

Tracking Progress in Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health - Webinar Summary

Summary of virtual exchange delivered June 24th 2020

With nearly 1.2 billion adolescents (10-19 years old) worldwide, there is a recognized need for addressing the unique challenges of adolescent health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR). Poor ASRHR outcomes not only have a significant negative impact on adolescents' current health, but also on their future health and well-being as well as the well-being of their communities. Global achievements in improving ASRHR remain uneven. In sub-Saharan Africa, inequalities in ASRHR persist along gender, geographic, educational and other dimensions. To address these challenges of ASRHR, we need data that helps us understand the nuances of ASRHR in a specific context. However, data collection on ASRHR is complicated for a number of reasons, including the sensitivity of asking about highly stigmatized or criminalized behaviours and events. Additionally, data is often not analysed or communicated to develop better policies and programming.

The gaps in data poses challenges for NGOs working in ASRHR, specifically in program planning, monitoring and impact measurement. These challenges can occur throughout the data collection process, including questionnaire length and structure, feedback options, difficulties in obtaining consent and time needed to fully analyse data. Current research approaches and instruments such as surveys may neglect certain variables necessary for understanding ASRHR or exclude population groups, for instance boys and their contraceptive needs and use. NGOs therefore need access to a range of methodologies and tools, beyond what is currently accepted, to understand progress in programs and respond accordingly.

This partnership, as part of the [Canadian Collaborative for Global Health](#), aims to address these challenges in two ways. The focus of work conducted in component one of the project recognizes the challenges posed by conducting local surveys on a project basis, which are resource intensive but also have difficulties detecting impact. Local and district surveys are unlikely to add information to our knowledge of ASRHR, while national surveys provide high quality results. Yet data is not always analysed in such a way as to be useful for NGOs or others working at the local level. Therefore, project partners looked at how to best measure and analyze existing data from ASRHR datasets and reports that are widely available but cover only standard indicators. The project is currently looking into what national surveys can tell us about SRHR inequalities, with three analyses workshops taking place with collaborators from 8 countries and 5 papers to be submitted in summer 2020.

The second component of the project explores ways of collecting the information that is not available from analyses of existing datasets. The focus is on testing mixed methods approaches for effective and feasible strategies to collect ASRHR data. The methods implemented included a survey using audio computer-assisted self-interviewing (ACASI), a facility survey focusing specifically on adolescent service use, and an adapted peer ethnographic approach. The survey tested the use of asking questions about stigmatized or entrenched behaviours in direct and indirect ways, for example using vignettes to explore gender attitudes and norms. The peer ethnography approach recruited adolescents to act as peer researchers working in conjunction with research assistant. After training, peer researchers discussed a specific ASRHR topic with friends each week for 3 weeks. At the conclusion of each week they debriefed and discussed their findings with research assistants. Our preliminary findings suggest that this method may provide promising insights on adolescent lives but work is ongoing. Future tool development and guidance resulting from this project will be shared through the CanWaCH platform.

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