

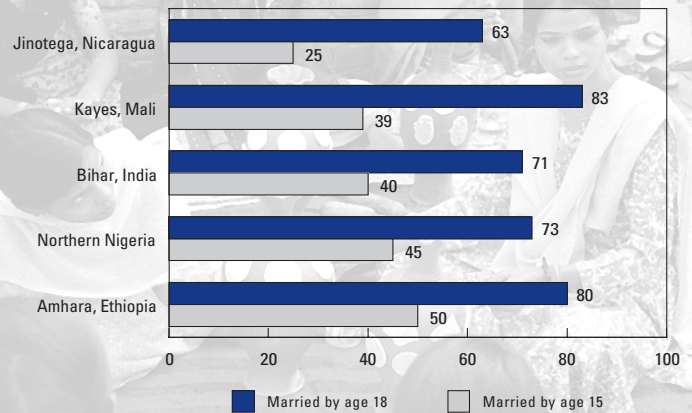
POPULATION COUNCIL WORKS TO ELIMINATE CHILD MARRIAGE

No matter where they live, girls who marry prior to the age of 18 often lead lives marked by frequent childbearing, inferior social status, limited educational attainment, and social isolation. These conditions perpetuate the cycle of poverty and poor health. In areas with a high HIV prevalence, child marriage may render brides particularly vulnerable to infection.

Although child marriage is declining in most of the developing world, hot spots exist throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America where the vast majority of girls marry before their 18th birthday (see graph). Building on nearly a decade of research on adolescents in the developing world, Population Council researchers are documenting and publicizing the extent, cost, and global implications of child marriage, through presentations to policymakers, through publications, and through the media.

In Ethiopia—where half the girls in some regions are married by age 15—the Council facilitated a fact-finding mission in February for a delegation of Democratic and Republican U.S. Congressional aides as well as representatives of faith-based organizations, a Christian journal, and a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In May, Judith Bruce, director of the Council's Gender, Family, and Development program, presented information to an audience that included Ethiopian government ministers and parliamentarians, representatives of the European Union and of NGOs, and health

Percentage of women aged 20–24 who were married by ages 15 and 18, by geographic area:



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys

experts who were meeting to reshape the country's reproductive health strategy for adolescents.

In Bangladesh—where more than 70 percent of women aged 18 to 24 were married before the legal age of 18—Senior Associate Sajeda Amin presented research at a conference in May on “Programmes and Policies to Prevent Early Marriage in Bangladesh.” Amin discussed the causes of early marriage, the harmful effect of dowries, and the need to motivate families and communities in order to effect change. One of the several newspapers that covered the conference editorialized, “To keep such a vast body of womenpower chained to a life of drudgery, nonproductivity and health-related complications of early motherhood, is nothing short of a significant barrier to development.”

In Guatemala, the Council and 18 governmental and nongovernmental groups sponsored a two-day regional conference entitled “Innovative Multisectoral

over

Strategies for Meeting the Needs of Indigenous Girls and Other Vulnerable Adolescents.” Council researchers reviewed the situation of Mayan girls and young women—who drop out of school and marry before other girls at a disproportionate rate—and the progress they have made in gaining skills and overcoming their social isolation. Media representatives were present throughout the December meeting, interviewing coordinators and participants for national radio and newspapers.

Media coverage of the Council’s work on child marriage has appeared recently in *The Daily Star* and *The Independent* (Bangladesh), *The Daily Monitor* and *Capital* (Ethiopia), and *New Kerala* (India), on *Voice of America*, and on the *AllAfrica* and *Business in Africa* Web sites. In the past year, the Council has published six *Transitions to Adulthood* policy briefs; five country briefing papers; two Policy Research Division working papers; and a workshop report on early marriage, the problems and conditions associated with it, and the policies and programs that may help prevent it.

Reprinted from *Momentum*, June 2006
www.popcouncil.org/publications/momentum/momentum606_2.html

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