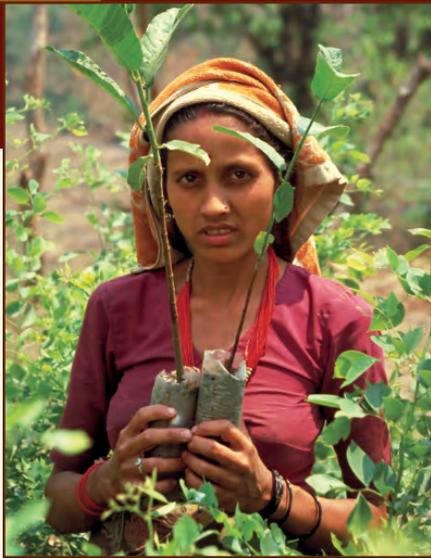


# Child Marriage and POVERTY



IFAD / Anwar Hossain

Child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries and is often concentrated among the poorest households within those countries. 🌿 It is closely linked with poverty and low levels of economic development. 🌿 In families with limited resources, child marriage is often seen as a way to provide for their daughter's future. 🌿 But girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor.

## CHILD MARRIAGE IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED TO POVERTY

**Child marriage is highly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia, the two most impoverished regions of the world.<sup>1</sup>**

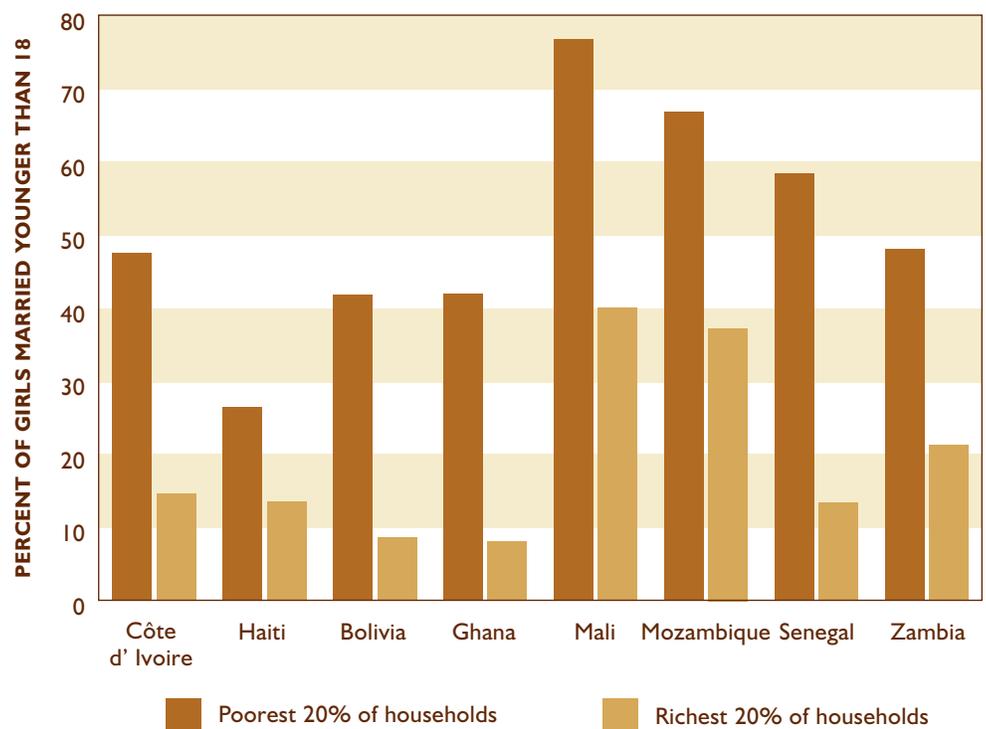
- More than half of the girls in Bangladesh, Mali, Mozambique and Niger are married before age 18. In these same countries, more than 75 percent of people live on less than \$2 a day. In Mali, 91 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day.<sup>2</sup>
- Countries with low GDPs tend to have a higher prevalence of child marriage. Chad has a GDP of \$1,600 per capita, and 71 percent of girls in the country are married. By contrast, South Africa has a GDP per capita of \$11,100, and 8 percent of girls in the country are married.<sup>3</sup>

