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Project title: A Mixed Methods Approach to Understanding the Marriage Decisions of Syrian Refugee Adolescent Girls in Lebanon

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DISCLAIMER

The ideas presented in this report are based on the results of the research study and are not opinions. They do not represent the views of the Doha International Family Institute or the Qatar Foundation.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT

Background

Early marriage is a social practice that negatively impacts girls, their families, and society at large. Our current understandings of early marriage practices among forcibly displaced populations are constrained by the fact that the practice is often discussed in a vacuum, extracted from the life trajectories of adolescent girls and the dynamics that occur within refugee populations. In this mixed-methods study, we built on our ongoing research with Syrian refugee adolescent girls and their families in Lebanon to better understand the process through which early marriage takes place in displacement. We also evaluated a community-based intervention to mitigate the drivers of early marriage among a group of Syrian refugee adolescent girls who enrolled in the Amenah Early Marriage Study which was implemented in a town in Bekaa, Lebanon.

Methodology

Our mixed methods study utilized a combination of in-depth, qualitative life history interviews and quantitative follow-up data from the Amenah study. For the qualitative life-history component, we utilized a purposive sampling strategy to recruit 20 Syrian women in their early twenties (20-24 years old) who married below age 18. We also recruited mothers and older sisters of nine early married participants to participate in an in-depth interview. Qualitative data analysis was carried out in two steps: 1) writing a summary of the life and marriage trajectory of each participant and 2) open coding the transcript data and grouping the codes into more abstract themes and subthemes through thematic analysis. For the quantitative evaluation of the Amenah intervention, impact was assessed through a baseline survey, an endline survey, and a 6-month follow-up. Baseline and endline data collection were carried out in person and the 6-month follow-up was carried out over the phone, all by trained university students. The data were analyzed using STATA.

Results

The life history analysis revealed three trajectories or patterns through which marriage before age 18 took place among adolescent refugee girls: 1) poverty-driven marriages that took place either in Syria or Lebanon particularly among participants who had worked in agriculture; 2) insecurity-driven marriages that took place during war in Syria; and 3) kinship marriages that were arranged through extended family networks. The three general marriage trajectories are not mutually exclusive and intersect in myriad ways. For example, kinship networks played a role in many marriages driven by insecurity and poverty. The life history interview method revealed that irrespective of the trajectory, school drop-out took place years before marriage arrangements began.

The results from the survey showed that, among the Amenah girl participants, attitudes towards education, marriage, and gender-role related outcomes showed a positive impact of the intervention. The mean ideal age at marriage for a girl, as stated by participants, declined slightly from 20.8 to 20.4 years of age ($p<0.05$) between baseline and endline. Girls were presented with a set of scenarios related to accepting or rejecting a marriage proposal. Between baseline and endline, the percentage of participants who never recommended accepting the proposal increased from 56.2% to 75.7% ($p<0.001$) and this increased further by the 6-month follow-up.

Discussion

Early marriage is oftentimes portrayed simplistically as forced marriage without considering the context and constraints in which it takes place or a girl's agency and choice. Acknowledging the dilemma of speaking about autonomy and choice in the context of early marriage, it is nonetheless important to examine the ways in which an adolescent girl participates in the decision-making process to accept or reject a marriage proposal. The qualitative life-history component of the study demonstrates myriad experiences in how marriage decisions and arrangements are made, with or without the participation of the adolescent girls, and the complex constellation of factros that give rise to it.

The impact evaluation findings of the Amenah intervention showed improvements in participants' knowledge and attitudes towards delaying marriage, which were sustained through 6 months after the intervention. This is an important finding as it indicates that girls retained intervention content even in a context where norms are permissive of early marriage. The use of marriage scenarios revealed that change in girls' attitudes around early marriage became less permissive, a very important finding considering the social acceptability of this practice.

STUDY OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE

Early marriage disproportionately impacts girls and women in poor settings and particularly those trapped in protracted displacement. It is important to advocate against the practice and advance viable policy solutions to mitigate its social determinants. However, our current understandings of early marriage among forcibly displaced populations are constrained by the fact that the practice is often discussed in a vacuum, extracted from the myriad other changes to family structure, the life trajectory of the adolescent, and dynamics that occur within refugee populations. This leads to representations of early marriage that are stigmatizing and inaccurate, reducing the efficacy of efforts to combat it. To avoid essentializing a social practice that negatively impacts the lives of millions of girls and women worldwide, it is critical to carry out empirical research to advance our understanding of the myriad ways in which early marriage decisions are made and explore how different types of early marriage (e.g., one that is forced versus one in which the adolescent girl participates in the decision after contemplating her limited opportunities in life) affect marital quality, cohesion in the extended family, and the future health, social, and economic wellbeing of the adolescent. In this study, we built on our community-based research with Syrian refugee adolescent girls and their families in Lebanon to better understand the context, process, and consequences of early marriage in displacement.

