Adolescents & Conflict in MENA

Study results

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Save the Children
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- Explored the conflicts that affect adolescents most and their experiences in managing them

- In depth discussions with 571 adolescent girls & boys 12-17 years, caregivers, community members and NGO/CBOs.

- Six locations in four countries: Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen

- Consultations conducted in 2017
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331 adolescents: 175 adolescent girls & 156 adolescent boys
240 caregivers & stakeholders : 131 female and 109 male
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**Methodology**

**Workshops with 331 adolescent girls and boys 12-14 and 15-17 (separated groups)**

- World Café and in depth interviews with 240
  - Families / parents / caregivers
  - Religious leaders and civil society volunteers
  - Teachers, youth counselors, Field outreach workers, program facilitators
  - NGO / CBO field staff
  - University academics and researchers

**Participatory & Interactive workshops with adolescents (sensitive topic):**

- **Identity exercise**: Ice Breaker and building trust/getting to know each other
- **Wall of Conflict**: reflection on a conflict that affected their life, how they managed it, and who did they turn to for support
- **Ranking cards game**: prioritize 9 cards depicting rights in relation to their conflicts
- **Forum Theatre**: participants reflect 3 scenarios of conflicts (in family, school and street / and work in Egypt) and what solutions they collectively proposed to resolve the conflicts presented.
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KEY FINDINGS

➢ Adolescents, across all age groups, gender and locations are overwhelmingly exposed to high levels of violence in all spheres of their life- at home, in school and in the community- with no safe place or support network to turn to

➢ Violence was not only highly prevalent in countries affected by armed conflict like Yemen or Iraq. The study also shows high levels of violence and discrimination adolescents face in locations not directly affected by armed conflict, like Egypt or Jordan.
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**Key Findings**

➢ Adolescents have to constantly **negotiate their way with their parents, teachers and peers**. They overwhelmingly reported **not resorting to their primary caregivers for support** - on the contrary, adolescents feared further punishment from their caregivers.

> Parents neglect us and they use us for work and violence
> [they] abuse us physically and verbally - adolescent girl 12-14 years

> I always handle my problems on my own. I refer to my friend when I need someone’s help — adolescent girl 12-14 years

> There was a girl who got married at 15. She gave birth and her husband used to hit her. She wanted to get divorced, then she got raped and her husband said he no longer desired her. [...] She didn’t tell anyone because she knew they won’t believe her. [...] They blame girls for everything – adolescent girl 15-17 years
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**Key Findings**

➢ Adolescents expressed how they had never been asked about the conflicts they face in their lives, and *overwhelmingly feel that nobody listens to them*.

*No one cares about our feelings. We are all humans, and even though we like it here, we are stressed out and tired too* - adolescent girl, 12-17 years

*There is usually no one to share the pain we feel inside* - adolescent boy, 15-17 years

*No one asked me before what my problems were. I don’t know how to deal with them at all* — adolescent girl 15-17 years
Adolescent girls reported feeling imprisoned by their parents, as they are forced to stay home and not allowed to go to school or even to go out with or speak with friends, for fear of their reputation. They reported violence, physical and psychological, consistently perpetrated against them by male relatives.

Mothers should have rule over their sons and prevent them from interfering in their sisters’ daily life. Because we are living in a patriarchal society so the mother should protect her daughters’ rights.— adolescent girl 12-14 years
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Key findings

➢ the environment of systemic violence in which they exist, at both a micro and macro scale, leads to their feelings of hopelessness and manifest through often (self) aggressive behavior

We get offered a lot of drugs. Some students smoke normal cigarettes in school and then do drugs directly afterwards. They get so addicted they’d work in anything to get the money for it – adolescent boy, 12-14 years

➢ In some instances they expressed desire to take part in the armed conflicts, to feel they were contributing in some way:

We would hear the sound of the bombs and the rockets. I was very brave and I faced the situation without fear. I wish I have fought in the war — adolescent girl, 12-14 years
All adolescents spoke of the violence, neglect and corruption they experienced in schools. They reported rampant violence from teachers and school administrators. They described the hitting in school as a great injustice being done to them. They expressed frustration with their inability to deal with the issues they face at school.

Adolescents girls and boys in the four different contexts reported being witness and/or subjected to high levels of violence in their communities. Those coming from an active war zone mentioned shelling/bombing and armed fighting, while the others mentioned prevalence of criminal violence, at time associated with drug dealing, kidnappings, killings and various forms of gender based and sexual violence.

We had a conflict between two tribes. Men came to our house and took me. I was scared. I cried. I asked them to take me to my mom. I was kept captive for 7 months in central prison. I was very tired and asked for the doctor. She was a lady. I told her what happened — adolescent girl, 12-14 years
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**Key Findings**

- Adolescent boys reported being systematically targeted by the police, as well as gangs and armed groups, and felt particularly powerless and resigned to not being able to change the situation.

  Parents and relatives place pressure on us by telling us to work and help our families, so some children go to war — adolescent boy, 12-14 years

  [we don’t have] any means of entertainment for children, and this makes children enter a miserable state and they go out in public where they can be an easy prey for armed forces — adolescent boy, 15-17 years
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Key findings

➢ Adolescents asked for **safety, education, more opportunities to express their views, and emphasized wanting to develop their talents**, by having more sessions that include drawing, theater, art and other games.

➢ They also expressed that they wanted more sessions in which they could “share their feelings” and “learn to deal with them.”

In spite of all of this, adolescents want to contribute and change things around them

> I wish I was able to help those in need and build places for them to live because I love others — adolescent boy, 12-14 years
When we set our minds to something, we can accomplish it. We need to depend on ourselves. We can build our future with power of will and determination. [...] We should be independent and don’t let any obstacles affect us - adolescent girl, 12-14 years