



ASIA/BANGLADESH - Alarms for child marriage, despite various initiatives and laws

Dhaka (Agenzia Fides) - "Early marriage is a big problem for Bangladesh. We cannot reduce maternal mortality and morbidity if we do not stop early marriage," Gias Uddin, a project manager for the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (FPAB), the largest family planning NGO in the country, told IRIN, the UN news service.

According to UNICEF's 2011 State of the World's Children report, about a third of women in Bangladesh aged 20-24 are married by the age of 15, and 66 percent percent of girls will wed before their 18th birthday – up 2 percent from 2009. The root causes of child marriage - the prospect of reduced dowry payments, and fears of sexual harassment - are continuing to prompt parents to marry girls off before they reach adulthood, according to Zinnat Afroze, a social development adviser at Plan International, Bangladesh. In many cases, parents marry off their daughters at an early age to prevent them from being stalked or sexually harassed. According to the 1929 national Child Marriage Restraint Act, it is illegal for parents to marry off children under 18. Occasionally the authorities have intervened to stop child marriages. "Early marriage means early pregnancy and there are serious health consequences of early pregnancy. The maternal mortality rate is high among girls who are married off at an early age," Plan's Afroze said. Meanwhile, government officials say they are doing what they can: "We are working to create massive awareness against early marriage through different campaigns across the country. The government has also taken steps so that the law is enforced properly," said Tariq-ul-Islam, secretary to the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs. (AP) (6/4/2011 Agenzia Fides)