

CHILD MARRIAGE CANCELLATION

Experiences and implications

A qualitative study in Bahir Dar Zuria and Kewet woredas

Amhara region, Ethiopia



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YES I DO.

ABOUT YES I DO

The Yes I Do project (2016-2020) aims to reduce child marriage, teenage pregnancies and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) related practices in Pakistan, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi. It is a joint collaboration with Plan Netherlands, CHOICE, Rutgers, Amref and KIT Royal Tropical Institute. It is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Published: August 2020 (second publication with new and adjusted recommendations)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a study conducted within the Yes I Do programme in some of the intervention areas in Amhara region in Ethiopia in 2019 (Bahir Dar Zuria and Kewet woredas). The purpose of the study is to provide insights about the scope and the implications of child marriage cancellation with a focus on the experiences of adolescent girls and boys. The partners of the YES I DO Alliance in Ethiopia identified child marriage cancellation as an existing practice that required deeper exploration in order to inform programs aimed at eliminating child marriage and therefore selected it as the focus theme for this qualitative research.

The report is organized as follows. This first chapter includes background information on the situation of child marriage in Ethiopia and on the limited literature on cancellation of child marriage. Methods for qualitative sampling, data collection and analysis are described in chapter 2. The main findings are presented in the next chapters: chapter 3 presents the scope and magnitude of child marriage cancellation in the study areas, chapter 4 focuses on the personal experiences of adolescents in child marriage cancellation, chapter 5 looks at adolescents' agency strategies, chapter 6 examines stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, and chapter 7 is about the main consequences of child marriage cancellation. The report ends with discussion, recommendations and conclusion.

1.1 Background

Ethiopia is one of the countries characterised by high rates of child marriage. About 40% of women aged 20-24 were first married or in union before turning 18, which is higher than the average for Eastern and Southern Africa (35%) and nearly two times the global average (21%) (UNICEF, 2018). According to the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey, the median age at first marriage among women aged 20-49 is 17.5 at the national level and 16.2 in the Amhara region. In Ethiopia, child marriage is more common among adolescent girls in rural areas, from the poorest wealth quintile and with lower education levels.

There is evidence of a declining trend in the prevalence of child marriage over the last ten years in Ethiopia. With an average annual rate of reduction of child marriage of 4.2, Ethiopia is one of the countries with the strongest progress in reducing the practice (UNICEF, 2018). The Amhara region is one of the regions that has made most progress reducing child marriage in Ethiopia. However, in order to eliminate child marriage by 2030, progress in Ethiopia will need to be 6 times faster than in the last 10 years (UNICEF, 2018).

In recognition of this situation, various actors are working to further advance the elimination of child marriage. In 2013, the government of Ethiopia launched a National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children to tackle child marriage and FGM/C. In 2015, a National Alliance to End Child Marriage was established as a response to the commitment made by the Government of Ethiopia at the Girl Summit held in UK in July 2014 to end both practices by 2025. The YES I DO program was introduced in 2016 in the Amhara region of Ethiopia as well as in other six countries. YES I DO is a strategic alliance of five Dutch organizations and their national counterparts, the main aim of which is to enhance the decision making space of young women about if, when and whom to marry as well as if, when and with whom to have children.

1.1.1 Literature on child marriage cancellation

While numerous studies argue that girls and young women have little or no voice in the decision to marry (Mc Dougal et al., 2018; Lee-Rife, S. 2012), there is also increasing evidence showing that adolescent girls and young women are influencing decision making processes around marriage

(McDougal et al., 2018). Recent studies in the Amhara region also show how access to divorce is improving (Jones et al. 2018).

Evidence from program implementation reveals that some girls cancel their early marriages through early marriage cancellation committees, which involve all levels of civil society actors. The YES I DO activities and studies indicate that while cancellation of child marriage is happening in the Amhara region, little is known about the scope and implications of these cancellations on the young people involved (Berhanu et al., 2019). The references about child marriage cancellation in grey literature are not recent.

The International Center for Research on Women (2007) identified as a success strategy the collaboration of Pathfinder International of Ethiopia with local partners to form early marriage cancellation committees. These committees included all levels of civil society actors which, in coordination with the Women's Affairs Department, responded to cases of planned child marriages through law enforcement actions (ICRW, 2007). A study conducted in 2009 on child marriage prevention activities in the Amhara region found that one out of four planned marriages were reported as being cancelled or stopped (Gage, 2009). The percentage of cancelled marriages was found to be higher among members of girls' clubs and urban residents (Gage, 2009). Girls' clubs were found to be instrumental in promoting awareness among female and male students of the importance of helping underage girls whose parents were about to marry them off. Members of these girls' clubs frequently reported planned child marriages to women's associations, teachers, or school directors who then intervened to stop child marriages (Gage, 2009). A study by Pathfinder International (2006) on early marriage in the Amhara region also indicated the active role of school girls in reporting cases of planned child marriages to prevent them.

1.1.2 Definition of child marriage cancellation

Due to the limited literature on child marriage cancellation, the term is not strictly defined and the differences with divorce can be unclear. In the present study, the research team defines and interprets child marriage cancellation as follows.

- The cancellation during the planning stage of a marriage in which one of the spouses is below the age of 18. That is, before the wedding ceremony takes place.
- The cancellation of a child marriage within one year after the wedding ceremony has already taken place and spouses might have started co-habiting despite one of the spouses having expressed their disagreement with the marriage.

1.2 Problem statement and justification

Child marriage is prevalent throughout Ethiopia resulting in high health risks and human rights violations, especially for adolescent girls. Several studies show that child marriage is attributed to social, economic and cultural factors. Traditional gender roles and norms stand as one of the most critical driving factors causing and perpetuating child marriage (Parsons et al. 2015, Jones et al., 2018). Despite burgeoning evidence reporting the health, economic, psychological and social impacts of child marriage on adolescent girls, rates of child marriage remain a concern. Different stakeholders have been working on reducing child marriage through multiple strategies including creating awareness, promoting education, economic empowerment, and law enforcement. Evidence from programs addressing child marriage in Ethiopia indicates that cancellation of child marriage is a strategy being used by different local actors. Advancing towards the elimination of child marriage requires an in depth understanding of the different strategies being used, including child marriage cancellation.

There is limited evidence about the scope, processes and consequences of child marriage cancellation. Little is known about the implications of child marriage cancellation on the lives of adolescent girls. The

reasons for cancelling child marriage, the personal experiences of adolescent girls and boys whose marriages have been cancelled including their aspirations and future perspectives, actors involved in the cancellation of child marriage, and the short and long term implications for the adolescent girls and boys involved, are all under-investigated. Therefore, studying child marriage cancellation is a timely issue, the results of which will aid efforts to reduce child marriage in the studied communities. The evidence generated can inform the YES I DO program and the implementing partner's understanding of existing strategies aimed at eliminating child marriage in the Amhara region.

1.3 Research objectives

The general objective of the research is to explore experiences and implications of child marriage cancellation and related future aspirations of adolescent girls (and boys)¹ in Bahir Dar and Kewet woredas of west Gojjam and north Shewa zones respectively in Amhara region.

1.3.1 Specific objectives of the research

1. To assess the scope of child marriage cancellation before and after marriage consummation (divorce) in Bahir Dar and Kewet woredas.
2. To explore adolescent girls' (and boys) experiences of the cancellation of child marriage in Bahir Dar and Kewet woredas.
3. To explore the role of adolescent girls (and boys) in regards to child marriage cancellation in Bahir Dar and Kewet woredas.
4. To explore longer term implications of cancelled child marriage (for the girls involved) in Bahir Dar and Kewet woredas.
5. To explore adolescent girls' (and boys') future aspirations after child marriage cancellation in Bahir Dar and Kewet woredas.
6. To explore roles and responsibilities of actors regarding child marriage cancellation in Bahir Dar and Kewet woredas.

¹ The focus groups for the study are females and males who married under the age of 18 and cancelled their marriage. Therefore, the term adolescent girls and boys is used to refer to young people under 18 years of age. However, the study also included females and males aged 20-24 (young women/men) who retrospectively shared their experiences on the cancellation of underage marriage.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study design

The study design is guided by a programmatic research approach aimed at generating qualitative evidence on child marriage cancellation that can inform the YES I DO implementing partners. The study is based on a qualitative research design with a focus on intervention areas of the YES I DO program in the Amhara region of Ethiopia.

2.2 Study setting

The study was conducted in four YES I DO intervention kebeles located in Bahir Dar Zuria and Kewet woredas of west Gojjam and north Shewa zones, namely Gombat and Wonjita kebeles in Bahir Dar Zuria and Sefeberet and Tere kebeles in Kewet. The selection was based on prioritization agreed in a joint research proposal workshop held in Addis Ababa with members of the YES I DO Ethiopia Alliance, from February 18-22, 2019. Three criteria guided the selection of the study areas: intervention areas of YES I DO with presence of all or most of the implementing partners, kebeles where the issue of child marriage cancellation had been identified, and inclusion of kebeles where no studies had been yet conducted within the YES I DO program.

2.2.1 Bahir Dar Zuria woreda

Bahir Dar Zuria is located in west Gojjam zone, surrounding Bahir Dar city – state capital - and has a population of 182,730 people (CSA, 2007). There are 32 kebeles, all of them rural. Gombat and Wonjita are the two kebeles selected and are located far apart from each other. Gombat is located along the Bahir Dar-Gondar road at a distance of 20 km, while Wonjita is located west of Bahir Dar city at a distance of approximately 25 kms from Bahir Dar bordering Lake Tena in the south.

Gombat kebele has a population of around 6100 people whose livelihood is based on agriculture where both crop and animal farming are common (Gombat kebele administration, February 2019). Wonjita kebele has an estimated population of 8000 people residing in 1240 households (Wonjita kebele administration, February 2019). Livelihoods are based on agriculture combining rearing of animals and crop production (millet and teff). Khat has recently become an important source of livelihood especially for young people who are engaged in cutting and selling Khat leaves.

