GENDER & ADOLESCENCE: GLOBAL EVIDENCE

MIDLINE REPORT SERIES

Adolescent bodily integrity in times of crisis in Ethiopia

Evidence from GAGE Round 3

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Introduction

Ethiopia has strong laws and policies forbidding corporal punishment at school, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage (Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, 2019; End Corporal Punishment, 2023). It has also signed up to deliver accelerated progress on eliminating violence against children by becoming a 'Pathfinding' country with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (End Violence Against Children, 2024). Despite this, however, Ethiopia – like most of its sub-Saharan neighbours – is currently not on track to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address violence (Sachs et al., 2023). These include SDG 5, which calls for eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls (including child marriage and FGM), and SDG 16, which calls for reducing all forms of violence and ending all forms of violence against children under the age of 18 (ibid.). Indeed, research in Ethiopia has found that myriad forms of sexual violence, age-based and gender-based violence against children remain endemic (Pankhurst et al., 2016; Central Statistical Agency (CSA) and ICF, 2017; UNICEF, 2020).

This report builds on previous research and synthesises findings from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme's third round of data collection (in 2021 and 2022) to explore patterns in Ethiopian young people's bodily integrity and freedom from violence (Jones et al., 2019; Emirie et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2021; Presler-Marshall et al., 2020; Presler-Marshall et al., 2022; Presler-Marshall et al., 2023). Paying careful attention to similarities and differences between groups of adolescents (aged 13–17) and young adults (aged 18–21) (based on gender, geographical location, and intersecting disadvantages, including disability and child marriage), we explore multiple indicators of bodily integrity. These include violence at home and at school, peer and youth violence, sexual violence, FGM, child marriage, and intimate partner violence. Given the rapid political, economic and social changes occurring in Ethiopia over the past five years, we also highlight some key changes in education outcomes using earlier rounds of data. The report concludes with implications for policy and programming.

Ethiopian context

Country timeline

Since GAGE last collected data in Ethiopia, in late 2019 and early 2020 (Round 2), myriad events at the international, national and regional levels have combined to shape Ethiopian young people's lives, and jeopardise their bodily integrity. The country's ethnic federalist constitution, which 'ties defined ethnic communities to particular territories', has proven to be a 'volatile constitutional construct' during the process of political transition that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed heralded in when he was elected in 2018 (Hagmann and Abdi, 2020). Since 2017 there has been widespread inter-ethnic violence, including: the 2017–2018 conflict between Oromia and Somali regional states that left hundreds of people dead and up to 1.5 million people displaced (ibid.); ongoing ethnic conflict over land disputes in Benishangul-Gumuz since 2018, which has also resulted in hundreds of deaths and more than 150,000 displaced people (Gardner, 2021); and ongoing violence in southern Ethiopia, which has led to a splintering of the ethnically diverse former Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and more than 1 million displacees (Maasho, 2018). In addition, the devastating conflict in northern Tigray between 2020 and 2022 resulted in an estimated 600,000 deaths and millions of people displaced (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). Indeed, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix estimates that over the past two years in Ethiopia, up to 4.39 million people have been displaced (IOM, 2024).

In the two regions that are the focus of this report, Amhara and Oromia, shocks that have exacerbated adolescents' and young adults' risks of violence include the Covid-19 pandemic, which disrupted the economy and forced schools and other public services to close in March 2020. Shortly after schools reopened in October 2020, conflict in the Tigray region broke out, creating country-wide unrest. By mid-2021, violence had spread to the Amhara (and Afar) regions. There was intense fighting there until August 2022, with some interruption between December 2021 and June 2022.

State of the evidence on children's exposure to violence

There is no national-level data that speaks to most forms of violence against Ethiopian children and young people. The country has never fielded a Violence Against Children and

Youth Survey, a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (tracking violent discipline in the home),[1] or a Global School-Based Student Health Survey (tracking violence at school) (End Violence Against Children, 2024). That said, research has found that violence against children in Ethiopia is endemic. This is partly because violence is seen as necessary to ensure the proper upbringing of children, to the extent that corporal punishment at home is explicitly exempted from laws that address the maltreatment of children (Chuta et al., 2019; Tadesse, 2019; End Corporal Punishment, 2023). Pankhurst et al. (2016) report that 90% of children in the Young Lives study, which has followed the lives of 3,000 Ethiopian children since 2001, have experienced violence. They add that violence peaks in early adolescence and is often gendered: boys are more at risk of physical violence while girls are more at risk of verbal violence. Kefale et al. (2023), using a sample of more than 400 adolescents attending school in urban Debre Tabor, found a similarly high rate of children reporting having experienced violence. The lifetime prevalence of child abuse in their sample was 84%. GAGE's Baseline findings, from 2017-2018, also underscore that Ethiopian young people are at risk of violence, with community social norms important to understanding risks: 67% of respondents had experienced violence at home, 72% had experienced violence at school, and 35% had experienced peer violence (Jones et al., 2019; Murphy et al., 2021).

Sexual and gender-based violence is also common in Ethiopia. At the national level, the 2016 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found that 40% of young women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 18, and that 47% of girls aged 15–19 had experienced FGM (Central Statistical Agency and ICF, 2017). It also found that 13% of girls aged 15–19 had experienced physical violence and that 4% had experienced sexual violence (ibid.).

Conceptual framing

Informed by the emerging evidence base on adolescent well-being and development, GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach that pays careful attention to the interconnectedness of what we call the '3 Cs' – capabilities, change strategies and contexts – in order to understand what works to support adolescents' development and empowerment, both now and in the future (see Figure 1). This framing draws on the three components of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach to evaluation, which highlights the importance of outcomes, causal mechanisms and contexts, though we tailor it to the specific challenges of understanding what works in improving adolescents' capabilities.

The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1985, 2004) and nuanced by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003) to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels, the capabilities approach has evolved as a broad normative framework exploring the kinds of assets (economic, human, political, emotional and social) that expand the capacity of individuals to achieve valued ways of 'doing and being'. At its core is a sense of competence and purposive agency: it goes beyond a focus on a fixed bundle of external assets, instead emphasising investment in an individual's skills, knowledge and voice. Importantly, the approach can encompass relevant investments in children and young people with diverse trajectories, including the most marginalised and 'hardest to reach' such as those with disabilities or those who were married as children. Although the GAGE framework covers six core capabilities, this report is on bodily integrity and freedom from violence. It focuses on violence at home and at school, peer and youth violence, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, child marriage, and intimate partner violence.

The second building block of our conceptual framework is context dependency. Our '3 Cs' framework situates young people socio-ecologically. It recognises that not only do girls and boys at different stages in the life course have different needs and constraints, but also that these are highly dependent on their context at the family/household, community, state and global levels.

The third and final building block of our conceptual framework – change strategies – acknowledges that young people's contextual realities will not only shape the pathways through which they develop their capabilities but also determine the change strategies open to them to improve their outcomes. Our socio-ecological approach emphasises that to nurture transformative change in girls' and boys' capabilities and broader well-being, potential change strategies must simultaneously invest in integrated intervention approaches at different levels, weaving together policies and programming that support young people, their

1 The only MICS undertaken in Ethiopia was in 1995.

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework

families and their communities while also working to effect change at the systems level. The report concludes with our reflections on what type of package of interventions could better support young people's bodily integrity.

Sample and methods

This report draws on mixed-methods data collected in Ethiopia between early 2021 and late 2022. It adds to what we have learnt from data collected at Baseline (2017–2018) and during Round 2 (2019–2020).

At Baseline, the quantitative sample included 6,924 adolescents from households across two cohorts (aged 10–12 years and 15–17 years), with purposeful oversampling of adolescents with disabilities and those who were married as children. Data was collected from three marginalised rural areas – Amhara's South Gondar, Oromia's East Hararghe, and Afar's Zone 5 – as well as urban Dire Dawa, Debre Tabor, and Batu. For this initial round, only younger cohort adolescents were sampled in rural areas, and in Batu only older adolescents were sampled.

For Round 2, an additional 1,655[2] young people (aged 10-20 at the time of recruitment) were added to the sample. Most were added because they were rural (to balance the older cohort in urban areas) or because they had married as children (due to this being of special interest to GAGE). Others were added because they were out of school, had a disability, or were internally displaced. Altogether, this brings the total sample size for Round 2 to 8,579 adolescents. Data was collected from the same three rural and three urban locations.

For Round 3, budget limitations meant that GAGE researchers only surveyed people living in rural South Gondar, rural East Hararghe and the city of Debre Tabor (see Figure 2). The total eligible sample was 8,543. This included 6,194 young people who were part of the Round 2 sample from these three locations, 807 older adolescents (new to the study) in Debre Tabor, aged 14–18 at time of recruitment, and 1,533 very young adolescents (also new to the study) aged 11–13 at time of recruitment. The final Round 3 survey sample involved 7,509 young people.

To facilitate the analysis of change over time, this report focuses on the 4,810 adolescents who were surveyed in both Round 2 and Round 3. Of these, 202 had reported a functional disability,[3] even if they have an assistive device available (such as glasses, hearing aids or a mobility device) (see Table 1). The sample included more females (2,802) than males (2,008). Of the females, and because GAGE over-sampled those who had experienced child marriage, 734 had been married prior to age 18. At the time they were surveyed, the younger cohort had a mean age of 14.3 years; we refer to these individuals as adolescents. The older cohort had a mean age of 18.9 years. To distinguish these young people from those in the younger cohort, we refer to them as young adults, despite the fact that a small minority of them are legal minors under the age of 18.

An important point to note, for interpreting our findings, is that the younger cohort (3,857 adolescents) is much larger than the older cohort (953 young adults). The younger cohort is also more likely to be rural than the older cohort (approximately 90% versus 65%). Because of these differences, means by cohort that do not take account of location cannot be directly compared, thus our findings are presented by cohort. For some indicators, we present changes over time. Specifically, we present change between Round 2 and Round 3, because both those samples included the older rural adolescents who were added for Round 2.

The qualitative sample for this report was primarily purposively drawn from the larger quantitative sample. It also, however, includes additional research participants who were purposively selected to explore the effects of the conflict in South Gondar—given that this was a major shock to young people, their households, and their communities. Because of the security situation and the timeline of the national election, the Round 3 qualitative data was not collected in a single window. It instead represents an amalgamation of six rounds of data collected in Debre Tabor and rural South Gondar and East Hararghe during the same time period in which surveys were fielded. In total, the qualitative sample includes 203 interviews with 336 individual young people, as well as 37 interviews with 219 individual caregivers and 141 interviews with 198 individual key informants (see Table 2).

2 This total includes: a) 1,124 older rural adolescents (aged 17-19 at recruitment) from East Hararghe, South Gondar, and Afa-- of these 680 were female (490 of whom were married) and 444 were male (117 of whom were married), b) 387 married adolescents, including those living in the same three rural areas (aged 10-16 at recruitment) and in GAGE's urban locations (aged 14-20 at recruitment), c) 157 adolescents with disabilities (aged 10-20 at recruitment)—but only 64 new individuals who were not part of a and b already detailed, and d) 140 adolescents with characteristics of special interest (e.g. those who were internally displaced or out of school)—but only 80 new individuals who were not part of a, b and c already detailed.

3 Determined by using the Washington Group Questionnaire: https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss/

Figure 2: GAGE Round 3 research locations

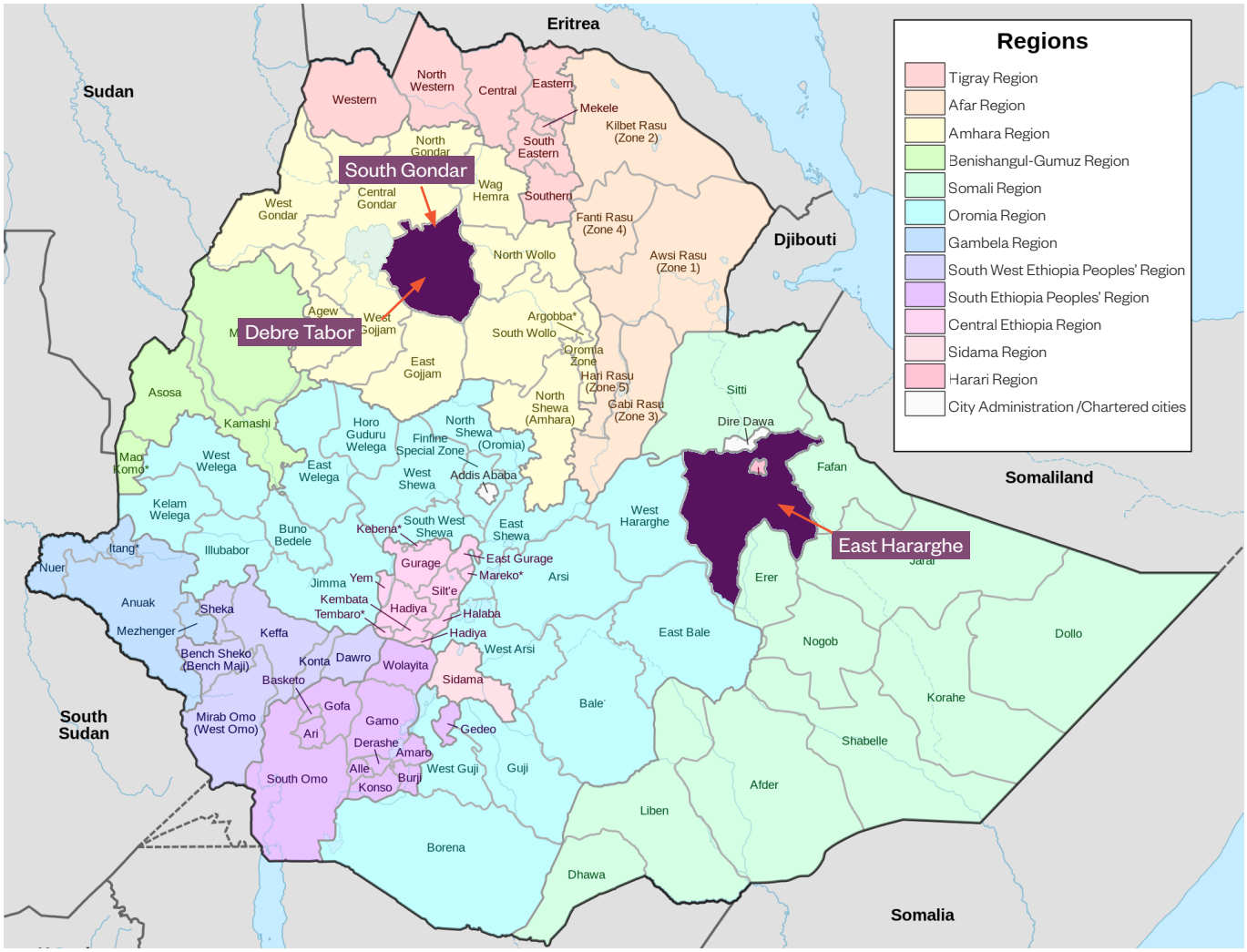


Table 1: Quantitative panel sample

	Locations			Sub-sample of those with disability	Sub-sample of girls married <18	Total
	Rural South Gondar	Rural East Hararghe	Urban Debre Tabor			
Females	1260	1164	378	107	734	2802
Males	852	816	340	95	na	2008
Younger cohort	1777	1704	376	157	377	3857
Older cohort	335	276	342	45	357	953
Total	2112	1980	718	202	734	4810

