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Marriage in Conflict: An exploration of the relationship between conflict and child marriage in
the Middle East and North Africa region

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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By Emma Elizabeth Rice

Child marriage is not a new phenomenon and has resounding health, social, and economic effects on the children in child marriages as well as society. In the Middle East and North Africa, a region plagued by heightened conflict events in the past couple decades, there are many factors that influence the decisions surrounding child marriage. This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between conflict in complex humanitarian emergencies and the prevalence of child marriage, with focus in the Middle East and North Africa region. I examined marriage laws and their minimum marriage ages for the region. Then, I sourced data from international agency reports on health, social, and economic impacts of child marriage, particularly in times of conflict. All states in the region have marriage laws, with approximately half of them subscribing to the Convention on the Rights of the Child's definition of a child as an individual under the age of 18. Though these laws are in place, the practice of child marriage still exists and is not aligned with the legal frameworks in the states. In eight states that had severe ongoing conflict in 2019, I determined common trends of higher child marriage prevalence among displaced persons, child marriage exacerbated by poverty, and similar driving factors behind the decision to involve a child in a child marriage. There are several rationales behind decisions concerning child marriage: economic, protective, social, religious, and political. In complex humanitarian settings, conflict catalyses all these rationales to increase the risk of child marriage. Establishing protective mechanisms is essential to decreasing the prevalence of child marriage, with education as the most common protective mechanism.

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Background + Significance

Child marriage has been practised throughout the course of history, and today, the practice continues to occur. There are various codes and laws that define minimum marriage ages, from civil codes to family law but not all countries have a set standard code or area of law where their marriage laws are housed. These codes and laws indicate the legal age at which marriages may be performed; however, practice does not necessarily reflect law. Though some might think that child marriage is a practice of the past, worldwide an early or child marriage occurs every three seconds.¹ UNICEF data indicate there are over 650 million child brides and approximate 40 million in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.² In complex humanitarian emergencies (CHEs), program implementation teams in response efforts have noticed higher frequency of early or child marriages.³ In CHEs subsequent emergencies may occur and response efforts are redirected to emergent needs to those situations. Often, the practice of child marriage is not determined as an emergent need for response and the increase in frequency of child marriage goes unchecked, an alarming trend. This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between conflict in CHEs and the prevalence of child marriage, with focus in the MENA region.

Child marriage has been a common practice for centuries. With the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 and its subsequent agreements of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, there are now several international treaties and laws that dissuade child marriage.⁴ The additional conventions to the UDHR are optional protocol for states meaning that states are not legally obligated to sign and ratify the conventions, but there is an implicit understanding in international relations that participation in the conventions contributes to a better world order and rights for individuals.

Every state in the world, except for the United States of America (US), has signed and ratified the CRC to protect the rights of children in principle and in law. The US has signed the CRC, meaning that in principle, they agree with the convention's aims and substance, but the US has not ratified the convention. They have not done so because they refuse to be legally bound by all its requirements. The US has also been hesitant to acknowledge social, economic, or cultural rights, rights which the CRC includes.⁵ The CRC states that a child is "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" and calls for the protection of children from exploitation of many kinds.⁶ The age of majority is the threshold of legal adulthood while an age of maturity is more fluid in definition and determined individually, not at an age determined by the state. While the CRC offers a definition of what constitutes a child, states may structure their law to include the provision of maturity, an individual metric, to allow for the marriage of an individual under the age of 18.ⁱ

The CEDAW distinctly states that "the betrothal and the marriage of a child should have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory".⁷ However, there are some marriage laws where the age of majority is not stated, leaving it ambiguous and arguably allowing for child or early marriage. For example, Turkey sets the minimum marriage age at 18 but allows for exceptions of various kinds including parental consent or authorization at a judge's discretion.⁸ The ambiguous wording of national laws to allow for child marriage is a clear departure from the CRC and CEDAW treaties, which advocate against child marriage. Not having specific language on marriage ages does not support the stipulations

ⁱ Some states and religious communities determine an age of maturity for a girl when she has her first menstrual cycle. This can be damaging given that girls may start menstruation as early as 9-10 years old, much younger than the age of majority in most states and certainly much younger than the definitions the CRC and CEDAW offer.

of the CRC, where states should have their laws structured to support the terms established in the convention since they have signed and ratified it.

It is important to recognise that while there may be laws surrounding marriage ages, the practice of performing marriages may substantially differ from these laws based on the region of the state in which the marriage is performed, cultural practices, or previous precedent established. Especially in the MENA region, where Islam is the most reported religion practiced, there are often conflicting views with religious texts and with nationally established laws surrounding marriage.⁹ For example in Islamic jurisprudence, the Qur'an does not specify an age of marriage but instead specifies events of maturity related to puberty in both females and males and generally is between the ages of 9-15.¹⁰ This raises concerns over which rules people follow and which institutions hold greater power and authority: their religion, its religious leaders, and texts, or their government and its enforcement mechanisms. Many marriage laws changed after the CRC was established and ratified to include its provisions more concretely. The dissemination of these changed laws may have been slow or non-existent in certain areas, so people are simply operating on previous precedent, unknowingly in some cases.¹¹ Additionally, introducing marriage laws that conflict with previous precedent or counter religious beliefs introduces tension between held attitudes and new concepts therefore influencing behaviour. It can be increasingly difficult to alter behaviour among full populations who are resistant to the introduced change.¹² However, simply because it is difficult does not mean it is impossible to adjust the general behavioural practices of a population, especially with something that is rooted in law.

Historically, marriage occurred at a younger age because people had shorter life expectancies and these life events occurred at a similar point in time in relation to the life expectancies of the times. Evolutionarily and within the confines of society, marriage often occurred before both

parties had reached reproductive age. However, life expectancies have significantly expanded with the average reaching well over 75 years in many Middle Eastern states.¹³ As society has progressed and research has increased surrounding adolescents and development, it is now well known that an adolescent brain continues developing much slower than initially thought with most research determining an individual's mid-twenties to reach full frontal lobe development.¹⁴ From a developmental perspective, children may lack the appropriate capacity to make life-altering decisions such as marriage on their own. Viewing it through an ethical lens, a child may have difficulties discerning the decision-making process that leads to marriage, and it is typically family or support systems that assist in a decision-making process such as this one. Typically, the child is not the one truly making the decision and has their autonomy taken away from them by denying them their right to choose a spouse.¹⁵ Children and adolescents are typically influenced by short-term outcomes as opposed to long-term outcomes. If they do not have fully developed capacity for consent, engaging cognitive and emotional capacities, a decision will likely be made in the short-term interest instead of the long-term interest.¹⁶ However, to ensure it is a decision made by an individual in a more developed capacity, the generally accepted age of 18 set forth in many legal documents, such as the CRC, is commonly understood as reaching the threshold for that developed capacity needed to make decisions.¹⁷

