



Young Lives Two Decades of Findings and Future Research Opportunities: Family Lives

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Overview

Understanding how both young women and girls, and young men and boys, experience and respond to different aspects of their family lives is crucial to achieving many of the gender equality targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5: Gender Equality). This includes issues relating to unpaid care and domestic work, early marriage and parenthood, and domestic violence, as well as sexual and reproductive health, which also aligns with targets under SDG3 (Good Health and Well-being). Gender inequality and its intersection with other inequalities – including in relation to wealth, location and marginalised groups – is a cross-cutting issue that affects education, health, employment and broader life outcomes, influencing young people's ability to reach their full potential.

Young Lives' unique mixed-methods longitudinal research provides a holistic, life-course perspective to understanding experiences of family lives in low- and middle-income countries – from infancy to adulthood – including the compounding impacts of shocks and crises, such as climate change, conflict and COVID-19. With its data now spanning more than two decades, Young Lives has collected the life histories of study participants who are now in their

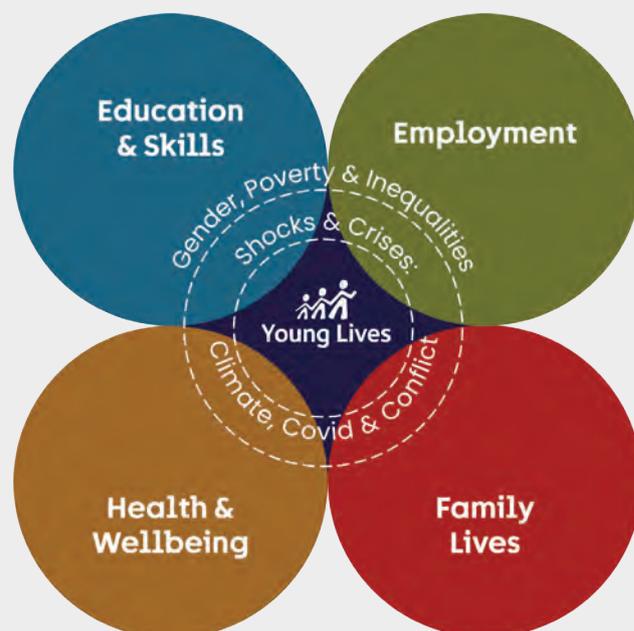
third decade of life, many of whom have formed formal or informal marriages and cohabitations, established households, and become parents themselves. [This data](#) is collected through individual and household survey questionnaires and in-depth qualitative interviews, exploring how people's backgrounds and earlier life circumstances relate to and influence their later relationships, living arrangements, well-being and family outcomes. [Young Lives' mixed-methods intergenerational research](#) shows that gender differences become significantly more marked in adolescence, affecting outcomes in education, early marriage and employment, and the transition to adulthood.

This report presents key findings from over 20 years of Young Lives' quantitative and qualitative data and research on experiences of family lives, and how gender inequalities have an impact on life outcomes for young people and their families. It also highlights the study's significant contribution to related policy debates, showcases impact case studies, presents the latest trends based on preliminary analysis of Round 7 data and sets out unique opportunities for future research.

The Young Lives study

Young Lives has been following the lives of 12,000 young people in Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam, from infancy into early adulthood, since 2002. In each country, the study is divided into two age groups: 2,000 young people born in 2001 (the Younger Cohort) and 1,000 born in 1994 (the Older Cohort).

This report is one of a series of four legacy reports – [Education and Skills](#), [Health and Well-being](#), [Employment](#), and [Family Lives](#) – which together provide a comprehensive overview of Young Lives' holistic research and policy findings from the last two decades.



[†]This report is dedicated to the memory of Gina Crivello, our friend, co-author and former Young Lives lead qualitative researcher, who passed away in 2022.



1. What we know: evidence from the Young Lives study

Gender gaps widen during adolescence and into early adulthood. Young Lives' findings show that gender differences increase significantly during adolescence as young people's gender identities become more established. This is reflected in divergent time use and increasing gender differences in educational and labour market outcomes, as well as in socio-emotional competencies (Singh and Krutikova, 2017; Rossiter *et al.*, 2018; Espinoza-Revollo and Portela, 2019; Perez-Alvarez and Favara, 2023; Vikram, Ganguly and Goli, 2023; Hossain and Jukes, 2025). Gender affects boys and girls in different ways and at different ages, shaped by household dynamics, socio-cultural norms, institutional structures and economic pressures (Feeny and Crivello, 2015; Hossain and Jukes, 2025). Gender impacts on life outcomes are complex, with girls and young women not always disadvantaged. Notably, it is the way in which gender combines with other intersecting disadvantages, including poverty, rural location and minority language or ethnic status, that often matters most (Ford *et al.*, 2018; Espinoza-Revollo and Portela, 2019).

