

**‘Girls don’t shout if they are raped...  
that is taboo’: exploring barriers to  
Ethiopian adolescents’ freedom from  
age- and gender-based violence**

Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Nicola Jones, Rebecca Dutton, Sarah Baird,  
Workneh Yadete and Tassew Woldehanna

December 2020





# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Methods</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings</b>	<b>3</b>
Adolescents' experiences of age-based violence	3
Violence perpetrated by caregivers	3
Violence perpetrated by teachers	6
Peer violence	7
Adolescents' experiences of gender-based violence	9
Female genital mutilation/cutting	9
Sexual violence	12
Child marriage	13
Intimate partner violence	16
Support seeking and access to justice	16
<b>Policy and programming implications</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>22</b>

## Figures

Figure 1: Age-based violence by gender and region.....	5
Figure 2: Gender-based violence by region and urban/rural location.....	11

## Boxes

Box 1: Servitude for schooling.....	4
Box 2: Adolescents' cost-benefit analysis.....	6
Box 3: Young people with disabilities stand up for themselves.....	7
Box 4: 'They are teaching us to throw stones'.....	8
Box 5: An answer for everything.....	10
Box 6: Marriage regrets.....	15

## Tables

Table 1: Quantitative sample of adolescents.....	1
Table 2: GAGE midline qualitative sample.....	2
Table 3: Household violence.....	4
Table 4: Experience and perpetration of peer violence.....	8
Table 5: Experience of FGM/C among older cohort.....	9
Table 6: Girls' experience of sexual violence.....	12
Table 7: Child marriage among older cohort females.....	13

# Introduction

Ethiopia has seen rapid political and social change over the past decade – change that has significantly impacted adolescents’ freedom from age- and gender-based violence. On the one hand, Ethiopia’s focus on gender inequalities and various forms of gender-based violence has grown significantly – with the country’s first female president, Sahle-Work Zewde, a champion of girls’ and women’s rights nationally and across the African continent (Jeffrey, 2020). The government launched its National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in 2013 (Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, 2013) and in 2019 produced a new costed national (roadmap to eliminate child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) by 2025 (Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, 2019). Ethiopia has also recently ratified the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (albeit with a reservation on marital rape) (OHCHR, 2019) and has been recognised by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for its progress in advancing gender equality and women’s rights (ibid.).

However, there are still significant challenges in overcoming multiple and widespread forms of age- and gender-based violence. Ethiopia has the fifth highest number of child brides globally (GNB, 2020) and progress in eradicating FGM/C is relatively slow and even stalling in some parts of the country (CSA and ICF, 2017). Moreover, Ethiopia has been roiled by ethnic and political violence in recent years, with hundreds of people dead and millions displaced (Economist, 2020), and there has been growing lawlessness and gun crime in many parts of the country. These social and political upheavals are ushering in unprecedented levels of violence against and by young people that threaten to undermine progress.

This report synthesises findings from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme’s midline data collection (in late 2019/early 2020, two years following baseline data collection) to explore changes in Ethiopian adolescents’ bodily integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence. We pay careful attention to gender, urban–rural and regional differences in how young people aged 12–19 experience age-related and gender-related violence, including corporal punishment at the hands of their parents and teachers, peer violence, FGM/C, sexual violence, child marriage and intimate partner violence.

# Methods

This report draws on mixed-methods research undertaken in late 2019/early 2020 as part of GAGE’s midline data collection in rural and urban sites in three regions of Ethiopia: Afar, Amhara and Oromia. Twelve rural communities (*kebeles*) – of which two were in pastoralist Zone 5 (Afar), five were in South Gondar (Amhara), and five were in East Hararghe (Oromia) – were chosen for their combination of economic and social vulnerabilities (areas with higher levels of food insecurity and high prevalence of child marriage). Their varying distances from the district town also allowed us to explore the relative importance of remoteness, i.e. distance to services and markets. The three urban settings – Batu/Ziway in East Shewa (Oromia), Debre Tabor in South Gondar (Amhara), and Dire Dawa City Administration – are just as diverse. Differences in their location, cultural and religious diversity, size, and migration patterns help to explain the different threats and opportunities that adolescent girls and boys face in terms of bodily integrity and freedom from violence.

GAGE’s Ethiopian midline sample for this report includes 7,526 successfully surveyed adolescents (out of a possible 8,555) as well as their caregivers (see Appendix for more details on the sampling). The sample was divided into two cohorts: younger adolescents (most aged 12–14 at midline) and older adolescents (most aged 15–19 at midline). See Table 1 for breakdown.

**Table 1: Quantitative sample of adolescents**

	Overall	Urban	South Gondar	East Hararghe	Zone 5
All	7526	1987	2482	2255	802
Male	3199	933	1005	933	328
Female	4327	1054	1477	1322	474
Old cohort	3207	1370	668	747	422
Young cohort	4319	617	1814	1508	380
Disability sample	581	200	143	204	34
Early marriage sample	1090	182	360	392	156

To ensure that the sample was consistently drawn from across sites and to minimise the risk of overlooking the most disadvantaged adolescents (such as out-of-school adolescents, married adolescents and adolescents with

disabilities), a door-to-door listing was undertaken in all research sites, following a specific protocol, and complemented with purposeful sampling.

The qualitative sample – of 388 core adolescents – was selected from the larger quantitative sample, deliberately oversampling the most disadvantaged in order to capture the voices of those at risk of being 'left behind'. It also included caregivers, grandparents and siblings, government officials, community and religious leaders, and service providers (see Table 2).

**Table 2: GAGE midline qualitative sample**

	DD	DT	Batu	SG	EH	Zone 5	Sub-totals
Girls younger	9	6	–	24	25	12	76
Girls older	14	8	11	3	5	8	49
Boys younger	5	8	–	22	16	12	63
Boys older	12	8	10	6	4	5	45
Married adolescents	2	2	1	30	30	18	83
Adolescents with disabilities	2	8	5	16	12	9	52
IDPs	6	–	7	–	7	–	20
Total adolescents	50	20	34	101	99	64	388
Parents IDI	5	3	–	8	–	–	16
Key informants	5	4	21	39	51	9	129
FGDs adolescents	21	20	48	54	60	16	219
FGDs parents	36	–	28	117	133	68	382
Sub-totals	117	67	131	319	343	157	1134

Data was collected in face-to-face interviews by enumerators who were trained to communicate with adolescents, and spoke the local language (Amharic, Afar Af, Afaan Oromo and, in the case of Dire Dawa, also Somali). Analysis of the quantitative survey data focused on a set of indicators related to child protection and well-being (data tables are available on request). Sampling weights, reflecting the probability of selection into the study sample, were used to make the results representative of the target population in the study area. Statistical analysis was conducted using Stata15.1. All differences cited in the text are statistically significant at least at the  $p=0.05$  level.



Adolescent boys in Oromia, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2020



Qualitative tools consisted of interactive activities such as timelines and body mappings, which were used in individual and group interviews (see Jones et al., 2019). Preliminary data analysis took place during daily and site-wide debriefings. Interviews were transcribed and translated by native speakers and then coded thematically using the qualitative software analysis package MAXQDA.

Prior to commencing research, we secured approval from ethics committees at the Overseas Development Institute and George Washington University, as well as from the research ethics boards in the regions of Ethiopia in which the research was conducted. We also secured informed assent from adolescents aged 17 and under, and informed consent from their caregivers (as minors under 18 are not legally able to give consent) and from adolescents aged 18 and above.

## Key findings

### Adolescents' experiences of age-based violence

#### Violence perpetrated by caregivers

Survey results reveal that violent disciplinary measures taken by parents remain common, with 47% of those in our midline sample reporting having experienced violence in the past year. Boys are at greater risk than girls (55% versus 40%) and young people living in urban areas report more violence at the hands of caregivers than their rural peers (56% versus 38% of the older cohort and 53% versus 47% for the younger cohort). There are significant differences in the types of violence meted out by parents, with verbal abuse more common than physical violence. Among boys, 46% have been yelled at or insulted by a caregiver in the past year, and 30% have been slapped or hit. For girls, the figures are 34% and 19% respectively. While there is no difference in older and younger adolescents' likelihood of experiencing some form of violence in the home, their odds of experiencing physical violence drop sharply as they grow older. Of the younger cohort, 28% have been slapped or hit, whereas only 19% of the older cohort reported the same. For both cohorts, physical violence was most common in Afar and verbal abuse was most common in East Hararghe.