The MENA region has been characterized by conflict for the better part of the 21st century; however, much of this conflict has demanded a reformation of governments, policies, and attitudes. In response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. by al Qaeda, American troops deployed to the Middle East to largely fight "The Global War on Terror" and the instability brought by this front left resounding impacts, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁸ While the Global War on Terror was ongoing, the Arab Spring movement began in late 2010 and continued through 2012,

prompting heightened anti-government protests against authoritarian government regimes.¹⁹ Some states saw reform whereas other states saw a stricter enforcement of previous laws or a turn to civil unrest, as in the case of the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) in which civil war has been raging since 2011.²⁰ With the heightened increase in violence comes heightened vulnerabilities, particularly in women and children. In a rapid gender analysis conducted in Syria in 2021, CARE noted that an adverse coping mechanism identified from the heightened conflict was early and forced child marriage.²¹ In these situations, coping mechanisms are when “people affected by disasters employ emergency measures [...] to reduce their vulnerability and minimize the effect of crisis”.²² They are sub-optimal and are often viewed as an option of recovery as quickly as possible.²³ Though not a proven causation, there is a presumed correlation between conflict and increases in prevalence of early or child marriage.ⁱⁱ

UNICEF reports that globally there are over 650 million child brides, including “currently married girls and women who were first married in childhood”.²⁴ UNICEF has determined that approximately 40 million of those brides are in the MENA region with high prevalence in Sudan and Yemen, two countries heavily impacted by violence and conflict in recent years. The same report estimates that in the MENA region, over 700,000 girls are married annually.²⁵ These estimates are likely underestimated for the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, as data collection and programs that monitored child marriages were slowed down or halted during the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent restrictions. Research has shown that in conflict and displacement settings, women and children are at heightened vulnerabilities from security to abuse to marriage.²⁶ The Brookings Institution reports an increase in child marriage “among all forcibly displaced and

ⁱⁱ Over the course of my time at the Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH) at Emory University and hearing from professors and guest lectures on CHEs, almost all of them report that in camp and refugee settings they see a higher frequency of child or early marriages. I was unable to find data that drew an explicit causation but combined with anecdotes from the field and further research through this thesis, I strongly believe there is a correlation.

otherwise conflict-impacted populations in MENA” and suggests it “could take decades to recoup their losses and resume progress” towards a decrease in child marriage prevalence after conflict.²⁷

Almost every country in the MENA region has laws on marriage with most laws clearly stating a marriage age indicating there is some degree of adherence to an age limit, legally speaking. Though these laws are in place, the following of the laws in times of conflict or in CHEs poses a question of adherence given there are not the institutional structures in place to support and enforce the law to its full extent. Adherence can be difficult to measure when reliable data is not consistently available, especially given a high number of these marriages may be religiously documented and not officially registered with the state.

Consequences of child marriage are long lasting, and they can affect the general and reproductive health of the children and adolescents who are married as well as their opportunities for economic and social development.²⁸ From a health lens, there are often unhealthy and misinformed sexual relations ranging from “unwanted and forced sex, domestic rape, vulnerability to domestic violence, [gender based violence (GBV)], adultery”, lack of knowledge surrounding contraceptive use, and protection during sexual activities against sexually transmitted infections.²⁹ When experienced individually or coupled together, these can have negative effects on the mental-wellbeing and the mental health of the child spouses.³⁰ If a child or adolescent spouse is pregnant, the risks surrounding their pregnancy increase as a girl aged 15 or below is five times more likely to die in childbirth than a grown woman.³¹ Furthermore, a child or adolescent spouse typically lacks the skills to negotiate the power balance to advocate for safe sex practices and have higher likelihood to experience domestic violence than those who marry at a later point.³² Being married at a young age also increases isolation and reinforces the tendency to leave school which can have

negative economic outcomes for the adolescent themselves as well as their family.³³ Economic outcomes in the country may have a correlation to the incidence rates of child marriage.

Methods

Prior to collecting data on marriage laws in MENA, the region selected for this analysis, I determined which states would fall into *this* regional analysis as there is no standardization on which states constitute the MENA region. Since for the purposes of this analysis, the legal and practise aspects of child marriage will be examined with deeper investigation into times of CHEs, I referenced the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's cluster agencies definitions of the MENA regions and the World Bank's MENA list. I cross-compared them to get the most encompassing list of countries to examine.

After I referenced cluster agencies' lists of the MENA region, there were differences in each list. Therefore, to encompass as much of the area as possible and to better assess the region, a list was created with every state referenced in the MENA region. The states are as follows:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, and Yemen.

The decision to include every country referenced in the MENA region lists also supports the theory that in conflict settings, people will seek out neighbouring countries during their process of emigration and asylum, as nearly 75% of the world's refugees are hosted by neighbouring states.³⁴ By doing so, they will be subject to the laws of those countries, including marriage laws.

After determining which states to include in the MENA region, I then determined the needed variables to conduct an analysis on whether marriage laws supported provisions stated in the CRC.

The needed variables include: if there is a marriage law; where in the legal texts the marriage law is based (if it exists); the link or reference to that marriage law; the marriage age of females; the marriage age of males; whether legal loopholes exist beyond the legal marriage age; and further details on those loopholes.

To find the laws surrounding marriage and as a result, early marriage, I conducted a Google search by country. Often these laws are found in family or civil codes, so I continued my search by adding in “family law” or “civil law” to the end of my search terms. This had better returns than my initial approach, so I continued doing it this way. If laws were only available in Arabic, I consulted an Arabic speaker for translation of the document or section; if laws were only available in another language other than English, French, or Arabic, I used Google Translate to determine the contents.