2.2.2 Kewet woreda

Kewet is located in north Shewa zone and has a population of 118,381 inhabitants (CSA, 2007). The woreda is located 220 km from Addis Ababa along the Dessie main road and has Shewa Robit as seat of the woreda administration. Kewet has 18 kebeles, all are rural. The two kebeles selected are located far apart from each other. Sefeberet is located east of Shewa Robit bordering Kumame woreda while Tere is located north of Shewa Robit.

Sefeberet kebele has a population of around 8963 people whose livelihood is based on agriculture where both crop and animal farming are common (Sefeberet kebele administration, February 2019). Teff, sorghum, and masha are the main crops. Tere Kebele has a population of around 9234 inhabitants (Tere kebele administration, February 2019). Residents' livelihoods are based on agriculture (95%) and the remaining (5%) are engaged in trade. Main crops grown include sorghum, teff and masha. They also grow onion and tobacco using small river and stream diversions.

2.3 Study population and recruitment

The study included a diverse group of participants. The focus was on young women and men aged 15 to 24 years who had been married before reaching their 18th birthday and whose marriage had been cancelled. Also included were young women and men who had been engaged, or who knew about cases of child marriage cancellation. Parents were another important group of participants in this study for their role in child marriage and the cancellation. The study aimed to target parents whose son or

daughter's underage marriage had been cancelled, but also included parents of young people in general. Finally, the third group of study participants were stakeholders identified as key informants to better understand child marriage cancellation in the study areas: teachers, kebele officials, youth and women representatives, police officers, health workers, religious leaders and NGO staff working on child marriage.

Data collection took place between May and June 2019. All study participants were purposively selected in each kebele by the research team with the support of implementing partners and information obtained from key informants (e.g. child marriage cancellation committee members). To recruit young women and men who had cancelled their child marriage in past years, the research team got information from young women and men that knew about cases of child marriage cancellation, teachers closely working with girls' clubs, members of the Ethiopian Youth Council for Higher Opportunities, ECHO (e.g. Tere kebele), Women's affairs officers, and anti-harmful traditional practices (anti-HTP) committee members.

Two research teams were deployed in the field. The Kewet team consisted of 3 researchers (1 female and 2 males) and data collection took place in May 2019. The Bahir Dar team consisted of 4 researchers (3 females and 1 male) and data was collected in June 2019. Four researchers were staff from implementing partners – Plan, Amref, DEC and TaYA.

2.4 Methods

The methods used were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

In-depth interviews were conducted with fourteen young women and men (11 females and 3 males) who got married under the age of 18 and whose marriage was cancelled in the last 2.5 years. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with parents/guardians whose daughter/son's child marriage had been cancelled. Twelve FGDs were conducted with young women and men as well as parents. Eight FGD were with young people aged 15-24 (4 with females and 4 with males) and four with parents (2 with mothers and 2 with fathers). Each FGD consisted of 6-8 persons. In addition, a total of 24 key informant interviews were conducted with: a father, a sister, anti-HTP committee members, local officials (kebele chairpersons, police/prosecutor, women affairs' officer and social court member), school community members (principals, deputy principals and girls' club members), religious leaders, health extension workers, youth leaders, and YIDA field staff (Table 1).

Table 1: Study participants by the different data collection methods

<i>Data collection method</i>	<i>Study group</i>	<i>Bahir Dar woreda</i>	<i>Kewet woreda</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>IDI</i>	Girls	6	5	11
	Boys	2	1	3
	Parents	2	1	3
<i>KII</i>	Father	-	1	1
	Sister	-	1	1
	HTP committee	3	-	3
	Local officials	1	4	5
	School community	2	4	6
	Religious leader	1	1	2
	Health extension worker	1	1	2
	Youth leader	1	1	2
	Yes I Do Staff	1	1	2

FGD	Girls	2	2	4
	Boys	2	2	4
	Parents	2	2	4

2.5 Data processing and analysis

All interviews and FGDs have been digitally recorded, transcribed and, where applicable, at the same time translated into English. The quality of the data transcription was also checked. A thematic coding framework based on the main themes under each study objective was developed to code all the transcribed data using NVivo 12. A 5-day data analysis workshop attended by YID Ethiopia and KIT researchers was conducted from October 21-24, 2019 in Addis Ababa. The workshop served to jointly analyse the coded data, discuss emerging findings and start writing short narratives on the main results.

2.6 Quality assurance

The topic guides for all methods were developed during a workshop held in February 2019 in Addis Ababa in which national researchers, KIT team and staff from the implementing partners in Ethiopia participated. All topic guides were translated to Amharic and were pre-tested in a community with similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics as the study areas. Based on that, all topic guides were discussed and refined. Additional data quality enhancing measures were also taken during the field work with the national researcher and research coordinators closely following up the data collection. Research assistants conducted daily evening briefing sessions to discuss issues related to the data collection and to address identified difficulties. The national researcher did quality checks of the interviews and transcripts. The analysis and report writing were done in a joint and participative effort which enriched the final results.

2.7 Ethical considerations

The research proposal obtained ethical clearance from the concerned government body – Amhara Public Health Institute - which is responsible for such matters. A copy of this document was carried by the research team and data collectors during field work. Upon arrival in each study area, the research team notified local authorities and kebele officials about the members of the research team, the purpose of the study, and the planned activities.

All members of the research team participated in sessions on ethical considerations during the study proposal development workshop as well as during the workshop to prepare for data collection right before going to the field. These sessions addressed topics such as informed consent, the principle of do no harm, the importance of protecting the privacy of participants, and confidentiality of all the information obtained from them.

Research assistants were instructed to present to each informant a consent form to be signed at the time of interviewing. The consent form emphasized that participation was voluntary, participants could avoid answering some questions (if they wished) and stop the interview at any moment. In FGDs the researchers emphasized that the content of the discussions was confidential. A confidentiality statement was verbally disclosed to the participant before the commencement of each interview. For informants under 18, assent forms were used and their parents/guardians were asked for the consent for their son or daughter's participation in the study.

3. SCOPE OF CHILD MARRIAGE CANCELLATION

To provide insights on the scope of child marriage cancellation, the study explored its main drivers, identified the types of child marriage cancelled and delved into how child marriages are cancelled. The main findings are summarized in this chapter. The study also aimed to get an indication of the number of cancellations in each kebele, but limited evidence was found.

Some key informants used expressions such as “common” or “a lot” to give an indication of how often child marriage cancellation occurred. Others mentioned the number of cases they knew about from their respective communities which were generally between five to ten. Key informants holding official capacity, especially school principals and kebele administrators, were aware of most cases: one kebele administrator in Gombat was able to mention 16 cases. This was partially due to poor coordinated documentation of these cases which is also explained at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Drivers of child marriage cancellation

Child marriage cancellation was influenced by various factors. First, it related to young women’s awareness about SRHR, linked to education and awareness-raising activities by girls’ clubs in schools as well as by governmental and non-governmental actors (e.g. women and children’s affairs office, YIDAZ partners). Secondly, an increased awareness among the community about the laws against child marriage together with a less negative perception of girls who refused to marry was identified as a factor. Thirdly, rural girls’ increased desire to stay in school and community’s growing support for girls’ education were also major drivers of child marriage cancellations in the studied communities. A member of the anti-harmful traditional practices committee in Bahir Dar Zuria woreda explained it as follows:

In the cancelled marriages that I participated, the main reason for the cancellations was that all the girls were students and they were underage for marriage. Nowadays, the community prefers sending girls to school instead of marrying them off. The involvement of governmental and non-governmental organizations also has its contribution in the cancellation because parents are now educated about harmful effects of child marriage. People understand that if underage girls enter into marriage, they will be exposed to different health problems including fistula and physical injury. (KII, HTP committee member, Gombat)

Other factors also facilitated the delay (e.g. of the wedding ceremony) and ultimate cancellation of child marriage. An arranged child marriage could be postponed because of an extended dry season leading to a lean harvest. Some young women used the HIV/AIDS blood test to delay the wedding by taking more time to find the appropriate health facility to take this required test. Moreover, some parents needed to prove that their daughters are old enough to get married and this procedure of age estimation in some cases delayed or cancelled the marriage.

However, there were a number of factors hindering efforts to cancel planned or consummated child marriages. First of all, negotiations to cancel an arranged child marriage did not always have the intended results. In a few cases, despite parents agreement to a cancellation requested by the daughter, the police, or other stakeholders, the planning could continue again and more secretly after the pressure exerted on them eased. Secondly, the study found various references to corruption with age estimation. Rural parents who aim to marry their daughters need to prove that she is not under the age of 18. Age estimation is done by health workers at health centers and hospitals in collaboration with the police. Some parents bribed health personnel to falsify the age of the girl. Participants testified that most girls referred for age estimation would often have results of 2 to 3 years above the actual age. In the words of a health extension worker:

Age estimation is conducted at health centre or hospital. Usually, health professionals provide false age certification; they certify under 18 girl as if she is above 18. As a result, girls who are under 18 are married. This affected the data regarding cancellation. We reported several cases of child marriage this year. However, only four were cancelled. This indicates that there is corruption in health centres. (KII, Health extension worker, Tere)

3.2 At what stage are child marriages cancelled

The different stages in which cancellation of child marriage occurred are: promise stage, planning and preparations stage, marriage ceremony stage and the co-habiting stage. Some child marriages were cancelled at the promise stage. These promissory marriages were arranged between parents, sometimes in early childhood, others during early adolescence. These marriages were often cancelled after the adolescent girl discovered that she had been given to marriage without her knowledge. Cancellation during the proposal stage seemed to be easier because it involved fewer economic and social costs for the parents. Other cancellations occurred during the planning and preparations of the wedding ceremony. In these cases, there was often the intervention of law enforcement bodies such as police officials. Most cancellations occurred before the wedding ceremony. A female FGD participant in Tere kebele described her village's experience with cancellation as follows:

In our village, cancellation after marriage is not common. If she got married, she stays there. Cancellation is common by school persons before marriage. Some cancel before marriage ceremony, the others during ceremony. Some girls who have good cousin in the cities go for a while to stay there and cancel their marriage. (FGD, adolescent girls, Tere)

In a few cases, cancellation was done soon after the wedding ceremony and in some cases also after co-habitation or consummation of the marriage. This type of cancellation did not often involve the intervention of external actors and was often related to young women's refusal to co-habit or to engage in sexual relations. Some of these young women just returned back to their parents. The quotes below illustrate the difficulties of child marriage cancellation after the wedding.

