

HUMAN
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UC Berkeley School of Law



Save the Children



TOWARD AN END TO CHILD MARRIAGE

Lessons from Research and Practice in
Development and Humanitarian Sectors

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SAVE THE CHILDREN AND BEYOND

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HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER

The Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law conducts research on war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. Using evidence-based methods and innovative technologies, we support efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and to protect vulnerable populations. We also train students and advocates to document human rights violations and turn this information into effective action.

The Health and Human Rights Program at the Human Rights Center promotes the health and protection of marginalized populations affected by humanitarian crises. Through applied research and technical assistance, we partner with local and international organizations to develop new tools, guidance, and interventions.

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SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children fights for children every single day. We stand side by side with children in the toughest places to be a child. We do whatever it takes to make sure they survive, get protection when they're in danger, and have the chance to learn. Because every child should be able to make their mark on the world and build a better future for us all.

savethechildren.net

Cover Photo: Rokaya,* 14, stands in the grounds of a temporary learning center for children who fled the conflict in Marawi city, the Philippines, run by Save the Children. At this site, girls and young women face a heightened risk of early or forced marriage as well as other forms of gender-based violence. **The child's name was changed to protect her identity.* Photo by Hanna Adcock / Save the Children.

Design and graphics: Nicole Hayward

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DESPITE RECENT DECLINES in the prevalence of child marriage globally, an estimated 12 million girls are still married each year.¹ Additionally, there has been growing concern around reports of increasing child marriage rates among those affected by conflict or natural disaster where underlying drivers such as gender inequality, social norms, and lack of opportunities for girls are exacerbated, and new drivers related to protection concerns and extreme poverty arise. Consequently, girls who are married young experience a violation of their human rights and suffer negative impacts on their education, economic prospects, social lives, mental and physical health, and the health and nutrition of their children. Effective interventions are urgently needed to address this critical issue.

The purpose of the following study is to gather findings from efforts to prevent and respond to child marriage in both development and humanitarian contexts and determine what Save the Children and other organizations can do to improve their response to this critical issue. The study adds to existing research by synthesizing the most up-to-date literature, bringing the voices of practitioners and experts into the discussion, and examining the topic of child marriage interventions in a humanitarian context for the first time. In addition, through a mapping and analysis of Save the Children's programming, it assesses the organization's approaches against the available evidence.

Methodology

The study methodology has three components:

- 1. LITERATURE REVIEW:** A literature review was conducted to identify the state of the global evidence on child marriage prevention and response interventions. In sum, 355 development and 27 humanitarian articles from both grey and academic literature were evaluated for inclusion. Forty-three development and no humanitarian articles met the inclusion criteria and were extracted and evaluated for quality using adapted STROBE and CONSORT scales.² Data was reviewed and findings relating to programs and initiatives for combatting child marriage were identified and analyzed for common themes.
- 2. MAPPING EXERCISE:** A mapping exercise of Save the Children's past and current programs to address child marriage was undertaken using internal and published documents from three sources: submissions from Save the Children member and country offices, Save the Children's Awards Management System Database, and the program and project Evaluation Repository database. Any evaluations meeting inclusion criteria for the literature review were included in the literature review extraction and analysis process. Program information from the 181 resulting documents that met the inclusion criteria was extracted to a standardized form for analysis.

Methodology

1

Literature Review

A literature review to identify the state of the global evidence on child marriage prevention and response interventions

2

Mapping Exercise

A mapping exercise of Save the Children's past and current programs to address child marriage using internal and published documents from three sources

3

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews with 27 practitioners active in child marriage prevention and response in 21 countries or regions across Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Europe, and North and South America

3. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: Key informant interviews were conducted with 27 practitioners active in child marriage prevention and response in 21 countries or regions across Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Europe, and North and South America. Interviews were conducted over Skype using a semi-structured interview guide. Twenty-one interviewees were from Save the Children, while six practitioners were from other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Transcripts were coded and analyzed thematically to identify patterns in participant responses.

Findings

The literature review identified 43 experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of 30 distinct interventions in development settings that had as their primarily objective or a significant outcome impacts on child marriage outcomes including related behavior, knowledge, and attitudes. Studies focused primarily on African and South Asian contexts. Interventions were typically designed as single-component or multi-component and targeted girls alone or multiple levels of the social-ecological model, including families, communities, policy environment, and society. Approaches to addressing child marriage included empowerment, incentive/asset transfer, community sensitization and engagement,

and legal and advocacy. Empowerment approaches were the most frequently evaluated and consistently effective, but covered a broad range of activities that were rarely evaluated independently to determine which components were most effective. Incentive/asset transfer approaches had mixed results, but were more likely to be effective when focused on younger adolescents and conditioned on or used to promote educational outcomes (such as school attendance). Community sensitization and engagement approaches, while promising, were poorly represented and evaluated in the literature, but programs focusing on deeper community engagement were generally more successful than those that used more light-touch sensitization approaches. Finally, legal and advocacy approaches were found to be the least represented in the literature, likely due to substantial challenges in evaluating such programs using experimental and quasi-experimental methods. We identified two studies evaluating programs designed to address child marriage in humanitarian contexts, but neither fit the criteria for inclusion in the study.

