

# EXPLORING THE ROLE OF EVOLVING GENDER NORMS IN SHAPING ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE IN PASTORALIST AFAR, ETHIOPIA

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## ABSTRACT

*There is a growing recognition that social norms play a key role in perpetuating gender- and age-based violence, and that tackling social norms must be an integral component of prevention and response interventions to ensure meaningful progress towards the ambitious targets of eliminating gender-based violence (Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] Target 5.2) and violence against children (SDG 16.2) by 2030. However, existing research often fails to adequately capture life-course and context-specific complexities. To explore these challenges, this chapter focuses on adolescents' vulnerabilities to violence in Afar, one of the Ethiopia's most disadvantaged regions. Drawing on findings from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) mixed-methods 2018 baseline research, and using a socio-ecological framework, the chapter highlights that while the patterning of violence experienced by adolescent girls and boys is shifting across generations at the micro-level, gender- and age-related social norms remain deeply entrenched in both migrating and settled pastoralist communities. At the meso-level, institutional barriers to addressing adolescents' experiences of violence include a lack of basic infrastructure, a dearth of confidential reporting*

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*spaces, limited adolescent- and gender-friendly personnel within the police and justice sectors, and poor coordination. At the macro-level, the chapter underscores the significant disconnect between Ethiopia's progressive national policies and adolescents' experiences of violence, reflected in the availability and quality of prevention and response services. The chapter concludes that to adequately tailor services to local realities and tackle adolescents' specific vulnerabilities, a fine-grained analysis of the gendered and generational experiences of violence in its diverse forms is critical.*

**Keywords:** Gender norms; violence; Ethiopia; adolescence; pastoralist; capabilities

## INTRODUCTION

There is a growing recognition that social norms play a key role in perpetuating gender-based and age-based violence (Harper, Jones, Ghimire, Marcus, & Bantebya, 2018; Vaitla, Taylor, van Horn, & Cislighi, 2017). However, existing evidence often fails to adequately capture life-course and context-specific complexities. To explore these challenges, this chapter focuses on adolescents in one of the Ethiopia's most disadvantaged regions, Afar regional state. According to national survey data (the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) module on gender-based violence), adolescents and young women from Afar face some of the lowest rates of violence in the country. However, the EDHS only provides data on young people aged 15 years or older; moreover, surveys of this nature risk underestimating context-specific variations in understandings and perceptions of violence, especially given insufficient time to establish rapport and trust between survey enumerators and respondents and issues of social desirability bias (Walby & Towers, 2017).

This chapter draws on research findings from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) mixed-methods baseline research carried out in 2017 and 2018 in rural and urban sites in Ethiopia, including in Afar regional state with pastoralist and more settled communities. The Afar sample involved surveys with more than 500 younger adolescent girls and boys (10–12 years) and their caregivers. It also included in-depth qualitative research with 46 adolescent girls and boys from two age cohorts (10–12 years and 15–17 years), their families and peers, as well as with community and district-level key informants.

Following an overview of our research methods and the Afar regional state context, this chapter first explores, using a socio-ecological analytical framework, how and to what extent the patterning of violence that adolescent girls and boys experience at the micro-level within the household and community is shifting across generations. It then turns to an analysis at the meso-level of the institutional barriers to addressing the normalization of violence experienced by adolescents. Finally, we discuss at the macro-level the extent to which national-level policy commitments are reflected in individual and community-level experiences of violence and in the availability, uptake and quality of services for young

people who are experiencing or have experienced violence. The chapter concludes with reflections on the implications of our findings for policy and programming, and especially in terms of promoting meaningful progress towards the ambitious targets of eliminating gender-based violence (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 5.2) and all forms of violence against children (SDG Target 16.2) by 2030.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

Our research draws on a capabilities conceptual framework, which looks at the multidimensional individual and collective capabilities that young people require to lead meaningful lives in the present and also to effectively transition to early adulthood (GAGE Consortium, 2017). Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1984, 2004), and nuanced to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003), the capabilities approach explores the multidimensional assets (economic, human, political, emotional, and social) that expand the capacity of individuals to achieve valued ways of “doing and being.” While our overall data includes six capability domains, this chapter focuses on just one: bodily integrity and freedom from violence (the other five being education, health – including sexual and reproductive health – and nutrition, economic empowerment, psychosocial well-being, and voice and agency). We define the bodily integrity domain in terms of access to the knowledge, skills, resources, and support adolescents need to protect themselves from age-based violence (including bullying and corporal punishment) and sexual- and gender-based violence (including early, forced and child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) (Fig. 1).

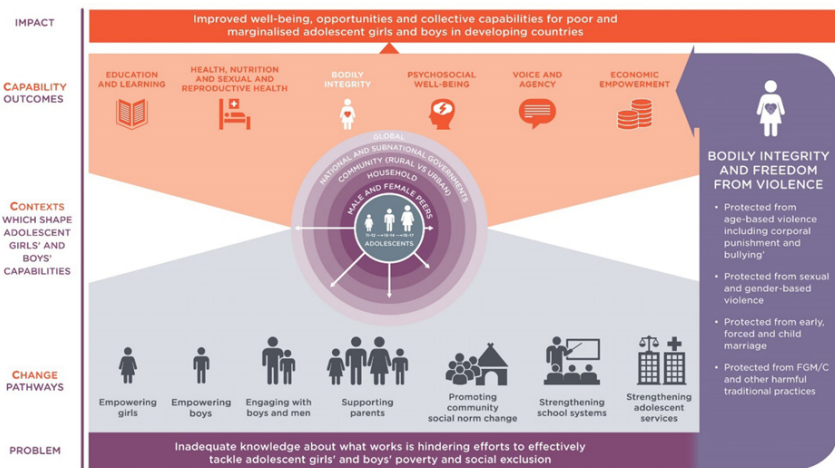


Fig. 1. GAGE Conceptual Framework, with a Focus on Adolescent Bodily Integrity and Freedom from Violence. Source: GAGE consortium, 2019 forthcoming.

