

# Empowering Adolescents, Transforming Futures – Durable impacts that Extend Across Generations

Erica Field (Duke University)  
Rachel Glennerster (Center for Global Development)

Nina Buchmann (Princeton University)  
Sakib Mahmood (BRAC University)

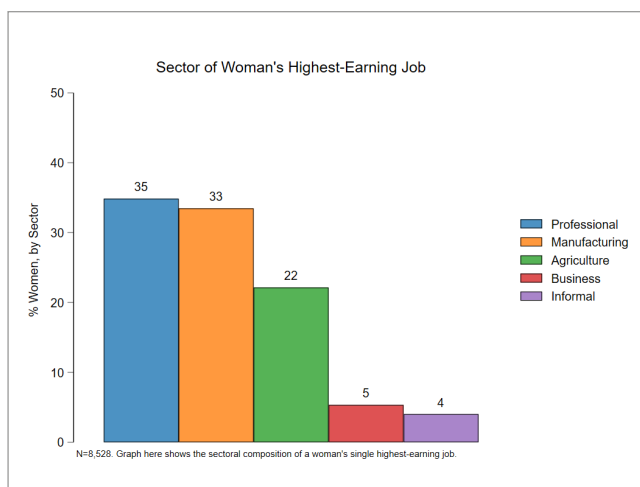


Adolescent intervention pays off: higher employment for women and stronger school outcomes for the next generation

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## Topic at a Glance

Child marriage remains pervasive in Bangladesh and many low-income settings, undermining girls' education, reducing their economic participation, and constraining opportunities for their children. Policymakers have invested heavily in empowerment programs and incentives to delay marriage, yet little is known about whether these interventions generate lasting economic gains. This project answers that question through a large-scale randomized trial offering adolescent girls either a six-month empowerment program or a financial incentive to delay marriage across 460 communities. More than a decade later, women exposed to either intervention are substantially more likely to participate in the labor force and work more hours, indicating that early agency-building translates into durable economic returns. Emerging evidence also shows sizable human capital investments: children of women who received both interventions are more likely to be in school. These findings reveal that adolescent empowerment can reshape women's life trajectories and strengthen human capital in the next generation.



Caption: Women exposed to both arms are more likely to engage in work, with their highest-earning job in the professional sector.

## New Insights

Although empowerment and marriage-delay programs are widely implemented, almost all evidence stops at schooling or early behavioral changes; little is known about whether these interventions translate into sustained economic gains later in life. This project addresses that gap by offering the first long-run causal estimates of how adolescent empowerment and delayed marriage shape women's labor force participation and employment trajectories.

The most robust effect is the persistent boost to women's labor force participation, which remains strong more than a decade after the intervention. Women exposed to either arm of the treatment show large and sustained improvements in labor market engagement over time: they are not only more likely to work, but they also supply more hours to the market. Preliminary

sectoral data further suggest that their highest-earning jobs increasingly fall within professional sectors, a meaningful indication that gains are not limited to the extensive margin, but include occupational upgrading and movement into better-earning forms of work. This pattern reinforces the interpretation that early-life interventions can reshape women's economic positioning, even in environments with structurally limited opportunities.

These results make clear that empowerment during adolescence generates persistent life-course effects. The intervention altered economic trajectories as girls transitioned into adulthood, increasing their likelihood of working, the quantity of labor supplied, and the quality of employment obtained. Importantly, this insight was not fully observable in the previous wave. Earlier follow-up suggested that labor market differences might be emerging, but without the distance of time it was impossible to know whether they would fade or compound. The latest wave shows that they have strengthened: women exposed to empowerment or incentives are now substantially more likely to be economically active and doing so in higher-earning roles.

This extended perspective illustrates why long-run evaluation matters. Limited follow-ups would have missed the fact that these translated into durable labor market gains in adulthood. The current results therefore reveal more than new impacts: they validate the importance of continued tracking and provide strong justification for additional waves of data collection, as the most consequential effects of adolescent interventions only become visible over time.

The results of this recent round also show a striking intergenerational effect: children of women who received both interventions are more likely to be in school. This pattern suggests that early intervention not only alters women's own life trajectories but also reshapes the educational investments they make in the next generation. Higher attendance among children is consistent with improved maternal agency, stronger decision-making, and greater valuation of human capital. These intergenerational gains highlight the long-run social returns to adolescent empowerment: returns that extend beyond labor outcomes and into the accumulation capital across generations.

## Policy Recommendations

**Policy recommendation #1:** Expand adolescent programs that strengthen women's labor market outcome, whether capability-building or incentive-based.

- Both components of the intervention produced durable improvements in women's participation in income-generating work: women exposed to empowerment programming and women who received incentives are more likely to work and supply more labor to the market in adulthood. This suggests that early investments, whether through building agency or altering life trajectories via incentives to delay marriage, can translate into meaningful economic gains later in life. Scaling interventions that enhance skills, confidence, or the timing of key transitions can help young women enter and remain in paid work, improving household resilience and economic inclusion.

**Policy recommendation #2:** Recognize adolescence as a leverage point for intergenerational human capital gains.

- The follow-up data also show that children of women who received both interventions are more likely to attend school. This indicates that early investments in adolescents may reshape the educational decisions they make as parents. Policies that enable girls to exercise agency and delay early marriage can therefore generate benefits that may improve the schooling and human capital accumulation of the next generation. Investing during adolescence is thus a mechanism not only for improving women's outcomes today but for accelerating intergenerational welfare improvements.

## Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the simple fact of time. Because we are examining the effects of a longitudinal intervention, many of the most important downstream effects, particularly those involving children, are still unfolding. While we observe clear gains in women's labor outcomes and strong improvements in children's school attendance, we cannot yet observe the full set of long-term trajectories these early advantages may produce. Since the intervention differentially impacted women's age at marriage and thus childbirth, many children of treated women are still young. For this reason, key outcomes such as sustained school progression and cognitive development remain unmeasured at this stage. As a result, our estimates at this time capture only the early stages of intergenerational impact; the true long-run effects on human capital investment will only become visible as further waves of data

are collected. A related limitation is that we cannot yet characterize a woman's full labor supply trajectory around childbirth. Since many women are still in their childbearing years, we do not yet observe how employment evolves as children age, including whether women who exit the labor force for childbirth later re-enter. Given the durable employment gains observed so far, a key question for future waves is how these patterns interact with childbirth and shifting childcare responsibilities over time.

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