

# Early Marriage and School Dropout in Iraq

Research Study Report  
June 2023



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## Acknowledgements

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## Executive summary

Early marriage and school dropout are closely related outcomes that negatively affect girls. In Iraq, however, the effects of early marriage practices and its link with school dropout for girls have yet to be adequately explored. This study seeks to explore the reasons for early marriage and school dropout among girls and the effects of early marriage practices and its correlation with school dropout for girls. The study is based on a sample of 5,273 girls aged 15-24 years extracted from the second round of the Iraq Women Integrated Social and Health II Survey (I WISH II) conducted in September 2021 and focus group discussions conducted with married and unmarried men and women aged 18 years and above, stratified by gender, age, and marital status.

The findings from the extracted data of the I WISH II survey revealed that among girls who got married before age 14, early marriage was the most common reason given for dropping out of school (30.6%). Logistic regression linking age at marriage with school attendance shows that girls who are attending school are (97%) less likely to marry between the ages of 15 to 18 than those who did not attend school at all. It was found that girls who had never been married, followed by girls who attended school in the past, are the ones who marry the earliest. For girls still in school, the risk of early marriage increases with age and leads to dropping out of school, and the number of school dropouts among these girls is highest among those between the ages of 14 and 17. However, it is also important to note from the findings that early marriage is not the only reason for school dropout among girls. Other underlying factors, such as no desire to continue with teaching (24.7%) and social reasons (18.8%) were given as reasons for school leaving among girls. Household wealth and individual level factors, such as the age of the girl and parental level characteristics, such as the age and education level of the parent were also found to be significant predictors of early marriage, and each elevates the risks of school dropout due to early marriage. The qualitative findings from the focus discussions support these findings. The qualitative results indicate a complex and bidirectional relationship between early marriage and school dropout. The participants in the focus group discussions reported early marriage as both a cause and consequence of school dropout for girls. School dropout was also perceived to be a reason and result of early marriage for girls. But there were also other underlying factors, such as poor performance in school, poor teaching staff, limited quality and access to school, household poverty, and social and cultural norms on girls' education and early marriage, which were also deciding factors in school dropout and early marriage for girls.

Considering these study findings, the following recommendations are made. The study suggests the need to design and implement contextually relevant interventions that would target mostly girls between the ages of 14 and 17 who were found to have an increased risk of dropping out of school due to early marriage. Such programmatic interventions should include

community engagement forums and discussion sessions focusing on the gender and social norms around early marriage and on the importance of girls' education or female education more generally. The programmatic interventions should also include capacity building for key community stakeholders and elected members from local governance to raise awareness around the harmful health and social effects of early marriage for girls. Engagement with and support from the government, especially across the education, justice and economic sectors is also critical. In the education sector, there is a need to advocate for the integration of extracurricular activities and technology-oriented modules in the school curriculum to make learning more attractive to girls since no desire to continue teaching is among the reasons given for leaving school. In the justice sector, it is recommended to review or repeal the exemption clause of parental consent for underage marriage and ensure adequate enforcement of the minimum age of marriage of 18. While reviewing or repealing the exemption clause of parental consent for underage marriage and enforcing the minimum age of marriage of 18, it is crucial to contextualize the discussion and consider the controversial nature of the topic of underage and minimum legal age of marriage within the Iraqi context. There is also a need to provide economic support to families to offset the economic drivers of early marriage and school dropout for girls. The economic support for families should target the poorest households since girls in low household socio-economic status were found to be (30%) more likely to get married before age 18 and are (84%) more likely to have left school. Such economic support could also target the governorates with the highest proportion of girls who have been married before the age of 14 years, which include Baghdad (9.17%), Babylon (10.0%), Wasit (9.17%), Al-Qadisiya (8.33%), and Ninevah, Thi Qar, Basrah and Maysān, which have between (7.73%) to (9.21%) of married girls between the ages of 15 to 18 years, as well as Mayan, which is among the governorates with the highest proportion of girls that dropped out from school or have never attended school at all.

Other practical recommendations by the study include the promotion of adolescent girl-parent communication on sexual and reproductive health matters including early marriage and supporting girls to remain in school through sponsorships and advocacy campaigns on the importance of girls' education. For girls who have dropped out of school due to early marriage, early pregnancy or other related reasons and are willing to return to school, a recommended strategy for their reentry to school may include giving them a second chance education, which could be in the form of remedial classes. Establishing literacy centers for these girls could also improve their literacy and numeracy skills for improved self-reliance, self-esteem, and livelihood skills later in life. These strategies can be achieved by working with school and community structures, such as school management committees and parent-teacher associations, if they are in existence.

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## **List of abbreviations and acronyms**

CSO	Central Statistics Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HPs	Harmful Practices
I WISH II	Iraqi Women Integrated Social and Health Survey II
IC	International Consultant
KR	Kurdistan Region
KRSO	Kurdistan Region Statistics Office

MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
OCHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PTA	Parent-Teacher Associations
SCM	School Management Committees
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations Human Rights Council

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and context**

Early marriage and school dropout are closely related outcomes that negatively affect girls. In Iraq, however, the issue of early marriage and its link with school dropout has not yet been adequately explored. This research study on early marriage and school dropout seeks to explore the reasons for early marriage and school dropout among girls and the effects of early marriage practices and its correlation with school dropout for girls in Iraq. The research study was commissioned by the UNFPA. The UNFPA intends to use the findings from this study to design contextually relevant interventions to mitigate the impact of early marriage practices on the education sector, as well as to advocate for girls' education in Iraq. The study findings are expected to set the benchmark for a contextually appropriate and relevant social framework for protecting the rights of girls in Iraq. The research study is in support and aligned closely with the global Strategic Plan of UNFPA (2022-2025), especially Outcome 3 of the Strategic Plan (SP), which seeks to end gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices (HPs), including early marriage by 2030. It is anticipated that the findings will prompt the responsible authorities

to take steps against early marriage in Iraq, where (28%) of girls are married before the age of 18, and (11.4%) have dropped out of school due to early marriage.

## **1.2 Research problem and rationale**

In Iraq, although the minimum legal age of marriage is 18, the law allows exception for this general rule and judges can authorize a marriage based on necessity or the approval of the father<sup>1</sup>. It is stated that many young girls in Iraq get married by these exemptions from law or get married with their parents' approval through informal religious marriage. In 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution aimed at strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate early marriage and in 2014; the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a global report on preventing and eliminating early and forced marriages. Despite the existence of this and other related international treaties and agreements, the practice of early marriage is still in perpetuation in many countries, including Iraq. It is reported that (28%) of girls in Iraq are married before the age of 18. The reasons why early marriage is common in Iraq are wide ranging and can be grouped under poverty, religion, tradition and culture, and gender inequalities. A study conducted on the Personal Status Court in the city center of Al-Diwaniyah found reported that many parents marry off their daughters at a young age to financially empowered people in society<sup>2</sup>. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, while poverty and economic vulnerability are primary reasons for early marriage for girls, the practice of early marriage is also deeply rooted in some communities' traditional social and cultural standards<sup>3</sup>. The 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) also revealed that early marriage in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is lower among women with an upper secondary or above to 6.8% and rising in the lower education levels to 33.8% for uneducated women<sup>4</sup>. This percentage suggests a possible correlation between early marriage practices and education in Iraq. However, although the 2018 MICS survey has provided information on the number of girls who were first married or in union before age 15 and 18 by education level, it does not show whether girls dropped out of school before or after they were married. But even more importantly no studies have yet been done to explore and establish the effects of early marriage and its correlation with school dropout in Iraq. The primary purpose of this study is to address these gaps in knowledge and to provide UNFPA and its partners, including government with detailed information on the type of interventions that can be design and implemented to reduce the effects of early marriage on school dropout among girls.

## **1.3 Aim and objectives**

The overarching research aim of this study was to explore and establish the correlation between early marriage and school dropout in Iraq. Within this, the study has five specific objectives:

1. To explore the reasons for early marriage and school dropout among girls in Iraq
2. To explore the impact of early marriage on rates of school dropout among girls in Iraq.
3. To investigate the relationship between early marriage and school dropout.
4. To explore how early marriages contribute to girls dropping out of school in Iraq as well as discover other attributing factors such as poverty, family pressure, limited access to education etc.
5. To provide policy and programmatic recommendations for addressing early marriage and school dropout for girls in Iraq.

