



Age- and gender-based violence facing young people in Jordan

Findings from GAGE midline evidence

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Summary

This report draws on mixed-methods data collected in late 2022 and early 2023 by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme and aims to support national and international efforts to improve the bodily integrity of young people in Jordan. Our sample includes nearly 3,000 adolescents and young adults – mostly Syrian refugees but also Palestinians living in Gaza camp and vulnerable Jordanians. Our findings underscore that young people in Jordan have highly uneven access to bodily integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence, with often large disparities between adolescents and young adults, between females and males, across nationalities, between Syrians living in different locations, and by disability and marital status. For example, adolescent girls and boys, especially those with disabilities, remain at substantial risk of violence in the home, due to caregivers' stress levels, beliefs that corporal punishment is necessary for proper childrearing, and gender norms. Adolescent boys are also at high risk of corporal punishment at the hands of teachers. Violence

can be extreme and is a major factor driving boys' school dropout. Adolescents and young adults – especially those living in host communities, those with disabilities, and ethnic minorities – regularly experience peer violence. The nature of this violence has changed in recent years as adolescents have grown up. For boys and young men, physical violence has become more deadly; for girls and young women, sexual harassment has become a near constant threat. In part because it is believed to protect them from sexual harassment, adolescent girls, especially Syrian girls, are at high risk of child marriage. Nearly all child marriages are arranged, and girls generally acquiesce because their parents convince them that marriage is in their own best interest. Young brides are also at risk in marriage. Most young people believe that wives owe their husbands total obedience, and many young men feel that they have a right to control their wife with violence. The report concludes with detailed recommendations for policy and programming to improve young people's bodily integrity.



A 13-year-old Palestinian girl who is bullied for wearing a hearing aid © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

Introduction

Young people's right to bodily integrity and freedom from violence is core to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is featured in two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 16 and 5 (UN, 2024). SDG 16, Peace and Justice, calls for ending all forms of abuse and violence against children, reducing all forms of violence, and promoting the rule of law. SDG 5, Gender Equality, calls for eliminating child marriage and all forms of violence against girls and women. Although Jordan is signatory to the SDGs, it is currently not on track to deliver on either goal (Sachs et al., 2023). Indeed, evidence from the National Study on Violence Against Children in Jordan and the Jordan Population and Family Health Survey suggests that young people in Jordan remain at substantial risk of multiple forms of violence at the hands of caregivers, teachers, peers and – for girls and young women – husbands (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), 2021; Department of Statistics (DOS) and ICF, 2023). This report, which extends baseline research conducted in late 2018 and early 2019 and draws on mixed-methods data collected in late 2022 and early 2023 by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme, aims to support national and international efforts to improve the bodily integrity of young people in Jordan. It begins with a brief section describing the current evidence base on violence against young people. We then present the GAGE conceptual framework, methodology, and midline findings. We conclude with a discussion of key actions needed to accelerate progress to ensure that all young people in Jordan are free from all forms of violence.

The Jordan context

Jordan's population is disproportionately young. It is estimated that 44% of residents – some 5.1 million individuals – are children and adolescents under the age of 20 (Higher Population Council (HPC), 2024). Recent research has found that violence against those young people is common. For example, a survey conducted by UNICEF and NCFA (2021) found that over half (55%) of children aged 8–17 in a nationally representative sample admitted to having experienced physical violence in the past year. Boys were more likely to report experiencing physical violence than girls (60% versus 50%). In that same sample, and likely due to under-reporting, rates were relatively lower among young people living in Syrian refugee camps (50%) and young people with disabilities (42%). Children taking part in UNICEF and NCFA's (2021) research reported that the most common perpetrators of physical violence were their parents, siblings, peers, and teachers. Children and caregivers alike reported that physical violence declines with age, with adolescents less at risk than younger children.

Due to cultural norms that 'normalize and justify violence against children when used for disciplinary purposes', parents do not gainsay children's reporting (UNICEF and NCFA, 2021: 39). Three-quarters (74%) of parents surveyed by UNICEF and NCFA (2021) admitted to having used physical violence as a form of discipline. The 2023 Jordan Population and Family Health Survey (JPFHS) also found high rates of violent discipline. Based on caregivers' reports, 78% of young adolescents aged 10–14 had experienced violent



A 20-year-old Syrian mother of 4 – who is not allowed to leave her home – with her husband and children © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

discipline in the month prior to the survey, and 11% had experienced severe physical punishment (DOS and ICF, 2023).

Emotional violence against children is also common according to UNICEF and NCFA (2021) research. Nearly three-fifths (58%) of children aged 8–17 reported having experienced emotional violence at least once in their lifetime, with peers, siblings, parents, and teachers most often reported as perpetrators. Two-thirds (65%) of surveyed caregivers admitted to having used emotional violence against their children.

With the caveat that exposure to profane language was categorised as sexual abuse, more than a quarter (27%) of children aged 8–17 included in the UNICEF and NCFA (2021) research reported having experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Boys were more likely than girls to report having been forced to view sexual images (6% versus 4%); girls were more likely than boys to report genital touching (4% versus 2%) (ibid.).

Despite Jordan's recent achievements, rates of child marriage – a form of violence against girls – are also high, especially among non-Jordanian girls. The 2023 JPFHS found that of young women aged 20–24, 20% of Syrians and 8% of Jordanians had married prior to age 18 (DOS and ICF, 2023).

Intimate partner violence is common among young brides. The 2023 JPFHS found that 17% of married young women aged 20–24 had experienced violence from their husband in the 12 months preceding the survey. Young brides who married prior to age 18 are especially like to experience all forms of domestic violence. NCFA et al. (2022) report that of married young women aged 20–24, 23% of those who married in childhood experienced physical violence at the hands of their husband, compared to 8% of those who married over the age of 18. Young women who married as children were also more likely than their peers who married as adults to experience violence from their mother-in-law (21% versus 8%), their sister-in-law (15% versus 5%) and their father- and brother-in-law (5% versus 2%) (ibid.).

Young women's help-seeking for intimate partner violence is rare. The 2023 JPFHS found that 43% of young women aged 20–24 who had experienced violence had never told anyone (DOS and ICF, 2023; see also HPC, 2020). This is in part because intimate partner violence is widely perceived as justifiable. Of adolescents aged 15–19, two-thirds of boys (66%) and half of ever-married girls

(46%) reported that wife beating is justified for at least one reason (DOS and ICF, 2023; see also HPC, 2020).

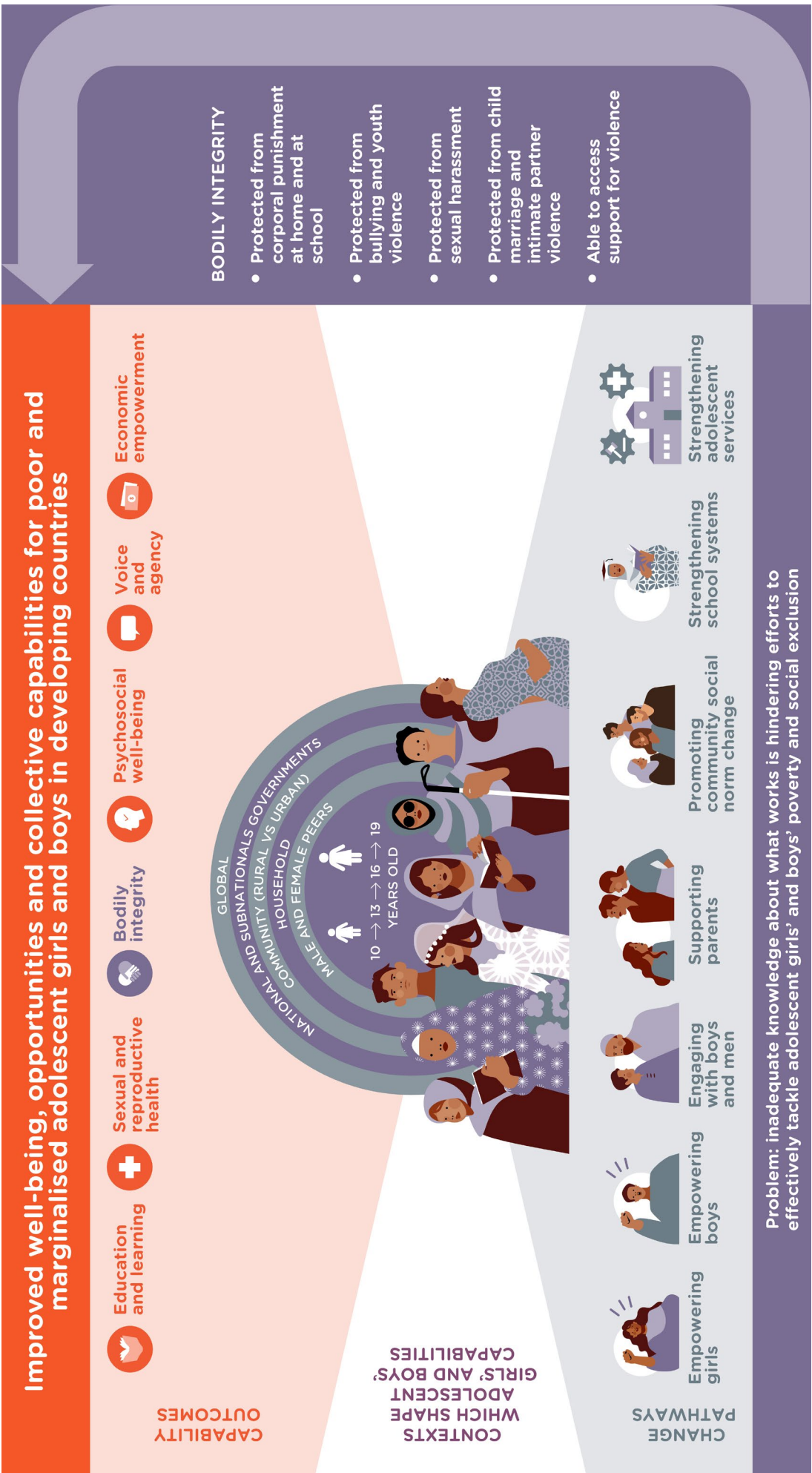
There has been little research on the incidence of sexual harassment in Jordan, where – as the Jordanian National Commission for Women (2017) notes – the issue is so shrouded in secrecy that the penal code uses euphemisms such as 'indecent flirting' to refer to it. A study by that commission found that over three-quarters of women in Jordan had experienced sexual harassment.