In almost all developing countries, child marriage is more common among the poorest people than the wealthiest. Recent research

shows that household economic status is a key factor in determining the timing of marriage for girls (along with education and urban-rural residence, with rural girls more likely to marry young). In fact, girls living in poor households are approximately twice as likely to marry before 18 than girls living in better-off households.<sup>4</sup>

In Côte d'Ivoire, a target country for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), girls in the poorest

*Child Marriage in the Poorest and Richest Households in Select Countries*



## Child Marriage in Afghanistan

20 percent of households are three times as likely to be married as girls in the richest 20 percent of households. In Senegal, a Millennium Challenge Account (MCA)-eligible country, girls in the poorest 20 percent of households are more than four times as likely to be married as girls in the richest 20 percent.<sup>5</sup>

### POVERTY OFTEN DRIVES CHILD MARRIAGE

#### Poor countries and families have few resources to support more healthy alternatives for girls, such as schooling.

In settings as diverse as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, India and Malaysia, families cite economic reasons for marrying girls early.<sup>6</sup> Poor families may see a daughter as an economic burden to be shed through marriage as early as possible.

Similarly, economic gains through the marriage of a daughter may also motivate poor families. In Ethiopia, parents said that they married their young daughters for economic reasons.<sup>7</sup>

In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, marrying girls is paired with exchanging wealth between the bride's and groom's families—in the form of a dowry or a bride price. Such practices can also give poor families an incentive to marry their daughters young.

Ending child marriage may help achieve the poverty reduction and development goals of U.S. foreign assistance programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2005). 2005 World Population Data Sheet. Population Reference Bureau: Washington D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2005).

<sup>3</sup> CIA World Fact Book. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/fact-book/> September 2005. Note: GDP values from 2004.; ORC Macro, 2005. MEASURE DHS STATcompiler. <http://www.measuredhs.com>, September 2005. The percentage of women ages 20 to 24 who were married by exact age 18. Note: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the value of goods and services produced in a country during one year. It is used as a general measure

The high incidence of child marriage in Afghanistan is directly tied to poverty and low levels of development.

Afghanistan's legal minimum age of marriage is 16. Yet nationwide, 16 percent of children are married before 15; 52 percent are married before 18. Girls make up most of the children married at these young ages. Figures vary by region: In some rural provinces, up to 30 percent of families reported placing girls into marriage before age 15.

Poverty is a large driver of child marriages. In five of the six provinces included in the study, the majority of parents who married their daughters by age 15 said that they did so for economic reasons. In some cases, girls are married off to pay debts to shop keepers, or a girl may be exchanged for her brother's wife — as the bride price.

The majority of child brides were married to significantly older men with other wives. Some girls were widowed or left to care for elderly husbands while still very young. None of the child brides had ever attended school.

Source: Tufts University Feinstein International Famine Center (2004).

of a country's economic activity and wealth. GDP per capita is the value of goods and services produced in a country per person in that country—or average wealth generated per person in the country.

<sup>4</sup> The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2005). *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries. Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries.* Cynthia B. Lloyd, Ed. Committee on Population and Board on Children, Youth, and Families. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, p. 432.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF (2005). *Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice.* UNICEF: New York.

<sup>6</sup> Berhane-Selaisse, T. (1993). "Research on Early Marriage or Child Marriage in Ethiopia; Summary of Interim Report." *Newsletter of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children*, 15(11); TUFTS University Feinstein International Famine Center (2004). "Human Security and Livelihoods of Rural Afghanistan, 2002-2003: A Report to United States Agency for International Development." TUFTS University: Boston.

<sup>7</sup> Sanyukta, M.; M. Greene and A. Malhotra (2003). *Too Young to Wed: The Lives, Rights, and Health of Young Married Girls.* ICRW: Washington D.C.

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