

**Factors Associated with Self-Reported Stopped Marriages among Adolescent Girls  
Aged 10-19 in Amhara Region, Ethiopia  
DRAFT**

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## **Introduction**

Child marriage is an important public health, development and human rights concern related to women's limited decision making power around pregnancy prevention and safe sex (Jensen and Thornton 2003), increased biological susceptibility to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS due to the immaturity of the reproductive tract (Clark, Bruce and Dude 2006), poor mental health (Kalil and Kunz 2002) especially when marriage is unwanted and girls are isolated from their natal family and friends, a longer exposure to the risk of childbearing and a greater number of lifetime births, increased risk of pregnancy and delivery complications including vesico-vaginal fistulae (Akpan 2003) and maternal mortality (Save the Children 2004; UNFPA and the University of Aberdeen 2004), the loss of educational opportunities, poor employment prospects, and poverty (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi 2003). Due to its association with early sexual activity and childbearing, child marriage also has implications for children's health. Infants of teenage mothers are more likely to suffer from low birth weight and to die when compared with infants of mothers who delayed childbearing, even after taking into consideration differences in birth order, sex of the child, multiple births, and socioeconomic status (Nour 2006).

Recent estimates from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) indicate that in sub-Saharan Africa the percentage of women aged 20-24 who are married below the age of 18 is as high as 75 per cent in Niger (Institut National de la Statistique (INS) and Macro International Inc. 2007) and 72 per cent in Chad (Ouagadjo et al. 2004) and ranges from 25-45 per cent in many countries in the region. By comparison, in Namibia, less than 10 per cent of women 20-24 years old were married by age 18 (Ministry of

Health and Social Services (MOHSS) 2003). In Ethiopia, 31 per cent of women aged 15-49 years were married before the age of 15 (Central Statistical Authority and ORC Macro 2001) in the year 2000. Although child marriage appears to be declining, the 2005 Ethiopia DHS showed that, nationwide, close to half of women aged 20-24 were married before age 18 and that men continued to marry at a much older age than women. The Amhara region of Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the country, with a median age at first marriage of 15.2 years for girls aged 20-24 (Central Statistical Agency and ORC Macro 2006). Many girls may be married even earlier, as young as age 8 or 9, and in some situations, are even promised in marriage at birth.

The Ethiopian Government has ratified many of the United Nations and regional human rights conventions that are relevant to early marriage and marriage with the consent by both spouses, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Domestic laws also recognize free and full consent to marriage and prescribe sanctions against child marriage. The Ethiopia Revised Family Code of 2000 stipulates that no marriage may be concluded between a man and a woman who have not attained the full age of 18 and considers marriage to be valid only if spouses give free and full consent to the conclusion of the marriage. The New Criminal Code that came into effect in May 2005 (replacing the 1957 Penal Code) contains specific provisions with regard to the violation of marriage laws (Teshome 2005). Regarding early marriage, Article 648 of the new Criminal Code specifies as follows: 'Whoever gets married to a minor girl in contravention of the provisions prescribed specified by the

relevant family law: (a) shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding three years where the victim is thirteen years old or above; or (b) shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment of not less than seven years where the victim is less than thirteen years old' (cited by Teshome 2005, p.29)

Furthermore, Article 647 stipulates that a person who solemnizes an unlawful marriage including early marriage with full knowledge of the facts is punishable by imprisonment not exceeding three years or with fine not exceeding Birr 5,000. 'Even a person who was present during conclusion of the marriage as a family member to give his consent thereto or one who appeared in the capacity of a witness is also liable to similar punishment' (Teshome 2005, p.29). However, these legal prohibitions are not well known. The ingrained nature of child marriage in Amhara society coupled with virtually non-existent birth and marriage registration systems pose immense challenges for the discontinuation of the practice. The 2005 DHS found that only 1 per cent of children younger than five years of age nationwide had a birth certificate (Central Statistical Agency and ORC Macro, 2006).