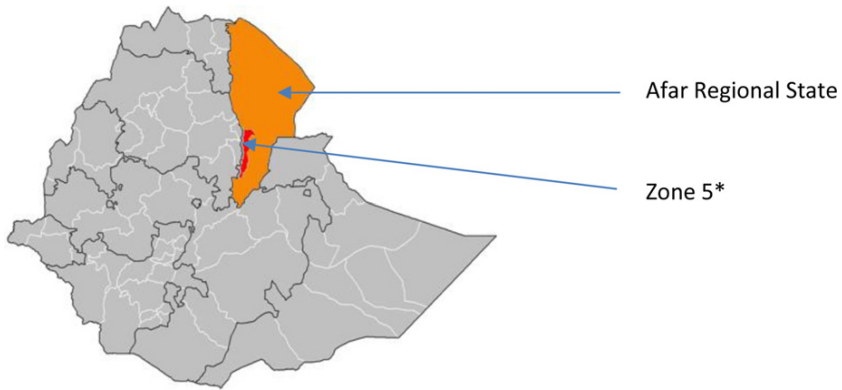
As highlighted in Fig. 1, we combine the capabilities approach with insights from a socio-ecological framework to explore how adolescent capabilities are mediated by micro-, meso- and macro-level contexts, and the role that policy and programming interventions can play in accelerating positive change. We pay particular attention to the role that context-specific gendered social norms play at household, community, sub-national and national government levels in shaping adolescent trajectories during the second decade of life and into early adulthood (Basu, Zuo, Lou, Acharya, & Lundgren, 2016; John, Stoebenau, Ritter, & Edmeades, 2016; Kågesten et al., 2016; McCarthy, Brady, & Hallman, 2016; Mmari et al., 2018). The years of early adolescence, in particular, restrict the worlds that girls inhabit, as they are compelled to start preparing to follow prevailing gendered adult pathways, which typically emphasize females' domestic and care work responsibilities and male control of female sexuality (including through restricted mobility, child marriage and early childbearing) (Harper et al., 2018; Kabeer, 2003; Nussbaum, 2011). By contrast, boys' worlds tend to expand during adolescence, although this often comes at a cost. A growing body of evidence suggests that adolescent males' higher risk of violence and substance abuse are related to social norms that emphasize risk and strength.

## METHODS

### *Data Collection*

While the overall GAGE Ethiopia baseline study sample involved a representative subset of over 6,700 adolescents, for the purposes of this chapter, we draw primarily on the data from Afar – although we make comparisons with adolescents in other regional states where applicable. Our quantitative survey for Afar involved 500 adolescent girls and boys (10–12 years) and their female caregivers in five *woredas* (districts) from Zone 5 – Dalifage, Dewe, Hadelela, Semurobi and Telalak (Fig. 2). Quantitative data collection involved face-to-face interviews with highly trained survey enumerators in all five *woredas*, collecting detailed survey information on the adolescents and their households. The adolescent survey instrument included questions on a wide range of issues, including experiences with and attitudes towards education, health, violence, mobility, and empowerment. Information on the households and the primary female caregivers for these adolescents was collected through administration of a separate survey instrument. In addition, surveys were administered to *kebele* (community) leaders, as well as school and health centre staff, to collect general information on the area as well as facilities, services, and infrastructure available.

Our qualitative research involved in-depth interviews in two rural sites pastoralist. Community A *kebele* (community) is 6 km from the district town and related services, and the community is pastoralist and relatively settled. Community B *kebele* is very remote (60 km on an unsealed road from the district town) and is largely without any services; the community is pastoralist and



*Fig. 2.* Ethiopia: Zone 5, Afar Regional State. *Source:* Based on the OCHA/ReliefWeb administrative map of Ethiopia and modified to show the GAGE research sites. Our study districts, Telalak, Dewe, Dalifage, Hadelela and Semurobi are located in Zone 5, running north to south.

migrates seasonally. Researchers conducted individual interviews using a range of interactive tools (see [Table 1](#) for research instruments) with 46 adolescent girls and boys from two age cohorts (10–12 years and 15–17 years), their families and peers. These were complemented by key informant interviews at community and district levels with service providers in the health, education, justice and social services sectors.

Research ethics approval was granted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Research Ethics Committee, and the Institutional Review Boards of George Washington University and Addis Ababa University, as well as from the relevant regional research ethics boards in Ethiopia. We secured informed assent from adolescents aged 17 and under, and informed consent from their parents and from adolescents aged 18 and 19 years, and report anonymised data.<sup>1</sup>

### *Data Analysis*

Prior to analysis, the quantitative survey data was cleaned, a process which primarily took the form of checks for consistency of responses within each survey. Where issues arose, survey enumerators were consulted and respondent households were contacted for clarification. Once the data was fully cleaned, outcomes of interest were constructed and analysed, and results were interpreted in conversation with local quantitative and qualitative data collection partners.

For the qualitative data, preliminary analysis took place during daily and site-wide debriefings with the research team, during which we explored emerging findings and probed surprising findings or emerging patterns. This also helped to inform the development of the thematic code book. Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed and translated by native speakers

**Table 1.** Respondents in Individual and Group Research Instruments

| Individual instruments                              | Objective   | Who               | Number          |
|---|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| <i>A few of my favourite things</i>                 | To use objects that are meaningful in an individual adolescent's life as an entry point to explore his or her perceptions and experiences across the six GAGE capability domains  | Girls             | 140             |
|   |   | Boys              | 100             |
| <i>Social support network quadrant</i>              | To systematically explore who adolescents are able to turn to within their families and social networks for support and advice and why, as well as who they tend to avoid spending time with and why                                |                   |                 |
| <i>Worries exercise</i>                             | To understand the predominant concerns in adolescents' lives and how they cope – the extent to which they are able to be resilient in the face of these concerns  |                   |                 |
| <i>Parents' life histories</i>                      | To understand the life trajectories of parents of nodal adolescents and the ways in which these have shaped their approach towards and experience of parenting an adolescent  | Parents           | 200             |
| <i>Key informant interviews</i>                     | To explore regional/ <i>woredalkebele</i> government officials', community leaders' and service providers' understandings of adolescent vulnerabilities and needs, and the extent to which existent programming is addressing these | Service providers | 160             |
| Group Instruments                                   | Objective   | Who               | Numbers         |
| <i>Social norm mapping discussions with parents</i> | To explore norms and practices related to more culturally sensitive adolescent-related issues, including migration, sexual and reproductive health, and disability  | Parents           | 16 groups (128) |
| <i>Community timelines</i>                          | To establish a timeline of the village/town/city in order to situate the individual findings  | Community leaders | 14 groups (112) |
| <i>Body mapping</i>                                 | To explore with younger adolescents' norms and attitudes that shape adolescent transitions  | Young adolescents | 9 groups (72)   |
| <i>Community mapping</i>                            | To understand adolescents' access to mobility and safe spaces, in their communities and beyond, including following migration   | Older adolescents | 15 groups (120) |

