

156. Societal Practices and Gender Norms that Influence Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Services among Adolescents in the Pastoralist Communities of Afar, Ethiopia

Addisalem Titiyos Kebede, Gizachew Jembere, Wondimu Tolera (**presenter**), Mehiret Begna, Melete Tefery, Tesfaye Garedew, Ana Aguilera, Kathryn A. O'Connell, Jemal Kassaw

**EngenderHealth*



Introduction

- Most people in the pastoralist state of Afar adhere to traditional cultural beliefs & practices
- Afar has the lowest rates of contraceptive use & highest rates of child marriage in Ethiopia
- EngenderHealth examined social norms & beliefs related to SRH & gender equity among adolescents in Afar

Methodology

- Snowball recruitment to engage adolescent participants
- Focus group discussions with age- & sex-disaggregated groups
- Thematic transcript-based analysis to identify themes & subthemes
- Data analyzed using ATLAS Ti

Results

Study participants highlighted the following constraints to SRH uptake:

- Limited access to SRH information and services in general
- Need for parental or spousal permission to access SRH care
- Inability of adolescent girls to access or pay for contraception without partner approval & use of a contraceptive dependent upon approval of a male partner
- Using condoms taboo among adolescent boys
- Married partners fail to regularly & effectively discuss need for birth spacing & contraception
- Harmful traditional practices (such as child marriage & female genital cutting) commonly held as acceptable; girls have little control or autonomy regarding SRH rights & decisions

Summary & Conclusions

- Deeply entrenched gender disparities prevent girls & women from accessing SRH care & exerting basic SRH rights
- Crucial need to address underlying gender norms that prevent girls & young women from accessing SRH services

