

I'm too young. I'm not ready to grow up.
I don't love him.



I don't want to get married. He's so old.
Who is this man?

Married Too Young

Child brides have no choice or chance for life

By Marielena Zuniga

Takia* is about to be married. She is 9 years old. As she stands there, the din of drums beating in the background, the villagers murmuring and waiting for the ceremony to begin, she sobs, tears sliding down her small face. She does not want to be here. She wants to be playing and laughing with her friends, wading in the nearby river, or sitting at her desk in school.

Instead, she stands next to her future husband, at least 50 years of age. Her father has insisted on this union as a way to secure his daughter's future. Besides, he already has seven children by three wives and another mouth to feed is too costly.

"One day my father told me I was to be married. I was never asked if I loved him or not. But it was my duty to respect the decision of my parents," says the girl from Niger.

Two years later, when Takia is 11, her husband consummates the marriage. That same year, she gives birth to a daughter.

Rakiya,* also from Niger, is 11 when she is betrothed. She had dreamed of an education for herself, but never sees the inside of a classroom. Instead, she is forced to marry at age 12. Her husband repeatedly rapes her, and her father beats her into submitting to her husband. Soon after she weds, she delivers her first child—two months before her 13th birthday.

By the time Rakiya is 20, she is widowed with five children and a sixth one on the way. She sells everything to feed her children. When nothing is left, she sells herself.

Such stories are shocking. Yet, for countless girls, child marriage—sometimes called early marriage or forced marriage—is a harsh reality. Defined as marriage before age 18 in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is illegal in many countries. Yet the practice thrives in Southern Asia, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of the Middle East. Girls 8 or 10 years of age—and sometimes even younger—are forced to marry much older men.

Worldwide, an estimated 51 million girls are child brides. In South Asia, more than 48 percent of 15-24 year-olds were married before they reached 18, according to a UNICEF report. According to that same survey, in Africa, this figure is 42 percent and rises to more than 60 percent in parts of East and West Africa; in Latin America and the Caribbean, the figure is 29 percent. If this trend continues, experts say that more than 100 million girls will become child brides within the next 10 years.

The causes for child marriage are complex and interwoven, and can include poverty, cultural norms, gender inequality, and lack of education, among others. The consequences for girls are devastating and lifelong, ranging from domestic violence and abuse, to dire health problems such as HIV and obstetric fistula.

At its root, early marriage takes away a girl's childhood, says Anju Malhotra, vice president for research, innovation and impact at the Washington, D.C.-based International Center for Research on Women <icrw.org>. The child bride is deprived of the opportunity to play, to blossom, to learn, to really be a child or adolescent.

"They don't get to fall in love, they don't get to be partners in their marriage the way they would like to be," she says. "Instead, they often are downtrodden in their marriages and at the beck and call of much older husbands."

The ICRW filmed videos of girls taken for marriage very young in Ethiopia. "I was at home screening one of those videos," Malhotra recalls, "when my 11-year-old daughter walked into the room and said, 'She's only a year older than me.' The vision for my daughter was a world of difference apart from this girl, who was fetching water and cooking and taking care of a family and bearing the weight of labor. The deprivation of childhood is a huge, huge consequence and it's really short-cutting the rest of her life."

Not only does it cut short a girl's life, but often a girl attempts to take her life rather than marry. When 14-year-old Falmata** of Chad learned of her impending marriage to a 65-year-old friend of her father's, she tried to convince

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Child marriage violates human rights

Does child marriage occur in the developed world? Although not often, surprisingly, it does occur. Marriage laws in the United States, for instance, vary from state to state—but most states require parental consent for those under 18 years of age. But there have been reports in the U.S. and other developed countries of secret illegal weddings, particularly among immigrant groups whose cultural traditions are at odds with the laws of their new countries, and other “outsider” groups.

NBC Dateline spotlighted the Irish Travelers in a 2002 segment that provided little-known insights into this tight-knit, closed community with members in states including South Carolina, and Texas. Traditionally, parents arrange marriages when their children are young (although these arrangements can be broken). Girls tend to marry early, sometimes as young as 12.

The subject of child brides received great scrutiny during the April 2008 rescue of numerous underage mothers living on a ranch owned by a polygamist sect in Texas. Its leader, Warren S. Jeffs, was convicted of forcing a 14-year-old girl into marriage and sexual relations, a sentence he is currently appealing.

Britain has reported girls as young as 9 being taken from their immigrant communities and secretly shipped overseas to be married to older men. Conversely, documented cases exist of immigrant families bringing in underage brides for their British-born sons.

Forcing a young girl to marry and engage in sexual relations is a devastating violation of her human rights—regardless of her country or culture. It is incumbent upon wealthier, developed nations to monitor this activity within their own countries, as they work to stem the practice elsewhere.—*M.Z.*

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her mother to oppose the marriage. But her mother, who had also married young, was powerless to change the decision.

Falmata ran away twice, once to an aunt, but men from the village stopped her and returned her to her father. He beat her and then shut her up in a small room, intending to leave her there until the marriage day. Dousing herself with kerosene from a lamp in the room, Falmata set herself on fire. Alerted by the smell of smoke, her mother ran in to find her daughter almost entirely burned. She required extended hospital care with third-degree burns over most of her body.



Causes of child marriage

While many factors promote child marriage, poverty is key. Families with limited resources often see it as the only way to provide for their daughter’s future. When parents marry off a young daughter, they have one less mouth to feed and also can ensure she is supported.

