Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Adolescents in Rural Rajasthan, India

Abstract - Studies suggest that child marriage is the leading cause of young women between the ages of 15-24 dying during pregnancy. Also offspring born too early in their mothers’ lives are at increased risk of illness and death. A study was undertaken in Rajasthan, India to develop benchmark on Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of adolescents on Sexual & reproductive health, life skills, child rights, protection and gender issues, to map the existing situation of child marriages and their consequences and to understand the role of parents, community groups and service providers existing in the community through adolescents perspective. Results suggest that every fifth adolescent (18%) in the intervention area is married, three fourth (75%) of the boys have no idea about menstruation, only 22 percent girls have access to sanitary napkins and 89 percent of the adolescent defecate in open. Only 54 percent boys believe that men-women have equal rights.

Introduction
In the age of 10-19 years there are around 243 million adolescents (India Census 2011) standing at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood. Child Marriage, an age-old harmful traditional practice in India, though reduced substantially, is still experienced in many parts of the country jeopardizing millions of children, their childhood and growth. It is one of blatant violations of children’s rights. The law that only restrained solemnization of child marriages in India since it came into being in 1929, was replaced with a more stringent, effective and child friendly law i.e., Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA, 2006) that came into effect from 1st November 2007.
Child marriage is the leading cause of young women between the ages of 15 and 24 dying during pregnancy. Not only the mothers but offspring born too early in their mothers’ lives are at increased risk of illness and death. If a mother is under the age of 18, her infant’s risk of dying in its first year of life is 60 per cent greater than that of an infant born to a mother older than 19 (UNICEF, State of the World’s Children, 2009). Even if the child survives, he or she is more likely to suffer from low birth weight, under nutrition and late physical and cognitive development (UNICEF, State of the World’s Children, 2009). Children who marry early often drop-out from the school and get into adult-like life and exposed to early parenthood, child labour and other vulnerabilities of exploitation, abuse and violence. Finally, child marriage often results in separation from family and friends and lack of freedom to participate in community activities, which can all have major consequences on girls’ mental and physical well-being. Where prevalent (like Rajasthan), child marriage functions as a social norm.
Rajasthan occupies 2nd place in the country and Tonk, third place in the state (Rajasthan) in terms of high prevalence of child marriages (DLHS-3). Child marriages and its consequential impacts create stumbling blocks on the way to achieve Millennium Development Goals by 2015. ‘The female mean age at marriage in Rajasthan and Tonk is 20.2 years and 19.2 years respectively as per AHS 2012-13. Also this Survey revealed that 51.2% and 66.6% of currently married women aged 20-24 years were married before legal age (18 yrs) in Rajasthan and Tonk respectively. The sex ratio all ages of Tonk present a disturbing picture and are below state average. Every fourth women in Tonk is still getting married before the legal age of marriage.
A Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) study was undertaken to understand the ground realities of adolescent’s girls and boys in terms of Child Marriage and its consequences, role of Parents,
Community Groups and service providers existing in the community. The data for the present study was analysed by taking thematic approach for each section as detailed below;

1. Education and work participation status of adolescents
2. Child marriage situation in selected areas
3. General Health services and Hygiene
4. Menstrual Hygiene, Knowledge and Practices
5. Reproductive and Sexual health Issues
6. Anaemia among adolescents and related services
7. Child Right and Birth Registration Issues
8. Issue of Self Awareness and Gender associated roles
9. Peer Pressure and Stress Management

Methodology
The data for this study was mainly collected through primary sources of data collection by adopting systematic random sampling methods. Villages in Tonk block of Peepleu Tehsil, Rajasthan India were selected in the first stage of the sampling, in the second stage of systematic random sampling all the adolescent’s girls from the selected villages were listed. After this total no. of adolescents was divided by the desired sample size for generating the interval. In the third stage adolescent girl were selected as per the desired interval. For this study a sample size of 800 adolescent girls were determined, in addition to that 90 adolescent boys were also selected for the interview purpose following the same methodology.