This study aimed to generate knowledge to achieve a deeper understanding and support better informed policy approaches to eliminate early marriage and its negative impact on disadvantaged adolescent girls. Our study objectives are to:

1. Examine how marriage arrangements among Syrian refugee adolescent girls commence in the context of displacement

2. Identify how personal and interpersonal factors intersect with contextual factors such as the displacement process, economic and legal vulnerability in the host country, school access, and family cohesion, to influence the decision-making of different actors in girls' marriage decisions

3. Assess the long-term impact of a community-engaged early marriage intervention (the Amenah study among Syrian refugee adolescent girls in the Bekaa region in Lebanon) at 6-month follow-up

4. Provide evidence to support the development of policies by refugee host states and international humanitarian organizations to protect against early marriage in refugee families

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through a mixed-methods approach utilizing qualitative data gathered through life history interviews and quantitative baseline and endline survey data gathered for the purpose of evaluating an early marriage intervention. The purpose of triangulating qualitative and quantitative data was to present a comprehensive analysis of the risks to early marriage before it takes place and its impact on young women's lives after it occurs. We utilized a combination of qualitative life history interviews and quantitative survey data from an ongoing early marriage intervention in Lebanon's Bekaa region. For the qualitative component of the study, we utilized the life history interview tool to understand the influence of events and decisions taken during different developmental junctures on the marriage decisions of Syrian refugee adolescent girls, considering the context of broad structural constraints. Following protocol approval by the American University of Beirut's Institutional Review Board, we recruited 20 adult participants who married before age 18 and 9 family members (mostly mothers and older sisters. In-depth interviews following the life history method were conducted to understand women's life trajectories and marriage decisions in their own perspectives. All interviews were held in the participants' homes which were either a tent in an informal settlement or an unfinished apartment. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Descriptive analysis consisted of two steps: 1) writing a summary of the life and marriage trajectory of each participant and 2) open coding the transcript data and generating themes from the codes.

The second component of the study was to conduct a 6-month follow up evaluation survey among Syrian refugee adolescent girls who participated in the Amenah intervention to mitigate the drivers of early marriage. For comprehensive information on the process of conducting the Amenah pilot study and its evaluation, review Sieverding and colleagues (2022). The Amenah impact evaluation was measured through a baseline and endline; the 6-month intervention was added to assess the long-term impact of the intervention. As with the baseline and first endline, the 6-month follow-up forms were programmed on Kobo Toolbox, which allowed the management of a large volume of data in one virtual space and monitoring the progress and quality of data collection in a timely manner. Data collection was carried out by trained university students over the phone inn January 2023. The data were imported into STATA for analysis.

STUDY FINDINGS

Qualitative Life History Interviews

The qualitative life history study sample of 20 participants is socioeconomically disadvantaged as most participants live in informal tented settlements and were subjectively evaluated by a member of the research team to live in low-income households. The participants are almost equally divided between those who married at a very young age (15 or younger) and those who married at age 16 or 17.

The life history analysis revealed three trajectories or patterns through which marriage before age 18 took place in the sample of women we interviewed for the study: 1) poverty-driven marriages that took place either in Syria or Lebanon particularly among participants who had worked in agriculture; 2) insecurity-driven marriages that took place during war in Syria; and 3) kinship marriages that were arranged through extended family networks. The three general marriage trajectories are not mutually exclusive and intersect in myriad ways. For example, kinship networks played a role in many marriages driven by insecurity and poverty. The life history interview method revealed that irrespective of the trajectory, school drop-out took place years before marriage arrangements began. We described in the full report each marriage trajectory through a walk-through the lives of anonymous participants. Although most early marriage stories present a negative experience in terms of how the marriage took place and its outcome, it is important to highlight that some early marriage experiences were relatively positive.

