

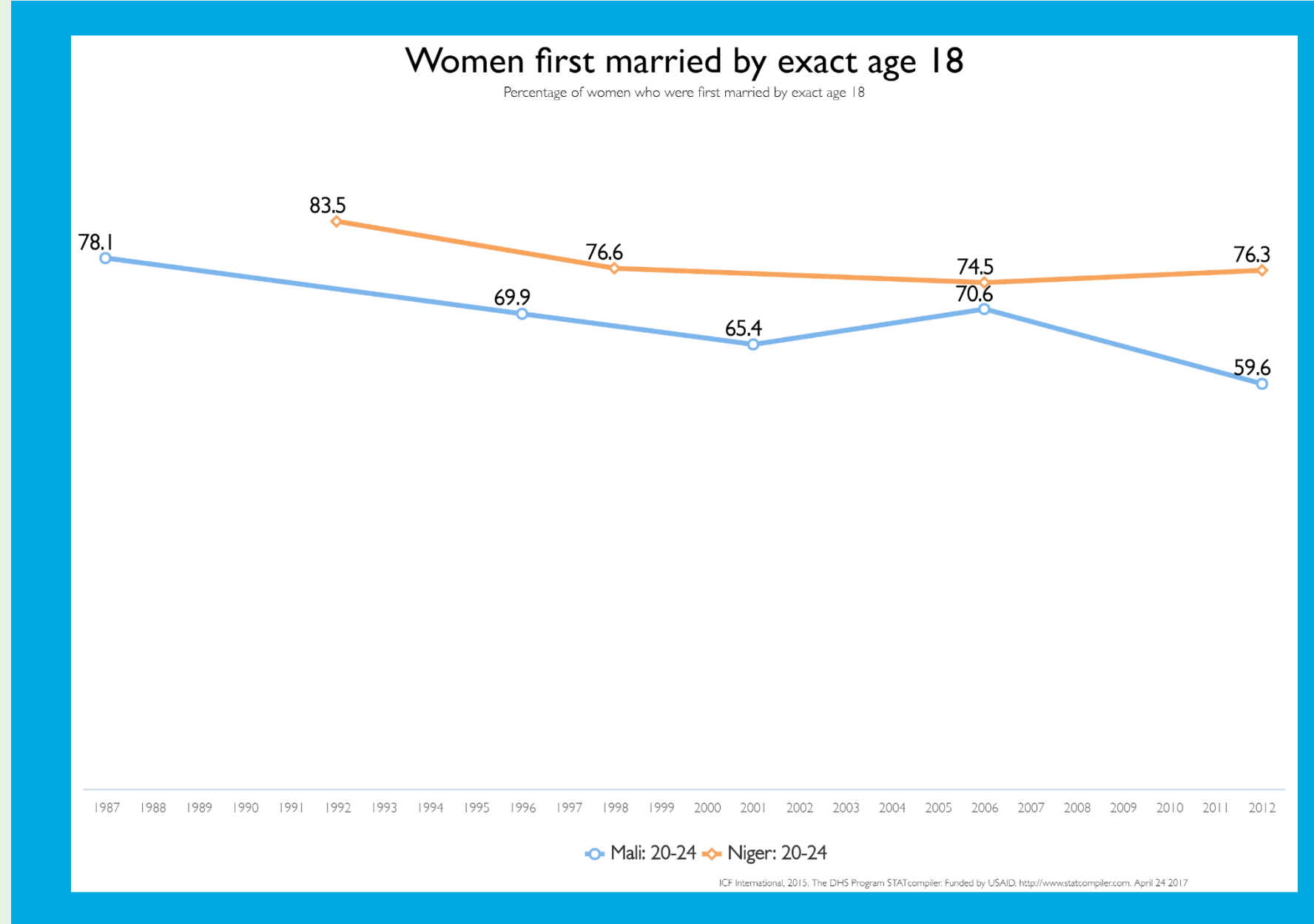
Child Marriage in Mali and Niger: Timing, Processes, and Transactions

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BACKGROUND

Child marriage (marriage under age 18) is common in West Africa, with Mali and Niger having among the highest rates of child marriage globally. In Mali, 59.6% of women 20-24 report being married by age 18 (6th highest globally) and in Niger it is 76.3% (highest globally). Some regions within Mali and Niger experience even higher rates: in Kayes region in Mali (70.9% of women 20-24 report being married by age 18) and Segou it is 57.8%; in Niger, Maradi (88.6%) and Zinder (87.3%) have the highest proportion married by age 18 (DHS data). While levels of child marriage are high in both countries, child marriage appears to be on the decline in Mali but not in Niger (DHS data; figure below).



OBJECTIVE

The current analysis compares marriage characteristics and covariates to explore drivers of child marriage in these two high child marriage West African settings.

METHODS

We conducted surveys of adolescent females ages 12-19 in select regions in Mali (Sikasso and Segou) and Niger (Maradi and Tillaberi) in July 2016 (Mali) and January 2017 (Niger). A total of 1455 adolescents (855 in Mali and 600 in Niger) were interviewed.

