



To: Ford Foundation

Project title: Exploratory research to assess the problem of child marriage in five Latin American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and southern Mexico

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Project director: Annik M Sorhaindo, MSc

Population Council, Mexico
Insurgentes Sur 2453
9th Floor
Colonia Tizapán
Delegación Álvaro Obregón
C.P. 01090
MEXICO

Introduction

In the 2012 UNFPA report *Marrying Too Young* child marriage is defined as the “legal or customary union between two people, of whom one or both spouses is below the age of 18” (UNFPA, 2012). Though the overall prevalence of child marriage in the region is moderate, the significant variation between and within countries masks the disproportionately high occurrence in the countries of Central America and among rural and indigenous subgroups. The proportion of women aged 20 to 24 who were first married or living in union before the age of 18 is recorded as 41 percent in Nicaragua, 39 percent in Honduras, 35 percent in Guatemala, 25 percent in El Salvador, and 23 percent in Mexico. Yet, the practice goes largely undocumented and the information that is available is dispersed and hidden within other issues or among other data. The practice of child marriage, though common in Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), has not received its due attention in the region. The bulk of energies with regard to documentation, research and intervention are directed toward global “hot spots” for the practice in the regions of Asia and Africa, leaving the LAC region largely overlooked.

This project was designed to be exploratory research as little evidence existed on the practice in the region. As outlined in the proposal, there was concern that aggregated regional data may mask a problem that disproportionately occurs in Central America and among specific subgroups, in particular rural and indigenous girls, and that these data tend not to take into account the patterns of undocumented cohabitation that are commonplace in the LAC region. Of particular concern were cases of coupling resulting from forced sex or rape that may involve a pregnancy. Much of the exploratory research conducted for this project has confirmed existing concerns about the practice of child marriage in Central America and Mexico. However, this work added to current knowledge about the practice in the context of the project countries.

Study aim and objectives

The Population Council Mexico undertook exploratory research to assess, document and better understand the problem of child marriage in four countries in Central America – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua – and in the state of Oaxaca and Guerrero in southern Mexico. The project also aimed to share current information about child marriage among a network of like-minded experts in the sub-region to lay the groundwork for the support and development of targeted and effective interventions designed for the context of Central America. This project’s specific aims were to:

- Assess the available data on prevalence, legal frameworks, services, programs and interventions, including advocacy and specific campaigns, relevant to child marriage, with a specific focus on early childbearing, existing in each project country.
- Document, from local networks in each country, the needs of married girls and those living in union, the social norms around the practice of child marriage in communities, and resources available or required to address the problem at the local level.

- Share results of this exploratory study on child marriage with key stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers and donors in each of the five project countries included in the study.

To achieve these objectives, this project was undertaken in three phases: (1) A review of existing literature and secondary analysis of relevant data, including relevant legal frameworks (2) In-depth interviews with key stakeholders and informants, and (3) Dissemination of findings to policy and research audiences in five small in-country stakeholder meetings.

Results

Database search

During the first phase of this project, we undertook desk-based searches of available international and national databases including variables exploring indicators of the causes and consequences of child marriage (Appendix 1a and 1b), grey and published literature on child marriage and the legal frameworks that may have implications for child marriage (Appendix 3) in each of the project countries.

Overall, databases including variables on child marriage were sparse and in some cases quite old (Appendix 1a and 1b). Organizations such as UNICEF and the Guttmacher Institute compiled international data on child marriage including information from the countries that were the focus of this project. For instance, the most recent relevant UNICEF report *Progress for Children: A Report Card for Adolescents* includes data on the proportion of girls and women aged 15-19 married or in union by world region. In Latin American and the Caribbean, 18 percent of young women ages were married or in union.

The most common sources of national level data were Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and local national health and census surveys; however, in most countries international agencies and research organizations also conducted surveys that captured information that could be used to characterize child marriage in the country. For example, in El Salvador, in addition to a Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 1985 and the 2007 household census, in 2008 USAID conducted a National Family Health Survey including variables to measure age difference between the couple, age of first sexual relationship and union. In Guatemala, in addition to a number of population and health national surveys, in 2006 and 2009 the Guttmacher Institute compiled data on the sexual and reproductive health of Guatemalan youth including measures for early marriage by sex and adolescent childbearing. During the period of study, the results of the National Survey of Demography and Health, 2011-12 for Honduras were released, including variables for fertility by level of educational attainment and use of modern contraceptives. The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, in Spanish) in Mexico conducted surveys in 2009 and 2010 that measured marital status by age group, and by age group and civil partnership. In Nicaragua, the National Information and Development Institute conducts a demography and health survey approximately every five years which includes data on

adolescent fertility and contraceptive use, and age at first sex among other factors. The results of the most recent survey, from 2011/12, were released in 2013.

Literature review

Our search for published and grey literature on child marriage in the project countries resulted in a list of approximately 75 publications in both English and Spanish, including online publications, newspaper articles, peer-reviewed journal articles and reports compiled by government and non-governmental organizations (see reference list). During the process of conducting this review of literature, the dearth of information about the practice in the LAC region was evident. The majority of research focused on countries within the regions of Africa and South Asia. Despite evidence to suggest that a concerning proportion of girls and young women in the region, particularly in Central America, form early unions. Below, we summarize this literature, initially at the regional level and later for each of the project countries.

Regional

A retrospective cohort study using DHS and Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS) from 2001-2006 found that in countries such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras the majority of adolescents unions (60-90%) are consensual (Remez, Singh and Prada 2009). However, these unions are viewed as “normal” and often go overlooked and underreported (Mathur, Greene, Malhotra, 2003). Though the same study found that approximately 45-60% of 20-24 year old women in Central America entered into a union (legal or consensual) as adolescents (Remez, Singh, and Prada 2009) the numbers often reported for marriages among 15-19 year olds in LAC hover around 20-29% (UNFPA, 2012; Mathur, Greene, Malhotra, 2003; Mensch, Singh, and Casterline, 2005).

In Central America, the majority of girls and young women who enter into an early union are from indigenous, rural areas and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and have little education (Remez, Singh, and Prada 2009). All of the project countries have indigenous sub-populations or groups from specific ethnicities who are systematically marginalized.

In the state of Oaxaca, the main indigenous ethnic groups are the Mixtec and the Zapotecs (Kearny, 2000) and in Guerrero, the Nahuatl, Mixtec, Tlapanec and Amuzgo (Casas and Caballero, 1996). The population of Guatemala is largely indigenous (60%), including ethnicities, such as the Achi', Akateco, Awakateco, Chalchiteco, Ch'orti', Chuj, Itza', Ixil, Jacalteco, Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, Mopan, Poqomam, Poqomchi', Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteco, Sipakapense, Tektiteko, Tz'utujil, Uspanteko, Xinka and Garifuna. The Garifuna are descendants of Carib, Arawak, and West Africans who settled in Central America. Honduras also has a Garifuna population and its major indigenous groups including the Lenca, Tolupan, Nahuatl, Chorti', Pech and Tawahka. In addition to indigenous populations, Nicaragua also has populations of African descent, such as the Garifuna and Afro-Caribbeans. The indigenous groups found in Nicaragua are the Chorotega, Cacaopera, Matagalpa, Ocanxiu of Sutiaba, Naáhuatl, Miskitu, Samu-Mayangna and the Rama (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2013). However, most of its indigenous

population is mainly found in the Pacific Coast and center north of country. In contrast, El Salvador, is more homogenous and mainly consists of mestizo, white and Amerindian (mainly Pipil tribes).

Several studies have found that child marriage inhibits women's agency in the relationship, and makes girls susceptible to unprotected and unwanted sex. Therefore, the risk of having unwanted pregnancies and contracting STIs and HIV increases (Remez *et al.*, 2008; Bruce and Clark, 2004; Mueller, 2008). For example, an international study using DHS data from 1996-2004 found that the percentage of young married women (15-19) in Guatemala and Nicaragua who reported having unprotected sex in the previous week was 55.8% and 70.8% respectively. These numbers were much lower for unmarried women, 0% in Guatemala and 9.8% in Nicaragua (Clark, Bruce, and Dude 2006). UNFPA also reported a figure of 67.1% of married girls 15-19 who had unprotected sex in the past week (2005). Though 80% of married adolescent (15-19) girls in LAC want to delay pregnancy for the next two years, over 50% of unintended pregnancies in LAC occur among married adolescents (Guttmacher Institute, 2010, UNFPA 2004). This suggests a dissonance between what married adolescent girls want and need and what is being decided for them.

Among girls 15-19 in underprivileged countries, pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death. Compared to women who have children after their 20s, pregnant 15-19 year olds are twice as likely to die. (Save the Children, 2004). Major causes of death are hypertension (26%), hemorrhage (21%), and complications and obstruction of pregnancy (25%) (UNICEF, 2005). Others face lifelong complications such as obstetric fistula which causes feces and urine leakage (UNICEF, 2005; Save the Children, 2004; Mathur, Greene, Malhotra, 2003). Obstetric Fistula is a completely preventable medical condition that "results from unrelieved obstructed labor" and mainly occurs among young girls whose pelvises are not fully developed (The Info Project, 2004). This condition is strongly tied to child marriage because of its significance to adolescent pregnancy. Young girls who marry before the age of 18 early are more likely to become pregnant before turning 18, and before their bodies have fully developed. For example, the 2013 UNFPA report "Motherhood in Childhood" states that nine out of 10 adolescent births in the world are to girls who are married or in a union (UNFPA, 2013). The same report found that births among girls under 15 years old are on the rise in the Latin America and Caribbean region. These findings have strong implications for the rate of obstetric fistula, which right now affects 3.5 million girls worldwide (UNFPA, 2013).

The State of the World's Mothers report found that infants born to adolescent mothers are twice as likely to die than those born to women in their twenties. In Guatemala for example, the infant mortality rate for babies born to 15-19 year olds is 70%, and among 20-29 year olds the infant mortality rate is under 50% (Save the Children, 2004). Other studies have also found that children born to adolescent mothers are more likely to be premature, have low birth weight, and are less likely to obtain good nutrition, higher education, and continue in the cycle of poverty (UNICEF, 2008, ICRW, 2007, Save the Children Foundation, 2004).