Our qualitative work highlighted that many parents consider physical discipline to be vital for proper

child-rearing, for boys and girls. *'If they have committed a mistake I punish them... I use sticks and a leather strap. Then I give them a warning not to repeat similar types of mistakes,'* explained a father in rural South Gondar (Amhara). On the whole, there is widespread agreement that while *'boys tend to misbehave'* far more than girls (11-year-old girl, East Hararghe) and that girls are careful to *'attend carefully to whatever they [parents] order me to do...because if a girl is not obeying her parents, she will be insulted and she will be labelled as someone born of a bad person'* (18-year-old girl, South Gondar), girls are more likely to be beaten than boys by mid-adolescence. In large part, this is because boys are more likely to be out of the house – though girls who are being fostered by extended family are also at high risk (see Box 1). There is also consensus that girls receive the most extreme beatings for actions that jeopardise family honour, such as speaking to boys. A father in East Hararghe (Oromia) admitted: *'I beat the elder girl when she did that... Once, I learned that she went to see boys. Then I went to the house [where] she was... I beat her well. She was injured... I took her to the health facility at Boko because she was injured. I didn't like her after that.'* Although young people in urban areas report more violence at the hands of caregivers than their rural peers, our qualitative work underscores that this violence tends to be less extreme. Adolescents in rural areas tended to report more extreme cases – for example, describing how parents *'tied me up with a rope'* before administering a beating (13-year-old boy, Zone 5, Afar) or beat them so severely that *'the scar remained'* (12-year-old boy, also Zone 5).

Among the panel sample, qualitative data suggests improvements since baseline appear largely related to reductions in physical violence, which generally declines as young people grow older, partly because they are better able to follow instructions and control their behaviour and partly because they are better able to escape and fight back. *'He never beats me now, because I am older,'* explained an 18-year-old boy from Zone 5 (Afar). A 13-year-old girl from South Gondar (Amhara) added that her mother used to beat her viciously, but *'these days, I am able to grab her hands if she tries to do so.'* A 14-year-old boy from East Hararghe (Oromia) noted that his father tries to beat him, for *'putting aside the role of working on the farmstead'* but that *'I run and escape'*. Girls often commented that while they are glad to be beaten less often than boys, they find being verbally insulted just as painful.

**Box 1: Servitude for schooling**

Chaltu<sup>1</sup> is a 13-year-old deaf girl who lives in Batu with her aunt and uncle, so that she can attend a special needs school. While she knows that she needs to live in Batu *'for the sake of my education'*, she would rather live anywhere else, because she is tired of being abused by the adults who are meant to be caring for her.

When Chaltu lived at home, with her parents, she was not beaten. Now, however, her aunt *'beats me every day'*.

Chaltu does not understand why she is beaten. *'I work every kind of household activity,'* she explained. *'I bake injera, cook chicken, wash clothes and clean the home. I do all the household jobs, but she beats me,'* she added.

Chaltu is also denied food: *'I am not given enough food for my breakfast and I have [a heavy] work burden at home... I often stay hungry.'*

For Chaltu, the real irony is that while she is living with her aunt so that she can go to school, her aunt is the major barrier to her doing well academically. *'I don't have enough time for my study as I have a lot of household work to do,'* she concluded.

1 All names used are pseudonyms.

Indeed, a 13-year-old girl from East Hararghe observed that she would rather be beaten than insulted: *'I would rather she hit me than insult me. She used to insult me. That made me upset... I really feel bad.'*

Underscoring that violence against women is relatively common and normalised from childhood, one in ten adolescents reported, at midline, that they had witnessed or heard their mother being beaten by their father or other adult in the household in the last 12 months. For the younger cohort this was more common in rural areas than urban areas (10% versus 7% ) and for boys than girls (11% versus 9% for rural adolescents). Across age groups and including both boys and girls, it was more common for adolescents in Afar (15%) and East Hararghe (14%) to report witnessing their mother being beaten than in South Gondar (6%) (see Table 3). A shocking 27% of boys in Zone 5 (Afar) reported

having witnessed or heard their mother being beaten in the last year.

In qualitative interviews, adolescents were overwhelmingly reticent to discuss domestic violence between their parents, due to deep-rooted social norms that position this type of abuse as a purely private matter. A few older girls reported that their mother strives to avoid their father's displeasure, keeping even financial need a secret to avoid *'bothering'* him (18-year-old girl, Batu, Oromia), and a few older boys admitted that *'quarrelling is inevitable in the household'* (16-year-old boy, Zone 5, Afar). It was fathers who were the most forthright about the inevitability of spousal violence. *'We beat them [wives] when we are annoyed. We also beat them when they refuse to do something we told them to do... There is no way she will escape if we grab her,'* reported a father from East Hararghe.

**Table 3: Household violence<sup>2</sup>**

	Overall		Urban		South Gondar		East Hararghe		Zone 5	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Experienced household violence	40% n=4167	55% n= 3133	52% n= 1040	58% n= 925	38% n= 1414	45% n= 988	35 % n= 1246	60% n=901	38% n= 467	60% n= 320
Witnessed household violence	9% n= 3860	12% n= 2911	10% n= 897	10% n= 810	7% n=1326	5% n= 945	11% n= 1174	15% n= 838	11% n= 463	27% n= 318

<sup>2</sup> Experienced violence includes the respondent reporting that a parent or other adult in household pushed, slapped, hit, physically hurt, yelled at or treated them poorly in any other way, such as withholding food. Witnessing violence indicates a respondent reporting seeing their father or other adult male in household hit or beat their mother. Respondents who did not have a father or other adult male in the household did not respond to questions about witnessing violence, resulting in a smaller sample size for witnessing violence compared to experiencing violence.



Figure 1: Age-based violence by gender and region



# Age-based violence

## Violence from caregivers

Boys are more at risk than girls.

1/3 of boys...



1/5 of girls...



...have been hit by a caregiver in the last year.

## Violence from teachers

Boys are more at risk than girls.

1/2 of boys...

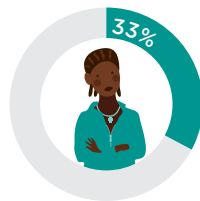
1/3 of girls...



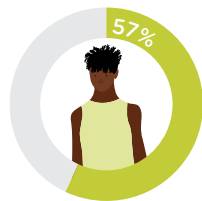
...have been violently disciplined by a teacher in the last year.

Adolescents in East Hararghe and Zone 5 (Afar) are more at risk than those in South Gondar.

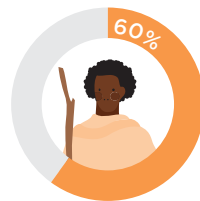
In **South Gondar**,  
33% of enrolled students...



In **East Hararghe**,  
57% of enrolled students...



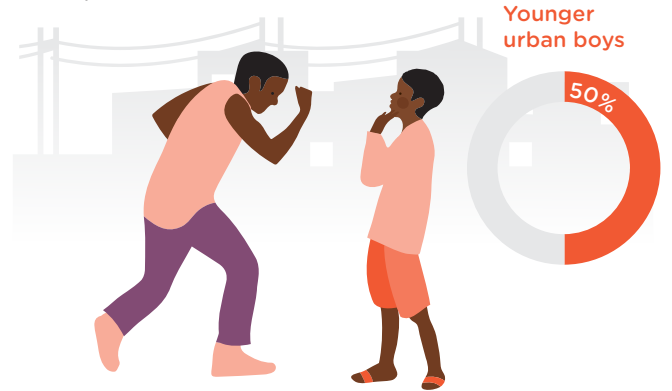
In **Zone 5 (Afar)**,  
60% of enrolled students...



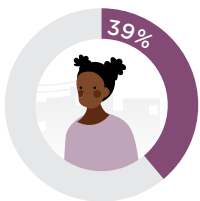
...experienced violent discipline from a teacher in the last year.

## Violence from peers

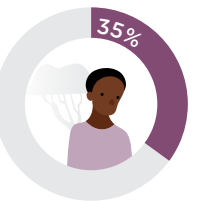
Younger urban boys are at the highest risk of peer violence.



