



## All Dressed in White: Innocence Lost

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**“Child Marriage is a practice that robs millions of girls of their childhood, their rights and their dignity.” – Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

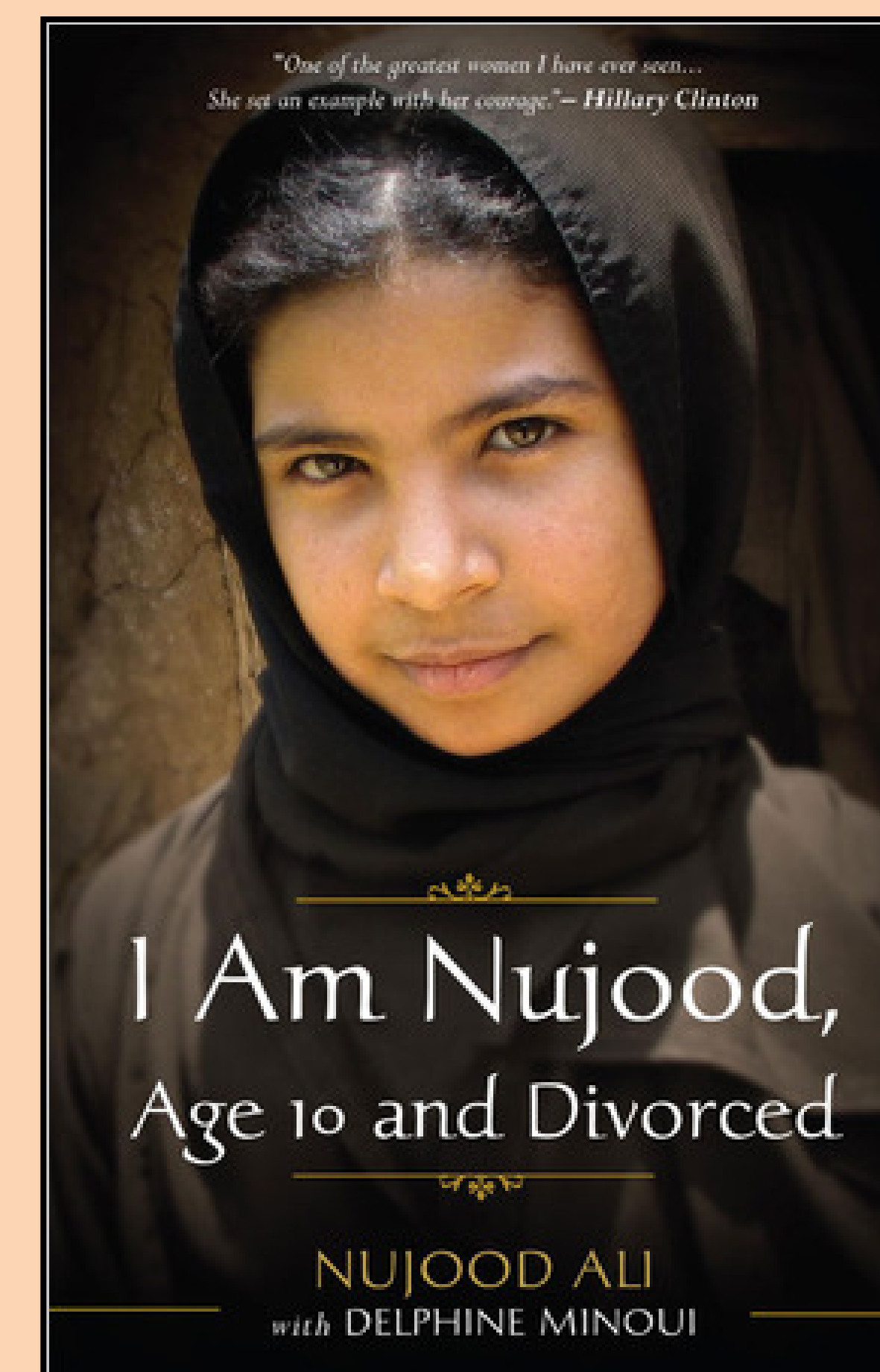
### Introduction:

Child Marriage, defined as a formal or informal union before the age of 18, is a reality for some children in some parts of the world. Child Marriage is a worldwide phenomena that can lead to a lifetime of disadvantages and deprivations. In 2014, UNICEF estimated that more than 700 million women that are alive today were married as children. The practice of subjecting these girls to marriage before they are 18 is exercised in developing countries like Yemen, India and Guatemala. Factors that aid this old age practice vary from region to region. Though these countries may have identical reasons for the practice, some of them hold much more weight than others.

**India:** India is sixth in place when it comes to Child Marriages, even though the legal marriage age for females is 18 and 21 for males. According to the United Nations, one in every three girls in India are Child Brides. The reasons behind this archaic practice in India are based more on traditions and customs than on religion.

**Guatemala:** Guatemala is predominantly a poor country, the most populous in Central America. It also has the highest fertility rate in Latin America. The birth rate is three children per woman and is significantly higher among rural and indigenous populations. In Guatemala, the legal marriage age is 14 years but to most it's just a suggestion.

**Yemen:** Yemen has one of the highest rates of Child Marriages in The Middle East. The difference between Yemen and India is that Child Marriages are based heavily on religion and poverty. Sharia Law is the code of law derived from the Koran and from the teachings and examples of Mohammed, who married a young child. This has led many to believe that it is correct to marry their own girls young as well.



### Risks and Consequences of Child Marriage:

#### High birth rates /Low birth weight

Petén has the highest maternal mortality rate in Guatemala at 172 deaths for every 100,000 births. The infant mortality rate is also high at 40 deaths per 1,000 births.

#### Obstetric Fistula:

A by product of pregnancy which occurs to girls because their bodies are inadequate to give birth. Due to this, a tear is created between the vagina and anus, which leads to other medical issues.

#### Lack of education

The girls that are getting married young have no formal education, and as a result are forced to live a life exclusively as a housewife.

#### Lack of healthcare /STD/ Death

In countries like these, the women have no official rights so many of them do not receive proper medical exams. Oftentimes their husbands force themselves upon them, with no protection. This can result in a deadly combination, which can cause the contraction of S.T.D.'s and even death of the bride.

#### Vicious cycle of poverty

Most families do not make enough money to support a large progeny. The father is the only one who is allowed to work since the mother is not educated enough to have a job and does not have the time because she cares for all the children.

**Solutions:** In Yemen there HAVE been movements to create a law that declares a legal age for marriage but it has come under fire because of the conservative values of a powerful party. Nonetheless, some families are realizing that this practice is harmful are beginning to change their minds. UNICEF and Girls Not Brides are two of many organizations that have come to the aid of these young girl with various programs that will enable them to have a normal life.