



YEMEN

Young girls sit inside a home outside of Al Hudaydah. Yemeni women's rights groups agree that child marriage is rampant in every part of Yemeni society.

Photo by Stephanie Sinclair / VII Photo / Too Young To Wed

CHAPTER

02

MEASURING CHILD MARRIAGE



CHAPTER 2

MEASURING CHILD MARRIAGE

The incidence and prevalence of child marriage is analysed and reported in a variety of ways. A 2012 report from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provides evidence that "Nearly one in every four adolescent girls aged 15-19 in the developing world (excluding China) is currently married or in union." The report goes on to say that "More than one third of women aged 20-24 in the developing world were married by age 18...."²⁵ Although both estimates approximate the extent of child marriage, it is also true that the indicators provide different information.

For the purposes of this report, the latter indicator – women 20 to 24 years old who first married or entered into union before age 18 – will be used exclusively, for two reasons: First, the percentage of girls aged 15 to 19 who are married or in union at any given time includes girls who are 18 and 19 and no longer children, according to the internationally accepted definition. Second, the indicator includes girls aged 15, 16 and 17 who are classified as single, but who could eventually marry or enter into a union before the age of 18. By taking a retrospective view, the preferred indicator – covering women aged 20 to 24 – is not affected by these limitations and so more accurately approximates the real extent of child marriage.

DATA SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS

The bulk of data on child marriage has been collected through household surveys —specifically, the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS)²⁶ — using national representative samples. The surveys were conducted in close collaboration with national counterparts, such as national statistics offices or ministries of health.

The resulting data were used to produce country, regional and global estimates of child marriage and to assess trends over time. Estimates are also provided on disparities in the rates of child marriage based on wealth, education and rural or urban residence. Although other variables, such as ethnicity and religion, also appear to influence child marriage levels and trends, they are absent from this report and will undergo later, more detailed, analysis.

Statistics on child marriage reflect data available for 107 developing countries. Together, these countries represented over two thirds (68 per cent) of the developing world's women aged 20 to 24 years in 2010. Every developing region, with the exception of East Asia and the Pacific, has information on child marriage for countries representing 60 per cent or more of its population.²⁷

The analysis of trends in child marriage in Chapter 3 is based on results from the two most recent household surveys available in 48 countries. These countries represent half the population of all developing countries (80 per cent in the case of African countries with two available data points). The first surveys were conducted during the period 1986-2006; the second surveys were between 2001 and 2010.

The analysis of disparities and inequalities in Chapter 4 is based on household survey data from 78 developing countries. Trends in disparities (over the period 2000-2010) reflect the situation in only 48 countries due to the lack of sufficient survey data.

The five regional groupings covered in this report are those used by UNFPA to monitor its work in developing countries. They include Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States, Eastern Europe and

Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa. Asia is broken down into two subregions: East Asia and the Pacific (China is not included for lack of available data) and South Asia. African subregions include Eastern and Southern Africa and Western and Central Africa.

Periodically estimating the extent of child marriage at the global, regional and country levels is a legitimate way to track progress towards its elimination. However, it should also be understood that such estimates represent *averages* only, and mask deviations within and among countries and regions. To identify the most marginalized, excluded or otherwise disadvantaged groups, data are disaggregated according to key variables.

CHILD MARRIAGE INDICATORS

The prevalence of child marriage is calculated as:

$$\frac{\text{Number of women aged 20 to 24 who indicated that they were married or in union before the age of 18}}{\text{Total number of women aged 20 to 24}}$$

The background characteristics of women aged 20 to 24, which were used to disaggregate data, are defined as follows:

Place of residence relies on two basic indicators:

- ◆ region of country of residence
- ◆ urban or rural residence

The levels of education considered are:

- ◆ No education
- ◆ Primary education
- ◆ Secondary or higher education

Household wealth is measured by quintiles:

- ◆ Poorest 20%
- ◆ Second 20%
- ◆ Middle 20%
- ◆ Fourth 20%
- ◆ Richest 20%

Thus, the prevalence of child marriage among the poorest quintile is interpreted as the percentage of women 20 to 24 years of age from the poorest 20 per cent of households, who were married or in union before their eighteenth birthdays.

The data used to produced this report can be accessed at www.devinfo.info/mdg5b.