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Addressing early marriage and adolescent pregnancy as a barrier to gender parity and equality in education

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ADDRESSING EARLY MARRIAGE AND ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AS A BARRIER TO GENDER PARITY AND EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Despite progress in expanding access to education for girls globally, important barriers remain. Girls' success in school – and after leaving school – is determined in part by characteristics of and factors in her household and community. Many policies and programs are based on an assumption that continued progress toward gender equality in education is hampered by early marriage and adolescent pregnancy. While education and age at marriage (and pregnancy) are positively correlated in many settings, evidence of a causal relationship is more limited. The effectiveness of policies and programs aiming to improve gender equality in education depends on a clear understanding of the barriers to success for girls, which are complex and vary between settings.

This paper begins by providing an overview of trends in child marriage globally, as well as the evolution of international and domestic policies outlawing child marriage, followed by information on adolescent pregnancy levels, policies, and programs, with a particular focus on schoolgirl pregnancy. The next section describes the challenges in disentangling the relationship between child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and schooling, and provides some evidence of the nature of these relationships. Next, four country case studies provide an opportunity to explore these issues in more detail in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, and Kenya. Last, policy and program recommendations are presented.

Overview of global trends in child marriage

As of 2012, an estimated 33 to 40 percent of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18 globally (Nguyen & Wodon 2012). Child marriage is a widespread challenge, with estimated prevalence exceeding 30 percent or more in 41 countries (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Half of girls affected by child marriage live in South Asia, although the risk is greatest for girls living in parts of West Africa (Lee-Rife et al. 2012; Loaiza & Wong 2012). Despite continued high levels of child marriage, prevalence is decreasing slowly worldwide (Brown 2012; Nguyen and Wodon 2012).

Using DHS data from 60 countries, Nguyen and Wodon (2012) estimated that the average prevalence of child marriage in low and middle income countries decreased from 51 percent for women born between 1955 and 1959 to 40 percent for women born between 1985 and 1989. However, there has been very little improvement in child marriage levels over the most recent decade (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Due to large youth populations in countries most affected by child marriage, if current trends continue the number of children married annually is estimated to increase from 14.2 million in 2010 to 15.1 million in 2030 (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Girls most likely to marry as children are those who live in rural areas, come from poor households, and have little or no education (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Women who marry at younger ages tend to have a larger age difference with their husbands, as well as lower power and autonomy in their relationships (Jensen & Thornton 2003; Lee-Rife at al. 2012) and are potentially at higher risk of domestic violence (Santhya et al. 2010).

> *If current trends continue the number of children married <u>annually</u> is estimated to increase from 14.2 million in 2010 to 15.1 million in 2030 (*Loaiza & Wong 2012*).*

Trends in policies and programs to address child marriage

Legal reform around child marriage began in 1929 when it was first outlawed in greater India through the Child Marriage Restraint Act. Beginning in the 1980s, international human rights law has established firm opposition to child marriage. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to full consent to marriage, a right that is reinforced in the context of child marriage in the 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). More generally, the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) commits governments to ensuring the protection of those under the age of 18, although it does not explicitly address child marriage. Most countries experiencing high levels of child marriage have ratified these conventions,[1] although some have included reservations. Progress was further reinforced and accelerated by the Program of Action adopted at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, where signatories agreed to strictly enforce laws against child marriage (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Regional treaties, such as the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, also commit governments to the prevention of child marriage (Equality Now 2014).

Table 1. Status of domestic laws on child marriage as of November 2013 in selected countries with high prevalence of child marriage (Source: Equality Now, 2014).

Country	Prevalence*	Domestic Law Prohibiting Child Marriage?
Niger	75%	No, age 15 for girls
Chad	68%	No, age 17 for girls, 13 for customary marriages
Bangladesh	65%	No, age 18 or above with exception for religion
Guinea	63%	No, younger than age 18 with parental consent
Burkina Faso	52%	No, age 15 for girls, 18 for boys with court waiver
Malawi	50%	No, age 15 with parental consent, under 15 not clearly prohibited
Ethiopia	41%	Yes
India	47%	No, age 18 except under religious law
Guatemala	30%	No, age 14 for girls, 16 for boys with parental consent
Kenya	26%	Yes

Prevalence is defined as the percent of women 20-24 years old who were married or in union before they were 18 years old based on DHS, MICS, and other nationally representative surveys conducted between 2002 and 2011. Note: The right column indicates whether each country has a domestic law stating that marriage before the age of 18 is illegal for both girls and boys, without exception.

Alignment of domestic laws with international conventions is a condition of ratification, and therefore a starting point for national policies (Brown 2012; Equality Now 2014). Equality Now recommends that effective domestic laws against child marriage must: establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage with no exception for both boys and girls, amend laws exempting punishment for rape in the case of marriage, and require marriage and birth registration, among other requirements (Equality Now 2014). Beyond outlawing child marriage, laws on related cultural practices, including FGM, bride price, dowry, rape, and sexual exploitation, are also potentially important in preventing early marriage (Equality Now 2014). Out of 55 developing countries for which data are available, the legal age of marriage increased

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[1] The United States, Somalia, and South Sudan are the only countries that have not ratified CRC, and seven countries (United States, Somalia, Iran, South Sudan, Nauru, Palau, Tonga) have not ratified CEDAW.

between 1990 and 2000 for women in 23 countries and for men in 20 countries. As of 2010, 158 countries had laws establishing 18 as the legal age of marriage for women without parental consent, although laws in 146 countries allow girls to marry younger than 18 with the consent of parents or other authorities (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Therefore, despite progress, many countries still lack domestic laws that prohibit child marriage without exceptions. Table 1 demonstrates the lack of clear laws against child marriage in some of the countries with the highest prevalence.

While laws prohibiting child marriage do exist in many countries, there is insufficient evidence that laws are an effective deterrent to this practice. Advocates often point to the fact that child marriage remains widespread, even in countries with laws prohibiting this practice. For example, Niger, Mali and Bangladesh – three of the countries with the lowest median age of marriage for women aged 20-24 – all have laws against marriage before age 18, although the laws all allow for exceptions (Brown 2012). In India, where about half of girls marry before age 18, this practice has been illegal for three decades, with exceptions for religious law (Nguyen & Wodon 2012). Reasons given for the perceived ineffectiveness of laws against child marriage include the lack of enforcement by national and regional governments, conflict with customary and religious laws, and lack of knowledge of laws by parents and children (Loaiza & Wong 2012; Equality Now 2014). An evaluation of the 1974 National Marriage Act in Indonesia, one of the few rigorous studies of its kind, found no significant departure from the trend in child marriage following the law (Lee-Rife et al. 2012). Although there is little evidence for an association between laws on age of marriage and mean age of marriage (Mensch 2005; Brown 2012; Nguyen & Wodon 2012), partially due to lack of rigorous studies examining this relationship, changes in the legal age of marriage could potentially indicate evolving norms, and be followed by changes in behavior (Mensch 2005).

Programmatic interventions to address child marriage have largely followed policy changes, increasing in frequency in the 1990s (Lee-Rife et al. 2012). Lee-Rife and colleagues (2012) conducted a review of 23 programs seeking to address child marriage that were implemented between 1973 and 2009 and evaluated. They found a notable increase between 2000 and 2010 in the number of interventions addressing child marriage; 56 percent of the programs reviewed began after 2000. They hypothesized that this increase followed, in part, recognition of the links between child marriage and key development goals, including maternal health, education, and poverty eradication. The largest proportion of programs were implemented in Bangladesh (7) and India (5), and most aimed to prevent child marriage as a secondary objective. The authors noted that the geographic distribution of programs did not fully align with the areas where the risk of child marriage was highest. They described five over-arching approaches to preventing child marriage adopted by these programs, some of which included multiple approaches: empowering girls with information, skills and support networks; educating and mobilizing parents and community members; enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls; offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families; and fostering an enabling legal and policy environment. The results regarding effectiveness of these approaches were complicated by several factors: the level of rigor of reviewed studies varied; nearly all of the programs combined multiple intervention approaches, but most of the evaluations were not designed to separate out the effects of each approach; the programs and evaluations had limited time horizons, so information was unavailable on longer-term effects; and in most cases program participation was voluntary, meaning

that the participants were a selective group. However, based on the available information, the strongest programs were those that worked directly with girls in order to build information, skills, and resources, while the weakest programs were those that worked only at the community level, e.g. community awareness raising activities. Programs focusing on financial incentives showed mixed but positive results (Lee-Rife et al. 2012).