**Table 1.** (Continued)

| Individual instruments     | Objective  | Who               | Number          |
|----------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Vignettes exercises</i> | To explore more culturally sensitive age- and gender-related norms, including migration, disability, SRH | Older adolescents | 10 groups (80)  |
|                            |  | Parents           | 15 groups (120) |
| <i>Total</i>               |  | 784 adolescents   |                 |
|                            |  | 720 adults        |                 |

of the local language, and then coded using the qualitative software analysis package MAXQDA. The code book we developed was shaped around the GAGE 3 Cs (Capabilities, Contexts, Change Strategies) conceptual framework – but given the breadth of the interviews, allowed flexibility to incorporate local specificities.

## KEY FINDINGS

### *Understanding the Afar Context*

The lives of adolescents in Afar are shaped by two major structural factors: pastoralism and drought. Although some communities – especially those located near more stable water sources – are relatively settled, many of the families in our sample move seasonally with their animals, looking for better grazing lands. The remote rural context and the challenging realities of pastoralist livelihoods – especially given recent droughts – limit educational opportunities for girls and boys in Zone 5. Overall, the net attendance rate for primary school in Afar is 61% – a full 10% lower than the national average (Central Statistical Agency (CSA) Ethiopia & ICF, 2017). School-aged children have primary responsibility for herding. Many spend their days with their family's goats, looking for water. As an adolescent boy from the district noted:

Unless a rainy season comes and pasture is grown in our locality, I can't come back to my home and attend education. Thus, in general, I can't attend my education, except in the rainy season where there is sufficient pasture in our locality for our livestock.

Because adolescents are occupied with herding, they often do not have time to go to school during the dry season. For many children, this means dropping in and out of school and making little progress over time. Whereas adolescent girls and boys in our sample in Amhara and Oromia regions had missed 12% (13% for boys and 11% for girls) and 17% (15% for boys and 19% for girls) of school days respectively in the previous two weeks, in Afar the number was significantly higher, at 24% (29% for boys and 18% for girls) (Table A1). Many adolescents also enroll relatively late, at age 10 or 12, when their younger siblings are old enough to take over herding. Indeed, our quantitative findings show that the mean highest grade level attended is 2.46 in Afar (2.3 for boys

and 2.6 for girls), compared to 4.66 in Amhara (4.3 for boys and 4.8 for girls) and 4.83 in Oromia (5.1 for boys and 4.6 for girls) among adolescents of the same age).

Schools in rural Afar typically only go through fourth grade, partly because schools are chronically under-staffed as teachers often cannot cope with the challenging lifestyle. As a district-level education officer noted:

We assign teachers every year, but we are not able to find anyone who is willing to go there. For example, last time we assigned three teachers and they went. One of them was even sick to the point of death because of shortage of food. There is no water and food there.

Geographical remoteness also plays a key role in shaping educational opportunities. For example, in one of our qualitative research sites Community A, access to school was easier because there was a primary school in the village and a secondary school 8–10 km away. However, in Community B, a more rural (less accessible) site, there was no functional school and most adolescents had not made it past second grade or informal koranic classes due to food insecurity.

Our findings also highlight that adolescence intensifies gender norms. First, mobility is highly gendered, as a 13-year-old adolescent girl from the district noted:

Boys go anywhere, even in the forest and to the river area without problem. In Afar culture, girls are not going everywhere unless their mothers and fathers order them to go somewhere.

The quantitative survey findings echo this, finding that girls are more likely than boys to require permission to move about. Even in middle and late childhood, boys have more freedom than girls. They can go to more places – and are more likely to be sent to school.

The household division of labour is also highly gendered, with negative consequences for girls' education. As a district-level education officer observed:

Parents do not have similar attitudes for daughters and sons. They will send their sons to school and they prefer that daughters spend much of their time helping at home, because most household chores are undertaken by females so they don't have much chance for schooling.

Moreover, opportunities for girls to exercise voice and agency are more limited, especially regarding age at marriage. As a teacher from the district explained:

Both sexes are keeping animals. The children are keeping animals until they start to rebel against their families and refuse to keep livestock anymore. The problem is more severe for females than males because they are also forced to marry at an early age.

In early adolescence, however, when young people begin to refuse to herd and insist on going to school, girls' options are shaped by impending marriage (as discussed below) – while boys' options are not.

It is against this backdrop that adolescent risks and experiences of violence play out. We now turn to discuss the patterning of violence experienced by adolescents, beginning with the micro-level context of family- and community-based violence.



*Micro-level Context of Violence against Adolescence*

At the micro-level, the patterning of violence experienced by adolescent girls and boys is complex. Our quantitative survey findings, mirroring EDHS data on domestic violence, suggest that adolescents in Afar are significantly less likely to have witnessed or experienced violence within the home (38% compared to 71% in Amhara and 72% in Oromia) (Table A1). However, our qualitative research suggested that corporal punishment at home was routine and often severe. A 10-year-old girl from Community A, for example, explained:

If we made mistakes, they could reprimand or beat us. When we fight with other children, they could beat us with a stick. Both my mother and my father beat me when I make mistakes.