Children's household roles and responsibilities become increasingly gender-differentiated during adolescence but vary depending on location and economic circumstances. Young Lives' data shows that while overall levels of work (both paid and unpaid) among adolescent girls and boys are broadly similar across all four study countries, the nature of their work and caregiving roles becomes increasingly gender-specific, and typically reflects socio-economic circumstances, such as household wealth and location (Espinoza-Revollo and Porter, 2018).

Adolescent girls spend more time on unpaid domestic and care work (Vikram, Ganguly and Goli, 2023), **while adolescent boys typically undertake more paid work** (Singh and Mukherjee, 2017; Winter, 2018). In Ethiopia,

household shocks such as illness among family members had a greater effect on increasing the amount of unpaid care work (including household duties and caregiving) for adolescent girls than they did for adolescent boys (Portela and Pells, 2014). In India, similar household shocks increased time spent on unpaid care work for both boys and girls; however, for girls – unlike boys – this often came at the expense of their leisure time.

Girls spend less time on leisure activities than boys, including within the same household (Khanna and Thomas, 2023; Vikram, Ganguly and Goli, 2023). Although this gap is relatively small in all four countries, it emerges early in children's lives and persists throughout childhood. For girls in India, less leisure time is directly related to greater domestic responsibilities (Ford *et al.*, 2025). In Ethiopia and Peru, gender differences in leisure time persist into adulthood: by age 29, men in Ethiopia spend 1.3 more hours per day on leisure activities than women, and men in Peru spend 0.4 more hours. In contrast, in India, men and women spend roughly the same amount of time on leisure activities after the age of 15.

There are striking differences in time use between urban and rural locations, as well as between the poorest and least-poor households. Rural children of all ages tend to work longer hours and spend less time on schooling and studying than urban children (Rojas and Cussianovich, 2013; Espinoza-Revollo and Porter, 2018). Similarly, across all four study countries, children from the poorest households spend more time working and less time studying than those from the least-poor households (Winter, 2018).

Gender disparities in education and learning also emerge during adolescence, though patterns vary by country. While gender gaps in learning outcomes and socio-emotional skills are almost non-existent in early childhood, they widen

significantly during adolescence (Singh and Krutikova, 2017; Rossiter *et al.*, 2018; Espinoza-Revollo and Portela, 2019; Hossain and Jukes, 2025). Girls in India typically attend less-effective schools than boys, whereas the opposite is true in Vietnam (Marshall and Moore, 2022). In Peru, higher education enrolment rates show no gender gap, but young women are underrepresented in STEM-related subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) (Sánchez, Favara and Porter, 2021). In India, young women are 1.4 times more likely than young men to drop out before completing higher education (Singh, Mukherjee and Kumar, 2023).

Gender inequalities in unpaid care work that emerge in adolescence tend to widen in early adulthood and limit women's labour market opportunities. By age 22, significantly more young women than men across all four countries were 'neither working nor studying', principally due to unpaid caregiving roles, including motherhood (Favara, Chang and Sánchez, 2018). The longer hours girls spend on unpaid care work also predicts the gender pay gap evident by age 22 (Carmichael *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, by age 29, women undertake more work overall – combining both paid and unpaid care work – than men, working 1.2 hours more per day in Ethiopia, 0.5 hours more in India, and 0.7 hours more in Peru (Ford *et al.*, 2025).

Significant gender gaps in both employment and pay have become evident across all four study countries as participants transition to adulthood, even after accounting for differences in skills. By age 26, the gender pay gap was 70% in India, 40% in Ethiopia and approximately 30% in Peru and Vietnam (Perez-Alvarez, Porter and Ramachandran, 2023). Strong cognitive skills at age 19 improved women's chances of securing paid employment in early adulthood, reducing the gender pay gap in Peru and Ethiopia, though this link was less evident in Vietnam and India. Socio-economic constraints and discriminatory gender norms that confine women to caregiving roles continue to limit access to decent work, while early marriage and family formation further constrain women's employment and education opportunities and outcomes (Favara, Lavado and Sánchez, 2020).

Experiences of marriage and childbearing during adolescence are complex and diverse, with several of the gender gaps previously described linked to early marriage. While most adolescents in the study said they wanted to delay marriage and starting a family until their twenties, their actual experiences were often very different (Feeny and Crivello, 2015). Among adolescent boys, the ideal age for marriage ranged between 25 years in India and 27 years in Peru, while for adolescent girls this ranged between 21 years in India and 26 years in Peru.

