



The Effectiveness of Radio Talk Shows by UNICEF Ethiopia in Increasing Knowledge and Changing Attitudes and Behaviors Around Child Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, And Gender Equality

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ABSTRACT

Female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage (CM), and gender inequality are some practices that are discriminatory and abusive to women and deny them the potential to live better and more inclusive lives. UNICEF in collaboration with other partners have initiated radio talk shows (RTS) in SNNP, Oromia, Somali, and Afar regions with the aim of addressing these issues. This evaluation study assessed the effectiveness of these shows on these matters. The study used a cross-sectional survey approach blended with key informant interviews to interrogate the issue at hand. A stratified cluster sampling method was used to identify 458 subjects to participate in the study. The study found that not many people have been reached by the radio talk shows. Those reached had acquired knowledge/enlightenment and attitude change that is positive towards lowering cases of FGM, CM, and gender inequality. The study thus found radio talk shows to be effective in increasing knowledge and attitude that could bring about social behavior change. It was recommended that UNICEF to scale up RTS into unreached areas to expand the reach hence the impact of the shows on FGM, CM, and gender equality.

Keywords: Female genital mutilation, child marriage, gender equality, radio talk shows, behavior change

INTRODUCTION

Female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage (CM) are some of the traditional and culturally instigated threats to the advancement of the rights of women and the attainment of Sustainable development goal (SDG) 5.3 [1]. They are also some of the ways through which gender inequality is advanced among practicing communities and, as such, is an area of interest globally. Child marriage and FGM have severe physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual effects on the victims [2]. Across the world, cases of CM have reduced steadily between 2010 and 2020 with an estimated 12 million underage marriages happening in 2020 across the globe. In order to attain SDG 5.3 on ending CM by 2030, the reduction of cases of CM must be six times faster than the current trend. What is more, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has further dented the progress made in reducing CM hence creating a bigger problem that must be addressed [2]. In Ethiopia, there is a legal framework stipulating the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years. However, the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey established that 58% of women and 9% of men in the age category of 25-49 years were married before attaining the legal age of marriage and the majority of them hailed from rural regions [2]. Presently, the country has a prevalence of 40.3% [3] of CM which is very high and needs to be addressed. Social, cultural, religious, and gender norms are the promoters of CM in Ethiopia [2].

Globally, by 2021, 200 million women have been exposed to some form of FGM and 68 million more will be at risk of facing the practice by 2030 [2]. Although a significant reduction in FGM cases has been recorded over the years [1], some countries like Ethiopia still have a high prevalence rate of 65.2% [3], which, according to UNICEF [2] is the largest number of cases in Eastern and Southern Africa affecting women aged 15-49 years. This high prevalence level is unacceptable locally and globally based on international standards. Many researchers have established FGM to be one of the worst forms of violence against women, and their rights, and a severe form of manifestation of gender inequality [4, 5]. Some studies like UNICEF [1] show that FGM and CM are intertwined and interdependent although in some areas they can exist independently. The study shows that in many communities, young girls who are cut are

considered mature for marriage regardless of their underage status. Gender equality is an issue of concern across the globe because it is a fundamental right. Even though the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been enacted and adopted by majority of countries in the world, women still face some forms of discrimination compared to men [6]. The Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) stands at 72% indicating that women across the world face a 28% gender gap [7]. In Ethiopia, the index stands at 71% [8] indicating that 29% of women are excluded which should be addressed in line with the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 on attaining gender equality and women empowerment by 2030. Gender inequality limits the potential of the disadvantaged persons thus denying the world of the contributions such groups could offer for development. Gender parity is the foundation for establishing a peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous world where women/girls and men/boys are allowed to enjoy their potential to the fullest. Gender equality also ensures the elimination of gender-based abuses and violence which mostly affect children and women [9].

