

Tenets of Different Faiths on Nutrition, WASH and Child Marriage

IMPROVED NUTRITION



REDUCED
CHILD MARRIAGE



INCREASED ENROLMENT
& ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOL

IMPROVED SANITATION AND
ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING
WATER

Islam

In Islam, marriage is a solemn covenant (*meethaqan ghaleezan*), one of the most significant forms of agreement in Islam and its purpose is to establish a successful relationship for achieving positive outcomes for all in the family.



The Quran terms marriage as a solemn oath:

And how could you take it away (marital gift) after you have given yourselves to one another, and she has received a most solemn pledge (مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا) from you? (Quran, 4:21)

Marriage is no child's play. It demands mature responsibility from both individuals—something children are not ready for. Therefore, the Quran terms marriage as a “most solemn pledge”.

In fact the phrase “*Meethaqan Galezaan*” (مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا) used in the marriage contract is the same as the contract made between God and His prophets.

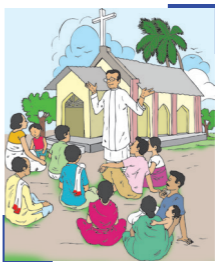
And when We exacted a covenant from the prophets, and from thee (O Muhammad) and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant (مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا). (Quran 33:7)

The Quran forbids forcing women to marry by compulsion:

O You who have chosen to be graced with belief! It is not lawful for you to force women into marrying or holding on to them in marriage against their will. (Quran, 4:19)

Christianity

Christians believe human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and look to the example of Jesus to live their lives. Jesus always treated the vulnerable with love and compassion.




Treat children with kindness and respect:

The recorded interactions between Jesus and children demonstrated kindness and respect:

Children were central to the new social order Jesus initiated. When he set a little child in the midst of the disciples and said, "*The kingdom of God belongs to such as these*" (Mark 10:14), he demonstrated enormous regard for children.

Whoever harms children deserves to be punished:

His reported words about causing children to stumble (Matthew 18:6), and the consequences for doing so are among the strongest in the New Testament.



"And everyone who commits an offense against one of these little ones who believe in me, it were profitable for him that a donkey's millstone would be hung around his neck and he be sunk in the depths of the sea." (Matthew 18.6, Aramaic Bible in Plain English)

Hinduism

Some verses of the Vedas discuss marriage, since married life is considered the second stage or span of human life according to the Vedic way of living. The following verses describe the basic requirements for entering married life, for young men.



"That man alone, who has taken the vows of Brahmacharya and has observed them strictly in his student life and perfected his knowledge, refined his character, and is well-dressed, enters married life in the full bloom of his youth." (Rig Veda III.8.4)

Girls were enjoined in the Vedas, not to be married young and to marry only after completion of their period of Bhramacharya ("conduct consistent with Brahma"—the virtue of celibacy when unmarried and fidelity when married), like their fellow brother disciples.

"An unmarried learned daughter should be married to a bridegroom who, like her, is learned. Never think of giving in marriage a daughter of very young age." (Rig Veda III 55:16)

Undernutrition and its linkage with child marriage

Child marriage is a violation of child rights, and has a negative impact on physical growth, health, mental and emotional development, and education opportunities.

Child marriage and early childbearing have significant implications for the health of the children born of young mothers. Econometric analysis suggests that in many countries, children of mothers younger than 18 are more likely to die by age five or be stunted than children of mothers older than 18, even after controlling for other factors.

Child undernutrition is very much a matter of gender for three main reasons:

1. It affects women more than it affects men due to the specific nutrition needs of women during adolescence, pregnancy, and lactation;
2. Widespread nutrition deprivation among women perpetuates an inter-generational cycle of nutrition deprivation in children. Undernourished girls grow up to become undernourished women who give birth to a new generation of undernourished children; Child marriage leads to this intergenerational deprivation among women
3. Sanitation issues compound the problem of undernutrition

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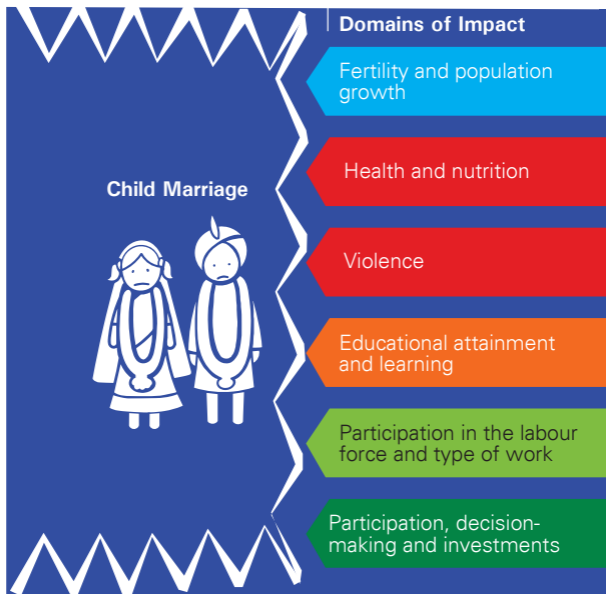


