An exploration of social norms that drive child early and forced marriage in Nigeria

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Nigeria has the largest number of child brides in Africa and the highest prevalence rates of CEFM globally. Nationwide, 43% of girls are married before age 18, while 17% out of these are married before they turn 15. (NDHS, 2018).

Identifying the most relevant norms that influence CEFM will help design interventions to transform and promote positive norms.
What is SNET?

Participatory, learning and action tool that guides a rapid “social norm exploration”.

Allows for rapid identification of reference groups and social norms influencing behaviors through rapid interviews.

Data collection tools: My Social Network tool, Vignettes (culturally relevant short stories about behavior of fictional characters) and the Five Whys (a deep dive to explore root causes).

MCGL address major contributors to maternal mortality and morbidity through the prevention and mitigation of the consequences of violence against women and girls (VAW/G) and possible drivers of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).
METHODOLOGY

Community Selection Criteria

- Communities with large populations
- Communities with the poorest indicators on CEFM
- Communities that are secure and accessible to researchers and participants due to insurgency and kidnapings in the state
- Resident of the community
- Adolescent girls and young women between 15-24 years (married or unmarried)
- Male partners of adolescent girls and young women 15 years and older
- Father of adolescent girl
- For 15-17 year old's, willing to provide assent and parental/guardian consent
- For 18 years and older, must be willing to participate in the interviews voluntarily and give consent

Study Location

- In Ebonyi, Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) selected: Ebonyi and Ezza North, with focus on 4 communities
- In Sokoto, Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) selected: Illela and Binji while focusing on 4 communities

Eligibility Criteria (Main Population & Reference Group)

- Identified 12 reference groups of each behavior through rapid interviews with the defined main population groups.
- Facilitated 40 FGDs in Ebonyi (and 32 FGDs in Sokoto to explore the social norms influencing specific behaviors of interest in the population and reference groups.)
FINDINGS: Norms that drive CEFM

Norms in Sokoto and Ebonyi

- Girls should get married early to protect their chastity
- Girls should agree to the marriage decisions taken by their parents to strengthen family ties (Auren zumunci) with relatives
- Girls should learn to obey their husbands from an early age
- Girls should get married before they reach or at onset of menstruation
- Girls marry early because they have less economic value than boys

Rewards

- Enhanced social status of adolescent girls’ families
- Family honor is maintained

Non normative factors

- Poverty
- Limited knowledge of the negative consequences of CEFM
- Protects girls from experiencing sexual harassment
- desire to elevate the girls’ families’ social and economic status and ease financial burden;

Sanctions

- Girls will be disowned by their families
- Girls will be subjected to isolation, stigma and verbal abuse by their peers and other community members
- Girls will struggle to find a future husband from the same community
## Stand-Out Factors Influencing CEFM

### Stand-out factors (participants’ responses) influencing CEFM across the communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Five Stand-Out factors</th>
<th>Main Population Groups, Reference Groups, or Both?</th>
<th>Who influences these factors?</th>
<th>In what ways does the factor affect Main Population Groups and the community?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female children are valued less in society than males</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Community members/family members</td>
<td>Female children are valued less in society than males contribute to parents marrying off the young daughters early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A desire for a submissive wife, who learns to obey her husband from an early age</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Men’s desire for a submissive wife, who learns to obey her husband from an early age contributes to child early and forced marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls are expected to remain chaste and avoid premarital sex and out of wedlock pregnancies/births</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Parents/Community</td>
<td>Fear or concern that girls will engage in premarital sex, leading to loss of virginity before marriage or out-of-wedlock pregnancies induce parents to marry off their daughters early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental authority is threatened if their children do not obey them</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Parents/Community</td>
<td>Parental authority is threatened if their children do not obey them. This may lead to forcefully marrying off the adolescent daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A girl becomes a woman when she starts to menstruate</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Parents/Community</td>
<td>A girl becomes a woman when she starts to menstruate. Marriage may be the next step towards her gaining status as a wife and mother.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CEFM Influencers in Ebonyi and Sokoto

People supportive of CEFM

- Mothers
- Fathers
- Brothers
- Aunties
- Grandparents
- Village head
- Community elders

People not supportive of CEFM

- Adolescent girls
- School teachers
- Educated community members or those who have lived in cities
Recommendations

1. Engage parents, other family members and prominent community members through community forums and discussion sessions to facilitate community-wide consensus building and address norms that drive CEFM and GBV by perpetuating women and girls’ low status.

2. Use gender transformative approaches to address norms that limit women’s autonomy and present barriers to FP use.
   - Promote male engagement in FP/RH matters and facilitate healthier, equitable couple relations through dialogue and critical reflection on issues of power, gender-based violence, contraceptive use, joint decision-making.

3. Employ age appropriate group or community-based dialogues with adolescents and youth around puberty, gender roles and equality, life goals and community expectations for boys and girls and gender norms that drive CEFM.

4. Use behavior change communication strategies (mass media, edutainment, community poster campaigns) to catalyze community-wide normative change and reflection on CEFM and encourage parents to allow their daughters to complete school before marriage.
“Beating your wife will make her learn her lesson.”

-Married man, Sokoto
“When you are given birth to as a girl, you don’t have a voice or a choice.”

-Married adolescent girl, Sokoto
References

1. 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS).

