

IRAN: 1500 cases of child marriage in one province only

Radio Farda (31.05.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2KvEnGF> – Figures from Iran suggest child-marriage is rampant in the country, with girls younger than 14 forced to take husbands.

The practice is most prevalent in rural areas with no age-limit on the age of the men that the girls may be forced to suffer as a spouse.

More than 1,500 cases of child marriage have been registered in the province of Hamedan, western Iran, a local-judiciary authority has revealed.

Saeed Golestani, the area's crime-prevention deputy, said 1,596 underage girls were pushed into marriages during the Iranian-calendar year ending 20 March 2018.

He added the coercion of girls was encouraged to anchor boys to their hometowns.

“Villagers of Hamedan,” he said, “believe that when the boys come of age, they leave their places of birth in search of a job and become reluctant to marry their fellow villagers.”

Golestani added that girls who reached the age of 15 were more

difficult to force into marriages as they were considered too old.

Shari'a courts can permit girls aged under 15 to marry, with the demand that the marriage be registered – in many cases, parents did not wait for a court ruling to give away their daughters, only registering the marriage years later, the deputy said.

There is no upper limit on the age that a girl's husband might be.

Golestani's announcement followed news reports of 1,400 girls aged under-14 having been married in Zanzan province, with 1,054 girls in northern Khorasan.

In April, the Zanzan governor-general's office estimated that 36,000 underage girls were forced into marriages across Iran, though only Zanzan, Hamedan and Khorasan have released figures.

There are no signs that the phenomenon is on the decline.

A bill to stop child marriages was recently blocked in the Majles, Iran's parliament, by legislators who included women.

Iran's Civil Code allows underage girls' to be forced into

marriages by fathers who have a court permit.

Ironically, children as young as 13 can be married in Iran while they have to wait until the age of 18 before they can vote or drive cars.

The story of Raha, an 11-year old girl forced to marry a 50-year old man led to heated debate in February. The man already has a wife and seven children. He paid around \$1,500 to Raha's parents to marry her.

After strong public outcry the government intervened and transferred Raha to a care center.

The ultraconservative ayatollahs insist that a girl can be allowed to marry once she reaches puberty, while there are some dissenting clerics who condemn child marriage as "illegitimate and against religious principles".

Ayatollah Bayat Zanjani told ILNA news website in February, "Since marrying underage children is unfair, it is illegitimate".

But a 99-year old ultraconservative ayatollah announced, "Setting a legal age for girls to marry is against religious regulations since only fathers have the right to decide when to give away their daughters, regardless of their age."