Global trends in adolescent pregnancy

UNICEF estimates that 150 out of every 1000 births are to adolescent girls aged 15-18 globally (Brown 2012). Approximately 90 percent of adolescent pregnancies in the developing world are to girls who are married, due to their higher exposure to sex, lower probability of using contraception compared to their unmarried peers, and pressure to conceive quickly after marriage (Erulkar 2013a; Presler-Marshall & Jones 2012; Brown 2012; Hindin 2009). As a result, the majority (75 percent) of adolescent pregnancies are planned (Presler-Marshall & Jones 2012). Using data from four countries, Jensen and Thornton (2003) found that women who married before age 15 had their first birth on average three years earlier than women who married between ages 15 and 20, and seven years earlier than those who married between ages 21 and 25. Women who give birth during adolescence face higher risks of maternal morbidity and mortality, and their infants are at higher risk of negative outcomes (Jensen & Thornton 2003; Brown 2012; Bott et. al 2003).

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Changes in the timing of marriage and increases in educational attainment are reflected in changing patterns of premarital sex and pregnancy. As the age of marriage has increased globally and the age of menarche has fallen, the risk of unplanned pregnancies has increased for unmarried adolescents (Presler-Marshall & Jones 2012; Hindin & Fatusi 2009). Although the majority of adolescent pregnancies occur within marriage, Mensch and colleagues (2006) found that the prevalence of premarital sex before age 18 has increased in 19 out of 27 countries included in their analyses. They did not find evidence of an overall shift toward earlier sexual initiation, but rather a change in the context of sexual initiation from marriage to pre-marital sex. They suggested that one possible explanation for the seeming stability in the age at sexual initiation is the increase in girls' educational attainment (Mensch, Grant & Blanc 2006). Cross-sectional data indicate that adolescents who stay in school longer are less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior than those who drop out of school, but it is unclear whether staying in school is protective, or adolescents who engage in risky sexual behavior are also less likely to stay in school for other reasons (Hindin & Fatusi 2009; Hargreaves et al. 2008). Conversely, sexual activity may increase adolescents' risk of poor school performance and dropout (Hindin & Fatusi 2009; Biddlecom et al. 2008; Grant & Hallman 2008).

Despite widespread policy attention, evidence of the prevalence of schoolgirl pregnancies, i.e. a pregnancy that precedes – and may cause – school dropout, is mixed (Lloyd & Mensch 2008). Among countries with primary enrollment rates greater than 50 percent, the relative contribution of pregnancy

to dropout rates varies (Lloyd 2009). Using DHS data from five francophone West African countries, Lloyd and Mensch (2008) found that marriage and pregnancy together explained up to 20 percent of school dropout. However, schoolgirl pregnancy accounted for only between 5 and 10 percent of girls' departures from school, and these factors were decreasing in importance over time. In some settings, however, schoolgirl pregnancy has been found to be a more common cause of school dropout. Eloundou-Enyegue (2004) found that pregnancy accounted for 13 percent of girls' dropout in grade 6 (last year of primary school), and 33 percent of dropout in grade 7 (first year of secondary) in Cameroon. A 2006 study of adolescents living in the Kibera slums of Nairobi found that, among girls who were out of school, 14 percent reported that they left due to marriage and 9 percent reported they left due to pregnancy (Erulkar & Matheka 2007). Recent findings from southern Malawi indicate that as much as one quarter of school dropout may be due to pregnancy (Kelly et al. 2014). Finally, a study in Chile, using instrumental variables to account for endogeneity of schooling and pregnancy, found that motherhood reduced the probability of attending and completing high school in this setting by between 24 and 37 percent (Kruger, Berthelon & Navia 2009). It is important to understand the extent to which pregnancy (and marriage) account for school dropout in each setting when designing policies and programs aimed at improving gender equality in education. However, failure to provide access to reproductive health services and education to adolescents, regardless of their marital or pregnancy status, is a violation of international and many national human rights commitments.

Policies and programs to address adolescent pregnancy

While adolescent pregnancy is not tied to legislation as directly as child marriage, there are numerous international and domestic policies related to this issue. As noted previously, attention was focused on adolescent reproductive health needs through the ICPD Program of Action in 1994, including emphasis on the responsibility of governments to ensure that adolescents have access to the information and services necessary to help them avoid unwanted pregnancies. These rights are reinforced in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the right to obtain reproductive health services without consent of a parent, spouse or guardian, and the right to complete and correct information about sexual and reproductive health. UNFPA conceptualizes a broad set of sexual and reproductive rights of adolescents, within which the right to consent to marriage, the right to decide the number and spacing of children, and the right to education and information falls (UNFPA 2009).

Programs and policies seeking to reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies must take into account marital status and fertility preferences. Given the fact that the majority of adolescent pregnancies occur within marriage, prevention is largely dependent on effective policies and programs to delay early marriage. Not surprisingly, the countries with the highest prevalence and numbers of adolescent pregnancies are also those with the highest levels of child marriage, including Niger, Chad, Mali, Bangladesh, and India (Loaiza & Liang 2013). Of the 16 percent of adolescent females who are married globally, about half have an unmet need for contraception, largely to space rather than limit births. While a full review of approaches to prevent adolescent pregnancy is beyond the scope of this paper, they generally fall into several categories: delaying marriage, expanding access to contraception for married adolescents, promoting abstinence and contraceptive use to unmarried adolescents, and –

more indirectly – expanding opportunities for adolescent girls, including education and employment (Loaiza & Liang 2013).

The endogeneity of marriage, pregnancy, and education

Policy makers and practitioners point to the strong correlation between educational attainment and age of marriage and childbearing in diverse settings as evidence of a causal relationship. For example, a recent UNFPA report uses DHS data from 78 countries and shows that, between 2000 and 2010, 63 percent of women ages 20-24 years old were married by age 18, compared to 20 percent of women with secondary education (Loaiza 2012). There are also strong correlations between age of onset of childbearing and years of education (Jensen & Thornton 2003). However, despite theories about the effect of marriage on educational attainment, vice versa, and correlations between these events, there are important challenges in estimating this relationship accurately because educational attainment is endogenous to marriage timing (Lloyd & Mensch 2008). In other words, decisions about education and marriage (as well as pregnancy) might both be a result of shared underlying factors (see Figure 1). Therefore, one cannot conclude, based on the strong association between education and timing of marriage alone, that policies or programs to delay marriage will lead to improved educational attainment, or that education policies and programs will lead to delayed marriage. An alternative

Figure 1. Simplified conceptual framework for the relationship between education, marriage, and pregnancy.
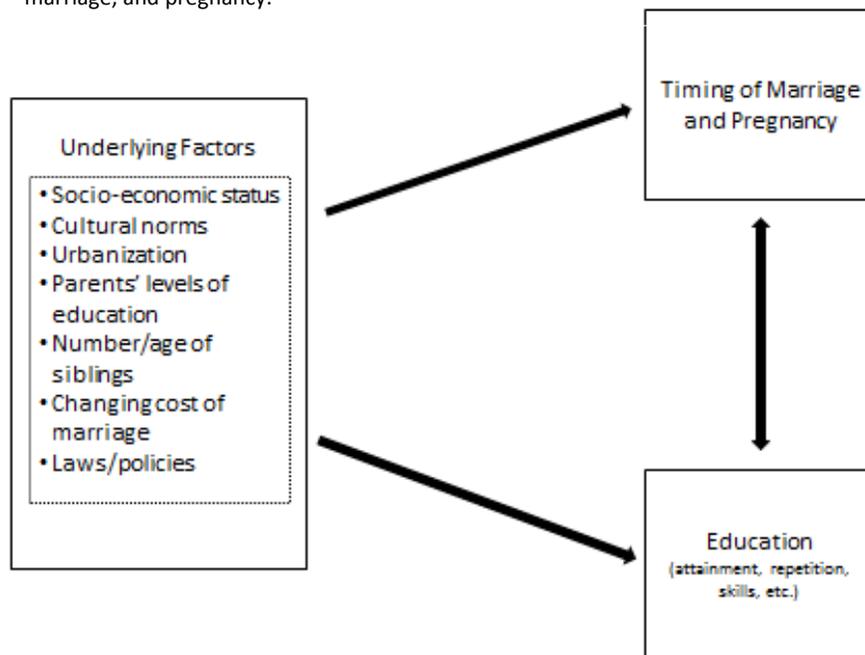
explanation is that the same factors, such as poverty or cultural norms, cause both low educational attainment and early marriage. In that case, policies to address household socio-economic status may lead to improvements in both education and age of marriage simultaneously. Further, few studies have explored the decision-making processes underlying school and marriage, so it is difficult to know precisely how they are related (Lloyd & Mensch 1999). Many studies on these issues are cross-sectional,

and lack data on factors that fall along the hypothesized pathway between education and marriage, such as attitudes about gender roles (Mensch et al. 2001; Lloyd & Mensch 1999; Mensch at al. 2003). Understanding the nature and direction of these relationships is critical to designing effective policies and programs to delay early marriage and childbearing and to promote gender equality in education. One effective way to disentangle decision-making about marriage, pregnancy, and schooling is to conduct a randomized controlled trial (RCT), the gold standard of research. For example, interventions might randomize financial incentives to stay in school or to keep girls unmarried until age 18.