Quantitative survey data was collected through face-to-face interviews[4] by enumerators who were trained to communicate with marginalised populations. Surveys were broad and included modules reflecting the GAGE conceptual framework (see Hamory et al., 2024). Analysis of the quantitative survey data focused on a set of indicators related to psychosocial well-being (data tables are available on request). Statistical analysis was conducted using Stata 17.0. For simplification, differences cited in the text as statistically significant have a p-value<0.05.

Qualitative tools, employed by researchers who spoke the respondent's native language (Amharic or Afaan Oromo) and had been trained to communicate sensitively with adolescents, consisted of interactive activities such as timelines, body mappings and vignettes, which were used in individual and group interviews (see Jones et al., 2024). 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.

4 Twenty-seven adolescents were interviewed by phone.

Table 2: Qualitative sample

Respondent Type	Sex	Location			Total
		Rural		Urban	
		South Gondar	East Hararghe	Debre Tabor	
Adolescents	Girls	56 (90)	11 (27)	9	76 (126)
	Boys	50 (81)	12 (29)	6	68 (116)
Total		106 (171)	23 (56)	15	144 (242)
Young adults	Females	13 (22)	8 (16)	8	29 (46)
	Males	13 (25)	6 (12)	11	30 (48)
Total		26 (47)	14 (28)	19	59 (94)
Sub-sample of those with disability		5 (11)	-	3	8 (14)
Sub-sample of girls married <18		5 (8)	2	2	9 (12)
Sub-sample of IDPs		4 (16)	-		4 (16)
Parents/Caregivers	Mothers	10 (58)	6 (35)	3 (18)	19 (111)
	Fathers	10 (56)	5 (34)	3 (18)	18 (108)
Total		20 (114)	11 (69)	6 (36)	37 (219)
Key informants		99 (125)	32 (63)	10	14 (198)
TOTAL		265 (492)	82 (218)	55 (85)	402 (795)

The table presents the number of interviews and then in brackets indicates the total number of participants as some interviews were with pairs or groups of people

Prior to commencing research, GAGE secured approval from ethics committees at ODI and George Washington University, the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists, and the research ethics boards from the relevant regional Bureaus of Health of Ethiopia. We also secured informed assent from adolescents aged 17 and under, and informed consent from their caregivers, and from adolescents aged 18 or above. There was also a robust protocol for referral to services, tailored to the different realities of the diverse research sites (Baird et al., 2020).

Findings

Our findings are organised according to the main risks to young people's bodily integrity: corporal punishment at home and at school; bullying and youth violence; sexual violence; FGM; and child and forced marriage and intimate partner violence. As noted earlier, survey findings are presented by cohort – first for adolescents and then for young adults.

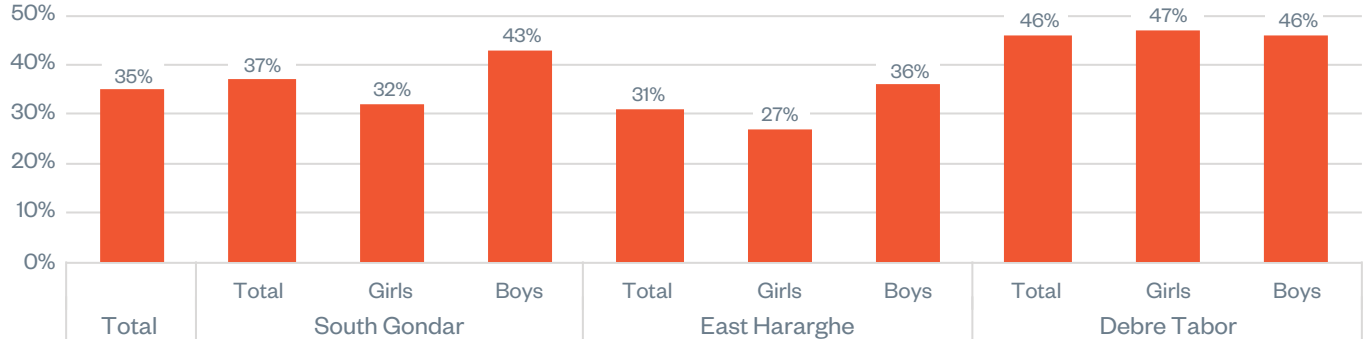
Violence at home

Survey findings for adolescents

The Round 3 survey found that more than a third of adolescents (35%) reported experiencing violence by a parent or other adult in their home in the 12 months preceding the survey (see Figure 3). Location differences were significant. Adolescents in urban Debre Tabor (46%) were more likely to report experiencing violence than their rural peers (37% in South Gondar and 31% in East Hararghe). This is probably because (as we discuss below) they were more aware and less likely to normalise violent treatment. In both rural locations, gender differences were also significant, with boys more likely to report experiencing violence than girls (43% versus 32% in South Gondar, and 36% versus 27% in East Hararghe). Again, as we discuss in the qualitative analysis below, this reflects the fact that boys are generally less compliant, while girls are ashamed to report violence. Due to norms surrounding intimate partner violence, which is deemed a very private matter (see below), only 5% of adolescents report having witnessed or overheard their father use violence against their mother.

Since the Round 2 survey, the proportion of adolescents reporting experiencing violence at the hands of a parent or other adult in the home has fallen significantly, by 10 percentage points. Declines were largest in East Hararghe (16 percentage points), and were far larger there for boys (23 percentage points) than for girls (10 percentage points). It is possible that some of these declines were driven by adolescents leaving their natal home as they get older.

Figure 3: Adolescents experiencing violence at the hands of a parent or other adult in the household in the past year



Survey findings for young adults

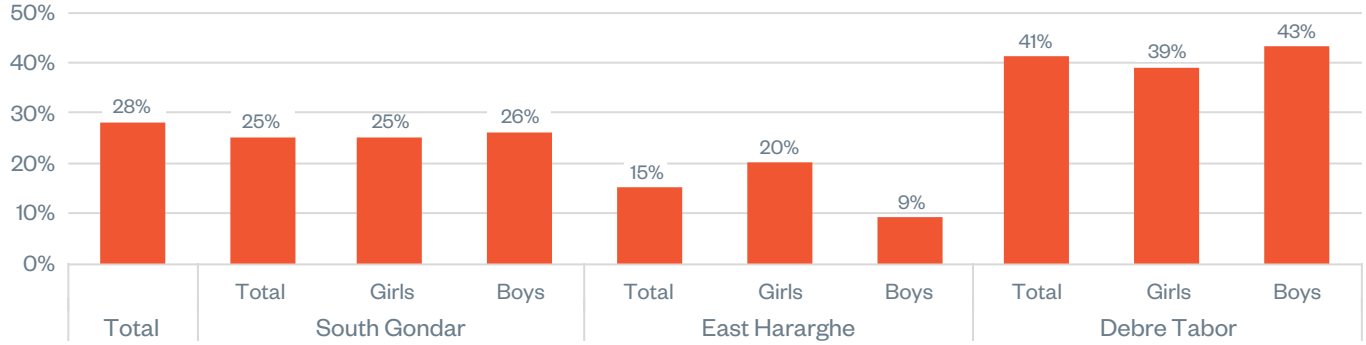
In part because they are less likely to be living at home, in part because they are broadly seen as too old to be disciplined, and in part because young adults are better able to take instructions from their parents, only (25%) report having experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver or other adult living in the home in the 12 months preceding the survey (see Figure 4). Location differences were significant, with young adults in urban Debre Tabor (41%) again more likely to report experiencing violence than their rural peers. In East Hararghe, gender differences were significant: young women, who (as we discuss below) are beaten by their mother for not completing chores fast enough, are at twice the risk of violence as young men (20% versus 9%). This is a very different pattern from the one seen in South Gondar and Debre Tabor, where rates are the same, and if anything slightly higher for young men. Only 4% of young adults reported having witnessed/overheard violence by another family member against their female caregiver in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Since the Round 2 survey, the proportion of young adults reporting experiencing violence at home has fallen significantly, by 8 percentage points. Again, this may be due to their having left the natal home as they get older.

Qualitative findings

Across locations, young people, and especially younger adolescent boys, report being violently disciplined by their parents for violating expectations. They note that discipline includes being hit, pinched, tied with ropes, and forced to inhale the smoke of burning peppers – for offences ranging from installing a forbidden app on their phone (in Debre Tabor), to losing control of livestock, to refusing to do as they are told, and fighting with others. A 12-year-old boy from East Hararghe recalled his experience: '*They [parents] beat us with sticks. For example, my father has beaten me when I do not accept and accomplish his instruction.*' A 15-year-old boy from South Gondar related a classmate's experience: '*The mother was hitting her [the girl] while forcing her to inhale the smoke of burning chilli.*' Notably, young people do not always see this violence as unjust because they – like their parents – see it as a necessary part of child-rearing. A 14-year-old boy from South Gondar explained, '*My father loves me, but he hits me. Fathers hit the child because he wants him to stop doing the wrong things.*' This may help explain why only a minority of adolescents have ever spoken to someone about the violence they have experienced at home (see Box 1).

Figure 4: Young adults experiencing violence at the hands of a parent or other adult in the household in the past year

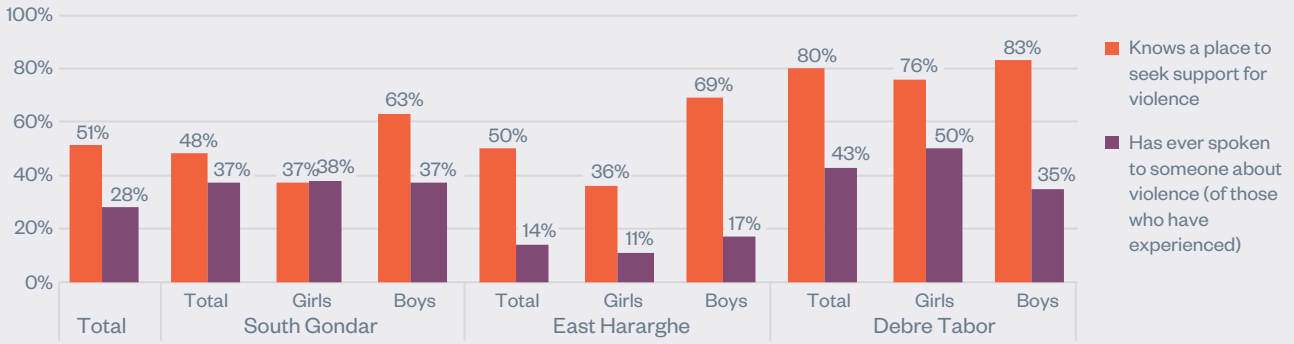


Box 1: Support-seeking for violence

Survey findings for adolescents

The Round 3 survey found that half of adolescents (51%) know where to seek support for violence (see Figure 5). Location differences were significant, with adolescents in Debre Tabor (80%) far more likely to know where to seek support than their rural peers. Gender differences were significant in rural areas. Rural boys were more likely to report knowing a place to seek support than rural girls. Compared to the Round 2 survey, adolescents' knowledge has improved by 5 percentage points, with improvements driven by boys in East Hararghe (13 percentage points) and girls in Debre Tabor (15 percentage points).