Against this backdrop, we examined factors associated with the likelihood of averting child marriages in the Amhara region. The analysis is based on the hypotheses that girls' own agency in stopping unwanted marriages and community intervention would increase the likelihood of child marriage prevention. These hypotheses were founded on the notion that the power to change embedded social practices in largely agrarian subsistence economies in Amhara region is founded in social institutions, communities, families and individuals and exercised through dialogue and multiple social interactions. As averting child marriage involves major changes in thinking and

behaviour in the community, a third hypothesis was that the more compatible was the legal minimum age at marriage with community definitions of early marriage for girls, the greater would be the likelihood that a marriage would be deferred. It is anticipated that the findings of this research will contribute to the refinement of strategies to prevent child marriage in Ethiopia.

### **Child Marriage Prevention Activities**

Over the past five years, a number of initiatives have been introduced in the Amhara region to help communities acquire the knowledge, skills, and information needed to prevent child marriage. These interventions fall into 3 main categories: School-based intervention, community-based interventions, and collaborative partnerships with national and regional legal and civil society organizations. Some interventions (such as those implemented by Pathfinder International and the Population Council) address child marriage from the perspectives of reproductive health, women's rights, and women's empowerment. In other programs, such as those implemented by World Learning, child marriage is addressed as a human resource development issue related to women's roles as productive members of society, with child marriage interventions introduced in the context of improving the quality of and equity in basic education.

School-based interventions are implemented through Girls Advisory Committees (GAC) and School Development Agents (SDA) by World Learning and through Girls' Clubs by Pathfinder International. Girls' Advisory Committees are made up of male and female students, parents, and teachers and tackle problems of non-school attendance with Parent-Teachers Associations. GACs also provide support to girls to ensure school

continuation. Typically, SDAs arrange community discussions with religious, traditional, and political leaders to encourage the community to give girls equal educational opportunities as boys; conduct house-to-house visits to foster attitudes conducive to girls' education; and provide public recognition of parents who send girl's to schools. SDAs also organize campaigns against abduction and early marriage in collaboration with GACs.

The Girls' Clubs supported by Pathfinder International are found at both the primary and secondary school levels and are made up of female students. Girls' Clubs provide peer education on child marriage, harmful traditional practices (HTPS), reproductive health, and life skills. They also provide a support network for girls who are 'escaping' early marriage and withdrawal from school. Girls' Clubs also promote community conversations around early marriage at social gatherings such as coffee ceremonies. As poverty often underlies early marriage of girls and school drop-out, Pathfinder also funds scholarships for girls who are committed to continuing their schooling and who are struggling to escape engagement or marriage. Members of the Girls' Club frequently report planned child marriages to women's associations, teachers, or the School Director who would then intervene to stop the marriages through discourse and social persuasion. In 2006, World Learning was working in 1,118 schools in Amhara Region and Pathfinder in 278 woredas (districts) nationwide.

Social mobilization is an integral component of community-based programs to avert child marriages. In programs implemented by Pathfinder International, Community-Based Reproductive Health Agents (CBRHAs) play a pivotal role in educating communities about the reproductive and health consequences of early marriage and

identifying vulnerable populations. CBRHAs go house-to-house, organize community gatherings, and work in market places to disseminate reproductive health information and early marriage prevention messages. CBRHAs also provide counseling to women suffering from obstetric fistula, distribute non-clinical family planning methods, and refer clients to health facilities for HIV/AIDS testing and restorative surgery for fistula (Pathfinder, 2006).

In the Berhane Hewan program developed by the Population Council and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, social mobilization revolves around adolescent girls aged 10-19 and occurs through a mentorship program. The program provides support to girls to stay in school, non-formal education and livelihood skills, community-wide conversations on early marriage and reproductive health issues affecting girls, economic incentives to families who did not marry off their daughters during the project period. This program was piloted in one village in Amhara Region from 2004-2006 (Erulkar and Muthengi 2007).

Public forums have also been organized to sensitize community stakeholders about the negative consequences of early marriage and childbearing for women, including increased vulnerability to poverty and reproductive health complications, and to engage traditional leaders in early marriage prevention activities. Local department engagement in child marriage prevention is exemplified by the Woreda Advisory Committees, composed of government representatives, religious leaders, the Amhara Women's Association, teachers and CBRHAs. These Committees play an important role in early marriage prevention by organizing campaigns at the local level and by intervening to stop child marriages (Pathfinder 2006).

