

Child marriage and adolescent girls in conflict-affected areas

Methodological note to accompany Global Girlhood Report 2022: Girls on the Frontline

Child marriage is a harmful practice and child rights violation that disproportionately affects girls. While child marriage is common in both development and humanitarian contexts, many countries with the highest estimated rates of child marriage are affected by conflict or other humanitarian crises, or considered to be fragile states. This, along with existing literature, suggests that child marriage may be more likely among girls living in areas affected by conflict.

This note sets out the data and methodology used in two sets of analysis, one looking at increased risk of child marriage among girls affected by conflict and a second estimating the number of girls living in conflict-affected areas today.

1. Child marriage and conflict

Findings

Our initial analysis, based on data from over 2 million women across 56 countries, finds an increased incidence of marriage before age 18 for women living within 50 kilometres of conflict, during or within five years prior to their year of marriage, compared to girls not affected by conflict. The child marriage rate is found to increase by 4.5 percentage points, roughly a **20% increase** from a baseline child marriage rate of 23% globally.

This analysis relies on two sources of data: population-level georeferenced microdata to measure the prevalence of child marriage, and georeferenced information on occurrence and severity of armed conflicts.

Child marriage data

To analyse the prevalence of child marriage, we used Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) phases IV-VIII, nationally representative household surveys conducted in most low- and middle-income countries (DHS Program 2022). We derived the relevant information (women's age, age at first marriage, year of interview) from the women's recode of 229 surveys. We then combined this data with geospatial information on the location of the cluster where the household is located, which was available for 172 of the 229 surveys in our sample, covering 56 countries. The central point of the cluster was measured by the survey enumerators using global positioning system (GPS).

As DHS surveys include women aged 15-49 years, this dataset does not only reflect child marriage at the time of the survey but also allows us to derive the year of marriage. Noting that the georeferenced location of the household is the location at the time of the survey, not the time of marriage, and that conflict may lead to increased migration and displacement we controlled for the possibility that women had moved in various ways.

Conflict data

We used data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program Georeferenced Events Dataset (UCDP GED) (Sundberg & Melander 2013). The database included information on occurrence and severity of conflicts (location, type of conflict, actors, estimates of number of deaths), with georeferenced locations for the period 1989 until 2021. UCDP defines a conflict event as "an incident where armed force was used by an organised actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 1 direct death at a specific location and a specific date" (Högbladh 2021). In line with previous research on children affected by armed conflict, we define conflict zones as circles or buffers of 50 km radius around each conflict event, a radius within we would expect conflict events to impact people's lives (Østby, Rustad & Arasmith 2021).

Note: We restricted the radius by national boundaries, assuming that conflicts did not automatically spill across international borders. This assumption may lead to an underestimation of the true effect of conflict on child marriage, as we ignored the potential impacts of violence on one side of an internal border on women and girls on the other side.

Empirical methodology

Our empirical methodology was inspired by analysis on the impact of conflict on child mortality conducted by Wagner et al (2018). Following that approach we compared incidence of child marriage *within* the same cluster over time, implicitly controlling for all cross-sectional differences between clusters. A linear probability model was used. Compared to a binary choice mode, the linear probability model allowed us to interpret the resulting coefficients more easily.

2. Method and data for number of girls living in conflict

Separate analysis of the number of girls living in conflict is also published in the Global Girlhood Report 2022. Our estimates show that 89.2 million girls aged 10-17 years live in conflict zones, 19.3% of the total global population of girls aged 10-17 years, which we estimate to be 463 million.

We drew on Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Georeferenced Event Dataset (see Sundberg & Melander 2013) to identify conflict events in 2020. Aligned to the methodology used in Save the Children's Stop the War on Children reports (Save the Children 2021c, Østby, Gudrun; Siri Aas Rustad & Andrew Arasmith 2021), we then estimated the number of children living in conflict zones (defined as areas with a 50km radius around each conflict event within the same country) using sex- and age-disaggregated World Pop gridded population estimates (Bondarenko et al. 2020).

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