Female genital mutilation, CM, and gender inequality have a relationship and are some of the harmful discriminations that women in Ethiopia face. To attain a better world where women's rights are nurtured and preserved, these issues must be addressed to meet world standards. UNICEF, in collaboration with other partners, has been conducting various projects aimed at addressing these issues. At the start of 2021, UNICEF in collaboration with Population Media Center-Ethiopia (PMC-E) initiated a project in January 2021 to promote positive behavioral change to end FGM, and CM and promote gender equality in 16 woredas from SNNP, Oromia, Somali, and Afar Regional States of Ethiopia. (SNNP region later split into three increasing the overall projected regions into six). This study evaluates the effectiveness of the project in knowledge creation and attitude change that informs behavior change away from these harmful/discriminatory practices to women and children.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Increasing people's knowledge about issues, and changing their attitudes and norms are some of the ways through which social behavior change (SBC) can be attained. Social behavior change is critical in addressing the issues of FGM, CM, and gender equality in Ethiopia, a country with some of the highest prevalence of FGM, CM, and gender inequality. Pilot studies conducted by UNICEF, as well as other researchers, have shown that well-planned radio talk shows (RTS) aimed at increasing knowledge and changing attitudes are critical to influencing SBC among communities because radios are easily accessible tools of information transfer in rural areas (compared to other forms of media tools), and that radio broadcasts offered in local languages can easily be understood and appeals to listeners (thus eliminating language barrier issues). The RTS were produced and aired for one and half years and have had a remarkable impact on the lives of many women and girls in the UNICEF/PMC-E intervention woredas.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The objective of the project was to evaluate the role of RTS in increasing knowledge, developing positive attitudes, and bringing behavior change related to 1) child marriage, 2) female genital mutilation (FGM), and 3) gender equality among individuals, families, and communities in target areas of Ethiopia using large-scale awareness creation, listener groups, and capacity building training and advocacy workshops activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey completed at the household level within the RTS broadcast area, supplemented with KII with PMC-E trained influencers. The talk shows addressed the issues of gender equality, prevention of FGM, and child marriage, and encouraged the listeners to act against these harmful practices. The talk shows also provided information and support to the victims and survivors of FGM and child marriage and empowered them to speak out and seek help. The talk shows have contributed to the reduction of FGM and child marriage cases in various woredas and have inspired many communities to abandon these harmful traditions and respect the rights and dignity of women and girls. The study used a stratified cluster sampling method where the households were stratified according to their region. The chosen sample comprised 458 households (divided nearly equally between RTS) from whom people aged 15-49 years were interviewed. Survey data was collected using KoBo Collect application uploaded by research assistants using Android phones and uploaded to the server as soon as was feasible while face-to-face interviews were used to collect data from KII. The KI were PMC-E-trained influencers and responded to questions that could not be included in the survey yet were important for the study. The data collection exercise took place between the 16th and 28th of January 2023. Out of the respondents who participated in the study, 111 were from areas covered by *Mano*, 111 were from *Ofiishiif*, 111 were from *YalalekeGuzo*, and 125 were from a jurisdiction covered by *Himilo*. The majority (77.7%) of the respondents were non-listeners. Collected data was cleaned and analyzed with the help of several programs including KoBo Toolbox, Microsoft Excel, QGIS, and RStudio. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis.

FINDINGS

Reach, and Audience Size

As shown in Table 1, the RTS broadcast for this project had a potential audience of an estimated 14,045,396 people within the target age range of 15-49. The table below summarizes the overall reach, audience size, and cost-per-listener for all RTS combined and individually.

Table 1: Reach, and Audience Size

Metric	All RTS	Himilo (Somali)	Meno (Afar)	Offiishiif (Oromia)	YalalekeGuzo (Sidama)
Total Target Population (15-49)	14,045,396	979,320 (7%)	1,446,829 (10%)	5,737,428 (41%)	5,881,819 (42%)
Percent aware of RTS	31% (average)	2%	65%	32%	30%
Percent of the target population that listens to RTS	23%	2%	65%	11%	14%
Number of Listeners	2,376,183	23,504	938,992	619,642	794,046
Percent of the target population that has access to radio	53%	6%	69%	51%	87%
Percent of the target population that listens to RTS, adjusted for radio access	43%	38%	94%	21%	16%

The largest potential audience for RTS (42%) was from Sidama where *YalalekeGuzo* was broadcast while the least potential audience was from *Himilo* (7%). Out of the total target population, 31% were aware of RTS. Specifically, in every RTS target area, the awareness about the shows was 65% for Meno, 32% for Offiishiif, 30% for YalalekeGuzo, and 2% for Himilo. The percentage of the target population listening to RTS was 65% for Meno, 14% for Yalaleke Guzo, 11% for Offiishiif and 2% for Himilo. The majority of the population had access to radio in most regions except in Somali where only 6% of the target population had access to radio.