“In many countries, marriage is such an important rite of passage, and women’s lives are often only seen in terms of wives and mothers,” says Malhotra. “So it’s a foregone conclusion that they should be married. And marrying them early seems a safe and smart thing to do for many parents because they’re taking care of their duty to their daughters. Even parents who love their daughters very often find no alternative other than marriage for them.”

Besides poverty, however, other reasons continue to drive the practice. Much of child marriage is deeply embedded in cultural traditions and gender discrimination. Many families marry their daughters before puberty to uphold family honor and avoid the risk of their daughters becoming pregnant outside of marriage.

“Many feel it’s good for a young girl to get married as soon as possible, during her puberty,” says Helen Amdemikael, UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) assistant representative in Ethiopia <unfpa.org>. “If she doesn’t do that, they feel it will be difficult to suppress her sexual urges and it would be difficult to domesticate her. Catch her early, catch her young before she gets too smart, before she starts asking too many questions.”

Malhotra agrees, pointing to traditional norms that ensure sexual purity of girls “so they don’t go astray or are violated before they’re married.” Social pressures are also a factor. By marrying their daughter to a “good” family, parents establish social ties between tribes or clans and improve their social status. If their daughter is not married by a certain age, parents often perceive they will be breaking social norms and neighbors will be talking about their families.

However, ICRW research has shown that a growing number of parents, when approached individually, want their daughters to marry later and have more aspirations for their future. “They see their daughters can have success and health if they marry later, but they’re so worried about social pressures, they don’t make that happen,” Malhotra says.

A daughter can also be used as the only commodity a family has left to be traded, and sometimes, girls can also be used as currency. In some cultures, the “bride price” is tied to the age at which girls marry. Bride price is an amount of money, property or wealth paid by the groom or his family to the parents of a woman

upon marriage of their daughter to the groom. The younger the girl, the higher the bride price and the sooner the economic burden of raising the girl is lifted.

Deadly consequences

Early and forced marriage and childbearing pose serious risks for girls who, physically, emotionally and mentally, are not ready. Damaging effects are widespread and perpetuate an unending cycle of gender inequality, poverty, sickness, and often death. Girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than women in their 20s, and pregnancy is the leading cause of death in developing countries for girls and young women ages 15 to 19, says Jennifer Wilen, assistant program officer for Francophone Africa for the NYC-based International Women's Health Coalition <iwhc.org>.

"Other vulnerabilities include obstetric fistula, not only the physical consequences, but the social stigma that goes along with that," Wilen says. This condition results when a young woman, whose body is underdeveloped, gives birth—tearing her vagina, bladder and/or rectum and causing urine and feces leakage. Fistula patients are commonly poor women, ages 15 to 20, many of whom report early and forced marriage. Perpetually soiled and smelling, they are often ostracized by their communities and live in shame (Read the March/April/May 2007 *Best for Women* article, *A Brighter Future: Restoring Dignity to Women with Obstetric Fistula*).

Married girls are also at risk of contracting HIV and AIDS from their often significantly older, and often unfaithful, husbands. Families and communities marry their girls in the belief they will be safer, but Amdemikael of the UNFPA finds this ironic.

"Girls are married to a man who is sexually experienced ... the girls don't have access to HIV information, and overall they have low negotiating capacity in the marriage," Amdemikael says.

Compared to their peers who marry at later ages, girls who marry before 15 are also more likely to experience domestic violence. That abuse usually continues 30 or 40

years, often throughout the women's lifespan, Wilen says.

"Many times people think of domestic violence as physical abuse, but there are multiple forms," she adds, "including sexual, verbal, emotional, psychological and economic abuse. Girls who marry younger are often abandoned by their husbands and kicked out on the streets with nowhere to go. They're left homeless and if their families won't or can't take them in, and with no education or skills, they are left with no means of support. Often, they turn to sex work."

No chance for education

Child marriage also impedes girls' education. After marriage, young girls' access to formal education is severely limited because of domestic burdens, childbearing and social norms that view marriage and schooling as incompatible. In the Amhara region of Ethiopia, for example, 30 percent of girls who were not in school said that the primary reason was marriage.

Rohini* from India had to give up her dreams of school when, at 15, she married a 21-year-old man. "I did not want to be married," she says. "I had other plans for my life. I wanted to continue studying." But Rohini's parents wanted the marriage and she had no say in the decision.

"I cried a lot and was afraid," she says. Since she had no child to care for, she thought she might be able to return to school. But her husband didn't want her to study. So, today, Rohini stays inside and does chores.

The education a girl receives, however, is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry, according to ICRW research. The organization reports that girls with eight or more years of schooling are less likely to marry earlier than girls with zero to three years of education.

Overall, the life a girl has after marrying so young is nothing like the life she imagined. In another study in Nepal, the ICRW asked girls to give them a picture of what their youth looked like. What they shared was not the reality, but what they wanted their lives to be, says Malhotra.

Taking Action

Education is an important part of preventing child marriage. By participating in the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards program, clubs can provide women with the resources they need to improve their education, skills, and employment prospects. Additionally, women receiving the award serve as role models for their daughters. When girls have educated mothers, their own chances of receiving an education increase, decreasing their vulnerability and making them less likely to become child brides.

Clubs can apply for Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls to help fund projects that provide girls with alternatives to early marriage. Start projects that teach girls life skills such as how to generate incomes, and provide them with information on reproduction, contraception and other important topics.