Health risks for women and children increase with a wider age gap between young girls and husbands. Men who are older tend to have longer sexual histories, and also tend to

overpower young girls in decisions of contraception use and sexual relations (Bruce and Clark 2004, Clark *et al.*, 2006, Remez *et al.*, 2008). In Central America the average age gap between adolescent brides and their husbands is between 5.8 and 7 years apart (UNFPA, 2005). A exploratory study conducted by The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) using DHS data from 1995-2003 found that in the case of Guatemala and Nicaragua, 51-56% of girls ages 15-19 in union had partners who were 0-4 years older, whereas around 70% of girls who were married by the age of 18 had husbands who were 10-14 years older. The majority (60%) of those who had partners closer in age had 1-2 children, and 39% did not have any children. However, over 40% of those who were married to men 10-14 years older in Guatemala and Nicaragua had more than 3 children, and only 2.8% and 4.8% respectively, had no children (UNICEF, 2008). Though child marriage occurs among adolescent boys as well, the rates in which they enter into unions are roughly half (21-39%) the rate at which women enter into early union (Remez *et al.*, 2008; Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003). Therefore, there is a lack of data on how young boys are affected by early marriage in Central America.

El Salvador

The prevalence of child marriage in El Salvador among adolescents under 18 is 25%, the lowest proportions among surrounding countries in Central America, but highest for girls under 15 (5%) (UNICEF, 2011). However, as is the case in many Central American countries the Family Code states that children under 18 years of age may not get married unless the woman is pregnant or already has a child, or if they receive permission from parents or legal guardians (Art. 14) (Appendix 3). However, the Penal Code conflict with this as it states that having sexual relations with a person under 18 is punishable by law with up a consequence of up to 12 years of prison (Art. 167) (Appendix 3). Yet, the common practice in El Salvador is for adolescents to enter consensual unions (86%), rather than legal unions (Remez *et al.*, 2008).

Little research has been conducted on the topic of child marriage in El Salvador, however a study conducted by the Guttmacher Institute using data from national reproductive health surveys from 1995 and 2002, found that almost half (45%) of women 20-24 entered a union during their adolescence, the figure increases among girls who received fewer years of education and come from rural areas (65% and 51%, respectively). However, the majority of the population of El Salvador lives in urban areas (60%) and receives at least 7 years of schooling (66%), unlike the percentages in neighboring countries, such as Nicaragua and Guatemala. However similar to Nicaragua and Guatemala are the consistent and high levels of adolescent births. It was reported that among 20-24 year olds, 42% gave birth by the age of 19. Once again year of schooling was found to exacerbate these numbers by more than 20%. About 9% of these births are to single adolescent girls, which is a small increase from the average in Central America (4-5%). This study also found that 43% of these births were unplanned and 76% of married 15-24 year olds want to wait at least two years before having a child (Remez *et al.*, 2008). However, the majority (68%) of married women without children do not want to wait to have their first child (Remez *et al.*, 2008; Marshall and Jones 2012), which contrasts with the overall attitude in Latin America where only 20% of adolescents want to have a child (Marshall and Jones, 2012).

Another study using national health surveys from 1987 and 2007 found that since 1993 the odds of adolescents entering their first union in El Salvador have risen to 1.5 in 2003 from (0.4). Unlike the rate of birth among adolescents, which has remained consistent since 1987, those in legal or consensual unions have higher odds of giving birth during adolescence (2.0) (Semandari and Speizer 2010). The use of contraceptives among adolescents is highest in El Salvador (Remez *et al.*, 2008) with 60% use among adolescents (Semandari and Speizer, 2010). As in most Central American countries, the rate of HIV/AIDS is very low, 0.3% among men and women 15-24 (UNICEF, 2011).

Though, the issue of child marriage affects both boys and girls, research continues to show that young girls are the ones who are particularly affected by this phenomenon since they are more likely to enter into a union as adolescents compared with boys, in El Salvador this ratio is 6:1 (Guttmacher, 1998). There are few to no programs in this region addressing the issue of child marriage (ICRW, 2007).

Guatemala

Guatemala has one of the largest indigenous populations in Central America, consisting of nearly 42% of the overall population (Ruano and Zambrano, 2006) all of which live in poverty (Guttmacher, 2006), and 53% of the total population lives below the poverty line (Ruano and Zambrano, 2006). This results in limited life chances, education, and socioeconomic mobility and leaves 51.5% of the population who are 17 years old and younger (Ruano and Zambrano, 2006) with limited opportunities. As is the case in Central America, the majority of adolescent girls in Guatemala (59%) who are in a union, are in a consensual union rather than a legal one. An exploratory study conducted by UNICEF found that 60% of 15-19 year olds in union have 1-2 children, and 56.4% have a husband who is 0-4 years older than them. In comparison, 35.9% of girls married by 18 have 1-2 children, and 69.8% have husbands that are 10-14 years older (UNICEF, 2005). Such large gaps in age can lead to higher risks of contracting HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and unwanted pregnancies (Remez *et al.*, 2008; Mueller, 2008; World Vision, 2008).

According to a study conducted by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the average age of girls at first union in Guatemala is 19.3 year old, and by 19, 40% have given birth. The study also found that the average number of years of schooling among 15-24 year olds is 5.4 (Ruano and Zambrano, 2006). This number is alarming since many studies have found that women with more education have lower odds of entering into a union before their 20s, compared with girls who have little to no education (Samandari and Speizer, 2010; Remez *et al.*, 2008; Mathur, Greene, and Malhorta, 2003). For example, a study by the Guttmacher Institute using data from national reproductive health surveys from 1995 and 2002, found that girls with no education entered into a union before their 20s at about three times the rate of those who had at least seven years of education (Guttmacher, 2006). Overall, in 2002, 50% of women in Guatemala reported entering a union before their 20s and 43.5% gave birth by the age of 20. These numbers show that there is a link between entering a union at an early age and giving birth at an early age. This same study stated that it is not uncommon for young girls to enter into a union or get married in order to legitimize their pregnancy. According to Guatemala's civil code, girls under 14 may get married if they become pregnant, though the legal age of marriage for

both males and females is 18. However, if a boy of 16 and a girl of 14 or older want to get married, they may do so with the permission from their parents or legal guardians (Art. 89) (Appendix 3). Yet, the penal code states that it is illegal and punishable by law to have sexual relations with a girl under the age of 14 (Art. 176). This law contradicts the previous stipulations, but in any case rate of birth among girls under 15 is lower than 3% (Remez, Singh and Prada, 2009; Ruano and Zambrano, 2006).

From 1987-2002 the fertility rate amongst 15-19 year olds has remained unchanged (18.6%) (Guttmacher, 2006; Remez *et al.*, 2008; Ruano and Zambrano, 2006). In 2002, 83% of 15-19 year olds in union reported not wanting a child for the next 2 years, and 29% of births to 15-19 year olds were unplanned. Yet, only 18% of adolescents reported using contraception. As of 2004, HIV prevalence among 15-24 year olds was 1.1% (Remez *et al.*, 2008). Yet, Guatemala continues to have the lowest rate of contraceptive use among all countries in Central America (Guttmacher, 2006; Remez *et al.*, 2008). The highest levels of adolescent births can be found in the indigenous region of Petén (66%). Those who at least complete primary education are more than three times less likely to give birth compared to those who receive no education (68%) (Guttmacher, 2006). However, recent national surveys show that the net attendance ratio for secondary school participation among men and women was 23% and 24% respectively (UNICEF, 2007-2011).

Honduras

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Central America, with 64% percent of its citizens living below the poverty line (World Vision, 2013). Individuals under the age of 18 make up 44% of the population, and 20% of adolescents are currently married or in a consensual union (UNICEF, 2013). In rural areas, the average number of adolescents entering a union/marriage is 46%, with the most affected regions being Paraiso 48%, Copan 47%, Olancho 46%, and Yoro 46% (UNFPA, 2012). These areas tend to offer fewer opportunities for educational advancement, jobs, and economic mobility, all of which have been linked to the pervasiveness of child marriage, and higher adolescent fertility (Samandari and Speizer, 2010; Remez *et al.*, 2009; Guttmacher Institute, 2008; ICRW, 2007). For example, from 2005-2009, 36% of women were enrolled in secondary education (UNFPA, 2012), that number has increased to 43% from 2008-2011 (UNICEF, 2013). Though the most recent numbers are unknown, data from 2005-2009 showed that 79% of women who received secondary education or higher were deterred from entering into a legal or consensual union before their 18th birthday. However, 63% of women who did not receive an education and 51% of those who only received a primary education entered a union/marriage before turning 18.

The Family Code stipulates that the minimum age for marriage is 21 years of age. However, exceptions are granted to boys as young as 18 years old and girls as young as 16 as long as they receive permission to get married from their parents, grandparents, or legal guardians. Exceptions are also granted to women who become pregnant before 21, in which case no adult permission is needed for marriage (Art. 16). Though, only 3% of girls under the age of 15 give birth (UNICEF, 2012), 11% get married or enter a consensual union as do 39% of girls under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2013; UNFPA, 2012).

A study conducted by the Guttmacher Institute, using nationally representative data from DHS surveys in 2001 and 2005-2006 found that 90% of 15-19 year olds are in a consensual union rather than a legal union. They also found that 54% of 20-24 year olds entered a union before 20, and these numbers were much higher among rural women (62%), those who were less educated (68.6%), and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (61.6%). Results were just as high for women 20-24 who gave birth before 20, and those from rural areas and with fewer years of schooling had significantly higher rates (Remez *et al.*, 2008; Remez, Singh and Prada, 2009). Similar results were found in a study using four National Health Surveys from 1987-2007. Adolescents ages 15-19 were more likely to enter into a union if they came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and had no education or only primary education. The study also found that adolescents entering into a union were more than twice as likely to give birth during adolescence (Samandari and Speizer, 2010).

The Guttmacher Institute's nationally representative study and with the United Nations Population Fund reported that HIV prevalence in 2001-2007 among 15-24 year olds was highest in Honduras (1.1-1.8%) compared to its neighboring countries (Remez *et al.*, 2008; UNFPA, 2012). These numbers show an increase of .7% within the span of six years, indicating an upward trend. Also, almost half of all adolescent births were unplanned, which is a 7% increase since 2001 (40%), and 62% of 15-24 year olds reported wanting to wait before having their first birth (Remez *et al.*, 2008). However, the use of contraceptives among men 15-24 years old (Remez *et al.*, 2008) and married girls 15-24 years old (UNFPA, 2012) is less than 50%. The study conducted by the UNFPA projected a steady increase in the number of girls who will enter a union/marriage before the age of 18 if nothing is done to reduce it. By 2015, 163,000 girls are expected to be married and by 2030 175,000 (UNFPA, 2012). Along with these numbers, fertility rates and HIV cases among adolescents are likely to increase as well. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 8-14% of the Garifuna population in Honduras is HIV positive (WHO, 2005). However, in a more recent UNAIDS report, the HIV prevalence rate among the Garifuna in Honduras was at 4.5% (UNAIDS, 2010). Though the prevalence has decreased this marginalized ethnic group still suffers from higher rate of HIV than the general population.

