[**Too young to wed**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1740105/too-young-to-wed)

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EVERY day we make hundreds of decisions. Most of them are trivial in nature, having no long-term impact on life. We forget such decisions soon. But there are certain matters where one has to make important decisions only after serious thinking. In order to arrive at the right decision at the right time, one needs to do some homework. This includes consultations with senior members of one’s family, as well as friends and even experts before taking a final decision. The outcome of such a decision is always significant and often has a long-term impact on a person’s life and even on others.

One such decision pertains to marriage. Marrying a person and taking him/her as a life partner is a matter of great importa­nce. It has personal, familial, social and spi­ritual implications, therefore, only those who are in a position to fulfil its requisites should enter into the bond of marriage. These include free consent, maturity, stable livelihood, a lifelong co­m­m­i­t­ment to taking care of each other, etc.

In our society, marriage is an important institution and one should enter into it only after reaching the marriageable age and giving an assurance of fulfilling their part of the contract. It is also necessary that before marrying, one should think seriously about the prospective partner, ask about their background and consider the ensuing responsibilities.

Of course, some relatives are forbidden for marriage. Thirteen such relations are mentioned in the Quran (4:23-24) with whom marriage is forbidden. Similarly, modern medical science has also hinted that marriages among close relatives may be detrimental for offspring born of such wedlock. Thalassaemia and other blood-related diseases occur due to such marriages. Some governments also suggest a medical check-up of prospective couples before marriage to help lessen the chances of disabled offspring.

Child unions devalue the concept of marriage in Islam.

Such matters need to be kept in mind while embarking upon the matrimonial journey. Marrying a person is not a joke, nor is it a game. It is a life-changing decision, creating a union to grow and shine like an evergreen tree. It is the founding of a family, creating heirs in this world and also a source of salvation in the hereafter. Therefore, marriage brings with it many responsibilities which include parenting, building new relationships, sacrificing time, resources and energy.

If a person marries in a non-serious manner or under duress, the consequences could be disastrous. It may result in the loss of happiness and mental peace. Therefore, the law does not allow those who are underage to take such an important decision. Their intellect is not yet sharpened to understand the ensuing responsibilities marriage brings with it. They have to wait until they reach the age of marriage.

Pakistan is beset with many problems. Every year the government plans and spends huge amounts of money on social welfare programmes but hardly sees the desired result. One reason for this failure is the backward practice of child marriage. The latter refers to unions where one or both partners are married in their early teenage years, or even before.

Though child marriage is illegal, it is widely practised in Pakistan. According to Unicef, three per cent of Pakistani girls under the age of 15 years are married, and the practice continues to be regarded as an integral part of culture.

The underlying reasons for child marriages could be lack of education, poverty and dowry as well as social and supposed religious influences. It is high time people realised that underage unions violate not only human rights, but also children’s rights. This practice can also have long-term harmful effects on both girls and boys.

For girls, it could lead to mental health concerns, a lack of access to opportunities and education, and several negative health impacts. For boys, it could mean being unprepared for responsibilities as they become fathers at a young age and have to support their families, thus losing out on several career possibilities.

Child marriage is a practice that not only violates internationally recognised human rights, but also devalues the concept of marriage in Islam. It is a serious threat to the purpose of marriage and the objectives of Islamic law, which includes protection from harm and preserving life and health.

Therefore, the ministries of health and social welfare should initiate a drive through the media to educate and sensitise people about pre- and post-marriage requirements. Religious scholars and marriage counsellors should be taken into confidence and be made part of such a drive. The government should also highlight the research on various kinds of diseases occurring due to marriages between close relatives.

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