## **1.4 Research questions**

In correspondence to the above study aim and objectives, the research questions that were identified and explored include:

1. What are reasons for early marriage and school dropout among girls in Iraq?
2. What are the consequences of early marriages on school dropout for girls in Iraq?
3. What evidence is there that early marriage increases rates of school dropout for girls?
4. Is there any correlation between early marriage and school dropout in Iraq?
5. What are the factors at the individual and family levels that contribute to early marriage and girls dropping out of school?
6. At which age is the practice of early marriage most prevalent among girls in Iraq and how is this related to their dropping out of school?
7. What can be done at all levels – policy, programme and community levels to reduce the effects of early marriage practices on school dropout for girls and what are the characteristics of such interventions?

## **1.5 Operational definition of terms used in the study**

### **Early marriage**

Early marriage in this study is defined as a type of marriage below the legal age of 18. Early marriage affects both boys and girls. However, a growing body of evidence suggests that girls are disproportionately affected by the practice of early marriage. This study specifically focuses on early marriage for girls. Early marriage for girls is, therefore, defined as marriages involving girls below the legal age of 18.

Many governments have set the minimum legal age of marriage for girls at 18 years. In Iraq, while the minimum legal age of marriage for girls is 18, the law allows exceptions for this general rule and judges can authorize a marriage based on necessity or the approval of the father. It is stated that many young girls in Iraq get married by these exemptions from law or get married with their parents' approval through informal religious marriage. In 2013, the

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution aimed at strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate early marriage and in 2014; the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a global report on preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriages. Despite the existence of this and other related international treaties and agreements, the practice of early marriage is still in perpetuation and is closely associated with school dropout in many countries.

### **School dropout**

The term “school dropout” has been used differently and the definition varies across countries. In some countries, school dropout is used to refer to early school leaving, not in education, or school completion. In defining dropout, Barnet, Arroyo, Devoe & Duggan (2004)<sup>5</sup> categorized a student as dropout if her/his school records documented a withdrawal date and if she/he was present at school in a given academic year fewer than 20 days of the 180-day school year. Laird, DeBell & Chapman (2006) and Rumberger (2011)<sup>6</sup> also defined dropout into three categories: 1) event dropout rate, 2) status dropout rate, and 3) cohort dropout rate. These definitions of the dropout classification are as follows: 1) The event dropout rate is defined as the percentage of persons or a specified given group (such as students of a particular age enrolled in high school) in a population who dropped out of school over a specific period, which is often a single year. 2) The status dropout rate is defined and measured as the percentage in a population or subpopulation enrolled in a high school program but did not pass or hold a high school diploma. 3) The cohort dropout rate refers to the percentage of students in grade 8 who had not attained a high school diploma by the age of 20.

In this study, school dropout refers to early school leaving or students who have not completed high school. The study is mainly concerned with school dropout for girls because the practice of early marriage affects more girls than boys and many studies have shown that early marriage and school dropout are closely related outcomes.

## Chapter 2. Methodology

A mixed methods research approach that included the use and collection of both quantitative and qualitative data was used in this study.

### 2.1 Data collection

#### 2.1.1 Quantitative data

For the quantitative data collection, the study extracted data from the second round of the Iraq Women Integrated Social and Health (I-WISH II) Survey. The I WISH II survey collected information on the different characteristics of families and individuals in Iraq. It provided statistical estimates at the country level, and at the level of each of the eighteen (18) Iraqi governorates and included interviews with 9,404 families for the household survey, as well as 12,754 individual women aged 15 years and above. The study extracted and analyzed data from a sample of 5,273 married and unmarried girls aged 15 to 24 from the I WISH II survey.

#### 2.1.2 Qualitative data

For the qualitative data collection, a large-qualitative survey was carried out with the support of the Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (KRSO) and the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of Iraq. The qualitative survey the involve the use of focus group discussions as primary data collection technique. The focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in ten (10) federal governorates of Iraq and three governorates of the Kurdistan region) including both urban and rural communities and districts. The federal governorates included Anbar, Basra, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Nineveh, Salahaddin, Karbala, Muthana, Qadisiya, Maysān, while the KRI included Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhok.

The focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted to explore perceptions of early marriage and school dropout, including prevalence and reasons for early marriage and school dropout among girls, consequences and impact of early marriage and school dropout on girls and perceptions of what can be done to reduce early marriage and prevent girls from dropping out of school. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select individuals for the FGD. The focus group discussions included six categories of respondents aged 15 to 40 years above, stratified by age, sex, and marital status. Each focus group discussion comprised of ten (10) participants. The focus group discussions were conducted with married and unmarried women and men aged 15-25 years, 25-40 years and above and typically lasted for about one and a half hour.

## **2.2 Data management and analysis**

### **2.2.1 Quantitative data**

For quantitative data management and analysis, first the raw dataset from the I-WISH II survey was checked for accuracy. Clarification on the variables of interest including their codes and definitions was done with the support of the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) which had supplied the raw dataset. Filtering was then done to ensure consistency and further clarification was sought from the CSO for those variables that were selected and were unclear in terms of code and definition.

Analysis of the quantitative data extracted from the I-WISH II survey was done in two stages. First, in the descriptive analysis, the bivariate distribution of each predictor by age at first marriage and school attendance was presented. The former was categorized into four groups: under 14 years old, 15 to 18 years old, 19 to 23 years old and 24 years old; whereas the second was created based on the variable: Have you ever attended school? Never attended, in the past or currently enrolled; the first two categories were merged and compared against those girls who at the time of the survey were enrolled in school. Percentages were calculated in columns to allow comparison of ages at first marriage and school attendance. For questions that were only asked to girls who never attended school and those who attended school in the past, bar graphs were made to compare between categories.

In the second stage of the analysis, survival analysis was performed. This type of analysis allows considering the individual time elapsed from the beginning (time zero) to the development of the two events of interest in this stage: 1= marriage before the age of 18 and 2= school leaving due to marriage before the age of 18. The unit of measure of risk in the survival analysis is hazards. These hazards are plotted in Figures 4 and 5. Figure 4 uses as dependent variables, the time from birth to marriage; for those who were not married at the

time of the survey, age at the time of the survey was used to include them in the analysis. Thus, censoring in survival analysis, which means the event of interest is not observed for some subjects before the study is terminated was applied for girls. The second dependent variable used was a dichotomous variable where 1 represents girls who got married before age 18 and 0 represents girls who had not been married at the time of the survey and girls who got married after age 18.

For figure 5, two dependent variables were used, a time variable that measures the years elapsed from birth to the time of leaving school due to marriage before the age of 18; to include in this analysis those girls who responded that they were currently enrolled in school, the age at the time of the survey was used; the second dependent variable used in this graph was a dichotomous variable where 1 represents those who left school due to marriage before the age of 18 and 0 represents those who are still enrolled in school.

In Tables 7 and 8, Cox regression was used to identify the predictors of two dependent variables: 1.- school dropout due to marriage before the age of 18 and 2.- marriage before the age of 18. Two models were run for the Cox regression. In the first model, each of the predictors was included against each of the two outcomes and crude Hazard ratios were obtained. In model 2, all predictors were entered to produce a multivariate Cox regression. All the analyses were conducted in Stata 12.0.

### **2.2.2 Qualitative data**

For qualitative data management, a data management process was in place. Before actual data collection, a training of trainers (ToT) was conducted for field supervisors and data management teams at the CSO and KRSO. Data collectors were then trained by the field supervisors and data management teams from CSO and KRSO. The training for both the field supervisors and data collectors includes sections on data monitoring and data management. During data collection, close supervision of the data collectors by field supervisors and data management team took place during fieldwork. The International Consultant (IC) conducted daily checks on field progress and activities through the national consultant to make sure any issues can be communicated and solved quickly. After data collection, data were checked and reviewed by the national consultant, supervisors, and data management team at CSO and KRSO. For the qualitative data management and quality control, each transcript was validated using a two-step approach: (1) first review by field supervisors and data management team at CSO and KRSO, (2) second review by the national consultant, and (3) final review by the International Consultant.