Once I collected data on marriage laws from government sources, data surrounding child marriage were collected by performing a Google search and narrowing down results based on my judgement of how reputable the sources were. For example, I found a source that had reported percentages of prevalence of child marriage in one country but the percent differences they referenced did not make sense to me. After reviewing their sources, a UNICEF report, I saw the correct percentage difference which was not in the first source. Using my judgement, I determined the original data from the UNICEF report was more reliable than the source that incorrectly reported the UNICEF percentages. Since a lot of this data is difficult to determine through government reports, I typically consulted data from program or project implementation reports on the topic or on related issues. These data came from reports from INGOs, such as the United Nations (UN) and its agencies or organizations like Doctors Without Borders (MSF). Agencies and organizations that specifically worked with children, such as United Nations Children’s Fund

(UNICEF), Save the Children, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and World Vision had many reports on child risks and potential barriers. Additional data comes from country censuses and Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reporting conducted by the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) DHS department. Additionally, data on individual experiences sometimes came from news reports that have been published either in country or consulted a journalist who had worked in country on these issues.

I mainly extracted conflict and historical data from Council on Foreign Relations's (CFR) Conflict Tracker, a tool that encompasses history of the conflict as well as recent updates on the conflict. To supplement additional needed information of conflicts, I performed a Google search to determine which of the MENA region states were under an internationally recognized state of conflict in the year 2019. Since the COVID-19 pandemic had a worldwide effect, I chose the year prior to the pandemic's spread and outbreak as the qualifying year to determine states and their conflicts to analyse.

Results

Laws + legality

The findings indicate that every MENA state in the determined list does have marriage laws. Most of the MENA states do establish minimum age for marriage; however, most of these states also have loopholes in their laws to allow for marriage below the minimum stated age in unique circumstances. In this sense, loopholes are instances where there is misalignment of laws and words because the law is phrased ambiguously. The ambiguity in the wording typically defers to a judge's discretion and sometimes judges are bribed to decide in favour of a child marriage.³⁵ At the very basis of two of the most powerful documents advocating against child marriage, the

CRC and the CEDAW, there are inconsistencies with the language used for definitions of a child and child marriage thus creating a misalignment in these binding conventions. However, these conventions are binding for the states who have signed and ratified them, meaning national laws should clearly match the contents of the convention including marriage at the age of majority (most internationally recognised as 18).³⁶

There was a high frequency of the same minimum marriage ages between females and males with 23 states having the same the minimum marriage ages. The most common minimum marriage age amongst those 23 states for females and males was 18 years of age (n=15). This indicates that approximately half the states in the overall MENA list have a minimum marriage age of 18, meaning that their national policies, in general, support the CRC. The lowest minimum marriage ages amongst those states with same marriage ages for females and males were 10 and 15 years of age while the highest minimum marriage ages were 19 and 20 years of age. The range of minimum marriage ages between states is 10 years, indicating a difference of acceptance and toleration of marriage ages in the MENA region in a legal context. In states where the minimum marriage age differs between females and males, the widest range of difference is two years between the sexes. The mean reported minimum marriage age for females (n=32) is 17.09 years of age and the mean reported minimum marriage age for males (n=31) is 17.53 years of age. These means are reported entirely based on the laws surrounding marriage in the states and do not consistently reflect the practice of marriage and the ages of parties involved throughout the states in the MENA region. 25 of the 32 states in the MENA list have loopholes or a law that allow for child marriage. Approximately one third of states have had updated or revised laws pertaining to marriage and family codes and a revision process after the CRC was signed and ratified. Table 1 below provides an overview of the laws by state, minimum marriage ages, difference between

females and males, loopholes in the law, and whether a revision occurred after the CRC was established.

State	Marriage Law?	Marriage Age (F)	Marriage Age (M)	Loopholes?	Revised after CRC?
Afghanistan	✓	16	16	Yes	No
Algeria	✓	19	19	Yes	Yes
Armenia	✓	17	18	Yes	Unknown
Azerbaijan	✓	18	18	Yes	Unknown
Bahrain	✓	16	Not stated	Yes	Unknown
Cyprus	✓	18	18	Yes	Unknown
Djibouti	✓	18	18	Yes	No
Egypt	✓	18	18	No	Yes
Georgia	✓	18	18	No	Yes
Iran	✓	18	18	Yes	No
Iraq	✓	18	18	Yes	No
Israel	✓	18	18	Yes	Yes
Jordan	✓	18	18	Yes	Yes
Kuwait	✓	15	17	Yes	No
Lebanon	✓	15	17	Yes	Unknown
Libya	✓	18	18	Yes	Yes
Malta	✓	16	16	No	Unknown
Mauritania	✓	18	18	Unclear	Unknown
Morocco	✓	18	18	No	Yes
Oman	✓	18	18	Yes	Unknown
Pakistan	✓	16	18	Yes	No
Palestine*	✓	15*/17**	16*/18**	Yes	No
Qatar	✓	16	18	Yes	No
Saudi Arabia	✓	18	18	Yes	Yes
Somalia	✓	18	18	Yes	No
Sudan	✓	10	10	-	No
Syria	✓	18	18	Yes	Yes
Tunisia	✓	20	20	Yes	Yes
Turkey	✓	18	18	Yes	Unknown
United Arab Emirates	✓	18	18	-	-
Western Sahara	✓	15	18	Yes	Unknown
Yemen	✓	15	15	No	No

Table 1: Legal standings on marriage laws in the MENA region including minimum age of marriage in females and males, loopholes in the law, and legal revisions after the CRC. References are found under the Law section in the References.

*West Bank age of consent and minimum age of marriage.

** Gaza Strip age of consent and minimum age of marriage.

Procedure versus practice

The practice of marriage is not consistently or well reported, especially in zones experiencing conflict or CHEs. However, of the data reported, a tendency toward younger marriage in CHE events and conflict settings is recorded.³⁷ In the countries in the MENA region who have been under the most conflict for the past decade such as: Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, and Palestine, marriage has been seen at younger ages compared to their counterparts in the MENA region.³⁸

State results

Since this thesis seeks to explore the relationship between conflict and child marriage, states experiencing conflict were specifically examined to determine trends and practices of child marriage. COVID-19 was a confounder and had a worldwide effect on many aspects of life, including the prevalence of child marriage. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic's confounding effect, I examined states that had major conflicts in 2019 prior to COVID-19's worldwide emergence to determine what the conflict situation looked like before COVID-19 changed the way world – and the conflict – operated. The list of these states includes Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. While other states may have experienced conflict events, these eight states were internationally recognized conflicts of concern or conflict zones due to the nature of the conflict and its intensity. Other states in the MENA region with smaller scale conflicts and “large-scale anti-government protests” include Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, and Tunisia.³⁹ Table 2 below details a brief overview of various conflicts in the selected states to understand the history behind the conflict landscape in these states.