Similarly, a 10-year-old boy noted: “Parents – because they send me everywhere they want to bring things – beat me if I refuse to bring them what they order me.” Corporal punishment is often linked to adolescents’ herding responsibilities. For example, an 11-year-old boy noted:

She [mother] often punishes me when I couldn’t manage the herding job and in case a goat gets lost. She also punished me when we get into quarrel with other family members. It is my father who often punishes me. When we are beaten by a stick it is painful and the pain goes to our inner parts.

Violence meted out by siblings tends to mirror violence meted out by parents. It is mostly older adolescents “punishing” younger adolescents, or younger adolescents “punishing” their younger siblings, for failing to do enough household work or adequately respect age hierarchies. As one 10-year-old boy in Community B explained, “My brother beats me when I refuse to accept what he said.”

Our findings on peer violence also reflected this contrast between regions. While just 22% of adolescents had experienced peer violence in Afar, the figures for Amhara were double (44%) and higher still in Oromia (49%) (Table A2). However, our qualitative results painted a different picture of a context where peer violence is widespread and normalized. A 12-year-old boy from Community A, for example, noted that:

First his friend beats my brother with a stick, while my brother hurts him with a Gille [large traditional knife] in reaction to that and finally their conflict has been resolved.

This normalization of violence was further reinforced by a 10-year-old adolescent girl in Community B, who, when asked what she needed in order to be happy, said:

I need to be a boy. Boys are brave. I will be very happy if I get the chance of being a boy. It is because boys can fight with others using their Gille and win.

Although, we do not have quantitative findings on sexual violence for the young adolescents, our qualitative findings suggest that the patterning of sexual violence differs across regions, with unmarried girls in Afar at lower risk than in

other areas in our sample, due to clan norms and sanctions against rape. As one 15-year-old girl from Community B explained, virginity is at a premium and the costs for violating these norms can be severe, not just for the individual but for his clan more broadly:

No one touches a girl if she is a “Sadula” [virgin]; they only touch those who have been married because they pay so many cattle and they could even get into fights that could be fatal. We haven’t witnessed such an incident here in Gala’alo but the elders tell us the story.

This said, younger girls reported that sexual violence still happens, it is just that girls are often afraid to speak out about abuse. As one 11-year-old girl from Community A explained:

It is humiliation for the girl but once it has happened, either the girl informs her family or hides the information from them because of fearing disgrace [...] So, there is only a small number of girls informing the incident to their families [...] This is because [...] sometimes, when the girls share their worry with their families, it causes conflict with others. For instance, when a girl is raped by somebody and informs her family [...] instead of trying to support the girl the family may go to attack or kill the rapist.

Other girls explained that they are afraid of physical violence they might experience at the hands of the assailant. As a 10-year-old girl from Community A noted: “Sometimes the boys try to make sexual relationship by force and beat the girl when she is refusing his request.” An 11-year-old girl similarly explained:

There are boys who follow girls when we are keeping goats in the pasture field. Firstly, they will ask girls peacefully, and if girls reject their request, boys cling their hands forcefully for rape. However, these boys didn’t hold my hands so far.

Turning to gender-based violence, adolescents spoke primarily about FGM/C and child marriage. Many respondents viewed FGM/C as normal, and culturally and religiously necessary. The quantitative results bear this out, suggesting that 90% of young adolescent girls in Afar have been cut by the age of 10 to 12. As a 15-year-old girl from Community B explained:

I will circumcise my daughter in the future [...] Currently children are circumcised by traditional birth attendants. Religious leaders in our locality taught us that; leaving daughters/girls uncircumcised is considered as “Haram” [proscribed by Islamic law].

However, although the practice is increasingly being carried out at a younger age – either soon after birth or in infancy – many of our respondents had been cut as early adolescents and spoke emotionally about the pain and violence it entailed. As a 15-year-old girl from Community B noted:

It is the circumcision which has a pain, it was too much. They told me it [would involve] a pain and bleeding. I was afraid, but I didn’t say [no]. You can’t escape from circumcision. When I was circumcised, I couldn’t say no, because, if you refuse not to be circumcise, you will be circumcised forcefully. They are women who come to that place when girls circumcise, and if you refused the circumcision, a woman clings your two hands back, another woman will cling your legs and spread apart, then....

It was, however, the theme of mandatory cross-cousin child marriage that adolescents spoke most about. Most Afar girls marry as children; the region has the second lowest median age at marriage of all regions at 16.4 years (CSA Ethiopia and ICF, 2017). Our findings (from interviews with people of different generations) underscored that norms around age at marriage have changed slowly in the district. As a teacher from Community A noted:

The number of girls married [...] early decreased from the previous time but the changes have been slow [...] Girls are marrying starting from 11–12 years, if her husband is old. They are married not based on their age but based on their physical appearance.

Generally, respondents concurred that age at marriage was increasing over time, with most girls now marrying in mid-adolescence. That being said, most respondents have low literacy levels and there was often a standard response that “marriage is for 15–16-year-olds.” Survey figures should be interpreted in this light also. However, adolescents and adults alike agreed that it is almost unheard of for a girl to remain unmarried at 19. As one 12-year-old adolescent boy from Community A noted: “She could be exposed for unintended pregnancy if she stays unmarried during adolescence. We fear that she could engage in a love relationship voluntarily and face unintended pregnancy.” A teacher from Community A elaborated: “Most of the families arrange their daughters’ marriage before they reached 8th grade. This is because after grade 8 girls also start to refuse their family’s marriage arrangement.”

Interestingly, the girls most at risk of marrying as very young adolescents are those who are to be married to much older men. For example, one young married girl, aged 15, from Community A noted: “He has another wife, I am the second wife. He is around 40 years old.” This is because culturally it is thought that while girls can “grow up” after they are married, especially if they are married to older men who can “guide” them, boys cannot. As one community key informant explained: “Girls are assumed to mature even within marriage; however, boys are not assumed to mature within marriage like girls.” By contrast, boys can negotiate with their parents on the timing of marriage, and whether or not to stay in school. As a teacher from Community A noted:

Males are not forced to marry at a particular age. If boys want, they can learn up to the end. If adolescent boys are good students, families do not force them to get married.

