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Preventing Child Marriage: Lessons from World Bank Group Gender Impact Evaluations

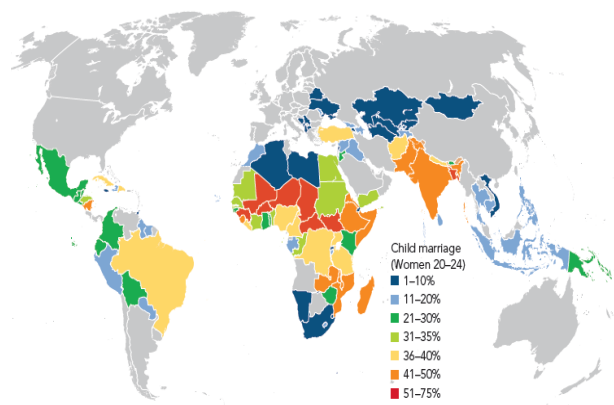
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Synopsis

Child marriage is closely linked to poverty and girls' educational opportunities. Across 18 of the 20 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage, girls with no education are up to six times more likely to marry than girls with a secondary education. Girls living in poorer households are almost twice as likely to marry before the age of 18, compared with girls in higher-income households. Drawing on results from seven impact evaluations (IEs) supported by the World Bank Group (WBG), this brief highlights lessons learned about what works to delay age of marriage and reduce child marriage. Effective programs will ultimately increase girls' educational attainment, increase girls' value and opportunities in society, and reduce poverty. Promising interventions are beginning to address the drivers of child marriage. However, more rigorous and long-term impact evaluations are needed to better understand intervention components and delivery mechanisms that are effective in preventing child marriage.

Background

Child marriage is a fundamental barrier to the achievement of international commitments for development and gender equality. In developing countries, one-third of girls are married before age 18, and one in nine is married before age 15 (UNICEF, 2013). These figures include girls in formal marriages and living in informal unions, which are referred to together as "child marriage" (UNICEF, 2005). If present trends continue, more than 142 million girls will be married before the age of 18 in the next decade, or 39,000 girls each day (UNFPA, 2012). Such early marriages remain pervasive despite legal prohibition in many countries. As shown in this map, across the 111 countries for which data are available, the prevalence of child marriage ranges from 2 percent in Algeria and Libya to as high as 74



Source: World Bank Group 2014.

and 75 percent in Niger and Bangladesh, respectively. While child marriage prevalence in India is not among the highest, the sheer size of its population means that India has the highest number, accounting for one-third of the world's child brides (World Bank Group, 2014).

Average regional prevalence ranges from 21 percent in Africa to 17 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, to 8 percent in Eastern and Southern Europe (Raj and Boehmer, 2013). However, these averages can mask considerable variation across and within countries.

In addition to violating the rights of millions of girls every year, child marriage brings significant development impacts at the individual, community, and society levels. Girls who marry before the age of 18 are at greater risk of poor health outcomes, including HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancy, and early childbearing (Hindin and Fatusi, 2009). In developing countries, pregnancy-related causes are the largest contributor to mortality among girls ages 15 to 19, killing nearly 70,000 girls each year (WBG, 2014; UNFPA, 2013). Early childbearing also increases the risk of complications such as obstetric fistula, which commonly occurs among girls who give birth before their bodies are physically mature. This can cause chronic incontinence, often resulting in stigmatization and social exclusion (WBG, 2014). In addition to the effect on a girl's sexual and reproductive health, marrying before age 18 increases the odds of experiencing intimate partner violence by 22 percent (WBG, 2014). The lack of power that young brides experience in their relationships is often exacerbated by large age differences between them and their husbands, which further constrain their voice and agency within marriage (UNICEF, 2005; WBG, 2014).

