# [ETHIOPIA: Child Marriage](http://catalyst.cm/new-blog-11/2015/7/2/ethiopia-child-marriage)

December 30, 2015

Catalyst

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In the Northern Amhara region of Ethiopia, two girls, ages 11 and 8, prepare for their marriage celebration. These pre-adolescent brides are about to be sold to men many years their senior. While in global decline, child marriage is still apparent in Ethiopia, with families selling their daughters into marriage as young as age five. The legal marriage age of 18 is widely ignored and 48% of rural women are married before the age of 15. In 2006, photographer Guy Calaf moved to Ethiopia. During his travels he photographed the young brides and their families.

Child marriage, which is broadly defined as marriage before the age of 18, is a practice that still exists in sub-Saharan, West, East and North Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Caribbean and even in some communities in Europe such as areas of France and North America with some U.S. states legally allowing children to marry under the age of 18 with parental consent. Children who are married off are often forced into the union and because of this it can also be referred to as forced marriage. While this practice might be seen as abhorrent in many cultures, in these communities, many families continue the practice because it is what they believe to be in their children’s best interest, or even, what they feel they must do to survive in cases of extreme poverty.

According to Pathfinder International, poverty is a defining factor as to why child marriage still exists. Giving a daughter away to marriage allows families to reduce expenses and in some traditions, receiving a dowry or bride price is common practice. Children coming from poor families are about twice as likely to marry before 18 as those from wealthier families. Child marriage is also deeply rooted in the traditions of these communities, with some families seeking to maintain family status within them. This is tied to the success of their children and when a daughter gets married, it is representative of her success. In many cultures, if a woman becomes too old for marriage it would mean a failure on part of their parents and be a risk her to her survival.