

Van: Human Rights Watch <news@hrw.org>
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Aan: Veerle Solia
Onderwerp: Sexual Assault in DC | The Trials of Child Brides

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Dear Veerle,

Sexual assault is the most underreported violent crime in the United States, partly because victims fear their cases will not be taken seriously or that police will not believe them. Hopefully this will be changing soon in Washington, DC. For nearly two years, Human Rights Watch investigated how Washington, DC's Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) handled sexual assault cases. We found that more than 40 percent of reported sexual assault in which survivors underwent forensic exams were not properly investigated.

The MPD responded to our findings, laid out in the report *Capitol Offense*, by [changing certain aspects of its sexual assault investigations](#). Because of these improvements, today's assault survivors have a better chance of being taken seriously by police. But more changes are needed to secure justice for victims.



Liesl Gerntholtz

Director Women's Rights Division



The Trials of Child Marriage

[RESEARCHERS](#)

Akech loved to study and dreamed of becoming a nurse. But when she was 14, the uncle who was raising her told her she was too old for school and forced her to marry a man she described as old, gray-haired, and married to another woman with whom he had several children.

Akech, from South Sudan, begged her uncle to let her stay in school. He refused. "Girls are born so that people can eat," he told her. "All I want is to get my dowry." The old man paid 75 cows for Akech. She tried to resist the marriage, but her male cousins beat her severely, accused her of dishonoring her family, and forced her to go to the man's house.

Like many girls in South Sudan, Akech was married off to the highest bidder. She never saw the inside of a classroom again.

In Yemen, South Sudan, and other parts of the world, instead of going to school or spending time with their friends and families, girls, some as young as 8, are married – often to much older men. If the girls don't want to marry, their families generally force them. After they are wed, life often changes for the worse.

Girls often drop out of school after marrying. In particularly conservative countries, on the eve of their marriage the girls may not even know what sex is – let alone birth control – and they quickly become pregnant. In part because they're not physically or mentally fully developed, they can face a lifetime of health problems. Girls who marry young are also at a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse.

Human Rights Watch has researched the issue extensively, honing in on child marriage in Yemen, where 14 percent of girls are married before age 15 and 52 percent before 18, as well as in South Sudan, where close to half of girls between 15 and 19 are married. This is what we found.

[Our findings >>](#)

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Agnes Odhiambo

Agnes Odhiambo is our Africa women's rights researcher. Before joining us, she worked on women's rights in southern and eastern Africa focusing on HIV/AIDS and media and women's rights. Agnes holds a doctorate from the University of Witwatersrand. She specializes in maternal health, obstetric fistula, and early marriage.



Gauri van Gulik

Gauri's research and advocacy focuses on Europe and Central Asia, where she specializes in domestic violence, reproductive health, and women migrants. She previously worked for Marie Stopes International and the European Parliament. Gauri studied European law in Maastricht and human rights at the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation.

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