

INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES TO DELAY MARRIAGE AND PROMOTE SCHOOLING

RESULTS FROM A BASELINE SURVEY IN RURAL TANZANIA

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Early marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18, is mainly practiced in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where over one third of African girls and nearly a half of South Asian girls are married during childhood.¹ In sub-Saharan Africa, the highest rates of child marriage are found in West Africa, in countries such as Niger, Chad and Mali. However, in East Africa, the numbers of girls married in countries such as Ethiopia, Zambia and Tanzania is also substantial. In rural Tanzania, median age at marriage is 18.5.¹

This research brief describes girls' experience of early marriage, education and sexual behaviour in the Tabora region of Tanzania. Located in the central-western part of the country, Tabora has an estimated population of over 1,700,000² and is largely rural and devoted to agriculture. Findings from this brief are drawn from a baseline study conducted in 2011 in rural Uyui district of Tabora. Over 2,000 girls aged 12 to 17 were interviewed, as well as over 400 parents.

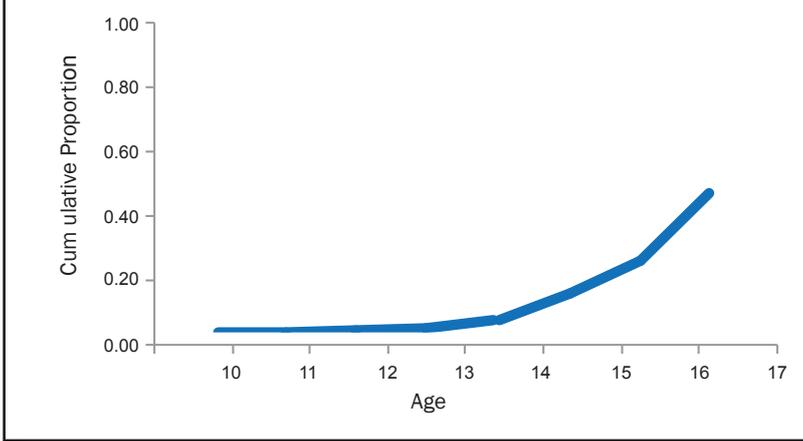
Early marriage in Tabora region, Tanzania

The legal age at marriage in Tanzania is 18 for males and 15 for females.³ Perceptions of the ideal marriage age for boys and girls seem to mirror biases in the law. Among those surveyed, the vast majority of both girls (88%) and parents (90%) believed that boys should marry at age 18 or older. At the same time, 42% of girls and 62% of parents believed that the ideal age for girls to marry was below 18. About one third of girls' parents believed their underage daughters were the right age for marriage at the time of survey.

Among girls in rural Tabora, 13% are married by age 15 and 47% are married by age 18 (Figure 1). Roughly half of these early marriages were arranged by families (49%) and half were of the girl's choosing (51%). Seventy-one percent of marriages included bride price. Girls' families received an average of eight cows and over

¹Among young women aged 20-24.

Figure 1: Cumulative proportion of girls 12-17 who are married, by age



TSH 300,000, or about US\$200, in marriage transactions. Most marriages are monogamous, but one in seven (15%) girls were in polygamous unions.

Low levels of education, especially among girls who marry early

Educational enrollment and attainment were low among girls in Tabora, particularly those who were married. Overall, one in eight girls (12%) in rural Tabora had never been to school, with married girls four times more likely to have no education compared to unmarried girls (10% unmarried, 41% married). The main

First, life is very hard. You might find that [a girl's] family is going through very hard times; they do not even have food... They will decide to let her [daughter] go and start her life so that they can get something small.

...Also the greed of the parents. Maybe there is someone offering [a girl's parents] ten cows so they [parents] prefer to take them in exchange for the girl. The girl will be forced to get married whether she likes it or not so the parent gets the cows.

Female village elder, Tabora region, age 53

reasons cited for never having been to school were parents not approving or seeing the benefit (46% unmarried, 50% married) and families' inability to afford schooling (24% unmarried, 40% married). On average, girls in rural Tabora achieved few years of schooling: 5 years among never-married girls and 3 years among married girls. Likewise, 23% of never-married girls and 52% of married girls reported to be illiterate.