Nicaragua

Of the countries in Central America, the highest rates of early marriage are found in Nicaragua. Though the civil code in Nicaragua states that only men of at least 21 years of age and women of at least 18 years of age may marry (Title ii, Chapter I, Art. 100) (Appendix 3); however, there are exceptions. For boys who are younger than 21 but older than 15, and girls who are younger than 18 but older than 14 and wish to get married, they may do so with the permission of their parents, grandparents, or legal guardians (Chapter IV, Art.140) (Appendix 3). However, the penal code stipulated that having sexual relations with a person younger than 16 is illegal and punishable by law (Art. 201) (Appendix 3). Various briefs have reported the rate of marriage in 2007 Nicaragua to be 41% for girls under 18 (UNICEF, 2011; UNFPA 2012). The majority of adolescents are in a consensual union, rather than a legal one. However, 15-19 year olds in consensual unions tend to be closer in age with over 50% having an age gap of 0-4 years. In comparison, over 70% of girls married by 18 have a husband who is 10-14 years older (UNICEF, 2005).

A study using DHS and RHS data from 2001-2006 found that Nicaragua has the highest number of girls under 20 entering into consensual unions (60.1%) and giving birth (47.9%). The majority of girls under 20 entering into a union in Nicaragua live in rural areas (73.1%), are less-educated (79.2%), and come from low socioeconomic areas (79.1%) (Remez, Singh and Prada, 2009). Other studies using DHS 1998-2006, found that for 2001 14.6-16% of girls in Nicaragua were married before the age of 15 (Clark, Bruce and Dude, 2006; World Vision, 2008). A report conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) showed that education is a significant predictor of age at first marriage. Of those who received no education or only received primary education, 63-69% were married or in union before the age of 18, compared to only 25% of those who received secondary education. The same held true for those living in rural impoverished areas versus urban areas (55% and 36%, respectively) (2012). These numbers make it apparent that early marriage in Nicaragua is an issue fueled by poverty, lack of education, and lack of opportunities.

Though young boys are also affected by the issue of early marriage, the numbers tend to be much lower. A study conducted by the Guttmacher Institute in 2008 using DHS data from 2001-2006 found that only 10% of 15-19 year old boys reported ever being in a union, in contrast to 30.4% of girls. However, for the boys who are in a union 95% are in a consensual union rather than a legal union 5%. Of all those 15-24 year old boys in union, 79% reported wanting to wait before having a child, compared to 86% of girls. The same study found that 25.4% of all the births in the past five years were from girls 15-19 years old, and 44.7% of these were unplanned. A total of 4.4% reported having their first child before the age of 15 and 28.1% before the age of 18. Close to half (47.9%) had their first child before the age of 20. Only 5.3% of girls and 7.3% of boys in unions reported using a condom at last sex (Remez *et al.*, 2008).

According to the WHO around 33% of maternal deaths in Nicaragua are to adolescents (WHO, 2006). This rate increases substantially to 70% in the Atlántico Sur, Atlántico Norte, Rio San Juan and Jinotega regions (Sequeira *et al.*, 2011). These same regions have the highest rates of early marriages. Atlántico Sur has the highest rate at 60%, closely followed by Atlántico Norte 59%, Rio San Juan 56%, Nueva Segovia 54%, and Jinotega 52% (UNFPA, 2012). An ICRW study found that the median age at marriage for girls in the regions mentioned above was 16 (ICRW, 2007). The same study reported that there were no programs in Nicaragua dedicated to combating the issue of child marriage (2007) despite it being the “hotspot” country for child marriage in Central America.

According to an UNFPA report using data from 2001 in Nicaragua, the Atlántico Sur and Atlántico Norte are regions where child marriage is highly prevalent. For example, the report found that 28% of 15-19 year olds are currently married or in union in both these regions. Likewise in Atlántico Norte, around 25% of girls were married before the age of 15 and 58.7% before turning 18. These are the highest rates in the country for marriage before 15 and Atlántico Sur has the highest rate of girls getting married before 18 (60.4%). Of those who were ever married, more than 80% in both regions reported ever being pregnant or currently having a child. The age gap between girls and their partner is also among the greatest in the country in Atlántico Norte and Atlántico Sur. Around 20% of all

girls who are married or in union have a partner that is 10 or more years older. Consequently, 34.4% of girls ages 15-24 in Atlántico Norte and 23.2% of girls in Atlántico Sur who were ever married reported never using any method of contraception.

Mexico

In 2010, 34.9% of the Mexican population consisted of adolescents (0-17) (La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2012). In terms of education, over 70% of both males and females complete secondary education (UNICEF, 2010; La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2012). Previous research in the area of early child marriage reveals strong associations between education and age at first union, which also indicates age at first birth (Semandari and Speizer, 2010; Juarez *et al.*, 2010; Remez *et al.*, 2008; Mathur, Greene, and Malhorta, 2003). In the case of Mexico, levels of education are significantly higher throughout the nation, and early marriage is less prevalent overall, compared to neighboring countries. In 2009 it was reported that 23% of girls under 18 were married, and in rural areas this number was 31% (UNICEF, 2010).

In the region of Guerrero, where the majority of 0-17 year olds (53.2%) live in urban areas (La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2011), early marriage among 15-17 year old girls hovers around 13.9% (REDIM, 2010), and adolescent fertility is as high as 77.6% (La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2012). The law in Guerrero stipulates the minimum age of marriages as 18 years of age, unless there are special circumstances or if parents or legal guardians grant permission for those who are as young as 16 to get married (Art. 412) (Appendix 3). Yet, 1.41% of 12-15 year old girls are married (REDIM, 2010).

Similar to Guerrero, the civil code in Oaxaca states that one must be at least 18 years of age to get married, unless one has permission from parents or legal guardians (Art. 147 and 148) (Appendix 3). Recent studies suggest that about 12.2% of 15-17 year olds were married (REDIM, 2010) and 54.4% gave birth (La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2011). Yet, what is most interesting about Oaxaca is that though the majority of 0-17 year olds (57%) live in rural areas (La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2011) and 57.6% of 16 year olds completed secondary school in 2010 (La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2012) the numbers for early births are still high. This is also the case for Guerrero, signaling a change in the pattern from neighboring countries in Central America where level of education and rural living has been closely linked to higher fertility rates among adolescents.

As expected, for boys the numbers of early marriage are much smaller. Among 15-17 year olds in Guerrero and Oaxaca 3.8% and 2.1% were married in 2006, and for 12-14 year olds 0.34% and 0.22% were married (REDIM, 2010). As these surveys have shown, early marriage in Mexico is not as high as in other areas of Central America, but surprisingly adolescent births are quite high with 56.1% giving birth between the ages of 15-17 in 2006. In certain regions of Mexico, such as Guerrero, there has been as much as a 10% increase in adolescence fertility from the previous year of study in 2009 (La Infancia Cuenta en Mexico, 2012). This increase in adolescent fertility may be due to the low levels of contraception use among adolescents in Mexico.

A study conducted by the Guttmacher Institute using national surveys from 1997 and 2006 found that nearly 50% of married Mexican adolescents ages 15-24 did not use any kind of contraceptive (modern or traditional) in 2006, and in rural areas the figure was 60% (Juarez *et al.*, 2010). More alarmingly, the rate of contraceptive use has decreased since 1997 steadily throughout the country. In 1997 in regions such as Oaxaca and Guerrero, the use of any contraceptive among adolescents was about 58%. In 2007 that number decreased to almost 50% (Juarez *et al.*, 2010). This same study reports that the level of unplanned pregnancies among married women is very high, and the rates at which adolescent women are having children has remained consistent since 1997, with about 8% having children before 17, and close to 30% before 20 (Juarez *et al.*, 2010). Though the use of contraceptives is very low throughout Mexico, HIV/AIDS prevalence is 0.1% (UNICEF, 2010). Overall, available data only accounts for marriage, and does not include rates of consensual unions which appears to be the pattern across Central America.

Review of relevant legal frameworks

In addition to the literature and data searches, we investigated the legal frameworks in each country that would have implications for the practice of child marriage in the country (Appendix 3). In nearly all countries, a civil code and a family code set the parameters for legal marriage in the country. However, in most cases, these codes can be overruled by permission from parents or guardians or by pregnancy. Further, it is common in these countries for the minimum age for legal matrimony to be younger for women than for men.

The laws on adolescent marriage vary by country, but the United Nations recommends that the age for legal marriage be 18 (WHRR, 2004). Though in more developing countries this recommendation has been implemented as the legal age for marriage without consent, various countries in Central America have exceptions that allow children under 18 to marry. For example, in the case of El Salvador those who are under 18 years legally marry if they have children or if the woman is pregnant (chapter 2, article 14) (Appendix 3). There is no mention for the need of parental consent or a minimum age of marriage. In other countries such as Guatemala the civil code states that, with parental consent, boys of 16 years and older and girls of 14 years and older may marry (Title 2, chapter 1, article 81 & 82) (Appendix 3).

Comparative minimum age for legal matrimony, by country

Country	Minimum age			
	Civil Code		Family code	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
El Salvador			18 years	
Guatemala	18 years		16 years	14 years
Honduras			21 years	
	14 years	12 years	18 years	16 years
Mexico	18 years			
	16	14		
Nicaragua	21 years	18 years	18 years	
	15 Years	14 Years	18 years	16 years

Interviews with experts

In the early stages of the study we began developing a database of key experts working on aspects of child marriage or issues closely related to child marriage in each of the project countries to serve as the foundation for the planned in-depth interviews that would characterize the second phase of the project.

Towards our second objective to, “document, from local networks in each country, the needs of married girls, the social norms around the practice of child marriage in communities, and resources available or required to address the problem at the local level”, early in the project, we sent an online survey to a long list of national and international experts. We intended to select, from the responses to this online survey, experts based on their specific expertise, perspective and knowledge about the subject area to participate in in-depth interviews. The invitation to the online survey indicated to experts that they had been contacted because they were believed to be working on issues related child marriage in the project country. After very minimal response to the online survey, we consulted local partners in Nicaragua and Guatemala to explore potential explanations for the lack of response. During these conversations, we discovered that child marriage or “matrimonios infantil” was not a familiar concept in Central America and Mexico. Further, that the practice of formal marriage was rare and it was more likely that young people, typically those experiencing an early pregnancy, form an informal partnership or early union. This perspective was corroborated with the data collected during our searches which is

summarized above. Based on this information we re-launched the online survey using the terminology “Early Unions” and re-approached experts for interviews.

