



African Population and
Health Research Center

The State of Education and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Adolescent Girls in Senegal: Findings of the Exploratory Study

Citation suggérée : Abuya, B. A., Muhia, N., Gueye, B. S., Fall, N., Sall, O., Konté, A. F. B., & Faye, C. M. (2021). La situation de l'éducation et de la santé reproductive des adolescentes au Sénégal : résultats de l'étude exploratoire. Nairobi: APHRC

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	vii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Background of the Study	1
1.2. Significance of the Study.....	2
1.2.1. Objectives	3
1.2.2. Research questions	3
1.2.3. Theoretical framework.....	3
2. METHODOLOGY	6
2.1. Study design and approach.....	6
2.2. Selection of study participants.....	6
2.3. Recruitment and Training of Field Interviewers	8
2.4. Qualitative interview guides	8
2.5. Data collection	9
2.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation	9
3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA .	10
3.1. ON EDUCATION	10
3.1.1. Obstacles to education in Senegal	10
3.1.2. Barriers to retention and completion	12
3.1.2.1. Economic obstacles to retention and completion	12
3.1.3. Cultural and religious obstacles to retention and completion	14
3.1.4. Sanitation and security as obstacles to retention and completion	16
3.1.5. Beneficiary perspectives on the status of education in Senegal....	17
3.1.5.1. How does poverty affect education for boys and girls?.....	18
3.1.5.2. Early pregnancy and marriage as obstacles to retention and completion	19

3.1.5.3. Lack of birth certificates and long distances to schools.....	20
3.1.6. Suggested strategies to improve girls' education from the perspective of key stakeholders	21
3.1.7. Suggested strategies to improve girls' education from the perspective of beneficiaries	23
3.1.8. Gender preferences for schooling and programs	24
3.1.9. Explaining regional education difference	25
3.1.9.1. Diourbel and Kaffrine	25
3.1.9.2. Dakar and Ziguinchor	25
3.1.10. Ideal educational program	26
3.2. ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH	26
3.2.1. Adolescents' views on puberty and sexuality	27
3.2.2. Appreciation of programs by beneficiaries	28
3.2.3. Issues of early pregnancy and marriage.....	30
3.2.3.1. Main causes of early pregnancy	30
3.2.3.2. Explaining the regional disparities in early pregnancy.....	31
3.2.3.3. Main causes of early marriage.....	32
3.2.3.4. Explaining the regional disparities in child marriage	33
3.2.4. Explaining excision in the regions of Senegal	33
3.2.5. Proposed solutions to early pregnancies, marriage and excision .	35
3.2.6. Ideal program in SRHR	36
3.2.7. Proposed strategies to improve programs on education and reproductive health.....	36
3.2.8. Uniqueness of Ziguinchor.....	37
3.2.8.1. Explaining the education indicators in Ziguinchor	37
3.2.8.2. Explaining the SRHR issues in Ziguinchor	41

3.2.8.3. Summary 46

4. DISCUSSION 46

4.1. Education 47

4.2. Reproductive Health 49

4.3. LESSONS LEARNED 50

4.4. RECOMMENDATIONS 53

4.4.1. Promoting Girls Education 53

4.4.2. Promoting Reproductive Health Training 54

5. SCOPE OF LIMITATIONS 55

6. CONCLUSION 56

7. REFERENCES 58

ACRONYMS

ANSD National Agency for Statistics and Demography

APHRC African Population and Health Research Center

BAC Secondary School Completion Certificate

BFEM Middle School Completion Certificate

CCIEF Coordination Framework of Girls' Education Interventions

DPRE Directorate of Education Planning and Reform

EDS Demographic and Health Survey

EFA Education For All

FAWE Forum for African Women Educationalists

FGD Focus Group Discussion

FGM Female Genital Mutilation

FI Field Interviewer

GAR Gross Admission Rate

GEEP Group for the Study and Education of the Population

GER Gross Enrollment Rate

IDI In-depth Interview

IGE Improving Girls' Education

JED Youth and Development

KII Key informant interview

MEN Ministry of National Education

NGO Non-governmental Organization

PADES Program for the Development of Education in Senegal

PAEF Girls' Education and Empowerment Support Project

PAQUET Program for the Improvement of Quality, Equity and Transparency in the Education Sector

PDEF Ten-Year Program for Education and Training

PI Parity Index

SCOFI Promotion of Girls' Education

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

SRHR Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

SSA Sub-Saharan Africa

UIS UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UNFPA United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WFP World Food Program

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completion of the Improving Girls' Education (IGE) Exploratory Study report would not have been possible without the support of Echidna Giving whose investment in the project has contributed to the much-needed evidence on improving girls' education outcomes and well-being in Senegal. Our gratitude also goes to our partner in Senegal, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) for overseeing the project launch, raising awareness of stakeholders, and for the mobilization of respondents along with the dissemination activities. Special thanks also goes to all the researchers at the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) who contributed to the different sections of the report. Finally, we are grateful to the ministry officials and program actors, adolescent boys and girls and their parents who participated in the research and took time to share their thoughts and experiences with us.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Exploratory Study was to establish the perspectives of stakeholders (ministry officials and program actors) including beneficiaries (parents and adolescents) on girls' education and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Senegal. In Senegal, 52% of the country's population is under 20 years (ANSD, 2019). This demographic context leads to a significant increase in basic social needs in education and health. The motivation for this study was to follow up on the findings of the scoping

review, which was Phase 1 of this project. For instance, data from the Scoping Review showed that access to primary education has increased over time. The Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) increased by 3.1% points from 83.3% in 2013 to 86.4% in 2018. During this period, girls' GER (83.3% in 2013 vs 86.4% in 2018) was higher than that of boys (78.5% in 2013 vs 80.4% in 2018) (DPRE, 2018). However, girls' retention and completion at all levels remain a challenge with huge regional disparities.

With regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the Scoping Review revealed that adolescents constitute a large part of the population that is exposed to SRHR vulnerabilities. As such, adolescents experienced low rates of access to, and use of reproductive health services along with high rates of sexual activity, early marriage and pregnancy (Guttmacher Institute & IPPF, 2014). As well, 6.1% of girls and 4.5% of boys aged 15-19 were sexually active, while 7% and 31% of girls were married before the age of 15 and 18, respectively (Equipop, 2018).

In order to follow up on some of the key issues on education and SRHR, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) liaised with partners to follow up through an Exploratory Study as a way to better understand the key issues highlighted in the Scoping Review. More specifically, this Exploratory Study sought to analyze the situation of, and obstacles to girls' education from the perspectives of stakeholders and beneficiaries in order to understand the hindrances to girls' education as well as the impact of implemented programs on education and SRHR indicators. The study also analyzed regional differences in terms of sexual reproductive health (early pregnancy, early marriage and excision) and issues of puberty. In addition, the study explored the unique situation of Ziguinchor, a region that has good education outcomes and poor SRHR indicators.

This study was largely qualitative in order to better capture the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders, including beneficiaries. Data was collected from 96 participants, including 6 ministry officials, 26 program actors, 32 parents and 32 adolescents. The qualitative tools were packaged into two categories: key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with ministry officials and program actors while in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with beneficiaries, both parents and adolescents.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to adapt to the "new normal" which entailed conducting distanced interviews. As such, the Improving Girls' Education (IGE) team adopted phone interviews and switched from focus group discussions (FGDs) to in-depth online interviews. In order to reach all respondents, it was necessary to go through a first stage of mobilization. This was done by our partner the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), from August 24th to September 15th, 2020. FAWE's participation was significant in this project, as they are in touch with program actors and ministry officials in both education and SRHR through their regional focal points across the country.

All the 96 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim into MS-Word documents. Data were then analyzed inductively and deductively and interpreted based on research questions.

The study findings show that with regard to the status of girls' education in Senegal, the **low enrollment of boys in primary and middle school** is related to the:

- Focus on girls' education programs (SCOFI , PAQUET and PAQUET-EF , PAEF1 , PAEF2) and the attendant neglect of promotion of boys' education.
- Household poverty which leads to boys dropping out of school to look for employment.
- Boys' aspirations to become athletes (soccer, basketball, wrestling) and to migrate to Europe rather than continuing with their education and facing an uncertain future.

According to the findings, **socio-economic barriers to retention and completion** are:

- Poverty as school expenses increase at a higher grade levels. School fees increases as children move from primary to middle and secondary school levels and parents with limited income cannot afford these additional charges.

¹ Promotion of Girls' Education

² Program for the Improvement of Quality, Equity and Transparency in the Education Sector

³ Program for the Improvement of Quality, Equity and Transparency in the Education Sector-

Education and Training

⁴ Girls' Education and Empowerment Support Project

- Regional economic activities (e.g., gold mining in Kédougou) attract children from low-income households who prefer to find a job and contribute to the family revenue rather than stay in school.

Stakeholders highlighted some **cultural and religious barriers to retention and completion** such as

- Early marriage and pregnancy contribute towards limiting the retention of girls as they leave school to join their husbands or to take care of their children.
- The belief that girls do not need to go to school or further their studies contributes to girls' dropping out or not advancing their education.
- The preference for Koranic schools in some regions as the formal schooling system is viewed as not being in line with the community's cultural beliefs and religious values.

In relation to the **strategies to improve girls' education**, study respondents proposed the following:

- Equitable access to education for both girls and boys.
- Enlargement of education programs in certain areas to enable both boys and girls to benefit from them.
- Promotion of scholarships to maintain girls in school as a way of encouraging parents and girls to continue with schooling.
- Ownership of programs by the community which could contribute to the sustainability of the initiatives.
- Involvement of adolescents, parents and the community leaders in all programs for better collaboration and synergies in the campaign for girls' education.


From the narratives, the following reasons explained the **regional disparities in education**:

- Diourbel and Kaffrine: low rates are related to the preference for Koranic schools as well as economic and cultural barriers.
- Dakar and Ziguinchor: higher rates are due to the existence of urbanization and the presence of adequate schools (including private and Christian schools) and amenities.

The key SRHR findings showed that the ideal age to discuss puberty and sexuality is 12 years for adolescents and preferably with parents, siblings, and friends.

The two main SRHR issues that were identified as affecting adolescent girls in Senegal were early marriages and pregnancy. Findings showed that the main reasons for early marriages and pregnancy are:

- Poverty and traditional values that support such practices as a continuation of inherited custom. Girls are married off early to reduce the costs of feeding the family, and this results in early pregnancy.
- Absence and lack of awareness on social support structures which could train and enlighten young people on questions and concerns about early marriage and pregnancy.
- Poor implementation of laws with no rigorous follow up on their application as well as maintenance of the legal age of marriage at age 16 which needs to be changed in the



The narratives showed that the reasons behind the issue of excision are traditional and cultural beliefs that perpetuate its practice. Regional differences around excision are due to the convictions held by some ethnic groups that the practice is part and parcel of their societal norms and they should preserve it.

The main strategies proposed by participants to reduce early marriage, pregnancy and excision are to:

- Reinforce support systems for girls with programs that expose them to the risks of excision for their well-being.
- Enhance awareness and advocacy through various media on laws against excision and the harmful effects of this practice.

The study findings also provided insights on the particularities of the Ziguinchor region which showed good education outcomes and high pregnancy rates. According to the narratives, **good education outcomes** are related to the:

- Presence of French Christian schooling since colonization which contributed towards fostering the importance of education within the community.
- Cosmopolitan population that understands the added value of schooling and therefore encourages children to go to school.
- Effective campaigns on education for all which have been successful thanks to the high regard for education within the community.
- Availability and increase of school facilities at all levels (public and private schools) which could contribute to meeting the high demand in education.

The **high adolescent pregnancies** noted in the region are due to the:

- Limited reproductive health programs in the region which makes the youth vulnerable as they are not prepared to deal with issues of sexuality and pregnancy.
- Cultural tolerance/acceptance of early marriage and pregnancies among some ethnic groups which could result in girls not seeing early pregnancy and marriage as issues in their lives.
- Poverty along with civil unrest has exposed young girls to sexual predators.

In conclusion, the findings point to the urgent need to reinforce collaboration between the Ministries (Health and Education) on the one hand, and between program actors, ministry officials and key community leaders to address major barriers to girls' education and SRHR. More importantly, there is a need to implement sustainable local programs to deal with regional education and SRHR disparities. In addition, future programs will need to include a financial support component and take social norms into consideration

INTRODUCTION

Existing statistics indicate that slightly more than a third of the rapidly growing sub-Saharan Africa's population is between the age of 10 and 19 years. It follows that substantial investment in youth education and well-being is necessary to tap into the demographic dividend and attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (ONU, 2015). Unfortunately, the population in this region has poor outcomes in terms of education and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In West Africa, Senegal has the lowest girls' enrollment and transition rates, alongside poor knowledge of SRHR among girls and young women (ANCEFA et al., 2009; UNFPA, 2018). For development of targeted interventions and improved decision-making in terms of girls' education and SRHR, it is necessary to build evidence on these two outcomes. As such, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in collaboration with the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) engaged in a two-phase study starting in 2019 that consisted of a comprehensive Scoping Review (mapping of organizations and programs on girls' education and SRHR, engaging policy and program actors) and an Exploratory Study. The overall goal of this inquiry was to find sustainable strategies to improve education outcomes and overall well-being for girls in Senegal.


1.1. Background of the Study

At the global level, the primary school Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) stands at 101.5% but decreases slightly by 25% at secondary school (75.9%). In primary school as well as in secondary school, the GER for girls is lower than that of boys: 100.6% vs 102.5% and 75.6% and 76.2% at primary and secondary school respectively. Gender disparities in terms of completion and transition are quite low with gender parity index at 0.9. For instance, completion rates are at 89% and 89.9% for girls and boys respectively while transition is at 91% for girls and 91.4% for boys (World Bank, 2020).

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) estimates that of the 63 million out-of-school children at the primary school age globally, 34 million (54%) are in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The latter has made strong gains in increasing access to primary education (KIX Africa, 2020). However, the region continues to have the highest rates of education exclusion and millions of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, remain out of school. Indeed, about 21% of primary school age children are denied access to education (UNESCO, 2021). SSA also leads in the proportion of out-of-school children in lower (37%) and upper (58%) secondary school (UIS, 2019).

The primary school GER has increased over time but transition is still a challenge. The GER for primary school has risen from just above 50% in 1970 to almost 100% in 2016 (Clement Sefa-Nyarko et al., 2018). Nevertheless, completion rates for primary school are well below the near universal rates observed for enrollment, declining as the level of education increases. Indeed, GERs for the secondary levels fall well below those of the primary level; with the 2016 GER being 51% for lower secondary and 32% for upper secondary (Sefa-Nyarko et al., 2018). Moreover, these authors observe that, in West Africa, upper secondary completion rates are higher in Ghana (44.85%) and Nigeria (59.29%) but are much lower in Niger (1.63%) and Benin (3.58%).

In regards to Senegal, its population is noted to be relatively young, with more than half (57.67%) of its 15,256,346 inhabitants under 18 years. Besides, this sub-population faces challenging issues with



regard to social demands such as access to education and health (ANSD, 2016). For instance, recent research shows that 47% of this young population is not in school with a majority comprises of girls (USAID, 2017), thus is in dire need of alternative education opportunities that differ from the formal schooling system, as well as medical care and economic security.

In terms of gender, the situation shows stark inequality and inequity. While Senegal has achieved great equity at the primary and middle school levels, statistics show that in general, girls are still left behind and their numbers decrease significantly as they advance in their schooling. In primary school, the GER stood at 87.58% compared to 34.60% in secondary school (DPRE, 2018).

Notably, thanks to the determination of local women's movements supported by civil society and international organizations, along with the government, Senegal has put in place meaningful laws to advance women's rights and well-being. However, despite the 1999 law that makes Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) an illegal and criminal act, the 2010 Gender Parity Law and the condemnation of rape and sexual abuse in 2020, women and girls continue to experience many challenges including FGM, early marriages and pregnancy and completion of their education.

In addition, adolescents' reproductive health indicators remain poor with low access rates and poor use of reproductive health services and contraceptive methods, as well as low levels of knowledge about SRHR (Guttmacher Institute & IPPF, 2014). Indeed, prevailing social norms prohibit sexual activity among unmarried youth, constraining programs directed at this vulnerable group as well as the measurement and tracking of their needs and behaviors (Cohen et al., 2020). As such, the practice of FGM as well as incidences of child marriage and teen pregnancy are still rampant, especially in certain regions. This continues to severely hamper girls' schooling, endanger their well-being and violate their basic rights.

Consequently, there are relatively high rates of sexual activity among the youth, in addition to early marriage and pregnancy. Sexual debut is reported by 6.1% of girls aged 15-19 compared to 4.5% of boys while 7% and 31% of girls are married before the age of 15 and 18 years respectively (Equipop, 2018). Despite the efforts of government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it seems that standard interventions targeting youth uptake of SRHR services – such as training on youth-friendly service delivery for providers, youth centers, and peer educators – have failed to reliably improve SRHR outcomes for youth (Cohen et al., 2020). It is necessary to identify the cognitive biases and features that underlie these barriers in order to address them through effective programs and policies.

1.2. Significance of the Study

In order to understand disparities revealed by the Scoping Review and to get the perspectives of stakeholders, this phase of the study involved an exploratory inquiry to better appreciate the assessments of all stakeholders including beneficiaries (both adolescents and their parents) on girls' education and SRHR programs and outcomes in Senegal. This was done through interviews with ministry officials, program actors who have implemented a diverse range of interventions in Senegal, alongside discussions with the parents and adolescents who were beneficiaries of the education and SRHR programs highlighted in the Scoping Review.

1.2.1. Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Establish the perspectives of stakeholders including beneficiaries on girls' education and SRHR programs and outcomes in Senegal including:
 - Analyzing the causes of regional, age, and gender disparities in education and SRHR;
 - Determining the impact on beneficiaries of education and SRHR policies and programs;
 - Gathering views on the link between education and SRHR.
2. Provide evidence on girls' education and SRHR in Senegal that can be used for policy formulation, refinement and/or better implementation.

1.2.2. Research questions

The following questions guided the Exploratory Study:

1. How do the participants perceive the educational situation of Senegalese girls and their reproductive health? What factors have led to the failure or success of girls in schooling?
2. What are the main causes of and possible solutions to the violence against girls such as FGM, teen pregnancy and early marriage?
3. What are the factors that contribute to promoting/preventing girls' continuing education and well-being in Senegal?
4. Why do we have regional disparities in education and reproductive health outcomes in Senegal?
5. What recommendations could be drawn from this study for ministry officials (policy actors)?

1.2.3. Theoretical framework

In this section, we discuss the theoretical framework used to investigate the role of the environment in shaping the development and life of adolescents. Essentially, the ecological model seems to be a relevant framework for this inquiry to better comprehend the ecosystem of adolescents and the struggles they are undergoing in relation to education and SRHR. This framework adopted from Bronfenbrenner explains the impact of the environment in which we grow up on each stage of our lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We bring into play the new adaptation by Heise (1998) that includes social and gender norms while also considering the interaction between gender dynamics and health outcomes (Heise, 1998). According to Cislighi and Heise (2020), social and gender norms (are) in the inner circle (of the ecological model) and they exist within – shape and are concurrently shaped by – the social system in which they are embedded. Specifically, we will look at how the ecological discourse and construction influence the education and sexual and reproductive health and rights

(SRHR) of girls in Senegal within the contexts of social and gender norms (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020).

Many researchers have tried to explain human life, especially human experiences and development, from the starting point of children's dependency on caregivers. According to these studies, the developing child relies strongly on others to take care of him/herself. For instance, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the power and importance of social interactions in human development when he argues that there is a dynamic interdependency of social and individual processes in human development. According to Vygotsky, the psychological functions of an individual are internalized relations that are derived for the most part from social interactions, and later represent the social construction of one's personality. Rogoff (2003) shares that same Vygotskian view and states that:


Understanding human development requires detailed understanding of the situations in which people develop – the immediate situations as well as the less immediate cultural processes in which children and their partners (and their ancestors) participate (p. 43).

These two perspectives developed by Vygotsky and Rogoff support the importance of the community's background and realities in understanding human development and in affirming the challenges of identity formation during adolescence.

The ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979) with its emphasis on the importance of the social environment in impacting the lifecycle of the child and the adolescent, parallels the insights of Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (2003) because it emphasizes the importance of the social environment and its impact on the lifecycle of the child and the adolescent. Therefore, in understanding the experiences of adolescents, particularly girls in relation to education and reproductive health, it is important to take into account the socio-cultural context in which they develop. Bronfenbrenner's theory looks at the multiple layers of the environment and lays out how each layer has a certain influence on the child's and adolescent's development as well as the interaction of these layers. To explain his ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines development as "a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his [ecological] environment ... conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 3). This set of "nested structures" suggests that children and adolescents do not develop in a vacuum. Rice & Dolgin (2003) reiterate Bronfenbrenner's concept and argue:

"Adolescents develop within the multiple contexts of families, communities, and countries. Adolescents are influenced by peers, relatives and other adults with whom they come in contact, and by the religious organizations, schools, and groups to which they belong. They are also influenced by the media, the cultures in which they are growing up, national and community leaders and the world events. They are partly a product of environmental and social influences. (p. 39)"

Furthermore, Cislaghi & Heise (2019) consider that the ecological model contributes to an understanding of the complex socio-cultural environment that involves different schemes such as the micro-system, the meso-system, the exo-system and the macro-system. Furthermore, social norms including gender principles/codes are at the center of the ecological model. In other words, cultural and institutional realities have a real impact on children and adolescents' evolution, behavior, schooling, well-being and life in general. The type of socialization in which they develop can explain their experiences in education and reproductive health within the internal framework of those different interacting layers. Within that network, social norms and gender dynamics play a big role.



In addition, these collective gendered conventions have considerable influence on educational and reproductive health realities. By adapting the ecological framework with the integration of social and gender norms, especially when addressing issues related to access, retention and completion of schooling, FGM, child marriage and pregnancy among others, it becomes a sine qua non factor that contributes to the construction (and potentially deconstruction) of cultural influences in the macro-system (Heise, 1998).

Thus, this adapted model seeks to comprehend:

1. The role of institutional power decisions to reproduce (or refute through some policies) the status quo of:
 - existing educational norms (access to education, lack of gender sensitive curricula, expensive education, dropout and repetition rates among girls, low rates of transition and completion, respect for compulsory education for boys and girls, safe school environment, etc.) as well as,
 - reproductive health patterns (lack of a reproductive health curriculum or information center for adolescents, high rates of early pregnancy and marriage in school, persistent practice of FGM, enforcement or lack there of policies for child marriage, teenage and other undesired pregnancies, etc.).
2. The role of community forces in continuing to enforce or challenge traditional norms such as child marriage and pregnancy, FGM, stronger emphases on boys' schooling, etc.

According to Pulerwitz et al., (2019) "norms" "compliance" and "deviance" are central components of social norms theory, yet the role of power has often been overlooked in the applications of social norms theory for health promotion (Pulerwitz et al., 2019). In the present framework, power is a central feature underlying and enforcing social norms, as well as behavior and health outcomes.

- The involvement or lack thereof of adolescents in the preservation of conventional realities and norms related to education and reproductive health.
- The ways in which the realities of the educational and reproductive health systems define the rules and roles of interaction at different levels, including individual, social and institutional. These realities also shape apparent or underlying power relationships of opportunities/possibilities or weaknesses in improving the education and reproductive health of adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

This section highlights the methodology used to collect and analyze data for this Exploratory Study. It describes the study design and approach, including the recruitment, training of field interviewers (FIs), the selection of study participants and reflections on issues faced while conducting the study.

2.1. Study design and approach

For this follow-up study, a qualitative methodology was used, based on the naturalistic inquiry paradigm to understand the experiences of participants. Lincoln & Guba (1985) stressed that qualitative methods highlight the importance of the human being because qualitative methods come more easily to the human-as-instrument. In-depth interviews were used to get information from the participants as a way for the researcher to get access to the social realities of these participants (Minichiello et al., 2004) which are, according to Gleisne (1999) “constructed by the participants in social settings, [...] to understand the nature of constructed realities, [while] interact[ing] and talk[ing] with participants about their perceptions” (p. 5). One of the goals of qualitative research is to understand the experiences of participants from their own perspectives. We sought to understand the participants’ perceptions and the meanings attached to their words and actions by trying to get the knowledge that they already have about the education and well-being of girls in Senegal. Through this method, we learned meanings, norms and patterns of ways of being and knowing through systematic explanations and analysis of phenomena (Gaudet & Robert, 2018; Gleisne, 1999; Haradhan, 2018). Purposeful sampling was used in identifying and selecting rich informants and individuals who are knowledgeable and fully experienced in education and reproductive health issues in Senegal in order to maximize efficiency and validity (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

2.2. Selection of study participants

A total of 96 participants were selected for key informant interviews (KIIs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). In total, 32 KIIs were conducted with six ministry officials and 26 program actors and 64 IDIs with 32 parents and 32 adolescents. A summary of the qualitative interviews by type is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of interviews by type

Study population	Dakar (EDEN)	Diourbel (FAWE)	Kaffrine (PASEB)	Matam (JED)	Sedhiou (GEEP)	Ziguinchor (SCOFI/ CHILDFUND/GEEP)	Total (N=96)
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)							
Ministry Official	6						6
Program actors	24			1		1	26
In-depth Interviews (IDIs)							
Parents	4	4	4	4	4	12	32
Adolescents	4	4	4	4	4	12	32

Selection of ministry officials: Six ministry officials were selected from the Ministries of Education, Health and Social Action, Professional Training, Higher education, and of Family, Gender and Youth. These ministry officials were in charge of the Gender Department or supported interventions in girls' education within their ministries.

Selection of program actors: 26 program actors were also enlisted into the study. The selection was guided by mapping exercise in Phase 1 which focused on mapping of interventions and programs that were being implemented in education and SRHR

Selection of parents: 32 in-depth interviews were held with parents from six regions: Matam, Ziguinchor, Dakar, Diourbel, Kaffrine and Sédhiou.

Selection of adolescents: 32 in-depth interviews were held with adolescents involved in education and SRHR projects implemented in the six targeted regions.

Selection of regions: The selection of regions was guided by the Scoping Review findings. Diourbel and Kaffrine were selected because of their low education indicators, Matam was picked due to the prevalence of FGM while Dakar and Ziguinchor, on account of their good education indicators. It is important to highlight the case of Ziguinchor with its good education results, yet poor SRHR outcomes. To interrogate the uniqueness of this region, we selected three different programs including Group for the Study and Education of the Population (GEEP), Promotion of Girls' Education (SCOFI) and Child fund Dimbaya, and also involved 12 adolescents and 12 parents in this Exploratory Study.

2.3. Recruitment and Training of Field Interviewers

In keeping with APHRC practice, the first step was to place advertisements for data collection activities and call for applications. Successful applicants were then contacted for interviews and six candidates were shortlisted for the first phase of training. The selected field staff were those who were familiar with phone interviews and spoke French as well as one local language besides Wolof.

The field staff were then taken through a rigorous and intensive four day training from September 8th to 11th 2020, on qualitative research methods including study objectives, research ethics and the use of phone interviews. Role-plays were a key aspect of the training to ensure that field staff had a good grasp of all interview guides as well as the phone recording application and consequently gained confidence in administering them. For a better understanding of training modules, key concepts were translated into local languages, including French and added to the final training manual.

After the training period, two sets of pilot interview sessions were conducted. The first was done with the IGE team to assess the process of obtaining consent and the interviewers' comprehension of the guides. The pilot showed that some of the guides were too long and adjustments were made to ensure that interviews could be done within the stipulated time. As a result, a second pilot was done targeting ministry officials who were not involved in the study to assess their level of understanding of the different questions, as well as estimate how long it would take to administer the guides, and to give the FIs more practice with interviewing. Following the two pilot sessions, the final selection of FIs was done based on their competencies and background as well as their participation/performance during the training. Finally, four FIs were shortlisted to conduct the data collection.

2.4. Qualitative interview guides

Qualitative tools for the Improving Girls Education Exploratory Study were packaged into two categories. The first set included KIIs (with ministry officials and program actors) and the second one included IDIs (with beneficiaries, both parents and adolescents). A brief description of the qualitative tools used are listed below. It should also be noted that the anticipated focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents were converted into IDIs, as it was not feasible to conduct them following the onset of the pandemic.

Ministry official's interview guide: this guide was used to gather information on regional, age and gender disparities in education and SRHR.

Program actor's interview guide: this guide was used to gather information on program implementation as well as to capture the reasons for regional, age and gender disparities in education and SRHR.

Parent's interview guide: this guide sought to understand parental roles in supporting education; the challenges that affect education in their community; differences in educating boys and girls; benefits of programs to them and to their children; and, their sense of the ideal education and SRHR program that should be implemented for their children's benefit.

Adolescent's interview guide: this tool investigates the understanding of adolescents on their role

and that of their parents and community towards their education; the challenges that affect education in their community; differences in educating boys and girls; benefits of the program to them; the ideal age to discuss puberty and sexuality issues and their sense of an ideal education and SRHR program.

2.5. Data collection

Because of COVID-19, it was necessary to adapt to the “new normal”, therefore virtual interviews became the team’s modus operandi. The IGE team adopted phone interviews and changed focus group discussions into in-depth interviews. In this regard, the Exploratory Study qualitative tools were revised to ensure compliance with the “new normal” regulations for conducting fieldwork.

In order to reach respondents, it was necessary to mobilize them. This activity was assigned to FAWE and was conducted from August 24th to September 15th, 2020. FAWE’s role was critical as they are in touch with program and ministry officials in both education and SRHR throughout Senegal through their regional focal points across the country.

The fieldwork for the Exploratory Study started in Senegal on Monday September 28th 2020 with a target of 96 respondents, all of whom participated in the study, representing a 100% success rate within the one-month data collection period.

Each FI was given 24 potential respondents and their contact information. Supervision was done by the research team to ensure effective allocation of the contact list, to oversee logistics (airtime, recording app), and to undertake quality checks and reporting. In addition, regular meetings were held to discuss data collection progress and any emerging issues.

2.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

All the qualitative data were recorded and transcribed verbatim into MS-Word documents as well as in French. A coding schema was generated and fed into NVivo software to make it easier to organize the data. With the assistance of a coder, data was coded based on those frameworks initially created for each guide. The narratives collected from different participants were coded according to emergent themes. We drew upon the rich literature and coding frameworks to develop the initial codes. The data were first analyzed inductively “to let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (Siedman, 1999, p. 100) and then deductively. Deductive codes were largely based on the research questions guiding the exploratory qualitative study while the inductive codes were thematic areas that emerged during the coding process. Participants’ narratives were cited and cross-referenced in line with Neuman’s (2014) suggested strategies of analytic comparison and narrative analysis. These are some explorations based on the comparison of some trends in the data and/or centered on the similarities and differences of participants’ verbatim communication.

The constant discussion of the findings with the team facilitated our familiarization with the data collected. Our interpretations of the individual and collective narratives were also triangulated and different understandings of the narratives and possible interpretations were shared as a team. That triangulation and comparison of ideas and analysis were key for creation of different coding frameworks and in feeding them with relevant data through “nodes”. Different coding reports were then examined and sorted out for possible ties/connections or lack thereof between different groups

of key informants. Interpretation of the results was done based on the research questions, relations between important emerging themes and the theoretical scaffolding of the ecological model. This would reveal larger meanings of the data by displaying different lessons learned.

The presentation of results will constitute the next chapter.

3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

3.1. ON EDUCATION

This section presents findings on the status of education in Senegal. The outcomes capture opinions from various education stakeholders including parents, adolescents, program actors and ministry officials on the reasons for the poor education outcomes highlighted in the Scoping Review. The results are based on the outputs generated by Nvivo (word clouds, word trees) and underline the low enrollment of boys at lower schooling levels, the socio-economic and cultural barriers to completion and retention, regional differences and participant experiences in education programming as well as recommendations for ideal education programs.

From the narratives related to the education component, words such as poverty, (lack of financial means), early marriage, and teen pregnancy were some of the terms most cited by participants as negatively affecting the education of children and adolescents. Suggested strategies included developing supportive campaigns, providing financial support for education of vulnerable groups, strengthening collaborative efforts with all stakeholders and initiating new approaches for girls' school retention and completion.

3.1.1. Obstacles to education in Senegal

The different questions presented to participants, in relation to the situation of and obstacles to schooling, were based on the results of the Scoping Review. They are related to the low rate of boys' enrollment at the primary level and the obstacles that cause low retention and completion at the middle and secondary levels, especially for girls.

Key stakeholders, ministry officials and program actors revealed that the low economic status of parents and families along with successful programs for girls' enrollment explain, to some degree, the low rates of boys' enrollment in primary and middle schools. As for retention and completion, while stakeholders still mention the issue of poverty, they also insisted that socio-cultural and religious values and beliefs affected both male and female students' retention and completion.

Low enrollment of boys in primary and middle school

Stakeholders largely confirmed the outcomes from the Scoping Review that access to basic education in Senegal has improved over time at all levels of education with high indicators for girls, especially in primary and middle schools. At the primary school level, the gross enrollment ratio (GER) parity index rose from 1.10 in 2011 to 1.15 in 2018 in favor of girls (DPRE, 2018) with a GER of 92.6% for girls compared to 80.4% for boys and an average of 86.4%. For middle school, enrollment rates also showed that girls represent 52.8% of the pupils, a trend that was observed since 2008 with an

increase of 8.1% over the last ten years (DPRE, 2018).

These changes in education indicators for girls, with a parity index in their favor both at the primary and middle school levels, are the results of a combination of programs and projects spearheaded by the Education For All agenda, endorsed by the Senegalese government. While girls have been enrolled in large numbers, boys' enrollment has decreased, especially in the regions of Diourbel and Kaffrine. Besides the high investment in girls' only programs, the review provided other reasons such as the inclination of families to send their boys to the Daara (Koranic schools) or Arab-Islamic schools, rather than to formal schools, especially in the two regions cited above.

Some of the common programs that were said to have disproportionately favored girls' education included SCOFI, PAQUET and PAQUET-EF. This was confirmed by one of the ministry officials who asserted that:

"At one point, the State, the State educational and academic authorities and donors invested heavily in girls' education. We had projects with the Ministry of National Education such as the PAEF1, PAEF2 and so on, all these projects were working for massive access of girls to school. And all this work that lasted for years bore fruit, we invested more in the education of girls than boys". (KII, Ministry official, Female, 07/10/2020).

This was also echoed by a program actor who applauded the efforts by various stakeholders including teachers in furthering the girls' education agenda.

"Yes, about the results in the field of education, it must be said that for more than 20 years there have been enormous efforts and I take this opportunity to congratulate the teaching staff, particularly the female teachers who have done an important work within the framework of SCOFI. At the primary level, we have achieved a 102% enrollment rate for girls". (KII, Program Actor, Female, 13/10/2020)

Besides the prioritization of girls' enrollment, a few ministry officials and program actors touched on other reasons that could explain the low enrollment of boys at the primary level. These issues included the economic hardships faced by some families who struggle to put food on the table, and so prefer not to take their children to school to cut costs. As in the Scoping Review, the stakeholders also alluded to the religious discourse that pushes parents in certain regions to send their children to koranic schools called "Daara" which they perceive as aligned with their values. The lack of birth certificates was also raised as contributing to limited enrollment of both boys and girls.

One Ministry official elaborated on the economic hardships that constrained families from supporting their children's schooling:

In general, there are economic problems, difficulties in taking care of our children's schooling. Because, as we are used to saying that before dealing with school supplies and so on, we have to take care of food first". (KII, Ministry official, Female, 02/10/2020)

From the review, the two regions that are greatly affected by religious barriers are Diourbel and Kaffrine with a GER of 55.8% and 47.2% respectively at primary level. This is considerably lower than the national rate of 87.3%. In terms of gender, the GER for Diourbel is 47.83% for boys and 64.42% for girls while in Kaffrine the GER is 40.70% for boys and 53.93% for girls. These regions are known to be well versed in religious education due to their historical experiences with Islam and so

changing the status quo would require very thoughtful, meaningful and holistic strategies involving all stakeholders. A ministry official narrates:

“For the boys, the problem is generally a bit cultural and religious. So, there are these cultural and spiritual dimensions that make people tend to entrust the boy to a marabout. Now he is taken out of the normal school system, but unfortunately, he is not put in a learning structure that is taken into account by the education system. These are the children who are often found in the street. That too is a problem for boys”. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 02/10/2020)

One program actor linked the lack of birth certificates for children in certain rural areas to low school participation for boys. Students who do not have a birth certificate are not able to register in school or to sit for any examination.

“As for the low rate, at first glance, I think there is the problem of civil status. If we solve this problem first, we will be able to bring all the children to school”. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 05/10/2020)

In this segment, as in the Scoping Review, stakeholders attributed the low enrollment rates for boys as being primarily caused by more supportive programs for girls’ education along with various economic, cultural and religious obstacles to schooling. However, these socio-cultural and religious barriers also affect girls.

3.1.2. Barriers to retention and completion

The Exploratory Study also wanted to find out the key reasons for the gradual decrease in retention and completion rates as students move up the school levels. For instance, according to the Scoping Review, at CM2 which is the last grade at primary level, the dropout rate was 26.7% for girls compared to 22.2% for boys, with peaks among girls aged between 10 and 12 years old (Fall, 2015). At the middle level as well, incidences of repetition (23.66%) and dropping out (18.57%) are more frequent among girls who are more likely to experience an interruption than boys (DPRE, 2018). Furthermore, there were regional disparities in completion rates at the secondary level. For instance, Ziguinchor had the highest rate at 61.6%, followed by Dakar with 39.9% and Thiès with 32.2%. The regions of Kaffrine (11.8%), Matam (12.6%), Diourbel (12.9%) and Tambacounda (13.6%) lagged behind and were well below the national average of 27.2%, which was also already quite low (DPRE, 2018).

The key barriers to retention and completion according to the study respondents are highlighted below:

3.1.2.1 Economic obstacles to retention and completion

Financial hardship was the most commonly cited obstacle to retention and completion for both girls’ and boys’ at the primary, middle and secondary levels. Despite the existence of programs such as the PAEF which involved donation of school uniforms, schooling charges still pose a significant obstacle for many low-income families (DPRE, 2012).

As a result of these financial difficulties, children from low-income households are forced to drop-out of school despite their desire and aspirations to study. In many cases, they get into income generating activities, get married off or stay home to take care of the household.

A program actor pointed out that some school charges are unbearable for many poor families. She explained:

“And we know that in education, the more children go to higher levels, the heavier the school fees are, so; some families can no longer keep up with the situation and are unable to buy everything related to school materials or ensure the transportation of these children”. (KII, Program actor, Female, 27/10/2020)

Other narratives corroborated the preference for boys' schooling over girls' education, when parents are faced with tough economic situations. One Ministry official expounded:

...The economic obstacles are current, the poverty of the population leads to opportunity costs that often mean that the girl is chosen to stay home to work so that the boy's education can be supported. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 02/10/2020).

A program actor substantiated the tendency to favor boys in the face of economic hardships despite the positive educational and life aspirations that girls may have.

Well, maybe for boys, but in any case girls are more motivated than boys. Perhaps, in relation to their future, girls will tell you they prefer to study long enough to be either magistrates, doctors.... Boys are looking for shortcuts. They will tell you they want to be sportsmen, teachers... That means that you feel more motivation in girls than in boys. Unfortunately for girls, there are other factors that do not allow them to maintain or complete their education, and these are early marriages, especially with its consequences in terms of early pregnancy; poverty with the problems related to the payment of school fees. The more the child moves up in his studies, the more expensive the costs are, and if the parents are not very motivated and committed, they will not be able to meet these costs. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 09/10/2020).

