

Social Norms around Adolescent Girls' Marriage Practices in Ethiopia: A Qualitative Exploration

Authors : Dagmawit Tewahido

Abstract : Purpose: This qualitative study was conducted to explore social norms around adolescent girls' marriage practices in West Hararghe, Ethiopia, where early marriage is prohibited by law. Methods: Twenty Focus Group Discussions were conducted with Married and Unmarried adolescent girls, adolescent boys and parents of girls using locally developed vignettes. A total of 32 in-depth interviews were conducted with married and unmarried adolescent girls, husbands of adolescent girls and mothers-in-law. Key informant interviews were conducted with 36 district officials. Data analysis was assisted by Open Code computer software. The Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework developed by CARE guided the development and analysis of vignettes. A thematic data analysis approach was utilized to summarize the data. Results: Early marriage is seen as a positive phenomenon in our study context, and girls who are not married by the perceived ideal age of 15 are socially sanctioned. They are particularly influenced by their peers to marry. Marrying early is considered a chance given by God and a symbol of good luck. The two common types of marriage are decided: 1) by adolescent girl and boy themselves without seeking parental permission ('Jalaa-deemaa'- meaning 'to go along'), and 2) by just informing girl's parents ('Cabsaa'- meaning 'to break the culture'). Relatives and marriage brokers also arrange early marriages. Girls usually accept the first marriage proposal regardless of their age. Parents generally tend not to oppose marriage arrangements chosen by their daughters. Conclusions: In the study context social norms encourage early marriage despite the existence of a law prohibiting marriage before the age of eighteen years. Early marriage commonly happens through consensual arrangements between adolescent girls and boys. Interventions to reduce early marriage need to consider the influence of Reference Groups on the decision makers for marriages, especially girls' own peers.

Keywords : adolescent girls, social norms, early marriage, Ethiopia

Conference Title : ICRSHR 2020 : International Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health Research

Conference Location : Copenhagen, Denmark

Conference Dates : June 11-12, 2020