A total of 40 experts in the field of early unions throughout Mexico and Central America participated in in-depth interviews in Spanish. The interviews focused on participant’s knowledge and opinions on the practice of early unions in their country of work. The majority of experts interviewed were women, over 50%, and most participants reported currently working in Guatemala (12). The rest of the participants were more or less equally distributed throughout Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In Mexico, our study focused on early unions in Oaxaca and Guerrero, specifically.

As many of the experts later explained, there is a significant difference between the conceptualization of early unions and child marriage in Central America and Mexico. Marriage implies a legal aspect, formalization through the law and often through religion. On the other hand, early unions are not legalized, they are culturally and socially recognized, but do not hold any legal or religious weight. However, this is just one of the many characteristics that set apart early unions from child marriage.

Experts in the field often described early unions as the simple act of leaving family homes to go live with a partner. “

...in Nicaragua, they don’t necessarily marry they just ‘get together’. These relationships increase gender inequality and bring with it all the repercussions already known, such as violence...Expert, Nicaragua.

Participants also often cited unplanned early pregnancies as the reasons for why early unions are brought about. For example, an expert in El Salvador said:

Early unions generally, are not through marriage, and they don’t always last, early unions many times, serve as protection for a girl who is pregnant.

As our expert noted, another characteristic of early unions is their temporality. Early unions often imply little commitment, and are not long lasting. This aspect of early unions is a product of the culture that requires a certain formality around the practices of premarital sex and pregnancy, though often sometimes it is also described as the will of young people, who decide to go live together on their own. Yet, as an expert in Mexico noted “[Early unions] are not brought about between adolescents only” meaning that in many cases in some countries, the majority of early unions occur between a young girl and a significantly older man. In Guatemala, for example, early unions between young girls and older men are brought about through what an expert describes as a “stolen wife”.

In the case of Guatemala, communities, Mayans, traditionally we have, two ways: stolen wife or requested wife. The stolen wife would serve as the example of a union or cohabitation that is initiated before the formalization of marriage through legal or religious means.

Bride theft has been defined as “the forceable abduction of a woman for the purpose of marriage, without her foreknowledge or consent and without the knowledge or consent of her parents or guardians” (Ayres, 1974). However, the same article states that bride theft can be enacted, meaning the bride and/or the parents have knowledge and consent of the abduction (Ayres, 1974).

A similar scenario was discussed with experts in other countries, who describe as a sale or an exchange of a young girl by the parents for stock and other goods. Other times, the girl would simply be given to the older man to take care of, because the parents could not provide for her. For example, in Nicaragua, an expert said that early unions often worked as a negotiation between the parents and an older “rich” man, “*they come to an agreement, almost like a sale*”. In some rural communities in Honduras, such as en la Mosquitia, many young girls ages 14 or 15 are “stolen” or “taken” from their home to engage in relationships with much older men. These pairings are not always formalized through marriage.

These specific circumstances were mostly discussed within the context of indigenous and poverty stricken groups. However, early unions in general were perceived as being concentrated in rural areas where poverty is high, indigenous groups and among Garifunas. As many experts throughout the region explained this is due to low socioeconomic status, lack of education and lack of access to information and services that are mostly seen in remote regions. For example, an expert from Oaxaca, Mexico said:

They are communities that because of the distance, transportation is terrible, no? There is no access to highways, there are no health services. Basically, the further, lets say “the city”, these communities of indigenous people are more likely to experience these kinds of practices [early unions].

However, other experts noted that the presence of early unions is not so much due to the region but really due to the high level of poverty that affects the entire country. Therefore, you can live in the city and still have cases of early unions. This is the case in El Salvador, where poverty is spread out through different regions of the country both in urban and rural settings.

El Salvador is such a tiny country, so small and it’s so similar in terms of its generalized poverty in rural areas...with a city where also the majority of people live in great poverty. Therefore, no, I can’t say, I don’t think that there is a great difference between regions of the country, or a particular region that draws attention, like an indigenous area in our country, for the high rates of early unions.

These observations are also in accordance with the main reasons perceived by experts for the occurrences of early unions. Overall, the experts we interviewed mostly perceived the main reasons of early unions throughout their country of work to be those concerning economic struggles, early pregnancy, and sexual violence. Economic reasons usually manifest themselves in the selling, exchange, and giving of young girls to financially compensate or alleviate the family’s economic situation. For example, in Mexico an expert said:

They can't support the son or daughter economically, no? Generally is the woman because of the idea that women were born to marry and have children, anyway. So what does it matter if she does it at 14 or 21 or until 25. The younger the better, because that's when she's young. Therefore, it's a cultural question of gender and economy, because since I [the parents] am not going to have the money to support her or take her to school, then it's best that she gets a husband now to support her.

In Mexico, early unions or child marriage takes place the poorest states, such as in Chiapas and Guerrero, where there is little economic opportunity and pervasive inequality. It was perceived by experts to be a problem in all parts of the state of Oaxaca. An expert in Nicaragua stated:

I think that early unions are very frequent in Latin America. It's higher than you would imagine. It is linked to two things: poverty and the indigenous population, above all. And where it is not, as in the case of El Salvador, it is not associated with the indigenous population, it is linked with early pregnancy.

An expert in Honduras concurred: *In Honduras, it is not considered like, they get married underage. Here, they get pregnant and there they stay, I guess.*

The same was expressed among other experts throughout the region, explaining that girls are “sold” because “it is one less mouth to feed” because “the girl is a weight on the family, an economic weight”. As some experts noted, in this sense the issue of early unions in Mexico and Central America is very similar to the issue of child marriage in Asia and Africa, the difference is the recognition that is given globally due to the subtle ways it manifests itself in this region of the world. For example, even among experts a common reason cited for early unions was “free will” among adolescents. It was sometimes even described as a manifestation of the empowered youth. In Guatemala, an expert said:

Here people are free, the constitution says it, we are free, therefore if they initiate this union first and then they marry. Even if the law says that [marriage] is at 20 years old, but if they found each other and there is an affinity between that couple, the law doesn't matter.

This draws attention to the normalization and acceptance of the problem in Mexico and Central America, it was often cited that adolescents would just decide to get married and that was it. In El Salvador, it is a common understanding that young women from poor backgrounds will get pregnant early and will then form a union at an early age. It is not viewed as a problem. On the contrary, it has become so common that it is expected and does not cause alarm.

It is not spoken of as a problem, because it is a situation that, it is a situation that has always existed. So the gravity of the problem is not noticed in terms of a violation of human rights that limits the development of young girls. Expert, Guatemala

...start to educate the population to understand that it is not normal or appropriate for girls to get pregnant so early. Because people have started to see it as something normal. So, start to work on educating to, to change this, this notion that people have that girls should be mothers from the age of 15... Expert, El Salvador

Yet, what this idea ignores is the various other factors that define adolescent's decisions, such as poverty which is linked to lack education and opportunities, cultural obligations such as legitimizing a pregnancy, and sexual violence, such as trying to "hide" a rape because of the social stigma the girl will have to endure. All of which, were also mentioned by experts throughout the country.

In El Salvador an expert said: *the majority of unions are the solutions to unplanned pregnancies or unwanted pregnancies in the majority of the cases to avoid that the family be criticized and the adolescent stigmatized...*

The perception of the experts interviewed is that sexual violence is at the center of many cases of early unions. In particular, there was the perception that sexual violence and particularly incest was more prevalent in rural, indigenous populations and among populations from African descent. In Guatemala, sexual violence in the home was considered the principal explanation for early pregnancy. Cases of sexual violence are also very rarely reported to the authorities, particularly in remote, rural areas where access to law enforcement and juridical authorities is difficult. In Nicaragua, one expert cited that about 10% of cases of sexual abuse are related to unions or marriage between a young woman and an older man.

In Honduras an expert said: *If a girl is raped then, they arrange it because well now you [the rapist] have to "marry" her...this is an arrangement made by the family because for the family this saves their honor, right, of the family and of the girl. Therefore if they marry that [the rape] doesn't carry the stigma.*

Often enough, the rape brings about the unwanted pregnancy, which leads to the early unions. Yet, it is accepted because the alternative would be a young single mother who was raped, and the stigma carried by this alternative is perceived as more detrimental to both the girl and the family.

When health personnel in a hospital encounter a pregnant woman under the age of 18, they are required to report it to the authorities. However, personnel only tend to report cases of very young women, such as women ages 10, 11 and 12. Even these cases are only reported if it is an obvious situation of sexual abuse or incest. After age 14, they are less likely to report the underage pregnancy, particularly if they attend with their partner.

In Honduras, a recently efforts have been made to link the health sector with the judicial sectors to address cases of sexual violence against women and minors. The *Modelo de Atención Integral*, help to coordinate the services offered to women who have been victims of sexual violence. The model integrates physical and psychological health services with law enforcement and the justice system. Women can enter the service through the health sector or the judicial sector and have access the range of relevant services. However, there

remains a need to provide sensitivity training to professionals in both sectors to allow them to provide a non-discriminatory service to women who attend.

However, as has been well-documented, early unions also have dire consequences for the young girl's reproductive health, education, and safety. Early unions imply early sexual intercourse, as well as lack of or inappropriate sex education, and lack of power and say in the negotiation of sex. Consequently, our results show that the main consequence experts foresee for adolescents in early unions is declining reproductive health, due to their lack of autonomy concerning sex. For example, in El Salvador an expert spoke to this matter:

The decisions are made for them, about their health, their body, their reproduction, their sexuality of course, that exposes them in terms of their health to big problems...Generally the younger the girl is, the greater the difference in age is in respects to their partner, therefore [they] have much more control, much more power over her, much more inequality in decision making.

This lack of autonomy also implies a higher risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease, higher rates of teen pregnancy, and a delay in sexual and physical development.

However, there are also social consequences to early unions, such as limited education, which experts mentioned most often.

...human trafficking. Because we see it in Guerrero, in fact. Migration forces girls to drop out of school, get into a couple, they are forced, it is obligatory, because it is the sale of girls." Expert, Mexico City, Mexico

Seasonal workers travel to the sugar plantations with their families and the young girls are vulnerable which is why it is common to see early pregnancy. The parents of the girl then feel obligated to marry the daughter. On the other hand, there is a lot of sexual abuse and to remedy the problem they marry the daughter with the person who sexually abused her..." Expert, Mexico

In Oaxaca, Mexico, one expert observed that many young people who enter early unions have not completed basic education and still lack maturity, both physical and emotional, to deal with the challenges they face with forming a home, a family and a relationship. Evidence suggests that completing secondary school protects against early pregnancy and early union. Guatemala has made strides in increasing the number of girls who complete primary education, but this still does not protect them from early union and early pregnancy.

