Gendered experiences of adolescents

Baseline findings from World Vision's Rupantaram adolescent lifeskills curriculum

Anita Ghimire, Fiona Samuels, Riju Tiwari and Samjhana Bhujel

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Executive summary

Adolescence has powerful impacts on children's capabilities – partly because of the physical transformations wrought by puberty and partly because children's place in their family and broader community shifts as they approach adulthood (Jones et al., 2018). In South Asian cultures where there is a belief that female sexuality needs to be controlled, the onset of adolescence is more difficult, as the physical changes brought about by puberty invite stigma and censorship, and social (gendered) norms and expected behaviours become more stringent (Samuels et al., 2017). This has particularly strong impacts on women and girls in patriarchal societies where female sexuality is a taboo and where control over women's and girls' sexuality is the norm. In such societies, girls start losing any autonomy they may have enjoyed as younger children as soon as puberty begins; they often experience psychosocial violence and bear the brunt of harmful gender norms and discrimination in opportunities, thus falling behind their male peers in their personal development (Jones et al., 2018).

In Nepal, adolescents comprise almost a quarter of the population (Ministry of Health et al., 2017) and almost half of all adolescents are girls. Investment in adolescents is important not only because of their sheer numbers but also to sustain the significant investment the country has made in child wellbeing and towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Nepal had fully achieved goal 3A (eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education) and 4 reducing child mortality, and partially achieved target 2A (ensuring that all children complete primary education). The government aims to make further progress on the partially achieved goals by tying actions in with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence, addressing the issues facing adolescent girls who lag behind their male peers will be a priority for Nepal in years to come.

While existing literatures have mapped programmes that focus on adolescents (see, for example, Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017; Bakrania et al., 2018), we have limited evidence on how different interventions help to build girls' capabilities, and under which circumstances. The objective of the broader GAGE research is to contribute to knowledge gaps on what works to develop adolescents' capabilities and improve their wellbeing. The objective of this baseline study phase is to understand adolescent vulnerabilities in different capability areas and to help us assess, in the second phase, whether interventions are addressing key capability deficits for adolescent girls and boys.

This report presents findings of a baseline study among adolescent girls and boys in Nepal. It is part of a nine-year (2015–2024) longitudinal research programme, Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE), which follows the lives of adolescents in four diverse countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal and Rwanda. Using the '3 Cs' conceptual framework (capabilities, change strategies and contexts), GAGE aims to fill the vast evidence gap on 'what works' to enable poor adolescent girls to emerge from poverty and fast-track social change for themselves, their families and communities, and their countries. GAGE's research addresses two broad questions:

- What do adolescents' lives look like as they evolve over the second decade of life and how are their experiences gendered?
- What impact have change strategies (e.g. through programme interventions) had on adolescents' development?

In Nepal, the first phase of the GAGE research is a baseline study for a peer learning programme, Rupantaran (meaning 'transformation') – an adolescent-focused life skills programme run by World Vision since 2016 as part of its Protection programme. Its objectives are:

- to establish and train adolescent and youth groups to provide life skills to vulnerable young adolescent girls and boys;
- to facilitate annual cycles of Rupantaran life skills curriculum with adolescents and youth groups to strengthen capacities across six domains (see below), including increased self-efficacy, self-esteem, agency, decision-making and communication skills.

Rupantaran programme from the World Vision uses peer education methods to teach a 15-module curriculum. It runs for between 7 and 10 months, which includes an inception phase. It was carried out in Morang district by World Vision, in the south-eastern Terai plains, and ended in 2018. . The study is divided into two phases, the first baseline phase and the second endline phase. The first phase of the study, on which this report is based, represents the baseline and was carried out in April 2018. It aimed to understand the current situation in terms of adolescents' capabilities across six key domains: (1) education and learning; (2) health, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and nutrition; (3) bodily integrity and freedom from violence; (4) psychosocial wellbeing; (5) voice and agency; and (6) economic empowerment. These capability areas were measured before programme implementation and will be measured again after implementation in order to discern any changes. We identified a control group of girls and boys from an area adjacent to each of the two research sites (see below) so that we can compare changes in the lives of participants that may be attributable to the programme. The control group participants were selected with the help of local World Vision staff who have long experience of working in the community and could thus help us identify sites with key similarities (for instance, in terms of caste and ethnicity) but with no programme intervention.

Methods

We conducted baseline research with 40 nodal adolescents and will conduct the follow-up survey with the same group at the end of the programme. We used qualitative and participatory methods, including semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with adolescent girls and boys, their parents, siblings and grandparents, teachers, community leaders, and local programme implementers. We explored the social networks that are meaningful to adolescents using social support analysis tools and through discussions. In group discussions with community members, we used historical process tracing of social norm change and community timelines to understand programmatic, infrastructural and institutional developments over time.

Recognising that adolescents are not a homogeneous group, we disaggregated data according to three cohorts: younger adolescents (10–12 years), mid-adolescents (13–15 years) and older adolescents (16–19 years). In the GAGE programme, we are interested in two cohorts, young adolescents (10–12 years) and older adolescents (15–17 years). However, in the field, there was a problem with sample size; there were only 4 programme participants aged 10–12 and few boys aged 16–17. It was impossible to find within such a small sample individuals meeting other criteria such as having a sibling, having a male or female sibling, etc., which we needed for the research. Lastly, the sample did not allow us to have an equal number of adolescents in the younger and older cohorts or even a sufficient sample. So, based on availability of participants, we opted for the three groups mentioned above.

Morang district was chosen as it is the district where World Vision (WV) Nepal has been working for a number of years and is where the Rupantaran programme will be implemented. While this district is viewed as one of the most industrialised and developed in Nepal, there are still pockets of extreme marginalisation, often linked to ethnicity. Thus, for instance, people belonging to the Madhesi ethnic group adhere to gendered social norms that are extremely discriminatory for girls; and while social norms among the Tharu ethnic group are more egalitarian, girls face other barriers to wellbeing, including lack of education. Little is known about adolescents in this area in general, and, more specifically, about the marginalised groups that the interventions focus on. Two study sites were selected – one urban (Biratnagar metropolitan city) and one rural (Gramthan rural municipality) – to capture differences in how norms and capability domains interact. To enable us to explore changes linked to Rupantaran, two villages were selected in each site – one that will take part in the programme, and one that will not (the control site).

Findings

Education and learning

- Parents of today's adolescents are more likely to aspire to educate their children compared to parents' and grandparents' generation, but this aspiration is still not strong enough to substantially improve adolescents' educational outcomes.
- Although enrolment and retention rates have improved compared to the parents' generation, many children (especially those in the rural study site, older children, and those from the Madhesi community) drop out of school.
- Older adolescent boys drop out due to the frustration of being humiliated by teachers, corporal punishment (which, though illegal, is widely practised) and dissatisfaction with the school system, such as its teaching methods. They also face family pressure to start earning and contributing to the household and thus drop out of school. Older adolescent girls drop out because they have to do unpaid care work or housework.
- Older adolescent boys can benefit from peer learning even when they miss classes. However, due to restricted mobility, girls cannot benefit from peer learning to catch up on what they miss when absent from school.
- Quality is a further disincentive: the level and quality of education that most boys and girls receive does not lead to jobs, also creating a sense of hopelessness.

Health, SRH and nutrition

- The most common health problems for girls are around menstruation; girls reported that they had severe pain and heavy bleeding but their parents did not want them to go to the doctor as this was considered normal, and besides, speaking to a doctor about it would be embarrassing.
- Girls and boys get most of their information about SRH from their peers (usually older adolescents).
- Local primary health care centres are the most common services used by families; access is reported to be similar for girls and boys, and in urban and rural areas.
- While premarital sex is taboo, it is happening more and more, especially among older adolescents. However, due to strong stigma, adolescents do not have access to relevant information, which puts them at high risk of sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) and other problems. There are no formal institutions through which girls and boys can get information on SRH.
- We did not find clear evidence to suggest any issues around gender discrimination in nutrition. Girls (and mothers) usually ate after men and boys, but they were not obliged to eat less food.

Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

- Corporal punishment in school is common and severe, and ranges from slapping, to beating with a stick or iron bar. Boys typically face punishment at school as well as at home.
- Boys are also punished or humiliated for things that are beyond their control (e.g. unable to do homework or pay fees, or for speaking Nepali in an English-medium school). This is largely the case for mid-adolescent and older adolescent boys, as humiliation and punishments increase as they grow older.
- Harassment of girls in public places (roads or near secluded areas) is common, and girls are in constant fear of harassment when they travel to and from school. While at school, boys and girls both engage in some sort of verbal teasing with their peers.
- Child marriage is common among the Madhesi community, where girls are married off as young as 15 years of age and mostly in secret and/or claiming that they are older (20 is the legal age of marriage). However, due to awareness-raising by local civil society groups (such as women's group, civil awareness centre) people are afraid to marry their daughters early.

Psychosocial wellbeing

- Social norms constrain girls' agency as they are expected to be subservient, not to question elders, nor voice their opinion if they do not agree with elders. They are also restricted from being in public spaces and interacting with the wider society. Older adolescent girls and girls from Madhesi and Dalit communities face severe restrictions in what is a strict hierarchical system, whereby younger people have to obey anything that elders say without question; if girls challenge this, they will be known as girls gone 'bad' and 'out of control' and thus bringing shame on the family. Few girls are able to defy the power of these strictly enforced norms, as to do so would bring unbearable stigma and psychological repercussions.
- Older boys and mid-adolescent boys can defy norms more easily than girls and younger adolescent boys. Older adolescent girls are the least resilient, because the fact that gender norms are more stringent for this group.
- The most important support networks for girls are mothers; for boys, it is their peers.
- Schools do not provide any psychosocial support to adolescents, either through informal programmes or daily interactions with teachers.

Voice and agency

- Mobility (freedom to leave the house alone) and public spaces are both gendered: adolescent boys (particularly older boys) have more mobility than girls. Mobility is highest among boys who have dropped out of school, and lowest among girls who have dropped out of school.
- Older and mid-adolescent boys can congregate freely in public spaces but such spaces are largely off limits to girls.
- There is mixed evidence around decision-making in personal lives, with older adolescent girls in the urban site given more of a say (albeit still limited) in decisions about their lives, while girls in the rural site and those from Madhesi families have very little say. Alongside parents, older brothers (particularly those who are working) have a significant say in decisions about their sisters' education, marriage and employment. Young and mid-adolescents, boys and girls, have less say about decisions that affect their lives, largely due to parental concerns about protection.
- There are no formal mechanisms through which adolescent boys and girls (whether younger or older) can participate in community decision-making. In other settings, children's clubs have begun to give some children more of a say and a voice in school and community life; however, in both study sites, such clubs were limited to teaching dancing (for girls) and sport (for boys). Moreover, these clubs target young and mid-adolescents only.
- Although schools are potentially a positive force in children's lives, the school system in Nepal is top-down and hierarchical; boys and girls are not included in decision-making around teaching methods, teacher–student interactions are limited, and there is no adequate grievance mechanism to discuss problems arising in school – all of which combine to limit children's voice and agency.

Economic empowerment

- Migration to the Gulf countries is a common aspiration for older adolescent boys who drop out of school and those from rural areas, while boys who transition to higher education have role models who have acquired better jobs through this route. Girls do not migrate, nor do they have aspirations to do so.
- When they drop out of school, boys find jobs locally (typically in factories, garages, construction sites, or as carpenters); girls do not take up such jobs, typically only earning cash through seasonal agricultural labour.
- Boys who drop out of school do not have opportunities to develop their skills and learn while in the job. There is no provision for on-the-job- training or access to technical and vocational education. Since girls do not go for jobs once they drop out of school, there is no opportunity for girls to develop skills.

- There is no access to economic endowments for boys. Older and mid-adolescent girls are sometimes given animals or jewellery as gifts from their grandparents. Boys also lack access to credit, and neither boys nor girls save.
- There is a mismatch between the level of education and skills required to do certain jobs and the educational attainment of girls and boys. There are only a few programmes accessible to boys and girls; children's clubs are the most common, and organise learning and fun exercise, but only cater for young adolescents.
- World Vision's programming largely focuses on building voice and agency around harmful traditional practices, providing psychosocial support for adolescents and equipping them with information on gender and other kinds of discrimination, as well as making them aware of the services available to them and policies that can benefit them. Its programming has fewer components addressing economic vulnerability. However, other programmes in the same area have economic components targeting selected adolescents with financial transfers. Some of the adolescent boys and girls in Rupantaran were also benefiting from these economic intervention programmes.

Conclusions

Given that it presents an important window of opportunity, a policy and programming focus on adolescence is necessary. Evidence shows, however, that there is less understanding of what works best to transform adolescent girls' lives in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), which are often fraught with challenges. The objective of GAGE is to fill this knowledge gap and the current study helps to contribute to the wider GAGE objective with case from Nepal.

Overall, this baseline study finds that gender norms remain restrictive for girls– much more so than for boys – across all six capability domains explored. However, there is evidence of change, especially when compared to earlier generations. This change has to do not only with changing norms but also due to availability of services and infrastructure, and awareness programmes such as through schools and community groups, commissioned by government and non-government stakeholders. There are, however, variations: thus younger adolescent girls aged 11–12 are likely to face fewer gender discriminatory norms than their mid-adolescent (13–15 years) and older adolescent (16–19 years) counterparts. Gender norms are also experienced more harshly among certain ethnic groups compared to others; in this case, Madhesi girls faced many more restrictions overall, irrespective of their age and location, when compared to their counterparts in the Tharu community.

Introduction

A large body of evidence has established that adolescence (10–19 years) is a critical juncture in human life, where physical and neuro-cognitive transformation happens rapidly, second only to the transformations that take place during infancy and early childhood (Crone and Dahl, 2012). It is also a period when hormonal changes induce high risk-taking behaviour and rebellious nature. This is a time when a child begins to move away from their family to interact with others in society and seeks to establish his or her identity and recognition within the family, among their peers and in their community. Hence, it is a turbulent time. In cultures where there is a belief that female sexuality needs to be controlled, the onset of adolescence is more difficult, as the physical changes brought about by puberty invite stigma and censorship, and social (gendered) norms and expected behaviours become more stringent (Samuels et al., 2017). This has particularly strong impacts on women and girls in patriarchal societies where female sexuality is a taboo and control over women and girls' sexuality is the norm. In such societies, girls start losing any autonomy they may have enjoyed as younger children as soon as puberty begins; they often experience psychosocial violence and bear the brunt of harmful gender norms and discrimination in opportunities, thus falling behind their male peers in their personal development (Jones et al., 2018).

Adolescents comprise almost a quarter of the population of Nepal (Ministry of Health et al., 2017) and almost half of all adolescents are girls. Investment in adolescents is important not only because of their sheer numbers but also to sustain the significant investment the country has made in child wellbeing and towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Nepal had fully achieved goal 3A (eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education) and goal 4 reducing child mortality, and partially achieved target 2A (ensuring that all children complete primary education). The government aims to make further progress on the partially achieved goals by tying actions in with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, it will not be possible to achieve the SDGs without investing in adolescents. Box 1 shows why a focus on adolescent girls is important, based on other global studies.

Box 1: Why focus on adolescent girls?

Adolescence has powerful impacts on children's capabilities – partly because of the physical transformations wrought by puberty and partly because children's place in their family and broader community shifts as they approach adulthood. While acknowledging that these processes affect both girls and boys, the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme focuses on girls because adolescent transitions more sharply curtail girls' capabilities.