Impact of RTS on Attitude and Knowledge towards FGM, CM, and Gender Equality

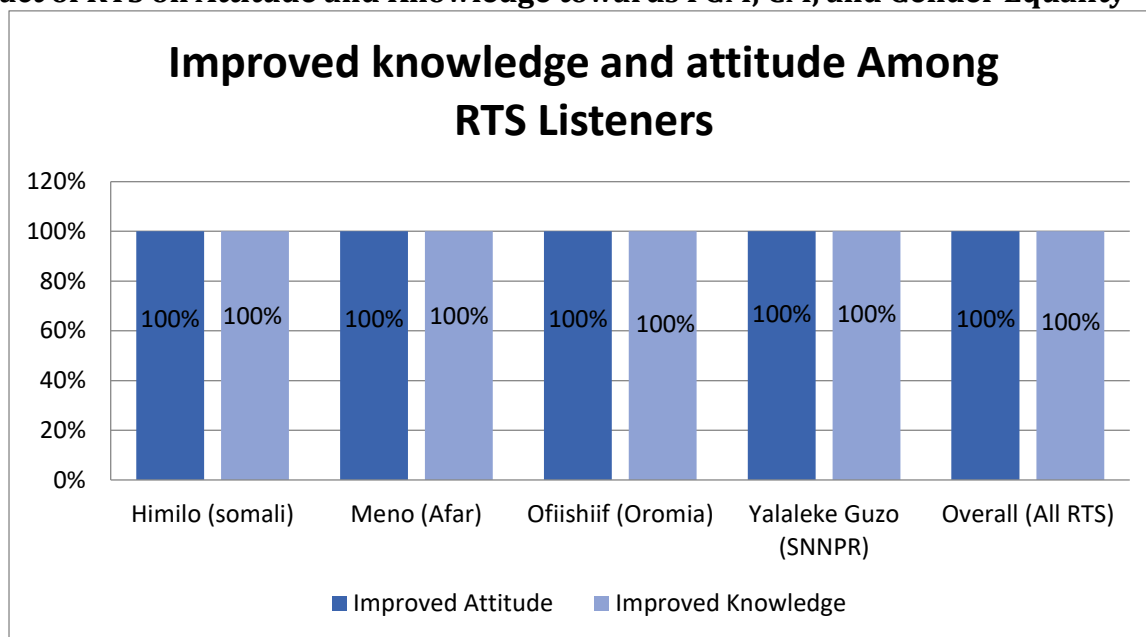


Figure 1: Listeners' knowledge and attitude improvement

Across all four RTS, all respondents (100%) recorded improved knowledge and attitudes on FGM, CM, and Gender equality.

Cascading training to community members was found to contribute to enhanced attitude change and knowledge gained from RTS. At baseline, it was estimated that each PMC-E trained influencer would reach 20 community members to whom they would create awareness of RTS. The total reach was, thus, projected to be 3,400 people (60% female and 40% male). However, this target was surpassed as shown in Figure 2 below as 11,508 people were reached.

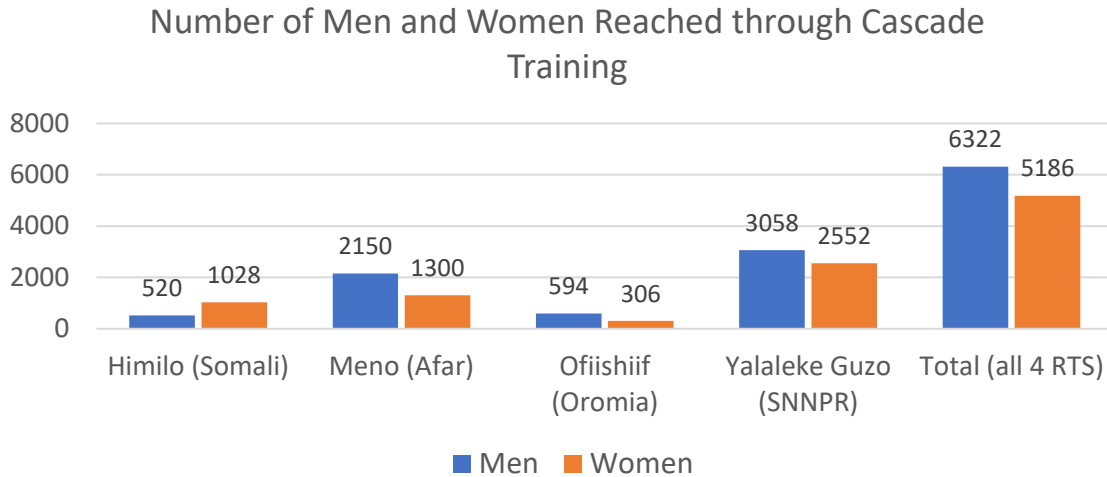


Figure 2: People reached through Cascade training

Overall, the cascade training was very useful in improving the knowledge and attitudes of participants. The chart below presents the percentage of participants whose knowledge and attitudes improved in the areas of child marriage, FGM, and gender equality. All are above 60%, except the gender equality participants in Somali, yet even that is a success if 40% of the participants improved knowledge and shifted attitudes related to gender equality.

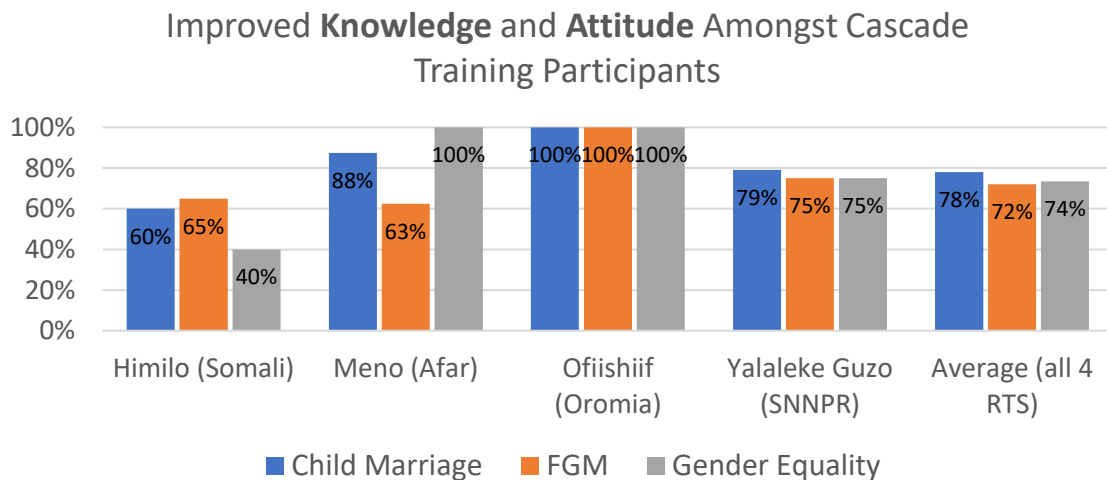


Figure 3: Improved attitude and knowledge among cascade training participants

The qualitative findings elaborated on how RTS brought about knowledge gain and attitude change. The findings indicated that RTS brings about knowledge, creates a positive attitude, and brings behavior change. For instance, a KI instanced the testimony one of the interviewees presented to him:

“I have been a part of the PMC radio programme series, which has made me learn a lot of new things [about FGM]. After listening to the programme, I made the decision not to allow any of my girls to be circumcised.”

