

Why discriminatory social institutions affecting adolescent girls matter

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Key messages

- **Persistent discriminatory social institutions such as early marriage, gender-based violence, son bias, time poverty and restricted inheritance rights are an obstacle to adolescent girls' empowerment.**
- **There are only 6 girls for every 10 boys enrolled in secondary school in countries where women and girls physical integrity is most restricted, compared to equal numbers of girls and boys in countries with low restrictions.**
- **Policies and programmes targeting adolescent girls need to address discriminatory social institutions. A mix of policies is required including an enabling legal environment; community awareness, empowerment and mobilisation programmes; social protection and incentives.**

There has been a growing focus on the empowerment of adolescent girls in development policies and programmes in recent years. In addition to fulfilling fundamental human rights, improving social and economic outcomes for girls can have a multiplier effect for improving the well-being of current and future generations. Yet, deeply entrenched social institutions – laws, social norms and practices – often pose significant and enduring obstacles for girls. A girl who is married early and then begins child rearing early is not likely to finish her education, which then limits her employment opportunities. If she finds herself in an abusive relationship, this means she will have little access to economic resources inside the household and her ability to make decisions about her children's well-being will be diminished. While policies typically focus on outcomes such as education, health and employment, achieving transformational change for the lives of adolescent girls requires policies and programmes to directly target discriminatory social institutions.

The OECD Development Centre's 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) is a composite measure of gender inequality across the lifecycle. By focusing on social institutions such as discrimination in the family, son bias, gender-based violence and restricted access to resources, the SIGI draws attention to dimensions of gender inequality that are often invisible, yet fundamental to adolescent girls' empowerment. This issues paper provides insight on how discriminatory social institutions impact on adolescent girls, drawing on the SIGI data. We find that practices such as early marriage, son bias and discriminatory inheritance practices remain persistent and prevalent in many parts of the world. Moreover, discriminatory social norms are related to outcomes for girls in areas such as HIV and educational outcomes.



This issues paper starts with an overview of social institutions as a framework for understanding gender inequality and presents findings relevant to adolescent girls from the SIGI and time-use surveys. The second section examines the relationship between discriminatory social institutions and education and health outcomes for adolescent girls. The final section proposes policy actions with examples of promising practice.

How do social institutions impact on adolescent girls?

Social institutions are defined as formal and informal laws, social norms and practices that shape or restrict the decisions, choices and behaviours of groups, communities and individuals (Jütting *et al.*, 2008; North, 1990; Sen, 2007). Social institutions set the parameters of what decisions, choices or behaviours are deemed acceptable or unacceptable in a society and therefore play a key role in defining and influencing gender roles and relations.

Social institutions are not fixed, and there are often significant variations across countries, regions and communities. They are also in constant flux and change over time, albeit slowly. While social institutions in themselves are not inherently good or bad, *discriminatory* social institutions are defined as those that restrict or exclude women and girls and consequently curtail their access to opportunities, resources and power. Through their influence on the unequal distribution of power between men, women, boys and girls in the private sphere of the family, in the economic sphere, and in public life, discriminatory social institutions restrict and exclude women and girls from opportunities and meeting their aspirations. It is on these discriminatory social institutions that the SIGI is focused.

While discriminatory social institutions affect women and girls across the lifecycle, there are social norms and practices that have a specific impact on adolescent girls with consequences for their social and economic outcomes. For example, the discriminatory practice of early marriage of girls limits their access to education and therefore also has an impact on their employment opportunities (UNICEF, 2005). Marrying young, particularly with large age gaps between spouses, can also lead to high rates of adolescent fertility, higher rates of infant mortality, poor maternal health and increased vulnerability to HIV (Clark, 2004; UNFPA, 2004). The OECD Development Centre analysis has also found that where women and girls are victims of violence or are subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM), they are at a much greater risk of experiencing complications or death during pregnancy and delivery (OECD Development Centre, 2010). Sexual violence against young women and girls in schools has negative consequences for girls' educational, health and economic outcomes, which in turn undermines development (Jones *et al.*, 2010).

The SIGI is made up of 14 variables grouped into five sub-indices: Discriminatory Family Code, Restricted Physical Integrity, Son Bias, Restricted Resources and Entitlements and Restricted Civil Liberties. Each sub-index of SIGI holds relevance for adolescent girls' empowerment (Table 1).



