

United Nations  Nations Unies

**United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

**Expert Group Meeting on good practices in legislation
to address harmful practices against women**

United Nations Conference Centre

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

25 to 28 May 2009

**FORCED AND EARLY MARRIAGE:
A FOCUS ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE
AND FORMER SOVIET UNION COUNTRIES
WITH SELECTED LAWS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES**

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** The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.*

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I. Introduction

Forced and early marriage deprives women and young girls of their basic human rights. Forced marriage describes a marriage that takes place without the free or valid consent of one or both of the partners and involves either physical or emotional duress. Early marriage is related to forced marriage because minors are deemed incapable of giving informed consent.¹ Forced and early marriages are serious human rights violations. The requirement for the free and informed consent of both parties to a marriage is recognized in numerous legal instruments at international, national and local levels. These instruments, along with all major world religions, condemn forced and early marriages.² Despite this opposition, only a few countries have specifically criminalized the practice. And regardless of the existing opposition and laws, the practices of forced and early marriage continue.

This paper provides a brief overview of forced and child marriage from an international perspective and discusses selected international and regional standards on this issue. It includes information about how this problem presents itself in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union (CEE/FSU) and discusses selected laws addressing forced and child marriage from other countries.

A. Prevalence

Forced and early marriage is a persistent problem that occurs mainly among young women and girls, although there are cases of young men and boys being forced to marry.

Reliable statistics on forced marriage are difficult to compile due to the unofficial and, therefore, undocumented nature of most forced marriages. Victims' resistance to speaking out against their typically "closed" families, or communities, poses another

¹ As a child under the age of 18 is not capable of giving their valid consent to enter into marriage, child marriages are considered to be forced marriages. See The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, November 7, 1962, 32 U.N.T.S. 231, *available at* <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/63.htm>.

² Forced marriages differ from arranged marriages. In forced marriages, one or more parties lose their right to choose their partner. In arranged marriages, the parents and families play a leading role in arranging the marriage, but the ultimate decision on whether to marry lies with the individuals getting married. Many regard arranged marriages as a well established cultural tradition that continues to successfully exist within many communities, and so it is important that a clear distinction be drawn between forced and arranged marriages. In some cases, however, the difference between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage may be semantic. In a January 2007 report, Sigma Huda, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Aspects of the Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, states that, "[a] marriage imposed on a woman not by explicit force, but by subjecting her to relentless pressure and/or manipulation, often by telling her that her refusal of a suitor will harm her family's standing in the community, can also be understood as forced." Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Aspects of the Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, at 10, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/4/23 (January 24, 2007)(prepared by Sigma Huda).

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obstacle to reliable data.³ The absence of a birth certificate can also mean that the victim has no way of proving that they are a victim of child or early marriage. In 2003, the International Centre for Research on Women estimated that more than 51 million girls under 18 years were married and they expected the figure to rise to over 100 million within the next 10 years.⁴ Similarly, in 2006, experts estimated that 38 percent of young women aged 20-24 in the fifty least-developed countries were married before the age of 18.⁵ While forced and early marriages are becoming increasingly less common among the wealthiest sectors of society in all regions of the world, they are most common still in Africa and South Asia, but also persist in certain areas of CEE/FSU⁶ and other parts of the world.

In South Asia, UNICEF estimates that among women ages 15 to 24, 48 percent were married before the age of 18. In Bangladesh, 27.3 percent of women ages 15 to 19 were married by the age of 15, and 65.3 percent of women ages 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18.⁷

UNICEF estimates that in Africa 42 percent of women ages 15 to 24 were married before the age of 18. In Niger, 27.3 percent of women ages 15 to 19 were married before the age of 15, and 76.6 percent of women ages 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18.⁸ According to surveys conducted by the National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia (NCTPE), the prevalence of marriage by abduction is as high as 92 per cent in Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), with a national average of 69 percent.⁹

According to the same analysis by UNICEF, within the Former Soviet Union early marriages are most common in Kyrgyzstan, where .3 percent of women ages 15 to 19 were married before the age of 15, and 21.2 percent of women ages 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18.¹⁰ In Kazakhstan, .2 percent of women ages 15 to 19 were married before the age of 15 and 14.4 percent of women ages 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18.¹¹ Similarly, in Turkmenistan, .1 percent of women ages 15 to 19

³ Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Aspects of the Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, at 11, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/4/23 (January 24, 2007)(prepared by Sigma Huda).

⁴ "Know the Facts," International Center for Research on Women, 2003, citing Population Council analysis of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) 2003, <http://www.icrw.org/photoessay/html/facts.htm>.

⁵ Mabala, Richard, "Youth and Their Well-Being," United Nations Conference Center Addis Ababa, June 2006, citing DHS Surveys, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/tc_addis06_3_health_unicef.pdf.

⁶ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., "Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States," Council of Europe, 2005, at 23, [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

⁷ "Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice," UNICEF, 2005, at 31.

⁸ Id.

⁹ "UNICEF Supports Fight to End Marriage by Abduction in Ethiopia," UNICEF Communications Section, www.unicef.org/ethiopia/ET_real_abduction.pdf.

¹⁰ "Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice," UNICEF, 2005, at 31.

¹¹ Id.