Younger urban girls



Younger rural boys




Older urban boys



## Violence perpetrated by teachers

Our midline survey found that violence perpetrated by teachers remains endemic. Among enrolled students, boys are more likely to report violence at the hands of teachers than girls (50% versus 32%), younger adolescents are more at risk than their older peers (46% versus 30%), and – as with violence perpetrated by parents – location also matters. Younger adolescents in East Hararghe (60%) and Zone 5 (57%) are at greater risk than those in South Gondar (33%), and urban adolescents report more teacher violence than their rural peers (54% versus 45%). The latter finding is surprising, and based on our qualitative data is perhaps due to greater awareness among urban adolescents about rights not to be subject to corporal punishment and verbal violence and how to report, in contrast to rural adolescents who appeared more likely to normalise such treatment as discussed further below.

Although young people in urban areas reported only 'normal' violence at the hands of teachers, those in rural areas often reported being seriously injured – with teachers beating them severely on 'their head and hand'

 I beat them when they do not sit properly ... I also beat them when they do not give a right answer.

(A teacher in Zone 5)

(13-year-old boy from Zone 5) and at times leaving them with permanent disabilities (see also Box 2). A 13-year-old boy from South Gondar explained that his teacher had left him partially deaf: *'The teacher hit on my ear last year, and I became sick. My mother took me to a health centre but the illness could not recover. I decided to dropout because I hate the school because of the violence and the illness resulted in partial damage of my hearing.'* Young people reported that they were beaten not only for misbehaving, but for arriving late to class (often due to parental demands on their time outside school hours), and for being unable *'to work out mathematical problems'* (13-year-old girl, East Hararghe). *'I cleaned notes from the blackboard that the teacher warned us not to erase... as a result, he made me kneel down and beat me,'* explained a 12-year-old boy from East Hararghe. *'He beats me seriously... using a stick,'* added

### Box 2: Adolescents' cost-benefit analysis

Kadiga is a 12-year-old girl who lives in rural Zone 5 (Afar) with her parents and three younger siblings. She recently began attending school in a larger community, rather than in her village, at her father's suggestion. While she is beaten at her new school, she considers the violence an acceptable trade-off given the other advantages that her new school offers.

Teachers at her new school take absences very seriously, Kadiga observed: *'Teachers beat us if we become absent from school... They will tie our hands like this and then they will beat us using a stick on our hands.'* On the whole, however, Kadiga thinks this violence is justifiable.

First, she explained, it encourages students not to miss school. Kadiga was beaten only once, because she was *'keeping goats in the place called Siselu'*. After that, she added, she learned not to miss classes: *'After that time they didn't tie me since I didn't get absent from school.'*

Second, she added, the quality of education is much better at her new school, because teachers and students both show up regularly. In her home community, she continued, *'students were not coming to school and also there was problem of teachers... there were no teachers who taught us properly.'*

Finally, she noted, her new school offers both school feeding – *'porridge made from fafa flour'* – every morning, and take-home rations of flour and oil. This is particularly important to Kadiga right now because she is doing all the cooking as her mother is heavily pregnant and unable to contribute much to running the household.

Kadiga hopes to attend school for a few more years and then migrate, in order to find paid work as a domestic worker. She explained, *'I will go to Jeddah [Saudi Arabia] when I completed 6th grade.'*

While Kadiga knows that brokers sell girls in Saudi Arabia and that some girls die, she is prepared to risk that trade-off as well – again, with her father's encouragement: *'I am afraid to go there; however, I will tell my family pay [the broker] his money.'*

Fortunately for Kadiga, her mother is apparently less sanguine and is willing to fight back on her behalf. *'My father wants to send me to Jeddah and my mother opposes him. She even said once that he will send me to Jeddah even if "over her dead body,"'* Kadiga concluded.

a 13-year-old boy, also from East Hararghe, recounting what happens on the days he must do farm work before he goes to school. Some teachers admitted that they see violence as a teaching tool: *'I beat them when they do not sit properly in the classroom. I also beat them when they do not give a right answer. I do this to make them disciplined and to give attention to their lesson'* (teacher, Zone 5). Adolescents observed that boys receive the brunt of the most extreme violence, not only because they are more likely to misbehave but because they are more likely to fight back, which infuriates teachers. *'There are some who try to beat teachers back,'* said a 12-year-old boy from Zone 5.

Our qualitative work suggests that there are some improvements since baseline that stem from several factors. First, as was the case with violence at home, adolescents are less likely to experience corporal punishment as they grow older. This is partly because teachers are more afraid of them, and partly because teachers are more likely to simply send them home if they misbehave. *'They may be chased away from school to go to their homes,'* explained a 12-year-old boy from South Gondar. Improvements are also the result of growing awareness about alternative disciplinary approaches, especially in urban areas and in South Gondar. For instance, a 14-year-old boy from a rural community in South Gondar added that rather than beating students who arrive late to school, teachers now order students to *'bring their parents to school'*, where they are then forced to sign a contract promising to deliver their children on time. Young people's broader narratives also highlight that violence at the

hands of teachers is so pervasive that many have become inured to it. It was not uncommon for adolescents to say, initially, that teachers never beat them, and then to add that they had been punished by being forced to kneel on stones for hours, carry heavy rocks around the school courtyard, or clean the toilets. *'They will make them kneel down... They will be told to collect stones from the field,'* explained a 12-year-old girl from South Gondar.

## Peer violence

Our survey found that despite improvements since baseline, peer violence remains common across study sites. Boys are more at risk than girls (36% versus 20%) and younger adolescents are more at risk than their older peers (29% versus 23%). Urban boys are at particularly high risk – 50% of younger urban boys have experienced peer violence in the past year, compared to 33% of older urban boys. Rural location also matters, with adolescents in South Gondar (29%) reporting more violence than those in East Hararghe (24%) or Zone 5 (20%) (see Table 4). Young people's reports of having perpetrated peer violence reflect some – but not all – of the same patterns. Boys are more likely to admit to bullying than girls (25% versus 11%), and urban boys (27%) especially so, but there are no differences between younger and older adolescents. Young people with disabilities are not more likely to report being bullied, but interestingly they are more likely to admit to perpetrating peer violence (26% versus 18%), as they likely push back against the peers who bully them (see Box 3).

### Box 3: Young people with disabilities stand up for themselves

Our qualitative findings strongly suggest that the lack of quantitative evidence about young people with disabilities reporting more bullying (when compared to peers without a disability) likely reflects under-reporting, as parents/caregivers of young people with disabilities were quite likely to report that their children were bullied. *'Children throw stones at her when she goes to the river to fetch water,'* explained the mother of a 10-year-old girl with a physical disability (South Gondar).

Adolescents with disabilities' ownership of their own violent behaviour towards others is, in many cases, further evidence that they are under-reporting their experiences of being bullied. It also speaks to how growing awareness around disability rights, especially at special needs schools,<sup>3</sup> is fostering resilience and supporting some adolescents with disabilities to stand up for themselves in the face of bullying. Some younger adolescents with disabilities stated that they challenged their peers, hit them and threw stones at them, because they do not like being *'looked at differently'* (10-year-old with a hearing impairment, East Hararghe). Older adolescents and young adults with disabilities, on the other hand, reported that they sought to use persuasion to make the same point. *'I'll tell them that they should treat us equally,'* explained a 17-year-old blind girl from Debre Tabor. *'I know I can improve my life like any other people,'* added a 19-year-old boy with a physical disability.

<sup>3</sup> In Ethiopia, separate special needs education classes for students in grades 1–4 are available in some district towns and urban centres. We included young people attending such classes in our urban sample.



