



Gender and Adolescence Research Panorama

Summary

Quarter 2 2019 Edition



INTRODUCTION

As highlighted at the recent Women Deliver 2019 (WD2019) Conference in Vancouver, entitled *Power, Progress, Change*, the need to invest in gender equality and especially in adolescent girls has gained greater visibility in global discussions over the past five years. Michelle Obama's closing ceremony remarks summed it up well: *'Investing in adolescents' empowerment is crucial and the only path to progress'*. But there is still much to be done, from eradicating child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), to ensuring that adolescents affected by conflict and climate-induced shocks receive tailored support.

Encouragingly, the case for high-quality data and evidence in order to track progress over time was powerfully made at WD2019. Nomi Fuchs-Montgomery, from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, emphasised how, in the case of very young adolescents, *'if we aren't measuring it, it doesn't exist'*, while Katja Iversen, Chief Executive Officer of Women Deliver, highlighted the centrality of robust data and evidence to programming: *'Let's use the sex- and age-disaggregated data that we have to guide the policies and programmes that empower women. And if the data does not exist, let's demand it.'*

To take stock of emerging data and evidence on gender and adolescence – a life-stage with distinct opportunities and challenges to fast-track social change – the GAGE research panorama uses a gender lens to look at the current literature on adolescents (from GAGE and external grey and published literature) published over the most recent quarter. We highlight key findings and relevant policy implications across six capability domains: education and learning; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; health, nutrition and sexual and reproductive health; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. Where possible, we draw attention to the ways in which exclusion on the basis of gender and age often intersects with other social identities – ranging from disability to area of residence and national identity (refugee or internally displaced person (IDP) status), among others.

This quarter we are excited to highlight the publication of a recent set of GAGE reports and policy briefs presenting our baseline findings from Ethiopia, and a synthesis of the evidence on programming in the Global South to tackle conservative masculinities among adolescent boys. We were also delighted to publish an article as part of a special issue of *Humanitarian Exchange*, focusing on 'Making humanitarian action work for women and girls', based on research with adolescents from IDP communities in Ethiopia. We also produced a brief as part of the UN Women Policy brief series on 'Gender and age-responsive social protection: the potential of cash transfers to advance adolescent rights and capabilities'.



Ethiopia: Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

Recommendation: Address the gender norms that leave boys vulnerable to peer violence and girls at risk of sexual violence, FGM/C and child marriage – and support parents and teachers to embrace non-violent discipline.



3/4 of young adolescents have experienced violence at school – 2/3 have experienced or witnessed violence at home



For many girls, the verbal and physical abuse they experience in childhood evolves into sexual violence in adolescence



FGM/C takes place from infancy to adolescence; in some contexts girls endorse the practice given strong cultural pressures



Child marriage remains common. Most child brides are pushed into marriage by parents, but some marriages are adolescent-led

Education and learning

In Jordan and Lebanon, there has been a strong focus on funding primary education for young people affected by the Syrian refugee crisis. However, there are **large gaps in access to secondary education** and there is a lack of support for accessing **higher education**, vocational training and labour market opportunities (El-ghali et al, 2019).

Globally, adolescents with disabilities fare worse than their peers without disabilities, evidenced by large gaps in learning outcomes, enrolment and school completion (World Bank Group, 2019). In Ethiopia, while enrolment in primary school continues to increase, **learning outcomes are low** and **transitions to secondary education are difficult**, partly due to lack of secondary schools in rural areas. Poorly trained teachers often rely on violent discipline to control children, with 75% of young adolescents reporting having experienced violence at school. Punishments can be severe, especially for boys and younger adolescents (Jones et al, 2019).

Recommendations

- » Invest in the transition from primary to secondary schooling, addressing concerns about quality of education by working with schools to promote non-violent classroom management techniques.
- » Support pathways to vocational training programmes as a viable alternative to tertiary education.

Health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health

In India, poor nutritional status, poor feeding practices, poor living conditions, lower education and limited access to health services put **adolescent mothers at risk of having undernourished children** (Nguyen et al, 2019).

Globally, a shift in diet to more unhealthy and processed foods has resulted in a **nutrition transition in adolescents** causing dramatic increases in the numbers of adolescents who are overweight or have anaemia (Azzopardi, et al., 2019).

In Ethiopia, adolescents (especially boys) are increasingly exposed to modern health risks such as substance abuse, particularly in urban areas (Jones et al., 2019). Young adolescents, especially those in rural areas, have limited access to and uptake of contraceptive information, supplies and services. There is also a need to address adolescent exposure to HIV, which seems to be on the rise (Jones et al., 2019).

Recommendations

- » Expand household and school-based nutritional education programmes, targeting adolescent mothers in particular.
- » Scale up access to sexual and reproductive health services, alongside awareness-raising campaigns to tackle the stigma surrounding uptake of these services.

Bodily integrity

In India, Uganda, Peru, Australia and Spain, **group dynamics aggravate street harassment** perpetrated by groups of men and boys. Abuse is typically verbal, sexual in nature, and occurs in the streets and in **school buildings** (Plan International, 2019).