By age 19, a substantial proportion of adolescent girls were already married or cohabiting and/or had given birth to their first child (Briones and Porter, 2019; Rojas and Bravo, 2020), **though patterns varied between countries.** In India, 44% of girls were married by age 19, compared to 24% in Vietnam, 19% in Ethiopia and only 3% in Peru. While formal marriage rates were low in Peru, 29% of 19-year-old girls were cohabiting and 31% were already

mothers (Briones and Porter, 2019). Girls who marry early (up to age 19) have significantly worse outcomes across a range of indicators, including lower subjective well-being, self-efficacy and agency (Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016). In India, marital status is the strongest predictor of salaried employment for young women (Singh and Mukherjee, 2022). **In contrast, only a very small proportion of adolescent boys were married or had become fathers by age 19;** lower educational attainment, maternal or paternal absence, larger household size and poverty increased the likelihood of becoming a father by age 22 (Jeong, 2021).

In contexts where fertility is strongly associated with marriage, first pregnancies and childbirth often occur shortly after marriage (Roest, 2016; Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016; Chuta, Birhanu and Vinci, 2020; Crivello and Mann, 2020). In India, over half of girls married by age 19 had already had one or more children (Singh and Vennam, 2016). Many young couples experienced familial and societal pressures to conceive soon after marriage. These are intensified in contexts where social norms put pressure on girls to give birth early, and where access to sexual and reproductive health services is limited and inequitable (Roest, 2016; Singh and Vennam, 2016; Crivello and Mann, 2020).

Adolescent marriage and childbirth were disproportionately prevalent among disadvantaged groups, particularly girls from poorer households and rural areas, with notable regional and local variations across all four study countries (Pankhurst, Tiemelissan and Chuta, 2016; Roest, 2016; Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016; Singh and Vennam, 2016; Briones and Porter, 2019; Pesando and Abufhele, 2019; Favara, Lavado and Sánchez, 2020). In Peru and Ethiopia, cohabitation was more common in urban areas, and often occurred in response to an unintended pregnancy or to bypass the costs of formal marriage (Briones and Porter, 2019; Rojas and Bravo, 2020; Tafere *et al.*, 2020). Many reasons for adolescent marriage and childbirth were rooted in a combination of community, household and individual-level factors (Pankhurst, Tiemelissan and Chuta, 2016; Roest, 2016, p. 201; Singh and Vennam, 2016).

Dropping out of school by age 15 is one of the strongest predictors of adolescent marriage and childbirth (Roest, 2016; Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016; Singh and Vennam, 2016; Pesando and Abufhele, 2019; Favara, Lavado and Sánchez, 2020). Aspirations also appear to play a role: girls whose parents had the lowest educational aspirations for them were more likely to be married by age 18, while 12-year-old girls who aspired to pursue higher education were more likely to remain unmarried at age 19 (Roest, 2016; Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016; Singh and Vennam, 2016).

Household composition is also a determining factor of early marriage, with the presence of older sisters strongly associated with lower rates of adolescent marriage for younger sisters (Pesando and Abufhele, 2019). In India, having older brothers increases the likelihood of girls being married by age 19 (Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016). In Ethiopia, the death or absence of a parent increases the likelihood of adolescent marriage (Pankhurst, Tiemelissan and Chuta, 2016).

Individual factors, such as early menarche, significantly increase the likelihood of early marriage (Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016; Bhan *et al.*, 2019). Comparing girls who were married, cohabited or had given birth by age 19 with those who had not reveals few early-life differences at ages 8 and 12 (Briones and Porter, 2019). However, by ages 19 and 22, significant differences emerge: in addition to early menarche, girls in the first group are less likely to have completed secondary school and, in Ethiopia, India and Peru, are also less likely to be working or studying at age 22.

Young people's sexual and reproductive health needs, including access to contraception, are frequently not being met. While contraceptive options are available across all four countries, they often fail to reach young married couples who need or want them. Qualitative research by Young Lives shows that most married girls lack awareness about contraceptives and related sexual and reproductive health services available to them prior to their first pregnancy, and many felt too embarrassed to seek information for fear of being judged (Roest, 2016; Singh and Vennam, 2016; Crivello *et al.*, 2018; Chuta, Birhanu and Vinci, 2020; Crivello and Mann, 2020). In India and Ethiopia, husbands are often the dominant decision makers on fertility issues, with in-laws often exerting significant influence. In Ethiopia, the community Health Extension Programme (HEP) has led to significant improvements in young women's sexual and reproductive health (Rudgard *et al.*, 2022).

Young women in both formal and informal unions often have fewer resources and less power and influence over decision making compared to men. Domestic relationships are heavily influenced by prevailing gender and age norms (Chuta, 2017; Rojas and Bravo, 2020). Across all four study countries, unpaid care work – including household duties, childcare and other caregiving roles – largely remain women's responsibilities, whereas men are typically expected to take on paid work in the role of household providers (Rojas and Bravo, 2020; Tiemelissan *et al.*, 2020). Marriage and childbirth intensify women's economic dependence on their male partners (Crivello, Boyden and Pankhurst, 2019), and marriage is associated with lower economic participation among women (Singh and Mukherjee, 2022).