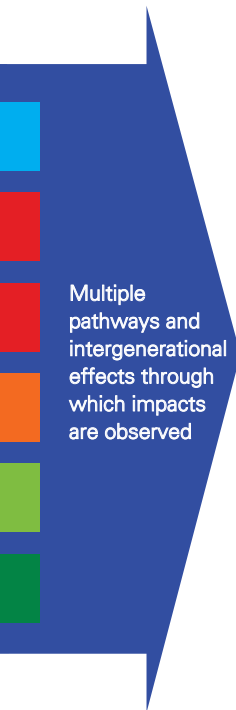
IMPROVED
SANITATION

INCREASED ENROLMENT
& ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOL



Causes and Consequences





Multiple pathways and intergenerational effects through which impacts are observed

Aggregate Measures Development of Impacts and Costs

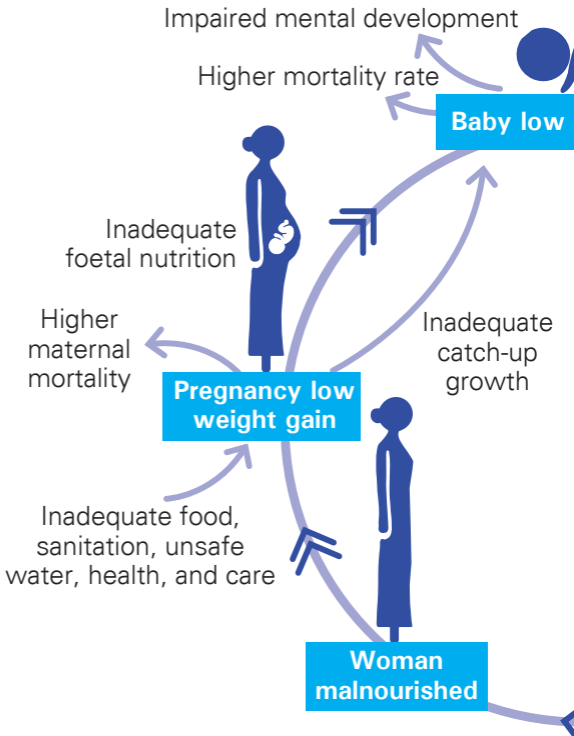
Earnings
productivity & consumption
per capita
.....
Private & public
expenditures
.....
Non-monetary
and social costs

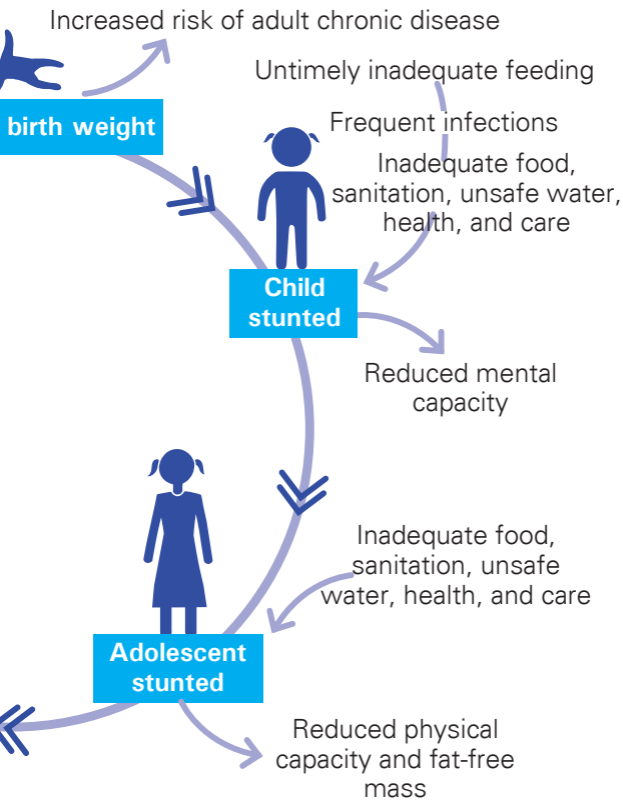
Development Outcomes



Perpetuation
of extreme
poverty and
inequality

Poor Nutrition Throughout the Life Cycle





What do different faiths say about cleanliness and hygiene (WASH)?

Islam

Importance of cleanliness—Ritual cleansing:


Before the sun awakens each day, and as the Call to praise the Holy Name of Allah (SWT) begins, Muslims perform the *Wudu* and *Ghusl*, the ritual washing and cleansing in preparation for holy prayer and worship.