Cancellation after marriage is very difficult. Cancellation has never been easy for us. How would it be possible for one to cancel after they have already started living together? Ooh, not possible! Most of the child marriages, if allowed to go ahead, end up in divorce. Thus, no need of cancellation! (FGD, Parents, Sefeberet)

I think that she wants to show respect for her mother and father. This is because she just accepts their idea of marriage and shows her respect. Then she will leave the marriage within 2 days stay ... (FGD, adolescent girls, Sefeberet)

3.3 Child marriage cancellation process

The cancellation process generally started with the adolescent girl not agreeing with the arranged marriage. Most turned to family members, especially to the mothers who could take up the concerns with the father. This was the case of an adolescent girl from Gombat kebele who confronted her mother when she realized that her parents were about to marry her without her knowledge or consent.

Immediately, when I heard the information, I asked my mother about it, then my mother told me that it was true, 'we wanted you to get married and return our debt we have eaten with our neighbour's child wedding'. I was shocked and immediately told my mother and father to cancel the marriage proposal. (IDI, young woman, Gombat)

When discussing with relatives did not work, some girls reported the case to the school authorities or teachers. These actors approached the parents to convince them to cancel the planned marriage so that the adolescent girl could continue with her education. The quote below of the personal experience

of an interviewed young woman illustrates how she turned to a school club teacher to cancel her marriage.

When my parents did not accept my idea to stop the marriage and continued the marriage ceremony, I told my school principal about it, and then he immediately told the health workers... The health workers then advised my parents to stop the marriage... After this, they cancelled their plan and the marriage was cancelled in this way. (IDI, young woman, Gombat)

Although some parents agreed to cancel the marriage, others continued with its preparation. If so, the news of a new child marriage could reach the wider community, including members of the anti-HTP committee, who become involved in the cancellation by putting more pressure on the parents. Intervention by the police, taken as a last resort, puts parents in a collision course with the law, and if resisted, might lead to fines and even imprisonment.

For many rural girls child marriage cancellation was not an easy process. The support of school friends, peers and role model girls was crucial for an adolescent girl's determination to cancel the marriage. Overall, the cancellation process was found to be challenging and time-consuming, and its success required the collaboration of different actors. A youth leader in Gombat kebele described the child marriage cancellation process as follows:

Students (a girl or a boy) themselves are the main source of information about the planned child marriage. Then they tell to their teachers what they hear. Then teachers together with other concerned bodies like kebele administrators and police ... will contact families who have a plan to marry off their daughter and tell them to stop the marriage... If parents (families) are not interested to cancel the planned marriage and proceed to preparation for wedding, then, police, teachers, local militia and kebele administrators will go again to the parents' home; then they will take, most of the time, the father and put him in jail ... for few days or may be for one night. Sometimes, also parents pay money for the kebele administration as a punishment, for not respecting the first agreement to cancel the planned marriage. In the end, parents will be forced to cancel the child marriage. (KII, youth leader, Gombat)

3.4 Documentation of cancelled child marriage cases

Not all child marriage cancellation cases were documented and the few ones that were documented were scattered amongst different stakeholders. Schools often kept records of girls whose marriage had been cancelled through the involvement of school officials or of those who returned to school after cancelling their marriage. In the words of a school principal in Tere kebele:

We document cases of child marriage cancellation through girls' club data. A teacher leading girls' club is in charge of collecting information regarding proposed child marriage and its documentation. The teacher recruits students who collect and report the practice of child marriage. As a result, we are able to get data about child marriage practice and cancellation. We have data about cancellation. (KII, school principal, Tere)

Schools could only keep track of those cases that pass through their offices. Police, health extension workers and the women's affairs office also documented cases of child marriage cancellation. The kebele administration kept records of cancelled child marriages only when they had handled the case. Police and health institutions had information related to cancelled marriages as well, but only of those cases that passed through their communication channels. Similarly, the women's affairs officer in Tere kebele explained that several offices and actors had data on cancelled child marriage (e.g. health centers, women's affairs office). The women's affairs office received information of child marriage cases

from different sources including schools, health development army and women's association. However, it seemed that there was no central point where all data came together.

Most of the time we conduct a quick appraisal of cases of child marriage during January and April (the main wedding months in Ethiopia). We register suspected arranged marriages with their location, household head name and specific village. We document in both soft and hard copies. Cancelled child marriages, after age estimation is done, are also documented in our office. The Police documents all cases which undergone age estimation. Then we copy a report from the police and document for our purpose. Health centres also document cases for which age estimation is done. Cancellation is largely documented by district police officer who handles cases of cancellation. (KII, women's affairs officer, Tere)

This shows that there is lack of organization in documenting child marriage cancellation in the studied communities. Keeping track of all child marriage cancellations seemed to not be an easy task and it was not clearly specified how and by whom it needed to be done.

4. ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE CANCELLATION

As the study aimed to explore personal experiences, the research team identified and interviewed adolescent girls and boys who went through child marriage cancellation. This resulted in fourteen illustrative cases that provide in-depth insights on adolescents' perspectives of the cancellation of their marriage: how the cancellation process was, who was involved, how they felt about it, what were the reasons behind it, the first reactions of relatives, friends and families and what were the main implications of the cancellation for them.

From the fourteen cases, there were thirteen adolescents - eleven girls and two boys - aged 15 to 19 whose marriages were arranged and cancelled when they were underage. The fourteenth case was a 23 year old young man whose arranged marriage with an underage girl was cancelled. All of them were living with parents or relatives in the study areas of Bahir Dar Zuria (8) and Kewet (6). None of them had children and their education level was between 6th and 10th grade. Some were still in school at the moment of the interviews while others were working in small business or in agriculture. All were Orthodox Christians.

The adolescent girls were between 10 and 14 years old when their wedding ceremony was being organized. The males were a bit older; the two that were underage were 16 years old, and the one that accepted the arrangement was 20 years old. Although the girl he was supposed to marry was underage, he argued that age was not an issue as both were mature enough to marry.

4.1 Personal feelings

All fourteen child marriage cases were arranged by parents without the knowledge or involvement of the spouses. Only in two of the cases shared by males, they had been informed of the marriage, which they then accepted, after the agreement was made between the families. The rest were unaware of their marriage until a few days before the marriage during the organisation of the wedding or promissory ceremony. Some noticed the preparations by themselves and others were informed by siblings or friends. The quote below presents the experience of one girl who asked about the preparations of a ceremony but was lied to about the reason for the event.

My marriage was planned in 2010 E.C. but I had no information. I saw while my mother was preparing a feast for the marriage. When I noticed that marriage was planned, I frequently asked my Mother what she was doing. She replied it was for cultural festivity. But I could not believe because the preparation was large. After this situation I had to notice and I asked again. My parents wanted to see me to marry and have many children, but I was not interested at that time. (IDI, young female, Gombat kebele)

Adolescent girls and boys felt differently when hearing about the child marriage. Most of the adolescent girls felt stress, confusion, sadness and anger. Depression, insomnia and suicidal ideas were also mentioned. Their first reaction was to express refusal and try to convince their parents and relatives to stop the child marriage. In some cases, parents and siblings reacted with violence towards the girl. None of the male participants expressed any of these feelings and reactions. Threats to the family about reporting to the police or school principals were commonly expressed by girls as well as by the one case of the adolescent boy who also did not know about his marriage.

Happiness and relief were the most common feelings of adolescent girls and boys after the cancellation. Also one of the boys who had accepted his father's decision on the marriage arrangement explained that he was happy with the cancellation because for him it meant having the option of trying to engage in small business activities. The one who was not underage when his marriage was arranged, felt differently. He felt ready to marry and the refusal by the girl and the cancellation led to feelings of

rejection and sadness. The following quotes illustrate the differences in what cancellation meant for the two male testimonies.

Even though I wasn't involved in the cancellation process, I also wanted to cancel the marriage. I was happy about it because I wanted to engage in a business by moving from place to place. (IDI, young male, Gombat kebele)

What would you feel if your love cancelled your marriage and prosecuted her parents for arranging marriage? We were even taken to district town by police. I feel very sad for her act for accusing us as wrong doers. We agreed first. I was ready but she refused. This is tragic for any person. From that time onwards I tried to keep silent about the issue. (IDI, young male, Sefiberet kebele)

Various adolescent girls were married several months before the marriage was cancelled. The most common feelings they experienced during the marital time were loss of confidence and fear, especially of sexual intercourse and health risks. One of them, after emphasizing that she did not want to engage in sex, added the following:

Even though I didn't have sexual contact with my husband I lost many things because of marriage. Getting married took my everything, I lost my confidence, it made me voiceless." (IDI, young female, Gombat Kebele)

4.2 When and why did cancellation happen

For some of them, (where the promissory ceremony had not already taken place at an early age) the promissory ceremony was the turning point towards cancellation of the child marriage. Most cancellations occurred before the wedding and before the two proposed spouses would start living together. In general, more actors were involved when the cancellation occurred before the wedding ceremony.

When I was at the age of 12 I was proposed for marriage and since I was grade four student I resisted the marriage and it was cancelled in that moment. I didn't start marriage life. (IDI, young female, Gombat Kebele)

Some cancellations happened days after the wedding ceremony and, in a few cases, months after living together. The cancellation after the wedding ceremony was done within the family or even by the adolescent girl alone. Moreover, the personal stories shared by these adolescents suggest that child marriage cancellation in this phase also intensified the reactions from bystanders as well as the implications for the ones involved in the cancelled marriage (parents, bride and groom).

When I was attending grade 10 I was given to a man without my consent. However I didn't even spend 15 days with him after marriage; I returned back home. I then continued my education; but I didn't score well on the national grade 10 exam. I failed and then joined TVET (technical and vocational education training) at Shewarobit town. I also didn't continue the TVET class and I returned back home. (IDI, young female, Tere Kebele)

The most common reason for the cancellation of child marriage was continuing with education. This was especially the case in the stories where cancellation was done before marriage and where the adolescent girls and boys had expressed their direct refusal to their parents. Also in the case of the younger male who accepted the marriage, the girl's reason for refusing was that she wanted to continue with her education. The following quotes from a female and a male show how education was framed as the main reason for the cancellation of their arranged child marriages.

