

# Adolescent boys in Jordan

The state of the evidence

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# Abbreviations

DfID	Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EER	Emergency Education Response
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based violence
GII	Gender Inequality Index
IMC	International Medical Corps
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JRP	Jordan Response Plan
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

# Executive summary

There is growing interest in understanding masculinities in the development sector – as a route to not only reducing violence against girls and women and opening space for their empowerment, but also to improving the outcomes of boys and men. While interest in adolescent boys' gendered experiences is of particular interest, given evidence that the gender norms that shape outcomes become increasingly salient during adolescence, there has been little attention directed at adolescent boys living in Jordan.

Sitting at the crossroads of the Middle East and North Africa, Jordan has long served as a haven for the region's refugee population. Beginning with Palestinian refugees in 1948, continuing with Iraqi refugees in the 1990s, and since 2011 absorbing hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing both drought and civil war, it is estimated that of the 9.5 million people living in Jordan, one in three is a refugee. Of those, just over 2 million are Palestinian and about 1.5 million are Syrian.

This brief situation analysis looks at each of the capability domains laid out in the conceptual framework of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme: education and learning; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. Where possible, it differentiates what is known about native-born Jordanians, compared to Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

## Adolescent boys

Adolescent boys living in Jordan have disparate experiences and needs – most of which we know very little about. Although research has been quite limited, with boys' needs vis-à-vis girls' poorly explored due to the ways in which the region's patriarchal traditions leave girls more visibly at risk, on the whole, refugee boys are at higher risk than their native born Jordanian peers across all domains.

### Education and learning

Adolescent boys living in Jordan are substantially less likely to be enrolled in school than girls. This is true regardless of whether boys are Jordanian natives, Palestine refugees, or

Syrian refugees. Syrian boys living in Jordan are especially unlikely to be enrolled in school – only one-fifth of those aged 15–17 are enrolled. Although household poverty and a need for child labour drives quite a bit of school leaving, particularly for refugee boys, many boys leave school due to poor classroom management and violence for boys' school leaving appears to be classroom management and violence. On a national level, boys' academic performance also lags behind that of girls. Indeed, Jordan ranks first globally in terms of the gender gap between boys' and girls' performance on the PISA test – an internationally normed exam that measures 15 year olds' learning outcomes.

### Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

In Jordan, violence is part and parcel of many boys' daily lives. Teacher-to-student and peer-to-peer violence at school is common and can be quite severe. Syrian refugee boys appear to be most at risk. While the government's double-shift schools may reduce peer-to-peer violence in the classroom, Syrian boys are bullied as they travel to and from school – and are indeed 'marked' as refugees by the time of day they attend school. There is also evidence that Syrian boys face sexual abuse, with younger boys victimised by both men and older boys. There appears to be no research that has addressed the experiences of Palestine refugee boys vis-à-vis violence.

### Health and nutrition

There has been very little research on the health of adolescent boys living in Jordan. The little evidence that we have suggests that boys' two biggest health issues are substance use and poor nutrition. Use of tobacco in particular appears to be very common, with up to half of Jordanian and Palestine refugee boys taking up smoking in late adolescence. Obesity is also a growing concern – even for the Syrian refugee boys who are food insecure.

### Psychosocial well-being

Very little research has touched on the psychosocial well-being of adolescent boys in Jordan. Jordanian boys report

being happier than girls, despite being less likely to have a friend or good communication with adults. Palestine refugee boys have been found to be less likely than other boys to respect parental authority. Syrian refugee boys feel less supported by their parents than their female peers – and substantial pressure to contribute to household income.

### **Voice and agency**

Because Arab cultures emphasise generational hierarchies, adolescent boys living in Jordan have relatively few venues to exercise their voice and agency. That said, there is evidence of generational shift, with Jordanian native and Palestine refugee boys claiming more control over personal decision-making. Adolescent boys', especially Syrian boys', access to organised activities and clubs is quite limited.

### **Economic empowerment**

Although adolescent boys are far more likely to be economically active than their female peers, and are likely

to have great identity investment in work due to gender norms that position men as breadwinners, high youth unemployment – exacerbated by the Syrian crisis – means that few adolescent boys can be said to be 'economically empowered'. Refugee boys' access to decent employment is especially limited, in part due to sharp legal limits on the types of employment which are open to them.

### **Conclusion**

Overall our findings point to an urgent need to strengthen the evidence base on adolescent boys from all nationalities in order to better inform policy and programming aimed at supporting boys' well-being and development trajectories into early adulthood. GAGE's primary research, which is following more than 3,500 adolescent girls and boys from Jordanian, Palestinian and Syrian communities in Jordan from 2018 to 2023, will be an important contributor in this space.

# Introduction

There is growing interest in understanding masculinities in the development sector – as a route to not only reducing violence against girls and women and opening space for their empowerment, but also to improving the outcomes of boys and men.<sup>1</sup> Given that the gender norms that shape those masculinities become more salient in adolescence, attention to adolescent boys' masculinities is of particular interest.<sup>2</sup> This situation analysis, which is meant as a companion piece to the longer situational analysis about adolescent girls, aims to briefly elucidate what we know about adolescent boys living in Jordan. It touches on each of the capability domains laid out in the conceptual framework of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme: education and learning; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. Where possible, it differentiates what is known about native-born Jordanians, compared to Palestine and Syrian refugees.

Outside of education, where there is growing attention to the fact that boys are increasingly falling behind girls, there has been little research that has addressed adolescent boys living in Jordan. Indeed, where research has focused on the nexus of age and gender, girls have received more attention than boys – often even in domains in which boys are likely to experience markedly different or

larger impacts (e.g. experiences with physical violence and access to employment).