State	Conflict events
<i>Major conflict</i>	
Afghanistan	US-led invasion in response to 9/11 terrorist attacks (2001-2014); Afghan National Defense and Security forces continued engagement against forces Taliban (2014-2020); Taliban formal takeover in late summer 2021 ⁴⁰
Egypt	military coup (2013); ISIL territorial disputes (2017-presumed present) ⁴¹
Iraq	US-led invasion (2003-2011); Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) attacks (2014- 2017); militia groups fighting (2017-present); perpetuated Kurdish tensions ⁴²
Israel	continued Israeli-Palestinian conflict; military confrontations between Israeli military and Hamas (2014); second intifada between Israeli military and Hamas (2018) ⁴³
Libya	civil war, ousting, and death of former leader Mummar al-Gaddafi (2011); Islamist militants attack on US consulate in Benghazi (2012); spread of ISIL and other armed groups (2014-present); battle for control of Libya (2012-present) ⁴⁴
Syria	civil war (2011-present); ISIL seizing territorial control (2013-2018) ⁴⁵
Turkey	Kurdish tensions; coup attempt (2016); ISIL establishment and presence (2015-presumed present) ⁴⁶
Yemen	civil war (2014-present); famine, making it a humanitarian disaster (2014-present) ⁴⁷
<i>Conflict events, smaller scale: large anti-government protests (2019 in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian territories, and Tunisia)⁴⁸; Arab Spring protests (2010-2013, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Syria)⁴⁹; terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda, ISIL, bin Laden, etc.</i>	

Table 2: Conflict events in MENA states featuring major conflict events and events that influenced smaller scale conflicts. Data primarily sourced from the CFR’s Conflict Tracker.

Afghanistan

As of August 2021, the Taliban has maintained political control in Afghanistan and serves as the current government.⁵⁰ Coupled with the effects of the pandemic, a rise in child marriage has been reported. International agencies, like UNICEF, have noted Afghanistan as a state of concern regarding early and child marriage and estimate that 28% of girls are married prior to the age of 18.⁵¹ The same UNICEF report also notes that more than half of Afghanistan’s population lacked basic necessities in 2020 and as a result negative coping mechanisms, such as child marriage, were utilized by Afghani populations.⁵² Prior to the Taliban’s takeover, Afghanistan had high child marriage rates and though there has not been a recent nationwide assessment since

the Taliban's takeover, reports from Amnesty International and other agencies with a presence in Afghanistan report spikes in child marriage.⁵³

In Afghanistan, child marriages are “usually aimed at strengthening ties with rival families and tribes, as part of deals or to settle debts and disputes” meaning that the children sold into marriage have little to no say as to who they marry.⁵⁴ Often, women are married to older men who are able to pay a dowry to the woman's family to ease their financial burdens. In Afghani culture, the married woman goes to live with her husband's family after marriage and the husband is financially responsible for his new wife, therefore easing the financial burden on the woman's family.⁵⁵ Even though this is viewed as a means of easing financial burdens, early marriage rarely brings families out of poverty but instead contributes to its cyclical nature.

The areas where child marriages are most prevalent in Afghanistan tend to be rural areas in which it is customary practice or driven by poverty concerns to engage in child marriage for a dowry payment.⁵⁶ However, that does not mean child marriage is exclusively in rural settings especially given the recent political changes with the Taliban gaining control of the country. The Taliban has yet to explicitly address child marriage, but did outlaw forced marriage in December 2021 where they stated a women's consent to matrimony was required.⁵⁷ Many young Afghani girls have expressed being frightened and unwilling to participate in marriages below the legal marriage age of 16 in Afghanistan. However, the marriages were often arranged prior to their age of consent for familial or financial purposes.⁵⁸ Additionally, with the Taliban closing all secondary schools to girls with their takeover of the government of Afghanistan, this predicts a likely increase in child marriage rates as education acts as a protective mechanism against child marriage.⁵⁹ If girls do not have the opportunity to participate in education as a protective mechanism, they will likely be subjected to other cultural and social aspects, including early marriage.

Amnesty International reports some of the common drivers of child marriage in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover include “the economic and humanitarian crisis; lack of educational and professional prospects for women; families’ perceived need to protect their daughters from marriage with a Taliban member; families forcing women and girls to marry Taliban members; and Taliban members forcibly marrying women and girls”.⁶⁰

Egypt

Child or early marriage is more commonly seen in rural areas, such as in Upper Egypt, and a UN Development Programme (UNDP) report states that based on Egypt’s 2017 census “over 111,000 women and girls were married before the age of 18, with 84 percent of these girls coming from or living in rural areas”.⁶¹ As seen in other countries, drivers of child marriage are multi-dimensional and include cultural norms and traditions, poverty status, education levels and continuation, and protection concerns.⁶² In a study of Syrian refugees in Egypt, when participants and focus groups were asked about the primary reasons driving early marriage, religion was not a given response unless probed.⁶³ Instead, participants reported a host of driving factors including “cultural norms and traditions, groom availability and the concept of qisma w naseeb (destiny), economic burden stemming from displacement [among the Syrian refugee participants surveyed], schooling and protection concerns”.⁶⁴

According to Egypt’s most recent census, approximately 1 in 20 girls aged 15-17 in Egypt is married.⁶⁵ The numbers for those married who were under the age of 15 were not reported by this source but the DHS survey conducted in Egypt in 2014 reports that approximately 2% of girls under the age of 15 are married. The DHS survey also reports that 17% of girls in Egypt were

married between the ages of 15-17.⁶⁶ The consequences of early marriage for adolescent girls include higher exposure to GBV, higher likelihood of dropping out of school, higher risk to contracting diseases, higher fertility contributing to population increase, and children born to adolescent mothers are more likely to die compared to their counterparts born to non-adolescent mothers.⁶⁷ If the Egyptian census is correct, the prevalence of child marriage in those aged 15-17 years old (5%) is an improvement from previous trends reported in the DHS report (17%). However, the act of child marriage is not criminalized for the perpetrator or organizers of the marriage in Egypt, which is a barrier to the reduction of child marriage.