Furthermore, the analysis identified a long list of themes and subthemes around early childhood in Syria, schooling, family relations, and war and displacement. Other themes revolved around different aspects of early marriage such as the ways in which marriage decisions and arrangements are made in the context of displacement, and the role of the adolescent girl, her parents, and the extended family in this process. The table below delineates the themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis.

Emergent themes and subthemes deduced through life history interviews

Theme	Subthemes
Life in Syria before displacement	Family (natal family's composition, siblings, presence/absence of father; mother's education, work, and role in the family; financial standing and employment of father and mother; family relations
	School (when and why participant dropped out of school)
War and displacement experiences	Fear of war; fear of sexual harassment; displacement within Syria; journey from Syrian to Lebanon
Life in Lebanon	Living conditions in Lebanon (informal tented settlement); school; work (in agriculture)
Marriage	Marriage arrangements (traditional, romantic story); marriage to escape poverty or insecurity

	Marriage decision-making (choice versus forced)
Marital quality	Husband's characteristics (education and work); relationship with husband; relationship with in-laws; marital role; violence/abuse in marriage; divorce
Pregnancy and childbearing	First pregnancy/child; hopes for children
Health	Health problems in general; poor mental health related to early marriage

"Choice" and decision-making in early marriage arrangements

Early marriage is oftentimes portrayed simplistically as forced marriage without considering a girl's agency and choice. Acknowledging the dilemma of speaking about autonomy and choice in the context of early marriage, it is nonetheless important to examine the ways in which an adolescent girl participates in the decision-making process to accept or reject a marriage proposal. The analysis demonstrates myriad experiences in how marriage decisions and arrangements are made, with or without the participation of the adolescent girls. A main marriage trajectory is the one typically emphasized in academic and lay discourse on early marriage whereby marriage decisions are made on behalf of adolescent girls by their parents (typically but not always the father), older siblings, or other members of the extended family without consulting them. A participant who married at age 16 recounted how her marriage was arranged through traditional filial connections with little if any opportunity for her to participate in the decision. Whilst marriage arrangements that involve the paternal cousin are more prevalent and are difficult for girls (and their mothers) to refuse, in some cases, it is the participant's mother who proactively participates in making the marriage decision on behalf of her daughter:

I: Is your husband a relative?

P: He is my maternal cousin.

I: Did you want to marry him?

P: No, but my brother wanted to marry his sister and their family put a condition that there should be a swap [marrying her to their son in exchange for giving their daughter in marriage to her brother].

I: Who made the decision [for you to marry your cousin], your mother or father?

P: My mother.

The second type of early marriage arrangement, which is rarely if ever acknowledged in academic or lay discourses, is illustrated by the description provided by a participant who married at age 15 of how the events leading up to her marriage unfolded. She met a man at her aunt's house and started to spend long hours conversing with him first in her aunt's tent and later in a nearby park. A few months into the relationship and after she became certain of her feelings towards this man, she asked him to visit her parents to ask for her hand in marriage. He obliged but was met with rejection from her father:

P: When he visited us to ask for my hand in marriage, my father and mother objected. They told him that I am still young and they don't want me to leave them and go live in Bekaa. They started to scare me that Bekaa is too far. I told [my parents] that I want to marry him but my father still objected … Then my grandparents got involved [to convince the father] and they met with [the suitor] and his family and started to arrange for my katb al kitab.

Whilst the previous quote demonstrates agency by a 15-year-old adolescent girl, acknowledging that the notion of agency in this context is contentious, most early marriages described in the study data were neither expressions of autonomy and agency nor can they be described as forced. The quote below, excerpted from the life history interview of a participant who married at age 17 illustrates this point:

P: My parents told me that they will ask about the young man [suitor] to check if he is good but the decision is yours. My parents asked about him and got information about where he works, etc.

I: Was your mother with or against you marrying him?

P: She was with.

I: What about you, were you convinced?

P: Yes, I talked to him a few times and felt that he is a good person.

I: Did you want to get engaged and married?

P: I was not thinking about marriage then. I had many suitors before him but I didn't agree.

I: Why did you agree this time?

P: Because I felt comfortable with him.

Whilst this participant was not forced to marry against her will at age 17, the process through which she agreed to marrying a particular suitor does not demonstrate agency or planning on her part. Other adolescents described the process through which they got married in similar ways – the marriage was neither forced on them nor did they describe it as an outcome of an autonomous decision-making. In some cases, as the quote excerpted below illustrates, adolescents entered into marriage simply to remove themselves from the constraints of their natal families and introduce change to their static lives in displacement:

P: … Yes, I married because of all the pressures I experienced in [my natal] family. I was not allowed to go out of the house, so I thought about marrying, maybe my life would change [after I marry]. At that time, I was young, and really didn't know what marriage means.

