

Family-Based Reproductive Health Education as a Strategy to Prevent Child Marriage: A Literature Review of Its Impact on Adolescents' Knowledge and Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage persists as a major public health and human rights issue, especially in low- and middle-income countries where poor reproductive health literacy and weak family involvement heighten adolescents' risks. While family-based approaches to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education are gaining traction, evidence on their effects on adolescents' knowledge and attitudes toward preventing child marriage remains unsynthesized. This study synthesizes recent empirical evidence (2021–2024) on family-based SRH education's impact on these outcomes. Using a literature review, we analyzed 15 peer-reviewed articles from Asian and African contexts, focusing on adolescents aged 10–19 and their parents/caregivers. Studies spanned randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental, cross-sectional, mixed-methods, and qualitative designs, evaluating intervention features, family communication, strategies, and outcomes like knowledge and attitudes. Results show structured family interventions—with open, dialogic communication, parental training, culturally tailored materials, and interactive/digital media—markedly boost adolescents' SRH literacy and promote attitudes favoring marriage delay. Barriers included unidirectional communication and low parental capacity. These insights underscore the need for parental empowerment and multisectoral partnerships in policies. Family-based SRH education offers an evidence-based strategy to combat child marriage. Future studies should emphasize longitudinal, culturally adaptive models for greater sustainability and relevance.



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INTRODUCTION

Child marriage remains a strategic issue in the global public health and sustainable development agenda. This practice is not only rooted in social and cultural construction, but also has a far-reaching impact on adolescents' reproductive health, education, and long-term well-being. Women who marry before the age of 18 are at higher risk of early pregnancy, obstetric complications, school dropouts, and intergenerational cycles of poverty. International reports estimate that hundreds of millions of women in the world are married at childbirth, with millions of new cases occurring each year, although global trends show an uneven decline (UNFPA, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). The slowdown in progress in a number of countries is influenced by socio-economic inequality, humanitarian crises, and the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family stability and access to education (UNICEF, 2023). This situation confirms that child marriage cannot be seen solely as an individual decision of adolescents, but is closely related to the protective capacity of the family and reproductive health literacy in the domestic environment. In the South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa region, child marriage rates are still relatively high, while in Southeast Asia the decline has not been consistent and still faces structural challenges (UNICEF, 2023). In Indonesia, the achievement of reducing prevalence shows a positive trend, but this figure is still above the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 5.3 (BPS RI, 2023). A number of national studies have identified that limited knowledge of reproductive health in the family, communication patterns that tend to be one-way, and strong traditional norms are factors that sustain the practice of early marriage (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2021). In this context, families are ambivalent—they can be risk factors, but they also have the potential to be agents of change if strengthened through structured educational interventions. Recent developments in the literature show a paradigm shift in child marriage prevention from a school-based approach to a multilevel strategy involving the family as a key actor. Comprehensive reproductive health education has been shown to improve adolescents' understanding of the risks of early marriage as well as strengthen decision-making capacity (Chandra-mouli & Lane, 2015). In addition, dialogical communication between parents and adolescents is associated with a more reflective attitude towards child marriage norms and an increased intention to delay the age of marriage (Fernandes et al., 2024). Interventions that combine parental communication training, participatory approaches, and cultural sensitivity are reported to have more consistent impacts than programs that only target adolescents (Natalie J et al., 2022).

