



Ministry of Gender,
Children, Disability, and
Social Welfare

AFIDEP

African Institute for
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Bridging Development Research,
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Fact Sheet

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Child Marriage in Malawi

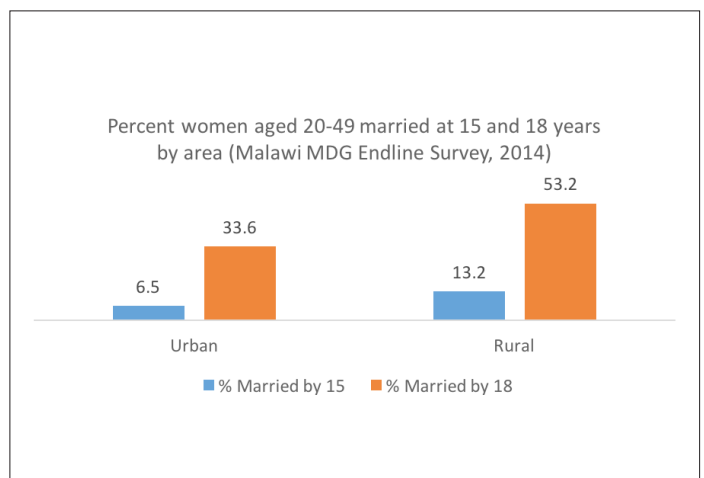
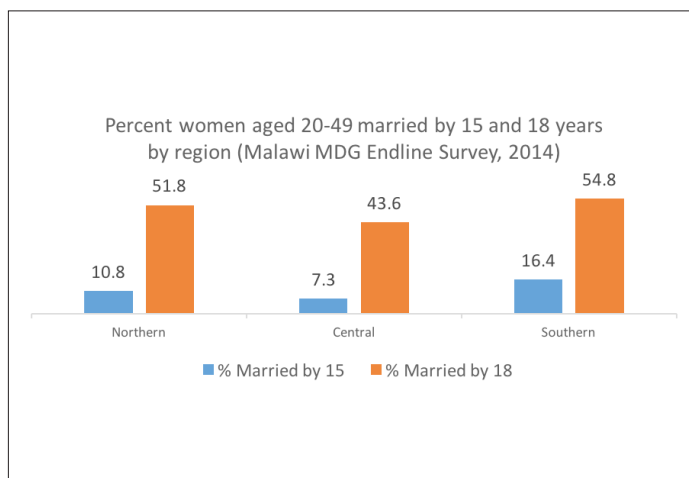
- Malawi has the 11th highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 47% of women marrying before the age of 18.
- The Southern and Northern regions have higher rates of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy than the Central region.
- Rural areas have higher rates of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy than urban areas.
- Education has a significant relationship to age at first marriage in Malawi – women with lower levels of education are much more likely to marry and have children early.

In Malawi, child marriage (marriage to a person less than 18 years old)¹ remains a key development challenge. Malawi has the 11th highest rate of child marriage in the world, and the 9th highest rate in Africa.² In Malawi, 47 percent of women marry before the age of 18, and 12 percent before the age of 15.³ Typically, the age at

first birth is about one year after marriage. As a consequence, Malawi's teenage pregnancy rate is very high – 29 percent of girls aged 15-19 have begun childbearing.⁴

The Southern and Northern regions of the country, which are largely rural, have

higher rates of child marriage and early pregnancy than the Central region, which is largely urban. The Southern region exhibits the worst child marriage and early pregnancy rates countrywide – the median age at marriage is 17.8 years compared with 18.2 and 18.6 in the Northern and Central regions respectively.⁵



¹The state of the world's children 2016: A fair chance for every child (Rep.). (2016). New York, NY: UNICEF.
²Ibid.

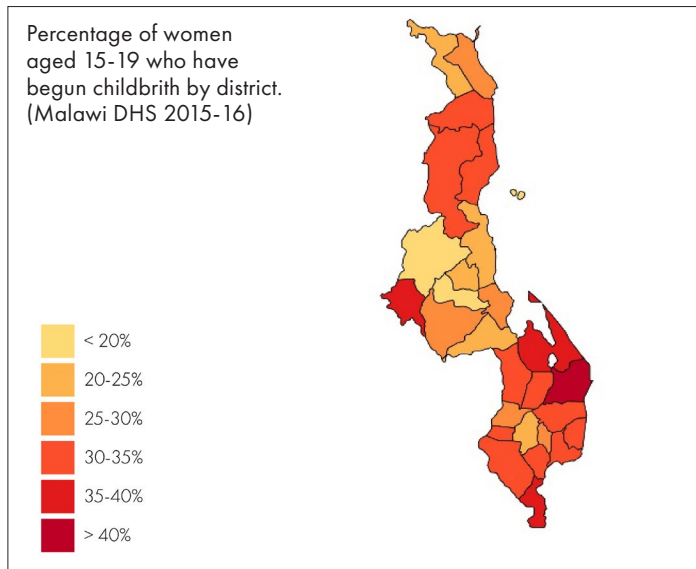
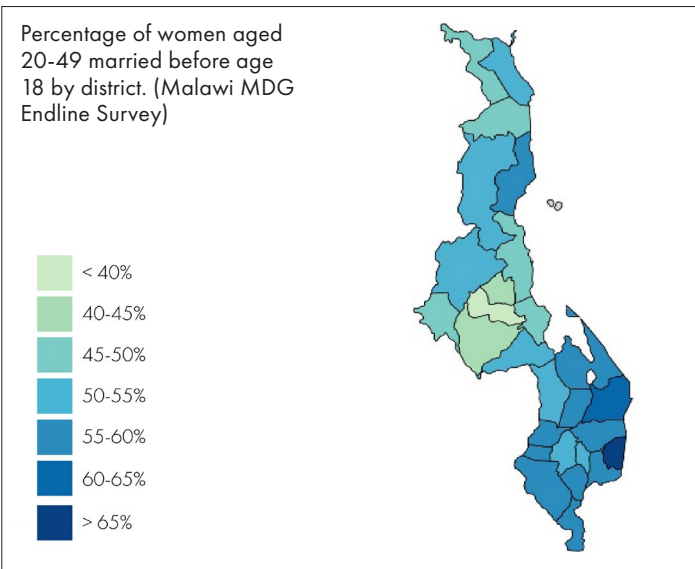
³Malawi: demographic and health survey, 2015-16. (2017). Zomba, Malawi: National Statistics Office.
⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

