Translating Research Into Scaled Up Action: Evidence Symposium on Adolescent and Youth in MENA
November 21-22 2017 | Amman, Jordan

EVIDENCE PAPER

VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH: NEW EVIDENCE AND KEY POLICY ISSUES FOR MENA

Save the Children (Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office) and UNICEF (MENA Regional Office)

November 2017
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BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE METHODOLOGY/SOURCES OF INFORMATION PRIORITIZED FOR THE PAPER

The purpose of this session is to share new data and evidence related to impact of violence against adolescent and youth and provide some insights into the way they perceive and experiences this in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, including insights into the ways in which they manage it and the support that they require.

We first hear from UNICEF that uses the latest available global data, statistics and analytics to present a regional overview on what the big data is telling us about violence against children in the region with a focus on the adolescent age group of 10-19 years of age and disaggregated by age and gender.

Then the American University of Beirut presents its findings from the most recent and comprehensive literature review undertaken by an academic institution in the region on violence against children also with a focus on adolescents.

Save the Children, will then take a deep dive to present a unique insight on how adolescents perceive and experience the violence perpetrated against them and the ways they find to manage it.

Most importantly the evidence presented in this session will also hear from adolescents and young person’s themselves from Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, through their testimonials.

Together, all this data and evidence will provide a unique insight into the situation of adolescents and youth in this region and collectively “Tell the all-to-familiar but still hidden story of violence they face in the Middle East and North Africa”.

In so doing, we seek to inform thinking, policy and practices around the ways that we prevent and respond to the violence that affect adolescents and youth in this region. As well as highlighting the evidence, we will also be identifying regional evidence gaps and proposing priorities for evidence generation. Building on these key findings and testimonials, and utilizing the opportunity for robust discussions between the stakeholders and young people participating in this session, we intend to formulate practical and targeted recommendations to guide and influence policy and programming strategies.
REGIONAL OVERVIEW: UNMASKING THE ALL-TOO-FAMILIAR FACES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CHILD ADOLESCENT¹ - THE EVIDENCE AND DATA

Staggering numbers of adolescents are experiencing violence in this region, often by those entrusted to take care of them and it start early in the life of an adolescent. The harm inflicted on children and adolescents around the world is truly worrying. Girls and boys forced into sexual acts; adolescents murdered in their communities – violence against children spares no one and knows no boundaries.²

EVERYDAY PLACES, FAMILIAR FACES: A REALITY THROUGHOUT CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

IT STARTS EARLY AND CONTINUES INTO ADOLESCENCE

Violence against children starts early and continues into adolescent and later life. A child’s first experience of human interaction typically occurs at home, in a positive, nurturing and loving context. However, home is also the place where a child’s first exposure to violence is likely to occur.³ In 8 of the 11 countries with available data in the region, more than 20% of adults say that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise or educate children.

¹ Based on A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents, UNICEF’s latest Global Report, launched 1st November, which uses the very latest data to show that children experience violence across all stages of childhood and in all settings
² Taken from quote made by Cornelius Williams Chief Child Protection, UNICEF HQ, NY for launch of this report
³ Three quarters of children aged 2 to 4 worldwide – close to 300 million – are regularly subjected to violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) by their parents or other caregivers at home, and around 6 in 10 (250 million) are subjected to physical punishment. Many children are also indirectly affected by violence in the home: Worldwide, 1 in 4 children (176 million) under the age of 5 live with a mother who has been a recent victim of intimate partner violence. In 7 of the 9 countries in MENA with available data, the percent of children who experienced any physical punishment in the past month was higher among children aged 2 to 4 than among the older 5 to 14 age group. These differences were statistically significant at the p<0.01 level in only 3 countries: Tunisia, State of Palestine, and Jordan
Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced physical punishment in the past month, by age

- Tunisia
- State of Palestine
- Egypt
- Yemen
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Jordan
- Algeria
- Iraq
- Qatar

Note: Countries where the difference between children aged 2 to 4 years and children aged 5 to 14 years is statistically significant at the p<0.01 level include Tunisia, State of Palestine, and Jordan.

Source: UNICEF analysis based on MICS and DHS, 2006-2014

Percentage of population aged 15 and above who think that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise or educate children

- Syrian Arab Republic
- Qatar
- Algeria
- State of Palestine
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Egypt
- Lebanon
- Yemen
- Morocco
- Tunisia

Notes: Data for Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic refer to mothers/primary caregivers only. Data for Lebanon and Morocco refer to children aged 2 to 14 years whose mother/primary caregiver thinks that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise or educate children. Data for all other countries refer to any adult household member who responded to questions about child discipline.

VIOLENCE ALSO OCCURS IN PLACES WHERE CHILDREN ARE MEANT TO LEARN AND SOCIALIZE.

In 13 of the 16 countries in MENA with available data on bullying, more than 1 in 4 adolescents aged 13-15 reported being bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months; in Egypt, the State of Palestine, and Algeria, more than 50% of adolescents reported being bullied. Corporal punishment by teachers at school is not prohibited in 8 countries: Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Only partial prohibition exists in the State of Palestine.

Note: Data for the State of Palestine are not nationally representative.

### Countries where corporal punishment at school is...

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MENA REGION AMONG THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACES TO LIVE IN THE WORLD FOR ADOLESCENTS

While only about 6% of the world’s adolescents live in the Middle East and North Africa, more than 70% of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence globally were living in this region – with mortality rates having risen dramatically since 2011. If all adolescents faced the same risk of dying due to collective violence as those in the Syrian Arab Republic, there would be an adolescent death in the world every 10 seconds compared to global average of 1 every 7 minutes.