**Table 4: Experience and perpetration of peer violence**

	Overall		Urban		South Gondar		East Hararghe		Zone 5	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Experienced peer violence	20% n= 3882	35% n= 2794	31% n= 679	43% n= 570	21% n= 1465	38% n= 991	15% n= 1268	32% n= 907	11% n= 47	29% n= 326
Perpetuated peer violence	11% n= 3950	25% n= 2818	23% n= 692	27% n= 575	7% n= 1472	20% n= 995	14% n= 1313	29% n= 923	5% n= 473	24% n= 325

Our qualitative work tells a more complex story than the survey results alone would suggest. Namely, while young people report experiencing less peer violence at midline than at baseline, the types of violence they are experiencing have become more severe and – especially in rural South Gondar and urban areas – even life threatening. In South Gondar, growing insecurity has manifested itself in banditry, and knife and gun violence. *‘The number of killing incidents has increased... They use both gunshot and knives to kill one another,’* explained a 12-year-old boy, when asked about the violence in his community. *‘We could not control our older boys. They drink tell (local*

*beer) in towns on market days, and then they fight with each other in the marker or on the way back home from towns. They are becoming beyond our control and we worried that this will lead to widespread community conflict in the future,’* added a parent in a focus group discussion. Older adolescents in Debre Tabor noted that violence is not confined to the streets, it is also inside schools and disrupting learning: *‘It doesn’t matter what year they are; students come together in times of clashes. The seniors gather fresh students, help them and they attack the others together’* (19-year-old girl with a physical disability).

#### Box 4: ‘They are teaching us to throw stones’

Desta is a 17-year-old girl who is currently in ninth grade. Until recently, she lived in Batu (Oromia), where her parents both had well-paying jobs and she and her six younger siblings attended private school and had time to focus on their studies. Now, however, after an outbreak of violence forced the family to flee the city and sell their property for much lower than market value, they live in a small community some distance from Batu. Desta feels her life has been turned upside down.

*‘We moved from here because of the conflict,’* she explained. *‘At that time the interaction and relationship between Wolayta and Oromo communities were not good. Not only us, there are many children and family who left the town,’* she added.

At first, Desta’s parents sent her and her siblings to stay with relatives outside of the city. *‘The time was risky for children... a lot of children were harmed... They sent us for protection... My father rented a house for us and kept us with relatives,’* she explained. Her parents, hoping the violence would end quickly, stayed in Batu to protect the house they had just built: *‘We had a big house... They were afraid to move and leave the house.’*

As the violence continued to escalate, Desta explained that the family’s Oromo neighbours pushed her parents into selling their house. *‘Oromos are the ones that pushed us to sell our house... They advised him (father) to sell the house, saying “you worked hard to build this house and the house may get burned. It is better you sell it”... Then my father was afraid of the risks and sold his house.’*

Although the violence in Batu has subsided, Desta and her family are now stuck in a community they do not consider their own, leading lives shaped by poverty because her parents lost both their well-paying factory jobs as well as their property and *‘have very low income now’.*

While Desta’s aspirations for her future remain high – *‘I want to be a scientist, and if that is not achievable, I want to be a doctor’* – she observes that violence has rocked her faith in the adults around her. *‘We have to learn good things from adults... They are teaching us throwing stones, burning houses, and ethnic discrimination.’*

There were children who demonstrate with us. They killed two people from the locality with bullets.

(A 20-year-old man from Batu)

In Oromia and Dire Dawa, the violence was linked to ethnic and religious tensions (see also Box 4). A 20-year-old man from Batu explained that children in that city were demonstrating for Oromo rights and were at risk as a result: *'There were children who demonstrate with us. They killed two people from the locality with bullets.'* A father from Dire Dawa noted how the violence in that city, which is largely perpetrated by adolescent boys and young men, has been so pervasive that he is afraid to let his children go outside: *'My personal worry is the ethnic violence that has been observed in our locality over the past few years. I worry about their [his children's] safety, that is, for fear of being exposed to risk or harm.'* In the camps for internally displaced persons near Dire Dawa, violence is not only pervasive but so extreme that federal troops have sometimes been required to keep the peace and even young girls admit to being brutal perpetrators. A 12-year-old girl whose father was killed in front of her explained that she has attempted to avenge his murder by taking it out on others:

*Oromo told us to leave their place ...They burned our house at night ...Then they burned our maize and sorghum farm...They slaughtered my father in front of my eyes...Once we found an Oromo girl and then we beat her. We knifed her with needles... Then federal come and stop us and beat us. We collected stones and hit the federal troops with stones. We did that because we hate them.*

## Adolescents' experiences of gender-based violence

### Female genital mutilation/cutting

At the macro level, our survey findings echo the most recent Ethiopia DHS, which found that 47% of girls aged 15–19 had been cut, with significant regional variation (CSA Ethiopia and ICF, 2017). Of the older girls in GAGE's sample, 47% reported having been cut – 65% in rural areas and 29% in urban areas. Regional patterning is marked in terms of both incidence and age at cutting. For example, in Zone 5 (Afar), 85% of older girls had been cut, whereas in South Gondar (Amhara), only 23% of older girls had been cut (see Table 5). In South Gondar, girls were cut in early infancy, and in Zone 5, while girls were predominately cut in early infancy the age ranged from less than one year to early adolescence. In East Hararghe, 89% of older girls had been cut, but at a much later age (mean age of 9 years). Our survey findings also highlight the importance of intra-regional variation, which is obscured in DHS reporting. We found that girls in South Gondar are less at risk of FGM/C than their peers across broader Amhara (where 48% of girls aged 10–14 had been cut, according to the 2016 DHS) while girls in East Hararghe are more at risk than their peers across the rest of Oromia (where 17% of girls aged 10–14 had been cut, according to the DHS). Both GAGE data and the DHS found similar rates of FGM/C in Afar (DHS notes 86% of girls aged 10–14 had been cut).

**Table 5: Experience of FGM/C among older cohort**

	Overall	Urban	South Gondar	East Hararghe	Zone 5
Experienced FGM/C	47% n=1788	29% n=715	23% n=388	89% n=441	85% n=244

Our qualitative work underscores that this patterning is not solely a result of cultural differences, but also reflects regional investments in eliminating harmful practices. Of the regions in which GAGE is working, Amhara stands out as having the most developed network of health extension workers (HEW), who have actively spread the message that FGM/C contributes to poor maternal and child health outcomes. It also has the most active Women's Development Army, which organises groups of women at neighbourhood level to address local development



Young married adolescent girl with her child in Amhara, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2020

needs (including family planning and child vaccination). Amhara also has more gender-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and more active school-based clubs that teach adolescents about their rights, and specifically about gendered topics. *'The awareness about side effects of mutilation is created well in the community,'* explained a district-level key informant in South Gondar (see also Box 5). In East Hararghe and pastoralist Zone 5, however,

messages have had more limited reach. An 18-year-old girl in East Hararghe, who was cut at age 13 and married at 14, reported that she had never heard that *'circumcision is harmful'*. Girls from Zone 5, where the work of HEWs is especially complicated by pastoralist realities, added that *'no one teaches against harmful traditional practices'* (12-year-old) and *'there is no girl who is not circumcised'* (19-year-old). In East Hararghe, HEWs admitted that

#### Box 5: An answer for everything

Nefisa is a 13-year-old girl living in rural East Hararghe and attending 4th grade. She has not yet experienced FGM/C and is adamant that she will not, because she has learned how risky it is from participating in the Act With Her programme run by Pathfinder International, an international non-governmental organisation. *'I did not get cut... FGM/C has risks, it leads to an operation during childbirth,'* she explained.

Nefisa is very confident about her views, and has a response for every question. When asked what she would do if her mother told her that it was shameful for girls to remain uncut, Nefisa replied, *'I tell her as it is wrong.'*

When asked what she would do if her mother told her that FGM/C was required by Islam, Nefisa answered that she herself has been taught in religious school that FGM/C is a religious mandate but that she rejects it entirely. *'I tell her that it is religiously acceptable,'* she stated.

When asked what she would do if her mother insisted she be cut, Nefisa observed that girls in her community have a voice in whether they are cut – and her voice is strong enough to win out: *'Since I am educated, I refuse to be mutilated!'*

When pressed to explain how she would handle the situation if her mother called in a traditional circumciser, Nefisa was again ready with a response – she would run away and get help. *'I would not get cut. I would go and tell those who teach us to avoid FGM/C,'* she reported.



Figure 2: Gender-based violence by region and urban/rural location

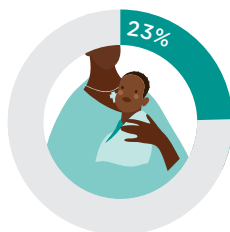


## Gender-based violence

### Female genital mutilation/cutting

FGM/C patterning varies by region.

In **South Gondar**,  
23% of girls are cut...