Table 1: Examples of social norms related to adolescent girls' empowerment and relevant SIGI dimensions

SIGI sub-index and variables	What the sub-index seeks to capture	Relevance for adolescent girls' empowerment
Discriminatory Family Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal age of marriage • Early marriage • Parental authority • Inheritance 	Social institutions that limit and restrict women and girls' decision-making power and status in the household and the family	Forced and early marriage of girls and young women Adolescent pregnancy Stereotyped roles in the family (girls and women as responsible for unpaid work) Denial of family assets to women and girls
Restricted Physical Integrity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence against women • Female genital mutilation • Reproductive Integrity 	Social institutions that limit and restrict women and girls' control over their bodies	Domestic violence and sexual abuse in the family Sexual harassment, violence and exploitation in educational settings and the community Female genital mutilation during adolescence Lack of reproductive autonomy
Son Bias <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing women • Fertility preferences 	Social institutions that foster intra-household preference for sons and the devaluation of daughters	Unequal allocation of household resources such as food, nutrition and care Unequal intra-household allocation of paid and unpaid work between sons and daughters
Restricted Resources and Entitlements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to land • Access to bank loans • Access to property other than land 	Social institutions which restrict women's access to, control of, and entitlement over economic and natural resources	Male family member control over use and allocation of household assets Lack of access to financial services and bank loans
Restricted Civil Liberties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to public space • Political voice 	Social institutions that restrict women and girls' access to, participation and voice in the public and social spheres	Family or male control over girls' movement e.g. visits to friends, schools, hospitals etc Lack of visibility of female role models in decision-making positions Gendered barriers to civic participation for adolescent girls and young women



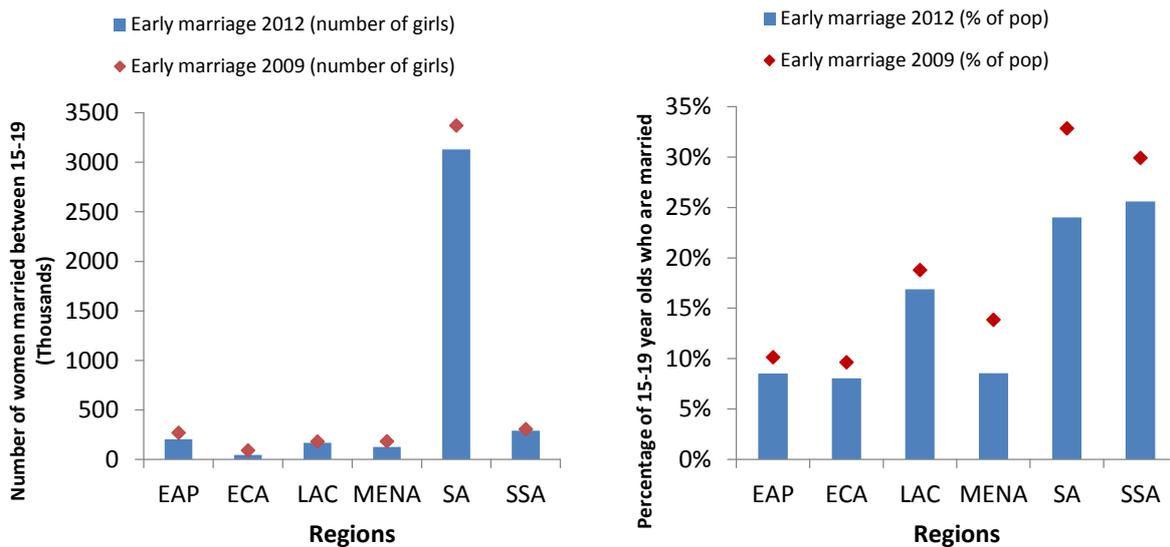
Early marriage

Early marriage is driven by a complex set of factors including social norms and practices about the value of girls and women in the family, community expectations of when a girl is ‘ready’ for marriage or laws which fail to set an equal minimum age of marriage. Several studies have recognised the role of early marriage and adolescent childbearing in shaping outcomes of adolescent girls. There are connections between early marriage and lower levels of female education, due to girls not completing their education or becoming pregnant (Lloyd and Mensch, 2008). Early marriage is also related to increased risks during childbirth (Jain and Kurz, 2007). The gendered power dynamics in relationships, often exacerbated by large age differences, are linked with increased risk of gender-based violence and sexual health risk as it reduces girls’ capacity to refuse sex and impose condom use (Boyden *et al.*, 2012; Clark, 2004; Jensen and Thornton, 2003). Moreover, early marriage contributes to the perpetuation of poverty, because of its negative effects on overall development outcomes in areas such as education and health across generations (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003).

