

Early Marriage in Palestine

Marriage is a union that forms the foundation upon which a stable family structure can be created. By definition, it is an institution of great values, especially in a society like Palestine where family is considered the main concrete of social life and offers reliable socio-economic and safety. Early marriage with its related social and health problems is a significant phenomenon in society and therefore becomes a topic that needed many areas of concern. Early marriage is considered a violation of human rights and deprives young girls from their basic rights in education and health. Statistics of Palestinian Central Bureau show for 2000 that 682 girls aged 14 years old and younger were legally married. In 2006, Pan Arab Project of Family Health conducted a survey and found that approximately 10% of young girls between the ages of 15 to 19 years old are married and 50% of 20 to 24 years old are married.

Palestinian civil law sets the legal age of marriage is 17 years old for a girl and for a boy is 18 years old. However, not all Palestinian families follow the law and as a result young girls are forced to marry and to demonstrate their fertility once they are married. Till now, Palestinian civil laws lack clear guidelines on early marriage and puberty is used as a define line for the age of marriage while the legal age of marriage is ignored.

Reasons behind early marriage come from socio-economic and cultural. But, the political situation in Palestine has played a major contributor to raise early marriage. In particular, the closures, instability of the economic situation and the uncertain future faced by many families. The closures have particularly affected schools, and girls were the primary victims. Many families, to ease the burden, marry off their girls early as they are unable to support them financially. An important factor is culture and traditions in which girls are viewed as the main source of family honor. One way to preserve the honor is by marrying off young girls earlier.

Early marriage leads to health and social problems. One of these problems is early pregnancy where it put young girls at high risk because their bodies not yet developed completely. Miscarriage and birth complications are most likely to cause death. In addition, girls are in charge of raising their children; as a result, a generation of illiterate is becoming the leader of the future.

Efforts are needed to limit the occurrence of early marriage. It will take long time to completely erase early marriage from the Palestinian society, but gradual efforts from the law and individuals will make a stoning step in the future. This is should be done by first improving the economic situation, creating job opportunities so families can have a stable income. Once this is established, there is no excuse for families not to send their daughters to school. Education is very important as it will raise an awareness about the consequences that comes with early marriage. With education, there is a better future full of hopes and a preservation of human rights.