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The effect of conditional incentives and a girls' empowerment curriculum on adolescent marriage, childbearing and education in rural Bangladesh: a community clustered randomized controlled trial

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Abstract

A clustered randomized trial in Bangladesh examines alternative strategies to reduce child marriage and teenage childbearing and increase girls' education. Communities were randomized into three treatment and one control group in a 2:1:1:2 ratio. From 2008, girls in treatment communities received either i) a six-month empowerment program, ii) a financial incentive to delay marriage, or iii) empowerment plus incentive. Data from 19,060 girls 4.5 years after program completion show that girls eligible for the incentive for at least two years were 22% (-0.9pppts, $p < 0.01$) less likely to be married under 18, 14% (-5.2pppts, $p < 0.01$) less likely to have given birth under 20, and 21% (5.6pppts, $p < 0.05$) more likely to be in school at age 22. Unlike other incentive programs that are conditional on girls staying in school, an incentive conditional on marriage alone has the potential to benefit out-of-school girls. We find insignificantly different effects for girls in and out of school at baseline. The empowerment program did not decrease child marriage or teenage childbearing. However, girls eligible for the empowerment program were 12% (3.1pppts, $p < 0.05$) more likely to be in-school and had completed 2.9 months (0.24 years, $p < 0.10$) of additional schooling.

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