Pathfinder International's collaborative partnerships include the Amhara Women's Association, *Ye Ethiopia Goji Limadawi Dirgitoch Aswegaj Mahiber* (EGLDAM, the former National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), the Ministry of Women's Affairs, faith communities, and law enforcement agencies. The Amhara Women's Association organizes and provides guidance to Girl's Clubs; offers scholarships to poor girls; and mobilizes local kebele (town/village) representatives to report on early marriages that are planned in their communities. EWLA gives free legal counsel to victims of early marriage, abduction, rape, and gender-based violence. EGLDAM provides material support to Girls' Clubs, promotes community conversations, and develops and disseminates behaviour change communication materials around early marriage. Advocacy sessions have been held with religious leaders of the major faiths in Ethiopia (Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Muslim Faith, the Catholic Church and Protestant Churches) resulting in these leaders signing statements condemning early marriage and harmful traditional practices and exhorting religious bodies throughout Ethiopia to advocate against these practices in their communities (Pathfinder 2006).

The significance of a multilevel integrated response focused on developing partnerships at the regional level, with local government agencies and at the community level is demonstrated by the process of identifying and averting potential child marriages. As described by Pathfinder (2006b), upon hearing about a *metachachet*, an Amharic word for 'formal engagement' which is an agreement between two families that requires witnesses, a student or CBHRA typically informs the school director or the Amhara



Women's Association. The community representatives and the Girls' Club leader would visit and counsel the family against marrying the child. In some kebeles, the case would be referred to an Early Marriage Screening Committee composed of three recognized community decision-makers. At this stage, a fine may be imposed on parents of the girl. Parents who persist in marrying off their children would be reported by the school director or AWA representatives to the Woreda Administrator, who would then send a judge or policeman to the family to determine the girl's age and marriage plans. In cases where the law has been clearly violated, the girl's father, both parents and anyone else who helped broker the marriage would be taken into custody by the police. Given the virtual absence of birth registration, disagreements over the girl's age are typically resolved by sending the girl to a medical centre for age estimation (Pathfinder 2006). Families found in violation of the law would be summoned to court and fined up to 5,000 birr (\$578 US at the current exchange rate) with up to 7 years imprisonment if the girl is less than 13 years old. In addition, the marriage may be annulled.

## **Method**

### *Data*

The 2007 Early Marriage Evaluation Study was a cross-sectional regionally representative household survey that explored the coverage and effectiveness of early marriage interventions in Amhara Region. Participants were female adolescents aged 10-19 years, male youth aged 10-24 years, and co-resident caretakers. The survey employed a three-stage cluster sampling design. Woredas were the primary sampling units. Using the 1994 Ethiopia census as the sampling frame, the first stage of sampling involved the random selection of 18 woredas for study implementation. At the second stage, 3 urban

kebeles and 3 rural kebeles were selected from each sample woreda, with the probability of selection proportional to size. At the third stage of sampling, 50 households were selected for study from each urban sample kebele and 30 households from each rural sample kebele, based on the household listings obtained from the regional authorities, which were recently updated by the Central Statistical Agency for the 2007 national population census. At this stage a systematic random sampling technique was used. Within each sample household, one adolescent and one of his/her co-resident parents/caretakers were randomly selected for interview.

The study was approved by the Office of Human Research Protection Institutional Review Boards, Tulane University and by the Ethiopian Public Health Association. Participants provided written informed consent or witnessed consent if unable to read or write. Fieldwork was successfully completed in 15 woredas and 120 clusters and included 3677 adolescent girls with a completed interview of whom 685 reported that their formal engagement had ever been discussed by their family. This paper focuses on the female adolescent data as the social trajectory to marriage during adolescence and early adulthood is more crystallized for females than for males.

