

## Policy Brief No 8 of 2025

### Child marriage and related harmful practices

#### Overview:

This paper presents levels and trend of child marriage, and related harmful practices in Kenya. Child marriage refers to marital union where one or both parties are under the age of 18 years. At the national level, the prevalence is high but declining. It is highest in ASAL counties and rural areas. A similar pattern is reported for female genital mutilation (FGM) and adolescent pregnancy. However, relevant legal and policy frameworks exist but extent of implementation and enforcement is low. Further research is therefore recommended to determine reasons for ineffectiveness of the implementation mechanisms.

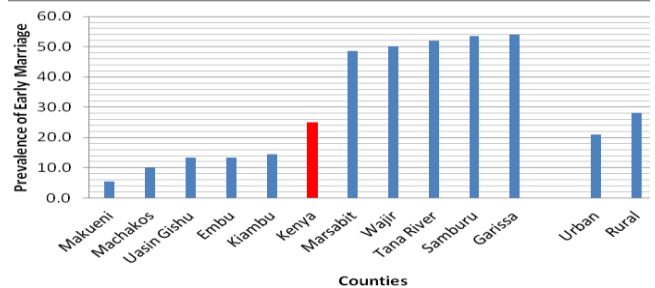
#### Background:

Globally, child marriage is highest in sub-Saharan Africa at 37 percent. Kenya has made major strides towards reducing the practice through constitutional and legal reforms, including the Kenya Constitution (2010), The Marriage Act (2014), the Children’s Act (2022), Prohibition of FGM Act (2011), the Sexual Offences Act (2006) and the Kenya Children Policy (2025). However drivers of child marriage including cultural norms, poverty, and lack of education and awareness continue to undermine progress towards eliminating the practices.

#### Key Findings:

1. Child marriage among women in Kenya is declining but remains high at 25%. The prevalence is highest in the ASAL counties especially in Garissa and Samburu counties at 54% each, and rural areas at 28%. Child marriage among men has however stagnated at four percent (4%) for the last two decades.

Prevalence of early marriage decreases as level of education and wealth index increases. The lack of education is known to limit an individual's options to improve their circumstances economically and make better choices.



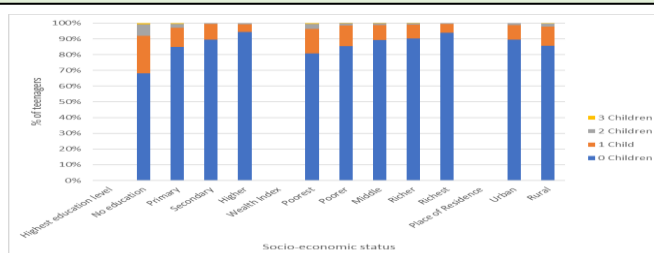
Prevalence of child marriage: Lowest and Highest levels, and Place of Residence

Child marriage is also known to be associated with FGM and adolescent pregnancy.

2. FGM in Kenya has declined by more than half in the last two decades to 15% in 2022 and is about twice in rural areas (18%) than in urban areas. Prevalence of FGM decreased as education level increases such that, it was 56% among women with no education against 6% among women with secondary education, and with wealth where FGM is highest among women from the poorest households (32%) compared to 6.6% among those from the richest households.

3. Adolescent/teenage pregnancy has decline gradually from 18% in 2014 to 15% in 2022 after stagnating in 2009-2014. It varies inversely with education and household wealth, and is higher in rural than urban area.

## Policy Brief No 8 of 2025



Pregnancy and childbirth complications are among the known leading causes of death in women aged 15 to 19 years in low- and middle-income countries.

### Implications:

Failure to address child marriage leads to high risks of unwanted pregnancies, childbirth complications, and maternal, perinatal and infant mortality. It also excludes affected individuals from full participation in education, labour markets, leadership, and decision-making spheres.

### Recommendations:

1. Legal system and police service enforce the Prohibition of FGM Act (2011) and Children Act (2022) provisions on minimum age of marriage and protection from child abuse.

2. ASAL counties develop and implement culturally sensitive interventions that are tailored to local context for harmful practices such as child-marriage and FGM.
3. The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) to lead civil societies organisations (CSO), county and national governments to implement educational and awareness creation campaigns involving men and boys to curb cultural practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation.

### Conclusion:

Child marriage among women in Kenya is declining but remains high especially in frontier counties and rural areas. This is despite existence of legal and policy frameworks. Child marriage, FGM and adolescent pregnancy are interrelated and are associated with maternal health complications. These harmful practices also limit a woman's access to education and economic opportunities, hence denying her family and country.

### References

1. National Council for Population and Development. 2025. *Kenya Population Situation Analysis Report 2025*.
2. National Council for Law Reporting, (2022)

This Policy Brief is based on the Kenya Population Situational Analysis Report 2025.

**Collaborating Organizations:** National Council for Population and Development (NCPD), Population Studies and Research Institute (PSRI) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

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