# Ending child marriage: what does the latest evidence say?
Webinar recap - 30 January 2018

Since the landmark review of Solutions to End Child Marriage in 2011, we have seen lots of new research on what works to end child marriage. What have we learned from recent evidence reviews? And what evidence are we will missing?

In January 2018, *Girls Not Brides* hosted a webinar with child marriage research experts to reflect on these questions. This is a short summary of the discussion.

### 1. Webinar overview

Presenters:

- Amanda Kalamar, from Population Services International presented findings from her 2016 paper, *Interventions to prevent child marriage among young people in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review of the published and gray literature.* The review found that a range of different approaches were effective, but that economic approaches (such as cash transfers) were the most powerful.
- Thoai Ngo and Sophia Chae from the Girl Center at Population Council presented findings from their 2017 systematic review, The global state of evidence on interventions to prevent child marriage. This review found that empowerment approaches were the most successful and that economic approaches were the least successful.
- Venkatraman Chandra- Mouli from the World Health Organisation presented findings from a 2016 paper, *What does not work in adolescent sexual and reproductive health. A review of evidence on interventions commonly accepted as best practices*. The paper found that popular interventions shown to be ineffective continue to be implemented, and effective approaches are often delivered inadequately.

Discussants:

- Margaret Greene, of Greeneworks, then explained that differences in methodology account for the different conclusions reached by the Kalamar et al and the Chae and Ngo studies, including different inclusion criteria and methods of categorisation.
- Rachel Marcus, of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) commented on what we know about social norms initiatives with potential to prevent child marriage. She mentioned a recent ODI review of girls' clubs and their impact on child marriage, *Girls' clubs, life skills programmes and girls' wellbeing outcomes*, which found that community based approaches, while less common, were on the whole the most effective. She also highlighted a 2014 ODI review of communication initiatives *Changing discriminatory norms affecting adolescent girls through communication activities*, which found that that some mass communication activities such as edutainment, radio or TV programmes can lead to quite significant attitude changes.

### 2. Key discussion points

**Different methodologies used in the Kalamar et al and Chae and Ngo studies**

The Kalamar et al and Chae and Ngo studies classify approaches differently. Chae and Ngo clustered interventions into four groups: economic, schooling, community and empowerment approaches. The Kalamar et al review was more descriptive of the interventions included rather than using a rigid classification system. They also didn't classify any interventions as primarily using an empowerment approach.

The Chae and Ngo study also considered multi component approaches, and classified the intervention by the dominant component. This however means that there may be some ambiguity in the classification process, making it harder to compare different types of approaches across studies.

**Gaps in the evidence**

There is a lack of evidence on how the impact of programmes are sustained in the long term. There are few evaluations of community based approaches. There are also few studies which look at the age gap between spouses.

There are very few evaluations which look at the quality of programme implementation, which is important to understand effectiveness of an approach.

**New and emerging research**

ODI's Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE) programme looks at the impact of programmes over the long term (nine year- long study) and is currently conducting research on approaches which work with young boys and men to promote gender egalitarian attitudes. There is more research being conducted which explores the quality of relationships within marriage, including girls' agency and experience of gender based violence. There is also an increasing focus on child marriage in humanitarian contexts, which this paper by Bartels et al explores.

3. **Key takeaways**

**There is no silver bullet when it comes to ending child marriage**

A number of different approaches have proven effective, but the best one will depend on your context and population. Combining different approaches in an integrated "package" is more effective than a single intervention.

**Measuring progress on child marriage must go beyond the age of marriage**

While it is important for programmes to measure progress towards ending child marriage, change takes time and indicators used to measure progress must go beyond age of marriage alone.

**Programme designers and donors should base programmes on evidence**

This means,

- Reviewing evidence of what works and what doesn't to avoid replicating ineffective approaches.

- Designing programmes to respond to drivers and influencers of change in that context.
- Recognising the fact that an approach worked in one place doesn't mean it will work elsewhere.
- Focusing on the quality (e.g. who is delivering the programme, how well trained are they, etc.) and intensity (e.g. how often, over what length of time) of the implementation.
- Documenting and evaluating the implementation of programmes to better understand the impact they have.

**We need more evidence in areas where there are gaps**

Few studies have looked at what works at scale, or how much successful programmes cost. There is also a lack of high quality evidence on community based interventions and interventions to change social norms.

**We need to build monitoring, evaluation and learning into the early stages of programme design, planning and budgeting. And more investment in evaluating what works and doesn't work**

Knowing what doesn't work is just as important as knowing what works but these results are less likely to be published and shared. We need to document and share failures, not only to focus investment on what works but so that others can avoid making the same mistakes. Finding space for open discussions about failures is important.