The female adolescent questionnaire collected information on the background characteristics of respondents; sexual activity and reproduction including experience of obstetric complications; stages of marriage and their timing; marriage cancellation (averted and annulled marriages); and respondents' experience with marriage by abduction. In addition, questions were asked on exposure to early marriage prevention messages and knowledge of marriage laws and the consequences of violating those laws.

Subsequent sections of the questionnaire dealt with sexual violence and respondents' psychosocial health.

To elicit information on marriages that were averted the EMES collected information on the last time the respondent heard that her formal engagement was being discussed and the ensuing chain of events. The following questions were used to determine the sub-sample of female adolescents aged 10-19 to whom the marriage cancellation section of the questionnaire was administered: 'Have your parents/family members ever discussed a formal engagement (*metachachet*) for you?' Respondents who answered 'yes' were then asked questions about partner choice, their reaction upon hearing of their planned marriages, respondent-initiated discussion about stopping the marriage, reasons for non-help seeking to stop the marriage, and whether community members visited the girl's family to counsel the parents against child marriage. The following question was asked to obtain information on the outcome of these discussions: 'Did a formal engagement take place?' Responses were categorized as 'yes', 'no' and 'formal engagement stopped'. Respondents whose formal engagement took place were asked whether they got married later on, with the responses coded as follows: 'yes', 'no' and 'marriage/wedding stopped'. Subsequent questions inquired about police or legal intervention in averting the marriage and perceived levels of stigma associated with stopped marriages.

### *Measures*

The outcome variable of interest was binary and reflected whether the last formal engagement or marriage was stopped (that is, averted). Demographic variables of interest included age at the time the respondent heard her formal engagement was being planned,

standard of living, level of education, place of residence, and parental education. Age was treated as a continuous variable. Standard of living was defined in terms of household possessions, living environment, and housing characteristics collected through the household questionnaire. Using principal components analysis, each household was assigned a standard of living score based on a sum of scores for 19 different household characteristics standardized in relation to a normal distribution with a mean of zero and standard deviation of one (Gwatkin et al. 2000; Rutstein and Johnson 2004). The analysis used the continuous weighted scores. Respondent's level of education comprised three categories: none/primary incomplete, completed primary, and secondary incomplete. None of the respondents had completed secondary school. Parental education reflected whether both parents were uneducated. Religion identified whether the respondent belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Dual orphan status reflected whether both parents were deceased. Ethnicity was not included in the analysis as 93 per cent of the sample was Amhara.

The respondent's desire to get married reflected whether she was sad or angry (as opposed to happy or indifferent) upon hearing that her formal engagement was being planned. Partner choice was comprised of three groups and was based on responses to the following question: 'Did you yourself choose (NAME) to be your future husband, did your family choose him for you or did someone else choose him for you?' Respondent's agency in marriage cancellation was measured by asking whether they had talked to someone about stopping the marriage when they last heard that their families were planning to marry them off. Community involvement in averting child marriages was based on the answers to the two questions: (1) 'Did anyone (else) ever talk to your family

about stopping the formal engagement?’ and (2) ‘Who (else) talked to your family about stopping the formal engagement?’ For respondents whose formal engagement took place, additional questions were asked as to community involvement in stopping the marriage/wedding. For the purpose of this analysis, police intervention was excluded from the definition of community involvement. Exposure to advocacy by religious leaders was binary and reflected whether the respondent had heard messages about early marriage prevention from a priest or religious leader, which was assumed to measure the moral legitimacy of deferred marriage. The number of information channels about early marriage prevention messages to which the respondent was exposed comprised 5 categories: none, 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10 or more.

Community-level measures derived from the parent/caretaker data set captured perceived levels of social criticism of families whose daughters’ marriages had been stopped and the gap between the legal minimum age at marriage and the average age cut-off used to define early marriage for girls among caretakers in the community. Parents who knew a girl whose marriage had been stopped were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with or had no opinion about the following statement: ‘People in my community criticize a family if the daughter’s marriage is stopped.’ The cluster was used as a rough approximation of the community, that is, respondents’ immediate social environment. Communities were divided into tiers based on the percentage of caretakers who agreed with the statement that people in their communities criticized a family if the daughter’s marriage had been stopped.