The Quran beautifully emphasises the holy importance of cleanliness, not only for the body, but for its symbolism with regard to the purification of our souls. *Taharah* is an Arabic word for purity and its meaning is to be free from impurities, both spiritual and physical. Purity, being free from sin, is the key to prayer and a means to spiritual *taharah*.

“Oh, You who believe! When you rise to prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles.”
(Quran, 5:6, Sūrat I-Māidah)

While people generally consider cleanliness a desirable attribute, Islam makes it a fundamental aspect of faith.




“Truly, Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.”
(Al Baqarah 2:222)



“In it (mosque) are men who love to clean and to purify themselves. And Allah loves those who make themselves clean and pure.” (9:108)


Importance of clean water:

Water is one of the immense mercies that Allah (SWT) has bestowed upon us. It is the lifeblood of our planet, falling from the skies like benediction, so that it may flow and nourish ourselves, our children, and all of nature.




“And have you seen the water that you drink? Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? If We willed, We could make it bitter, so why are you not grateful?” (Al-Furqan, 56: 58-70)

Given that we pollute this gift from our Creator, let us lead the way and show our deepest gratitude to our Creator and build a world where everyone, everywhere has access to clean and safe water. This begins with our actions at home and in our communities to promote a healthy family and society by conserving water, and ensuring it is kept clean and free from pollution.



“And sent down upon you from the sky, rain by which to purify you and remove from you the evil of Satan.”
(Al-Anfal, 11)



“And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy, and we send down from the pure sky water”.
(Quran, 25:48, Al-Furqan)

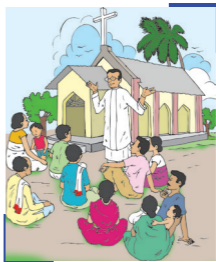
Importance of sanitation:

When people defecate in the open, they not only pollute the land and waters, but also aid the spread of diseases. As a result, every year, countless people become prone to serious illnesses and many; especially vulnerable children and those already fighting other infections or diseases, die as a result of poor sanitation practices and lack of access to clean toilets. For women and girls, the absence of access to toilets is especially devastating, as it makes them vulnerable to harassment, rape and loss of dignity. Many young girls drop out from schools mainly because their schools lack safe and enclosed toilet facilities.

The Prophet (PBUH) enjoined his followers to follow practices that do not harm others: *“Beware of the three acts that cause others to curse you: relieving yourselves in a watering place, on foot paths or shaded places.”*
(Abu Dawud, No 26)

Christianity

Water is a life giving force, essential for all and as is believed by people of other faiths, Christianity also recognises that water has been part of God's creation, since the beginning, for all living creatures. For Christians, water is important and holds a deep spiritual significance. Indeed, water is a metaphor for the new spiritual life promised by Jesus.



Jesus described himself as “living water”: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them, will never thirst. Indeed the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John, 4: 13-14)

Importance of water and cleanliness:

Water has an important quality. It gives us life: *“Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.” (Mark 9:41)* and washes away impurities. This physical cleanliness symbolises a new spiritual state of being. Water is used in baptism to symbolise being born into a new spiritual life. The Gospel tells us that Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan.

For Christians, physical cleanliness is a symbol of spiritual purity. *“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with clean water.”* (Hebrews, 10:22)



“Give thanks to the Lord, because He is good; His love is eternal. He built the Earth on the deep waters; His love is eternal.” (Psalm 136 v1, v6).

In the eyes of God, water and justice are meant to flow like a stream—continually available to enhance abundant life for all.



“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” (Isaiah 1.17)

“But let justice roll like a river; righteousness like a never-failing stream.” (Amos 5.24)

Early on it was recognised that human excreta was a source of disease and lead to filthy, polluted surroundings and it was important to dispose them off safely and clean oneself properly: *“... dig a hole and afterward cover up your excrement.”* (Deuteronomy 23: 12-14) and *“Outside the camp, you shall have a place set aside for latrine.”* (Deuteronomy 23: 12-13)

Hinduism

Water - the gift of life:

Our planet blessed with an abundance of water, is blessed with an abundance of life. Water is like the mother of all creatures, giving us life, giving our world beauty. Perhaps this is why in the Rig Veda, the waters, in the form of Apas, are described as mother.



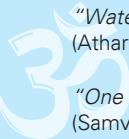
“Waters, you bring health and bliss.” (Samveda 2:9)

“O waters! Verily you are bliss-conferring! Being such, grant us food, and great and beautiful insight of the Supreme Principle.” (Mahanarayana Upanishad 1:54)

The Earth provides for all of us and sustains us. Hindus acknowledge her power of creation and sustenance: “O mother, with your oceans, rivers and other bodies of water, you gave us land to grow grains, on which our survival depends.” (Atharva Veda Samhita 3)

Cleanliness and sanitation:


Besides sustaining life, water is a wonderful purifier, cleaning everything in its wake and letting new life take root. It cleans our bodies and homes and ensures health and well-being. It is important that everyone conserves water and uses it judiciously to keep themselves and their surroundings clean.