Limited education is a cause for early unions, but often it is also the result of and what keeps these populations in a cycle of poverty. Yet, as we heard from most experts, due to the characteristics of early unions, discontinuation of education is one of the first events to occur, if it has not already. In Mexico an expert said:

Statistics about school dropouts, I think it is 90% or something like that, of the girls that become pregnant dropout of school, because from the start schools are not made to receive girls who are pregnant.

Similarly, some of obstacles defined by experts for the reduction and elimination of early unions was sexual health education, in conjunction with more educational opportunities in general for young people. Experts throughout the region expressed that hiding information about sex and contraceptives is putting adolescents at a disadvantage. In El Salvador an expert said:

In the center of the problem is the negation of sexuality. We have to give them, we have to teach them more...the children are growing without any defense; they are exposed to abuses and lies basically, to seductions and with very little life expectations, very little expectations for self-development.

In Guatemala, an expert highlighted the need for greater access to education and information as a main method for addressing early unions:

The other obstacle is, that an issue like this should not be seen as an isolated problem. Instead, it should be incorporated with other politics, especially those [politics] concerning access to information and education.

An expert from Oaxaca explained that in communities where early union is prevalent, there is a need for education, opportunities for communication with people from other areas and a general dearth of opportunities for young people to widen their horizons. This expert suggested that the only way to deter the practice is to provide young people with opportunities to develop a career, become professional and build economic prospects.

Overall, experts urged the understanding of early unions as an issue that has come about because of many other social problems, and has become a “good alternative” in the context of the lack of opportunities that are available. Though, early unions are not legally recognized, they should be addressed by the law. This sentiment, of needed government action in addressing early unions was also wide spread among the experts throughout the region. In Oaxaca, Mexico an expert explained:

The fundamental task it's in the discussion, in generating other positions from the view of the rights or the child, starting with the sensitizing [the public] to understand that these unions are not the best alternative.

Though sanctioned, often, local laws or international treaties to protect women are against early marriage and unions are not enforced.

It is worth noting that the state has been working towards a few on the international covenants or treaties that outline human rights and they are being ratified, but putting them in practice, in our country this is still not a reality. Expert, Honduras

An expert in El Salvador believed that strengthening the legal consequences for unions involving a minor would improve the situation, but the population needs to be informed. Especially young girls in school need to be educated about their human rights and how to exercise them.

Brief seminar survey

To fulfill our third objective to “*share results of this exploratory study on child marriage with key stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers and donors in each of the five project countries included in the study*”, we organized and held five in-country seminars throughout the month of August (El Salvador, 14 August; Nicaragua, 16 August; Mexico, 19 August; Guatemala, 23 August; and Honduras, 27 August) to disseminate the results of the desk-based research, online survey and in-depth interviews to audiences of up to 30 key stakeholders. At each seminar, each participant received a folder of materials including: the country-specific program agenda, list of participants and fact sheet, information on Population Council’s *Abriendo Oportunidades* program, a copy of *Girls on the Move: Adolescent Girls and Migration in the Developing World*, and a short self-completion questionnaire. Before the seminar began, we requested that participants complete the short self-completion questionnaire in their folder.

We received a total of 87 surveys (1 missing) to experts in the subject of child marriage, throughout all the project countries. The majority of participants were women (82.8%) and most worked and reported having most experience in Guatemala (31.0% and 27.6%), respectively. Only two participants reported their country of work and country of most experience outside of the studied region (Belize and Panama) (Table 1).

In Mexico, 5.3% of experts reported that the practice of early unions does not occur in their region. With the exception of Mexico and Nicaragua, most experts (62.8%) reported that early unions in their country usually take place between an adult and a minor (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the legal age of marriage perceived by participants in their country of work. Those who work in Guatemala reported the legal age of marriage for girls to be 14 (40.7%) and for boys 16 (51.9%). Yet, according to Guatemala’s civil code the legal age of marriage for both male and female is 18. Though, it is also stated that a girl of 14 and a boy of 16 may get married if they receive consent from a parent or guardian (Art. 89) (Appendix 3). Interestingly, the second highest responses for the legal age of boys and girls was 18 with a response rate of 30%. Only 3.7% of participants reported not knowing the legal age of marriage for either boys or girls.

Likewise, civil and family codes in El Salvador (Art. 14), Mexico (Art. 147 and 148), Honduras (Art. 16) and Nicaragua (Title ii, Chapter I, Art. 100) state that the legal age of marriage is at 18 or 21 (Appendix 3). Correspondingly, most experts from El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua also listed 18 or 21 as the legal age of marriage for girls and boys in their country. However, as it is the case for experts in Guatemala, most experts in Mexico listed 14 (girls) and 16 (boys) as the legal age of marriage. Though the legal age in both Oaxaca and Guerrero is 18 for boys and girls, 0% reported this to be the legal age. Equally, 0% of participants in Mexico reported not knowing the legal age (Table 3).

The results of this survey also showed expert's opinion on which populations are most at risk (Table 4), the main reasons for early unions in the given country (Table 5), the major risk factors for early unions (Table 6), and the consequences it carries (Table 7). In Guatemala, 96.3% of experts reported rural populations to be most at risk, along with those living in poverty (85.2%) and indigenous populations (81.5%). The three most cited reasons for why children enter early unions were teen pregnancy (85.2%), to hide a rape (70.4%) and because of economic reasons (63.0%). Similarly, the major risk factors perceived by participants were also teen pregnancy (88.9%) and poverty (85.2%). Consequently, the most cited consequences of early unions were maternal mortality (85.2%), pregnancy/birth complications (81.5%) and interruption of psycho-social development (81.5%).

These results were very similar for the rest of the countries involved. Participants working throughout the rest of the region reported that rural (89.5%), those living in poverty (83.7%), and indigenous populations (64.0%), were most at risk of experiencing early unions (Table 4). Comparable to Guatemala, experts working in El Salvador reported economic reasons, teen pregnancy, and hiding a rape as the main reasons for why children enter into early unions. However, the rest of the region did not perceive hiding a rape as one of the three main reasons, but rather culture and customs (48.8%), along with economic reasons (69.8%) and teen pregnancy (83.7%) (Table 5). As perceived by experts in Guatemala, experts throughout the region also perceived teen pregnancy and poverty as the main risk factors of early unions, with an overall rate of 84.9% and 74.4%, respectively (Table 6). Equally cited throughout the region were the consequences of early unions. Overall, participants reported maternal mortality (79.1%), pregnancy/birth complications (82.6%), and interruption of psycho-social development (89.5%) as the main consequences of early unions (Table 7).

Half of participants reported that laws against early unions can reduce the prevalence of early unions in their country of work, 5.8% were unsure (Table 8). Correspondingly, lack of policy implementation was reported as second greatest obstacle in the reduction of early unions (60.5%) throughout all the regions. The number one cited obstacle among all the countries was limited education for adolescents (87.2%) (Table 9). Consequently, 68.6% of all respondents reported programs to prevent school drop-out as an intervention that has the potential to reduce the prevalence of early unions. Comprehensive sex education and dissemination of information of the consequences of early unions through media were also cited by experts as possible interventions, 94.2% and 84.9% respectively. More severe legal consequences was the least reported intervention to reduce early unions (Table 10).

Recommendations from seminars

For each one-day seminar, after the Population Council presentation of the study results, 2-3 experts who were interviewed during phase 2 of the study were invited to present their perspective on the problem of child marriage in their country. At the end of each seminar, we held a dynamic session to discuss with participants the next steps that should be taken in terms of research, intervention and legislation to address the problem of child marriage in the project country. We summarize their responses below.

El Salvador

Research

- The next key step is to actually speak to young women who have experienced early marriage and early unions. Case studies would be a good approach.
- More research is needed to generally understand the reality of being a young person in El Salvador.
- It is important to quantify and assess the difference in terms of the characteristics and consequences by age.
- There is overall dearth in qualitative and quantitative data on the issue in the country.
- There is a need to better understand the role of “pandilla” gangs in early unions. How do you make the information about violence more visible in the community and among key stakeholders including the government? How do you ensure that health providers report violence that they encounter with young women?
- Explore the high rates of suicide among youth to better understand why the rates are high and increasing.
- There is no data available for young people younger than 15 years old.
- More data is needed to determine the age of partners of the young women.
- Research findings, such as these, should be widely disseminated.
- Investigate the determinants of early sex.

Intervention

- It is important to educate providers as they are also part of the barrier. Because of religious reasons they do not offer information on contraception to young people.
- Hospitals should be made to recognize that young mothers are still adolescents and should not be treated as adults.
- All physicians should be required to have some knowledge of sexual and reproductive health
- The Ministry of Education should be pressured to offer mandatory sex education in schools.
- Young people need to be made aware of their rights: pregnancies and births that are not in risk; the right to decide how many children you have; and the right to enjoy your sexual health and life.
- Mechanisms for protected young girls who are being sexually abused in the home need to be developed.
- Provide contraceptive methods to young people younger than 15 years old.
- Conduct a study to determine how much sexual violence is implicated in pregnancies among women under the age of 14.
- Expressions of outrage at the practice need to become more prevalent in advocacy efforts.
- Perhaps change the topic to early sexual behavior rather than the focus on early marriage and unions.
- Young people should be made aware that early marriage and early union is a crime perhaps through campaigns and messages at the community level.

- Work with other organizations to link all these issues together, particularly youth organizations.
- Need to change the view in the culture with regard to the number of children a family should have.
- Discuss with the church the experience of the young people who have children and get married early.

Legislation

- The issue should be prioritized in government departments; including all sectors, not just health.
- It is important to note that harder sentences do not prevent sexual violence or early unions.
- The public needs to understand the laws against early marriage and union that already exist

Guatemala

Research

- Develop a deeper understanding of the barriers to sex education.
- Further investigate the cultural factors that are implicated in the practice.
- Explore why teenage pregnancy is increasing when they do have sex education in the country. Who are the people who are not being impacted by sex education?
- Determine which areas are most effected and direct energies towards them.
- Develop studies to specifically demonstrate the effects of early unions and pregnancies.
- Humanize existing data; what kind of support do these women need?

Intervention

- The focus should be on all young people, not just rural and indigenous.
- Present family planning at the community level and not just individually to allow greater access to young people.
- Address the low-self esteem associated with being from a ethnic community.
- De-naturalize and de-culturalize early marriage, union and pregnancy.
- Return to Mayan belief and culture that would not support early unions.
- There is sufficient research. What are needed are national level programs.
- Develop mechanisms to increase collaboration between both the health and education government departments.
- Develop and inventory of the strategies that already exist and make better use of these.
- Use radio spots to distribute information about early marriage and early unions to the community in the language of the target population.