One cannot conclude, based on the strong association between education and timing of marriage alone, that improving girls' educational attainment will lead to delayed marriage, or vice versa.

Despite this caveat, there are theoretical reasons to believe the relationship between marriage and education is causal. Mensch (2005) point out that school attendance is incompatible with the responsibilities and expectations of marriage and motherhood in many cultures, a possible reason why marriage and pregnancy might lead to school dropout. For example, qualitative research in Bangladesh revealed that parents consider education and marriage as a tradeoff for their daughters, and are concerned that choosing to keep their daughters in school will make it more difficult to find them appropriate husbands (Schuler, Bates et al. 2006). In terms of the effects of education on marriage, Jejeebhoy (1995) proposes three potential pathways: educated girls and women have more input into who they marry, and they resist early marriages; educated girls and women or their families delay marriage in order to focus on work; or it is more difficult to find a husband for an educated woman because it is more costly and there are fewer potential partners.

Existing evidence for the strength of the relationship between marriage, childbearing, and education is mixed and largely cross-sectional, limiting exploration of the direction of the relationship. In one of few exceptions that addresses the endogeneity of marriage and schooling decisions, Field and Ambrus (2008) estimated that postponing marriage by one year for girls aged 11 to 16 in Bangladesh would increase their schooling by an estimated 0.22 years and adult literacy by 5.6 percent. They deduced that effectively eliminating marriage below the age of 17 would increase female schooling by at least 0.56 years, or 9 percent. In order to explore this relationship on a global level, Mensch (2005) used DHS data from 39 countries to compare the expected change in early marriage given increases in educational attainment for a younger cohort of women in each country. They found that in 16 out of 39 countries the expected change exceeded the observed change, meaning that the magnitude of decline in early marriage was less than what would have been expected given the increase in educational attainment. In the majority of countries, however, they found that the decline in the percentage marrying at early ages was larger than expected given the increase in educational attainment. In these cases, factors other than schooling seemed to be driving declines in early marriage. The authors concluded that increases in schooling were unlikely to explain *all* of the declines in early marriage, although in sub-Saharan Africa schooling did appear to be an important factor in the changes in early marriage. They suggested that other factors, such as urbanization, declines in arranged marriages, increases in the cost of marriage,

and changing laws and norms might also have been driving the changes in age of marriage. However, they noted that these analyses did not take into account the association of schooling with other determinants of early marriage, leading to inflated estimates of what could be accomplished through schooling alone (Mensch, Singh & Casterline 2005).

Country case studies

This section presents four country case studies exploring in more detail the situation of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy from a policy and program perspective.

Bangladesh

Trends in education, early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy

Increases in schooling – especially among girls – occurred in the 1980s and 1990s in Bangladesh, leading to near gender parity in enrollment for the first ten years of schooling (Amin & Huq 2008). These increases are reflected in changes across cohorts in the most recent DHS from Bangladesh (see Figure 2).

The proportion of women with no education decreased from 50 percent among women older than 65 to less than 13 percent among women ages 20-24 in 2011. Over the same period, the proportion of women with at least a secondary education increased from 10 percent among women 65 or older to 27 percent among women ages 20-24 (NIPORT 2013). Despite dramatic improvements in attainment, girls continue to drop out at higher rates than boys, and a smaller proportion of girls than boys pass the secondary school certificate examination (Amin & Huq 2008). While some previous research

Figure 2. Trends in Educational Attainment in Bangladesh (2011 DHS)

suggests that girls in wealthier families may be more likely to drop out of school due to marriage than girls in poorer families (Mahmud & Amin 2006), this practice also may be changing most quickly among wealthy families due to evolving gender norms (Schuler et al. 2006).

Bangladesh has the fourth highest level of child marriage globally, and the highest level in South Asia (Loaiza & Wong 2012; Brown 2012). Nguyen and Wodon (2012) found that the prevalence of child marriage (before age 18) in Bangladesh was 82 percent among those born between 1985 and 1989, a 13 percentage point decrease from the prevalence (95 percent) among women born between 1955 and 1959. The 2011 DHS also indicated a decrease in the prevalence of child marriage among younger cohorts (see Figure 3). Brown (2012) noted that Bangladesh is the only country where the median age of marriage has increased by at least one year since the early 1990s, although some evidence indicates that this increase might be due in part to reporting bias, due to public attention on child marriage, rather than an actual change in marriage patterns (Amin et al. 2006). As of 2007, a similar proportion of girls with no education or primary education were married before age 18 (82 percent and 80 percent,
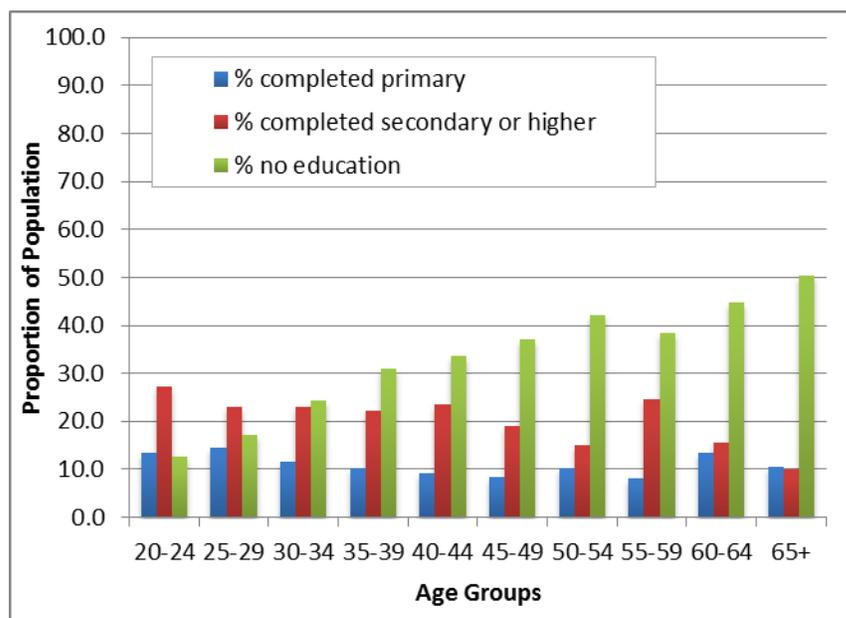
respectively), compared to 57 percent of girls with a secondary education (Loaiza & Wong 2012). Amin and Huq (2008) pointed out that the increases in age of marriage seen leading up to 2000 were small relative to the dramatic increases in schooling for girls.

The changes in the age of marriage in Bangladesh have not been mirrored by changes in the proportion of girls giving birth before age 18. Childbearing outside of marriage is strongly discouraged in Bangladesh (Amin et al. 2006), but once girls are married, only 42 percent use contraception (Loaiza & Wong 2012). The proportion of girls having children before age 18 decreased only slightly between cohorts in the 2011 DHS, from 45 percent among women aged 45-49 to 40 percent among women aged 20-24. These trends indicate that, while there have been clear shifts in the age of marriage in Bangladesh, this has likely been reflected in a shorter interval between marriage and first pregnancy, rather than a delay in the timing of first pregnancy.
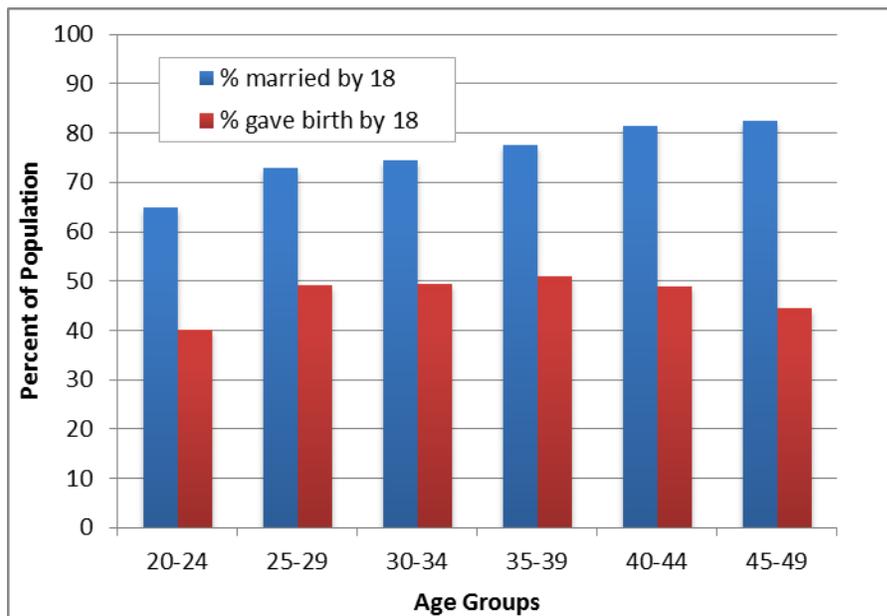
Figure 3. Trends in Child Marriage and Pregnancy in Bangladesh (DHS 2011)