Risk Factors for Early Marriage

High prevalence of child marriage is both a symptom and a consequence of poverty. The practice is driven by social norms and expectations and by gendered discrimination that devalues women and girls and their right to make choices for themselves. It is also driven by limited choices for poor families. Girls living in poor households are almost twice as likely to be married before the age of 18 compared with girls in higher-income households, as are rural girls compared with those from urban areas (WBG, 2014). Girls are often married off by their families to pay debts

or to save on the bride price—the younger the bride, the lower the dowry her family has to pay. Families often perceive marriage as a way to provide for their daughter's future, believing it will improve her economic and social circumstances. The reality, however, is that girls who marry young are more likely to remain poor even after marriage (WBG, 2014; Mathur et al., 2003). The girls most likely to marry early are those with the least education and lowest economic status (Raj, 2010). Given the connection between poverty and access to education, girls in poor households face overlapping disadvantages and greater risk of being married before age 18.



Where girls have greater educational and economic opportunities, they are more likely to take up those opportunities than to have children in their teenage years (WBG, 2014). Lack of education can be both a risk factor for and an outcome of child marriage. Evidence from Bangladesh and Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that women who married early are over five percentage points less likely to be literate and over eight percentage points less likely to have any secondary education (Nguyen and Wodon, 2013; Field and Ambrus, 2008). A study across 18 of the 20 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage found that girls with no education were up to six times more likely to marry young compared with girls who had received secondary education (ICRW, 2006). Across Africa, each additional year a girl is married before age 18 reduces her probability of literacy by about six percentage points, probability of having at least

some secondary schooling by eight percentage points, and probability of secondary school completion by almost seven percentage points (Wodon, 2014). We see from this evidence that child marriage is closely associated with illiteracy and lower levels of education, and that more schooling seems to raise the age of marriage.

Evidence from the World Bank Group

In recent years, the World Bank Group has increased investments in gender-informed programs, research, and impact evaluation. At the same time, there has been greater programmatic effort to reduce child marriage across the globe, with programs increasingly addressing poverty, education, and lack of economic opportunities as drivers of child marriage. From the 161 IE papers within the enGENDER IMPACT (eGI) database, we identified those measuring programmatic impact on child marriage. Age at marriage is an outcome measured across seven of these eGI evaluations. The programs evaluated were overwhelmingly designed with the aim of increasing educational attainment for girls, with increasing age at marriage as a secondary goal. This brief explores strategies and program components to identify intervention strategies that are effective in delaying marriage. (See Table 1 for a summary of the included IEs.)

Summary of Programs and Evaluations

Conditional Cash Transfer Programs

Three of the seven IEs evaluated conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs that were “cash for attendance” interventions (Baez et al., 2011; Baird et al., 2011; Baird et al., 2010), with one of those IEs comparing the conditional versus unconditional arms of an intervention (Baird et al., 2011).

Programs offered financial incentives, conditional on girls’ attendance in school. In a program for girls in Pakistan, girls received a stipend of approximately US\$3.50 per month if they were enrolled in grades six through eight of government schools and had at least 80%

attendance rates. In the Zomba program in Malawi, girls received US\$1-5 per month, in addition to school fees, if their monthly school attendance rate was above 80%. The unconditional cash transfer (UCT) arm in the Zomba program offered identical cash transfers but without a school attendance requirement.

Additional Educational Components

Two of the six IEs looked at CCT programs with additional education components that supplemented the cash incentive for sending girls to school. In addition to cash based on school attendance, one program (Bandiera et al., 2012) included girls clubs, vocational and life skills courses, mentors, and recreation activities as a part of the intervention, and a second (Khandker et al., 2003) included a subsidy for school uniforms, school curriculum reform and infrastructure improvements.



The third IE in this category evaluated a school-based reproductive health curriculum intervention in Kenya, specifically focusing on the arm of the intervention that reduced the cost of education with the aim of keeping children in school longer (Duflo et al., 2006).

Structural Interventions

The final IE in this analysis examined structural factors in labor market supply and demand and their impact on child marriage in Bangladesh (Heath and Mobarak, 2012). Analysis compared girls in villages with garment factories versus those in villages without factories.

So What Works? Implications for Future Programming

Multiple strategies were used across the evaluated programs to improve girls' education and delay marriage. Nearly all interventions evaluated included a cash transfer, and additional educational and structural components were used in half of the IEs. Here we examine which programmatic components appear to have the greatest effect on reducing child marriage.