For adolescent boys, the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq were among the top ten most deadly places, having the world’s highest mortality rates from collective violence and homicide.

CAUSES OF DEATH AMONG ADOLESCENTS AGED 10-19 IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Percentage distribution of deaths among adolescents aged 10 to 19 years in 2015 in the Middle East and North Africa, by cause


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4 Collective violence and legal intervention: Injuries to civilians and military personnel caused by war and civil insurrection, or injuries inflicted by the police, other law-enforcement agents and on-duty military personnel in the course of arresting or attempting to arrest lawbreakers, suppressing disturbances, maintaining order and other legal action. Because deaths due to legal intervention are rare in most countries/regions, this cause of death is frequently referred to as ‘collective violence’ in this report for readability. Interpersonal violence: Homicides or injuries inflicted by another person with intent to injure or kill by any means.
CAUSES OF DEATH AMONG ADOLESCENTS AGED 10-19, BY COUNTRY. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENTS AGED 10-19 IN 2016, BY CAUSE

Notes: Multiple years of national death registration data with high completeness and quality cause-of-death assignment were available for Israel. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and/or moderate quality issues were available for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and/or severe quality issues were available for Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Qatar and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. National death registration data were unavailable or unusable due to quality issues for Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen; therefore, the estimates are uncertain and should be interpreted with caution.


VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENTS: COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

Mortality rates (deaths per 100,000) due to collective violence among adolescents aged 10 to 19 years in 2015, by sex

VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENT BOYS: COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE (SYRIA, IRAQ AT THE TOP)

Mortality rates (deaths per 100,000) due to collective violence among boys aged 10 to 19 years in 2015

Notes: Multiple years of national death registration data with high completeness and quality of data were available for Israel. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and quality of data were available for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and quality of data were available for Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Qatar and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. National death registration data were unavailable or unusable due to quality issues for Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen; therefore, the estimates are uncertain and should be interpreted with caution. Zeros appearing in the chart do not necessarily mean there were no victims in these countries, but rather that the recalculated rate came to zero after rounding.


VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS: COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE (SYRIA AT THE TOP WITH IRAQ AND LIBYA)

Mortality rates (deaths per 100,000) due to collective violence among boys aged 10 to 19 years in 2015
VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENTS: TRENDS IN MORTALITY FROM COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

Mortality rates (deaths per 100,000) due to collective violence among adolescents aged 10 to 19 years, 2000-2015

VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENTS: HOMICIDES

Mortality rates (deaths per 100,000) due to homicide among adolescents aged 10 to 19 years in 2015

Notes: Multiple years of national death registration data with high completeness and quality cause-of-death assignment were available for Israel. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and/or moderate quality issues were available for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and/or severe quality issues were available for Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Qatar and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. National death registration data were unavailable or unusable due to quality issues for Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen; therefore, the estimates are uncertain and should be interpreted with caution. Zeros appearing in the chart do not necessarily mean there were no victims in these countries, but rather that the recalculated rate came to zero after rounding.

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VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENT BOYS: HOMICIDE AND COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

Mortality rates (deaths per 100,000) due to homicide and collective violence among boys aged 10 to 19 years in 2015
VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS: HOMICIDE AND COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE AMONG GIRLS

Mortality rates (deaths per 100,000) due to homicide and collective violence among girls aged 10 to 19 years in 2015

Notes: Multiple years of national death registration data with high completeness and quality cause-of-death assignment were available for Israel. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and/or moderate quality issues were available for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. Multiple years of national death registration data with low completeness and/or severe quality issues were available for Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar and comparison among countries should be interpreted with caution. National death registration data were unavailable or unusable due to quality issues for Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen; therefore, the estimates are uncertain and should be interpreted with caution.


SEXUAL VIOLENCE AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS: EXPERIENCE OF FORCED SEX COMMITTED BY A HUSBAND OR PARTNER

Forced sex includes sexual intercourse or any other sexual acts that were forced, physically or in any other way. Among ever-married adolescent girls in Jordan, more than 1 in 10 reported having ever experienced forced sex by a husband or partner.
Percentage of ever-married girls aged 15 to 19 years who ever experienced forced sex committed by a husband or partner

HARMFUL PRACTICES AMONG HIGHEST IN THE WORLD IN MENA

CHILD MARRIAGE ON THE INCREASE IN CONFLICT AFFECTED COUNTRIES IN MENA

The overall rate of child marriage in the MENA region has been declining for decades and is now meaningfully lower than the global average. The current rates remain nonetheless alarming, with serious concerns about the impact of instability on child marriage within the region. At the regional level, 18% of girls or 1 in 5 girls in the MENA are married before the age of 18 whilst 3% of girls are married before the age of 15.