“Waters cleanse humanity from the evil of pollution.”
(Atharva Veda Samhita 12-2-40)

“One who maintains cleanliness keeps away diseases.”
(Samveda)

In Hinduism or Sanatna Dharma, cleanliness is essential, whether for the practice of yoga or for religious ceremonies. *Shaucha* (hygiene) is the first of the five *niyamas* (precepts of yoga). Hence, both outer and inner hygiene are extremely important. A healthy body creates a healthy mind, and this makes the inner core purer. Our surroundings leave an impression and affect our bodies. If the surroundings are invigorating and clean, then purity prevails both inside and outside. Hence it is essential to keep our surroundings, our homes, water bodies, lands clean and free of waste and pollutants.



“May those born of thee, O Earth, be of our welfare, free from sickness and waste.” (Atharva Veda Samhita)

Some people wonder why open defecation and pollution of rivers and water bodies have suddenly become a grave issue, a taboo, when for centuries nobody objected. We do not realise that back then there were less people. Human habitations did not generate the volume of waste and pollutants that we generate today, which overwhelm our waters, lands, oceans and natural processes.

Our scriptures say that when times change we must also change in step with them. We should change our habits and behaviour.

We must bear in mind that the body is a temple: *“Shariramadyam khalu dharmasadhanam”* (The body is the primary tool for the practice of virtue). The body is a temple. Let us respect it, and follow practices that help us keep it and our surroundings clean. One of the easier ways of ensuring we keep ourselves clean and stop the spread of infectious diseases is by making use of toilets and keeping our surroundings clean.

What can be done?

The critical window of opportunity, when nutrition interventions offer children the best chance for survival and development to their full potential is girls' adolescence, women's pregnancy and children's first two years of life. After the age of two, the window closes and the opportunity for the child is lost.

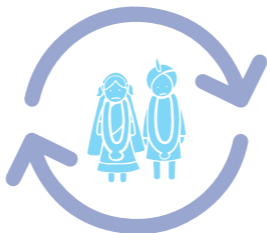
There are proven, high-impact nutrition interventions that can halve child undernutrition rates:

	Nutrition Specific	Nutrition Sensitive
1	Timely initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth	Marriage of girls only after 18 years
2	Exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life, Handwashing with soap before breastfeeding	Handwashing with soap <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ before preparing food ◆ before feeding baby ◆ after using the toilet ◆ after washing/cleaning baby's bottom ◆ after disposal of baby's faeces
3	Timely introduction of complementary foods at six months	Handwashing with soap before eating food and after defecation
4	Age-appropriate foods for children six months to two years	Using hygienic toilets
5	Safe and hygienic complementary feeding practices/ Good hygiene (cleanliness) practices prevent disease	Disposal of child faeces in hygienic toilet
6	Full immunisation and bi-annual vitamin A supplementation with deworming	Safe handling of drinking water <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Cover the water with a lid b. Use a ladle to pour water c. Don't touch drinking water with fingers
7	Appropriate feeding for children during and after illness	
8	Therapeutic feeding for children with severe acute malnutrition	
9	Adequate nutrition and anaemia control for adolescent girls	
10	Adequate nutrition and anaemia control for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers	

No marriage of girls before 18 and boys before 21

Legal framework to prevent child marriage and protect children:

- * The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, makes it illegal for girls under 18 years to marry and for boys under 21 years. Child marriage can be made voidable by the child but also within two years of becoming an adult.
- * Child marriage is a punishable offence with a fine up to INR 100,000, or up to two years of imprisonment, or both. It is a non-cognisable and non-bailable offence.
- * Dowry was prohibited in 1961 by the Dowry Prohibition Act, with a fine up to INR 15,000, or the dowry amount, whichever is higher, and imprisonment for between six months and five years.



- ★ Other laws that may provide protection to a child bride include the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, the Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.
- ★ Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act 2005
- ★ Childline 1098 to report child rights violation including complaining against child marriage

Sanitation, Hygiene, Water

I. Use a hygienic toilet

- a. At home, schools, health centres, Anganwadi centres and market places
- b. To dispose baby's faeces

II. Wash your hands with soap and water:

- a. Before preparing foods
- b. Before feeding baby
- c. After using the toilet and washing or cleaning baby's bottom
- d. Disposal of baby's faeces

III. Safe handling of drinking water

- a. Cover the water with a lid
- b. Use a ladle to pour water
- c. Don't touch drinking water with fingers

