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.¹

- 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.²

- 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.³

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.⁴

In Côte d’Ivoire, a target country for the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), girls in the poorest households are more likely to marry young than those in the richest 20% of households.
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.  

**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. 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.  

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.

**REFERENCES**  


