

Global Youth Advisory Board Qualitative Research Report



Global Early Adolescent Study

Introduction

The Global Early Adolescent Study is a worldwide investigation into how gender norms evolve and inform a spectrum of health outcomes in adolescence. This study seeks to better understand how gender socialization in early adolescence occurs around the world, and how it shapes health and wellness for individuals and their communities. To ensure meaningful youth participation in GEAS, the Global Youth Advisory Board (GYAB) was set up in mid 2021. The specific objectives of the GYAB are; to gain youth perspectives on current and future GEAS work, create a global network of youth leaders, and train on new skills on qualitative research methods, communications, and advocacy. It is made up of youth leaders who were a part of the local youth advisory boards in six sites of the longitudinal study arm of the GEAS (Malawi, DRC, Chile, USA, Indonesia, and China).

One of the objectives of GYAB is to empower young people as research partners via training and participatory research methods to create opportunities to promote both youth development and to improve the scientific study of issues affecting young people's lives. Youth engagement in research has the potential to enhance youth leadership skills as change agents; promote critical thinking; and increase knowledge around issues that affect young people (Goto, 2004, Liebenberg, 2017, Powers, 2006). In addition, it allows them to build a strong network and advocacy groups and to serve as role models and experts to other youth.

In November of 2021, the GYAB received comprehensive training on qualitative research methods with an emphasis on how to conduct key informant interviews. All of the GYAB members then descended to their respective communities to interview their peers on gender norms and their impact on the health of young people. This report brings to light the approach used and a synthesis of the findings of six GYAB members.



Methods

Objectives

- To build the skills of the members of the youth advisory board on qualitative research methods
- To conduct youth-led research to explore and understand the perspectives of young people on gender norms

Study design and context:

This was a qualitative research method design centered on the youth participatory design approach. After receiving the training on qualitative research methods, the members of the GYAB co-designed the question guide. With a social constructivist perspective approach, key informant interviews were conducted both virtually and in person. The study population included young people living in Santiago, Blantyre, Indonesia, and New Orleans. Youth researchers identified their peers in their respective schools and communities and approached them for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Data Collection and analysis: Key informant interviews were conducted on Zoom, over the phone, and in person. The interviewers (members of the GYAB) were accompanied by a notetaker for the in-person interviews. The interviews were not recorded. Data was collected via note-taking. At the end of the interviews, the youth researchers used the notes to respond to the questions on the interview guide (Appendix 1)

Due to the nature of this exercise, the Johns Hopkins University Institutional Review Board deemed no formal ethical clearance was needed. An adolescent assent form was signed by the participants (Appendix 2).



Results

Demography

- Over 43 (21 males, 22 females) participants participated in this study. The age range spanned from 14 to 22 years.

Prior Knowledge of Gender Norms

- Some of the participants had an understanding of different gender norms in their community.
- For the interviewees who did not understand the meaning of gender norms, the interviewers had to explain using other words. There was no obvious difference when it comes to gender norms awareness across the different regions.
- Girls spoke about the impact of gender norms on tasks such as household chores, while boys spoke more on gender roles' impact on attire and mannerisms (**New Orleans**).
- Girls are to study humanities while the boys study sciences (**Blantyre**). Boys receive the priority to go to school, girls cook, while boys play (**Blantyre**).



The Impact of Gender Norms on Boys and Girls

- The general trend was a negative impact on education for girls (Shanghai)
- Pressure on boys to behave as breadwinners (Chile)
- Boys pursue paid jobs while girls are raised to pursue non-paid occupations like reproduction (Blantyre)

Gender Norms and Health

- Girls tend to face stigma during their menses.
- Negative impact on the mental health of boys who are raised not to express emotions.
- Boys do not go to the hospital when sick as an expression of masculinity.
- Change of feelings vis-à-vis the opposite sex (e.g. Some girls said they; became afraid to hold a boys hand, developed a slight fear for men. This fear was enforced by media and family) (New Orleans)
- Girls get shy when they see boys.
- Boys and girls stop playing together at puberty.



Gender Norms that Should Be Changed

- Boys can't use skincare (Indonesia)
- Girls must cook for their families (Blantyre)

Recommendation for Most Useful Programs to Change Gender Norms

- Sexuality education in schools, within the community, and at household levels
- Some boys said instead of them, they will rather allow their sisters to go to school (Blantyre)

Things If Known Early on That Would Have Had an Impact on Their View of Gender Norms

- Boys: if they knew that girls can also feed the livestock, they would go to the bush together with them (Blantyre)
- Girls: If I knew that my brother could wash dishes, I would not allow myself to be late at school because of household chores (Blantyre)
- Both boys and girls: One could be one's self without worrying about what others think (New Orleans)



Challenges

Some of the interviewees did not know the meaning of gender norms.

The interviews conducted over the phone and some of the interviews conducted over Zoom prevented the interviewers from reading the body language of the interviewees.