Typically, boys wait to late adolescence or early adulthood to marry because they need to accumulate money for the wedding ceremony and for their own livestock and to live an independent life. Clan members will even support the poorest boys or young men to do this.

In Afar culture, marriage involves a union with an *absuma* (maternal cousin). The *absuma* marriage system is a deeply rooted cultural norm and is critical to kinship ties, clan identity and economic survival. As one 16-year-old boy from Community A commented: “The *absuma* marriage system is our traditional norm and we strongly support this marriage system, which has to be pursued in

the future.” A community key informant further emphasized the critical importance of kinship lines:

Personally I support the absuma marriage tradition and I prefer my children get married through it. It is widely practised for the sake of maintaining our kinship lines. If my daughter married to someone outside of our kinship, our family line would discontinue.

Each individual can have many absumas; one research participant mentioned that she had more than 30. The particular absuma an adolescent (boys as well as girls) will marry is determined by parents. As one 12-year-old girl explained: “As long as we are alive, it is our abu [mother’s brothers’ sons] that we are going to marry.” Similarly, a recently married 17-year-old young man from Community B said of his wife: “I don’t have any love for my absuma [father’s sisters’ daughter] but I couldn’t refuse them [my clan] to get married.”

The costs of not conforming to the absuma marriage system are very high – for males and females – both financially and in terms of the risk of violence. As a father from Community B underscored: “It is our culture and if I refuse to accept absuma marriage I will be punished by my clan because the two clans are intertwined through absuma marriage.” And for boys who seek to marry another person’s absuma or a girl from outside his own clan the consequences can be severe. According to a 15-year-old from Community A:

In our culture getting married to another’s absuma is costly, you may conflict with the girl’s absuma or they may kill you, or you should pay many cows for compensation. So I don’t want to touch others’ absuma.

This said, as long as boys are complying with the general principle of absuma marriage, they do have a choice as to which absuma – among often multiple possible options – will become their bride. As a 12-year-old boy from Community A explained: “I have many absuma. I chose my absuma by my own. I chose her for her beauty.”

However, adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by the absuma system as they lack any choice or exit option. As a 12-year-old girl from Community A emphasized:

If we know the person who will marry us, we like to get far from him. We dislike to get closer to him. We do not like boys that are going to marry us as then our future is decided.

Another 11-year-old girl from Community A explained that the use of physical force in absuma marriage was not uncommon: “They will coerce you to get married, they beat you violently, if you repudiate to get married.”

### *Meso-level Context of Violence against Adolescents*

At the meso-level, our findings indicate that forces are slowly coming together at the district level in Afar to improve the response to adolescent vulnerabilities to violence, but that these change processes largely relate to tackling child marriage, with no efforts to tackle corporal punishment or peer violence. Officials tended to dismiss these risks as insignificant in Afar culture and instead viewed them as problems experienced elsewhere in the country.

In the case of initiatives to address child marriage, our findings suggest that these are nascent and uneven, especially in communities that are remote from the district town. District-level officials – including those from the Bureaus of Health and of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and the shariah courts – are involved in community awareness-raising activities to highlight the risks of child marriage and the importance of education for longer-term economic empowerment. As one official noted:

We are teaching the community about the right that daughters have to say no if someone who she never likes comes to marry her, because that is her right to get married to a person who she likes and she has the right to decide.

These messages are also being reinforced in some schools through girls' clubs, which focus on girls' rights to choose to pursue their education, and by a few community role models who have made different choices for their children. For example, one community key informant from Community A noted that: "In this *kebele* there is a woman who has been educating her children. She never allow her children to get married to their 'Absuma' before completing their schooling." Several young women who have graduated and who are now able to contribute to their family's finances are also further contributing to attitudinal change. As one father in Community A explained: "We are also seeing educated girls who give financial support to their family. As a result, we are now able to understand the value of education."

Overall, however, our findings highlight that a focus on awareness-raising and individual empowerment is insufficient to support adolescent bodily integrity and freedom from violence in its multiple forms. Several key informants were clear that the current approach is not bringing about significant change, even in communities close to the district town where secondary education is a possibility. Part of the problem is uneven implementation of awareness-raising activities. One community key informant, for example, noted that: "The school clubs have just been established solely for reporting purposes. The school clubs are not functional at all [...]" Community-level resistance is also a major challenge. As a teacher from Community A observed:

When we are teaching in girls' clubs, sometimes we face challenges or conflicts. If we teach them directly to stop early marriage and absoma we will provoke conflict [...] The [female] students also understand the impact of early marriage. This is because they have heard from different areas [about the risks] but the problem is they have no capacity to say no to their parents when parents arrange their daughters engage in 'absoma' marriage.

In other words, raising girls' awareness of their rights is an important first step, but without engaging a wider range of actors, it will have very limited efficacy, given that girls have such limited agency over their own lives. Our findings highlighted that while some girls seek to exercise agency against absoma marriage by running away or attempting suicide, clan enforcement – including by physical force – is pervasive. As one 11-year-old adolescent girl from Community A explained: "They will escape to the river. Families will

find them and bring them back to home.” Similarly, a 16-year-old boy from Community A noted that:

I know two girls Who were our neighbors and they attempted suicide rather than engaging in ‘absuma’ marriage arranged by her parents. One of these girls, attempted suicide since she disliked to live with her husband, who got married her coercively through ‘absuma’ marriage. She was complaining to her parents and clan leaders so far as she dislike living with her husband and once she escaped to her parents’ home and told them as her husband abandoned and left her to his parents. However her parents also push her back to her husband’s home to live with him in whatever situation. Her parents also warned her to respect the ‘absuma’ marriage, and her husband’s family. Eventually looking conditions as hopeless, she took pesticide. However people got her fainted and they gave her milk and she recovered.