Conditional Cash Transfer Programs

In all the CCT programs, significant decreases occurred in early marriage, measured by the proportion of girls in the treatment group married by age 18 at the end of the intervention compared with girls in the control group. In the IE of the Zomba program in Malawi (Baird et al., 2011), there were substantial and statistically significant delays in marriage and childbearing among girls in the UCT compared to those in the control group. The observed impact among girls in the CCT arm was smaller and not significant. The largest impact among girls in the UCT arm was among those who had dropped out of school after the program began, which suggests that the decision to delay marriage is influenced not only by increased educational attainment, but also by the economic needs and stability of a girl and her family.

Additional Educational Components

All these IEs reported significant decreases in child marriage among those who were a part of the interventions. Among those who received education at a reduced cost, a delay was seen in the age at marriage, compared with those for whom the cost of education was not offset through program participation.

IEs of programs that were found to delay marriage address multiple drivers of early marriage, including poverty, access to education, and limited livelihood opportunities. Cash transfer programs were shown to have positive impacts across all IEs. Also effective were extended CCT programs that

incorporated the following components into programming in addition to the cash transfer:

- assigning mentors for girls
- providing recreational activities and vocational skills for girls
- improving education facilities
- providing subsidies for uniforms.



Structural Interventions

In one IE that examined the impact of available garment factory jobs and the connection to education level and age at marriage among girls (Heath and Mobarak, 2012), household surveys assessed whether a girl was married before age 16 or 18. In villages where garment factories were present, girls were statistically significantly less likely to be married by age 16 and age 18 compared to girls in villages without factories, suggesting opportunities for employment provide alternatives to early marriage for girls in these areas.

Components of Effective Programming

The findings from these seven IEs resonate with evaluations of other child marriage prevention efforts. Here we look at two examples of programs in India and Ethiopia. In 1994, the Haryana State Government in northern India launched Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD, or “Our Daughter, Our Wealth”), a program that gave poor families an incentive to keep their daughters in school and unmarried until age 18 and sought to improve family and community perceptions about the value of girls. An impact evaluation showed that girls in the treatment group were significantly more likely to be in school and unmarried at age 18 than

girls in the control group, although the impact on attitudinal changes about the value of girls are less clear (Nanda et al., 2014; WBG, 2014).

In the Awi zone of Ethiopia, in the rural Amhara Region, one in five girls is married before her 15th birthday and nearly half (44 percent) are married by age 17. Virtually all (92 percent) of these marriages are arranged by their families. In 2004, the regional government partnered with the Population Council on a two-year project to delay marriage and keep girls in school. This program, Berhane Hewan (“Light for Eve”), provided families with cash conditioned on their daughters’ remaining unmarried and in school for the duration of the program. Other elements included social mobilization of girls led by female mentors, provision of school supplies, livelihood training for out-of-school girls, and “community conversations” on early marriage and reproductive health. Two years later, girls (ages 10 to 14) enrolled in the program were only one-tenth as likely to be married compared with girls in the control group. Participants were also three times more likely to be in school compared with girls in the control group (Erulkar and Muthengi, 2009; WBG, 2014).

Components of these two programs are consistent with the key intervention components seen in the seven IEs included here: CCTs, teaching life and vocational skills, providing mentors, increasing access to free education, engaging in health awareness conversations with girls and their communities, and addressing the underlying economic drivers of child marriage. From the initial success of the programs in Ethiopia and India as well as results from the seven eGI evaluations, it is evident that the drivers of child marriage—poverty, limited opportunities for educational attainment and vocational training, and the low perceived value of girls in society—must be addressed simultaneously to reduce the number and proportion of girls marrying before age 18.