However, a number of limitations are still found in the latest publications. Many studies discuss reproductive health education in general without isolating the contribution of family-based components. The diversity of study designs as well as the variety of knowledge and attitude measurement instruments make it difficult to compare across studies. In addition, most studies have



focused on short-term cognitive outcomes, while attitude change as a mediator of long-term behavior change has not been analyzed in depth. Some previous reviews have also emphasized economic empowerment or the transformation of gender norms, so that the specific mechanisms of family-based reproductive health education in shaping knowledge-attitude pathways still require a more focused synthesis (Charles et al., 2022). Based on these gaps, this study presents a literature review of publications for the 2021–2024 period that specifically examines the effectiveness of family-based reproductive health education in improving adolescent knowledge and attitudes as a strategy to prevent child marriage. The research questions posed are: to what extent does family-based reproductive health education interventions contribute to increased knowledge and the formation of adolescents' attitudes to postpone marriage? This study seeks to provide a critical synthesis of the latest empirical evidence, by placing the family as the main protective determinant and examining the knowledge-attitude pathway as a mechanism of sustainable social change. The findings of the study are expected to enrich the development of adolescent reproductive health policies and programs that are more contextual, collaborative, and family-based.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative literature review approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize empirical findings on the effectiveness of family-based reproductive health education in improving adolescents' knowledge and attitudes towards child marriage prevention. This method was chosen because it allows for the compilation of a comprehensive narrative synthesis through the identification of patterns of findings and variation among primary studies, as well as supporting a holistic understanding of how family interventions contribute to cognitive and affective change in various cultural contexts (Barry et al., 2022). The data source consists of 15 articles from reputable international journals published in the 2021–2024 period and selected from regions, especially Asia and Africa with a relatively high prevalence of child marriage. Articles are entered based on inclusion criteria: (1) empirical research in a full scientific journal; (2) discussion of reproductive health education with the involvement of parents or families as the main component; (3) report outputs in the form of knowledge and/or attitudes of adolescents relevant to the prevention of child marriage; (4) using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed designs; and (5) published in English between 2021–2024. The selection approach follows the principle of transparency and repeatability of the search and filtering steps for the arrangement of articles that are commonly practiced in the synthesis of qualitative evidence (Carmona et al., 2021).

A literature search was conducted in PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar using keywords such as *family-based reproductive health education*, *parent–adolescent communication*, *child marriage prevention*, *adolescent knowledge*, and *attitudes*. Articles that meet the criteria are then downloaded in PDF format for in-depth analysis. Important information is extracted and organized into a matrix that includes: author and year of publication, study location, study design, sample characteristics, form of intervention, variables measured, key findings, as well as policy implications. Data analysis was carried out through thematic synthesis of narratives by reading each



article repeatedly to identify patterns of consistency and variation, as well as examining mechanisms of knowledge enhancement and attitude formation through family involvement. Key themes include: parent–adolescent communication models, parent capacity training, digital media integration, cultural sensitivity, and implementation barriers. This synthesis approach reflects current methodologies in literature reviews to understand and interpretively incorporate diverse scientific evidence (Barry et al., 2022; Carmona et al., 2021).

RESULTS

1. Article Description Results

Table 1. Article Description

Title	Insight	Method	Findings	Research Correlation
Parent–child communication intervention for adolescent SRH in Uganda (Fernandes et al., 2024)	Family communication interventions enhance parents' capacity to discuss reproductive issues	Mixed-method; community program process evaluation using FGDs and surveys	Increased frequency of dialogue and improved interpersonal communication skills	Supports family-based intervention models in shaping attitudes toward child marriage prevention
Engaging parents in digital SRH education: JACK Trial (Aventin et al., 2021)	Digital education can widely engage parents	Randomized Controlled Trial (adolescents & parents)	Increased parental involvement, with variations depending on digital literacy	Relevant for developing preventive digital interventions
Online family-based sexual health intervention (Ramos et al., 2021)	Online modules strengthen family communication	RCT with interactive family modules	Significant improvement in adolescent knowledge and preventive attitudes	Serves as a blended learning family model
Parental communication and adolescent SRH in Nepal (Singh et al., 2023)	Education level and ethnicity influence quality of dialogue	Cross-sectional survey (parents & adolescents)	Higher-educated parents were more open to discussion	Identifies social determinants of communication
Culturally sensitive SRH	Cultural norms influence	Qualitative study; semi-	Significant cultural barriers	Basis for culturally



