



Share-Net
International

OCTOBER 10 & 11, 2017

WHO, GENEVA

Report Share-Net International – Technical workshop Global Early Adolescence Study & Lunch Seminar



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 **Save the Children**  **JOHNS HOPKINS**¹
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
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Share-Net International Report

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Technical workshop Global Early Adolescence Study & Lunch Seminar

On the 10th of October 2017, Share-Net International attended the Technical workshop on the Global Early Adolescence Study (GEAS) at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva. This workshop was organized in commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child on October 11th and hosted by the WHO department of Reproductive Health and Research (RHR) / Human Reproductive Programme (HRP) and Safe the Children. On October 11th, a lunch seminar was attended to celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child.

Attending on behalf of Share-Net International: Bianca Tolboom and Lotte Roosendaal

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1. Overview of the GEAS Study and toolkit

The study, led by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the WHO/HRP, is the first international study exploring gender norms and healthy sexuality among early adolescents (10-14 years). Phase One of the Study has been carried out in Belgium, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, People's Republic of China, USA, and Vietnam. It has involved formative research and the development of a set of tools for use in Phase Two, which will consist of a longitudinal study of cohorts of young adolescents.

This study group (age 10-14) is very little studied so far and most existing instruments have been developed in Western cultures. The goal of the instruments is to assess how gender norms relate to empowerment and predict health trajectories over time and across cultures. Mixed methods were used to develop the toolkit, such as narrative

collection and analysis, questionnaires, and participatory methods. A [special supplement](#) to the Journal of Adolescent Health is published to share the research findings.

The GEAS tools are intended to assess gender norms and gender socialization in young adolescents. The toolkit includes:

- The GEAS Parent/Guardian Questionnaire
- The Global Early Adolescent Health+ Instrument
- The Global Early Adolescent Gender Norms Instrument
- The Global Early Adolescent Vignettes-based Measure of Gender Equality

More information on the study can be found [here](#), and access to the toolkit itself can be found [here](#).

2. Implications for policy and programs

The most important implications for policy and programs are:

1. Focus on puberty as a critical window of opportunity to engage in open discussions about gender equality
Studies show that already at the age of 15 gender norms and roles are very clearly defined in many cultures. That is why early adolescence forms a crucial period in which programmes have the potential to effectively discuss and influence gender norms.
2. Work simultaneously at different levels of the ecological framework to change norms.
Since gender norms are strongly influenced on various levels, it is essential to work simultaneously on each of these levels: individual, family & peer, and community. Only then an unambiguous message can be conveyed to the target group.
3. Stimulate critical reflection to change attitudes & norms within peer groups.
It is precisely at this age of early adolescence that development is accelerating, both physically and psychologically. This is the age where children start raising questions about themselves and the world they live in.
4. Parenting interventions need to address gender equitable norms and attitudes
The role of parents cannot be emphasized enough. Message sent by peers are reinforced by parents and vice versa. Therefore, more attention should be paid to addressing gender norms in parenting interventions.

5. Implement school-based/wide efforts to promote equitable gender attitudes & norms
Schools can be excellent sites to incorporate gender norms and attitudes in their curriculum or convey messages that promote gender equitable norms.
6. Address gender stereotypes perpetuated by media & use media to promote gender equitable norms/messages
Media are influential channels to reinforce gender stereotyping. However, they can be equally powerful channels to promote gender equitable norms.

3. How to use the tools

Even though everyone is free to use the tools for their own purposes, it must be said that using the tools as an entity is strongly recommended. If all users start to pick the cherries from each tools, then no comparison will be possible and there is no common approach anymore. Currently there is not a 'light' version yet, for studies that are on a lighter budget. In the future, a trimmed version that contains the core questions might be developed.

The GEAS toolkit is not intended to define what norms should be, what attitudes should be shown, and the pathway that should be taken to make a change. It is to identify the current situation, the state of the art, and how that is related to what is happening (for example Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or child marriage). The toolkit allows gender norms to be measured in the age group of 10-14, which is the gap that GEAS addresses, by using a unique set of tools. What is done with the results is up to the user.

4. Key take-aways

- Early adolescence forms a critical window of opportunity to discuss and influence gender norms.
- Parents play a key role in reinforcing existing gender norms and attitudes.
- Very rich data can be obtained in this study population.
- Ethical approval and parental consent (and assent from adolescents) for this study population was attained without major challenges in all the study sites.
- Even though no claim can be made that these tools are perfect or universal, nowhere else have these instruments been tested and used so widely.
- The tools are publically available, including manuals, videos and protocols on how to use them (see link below).

- The outcomes of GEAS can be used for advocacy. It creates clarity about the importance of paying more attention to this age group and push early adolescence on the agenda.
- This toolkit allows researchers to measure gender norms in early adolescents, which is a huge gap that is finally addressed. Data on this issue in this particular age group was missing, we can finally apply a common approach to collect data and give this age group a voice.

5. Presentation of the new SRHR framework

A new SRHR operational framework was presented by Lianne Gonsalves (WHO). Sexual health and reproductive health are strongly linked, but often sexual health aspects are ignored. Therefore, a distinction has been made in the model to prevent important themes from being overlooked.

The [model](#) has a foundation of 6 guiding principles that should be incorporated in all interventions. On top of this foundation, a rosette represents 8 intervention areas of which 4 relate to sexual health, and 4 to reproductive health. Around the rosette a climate of socio-cultural factors is depicted, which are overlapping dimensions that affect all intervention areas.

Although it must be emphasized that sexual health and reproductive health cannot be approached separately as such, this framework gives a clearer overview of all aspects that comprise SRHR, which provides guidance and structure to sexual health programming and research, thereby supporting achievement of sexual and reproductive health and rights targets.

6. Summary of the lunch seminar

On October 11th, a lunch seminar was organized to celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child. The seminar was opened by Dr. Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli (Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health, RHR, WHO). Key-note speaker Kate Gilmore (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights) introduced the seminar with inspiring words on the role of adolescents in policy-making and programming, particularly with regards to young women. She emphasized the need for adolescents being prioritized in policy-making and the two fundamentals to this: we must engage this group and we must respect their rights, in particular those of young women. Young women are, more than other groups, discriminated against, they experience least opportunities and are often much more affected by crises and natural disasters. Therefore, the critical phase of puberty should be a public priority in which we must amplify the voice of young girls and give them a way for meaningful participation.

Furthermore, the GEAS study was introduced and implications for policy and programs were highlighted. A panel discussion was held with various speakers from, amongst others the UNFPA, World YWCA and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India. A lively discussion was held on the work that each of the panel members does on adolescent SRHR, the difficulties that they face and how they cope with these. The GEAS study outcomes were mentioned as evidence that finally gives us something to make a strong case to put early adolescence on the agenda. In addition, the question was raised on how our ideas and findings can be brought to a local level without a top-down message or approach. Every organization present at this meeting must use their own network to address this topic, bottom-up programming is crucial and schools can be used as source to spread the message. Furthermore, it is essential to share findings of programs on a local level, and not report directly (or only) to head quarters.

In conclusion, this seminar stressed that if we aspire to transform gender norms, we have to close the gap between girls and women by empowering the voice of adolescent girls. Competent strong girls make mighty women!

7. Links

- GEAS [website](#)
- [Background of GEAS](#)
- [Special supplement](#): The Global Early Adolescent Study: An Exploration of the Factors that Shape Adolescence
- [SRHR frame-work](#)