

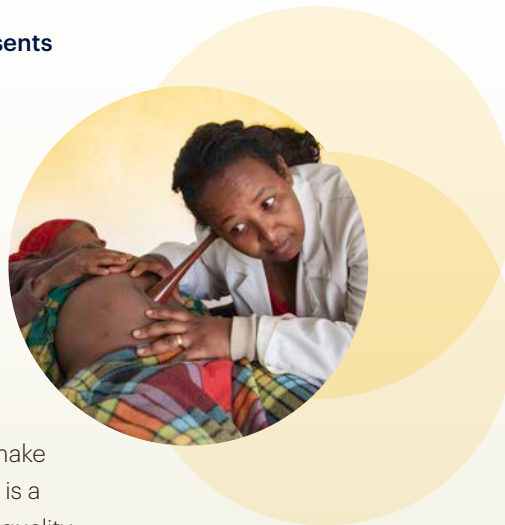


**HAVING A CHILD BEFORE  
BECOMING AN ADULT:**  
EXPLORING THE ECONOMIC  
IMPACT IN A MULTI-COUNTRY  
ANALYSIS

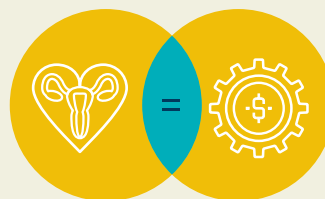


# WHEN A WOMAN HAS A CHILD BEFORE THE AGE OF 18, WHAT DOES HER ECONOMIC FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

Prepared for the Women Deliver 2019 Conference by Population Council and Women Deliver, this report presents findings from one of the first multi-country analyses to examine the short- and long-term impacts of having a child before 18 on employment and monetary compensation (cash earnings). Cash earnings (as opposed to in-kind payments and unpaid work) play an important role in economic empowerment, as research suggests women receiving cash are more likely to be able to make decisions about their own healthcare and education. The study dives further into women's economic empowerment by analyzing married women's sole control over her cash earnings. A woman's power to make her own decision over her health, income, and life choices is a marker of empowerment and a core elements of gender equality.



**WOMEN'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO THEIR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT. BOTH FACTORS PLAY ESSENTIAL ROLES IN ACHIEVING A MORE GENDER EQUITABLE WORLD AND REACHING DEVELOPMENT GOALS.**



Fully meeting contraceptive needs in developing countries and providing comprehensive care for all pregnant women and newborns would reduce unintended pregnancies, unplanned births, and induced abortions, leading to an estimated 73% decrease in maternal deaths and 80% in newborn deaths.<sup>1</sup> Fully closing the gender gap in workplaces would add up to \$28 trillion (or 26 percent) in annual gross domestic product by 2025.<sup>2</sup> It has been estimated that every \$1 invested in meeting the unmet need for contraceptives could yield as much as \$60-100 in long-term benefits from economic growth.<sup>3</sup> **Despite these benefits, the world is far from meeting the sexual and reproductive needs of girls and women—and from closing the economic gender gap.**

In line with the spirit of the Women Deliver 2019 Conference, which focuses on **POWER. PROGRESS. CHANGE**, this study explores the association between having a child before 18 and economic opportunity. The findings have implications for both the **Individual's Power** (girls' and women's individual power, self-esteem and agency) and **Structural Power** (the systems, barriers, and opportunities for progress in power relations, including political, economic, and social structures).

<sup>1</sup> Starrs et al., "Accelerate Progress—Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for All: Report of the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission."

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, "The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth."

<sup>3</sup> FP2020 "Fact Sheet: Returns on Investment." <https://www.familyplanning2020.org/roi>

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## KEY FINDINGS

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An analysis of data representing more than 600 million women, ages 20 to 49, from 43 low- and middle-income countries found the following:

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**THERE IS A STRONG AND CONSISTENT LIFELONG NEGATIVE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN HAVING A CHILD DURING ADOLESCENCE AND A WOMAN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.**



- **Women, ages 20 to 24, who had a child during adolescence are 1.2 times more likely to work than their peers.** Young mothers may be pushed into working by economic necessity. This effect of adolescent childbearing on employment disappears among women ages 25 to 49.
  - **Women who have a child before the age of 18 are set back economically throughout their lives.** Across all age groups, working women who had a child during adolescence are less likely to earn cash for their work than women who did not have a child during adolescence.
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**MOST WOMEN, AGES 20 TO 49, ARE EMPLOYED; HOWEVER, THE WORK IS OFTEN NOT ECONOMICALLY COMPENSATED OR EMPOWERING.**



- **More than half of all women in more than three quarters of the countries analyzed were employed.** Employment tends to be lowest among 20 to 24 year olds and increases steadily with age, and in some countries levels off after age 40.
  - **The percentage of women paid in cash for their work varies widely across countries.** The percentage of working women paid in cash ranges from less than 30 percent in Burundi and Rwanda to more than 90 percent in South Africa, the Maldives, Guatemala, and Colombia.
  - **Unpaid work outside the household is the second most common form of employment in 22 of 43 countries after cash payment, and the most common form of employment in five countries.** Overall, unpaid work outside the household accounts for at least 10 percent of women's employment in more than half of the countries analyzed.
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**MARRIED OR COHABITING WOMEN'S CONTROL OVER THEIR CASH EARNINGS GENERALLY REMAINS LOW.**



- **Less than 50 percent of married women work, earn cash, and have control over their earnings across all countries studied, except Togo and Cambodia.**

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## CONCLUSIONS

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Taken together these results demonstrate that when a woman gives birth before the age of 18, her economic and financial options become more limited throughout her lifetime.

The evidence paints a picture of the difficult and important decisions young mothers may face. Young mothers may be compelled to work out of necessity in jobs that may not promote their economic empowerment—a reality that can extend throughout the rest of their reproductive lives.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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What governments, policymakers, civil society, and donors can do:

**IMPROVE** the provision of, and access to, high-quality, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health service and information, including voluntary, modern contraception and safe abortion, before, during, and after girls and women have begun having children.

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**DEVELOP** policies and programs to open up a range of employment opportunities that are economically empowering for girls and women, including those that are compatible with motherhood such as social protection systems (for example, parental leave policies, old-age pensions, flexible working hours, child allowances) and recognizing and valuing unpaid care work.

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**COMMIT** to collect nationally representative gender- and age-disaggregated data and using evidence to inform policies and practices.