



Early marriages in the Palestinian society

Underage marriage is a significant problem in Palestine and primarily involves girls.

- one in five girls marries before her 18th birthday,¹
- in 43% of marriages that were registered in 2014 the brides were younger than 19 years old.¹
- 670 brides were younger than 14 years old in 2014,¹

Early marriage violates girls' rights and often means an end to their schooling, forced sexual relations, and early childbearing. Moreover, girls who marry at a younger age are generally more vulnerable to spousal violence than girls who wait longer to marry. Child marriage often perpetuates a cycle of poverty, low education, high fertility, and poor health, which hinders societies' economic and social development.

➔ Sawa's response

In the first two months of 2016 Sawa Organization – supported by the Representative Office of Canada to the Palestinian Authority – implemented a community outreach and awareness raising project in and around East Jerusalem educating about children's rights, changing attitudes and discouraging early marriage. The project used a combination of interactive educational methodologies and targeted high schools students, their teachers and parents.

- ➔ 246 students (68 boys and 178 girls) took part in 16 awareness raising workshops;
- ➔ 55 parents took part in five workshops;
- ➔ 15 teachers participated in one teachers' workshop;

Sawa also launched a targeted **social media campaign on Facebook** including 16 images visualizing cultural believes about early marriage, popular and widespread in the Palestinian society. The campaign has reached an unprecedented success:

- ➔ It reached more than 7 million people;
- ➔ It received more than 200,000 likes, and was shared in more than 22,000 occasions;
- ➔ It spread way beyond Palestine, as images were viewed in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunis and Egypt too;
- ➔ <https://www.facebook.com/Sawa.Organization/insights/?section=navPosts>

Sample of public comments on our Facebook campaign

“Life is not only about marriage and children, life is deeper and more than this, and early marriage destroys all the natural stages of life, which the person should go through and live in all its details....Those norms and traditions should disappear from our societies, as they kill everything beautiful in our lives”.

“You now want to change our culture? Arab girls realize all their rights, and have a guaranteed future, and the “foolish” guy works all day long and spoils the girl with everything, and even European girls don’t get what our girls get...Our girls are spoiled, respected, they get everything easily...I live in Europe and I can see that our girls live a better life than those girls here.”

However, as many of the comments during the workshops and on our Facebook page have shown the fight against this harmful social practice is not over. Change in attitudes and behavior has a slow pace. More work is needed at all levels starting with an integrated approach targeting the entire family. Since families have tremendous influence in their daughters’ marriages, parents in Palestine need to be involved in the solutions and are key to ensuring a healthy transition to adulthood for all girls.

➔ **Take action against early marriage now.**

Please support our integrated outreach and educational work and enable Palestinian girls to fulfil their potential.