Conceptual framework

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 young people's capabilities.

The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1985, 2004) and nuanced to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003), the capabilities approach 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 adolescents with diverse trajectories, including the 'hardest to reach' such as those who have a disability or are already mothers. Although the GAGE framework covers six core capabilities, this report focuses on bodily integrity and freedom from violence. It focuses on violence at home and at school, peer and youth violence, sexual harassment, child marriage, intimate partner violence, and support for survivors of violence.

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework



The second building block of our conceptual framework is context dependency. Our '3 Cs' framework situates adolescents socio-ecologically; it recognises that not only do adolescents have different needs and constraints at different times in the life course, but that these are also highly dependent on their contexts at the family/ household, community, state and global levels. In the case of bodily integrity and freedom from violence, cultural contexts and deeply entrenched gender norms are key factors.

The third building block of our conceptual framework – change strategies – acknowledges that adolescents' contextual realities will not only shape the pathways through which they develop their capabilities but also determine the change strategies available to them to improve their outcomes. Our ecological approach emphasises that in order to nurture transformative change in adolescents' 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 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 the bodily integrity of young people in Jordan.

Sample and methods

This report draws on mixed-methods data collected in Jordan in 2022 and 2023. At baseline (2018–2019), the quantitative sample included adolescents from marginalised 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. The baseline sample consisted of 4,095 adolescents in five governorates: Amman, Irbid, Jerash, Mafrqa and Zarqa.

At follow-up in late 2022 and early 2023, the GAGE Jordan midline sample included 2,923 young people – a 71% follow-up rate compared to baseline (see Table 1). Of these, just over two-thirds are Syrian refugees (2,145). Most Syrian refugee respondents (56%) have lived in host communities consistently since baseline (1,195). However, approximately 27% of Syrian respondents (595) have lived in refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) since baseline, and 12% (257) have lived in informal tented settlements at any point since baseline. A comparatively small number of Syrian refugees (98, or 5%) have moved between host communities and camps in the time between the baseline and midline surveys.¹ The remainder of the midline sample are Jordanians (457), Palestinians (272), and a small group of individuals (49) that identified as another nationality (denoted 'other' and primarily Iraqi). Almost all Palestinians in the GAGE sample live in Gaza camp in Jerash governorate; most are ex-Gazans who were displaced during the 1967 Arab–Israeli War and who lack Jordanian citizenship and its attendant benefits. Due to the sample size, the 'other' nationality group is not included in comparisons by nationality, but is included in all other demographic group disaggregation, such as gender and age cohort.

Just over half the midline sample was female. Although the baseline sample was approximately equally split between the two age cohorts (younger and older), older adolescents were more likely than younger adolescents

Table 1: GAGE midline quantitative sample

| | Nationality | | | | Sub-sample of young people with a disability | Sub-sample of females married before age 18 | Total |
|----------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|--|---|-------------|
| | Syrian | Jordanian | Palestinian | Other | | | |
| Females | 1057 | 291 | 156 | 24 | 160 | 229 | 1528 |
| Males | 1088 | 166 | 116 | 25 | 146 | | 1395 |
| Younger cohort | 1163 | 277 | 183 | 23 | 179 | 25 | 1646 |
| Older cohort | 982 | 180 | 89 | 26 | 127 | 204 | 1277 |
| Total | 2145 | 457 | 272 | 49 | 306 | 229 | 2923 |

¹ Between baseline and midline, a small minority of young people moved location. This was most common among Syrians, 10% of whom moved in the four years between baseline and midline. The bulk of movement was between UNHCR-run camps and Jordanian host communities. Because of this movement, young people are classified as camp-dwellers if they were living in a UNHCR-run camp at both baseline and midline; they are classified as 'ITS' if they were living in an informal tented settlement at either baseline or midline. Due to small samples sizes when stratifying young people by age cohort, young people who moved between camp and host were grouped in with the young people who lived in camp at both baseline and midline to form an ever-camp group.

to be lost to follow-up between baseline and midline (67% follow-up for the older cohort versus 75% follow-up for the younger cohort). Because of this, the younger cohort is slightly over-represented in the midline sample. At midline, on average, younger cohort adolescents were aged 15 (most were between 14 and 16); they are referred to in this paper as adolescent girls and boys. The older cohort has transitioned to young adulthood (average age of 20 and most were between 19 and 21) and are referred to as young women and young men. Where both cohorts are discussed simultaneously, they are referred to as young people.

Because GAGE's sample includes the most marginalised adolescents and young adults, over an eighth of young adults in our quantitative sample have any functional disability (513).² Among those, 306 report having functional difficulties even if they have an assistive device available (such as glasses, hearing aids, or a mobility device). Our sample also includes girls who were married as children. Of the 336 ever-married females, 229 married prior to age 18.

Most of the qualitative sample of 188 young people were selected from the larger quantitative sample, deliberately

oversampling the most disadvantaged individuals in order to capture the voices of those at risk of being 'left behind' (see Table 2). The qualitative sample also included 29 young people from Jordan's Turkmen and Bani Murra communities (highly marginalised ethnic minorities) (see Annex 1), as well as 84 caregivers and 24 key informants (government officials, community and religious leaders, and service providers). This report also draws on GAGE's ongoing qualitative participatory research with 42 young people who are living in Jordan (see Table 3).

Quantitative survey data was collected in face-to-face interviews by enumerators who were trained to communicate with disadvantaged populations. Surveys were broad and included modules reflecting the GAGE conceptual framework (see Baird et al., 2023). Analysis of the quantitative survey data focused on a set of indicators related to bodily integrity and freedom from violence (data tables are available on request). Statistical analysis was conducted using Stata 17.0.

Qualitative tools, also employed by researchers carefully trained to communicate sensitively, consisted of interactive activities such as timelines, body mappings

Table 2: GAGE midline qualitative sample

| | Syrian | Jordanian | Palestinian | Bani Murra/ Turkmen | Totals |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Unmarried females | 37 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 78 |
| Adolescent girls | 23 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 41 |
| Young women | 14 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 37 |
| Unmarried males | 38 | 7 | 10 | 13 | 68 |
| Adolescent boys | 20 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 38 |
| Young men | 18 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 30 |
| Married young people | 34 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 48 |
| Females | 30 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 44 |
| Females married <18 | 23 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 33 |
| Males | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Males married <18 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Young people with disabilities | 26 | 12 | 7 | | 55 |
| Location | | | | | |
| Host | 37 | 19 | 23 | 29 | 108 |
| Camp | 54 | | | | 54 |
| ITS | 26 | | | | 26 |
| Total young people | 117 | 19 | 23 | 29 | 188 |
| Group interviews with parents | 12 (incl. 42 individuals) | 4 (incl. 15 individuals) | 2 (incl. 13 individuals) | 4 (incl. 14 individuals) | 22 (incl. 84 individuals) |
| Key informants | | | | | 24 |
| Totals | 159 | 34 | 36 | 43 | 296 |

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

Table 3: GAGE participatory research sample

| | Syrian | Jordanian | Palestinian | Totals |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Females | 11 | 2 | 15 | 28 |
| Adolescent girls | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Young women | 11 | 1 | 14 | 26 |
| Males | 7 | 6 | 0 | 13 |
| Adolescent boys | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Young men | 6 | 6 | 0 | 12 |
| Married females | 11 | 0 | 1 | 12 |
| Young people with disabilities | 1 | 8 | 15 | 24 |
| Totals | 18 | 8 | 15 | 41 |

and vignettes, which were used in individual and group interviews (see Jones et al., 2019). Preliminary data analysis took place during daily and site-wide debriefings. Interviews were transcribed and translated by native speakers and then coded thematically using the qualitative software analysis package MAXQDA.

The GAGE research design and tools were approved by ethics committees at the Overseas Development Institute and George Washington University. For research participants in refugee camps, permission was granted

from the UNHCR National Protection Working Group. For research participants in host communities, approval was granted by Jordan's Ministry of Interior, the Department of Statistics and the Ministry of Education. Consent (written or verbal as appropriate) was obtained from caregivers and married adolescents; written or verbal assent was obtained for all unmarried adolescents under the age of 18. There was also a robust protocol for referral to services, tailored to the different realities of the diverse research sites.



Findings

Our midline findings are organised according to risks to young people's bodily integrity: corporal punishment at home and at school; bullying and youth violence; sexual violence; child and forced marriage; and intimate partner violence. The final findings section is on support for violence. Where there are significant differences between adolescents and young adults, findings are presented by cohort.

Violence in the natal home

The midline survey found that 20% of young people had experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver or another adult in the natal home in the past year (see Figure 2). In line with existing evidence, adolescents (24%) – who were more likely to be living in the natal home and therefore more subject to parental restrictions – were significantly more likely to report experiencing such violence than young adults (14%). Across cohorts and also in line with existing evidence, Jordanians (28%) and Palestinians (30%) were significantly more likely to report violence at the hands of caregivers than Syrians (17%). Syrians living in camps were the least likely to report such violence (9%), most likely – based on qualitative evidence – due to fears of repercussions for doing so. Gender differences were insignificant.

Unsurprisingly, given the four years between baseline and midline, as well as evidence that physical violence declines as young people grow up, the proportion of young people reporting having experienced violence at the hands of adults in the natal home fell significantly between rounds. In aggregate, young people were 30 percentage points less likely to report having experienced violence in the home at midline (20%) than at baseline (50%). Age and location

differences were mostly small and marginally significant at best. In terms of nationality, there is a statistically significant difference at the 10% significance level in the change between Jordanians (-34 percentage points) and Palestinians (-25 percentage points). Gender differences were low overall, and were primarily driven by girls in the younger cohort who saw less of a decline over time.

Of young people who had experienced or witnessed violence at home, a minority (16%) had ever spoken to someone about it (see Figure 3). Cohort differences were significant. Across nationalities and locations, young adults (23%) were more likely to have spoken of violence than adolescents (12%). Among adolescents, gender differences were significant. Across nationalities and locations, adolescent girls (17%) were more likely to have spoken to someone about violence at home than adolescent boys (7%).