Adolescents undergo significant physical, cognitive and emotional changes between the ages of 11 and 19. As girls enter and progress through adolescence, the gendered norms of their socio-cultural environments also begin to play a much stronger role in shaping their trajectories. The early adolescent years are especially important because of the ways in which social (gendered) norms start to become both more rigidly enforced and more personally salient. Critically, for girls in the global South, rather than expanding their world, the early adolescent years often see their world shrink as girls have to leave comparatively free childhoods and are forced down the gendered adult pathways of their local environments. Girls who have begun to aspire to a life that is different from that of their mothers and grandmothers find that as their bodies evidence maturity, they are instead required to leave school and marry, abandoning not only their educational and professional plans but also their mobility and friendships. Pressures of domestic and care work burdens, sexual purity and family honour, and heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence, combine to limit girls' possibilities in ways that often have life-long consequences.

Source: GAGE, 2017

Interest in adolescence is growing but also relatively recent, and there are both programmatic and knowledge gaps. We know that adolescents are not a homogenous group; their transitions to adulthood, the opportunities open to them and their life trajectories are markedly different based on gender, age group, income level, infrastructure and policy support, and the prevailing gendered social norms and values (Harper et al., 2018; Bakrania et al., 2018; Viner et al., 2015). We also know that girls in LMICs are among those with the least

opportunities to build their capabilities (Harper et al., 2018; UNICEF, 2011). But we know less about what combination of programme activities works to help adolescents and communities overcome the barriers to adolescent development. GAGE contributes to filling this gap by creating evidence on what works for transforming the lives of adolescent girls in LMICs and those living in fragile states.

GAGE is a nine-year (2015–2024) mixed-methods longitudinal research and evaluation programme following the lives of adolescents in diverse developing country contexts. GAGE will generate new evidence on 'what works' to enable poor adolescent girls to emerge from poverty and fast-track social change for themselves, their families and communities, and their countries. The programme is funded by UK aid from the UK government. We will generate unique cross-country data following 18,000 adolescents (including approximately 12,000 girls and 6,000 boys) in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal and Rwanda, along with their families and peers, as they move from late childhood into early adulthood. We will complement this with participatory action research with adolescent girls and boys in conflict-affected refugee and host communities in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank. GAGE research will put girls' perspectives at the centre of its evidence base. Our results will support policy-makers and programme implementers to develop policies and programmes to effectively reach adolescent girls and boys and advance their wellbeing. Our research will contribute to international efforts to meet the ambitious adolescent- and gender-related SDG targets.

In Nepal, the first phase of the GAGE research is a baseline study linked to World Vision's peer learning programme Rupantaran (meaning 'transformation') for adolescent girls and boys. The objective is to understand adolescents' capabilities across six key domains (see section 1.3), before implementation and after, to discern any changes.

Research questions

GAGE addresses two broad research questions:

- What do adolescents' lives look like as they evolve over the second decade of life and how are their experiences gendered?
- What impact have change strategies (e.g. through programme interventions) had on adolescents' development?

In the current baseline study, we focus on the first of those two questions and analyse the following:

- What factors shape adolescent wellbeing during the second decade of life? What is the relative importance of family influences, gender norms, community and national context, institutional dynamics, and broader national and international policies?
- How do girls and boys understand their worlds as gendered? And how does this vary by context, within and across countries?
- How much do girls' and boys' experiences, attitudes and identities in early adolescence shape their subsequent behaviours and world views?
- How do adolescent boys and girls understand the wider macro context, and their place in the changing social and political order?

Conceptual framework

GAGE's conceptual framework (Figure 1) takes a holistic approach in order to understand what works to support adolescent girls' and boys' development and empowerment – now and in the future. We pay particular attention to adolescents' gendered experiences and the ways in which gender discriminatory norms and practices interact with other forms of social disadvantage to shape adolescent development trajectories.

Figure 1: The GAGE conceptual framework
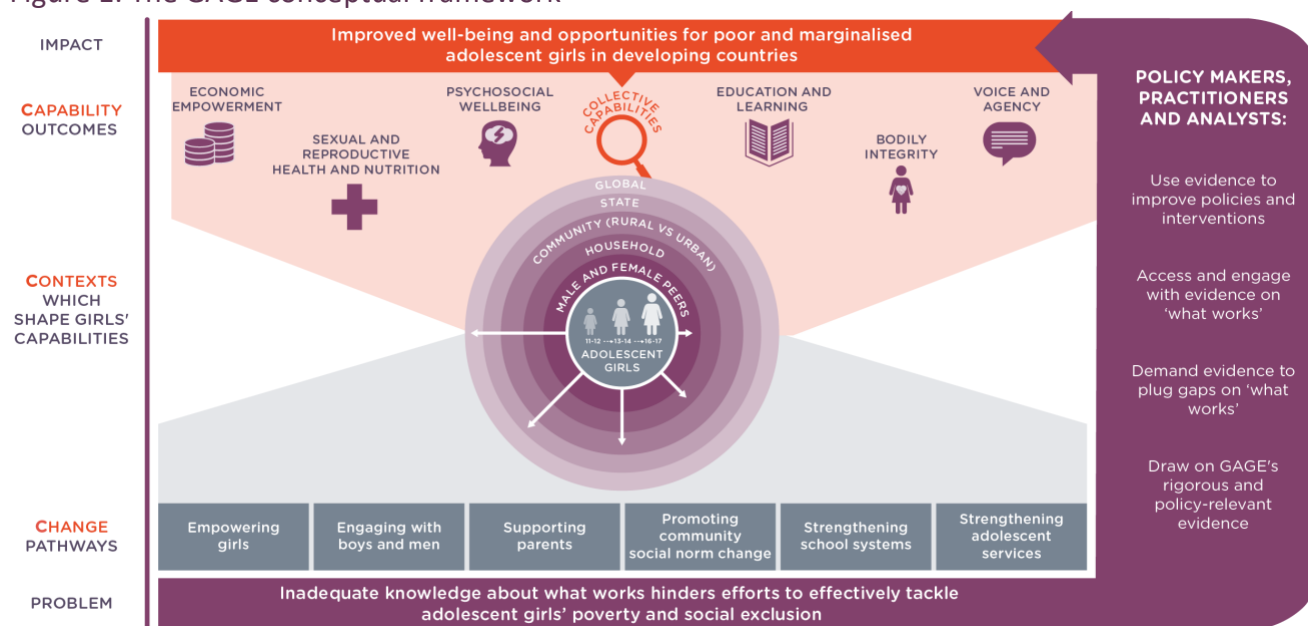
Source: GAGE Consortium, 2017

The framework enables us to explore '3Cs':

Capabilities: the individual and collective capabilities that underpin adolescent wellbeing, and the challenges that need to be overcome across the six key capability domains: education and learning, bodily integrity (including freedom from sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage), physical and reproductive health and nutrition, psychosocial wellbeing, voice and agency, and economic empowerment;

Change strategies: the ways in which transformative change requires simultaneous interventions at the levels of the individual, family, community, services and systems;

Contexts: the ways in which adolescents' local, national and international environments shape their development trajectories.

Our 3 Cs framework recognises that adolescent girls of different ages have different needs and constraints. For example, 10-year-old girls need time to play, while 19-year-old girls may need help parenting their own toddlers. Similarly, an unmarried 15-year-old girl studying at an urban secondary school is likely to have very different needs from a married 15-year-old girl living in a remote rural village. Both need the support of friends and family and may face gender-based violence, but programmes aimed at helping them to achieve their goals need to be built on a recognition not just of the similarities they share, but also their differences.

GAGE is focused on six capability domains that adolescents need to develop in order to successfully transition into empowered adults. The six capability domains and sub-domains they consist of are given below:

Education and learning

- Cultivation of educational aspirations
- Access to quality education
- Freedom from child labour, domestic and care work responsibilities
- Transitions to (post-) secondary educational and learning pathways

Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

- Avoid early, forced and child marriage

- Be protected from sexual and gender-based violence, including harmful traditional practices
- Be protected from age-based violence (e.g. corporal punishment)

Health, sexual and reproductive health, and nutrition

- Stay healthy
- Maintain a nutritious diet
- Manage menstruation and pubertal development
- Ensure sexual and reproductive health

Psychosocial well-being

- Cultivation of individual and collective interests, identities and a resilient sense of self
- Access to support networks
- Social connectedness with peers
- Access to quality psychosocial and mental health services

Voice and agency

- Mobility and access to safe spaces
- Access to age-appropriate information
- Opportunities for voice and decision-making in family, school and community
- Opportunities for civic participation
- Access to role models who have followed different pathways from prevailing restrictive gender roles

Economic empowerment

- Cultivation of economic aspirations towards decent, rewarding and age-appropriate employment
- Improved numeracy and financial literacy
- Access to market-responsive technical, vocational and business skills
- Access to equitable resource endowments
- Access to saving and credit

Helping girls grow up to be healthy, happy, well-educated women who can choose their own futures – including whether, who and when to marry – and have access to decent employment requires working with girls, as well as with their families, intimate partners, communities and governments.

GAGE's conceptual framework envisions six key change strategies that weave together to create a 'web' of support for girls. These strategies work with:

- girls, to help them develop their skills, confidence and friendships;
- adolescent boys and young men, to engage them as brothers, peers, partners, and future fathers;
- families, to help them learn how to treat their daughters equitably and how to set healthy boundaries;
- schools, to help them become gender-responsive, adolescent-friendly spaces that optimise learning;
- communities, to help them encourage girls' growing capabilities – paying special attention to the local leaders who speed or slow change and the in-laws who shape married girls' daily lives;
- services and systems, to help them meet girls' broader needs.

Policy context and systems

In 201 Nepal established a holistic policy that covers many areas of adolescent development. Prior to that, policies for adolescents were largely limited to sexual and reproductive health (see Table 1). A detailed overview of policies and constitutional amendments, including those on education and gender-based violence, can be found in Ghimire and Samuels (2014).

Table 1: Policies and strategies relating to adolescents in Nepal (1998 to the present)

Policies and strategies developed by the Ministry of Health		
Year	**Policy and strategy**	**Provisions that affects adolescents**
1998	National Reproductive Health (RH) Strategy	Identifies adolescent SRH as one of the pillars
2000	National Adolescent Health and Development Strategy	Targeted health services and counselling for adolescents and creating safe and supportive environments at various levels
2000	Essential Health Care Service (EHCS) package	Adolescent reproductive health services as a sub-set of reproductive health services
2005	National Health Communication Strategy for family planning and maternal and child health (2005–2010)	Adolescents are a target group for family planning and maternal and child health communication
2006	National AIDS Strategy 2006–2011	Youth are a target group
2010	National Health Sector Programme (NHSP) II (2010–2015)	Target of introducing adolescent-friendly services into 1,000 public health facilities
2011	National ASRH Communication Strategy (2011–2015)	Targeting adolescents for communications
2013	National plan of action for holistic development of adolescents	Targets different areas of adolescent wellbeing
Policies and strategies developed by Ministry of Youths and Sports		
2010	National Youth Policy	Identified strategy and action around education, empowerment and leadership, health, trafficking, participation and social security (among other sectors)
2015	Nepal Youth Vision 2025	Identifies 5 pillars of youth(aged 16–24) development alongside an implementation plan
2016	14th Periodic Plan	Target of ending all forms of discrimination and violence against children and adolescents, ensuring the rights of children and adolescents

As well as these policies and strategies, sectoral programmes from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of health, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens also cover certain aspects of adolescent development such as livelihoods and life skills, alternative education for dropouts, and adolescent-friendly health services.

The past decade has also seen donors actively engage with the theme of adolescent development, including a focus on combating harmful traditions that impact the lives of adolescent girls. Some donors now have longer-term programmes for adolescents in Nepal. They include UNICEF (Adolescent Development and Participation Programme), Care Nepal (Sakcham and Tipping Point using Rupantaran), Plan International (Rupantaran), World Education (Literacy and Financial Skills), World Vision (Rupantaran, Area Development Programme), UNFPA (Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Engaging Youth) and GIZ (Adolescent-Friendly Health Service). For an analysis of the recent programme landscape on adolescent girls in Nepal, see Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017).

Research methods and sample size

The main participants of the research in Nepal are 40 nodal adolescents (girls and boys). Their parents and siblings are also interviewed as part of the research, and we will do the follow-up survey with the same participants/interviewees at the end of the programme. The number of adolescents is proportional to the sample taken in other GAGE countries and corresponds to the number of adolescents that World Vision intends to reach in the first phase of its programme in the two case study areas. Our study uses a qualitative and participatory methodology, with semi-structured, in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), using body mapping, community mapping and vignette tools, carried out with nodal adolescent girls and boys, their parents, siblings and grandparents, teachers, community leaders, and local programme implementers. Networks that are meaningful to adolescents were explored using social support analysis tools and through discussions with nodal adolescents. Furthermore, through group discussions with community members, we used historical process tracing of social norm change and community timelines to understand programmatic, infrastructural and institutional developments over time. Table 2 identifies the different tools used in this study, while Table 3 presents the sample size and description of different samples.

Table 2: Research tools

Serial No.	Activities	Technique
1	Individual interview with adolescents and parents	IDI with adolescents IDI with parents IDI with siblings
2	Group exercise with adolescents	Body mapping with younger adolescent boys and girls Community mapping with older adolescent boys and girls
3	Group exercise with adults	FGD with grandparents Vignettes with parents Community norms and community timeline
4	Key informant interviews (KII)	IDI with key informants

Table 3: Study sample and respondents

Tool	Total sample size	Programme site (1 urban and 1 rural)	Control site (1 urban 1 rural)
IDI with nodal adolescents	40	24 (11 boys and 13 girls)	16 (7 boys 9 girls)
IDI with father of nodal adolescent	9	5 fathers of young boys and girls	4 fathers of young boys and girls
IDI with mother of nodal adolescent	11	7 mothers of young boys and girls	4 mothers of young boys and girls
IDI with siblings	8	4 (2 boys and 2 girls)	4 (2 boys and 2 girls)
Community sessions (community timeline and community norms)	4	1 community timeline and 1 community norms	1 community timeline and 1 community norms
FGD with grandmothers	4	2 FGDs with grandmothers who have adolescent grandchildren	2 FGDs with grandmothers who have adolescent grandchildren
FGD with grandfathers	4	2 FGDs with grandfathers who have adolescent grandchildren	2 FGDs with grandfathers who have adolescent grandchildren
FGD with parents	4	2 vignettes with mothers and fathers	2 vignettes with mothers and fathers
FGD with male adolescents	2	2 community mapping with older boys	-
FGD with female adolescents	2	2 community mapping with older girls	-
Body mapping with girls	2	2 body mapping with younger girls	-
Body mapping with boys	2	2 body mapping with younger boys	-
KIIs	10	8 (programme implementer, community stakeholders)	2 (community leaders)

The study uses three age cohorts: 10–12 years (younger adolescents), 13–15 years (mid-adolescents) and 16–19 years (older adolescents) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Age and gender of nodal adolescents

Age/ Gender	Younger adolescents (10–12)				Mid-adolescents (13–15)			Older adolescents (16–19)				Total
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
Boys	1	1	0	2	2	3	3	3	1	1	1	18
Girls	0	0	1	4	4	1	1	5	2	2	2	22
Total	1	1	1	6	6	4	4	8	3	3	3	40

Study area and sites

The study was carried out in Morang district (see Figure 2 and Table 5), as this is where World Vision (WV) Nepal has been working for a number of years and is also the district where it will implement the Rupantaran programme (see below). Working closely with the WV team, two study sites were selected (one urban, one rural): Biratnagar metropolitan city and Gramthan rural municipality. In Biratnagar, the programme is implemented in a community with high rates of early marriage and school dropouts. The community is largely of Terai origin, and all the WV programme participants belong to the Madhesi and Tharu ethnic group. While Biratnagar is the district's largest city, we chose Gramthan as the rural site in order to engage girl participants from the same ethnic group as the urban participants. We wanted to compare rural and urban differences in adolescents' experiences because we assume that the ways in which norms and the various capability domains interact are likely to differ across urban and rural sites. To explore change and difference, two villages were selected at each site – one receiving the Rupantaran programme (the intervention site), one not (the control site).