Later during the interview, the same participant described what was illustrated in our findings as a typically "natural" manner through which adolescent marriages took place in this community residing in poverty and displacement:

P: That's it simply. Someone came and asked for my hand. I made the decision on my own. Since my life [in my natal family] is like this [meaning, her family restricted her movement and didn't allow her to go out or visit friends], I agreed to marrying just to see how my life would change.

Quantitative 6-Month Follow-Up

The retention rate for the survey was very good; of the 339 girls who completed the Amenah baseline survey in January-February 2022, 301 (89%) completed the 6-month follow-up. The results from the survey showed that, among the Amenah participants, 3.7% (12 girls) got engaged or married in the year between the baseline and the 6-month follow-up. Already at baseline, only two-thirds of participants were enrolled in school. By the 6-month follow-up, an additional 30 girls had dropped out of school, or 15% of those who were in school at baseline. In other words, 57% of participants were still in school at 6-month follow-up. The 6-month follow-up survey allowed us to assess the degree to which the outputs and intermediate-level impacts of Amenah, when realized, were sustained after the intervention ended. This is a key contribution to the literature on interventions to prevent early marriage, since most such interventions are evaluated shortly after they end. However, girls who participate in such interventions may not face decisions about marriage for several years. If attitudinal changes achieved during the intervention period are not sustained over time, the intervention may ultimately be less effective in achieving the ultimate desired outcome, older ages at marriage.

The table below shows the results of the Amenah intervention on girls' attitudes towards education, marriage, and gender-role related outcomes. We compare participants' responses at baseline, endline (July 2022, directly after the intervention was completed), and 6-month follow-up. The ideal pattern of responses would be to see an improvement in attitudes between baseline and endline, indicating a positive impact of the intervention, and then no change or further improvement between endline and 6-month follow-up, indicating that attitudes were sustained or even further improved over time. Because girls' responses to standard questions about the value of education showed strong response bias (e.g. the vast majority of girls said that the ideal level of education for a girl is university), the research team developed a set of scenarios in which an adolescent Syrian refugee girl and her family are presented with a marriage proposal. The girl's education status and relationship to the potential groom varied across scenarios and in each scenario the participant was asked whether the proposal should be accepted. Between baseline and endline, the percentage of participants who never recommended accepting the proposal increased from 56.2% to 75.7% (p<0.001) and this increased further by the 6-month follow-up.

Impacts of Amenah on early marriage, education, and gender-role related attitudes

	Baseline	Endline 1	Sig[1]	6-month follow-up	Sig[2]
Early marriage scenarios (%)			***		**
Never accepted proposal	56.2	75.7		78.0	
Accepted proposal in at least in one case	43.4	24.3		22.0	
Mean ideal age at marriage (sd)	20.8 (3.0)	20.4 (3.0)	*	21.0 (2.6)	**
Mean expected age at marriage (sd) (age 13+ at baseline only)	20.2 (2.7)	20.2 (2.7)		20.5 (2.5)	
Mean mother-daughter puberty communication score (sd)	3.4 (1.9)	3.2 (2.2)		2.7 (2.2)	**
Mean mother-daughter social communication score (sd)	2.1 (1.6)	1.9 (1.7)		1.8 (1.8)	
Mean gender role attitudes score (sd)	0.45 (1.6)	0.22 (1.7)		--	

[1] Significance test for difference between baseline and endline

[2] Significance test for difference between endline and 6-month follow-up

* p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

The mean ideal age at marriage for a girl, as stated by participants, declined slightly from 20.8 to 20.4 years of age (p<0.05) between baseline and endline before increasing to 21.0 (p<0.01) at 6-month follow-up. There was no significant change in girls' assessments of their own expected age at marriage. It is of note that both the mean ideal and expected age at marriage were above 18 and considerably above what participants viewed to be the normative age of marriage in their community, which was between age 15 and 16 across all three survey waves.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The use of the life history method for the qualitative component guided a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how events and decisions taken during a woman's life are related to broad social structural constraints and a context of social and political change. Study participants were active agents throughout the interview process and guided the interview in that they focused on life events that they deemed important. This helped us move the discourse about early marriage away from stigmatizing the adolescent girl and labeling her as a victim and her parents as oppressive; instead, it allowed a nuanced examination of how personal agency interacts with structural constraints to determine the options, albeit limited, of girls who live in displacement and poverty. Our findings revealed that marriage decisions were shaped by structural factors and events such as poverty, insecurity related to war, and long-standing kinship systems that constrain girls' and women's choices in the family. In sum, the method we used placed a strong emphasis on seeing the lives of adolescent girls as a whole and in context and provided evidence on how the decision to marry at a young age connects with a complex web of life course factors.