Figure 5: Support-seeking for violence, adolescents

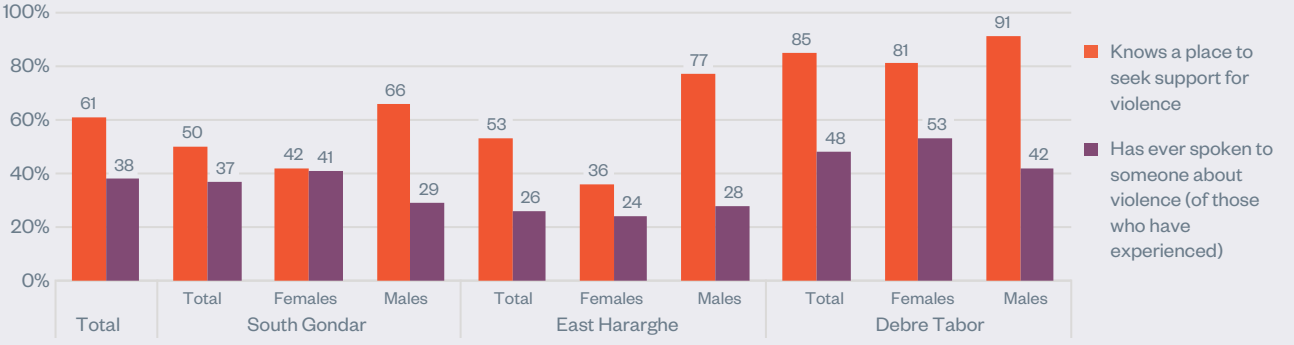


Of adolescents who had experienced violence at home or from a peer, the survey found that 28% had ever spoken to someone about that violence (see Figure 5). Location differences were significant, with those in East Hararghe (14%) less likely to have spoken to someone than their peers in other locations. In East Hararghe, gender differences were also significant, with boys more likely than girls to have spoken of violence (17% versus 11%). Compared to the Round 2 survey, adolescent girls in South Gondar are 8 percentage points less likely to have spoken of violence at Round 3. In East Hararghe, girls (15 percentage points) and boys (23 percentage points) are less likely to have spoken of violence.

Survey findings for young adults

The survey found that nearly two-thirds (61%) of young adults know a place where someone experiencing violence could seek support (see Figure 6). As with adolescents, location differences were significant, with those in urban Debre Tabor (85%) more aware of where to seek support than their rural peers. In all locations, young men are significantly more likely to know where to seek support than young women (78% versus 51%). Approximately 18 months since the Round 2 survey, young women in East Hararghe were 21 percentage points less likely to know a place to seek support if someone is experiencing violence.

Figure 6: Support-seeking for violence, young adults



Of young adults who had experienced violence at home or from a peer in the 12 months preceding the survey, 38% had ever spoken to someone about that violence (see Figure 6). Location differences were significant, with those in East Hararghe (26%) less likely to have spoken to someone than their peers in other locations. Gender differences were not significant (due to small sample size).

Young people reported that violence is meted out by both parents. In some cases, they report that mothers are disciplinarians, because it is mothers and not fathers who are tasked with child-rearing. Adolescent girls – especially those from East Hararghe – are particularly at risk for being beaten by their mother. A 12-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained:

> *Most of the time, girls are beaten by their mother. When girls become late coming from fetching water or firewood, mothers beat them. When girls play outside the home with someone forgetting the domestic chores, mothers beat them.*

A 15-year-old boy from Debre Tabor added, '*Last year, I had bad behaviour … my mother beat me many times … She is strong*.' In other cases, young people report that their mother '*didn't hit us, but hands out advice*' (12-year-old boy, South Gondar) and that '*whether a girl or a boy, the father will beat*' (16-year-old boy, East Hararghe). A 13-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained that in his family, both parents perpetrate violence, but in different ways: '*Mothers always do the pinching while fathers are masters of the stick*.'

As noted in GAGE's most recent report on adolescents' bodily integrity in Ethiopia (Presler-Marshall et al., 2022), respondents were unanimous about why violence is declining over time: adolescents are growing up. A 16-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained that it is younger children that are beaten, not adolescents, explaining that, '*They [parents] beat the younger children … because they are too young and cannot obey advice. They do not hit us currently*.' A mother from Debre Tabor agreed, '*You can only beat the small kids … We cannot beat our children these days*.' A 12-year-old boy from East Hararghe added nuance to this explanation, noting that adolescents, especially boys, are also more capable of fighting back: '*Older sons do not accept the punishment from fathers and they may try to quarrel with the fathers. Older sons can also escape when fathers try to beat them*.'

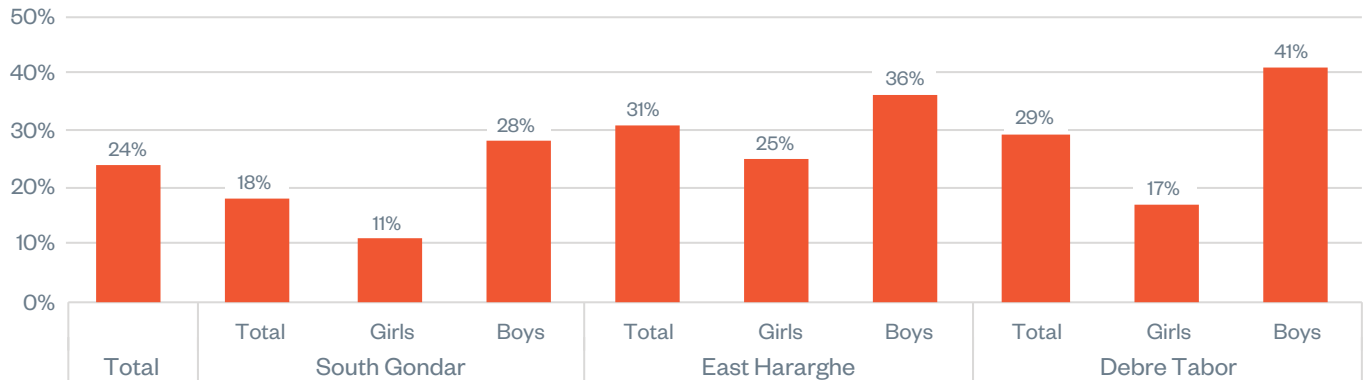
It was common for younger adolescents to report that their older brothers also perpetrate violence at home. Girls and boys reported being hit by their older brothers for failing to do their chores and for skipping school. A 15-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained that he beats his young brother at his father's bequest: '*My father tells me to hit my brother with thinner stick. He tells me not to hit him with big/thick stick. They tell me to beat him up if he fails to obey them*.' Girls (especially in East Hararghe, where adolescent-driven child marriages are common) also reported being hit by older brothers for interacting with boys and jeopardising family honour. An 11-year-old girl from East Hararghe stated, '*If you agreed and start a relationship with a boy and your brother knew that, he will beat you*.'

Corporal punishment at school

Survey findings for adolescents

Of the 75% of adolescents still enrolled at the time of the Round 3 survey, just under a quarter (24%) – and 31% of students with disabilities (see Box 2) – had experienced corporal punishment at school in the 12 months preceding the survey (see Figure 7). Location differences were significant. Adolescents in South Gondar (18%) were less likely to report teacher violence than their peers in Debre Tabor (29%) and East Hararghe (31%). Girls were significantly less likely to report experiencing corporal punishment than boys, probably because (as we discuss below) boys tend to be less compliant than girls.

Figure 7: Corporal punishment at school in the past year, adolescents



Compared to the Round 2 survey results, and again most likely due to adolescents' maturation, the proportion of adolescents reporting experiencing corporal punishment at Round 3 had declined by 19 percentage points (see Figure 8). While declines were significant for all groups of adolescents, they were largest among those in East Hararghe (25 percentage points), perhaps because – as noted in the companion report on Round 3 findings for education – enrolment falls off fastest in that location, leaving only the more committed students attending class (Presler-Marshall et al., 2024a). Declines were smallest in South Gondar (14 percentage points). While the decline in corporal punishment was reported to be very similar for girls and boys in East Hararghe and South Gondar, in urban Debre Tabor, boys experienced a 26 percentage point decline while girls experienced only a 15 percentage point decline.

Survey findings for young adults

At Round 3, and with the caveat that many young women in rural areas were purposively selected because they had been married, one-quarter of rural young adults – compared with three-quarters of their peers in urban Debre Tabor – were still enrolled in school. Of these students, the survey found that 12% had experienced corporal punishment at school in the 12 months preceding the survey (see Figure 9). Rates varied from 9% in South Gondar to 11% in Debre Tabor, and 17% in East Hararghe (for males only, because there were too few young women enrolled to report). Rates among males were higher across all locations.

In the approximately 18 months between the Round 2 and Round 3 surveys, some young adult students saw their exposure to corporal punishment at school decline significantly. In particular, young women in South Gondar and young men in Debre Tabor were 14 percentage points less likely to have experienced teacher violence in the past year at Round 3 than at Round 2 (see Figure 10).

Figure 8: Declines in teacher violence between Round 2 and Round 3, adolescents

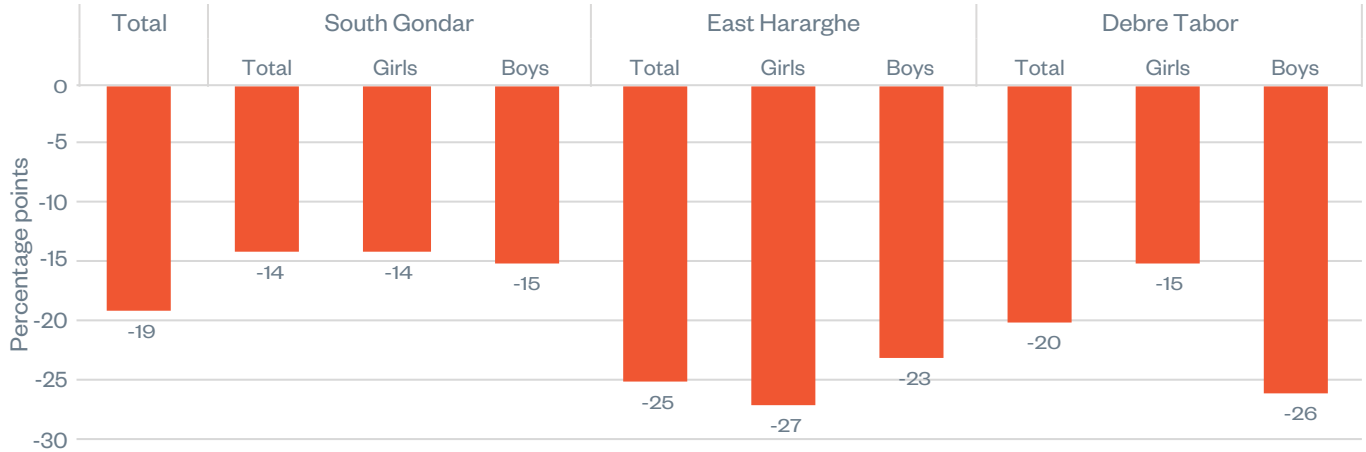
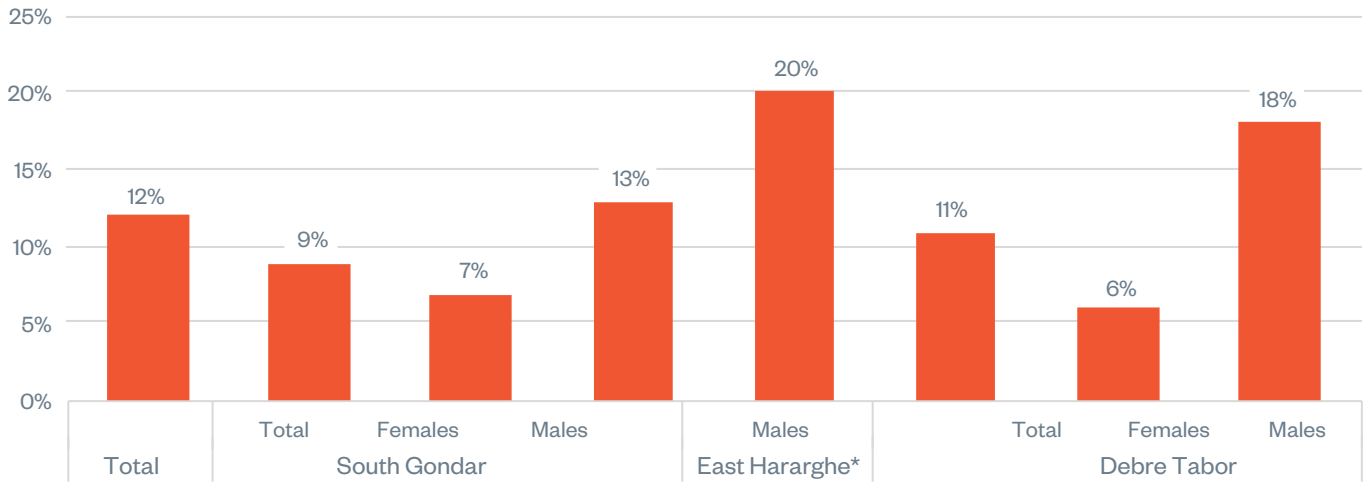
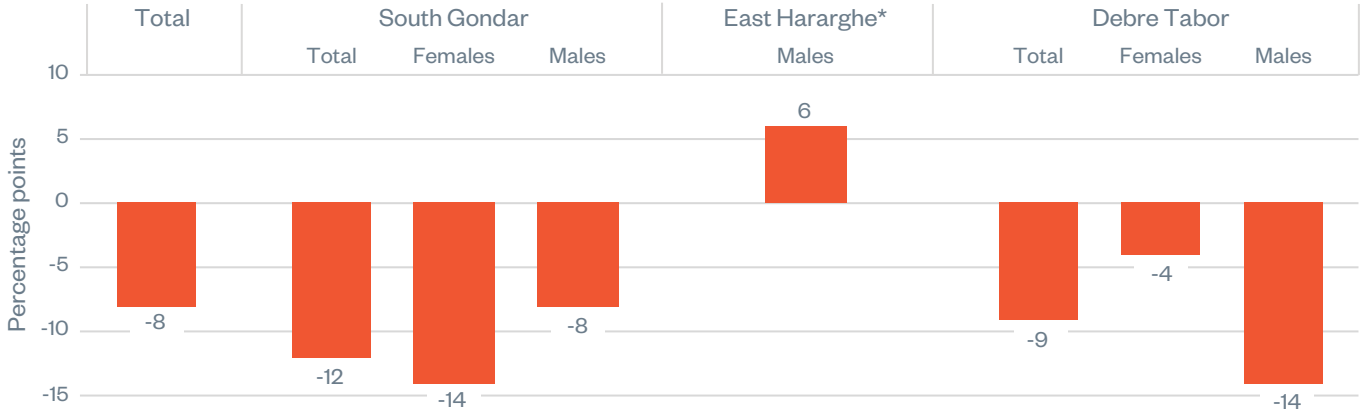


Figure 9: Corporal punishment at school in the past year, young adults



*There were too few young women enrolled in East Hararghe to report.