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were married before the age of 15 and 9.1 percent of women ages 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18.¹² In addition, early marriage is practiced particularly among Roma and in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, where 27 percent of the women who married in 1994 were aged 15 to 19.¹³ In Uzbekistan, more than 45 percent of women, while only 8 percent of men, marry before the age of 20.¹⁴ In 1998, according to government statistics 10,847 Uzbek women below the age of 18 were married compared to 183 men under the age of 18.¹⁵

Within North America, in 2000, approximately 4 percent of women aged 15 to 19 were married.¹⁶ In addition, in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission estimates that over 38 percent of women have been victims of forced marriage.¹⁷ UNICEF has stated that 54 percent of Afghan girls are victims of early marriage.¹⁸ The United Kingdom’s Forced Marriage Unit sees over 250 cases a year.¹⁹

B. International and Regional Laws and Policies

Forced and early marriages are recognized as human rights violations. Numerous international and regional legal instruments condemn the practices of forced and early marriage. Many of these documents mandate consent of both parties, recommend a minimum marriage age, and require that the marriage be registered to better review the occurrences of forced and early marriages and to ensure that both partners receive equal rights and protections. Although most countries have signed onto these documents, many countries lack adequate implementation of the treaties. For example, despite the recommendations to set the minimum age to marry to 18, many countries lack domestic laws specifying 18 as the minimum age to marry as a means of preventing early marriages.

¹² Id.

¹³ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., “Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States,” Council of Europe, 2005, at 23. [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf)

¹⁴ “Domestic Violence in Uzbekistan,” Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, December 2000, at 14, citing “Status of Women in Uzbekistan,” United Nations Development Program 1999, at 40, and “Women of Uzbekistan,” Statistical collection of the State Department of Statistics under the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1990, at 40.

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ “Too Young to Wed: The Lives, Rights, and Health of Young Married Girls,” International Center for Research on Women, 2003, citing Population Reference Bureau 2000.

¹⁷ “Evaluation report on General Situation of Women in Afghanistan,” Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2005, http://www.aihrc.org.af/rep_eng_wom_situation_8_march.htm#_ftn7.

¹⁸ “Child Marriage Fact Sheet,” press release, United Nations Population Division, 2005, http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm.

¹⁹ “What We Can Do to Help,” Forced Marriage Unit, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Servlet?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1094234857863>; The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) in the United Kingdom is a joint-initiative with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. The FMU works both outside of the UK with embassy staff to rescue victims held captive, raped, or forced into having an abortion, as well as in the UK by providing extensive guidelines for social workers, educators, police, and health workers on how to provide services for cases of forced marriage. See FMU website at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit/>.

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Both The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (The Convention on Consent to Marriage),²⁰ as well as The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),²¹ contain all three principles articulated above. They require the consent of both parties. In addition, both Conventions mandate that all State Parties take legislative action to set a minimum age to marry, and both Conventions direct that marriages be registered. Neither Convention, however, suggests what that minimum age should be. While the CEDAW warns that the betrothal and marriage of a child will have no legal effect, The Convention on Consent to Marriage allows for exceptions to whatever minimum age is set.

The following CEE/FSU countries have ratified both the Convention on Consent to Marriage as well as the CEDAW: Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia.²² In addition to those listed, the CEDAW has also been ratified by the following CEE/FSU countries: Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.²³

Similarly, the United Nation's Recommendation on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (The Recommendation) requires consent of both parties as well as registration of the marriages.²⁴ The Recommendation also mandates that Member States specify a minimum age to marry, and goes even further to set 15 as the recommended minimum age for marriage. Just like the Convention on Consent to Marriage, however, The Recommendation allows for exceptions to this minimum age.

Although The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) does not contain the specific principles related to marital consent and registration, it does specifically define

²⁰ The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, November 7, 1962, 32 U.N.T.S. 231, *available at* <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/63.htm>.

²¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, G.A. res. 54/4, annex, 54 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 46) at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, *entered into force* Sept. 1, 1981, *available at* <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instr/e1cedaw.htm>.

²² See <http://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/mtdsg/volume%20ii/chapter%20xvi/xvi-3.en.pdf> and <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states.htm>.

²³ See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states.htm>

²⁴ The Recommendation on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, G.A. res. 1965 (XX), 20 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 14) at 36, U.N. Doc. A/6014 (November 1, 1965), *available at* <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/64.htm>.

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children as people under the age of 18.²⁵ The CRC has been ratified by all countries with the exception of the United States and Somalia.

Regional legal instruments such as the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1468²⁶ and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child²⁷ have taken a strong position on the age of consent to marry, and recommend that 18 be the minimum age of marriage. In 2005, the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 1468 on forced marriages and child marriages. The resolution defines forced marriage as “the union of two persons at least one of whom has not given their full consent to the marriage.”²⁸ It defines child marriage as “the union of two persons at least one of whom is under 18 years of age.”²⁹ Among other things, Resolution 1468 urges the national parliament of the Council of Europe member states to set the minimum age for marriage at 18 for women and men, to make it a requirement that every marriage be declared and officially registered, and to consider criminalizing acts of forced marriage.³⁰

Resolution 1468 applies to many CEE/FSU countries including: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and the Ukraine.³¹

II. Forced and Early Marriage in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union

A. Characteristics of Forced and Early Marriage: Causes and Consequences

Bride kidnapping, arranged marriages, and unregistered marriages continue to occur within the local populations of CEE/FSU countries. Not every country has laws prohibiting forced and early marriages. In countries that do not have specific laws, criminal offenses that occur as part of the forced marriage can sometimes be used to penalize the perpetrators. Even when countries do have such provisions, however, the practice of forced and early marriage continues.

²⁵ The Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A. res. 44/24, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), *entered into force* Sept. 2, 1990, in accordance with article 49, *available at* <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>.

²⁶ The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1468, 5 October 2005, *available at* <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta05/eres1468.htm>.

²⁷ African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49 (1990), *entered into force* November 29, 1999, *available at* <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/africa/afchild.htm>.

²⁸ The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly 1468, 5 October 2005, at para. 4.

²⁹ *Id.* at para. 7.

³⁰ *Id.* at paras. 14.2.1, 14.2.2 and 14.4.