The mapping of Save the Children's programming revealed that Save the Children has been active in addressing child marriage since at least 2001 when the *Ishraq* program for out-of-school girls was instituted in Egypt. Since then, the organization has

conducted over 52 projects, programs, and advocacy initiatives in more than 41 countries. The majority of programs are designed as multi-component, multi-level interventions, and all four approaches identified in the literature are recognized in Save the Children's programming. However, empowerment and community sensitization and engagement approaches are the most frequently utilized, with legal and advocacy efforts increasingly common. Incentive/asset transfer approaches were used to address child marriage only twice by the organization.³ Program evaluations ranged from highly rigorous randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to quasi-experimental and qualitative evaluations, and less-rigorous baseline-endline evaluations. Four past and current programs in humanitarian contexts were identified.

Key informants discussed interventions or strategies to address child marriage, outcomes or impacts (anecdotal or based on formal evaluation), implementation challenges, risk factors and intervention adaptation strategies for humanitarian settings, information or guidance needs of practitioners, and key programming gaps. A number of themes arose from the interviews. On strategies and promising practices, practitioners discussed the importance of multi-level, integrated interventions, mobilizing communities to change social norms, conducting formative research to inform intervention design, and contextually sensitive framing of child marriage. They also identified implementation challenges and gaps, including the need for a holistic, coordinated strategy across sectors, the diverse and context-specific drivers of child marriage, the resource and time intensive nature of social norms change, limited legal frameworks and enforcement, and the difficulty of translating national level legal and policy successes into meaningful change at the local level. Researchers identified certain groups—such as ethnic minorities, faith-based leaders, men and boys, and married girls as needing greater inclusion in future efforts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are targeted at Save the Children and intended to help move the organization forward in addressing child marriage in development and humanitarian contexts. They are also intended to help other stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, to more effectively prevent and respond to child marriage.

Development

Cross-thematic Recommendations

1. Adopt a gender equality lens when designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating child marriage programs and initiatives.
2. Expand the geographic coverage of child marriage programming and advocacy to include countries or regions with very high rates of child marriage not currently covered by Save the Children's efforts.
3. Target programs and advocacy to address the following under-reached populations: 1) girls in urban contexts, 2) very marginalized girls, 3) faith-based and customary/traditional leaders, 4) men and boys, and 5) married girls.
4. Consider addressing context-specific risk factors at multiple social-ecological levels; however, these activities should complement efforts to support, empower, and build the capacity of girls themselves.
5. Contextualize empowerment approaches to address local drivers of child marriage as well as the specific needs and interests of the girls themselves.
6. Use incentive/asset transfer approaches to build girls' human capital by incentivizing educational outcomes or combining them with complementary approaches for long term impact.
7. Ensure community sensitization and engagement approaches are long-term, participatory, and engage a broad range of actors within a community who have been identified through formative research.

8. Identify and engage key decision-makers and/or people of influence within communities to serve as champions for child marriage prevention and response.
9. Design programs with the following considerations in mind: 1) scalability and cost, 2) length, 3) formative research, 4) community input, and 5) rigorous evaluation.
10. Develop a coordinated strategy at the organizational level to address child marriage by establishing joint objectives, outcomes, and indicators; unifying terminology; and clarifying where the issue sits within Save the Children and how coordination within the organization will take place.
11. Develop a coordinated strategy at country levels with all stakeholders within and outside of Save the Children active in addressing child marriage.

Advocacy

1. Place youth voices at the center of all advocacy efforts, with a particular emphasis on girls' voices.
2. Develop high-level partnerships and identify champions to expand political will and buy-in.
3. Coordinate with well-established women's rights organizations to strengthen advocacy efforts and maximize impact.
4. Combine advocacy efforts with technical assistance to support governments in developing and implementing legislative and policy changes.
5. Ensure advocacy efforts complement programming directly benefitting girls where possible, that programs integrate advocacy components, and that programming and advocacy are coordinated and work in synergy with each other.
6. Expand legal advocacy initiatives to include educational goals for adolescent girls.
7. Assess the impact of advocacy achievements on women and girls, rather than strictly focusing on whether legal or policy goals have been achieved, to strengthen evaluation efforts.

8. Increase the rigor of evaluations of child marriage advocacy initiatives using creative, context-appropriate methodologies.

Child Poverty

1. Measure the impact of child poverty programming on behavioral child marriage outcomes.
2. Consider the use of incentive/asset transfer programs which incentivize educational outcomes to reduce child marriage.
3. Ensure that incentive/asset transfer programs are well-evaluated and that impact is measured by age.
4. Consider the use of age-appropriate employment and livelihood opportunities, as well as training, to delay marriage among older adolescent girls.