Figure 10: Declines in teacher violence between Round 2 and Round 3, young adults

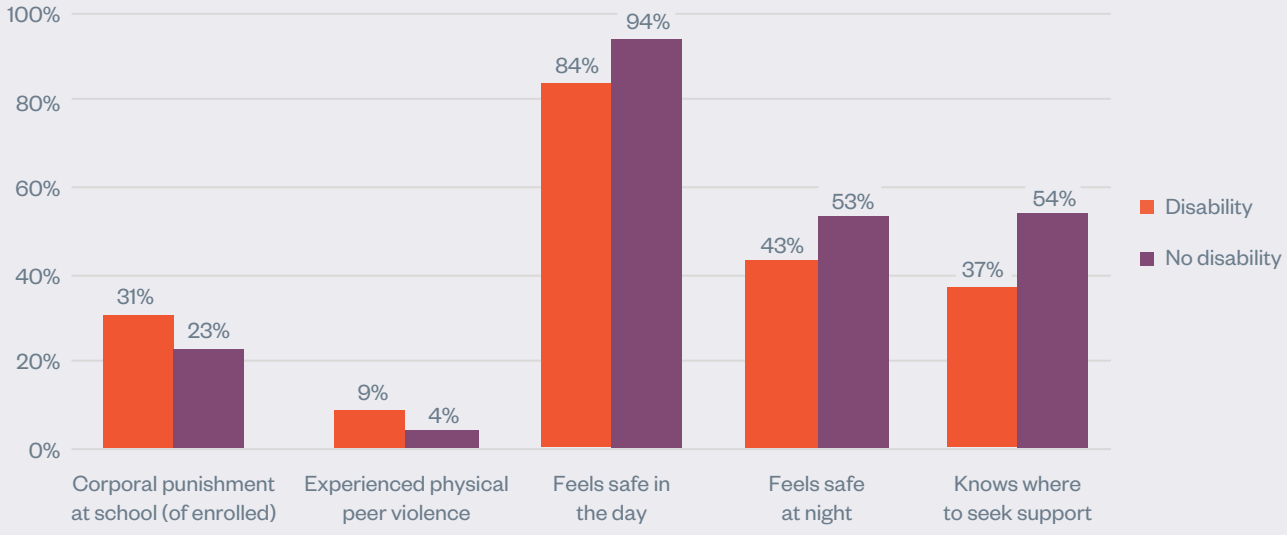


*There were too few young women enrolled in East Hararghe to report.

Box 2: Disability increases young people's risk of violence

The Round 3 survey found that compared with young people without disabilities, young people with disabilities were more likely to have experienced corporal punishment from a teacher in the 12 months preceding the survey (31% versus 23%) (see Figure 11). They were also more likely to have experienced physical peer violence (9% versus 4%), and less likely to feel safe day and night, and to know where to seek support for violence.

Figure 11: Bodily integrity indicators by disability status



Young people with vision impairments, living in South Gondar and taking part in GAGE's participatory research, reported that disability leaves them at heightened risk of all forms of violence. A 17-year-old boy stated that his father taunts him for being less able than his sighted brother:

> *If I and my brother are making mistakes together, we could be beaten equally. What is worse on me is my father insults me as 'you are a dependent person forever!'*

A 16-year-old boy commented that adolescents with disabilities are given more chores (and harder chores) than their siblings. He stated, '*More than the normal ones, adolescents with disability have much work burden … Harder jobs are given to girls with disability*.' Young people also noted that girls with disabilities are at heightened risk of sexual violence, because they cannot hear or see who is approaching them and because, if they have a vision impairment, they are at risk of being tricked by people who offer to guide them home. A 17-year-old girl explained:

> *We do not recognise when someone is coming near to us. Those who can see can identify a person from distance. They may escape attacks or report it, since they see and identify him, but visually impaired people cannot do that.*

Qualitative findings

At Round 3, most respondents agreed that corporal punishment at school is less common now that young people are in mid-adolescence and early adulthood. A 16-year-old girl from Debre Tabor reported, '*There were punishments with hitting when we were at elementary school but currently there are no punishments … because we are grown-ups*.' A 17-year-old boy from South Gondar agreed: '*No one was hit by the teacher in high school*.' Students in South Gondar and Debre Tabor, where there have been more efforts to enforce the government's ban on corporal punishment at school, also reported efforts to reduce violence, with teachers using words rather than fists, and principals sending students home to bring in their parents for joint conversations. A 14-year-old boy from South Gondar explained how two disruptive students were recently disciplined: '*The principal told them to bring their parents and he gave advice to them together with their parents*.'

That said, teacher violence remains common and can be severe. Across locations, students reported being hit for being late to school, for not having done their homework, for answering questions incorrectly, for talking with their friends, for chewing gum, or for being disrespectful to school staff. A 16-year-old boy from East Hararghe, enrolled in 6th grade, reported having been beaten by his school principal for talking back to his teacher:

> *The principal beat me up a lot. He hit me on my back and legs! He beat me so harshly and made me to beg that I wouldn't repeat the behaviour.*

A 13-year-old girl, also from East Hararghe, commented that she is afraid to go to school:

> *We fear the teachers … We will be punished when we do something wrong and when we didn't get answers correct like our classmates … Mostly they use a stick to punish us.*

A mother from Debre Tabor explained that despite efforts to eliminate corporal punishment at school, her children are '*now terrified to go to school because the class leaders and the teachers all beat them*'.

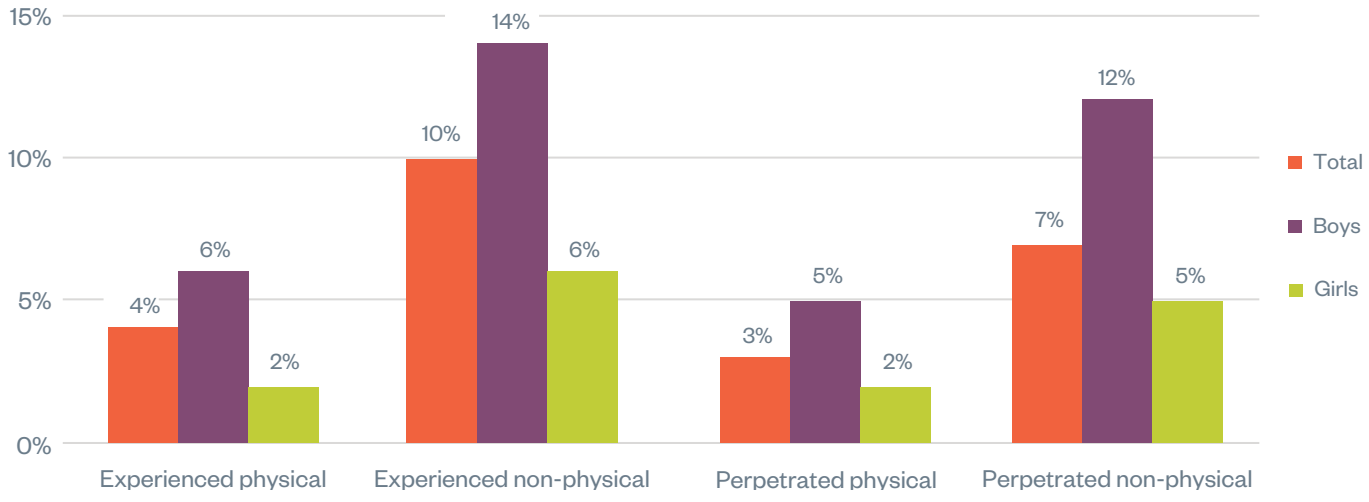
As was the case at Baseline and Round 2, young people reported that boys are more at risk of corporal punishment than girls, because they are more likely to be disruptive. A 15-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained, '*They punish boys more severely … The girls don't misbehave as much as boys. That is why boys' punishment is more*.' As noted earlier, when girls are beaten, it is generally for reasons beyond their control, such as being late to school because they were making breakfast for others in their family.

Peer and youth violence

Survey findings for adolescents

The Round 3 survey found that 16% of adolescents reported experiencing peer violence in the year preceding the survey (see Figure 12). Across locations, only 4% of adolescents reported having experienced physical peer violence, while 10% reported having experienced non-physical peer violence. A smaller number of adolescents admitted perpetrating violence against others; 3% reported having perpetrated physical peer violence, and 7% admitted to having perpetrated non-physical violence. Boys were more at risk than girls both for experiencing and perpetrating physical and non-physical peer violence.

Figure 12: Peer violence in the past year, adolescents



In part due to their maturation, adolescents were significantly less likely to experience and perpetrate peer violence at Round 3 than at Round 2. Aggregating across locations and combining girls and boys, the proportion of adolescents reporting having experienced physical peer violence was down by 5 percentage points; the proportion reporting having experienced non-physical peer violence was down by 10 percentage points. Declines for perpetrated physical and non-physical peer violence were 5 and 7 percentage points respectively.

Survey findings for young adults

The Round 3 survey found that in the year preceding the survey, 3% of young adults had experienced physical peer violence and 10% had experienced non-physical peer violence (see Figure 13). Rates of perpetration were 3% and 6% respectively. Young men were more at risk than young women of perpetrating and experiencing violence.

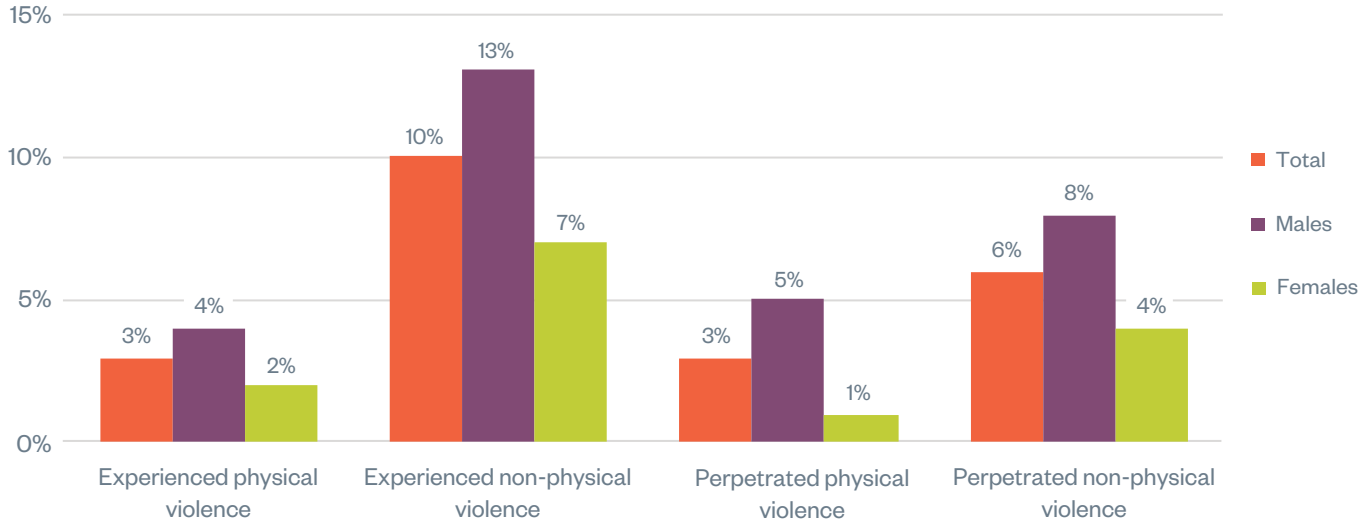
Young adults were less likely to report experiencing and perpetrating peer violence at Round 3 than at Round 2. Aggregating across locations and combining girls and boys, the proportion of young adults reporting having experienced physical peer violence was down by 4 percentage points; the proportion experiencing non-physical peer violence was down by 7 percentage points; and the proportion reporting having perpetrated non-physical peer violence was down by 7 percentage points.

Qualitative findings

Qualitative findings suggest, however, that young people (especially those in rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor) tend to normalise everyday violence and do not always interpret the youth violence that surrounds them as peer violence. Across locations, adolescents and young adults alike reported that boys and young men regularly engage in violence with one another. This fighting is often linked to substance use (alcohol in South Gondar and *khat*[5] in East Hararghe) and is most often attributed to males' attempts to claim the affections of particular girls and young women. A 12-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained that in his *kebele* (neighbourhood), older boys '*fight each other over girls … they even fight each other using stones*'. A 17-year-old boy from Debre Tabor reported much the same: '*Students fight in the school area … because of females*'. Other respondents noted that boys and young men fight just to prove they are strong. A 13-year-old boy from East Hararghe stated, '*Sometimes the youths of one kebele organised to fight with the youths of another kebele*.'

In rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor, respondents universally described '*a huge security problem*' (15 year-old boy, Debre Tabor), especially after the conflict in northern Ethiopia and the rise of the Fano[6] movement, which over time increasingly resorted to violence as a means to mobilise support. Young people,

Figure 13: Peer violence in the past year, young adults



5 *Khat* is a shrub grown in East Africa. Its leaves are chewed as a stimulant.