Clubs can raise awareness about child marriage by using the Soroptimist white paper on the topic, "Unhappily Ever After: The plight of child and mail-order brides." Distribute copies of the paper at community events, or use it to create an op-ed or letter to the editor and send it to local media.

Clubs in the U.S. can rally support for the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009. Encourage local communities to lobby their legislators to support the Act so that it can be signed into law.

U.S. legislation aims to prevent child marriages

Efforts to end child marriage in the developing world depend, in large part, on support and financial aid from the developed world. Toward that end, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed key provisions of the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009. The bill authorizes U.S. foreign assistance funding for community-based efforts to prevent child marriage, and provides educational and economic opportunities to girls in the developing world.

More than 40 leading human rights, development and health organizations are supporting the legislation, and are urging the U.S. Senate to pass these provisions as well so it can be signed into law.

“If enacted—and implemented—this policy would make real strides toward ensuring that the fundamental human rights of girls are protected,” says Kelly Castagnaro, director of communications, International Women’s Health Coalition <iwhc.org>. “Girls everywhere deserve a choice and a chance.”

U.S. Representative Betty McCollum (MN-4), the bill’s lead sponsor, states: “It is deeply troubling that girls, little girls only 9 to 10 years old, are being given as child brides to men sometimes decades older, putting these girls at greater risk of contracting HIV, dying in childbirth, delivering underweight babies or living in extreme poverty.”

The manner in which a country treats women and children says a great deal about its cultural and societal values, adds Senator Richard J. Durbin (D-IL), the Senate bill’s lead sponsor. “Young teenage girls who are forced to marry face serious health risks and are often less educated than their unmarried peers,” he says. “This bill will bring this harmful practice to an end and give millions of girls around the globe hope for a better future.”—M.Z.

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“So they told us, a young girl goes to school at 5; at 11 or 12 she menstruates and makes friends; then she graduates, goes to college and falls in love; at 22 she marries; and at 25 she negotiates with her husband about contraceptives and she may start a business with him,” she says.

“But when we asked mothers what life was like for young girls in their communities, they told us, ‘She gets pulled out of school at 11 or 12, and she marries at 15,’ and then they stopped,” Malhotra shares. “The girl’s life is over. Mothers were seeing what was really happening, but girls wanted to live a life they couldn’t have.”

Working toward solutions

As deplorable as the plight of the child bride is, some progress is being made. Research shows that in countries where poverty has decreased, such as Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, the incidence of child marriage has also declined. And in Bangladesh and Taiwan, studies prove that when jobs are available to girls, both daughters and parents become interested in delaying marriage.

Media attention also can raise awareness of the issue and prompt change. After a highly publicized story in 2008 in which a 10-year-old Yemeni girl fled her husband two months after being married and successfully obtained a divorce, Yemen increased the legal age for marriage from 15 to 18 years.

Governments, NGOs and many development agencies and local organizations are also working in a variety of ways to raise awareness about the adverse consequences of child marriage. Programs and policies are aimed at educating the community, engaging local and religious leaders, involving parents and empowering girls through education and employment.

“In India and Ethiopia, for example, we’ve learned that interventions that involve parents and community leaders can be successful in a relatively short time,” Malhotra says.

The Life Skills Education Program, for example, developed by ICRW and the Institute for Health Management, Pachod (an NGO), has worked with a community in Maharashtra, India, to develop a one-year life skills course for girls that focuses on self-sufficiency and covers a wide range of practical lessons, including how to negotiate conversations with their parents.

“Within two years of implementing the program, the median age of marriage for girls increased by one year to 17,” Malhotra says.

The ICRW is also rallying support for the child-bride legislation (H.R. 3175 and S. 1998) before the U.S. Congress to curb child marriage as part of broader development efforts (see sidebar). The organization also works toward building a larger network of international and national organizations mobilizing against this issue.

Education and other grassroots efforts

One of the primary solutions to delaying early marriage, many agree, is education. “Education is a key factor that can eliminate this epidemic of early and forced marriage,” Wilen says. Based in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the IWHC works to empower young girls to resist early and forced marriage through comprehensive sexuality education programs and policy advocacy at the local, national and international levels.



A girl at a local primary school in Hodeidah Governorate, Yemen. UNICEF, which supports the school with books, learning materials and other supplies, has condemned the practice of child marriage in Yemen and other countries where it remains an issue.

Photo credit: © UNICEF/NYHQ2007-1644/Giacomo Pirozzi

In the extreme north of Cameroon, the organization is working with the Association pour la Promotion et l'Autonomie des Droits de la Fille (APAD), a group of “survivors” of early and forced marriage—girls who have been thrown out of their homes by their husbands or who have managed to escape these marriages. Some are living with HIV and many of them have one child, if not more.

“APAD banded together to do two things,” Wilen says. “They’re receiving skills training so they can generate income to support themselves—and they’re spending time educating communities where they live about the causes and consequences of child marriage, as well as the innate rights that girls should be afforded to choose whether or not they want to get married and to whom.”

The UNFPA is another organization with a history of supporting interventions at the grassroots level, helping to create access to literacy programs for young girls, combining that with sexual reproductive and health issues, and introducing livelihood skills. Cultural sensitivity and community engagement is key, adds Amdemikael.

“It’s really critical to create an enabling environment by bringing in communities and having dialogues on a bimonthly basis,” she says. “This is a tested approach that U.N. agencies have been using for a number of years. It’s an interactive tool that helps to discuss issues, look at pressing problems and challenges, and ask where these practices come from.”