Despite global campaigns to eliminate early marriage, referred to as "child marriage" in many reports by international groups, few studies document the process through which these marriages are arranged and officiated in contexts of displacement. In Lebanon, the legal status of early marriage is contentious as the minimum age of marriage is left up to each sect to define. This has contributed to politicizing discussions around early marriage and extracting it from debates on women's rights and wellbeing. The discourse on early marriage, globally and not only in Lebanon, is grounded in moral concerns (Schaffnit, Urassa, Lawson, 2019), rather than an understanding of its determinants and risks that unfold along an adolescent girl's life trajectory. Our study attempted to rectify a bias in how early marriage among Syrian refugee adolescent girls in Lebanon is conceived and to generate knowledge that aligns with a growing nuanced writings about it from various cultural contexts. By embarking on this study, we did not intend to deny the negative social and health consequences of early marriage and early sexual initiation. Instead, we aimed to explore the structural forces that lead to it and highlight that it takes shape in various forms and is not always negatively perceived by the girls who marry early, their parents, or community.

The findings of our study highlight at least three broad structural forces that lead to early marriage in displacement: poverty, insecurity, and tradition. These three forces intersect and highlight that the real underlying determinant of early marriage is the limited opportunities afforded to adolescent girls who live in displacement, especially the opportunity to stay in school. In some cases, the presence of the father in the family increases a girl's risk of early marriage, in that fathers reinforce traditional patriarchal norms and favor marrying their daughters early and within the extended family. On the other hand, our study revealed that the absence of the father in some cases exacerbates an adolescent girl's risk of early marriage. Wars lead to breaking away from communal bonding and intensify girls' and women's insecurity and vulnerability to sexual violence. During flight inside Syria or after displacement in Lebanon, adolescent girls whose

fathers have been killed or separated from the family were encouraged to marry by their mothers to protect them from sexual violence. Rather than labeling all early marriages as forced by male guardians and tradition, a nuanced understanding of the role of the father and the mother is critical to identifying the early marriage risk profile of a girl.

Similarly, painting all early marriages as indications of girls' lack of decision-making or agency does not represent the complex reality of marriage arrangements in contexts of displacement. In some circumstances, girls resist marriage proposals, particularly those initiated by the extended family without their knowledge. In other cases, girls enact agency by initiating a relationship with a suitor, despite parental disapproval, and solicit support from the extended family such as grandparents. The important point to make in this regard is that there is substantial variation in how early marriage takes place and the role of the adolescent girl in resisting or initiating it.

The findings of our qualitative study chart pathways for the prevention of early marriage, which is critical from not only a health but also a social wellbeing perspective. Prevention efforts need to acknowledge that there are structures that maintain early marriage as an attractive option for girls who live in displacement and who are deprived of opportunities. In the absence of educational access or valuing education as pathway to social mobility, girls believe that they gain social status and expand their social network through marriage. Our study revealed a mixed reality with some adolescent girls feeling content with life after marriage whilst others experiencing disappointment, poverty, and abuse. Therefore, rather than demonizing early marriage in a context where it is socially normative, programs that create opportunities and spaces for adolescent girls to connect with each other, build relations with role models, and direct their decision-making and agency to delay marriage stand to achieve more impact.

The Amenah study is one of only a handful of early marriage interventions that are community-based and aim to mitigate early marriage taking the displacement context into account. The impact evaluation findings of the Amenah intervention showed improvements in adolescent girls' knowledge and attitudes towards delaying marriage, which were sustained through 6 months after the intervention. This is an important finding as it indicates that girls retained intervention content even in a context where norms are permissive of early marriage. The use of marriage scenarios revealed that change in girls' attitudes around early marriage became less permissive, a very important finding considering the social acceptability of this practice. In addition, the follow-up survey showed that the improvements seen in Amenah participants' SRH knowledge and attitudes were sustained through 6 months after the intervention. This is an important finding as it indicates that girls' retained intervention content even in a context where norms regarding adolescent SRH are very restrictive. Importantly, change in girls' attitudes around early marriage was also sustained, although measurement of this outcome was challenging. The finding of less communication between mothers and daughters over time, despite participation in the intervention, is counter to expectation and needs further exploration. This may be related to maturation among participants, or participants may have started to turn to the intervention staff (community workers and peer educators) to discuss topics they would previously have raised with their mothers.

