

**GIRL Center Insights Collections** highlight the Population Council's extensive body of research on adolescent-related topics as well as important papers from scholars in the field. The collections present research that changes thinking or demonstrates novel and innovative approaches.

## INSIGHTS COLLECTION

# Adolescent economic empowerment

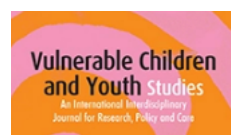
Curated by [Sajeda Amin\\*](#) and [Sapna Desai](#)

Economic empowerment is an increasingly common goal of community-based interventions for adolescent girls. In this GIRL Center Insights Collection, we highlight economic interventions for girls—such as financial literacy, savings groups, and programs to build skills and improve livelihoods—and an array of indicators used to measure their impact. The articles highlight the feasibility of synergistic interventions to improve social, health, and economic assets as well as persistent barriers to addressing girls' vulnerability. Existing evidence also underscores the challenges in defining what constitutes—and how to measure—economic empowerment specific to adolescent girls. Beyond traditional indicators developed for adult women (such as savings, workforce participation, and asset generation), interventions with adolescents require indicators that reflect local context and norms, household dynamics, and measurement of sustained effects on the economic empowerment and well-being of girls. Social indicators such as child marriage and attitudes toward and experience of violence are important elements on the trajectory of positive change. Moreover, given the critical role of context, economic empowerment interventions should be viewed as localized processes rather than through generalizable measures across settings.



**Skills-building programs to reduce child marriage in Bangladesh: A randomized controlled trial** (Amin et al., 2018). This study evaluates the effects of programs that

offer livelihoods training, educational support, and gender rights awareness on the prevalence of child marriage in rural Bangladesh. Results demonstrate the feasibility of reducing child marriage through holistic skills-building among girls, and suggest that offering positive alternatives to marriage is key to changing this entrenched practice.



**Worth the effort? Combining sexual and reproductive health and economic empowerment programming for married adolescent girls in Amhara, Ethiopia** (Edmeades et al., 2016).

This paper compares the impact of two programs: a single-focus sexual and reproductive health program and one that combined sexual and reproductive health with economic empowerment. While both interventions improved health outcomes—with a stronger effect in the health-only intervention—the combined intervention improved a wider range of assets. The study design and findings demonstrate the importance of examining outcomes and context to determine whether single-focus or integrated interventions are more appropriate.



**Can economic assets increase girls' risk of sexual harassment? Evaluation results from a social, health and economic asset-building intervention for vulnerable adolescent girls in Uganda** (Austrian et al., 2014). This

evaluation compares the effectiveness of a savings-only program with a multidimensional intervention comprised of safe space group meetings, financial and health education, and savings accounts. While girls' economic assets improved from both interventions, girls enrolled in the integrated program were less likely to have been sexually harassed. The findings highlight the importance of addressing social and health issues alongside economic interventions to improve girls' overall well-being.



**Do labor market opportunities affect young women's work and family decisions? Experimental evidence from India** (Jensen et al., 2012). This

study evaluates the impact of providing recruiters to visit villages and inform young women about job opportunities in the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry (e.g., call centers). Girls in the treatment villages were more likely to be employed in the BPO sector and less likely to get married or have given birth; they also reported a greater desire to work for pay outside of the home throughout their lives. Results provide evidence of the positive effects of a direct employment intervention—a different approach from community-based, integrated programs for adolescent girls—and demonstrate the feasibility of using measures of current participation to indicate change in future aspirations.



**Evaluation of Berhane Hewan: A program to delay child marriage in rural Ethiopia** (Erulkar et al., 2009). This study

evaluates the effect of group formation and economic and health interventions on the prevalence of child marriage among girls aged 10–19. Evidence indicates that the program reduced the odds of child marriage, increased school enrollment among younger girls, and improved contraceptive use among sexually active girls. Results also suggest an increased risk of early marriage among older girls exposed to the intervention, indicating a catch-up effect, and underscoring the challenges in addressing this complex issue.



**Reaching the girls left behind** (Bruce et al., 2008). This research reviews

a range of factors, including economic insecurity and early marriage, which render young girls and women vulnerable to HIV infection. The paper examines successful interventions that demonstrate how economic security is a key pathway to addressing vulnerability to HIV. Safe space interventions have enhanced girls' economic, health, and social security by providing financial literacy and access to savings, combined with improved health awareness, entitlements, and social networks.

**The Girl Innovation, Research, and Learning (GIRL) Center generates, synthesizes, and translates evidence to transform the lives of adolescent girls. Through rigorous research about what works—and what doesn't—we can better direct limited resources to support evidence-based solutions that improve girls' lives.**

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