During qualitative interviews, respondents reported that violence from caregivers towards young people is common. Boys and young men reported high levels of physical violence, usually at the hands of their father. A 14-year-old Palestinian boy reported that his father is so violent that he tries to never be in the same room at the same time: *'When I see my father, I run away. Show my father, I run away!'* A Syrian boy the same age, who first noted that *'my father is the only man who doesn't hit'*, then added that his father instructs his brothers (the boy's uncles) to mete out beatings. Girls and young women did not speak of physical violence from their father, which a facilitator with an adolescent empowerment programme (Makani) attributed to social norms. This facilitator explained that he had made a recent referral to the Family Protection department on behalf of several

Figure 2: Experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver or other adult in the natal home in the past year

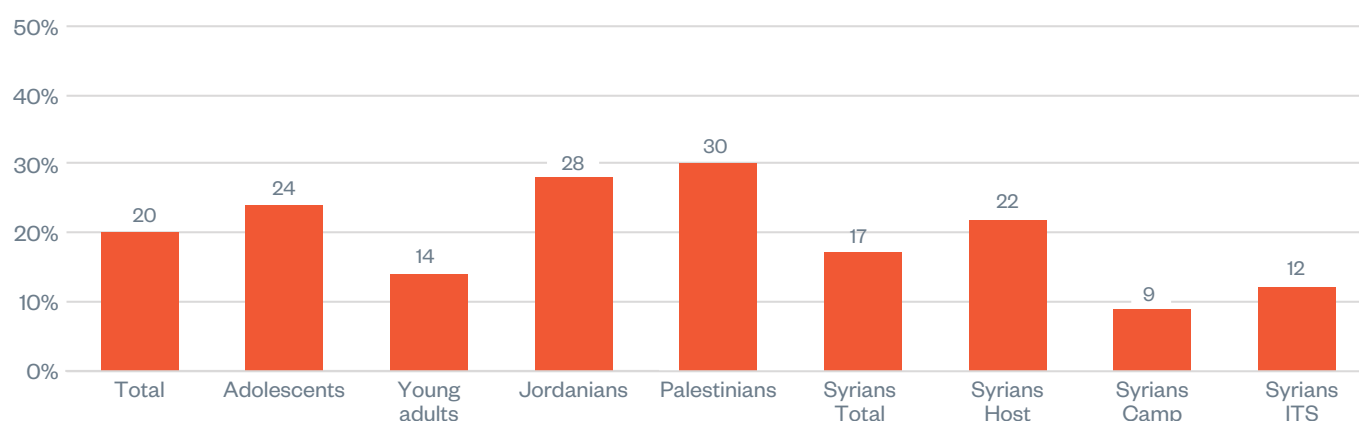
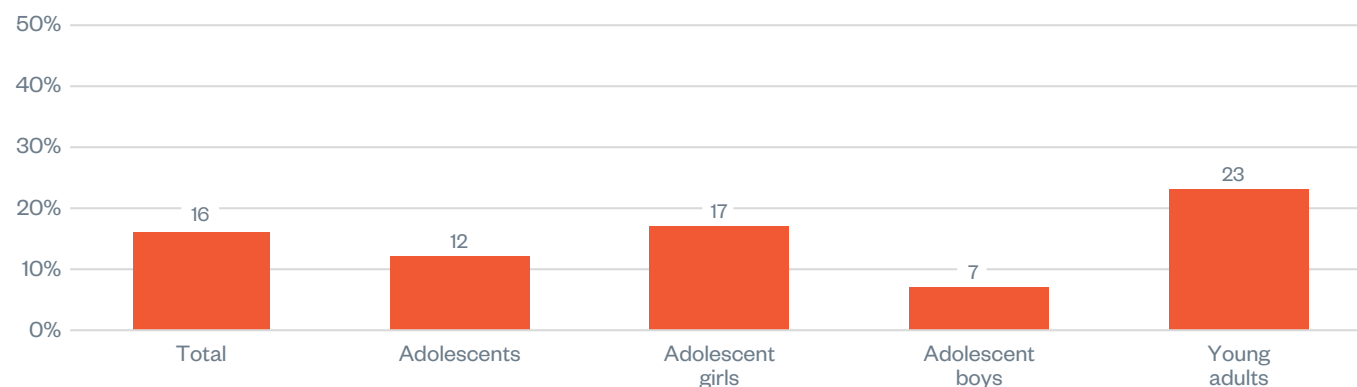


Figure 3: Ever talked to someone about violence at home, of survivors



sisters because *'the girls were not able to complain about the father according to societal custom'*. Girls and young women did, however, report significant emotional violence from mothers, generally related to girls' having violated social norms. A 21-year-old Syrian young woman who fell in love with the *'wrong'* man, recalled, *'My mother said, "I will kill you, I will tell your brother!"... She shouted at me, "Go to hell, I hope you die and I get rid of you!"'* Girls and young women also observed that violence at the hands of stepmothers is common and can be extreme. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl in a participatory research group reported that her stepmother emotionally and physically abuses all of the children in the home: *'[The stepmother] was abusing and cursing unbelievable words at us ... My stepmother then pulled my sister by her hair and started hitting her.'*

Echoing GAGE's baseline research, caregivers did not gainsay young people's narratives about violence; in fact, they often reported more violence than young people had reported. Mothers and fathers admitted to beating their children, sometimes because they were angry about specific things their adolescent child had said or done, but more often because of their own stress levels. A Jordanian mother reported that in her family, where money is always tight, *'Everything is only about fights ... [her husband] shouts and might hit [her son] with anything.'* A Palestinian mother added, *'When a man wants to vent his anger, he takes his anger out on his daughter ... He may hit his daughter if she holds the phone ... Claiming that she is not allowed to do this.'* A Syrian mother explained that stress pushes mothers into violence as well: *'Due to the stress I was facing, I started beating the children.'* A Syrian father noted that parents' stress levels – and violence – increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. He stated, *'We won't say we were angels ... There was an increase in violence from the fathers against the children.'*

Girls and young women also reported high levels of violence at the hands of their older brothers. An older Palestinian girl in a participatory research group reported that in part, brothers' violence towards their sisters is driven by brothers' expectations that their needs will always be catered to. She explained:

My brother wants his requests immediately ... If he sees a glass of water, he asks me to bring it for him quickly ... this is obligatory ... Even before he says that he wants water, the glass of water should be in his hand ... When he comes back home [from work], his clothes should be ready ... his boots should be clean, God bless you ... His perfume should be ready. He needs that everything is ready in front of him.

Other respondents added that brothers' violence towards sisters is due to parents' tasking their sons with monitoring the behaviour of – and enforcing the rules for – their daughters. Girls and young women regularly reported that their brothers confiscate and search girls' phones, interrogate girls about their movements and interactions, and beat girls for perceived infractions. Indeed, while at baseline younger adolescent girls often saw their older brothers as protectors, by midline, it was not uncommon for girls to be afraid of their older brothers. An 18-year-old Palestinian young woman noted that girls are aware that brothers' violence can be lethal: *'There is no safety ... A guy killed his sister.'*

Violence from teachers

In line with existing evidence, and despite reductions since baseline,³ violence at the hands of teachers remains common in boys' schools in Jordan. Looking only at enrolled younger cohort adolescents (with an average age of 15), the midline survey found that experiencing physical

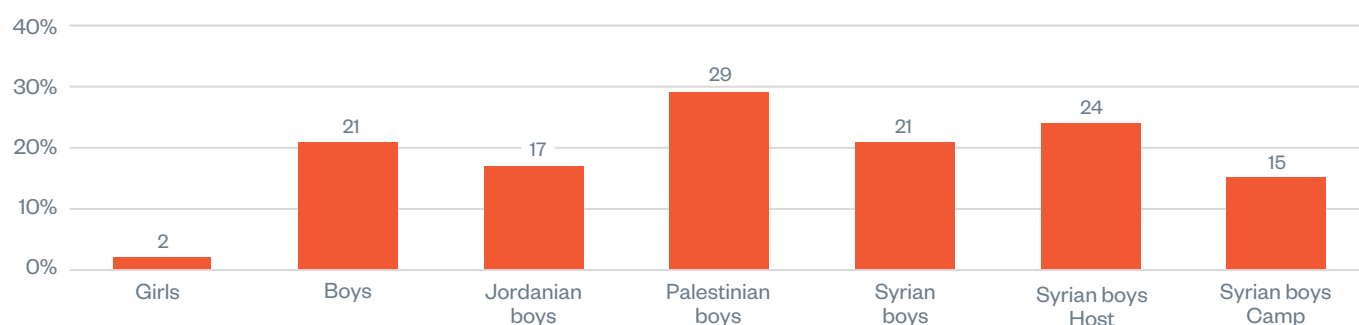
³ The baseline survey asked adolescents whether they had ever been physically punished by a teacher; the midline survey asked about experiences of violence in the past 12 months. Because of this, findings are not directly comparable.



violence⁴ from teachers is 10 times more likely for boys than for girls (21% versus 2%) (see Figure 4). Teacher violence is especially common for Palestinian boys (29%) and Syrian boys living in host communities (24%). With no significant differences across nationalities and locations, boys (45%) are also significantly more likely to report witnessing teacher violence at school in the past year than girls (6%). Of adolescents who had experienced or witnessed violence at the hands of a teacher in the past year, only 29% had ever spoken to someone about that violence. There were no significant gender, nationality or location differences.

During qualitative interviews, most respondents agreed that violence is especially common in boys' schools. A 15-year-old Syrian girl stated, *'My brothers are all beaten in their schools.'* A 14-year-old Syrian boy added that there is little recourse for teacher violence, since principals are also violent: *'The teacher hits the students without care ... all teachers. Also, the principal of the school hits me.'* Parents agreed with young people's assessment of violence at school and noted that it often pushes boys to drop out. A Syrian mother, when asked why her son is chronically absent, explained, *'My son doesn't dare to go to the school. He [the teacher] keeps beating ... with an iron pipe, stick, whatever is in his hand, he beats the children.'* A

Figure 4: Has been physically punished by a teacher in the past year, enrolled adolescents only, by gender and for boys by nationality and location



NB: There are too few Syrian boys living in informal tented settlements to report on.

⁴ The question asks: 'Have you been beaten, hit, whipped, caned, or punished through other physical contact by a teacher in the past 12 months?'

Palestinian mother added that her son had dropped out at age 13 because ‘he was afraid of being hit’.

