

Center for International Development
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POLICY BRIEF

Maternal Age as a Predictor of a
Child's Preschool Enrollment in sub-
Saharan African Countries

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Background

Adolescent parenthood is prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. Over **700 million** women today were married or partnered before reaching the age of 18. In 2014, the, the average global birth rate among girls age 15 to 19 was 49 per 1000 (**1 in 20**), the highest rates of which were found in sub-Saharan Africa. Young maternal age may pose critical risks that aggravate inequalities in their children's early development and education. This study aims to investigate the association between maternal age and a child's preschool enrollment in 29 sub-Saharan African countries.

In Niger, 77 per cent of women age 20 to 49 were married before age 18 in contrast to 5 per cent of male counterparts.

Teenage parenthood is associated with an increased risk of preterm birth and intrauterine growth restriction, infant mortality, and child undernutrition

Methodology

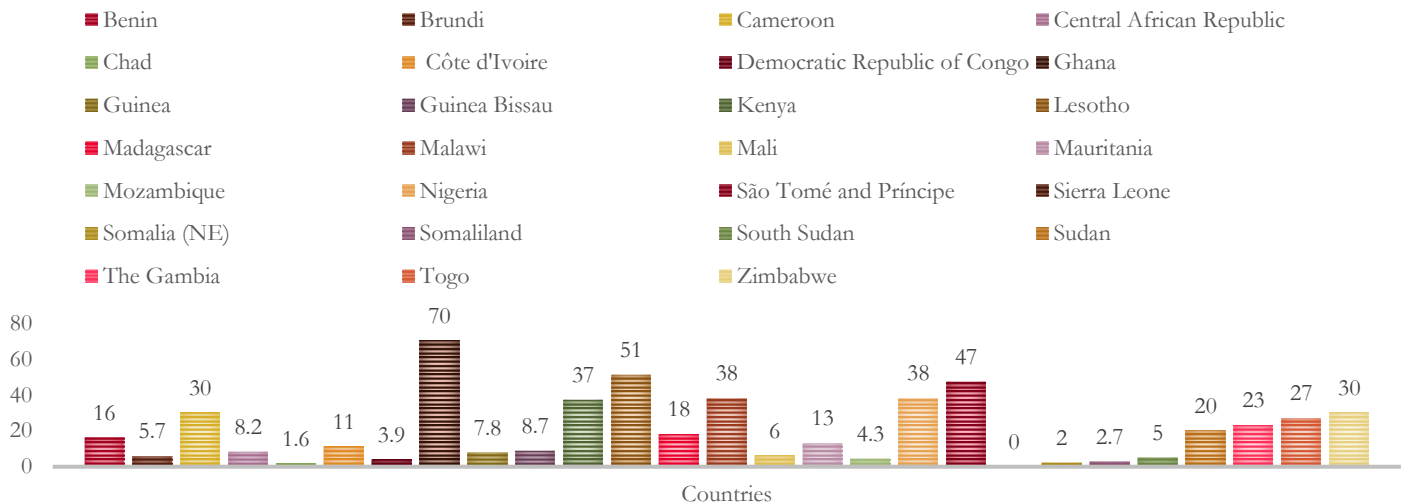
The study aggregated nationally representative Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) in 29 sub-Saharan African countries. The study used linear probability models, regressing a child's preschool enrollment status on age of a matched mother while sequentially adjusting child-, mother-, household-, and country-level confounders. The study then added an interaction term between maternal age and country in order to determine whether the association varies across the 29 countries.

Enrollment in preschool programming can effectively mitigate individual and societal inequalities over time and help break intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Results

In the total sample, 81% of 90,152 children aged 3 and 4 were not enrolled in any forms of organized early childhood education program. After controlling comprehensive levels of covariates, **one year increase in maternal age was estimated to be associated with 0.16 percentage points of increment in probability of a child's preschool enrollment ($p < .001$)**. However, such an association substantially varied in both magnitude and significance across 29 sub-Saharan African countries.

PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT RATE



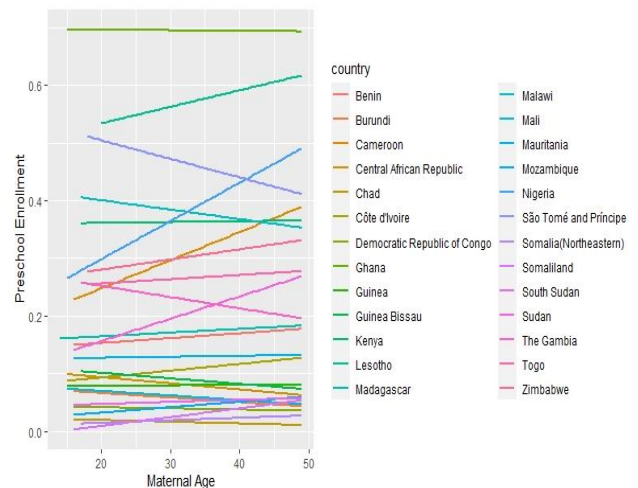
Discussion

Younger mothers are predicted to be less likely to enroll their children in ECCE programs.

The association significantly varied across 28 sub-Saharan African countries.

Significant relationship between maternal age and a child's preschool enrollment rate was found in following countries (ordered by magnitude in percentage points): Nigeria (0.67), Cameroon (0.45), Sudan (0.18), Benin (0.17), Somalia Northeast zone (0.12).

Varying Associations across 28 countries



Policy Implications

Policies to support adolescent mothers may mitigate inequalities in early childhood development and education and allow young children at risks to meet their full developmental potential. This endeavor may critically share a pathway of eradicating social and economic inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa. However, such policies have to be complemented with sufficient penetration of access to preschool programming across the continent and further investigating the specific risks posed by adolescent motherhood for young children and cultural norms of individual countries