Table 5: General information about Morang district

Particulars	Data
Total population	965,370*
Adolescent population	222,079 (male=50.41%, female=49.59%) *
Sex ratio	93.6*
Deprivation in economic provisioning	17.29**
Literacy rate (%)	66.33**
Human Poverty Index (HPI)	25.32 **
Life expectancy (years)	69.6**

Source: Adapted by authors from different sources

Figure 2: Map of Nepal

Morang district

Morang district lies in Koshi zone, in the eastern part of Nepal, currently Province 1 (see Figure 2). Biratnagar is the largest city and the district's administrative headquarters. Morang has slightly more male adolescents than female adolescents. Average household size is 4.51 and average population density is 520 people per sq km. It has seen an average population growth rate of 1.35%. There is a significant gender gap (57.12% for women Vs 75.54 % for men) in the literacy rate. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of the population are Brahmin, Chhetri, Rajbanshi, Limbu, Raiput, Tamang, Kami and Damai. The main languages spoken are Nepali, Maithili, Tharu, Rajbansi and Limbu (National Planning Commission (NPC) Secretariat and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2012). The main religion is Hindu (80.27%) followed by Kirat (6.55%), Islam (4.74%),Buddhism (4.13%), Christianity (1.64%)and others (2.94%) (MPRC, 2015).

Morang is known as the industrial capital of Nepal, with high rates of migration from rural areas. Biratnagar is connected to India and is a major export/import hub. In 2017/18, it was the export gateway for agricultural and non-agricultural goods worth NPR 16.33 billion (Nepalese rupees) –accounting for almost a third (30.58%) of the country's total exports (Department of Customs, 2018).

Morang also has strong historical connections to Nepal's political regimes. It has been home to five prime ministers and a cadre of political leaders who fought to overthrow the autocratic Rana regime, establishing constitutional monarchy and the multi-party system, mainstreaming Maoist rebels into national politics, and overthrowing the monarchy to pave way for the federalism of today.

Biratnagar metropolitan city

Biratnagar's population is 166,674 (52.9% male, 47.4% female). It is the third most-populated metropolitan city of Nepal (MPRC, 2015). Average household size is 4.95 and there are 33,678 households (ibid.). The study was conducted in Baijanathpur (19 ward), which has a population of 4,498 (49.9% male, 50.1% female). Average household size in Baijanathpur is 4.75, and there are 946 households in total(ibid.).

Gramthan rural municipality

In Gramthan rural municipality, the study was conducted in Lakhantari and Jhorahat villages. Lakhantari's population is 4,007 (51% male, 49% female) (MPRC, 2015). Average household size is 4.91 and there are 816 households(ibid.). Jhorahat's population is 4,844 (50.7% male, 49.3% female) (ibid.). Average household size is 4.84 and there are 1,001 households in total.

Data analysis

All interviews (see Table 3 for sample size and type) with appropriate consent were recorded. Interviews were then transcribed and translated into English and coded using MAXQDA. Coded segments were then analysed thematically and written up following the GAGE conceptual framework's focus on the 3Cs.

Ethics

Research protocols were developed and approved by ethical review boards at ODI, NISER and World Vision. GAGE has an advisory board, which approved the tools. Written consent from guardians was obtained for all the interviews with adolescent girls and boys and also submitted to World Vision. For interviews with parents, verbal consent was taken.

All due ethical processes relating to data are in place. This includes anonymising transcripts, access to data only by approved team members, and other safeguarding measures for the respondents.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is the sample size. Due to time and resource constraints, World Vision can only implement the programme with a smaller number of boys and girls in each cluster of interventions. There are similar constraints on the research itself; limited time and resources meant we were able to reach only a

limited number of girls and boys and parents. Hence, our findings are based on a small sample; the evidence for causal relationships between variables arising from our analysis might be different had we been able to use a larger sample.

Box 2: Rupantaran programme

Rupantaran's life skills curriculum model is a comprehensive training package for children and adolescents in Nepal, introduced by UNICEF and owned by the Nepal government. It aims to develop adolescents' skills and help them become social agents for change in their families and communities, while empowering them to realise their rights. Rupantaran teaches children to take more responsible and accountable life decisions and actions, equipping them with skills that benefit their own lives, as well as those of their families and communities.

The package consists of 15 modules with one book for each module. The course covers topics around basic child rights, life skills, health and hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, savings, social and financial skills, leadership, decision-making, interpersonal communication, goal-setting, managing feelings, self-esteem, active listening, team building, group facilitation, problem-solving, critical thinking, and creative thinking.

The course uses peer-to-peer teaching methods. For each group, an adolescent boy and girl from among the group are selected as peer leaders and undergo training. When they are ready to take classes, they are supported by trained facilitators. The full curriculum takes 7–10 months to complete. The core (mandatory) components of the life skills model are as follows.

- Selecting the vulnerable cluster/ adolescents for peer education
- Training peer educators on the Rupantaran model
- Providing 25–32 sessions on life skills through peer education to the selected adolescents at weekends/holidays
- Using standard session plans, teach the 15 modules and curriculum regularly over the course of a year to the selected adolescents
- Empowering adolescents to take better decisions to make their lives successful and avoid unnecessary child protection issues such as child marriage, drug abuse, child labour and child abuse.

Source: World Vision personal communication, 2017.

Main findings

This section describes key findings across the six capability domains.

1   Education and learning

Key messages

- Parents now have greater aspirations to educate their children, but those aspirations are still not strong enough to deliver substantial changes in adolescents' educational outcomes.
- Despite improved enrolment and retention rates, dropout is still common – particularly in the rural study site and among the Madhesi community. Boys quit school due to frustration with the school system and family pressure to start earning and contributing, while girls drop out because of demands on them by parents to undertake care work.
- Schools still practise corporal punishment, which is another cause of dropout. Boys are more likely to be punished than girls, and older adolescent boys are often humiliated by teachers, which further discourages them from attending.
- Absenteeism is higher among girls, but due to restricted mobility, girls cannot benefit from peer-to-peer learning to fill the gap.
- The level and quality of education available to boys and girls does not lead to jobs, so there is a sense of hopelessness, particularly among older adolescent boys and girls, when it comes to education.

Introduction

Based on the interviews with study respondents, this section explores issues of enrolment and truancy, quality of education and infrastructure, and educational aspirations (adolescents' own aspirations, and parents' aspirations for their adolescent children).

There is a considerable body of literature on education and learning out comes of adolescents in Nepal, most of it (for example, MoEST, 2017; CBS and UNDP, 2016; Bhatta and Pherali, 2017) from programme evaluations and reports produced either by government or non-government organisations (NGOs).

The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP), implemented since 2009, set out reform agendas for early childhood education, basic, primary and secondary learning, lifelong learning, and technical and vocational education, among others. This was a continuation of other reform programmes prior to 2004 such as the Community School Support programme, the Teacher Education programme, Education for All, and the Secondary Education Support programme. Each of these aimed to increase enrolment and strengthen the transition to higher education by improving services for population groups that had been left out of education. The government financed these initiatives but was also able to mainstream donors' development aid into the programme. Currently, the literacy rate among adolescents and youth (as shown by the 2011 Adolescent and Youth Survey)is 92% (95% for boys ,88% for girls)(Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), 2011).In rural areas, the literacy rate for boys aged 10–14 is 93.22%, and for boys aged 15–19, it is 95.81%;for urban boys, the rates are 98.14% and 98.51% respectively. For rural girls aged 10–14, the literacy rate is 91.42%, and 89.59% for girls aged 15–19; for urban girls, the figures are 98.33% and 97.52% respectively (MoHP,2011).

Educational aspirations

As envisioned in the development of the SSRP, our study shows an increase in educational aspirations for children – among parents and children themselves – which has, in turn, led to increased enrolment. This is strongly reflected in the fact that only one grandmother among our respondents had ever gone to school

(studied class 1), while two generations later, most girls interviewed had been enrolled in school, even if they had only completed primary education.

> *We didn't get the chance to study at our time but we are trying to educate our children. We were not able to write our name. (IDI, mother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)*

Awareness about the benefits of education (leading to a job or career) and aspirations to send their children to school had started in the grandparents' generation, as this quote illustrates:

> *We were not educated but we know if our children get education then they will have good knowledge and can find better jobs, which will increase their skills and can lead to a better future. (FGD, grandmother of adolescent, Biratnagar)*

However, this awareness did not lead to children going to or staying in school in the grandparents' generation. According to respondents, the reasons for this included: a lack of a culture for educating children (and since nobody was sending their children to school, this was seen as normal); lack of schools in the vicinity; and poverty, which meant families could not afford to send their children to school. Hence, in our respondents' grandparents' and parents' generations, children either dropped out before completing primary school or did not go to school at all.

The grandparents' generation had high educational and career aspirations for their grandchildren, which seems to stem from the fact that they know education leads to a better career and better life. They think that their grandchildren will become doctors and engineers after being educated. However, educational facilities in the study site are poor, and skilled careers are not possible given the level and quality of basic education received by most respondents.

> *About grandchildren's study... They should study hard so that they can become doctors and nurses in the future. We wish they go for higher level of study and get a good job. If they have higher education, then they will get government jobs where they can earn more money. (FGD, grandmother of adolescent, Biratnagar)*

The parents' generation (compared to the grandparents' generation) is more aware of the benefits of education. This is due to intergenerational change in access to education and growing awareness in recent years. However, due to a range of reasons (including poverty), not all parents send their children to higher education. The parents' generation was also found to be a transitional generation; despite a surge in awareness of the benefits of education among parents, this has not led to behavioural change. This means that a significant number of respondents sent children to schools only when it was easily doable. For example, while they sent children to primary school (which is free), they did not want to invest in higher education, which typically involved some costs. Similarly, they sent daughters to school when there was no household work but forced girls to drop out of education to care for others in the household. However, since some parents have been educated, there are also some strong outliers or positive role models among the parents' generation who have invested in educating their sons and daughters, often against the accepted norm.

Generally, findings from interviews with fathers and mothers – particularly in rural areas and among Madhesi and Dalit groups – indicate that most parents are not keen for their children to stay on in school and go into higher education. This can largely be explained by the fact that parents' primary concerns are, on the one hand, adhering to social norms around early marriage, and on the other, trying to ameliorate their economic status. One means of escaping poverty – or at least for some members of the household to escape poverty – is through marrying their daughters off early.

Regarding gender differences in parental aspirations, we found that mothers tend to be more supportive and happier to educate their daughters, particularly if the children study well.

My younger daughter has told me that she has a desire to work in a bank. I can afford her studies only up to grade 12. At first she has to pass her SEE [Secondary Education Exam]. (IDI, mother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

Fathers appear more likely to feel societal pressure and marry their daughter at a young age.

In our custom, we marry our daughters early. I cannot keep her for long in my house. If a good marriage proposal comes, I have to marry her off. (IDI, father of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

There are, however, some very strong outliers, with some fathers making their daughters retake classes (incurring additional expenses), and insisting they stay in school even when they fail in their studies:

I have repeated her class. She failed. We [both her mother and father]go for work[and hence cannot keep an eye on her and make sure she is in school]. She is not interested in studying. (IDI, father of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

Parents who made sure their children stayed in school and provided an appropriate environment for children to access higher education tended to themselves be educated or have been exposed to other cultures where education is afforded greater importance.

However, apart from these outliers, parents' greater aspirations for their children's education (although having positive impacts on enrolment) have not translated into children (particularly girls) making the transition to secondary education.

We found strong gender differences and outliers among adolescents when discussing their own educational aspirations. Among the Madhesi community in a rural area, only one girl was enrolled in higher education; while others would have liked to continue their education, they felt they had to accept the wishes of their family to take them out of school. Outliers (such as the girl whose father ensured that she repeated a class) usually had parents or guardians (e.g. uncles) who were strongly supportive of education, who were leaders themselves and/or who had been exposed to other cultures that promote the value of education.

Boys tended to have stronger parental support for continuing secondary education and were also found to be influenced by role models. However, similarly to the situation with girls, only two boys among the study respondents were in higher education. Older adolescent boys – though they may understand the benefits of higher education – are drawn to paid work, which is largely available in the city in the construction and service sectors, or through seasonal migration to India.

Younger adolescents, boys and girls mostly go to school. Dropouts tend to be older adolescents, and the reasons why they drop out are described in the subsequent sections.

Access to appropriate and quality schooling

In Morang district, there are 689 primary schools, 313 lower secondary schools, l,194 secondary schools and 111 higher secondary schools (MPRC, 2015). There are also 39 private higher secondary schools and 72 government higher secondary schools (ibid.). According to key informants and the community timeline, schools in the study community have improved substantially over the past three generations. In the grandparents' generation, there was no school in or near the study sites and, according to respondents, wealthy people from other ethnic groups used to hire Indian teachers to home-school their children. None of our study participants had had that form of education. A historical timeline by community members showed that the introduction of an early child development (ECD)centre/class in the village in one study site, and of primary schools an hour's walk away from the other site, had started during the parents' generation. Respondents (grandparents) reported having had mud slates and chalk pieces to write with and sat on the floor or under the tree. Attendance at the ECD classes and the primary school was irregular, with children usually attending only when the weather was good. Also, as there were only male teachers, girls did not go to

school. However, within the same generation, better infrastructure and a higher education system was introduced in the community, with a few girls starting to attend school and pupils using books and notebooks.

Currently, according to respondents, there are two government schools and one private English-medium school near the rural study site, and one government school near the urban site. In both sites, there is an ECD class/centre, and private schools run classes up to grade 12. All but a few respondents (girls and boys alike) reported going to government schools, which are cheaper. While older adolescent girls and boys did not go to ECD classes, their younger siblings (both girls and boys) do attend ECD classes and English-medium schools. Only a few older adolescent boys and girls from the study site went to the private English school. The private schools have school buses and are planning to have a library and computer facilities; the government school does not. There was no complaint about the quality of infrastructure in the government school and respondents (both girls and boys) were happy with the fact that the government school now teaches some subjects in English. However, the vast majority of respondents find English and Nepali (the two mediums of teaching) difficult subjects and hence there is a question about whether they really understand what is being taught.

> *No I don't speak Nepali at home or in school and I don't understand when the teacher teaches in Nepali. I can read Nepali but it is difficult for me to speak. (IDI, sister of adolescent boy, Biratnagar)*

Girls and teachers both commented that in recent years, schools have begun to address basic gender needs; there are, for instance, separate toilets and the provision of sanitary pads.

The student–teacher ratio appears to have improved, though it is still high in government schools (approximately 40 students in a class, according to respondents). In the grandparents' generation, schools often had just one teacher for the whole school:

> *There was a school where there was only one teacher. But I never went to school. He used to teach 70 students. There were morning and evening classes. (FGD, grandfather of adolescent, Gramthan)*

Respondents reported that schools now have a range of extracurricular activities (which they did not have during their parents' generation) such as sports, dancing and visits to nearby parks. Some schools also have children's clubs, which tend to promote gender-stereotypical activities such as dancing (for girls) and sports (mainly football, for boys).

Teaching methods in private and government schools

Older adolescents (boys and girls) were particularly dissatisfied with teaching methods, teacher behaviour and the school environment. This was largely the case for government schools but also in a few private schools. Older adolescent boys in particular had problems with longer holidays and corporal punishment. Older adolescent boys who had attended private schools felt that having shorter holidays and more learning time would improve educational attainment as well as adolescents' interest in education.

