

Nigeria: Girls' Education, Child Marriage, and Early Childbearing across States

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In most countries, there are strong relationships between girls' educational attainment and the prevalence of child marriage (engaging in a formal or informal union before the age of 18), as well as between the prevalence of child marriage and that of early childbearing (having a first child before the age of 18). Keeping girls in schools is often seen as one of the best ways to delay marriage beyond the age of 18, and likewise preventing child marriage is often one of the best ways to avoid early pregnancies. This brief provides a rapid state-level analysis of educational attainment for girls, child marriage, and early childbearing in Nigeria using the latest available Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for 2018 (data from the planned 2023 DHS should be available in 2024). The analysis suggests that in Nigeria, keeping girls in schools at the secondary level would help delay marriage, which in turn would help prevent early pregnancies and thereby early childbearing.

Estimates of girls' education, child marriage, and early childbearing vary between states

Figure 1 visualizes through maps estimates of girls' completion rates for various education levels, together with the prevalence of child marriage and that of early childbearing. The analysis is conducted at the state level using data from the 2018 DHS (actual estimates are not provided for space reasons but are available from the authors).



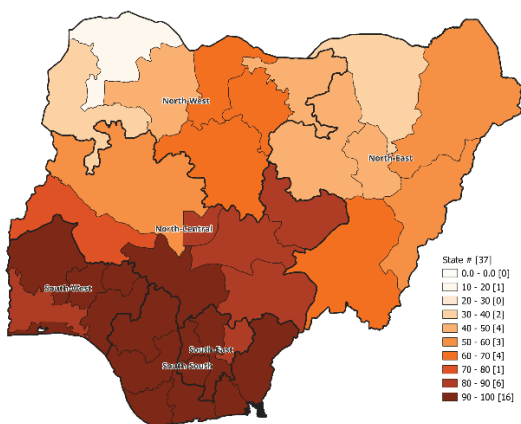
Background: This brief was prepared for a KIX Africa 19 Hub national policy dialogue in Nigeria with a focus on data and achieving gender equality in and through education. KIX (Knowledge and Innovation Exchange) Africa 19 contributes to education systems strengthening in African anglophone countries by bridging the gap between research and policy making. With support from the Global Partnership for Education and Canada's International Development Research Center, KIX Africa 19 is managed by UNESCO IICBA.

Key findings: Using data from the last Demographic and Health Survey for 2018, this brief provides an analysis of girls' education, child marriage, and early childbearing across states.

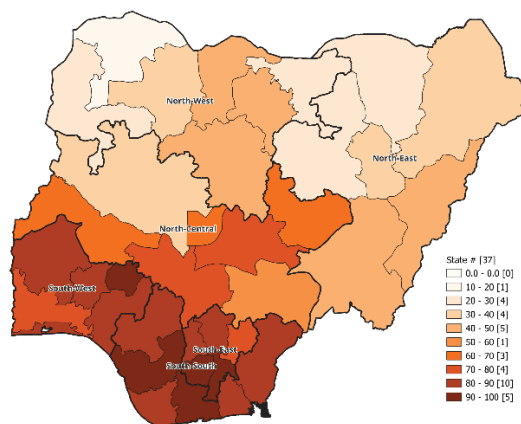
- Educational attainment for girls remains low in Nigeria, while the prevalence of child marriage (engaging in a formal or informal union before the age of 18) and early childbearing (having a first child before the age of 18) remain high.
- State-level estimates suggest large differences between states in girls' educational attainment, child marriage, and early childbearing, with northern zones and states faring less well. This is visualized through maps.
- Simple scatter plots suggest that differences in child marriage rates between states may account for a large share of the differences between states in both girls' educational attainment and early childbearing. This is confirmed through regression analysis and a brief review of the literature, with effects going both ways.
- The analysis suggests that keeping girls in school may be one of the best ways to end child marriage. In turn, reducing the prevalence of child marriage may be one of the best ways to reduce the risk of early pregnancies and early childbearing.