There is great variation at the district level, though the regional trends largely hold. Phalombe and Machinga in the Southern region have the highest rates of child marriage with 67.8% and 61.8% of women aged 20-49 having married by the

age of 18, respectively.⁶ Machinga and Nsanje in the Southern region have the highest rates of adolescent childbearing with 41.1% and 38.8% of women and girls aged 15-19 having begun childbearing, respectively.⁷ Dowa in the Central region

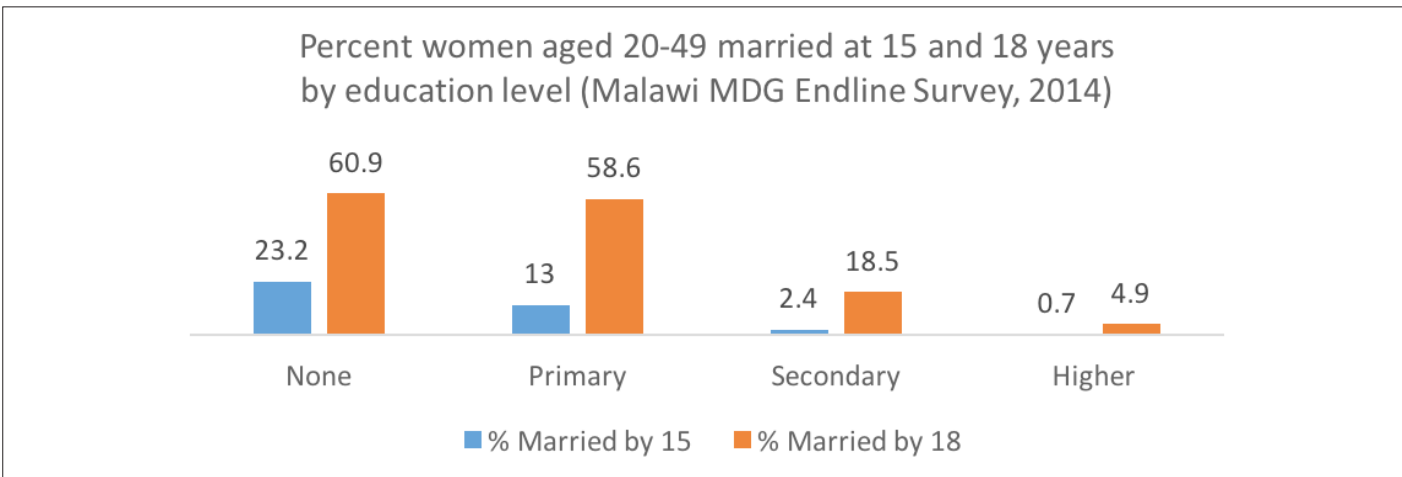
has the lowest rates of both child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, with 37.7% of women aged 20-49 having married by the age of 18,⁸ and 15.6% of women and girls aged 15-19 having begun childbearing.⁹



Higher rates of child marriage and early pregnancy in rural areas may be related to lower levels of education in rural areas than in urban areas,¹⁰ due in part to poor retention as a result of primary schools being incomplete (not offering all grade levels) as well as low capacity to

accommodate students at the secondary level.¹¹ Education has been found to have a significant relationship to age at first marriage in Malawi.¹² Women with lower levels of education are much more likely to marry and have children early – the median age at marriage is 17.7 years

for women with just a primary education and increases to 20.4 for women with a secondary education and 24.8 for women with higher education.¹³



⁶Malawi MDG Endline Survey 2014. (2015). Zomba, Malawi: National Statistical Office
⁷Malawi: demographic and health survey, 2015-16. (2017). Zomba, Malawi: National Statistics Office.
⁸Malawi MDG Endline Survey 2014. (2015). Zomba, Malawi: National Statistical Office

⁹Malawi: demographic and health survey, 2015-16. (2017). Zomba, Malawi: National Statistics Office.
¹⁰Ibid.
¹¹The education system in Malawi (World Bank Working Paper No. 182, Rep.). (2010). Washington, DC: The World Bank.
¹²Palamuleni, M. E. (2011). Socioeconomic determinants of age at marriage in Malawi. *International Journal of Sociology and*

Anthropology, 3(7), 224-235. Retrieved from <http://www.academicjournals.org/USA>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2017.
¹³Malawi: demographic and health survey, 2015-16. (2017). Zomba, Malawi: National Statistics Office.

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