Figure 1a and 1b compare the SIGI Early Marriage variable for 2009 and 2012. The data shows an overall improvement across all regions in reducing early marriage. In 2012, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) had the highest regional average of early marriage. In some countries, such as Mali and Niger, over 50% of girls aged 15-19 are married. However, it is useful to consider the real numbers of girls affected in different regions by weighting the Early Marriage variable to the population). On this basis, South Asia has the highest number of girls affected by early marriage, mainly due to the large populations of India and Bangladesh, where 28% and 48% of 15-19 year old girls are married, respectively. While some sub-Saharan African countries have higher national averages (as a percentage) of girls married, due to lower population levels, the actual number of girls affected is considerably lower than South Asia. An estimated 3.1 million of girls aged 15-19 are married in South Asia, compared to 0.3 million in sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 1a and 1b: Early marriage has decreased across all regions between 2009 and 2012, although large numbers of girls remain vulnerable

SIGI Early Marriage variable (% of 15-19 girls who are married, widowed or divorced) for 2009 and 2012, by regional average, weighted to the population (females aged 15-19)



Note: Regions are: East Asia and Pacific (EAP); Europe and Central Asia (ECA); Latin America and Caribbean (LAC); Middle East and North Africa (MENA); South Asia (SA); and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

Source: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database



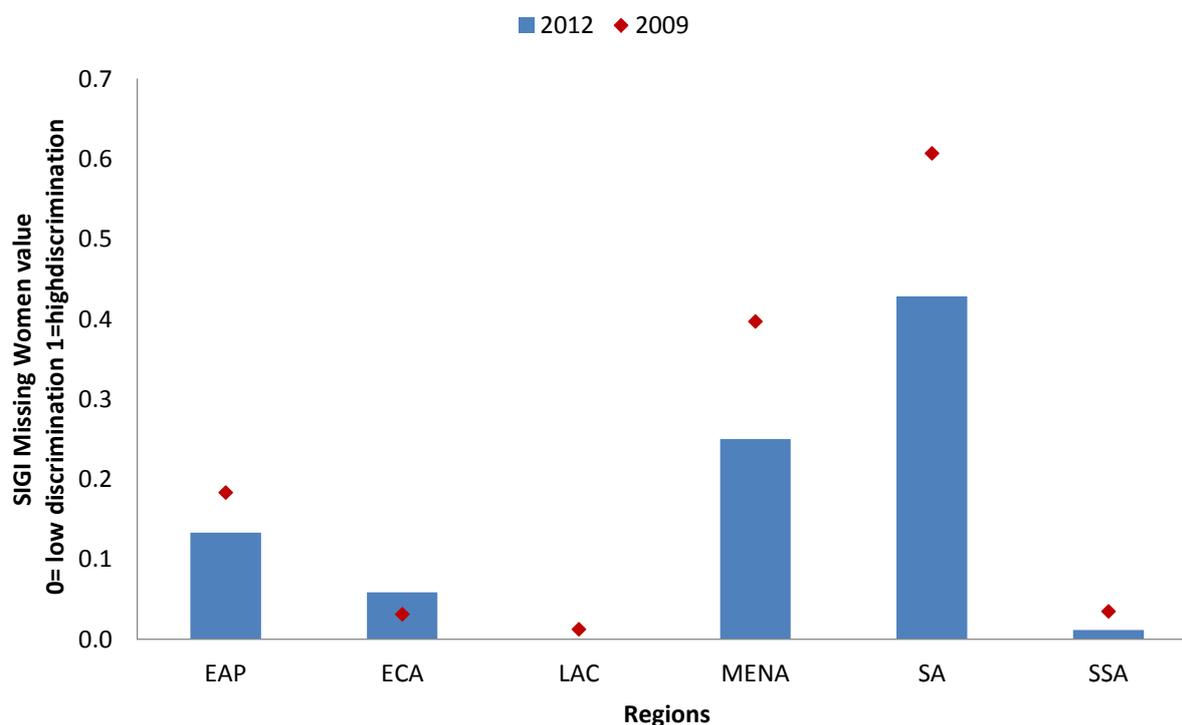
Son bias

The preferential treatment and value placed on sons and corresponding devaluation of daughters in the household can have a range of different impacts on adolescent girls' well being. The underinvestment in girls' health and nutrition during childhood (Pande, 2003), which includes gender gaps in breastfeeding and higher mortality for girls under five years old, can have longer term negative health effects. Son bias encourages different support for educating sons and daughters (Wang, 2005) which is linked with resource constraints of the family and social expectations about future income and support.

The SIGI Missing Women variable is an indicator of son bias that assesses the most extreme form of daughter devaluation - imbalance of sex-ratios due to sex selective abortions or female infanticide. This phenomenon is rooted in social norms valuing sons over daughters due to the view that sons represent a lifelong economic support while daughters are typically considered an economic burden (UNFPA, 2007). Figure 2 shows Missing Women by regional average. Based on this variable, South Asia has the highest level of discrimination with respect to Missing Women, followed by Middle East and North Africa and East Asia and the Pacific. While all regions showed improvement between 2009 and 2012, there appears to be an increase in missing women in the Europe and Central Asia evidenced by changing sex ratios across age groups in countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Figure 2: The problem of 'Missing Women', an indicator of son bias, varies across regions. All regions have improved between 2009 and 2012 except for Europe and Central Asia.

