



The USAID Office of Population and Reproductive Health's Technical Approach to Child Marriage

In ten countries around the world, between half and three quarters of girls are married before the age of 18.¹ USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health (PRH), works in all of these countries and in others to delay the age of marriage and protect the rights of women, girls and children. Child marriage is a cross-cutting issue that has broad implications on girls' health, education, economic status and more. PRH's Child Marriage work is grounded in data collection and analysis, and evidence-based best-practices that inform programs and policies to improve reproductive health outcomes for women and girls. PRH implements a two-pronged approach to child marriage: 1) activities to prevent child marriage, and 2) activities that address the family planning and reproductive health needs of young married girls/couples.

Prevention of and response to child marriage is carried out through a range of community-based and behavior change communication (BCC) approaches that engage vulnerable girls and their parents, school teachers and administrators, community and religious leaders, police, and health care providers with the goals of:

- Changing individual and community norms around the age of marriage
- Reducing girls' vulnerability to early marriage
- Increasing public awareness of the prevalence and harmful effects of child marriage and advocating for policies to prevent child marriage
- Increasing awareness and improving enforcement of age-of-marriage laws (in most countries the legal age of marriage for girls is 18, but laws are seldom enforced)

Impact of Child Marriage:

Girls that marry before the age of 18 have less access to education, economic opportunities, social networks, and health information and services, resulting in unwanted pregnancy, higher maternal and infant deaths, higher rates of HIV/AIDS and obstetric fistula, and higher incidence of gender based violence.

PRH supports programs that work to bring about behavior change and improve reproductive health outcomes for youth by implementing interventions at multiple levels – from individuals and communities to health systems and national policies. PRH programs:

- Employ BCC strategies with young married couples to increase contraceptive use to delay and space births
- Implement a community-based approach to address and transform the underlying norms that prevent young people's access to reproductive health services
- Support health services to provide youth-friendly reproductive health care

PRH Project Examples:

MEASURE DHS III, ICF International

The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have been providing nationally representative demographic and health data, including data on prevalence of early marriage and its associated

health outcomes, in over 90 countries since 1984. These data are used for in-country awareness-raising, policy and program development, and further research and analysis.

Informing Decision Makers to Act (IDEA), Population Reference Bureau

IDEA trains senior women journalists from around the world to report on pressing issues affecting women's reproductive health and status, including child marriage. In 2011, after a Nigerian participant of the training program published a newspaper article focusing national attention on child marriage, the Executive Secretary of the Universal Basic Education Commission in Nigeria put in place an intervention scheme that offers incentives for girl-child education and reduces the high rates of child marriage in the country that continue, despite laws against it.

Quick Fact:

One in nine girls in developing countries has been forced into marriage between the ages of 10 and 14.¹

Building an Evidence Base of Effective Programs that Increase the Age at Marriage, Population Council

The Population Council is developing and testing alternative approaches to delaying marriage and building the capacity of local NGOs to address child marriage in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. This project will evaluate the impact of various approaches, and develop interventions with local partners using formative research. Interventions will include community education, programs to build education and economic assets of girls, and direct incentives.

Impact on Marriage: Program Assessment of Conditional Cash Transfers (IMPACCT), International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

IMPACCT is now evaluating the Apni Beti Apna Dhan program, one of the first conditional cash transfer interventions initiated in 1994 by the government of India to incentivize families to delay their daughters' marriages. Parents of new born girls were given a bond to cash in if the girl turns 18 and is still unmarried. The first cohort of girls will turn 18 in 2012, offering the first opportunity to evaluate this potentially cost-effective, high-impact intervention. IMPACCT will analyze government records and data, survey selected girls and parents, and interview key government officials to examine the program's impact and implementation.

The Safe Age of Marriage Project, Extending Service Delivery

In rural Yemen, the Safe Age of Marriage Project uses community mobilization efforts, including school and community-based awareness sessions and mobile clinics to raise the age of marriage. In 2010, community members pledged to ban child marriage and set marriage dowry at 400,000 Yemeni Riyals to deter trade marriage. As a result, the most commonly reported age of marriage among girls aged 10 to 17 rose from 14 to 17 over the duration of the project. The project also helped avert 53 girl-child and 26 boy-child marriages, and helped the first ever female school principal be appointed in Al Sawd District, encouraging parents to enroll and keep their daughters in school. The intervention is now being replicated in two new districts.

Quick Fact:

If present trends continue, 100 million girls will marry over the next decade.²

¹ Population Reference Bureau, "Who Speaks for Me? Ending Child Marriage," April 2011.

² International Center for Research on Women, "Child Marriage Facts and Figures," 2012, <<http://www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures>>.