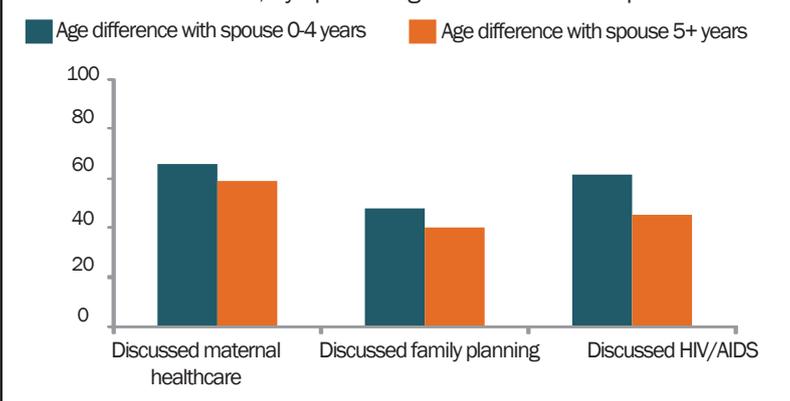
Contrary to popular assumptions, only a minority of girls dropped out of school in order to get married (12%). This is partly because only a minority of married girls ever went to school in the first place. That most married girls have so little education highlights the limited capabilities with which girls enter marriage – and commence associated adult marital roles.

The terms of early marriage undermine girls' agency

While married girls' low levels of education barely equip them for adult roles in marriage, the terms of early marriages also undermine girls in those relationships. The younger a girl is when she marries, the more likely she is to have a large age difference with her husband.⁴ Girls who are significantly younger than spouses typically have limited power and decision-making ability within their relationships.⁵ There is also emerging evidence that early marrying girls experience higher rates of intimate partner violence.⁶

Among married girls in Tabora, the average age difference between spouses was 8 years among girls aged 10 to 14, and 6 years among girls 15 to 17. A quarter (25%) of girls aged 12 to 17 married men who were at least seven years older than themselves. Married girls with much older husbands were less likely to report discussing reproductive health topics with them, such as maternal healthcare, family planning and HIV/AIDS (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percent of married adolescent girls reporting spousal discussion, by spousal age difference and topic



Many girls in rural Tabora experience intimate partner violence. Almost two in five married girls (39%) had experienced some type of physical abuse, including being slapped, punched or choked. One-third (35%) had experienced marital sexual abuse. Girls who married older spouses were significantly more likely to report being sexually abused than girls who married spouses closer to their own age. For example, 46% of girls with husbands 7 or more years older had been forced to perform sexual acts against their will, compared to 13% of girls with spouses 0 to 3 years older.

Early marriage and reproductive health

Adolescent girls are frequently too young physically, emotionally and developmentally for pregnancy. Births to young mothers are associated with increased risk of pre-term birth, infant mortality, maternal mortality and maternal morbidities such as obstetric fistula.⁷ The majority (71%) of married girls had given birth or were pregnant at the time of survey, compared to only 8% of unmarried, sexually-experienced girls. Most young mothers (84%) reported that they saw a health professional for prenatal care during their first pregnancy and less than one third (29%) gave birth at home. The majority of girls who were mothers had only one child; however, 13% already had more than one child.

The majority of married girls (84%) and unmarried, sexually-experienced girls (69%) had never used a family planning method. There was high unmet need for family planning; 65% of married girls who had never used a method reported that they would like to use family planning. Among those who had used family planning, the most common method was condoms (89% unmarried, 72% married). Other methods used by married girls included injectables/depo (28%), pills (14%) and female condoms (12%).

In many settings, married girls have a higher risk of HIV infection than sexually-active unmarried girls because they tend to have greater sexual frequency and older partners who are more sexually experienced and more likely to be HIV positive.⁸ Almost half (47%) of married girls feared that their husbands would give them HIV, and 43% suspected their husband of being unfaithful. Of these, only a third had ever insisted on condom use with their husbands. More than half (56%) of married girls had been tested for HIV: 35% before marriage, 44% after marriage and 17% both before and after marriage.