For the qualitative data analysis, the steps involved the following: First the sound recordings of all focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and into Arabic. The report of the

transcripts was then shared with the International Consultant, and which were later sent to a professional translation company for translation from Arabic into English. Finally, the international consultant then coded the transcripts appropriately and investigated them using a manual qualitative thematic analysis. For analyzing the FGD data, the International Consultant first read at three times each of the FGD transcript report to create familiarity and make sense of the data. While reading the transcript report, he underlined the significant statements in each transcript report and extract them. He then labelled and code meanings of significant statements and sentences that bear similar attributes. Open coding was used at this stage, in which different parts of the text that contained significant statements will be marked with appropriate labels and coded for further analysis. The International Consultant used common properties to group descriptions of similar situations or ideas into key concepts. Concepts with common properties will then be classified based on the study objective and the data collected and then subject the labels and codes to further manual thematic analysis.

## 2.3 Research ethics

The study was approved by the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) and Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (KRSO). The CSO provided the secondary data from the second round of the I-WISH II survey and in collaboration with KRSO reviewed and refined the qualitative data collection tools and protocols, which were used for the conduct of the large-scale qualitative survey.

### **A note on ethics and safeguarding principles**

Because the study covered sensitive and stigmatized issues surrounding early marriage, care was taken to ensure that all questions were asked in a culturally respectful and non-judgmental way. This was achieved through the careful recruitment and training of data collectors and supervisors, as well as by the design of the focus group discussion guides for the qualitative interviews. Data collectors and field supervisors were trained on the sensitivity of the research topic and the possible effects that the questions could have on the respondent. They were informed that the respondent is at liberty and free to terminate the interview at any point that the effects of the discussion seem too. Data collectors identified and worked with local authorities at the CSO and KRSO in the selected governorates who served as “gatekeepers” and liaisons between communities and the data collection team. The study participants were informed that they can contact any of these key people if they wish to talk over their situation because of their participation in the study.

## Chapter 3. Results

This chapter presents the results of the study. First, the quantitative results of the data that was extracted from the I-WISH II survey are presented. This is followed by presentation of the results of the largely-scale qualitative survey. By design, the large-scale qualitative survey was conducted to supplement findings from the quantitative data extracted from the I-WISH II Survey.

### 3.1 Quantitative results

#### 3.1.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of survey respondents

The study analyzed data from a sample of 5,273 married and unmarried girls aged 15 to 24 from the I-WISH II survey. For girls who were married before 18, at least (33.9%) were over 15 to 19 years old at the time of the survey. About (97%) are married and at least (11.3%) do not know how to read or write. (95%) of them are not enrolled in school and (51.7%) have completed primary school as their highest level of education at the time of the survey.

#### 3.1.2 Governorate's distribution of age at marriage and school attendance

In terms of Governorate's distribution of age at marriage and school attendance (**Table 1**), the governorate with the highest proportion of girl who have been married before age 14 years are Baghdad (9.17%), Babylon (10.0%), Wasit (9.17%) and Al-Qadisiya (8.33%). Also, the governorate with the highest proportion of married girls between 15 to 18 years are Ninevah (9.21%), Thi Qar (7.73%), Basrah (7.73%) and Maysan (7.07%) and the governorate with the

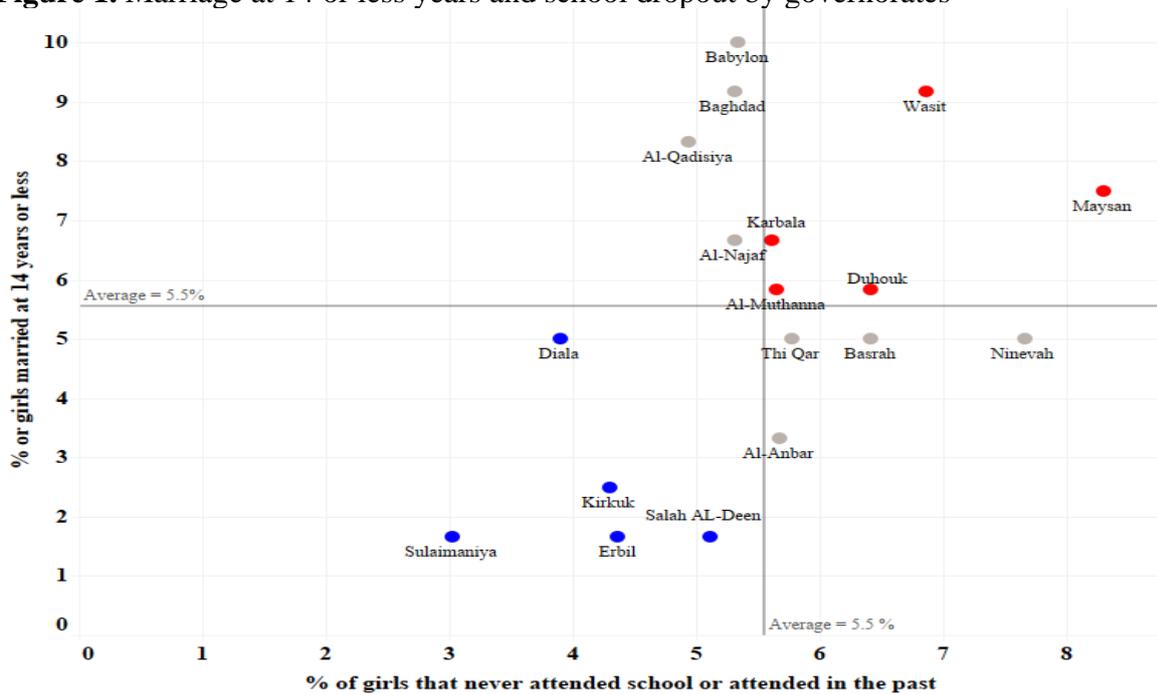
highest proportion of girls that attended school in the past or never attended school at all are Maysan (8.30%), Ninevah (7.6%), Wasit (6.86%) and Basrah (6.42%).

**Table 1.** Governorate's distribution of age at marriage and school attendance

Variables	Age at first marriage (years) N= 5, 273				School attendance N= 5, 273	
	14 or less (%)	15 to 18 (%)	19 to 23 (%)	24 + (%)	In the past or never attended (%)	Currently enrolled (%)
<b>Governorate</b>						
Duhok	(5.83)	(3.78)	(8.64)	(8.0)	(6.42)	(8.92)
Ninevah	(5.0)	(9.21)	(8.91)	(5.02)	(7.66)	(3.31)
Sulaymaniyah	(1.67)	(2.14)	(4.74)	(4.42)	(3.03)	(5.53)
Kirkuk	(2.50)	(3.13)	(2.51)	(5.06)	(4.30)	(5.0)
Erbil	(1.67)	(4.11)	(3.90)	(5.57)	(4.37)	(6.27)
Diala						