While there is no criminalization of child marriage in Egypt, the Egyptian government's National Population Council created the National Strategy to Prevent Child Marriage in 2014 where they aimed to reduce the prevalence of child marriage in Egypt by 50% over the course of five years. The five main strategies devised to do so included:

“Minimising the negative impact of child marriage on girls and their families; Updating legislation to ensure better protection of women and girls; Developing specific policies to mitigate child marriage; Empowering and educating young girls to address family and societal pressures; and raising awareness on the harmful consequences of child marriage”.⁶⁸

There was a draft bill proposed to the Egyptian legislature in late 2021 to begin the criminalization process for perpetrators of child marriage. It is not gender-specific and places monetary and imprisonment penalties on those who marry anyone under the age of 18. However, this proposed bill is under a delay as of December 2022 in the Egyptian parliament as they are waiting approval from Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the country's largest religious institution, to determine if it aligns with Sharia law.⁶⁹ Over the past decades, Egypt has seen a decrease in the prevalence of very early child marriage with rates for those married before the age of 15 dropping from 3.9% in 2000 to

2.0% in 2014. And if the proposed bill passes, the prevalence is likely to continue its decreasing trend in all child age categories.^{70,71}

Iraq

Following the aftermath of the September 11th attacks on the US, the US began a protracted armed conflict in Iraq spanning from 2003 to 2011 dubbed as The Iraq War. Iraq then entered another conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) which officially spanned 2014 to 2017.⁷² However, its effects still resounded well into 2018 and proved a genuine threat to citizens in the regions that ISIL maintained control over. Since then, there have been numerous instances of political unrest with changes where newly appointed governments entered office and people demanded change within those governments.⁷³ As a result of the combination of these political events, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were displaced.

During conflict, armed forces systematically used GBV and abductions as a tool and “used rape, slavery, [and] forced marriage as ‘weapons of war’”.⁷⁴ As of 2022, the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (OCHA) humanitarian findings indicate there are 2.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Iraq with 1.8 million of those people displaced internally (IDPs). 45% of the people in need are children, showing a heightened vulnerability among the population in need.⁷⁵ In humanitarian settings, negative coping mechanisms including child and forced marriage are witnessed, with girls more often subject to these practices than boys.⁷⁶ The current major drivers of child marriage in a post-conflict Iraq are displacement, level of education, poverty, religion, family honour, and the effects of COVID-19 on the population.⁷⁷

Respect for traditional cultural practices was also found to be an important factor in communities that valued tradition and religion.⁷⁸

In addition to portions of their own population being displaced due to ISIL conflict, Iraq is experiencing an influx of Syrian refugees in their Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) which influences the trends concerning child marriage. In May 2019, nearly half of Iraq's 382,909 IDPs resided in the KRI.⁷⁹ A study conducted on child marriage in KRI determined that IDPs had the highest child marriage prevalence at 12.9%, the host community had the second highest child marriage prevalence at 9.8%, and the Syrian refugees had the lowest child marriage prevalence at 8.1%.⁸⁰ The study determined child marriage by looking at married girls 10-19 years of age and reported prevalence rates of child marriage for only females, not males. Similar drivers of child marriage are indicated in these refugee populations compared to the host population with the most common being related to socio-economic statuses, lack of education or perceived alternatives, religious influence, and peer pressure.⁸¹

Over the course of 2013 to 2017, Iraq's gross domestic product (GDP) decreased from \$234.6B USD to \$187.2B USD due to decreasing prices for oil and an overall economic collapse in the struggle against ISIL.⁸² An economic downturn such as this can have devastating, long-term impacts on the economy's ability to return to its prior state. In 2016, child marriage was reported at 24% in Iraq, a large rise from 1997's 15%.⁸³ In UNICEF's 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) on Iraq, 6,005 of 24,210 women (approximately 24.8%) reported being married before the age of 18, showing a plateau of child marriage prevalence over the course of two years.⁸⁴ There is not one sole driver of child marriage; however, negative economic concerns pose a large threat to an increase in child marriage.

Israel

From a conflict perspective, Israel has experienced heightened tensions with the Palestine people through the division of the Palestine territory into the state of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.⁸⁵ There has been prolonged conflict and international war violations with and against the Occupied Palestinian Territories by Israel hallmarked by recent incidents involving missiles and bombs aimed back and forth between Israel and Palestine.⁸⁶ There is very limited information concerning child marriage in Israel as Israel does not publicly report government data on child marriage within its borders. However, child marriage still occurs in Israel and the Israeli Parliament released a 2016 report on Knesset – the Israeli Parliament’s – Law and Justice Committee that documented 716 child marriages over 2014 to 2015. Only 37 of the 716 child marriages reported were investigated by officials.⁸⁷ Child marriage is primarily seen in Jewish ultra-Orthodox communities as well as Bedouin communities in Israel, and these marriages are typically not reported to authorities or the government for fear of legal repercussions for going against marriage laws. The primary driver of child marriage in Israel is religion. In 2017, a man was arrested by the Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services moments before he attempted to marry a 14-year-old girl.⁸⁸

At an international level, Israel co-sponsored the 2017 Human Rights Council resolution “on recognising the need to address child, early, and forced marriage in humanitarian contexts” and the 2019 Human Rights council resolution on the consequences of child marriage. Each convention subsequent to the UDHR has committee reviews and in CEDAW’s 2017 Committee Review, the Committee raised concerns about the continuation of child marriages particularly in the Arab and Bedouin communities in Israel and urged the government to take further action through legislative and educational means.⁸⁹ There were not any available updates on actionable

steps taken by the Israeli government. Overall, the information surrounding child and forced marriages in Israel is lacking which makes it difficult to assess what precisely contributes to the rates of child marriage in Israel.

Libya

The state of Libya has been in a crisis since 2011 and has struggled to rebuild and restructure state institutions since the death of former dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi in October 2011. Since then, Libya has experienced civil unrest with various factions competing for political control over the capital of Tripoli, as well as ISIL presence as a North African stronghold between 2014 to 2017.⁹⁰ Militia and terrorist groups have dominated the country's landscape for the past decade leaving citizens facing increased economic hardship, political instability, and violence, which has created the perfect situation for child marriage. This failed state has become a political stronghold and the conflict has developed into a proxy war by additional foreign powers due to ideological and economic interest, primarily the bulk of Libya's international exports (80% being oil). In a bid to remedy the failed state, foreign powers have intervened with diplomacy-based actions and encouraging the Libyan government to incentivize economies to support the Libyan people in revitalizing their infrastructure and economy.⁹¹

One of these economic incentives is government subsidy for marriages, giving people the financial incentive to get married since many had put it off due to instability and unaffordability throughout the conflict. This government program provides up to 40,000 Libyan dinars (\$8,700USD) for newlywed couples. In a competition bid, a competing government faction implemented a program that offered up to 50,000 Libyan dinars (\$10,800USD) for all newlywed

couples.⁹² While financially beneficial to new couples, the marriage program has had a negative impact on child marriage given some families are forcing their daughters to get married to receive the government stimulus.