However, prevalence varies across the region, masking the wide variation in prevalence between different countries in the region which ranges from 3% married before 18 in Algeria to 32% in Yemen. Moreover, data on national average do not capture trends of child marriage prevalence at sub-national level where rates are much higher, particularly in countries affected by conflict. Although the relationship between conflict and increase in the incidence of child marriage has not yet been clearly established, this is a worrying trend in what is a fragile region affected by conflict and prevailing humanitarian contexts in a number of countries (see box 1) showing impact of conflict. Figure 1 below shows that despite overall decline in Humanitarian contexts in the region and countries affected by conflict CM is actually increasing significantly at alarming rate.
Percentage of women 20-24 first married by exact ages 15 and 19 years

BOX 1: HOW CONFLICT INFLUENCES CHILD MARRIAGE

In the MENA region, where child marriage is practiced in peacetime, its prevalence increases during violent conflict. In Yemen a survey undertaken in 2013 showed the prevalence of respondents married before the ages of 15 and 18 had increased since the start of the conflict. This is also true of girls affected by the conflict in Syria, as evidenced by the growing number of Syrian refugee girls being married in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. Of the top ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage, nine are considered fragile states, illustrating the reality that conflict impacts child-marriage decisions. As CARE International’s 2015 report put it, the increased prevalence of child marriage in conflict situations is largely the result of the, “fatal confusion between protecting girls and sexual violence.” In an environment where girls and young women are more susceptible to rape, families choose marriage as a method to protect girls from the dishonour of being raped and having children out of wedlock. This increased need to secure girls’ honour (as a method of securing family honour) is seen in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, where girls from urban Syrian communities – areas where child marriage was not commonly practiced before the conflict – are increasingly being married before age 18.

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FGM/C PREVALENCE IN THE REGION AMONG THE HIGHEST GLOBALLY AND MAINLY AFFECTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Latest prevalence rates of FGM in the region is as follows:

Egypt: 87% aged 15-49 (EDHS, 2015); 14% AGED 0-14 (UNICEF 2016)
Sudan: 86.6% aged 15-49 (Sudan MICS, 2014); 32% aged 0-14 (UNICEF 2016)
Djibouti: 78% aged 15-49 (Djibouti DHS, 2012)
Somalia: 98% aged 15-49 (UNICEF, 2013)
Yemen: 19% aged 15-49 (Yemen DHS, 2013)
Iraq: 8% MICS aged 15-19 (MICS 2011)

Egypt is one of three countries in the world where half of the women and girls who have been cut. Egypt has the highest rate of medicalization of FGM in the region, at 82%.

UNIVERSALITY AND INEQUITIES

Violence is both common and widespread – and no society is without some level of violence against its younger members. Data confirm that some types, such as violent discipline (up to 14 years of age), affect children from rich and poor households alike. However, certain groups of children remain particularly vulnerable to other forms of abuse. Knowing relevant risk factors can help ensure that protective measures reach those who need them most. For some types of violence, exposure and risk have a geographical component.

For example conflicts or civil insurrections kill more adolescents in the Middle East and North Africa than in all other regions combined. Only 6 per cent of the world’s adolescents live in this region, yet it accounts for more than 70 per cent of the adolescent deaths from collective violence.

Two of the world top five most deadly places for adolescent boys are in the region – the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. For girls, the risk is highest in the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by Iraq. The data also point to some groups of adolescents being at greater risk of violent death based on individual characteristics, such as sex and race. The global homicide rate is four times higher among adolescent boys than girls. Perpetrators of homicide also reflect a distinctly gendered pattern: Males are much more likely to be killed by strangers. Almost half (47 percent) of female homicide victims are killed by family members or intimate partners compared to about 6 per cent of males.

While boys face a substantially higher risk of dying from violence, girls are generally more vulnerable to sexual victimization. However, the limited availability of data on boys related to sexual violence constrains our understanding of the risks they face.
STILL HIDDEN

Preventing violence against children and adolescents requires a major shift in what societies regard as acceptable practices.

Worldwide, around 1.1 billion caregivers, or slightly more than 1 in 4, admit to believing in the necessity of physical punishment as a form of discipline. To date, only 60 countries have adopted legislation that fully prohibits the use of corporal punishment at home, leaving more than 600 million children under age 5 without full legal protection. In the MENA region, corporal punishment by teachers at school is not prohibited in 8 countries: Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Only partial prohibition exists in the State of Palestine. This lack of legal prohibitions is a clear sign that violent discipline remains a largely unacknowledged form of violence against adolescents.

A key reason why violence against adolescents remains hidden is the reluctance of many victims to disclose their abuse, seek help to cope with the experience or take action to protect themselves from further victimization. Findings from 30 countries including MENA countries confirm this, with only 1 per cent of girls who had experienced forced sex saying they had sought professional help. This reluctance on the part of victims to report incidents to authorities or other professionals poses a challenge to exposing the true extent and nature of Violence against children.

Lack of data can hinder efforts to reveal the pervasive nature of violence. This in turn limits the effectiveness of initiatives to prevent it. While the past decade has seen a marked improvement in the availability of data on violence against children, certain types remain under-researched. In a notable example of this gap, just 40 countries have comparable statistics on sexual violence against girls, and only 7 have comparable data on sexual violence against boys.

RIGHTING A GLOBAL AND REGIONAL WRONG

The data and analysis presented in this report aim to influence the way we think and talk about the all-too-familiar faces of children and adolescents violence. It is hoped that the findings will encourage governments, organizations and individuals everywhere to acknowledge the extent of violence against children and adolescents and intensify their efforts to end it.

Signs of progress are evident. Whereas the Millennium Development Goals did not address violence directly, three targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 speak to the issue of violence against children. Many additional targets integrated throughout the framework address related risk factors.
At the national level, an increasing number of countries have implemented coordinated national action plans to address violence against children (Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan), enforced legislation to protect victims, and promoted programmes aimed at changing societal beliefs and attitudes around violence, including in this region.

