

What Works To Prevent Child Marriage?

Lessons From Evidence On Key Strategies

Globally, 12 million girls marry before the age of 18 each year¹. The evidence base on what works to end child marriage has grown substantially over the past decade and provides greater clarity on policy and programme directions than ever before^{2,3,4,5}.

WHAT DO HIGH QUALITY EVALUATED PROGRAMMES REVEAL ABOUT WHAT WORKS TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO CHILD MARRIAGE?

Legend ◆ Positive and consistent findings ◆ Promising findings and requires further rigorous evaluation ◆ Requires further rigorous evaluation

INCOME AND ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING

- ◆ Cash transfers
- ◆ Favourable job markets
- ◆ Vocational training
- ◆ Inclusive economic growth

EDUCATION AND LIFE SKILLS

- ◆ Cash and in-kind transfers for schooling
- ◆ Targeted and tailored life skills

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS INTERVENTIONS

- ◆ Comprehensive sexuality education
- ◆ Adolescent-responsive sexual and reproductive health services

GENDER AND/OR SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE

- ◆ Community engagement to address social and gender norms and behaviours

SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

- ◆ Transforming education, health, social and economic systems to be adolescent and gender-responsive
- ◆ Training to build capacity of workforce across sectors

COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOCUSED ON GIRLS

- ◆ Safe spaces/Girls' empowerment programmes

LAWS AND POLICIES

- ◆ Minimum age at marriage laws

OUR GOAL

ADOLESCENT GIRLS FULLY ENJOY THEIR CHILDHOOD FREE FROM THE RISK OF CHILD MARRIAGE

experience healthier, safer and more empowered life transitions

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KEY MESSAGES

1 Leverage Social Protection to Support Girls' Schooling and Prevent Child Marriage

Providing cash and in-kind transfers for girls' secondary education is a proven strategy to prevent child marriage. When cash transfers are combined with context-specific 'plus' programs—including education, health, and livelihood interventions—these measures enhance girls' well-being, safety, and sense of agency, giving them greater control over their futures.

2 Support Adolescent Girls' Transition from School to Secure, Safe, and Productive Employment

Investing in livelihood skills—including financial literacy and vocational training—empowers girls to transition safely from school to meaningful employment, reducing their vulnerability to child marriage. These efforts must be reinforced by inclusive economic policies that promote sustainable growth and expand opportunities for girls.

3 Challenge Gender Norms to Create Lasting Change

Shifting harmful social and gender norms is essential to preventing child marriage. Interventions—such as caregiver discussion groups, community dialogues, male engagement, and strategic media and communication campaigns—play a crucial role in fostering positive change.

4 Strengthen Systems and Services for Adolescent Girls

Greater investment in social protection, education, health, and child protection systems is critical to addressing the distinct needs of adolescent girls and accelerating progress in reducing child marriage.

5 Ensure Comprehensive Legal Protections for Adolescent Girls

A holistic, multisectoral response to addressing child marriage includes implementing laws and policies that protect the rights of girls and women. Comprehensive legal protections should encompass marriage and divorce regulations, eliminate harmful practices such as dowry, ensure gender-equitable property and inheritance rights, combat gender-based violence, mandate birth and marriage registration, and guarantee access to education and healthcare.



IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMMES

Targeting:

Adopt targeting and enrolment strategies that ensure that families with the most at-risk girls have access to cash transfers and other forms of social assistance.

Conditionality:

Where conditions are used, cash transfers conditional on girls' schooling need to be broad-based to include non-formal and vocational education and should be non-punitive (soft conditionality), particularly for poorest households who are most likely to struggle to meet conditions.

Size and duration of transfer:

Cash transfers need to be sufficient to cover increasing living costs over a long enough period to prevent families from resorting to negative coping mechanisms due to economic insecurity. Households that receive transfers for longer periods such as through standing social protection or other sector programmes such as education and health have longer-term positive outcomes.

'Plus':

Consider adding complementary interventions and/or access to services ('plus' components) to mitigate related drivers of child marriage, including sexual and reproductive health support, access to health services, skills training, case management, community engagement on social and gender norms, etc.

Deliver at scale and link with government systems:

Government-led cash transfers that are part of social protection systems offer the greatest potential for addressing key drivers of child marriage sustainably and at scale. This is particularly important for 'plus' components which are cross-sectoral.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensuring that the programme is effective and that it is reaching its intended beneficiaries. Data should be collected on the number of girls enrolled in school, the number of girls who are married, and the impact of the programme on the economic wellbeing of families.

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