## Jordanian context

Sitting at the crossroads of the Middle East and North Africa, Jordan has long served as a haven for the region's refugee population. Beginning with Palestine refugees in 1948, continuing with Iraqi refugees in the 1990s and since 2011 absorbing hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing both drought and civil war, it is estimated that of the 9.5 million people living in Jordan, one in three is a refugee. Of those, just over 2 million are Palestinian and about 1.5 million are Syrian. While ranked 'high' in terms of human development, Jordan is not a rich country. It has struggled to absorb those fleeing from civil and regional wars – physically, economically and socially. Jordan's public schools, which are running double-shift, cannot meet demand and the country is running out of water. Jordan long ago granted most Palestine refugees full citizenship, giving them access to the same rights and services as other Jordanian citizens. The roughly 20% who remain living in refugee camps, however, continue to face high rates of unemployment and poverty. Jordan's Syrian population, of which only about half is officially registered with the UNHCR, is incredibly fragile. Nearly 90% live below the Jordanian poverty line and, despite assistance from the UNHCR and UNICEF, at least two-thirds are food insecure.

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<sup>1</sup> Barker, 2005; Ricardo and Barker, 2009; Barker et al., 2011, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Kagestan et al., 2016; Kato-Wallace et al., 2016.



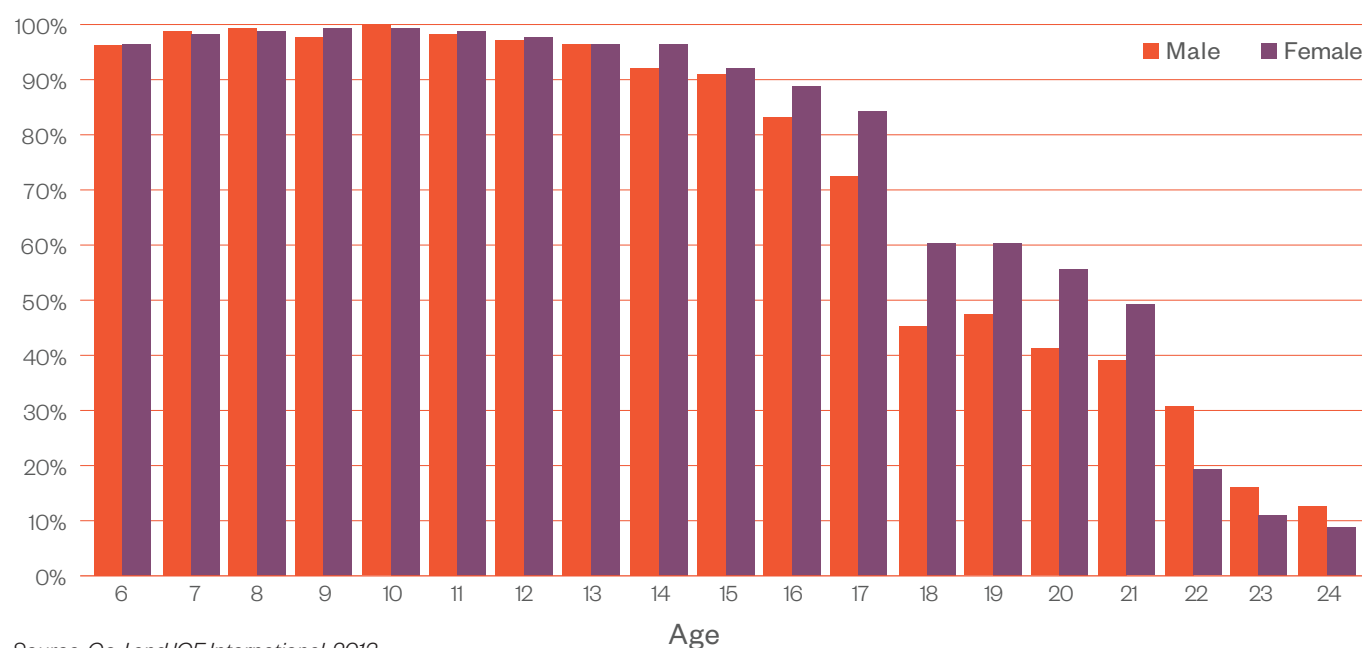
# 1 Education and learning

While estimates of magnitude vary,<sup>3</sup> adolescent boys in Jordan are disadvantaged compared to their female peers in terms of school enrolment. Some research finds that this is true even in early adolescence, all finds that it becomes markedly more so in later adolescence given that the transition from basic to secondary education occurs at the end of grade 10 in Jordan (see Figure 1<sup>4</sup>). UNESCO (2019) reports that in 2017, the overall secondary gross enrolment ratio for girls was 65% and for boys 63%. The Ministry of Education<sup>5</sup> (2017), supported to bring a new EMIS system online in order to better monitor educational provision and uptake, reports an even larger gap in girls' favour (see Table 1). Because university education is even more heavily tilted towards females, by young adulthood, the average woman

aged 20-24 has nearly two more years of formal schooling than does the average young man (13 vs 11.3).<sup>6</sup>

Boys in Jordan are not only less likely than girls to attend school, they do not perform as well academically. Indeed, Jordan ranks first globally in terms of the gender gap between boys' and girls' performance on the PISA test – an internationally normed exam that measures 15 year olds' learning outcomes.<sup>7</sup> In 2015,<sup>8</sup> boys scored an average of 373 in math (compared to 387 for girls), 372 in reading (compared to 444 for girls), and 389 in science (compared to 428 for girls).<sup>9</sup> These score differences mean that by age 15, girls are performing an entire year ahead of boys in science and nearly two years in reading.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 1: Age-specific attendance rates, by sex**



Source: GoJ and ICF International, 2013

3 In part because planned research was never completed due to resource constraints and in part because the Syrian conflict – and the waves of immigration that it has driven – has shifted priorities and complicated research.  
 4 The 2012 DHS (GoJ and ICF International, 2013) does not reflect the influx of Syrian refugees – given the timing of data collection. Findings from the 2017-2018 DHS are not yet available.  
 5 Note that these new figures include all schools and all students in Jordan.  
 6 GoJ and ICF International, 2013.  
 7 Tweissi et al., 2014.  
 8 The magnitude of the gender gap predates the influx of Syrian students. On the 2012 test, boys scored an average of 361 on reading, 375 on math, and 388 on science. Girls scored 436, 396, and 430 respectively.  
 9 OECD, 2018.  
 10 Ripley, 2017.