Figure 1: Girls' Educational Attainment, Child Marriage, and Early Childbearing by State, 2018

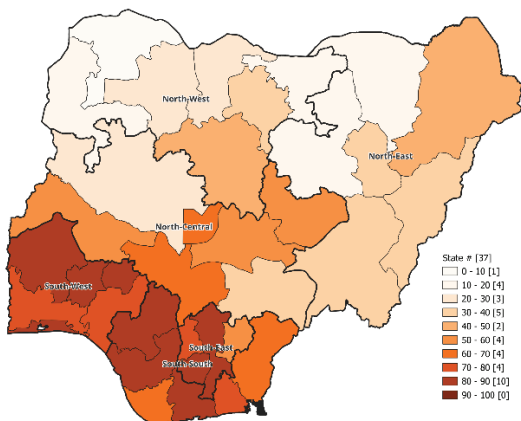
Primary completion rate, girls ages 15-18 (%)



Lower secondary comp. rate, girls ages 18-20 (%)

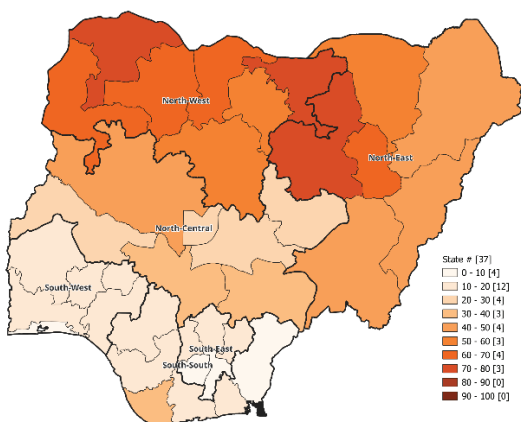


Upper secondary comp. rate, girls ages 21-24 (%)

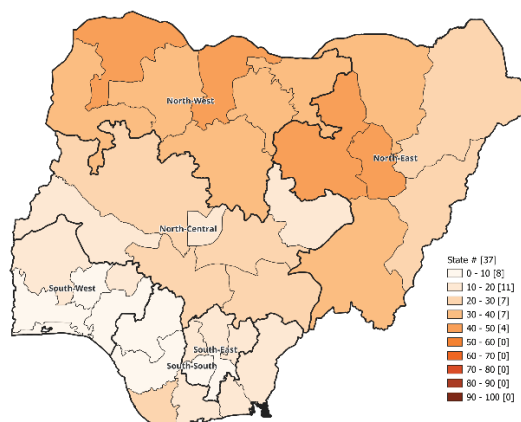


For educational attainment, estimates of primary completion rates are computed for girls ages 15 to 18. At the lower secondary and upper secondary levels, the estimates are computed respectively for girls ages 18-20 and 21-24. The choice of those age groups stems from the fact that for boys and