

Child Marriage

What Drives Child Marriage and What Works to Address Child Marriage in Humanitarian Contexts: An Evidence Review Summary

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In the full length review we explore the landscape of drivers of child marriage as well as interventions that can prevent child marriage and support children who have already been married. This is a topline summary of the findings.

The evidence included comes from a variety of sources and study designs and is meant to give a perspective on the breadth of interventions that have been utilized in the sector. Most interventions do not have consistent, statistically significant impacts on child marriage but instead would be considered promising or emergent. Financial interventions have the most evidence for their usage and their impact and have mixed to positive results. This is in line with the evidence that shows that financial distress is an often cited driver of child marriage, especially for families with girls.

Other interventions that have been utilized to prevent child marriage and in some cases support children that have been married include - among others - in-kind asset transfers to continuing schooling, case management for livelihood training, sexual reproductive health (SRH) access, and education. The evidence indicates that many interventions utilize multiple mechanisms to address child marriage. While some are single component interventions, others utilize a multicomponent, multisectoral approach in a bid to address the varied drivers present.

Note: The evidence broadly uses the following categories to classify children, youth, and adolescents. There may be outliers to these definitions and these definitions are meant to give the reader a generalized idea of how the categories could be utilized. Additionally effort has been made to differentiate studies which have a single gender or single sub-population focus, however it can be difficult to disaggregate study populations as “children” can be used to refer to interventions for all children or can be an umbrella term to refer to interventions which really focus on girls as the primary focus of child marriage. Much of the included literature focuses on adolescents.

Young Children: Individuals between 12 months and 3 years of age

Children: Individuals generally below 19 years old but can refer to individuals younger than 12 or 13 years

Adolescents: Individuals between 10 and 19 years old



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Youth: Individuals between 15 and 24 years old
Young People: Individuals between 10 and 24 years

KEY FINDINGS**Justification & Drivers of Child Marriage**

- In humanitarian contexts, the drivers of child marriage include gender inequality and gender-based violence; social and cultural norms; economic needs; poor educational access; and seeking independence.
- Any insecurity that exists in non-humanitarian contexts that can drive child marriage can become amplified and more complex in humanitarian contexts.
- The perceived primary drivers of child marriage can vary by population group, especially by gender. Safety and lack of educational access are more cited by women and girls while men are more likely to cite financial stressors. Child marriage can be seen as a protection element against other forms of gender-based violence.
- Financial distress in the household seems to be a strong factor in the likelihood of child marriage.
- It seems that girls face a higher risk of child marriage than boys but there is limited data.
- Peer-to-peer marriages between children are highly unstable. However, peer-to-peer marriages were not frequently discussed in the literature and the how often these kinds of marriages occur is not clear.

Preventing Child Marriage

- In-kind and cash transfers appear to be effective in preventing child marriage in eliminating or decreasing the financial stress upon a family and/or keeping the child in school
- The positive impacts of cash or in-kind intervention may only last as long as the cash or other benefit component is on-going.
- School attendance seems to have a protective element against child marriage.
- Risks of child marriage and the rights of the child awareness building for children, parents, community members, and local leadership was cited as an important consideration in any preventing intervention.
- Life skills training can supply children with needed information and skills to alleviate economic stressors that could otherwise lead to child marriage
- Children often are not provided necessary SRH education, interventions can include SRH programming as a means of preventing extramarital marriage
- While parental programming can improve awareness and the child's ability to utilize their own autonomy, changing perspectives and practices on child marriage may take a longer period of time for the active intervention and for the follow up to note a significant change. This is true of any norms change intervention.
- Child marriage-prevention programs should explore the diversification of information channels.

Supporting Married Children

- Married children - especially but not exclusively married girls - often lack necessary SRH and MNH education and access to services leaving them vulnerable to medical crises; these interventions offer the opportunity to increase their knowledge and safety through this service provision.
- Life skills training can improve married children's physical and psychosocial wellbeing and increase their resilience to GBV. However, barriers can include limited access to married children who remain inside homes, concerns over cost of training or education, and household responsibilities.

Gaps

- Case management can improve the immediate, everyday lives of married children by offering them service referrals, improved interpersonal relationships with their families and spouse, and giving plans for the future. This can be hindered by crises like COVID-19 which restricted in-home interventions as well as by the same barriers that prevent life skills training.
- While the evidence seems to indicate that boys are less likely to enter into child marriages, there is little data on the drivers or how to best support the boys. Some literature does argue that too little attention has been made to the “demand side” of child marriage, especially as cultural perceptions of masculinity can drive child marriage in some contexts, and in turn lead boys to illegal activities to achieve preferred marriagable status in the communities.
- There is very little evidence on how legal protections can be implemented or awareness building done for legal protections. A literature review found that when legal and advocacy approaches were utilized, they were “poorly described and evaluated” and when they were evaluated it was only if the advocacy goals were reached.
- Widowed girls are vulnerable due to cultural norms and limited rights, especially if their spouse was in an armed group. No evidence was found on interventions to support children whose spouses have died.
- The use of mass and social media to influence social norms is one that has great potential but is still underutilized in most settings. Evidence shows it is a promising strategy for changing gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors.
- While there is support for a child leaving marriages and returning to their families, these programs are not widespread. Divorce was cited by some sources as being “common”, especially in peer-to-peer marriages but exact statistics were not available to reinforce this observation. Divorced children are especially vulnerable to risks to their service access and physical safety in part due to social stigma of divorce as well as the lack of education they might have received as children instead of being married. It is not clear how social stigma or taboos impact divorce rates among married children within peer-to-peer marriages or marriages between children and adults.

EVIDENCE BASE

The bibliography and the search strategy may be found in the [full evidence review](#).

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