**Table 1: Gross and net enrolment ratios, by level and sex**

	GER basic	NER basic	GER secondary	NER secondary
Boys	97.3	92.4	67.8	61.9
Girls	97.3	94.1	81.6	74.7

Overall, these patterns – boys’ lower enrolment and poorer performance – hold true for Jordan’s refugee populations as well, at least for those in middle adolescence. Of Palestine refugee 14 year olds who live in host communities, for example, 93% of boys versus 97% of girls are enrolled in school (compared to 87% and 88% of boys and girls who live in camps).<sup>11</sup> Of Syrian refugee children, only 22% of boys aged 15–17, compared to 29% of girls the same age, are attending school<sup>12</sup> (see Figure 2). Syrian adolescent boys with disabilities are especially likely to be out of school. Of those aged 12–17, only 33% attend school (compared to 47% of girls).<sup>13</sup>

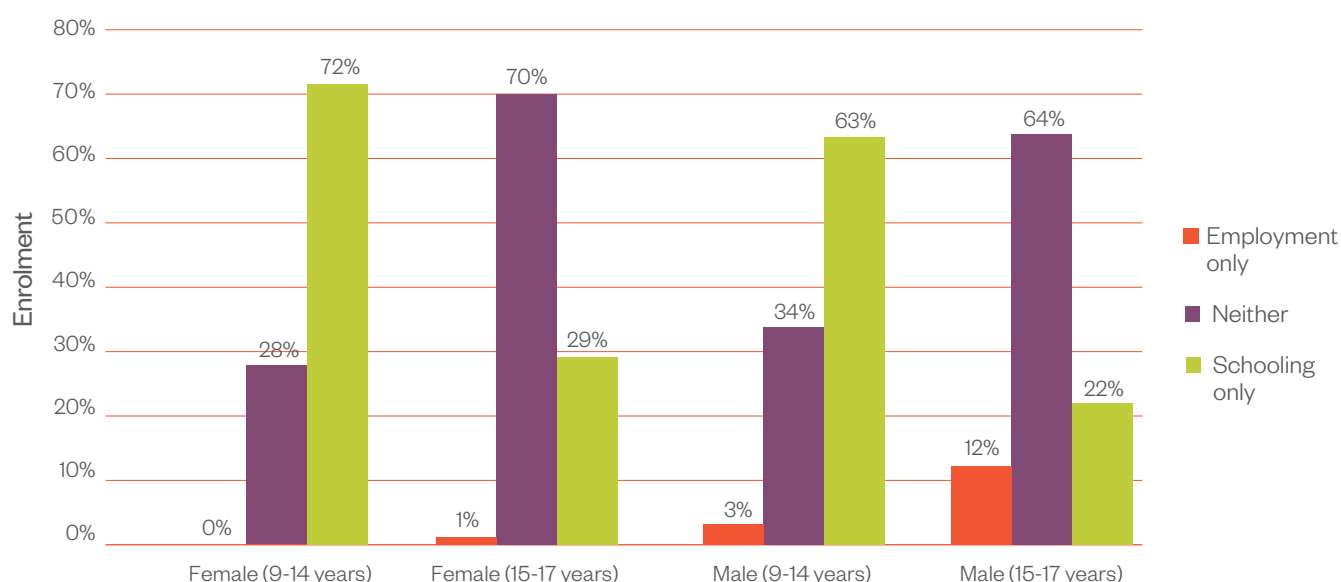
However, while broad patterns favouring girls hold across populations during middle adolescence, in later adolescence, they begin to diverge. For Syrian refugees, unlike for Jordanians, starting at around age 18, adolescent

girls become less likely to be enrolled in education than boys (see Figure 3).

Reasons for boys’ relative disadvantage are varied. For some boys, child labour is a barrier to learning. The need to contribute to household income can pull them out of school altogether, or slowly over time as their absences accumulate and their performance declines.<sup>14</sup> Economic factors are particularly potent for Syrian refugee boys. HRW (2016), for example, found that 60% of Syrian families living in Jordan reported relying on income earned by children to make ends meet and UNICEF (2017) found that on average, and excluding international assistance as a source of income, 22% of household income was earned by children under the age of 16. These children are far more likely to be boys than girls. UNICEF (2017) found that 37% of boys – compared to only 5% of girls – listed child labour as a barrier to school enrolment<sup>15</sup> (see Figure 4). That said, Culbertson et al. (2016) found that most Syrian adolescent boys who are out of school are not working. In their sample, nearly two-thirds of boys aged 15–17 were neither in school nor working (see Figure 2).