³¹ See http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/AssemblyList/AL_DelegationsList_E.asp; The special guest status of the Belarus National Assembly was suspended on January 13, 1997 by the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly.

In former Soviet Union countries, forced and early marriages have re-emerged since the end of the communist era in the form of bride kidnapping or bride abductions. The practice of non-consensual bride kidnapping or bride abduction has only recently become an issue of forced marriage. Historically, bride abductions in the 18th and 19th centuries had been used by consenting couples who would not otherwise have been able to marry due to financial difficulties or social constraints. In modern times, consensual “pretend abductions” still occur to avoid financial and social restrictions. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, research shows that the non-consensual form of these marriages is on the rise.³² A description of non-consensual kidnappings of women by a stranger or acquaintance for forced marriage is summarized by a Human Rights Watch Report on Kyrgyzstan:

“Kidnappings of women and girls – some as young as 12 years old – for forced marriage are carried out by groups of men who capture a woman through physical force or deception and take her to the home of the intended groom. The abductor’s family then exerts psychological, and sometimes physical, pressure to coerce the young woman to consent to marry. In some cases the young woman is raped soon after being taken to the abductor’s house, so that she will feel shame and feel unable to return to her parents’ home; other times the kidnapped woman is coerced to have sex or in some cases is raped on her wedding night, after a marriage ceremony is performed.”³³

Bride abductions have been documented in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Albania.³⁴ In Kyrgyzstan, “bride-kidnapping” is one of the most common forms of forced marriage and is becoming more common.³⁵ Human Rights Watch found that approximately 40 percent of women in cities had been victims of bride kidnapping, while 60 to 80 percent of

³² Kleinbach, Russell, Mehrigiul Ablezova & Medina Aitieva, “Kidnapping for Marriage (*ala kachuu*) in a Kyrgyz Village,” Central Asian Survey, June 2005, at 192-193.

³³ “Reconciled to Violence,” Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 2, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

³⁴ *In Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan see:* “Bride Kidnapping,” United Nations Population Fund, 2006, http://www.unfpa.org/16days/documents/pl_bridenapping_factsheet.doc; *In Azerbaijan see:* Kiryashova, Sabina, “Azeri Bride Kidnappers Risk Heavy Sentences,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 17 November 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=wpr&s=f&o=258105&apc_state=henpwpr; *In Armenia and Georgia see:* Kokhodze, Gulo & Tamuna Uchidze, “Bride Theft Rampant in Southern Georgia,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 15 June 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=321627&apc_state=henicrs2006; *In Uzbekistan see:* Aminova, Alena, “Uzbekistan: No Love Lost in Karakalpak Bride Thefts,” 18 August 2003, http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/uzbekistan_kidnapping.htm; *In Albania see:* Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., “Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States,” Council of Europe, 2005, at 29. [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

³⁵ “Reconciled to Violence,” Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 90, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

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village women had been victims.³⁶ In Albania, some families encourage girls to marry young to prevent them from being kidnapped on their way to school.³⁷

Bride kidnapping, as any form of forced marriage, is a violation of human rights and deprives women of other fundamental rights, including: freedom of movement, the right to education, the right to work, the right to be free from forced or compulsory labor, as well as a woman's right to liberty and security of person, and right to life and physical integrity, especially if it involves battery and/or rape.³⁸ Although some abductions are consensual and arranged, there are many reports of the abductor-future-husband raping the abducted woman in order to make the marriage irreversible and shame the women into staying.³⁹ Even if she is not raped, her virginity will forever be questioned after being abducted. Given the confines of the community, tradition, and social stigma, the woman finds little choice but to stay. Restrictions on land ownership rights, lack of education, and the resulting economic dependence on men and their families also contribute to women staying in abusive situations.⁴⁰ Even if the woman does escape the abductor's home, she often faces disgrace and is ostracized by her family and the community. Women who are kidnapped can suffer physical as well as psychological and emotional trauma.⁴¹ Others, perhaps as a coping mechanism, begin to identify with their abductor. Just as the initial encounter with their husband is violent and traumatic, continued domestic violence throughout the marriage is particularly prevalent in marriages that begin with kidnapping.⁴² In addition, women are often forced to work as unpaid servants for their in-laws.⁴³

Amnesty International has specifically documented the practice of non-consensual bride kidnapping in Armenia and in Georgia.⁴⁴ As mentioned, the practice of bride

³⁶ Id.

³⁷ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., "Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States," Council of Europe, 2005, at 29, [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

³⁸ Bride Kidnapping," United Nations Population Fund, 2006, http://www.unfpa.org/16days/documents/pl_bridenapping_factsheet.doc.

³⁹ Id; Kiryashova, Sabina, "Azeri Bride Kidnappers Risk Heavy Sentences," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 17 November 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=wpr&s=f&o=258105&apc_state=henpwpr; Kokhodze, Gulo & Tamuna Uchidze, "Bride Theft Rampant in Southern Georgia," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 15 June 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=321627&apc_state=henicrs2006; Aminova, Alena, "Uzbekistan: No Love Lost in Karakalpak Bride Thefts," 18 August 2003, http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/uzbekistan_kidnapping.htm.

⁴⁰ "Domestic Violence in Tajikistan," The Advocates for Human Rights, October 2008, at 22.

⁴¹ "Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 114-119, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

⁴² "Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 117, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>; "Domestic Violence in Tajikistan," The Advocates for Human Rights, October 2008, at 23.

⁴³ "Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 118-119, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

⁴⁴ "No Pride in Silence: Countering Violence in the Family in Armenia," Amnesty International, November 2008, at 17; "Georgia - Thousands Suffering in Silence: Violence Against Women in the Family," Amnesty International, September 2006, at 11.