Dowry, marriage, and education

Dowry, or payment by a bride's family to the groom or his family, is a relatively recent practice in Bangladesh, replacing bride price, payments in the opposite direction, in many communities over the last two decades (Amin & Huq 2008; Amin et al. 2006). Dowry contributes to pressure for young girls to marry because the price increases as girls get older, and is higher for more educated husbands (often required for more educated girls) (Amin et al. 2006; Brown 2012). In a study conducted in two villages in Rajshahi district in 2000, Amin and Huq (2008) found that 70 percent of marriages studied included dowry payments, and the average amount reported was about US$220, an amount comparable to average payments a decade earlier, as well as nationally representative estimates. Beyond the cost to the bride's family, Amin and Huq (2008) argued that dowry also creates a sense of entitlement by grooms, which surfaces in the marriage in different ways. They noted that poor families sometimes marry their daughters to less educated or much older grooms to pay a lower amount, while wealthier families

Laws against child marriage might be ineffective in a setting like Bangladesh because parents' motives for marrying their daughters at a young age are often financial and linked to the price of dowry, and education may not alleviate dowry (Field & Ambrus 2008).

tend to seek more educated husbands for their daughters, and are able to pay more. Further, when

parents are concerned about being unable to pay the dowry for their daughters, they might choose to invest in education instead so that she can find a husband herself (Amin & Huq 2008). Overall, Amin and Huq (2008) find that the contribution of education to improving marriage prospects for girls is only relevant for families who can afford the higher dowry necessary for more educated grooms.

Policy and program approaches to addressing early marriage

As part of greater India, the region of Bangladesh was subject to laws against child marriage, such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, which was revised by the government of Bangladesh in 1984 (Loaiza & Wong 2012). This Act defined children as girls younger than 18 and boys younger than 21, although the Special Marriage Act allowed girls aged 14 and older to be married with parental consent (Center for Reproductive Rights 2013). The penalty for involvement in child marriage is a fine or up to one month in prison, which applies to any adults who promote or fail to prevent the marriage, including parents or guardians. The government also acceded to the CEDAW and ratified the CRC. In its accession to the 1998 Convention on Consent to Marriage, the government of Bangladesh reserved its right to apply articles on child marriage in accordance with religious customs (Garg 2012). The practice of dowry was also outlawed in the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 in Bangladesh (Amin & Huq 2008; Amin et al. 2006). Despite the long-standing presence of laws and policies to prevent child marriage and discourage practices such as dowry, and trends showing a decrease in the practice of child marriage over time, there is little evidence of the direct impact of these policies on child marriage (Amin et. al 2014). Field and Ambrus (2008) argue that laws against child marriage might be ineffective in a setting like Bangladesh for several reasons: parents motives for marrying their daughters at a young age are often financial and linked to the price of dowry, and education may not alleviate dowry; and delaying marriage may not lead to more schooling in settings where schooling opportunities are limited, but may lead to higher dowry due to the older age of the girl.

In contrast to laws on child marriage, the government's education policies do appear to have had a clearer impact on both education and early marriage. The Female Secondary School Stipend Project (FSP) was launched in 1982 in Bangladesh with the goal of increasing enrollment of girls in secondary school, and delaying marriage and childbearing. Although ostensibly an education program, the requirement that girls remain unmarried until age 18 was a direct reflection of the government's focus on reducing child marriage through education. The program provides tuition fees and monthly stipends for unmarried rural girls up to grade 10 who maintain a high attendance level and at least 45 percent marks on annual exams (35 percent is passing). In partnership with the World Bank, the government of Bangladesh scaled up the program in 1994, and extended it to higher secondary education for a select group of students in 2002 (Schurmann 2009). Throughout its evolution, the focus on lower fertility and delayed marriage has been consistent.[2]

A full impact assessment of the Female Secondary School Stipend Project has not been conducted, and would be difficult given the lack of necessary data, including baseline data, a control group, and

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[2] A full timeline laying out the evolution of the funding and priorities of the Female Secondary School Stipend Project is included in Schurmann 2009.

individual-level data on student progress and socio-economic status (Schurmann 2009). However, Amin and Sedgh (1998) found that the proportion of females who were married declined dramatically in intervention communities between 1992 and 1995: from 29 to 14 percent for 13-15 year olds and from 72 to 64 percent for 16-19 year olds. The World Bank's 2008 *Implementation Completion and Results Report* for the second phase of this project referenced "anecdotal evidence" of a decline in early marriage among project participants, although changes in marriage and fertility were not included as indicators of success in World Bank implementation status reports (World Bank 2008). Schuler and colleagues also noted qualitative evidence that parents consider the availability of the education stipend in decisions about a daughter's marriage (Schuler, Bates, et al. 2006). Amin and Huq (2008) attributed the improved gender parity in school access over the 1980s and 1990s to a series of education policies and programs undertaken by the government of Bangladesh during this period, including the secondary school stipend program, as well as enrollment drives targeting girls. However, they also found evidence that incentive programs that defray the costs of girls' education have led to parents placing their daughters in school until they are able to find a groom, rather than adopting an intentional strategy to educate their daughters (Amin & Huq 2008).

In addition to government programs and policies, national and international NGOs have been active in addressing child marriage in Bangladesh. Population Council's BALIKA (Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents) program aims to prevent early marriage among adolescent girls aged 12-18 in three districts (Khulna, Narail, Satkhira) of Bangladesh. Participants in intervention villages meet regularly with mentors and peers in girl-only safe spaces to receive life skills training. A different package of interventions was randomized to each arm, and a control arm was established, so that the evaluation could provide evidence of which approach is most effective in delaying marriage. The four-arm cluster RCT includes 9000 girls in 72 villages. Baseline results indicated that 37 percent of 16-18 year olds in the study sample had ever been married, increasing to 70 percent by age 19. Among adolescent girls who were not in school, the primary reason given was marriage (52 percent), indicating that marriage continues to have an important impact on schooling in these districts. Final results will be available in 2016 (Population Council 2014).

Overall, there appear to have been slow but steady declines in the prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh since 1990. There have also been dramatic declines in the proportion of women with no education, although progress in primary and secondary school completion has been slower. While evidence of the direct effects of child marriage laws on both child marriage and education is limited, the evidence for the effects of education policies and programs on both outcomes is stronger. In many ways the Female Secondary School Stipend Project can be seen as a joint education and child marriage initiative, and the existing evidence – albeit limited – indicates that this program has had a beneficial effect on both outcomes.

Ethiopia

Policy overview

The Ethiopian Constitution, ratified in 1995, emphasizes the importance of addressing traditional attitudes and discrimination against women and promoting gender equality. Numerous additional policies have been enacted that reinforce this commitment, including the Education and Training Policy (1994), the Ethiopian Women Empowerment Package (2005), and a series of four Education Sector Development Programs (Ministry of Education, Government of Ethiopia, 2011). A Revised Family Code was adopted in 2003, which set the legal age of marriage at 18 for boys and girls, and stated that consent from both is required (Brown 2012). Brown (2012) argues, however, that laws against child marriage are rarely enforced in Ethiopia. Equality Now also reports impunity among those who violate these laws, including one law that prohibits marriage as a strategy to exempt rapists from prosecution (Equality Now 2014).

The 2010 National Girls' Education and Training Strategy outlines ongoing supply-side measures aimed at expanding access to school for girls, such as improving school facilities, building alternative basic education centers (ABECs) near rural communities to reduce the distance to schools, and recruiting female teachers, but these measures are not explicitly tied to addressing early marriage and childbearing. The Strategy suggests demand-side approaches, such as raising community awareness about the importance of girls' education and potential harm of traditional practices, educating male and female students on gender equality from a young age, and creating girls' clubs in schools. It also notes the importance of alleviating financial barriers to girls' education by encouraging communities to defray the costs of education for girls, rather than indicating that the government will provide direct funding. Overall the National Girls' Education and Training Strategy lays out suggestions of common approaches to promoting girls' education, but the evidence for many of those interventions is inconclusive (Lloyd 2009), and links between certain approaches (e.g. building community schools) and early marriage are uncertain (Ministry of Education, Government of Ethiopia, 2011). Most recently, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs is finalizing the latest policy on harmful traditional practices, which includes early marriage. They also lead a national Alliance to End Child Marriage, formed in 2013, although action by this group has been limited to date.

Trends in education, early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy

Data from the 2011 DHS in Ethiopia indicate considerable improvements in educational attainment over the past few decades (see Figure 4) (Central Statistical Agency & ICF International 2012). The most dramatic change has been in the proportion of adults who have ever attended school, which increased from 15 percent among 45-49 year olds to 62 percent among 20-24 year olds. As of 2008/9, the primary Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for boys was 98 percent, and for girls was 91 percent. Between 1999 and 2011, the proportion of children entering school on time in Ethiopia increased from 23 percent to 94 percent (UNESCO 2014). The proportion of adults who have only completed primary school increased slightly from 1 percent among 45-49 year olds to 5 percent among 20-24 year olds, as did the proportion who have completed secondary school (from 1 to 11 percent). According to the Ministry of Education, a

large proportion of children (both boys and girls) drop out after grade 1, and by the end of secondary school women only comprise about one third of the student population (Ministry of Education, Government of Ethiopia, 2010).