Soroptimist International of the Americas works to prevent child marriages by giving girls and women tools, skills and edu-

cational opportunities to achieve financial empowerment and independence. Through its programs and initiatives, including the Women’s Opportunity Awards (which provide head-of-household women cash grants to obtain education and/or skills training), the organization strives to effect change on a fundamental level.

“We believe education is the most significant factor to ensure that girls avoid early marriage,” states Soroptimist’s senior director of program services, Lori Blair. “And the best way to achieve the sustained education of girls is to make sure their mothers are educated.

“When a mother is educated, the chances of her girl children receiving education increase dramatically. And this, of course, diminishes their vulnerability. Our major program, the Women’s Opportunity Awards, addresses this directly by providing educational opportunities to women so they can create better lives for themselves and their families.”

On many levels—governmental and non-governmental—efforts must be supported to delay marriage, advocates agree. And while countries and communities continue to lag in political will, the girls themselves live day-to-day with the devastating consequences of being married too young.

Rakiya, who was widowed with five children and a sixth on the way before she was 20, resolved to find a new way of life. After four years in the sex trade, today she sells beans and cakes by the side of the road.

“The ignorance of our people leads to child marriage,” she says. “They believe the girl will spoil, not knowing it is wrong.”

Takia, who was married when she was 11 and gave birth that same year, says she is “resigned to her destiny.” When asked what she would do differently if she had a choice, she answers, “I would have wanted to wait and find the one I love. But now it is too late. Now I prefer not to think about it. I don’t have any options. It is difficult for me, and it is difficult for the whole country.” 🌐

* Takia’s, Rakiya’s and Rohini’s stories are taken from ICRW’s “Too Young to Wed: Child Marriage in Their Own Words.”

** Falmata’s story was taken from “Before She’s Ready” by World Vision.

Marielena Zuniga is SIA’s staff writer. Winner of the 2009 Croly Award, she is a long-time contributor to *Best for Women* magazine.

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In the next issue: Assisted Reproductive Technology. Please email Editor Jessica Levinson <jessica@soroptimist.org> with relevant information.

membership



Follow (Up) the Leader and Make a Great Impression!

Have you ever conducted an interview with a potential employee who was unapologetically late for the meeting, unprepared and wearing workout clothes? Then, he/she never sent a thank-you note?

It happens so quickly—the chance to be a shining star or a total flop. Some say it takes as little as three seconds to make an impression (good or bad). If that is true, it took longer to read the headline of this article!

For nearly 90 years, Soroptimist's mission has been to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world. In order to be successful, our clubs have, and still must, evolve and grow along with the ever-changing times. And that includes making a positive first impression with every person who comes in contact with Soroptimist. By keeping the door "open" and impressing new and potential members, we can assure the sustainability of our organization well into the future.

Soroptimist headquarters receives about a dozen membership inquiries every week through the SIA website, which are acknowledged and then forwarded on to the appropriate regions. In a recent survey of potential members, half the respondents said that following their initial contact with Soroptimist, no one responded back to them about becoming a member. NO ONE! Hard to believe, yes, but it's true.

On the upside, the survey reported potential members had a positive perception of current members, when they met them in person. According to website visitors/potential members, Soroptimist members are:

- Focused on helping women and girls in their community
- Positive about their Soroptimist experiences
- Warm and welcoming
- Successful business and professional women
- Focused on helping women and girls around the world.

People like what they see in our organization. They support the mission and are looking for an opportunity where they can be involved, make a difference, and work with others toward common goals. We've got their attention and this is the time to strike—while the iron is hot!

Follow-up is an essential piece of the puzzle when wooing new members into your Soroptimist club. Besides the obvious benefit of gaining a new member, there are several other advantages to adding this personal touch to your recruitment repertoire.

Help them remember Soroptimist and you

You are the ambassador for a wonderful organization and are the expert when it comes to your club and the activities it organizes. Can you have too many friends and acquaintances? Will another business contact put your rolodex over the edge? The answer, probably, is "no."

Find out how you "match" each other

This is a chance to see what perspectives expect from membership and how that corresponds with your club. Are their perceptions and expectations in-line with our mission? What are their strengths—what are they interested in bringing to the table and how can your club use those skills?

Impress them

Because many other organizations do not follow up, you'll stand out from the crowd. Don't worry about appearing like a pushy salesperson. By carefully and thoughtfully following up, your sincere passion for Soroptimist will be evident.

As our world continues to move at a phenomenal pace, people can pass judgment quickly. We only have one chance (three seconds!) to make a first impression—and bad ones are practically irreversible. Without follow-up with potential members, we are at a disadvantage in the realm of competing volunteer organizations. Think about how you came to know

Soroptimist. Think about the experiences and friendships you've gained over time. By following up, you are building relationships with potential members who might lay the foundation for Soroptimist's continued success.

So, don't be like the interviewee who shows up late, unprepared and under-dressed. Share the Soroptimist experience and make a great first impression by following up with all your potential members! 🌍

By Nicole Simmons
Membership Director

Email: nicole@soroptimist.org

Follow-Up Tools & Tips

Use the resources found on the SIA website to optimize your follow-up arsenal!

