



THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE: KEY FINDINGS

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Child marriage, defined as a marriage or union in which either or both parties are below the age of 18, prematurely ends childhood for 41,000 girls around the world every day.

Girls who marry as children have poorer health outcomes, are economically less secure, experience higher school dropout rates and are more likely to suffer violence and abuse at the hands of spouses or extended family members. They are also more likely to have restricted physical mobility as well as limited decision-making ability, personal agency and empowerment.

Child marriage is a human rights violation that limits girls' basic rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination and to live a life free of violence and exploitation. On a macro level, child marriage can also impact development outcomes for entire nations where the practice is prevalent.

To quantify this impact, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and the World Bank undertook research to document the human and economic costs of child marriage, looking at global data for 106 countries and specific data for smaller subsets of countries with high rates of child marriage. The researchers estimated the reduction in population growth that would occur if child marriage had ended completely by 2015. They then estimated the benefit of these population reductions annually through the year 2030, which was chosen in part because it is the target date for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (ending child marriage is a target under Goal 5 to achieve gender equality). According to these estimations, the annual benefit of ending child marriage by 2030 would be on the order of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Based on these calculations, there is strong evidence to suggest that child marriage imposes significant social and economic costs on all levels of a society — from the individual to the global economy. In order to address the damaging impacts and improve the outcomes for millions of girls, ending child marriage must become a key component of global poverty alleviation and development efforts.

This brief presents an overview of key findings and insights from that study, as well as quotes in which child brides articulate in their own words the human cost of the practice.

THE PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Of the 25 countries that account for the majority of child marriages globally, on average, more than **one in three women aged 18 to 22 married before turning 18**. Almost **one in five gave birth before they turned 18 on average**.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE

In addition to the economic cost, the report also centered around other key domains of impact:

Fertility and population growth

- ◆ The welfare benefit to ending child marriage is estimated to be **\$22.1 billion globally in the first year (2015)**. This number increases to **\$566 billion annually by 2030**, for a **cumulative welfare benefit of more than \$4 trillion**.
- ◆ Girls who marry early have children earlier than their peers, and also have more children more frequently than their peers do. Given the direct relationship between child marriage and early childbearing, the researchers estimate that across 25 countries, **more than four out of five early childbirths may be attributable to child marriage**.
- ◆ The welfare benefit to ending early childbirth is even higher. It is estimated to be **\$27.8 billion globally in the first year (2015)**, increasing to **more than \$700 billion annually by 2030**, for a **cumulative welfare gain of more than \$5 trillion**.
- ◆ Ending child marriage could reduce the **total fertility rate by 11 percent** across 15 countries, leading to substantial **reductions in population growth**. Decreased household sizes would lead to an increased availability of funds which then could be used to pay for food, education, health care and other expenses for other members of the household.

“...because I gave birth without adequate spacing and because I had seven children, my life gets so difficult. Because I had seven children, I couldn’t afford their medical expense... What is the use of having lots of children? When we have lots of children we can’t raise them properly.”

—Ethiopian woman, married at age 14

Health, nutrition, and violence

- ◆ Children born to adolescent mothers are more likely to have low weights at birth and poor nutrition throughout childhood. On average, in the 15 countries studied, **three in every 100 under-five fatalities and one in every 100 cases of under-five stunting** can be directly attributed to being born to a mother below the age of 18.
 - ◆ From 2016-2030, were child marriage to have been eliminated, **2.1 million additional children could have survived past age 5, and 3.6 million could have avoided stunting**. This amounts to \$41.6 billion in economic benefits from reduced deaths in 2016, and \$81.6 billion in 2030. Stunting-related savings could have been \$9.1 billion in 2016, and \$15.8 billion by 2030.
- ◆ For the majority of the 10 countries studied, the risk of experiencing **intimate partner violence is higher** when girls marry very early (at or under 15 years of age).

“After 2-3 months of marriage, my husband had a sexual relation with me forcefully. Because of this sexual abuse, I soon became pregnant. I was in labor pain for three days. At the young age of 16, I was carrying a child in my womb... My body had not developed and matured enough.”

— Nepalese woman, married at age 16

Educational attainment and learning

- ◆ Typically, country-level estimates (including those for this study) suggest that 10 to 30 percent of girls who drop out of school do so because of early marriage or a pregnancy.
- ◆ Every year of early marriage before the age of 18 reduces the likelihood of girls’ secondary school completion by **four**



to six percentage points, with larger impacts in regions (and countries) where completion rates are higher.

- ◆ For each year of secondary school education completed, the risk of child marriage for girls in the 15 countries studied **reduces by an average of six percentage points**.
- ◆ Lowered educational outcomes are associated with lower earnings in adulthood. Child marriage's relationship with education results in a loss of one percent in earnings for the entire labor force, or \$26 billion in the 15 countries included in this analysis.

“I did not want to stop attending school, it was in their ignorance that my parents said that a girl’s education is not the same as a boy’s, so I was taken out from school to marry me. I did not want that.”

— Nigerian woman, married at age 13

Labor force participation

- ◆ Frequent interruptions to employment due to childbirth and the time burden of care responsibilities can affect the types of jobs that women can engage in, forcing them into **lower-paying jobs and more unstable work situations**.
- ◆ Child marriage, on average, **reduces earnings in adulthood by nine percent**. Ending child marriage could generate (in additional earnings and productivity):
 - ◆ \$179 million per year in Burkina Faso
 - ◆ \$4.8 billion per year in Bangladesh
 - ◆ \$7.6 billion per year in Nigeria

“Every decision is made by father-in-law and husband. I have to give all my hard-earned money [as a manual laborer] to my father-in-law.”

— Nepalese woman, married at age 14

“I dreamed of continuing my studies. I was hoping to become a health worker or even a teacher. My friends also had the same dreams. We all wanted to have a job to live well and to help our families. If I had waited until I was 22...I would have chosen to marry a man of my choice...Now I have to wait my husband gives me money and he does not give me often.”

— Woman from Niger, married at age 13



THE COSTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE: BY THE NUMBERS

Ultimately, the prevalence of child marriage and early childbearing is directly connected to tremendous negative impacts worldwide. If these trends hold steady, child marriage practices could **cost hundreds of billions of dollars globally** from now to 2030.

- ◆ If child marriage and early childbearing had ended by 2015, the estimated global welfare benefit from reduced population growth would have been **\$22 billion in the first year (2015)** and could be **\$566 billion by 2030**.
- ◆ The combined estimated gains of ending under-five mortality and under-five stunting resulting from child marriage were **\$51 billion** in 2015, and by 2030 this number **nearly doubles to \$98 billion**.
- ◆ For the 15 core countries considered in the analysis, the estimated losses in women’s earnings due to having married early would have been **\$26 billion in 2015**.
- ◆ Of 18 of the countries considered, many of which are among the most affected by child marriage, national governments combined could save up to **\$17 billion per year** by 2030, just from savings related to providing universal secondary education alone.



The *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage* project is a collaborative effort by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and the World Bank, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, and additional support from the Global Partnership for Education. This report and associated briefs can be found at: icrw.org/publications/economic-impacts-child-marriage

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