Ethiopia is one of very few countries that showed a decline of more than 10% in child marriage rates between the last two rounds of DHS (2005 to 2011). The 2011 Ethiopia DHS showed clear downward trends in the proportion of women married and having children by age 18 (see Figure 4), decreasing from 73 percent among 45-49 year olds (age 18 approximately between 1980 and 1984) to 41 percent among 20-24 year olds (age 18 approximately between 2005 and 2009). Similarly, the proportion who gave birth by age 18 decreased from 43 percent to 22 percent between these two cohorts (Central Statistical Agency & ICF International 2012). There are important regional differences in child marriage, with much higher levels in the rural Amhara region than in urban Addis Ababa, for example (Brown 2012).

Figure 4. Trends in Educational Attainment in Ethiopia (Central Statistical Agency & ICF International 2012)

The proportion of women giving birth before age 18 has also decreased over time, from 43 percent among women ages 45-49 to 22 percent among women ages 20-24 (see Figure 5). Timing of childbearing varies with level of education and location (urban/rural). Women ages 15-19 with no education are eight
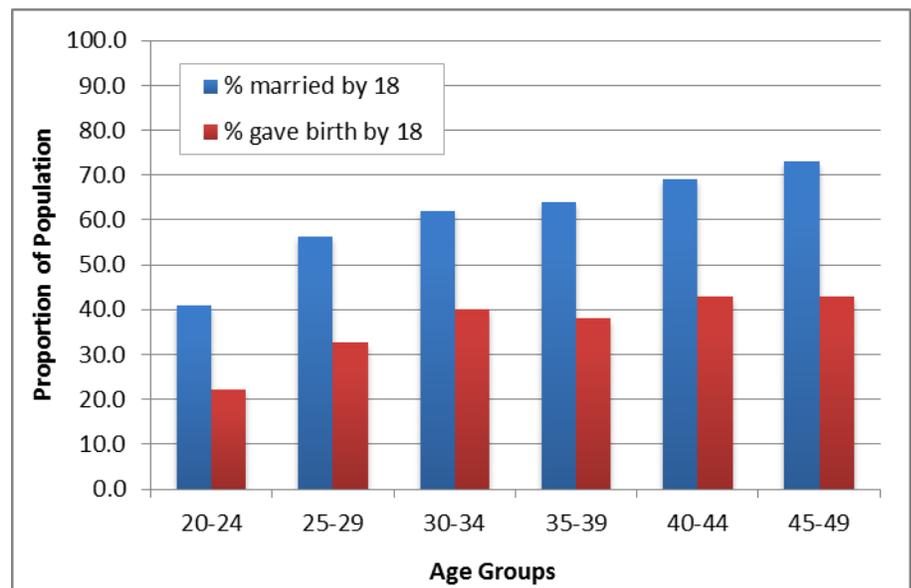
Figure 5. Trends in Child Marriage and Childbearing in Ethiopia (DHS 2011)

times more likely to have begun childbearing than women ages 15-19 with secondary or higher education. Reflecting disparities in levels of early marriage, 15 percent of women ages 15-19 have begun
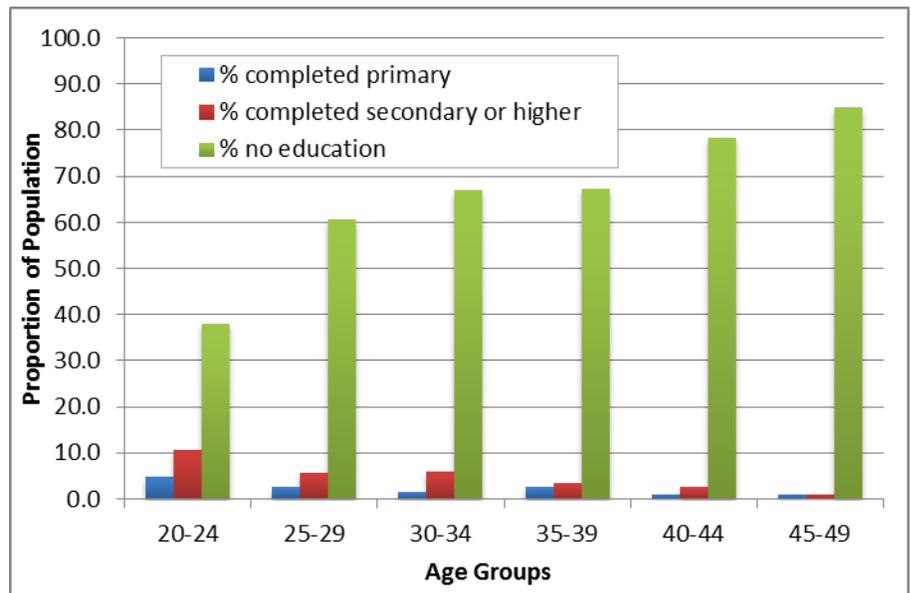
16

childbearing in rural areas, compared to 4 percent in urban areas (Central Statistical Agency & ICF International 2012).

Ethiopia has seen success in access to primary school, child marriage, and adolescent childbearing over recent decades. However, the fact that these trends coincided does not, in itself, indicate that declines in early marriage caused increased educational attainment. For example, a population-based survey with adolescents in Ethiopia conducted in 2009-2010 found that, although women with no education were 9 times more likely to marry before age 15 (compared to women with any education), only 9 percent of women married at ages 15-17 reported that they left school because of marriage (Erulkar 2013a). Therefore, it is possible that other factors besides marriage, such as financial barriers, are responsible for low educational attainment in many parts of Ethiopia.

Policy and program approaches to addressing early marriage

In their 2010 National Girls Education and Training Strategy, the Government of Ethiopia highlighted progress in closing the gender gap in primary school enrollment between 2000 and 2010, as demonstrated in Figure 4 (Ministry of Education, Government of Ethiopia, 2010). However, several persistent obstacles to achieving gender parity and equality in the education system were identified, including: 1) cultural barriers related to treatment of girls and women, including early marriage; 2) poverty, which increases the opportunity cost of sending girls to school; 3) gender-insensitive school environments, including sexual harassment in schools; and 4) lack of accountability among regional and local officials for implementing gender-related policies. The 2010 Strategy also states that national learning assessments in grades 4 and 8 find that boys outperform girls. These challenges are echoed by Jennings (2011) in a review of the social barriers in the Ethiopian education system. The government's 2006 alternative basic education (ABE) program targeted out of school children ages 7 to 14 (Jennings 2011). Although one goal of this program has been to overcome barriers to schooling for girls by bringing education closer to communities and engaging local female facilitators, the majority of participants have been boys (54 percent) (Ministry of Education, Government of Ethiopia, 2010). The government has also worked to increase the proportion of teachers who are female, although they remain the minority at all levels: 37 percent in primary, 12 percent in secondary, and 12 percent in teacher education colleges (Ministry of Education, Government of Ethiopia, 2010).

> *Although women with no education were nine times more likely to marry before age 15 (compared to women with any education), only 9 percent of women married at ages 15-17 reported that they left school because of marriage (Erulkar 2013a).*

In partnership with the Ethiopian government, the Population Council has been implementing programs to address child marriage in Ethiopia since 1993. One of the most recent interventions, Berhane Hewan, included a rigorous evaluation, which is lacking in much of the ongoing programmatic work to address this issue in sub-Saharan Africa (Lee-Rife et al. 2012; Erulkar & Muthengi 2009). Berhane Hewan ("Light for Eve" in Amharic) is ongoing in the Amhara region, where levels of child marriage are particularly high (Central Statistical Agency & ICF International 2012). The primary objectives of the pilot phase of

Berhane Hewan (from 2004-2006) were to delay marriage and keep girls in school through community conversations, support for remaining in school, and cash transfers if the girls remained unmarried and in school for the duration of the program. By the end of the pilot, more than 450 girls were participating in the intervention group, and their results were compared to a comparably sized control group. The evaluation of the pilot phase found that participants reported stronger friendship networks, better school attendance, older age at marriage, better reproductive health knowledge and communication, and higher contraceptive use. At the end of the pilot phase, participants ages 10–14 were three times more likely to be in school, and 10 times less likely to have ever been married than their peers in the control sites. Notably, educational attainment improved during the implementation period for both the control group and the intervention group, but the improvement was greater for the latter. In terms of marriage, among 10-14 year old girls, 5 percent of girls in the control group were married during follow-up, compared to none of the girls in the intervention group. Among girls 15-19, however, 7 percent of girls in the intervention group were married in the previous year, compared to 4 percent in the control group. The increase in risk of marriage for participant girls ages 15-19 during the project period indicates an overall shift to older ages of marriage, although marriage before age 18 remained common (Erulkar and Muthengi 2009). Because the whole intervention was compared to no intervention during the pilot phase, it was not possible to determine which components were most effective. In the current phase of Berhane Hewan, components are being tested in different districts, and cost-effectiveness is being assessed, enabling comparison between each approach (Erulkar & Muthengi-Karei 2012).