6 The Fano is an ethno-nationalist Amhara militia and protest movement that played an active role in the conflict in northern Ethiopia and which continues to play an influential role in Amhara regional politics. Although the group's historic roots stretch back to resistance against the Italian fascist occupation of Ethiopia (1935–1941), the current Fano took shape during mass protests from 2016 to 2018 and was initially a loosely organised youth movement. Over time, the Fano militia fighters have clashed with the federal government as the group has refused to give up arms and there are ongoing tensions with national security forces (The Africa Report, 2023; Necho and Debebe, 2024).

caregivers and key informants all agreed that daytime property crime and violence – including kidnapping for ransom – has increased, that the streets are life-threateningly dangerous after dark, that school campuses are not safe, that the situation is worsening rather than improving, and that boys and young men are to blame. A 16-year-old boy from rural South Gondar reported that the community is not safe, '*Youths in this area also drink alcohol, they disturb the community, fight each other, stab each other using a knife.*' A 12-year-old boy from the same location added that even children are at risk:

> *When the children were looking after the cattle, they attacked the children and they took the sheep and they hit the children really hard … Children were also abducted from this kebele by the youths …They asked 300,000 birr or more from the family to release the child.*

A 14-year-old girl from Debre Tabor noted that schools are not safe spaces, '*The school does not have a fence and so outsiders can come into the school … Even the teachers cannot stop them.*' Respondents agreed that recent conflict has exacerbated security concerns, because communities are flooded with guns and ammunition. An 18-year-old young man explained that:

> *Before the war, if a person shoots a single gun without reason, he was punished 1,500 birr, but currently a person shoots 30 bullets in a single night, no one forbids him … Before the war, a bullet was sold with 100 birr, after the war it is 25 or 30 birr. People are buying many bullets at a time and they use it for illegal purposes, which scales up insecurity.*

Respondents in rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor also agreed that efforts to contain and reduce violence have failed. Indeed, they noted that many community members are too afraid at this stage to even identify those who perpetrate the violence. A father from Debre Tabor reported how:

> *One day the militiaman brought a criminal to a court. The court sentenced him a short stay in prison. When the criminal was released, he started to revenge himself. He brutally attacked the very militia [that prosecuted him]. The people are afraid of such bad consequences, so they don't want to cooperate with the police to catch the criminal.*

Another father commented that even when community members do report crime, justice officials are often either corrupt or afraid of retaliation, and so are unwilling to prosecute:

> *Last Wednesday, we caught a thief red-handed. We took him to a police station and the exhibits were demonstrated before the eyes of the police. The chief of the police station ordered to return the exhibits to the owners and to send the thief free.*

A 15-year-old boy from South Gondar stated that the risk of retaliation has grown in recent years, because now perpetrators are more heavily armed. He explained, '*The situation became worse after the TPLF's [Tigray People's Liberation Front] conflict since many people are now equipped with guns.*'

Youth violence in rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor is widely attributed by young people and adults to unemployment and hopelessness. A 16-year-old boy from Debre Tabor explained that boys and young men resort to crime because they have nothing else to do:

> *The adolescents graduate and they simply sit in their house and when they sit for long, they become hopeless and they start to engage in robbery. The number of adolescents who don't have jobs is very high in this city.*

A father from South Gondar agreed:

> *Boys and youths, especially those who graduated from their college studies, are engaging in criminal acts like killing each other, robbing others, etc. These all are due to despair for their being unemployed.*

Sexual violence

Survey results for adolescents

At the Round 2 survey, 8% of adolescent girls reported ever experiencing sexual violence; that proportion had risen to 10% by Round 3 (see Figure 14). With the caveat that urban girls may be more likely to report than their rural peers, due to widespread beliefs in rural areas that girls are to blame for rape, reported sexual violence was most common among girls in Debre Tabor (14%) followed by South Gondar (10%) and East Hararghe (9%).

At Round 3, nearly half (46%) of adolescent girls responded that they did not feel safe in their communities at night (see Figure 15). Some (7%) also felt unsafe during daylight hours. Location differences were significant, with girls in South Gondar (11%) more likely to feel unsafe during the day and girls in Debre Tabor (82%) the most likely to feel unsafe at night.

Figure 14: Ever experienced sexual violence, adolescent girls

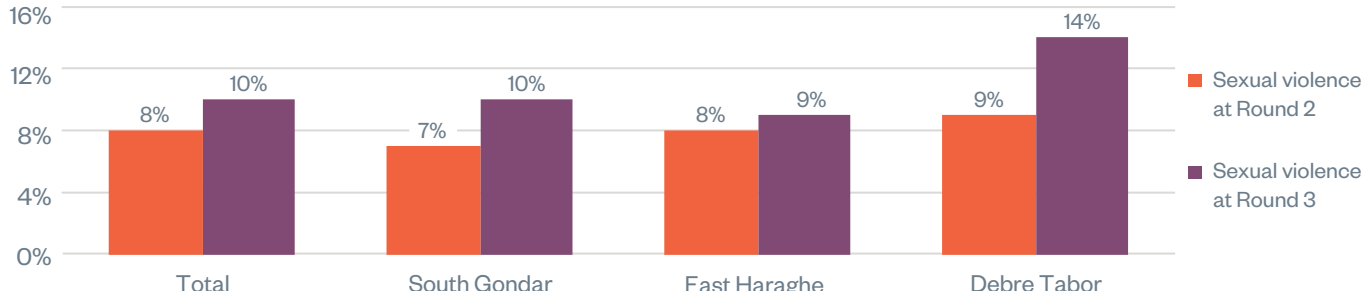
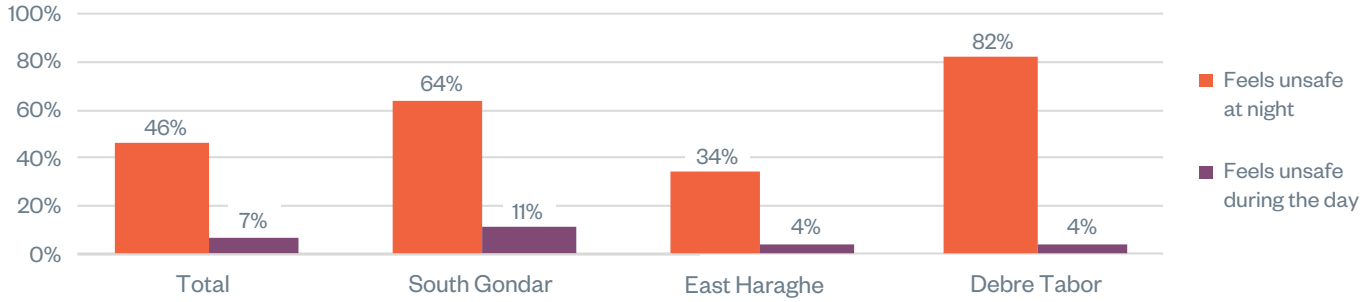


Figure 15: Adolescent girls' perceptions of safety in the community



Survey results for young adults

The Round 3 survey data shows that 20% of young women reported having ever experienced sexual violence, up from 15% at Round 2 (see Figure 16). At Round 3, rates of reported sexual violence were much higher in Debre Tabor (27%) and South Gondar (24%) (both areas that have seen recent conflict and are plagued by youth violence) than in East Hararghe (8%).

Approximately half of young women (52%) reported that they did not feel safe in their community at night (see Figure 17). Young women in urban Debre Tabor (79%) were more likely to feel unsafe than their peers in rural South Gondar (68%) and East Hararghe (25%). In South Gondar, 11% of young women did not feel safe even during daylight hours.

Figure 16: Ever experienced sexual violence, young women

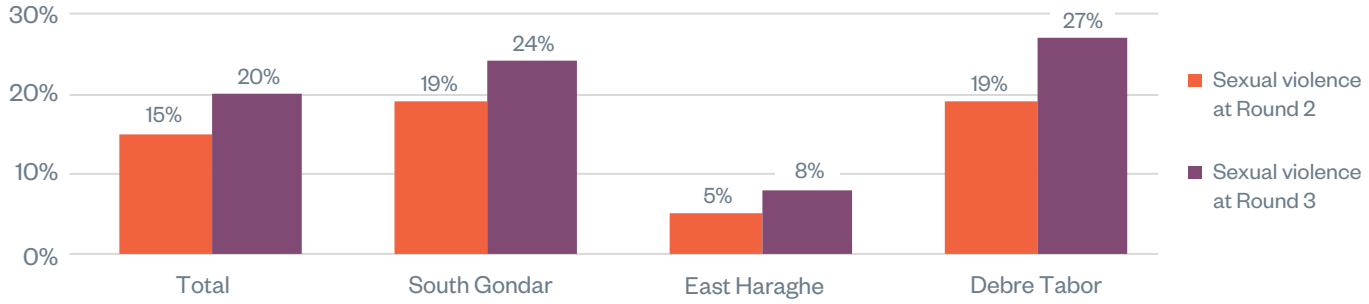
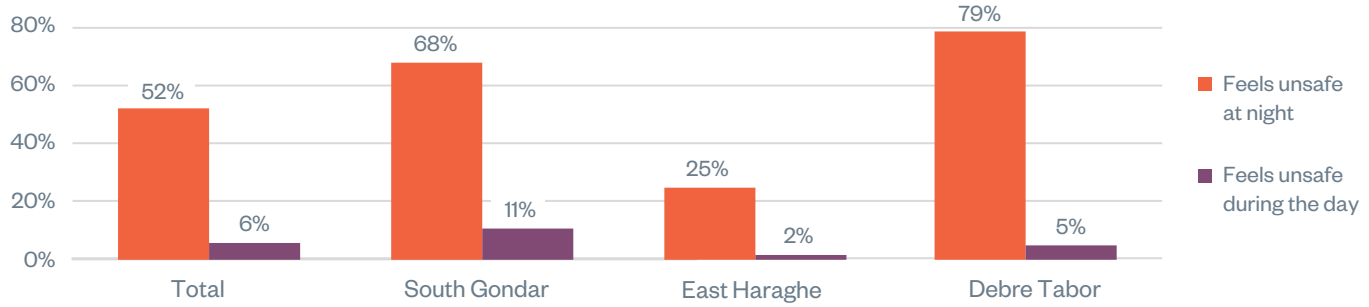


Figure 17: Young women's perceptions of safety in the community



Qualitative findings

Qualitative research found that girls and young women in all locations are at significant risk of sexual violence, but that their understanding of that violence shapes their reporting of it. In East Hararghe, several girls denied that rape exists in their community. A 15-year-old girl stated, '*there is no rape in our community*'. This is partly because the perpetrators of sexual violence in East Hararghe are usually boys and young men that are known to girls, meaning that parents (and girls themselves) blame girls for having been with those boys in the first place; and partly because girls '*give in*' to sexual violence rather than endure the physical violence that would ensue if they resisted. A 16-year-old girl reported that:

> *When it gets dark, boys want to have sex with girls, they beat the girl that refuses having sex … They do not beat the girl that accepts the request of having sex.*

Respondents added that girls rarely report having experienced sexual violence, even to their parents, because survivors are typically made to marry the boy or young man who raped them, to protect family honour. A 11-year-old girl explained it thus: '*Parents accept and approve marriage once she got raped, though they are not interested in that marriage*.'

Younger adolescent girls in East Hararghe often report sexual harassment (rather than sexual violence), though they do not frame the harassment as sexual. Indeed, most of the in-school younger girls in East Hararghe reported that they are at least occasionally harassed on their way to school by boys and young men who try to attract girls' attention by stealing their head scarves and schoolbooks. A 13-year-old girl explained:

> *Someone meets you on your way to school and wants to harass you when he finds that you are beautiful. You may meet a young man and he asks you to stand and talk with him, you may answer him 'I am going to school, I do not have time to stand and talk.' When you do not want to stop and talk with him, he may take your exercise book, your scarf or any other thing.*

Although an 11-year-old girl commented that it is possible to report this harassment to the school and even the Bureau of Education, and that educators do intervene, it is more common for girls to report that they are '*punished for going to school late*' (13-year-old girl) and that harassment contributes to school dropout.

In rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor, narratives about sexual violence are markedly different, in part because sexual violence is endemic and in part because it is typically perpetrated by strangers. A mother from Debre Tabor stated that 'any girl above the age of 10 can get raped'; a father from South Gondar added, '*many girls use contraceptives in case they face rape … unless girls are aware about contraceptives and use when they are raped, all girls would have been pregnant*'. Respondents reported that girls and young women are at risk '*anywhere outside the house*' (15-year-old girl, South Gondar), but especially when they are fetching water and fuelwood, travelling to and from school (which at secondary level can involve weekly commutes of four hours each way), and during the recent conflict (see Box 3). A father from South Gondar stated that:

> *I also observed boys violating girls while they were on their way to and from school, or the river where girls fetch water. My farmland is located alongside the road … and I observed boys harassing girls.*

As noted in the GAGE Round 3 companion report on psychosocial well-being, the constant threat of sexual violence leaves girls and young women in South Gondar feeling constantly anxious and distressed (Presler-Marshall et al., 2024b) (see Box 3).

