

Girls and Women in Mwanza

Mwanza Context and the Life of Girls

Mwanza is a predominantly rural region of the Lake zone in northwest Tanzania, which includes the southern parts of Lake Victoria. As such, it is a highly migrant community, with people frequently coming in and out of the region. Comprised of 3.1 million people, the region is divided into 8 districts: Ukerewe District Council (DC); Magu DC; Kwimba DC; Sengerema DC; Buchosa DC; Misungwi DC; Ilemela MC (Municipality Council); and Nyamagana MC.

While average in its intense poverty – with 47% of its population defined as very poor and another 27 % vulnerable to poverty, A number of other factors hold our attention- the condition of and potential of adolescent Girls: it is clear from these data gathered together in a report (The Adolescent Experience IN – DEEPH: Using data To identify and Reach the Most vulnerable Young People- Population Council /UNICEF drawn 2015) that Girls lives go off track early.

School attendance among girls aged 10 to 14 shows a troubled picture, of them 19.2% are not in school / Primary- 75.8% and/ secondary 4.4% (Pg.12) We noted that almost a fifth Not in school and gravely therefore “off track” and see a tremendous acceleration in school leaving among rural girls at age 10, with 10% out of school more than tripling to or rising to 36.3 by age 14 – (Pg. 15). And of those school going – rural girls in Tanzania overall – where as 83% are at grade for age by 14% this falls to 62 % (Pg. 17).

The Child Marriage picture is grim as well; in Mwanza 7.4 % are married before exactage 15years (Pg. 25) and a six fold increase by before exact age 18 – when 37.4% are married. Apart from “official” marriage extensive information across Tanzania using the Assert Tool in Similarly districts reveals high levels of sexual exportation of adolescent girls in the course of seeking food and other resources for their families , finding transport to vital services work ,accessing basic entitlements like school but also medical / health services and in daily social relationships. (Hallman et al Page 30-37).

Females 20 to 24years in Mwanza report early sexual initiation, 9.5% before age 15 and before age 18 51.5% (Pg. 104) .Of females 20 to24 , Almost 7% gave birth before 15 years and almost half before exact age 18 – that is as children themselves (Pg. 28).Low self-esteem, self-efficacy, the expectation and acceptance of physical and sexual control of females by males from a young age is reflected in the high proportion of those age 15 to 24 who accept at least one reason “wives are justified in being beaten - 67.3% and almost 12% who accept all five conditions (Pg. 108). In Mwanza levels of violence are shocking—of those aged 15 to 24 years the following percentages report experiencing Sexual or physical Violence (15 to24 15-17 27.7%, 18-19-49.6%, 20 -24 - 57 % (Pg. 112).

Age-disparate transactional sex (ADTS) refers to relationships between adolescent girls under 18 years old, and adult men more than 10 years older. These relationships occur outside of marriage or sex work and are based on the implicit understanding that material support or other benefits will be exchanged for sex (Stoebenau 2016). Whereas it can be argued that all intimate relationships include transactional elements, inherent inequities in ADTS relationships related to age, gender and income have been found to render some of these relationships exploitative (Mojola, 2014). ADTS can constrain girls' agency, and contribute to negative health, social and developmental outcomes: STIs including HIV, unplanned pregnancy, school dropout, and sexual coercion (Luke & Kurz 2002, Kyegombe et al 2020). Due to mitigation measures such as quarantine, curfews, and school closures epidemics like COVID-19 can exacerbate gendered inequalities and the risk of sexual exploitation, including ADTS (Peterman et al 2020), as well as broader secondary socio-economic impacts.

Female's economic disadvantage and Responsibility for themselves and their families frames this story of Sexual exploitation, Child marriage and Poor schooling access. Only 13.7% of Girls have access to savings or Power and self-esteem, Leadership & Friends (includes peer pressure), Finance, Girls' Health, Communication and access to economic opportunities. While over 70% of Tanzanian Females if present trends continue will be single mothers through partnered childbearing or as divorced, abandoned or widowed mother (Registration, Insolvency and Trusteeship Agency – RITA 2018/2019 Report). The majority of Tanzanian Females will experience single motherhood and its economic responsibilities and social isolation by age 30. Clearly as a matter of rights but also need, young females must be prepared for decent livelihoods, provided Financial and technical literacy and access and safe savings products. They are currently invisible and unsupported actors from age 14-25 on in family economies.

The History of HIV/AIDS epidemic can be seen as a story of female disadvantage and the ineffectiveness of conventional (male) centered approaches to reaching them. HIV/AIDS on its own is an avoidable tragedy and it also can be seen as a biological maker of exploitation of females and failed preventive program strategies. While only 27% of the girls 15 to 17 years have knowledge of both HIV prevention measures – use – Condom and stick to one partner (Pg. 115), over half have been sexually initiated. Only one fifth of these girls 15 to 17 years – 11 % have ever been HIV tested and received result (Pg. 139). Of those with a current partner currently 15 to 24 years, 2/3 have a partner 4 or more years older and 27% have “partners” more than 10 years older- raising HIV risk through multiple channels – differential power and the higher sexual activity and exposure of partners. As many of these relationships are economically driven, young females' ability to bargain for condom use or contraception is limited. Only 5.2 % of currently married females 15 to 24 years are using contraception – these females have even less power than their

unmarried sexually active peers of whom 20.7% use contraception. These young married girls are along with the very young adolescent girls extremely disempowered while at high risk and carrying heavy – invisible economic responsibilities.

Notably the female to male HIV prevalence ratio at age fifteen in rural communities is 4 fold– females 1.3% and males 0.3 %.The ages 10 to 14 years girls carry many more risks – Life altering events than males – school leaving, sexual abuse inside and outside of marriage, poverty driven sexual exchanges, childbearing and being infected by HIV - and looking ahead to huge sported responsibilities for self and children, younger and older family members. Income in female hands is worth 10 to 20 time's comparable income in male hands.