The government does not offer publicly available data on child marriage; however, some data is available for specific cities. Data collected by Al-Araby Al-Jadeed from the Tripoli Courts indicate that between the years 2011 and 2017 there were 186 child marriages that had occurred in the capital city of Tripoli. Government authorities have commented that since 2012, they do not have statistics on marriage and divorce rates in the country due to the protracted crisis and specific attacks against government.⁹³ During ISIL's occupation of certain cells in Libya, there have been many reports on young girls in Darna being married off to ISIL soldiers as a protective mechanism for their communities.⁹⁴ Girls as young as 12 years old were married off to ISIL members in order for the protection mechanisms to be sustained. Local doctors and networks have reported these data. Though not officially recorded as such, it is speculated that all these marriages were early or forced marriages.⁹⁵

Suad al-Uraibi, director of Social Service, School Health, and Psychological Support Office in Benghazi and inspector at the Education Bureau of the government of Libya, commented that "hard economic conditions in the country impact families with medium and low incomes so they force their children into marriage due to the lack of cash in Libyan banks" and in order to have funds to pay for the rising costs of living, goods, and food items.⁹⁶ Additionally, Libya is a very conservative country and though child marriage occurs, it is rarely discussed openly.

Syria

Since 2011, in response to protests during the Arab Spring movement, a full-scale civil war broke out. The Syrian government, backed by Iran and Russia, opposes the anti-government rebel groups, backed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other regional groups. Within the civil war, there are several sub-conflicts present, including terrorism fronts driven by ISIL combined with anti-government rhetoric from rebel factions.⁹⁷ Since external actors have become involved with Syria's civil war, the way in which humanitarian aid is received by Syria has been drastically changed making it more difficult to distribute aid to the half of the Syrian population displaced because of the conflict. With the occurrence of the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in February of 2023, there was a delay in dispersing international aid to Syria due to the provisions the Syrian government has imposed upon international humanitarian aid.⁹⁸

Child marriage in Syria existed before war broke out, however, with the ongoing war the data is very limited on the prevalence of child marriage. Reports estimate the prevalence to be around 13% and suspect the child marriage is more prevalent in northwest Syria.⁹⁹ This reported prevalence is only indicating the marriages that have been officially reported to the government in some capacity. In the rebel strongholds in the northern regions of Aleppo, Idlib, and al-Hasaka provinces, most child marriages that take place are not appropriately registered as the local courts lack official recognition.¹⁰⁰ As of 2006 data, child marriage in Syria was reported in both urban and rural settings.¹⁰¹

The primary drivers of child marriage in Syria and among Syrian populations are perpetuation of harmful practices, trafficking, family honour, gender discrimination and norms, protection, and level of education.¹⁰² Similar complications of child brides arise in the Syrian child bride population, with heightened risk for complications during pregnancy and childbirth,

increased GBV, limited economic and social opportunities, and greater isolation compared to their peers.¹⁰³ Most of the data surrounding child marriage in Syrian populations focuses on Syrian refugees in MENA states, but not in Syria. There is narrative comparison from study participants of previous practices in Syria; however, there is not prevalence data or practice data to back the narratives.

When examining Syrian refugee populations, many members of the population hold the belief that child marriage has risen due to displacement. For instance, in refugee camps in Jordan, there was a time where Syrian refugees were not permitted to work in Jordan, creating a dire financial situation for their families which led some families to make decisions for their daughters to participate in child marriages in order to receive a dowry.¹⁰⁴ By marrying off children to Jordanian men, many families believe it can secure them sponsorship in Jordan and that they may be able to move out of the refugee camps and into society.¹⁰⁵ In other refugee settings, reports have shown a 3 times to 6 times child marriage rate of Syrian refugee girls compared to their national counterparts.¹⁰⁶ For example, in Lebanon the child marriage prevalence among females was reported at 6% while amongst Syrian refugee girls in Lebanon, the child marriage rate was reported at 40%. In Turkey, approximately 15% of women aged 20-24 reported being married under the age of 18 and for the same age group of Syrian refugee women, that number was tripled.¹⁰⁷ In a primarily Syrian refugee camp in Jordan in 2011, the prevalence of child marriage was 12% but spiked to 32% in 2014 as higher amounts of people were displaced.¹⁰⁸ Many Syrian refugees flee to surrounding countries or countries with established refugee camps such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt and are subject to different hardships than before. In these settings, researchers can study child marriage patterns, however, it is increasingly difficult to determine the child marriage patterns within Syria at this time given the protracted conflicts.

Turkey

The bulk of Turkey's conflict in recent years involved the Turkish government and its military operations against the Armed Kurdish Forces (PKK). The Kurdish people are an ethnic group in various MENA states and comprise approximately one fifth of Turkey's population. The PKK has been fighting for greater political and cultural rights for decades and continues to do so against the Turkish government.¹⁰⁹ Turkey also experienced the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in February 2023, and was able to receive international aid and relief more extensively than its counterpart Syria.¹¹⁰

DHS data from 2017 documents 15% of girls in Turkey married before the age of 18 and 2% of girls in Turkey married before the age of 15.¹¹¹ Similar to other countries, underage and child marriages may be conducted in an unofficial or purely religious sense were not registered promptly to ensure no legal recourse for marrying young. One group at high risk for child marriage in Turkey is Syrian refugee girls, who experience a heightened risk of child marriage compared to their national Turkish counterparts.¹¹²

Top drivers of child marriage in Turkey include gender inequality, violence against women and girls, religion, poor birth registration systems, trafficking, poverty, level of education, and compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender inequality is very prevalent in Turkey and magnified by patriarchal beliefs and actions of violence against women and girls. Femicides are common in Turkey and there is typically little legal intervention from appropriate legal bodies, as the violence against females is an accepted part of society.¹¹³

Government officials of Turkey have recognized child marriage as an issue, with Turkish Family and Social Services Minister Derya Yanık deeming violence against women and child abuse in the form of early marriage as a “human nature issue”.¹¹⁴ UNICEF offers technical support to the Turkish Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Services at the central level where they worked to implement their child marriage prevention and response model. This model includes key factors such as

“identifying leading factors of child marriage; identifying barriers to the elimination of child marriage; developing mechanisms for the identification and management of cases of child marriage; Mapping of available services across the continuum of care; and increasing the local service providers capacities to prevent and respond to child marriage.”¹¹⁵

They created comprehensive training programs for education professionals, religion officers, mukhtars, and civil servants in specific sectors. They also developed community-based trainings for mothers, fathers, and adolescents of all genders to increase community awareness and influence social norms. Though there are programs in place, the practice of behaviours has not yet aligned to the outcomes of these programs.