Interestingly, stakeholders also mentioned that at a certain age, boys were said to become aware of their future roles as household heads and breadwinners which propelled them to look for more ways and means to earn money rather than remain in school with its many uncertainties, especially if they belonged to low-income families. Some boys may decide to help their fathers at the farm, but the majority seemed to prefer to go find an informal job preferably in the urban cities. Others would work on developing their talents as they dreamed of becoming famous sportsmen, soccer players, basketball players, athletes, wrestlers, or dream of migrating to Europe which is believed to be an “El Dorado”. In some cases, children were involved in income-generating activities as early as 10 years. A ministry official explained:

At present, one important cause is the search for income-generating activities. So, I can say it's a problem of poverty because boys who are in poor families tend, from the age of 10 to 12, to do an income-generating activity to support their parents. And when they are 15 and over, they all want to become sportsmen, this is what we have observed on the field. Most of the boys we interviewed tell us that with sports, you quickly earn many millions, they want to become internationally renowned wrestlers, footballers or basketball players, and this is a primary cause among others. And in the same way, there is the desire to travel abroad because the boys firmly believe in the European El Dorado. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 07/10/2020).

Another ministry official held the notion that some boys may prefer to stop going to school in order to join their fathers in the fields to support their families. She declared:

At the secondary school level, the problem I had noted for boys is that they prefer to leave school, in general, to stay in the fields with their fathers or to go and look for work to help the family that is to be breadwinners. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 03/10/2020)

Economic activities like gold mining in the region of Kédougou were also cited as potentially pulling away many children from poor families into employment. One program actor explained:

⁵ A place where life is supposed to be prosperous and better

At a certain level of study, boys drop out for different reasons. In regions like Kédougou, gold mining and certain poor social situations seem to be the main reason for dropping out of school. Most of the time, the work in the fields or in the household gives the children little chance to stay at school. Some parents even send their children to the cities in search of work, making it difficult for them to complete their education. Among secondary school students, a certain understanding of the world can be noted. This leads some of them to think about dropping out of school and looking for work. In our areas of intervention, Dakar for example, during the dry season, we can note that these children carry out several activities (carts - horse-drawn transport, housework and boy gardeners). (KII, Program actor, Female, 05/10/2020)

With regard to Kédougou, the Scoping Review noted that despite the high rates of enrollment in primary education for both boys and girls, the numbers drop drastically at the higher levels, even though they are still better than in many other regions. As such, Kédougou accounts for a GER of 115.8 with 118.04 for boys and 113.48 for girls at the primary level with a completion rate of 99% (103.8 for boys; 93.9 for girls) (DPRE, 2018). This completion rate is the highest among the regions, even above Dakar and Ziguinchor which are the top two regions as far as educational outcomes are concerned. However, at the middle level, the GER falls by almost half to 51.99% (60.85% for boys; 42.50% for girls). Also, the Gross Admission Rate (GAR) is low at 45.2% (50.6% for boys and 39.5% for girls), despite being above the national rate of 43.9%. At the secondary level, the GER stands at 25.76% (33.30% for boys; 17.50% for girls) compared to the national GER of 34.17% (34.62% for boys; 34.17% for girls) with a Parity Index (PI) of 1.03 (DPRE, 2018). The region of Kedougou has the country's lowest PI of 0.53 in favor of boys. The secondary school completion rate is 21.91% (28.79% for boys; 14.35% for girls) versus the national rate of 26.77% (27.17% for boys; 26.34% for girls). (DPRE, 2018)

According to study participants, many challenges related to the adolescence stage including risks of delinquency, reduced interest in schooling and engagement in unsafe sexual behavior, lead to parents taking extreme actions such as pulling them out of school and giving them off to early marriage as a way of dealing with the precarious situation and protecting their offspring. For instance, in a bid to avoid the stigma associated with early pregnancy, some parents decide to marry off their female children as soon as they get to adolescence. **A program actor** narrated:

Completion is really about keeping children in school. For boys, it is especially a problem of age. The more they grow up; the more they have financial needs related to their adolescent status; but often parents cannot cope with them and it is an open door to abandonment, to discouragement. Perhaps it is the quality of education that is not attractive to these young boys. As for girls the major problem is marriage, because, at a certain age of adolescence, parents are torn between the desire to let them continue their studies and the desire to prevent unwanted pregnancy. So, they want to give them away in marriage before these kinds of situations arise. This is really what compromises the completion rate. (KII, Program actor, Male, 3/11/2020)

3.1.3. Cultural and religious obstacles to retention and completion

Both program and ministry officials also highlighted several deep-seated cultural beliefs that prevent girls and women from making progress in school. Poverty in tandem with cultural and religious beliefs around roles and responsibilities for boys and girls in the family, ensures the maintenance of gender bias and sets back girls' schooling and well-being. The lack of schooling and information on certain precautionary measures expose girls to all sorts of risks that may compromise their futures. These range from the risks of early marriage and pregnancy, to the threat of excision, among others.

Stakeholder narratives confirmed the Scoping Review's findings on girls dropping out as they progress to middle and secondary schools. According to Fall (2015), 53% of girls do not stay in school compared to 47% of boys. Several factors explain the exclusion of girls from the education system including geographical isolation of schools (some parents do not allow their daughters to travel long distances from home), socio-cultural influences that view school as not being the right vehicle for societal and religious values, low educational attainment, the need for labor for domestic work, parental biases that favor boys' education, among other factors.

The Scoping Review data substantiated this drop in the enrollment numbers of girls as they move up the grades. This decline can be noticed in the GER and GAR for girls from primary to secondary school levels. For instance, at the primary school level, GER for girls is 93.86% compared to 81.1% for boys and 87.3% nationally, while GAR for girls is 68.8% compared to 55.2% for boys and 61.8% nationally. At the middle school level, the GER falls to 55.43% for girls compared to 47.21% for boys and 51.20% nationally, while GAR drops to 47.5% compared to 40.4% for boys and 43.9% nationally. At the secondary level, the drop in rates is even more significant, with GER for girls going down to 34.6% compared to 33.1% for boys and 33.8% nationally. The GAR is even lower at 26.34% for girls compared to 27.17% for boys and 26.7% nationally, with high regional discrepancies. Additionally, many regions are lagging behind with rates well below the national average (28.3% and 29.6% for girls) which is itself quite low. Additionally, some regional rates for girls do not exceed 13.7% such as Sédhiou (19.70% regionally with 13.16% for girls), Kolda (16.25% regionally with 13.6% for girls), Tambacounda (13.6% regionally with 11.72% for girls), Diourbel (12.9% regionally with 12.58% for girls), Kaffrine (11.8% regionally with 10.22% for girls) and Matam (12.6% regionally with 12.05% for girls). (DEPRE, 2018)

Narratives from program and ministry officials agreed that the key cultural barriers to girls' education were early marriages and pregnancies:

What I can tell you is that from the first to the second grades of primary school, girls outnumber boys; but the further you move up, the more boys become more numerous. At the beginning the rate of boys is lower but later on, as they move up to higher levels of studies, girls drop out because of early pregnancies and marriages (KII, Program Actor, Female, 9/10/2020).

According to the Scoping Review, regions such as Kolda, Tambacounda, Kédougou and Matam, are among the regions with the lowest enrollment rates for girls, particularly at the secondary level. In addition, these same zones are reported to have the highest numbers of adolescents who have started their reproductive life (Kédougou 39%; Kolda, 30%; Tambacounda 30%, Sédhiou 24%, and Matam 22%) (ANSD, 2017). This issue was reiterated by study participants in the Exploratory Study, with some calling for inclusion of parents and the larger community in programming for girls since they are key decision makers in issues affecting girls, especially early pregnancies and marriage. This is what one of the ministry officials had to say:

Today, in primary schools, there are fewer problems, girls are even top in the Primary Education Certificate examination and the entrance examination to 1st grade of the junior high and by the way, they are the best. In most classes, if you ask who is top, it's a girl who answers, that's what we have observed in the field. The major problem is when they reach secondary education level, i.e. all along the Fouta river in the north of Senegal or in the east of the country around Kolda, Tambacounda and Kedougou, it is from 4th grade of junior high school onwards that they drop out of school. The problem has just become widespread in the Fouta area, and the cause is early marriage and a lady called me from Matam to tell

me: "you don't have to sensitize girls, because, above all; we parents have to sensitize families. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 7/10/2020)

In fact, one of the program actors described the declining transition of girls from middle to secondary school as being similar to "going through a narrow pipe" where by the third year of secondary school there are almost no girls left." In Louga, the achievement rate at primary level is 46.6%. At the middle level, Louga is among the regions with lowest figures for potential demand for education (47% in Louga compared to 50.9% in Dakar). Louga's secondary school enrollment rate drops to 23.51% (25.19% for girls; 22.02% for boys) compared to the national rate of 34.17% (34.62% for girls; 33.73% for boys). In addition, the GAR remains disturbingly low (17.85%), (17.91% for girls and 17.80% for boys) (DPRE, 2018). As highlighted in the narrative below by a program actor, one of the reasons for the low outcomes in Louga is the pressure for parents to marry off their adolescent girls to male immigrants (Modou Modou) as they are perceived to have progressed financially:

Over the last few years, we have begun to implement schooling for girls, and this has a long-term impact that means that today, at the primary level up to last grade, the GER is higher than that of boys. But as soon as they reach the first cycle of the secondary, it's as if girls are sifted through a sieve, and at the end of the cycle in 4th grade, there are almost no girls left. And the causes are manifold, and we can even blame early marriages at this level. Because if there is a huge dropout rate at this level, it's because there are a lot of early marriages, I don't know from which region, but at the FAWE level, we have seen that in the Niambour area (another name of the Louga region), there are people who go abroad and come back home at a certain period of the year, and there are periods when parents give the daughters in marriage to these Modou Modou (Senegalese living abroad), excuse me, it's not pejorative. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 20/09/2020).

The rigid cultural obstacles including the position conferred to girls and women in the Senegalese society are also key barriers as highlighted in the Scoping Review that reported on the country's strong patriarchal tradition and the clear hierarchy across generations and between sexes. In addition, family demands shape individual choices, and socio-ethnic as well as religious groups have a large influence on people's life in general. A ministry official posits that:

Beyond economic barriers, there are cultural barriers as well. That is the position of women in society. In some localities, people think a woman does not need to go to school. Sometimes, there are also religious obstacles; people hide behind religion to say that the educational offer does not allow girls to go to school. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020).

Program actors validated the socio-cultural blockages to school completion for girls citing regional differences. For instance, one program actor stipulated that awareness campaigns need to be addressed at the family level in the southern areas of Senegal to deal with this reality. She asserted:

Obstacles to completion can be of several kinds: social, economic, but also sociocultural. Well, of a social nature because, in some localities, it is always thought that a girl does not need to go to higher education. Since she has to marry afterwards, to be a housewife, to take care of her children, keeping them in school is not acceptable for the community. So, from a cultural point of view, in some areas, girls don't even go to school. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 27/10/2020).

3.1.4. Sanitation and security as obstacles to retention and completion

According to stakeholders, another aspect of the barriers to school retention and completion is security and sanitation. Some middle and/or secondary schools are located far away from the students' homes which poses a security challenge for students who have to walk long distances to their schools. They also mentioned the inadequacy of decent toilets, which makes schools unwelcoming environments for girls, particularly during their menstrual period. These sentiments were also captured in the

Scoping Review which stated that girls' toilets in schools are not installed everywhere and this further disadvantages them, consequently compromising their education (Abuya et al., 2020). **A program actor** validated these findings and criticized the layouts of schools that do not always integrate the building of decent toilets, which is a big factor causing girls to drop out.

The layout of the school can even be a blockage. We can take the example of girls' toilets in schools. At a certain time each month; a girl must have her menstrual period, but in the school's layout, the infrastructure does not take this into account. There is no private corner where the girl can go to change her sanitary towels or there are no sanitary towels. This, too, is what urges or may in any case encourage school dropouts. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 30/09/2020)

In addition, a ministry official reiterated the absence of toilets in schools as contributing to girls' withdrawal and stated that sanitation has been a priority interest for the Ministry of Vocational Training which is concerned with such situations in those schools it is responsible for.

...There is another problem which has been being explored for the last three years within the Ministry of Vocational Training, and that is the management of menstrual hygiene (in reference to the building of toilets in school). (KII, Ministry official, Female, 7/10/2020)

One of the program actors shared her experience working in Koussanar, within the Tambacounda region, where girls faced risks of insecurity due to the distanced location of high schools. Likewise, the Scoping Review found that girls face real difficulties with transportation and accommodation when they move to the middle and secondary levels. The program actor asserted:

In any case, in the villages, where we intervene, the obstacles are the distance from the school. For example, when we take the example of Koussanar, the last time we raised questions about the risk of dropout; the answer was that when the girl is at secondary school level, she has to travel miles to and from school. This poses a problem of insecurity. It also poses a problem of host families. Because sometimes they are obliged to go and find a host family, which accepts to take in the child during the week or during the month, and this is not always easy. There is also the problem of transport, the problems related to the accommodation which usually demotivate the child. And this does not encourage parents to let their daughters continue their studies. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 30/09/2020)

Similarly, a ministry official elaborating on both issues of security and sanitation, confirmed their impact on girls' retention and completion at the middle and high school levels, especially in some rural areas:

There is also the fact that in the structuring of the premises of schools or high schools, especially I would say in rural areas, the conditions do not allow the girl to go to school all the time. Especially in relation to the period when she has her menstrual period, this is also one of the problems that can lead the girl to stop her studies. I also mentioned the problems of accessibility in areas where there are no high schools. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 06/10/2020)

Lastly, it is observed that a few stakeholders disapproved of the remote locations of middle and high schools. However, while this may be true in some rural areas, the problem of accessible middle schools seems to have been largely tackled by the government with the building of "closer middle schools" thanks to the PAQUET program and others. The review mentioned that many middle schools and a few high schools have been built in numerous districts, both urban and rural, at accessible locations and promoting retention and completion for both boys and girls. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the issue remains, with an urgent need to focus now on building proximally-located high schools.

3.1.5. Beneficiary perspectives on the status of education in Senegal

Parents and adolescents were both asked to reflect on the status of education and obstacles to the schooling of youth in their communities. Adolescents were specifically probed to reflect on their own difficulties as learners. Based on the “word clouds” from the qualitative data, the terms used most often were “marriage”, “financial means”, “early marriage” or “early pregnancy” which point to the main problems children face in their education.

Like key stakeholders, beneficiaries considered poverty to be the main barrier to schooling for both boys and girls, with early marriage and pregnancy as additional barriers for girls. Parents on the other hand were said to face financial difficulties in honoring the charges levied in schools as their children progressed through the various levels. Parents often have no alternative but to withdraw their children from school. For girls, withdrawal from school meant that they became targets for early marriage. Another barrier that was associated with poverty by the beneficiaries was teen pregnancy at the middle and secondary school levels. The poverty level and financial hardships exposed adolescent girls to unscrupulous sexual predators.

3.1.5.1. How does poverty affect education for boys and girls?

Parents and adolescents corroborated the citing of poverty as a barrier raised by key stakeholders and confirmed in the Scoping Review. To remedy the situation, one of the parents suggested the need for support from authorities to be directed towards families facing financial problems:

Today, people in Matam thank God and His prophet because studies are going well. Young people are studying, and the parents are also courageous and they are accompanying them. We only ask for help from the authorities because some of the parents don't have enough means. There are difficulties here because the children can get their Junior High School Diploma or their Primary School Diploma but they don't have the means, for most of them are villagers and they don't have enough money, which can help them meet their needs. You know, a girl can't be trusted to just anyone, she can't also be taken everywhere to study, and when I talk about parental responsibility, not all parents have the means to support their children. People's wealth is unequal; there is also a lack of social assistance. Today, the NGOs here should take care of children to help poor parents. This kind of action is also lacking in the area. (IDI, Parent Female, Matam, 5/10/2020)

In line with this narrative, another parent highlighted expensive school registration fees and school supplies at the middle and high school levels that parents are unable to meet due to their limited resources. This results in parents encouraging their children to drop out of school and search for jobs. He noted:

At this level many young people drop out of school to learn a trade, or parents urge them to go and learn a trade and for some; it is due to the lack of school supplies because they are costly at this level unlike in primary school where parents only pay contribution. But at the level of Junior High school, it's 10,000 francs for enrollment, let alone the school supplies. And the Principal helps us a lot by giving us sometimes the possibility to pay the enrollment fee until March, but this does not prevent some pupils from dropping out of school because of poverty. (IDI, Male Parent, Kaffrine, 8/10/2020)

A third parent echoed the above position, arguing that learning requires investment in resources. As long as the population is on the poverty line, schooling is not a priority:

To be honest, poverty is a major problem here and it must be admitted that the population is destitute. If you don't have the means, you can't invest in your child's education because studying requires means that must be made available to help the learner. Sometimes, you see cases of pupils dismissed by the headmaster during the school year because they are simply not enrolled. It is difficult to see the child in these conditions. Even if the parent wants to find money to enroll his child, he cannot. (IDI, Male parent, Diourbel, 1/10/2020)

Adolescents on their part concurred with parents' views on the economic hardships that families deal with. One of them said:

Yes, there are some here, you sometimes see them studying and at some point they deliberately give up or even their parents can urge them to do so. Or sometimes, they even get married and drop out of school. The main problem is the lack of means, they study and at a certain point they realize that there are too many fees, too many charges and it's not worth the while, so they drop out, or asked to do so, for parents don't have the means and can't meet all the charges. (IDI, Adolescent, Girl, Matam, 4/10/2020)

Another adolescent reiterated that students are determined to study but because of limited means, they are obliged to drop out:

Sometimes, there are young people who want to study but the lack of means often causes problem. Parents do not have the economic resources to invest in their children's education by paying for their school fees and buying school supplies etc. Often, there are students who are excluded from school because of the registration fees problem. There are certainly cases of early marriages, but I have not been here for a long time and I have not noticed any case yet. People who live here are not against the education system but they prefer to send their children to Koranic schools first before taking them to formal school. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Kaffrine, 9/10/2020).

3.1.5.2. Early pregnancy and marriage as obstacles to retention and completion

Beneficiaries also identified the issues of early marriage and pregnancy as obstacles to their education as presented in the Scoping Review and discussed earlier by ministry officials and program actors. One parent explained the recurrent situation in Casamance (also known as Ziguinchor) where girls of 14 and 15 years leave school because of pregnancy.