> *In public schools, study is not good as they have holidays for 2–3 months or a minimum of 35 days. If the holidays are reduced and teacher teaches us well, then our study will improve. If the school do not teach well, nobody wants to go to school. If there is good education in the school, many things will improve. (Community mapping, older adolescent boys, Gramthan)*

Interviews with adolescent boys showed that teaching methods and the school environment are not always conducive, especially for older adolescent boys, as some schools still practise corporal punishment. Some boys in secondary school also felt that some male teachers flirt with and favour girls and discriminate against boys – for example, humiliating them in front of the class and beating them. They explained that this leads to boys losing respect for the teacher and the teaching system, and is one of the major reasons why boys miss classes or drop out of school altogether. While some boys shared that the teachers touch girls inappropriately, this was not reported by girl respondents.

The impact of incentives

There are both cash and non-cash incentives to help children stay in school at both study sites. At one school in the urban site, primary class students (usually children and younger adolescents) were given a mid-day meal (porridge). Teachers reported that before this provision, children would run away from school during lunch break and not come back. After the introduction of the mid-day meal, children do not go home during lunch break. Teachers find that this has hugely helped to keep at least younger adolescents at school. Teachers also feel that there has been a substantial improvement in children's attendance after introducing a small lunch. There appear to be fewer absences now that the school provides the mid-day meal.

> We never realised that children cannot learn with an empty stomach. The fence was broken. Although there were guards standing in the school gate, during lunch hour our children used to run away from school through the broken fence. Now, we give them tiffin in school. Children do not want to go home during lunch hour. All of them are in their class after lunch. (IDI, key informant, Biratnagar)

According to key informants, some schools give children a cash allowance ($0.13 per month) instead of a mid-day meal. However, in our study sites, both schools gave mid-day meals.

Cash and material support are also sometimes used as incentives. In government schools, children do not have to pay fees and they get free books until grade 6. Besides this, underprivileged groups (such as Dalits) receive an allowance ($34) per child once a year for school uniform and educational materials. Some parents preferred receiving the actual school uniform instead of the allowance because they find that when the school gives them the uniform, children do not quarrel with them; but when parents get a cash allowance, children are selective and want to have certain materials or designs, which are more costly.

Parental support for education (time use, domestic work and labour)

As already discussed, parents' aspirations for their children's education have changed for the better but have not yet been acted on sufficiently to lead to a significant increase in educational attainment among adolescents, especially girls. The only exception to this is where parents are themselves educated or have been exposed to other cultures that place high value on education. This applies in both rural and urban areas, at the intervention and control sites. When there is parental support, there is a gendered trend – i.e. even among poorer households, parents send their sons for higher education to the cities in better schools, while sending daughters to cheaper schools nearby (although a few educated parents have sent their daughters to private schools). However, among younger adolescents, more young adolescent girls go to private schools than their older sisters– which is true across both sites.

In both study sites, parental (and community) expectations that girls are solely responsible for doing household work and taking care of younger siblings is affecting their school attendance. Mothers, even when they had some time, did not help mid-adolescent and older adolescent girls with such work. This might be due to belief that a girl should be trained to do all household work before she is married so that she can perform her duties well in her in-laws' house.

Due to truancy, girls also do not do well in studies. It becomes difficult for them to understand courses after missing weeks of lessons, thus they feel less confident and embarrassed and also do not have additional support at home to learn what they have missed in school. Boys miss school during the agricultural season when harvesting and planting rice. Since there are no restrictions on boys' mobility and less pressure for them to do household work, they are more able to catch up through peer learning (e.g. by going to their friend's house). Due to restricted mobility and lack of free time, girls do not have this same opportunity (they are not allowed to go to their friend's house to discuss what they missed in school). This further dents girls' confidence, thus leading to a vicious cycle of lack of self-confidence and not doing well in education.

The eldest female siblings in rural sites are largely out of school. When a girl marries and moves away, the next youngest female sibling drops out of school to take over her household work and responsibilities. Mothers

rarely do household work; they are either busy doing paid work or going to the market to buy or sell things. In the urban sites, except for a few girls from a Dalit community, girls go to school.

Boys running away from school during school hours is common, both in rural and urban sites. They roam around, run away at lunch to play, and consume alcohol or drugs and marijuana. In some cases, parents are aware and scold the boys occasionally; in others, boys go to school on time and return on time even though they truant the whole day, so the parents do not know about it. We did not find any reports of girls playing truant from school.

Pressure to support their parents financially falls on boys as they grow up. Due to economic problems at home, some boys usually from poor families themselves decide to drop out of school and take up paid labour. In some cases, when parents want to re-admit boys to school, they do not want to go to the same school and prefer to study at home.

Education transitions

In the grandparents' generation, girls rarely went to school and boys dropped out before they completed primary education. Education transitions were highly gendered, in both the grand-parents' and parents' generation, and remain so. Few fathers and even fewer mothers had ever gone beyond primary education. While more adolescents go beyond primary education now, dropout rates remain substantial. Dropout from primary education is higher among older adolescent girls, while dropout from lower secondary education seems to be higher among older adolescent boys. There are fewer dropouts among younger adolescents (those aged 11–14) than among their older siblings. Dropout is more common in the rural study sites than in the urban sites, across all age groups.

Older adolescent girls and boys who were not going to school had typically dropped out at grade 6 when they would usually be 11–13 years of age. This might be due to the fact that until recently (2–4 years ago), the village school was a primary school only – i.e. up to grade 5. Having to travel out of the community on foot for study might have contributed to adolescents dropping out at grade 6.

However, even now that there are more schools available, only a few boys and girls in the rural study site have gone beyond higher secondary education (only one girl and two boys had got to grade 10). In urban areas, adolescents' older siblings had already transitioned to higher education, with some doing a staff nursing course (female siblings) and others(boys) doing a bachelor's degree. Hence, in urban areas, adolescents have more access to tertiary education.

As already discussed, the household environment is not conducive to girls' educational transition, since on the one hand they are overburdened with household work, and on the other, social norms around mobility and care work prevent girls from accessing higher education in the city. This is most common in the rural study site, and among Dalit groups in the urban site. There were only a few girls among our respondents who had studied up to grade 10 in the rural site. As already noted, these girls have families that are exceptionally supportive.

There is no girl in this place who has had higher education. No one has studied more than grade 10. My daughter has passed SLC [school leaving certificate]. There are girls in the village who have not studied up to grade 10. Some have studied but could not pass the exam. So, there is no chance for higher studies. I will educate my daughter and she also wants to have higher education. (KII, Biratnagar)

In the rural site, some girls did not transition to secondary school due to the school's distance from their home, while others did not do so because they did not understand what the teachers were teaching. In households where either parent is sick, the oldest child tends to drop out of school.(girls drop out to look after other family members, while boys drop out to provide economic support for the family).

Poverty negatively affects education for girls and boys alike. In other cases, girls drop out largely due to domestic work burdens and marriage, while boys drop out due to lack of interest and/or pressure to earn. However, there were also some cases where girls dropped out to earn money:

She is 16/17 years old and does not study. She dropped out after grade 3. The economic condition of our house was very bad. We did not have food to eat and she had to go to work with mother. So she dropped out to go for work. (IDI, sister of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

Others drop out due to failing the exam (grade 8 or grade 10 –typically administered by the district government and the national government respectively, and which girls and boys usually find tougher than the school's exam) or failure in lower classes.

While parents in the rural sites were aware of higher education, their ideas about what higher education is tend to be very narrow – i.e. they think that passing high school is higher education. All of this is likely to negatively influence educational investment and transitions in rural areas:

I think if they study up to grade 10 their future will become bright. (IDI, mother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

Learning outcomes: effects of schooling, link to career/jobs

According to the 2001 census, 51% of adolescents have completed primary education. However, only 6% have passed the SLC or attained a higher level. There is no significant difference between male and female adolescents when it comes to educational attainment. A study conducted by the National Planning Commission (NPC) revealed that 60.5% of adolescents aged 10–14 and 71.5% of those aged 15–19 were in employment (CBS and NPC, 2011).

Our findings show that learning outcomes differ according to whether the site is rural or urban. Formal education has not led to jobs in rural areas – hence, the outcome of learning is not very appealing, which is one of the main reasons why older adolescents in rural areas are disinterested in higher education. Also, in rural areas, findings show that the largest problem is that the level of education most families can afford for their children does not help them find a job. As already discussed, parents in rural sites have a narrow vision of what constitutes higher education, believing that educating a child to grade 10 will get them a white-collar job (e.g. in an office or other administrative role). So there is already an expectation that boys will get good jobs and contribute to household income once they reach grade 10. However, this does not happen in practice. For girls, there is no such expectation, but parents feel that keeping their daughter in school upto grade 10 makes her eligible for marriage, and she will have a bright future after marriage.

In the rural site, adolescent boys reported that by the time they were in grade 10, they had started to feel pressure to earn money (either for their household or themselves) and drop out of school. Girls did not feel the same pressure to support their family financially. This might be because families do not usually use girls' income for household expenditures. The fact that education is not useful for them has created frustration among adolescent boys who face pressure to earn money. Furthermore, boys reported feeling that they should be able to pay back the investment that parents make in their education and, as such, felt that it was better to start earning early rather than making parents invest even more in higher education. This explained why boys tended to leave school to find work in the city or went to brokers who hired them for construction work elsewhere in the country.

The situation was different in the urban study site. Adolescents here had older siblings who had taken up vocational and higher education and who had obtained jobs – for instance, as staff nurses and teachers. Parents here had, therefore, seen the benefit of investing in their children's tertiary education. There was also an understanding, among parents and adolescents themselves, that only higher education will help young people get better jobs and generally lead a better life (for them and the wider family). This applies to boys and girls in the urban site, except in the case of Dalits (e.g. the Rishidev community), where families are poor and girls drop out of school early either for marriage or to help with seasonal agriculture labour or household work.

2   Health, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and nutrition

> **Key messages**
>
> - The most common health problems for girls are around menstruation. However, they do not usually seek any support, as such problems are regarded to be normal.
> - Girls and boys get most of their information on SRH from their peers.
> - Local primary health care centres run by the government or local pharmacy are the most common service points used by the community, and this applies equally for girls and boys and in urban and rural areas.
> - While premarital sex is taboo, it does happen, and is on the rise. However, due to the stigma surrounding it, adolescents do not have proper information, which puts them at high risk of sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) and other SRH-related problems. There are no formal institutions through which girls and boys can access information on SRH.

Introduction

This section presents findings on the health, SRH and nutrition status of adolescent girls and boys in the study areas. It looks at common health problems and health-seeking behaviour, health status and access to information, available health care services, and access to information on SRH.

According to the Nepal Adolescent and Youth Survey 2010/11 (MoHP, 2011), nearly one in every four female adolescents aged 10–24 was married. Early pregnancy seems to be common: the median age of first birth is 19 years; 4% of adolescent girls and 3% of boys aged 15–19 had their first sexual intercourse before they were 15. Within this same age group, 4% of girls were married and less than 1% gave birth before the age of 15. For boys, less than 1% of boys were married by the time they reached 15 and none of them had fathered a child by that age (Ministry of Health et al., 2017). Only 15% of currently married adolescents aged 15–19 reported using a modern method of contraception (ibid.).

In terms of information on SRH rights, the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016 finds that 73% of adolescents have heard about STIs, 99% about HIV/AIDS, and 58% about Syphilis (ibid.).

Regarding sources of information about the physical changes during adolescence, 40.32% of those aged 10–14 and 64.89% of those aged 15–19 shared that the main source of their information is a school course-book.

Health status, access to information, and access to primary health care/health services

There are two government hospitals in Morang district and seven primary health care centres or health posts. There are also seven health facilities run by NGOs, international NGOs or the private sector (MPRC,2015).

Common health problems among adolescents in rural and urban areas alike included fever, stomach ache, headache, cold and cough. Adolescents go to the nearest chemist, with their parents, for general medical care. Stomach ache when menstruating was common for girls but they did not seek any medical advice as this was regarded as normal. For other problems, in both sites, people reported going to a hospital in Biratnagar. Respondents did not know if there was a certified medical doctor in the clinic they visit, but have experienced good treatment from service providers:

> *Yes, I am satisfied with the health service I receive here. It is effective. We get cured of our ailments after going there. (Community mapping, older adolescent girls, Gramthan)*

Some adolescents had grandparents or parents with chronic illness; paralysis and diabetes were also common among grandparents and parents, particularly in the rural area. Elderly participants complained that people today fall sick more often, which they believed was due to the large amounts of pesticide that go into food. However, they also reported that treatment was better now than in their generation.

Drug abuse, tobacco use and alcoholism are growing problems in both sites (rural and urban). This is particularly the case among older adolescent boys who drop out of school and take on small odd jobs, but these social ills are also increasing among school-going older and younger adolescents. Key informants, as well as adolescents, reported that this has become much more of a problem in recent years, and is now a trend. Drugs, tobacco and alcohol are all readily available in nearby areas, and parents often send children to buy alcohol and tobacco for them, which leads adolescents to pick up the habit from their parents and peers.

> *Earlier, only old people used to take alcohol. Nowadays, children as young as10 years old have started to take alcohol. It has been 8–10 years that adolescents are taking tobacco, alcohol and playing cards here. They see others taking such things. They also learn from old people. Some old people also influence them. (Focus group discussion on community norms, women, Biratnagar)*

Findings from a group discussion with adolescent boys shows that it can be difficult for them to avoid spending time with friends who may be using drugs. They have to resist strong peer pressure and may be ostracised by peers:

> *I don't like spending time with, 'lyangfyange' [meaning drug abusers who do not care about themselves] friends… Right now, they are calling me for smoking. (IDI, adolescent boy, 19 years old, Gramthan)*

As already mentioned, smoking, tobacco-chewing and alcoholism are common among adolescent boys who have dropped out of school; boys still in school try to avoid them.

> *I don't feel good spending time with boys who don't go to school. Some eat tobacco, some smoke cigarettes.(IDI, adolescent boy, 14 years old, Biratnagar)*

Culturally, in the urban and rural study sites, brewing, storing and drinking alcohol is accepted during certain festivals, with children also drinking alcohol at those times. In the rural site, the local women's group had banned the production of alcohol in their village, but other women started brewing and selling alcohol in the adjacent village. Men and boys frequent these villages and get drunk. In the urban site, alcohol is brewed in the village itself, among Dalits. Marijuana is available in the main market and in the border town with India and is also sold in the local markets at both study sites. Grandparents and adolescent boys also reported that boys use injections and syringes, which implies that they are also using hard drugs. However, our respondents were unable to say which hard drugs those were, although they knew that they bring them from the city and that they originate from Indian cities across the border:

> *They buy alcohol in village shops. Alcohol is also prepared in some houses. They also buy tobacco in local shops. Injection and syringes for drugs: they bring them from the main market. It is not found in the village shop. They buy from a shop in Biratnagar. In Biratnagar, it comes from the border side of India. (Community norms, women, Biratnagar)*

When asked about how adolescents afford to buy drugs, it seems those who drop out of school to find work use money from their odd jobs, while those still in school and from wealthier families use their pocket money:

> *They work in the factory and spend what they earn on drugs. If he is a single son of a rich family, he gets money from home. (Community norms, women, Gramthan)*

Alcohol and drug abuse is one of the main worries parents have about their adolescent children.

> *I worry that my son might be spoilt. He might get into bad habits like drinking alcohol or use of drugs and weeds. I worry about all those things. (IDI, mother of adolescent boy, Biratnagar)*

We did not find any instances or reports of girls using drugs or consuming alcohol.

Nutritional status, access to information, and equitable access to nutritious food

Adolescents are taught about health and nutrition at school and seemed well-informed about what constitutes a nutritional diet by local standards. However, since what is eaten at home is decided by parents who are not

very aware about nutritious food, this knowledge does not translate into better nutritional outcomes. Moreover, adolescents usually reported that they like junk food, which was available in the market for their snack/tiffin.

