

Influencing policy on early marriage in India and Ethiopia

May 2017

Young Lives' research on adolescence, youth, gender and poverty finds a specific focus in its work on early marriage and child-bearing. The life courses of young people, particularly girls, are strongly affected by expectations and practices in this area, but the factors affecting early marriage are complex. By examining and connecting many different aspects of young people's lives (work, school, home, marriage, community, peers) Young Lives can build a powerful picture of this complexity and put itself in a strong position to inform policy in constructive ways. The core DFID-funded research has once again enabled Young Lives to attract additional funding (from CIFF and the Hewlett Foundation) so that existing research findings can be leveraged to address this area of work.

In India, Young Lives is supporting state-level approaches to early marriage and the development of effective adolescent sexual and reproductive health care policies. In May 2016 Young Lives organised research dissemination workshops on the topic of early marriage in Hyderabad, New Delhi and Jaipur. These were well-attended by state and national government departments, national and state NGOs, and international organisations, and widely reported in the media. As a direct result of these workshops Young Lives was able to develop a formal partnership with the National Council for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) through a Memorandum of Understanding. NCPCR has good links to state-level actors through State Commissions for the Protection of Child Rights, and has the power to convene senior representatives from across government and the research community. Through its partnership with NCPCR, Young Lives is supporting the development of a national strategy and standard operating procedures to address child marriage, and state, and district-level plans in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The partnership enables Young Lives to work with officials from across government, civil society and the research community.

Beyond NCPCR, there has been continued demand for Young Lives evidence on child marriage, early childbearing, and adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Case studies have been shared with the Government of India's Ministry of Women and Child Development, at their request. In an innovative development, Young Lives was invited to be part of a UNICEF Technical Advisory Group developing a multimedia initiative on gender empowerment for adolescents, in collaboration with BBC Media Action. Young Lives' case studies have been incorporated into the resulting TV series, 'AdhaFULL' ('half full'), a social thriller which launched in October 2016. The project aims to break the silence surrounding sensitive issues affecting young people, challenge traditions that perpetuate gender stereotypes, and boost the ability of teenagers to take action to improve their lives.

“Young Lives India is a fantastic longitudinal research programme which is providing real insights into the vectors of inter-generational poverty transfer. The first cohort of children Young Lives studied are now having their first babies – and the data Young Lives provide are giving us real insight into issues such as early marriage, nutritional status of children relative to their parents, learning journeys, and education to work transition. Young Lives has added value as with its four country focus it is able to offer a comparative perspective on common issues. The value of Young Lives' work will only grow as the cohorts grow older and research provides greater insight into intergenerational poverty.”

Colin Bangay, Senior Education Adviser, Development Partnership Hub, DFID India (from Annual Report 2015/16)

In Ethiopia, Young Lives has developed timely messages around the topic of child marriage, arguing that there should be a focus on preventing child marriage among younger adolescents, that for girls who marry in late adolescence it is more important to improve access to sexual and reproductive health, and that the priority focus should be on education, training, work and migration. These issues were raised in a [blog](#) for Thompson Reuters by Country Director Alula Pankhurst on International Day of the Girl Child, referencing a new Young Lives working paper to draw attention to the complexity of factors influencing early marriage and warning that enforcement of the ban on child marriage (rather than using persuasion) risked forcing the practice underground. Young Lives blogs and news stories in *New Internationalist* and on the University of Oxford website have also been able to address the way boys are neglected in the gender and empowerment discourse, and to argue for a stronger relational gender approach.

Research findings have been shared through relationships with a range of stakeholders in Ethiopia, including UNICEF and the Population Council. In August 2016 Young Lives delivered training to the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs staff, and in November 2016 Young Lives moderated a Population Council dissemination workshop on the experience of Ethiopian adolescents and youth. Uptake of research findings has been effected especially through Young Lives presentations to the Child Research and Practice

Forum (CRPF). This year the CRPF promoted a series of presentations by non-Young Lives researchers showcasing research on gender in adolescence, including on child marriage.

Throughout the year Young Lives has maintained country-based advisory groups on child marriage and adolescent parenthood in India and Ethiopia, and intends to continue to use these groups for expert advice and as a means to further amplify Young Lives findings over the coming year.

“ The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation supports Young Lives in India and Ethiopia to use its research insights to influence policy. In India, Young Lives’ longitudinal research in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana documented the causal link between girl’s education and increased age of marriage. Now, the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has called upon Young Lives to help it strengthen state-level efforts to prevent child marriage by bringing its research to the attention of policymakers. Young Lives has enabled the Commission to be evidence-based in its work. ”

Steven Chapman, Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)