In Casamance, the school education of young girls is sometimes problematic; sometimes they find it difficult to continue their school education to the level they want; there are numerous early pregnancies. Sometimes, you see a 15 or 14 year old girl get pregnant. Now what we do is talk to them and monitor them hoping that this doesn't happen to them. (IDI, Female parent, Sédhiou, 13/10/2020)

According to adolescents' narratives, teenage pregnancy is real, especially in regions like Sédhiou where before the end of a school year, about five to seven girls are expected to get pregnant and consequently withdraw from school. Further, once girls become pregnant, parents tend to give them off for marriage. One adolescent stated that:

There is also the problem of early pregnancies which is very visible in the Sédhiou region because there are classes (grades) where 5 out of 7 girls get pregnant before the end of the school year and will not be able to continue their studies. There is also the problem of early marriages, for parents give them in marriage before they can continue their studies. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Sédhiou, 12/10/2020)

Parents were also concerned of girls being more vulnerable than boys with risks of early marriage and pregnancy and many more. Even though parents are conscious of their obligation to deal with such situations, they requested for help as indicated by one of the parents below:

Well, I admit that, at the moment, there were some concerns about the girls' group. But for the boys' group, people have now become aware that education is something important to which special attention must be paid. Perhaps there are girls who are a little negatively affected with early marriages and domestic work that hinders their progress in the school curriculum. There are also early pregnancies and I believe that this is something that is taking its toll right here in the

Ziguinchor region. And this deserves to be tackled because it is causing a lot of harm to this vulnerable group, which is the girls group. (IDI, Male Parent, Ziguinchor, 8/10/2020)

Another parent gave the example of a girl married at age 15 in her neighborhood. For her, the rationale for such early marriages is the belief that girls' education is not sustainable as they usually end up in the kitchen. In line with socio-cultural barriers enforced by gender norms discussed in the Scoping Review and by key stakeholders, she declared:

This is more common among girls. When they don't get the Primary Education Certificate, their parents ask them to drop out on the pretext that girls' education is not sustainable and that sooner or later they will end up in the kitchens. If they don't have an educated person in the neighborhood, no one will encourage them to study. In addition, at the age of 15, many girls are given away in early marriage. For example, not long ago, a girl aged 15 or younger was given in marriage and was to go to her marital home in Touba. In any case, the main cause is early marriage. (IDI, Female Parent, Dakar, 8/10/2020)

Adolescents on their part are aware that early marriage is detrimental to girls' education and they place responsibility for this on parents. Parents marry off their daughters at an early age against their will, sometimes as early as the end of primary school cycle, which corresponds with puberty. For parents, early marriage is viewed as a way of protecting girls from undesired pregnancies. This is what one of the adolescent girls had say:

I'm going to take the example of girls, if I may, the example of early marriage, because it's something I know very well. When girls reach the last grade of Primary school and their bodies develop, parents tend to propose to marry them off. Hence they flee home to go and settle somewhere else. So, their future is compromised. Sometimes they are in a family where the parents are poor, and in this way they are exposed to all sorts of dangers, they are given trays of mint leaves to sell from door to door. So, they go out to sell the hours they were supposed to spend learning. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Ziguinchor, 15/10/2020)

This adolescent boy also confirmed the parents' responsibility in discouraging girls from continuing with their education and getting married early:

The young people are doing quite well, however some parents do not agree to let their children continue their studies until they succeed, for them the best thing would be to give their daughters in marriage as soon as they reach a certain age otherwise they will be perverted by the boys. This is why parents do their best to marry off their out-of-school girls as soon as possible; this will lead to forced marriage and the girl's non-consent. (Male parent, Ziguinchor, 9/10/2020)

3.1.5.3. Lack of birth certificates and long distances to schools

Parents and adolescents also touched on the problems of birth certificates and distant schools, raised in the Scoping Review and confirmed by both ministry officials and program actors. The beneficiaries reaffirmed that adolescents are constantly sent away from school to get birth certificates which in most cases are non-existent because they were not registered at birth. A parent intimates:

Yes, that's right, you know that for a child who goes up to upper grade of primary school to take the exam without a birth certificate is impossible, so he drops out at the level of studies. Really for me, the fault lies with the parents because not declaring one's child at birth is a mistake, the money the parent use to declare his child is nothing compared to the sheep he buys at his naming ceremony. This is an obstacle for the child because when the child reaches the upper grade of primary school and is asked every day by his teacher to tell his parents to bring his birth certificate, or is sent back to go and tell his parents to get him a birth certificate, will this child be able to continue his studies? This child cannot continue, that's why I encourage the parents. (IDI, Female Parent, Ziguinchor, 14/10/2020).

This challenge of birth registration contributing to school dropouts is confirmed by an adolescent girl living in Dakar (the capital city of Senegal) showing the magnitude of the issue in both rural and urban areas. However, on a positive note, she declared that birth registration is now being enforced and encouraged for every born child to avoid situations that could compromise their education in the future. She explained:

To tell the truth in my community, there are many children who are not in school. Although an important step is being taken for the acquisition of birth certificates for children which is a real problem here. And we know that the birth certificate is one of the indispensable documents to go to school. The improvement noted is that the baby that has just been born is now registered immediately at the hospital. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Dakar, 7/10/2020).

In relation to far-off schools, adolescents agreed with ministry officials and program actors. Based on their own experiences, they confirmed that some girls decide not to complete primary school so that they are not sent to middle schools outside of their communities. And going to school outside the communities is often resisted by their parents. One of the girls pointed out that:

Well, I saw students who did not have birth certificates. And when I asked one of them about this, she told me that when she was in the upper grade of primary school, it wasn't worthwhile sitting for the exam because after the primary school certificate, they're going to send her to a school far away from her locality, and her parents won't let her study away from them for sure, she has difficult parents. So, if it's a place where you don't have relatives, they can't let you go. That's the cause. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Kaffrine, 14/10/2020).

3.1.6. Suggested strategies to improve girls' education from the perspective of key stakeholders

This sub-section highlights the main strategies that key stakeholders think could impact girls' education. Ministry officials and program actors shared different options to boost retention and completion for girls. In the Scoping Review, many actions have been taken by the government in the improvement of girls' education (Abuya et al., 2020). The logical framework adopted through many programs such as the Improvement of Quality, Equity and Transparency in the Education and Training Sector (PAQUET 2013-2025), reinforced by the Women's Education and Empowerment Support Project (PAEF Plus 2014-2018) and later the Program for the Development of Education in Senegal (PADES, 2019-2022) prioritizes the coherent organization of these different projects through the Coordinating Framework of Interventions on Girls' Education (CCIEF). The new educational policy favors a better gender balance. It targets the equity of the education professional routes starting from the managerial level with an increasing proportion of women with responsibilities. At the local level, there is the involvement of community actors to break down barriers for more inclusivity. In terms of concrete actions, uniform donations, distribution of school kits for girls, support for mothers' associations and creation of mutual health schemes for girls have been noted in the Scoping Review.

According to ministry officials, despite government efforts to spearhead the education of girls and achieve gender equity and equality, girls are still more unlikely to complete their schooling because of numerous barriers previously cited. Strategies implemented by government include the enlargement of education programs and the promotion of scholarships as well as incentives to keep girls in school. Key terms seen in the "word clouds" that emerged from different narratives were "girls", "maintain", "scholarship", "diversification" [educational choices/provisions/opportunities], "discrimination", "intensification", "invest", "girls granted assistance from the government", "maintaining the best partners", "material/money/finances to poor families". For the ministry officials, everything possible

should be done to help advance the move towards gender equity and equality.

One Ministry official confirmed the government's numerous policies, including establishment of school canteens in rural areas to address the food insecurity and enhance school attendance. According to her, school should ideally be free from all charges to enhance access for all.

I believe that the first thing is school for everyone. In a school for all, there are no conditions, no discrimination between a girl and a boy. School is for every child who really wants to learn. A school for all, as we are told is a free school. I think that is not often said, but free schooling is certainly a state policy so that all children are equal in terms of education. Well, there are a lot of policies, I think even in rural areas, the fact of creating school canteens. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 6/10/2020)

Another ministry official pointed out that many strategies have been revisited in order to adapt them to the respective needs of people depending on the locality and the allocated programs/projects. Nevertheless, implementation is often hampered by the shortage of funds:

At this time, it will be difficult for me to say what didn't work, because we are still going through the process because strategies have been revisited to adapt the needs in certain localities on certain programs or projects. I'm going to be honest anyway. There is also a lack of means, we have to invest a lot of money, review the buildings that are built first in primary and even pre-school. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 3/10/2020).

Key stakeholders applauded programs initiated by the government to boost girls' education, but they expressed concern about the limited resources of the Senegalese State to manage the various needs and expectations of its population. Narratives from program actors point to the challenges and wishes for strategies and monitoring systems that could help stimulate capitalization and ownership of programs by the community. Program actors noted that numerous initiatives and projects were implemented but unfortunately, many of them faded out because of the lack of meaningful community involvement and the appropriation of resources. As observed in the Scoping Review, a new approach that is predominantly community-based has been adopted to replace the previous "exclusively supply-oriented" approach to allow "the school as an institution to be integrated in the social imaginary of the parents." (Gerard, 1998).

Program actors also emphasized the importance of including the views of the community in design and implementation of programs targeting them, which would also help ensure sustainability of the programs. This way, programs initiated by the national government are not perceived as political projects but rather as genuine community initiatives that are endorsed at the local level. One program actor observed that:

There are problems of documentation and capitalization of our intervention. As a challenge when projects end and there is no appropriation and follow-up, this is a problem. Many initiatives have been developed, but unfortunately in relation to appropriation, for example, we do not see the involvement of these local elected representatives because often it is purely political. The challenge of sustainability is going to arise and it is only the State that is capable of ensuring the sustainability of both the central and decentralized levels. (IDI, Program actor, Male, 7/10/2020)

The importance of community involvement was echoed by another program actor who stated that:

If we have points to improve it is above all a better involvement of the community for the continuity of learning. As I told you, for example, we have projects and sometimes we implement these projects in one area, we are in Thiès and Saint-Louis. We implement a project and when the project ends, there are difficulties to perpetuate it. So, if there are things to

be redone, it is really a better involvement and a better taking charge of the communities although we are already working with these communities, but to involve them well and to put in place strategies for sustainability so that the achievements can continue beyond the projects. (IDI, Program actor, Female, 4/10/2020).

The preservation of partners' work and the securing of sustainable funds are among other strategies raised by program actors. One female program actor requested for long lasting programs and projects that would enable actors to perform their work without facing any shortages or bankruptcy, especially for programs related to nutrition. She wanted:

...To find partners and funds to help us take care of our pupils who have no supplies, who have problems going to school, pupils who suffer from a lack of food. The Ministry had tried a bit and it didn't work, the World Food Program (WFP) was there with the school canteens which have not worked in recent years. (IDI, Program actor, Female, 9/10/2020).

3.1.7. Suggested strategies to improve girls' education from the perspective of beneficiaries

Parents and adolescents also spoke about some strategies that can support the government's efforts to improve girls' education. The key strategies suggested by parents included assistance through support systems such as giving advice and extra academic help like tutoring, provision of school supplies and possibilities for communication and interaction to discuss important issues. On the other hand, adolescents requested for supported in the form of provision of learning resources and other basic needs as well as follow up on academic progress.

Most parents believed that it was necessary for them to have candid discussions with their girls about the need to take education seriously. As such, they advised their fellow parents to be close to their daughters by communicating with them and providing requisite support.

As a parent, you need to talk to your children and advise them to take school seriously. Now for the school supplies, you have to buy them in full so that the child can be in good conditions to succeed. On the pedagogical side, this is sometimes a problem because here, if you don't have enough money, you will have difficulty finding a tutor for the children, and if the parent doesn't have a good level of education, it's really difficult to do so. (IDI, Female Parent, Diourbel, 29/09/2020)

This was echoed by another parent who shared her opinion on the roles of a good parent:

For me, it's like I do, when I enroll my child in school, first of all I try to be closer to him to discuss with him and advise him. And if I have money before doing anything else I try to see what the child needs for his studies, that he doesn't lack anything, or doesn't lack clothes. (IDI, Female Parent, Matam, 4/10/2020)

In line with narratives from adolescents, there was a call for respect and consideration of children's opinions with regard to their education and the way in which they wanted to be helped. According to the teens, their voices, whether those of girls or boys, deserve to be heard as they have different needs. Additionally, adolescents felt that parents ought to invest in their schooling journey, whether or not they are educated. One adolescent summarized this by saying:

For me, what is a bit missing is to know the children's opinion on how they would like to be supported and accompanied by their parents to succeed in school education. In my opinion, even if parents have not had the chance to go to school, they should still offer this chance to their children whether they are girls or boys. In addition to this, they must also provide the necessary support in terms of school materials, clothing and even a tutor if the parents are not educated. (IDI, Adolescent Boy, Ziguinchor, 8/10/2020)

One of the narratives that stands out is of one adolescent who voiced his dissatisfaction of living around many “out-of-school children”. The adolescent from Dakar claimed that girls should be given the chance to focus more on their studies rather than on domestic chores. She urged the community and religious leaders to visit families and raise awareness as well as inform parents about education being part of children’ rights:

They need to let the children concentrate more on their studies because if the child has to go to school and come back home to do the housework, or if the child who goes to school knows that he or she will have to go downstairs to sell or do some other commercial activities, in this way, they are often disturbed and will not concentrate in class. A child who is studying should be encouraged to concentrate only on his or her studies and not be given other tasks to do in addition to school. The community, especially religious leaders and the municipality, should go into homes to sensitize parents and let them know that education is a right for children. Because our locality is home to many children who are not at school. We often see children who are only 12 years old and who have dropped out of school to work as "housekeepers". (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Dakar, 7/10/2020)

Adolescents also requested that parents play their part through supporting and motivating them by rewarding those who do well.

Parents must accompany, supervise and encourage their children to study. But also discuss with them and encourage them. They must supervise and control their children. And above all, they must reward their children who do well. For example, if your child comes out top of his class in the semester evaluation, you should give him a gift; that way he will be happy and will want to continue to work well in class. And if the child shows this gift to his classmates, they will want to work better in class and be rewarded by their parents. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Diourbel, 28/09/2020).

3.1.8. Gender preferences for schooling and programs

All beneficiaries believed that both boys and girls deserve the chance to go to school. The question was asked specifically to parents and adolescents with the “word clouds” from the qualitative data displaying no difference as shown by the narratives below:

I don't see any difference, education is essential for everyone and also wherever a man has a job, a woman can have the same. (IDI, Parent Female, Kaffrine 8/10/2020).

Now, there is no difference, girls occupy the higher ranks than boys; now what boys can do, girls can do that's why I don't see any difference (IDI, Parent Female, Ziguinchor 14/10/2020).

There is no difference, they must all be put on the same level. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Matam, 4/10/2020).

While majority of the beneficiaries advocated for no discrimination, some still believed in the need to have more supportive programs for girls as they are still marginalized. According to some adolescents, girls are more prone to dropping out and so need more support systems. Others believed that boys’ education is more important because they are breadwinners and are expected to be family leaders.

School education for boys! Because the boy is called to be the head of the family. (IDI, Adolescent Boy, Kaffrine, 7/10/2020)

No! Both boys and girls have both to study to succeed. I think the programs should benefit girls more because a girl's education is fragile, she can easily drop out. So if she can always have someone to encourage her; that would be good. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Diourbel, 28/09/2020)

3.1.9. Explaining regional education difference

Questions on regional differences were only asked to the ministry officials and program actors due to their experiences working and programming in the various regions of Senegal. Findings from the Exploratory Study indicated that poverty and religion were the main reasons why Diourbel and Kaffrine lagged behind in terms of education outcomes. This substantiated the Scoping Review finding that illustrated the strong Islamic influence on Koranic education and the weakness of interventions in these central regions. According to respondents, the successful influence of French education as well as positive population dynamics to formal schooling, along with the influence of Christianity, accounted for the advanced education outcomes in Ziguinchor and Dakar. In addition, Dakar as the capital city was perceived to be privileged in terms of adequate school infrastructure, interventions and resources.

3.1.9.1. Diourbel and Kaffrine

One ministry official summed up the religious realities of the two regions in addition to rampant poverty and isolation in Kaffrine that was associated with the low rate of enrollment.

You can understand that through the area, they are generally religious cities. As for Kaffrine, I would say it's a problem of remoteness, the poverty rate can be high there. However, for Diourbel, I would say that it is a religious capital. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 3/10/2020).

Another ministry official explained that from a sociological standpoint, the two regions of Diourbel and Kaffrine are rural and very religious and their people prefer to send children to the 'Daaras' (religious informal school called also "Koranic school") as highlighted in the Scoping Review.

There is a sociological explanation to this because these are religious areas. They prefer their children to go to the 'daara' (Koranic school) rather than to the French school because for them slavery still continues and they also think that the French school will divert the children on a wrong path. That is also the case in Kaffrine, it is not only a rural area but also a religious area. And this population encourages emigration more than education. The young people are in fishing, others emigrate and the rest practice trade from an early age to become great traders. Therefore, even the young people who are mobilized to go to school abandon their studies in the long run because for them studies are of no use. Basic education in these areas is the 'daara'. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

Program actors corroborated these views, confirming that people do not believe in their children receiving a formal education, let alone educating girls. One of them explained that:

In these areas too, we see that there are sociological realities that need to be taken into account. So, because of these sociological realities and the strong tradition too, people think that the purpose of life for a girl is to get married and have children, so what is the importance of staying in school? Young boys too are in informal schools like the 'Daaras' and we have to take into account these factors which mean that perhaps in formal education, we don't have a high rate. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 4/10/2020)

3.1.9.2. Dakar and Ziguinchor

Turning to Ziguinchor and Dakar, narratives from ministry officials and program actors endorsed findings from the Scoping Review and added that parents from those regions are conscious of the importance of education. Moreover, Dakar as the capital of Senegal, epitomizes modernization with the presence of many schools, which facilitate enrollment of girls and boys.

Ziguinchor is one of the first regions where education rate is very high, and often people's mentality in this region is a bit open. It's a very diverse region where parents are aware of the importance of studies because many executives from Casamance and Ziguinchor have gone through school. For Dakar, it is normal, it is an urban area, and it is the capital. The phenomenon of modernization or education, and this has been the case since the colonial period, is what has led to the fact that until now there are many schools in Dakar, there are training centers, reception centers that allow young people to be able to do their studies. (KII, Program actor, Male, 15/10/2020)

For Ziguinchor, I think it's an area with a high level of schooling, so the reasons may be because there is a cultural dimension somewhere, I think. There is also a fairly dense school map at this level, and the population has also understood the added value of schooling. For Dakar, the environment is favorable there too. So, we are in the capital city. As I said earlier, the level of education is coming back, the educational offer is quite diversified, and the availability of school structures is quite dense in Dakar. There are all the services and all the awareness raising around education and so on. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 02/10/2020)

3.1.10. Ideal educational program

Beneficiaries reflected on the ideal educational program they would like to have in their communities. According to parents, they yearn for programs that strike a balance between modernization and community values. For instance, they would prefer a program rooted in their culture with some religious foundation while being open to the world. A program that does not confuse, nor disorient children, one that is adapted to the realities of the Senegalese people. As one parent explained:

Well, I would say that a program centered on education should at least meet the expectations of people, of parents, in forming a well-trained citizenry; someone rooted in the culture of his country but also open to the modern world. A person should not be uprooted. The program should really have religious foundations; this is also often necessary in the programs, they are often ignored and for me it is an important link that can really play on the balance, especially in the future of these young people. (IDI, Parent Male, Sédhio 7/10/2020)

On the other hand, other parents sought programs that would enable young people to cope with future demand and challenges. A parent stated:


An ideal project must be useful to the community, must raise the young people's awareness and also have a projection on the future so that they can have ways and means out, in order to avoid certain future constraints. It should make them (young people) aware of the need to abstain until they can support themselves in order to avoid certain problems. The same applies to girls so that they can avoid early marriages, early pregnancies and thus be pushed to continue their studies so that they can help their parents also themselves. (IDI, Parent Male, Ziguinchor, 9/10/2020).

Other parents asked to be involved in the design of programs and interventions so that they could also provide their input on relevant content especially on education and health.

It will be a project with themes for discussion among the children. Parents will meet there to share their ideas, choose the most relevant ones for a better running of the program; to help the children more in the fields of education and health. (IDI, Parent Male, Ziguinchor, 15/10/2020).

3.2. ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

This section presents results on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for adolescent girls in Senegal. According to the Scoping Review, Senegalese adolescent girls face multiple difficulties in terms of reproductive health and yet they represent 22% of all women of childbearing age and



10% of women's total fecundity (ANSD, 2017). Consequently, it is important to discuss and confront these health problems by looking into girls' social environments to better understand the causes of their vulnerability. In doing so, the Exploratory Study gave voice to ministry officials, program actors, parents and adolescents to provide perspectives on the status of SRHR and to propose suitable recommendations that would remedy the situation.

This section first starts with adolescents' reflections on puberty and sexuality, and their evaluations of the health programs they have been enrolled in. Parents also share their assessments of the same programs and their suggestions for improved projects.

Secondly, ministry officials and program actors reflected on some reproductive health issues such as the causes of early marriage, pregnancy and excision, specifically in certain regions, based on the results of the Scoping Review. They also propose some solutions to the problems and discuss the state of collaboration between the government and the different programs on education and reproductive health.

