

Child Marriage Evidence Profiles

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Zambia



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BACKGROUND

High-quality data and evidence on child marriage prevention and response is essential in informing efforts to end child marriage in Zambia. A global review of child marriage evidence over the last 20 years covering English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese identified just 51 publications with a focus on Zambia¹. In other countries, such as Ethiopia, 117 publications on child marriage were identified

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.

highlighting the smaller pool of evidence in Zambia. Still, the implementation of select programmes in the region and detailed in this brief have contributed to understandings of the practice in Zambia.

EVIDENCE OVERVIEW

With regard to drivers of child marriage, recent work by Muthengi et al². identified that the most common reasons given by girls for marrying or cohabiting were poverty and pregnancy. Programme baselines such as the 'Yes, I Do programme' in eastern Zambia reveal a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy and child marriage among young women, with marriage often a common response to pregnancy. A qualitative study on child marriage, early pregnancy and schooling in rural Zambia describes bride-wealth as another driver of child marriage.

Of the intervention-focused literature in Zambia, most draw from the following programmes:

Yes, I Do Programme

The Champions of Change (CoC) intervention was implemented and monitored by Plan Zambia over two years in Chadiza and Petauke districts in the Eastern province of Zambia. An endline evaluation found that the CoC intervention has shown changing attitudes and perceptions towards gender equality, as well as changing social norms. However, the study also found no change and negative changes regarding various statements on gender equality, including on sexual and reproductive health and violence.

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.



Adolescent Girls Empowerment Programme

This study measured improved sexual and reproductive health knowledge, improved self-efficacy, and decreased transactional sex, yet found no long-term effects on pregnancy/birth, marriage, sexual debut, equitable gender attitudes or experience of physical or sexual violence.

Stamping Out and Preventing Gender-Based Violence (STOP GBV) Programme

This intervention was implemented over six years between 2012 and 2018. The STOP GBV programme has established 16 One Stop Centers, built the capacity of close to 4,000 police and judiciary staff on GBV prevention and response, facilitated the court processing of 2,872 GBV cases and supported more than 70,000 GBV survivors with medical, psycho-social and paralegal counselling. The programme has also engaged with traditional leaders, 270 of whom have denounced the practice of child marriage in their chiefdoms.

The Transfer Project

This study examined the impact of two government-run unconditional cash transfer programmes on early marriage/cohabitation and fertility among poor, rural youth in Zambia. While the study found strong impacts on poverty and schooling, there was limited impact on safe transition outcomes, including delayed pregnancy and marriage.

Research Initiative to Support the Empowerment of Girls (RISE) Programme

This programme, implemented from 2016 to 2018, involved cash transfers and community dialogue components and was found to increase school retention. The programme also found that acceptability of a cash transfer programme was increased by linking the benefits to girls to other family members.

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage programming in Zambia

Programme activities have included establishment of



safe spaces for in- and out-of-school adolescents, where adolescents are taught financial literacy and life skills. The programme also supports schools to run clubs that teach life skills for girls and boys, and career clubs for girls to encourage and support secondary education completion. For a detailed description of the Global Programme in Zambia and results, refer to the [Zambia country profile](#).

GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Less is known on what works to prevent child marriage and respond to the needs of married girls and boys in Zambia. Nkwemu et al³. explored the experiences of school-going adolescent mothers in Lusaka. Interventions addressing the needs of married girls can provide rare insight into the marital relationship, including power dynamics which influence key health and social behaviours and outcomes, such as use of family planning, mental health, safety, etc. Addressing violence experienced by married girls is another area of research and programmatic neglect.

For more information on global evidence gaps and priorities for the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, refer to the [Phase II Research Strategy](#).

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- 1 Siddiqi M, Greene M.E. Mapping the field of child marriage: Evidence, gaps and future directions from a large-scale systematic scoping review, 2000-2019. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, supplement on child, early and forced marriage
- 2 Muthengi E, Muthoni L, Austrian K. Comparing Cohabiting Unions and Formal Marriages Among Adolescent Girls in Zambia: The Role of Premarital Fertility and Parental Support. *J Adolesc Health*. 2022 Mar;70(3S):S47-S53. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.11.024. PMID: 35184830; PMCID: PMC9475187.
- 3 Nkwemu, S., Jacobs, C.N., Mweemba, O. *et al.* "They say that I have lost my integrity by breaking my virginity": experiences of teen school going mothers in two schools in Lusaka Zambia. *BMC Public Health* **19**, 62 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6394-0>