Interviewees were also asked about child marriage and the general feedback was that the RTS had influenced a reduction in cases of CM. One respondent, (a lawyer) explained:

“When we compare current statistics of CM in RTS broadcast areas with figures from the previous years (before the shows) we see a reduction in the cases of CM.”

Another respondent informed.

“If we work together [with RTS] to overcome weaknesses [in the fight against FGM, CM, and Gender Equality], we will show positive and progressive changes in the future.”

However, regardless of the positive knowledge creation opportunities RTS made and the impact that knowledge had on FGM, CM, and gender equality, a respondent in Sidama informed that the RTS exposition of the issue of FGM had influenced the secret performance of the practice. The respondent said.

“FGM is reduced but it is not stopped completely. It is done secretly with the permission of the mothers and the teenagers.”

Influence of RTS on Child Marriage

The study revealed that 100% of RTS listeners consider girls' education important while many non-listeners do not consider it important. As a result, many (100%) of the listeners interviewed agree that they would allow their girls to complete school before being married off while over 70% of non-listeners do not commit to allowing their girls to complete school before being married off. Both listeners (100%) and non-listeners (96%) know that child marriage is a crime in Ethiopia. However, 4% percent of the non-listeners do not know about the illegality of CM.

Influence of RTS on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The majority (98%) of listeners to RTS commit to keeping their daughters uncircumcised while a lower percentage of non-listeners commit to the same. Many (71%) listeners are aware that FGM is not a requirement in their religion while many (86%) non-listeners do not hold the same view. The study also established that the community expects more non-listeners than listeners to support FGM. However, both listeners (93%) and non-listeners (94%) agree that FGM is becoming less common in their communities over time an indication that generally the practice is being managed/reduced.

Influence of RTS on Gender Equality (GE)

The majority (99%) of listeners and 92% of non-listeners agree that men and women should share work and responsibilities equally in families. However, many listeners (94%) agree while non-listeners (77%) disagree that it is not important for a man to show his wife/partner who the boss is. More non-listeners than listeners believe that when women get rights, they are taking them away from men. Non-listeners think that in their communities' women's opinions are invaluable and should not be considered always when making household decisions. Non-listeners also do not believe that a husband and a wife should unite in deciding the spending of their household income. Contrastingly, listeners think that in their communities' women's

opinions are valuable and should always be considered when making household decisions. Listeners also believe that a husband and a wife should unite in deciding the spending of their household income. More non-listeners (57%) than listeners (56%) believe that women who make important family decisions are taking power away from their husbands. Concerning children, 100% of listeners and 98% of non-listeners opine those daughters and sons are equally valuable to their parents.

Key Messages Recalled

RTS listeners were read a list of key messages and asked which they recalled the RTS discussing. The evaluation found that messages on FGM, CM, and gender equality were recalled across all areas covered by the four radio shows. Overall, YalalekeGuzo and Offiishiif listeners recalled more of the messages, while Meno listeners showed moderate recall. Himilo listeners recalled the fewest specific child marriage and FGM messages, which may be a function of the very small number of listeners within the sample.

Child Marriages Messages Recalled

The specific CM messages recalled are shown in Figure4 below.

