

Adolescents in Jordan: freedom from age- and gender-based violence

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The Jordanian government, together with international development partners, has committed to ensuring that young people grow up in an environment free from violence and embrace the values of tolerance and peace. Yet GAGE research suggests that adolescents in Jordan—irrespective of whether they are Jordanian or refugee or whether they live in host communities, camps or informal settlements—continue to face multiple age- and gender-related risks, and that programming needs to do much more to mitigate these.



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GAGE research findings

Our research found that corporal punishment is common in Jordan. Of the nearly 4,000 adolescents surveyed, 49% reported violence at home, while more than a third of mothers (37%) admitted using physical discipline and 8% admitted severely beating their adolescent child in the past month. As one Syrian mother in a host community said, *'I have no solution except beating them. I like beating ... It is like emptying and a release.'* In addition, 41% of adolescents reported experiencing violence by teachers, with boys at greater risk than girls (58% versus 25%), causing many to drop out.

Adolescents are also at risk of bullying (verbal and physical) from peers, which can be severe. Syrian young people tend to face the brunt of host-community resentment towards the changes brought about by the refugee crisis. Of the adolescents in our sample, 42% reported experiencing peer violence in the past year. Boys are more at risk than girls (46% versus 38%) and younger adolescents (age 10-12) are more at risk than their older peers (age 15-17) (49% versus 34%). Young people with disabilities are more at risk than those without (53% versus 40%).

Adolescent girls, especially refugees, face widespread sexual harassment and are at substantial risk of child marriage. Girls reported that they are often blamed for inviting abuse, which can make travelling to and from school daunting. A 15-year-old Syrian girl from Zarqa explained, *'Our community is unmerciful ... If anyone violates any girls, the community thinks that the girl ... wanted this action'*. Of the 997 older adolescent girls (age 15-17) in our sample, 18% – almost exclusively refugees – were already married. *'We don't consider girls in 9th grade as a young girl'*, explained a Syrian mother in a host community. Girls are typically married to their paternal cousins, whether they want to or not, partly to free parents of *'their burden'* (Palestinian mother) and partly to keep girls from becoming too *'open-minded'* due to the *'influence of their friends'* (Syrian mother in a host community).

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(15 year old Syrian girl from Zarqa)



Makani programme effects

UNICEF's integrated Makani programming is having a positive impact on adolescents' vulnerabilities to age- and gender-based violence. For example, older girls who have never attended Makani are more than twice as likely to be married as those who have (24% versus 10%). Makani facilitators reported that this is partly due to parent education sessions. One explained, 'People now are convinced, 95% of them, that early marriage is not good. I would say that 30% of them got convinced of that due to our lessons' (Mateen key informant in an informal tented settlement). Parents also learned how to discipline their children in non-violent ways. As a Syrian mother in a host community reported:

'I benefited a lot from lectures ... I used to hit my children a lot, but now it's impossible ... Beating does not help ... on the contrary, [it] hurts the psychology of children.'

Child protection sessions help adolescents learn that *'there are sensitive parts in the human body, that others are not allowed to touch'* (mother, host community) and to *'become strong and brave'* (11-year-old girl, Zaatari). They are also teaching young people where and how to seek help if they experience violence. Older girl participants are 30% more likely than non-participants to know where to find help if they are hit, and older boys are 39% more likely than non-participants to have spoken to someone about peer violence they experienced.

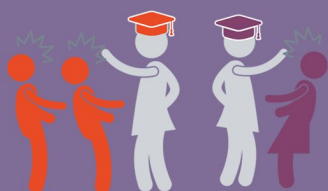
Programme recommendations

Scale up parenting support groups to improve communication between parents and adolescents, shift gender norms, and relieve parent stress.



Expand programming that supports empowerment for girls and positive masculinities for boys, through synchronised and structured gender transformative curricula.

Identify champions of change among religious and other community leaders to disseminate messages about the risks and opportunity costs of child and consanguineous marriage.



Continue investing in and expand opportunities for teachers and schools to adopt child-friendly pedagogies and positive disciplinary approaches to improve learning and reduce peer violence as part of broader national efforts to ensure all children and adolescents' safety from violence. Establishing complementary initiatives to ensure safe and anonymous reporting of violence within schools, and timely follow up and responses, including case management support will also be key.

Organise and scale-up parent and adolescent volunteers to provide better security on the streets and outside school buildings, building on learning from a forthcoming UNICEF pilot.

Promote national efforts to expand psychosocial support services, including case management services, for adolescents – especially girls who have experienced age- and gender-based violence.