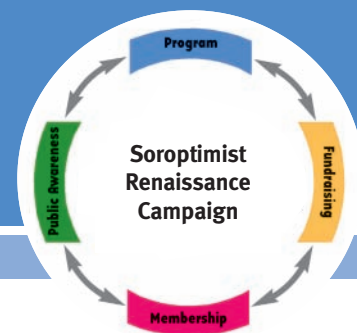
Soroptimist 101—A great tool for educating new members about the organization. Includes general information about resources, programs, and the A, B, C's of Soroptimist. (Membership Resources & Information)

Membership FAQ—Eligibility, types of memberships, etc. (Membership Resources & Information)

Program Quick Reference Guide—Summarizes the numerous programs we have to offer such as Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards, Soroptimists STOP Trafficking, Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award, and Soroptimist Ruby Award. (Program Overview)

Coming Soon: New Member Section!—To make membership more appealing, we will launch a New Member section of the website to address the needs of potential and new members, and to assist you with your follow-up and recruitment efforts.

Do you have a favorite follow-up technique? Please let us know by emailing nicole@soroptimist.org.



Soroptimist White Papers: An Outstanding Resource for Clubs

A white paper is an authoritative report or guide that addresses issues and offers suggestions for how to solve them. Soroptimist white papers focus on issues important to Soroptimists, and women and girls worldwide. White papers help to promote Soroptimist as an expert on international women's issues and as an organization addressing those issues. Currently, Soroptimist offers 14 white papers—available at <Soroptimist.org>.

Soroptimist white papers can be used by Soroptimist members and clubs in a number of different ways, including as the topic for a club program meeting or to support the club's work in the community.

Educate club members

Using white papers as the center of a club program meeting is a simple and easy way to educate members about an issue of interest to them:

- Design a quiz on the white paper and give awards to those members who score the highest.
- Email the white paper to all members prior to the club meeting. Have a member lead a discussion—like a book club.
- Hand out or email a white paper to all members. Ask members to read the paper highlighting information they did not previously know. Go around the room asking each member to discuss things they learned.
- Use the white papers to launch a discussion about ideas for new club projects. After presenting the information in the paper, brainstorm with members about ways the club could address the issue.

Promote Soroptimist programs

As mentioned above, the white papers focus on topics important to Soroptimists, so frequently a tie exists between federation projects and the white papers. When promoting Soroptimist programs in the

community, use the white papers to give depth to the argument about why they are important. For instance, SIA has white papers on women and education (Women's Opportunity Awards), women and disaster relief (the Soroptimist Disaster Recovery Fund), domestic violence in the workplace (Soroptimist Workplace to End Domestic Violence), and women and trafficking (Soroptimists STOP Trafficking). If applicable, use the white papers to promote local club projects as well.

Educate the community

White papers can serve as the centerpiece of awareness activities in the community. For example, if a club wants to present a program to a local school about women and education, use the white paper as a starting point to build a compelling case about the importance of women's education.

Often, club members are asked to speak on topics important to women. To find out necessary background information about a topic—and what Soroptimist is doing to address that issue—check to see if Soroptimist offers a white paper on the topic.

Interest the media

A good time to use white papers is when an important issue comes up in the news that is addressed by one of the white papers. They can be used to create an impressive op-ed or letter to the editor. Also, if clubs are holding an event and are inviting the media, include a copy of a white paper addressing the event in the press kit.

Strengthen advocacy efforts

When the club chooses a topic to advocate for or against, the Soroptimist white papers can provide the information needed to prepare an advocacy statement and

plan a campaign. It can provide the background information needed to build a coherent argument and an effective campaign.

For even more ideas and information on white papers, see the new resource, Soroptimist White Papers: Raising Awareness of Issues Affecting Women and Girls, available in the program section of the SIA website. 🌐

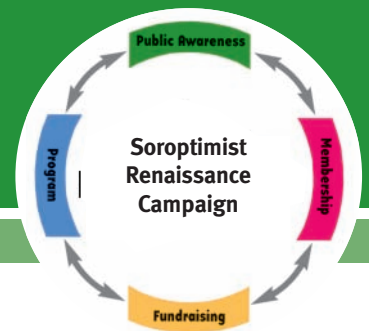
By Lori Blair
Senior Director of Program Services
Email: lori@soroptimist.org

Current white papers are available, free of charge, at Soroptimist.org/whitepapers/whitepapers.html:

- “Women at Work”
- “Domestic Violence as a Workplace Concern”
- “The Gender Wage Gap”
- “Work/Family Life Balance”
- “Legal Issues Addressing Human Trafficking”
- “The New Face of Slavery”
- “Breast Cancer and Low-Income Women”
- “Reaching Out to Women When Disaster Strikes”
- “Women and Cardiovascular Disease”
- “Women and Education”
- “Women and Poverty”
- “Women and HIV/AIDS”
- “Teen Dating Violence”
- “Child and Mail-Order Brides”

And coming soon: new white papers on prostitution and issues facing girls.

public awareness



Tweet, Tweet: The Ins and Outs of Twitter

Are you on Twitter? Is your club? Since its creation in 2006, the social networking site has gained popularity around the world by enabling people to post information about things happening in real time.

Don't have a Twitter account? Getting one is easy. Go to Twitter.com and click "Create Your Account." With an account, users can follow Soroptimist and get news and information about the organization. To follow Soroptimist, click "Find People" at the top of the Twitter site and type "Soroptimist" in the "Find on Twitter" search field. Accounts from various clubs and federations will also appear. SIA's profile is the one with the "S" logo and is called "Soroptimist." Click on the "Follow" button to the right of "Soroptimist."