To capture personal definitions of early marriage, respondents in the EMES were asked: ‘In your opinion, before what age is it too early for a girl to get married?’ For

each community, we calculated the difference between the legal minimum age at marriage (i.e., 18 years) and the average age below which resident caretakers considered a girls' marriage to occur too early. The early marriage definition gap indicated whether this difference was more than 2 years. A measure of community endorsement of women's traditional domestic roles was derived from male youth data and was based on the percentage of young men who agreed with each of the following statements: (1) 'A woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for the family' and (2) 'Giving the children a bath and feeding the children are the mother's responsibility.' These questions were only administered to male youth. Communities were divided into tiers to reflect low, medium and high levels of endorsement of women's traditional domestic roles among resident young men..

#### *Statistical analysis*

The analysis was limited to girls who were younger than age 18 at the time they last heard that their formal engagement was being discussed by their families. Of the 625 adolescent girls who fell into this category, 36 were excluded due to missing data on one or more variables included in the analysis. The resulting analytic sample therefore included 589 adolescent girls. We calculated prevalence estimates, expressed as percentages to analyze socioeconomic differentials in respondent-initiated and community-initiated discussion of forestalling marriage and in averted marriages, and incorporated sampling weights to adjust for varying probabilities of selection and response. Differences in prevalence estimates were evaluated using F-tests.

Multivariate logistic regression was used to examine factors associated with child marriage prevention. For this purpose, we estimated two models. The first model

included demographic and socioeconomic covariates and the second added community-level factors and interaction terms. To examine whether the association between these variables varied by type of place of residence, we included interaction terms in the logistic regression models. The analysis was conducted using SVY commands in Stata Version 10.0 (StataCorp 2007), which take into account the complex sampling design, clustering, and unequal probabilities of selection and response when calculating sampling errors.

## **Results**

### *Characteristics of the sample*

Weighted sample characteristics are presented in Table 1. At least half of the sample lived in urban areas and 45 per cent had attended but not completed secondary school. For two out of three girls, both biological parents were uneducated. Seventy-three per cent of girls belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and 7 per cent had lost both parents. On average, respondents were 13.5 years old when they last heard that their formal engagement was being planned by their families. A substantial proportion of girls had not chosen their prospective spouse. For the vast majority, 71 per cent, the prospective spouse was chosen by their families. More than half of adolescent girls were sad or angry when they heard that their marriage was being planned and one in three talked to someone about forestalling the marriage. A majority of respondents had been exposed to child marriage prevention messages from religious leaders (70 percent). In 19 per cent of cases, members of the community (police and legal representatives excluded) talked to the respondent's family about stopping the marriage. More than a third of girls lived in communities with high perceived levels of stigma against families that had

experienced an averted marriage and sixty-three per cent in communities where men aged 15-24 had relatively low levels of endorsement of women's traditional domestic roles. Almost half of girls in the sample resided in areas with an average gap of 3 or more years between the minimum legal age at marriage and the age before which the community considered a girl's marriage to occur 'too early'.

-- Table 1 about here --

### *Bivariate analysis*

Table 2 shows the association between selected socioeconomic variables and the prevalence of discussion about forestalling marriages and the prevalence of averted marriages. In the second and third columns, we show the prevalence of respondent-initiated and community-initiated discussion about forestalling marriage, respectively. The fourth column shows the proportion of planned marriages that were stopped before a formal engagement could take place. The estimates shown in the fifth column are based on planned marriages that resulted in a formal engagement and reflect the proportion of formal engagements that were stopped before a formal marriage or wedding could take place.

The reported prevalence of respondent-initiated and community-initiated discussion about forestalling marriage was 34 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively. About 19 per cent of the planned marriages of under-age girls were averted before a formal engagement could take place. Once a formal engagement had occurred only 7 per cent of planned marriages were averted. At least one out of four girls reported that the planned marriage was averted. Further analysis (not shown) revealed that that the police



intervened to stop planned child marriages in three per cent of cases and that an arrest was made for organizing a child marriage less than one per cent of the time.