SIGI 2012 and 2009 Missing Women variable, by regional average.



Source: 2009 and 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database



Inheritance rights

Discriminatory inheritance laws and practices are another social institution impacting on adolescent girls, rooted in social norms about women and girls' less valued role and status in the family and the assumption of women and girls' dependence on male family members. In many countries, girls are partially or fully denied family assets such as land or property, which are instead given to male relatives. Such discrimination limits women and girls' opportunities to earn a livelihood and become economically empowered (World Bank, 2010). It also gives them less bargaining power in the household, which can increase vulnerability to domestic violence. Finally, being deprived of assets leaves them more financially insecure in times of crises.

The SIGI Inheritance variable captures whether inheritance laws and practices discriminate against women as widows and daughters. The data indicates that discrimination against daughters in inheritance rights is widespread: 79 out of 121 countries have evidence of discriminatory laws or practices. Even when equal inheritance rights are introduced, they are not implemented or there are dual or tri-partite legal systems which provide different rights for specific groups in the population. For example in Morocco, daughters inherit only half the share passed on to sons. In addition, if there are no sons, daughters do not inherit all of their parents' estate, as part of it is distributed amongst extended family members. In Somalia, the government adopted inheritance rights based on the principles of Sharia law. As a result, daughters inherit only half the amount awarded to sons. In Viet Nam, younger sons often inherit some land or other assets of value, while daughters receive only small symbolic items. Ensuring that girls have equal rights to assets is important for securing their economic position, but for also shifting social norms around the status of women and girls in the family.

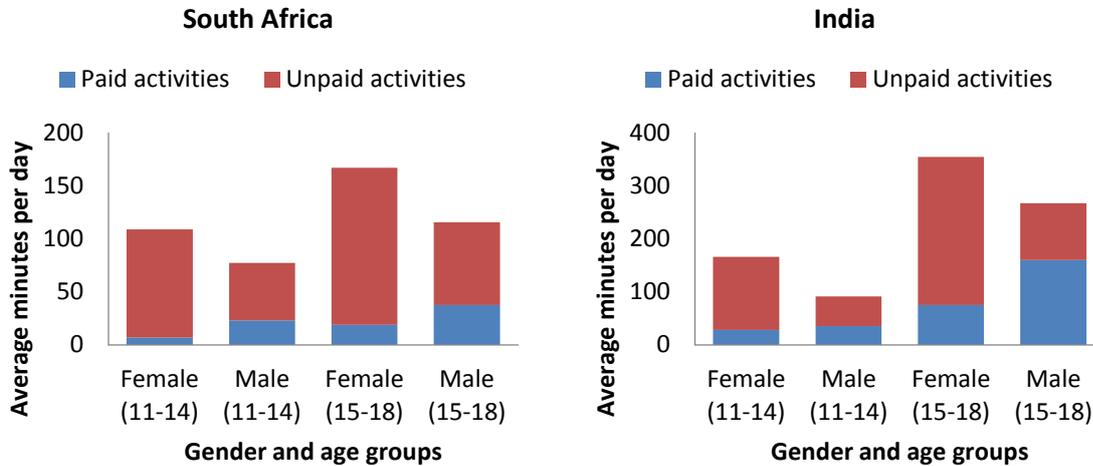
Time poverty

Children's time use has significant effects on their well-being and material outcomes (Vogler *et al.*, 2009), but it is not captured by the SIGI due to data availability and coverage. Examining countries for where data is available shows stark gender differences in the allocation of unpaid work between girls and boys in the household which signals strong gender norms around the role of sons and daughters. These norms are related to the status of girls in the family and son bias. Figures 3a and 3b show a considerable gap in unpaid workload of boys and girls in South Africa and India. Girls (11-14) in South Africa undertake on average 102 minutes of unpaid work per day, compared to 54 minutes for boys in the same age group. A similar pattern is found in India. In addition, the unpaid workload for girls increases substantially during adolescence. In India, the average daily time girls spend in unpaid work increases from 138 minutes to 279 minutes between the 11-14 year old and 15-18 year old age groups. Boys, on the other hand, spend more time in paid work across both age groups in South Africa and India. Looking at free time (without including learning activities), the data indicates that girls have less time for community, leisure and personal care than their male counterparts. The burden of unpaid work for adolescent girls has significant implications. Time poverty not only means less time for education and quality paid work, but also negatively impacts on girls' general health and well-being.



Figures 3a and 3b: Girls spend more time than boys in unpaid work and the unpaid workload increases during adolescence

Average minutes per day in paid activities (including primary production, secondary production and trade services) and unpaid activities (primary production, secondary production, trade services, housework care), by age groups and sex.



Sources: South Africa Time Use Survey 2001 and Indian Time Use Survey 1999

How are social norms related to development outcomes for adolescent girls?

