Understanding Religious Perspectives about Death and Sample Collection from Dead Bodies Using Minimally Invasive Tissue Sampling in the Context of the CHAMPS Study in Harar and Kersa: Eastern Ethiopia.

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Background

- Ethiopia is one of the countries of high under-five and infant mortality rate 55 and 43 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- In Ethiopia, children often die at home without medical supervision and no one knows the cause of under-five death.
- CHAMPS is a Program that aims to track definitive causes of child mortality in sites and produce and disseminate high-quality data to inform policy and public health action.
- CHAMPS employs minimally invasive tissue sampling (MITS) to gather small samples of body fluids and tissue from the bodies of children who have died that uses a special instrument with a spring-loaded needle a mechanism to gather the samples without any incisions on the body.
- Socio-behavioral studies are being conducted related to death and dying in the study site to investigate child cause of death through biomedical procedures.
- Religious leaders are socially assigned to prepare, wash, wrap, and pray with the dead body. Knowing the role of religious affiliation, religious beliefs, and practices in sample collection from dead bodies for the cause of death, a determination is significant for the consent process, MITS doing, and increase acceptability.

Methods

- Qualitative data collection tools was used
- The study was conducted in Harar city and Kersa district, Eastern Ethiopia, at the study site of Harar and Kersa Health Demographic Surveillance site (KDHSS) and at Hwof Fana Specialized University Hospital, Harar.
- Seventy-six participants took part in the study through qualitative data collection, which included in-depth interviews (N=12), semi-structured interview (N=6), focus group discussions (N=6) and participant observation (N=10).
- Data was managed and coded in NVivo 12, and thematically analyzed; to identify patterns, commonalities, and differences among the emerging themes

Results

- Both Muslim and Christian participants explained death is the will of God.
- Mothers reported that when a child death happens at early age it is called shafaa. The child should not have died; however, God took the child’s soul. His/her soul enter heaven as dead children have no sin.
- Muslim religious leaders stated that after a child dies their soul is detached from the body and becomes an independent entity and the soul is capable of conducting its function (pray or intercession to Allah) without the physical body.
- Christian participants explained that, at death, the body returns to dust while the soul returns to the creator, God. Will of God: Religious leader’s perceptions of death decided and brought by God. CHAMPS cannot reduce from what God/Allah already decided and only God/Allah knows the cause of death.
- Muslim objection to MITS: Muslim objections to Minimal invasive tissue sampling for the dead bodies have emerged on the importance of body holiness at death; MITS procedure will delay burial, the sacredness of the body and how the corps perceives pain.

Conclusion

- This formative qualitative study provided an opportunity to views of religious leaders towards death and dying in the study site to investigate child cause of death and new techniques of MITS to the site.
- Understanding the role of religion in collecting tissue samples has practical implications for health practitioners; especially to sample collection from dead bodies using MITS.
- Findings from this research will be vital in providing appropriate counseling and consent for MITS.
- To understand the feasibility and acceptability of MITS in Ethiopia, close follow-up of study participants is needed to understand the consent and decision-making process, and explore factors that could affect the acceptance for MITS.
- Overall, religious leaders viewed the MITS procedure positively when it is performed with respect to the deceased body and religious procedures.

See more data at champshealth.org