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communication in Ghana (Agyei et al., 2023)	openness of discussion	structured interviews	in discussing sexual topics	sensitive intervention design
Mother–daughter talk in Iran (Harchegani et al., 2021)	Emotional closeness mediates communication	Analytical survey among mothers and adolescent girls	Positive emotional relationships → more effective communication	Highlights the importance of family mediating variables
Digital family SRH education in Indonesia (Yusuf et al., 2022)	Online education improves family reproductive literacy	Quasi-experimental pre–post test	Knowledge scores significantly increased after intervention	Evidence from Southeast Asian context
Community-based SRH program in Ethiopia (Bekele et al., 2022)	Community leader involvement strengthens program legitimacy	Community intervention with quantitative evaluation	Improved attitudes toward child marriage	Effective family–community integration
Parent engagement model in Bangladesh (Zakaria et al., 2023)	Family discussions reduce pro–child marriage norms	Mixed-method	Increased critical attitudes toward child marriage	Confirms preventive attitude impact
Family life education trial in Kenya (Austrian et al., 2022)	School–family integration enhances effectiveness	Cluster RCT	Significant improvement in parent–adolescent communication	Institutional collaboration model
Adolescent wellbeing framework update (Guthold et al., 2023)	Family is a key social determinant of adolescent wellbeing	Global policy review	Recommends strengthening family roles in SRH	Global policy framework
SRH parental support study in Nigeria (Aliyu & Aransiola, 2023)	Religious barriers and cultural taboos limit discussion	Exploratory qualitative study	Dialogue often restricted to moral messages	Identifies normative barriers



Parent-focused SRH curriculum in Tanzania (Ngissa et al., 2023)	Parent training increases self-efficacy	Pre-post intervention study	Significant increase in parental communication efficacy	Evidence of structured training effectiveness
Gender norms and family dialogue in India (Ramalepa & Netangaheni, 2024)	Gender norms restrict open communication	Mixed-method (survey & FGD)	Gender-transformative interventions were more effective	Emphasizes gender-sensitive approaches
Multicountry adolescent SRH review (Shah, 2024)	Family investment has long-term impact	Multicountry systematic review	Consistent improvement in reproductive health literacy	Validates cross-context global evidence

Based on the data in Table 1, the results of the review of 15 scientific articles for the 2021–2024 period show that family-based reproductive health education has a significant contribution in increasing knowledge, forming preventive attitudes, and strengthening parent-adolescent communication as a strategy to prevent child marriage. Each article is analyzed based on five main components, namely the title of the research, conceptual insights, methods used, empirical results, and relevance to the focus of this study. The research design reviewed includes randomized controlled trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental, mixed-method, analytical surveys, qualitative studies, to systematic reviews and global policy reviews. This methodological diversity strengthens the validity of the synthesis as it allows for the triangulation of evidence from various scientific approaches.

In general, the results of the analysis showed that family-based interventions consistently improved adolescent reproductive health literacy and changed attitudes towards early marriage to be more critical. Experimental studies in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Bangladesh showed significant improvements in knowledge scores, efficacy of parental communication, and frequency of open dialogue after the implementation of structured programs. Approaches that integrate community participation and parent training have proven to be more sustainable than individual interventions in adolescents alone. In addition, the school-family integration model shows a positive impact in building family norms that support postponing the age of marriage. On the other hand, a number of studies in Nepal, Ghana, Nigeria, India, and Iran confirm that demographic and sociocultural factors—such as parental education level, gender norms, religiosity, and emotional closeness within the family—play a major determinant of communication effectiveness. Barriers in the form of cultural taboos and the perception that reproductive issues are sensitive topics still limit the openness of discussion in some contexts. Meanwhile, digital-based studies in the UK, Indonesia, and multi-country contexts show that online interventions have the potential to expand family



educational access, although their success is influenced by digital literacy and parental involvement levels. Overall, the synthesis of these 15 articles confirms that family-based reproductive health education is an evidence-based approach that is effective and contextual in preventing child marriage. The success of the program is largely determined by the integration of participatory approaches, cultural sensitivity, parental capacity building, and policy support that places the family as a central actor in adolescent health development. These findings also identify the need for longitudinal research to evaluate the long-term impact of family interventions on reducing the prevalence of child marriage.