Teenage pregnancy and early marriage have adverse effects on both mothers and their children. Women who experience teenage marriage, cohabitation or motherhood are less likely to be enrolled in education and more likely to be overweight compared to their peers at age 19 (Briones and Porter, 2019; Sánchez, 2019; Favara, Lavado and Sánchez, 2020). They also tend to have significantly lower agency, self-esteem and life satisfaction, and are more likely to be not in education, employment or training (Briones and Porter, 2019). Children born to mothers under 18 have lower birthweights and shorter height-for-age, effects that persist into adolescence. The effects are most pronounced among girls born to very young mothers (under 16) (Perez-Alvarez and Favara, 2023).

Over the past decade, teenage childbearing has decreased substantially across all four study countries, when comparing fertility rates at ages 19 and 20 between the Older Cohort (2013) and the Younger Cohort (2020–21): from

6% to 2% in Ethiopia, 14% to 8% in India, 19% to 12% in Peru and 12% to 8% in Vietnam. Public policies have likely played a key role in this progress. For example, in Ethiopia, girls who received health education and support through the HEP were less likely to be married or to have had a child by age 19 (Rudgard *et al.*, 2022).

Although Young Lives data shows an overall decline in adolescent marriage, informal unions and cohabitation are becoming more common. When these informal relationships do not transition into formal marriages, they can put young women at greater risk of being abandoned by partners following pregnancy and childbirth. However, in Peru, some young women prefer informality because it provides a potential escape route if the relationship breaks down (Crivello and Mann, 2020; Rojas and Bravo, 2020; Tafere *et al.*, 2020). Separation and divorce also appear relatively common among young couples in all study countries except India, though patterns vary depending on context (Thuc Duc and Thang, 2014; Crivello *et al.*, 2018; Pankhurst and Crivello, 2020; Rojas and Bravo, 2020).

Social norms influence gendered patterns of exposure to violence. Within the context of early marriage and cohabitation, a significant proportion of young women reported having experienced violence at some time. Violence against girls and women perpetrated by partners is widespread, yet access to formal services – such as counselling, crisis intervention and justice – remains limited (Crivello and Mann, 2020; Pankhurst and Crivello, 2020). Marrying at an early age increases girls' vulnerability to intimate partner violence, especially when significant age gaps reinforce the authority of husbands or senior in-laws. Adolescent girls often hold the lowest position of power within their households, reflecting how age and gender intersect to heighten vulnerability both before and after marriage. Support from family and friends can play a vital role in safeguarding young women's well-being.

The perceived failure of girls and young women to carry out household work or cooking to the satisfaction of husbands, partners or in-laws is a common source of marital conflict, sometimes leading to violence. In India, patriarchal norms often legitimise violence against girls and women as an acceptable response to such perceived 'transgressions'. Likewise, in Vietnam, prevailing gender norms often entitle men to discipline household members, increasing girls' and young women's risk of domestic violence (Morrow and Singh, 2016; Vu, 2016; Pells *et al.*, 2018).

Experiences of violence are often transmitted across generations (Guerrero and Rojas, 2016; Morrow and Singh, 2016). Parents who were subjected to violence in their own childhoods are more likely to believe that violence is an appropriate way of disciplining or teaching children, and are more likely to use it with their own children.

Patriarchal norms underpin gender differences and inequalities. They drive practices such as female genital mutilation and cutting in Ethiopia, despite common knowledge about the government ban and rationale for stopping (Pankhurst and Espinoza-Revollo, 2022), and they shape the unequal distribution of unpaid care work within

households (Favara *et al.*, 2022). Perceived gender roles are linked to gender differences in socio-emotional skills – such as self-efficacy and agency – among adolescents aged 12 to 22 (Hossain and Jukes, 2025). Social norms also drive early marriage and childbearing; for example, almost half (43%) of young women in India who married by the age of 19 had no say in choosing their spouse, and all married older men (Singh and Espinoza-Revollo, 2016). Women who experience teenage marriage, cohabitation or motherhood also report less gender-egalitarian views on women's roles and behaviours than women who do not experience teenage marriage, cohabitation or motherhood (Briones and Porter, 2019).

