

WOMEN'S AGENCY IN MARRIAGE AND PARTNERSHIPS

Laws, social norms and access to economic resources shape women's agency in marriage and partnerships.

Women's agency to enter marriage

Women should be able to choose freely whether to enter a partnership, when and with whom. Children, by definition, cannot consent to marriage.



1 in 5 young women aged 20 to 24 were married as children

42 countries and territories have legalized same-sex unions or marriage

But, in 68 countries, consensual sex between same-sex partners is against the law.

Women's agency within marriage

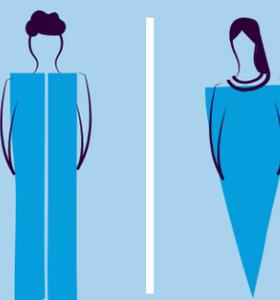
Within marriage, women's rights are often curtailed by discriminatory laws.



Despite progress, in many countries when a woman marries, her rights to move freely, work and make decisions for herself are stripped away.

Women's agency to exit marriage

Even where divorce is accessible to women, lack of economic resources may prevent them from leaving.



In some countries, women lack the same rights as men to initiate a divorce or may lose custody of their children if they do, which can lock them into unhappy or abusive marriages.

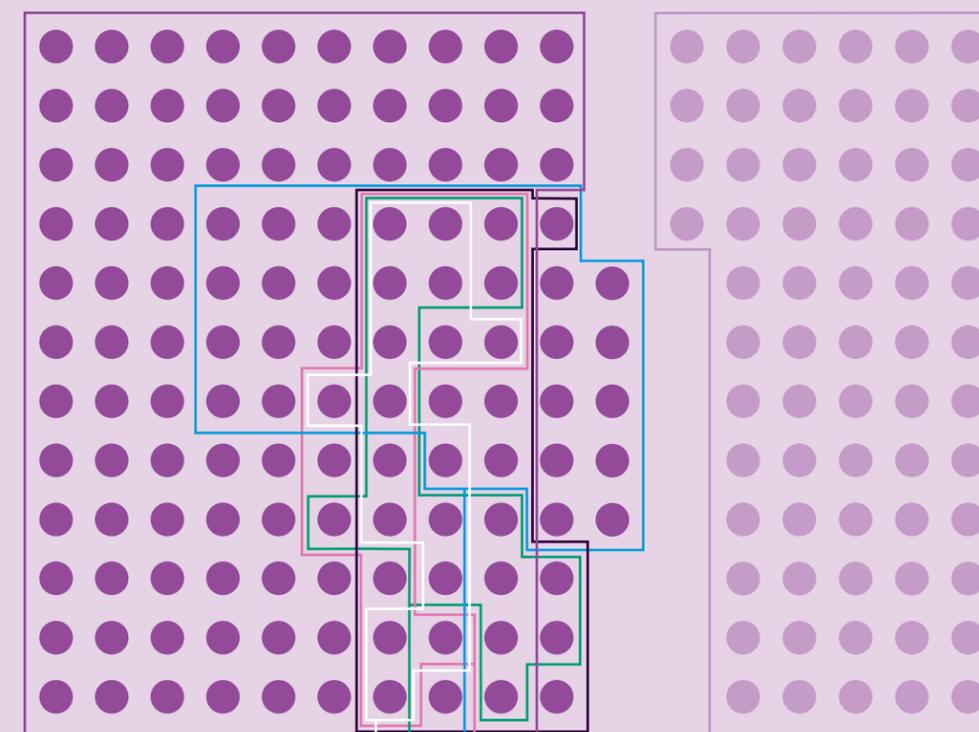
Laws that affect women's agency within marriage.

1. Compared to married men, do married women have the same right to:

- travel outside the home?
- get a job or pursue a trade or profession?
- choose where to live?
- apply for a passport?

2. Does legislation explicitly criminalize marital rape?

3. Are married women required by law to obey their husbands?



NO

In 17 countries, there are restrictions on married women traveling outside their homes

In 19 countries, married women do not have the same rights as married men to get a job or pursue a trade or profession

In 31 countries, married women lose the right to choose where to live

In 37 countries, married women are not allowed to apply for a passport

YES

In 111 countries, marital rape is not explicitly criminalized in law

In 19 countries, married women are required by law to obey their husbands

In 64 countries, marital rape is explicitly criminalized and women are not required by law to obey their husbands. Married women have the same rights as married men to travel outside their homes, get a job, choose where to live and apply for a passport

Source: UNICEF 2018a; Ramón Mendos 2019 and World Bank 2018e.

Note: The analysis on laws that affect women's agency within marriage is based on a sample of 189 countries and territories.