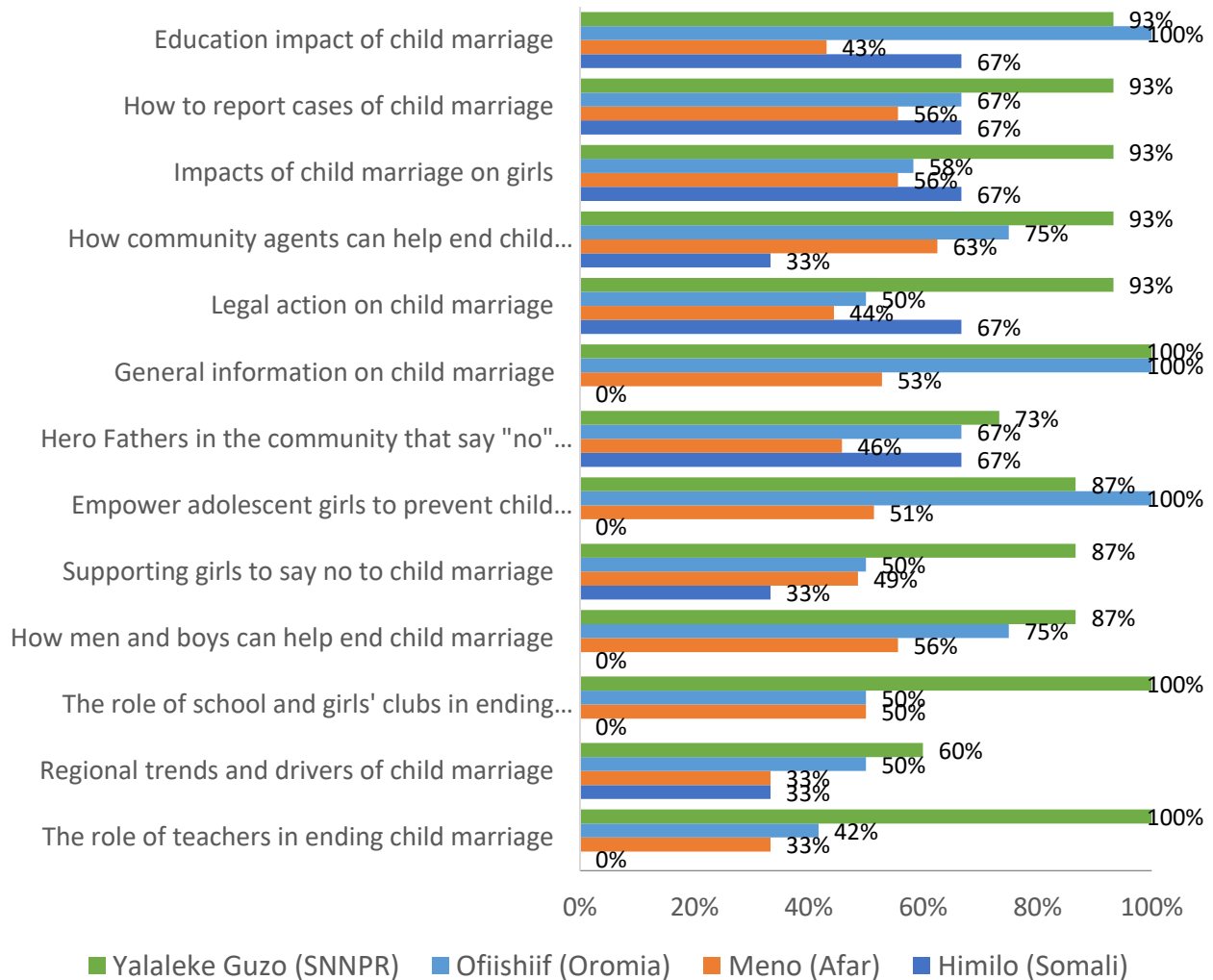


Figure 4: Child marriage messages recalled

Child marriage messages were widely remembered, particularly with YalalekeGuzo listeners followed by *Offiishiif* listeners. Himilo, listeners did not recall how boys and men could help in ending CM as well as failed to recall the role of schools, teachers, and girls' clubs in ending CM, The Himilo listeners also failed to recall the general information on child marriage.

Recall of FGM Messages:

Figure 5 shows the FGM messages recalled by respondents.

