

“It has come to destroy me.”

An exploratory study to
understanding the well-being of
married girls in Eastern Region,
Ghana



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Background

- Research Question: How does child marriage influence experiences of and agency related to well-being amongst girls in rural Eastern Region, Ghana?
- Her Choice
- The Hunger Project
- Methodologies
 - Semi-structured interviews with married girls, single mothers, and community nurses
 - Focus group discussions with married girls & single mothers and community members



Source: www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/Africa/2008/11/081126_ghana08_koforidua

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Main Findings

- Girls generally experience worse health and well-being after pregnancy/childbirth and early marriage.

Participants	Economic Situation	Emotional Well-Being	Physical Well-Being	Social Well-Being	Overall Impact	Advice for Others
Piper	±	X	≈	X	X	Against
Sally	+	X	X	+	X	Against
Gillian	±	X	X	±	X	Against
Diana	±	≈	≈	≈	X	Against
Nell	X	X	X		X	Against
Phoebe	X		X		X	Against
Mia	X	+	X		X	Against
Penny	±	±	X	≈	+	Against
Ingrid	X	X	X		±	
Francis	+	+	X	≈	+	Against
Joanna	±	X	±	≈	+	Against
Lena	X		≈			
Bonnie	+					
Lily	+		X			



Main Findings

- Girls and women feel they make decisions related to their health and well-being, but their stories illustrate *thin agency* because of economic hardship and the structure of the relationships they have with their husbands and parents.
- Single girls initially looked to sex and sexual partners to help manage economic hardship in their familial homes, but resulting pregnancy and marriage contribute to *restrictive contexts* in which girls and women make choices about their health and well-being.



Main Findings

- Emotional well-being is reported to be the most problematic area of concern.
- Girls were largely unaware of health and well-being consequences of early pregnancy and marriage.
- Husbands are generally seen to undermine the health and well-being of their wives, while a girl's parents/relatives bolster it.
- Some girls are unafraid to look to people outside their marriage for monetary assistance in addressing a health issue, but this is reserved for illnesses that are seen to be very serious.



Answer to Research Question

- Girls and community members perceived child marriage as a negative influence on girls' overall well-being, be it mental, physical or social.
- Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage cause a shift in well-being concerns and priorities because of the exposure to new risks and realities.
- Decision-making is influenced by structure both before and after marriage and/or motherhood. Girls' agency is thin, complex, opportunistic, and dependent on structure.



Policy and Practice Recommendations

- In order to eliminate child marriage, adolescent pregnancy must be addressed first.
- Development actors and the government need to identify solutions for providing emotional and psychological support to married girls and single mothers.
- Promote education and employment opportunities for girls to improve economic well-being and financial security.
- Continue to create and encourage dialogue around changing norms and traditional practices related to premarital sex, contraception, child marriage, and well-being of girls more broadly.



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