In the lead up to 2030, the goalpost for the Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is strong global interest in promoting evidence-based strategies to end child marriage and in tracking progress toward target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2019, the UNDP-UNFPA-UNICEF-WHO-World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction, the World Health Organization, the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, and Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage convened an expert group meeting to review progress made in building the evidence base on child marriage, identify an updated set of research priorities [1], and discuss how best to support research coordination, translation, and uptake [2].

Several recent initiatives address that latter objective of research coordination and translation and uptake of evidence by practitioners and policy makers. This includes the Child Marriage Learning Partners Consortium described in the accompanying commentary by Efeyvera and Petroni et al. [3] and whose learning products make up the current supplement. We describe two additional efforts that are designed to be of value to researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and the general public interested in the issue of child marriage, and serve to more widely disseminate the kind of work published in this supplement.

The first of these is a partnership of Girls Not Brides and the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, the Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK) [4]. Over the last 10 years in particular, there has been tremendous growth in research on child marriage, often as part of broader research on adolescent girls’ access to education, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and other related topics. These efforts—led by civil society, academic and research institutions, multilateral organizations, bilateral organizations and foundations—are generating a significant amount of evidence on key drivers and consequences of child marriage and what works to prevent it in different contexts. As discussed and agreed by participants in the above-mentioned expert group meeting, however, the findings from this research are not consistently synthesized or communicated in a way that is accessible and useful for decision makers so that they can help to inform policies and programmes. Furthermore, there has been duplication and proliferation of research and evidence in some areas, to the neglect of others. For example, most evidence on the consequences of child marriage focuses on maternal and perinatal health, whereas the broader impacts on health and social well-being, economic costs, and consequences for younger adolescent girls are less well-studied [5].

Responding to these issues, the CRANK is an open platform for a better coordinated and harmonized research agenda on child marriage that is aligned with global research priorities and responds to the needs of policy makers and practitioners. It brings together child marriage researchers, practitioners, and policy makers regularly to present and deliberate the latest evidence on key topics, particularly those identified as being gap areas in the past. For example, the launch session of the CRANK focused on the evidence on gender-transformative approaches to ending child marriage, and subsequent themes include taking systems approaches to upholding adolescent rights and entitlements and delaying age at marriage and the evidence on child marriage in humanitarian settings, among others. The CRANK also aims to serve as a knowledge management mechanism through which ongoing and upcoming research is tracked, patterns are monitored, and
continuing and emerging gaps are identified. Recognizing that other platforms do exist for coordination and sharing of research related to child marriage—such as the Sexual Violence Research Initiative’s biennial fora [6] and the Global Network On Mental Health And Child Marriage [7]—CRANK will focus on studies that include child marriage (or age at marriage) as an outcome or as a determinant of other outcomes for girls and boys.

The second initiative of interest is the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism [8]. Data are critical to informing policies and programmes and for holding governments accountable for progress toward Sustainable Development Goal target 5.3. Experience with other key development issues—for example, maternal and child health, education, water, and sanitation—suggests that investments in global monitoring mechanisms have been critical in lifting these issues from a fragile positioning to becoming prominent concerns in global and national agendas. To give such prominence to the issue of child marriage, UNICEF has launched the monitoring mechanism as an initiative that brings together international and regional organizations, civil society organizations, and young people around a shared commitment to strengthening monitoring and accountability on ending child marriage. The monitoring mechanism will contribute to meeting the demand for informed policy and programmatic action by providing easy access to relevant statistical information across several indicators related to child marriage and by fostering the effective utilization of these data. Although evidence needs in this area are broad and could be addressed through an array of approaches and partnerships, this mechanism will maintain a focus on the monitoring function and on the quantitative measures most appropriate to meet this need. The work of the monitoring mechanism and the activities under the CRANK will therefore complement each other: the first one will facilitate access and understanding of patterns and trends, whereas the second one will promote generation and use of research on drivers and solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred a new set of studies on child marriage, specifically on how it has been impacting children and adolescents—especially girls—and their families, including through economic pressures, disruptions in systems and service provision, and changes in family structures and ties [9—11]. Several research initiatives have arisen as a result of the pandemic, such as the multicountry RECOVR surveys [12] and the Civil Society Collaborative on Inclusive COVID-19 Data [13]. Given all of the urgent priorities and challenges that COVID-19 has introduced and the competing demands on policy makers and practitioners, the need for effective and efficient coordination, translation, and uptake of data and evidence on child marriage is greater than ever.

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**References**