Yemen

Yemen’s civil war broke out in 2015 and was the world’s worst humanitarian crisis prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Coupled with the effects of the pandemic, the state of child marriage in Yemen has changed. Save the Children reports that child marriage rates “have risen in war-ravaged Yemen [... and n]ow more than two-thirds of Yemen’s girls are married before age 18, compared to half before the conflict escalated”.¹¹⁶ This reflects an increase of over 16% in child marriage prevalence for Yemen’s girls and likely suggests an increase in risk of child marriage among the general population. In a study commissioned by Johns Hopkins University and the

Women's Refugee Commission for the Global Programme, findings indicated that one in five displaced girls aged 10-19 are currently married compared to one in eight in adjacent host communities.¹¹⁷ UNICEF reports that the "risk of marriage in childhood in Yemen for girls with no education or only primary education is 3.5 times higher than for the girls with secondary or higher education", indicating the absence of a protective mechanism such as education can influence rates of child marriage.¹¹⁸ This data, coupled with worldwide effects of the COVID-19 pandemic shifting to distance and e-learning, something that is not possible for many Yemeni students, creates heightened vulnerabilities for girls in particular regarding child marriage.

There have been committee reports from the CEDAW that call for reformation of Yemen's national laws surrounding marriage to make it more aligned with the treaty. UNICEF shares stories of girls who are or have been in child marriages to bring light to the prevalence of child marriages throughout the state. Several international organisations, including UNICEF, have implemented programs that work to address topics surrounding child marriage and its underlying factors. Additional data from Yemen is extracted from the 2013 cycle of DHS reporting which, though helpful, may be outdated in engaging current numbers and realities with the ongoing civil war.

Analysis + Discussion

A key feature of child marriage is that it is not localized to one world region and is compounded by poverty. It is essential to address child marriage prior to conflict and humanitarian contexts, as child marriage is often not regarded as a priority issue to respond to in humanitarian contexts. Responding to disasters and emergency settings is incredibly difficult and deciding what to prioritize has a large effect on the wellbeing of the population of response; however, child marriage has resounding impacts for the community and its population health in both short- and

long-term ways. States should devise plans to decrease the general prevalence of child marriage (outside of conflict) as it is in their best interest to have a population that is able to contribute to their economy and lessen national health burdens. As a state, they also have an obligation to ensure their citizens can enjoy their rights, such as rights set forth in the CRC. Humanitarian and aid organizations are one of the first actors to respond to CHEs after governments and often have an established presence throughout the various stages of emergencies and re-development processes. It is crucial for humanitarian and aid organizations to track the prevalence of child marriage in humanitarian and conflict settings and report the data to the host government. Referencing the data, the state government can then determine when and how is the best way to respond to the phenomenon of child marriage, particularly in tumultuous settings, and perhaps with the assistance of the already present humanitarian and aid organizations.

Trends in child marriage

Poverty and economic insecurity are noted as primary risk factors for child marriage in most situations, and with the blending of the COVID-19 pandemic related effects, many of the countries in the MENA region have experienced increases in poverty because of conflict.¹¹⁹ In MENA countries, a dowry is paid to the bride's family to provide them with an economic boost as well as an economic incentive to drive the notion of marriage within their families.¹²⁰ In difficult financial situations, child marriage is often viewed as a necessity to improve a family's financial situation by receiving a dowry to sustain the family once the girl has departed with her new husband. A family may allow or encourage their daughters to enter a child marriage for the greater good of her family (in this case, financially), illustrating how sometimes the greater good of the collective may not mirror that of the individual. Furthermore, in many countries in the MENA

region, traditional familial values are emphasized alongside the notion of honour. A system of duty has been cultivated and many times, daughters may feel obligated to help provide for their families, even if it means participating in a life-altering decision such as child marriage.¹²¹ In situations in which poverty is exacerbated, child marriage is used as a negative coping mechanism to alleviate economic hardship.

Conflict drives large disruptions within society and their structures that can provide for its citizens and constituents. After examining these eight MENA countries under states of conflict in 2019, it is evident that there has been institutional collapse in some and failure in others to adequately provide for its citizens which in turn, leads to extreme individual action such as child marriage. At an individual level, conflict disrupts everyday life and often leads to displacement, whether it be internal or seeking refuge outside of the country. During precarious times like these, other areas of life are greatly affected from availability to get basic resources to opportunities to earn a livelihood to schooling which can create disastrous circumstances. Conflict is also well-known to exacerbate poverty levels which have intense effects on the option to pursue child marriages.

Child marriage as a weapon of war is a phenomenon more recently recognized with the expanded coverage of conflict events worldwide. With the advent of photojournalism of war and conflict zones, this historical trend is being visually represented and perhaps better documented than ever before. In the MENA region, ISIL has been a large threat in past years and have also served as large participants in child marriages. Families and communities will marry their daughters off to ISIL fighters and leaders in exchange for protection of the community or simply the understanding that they will not attack that specific community.¹²² Terrorist organizations have been known to perpetuate GBV and use rape as a tool of war, and by marrying young girls

off to terrorists, families are spared the shame associated with girls being raped and forced into pregnancies out of wedlock with terrorists and its surrounding stigma. In reality, the violence will only continue in these marriages as child marriage as a weapon of war is a way to instill “panic, intimidate and displace populations” to meet goals within the terrorist organization.¹²³

Gender discrimination is a large driver of child marriage and potentially the very foundation upon which child marriage occurs. In the MENA region, there are common beliefs that women should prioritize goals such as being a wife or mother as opposed to other goals. The treatment between the male and female genders varies vastly in society with boys having some degree of autonomy and independence whereas girls are often restricted in their movement or must rely on male permission to travel or partake in certain activities. Furthermore, the use of patriarchal language to speak about girls only reemphasizes the discrimination between the genders and the predetermined roles each gender should take in society. For example, in the latest Arab Barometer survey, a plurality of respondents “either agree or strongly agree with the statement ‘In general, men are better at political leadership than women.’”¹²⁴ This seems to counteract against some of the recent feminist movements throughout the MENA region supported by governments in a bid to bolster national image, showing a disconnect between the populous’ view on women and the forward movement to integrate women into more positions of power.¹²⁵ There are movements toward more gender equality, however, deeply ingrained attitudes of gender norms are still present.

