

The Importance of Collecting New Data in Assessing the Economic Impacts of Child Marriage

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While child marriage is increasingly recognized as a social and a human rights issue, the potential economic impacts of child marriage in terms of forgone earnings, future public sector costs, inter-generational transmission of poverty, human capital deprivation and economic growth remain unclear. This study being undertaken by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and the World Bank aims to build the evidence around and raise awareness of child marriage as an economic issue, so that the economic losses associated with child marriage are better recognized and acted upon.

Utilizing both newly collected primary data and existing secondary data, the project is estimating the economic impacts and costs of child marriage for a select group of countries, regions, and at the global level. This effort, along with communications and capacity building work across countries, will help to create a clear value-for-money case for investing in the prevention of child marriage by governments, multilateral agencies, donors and other stakeholders.



The Economic Impacts of Child Marriage Project (2014-2017)

Phase 1

Develop conceptual framework and analyze existing datasets

Phase 2

Undertake new data collection in three countries

Throughout the project

Dissemination and use of findings, along with building of capacity to use data to inform policies and programs

Two project phases

In the first phase, which is currently underway, we are examining and testing critical pathways through which child marriage may influence economic and social outcomes at the household and national levels, using only existing datasets. Analyses of these (secondary) data, taken from a variety of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), other surveys, and, in some cases, national censuses, are extremely valuable, but they can only go so far in providing the type of information that will generate a complete understanding of the varied impacts, including economic impacts, that child marriage may have over the course of a woman's life.

The second phase of the project, the focus of this brief, is designed to fill gaps in and deepen the existing evidence base, using three countries as case studies. During this phase, project staff will collect new (primary) data in three diverse countries affected by child marriage to enable more in-depth analyses of the pathways through which child marriage impacts economic outcomes.

The use of both primary and secondary data is essential for this project, with each source

having distinct advantages, as well as limitations. The main advantage of existing data is that, for at least some of the surveys, data are available for a large number of countries. This makes it feasible to assess the impact of child marriage on various development outcomes across different contexts. Further, using a wide range of surveys with different types of information on child marriage and its potential impacts can provide rich and complementary insights.

At the same time, few existing datasets have comprehensive information on the many different areas of potential impacts of child marriage. Currently available data have poor or, in some cases, no measures on female empowerment and related domains of decision-making and participation, violence, and mental health, for example. Moreover, the impact of child marriage on some outcomes, especially in the case of education, is difficult to assess with existing data because of reverse causality and endogeneity issues. While collecting new data may not necessarily solve these challenges, it provides an opportunity to gather new information on potential instrumental variables, or ways to address some of these complexities, and to generate more precise estimates of the



Countries:

- Ethiopia
- Niger
- Third country TBD

Methods:

- Nationally-representative quantitative survey
- Qualitative interviews

Key Domains of Impact to be Measured:

- Fertility & population growth
- Health, nutrition & violence
- Educational attainment & learning
- Labor force participation & type of work
- Participation, decision-making & investments

social and economic costs of child marriage.

Another benefit of collecting new data is the ability to obtain information on the conditions of a woman's natal home and family, which can provide useful information to help understand the varied drivers of child marriage across diverse settings. This information is currently available in only a few existing data sets.

In short, using surveys that are designed specifically to understand the impacts of child marriage on various pathways will provide opportunities to address these limitations of existing data, and will help gather new data that can provide an improved understanding and better measurement of the economic costs of child marriage.

Approach for Phase 2 Research

Countries

In Phase 2 of this project, primary data collection will be undertaken in three countries with high child marriage prevalence rates in order to develop detailed country case studies and further illustrate how the practice can lead to economic impacts. Niger, Ethiopia, and a third country will serve as these case studies.