Some of the interviewees chose a noisy environment for the interviews. This made the communication a bit more difficult and tedious as the interviewers had to repeat questions in certain circumstances.

Experiences

The more they interviewed their peers, the more they gained confidence in their ability to lead the interviews.

Some of the interviewers learned that silence is not the time to interrupt as they realized that after a moment of silence, some of the interviewees shared profound experiences.

Some of the interviewers were surprised to have some interviewees who were very open with them in sharing very personal and confidential information

One interviewer identified a case that needed specialized help and referred the participant for counseling and follow-up.

All of the interviewees declared that they learned new things during the interviews.

Conclusion

Youth engagement in research has the potential to enhance youth leadership skills as change agents; promote critical thinking and increase knowledge around issues that affect young people (Liebenberg, 2017). The use of a participatory approach from the inception to the execution and the analysis of this research exercise has been an effective way of training young people in qualitative research methods as well as a successful approach in engaging young people to understand things that concern them (Goto, 2004). The evidence collected by the GYAB point to the fact that gender norms have a negative impact on the education of girls, boys are pressured to behave in a particular way (e.g girls should not be loud, boys should play outside of the house while girls should take care of chores at home) and are taught to suppress their emotions, boys and girls have different chores, some boys will rather have their sisters go to school than them, some girls will want to share their chores with their brothers. The youth researchers felt happy, learned new things, and built their confidence in communicating with their peers on matters that concern them.

Recommendations

From the GYAB:

1. Sexuality education should be taught in schools, within the community, and at household levels.
2. To shift gender norms, both parents and young people should be engaged



References

Goto, K. (2004). The application of a participatory approach in health and Nutrition Programs: A case study of an HIV/AIDS prevention initiative among youth. PhD Thesis, Cornell University, New York.

Liebenberg, L. (2017). Special Issue: Understanding Meaningful Engagement of Youth in Research and Evaluation. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1).

Powers, J. L., & Tiffany, J. S. (2006). Engaging youth in participatory research and evaluation. *Journal of Public Health Management Practice*, S79-S87.

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APPENDIX 1: Question Guide

- 1.** Have you heard the term “gender norms” before?
 - IF NOT: Gender norms are ideas about how girls and boys should be and act, and lead to standards and expectations that men and women follow.

- 2.** When you hear the term “gender norms,” what comes to mind?
 - What are some examples of gender norms in your community?
 - What do you think young people in your community think about these norms? (i.e., are they good? bad?)

- 3.** How do gender norms impact boys and girls?
 - Positively?
 - Negatively?

- 4.** In what ways do you think gender norms influence young people’s health?
 - Probe: By health, we could mean sexual health, mental health, physical health, or other forms of health.
 - How?

APPENDIX 1: Question Guide continued

5. Can you describe how your feelings about {the opposite sex} may have changed since you were a child?

- What do you think influenced these changes?

6. If you could change one gender norm in your community, what would it be? How might you change it?

7. What kind of programs would be most useful to change gender norms?

- DEFINITION: By program, we mean an organized activity that brings young people together, and sometimes with adults, that aims to change gender norms in the short and/or long term.
- Who do you think should take part in such a program?

8. Is there anything that you have learned since you were a child that, if you knew early on, would have changed how you perceive your gender and the opposite gender?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about gender norms in your community?

APPENDIX 2: Adolescent Assent Script

Hello,

My name is _____ and I want to tell you about a research study I am doing with young people in our community. This study is part of the Global Early Adolescent Study, which is run by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and [LOCAL RESEARCH INSTITUTION]. Researchers are learning from young people like you what it is like to grow up as a boy or a girl and about relationships between boys and girls your age. We are also interested in how young people your age feel about their roles as girls and boys as they get older.

We are asking you to be part of this study because you are between 14 and 18 years old and you live in [CITY NAME]. If you want to participate, you may; and if you don't want to participate, you don't have to, and it will not be held against you. Your participation will help researchers better understand how ideas about what it means to be a boy or girl in your community shapes long term health and social outcomes, and what programs could potentially change these outcomes.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview that includes questions about health, relationships, and your community. The interview will last up to an hour and will be recorded, if you are comfortable. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside of the study team and will be saved on an encrypted server. All responses will be confidential and no one will be allowed to see your answers, even your parent or guardian.



APPENDIX 2: Assent Script continued

There are no major risks to being in this study, but questions address topics that might be considered personal, such as relationships with friends and family. If you feel uneasy talking about these questions, you can choose to skip them. Or, if at any point you feel uncomfortable and want to stop the interview, you are free to do that also.

While there are no direct benefits to participating in the study, the results will be used to develop a program aimed at better serving the social and health needs of adolescents in your community.

You do not have to join this study, it's up to you. You can say okay now, and you can change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us, no one will be mad at you if you change your mind.

Before saying yes to this study, I will answer any questions you have. You can also contact my supervisor at [EMAIL OR PHONE NUMBER].

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Questions? Contact us.



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