Legislation

- Government officials themselves should be made more aware of the relevant laws.
- Encourage the practice of offering the option of adoption for teenage parents. Lawyers currently do not give young people this option and they are forced into a union.

Honduras

Research

- The questions on this issue must be further defined: Is it a problem or is it cultural?
- Explore the impact of masculinity and macho culture in the practice.
- Research is conducted, but more of it needs to be published.
- Collect and annual data on violence; different agencies often have different findings.
- Develop a mechanism for increasing access to existing government data.
- The research is too concentrated in rural areas. Studies are also needed in urban areas.
- Develop better indicators of the practice; too much is based on perceptions.
- Create a definition of the issue that better suits the region. This will facilitate better research.

Intervention

- Any response to this problem must be multi-factoral.
- The family needs to be supported to teach their young people to not be taken advantage of and not to have children or get into a union early.
- Encourage families to report sexual violence that occurs in the home.
- Create and encourage the continuation of a network of professionals working on early marriage and union.
- Develop strategies for confronting religious fundamentalists who prevent the delivery of sex education in schools.
- The Garifuna community must be part of the development of any strategies. If not, they will resist anything the government suggests.
- Develop a critical pathway for young people who have experienced sexual violence.
- Increase information about emergency contraception is used and make it available for all young women who have experienced a rape.
- Work with the entire family, not just the young person.
- Focus on the pregnancy, not the union; but add early union to the list of things to discuss during conversations about sex education and prevention. Focus on the prevention of early sex and not early union.
- Share information on early unions with health providers.

Legislation

- Political will around this topic needs to be generated.
- The Congress does not cover the topic because it is not seen as important
- Reassess some of the programs that create an incentive to becoming a mother
- Encourage decision makers to work directly with young people to make sure they make the right decisions in Congress.
- Need to raise awareness about the laws that already exist and force the government to heed.

Mexico (Oaxaca and Guerrero)

Research

- Investigate the problem at the level of the middle and upper middle classes.
- Re-assess the term “early union”. Does it truly capture the problem? It does not problematize the type of union, only the age.
- Collect more detailed information about the difference in age between the young woman and the man she forms a union with.
- Explore why certain states have a lower legal age of marriage than others and the ages for girls has been lower than for boys.
- Disseminate information to politicians and NGOs to support activism.
- Work in collaboration with other organizations.
- Develop qualitative studies to further understand the practice and look at the different contexts in which it happens.
- Analyze the quantitative data that is already available from the government.

Intervention

- Distribute information on early marriage and union to the entire community, including men, not just young women.
- Broaden young people’s perspectives on the options and opportunities available.
- The focus on indigenous culture is discriminatory. Broaden the focus.
- Give workshops to women and girls in the community about their rights.
- Increase access to contraceptive methods for young people.

Legislation

- There is a need to have a clear separation between “usos y costumbres” and human trafficking in the law.
- Standardize the Federal age across all the states in the country.
- Legislate consequences, based on international declarations and pressure the Mexican government to comply with international declarations.
- Stop the practice of stopping pregnant young people from attending school.
- Allow providers to offer young people contraceptive methods without the permission from their parents

Nicaragua

Research

- When documenting cases of teenage pregnancy, record the age of the partner.
- Develop a database of national level indicators.
- Disseminate research evidence widely.
- The legal part is clear and the health part is clear but we are missing the social aspect and the cultural aspect. How do we understand more about how it manifests and how it might be changed?

Intervention

- Construct different responses for rural areas versus urban areas.
- Develop a better definition of the topics and a consensus of the issue that is being promoted.
- Help young people to enjoy their sexuality.
- Change the perception among providers that they cannot offer contraceptives to young people.
- Include boys in the discussion of early pregnancy and early unions.
- Need to change that young people and the culture think that it is normal for young people become pregnant at a young age.
- Support an increase in conversation and communication between young men and young women and focus on gender equality.
- Create campaigns to make people understand that this is inappropriate, working with the community to spread the message.
- Create messages for parents using television and radio.
- Encourage young people to attend health services.

Legislation

- Enforce a separation between church and state.
- Encourage legislation that would make it illegal for an older man to marry or create a union with underage women.

Conclusions

As set planned, this exploratory study has taken the first steps to better understand the phenomenon of child marriage in four countries in Central America and two states in Mexico. The key finding observed in this process is that in these countries formal marriages are uncommon among adolescents and young people. It is far more customary for young people to form unions for short periods of time. In fact the term, “child marriage” was not understood. Additionally, while there are laws in all of the project countries that prohibit the formal marriage of adolescents and young people, but in nearly all cases, parental or guardian consent or pregnancy can overrule the law. Further, though laws exist they are not typically implemented. Early pregnancy has been normalized and young people often experience significant pressure from their families to marry or form an informal union as a result of the pregnancy. In addition to the known health consequences of early pregnancy and early marriage or union, experts have begun to note and increase psychological consequences such as depression, suicide and the abuse of alcohol and/or drugs. There is significant lack of awareness about the magnitude of problem, little implementation of laws and interventions to address it, and minimal political will to rectify the situation. In contrast to the antecedents of the problem in other regions, child marriage or early union in Central America and Mexico is practiced as a response to another “problem”, such as early pregnancy or violence, as mechanism for improving what is perceived to be a negative social or economic situation. New interventions aiming to address child marriage, *per se*, will not tackle the root of the problem. Strengthening programs to reduce early pregnancy, improve gender equality and increase access to education and opportunities for economic

development is more likely to impact upon the practice. Child marriage and early union should be considered an important indicator of overall vulnerability and disadvantage, and program providers should include child marriage in their screening and assessment activities.

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Table 1. *Descriptive information on Experts in Early Unions.*

	(n)	(%)
Sex		
Male	14	16.1
Female	72	82.8
Country of Work		
Guatemala	27	31.0
El Salvador	19	21.8
Mexico	19	21.8
Honduras	20	23.0
Nicaragua	14	16.1
Other	2	2.3
Country of most experience		
Guatemala	24	27.6
El Salvador	16	18.4
Mexico	18	20.7
Honduras	17	19.5
Nicaragua	10	11.5
Other	2	2.3
Total	86	100%

Table 2. *Difference in Ages Between Boys and Girls Who Enter Into Union According to Experts in their country of work.*

	Difference in ages between boy and girl entering into union (%)		
	Two minors	An adult and a Minor	Practice does not occur
Guatemala	40.7	88.9	0
El Salvador	31.6	57.9	0
Mexico	73.7	36.8	5.3
Honduras	45.0	85.0	0
Nicaragua	78.6	57.1	0
Other	50.0	100	0
Overall	53.5	62.8	1.2

Table 3. Legal Age of Marriage of Boys and Girls According to Experts in Their Country of Work.

	Legal age of marriage (%)							
	13	14	15	16	17	18	21	Don't Know
Guatemala								
Girls	14.8	40.7	11.1	0	0	29.6	0	3.7
Boys	3.7	3.7	3.7	51.9	0	33.3	0	3.7
El Salvador								
Girls	15.8	0	10.5	10.5	5.3	47.4	0	5.3
Boys	10.5	0	0	21.1	5.3	52.6	0	5.3
Mexico								
Girls	36.8	47.4	15.8	0	0	0	0	0
Boys	15.8	21.1	0	52.6	10.5	0	0	0
Honduras								
Girls	15	5	105	10	10	15	30	5
Boys	5	5	5	15	0	40	25	5
Nicaragua								
Girls	7.1	0	14.3	21.4	0	57.1	0	0
Boys	0	0	0	21.4	0	7.1	71.4	0
Other								
Girls	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Boys	50	0	0%	50	0	0	0	0
Overall								
Girls	15.1	25.6	5.8	8.1	3.5	30.2	7.0	3.5
Boys	5.8	7.0	2.3	29.1	3.5	30.2	17.4	3.5

Table 4. *Perceived Populations at Risk According to Experts in Their Country of Work.*

	Perceived Populations at Risk					
	Rural	Indigenous	Urban	The Poor	None	Other Pop
Guatemala	96.3%	81.5%	14.8%	85.2%	0%	11.1%
El Salvador	89.5%	15.8%	15.8%	94.7%	0%	5.3%
Mexico	68.4%	84.2%	5.3%	52.6%	0%	10.5%
Honduras	95%	70%	35%	95%	0%	0%
Nicaragua	92.9%	57.1%	28.6%	85.7%	0%	7.1%
Other	50%	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%
Overall	89.5%	64.0%	19.8%	83.7%	1.25	9.3%

Table 5. *Perceived Reasons for Early Unions According to Experts in Their Country of Work.*

	Perceived Reasons for Early Unions							
	Hide premarital sex	Economic reasons	Interfamily Violence	Teen Pregnancy	Culture and Customs	Hide Rape	Will of their own	Other Reason
Guatemala	40.7%	63.0%	40.7%	85.2%	51.9%	70.4%	11.1%	3.7%
El Salvador	36.8%	89.5%	36.8%	84.2%	26.3%	42.1%	10.5%	10.5%
Mexico	26.3%	57.9%	52.6%	78.9%	78.9%	15.8%	5.3%	0%
Honduras	40.0%	75.0%	35.0%	85.05	50.0%	30.0%	20.05	0%
Nicaragua	28.6%	71.4%	28.6%	85.7%	64.3%	28.6%	0%	7.1%
Other	0%	50.0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%	0%	50.0%	0%
Overall	33.7%	69.8%	41.9%	83.7%	48.8%	39.5%	9.3%	3.5%

Table 6. *Perceived Majors Risk Factors for Early Unions According to Experts in Their Country of Work.*

	Major Risk Factors for Early Unions						
	Lack of Opportunities	Interfamily Violence	Teen Pregnancy	Poverty	Religion	Tradition and Culture	Other Factors
Guatemala	59.3%	74.1%	88.9%	85.2%	22.2%	55.6%	0%
El Salvador	63.2%	57.9%	94.7%	68.4%	10.5%	36.8%	5.3%
Mexico	63.2%	57.9%	73.7%	63.2%	10.5%	47.4%	0%
Honduras	80.0%	55.0%	90.05	90.0%	20.0%	45.0%	10.0%
Nicaragua	78.6%	57.2%	92.95	78.6%	14.3%	57.1%	0%
Other	50.0%	50.0%	100%	100%	0%	50.0%	0%
Overall	70.9%	59.3%	84.9%	74.4%	14.0%	47.7%	3.5%

Table 7. Perceived Consequences of Early Unions According to Experts in Their Country of Work.