Protecting children against violence is a path towards more peaceful and inclusive societies, as called for by SDG 16. It will take individual and collective action to right this global and regional wrong.

WHAT IS THE LITERATURE TELLING? BY AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT (AUB) FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON POPULATION AND HEALTH

To date adolescence has not received nearly as much attention and investment as it should.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS?

Adolescence is a transitional period that is separate from both early childhood and adulthood, occurring in the second decade of life (UNICEF). During adolescence, an individual acquires the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and economic resources that are the foundation for later life health and wellbeing. These same resources define trajectories into the next generation. Investments in adolescent health and wellbeing bring benefits today, for decades to come, and for the next generation (Lancet Commission).

Adolescence has not received nearly as much attention and investment as it should, as it is often considered the healthiest time of life.

VIOLENCE GLOBALLY NOW RECOGNIZED AS A PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM

In 1989, with the adoption of the CRC, the international community recognized that children are rights holders, and that the family is the natural environment for growth and wellbeing.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights treaty. It ensures that children should be protected from violence both at home and in schools, etc. (Shows how our conceptualization of childhood has changed over time). Article 19 of the Convention protects
children from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, while in the care of parents and other caregivers.

To increase the protection of those under 18, the UN Committee has encouraged raising the legal age for adulthood in those countries. Overlaps with adolescence, often defined as 10-19 (or 15-19 for programmatic purposes).

The Convention is the first international human rights treaty to bring together the universal set of standards concerning children in a unique instrument, and the first to present child rights as a legally binding imperative. The Convention: http://indicators.ohchr.org/ defined childhood as a separate space from adulthood and recognized that what is appropriate for an adult may not be suitable for a child – includes adolescents.

The Convention called on governments to provide material assistance and support to families and to prevent children from being separated from their parents. It also recognized that children are the holders of their own rights and are therefore not passive recipients of charity but empowered actors in their own development.

All 22 countries in the MENA region have ratified the CRC, and many are committed to meeting the SDG on ending all forms of violence.

**DEFINING VIOLENCE**

Violence against children takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation\(^{11}\)

Violence occurs in many settings, including the home, school, community and over the Internet. Similarly, a wide range of perpetrators commit violence against children, such as family members, intimate partners, teachers, neighbours, strangers and other children. Such violence not only inflicts harm, pain and humiliation on children; it also kills. All children have the right to protection from violence, regardless of the nature or severity of the act and all forms of violence can cause harm to children, reduce their sense of self-worth, affront their dignity and hinder their development. Examining global patterns of violence as well as attitudes and social norms sheds light on an issue that has remained largely undocumented. Using data to make violence against children and its many ramifications more visible will bring about a fuller understanding of its magnitude and nature and offering clues to its prevention.

\(^{11}\) UNICEF definition widely accepted and based on CRC
THE REGIONAL REVIEW ON VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENTS IN THE ARAB REGION BY AUB

This regional research review was conducted by the Centre for Research and Population and Health at the American University in Beirut. The full paper presenting and discussing the findings of this research will be shared at the symposium so the below is a brief summary about this research conducted.

The main motivation for this piece of work was twofold: Arab States have expressed a commitment to ending violence; no comprehensive review of violence against Arab adolescents had been conducted.

The main objectives of this research were:

- Assess the state of the evidence in the region,
- Obtain estimates of levels of different forms of violence,
- Fill gaps in current knowledge,
- Facilitate comparisons between Arab region and others, and
- Draw implications and recommendations for future research and action

THE RESEARCH STRATEGY

A systematic search on prevalence of violence:
Maltreatment, violent discipline, and peer violence.
The search included data from all 22 Arab countries from 2000-2016.

Review of published, peer-reviewed literature.
- 32 articles contributed prevalence data.

Review of population-based, international survey data.
- 6 DHS, 11 MICS, and 18 GSHS contributed data.
MAIN CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

All 22 Arab countries have recent, national household and/or school-based data from international surveys on at least some form(s) of violence, but national survey data on many other forms of violence, including sexual abuse, are scarce.

The evidence from peer-reviewed articles on the prevalence of violence against adolescents in Arab countries is limited in scope and quality, and many used small, non-representative samples and widely different operational definitions, making prevalence findings hard to interpret and compare.

The evidence analyzed in this review suggests that these forms of violence against adolescents are widespread in the Arab region. Estimates of physical punishment and psychological aggression in the region are higher than global estimates 1. These results underscore both the need for more information and for efforts to inform policies and programs in countries committed to ending violence.

Findings also suggest that there has been very little in-depth assessment of the interplay between cultural factors, the prevalence of violence, and its consequences among children and adolescents in the region. Further research is needed to shed light on the factors that influence the prevalence and forms of violence in the region.

A more details paper on this research is available on request.

THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON ADOLESCENTS, BY SAVE THE CHILDREN: ‘ADOLESCENTS & CONFLICT IN FOUR COUNTRIES IN MENA’

Save the Children conducted a qualitative study with 571 adolescent girls and boys (12-17 years), their caregivers, community members and NGO/CBO staff in six (urban and rural) locations in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, exploring the conflicts that affect adolescents most and their experiences in managing them. In each country, we met with six main groups of stakeholders: 331 adolescent boys and girls from two age groups (12-14 and 15-17), with a focus on out-of-school; and 240 caregivers, religious leaders, civil society volunteers, field facilitators, teachers, youth counsellors, outreach workers, and university academics and researchers. Save the Children worked with Notre Dame University (Lebanon) and Steps Lebanon in this study.
An interactive and participatory methodology was designed to build trust and allow for adolescents to feel safe and comfortable sharing their views around sensitive topics. Groups of adolescents met for about 4.5 hours to discuss and reflect upon: key conflicts affecting them and with whom; how they managed those conflicts; who did they turn to for support; and what helped them cope better with those conflicts in their lives. The methodology included four components: Commencing with ice breaker activities to build trust and explore identity (‘My Identity’); followed by an exercise which facilitated the identification of, and reflection upon, conflicts that had affected the adolescents’ lives, how they coped with them and who helped them (‘Wall of Conflict’); moving on to a participatory ranking exercise, where the adolescents considered their rights in relation to their conflicts (‘Diamond Ranking’); and a final session where adolescents were asked to enact a conflict at home, at school and in the community, and collectively find a solution to it (‘Forum Theatre’).

The adults (caregivers and other stakeholders) were convened for two to three hours in a ‘World Café’ activity where they considered four questions: major conflicts facing adolescents, how adolescents manage those conflicts, programmes that have been successful in supporting adolescents, and positive and negative ‘influencers’ on adolescents. In addition, other stakeholders were engaged in semi-structured interviews, lasting between 30-40 minutes, to share their experiences and reflections on adolescents. All discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. Save the Children led the study, contributed to the study methodology and design, coordinated all field activities, facilitated the discussions in three locations, and contributed to the analysis. Steps Lebanon contributed to the study methodology and facilitated the discussions in 3 locations. Notre Dame University contributed to the study methodology and design, and conducted the analysis.

KEY FINDINGS

The Save the Children study found that adolescents, across all age groups, sex and locations in all four countries, are overwhelmingly exposed to high levels of violence in all spheres of their life- at home, in school and in the community- with few safe places or support networks to turn to.

Violence was not only identified to be highly prevalent in countries affected by armed conflict such as Yemen or Iraq. This study also shows the high levels of violence and discrimination faced by adolescents in locations not directly affected by armed conflict, like Egypt and Jordan. Adolescents also expressed that they had never been asked about the conflicts they face in their lives, and overwhelmingly felt 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, Iraq

“There is usually no one to share the pain we feel inside.” Adolescent boy, 15-17 years, Egypt

Adolescents expressed how they 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. They consistently reported that this environment of systemic violence in where they exist leads to their feelings of hopelessness and manifests through often (self) aggressive behaviour like drug consumption.

The study found a very deep divide and breakdown between adolescents and their caregivers. Caregivers reported feeling overwhelmed with the economic situations they find themselves in, trying to make ends meet, and therefore do not have the time or energy to deal their “stubborn, selfish or aggressive” adolescents.

**ACROSS ALL FOUR COUNTRIES, THE STUDY FOUND THE FOLLOWING:**

Adolescent girls and boys reported use of physical and psychological violence at home, by caregivers as well as other relatives. They reported how caregivers were not only unable to play a positive role in helping them manage conflicts in their lives, but were often the source of conflict and violence. 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 being negatively affected. They reported violence, physical and psychological, consistently perpetrated against them by male relatives.

*Parents neglect us and they use us for work and violence [they] abuse us physically and verbally* – adolescent girl 12-14, Yemen

*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, Yemen

Adolescent’s girls and boys in the four countries spoke of the violence, neglect and corruption they experienced in schools. They reported rampant violence from teachers and school administrators. They described the corporal punishment 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.

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

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. Adolescent girls expressed frustration at their lack of options and the fact that no one listens to them. They do not feel in charge of their present or their future.

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

The study showed how adolescents’ hardships are further exacerbated by the violence they face on a macro scale, i.e. political, armed conflict, which forces families into dire economic conditions and causes psychological distress to the whole family.

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, Yemen

Adolescents highlighted how safety and security and/or protection from various forms of violence is of utmost importance for them and crucial in helping them pursue their goals and ambitions in life. They asked for more opportunities to express their views and develop their talents. They also expressed that they want more sessions in which they can “share their feelings” and “learn to deal with them”.

No one asked me before what my problems were. I don’t know how to deal with them at all – adolescent girl 15-17, Jordan.

Findings of the study suggest that, in spite of their situation, adolescents had not normalized violence and expressed their anger and frustration at what they saw as injustices inflicted on them. Many showed the desire to change things around them.

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, Yemen

MAIN EVIDENCE GAPS IDENTIFIED

MEASUREMENT AND ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN COLLECTING DATA ON VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENT CHILDREN

Collecting reliable data on violence against adolescents is a complex undertaking that raises considerable methodological challenges. Widely perceived as a social taboo, violence is often under-reported by either victims or perpetrators, even in anonymous surveys. Adolescents may feel

12 Taken from UNICEF’s Global Report on Violence against Children : A Familiar Face (see footnote 1) see page 13
pressed to conceal incidents of abuse, particularly when perpetrated by people they know and trust, or may be unwilling to report them for fear of retaliation or stigma.

Depending on their age and stage of development, adolescents may be unable to provide accurate accounts of their experiences. When interviewed about the experiences they had as children, adults may likewise be unwilling or unable to report what happened to them. Caution is therefore warranted when interpreting data on violence against adolescents, and one should assume that figures underestimate the actual number of victims.