Level of education can have such a pivotal impact and whether someone ends up in a child marriage. Education is often viewed as a protective mechanism and is one of the most helpful tools for combatting child marriage. However, education can be easily disrupted in times of conflict and during early conflict stages, many parents make the protective decision to pull their children out of school as especially girls are more likely to encounter violence on their way to school. The

protective action by parents can be a disruption of the protective mechanism that education provides. Schools are often regarded as safe havens, however, amid conflict or emergency settings, they can serve as targets or may have to halt operations completely for safety. Furthermore, pausing or altogether stopping education for both boys and girls opens a host of risks including child marriage, recruitment into the child labour force, and potential recruitment into armed groups.¹²⁶

Geography may play a role in some countries in the MENA region where the trend is localized toward more rural regions; however, in others, there is no distinguishment between rural or urban levels of child marriage. Given that not all child marriages are reported, I believe that reports of child marriage in urban areas would be more accurate than the child marriage reports in rural areas given there is likely an official institution in closer proximity where those marriages may be recorded. However, there is also the argument to be made that law enforcement may be stronger and have larger recourse in urban areas as opposed to rural areas so very underage marriage may not be reported for fear of legal repercussions or economic fines. Regarding geographic locations, the more proximate a population is to conflict or emergent settings, the more likely they are to experience heightened effects of the drivers of child marriage potentially prompting involvement in child marriage.

A note on the COVID19 pandemic... the COVID-19 pandemic had effects worldwide and exacerbated many of these drivers of child marriage. In some countries, such as Syria, the poverty rate has been reported to have risen during the pandemic with approximately 90% of their population in poverty.¹²⁷ There has been an increase in prevalence of child marriage over the course of the pandemic, and some child marriage experts fear it will take decades to revert to pre-pandemic numbers as the process of reducing child marriage is a slow one.

Available information plays a large role in determining if it is conflict contributing to the rates of child marriage or if there are other contributing factors. In some states with marriage data not publicly available, more anecdotal accounts must be considered to determine what child marriage looks like in those states. Though states in similar regions may often behave similarly in politics, economics, or international relations; elements of child marriage can be woven deep into specific cultural and traditional aspects unique to states, and the phenomenon should be considered uniquely to each state. There are several rationales that drive increased prevalence in child marriages, detailed in Table 3 below.

<i>Rationale</i>	<i>Description + Relation to driving child marriage</i>
<i>Economic</i>	<p>An economic rationale is when a child marriage occurs to improve one's economic situation or their family's situation. They may include financial incentives (i.e. government stimulus or paid dowry) or bartering as a component of the marriage.</p> <p>In difficult financial times, child marriage may be viewed to provide for a family in ensuring financial security for those not being married and financial security for the child being married, as the spouse would likely assume their finances.</p>
<i>Protective</i>	<p>Child marriage may be viewed as a protective rationale where the child's safety, family honour, or community can benefit from performing a marriage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Safety</i>: If a family is unable to provide for their child, marrying their child to someone who may be able to better provide for them could enhance their safety overall. Children may also be motivated to seek spouses as a protective figure if they are subject to violence, especially GBV. • <i>Family honour</i>: In CHEs, women and girls experience heightened risk of violence, especially sexual violence. By marrying off girls, families believe they are protecting them in maintaining their family honour and avoiding any stigmatized shame that may come with sexual assaults or pregnancies out of wedlock. • <i>Community protection</i>: In conflict settings, using brides to barter for either familial or community protection against armed militia groups or terrorists occurs and does not exclude children.
<i>Social</i>	<p>In some communities, marriages are used to strengthen relationships between communities and marriages have been arranged since the children were infants.</p> <p>In CHEs and refugee camps, child marriages to nationals may be used to secure sponsorship in a host state. This allows for families to leave refugee camps, an unduly difficult process for many people, through an easier avenue.</p>

<i>Rationale</i>	<i>Description + Relation to driving child marriage</i>
<i>Religious</i>	In religious contexts, religious text may allow for various provisions of when a person may be married. If a child is grown up in a religious community where religious-based marriages occur and are not registered with the state, the child may perceive that to be the norm, accept those attitudes, and participate in the practice of child marriage.
<i>Political</i>	Strengthening relationships between communities may also be used to maintain peace or for political gain. The bartering of particularly young girls in child marriage occurs to achieve political ends. Additionally, if a child marriage occurs to secure sponsorship in a host country, there are often aims outside of wanting to leave refugee camps that may influence these decisions, such as establishing families amongst community.

Table 3: Rationales of child marriage and how they drive child marriage. These rationales are all exacerbated by conflict and have larger weight during the decision-making process of families to marry off their children or in a child's sense of obligation to help provide for their family by pursuing a child marriage.

CHE + conflict trends

In CHEs it appears that emergencies where child marriage is most observed are ones driven by conflict or politically related conflicts. In natural disasters, there is certain displacement of populations and exacerbation of the drivers of child marriage; however, there does not seem to be that same undercurrent of the political stance of a country affecting the population. For example, while the effects of the Syria-Turkey earthquake have yet to be fully experienced by all populations, the duality of the conflict and the natural disaster will certainly have interesting outcomes and likely, we will see an increase of child marriage prevalence because conflict is present.

Conclusion

The public health implications of child marriage are widespread, and specifically in the MENA region where there are at least eight countries undergoing active conflict, the implications continue to perpetuate health issues in the region. Young brides are often young mothers and have heightened complications and risks during pregnancy and childbirth, and their babies are more likely to die compared to an older mother.¹²⁸ This affects both the maternal mortality rate as well as the child mortality rates, as there are not adequate systems designed to support an informed family planning understanding and process. Young brides are more fertile and contribute more to the population, which can place higher demand on the family for provision of commodities and resources. Furthermore, the economic hinderances and social effects experienced by young brides can contribute to a less experienced and skilled workforce and higher mental health burden due to increased isolation.¹²⁹

Outside of CHEs, it seems that gender inequality is the largest driving factor of child marriage. However, in CHEs conflict is the exacerbating factor that drives child marriage. It is extremely difficult to access the conflict at its core and address it in-country, as most humanitarian organizations end up working with refugee populations or IDPs geographically away from the height of the conflict. Establishing protective mechanisms is the most effective way to see a reduction in child marriage, and I strongly believe that education is the best protective mechanism for most of the at-risk populations.

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