Poverty reduction strategies and social protection programmes can have different impacts on women and men – and vulnerable groups – often through diverse mechanisms. In Peru, the JUNTOS conditional cash transfer programme is linked to higher educational attainment for young men but not for young women aged 21–22; young men benefited more than young women whether or not they lived with parents, and particularly those with siblings or those from the poorest households (Patel-Campillo and García, 2022). Similarly, the reform to extend public secondary school days in Peru (*Jornada Escolar Completa*, JEC) is linked to reduced teenage pregnancy among the Younger Cohort by improving psychosocial competencies and increasing educational aspirations. Increases in young women's sense of pride and agency, alongside improved sexual and reproductive health knowledge among young men, may have promoted safer sexual practices and fewer teenage pregnancies (Sánchez and Favara, 2019). In Ethiopia, receiving support from the HEP is positively associated with reduced child marriage and adolescent pregnancy (Rudgard *et al.*, 2022).

The impact of shocks and crises (climate, conflict and COVID-19) on family lives

The young people in the Young Lives study are beginning their adult lives having to navigate the profound economic and social impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the increasingly urgent and growing impacts of climate change due to the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events that typically affect poor countries considerably more than high-income countries. Many Young Lives families in Ethiopia have also been severely affected by the ongoing armed conflict (Endale *et al.* 2025). These crises pose a real risk of exacerbating inequalities within intimate relationships and family dynamics, while also widening social and economic disparities among this generation of young people (Crivello, 2020).

Young Lives' research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted how young people spent their time and contributed to their families, leading to more time spent on childcare and unpaid domestic work across all four study countries. The increase in unpaid care work disproportionately fell on young women, while young men devoted more time to family businesses (Favara *et al.*, 2022; Ford and Freund, 2022b). In Peru, young women were less likely than young men to return to paid work after lockdown measures ended, raising concerns about the longer-term

impacts of widening gender employment gaps during this critical period of life transition (Scott *et al.*, 2025).

The health, economic and social stresses associated with the pandemic posed significant risks to young people's mental health and well-being, with gender differences exacerbating these challenges. Even after controlling for various factors, young women were more vulnerable to anxiety in India, Peru and Vietnam, and to depression in Peru and Vietnam (Porter, Favara, Hittmeyer, *et al.*, 2021).

In Ethiopia, the pandemic negatively affected young people's access to sexual health and reproductive services. Lockdowns – particularly in urban areas – reduced the availability of face-to-face services and made young people more reluctant to attend clinics, particularly disadvantaging young people living with HIV and those engaged in sex work (Jones *et al.*, 2022).

Pandemic lockdowns were also linked to a reported increase in physical domestic violence, including both family and intimate partner violence, during 2020. In Peru, over 8% of young people in the study reported increased physical violence in their households during the lockdown. Those who had previously experienced domestic violence (as reported in 2016) were significantly more likely to report physical violence in 2020, with nearly 24% reporting an increase during this period (Porter, Favara, Sánchez, *et al.*, 2021).

The armed conflict in Ethiopia, which began in late 2020 shortly after the pandemic, significantly increased the unpaid care responsibilities of women and girls, limiting their access to education and employment. Almost one-third of women reported that, without the pandemic and the conflict, they would have been able to continue their education, as they would have had fewer household responsibilities. During the conflict, tasks such as fetching water fell entirely to women and girls, while men and boys were involved in the fighting (Ford *et al.*, 2025).

Armed conflicts can have profound intergenerational consequences. In Peru, the children of mothers who were exposed to the 1980–2000 civil conflict were more likely to experience teenage pregnancy, have a lower age at first birth, and have more children overall (Hidalgo-Arístegui *et al.* 2025). Their mothers were also less likely to be the primary decision maker within their households. These findings underscore how the effects of conflict can be transmitted across generations.

Climate crises push children from play to work. In Vietnam, rainfall shocks are associated with children entering agricultural work as well as being pulled into – and spending more time doing – household work (Trinh, Posso and Feeny, 2020). Food shortages and limited access to clean water during droughts and floods also disrupt young people's daily activities. Girls and young women are particularly affected, often taking on extra household tasks – such as walking longer distances to fetch water or firewood, and caring for siblings when schools close – which reduces their study time and increases their risk of dropping out of school (Ford and Freund, 2022a).



2. Policy implications and how Young Lives has made an impact

Young Lives' longitudinal research provides a holistic, life-course perspective to understanding family lives in low- and middle-income countries, highlighting the compounding impacts of inequality, gender, shocks and crises – such as climate change, conflict and COVID-19. The evidence generated over the past two decades is crucial for shaping policies aimed at achieving many of the targets in SDG5, to 'achieve gender equality and empower all girls and women'.

Young Lives' findings highlight the importance of understanding how young women and girls, as well as young men and boys, experience and navigate different aspects of their family lives. These insights are crucial for addressing the social norms and discriminatory gender roles that drive persistent gender inequalities and shape young people's long-term outcomes in education, health and well-being, employment and broader family life.