Among other methodological challenges, certain types of violence can be particularly difficult to define and operationalize, while some are hard to measure due to the extreme secrecy and illegality that surround their occurrence. Furthermore, acts of violence that are socially condoned may not be considered a priority for data collection. While administrative data can be used in the absence of surveys to provide certain information, these data will only capture violence that has been reported to authorities.

The comparability of data across multiple sources and/or countries also presents a challenge. To facilitate comparisons across countries and regions, data collection processes and measurement systems must share a standardized approach.

However, measurement of violence against adolescents often varies widely across datasets, studies, countries and regions. The types of violent acts reported are often inconsistent, resulting in underestimates of some forms of child abuse. Moreover, differences among national, regional, and even provincial or territorial definitions and/or theoretical understanding can result in misleading interpretations of prevalence levels across countries and contexts.

Numerous ethical issues confront researchers when collecting data on violence against adolescents, and there are potential safety risks for all involved. When adolescents are involved in this research, it is crucial that fundamental principles are followed for the ethical collection of sound data. Key considerations include: ensuring that questions are asked in a sensitive manner and are tailored to adolescents’ developmental stages and capabilities; securing informed consent and, if appropriate, parental consent; protecting adolescents from potential dangers due to their participation, such as the risk of re-traumatization; maintaining confidentiality; and instituting clear procedures for providing follow-up support for adolescents who report being at risk.

THE URGENT NEED FOR DATA

The urgency of collecting evidence on the most effective prevention and response strategies in relation to violence, and utilizing that evidence to inform future policies and programmes, is very clear based on the findings of these studies.
It is critical that we decide what we as agencies, donors and policy makers can do to tackle this situation of widespread violence experienced by adolescents in the MENA region, but simultaneously there is more evidence to be gathered to gain a more nuanced understanding of the situation and how to tackle it. For example, it is crucial that we integrate a strength-based approach in our research and identify and explore the positive ways in which young people themselves are preventing and responding to violence across the MENA region. It is also important to consider how and why young people who are exposed to such high levels of violence and conflict in their own lives then choose to turn away from violence. “Researching, documenting and studying the positive contribution of many young girls and boys in building more inclusive and equitable societies is often neglected in empirical literature in favour of a predominant narrative of risk mitigation and countering violent extremism (CVE). Much scope exists to increase the availability of evidence that demonstrates how young people are changing their own societies for the better, and how these efforts can be strengthened and replicated”13.

There is a need for further disaggregation within our qualitative research beyond age and sex. For example, considering the experiences of young people with disabilities in relation to violence and conflict.

Further, overall in this region there is a lack of data on sexual violence. There is also limited data on violence from some of the Gulf countries, welcoming recent efforts and political commitment to address this. There is also a need to strengthen mechanism for collection of administrative data among government Ministries and departments in most of the MENA countries14.

Another key gap in data in concerning social norms, in particular the measurement of behaviour change and social norms so critical for the work around prevention of violence.

UNICEF MENA regional office is partnering with UNICEF HQ to develop and test tools to address this which will significantly address current gaps which exist globally in this regard.

There is also need for a deeper understanding of the role and value of social media in preventing and responding to the impact of violence experienced by adolescents. We know that social media provides a major avenue for young people’s expression of creative and non-violent political views in societies where they most often feel excluded from political dialogue and decision-making15. But it can also promote, provoke and exacerbate conflict and violence. Therefore, we need further exploration to determine if there is, or can be, a direct correlation between engagement with social media and violence prevention or reduction. We are also aware that social media can provide young women with an outlet for their feelings and opinions, even when they are restricted in their

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13 Evidence Brief. Translating research into scaled up action: evidence symposium on adolescents and youth in MENA.
14 See recent findings from the UNICEF global initiative to map and review administrative data on violence against children. In MENA this involved Egypt, Sudan and Morocco.
15 Evidence Brief. Translating research into scaled up action: evidence symposium on adolescents and youth in MENA
movements due to cultural norms or insecurity, and this important, gendered perspective requires further research.

Supporting caregivers is essential to prevent violence against adolescents. Strategies and best practices on how to foster intergenerational support for adolescents in conflict affected areas, both to adolescents and their caregivers.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVIDENCE ON ADVOCACY, POLICY AND PROGRAMMING TO SCALE UP AND ACCELERATE ACTION TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENTS IN MENA WHAT WORKS**

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION (E.G. IN TERMS OF GENDER, FOR POLICY MAKERS, FOR DONORS, ETC.) – IMPLICATIONS OF EVIDENCE FOR ADVOCACY, POLICY, PROGRAMMING**

Whilst recommendations will be drafted at the end session, below are some of the recommendations on “what works” based on the available evidence.

**SIGNS OF PROGRESS**

The challenges presented here are daunting, in part because violence against adolescents is so pervasive. The stakes are high: If current trends continue, close to 2 million children and adolescents could be killed by an act of violence by the year 2030.

One of the key recommendations of the United Nations Secretary-General’s 2006 World Report on Violence against Children was to improve the quality and quantity of the evidence on this issue. Now, just over a decade later, significantly more data have become available. For instance, the number of countries with cross-nationally comparable data on violent discipline has grown from around 39 in 2005 to nearly 80 today. Data gaps are slowly being filled, thanks to the surge of national surveys and studies dedicated exclusively to the collection of information on children’s experiences of violence.

