

Empowering Girls in Rural Bangladesh

Nina Buchmann, Erica Field, Rachel Glennerster, Shahana Nazneen, Svetlana Pimkina, Iman Sen



The conditional incentive program delivered cooking oil to families with unmarried girls aged fifteen through seventeen. Photo: StevenK | Shutterstock.com

Fieldwork: Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

Location: Barisal division, Bangladesh

Sample: 460 villages with approximately 45,000 adolescent girls

Timeline:
2007 to 2015

Partners:
Bangladesh Development Society (BDS)
Save the Children USA
International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
National Institutes of Health (NIH)
Fondation Nike
International Development Research Center (IDRC)

Question de politique: Throughout the world, cultural stigmatism has often excluded women from receiving education or earning income equivalent to men, though educating a woman increases her financial independence and dramatically improves the chances that her children will survive, be better nourished and better educated. For less developed nations in particular, women may embody a previously untapped source of human capital, and those countries that have embraced more aggressive policies in regards to gender equality in education can be expected to return greater social and economic benefits.

Cadre de l'évaluation: When it comes to education, social mobility, and marriage choices, adolescent girls in Bangladesh appear to face numerous barriers. In recent years, school enrollment rates have improved, but girls are still often forced to drop out of school, to be married off at a

young age. A recent UNICEF study shows that almost 50% of girls are married by the age of 15, and 60% are mothers by the age of 19. Effectively, this harms their health, education, and future decision-making prospects as well as their future income-generating potential and their status within the family. While some female-empowerment programs focus on rights-based campaigns or skill-building activities within the community, little is known about the relative costs and effects these different programs have on the social and economic empowerment of adolescent girls.

Détails de l'intervention: Researchers are cooperating with the Bangladesh office of Save the Children USA to implement a broad range of interventions, aimed at empowering adolescent girls in southern Bangladesh. The Kishoree Kontha (KK) project operates through small peer-led sessions in Safe Spaces (spaces within a community where adolescent

girls can safely meet on a regular basis). Out of a sample of 460 target villages, 307 villages have been randomly selected to receive one of four intervention packages. The remaining villages will serve as the comparison group. The four intervention packages are:

1. *Basic Package*: This package provides literacy and numeracy training for illiterate girls, as well as study support and educational mentoring for school-going girls. It also provides social competency training, which includes information on health, rights, and general negotiation and social skills.
2. *Livelihoods Package*: This package complements the Basic package with additional sessions on financial livelihood readiness. Rather than providing direct vocational training, these sessions build entrepreneurial and budgeting skills that are applicable to a wide

variety of financial opportunities in the community.

3. *Full Package*: This package includes all the sessions of the Livelihood package, but adds a direct incentive to delay marriage until the legal age of 18 years old. All girls in targeted villages, between 15 and 17 years old, will be eligible to receive approximately 16 liters of cooking oil per year, on the condition that they remain unmarried. This amount surpasses the financial cost associated with delaying marriage that families must pay in the form of dowry.
4. *Delayed Marriage Package*: This package provides only the incentives to delay marriage, as described above, without any peer-led sessions in the communities. As such, it will allow researchers to disentangle the effects of direct conditional incentives from changes in attitudes and skills.

Résultats et conclusions politiques: Results forthcoming.

¹Loaiza, Edilberto Sr. and Sylvia Wong. 2012. *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*. New York: United Nations Population Fund. Accessed March 21, 2017. <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

²UNICEF. 2014. *Ending Child Marriage: Prospects and Progress*. New York: UNICEF. Accessed March 21, 2017. https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR..pdf

³Mitra, National Institute of Population Research Associates, and ICF International Training (NIPORT). 2016. *Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014*. Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NIPORT, Mitra and Associates,

and ICF International. Accessed March 21, 2017. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR311/FR311.pdf>

⁴Field, Erica and Attila Ambrus. 2008. "Early Marriage, Age of Menarche, and Female Schooling Attainment in Bangladesh." *Journal of Political Economy* 116 (5): 881-930.

Related Papers Citations: *Buchmann, Nina, Erica Field, Rachel Glennerster, Shahana Nazneen, Svetlana Pimkina, and Iman Sen. "Power vs Money: Alternative Approaches to Reducing Child Marriage in Bangladesh, a Randomized Control Trial." Working Paper, September 2018.*

Visit this page online for links to related research, news, videos, and more:

<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/fr/evaluation/empowering-girls-rural-bangladesh>

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a network of 194 affiliated professors from 62 universities. Our mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. We engage with hundreds of partners around the world to conduct rigorous research, build capacity, share policy lessons, and scale up effective programs. J-PAL was launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and now has regional offices in Africa, Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. For more information visit povertyactionlab.org.