Caregivers observed that while boys are more at risk, girls are not immune to teacher violence. Some caregivers emphasised that girls are emotionally, rather than physically, abused. A Syrian mother, whose daughter is not a strong student, explained that her daughter is humiliated by her teacher: *‘Even though my daughter is in 8th grade, she cannot write. She cannot solve, she doesn’t know how to answer a question. The teacher says, “Are you a child that I will help you?” She says that to my daughter.’* Other caregivers noted that girls are particularly prone to under-reporting – sometimes because they are afraid of their teachers (who might retaliate if parents intervene), and other times because they are afraid that their parents will make them leave school. A Bani Murra mother, whose daughter was beaten by her teacher for months before she disclosed, explained, *‘My daughter didn’t tell me. She was too scared of her teacher and she was scared that I might talk to her.’*

Peer and community violence

Also in line with existing evidence, the midline survey found that a large minority (22%) of young people had experienced peer violence in the past year. Adolescents (25%) reported more peer violence than young adults (18%). Of adolescents, boys (29%) reported significantly more peer violence than girls (22%) (see Figure 5). In addition, adolescents in host communities – regardless of whether they are Jordanian (32%) or Syrian (29%) – reported more peer violence than those in camps or informal tented settlements (ITSs) (20% and 17% respectively). Among young adults, gender – but not nationality or location – shapes experiences of peer violence. Young men (22%) reported having experienced significantly more peer violence than young women (15%). The GAGE midline survey found that young people with disabilities are significantly more likely to experience

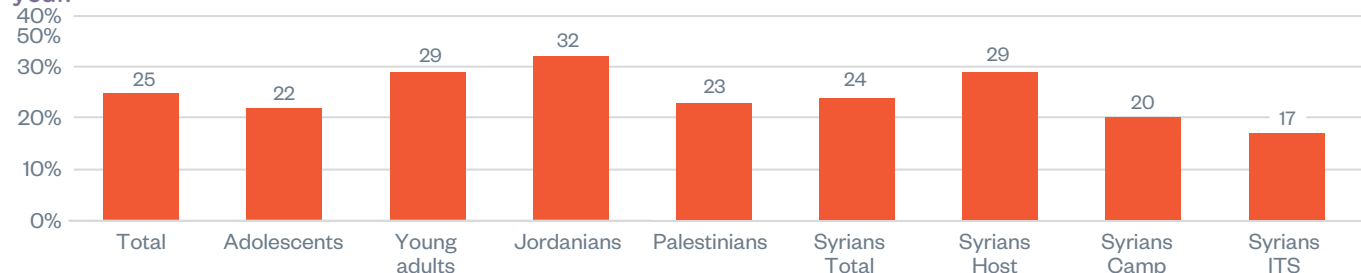
peer violence than their peers without disabilities (see Box 1).

In line with evidence that peer violence declines as young people grow up, peer violence declined by approximately half between baseline and midline, falling in aggregate from 42% to 22%. Among adolescents, past-year experience of peer violence dropped 24 percentage points, with boys (26 percentage points) experiencing larger declines than girls (22 percentage points) (see Figure 7). Among young adults, past-year experience of peer violence dropped 15 percentage points, with Jordanians (26 percentage points) seeing larger declines than Syrians (13 percentage points) or Palestinians (9 percentage points) (see Figure 8).

Of the young people who had experienced peer violence in the past year, a minority had ever spoken to someone about it. One-third (33%) of adolescents had spoken of peer violence, with no significant differences by gender, nationality or location. There were significant gender differences among young adults, with young women (44%) more likely to have spoken of peer violence than young men (24%).

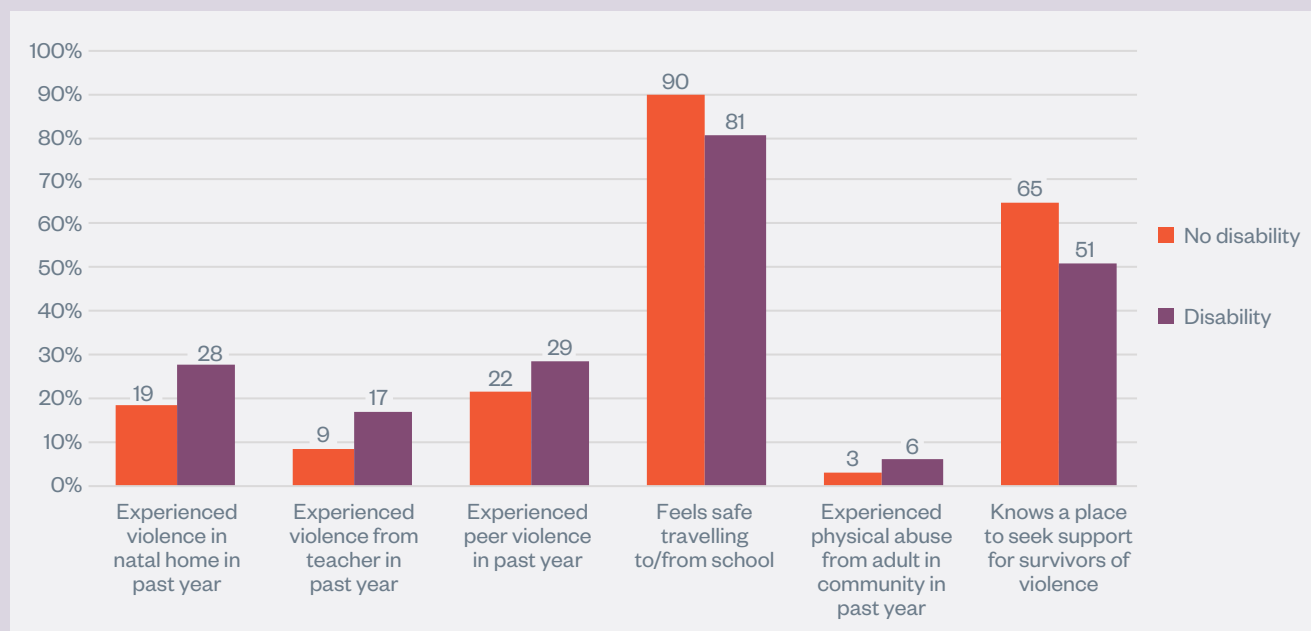
The midline survey found that while nearly all (92%) young people feel safe in the community during daytime hours, with males (96%) significantly more likely to do so than females (89%), young people are far less likely to report feeling safe in the community at night (56%). This is particularly the case for girls and young women, only 40% of whom reported on the midline survey feeling safe walking in the community after dark (versus 74% of boys and young men) (see Figure 9). Refugee females were the least likely to report feeling safe at night. While 50% of Jordanian girls and young women reported feeling safe, analogous figures for Palestinians and Syrians were only 42% and 37% respectively.

Figure 5: Experienced peer violence in the past year.



Box 1: Disability amplifies young people's risk of violence

The midline survey found that young people with disabilities are at elevated risk of myriad forms of violence. Compared to their peers without disabilities, they are significantly more likely to report experiencing violence at home (28% versus 19%), peer violence (29% versus 22%), violence from a teacher (17% versus 9%), and physical violence from an adult in the community (6% versus 3%) (see Figure 6). They are also less likely to feel safe travelling to and from school (81% versus 90%). There are significant gender differences for some forms of violence. Compared to girls and young women with disabilities, boys and young men with disabilities are significantly more likely to have been hit or beaten by a teacher in the past year (36% versus 3%) and to have been physically abused by an adult community member in the past year (12% versus 1%). Young people with disabilities are significantly less likely than their peers without disabilities to know where to seek support for survivors of violence (51% versus 65%).

Figure 6: Bodily integrity indicators, by disability status

During qualitative interviews, many young people with disabilities reported high levels of social exclusion and bullying at the hands of their peers. In a minority of cases, violence was physical. A 16-year-old Palestinian girl with hearing and mobility impairments stated that she had become so tired of being hit by the other girls at school – and ignored by the teacher – that she had begun hitting back: *‘I had problem with my friends at the school ... I have disability in my leg ... I used to complain to the teacher and say “My teacher, why didn’t you talk to them?” ... But it’s enough ... I hit them as they hit me.’* More often, young people with disabilities reported that their peers exclude and taunt them, due to the stigma that surrounds disability. A 15-year-old Syrian girl with a hearing impairment recalled that the other girls in her class banded together to ensure that she was never able to sit close enough to the teacher to hear what was being said: *‘The girls in the class did not allow me to sit in the first seat.’*

Caregivers of adolescents with disabilities added that bullying can include damage to the assistive devices on which their children rely. A Jordanian mother, whose 15-year-old son has a cochlear implant, recalled that, *‘he faced bullying ... and they would damage his device’*. The mother of a 15-year-old Palestinian boy with a mobility impairment added that her son’s wheelchair had also been damaged by other students: *‘You will see four of them chasing the wheelchair ... they are the ones who broke the previous wheelchair’*.

Qualitative research found that while the incidence of peer violence is down since baseline, the severity of peer violence for boys and young men has increased markedly. It was common for respondents to report that such violence now involves weapons and that injuries can be extreme. Although this was especially the case in Gaza

camp, where a 17-year-old Palestinian girl reported that her brother had been involved in a fight with machetes and a 14-year-old boy noted that *‘the camp is all weapons’*, Syrians and Jordanians also reported dangerous levels of youth violence in host communities. A 17-year-old Syrian boy reported that he and a friend had been attacked on the

Figure 7: Percentage-point decline in peer violence between baseline and midline, adolescents

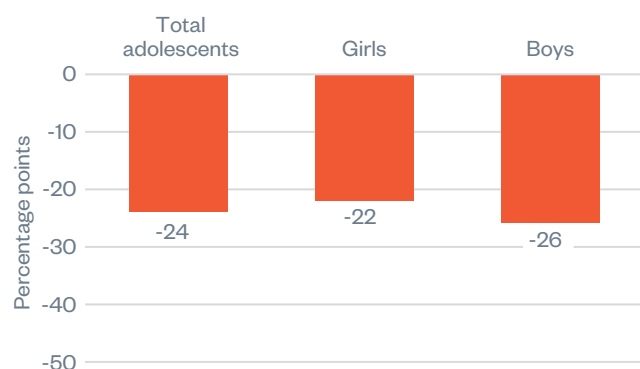


Figure 8: Percentage-point decline in peer violence between baseline and midline, young adults

