Does Exposure to Early Marriage-Prevention Messages Influence Caretakers' Knowledge and Attitudes? Findings from Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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Introduction

Preventing child marriage is a public health priority in Ethiopia. With a median age at first marriage of 16.6 years for women aged 25-29 in 2005, compared to 24.2 for men of a similar age (CSA and ORC Macro, 2006), Amhara Region had the highest rates of child marriage in the country. Although child marriage is associated with immediate and long-term health risks, proven strategies for its prevention are limited. Despite the growing use of mass media and community-based information channels to disseminate messages on early marriage prevention, little is known about their coverage and influence on caretakers' knowledge and attitudes, let alone behaviors, in a setting where marriage decisions are largely controlled by the family as opposed to the individual.

Objectives

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between exposure to child marriage prevention messages and caretakers' knowledge of marriage law, personal definition of early marriage, beliefs in daughters' rights to choose at what age to marry, and perceived self-efficacy to advocate for early marriage prevention.

Data and Methods

The study was based on 4452 caretakers who were living in the same households as interviewed adolescent girls aged 10-19 and young men aged 15-24 years. The data were derived from cross-sectional household survey conducted in Amhara Region in July-August 2007. The survey employed a three-stage cluster sampling design, with woredas (districts) as the primary sampling unit. Statistical tests of endogeneity were conducted on the observed relationship between message exposure and the outcomes of interest to determine if unobserved influences could account the observed dose effect of communication exposure. None of the tests were statistically significant. All regression models controlled for the effects of age, sex, level of education, current employment, age at first marriage, type of place of residence, and household ownership of a bank account, radio, and television. Independent variables of interest were mass media and interpersonal communication exposure (representing the total number of sources of information of the relevant type that the respondent could recall).
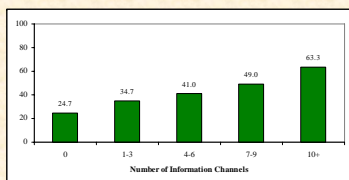
Result 1: Exposure to early marriage prevention messages by type of communication channel
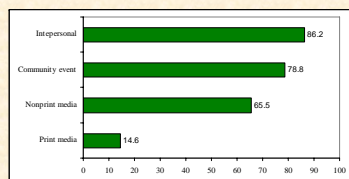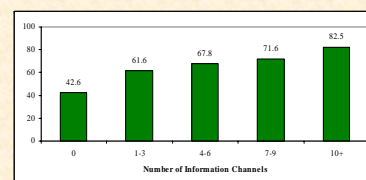

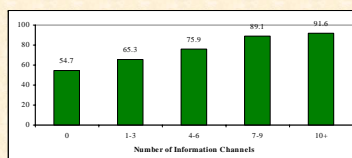## Result 2: Knowledge of the legal minimum age at marriage
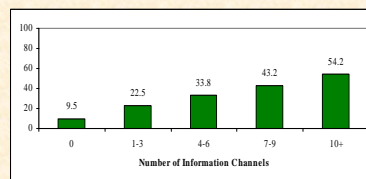
Result 3: Definition of early marriage as occurring before age 18

Result 4: Belief that daughters have the right to choose at what age to marry

Result 5: Perceived self-efficacy to advocate against early marriage

Result 6: Odds ratios from multiple logistic regression

Regression Model/Variables	Knowledge of Legal Minimum Age at Marriage	Definition of Early Marriage as Occurring Before Age 18	Belief in a Daughter's Right to Choose Marriage Age
Model 1 [1]			
Total exposure	1.100 ***	1.073 **	1.146 ***
Female	0.497 ***	1.048	0.853
Urban	1.180	1.328 *	1.508 ***
Female * total exposure	1.047 *	1.013	1.025
Urban * total exposure	0.974	0.972	0.925 **
Model 2 [1, 2]			
Mass media exposure	1.059	1.132 *	1.272 ***
Female	0.550 ***	1.204	0.877
Urban	1.085	1.184	1.178
Female * mass media exposure	1.086 *	0.958	1.065
Urban * mass media exposure	0.959	0.967	0.877 *
Model 3 [1, 3]			
Interpersonal channel exposure	1.152 ***	1.065	1.196 ***
Female	0.579 ***	0.938	0.937
Urban	1.015	1.243	1.427 **
Female * interpersonal channel exposure	1.033	1.061	1.007
Urban * interpersonal channel exposure	1.012	0.977	0.889 **

1: Controlling for age group, level of education, current employment, age at first marriage, and household ownership of a bank account, radio, and television.

2: Controlling for exposure to early marriage prevention messages disseminated through any interpersonal channel.

3. Controlling for exposure to early marriage prevention messages disseminated through any mass media channel.

*** p < .001;   ** p < .01;   * p < .05

Conclusions

The results suggest that total exposure to early marriage prevention messages may have led to increased knowledge of the legal minimum age at marriage, a tendency to define early marriage as occurring before age 18, and stronger beliefs in girls' rights to choose at what age to marry. The effect of total exposure, and more specifically, mass media, on knowledge of the legal minimum age at marriage was significantly stronger among female caretakers than among their male counterparts. Exposure to early marriage prevention messages had significantly weaker effects on urban as opposed to rural caretakers' beliefs in a daughter's rights to choose marriage age. Although it was difficult to assign specific effects to any information channel, public education interventions hold promise for altering knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding child marriage.