There were no reports of chronic food insecurity in either the rural or urban site. The staple food is rice and vegetables (which families grow in their vegetable garden) and lentils. People fish from the nearby river or buy from the nearby market, and families in both sites regularly eat meat and fish. However, according to local key informants, parents are not aware about additional nutritious food, especially during pregnancy and childhood, when lack of such food can cause problems in later life:

Yes! Malnutrition is a challenge. When a woman is pregnant, we should focus on how she can get nutrition. This does not happen here. The baby should be fed with nutritious food when it is growing up so it doesn't become malnourished later. Only then can they have a well-developed brain and a sharp mind later on. If we do not give a woman good food from 1–2 months of pregnancy, we cannot have a healthy baby and sharp-minded adolescents. I do not believe that the adolescent boys and girls will become a scholar only through education. (IDI, key informant, control site, Biratnagar)

Key informants believed that there is both foetal malnutrition (which means inability to gain muscle and fat mass when the foetus is growing in the womb) and malnutrition among children, which they have been unable to deal with as it remains hidden. While none of our girl respondents were pregnant, respondents in the FGDs revealed that pregnant women and lactating mothers were mostly unaware of what constitutes a nutritious diet, and that they have not received any training or information on this. According to key informants, lack of nutrition among adolescents affects their brain development:

To speak the truth, we are finding it difficult to make a good base for adolescents now. There is malnutrition or something like that in adolescents. We advise them to study, but they do not have a sharp mind…This may be due to malnutrition. Their brains are not fully developed. (IDI, key informant, control site, Biratnagar)

In the case of natural disasters such as flooding, people had short-term problems accessing sufficient food, but this was buffered by help from their social networks until they were able to return to a normal situation.

Adolescent girls and boys in both study sites did not report gender discrimination in relation to food. However, in vignettes and FGDs, mothers shared that women might eat food last, mostly after the men in the family, and this might mean that sometimes they end up eating less:

At the end, if food remains then women will eat, otherwise they would sleep with an empty stomach. (Vignettes, mothers of adolescents, Biratnagar)

Access to information on SRH (including puberty and menstruation), and related supplies and services

The bulk of information given to girls about SRH is on menstruation, and does not cover other aspects. Unmarried girls and boys get some information about SRH through course-books starting from grade 6. However, in both sites, due to mixed groups in class, the subject is not taught. Peer learning is the most common source of SRH information for girls and boys alike. Our study found that girls have information about menstruation prior to menarche (the onset of menstruation), usually obtained from friends or older siblings. Mothers typically still find it difficult to talk about SRH with their adolescent daughters, and while some tell them to wear sanitary pads, mostly they expect that their daughters will learn what to do during menstruation from their friends.

No, I feel shy about talking to my daughters about menstruation. Their friends tell them.(IDI, mother of adolescent girls, Gramthan)

Some mothers whose daughters do talk to them about menstruation are considered to be behaving inappropriately:

> *We didn't use to tell about menstruation to our parents, but these days they express openly about such things. They are bold and shameless. (Community norms, women, Gramthan)*

While in other cases, mothers give their daughters wrong information:

> *My mother talked to me about this [menstruation] when I was 12. She said, 'If you don't have your period, then you will die. All the girls should have their periods.'(IDI, adolescent girl, 13 years old, Gramthan)*

However, for ethnic groups that practise 'untouchability' (refraining from touching certain things and places, such as water, kitchen, food, prayer rooms, temples and deities) during menstruation – that is, all groups except the Tharu community(where such practices do not exist) – mothers teach their daughters about these rituals once they know the girls have reached menarche:

> *I told her not to touch the cow dung. I tell them not to wear tight clothes. (IDI, mother of adolescent girl, Biratnagar)*

While some schools provide trained female teachers and services to girls (e.g. sanitary pads), the information is not always clearly conveyed and there seems to be misunderstanding between the two parties. Teachers feel that the girls are too shy to discuss the issues, while girls – even when they reported feeling dizzy and weak during menstruation or had severe bleeding for longer periods – did not discuss this with the designated female teacher. Some girls have tried to talk to their mothers about menstrual problems but have been shunned:

> *I told my mother that I have to see a doctor for this [bleeding for 10 days every month]. But she rebuked me, saying that I shouldn't visit a doctor for such things and that it will get solved later as I grow older. (IDI, adolescent girl, 13 years old, Gramthan)*

For boys, there is no way to access information on SRH. While mothers expect that fathers will teach boys about puberty and reproductive health, this does not seem to be happening. We did not find any male respondents who had ever gone to a health facility or a senior person to discuss SRH issues. Since there have been some reports of excessive use of mobile phones and pornography, online content might be the only source of information for boys. However, this did not come up in our research. Hence, boys (in both the rural and urban sites) appear to have no sources of information on SRH other than from their peers.

Adolescent boys and girls as well as key informants shared that premarital sexual relationships among adolescents are becoming more common:

> *Adolescent girls think a lot about marriage and get infatuated with boys. They tend to have intercourse with boys. Yes, they tend to have sexual relationships before marriage. I cannot tell how many of them, but they do have sex. They meet on Facebook. Some of them meet at school as class mates. They tend to go to hotels and sometimes even in the bushy places around the village. They even go somewhere near the field. I have seen some incidents even in open places. (IDI, key informant, Biratnagar)*

Discussions with boys and girls also revealed that relationships with the opposite sex, love and elopement marriage are becoming more common:

> *Yes.my friends have girlfriends. They meet in market area and in the fields. We talk about girls sometimes among our friends. (Body mapping, older adolescent boys, Gramthan)*

In the case of girls, love affairs are understood to be more prevalent among school-going adolescents than among those who are out of school, since school is one of the main places where girls are able to meet boys. While boys and girls talking is less stigmatised in the Tharu community in the urban study site, in the rural site, among the Madhesi community, such interactions are shunned. However, girls and boys mix and make friendships at school quite freely.

Despite growing incidence of sexual relationships between unmarried adolescent girls and boys, there are no formal institutions and services that provide them with information and counselling, as such relationships are still stigmatised by the community and remain largely hidden and/or not openly acknowledged.

Married girls mostly go to the nearest health post for SRH services. Early marriage – especially among Madhesi households in the rural study site and among Dalits in the urban site – is common and leads to early pregnancy. Since only two married adolescent girls took part in our research and both did not have children, we could not gather much evidence about their access to SRH information. So far, their knowledge had come only from husbands and peers.

3   Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

Key messages

- Corporal punishment in school is common and severe, and ranges from slapping to beating with a stick or iron bar. Boys typically face punishment at school as well as at home.
- Boys are also punished or humiliated for things that are beyond their control (e.g. unable to do homework, pay fees or speak English).
- 'Eve-teasing' (sexual harassment) is common but happens among girls and boys.
- Harassment of girls in public places (roads or near secluded areas) is common and girls are in constant fear of harassment when they travel to and from school.
- Rape, witchcraft and polygamy are also reported, but not extensively.

Introduction

Much of the evidence on bodily integrity for adolescents focuses on girls rather than boys. Similarly, much of the literature focuses on child marriage, as many interventions aim to tackle this harmful tradition, which affects girls more than boys. There is other evidence available on trafficking, *chaupadi* (whereby girls stay in a hut or small room away from the family during menstruation as they are considered 'impure') and domestic violence. There is relatively little evidence on bullying, street violence, emotional and psychological violence, and cyber-crimes/bullying, which adolescent girls and boys often face today. The Nepal Adolescent and Youth Survey (MoHP, 2012)found that 41.04% of adolescents aged 10–14 and 12.26% of those aged 15–19 experienced physical violence from family members. Similarly, the same study finds that 12.84% of those aged10–14 and 4.40% of those aged 15–19 experienced physical violence from outsiders. Adolescent girls also report experiencing physical violence (11%)and sexual violence (3%) (Ministry of Health et al., 2017).

This section aims to fill some of the existing evidence gaps on bodily integrity and freedom from violence. It includes physical violence (e.g. corporal punishment and bullying), sexual violence, harmful traditional practices, and neglect.

Physical violence (including corporal punishment and bullying)

Evidence from our study sites (see also section 2.1.4) shows that corporal punishment – although illegal – still exists in schools and can be so severe that boys in particular may stay away from school because they are afraid of their teachers. Teachers were found to use their hands, sticks and even iron rods to beat students.

> *Yes, teachers punish us when we do not finish our homework on time. They beat us with their hand as well as with a stick and they beat us badly. (IDI, brother of adolescent, Biratnagar)*

Reasons for beating, according to boys, included not doing assignments, inability to pay fees, and speaking in Nepali in an English-medium school. The reasons for receiving a beating are often beyond boys' control – e.g. they may be unable to do the assignments because they have to do household work, or their family may not

have the cash to pay their school-related expenses. As the following quote shows, boys often fear that their teachers will find any reason to beat them:

No, I cannot solve my worry of teachers beating me up in school. The teachers will always beat us for one reason or the other. They even use iron sticks for beating us. (IDI, adolescent boy, 13 years old, Biratnagar)

Physical violence perpetrated by teachers has led to absenteeism and dropout among our respondents, with boys affected more than girls.

I told my mother to pay my fees otherwise I will not be allowed to take my exams. She said that she does not have even a single rupee and asked me to go to school and that she will pay fees tomorrow. But I did not trust her and I did not go. I cannot tell my teacher that my mother will pay my fees tomorrow, so I did not go to school altogether. The teachers do not understand it. They will beat me up if my parents do not pay my fees on time. So, I don't like to go to school if my fees are not paid. (IDI, adolescent boy, 14 years old, Biratnagar)

In the home environment (in rural and urban sites alike), only younger adolescent boys reported being beaten by their father and brother and occasionally being scolded by their mother. This was mentioned commonly in interviews with young adolescent boys, who said that they try to stay away from their father and brothers:

I don't like spending time with my mother and father. I don't know why I don't like spending time with them. Probably it is because they scold me. (IDI, adolescent boy, 14 years old, Biratnagar)

Bullying by seniors at school is common among younger adolescent boys but is often seen as their fault (they might have misbehaved with the older boys) or their complaints dismissed by the school administration and teachers. Younger boys also appear not to tell their parents they are being bullied, perhaps due to lack of awareness that their parents can do anything to help or for fear of being accused themselves of behaving badly.

This, therefore, discourages young boys from reporting bullying even when it is severe. We did not find evidence in either site of girls being bullied by older girls (as was the case with older boys bullying younger boys). While children's clubs in school teach about sexual violence, which largely affects girls, they do not tend to address bullying, which has a deeper impact on school-going boys, as the following quote shows:

I dislike when older boys beat me in school. However, I do not tell my parents about it. I told my teacher but he shouted at me instead saying I probably was the one to go and fight with them. I was wounded and had to go to the doctor for medicine. I don't know why they beat us. (IDI, brother of adolescent, Gramthan)

Regarding unsafe spaces, mid-adolescent (13–15 years) and older adolescent girls (16–19) find roads unsafe, especially if they are travelling unaccompanied, when it is dark and if the area is deserted. They described being verbally harassed by boys, boys saying foul words to them and making vulgar gestures, as well as being followed on motorbikes by boys wearing masks, from other communities. Pulling of dresses and scarfs on their way back from school by unknown men was another problem:

When we walk alone on the road, sometimes a bike (motorbike) starts following us. I don't know why they are following us. If they see us alone they will start to follow us everywhere. We get scared. (Community mapping, older adolescent girls, Gramthan)

Boys teasing girls – and vice versa – is common and takes place inside school too.

Respondent: Girls tease boys more than boys tease girls. <laughs>

Interviewer: How about you? Do you also do that?

Respondent: Yes. we all tease boys. We do that in the classroom. We discuss among our group about teasing boys. We tease boys who are shy. Most of them are shy anyways. They cover their face when they see girls. (IDI, adolescent girl, 12 years old, Biratnagar)

Interviews with teachers show that cases of eve-teasing are reported only when they become severe and when it is likely that parents will hear about it. They also believe that girls who are much older than their peers in class are more likely to be teased, while boys who have seen their parents engaging in sexual activities are more likely to tease such girls.

> *Actually some girls start their school very late. We have a few girls who are studying in grade 2 but in normal cases, they would have been studying in grade 11. They are a bit more developed physically and are conscious about their appearance. They focus on their make-up like eyebrow threading and using lipsticks. Boys belonging to lower castes around here are active sexually as they observe their parents' sexual life. Among Dalits, there is little privacy due to lack of facilities at home. Parents are also unaware that their behaviour might have a bad impression on their kids. When boys see such girls here at school they might feel eager to tease them even though they are just studying in grade 5. Some of them are even 22 years old. Up to grade 10. Mostly girls in our school are of age 13, 14 to 20 years old. (KII, Biratnagar)*

Respondents commented that there had been reports of rape in other nearby villages but not in their own; however, mothers and girls were extremely fearful about it. Rape, according to them, usually involved younger adolescent girls and older adolescent boys. Key informants were of the opinion that the incidence of rape has now decreased due to activities of children's clubs and awareness-raising in schools.

> *Around 75% of children are aware about sexual abuse. Most of the schools have child training clubs where they give training to the school students about sexual abuse and these days there are less cases of child sexual abuse. Earlier, we used to hear about rape cases while these days it has been reduced.(KII with school teacher, Biratnagar)*

Girls in rural and urban areas felt that schools and their own community were safe places for girls in general, but nearby canals and bushes have a bad reputation as being a hangout place for drug abusers and lovers. As described in section 2.2.2, boys often experienced peer pressure to use drugs and alcohol, with such activities taking place around canals and bushes and in areas by the border with India; however, boys themselves did not feel unsafe in any public places. This was true for respondents from rural and urban sites alike.

A few mothers were concerned about the fact that older men lure their adolescent daughters with gifts. However, most mothers and girls did not believe this would happen and thought that girls today are 'smart' enough to be able to identify hidden intentions. However, there is a fear that when it comes to boys of their age, girls are naïve and easily trust them, which might sometimes lead to negative consequences. With a dating culture and premarital relationships on the rise, intimate partner violence might also be rising, and given the patriarchal structure of society, would be likely to affect girls more than boys. But this was not mentioned in our interviews – probably because, as other studies in Nepal (Ghimire and Samuels, 2014)have observed, love affairs and premarital sex are highly stigmatised and seen as a mistake by girls (more so than boys), and hence girls may believe any intimate partner violence they experience is justified.

Stigmatisation around use of mobile phones and social media by boys and girls hampers open discussion about cyber-crimes/cyber-bullying. Parents, and girls and boys themselves, in rural and urban sites, link use of mobile phones and social media to interest in love affairs. This stigmatisation is particularly strong for girls and is associated with eloping. However, use of social media is common for girls and boys in rural as well as urban sites, though less available to younger adolescents and to girls.

> *Everyone uses phone these days. After 14–15 years old, everyone uses a phone to be connected to the parents. It is not like old generations. Suppose, we get stuck at Jhorahat [a market place near Gramthan], then we can call someone. All of us have cell phones. (Community mapping, older adolescent boys, Gramthan)*

Parents often expressed worries about their daughters' safety but also about how adolescents can now deceive parents, especially with the advent of mobile phones:

If her friend is across the canal and calls my daughter, my daughter tells me that 'I'm going somewhere' and she leaves the house immediately. She does not say that she is going to meet her friend. She does that frequently. I'm worried about where she goes. I cannot know her true location. This is the disadvantage of giving them mobile phones. (FGD, grandmother of adolescents, Gramthan)

Sexual and gender-based violence (including harmful traditional practices and child marriage)

Harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and dowry are common in rural villages and, among certain ethnic groups (such as the Madhesi and Raida), in urban as well as rural areas. In such cases, parents marry off their daughter early to protect a girl's virginity and to pay less dowry. Among other ethnic groups (e.g. the Tharu), early marriage happens due to elopement rather than parental arrangement.