I wanted to continue my education. I have much interest on my education. I learn more things now. If I was married at that time, my life would not be good now. (IDI, young female, Wonjeta)

The main reason was I wanted to continue my education. This was my only reason for the cancellation of the marriage. (IDI, young male, Wonjeta)

Besides education, these adolescent girls also referred to not being mature enough to marry or fear of health risks related to early pregnancy such as obstetric fistula as other reasons to cancel the child marriage. Others also mentioned disliking the man and one argued that she wanted to marry someone who she would love.

Different reasons were shared by those who had cancelled the marriage days or months after the wedding ceremony. Of those who were forced to marry, the main reasons for cancelling their marriage were their rejection of engaging in sexual relations, discomfort in living together with their husband, and in one case also experiences of physical violence. Some expressed continuously disliking and even hating the man. In general, parents seem to progressively accept that these girls would not return to their husbands and ultimately supported them in the cancellation

He slapped me one day and my face swelled. Then I went to my mom and showed her and told her that he would rape me. Starting from that day my mother stood with me and she told my father either he should divorce me from my husband or my mother would divorce from him. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

I preferred my death rather than living with him. (IDI, young female, Tere)

The child marriage cancellation of the adolescent boy who agreed with the marriage and was happy after the cancellation, occurred one year after co-habitation. The main reason for terminating the marriage was a disagreement between the parents of both spouses about the payment of the bride price.

The main reason for our marriage cancellation (divorce) was our parents' disagreement. They were totally involved in our marriage life due to property... Me and my wife were not given too much attention about the cancellation of our marriage, but our parents entered into conflict and her parents forcefully took her from me. (IDI, young male, Gombat)

4.3 Who they first turned to, who was involved and how the process went

Usually, young people sought help within the family, like from an uncle, aunt, cousin, or siblings. Some went directly to their parents, others turned to school teachers, and one girl went directly to a religious leader. Others discussed the situation with friends. One adolescent girl, as the quote below illustrates, tried to ask the promised husband for cancellation directly.

I was telling him I do not want to marry him. And he shall cancel the promise. I even told him, despite I would be forced to marry him I will not live with him. I will be back within three days, if I get marry him. But he didn't respond to me." (IDI, young female, Tere)

All the adolescent girls and boys who expressed their refusal to marry when realizing about the marriage preparations played an active and key role in the cancellation. They initiated the discussions to stop the marriage, pleading directly with their parents and/or by engaging different actors.

The idea was mine. I was interested to focus on my education, therefore I told my teacher and school director, they counsel on my behalf with my parents and the arranged marriage was cancelled. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

Umm no one worked harder in the cancellation process than me, I worked a lot. Actually I am happy it was successful with the help of others. (IDI, young female, Tere)

The actors involved in child marriage cancellation before marriage included religious leaders, school principals/deputy principals, health extension workers, kebele administrators, police, and relatives (mothers/aunts/uncles). Their role was mainly to advise the family and convince them to stop the marriage. The most common arguments were about the enforcement of the law and the negative health consequences of child marriage. In various cases, this gradually worked out and parents ended up accepting the cancellation of the arranged marriage. The cancellation before the wedding ceremony was generally done through an agreement where the bride's family paid back the bride price or money.

When my parents didn't accept my idea to stop the marriage and continue the marriage ceremony, I told to my school principal about my marriage, then, he immediately told to health workers. It is nearby to the school. The health workers then advised my parents to stop the marriage. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

I raised the question to my aunt and uncle. They said just focus on your education we will persuade your family. After they told me this, they went to my home and they were talking about me with my father. They told him "if she gets married at this age you will be punished by law." After a long discussion my family was convinced and the marriage was cancelled. (IDI, young female, Wonjeta)

However, not all of them managed to cancel the marriage before the wedding. Some ended up marrying unwillingly to respect their parents or mother and did not reach out to actors outside the family. Moreover, the involvement of different actors did not lead to cancellation before marriage in all cases. In one of the cases, the police brought an official warrant letter, however, the marriage happened anyway. The adolescent girl returned home fifteen days after. The cancellation process after the wedding mainly involved the adolescent girl returning home and their parents gradually accepting the new situation.

4.4 Reactions to and implications of child marriage cancellation

In most cases, especially in females' stories, family members' reactions were initially negative. They usually ignored the expressed refusal and pressured the adolescents to continue with the marriage. Some relatives gradually accepted the cancellation based on the threats of the adolescent girls and boys that they would escape or take poison. Others resisted more, with the use of physical violence in some cases. One of the female informants explained her eldest brother's aggressive reaction with the following words:

I frequently told my mother to stop the preparation of the ceremony I told her I did not want to go to the fiancé family home and I want to attend my education but my mother didn't listen me. When I said this, all my mother, brothers and sister started to challenge me. Especially my elder brother said that unless you go to husband's house I will kill you, 'one bullet is enough for you' he said. (IDI, young female, Wonjeta)

In the personal experiences shared, the acceptance of the cancellation by parents was linked to the realization of girls' good performance at school or the ability and willingness of the boys to combine the continuation of their studies with the support of the family.

The support of friends and peers seemed to be important in the process of child marriage cancellation. There were no negative reactions mentioned from friends and peers towards the cancellation. Only a few were non-supportive at the stage of realization of the marriage arrangement. In relation to the cancellation, all friends and peers were supportive.

When the marriage was cancelled, my friends were very happy because they knew that early marriage could affect my life negatively. But the communities complained about why I acted against the decision of my parents. After a few days, they saw my good result in the school, and they changed their mind. My parents used to resist cancelling the marriage plan, but later they accepted. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

Some of the adolescent girls also faced reactions from the promised husband and his family. Various participants mentioned that they started posing questions about the reason for the cancellation. Some also explained that the promised husbands tried to convince them to marry by approaching them through friends.

The reactions from the communities were diverse. While in general there seemed to be a negative reaction, a few also argued that communities reacted positively or neutral. The personal stories shared by adolescent girls and boys suggest that the reactions of the community were more negative when the cancellation occurred after the wedding ceremony or when external actors had been involved. The following quotes of two adolescent girls from the same area, who cancelled their marriage but had very different reactions from the communities, support this argument. One managed to have the marriage cancelled before the wedding ceremony while the other did so a few months after.

I feel shame when I pass in front of the villagers because they assume me as a disobedient girl and said 'she separated like a prostitute.' Whereas my peers get happy because they assume as I escape from something which is not good. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

The reaction of the outsider was that, 'if the girl is not interested she shouldn't be forced'. They said, 'don't pressure her, and just educate her.'" (IDI, young female, Gombat)

Criticism of adolescent girls for not respecting their parents' decisions was the most common reaction from community members. Others also referred to the adolescent girl making the husband wait. The three males that shared their stories did not refer to any negative reactions, neither from the community nor from relatives. One explained the following:

My friends were happy on my decision, even members of the community were also happy and I got appreciation from the community as well as from my friends. (IDI, young male, Wonjeta)

The other male argues that cancellation and divorce are common and normal so it is not a big issue for the community.

In our community making divorce is considering as a normal practice. So people don't wonder about divorce or cancelled marriage. No one gives too much attention for divorce. There is no any discrimination or even appreciation for anyone who makes divorce. (IDI, young male, Gombat)

None of the adolescents referred to negative mid- or long term consequences. Most highlighted the fact that the cancellation had allowed them to continue with their education. Some adolescent girls also argued that the experience made them more mature and had given them the experience to be able to support and advise other girls who face similar situations.

There is no serious negative impact on me; the bride price and promises were returned back to the male's parent. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

I get my freedom now, I continue my education if I got pass mark I want to continue preparatory school and join university and support my family. I am able to teach other girls about my experience now. (IDI, young female, Wonjeta)

One of the adolescent girls did not succeed in continuing her education and was planning to migrate to the Arab states. Also the younger man who felt ready to marry, tried to migrate to the Arab countries but he did not succeed. At the time of the interview, he explained that he was planning to marry. However, both he and the other adolescent man who had initially accepted the arranged child marriages ended up working in small businesses.

The cancellation of my marriage brought an improvement in my life. I became a businessman, that was what I wanted, it was my dream being a business man. Cancellation of my marriage didn't bring a negative consequence, but my family and her family are in conflict after we divorced. My wife was also not interested to make divorce, so she may be hurt psychologically. (IDI, young male, Gombat)

I opened this small business and started generating my own income. Now I am in the process of mate selection (courtship). I think I will marry very soon. (IDI, young male, Sefiberet)

These examples show that despite the diverse initial reactions, adolescents argued that in the longer term the cancellation was positive and allowed them to continue with their education or start becoming economically independent through small business or migration.

5. AGENCY STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY ADOLESCENTS IN CHILD MARRIAGE CANCELLATION

5.1 Agency strategies

Qualitative evidence from both Kewet and Bahir Dar shows that adolescent girls used different strategies to resist proposed child marriages, which was generally the first step in the cancellation process. Some of these strategies included outright refusal, reporting to school officials and kebele, and seeking help from their siblings. Also, after the wedding ceremony and after starting to co-habit, adolescent girls exercised agency by running from the groom's home to escape the marriage, migrating to nearby towns, or seeking support from close relatives.

As in most cases adolescent girls could not cancel their marriage on their own, they actively sought support from others. For example, it was common for adolescent girls to report a proposed child marriage to teachers. As an example, one of the adolescent girls who shared her story explained that she first confronted her parents, and when they refused to listen to her she reported the case to the school principal. Ultimately, she managed to cancel the proposed marriage.

I strongly disagreed and told them I don't want to get married I have to continue my education. Even I told them, "If you don't cancel this proposal, I will tell to school principal and the school principal will take it to police and you will be arrested". They didn't accept my idea then I told to my uncle to advise them, I finally told to the school principal that I will not be able to continue education as my families were preparing me for marriage then he immediately told to health worker to advice on this issue. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

Underage girls whose marriage had been arranged by their parents were inspired by the experiences of those who had successfully cancelled their marriage who acted as role models. As shared by a male participant from Wonjeta, young people also drew on the support and experience of their friends to make the cancellation of the marriage possible.