Meanwhile, global commitments to address violence against children have reached an all-time high with the integration of relevant targets into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals, adopted by the international community in September 2015, reiterate that ending violence against children is a critical component of progress in global development.
The inclusion of targets to eliminate violence against children by 2030 has helped to elevate the issue, which affects children in all countries, from the richest to the poorest. The SDGs hold an enormous potential to drive change for children, reach those furthest behind and address persistent inequities. Investing in data—including collection, analysis, dissemination and use—will be vital for monitoring progress and ensuring accountability among both national-level actors as well as members of the international community.

Many organisations have now made ending violence against adolescents an organization-wide priority across all programme areas.

In MENA region, there is increasing political will and commitment among countries to address violence against adolescents, including but not exclusively, Lebanon, Jordan, Gulf countries, Oman, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan in both humanitarian and development contexts. This shows that violence is both a humanitarian and development issue across the region and touches all children regardless of their economic situation and gender. However there is still an urgent need to scale up and accelerate action to address violence based on the evidence and data presented on the basis that MENA continues to remain the region with some of the highest prevalence of violence against children and adolescents and one of the most dangerous regions in the world for adolescents.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDED BASED ON THE EVIDENCE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS?**

**STRENGTHENING NATIONAL COMMITMENTS TO MULTISECTORAL PLANS AND PRIORITY**

There is broad international and regional consensus that the most promising approaches to long-term prevention of violence against girls and boys involve comprehensive, coordinated action across all sectors, including leadership from governments and engagement of civil society.

Some countries in MENA, for example Morocco (Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt ongoing), have carried out action under a single comprehensive, costed national plan.

**ASSISTING WITH THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS.**

The development of legal and policy frameworks to protect children and adolescents from all forms of violence, exploitation and discrimination is an essential component of building a protective environment for every child. Such frameworks include national and subnational criminal and civil legislation, family codes and administrative laws, along with other policies, regulations and codes of conduct. But while legal reform may be an important achievement, we recognize that it is often just a first step in a longer chain of actions. The greater challenge is to ensure that laws and policies are implemented and enforced in ways that protect all girls and boys from harm.
Providing technical support to the justice, social welfare, health and education sectors, along with other sectors as relevant, including travel and tourism, and information and communication technology

At the country level, technical support is frequently required to strengthen prevention programmes, reporting mechanisms and response services for children and adolescents affected by violence. We provide such support, helping to establish or strengthen child protection services that directly address the problem and seek to prevent it through, for example, enhancing the capacities of service providers. This support is focused particularly, but not exclusively, within social welfare systems to strengthen the workforce and support the establishment of effective referral pathways between social welfare and child protective services, the police and other sectors.

Supporting communities, parents and children

Shifting the social norms that encourage violence and discrimination is a key component of our work to protect adolescents. Behaviour change efforts are undertaken in community-based interventions and school-based programmes, and through comprehensive and sustained mass media awareness-raising campaigns to shift attitudes, behaviour and social norms and to encourage reporting of violence.

Parenting programmes are another critical area of intervention to prevent and respond to violence. Spurred by neuroscientific evidence on the importance of protecting children from violence and neglect, especially during their early years, most of these programmes have focused on early childhood development, but some have also aimed to reach older children. Evidence suggests that household economic insecurity, gender inequality and domestic violence are among the factors associated with an elevated risk of violence against adolescents, and UNICEF supports action to address these factors as well.

To amplify and improve coordination in prevention and response, we would recommend great engagement with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, which brings together governments, United Nations agencies, civil society groups, philanthropic foundations and academics, and engages children as well.

Within the framework of the Global Partnership, UN agencies including UNICEF, pathfinder countries/government, civil society groups have adopted iNSPIRE, a common approach to strategies that address violence against children, which aims to align concrete action through evidence-based programmes. These consist of 7 evidence-based strategies and actions to accelerate and scale up action to address violence:
INSPIRE — is a multi-sectoral programme package with key partners (including WHO, CDC, USAID, SRSG VAC, Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, INGOs etc.) for the prevention and response to violence against children.

The multi-sectoral package identifies key interventions to address VAC and will include indicators to track results that will be aligned with the SDG goals, targets and indicators. The multi-sectoral approach will draw from documentation from the cross-sectoral work on child marriage and gender more broadly on preventing VAC through both attitudinal and normative change, but also through structural interventions (such as education, social protection etc.).
MORE SPECIFICALLY, THE EVIDENCE IS POINTING TO THE NEED TO FOCUS AND PRIORITISE THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF WORK IN THIS REGION TO ACCELERATE AND SCALE UP ACTION TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENTS

BUILD POLITICAL WILL

- Mobilizing and increasing the number of countries in the region commit to action and increased finances to end violence against adolescents.

ACCELERATE ACTION TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE

- Countries in the region adopt national legislations, policies and programmes to protect children. This includes implementation of the seven evidenced based multi-sectoral strategies listed in the INSPIRE package to prevent and respond to violence
- Priority should be given to addressing urgently violence in those areas where adolescents mostly engage to ensure they provide a safe environment for them: in the home, schools and learning environment and in the community and importantly ensure
- Interventions aimed at increasing adolescent engagement participation and empowerment in decisions affecting them
- There is an urgent need to focus efforts on interventions on sexual related violence both in terms of evidence and data but also gender responsive programming especially around GBV, FGM/C and Child Marriage which is significantly increasing in humanitarian contexts

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION – NO ONE AGENCY, MINISTRY, ORGANIZATION CAN ADDRESS VIOLENCE ALONE