girls alike, an education cycle is often completed at an older age because of late entry in primary school, repetition, or time out of school. More than the specific values of the indicators which can be sensitive to the age brackets used for measurement, the focus in this brief is on the relationships between indicators.

Child marriage, girls ages 18-22 (%)



Early Childbearing, girls ages 18-22 (%)



Source: Authors' estimation using 2018 DHS.

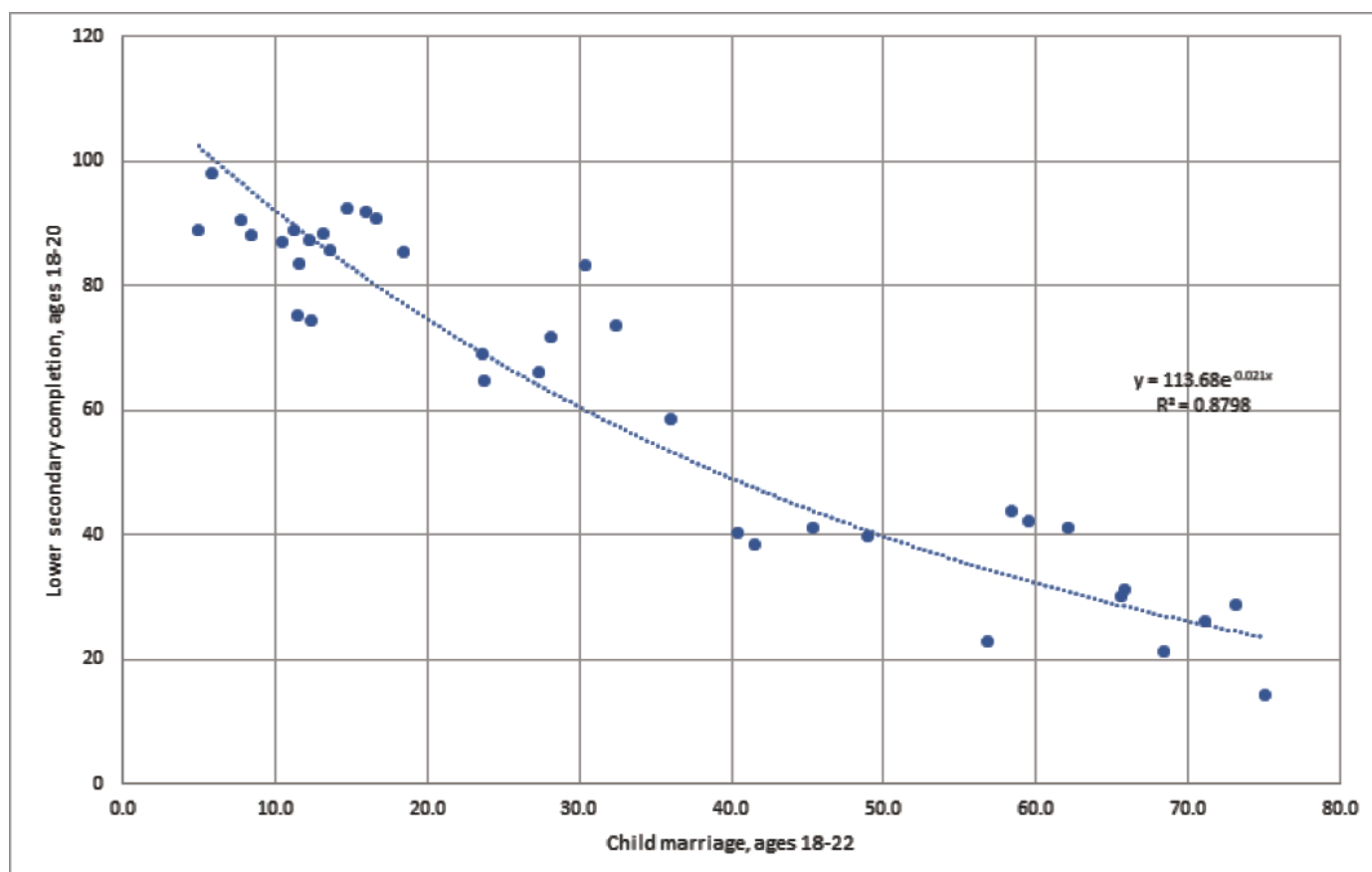
The maps make it clear that states with lower levels of educational attainment tend to have a higher prevalence of child marriage and early childbearing, as expected. Also