The survey instrument included questions on demographics, marital status and processes, sexual and reproductive health knowledge and experience, mobility and social life, experience of harassment, attitudes towards gender equality and gender-based violence, and experience of migration.

DEMOGRAPHICS

TABLE 1 Overall Sample Demographics

	Mali N=855	Niger N=600
Age (mean)	15.2	15.1
Respondents who were currently married (%)	14.4	30.7
Respondents 15-19 who were currently married (%)	25.2	50.6
Age at marriage (mean)	16.1	14.5
Ever attend school (%)	63.0	62.0
Out of school (%)	59.6	60.8
Years of school completed (among ever attended) (mean)	6.2	4.9
Mother has no formal schooling (%)	87.4	84.5
Number of siblings (mean)	5.1	5.5
Ever pregnant (those age 15 and older) (%)	22.4	13.7
Ever worked (%)	48.6	15.8
Currently involved in income-generating activities (%)	20.7	7.5

MARRIAGE & CHILDBEARING

- 25.2% (Mali) and 50.6% (Niger) of females 15-19 were currently married
- Among ever married, mean age difference between partners was 10.4 years (Mali) and 8.8 years (Niger)
- Among married girls, 25.6% (Mali) and 21.2% (Niger) reported being in polygamous unions
- Knowledge of family planning is higher in Mali but still quite low: Only 35.8% of respondents in Mali and 7.3% in Niger had heard of condoms and knew they could be used just once
- 21.2% (Mali) and 40.8% (Niger) could not name a place to obtain family planning methods

TABLE 2 Demographics by Marital Status

	Mali		Niger	
	Ever Married (n=125)	Never Married (n=729)	Ever Married (n=190)	Never Married (n=410)
Age (mean)	17.8	14.7	17.0	14.2
Ever attend school (%)	66.4	65.1	61.9	71.9
Ever pregnant (%)	61.3	9.3	25.7	0.6
Ever worked (%)	62.9	46.1	14.7	16.3
Currently involved in income-generating activities (%)	27.4	19.6	5.8	8.3
Currently saving money for the future (%)	25.0	25.2	10.5	11.5
Has always lived in current village (%)	66.4	91.5	66.3	81.1

- Among respondents over 15 (n=490 Mali; n=336 Niger), 22.4% (Mali) and 13.7% (Niger) have ever been pregnant
- Among ever married: 61.3% (Mali) & 25.7% (Niger)
- Among never married: 9.3% (Mali) & 0.6% (Niger)

MARRIAGE PROCESS & TRANSACTIONS

- Girls in Mali were more likely to report their marriage was arranged by the family (59.3%; 19.5% in Niger) and to agree that girls do not have the right to refuse an arranged marriage (68.7%) compared to girls in Niger (37.2%). Girls in Mali also were more likely to agree that women should tolerate violence to keep her family together (93.5% compared to 48.3%).

TABLE 3 Marriage & Agency

	Mali		Niger	
	N	%	N	%
% who report that respondent and husband chose each other	25	20.3	93	48.9
% who report that family arranged the marriage and the respondent accepted	73	59.3	37	19.5
% agree/strongly agree that girls do not have the right to refuse an arranged marriage	587	68.7	223	37.2
% agree/strongly agree that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together	799	93.5	290	48.3
% who report she can disagree with parents on decisions affecting her	204	23.9	73	12.2

Bride price

- Among married girls, 90.2% (Mali) and 91.6% (Niger) report that a bride price and/or a bride price other in-kind items were arranged as part of marriage
- More than half (53.1% in Mali and 51.1% in Niger) did not know the total amount
- Among those who did know the amount, the mean amount was 131,827 CFA (about \$213) in Mali and 142,292 CFA (about \$230) in Niger [Note: GDP per capita is \$724 (Mali) and \$359 (Niger) (World Bank 2015)].



DISCUSSION

- Mali and Niger are similar on a number of indicators (school attendance, migration) but differ on early marriage (higher in Niger), pregnancy out of wedlock (higher in Mali), and livelihoods (higher proportion ever worked in Mali).
- Early marriage is common in both settings but more than twice as likely in Niger compared to Mali. Surprisingly, indicators of agency related to marriage suggest that girls in Niger have more agency than girls in Mali.
- Marriage transaction costs, marriages to older men, and polygamy are similar in both settings suggesting that differences in child marriage rates are not explained by these customary practices.
- Girls in Mali are much more likely to work than in Niger: 20.7% of girls in Mali and 7.5% in Niger are currently involved in income generating activities. Differences in proportion who have ever worked (48.6% in Mali and 15.8% in Niger) are similarly large. These figures are consistent with the higher per capita income in Mali suggesting the country is further along in the trajectory of development. This also suggests that the lack of livelihoods opportunities in Niger may be a driver of child marriage.
- Several reproductive health indicators suggest greater premarital sexual activity in Mali than in Niger. In Mali, 9.3% of never married girls reported ever being pregnant compared to just 0.6% in Niger. Indicators of access to services suggest that access to family planning is poor in both settings. Delayed marriage is associated with rising premarital sexual activity (Bongaarts, 2007); given the low access to contraceptives, as early marriage declines in Mali we expect births out of wedlock to rise.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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