Overall, Ethiopia has experienced success in recent decades in reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and improving educational attainment. However, the limited available evidence indicates that marriage may not be the primary reason why girls drop out of school, particularly given low overall levels of educational attainment. On the other hand, the Population Council's Berhane Hewan program, which tested the effect of financial incentives to delay marriage, found that girls in the intervention group achieved a higher level of educational attainment than their peers in the control group. Together, this indicates that a package of policies and programs, including awareness-raising and incentives to delay marriage, may be effective in this setting in improving educational attainment for girls.

Guatemala

Trends in education, early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy in Guatemala

Since the Guatemalan Civil War ended in 1996 there have been large improvements in education, but Guatemala still has the lowest level of primary school completion in Central America, and lags behind most countries in the Western hemisphere. There are also important disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Between 2000 and 2011 in Guatemala there were improvements in net enrollment levels in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school (INE 2013). Girls' primary net enrollment increased during this period from 82 to 92 percent, followed by a slight decrease between 2009 and 2011. Gender gaps narrowed at the primary level (from 7 points to 1 point) but remained stable at the lower secondary level. For both boys and girls, dropout during primary school remains high. By 2011, although net primary enrollment was 92 percent for girls and 93 percent for boys, net

Figure 6. Trends in primary and secondary school net enrollment ratios in Guatemala. (Source: INE 2013)

enrollment at the lower secondary level was only 42 percent for girls and 45 percent for boys. At the upper secondary level, by 2011 a slightly higher proportion of school-aged girls than boys were enrolled (24 percent of girls vs. 23 percent of boys) (INE 2013). There have also been shifts between 2000 and 2011 in the most common reasons that adolescents (15-24) report they are out of school. Among males, the primary reason for being out of school in 2000 was work, while in 2011 responses were divided almost equally between work, lack of
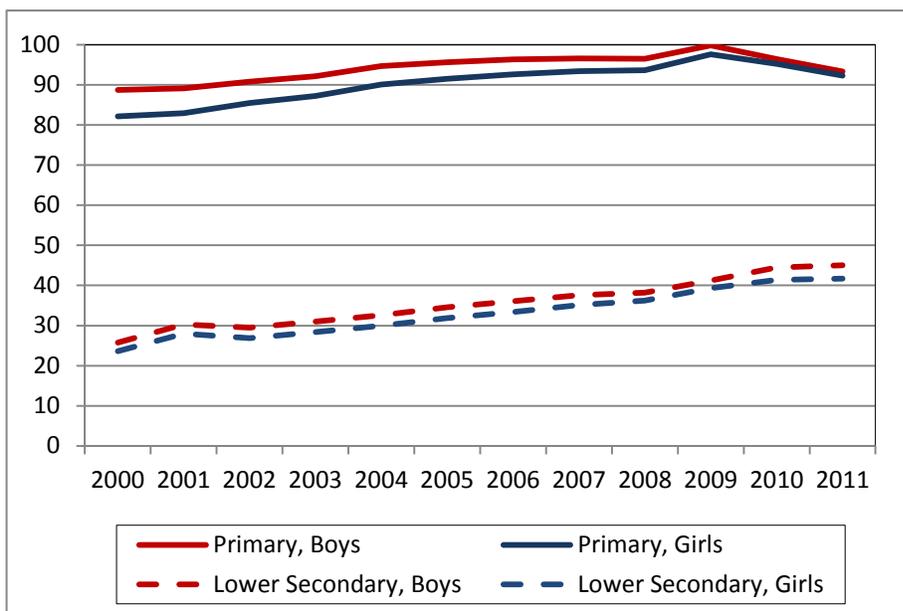

Figure 7. Trends in age at first sex, marriage, and birth in Guatemala (Source: ENSMI 2008/2009)

money, and age (being overage for grade). Among females, the primary reason for not being in school in 2000 was housework; other common reasons were age, lack of money, and work. In 2011, the most important reason cited by females was being overage for grade, followed by lack of money, housework, and lack of interest (INE 2013).

Currently in Guatemala, about 30 percent of girls are married before the age of 18, one of the highest levels of child marriage in Central America. Prevalence is highest in rural areas, where approximately 53 percent of women ages 20-24 are married by 18 (Amin 2011). Levels of adolescent pregnancy and marriage have largely stagnated in recent decades. Samandari and Speizer (2010) found that the odds of getting married before age 18 remained stable between 1987 and 2002. Retrospective data collected in 2008/2009 indicated similar trends (see Figure 7). The proportion of adults reporting that they gave birth by age 18 has remained steady: 23 percent among 45-49 year olds and 22 percent among 20-24 year olds (MSPAS 2010). However, more recent data show that, between 2000 and 2011, the proportion of adolescents who gave birth (between the ages of 13 and 19) decreased from 77 per 1000 women in that age group to 67 per 1000 women (INE 2013). A Government of Guatemala report attributed this shift to improved access to family planning methods.

Indigenous Girls in Guatemala

Indigenous groups in Guatemala include the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinka. According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Associated Forms of Intolerance, racial discrimination against indigenous groups is widespread in Guatemala (UNICEF & DEMI 2008). The 2000 census in Guatemala indicated that indigenous people comprised 41 percent of the population, while Ladinos (European and mixed descent) comprised 59 percent (UNICEF & DEMI 2008). Three quarters of Mayans are poor, compared to 40 percent of Ladinos (Hallman et al. 2007). In 2000, by age 18 nearly 40 percent of Mayan girls were married, nearly twice the proportion of Ladina girls of the same age (Hallman et al. 2007). Hallman and colleagues (2007) explored the specific vulnerabilities of indigenous girls in Guatemala using the 2000 Guatemala Living Standards Measurement Survey. They found that indigenous females, especially those from poor households in rural areas, were the most disadvantaged in terms of education. Enrollment rates were comparable for indigenous boys and girls at age 10, but the gender gap grew dramatically as they got older; by age 14 only 40 percent of indigenous females compared to 60 percent of indigenous males were still in school. The main barrier to school enrollment for all children, however, regardless of gender or ethnicity, was lack of money. The authors observed a gap of about five years between school leaving and age of marriage for girls, indicating that marriage was unlikely to be the direct reason for dropout in many cases (Hallman et. Al 2007).

Colom and colleagues (2004) reported on a qualitative study conducted in four rural Mayan communities in Guatemala that found conflicts between girls' aspirations for the future and their realities in terms of access to resources and opportunities. Some parents also expressed hesitation to invest limited resources in their daughters' education, given plans for their daughters to get married and have children. At the same time, they expressed concerns about allowing their adolescent daughters to go to school because of fear of pregnancy (Colom et al. 2004).

Policy and program approaches to education and child marriage

The Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala, passed in 1985, states that every citizen has a right and obligation to education from pre-primary through lower secondary school (Martinic 2003). Guatemala was the sixth country to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, although domestic laws conflicted with its provisions until the Law for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents was enacted in 2003. The legal age of marriage in Guatemala is 16 for boys and 14 for girls with parental consent, and 18 without it. Parental consent is also required when a girl is pregnant and younger than 18 (Equality Now 2014). While public education is free and mandatory, many families, especially in rural and indigenous communities, are unable to pay other costs such as uniforms and books (Colom et. al 2004). The government of Guatemala has adopted several measures to expand access to education to marginalized populations, including the introduction of self-managed schools, the Equal Opportunities Plan for Guatemalan Women, and the 2000-2004 Government Social Policy Plan (Martinic 2003). Although trends in education have been positive, the rigorous evidence for the direct impact of these policies is limited.

Because school leaving tends to precede marriage among the most vulnerable adolescents, the most relevant policy question in this setting is whether increases in schooling might affect age of marriage. To address this question, Berhman and colleagues (2006) used 35 years of longitudinal data collected in four villages in Eastern Guatemala between 1969-1977 and 2002-2004 to estimate the impact of schooling on transitions to marriage and childbearing for women and men. They used instrumental variables estimation to account for the endogeneity of schooling, union formation, and parenting. Results indicated that failing to control for shared underlying variables leads to underestimates of the positive schooling effects for females, and overestimates of the positive effects for males. While their findings provided evidence that schooling was causally related to the timing of marriage and childbearing in Guatemala, the lack of change in the age of marriage over time indicated that other important factors were also involved (Behrman et al. 2006). In addition to poverty reduction programs, Hallman and colleagues (2007) suggested that policies to encourage parents to enroll their children in school on time in order to reduce the conflict between schooling and other responsibilities might result in higher educational attainment. They further noted that innovative approaches to improving the flexibility of schooling to accommodate indigenous girls' other responsibilities, as well as continued bilingual education in early grades, might be effective (Hallman et al. 2007).