SOCIETAL, LEGAL, AND POLICY IMPACTS OF THE STUDY

The study findings have considerable potential to impact approaches to mitigate early marriage when adapted to the context. Gaining a nuanced understanding of how events and decisions taken during an adolescent girl's life are related to broad social structural constraints and a context of social and political change. This promises to move the discourse about early marriage away from stigmatizing the adolescent girl and labeling her as a victim and her parents as oppressive; instead, they allow a nuanced examination of how personal agency interacts with structural constraints to determine the options, albeit limited, of girls who live in displacement and poverty. Our findings revealed that marriage decisions were shaped by structural factors and events such as poverty, insecurity related to war, and long-standing kinship systems that constrain girls' and women's choices in the family. In sum, seeing the lives of adolescent girls as a whole and in context provided evidence on how the decision to marry at a young age connects with a complex web of life course factors. This evidence has important implications for future policy to mitigate the drivers of early marriage. We highlight three policy implication based on the findings of our study:

1. Adopting a comprehensive social policy approach
    Thus far, policy responses in the region have focused on raising the age of marriage in national statutes. There is considerable policy debate in the region around setting a legal age of marriage; whereas countries including Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco introduced policies to set the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 (with judicial exception for the last two countries), other countries in the region, including Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen, have not done so. In Lebanon, the perception of high and increasing rates of early marriage among Syrian refugees has in fact led to recent proposals at the Parliamentary level to establish a legal age at marriage. However, given the Lebanese context where personal status laws are set by religious sects and there are no civil laws that govern marriage, divorce, or custody, the proposal has met with considerable resistance. In light of evidence highlighting the limited efficacy of minimum age at marriage laws, we propose instituting social policies that address the economic drivers for early marriage.

2. Mitigating against unregistered marriages
    Moreover, legal policies that are disconnected from the needs and realities of disadvantaged populations may result in an increase in unregistered marriages rather than a decrease in occurrence of marriages. Therefore, our study findings also highlight the need to institute policies to reduce unregistered marriages which pose negative legal, social, and health consequences on refugee women and their children. Among displaced populations, refugee adolescent girls whose marriages are not registered become deprived of legal and social protections. Understanding the processes through which unregistered early marriages take place will inform policies that protect the rights and health of married adolescents (and their children) while at the same time advocating to end them.

3. Ensuring access to education for refugee children and adolescent girls
    Although there is agreement that early marriage is harmful, the available evidence provides little guidance on how to address it in ways that respond to the constraints experienced by adolescent refugee girls and their families. We strongly argue for mitigating early marriage before girls are placed on risk trajectories due to structural factors. It should come as no

surprise that ensuring refugee girls' (and boys') access to education in the host country is one of the most effective policy interventions to reduce the rates of early marriage and its risk. Our findings on the temporality of school dropout and the beginning of making early marriage arrangements lend support to existing evidence that points to school enrollment as an important protective mechanism against early marriage. Nonetheless, access to education for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon has been challenged by limited financial resources and lack of political will.

4. Supporting long-term evaluation research on early marriage in displacement

Finally, findings of the quantitative component of the study, which aimed to assess the long-term impact of a community-engaged early marriage intervention at 6-month follow-up, also have broader relevance and potential impact for studies on early marriage among forcibly displaced populations in the region. Early marriage interventions generally evaluate impact immediately following a study's implementation phase and therefore rarely capture long-term change and retention in knowledge and attitudes. Although there is a growing number of descriptive studies on early marriage among refugees in the Arab region, the Amenah study is one of only a couple of intervention studies that sought to examine the long-term impact of community engagement and the delivery of structured sessions to adolescent girls on their gender attitudes and expectations related to marriage including age at marriage. The nuanced results comparing the first endline data with the 6-month follow-up highlight the importance of collecting long-term endline data in studies on early marriage among refugees in the region. These results highlight which knowledge and attitude domains are retained in the long-term following an early marriage intervention and guide researchers and practitioners to focus on those.

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