The need to contribute to household income is not the only economic factor that shapes boys’ schooling outcomes, however. Hamad et al. (2017) and USAID

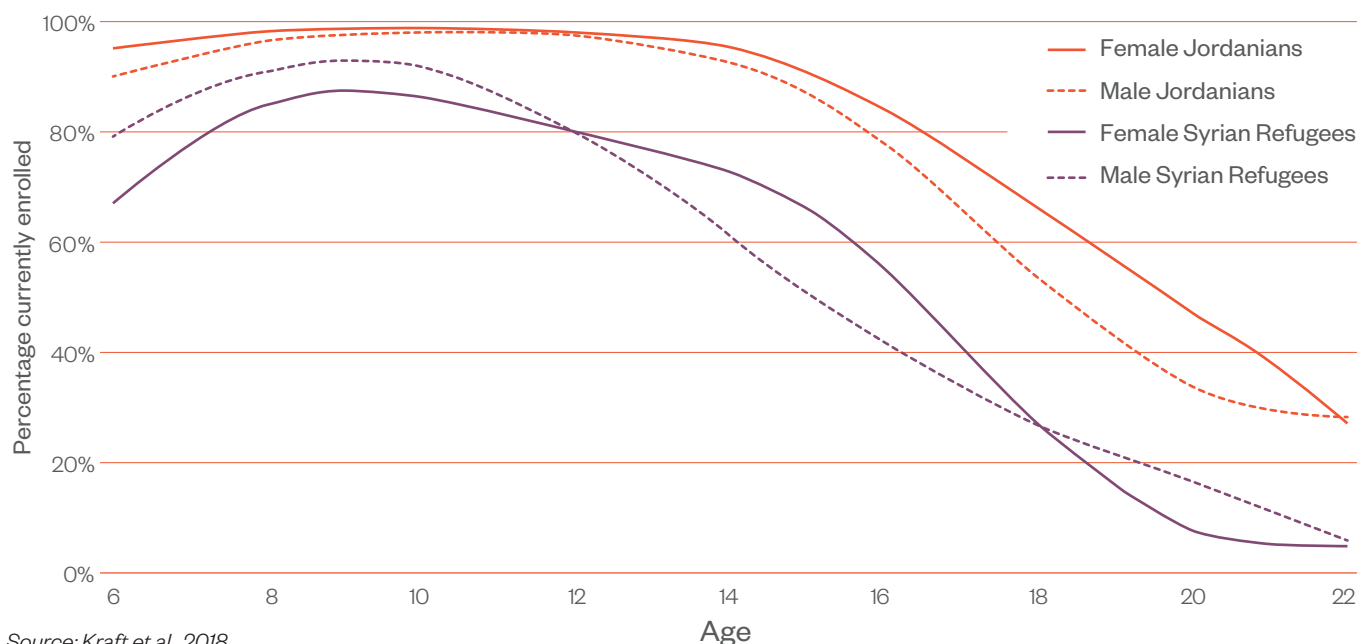
**Figure 2: Schooling and employment status of Syrian refugee children, by age and sex**



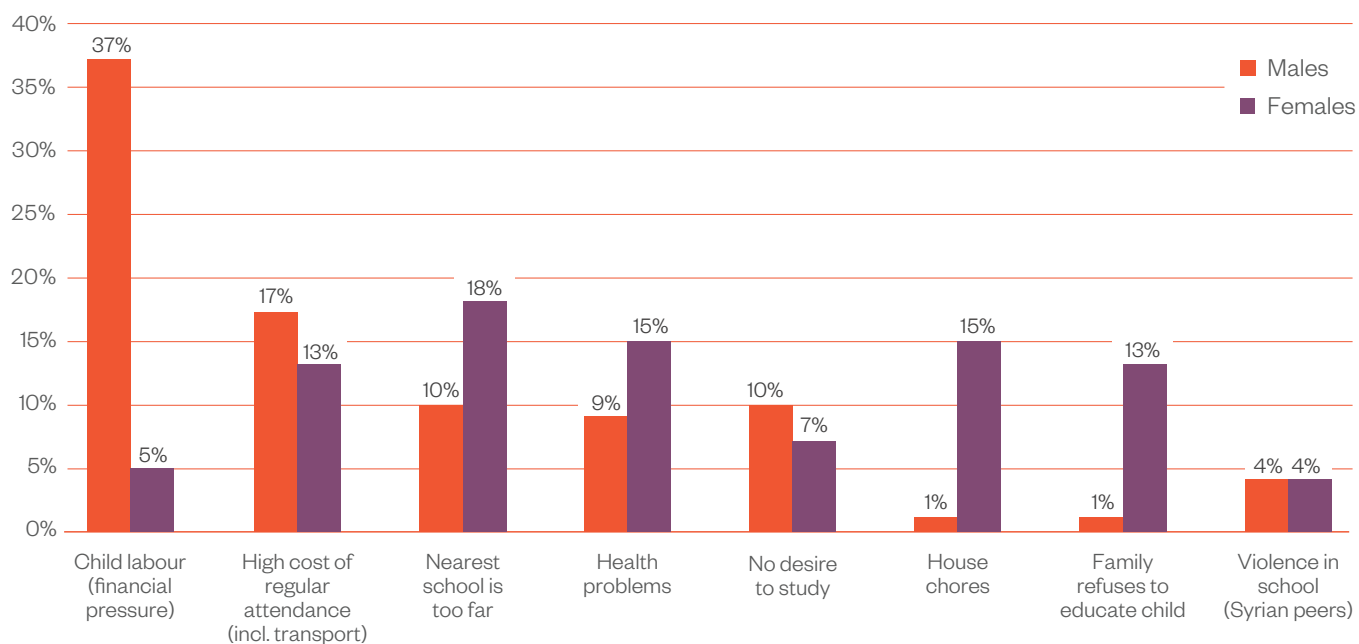
Source: Culbertson et al., 2016

11 Tiltnes and Zhang, 2013.  
 12 UNICEF, 2015; Culbertson et al., 2016.  
 13 UNICEF, 2015; Culbertson et al., 2016.  
 14 USAID, 2015; UNICEF, 2014, 2017; World Bank, 2017.  
 15 UNICEF, 2017; see also Hamad et al., 2017.

**Figure 3: Current enrolment in school (%), by sex and age, Jordanians and Syrian refugees aged 6-22, 2016**



**Figure 4: Barriers to enrolment in formal education**



(2015) found that some boys and their parents question the value of investing in boys' education, given high unemployment rates even for those who have passed the *Tawjih*<sup>16</sup> or graduated from university. This may be

particularly the case for refugee boys, who find it more difficult to secure spots at university and are prohibited from working in more lucrative professions even were they to do so.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the underinvestment in boys'

<sup>16</sup> The *Tawjih* is the exam that students sit at the end of secondary school. One's score on the exam is the sole factor considered for university admission and placement.