Previous OECD Development Centre analysis based on the SIGI has found a relationship between discriminatory social institutions and development outcomes such as child nutrition, maternal mortality and primary school attainment (OECD Development Centre, 2010 and 2012). The following analysis examines the relationship between discriminatory social institutions and selected indicators of adolescent girls' empowerment in the areas of education and health. The analysis is not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide some illustrative examples.

Secondary education

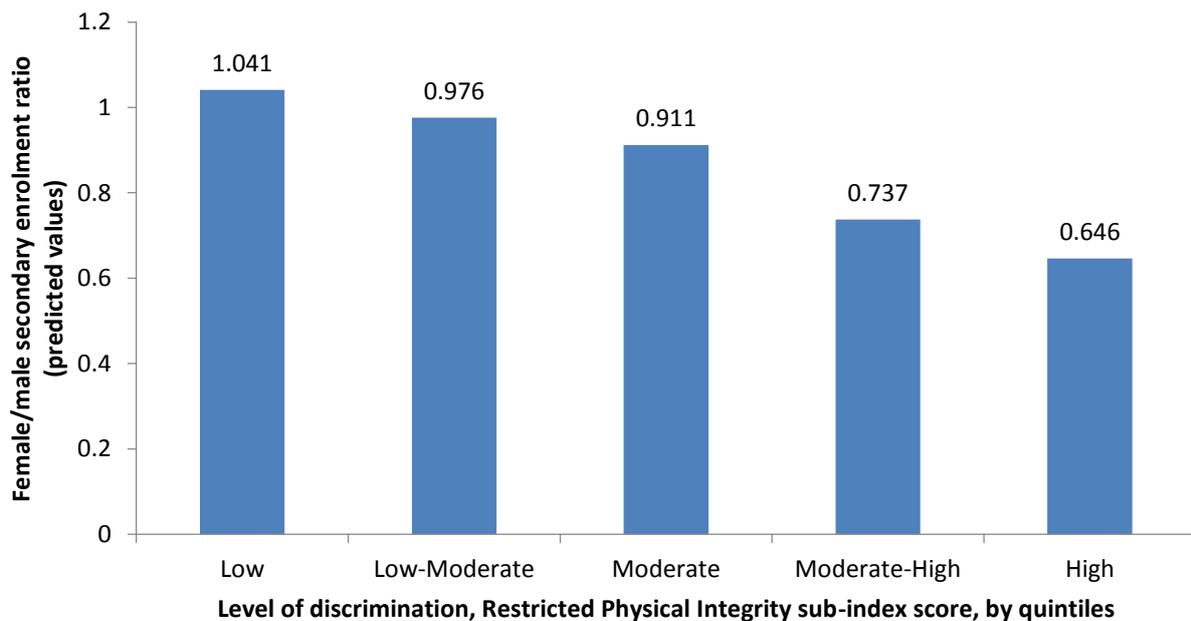
Human capital is a critical gateway to poverty reduction and development. Discriminatory social institutions can negatively influence education attainment in several ways. Practices such as early marriage or sexual harassment can lead to girls leaving their studies early (Alam *et al.*, 2009; Ambrus and Field, 2008; Lloyd and Mensch, 2008; OECD, 2012). For example, Alam *et al.* (2009) find from a study in Bangladesh that 43% of girls had experienced some form of sexual harassment on the way to school or college. A recent report from Plan UK (Lucas, 2012) has found high levels of sexual violence and abuse in schools, often perpetrated by teachers. The research cites the example of Mali, where 15% of children interviewed named a teacher as responsible for the pregnancy of a classmate.



To understand the relationship between discriminatory social institutions and education outcomes, the gender gap in secondary school enrolments (female/male ratio) is analysed with the SIGI and its sub-indices. While there has been impressive progress in closing the gender gap in primary school enrolment, in some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, gender gaps in secondary school education persist (OECD, 2012). A linear regression model is estimated, controlling for country income level and urbanisation. The SIGI bears a significant and negative relationship with gender gap in secondary school enrolment: countries with lower levels of discrimination against women are more likely to have gender parity in secondary school enrolment. When SIGI sub-indices are included in the model, the Restricted Civil Liberties and Restricted Physical Integrity sub-indices are significant and negatively related to the gender gap in secondary school enrolment. There is a greater gender gap in secondary school enrolment in countries with higher restrictions on women and girls’ physical integrity and civil liberties (Figure 4). This suggests that social norms around women and girls’ access to public space and violence against women should be taken into account in policies and programmes to close the gender gap in secondary school enrolments.

Figure 4: There is a greater gender gap in secondary school enrolment in countries with higher restrictions on women and girls’ physical integrity

Predicted values of the female-to-male ratio of secondary school enrolment rate (net), by SIGI 2012 Restricted Physical Integrity sub-index, controlling for all other SIGI sub-indices, GDP and level of urbanisation.