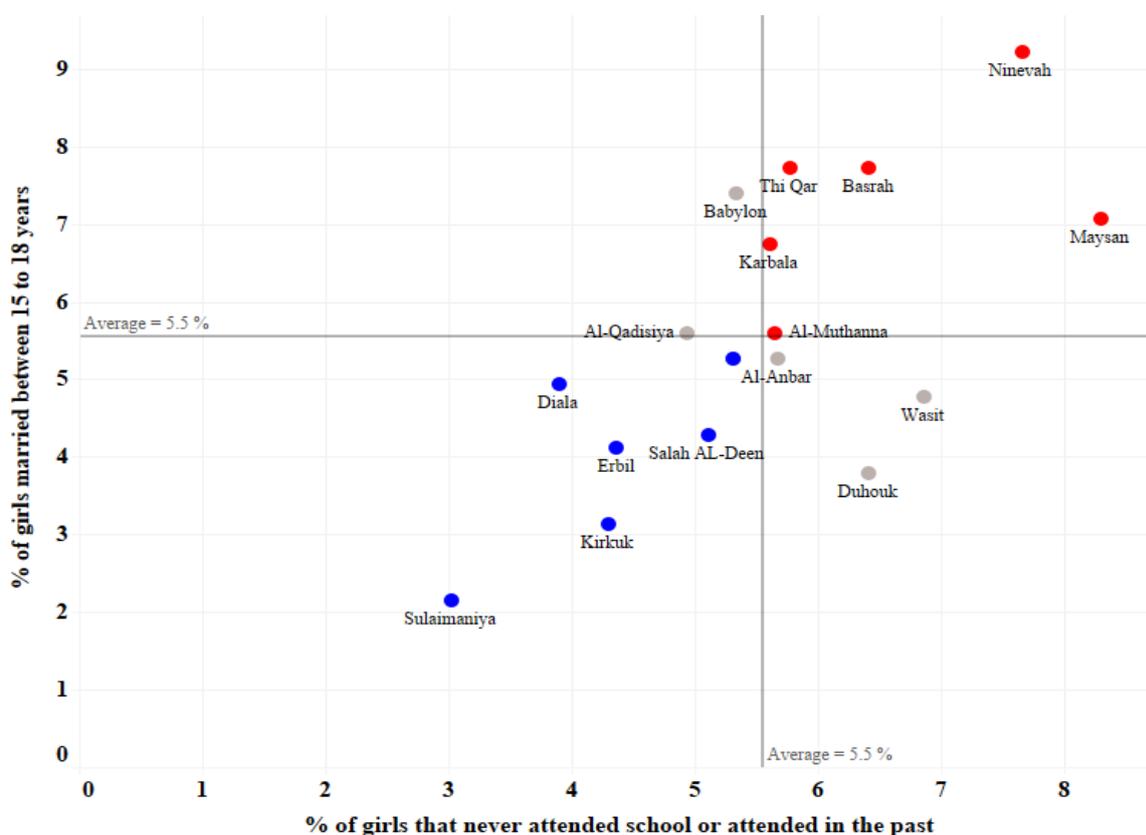
	(5.0)	(4.93)	(5.57)	(4.37)	(3.90)	(5.35)
Al-Anbar	(3.33)	(5.26)	(6.41)	(6.59)	(5.68)	(7.22)
Baghdad	(9.17)	(5.26)	(3.90)	(5.42)	(5.31)	(5.48)
Babylon	(10.0)	(7.40)	(5.85)	(4.71)	(5.34)	(5.05)
Karbala	(6.67)	(6.74)	(6.96)	(5.49)	(5.61)	(5.96)
Wasit	(9.17)	(4.77)	(5.01)	(6.21)	(6.86)	(4.96)
Salah AL-Deen	(1.67)	(4.28)	(3.62)	(5.92)	(5.11)	(5.96)
Al-Najaf	(6.67)	(5.26)	(6.41)	(5.35)	(5.31)	(5.61)
Al-Qadisiya	(8.33)	(5.59)	(6.96)	(5.76)	(4.94)	(7.09)
Al-Muthanna	(5.83)	(5.59)	(4.18)	(5.30)	(5.65)	(4.79)
Thi Qar	(5.0)	(7.73)	(5.85)	(4.56)	(5.78)	(4.05)
Maysān	(7.50)	(7.07)	(5.57)	(6.35)	(8.30)	(3.96)
Basrah	(5.0)	(7.73)	(5.01)	(5.88)	(6.42)	(5.48)

**Figure 1.** Marriage at 14 or less years and school dropout by governorates



**Description figure 1.** Governorates in red are those above country average in terms of prevalence of marriage at 14 or less years and school dropout (attended school in the past or never attended). On the other hand, governorates in blue are those better than the rest because they are below country averages.

**Figure 2.** Marriage at ages 15 to 18 years and school dropout by governorates



**Description figure 2.** Governorates in red are those above country average in terms of prevalence of marriage at 15 to 18 years and school dropout (attended school in the past or never attended). On the other hand, governorates in blue are those better than the rest because they are below country averages.

### 3.1.3 School dropout and early marriage

The findings show that among girls who got married before the age of 14, the three most frequent reasons they dropped out of school are early marriage (30.6%), no desire to continue learning (24.7%) and social reasons (18.8%). For girls who got married between 15 to 18 years, social reasons (28.6%), no desire to continue teaching (25.2%) and early marriage (17.6%) were the main reasons given for their leaving school (**Table 2**).

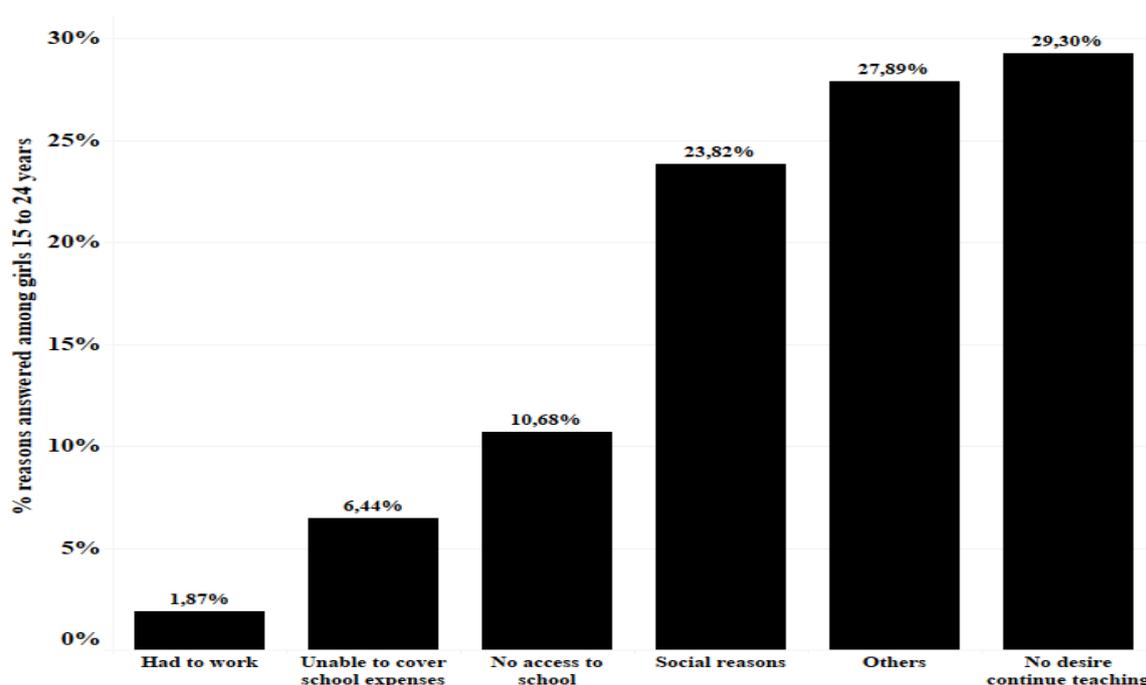
**Table 2.** School dropout and early marriage

Variables	Age at first marriage (years)			
	14 or less (%)	15 to 18 (%)	19 to 23 (%)	24 + (%)
<b>Reasons for school dropout</b>				
There is no easily accessible school in the area	(8.2)	(9.6)	(11.0)	(11.2)
Teaching is not good and not serious enough to encourage enrollment	0	(0.4)	(1.3)	(1.2)
There is no flexibility in study hours	0	(0.2)	(0.4)	(0.7)

Ill-treatment of the teacher / teacher / professor	0	(1.6)	(0.8)	(0.6)
I have to work to support my household	0	(1.4)	(3.4)	(1.9)
The household is unable to cover school expenses	(7.1)	(4.5)	(5.9)	(7.2)
My household believes that school will not help me get a better job	(1.2)	(1.6)	(2.5)	(1.7)
Going to school is dangerous	(3.5)	(0.8)	(1.7)	(2.2)
Social reasons	(18.8)	(28.6)	(22.0)	(22.7)
Early marriage	(30.6)	(17.6)	(7.2)	(3.7)
Due to pregnancy	0	(0.8)	(2.5)	(0.1)
Disease or disability	0	(0.4)	0	(2.5)
I have no desire to continue learning	(24.7)	(25.2)	(26.3)	(31.6)
Helping with the housework	(5.9)	(4.7)	(7.6)	(7.0)
Due to	0	(0.4)	(1.7)	(1.1)

displacement				
Because of ISIS gangs	0	(1.0)	(1.3)	(1.3)
Due to the outbreak of the Corona epidemic	0	0	0	(1.0)
Other	0	(1.0)	(4.2)	(2.5)

**Figure 3.** Reasons for school dropout among girls aged 15 to 24 years who attended school in the past



No desire to continue learning is the main reason for leaving school among girls aged 15-24 (**Figure 3**) above. Others reasons such as teaching is not good and not serious enough to encourage enrollment, there is no flexibility in study hours, ill-treatment of the teacher/teacher/professor, my household head believes that school will not help me get a better job, going to school is too dangerous, early marriage, due to pregnancy, disease or disability, helping with

the housework, due to displacement, because of ISIS gangs and due to the outbreak of the Corona epidemic were grouped into the category others and represents (27.8%).