Twitter is a site for micro-blogging. Posting information is called "tweeting" and those messages are called "tweets." The site is "micro" because each message (tweet) is limited to 140 characters or less (characters include letters, punctuation and spaces). Clubs can direct followers to the club or SIA websites for more information. Twitter keeps communication short and simple.

If including a web address in the tweet always include the full address with the <http://>. The easiest way to get the complete address is to go to the site and copy the exact address from the URL box. Twitter will create a hyperlink to that site, but not without the complete address. Many web addresses are too long to post on Twitter. To shorten them, use a free URL shortening program like <http://tinyurl.com/>, <http://bit.ly/>, or <http://tr.im/>. These sites create a shorter URL that links to the same page within seconds. Using tinyurl.com, for example, shortens <http://www.soroptimist.org/pdf/WomenandEducation0508.pdf> to <http://tinyurl.com/ygty6zl>.

Twitter offers a variety of functions—such as hashtags, retweets and direct messages—to help create a better networking experience.

If you use Twitter, you've probably noticed the pound sign followed by a keyword. In Twitter, this pound sign stands for a "hashtag." There are a couple benefits to using hashtags. They help make tweets more searchable; they also help categorize and organize them. For example, search #CathyBlog and all the tweets posted about President Cathy's blogs will appear.

There aren't really any rules to using hashtags. Just be sure to give hashtags some kind of meaning. #CathyBlog is obviously



about President Cathy's blog. Try to keep hashtag names short because they take away from the 140-character limit. And lastly, try not to include a different hashtag in every tweet. Overusing hashtags can take away from the overall message.

A big use of hashtags is to organize information for conferences and events. Soroptimist plans to create a hashtag for its upcoming convention in San Francisco, enabling members to keep track of activities taking place during convention as they happen.

Another Twitter function is the "retweet," which is a great way to spread information. Retweet means to repost a message someone else tweeted so your followers can see it too. It makes messages more viral. To retweet a message, click "Retweet This," to the right of the message. Retweets have an "RT" in front of them. Clubs can retweet Soroptimist's posts to help spread the word about SIA initiatives.

Users can also reply to the tweets of people or organizations they follow. When replying to someone, the message will show up on both walls with "@" in front of it. For example, a Soroptimist club member (kanderson53) tweeted the following message: "KalisPELL Soroptimist has 7 new members. More power to improve the lives of women & girls. Focus on human trafficking & DV." Because Soroptimist follows kanderson53, the message appeared on Soroptimist's page. Soroptimist's reply appeared like this: "@kanderson53 Congrats on getting so many new members to join your club and thanks for your continued support of our mission!"

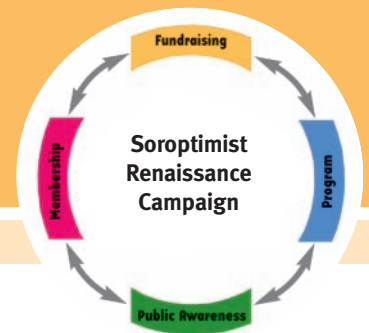
Messages on Twitter don't always have to be public. Users can send direct messages (DM) to other Twitter users that no one else sees. DM's are private and similar to sending an email.

A nice thing about social networking sites is that they often work hand-in-hand, making it easier to post information. For example, clubs can set their Facebook account to simultaneously post tweets on its Twitter page. Twitter also has a similar partnership with LinkedIn.

Those are some of the ins and outs of Twitter. As with other new media tools, it is an excellent way to spread the word about Soroptimist and its mission to help women and girls. So, sign up, log in, and start tweeting today! 🌐

By Kamali Brooks
Public Relations Manager
Email: kamali@soroptimist.org

fundraising



The Power of Partnerships

The popular trend of corporations to engage in cause marketing has suffered in this recession. Cause marketing is an alliance between non-profits and companies, in which the company funds non-profit programs in return for being linked to the good work done by the non-profit. Marketing surveys have indicated that customers consider a company's charitable giving record when deciding which brands to buy. In the current economic downturn, corporate resources are limited, longstanding partnerships have been cut back, and new partnerships are on hold.

However, even in these hard times, a few corporations are still reaching out to causes and missions that resonate with them. This is the story of such a partnership.

On August 23, 2009, SIA took a calculated risk and placed an ad in *The New York Times* magazine. On Aug 24, 2009, Danamichelle Brennan, a Jackson Hewitt executive, contacted SIA headquarters saying that she had seen the ad, and wanted to work with SIA and its "wonderful mission."

With the negative effect of the economy in play, Jackson Hewitt, the second largest tax preparation firm in the U.S., was unable to commit to a cash partnership, but was inspired by the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards program, and wanted to explore the donation of laptop computers for a number of recipients.

After much discussion and some negotiation, it was agreed that Jackson Hewitt would donate 25 brand new, fully equipped IBM laptops, and would ship them to our Women's Opportunity Awards recipients next spring! The partnership was formally announced at a press conference in Sarasota, Florida, in November. President

Cathy was in attendance, as well as SIA's director of corporate relations Debra Beach, and several Soroptimist members from the Sarasota/Tampa, Florida area. As for future opportunities, Jackson Hewitt has an interest in making this a multi-year program, and also in "introducing" Soroptimist to other corporate executives who may be interested in partnering.

As the women we serve work to improve their lives and the lives of their families, they often have no one to believe in or encourage them. For a single mother, juggling work and school, standing in a long line at the local library to use a computer is the last thing she needs.

Sometimes these women feel like no one cares or believes in them. They have so many challenges, and anything Soroptimist and its partners can do to make their lives easier brings them one step closer to living their dreams.

