



CPS Paper

Child marriage and teenage pregnancies in Africa: A multivariate analysis

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Brief Description

Six hundred fifty million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday. That’s one of the startling figures in a UNFPA 2021 report about child marriage. Africa’s sub-Saharan region is home to nine of the ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage in the world. This study focused on selected African countries and used Demographic and Health Survey data. Multivariate analyses were applied to figure out the comes. The answers we found to why early marriage is so common in these countries were not always clear-cut. What’s more, there were many statistical variations across the four countries and contradictions, as was to be expected. Ingrained traditions and cultural practices typically entrench such early marriages. State or customary laws in 146 countries allow girls younger than 18 to marry with the consent of their parents or other authorities. In 53 countries, girls under 15 can marry with parental consent. Early marriage among boys is also widespread, though the numbers are far lower than for girls and young women. And girls and young women pay the highest costs for early marriage. Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to be subjected to domestic violence and less likely to continue schooling than their peers. They have worse economic and health outcomes, a burden they almost inevitably pass on to their children. There is an urgent need for governments in these countries to introduce programs that promote delaying the age at which girls first have sex and to equip adolescents with knowledge about responsible and safer sex. Policymakers should also work to encourage prolonged enrolment in schools for adolescent girls. And, crucially, laws that criminalize child marriages are needed – and must be enforced.

Abstract

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