



Child Marriage and Education: An Information Sheet

The scale of child marriage is huge: 15 million girls a year are married before the age of 18. One in three girls in the developing world is married before the age of 18. If there is no reduction in the practice of child marriage, 1.2 billion women alive in 2050 will have married in childhood – that is equivalent to the entire population of India.ⁱ

The continuing practice of child marriage undermines efforts to improve girls' education and must be addressed to make progress on global education goals. At the same time, keeping girls in school is a critical strategy in preventing child marriage.

Child marriage and education are intrinsically linked

- Out of the world's **121 million out of school children**, a vast proportion are girls living in regions where **child marriage rates are the highest**: sub Saharan Africa and South Asia.ⁱⁱ
- **Girls who are married young have lower levels of education.**
 - Girls who have no education are three times as likely to marry by 18 as those with a secondary or higher education.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Over sixty per cent of women with no education were married by age 18, compared to only 20 per cent of women who had a secondary education.**^{iv}
 - In Malawi for example, two thirds of women with no education were child brides compared to only 5 per cent who had attended secondary school or higher.^v
- **Girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory time before marriage or shortly afterwards** when their marital and domestic demands increase. While child marriage is not always the reason for school dropout, once a girl has left school, she is more likely to be married early and have children before she is ready. **In most cases child marriage means an end to formal education.**

Efforts to improve girls' education will only be successful if they also address child marriage

As both a driver and consequence of poor educational attainment, it is crucial to address child marriage to improve girls' education.

- **While the achievements made in girls' education are unprecedented** and more girls are being educated than ever before, **progress continues to stall in a number of the world's poorest countries.** These 'hotspot countries' are struggling to close the gender gap in their education systems, leaving behind those girls who face multiple disadvantages in life, and are more at risk of child marriage.

- **Child marriage is underpinned by the low status of girls.** Many girls drop out of or are excluded from school because their parents see little value in educating their daughters. Yet girls have both a right and critical need for quality education. Unless social norms around the role and value of girls change, progress on a range of issues, including education, will be undermined.
- **Married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so.**^{vi} Girls who are socially isolated, geographically remote or have children to look after, may not be allowed or have the opportunity to remain in school, or simply prefer not to attend due to the stigma associated with pregnancy and having to repeat school years.
 - Over the past few decades several sub Saharan African countries have introduced policies supporting the re-admittance of girls who have children. However, uptake is low with many schools unaware of the policy or girls preferring to stay at home rather than face stigma and discrimination by students and teachers. In South Africa where the law forbids school excluding pregnant girls, only 1 in 3 return after giving birth.^{vii}
- **It is vital that education plans integrate the goal of ending child marriage,** for example by developing a prevention strategy that targets girls at risk, promoting girls' education in and outside of school and ensuring that education is of high quality, safe and relevant to girls.

Education is a key strategy to address child marriage^{viii}

The more education a girl has, the later she is likely to marry, the fewer children she has and the healthier and more prosperous she and her family is likely to be.^{ix}

- **Education is a key protective factor against child marriage.** Being in school builds a girls knowledge and skills so she is better able to delay marriage and can help support the **perception that girls are still children** and are therefore not of marriageable age.
- **Primary schooling is not enough; the critical transition from primary to secondary schooling,** and completion of secondary schooling must be addressed. School dropout rates for girls escalate during this transition period in many parts of the world.
 - Research suggests that **girls who have secondary education are up to six times less likely to marry while children** compared to girls with little to no education, illustrating the effectiveness of education as a strategy to prevent child marriage.^x
- **Education must address factors threatening the confidence or ability** of families to keep their children in school:
 - **Accessibility:** Both primary and secondary schools should be accessible for girls to reach. Providing a safe means for girls to get to school can increase girls' enrollment. A scheme in Bihar in India which provided girls with bicycles to safely reach their local secondary school closed the gender gap in age appropriate secondary school enrollment by 40 per cent.^{xi}

- **Safety:** Concerns about travelling to school, safety at school, sanitation facilities and gender based violence must be addressed. One study found that more than 30 per cent of girls in southern Africa are raped in and around school.^{xii}
- **Quality:** Simply being in school is not enough, girls need high quality learning experiences to be able to translate their education into real advances in their lives.^{xiii} Education services must be high quality and relevant to the needs of girls and gender sensitive learning materials and curricula must be available to help develop the knowledge and life skills needed to make free and informed decisions, including if, when and whom to marry. Increasing teaching quality and the number of female teachers can also have a positive impact on girls' learning experience. Teaching girls the basic competencies before they are pulled out of school as well as making the classroom conducive for girls' learning may be more likely to convince parents and girls about the value of education.
- **Cost:** The direct and indirect costs of schooling, i.e. financial costs to attend school as well as the opportunity costs, e.g. time that could have been spent cleaning, working, looking after siblings, are higher for girls than for boys. Reducing these costs and increasing the value placed on education is essential if girls are to access and remain in school.^{xiv}
- **Comprehensive sexual reproductive health education that explicitly addresses girls' rights and gender inequality** can transform the harmful social norms that perpetuate child marriage.

Education alone will not be enough to end child marriage

- Ending child marriage **requires action at all levels and across sectors**. Addressing the root causes such as **poverty, insecurity, the lack of alternative economic and social opportunities for girls and gender inequality** must all be addressed for progress to be made.
 - In Ethiopia educational attainment for girls has increased at the same time as a reported 20 per cent decrease in child marriage between 2005 and 2011. It is believed that this has been achieved through a comprehensive framework of legislative change, including education sector development programmes, advocacy and community mobilization campaigns.^{xv}
- *Girls Not Brides'* [Theory of Change](#) outlines the range of approaches needed to end child marriage: empowering girls, mobilizing families and communities, providing services across sectors, and establishing and implementing laws and policies. The education sector has a critical role to play but must be accompanied by wider cross-sectoral partnerships to address child marriage.

ⁱ UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage. Progress and prospects*, 2014

ⁱⁱ UNESCO, UNICEF, *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All*, 2015

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Population Fund, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012

^{iv} Note: women refers to those aged 20 -24. United Nations Population Fund, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012

^v UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage. Progress and prospects*, 2014

^{vi} UNICEF, *Early Marriage: Child Spouses*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2001

^{vii} UNESCO, *Global Monitoring Report*, 2015

^{viii} For further information see ICRW, *Solutions to End Child Marriage*, 2011

^{ix} UNICEF, *Progress for children: Achieving the MDGs with equity*, 2010

^x United Nations Population Fund, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012

^{xi} Muralidharan and Prakash (2013) as cited in *Brookings Today's Challenges for Girls' Education*, 2015

^{xii} Prinsloo (2006) as cited in *Brookings Today's Challenges for Girls' Education*, 2015

^{xiii} *Brookings Today's Challenges for Girls' Education*, 2015; UNESCO, *Global Monitoring Report*, 2015

^{xiv} *Brookings Today's Challenges for Girls' Education*, 2015

^{xv} UNESCO, *Global Monitoring Report*, 2015