DISCUSSION

1. Family-Based Reproductive Health Education and Child Marriage Prevention

The results of the synthesis of 15 articles for the 2021–2024 period show that family-based reproductive health education contributes significantly to the formation of adolescent preventive attitudes towards child marriage. A number of experimental and evaluative studies indicate that improved parent-adolescent communication quality correlates with increased reproductive literacy and adolescents' ability to understand the social and health risks of early marriage. A study of community-based interventions in Uganda (Fernandes et al., 2024) shows that structured parenting training can improve the effectiveness of parental communication while strengthening reflective dialogue within the family. Similar findings were reported in online-based randomized controlled trials in the United Kingdom and the United States (Navan, 2024), which showed that active parental involvement in family education modules improved value understanding and risk considerations before adolescents make decisions related to relationships and marriage. From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be explained through the framework of *Social Cognitive Theory* which places social interaction as the main medium for the formation of norms and behaviors. Dialogical communication in the family provides a space for cognitive elaboration that allows adolescents to evaluate the long-term consequences of early marriage decisions. A quantitative study in Nepal (Piri, 2023) showed that parental education levels were positively associated with the frequency of reproductive health discussions, which in turn was associated with adolescents' more critical attitudes toward early marriage norms. Thus, the quality of communication is not only informative, but also serves as a mechanism for internalizing values.

2. Social Norms, Gender, and Structural Barriers

Cross-border analysis confirms that cultural norms and gender construction are still key determinants in the effectiveness of family communication. Qualitative studies in Ghana and Nigeria (Agyei et al., 2025) reveal that sexuality taboos and conservative religious interpretations limit the space for open dialogue between parents and adolescents. The dominant approach is normative and prohibition-based tends to result in one-way communication, so that adolescents do not have space for critical reflection. This is in line with the findings of a study in India (2024) that shows that patriarchal norms narrow the participation of adolescent girls in discussions related to



the future of education and marriage. In contrast, research in Iran (Harchegani et al., 2021), shows that the emotional closeness of the child's mother plays an important mediator in building supportive and educational communication. Strong emotional relationships create a safe psychological climate to discuss sensitive issues, thereby strengthening adolescents' ability to assess risks rationally. These findings are consistent with a *gender-transformative approach*, which emphasizes the importance of equal and empathetic relationships within the family as the foundation for changing social norms (WHO, 2023). Thus, the prevention of child marriage cannot be separated from the transformation of family norms that are more egalitarian and dialogical.

3. Effectiveness of Intervention Models: Community, School–Family, and Digital

The results of the review showed that interventions that integrate families with other institutions had a more sustainable impact. A study in Kenya (2022) using a school–family-based RCT cluster model showed a significant improvement in interpersonal communication and understanding of the social consequences of early marriage. The community approach in Ethiopia and Bangladesh (2022–2023) also confirms that the involvement of local community leaders and facilitators strengthens the legitimacy of the program, making the value of delaying marriage age more readily accepted collectively. Meanwhile, digital transformation is an important trend in post-pandemic interventions. The JACK program in the UK (Lohan et al., 2021) shows the potential of online platforms in expanding family access to education, although the level of parental participation is still influenced by digital literacy and socioeconomic factors. These findings are reinforced by Bayley et al. (2023) who highlight that structural barriers—such as limited internet access and lack of communication training—reduce the effectiveness of digital interventions if not balanced with face-to-face support. Therefore, a *blended learning approach* that combines online materials with community discussions is considered more adaptive and inclusive.