**Table 3** shows that the reasons cited for marriage among girls who married before the age of 14 years. The most frequent reasons for marriage are clan customs and traditions (46.6%), girl's wishes (35.0%) and the parents' insistence on marriage (33.3%). For girls who got married before the age of 18 years, the most frequent reasons for marriage are girl's wish (46.0%), clan customs and traditions (41.4%) and the parent's insistence on marriage (21.8%). For girls, who attended school in the past or did not attend school at all, the top three reasons for marriage are girl's wish (43.4%), clan customs and traditions (43.2%) and the parent's insistence on marriage (23.8%).

**Table 3.** Reasons for marriage

Variables	Age at first marriage (years) n= 704			
	School attendance n= 704			
	14 or less (%)	15 to 18 (%)	In the past or never joined (%)	Currently enrolled (%)
<b>Reasons for marriage</b>				
Economic situation	(8.33)	(9.94)	(9.61)	(2.52)
Clan customs and traditions	(46.67)	(41.4)	(43.2)	(23.8)
The parents' insistence on marriage	(33.3)	(21.8)	(23.8)	(33.3)
Girl's wish	(35.0)	(46.0)	(43.4)	(52.4)
The security situation	(0.83)	(0.43)	(0.53)	0

Other	0	(0.22)	(0.18)	0
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**Table 4** shows age at marriage and school dropout by wealth index. It shows that for girls in high socioeconomic status, about (16%) got married before 18 years and (42.3%) attended school in the past. Conversely, for girls in the middle socioeconomic status about (12%) got married before 18 years and (49.5%) attended school in the past. Finally, for girls in the low socio- economic status, about (16%) got married before 18 years and (57.7%) attended school in the past.

**Table 4.** Age at marriage and school dropout by wealth index

Variable	Wealth index N= 5, 273		
	High socioeconomic status (Live 1 family or less than 7 household members) (%)	Middle socioeconomic status (Live 2 families or more than 7 household members) (%)	Low socioeconomic status (Live 2 families and + than 7 household members) (%)
<b>Girl's age at first marriage</b>			
14 or less	(2.57)	(1.95)	(2.33)
15-18	(12.14)	(10.6)	(14.0)
19 to 23	(7.07)	(6.80)	(4.28)
24 +	(78.2)	(80.6)	(79.4)
<b>School attendance</b>			
Attended in the past	(42.3)	(49.5)	(57.5)
Never attended	(8.72)	(11.1)	(13.2)

Currently attending	(48.9)	(39.3)	(29.2)
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### 3.1.4 Logistic regression linking age of marriage with school attendance

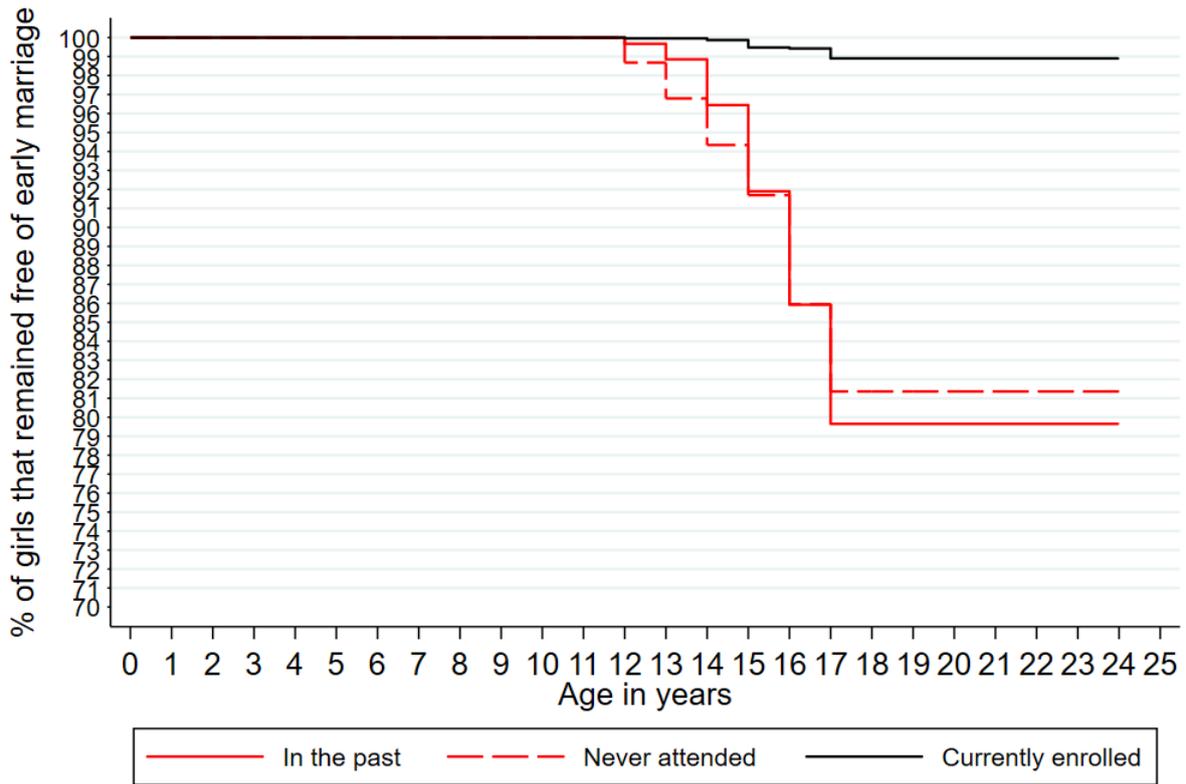
Logistic regression linking age at marriage with school attendance showed that girls who attended school in the past or never attended at all are 5.71 times more likely to marry below the age of 18 than those who are currently attending school (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Logistic regression linking age at marriage with school attendance.

Variable	Age at first marriage before 18 years (N=5,273)		
	Crude odds (OR) ratio	P value	95% Confidence Interval (CI)
	<b>School attendance</b>		
Currently enrolled	1		
In the past or never attended	5.71	<0.001	4.61, 7.07

