

# The cost of child marriage over the life cycle: Evidence from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Tunisia

## Theoretical Framework

9 November 2021



Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



# Section 1

## Motivation

# Motivation

- ▶ This report focuses on estimating the impacts of child marriage over the life cycle of women and girls in four Arab States that have differences in prevalence of child marriage.
- ▶ Our analyzes aim to understand how child marriage affects women's well-being throughout their lives, and how child marriage might serve as a channel for life long deprivation.

# Motivation

- ▶ Since child marriage affects a woman's life in a multiplicity of ways, any costing exercise should try to address as many of these facets as possible.
- ▶ The framework to assess the economic impacts of child marriage was developed by Wodon et al. (2017).
- ▶ We overcome a limitation of the presented in the Global Synthesis Report (Wodon et al. 2017) as we analyze datasets that have information on both earnings and the age at first marriage.

# Motivation

- ▶ Aggregating these individual effects represents a great loss for society as a whole and contributes to the perpetuation of extreme poverty and inequality.
- ▶ They only estimate the opportunity (economic) cost and do not consider financial costs.
- ▶ The opportunity cost is a measure of - **what could have been in the absence of child marriage.**

# Motivation

- ▶ To date, however, there has been relatively little in the way of rigorous evidence-based assessment of the economic impacts of child marriage or how much child marriage may **cost** countries and societies (Wodon et al., 2017).

## Section 2

# Drivers of child marriage

# Drivers of child marriage

- ▶ There is a growing body of literature on the drivers of child marriage and its impact on the different stages of the life cycle of women and girls (e.g., Parsons et al., 2015 summarizes the economic impacts of child marriage).
- ▶ Substantial research has also been conducted to identify the determinants of child marriage and their consequences on the well-being of girls throughout their lives.



# Drivers of child marriage

## Socioeconomic factors:

1. The loss of livelihoods increases the likelihood of transactional marriages.
2. Limited access to education reduces the opportunity costs of marriage, mostly for girls.
3. Unavailability of schools, or schooling interruptions induce additional dropouts who ultimately marry at a younger age.

# Drivers of child marriage

Social and cultural norms factors:

1. Norms regarding transition to adulthood, sexuality, age hierarchies, religious beliefs.
2. Protecting family reputation and heritage.
3. Ethnic pro-natalism encouraged within group family formation.
4. Parents' may see the role of women and girls only as mothers and their role inside the home.
5. Parents' resort to child marriage to protect girls against the threats of sexual violence.

## Drivers of child marriage

- ▶ Despite many States having adopted minimum age of marriage laws, which themselves codify a set of norms and aspirations, many of these laws allow for exceptions, have weak enforcement or allow for impunity.
- ▶ Their existence alone does not signify an effective tool for shifting the drivers of child marriage (UN ESCWA, 2020).
- ▶ The intersection of the various drivers cannot be understated, as the overlapping of these factors often leave few options for girls but to marry early, contributing further to the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty and discrimination against women and girls.

## Drivers of child marriage

- ▶ Establishing causality between these factors and child marriage can prove challenging.

## Section 3

# Life Cycle Skill Formation Model

## Life Cycle Skill Formation Model - Cuhna and Heckman (2007)

- ▶ We frame the study using the life cycle skill formation model.
- ▶ This model shows the skill formation process from conception to old age, to demonstrate how human capabilities are developed across a lifetime.
- ▶ It provides a theoretical framework of how child marriage affects women, girls, and their children at different stages of life.
- ▶ It also points to critical life periods that are particularly sensitive to adverse circumstances.

# Life Cycle Skill Formation Model

- ▶ The LCSFM provides a theoretical framework for interpreting the evidence from a vast empirical literature, for guiding the next generation of empirical studies, and for formulating policy.
- ▶ Central to our analysis is the concept that childhood has more than one stage.
- ▶ The model formalizes the concepts of self-productivity and complementarity of human capital investments and use them to explain the evidence on skill formation.
- ▶ Together, they explain why skill begets skill through a multiplier process.

# Life Cycle Skill Formation Model

- ▶ Skill formation starts in the womb and goes on throughout life.
- ▶ Families play a role in this process that is far more important than any other factor.
- ▶ There are multiple skills and multiple abilities that are important for adult success.



# Life Cycle Skill Formation Model

- ▶ Abilities are both inherited and created, and the traditional debate about nature versus nurture is scientifically obsolete.
- ▶ Human capital investment exhibits both self-productivity and complementarity.
- ▶ Skill attainment at one stage of the life cycle raises skill attainment at later stages of the life cycle (self-productivity).
- ▶ Early investment facilitates the productivity of later investment (complementarity).

# Life Cycle Skill Formation Model

- ▶ Early investments are not productive if they are not followed up by later investments (another aspect of complementarity).
- ▶ This complementarity explains why there is no equity-efficiency trade-off for early investment.
- ▶ The returns to investing early in the life cycle are high.
- ▶ Remediation of inadequate early investments is difficult and very costly as a consequence of both self-productivity and complementarity.

# Life Cycle Skill Formation Model

Our analyses study the effects of child marriage on the following domains:

- ▶ Fertility and modern contraceptive use
- ▶ Health – under 5 age mortality and under 5 stunted growth
- ▶ Decision-making (household and marital decision making)
- ▶ Domestic violence (intimate partner sexual and non-sexual violence)
- ▶ Educational attainment (completion of primary and secondary education)
- ▶ Labor market outcomes (labor force participation, wages, and market and household hours)