	18,8
Couldn't do business	6,5
Couldn't go to work abroad	11,6
Difficult to answer	4,3
Relations soured	0,7
Couldn't get a job abroad	0,7
There were no changes	2,9

During the survey, 41% of respondents also spoke about adverse changes in their personal lives that occurred as a result of marriage. The most common responses are a decrease in the standard of living (12.8%) and deterioration in health (12.5%). For a significant number of respondents, the result of marriage was the breakdown of social ties - with friends (7.9%), with parents and family members (10.9%), with colleagues (4.2%).

The attitude of respondents to early marriages in most cases is negative - 55% of respondents do not see any positive consequences of such marriages. At the same time, the rest of the respondents note their positive impact on family relationships - support for parents (24%), family strength (18%), strengthening the morals of young people (15%), more successful resistance to life's difficulties (7.3%) (table 7).

Table 7. Opinion of respondents on the positive consequences of early marriages, %

Opinions on the positive effects of early marriage	%
There are no benefits to early marriage	55,4
Usually such families are stronger	14,6
Early marriage protects youth from the risk of corruption	15,4
In such marriages, women's rights are better secured	1,9

Opportunity to overcome various difficulties together	7,3
There is no cheating in early marriages	3,5
Children will be able to stand next to their parents earlier	24,2

Many respondents are aware of the negative impact of early marriages - only 15% see nothing wrong with such a union, including 24% of men and 12% of women. Two-thirds of the respondents (62%) among the negative consequences named possible health problems for a young mother and child (moreover, women think about this much more often than men), 36% believe that early marriage leads young people to abandon their intentions and life plans, 18% think that the unpreparedness of young people for life can lead to divorce. Among other undesirable consequences, the respondents indicated a high probability of marital infidelity, violation of women's rights (Table 8).

Table 8. Opinions of respondents about negative consequences of early marriages, %

Opinions on the negative consequences of early marriages	Men	Women	Total
Opinions on the negative consequences of early marriages	40,3	35,1	36,4
Can lead to premature birth or harm the health of the girl	19,4	38,1	33,7
Children with disabilities can be born	12,9	32,7	28,0
The unpreparedness of young people for life can lead to divorce	91,9	17,8	18,2
The unpreparedness of young people for life can lead to divorce	0,0	2,0	1,5
In such a marriage there is treason	3,2	3,0	3,0
Nonegative effects	24,2	11,9	14,8
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Comparing tables 7 and 8, one can see that the interviewed spouses find more negative consequences in early marriage than positive ones. There is no doubt that respondents' answers reflect their own positive and negative experiences. Thus, we can conclude that people who have entered into early marriages are more aware of the problems that lie in wait for very young spouses. Apparently, this is why 63% of respondents do not want their children to marry too early (including 46.9% of men and 68.2% of women). Only 10.2% of respondents (including 17.2% of men and 8% of women) are supporters of early marriages, 12% are indifferent to this phenomenon, the rest (14.7%) have not defined their attitude to such a marriage (including including 21.9% of men and 12.4% of women).

Despite the influence of parents and older relatives on the decision to marry children, many respondents do not consider this to be correct (Table 10). More than half of the respondents (55.6%) are sure that young people should make their own decisions about starting a family, 29% agree that such a decision should be coordinated with their parents, and only 16% believe that the opinion of parents in this matter is the main thing. Women are slightly less inclined to make independent decisions than men (55% and 59%, respectively) and are more likely to rely on the opinion of their parents (16% and 14%, respectively).

Table 9. Respondents' perceptions of who should make the decision to marry, %

Making a marriage decision	Men	Women	Total
The man who creates a family	58,5	54,7	55,6
Parents or relatives	13,8	16,4	15,8
A person creating a family and his relatives, subject to mutual consent	27,7	28,9	28,6

Most respondents believe that the most suitable age for marriage is in the range of 20-25 years. At the same

time, the optimal age for men and women is quite noticeably different in the views of the respondents: for girls it is 20 years (38%) and 22 years (25%), for boys - 25 years (31%), 24 years (18%), 22 year (16%). Every tenth respondent is sure that men should marry after 25 years. Most of the respondents believe that young people are not quite ready to start a family, and this serves as the basis for raising the marriageable age. At the same time, men demonstrate more categorical opinions, women express more restrained assessments and prefer to talk about the lack of preparedness of young people for family life.

Only 3% of respondents believe that young people do not need training to prepare for family life, the rest of the respondents are sure that such training is necessary. The vast majority of respondents believe that the most important thing in such training is instilling in young people ideas about the family responsibilities of spouses.

Table 10. Respondents' opinions on the areas of education for young people to prepare for family life, %

Directionsofstudy	Men	Women	Total
Duties of spouses in the family	68,8	78,8	76,3
Family relations from a religious point of view	31,3	36,4	35,1
Features of sexual relations in the family	28,1	15,2	18,3
Rules of conduct and overcoming conflict situations in the family	39,1	33,8	35,1
There is no need to organize such classes for young people	1,6	3,0	2,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Conclusions:

1. The decision of young people to marry before reaching the age of majority is in many cases determined by parents and other relatives. Women are more likely than men to experience pressure from relatives and are less likely to marry by mutual inclination.

2. Young people quite rarely express disagreement with their parents' decision to marry and do not make any attempts to prevent an unwanted marriage.

3. The most suitable age for marriage is considered by the majority of respondents to be 20-25 years old.

4. The awareness of respondents in the premarital period about the risks that await people when entering into marriage is rather low. Most of the information young people receive from unreliable and incompetent sources. Решение о браке девушек в раннем возрасте подкрепляется устойчивыми стереотипами гендерных ролей в семье. При этом носителями таких стереотипов чаще выступают сами женщины, которые традиционно занимаются воспитанием детей.

5. Negative attitudes towards early marriage are more common than positive ones. Spouses who marry early in most cases do not want their children to marry at an early age.

6. The results of the study do not allow us to identify significant similarities and differences between the studied families and average families. The impossibility of conducting a comparative analysis is due to the lack of relevant statistical data and survey data on the topic under study.

Recommendations:

1. Development of programs and plans for training employees of institutions and organizations responsible for the implementation of family policy.

2. Development and introduction into statistical practice (Goskomstat) of a system of indicators that reflect the necessary and sufficient characteristics of the phenomenon of early marriages. Includedataonunregisteredreligiousmarriagesandcohabitation. Ensure that all data are disaggregated by age and gender.

3. Raising awareness among civil society, the media, faith-based organizations, community representatives and parents about the impact of early marriage on the fate of girls, families and society as a whole.

4. Introduction to the school curriculum of information about the negative impact of early marriage on health and social well-being, as well as the course of sex education, taking into account cultural and age characteristics.

5. Ensuring, in accordance with the law, the protection of the right of citizens to freely enter into a marriage union, organizing effective measures to protect women who are subjected to forced marriage. Introduce monitoring mechanisms for law enforcement practices related to early marriages.

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