### *Macro-level Context of Violence against Adolescents*

At the macro level, the Ethiopian government has made significant strides in establishing inter-sectoral strategies and policies to tackle gender-based violence and violence against children and youth (Jones, Presler-Marshall, Tefera, & Gebre Alwab, 2018). For example, the 1995 Constitution lays out children’s rights (Article 36), including to be free of corporal punishment, and the Revised Family Code (2000) sets a legal minimum age of marriage (for boys and girls) of 18 years and calls for the elimination of harmful traditional practices (Woldeyesus, Domingo, & Bekele, 2018) (Table A2). In addition to these legal reforms, a number of gender, child and adolescent policy and strategy frameworks – with an increasingly strong focus on rights-based language – have been established. These include the 2017 National Child Policy, which calls for children to be protected from all forms of violence, and the 2019 National Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C, which details the government’s plans for elimination. These strategy documents reflect the strong role that UNICEF has played in helping to set government agendas, as well as the influence of powerful national human rights-focused organizations, including the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (the national human rights institution directly accountable to parliament) (Woldeyesus et al., 2018).

This said, there are some important gaps in Ethiopia’s legal and policy framework, including the lack of measures to proscribe marital rape, economic and psychological violence, sexual harassment, and stalking. The absence of civil remedies for victims of violence and dearth of procedures to obtain protection orders constitute significant lacunae (Woldeyesus et al., 2018).

More challenging still is the implementation of these legal and policy provisions. There is evidence of policy diffusion from South Africa, which has a strong rights-based approach to child protection programming, as seen in the establishment of a one-stop-centre approach to provide comprehensive medical, justice and psychosocial support for survivors of violence. However, to date despite the presence of a cross-agency government and donor Strategic Plan for an Integrated and Multi-sectoral Response to Violence against Women and Children and Child Justice in Ethiopia established in 2010, only one such centre

has been established, and this is in the capital city, Addis Ababa (Woldeyesus et al., 2018). Our findings further underscore that there is a significant disconnect between national-level policy commitments and community-level experiences of violence, as well as deficits in terms of the availability, uptake and quality of services for young people experiencing violence.

In rare cases and in communities close to the district town, our findings indicate that the law may work to protect girls from forced child marriage, especially in cases where girls are enrolled in school. As a district-level official from the Bureau of Justice noted: "When this kind of case comes to us, we will bring the case to the police." And indeed, a limited number of adolescent girls in our sample were aware of this possibility. As one 12-year-old girl from Community A explained:

Our parents arrange our marriage. They want daughters drop out of school and get married to their 'absuma'. We tell them always as we are not interested to drop out of school, and getting married. We also tell them so far as we will report to the justice office, if they coerce us for marriage.

Some parents are also increasingly aware of this possibility, and while not convinced by the law, are nevertheless starting to alter their behaviour for fear of punishment if they force their daughters to marry against their will. As one father from Community A noted:

If I arrange a marriage for my daughter through the absuma system, she may reject what I arranged. Even more, she may accuse me to the court. Hence, we have to accept that, we; parents can't coerce our daughters. There are female students who accused their fathers for coercing them to get married against their will. However, if our daughters are interested to engage in marriage through absuma marriage system, we will well come them, unless we will be punished legally. Although we support strongly the 'absuma' marriage, we don't want to be imprisoned.

However, overall, our findings underscored that despite government commitments, there are significant barriers to addressing the normalization of violence experienced by adolescents in Afar. First, and perhaps most fundamentally, there is limited demand for services as the Afar population either see violence against young people as routine or as an issue that can be solved through traditional clan mechanisms. For example, when asked about violence against children and adolescents, a district-level Bureau of Women and Children's affairs key informant explained that if young people are caught up in clan conflicts, this is seen as part of life. Moreover, reporting (even if families were to seek to do so) is challenging because families migrate regularly and follow up is therefore difficult:

The Afar people lead a mobile way of life. And if conflict occurred between clans, a family may migrate to another place and then children may remain without any one who care for them, and who support them.

Moreover, as a *kebele* (community) administrator key informant noted there is a strong preference to solve issues within the clan, even in the case of abduction and associated sexual violence:

Yes, there is rape and also abduction on those girls who haven't 'abu'. Individuals who haven't 'absuma' may abduct these girls who have not 'abu'. However, if a man abduct a girl

who has ‘abu’, conflict will arise between the two clans. However such conflicts will be resolved by “Mablo” [to mean: Afar’s traditional way of resolving conflicts between clans, individuals and even families]

However, the problem for young people and especially for adolescent girls with such mechanisms is that they are typically informed by entrenched patriarchal norms and risk reinforcing the silencing of sexual violence rather than addressing it and bringing perpetrators to justice. This quote by a local religious leader attests to this risk:

[Interviewer] What action will be taken, if the girl’s clan members know as if she is raped?  
[Respondent] he is her brother who control and care for his sister. And if she is raped by someone, her brother might take action on a person who raped his sister. Or he might beat her or he can also report the case to the clan leaders and members of the clan.

This gender bias within traditional clan mechanisms was corroborated by a local NGO worker who noted:

I think it is due to the culture of the society that women won’t talk to any one even if they face rape. If a woman/girl talked to her family or clan members as if she is raped, her relatives or clan may quarrel with the clan of a person who raped a girl. the girl’s relatives or clan can attack a person who raped the girls before the case reaches to the court. Women and girls also face a blame by the community thinking that the girl exposed herself for rape and people in the community blame her so far she did it willingly,. In that women/girls do not expose themselves as they are raped and prefer silent. the community never understand her, as if she is asking her right rather they deprave her for exposing what she has faced.

Second, there is a lack of basic infrastructure, including a dearth of confidential reporting and testimonial spaces for girls wanting to report an impending case of forced marriage or violence. As a district-level female prosecutor explained:

For a girl to come and report, she would not only have to sum up the courage to report but then she would have to explain all the terrible things that happened to her in front of all the officials sitting here – we do not have a dedicated room for girls to testify confidentially. This is just a very basic gap but it’s so important.

Third, there are very few personnel in the police and justice sectors who have been trained in child-friendly and gender-sensitive approaches. While there is a gender unit in both the police and local justice bureau, they are staffed by just one person who has received very limited training, especially in tackling sexual violence. This is further compounded by a perception that because there is no reporting then there is not a problem, rather than informed by a broader understanding of the barriers to recognising sexual violence as a reportable offence and then overcoming physical and social barriers to report. The following quote from junior prosecutor in the district office exemplifies the challenge:

In our woreda (district) it is fine. There are no reported monthly cases related to rape. It is only once a year that the case of rape is reported to our office [...] Nothing is heard in our office regarding rape; I don’t know whether they resolve such cases by themselves.