Respondents in South Gondar reported that boys and young men are able to perpetrate sexual violence with near impunity, because of conservative gender norms that place a premium on girls' sexual purity before marriage. Most survivors do not even report rape, because they know they will be blamed for having violated those norms – and because they are afraid that if they report, then the perpetrator will target their family for further violence. An 18-year-old young woman from South Gondar explained it thus:

> *The community consider it serious when rape happens to girls of under 15 years old. If she is over 15, they blame her – 'why she did not shout for help or escape the violence?' They consider her grown and capable of self-protection.*

A mother from urban Debre Tabor echoed this view, stating that even parents are not sympathetic should their daughter be raped:

> *The community will not have a positive attitude towards her. Even if we know she was raped by force, they will*

Box 3: Conflict-related violence has left young people traumatised

Respondents in rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor reported that conflict-related violence has left young people extremely traumatised. Physical violence and destruction in some communities has been extreme. A 15-year-old girl from Debre Tabor recalled her experience:

> *We were scared that they would come here and kill us. Many people fled to other localities because of this fear … Only the poor and the ones who don't have family stayed here. We were scared because they ruined women, destroyed crops and killed people.*

Young people not only witnessed friends and family members being injured and killed, but many were pressed into conflict-related violence themselves. In some cases, adolescents participated in violence voluntarily – to protect their families and communities and, in the case of boys, to demonstrate their masculinity. A 19-year-old young man from Debre Tabor explained:

> *The role of the adolescents during the war was crucial … Those adolescents made a group and to protect the city from damage by using any defence material like swords and other weapons they had at hand.*

A 14-year-old boy commented:

> *We saw the destruction, the killing and the raping of our women … we saw many soldiers of the junta who were just kids and they were attacking us because they had the gun. Because of that, the youths feel ashamed running for those little children. So they want to join the military more than anything.*

In other cases, young people were forced into violence by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). A key informant from Debre Tabor recalled, '*They force young people in the areas they captured and force them to stand in the front row at the warfront*.'

According to respondents, the TPLF used rape as a weapon of war. Young people and adults reported that girls and women – even those who were very young, pregnant or elderly – were gang raped, often in front of their family members. A *kebele* leader in South Gondar reported that:

> *A mother and her grade 8 student daughter faced group rape by TPLF forces in one of our sub-kebeles. They were raped in the same room. They ambushed the husband of the mother before they raped them. They were raped the whole night.*

Another key informant noted that because of gender norms that value girls' and women's sexual purity, females lived in terror for months and survivors were at risk of suicide:

> *The psychological impact of the war was higher on girls than boys, because of what they heard about the atrocities the junta's force inflicted on girls … They were hearing about the sexual assaults on Amhara women and they were really afraid during that time … In addition to the rape, they were really afraid for the stigma by the community following the incident if they were raped by the junta … there were even some female adolescents who killed themselves after they were raped.*

> *smack their lips and feel sorry for her. Many would still say she got herself in to such situation and blame her. They would assume she wanted or asked for it … even parents are not understanding.*

As in East Hararghe, survivors of rape in South Gondar are regularly made to marry their rapist. A 17-year-old girl from Debre Tabor explained that, '*Here, virginity is dignity. Losing it is losing dignity*.' A boy the same age but from a rural community said, '*After rape, it is common to see elders pushing the man to marry the girl*.'

Sexual harassment was also reported to be common in South Gondar. In urban Debre Tabor, respondents stated that this includes catcalling and unwanted touching. One mother in Debre Tabor noted that this is considered by boys and young men as 'a *fun thing to do … because they are just kids*'. Across communities, sexual harassment was reported to also include stalking girls and young women, making unwanted marriage proposals, and threatening girls who refuse those proposals. A 13-year-old girl from Debre Tabor, who sought help from her teachers, explained why girls do not generally report their experiences:

> *Boys give the girls a hard time. They think it is a fashion or something … They even threaten the girls not to tell their teachers or the school. They say they will beat them if they tell a teacher. So, no one reports it.*

A 19-year-old boy prepares khat in East Hararghe, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

A 17-year-old boy from a rural community in South Gondar stated that as in East Hararghe, this harassment drives girls' school dropout – and child marriage:

> *These especially happen when girls pass grade 9 and come to learn in the town. The rural community prefer her to get married than going to town and marry. They usually tell her to quit her education and get married.*

Respondents noted that there are few safe options for rejecting male harassment. A 17-year-old boy from Debre Tabor stated that girls who ignore their harassers are at risk of physical violence, '*There are male students who violate female students physically if they didn't respond to their love question*.' A mother from the same community added that a young neighbour was recently abducted, raped, and married off when her harasser was not given permission to marry her:

> *He kidnapped the girl for a week. The mother told her daughter she does not want to see her again and to get married there. She told her not to come back after facing such an incident.*

Respondents in urban Debre Tabor and rural South Gondar reported that there is no one working to protect girls and young women from being violated – or working to ensure that survivors of sexual assault have access to justice and psychosocial services. Adolescents and adults admitted that bystanders to rape seldom intervene. A 12-year-old boy from a rural community reported that he had witnessed a rape last year and that the women who also witnessed it stood by:

> *The girl was 16. She was with two friends and her younger brother. The friends ran away when the man told them to run. The man hit the brother, he called for help as his sister was dragged away … She was telling him she wasn't on contraceptive but he dragged her to the forest anyways … She stopped screaming when he started hitting her … People did nothing … they were women and they did nothing to stop him.*

A 17-year-old girl from Debre Tabor explained that witnesses stay silent because they are terrified of retaliatory violence, '*They walk away for fear of the fact that the perpetrator will kill them if he identifies them*.' While survivors do report accessing health services after rape, for emergency contraceptives and treatment for physical injuries, access to justice appears non-existent. A 20-year-old young man from a rural community noted that the justice officers do not take rape seriously and are corrupt:

> *Those who work in justice are not serious. Unless you have [powerful] relatives, the justice [officers] do not give focus to your case and try to help you. We can say there is not justice here, they are not working.*

A *woreda*-level key informant agreed:

> *They do not give value to it as they do for other crimes … There is only one case so far where a man was sentenced to 17 years in prison. There is no other case that I know of in our woreda.*

Female genital mutilation

The Round 3 survey found that of adolescent girls, 25% in Debre Tabor, 40% in South Gondar, and 80% in East Hararghe had undergone FGM (see Figure 18). Rates for young women in Debre Tabor (24%) and rural South Gondar (35%) were similar to those for adolescents. In East Hararghe, however, where girls can be cut at any time prior to marriage, young women (94%) were significantly more likely to have been cut than adolescent girls.

In rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor, where FGM primarily takes place during infancy, most participants in qualitative research agreed that FGM has been eliminated. A 15-year-old girl from a rural community stated, '*There is no FGM in this community, the practice stopped … a long time ago*'. This is because, as a 14-year-old girl from a rural community explained:

> *[There] was education for the people for years. They were telling them the side effects, including the problem during delivery [giving birth] because the scar doesn't allow the full dilatation of the genital tract. There were many educated people who were creating the awareness for the community. We are also telling the side effects of FGM to people.*

That said, in line with previous GAGE research on FGM in Ethiopia, there is reason to interpret respondents' statements about how widespread the practice is with caution (Presler-Marshall et al., 2022). Because girls are cut as infants, many respondents do not in fact know whether they have undergone FGM. In addition, due to awareness-raising efforts, which include publicising the law, adults are incentivised to under-report and use hidden practices instead.

In East Hararghe, on the other hand, qualitative research participants confirmed survey findings that FGM remains effectively universal, with most girls cut before marriage and the remainder cut on their wedding day. They reported that while infibulation with scar tissue (Type 3) was regularly practised in the past, today most girls undergo clitorectomy (Type 1) and – in the communities nearest the Somali region – excision (Type 2). A 16-year-old girl explained the difference between the type of FGM she underwent compared with the type her grandmother underwent:

> *Now they cut only the tip [the clitoris] … Before, the cutter removed all the tissue, and then sewed it with thorns and tied the legs. They cut it again when she got married.*

Respondents stated that while girls used to undergo FGM before the age of 10, in recent years there has been a shift towards waiting until girls are 12 or 13 years old. This is because with recent increases in adolescent-driven child marriages, parents are using delayed FGM to delay the age at which girls marry. A 15-year-old girl explained:

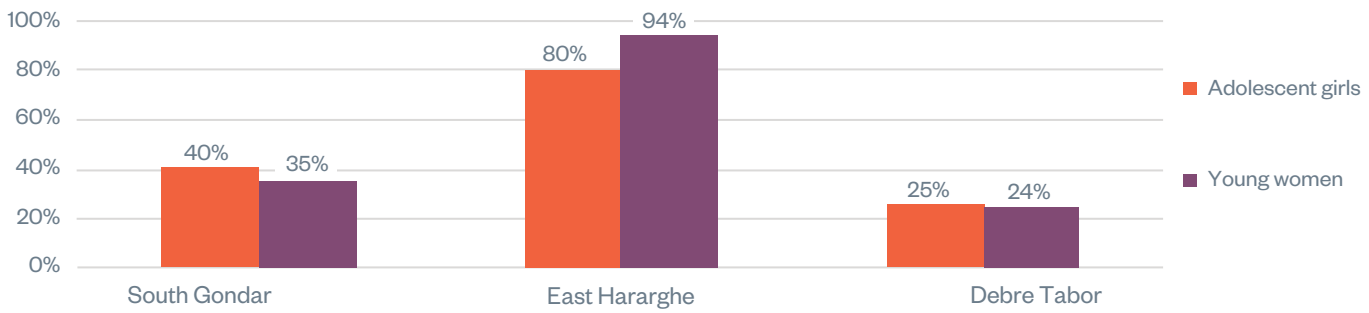
> *Some mothers delay FGM, so that the girl grows. They are afraid the girl will get married early once they experience FGM. Some girls beg their mother, cry and beg their mother to help her experience the cut. Some mothers reprimand them and tell them to wait till she grows [older].*

Adolescent girls and boys reported that they are committed to the continuation of FGM A 14-year-old girl stated that it is a cultural practice that is necessary in order to find a husband:

> *We are just following the footsteps of our foremothers. They have been practising it and we also kept practising it … We know that it is good … No man is interested in you if you are not circumcised.*

A 17-year-old boy echoed this view, saying, '*Boys want to marry circumcised girls … It is our culture*.' A 16-year-old boy commented that this is because community members believe that the clitoris '*grows bigger*' and closes the vagina, leaving it impossible for uncut girls to have sex.

Figure 18: Has undergone FGM



Despite the efforts of the Act with Her programme in Ethiopia (see Box 4), and in stark contrast to the situation in South Gondar, respondents in East Hararghe reported that there are few if any efforts to eliminate FGM. A 15-year-old boy explained that there is only discussion, no action, saying, '*Some people have been talking about the elimination of FGM but practically no actions have been taken by anybody*.' Indeed, a 15-year-old girl said that even those meant to be raising awareness about the risks of FGM are instead advocating that girls are cut in a timely manner: '*She [the AWH mentor] said if a girl gets married without experiencing FGM, she will face problems. She needs to get cut before marriage*.'

Child marriage

With the caveat that the GAGE sample was purposively drawn to include girls who had married as children, and therefore does not speak to the population prevalence of child marriage, girls and young women in our sample are very likely to have married as children. The Round 3 survey found that of adolescent girls (aged just over 14 years on average), 5% in Debre Tabor, 12% in South Gondar and 25% in East Hararghe had ever been married (see Figure 19). Of the young women in our sample (aged 19 years on average), and with the caveat that at Round 2, 353 rural girls were purposively selected into the sample because they had been married, a large majority (78%) of those in rural South Gondar and East Hararghe had married before the age of 18 at Round 3 (see Figure 20). In urban Debre Tabor, where sampling was not conditional on marital status, 18% of young women had married prior to adulthood.

Using only the younger cohort adolescent girls who were part of GAGE's random Baseline sample (i.e. excluding those who were sampled because they had married as children), it is possible to track girls' rates of child marriage over time. At Baseline, when girls were between the ages of 10-12, only two girls in East Hararghe (out of 1,168) and seven girls in South Gondar (out of 1,105) had been married (see Figure 21). By Round 2, 7% of girls in East Hararghe and 3% of girls in South Gondar had been married. By Round 3, rates had risen to 15% and 5% respectively.

As discussed earlier, violence is a driver of child marriage both in South Gondar and East Hararghe. Not only are girls and young women who have been raped often required to marry their rapist, but the threat of physical violence forces many girls (and their families) to capitulate to an unwanted marriage. A religious leader in East Hararghe reported that if a girl is abducted overnight, she cannot be returned to her family:

Box 4: Act with Her

The Act with Her (AwH) programme, implemented by two non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Pathfinder International and CARE, aims to improve the educational, health, psychosocial and economic outcomes of Ethiopian adolescent girls (see Hamory et al., 2023 for details). Delivered in different ways in different communities in rural South Gondar and East Hararghe, in order to tease apart the impacts of various aspects of programming, AwH provides adolescent girls – and sometimes boys – with near-peer mentors and an age-appropriate curriculum that focuses on sexual and reproductive health, negotiation skills, and gender norms. In some communities, the programme also works with parents and service providers.

Qualitative research suggests that Act with Her is contributing to reductions in age-based violence. Participating parents are learning to use non-violent discipline methods; adolescents (especially girls) are learning to negotiate with their parents regarding time-use; boys are learning to support their sisters with domestic work; and boys and girls are learning to eschew violence with one another. A 13-year-old girl from South Gondar reported that boys' harassment of girls en route to school has declined significantly since the programme began: '*Boys that attended the AwH programme are supportive, they do not beat girls or take their pen or exercises book*.'

AwH is also contributing to girls' and boys' awareness of violence – especially harmful and traditional practices such as FGM and child marriage and sexual violence – as well as how to protect themselves and report such incidences. A 14-year-old girl from East Hararghe explained:

> *There are different types of violence: verbal, emotional, physical, gender-based. Physical violence is beating, verbal violence results from using bad words, gender-based violence is violence like rape … We learn how to prevent violence and to shout for help.*

A 12-year-old boy, also from East Hararghe, said that he had learnt that child marriage is dangerous, because '*if you [girls] get married before you are old enough, you will be harmed during childbirth*'.