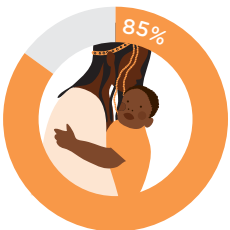
...usually around their  
1<sup>st</sup> birthday.

In **East Hararghe**,  
89% of girls are cut...



...usually around their  
9<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In **Zone 5 (Afar)**,  
85% of girls are cut...



...usually around their  
1<sup>st</sup> birthday.

### Sexual violence

Sexual violence is under-reported because of beliefs that girls are to blame for rape.

1/3 of rural adolescents...



1/6 of urban adolescents...



...believe that  
girls should  
be blamed if  
they are raped.

### Child marriage

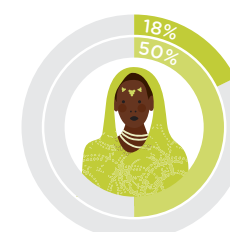
Half of GAGE's older girls marry before adulthood.

In **South Gondar**,  
25% of GAGE's older  
girls were married by  
age 15...



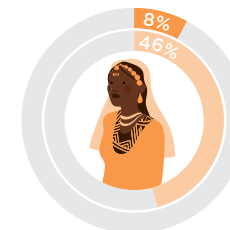
...and 59% were  
married by age 18.

In **East Hararghe**,  
18% of GAGE's older  
girls were married by  
age 15...



...and 50% were  
married by age 18.

In **Zone 5 (Afar)**,  
8% of GAGE's older  
girls were married by  
age 15...



...and 46% were  
married by age 18.

## Since I am educated, I refuse to be mutilated!

(A 13-year-old girl living in rural East Hararghe)

they did not try to speak out against the practice. These divergent realities were reflected in the number of older girls who were able to identify that FGM/C entails risks: 50% in South Gondar, 40% in Zone 5, and only 27% in East Hararghe – where our qualitative work found that even girls who understand the risks sometimes demand to be cut themselves because they cannot participate in cultural dances until they have signaled conformity.

### Sexual violence

Our midline survey found that 5% of girls reported having experienced sexual violence. Unsurprisingly, older girls are more at risk than younger girls (10% versus 3%). Location also matters, with older girls in urban areas more likely to report sexual violence than their peers in rural areas (12% versus 8%), and those in South Gondar (15%) more likely to report sexual violence than those in East Hararghe (5%) and Zone 5 (4%) (see Table 6). However, these figures may reflect significant under-reporting, as our survey also found that 25% of adolescents believe that a woman who has been raped should be blamed for the assault. Surprisingly, there are no differences in reporting by gender. There are, however, stark location differences, with rural adolescents more likely to believe that a woman should be blamed than their urban peers (33% versus 16%), and those in East Hararghe (38%) more likely to blame girls for being raped than those in South Gondar (30%) or Zone 5 (25%).

**Table 6: Girls' experience of sexual violence**

	Overall		Urban		South Gondar		East Hararghe		Zone 5	
Cohort	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old	Young	Old
Experienced sexual violence	3% n=2429	10% n=1861	4% n=296	12% n=756	3% n=1052	15% n=422	2% n=867	5% n=441	3% n=214	4% n=242

Our qualitative work, however, suggests that sexual violence – and fear of sexual violence – is pervasive. In urban areas, girls reported that they never truly felt safe. This was particularly the case for girls who were living in rented accommodation in order to attend secondary school. A 20-year-old woman in Batu reported that a friend had chosen to leave school permanently after having survived two attempted abductions: *'Boys attempted to abduct her twice when she was going to school...*

*She finished school because of that.'* A 21-year-old man in Debre Tabor added that the city is becoming more violent, with gang rape more common now than in the past. *'Sometimes they try to attack in a group if a girl is alone,'* he reported.

Respondents in rural South Gondar observed that lawlessness has increased outside of the city as well, much to girls' detriment. For example, a 19-year-old boy, who is an avid consumer of the news, reported that 33 local girls had been raped en route to school in the past year alone, and fathers noted that rape has become so common that many parents support their unmarried daughters to use contraceptive injections to prevent pregnancy in the event of rape. Girls are scared, because there is no way for them to avoid the daily tasks – such as herding and fetching water – that leave them at risk. A 13-year-old, for example, related that she had been recently accosted by a strange man who *'asked me to accept his love affairs and requested me to be his girlfriend'*. When she refused, *'he caught my arms... and scratched my face... I was terrified... Then my relatives came... and he ran away.'* In East Hararghe and Zone 5, sexual violence is most often perpetrated by peers, usually in the context of cultural dances (*shgoye* in Oromia and *sadah* in Afar). A younger boy from East Hararghe reported that boys see sexual conquests – whether by consent or force – as a way to demonstrate virility. *'The boys who had intercourse last night, for example, tell the information to their friends and it spreads in that manner... The male partner talks whether he did it by pushing the girl or with her consent,'* he explained.

## Boys attempted to abduct her twice when she was going to school... She finished school because of that.

(A 20-year-old woman in Batu)

**DD** In earlier times, no one was touching a *sadula* [unmarried virgins]. But now they can grab a *sadula* if they get her.

(A 16-year-old girl from Zone 5)

A 16-year-old girl from Zone 5 added that while boys are penalised for premarital pregnancy (they must pay livestock to the parents of the girl but are not necessarily forced to marry her as she *'belongs'* to her *absuma* or maternal cousin), rape has become more common in recent years: *'In earlier times, no one was touching a sadula [unmarried virgins]. But now they can grab a sadula if they get her.'*

Supporting the notion of under-reporting, our qualitative work found not only that sexual violence is narrowly perceived (only rape – not physical touching or verbal catcalling), but that girls who experience sexual violence are often forced to bear subsequent emotional and physical violence, as their parents and communities blame them for having been assaulted. Some parents acknowledged that *'our boys have bad behaviours'* and *'girls don't shout if they are raped or abducted... that is taboo in the culture'* (community key informant, Zone 5). Yet girls who admit to being raped are *'belittled afterwards... They will nag her about why she yielded to the boy,'* explained a 13-year-old boy from South Gondar. Some parents also resort to physical violence, *'tying her and applying wood using torture'* (12-year-old boy, East Hararghe), to force their daughters to divulge the name of their rapist. In South Gondar, where rape is seen to besmirch family honour, girls are often forced to marry the rapist, or to *'abandon her home place... for fear of humiliation'* (15-year-old girl).

## Child marriage

Despite being illegal, child marriage (like FGM/C) remains common. Underscoring the importance of focusing on the most disadvantaged adolescents, child marriage is markedly more common among GAGE participants than it is among more representative samples. For example, while the 2016 DHS reports that at a national level, only 5.7% of girls aged 15–19 had been married by age 15, nearly one-fifth (19%) of the older rural girls in our sample had been married by that age (CSA and ICF, 2017). Similarly, while at a national level, 'only' 40% of young women aged 20–24 were married by age 18, half (50%) of the older girls in our rural sample were married before adulthood (ibid.). Patterning across locations echoes DHS findings on the median age at first marriage, which is 16.2 years in Amhara, 17.4 years in Oromia, and 16.4 years in Afar (for women aged 20–49). Among the older girls in our sample, rates are higher in South Gondar (23% married by age 15 and 55% by age 18) than in East Hararghe (19% by age 15 and 48% by age 18) or Zone 5 (8% by age 15 and 48% by age 18) and are particularly low in urban areas (14% by age 18) (see Table 7). Although boys are much less likely to marry in childhood than girls, child marriage was also not uncommon for boys in our sample – 13% of older rural boys had been married by age 18 (versus 5% on a national level according to the DHS). Our survey also found that girls in South Gondar and Zone 5 (Afar), far more than those in East Hararghe, would have preferred to marry later than they did – patterning central to our qualitative findings below.