In some of the study sites, in the grandparents' generation, a form of bride price called 'main' was given to the girl's family by the boy's family. This was a token amount, symbolising the finalisation of the marriage deal. However, this practice has changed, both in terms of the amount and the exchange direction, such that now, a large sum of money is involved and the girl's family pay it to the boy's family (see quote below). The dowry, as well as the costs of the marriage ceremony, have increased substantially in rural and urban sites alike. While dowry was not originally practised among Tharu communities, it has now seeped into their tradition and grown exponentially over the years. According to parents, there is growing social pressure to spend lavishly for the marriage ceremony. As such, the bride's household often incurs additional debt for marriage in order to be able to fund the ceremony and the dowry. In the study sites, dowry now consists of cash but also often vehicles and gold. While dowry is illegal, the deal is done with the help of a broker and behind closed doors, so any legal action is extremely unlikely.

But now the situation is opposite. Instead of buying the bride, the bride's family has to give a motorbike or piece of land or many other things to the groom. Even though the demands are not written, it has to be arranged. It is done secretly through the matchmaker. Everything is done secretly. (KII, Biratnagar, intervention site)

Besides this, new expenses related to marriage are also incurred, as a display of social class, affluence and modernity – largely on the part of the bride's family but also on the part of the groom's family. They may hire modern music bands, buy expensive clothes and gifts, and use catering services with a variety of cuisines, replacing the modest food and traditional help from neighbours when cooking for a marriage ceremony.

Adolescents mentioned hearing about witchcraft but also visiting witchdoctors, indicating that there is still a belief in witchcraft. Key informants shared that there have been incidences where girls are blamed for witchcraft. However, we did not find evidence of violence linked to such claims. Other harmful traditional practices that were evident in the study communities were discrimination between people from so-called 'high' and 'low' castes. In rural and urban sites, the settlements for Dalits and non-Dalits were different, and untouchability was practised in private life. Respondents in both communities shared that while the situation is changing in public spaces, in private spaces (such as at home and in spousal relationships), discrimination based on caste persists.

Young girls are blamed as witches by the whole community. There is a concept of witchcraft and untouchability in the community. Sometimes fights break out because people complain that a lower-caste girl touched their food or came to their rituals without permission. Mostly these blames are oriented towards girls because girls are more involved in cleaning and cooking help. (KII , programme site)

Since our study sample did not include many married adolescents, we were not able to discuss domestic violence or intimate partner violence in either site.

Neglect

While respondents did not report feeling neglected by their parents, we did find that parents were unable to give much time to their children. This was more common in the rural community, where most parents work as daily wage labourers. Fathers start work early in the morning and travel long distances to the city for work or only return home at dusk (or once a week/at weekends if the work location is far). Hence there is not much interaction between children and their father. Mothers too are engaged in wage labour in agriculture and do not have time for children. While they persuade children to go to school, they cannot keep track of whether they are actually going to school, or their studies or peer groups. It is usually the older sibling who takes care of younger children and assumes this responsibility from a young age. Similarly, as also discussed in section 2.1.4, older adolescent boys and girls may have dropped out of school due to being mistreated in school or because parents did not have time to be persistent enough to keep them in school or discuss alternatives.

In the urban study site, and among educated parents, there is more communication between fathers and their children. Communication is largely about education. Some parents have stopped children from working and forced them to go to school.

Access to justice services

There were mixed responses around access to justice. No respondents had ever had to seek support from the formal justice system. Only one adolescent reported going to the police station when there was a fight in the community. In cases which might warrant seeking out justice-related services, adolescent girls have turned to parents for help when they feel confident and, in turn, parents involved the relevant authorities, as this quote shows:

> I talked to my mother about boys teasing me on the way to school. She shared about it with my father. Father gathered all the people in the village and all of them went to complain in the school. The school complained to the police. A few police came for security in the area where such boys gathered. Now the teasing is controlled to some extent. (IDI, adolescent girl, 19 years old, Biratnagar)

Adolescent boys do not share their grievances with anyone – in the family, in school or with any formal services.

Apart from their school book, where they are given cursory information, adolescents have not had any formal training or discussions around how to access the justice system, including where and how they should access government and justice-related services more specifically. Usually, in other areas, children's clubs and adolescent clubs include this as part of their life skills training, but this has not happened in either of the study sites.

4 Psychosocial wellbeing

Key messages
- Social norms are more strictly enforced for older adolescent girls and for girls from Madhesi and Dalit communities.
- Boys can defy norms more easily than girls, and older adolescent boys do so more often than others.
- The most important support networks for girls are mothers; for boys, it is their peers.
- Schools do not provide any psychosocial support to adolescents, either through informal programmes or through daily interactions with teachers.

Introduction

This section discusses adolescents' psychosocial well-being and includes characteristics such as resilience, which means the ability to challenge discriminatory norms and speak up about injustices. It also discusses family and support networks and the connectedness adolescents feel with their families, peers and communities.

While there is limited evidence generally on adolescents' psychosocial wellbeing, there is less evidence about the psychosocial wellbeing of adolescent boys than girls. Existing evidence uses tangible indicators such as happiness, sadness, suicide rates and hope for the future. There is no agreed definition of the term 'psychological wellbeing' but it is understood to be a combination of cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012). Most of the evidence we have measures emotional status (happiness, sadness) and social wellbeing (support networks).

The Nepal Adolescent and Youth Survey (MoHP, 2012) finds that girls suffer more from mental health problems than boys; 74.11% of boys (compared with 76.76% of girls) felt anxious in their daily lives and 36.15% boys (compared with 43.44% of girls) felt they had less self-confidence. According to the study, 68.18% of adolescents aged 10–14 were found feeling anxious, while 31.51% of the same age group shared that they had low self-confidence. Similarly, among adolescents aged 15–19 years, 75.84% reported feeling anxious, and 45.71% feeling hopeless.

Resilience and motivation

Older adolescent girls face many more restrictions on where they go and whom they go with, how they behave and whom they interact with than younger adolescent girls, and in general girls face more restrictions than boys. Older adolescent boys have the most freedom. Older adolescent girls are the least resilient – i.e. they are not able to overcome these restrictions. Boys of the same age can defy family orders and social norms and are therefore the most resilient. Similarly, the wider community tends to be more lenient towards boys, while it takes a controlling and uncompromising approach towards girls. Gendered social norms become more stringent as girls progress through adolescence and puberty. While norms around education, mobility and social interactions have generally become less rigid, there remain concerns about potential repercussions if some of these norms are transgressed, as doing so could challenge deeply held patriarchal values. In our research, this could be observed in the way that community members talked about use of mobile phones, elopement marriage and girls' mobility.

Our study finds that there is a great deal of self-censorship among girls themselves in the rural study site. Unlike the Tharu girls in the urban community, Madhesi girls in the rural community think that any physical violence they experience is punishment for not adhering to a prescribed norm – for example, not dressing well or being too modern or stylish. As the quote below illustrates, they feel that boys teasing girls is due to girls being fashionable and hence it is girls' fault. This means they are less likely to report any teasing to their parents and seek help:

Yes, teasing by boys on the way to school is also one of the main problems here. Boys do not tease me, they tease the most stylish girls who like to show off. They do not tease simple girls like me. (IDI, adolescent girl, 17 years old, Gramthan)

Girls in the Madhesi community (the rural site) are least able to express their feelings, while those from the urban site (including the Tharu community) were bolder and more expressive. The following two excerpts from discussions around eve-teasing highlight this difference:

Girls in the rural sites answer differently:

Yes, we face difficulty walking on the road or while going to school. We are teased by boys? (Body mapping, young adolescent girls, Biratnagar)

However, as shown in section 2.3, girls in the urban area felt that they too were able to tease boys and had no problems with being teased. Such differences could also be explained by the fact that there is more control and moral policing of girls in the Madhesi community, who mostly live in rural sites (as opposed to Tharu respondents, who live in urban sites), where norms are highly gendered. In such cases, girls have also experienced backlash when they have reported experiencing abuse:

Yes, I have faced harassment. once I was going to Jhorahat and a guy was standing on the way. On my way back, the same person tried to touch me and my bicycle fell down. I started crying and people who heard me came running towards me, by that time the man had already fled away. No one helped. Instead, one old man raised his hand to beat me up saying, 'This is the fault of this girl'. I told them that I had done nothing. But people didn't believe me. (IDI, adolescent girl, 12 years old, Biratnagar)

Girls in the Madhesi community are also more likely to be controlled by their adolescent brothers, as shown below

I never talk/share with my brothers about being teased by boys on the way to school. They will not help me. Instead they will find my fault with it. They will make me guilty instead by saying, 'Why should you walk alone and go near those types of boys? You are responsible for that'. So, I am scared of sharing about such incidences with them. (IDI, adolescent girl, 17 years old, Gramthan)

However, in Tharu community, there was no evidence about brothers controlling the sisters. Among girls across both study sites, those who had dropped out of education appear to be the least resilient; they are unable to express their feelings within their family and to resist family decisions, thus giving in to what the family and community demands of them. Despite schools being available nearby, girls wanting to go to school, and the presence of female role models already accessing higher education, older adolescent girls were often seen to obey family decisions without question, including dropping out of school to take care of younger siblings who were still in school:

My parents told me to look after my siblings. So, I dropped out of class 6. (IDI, adolescent girl, 17 years old, Gramthan)

These girls, despite being older, were also least able to express themselves in the interviews.Our sense from the interviews with them is that they are resigned to their life and do what is required of them without questioning or discussing what they themselves may want.

Girls typically have less capacity to express themselves and often depend on decisions made by their brothers, especially those who are a few years older, as the following quote shows:

No I don't share things with my brother… He is always angry at me. He doesn't allow me to use his mobile phone. He beats me even if I just touch his phone. I feel like using his mobile phone, but he doesn't allow me to touch his phone so I use my auntie's phone instead.(IDI, sister of adolescent boy, Gramthan)

Among adolescent boys, younger boys appear less resilient than older boys. They were less able to resist household rules and rules set by their older brothers around (for instance) who gets to use mobile phones and hanging out/playing with their older siblings:

Interviewer: Do you ever hang out and/ or go out and play with your brother?

Respondent: He doesn't let me hang around with him, if I try and tag along with him, he will shout at me and tell me to go back home and if I don't obey him then he will beat me. (IDI, younger brother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

Family support networks

Mothers are the most important source of non-financial support for girls and boys alike; adolescents first approach the mother, who will in turn approach the father. However, when they did well in studies, adolescent girls and boys also felt supported by the father. This was reported especially when fathers have invested in educating their children in private schools.

While not undermining the value of emotional support from a mother, many of our respondents noted that it is the father's support that helps them challenge norms and achieve better opportunities. A father's support therefore also arguably adds more value when fighting discriminatory gendered norms. For example, when

fathers wanted to or were able to afford it, they would send their daughters to private schools that were further away, thus challenging two norms – gender bias in education and restrictions on girls' mobility –to ultimately lead to better educational outcomes for their daughter.

There were mixed responses about support from older brothers: if they were working, they would sometimes provide financial help for girls' education and, in some cases, girls turned to them for protection. However, for most girls in our study, either they did not have much interaction with older brothers or they reported them as being extremely controlling of them and their sisters, and enforcers of gendered norms (e.g. not allowing girls to use mobile phones, assuming that as the male they would decide, along with parents, whom their sisters should marry).This was also true for younger adolescent boys, as older brothers controlled their access to mobile phones (this was the case in rural and urban sites).

Except in private schools, we did not find evidence of teachers being seen as supportive. Where teachers were reported to be supportive, adolescent girls tended to seek out their support more than boys. Girls often complained to teachers about eve-teasing and received emotional support from teachers, such as encouragement for their studies. In stark contrast, and as discussed in section 2.1.4, older adolescent boys felt discriminated against and humiliated by teachers, while younger boys felt unfairly and harshly punished. This might be the reason why boys did not seek support from teachers in the first place.

Social connectedness with peers and communities

Our findings show that younger boys are able to build and expand their social networks as they become older adolescents. Boys can go to places like bushes and canals, which are restricted areas for girls; they can also come home late and defy household rules. Communities are also more lenient towards boys and almost expect them to break rules – around social interactions with girls, for example. This all helps boys to both maintain and expand their social connectedness. It was also noted in both the rural and urban sites that parents are unable to enforce restrictions on sons after mid-adolescence:

> My brother goes out with his friends during holidays. He gets scolding from mother, but he doesn't care about that. He doesn't even ask for permission. I know they will not let me go out with friends. If I went out with friends without permission, they would scold me when I got back home. (IDI, adolescent girl, 13 years old, Gramthan)

In the absence of guardianship and mentoring by parents, this expansion of older boys' social networks can have positive and negative consequences. Parents – particularly those in the rural site, where most were agricultural labourers and illiterate – do not have strong communication with their children. Although some boys develop more self-confidence, expand their worldview, and may be able to express their opinions and negotiate better, respondents reported that some boys have also fallen victim to peer pressure and have succumbed to drugs and alcoholism.

On the contrary, for girls, their world starts to constrict as they transition from a relatively free younger adolescent phase into older adolescence. As shown in section 2.1(Education and learning), girls are often required to drop out of school to take up care work. This is more common in the rural site but also applies to the urban site, in cases where parents were sick and unable to do their respective household responsibilities. At the same time, as girls get older, members of the community also start to scrutinise their behaviour, which often results in girls being fearful, introvert, and unable to express themselves and to negotiate with their parents as boys do. Since school is the most important platform for girls to socialise, be exposed to peer networks and ideas, and share their emotions, dropping out means their world narrows down to one that consists of their family, neighbours and relatives only. For older girls who are allowed to attend school, school provides a respite, but their out-of-school social interactions continue to be restricted. Unlike boys, they have limited opportunities to meet their school friends outside of school.

Girls using a mobile phone in public are not seen as ideal by the community. They also face restrictions using mobile phones at home. The community in both sites associated girls using mobile phones with eloping and was something that was frowned upon. Due to this, girls have very little opportunity for virtual interaction.

When boys drop out of school they find work and venture out of their communities, increase their exposure to others, and find networks and social connectedness. Since they have more access to information and communications technology (ICT) than girls, they are also more likely to maintain their social connectedness after they have left school. This improves their psychosocial wellbeing (this was evident in both the rural and urban sites). However, as already discussed, girls have fewer opportunities to use ICT to stay connected.

There are no programmes or services available in the study sites, either in the community or in school, where adolescents can access psychosocial support. Thus, girls who have dropped out of school (in the urban as well as rural study site) are confined to the home and household work, and have no social interaction beyond their family.

5   Voice and agency

Key messages
- Both mobility and access to public spaces are gendered. Adolescent boys (and particularly older boys) have much more mobility than girls. Mobility is highest among boys who have dropped out of school, and lowest among girls who have dropped out of school.
- Adolescent boys can move freely in public spaces while such spaces are largely off limits to girls.
- There is mixed evidence around decision-making in personal lives, with girls from the urban site given some (albeit still limited) say in decisions about their lives, while girls from rural communities and of Madhesi origin have very little say. In such communities, as well as parents, older brothers (particularly if they are working) have a significant say in their sisters' education, marriage and employment.
- There are no formal ways in which adolescent boys and girls can participate in community decision-making. While elsewhere, children's clubs are an important pathway for community participation and civic engagement (see, for example, Ghimire and Samuels, 2014) in both study sites, such clubs are limited to teaching gender-stereotyped classes – dancing for girls and sports for boys.
- - The school system is top-down and hierarchical; boys and girls are not included in decision-making around teaching methods, teacher–student interactions are limited, and there is no adequate grievance mechanism to discuss any problems that arise in school.