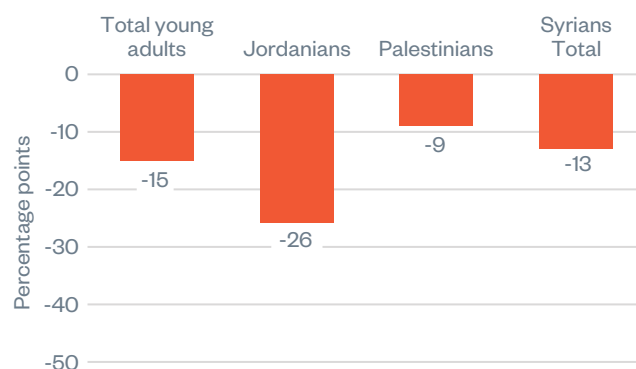
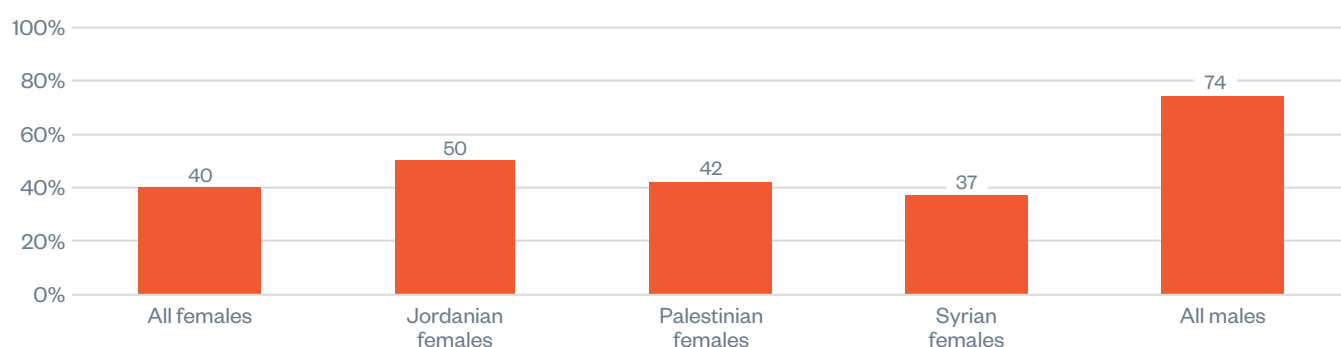


Figure 9: Feels safe in the community at night



street by a group of four younger boys armed with stones and knives, ‘One day, my friend and I were walking in the street at night. Four young men, aged 15, confronted us. They started throwing stones at us and also cut my friend’s hand with a blade.’ A 15-year-old Syrian girl reported that her brother had also been attacked on the street, but with glass, ‘One of the boys hit my brother with a piece of glass in his chest near the heart ... My mom took him to the hospital, where the doctor sewed the wound to stop the bleeding.’ Several respondents added that extreme violence has even infiltrated boys’ schools. A 15-year-old Syrian girl reported that two Syrian boys had been shot while at school, and a Jordanian mother stated, ‘Even in schools, boys bring sharp objects, fight and beat each other.’

Turkmen and Syrian respondents also reported high levels of verbal and emotional violence from peers. In the case of Turkmen young people, exclusion and bullying are most often related to differences in customs. A Makani facilitator explained, ‘Turkmen students are mocked for the way they talk and the way they dress.’ In the case of Syrian young people, exclusion and bullying – in the community and at school – are most often related to many Jordanians’ beliefs that Syrians are responsible for Jordan’s socioeconomic problems. A 15-year-old Syrian girl stated, ‘The Jordanians talk a lot against the Syrians

... They insult them ... They say, “You are Syrians and you cannot live here. You are refugees!” An 18-year-old Syrian young man, the only Syrian in his 12th grade class, added: ‘In school there is bullying ... They talk about Syrian girls, that most Syrian girls are cheap.’ A 15-year-old Syrian boy recalled that he had lost his one Jordanian friend because other Jordanian boys had warned the friend off: ‘One of the boys told him not to play with me. The boy told him, “He is Syrian, stay away. They destroyed our country.”’ Some Jordanian adults admitted that their children are picking these beliefs up at home. A Jordanian community key informant explained, ‘Our children repeat what they hear ... from parents of course ... They don’t come up with this on their own.’

During qualitative interviews, most respondents agreed that Jordanian communities are increasingly dangerous – primarily due to rising youth violence. A Makani facilitator stated, ‘There is violence in the area.’ A community key informant added, ‘Violence has increased now ... and the nature of violence is getting more aggressive.’ Respondents attribute shifts both to increased economic pressure and increased substance use. A 16-year-old Palestinian girl reported of Gaza camp, ‘Because of unemployment, they started fighting a lot with each other. Many problems, murder and crimes ... Neighbours no

longer stand each other, they fight over the lamest things. A Turkmen father, who noted that he does not allow his children to leave home after sunset, added, *'We cannot walk in the streets after 12 o'clock because of the spread of alcoholic drinkers and drug dealers.'*

From respondents' broader narratives, it was also clear that clan violence is a substantial and perhaps growing threat to young people's bodily integrity. A 17-year-old Bani Murra girl was the only respondent to openly identify such violence, reporting that *'families have revenge with others ... because of the hatred they have for each other.'* However, young people and caregivers of all nationalities told stories about family members who had been injured and killed while fighting to protect the honour of the family, extended family, or clan.

Sexual harassment

During qualitative interviews, and in line with prior GAGE research, most girls and young women admitted to having experienced verbal harassment, usually in the form of unwanted compliments and salacious offers (see Presler-Marshall et al., 2023a). A 15-year-old Bani Murra girl, when asked what she is most afraid of, replied, *'The young men ... They look at the girl in a provocative way.'* A Syrian mother, when asked the same question, replied, *'I don't feel that the girl is safe anymore in the camp, this is the main thing that I felt unsafe about in the camp ... The guys in the camp are disturbing and teasing the girls.'* Boys and young men – even those who report being deeply offended when their own sisters are harassed – often acknowledged that they see verbally harassing girls and young women as a form of entertainment. A 20-year-old Turkmen father explained, *'I do love my wife but teasing is something that I cannot stop to do, because it amuses me.'*

Respondents agreed that girls and young women are most at risk of sexual harassment in the community as they travel to and from school, albeit partly because so many girls and young women do not leave home other than to go to school. A 16-year-old Syrian girl explained, *'There are always young men in front of the girls' school ... every day the police come.'* A Jordanian father agreed: *'I see many guys gathering in front of school, this is a horrible phenomenon.'* Girls added that they tend to endure harassment rather than disclose, even to their parents, because they are afraid that if they speak up then they will be made to leave school. A 17-year-old Syrian girl explained, *'If I tell my parents they might not let me step out of the door!'* The mother of a 15-year-old Syrian girl,

who is being followed home on a regular basis by young men who then propose to her, admitted that this outcome is not unlikely. She stated, *'I am sending her to study ... but yesterday, I told her that I won't allow her to leave the house.'*

Online sexual harassment emerged at midline as a growing threat to girls and young women – in large part because the pandemic increased young people's access to mobile phones. Quite a few girls reported that they or their friends had been victimised by boys and young men who either took secret photos or who gained access to girls' private photos and then shared them online. A 16-year-old Syrian girl explained that girls suffer real harm from this: *'People hack into accounts via the internet, and they take private photos and publish them ... There are some girls who were beaten by their parents because their private photos were published.'* Several girls and young women added that their female peers, cousins and sisters had helped perpetrate online harassment. An 18-year-old Palestinian young woman admitted that she threw herself off her balcony, hoping to die but instead badly breaking her legs, because a girl she believed to be a friend sent a photo of her to a boy and then told her parents that she had done it. A 21-year-old Syrian young woman, who was kicked out of her home by her mother for communicating with a man, reported that her sister and brother-in-law had been behind the photos and rumours that destroyed her reputation. She explained, *'My sister took my pictures ... and my pictures reached my sister's husband ... He created an account on Facebook in my name and created another account in the name of a man.'*

Child marriage

The GAGE midline survey found that most young people do not know that 18 is the legal age of marriage for both girls and boys. While 75% of young people reported that they knew the legal age of marriage for girls, only 53% correctly identified age 18. Similarly, while 62% reported that they knew the legal age of marriage for boys, only 34% correctly identified age 18. Across both cohorts, females were more likely than males to know the legal age of marriage for girls (58% versus 48%); males were more likely than females to know the legal age of marriage for boys (45% versus 24%). Also across both cohorts, Syrians living in UNHCR-run camps were the most likely to have correct knowledge about the legal age of marriage for girls (60%) and boys (39%). Palestinians were the least likely to have accurate knowledge about the legal age of marriage for girls (43%) and boys (28%).

Echoing previous research, the GAGE survey found that child marriage is common in Jordan, especially among Syrian girls. Nearly half (46%) of young women in the older cohort had been married by midline, with 30% married prior to age 18. Of young Syrian women, rates were 51% and 35% respectively. Marriage was less common among young men (10%) and adolescent girls in the younger cohort (3%) (see Figure 10).

As has been reported in previous GAGE publications, child marriage in Jordan is driven by a complex web of social and economic drivers that have been amplified by conflict and displacement (Presler-Marshall et al., 2020). In a small minority of cases, girls are forced into child marriage. This is most often the case when a girl marries her cousin, and is primarily due to girls' parents being unwilling to foment family discord by failing to provide a nephew with an inexpensive bride. A 16-year-old Bani Murra girl reported that she was given no choice of when or whom to marry: *'My mother beat me too much to agree to my marriage ... I cried a lot, I hated him and refused to marry him, but they forced me.'* More often, however, parents – usually mothers – convince girls that marriage is in their best interest, leading some girls to acquiesce and others to enthusiastically agree.

