

Child Marriage, Couple Communication and IPV: Insights from the TESFA Project

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Child, Early and Forced Marriage and IPV:
What do we know and what can we do?

Overview of TESFA Program



- Two rural woredas in the Amhara region of Ethiopia
- Targeted 5,000 ever-married girls, aged 14-19
- Three training 'arms'
 - Financial training
 - Sexual and Reproductive Health training
 - Combination

CARE's Innovative Programming

- Working directly with hard to reach ever-married and most vulnerable adolescent girls
- Group based, peer-education model adapted from CARE's VSLA approach to provide safe spaces for discussion and education on SRH and EE, using tailored curriculum
- Creation of buy-in and sustainable social support systems for married girls through Social Analysis & Action (SAA) groups



Program and Cultural Context

- Ethiopia has high rates of IPV and performs poorly on gender indicators
- Arranged marriage is norm
- IPV not a direct focus of the project, though constant feature of planning and thinking
- Program components included factors related to empowerment and gender equality that shape violence
- In particular, all arms included training on conflict resolution/negotiation
 - Pilot indicated very significant effects that extended beyond SRH and EE
- In particular, changes in communication and couple relationships



Data

- Baseline and endline
 - Quantitative at both points, qualitative at endline
- Cohort design
- One year apart
- Focus on SRH and EE
- BUT also collected data on:
 - Experience with IPV
 - Relationship characteristics
 - Couple communication
 - Decision-making
 - Mental health
- Unique in focus on married girls

Levels of IPV at Baseline

Has your current husband/partner or any other partner done any of the following in the past 12 months?	Percentage answering yes
Insulted you or made you feel bad about yourself?	35.0
Belittled or humiliated you in front of other people?	14.4
Done things to scare or intimidate you in person?	27.0
Threatened to hurt you or someone you care about?	9.2
Slapped you or shoved you or pulled your hair?	12.2
Kicked, dragged, or beat you up?	10.8
Physically forced you to have sexual intercourse when you didn't want to	25.9

What about relationships?

In general, how often do(did) you and your (current or most recent) husband or partner discuss:	Percentage answering 'Never'
Things that happened to you during the day?	20.6
Your worries or feelings?	25.1
Your hopes for the future?	24.5
What to spend money on?	14.0
Things that happen in the community?	30.4
When to have children?	27.1
Whether to use family planning?	24.7
Where to get family planning methods?	29.5

Implications - Mental Health

Question	Percent responding 'Yes'
Do you sleep badly?	25.2
Do you feel nervous, tense or worried?	33.7
Do you feel unhappy?	49.6
Do you find it difficult to enjoy your daily activities?	27.9
Do you feel you are a worthless person?	37.5

Program effect on IPV

- Quantitative results mixed
 - Decline in psychological violence greatest in intervention arms
 - Otherwise all arms and control saw quite large decreases in reported IPV
- Limited program duration
- Measurement challenges (time period)
- Qualitative findings were much more conclusive
- Suggest that negotiation/conflict resolution skills were catalyst for improved relationship quality

Changes in Gender Relations

Before, I would expect my wife to wash my feet when I get home. It doesn't matter if she was with me in the farm or not. I observed huge difference in our life before and after TESFA. It is like the distance between the earth and the sky. Before TESFA, when I want to sell cattle, I would not tell my wife. She has no saying. But now we discuss in every family matters and we will decide after discussing what we want to do. If my wife doesn't agree, I will try to persuade her by strengthening my arguments. If she resists the idea, I will respect her decisions.

Male SAA Member, Combined Treatment Arm



Lessons learned

- Conflict resolution and negotiation skills especially important for child brides
- Fostering functional relationships key
 - Understand how little communication, intimacy, and support there is in these marriages
 - Focusing on basics is very good start
- But not sufficient in absence of broader transformative programming
- How to show clear effect of child marriage?
 - Contexts of high rates of child marriage also those where IPV is likely to be higher
 - Recent research shows some linkages
- How to show correlation with additional effects?
 - Upcoming research will look more closely at mental well-being

Focus on couples

- Focus on prevention obscures that millions of girls are living in marital relationships already
- More needs to be done to understand the nature of marital relationships, particularly in the context of child marriage
- Interventions need to focus more on couples and the dynamics of their relationships – for many reasons

What we do and don't know

We know

- Relationships of child brides are even less equitable, intimate, and supportive than the norm
- This increases vulnerability of girls
- BUT, providing framework for simply talking is a necessary first step
- Conflict resolution and negotiation skills are critical to broader set of interventions
- Community support is key

We don't know enough about

- How much worse IPV is for child brides?
- Whether the effects of IPV are uniquely bad for them
- What the intergenerational impacts are

Parting plug

Now finally have a peer-reviewed publication!
Edmeades, J., H. Lantos, and F. Mekuria. 2016. "Worth the effort? Combining Sexual and reproductive health and economic empowerment programming for married adolescent girls in Amhara, Ethiopia." *Children and Vulnerable Youth Studies*, Vol 11, Issue 4: 339-359.

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