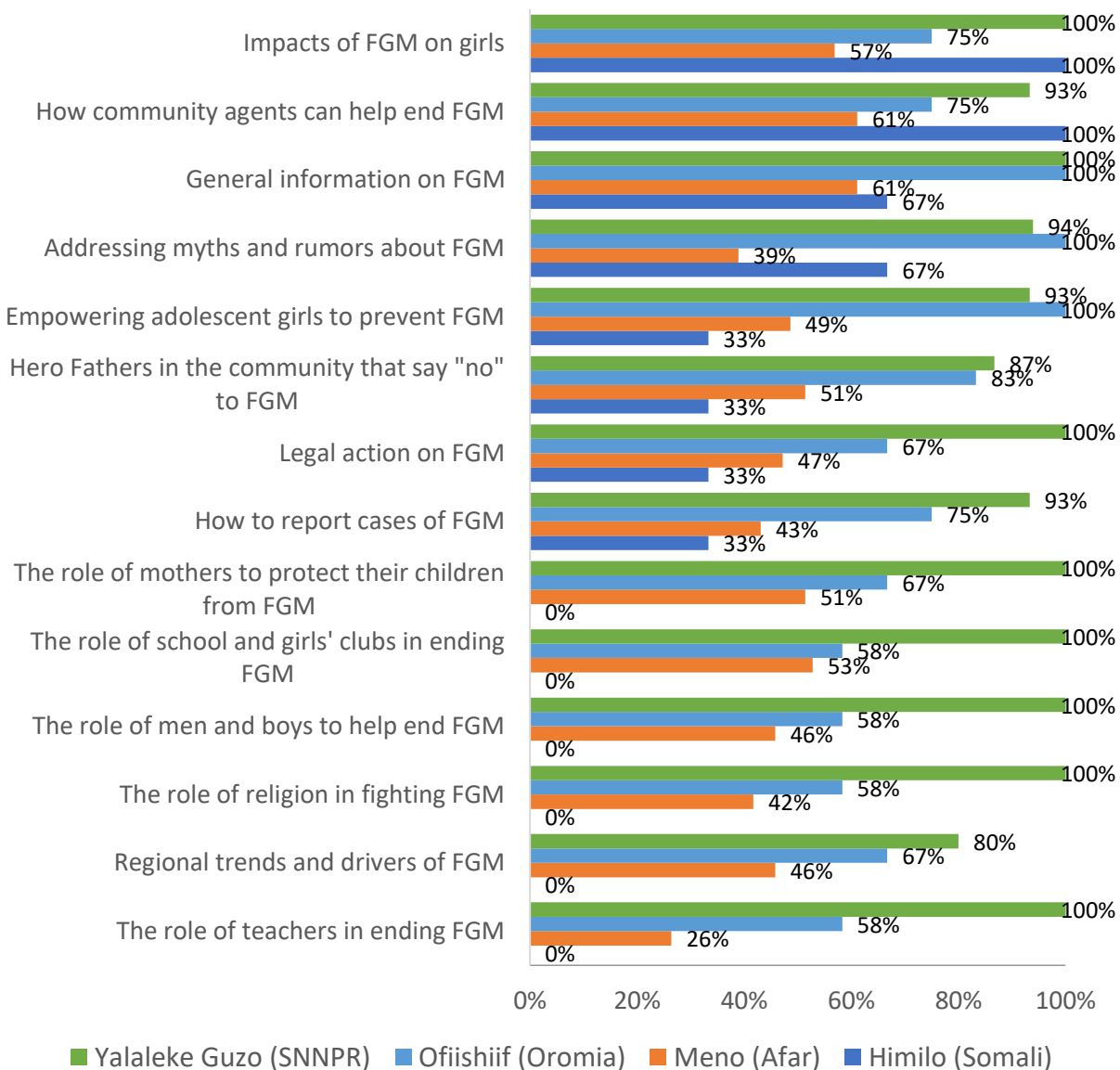


Figure 5: FGM Messages Recalled

Overall, FGM messages were largely recalled as the majority of the messages had a recall rate higher than 50%. YalalekeGuzo listeners recalled most of the messages presented to them (80-100% recall rate). The other recall rates were 58%-100% for *Offiishiif* listeners, 26%-61% for *Meno* listeners and the least recall was among Himilo listeners who failed to recall the role of mothers in protecting their daughters from FGM, the role of schools, teachers and girls' clubs

in ending FGM, the role of men and boys, the role of religion in ending FGM and the regional trends and drivers of FGM.

Impact of Radio Talk Shows

The evaluation found that the majority of the listeners considered the RTS as entertaining, educational, worth sharing with family and friends, and were broadcast at a convenient time to listeners. Additionally, the change that RTS had created among listeners was investigated and presented in Figure6 below.

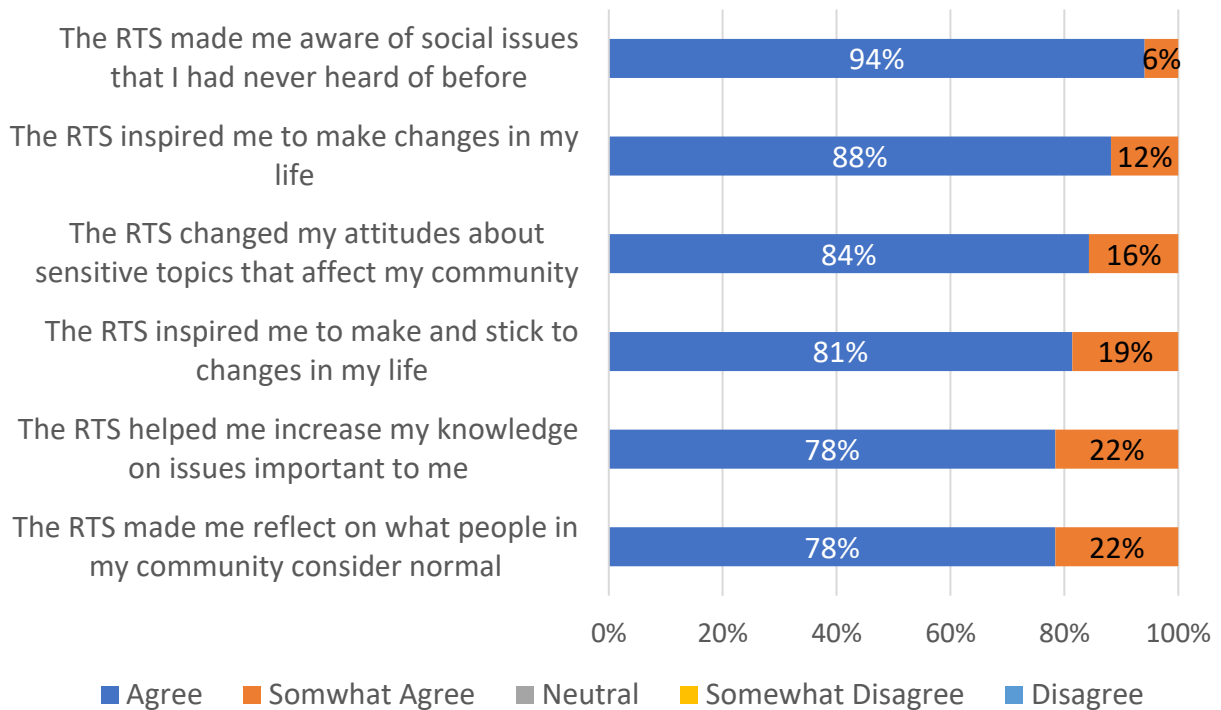


Figure 6: Impact of RTS

All respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that RTS had made them aware of social issues they had never had before, inspired them to make changes in their lives, changed their attitudes about sensitive topics that affect their communities, inspired them to make and stick to changes in their lives, helped them increase knowledge on important issues to them, and made them reflect on what people in their communities considered as normal.