Figure 19: Child marriage, adolescent girls

Of adolescent girls, who were an average age of 14 years old, 25% of those in **East Hararghe** had already been **married**. Marriage was less common among girls in **rural South Gondar** (12%) and in **urban Debre Tabor** (5%).

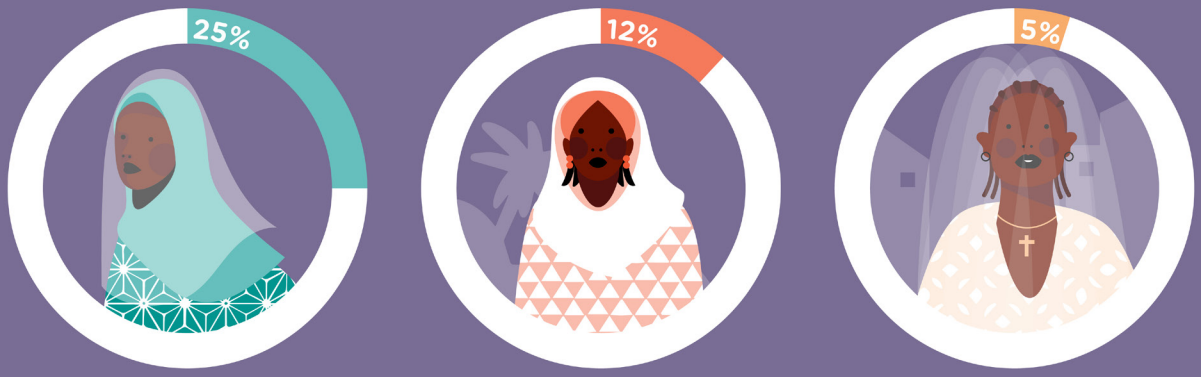


Figure 20: Child marriage, young women

Of young women living in rural East Hararghe and South Gondar, 78% were **married prior to age 18.**

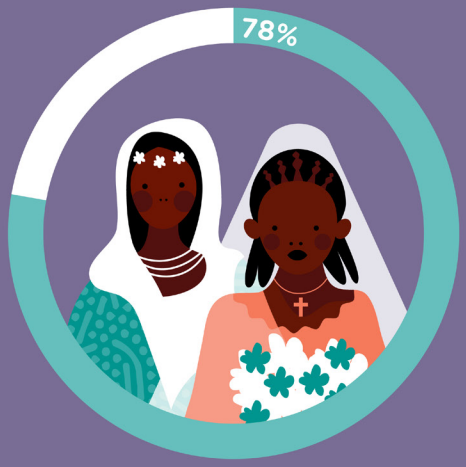
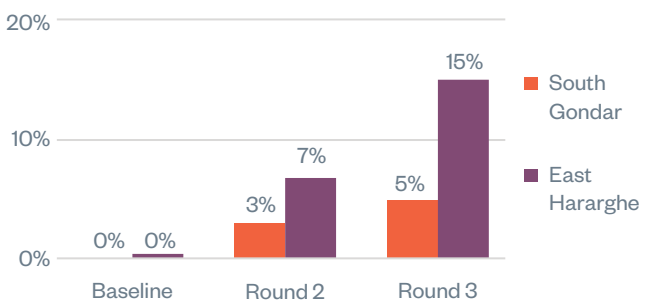


Figure 21: Proportion of adolescent girls who have been married, by Round



There is a culture in our society which highly opposes a return of a girl to her family's house after she went with a boy. This is a great shame in our society … Her family will be happier if she died than seeing her come back home.

A 16-year-old girl in South Gondar recalled that her cousin was '*allowed*' to marry in order to prevent violence against her family:

My cousin was 17 years old and she was learning at that time. He abducted her and they got married … He was

threatening the family to kill someone in the family, so they allowed the marriage.

Child marriages are arranged quite differently in South Gondar compared with East Hararghe (see Jones et al., 2020; Emirie et al., 2021). In South Gondar, most child marriages are arranged by parents, who consider the marriage of their daughters as affording them '*dignity*' in the community (20-year-old young woman, South Gondar). Because girls are socialised to be compliant, a 15-year-old boy stated that most girls '*simply accept the marriage arranged by their parents*'. Besides, according to a 16-year-old girl, '*there is no point of refusing the marriage after that because there is nowhere we can go after disobeying our family*'. That said, because parents in South Gondar are broadly committed to formal education, it is becoming unusual for parents (except those in the most remote communities) to arrange a marriage for their daughter until she has completed middle school. In more central communities, where girls' access to secondary school is improving, marriage is even further delayed. Young people reported that once girls leave school, many are not opposed to the marriage arranged by their parents. Sometimes this is because marriage affords girls adult status, and other times because girls strategically use marriage to reduce other risks. A 20-year-old young woman explained that marriage reduces the risk of rape, explaining that '*married girls are safe, no one wants to touch them*'. A 17-year-old boy commented that girls also marry to escape poverty: '*Many girls are seen to marry someone who has better income, even if she doesn't love him*.'

In East Hararghe, on the other hand, most child marriages are adolescent-driven. A 15-year-old girl stated that, '*Girls get married by their own will.*' Although most respondents reported that girls are in love with the boys (and young men) they elope with – and that there is nothing that parents can do to control their daughters' behaviour – a few respondents told a more nuanced story. A 12-year-old girl explained that girls follow boys home because they are tired of being over-worked and punished by their mothers:

Girls do not like disagreeing with their mothers. They rush to follow a young man that told her he loves her. She contacts him when she is angry and asks him to take her home if he loves her truly.

A community key informant commented that mothers even encourage child marriage, by supporting adolescent sons and daughters to interact with one another. He stated that:

Children that are 15 and older than that, gather and chew khat … Usually, girls do not chew khat, they boil coffee for young men that chew khat … This gathering is increasing child marriage … The main supporters of this practice have been women, the mothers, who have been encouraging the girls and the boys as well for the marriage.

Like girls, who report that child marriage affords them social status in their peer group and sometimes better economic conditions, boys also see advantages to child marriage. One admitted that he married for sex, and to have someone to provide his meals. A teacher stated that unemployment also contributes to boys' interest in child marriage: '*The other problem which could be a reason for early marriage is unemployment. There are many students who graduated but are not yet employed*.'

Efforts to prevent child marriage also vary by location. With the caveat that efforts faltered during the conflict, in South Gondar, there are widespread and longstanding efforts to have marriages cancelled altogether. Schools serve as the first link in the reporting chain that makes this happen. A *kebele* chair stated, '*If she [a girl] is in school, the school principal will never allow them to marry her*', adding that seven marriages have been cancelled in the past year. In East Hararghe, respondents reported myriad recent efforts to reduce and delay child marriage. These include: outlawing the shegoye dances and night-time wedding ceremonies where adolescents were most at risk of entering into unions; returning girls who were still enrolled in school at the time of marriage to their parents (and to the classroom); fining the parents of girls and boys who marry without parental permission; fining religious leaders who bless child marriages; and reinstating the custom of bride price. A father explained:

Now we have prevented a night wedding … The current trend is those who want to establish friendship can see each other in the daytime and inform his father for further marriage process.

A religious leader commented:

We punish the father of a boy who took a girl [for marriage] with 500 birr. If a religious leader makes nikah [religious marriage] for under-aged girl, he will pay 3,000 birr because he has to know better than others.

As is evident from Round 3 survey findings that more than three-quarters of young women in East Hararghe and South Gondar had married prior to adulthood, efforts to prevent child marriage are clearly not effective in either location. In South Gondar, respondents identified multiple points of failure. First, out-of-school girls rarely have a way to report. This, noted a *kebele* chair, drives parents to first make their daughter leave school: '*Whenever a parent is thinking of marrying children, they first force her to interrupt her education*.' Respondents also noted that interventions must be timely in order to be effective; once married, girls are stuck. Another *kebele* chair explained that:

> *If we heard about it after marriage, it is difficult to accuse them. They have invested much to the wedding and it would be a catastrophe for both families.*

Adolescents reported that even in-school girls who make timely reports can still be let down by the system. A 15-year-old boy from a rural community recalled that a classmate was forced to marry last year – and the school principal did not even try to intervene, because '*the man [the groom] and his friends could attack*'. A teacher stated that *kebele* officials also fail to implement the law:

> *The law is good. The problem is on those people who have the power to implement the law. The offices responsible for that are careless and they are not working on their full potential.*

A teacher in East Hararghe echoed the view that the law is not enforced properly, noting that *kebele* and *woreda* officials allow under-age girls to give consent, despite the law prohibiting this. He explained:

> *They will ask her interest despite her being a kid. If she said 'It is my decision', then it is over. Everything will stop here and she will marry. The problem is how could girls below 18 years of age decide? She cannot decide, according to law.*

Respondents in East Hararghe also noted that while religious leaders are ostensibly fined for blessing child unions, they often make no efforts to establish a girl's age – other than looking at her breasts. One religious leader confessed, '*You will smoothly tell them she is big enough. Then it will be done.*'

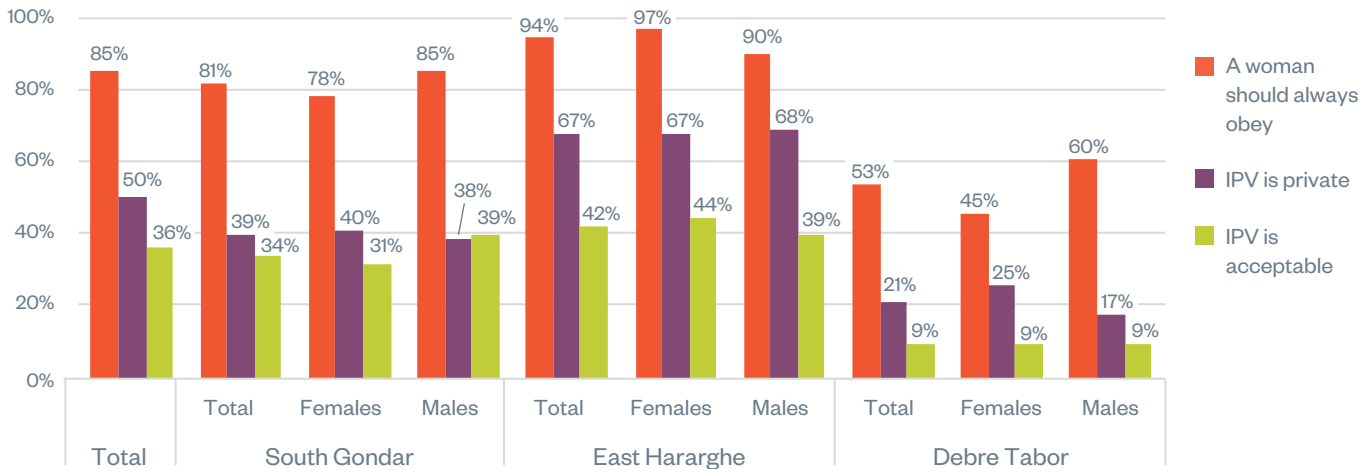
Intimate partner violence

Survey findings for adolescents

The GAGE quantitative surveys collect information on a wide range of attitudes related to gender, including attitudes to intimate partner violence (IPV). The Round 3 survey found that a large majority (85%) of adolescents agreed that a woman should always obey her husband (see Figure 22). Location differences were significant, with adolescents in East Hararghe (94%) more likely to agree than their peers in South Gondar (81%) and Debre Tabor (53%). Gender differences were not significant in aggregate, but this is because patterning varies by location. In East Hararghe, girls were more likely than boys to report that a woman should always obey (97% versus 90%). In rural South Gondar and urban Debre Tabor, the reverse is true.

Half of adolescents (50%) agreed that intimate partner violence is a private matter and should not be discussed outside the home. Location differences were

Figure 22: Adolescents' beliefs about intimate partner violence



again significant, and mirror young people's beliefs about women's obedience.

Just over a third (36%) of adolescents agreed that intimate partner violence is an acceptable way for a man to mould his wife's behaviour. Location differences were significant, with adolescents in East Hararghe (42%) more likely to agree than their peers in rural South Gondar (34%) and urban Debre Tabor (9%). Gender differences were significant in East Hararghe, where girls were more likely than boys to agree with the statement (44% versus 39%), and in South Gondar, where boys were more likely than girls to agree (39% versus 31%).

In the approximately 18 months between the Round 2 and Round 3 surveys, adolescents' beliefs about women's obedience and intimate partner violence being a private matter have remained stagnant. However, there have been some changes in beliefs about the acceptability of intimate partner violence. Girls and boys in all locations were significantly less likely to agree with the statement that 'intimate partner violence is acceptable' at Round 3 than they were at Round 2. Declines were much larger in East Hararghe than in other locations: girls were 43 percentage points less likely to agree, while boys were 32 percentage points less likely to agree.

Survey findings for young adults

At Round 3, a large majority (76%) of young adults agreed that a woman should always obey her husband (see Figure 23). Location differences were significant, with young adults in East Hararghe (97%) most likely to agree, and those in Debre Tabor (45%) least likely. In all locations, young men were more likely than young women to agree that wives should be obedient.