<sup>17</sup> Van Blerk and Shand, 2017.

education is reflected in the amount of time they spend on homework compared to girls<sup>18</sup> – as well as the level of homework supervision that parents provide.<sup>19</sup> Overall, nearly 40% of boys who leave school before completion report that they did so because there were ‘not interested’. Another 33% indicated that they had failed an examination.<sup>20</sup>

Recent efforts to understand Jordan’s ‘reverse’ gender gap in education have moved away from economics and begun to focus on pedagogy and classroom management as key drivers of boys’ disengagement from schooling.<sup>21</sup> In Jordan, most schools are segregated starting in third grade. Boys go to school with other boys and are taught by men and girls go to school with other girls and are taught by women. The ramifications of this division appear myriad and cascading. Not only are boys studying in environments where they are more likely to experience peer-to-peer violence, especially if they are refugee children,<sup>22</sup> but they are taught by teachers who are less qualified, less well supervised by their principals, less satisfied with their jobs and consequently more likely to leave,<sup>23</sup> and relatively more likely to resort to violence to control their classrooms.<sup>24</sup>

Adolescent boys feel the impacts of this gender segregation acutely. Those who participated in Thawabieh and Al-Foro’s (2010) research on school vandalism reported that they were striking back at their schools because they felt they were being treated unfairly. Approximately 60% reported that they were not rewarded for good performance, were denied access to recreational activities while at school, had only limited opportunities for participation in the classroom, and felt that relationships between students and teachers were poor.

Ripley (2017) notes that differences between male and female teachers are primarily a result of the teaching profession being undervalued and underpaid in Jordan – with World Bank (2017) observing that the profession attracts poorly performing students who are then poorly trained. Teaching being one of the few respectable professions open to women in Jordan, which has one of the world’s lowest rates of female labour force participation,<sup>25</sup> female teachers are relatively more satisfied with their jobs and invested in their careers and classrooms. This is not the case for male teachers, who find it difficult to support a family on a teacher’s salary and can feel disrespected by their peers for their choice of profession.<sup>26</sup>

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18 Haddad et al., 2009.

19 Tweissi et al., 2014.

20 Barcucci and Mryyan, 2014.

21 Tweissi et al., 2014.

22 Hamad et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2016; IRC, 2015; Sirin and Sirin-Rogers, 2015; USAID, 2015; WRC, 2014; UNICEF, 2014.

23 Tweissi et al., 2014.

24 Ripley, 2017; World Bank, 2017.

25 World Bank, 2018.

26 Ripley, 2017; Tweissi et al., 2014.

## 2 Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

In Jordan, violence is part and parcel of many boys' daily lives. As noted above, teacher-to-student and peer-to-peer violence at school is common and can be quite severe (e.g. boys are slapped, beaten with sticks, dragged across the ground, and have their heads bashed into walls).<sup>27</sup> USAID (2015) reports that while teachers are aware that violence is driving boys to dislike school, they see it as the only way to control overcrowded classrooms. Interestingly, both boys and their parents often see even this harsh violence as justified.<sup>28</sup> Fathers in particular see it as preparing boys for life.<sup>29</sup>

There is also some evidence that adolescent boys in Jordan commonly experience sexual violence. In one study, 27% of male university students reported having experienced sexual violence before the age of 14.<sup>30</sup>

Syrian refugee boys living in Jordan are especially likely to experience violence. Many studies have found that violence at the hands of host community peers is endemic, with violence in some communities so pervasive and severe that parents pull their children from school in order to keep them safe.<sup>31</sup> UNICEF (2016) found that about 13% of all drop-outs can be attributed to bullying by Jordanian peers and Krafft et al. (2018) report that violence is the most common reason that Syrian refugees leave school, with 60% listing it as the primary reason for school leaving. While the government's double-shift schools, which educate native-born boys in the morning and refugee boys

in the afternoon, may reduce peer-to-peer violence in the classroom, boys are also bullied as they travel to and from school – and are indeed 'marked' as refugees by the time of day they attend school.<sup>32</sup> As is the case with Jordanian boys, teachers offer refugee boys little protection and indeed in some cases further victimise them.<sup>33</sup>

Syrian refugee boys also appear to be at particularly high risk of sexual violence. This is especially the case for younger boys – who are at risk from not only adult men, but also older adolescent boys.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, a 2013 study found that refugee families perceive boys to be more at risk of sexual violence than girls. This is perhaps because there is no threat to family honour when boys are assaulted and perhaps because of their greater risk of detention. Reporting is minimal, however, because the sexual assault of boys impugns their masculinity.<sup>35</sup>

While not age disaggregated, Care and Promundo (2017) found that in Amman and other larger cities in Jordan, Syrian refugee boys and men are especially afraid of being hassled, arrested and forcibly encamped/repatriated to Syria by Jordanian security forces – who accuse them of seeking illegal work when they are merely moving around their communities. They also report some evidence that adolescent boys are being recruited by armed groups.

There appears to be no research that has addressed the experiences of Palestine refugee boys vis-à-vis violence.

<sup>27</sup> Hamad et al., 2017; USAID, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> USAID, 2015; Seely, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Seely, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in UNHCR, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Hamad et al., 2017; IRC, 2015; Sirin and Sirin-Rogers, 2015; USAID, 2015; WRC, 2014; IMC and UNICEF, 2014; Care and Promundo, 2017; UNICEF, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Hamad et al. 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Hamad et al. 2017.

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> UN Women, 2013.