- There is an urgent need to build, leverage and mobilize existing partnerships and delivery platforms in the region to address violence against adolescents
- The Partnerships will strengthen collaboration among and between countries, and with civil society and other stakeholders. They will be encouraged to confront shared threats and develop shared solutions, acknowledging that violence against adolescents cannot be considered in isolation from the broader context of violence. The Partnership will work with and supplement the efforts – but neither displace nor distort – the work of existing partnerships

STRENGTHEN FURTHER THE DATA ON VIOLENCE AND THE MECHANISM FOR COLLECTION OF DATA ESPECIALLY AMONG GOVERNMENT TO INCLUDE MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM

- Greater investment in knowledge, evidence and data is crucial to effective implementation and measuring progress; likewise, we urgently need to expand the evidence base on what
work. We would advocate for significant increases in the generation and dissemination of relevant and timely knowledge and evidence. This will help strengthen strategies for ending violence against children and contribute to future iterations of the INSPIRE toolkit.

**ON CHILD MARRIAGE**

- **Throughout the region, structural and geopolitical factors influence the drivers of child marriage. In particular, conflict increases the risk of economic insecurity and poverty which together, exacerbate child marriage practices and sexual violence.** In addition to increasing prevalence, these structural and geopolitical forces further affect funding to programming focused on child marriage with drastic cuts, whilst presenting challenges to the implementation of such programming, especially in relation to securing government commitment and overcoming logistical issues.

- **Where government and donor priorities turn towards humanitarian needs, women’s rights organisations are often the first to be stifled by competing priorities. Yet women’s movements have been seen to be at the forefront of democratisation in the region and should be at the centre of the efforts to cease conflict and instability.** These movements are also key to the efforts to change social norms on child marriage. However, they must have the core resources necessary to be able to allow activism to grow and develop organically.

- **Effective programming on child marriage engages the whole community; that is, community leaders, parents, teachers, children and adolescents, and health professionals.** Due to the significance of religion in those communities, especially amplified in times of conflict, displacement and extreme poverty, engaging religious leaders is also key. However, it is important to recognise that there remain significant differences in opinion on the message of religious scripture when it comes to child marriage. As such, it is necessary in the first instance, to work separately with religious leaders and scholars to strengthen agreement on scriptural support for delaying marriage, before rolling out programming that relies on such actors as advocates for delaying marriage.

- **Data show that understanding the benefit of education influences child marriage decisions by reducing its prevalence.** One of the main approaches to increasing girls’ attendance and retention at school is the use of cash incentives which, whilst effective, is acknowledged to be financially unsustainable. Evaluations of programmatic results have indicated, however, that quality teaching is a significant driver for increased retention of girls in school. As such, and in recognition of girls’ agency, there is wide scope to focus programmatic interventions on strengthening the capacity of teachers, and increasing the number of female teachers, as a way to incentivise girls’ attendance.

- **Whilst it is critical that child marriage is seen within the wider frame of violence against women and patriarchal gender norms that prevent women and girls’ empowerment, child marriage initiatives are less likely to be effective if they are subsumed into other broader programming.** Similarly, at the national level, it is not enough to incorporate child marriage into broader violence against women policy.

- **Across the region, the domestic legal frameworks as they relate to child marriage do not**
meet international standards, on paper or in practice. Where child marriage laws do exist, evidence shows that they will only be effective in reducing prevalence where resources are invested in enforcement, in particular, through capacity development of law enforcement, public and judicial officials. Since the legal framework and its enforcement are inextricably embedded within socio-cultural norms, work towards strengthening the legal framework must not be pursued in a vacuum.

- This research has shown that positive progress is being made in the region to address child marriage. There are signs that there is an increasing understanding that girls can benefit from spending a longer time in school and delaying marriage. However, the prevalence of child marriage in the region is still rooted in the perception that it is an appropriate method for protecting girls from financial and/or physical insecurity – perceived or real. As such, programming must address both the societal gender norms that constrain the agency and potential of girls, whilst addressing the physical and structural barriers that affirm these norms and practices. Programming must be holistic, incorporating all levels of the socio-ecological model in its approach. Not only will this approach address child marriage, it has the potential to address the women and girls’ empowerment deficit in the region more generally.

**CONCLUSIONS**

All adolescents have the right to be protected from violence inflicted on them by anyone in their lives – whether parents, teachers, friends, romantic partners or strangers. And all forms of violence experienced by adolescents, regardless of the nature or severity of the act, are harmful. Beyond the unnecessary hurt and pain it causes, violence undermines adolescent’s sense of self-worth and hinders their development.

Yet violence against adolescents is often rationalized as necessary or inevitable. It may be tacitly accepted due to the familiarity of perpetrators, or minimized as inconsequential. The memory or reporting of violence may be buried due to shame or fear of reprisal.

Impunity of perpetrators and prolonged exposure may leave victims believing violence is normal. In such ways, violence is masked, making it difficult to prevent and end.

This paper is using some of the most current data to shed light on specific forms of violence: violent discipline and exposure to domestic abuse during early childhood; violence at school; violent deaths among adolescents; violence in the community, including sexual violence in childhood and adolescence. The statistics reveal that adolescents experience violence across all stages of childhood, in diverse settings, and often at the hands of the trusted individuals with whom they interact on a daily basis.

Ensuring that violence in all its forms is documented through solid data is a first step towards its elimination\(^\text{16}\).

\(^{16}\) UNICEF’s A Familiar Face p6.