

## COVID-19 Research Series

GAGE consortium

The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year (2015-2024) mixed methods longitudinal research and evaluation study following the lives of 20,000 adolescent girls and boys in six low- and middle-income countries in Africa (Ethiopia and Rwanda), Asia (Bangladesh and Nepal) and the Middle East (Jordan and Lebanon). Funded by the Research and Evaluation Division of the FODO, it is the largest study of its kind, and aims to fast-track social change for marginalized girls in line with the Agenda 2030's pledge to leave no one behind.

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, GAGE was able to leverage its longitudinal sample and quickly launch mixed-methods research to investigate the implications of the pandemic on adolescent lives. Over the course of two data collection rounds aimed at assessing firstly the immediate effects (April to June 2020), and then the longer-term implications as the pandemic evolved (October to January 2021), GAGE was able to assess how the pandemic – and respective containment measures – impacted adolescent lives across 6 key domains: 1) education and learning; 2) bodily integrity and freedom from violence; 3) health, nutrition and SRH; 4) voice and agency; 5) psychosocial wellbeing; and 6) economic empowerment. Mirroring the GAGE longitudinal sample, there was a particular focus on marginalized sub-cohorts of adolescents, including adolescent refugees, young married girls, adolescent mothers, out-of-school adolescents and adolescents with disabilities.

### Key findings during COVID-19 cross-country research:

GAGE's key findings during COVID-19 cross country fieldwork draw on mixed-methods research with over 11,000 adolescents and their caregivers in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, supplemented by two rounds of phone- and/or in-person based qualitative interviews with adolescents, caregivers and key policy advisors and programme implementers. A snapshot of our findings are presented below.

Adolescent girls were significantly disadvantaged compared to their male peers, with the important exception of pressures to household level, **girls faced greater domestic work pressures** during



school closures, and poorer access to distance learning opportunities, due to their **lower levels of access to devices and lack of digital literacy skills**. Girls were also at **heightened risk of age- and gender-based violence** stemming from aggravated household tensions, and face **elevated risks of child marriage and FGM** in some rural contexts.

- **Rural adolescents** were significantly disadvantaged compared to those in urban communities during lockdowns in terms of access to services and digital connectivity, but experienced fewer constraints than their **urban peers** in terms of **mobility and interactions with peers**.
- Covid-19 risks have often been compounded for the most disadvantaged groups of adolescents, including **married girls**, who emphasised a greater domestic and caring workload, increased tensions at home, and greater risk of violence (including intimate partner violence), with fewer opportunities to participate in community activities. For **adolescents with disabilities**, the pandemic and lockdowns exacerbated communication and service access barriers – including access to education and health services – and, in some cases, led to heightened stigma. For **refugees and internally displaced families**, their already very precarious living situations have been rendered even more fragile due to the pandemic, and the closure of key essential services (Child/Woman Friendly Spaces; Educational Institutions; etc) have exacerbated marginalization.
- Adolescent girls and boys deployed **diverse coping strategies** in the face of the pandemic but this should not be confused for resilience, especially given the dearth of adolescent-friendly health, mental health and distance education services in many LMICs.
- The range of **social protection responses** by national governments, UN agencies, donors and NGOs increased as the pandemic has evolved, although they have been relatively slow to scale up to provide a meaningful safety net, and few appear to be tailored to tackle the specific age- and gender-based vulnerabilities that adolescent girls and boys are facing.

## Policy and programming priorities:

GAGE's research findings point to some key priority policy and programming actions to support adolescent girls, their families and communities, including:



Design distance education services that ensure equitable access for girls and for adolescents from lower socio-economic households, including providing no-to-low tech options for disadvantaged learners as well as catch-up classes once in-person education resumes.



Ensure adolescents have access to a range of reporting mechanisms that are able to function during emergencies – in-person, online, phone-based – as part of age- and gender-based violence prevention and response efforts, and that parents are provided with increased support to mitigate heightened tension in the household.



Invest in the development of community-based surveillance and reporting mechanisms that can function even during education and health service closures so as to minimize the risk of child marriage.



Ensure that social protection platforms can be rapidly scaled up so as to reduce the economic drivers of discriminatory gender practices like child marriage, and where possible design social protection programmes so that they benefit adolescents directly. For in-school adolescents, link social protection (e.g. cash or asset transfers) to school attendance whether in-person or online to support learning during crises. For out-of-school adolescents, such as migrants, ensure that they are included in social protection programme targeting so that they can receive economic support during lockdowns or economic downturns.



Prioritise engagement with adolescents and young people in emergency and recovery responses through partnerships, funding and leadership positions, especially to ensure that adolescents from diverse backgrounds and social groups are equitably represented and supported in these roles.

## For our publications and to get in touch

The GAGE consortium, managed by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), includes 35 partner organisations from around the world known for their expertise in research, policy and programming in the fields of adolescence, gender and social inclusion. GAGE is funded by UK aid from the UK government.



Find out more about GAGE at <https://www.gage.odi.org/>

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