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kidnapping in both these countries includes the abduction and sometimes rape of a woman who then, to avoid public shame, is required to marry her kidnapper and sometimes rapist.⁴⁵ If she escapes, once kidnapped, a woman is no longer considered a virgin by society, whether she was actually raped or not.⁴⁶ Given the traditional expectation that women are virgins when they marry, a once kidnapped woman will have difficulties creating a new life and finding a different husband.⁴⁷ As a result of this pressure, Amnesty International documented that some women in Armenia attempt hymen reconstruction surgery.⁴⁸ In addition, Amnesty International documented that the abductors are rarely punished because the victims of bride-kidnapping avoid reporting the abduction to police in fear of the public stigma.⁴⁹

In Tajikistan, young girls are often forced to marry. Some feel such despair they attempt suicide.⁵⁰

“I have been working here for twenty-five years and I’ve seen a lot for my years of experience of what happens to young girls. The biggest problem is when the parents make, they force, the young girls to get married. This is when suicide happens. These young girls are desperate and they would do anything not to get married...they are 14, maybe 15, and they are in school, or maybe they just finished school and their parents won’t send them back to school or let them keep studying and instead force them to marry. This is when many girls commit suicide or burn themselves or jump into a river.”⁵¹

Similarly, in Uzbekistan most marriages are arranged and often women are married off by their families at 15 or 16, despite the legal marital age for women being set at 17.⁵² As one Uzbek woman explained:

“My daughter is 16. My husband says that he is not going to give her in marriage before she is 20. ...[but] we won’t succeed because people are starting to criticize – how can you keep a girl home for so long? It’s a terrible thing and then

⁴⁵ Id.

⁴⁶ “No Pride in Silence: Countering Violence in the Family in Armenia,” Amnesty International, November 2008, at 17.

⁴⁷ Id.

⁴⁸ Id.

⁴⁹ “Georgia - Thousands Suffering in Silence: Violence Against Women in the Family,” Amnesty International, September 2006, at 11.

⁵⁰ “Domestic Violence in Tajikistan,” The Advocates for Human Rights, October 2008, at 23.

⁵¹ Id. at 23, fn. 217, Interview with Local Gov’t Official, in Taj. (Nov. 8, 2005).

⁵² “Domestic Violence in Uzbekistan,” Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, December 2000, at 14, citing Interview, March 1, 2000 (NGO, Tashkent), and “Problems of Women,” May 3, 2000, at section 6.2 (unpublished sociological study).

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suddenly no one will propose. Here, the sooner she's out of your hands what comes later no longer worries us."⁵³

B. Legal Reform to Address Forced and Early Marriage

There are laws in CEE/FSU countries criminalizing the practice of bride kidnapping and forced and early marriage in general. Under Article 23 of the Georgian criminal code, bride abduction qualifies as a "crime against human rights and freedoms" and a perpetrator can receive a sentence of four to eight years in prison or up to twelve years if the act is premeditated by a group.⁵⁴ The practice is also a crime in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.⁵⁵ Despite the view by some that bride kidnapping is often a harmless and consensual way to avoid wedding expenses or parental disapproval, Azerbaijan's parliament recognized that forced abductions also occur, and voted to equate bride kidnapping with the more serious crime of kidnapping. As a result, the possible sentences for bride kidnapping increased.⁵⁶

The Kyrgyzstan criminal code prohibits forced and early marriages. Article 154 criminalizes marriage with anyone younger than 16, including by way of kidnapping, and provides a penalty of between three and seven years in prison.⁵⁷ Article 155 specifically criminalizes non-consensual marriage by abduction: "Forcing a woman to marry or to continue a marriage, or kidnapping her in order to marry without her consent" can be punished by either a fine or up to five years in prison.⁵⁸ In addition, other laws within the criminal code can be used to hold kidnapers accountable for the violence that often accompanies the abduction.⁵⁹ In March 2009, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Center in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, held a hearing to discuss the

⁵³ "Domestic Violence in Uzbekistan," Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, December 2000, at 14, citing "Problems of Women," May 3, 2000, at section 6.2 (unpublished sociological study).

⁵⁴ Kokhodze, Gulo & Tamuna Uchidze, "Bride Theft Rampant in Southern Georgia," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 15 June 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=321627&apc_state=henicrs2006.

⁵⁵ Aminova, Alena, "Uzbekistan: No Love Lost in Karakalpak Bride Thefts," 18 August 2003, http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/uzbekistan_kidnapping.htm; Kiryashova, Sabina, "Azeri Bride Kidnappers Risk Heavy Sentences," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 17 November 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=wpr&s=f&o=258105&apc_state=henpwpr; See also "Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan," 22 September 1994, Article 136-137, *available at* <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/section/criminal-codes/country/55>.

⁵⁶ Kiryashova, Sabina, "Azeri Bride Kidnappers Risk Heavy Sentences," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 17 November 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=wpr&s=f&o=258105&apc_state=henpwpr.

⁵⁷ Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 154; see "Kyrgyzstan: Status of Law and Violence Against Women," <http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/laws.htm>.

⁵⁸ Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 155; see "Kyrgyzstan: Status of Law and Violence Against Women," <http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/laws.htm>; Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 120, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

⁵⁹ Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, p. 120, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>, citing Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 111 which criminalizes the infliction of physical or psychological suffering on a person through systematic beatings or other violence with a penalty of between three to seven years. See also Article 112 "Purposeful infliction of light damage to health."