It happened when I was 16 years old...but I was not happy to get married and I rejected their request for marriage. My friends gave me advice to continue my education and not to enter into marriage. My friends were not happy when I told them about my marriage. My friends were eager to tell the case to our teachers, to interfere and to help me to cancel the marriage, but fortunately my parents respected my interest." (IDI, young male, Wonjeta)

Some underage girls, when confronted with marriage proposals, also relied on the kebele administration and youth associations in their efforts to cancel the marriage. Some also went to the police, sometimes secretly to avoid repercussions. An 18 year-old female narrated her experiences regarding the various strategies she used to cancel her proposed marriage. This is depicted in the following quotes from her interview:

I went to the kebele, but I was afraid when I reached the office...I asked my villager youth representative to help me to get inside the office. I told my problem to kebele people and they asked me to tell names of the elder people who participated in the process, then I only remembered one of them... He also told me to call him if I wanted to talk to him. Then they talked to the elder people and my uncle. (IDI, young female, Tere)

As the quote above shows, reporting to kebele authorities did not seem to be easy for some young people who did not have experience in speaking to officials. A 25 year-old youth representative from Sefiberet kebele, who helped a girl in her effort to cancel the marriage, acknowledged the importance of the role played by young girls in the process of child marriage cancellation.

Girls themselves play a crucial role! We have partly assisted them for instance in reporting to police but girls are the main actors in cancelling their marriage. Girls' agency is very important in cancellation. If the girl is strong enough to refuse marriage, she can. Her strength matters. Two of those girls who cancelled their marriage have migrated to Arab countries. One girl has married this year. Girls are the main players than even police and youth clubs. (KII, youth representative, Sefiberet)

Young people also discussed their concerns about arranged marriage with their friends to get advice and help from them to find a way to end the marriage. As presented below, an 18 year-old boy from Wonjeta stated that he talked to his friends when he first heard that his parents were preparing his wedding.

When my parents asked me to get married, I talked with my friends and they pushed me not to get into the marriage and to focus (continue) only on my education. Therefore, after the marriage cancelled, I continued my education. (IDI, young male, Wonjeta)

5.2 Young people's space for voice and choice in child marriage cancellation

Some adolescent girls have limited space to choose when and whom to marry and therefore their space to choose child marriage cancellation is constrained. Some participants referred to the negative implications of defying parents' decisions in relation to marriage arrangements, including punishments. In the words of a male FGD participant:

Girls don't have the freedom to choose with whom to marry for example, if her parents bring a husband for her, she should accept what her parents bring, if she refuses, her parents especially her father, may fire her from home or kick her. She may get physical punishment and then forcefully she enters into marriage. (FGD, young male, Wonjeta)

At the same time, other participants argued that some parents, particularly mothers, were responsive to young daughters' refusal of child marriage. FGD participants' accounts indicate that some young people are making their own choices in relation to marriage. During an FGD with boys, a male participant explained how young people were increasingly deciding about their marriage with the following words:

Previously they did not have, but now they have the right to accept or reject; they can make a decision. Before, girls were requested to be out when elders from the side of boy came and asked the willingness of her parents to marry their child to the boy. However, now, the parents of the girls ask their daughters' idea about the marriage proposal. She has full right to reject if she is not happy with the proposal. (FGD, young males, Tere)

Some participants linked the increasing decision-making space of young people to child marriage cancellation. Parents participating in a FGD in Tare affirmed that some girls are willing to risk their parents being punished when they report them for pushing them to marry underage. The following case of a father who was punished because of arranging a marriage for his underage daughter illustrates this.

Children are currently not giving chance for their parents to have a say in their choice about whom they should marry. Parents are getting ashamed that they are not able to influence whom their children should marry. Daughters may even accuse their fathers or parents if they influence her to marry below 18 years old. She has a right to call elders and negotiate between her parents and her interest when she is willing to stop the marriage. I had prepared wedding feast for marriage ceremony of my daughter. However, her marriage was cancelled due to her age that she was below 18 years old. I did not consider her age. Then, I was caught by police and detained. (FGD, parents Tere)

Delaying the engagement until the young women become 18 was a strategy used by some adolescent girls. This seemed to become more common among school girls who are better informed and have the confidence to challenge their parents' decisions regarding arranged child marriage. On the other hand, girls who were out of school seemed to have fewer options due to their limited exposure to life outside their immediate environment and a lack of information about where to go and where to seek support when they are confronted with an arranged child marriage. The following quote from a father (age 58) who participated in the parents FGD in Tare describes girls' experiences in his village regarding delayed marriage.

Educated girls rarely comply with the marriage proposal of the parents. Parents wait for until she reaches 18 years old if the marriage is cancelled due to age. The marriage will take place when the girl reaches 18 years old. Both wait for each other. There are also some who married each other by their own way after the marriage was cancelled due to age. Some wait for each other for 2 to 3 years together until she reaches 18 years old. (FGD, fathers, Tere)

5.3 Young people's feeling of empowerment to cancel child marriage

Adolescents that felt empowered were more likely to cancel the marriage. Sources of empowerment were diverse including continuing education, performing well at school, establishing home businesses, working on a flower farm, being active in school clubs or serving as a role model in fighting child marriages. Parents who saw their daughters perform well in school were more likely to accept requests to cancel the planned marriage. This was the case of a 34 year-old woman who decided to cancel her daughter's planned marriage after she saw her daughter receiving a prize in the school closing ceremony.

I was invited to attend the school closing ceremony and saw while she was receiving a prize. When I saw that, I felt so happy and decided to cancel the marriage plan. My daughter... received different types of trainings including early marriage, and has a strong desire to focus on her learning. (IDI, mother, Gombat)

This shows that education gives underage girls a bargaining power with their parents in matters related to marriage. This was also confirmed by a youth representative from Sefiberet kebele.

A girl in our neighborhood had refused marriage before two years and continued her education. She was forced by her parents but she rejected. Then she was 16. She has married this year with her consent at her 18. Her husband promised her parents that he would assist her to continue her education. Some years ago, my aunt faced the same challenge. She was clever student. However, she was forced by her parents to marry. She refused marriage because she was clever student and wanted to continue her education. She was successful. (KII, youth representative, Sefiberet)

Similarly, access to employment opportunities could give some adolescent girls confidence to negotiate with their parents regarding a proposed child marriage. For example, a YES I DO field staff member working in Kewet woreda described the role of economic empowerment of underage girls in their decision to refuse child marriage as follows:

There are girls who work on rearing sheep and goats through our income generating activities (IGA). Parents do not want these girls to marry because they would lose all these resources. If she were married, the girl would take all the sheep and goat. Economically empowered young people are less likely to be pushed into marriage. (KII, YID field Staff, Kewet)

6. STAKEHOLDERS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 Schools, teachers, school clubs and peer-students

Both teachers and students had an influential role in child marriage cancellation because they are close to the information and their commitment to ending child marriage was found to be very strong. Furthermore, teachers and school principals were involved in awareness raising programs about the effects of child marriage for the community. In addition, schools have a suggestion box which is also of help for teachers to identify cases of child marriage, discuss with parents or, when necessary, with the police regarding cancellation.

Students reporting to the school principals, then school principals called students' parents to discuss with regarding the cancellation of the marriage and they advise them to encourage and support their children to stay and continue their education. (IDI, young female, Wonjeta)

Schools documented data related to child marriage cancellation and referred to monitoring activities after cancellation. After a child marriage had been cancelled, teachers followed up on the situation of the girl, checking whether they were continuing their education or not. Most of the time teachers were responsible for this.

Teachers will give advice and counselling for those girls whose marriages have been cancelled. If girls don't return back to school, after the cancellation of their marriage, teachers will go to their home to know the reason why a girl doesn't continue her school, then they will push/encourage girls and her family to send their girls to school. (KII, school deputy, Wonjeta).

Apart from specifically tackling child marriage, schools also had different structures in place to improve sexual and reproductive health rights of students, including psychosocial support for the students. Furthermore, schools have strategic plans to prevent harmful traditional practices which included support to school clubs.

Teachers prepare strategic plan on how to prevent harmful traditional practices in general and child marriage specifically. Schools/teachers provide different materials and also give technical support for school girls' clubs to prevent child marriage. (KII, school deputy, Wonjeta)

6.1.1 Parents teachers and students associations

Parents teachers and students associations (PTSA) also played a significant role in the cancellation of child marriage. Parents that participated in those institutions were very supportive of the children. As soon as school principals and teachers have information about child marriage, they call the student's parents to discuss or give advice about the planned marriage. If parents are not willing to cancel the planned marriage, teachers will bring the case to the police or kebele officials' attention.

Students, when they get information about child marriage, will tell to teachers secretly regarding the marriage or if they are afraid to tell teachers, they will put the information in the suggestion box or they will tell to one of their close friends to transfer the information to the teachers. Teachers with collaboration of police and kebele officials cancelled planned child marriage." (FGD, young men, Wonjeta)

6.1.2 Youth clubs

Youth Clubs, including Anti-HIV AIDS and Reproductive Health clubs, school girls' clubs, together with mini media clubs were involved in the cancellation of child marriage by working together with ECHO members, kebele administration and anti-HTP committee. These clubs had a pivotal role in creating awareness within the community to prevent child marriage. For example, with drama and theatre clubs, students played the role of health professionals, health centers and parents. Moreover, they provided trainings for girls whose marriage had been cancelled and educated the community about harmful traditional practices. These clubs (especially school clubs) were also main sources of information for planned child marriage.