	Perceived Consequences of Early Unions					
	Maternal Mortality	Pregnancy and birth complications	Interruption of psycho-social development	STIs	HIV/AIDS	Other Consequences
Guatemala	85.2%	81.5%	81.5%	70.4%	48.1%	7.4%
El Salvador	84.2%	89.5%	100%	47.4%	42.1%	26.3%
Mexico	73.75	68.4%	84.2%	15.8%	15.8%	10.5%
Honduras	80.0%	85.0%	90.0%	70.0%	55.0%	25.0%
Nicaragua	64.3%	85.7%	85.7%	57.1%	57.1%	21.4%
Other	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Overall	79.1%	82.6%	89.5%	48.8%	41.9%	12.8%

Table 8. Perceived Impact of Laws on the Reduction of Early Unions According to Experts in Their Country of Work.

	Perceived Impact of Laws on the Reduction of Early Unions		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
Guatemala	77.8%	18.5%	0%
El Salvador	57.9%	36.8%	5.3%
Mexico	26.3%	68.4%	5.3%
Honduras	25.0%	55.0%	10.0%
Nicaragua	50.0%	35.7%	7.1%
Other	0%	100%	0%
Overall	50.0%	39.5%	5.8%

Table 9. *Perceived Obstacles in the Reduction of Early Union Rates According to Experts in Their Country of Work.*

	Obstacles that Prevent Rates of Early Unions to Decrease							
	Norm of Practice	Limited Education for adolescents	Norm of early pregnancy	Prohibition of abortion	Lack of a regulatory legal frame	Lack of policy implementation	Lack of organizations focusing on the problem	Other
Guatemala	48.1%	88.9%	48.1%	29.6%	22.2%	59.3%	40.7%	11.1
El Salvador	47.4%	94.7%	73.7%	36.8%	10.5%	63.2%	55.6%	15.8
Mexico	47.4%	78.9%	36.8%	47.4%	21.1%	63.2%	42.1%	21.1
Honduras	35.0%	85.0%	40.0%	30.0%	20.0%	65.0%	50.0%	15.0
Nicaragua	35.7%	78.6%	64.3%	35.7%	7.1%	50.0%	50.0%	21.4
Other	0%	50.0%	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%	0%
Overall	45.3%	87.2%	51.2%	33.7%	19.8%	60.5%	45.9%	19.8

Table 10. *Interventions that are Perceived to Reduce Rates of Early Unions According to Experts in Their Country of Work.*

	Interventions to Reduce Rates of Early Unions					
	Programs to prevent school drop-out	Comprehensive Sex-education	Stricter laws against early unions	More severe legal consequences	Information through media of the consequences of early unions	Other Interventions
Guatemala	70.4%	88.9%	59.3%	55.6%	85.2%	22.2%
El Salvador	73.4%	94.7%	42.1%	26.3%	100%	10.5%
Mexico	78.9%	94.7%	42.1%	10.5%	63.2%	26.3%
Honduras	55.0%	85.0%	25.0%	20.0%	85.0%	20.0%
Nicaragua	50.0%	78.6%	42.9%	14.3%	85.7%	21.4%
Other	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Overall	68.6%	94.2%	44.2%	26.7%	84.9%	22.1%

Appendix 1a. General databases with variables exploring child marriage

Source of Database	Name of Database	Year	Key Variables
UNICEF	Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice	2005	Proportion of women aged 20-24 married by 18 by country, household wealth, type of union (polygynous, monogamous), age difference between spouses, and spousal education gap
UNICEF	Progreso para la Infancia: Un balance sobre la mortalidad materna	2008	Adolescent fertility by region of the world, and in countries within regions
Guttmacher Institute	Facts on the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Adolescent Women in the Developing World	2010	Age of first sexual encounter, by sex and urban/rural area of residents; early marriage by sex, educational attainment, and urban residence; adolescent maternity by educational attainment, SES, relationship status; unmet need for family planning; knowledge of HIV and risk factors
UNICEF	Progress for Children: A Report Card for Adolescents	2012	% of girls and women aged 15-19 married/in union by world region; % of adolescents who have had sex before age 15, by world region and sex; early childbearing by country; skilled birth attendance by age of mother; HIV knowledge by region and sex; spousal violence amongst adolescent girls; justification for wife beating, by region and sex

Appendix 1b. Country-specific databases with variables exploring child marriage

Country	Source of Database	Name of Database	Year	Key Variables
El Salvador	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	1985	Place of residency (department, municipality); respondent's background; history of pregnancies; marital status; sexual activity; partner's background
	Asociación Demográfica Salvadoreña	National Family Health Survey - Encuesta Nacional de Salud Familiar (FESAL)	1985	Marital status according to place of residency (urban rural, metropolitan); age group; age of first union according to age; risk of pregnancy according to age and marital status
	Ministerio de Economía, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos	VI Population Census, V Household - VI Censo de Población V de Vivienda	2007	Marital status by age and place of residency
	USAID	National Family Health Survey - Encuesta Nacional de Salud Familiar (FESAL)	2008	School drop-out according to reason and age; age difference between couple; age of first sexual relationship, union, birth, according to place of residency, education, welfare; marital status by age (current age, trend 1993-2008); by place of residency (education, welfare); respondent's background; history of pregnancies; sexual activity; reproductive health; domestic violence; knowledge of STDs; partner's background (age, occupation)
	Guttmacher Institute	Fact sheet about the sexual and reproductive health of Salvadorean youth - Datos sobre la salud sexual y reproductiva de la juventud salvadoreña	2008	Age of first sexual encounter, by sex and urban/rural area of residents; early marriage by sex, educational attainment, and urban residence; adolescent maternity by educational attainment, SES, relationship status; unmet need for family planning; knowledge of HIV and risk factors
Guatemala	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	1998-99	Respondent's background; place of residency by department, municipality; contraceptive use; history of pregnancies; marital status; sexual activity; partner's background

	National Institute of Statistics - Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)	National Maternal and Child Health Survey - Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil (ENSMI)	1998-99	Fertility by age group by various sociodemographic variables; knowledge and use of modern contraceptive methods by residence, ethnic group, and educational attainment; marital status; age at first union and sexual relation by residence, ethnic group, and educational attainment
	Guttmacher Institute	Early marriage in Guatemala: A constant challenge - Maternidad temprana en Guatemala: Un desafío constante	2006	Marital status, age of first pregnancy, contraceptive knowledge and use, and age at first sexual encounter by place of residence, educational attainment, and ethnic group
	Guttmacher Institute	Fact sheet about the sexual and reproductive health of Guatemalan youth - Datos sobre la salud sexual y reproductiva de la juventud guatemalteca	2008	Age of first sexual encounter, by sex and urban/rural area of residents; early marriage by sex, educational attainment, and urban residence; adolescent maternity by educational attainment, SES, relationship status; unmet need for family planning; knowledge of HIV and risk factors
	National Institute of Statistics - Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)	5th National Maternal and Child Health Survey - V Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil (ENSMI)	2008-09	Marital status by age and place of residence (rural, urban); marital status trends among women aged 15-49 (1987-2009); age of first sexual relationship, union, birth (by age, area, education, welfare); area of residency by department, municipality; history of pregnancies; contraceptive use; marital status; sexual activity; partner's background; domestic violence
Honduras	Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM)	Women in Statistics: Socioeconomic Indicators around the Situation of Honduran Women - Mujeres en Cifras: Indicadores socioeconómicos de la situación de las mujeres hondureñas	2004	Fertility by age group; modern contraceptive use by educational level; rate of domestic work by age group for men and women
	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	2005-06	Respondent's background; place of residency by department, municipality; history of pregnancies; contraceptive use; marital status; sexual activity; partner's background (age); domestic violence

	National Institute of Statistics - Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)	National Reproductive Health Survey - Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud (ENDESA)	2005-06	Marital status by residential area (rural, urban) and age; age of first sexual relationship, union, birth (by age, area, department, education, welfare)
	Guttmacher Institute	Early marriage in Honduras: A constant challenge - Maternidad temprana en Honduras: Un desafío constante	2006	Marital status, age of first pregnancy, contraceptive knowledge and use, and age at first sexual encounter by place of residence, educational attainment, and ethnic group.
	Guttmacher Institute	Fact sheet about the sexual and reproductive health of Honduran youth - Datos sobre la salud sexual y reproductiva de la juventud hondureña	2008	Age of first sexual encounter, by sex and urban/rural area of residence; early marriage by sex, educational attainment, and urban residence; adolescent maternity by educational attainment, SES, relationship status; unmet need for family planning; knowledge of HIV and risk factors
	UNFPA	UNFPA Child Marriage Profiles: Honduras	2010	Early marriage by place of residence, educational attainment level, and wealth index quintiles
	Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)	National Survey of Demography and Health 2011-2012 - Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud 2011-2012	2011	Fertility by educational attainment level; modern contraceptive use and knowledge of HIV by region
Mexico	DHS/ENFES	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	1987	Place of residency (municipality, delegation); respondent's background; history of pregnancies; contraceptive use; pregnancy risk; data on household members
	Ministry of Health - Secretaría de Salud (SSA)	National Reproductive Health Survey - Encuesta Nacional sobre Fecundidad y Salud (ENFES)	1987	Marital status according to age, place of residency; age of first union; risk of pregnancy by age and marital status.
	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI)	Marriage and households - Nupcialidad, hogares y viviendas	2009	Marital status by age group and size of place of residence (in thousands); civil partnership by age group and differential educational level of women and men; domestic work by sex and age group

	National Institute of Statistics and Geography - Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI)	Censo de población y vivienda (INEGI. Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010: Tabulados del Cuestionario Básico)	2010	Marital status according to state, age, sex, religious or civil marriage
	Guttmacher Institute	Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Adolescents in Mexico: Challenges and Opportunities - Las Necesidades de Salud Sexual y Reproductiva de las Adolescentes en México: Retos y Oportunidades	2010	Educational attainment of women by area of residence (urban vs. rural); % of women 20-24 who had had sex, were married, and had a child at 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 years of age; modern contraceptive use and unmet need amongst girls and women 15-24 by marital status and place of residence (urban vs. rural)
	Red por los derechos de la infancia	Adolescents in Mexico: Regional overview of their rights - Las y los adolescentes en México: Miradas regionales sobre sus derechos	2011	% of population <i>not</i> single by age group (12 to 14, 15 to 17) and region; adolescent motherhood by region; % of 16-year-olds who have completed secondary school by region; economic activity in adolescents by region
Nicaragua	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)	2001	Respondent's background; place of residency by department, municipality, district; contraceptive use; history of pregnancies; marital status; sexual activity; partner's background; knowledge of HIV
	National Information and Development Institute - Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE)	Nicaragua Reproductive Health Survey - Encuesta Nicaragüense de Demografía y Salud (ENDESA)	2001	Marital status by area (rural, urban), department, age, sex; age of first sexual relationship, union, birth (by age, area, department, education)
	National Information and Development Institute - Instituto Nacional de	Demographic and Household Survey - VIII Censo de Población y IV de Vivienda	2005	Marital status by area, municipality, age, sex

