

Socio-cultural context of adolescent sexuality and youth friendly service intervention in West Gojjam Zone, Northwest Ethiopia: a qualitative study

Recognizing that adolescents face barriers in accessing services, may feel embarrassed, face stigma on sexual matters, or have concerns about judgmental providers, youth-friendly service (YFS) has been introduced to deliver health services that meet the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of young people. Evidence on the role of YFS in addressing the socio-cultural norms that influence unmarried adolescent SRH behaviour is limited.

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Socio-cultural context of adolescent sexuality and youth friendly service intervention in West Gojjam Zone, Northwest Ethiopia: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Background: Recognizing that adolescents face barriers in accessing services, may feel embarrassed, face stigma on sexual matters, or have concerns about judgmental providers, youth-friendly service (YFS) has been introduced to deliver health services that meet the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of young people. Evidences on the role of YFS in addressing the socio-cultural norms influencing unmarried adolescent SRH behaviour are limited. Therefore, this study explore whether the socio-cultural norms influencing adolescent SRH behaviour vary between youth friendly service program and non Program areas in West Gojjam Zone, North West Ethiopia.

Methods: Qualitative case study design was employed to explore the socio-cultural context of adolescent sexuality. Purposive sampling was used to identify study participants. Data were collected from 112 participants both from YFS program and non-program areas using semi-structured in-depth interviews, key informants, and focus group discussions guides. A total of 18 key informant interviews, twelve FGDs and four in-depth interviews were conducted. Participants were comprised from unmarried adolescents, parents, religious leaders, community elders, health professionals, teachers, and unmarried adolescents who experienced SRH problem. Thematic analysis was used to summarize the data.

Results: The socio-cultural norms related to adolescent sexuality in both YFS program and non-program areas indicated that the community is intolerant to premarital sex, SRH service utilization (eg, contraceptive use) by unmarried adolescent, and discourage SRH communication with unmarried adolescents. According to the participants, premarital sex and SRH service use were not accepted by the community. Moreover, participants believed that, having communication on SRH issues with unmarried adolescents are equivalent to encouraging them to initiate sex, therefore, should not be practiced.

Conclusion: The socio-cultural norms influencing adolescent sexual behaviour were more or less the same between settings. In both areas, the socio-cultural context discourages YFS intervention like SRH communication and service use. Also, the YFS program does not modify the socio-cultural norm affecting adolescent sexuality. Therefore, the YFS interventions strategies should give due emphasis to the socially accepted sexual norms like sexual abstinence.

Keywords: Socio-cultural norms, Unmarried adolescent, Sexual behaviour

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