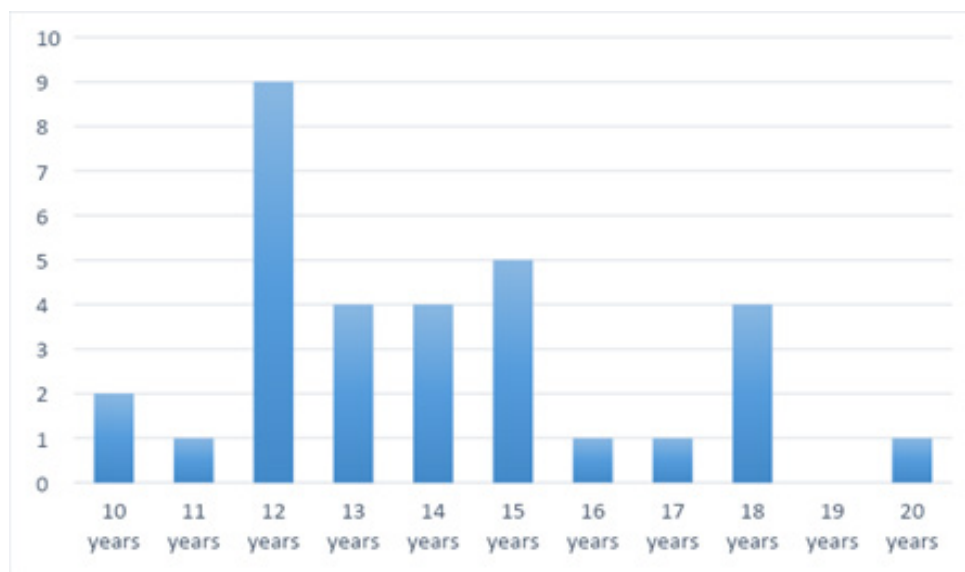
3.2.1. Adolescents' views on puberty and sexuality

Adolescence is understood to be a challenging time during which physical and cognitive changes occur (Slobodskaya, 2021). Children therefore need to be guided and supported to go through that developmental stage. However, as puberty and sexuality can be intimate issues that are not always openly discussed, it was important to understand whether our adolescent participants have had the chance to talk about these key issues with someone they trust.

Although the Scoping Review had noted a certain lack of dialogue between parents and adolescents on issues of sexuality and puberty, this study showed that children felt more comfortable talking with their parents over their siblings and peers. Girls sought advice from their mothers, sisters and friends whereas adolescent boys consulted with their fathers, brothers, uncles, friends or schoolmates. Consequently, it is important for projects and programs that aim to help children's education and well-being to involve parents at all stages of the interventions, especially at the decision making and implementation levels.

When asked about the ideal age that adolescents should discuss issues on puberty and sexuality, most of them felt that between 12 to 15 years would be ideal (Figure 1). These responses are important to consider in planning initiatives on reproductive health within communities and schools.

Figure 1: Ideal age to discuss puberty and sexuality



These results point to the necessity for programs to address issues of reproductive health as early as 12 years of age. However, the Scoping Review found that most peer education programs and youth centers tend to attract older youth and rarely plan to meet the specific needs of very young adolescents (UNFPA, 2012). Yet, based on this Exploratory Study, issues of early marriages and early pregnancies in Senegal may occur as early as 12 years. Consequently, health and sectorial policies need to take into full consideration younger adolescents' needs and claims.

3.2.2. Appreciation of programs by beneficiaries

Health programs have been implemented in almost all of Senegal's territory, although at different levels based on the situation within each region. The beneficiaries of such programs shared their opinions on the different projects they had or have been participated in. Both parents and adolescents were grateful for what they have learned, experienced and/or gained, due to those initiatives. The "word clouds" from interviews with parents found that the most common words were: "useful", "beneficial", "advantageous" and "help". As for adolescents they also used words such as "beneficial", "yes", "for sure", "useful", "good", "help learn", "library", etc." to express their appreciation.

Parents held the view that the adolescent health programs were beneficial to the children in disseminating important information on issues such as early marriage and in broadening their view of the world through travel opportunities.

I think she sees the benefits of the program, because whenever she comes back from meetings, she talks about some of the beneficiaries who have traveled through the EDEN program (a local association) as part of their education. I often hear from her that the program says that parents should not give their daughters into marriage at an early age. (IDI, Parent Female, Dakar, 6/10/2020)

Another parent noted that initially, he was reluctant to enroll his daughter into such programs thinking that it would hamper her studies. However, the program ended up contributing positively to his daughter's maturity, awareness, empowerment, and self-belief and in her capabilities to progress in her studies.

Yes, if it wasn't beneficial, I would even have asked her to stop for a while, well and for the last two years, she feels at ease, it's not an overload in her studies for her already, it's very important but it's in line with the content of the teaching programs....Anyway, what I have noticed about her is that she is much more aware than us, that she can succeed in her studies, she is going to stay at school, to go to the top and continue but also, she is gaining experience with this project; well I said the meetings, the sharing and everything that is done there, I think, she is gaining more and more maturity. (IDI, Parent Male, Sédhiou, 7/10/2020)

Like parents, adolescents shared their gratitude for the different initiatives that guided, enlightened and contributed to their well-being and education.

One adolescent disclosed that she had learned meaningful lessons which she shared with her mother whom she is very close to. For instance, she notified her mother about the risks of excision. This implies that they had discussed the dangers of excision and its negative consequences on girls' health and well-being, in her program. She explained:

Yes, at least for me it is very beneficial because I often talk to my mother about it, we get along very well. I tell her about the risks of excision. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Sédhiou, 9/10/2020)

Another adolescent confirmed that all the program's activities are centered on education and reproductive health. She believed that the latter is crucial and helpful for adolescent boys and girls who are unaware of the many risks and adversities they could encounter during that difficult stage of their life.

Of course. Because the project as such doesn't only talk about education, it also talks about reproductive health, so reproductive health is very normal for a girl, for a pubescent boy, who have just become teenagers. It helps us a lot because at the age of puberty, we're just messing around and the project helps us to study how to overcome these difficulties. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Sédhiou, 12/10/2020)

Moreover, narratives from the adolescents reinforced the valuable returns from adolescent SRHR programs. One adolescent pointed out that, since there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy in the area, the project provides them with advice on abstinence and hard work in school. Youth in the program are also encouraged to relay the information learned, so as to raise awareness among their peers.

Yes, the project also helps us, as there are many teenage pregnancies; it advises us to abstain and to commit ourselves to do good things and to learn at school too, not to neglect our studies. It helps a lot with the education of the children. We hold meetings to raise awareness among other people, to help them. We do it in schools too. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Ziguinchor, 9/10/2020)

Apart from the reproductive health understanding and knowledge gained, other benefits from the various programs included imparting vital skills such as public speaking and networking with important personalities. This adolescent contended that some of the programs have multiple purposes:

Yes, it is a beneficial project because I learned a lot of things I didn't know. I am able to do public speaking, which they taught us for 3 years. We have done a lot of training, we have also built relationships with personalities through the project. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Ziguinchor, 15/10/2020)

⁶ Education and Child Development

3.2.3. Issues of early pregnancy and marriage

The Scoping Review found that adolescent pregnancy is linked to early marriages and remains very high in Senegal. Statistics reveal that “in 2011, the national proportion for women, aged 20-24 who gave birth before age 18 was about 21%.” Among those young girls, 32% are in rural areas and have no education, while 2.4% are from urban areas and 0.2% have secondary education. By age group, 78% of pregnancy cases occurred between 12 and 18 years with 25.6% happening before age 15. It was also observed in the review that among girls aged 15-19 years, those living in rural areas with no education and in the lowest wealth quintile have the worst statistical outcomes (ANSD, 2017; GEEP & UNFPA, 2019).

In 2019, teen pregnancies rose to 32.7% compared to 31.48% in 2018, according to the Scoping Review (Abuya et al., 2020). This situation for girls between 12 and 19 years, affects 439 middle and secondary schools out of 1,356 schools (GEEP & UNFPA, 2019). As a result, the phenomenon of early marriages and pregnancies has contributed to low levels of school retention and completion for girls in comparison to boys. The issue of early pregnancy poses a critical challenge to the education system, especially in middle and high schools.

As a follow up to the Scoping Review, the present study explored the perspectives of ministry officials and program actors in order to have a clearer understanding of the situation and to reflect on meaningful measures that can address this trend.

3.2.3.1. Main causes of early pregnancy

The Scoping Review revealed the contextual barriers influencing early marriage such as socio-cultural and economic realities. These obstacles were confirmed by stakeholders as impacting negatively on girls’ education and well-being. In addition to poverty and traditional values, ministry officials identified the absence of support mechanisms or weaknesses in existing mechanisms that prevented youth from having their questions on sexuality addressed. They also mentioned the absence of communication and the lack of awareness on existing structures of assistance among the community. Program actors confirmed issues of poverty and recognized the precocity of youth sexuality which they deemed problematic in certain areas, particularly in the South.

A ministry official reported on the lack of assistance and support for adolescent groups in need of sexual education. She accused society at large of giving up on the supervision and support of its youth.

We can always do things without being aware of the consequences, because we don't know ourselves. When the child is in a situation of sexual education, he needs to be accompanied. We do not (find) this accompaniment anymore in our society.

(KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

Some ministry officials criticized the negative influence of social media and the lack of vigilance by the family for exposing adolescents to social ills.

There is the fact that the adolescent is at a level of sexual maturation, they do not understand what happens to them. That is one element. We have lost the device of accompaniment of the children, to think about the media and the social networks, which burst in the life of these children, therefore a bad use of these media, and the social networks. There is a lack of supervision on the part of the family. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

It also became apparent that some stakeholders were opposed to some reproductive health programs that distribute condoms which in their view impact negatively on children's education and behavior by encouraging them to be sexually active.

First of all, when we talk about reproductive health, I have a different idea. Because you take your child and you make him aware of the use of condoms so that girls cannot get pregnant and go to school. I say it is destroying the education of the child. Because when we talk about prevention or sensitization it is for the married people etc. and now we let children use condoms for free, that is destruction of the education of children. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

3.2.3.2. Explaining the regional disparities in early pregnancy

The Exploratory Study also addressed the reasons behind the regional disparities in early pregnancy. For instance, the Southern regions such as Sédhiou, with 198 pregnancy cases and Ziguinchor with 168 pregnancy cases, had one of the highest rates of school pregnancy among unmarried adolescents. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Dakar (38), Diourbel (44) and Saint Louis (39) had the lowest cases of teen pregnancy among schoolgirls. The situation in these regions were discussed with ministry officials and program actors.

According to key stakeholders, the main causes of adolescent pregnancies in the southern regions of Sédhiou and Ziguinchor can be related to poverty and the precocity of adolescent sexuality. The immaturity of adolescents coupled with limited financial means and some local sexually liberal attitudes lead to adolescent involvement in sexual activities leading to pregnancy.

The regions of Dakar, Diourbel and Saint Louis which have low rates of teen pregnancy seem to cope satisfactorily with this issue in comparison to the southern regions. According to key stakeholders, the main reasons for this satisfactory coping may be related to specific characteristics and realities in those regions. Religious aspects with respect to islamic values and principles in Diourbel and Saint Louis contribute towards regulating teenagers' behavior and inhibiting their sexual activities. In the case of Dakar, its privileged position as capital of Senegal, along with the presence of support systems that raise awareness on adolescent sexuality, are factors that may explain its relatively low teen pregnancy rate.

One ministry official explained that there are many programs in the high pregnancy rate areas and that socio-cultural beliefs along with issues of poverty are the main drivers of the high rates. Being pregnant is more acceptable in certain ethnic groups compared to others.

Socio-cultural phenomena could explain this situation because I know these two regions well, I have carried out a lot of activities there. There are some single girl mothers that I had met and when I asked them the question; one of them answered that at a certain age if you don't have a boyfriend, if you don't have a child, if you don't have a husband, the family laughs at you saying that the others have already proved themselves and you nobody expects anything from you. And so sociological, socio-cultural factors and the mentalities of each ethnic group in Senegal mean that it is more widespread in these areas. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 7/10/2020)

Program actors also pointed out issues of poverty and the lack of sexual education as being contributory factors for young girls' exposure to the risk of pregnancy.

I think that there is a lack of information on sexuality, so we have to give them the right message. There are also issues of poverty. Because children are vulnerable; for (the sake of) a good snack at school, they can go beyond. If we don't prepare them psychologically, this lack of awareness could increase their vulnerability. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 7/10/2020)

As stated earlier, the cases of Dakar, Diourbel and Saint Louis which have low pregnancy rates can be explained by viable teenage support systems in the capital and by religious education in the other regions, which tends to limit incidences of early pregnancies. One ministry official confirmed Dakar's exceptionality as the national capital and its numerous centers for adolescents alongside information and support systems.

This is due to awareness-raising. There are adolescent centers, partners who fight against early pregnancies in schools, which are based in Dakar. But on top of all this, information and communication is easier in these regions, particularly in Dakar. And another phenomenon which explains this low rate is that girls are practically much more aware of contraception than other girls in the regions in the interior of the country. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 7/10/2020)

As proposed by one program actor, religious education in Diourbel and Saint Louis plays a significant role in stopping the community from engaging in social ills.

For example, the region of Diourbel is almost religious, so they have a religious education that allows them to take charge of their lives and protect themselves from certain acts; the region of Saint-Louis is also practically the same. Young people also have a much more open mind, whether in Saint-Louis or Dakar. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 5/10/2020)

3.2.3.3. Main causes of early marriage

Senegal has committed to fight against child, early and forced marriages. The country ratified the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Target 5.3 which looks to, "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Senegal also ratified the joint statement of the Human Rights Council on strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriages. Despite these endorsed resolutions on child marriage, Senegal remains among the countries in West Africa with the lowest median age at marriage of 15 years followed by Sierra Leone at 17 years, based on the results of the Scoping Review (ANCEFA et al., 2009). In 2011, the overall proportion of women aged between 20-24 years who got married before the age of 18 was about 33% (GEEP & UNFPA, 2019). This highlights the huge gap between the signed conventions and the realities in Senegal.

In addition, Senegalese society is characterized by a strong patriarchal tradition, as well as a well-defined hierarchy between sexes and generations (Kane & Kane, 2018). As such, the family and the social group have a significant influence on individual choices. Some groups support early marriages because they magnify the roles of wife and mother while others would choose early marriage as a way to protect their daughters from unplanned pregnancies.

In general, ministry officials and program actors validated the socio-cultural and economic factors revealed in the Scoping Review that could explain the realities of early pregnancy. They also mentioned the lack of political willpower to act on the family law and enforce the signed resolution on early marriages. The highlighted terms in 'word clouds' derived from interviews with ministry officials and program actors were "cultural", "religious" and "socio-economic".

One ministry official regretted the lack of legal endorsement to outlaw early marriage while also drawing attention to the cultural aspects that support such practices and the fear of unwanted pregnancies that pushes some groups to promote early marriages.

What is lacking is the political will concerning marriages. At age 16, there is no legal framework that prohibits marriage or to consummate marriage. So, the girl is practically a lost girl. I always come back to the cultural dimension in certain localities, when the girl is not married, at a certain age, she is considered to be an old maid. There is also fear of girl

pregnancies in some localities (which) means that the girl is given (away) in marriage early. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

Besides, a program actor explained how parents were inclined to marry their teenagers in order to prevent them from getting pregnant, due to the shame it brings to certain families and communities:

Factors that explain early marriages are, among others, the precocity of the girls. The desire of their parents to prevent an unwanted pregnancy can lead them to give them in marriage on the one hand and on the other hand to avoid the shame of ending up with an unwanted pregnancy. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 3/11/2020)

Furthermore, another program actor touched on the economic causes of early marriage and pregnancy:

In terms of the results obtained through the studies that have been carried out in areas that show that parents marry their children according to the social determinants of poverty, dignity, respect and also all the issues related today to the virginity of the girl. These are the results obtained through studies that have been carried out. And these aforementioned social determinants explain why parents often marry their children. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 4/10/2020)

3.2.3.4. Explaining the regional disparities in child marriage

Looking at regional disparities, stakeholders confirmed that tradition, poverty and religion were supporting or causing early marriages in Thiès, Matam and Kaffrine. A program actor confirmed these statements, particularly in Matam where the major ethnic group of Pulars are deeply rooted in their traditions of early marriage.

Sometimes, for regions like Matam, it's a question of social norms, there is a strong religious belief, a belief in culture which means that among the Halpoulars, they give children in marriage at a very early age. It's culturally certified, accepted that a child has to be given away very early in marriage. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 30/09/2020)

To corroborate the above statement, a ministry official pointed out the negative influence of culture on early marriages in some areas:

As far as Matam is concerned, it is because of tradition and religion. Because among the Toucouleurs (or Halpoulars), girls marry very young, and the ethnic tradition is also predominant in this social environment. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 3/10/2020)

Another program actor talked about poverty as a contributing factor to early marriages in the above-mentioned regions.

In other areas, the main factor is poverty. This means that with the dowry, the family has the possibility to improve their income and also to allow the girl to be less of a burden. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 30/09/2020)

3.2.4. Explaining excision in the regions of Senegal

The environment and region of residence, level of education, and level of economic well-being also determine the probability of a girl being subjected to female circumcision, according to the Scoping Review (Abuya et al., 2020; ANSD, 2017). For example, results showed that in 2017, 14% of girls aged 0-14 in Senegal were subject to female circumcision and 92% of the girls reported that it happened before they turned 10 years old. In addition, in the regions of Matam, Kédougou, Tambacounda, Ziguinchor and Kolda, more than one third of girls up to age 14 were circumcised. This shows the wide prevalence of excision in the country, despite the resolution voted on by the Senegalese government under the Law 99-05 of January 29, 1999 prohibiting the practice of female genital mutilation and imposition of a penalty that could range from 6 months to 5 years imprisonment. This

was supplemented in 2000 with the introduction of a national plan of action for abandonment of the practice. As part of that plan, women who used to perform such excisions have been retrained in legal income-generating occupations (Law n° 99-05 of January 29th 1999).

Findings from the Scoping Review indicated that the more educated a mother is, the less likely her girls are exposed to excision. As such, it was observed that 16% of girls whose mothers had no education went through circumcision compared to 6% of girls whose mother had a middle/secondary level or higher education. Large differences were also observed between households with a high standard of living (4%) those with lower living standards (26%) (ANSD, 2017).

In addition to the level of schooling, socio-cultural barriers to girls' protection and well-being were also commonly mentioned. Key terms from the 'word clouds' based on the interviews range from "tradition", "islamic religion", "cultural, ethnic values and realities".

Ministry officials and program actors discussed the main sources of excision in the South East regions, specifically in Matam, Kédougou, Tambacounda, Ziguinchor and Kolda where more girls are exposed to excision in comparison to the less affected regions such as Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaffrine, Kaolack, Louga and Thiès. Diverse cultural values within the regions and among the ethnic groups are key explanatory factors in all these regions. While some ethnic groups such as Pulars or Fulanis, Maninkas, Soninkes, Bambaras, practice excision, others like Wolof and Sereres are unfamiliar with this practice.

In the southern region, ministry officials and program actors confirmed the persistence of traditional values that impact girls' well-being, especially in those regions where many ethnic groups practice excision.

It's cultural and it's the first practicing ethnicities that live in these localities, that's why the data shows that there are a lot of cases (in) these areas, there are socio-cultural practices. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 5/10/2020)

According to ministry officials, besides the cultural traditions that impose excision, girls who do not go through it, are believed to be impure and are not respected in their communities.

First of all, excision is part of their traditions and customs. The proof, if for example you are not excised, you are perceived as impure or even trivialized in the eyes of the community, in addition, there is the refusal to eat the meals cooked by an uncircumcised girl. She will not be given in marriage either. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

Parents were also said to be misinformed about female genital mutilation being a good means of protecting girls against early sexuality. As a result, they continue to practice it behind closed doors.

Indeed, excision is first and foremost a cultural and traditional phenomenon. In Peulh families, it is said that the girl is excised to protect her, so that she does not engage in early sexuality. Ignoring the fact that it is not a just immediate solution but a lifelong trauma. These regions are made up of conservative populations who continue to practice excision in secret. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 5/10/2020)

Both ministry officials and program actors observed that when communities are not rooted in the practice, they are less likely to practice it. This program actor observes:

This is because these communities are Wolofs and "ceddos" and therefore they do not know and do not do this practice. In Touba, who is going to do the excision? Nobody because they don't know. In Thiès, it's the Cadior area, they don't know about excision; in Kaolack it is also the same. In Fatick, there was a little bit of the Serere community that did excision,

but they were few in number, and in Louga too, it's always the Wolofs and they don't do it. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

This is because culturally they are less affected by this phenomenon. I say culturally, these ethnic groups are less anchored to the practice of excision. This means that the prevalence in these regions is lower than in the regions (with) people of Mandingo and Halpular origins, who are inclined to continue the practice. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 3/11/2020)

3.2.5. Proposed solutions to early pregnancies, marriage and excision

After discussing the main causes of early pregnancies and marriages and excision, ministry officials and program actors who play key roles in addressing these challenging realities, also recommended resolutions.