Violence against women and girls remains a highly underfunded area of humanitarian response. There is a lack of expertise on gender-based violence (GBV) within humanitarian response plans and progress towards including the GBV response in the humanitarian response has been low (IRC and Voice, 2019).

Data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of 32 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (2010–2013) show that lower household income was associated with **increased violent disciplinary practices and beliefs**. It was also associated with greater likelihood of **using violent discipline**, even when the parent or caregiver did not believe in its utility (Beatriz and Salhi, 2019).

In Ethiopia, child marriage remains common yet **marriage practices vary significantly across locations, demanding tailored solutions**. In Amhara, for example, child marriage is still often parent led, but in general arranged marriage is declining; in Afar, child marriage is commonly enforced by parents and shows limited signs of change; and in Oromia, due to a lack of alternative options, some adolescents are ‘choosing’ child marriage (Jones et al., 2019).

Recommendations

- » Introduce public awareness-raising campaigns against harassment that specifically focus on masculinities and include awareness to both the community and professionals on the laws surrounding harassment and how to implement them
- » Increase funding and expertise on GBV in programming, especially in humanitarian settings.
- » Give parents practical guidance on positive discipline approaches, through health extension services, parent–teacher associations and other community fora.
- » Programming on child marriage should map the context-specific practices and norms to ensure adequately tailored approaches and to maximise scarce resources.

Psychosocial well-being

Life skills programmes are effective in reducing symptoms of anger, improving life skills and decreasing PTSD; programmes that focus on **parent-child interactions**, interpersonal relations and stress management are particularly effective (Singla et al., 2019).

Emotional violence is associated with **increased suicide ideation** among adolescents, and this is significantly greater among young men in Kenya (Seff & Stark, 2019).

In Ethiopia, while adolescents have low levels of mental distress overall, **girls experience considerable levels of anxiety and depression** due to sexual harassment, the risks of **sexual violence, and forced child marriage**. Boys have greater access to peer networks, while adolescents with disabilities are less able to discuss problems with their parents (Jones et al., 2019).

Recommendations

- » Target parent–child interactions through policy and programming, providing guidance to parents on how best to support their adolescent children, particularly those with disabilities.
- » Provide gender-sensitive safe spaces where adolescents, especially girls, can interact with peers.

Voice and agency

Rural girls in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam have the lowest levels of agency and self-efficacy. These two measures were more likely to be greater for girls who grew up in households with higher **socio-economic status** (Espinoza Revollo & Ogando Portela, 2019).

The majority (60%) of positive youth development (PYD) programmes in LMICs showed positive impacts on adolescents’ behaviour (such as risky sexual activity and substance use) as well as on health indicators and employment (Catalano et al., 2019).

In Ethiopia, **there is a large digital divide**; among young adolescents, those from urban areas are twice as likely to have a phone as those in rural areas. Adolescents with disabilities and girls are less likely to have a mobile phone and access to



Ethiopia: Voice and agency

Recommendation: Support adolescents' safe access to information, including in the digital sphere, and to school parliaments and adolescent clubs to encourage opportunities for participation and development of leadership skills, and link them with aspirational role models and mentors.



Older adolescent girls' mobility is far more restricted than adolescent boys'



Twice as many urban boys as girls have access to the internet



Adolescents have very limited opportunities for safe civic engagement



Only one-third of young adolescents have a role model

the internet. Younger adolescents and girls are also less likely to have a role model outside their family compared to boys and older adolescents in urban areas, who are more likely to cite educational professionals and politicians as role models (Jones et al., 2019).

Recommendations

- » Provide adolescents with opportunities to develop participation and leadership skills through clubs and PYD programmes.
- » Support adolescents (especially girls and those in rural areas) to access information through mobile phones and the internet, and link local schools with appropriate role models.

Economic empowerment

In Ethiopia, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) registration list has remained static over the last decade, in effect excluding younger couples. It does not always reach adolescents with disabilities, and runs the risk of families substituting adolescents' labour for that of adults (Jones et al, 2019).

In Mozambique, 46% of children suffer from both monetary and multidimensional child poverty. The most vulnerable children are those from rural areas, those from less well-educated families, those involved in agriculture and those whose households have experienced weather shocks (Ferrone, et al, 2019).

In Ethiopia, adolescent girls and boys alike have high aspirations for their future livelihoods, as do their caregivers. But there is a significant mismatch in terms of the knowledge and opportunities available to realise these aspirations. **Uptake of TVET are limited** due to cost barriers, minimum grade requirements, and perceptions that TVET qualifications are less desirable (Jones et al, 2019).

Emerging evidence suggests that a cash plus approach to cash transfers that works in tandem with other interventions (e.g. life skills training and opportunities for savings and vocational training) is likely to be more transformative than cash alone (Jones et al., 2019).

Recommendations

- » Strengthen access to, and quality of, TVET courses and increase information to adolescents on TVET opportunities and link these to potential employment opportunities.
- » Invest in social protection programming (including integrated cash plus transfers) that respond to adolescent and gender-specific vulnerabilities, such as care work responsibilities child marriage, and ensure social protection programmes are adjusted to reach these populations.