Increasing opportunities to delay marriage and promote schooling

Early marriage has a significant impact on girls' health, well-being and personal development. Girls who marry early are already disadvantaged. They tend to come from poor backgrounds and have little or no education. Research in Tabora, Tanzania shows that a considerable proportion of girls married early have only limited discussions on health issues with their spouses, experience intimate partner violence and have high unmet need for family planning. Early marriage leads to early childbearing which, in turn, leads to elevated health risks. Increasing the age at which girls are married would arguably result in brides who are better prepared for marriage, and marriages that are more equitable, safe and healthy.

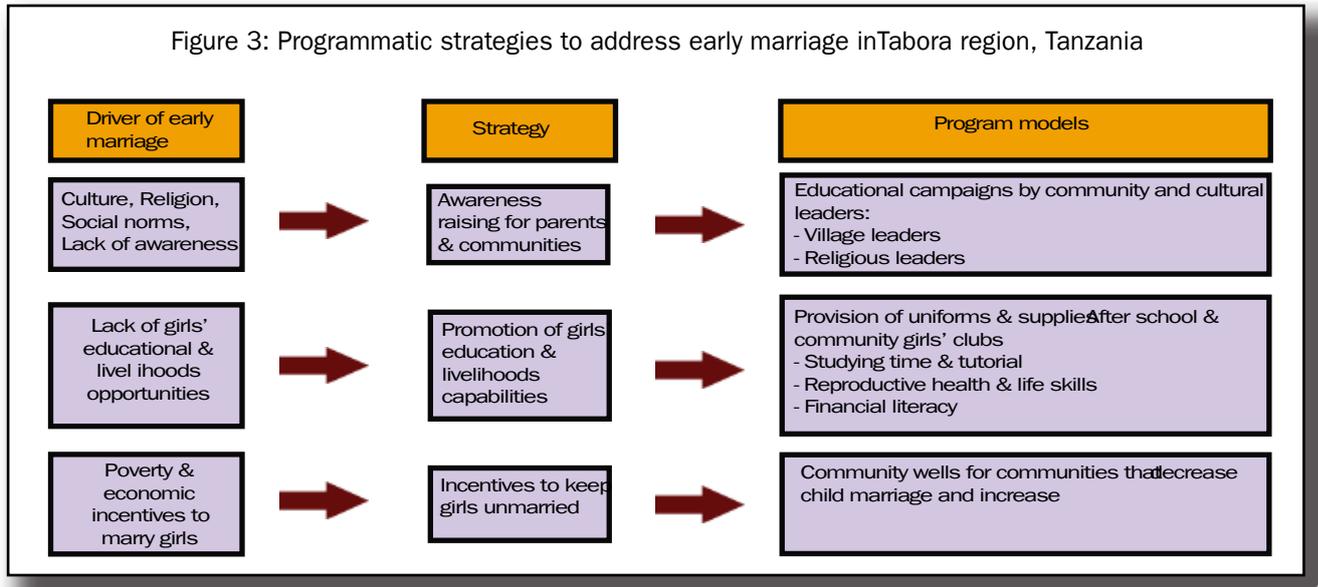
Tabora Development Foundation Trust (TDFT), in partnership with the Population Council, is implementing strategies to increase marriage age in rural Tabora region. The goal of the program is to identify effective, sustainable and cost-effective approaches to increase the age at marriage and increase educational participation among girls in Tanzania.

Program activities include: community awareness, support to get girls back into school and keep them there, as well as conditional transfers (Figure 3). Each strategy will be implemented in a different area, enabling researchers to test the impact of each model.

Religious leaders and village elders will lead efforts to sensitize communities on the importance of education and the risks to girls who marry early. In selected

project sites, unmarried girls will be eligible to receive educational support in the form of either a uniform or school materials, in exchange for parental assurance that they will not arrange a marriage and attempt to keep her in school. 'Smart Girls Clubs' will provide girls with social support and protected studying time, and also include sessions on reproductive health, life skills and financial literacy. Clubs will be held both after school and in community settings. Lastly, community incentives - most likely water wells - will be provided to communities in some sites if they significantly reduce early marriage and increase girls' educational participation, over the two-year period. After two years, surveys will be undertaken in rural Tabora to measure the impact of these strategies on marriage age, educational participation and reproductive health behaviour, among others.

Figure 3: Programmatic strategies to address early marriage in Tabora region, Tanzania



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