More than 250 million children and adolescents worldwide are not in school. While the gender gap has narrowed over time, girls are still more likely than boys to never enroll in school. Universal primary completion has not yet been achieved, to say nothing of secondary completion, and a crisis exists in learning. A recent analysis of 43 developing countries indicates that more than 30% of young people who have completed primary school do not have basic literacy skills, with girls more disadvantaged than boys.

In response to these issues and expanding on decades of experience working with adolescent girls, the Population Council has grown its portfolio of education projects focused on eliminating barriers to school participation among girls, increasing completion of primary school and progression to and completion of secondary school, and improving learning.

Successful policies and programs are directly tied to the quality of the evidence informing them, yet too often scarce resources are invested in girls’ education without the necessary data. The rapid expansion of school participation since the 1990s was motivated, in part, by the expectation of improved health and economic outcomes for women and their families. Yet questions remain about persistent gender gaps in school enrollment and progression, skill acquisition, and transitions from school to work.

What are the most effective interventions when it comes to enrolling girls in school, retaining them as students, ensuring quality learning, and helping prepare them for work and healthy adulthood? The Population Council is leveraging its unique combination of research, impact evaluation, and programmatic expertise to fill evidence gaps and help girls around the world lead healthy, productive lives.
The Population Council’s work in girls’ education ensures that education policies and programs for girls are based on sound evidence. We focus on three key areas: increasing school enrollment and retention, improving the quality of education, and preparing for the transition from school to work.

We showcase here some of our many projects. Visit popcouncil.org/research/girls-education to learn more.

**INCREASING SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION**

**GUATEMALA/MEXICO/BELIZE (2014–2018)**

**ABRIENDO OPORTUNIDADES, ABRIENDO FUTUROS, AND THE TOLEDO ADOLESCENT GIRLS PROGRAM**

» Indigenous girls aged 11–19

» Aims to improve economic, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-related outcomes, as well as literacy, school enrollment, and school retention.

» Evidence-based program drawing on prior research investigating girls’ lives.

» Key components: community engagement, community leadership training, safe spaces with life skills training, and tutoring.

Contact Alejandra Colom (acolom@popcouncil.org)

**INDIA/MALAWI/MALI/NIGER/PAKISTAN (2016–2020)**

**MORE THAN BRIDES ALLIANCE**

» Girls aged 12–19

» Aims to develop and test a strategy for reducing marriage and pregnancy.

» Employs a multi-pronged approach and operates in several domains—sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, livelihoods, social norms, and the legal/policy environment.

» Includes activities to raise awareness about the negative effects of child marriage and the importance of staying in school.

Contact Sajeda Amin (samin@popcouncil.org)
IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

ZAMBIA (2016–2019)

GIRLSREAD!

» Randomized controlled trial; girls in grade 7
» Evaluates an intervention that includes safe spaces with empowerment-focused life skills training or safe spaces with empowerment-focused life skills training PLUS solar charged e-readers loaded with books by African authors on: literacy, performance on the primary school leaving exam, and progression to secondary school.

Contact Barbara Mensch (bmensch@popcouncil.org), Nicole Haberland (nhaberland@popcouncil.org), or Michael Mbizvo (mmbizvo@popcouncil.org)

KENYA (2016–2019)

NIA PROJECT

» Randomized controlled trial; girls in grade 7
» Analyzes the impact of providing sanitary pads and underwear and/or sex education to address how menstruation and health education affect school attendance and completion, performance on the primary school leaving exam, literacy and numeracy, gender equity, and adolescent sex and pregnancy rates.

Contact Karen Austrian (kaustrian@popcouncil.org)

PREPARING FOR THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK


BALIKA (ACCELERATING ACTION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE)

» Randomized controlled trial; girls aged 12–18
» Safe spaces project to prevent child marriage and improve life skills by providing various combinations of tutoring, training in gender rights/negotiations, critical thinking, basic first aid, and vocational training.
» Impact: Girls in the three intervention arms were nearly one-third less likely to be married as children as those in the control communities. Depending on the intervention they received, they were also more likely to be attending school, have improved math skills, and/or more likely to be earning an income.