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country's draft legislation on forced marriage. The new legislation seeks to reduce forced marriage and bride kidnapping, reduce domestic violence, and promote equality on behalf of women.⁶⁰

While there is no specific mention of bride kidnapping in its legislation, Tajikistan criminalizes early marriages. The minimum legal age for marriage in Tajikistan is 17. Under the Tajikistan criminal code, the giving in marriage of a girl who has not reached marriage age by parents or guardians can be punished with correctional labor for up to two years, restriction of freedom for two years, or confinement for six months.⁶¹ Contracting a marriage with a person who has not reached the marriage age is punishable by a fine, correctional labor for up to two years, or up to six months confinement.⁶²

In most countries where there is no specific criminal offense for forced or early marriage, other crimes related to the act can be used to hold perpetrators accountable. While categorized differently in various countries, typical offenses include, among others, "rape, attempted rape, physical and psychological violence, sexual violence, bodily harm, threatening with a weapon or dangerous object, ill-treatment, trespass to the person, indecent assault, false imprisonment, infringement of freedom and integrity, psychological duress, sexual duress, kidnapping and abduction, offenses against the person, infringement of sexual integrity, and honor crimes."⁶³

A study of laws of Council of Europe Member States found the following with regard to laws relating to forced and early marriage in some CEE/FSU countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Article 222 of the criminal code punishes rape within the marriage and Article 236 penalizes a parent or guardian who abuses a minor or fails to fulfill his or her duty of care toward the minor.⁶⁴ In Croatia, rape is also prohibited within a marriage and forced marriage can be penalized under Chapter 14 of the criminal code, which describes "criminal acts directed against sexual freedom and sexual morality."⁶⁵ While Slovakia has no specific provision against forced marriage, Section

⁶⁰ "OSCE Centre in Bishkek Supports Parliamentary Hearing on Gender and Legislation to Curb Bride Kidnapping," OSCE Press Release, 3 March 2009.

⁶¹ Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, Chapter 20, Article 168; See OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights ("ODIHR") Legislationline.org, <http://www.legislationline.org/countries/country/49>.

⁶² Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, Chapter 20, Article 169. Polygamy is also criminalized by Article 170. See OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights ("ODIHR") Legislationline.org, <http://www.legislationline.org/countries/country/49>.

⁶³ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., "Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States," Council of Europe, 2005, at 42, [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

⁶⁴ Id.

⁶⁵ Id.

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VI of the Slovakian criminal code contains specific provisions protecting children against various forms of assault and violence.⁶⁶

In Romania, rape between spouses does not constitute a criminal offense. Nonetheless, Romanian law provides for certain remedies on behalf of women who are victims of sexual cruelty within marriage.⁶⁷ In the Czech Republic, however, marital rape is not recognized as a specific offense. In addition, there is a further absence of legal provisions relevant to the practice of forced marriage. The lack of relevant laws means perpetrators are relatively immune from punishment.⁶⁸

C. Problems with Implementation of Laws on Forced and Early Marriage in Central and Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union

While laws prohibiting forced and early marriages may be helpful, their existence alone does not eliminate the practice. Even in countries where there are laws that address forced marriage and early marriage, the practice continues to increase and abductors are rarely punished. Furthermore, there is frustration that the option of a fine as a punishment, such as in Kyrgyzstan, is a seriously inadequate response to the prevalence and severity of the problem.⁶⁹

Despite provisions prohibiting forced and early marriages in Tajikistan, as discussed above, girls there are often forced into marriage before they reach the minimum age of 17.⁷⁰ In Uzbekistan, people sometimes do not realize that forced marriage is a crime and police have indicated that, in practice, local tradition has taken precedence over the law.⁷¹ In Kyrgyzstan, government officials sometimes contend that bride kidnapping is a tradition and often consensual.⁷² As a result, officials fail to acknowledge bride abduction for forced marriage as a serious crime or recognize the state's duty to punish perpetrators and prevent the continuation of the practice.⁷³

Research discredits this belief that non-consensual bride kidnapping is a Kyrgyz or Turkmen adat (common law) tradition that was widely practiced with social approval

⁶⁶ Id. at 44.

⁶⁷ Id.

⁶⁸ Id. at 43.

⁶⁹ "Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 120, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

⁷⁰ "Domestic Violence in Tajikistan," The Advocates for Human Rights, October 2008, at 23.

⁷¹ Aminova, Alena, "Uzbekistan: No Love Lost in Karakalpak Bride Thefts," 18 August 2003, http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/uzbekistan_kidnapping.htm.

⁷² "Bride Kidnapping," United Nations Population Fund, 2006, http://www.unfpa.org/16days/documents/pl_bridenapping_factsheet.doc, citing "Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, at 88, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

⁷³ "Reconciled to Violence," Human Rights Watch, September 2006, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/kyrgyzstan0906/>.

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in the ancient times.⁷⁴ Non-consensual bride kidnapping is not permitted by Kyrgyz criminal law or Islamic law.⁷⁵ It is also not legitimized by either Kyrgyz or Turkmen adat (common law) tradition.⁷⁶ Non-consensual bride kidnapping was a practice that has always been a violation of traditionally approved forms of marriage and, in ancient times, often resulted in major conflict.⁷⁷ In its modern form, it has been described as “an illegal and a distorted version of the old custom of pretend abductions because it increasingly involves coercion and rape.”⁷⁸

Unregistered Traditional Marriages

Furthermore, laws on forced and early marriages are often circumvented by participation in traditional religious marriages, sometimes called “nikoh marriages.” These marriages, however, are not recognized by the law, which can affect the rights of women both during and after the marriage.