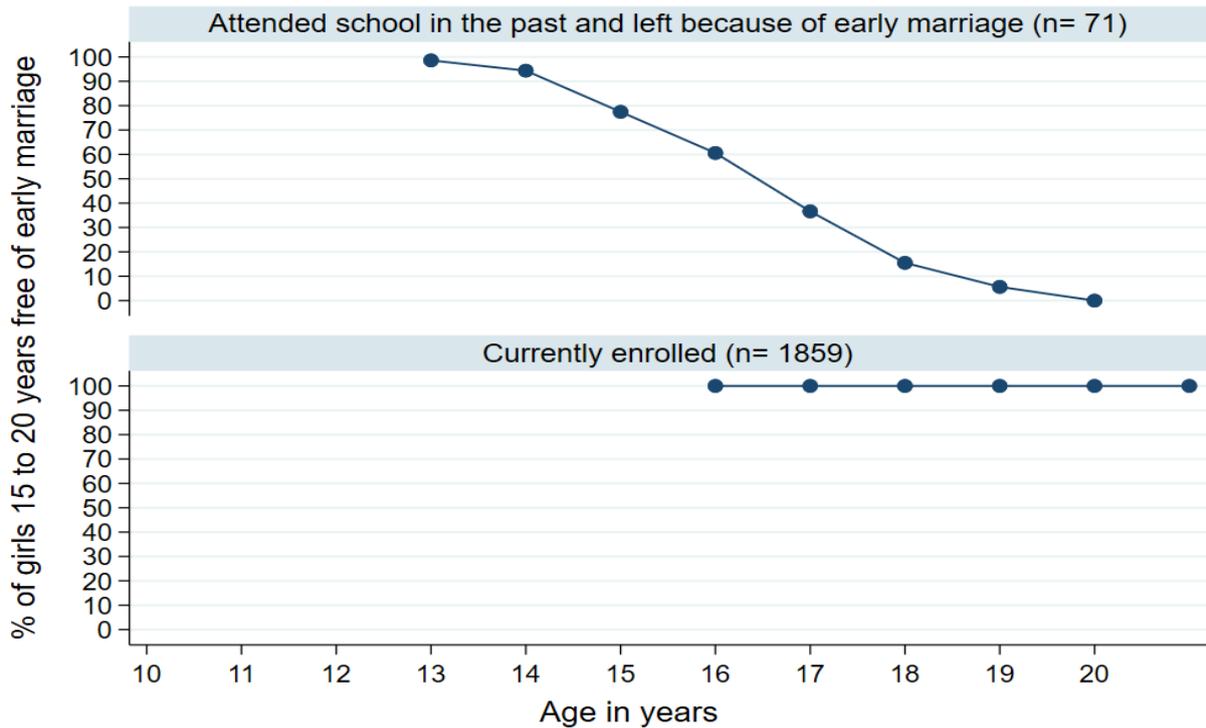
**Figure 4** below presents the risk of marriage before age 18 by level of school attendance. In this age range, 583 girls got married before 18 years. Up to age 10, (100%) of girls aged 15 to 24 had not been married. At age 12, (1%) of the girls who never attended school have already married; at this same age, girls in the other two groups are still unmarried. At age 14, (3%) of the girls who never attended school were already married as were about (1%) of the girls who attended school in the past. At the same age none of the girls currently attending school were married. At age 16, (13%) of the girls who never attended school and girls who attended school in the past are already married, while less than (0.5%) of the girls currently attending school are already married. What this finding shows is that girls who never attended school followed by girls who attended school in the past are the ones who marry the earliest.

**Figure 4.** Risk of marrying before 18 years by school attendance among girls aged 15 to 24 years.



The next **Figure 5** compares the risk of dropping out of school due to marriage before the age of 18. 71 girls responded that they dropped out of school due to marriage, so the date of first marriage was used as the dropout date. In this group of girls who attended school in the past, at age 13 none were married. Two years later (20%) of the 71 girls were already married. By age 17, (70%) of the girls were married and (30%) were unmarried. Comparatively, the panel below presents the risk of early marriage among girls still in school and shows that (100%) of them remain unmarried from the age of 16. Again, what this finding shows is that the risk of early marriage increases with age and leads to dropping out of school.

**Figure 5.** Risk of leaving school due to early marriage



**Table 6** presents a life table of school dropout rates. **Column A** shows the age intervals. **Column B** presents the number of girls aged 15 to 20 who were in school at the beginning of that interval. **Column C** presents the number of girls who dropped out of school in that interval. **Column D** presents the number of girls for whom no information is available on whether they dropped out or stayed in school. **Column E** presents the proportion of girls aged 15 to 20 who are still in school and have not been married. It can be seen that the number of dropouts is highest between the ages of 14 and 17.

**Table 6.** Risk of school leaving due to early marriage. N= 5, 273

Age interval in years (A)	Total girls 15 to 20 years (B) N = 4,512	Number of girls that left school due to early marriage (C) N=71	Number of girls without information of the time the event occurred (D)*	Rate of girls 15 to 20 years in school and not marriage (E)
12 to 13	1930	1	0	0.9995
13 to 14	1929	3	0	0.9979
14 to 15	1926	12	0	0.9917
15 to 16	1914	12	382	0.9848
16 to 17	1520	17	384	0.9722
17 to 18	1119	15	304	0.9571
18 to 19	800	7	286	0.9469
19 to 20	507	4	282	0.9366
20 to 21	221	0	221	0.9366

\*Lack information on educational status

Analysis of risk of school leaving due to early marriage by educational attainment (**Table 6.1**) shows that the rate at which school dropout occurs due to early marriage varies depending on the girl's age and level of schooling. For girls who completed less than primary school education, the maximum dropout rate is between the ages of 14 and 17, while for those who completed primary or secondary school, the highest dropout rate is between the ages of 16 and 18.

**Table 6.1.** Risk of school leaving due to early marriage by educational attainment\* N= 5,273

Age interval in years (A)	Total girls 15 to 20 years n = 71 (B)	Number of girls that left school due to early marriage n = 71 (C)	Number of girls without information of the time the event occurred (D)	Rate of girls 15 to 20 years in school and not marriage (E)
<b>Less than primary</b>				
14 to 15	1869	2	<b>0</b>	<b>0.9989</b>
15 to 16	1867	2	<b>382</b>	<b>0.9977</b>
16 to 17	1483	2	384	0.9962
17 to 18	1097	1	304	0.9951
18 to 19	792	1	286	0.9936
19 to 20	505	2	282	0.9881
<b>Primary</b>				
12 to 13	36	1	0	0.9722
13 to 14	35	3	0	0.8889
14 to 15	32	8	0	0.6667
15 to 16	24	6	0	0.50
<b>16 to 17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.2222</b>
<b>17 to 18</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0556</b>
18 to 19	2	2	0	0
<b>Secondary and higher</b>				
14 to 15	25	2	0	0.9200

15 to 16	23	4	0	0.7600
<b>16 to 17</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.5600</b>
<b>17 to 18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.2400</b>
18 to 19	6	4	0	0.0800
19 to 20	2	2	0	0.00

\*This analysis is restricted to those girls with data on the variable educational status and that answered that they left school due to marriage below 18 years.

### 3.1.5 Predictors of early marriage and school dropout

**Table 7** presents Cox regression linking the gender of the head of household, the educational level and age of the girl with school dropout due to marriage before the age of 18. **Model 1** shows that girls in female-headed households have (18%) lower odds of dropping out of school due to early marriage. Similarly, girls' educational level of primary school or less increases the hazards 116.8 times. Girls aged 15 to 19 years have a (52%) lower dropout rate due to early marriage. The direction of the associations found in model 1 are maintained in model 2, where living in a female-headed household and ages 15 to 19 years at the time of the survey decreases the odds of leaving school due to early marriage; having primary education or less increase the hazards (probabilities) of dropping out of school due to early marriage by 4.46 times.

**Table 7.** Sociodemographic factors predicting school dropout due to marriage before 18 years. N= 5,273

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
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Variable	Crude hazard ratio	95 % Confidence Interval	Adjusted hazard ratio	95% Confidence Interval
<b>Household head gender's</b>				
Male	1		1	
Female	0.82	0.41, 1.62	0.72	0.52, 1.01
<b>Girl's educational status</b>				
Higher than primary	1		1	
Primary or less	116.8	79.7, 171.3	4.46	3.73, 5.32
<b>Girl's age at the time of the interview</b>				
20 to 24	1		1	
15 to 19	0.48	0.33, 0.69	0.69	0.58, 0.81

**Table 8** presents socioeconomic factors linked to the occurrence of marriage before the age of 18. In model 1, living in a female-headed household decreases the odds of early marriage by (25 %). Using less than primary school category as reference group those girls with primary education have 3 times higher risk of early marriage. Girls that completed secondary school have (13%) higher risk of early marriage. Girls aged 15 to 19 years have (37%) lower odds of early marriage than girls aged 20 to 24 years. In model 2, statistical adjustment for the three variables included in model 1 shows that living in a female-headed household decreases the risk of marriage before age 18 by (19%); while having primary school education or higher decreases the risk of early marriage. The greatest protective effect against early marriage was observed among those girls that completed secondary school or have higher educational attainment. Finally, girls aged 15 to 19 years have (33%) lower hazards (probabilities) of early marriage than those aged 20 to 24 years.