Child Protection

1. Evaluate the impact of child protection interventions on child marriage-related outcomes using rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies or alternative rigorous evaluation approaches.
2. Encourage other sectors to include child marriage outcomes when evaluating interventions to address drivers of child marriage in the local context.
3. Coordinate with other thematic areas to address child marriage through approaches such as education, health, or livelihoods.
4. Provide assessment and measurement guidance to other sectors to support the identification of contributing factors to child marriage.

Child Rights Governance

1. Support opportunities for child-led advocacy and accountability on child marriage, such as via child clubs and other forums for children to receive information about their rights, gain advocacy skills, and lead activities in their communities and countries.

2. Build gender equality and child marriage into child-friendly budget analysis and advocacy work, to increase resourcing for child marriage policies and programs.
3. Integrate gender equality and child marriage into efforts to protect and expand civil society space from local to international levels, including through working with girls' and women's groups.
4. Measure the impact of nutrition programming on child marriage behaviors.
5. Evaluate the impact of SRH programming, including CSE, SRHR information, and youth-responsive SRH services, on behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes around child marriage.
6. Offer youth-responsive SRHR education programs and services, as well as nutrition programs, to already-married girls.

Education

1. Measure the impact of educational programming on behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes on child marriage.
2. Remove barriers to school participation and increase access to education for adolescent girls.
3. Consider additional incentives to lower barriers to school attendance and increase the opportunity cost for older adolescent girls to leave school.
4. Integrate comprehensive sexuality education and/or child marriage, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) into standard education curriculum.
5. Remove barriers to education for already-married girls and pregnant and adolescent mothers.

Health and Nutrition

1. Determine whether food-insecurity is a driver of child marriage and consider how nutrition programs may improve child marriage outcomes.
2. Determine whether lack of access to youth-responsive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services is a driver of child pregnancy, and thus child marriage, in a given context and consider how such programs may improve child marriage outcomes.
3. Integrate child marriage into comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), SRHR, and gender-based violence (GBV) education and awareness-raising activities for in- and out-of-school youth.

Humanitarian

1. Conduct assessments to identify both pre-existing drivers of child marriage, as well as new risk factors related to crisis coping, such as economic and protection concerns, when developing child marriage interventions.
2. Determine which forms of child marriage intervention are appropriate for various phases of an emergency.
3. Identify key entry points for mainstreaming child marriage into existing humanitarian response efforts.
4. Pilot stand-alone child marriage programs and integrate sector-specific approaches to address child marriage in humanitarian settings. Build in rigorous evaluations to develop evidence in acute and protracted displacement settings.
5. Build child marriage prevention and response capacity in fragile contexts whenever possible to ensure that the underlying drivers of child marriage are being addressed prior to acute crises.
6. Enable girls to return to school as quickly as possible following acute crisis.

Research

1. Expand research on child marriage drivers and interventions to include settings that are poorly represented in the literature, including child marriage in urban contexts, child marriage in regions such as Latin America and Southeast Asia, and child marriage in the context of gang conflict in Central America.

2. Conduct more rigorous impact evaluations of child marriage programming and advocacy initiatives.
3. Disaggregate evaluation data by age to better understand what works to prevent child marriage among younger and older adolescents and among different social, economic, and identity groups.
4. Lengthen evaluation time to capture individuals' significant life events and social norm change.
5. Evaluate each component of multi-component and multi-level programming individually as well as together to determine which components are most successful at addressing child marriage.
6. Consider cost, sustainability, and scalability when evaluating program impacts.
7. Evaluate distinct components of empowerment programming separately to determine the impact of each component on child marriage outcomes.
8. Improve evaluation of community sensitization and engagement to contribute significantly to organizational and global evidence on changing social norms.
9. Improve evaluation of advocacy initiatives to contribute to organizational and global evidence by 1) assessing the impact of advocacy achievements on women and girls and 2) employing creative, context appropriate methodologies to improve rigor of non-experimental methodologies when necessary.
10. Evaluate the impact of other approaches such as health, nutrition, and education on child marriage as an outcome.
11. Build a formative research phase into piloting and evaluation efforts to tailor interventions to the context-specific drivers and needs and preferences of the community.
12. Prioritize research addressing support needs, outreach strategies, and effective interventions for already-married girls to expand child marriage response efforts.
13. Build an evidence base in humanitarian settings that addresses the following topics: 1) why child marriage increases in some contexts, 2) decision-making factors of parents, 3) pre-existing and crisis-specific drivers of child marriage, 4) support needs of girls and their families, and 5) what interventions work to address child marriage.
14. Engage youth in participatory research during formative and pilot design phases to ensure that the needs and interests of young people are prioritized and to improve buy-in.

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