While policies to address these challenges must be tailored to specific countries and regional contexts, the following recommendations outline broad strategies, with a strong focus on supporting the most vulnerable groups, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are disproportionately affected by intersecting inequalities and compounding crises.

1. Initiatives to promote gender equality are more likely to succeed if they are rooted in the local context and engage whole communities. This includes engaging with boys and men to challenge patriarchal norms, and working collaboratively with community leaders, civil society and local media. Schools, youth clubs and religious leaders can also be

influential in advocating for change. Early adolescence is a unique window of opportunity for shifting harmful social norms and behaviours that discriminate against girls and women, as this is the critical period when gender inequalities emerge.

- 2. Programmes and campaigns promoting a fairer division of unpaid care work need to challenge discriminatory gender roles to help transform unequal power relations.** Investment in public services and infrastructure is also essential to help young women and men balance unpaid care work with paid employment. This includes measures to support mothers returning to paid work through access to quality, affordable childcare and creches, as well as elder care and support for people with disabilities. Providing affordable and accessible time-saving technologies and infrastructure, such as access to clean water, efficient cooking stoves and rural electrification, can reduce the overall burden of domestic work and help enhance women and girls' well-being and available leisure time. Particular attention needs to be paid to young mothers, who often have very little control over their domestic arrangements.
- 3. Approaches to reducing early marriage and teenage pregnancy should include tackling underlying drivers related to poverty and intersecting inequalities, discriminatory gender social norms, and supporting adolescent girls to stay in school,** particularly in rural areas where they are more at risk of dropping out. This may include investing in quality education for girls (including secondary and higher education) that is safe and accessible, and opening

up access to decent jobs for young women; ensuring that vulnerable girls and young women are protected by effective safety nets and empowered to participate in marital and fertility decision making; and involving whole communities in initiatives to address early marriage, including targeted engagement with men and boys. Preventing early marriage and teenage pregnancy is vital as these disadvantage girls and young women in education, training and employment. Priority should be given to measures that support girls' attendance in school and protect their time for studying, as well as the promotion of vocational training and employment.

Young Lives' impact: informing legislative change on early marriage in India and prohibiting child marriage in Peru

Young Lives' mixed-methods longitudinal research is driving legislative change to eliminate early marriage in India, while in Peru its evidence was directly cited in new legislation to prohibit child marriage, protecting the next generation of girls from this harmful practice and its life-altering consequences.

In Peru, evidence from Young Lives was cited in a Congressional Bill enacted on 25 November 2023, following extensive policy engagement, targeting key government ministries, and wider public engagement. This law will protect thousands of vulnerable girls, particularly from poor and Indigenous communities, who are most at risk. Congresswoman Flor Pablo highlighted that 'Young Lives' longitudinal evidence ... has been pivotal for driving this important legislative change ... by giving voice to the lived experiences of girls and young women.'

Young Lives was selected as a winner of the [University of Oxford Social Sciences Impact Awards 2025](#) for this notable achievement.

4. **Improving the sexual and reproductive health of young people, particularly adolescent girls and young women, requires coordinated approaches to address persistent inequalities and entrenched patriarchal norms.** This includes increasing sexual and reproductive health knowledge through age-appropriate information in school curriculums, girls' clubs and community health extension workers, and reaching adolescent girls who have dropped out of school; and increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services, which may have been disrupted in times of crises, including better access to contraception, particularly for adolescent girls and young women, regardless of marital status. It also includes a renewed focus on eliminating female genital mutilation/cutting, especially where prevalence remains high, by shifting cultural beliefs, preventing medicalisation of the practice, and targeting approaches in response to different regional practices.

5. **Preventing violence against children, girls and women also requires transforming harmful gender and social norms.** This typically involves community-led efforts that advance gender equality, confront discriminatory practices and actively involve men and boys, as well as integrating education on positive relationships, conflict resolution, and non-violent discipline into school and community programmes. These efforts can be reinforced by expanded social protection and economic support to reduce vulnerabilities, alongside strengthened legal and policy frameworks that ensure comprehensive protection and accountability.

Young Lives' impact: protecting children from violence in Peru

Young Lives provides one of the few sources of longitudinal data on violence affecting children and generates high-quality research examining the causes and consequences of such violence. Its research demonstrating both the extent of violence against children and the negative impact on their learning and education outcomes in Peru and Vietnam was key evidence in UNICEF's Multi Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children (UNICEF, 2016). This study directly informed a change in the law in Peru to ban all forms of corporal punishment, working in collaboration with government departments of health, education and social services to successfully lobby for legislative change.