**Table 8.** Sociodemographic factors predicting marriage before 18 years. N= 5083

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Crude hazard ratio	95% Confidence Interval	Adjusted hazard ratio	95% Confidence Interval
<b>Household head gender's</b>				
Male	1		1	
Female	0/75	0.54, 1.05	0.81	0.57, 1.16
<b>Girl's educational status</b>				
Less than primary *	1		1	
Primary	3.05	2.56, 3.62	2.89	2.43, 3.44
Secondary and higher	1.13	0.86, 1.49	0.97	0.73, 1.29
<b>Girl's age at the time of the interview</b>				
20 to 24	1		1	
15 to 19	0.63	0.53, 0.75	0.67	0.56, 0.79

\*No certificate, Illiterate, no testimony, only reads, no testimony only reads, literacy certificate

**Table 9** shows the logistic regression predicting school attendance in the past. Girls who married before 18 years are 6 times more likely to attend school in the past than those who were married 18 years and above. After statistical adjustment for the gender of the household head and girl's age at the time of the survey, marrying before 18 years increases school leaving by 5.53 times.

**Table 9.** Logistic regression predicting school attendance in the past (N=5,273)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Crude hazard ratio	95% Confidence Interval	Adjusted hazard ratio	95% Confidence Interval
<b>Age at first marriage</b>				
Married 18 years and above	1		1	
Married before 18 years	6.32	5.09, 7.83	5.53	4.44, 6.88
<b>Household head gender's</b>				
Male	1		1	
Female	1.12	0.92, 1.37	1.13	0.92, 1.40
<b>Girl's age at the time of the interview</b>				
20 to 24	1		1	
15 to 19	0.35	0.31, 0.39	0.38	0.34, 0.33

## 3.2 Qualitative Results

This section of the report presents the results of the largely-scale qualitative survey. By design, the large-scale qualitative survey was conducted to supplement findings from the quantitative data extracted from the I-WISH II Survey. The large-scale qualitative survey was conducted through focus group discussion with six categories of respondents stratified by marital status and gender. The focus group discussions comprised of married women aged 15-25 years, unmarried women aged 15-25 years, married and unmarried women aged 25-40 years, married

men 25-40 years, married and unmarried women aged 40 years and above and married and unmarried men aged 40 years and above. The study grouped the results of the focus group discussions into two themes: early marriage and school dropout and sub-themes including reasons for early marriage and schools and consequences of early marriage and school based on the aim and objectives of the study.

### 3.2.1 Early Marriage

#### 3.2.1.1 Reasons for early marriage of girls

When asked if early marriage below the age of 18 for girls is common in their districts, governorates, or communities and what do they think are the reasons for early marriage of girls, almost all the participants in the focus group discussions replied that the practice of early marriages in their governorates, districts, or communities are prevalent. Furthermore, the participants noted that the reasons why girls are married off early include various factors. These factors include households' limited financial capacity, cultural and traditional norms that perceived early marriage as a rite of passage, men's preference for younger girls for marriage and societal pressure. The participants also noted that girls in their governorates, districts or communities get married early because of marriage fanfares and the perceived lack of destiny for girls who are late to get married. In addition, protection of family honor and the need to stabilize girls' personal lives and protect them from insecurity (such as ISIS) attacks, parent's fear of early adolescent sexual debut or activities and unwanted pregnancy outside of wedlock were also primary reasons cited for the early marriage of girls. These reasons for early marriage provided by the participants are further discussed.

##### 3.2.1.1.1 Households' limited financial capacity

Many participants during the focus group discussions (FGDs) mentioned that households that are faced with limited financial capacity are more likely to marry off their girls early, especially if the father who is regarded as the head of the household is poor and is faced with financial difficulties, such as explained this participant:

*“Sometimes families are poor and have many girls, so they arrange for their girls to get married early to get rid of them”.*

Another participant added:

*“If the father's financial situation is also weak, he is compelled to marry off her daughter”.*

These statements suggest that girls can be perceived as burden to their families, especially if they are many in a household and the only way to relief this burden from the family, especially if it is a poor household is to get rid of them by marrying them early. This factor combined with other cultural and traditional norms have continued to perpetuate early marriage for girls.

### **3.2.1.1.2 Cultural and traditional norms that perceived early marriage as a rite of passage**

In many cases, early marriage for girls is perceived as a rite of passage. Many participants explained that there is nothing more important than marrying your girl child at an early marriage because to them this serves to safe the girl from unwanted pregnancy outside of wedlock, which is socially frowned upon and perceived as quite dishonoring for the family if it happens. Many participants mentioned that:

*“A woman’s most important role is to get married and this becomes more beneficial if the marriage happens at an early marriage”.*

Many participants narrated that because of pressure from close relatives and family members to marry off their daughters and the continuous demand from men for younger brides, most parents are forced to marry off their daughters early. A participant was quoted as saying:

*“If you have a young girl, it is hard to escape the pressure from people. They will always tell you to marry her off. There will be many requests for her hand in marriage and it is hard to escape the pressure from society and men who are mainly interested in young girls to get married”.*

*“If you are faced with pressure, there is no other option but to marry her off because it is hard to find a “good” potential husbands nowadays and there are also no opportunities for girls beside marriage even after they have finished school”.*

The above statement suggests that lack of meaningful alternatives to marriage including job opportunities for girls also contribute to parents’ decision to marry off their daughters early. These and other related statements suggest that girls are often unable to find job even after they

have completed school and need to depend on their parents for survival. This may compel some parents to marry off their daughters early so as to reduce the survival depend on them. This situation may be more complicated in communities where there is perceived scarcity of “good” potential husbands, such as explained above by one of the participants. These factors combined with marriage fanfares and the perceived lack of destiny for girls who are late to get married and the common belief that early marriage stabilize the girls' personal lives and protect them from insecurity (such as ISIS) attacks are primary reasons in the decision of parents to marry off their daughters early. The participant nonetheless viewed early marriage as difficult for girls and with many consequences.

### 3.2.1.2 Early marriage consequences or impact on girls

Among the reported consequences of early marriage on girls by the participants in the focus group discussions include school dropout, divorce, and early pregnancy. Many participants reported that once a girl is married, she ceases to go to school. The participants also reported that the girl at this stage may lack maturity or be unable to handle marital problems and expected domestic chores and other responsibilities expected of a housewife and as such she might face marital problems with her husband or other members of polygamous household, leading to possible divorce. The participants claimed that:

**“Early marriage has forced many girls to leave school and often leaving them with long-lasting physical, psychological social complications and increase divorce cases”.**

The participant further explained that young girl who are married early often lack experience and may not be able to carry out childbearing and other marital responsibilities and these have been cited as a major source of incident of marital problems, including divorce.

**“Girls who had been married early may find it difficult to perform house chores and other marital responsibilities and these have often the source of violence with their husbands and other members of polygamous household and often times could lead to domestic violence and subsequent divorce”.**

Another consequence of early marriage on girls that was cited by the participants included early pregnancy. Participants in numerous focus group discussions decried that early marriage has been a major cause of early pregnancy for married girls and this has often been associated with long-lasting physical and psychological distress for married girls and their offspring. To prevent the practices of early marriage and reduce its effects on girls in Iraq, the participants suggested adolescent girl-parent communication on issues related to marriage and awareness

raising on the harmful effects and consequences of early marriage. The participants further recommended the enforcement of the law banning early marriage for girls below 18, enactment of ordinances in the local courts for sheiks and holding them accountable, making education compulsory for girls, as well as institutionalizing legal fines for parents whose daughters were married underage, and encouraging girls to remain in school.