## 3 Health and nutrition

There has been very little research on the health of adolescent boys living in Jordan. Even the Global School-based Student Health Survey has not been done since 2007. The little evidence we have suggests that boys' two biggest health issues are substance use and poor nutrition.

Boys in Jordan are significantly more likely than girls to smoke – and their rates of smoking appear to be increasing over time. A survey of 8,000 young people aged 14–25 found that 27% of boys, and only 5% of girls, smoked tobacco.<sup>36</sup> Another study, with a longitudinal design, found that in 2008, 25% of seventh grade boys admitted to smoking. By 2011, 50% of boys said they smoked cigarettes daily.<sup>37</sup> Adolescent boys' use of alcohol and drugs is also significant. The survey of 8,000 young people mentioned above found that 37% of boys, compared to 20% of girls, consumed alcohol and that 15% of boys, compared to 6% of girls, had friends who used drugs.<sup>38</sup> The prevalence of substance use – and the toll that it is taking on youth culture – was also apparent in USAID's (2015) Youth Survey. When young people were asked what they would like to change about society, many reported drug use, which they said was common and reflected the hopelessness which they felt about their future.

Boys in Jordan, like their female peers, are also increasingly likely to be overweight and obese. Indeed, boys aged 15–18 are more than twice as likely to be obese as girls the same age (8% versus 3%),<sup>39</sup> despite tending to get more exercise.<sup>40</sup>

While we know that Syrian refugee children and adolescents living in Jordan have extremely high rates of food insecurity and face many barriers to accessing health care,<sup>41</sup> there is no evidence that speaks to the health vulnerabilities facing adolescent boys specifically.

The sole study that touches on the physical health of Jordan's Palestinian population merely observed that boys between the ages of 15 and 19 were in good health – with no real differences between those living in (96%) and out (97%) of camps.<sup>42</sup> Like their Jordanian peers, however, a large proportion of boys take up smoking in later adolescence. While at age 15, less than 20% of boys smoke cigarettes, by age 20, about 45% smoke.<sup>43</sup>

The most recent Demographic and Healthy Survey reports that boys' knowledge about HIV transmission is overall poor. Less than half (46%) of boys aged 15–19 know that HIV can be prevented by using condoms, for example (Department of Statistics and ICF, 2018).

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<sup>36</sup> Ismayilova et al. 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Jaber et al., 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Ismayilova et al. 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Musaiger et al. 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Haddad et al., 2009.

<sup>41</sup> UNICEF, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Tiltne and Zhang 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Tiltne and Zhang 2013.

# 4 Psychosocial well-being

Very little research has touched on the psychosocial well-being of adolescent boys in Jordan. Indeed, much of what we know about boys has grown out of research about girls. The more gender-specific threats to boys' well-being, outside of violence, have barely been addressed.

Haddad et al. (2009) found that boys aged 12–17 are more likely to report being 'very happy' than girls the same age (25% versus 18%), despite the fact that they are less likely to report having a friend or family member they could talk to (77% versus 83%), are twice as likely to report having poor communication with adults (6% versus 3%), and are more likely to feel lonely (47% versus 32%). How much of boys' reported happiness is due to gender norms that dictate emotional stoicism for boys is unknown.

Ismayilova et al. (2013), in their study of 8,000 young people aged 14–25, found that boys who had been physically abused were significantly more likely to exhibit signs of depression. In addition, among boys aged 14–16, depressive symptoms were associated with ever drinking alcohol. Among those aged 17–19, they were associated with low assertiveness, susceptibility to peer pressure and current use of tobacco.

Boys in Jordan have also been found to be more likely than girls to engage in non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI). Nearly 30% of boys, and only 18% of girls, report engaging in such behaviour – though it should be noted that the types of NSSI that boys engage in (e.g. hitting oneself) is arguably less dangerous than that that girls engage in (e.g. cutting).<sup>44</sup>

While there has been a great deal of research aimed at exploring the psychosocial well-being of Syrian refugee children living in Jordan, and that research has universally found young people of all ages to be at high risk of mental health issues born of conflict and poverty, most of the research which is disaggregated by gender specifically focuses on girls.<sup>45</sup> UNICEF and IMC (2014) offer a rare glimpse into the psychosocial needs of Syrian refugee boys. They find that boys are more prone to externalising

behaviours, such as getting into trouble, and have more limited pro-social strengths.<sup>46</sup> They also find that boys feel less supported by their parents and friends than girls (see Figure 5). UNHCR (2017) adds that a key stressor for adolescent boys is the pressure that they feel to contribute to household income.

In regard to Palestine refugee boys living in Jordan, research has found that they are less likely than other adolescent refugees to respect parental authority, and more likely to be rebellious and exhibit emotional distress.<sup>47</sup> Boys are more likely than girls to engage in activities that they did not want their parents to know about – and were consequently less likely to disclose information to their mothers.<sup>48</sup>

A recent study on Youth Transitions in Jordan provides a case in point about missed opportunities to explore the gendered threats to boys' psychosocial well-being. Van Blerk and Shand (2017) note that barriers to obtaining 'good work' have significant impacts on adolescents' and young adults' psychosocial well-being, as without work they are trapped in a prolonged adolescence unable

**Figure 5: Perceived adolescent support**

Do you...	Boys N=948	Girls N=1080
Feel that you can get along well with your parents?	3.1 (1.2)	3.1 (1.2)
Feel that your parents can take care of you?	2.9 (1.2)	3.2 (1.1)
Feel that your parents can take care for themselves?	2.9 (1.2)	3.2 (1.1)
Feel that you get help from your siblings?	2.4 (1.3)	2.5 (1.3)
Feel that you get help from your friends?	1.9 (1.3)	2.2 (1.3)

Scale: 0 = never, 1 = little, 2 = sometimes, 3 = a lot, 4 = always  
 \* Comm=non-camp setting

44 Hanania et al. 2015.

45 Hamad et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2016; Sirin and Sirin-Rogers, 2015; NRC, 2016; IMC and UNICEF, 2014.

