

Malnutrition higher in children born to child brides

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Infants born to child brides in India (married before the age of 18) have a higher risk of malnutrition than children born to older mothers, according to research published on bmj.com today.

However, [low birth weight](#) and childhood mortality are not significantly linked with the age of the mother, concludes the research, and the child's [malnutrition](#) was not related to the mother's [body mass index](#).

Despite significant economic growth in the past decade, India still has the highest number of under-five deaths in the world. Almost half (44.5%) of 20-24 year olds in India are married before they are 18 and almost a quarter (22%) of the same age group have given birth by the time they reach 18.

The authors, led by Associate Professor Anita Raj, from Boston University School of Public Health, investigated the relationship between early marriage and infant and children mortality-related infection in India.

Professor Raj and colleagues analysed the data of a representative sample of almost 125,000 Indian women between the ages of 15 to 49. The information was collected from the 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey.

The study was restricted to births that took place in the last five years to women who had been married between the ages of 15 to 24 - this

included over 19,000 births to almost 13,500 mothers.

The results show that the majority of births (73%) were born to child brides. Among the currently living children, the majority (67%) were malnourished - meaning they were either underweight or suffering from wasted or stunted growth.

The authors argue that "in view of previous evidence that child brides often are more controlled by husbands and in-laws, it may be that women married as minors are unable to advocate for adequate nutrition for their children."

Professor Raj concludes that the findings "emphasise the value of delayed childbearing among adolescent wives. They also reveal the need for targeted intervention efforts to support [children](#) born to mothers married as minors, who may be more vulnerable to nutritional deprivation than others in the family."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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