Although both Niger and Ethiopia have high rates of child marriage, there are interesting differences in the contexts, prevalence and explanations for child marriage that make them stimulating case studies to build knowledge on

how these differences might impact costs. Niger, with very high rates of poverty and weak social protection systems, also has the highest child marriage prevalence rate in the world, with prevalence changing relatively little in the past two decades. Ethiopia, too, has historically had a very high prevalence of child marriage, particularly in rural areas, where child marriage rates as recently as a decade ago rivaled those in Niger. However, available data suggests significant declines in the practice over the past decade. These countries also differ in terms of their socioeconomic characteristics, cultural traditions and religious backgrounds, and governmental commitment to addressing child marriage through legislation or policy. While Ethiopia has focused in recent years on reducing child marriage, Niger's efforts are more nascent. Niger's government has recently allocated substantial resources to several large scale development projects that aim to reduce child marriage and provide more opportunities to adolescent girls.

Despite a common commitment to ending child marriage, these countries differ in regard to the context and extent of child marriage. This diversity is advantageous for a number of reasons. It allows us to examine the ways in which costs differ depending on contexts and the relative importance of different pathways leading to specific costs. For example, the relative costs associated with child marriage may be higher or lower in a context where child marriage is declining, such as Ethiopia, and where more girls are completing their schooling than in Niger, where child marriage remains overwhelmingly the norm. Further, estimating impacts and costs in a variety of settings allows for a more robust assessment of the various ways in which child marriage may affect development outcomes than would be possible in a single setting, or by using more homogenous countries.

Methods

In all Phase 2 countries, the broad research approach will be the same, and will include the use of a mixed method design with both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative survey data will be used to estimate impacts (both in terms of intermediate effects for women and households and the economic costs associated with these), while qualitative research approaches will be used to explore and validate the pathways themselves, and to provide greater context to the data. As was the case for Phase 1, the analytical approach will first focus on estimating the impacts of child marriage on the critical domains identified by the project,

including fertility, health and violence, educational attainment and learning, labor force participation and type of work, participation, decision-making and investments. This will be followed by estimating the associated economic impacts and costs of these domains, which are grouped in three broad 'buckets': earnings and productivity, public and private expenses (for example, for health and education), and other, often non-monetary costs. The study will also seek to estimate the effect of child marriage on broader impacts at the household level, such as household poverty, and household food and nutrition security. Finally, the intergenerational impacts of child marriage will also be examined focusing on outcomes such as child health and educational attainment of the children of women who were, themselves, married as children.

The quantitative survey will be conducted among a nationally representative random sample of married women between the ages of 18-45 years and the heads of their households. In addition, a community survey will be conducted in each primary sampling unit to collect information on the prevailing socio-economic conditions, quality of schooling and health services in the community. We will collect detailed information on women's socio-demographic background, including conditions of her natal home, the process of marriage, communication and her relationship with her spouse, participation in household decisions (particularly those related to herself and her children), health history and experience with gender based violence, along with detailed information on her access to income and assets. The household survey will collect socioeconomic and demographic data about household members (gender, marital status, educational status, etc.), and measurements of socioeconomic status.

The qualitative research will examine the same domains of impact as explored through the quantitative data, but with a focus on women's own experiences and perceptions of what constitutes a 'cost' of early marriage, what the critical pathways of child marriage-related costs are in their communities, and how these pathways interrelate to shape the different economic impacts of child marriage. The data will be collected with community members and women who are purposively sampled to engage in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.



Conclusion

Undertaking primary research in countries and communities affected by child marriage provides a unique opportunity to complement the project's analysis of existing data and to expand significantly the evidence base regarding the true economic costs of child marriage. It is also helpful in identifying ways to reduce the practice at the community and country levels. By the end of 2016, the combination of evidence generated through both phases of research will generate the most robust assessment of the social and economic impacts of child marriage ever. This evidence will serve as a critical asset for those seeking to better understand how child marriage affects not only health and human rights outcomes, but economic and development ones as well.



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The opinions expressed in this brief are those of the authors only and need not reflect the views of the World Bank, its Executive Directors, of the countries they represent.

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