46 see also NRC, 2016.

47 Smetana et al., 2015, 2016.

48 Ahmad et al., 2015.

to achieve independence or form families of their own (because they cannot afford to marry<sup>49</sup>). However, while the authors discuss the especially high institutional barriers facing refugee youth, they do not explore differential impacts on boys and young men versus girls

and young women. Given social norms regarding bread-winning, and the reality that marriage is the central marker of adulthood for females in Jordan, it is likely that the psychosocial impacts of this period of 'wait-hood' are significantly different for boys and girls.

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<sup>49</sup> Assad, 2014; USAID, 2015.



## 5 Voice and agency

Ahmad et al. (2015) observes that Arab cultures emphasise generational hierarchies, with even adult children expected to accede to their parents' demands and adolescents seen as immature and in need of monitoring and control. Parents stress traditional values, including obedience and interdependence, and adolescents are expected to conform to tradition and uphold family honour.<sup>50</sup> USAID's (2015) National Youth Assessment, which included both Jordanian and Syrian refugee boys between the ages of 10 and 24, found that boys felt they had very little choice and voice because of these generational hierarchies. On the other hand, there is some evidence of change. Haddad et al. (2009) found that 22% of boys aged 12–17 felt that they almost always had control over events in their personal lives (compared to 12% of girls).

Adolescent boys in Jordan, like their female peers, are not especially likely to participate in organised activities. For example, Haddad et al. (2009) found that less than half of boys aged 12–17 participate in school activities (47%) and only one-third participate in activities outside

of school. USAID (2015) found that student parliaments are generally perceived to be adult-controlled and ineffective at encouraging youth engagement and that young people prefer volunteering activities, which make them feel useful. Mercy Corp (2012) found that Jordan has the second lower rate of youth membership in civic groups in the MENA region – only 8% of boys and 4% of girls were members of a civic group.

Syrian refugee boys have very little access to programming aimed at growing agency and participation, outside of UNICEF's Makani Centres. Boys in USAID's (2015) youth study reported that the costs of accessing such programming were prohibitive.

As noted above, Smetana (2015) found that Palestine refugee boys make relatively more decisions about their own lives and increasingly see parents' authority as 'bounded'. Their access to other forms of decision-making and their broader participation in home, school and community life is yet to be explored.

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<sup>50</sup> See also Smetana, 2015, 2016; Haddad et al., 2009.

# 6 Economic empowerment

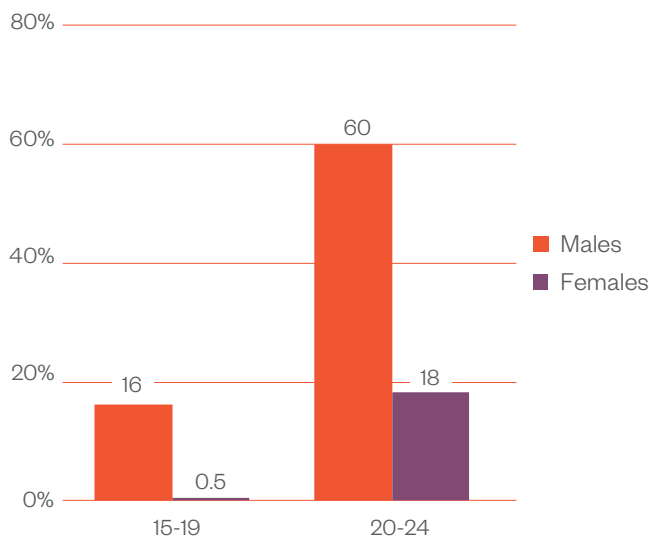
Driven by the size of its ‘youth bulge, youth unemployment is a significant issue in Jordan – and one that has escalated considerably with the onset of the Syrian crisis, which has flooded the labour market with low-skilled workers.<sup>51</sup> This has had particular ramifications for boys, who are far more likely than girls to be economically active and, as noted above, are likely to have great identity investment in work due to gender norms that position men as breadwinner (see Figure 6). The World Bank (2018) reports that male youth unemployment (ages 15–24) climbed from 25% to 31% between 2010 and 2017. Of that group, adolescent boys are more likely than young men to be unemployed. The 2013 Labour Force survey found that one in three economically active boys aged 15–19 were unable to find work.<sup>52</sup> Critically, in terms of supporting boys’ longer-term trajectories, there is evidence that boys do see lower returns to education than girls. In 2010, boys and young men aged 15–29 who had a university education were more likely to be unemployed than boys with only a secondary

education (see Figure 7).<sup>53</sup> The OECD notes that young graduates face an average labour market transition of three years.<sup>54</sup> Barcucci and Mryyan (2014) found that 90% of boys and young men used no financial services – including savings accounts – largely because they saw no need given that they were living at home.

In part, Jordanian boys’ and young men’s high unemployment rates – and lengthy transition periods – are driven by their preferences for particular jobs. Brown et al. (2015) note that they continue to have a strong preference for public-sector employment, which UNDP et al. (2015) observe is increasingly hard to obtain. Indeed, USAID (2015) found that boys aged 10–18 often refuse to consider ‘humble’ professions, because they view them as socially humiliating, though they also observe that boys’ career choices are driven less by their own preferences than by familial and societal expectations.