DISCUSSIONS

Reach, and Audience Size

Out of the total potential audience of 14,045,396 people aged 15-49 for RTS, Yalaleke Guzo, and Offiishiif broadcast areas had the largest potential audience while the least potential audience was from *Himilo* purely determined by the population in the respective areas who can access the said shows. Out of the total potential target population, the majority of the audiences were not aware of RTS indicating a need for continued marketing of the shows which according to Mohammed [10] increases listenership. The majority of the target population does not listen to RTS as only 23% do. This is surprising given that the majority (53%) of the target population have access to radios. However, this finding could be associated with listeners not being

interested in listening to RTS or having alternative programmes that they are listening to which can be averted by enhanced marketing of the shows and their significance.

Knowledge Gain and Attitude Change

The study established that RTS listeners have improved attitudes towards/ and knowledge of FGM, CM, and gender equality issues. This finding is in concurrence with Mohammed's [10, 11] submissions that listenership influences attitudinal and behavioral change. By informing listeners on the need to rise up against FGM, CM, and gender inequalities, the shows create awareness and inculcate in listeners a positive perception towards these issues hence inducing in them a change of their attitudes from the traditional and cultural hard line against gender equality and anti-FGM and CM issues to a softer and positive attitude that discourages the perpetuation of these harmful practices. This analysis is in line with what the KI indicated—that the shows create awareness which is the foundation for changing behavior from negative pro-FGM and CM to anti-FGM, gender equality, and anti-CM behavior.

Generally, the study found knowledge gain as one of the key impacts of the RTS. From the KIs, it was revealed that knowledge gaining was a precursor to attitude shift indicating that the knowledge respondents gained from the shows enlightened them on the issues at hand (FGM, CM, and Gender equality) hence putting them in a well-informed position to adopt certain acceptable attitudes and behavior. This purpose of education is in concurrence with Arlinghaus and Craig's [12] study. Besides live RTS, the KI offered listeners booklets written in one's specific language from which they could get informed about the issues at hand. This contributed to the enhanced knowledge gain.

One of the predictors of knowledge gain as established in the study was the ability to recall key messages. Messages on FGM, CM, and gender equality were recalled across all areas covered by the four radio shows. One is likely to apply messages that they can remember [12] hence, the finding that many of the respondents were able to recall the key messages, is an indication that learning has taken place and that the messages can be applied in their respective places of need. *Child marriage, FGM, and gender equality messages were widely remembered, particularly with YalalekeGuzo listeners followed by Offiishiif listeners. This presents RTS as an informative avenue for disseminating messages [10]. Himilo, listeners did not recall some specific messages perhaps because the messages were from topics of less interest to them. Therefore, creating awareness through continued sensitization to demystify the issue of child marriage and the roles taken by each party would help enable listeners to find value in the topics shared and hence appreciate the messages broadcast in the shows. This could enhance the recall levels of Himilo listeners, particularly on messages concerning the roles of stakeholders in ending CM, and FGM.*

On the flip side, the study revealed a negative attitude/behavior among listeners that was associated with knowledge gain from RTS—concealment of illicit practices like FGM. Although the awareness created by RTS was good in presenting a positive change as explained above, it also enticed some who still had a strong cultural connection to FGM to continue the practice in secrecy. The interviews substantiated this finding that out of the enlightenment listeners received, some had devised the behavior of engaging in FGM in secret which likely pulls back the efforts against FGM. Noteworthy, this dissenting effect of the awareness was minimal as fewer respondents attributed to it. Overall, there was a reduction in FGM, and CM cases

compared to the previous year's possible indication of the impact of RTS as predicted by UNFPA [14].

Child Marriage

RTS creates awareness against the culture of honoring child marriage over their education [15]. This is evidenced in the positive perception towards education that listeners have for their girls compared to non-listeners. As a result, the shows encourage listeners to allow their girls to complete school before being married which then fights against CM. The shows should thus be advanced to non-listeners as their lack of listenership to the shows makes them prioritize CM over their girls' education. It seems that those who perpetuate CM do so with the knowledge that they are contravening the law since the findings show that both listeners and non-listeners are aware of the illegality of CM under Ethiopian law and the internationally accepted best practice for the treatment of children [2]. There is a possibility that through other awareness forums (other than RTS), the Ethiopian citizenry (including non-RTS listeners) have been informed of the illegality of CM. However, more awareness needs to be created to enable the remaining 4% to get informed about this illegality because, as few as they may be, they can still slow the achievement of CM-free Ethiopia by 2030.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Many of the listeners more than the non-listeners have committed to keeping their daughters uncircumcised. Although this is a good report on the fight against FGM, more needs to be done to ensure the attainment of 100% commitment among all listeners and non-listeners. The higher commitment among listeners compared to non-listeners is attributed to the increased knowledge gained on FGM through the RTS which has enlightened the respondents more than the non-listeners [2].

