

Women with a disability are more likely to experience child marriage than women without a disability

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In 2015, the United Nations created the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve by 2030. With only seven years to go, the world is not

on track to meet the goal of eliminating child marriage and other forms of violence against women and girls. Child marriage has been linked with negative reproductive and mental health outcomes.

Although there have been some improvements around the world toward the UN goal, progress towards reducing child marriage has been uneven and stagnant, particularly in fragile states where there are high levels of child marriage (being married before the age of 18). The SDGs also call for more data on people living with [disabilities](#). Disability as a determinant of child marriage has been previously under-researched.

A new study from George Mason University Ph.D. in Public Health student Samantha Kanselaar has found that women with a disability are more likely to report child marriage compared to women without disabilities. The study assessed the prevalence and associations of disability with girl child marriage and [intimate partner violence](#) (IPV) among currently married/cohabiting women (aged 20–24 years) in Pakistan, Mali, Uganda, and Haiti.

[The paper](#), titled "Exploring Disability as a Determinant of Girl Child Marriage in Fragile States: A Multicountry Analysis," is published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

"These findings are critical given the high rates of child marriage and increasing vulnerability to disability from poverty, conflict, disaster, displacement, and [infectious disease outbreaks](#) in fragile states," said Kanselaar, the lead author of the study.

Overall, the study found that the prevalence of girl child marriage was 45% and ranged from 35% in Pakistan to 63% in Mali. Women with disabilities were more than one and a half (1.62) times more likely to report girl child marriage compared to women without disabilities. Additionally, women with disabilities and a history of child marriage

were 1.78 times more likely to report past year IPV compared to nondisabled [women](#) with no history of child marriage.

This is the first study to examine the association between disability and girl [child marriage](#) in fragile states through pooling nationally representative household survey data from multiple countries. Guided by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) fragility framework, the study looked at fragile states, which are countries characterized by poverty, conflict, [political instability](#), insecurity, and disaster. Kanselaar says the findings underscore the need for more disability-inclusive violence programming and policies to support girls with disabilities.

Additional authors include Nursing Assistant Professor Karen Trister Grace, Assistant Professor of Global and Community Health Jaffer Zaidi, Ph.D. student Cheyu "Sarah" Zhang, former Associate Professor Lisa Lindley, and Associate Professor of Global and Community Health Jhumka Gupta, ScD (senior author of the study).

More information: Samantha Kanselaar et al, Exploring Disability as a Determinant of Girl Child Marriage in Fragile States: A Multicountry Analysis, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.07.009](#)

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