Syrian refugee boys, who are legally restricted to the agriculture, construction and service industries,<sup>55</sup> are

**Figure 6: Labour market participation rate, by sex and age**



Source: ILO, 2014

**Figure 7: Unemployment rate by sex and education**



Source: World Bank, 2013

51 USAID 2015; Brown et al., 2015; Barcucci and Mryyan, 2014; Stave and Hillesund, 2015.

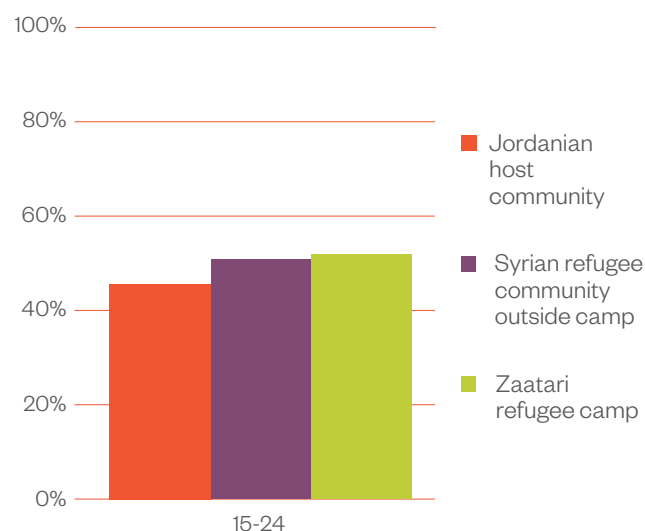
52 As cited in USAID 2014.

53 World Bank, 2013; see also Barcucci and Mryyan, 2014.

54 OECD, 2018b.

55 Van Blerk and Shand, 2017.

**Figure 8: Labour force participation, male youth, by community**

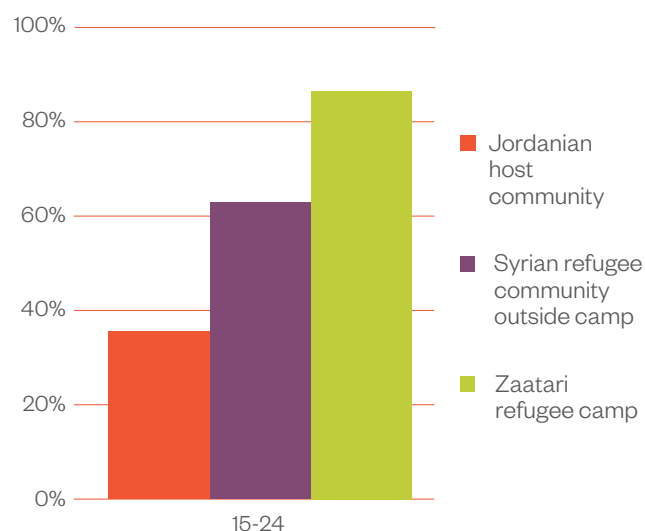


Source: ILO, 2014

simultaneously more likely to be economically active and underemployed. Stave and Hillesund (2015) report that while 8% of Jordanian boys aged 15–18 are employed, 14% of Syrian refugee boys the same age are working. This pattern is replicated across the larger group of male youth (aged 15–24). As can be seen in Figure 8, young Syrian men are more likely to be in the labour market than young Jordanian men. Differentials in unemployment are even more striking. The unemployment rate of young Syrian refugee men living in host communities is more than 20 percentage points higher than that of their Jordanian peers – with those living in Zaatari camp only rarely able to find work (see Figure 9).<sup>56</sup> This bleak reality is reflected in boys’ aspirations. The USAID (2015) Youth Assessment found that Syrian refugee boys have no aspirations of ever obtaining ‘real’ jobs because of their refugee status.

Among Palestinian refugee boys, younger adolescents are quite unlikely to be in the labour market. Fewer than 1% of boys aged 10–14 who live in host communities were working in 2012<sup>57</sup> (compared to approximately 2% of those

**Figure 9: Current unemployment rate, male youth, by community**



Source: World Bank, 2013

living in camps). Of those aged 15–19, fewer than 15% were working (compared to approximately 25% of those living in camps). In part this reflects boys’ growing participation in education. In part, however, it reflects Palestine refugees’ forced disengagement from the labour market.<sup>58</sup> Of all Palestine refugee men living in host communities, labour-force participation dropped from 71% to 62% between 1996 and 2012.<sup>59</sup> Of those aged 20–24 and living in host communities, the proportion who were not in school and not working tripled between 2003 and 2012 (from 5.1% to 15.6%). Of those living in camps, it nearly quadrupled (from 5% to 19%). As is the case with Syrian refugee boys, Palestine refugee boys’ aspirations are increasingly realistic – and fatalistic. Van Blerk and Shand (2017) observe that while work continues to be seen as a ‘vital step towards adulthood’, it is so severely restricted by regulation that many Palestine refugees, especially those from Gaza – who lack a national ID number and are largely shut out of formal employment all together – see little chance of ever obtaining decent employment (p.18).

<sup>56</sup> Stave and Hillesund, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Tiltne and Zhang, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Van Blerk and Shand, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Tiltne and Zhang, 2013.

# Conclusions

Outside of education, research has paid only the most minimal attention to adolescent boys in Jordan. Primarily focused on the needs of the Syrian refugee population more generally, or on the broader impacts of the refugee influx on host communities, the age and gender disaggregated experiences of adolescent boys have not been prioritised. Adolescents are typically subsumed within the wider populations of children under the age of 18, or youth between the ages of 15 and 24, and the needs of boys versus girls are rarely considered. Indeed, where research has taken note of the gendered needs of adolescents, it has conflated gendered needs with girls' needs and effectively ignored the gendered issues facing

boys. Given growing evidence that adolescent boys in Jordan are increasingly disconnected from school, in part because they are more vulnerable to physical violence, and have only limited access to decent employment, which can effectively trap them in a prolonged adolescence that has profound implications for their psychosocial well-being and access to voice and agency, more focused and sustained attention to the experiences of adolescent boys in Jordan, irrespective of nationality, is required. This strengthened evidence basis will be essential for policy and programming to support adolescent boys' well-being and development trajectories into early adulthood.

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Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South.

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