**Table 7: Child marriage among older cohort females**

	Overall	Urban	South Gondar	East Hararghe	Zone 5
Married before 18	33% n=1881	14% n=757	55% n=423	48% n=446	48% n=255
Married before 15	11% n=1884	3% n=758	23% n=423	19% n=447	8% n=256
Would have rather waited to be married	52% n=847	53% n=189	70% n=268	29% n=255	67% n=135



## They said that I need to get married when I complete my education.

(A 12-year-old girl in South Gondar)

Our qualitative work adds nuance to these figures. In South Gondar, where the 2016 DHS reports that the age at which girls marry has risen rapidly in recent years, respondents agreed that it is now comparatively rare – outside of the most rural lowland communities – for girls to marry before mid-adolescence because *‘every child is educated now’* (key informant) and because parents *‘do not have any asset to pay for the marriage gift’* (18-year-old boy). *‘They said that I need to get married when I complete my education,’* explained a 12-year-old girl. *‘My first marriage proposal was at the age of 13 but my father refused as I was a teenager and then I got married at age 15,’* added a 17-year-old. Given widespread messaging about the health, educational and economic risks of child marriage, both in the community (through the same channels that are addressing FGM/C) and at school (in the curriculum and in girls' clubs), respondents observed that parents have all but abandoned the practice, and that girls are now claiming more space to negotiate for delays to arranged marriages and even, sometimes, to have a say in choice of marriage partner. *‘We only marry her based*

*on her interest,’* noted a father of an unmarried girl. That said, girls added that *‘their interest’* remains shaped by the interest of their parents and that delays can only go on so long, given parental concerns about their daughters' sexual purity. *‘I would have been cursed and my parents would feel sad,’* explained a recently married 15-year-old girl about why she capitulated to marriage, despite having preferred to wait until she was an adult. *‘We are afraid that they will start a sexual relationship before marriage,’* added the mother of a married girl.

In East Hararghe, where the 2016 DHS finds only stasis in early marriage rates, narratives are sharply different, with respondents primarily agreed that most girls choose of their own accord to drop out of school in order to marry in early adolescence. *‘It is now that they get married early. We used to get married after we grow up, like at the age of 18. But now they get married at the age of 12 or 13,’* explained a key informant with the local Women's Association. *‘Even by now those who are 10 years old start to go with boys,’* added a 13-year-old girl. Broader narratives suggest that while girls embrace the idea that they have chosen to marry, their *‘own accord’* is hardly their own – and that pressure in fact comes from all directions. Girls are prevented from focusing on their studies by heavy household chore burdens and are pushed by their mothers (subtly through



Community in Afar, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2020

### Box 6: Marriage regrets

Nuriya is a 15-year-old girl from rural East Hararghe who married – by ‘choice’ – at age 13. She is living with her parents and planning on divorcing her husband. She wishes she had made different decisions.

Nuriya is quite clear that her marriage was her own doing, and that her parents were not involved at all. *‘I ran away with him without informing my parents,’* she recalled. On the other hand, her broader narrative highlights how her choices were shaped by others.

Nuriya dropped out of school at age 10, when she began planning to participate in *shegoye* (cultural dancing), which required her parents to invest considerable resources in feminine accoutrements. *‘My interest at the time was to enjoy shegoye... We put on a type of clothing called mamudi by decorating it with different strands of colours at its edge. We also braid our hair with beads. We leave our hair open, we don’t cover it. Traditional bracelets and necklaces are also used for more beauty... My parents bought me the things,’* she explained.

By the time she was 12, her friends had begun marrying and she was *‘seeking to get married’* herself. She was especially attracted to the idea that new brides are allowed a restful honeymoon and *‘stay at home for 2 months subsequent to their wedding’*.

When she went to a relative’s wedding, soon after her 13th birthday, she met her husband – who it turns out was looking for a wife to take home to the house that his parents had built for him the previous year. *‘We stayed for a week and got married... He had a plan in advance for he was the one that initiated and presented the request for marriage,’* she recalled.

However, Nuriya had second thoughts only days after eloping, but because she had already run away with her husband, it was too late to back out.

Two years of marriage had only confirmed her early doubts. While she admits that her husband *‘beat me at night... when I would fail to make and take him hojja [a local drink made from coffee and milk] when he works on the farm,’* what she is most furious about is that he does not trust her and makes her stay home while he attends friends’ weddings on his own. *‘He warned me not to go to [a friend’s] wedding. I insisted that I should go.’*

It is culturally taboo, Nuriya noted, for girls in East Hararghe to talk to their parents about their husband. Nuriya does not abide by this though. Her parents are – unusually for the area – on her side and while her husband has visited three times to request that she come home, her parents have sent him away each time. *‘They tell my husband to go away and search for a female that he will have trust in,’* she reported.

the purchase of clothing and jewellery, see Box 6) and their peers (unsubtly through the use of gossip and physical violence) to participate in the *shegoye* dancing that precedes most child marriages. *‘Since they are busy with housework they prefer to get married and work for their own. They... cook food for lunch and dinner and clean the compound and fetch water. When they cover all the work in the family house, they assume that they can get married and lead life,’* explained the mother of an adolescent girl. A 15-year-old girl stated: *‘When they call you and you do not follow them to go to shegoye, they beat you with a stick.’* Young husbands noted that they considered their early marriage a source of considerable pride, especially when they had to do ‘battle’ with their peers. A 17-year-old boy, who married at age 14 to a 10-year-old girl, recalled: *‘My soul agitated me to get married right way when I reached*


*puberty... While experiencing this feeling, I came across a gorgeous girl and wanted to seize the opportunity to marry her... We competed with a lot of males for the girl... The competition was fierce... Our rivals beat us with stones... I beat them and married her finally.’*

In Zone 5, again in line with the 2016 DHS, we found little evidence of progress. The *absuma* marriage system, which dictates that adolescents must marry a maternal cousin, means that girls marry when and whom they are told to, regardless of whether they would prefer to wait. *‘We have our own peculiar culture and tradition with regard to marriage practice... It is the absuma marriage tradition...’* explained a father. Girls added that as menarche (the first occurrence of menstruation) is seen as a sign that girls are marriageable, they try not to let their parents know that their periods have started. As a 16-year-old girl explained,

her father *'told me that if a girl experiences menstruation for three times, she needs to be married. And he asked me if I experienced menstruation three times, and I told him it was only twice.'* In the end, however, girls have no choice but to capitulate to the inevitable. *'I cannot refuse. If I refuse the man who was going to marry me, he would be given permission to take me by force,'* concluded a 17-year-old girl married against her will at age 15.


### Intimate partner violence

In the qualitative data, married adolescents spoke relatively openly about their experiences of intimate partner violence, especially physical violence. Girls in all three regions reported being beaten by their husbands, for reasons ranging from losing livestock to talking back – but primarily reflecting the reality that violence within marriage is seen as customary. *'If I go to someone's home or if I visit my friends, my husband beats me,'* explained a 17-year-old in Zone 5. In South Gondar, girls added that violence is especially extreme when their husbands have been drinking. *'We often quarrel and he beat me when he got drunk,'* reported a 15-year-old. Young husbands

 I cannot refuse. If I refuse the man who was going to marry me, he would be given permission to take me by force.

(A 17-year-old girl in Zone 5)

were similarly forthright and admitted to physical and sexual violence that often began on the wedding night. A 19-year-old boy from South Gondar admitted that he had raped his 12-year-old wife, causing her physical harm. *'When I hugged her, she refused and shouted and then tried to leave the room... I forcefully had sex at first as she refused to do so,'* he recalled. A 19-year-old boy from East Hararghe similarly acknowledged that he saw it as his right to beat his wife for myriad infractions. *'I don't beat her with something that hurts. I beat her with electric wire. I don't beat her with a stick,'* he explained. While married girls in South Gondar and East Hararghe often choose to divorce – more secure in their right to do so even if not comfortable admitting why they have chosen to divorce – girls in pastoralist Zone 5 have little option but to flee the country. *'I do not have anywhere to go,'* explained a 17-year-old who married at age 15.

 I don't beat [my wife] with something that hurts. I beat her with electric wire.

(A 19-year-old boy from East Hararghe)

### Support seeking and access to justice

Our survey found that adolescents' knowledge about where they could seek support in the event of violence has improved over the past two years, with nearly half (48%) reporting that they now know where to get help compared to 41% at baseline. Boys, who have fewer restrictions on their mobility outside the home, were significantly advantaged over girls (59% versus 40%), and location differences were again evident, with adolescents in urban areas advantaged and those in rural Zone 5 disadvantaged when it comes to knowing where to seek help. Among the younger cohort, 72% of those in urban areas, 46% of those in South Gondar, 43% of those in East Hararghe and 32% of those in Zone 5 knew where to seek help. However, our survey also highlights that knowledge does not necessarily translate into behaviour change. Across locations and cohorts, and including both boys and girls, of those who had experienced violence, only 29% had spoken to someone about it. Patterning echoes knowledge, with boys more likely to have spoken about experiencing violence than girls, and young people in Zone 5 especially unlikely to have spoken up.