Limitations

While our findings are consistent with other impact evaluations of what works to prevent child marriage, there are some limitations to this analysis. The universe of IEs included in this analysis is limited to only those carried out or supported by the World Bank Group and subsequently included in the enGENDER IMPACT database. The IEs selected for this database apply a gender lens to either programming content or the data analysis and evaluation process. We therefore acknowledge that this database is not inclusive of all existing evaluations of strategies to prevent child marriage. In addition, much of the evidence linking education to child marriage comes from cross-sectional survey data, so attributing causality is difficult.



Conclusion

Evidence points to a number of drivers of early marriage, including poverty, social norms, and gender-based discrimination. More longitudinal data analysis and continued impact evaluations of programs are necessary to determine the direct and indirect long-term effects that programs have on delaying marriage. Based on these eGI evaluations, and supported by evidence from other evaluations, it is clear that programs and strategies must address multiple social and economic drivers to delay marriage. It is also critical to provide individual and family-level resources within interventions. Families make decisions about their daughters’ marriages within the context of social norms, financial constraints, and labor market factors. The practice of child marriage

also continues in many countries despite laws regulate age at marriage.

In addition to promoting programmatic strategies that increase educational attainment and economic opportunities for girls, preventing child marriage requires strengthened legal and policy frameworks, to ensure increased awareness and greater enforcement of existing laws. Early marriage is a complex public health issue that impacts girls' and women's health, educational attainment, and economic opportunities as well as broader development objectives for communities and countries. Programs and strategies that increase girls' access to

education and financial opportunity can either directly or indirectly delay marriage.



enGENDER IMPACT

enGENDER IMPACT is an online gateway for Gender-Related Impact Evaluations. At www.worldbank.org/engenderimpact you will find profiles summarizing key information about World Bank Group funded gender-related impact evaluations. These profiles are organized around priority areas for policy action, including: reducing health disparities, shrinking education and skills gaps, increasing economic opportunities, boosting voice and agency, and addressing gender-based violence. enGENDER IMPACT aims to share knowledge from previous evaluations and encourage more and better evaluations in key gender topics.

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Photo Credits:

1. Map: The World Bank Group (2014). *Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*, page 103. The report can be downloaded here: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/publication/voice-and-agency-empowering-women-and-girls-for-shared-prosperity>
2. Students at Al Shami Girls Secondary School. The school, established in 2004, is very important for the education of the girls in the Beit Our Titha community near Ramallah. **Photo: Arne Hoel**
3. A computer class at the Female Experimental High School in Herat. The school is benefitting from the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) whose objective is to increase access to quality basic education, especially for girls. **Photo: Graham Crouch**
4. Life for students at Tailulu in the Tongan capital Nukua'lofa, is set to change with the arrival of high-speed broadband internet in Tonga. **Photo: Tom Perry**
5. History teacher Nicoleta Caraiman (center) helps her students during class exercise at the Scoala Frumusani School in the village of Frumusani, Romania. **Photo: Dominic Chavez**
6. High school students in La Ceja, Department of Antioquia, Colombia. **Photo: Charlotte Kesl**

Table 1:

Summary of Education outcomes measured by WBG Gender IEs

		Programmatic Approach				
		Conditional Cash Transfer	Unconditional Cash Transfer	Additional Educational Components	School Based SRH	Labor Supply and Demand Impact
Impact Evaluation	Citation					
Does Cash for School Influence Young Women's Behavior in the Longer Term? Evidence from Pakistan	Baez et al., (2011)	✓				
The Short-Term Impacts of a Schooling Conditional Cash Transfer Program on the Sexual Behavior of Young Women in Malawi	Baird et al., (2010)	✓				
Cash or Condition Evidence from a Cash Transfer Experiment	Baird et al., (2011)	✓	✓			
Subsidy to Promote Girls' Secondary Education: The Female Stipend Program in Bangladesh	Khander et al., (2003)	✓		✓		
Empowering Adolescent Girls: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Uganda	Bandiera, et al., 2012	✓		✓		
Education and HIV/AIDS Prevention: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in Western Kenya	Duflo et al., (2006)			✓	✓	
Does Demand or Supply Constrain Investments in Education? Evidence from Garment Sector Jobs in Bangladesh	Heath and Mobarak, (2012)					✓