-- Table 2 about here --

Significant differentials were observed in both discussion about forestalling marriage and, regardless of the stage of the marriage process, in averted marriage rates by the respondent's desire to get married, partner choice, number of information channels on early marriage prevention, and level of education. Prevalence estimates were significantly higher for respondents who were sad or angry upon hearing about the plans for their formal engagement than for those who were happy or indifferent. A higher percentage of the formal engagements of adolescent girls whose prospective husbands were chosen by someone else were averted (40 per cent) compared to formal engagements characterized by individual partner choice (6 percent), which could reflect in part efforts to promote free and full consent to marriage and the older age of girls who exercised individual partner choice at the time they heard that their formal engagements were being planned (15.8 years versus 13.1 years among girls in family-arranged prospective marriages and 13.8 years among girls whose prospective spouses were chosen by someone else).

The level of respondent-initiated and community-initiated discussion about forestalling marriage increased from 12 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively, among adolescents who were exposed to no information channels on early marriage prevention to 53 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively, among those who were exposed to 10 or more information channels. Differentials by household wealth were only significant for the prevalence of respondent-initiated discussion and showed a positive relationship.

Parental education and urban-rural differentials revealed a significantly higher level of respondent-initiated discussion and post-engagement averted marriages among urban than rural girls and among those with at least one compared to no educated parent. The analysis revealed no significant differentials in the level of discussion about forestalling marriage and in averted marriage rates by parental survival and religion.

Further analysis indicated that 97 per cent of the girls whose marriages were averted were never married at the time of the interview (not shown). We calculated the difference between age at the time of the interview and age at the time the girls last heard that their formal engagements were being discussed by their families. This calculation was restricted to girls who were younger than age 18 at the time they last heard their families were planning to marry them off and who reported being never married at the time of the survey. The average number of years elapsed since the last time the respondent heard that her formal engagement was being planned by her family was 3.6 years.

#### *Multivariate analysis*

Table 3 presents odds ratios (OR) and confidence intervals (CI) from multivariate logistic regression models of the likelihood that the formal engagement or marriage was averted. Model 1 controls for individual-level factors while Model 2 adds community-level variables and interaction terms. The addition of community-level factors and interaction terms did not affect the magnitude or direction of the effect of any of the variables in Model 1, with the exception of secondary school attendance which increased in magnitude and attained statistical significance at the five per cent level. Adolescent girls who had attended secondary school were twice as likely as those who did not

complete primary school to report an averted formal engagement or marriage ( $p = .035$ ). Double orphans were 0.224 times as likely as girls with at least one surviving parent to have their formal engagement or marriage prevented ( $p = .015$ ). Both respondent initiated and community-initiated discussion had strong positive effects of the odds that the formal engagement or marriage was forestalled ( $p = .001$  for each covariate). Exposure to early marriage prevention messages from religious leaders increased the odds of reporting a forestalled formal engagement or marriage four-fold ( $p = .001$ ).

--- Table 3 about here ---

The findings also showed that the odds that a child marriage was averted decreased significantly with an increase in the level of perceived criticism of families whose daughters' marriages had been stopped. Girls residing in communities with medium and high perceived levels of criticism were 0.450 and 0.341 times as likely as those in communities with low perceived levels of criticism to report that their planned marriages were averted. Contrary to expectations, areas with low endorsement of women's traditional domestic roles among male youth aged 15-24 had significantly lower odds of forestalled marriages than in areas with medium to high levels of endorsement ( $p = .001$ ). The findings also showed that a gap of three or more years (as opposed to 0-2 years) in the legal and community definitions of early marriage was unrelated to the odds of averting child marriage in the total sample.

We tested interactions terms between each covariate and urban residence. Only two of these interaction terms were significant. The odds of child marriage prevention were significantly higher and positive among Orthodox Christian girls residing in urban areas than among their rural counterparts, although the confidence intervals were wide.

The second interaction term was positive and implied that a gap of 3 or more years in the legal and community definitions of early marriage gap had significant negative effects on the likelihood that a marriage was averted in rural as compared to urban areas. We initially included partner choice, the number of information channels, and community-level measures of education, knowledge of the legal minimum age at marriage, knowledge of the civil code, and knowledge of someone who was punished by the law for involvement in child marriage (based on the caretaker data) in the regression models. These factors were excluded from our final model because they were insignificant predictors of the likelihood that a planned child marriage was forestalled.