	Información de Desarrollo (INIDE)			
	Guttmacher Institute	Early marriage in Nicaragua: A constant challenge - Maternidad temprana en Nicaragua: Un desafío constante	2006	Marital status, age of first pregnancy, contraceptive knowledge and use, and age at first sexual encounter by place of residence, educational attainment, and ethnic group.
	National Information and Development Institute - Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE)	Nicaragua Reproductive Health Survey - Encuesta Nicaragüense de Demografía y Salud (ENDESA)	2006-07	Marital status by area, department, age, sex
	Guttmacher Institute	Fact sheet about the sexual and reproductive health of Nicaraguan youth - Datos sobre la salud sexual y reproductiva de la juventud nicaragüense	2008	Age of first sexual encounter, by sex and urban/rural area of residents; early marriage by sex, educational attainment, and urban residence; adolescent maternity by educational attainment, SES, relationship status; unmet need for family planning; knowledge of HIV and risk factors
	UNFPA	UNFPA Child Marriage Profiles: Nicaragua	2010	Early marriage by place of residence, educational attainment level, and wealth index quintiles
	Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE)	Nicaraguan Demographic and Health Survey 2011/2012 - Encuesta Nicaragüense de Demografía y Salud 2011/2012	2011/2012	Fertility by age group and region of residence; modern contraceptive use by place of residence (urban vs. rural); prenatal and labor & delivery care and % live births by age group; modern contraceptive use by region and age group

Appendix 3. Legal frameworks that have implications for child marriage in project countries (English translation)

From the legal point of view, there are two different parameters contained within legislation on child marriage that, on the one hand, condemn child marriage, and on the other sanction it.

Below we analyze civil codes (called in some cases “family codes”) in order to understand the concepts around marriage, minimum age for contracting marriage, as well as the requirements in each project country. Additionally, we will look at other conventions practiced by the countries chosen for this study, as well as special laws on the rights of children and adolescents.

This will allow us to understand the extent to which the rights of children and adolescents are violated when they marry at such a young age. Every time a minimum age for marriage is established—although it can be changed with the parents’ permission, or if the female is pregnant—it protects the “uses and customs” which permit arranged marriages in children, cases in which girls (particularly in indigenous communities) are forced into marriages.

Republic of Nicaragua

Definition

Article 94 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Nicaragua: "Marriage is a solemn contract by which a man and a woman are joined for the duration of their lifespan, having the object of procreation and mutual help."

Article 47 of the Family Code: Marriage is the voluntary union of a man and a woman, constituted by the free and mutual consent of intending spouses with legal aptitude for it, in order to make and share a life in common and form a family based on solidarity and mutual respect. Marriage shall take legal effect from the moment of its celebration and must be registered in the Registry of the Civil Status of Persons, pursuant to this code.

The marriage is voluntary, *i.e.* two (male-female) people decide to marry, without any pressure, and acknowledge both the legal and emotional consequences that are involved marriage. This decision is expressed by means of each member’s consent.

Legal capacity for marriage should be understood as the same as the capacity to understand a legal act, that is, be subjects under the law.

Minimum age

In the Civil Code of the Republic of Nicaragua, we find two assumptions in article 100 that establish the minimum age for marriage:

"A man of 21 years or older, and a woman of 18 years or older, may freely marry."

This statement contradicts itself in article 101 of the Civil Code:

"A male of 15 years and a woman of 14 years may be married."

Analyzing the articles transcribed above, we notice a large discrepancy between them. One specifies a set of requirements for marriage between 18- and 21-year-olds, and the other speaks of the ability of 14- and 15-year-olds to marry, which clearly denotes a violation of the rights of children and adolescents, mainly the right to "form a family," referred to in the Political Constitution of the Republic of Nicaragua, and which should be interpreted as the right to choose the time in which they are going to marry.

Also the Family Code defines the age for marriage, establishing that women and men of 18 years-of-age are legally eligible for marriage. However, children of 18- and 16-years-old (of either sex) can obtain permission to get married, granted by the minors' legal representatives.

The Family Code also makes reference in article 51 to barriers that would prevent adolescents from marrying: "Minors under 16-years-old"

Requirements

Those who want to get married must have previously submitted the following documents:

- a) Birth certificate of the applicants;
- b) Identity card of the applicants;
- c) Application of marriage wherein shall be entered their names and last names and those of their parents, profession or office, place of birth of each one of them and residence or domicile;
- d) Two suitable, properly identified witnesses who under the law testify that the two applicants are free to marry. Relatives are allowed to testify against this matter;
- e) The test of widowhood if one of the spouses has been married;
- f) Certification of the dissolution of the marriage or of the civil union, if any of the contracting parties had been married or in a civil union, or testimony, with the declaration of dissolution by mutual consent duly registered;
- g) Deed stating the very special power to request and/or contract marriage; the certificate of bachelorship extended by the Central Registry of Persons; certificate of birth of any children that need to be recognized in their case;
- h) Identification of legal guardians authorizing the marriage, when appropriate;
- i) Record that proper authorization has been granted, by whomever is appropriate, in cases required by this code.

Another concept that also must be evaluated is that of "Civil Union" (domestic partnership), which is defined in article 78 of the Family Code.

“Civil union, or domestic partnership, rests on the voluntary agreement of the man and the woman that no legal impediment for their marriage exists, that they freely live together in a way that is stable, obvious, and singular for at least for two years consecutively. For all intents and purposes, the members of this union will be called cohabitants.”

This arrangement has the same rights and obligations as marriage, as set forth in this article 72 of the Constitution of Nicaragua, so although the minimum age to be able to enter a civil union is not regulated, a couple should meet the requirements set forth for marriage. A civil union, in fact, has three main characteristics: stability, singularity and legal aptitude.

Legal consequences of early marriage

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children considers marriage younger than 18 as a human rights violation. Article 2 of the Code on Children and Adolescents sees children as those younger than 13-years-old and adolescents as those who are between 13- and 18-years-old.

Republic of Honduras

Definition

Article 11 of the Family Code: For all the purposes specified in this code, *civil marriage* is only celebrated with the requirements and formalities laid down therein, and based on the legal equality of both spouses.

Age for marriage

Family Code Article 16: The age of maturity is 21. Only the individuals of mature age can enjoy the freedom of marrying. However, males of 18-years-old and women of 16-years-old can marry if they obtain authorization in accordance with this code. Marriage can be entered into by persons who are not of the ages referred to in the preceding paragraph, within a month after the minor spouse turns 16-years-old, or if the woman gets pregnant before reaching that age.

Civil Code, Article 45: The existence of the union between a man and a woman, with the capacity to enter into it and meet the requirements of singularity and stability, shall have all the effects of the marriage legally performed when it is recognized by the competent authority.

Requirements

Civilly capable persons who intend to get married will manifest their intention verbally or in writing before a competent official of the domicile of either member of the couple, presenting their respective personal identification documents and expressing their full name, nationality, age, marital status, and address during the last two years, profession or

post, full names, nationality of his/her parents, as well as the express declaration of not being married or having a formal union with any third person.

Legal consequences

Article 6 of the law against the trafficking of persons in subparagraph (f) provides the definition of forced marriage, which is considered a crime.

(f) forced or servile marriage: Any institution or practice by virtue of which a person, without the right to object, is promised or given in marriage in exchange for compensation in the form of money, or in-kind, to the father, mother, guardian, family or any other person or group of persons. Servile or forced marriage also occurs when a person gets married under deception and is subjected to sexual servitude or forced labor.

Republic of Guatemala

Definition

Article 78: The Civil Code of the Republic of Guatemala. Marriage is a social institution by which a man and a woman come together legally, with the intention of permanence and in order to live together, breed, feed and educate their children and help each other.

Age for marriage

Article 81: Civil Code of the Republic of Guatemala. The age of maturity is determined by one's freedom to enter into a marriage. However, males older than 16-years-old and women older than 14-years-old can get married provided the proper authority mediates to determine the following items.

Formalities

Civily capable persons who intend to get married will manifest their intention before the competent official of the domicile of either member of the couple, who will receive under oath each legally identified member of the couple the following declaration, which shall be recorded in the minutes: names and surnames, age, marital status, neighborhood, profession or post, nationality and origin, names of parents and grandparents if they know them, absence of kinship among themselves that prevents marriage, not having any legal impediment to enter into marriage and an economic regime which they adopt if they do not present prenuptial agreements, as well as the express declaration of not being married or having a formal union with any third person.

Minors applying for marriage must appear accompanied by their parents or guardians, or submit written authorization from them, either authentic or judicial if appropriate and, in addition, birth certificates or, if this is not possible, certification of qualification of age declared by the judge.

Republic of El Salvador

Definition

Family code, Article 11: Marriage is the legal union of a man and a woman, in order to establish a full and permanent community of life.

Age for marriage

Family code, Article 14. The following cannot get married:

- 1) Children under eighteen years of age;
- 2) Those already married; and
- 3) Those who find themselves unable to use their full reason, or those who cannot express their unequivocal consent.

However, regarding the first point, children under 18-years-old can marry if, as adolescents, they have already had a child together, or if the woman is pregnant.

Minors of 18-years-old, in conformity with this Code, can get married, but they must obtain the expressed consent of the parents under whose parental authority they find themselves. If one parent's consent is missing, the consent of the other will suffice; but if both are missing, the next closest degree of ancestor will be called to give it, preferable relatives who live with the minor. In a parity of votes, the vote in favor of marriage will be given preference.

Requirements

- Unique document of identity (DUI)
- Certification of birth certificates, which must have been issued within the two months prior to the celebration of the marriage.
- The legal instrument evidencing their ages;
- The death certificate of any former spouse;
- Certification of divorce, or of the executive statement declaring the nullity of marriage;
- Birth certificates of any children the couple has had together;
- Medical certificate issued by a public health entity, which proves that the female minor under 18-years-old is pregnant or that it is not the same woman who enters into a new marriage, as in the case of article 17;
- Certification of the executive statement that approves the guardian's accounts, and the receipt that authentically evidences the payment of the balance waged against them; and,
- Legal document stating the special power to enter into marriage.

Comparative minimum age for legal matrimony, by country

Country	Minimum age	
	Civil Code	Family code

	Men	Women	Men	Women
Guatemala	16 years	14 Years		
Honduras			21 years	
	14 years	12 years	18 years	16 years
Mexico	18 years			
	16	14		
Nicaragua	21 years	18 years	18 years	
	15 Years	14 Years	18 years	16 years
El Salvador			18 years	