Because of the determination of Soroptimist women—strengthened and supported by a caring corporate partner—these women DO have someone who believes in them.

Soroptimist and its "great mission" are persevering through these hard times, and with the help of current and future partners, SIA will continue to be a source of hope and encouragement for women and girls, locally and throughout the world. ♀

By Nancy Montvydas
Senior Director of Development
Email: nancym@soroptimist.org

Providing Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards recipients with laptops is an important part of helping them succeed. Thanks to Jackson Hewitt's generous donation, SIA will be able to help even more women. Below is a letter SIA received in appreciation from a winner who received a laptop.

Dear Soroptimist,

What a wonderful surprise and much needed gift. It was as if the Soroptimist women knew what I needed to keep my dreams alive, a computer. My home computer had just crashed and with no money to invest in my future, receiving such a gift was and is life-changing.

My greatest desire is to one day own my own graphics and printing company, Divine Graphics. Since receiving my wonderful computer I have created logos and other graphic work for various people. I never would have been able to create the work without my computer.

I recently lost my job do to cutbacks, but I am able to support myself with the help of my computer and the wonderful women of the Soroptimist organization. Thank you so much.

Forever grateful,

Sonia Alexander



This is the first of two columns that will be devoted to reporting the findings and recommendations of the 2009 membership/market research. Data was collected from 647 club presidents, 6,678 members, and 358 potential members who visited the Live Your Dream website or completed an introduction form on the SIA website. In addition, the 2008-2009 Board of Directors conducted focus group sessions at region conferences that added depth and perspective to the recommendations made by the consultant, Phillip Downs of Kerr & Downs Research, who also conducted the research in 2003.

It's official! The results of the membership/marketing research are in and the Renaissance Campaign has been successful by providing:

- More cohesion among clubs with regard to programs and projects
- More clarity in club purpose
- Increased public awareness of SIA
- More focused efforts on women and girls.

The development and promotion of a federation Strategic Plan that most clubs follow has also helped us to survive a very difficult economic period. Despite decreased contributions, less investment income, minimal corporate sponsorships, and lower dues revenue—SIA clubs continue to tell a compelling story. We have achieved almost all of our program goals and strengthened our brand as an organization that improves the lives of women and girls.

While lauding these accomplishments, Kerr & Downs is of the opinion that we are underachieving when it comes to fundraising, public awareness and membership. The full report is 185 pages long. Let's look at some of the results that led to that observation and their subsequent recommendations.

Program

There is very high awareness of all SIA programs and very high agreement that all programs are consistent with SIA's goals. Yet members are less likely to agree that SIA's programs are definitely relevant to their communities—a high of

67 percent of members say the Women's Opportunity Awards program is definitely relevant to their communities' needs. Three in four members (73 percent) agree that clubs' activities and projects have met their expectations.

Four out of five club presidents (80 percent) agree that SIA should continue with one signature project. Three in four (74 percent) say most of their club's projects are consistent with SIA's mission, and more members are willing to participate in SIA's signature project than they were in 2003. More than three in four club presidents (77 percent) prefer that their money and effort be directed to women in their communities rather than more globally—this is up from 69 percent in 2003.

Fundraising

Eighty-five (85) percent of members agree that fundraising is critical to achieving SIA's mission. However, just over half of members (53 percent) report contributing financially to SIA (beyond paying dues). Most who do not contribute cite their reasons as: payments by their clubs, lack of discretionary income, and an interest in keeping financial contributions within their respective communities.

Club presidents reported that fundraising is, by far, the lowest priority across the four strategic outcomes (program, fundraising, membership, public awareness). Fewer than two of five (37 percent) report satisfaction with the recognition their clubs receive for finan-

cial donations to SIA. The typical club budgeted \$250 as an annual contribution to SIA beyond dues. This is up from \$100 in 2003. The typical club reported earmarking 5 percent of its fundraising dollars for SIA. Three in four presidents (74 percent) report knowing how SIA uses contributions received from clubs.

Public Awareness and Image

Focus groups of newer members offered three main themes as changes to make Soroptimist better:

- Younger members should be more heavily recruited
- New members need to be encouraged/mentored regarding their Soroptimist involvement
- Public awareness of Soroptimist needs to be increased.

Generating public awareness is the highest strategic outcome in members' minds. Unfortunately, six in ten members (60 percent) feel that clubs should have freedom to pursue their own projects even if this approach results in no increases in public awareness of SIA. Members continue to maintain they will promote SIA in their communities in an effort to enhance the value and image of SIA.

Fewer than half of club presidents (45 percent) express high levels of satisfaction with their club's image. And, just over half (55 percent) express high levels of satisfaction with their club's membership profiles and demographics. About half of club presidents (48 percent) say

that more than three-fourths of members are actively involved—down from 54 percent in 2003.

About half of potential members had met a Soroptimist member; about three-fourths of these women were MORE interested in joining after meeting members. Key perceptions of members included:

- Focused on helping women and girls in their communities
- Positive about their Soroptimist membership
- Warm and welcoming
- Excited about gaining new members
- Successful business and professional women.

Fewer than 20 percent of potential members had negative perceptions of Soroptimist members.

Membership

The biggest attraction to Soroptimist is its mission to improve the lives of women and girls. The ability to set an example for their daughters, help within the community, and interact with other women in a social setting were other commonly named attractions. Six in ten women (59 percent) who visited the Live Your Dream website had already joined a club by the time the survey was conducted. Only six percent who had visited the SIA website had joined, and only 18 percent definitely planned to join. These low percentages can be explained by the fact that clubs never contacted half (50 percent) of the women who had visited the SIA website and filled out an introduction form!