Since the law was passed in 2015, there has been a significant reduction in violence experienced by children at school in Peru. In the four years before the COVID-19 pandemic (2015–19), such violence fell by one-fifth, with an estimated 700,000 schoolchildren benefiting from reduced physical and psychological violence in the classroom, though levels of violence remain very high. While the legal change in Peru has been pivotal, it is not sufficient to protect all children from violence. Young Lives' evidence suggests that a systematic and multi-sectoral approach is required to protect and support children at risk of violence, including better addressing the underlying drivers of violence, including social and cultural norms intersecting with factors related to poverty, gender and intersecting inequalities.

6. **Targeting support to improve adolescent girls' and young women's socio-emotional skills – such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and agency – is critical to address gender inequality and to make a real difference for well-being and later life outcomes, particularly for girls from poor households and in rural areas.** Successful initiatives to improve women and girls' empowerment often combine education, life skills training and mentorship, in schools and other community settings. Supporting adolescent

girls in managing everyday situations confidently and navigating their transition towards adulthood, including how to negotiate relationships with partners, family and friends, as well as accessing higher education and decent jobs, is also crucial, particularly in uncertain and changing times.

7. **Reducing the gender employment gap requires addressing the socio-economic constraints and gender norms that keep young women out of the workforce, alongside initiatives to increase adolescent girls' skills and improve young women's access to high-paid and high-status jobs.** Supporting women's participation in paid employment includes challenging social norms that discriminate against girls and women, lightening the load of unpaid care work, increasing access to affordable childcare and reducing early marriage. Targeted investment in promoting adolescent girls' skills and supporting them to stay in education, including in higher education and vocational training, remain key goals. However, improving skills and educational outcomes may not translate into increased women's participation in decent paid work without addressing country-specific barriers to gender equality. Employers should also be encouraged to adopt care-friendly employment policies where possible, including flexible working arrangements, maternity and parental leave and anti-discriminatory practices.
8. **Investing in inclusive, gender-responsive social protection – such as cash transfer programmes – is essential for reducing poverty, advancing gender equality and improving family lives.** In addition to easing financial pressures and food insecurity, well-targeted social protection measures help keep girls in school, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, lower rates of early marriage and intimate partner violence, and increase women's access to decent jobs. It is increasingly critical to expand gender-responsive social protection to address the climate-related vulnerabilities faced by women and girls, particularly in disaster-prone regions, and to ensure sustained support for acute nutritional deficits. Prioritising safety nets for adolescent girls and young women, especially pregnant teenagers and young mothers, not only safeguards their own health and well-being but also supports their children's long-term development, helping to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and inequality.
9. **Climate finance should be gender responsive.** As climate finance is scaled up to meet the New Collective Quantified Goal, it is vital that the Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility and individual countries' climate finance mechanisms prioritise gender equality and ensure that women who are affected by climate change particularly those from the most vulnerable communities, such as rural, Indigenous and migrant women, can access funding. It is also important to improve women's employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the green industries expected to grow during the just transition, including by reducing the gender gap in STEM subjects, eliminating gender discrimination in the labour market and workforce, and challenging gender stereotypes about what constitutes 'appropriate' work for women.
10. **There is a need to develop and implement climate adaptation policies and strategies that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and children.** This includes measures to make schools more resilient to climate change and environmental shocks, to reduce prolonged closures that heighten the risk of dropping out of school, which reduces education and employment opportunities and can increase the risk of early marriage for young women and girls. Systematically integrating child protection and gender-specific needs, such as access to sexual and reproductive health services, into adaptation and responsiveness planning for climate-related hazards will also reduce the disproportionate impacts of climate shocks on women and girls.



3. Latest findings from Young Lives' Round 7 survey

In 2023–24, Young Lives completed its seventh round of data collection in India, Ethiopia and Peru, surveying the Younger Cohort at age 22 and the Older Cohort at age 29.¹ A series of factsheets provides a preliminary overview of Round 7 data on education and learning, health, nutrition and well-being, as well as work and family lives. The country-specific family lives factsheets and preliminary findings from Round 7 (Campos and Lopez, 2025; Ford *et al.*, 2025; Tanima, 2025a, 2025b) present recent trends and changes in time use and family formation as participants transition into adulthood.

Preliminary findings show that **the gender gap in unpaid care work has narrowed slightly, but women continue to bear the greater burden.** Comparing young people at the same age (22 years), Younger Cohort participants in 2023 are spending more time on unpaid care work – including domestic work and caregiving for children, people with health conditions, and elderly people – than Older Cohort participants did in 2016. Women continue to undertake the majority of this work, despite a modest increase in men's contributions.