Many marriages in Uzbekistan are purely religious and not legally registered. This is, in part, because religious ceremonies allow for under-aged women to be married as well for polygamy. However, rights to property and child support are based on the existence of a lawful marriage. Thus, women who marry only in religious ceremony have no legal protection.⁷⁹

Most marriages in Tajikistan are arranged by parents and, although the minimum legal age for entry into marriage is seventeen, many people circumvent the law by entering into traditional Muslim *nikoh* marriages.⁸⁰ As these marriages are purely religious, they are not registered or recognized by the state. In the event of a divorce, the

⁷⁴ Kleinbach, Russ & Salimjanova, Lilly, “Kyz ala Kachuu and Adat: Non-Consensual Bride Kidnapping and Tradition in Kyrzgyzstan,” Central Asian Survey, June 2007, http://faculty.philau.edu/KleinbachR/2007_study.htm.

⁷⁵ Aminova, Alena, “Uzbekistan: No Love Lost in Karakalpak Bride Thefts,” 18 August 2003, http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/uzbekistan_kidnapping.htm; Kleinbach, Russ & Salimjanova, Lilly, “Kyz ala Kachuu and Adat: Non-Consensual Bride Kidnapping and Tradition in Kyrzgyzstan,” Central Asian Survey, June 2007, at 217, http://faculty.philau.edu/KleinbachR/2007_study.htm.

⁷⁶ Kleinbach, Russ & Salimjanova, Lilly, “Kyz ala Kachuu and Adat: Non-Consensual Bride Kidnapping and Tradition in Kyrzgyzstan,” Central Asian Survey, June 2007, http://faculty.philau.edu/KleinbachR/2007_study.htm.

⁷⁷ Id.

⁷⁸ Id. at 228; Aminova, Alena, “Uzbekistan: No Love Lost in Karakalpak Bride Thefts,” 18 August 2003, http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/uzbekistan_kidnapping.htm.

⁷⁹ “Domestic Violence in Uzbekistan,” Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, December 2000, p. 14, citing Family Code of Uzbekistan, Article 13.

⁸⁰ “Domestic Violence in Tajikistan,” The Advocates for Human Rights, October 2008, p. 23, citing Collette Harris, “Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan (Pluto Press 2004).

couple's assets are not divided as the state does not recognize the marriage, and the woman often ends up homeless and with little or no money.⁸¹

In addition, the failure to maintain registers of birth, deaths, and marriages makes it more difficult to check the age of people getting married and to track the circumstances and occurrences of early marriages. Most legal instruments that condemn the practice of forced and early marriage also recommend that marriages be officially registered.⁸² This would allow for tracking of marriage practices and equal protection of rights under the marriage.⁸³

III. Laws on Forced and Early Marriage in Other Selected Countries

Few countries have criminalized forced marriage. However, in most countries, criminal offences that occurred as a part of the forced marriage can be used to punish perpetrators. As discussed above, these crimes include: rape, sexual violence, assault, false imprisonment, kidnapping or abduction, and some child protection laws.⁸⁴ In the United States, for example, though forced or child marriage may not be a criminal offense in most states, perpetrators have been held accountable under statutory rape laws even when the parties are married.⁸⁵ Marital rape, however, has not yet been recognized by every country.⁸⁶ The dearth of laws criminalizing marital rape can make it difficult to prosecute perpetrators of forced and early marriages in many countries. The following are examples of legal reform in other countries throughout the world.

A. Europe

⁸¹ "Alternative Report on the Observance of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by the Republic of Tajikistan," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 2006, at 28.

⁸² The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, November 7, 1962, 32 U.N.T.S. 231, *available at* <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/63.htm>.

⁸³ The 1999 World Health Organization survey found that more women in a Nikoh marriage experience sexual or psychological violence from the husband compared to officially married women: 40% of officially married women experienced sexual abuse from the husband and 52% of Nikoh women experienced sexual abuse from the husband; 51% of officially married women experienced psychological abuser from the husband, compared to 67% of Nikoh women. "Domestic Violence in Tajikistan," The Advocates for Human Rights, October 2008, at 24, fn. 222, citing "Violence Against Women: Report on the 1990 WHO Pilot Survey in Tajikistan (World Health Org. 2000) at 15.

⁸⁴ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., "Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States," Council of Europe, 2005, at 9, [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

⁸⁵ States such as Delaware, Georgia, and Kansas have all addressed this conflict between minimum age to marry and statutory rape laws. See Section C on United States below for further information.

⁸⁶ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., "Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States," Council of Europe, 2005, at 9, [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

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Norway was the first country in the world to introduce legislation to criminalize the practice of forced marriage.⁸⁷ Norway's laws criminalized forced marriages in Norway as well as the act of taking a young person to another country and forcing them to get married there.⁸⁸ Norwegian law states:

“In the case of forced marriage, anyone who through violence, loss of liberty, improper pressure or other unlawful conduct, or by threatening such conduct, forces another to enter into a marriage shall be punished. The punishment for forced marriage is 6 years. Aiding and abetting shall be punished the same manner.”⁸⁹

As of 2008, there had been two Norwegian court cases convicting someone of forced marriage.⁹⁰

Belgium became the second country in the world to enact a criminal law penalizing forced marriages.⁹¹ Previously in Belgium, laws against physical and mental abuse, rape, and threats were used to penalize forced marriages, and only the married partners could apply for an annulment.⁹² As of 2006, forced marriages were specifically punishable with a jail term of one month to two years or maximum fines of EUR 500 to EUR 2,500. An attempted forced marriage is punishable by a jail term of 15 days to a year or a fine of EUR 250 to EUR 1,250. In addition, the law gives public prosecution authorities the ability to annul a force marriage. This helps the partner who was forced into the marriage avoid further persecutions or abuse for attempting to annul the marriage him-or-herself.

Criminalization, however, is not universally accepted as the only, or even best, way to eliminate the practice of forced marriage. Many countries in the European Union tend to associate forced marriage with immigrant families.⁹³ Denmark, for example, addressed the issue of forced marriages by tightening their immigration policy and restricting the right to family unification with a foreign spouse.⁹⁴ In 2002, they amended

⁸⁷ “Western Resistance: Special Report: Muslim Forced Marriages in Europe,” 8 June 2006, <http://www.westernresistance.com/blog/archives/002305.html>.