SIA is making progress in membership satisfaction and perceived value of membership—both indicators are up from 2003. Members who are dissatisfied cite financial obligations, time commitment, and personality conflicts within the club. The median age of members has increased two years from 58 in 2003 to 60 in 2009. The typical person in the study has been a member for 10 years. One in three members expects to be a Soroptimist for life. Fifty-nine (59) percent of members are self-employed and the typical member works 35 hours per week. Median household income for members is \$75,000.

Fewer than half of presidents (45 percent) express high levels of satisfaction with their club's image. And, just over half of presidents (55 percent) express high levels of satisfaction with their clubs' membership profiles and demographics. Just one in six presidents (17 percent) claims that fewer than half of their clubs' members are actively involved in club programs, projects, and fundraising—although 48 percent of club presidents say over three-fourths of members are actively involved (down from 54 percent in 2003).

Club presidents' satisfaction with membership in 2009 is similar to 2003, and presidents' satisfaction with serving as club president remains virtually unchanged in 2009. Ninety-eight (98) percent of presidents maintain their experience as president has

been at least somewhat fulfilling. Unfortunately, one in five presidents (19 percent) is uncertain about or unlikely to recommend that others join Soroptimist—39 percent of presidents in Japan share these feelings.

SIA Support

Nearly nine in 10 members (86 percent) believe that SIA materials reflect a professional image. A large majority of members agree that SIA materials are effective in helping them plan and conduct projects, recruit new members, and explain SIA to others. Three out of four members (75 percent) rated SIA's staff as excellent or good in being responsive to their needs and treating them as valued customers.

Recommendations

- Extend the Renaissance Campaign
- Streamline structure, increase direct communication with clubs, reduce the burden on regions
- Strengthen cohesion between the federation and clubs
- Set specific goals and delineate responsibility between the federation and clubs for fundraising, programs, public awareness, and membership
- Focus on SIA's signature project (Women's Opportunity Awards)
- Increase the perceived and actual value received from SIA to clubs/members
- Build a new non-club based membership type
- Form experimental clubs
- Continue efforts to maintain consistent branding strategies
- Move toward total electronic communication
- Examine reasons for differences between responses from clubs in Japan and other clubs.

There was much discussion about this survey; however, the Board of Directors took no action on any of the recommendations at its November meeting. The Board will be considering the full report and recommendations over the next several months in order to design and launch the next iteration of the Renaissance Campaign, and update the SIA Strategic Plan.

Part II of this column will appear in the next issue of *Best for Women* magazine and will focus on more detail of each recommendation, which the Board will consider carefully before adopting. The SIA Strategic Plan will be modified to implement the recommendations that make the most sense for the federation and can be accomplished with available resources. Clubs will be asked to do their part through the next version of the Renaissance Campaign, which will be launched at the SIA convention in San Francisco, July 7-10, 2010. 🌐

For a complete list of sales items, pricing, and shipping information, or to make a purchase online using a credit card, visit the Soroptimist Store located in the the members area of <Soroptimist.org>. If assistance is needed logging in, please contact <siahq@soroptimist.org> or call 215-893-9000.

NEW! SOROPTIMIST TEEN DATING BOOKMARK #501

This 2" x 7" glossy bookmark promotes healthy dating relationships among teenagers. One side includes a checklist of warning signs that a dating partner may be abusive, while the other side lists teens' dating rights and qualities of healthy relationships. **\$6/pack of 50**



NEW! "S" LOGO FLASH DRIVE #452

Store your important electronic files on this handy 1GB flashdrive. White with blue detail and the "S" logo, this USB device connects easily to your computer. Folds conveniently into a small oval shape and includes a black carrying strap. **\$15**

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Blue ceramic coffee mug with SIA's logo. Perfect for desk or kitchen. Comes boxed for easy shipping. Microwave safe. **\$10**



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Stay dry under this blue and white umbrella that sports the "S" logo. Features an easy-push button for opening, and closes manually. Durable and compact, this umbrella measures about 16" when closed. Its wind resistant frame opens to full-size for extra rain-protection. **\$15**

Magazine Matters: All magazine-related information, including editorial guidelines and submission deadlines, is available on SIA's website. Mailing address changes should be sent to <siahq@soroptimist.org>. Magazine submissions and letters to the editor should be sent to Editor Jessica Levinson at *Best for Women*, 1709 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103-6103 or <jessica@soroptimist.org>.

Subscribe to Best for Women: A subscription to the magazine is available for \$11 a year (U.S. and Canada; \$15 all other countries). Translated excerpts of the magazine—in Spanish, Portuguese, Korean and Taiwanese—are also available on SIA's website. For more information, or to subscribe, go to: <Soroptimist.org>.

MEMBERS!

Are you missing out on important emails, alerts, or the magazine? In order to keep SIA's rosters accurate, please review your profile at <Soroptimist.org/members/membership/updateprofile.html> and make any necessary changes.

CLUBS!

The best way for headquarters and potential members to contact clubs is through the Soroptimist club email accounts. A designated member should be checking the club email account regularly (at least once per week) to keep up to date with the latest SIA news. For help with setting-up or accessing the account, see the members area on SIA's website <soroptimist.org/members/membership/membershiphome.html> or contact <siahq@soroptimist.org>.

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