

# Child Marriage Evidence Profiles

2023

NIGER



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## EVIDENCE OVERVIEW

A global review of child marriage evidence conducted by [Siddiqi and Greene \(2022\)](#) revealed that among the 157 countries reflected by the evidence, Niger had the highest number of publications focused on child marriage (81 publications) after India, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh. While the vast and growing evidence base on child marriage in Niger has advanced understandings of the practice including the drivers and consequences of child marriage, knowledge gaps particularly related to interventions to address child marriage in Niger remain.

### Prevalence and drivers of child marriage

A spatial analysis by [Shakya et al. 2020](#) describes the sub-national clustering of child marriage, such as in cold spots in the Hausa-dominated eastern area where age at marriage is particularly low and a cluster of hot spots where child marriage is relatively high such as in the Zarma-dominated western areas. For details on the statistical profile on child marriage in Niger, see this [brief](#) published by the Global Programme.

Evidence of the drivers and correlates of child marriage in Niger is well-established. Consistent with the global literature on child marriage, several analyses on child marriage in Niger have found educational attainment to be associated with delayed marriage ([Shakya et al. 2020](#), [Belachew et al. 2022](#), [Perlman et al. 2017](#)).

## BACKGROUND

Child marriage, a harmful practice rooted in gender inequality and discriminatory norms, disrupts childhood dreams and interrupts girls' lives. Ending child marriage requires a robust evidence base to guide actions to promote the rights of adolescent girls and enable them to achieve their aspirations.

The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage promotes the rights of adolescent girls to avert marriage and pregnancy. It implements programmes in 12 countries including Niger, which has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, with 76% of women married before the age of 18 ([UNICEF 2023](#)).

This brief presents an overview of the evidence base on child marriage in Niger.

An examination of the drivers of child marriage by [Psaki et al. 2021](#) included an in-depth case study on Niger. The study uncovered how economic factors such as poverty and lack of opportunity interact with social norms to influence girls' attitudes towards the timing of marriage, including in some cases making child marriage appealing to adolescent girls, themselves, when faced with a lack of alternative options. Programmes addressing child marriage must consider targeted components to address the closely connected drivers related to girls' agency, social norms, poverty, and lack of opportunity in the context of marital choice in Niger.

## Health and economic consequences

The literature on the consequences of child marriage in Niger tends to focus on the maternal and reproductive health impacts, although research on the psychological effects of child marriage for married girls in Niger is also growing. [Godha et al. 2016](#) found that maternal health care use is influenced by age at marriage, parity, and age of residence. Among first-order births, the youngest married adolescents (married at age 14 years or younger) have the lowest probability of use of maternal health care services in both rural and urban areas. An analysis by [Silverman et al. 2020](#) found that married adolescents experiencing physical intimate partner violence or reproductive coercion were more likely than others to use family planning without their husbands' knowledge. Similarly, [DeLong et al. 2020](#) also found that married very young adolescent girls (ages 13 to 14 years) had worse reproductive health, reproductive coercion, and sexual intimate partner violence experiences than the older cohort of married Nigerien adolescent girls and young women.

Child marriage has also been shown to have a negative impact on the mental health of girls and adolescents. That they experience poor mental health is not surprising. They are cast, willingly or unwillingly at a young age, in the role of a wife and required to take on the responsibilities that come with that position. A study on the psychological impacts of child marriage conducted by [John et al. 2019](#) found significant negative associations between very early marriage (marriage of adolescent girls at 15 years or earlier) and overall psychological well-being.

While research on the economic impacts of child marriage is limited, a cost benefit analysis research study conducted by ICRW and the World Bank ([Wodon et al. 2017](#)) reported that ending child marriage would result in significant cost savings for Niger. For example, eliminating child marriage in 2015 in Niger would have led by the year 2030 to \$327 million in savings to the education budget, and \$34 million through reduced infant mortality, among other large-scale savings.



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## Interventions

The evidence base on interventions to address child marriage in Niger is limited. Evidence draws largely from the following key programmes:

- The [More than Brides Alliance programme](#) led to a decline in the proportion of girls reporting ever being married from 25.7% at baseline to 16.0% at endline. Additionally, it increased girls' agency, awareness of the risks of child marriage, knowledge of contraceptive methods. The programme expanded alternative life paths for girls with the proportion of girls who were currently working for income increasing from 23.8% at baseline to 67.1% at endline.
- The [Illimin programme](#) implemented by UNFPA is a safe space programme to delay early marriage and pregnancy among adolescent girls. It offers lessons on life skills and reproductive health in safe spaces set up in both urban and rural areas including refugee camps in Niger. An evaluation of the program found that targeted girls increasingly speak out against child marriage and express their opinions about their potential husbands. Girls also reported to have stronger social networks, that they felt less shy and vulnerable as a result of self-confidence building activities. Knowledge of contraceptives and risks of teenage pregnancies have also increased, as well as the utilization of health services among the girls participating in the Illimin programme.
- A programme reaching married adolescents in Dosso, Niger targeted married adolescent girls (ages 13 to 19) and their husbands. A cluster randomised control trial was conducted to evaluate effects ([Silverman 2023](#)). Participants of the programme were found to have nearly 2.3 factor higher likelihood of current modern contraceptive use after 24 months of intervention, and 0.43 factor lower likelihood of recent intimate partner violence.



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## GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the high prevalence of child marriage in Niger, there is a lack of evaluative evidence on interventions. Given the well-established links between poverty, inequitable gender norms, and poor educational attainment, there is a critical need for interventions that address these central drivers of child marriage. The analysis presented in this brief calls for greater attention to the piloting and evaluating of evidence-

based approaches to prevent child marriage and improve outcomes for girls. Intervention research, including in humanitarian settings in Niger, is needed to establish what works and how.

As the evidence base points out, child marriage is strongly associated with deleterious consequences for girls with risks to girls' sexual and reproductive health, maternal health, and safety. However, services and support targeting married girls appears limited. Further research is needed in order to determine how best to reach married girls and young women and improve outcomes so that they may thrive and fulfill their potential.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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For a detailed description of the Global Programme in Niger and results, refer to the <https://www.unicef.org/media/128371/file/Country-profile-Niger-2021.pdf>. For more information on global evidence gaps and priorities, refer to the Global Programme to End Child Marriage Research Strategy.