With very few exceptions, adolescents experiencing violence inside the home (from caregivers or husbands) only reported assistance from friends and family. For example, a 14-year-old girl from Debre Tabor noted that her father often tries to stop her mother's violent behaviour towards her: *'Sometimes when my father sees me get a beating, he'll tell her to let go of me.'* Similarly, a 15-year-old divorced girl from East Hararghe, married at age 12, observed that her parents had supported her to leave her marriage in order to keep her safe. *'My parents prefer if I hang out with other children by living with them instead of letting me be beaten by my husband. They want to rescue me from the violence at any cost,'* she explained. Other adolescents relied on neighbours to intervene when household violence became too extreme. *'The neighbours would come and stop my father from beating me,'* recalled a 13-year-old boy from Zone 5 about the worst of his father's physical violence. Only a few girls mentioned having sought or received formal support for intra-household violence. A 14-year-old girl from Dire Dawa



reported approaching both the police and the Bureau of Women and Children Affairs to prevent neighbouring children from being beaten by their father, and a 17-year-old girl from East Hararghe noted that when her parents cannot stop her husband from beating her, *'they report it to local officials.'*

Many young people experiencing violent discipline at school reported that their parents have worked to help end it. *'Here the teachers do not beat us since we tell when they beat us,'* explained a 12-year-old boy from rural East Hararghe. Though parents often complained that *'democracy'* in the classroom has ruined the learning experience, because students who are afraid are students who are attentive, most adolescents felt supported by their parents. *'Parents are taking the side of their children and scolding teachers if the teachers beat the students when they misbehave,'* stated a 15-year-old girl from East Hararghe. *'Families started to blame the teachers when their child is punished in the school,'* added a 14-year-old boy East from Debre Tabor.

Support for sexual violence, as noted above, is particularly rare. Not only are girls blamed for having attracted attention (and therefore violence), but bystanders are afraid to intervene – even when they witness rape – and justice is too often subverted. Although several

## Here the teachers do not beat us since we tell when they beat us

(A 12-year-old boy from rural East Hararghe)

adolescents reported that they had witnessed peers being raped, both in the forest and in closed rooms at school, no young person mentioned having sought help for the victim, because they were afraid of retaliation. *'Adolescents would keep silent...they fear to say anything,'* explained a 14-year-old boy from East Hararghe. Besides, others added, what is the point given that justice fails and even the convicted are *'released from jail as long as he pays the penalty'* (14-year-old girl, South Gondar). Key informants agreed that young people are accurately reporting. While there are systems in place – at least in urban areas – to help victims access medical care (including emergency contraceptives and anti-retrovirals), legal systems fail girls. A key informant from Debre Tabor explained: *'one of the tricky things is that criminals are not penalized... these days, the police might be bribed by defendants to obscure the evidence... the legal system is now very loose... criminals are released without getting the required legal punishment.'*

While no girls mentioned seeking or receiving formal support to prevent FGM/C – in part because girls in South



Young adolescent girls in Amhara, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2020



Young adolescent boy in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2020

Gondar and Zone 5 are typically cut very young and girls in East Hararghe largely want to be cut in order to conform to social norms – girls in South Gondar often mentioned seeking help to prevent child marriage. Most sought help from their teachers, who then approached parents or *kebele* officials as needed. *'Most of the time they tell to their home room teacher at school. This teacher will then notify the education bureau so that they will not drop their class. The teacher will also report to our office [Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs] so that the marriage will not happen,'* explained a *woreda*-level key informant from South Gondar. *'I heard that students report when parents arrange a marriage. We heard that after a girl reported the school principal take the issue to police,'*

added a girl from a remote community in South Gondar. In East Hararghe, where marriage is usually adolescent initiated, a few married girls reported that their families had sought support in order to prevent their marriages. An 18-year-old girl, married at 14, recalled that her father had been desperate to stop her from marrying before adulthood: *'He [my father] beat us and brought us to the kebele administration. My brother is a militia..... He told me at that time, as I will marry in the future and to learn for the time being.'* In Zone 5, where the *absuma* system leaves no room for dissent, girls reported only the 'support' of friends. *'They advised me it is better to kill myself,'* reported a 20-year-old married at 17.



# Policy and programming implications

Our findings underscore that Ethiopian adolescents have highly uneven access to bodily integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence, with large disparities between girls and boys, between those living in urban and versus rural areas, and across regions. The primary risk factor to emerge in our research appeared to be harmful gender norms, which impact both girls and boys, but leave girls overall more vulnerable to more forms of violence than boys.

It is also important to tackle the significant gaps in knowledge about reporting of violence; in order to overcome the disadvantages faced by girls and rural adolescents it is essential to invest in tailored outreach efforts in person and also via behavioural change communication messaging through media and social media.

Key policy and programmatic actions for accelerating progress in eradicating the different forms of violence outlined in this report include the following.

## 1 Parental violence

- To tackle parents' use of corporal punishment, it will be important to invest in discussions through schools and community conversations to support parents to learn about positive disciplinary approaches and adolescent-parent communication. Promoting successful local families as role models could help make these discussions feel real. Simultaneously, there is a need to invest in and train a cadre of social workers to identify and address the worst forms of parental violence and to strengthen legal institutions such as social courts and community police to identify and address the worst forms of parental violence. Such efforts could also be complemented by behavioural change communication through the media with regard to positive disciplinary approaches and parenting.

## 2 Teacher violence

- To eradicate teachers' use of corporal punishment, there is an urgent need to step up efforts to train teachers in child-friendly pedagogies and positive disciplinary approaches in line with Ministry of Education guidance against the use of corporal punishment, while simultaneously working to reduce class sizes to a more manageable level. Such efforts

need to be complemented with strengthened Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (to contribute to discussions about positive discipline approaches), improved access to school counsellors (who can support both students and teachers to resolve conflicts), investments in accountability mechanisms (including establishing reporting boxes for students to hold teachers accountable for violating formal bans on violent disciplinary approaches), and improved enforcement and follow-up (to ensure that repeat offenders are sanctioned in order to dismantle the current culture where violence is widely tolerated). In addition, strengthening school-based structures such as school clubs and school parliaments can help to improve students' voices and agency including speaking up against corporal punishment within the school system.

## 3 Peer violence

- To combat peer violence, investments in school- and community based adolescent empowerment programming are urgently needed. Interventions should aim to foster friendships and promote collaboration, positive communication, and negotiation skills – while simultaneously proactively addressing peer violence in the community and how to reduce and report it. Programme curricula should tackle violent masculinities and promote inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships within schools and other non-formal education settings. Furthermore, peer-to-peer education within communities and schools can promote discussions among adolescents, including how to reduce peer violence.

## 4 Sexual violence

- To tackle sexual violence in the community, it is important to invest in tailored empowerment and safe space programming for adolescent girls (married and unmarried) that includes messaging on girls' rights to bodily integrity (including also verbal sexual harassment), self-defence skills and knowledge of reporting processes. Such programming should be complemented by programming for and with adolescent boys and young men on positive

masculinities. There is simultaneously a need to work with parents and communities to avoid blaming girls who are assaulted, and – as part of efforts to tailor curricula and messaging to specific localities – to address violence that occurs as part of adolescent-only cultural dances (*shegoye* in East Hararghe and *sadah* in Afar) as appropriate.

- At the enabling environment level, there is a need to prioritise scaled-up investments in district-level law enforcement and prosecution in line with national strategies and laws. It is important to simultaneously work with elders (given that customary arbitration mechanisms are widely used) and to address discriminatory gender norms, and promote adherence to formal justice approaches, especially in rural communities.
- Efforts should also be made to ensure that shelter houses are available in each district and that such facilities are welcoming not only of adult women, but also adolescent girls, especially those who face sexual violence.
- In remote rural communities it is vital to work with student-teacher-parent associations to combat sexual violence that may happen in, near or on the way to schools.
- Simultaneously, both government and NGOs should consider providing school stipends to support the secondary education of girls from vulnerable households so that they can stay in rented rooms near schools so as to reduce the risk of sexual violence that girls face while travelling long distances to schools.