as expected, the prevalence of early childbearing tends to be lower than that of child marriage as girls tend to be married before they have their first child.

Keeping girls in schools helps in reducing child marriage

The scatter plot in Figure 2 shows that the negative relationship across states between the prevalence of child marriage and the completion of lower secondary education for girls is strong. The trendline suggests that differences in the prevalence of child marriage may account for 89 percent (R² value for the trendline) of differences between states in lower secondary education completion rates for girls. This does not imply causality, but it suggests that child marriage affects educational attainment for girls negatively, while keeping girls in schools could reduce the prevalence of child marriage. This is confirmed by regression analysis as each additional year of secondary education reduces the risk of child marriage, and each additional year of early marriage (i.e., marrying very early) reduces the likelihood that a girl will be able to complete her secondary education (Wodon et al., 2017, 2018).

Figure 2: Relationship between Child Marriage and Lower Secondary Completion by State (%)



The fact that keeping girls in school is likely to reduce the prevalence of child marriage is also confirmed by the literature. Targeted interventions to delay marriage and early childbearing include (1) programs providing life skills and knowledge of reproductive health; (2) programs expanding economic opportunities; and (3) programs

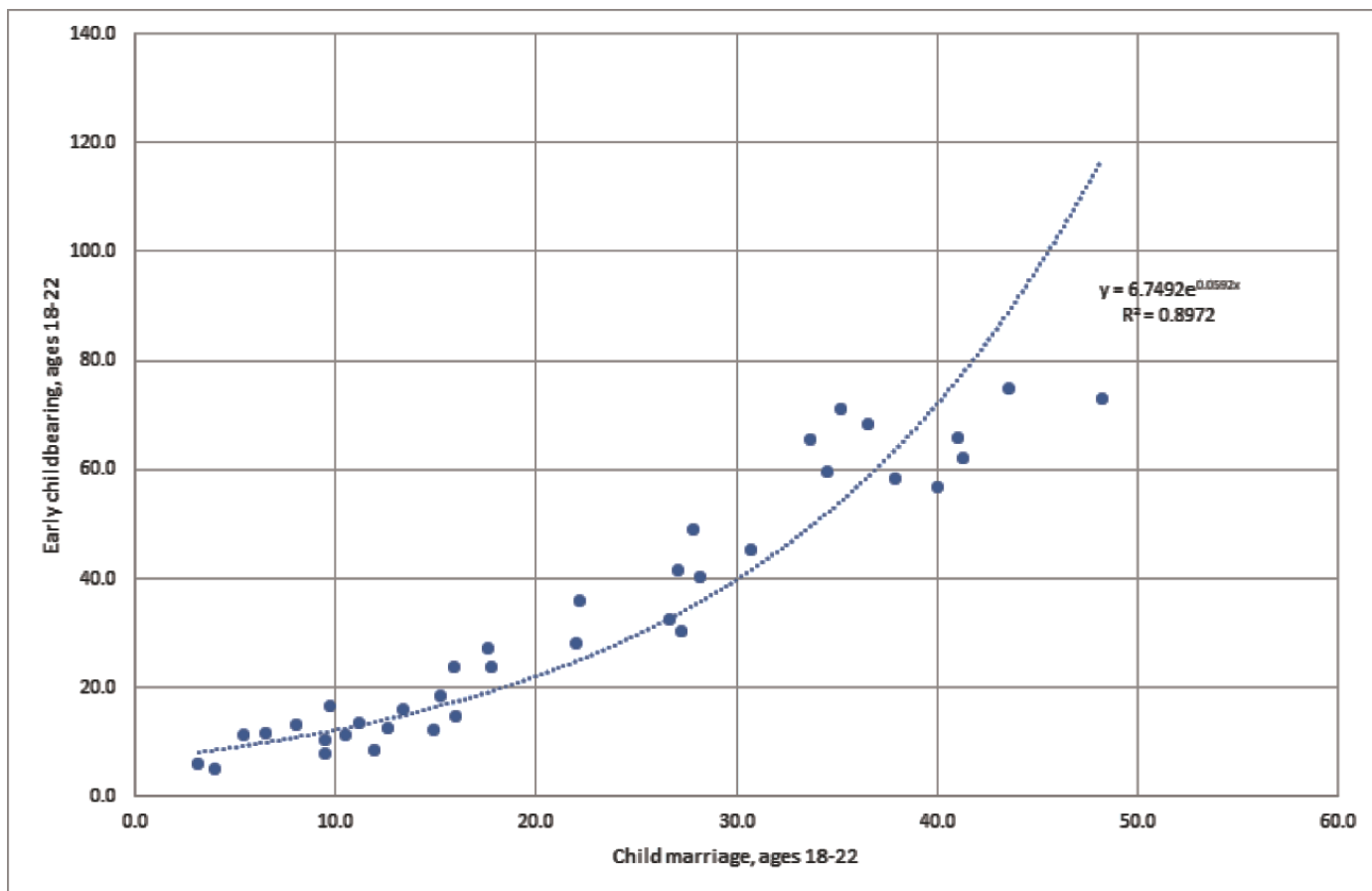
keeping girls in school or enabling them to return to school. Summary findings from a review of the literature on those interventions (Botea et al., 2017) suggest that keeping girls in school should be a priority, even if other types of interventions also have clear benefits. Several other analyses and reviews of the literature have reached similar conclusions, albeit with some differences including for reviews of the literature (see some of the references in the bibliography).

Reducing child marriage in turn helps in reducing early childbearing

Another scatter plot in Figure 3 shows a positive relationship across states between the prevalence of child marriage and that of early childbearing. The trendline again suggests that differences between states in the prevalence of child marriage may account for much (84 percent) of the differences between states in early childbearing. This does not, once again, imply causality, but it suggests that ending child marriage could substantially reduce the prevalence of early childbearing. This is confirmed by an analysis of the timing (by year and month) of marriage and childbearing in the data, in Nigeria as well as in most other sub-Saharan

countries (Wodon et al., 2020). Therefore, through its impact on child marriage, higher educational attainment for girls may also contribute to reducing early childbearing, an assertion that is again confirmed by regression analysis with each additional year of secondary education for girls reducing the risk of early childbearing (Wodon et al., 2018).

Figure 3: Relationship between Child Marriage and Early Childbearing by State (%)



Takeaways

Educational attainment for girls remains low in Nigeria, while the prevalence of child marriage and early childbearing tends to be high. This brief has documented differences between states in girls' educational attainment, child marriage, and early childbearing. Scatter plots suggest that differences in girls' educational attainment between states may account for a large share of differences in the prevalence of child marriage (and vice versa). In turn, differences in the prevalence of child marriage may account for a large share of differences in rates of early childbearing. This is confirmed by regression analysis and a brief review of the literature. The analysis suggests that keeping girls in school may be one of the best ways to end child marriage and reduce the risk of early pregnancies and early childbearing.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

The analysis in this brief is that of the authors only and need not reflect the views of UNESCO, its Executive Directors, of the countries they represent, nor do they necessarily represent the views of the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa. The use of maps does not imply any judgment on potential territorial claims by countries.

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