Sources: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database, World Bank World Development Indicators (2011 data)

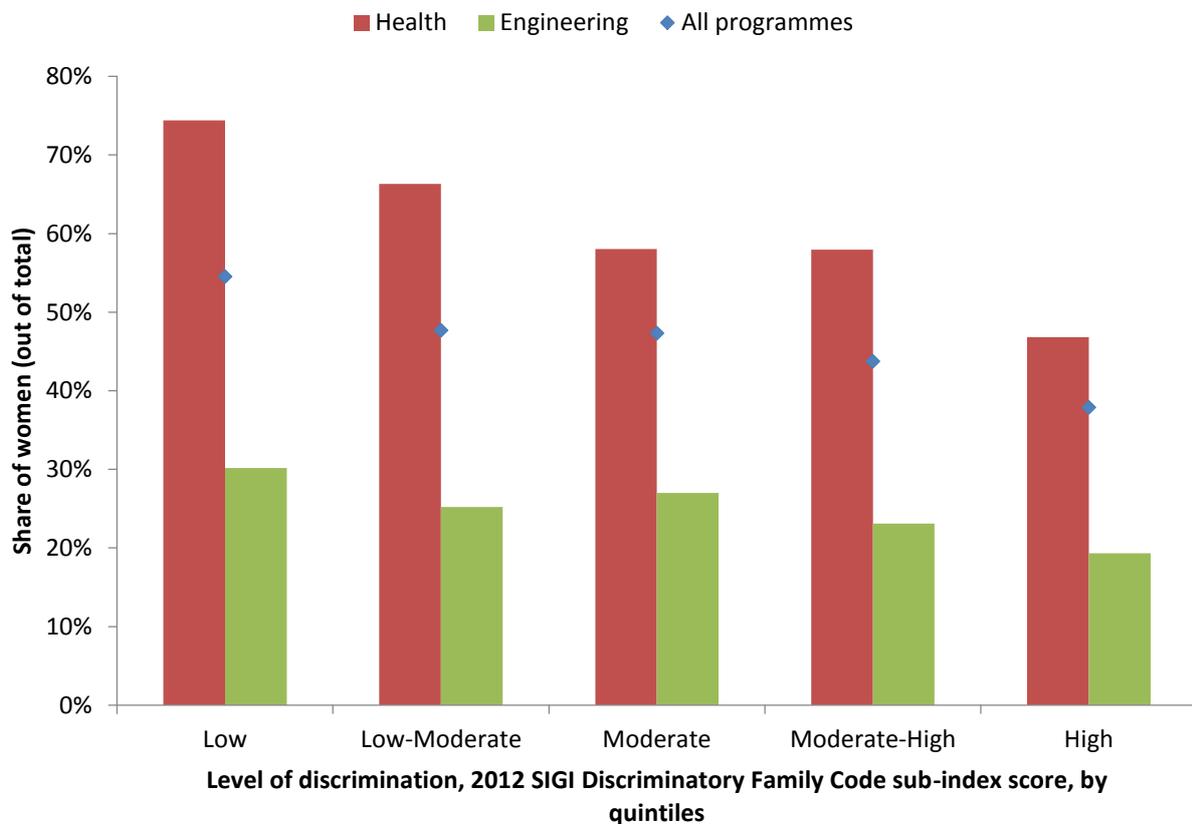
Note: The R-squared of the regression is 0.63. Regression results available upon request.



In addition to social institutions influencing girls’ access to education, social norms and practices can also shape educational aspirations and subject choices. Using data from Indian villages, a study by Duflo *et al.* (2012) found that parents are 45% less likely to aspire to an education beyond secondary school for their daughters, compared to sons. The study also found that a greater representation of women in local decision-making positions expands the aspirations of adolescent girls. Examining the relationship between the SIGI Discriminatory Family Code sub-index and tertiary programme enrolments (Figure 5), there is a greater share of females enrolled in tertiary programmes in countries with low discrimination (55%), compared to countries with high discrimination (38%). The data for enrolments in specific programmes shows gender differences between all fields in areas such as health and education generally having a greater share of women, compared to science and engineering. This pattern remains the same for all categories of discrimination, however the share of females in both programmes decreases as discrimination increases. In countries with high discrimination, the female share of enrolments in engineering programmes is only 20%. In countries with low discrimination, the female share of enrolments in health programmes is 74%, compared to 47% in countries in high discrimination. A similar pattern is found with the overall SIGI value, indicating that policies to improve girls’ tertiary education outcomes and address gender segregation in subject choices should address discriminatory social institutions not only in the education environment, but in the broader community and family.

Figure 5: Women’s enrolments rates in tertiary education are lower in countries with greater discrimination in the family.