We often teach the community about the effects of child marriage, FGM and related harmful practices. We empower young people to take care of their lives through drama and plays. We also inspect cases of child marriage and report to police, women, and children affair office. (FGD, young men, Tere)

We work with ECHO members and kebele structure to help girls and boys in every aspect of their life. We often work with marriage cancellation committee. We give the committee information about child marriage. (KII, School club girl, Tere)

6.2 Roles of police and kebele officials

When teachers were unable to cancel planned child marriages after discussing with the parents, the police often got involved. They also played a key role in the child marriage cancellation process. After being aware of a child marriage, the police, in collaboration with the health professionals, focused on the age estimation of the children. If the age of the girl or the boy is below 18, and they do not want to get married, the police would first talk to the parents. When the family do not accept the request to cancel the marriage, they are punished by the police who finally would force cancellation of the marriage. The punishment could be a fine or staying in custody. A police officer interviewed explained that when cases are beyond their capacity, these are brought to court with support from women's affairs office.

Police is the most diligent member of the committee who is able to challenge the community in the cancellation. No cancellation takes place without the involvement of police. (KII, Women Affairs Expert, Kewet)

Police plays an important role not only in cancellation but also in teaching the community about the legal issues regarding child marriage. (KII, social court leader, Kewet)

Whenever we find cases beyond our capacity, court involve and cancel the marriage with the help of court and women and child affair office. (KII, Police, Sefiberet)

One young female whose marriage had been cancelled shared that she had not wanted to reach out to the police due to the fear of the legal consequences for her parents. In her words:

"If I accused the man to cancel the marriage promise which is traditional, my family could be jailed."
(IDI, young female, Tere Kebele)

In some cases, not only the family members were punished but also elder people involved in the child marriage process. The police worked closely with court and justice office, two bodies that also played an important role in child marriage cancellation processes. As stated in the quote below by a police officer, especially during the months of January and April, when most weddings take place in Ethiopia, police follow possible cases of child marriage. In addition, they do a follow-up after the cancellation of child marriage and collect data on the child marriage cancellation through a survey.

Every year (during January and April) we analyze the existence of arranged child marriage. We also compile reports on child marriage cancellation and follow up after cancellation. We conduct a baseline survey about arranged child marriage. In collaboration with health extension workers, youth clubs and women support association, we provide awareness. (KII, Police, Sefiberet)

6.3 Roles and responsibilities of siblings

Siblings, especially when they were educated, opposed child marriage and pressured their families to cancel child marriage. Their opinion was in some cases more easily accepted by the parents. However, there were also siblings who supported child marriage and pushed their sisters or brothers to get married.

My family gave her (my sister) for marriage because the boy was from good/rich family...I told to my grand-mother that my sister is too young and below age of 18, even much younger than me. So I tried to

tell her about the bad consequences of child marriage. My grandmother thought that I am educated and trusted what I said, and was convinced to cancel the marriage, but my uncles and aunts stood against me. Finally, my grandmother got the power to stand next to me and opposed my aunts and uncles. Then they also agreed with the influence of my grandmother. She was the one who decided on the marriage cancellation and next day when the elder people came, they were told by grandmother that she was student and couldn't marry by the time. (IDI, young female, Sefeberet)

6.4 Roles and responsibilities of religious and community leaders

Religious leaders were the main actors in negotiating and setting the date of marriage in general, whether it was a child marriage or not. Marriage approved by religious leaders and community leaders was accepted and considered legitimate. Almost all marriages are negotiated by religious and community leaders. Sometimes, religious leaders wanted to show their respect to families by attending a child marriage ceremony. In some areas, religious leaders and elders involved in the process of child marriage had been punished.

Elders and religious leaders don't want to hear marriage they have facilitated cancelled. This is shame for them. They hate the parents and brides involved in the cancellation. Elders are the main players in arranging marriage rather than getting involved in cancellation." (KII, Girl from school club, Kewet,)

However, nowadays religious leaders have increasingly become aware of the illegality of child marriage and are playing a positive role in the cancellation of arranged marriages. Many encouraged adolescent girls to continue with their education. They were aware of the health risks of child marriage and of other harmful practices. Sometimes they worked together with police and kebele officials.

Religious fathers do not allow child marriage. They preach the community not to exercise child marriage. ... They are trying to raise awareness among the community members and condemned those who married off their underage children. They are also consulting children in the church to get relief from their stress. (KII, Priest, Bahir Dar)

One day my younger sister told me as I will marry soon and the marriage ceremony preparation is already started. Then I told to my family as I'm not interested to marry, but they didn't accept my idea. During that time, I got nervous and gone to the religious leader and I begged him to convince my family to cancel my marriage. I told him as I'm not interested to marry at that age rather I'm interested to attend my education. Based on my interest, the religious father told my family not to force me for the planned marriage. (IDI, young female, Gombat)

6.5 Roles and Responsibilities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Different local and international NGOs and consortia like YES I DO were directly or indirectly involved in child marriage cancellation efforts. These NGOs were more involved in activities and trainings to create awareness of the effects of child marriage among government officials, community members and leaders, teachers, kebele officials, police, religious leaders, students' representatives, and for community based organizations like "Iddirs". NGOs also supported young people who were unable to finance their education by providing educational materials.

There are also community conversation (cc) facilitators who are established by the Yes I Do project. These are peer-to-peer groups, change agents, IDIRS, youth activist groups. The CC are working through awareness creation in the community. They try to provide awareness about child marriages and other harmful traditional practices and try to cancel if child marriage occurred or they report to the government established committee. (KII, YID staff).

One girl whose marriage was cancelled was luckily supported by NGO. She was provided a sheep. Her parents were also positive about cancellation. She is now leading good life with her parents because she has source of income. Such case is very rare! (KII, school club girl, Tere)

7. IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD MARRIAGE CANCELLATION

This chapter focuses on the long and short term implications of child marriage cancellation. It starts with the reactions of the community, families and peers once a child marriage is cancelled. Then, the main short term social, economic and psychological implications of cancelling child marriage are described followed by the longer term ones which are more linked to young people's future perspectives. These are mainly related to education, work, migration and remarriage.

7.1 Reactions to child marriage cancellation

Various participants, especially young men and key informants, argued that child marriage cancellation was generally accepted and appreciated. The main reasons mentioned were an increased preference to continue education rather than early marriage, together with an increased awareness of the illegality of child marriage and the health risks for young girls. Some mothers also mentioned the fear of girls running away to escape from an arranged child marriage as a reason why parents accepted the cancellation. In the words of a member of a child marriage cancellation committee:

At this time our kebele community has become aware of how child marriage is forbidden and they see child marriage as a crime action. They understand the harmfulness of child marriage, how much it exposes their child for fistula and other physical injury. In addition, peoples' economy in this community is improving, so many people don't want to marry off their daughter, rather they want their child to stay with them by following their education... Due to these, by this time, it's difficult to get people consider child marriage as a good practice. Rather, they appreciate cancellation of child marriage. They see the cancellation of child marriage as a good practice. The community will condemn if any is trying to be an obstacle to the cancellation process. (KII, member anti-HTP committee, Gombat)

Peers and school teachers seemed to be the main stakeholders that were most generally supportive of child marriage cancellation. Relatives and communities expressed positive reactions in some cases, particularly in relation to good results of young girls in school. The study found a few cases where parents initially disapproved of the cancellation but became more supportive when they saw their daughters' commitment to education reflected in good results in schools. That was the experience of a girl who was interviewed in Gombat kebele:

The communities complained why I acted against the decision of my parents. After a while seeing my good results in school, they changed their mind. My parent used to resist cancelling the marriage plan, but later they accepted." (IDI, young female, Gombat)

At the same time, the study shows that negative reactions were common as evidence was found of multiple cases in which relatives and community members were against the cancellations. These negative reactions were most commonly expressed towards young girls. The disapproval of child marriage cancellation was mainly related to social and economic reasons. The social reasons included the value of marriage, obedience to parents' decisions as a sign of respect, and the importance of social bonds. Young girls who cancelled or wanted to cancel their marriage were criticized by neighbours and community members who also sometimes questioned the parents' roles and reactions, putting pressure on the parents and thereby influencing their reactions. Key informants highlighted that child marriage cancellation was seen as undermining parents. In the words of a women's affairs expert:

The community doesn't like cancellation. Cancellation is considered as disregarding the fame of the parents. Parents are eager to attend the wedding of their daughter. They want to enjoy while they are alive. Cancellation in this sense means degrading the prestige of the parents or undermining them. No parents wholeheartedly approve child marriage cancellation (KII, women's affairs experts, Tere)

Moreover, as child marriage can be partly arranged for economic reasons, cancellation eroded parents' economic aspirations. In several cases cancellation occurred when the ceremony preparations had already started, which implied costs for the families. Arranged child marriages were based on agreements and cancellation meant parents losing social relationships with community members. A health extension worker in Wonjeta kebele stated the following:

The relationship between the family and the children will be harsh and they may quarrel with the person involved in the cancellation. Families also incur more expenditure for wedding ceremonies to invite more people and hence marriage cancelled makes them angry ...(KII, health extension workers, Wonjeta)

Parents therefore often felt ashamed and angry towards young girls. According to interviewed young girls, some parents refused to accept cancellation or opted to deny access to education support for their daughters. In a few cases, mothers' initial disapproval evolved to a more supportive reaction. As for young boys, the study found less evidence of negative reactions towards them, which was partly explained by participants' reasoning that it is less common for young men to cancel a child marriage. However, participants' accounts suggest that young men too feel ashamed and rejected.

Regarding when and how the child marriage cancellations seemed to have a strong influence on the reactions of community and relatives, reactions were more negative when a child marriage was cancelled after the wedding feast had already been organized or when actors outside the family intervened in the cancellation. This situation is often considered a disrespectful act towards parents and parents felt more shame and anger in this context. The quote below from a key informant illustrates this. The study also found one case where the community reactions were linked to the reason of the cancellation. In that case, community members were supportive of the cancellation because the reason was that the young man could not pay for the bride price.

If the reaction by the community will be different when the cancellation involves arresting parents, then the pressure on the girl will be high. The community insults and humiliates the girl as rude and disrespecting them. (KII Chairperson, Tere)

To sum up, the study results indicate that the communities' first reactions towards child marriage cancellation were very diverse, from supportive to complete disapproval. Reactions were more negative towards girls especially when cancellation occurred in advanced stages of the organization of the wedding ceremony and with the intervention of law enforcement actors.

