

Addis Birhan ('New Light')

Fostering Husbands' Involvement & Support in Amhara Region, Ethiopia

Prepared by Annabel S. Erulkar and Awraris Alemayehu

Men have traditionally been excluded from initiatives related to reproductive health, family planning, parenthood, and sexuality. While HIV programs frequently recognize the role of men's risk taking behavior in transmission of HIV, little is known about men's sexual and reproductive health. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopia Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Amhara Regional Bureau of Youth and Sports (ARBOYS) and the Population Council have been implementing programs for vulnerable girls in Ethiopia, including married adolescents. As programs for married girls became increasingly popular and widely known, demand for support programs arose from their husbands.

As a result, qualitative, in-depth interviews were undertaken among adolescents, men, and women in the Amhara Region in Ethiopia, exploring the roles of men and women, risk taking behavior, and patterns of HIV and reproductive health vulnerability. Findings of the study were used to guide development of a program for Ethiopian men in peri-urban areas, as well as men who are rural-urban migrants.

Addis Birhan ('New Light') for rural men in Ethiopia


Addis Birhan (Amharic for 'New Light') is a program of the Amhara Regional Bureau of Youth and Sports and the Population Council. The program targets married men in peri-urban and rural areas of Amhara region, Ethiopia. Following a curriculum that spans roughly three months, trained male mentors mobilize groups of married men and meet on a weekly basis. Mentors range in age from 25 to 40 and have at least six years of education. Meetings are held at the community level in places agreed upon by members, frequently under a tree, at the residence of a member, or in church compounds. Groups comprise roughly 25 to 30 men, who are typically members of the same village/ 'gott.'

Awraris Alemayehu



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Based on existing curricula from Population Council India, Promundo, and Engender Health, the Population Council Ethiopia tailored a curriculum for rural Ethiopian men. The curriculum includes modules on gender, relationships, caring for children and families, drugs and alcohol, HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and violence. The pedagogy is not simple transfer of information but, rather, promotes dialogue, self exploration, and expression of one's feelings, in a non-judgmental environment. As the program targets men with very low levels of education, the curriculum includes many pictures of contextually relevant situations, used as teaching aids.

Demonstrating that men can change

Though the program is only in its first six months of implementation, it is already achieving its intended results. Sixty mentors have been recruited from the project communities and trained. Through qualitative research by Population Council, participants and their families have described changes resulting from participation, such as increased communication among couples and dialogue that is two-way, rather than directive. Men report that they return from the group meetings and share what they have learned with their wives and children, effectively opening up dialogue within the home. Men have started to change the way they think about distribution of labor in the home, with many men now undertaking traditionally female roles, such as fetching water or assisting with cooking and childcare:

Now I want to quit drinking and I have started to fetch water and prepare firewood when my wife is at the market. I want to help my wife at home and she is happy about it.

- Married male farmer, age 40, 3 children

Previously, he was not helping me in the home, but now he even weaves cotton for me.

- Wife of male participant, age 22, 1 child

Many members report that they have changed risky behavior, such as drinking, as well as their perceptions of gender norms:

Previously, he was not helping me in the home, but now he even weaves cotton for me.

- Wife of male participant, age 22, 1 child

Before, I used to spend a lot of time drinking alcohol, but now I decided to limit the amount I drink... I used to visit sex workers before. Now I do not do that. This education has helped me.

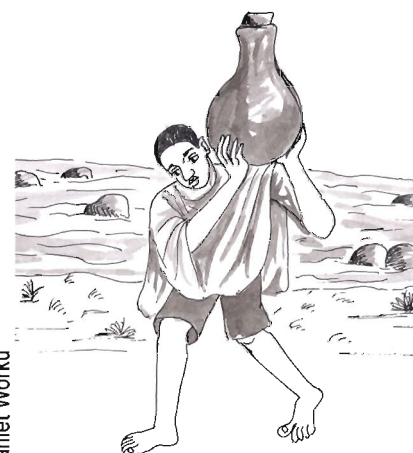
- Married farmer, age 27, 1 child

For instance if a man comes and asks for my child in marriage, I will refuse, because of the education I got from this program. Now I am leading my life with a plan. I respect equality [between the sexes]. I used to simply watch my wife when she was breast feeding and cooking 'wot' at the same time, and I did not care whether the 'wot' spilled or not. But now I am changed..

- Married farmer, age 43, 6 children

Engaging large numbers of rural men

Within the first six months of the program, Addis Birhan has already reached, over 3,500 married men and additional recruitment is ongoing. Members range in age from 18 to 85, with the majority aged 25 to 39. Ninety-four percent are head of their household; others are sons of the household head. Participating men have very low levels of education, with a mean educational attainment among members of 1.7 years of education. Over half of Addis Birhan members have never been to school, and only two percent have attained some secondary education.



Mahlet Worku

Characteristics of Addis Birhan members, December 2008 (N=3,547)

		Percentage
Location of program	North Gondar	58.4
	West Gojjam	35.4
	South Gondar	6.2
Age category	18 to 24	7.6
	25 to 39	52.1
	40 +	40.3
Educational attainment	No education	55.4
	1 to 4 years education	30.8
	5 + years education	13.8

Measuring changes associated with the program

Changes associated with the Addis Birhan program are being measured through evaluative surveys. In mid-2008, a survey was undertaken among husbands and married adolescent girls in six districts in Amhara Region. In all, 998 husbands were interviewed in both intervention and control sites. After two years of intervention, an endline survey will be undertaken in the same areas, allowing researchers to measure changes associated with the project. Population Council researchers will measure changes in reproductive health knowledge, gender attitudes, domestic violence, and family planning use, among others.

Future directions for Addis Birhan

Addis Birhan continues to expand, with program managers monitoring quality and acceptance. The initial participants in Addis Birhan increased their involvement in the management of their rural households, including water and firewood acquisition, as well as nutrition of their children. As a result, members requested additional content on management of natural resources and nutrition. Plans are underway to include these topics in the curriculum.

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- Married farmer, age 27, 1 child

For more information contact:

Awraris Alemayehu
Program Officer
Population Council
P.O. Box 25562-code 1000
Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
aalemayehu@popcouncil.org

Gebeheyu Mekonnen
Chief of Party
Population Council
P.O. Box 25562-code 1000
Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
gmekonnen@popcouncil.org

Ato Yayeh Addis
Regional Bureau of Youth & Sports
P.O. Box 25
Bahir Dar ETHIOPIA

Annabel Erulkar
Country Director/Senior Associate
Population Council
P.O. Box 25562-code 1000
Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
aerulkar@popcouncil.org

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Population Council
One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza
New York, New York 10017 USA

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