Share of women enrolled in all tertiary programmes (all, health and engineering) , by SIGI 2012 Discriminatory Family Code sub-index score quintiles.



Sources: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010 data)



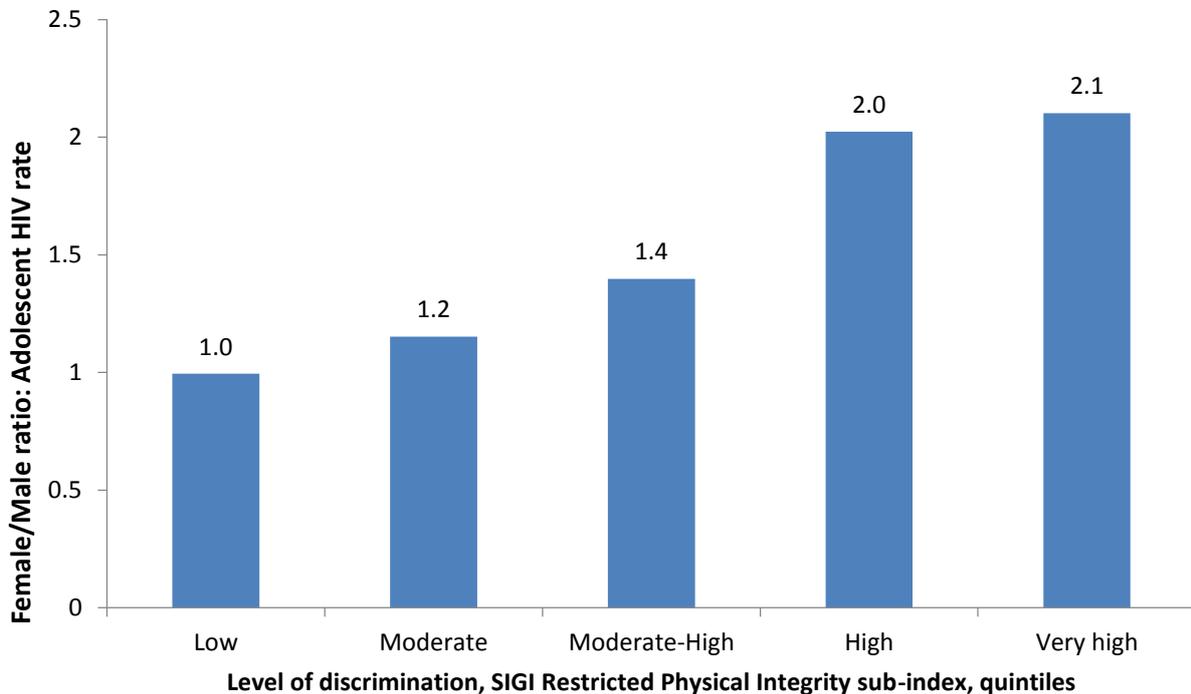
Vulnerability to HIV

HIV remains a significant global public health challenge. There is evidence of the relationship between gender-based violence, women’s limited sexual agency and increased HIV rates amongst women and girls. Gender-based violence facilitates the spread of HIV as women are more likely to become infected through forced sex and when in violent relationships women and girls may not be able to negotiate safe sex. A study from South Africa found that abusive men are more likely than other men to impose risky sexual behaviours, such as unprotected intercourse, on their partners (Dunkel *et al.* 2004). Further, population-based studies in Botswana and Swaziland have found that women’s lack of control over sexual decision-making, including the decision of whether or not to use condoms, is a key factor influencing their vulnerability to HIV (Physicians for Human Rights, 2007).

Power dynamics in relationships related to age can also make adolescent girls more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, compared to adolescent boys. In Southern Africa, adolescent women are 2 to 3 times more likely to be infected than males of the same age. Examining the relationship between the SIGI Restricted Physical Integrity sub-index and the female-to-male ratio of adolescent HIV prevalence shows that adolescent girls are twice as likely to be infected with HIV in countries where there are very high restrictions on women and girl’s physical integrity (Figure 6) compared to countries where there are low restrictions. Interventions tackling gender-based violence and reproductive autonomy should therefore be part of policies and programmes to tackle adolescent HIV.

Figure 6: Girls are more vulnerable to HIV in countries where there are greater restrictions on women and girls’ physical integrity.

Female/male ratio of HIV prevalence (aged 15-24), by SIGI 2012 Restricted Physical Integrity sub-index quintiles.