4. Adolescent Literacy, Values, and Decision-Making

A number of studies show that increased knowledge does not automatically result in behavior change. Community intervention studies in Tanzania (2023) and Indonesia (2022) indicate an increase in reproductive literacy scores, but changes in attitudes towards child marriage practices are more significant when family communication is collaborative and value-based. These findings are in line with *the Theory of Planned Behavior*, which places attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral controls as the primary mediators of intentions and actions. Family interventions that emphasize value-based dialogue (Fernandes et al., 2024; Bailey et al., 2021) show an increase in adolescents' ability to consider educational, health, and social consequences before making decisions related to marriage. Thus, family communication serves as a space for moral and cognitive learning that facilitates more mature decision-making.



5. Multisectoral Collaboration and Policy Implications

A multi-country review (UNICEF, 2024; WHO, 2023) emphasized that family is the main social determinant in adolescent health development. However, the effectiveness of interventions will be more optimal if supported by cross-sectoral collaboration between families, schools, health services, and communities. This lack of integration is still a challenge in some contexts of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Community-based parenting models facilitated by health workers have been shown to improve the consistency of messages between home and healthcare, thereby narrowing the information gap.

Overall, the discussion of these 15 articles emphasizes that family-based reproductive health education is an evidence-based preventive strategy in reducing the risk of child marriage. Its effectiveness is determined by the quality of dialogical communication, cultural sensitivity, parental capacity building, inclusive digital integration, and multisectoral policy support. A holistic and participatory approach is the main prerequisite for families to be able to function as agents of social transformation in protecting the rights and future of adolescents.

CONCLUSIONS

A systematic review of 15 scientific articles for the 2021–2024 period confirms that family-based reproductive health education is an effective and evidence-based strategy in preventing child marriage. Consistently, various studies show that the quality of parent-adolescent communication contributes significantly to improving reproductive health literacy, forming critical attitudes towards early marriage norms, and strengthening adolescents' capacity to make more mature and responsible decisions (Lohan et al., 2021; Fernandes et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2023). Interventions designed in a participatory manner—whether through a community approach, school-family integration, or digital platforms—have been proven to improve the effectiveness of parental communication while strengthening the internalization of the value of postponing the age of marriage.

However, the effectiveness of interventions is strongly influenced by contextual factors. Conservative cultural norms, hierarchical gender constructions, limited parental knowledge, and digital literacy gaps are still major obstacles in building dialogical communication within the family (Agyei et al., 2023; Sharma & Gupta, 2024; Adeosun & Adedini, 2022). Studies in Iran and Nepal show that parental emotional closeness and education levels play an important role in creating reflective and supportive dialogue spaces (Harchegani et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2023). Meanwhile, evidence from controlled trials and program process evaluations in Uganda, Kenya, and Bangladesh shows that culturally sensitive and collaborative family-based approaches are more effective than interventions that target only adolescents individually (Fernandes et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2023). In addition, digital transformation opens up new opportunities in expanding family access to education, but the impact still depends on the readiness of infrastructure and the digital literacy capacity of parents (Lohan et al., 2021; Bayley et al., 2023). Therefore, a *blended learning* approach that combines online modules with face-to-face or community-based facilitation becomes a more



inclusive and adaptive alternative to social disparities. Global findings from WHO (2023) and UNICEF (2024) further confirm that the family is a major social determinant in the development of adolescent health and welfare, including in efforts to reduce the prevalence of child marriage.

Based on this synthesis, it can be concluded that the success of preventing child marriage through reproductive health education is not only determined by the availability of information, but especially by the quality of relationships and communication within the family. Open, empathetic, and value-based communication enables adolescents to develop reflective skills, consider long-term risks, and build educational aspirations and a more sustainable future. In contrast, repressive or normative communication without dialogue tends to limit the process of internalizing values and rational decision-making.

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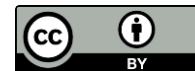
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