A series of scholarship programs aiming to expand access to education for girls, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), were implemented between 1991 and 2001. A review of these efforts conducted in 2001 found that, although there were improvements in school attendance, dropout, and participation among participants, the proportion of students who completed primary school remained low overall (Enge 2001; Chesterfield & Enge 2002). Since 2002, the Population Council has been implementing the Abriendo Oportunidades (*Creating Opportunities*) program (AO), supporting indigenous girls ages 8-18 in Guatemala to learn to navigate adolescent transitions, including the transitions to marriage and childbearing, successfully. The program engages community leaders and trains girls to run community girls' clubs, where they learn practical skills and assume leadership roles. As of 2011, AO had reached 3500 indigenous girls in 40 communities. The

program has since expanded to include tutoring and a weekly educational radio program in Mayan languages. The AO curriculum guide has been standardized and is now being adapted for boys and girls in urban areas. A 2010 evaluation of AO found that 100 percent of Abriendo girl leaders completed sixth grade, compared to less than 82 percent of girls nationally. In addition, 97 percent of AO girl leaders, all from indigenous communities, remained childless during the program, compared with 78 percent of girls in their age range nationally (Catino et al. 2011).

Overall, existing evidence indicates that early marriage and childbearing are unlikely to be direct causes of school dropout among indigenous population in Guatemala. This is consistent with trends in Latin America as a whole. Comparing trends in age of marriage and educational attainment across regions, Mensch and colleagues (2005) found that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the expected decline in early marriage between cohorts of adults, given the increase in educational attainment over time, far exceeded the actual decline. Further, most adolescent childbearing in Guatemala occurs within marriage, so this is unlikely to be an important cause of school dropout (Hallman et al. 2007). In particular, among rural indigenous girls, who are at the highest risk of child marriage in Guatemala, school-leaving often occurs for financial reasons, and precedes marriage by several years. However, Hallman and colleagues (2007) point out that parents' expectations for their daughters' futures likely affect their investments in schooling. Therefore, policies seeking to address both marriage and education may have the greatest impact by defraying the costs of education, such as uniforms and books, among rural indigenous communities.

Kenya

Trends in education, early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy in Kenya

Data from the 2008-2009 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) identified improvements in the proportion of adults who had ever attended school, increasing from 79 percent among 45-49 year olds

to 93 percent among 20-24 year olds. The proportion of adults who had completed primary school increased slightly to 30 percent of 20-24 year olds from 24 percent of 45-49 year olds, although there were fluctuations between cohorts. Similarly, while more 20-24 year olds (18 percent) had completed secondary school than 45-49 year olds (13.3 percent), there was no clear positive trend between cohorts (KNBS & ICF Macro 2010). There was no gender gap in school attendance until age 13, at which point more girls than boys began to drop out of school (EPDC 2012). The 2013/14 EFA Global Monitoring Report categorized Kenya as

Figure 8. Trends in Educational Attainment Kenya (KNBS & ICF Macro 2010)

being far from the universal primary education target by 2015 (i.e. 80-94% enrollment), but making strong progress (UNESCO 2014). Similarly, the Education Policy and Data Center projects that primary completion rates in Kenya will exceed 90 percent for both boys and girls by 2015 (EPDC 2012).
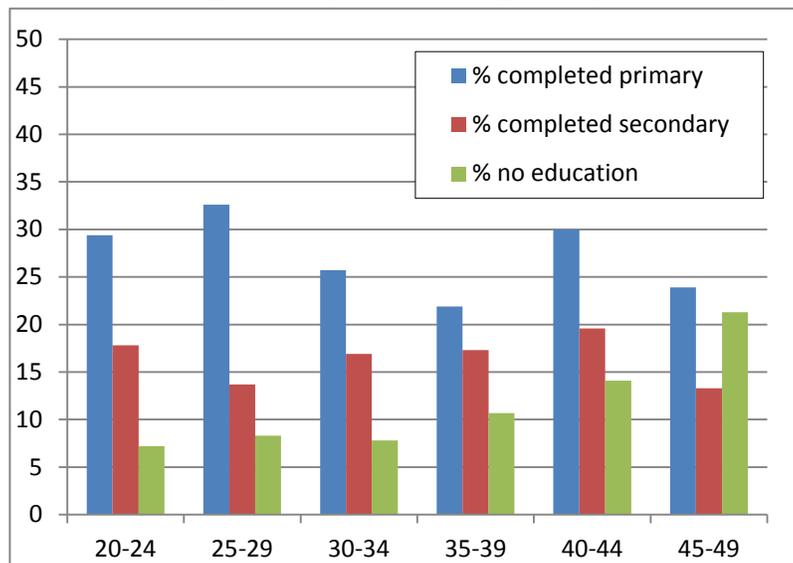
Mirroring global trends, Kenya has experienced a slow decline in the practice of child marriage. Using data from the DHS, Nguyen and Wodon (2012) reported that the prevalence of child marriage in Kenya decreased from 48 percent among those born between 1955 and 1959 to 23 percent among women born between 1985 and 1989. Figure 9 shows this trend between cohorts using the 2008-2009 DHS data. Adolescent childbearing has followed a similar, but less dramatic, trend. About 26 percent of women ages 20-24 reported that they had given birth before age 18, compared to 36 percent of women ages 45-49. In the 2003 Kenya
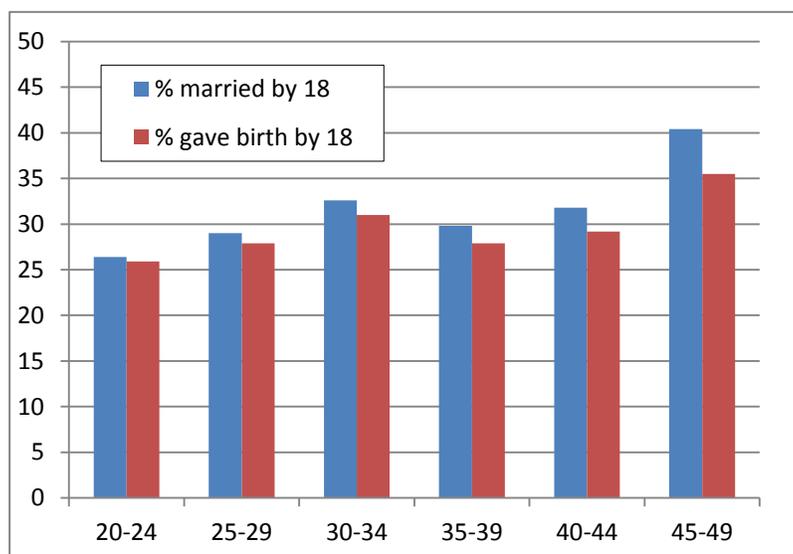

Figure 9. Trends in Child Marriage and Childbearing in Kenya (2008-2009 DHS)

DHS, only 9 percent of adolescents (ages 15-19) who had ever been pregnant had never been married, indicating that most adolescent pregnancies occured within marriage (Khan & Mishra 2008).

The scope of schoolgirl pregnancies

There has been much policy attention in Kenya to the issue of schoolgirl pregnancies, or pregnancy among young women who are still attending school (Mensch, Clark et al. 2001; Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008). However, to our knowledge, nationally representative data on the prevalence of schoolgirl pregnancy as a cause of dropout in Kenya have never been collected. Several reports state that 10,000-13,000 girls leave school annually due to pregnancy (Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008; Achoka & Njeru 2012), but the source of this number is unclear. Smaller or outdated studies have provided varying estimates of the scale of this problem. Mensch and colleagues (2001) noted a 1987 study that estimated that 1 percent of girls enrolled in school dropped out due to pregnancy. In their own study of adolescents in three rural districts of Kenya (Nyeri, Kilifi, Nakuru), they found that childcare was the main reason for leaving school for 5 percent of the girls who dropped out, or about 1 percent of girls who had ever attended school. More common reasons given for leaving school included: inability to pay fees, having finished the current level, poor performance, and lack of interest. The authors also found that girls were less likely to engage in premarital sex if they attended a school where they felt they were being treated equitably (Mensch, Clark et al. 2001). Based on these findings, Mensch and colleagues (2001) argued that, given the reported reasons for school dropout in their study, efforts aimed at making school more affordable, effective, and inclusive for girls in these settings will likely have a bigger impact on dropout than efforts to prevent schoolgirl pregnancies. In contrast, a study conducted with adolescents living in the Kibera slums of Nairobi in 2006 found that, among girls who were out of school, 14 percent reported that they left due to marriage and 9 percent reported they left due to pregnancy (Erulkar & Matheka 2007). Preliminary data from an ongoing Population Council study in urban Kenya indicate that 11 percent of out of school girls report that they left school due to pregnancy, ranging from 4 percent in Nakuru to 16 percent in Thika (Muthengi et al. 2014). The differences in the estimates between the 2001 study by Mensch and colleagues and the more recent studies (Erulkar & Matheka 2007; Muthengi, Austrian & Gitau, 2014) may be due to the different location (urban versus rural), rather than an overall increase in the prevalence of schoolgirl pregnancy.