Ministry officials insisted on the reinforcement of support systems, the organization of activities for awareness and for advocacy in collaboration with women's associations like FAWE which are dedicated to the reproductive health and well-being of girls, in urban and rural areas. They also suggested the use of TV, radios and social media to reach wider audiences.

First of all, the support programs for girls' education, in terms of granting scholarships, in terms of uniforms, in terms of reinforcing pupils with learning difficulties, in terms of awareness-raising. There is a partnership with the women's organizations that provide education, the National Service of Education for Health (SNEPS) too. We also have all the programs run by these structures. I take the case of FAWE, which has provided the means to raise awareness among children, especially girls. So there is all the work of training the actors. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

Awareness-raising, the public authorities raise awareness through sketches, through radio, television and the ADO centers that are everywhere. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 7/10/2020)

The centers of the Ministry of Youth, the teenage centers with the support of partners. There are centers dedicated to this to instruct, educate and also guide girls to take precautions to avoid contracting these pregnancies at a very early age. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 6/10/2020)

As for program actors who are in charge of local projects, they recognized the good progress made for the promotion of girls' education and health. However, they also reiterated that issues of reproductive health are complicated in Senegal, given the many reservations of families and communities as well as their unhealthy perceptions about reproductive health actors and programs. Some would even equate reproductive health education with promotion of perversions among the youth. They recommended close collaboration with local leaders such as "Badienou Gokh" (Aunties in the communities) who fight for the well-being of the communities while also playing a significant role in helping change negative stereotypes around reproductive health education.

There have been positive developments around the various programs. However, it must be acknowledged that the issue of reproductive health is complicated by a great deal of reticence and unhealthy considerations. In our socio-cultural context, talking about reproductive health education would be tantamount to promoting perversion among young girls. There is much more to be done in reproductive health than in education. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 5/10/2020).

I think that there are still things to be done, we must recognize that, but all is not lost, there are good things and there are things that we must improve. If today there is a critical mass, we must also maintain this critical mass. So, in these regions,

we even see "Badjenou Gokh" who talk with other parents to help them understand certain practices are not meant to pervert. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 7/10/2020).

3.2.6. Ideal program in SRHR

In terms of the ideal programs for implementation, both the parents and adolescents asked for programs that have follow-ups and in-built evaluations for the sake of improvement and sustainability. In addition, they suggested that projects should be co-created and implemented, primarily in liaison with communities while keeping in mind the region's socio-cultural realities.

Parents also suggested having projects that involve them and which focus on pertinent themes that can foster relevant discussions between themselves and children.

It will be a project with topics for discussion among the children. The parents will meet to share their ideas, choose the most relevant ideas for a better development of the program; help the children in the fields of education and health. (IDI, Male Parent, Ziguinchor, 15/10/2020)

Further, other parents pointed to projects that enlighten the youth and help them to face the difficulties which they may experience in future, such as those promoting abstinence until they are able to support themselves.

An ideal project must be useful to the community, must awaken the young people and also have a projection on the future so that they can have ways and exits, to avoid certain future constraints. It should make them (the youth) aware of abstaining until they can support themselves, in order to avoid certain problems. It is the same for the girls so that they preserve themselves to avoid early marriages, early pregnancies and thus push them to continue their studies so that they can help their parents but also themselves. (IDI, Male Parent, Ziguinchor, 9/10/2020).

3.2.7. Proposed strategies to improve programs on education and reproductive health

Some stakeholders such as program actors reflected on strategies to improve girls' education and reproductive health issues. These actors are in the heart of different activities planned by the Senegalese government and its partners (NGOs, local organizations, etc.) on behalf of diverse communities. Although they are trained to carry out and deliver pre-determined programs, they also believe that the success of most of the projects depends significantly on allying with key community members to support the causes they are advancing and the discourse they are promoting. They reiterated the need for close alliances with socio-cultural leaders such as 'Badjenou Gokh' who are representatives of the communities, as well as with religious leaders and parents, teachers and school authorities. This aligns with what adolescents have suggested for an ideal program that integrates parents and teenagers. Besides the mandatory teamwork approach from inception of projects to their implementation/execution, program actors also emphasized the importance of communication through all possible media to pass on messages and facilitate understanding.

At the strategic level, they advised on the need for comprehensible and honest communication with partners to enlighten them on the holistic character of programs that should not be limited by a sectoral mindset. Key terms from the "word clouds" are "sensitize", "community leaders", "school authorities", "Badjenou Gokh", "communication", "engagement" and "families".

The following narrative explain in a nutshell, strategies suggested by program actors that need to be strengthened in order to achieve set objectives that impact education and the well-being of Senegalese youth in different regions.

It's particularly on the socio-cultural actors, I think that (there is great) work with the communities and the teachers to be able to make them carry these questions and these problems and to be able to approach them according to the way which is also appropriate to them. Not to impose a model on the way, what should we say? How should we do it? But also to be able to enter into a kind of co-creation process where we agree on the important messages to be conveyed and we reflect together on the best way to do it, including by involving people from outside the school when necessary or relevant. (KII, Male Program Actor, 13/10/2020)

3.2.8. Uniqueness of Ziguinchor

Ziguinchor is one of the 14 regions of Senegal located in the South-East part of the country. It is bordered by the Republic of Gambia in the North, Republic of Guinea Bissau in the South, the regions of Kolda, Sédhiou in the East and the Atlantic Ocean in the West. It also borders the republics of Guinea and Mauritania, which contributes to its cosmopolitan character. The region is composed of diverse ethnic groups such as Diolas (57.8%), Mandingues (11.10%), Pulaars (10.5%), Wolofs (3.9%), Manjacks (3.5%), Ballantes (2.9%), Sérères (2.70%) and Mancagnes (2.4%) (ANSD, 2013). It is rich in ethnic and cultural diversity with a few ethnic groups located in specific areas. The dominant religions are Islam (78%) and Christianity (18%), however, there is a strong presence of animists and pagans in the Department of Oussouye (32.7%) (ANSD, 2008).

Based on the results of the Scoping Review, Ziguinchor showed mixed results that implied a complex situation in the region. On the one hand, it has one of the highest rates of school success among girls. For instance, the achievement rates of girls in primary level of education stands at 91.0% compared to the national rate of 68.8% and 83.2% for Dakar. At the middle school level, the achievement rates of girls stand at 75.1% compared to the national rate of 67.5% and 72.2% for Dakar. At the secondary school level, the achievement rates of girls in Ziguinchor stands at 61.98% compared to the national rate of 26.34% and 40.72% for Dakar (DPRE, 2018). However, the rate of early pregnancies among schoolgirls remains high at 12.72% after Thiès (13.02%) and Sédhiou (14.99%) (GEEP & UNFPA, 2019).

3.2.8.1. Explaining the education indicators in Ziguinchor

Comparison of the GER at the middle school level, shows higher rates for the regions of Ziguinchor (73.9%), Dakar (68.9%) and Thiès (54.7%) in contrast to regions such as Kaffrine (17.7%), Diourbel (22.1%) and Tambacounda (26.7%). The middle school GER for Ziguinchor is better than that for the capital, Dakar, notwithstanding all its facilities and support systems. In addition, even though completion rates in secondary education vary from region to region, Ziguinchor still leads with 61.6%, followed by Dakar with 39.9% and Thiès with 32.2% (DPRE, 2018).

Program actors, ministry officials and beneficiaries from Ziguinchor were unanimous about the dedication of the education stakeholders in the region to achieving better schooling results. The reasons given for the continued commitment to improved schooling outcomes include the effective campaign for education for all in Ziguinchor during which all interested parties (parents, the government of Senegal, local and international organizations, civil society) played their part for the success of that pledge. Secondly, Ziguinchor's geographic situation exposes the population to the world and therefore to the importance of learning and education. Thirdly, other stakeholders

referred to historical episodes, such as the encounter with French Christian schooling as accounting for the success in Ziguinchor. That colonial heritage has influenced the region's openness to French schooling in comparison to other regions like Diourbel where the Islamic power has been stronger and where the success of Christian schools has been limited due to the presence of many existing Koranic schools. This historical fact still explains Diourbel's low enrollment rate in formal education and Ziguinchor's success with formal schooling.

A population that has believed in education since colonial times

Two ministry officials attributed the good academic performance of Ziguinchor to its well-informed and engaged population, who understand the value of education. The ministry officials further described the Ziguinchor region as exhibiting good education results due to the cultural dimension of the region with local people who understand the benefits of schooling.

This ministry official explained that:

For Ziguinchor, I think it's an area with a high level of schooling, so the reasons may be because there is a cultural dimension somewhere, I think. There is also a fairly dense school map at this level, and the population has also understood the added value of schooling. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 02/10/2020)

The second ministry official observed that:

We should not forget that Senegal is a secular country and people know the value of education. French is their second language, so school is compulsory in this area. Because even if you don't study you have problems. So it's sociologically part of their life and there are a lot of Christians there. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 02/10/2020)

The narratives of ministry officials speak to the statistics from ANSD (2018), which noted that the number of schools in Ziguinchor has been increasing, especially private schools from kindergarten to secondary school along with professional schools. For instance, early childhood care facilities increased by 15% from 2017 to 2018 and kindergartens by 165%. As for primary schooling, the public schools have a 1% increase compared to the private ones with a 7% increase. The amount of school infrastructure at the middle and secondary levels improved by 4% and 11% respectively in 2018 in the Ziguinchor region compared to 2017. In recent years, besides the national vocational schools established in the area, Ziguinchor has many regional manufacturing and industrial units that guarantee young people better integration into the labor market. The region also has two universities (one private and one public) and 20 higher education institutes, 75% of which are private (ANSD, 2018). The ministry officials' sentiments are in tandem with what was captured during the Scoping Review analysis.

Program actors confirmed the positive attitude of the region's population towards schooling. They explain that not only was Ziguinchor among the regions that were exposed to education early during colonialism, but people from the area have also an open mentality due to its geographic situation and cosmopolitan reality. Furthermore, they pointed out the presence of numerous private catholic schools in the region and mentioned the many successful personalities in the region, who are products of the educational environment in Ziguinchor. They were hopeful that these reasons were sufficient to convince and remind parents about the worth of education. One of the program actors explained:

Ziguinchor is among the first regions to be schooled, and often the mentality of this region is a bit open, it is a very diverse region where parents are aware of the importance of education because many executives from Casamance, Ziguinchor have gone through school. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 15/10/2020)

Another program actor confirmed the above testimony and referred to the sociological aspect about private catholic schooling.

There is the sociological context, if you take the region of Ziguinchor, you know that there are many public or private missionaries, the Catholic Church and you know that the Catholic Church intervenes in health with dispensaries etc. But also in the private education that we call private catholic school. That's why there is this difference. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 28/09/2020)

It is known that during colonization, France used education as a means to achieve its imperialist objectives including spreading the French language and its cultural values in the colonies. Similarly, the church has been an effective means to achieve this end. According to Labrune-Badiane (2016), the Church, anxious to establish itself in the least Islamized region of Senegal (Casamance), took part in the promotion of French schooling in Casamance. As a result, the population of Casamance invested their time and efforts in school, which since then has been considered as a privileged path for social advancement and progress to public service, according to Fouchier (2002 in Labrune-Badiane, 2016).

Furthermore, from the archives (1978 in Labrune-Badiane, 2016), it is said that, "Education is perceived in Casamance as a surplus-priority by the populations who contribute in the multiplication of school infrastructure. There is even an anarchic proliferation symbolized by the existence of 201 temporary shelters that serve as classrooms (page 2). This historical reference supports the above statements from program actors with regards to Ziguinchor heritage of French education and its big success in education compared to other regions.

Besides, beneficiaries (parents and adolescents) confirmed the commitment of Ziguinchor's population to education. They explained that not only are parents supportive of their children's education, they also advise and motivate them while pressuring them to do better. They further said that young people are very conscious of their role as students and consequently do their best to thrive in school. They voiced their commitment to school success and cited their parents' support in pursuit of their dreams. Moreover, all parents who participated in the study reaffirmed their pledge to the education of both boys and girls with no gender preference whatsoever. Since colonial times, Ziguinchor has been among the first regions where girls' education has been instituted and supported.

A female parent from Ziguinchor explained how she is able to pressure her daughter into studying:

I do my best to help her in her education, because nowadays studies are essential or even indispensable. I support my daughter in her studies by advising her, putting pressure on her to make efforts in class. (IDI, Female Parent, Ziguinchor, 14/10/2020)

An adolescent girl from Ziguinchor elaborated on the need to work hard to achieve her goals:

I think that there is no problem because my parents help me to learn well, so sometimes I do private tutoring so that it can help me to advance in my studies. I have to make my commitments and tell myself that if I want to succeed, I have to study and not lose my concentration. I have to study when I get home, prepare my homework. If I have exercises to do, I deal with them at home when I arrive. I have made a new schedule for myself. Maybe if I come home from school, I can rest a

little bit and wait until the afternoon or evening to do my exercises and learn my lessons. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Ziguinchor, 9/10/2020)

Another girl from Ziguinchor validated and added:

My role in my education is to go to school, to study well, to do well to please my parents and make them proud. I aspire to study until I become a women's lawyer. In any case, I have several dreams, including becoming president of the Republic of Senegal. (IDI, Adolescent Girl, Ziguinchor, 15/10/2020)

The presence of good learning conditions

In addition to a population dedicated to education, one ministry official confirmed that the region's good results are due to the presence of better teachers and good learning conditions alongside the presence of canteens and school materials. This could explain the advanced position of Ziguinchor as far as education is concerned. The ministry official explained:

In Ziguinchor, there are better teachers and the students are in better conditions; they are perhaps in a safe and secure environment and that they have settled this school stability in school canteen, materials etc. That justifies their good results. (IDI, Ministry official, Female, 3/10/2020)

In the region, the relatively high completion rates showed that significant efforts have been made in improving the quality of education, as seen in the narrative of the ministry official. According to ANSD (2018), the GER rose from 85.6% in 2017 to 88.3%, in 2018 while the parity index increased by 1% in 2018 compared to 2017 in all departments of Ziguinchor region. Further, the average pupil to class ratio was 32 while the pupil to teacher ratio was 30 in 2018. This in comparison to most other regions in Senegal that had ratios of pupils per class and pupils per teacher above 50 (ANSD, 2018).

As far as teachers' academic qualifications are concerned, statistics support the ministry officials' narratives. The majority of primary teachers have a high school diploma (1,744/3,618 teachers) and 1,584 have a middle school diploma (BFEM). Since primary school teachers in Senegal are basically required to have at least the BFEM, it can be inferred that Ziguinchor region has teachers with good academic preparation and training. For middle school teachers, 70% have the BAC (Secondary School Completion Degree). 12% have the DEUG, which corresponds to a two year-degree from the university and 3% have a Master's degree. At the secondary level, 42% hold a Bachelor's degree, 37% have a Master's degree and 12% have the BAC. The amount of school infrastructure at the middle and secondary levels improved by 4% and 11% respectively in 2018 in the Ziguinchor region compared to 2017. This increase in the amount of public school infrastructure follows that of the private sector schools, both have grown respectively at 40% and 17% in 2018 compared to 2017 (ANSD, 2018).

As a result of such a favorable environment, the transition rate from the primary cycle to the middle level is 84.1% in 2018 in the Ziguinchor region, and 68.2% nationally. This rate has increased by 7% in the Ziguinchor region and 3% in the country compared to the year 2017. The same trends can be observed for transition from middle to secondary level. The rate has improved by 11% in 2018 compared to 2017. Consequently, the number of primary school students rose from 106,839 in 2017 to 108,232 in 2018, a growth of 1%, with an increase of 2% for girls reported for the same period (ANSD, 2018).

Despite Ziguinchor's top ranking in the country with strong education outcomes at all levels, the

region still needs to improve in certain aspects. Despite the high enrollment rate (110.80% boys; 109.40% girls) with a parity index in favor of boys (0.95), Ziguinchor has a dropout rate of 19.69% and repetition rate of 7.6% at the primary level (ANSD, 2018). Those rates are sometimes even higher at the middle and secondary levels. At the middle level, repetition rate varies between 19.8% to 22% and dropout rates from 8.4% to 16.7%, while at the secondary level, repetition ranges from 20.5% to 29.7% and the dropout rate from 14.6% to 40.6%. As such, statistics show that there are more boys who get their BFEM (67.96% of boys and 64.01% of girls) and Baccalaureate (28.96% of boys and 24.07% of girls) (ANSD, 2018).

These indicators reveal some limitations to the positive results of the Scoping Review which showed Ziguinchor as having the highest enrollment and admission rates compared to all regions, including Dakar the capital. However, this picture conceals some clear gender disparities and schooling issues in the region. While the general completion rate is high, it is still in favor of boys throughout the cycles. Thus, in Ziguinchor, there is a need for more strategies and programs to help capitalize on the high enrollment rates already achieved by boosting retention and completion rates, especially those of girls. As well, it is essential to significantly reduce the high dropout rates at all levels. These improvements could help maintain the region's lead in education.

3.2.8.2. Explaining the SRHR issues in Ziguinchor

If Ziguinchor is exemplary in education outcomes, the region shows a different character as far as reproductive health is concerned. While the population is described as being devoted to schooling since the colonial era, it could be inferred that their commitment to girls' well-being is questionable, as per the Scoping Review which highlighted issues of pregnancy, particularly in school. To understand the paradox, we listened to participants' reflections during the course of this study to obtain a clearer picture of the situation. Efforts by stakeholders (government, parents, civil society organizations) have boosted enrollment, and to a lesser degree retention and completion rates, but there is a lack of meaningful mechanisms to prevent teenage pregnancy, which is a drawback to girls' reproductive health and well-being. This also contributes to the paradox of high education outcomes and low reproductive health results.

From the Scoping Review, Ziguinchor and Sédhiou have the highest rates of pregnancies among adolescent girls. Among girls 12 to 19 years old, 168 girls from Ziguinchor were pregnant compared to 198 in Sédhiou, and 38 in Dakar (GEEP & UNFPA, 2019). Comparing by age group, we noted that even though the highest number of pregnancies was among adolescent girls aged 16 and 18 years, which corresponds to the period in secondary school, girls in Ziguinchor became pregnant as early as 12 years old., which corresponds to the period when these girls would be in primary school. At this age, girls are at the onset of puberty, and likely in their final year of primary school, which is an alarming situation. Pregnancy at 12 years implies that girls are exposed to early sexual initiation. It is therefore imperative to explore the social environment to better understand the causes of this vulnerability.

The Scoping Review presented some reasons for the early pregnancies. According to Abuya et al., (2020) there is a lack of fairly decentralized interventions in different regions, with a concentration of technical and financial partners for development aid programs in some specific regions. For example, while Dakar has 43 wide-ranging NGOs (11%) working on various programs, Ziguinchor has only 25

of them with 6.3% of the national projects, most of which are supported by UNICEF and a few NGOs from the United States.

Although this limited number of interventions could explain the region's lagging indicators in terms of girls' well-being, and the evidence of its high pregnancy rates for girls; participants from Ziguinchor explained this situation from a more sociological perspective. On the one hand, the cosmopolitan attributes of the region, due to its geographic location bordering multiple neighboring countries and its touristic qualities and assets, contribute to the prioritizing of education. On the other hand, these same characteristics present some disadvantages, in the sense that contact with foreigners coupled with low reproductive health awareness expose children, especially girls to early sex and consequently early pregnancy. The narrative of a parent below corroborates this assertion. A male parent observed that:

I admit that at the moment there were some concerns about the female gender. But for the male layer, people have become aware that education is something important that needs to be given special attention. Perhaps it is the female layer that is a little negatively affected with early marriages, work in the family that prevents a little progress in the school curriculum. There are also early pregnancies and I believe that this is something that is taking its toll here in the Ziguinchor region. And it deserves to be taken care of because it causes a lot of harm to this vulnerable group of women. (IDI, Male Parent, Ziguinchor, 8/10/2020)

Poverty issues causing adolescent vulnerability

Others refer to the poverty levels in Ziguinchor, a view that has been validated by the economic situation of the region (ANSD, 2018). The area is regarded as the breadbasket of Senegal with ample rainfall, fertile soil and the ideal topography for a large agricultural area, which it used to be in the past. This agricultural advantage is complemented by its seaport and airport facilities. Nevertheless, Ziguinchor remains characterized by a gloomy economic and social situation (ANSD, 2018), with more constraints than strengths and limited economic opportunities. To better understand the economic situation of Casamance and Ziguinchor, we refer to the historical analysis of the region by Trincaz (1984) in association with the statistics from the ANSD census of 2018.