7.2 What happens after the marriage is cancelled?

Stigmatisation and social exclusion were brought up as major consequences of child marriage cancellation for adolescent girls. Adolescent girls who initiated child marriage cancellation were seen as breaking social norms and values, and hence could be excluded from social affairs which led to frustration and depression as it is stated in the quote below.

Imagine the girl was forced to marry. Then her marriage is cancelled either through her own effort or by the intervention of police. The social pressure of the community is high. In that situation, you feel neglected, unwanted and unfit. You feel as if you have done something wrong to the moral sentiments of the community. When you feel that your parents are disgusted with your decision, you will be trapped in psychological problems. You will be shocked when you found your peer negatively reacting to your decision. In addition to this, boys would insult her or harass her in different places. (KII, Health Extension Worker, Tere)

These negative reactions were particularly reported by adolescent girls who cancelled the marriage after the wedding ceremony had taken place. For example, a female participants described her life after

cancellation with the following words:

It was very hard time to me, my father reacted in a very negative manner, he enforced me to have overloaded activities. Majority of activates in the household turn to me, I become overloaded after marriage cancellation. I hope my father challenge me in that way and he enforces me to choose the husband... The community is still not good for me because they assume I am a bad girl. I feel shame when I pass in front of the community because they see me as a disobedient girl and say 'she separated like a prostitute.' (IDI, young female, Gombat)

Negative reactions towards adolescent girls that cancelled child marriages affected them psychologically. They were called deviant, 'agbo fet' (divorced), a 'wrong doer', 'or 'sexy or prostitute'. The continuous harassment and stigmatisation reduces the girl's chances to develop a future in the village where she lives. In some cases this leads to adolescent girls migrating to Arab countries, or even in a few cases, attempting or threatening suicide. This was brought forward by mothers who participated in the FGD conducted in Sefeberet kebele

If her family stigmatizes her it hurts her psychology and the stigma from her family scale up to community, and she can't do anything if she is ignored from community and she can't get work opportunity in the village and she prefers to be commercial sex worker. (FGD, mothers, Sefiberet)

The case of suicide was mentioned by many study participants. Various participants referred to adolescent girls attempting to commit suicide due to all the social pressure. At the same time a few adolescent girls would also use the threat of suicide as a strategy to cancel an arranged child marriage. A school principal described it as follows:

If the girl reported her case to kebele or police and cancelled her marriage by her own initiative, the reaction for the community would be very serious. Her parents do not consider her as their child. They would say 'you are not our child. You are no longer our child...' Parents will force the girl choose between leaving home and marriage. She will be stigmatized and humiliated for reporting the case. Cancellation is considered as degrading the fame of parents. Due to the pressure from parents, girls who cancel their marriage often try suicide. Girls drink pesticide to take their life away rather than suffering from the pressure from the parents and the community at large. In addition to this, girls try irregular/ illegal migration in order to escape the nagging and negative reaction from the community. Stigmatization and labeling as 'rude' and 'disobedient' push the girl to suicide. (KII, School Principal, Tere)

On the other hand, some adolescent girls who successfully cancelled marriage and were able to reach their dream through education were seen as role models by their peers and faced less negative reactions. Cancellation could also affect the relationship with the actors involved in the cancellation as well as the relationship between the parents of the boy and the girl. It also had economic implications such as losing the expenses incurred for the wedding ceremony or having to return the bride price.

7.2.1 Protection and support

Most adolescent girls returned to their parents' home after skipping the ring wearing ceremony arranged by her parents. This allowed them to keep living with their parents and continue their education. In other situations young people also negotiated with their parents about their marriage by telling them their future aspirations such continuing their education, establishing their own business and looking for a job, which would improve their parents' living conditions. Generally, adolescent girls and boys mainly turned to their parents as there seemed to be very limited sources of protection and

support outside the family. In this regard, a young informant stressed the need to be practical by winning her parents support.

Bringing people on my side was my first role. I strongly disagreed with the action and tried to convince my mom, consulted my relative and brought them onto my side. That made my cancellation practical. (IDI, young female Gombat)

When parents were not supportive, some adolescent girls turned to other relatives. The study found a few cases where adolescent girls started living with brothers, uncles or aunts after their arranged child marriage had been cancelled, especially if the relatives lived in other areas.

In our neighborhood, a girl was promised by her parents at her 17. She had no any information. She was a student. She was told to wear ring. She had no any information about whom she would marry. Then the girl took all her exams and left the area to Addis where her brother was living. Then she escaped the ring-wearing day. She came back after the ring-wearing day was passed. The boy who was promised for marriage is my friend. He feels irritated because he has already purchased the ring. The girl stayed in Addis for some months and came back. The ring wearing time is already gone. Now she is attending her education. (KII, youth representative, Sefiberet)

7.3 Life after child marriage cancellation

7.3.1 Education and Work

After child marriage cancellation, young people usually continued their education as it was seen as an opportunity to pursue dreams and improve their own and their family's lives. Most females also mentioned the wish of becoming role models, sharing their experience and supporting other adolescent girls who want to cancel their marriage.

Yes, I get my freedom now, I continue my education if I got pass mark I want to continue preparatory school and join to university and support my family. I am able to teach other girls about my experience now. (IDI, young female, Wonjeta)

It seems that parents generally covered the education expenses of their children, especially if young people used to live with the parents before child marriage cancellation. However, sometimes young people also took a side job to support the family and/or their education. Going back to school was not always an easy process. As mentioned by boys during an FGD in Sefiberet, family members and the community sometimes question young people's choice to continue education. They should be persistent and clear about their intention to go back to school.

The negative influence from the community in this area against continuing education is big. However, I am coming to the point that if somebody has interest in education he/she can continue by ignoring influences from the community. Personal determination matters most to return back to school, ignoring influences from the side of community. (FGD, young males, Sefiberet)

One study participant argued that continuing with education was more difficult for boys whose marriage had been cancelled due to pressure from the community. Therefore, some boys migrated to urban areas or to another country to find a job, instead of continuing with their education.

Alternatives vary between males and females. Usually boys whose marriage was cancelled leave the area in order to escape the social pressure and gossip. Boys whose marriage was cancelled will never want to see their former partner marry another boy. As a result, they often leave the area. In this area, boys migrate more than girls do both legally and illegally. Girls have more choices than boys do in this kebele. After their marriage is cancelled, usually

girls continue their education. If they fail to manage continuing their education, they migrate to urban areas and seek jobs. (KII, Chairperson, Tere)

Also for adolescent girls who co-habited with the husband or had a child before cancellation were less likely to go back to school according to a school deputy from Wonjeta kebele. Such girls often started working or migrated to another country or city.

Yes. However, the type of cancelled marriage matters. If the cancelled marriage is a planned marriage, she will be able to rejoin school no problem. However, if cancellation is after marriage is consummated, it is less likely. It is difficult to be a student after becoming a wife. Being a wife is considered as a transition for girls. (KII, Women Affairs expert, Tere)

Although most young people decide to continue with education to pursue a better job in the future, deciding to start working instead of not continuing with their education is also an option for young people. Working in a flower farm, or as shoe shiners, or housemaids or in small business like mini shops are some of the options available to young people. However, others decide to migrate and find a job in another country or city.

In general, many young people in "Gombat kebele", after cancelled their marriage either they will return to school or will work in the flower farm/ "khat" farm or migrate to the nearby cities like Bahir Dar, Gondar or any other cities including Addis Ababa." (IDI, young male, Gombat)

7.3.2 Migration

Migration was found to be common amongst adolescents after the cancellation of the marriage, especially in Kewet. The presence of established social networks is an incentive for the young people to migrate to countries where there is a sibling or relative as a migrant such as in the Middle-East. Some parents with financial needs encouraged their children to migrate so that they could financially contribute to the family economy. Although most of the migrants were young girls who quit grade eight or ten, young boys migrated as well. A young man from Sefiberet who migrated when he was 16 and returned to his village explained the linkage between child marriage cancellation and migration in his area.

Once the marriage of youngsters cancelled due to age being below 18 years old, migration is the only option. They do not return to school. It may be 1 out of hundred who returns to school after their marriage cancelled. There may be some who want to remarry again after their marriage was cancelled. But in this area almost all of those whom their marriage cancelled migrate to other countries. (IDI, young male, Sefiberet)

Migration was used by young people to escape from social embarrassment thereby allowing young people to start their life from zero in a place where people did not know them. Some adolescent girls, shortly after resuming school, again decided to drop out of school and migrate. Moreover, migration was seen as a means to improve their social and economic status after marriage cancellation. For adolescent boys this meant more options to remarry when they return.

For instance, I know two boys whom their marriage cancelled due to age...They decided migration as the best alternative. They returned with improved economic status. Then, they got married. Especially boys want to migrate to another area when they cannot get the person whom they want to marry. Then, he can marry another person of his choice after improving his economic status. (FGD, young males, Tere)

If the girls move to another area, nothing will be said about them. So, girls whom their marriage was canceled will migrate to another area. They use migration as a mechanism to

withstand the influence towards them as a consequence of their marriage cancellation. (FGD young males, Sefiberet)

Illegal migration often involves physical as well as psychological violence. Yet, young people in Kewet saw migration as one of the alternatives.

Migration is among the main alternative for girls who cancelled their marriage. Migration is taken as coping mechanism to escape the gossip and social pressure after cancellation. In the course of migrating to Arab countries, girls experience severe plight such as physical abuse, sexual abuse and more. Rural girls have no experience of sex before marriage. But with illegal migration they are vulnerable to several abuses. (KII, school club representative, Tere Kebele).

The situation in Bahir Dar is a bit different since opportunities for international migration are limited and there seem to be other economic options in the area. In these areas, when young people decide to migrate their options seem to be limited to urban areas like Bahir Dar, Gondar or Addis Ababa.

7.3.3 Remarriage

In general participants agreed that it was possible for girls to get married again after they had cancelled a child marriage. However, depending on when and why the marriage was cancelled remarriage was more or less difficult. As stated in the quote below, it was easier when the marriage was cancelled during the planning stage whereas when cancellation occurred after co-habiting, it was more difficult as it was associated with having started sexual intercourse.