Introduction

A recent evidence review on voice and agency of girls in Nepal (Presler-Marshall, 2017) finds that there is quite a significant body of literature on how social norms affect girls' voice and agency, in relation to their own life, their role in decision-making at home and in school, and at the community level. Our study provides further evidence to fill some of the remaining gaps. These include exploring the comparative opportunities for leadership open to girls and boys in the community, whether and how boys and girls have a say in decisions that affect them, and how this might vary across age groups (younger, mid- and older adolescents).

In this section, we explore adolescents' physical and virtual mobility and access to spaces; we also examine access to age-appropriate information and digital technology, participation and decision-making in family, community and school life, and civic engagement. We explore how these issues are all shaped by gender and other cross-cutting factors such as caste and ethnicity, area of residence (rural/urban) and school attendance.

Children's clubs are important avenues for voice and agency (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017). According to the Nepal Adolescent and Youth Survey, (MoHP, 2011), about 6% of adolescent boys and5% of adolescent girls aged 10–14 years were affiliated to children's clubs.

One of the barriers to participation (much more so for girls than boys) is mobility (Watson, 2014; Johnson, 2010; Beutel and Axinn, 2002): Just over a quarter (27.72%) of boys aged 10–14 and more than half (55.56%)

of those aged 15–19 years are free to leave their home without permission, whereasonly 12.22% of girls aged 10–14 and 14.59% of those aged 15–19 can do so (MoHP, 2011).

Connectedness, mobility and access to public spaces

The notion of connectedness – both physical and virtual (such as through use of mobile phones), and particularly where girls are concerned – is tied to the notion of purity. For parents and the wider community, it has negative connotations, while for girls and boys, it is seen as an opportunity and therefore has positive connotations. According to study respondents, when girls were seen to use mobile phones, it was often regarded as synonymous with impurity, as phones facilitated contact with boys. Studies show that girls interacting with boys is highly stigmatised (Pokhrel, 2013; MoHP, 2012). Most of the parents who participated in FGDs in our study perceived that such means of contact – whether physical or virtual – could lead to girls being out of guardian control and might have physical relationships with boys and then elope. To remain pure, it was expected that girls 'do not roam around', 'do not use mobile phones', do not have extended social networks and remain confined to the school and home. These constraints do not apply to boys, yet the social restrictions on girls become more rigidly enforced as they traverse through mid- and older adolescence. Among married adolescent girls, mobility and use of mobile phones is most strongly restricted, followed by girls who have dropped out of school. Among the Madhesi community, girls' mobility is highly restricted (see quote below) but is relatively more relaxed among the

> "No, they don't go for foreign employment. Only boys go. The girls from the hilly region [khas community] may go but not the girls from Terai [Madhesi community], they never go for foreign employment. They do not want to go. Girls from hilly community go because they are fickle character…I have a sister-in-law who is in Malaysia. She is a girl from a hilly region and married into the community of Madhesi. Look at her – she is married. Her husband has a shop here and he looks after the house and she is not taking care of the family and house. (Vignettes, mother of adolescent, Gramthan)

Girls talked about using a mobile phone to listen to songs and watch films (put on the phone by their brothers or fathers), and to talk to extended family members. Boys reported using a phone to talk to friends as well as to watch films and listen to songs. Unlike girls, boys choose which songs they want to listen to. We did not find evidence of girls and boys listening to other means of communication such as radios.

For boys – irrespective of their ethnicity – mobility and connectedness are not linked to physical purity. Once they drop out of school their mobility increases exponentially, and they are seen to move from their community to the city, to India and even beyond to Gulf countries.

The research exercise on community norms in both the rural and urban sites highlights why attitudes towards mobility and connectedness are gendered. Notions of 'bodily purity' and 'household and community honour' were found to be very strong among the parental generation and particularly among rural communities, where many Madhesi live. Such notions are regarded as a symbol of high class and high cultural status of the family and community. The fact that there is strong resentment of practices that challenge such notions (such as foreign employment, elopement marriage, love affairs, and mobile phone use – largely targeted at girls) shows that there is an inherent understanding that women and girls are responsible for upholding the honour of their family and community. Again, this is more stringent among the Madhesi community (rural site) but relatively flexible among the Tharu community (urban site).

The notion of bodily purity is not strongly linked to men and boys; as discussed in section2.3 (Bodily integrity and freedom from violence), as boys grow up they are able to defy family and community rules, while girls and women are not able to.

'Gatekeepers' of norms – that is, influential individuals at the community level (such as traditional leaders) or within the family (fathers and mothers) – expressed considerable distress about their inability to control the new freedom of interaction that girls have, which they see largely as a result of access to mobile phones. They

also see phones as a means through which girls are able to transcend gatekeepers' control of their physical mobility.

Our study finds that access to public spaces, except for those in schools, is highly gendered and age-specific. With the exception of schools, girls are restricted from accessing spaces where there is a chance that they will interact with men outside of their family. Hence, going to market areas, to neighbourhood communities, fairs, factories – indeed, anywhere where there is a possibility of meeting men – is forbidden for girls. Again, these restrictions are stronger among the Madhesi community but relatively more relaxed among the Tharu community, where women have been independent traders for generations. In terms of age, younger girls are allowed to go outside their home and play with friends or go to a friend's house, but this mobility becomes restricted as they grow older. Since public spaces are gendered, girls themselves avoid places where they fear they may encounter violence from men who may be drunk or under the influence of drugs. In our study sites, places that fell into this category included deserted places in the community, such as forests, bamboo groves, rivers and canal banks.

Apart from schools, there are no designated spaces where adolescents can gather; we found no places in either study site (such as libraries or playgrounds) for adolescents. So far, World Vision is planning to run Rupantaran classes using local school classrooms where available, but does not yet have provision for additional safe spaces. The Kishori programmer[1]un by government used rooms for adolescent girls in women's cooperatives. But there are none in Biratnagar. While temples are normally a place where adolescent boys can congregate, we found no evidence of them doing so in either site. Community buildings are used by adults and were not popular among boys or girls. However, as already noted, while some public places are known as boys' gathering places (though in a negative way and hence not all boys use those spaces), there are no such recognised spaces for girls to meet and socialise.

Access to age-appropriate information and digital technology

Mobile phones are the most popular source of information and the most common form of digital technology used in both sites. Adolescents, mostly boys, use smartphones. According to respondents, mobile phones became widely accessible in both study sites 3–4 years ago. Radio is not popular, while television (TV) is declining in popularity, especially among boys. This might be because they now have access to smartphones, which enable them to watch films of their choice, which is not possible on TV. However, TV is still popular among girls who said that they watch films, serials and music programmes. Girls and boys did not report using TV and mobile phones to access news and other information (e.g. on education). Boys use mobile phones for networking with friends; girls do not tend to have access to a phone of their own, so generally cannot use phones for networking.

Parents explained that their children place a large amount of pressure on them to buy mobile phones for them:

> It's all because of the Facebook and mobile uses among all. These days, children ask for a mobile phone at a very early age. They know how to convince their parents for a phone. They show various reasons for wanting that and get it anyhow. (IDI, mother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

Boys who have dropped out of school buy mobile phones with their wages, while boys still in school either keep their mother's mobile phone or persuade their parents to buy them one. They also use pocket money or money saved from household expenses to buy a mobile phone:

> Their parents provide them with cellphones. If the parents deny buying them cell phones then they ask 200 rupees to buy 100 rupee notebooks and buy a cell phone. (IDI, mother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

If a girl does have a mobile phone, it is usually a gift from an uncle or from her father, who may have gone abroad to find work.

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1   Kishori is a life-skill and livelihoods programme implemented for out of school girls by the government of Nepal.

As already noted, older adolescent boys have most access to digital technology while younger adolescents have least access. In both sites, girls and boys were found to start using mobile phones independently after reaching 14–15 years of age. Girls have less access to digital technology than boys in general. Among ethnic groups, Madhesi girls have less access to technology than Tharu girls. For older adolescent boys, there is no difference along ethnic lines.

There is a negative perception among parents and gatekeepers about adolescents' use of mobile phones and TV. Parents feel that both TV and mobiles are misused, as their children do not watch informative content; similarly, they feel that TV and mobile phones have led to a degradation of adolescents' education and cultural values:

> *Respondent 1: Some don't go to school and keep on watching TV at home.*
>
> *Respondent 2: Some do both watching TV and doing household chores.*
>
> *Respondent 5: Some run away and get married because of TV. (Vignettes, fathers of adolescents, Gramthan)*

Meaningful participation and decision-making in family, community and school life

The study looked at adolescents' participation in the household, community and school life. In households, participation is gendered and varies by age as well as socioeconomic. In the Tharu community, for example, both girls and boys are allowed to express themselves about household matters. Adolescent boys who drop out of education for work, and boys and girls who have higher education, are consulted more than others on household matters. It is also important to note that adolescent boys who are employed give their earnings to their mother, and the mother gives them pocket money in return. Hence, the decision-making space for adolescent boys who drop out of school might be 'earned' by the fact that they contribute to household income. When girls drop out of school, they do household work and generally do not find paid work – something which may also limit their ability to voice their opinions within the household.

Decision-making about personal issues is mixed. In the urban site, where there is a majority Tharu community, parents increasingly feel that girls and boys make their own decisions around marriage and education:

> *These days boys and girls don't marry a girl of a mother's choice. He will look for a girl himself. He won't agree to marry a girl we chose for him. No one agrees like that nowadays. Everyone has brought a girl of their own choice. We have to let him do what he wants regarding his marriage. (IDI, mother of adolescent boy, Biratnagar)*

Regarding education, there was already evidence from the community that older siblings (girls) had made their own decisions around higher education:

> *No, she[sister]herself wants to study a staff nurse course. Father and mother did not force her to study it. (IDI, brother of adolescent girl, Biratnagar)*

In the rural community, where there is a majority Madhesi population, girls have less say in decisions that affect their lives. Interviews with brothers showed that apart from parents, brothers are also likely to have a say in decisions about girls' lives, including marriage:

> *If they choose their husbands-to-be by themselves, we will check if he is good enough or not. If we do not find him good, we will look for another one. Then father or mother will look for a better person to marry them off. (IDI, brother of adolescent girl, Biratnagar)*

When they start earning, adolescent boys contribute to their sisters' education costs but also decide when and whom the sisters will marry. This might be because they are expected to earn to contribute to the sister's dowry and marriage costs, along with helping the house economically:

> *Interviewer: So are you thinking of educating your sister from your earnings?*

Respondent: I am thinking of educating my sisters. I ask them to go to school but they don't go and I can't beat them. Shanti is going but others have decided not to go. We will let her study till SLC [grade 10] and we will marry her off. (IDI, brother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

Similarly, in the rural community, adolescent brothers also have a say in their sisters' education and employment, particularly if they are contributing financially to the household. Brothers have a strong sense of responsibility to make sure that sisters do not transgress gender norms, as the following quote shows:

No. I will not let my sister work in places outside home, like me. How can we allow them to go for work? I will not allow her to go to Biratnagar for work. We are earning and we will bear the household expenses. We will not allow them to work out of the village. (IDI, brother of adolescent girl, Gramthan)

As already noted, while children's clubs can be an important medium for adolescents to participate in their school and potentially their community (Presler-Marshall, 2017; Ghimire and Samuels, 2014), in both our study sites, such clubs were school-based and their activities strongly gendered.

Again, as already noted, schools are very hierarchical, and there are no mechanisms to allow girls and boys to have a say in teaching methods or teacher–student interactions, or mechanisms through which students can raise any grievances they might have.

There was no formal mechanism to ensure adolescents' participation in community decision-making in either study site. Respondents also noted that adolescents were not involved in any way in informal decision-making at community level.

6   Economic empowerment

Key messages
- Migration to the Gulf countries is a common aspiration for older adolescent boys who drop out of school and those from rural areas, while boys who continue higher education have role models who have acquired better jobs through this route. Girls do not migrate and have no aspirations to do so.
- When they drop out, boys work in locally available jobs such as in factories, garages, construction sites, and as carpenters. Girls who work are confined to seasonal agricultural labour alongside their mothers.
- Boys who drop out of school do not have opportunities to develop their skills and learn while in the job. There is no opportunity for girls to develop their skills.
- There is no access to economic endowments for boys. Girls sometimes receive animals and jewellery as gifts, usually from grandparents. There is no source of credit and boys and girls do not save.
- The current level of education they have is not sufficient for boys and girls to get a good job; hence there is a mismatch between the skills required and the education girls and boys have.

Introduction

This section discusses adolescents' economic aspirations, local job opportunities for skill-building and training, access to resources such as savings and loans, and access to jobs.

Evidence from Nepal around economic empowerment shows that there is a concentration of literature on girls' unpaid care work, but less about their paid work (Presler-Marshall, 2017). There is also less evidence on how boys and girls transition from education to work, on the work (paid and unpaid) that boys do, on adolescents' economic aspirations and how they vary according to gender and age, as well as the economic inputs that girls and boys have access to (e.g. skills, training and loans). According to the Nepal Living Standards Survey (CBS and NPC, 2011), the incidence of child labour (5–14 years old) is 42%, though this rises to 61% among the 10–14 age group.

Economic aspirations

Economic aspirations among boys typically start in mid-adolescence, when there is already a strong pull factor to drop out of school (especially among boys in the rural study site, where there is greater pressure for older adolescent boys to contribute to the household due to poverty). There were cases of boys running away from home at a very young age to work in the city and eventually to learn skills that would enable them to get a better job (see case study, Box 3).

While girls in urban areas who had older siblings as role models wanted to have careers like their sisters, this was not the case for girls from the rural community. Girls in the urban community largely did not work but were studying to build their career. Girls in the rural area would do seasonal agricultural work during holidays or if they had dropped out of school. Their earnings, if any, would be derived from such work or rearing animals, which they might receive as gifts from family members. We did not find evidence of girls in rural areas aspiring to a well-paid career. If they did do paid work, girls would save the money earned to buy jewellery or invest in animals, and sometimes support the family in case of emergency.

Box 3: Running away from home

Raju dropped out of school and ran away from home when he was 14. He worked in India in many different places. He did not tell his parents he had run off to India and they searched frantically for him. It was only after he found a job some weeks after he had left that he told his parents about his stay in India. He is the oldest son in the family and every time he returned home, his mother would cry and ask him not to run away again. But he kept running away and returning home every couple of years. Each time he would go to a new city, using the social networks he made from his earlier visit, and has ended up visiting many cities of India. He recalled his earlier years of running away from home:

> My parents used to say not to leave but I used to run away and I could meet them only after one and a half or two years.
> And what did your parents used to do when you came? Did they cry and love you more and again you leave?
> They used to cry and start calling everywhere but I used to turn off my phone after I ran away.
> So they used to be very worried?
> Yes and I used to call once I reached a safe place and inform them that I have reached.
> Did your father used to cry and ask you to return?
> Yes. But I had to work and develop my skill. Once you have skill you can get work. If you have skill you can get any work.
> So you used to think that way and work?
> Yes I have a learned a lot of skill but I do not know driving.

He is now back in his home village and has been working with an event management team where they organise parties for marriages and other occasions. He reported that he earns a better living now in Nepal than he used to in India, so intends to stay in Nepal now.

> Yes, I get 500 rupees a day and can earn 15,000 rupees here in Nepal. I used to earn 7,000 Indian rupees only while in India.

He says that he does not want to run away now because his father is old and his younger brother is still young. He says that as an older son, he now has the responsibility of looking after the house. He is 19 years old.