There is also a downside to the enlightenment brought about by the RTSs. For a long time, FGM has been associated with religion [1, 2] which is contrary to what this evaluation discovered courtesy of the awareness created by the RTS. The majority of the listeners believed that FGM is not required in their religion. Although non-listeners still believe their religion supports FGM, this belief is only founded in lack of awareness and, as such, the shows should be promoted more among the non-listeners to elucidate this issue and bring about a changed belief on the relationship between FGM and religion.

Female Genital Mutilation is an age-old cultural practice perpetuated by the community keen to preserve their culture [1, 2, 4]. The fact that non-listeners think that the community expects them to support FGM reveals the needed awareness to concert this perception among this group. It is positive that listeners do not feel that their communities expect them to support FGM—which is associated with the enlightenment they have received from the RTS. Since individuals are the ones to change communal perceptions, reaching out to more non-listeners will help change the notion that the community holds towards supporting FGM. The finding that FGM is becoming less common among listeners and non-listeners indicates that progress is being made and that besides the RTS, there are other awareness-creation measures that are becoming fruitful in de-popularizing the practice. Out of the lack of support from individuals and the community, FGM was becoming less common over time which is in line with the world's expectation of an FGM-free world hence the focus of RTS.

Gender Equality (GE)

Generally, both listeners and non-listeners agree that men and women should share work and responsibilities equally in families indicating that all are aware of the abilities of either gender in completing tasks contrary to Endalcachew's [17] finding. Regardless, Ethiopians still hold inequality practices which are mainly dominant among non-listeners. While listeners have been informed that showing their wives who the boss is irrelevant in families, non-listeners still hold on to this view, an indication that the shows have desensitized the chauvinistic beliefs of listeners. Non-listeners think that women's opinions are not of value and that these opinions should not be considered when making decisions, and that a husband and a wife should not unite in deciding the spending of their household income while listeners think otherwise.

More listeners than non-listeners also appreciate gender equality among their children. Thus, the study shows that non-listeners have a higher tendency of practicing gender inequality compared to listeners who, the study has found to be promoters of the gender equality factors. This clearly indicates how awareness creation is critical to eliminating the inequalities common in Ethiopia as presented in many literatures [6]. From these findings, it is clear that through the RTS, Ethiopians can advance the principle of gender inclusivity as indicated in the literature by Asuako's study [16]. This creates room for the advancement of RTS among non-listeners by addressing the inhibitory factors.

It is, however, worrisome that the majority of both listeners and non-listeners communities believe that if women make important family decisions, then they are taking power away from their husbands. Among the listeners, this is indicative of the feeling respondents have as the balance of gender equality is appreciated. Those (women) who did not have certain privileges since all was meant for men) are now appreciating the same. It is however interesting that they perceive this privilege as power (which is not).

Impact of RTS

To many people in the targeted regions, RTS were relevant and useful as the shows were entertaining and educational and the information disseminated through the shows was broadcast at a convenient time to listeners and was worth sharing with family and friends. This indicates that the programmes were well thought out to ensure they catch the attention of listeners, offer appropriate and relevant content, and inform. Thus, the shows met the intended target of offering knowledge and information relevant to enable the management of CM, FGM, and gender inequality. The RTS created awareness of social issues listeners had never had before, inspired them to make changes in their lives, changed their attitudes about sensitive topics that affect their communities, inspired them to make and stick to changes in their lives, helped them increase knowledge on important issues to them, and made them reflect on what people in their communities considered as normal. These findings are in agreement with the pieces of literature [10, 11, 13] on the advantages of radio programs to listeners.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that RTS is effective in informing and educating listeners on FGM, CM, and gender equality matters. By providing information and educating listeners, the shows create awareness which enlightens listeners to change their behavior by discarding the negative practices and adopting the positive ones. This has an impact on reducing FGM, CM, and gender inequality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RTS should be scaled up into unreached areas to expand the shows' reach and influence on FGM, CM, and gender equality. This must be planned carefully after a media analysis in appreciation of the changing media landscape in the country and globally.
2. The media landscape is changing not only in Ethiopia but also across the world. This means that the time people spend listening to the radio, as well as ownership of radios, is decreasing significantly. Thus, as FGM, CM, and gender equality interventions are being designed, they should bear in mind this change and adjust appropriately by providing alternative channels through which information on choice topics can be disseminated to listeners e.g., by use of mobile phones or apps, podcasts among other media. The media channels should also offer listeners control over the content and promote listener participation in their programmes which are characteristic of modern-day media consumers.
3. Since FGM and CM are culturally embedded, creating change against them requires that RTS programmers and implementers work closely with the Bureaus of Women and Social Affairs to coordinate the efforts of RTS for utmost success.
4. There is a need to strengthen the involvement of influencers and listener groups to advance community mobilization and awareness-creating activities.

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