BACKGROUND

Home to one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, the evidence on child marriage in Sierra Leone is extremely limited and draws mostly from multi-country, regional studies rather than in-depth country analyses. While child marriage has declined in Sierra Leone (2006-2016), little is known about the drivers of this changing prevalence across various populations within the country.

THE ROLE OF STAR INITIATIVE:

Through the Strategic Technical Assistance for Research (STAR) Initiative to end harmful practices, UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti aims to strengthen research in countries supported by the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. The STAR Initiative focuses on evidence generation, synthesis and uptake.

EVIDENCE OVERVIEW

The existing body of research on child marriage in Sierra Leone centres around the following common themes and sources for the gathering of data.

Use of cross-sectional DHS data
Much of what we know about the prevalence and trends of child marriage in Sierra Leone and its associated outcomes, comes from cross-sectional demographic and health survey data from Sierra Leone and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the cultural specificity of child marriage, there is a need for more country-specific studies focused on Sierra Leone.

Forced marriage in armed conflict contexts
The recognition of forced marriage as a crime against humanity by the Appeals Chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone spurred research attention particularly from legal scholars. These studies examine the definitions of forced marriage, its overlap with other practices such as sexual slavery, and the legal implications for child brides.

Insights from regional evidence on adolescent pregnancy
Data on this area offers relevant insight into the context of the lives of girls in Sierra Leone. A report based on intensive fieldwork conducted by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) examines the available programming in the country that aims to reduce teenage pregnancy including child-friendly spaces, life skills training, peer education, and awareness raising and sensitization to name a few.

This research series, prepared by the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, in collaboration with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, presents an overview of the research on child marriage in select countries.
**GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**Health**
While the existing evidence offers some insight into health interventions aimed at adolescent girls, greater attention to interventions beyond maternal and reproductive health care are needed particularly around the issues of mental health and violence.

**Violence prevention, health and safety**
Addressing violence experienced by married girls is another area of research and programmatic neglect. A greater understanding of the needs of married girls and how best to respond to them, and effective interventions that address these can provide insights into the marital relationship including power dynamics which influence key health and social outcomes such as use of family planning, mental health, safety, etc.

Greater attention to response services for married girls including those addressing the issues of mental health and violence prevention is needed.

**Gender norms and economic livelihoods**
There is currently a dearth of evidence on interventions addressing norms and/or the economic livelihoods of girls and their families. The evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions is well-established in other African countries highlighting the opportunity for cross-country learning and adaptation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage is generously funded by the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom, the European Union through the Spotlight Initiative, and Zonta International.

For a detailed description of the Global Programme in Sierra Leone and results, refer to the Sierra Leone country profile.

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