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Going to cities and to work overseas is a common aspiration among older adolescent boys and primarily for those in the rural area. Many have brothers, brothers-in-law or uncles in Gulf countries and think that they would help them in their migration. Young adolescent boys, however, shared that they do not want to leave their homes yet. As with girls in urban areas, boys in those areas had role models who had taken up white-collar jobs in the city and they wanted to follow in their steps when they complete their education.

Skill-building and training (including numeracy and financial literacy)

In both study sites, there are no skills-building or training facilities for adolescent boys and girls. Often, older adolescent boys learn skills on the job, whether locally or through migration (see Box 3). While in other districts there is a government programme (Kishori) providing livelihood support and life skills training for out-of-school adolescent girls, there were no such interventions in our study sites. Except for the World Vision's Rupantaran Programme and a small-scale targeted cash transfer (sponsorship) programme, we did not find any other NGO programming in the two sites. Similarly, we did not find evidence of boys and girls receiving technical and vocational training from government institutes that offer such training in other districts.

Furthermore, adolescents in both sites did not go for self-funded vocational training in the city when they had dropped out of school. Girls in rural area who do seasonal agricultural labour learn what to do on the job; employers neither look for any particular skills nor pay for those skills.

While members of women's groups were part of the local adult literacy programme and had learnt to write their names, there were no such training opportunities on financial literacy available for girls and boys at either study site.

When they studied in private institutions, boys studied vocational subjects, including basic engineering and electrician courses, since they perceived this to be helpful for them to get better jobs in future and did not necessarily mean they had to wait until they graduated. However, as already discussed, not many boys go to private schools; hence adolescents are largely excluded from skill-building opportunities.

Access to resources, savings and credit

Our research found only two resources/programmes in the study sites that exclusively target adolescents: (1) the Dalit grant (a government grant for school-going adolescents); and (2)a cash transfer provided through World Vision's Area Development Programme (ADP)for boys and girls. However, neither of these were universal benefits; indeed, only 7 adolescent boys and girls received occasional stipends through the ADP. Those who did receive it had received different amounts on just two separate occasions. The money was given to the adolescents themselves rather than the head of household. Adolescents had decided how to spend this money and used it to buy bicycles, educational materials and household items such as pots.

The Dalit grant, on the other hand, is targeted only for Rishidevs[2] and other Dalits in the study sites. It consists of a yearly sum of NPR 4,000 for school uniform and educational material and NPR 15 per day per student for tiffin (snack). The Dalit grant was typically paid to mothers (not directly to the students), who spent it on their children's educational needs. There are also in-kind transfers, including clothing in winter and school bags at the start of each academic year. Some schools also give mid-day meals to all children, even though the students also receive tiffin.

Apart from the Dalit grant for school-going children, there are other schemes not directly classed as social protection but understood as being 'socially protecting' – that is, buffering poverty and its negative consequences for marginalised groups. Among such schemes are the Youth Self-Employment Fund, free vocational training under the Department of Cottage and Small Industries, and subsidies for agricultural tools and seeds. However, adolescents in both study sites did not know about these schemes.

Mid-adolescent and older adolescent girls typically receive gifts such as animals (goats or hens) or jewellery from their maternal and paternal grandparents. Boys did not receive such gifts or money from grandparents, probably because they are assumed to inherit parental property when they grow up, while girls get nothing. Girls can keep the money they earn from such gifts and usually other household members do not use this money. This was common for girls who had dropped out of school and who were also earning some money, which they often used to buy jewellery. Some girls had also been able to earn money to buy more animals:

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2   Rishidevs are the so-called Dalits of Terai origin.

> *Interviewer: Did you buy it or did someone give it to you?*

> *My grandmother gave me the chickens and the goat. I sold the chicken at NPR 500–700 per chicken. (IDI, sibling sister of adolescent girl, Gramthan)*

While women in both the rural and urban sites were members of local saving groups, there was no equivalent for adolescent girls, who are unable to take part in the adult(women's) groups. We did not find evidence of boys saving money either. Boys who were in work were often gave their earnings to their mothers, who would decide how to spend the money. Similarly, boys who had taken up jobs were given pocket money by the mother. We did not find evidence of girls receiving regular pocket money from mothers. Girls who earn keep the money and can use it as pocket money when needed, unlike boys, who give it to their mothers to contribute to household expenses.

Decent and productive work and employment

As already stated, employment opportunities for boys who drop out of school early include working in factories and construction sites, helping in event management and catering, and taking on odd jobs in garages, shops and in carpentry. Boys are poorly paid when they start as they are often taken on as apprentices. Nevertheless, some boys stay on in those jobs as it can lead to more regular and lucrative work after they learn the skill.

> *I want to become a cycle repairer because they give 100 rupees sometimes. I am learning now. If I learned all the techniques, then they will give me NPR 3,500 as salary. (IDI, adolescent boy, 14 years old, Biratnagar)*

Given that Biratnagar is one of the biggest industrial towns in the country, there are better opportunities for adolescents there than in other parts of Nepal. When they get regular jobs, such as in factories, boys can earn up to NPR 9,000 a month. Their working hours are very long though:

> *I used to go early in the morning and work til 5pm in the biscuit factory. And, for that I have to wake up at 4am. (IDI, adolescent boy, 19 years old, Gramthan)*

Since it is not deemed socially acceptable for unmarried girls to take up jobs in the above-mentioned workplaces, girls who do paid work mostly do seasonal agricultural work alongside their mother. The tasks involved in such work are gendered: women plant saplings and do weeding, while men plough the field and lay the borders. The wage paid differs according to the work: women and girls get NPR 250–300 (younger adolescents get NPR 200) while men earn between NPR 700 and 1,000 per day. However, the vast majority of girls look after the household and other family members, so do not do paid work regularly in both study sites, even though Biratnagar has many more opportunities for work (for example, in factories).

When a father is sick, the oldest male child bears responsibility for supporting the household economically. In such cases, older adolescent boys were found to be under a great deal of pressure to keep up with social customs/expectations such as expenditure on visitors, festivals and other social ceremonies, which are expensive but obligatory. While this was not the case among high-class members of the Madhesi community, Dalit girls also took up daily agricultural wage labour if their father was unable to earn money and/or if the family was in debt.

> *Also sometimes I worry about Baishakh [month of April] coming near. There are festivals then so I worry about where the money would come from. And if any relatives come to stay…or if my friends come then I worry about where the money will come from. (IDI, adolescent girl, Biratnagar)*

Conclusions

A focus on adolescents is necessary, not just because they comprise a quarter of the population in Nepal but also because adolescence is a critical window in which to promote individual and collective capabilities, which will ultimately enable Nepal to achieve the SDGs. Yet there remains a lack of understanding about what works best to transform adolescents' lives, taking into account key differences according to an individual's gender, age, ethnicity, area of residence, and other factors.

Our study reinforces findings of other research in relation to gender- and age-based differences in capability domains. It also finds that girls and boys experience positive changes in some of the domains more rapidly than their parents' and grandparents' generations (particularly in education and learning, and health, SRH and nutrition) but not as much in others, such as psychosocial wellbeing. It finds that along with technical programmatic interventions targeting adolescents, awareness-raising in the community more generally, along with small transfers (e.g. mid-day meals to school-going children) have the potential to deliver substantial changes.

Education and learning

Educational aspirations – Adolescents' educational aspirations, and parents' aspirations for their adolescent children– have increased compared with the previous two generations. However, there are discrepancies between urban and rural areas, boys and girls, and ethnic groups. In rural areas, despite an increase in aspirations, boys and girls rarely transition to higher education. Poverty, gendered responsibilities (e.g. care work for girls, pressure to contribute cash to the household for boys), early marriage and frustration with the educational system contribute to high rates of dropout. For families in which the mother or father is unable to earn, the eldest sibling drops out to take on earning or care responsibilities, in urban and rural areas alike. In urban areas, parents were more aware of the importance of education and of investing in educating daughters as well as sons. Education, economic status, and father's exposure to different cultures or values (such as through working in the city or with the non-Madhesi community) have contributed to these raised levels of awareness.

Health, SRH and nutrition

In general, adolescents in urban and rural areas experienced similar health problems, including fever, stomach ache, headache, cold and cough. Menstrual pain was one of the biggest issues facing adolescent girls, though this was not a concern for their mothers, as what their daughters were experiencing was considered 'normal'. For minor health issues, adolescents usually visited the health post or clinic nearby or even a pharmacy where they could easily get medicine without a prescription; for major health problems, people attended one of the hospitals in Biratnagar city.

Drug addiction, tobacco consumption and alcoholism are common social problems among adolescent boys and are of great concern to parents. Peer pressure and the easy availability of drugs from across the border seem to have fuelled drug addiction. There were no such reported cases of adolescent girls engaging in substance abuse.

In terms of access to SRH information and services, adolescent girls and boys have learnt about reproductive health through school books starting from grade 6. Sexual relationships and love affairs among unmarried adolescents seem to be on the rise, but there is no sexual and psychosocial counselling available. Girls were aware of menstruation before reaching menarche and the main source of information about puberty and SRH was their friends and older sisters. Mothers of adolescents do not educate their daughters about menstruation; they expect that girls will learn from their school or from peers.

Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

Despite being illegal, corporal punishment emerged as an important issue in both sites. Teachers use hands, sticks and even iron rods to punish students; reasons for punishment include not doing assignments, not paying fees, and speaking Nepali language in private (English-medium) schools. Regular use of corporal punishment has led to high rates of absenteeism and dropout. Boys are more likely to be punished or humiliated by teachers than girls.

Bullying of younger adolescent boys by older boys in school is another significant challenge – but girls did not report being bullied by older girls. However, girls in rural and urban areas alike reported facing the threat of physical violence when going to and from school (e.g. being followed by strangers on bikes, having their dress and scarf pulled, and men shouting out vulgar remarks).Girls in both settings (rural and urban) shared that their own community and schools are safe places for them, but the canal and bushes are unsafe, as drug users and couples are found hanging around such places.

Harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and dowry are common in both sites, but more prevalent among the Madhesi and Dalit groups than among Tharu communities.

There is also evidence of women being accused of witchcraft, but it is not clear if this affects adolescent girls directly. Untouchability, on the other hand, affects adolescent girls from the Dalit community, who do paid labour for others.

Psychosocial wellbeing

Older adolescent girls are the least able to defy norms while boys of the same age can defy family rules and social norms, seemingly with impunity, and are the most resilient. Girls from the Tharu community (in the urban site) and the Madhesi community (rural site) believe that they bring physical violence upon themselves by not adhering to prescribed norms – e.g. not dressing appropriately and being modern or stylish. Girls in the Madhesi community were least able to express their feelings, while girls from the Tharu community (urban area) were bolder and more expressive. Girls who had dropped out of education appeared to be the least resilient, were unable to express their feelings within their family and to resist family decisions, thus giving in to what the family and community demanded of them. Girls generally had less capacity to express themselves than their male siblings, who (especially if they were a few years older and in work) had a strong say in decisions affecting their sisters' lives. Among adolescent boys, younger boys were less resilient than older boys. They were less able to resist household rules and rules set by their older brothers around (for instance) who gets to use a mobile phone and hanging out/playing with their older siblings.

Mothers are the most important source of non-financial support for girls and boys alike. When it comes to financial support, adolescents of both sexes would approach the mother first, who would in turn approach the father. While not undermining the value of emotional support from a mother, many of our respondents commented that it is the father's support that helps them transcend normative boundaries and achieve better opportunities. Except in private schools, we did not find evidence of teachers being seen as supportive of adolescents. Where there were supportive teachers, adolescent girls tended to seek out their support more than boys. Girls sometimes complained to teachers about eve-teasing and received emotional support from some teachers, such as encouragement for their studies.

In terms of connections with peers, younger boys are able to maintain and expand their social networks as they become older adolescents. The community is also more lenient towards them when they break rules around social interactions with the opposite sex. In the absence of guardianship and mentoring by parents, this freedom has both positive and negative consequences. While boys typically develop their self-confidence, expand their worldview, and may be able to express their opinions, girls are unable to do so. Due to stringent norms around mobility and interaction, girls' social networks start to shrink as they transition from a relatively free younger adolescent phase to become older adolescents. Dropping out of school means they lose their

friends, and limited access to mobile phones or ICT means they also lose any opportunities to maintain virtual connections or friendships.

Voice and agency

Adolescent boys who contribute to household income are most likely to have a voice in decisions about their personal life. However, for adolescent girls, irrespective of their income status, this is not possible; fathers and brothers generally make important decisions about adolescent girls' lives.

There are no pathways for adolescent boys – let alone girls – to have a say in the community. While in other settings, children's clubs have become an important platform for boys and girls to exert their voice and agency in their community, this was not the case in Nepal; in both study sites, such activities were strongly gendered and confined to school.

Teaching methods at schools were top-down and not inclusive. Adolescent girls and boys were not included in decision-making around any school activities. There was also no mechanism for students to share any grievances or concerns with school teachers or authorities.

The study finds that overall, there has been positive change in capabilities that underpin adolescent wellbeing. However, changes are uneven and vulnerabilities and gaps in some domains have been better addressed than others. There are also variations according to age, gender and ethnicity, and poverty and accessibility might have played a significant role in how adolescents experience resilience.

The above-mentioned changes have not come out of a single or one-off intervention but represent the culmination of multiple programmes addressing different actors who are important in shaping adolescents' life trajectories. There have been simultaneous interventions at the level of the individual, family and community, but also in the areas of global and national policy and service systems. Our study finds that as one part of the microcosm of programmes and systems, the Rupantaran programme run by World Vision has been able to capture one of the most vulnerable groups of adolescents: those from marginalised communities who are located in one of the most developed parts of the country. Evidence from this baseline study finds mixed effects among these adolescents: their capabilities in some domains have been better addressed (including through improved infrastructure), often as a result of the area's relatively high level of development. However, many adolescents' continue to face discriminatory and restrictive norms on a daily basis, which affect boys and girls of all age ranges. As such, there is a need for ongoing and increased investment in multiple programmes targeting multiple actors, including parents and other gatekeepers. It is nevertheless hoped that the Rupantaran programme will also affect this core context, and the second follow-up study in 2019 March/April will explore the effects on and changes in adolescents' lives as a result of the programme.

Economic Empowerment

Our research found that adolescent girls' economic aspirations depend on where they live and whether they have role models. Urban girls, especially those with successful older sisters, aspire to careers. As they are focusing on their schooling, few are employed. Rural girls appear to have few work aspirations beyond agriculture – work which is easily available to them over holidays and after they drop out of education. While boys in urban areas more often aspire to white-collar jobs that require higher education, many boys in rural areas feel compelled to help support their families and begin working in early adolescence. Their aspirations often revolve around eventually finding decently paid work in the Gulf and it is not uncommon for them to leave school entirely by mid-adolescence, in order to undertake a series of low-paid jobs that they hope will help build their skill-sets.

In neither of the GAGE research locations did we find evidence that financial literacy or technical and vocational training programmes are available to adolescents, outside of the handful of boys who study at private school. Instead, adolescents acquire work skills on the job.

We found only minimal evidence that adolescent girls and boys have access to financial assets. Although a small proportion are sponsored by World Vision or receive a transfer because they are school going Dalits, adolescents' own access to assets, including cash, is extremely limited. Girls appear advantaged compared to boys. They not only receive gifts of jewellery or livestock from family members, whereas boys do not (because it is assumed, they will eventually inherit), but working boys in general turn their incomes over to their mothers for household use, whereas girls do not.

Boys, on the other hand, are advantaged compared to girls in terms of access to employment. While the sorts of jobs they undertake tend to be quite poorly paid, they have options. Due to social norms, girls are almost entirely confined to unpaid work and when they do work for pay, almost exclusively do so in agriculture alongside their mothers.

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About GAGE

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. Visit www.gage.odi.org.uk for more information.

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