## **Discussion**

Data from the 2007 EMES, Amhara Region, Ethiopia showed that one out of four planned child formal engagements or marriages were averted. In the statistical analysis, the strongest predictors of a child marriage being averted were respondent-initiated discussion about forestalling the marriage, community-initiated counselling of the girl's family against early marriage, respondent's exposure to child marriage prevention messages from religious leaders, double orphan status, and perceived level of community criticism of families whose daughters' marriages had been stopped. Furthermore, in rural areas, a gap of three or more years (as opposed to 0-2 years) in the legal and community definitions of early marriage was associated with reduced odds of a child marriage being averted. These effects were independent of household wealth, education, and age. The negative relationship between low support for women's traditional domestic roles in the area and the odds that a planned formal engagement or marriage was averted was

unexpected and could possibly indicate a focus of child marriage prevention efforts on communities with stronger endorsement of traditional gender roles.

Overall, the study suggested that changes in social norms around early marriage can be influenced by religious leader involvement and community engagement. In the survey, over 70 per cent of young people (females aged 10-19 and males aged 15-24) and 40 per cent of caretakers reported hearing early marriage prevention messages from religious leaders. Given their close links with communities, religious leaders who advocated against early marriage could have been considered more credible than other information channels. We tested the effects of exposure to early marriage prevention messages from teachers, Girls' Clubs and CBRHAs but none of these effects were found to be statistically significant. The findings also suggested that the extent to which marriage was forestalled in rural areas depended upon the degree to which the legal minimum age at marriage was compatible with community values and norms. Where community age definitions of early marriage were 3 or more years lower than the legal minimum age at marriage, rural child marriages were less likely to be forestalled.

One limitation of the study is that the data are cross-sectional and that planned and averted marriages were based on self-reports. Due to the intense campaigns against early marriage and some enforcement of marriage laws, it is possible that there may have been some under-reporting and that social desirability bias may have occurred. For example, over 95 per cent of adolescent girls, male youth, and caretakers reported that there were no advantages of early marriage, which precluded an examination of whether there was a relationship between community perceptions of the relative advantage of delayed marriage and the likelihood that a child marriage was averted. Second, the study

could not examine community variation in deferred marriages due to the small average cluster size of 4.9 girls who ever heard that their formal engagements were being planned by their families.

Data were also not collected on the full range of community factors that may be relevant to child marriage prevention. Such factors could include sense of community, interconnectedness, trust, community participation, civic engagement, community capacity, and social support. Since the overwhelming majority of girls whose marriages were averted reported being never married at the time of the survey and data were not collected on the age or date at which the last formal engagement or marriage was stopped, survival methods could not be used to analyze multiple entries and exits into the marriage process. Another limitation of the data is that girls who may have run away from home or migrated to avoid early marriage were not captured by the 2007 EMES. A study by Erulkar et al. (2006) found that nearly one-quarter of female migrants in slum areas of Addis Ababa Ethiopia had moved from rural areas to escape early marriage. In the EMES, 12 per cent of girls mentioned running away from home as a panacea to early marriage.

This study is among the first to provide evidence regarding predictors of child marriage prevention at the individual level. We recommend additional longitudinal studies of girls whose marriages were averted to determine for how long a marriage is averted and possible impact on exposure to the risks of childbearing and on girls' educational attainment and employment opportunities. Future research should clarify salient aspects of the community that influence child marriage prevention. Programs should intensify efforts to engage community members and religious leaders in child

marriage prevention efforts and empower girls to take the first steps to having their marriages delayed by their families. The findings also point to the need to incorporate child marriage prevention activities into programs that address the needs of orphans and vulnerable children and devise strategies to address perceived levels of stigma and criticism around forestalled marriages in the community. The widespread introduction, strengthening, and enforcement of vital registration systems are also integral to the enforcement of the minimum age at marriage law.

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