Sources: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database, World Bank World Development Indicators (2011 data)



A mix of policies are required to tackle discriminatory social institutions

Although evaluations of policy interventions to address discriminatory social institutions are limited, there are three areas of policy action which emerge as promising. Firstly, legal reform, including the harmonisation of laws, to ensure equality before the law and the prohibition of discriminatory practices is a critical first step. An enabling legal and policy environment has long been identified as critical to improving women and girls' economic and social outcomes. Examples of legal reforms to promote adolescent girls' empowerment include introducing an equal minimum age of marriage. Countries such as Botswana, Mozambique and Madagascar have increased the age of consent for marriage in recent years. In India, the Prevention of Child Marriage Act 2005 provides a three-pronged approach combining prevention, protection and prosecution of early and forced marriage. The law includes penal provisions for those who solemnise child marriages; provisions to make child marriages voidable by giving choice to the children in the marriage to seek annulment of marriage; and provisions for maintenance and residence of the female contracting party. Importantly, the law provides guidance on implementation mechanisms to be developed by states, although to-date the implementation has been uneven across the country.

Secondly, even when strong laws are in place, long-term change in social institutions requires strategies to address the gap between laws, attitudes and practice on the ground. Interventions such as public awareness programmes, empowerment programmes or community mobilisation activities can be effective. For example, the USAID 'Safe Age of Marriage' programme in Yemen uses community education to tackle attitudes about early marriage. Initial results of the programme found an 18% increase in awareness about the benefits of delaying marriage, with a 34% increase in those agreeing that delaying marriage would create more opportunities for education and a 19% increase in those agreeing that delaying marriage would increase work opportunities.

A global conversation on the impact of discriminatory social norms on adolescent girls

In April 2013, Wikigender and Wikichild hosted an online discussion gathering 62 contributions on how discriminatory social norms could be transformed to empower adolescent girls. Among the strategies proposed, three emerged as essential:

- Listen to the voices of adolescent girls and create spaces for peer support
- Change attitudes through awareness campaigns
- Addressing multiple forms of disadvantage

For more information and to read the full report, please visit http://www.wikigender.org/index.php/Online_Discussions

Community-based empowerment programmes are important for providing adolescent girls with skills development and a platform to make their voices heard. An example is the Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) which was initially implemented in Bangladesh in 1993 by BRAC (formerly Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), but has since been replicated in countries such as Tanzania and Uganda. The programme seeks to transform social institutions such as early marriage and dowry practices by establishing clubs in rural areas where young girls are provided peer support and continued education on health, sexual abuse, children's rights, income generation skills and microfinance training. Evaluation of ADP in Uganda found that vulnerable girls (namely single mothers, girls who are alienated from their families and those who lack skills to be successful entrepreneurs) are more likely to benefit from the programme (Bandiera *et al.*, 2010). Girls become able to take informed decisions and to match their aspirations with their new capabilities contributing to economic and social empowerment.



Finally, social protection programmes and incentives for individuals and families can change behaviours that sustain discriminatory social institutions. One example of an economic incentive in a developing country context is the Apni Beti Apna Dhan programme in India, which provides to girls and their families cash incentives that are conditional on the daughters remaining unmarried until age 18. Initial evaluation results suggest the programme helped parents increase their investment in daughters' human capital (Sinha and Young, 2009). Similarly, the Zomba Cash transfer programme in Malawi has shown to be effective in changing social norms and practices such as reducing the incidence of early marriage and teenage pregnancy. The programme is an ongoing cash transfer intervention in the district of Zomba which provides cash transfers to young women to stay in (or return to) school. Research shows that the intervention of US\$10 per month conditional on satisfactory school attendance as well as direct payment of secondary school fees has led to significant declines in early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and self-reported sexual activity among beneficiaries just one year after programme implementation (Baird *et al.*, 2010).

Conclusion

Adolescence is a time of opportunity and challenges for girls to meet their aspirations and secure their futures. While development policies and programmes are increasingly focusing on adolescent girls as agents of change, this issues paper underscores the importance of understanding how discriminatory social institutions can significantly influence opportunities and outcomes. Moreover, this paper has highlighted why policy makers must adopt a life-cycle approach to take into account how discriminatory social institutions play out at different life stages.

Changing discriminatory social institutions is a complex task, particularly taking into account specific contexts and the multiple layers of discrimination experienced by girls based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic grouping and rural/urban status. A key challenge for policy makers is balancing the long-term task of change with short-term interventions and programme cycles. A considerable limitation for analysis in this area is the quality and coverage of gender and age disaggregated data related to adolescent girls and discriminatory social institutions. Greater investment is needed both in the evaluation of programmes and statistical capacity to enable a deeper understanding of the barriers to adolescent girls' empowerment.

Looking forward to the debate on the post-2015 development agenda, this issues paper highlights the need to take a holistic and inclusive approach to addressing gender inequality which includes both outcome indicators, such as education, and discriminatory social institutions, such as gender-based violence. Moreover, the post-2015 development agenda should take account of the specific forms of inequalities and vulnerabilities experienced by adolescent girls.



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