Younger Cohort women in Ethiopia and India now spend an average of 5.2 and 5.7 hours per day, respectively, on unpaid care work, compared to 4.9 and 5.6 hours among Older Cohort women at the same age. Younger Cohort men in both countries average 2 hours per day, up from 1.1 hours in Ethiopia and 1.4 hours in India for the Older Cohort. In Peru, the trend differs slightly: Younger Cohort women spend 4.4 hours per day on unpaid care work, a

decrease from 5.3 hours in the Older Cohort, while men's time has increased from 1.4 to 1.8 hours per day. This unequal distribution of unpaid care work is closely linked to women's lower participation in paid employment, a topic explored further in the Employment Legacy Report (add link).

Although rates of early marriage (before the legal age)² and early parenthood (before age 19) among women have decreased over time, these practices remain widespread, particularly in India and Peru. In Ethiopia, 4.6% of women in the Younger Cohort were married before the legal age, a decrease from 13.3% in the Older Cohort, while 7.3% had a child by age 19, compared to 17.8% in the Older Cohort. In India, early marriage among women fell from 24.9% in the Older Cohort to 12.5% in the Younger Cohort, while early parenthood declined from 27.2% to 17.9%. In Peru, 9.6% of Younger Cohort women were married or cohabiting before the legal age, down from 20.1% in the Older Cohort, and 23.4% had a child by age 19, compared to 32.2% in the Older Cohort.

A similar pattern is observed among men, though at substantially lower rates compared to women – ranging from 0.4% to 6.6% for early marriage and from 0.8% to 9.9% for early parenthood across countries and cohorts. Despite declining trends and legal prohibitions, early marriage and parenthood remain significant factors that continue to harm girls' education, underscoring the need for stronger action.

¹ Data was not collected in Vietnam in this survey round due to a change in government regulations regarding the international transfer of personal data.

² In the case of Peru, the figures for marriages include both formal marriages and cohabitating unions.

Current patterns of fertility and marital status among young people are closely related to early-life inequalities. Across the three study countries, women are significantly more likely than men to be married or have a child by age 22. Among the Younger Cohort in 2023, this included 22.4% of women in Ethiopia, 47% in India and 44.3% in Peru, compared with just 5.2%, 5.8% and 20.1% of men, respectively. A similar pattern is observed among the Older Cohort, both at age 22 and at age 29. In Ethiopia, being married and/or having a child by age 22 is more common among those born into the poorest households and in rural areas, for both the Younger and Older Cohorts

at the same age. Similarly, in India, early family formation is strongly associated with being born into the poorest households, living in rural areas, having a mother with low formal education, and belonging to a disadvantaged caste. In Peru, strong predictors of early family formation include lower maternal education, being born into a poorer household, and having an Indigenous maternal language.

Overall, these findings highlight the need for targeted policies that address the structural inequalities driving early marriage and parenthood, particularly those affecting young women.



4. Looking forward: harnessing the power of longitudinal research

Unique research opportunities in family lives: Young Lives' latest survey, combined with the extensive quantitative and qualitative data collected and research evidence generated over the past two decades, will enable a thorough investigation of different family dynamics and life-course trajectories spanning three decades of life and across varied country contexts in the Global South, in times of multiple and intersecting crises.

The third decade of life presents a number of key opportunities to build on the existing knowledge base on adolescent marriage, fertility and family dynamics, and to better understand how gender inequality is produced, reproduced or challenged within family contexts and between generations. Young Lives offers a unique opportunity to conduct policy-relevant research on the effects of early marriage and early parenthood on labour market outcomes, as well as the roles of climate change and armed conflict in the family dynamics, while examining the influence of poverty, gender, ethnicity, structural inequalities and early-life vulnerabilities as key factors behind the differences observed.

The future of Young Lives

Young Lives' vision to 2030 is an ambitious plan to extend its longitudinal research, creating a unique 'birth-to-thirty' evidence base to track the long-term, intergenerational impacts of global crises on young people's lives. The core goals of this vision include:

- expanding the recently launched Research Hub on Climate Change and Environmental Shocks to generate policy-relevant evidence on the long-term and intergenerational effects of extreme weather events across the life course and across three generations of children and young adults.
- pioneering new research to uncover the profound impact of crises (COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the recent armed conflict in Ethiopia) on mental health, alongside an innovative analysis of cortisol stress levels in hair samples – an approach never before undertaken in the Global South.
- launching a new nationally representative longitudinal cohort study in the Global South. Building on the existing Young Lives study, the SDG Generation study will collect new data on the children of Young Lives participants and their peers, including expanding into new countries where possible. This cohort study will generate groundbreaking evidence on the life trajectories of a new generation born into a time of unprecedented crises, enabling in-depth intergenerational analysis.

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[†]This report is dedicated to the memory of Gina Crivello, our friend, co-author and former Young Lives lead qualitative researcher, who passed away in 2022



Young Lives is a longitudinal study of poverty and inequality, following the lives of 12,000 young people – from infancy to adulthood – in four countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam).

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