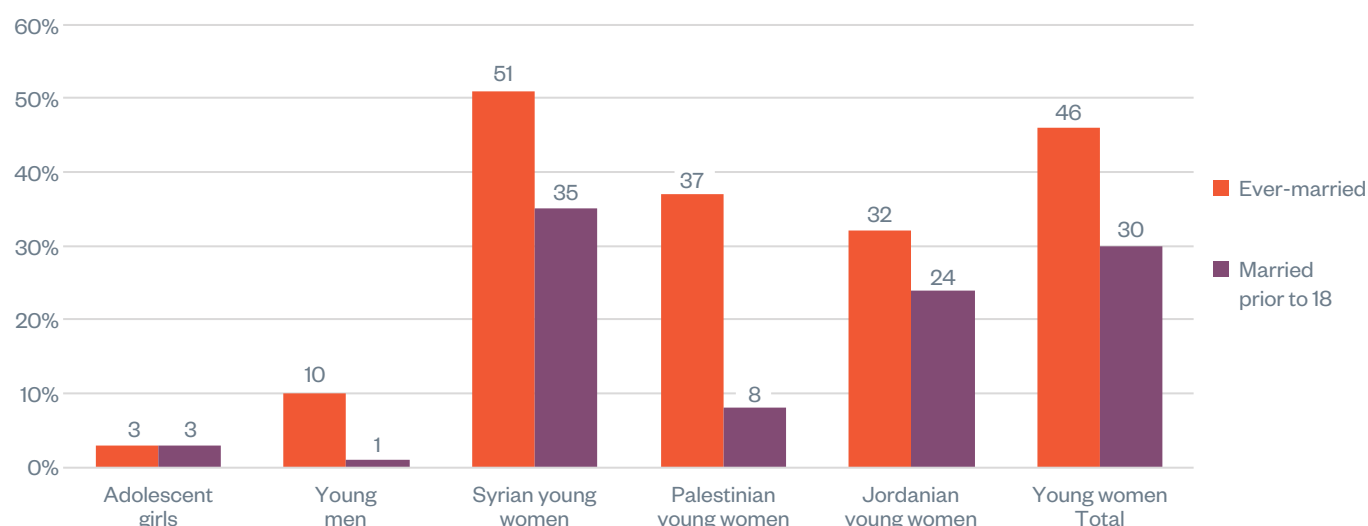
Parents' arguments in favour of child marriage are diverse and include: better financial conditions; protection from sexual harassment and threats to honour; a move to a host community from an informal tented settlement or UNHCR-run refugee camp; escaping family violence; being a girl's fate; and having children to replace family members who have died. A 19-year-old Syrian young woman who married at age 16 explained that for her, her mother's

arguments about financial benefits had been strong: *'My family couldn't help or provide me with a decent life ... So, I decided to marry.'* Parents also admitted that they push girls into accepting a child marriage by so severely limiting girls' lives that girls feel that marriage is an escape. A Palestinian mother explained that her 17-year-old daughter is asking to get married, because her father made her leave school: *'My daughter is asking me to get her married! ... If the girl's father stops her from studying and she stays at home, that's it, the door for marriage has opened for her.'* Young wives often added that they had agreed to child marriage in large part because while they knew about romance – from hours of watching television each day – they had no idea what marriage entails. A 21-year-old Syrian mother explained that she had not even known that marriage includes a sexual relationship: *'I didn't know anything!'*

Several respondents noted that parents also work to convince young men to marry, which has implications for girl child marriage because young men almost always marry girls 5–7 years younger than themselves. In some cases, parents want their sons to marry because they believe that marriage will force their sons to grow up or because they want grandchildren. In other cases, young men's parents want them to marry for more practical reasons. A 22-year-old Syrian man, when asked why he had married relatively young, replied that he had done so for a separate caravan:

The main reason was the residence ... From the day we arrived, we have to eat, sleep, bathe in this one caravan ... My father told us that he will get us married and we will live separately. You know that a grown-up guy is different. Not like a young boy.

Figure 10: Ever been married and married prior to age 18



A Makani facilitator noted that other young men marry in order to maintain access to ration cards, which is cut off at age 18, unless young men are still in school or are married. He explained, *'If they have an 18-year-old male, who isn't studying, his ration card will be stopped ... his parents get him married.'*

Intimate partner violence

Only a small minority of ever-married girls and women who agreed to answer survey questions about intimate partner violence admitted to having experienced it. Of those living in host communities and informal tented settlements,⁵ 9% admitted to having ever been physically assaulted by their husband; 6% admitted to ever having been humiliated by him.

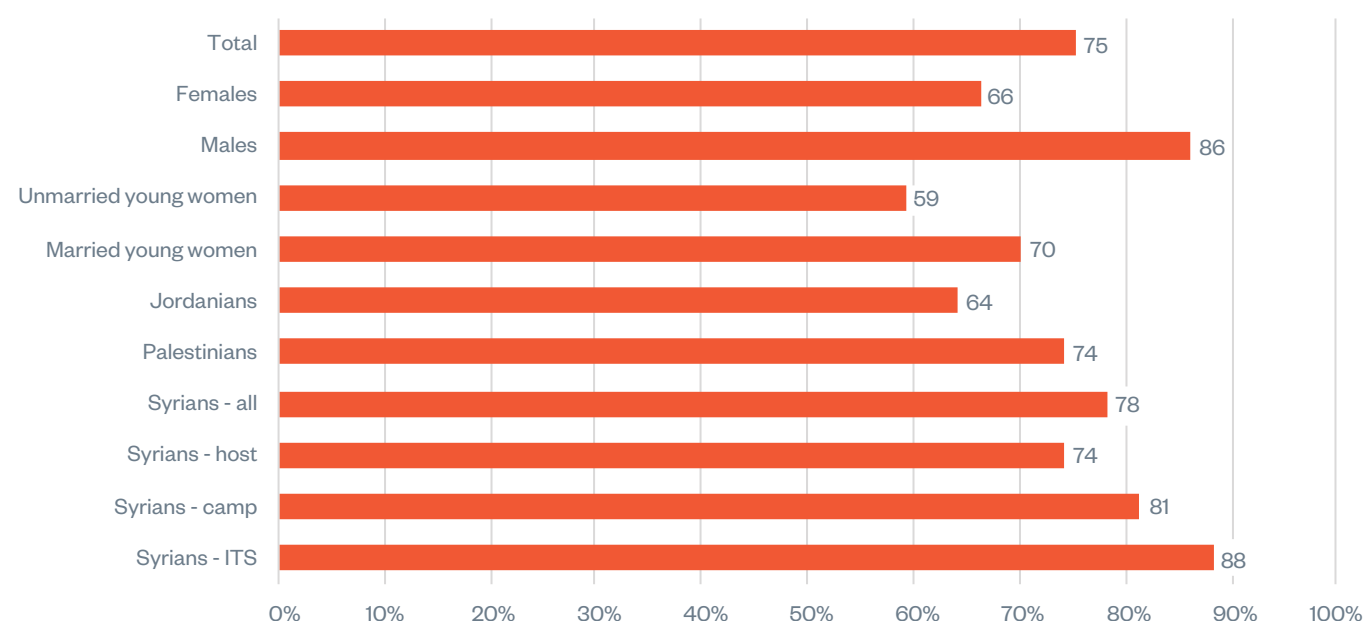
Young people's general attitudes toward marital relationships and spousal violence show a different picture, one in line with findings from the Jordan Population and Family Health Survey. When asked if they agree with the statement that *'a woman should obey her husband in all things'*, a large majority (75%) of those aged 15 and over said yes (see Figure 11). Although there were minimal differences between cohorts, males – across all nationalities and locations – were significantly more likely to agree than females (86% versus 66%) (see Figure 11). Among young women, those who had ever been married were more likely to agree than those who had not (70% versus 59%). Syrians

(78%), especially those living in informal tented settlements (88%) and formal refugee camps (81%), were more likely to agree that wives owe their husband total obedience than Palestinians from Gaza camp (74%) and Jordanians (64%).

The midline survey also asked young people aged 15 and over whether they agreed with the statement, *'it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife to mould her behaviour'*. This statement was less supported than the previous statement. At the aggregate level, 14% agreed (see Figure 12). Age, gender, some nationality, and location differences were significant. Adolescents were more likely to agree than young adults; males were more likely to agree than females; and Syrians and Palestinians were more likely to agree than Jordanians, with Syrians living in UNHCR-run camps and informal tented settlements more likely to agree than those living in host communities. Syrian males living in informal tented settlements (34%) were the most likely to agree that wife beating is justifiable (not shown). There were no differences between married and unmarried young women.

Finally, the survey asked young people aged 15 and over whether they agreed with the statement, *'A man's use of violence against his wife is private and should not be discussed outside the home'*. At the aggregate level, 43% of young people agreed (see Figure 13). Adolescents were more likely to agree than young adults; males were more likely to agree than females; married young women were

Figure 11: Agrees with the statement, 'A woman should obey her husband in all things'



⁵ We were not allowed to ask this question of married girls and women living in UNHCR-run camps. There were a total of 223 married females living in host and ITS communities that agreed to answer questions on intimate partner violence.

Figure 12: Agrees with the statement, 'It is acceptable for a man to beat his wife to mould her behaviour' (age 15+ only)