## 5 Ethnic-based violence

- To address widespread ethnic-based violence as identified in our findings, it is important to design a strategy that can help to strengthen community cohesiveness and solidarity. This may include strong advocacy through media, social media, community meetings and dialogues about common social and cultural values, and the importance of ethnic, language, religious and cultural diversity for nation building. It is also important to strengthen the role of the Ministry of Peace, which has been working on the importance of national and regional dialogues for reconciliation.

## 6 Child marriage

- To address widespread child marriage practices in rural areas, there is an urgent need to adopt a multi-pronged strategy to step up school- and community-based awareness raising about the negative health, educational, economic and social impacts of child marriage; strengthen reporting chains at school; invest in empowerment programming (targeting arranged marriages, abduction and 'adolescent-initiated' marriages, depending on the local context; and work with adolescent boys and young men, parents and religious leaders to shift discriminatory gender norms, including around delaying the age of marriage.
- To tackle the limited knowledge of girls about reporting options, it is critical to provide tailored outreach to girls, especially in rural areas, about how they can report risks of child marriage and other forms of age- and gender-based violence.
- For in-school girls, it is important to strengthen girls and gender clubs which are critical mechanisms for reporting arranged and proposed child marriages.
- In pastoralist communities like Afar, it is important to work with elders, clan leaders and religious leaders on how to shift the tradition of *absuma* marriage system so that girls may have an option not only to delay their marriage but also to choose their marriage partner. At the same time, it is important for NGOs, researchers and other concerned bodies to advocate with the Afar regional government to accept the national legal age for marriage of 18, rather than 16 years as is currently the case.
- There is also a need to step up enforcement and to prosecute parents, husbands and brokers, in accordance with the law, and to invest in monitoring to verify whether communities that are declared FGM and child marriage free have, in reality, eradicated the process in line with the government's National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C.
- For married girls, there is also an urgent need to provide support for those at risk of intimate partner violence, through awareness-raising efforts by health extension workers about reporting options, and through community and religious leaders.



## 7 FGM/C

- To tackle FGM/C, which remains widespread in many parts of the country, especially in rural areas, it is critical to expand the reach of health extension workers and messaging about the health consequences of FGM/C. There is also a need to work with religious leaders and through parenting classes to shift harmful gender norms at the community level. In localities where FGM/C is carried out soon after birth or in early childhood, engaging with mothers is critical, while in areas when cutting takes place during adolescence or nearer to marriage age, it is essential to engage with adolescent girls and boys themselves about the risks of the practice and how to report it. Finally, schools can also provide an important entry point to provide contextualised messaging, including around the risks of *shegoye* and *sadah*, both of which necessitate female circumcision for girls' participation.

## References

- Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of Ethiopia and ICF (2017) *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2016*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: CSA and ICF.
- Economist (2020) 'Ethiopia's democratic transition is in peril'. (<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/09/19/ethiopias-democratic-transition-is-in-peril>)
- Girls Not Brides (GNB) (2020) Ethiopia. (<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/ethiopia/>)
- Jeffrey, J. (2020) 'A gender-equal Ethiopian Parliament can improve the lives of all women'. IPS (Inter Press Service) News Agency, 10 April ([www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/gender-equal-ethiopian-parliament-can-improve-lives-women](http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/gender-equal-ethiopian-parliament-can-improve-lives-women))
- Jones, N., Presler-Marshall, E., Małachowska, A., Jones, E., Sajdi, J., Banioweda, K., Yadete, W., Gezahegne, K. and Tilahun, K. (2019) *Qualitative research toolkit: GAGE's approach to researching with adolescents*. London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence ([www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Qualitative-research-toolkit\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Qualitative-research-toolkit_WEB.pdf))
- Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (2013) *National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) against Women and Children in Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs ([www.africanchildforum.org/cfr/policy%20per%20country/2018%20Update/Ethiopia/ethiopia\\_http\\_2013\\_en.pdf](http://www.africanchildforum.org/cfr/policy%20per%20country/2018%20Update/Ethiopia/ethiopia_http_2013_en.pdf))
- Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (2019) *Summary: national costed roadmap to end child marriage and FGM/C 2020–2024*. Addis Ababa: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth ([www.unicef.org/ethiopia/reports/national-costed-roadmap-end-child-marriage-and-fgmc-ethiopia](http://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/reports/national-costed-roadmap-end-child-marriage-and-fgmc-ethiopia))
- OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) (2019) 'Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considers report of Ethiopia'. OHCHR website, 21 February (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24192&LangID=E>)

## Appendix

The GAGE Ethiopia baseline sample comprised 6,956 female and male adolescents, from three different subsamples of interest, living in East Hararghe (Oromia Region), South Gondar (Amhara Region), Zone 5 (Afar Region), and the urban areas of Debre Tabor, Batu/Ziway, and Dire Dawa. The largest subsample (6,647 adolescents) were chosen through randomised selection from a household listing exercise. During the listing exercise, survey enumerators followed a detailed protocol for making door-to-door visits to households in the study sites in order to identify adolescents aged 10-12 and 15-17 years of age living in the community (in rural areas, only adolescents aged 10-12 years old were sought). Once a list of these eligible adolescents had been made, a random sample of male and female adolescents from each of the two age groups was drawn, with equal numbers selected across research communities. GAGE researchers then purposefully sought and selected additional adolescents in these communities to be included in the data collection in order to ensure sufficient voice from particularly marginalised youth, such as those out of school, married or parents prior to age 18, and those with disabilities. This approach created two additional subsamples of adolescent respondents - a group of 'additional qualitative extra-nodal adolescents' who were chosen to take part in a series of qualitative interviews as well (119 adolescents not already selected to be part of the random sample), and a group of adolescents with physical disabilities (190 adolescents not already selected as either of the previous samples). Although the random subsample of GAGE adolescents is representative of adolescents in the focal age group from the study areas, the overall GAGE sample overweights adolescents who are out of school, married, or have disabilities, as these are areas of particular interest for the research team. 6,825 adolescents from the overall baseline sample were interviewed during baseline data collection.

During midline data collection, the GAGE research team attempted to interview the entirety of the baseline sample of 6,956 female and male adolescents, including the random and purposefully selected samples. Furthermore, the researchers endeavored additionally to enlarge the sample along various characteristics of interest. In particular, during midline data collection, GAGE researchers sought to recruit additional adolescents who were married prior to age 18 (including several who were married prior to age 15), additional adolescents with physical disabilities, and adolescents in rural areas who were aged 15-17 at the time of the baseline data collection. After these various sample expansions, the GAGE Ethiopia midline sample comprised 8,555 female and male adolescents, from four different subsamples of interest. The random sample drawn prior to baseline data collection was unchanged (6,647 adolescents), but the sample of additional qualitative adolescents increased (for a total of 369 adolescents not part of the random sample), and likewise for the subsamples of adolescents with disabilities, those married prior to age 18, and those aged 15-17 during the time period of baseline data collection in rural areas. Once again, for the midline data collection, although the random subsample of GAGE adolescents is representative of adolescents in the focal age group from the study areas, the overall GAGE sample overweights adolescents who are out of school, married, or have disabilities.





GAGE Programme Office  
Overseas Development Institute  
203 Blackfriars Road  
London SE1 8NJ  
United Kingdom  
Email: [gage@odi.org.uk](mailto:gage@odi.org.uk)  
Web: [www.gage.odi.org](http://www.gage.odi.org)

ISBN: 978-1-913610-29-6



## 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](http://www.gage.odi.org.uk) for more information.

## Disclaimer

This document is an output of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme which is funded by UK aid from the UK government. However, views expressed and information contained within do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies and are not endorsed by the UK government, which accepts no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.

## Copyright

Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce material from this report for their own non-commercial publications (any commercial use must be cleared with the GAGE Programme Office first by contacting [gage@odi.org.uk](mailto:gage@odi.org.uk)). As copyright holder, GAGE requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. When referencing a GAGE publication, please list the publisher as Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the GAGE website, [www.gage.odi.org](http://www.gage.odi.org)

© GAGE 2020. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Front cover: Adolescent girl in Amhara, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/  
GAGE