### 3.2.2 School Dropout

#### 3.2.2.1 Reasons for school dropout among girls

In the focus group discussions, participants including married and unmarried girls, men and women all mentioned a combination of factors contributing to school dropout among girls, and there were several cases of girls who entered marriage after they dropped out of school. The most common responses for dropping out of school that were mentioned by the participants were lack of interest in schooling, cost of schooling, and no interest to study. These issues were most salient in the interviews with married and unmarried girls. But other reasons for school dropout among girls that were cited also included the inability to cope with academic pressure by some girls, which may also be linked to poor performance, such as explained by a participant in one of the focus group discussions:

***“If the girl failed to pass the same class several times, they will make her leave school and let her marry”.***

This statement demonstrates that besides the lack of interest in schooling and the cost of schooling, poor performance in school could lead to school dropout and subsequent early marriage for girls. But for other participants, the reason for dropping out of school is also not simply due to poor performance, but because of financial constraint, including low income of families, long travel distance to school, domestic work/or job responsibilities at home, the high of level insecurity, including (ISIS) attacks, poor quality of teaching, especially in rural areas where there are few good schools and lack of teaching staff in these rural areas. Some parents also are adamant to send their daughters to mixed schools and because there is a lack of same sex schools in some communities these parents would prefer to withdraw their daughters from school or not send them to school at all. This is what one participant had to say about the lack of same-sex schools for girls:

***“The parents do not accept mixed schools. And Girls' only schools are few. This a major reason for why some parents will withdraw their daughters from school”.***

In other cases, participants described interruptions in girl's schooling as due to parent's fear of romantic relation between boys and girls, sexual harassment in and outside of the school, peer influence, traditional and tribal norms, and exposure to modern technology (TikTok, Facebook and other social media). Additionally, the interviews revealed that not seeing the value of schooling because of the perceived lack of job opportunities after completion of school was also found to have a compounding effect. Other reported barriers to girl's education also included social norms against girl's education, for early marriage of girls, laziness, and poor health condition.

### 3.2.2.2 Consequences or impact of school dropout on girls

Participants mentioned numerous consequences or impact of school dropout on girls, including loss of future opportunities, such as explained by this participant:

*“Her future opportunity will be lost; she will have neither work nor a job”.*

Other consequences associated with early school leaving for girls that were reported by the participant included illiteracy, poor quality of life due to lack of self-efficacy and future employment, as well as limited rights including decision-making autonomy within the household. Early marriage was also cited as one of the consequences or resulting impact of school dropout for girls. Many participants viewed the practices of early marriage as difficult for girls with consequences often including physical and psychological distress for them and their offspring.

Analysis of the similarities and differences in reported causes of early and school dropout by the focus group discussions participants revealed that although the causes of early marriage and school dropout are similar across the different regions where qualitative data was collected, compared with urban and semi-urban areas, participants from rural areas tended to report poor quality of school and long travel distance from school as major reasons for school dropout among girls in their communities. However, across all the regions and governorates where focus group discussions were conducted, issues such as households limited financial capacity, cultural and traditional norms associated with marriage and societal pressures were common appearing themes that were reported in the decision of parents to marry of their daughters early. Analyzing by marital status and age, the reported reasons for early marriage and school dropout were also mixed but similar across the different sex and age strata.

## Chapter 4. Discussion

This study seeks to explore the reasons for early marriage and school dropout among girls and the effects of early marriage practices and its correlation with school dropout for girls in Iraq. The study is based on quantitative data extracted from the second round of the Iraq Women Integrated Social and Health II Survey (I WISH II)<sup>7</sup> conducted in September 2021 and focus group discussions conducted with married and unmarried men and women aged 18 years and above across various governorates in federal Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The study findings show that early marriage and school dropout in Iraq are a standard set of behavior that arise in response to underlying individual factors, such as the age of the girl, school attendance (e.g., whether the girl is attending school), and performance in school. In addition, household wealth and individual level factors, such as the age of the girl and parental level characteristics, such as the age and education level of the parent were also found to be significant predictors of early marriage, and each elevates the risks of school dropout due to early marriage. But there were also other underlying factors, such as poor performance in school, poor teaching staff, limited quality and access to school, household poverty, and social and cultural norms on girls' education and early marriage, which were also deciding factors in school dropout and early marriage for girls. These findings are in keeping with previous studies in Iraq<sup>8-10</sup>. For instance, a study conducted on the Personal Status Court in the city center of Al-Diwaniyah found that many parents marry off their daughters at a young age to financially empowered people in society<sup>2</sup>. Another study conducted in the Kurdistan region of Iraq reported that while poverty

and economic vulnerability are primary reasons for early marriage for girls, the practice of early marriage is also deeply rooted in some communities' traditional social and cultural standards<sup>3</sup>.

The study findings point to a complex and bidirectional relationship between early marriage and school dropout Iraq. Early marriage was found to be both a cause and consequence of school dropout for girls. School dropout was also reported and found to a cause and consequence of early marriage for girls. Given this complex relationship between early marriage and school dropout, it is argued that early marriage and school dropout prevention programs for girls in Iraq should not assume that delaying marriage for girls will automatically lead to lower school dropouts or that improved school enrolment for girls will automatically lead to delayed marriage. Instead, it is essential to consider the other underlying factors that impact both girls' likelihood of getting married early and dropping out of school by developing and strengthening a holistic package of response services for early marriage and school dropout.

### **Strengths and limitations of the study**

This study has numerous strengths. First, the first study has explored and established the effects of early marriage practices and their correlation with school dropout among girls in Iraq. Previous studies in Iraq have mainly focused on investigating factors and causes of early marriage and school dropout. Still, none of them have shown a correlation between early marriage and school dropout in Iraq. Therefore, this study has contributed to filling the knowledge gap on the links between early marriage and school dropout in Iraq. In addition, although the 2018 MICS survey of Kurdistan Region of Iraq has provided information on the number of girls who were first married before age 15 and 18 by education level, it does not show whether girls dropped out of school before or after they married. This study addresses this knowledge gap by showing that girls attending school are (97%) less likely to marry between the ages of 15 and 18 than those who did not attend school. The study also revealed that girls who attended school in the past are the ones who marry the earliest, which suggests that marriage for girls often happens following school dropout or after the girl has completed school. Finally, the study also provided information on the type of policy, programmes and community-based interventions that can be designed and implemented to reduce the effects of early marriage practices on school dropout among girls in Iraq. This is among the most salient points of the study. However, it is also important to note that the study is limited by design. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data extracted from the I WISH II survey and the fact that the study participants extracted from the I WISH II was limited to ages 15-24 years may not provide a representative sample of the different ages of girls in Iraq who are either married

or are at risk of early marriage because ages below 15 could also be prone to early marriage and school dropout due to early marriage.

## Chapter 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations for policy, programme and community-based interventions are provided in light of the study findings.

### 5.1 Policy and programmatic interventions

#### Overall:

- Develop and continue to strengthen an integrated approach to end early marriage and reduce school dropout for girls with key sectors such as justice, education, economic and social protection. This is critical to ensure a holistic package of response services are delivered for girls at risk of early marriage or already in marriages or who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school for marriage.

#### Justice sector

- Review or repeal the exemption clause of parental consent for under age marriage and ensure adequate enforcement of appropriate age of marriage. While enforcing the law on appropriate age of marriage, it is crucial to consider the controversial nature of the topic of underage marriage within the Iraqi context.
- Enacting laws for the court and sheikhs and holding them accountable
- Setting legal fines for underage marriages

#### Education sector

- Integrate extracurricular activities and technology-oriented modules in the school curriculum to make learning more attractive to girls since no desire to continue

teaching, lack of interest in schooling and no interest to study are among the main reasons given for early school leaving among girls.

- Introduce Accelerated School Programmes and establish Literacy Centers for girls who have dropped out or who wish to return back to school
- Work with established school management in communities to convince parents to send and retain their girls in school and to advocate for the prevention of early marriage and school dropout among girls
- Making primary and high school education compulsory for girls and boys

### **Social and economic sector**

- Provide economic support to families to offset the economic drivers of early marriage and school dropout for girls. The economic support for families should target the poorest households since girls in low household socio-economic status were found to be (30%) more likely to get married before 18 and are (84%) more likely to have left school.

## **5.2 Community-based interventions**

- Capacity building for key community stakeholders and elected members from local governance to raise awareness around the harmful health and social effects of early marriage for girls.
- Awareness raising campaigns on the importance of girl's education. The awareness raising campaigns should target girls, parent and community at large.
- Promote parents-daughter communication on issues surrounding early marriage
- Awareness raising on the harmful effects and consequences of early marriage with key community stakeholders and members, including families, parents and social and religious leaders
- Work with school and community structures, such as school management committees (SMC) and parent-teacher associations (PTA) to ensure girls remain in school until they reach the legal age of 18.

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