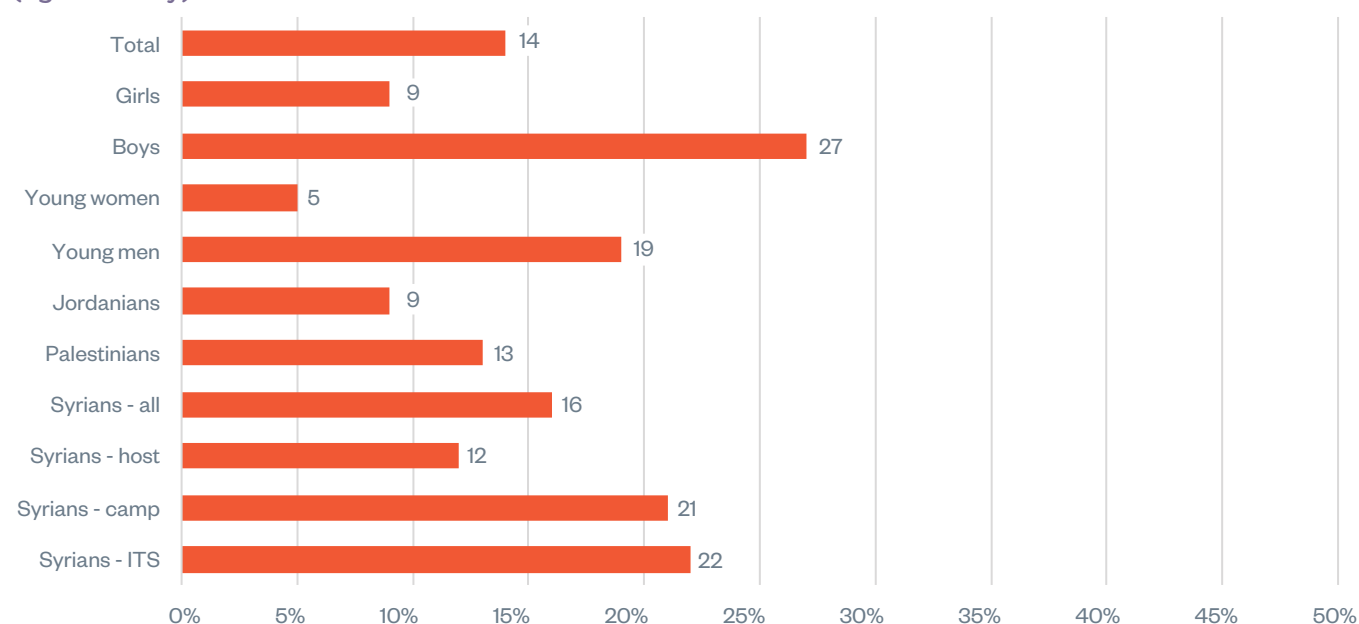
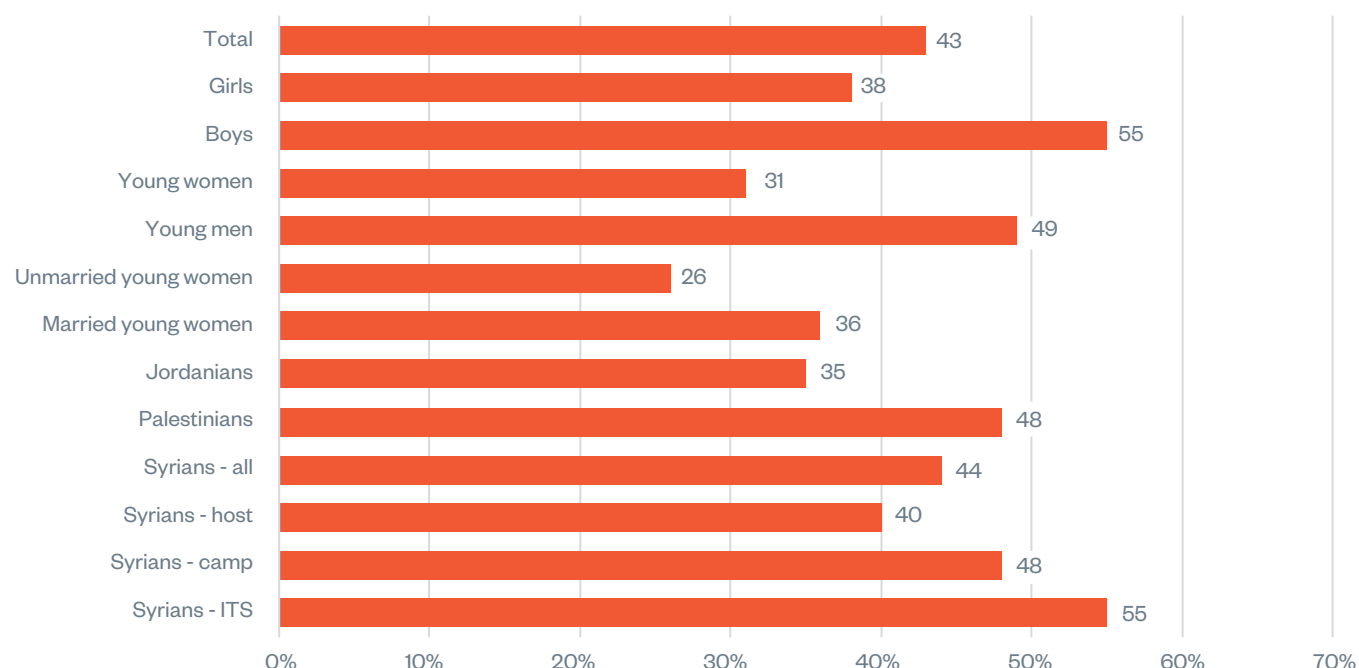


Figure 13: Agrees with the statement, 'A man's use of violence against his wife is private and should not be discussed outside the home' (age 15+ only)



more likely to agree than unmarried young women (36% versus 26%); and Palestinians (48%) and Syrians (44%) (especially those living in informal tented settlements) were more likely to agree than Jordanians (35%). Palestinian males (60%) were the most likely to agree that spousal violence should be kept private (not shown).

During individual interviews, and as noted in a previous GAGE publication on gender norms, married girls and young women in Jordan reported that intimate partner violence is common, can be severe, and is almost always

kept private due to the stigma that surrounds divorce and the lack of alternatives for young wives experiencing such violence (Presler-Marshall et al., 2023b). A 21-year-old Syrian mother recalled having tolerated abuse for some years before she finally returned to her parents' house and asked for a divorce:

I was living like an animal ... He would leave me and the children alone and I was forced to put up with everything like lack of money, insults, beatings ... No one knew

about it, and if I told anyone about our problems, he would refuse anyone's interference.

A 20-year-old Turkmen mother, asked why she tolerated violence for three years, replied, *'I had a daughter who needed money, I needed money and my parents cannot bear our expenses.'*

Caregivers and key informants did not gainsay young wives' narratives. A Palestinian mother reported that nearly *'all wives are beaten and insulted'*. A Syrian mother noted that this is because men do not have enough access to work and instead focus on what their wives are doing (or not doing) – and how this reflects on men. She explained, *'The husband is sitting at home for 24 hours. Why this and that? Why is that thing here and so. And all this reflects on whom?'* A Makani facilitator clarified that the beatings that young mothers endure often arise from them carrying out their duty to care for their children. He reported that a young mother had been beaten badly for asking to take her very ill daughter to the doctor: *'Her husband had beaten her when she came to me, she told me that her husband had beaten her and that her head was swollen because he did not want her to take the girl to the doctor.'*

Support seeking for violence

A majority (64%) of young people reported on the midline survey that they are aware of where a survivor of violence might seek support. Young adults (71%) were significantly more aware of services than adolescents (58%). Of those who were aware of services, and echoing the findings of the 2023 Jordan Population and Family Health Survey, only a small minority (8%) had ever utilised those services. Males were significantly more likely to have done so than females (12% versus 5%). Nationality and location differences were insignificant.

During qualitative interviews, respondents reported a wide array of services and programming aimed at preventing and redressing various types of violence. In line with the GAGE survey findings, although awareness of these programmes and services was relatively high, uptake – especially of survivor services – was overall limited.

In terms of helping young people experiencing violence in the natal home, the efforts of UNICEF-supported Makani centres stood out. Several mothers noted that they had taken a parenting education course aimed at reducing violent discipline. A Palestinian mother recalled, *'I also learnt how to deal with myself... and about how to deal with my children, not by beating, but by something else.'* Several

Makani facilitators added that they also refer cases of child abuse for medical and justice services. One explained that several sisters who were part of a Makani WhatsApp group had used that service to solicit his help in protecting themselves from their father:

The girls took my phone number from the WhatsApp groups and contacted me. We made a referral for them to Al-Tutanji hospital and then to the Family Protection Department. There was a lawyer from the current community who stood with us and stayed with the girls and the family. The father signed a pledge [to not beat his daughters in the future].

With the caveat that it is extremely rare for young people to accuse their parents of violence, broader narratives suggest that many young people are aware of both their right to bodily integrity (often due to classes they had taken at Makani centres) and mechanisms for reporting violence. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl reported that she had made recordings of her stepmother's abuse, and taken them to the police; and a Syrian mother noted that every time she scolds her adolescent daughter, her daughter *'says that she will complain against me to the Family Protection department'*.

In terms of teacher violence, several young people reported that government policies prohibiting corporal punishment can be effective. An 18-year-old Syrian young man taking part in participatory research, when asked about violence at school, replied, *'Hitting is forbidden in education, the teacher didn't hit us.'* A young Syrian woman the same age agreed: *'There is no beating in schools in Jordan.'* That said, for the many young people whose teachers do beat and humiliate them, there appear limited options for redress. Whereas it was common for parents to report having gone to their child's school in response to teacher violence, no parent reported having successfully resolved the problem. Indeed, a Bani Murra mother noted that the accused teacher had then violently approached her: *'I went and told the principal that it is my right to speak and complain, and the teacher came towards me shouting.'*

Efforts to prevent and provide redress for peer violence vary according to whether that violence is akin to bullying (which is more typical) or more dangerous forms of youth violence. In helping to address bullying, Makani centres again stand out. Several adolescents reported having learnt at centres that bullying is not acceptable. A 15-year-old Syrian girl admitted that she used to be quite violent, before learning alternatives:

I always hit boys and girls younger than me ... When I learnt that physical and verbal violence is inappropriate and prohibited, I changed and evolved. That it's not allowed at Makani, I placed my brain in my head and stopped doing it.

For adolescents seeking to end bullying, parents and school counsellors emerged as the strongest advocates. A 17-year-old Palestinian girl, who had been hit by another girl at school, recalled: *'The first thing I do is call my mother and ask her to come to school, and then I go to the social counsellor.'* For youth violence, respondents reported that the police are generally responsive. However, Syrian boys and young men admitted that unless they are badly hurt, they rarely press charges, because they feel the police do not take Syrians' complaints seriously. A 17-year-old boy, who was accosted and beaten on the street, explained, *'I wanted to file a complaint, but I didn't dare.'*

Although a few young people in previous rounds of research have mentioned learning at Makani centres that sexual harassment is not acceptable and should be reported, respondents' narratives about sexual harassment at midline overwhelmingly featured the police. Young people and caregivers reported stepped-up policing around girls' schools. They also reported that when girls are able to report sexual harassment to their parents, some parents are now willing to call the police. A Syrian mother of a 15-year-old girl stated, *'A young man verbally harassed my neighbour's daughter ... The police came and intervened.'* That said, the community gossip that surrounds girls and young women continues to limit their options for asking for help. A 21-year-old Syrian young woman reported that when her friend asked a police officer for help, she was accused of flirting: *'People said that she spoke to the policeman and flirted with him, and should not have spoken beautiful words to him.'* Respondents reported that Makani centres and the police are involved in efforts to address digital harassment. With the caveat that many parents' surveillance of girls' digital lives is already extreme, a Palestinian mother reported that she had learnt in a parenting education course that she should monitor her children's online lives carefully: *'They told us about the cyber-crimes ... that you have to pay attention.'* A Makani facilitator added that if girls are able to report online threats, the police are responsive. He reported that he had recently worked with an adolescent girl to put an end to blackmail:

He started blackmailing her with these photos, telling her ... if she won't accompany him, he will post her photos ... The case was referred to the electronic crimes department of the police and it was solved under total confidentiality. The guy was in trouble, all the photos were deleted from his mobile.