Policy and program approaches to addressing schoolgirl pregnancy

The Kenyan government has taken several steps toward free primary education since the 1970s. Limited scope free primary policies were first passed in 1974, expanded to eliminate primary school fees and related charges in 1979, and intensified since 2003 (Oketch & Ngware 2010). A free secondary education policy was passed in 2008, which stipulated that the government would cover day students' tuition costs, while parents would continue to be required to cover other costs such as transportation. The Children's Act of 2001, enacted to incorporate the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Kenyan law, outlawed child marriage (i.e. before the age of 18). Other policies, such as the National Population Policy for Sustainable Development in 2000 and the Adolescent Reproductive Health and Development Policy of 2003, have sought to build on the Children's Act.

The 1994 Return to School Policy was supplemented by guidelines in 1996, and revised in 2009 to address the issue of schoolgirl pregnancy by allowing pregnant girls to remain in school as long as possible, and to return to (the same or a different) school after they have given birth (Omwancha 2012; Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008; Achoka & Njeru 2012). Reviews of the implementation of this policy, although limited to qualitative data, highlight two broad challenges: lack of awareness and gaps in the policy. Drawing on qualitative research conducted with Ministry of Education officials, teachers, parents and students in Kuria district of Kenya, Omwancha (2012) notes the lack of awareness of the policy among Ministry officials, and the lack of guidelines on how to implement the policy reported by teachers and school officials. Conflicting views were reported by students and teachers on whether the policy was appropriate, and whether schools were implementing it effectively. Reporting on a project to improve the implementation of the Return to School policy in Suba and Kisumu districts, Muganda-Onyando & Omondi 2008 echo similar challenges, including lack of knowledge of the policy among school officials. They also described persistent challenges for girls seeking to return to school, including lack of childcare, stigma, poverty, poor performance, and lack of interest in school.

Various programmatic approaches exist to prevent pregnancy and improve reproductive health among adolescents. Recently, the Ministry of Health in Kenya collaborated with USAID and Family Health International (FHI) 360 to review evidence-based approaches to promoting adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) in Kenya. Programs were scored based on several criteria: replicability, sustainability, increased service utilization, and cost. This review indicated that ASRH programs adopt several common approaches, including peer education, youth friendly clinic and outreach services, edutainment, and mentorship (Division of Reproductive Health, Kenya Ministry of Health, 2013). The highest rated program for in-school youth was the Kenya Adolescent Reproductive Health Program (later called APHIA) implemented by PATH and the Population Council using peer education, guidance and counseling in school, and introduction of youth friendly services in health facilities. Among other results, the program's evaluation found a reduction in reported sexual initiation and activity among boys and girls at age 16 compared to baseline, and an increase in the proportion of adolescents who reported discussing sexual and reproductive health issues with their parents. The evaluation results did not specifically mention schoolgirl pregnancy (Division of Reproductive Health, Kenya Ministry of Health, 2013).

Duflo and colleagues (2012) also reported on promising findings from a randomized evaluation of an education subsidy program implemented in 328 schools in Western Kenya in partnership with the Kenyan Ministry of Education. They found that the subsidy program, which provided two free school uniforms during the last three years of primary school, led to a 17 percent reduction in the proportion of adolescents who became pregnant. They argued that adolescent girls' decisions about partnerships and sexual behavior were determined, in part, by their expectations for future schooling. That is, when continued schooling became more feasible and appealing as a result of the subsidies, participants changed their behavior in order to reduce the risk of pregnancy, which would interfere with continued schooling (Duflo et al. 2012). Interventions specifically targeting schoolgirl pregnancy in Kenya are limited. However, the Population Council is currently implementing a program in Homa Bay County to

raise awareness of the school reentry policy among key stakeholders. The project uses a pre- and post-intervention design, and the final results will be available in 2017.

Overall, Kenya appears to be making progress toward universal primary education, as well as reducing early marriage and adolescent childbearing. Despite the lack of nationally representative data, or any data from most areas of the country, a fair amount of policy and programmatic attention has been focused on the issue of schoolgirl pregnancy in Kenya. Several qualitative studies have called attention to the barriers to effective implementation of the 1994 Return to School Policy, the most commonly cited of which is lack of awareness among key stakeholders. While evidence of the impact of schoolgirl pregnancies on school dropout varies, a comprehensive approach to the promotion of girls' schooling that integrates adolescent sexual and reproductive health is advisable, given the fact that adolescent sexual activity is widespread.

Conclusions and recommendations

This review focused on recent trends in policies and programs on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, and their effects on gender equality in education globally. Perhaps the most striking finding is the lack of rigorous research on the effects of policies in particular, and to a lesser extent the effects of interventions, related to these outcomes. This question is complicated by the endogeneity of decisions regarding marriage, pregnancy, and schooling for adolescents and their parents. Overall, it is clear that decisions about schooling and transitions to adulthood are so closely related that policies seeking to address any of these outcomes should incorporate all of them.

Globally, there is little evidence of the impact of child marriage policies on child marriage or education, perhaps because of lack of data, or poor implementation of policies, or both. However, governments have a responsibility to ensure that domestic policies align with international human rights conventions. The evidence for the effects of education policies on attitudes and behaviors related to marriage and pregnancy is stronger. There is also reason to believe that child marriage or adolescent pregnancy policies, if tied to relevant incentives, might be effective in changing these behaviors, as well as improving educational attainment, in some settings. Ultimately, the choice of appropriate policies depends on the context. Rather than approaching gender equality in education with an assumption regarding which policies should be prescribed, a more effective approach would be to gain a clear understanding of the context of decisions about marriage, pregnancy, and schooling, and to design policies that are responsive to that context.

The following recommendations emerge from these analyses:

- *Countries that have ratified international conventions on child marriage should align their domestic laws with those conventions.* Efforts must also be made to ensure that policies are communicated and enforced at the district and community levels. In particular, governments must reconcile human rights protections with religious and customary laws when the two conflict, as well as provide accessible legal services for girls and women.

- *Policies should be seen as one tool in a broader approach to addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, and to promoting education.* Although rigorous reviews are limited, a common criticism of policies on child marriage and schoolgirl pregnancy is that policies alone are unable to address the many financial and cultural barriers to progress, such as the cost of childcare for young mothers seeking to return to school, and the cultural and financial pressure to marry for adolescent girls. While passing appropriate laws and policies to address these issues is an important step, they must be reinforced with efforts at the community level, as well as combined with policies and programs to address related challenges, such as poverty and lack of employment opportunities for women.

- *Policies and programs to promote gender equality in education must fit the realities of each context.* While marriage might be an important direct or indirect cause of school dropout in some settings, such as Bangladesh, other factors might be more important causes in other

settings, such as Guatemala. Even in contexts where marriage is a common cause of school dropout, policies prohibiting child marriage might not be the most effective approach to addressing this barrier. Similarly, while schoolgirl pregnancy is an important human rights issue regardless of prevalence, policies aiming to reduce school dropout should take into account the factors that most commonly contribute to school leaving in each setting, and be crafted accordingly. For example, if parents and students report that the most common reason for leaving school is financial, policies and programs should aim to address financial factors through activities such as cash transfers, scholarships, or access to savings.

- *Policies and programs should account for the close relationship between decisions about schooling, marriage, and pregnancy in many contexts.* The endogeneity of pregnancy, marriage, and school leaving in many contexts means that policy makers cannot effectively address these issues separately. Policies aiming to address any of these must take into account the relationship between them, as has been done in Bangladesh through the requirement that girls remain unmarried until age 18 in order to receive a secondary school stipend. Given a choice, however, the evidence indicates that investments in education are more likely to affect both early marriage and education than are child marriage policies alone. At the same time, programs that provide parents with incentives to delay their daughters' marriage, as Population Council has done in Ethiopia, might have benefits for both delayed marriage and improved educational attainment.

- *More rigorous research and evaluation on the effects of policies and programs on child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and gender equality in education are needed*. Policies present a challenge in evaluation due to the fact that they are often rolled out in multiple stages, a control group is rare, and they may reflect changing cultural norms, rather than precede them. However, the lack of rigorous research aimed at understanding how policies are rolled out and communicated, and their impacts on outcomes of interest, represents a missed opportunity. A more concerted effort to assess the impacts of policies will inform more effective policies in the future.

- *More investment is needed in rigorous evaluations of interventions seeking to address child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, and to promote gender equality in education.* While programs in these areas are increasingly widespread, the evidence base on many of these issues is still weak. Interventions should be designed with rigorous evaluations from the beginning, and should build on research and evaluation that has come before them.

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