Finally, our findings emphasized that there is minimal visibility of the issue of violence towards adolescents across sectors, alongside poor coordination



mechanisms and a dearth of coordination on reporting and referrals. Key informants at schools and health clinics admitted freely that there was no system of referrals to the Bureau of Justice or Bureau of Women and Children's Affairs.

### *Conclusions*

Drawing on a tailored capabilities framework that looks at the interconnectedness of adolescent capabilities, micro- to macro-context factors and the ways in which these are shaped by policy and programme change strategies, this chapter has highlighted that social norm change processes require an in-depth understanding of shifting gender and generational norms that underpin practices and experiences of violence.

At the micro-level, while the patterning of violence experienced by adolescent girls and boys in Afar is shifting across generations – especially in communities closer to urban centres, due to increased access to schooling and awareness-raising efforts – gendered and age-related social norms remain deeply entrenched at the household and community levels. These norms proscribe meaningful exit options from violent relationships for many adolescents, especially girls, and undermine the achievement of their full human capabilities.

At the meso-level, while there are increasing efforts among sub-national governments to raise awareness about the risks of child marriage, a focus on the multiple forms of violence to which adolescents are vulnerable is all but absent. Moreover, even in the case of efforts to empower girls vis-à-vis their rights to an education and to postpone marriage, messaging is only making limited inroads due to strong community resistance and the lack of a critical mass of role models who can start to demonstrate the benefits of delaying marriage in terms of future economic empowerment and family financial support.

At the macro-level, while the Ethiopian Government has made considerable progress in establishing inter-sectoral strategies and policies to tackle gender-based violence and violence against children and youth, there are some important gaps in the policy framework in terms of protecting young people from violence. More critically, our findings underscore that there are major implementation gaps at community-level. Not only is there limited recognition about the multiple forms of violence to which adolescents are vulnerable, but there are also significant lacunae in availability, uptake and quality of relevant services. Adolescents face multiple barriers in tackling the normalization of violence, in terms of both basic infrastructure (e.g., a dearth of confidential reporting spaces) and a dearth of appropriately trained front-line personnel to whom they can turn within the police and justice sectors. This is compounded by limited visibility on the policy agenda of violence towards adolescents, and an underinvestment in effective coordination mechanism across sectors (including education, health, women, children and youth affairs, justice and police) in terms of reporting and referrals.

In sum, our findings highlight that for violence prevention and response services to be adequately tailored to local realities, a fine-grained analysis of the gendered and generational experiences of violence in its diverse forms is critical. Only then will countries be on a more positive trajectory towards achieving the 2030 Agenda's commitments to end all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres (SDG 5.2) and all forms of violence against and torture of children (SDG 16.2), and to support adolescents' bodily integrity and freedom from violence.

## NOTE

1. Please note that while we identify the region and district, we anonymize at the community level.

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## APPENDIX

**Table A1 notes:** This table summarizes information from GAGE baseline data collection in Ethiopia (2017–2018). Means are weighted to make results representative of the study areas. Differences between subgroups in the urban/rural panel, and the urban location panel, are calculated using a (weighted) regression of the outcome measure on an urban (or Dire Dawa) indicator. Differences among the subgroups in the rural location panel are calculated using a joint test of significance from a regression of the outcome measure on indicators for South Gonder and East Haraghe. Differences between subgroups that are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  are denoted in the fourth column of each vertical panel with an X, while those that are statistically significant at  $p < 0.10$  are denoted with an O. The “% difference” columns in the urban/rural and urban location panels are calculated as [(second value – first value)/first value] and should be interpreted as percentage differences in all cases. The attitudes and norms index is a sum across several attitudes and norms statements, where for each statement respondents were assigned a “1” if they agreed or partially agreed and a “0” if they disagreed (in cases where agreement suggested a gendered response), and the reverse if agreement suggested a non-gendered response. Thus, higher values of the index indicator more gendered attitudes and norms.