⁸⁸ “The Marriage Act”, Section 1a; See <http://introengelsk.cappelendamm.no/c35050/artikkel/vis.html?tid=35358>.

⁸⁹ Norwegian Penal Code, Section 222, subsection 2; See <http://introengelsk.cappelendamm.no/c35050/artikkel/vis.html?tid=35358>.

⁹⁰ “Norway: Four Years for Forced Marriage,” Islam in Europe, 1 July 2008, <http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2008/07/norway-four-years-for-forced-marriage.html>.

⁹¹ “Western Resistance: Special Report: Muslim Forced Marriages in Europe,” 8 June 2006, <http://www.westernresistance.com/blog/archives/002305.html>.

⁹² “Belgium Set to Ban Forced Marriages,” 10 March 2006, http://www.expatica.com/be/news/local_news/belgium-set-to-ban-forced-marriages-28329.html.

⁹³ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., “Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States,” Council of Europe, 2005, at 8 and 23, [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

⁹⁴ Dostrovsky, Nadine, Cook, Rebecca, J. & Gagon, Michael. “Annotated Bibliography on Comparative and International Law Relating to Forced Marriage,” Canada Department of Justice, August 2007, 5.2.3.

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the Alien Act by increasing the required age of foreign spouses from 18 to 24, declaring that spouses cannot be cousins, and requiring that both spouses have strong affiliations with Denmark. Danish Immigration Services presumes that the marriage is forced if the spouses have a close family relationship. In addition, Danish criminal code provisions addressing coercion also apply to marriage. The first conviction in a forced marriage case occurred in 2004 when a father was sentenced to one year in prison under the coercion laws for forcing his 15-year-old daughter into an arranged marriage.

When enacting the Forced Marriage Civil Protection Act in 2007, the United Kingdom specifically declined to criminalize the practice of forced marriage. The Act, which extends to England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but not to Scotland, seeks to help both victims of forced marriage as well as those threatened with forced marriage, by providing civil remedies.⁹⁵ This Act offers civil protections but does not criminalize the practice of forced or early marriage. Britain made a calculated decision to not include forced marriage as a criminal offense after considering the possible negative consequences of such a move, including concerns that victims would not want their families to be punished, or that the practice would go further underground.⁹⁶ The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) in the United Kingdom provides extensive guidelines for social workers, educators, police, and health workers on how to provide services for cases of forced marriage.⁹⁷

B. Sierra Leone

In May 2004, the Special Court for Sierra Leone included forced marriage in its statute as a crime against humanity.⁹⁸ This amendment was in response to the thousands of women who were abducted and forced to become “bush brides.” They were forced, usually through threats of violence, to undertake all the duties expected of a wife in Sierra Leone. This involved cooking, cleaning, as well as bearing and rearing children, which were often the result of rapes. These “marriages” lasted for years, and some wives have stayed with their husbands despite the fact that the conflict is long over.⁹⁹

In January 2009, a new law was approved by Sierra Leone’s President that promotes women’s rights by recognizing customary or traditional marriages that have not

⁹⁵ “The Force Marriage (Civil Protection) Act,” 2007, Chapter 20, *available at* http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070020_en_1.

⁹⁶ “Our Two Year Strategy,” Forced Marriage Unit, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, May 2007, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/FMU%20Two-Year%20Strategy.pdf>.

⁹⁷ See Forced Marriage Unit website at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit/>.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Aspects of the Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, at 15, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/4/23 (January 24, 2007)(prepared by Sigma Huda).

⁹⁹ Scharf, Charles P. & Suzanne Mattler, “Forced Marriage: Exploring the Viability of the Special Court for Sierra Leone’s New Crime Against Humanity,” Case School of Law, October 2005. 3-4.

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been registered by the state.¹⁰⁰ The goal of The Customary Marriage and Divorce Act is to protect women from the abuses that occur as a result of marriages not being registered by giving them the same legal recognition as civil, Christian, and Muslim marriages. The Act also makes forced marriage illegal and sets 18 as the legal marriage age.

The country saw its first court conviction on the charges of “forced marriage” in February 2009. After a four-year trial, The Special Court for Sierra Leone convicted three former leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and forced marriage.¹⁰¹ The court set legal precedent by considering forced marriage as a crime against humanity, separate from other forms of sexual violence and specifically sexual slavery. The fact that many of the marriages lasted for years and involved the domestic nature of marriages was a factor in that decision.

C. United States

In the United States, marriages of girls may take place as early as 14 or 15 with the consent of parents. Individual state laws recognize a minimum age of consent to marry that can be lowered if parental or judicial consent is received. The majority of states recognize the age of consent to marry without parental consent to be 18.¹⁰² With parental or judicial consent, the minimum age of consent to marry often drops, ranging from no age limit to 18.¹⁰³ Some states also have gender-based differences in minimum age of consent to marry with and without parental consent.¹⁰⁴

Some states make exception to their minimum age if there is a pregnancy involved. These exceptions to the minimum age requirement, however, can sometimes conflict with states’ statutory rape laws which criminalize sex with anyone under a

¹⁰⁰ “Sierra Leone Endorses Marriage Act,” AfricanLoft, 27 January 2009,

<http://www.africanloft.com/sierra-leone-endorses-marriage-act/>.

¹⁰¹ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), “Sierra Leone: ‘Forced Marriage’ Conviction a First,” 26 February 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49ab9a121a.html>.

¹⁰² “Marriage Laws of the Fifty States, District of Columbia and Puerto Rico,”

http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/table_marriage.