Those who have cancelled their planned marriage would have more chance of remarriage than those who cancelled their marriage after consummation. The latter are considered as divorcee or those who had already sexual intercourse with someone else. Their marriageability would not be the same as those who cancelled planned marriage. (KII, school club girl, Tere)

In all cases, virginity loss seems to make girls whose marriage was cancelled less marriageable. Nonetheless a teacher from Sefiberet kebele explained that sometimes it was easier to marry again once girls had lost their virginity because then the boys did not have to pay bride price to the girl's family.

They will remarry. The chance of the girl getting married again is much bigger. The reason for this is that, when they marry a virgin girl ("lejagered") they face a lot of expenses. They will have to buy different jewelleries as a gift. But when they marry a girl whose marriage was cancelled ("fet"); they save money. (KII, Teacher, Sefiberet)

Sometimes conflict emerged when the girl get married before the boy with whom their marriage was cancelled. The former proposed husband could create conflict with the new couple, and was sometimes supported in this by the community. Therefore, participants argued that it was easier for girls to remarry someone from another area.

It depends on where the girls would remarry. If the second husband is from the same area with her first husband it would be difficult for her to marry because there would be dispute between the two boys. However, if the second husband is from another area, no problem. The reaction of the first boy determines the probability of marriage of the girl. Most of the time a girl does not marry another husband until the first husband (whose marriage was cancelled) marries. If the girl gets married before the husband marries, there would be a dispute between the husbands. (KII, Chairperson, Tere)

Although in general it was more difficult for females than for males to remarry, there were also exceptions. For instance, for females with land, a house or cattle, or for those considered to behave well after cancelling the child marriage, it was easier to remarry.

“If a girl has a good behavior in the eyes of the community, she has a chance to remarry.... Also if a girl has her own cultivated land or house or cattle she can remarry. In general; girls whose marriage was cancelled remarriage is common and normal here in this kebele.” (KII, HTP committee member, Gombat Kebele)

8. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion and recommendations for programmes and research on child marriage are presented along the main study objectives, scope of child marriage cancellation, the role of adolescent girls and boys in child marriage cancellation, the role of different stakeholders and the implications - short and long term - of child marriage cancellation.

8.1 Scope of child marriage cancellation

Differentiating child marriage cancellation from child divorce is challenging. The research team understands that a child marriage is cancelled when the child has expressed his or her disagreement from the time they hear about the marriage. Sometimes, the cancellation takes place prior to the ceremony and sometimes a few days after the ceremony. Most of the time child marriages are cancelled before the ceremony, however, there are some cases where girls are forced to get married and after a short time they go back to the family house. Child divorce is understood in this study to refer to cases where a child initially does not directly oppose or reject the marriage, but during the cohabiting period they decide to stop their marriage and/or return back to their parents' house. Moreover, some child marriages are suspended or postponed rather than cancelled, meaning that these marriages can take place at a later stage.

Research also shows that it is difficult to know the scope of child marriage cancellation. Many actors are involved in the cancellation of child marriage and there is not a lot of communication between them. In addition, there is no central point where all cases reported are collected and documented. Nor is there any formal procedure for how that process is done and how information is collected. Finally, child marriage cancellation in Ethiopia is a strategy related to the enforcement the National Policy against harmful traditional practices that led to the establishment of local-based committees against harmful traditional practices, including child marriage.

Key recommendations:

- Strengthen the capacity of the women's affairs office and anti HTP committee on collecting and compiling data on child marriage cancellation in coordination with the different key stakeholders involved in child marriage cancellation and its identification. This would facilitate having a complete overview of all child marriage cancellations and increasing accountability.
- Further research is needed to clarify what is considered child marriage cancellation, especially in the cases when the cancellation happens after the ceremony.
- There is a need for young girls to be informed on how they can cancel their child marriage. This could be provided by the members of young girls' clubs. Capacity-building trainings could be provided to the members of the groups.

8.2 Roles of adolescent girls and boys in child marriage cancellation

Adolescent girls usually try to exercise their agency by opposing their planned marriage; however, this does not seem to be sufficient to cancel the marriage if they do it on their own. Most of the time, they need to seek support from other actors such as family members, school officials, police officials or peers. This might also be influenced by a lack of knowledge of how the cancellation of the marriage works.

Furthermore, it is difficult for adolescents to strategize the cancellation of their marriage if they are only informed about their marriage days before it is planned to happen. Furthermore, it is important to add that they go through a lot of emotional stress throughout the process. This distress could be avoided if they had someone to talk to.

As mentioned throughout the report, there are different reactions towards adolescent girls when they decide to cancel their marriage. Sometimes these reactions are negative and aggressive. It is very hard for adolescent girls to navigate these situations and most of the time they do not have the skills to face these reactions.

Finally, reaching out to certain stakeholders such as police officers to interfere in the cancellation of the marriage is not always easy for adolescent girls. School teachers and youth clubs are more accessible to young girls and they feel more comfortable talking to them. Most of the times police officers are the last resource for adolescent girls to cancel their marriage.

Key recommendations:

- It is important that schools, NGO workers and health workers have the tools to help adolescents coping with the emotional stress that they go through before, during and after the cancellation of their marriage. They also need to be able to inform adolescents about the possibilities and consequences of cancellation.
- Implement psychosocial interventions to support adolescents during and after child marriage cancellation.
- Sometimes it is difficult for girls to express their rejection of the marriage. Young girls' clubs could work with girls on how to improve intergenerational communication. Strategies to also involve out of school youth are also important.
- Role models have a great influence on a girl's cancellation of her marriage. Girls see it as inspiring and as something they want to aspire to do. Linking role models with parents could be used in the same way. Parents and other family members involved in the planning of the marriage could learn about the role model's stories and experiences.
- Awareness raising among parents on young people's right to know about and consent to the marriage arrangements.

8.3 Stakeholder's roles in child marriage cancellation

Different actors are involved in child marriage cancellation and each case is different. However, in general, the interventions by external actors are more likely to also have negative outcomes. Using mediation strategies, mainly discussing with parents as teachers and health workers do, has more positive influence in the cancellation of the marriage. Nevertheless, families who want to marry their daughters will find a way to do it. From the research it is unclear if law enforcement actions reduce child marriage cases or if the ceremony still happens but more secretly.

It is not easy for girls to report the marriage to the police. This process usually brings rejection by the community and her parents. Violent and aggressive reactions towards girls quite often take place in these situations. It is important to mitigate the impact on the adolescent girl who is reporting the planned marriage and put mechanisms in place for girls to not feel blamed for contacting the police. There is no support and protection mechanism for girls when they are in this situation.

After the cancellation of the marriage some of the girls go back to school, others migrate to Arab countries or move in with a family member who lives in another city. In general, stakeholders involved in the cancellation of child marriages do not offer support to girls after the cancellation of the marriage.

Finally, there is a gap in the coordination of the anti-harmful traditional practice committee as its role in child marriage cancellation was often dependent on actions undertaken by individual members. Most adolescents are not well informed about the existence of the anti-HTP committee.

Key recommendations:

- It is important to train key actors such as teachers and the women's affair officers on how to accompany or support girls after the cancellation of their marriage.
- Sensitization activities with fathers in particular are recommended, as fathers can be more reluctant to child marriage cancellation. These activities need to take into account the multiple factors that make fathers resist cancellation.
- Analyse the side effects that punitive strategies have on adolescent girls whose marriage is cancelled with the intervention of law enforcement actors as in these cases the reactions from community members can be more negative. Consider strategies to ensure support and close sensitive monitoring of these cases after cancellation.
- Train staff of the legal and judicial sector to better inform adolescents about the legal status and implications of traditional marriages and promised marriages.
- Strengthen the role of the anti HTP committee and its unit responsible for child marriage cancellation.
- Strengthen the coordination between stakeholders and ensure alignment of child marriage cancellation interventions with the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C 2020-2024.

8.4 Implications of Child Marriage cancellation

Parents and community members are more likely to react negatively towards girls who cancelled their marriage because of social and sexual norms and the control of women's sexuality. Respect towards the parents and family honour is often used to convince adolescent girls to continue with the wedding. Friends and peers are the ones who offer more support and encouragement to adolescent girls to cancel their marriage.

In general, adolescent's girls and boys life after the cancellation is not much different to the life of other adolescents who have not been through that process, especially for those that cancelled the marriage before the wedding ceremony. Most of the time, they focus on education or migration. However, alternatives for adolescent girls who cohabitated with the husband are more limited. It seems that education is only for unmarried girls, or those that have cancelled the marriage before cohabitation.

Key recommendations:

- Awareness raising about cancellation of child marriage amongst family members, elders and religious leaders is needed. It is important to sensitize community members and parents about the burden that girls are placed under when cancelling their marriage.
- It is important to develop programmes that address how child marriage cancellation affects boys. Masculinities influence boys' reactions to and experience of child marriage cancellations. Moreover, the study found that it was more difficult for boys to continue with education after child marriage cancellation.
- More tailor-made educational programmes that include vocational training are needed. They could specially focus on married or divorced young women who are still interested in having an education but are not able to follow school programmes.

9. CONCLUSION

Child marriage cancellation is common although the exact number of cases is unknown. The main drivers are an increased awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage and about its illegality together with young people's desire to continue with their education instead. Child marriage cancellation can take place before the wedding ceremony - at the proposal or planning stage - or after the wedding ceremony. When cancellation happens influences not only how cancellation is done and who intervenes but also the implications for adolescent girls in terms of reactions towards them and alternatives after the cancellation.

Adolescent girls play a central role in the cancellation although they cannot do it by themselves. They generally express their refusal first to their parents and relatives. When this does not work they turn to teachers, health workers or even the police. The intervention of the police can imply financial fees and detention. In these cases the community and family reaction towards girls is more negative. Peers and teachers are the most supportive actors for girls.

Evidence coming from program implementations shows that some girls cancel their early marriages through members of the anti-HTP committee, which involve all levels of civil society actors. Generally, however, there is very limited support for adolescent girls and boys after child marriage cancellation despite the emotional burden they often carry. The alternatives after child marriage cancellation are similar to the ones available to youth in general; education, limited job opportunities, migration in the case of Kewet, or marriage.

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