According to Pierre Trincaz (1984) "...the city is a foreign creation and not a "Casamançaise" initiative. From the beginning, it was designed and built by exploiters, to the detriment of local people. Its primary role is that of commercial relay for the promotion of the plundering of Casamance by foreign groups" (Trincaz, 1984, p.225).

He states that Senegal's political and economic dependence to the metropole (France) has some negative consequences particularly on Ziguinchor. Despite the declared independence in 1960, Casamance and Ziguinchor in particular continues to see its resources exploited without much benefit for its inhabitants. Moreover, invasive tourism is disrupting people who do not receive much in the way of benefits. Trincaz (1984) finally concludes that Ziguinchor is paradoxically experiencing a double colonization, on the one hand, there is foreign capital owned by a minority of Europeans who continue to direct the economic system for their exclusive benefit. On the other hand, a second colonization or neo-colonialism has emerged since independence with the concentration of political and economic power in Dakar. This has left the region of Ziguinchor with little autonomy and its significance in the Senegalese economy has declined in favor of the capital. The picture of the economic situation of Ziguinchor described in the census along with its decline, contribute to hindering the development

of the region. Unfortunately, as stated by Trincaz, persistent insecurity in the region has limited the range of possibilities for exploitation and financing of resources.

Consequently, the participants' opinions which partly attributed teen pregnancies to poverty in Ziguinchor resonated well with the region's economic situation. Parents and ministry officials highlighted poverty as an important factor along with the region's geographical position at the crossroads of several bordering countries. Additionally, ministry officials stated that conflict, caused by an ongoing rebellion, has impoverished families who are barely surviving. This situation of poverty, conflict and the fact that the region borders many countries favors predatory sexual behavior and early sexual encounters as children are exploited by reckless adults, leading to early pregnancies. One ministry official went further and elaborated on the loss of land and consequently wealth by families which destabilized parents, leaving them more concerned about obtaining household food than addressing issues facing their adolescent children, especially their daughters.

It is poverty, as I said, if parents no longer have time to take care of their families, if everyone is looking for a job, if there is no time for survival, everyone goes their own way, these children can be exploited by irresponsible adults. It is always the effect of poverty, it is the consequences of poverty because Ziguinchor is not in the same situation as other regions, there is the rebellion, there are households that are evicted. The parents no longer have their land, they no longer have the wealth they used to earn...it is normal that they no longer have the material time to really see what is going on in their family, and to keep them busy as it should be, it is the effect of poverty. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 5/10/2020)

A program actor reaffirms that poverty is the reason for the propensity towards early sexual encounters and teenage pregnancies:

It is possible that they have these cases [of pregnancy] but most often it is due to the fact that they are desperate and do not want to continue school. Because there are intelligent children who don't finish school because their parents can't afford to pay for their education. (IDI, Parent Male, Ziguinchor, 15/10/2020)

Another program actor reiterated this narrative and confirmed the negative effects of the poor region with immigrants from other countries and tourism which exposed young girls to sexuality along with limited programs and initiatives to educate them on reproductive health.

He explained:

I cannot say the fundamental reasons, but as I said earlier, this tradition of openness to others can explain this propensity of young girls to become sexually emancipated rather than girls from other countries. And this sexual emancipation without a good mastery of their reproductive life, nor means of preventing these pregnancies can cause this situation. Note also that Ziguinchor is a concentration area, a pole of attraction for migrants who come to this locality. And so this population mix will necessarily play on the interactions where men who come from other horizons will seek to satisfy their libido. Women who are from there with the constraints that the region has experienced since the Casamance crisis, are rather looking for means of subsistence and precisely all these factors contribute to increasing this phenomenon of pregnancy in this part of the country. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 3/11/2020)

Limited reproductive health programs

Other participants, especially program actors who were serving in the areas, insisted that the limited reproductive health programs were a major factor behind the high pregnancy rates. It was noted from the Scoping Review that while Dakar has 43 programs and projects, Ziguinchor has only 23 of them,

which does not seem to be sufficient nor effective for its young population.

One program actor confirmed the lack of access to information on reproductive health in regions like Ziguinchor, Sédhiou and Kolda in comparison to Dakar and Thiès:

In regions such as Dakar and Thiès, young people have much more access to reproductive health information than in more peripheral areas such as Ziguinchor, Sédhiou and Kolda. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 5/10/2020)

Moreover, another program actor commented on the vulnerability of girls who need protection and support. She admitted that there is greater concern for girls' schooling than that of boys because of early marriage and pregnancy. Parents are aware of their obligation to deal with such situations but they need more support in the form of programs. She said:

Well, I admit that at the moment there were some concerns about the female gender. But for the male group, people have become aware that education is something important that needs to be given special attention. Perhaps it is the female layer that is a little negatively affected with early marriages, family chores that prevent progress in the school system. There are also early pregnancies and I believe that this is something that is taking its toll here in the Ziguinchor region. And it deserves to be taken care of because it causes a lot of harm to this vulnerable group of women. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 30/09/2020)

Another program actor mentioned the poverty factor but also dwelt on the ignorance and vulnerability of adolescents who do not have enough information on sexual and reproductive health, which is further complicated by the taboo nature of the subject. Adolescent girls ventured naively into certain relations and ended up dealing with unwanted pregnancies. This program actor explained:

It is due to poverty as I said. The first regions that you mentioned, whether it is "Kolda, Ziguinchor, Kedougou, all that is southern access, their level of poverty is not the same as in Dakar, so it is already a driver. The other obstacle that I forgot to mention is that the question of sexuality is still taboo in our cultures and social norms because it is a little embarrassing to talk about sexuality for a mother or father to his children. Therefore, children, because of their ignorance, will try to have adventures and unfortunately they get pregnant. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 30/09/2020)

A parent desperately explained the sad situation of girls being exposed to pregnancy as early as 14 and 15 years, despite their commitment to transitioning into higher education. As parents, all they could do was counsel and observe their daughters with the hope that they do not fall pregnant. Parents felt that they had been left on their own, having limited resources and skills to address sensitive topics which would protect their adolescent girls from dangers such as sexual abuse and early pregnancy. One parent said:

In Casamance, the school education of young girls is sometimes a problem; sometimes they have difficulty continuing their school education up to the level they want, early pregnancies are numerous sometimes you see a 15, 14 year old girl get pregnant, now we just talk and watch them hoping it doesn't happen to them. (IDI, Female Parent, Sédhiou, 13/10/2020)

Cultural tolerance/acceptance of early marriage and pregnancies

On a different note, some participants discussed some cultural beliefs among a few ethnic groups of Ziguinchor related to early marriage and pregnancy. According to these participants, girls who were married young were naturally exposed to early pregnancies. However, for those who were not married, being pregnant was not a shame or dishonor in the region compared to other parts of the country where girls who became pregnant out of wedlock were a cause of distress in their

communities. These cultural realities, for some stakeholders, contributed to children's vulnerability, on top of the other factors mentioned above. They insisted that they did not want to stigmatize certain groups but, these were the factors that explained these realities based on their experiences in the areas.

One program actor stated that adolescents in Ziguinchor were exposed to early sexual encounters as they had more freedom to initiate such relationships compared to other more conservative regions. Further, having babies before marriage was not a cause for shame. This program actor explained:

It's cultural, people don't mind having children before marriage, they have a rather early sexuality, rather liberated. All the public officials who have been to Ziguinchor know something about this. Today the Casamance girl, it is not to stigmatize, has a greater sexual freedom than other girls from other regions. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 2/10/2020)

Another program actor confirmed the cultural basis of this early sexual debut based on her experience working with an NGO that promotes reproductive health programs. She noted that there were more adolescents visiting the Ziguinchor center which provides reproductive health advice and distributes condoms in comparison to centers in other regions.

Concerning pregnancies, frankly, I think that there is a cultural factor that you cannot mention without stigmatizing, but I am convinced that there is this aspect of culture that makes these young people sexually active at an early age and that participates a little in the education. That is a reality in some areas of the country, I have made this observation. I see sexually active youth, I worked with teen centers long before Save The Children; I found that with the teen counseling center in Ziguinchor for example, it received more youth than other centers and the distribution of condoms was more important in this region than others. (KII, Program Actor, Female, 14/10/2020)

Another program actor referred to Sédhiou and Ziguinchor. According to him, the trivialization of early sexual debut is a real concern in both regions. Compared to central regions like Diourbel and Saint Louis which preserve traditions that honor virginity, in Ziguinchor being pregnant is not a problem. This program actor explained:

In Ziguinchor, it is like in Sédhiou, the realities are the same. A girl leaves her parents' house and goes to her boyfriend's for a week without any problem. Sexuality is almost commonplace compared to other places where virginity is sacred. There may be cases but not many. Do you understand? The central regions believe in virginity, like Saint Louis, Diourbel, those places that preserve traditions compared to Ziguinchor and Sédhiou, whether you get pregnant or not, it's not a problem. (KII, Program Actor, Male, 12/10/2020)

Age reduction to comply with school requirements

Contrary to most of the participants who agreed that various socio-cultural and economic issues could explain the precocity of pregnancy among girls in Ziguinchor, one program actor was hesitant about the statistics. Since the country is known for its lack of rigor in terms of enforcing birth certification, especially in certain areas, this same situation may apply to Ziguinchor. Sometimes children get their birth certificate long after they are born, at times only when parents plan to take them to school. As such, in order to respect the school age cohort and obtain registration for their children, parents may understate their children's real age. This could be the case for those who are considered to have become pregnant early, whether married or not. Some girls may actually be 18 while on paper they are listed as being 12 years, because of late birth declaration. This issue has been a real concern in Senegal and many initiatives have been put together by the government to inform the population about the importance of birth certification, especially about registering children's correct age for

purposes of schooling. While these incidents may be considered as early pregnancies, they should not actually count as such. This could limit the validity of some statistics for action by different programs. This ministry official explained:

In Ziguinchor, in some ethnic groups, they marry early because there are girls who have their husbands and go to school. So, there is early pregnancy in relation to age. And I told you, most of them have reduced their age. You can be 18 naturally and on paper you're 12. You think it's an early pregnancy when naturally it's not. Then the reality of their customs and mores is not similar. (KII, Ministry official, Female, 2/10/2020)

3.2.8.3. Summary

The case of Ziguinchor has been discussed by stakeholders, addressing positive factors that could explain the region's advantages in terms of education outcomes and negative aspects related to early pregnancies among adolescent girls. Participants in this study referred to the positive heritage of the region, in terms of education outcomes, along with its diverse population which is open to the world and supports the schooling of children, particularly girls. On the other hand, participants addressed specific economic reasons as being a major factor in driving teen pregnancies. In addition, they also reported the cultural tolerance for early sexual encounters and pregnancy as causing a rise in teen pregnancies. In addition, other stakeholders maintained that the lack of programs on reproductive health has a negative impact on adolescents in Ziguinchor, especially girls.

Ziguinchor therefore presents the contradictory characteristics of appearing to be supportive to education including that of girls, but not being culturally, economically, legally and institutionally prepared to protect girls. Exposure to education does not seem to be enough for children, they require more protections and support systems that are conducive to their well-being in order to make education efforts worthwhile. In a nutshell, education and reproductive health are linked, one is inseparable from the other, especially for the welfare and accomplishment of adolescents. Despite interesting explanations from participants to untangle the Ziguinchor paradox, we believe that studying more programs and listening to more people from the region would be fundamental to fully appreciating Ziguinchor's exceptionality and to enhance the validity of potential outcomes.

4. DISCUSSION

In this section, we discuss and interpret the data in relation to the different theoretical frameworks. The perceptions of stakeholders on questions pertinent to girls' education and reproductive health in Senegal are compelling and informative. The main obstacles affecting girls' well-being and schooling were found to be economic due to the general poverty levels in the country, particularly in certain regions. Additionally, the narratives mention other barriers that hamper the well-being of adolescent girls. Narratives from participants highlight the socio-cultural barriers related to certain ethnic, religious, and gender norms and beliefs, which hamper the well-being of adolescents. These themes – poverty and socio-cultural factors – provide an important line of reasoning for the understanding and interpretation of participants' narratives.

To elaborate on these different subjects, we will discuss the different arguments related to education first and then reproductive health, before reflecting on lessons learned and finally providing some recommendations.

4.1. Education

Economic obstacles to education of boys and girls


According to the World Food Program (2021), Senegal stands at position 168 out of 189 in the 2020 Human Development Index. Senegal is considered one of the world's least developed countries, with more than 37% of its population is living below the poverty line (ANSD, 2018). Low economic growth has a negative impact on its social system, especially education and welfare. The education of the youth, who represent more than 60% of the population, is under siege partly because of the financial situation of the country. All the stakeholders conveyed how poverty influences low enrollment of boys at the primary school level and low retention and completion of girls at the middle and secondary school levels.

Low rates of school enrollment, retention, and completion can be explained by the interaction of the different layers in the ecological model by Bronfenbrenner and how these interact with the children's environment thereby influencing their life in general and their schooling in particular. Fundamentally, the micro-system (family, school and religious realities) as well as the meso-system (interactions between the different elements of the micro-system), the exo-system (local programs and government services) and the macro-system (larger cultural ideology meaning social and institutional norms) impact their possibilities of success and failure.

The micro-system represents families with their financial constraints and the realities of school related to fees and distance from the communities which raises the need for transportation. The results of the study show that the inability of parents to pay for school fees and supplies, along with transportation charges leads to low enrollments, failure or dropping out of school for adolescent girls. As such, schooling requirements do not seem to be in line with the abilities of parents and communities to pay for the children's education. Consequently, there are incompatibilities and misalignments between two important entities that are part and parcel of children's immediate ecosystem that is school and family. Children are affected by such inconsistencies yet the collaboration and complementary of these two components – school and family – is necessary for the benefit of children and adolescents.

Furthermore, the meso-system, meaning the ideologies of schools and the communities and their interaction or lack thereof, reinforces the incongruities noted in this study. For instance, the Senegalese philosophy of schooling seems to be grounded in and structured around elitism and the absence of inclusion with inadequate support for students towards provision of all the tools necessary for school completion, despite the limited financial capabilities of families. Additionally, these school ideologies largely inherited from colonial France are often detached from people's realities, despite the many resolutions within the educational system and Senegal's ratification of major Education for All (EFA) amendments. Unsurprisingly, alternative religious schooling systems with a more inclusive approach have gained more traction, especially in certain regions like Diourbel and Kaffrine where the population maintains a reluctant and unenthusiastic attitude towards formal schooling.

According to Bronfenbrenner, disconnects between the school culture and the home culture negatively affect children's education. While parents may know the realities of school with all its requirements, they may not be able to comply with those obligations. When parents either cannot comply with schooling obligations or have other priorities to take care of, they will ignore school requirements for



their children or may not be convinced about the importance of education when other alternatives are more relevant to their values and possibilities.


That interaction or lack thereof in the meso-system could infer that school which is supposed to benefit the community and to serve as an equalizer among children from different socio-economic backgrounds, fails to be inclusive towards all children regardless of their family circumstances (poor/ rich, urban/rural, boys/girls, etc.). From stakeholders' observations, the meso-system can be appraised as impoverished, therefore negatively affecting the education of children and adolescents.

Based on the study results, the exo-system, including local programs and government services which are meant to enhance children's education, can be regarded as inadequate and disorganized, with limited resources available to fill in the gap between school requirements and parents' limited financial means and commitment. According to the Scoping Review, progress has been made in children's education, especially girls' enrollment, thanks to the efforts of multiple institutional actors and the commitment of all education stakeholders. However, there are many inadequacies and flaws noted, such as lack of coordination of programs resulting in weak governance, limited available funds, unbalanced interventions between regions and the short cycle projects that constrain ownership by local institutions and communities. These weaknesses in interventions were confirmed by stakeholders, especially beneficiaries who requested more support systems. It can be concluded that the exo-system, an important ecological layer in adolescents' development and education, is challenged and does not favor young people's success in school and in life.

Subsequently, the macro-system, which corresponds to socio-economic and institutional norms of the country, comes into play with regard to adolescents' education. As stated by the World Food Program (WFP), despite significant economic growth and decades of political stability, Senegal still faces development challenges. More than one third of the population lives below the poverty line, and 75% of families suffer from chronic poverty, (WFP, 2018). Consequently, many Senegalese parents cannot afford to pay school fees. However, it has been recognized that despite the tough economic times, projects and programs for girls' enrollment have been successful thereby reversing the parity index in favor of girls at the primary and middle levels. This big achievement has been materialized thanks to the dedication of all participants working to support girls' education. This same commitment should be enacted to enhance boys' and girls' enrollment, retention and completion. Among the measures that could be used is the implementation of important ratified laws in more rigorous ways with incentives and injunctions that would elevate adolescents' schooling, especially for girls. Among others, we can name the Mandatory Education Law No. 2004-37 that has been in place since December 3rd, 2004 which stipulates compulsory and free education for all children aged 6 to 16 years. There is also the National Strategy for Equity and Gender Equality for 2016 to 2026 which targets reduction of gender discrimination. This law is derived from the 2010 Parity Law that gives women, girls, men and boys the same opportunities in any development domains, including education.

Socio-cultural obstacles to the education of adolescents

Besides economic barriers, participants have elaborated on strong socio-cultural values that affect the adolescent youth, particularly girls. Participant narratives highlight the existence of traditional beliefs regarding girls' and boys' familial and societal expectations. These beliefs are deeply rooted from the onset in children's lives and nurtured at all levels of their ecosystem from the micro- to macro-



levels. From the discussions, it is clear that girls' gendered roles, for instance, their responsibility for household chores and their likelihood of being married early, compel parents to make decisions that may not favor the education of girls when households are facing financial constraints. This happens despite parents, both mothers and fathers, confirming their unbiased attitudes toward boys' and girls' education. This confirms how the family representing the micro-system is itself entrenched within a gender binary that does not necessarily favor girls. Girls' experiences with school suggest that gender is still a decisive factor in their education journey and completion. Subsequently, poverty sustained by socio-cultural norms around boys' and girls' status and responsibilities within families and communities, continue to maintain gender bias and set back the academic success of girls.

As well, social beliefs around masculinity, for instance, that boys are the de facto future providers of the family, deny them educational opportunities and possibilities. Those who belong to financially vulnerable families, are likely to leave school in order to fulfill their role as breadwinners. They turn out to be more interested in finding ways and means to get a job quickly and helping their parents than in embarking on a long, expensive and uncertain schooling journey.

Finally, as stated by Bronfenbrenner, the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems are all established within the context of social and gender norms. These have significant influences on children's lives, and since social norms position girls as subordinate and at times as misfits, the impact on their schooling and academic success is enormous.

4.2. Reproductive Health

Early pregnancy and marriage as obstacles to retention and completion

In Senegal, more than half of the population is under 20 years old and more than 60% of the national population is under the age of 25 (ANSD, 2018). Adolescents who represent the majority of that 60% of the population that is under 20 years, face serious reproductive health issues with high rates of early marriage, pregnancy and female genital mutilation. The stakeholders noted the proliferation of practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, due to community ways of life and actions that compromise adolescent well-being. Despite the ratification of some laws against early marriage, pregnancy and FGM, some communities within certain regions of Senegal continue to practice these traditions.