Key Findings
Educational Status- The educational status among adolescent girls is very grim as compared to the boys. 5 percent of the girls cannot read and write at all and never been to school. The data suggests that 49 percent of the boys and girls have not gone beyond primary level of schooling. One third of the boys (35%) have not attained more than primary level of education while for girls this stands as high as 50 percent. Among those who have been enrolled to schools 20 percent have discontinued their studies for different reasons.

Marital Status of Adolescents- Almost every fifth adolescent (18%) in the intervention area is married, when analysed gender wise we found that more girls (19%) were married as compared to boys (8%) of the area. Dissecting the data further revealed that 17 percent of the adolescents got married at the age of 18 or before that for girls (18%) and boys (7%) respectively. In all these instances only 31 percent of the girls gave their consent for the marriage suggesting that two third of the bride went into the wedlock without their consent. Among those who were not married we asked at what age they would like to get married and more than half (58%) of them intended to get married by the age of 18 years.

Knowledge about Child Marriage Law- A little below two third of the adolescent doesn’t know the legal age of marriage as only 38 percent of the respondents correctly mentioned the age of marriage. Only 35 percent of the girls responded correct age of marriage and 71 percent of the boys knew the legal age. The adolescents were further asked about child marriage law and a little more than half of the respondents (53%) answered affirmatively. At the same time as high as 72 percent of the respondents answered that dowry is practiced in their community, interestingly 82 percent of the boys admitted the cultural practices of dowry while admission of dowry practices by girls was only 71 percent.
Hygiene status- Only 5 percent of the adolescent girls and boys received any kind of training on adolescent health or nutrition. In 71 percent cases adolescent respondent that piped/tap water connection is main source of drinking water at home, on the question of water treatment two third of the respondents (65%) said that the water is filtered with a cloth before drinking. On the question of place of defecation only 10 percent said that they use toilet with flush and 89 percent of the adolescent defecate in the open.

Menstrual Hygiene- We asked all the adolescent what is menstruation and as high as three fourth (75%) of the boys answered don’t know in response suggesting inhibiting behaviour to some extent as compared to that only 13 percent of the girls answered don’t know and most of these girls belongs to 13-14 years of age group. Some of the questions were specifically asked from girls, like what do they use during menstruation and in response to that only 22 percent said that they use sanitary napkins, while 61 percent responded that they use clean clothes during menstruation period. One third of the girls (33%) responded that they reuse these clothes.

Knowledge about RTI/STI- Only 23 percent of the adolescents aged between 15-20 years have ever heard about Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI) or Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI), more girls (23%) have heard about RTI/STI as compared to only (20%) of the boys. Among the same age group only 1.3 percent of the adolescent admitted that they had some symptoms of RTI/STI. The study inquired for knowledge about Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS) and only 6 percent of them answered in yes for this question.

Health quotient of Adolescents- Only 18 percent of the adolescent said that anemia is caused because of iron deficiency, 40 percent said that anemia is caused because of blood and water deficiency while according to 14 percent anemia is caused due to vitamin deficiency. One in every fourth (26%) said that they don’t know about anemia. Only 14 percent admitted of undertaking a Hemoglobin test in last one year, but only a few were able to recall their Hb status. In total 52 percent of the boys and girls admitted of receiving IFA tablets but only 40 percent of these adolescents admitted of receiving de-worming tablets in past three months. Knowledge about malnutrition is not so high as only 26 percent of the adolescents said that they knew about malnutrition.

Birth Registration- When asked for importance of birth registration 22 percent said that it is required for personal identification while 18 percent girls and boys said that birth certification is required for school admission and 8 percent said this helps in age certification, though among these adolescents only 17 percent possess birth certificates.

Self Awareness-On the issue of self awareness 56 percent said that they can take decisions about their own life, though more boys (62%) as compared to girls (56%) shared this sentiment during interviews. When asked that does male and female have equal rights 54 percent of the boys answered affirmatively and 62 percent of the girls acknowledged the same.

Gender Norms- Questions on gender norms reveals remarkable difference between what adolescent perceive and what happens actually in their community. Only 6 percent of the adolescent girls think that female should earn for the family but in reality in 40 percent of the cases both male and female are earning members of the family. Similarly, 47 percent of these adolescent believes that only male members should do job outside and in only 33 percent they said that both male and female should do jobs outside.