Contact Sajeda Amin (samin@popcouncil.org)

KENYA (2014–2020)

adolescent girls initiative-kenya

» Randomized controlled trial; girls aged 11–15
» Four intervention arms: 1) violence prevention, 2) violence prevention + education, 3) violence prevention + education + health, and 4) violence prevention + education + health + wealth creation.
» Primary outcomes are age at first birth, sex, and marriage. Secondary outcomes are violence reduction, improved educational attainment, and financial literacy and savings. The study will also assess the cost effectiveness of these packages.

Contact Karen Austrian (kaustrian@popcouncil.org)
Population Council girls’ education evaluations

Our dynamic body of research and innovations on girls’ education is currently ongoing in 14 countries across 3 continents and reaches more than 30,000 adolescent girls.

Population Council intervention projects are almost always multi-sectoral; the map indicates projects that aim to improve education outcomes, often in addition to other outcomes of interest. In addition to adolescent girls, some studies include data on other groups, such as teachers, parents, and community members.
Population Council research is published in scientific journals, influencing policymakers, program planners, and other researchers.

We highlight here some of our latest publications focused on girls’ education.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLES

EVIDENCE FOR CAUSAL LINKS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

» Council researchers conducted a systematic review to assess evidence for a causal link between education and maternal and child health in low and middle-income countries.

» They found that while advances in women’s educational outcomes have contributed to improved health in many settings; the effect is not as strong as some researchers and advocates have claimed.

» Results on the effects of education on sexual and reproductive health are forthcoming in Social Science and Medicine: Population Health (Psaki et al. 2019).

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL AND AT HOME AND EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN RURAL MALAWI: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

» Council researchers found that violence at school is a common experience for both girls and boys in Malawi, but that it does not seem to disrupt schooling as expected, with the exception of sexual violence experienced at school by boys. They also found that violence at home is common, and disrupts schooling for both girls and boys.

» These findings emphasize the need for an integrated view of gender, education, and violence in order to implement effective programs and policies to curb school-related gender-based violence and improve education outcomes for young people.

READING AND NUMERACY SKILLS AFTER SCHOOL LEAVING IN SOUTHERN MALAWI: A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

» Using longitudinal data from the Malawi Schooling and Adolescent Study, Council researchers investigated what happens to academic skills after young people leave school. They found that girls were more likely to lose literacy skills than boys in the years after leaving school, even after adjusting for differences in grade attainment and use of skills.

» The results show that gender-related barriers to education may continue even after young people leave school.

TRENDS IN THE AGE AT REPRODUCTIVE TRANSITIONS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

» Council researchers reviewed data on the relationship between education and reproductive health in 43 countries.

» More schooling—especially secondary education—was associated with older age at first sex, marriage, and first birth.

» These results prove that recent increases in the timing of sex, marriage, and first birth globally were largely attributable to the expansion of education, rather than changes in behaviors within educated populations.
ADDITIONAL COUNCIL RESEARCH ON GIRLS’ EDUCATION

2019

2018

2017

2016

2015

2014

2013

2012

2009

2008
Bruce, Judith and Kelly Hallman. “Reaching the girls left behind,” Gender and Development, 16(2): 227–245.

2007
The Population Council is committed to ensuring that young people around the world, especially girls, are able to receive a quality education in a safe environment, ideally through completion of formal secondary school or an appropriate nonformal alternative, in order to lead healthier and more productive lives.

Our ongoing education research and programs will provide critical evidence regarding what works to promote girls' education, as well as identify gaps in need of further research, evaluation, and implementation.

To that end and to accelerate our impact, girls' education is one of the seven strategic priority areas in which the Council is making an investment over the next few years.

For more information about the Population Council's work in girls' education, read more at popcouncil.org/research/girls-education, or contact our education experts:

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