The relationships between social norms and reproductive health can be discussed through the lens of the ecological framework used in this study. Social norms include gender norms which refer to the ways in which people behave as girls and boys or men and women in communities. Adolescents developing under such circumstances would come of age with already set values and principles that resemble those of the communities from which they originate. The ecological model with its social norms framework highlights how the different environments in which adolescents develop play a part in molding them in certain ways of being and doing. From the study, stakeholders highlighted the important role that families and communities play in maintaining the status quo of girls in terms of early marriage and pregnancy. In addition, schooling does not seem able to address the deep-rooted culture of early marriage which leads to teenage pregnancy in some of the communities. Rather, it may be argued that school is also complicit in a culture that downgrades girls' education, well-being and future.

We note that the relationships between schools and the communities are not complementary in combatting harmful social norms. This confirms the weaknesses of the meso-system that is the interactions of the school and the community to bring about changes within girls' education and reproductive health. As for the exo-system, despite the existence of social welfare services in all regions of Senegal, much has not been done in terms of eliminating these barriers for promotion of adolescents' well-being, particularly for girls. In addition, according to the Scoping Review, these services are not enough, especially in other regions outside of Dakar, where few organizations are involved in welfare initiatives. Not only are the programs limited in scope but they are also not co-created in collaboration with all stakeholders, especially beneficiaries and community leaders. It is for this reason, that participants, mainly adolescents, request that programs be made more inclusive and work with communities, parents and adolescents from the start in order to achieve their set goals.

Finally, the macro-system, represented by institutional norms can be understood through the different laws against child, early and forced marriages, prohibited in Article 108 of the Senegalese Family Code. Similarly, excision is considered a criminal act under the Law 99-05 of January 29, 1999. Unfortunately, these laws are disregarded, weakening the macro-system in its attempts to positively influence lives and reproductive health of adolescents. For instance, according to the Scoping Review, early pregnancy is a real challenge in school settings with 32,7% of pregnancies occurring among girls ages 12 to 19 years in 439 middle and secondary schools out of 1,356 schools (GEEP & UNFPA, 2019). Most of the affected regions are those in the south, including Sédhiou and Ziguinchor. It is also noted that early marriage (by 18 years) stands at 33% among school-girls, predominantly in regions like Diourbel, and Kaffrine. As for FGM, it is recorded at 14%, and practiced in the regions of Matam, Kédougou, and Tamba. This daunting situation confirms the ambiguities between ratified regulations and cultural systems that continue to negatively affect girls' ecological environment, and thereby impair girls' ability to function in school and life as a whole.

The ecological framework enables us to see the ineffective collaboration between the different systems within which children grow. This lack of collaboration between the systems in turn hampers the provision of education and reproductive health services. Moreover, with a generally poor population, with deep-seated, gendered, socio-cultural convictions, Senegal would gain by communicating with all stakeholders in order to find sustainable ways to improve girls' education and well-being. One of the prerequisites should be greater financial assistance to alleviate school charges and help parents support their children, both girls and boys, to complete school. In addition, there should be an obligation to challenge the status quo around gender differences and gender biases to help people detach themselves from binary sexist stereotypes, and to accept and respect the human right to education and to reproductive health awareness, especially for girls.

4.3. LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned from this study are multidimensional. The issues of girls' education and reproductive health are complex and interconnected because of similar yet multiple factors that are simultaneously challenges and potential solutions.

Lessons learned on education

Education is seen by most of the participants as an asset. Nevertheless, in some areas, the role of

formal schooling is downplayed due to the economic realities of families and communities. This may be accentuated by its irrelevance to societal realities and its uncertain pay-off evidenced in the many unemployed graduates. Rethinking the school system is therefore necessary along with innovative alternatives that are necessary to respond to the education needs of the youth in general, and girls in particular.

- The Scoping Review noted great progress at the primary level with a parity index in favor of girls. However, it is imperative to avoid any discrimination by maintaining girls' progress while working on boys' education. Education for both boys and girls is equally important.
- Participants, including beneficiaries, call for reduced school fees and schools that are closer to their respective communities. If this is not possible, consideration should be made to provide transportation to those distant schools. Charges levied by schools and their distant locations are contributing to higher dropout rates and gender disparities, especially for underprivileged families that cannot afford school fees or transportation costs. While it is true that economic reasons prevent boys and girls from continuing with their education, social and gender norms also play a part in this. Socio-cultural dynamics seem to have a more significant effect on girls' education and reproductive health than economic factors.
- While parents claim that to not have any gender preference in terms of schooling, many of them agree that when faced with a financial crisis, they would likely sacrifice their daughter's education. This shows that parents themselves have internalized the gender norms that are found within their respective communities.
- Girls may be dedicated to schooling and may wish to go far but they need more support from parents, teachers and communities as well as from implemented programs.
- Laws on education, early and forced marriages and FGM would lose their validity if their application and implementation is still an issue in Senegal. Many children between 6 and 18 years are out of school due in part to early marriage and pregnancy. The respect and implementation of the various laws would have a positive impact on girls' education and reproductive health outcomes.

Lessons learned on reproductive health

Early pregnancy and marriage and FGM are very sensitive issues in Senegal. Even though adolescents declare that they are more comfortable with talking about questions of puberty and sexuality with parents, these topics remain taboo in Senegal and are difficult for parents to address. In addition, healthcare demand is very high, especially among vulnerable groups like adolescents and girls.

- Programs on reproductive health are more centered in the capital, Dakar, leaving other regions with limited services.

- Some regions are portrayed as being more open to early sexual encounters, especially in the South. These regions need more reproductive health programs to support adolescents. In some of those regions, parents are very concerned about their girls because of the high rate of early pregnancies.
- In certain regions like Diourbel, early pregnancies are linked to early marriages. To avoid the former, there is a need to delay marriage through a change in legislation which sets the minimum legal age for marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys.
- FGM is still practiced in certain areas and among some ethnic groups. It is imperative to apply the law and enforcement strategies as well as approaches to bring about changes in social norms.
- In Ziguinchor, the high rate of teen pregnancy among school-going adolescents requires further research.

Lessons learned on interventions

- Many efforts have been made by the government but there is a need for better collaboration to develop programs involving multiple sectors and SRHR stakeholders, including beneficiaries. This would help boost the education rates for both boys and girls as well as improve reproductive health outcomes among adolescents.
- Beneficiaries need more programs that are relevant to their needs and realities. Interventions are sometimes not well received in some areas and communities may consequently not be interested in ownership.
- Programs have to be more inclusive of all stakeholders, especially beneficiaries, such as adolescents, parents, and community and religious leaders in order to gain more traction within communities. Relevant and well thought-out projects and programs can change the status quo.
- There is an unbalanced distribution of different programs in education and reproductive health across the regions. More programs are needed in other regions, including the central and southern parts of Senegal.
- Interventions are not sustainable and local communities are not equipped to continue some good initiatives.
- Programs need to target early adolescents who are 12, since at this age, puberty could start kicking in.

4.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.4.1 Promoting Girls Education

A break in the cycle of repressive social and gender norms is needed for the successful promotion of girls' retention and completion at middle and secondary school levels, which tend to decline in all regions as girls move up the higher grades. To achieve this:

- Parents and communities need to find ways to boost boys' enrollment at primary school level, particularly in religious regions like Diourbel and Kaffrine which have low GER for boys.

Moreover, the data has shown that social norms have a big impact on some persistent practices such as early marriage and FGM, thereby denying girls the chance to be educated.

- Social and gender norms framework need to be included within all interventions to challenge the status quo in a more vigorous way in collaboration with the communities within the various regions where such practices are still rampant.
- All key gatekeepers including community and religious leaders, need to be involved in the programs, as the community easily identifies with them. In doing so, these gatekeepers can be instrumental in changing the values and norms within their respective communities.
- The government in collaboration with all stakeholders has to implement well-thought projects with strong communication strategies to inform and inspire communities to recognize, respect and even advocate for the ratified laws on education, thereby spurring enrollment and school completion for girls.
- Education programs have to be expanded in all regions without discrimination, with full participation of beneficiaries, parents and adolescents to boost enrollment.
- There is a need for parental involvement in both education and SRHR initiatives. This would enable parents to identify the ways in which they can support adolescent girls and boys in the course of their education and reproductive health awareness.
- Programs initiated in such regions where parents prefer income-generating activities, should have an income generation aspect for parents, to prevent them from encouraging their children to seek an income.
- CCIEF and the relevant ministries (Education, Health and Gender) could learn from regions where programs seem to be working well and use the lessons learned to improve education and SRHR outcomes. For instance, this may mean taking up the educational measures that are working in Dakar and Ziguinchor and applying them in other regions to boost girls' education.

It is clear from the discussions that all stakeholders, especially parents and adolescents value education, especially formal education, with few exceptions. However, to raise retention and completion rates among girls, it is important to find solutions to the poverty that afflicts parents and address the parental challenges to pay school fees and transportation costs to distant schools. As with previous campaigns on girls' enrollment, it is possible to maintain and guide all adolescents to completion if they have a healthy environment for their development. The micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems, meaning family as well as communities, should work together along with programs supported by policy and legislation in favor of girls' education. Since the government has initiated free and compulsory education, budgetary re-adjustments are needed to reduce the monetary contributions of families.

4.4.2. Promoting Reproductive Health Training

In order to promote the SRHR of adolescents, this study recommends the following.

- Better synergy of stakeholders around the coalition led by the School Health Control Division (DCMS)
- More relevant and well-funded local programs in areas where the rates of early pregnancy and marriage and FGM are high. This includes the regions of Sédhiou and Ziguinchor (for early pregnancy), Thies, Matam and Kaffrine (for early marriage), and Matam, Kédougou, Tamba, Ziguinchor and Kolda (for excision).
- Sustainable and decentralized programs are needed through well-defined collaborations with community and religious leaders and parents for the whole programming process to be owned, internalized and implemented by communities.

These initiatives need to be led by the community including religious leaders together with parents and adolescents. Parents should be encouraged to be more involved in projects. This could be seen as the missing link of most SRHR initiatives. Parents can approve for their children to be part of initiatives but they themselves should be included right from the start, in all projects to better serve their adolescents. This focus on collaborating with parents is key to the fight against early marriage and pregnancy and FGM and would lead to the success of girls in school.

- Involve and empower those who design curricula for programs that reflect our cultures and values
- Programs need to start including and targeting pre-adolescents with the approval and involvement of parents and communities. The Exploratory Study found that reproductive health issues touch girls as young as 10-12 years old. If targeted earlier with information and programming, the crisis in late adolescence could be avoided.
- Integrate other ministries (Ministry of professional training for washable pads) and youth clubs for gender mainstreaming in the school environment
- Raise awareness among parents and communities including religious leaders about

the close interrelations between reproductive health issues and educational issues. Additionally, the promotion of SRHR is vital in resolving problems around education, and education can be an effective pathway out of poverty and a means to support girls' well-being.

- From a research perspective, more case studies should be conducted in specific areas with a high rate of reproductive health issues such as Ziguinchor, to understand the underlying cause of the teenage pregnancies.
- More effective application of laws to eliminate early pregnancy, child marriages and excision. Implementation of good communication strategies is needed to raise awareness on those laws and their penalties while taking into consideration each communities' economic and socio-cultural realities and religious beliefs. The media could also help point out gender barriers in society and how these negatively impact girls.

In addition, a new framework on social and gender norms discourse in all programs and projects could help address gender barriers in reproductive health issues. This would lead to a practical frame of reference with effective programs addressing multidimensional social norms. This seems to be a dynamic yet vital framework for "social change" through reflection and consideration of the adolescents' ecological environment. The latter includes all domains of influence starting at the individual, familial, social, collective and institutional (community, schools, peers, and religions) levels. This could be more cost effective and strategic as it is inclusive of all aspects of the child's milieu.

5. SCOPE OF LIMITATIONS

There were a few limitations noted during this Exploratory Study. However, they did not affect the validity of the results as they were addressed to the greatest extent possible. Even though it was somewhat complicated to find participants for selected programs, through collaboration with FAWE, we managed to find the right participants for the interviews. Due to COVID-19, there were some constraints during data collection, as the research team could not conduct face-to-face interviews. We therefore introduced phone interviews after training field workers on how to collect data remotely, with a focus on phone interview techniques, quality assurance, ethics, and obtaining the consent of minors over the phone.

Going forward, a set of research studies could balance this report inquiry:


- (i) A regional qualitative study in areas with issues on education and reproductive health that would include face-to-face and focus group discussions with community leaders, program agents, teachers, parents and adolescents to complete this study. For instance:
 - a. In Diourbel and Kaffrine which have the lowest GER, there is a need to consider alternative schooling systems, change in gender norms and cultural/religious beliefs;

- b. In Ziguinchor with the highest GER and low SRHR outcomes, a more in-depth qualitative case study could help to better explain its contrasting outcomes on education and SRHR.
- (ii) Adapting an intervention to improve girls' education and SRHR: a well thought-out and sustainable intervention that takes into consideration all stakeholders' inputs.
- (iii) COVID-19 has presented new challenges and opportunities which need to be considered:
 - a. A complementary study on the impact of COVID-19 on the already achieved outcomes in girls' education and reproductive health. This could help in strengthening recommendations for policies;
 - b. The Exploratory Study has also unearthed that most policies face implementation issues. This raises the opportunity for synergy with other units like the Urban Education Group (UEG) working in Senegal to advocate for the application of policies using evidence from the Exploratory Study.
- (iv) Scaling up the same study in neighboring countries and more broadly in West Africa to explore issues faced by their populations in education and reproductive health. If so, it would be important to jointly reflect on ways of scaling up or unifying strategies and forces to promote education and advance reproductive health issues among girls.

6. CONCLUSION

This Exploratory Study is a follow-up of the Scoping Review on the state of education and reproductive health and rights of adolescents in Senegal. It consisted of qualitative research to bring in the perspectives of ministry officials, program actors, adolescents and their parents who are beneficiaries of some targeted projects. By giving voice to key stakeholders on these topics, the study captured perspectives of the participants on education and SRHR issues. Most of the results validate or complement the conclusions from the preliminary Scoping Review. Findings indicate that poverty interferes with youth education and reproductive health outcomes. As well, socio-cultural and religious factors play a significant role in downgrading adolescents' education and their well-being, especially for girls. Results reveal that social norms and gender barriers exist at all levels of the ecological environment for Senegalese adolescents. These social and gender norms are part and parcel of the society and so need to be addressed in all projects and programs related to education and welfare.

Moreover, it is important to include all key constituents, (government, community and religious leaders, parents, adolescents and civil society associations and NGOs) to identify possibilities for sustaining and applying policies intended for the protection of vulnerable adolescent girls. This could result in more diverse and holistic approaches to improve adolescents' lives, above all the education and well-being of girls.




Additionally, findings from both studies (Scoping Review and Exploratory Study) show clearly that economic and social cultural and religious obstacles dominate the constraints to education (access, retention and completion) and reproductive health (early marriage, pregnancy and excision) outcomes. Therefore, research studies become essential factors to put into place. Nevertheless, studies would need to take a holistic perspective with an ecological model structure based on a social change framework on gender norms that is fundamental for improved interventions and to address gender imbalances.

7. REFERENCES

- Abuya, B.A., Cissé, R., Faye, C. M., Fall, N. A., Muhia, N., Konté, A. F. B., & Sall, O. K. (2020).** Revue documentaire sur l'éducation des filles et les implications de la SRD des adolescentes au Sénégal. <https://doi.org/10.1051/mattech/196952110304>
- ANSD. (2008).** Résultats Définitifs du Troisième Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat (2002).
- ANSD. (2016).** Rapport projection de la population du Sénégal.
- ANSD. (2017).** Enquête Démographique et de Santé Continue (EDS-Continue). In Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (ANSD). <https://www.ansd.sn/ressources/publications/EDS-C-2016.pdf>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979).** The ecology of Human Development: Experiments by nature and design (Harvard Un).
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994).** Ecological models of human development. International. Encyclopedia of Education, 1(3).
- Cislaghi, B., & Heise, L. (2019).** Using social norms theory for health promotion in low-income countries. *Health Promotion International*, 34(3), 616–623. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day017>
- Cislaghi, B., & Heise, L. (2020).** Gender norms and social norms: differences, similarities and why they matter in prevention science. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 42(2), 407–422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13008>
- Cohen, N., Mendy, F. T., Wesson, J., Protti, A., Cissé, C., Gueye, E. B., Trupe, L., Floreak, R., Guichon, D., Lorenzana, K., & Buttenheim, A. (2020).** Behavioral barriers to the use of modern methods of contraception among unmarried youth and adolescents in eastern Senegal: A qualitative study. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09131-4>
- Cresswell JW, Plano Clark VL. Designing and conducting mixed method research. 2nd Sage; Thousand Oaks, CA: 2011.** [Google Scholar]
- Direction de la Planification et de la Réforme de l'Éducation. (2012).** Rapport national sur la situation de l'éducation.
- Direction de la Planification et de la Réforme de l'Éducation. (2018).** Rapport national sur la situation de l'éducation.
- Equipop. (2018).** Prioriser les droits et la santé sexuels et reproductifs (DSSR) des adolescent•e•s et des jeunes dans les programmes de développement (p. 2).

- Fall, A. S. (2015).** Jangandoo, Baromètre de la qualité des apprentissages des enfants au Sénégal.
- Gaudet, S., & Robert, D. (2018).** L'aventure de la recherche qualitative: Du questionnement à la rédaction scientifique (University). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19x4dr>
- GEEP, & UNFPA. (2019).** Rapport des observatoires sur les grossesses chez les adolescentes en milieu scolaire.
- Gleisne, C. (1999).** Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction (Longman).
- Gutmacher Institute, & IPPF. (2014).** Santé sexuelle et reproductive des jeunes sénégalaises.
- Haradhan, M. (2018).** Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1), 23–48.
- Heise, L. L. (1998).** Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework. *SAGE Periodicals Press*, 4(3), 262–290.
- Kane, Oumar & Kane Hawa. (2018).** The origins of the feminist movement in Senegal: A social history of the pionneeing Yewwu-Yewwi. *African Sociological Review*, Vol 22-1
- KIX Africa. (2020).** Thematic priorities in GPE member states within the KIX Africa 19 hub region (Vol. 1, Issue August 2020).
- Labrune-badiane, C. (2016).** L'enseignement secondaire postcolonial au Sénégal : enjeux politiques et sociaux. L'exemple du lycée Djinabo de Ziguinchor (1960 / 1980)
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985).** *Naturalistic Inquiry* (SAGE Publi).
- Loi n° 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999 relative à l'excision.** 99-01-29 Modification du Code pénal - Interdiction des mutilations génitales féminines au Sénégal. *JORS*, 1999, 5847 : 832ss.
- Minichiello, V., Madison, J., Terrence, H., & Parmenter, G. (2004).** Doing qualitative in-depth interviews. In R. A. Victor Minichiello, Gerard Sullivan, Kenneth Greenwood (Ed.), *Research Methods for Nursing and Health Science* (pp. 410–446). Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Pulerwitz, J., Blum, R., Cislighi, B., Costenbader, E., Harper, C., Heise, L., Kohli, A., & Lundgren, R. (2019).** Proposing a Conceptual Framework to Address Social Norms That Influence Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 64(4), S7–S9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.01.014>
- Rice, P. F., & Dolgin, K. G. (2003).** *The Adolescent: Development, Relationships and Culture* (A. & Bacon (ed.).



Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development* (Oxford Uni).

Sefa-Nyarko, C., Kyei, P., & Mwambari, D. (2018). *Transitions from Primary to Lower Secondary School: A Focus on Equity*. www.pdaghana.com

Slobodskaya, Helena R. (2021) *Personality development from early childhood through adolescence*, *Personality and Individual Differences*, Volume 172, 110596, ISSN 0191-8869, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110596>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019188692030787X>)

Trincas, P. X. (1984). *Colonisation et Régionalisme Ziguinchor en Casamance*.

UIS. (2019). *New methodology shows that 258 Million children, adolescents and youth are out of school*. <http://uis.unesco.org>

UNESCO. (2021). *Education in Africa*. <http://uis.unesco.org/fr/topic/education-en-afrique>

USAID. (2017). *Etude nationale sur les enfants et les jeunes hors du système éducatif au Sénégal*.

Vygotski, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. (Harvard Un).



**African Population and
Health Research Center**