Respondents report that efforts to prevent child marriage are wide-ranging. Makani centres work with girls and parents, teaching them about the law and also the disadvantages of child marriage. A 15-year-old Syrian girl reported, *'The teacher always explained to us about violence and about marriage before the age of 18 ... A person under 18 is considered a child.'* Recent United Nations (UN) policies are also aimed at prevention. Many respondents reported that if an incentive-based volunteer⁶ of UNHCR or UNICEF is found to have married his or her daughter prior to age 18, he or she will not only lose access to the position, but – in formal camps – may also lose the caravan provided by UNHCR to his or her family.

Jordanian justice services are also getting stricter. Although it remains unusual for girls to avail themselves of the Family Protection department to prevent a child marriage, because girls are unwilling to jeopardise their parents, several young wives reported that the full force of the law had been brought to bear on their natal and marital families when they gave birth to a child prior to being old enough to legally marry. A 17-year-old Syrian girl, who gave birth at 15, reported that her newborn was put into care, her husband was imprisoned, and her parents and parents-in-law were fined: *'They say I taught half the clan a lesson with my story ... They stopped girls getting married at a young age.'*

In the case of intimate partner violence, qualitative evidence suggests that most survivors know where they might get help, but face high barriers to doing so. Due to social norms that dictate that intimate partner violence should never be discussed outside the marital home, the first barrier faced by many young wives is disclosing. Disclosure is complicated by the reality that young wives' main source of support – their parents – are often less concerned about their daughter's safety than family reputation. A Palestinian mother explained that preventing gossip is vital: *'She has no right to complain. Let him beat her. No problem. The important thing is that people do not*

⁶ Syrian refugees working in UNHCR or UNICEF interventions work on a volunteer basis but typically receive a financial incentive for their contributions.

talk about you! A 22-year-old Jordanian young woman added that even when families witness violence, they are hesitant to get involved. She reported that her brothers were there when her husband shoved her into a wall and hit her, but declined to intervene because *'they thought that it was a private issue between us and they think my husband has the right to do what he wants'*. A 14-year-old Palestinian boy noted that his father had finally agreed to protect his oldest sister, but had then backed down – and forced her to return to her marital home – when the sister's husband visited her natal family with elders, *'My father told him that you keep hitting her and we will help her divorce you ... but then they brought notables to my father and he returned her.'*

Survivors of intimate partner violence are also limited by Jordanian law, which makes it difficult for women to initiate divorce, grants custody of children to fathers rather than mothers, and sometimes requires a burden of proof so high that even medical records documenting serious injuries fail to convince a judge of violence. A 21-year-old now divorced Syrian mother explained that it took her months to regain custody of her children after her abusive husband absconded with them: *'They were saying: he is their father and he took them, and you do not have a divorce paper or a paper proving that these children are within your custody.'* That said, with the caveat that many Syrian families are wary of the Family Protection department, because they believe that it favours Jordanians, respondents were agreed that those services are effective. A Jordanian mother whose daughter has now ended a violent marriage, reported that, *'The Family Protection department has become much better than the previous times ... Now there is a law to protect the woman ... The Family Protection department got her divorced from him ... They did it by themselves. He was arrested.'* A 21-year-old Syrian mother added that the Family Protection department not only solved her short-term problem (namely that her mother-in-law was fomenting discord between young partners) but also *'promised to follow me up, to know if something new happened with me or not'*.

Conclusions and implications for policy and programming

GAGE midline research findings underscore that young people living in Jordan have highly uneven access to bodily integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence, with often large disparities between adolescents and young adults, between females and males, across nationalities, between Syrians living in different locations, and according to a young person's disability and marital status. In terms of violence at the hands of caregivers, and with the caveat that Syrians (particularly those living in formal refugee camps) tend to under-report to protect their community, violence remains common – especially for adolescents and those with disabilities – due to caregivers' stress levels and beliefs that corporal punishment is necessary for childrearing. In terms of violence at the hands of teachers, adolescent boys (especially Palestinian boys) are at far greater risk than girls. This is partly because girls are socialised into compliance, and rarely make trouble in the classroom; but it is also partly because boys are taught by male teachers, who are under-paid and under-respected and take out their frustrations on their students. Boys and young men, especially those from refugee and ethnic minority communities, are also at greater risk of peer violence than girls and young women, due to greater restrictions on females' mobility and due to social norms that position violence as a core masculine trait. In addition, while the risk of young males experiencing peer violence is falling over time, as boys outgrow schoolyard bullying, the intensity and dangerousness of violence that young males experience and perpetrate is growing, in line with their frustration about unemployment and their access to drugs. Due to conservative gender norms, girls and young women are at high risk of sexual- and gender-based violence, including not only sexual harassment (perpetrated by the same young males who fight with one another in the community) but also child marriage and intimate partner violence. Although Syrian girls are at especially high risk of child marriage, because of concerns about their sexual purity and how it reflects on family honour, girls of all nationalities are at risk once they are married, due to widespread beliefs that husbands have authority over their wives and that intimate partner violence is a private matter. GAGE research participants emphasised that UNICEF's supported Makani centres are effectively working to reduce all types of violence against young people – by teaching parents non-violent discipline strategies, by increasing young people's awareness of their rights and how to report violence, and by encouraging boys and young men to eschew 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:

To address violence in the home:

- Continue and scale up parenting education courses (including at Makani centres) that teach alternative discipline strategies and address gender norms and how these impact expectations and violence over the life course. Courses should also address sibling violence, particularly older brothers' violence towards their younger sisters. To improve outreach to fathers, Makani centres might consider partnering with religious institutions and teaching father-only classes at mosques.
- Provide parents with stress-reduction programming that includes attention to gender norms and how these impact parents' stress levels and stress reactions. Proactively target the parents of young people with disabilities, given their often greater stress levels.
- To tackle the culture of silence that surrounds violence, continue and scale up efforts to raise young people's awareness of their rights and how to report various forms of violence, through Makani centres and other community-based programming as well as at schools.
- In line with Jordanian national law that requires providers of education and health services to report suspected child abuse, provide teachers, school counsellors, and health care providers with training on how to recognise the signs of child abuse, and on when and how they should bring in protection services.
- Improve access to social protection to reduce household stress levels, proactively targeting young people with disabilities and setting benefit levels to reflect added disability-related costs as necessary.
- Use mass media and social media campaigns to encourage those adolescents and young people who are experiencing violence at home to seek help.
- Establish hotlines that can be anonymously accessed via the phone and internet, so that those who are experiencing violence can access support and information at the times and locations that best suit them. Ensure that responders have training in disability-specific bodily integrity risks.

To address violence at the hands of teachers:

- Provide teachers with regular training on how to control classrooms using non-violent discipline strategies. Ensure that this training includes a component on inclusion, integration and non-discrimination toward young people with disabilities.
- Develop and monitor accountability systems that let students and parents (anonymously) report teachers who are violent, and principals who fail to act on such reports.

To address peer violence:

- Continue and scale up programming for young people – at Makani centres and other community venues – aimed at fostering social cohesion across ethnicities and nationalities and reducing disability-related stigma. Programming should proactively address all forms of violence in the community and ensure that young people know how to avoid, reduce and report violence.
- Develop and scale programming for boys and young men, perhaps using near-peer mentors, aimed at supporting the adoption of non-violent masculinities. Pair this with increased access to recreational spaces and opportunities, including those that can be used after dark (such as floodlit football fields).
- Provide parents with parenting education courses that address gender norms, and how these impact children's risk of perpetrating and experiencing peer violence, as well as how to support children to become resistant to bullying.
- Provide teachers with training on how to prevent and address bullying at school.
- Improve policing in the most at-risk areas during the most at-risk hours – and pair this with efforts to develop trust between communities and the police.
- Use mass media and social media campaigns to encourage the reporting of violence, especially in marginalised communities (e.g. the Turkmen or Syrians living in ITS).

To address sexual harassment:

- Continue and step up policing around girls' schools during the hours that girls are arriving at and leaving school.
- Using in-person sessions and mass media and social media campaigns, work with girls and young women, their parents and communities to raise awareness that sexual harassment is not the fault of victims, to support

reporting, to shame perpetrators, and to encourage bystanders to intervene.

- Develop and scale programming for boys and young men aimed at fostering alternative masculinities and encouraging them to become protectors rather than harassers.
- Enforce the law, with perpetrators of sexual harassment first fined and then imprisoned for repeat offences.

To address child marriage:

- Use all measures to keep girls in school as long as possible, including awareness-raising sessions with girls and their parents, increasing the number of years of compulsory education (and enforcing the compulsory education law), tutorial support, transport allowances and cash transfers.
- Provide girls with gender-focused empowerment programming that teaches them their rights, raises their aspirations, strengthens their voice, and encourages reporting and help-seeking (when needed).
- Continue efforts with adolescent girls, their parents and the parents of young men – at Makani centres and schools and through other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and religious institutions – to raise awareness about the risks of child marriage and the advantages of adult marriage. For girls, this should include instructions on what marriage actually entails.
- Eliminate the legal loophole that allows girls to marry at 16 with the permission of the religious court, moving the minimum age for marriage first to 17, and then 18. Pair this with stepped-up enforcement, using mechanisms already in existence, prosecuting parents and husbands as needed.

To address intimate partner violence:

- Provide engaged and newly married couples with programming (perhaps at religious institutions) aimed at teaching communication skills, raising awareness about gender norms and how these impact relationships, and ensuring that young couples know their rights and responsibilities and how and where to seek help should they need it.
- Develop and scale programming for young wives, providing them with access to caring mentors and peers and a venue for reporting should they need one. To make such programming palatable to gate-keepers (e.g. husbands and in-laws), courses could provide practical instruction on housekeeping, cooking and childcare.
- Develop and scale programming for young husbands aimed at fostering alternative masculinities; this might be made more palatable by linking it to fatherhood courses.
- Ensure that parents are made aware (through parenting education courses and mass media and social media campaigns) that their obligations to their daughter do not end when their daughter marries.
- Establish hotlines that can be anonymously accessed via the phone and internet, so that those who are experiencing violence can access support and information at the times and locations that best suit them. Raise awareness about these services at health clinics, religious education centres, markets, and other localities that women frequently visit.
- Scale up medical, legal and psychosocial survivor services, working to reduce the stigma and shame that surrounds divorce.
- Use mass media and social media campaigns to encourage non-violent masculinities.
- Lower the legal burden of proof required by survivors.

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Front cover: A 14-year-old Jordanian girl from Bani Murra community, Jordan © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2024