**Table A1.** Bodily Integrity (Young Cohort), Ethiopia.

|   | Overall     |      | Urban/Rural |       |              |          | Rural Location |                   |      |          | Urban Location |           |                |          |
|---|-------------|------|-------------|-------|--------------|----------|----------------|-------------------|------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|----------|
|   | Sample Size | Mean | Urban       | Rural | % Diff (R-U) | Sig Dif? | South Gonder   | East Haraghe Mean | Afar | Sig Dif? | Debre Tabor    | Dire Dawa | % Diff (DD-DT) | Sig Dif? |
| = 1 if experienced corporeal punishment at school                                 | 4,528       | 72%  | 75%         | 72%   | -4%          | O        | 62%            | 83%               | 72%  | X        | 73%            | 77%       | 5%             |          |
| Peer violence scale (0–6), higher values indicate worse outcomes                  | 5,386       | 0.86 | 1.14        | 0.82  | -28%         | X        | 0.79           | 0.95              | 0.34 | X        | 1.47           | 0.86      | -42%           | X        |
| = 1 if experienced peer violence  | 5,386       | 46%  | 57%         | 45%   | -22%         | X        | 44%            | 49%               | 22%  | X        | 65%            | 51%       | -22%           | X        |
| Peer violence scale (0–6, at school), higher values indicate worse outcome        | 5,381       | 0.58 | 0.9         | 0.55  | -39%         | X        | 0.52           | 0.65              | 0.16 | X        | 1.18           | 0.66      | -44%           | X        |
| = 1 if experienced peer violence at school  | 5,381       | 35%  | 49%         | 33%   | -32%         | X        | 33%            | 38%               | 11%  | X        | 57%            | 41%       | -27%           | X        |
| Peer violence scale (0–6, away from School), higher values indicate worse outcome | 5,381       | 0.43 | 0.39        | 0.43  | 11%          |          | 0.38           | 0.51              | 0.29 | X        | 0.51           | 0.28      | -44%           | X        |
| = 1 if experienced peer violence away from school                                 | 5,381       | 27%  | 25%         | 27%   | 6%           |          | 25%            | 31%               | 18%  | X        | 31%            | 21%       | -33%           | X        |
| Peer violence perpetration scale (0–6), higher values indicate worse outcome      | 5,377       | 0.53 | 0.63        | 0.52  | -18%         | X        | 0.27           | 0.8               | 0.26 | X        | 0.58           | 0.68      | 16%            |          |
| = 1 if perpetrated peer violence  | 5,377       | 29%  | 35%         | 28%   | -21%         | X        | 19%            | 38%               | 19%  | X        | 35%            | 36%       | 2%             |          |
| = 1 if experienced/witnessed violence at home                                     | 5,387       | 68%  | 61%         | 68%   | 11%          | X        | 71%            | 72%               | 38%  | X        | 64%            | 59%       | -9%            |          |
| = 1 if has talked to someone about peer/home violence                             | 4,034       | 39%  | 40%         | 39%   | -2%          |          | 32%            | 46%               | 26%  | X        | 45%            | 35%       | -21%           | X        |
| = 1 if know of a place to get support after violence                              | 5,262       | 40%  | 62%         | 37%   | -40%         | X        | 40%            | 37%               | 24%  | X        | 63%            | 60%       | -4%            |          |
| = 1 if adult female caregiver   | 5,228       | 79%  | 46%         | 83%   | 79%          | X        | 89%            | 79%               | 77%  | X        | 58%            | 37%       | -36%           | X        |
| Married before age 18   |             |      |             |       |              |          |                |                   |      |          |                |           |                |          |
| = 1 if married before age 18  | 5,388       | 0%   | 0%          | 0%    | 155%         |          | 1%             | 0%                | 0%   | X        | 0%             | 0%        | -100%          |          |
| Relationships and marriage attitudes and norms                                    | 5,166       | 2.23 | 1.68        | 2.29  | 36%          | X        | 2.24           | 2.13              | 3.36 | X        | 1.75           | 1.62      | -7%            |          |

**Table A2.** Government of Ethiopia Legal Policies Addressing Violence against Adolescents.

| Document, Year, Agency   | Focus and Objectives  |
|--|---|
| <b>Constitution of 1995</b><br><b>1995</b><br><b>FDRE</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of a legal basis for the protection of the well-being of youth and adolescents.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Revised criminal code</b><br><b>2004</b><br><b>FDRE</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased punishment for violent crimes against women and children.</li> <li>• Criminalization of rape and sexual violence, trafficking of women and children, abduction, and female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Revised family code</b><br><b>2000</b><br><b>FDRE</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elimination of child marriage – legal minimum age of marriage set at 18.</li> <li>• Elimination of domestic violence against women and children.</li> <li>• Elimination of harmful traditional practices (HTPs).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>National roadmap to end child marriage</b><br><b>2019</b><br><b>Ministry of women, children and youth</b> | <p><b>Focus:</b> child marriage; FGM/C</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased social action, acceptance, and visibility around investing in and supporting girls and generating shifts in social expectations relating to girls' education and elimination of child marriage and FGM/C.</li> <li>• Enhanced systems, accountability, and services across sectors that are responsive to the needs of adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage and FGM/C; a supportive environment that enables and promotes the rights of adolescent girls and supports national efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C,</li> </ul> |
| <b>Ethiopian women development and transformation strategy</b><br><b>2015</b><br><b>Ministry of health</b>   | <p><b>Focus:</b> HTPs, violence against women</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of community education and engagement with religious leaders about gender equality to prevent HTPs and violence against women.</li> <li>• Creation of community awareness surrounding HTPs affecting girls and women.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>National child policy</b><br><b>2017</b><br><b>Save the children</b>                                      | <p><b>Focus:</b> violence towards children; exploitation of children</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of children from labour exploitation, HTPs, and violence in families, schools and communities.</li> <li>• Creation of an environment conducive to helping communities fight against HTPs that have a negative impact on children's development.</li> <li>• Establishment and strengthening of partnerships among governmental, religious institutions, community coalitions, and non-governmental organizations</li> </ul>   |

**Table A2.** (Continued)

| Document, Year, Agency  | Focus and Objectives  |
|---|---|
| <b>Youth strategy</b><br><b>2007</b><br><b>Ministry of health</b>   | <b>Focus:</b> youth reproductive health access<br><b>Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling youth to reject HTPs, have increased focus on personal and professional development and development culture and enable them to be self-confident citizens.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Adolescent development and participation strategy</b><br><b>2013</b><br><b>Ministry of education</b>                                       | <b>Focus:</b> protection of adolescents; adolescent agency<br><b>Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of a framework for adolescent development and participation so as to create a responsible, self-conscious and forward-looking generation that could not only play pivotal role in its own development but could also contribute to the development of Ethiopia.</li> <li>• Improved protection of adolescents against risks and harm under all circumstances.</li> <li>• Expansion of the child-friendly court system to improve the legal management of delinquent adolescents.</li> </ul>                                   |
| <b>HTP strategy</b><br><b>2013</b><br><b>Ministry of women, children and youth affairs</b>  | <b>Focus:</b> HTPs<br><b>Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalization of national, regional, and grassroots mechanisms by creating an enabling environment for the prevention and elimination of all forms of HTPs (including child marriage, FGM/C and gender-based violence).</li> <li>• Ensuring multisectoral mechanisms are available to women and children through services to prevent and protect them from HTPs, and services to support them in the event they are subject to HTPs.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Strategic plan for a multisectoral response to violence against women and children</b><br><b>2010</b><br><b>National coordinating body</b> | <b>Focus:</b> violence against women and children (VAWC)<br><b>Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved protection of the rights of women and children with respect to violence and child justice by having a coordinated and functional protection system that respects the rights of women and children, including when they come into contact with the justice system.</li> <li>• Increased availability and accessibility of immediate, relevant, comprehensive and effective care, and support services to survivors of VAWC and to children in contact with the justice system in an integrated and coordinated manner.</li> </ul> |

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