¹⁰³ Under Mississippi law, with parental consent or judicial consent there is no age limit to consent to marry. Mississippi Code § 93-1-5(d) (2008); Under New Hampshire law, the legal age of consent to marry is 18, but with parental consent and judicial permission the age of consent to marry for males is 14 and 13 for females. New Hampshire Statutes, Title 43, Chapters 457:4 (1907) and 457:5 (1973).

¹⁰⁴ Under Massachusetts law, the age of consent to marry without parental consent is 18 for both male and females. However, with parental consent, the age of consent to marry for boys is 14 while it is 12 for girls. Massachusetts General Law, Title III, Chapter 207 (2007). Under Mississippi law, the age of consent to marry without parental consent for a male is 17 while it is 15 for a female. Mississippi Code § 93-1-5(d) (2008).

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certain age.¹⁰⁵ States such as Delaware, Georgia, and Kansas, have all addressed this conflict between minimum age to marry and statutory rape laws.¹⁰⁶

In Minnesota, like the majority of states in the United States, the age of consent to marry without parental consent is 18, but only 16 with parental and/or judicial consent.¹⁰⁷ Although Minnesota does not have a specific law against forced marriage, it does recognize crimes that could occur in connection with the practice such as kidnapping¹⁰⁸ or assault.

The District of Columbia, however, does specifically criminalize the practice of forced marriage. The specific language, which is found within the state's pandering and prostitution statute, states:

“It is unlawful for any person, within the District of Columbia to take or detain an individual against the individual's will, with intent to compel such individual by

¹⁰⁵ See Bushey, Claire, “Age of Consent Muddles Law on Marriage vs. Rape,” WomensEnews, 7 June 2007, <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3197>.

¹⁰⁶ Delaware law, for example, previously contained a pregnancy exception which allowed younger parties to marry in the event of pregnancy or birth. This pregnancy provision was in direct conflict with the state's statutory rape law which classified sex with anyone under 16 as a felony. Pregnancy is no longer an exception to the age restriction in Delaware and the current law requires anyone younger than 18 to petition to Family Court for permission to marry and a judge will decide whether the marriage is in the minor's best interest; See, 13 Del. Law, c. 1, § 123 (2007).

Georgia previously had a provision which allowed individuals under 16 to marry in the event of pregnancy with parental and/or judicial consent. In 2006, however, Georgia eliminated the pregnancy provision from its code and set 16 as the minimum marriage age. This change was made after 37 year-old Lisa Lynette Clark married a 15 year-old boy who had impregnated her. The couple had been allowed to marry due to the pregnancy exception, but Clark was charged with child molestation, statutory rape and enticing a minor days after marrying the boy. She was sentenced to nine months in prison after pleading guilty to statutory rape; See, O.C.G.A. § 19-3-2 (2006); Age of Consent Muddles Law on Marriage vs. Rape, Bushey, Claire, Women's E News, 7 June 2007; Kansas Setting Minimum Marriage Age: 15, Associated Press, 5 May 2006.

In Kansas, the age of consent to marry without parental or judicial consent has been 18. Until recently, however, Kansas had no minimum age of consent if parents or the court approved of the marriage. In 2006, the minimum age to marry was set to 15 and even then, only if a district court judge decides it is in the best interest of the person 15 years of age. Someone who is 16 or 17 can be married if they receive parental and/or judicial consent. This change may have been instigated by the case of Mathew Koso from Nebraska. When Koso was 20 he began dating a 12 year-old and impregnated her when she was 13. They crossed into Kansas to get married after her fourteenth birthday because, at the time, Kansas had no set minimum age for marriage if the minor had parental permission. Despite the marriage, Nebraska's Attorney General, charged Koso with breaking the state's statutory rape laws. Koso served 15 months for statutory rape; See, K.S.A. § 23-106(c)(1) and (2) (2006); Age of Consent Muddles Law on Marriage vs. Rape, Bushey, Claire, Women's E News, 7 June 2007; Kansas Setting Minimum Marriage Age: 15, Associated Press, 5 May 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Minn. Stat. § 517.02 (2006).

¹⁰⁸ Minn. Stat. § 609.25 (2009).

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force, threats, menace, or duress to marry the abductor or to marry any other person.”¹⁰⁹

Recently, at a federal level, The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriages Act of 2009 was proposed to the United States Congress.¹¹⁰ The draft bill seeks to protect girls in developing countries through the prevention of child marriage. It will be important to see how this proposed federal legislation progresses, but it appears its focus is on international forced and early marriage, as opposed to forced or early marriage within the United States.

VI. Conclusion

There has been recognition of the practice of forced and early marriage throughout the world. International legal instruments as well as country-specific laws have been created which condemn the practice or even specifically criminalize the practice. The practice, however, continues, and is actually increasing in CEE/FSU countries. It is important to demand the creation of new laws which specify 18 as the minimum age for both males and females and to mandate registration of births, marriages, and deaths.¹¹¹ In addition, however, it is vital to recognize that sometimes the “ineffectiveness of the law lies not in its content but in its implementation.”¹¹² Efforts also need to be focused on how the implementation of these laws, as they are created, can be more forceful to protect women and prevent the continuation of the practice of forced and early marriage.

¹⁰⁹ D.C. Criminal Code § 22-2705 (2007).

¹¹⁰ “H.R. 2103: International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009.” 111th Congress, 1st Session, 2009-2010, *introduced April 27, 2009, available at* <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-2103>.

¹¹¹ Rude-Antoine, Edwige, ed., “Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States,” Council of Europe, 2005, at 41. [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG\(2005\)1_E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Equality/PDF_CDEG(2005)1_E.pdf).

¹¹² *Id.*