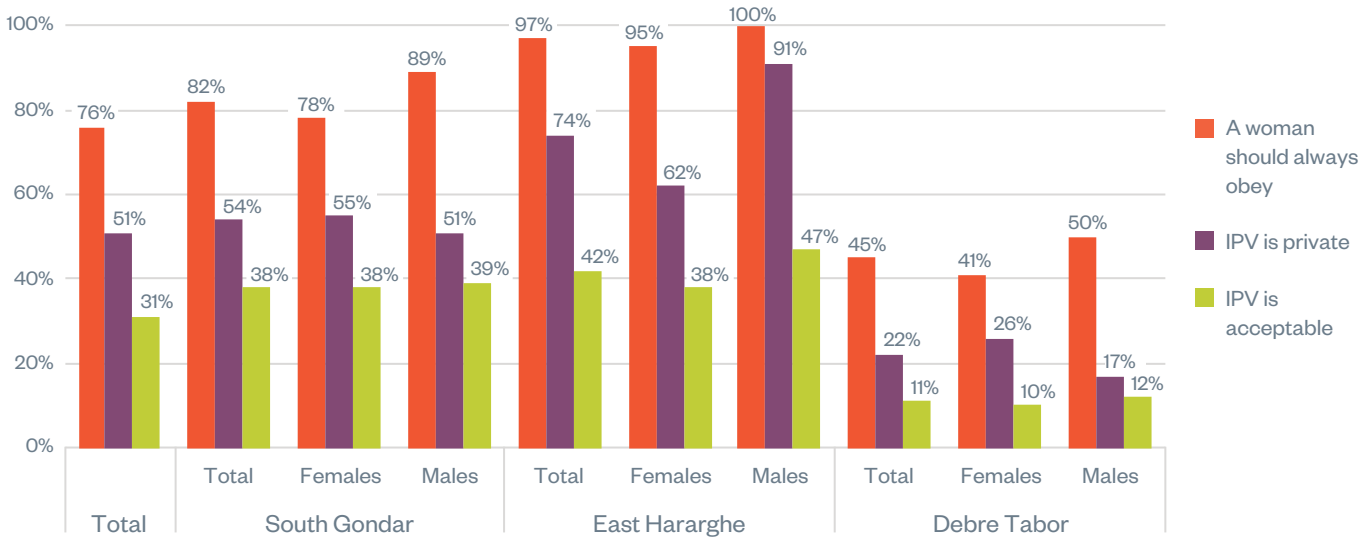
Half (51%) of young adults agreed that intimate partner violence should be kept as a private matter. Location differences were significant, with young adults in East Hararghe (74%) most likely to agree. Gender differences were significant only in East Hararghe, where young men were far more likely than young women to agree (91% versus 62%). In South Gondar, the proportion of young women who agreed that intimate partner violence should remain private was higher than the proportion of young men who agreed with that statement.

Just under a third (31%) of young adults agreed that intimate partner violence is an acceptable way for a man to mould his wife's behaviour; rates were much higher in the rural locations, and there were limited differences by gender in each location.

The survey also found that young women who married before age 18 were more likely than their peers who had never married to believe that a wife should always obey her husband (82% versus 54%) (see Figure 24). They were also more likely to believe that intimate partner violence is private (55% versus 35%), and that it is an acceptable way for a man to mould his wife's behaviour (35% versus 19%).

Young adults in East Hararghe were much less likely to agree that intimate partner violence is acceptable at Round 3 than they were at Round 2. There was a 23 percentage point decline for young women and a 27 percentage point decline for young men. At Round 3, young adults were also

Figure 23: Young adults' beliefs about intimate partner violence



less likely to believe that intimate partner violence should be kept private. There were declines of approximately 10 percentage points for young women in South Gondar and Debre Tabor and young men in East Hararghe.

Qualitative findings

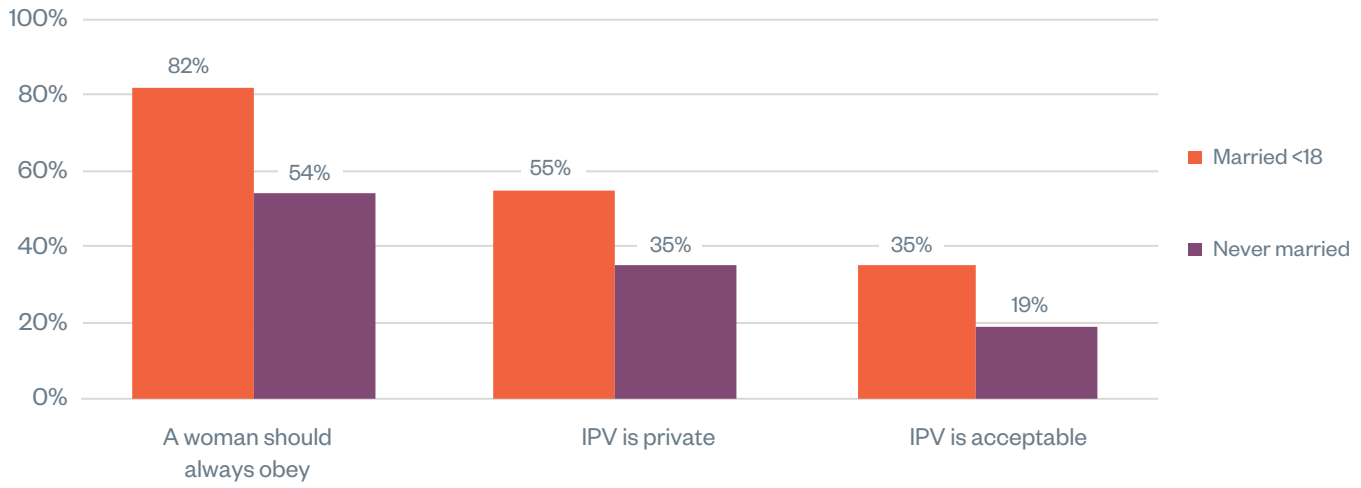
The current qualitative sample is unusual in that relatively few adolescent girls and young women have been married, which means that personal reports of intimate partner violence were rare. That said, in individual and group interviews, young people agreed that '*insulting women is a very common phenomenon among husbands*' (16-year-old boy, South Gondar) and that '*there are those who beat very much very hard*' (14-year-old boy, East Hararghe). They also agreed that intimate partner violence is under-reported, because it is seen as men's right and because it is considered private. An 18-year-old young man from East Hararghe stated that '*as per our culture, a man has the right to show his wife the right direction … Once the female is married, nothing they can say.*' An 18-year-old young woman from South Gondar concurred. When asked if she would report her husband if he beat her, she replied: '*I will not report him … I decided to be with him when I decided to get married.*' A 16-year-old girl from East Hararghe added that marital rape is also un-reportable: '*It is not culturally acceptable to complain about rape within marriage. She keeps the issue for herself, she does not share it with anyone.*'

Respondents reported that young wives who do feel able to disclose intimate partner violence have few sources of support. A 12-year-old boy from East Hararghe, for example, recalled that when his sister fled home, to escape her violent husband, their father beat her until she left again:

> *My sister refused to stay with her husband. He was beating her all the times, then she had fled to our home several times … My father beat my sister three days with a stick.*

A 15-year-old girl from South Gondar reported that it took the extreme measure of her attempting suicide before her parents allowed her to leave her violent husband: '*I tried to commit suicide also. So they allowed the divorce after that.*' Although in Debre Tabor a key informant with the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth reported that the office manages intimate partner violence situations in collaboration with the justice office, a Bureau of Justice official admitted that this primarily consists of '*helping them resolve their problems and reconcile through community elders*'. Indeed, an 18-year-old young man from East Hararghe explained that no matter how badly injured a woman may be, '*officials say nothing. Unless they will be divorced, they may not take it to court.*'

Figure 24: Young women's beliefs about intimate partner violence, by marital status



Conclusions and implications for programming and policy

Our findings underscore that Ethiopian young people have highly uneven access to bodily integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence, with large disparities between females and males, across regions, and between those living in urban Debre Tabor compared with rural South Gondar. In terms of age-based violence, boys and young men are at higher risk than girls and young women, primarily because girls and young women are heavily socialised into docility whereas boys and young men are taught that independence and violence are core masculine traits.

Across locations, and due to conservative gender norms, girls and young women are at constant risk of myriad forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including not only sexual harassment and rape, but also FGM, child marriage, and intimate partner violence. How girls and young women (and their families) understand those risks – and, indeed, whether they recognise them as risks – depends on where they live. For example, in South Gondar, where child marriages are arranged by parents and rape is typically perpetrated by strangers, both are broadly understood as risks, especially in urban Debre Tabor. Yet in East Hararghe, where child marriages are increasingly adolescent-driven, where FGM is a requirement for a girl to marry, and where rape is typically perpetrated by peers in the context of existent relationships, few girls regard themselves as being at risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

Due in part to the conflict-related violence that subsumed parts of Amhara region in 2021, which has left communities saturated with firearms and even police officers afraid to intervene, young people in urban Debre Tabor and rural South Gondar are at especially high risk of physical and sexual violence.

Based on our research, we suggest the following key policy and programmatic actions to accelerate progress in eradicating the different forms of violence outlined in this report:

A 14-year-old girl and her 18-year-old husband on their honeymoon, East Hararghe © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

1. **Expand efforts to prevent violence in the home.**
   - Provide parents with parenting education courses, in the community (through programmes such as Act with Her) and at school (through parent–teacher associations), which teach alternative discipline strategies and address gender norms, including how these leave girls and boys at different risk of parental and sibling violence.
   - Build a cadre of social workers to identify and support the young people most at risk of parental violence.
   - Strengthen legal institutions such as social courts and community police to identify and address the worst forms of parental and sibling violence.
   - Use mass media campaigns to promote positive parenting and encourage young people to seek help if they need it.

2. **Step up efforts to eliminate corporal punishment in schools.**
   - Train teachers in child-friendly pedagogies and positive disciplinary approaches in line with Ministry of Education guidance.
   - Hold teachers and principals accountable for violating Ministry of Education guidance, including sanctioning – and terminating contracts of – recidivists.
   - Strengthen parent–teacher associations and school-based structures such as clubs and school parliaments so that parents and young people are aware of students' rights and how to report violence teacher violence.
   - Provide students with anonymous ways to report teacher violence (such as drop-boxes that are regularly monitored and followed up) and access to counsellors who might help them mediate conflicts with teachers.

3. **Tackle peer and youth violence.**
   - Provide adolescents – especially boys and young men – with programming designed to improve their communication skills and develop positive masculinities.
   - In South Gondar, step up neighbourhood watches and community policing, including providing personal protection to those who report and intervene in crimes.
   - Strengthen the rule of law, ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted and imprisoned.
   - In South Gondar, buy back guns to remove them from communities, and/or ensure strict gun licensing provisions.
   - Address the antecedents and correlates of boys' and young men's perpetuation of community violence, including substance use and unemployment, by investing in community youth centres, providing loans and mentoring for youth to initiate micro-enterprises, and providing referrals to addiction services through school counsellors and community social workers.

4. **Prioritise preventing sexual violence and supporting survivors.**
   - Invest in community conversations and mass media campaigns that address cultural beliefs that sexual violence is the fault of the girls and women who are subject to it – and provide guidance on how bystanders can safely intervene.
   - Provide girls with empowerment programming designed to help them recognise diverse forms of sexual violence as violence, protect themselves and their peers, and develop the courage and knowledge they need to report to relevant authorities.
   - Provide boys and young men with programming designed to support non-violent masculinities in schools, through community youth centres and also churches and mosques.
   - Step up community policing, especially where and when girls travel to and from school.
   - Make dormitories available to more girls and young women studying at secondary school level, and ensure that they have adequate security.
   - Expand access to one-stop centres, to ensure that survivors of sexual violence can receive integrated health, legal and psychosocial support.
   - Strengthen the rule of law, ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted and imprisoned, rather than relying on traditional justice systems.
   - Ensure that no survivors are forced to marry their rapist, by fining the parents and religious leaders who are involved in these marriages and cancelling marriages as needed.

5. **Redouble efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation.**
   - Continue work in South Gondar (using education delivered by religious leaders, health extension workers and teachers) to reduce the incidence of hidden practices and to ensure that young people associate FGM with the past and do not cut their own daughters in the future.
   - In East Hararghe, work with religious and traditional leaders to develop messages and programming aimed at reducing support for FGM. Broader efforts should directly address gender norms and the perceived benefits of FGM. Specific efforts should target mothers (who arrange for their daughters to be cut), girls themselves (to reduce peer pressure-driven demand for FGM), and boys and young men, and their fathers (to address preferences for wives who have been cut).
   - Enforce the FGM law, fining the parents of girls who have been cut (for instance, working together with health extension workers), and the women who cut girls.

6. **Expand and strengthen efforts to eliminate child marriage.**
   - 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, as well as addressing broader discriminatory gender norms and how these leave girls at risk of child marriage.
   - Invest in empowerment programming for girls, including school-based girls' clubs and gender clubs, which can help girls protect themselves and their peers from child marriage. Programming must be carefully tailored to account for local practices – for example, whether marriages are adolescent-led or arranged by families.
   - Provide tailored outreach to girls, especially in rural areas, about how they can report risks of impending child marriages; simultaneously, strengthen reporting chains and ensure that reports are acted upon.
   - Enforce the child marriage law, including fining the parents of under-age partners, religious leaders who officiate, and adult husbands.
   - Invest in capacity-building of local government officials at district and community levels so that they are aware of the provisions of the Family Law in banning child marriage and how they can practically strengthen its implementation.

7. **Tackle intimate partner violence.**
   - Invest in community conversations and mass media campaigns that address discriminatory gender norms, including that wives must obey their husbands, that intimate partner violence is private, and that violence is an acceptable form of control.
   - Educate parents about their responsibility to their daughters, even after she may be married.
   - Provide tailored outreach about how girls and women experiencing intimate partner violence can report and seek support. Provide boys and young men with programming designed to encourage non-violent masculinities and address their mistaken beliefs that they have the right to be violent towards their wife.
   - Expand access to one-stop centres, to ensure that survivors of intimate partner violence can receive integrated health, legal and psychosocial support.
   - Strengthen the rule of law, ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted and imprisoned, rather than relying on traditional justice systems.

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About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a decade-long (2016-2026) longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org.uk for more information.

GENDER & ADOLESCENCE: GLOBAL EVIDENCE

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