

School Uniform vs. Wedding Dress: How Education can Prevent Child Marriage in Nepal



RUKMINI FOUNDATION
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

“In today's world, a child who is not educated is disadvantaged in terms of income, health and opportunity. In coming years, a society that does not educate its children will be disabled in terms of the economic productivity and social welfare of its people”

Nepal, a country landlocked between India and China, has a population of 31 million and is the 3rd poorest country in Asia. With 34% of the population living under the extreme poverty line of US \$1.25 per day, the Gender Gap Index for 2014 ranked Nepal 112 out of 142 countries. Nepal ranks N0. 122 in world education attainment, with only 47% female being literate, compared to 99% in US.



Child Marriage in Nepal: Due to the extreme poverty level, child marriage is a common practice in Nepal, with 41% of girls being married before the ages of 18, despite the legal marriage age being 20. Traditionally child marriages occurred mainly due to two reasons: to lighten family's economic burden and to secure the girl's future. Parents still view their daughter's future roles in society as being a wife or a mother, hence did not see the need to invest in their education.



Barriers to Education: Extreme poverty is the biggest barrier to education for women, as it makes the direct costs of schooling and the opportunity cost of forgone child labor too expensive for many families. Young girls are seen as an economic asset to their household, as they are often tasked to collect water, fuel, and fodder; along with assisting their mothers in domestic chores, looking after their younger siblings or helping out in other economic activities.

Cultural rituals and beliefs also act as a major impediment towards a girl's education. They range from religion, early marriage and dowries, to concerns for girl's physical and moral welfare. Society's perception towards educational needs of boys and girls also affects their level of attainment. Countries where majority of the populations are below poverty level usually see boys as the future breadwinners and head of household, while girls as wives and mothers.

Importance of Education: Education plays a critical role in alleviating poverty, primary education being the most important for economic growth in low income developing countries like Nepal. The relationship between poverty and education has two directions:

poor people are usually not able to access adequate education, and without an adequate education people often are confined to a life of poverty.

On average, a girl with 7 years of education will marry 4 years later and have 2.2 fewer children. A girl who completes basic education is three times less likely to contract diseases such as HIV. Children born to educated mothers are two times more likely to survive past the age of 5. Education fosters critical thinking skills, which are essential for effective leaders and democracy. Women and girls need to be empowered in order to affect positive change for local and global problems.

“Educating girls offers the best hope of breaking the cycle of female deprivation. Increased schooling has similar effects on the incomes of males and females, but educating girls generates much larger social benefits. Because of what women do with the extra income they earn, because of the extra leverage it affords them within the family, and because of the direct effects of greater knowledge and awareness, female education has an enormous social impact.”

- Lawrence H. Summers

Dress for school not a wedding

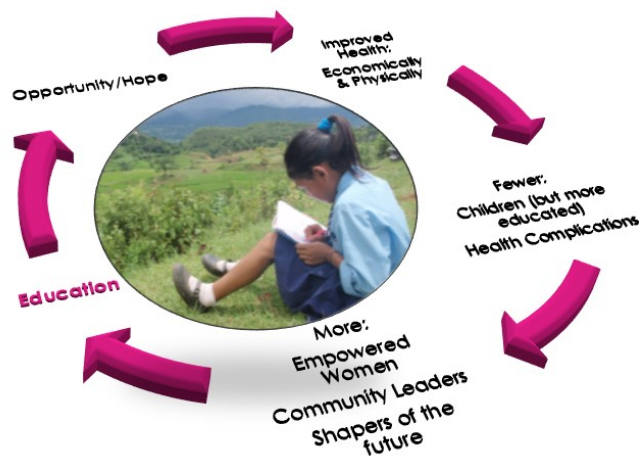


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The Rukmini Foundation's mission is to improve the lives of underprivileged girls by empowering them through a holistic program of: quality education, supportive mentoring services, and health and wellness program.

Our Mission: We believe that by fulfilling our mission, we will: reduce the literacy gap between males and females in Nepal, reduce marriages of underage girls and the health, economic, and emotional side effects associated with being a child bride, ensure the mental, emotional and physical well being of at-risk girls, and empower girls with a sense of self-esteem as well as with valuable life skills so they can better protect themselves and their families

Where We Serve: Pharping is a village rich in diversity but still follows the rules of the caste system. The lower castes are most vulnerable to child marriage, as girls are often married at an early age of 13-16. Due to the low mortality rate, Tamang families tend to produce more offspring, resulting in lack of resources for sustainable living. As number of siblings increase, there are less resources available for feeding, nurturing, and a proper education – leading to girls being married at an earlier age.



Our Approach: The Rukmini Foundation is hoping to cultivate leaders through our holistic program of quality education, health & wellness services, and mentoring. We believe that simply providing access to education is not enough as we have to provide a quality education. We also want to ensure the health and wellness of the girls as they seek to empower themselves, and we also provide mentoring so that these girls believe in their own power to change their futures and the future of their communities.

Challenges: Despite our endeavors, there are still cases where our work was unable to make a change. Sapana Rai is a 15 year old from Simpani Village, a remote village in Nepal. She lost her mother at a young age and although her uncle initially financed her studies, he was no longer able to do so, resulting in Sapana having to drop out of school.

Rukmini Foundation stepped in and offered to fund Sapana's education. However, there were no schools near her house, resulting in Sapana having to walk for nearly an hour to get to class every day. Delved in poverty and the daily hardship of attending school, Sapana was unhappy with her situation. She decided to elope with her boyfriend for an easier life. Although Sapana did have the opportunity for education, she was unable to utilize it due to poverty and the lack of school availability in her area.

A Success Story: Though we have faced numerous difficulties, we have also encountered many successful cases. Anju, a 15 year old girl, is a current scholar of Rukmini foundation studying in grade 10. At age 13, she lost her mother due to terminal illness and was given the responsibility of taking care of her household. Although she had the desire to study and wanted to continue her education, her father stopped her from attending school and forced her to devote all her time in household chores. Soon after, the pressure started mounting on her to get married, as her father saw this as a viable solution to ease his burden. As Anju fought against the child marriage to continue her schooling, Rukmini foundation reached out to Anju's family and offered Anju a scholarship to further her studies. Rukmini foundation funded Anju's tuition, provided her with school uniform and the textbooks. Anju was able to fulfill her dream of going to school and educating herself in the hope of someday having a profession and leading a better life.

Our Hope: Providing education alone is not enough. These girls deserve the best possible chance for a successful future. We hope with our hard work, resources, and belief, we will bring about the change that is needed to ensure every girl gets the opportunity to be the happiest she can be.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
- Nelson Mandela